Combined ACIP, AILA, and NAFSA Questions for BLS 7/8/09 teleconference
Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) written responses

1.   Job Zone Designation on the O*Net:

        a) Please describe the method for determining Job Zones for particular SOC-coded occupational classifications and the factors that you consider in determining what the Job Zone should be for an occupation.

        b) Please describe the method for determining the SVP range for the Job Zone and whether this is intended to be the SVP for the particular SOC code. Is the SVP intended to be used as a tool for evaluating whether specific job requirements are normal in a specific case?

        c) Please describe the method and how often Job Zones are re-evaluated and updated.

Job zones are from O*NET. O*NET is not a BLS survey. It is an Employment and Training Administration (DOL/ETA) survey.

2.   We understand that BLS provides the wage data that is collected under the OES program and posted on the Online Wage Library. Please provide a brief description of how the data is collected. Please provide a copy of the standard wage survey that is sent to employers to complete and collect the data.

The OES survey provides some of the data in the online wage library. OES collects data on wages by wage range and occupation for each employee in the establishments sampled.   A detailed survey methodology statement can be found here: http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/methods_statement.pdf

Establishments are sent different forms, listing different occupations that are common in their industry, based on their industry and their size. There are close to 100 forms. You can download any of our survey forms through the link below. Click on "download forms" from the list on the left side. http://www.bls.gov/respondents/oes/home.htm

3.   Please explain how BLS determines where to send the survey within an organization, whether reminders are issued or what follow-up BLS does with the organization to encourage employers to respond with the needed data. We would like to work with BLS to increase employer responsiveness so the data can be kept to the most precise possible geographic area.

Analysts and data collectors in the state conduct address refinement prior to the survey reference date. The address refinement may include attempting to get the name of the individual who would best be able to fill out the survey form.

These are often Human Resource offices in larger establishments. Address refinement often times means the surveyed establishment will be contacted by phone or post card letting them know that the OES survey form is coming, and asking for an appropriate contact name. The sampled establishment will then be contacted up to 4 times by mail, as well as by telephone. The mailings include a letter, a survey form, and additional instructions on how they may respond.

It might be useful for organizations to let their members know that the OES survey is conducted each May and November, and that individual establishments are in the survey at most once every three years. Endorsement letters, or notes in trade publications or newsletters may be used to encourage response. It is important to note that the surveys must be filled out completely and correctly to be used. There are alternative methods of reporting if employers do not want to fill out the paper form. Usually with the survey solicitation materials, respondents are notified of electronic alternatives for reporting data.

4. We understand that if BLS deems the scope of their data to be insufficient, they might expand their survey of wage data to other geographic areas beyond the MSA or state. This practice can artificially lower or raise the prevailing wage.

a) Can BLS please explain how they decide when their data is insufficient?

BLS does not publish data that has a wage relative error above 30%, and employment criteria were determined in 1996 according to specifications laid out by the Foreign Labor Certification program. In addition there is a quality review and confidentiality screening applied to the data. If the data don't meet these quality and confidentiality criteria, then the next largest geographic area's data is used.

b) Is there a required number or percentage of responses to survey questionnaires about wages that are required in order for BLS to "validate" the survey responses before incorporating into OES?

There must be at least 3 establishments contributing to an estimate for it to be released.

c) If so, what is the necessary response rate for validation?

The overall response rate for the survey in 2008 was 80 percent, but response rates in universities was lower – 67 percent. There is no automatic minimum response *rate* – just a minimum response. Occupations with very high imputation rates are subject to manual review.

d) Is there a validation study related to creation of OES data?

The survey methods and reliability statement has information on data reliability.

e) Has this practice occurred in the Boston region in the past few years?

The practice of using expanded areas in FLC has been consistent since 1996.

5.   Is there any process in place that helps BLS track seemingly unusual trends?

Data that are outliers are subject to a manual review.

6.   Our latest PW determinations have been providing postdoc salaries for Chemists fresh out of school with wages of $68,910 and Physics postdocs fresh out of school with $ 62,296. These are Level 1 wages. Postdoctoral Research Fellows are training positions, are historically paid training type salaries and should elicit ACWIA wages. Salary determinations have been steadily rising at a rate thoroughly out of step with any economic trends, and are not in line with what people in these fields are being paid in any university in our state according to our professional contacts. Can BLS please address whether these are indeed ACWIA wages and how they are obtaining these numbers? Has BLS noticed a trend of steeply rising salaries in ACWIA wages?

The FLC program, not BLS, determines which wage rates, including occupational and level classification, to use for any given applicant.

7.   We have noticed that there are instances of ACWIA database wages being higher than the All Industries database wages for certain job codes. Our understanding is that ACWIA wages are, in general, supposed to be lower to reflect the salary scales paid at educational institutions. Is this a common phenomenon? One such example is All Industries wages for 19-2021 which at each level in the Boston-Cambridge -Quincy area is approximately $8,000 to $1,500 lower than the ACWIA wages.

There is no check to determine whether people working in R&D or people working in universities are paid higher or lower wages than average. The wages are based on the survey response data.   OES does not cover workers that are not covered by UI. Depending on State law, many student workers are not covered by UI and are not included in the OES survey.

8.   "Nanny" currently has no prevailing wage assigned. For a PWD for a Nanny, the SWAs have generally been borrowing the wage from "Child Care Worker" (which is a different job description and type of workplace). Some

SWAs then assign the "Nanny" SOC/ONET code to the PWD; others assign the "Child Care Worker" SOC/ONET job code to the PWD. The "Child Care Worker" actually has a lower SVP than "Nanny." Is there a way to get a prevailing wage assigned for the "Nanny" position? If not, is it possible to request all SWAs to state "Nanny" on the PWD? The OES uses the Standard Occupational Classification, which defines occupations to be used in all federal statistical surveys collecting occupational data. The BLS does not assign an occupation for FLC purposes.

Dept. of Labor OES Wage Survey

NAFSA Questions/Reports

Monday, June 8, 2009

NAFSA, Association of International Educators, has received the following reports/questions from members who represent a wide range of higher education institutions regarding the OES Wage Survey.

1. The OES wage survey is designed to reflect the differences between industries, including academic wages. However, institutions report that wage levels listed in the OES wage survey inaccurately reflect wages for post-doctoral positions at academic institutions.

    a. Could BLS provide information on the process, e.g. how many institutions receive the wage survey per year, how often does an institution have the opportunity to complete the survey? Almost 3,000 establishments in colleges, universities, and professional schools, and almost 1,500 in junior colleges were in the 3-year survey sample used for the 2008 May estimates. Most large establishments are included in the survey. Approximately one third of these establishments were surveyed each year between November 2005 and May 2008. State-owned schools are surveyed in November. Local government- and privately- owned schools are surveyed in either May or November. Each establishment is surveyed once every three years at most, and their data is retained and updated for the following 2 years. A detailed survey methodology statement can be found here: http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/methods_statement.pdf

    b. International offices encourage their campus compensation offices to complete the survey to create a pool of accurate academic wages. It would be helpful to know where the surveys are going, and whether institutions can do more to ensure that the surveys are completed so that there is accurate local information for higher education institutions. How can international programs assist further in obtaining accurate data for academic institutions? Data collectors in the states attempt to identify the person or office in the establishment most likely

2. In scanning the new ACWIA data from July 2008, it appears that the majority of the PW are not MSA-specific but cover a wider range. In particular, there are 79,990- almost half of the total 181,641 records- with a geo level of 4 (national average). The survey explains "if there is no releasable estimate for the state, the national average is used." Does the use of the national average reflect that there were not enough responses within the MSA to be statistically significant, forcing BLS to default to the national average?   Yes, if the national wage is provided, this indicates that there was no releasable data at the MSA, expanded area, or statewide level for quality or confidentiality reasons. About 45 percent of the 2008 wage estimates in the education specific estimates are at the national level.

3. New prevailing wages were released on 7/1/2008 and some increased dramatically from the prior year. Some institutions report that many Level 1 wages are now well above the salary range for post-docs currently at the institution.

    For example, here are some of the increases in Level 1 wage for Boston:

	7/2007 - 6/2008	7/2008 - 6/2009
Environmental Engineers	$37,107	$67,621
Chemists	$48,506	$68,910
Physicists	$39,499	$62,296 (almost a 40% increase)
19-2099: Physical Scientists	$35,859	$52,374

    Is there some reason for the extreme increases during this year?

Many of the wages in the examples in questions 3 and 4 are not directly comparable because they are not for the same areas.   The estimates were provided at one geographic level for 2006, and another level for 2007.   In other cases, changes are a result of changes in survey responses.   Note that the OES survey does not cover workers that are not covered by Unemployment Insurance (UI). In many states student workers are not covered by UI or the OES survey.

4. Similarly, one institution reports a large increase in prevailing wages on the OES for postsecondary teachers in Lubbock county in Texas, specifically in 2 areas (see below), which has affected the institution's ability to hire instructors with this level 1 wage. Lubbock County is the only country in Texas that increased this much; even Dallas and Houston areas did not increase this much.

	ACWIA - Education Industry database for 7/2007 - 6/2008	**ACWIA - Education Industry database for 7/2008 - 6/2009**
Area Code: 31180 Area Title: LUBBOCK, TX OES/SOC Code: 25-1022 OES/SOC Title: Mathematical Science Teachers, Postsecondary	Level 1 Wage: $29,670 Level 2 Wage: $38,413 Level 3 Wage: $47,157 Level 4 Wage: $55,900	Level 1 Wage: $68,040 Level 2 Wage: $77,503 Level 3 Wage: $86,967 Level 4 Wage: $96,430
Area Code: 31180 Area Title: LUBBOCK, TX OES/SOC Code: 25-1193 OES/SOC Title: Recreation and Fitness Studies Teachers, Postsecondary	Level 1 Wage: $25,230 Level 2 Wage: $33,313 Level 3 Wage: $41,397 Level 4 Wage: $49,480	Level 1 Wage: $43,140 Level 2 Wage: $55,157 Level 3 Wage: $67,173 Level 4 Wage: $79,190

Another institution reports a significant increase in the level 1 wage for 25-1124: Foreign Language and Literature Teachers in Northeast Mississippi:

	7/2006-6/2008	**7/2007 - 6/2008**	**7/2008 - 6/2009**
Area Code: 280001 Area Title: Northeast Mississippi OES/SOC Code: 25-1124 OES/SOC Title: Foreign Language and Literature Teachers	Level 1 Wage: $24,110	Level 1 Wage: $33,190	Level 1 Wage: $46,420

Can OES explain why there was such a large increase in the Level 1 Wage, particularly when the new wages do not appear to reflect the current economic trends/situation?

5. In many cases, the wages for different subfields within the same discipline are dramatically different. For example, the Level 1 wage for Biochemists is $34,237, but for Chemists it is $68,910. For Computer Software Engineers, Applications, R&D it is $34,611 and for Computer Software Engineers, Systems Software, R&D it is $35,256, but for Computer and Information Scientists, Research it is $70,699. For Materials Engineers it is $44,470, but for Materials Scientists it is $48,776. These and those in (4) are explained by the sample sizes and responses, variability of small sample sizes and the geographic leveling used in the Foreign Labor Certification program.

6. A significant amount of research is "interdisciplinary," and one institution reports that when more than one field is listed under "degree requirements," the classification given is usually for the degree with the highest wage. This is a policy issue that could be addressed to ETA.

7. When no specific OES classification exists, institutions are given a general classification which is usually quite high. For the Level 1 wage for Biological Scientists, All Other is $47,861 and for Engineers, All Other it is $66,269. If an occupation cannot be associated with any other SOC classification other than the " all other" category, that is coded in the classification system.

8. Similarly, in the instructions on the DOL web site to determine prevailing wage, DOL advises that if a teaching position is a mixture of two fields with any clinical duties or technical duties (e.g. associate professor with some surgical, computing, or research duties), the employer must choose the higher wage of the two. Would DOL consider using a weighted average instead that more accurately reflects the percentage of the position that falls under each category, e.g. 75% postsecondary teacher, 25% computer and information scientist. This is a policy question for ETA.

9. Has DOL considered adding a trainee category in the wage survey? There is no corresponding title that accurately reflects a trainee position; instead, a trainee is generally considered under the professional scientific categories, e.g. Chemist or Physicist, which implies s/he is in an established position rather than classifying it as a trainee position. The OES survey uses the SOC and SOC specifies that trainees be classified in with the occupation that they are training for. Something like this could be done by expanding the detail in the SOC, if it were designated as a priority for the program, but this would seem to be the purpose of looking at the mean of the lower third of the wage distribution as a proxy for entry level. We have not been asked to do this.

10. Clinical residence at medical institutions is similarly problematic. While they are often labeled as full doctors/surgeons, or even sometimes health specialty teachers, neither is appropriate for clinical residents.

11. Has OES considered adding a "researcher" category similar to postsecondary teacher by specialty? The concept of a post-doc is somewhere between education and training, but is not full employment as a practicing scientist. Even the SWA do not know where researchers should fall; one institution reports that in the last year, it has received 3 different classifications with 3 different wages from the local SWA for a "post-doc research associate in the department of biomedical engineering": Life Scientist, All Other; Biomedical engineer; Biological Scientist, All Other. Note: A general researcher category would not be sufficient; a researcher in one field would not have the same wage as others.

    The OES survey collects data for occupations in the Standard Occupational Classification.   For FLC purposes, we also produce wage estimates for a small number of occupations that are mainly engaged in research and development at universities.

12. Many scientists are funded through NIH grants which have a regional component. Would DOL be willing to consider the NIH standards? Since there is no researcher/trainee option, would there be any room for using these wages in the wage assignment? This is a question for ETA.

13. The current OES wage survey field is paper-based survey and overwhelming. Is OES considering an online version that would be more user-friendly? There are many ways to respond to the OES survey. In fact most of our larger respondents provided their date electronically, by email, sending electronic files, or uploading data to a secure internet site.