



David Backus <david.backus@gmail.com>

Fwd: [ces] Where do I stand in the unemployment statistics?

Kim Ruhl <kruhl@stern.nyu.edu>

Thu, Mar 1, 2012 at 10:35 AM

To: David Backus <dbackus@stern.nyu.edu>

An exchange a student had with BLS after the labor markets class. He gave me permission to use in class.

Thought you might find it interesting.

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----- Forwarded message -----

From: **David Landesman** <drl287@stern.nyu.edu>

Date: Fri, Dec 9, 2011 at 3:52 PM

Subject: Fwd: [ces] Where do I stand in the unemployment statistics?

To: Kim Ruhl <kruhl@stern.nyu.edu>

Kim--

I wrote to BLS to get their thoughts on my unemployment status. Their response is below. There is a bucket just for my status. I thought you would appreciate it.

Have a nice weekend!

--David

Begin forwarded message:

From: David Landesman <drl287@stern.nyu.edu>

Date: December 9, 2011 3:48:19 PM EST

To: "Kosanovich, Karen - BLS" <Kosanovich.Karen@bls.gov>

Subject: Re: [ces] Where do I stand in the unemployment statistics?

Hi Karen--

Thanks so much for the response. I have a much better understanding of where I am in the figures

now.

I would definitely be "waiting for a new job to begin." My last job search activity was on 11/14, when I was offered a higher salary based on negotiation discussions that had taken place the prior week. I accepted the offer at that time. So as of today, it sounds like I would be "unemployed." Come next week, I would be "out of the labor force," since four weeks will have elapsed since my last job search activity.

I look forward to sharing this information with my professor. He will definitely appreciate it!

Have a great weekend.

--David

On Dec 9, 2011, at 11:45 AM, "Kosanovich, Karen - BLS" <Kosanovich.Karen@bls.gov> wrote:

Greetings,

I work with the Current Population Survey (CPS), the monthly household survey that provides information on employment and unemployment in the US. We're pleased that you're studying the concepts and methods used in determining the official employment status of the population.

In general, you might fall into a category often called "waiting for a new job to begin." The survey does not specifically try to identify all those who are waiting for a new job to start, but it does account for people who volunteer that information. This group, usually quite small, has been the subject of some classification debate over the 70 year plus history of the household survey. Currently, people waiting to start a new job must have actively looked for a job within the last 4 weeks in order to be counted as unemployed. Otherwise, they are classified as not in the labor force—that is, they're not employed, and they're not unemployed. (This classification has been used since 1994. I can send you additional detail on how this group was treated over time if that would be of interest to you.)

However, from what you've described below, I don't quite have enough information to classify your employment status. We can walk through some of the major survey questions see how you might be categorized. (See the definition and key questions online at http://www.bls.gov/cps/cps_hqgm.htm#unemployed.)

You will not be counted as employed for a job that you have not yet begun. Even if you try to count your future job, we'll redirect you in the survey. For example, let's say that you reported to us that you had a job (thinking ahead about the one you were waiting to start) but did not work at all during the survey reference week. When asked the reason you were not at work, a response of "waiting for a new job to begin" will route you to the jobsearch questions to see if you are unemployed. (This reason not at work question helps identify those people who are with a job, but not at work during the survey reference week for reasons like vacation or illness.)

If you don't report having a job, you will be asked questions about layoff and jobsearch activity. You mentioned "I am not actively looking for work right now", but you might meet the criteria to be classified as unemployed.

The unemployed are defined as persons

- 1) without jobs;
- 2) actively seeking work (looked in the prior 4 weeks), or on layoff from a job and expecting recall (who need not be seeking work to qualify); and
- 3) currently available to take a job (including temporary illness).

In your case, you are not on layoff, so you'll be asked if you've been doing anything to find work during the last 4 weeks. If you haven't looked for work in the last 4 weeks, you will not be counted as unemployed. You will be out of the labor force.

If you have looked in the last 4 weeks, you will be asked about your availability to start a job in the survey reference week. (*In the survey reference week*, could you have started a job if one had been offered?) If you respond that you were available to start a job, you'll be unemployed. If you respond that you were not available to take a job (for example, you have committed to your new employer), you will not be counted as unemployed. You will be out of the labor force. (One of the response options for why you are not available is "waiting for a new job to begin".)

If you are out of the labor force (neither employed nor unemployed), you will not be counted among the discouraged. (Discouraged workers have looked for a job sometime in the prior 12 months, but stopped looking for work specifically because they believed no jobs were available for them or there were none for which they would qualify. They are not counted as unemployed because they had not searched for work in the 4 weeks preceding the survey.)

You can learn more about the CPS online at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/>. You may contact me at the phone number or email address below if you have any questions about the data or concepts from our survey.

Regards,

Karen Kosanovich

Economist
Office of Employment and Unemployment Statistics

Bureau of Labor Statistics
[\(202\) 691-5457](tel:(202)691-5457)
kosanovich_k@bls.gov
<http://www.bls.gov/cps/home.htm>

From: CES Feedback Form [mailto:labstat@bls.gov]
Sent: Thursday, December 08, 2011 2:19 PM
To: cesinfo
Subject: FW: [ces] Where do I stand in the unemployment statistics?

[View the frequently asked questions](#)

**To receive an answer to your CES inquiry,
enter the following:**

Email address:

Full name:

Subject:

Enter your question in the box:

Hello! I am currently studying macroeconomics at New York University part time, while working full time. We have been spending a lot of time talking about unemployment statistics, including U3 and U6, and how BLS surveys Americans to gather that data.

I had a question that stumped my professor so I wanted to see what the experts would have to say on the topic.

I voluntarily left my prior job on 12/2. I start my new job on 12/19. Thus, I am not actively looking for work right now. If BLS were to survey me right now, where would I fall in the unemployment statistics? Would I be unemployed? Would I be a discouraged worker? Would I be put into a bucket similar to how you treat people on vacation?

Thanks for your help!

—David

Referring Page: <http://www.bls.gov/opub/opbinfo.htm>
