# Undergraduate Track – Meal Breaks

## Background

In this track of the competition, you will be performing an analysis that is commonly done by companies evaluating their compliance with California’s Wage and Hours law concerning meal breaks. Specifically, Section 512 of the California Labor Code says:

Section 512(a) - Meal periods.  An employer shall not employ an employee for a work period of more than five hours per day without providing the employee with a meal period of not less than 30 minutes, except that if the total work period per day of the employee is no more than six hours, the meal period may be waived by mutual consent of both the employer and employee. An employer shall not employ an employee for a work period of more than 10 hours per day without providing the employee with a second meal period of not less than 30 minutes, except that if the total hours worked is no more than 12 hours, the second meal period may be waived by mutual consent of the employer and the employee only if the first meal period was not waived.”

When a company doing business in California is accused of violating Section 512(a), an analysis of its past meal break activity may be performed. Investigators typically look back at the three or four years prior to the accusation and require the company to turn over all timekeeping records for its hourly employees during this period. If investigators determine that the company violates meal break laws, the company could be held liable and forced to pay penalties of 1 hour of wages for each violation to affected employees.

## Objective

The Chief Operating Officer at Company XYZ has tasked you with auditing the Company’s meal break policies. The COO is interested in whether the Company is providing its employees with meal breaks in compliance with California Labor Code Section 512(a). If there are shifts that are not in compliance, the COO is interested in identifying strategies to increase compliance. Further, the COO is interested in knowing if the Company’s past efforts to increase meal compliance have been successful and whether problems exist everywhere or are concentrated among certain people or groups. Finally, the COO is interested in learning financial implications of the meal break issues including the number and dollar amount of penalties owed to employees.

As the analyst in charge of the audit, your job is to determine Company XYZ’s compliance with Section 512(a) and to recommend operational changes to increase compliance. It could be that specific employees need to be coached to increase their compliance, or that you recommend operational changes for certain departments and not others, or that a certain issue affects all employees and departments equally. Your goal is to convince the COO that your recommendations will improve the Company’s compliance and reduce economic exposure to meal break laws.

## Data

You will be provided with a dataset that contains approximately three years of timekeeping records produced by Company XYZ. It contains daily timekeeping information for all full-time, hourly employees covering from July 2021 through October 2024. The Company extracted the data from their timekeeping system on October 3, 2024. In addition, you will be provided with a payroll dataset that will provide rates of pay for each employee over the time period.

#### Timekeeping:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Variable Name** | **Format** |
| Employee\_ID | Numeric |
| Department | Character |
| Location | Character |
| Supervisor | Character |
| Date | Date |
| PunchIn1 | Datetime |
| PunchOut1 | Datetime |
| PunchIn2 | Datetime |
| PunchOut2 | Datetime |
| PunchIn1 | Datetime |
| PunchIn3 | Datetime |
| PunchOut3 | Datetime |

#### Payroll:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Variable Name** | **Format** |
| Employee\_ID | Numeric |
| Pay Rate | Numeric |
| Year | Numeric |