

The August Review

The temporary help services industry employs workers whose salaries are paid by a temporary help services agency that supplies them, upon request, to employers looking to fill a temporary full- or part-time staffing need. These workers—also referred to as contingent, contractual, seasonal, or “temp” employees—may work under terms of employment ranging from a day or less to several years, and maintain a contractual employment relationship with their employment services firm and not with the requesting firm. Bureau economists Tian Luo, Amar Mann, and Richard Holden present in-depth analysis of the temporary help services industry in “The expanding role of temporary help services from 1990 to 2008.” The authors show that, during the period covered, temporary help workers in the United States have grown in importance as firms have increasingly relied on such workers to help them meet their ever-changing labor needs. The article also explains that the temporary help services industry has evolved from a source of temporary labor used primarily for routine clerical work to an important role as a bridge to permanent employment in a diversified base of industries, occupations, and geographic regions.

The Bureau’s American Time Use Survey (ATUS) collects information on how people spend their time. Specifically, the ATUS asks survey respondents to report sequentially what they did on the day before the interview. Robert W. Drago, research director at the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, and BLS’ Jay C. Stewart point out that the ATUS does not systematically ask survey respon-

dents for information on doing secondary activities concurrently with primary activities, or “multitasking.” In “Time-use surveys: issues in data collection on multitasking” the authors show that the ATUS is limited in what it can report on secondary activities because the survey collects this information only when the respondent voluntarily provides the information. They discuss a number of reasons that capturing data on secondary activities is important and pose two key questions: How is the information on secondary activities in the ATUS affected by the method of collection? and How does the collection of information on secondary activities affect the quality of primary-activity reports?

The Federal Government published the first Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) manual in 1977 and then revised it in 1980 in attempts to unify agencies’ independent collection of occupational data. Neither system, however, was universally adopted. In 1994, a cross-agency effort began in order to revise the system to make it more palatable, which culminated in a new edition published in 2000. A revision of the 2000 system was targeted for 2010. This issue of the *Review* wraps up with an article from Bureau economists Theresa Cosca and Alissa Emmel titled “Revising the Standard Occupational Classification system for 2010.” As the title implies, the article describes the process used to revise the 2000 SOC system for 2010, the scope and nature of the changes incorporated, new and improved features, and plans for implementation and future revisions. The SOC system, as many readers may be aware, is used for classifying all occupations in

the U.S. economy, including private, public, and military occupations, in order to provide a means to consistently organize occupational data.

People with disabilities and employment

The unemployment rate among people with disabilities in 2009 was 14.5 percent, compared with 9 percent among people who did not have a disability, according to figures released this month by BLS from the Current Population Survey (CPS). These figures mark the first time the Bureau has published [annual employment data for people with disabilities](#), which BLS began collecting in 2008. The data also indicate that the share of adults with disabilities who were employed last year was 19.2 percent, compared with 64.5 percent among adults without disabilities. This gap exists in part because people with disabilities tend to be older, and older people are less likely to be employed, regardless of disability status. The CPS, a household survey, asks respondents whether anyone in the household age 15 or older is deaf or has serious difficulty hearing; is blind or has serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses; has difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions, because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition; has difficulty walking or climbing stairs; has difficulty bathing or dressing; or has difficulty doing errands alone, such as visiting a doctor’s office or shopping, because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition. The news release regarding these data is available online at www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/disabl_08252010.htm. Additional information is available at www.bls.gov/cps. □