Maine's Standard Eligibility Policy Training Program

Evaluation Findings from Year 4
Maine's Standard Eligibility Policy
Training Program

Evaluation Findings from Year 4

July 2003 – June 2004

George Shaler, Evaluation Coordinator
Sally Ward, Manager

The authors are on the staff of the
Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service
Institute for Public Sector Innovation

This report made possible by a cooperative agreement between the
Maine Department of Health and Human Services
Bureau of Family Independence
&
University of Southern Maine
Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service
Institute for Public Sector Innovation

August 4, 2004
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword and Acknowledgements i

Section I: Executive Summary 1

Section II: Background 1

Section III: Implementation 4

Section IV: Evaluation 5
- A. Weekly Training Assessments 7
- B. Interactive Interview 11
- C. Six Month Follow-up Interviews 14
  - 1. New Specialists 14
  - 2. Supervisor Follow-up 17

Section V: Evaluation Findings-Highlights 19
Foreword

About the Muskie School of Public Service

The Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service educates leaders, informs public policy, and strengthens civic life through its graduate degree programs, research institutes and public outreach activities. By making the essential connection between research, practice, and informed public policy, the School is dedicated to improving the lives of people of all ages, in every county in Maine and every state in the nation.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the leadership provided by Barbara Van Burgel, Acting Director, Bureau of Family Independence, Maine DHHS, and the ongoing support of the Bureau’s Program Managers, Program Administrators, and Supervisors in creating and implementing the Standard Eligibility Policy Training Program.

We are especially grateful to the Muskie instructors and support staff for their dedication and hard work in carrying out the program goals:

- Patricia Toole, Training Specialist
- Tamara Blair, Project Specialist
- Bonnie Hopkins, Training Specialist
- Melanie LaPierre, Project Specialist
- Claire Walker, Administrative Assistant
Section I. Executive Summary

Maine’s Standard Eligibility Policy Training Program (SEPT) is a competency-based training program for new Family Independence Specialists hired by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. The program, now in its fourth year, evolved this year in response to Maine’s adoption of an Automated Client Eligibility System (ACES). SEPT was developed through a state-university partnership between the University of Southern Maine (USM) Muskie School of Public Service and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services.

During the 2003-2004 program year, the project staff also introduced the Interactive Interview as a way to observe a new specialists integrating, applying, and explaining program policy while using the ACES system. The demonstration is intended to check for understanding and application of key program requirements. A trainer observes the Interactive Interview demonstration; after the demonstration, trainers also look behind in the ACES training database to verify data entry and accuracy of eligibility determination results.

Thirty-four (34) new hires started the Standard Eligibility Policy Training Program. Of these, 31, from eight of the 16 local offices, graduated; three others are scheduled to complete the training by mid-August. Four of these offices (Augusta, Bangor, Portland, and Rockland) had 74% of the graduates. Offices in rural areas traditionally have low staff turnover and do not send many people to the centralized training. In addition, two Quality Assurance (QA) Supervisors and 15 QA Specialists attended policy modules in preparation for their adoption of an integrated approach to QA. In addition, the Standard Eligibility Policy Training Program provided 8,250 training hours of instruction (number in class * number of class hours).

Results from the weekly training assessments reveal that the budgeting exercises were the most helpful training activities in the Food Stamps, MaineCare and TANF modules. Likewise, budgeting was the subject people struggled with most in the Food Stamps, MaineCare, and TANF modules.

Among the three areas assessed in the Interactive Interview Demonstrations, the trainees scored higher on client service skills, followed by use of ACES, and then application of policy.

For this report both new specialist and their supervisors were interviewed six months after the specialists graduated. The specialist interviews indicate that most new specialists report few problems with the Food Stamps module; however, some grapple with the unemployed parent component in TANF and the complexity of programs in MaineCare. Several new employees added that more time spent on the computer during training would have benefited them.

The supervisors report that their new specialists are managing full caseloads and they are satisfied with the instruction their employees received.

Section II. Background

Maine’s Standard Eligibility Policy Training Program (SEPT) is a competency-based training program for new Family Independence Specialists hired by the Department of Health and Human Services. This paper describes the evaluation of the program, now in its fourth year, and its ongoing evolution in response to Maine’s adoption of an Automated Client Eligibility System (ACES). SEPT was developed through a state-
Maine's Standard Eligibility Policy Training Program

university partnership between the University of Southern Maine (USM) Muskie School of Public Service and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services.

Problem
In 1999, the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau of Family Independence (BFI), asked the Muskie School’s Institute for Public Sector Innovation for assistance creating a centralized Standard Eligibility Policy Training Program for new Family Independence Specialists. BFI administers the Food Stamp, MaineCare, and TANF programs. While program policy is written centrally, the programs are administered locally through sixteen regional offices; prior to this program, new specialists received training from their supervisors. BFI decided to adopt a standard training program to address several problems:

1. Supervisors were spending too much time training new staff;
2. Training quality varied greatly from office to office and supervisor to supervisor;
3. The pending development of an Automated Client Eligibility System (ACES) would magnify the first two problems; and
4. Specialists needed to learn policy for all three programs (Food Stamps, MaineCare, and TANF) in order to implement ACES. At the time, the majority of employees worked with specialized caseloads.

Design
In order to be successful, the training design had to meet several criteria:

1. Acknowledge a vital role for supervisors in the training process while significantly reducing the amount of time required of supervisors in the training process;
2. Incorporate a practical way to bridge centralized classroom training and application on the job;
3. Train new employees in all three programs and, at the same time, develop a schedule that permits new employees to begin training as close to the date of hire as possible; and
4. Ensure that the training cycle gives supervisors opportunity to observe work performance within the 6-month probationary period.

With these criteria guiding the process, the Muskie School worked with a design team of 8 BFI supervisors and the Program Managers for the Food Stamp, MaineCare, and TANF programs to design a standard training system; BFI asked the design team to base the training on the Bureau’s performance expectations for new specialists and the functions new specialists had to be able to carry out during the first six months of employment. The resulting program included two weeks of classroom training for each policy area, with a week in the local office after each week of central training. The training design addressed the guiding criteria in the following ways:

1. Supervisor Role
By eliminating supervisory responsibility to provide all the basic training content, the supervisor’s role became coaching and guiding the application of policy, reinforcing the materials studied in class, and helping new employees to learn local procedures and expectations. The training design included several tools and approaches to support the supervisor’s role and to ensure close communication between the trainers and supervisors.

Weekly training reports
Trainers send weekly reports to supervisors for each of their new employees; the reports outline the material covered during the training and highlight areas where the employee may need extra assistance during the Learning-at-Work (LaW) week.
Maine's Standard Eligibility Policy Training Program

Self assessments:
• After key components in each training module, employees complete self-assessments. The answers are reviewed in class as a recap of the component. Trainers correct the self-assessments to ensure trainees understand the concepts. Supervisors are encouraged to review all the self-assessments with their new employees during LaW weeks.

Oversee trainees' completion of Learning-at-Work activities:
• Learning-at-Work activities provide a structure for new employees to use in their local offices to reinforce material covered during classroom training. Supervisors oversee the LaW activities and review trainees’ work, a process that provides the supervisor with information about a trainee’s progress in learning to apply policy. Learning-at-Work weeks also give Supervisors an opportunity to train new Specialists in local procedures.

(2) Bridging policy and practice
In order to minimize the gap between classroom training and real-world application, the Standard Eligibility Policy Training Program alternates a week of central training with a week in the local office. During weeks in the office, trainees practice applying the information covered during training; they job-shadow experienced employees, observe interviews, complete Learning-at-Work activities, and perform some case-related function. This approach connects learning with performance expectations and ensures that both policy and application receive adequate attention.

Structured LaW Guides set forth a common set of field practice activities that complement each training module. LaW Guides were based on best practices used by local offices to help new employees learn how to do their jobs. For example, Muskie School staff worked with supervisors to clarify the goals of case readings and to develop a form to direct and document the new employee’s learning through case readings; as a result, Guides to Case Reading are included in the three LaW Guides.

(3) Train new employees in all three programs and begin training as close to the date of hire as possible
In order to meet this third criterion, the program was designed to permit new specialists to attend the three training modules in any order. The schedule consisted of one module per month; each module included two weeks of classroom training alternating with two weeks of Learning-at-Work. This approach necessitated repetition of some basic information in each module, such as the mission and purpose of BFI, confidentiality, verification methods, etc. This schedule prevailed for the first two years of the project.

When BFI adopted ACES in late 2002, the simple, flexible schedule was no longer viable. A new employee cannot use ACES without basic policy knowledge. Providing all the ACES training at the end was not an option because functions as basic as reading a case required knowledge of ACES. Moreover, after basic ACES navigation, each subsequent component of the ACES training builds on the previous step.

(4) Supervisors have opportunity to observe work performance within the 6-month probationary period
Although a new employee attends central classroom training during a significant portion of his/her probationary period, state policy requires supervisors to make decisions about a new specialist’s ability to do the job within the first six months of employment. The Standard Eligibility Policy Training Program includes several key provisions to support supervisors in that process:
• Trainers provide written feedback to supervisors after each training module.
Maine's Standard Eligibility Policy Training Program

- Supervisors are encouraged to review all self-assessments and classroom training activities as documentation of a new employee's learning.
- Each LaW activity includes a form to document learning, providing the supervisor with information about a specialist’s understanding of policy and procedures.
- Alternating weeks of training with weeks in the office provides supervisors with regular, predictable opportunities to observe new employees’ work.

Section III. Implementation

Prior to project implementation, Muskie staff met with all BFI supervisors to present an overview of the training and respond to questions. Supervisors reviewed drafts of the LaW Guides during this meeting and suggested changes and additions.

In the fall of 2000, the Muskie School hired two former Family Independence Specialists as trainers. Training was offered in monthly program-based modules from July 2000 through June 2002. At that time, the Bureau temporarily froze hiring during the statewide implementation of ACES. During the ensuing break in training, project staff revised the curriculum to include ACES in the training; a third trainer was hired to take the lead role in developing and providing the ACES training.

Evolution to incorporate ACES

In order to free up time in the schedule to accommodate the ACES training, repetition of basic information originally built into the curriculum was eliminated. In its place, project staff developed an introductory training module that covered basic information applicable to all the programs and an introduction to ACES. Other schedule changes were also made to accommodate ACES: Food Stamp training was reduced to one week (with no ACES component); ACES components were added to the MaineCare and TANF Modules; and, a final Integrated Policy Application week was added to address complex topics in ACES that require knowledge of policy for all three programs. As a result of all the changes, the total number of classroom training hours stands at 194 hours.

Competency-based interactive interview demonstration

With the introduction of ACES, the Interactive Interview emerged as the ideal opportunity to observe a new specialist integrating, applying, and explaining program policy while using the ACES system. During the Integrated Policy Application week, each new specialist conducts an Interactive Interview. Muskie School staff play the role of the clients. The demonstration is intended to check for understanding and application of key program requirements. A trainer observes the Interactive Interview demonstration; after the demonstration, trainers also look behind in the ACES training database to verify data entry and accuracy of eligibility determination results.

Trainees and their supervisors receive a comprehensive report on the Interactive Interview demonstrations. The reports focus on three areas: client service skills, application of policy, and use of ACES; the reports highlight strengths call attention to areas that need continued work.

Academic Credit

Project staff worked with the University of Maine at Augusta to create an opportunity for trainees to receive academic credit for the training. Trainees may receive 3 credits based on the classroom training and 4 credits for the Learning-at-Work based on review of portfolios. Credits apply toward either an Associate’s Degree or Bachelor’s Degree in Human Services.
Section IV. Evaluation


The following table includes the training schedule for the last six months of the 2003-04 program year. This schedule is indicative of what the training team has been delivering to new trainees over the previous 12 months. The schedule also reflects some overlap between training groups. During some weeks, the trainers were delivering two different modules.

Training Schedule - January through June, 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 5 - 9</td>
<td>Introduction and Overview of ACES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 12 - 16</td>
<td>Family Related MaineCare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 19 - 23</td>
<td>Learning-at-Work for Family Related Maine Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 26 - 30</td>
<td>SSI Related MaineCare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2 - 6</td>
<td>Introduction and Overview of ACES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2 - 6</td>
<td>Learning at Work for SSI Related Maine Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 9 - 13</td>
<td>TANF Week 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 16 - 20</td>
<td>Learning at Work for TANF Week 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 17 - 20</td>
<td>Special TANF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 23 - 27</td>
<td>TANF Week 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1 - 5</td>
<td>Special TANF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1 - 5</td>
<td>Introduction and Overview of ACES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 8 - 12</td>
<td>TANF Week 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 15 - 19</td>
<td>Learning at Work for TANF Week 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 22 - 26</td>
<td>Food Stamp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 30 - April 2</td>
<td>Integrated Policy Application and Interactive Interview Demonstration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 5 - 9</td>
<td>Introduction and Overview of ACES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 12 - 16</td>
<td>Family Related MaineCare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 19 - 23</td>
<td>Learning at Work for Family Related Maine Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 26 - 30</td>
<td>SSI Related MaineCare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 26 - 30</td>
<td>Introduction and Overview of ACES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 3 - 7</td>
<td>Learning at Work Week SSI related MaineCare &amp; Intro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 10 - 14</td>
<td>TANF Week 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 17 - 21</td>
<td>Learning at Work Week TANF Week 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 24 - 28</td>
<td>TANF Week 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 31 - June 4</td>
<td>Learning at Work Week TANF Week 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 7 - 11</td>
<td>TANF Week 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 14 - 18</td>
<td>Learning at Work Week TANF Week 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 21 - 25</td>
<td>Food Stamp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 28 - July 2</td>
<td>Learning at Work Week Food Stamp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 28 - July 2</td>
<td>Introduction and Overview of ACES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluation Plan
As the training curriculum has evolved over time, the evaluation process has also changed. An independent evaluator oversees a mixed-method evaluation process that currently includes:

1. Weekly written evaluations of all classroom training modules. All trainees complete these weekly assessments identifying areas of the training they enjoyed, those that challenged them, and areas they would like to revisit;
2. Six-month follow-up evaluation with trainees. An independent project specialist conducts the six-month follow-up interviews via telephone. The interviews focus on what programs and issues caused (or continue to cause) problems for the new specialists. In addition, the specialists are asked to think about what areas of the training merits more attention in light of any problems they have encountered on the job.
3. Six-month follow-up evaluation with the trainees’ supervisors. The same project specialist conducts the six-month follow-up interviews via telephone. The interviews focus on what programs and issues caused (or continue to cause) problems for their new specialists. In addition, the supervisors are asked to think about what areas of the training merits more attention in light of any problems they have observed in their new hires.
4. The recent adoption of Interactive Interview demonstrations greatly enhanced the training evaluation process. Observation of the interview demonstrations has been a very powerful way to learn which parts of the training are most effective and which need to be improved.

Since the Interactive Interview demonstration is a relatively new evaluation tool only a relative few number of interviews will be included in the evaluation results. The use of these data will be more widespread in the 2004-05 report.

2003-2004 Training Highlights
Graduates
During the 2003-2004 program year, 34 new hires started the Standard Eligibility Policy Training Program. Of these, 31, from eight of the 16 local offices, graduated; three others are scheduled to complete the training by mid-August. Four of these offices (Augusta, Bangor, Portland, and Rockland) had 74% of the graduates. Offices in rural areas traditionally have low staff turnover and do not send many people to the centralized training. In addition, two Quality Assurance (QA) Supervisors and 15 QA Specialists attended policy modules in preparation for their adoption of an integrated approach to QA. Some were integrated into regular training modules while others participated in training modules specifically tailored to QA needs.

Graduates by Office Location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Number of Graduates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Augusta</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biddeford</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calais</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribou</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellsworth</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmington</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Kent</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houlton</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewiston</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

August 4, 2004
Maine's Standard Eligibility Policy Training Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Machias</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockland</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanford</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skowhegan</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Paris</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>31</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hours of Training**
The Standard Eligibility Policy Training Program provided 8,250 training hours of instruction (number in class * number of class hours). The number of training hours by class is depicted in the table below.

Please keep in mind that training modules vary in length. The “Introduction and Overview of ACES,” Food Stamps, and the “Integrated Policy Application and Interactive Interview Demonstration” classes all generally run a week. MaineCare and TANF run two and three weeks respectively. In addition, the Integrated Policy Application and Interactive Interview Demonstration class was offered on a variable schedule after groups of trainees finished all the other modules.

### Training Hours by Class/Module

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class/Module</th>
<th>Training Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction and Overview of ACES</td>
<td>850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Stamps</td>
<td>1,025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine Care</td>
<td>2,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TANF</td>
<td>3,025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated Policy Application and Interactive Interview Demonstration</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,250</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the following sections, results from each evaluation instrument are presented. At the end of each section, a summary is provided. The instruments used are:

1. Weekly Training Assessments
2. Six month Follow-up Interviews with New Specialists
3. Six month Follow-up Interviews with the Supervisors of New Specialists
4. Interactive Interview Reports

**A. Weekly Training Assessments**
During the 2003-04 training year, 227 weekly training assessments were completed. The table below summarizes the number of assessments completed for each training module. Training assessments were typically not distributed for the Integrated Policy Application and Interactive Interview demonstration module.
The weekly training assessment consists of five questions. Each of the following questions has a four-part answer depending on the particular module.

#1. What training activity was most helpful?

**Introductory**

Twelve (50%) of the 24 respondents stated that the ACES related activities were most helpful. One of these individuals commented, “ACES training - it helped to make it less confusing whenever we talked about it.” Another specialist stated, “The computer based activities ... helped [to] illustrate the things we're learning.”

**Food Stamps**

Twenty-three (66%) of the 35 respondents mentioned budgeting activities. One of these trainees stated, “The budgeting unit was very helpful and well explained. The more we completed the more I understood.” Another stated, “… I liked that we worked on them for quite some time.”

Seven (20%) people said they enjoyed all the activities. This individual summed it for this group of respondents when s/he mentioned, “They all were helpful. ... They were very helpful and [the instructors were] VERY willing to answer any and all questions.”

**MaineCare**

Nineteen (26%) of the 74 respondents said the budgeting exercises were most helpful. In reference to the budgets, one person said, “All [exercises were] helpful... examples help with understanding.” Seventeen (23%) trainees stated the entire training was helpful. In support of this idea one new specialist offered, “All were very helpful as I am new to all programs...” Thirteen (18%) people liked the ACES activities. One new trainee added, “Putting the exercise case into ACES, doing the examples of budgeting MaineCare the hands on stuff is the most helpful for me.”

**TANF**

Seventeen (19%) of the 91 respondents mentioned budgeting activities. With some confidence this trainee stated, “Step parent budgeting. I think I did well with it.” Another 15 (16%) trainees said they liked all the activities. Fourteen (15%) new specialists enjoyed the ACES applications. One trainee offered the following suggestion on ACES applications, “Working on actual examples in ACES is good but there are parts (like the self employment part) that it would have helped to discuss before what they were...”

#2. What subject did you struggle with this past week? Please be specific.

**Introductory**

Eight (35%) of the 23 respondents stated they did not struggle with any topic. One of these individuals said, “I don't feel I struggled with any of it really. Everything was explained really well and was understandable.” Four people (17%) cited the hands-on computer work as problematic. The following
quote is indicative of this sentiment. “... computer hands on ... not enough time to think we just blew through it.”

**Food Stamps**
Fourteen (41%) of the 34 respondents indicated that they struggled with the budgeting activities. Among those giving this response one person stated, “A little bit of budgeting (particularly) with cap amounts and when to apply. At first I was confused if it applied to all.” Another specialist commented, “To some extent budgeting. Categorical was a little fuzzy. There was so much info at once it was somewhat overwhelming, but as the week went on it started coming together.” In addition, five (15%) of the new eligibility specialists grappled with change reporting vs. six month reporting.

**MaineCare**
Step-parent issues were mentioned by ten (15%) of the 68 people responding. One person claimed, “Step-parent budgeting - feel I have the concept but need to work on more of them.” Another person mentioned, “Step parent budgets & deeming - hard to determine who to "remove" for new configurations.” No other topic garnered much of a response.

**TANF**
Twenty (28%) of the 71 respondents said none or N/A. The following quote seems to indicate that this trainee understood the material as the training progressed. “Actually this week seemed better than the past few weeks.” On the other hand, ten (14%) new specialists struggled with budgets. One person suggested adding more examples. “The budgeting - not enough examples to practice enough to understand what I am supposed to do.”

# 3. If you could repeat a portion(s) of this week's training what would it be and why?

**Introductory**
Seven (35%) of the 20 respondents indicated that they would not repeat any portion. One new trainee mentioned, “I wouldn't repeat any of the training because it all makes sense for the most part.” Another person put forth, “I feel comfortable with what I've learned and do not feel as though I need to repeat anything.” No other topic generated more than two responses.

**Food Stamps**
Eleven (44%) of the 25 respondents indicated they would repeat the budgeting portion of the training. A couple people commented that they would like to repeat budget portions to further reinforce what they learned during the training. One new specialist offered, “Budgets to be sure I got the whole idea of when dates happen.”

**MaineCare**
Seventeen (27%) people said they repeat the budgeting portion of the training. One of these individuals indicated, “Budgeting... the more I deal with it, ... AT MY OWN PACE ... the better I will be. Many of the people who stated budgets specifically mentioned step-parent budgets. One of these individuals added, “Step parent budgeting - wanted more time on deeming income & allocations.” Lastly, thirteen (21%) of the 63 respondents stated none to this question.

**TANF**
Twenty (27%) of the 73 respondents said none. One person seemed to sum it for this portion of the trainee pool and said, “No repeat needed, all set.” Twelve (16%) trainees would repeat the ACES portion of the TANF training to get some more repetitions. Eight (11%) trainees would come back for more
Maine's Standard Eligibility Policy Training Program

budgeting.

#4. If you were charged with redesigning this week's curriculum what changes would you make and why? Would you add/subtract anything?

**Introductory**
Six (29%) of the 21 respondents said they would not make any changes. One person eloquently summed up this idea with the following quote, “I wouldn't make any changes. All of the instructors were open and helpful. ... if they didn't know the answer to a question they would find it.” Another five (24%) new specialists said the training was great as is.

**Food Stamps**
Thirteen (42%) of the 31 respondents indicated they would not make any changes to the curriculum. The following response from one specialist supports this idea. “No changes - feel with the amount of material covered class was set up well.” Another person added, “It works as it is. I wouldn't change it.”

Four (13%) respondents would add more budgeting activities. One specialist made the following constructive comment. I would add a little more time for budgeting on our own in class with the opportunity to ask questions as we're doing them - the 30+ examples in book.”

**MaineCare**
Sixteen (25%) of the 65 respondents would not make any changes. One person who liked it as is said, “I thought the entire training was very helpful. I have been working with ACES since Sept. 2002 and have learned a lot more about ACES [at this training].” Another person succinctly stated, “I would not re-design anything.” Nine (14%) people stressed that they would like to see policy discussions integrated more with computer applications.

**TANF**
Thirty-one (46%) of the 67 respondents, nearly half, responded by saying no changes. One person offered, “I wouldn’t re-design anything.” Thirteen (19%) trainees had suggestions about how this module should be sequenced. Most of these individuals suggested that ACES be better integrated into the training instead of waiting until the end to introduce it. This quote sums of this feeling. “Perhaps integrate computer work on a daily basis rather than at the end.”

#5. Any other comments?

**Introductory**
Seven (64%) of the 11 respondents praised the instructors. One person summed up the feelings of those in the introductory sessions when s/he said, “Teachers are patient, encourage questions. The instructor appears to pick up on difficulties a student may have.” In addition, three praised the training as evidenced by the following statement. “I enjoyed the training ... I have learned how to do things differently and have learned new ways.”

**Food Stamps**
Thirteen (81%) of the 16 respondents praised the instructors and/or the training. One person said, “[The instructors] did a great job. They know their work well and knew how to get it across to all. Thank you.” Another added the following praise, “Teachers (trainers) are very patient and willing to help in any way they can.”
MaineCare
Eighteen (53%) of the 34 people responding to this question praised the trainers and/or the instruction. This appreciation is summed up in the following quote, "Thanks for your patience and clear teaching on confusing subjects [the instructor]!" Another eight (24%) people stated they enjoyed the training. In support of this theme one person added, "A lot of information but I feel it is coming together at an acceptable rate. I am looking forward to the 2 weeks at home for the info to gel..."

TANF
Twelve (27%) of the 44 respondents made compliments about the training. Indicative of this sentiment was the following quote, "This week was great. I felt positive and felt like I understood. ... Thank you very much for everything!" Another eight (18%) singled out the trainers. While offering praise for the instructors, this person also took time to critique his/her classmates. "On a whole, I find the instructors & training excellent..." Lastly, six (14%) people indicated that the module had contained a lot of information. One slightly overwhelmed person added, "This week felt like a lot of information [and] it was tiring for some reason [with] the night time reading... maybe because it is at the end of many weeks down here."

Section Summary
Budgeting exercises were the most helpful training activities in the Food Stamps, MaineCare and TANF modules. Likewise, budgeting was the subject people struggled with most in the Food Stamps, MaineCare, and TANF modules. If new specialists could repeat a portion of the training it would be the budgeting exercises. If empowered, many trainees would not make any changes to the curriculum. Lastly, most of the trainees offered praise for the instructors, training materials, and/or the training in general.

Interactive Interviews
As mentioned earlier, the curriculum instructors now use Interactive Interview Demonstration as a way to observe whether a new specialist is integrating, applying, and explaining program policy while using the ACES system.

The evaluations are based on expectations about how well a new employee could manage an interactive interview. The three areas evaluated during the demonstrations were:

- Client service skills
- Application of policy
- Appropriate use of ACES

Explanation of rating scale:
5 = Demonstrates a commendable understanding
4 = Demonstrates above average understanding
3 = Demonstrates average understanding
2 = Demonstrates below average understanding
1 = Demonstrates little or no understanding or did not do

Please keep in mind that the means are based on twenty-eight (28) interviews. In some cases, not every trainee was graded on a particular question. Also, this process is highly subjective. The reviews were performed by different people. This instrument has not been tested for inter-rater reliability.
### 1. Client Service Skills:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greets client in waiting room.</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offers client the opportunity to apply for range of BFI programs.</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains that the computer screen will be hidden sometimes to protect confidentiality of other clients.</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains purpose of the interview.</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimates how long the interview may take.</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks an opening question(s) before getting into ACES (For example: “What brings you here today?” or “Please tell me about the types of benefits you want to learn about today.”)</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turns screen so client cannot see it during client searches</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates appropriate body language and tone throughout the interview.</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides opportunity for client to ask questions.</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides opportunity for client to answer all questions without the making assumptions about the client’s answer (e.g., asks “Are you a citizen?” rather than saying “You are a citizen, right?”)</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responds to client questions professionally. (For example: says, “Let me try to explain this” instead of “It’s really complicated.” or pauses instead of saying “Calm down.”)</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks clarifying questions or paraphrases answers to make sure s/he understands the information given by the client.</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2. Application of Policy:

#### a) Food Stamp policy explanations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HEAP</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Food Stamps</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What FS can/cannot be used for</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBT</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### b) MaineCare policy explanations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TPL compliance</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retroactive coverage</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MaineCare Card – what it looks like, etc.</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### c) TANF policy explanations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TANF Orientation</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PaS</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Limits</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASPIRE Participation</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EITC</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lump Sum</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer Alternative Aid</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains family contract</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBT</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Deposit</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Maine’s Standard Eligibility Policy Training Program

#### d) General policy information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>17</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explains confidentiality of information provided by client</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains client rights</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains reporting responsibilities</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains fraud penalties</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prints application document for applicant’s signature at close of interview</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prints appropriate program specific pages</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviews list of verification needed, if applicable</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refers to other services if appropriate (e.g., food pantry, EA, etc.)</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3. Use of ACES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Records all client information appropriately in ACES:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performs client search/register functions appropriately</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completes Individual Demographics Summary page accurately for all case members (e.g. demographics, Client Detail 2, citizenship, etc.)</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completes Case Relationship page accurately (including Start Dates)</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completes the Income Worksheet when recording earned income</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Records all Asset information via Asset Summary page or Notes</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Records all Expense information via Expense Summary page or Notes</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates Appointment records, as necessary</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides adequate explanations, gathers information, and completes Program Specific pages accurately</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Demonstrates understanding of Dates and Verifications:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses appropriate Start/End Dates throughout the Interview</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completes Verification Status appropriately</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates Verification Due Dates, as needed</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Demonstrates understanding of letter functionality:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates the Application Document</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates the Program Brochure</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates the Verification Checklist, as needed</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates other Program Specific letters, as needed</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtains signatures on letters, as needed</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suppresses letters, as needed</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Determines and accepts eligibility, as appropriate:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determines eligibility for the appropriate periods</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

August 4, 2004
Maine's Standard Eligibility Policy Training Program

- Ensures benefit amounts are correct by examining the Eligibility Results Details prior to accepting benefits. Mean = 2.74
- Demonstrates ability to troubleshoot the case, as needed. Mean = 3.14
- Receives correct final benefit. (Pro-rated and Prospective Periods) Mean = 3.11
- Discusses eligibility determination results with the clients Mean = 3.77

Section Summary
Within the “Client Service Skills” section, the scores ranged from a high of 4.89 (Greets clients in waiting room) to a low of 3.89 (Explains purpose of interview). Only two of the 12 questions generated a mean below 4.00. Seven of the questions had means of 4.50 and above.

In the “Application of Policy” section, mean scores were a bit lower than the previous section. Scores ranged from a high of 4.86 (prints application document for applicant’s signature at close of the interview) to a low of 1.71 (for a policy explanation of the earned income tax credit). The results suggest that trainees struggled most with the section that deals with TANF policy explanations. In addition to the grappling with the explanation of the earned income tax credit, new specialists scored lower when it came to explaining lump sum payments, ASPIRE participation, time limits, and direct deposit. New specialists performed better on general policy information. Among eight items in the sub-section, only one indicator had a mean of 3.5 or lower.

On “Use of ACES” section, the scores ranged from a high of 5.0 (creates the application document) to a low of 2.74 (Ensures benefit amounts are correct by examining the Eligibility Results Details prior to accepting benefits). Trainees did well on the “Records all client information appropriately in ACES” and “Demonstrates understanding of letter functionality” sub-sections. In general, the “Demonstrates understanding of Dates and Verification) and “Determines and accepts eligibility, as appropriate” sub-sections generated lower mean scores.

In summary, trainees did well with the client service skills portion of the IID. The application of policy, especially TANF policy, created the most challenges for the new workers.

Six-Month Follow-up Interviews
As part of the evaluation process, both trainees and their supervisors are interviewed six months after they complete the training to establish how they are faring as new eligibility specialists. These interviews allow the new workers and their supervisors to reflect on what aspects of the training were most and least helpful.

New Specialists
During the spring of 2004, 18 (86%) of the 21 eligibility specialists who completed the training in October and December were interviewed over telephone by a Muskie School Project Specialist. Specialists who graduated in the last half of the program year will be interviewed during the 2004-05 program year. Those interview results will be included in next year’s report.

Findings
1. What areas related to Food Stamps do you still find difficult?
 Seven (39%) of the 18 respondents said none to the question above. One of these seven said, “I haven’t been having any problems at all that I know of.” Three (17%) new specialists mentioned 6 month reporting. One of these specialists offered, “Just the changes with the six month reporting and stuff,
Maine’s Standard Eligibility Policy Training Program

because I know they don’t have to report anything, but they do for the other programs and you can’t ask questions anymore.

1A. Who do you turn to for advice and help with Food Stamps?
Among this group of new specialists slightly more of them turn to their co-workers than their supervisors. With more complicated questions, specialists look to office supervisors.

2. What areas related to TANF do you still find difficult?
Unlike Food Stamps, TANF produced some difficulty for a majority of new specialists. Twelve (67%) of the 18 respondents indicated the unemployed parent program. One of these individuals mentioned, “UP (Unemployed Parent) of course. Non-mutual and mutual children, that whole issue.” Two new specialists mentioned transitional issues. One of these specialists added, “Transitional [issues] -- we didn’t really get any training in it at all.”

2A. Who do you turn to for advice and help with TANF?
Among the 18 respondents, co-workers were mentioned 14 times while supervisors were cited 13 times.

3. What areas related to MaineCare do you still find difficult?
Five (28%) of the new workers indicated differentiating between the many MaineCare programs as challenging. One of these workers indicated, “I think MaineCare is difficult just because there are so many programs, so I really can’t give you a definite on that one.” Another new specialist added, “Differentiating between the different programs and the rules that apply to the different programs.” On the other hand, five new workers said none to this question.

3A. Who do you turn to for advice and help with MaineCare?
Similar to TANF, co-workers were mentioned 14 times while supervisors were cited 13 times.

4. What areas related to ACES do you turn to others for help with most often?
Five (28%) people reported no problems with ACES. One person with some prior experience stated, “I’m pretty good with ACES, did ACES as a clerk and don’t usually have a problem with ACES.” Four (22%) people mentioned ACES computer system/program related problems. One of these individuals declared, “Just wacky error messages that are unusual and we know that they should not come up… .”

4A. Who do you turn to for advice and help with ACES?
With ACES, supervisors were mentioned 15 times, while co-workers were cited eight times.

5. Now that you have some experience, which topics would you add to the Standard Eligibility Policy Training Program?
Seven (39%) of the 18 new specialists indicated none or “Don’t Know” to the question. Two (11%) people suggested more time on TANF, specifically unemployed parent issues.

5A. Which areas would you want to spend more time on?
Six (33%) people mentioned some aspect of the unemployed parent program. One of these new workers acknowledged, “Again the Unemployed Parent Primary Wage Earner part of it.” Three (17%) new trainees cited some facet of ACES. Of these three, one suggested, “Maybe just the ACES training a little bit more….” Lastly, two (11%) people each cited budgets and MaineCare.
5B. Less time on?
Nine (50%) of the 18 respondents said none to question above. One of these individuals mentioned, “Nothing, everything was time well spent.” Three (17%) people said they would want to spend less time on Pickles. Two others would prefer less time on DWBS and DACS. Two people stated the week should be lengthened while one person indicated the introductory week was not productive. One of the people requesting more time said, “I think it should be extended and be more lengthy. A lot of things could have been explained more. I’ve heard it from other people, there wasn't sufficient amount of time to spend on some areas…”

6. Which areas of your job do you feel most confident in?
Eight (44%) of the 18 new trainees reported they feel comfortable dealing with clients and/or the client interview/application process. This idea was echoed in the following quote. “I think I’m really patient with my clients. Sometimes they don’t want to be as cooperative as I would like them to be, but I am very patient with them.”

7. What is the best way for you to learn and apply new policy/technical skills on the job?
Nearly all the respondents indicated a hands-on approach or on-the-job training.

8. What could have been done in the central portion of the policy training to help you more easily learn to do the job of a Family Independence Specialist?
ACES and/or more computer time was mentioned by five (28%) of the respondents. One of these individuals declared, “I would say the ACES training for me. If I had gotten that more solidly I wouldn't have struggled as much for the first couple of months.” Four (22%) people indicated nothing or don’t know. Three (17%) people cited more job shadowing even though this is part of the LaW weeks, rather than the centralized portion of the training.

9. What could have been done in your office to help you more easily learn to do the job of a Family Independence Specialist?
Six (33%) people said nothing. Three (17%) new specialists would like to have worked with a mentor or had the opportunity to job shadow. One more desperate specialist said the following, “I had to beg and cry for people to take me out front with them to shadow. That was very difficult. I put up signs…”Lastly, two (11%) specialists suggested more supervisor help and another two (11%) trainees said having more staff in their office would have helped with their caseloads.

10. Approximately what percent of the Learning-at-Work activities did you complete? [ %]
Among the 17 respondents, the average was 84%. There was only two respondents who said 50% or less. The supervisors were asked the same question. Their mean was 78%.

10A. Did your supervisor review these activities with you? [y/ n]
67% (12 of 18) of the respondents said “Yes.” Likewise, 67% of the supervisors said they reviewed the materials with their new workers.

10B. Overall, how helpful were the Learning-at-Work activities? [on a scale of 1-5?]
The mean score was 3.7. The mean score for the supervisors was 4.1.

11. In general, how helpful was it to conduct the Interactive Interview Demonstration? [on a scale of 1-5]
The mean score was 4.1.
11A. How have you used the information in the report on your Interactive Interview Demonstration?
Thirteen (72%) of the trainees reviewed it at least briefly. Some continue to keep it in mind as they carry out their job duties. One of these individuals stated, “When I got it back in the beginning I looked it over very well and tried to work on the areas I had problems with. It was very informative.”

Section Summary
Most new specialists report few problems with the Food Stamps module; however, some grapple with the unemployed parent component in TANF and the complexity of programs in MaineCare. Most specialists interviewed turn to both colleagues and supervisors for problems with any of the three modules and ACES.

If they could add topics to the training, a significant number of trainees would add more time on unemployed parent issues. Several workers added that more time spent on the computer during training would have benefited them. Nearly half of the specialists report feeling the most comfortable with the client interview application process.

Most specialists complete or come close to completing all the Learning-at-Work activities. These activities are viewed favorably by the specialists. Lastly, most specialists find the Interactive Interview Demonstration helpful and many refer to it after the training.

Supervisor Follow-up
In the spring of 2004, the supervisors of 18 of the 21 eligibility specialists who completed the Standard Eligibility Policy Training in October and December were interviewed over telephone by a Muskie School Project Specialist.

Findings
1. What percent of a caseload does the new employee currently manage? Based on the percentages provided, the mean was 100%

1A. Does this meet your expectations? Who do you turn to for advice and help with Food Stamps? Seventeen (94%) of the 18 supervisors said “Yes.”

2. What areas related to FS does your new employee still find difficult? Fifteen (83%) of the 18 supervisors said none/no problem to this question. One supervisor mentioned, “Actually she does quite well, she’s probably comfortable in all aspects of it.” No other topic generated more than one response.

3. What areas related to TANF does your new employee still find difficult? Seven (39%) of the 18 supervisors said none. One supervisor declared, “I don’t get questions on TANF.” On the other hand, four (22%) supervisors said step-parent budgeting. Of these supervisors one indicated, “…Same issue she has once in awhile like all staff --step-parent budgeting. I also get the same questions from seasoned staff.”

4. What areas related to MaineCare does your new employee still find difficult? Ten (56%) of the 18 supervisors said none to this question. One of these supervisors mentioned, “I think MaineCare is going well for her. She came back to the office and learned transitional and deductibles, but doing a good job.” Three (17%) supervisors cited ACES related problems. One such problem was stated in
the following quote, “... because of ACES doing most of the work for them, they can't differentiate which program is working for them for each case.”

5. **What areas related to ACES does the Specialist still find difficult?**
Ten (56%) of the 18 mentioned none to this question. Most supervisors who said none indicated that when there was a problem it was usually with the system and not the employee. The following quote is emblematic of this idea. “When you have problems with ACES not functioning properly and they are not getting the answer they are suppose to get... [it is] ... not the employee...” Workarounds were cited by two (11%) supervisors.

6. **If you could send the Specialist back for a day or two of training, what subjects would you like him/her to review?**
Four (22%) supervisors said none. One supervisor said, “Nothing that she needs to review, she is doing really, really great.” Three supervisors (17%) stated transitional issues. One of these supervisors declared, “I don’t think the training deals with transitional enough, doing the reports... I would send her so she could come back and share her knowledge with all of us.”

7. **Have you encountered situations in which regional business practice conflicts with what the Specialist learned in training?**
Twelve (67%) of the 18 supervisors said “No.”

7A. **If so, please provide specific examples and what you did to resolve them?**
Among the six supervisors who answered yes to question #7, two (11%) of them mentioned the use of “three month prior dates” for case establishment in ACES.

8. **Approximately what percent of the Learning-At-Work activities did the Specialist complete?**
Based on 17 responses, the mean was 78%. By comparison, the mean for the new specialists was 84%.

8A. **Did you review these activities with him/her?**
Twelve (67%) of the 18 supervisors answered “Yes.” Likewise, 67% of the trainees said their supervisors reviewed the materials with them.

8B. **Overall, how helpful are the Learning-at-Work activities on a scale from 1-5? (1=Poor and 5=Great)**
The mean was 4.1. By comparison, the mean for the new specialists was 3.7.

9. **How have you used the information in the report on the Specialist's Interactive Interview Demo?**
Six (33%) of supervisors have not used this information as of yet, though many were not the employees’ supervisors at the time of the training. Four (22%) supervisors reported they used the information in making determinations about probationary status. One of these supervisors mentioned, “I keep a copy in the file and review prior to the performance appraisal. I feel they were important.” Another four supervisors stated they reviewed the information with their new employees.

9A. **How well does the report reflect your priorities about how a new employee conducts an Interview? Explain.**
Nearly all the supervisors stated that the report reflected their priorities. This quote is indicative of this sentiment. “I felt they were looking for the right stuff and it gives the supervisor an idea of how
comfortable the employee was and how they might conduct interviews once they have a caseload.” Three
(17%) of the supervisors mentioned that the reports pointed out some picky issues, but it still met their
priorities. “I think it gives us a basis of where to look. It is very knitpicking, but that is ok. As long as we
know that, I know where to begin with someone and where their problem areas might be.”

10. How do you help your new employees learn to apply policy that they have studied in the central
portion of the training?
Five (28%) of the supervisors cited question and answer sessions with the new employee. One of these
supervisors stated, “We had four people training at once so we scheduled a couple of meetings a week in the
a.m. and they brought in their real cases with questions and we all went over as a group.” Four (22%)
supervisors employ case reviews/readings as a way to help new employees learn and apply policy. Another
four (22%) supervisors indicated they review policy and procedures when their new worker has questions.

10. How do you track the progress new employees are making in learning to apply policy correctly?
Thirteen (72%) of the 18 supervisors cited case readings. One of these supervisors mentioned, “… I look at
what is [she/ he] working on... That is how I keep aware of what is going on. That is no different for the
new worker than the experienced worker.” The only other techniques mentioned more than once were
talking with the specialist and phone calls.

11. What do you need in order to support your new employee?
Five (28%) supervisors said having more workers with lower caseloads. One supervisor said the following
of his/ her new employee, “He is one of 12 or 13 people. What would really be nice if he wasn’t one of 12
or 13 people. If there were less workers to supervise for each supervisor.” Two (11%) supervisors would
like refresher trainings and another two (11%) would welcome additional feedback from the Muskie
trainers.

Section Summary
All supervisors report that their new specialists are managing full caseloads. They also report that for the
most part their new charges are not experiencing any problems with Food Stamps, MaineCare and TANF
programs or the ACES computer system. Most supervisors appear satisfied with the instruction their
employees received.

Most supervisors find the LaW activities helpful. Most supervisors report that they had not used the report
on their specialists’ interactive interview demonstration.

Question and answer session appear to be the most common way supervisors help their new employees
learn to apply new policy. Many supervisors gauge their specialists’ progress by reviewing their case notes.
Lastly, several supervisors said they could offer their new employees more help if they had more workers
with smaller caseloads.

Section V. Evaluation Findings - Highlights

Training Assessment
> Budgeting exercises were the most helpful training activities in the Food Stamps, MaineCare and
TANF modules.
Likewise, budgeting was the subject people struggled with most in the Food Stamps, MaineCare, and TANF modules. If new specialists could repeat a portion of the training it would be the budgeting exercises. Most trainees feel the curriculum is fine as is. Most trainees offered praise for the instructors, training materials, and/ or the training in general.

Interactive Interviews
- Among the three areas assessed in the Interactive Interviews, the trainees scored higher on client service skills, followed by use of ACES, and then application of policy.

New Eligibility Specialist Follow-up
- Most new specialists report few problems with the Food Stamps module; however, some grapple with the unemployed parent component in TANF and the complexity of programs in MaineCare.
- If they could add topics to the training, a significant number of trainees would add more time on unemployed parent issues.
- Several workers added that more time spent on the computer during training would have benefited them.
- Nearly half of the specialists report feeling the most comfortable with the client interview application process.

Supervisor Feedback
- All supervisors report that their new specialists are managing full caseloads.
- Most supervisors appear satisfied with the instruction their employees received.
- Most supervisors find the LaW activities helpful.
- Question and answer session appear to be the most common way supervisors help their new employees learn to apply new policy.