

The Graduate School and University Center  
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**Changing Demographics of the Taxi Workforce:  
Implications for Taxi Driver Education**

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Abstract  
Changing Demographics of the Taxi Workforce:  
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In 1984, 74% of the incoming drivers entering the workforce of the New York City taxi industry were immigrants born outside of the U.S. with the greatest numbers, in ascending order, coming from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, Korea, the Soviet Union and Pakistan. In 1988 the survey of students entering the New York City Taxi Driver Institute (NYCTDI) was replicated. It revealed that the immigrant population had increased to 86% with significant numbers still coming from Haiti but with an even higher percentage entering from the countries of the Indian sub-continent. Administrators at both sites of the NYCTDI utilized findings about students' birthplaces and languages to restructure the training sections on driver-passenger relations. The data was used to address cultural differences that could interfere with providing an acceptable level of passenger service. The immigrant population has increased markedly in the taxi workforce in urban areas throughout the U.S. necessitating language screening tests as well as longer driver training programs. In New York City the training program was lengthened from 20 to 40 hours. The challenge of preparing new immigrants to meet the demands of passengers in a complex urban area is enormous. An updated survey of the demographics of the incoming taxi workforce in New York City was carried out over a six month period starting in February, 1992. Basic demographic data collected included place of birth, languages spoken, length of time in the Metropolitan area, level of education and previous work experience. Current and previous requirements for taxi driver training programs are discussed including program length and content as well as the recently instituted language screening test.

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## Changing Demographics of the Taxi Workforce: Implications for Taxi Driver Education

### Background

The taxi industry is the leading private sector provider of passenger transportation. Taxi driving has been a traditional route of upward mobility for entry level workers in the United States as well as in other Western countries. Despite the labor intensiveness of the taxi industry, little demographic information existed about its workforce. In 1984, the Center for Logistics and Transportation carried out a landmark study of the demographics of incoming drivers in conjunction with an evaluation of a newly established taxi driver training program. It was found that 74% of the incoming taxi workforce in 1984 were recent immigrants to the United States who knew little about the city's geography and its regulations. The shift in population from native New Yorkers to newcomers to the area was a factor in the requirement for a mandated taxi driver training program by the Office of the Mayor of New York.

The taxi driver has been celebrated and berated by all manner of media. The legendary New York cabbie is expected to tell the tourist everything there is to know about what to do and see in the "Big Apple," while discoursing upon all manner of current topics, from politics to sports. Passengers expecting the mythic taxi driver, as exemplified by the sit-com "Taxi," have been discomforted to meet drivers who were often new to the City and who lacked a facility in English. This made it difficult to carry on the dialogue anticipated by exposure to a generation of comedians and actors who found taxi drivers an ideal foil for comedic roles. In reality, the typical driver today is a recent immigrant who has come to the City to seek his fortune and starts by hitting the mean streets in a demanding and difficult entry-level job.

When the 1984 study was completed, administrators at the taxi driver training program put the findings about students' birthplaces and languages to good use. The training module on driver-passenger relations was revised to respond to cultural differences that could interfere with providing an acceptable level of passenger service. An update of the survey carried out in 1988 showed that the immigrant population had increased to approximately 86%. The composition of the driver population continued to change while a rapidly rising level of complaints about drivers who were not knowledgeable about the streets of New York persisted. Although the training program has been expanded, the challenge of preparing an increasing number of new immigrants to meet the demands of passengers in a complex urban area is enormous. In light of the importance of tourism to the City's faltering economy, the Mayor's Office and the Taxi & Limousine Commission (TLC) continue to stress the need to improve quality service to all

passengers. The high driver turnover and the entry of increasing numbers of recent immigrants to the workforce supported the need for a comprehensive training program that would prepare new drivers to provide quality service. However, the driver-passenger relations module could not be utilized efficiently by curriculum planners and faculty because of a lack of descriptive data about the continually changing workforce demographics. Such information would enable them to address the broad spectrum of cultures represented in the classroom during the driver-passenger relations module in which the instructor focuses on how to deal with the public including difficult and demanding passengers. During the role playing sessions especially there is enormous opportunity to illustrate the variety of problems drivers face. At this point in the program the gender issue can be dealt with directly but always within the context of the demands of the taxi business.

### Significance of the problem

The taxi driver's role in enhancing New York City's image has led to concern with continuing complaints about poor taxi service, including a lack of knowledge about the City, discourteous drivers, and, most recently, reckless driving which has led to accidents. The taxi driver has been called, "The City's First Ambassador." Often the driver is the first person to greet a newcomer to the Metropolitan area. He has an opportunity to set a positive or negative image that the visitor will carry with him when he returns home. Clearly, the City hopes that the visitor will want to return to New York for both business and pleasure. It is also recognized that the taxi industry brings in needed revenues while providing New Yorkers, as well as tourists, with a broad range of transportation services. Demographic data describing the incoming taxi workforce will allow program staff to refocus and adapt the driver-passenger relations module to respond to the changing cultural values of newcomers to the taxi workforce. The instructors can then reinforce the notion that the primary function of a taxi driver is to listen courteously to the passenger or "fare," regardless of gender, and take her/him quickly and safely to the requested destination. The bottom line that must be repeatedly stated is that improved service to passengers pays off at the fare box---a win-win situation for both passengers and drivers.

### History of New York City's Taxi Industry

In the public's eye, New York City's paratransit services are symbolized by the "yellow taxi." In reality, the "yellow" or "medallion cab" is but a small part of the total paratransit package in the New York metropolitan area; however, it is the only vehicle which can legally pick-up street hails. There are 11,787 medallion cabs, while there are between 25-30,000 licensed For-Hire-Vehicles

(FHV) plus an undetermined number of "gypsies" or unlicensed vehicles. Factors that may have contributed to the loss of experienced drivers from the medallion vehicle to the FHV include the taxi industry's shift to leasing from payment of a minimum salary plus commission, which was the dominant method of payment until the late '70s and early '80s. In the lease arrangement there were no opportunities for advancement via increased commissions; thus, drivers who planned to stay in the industry got their own medallions or left the industry. Another disincentive for experienced drivers was the removal from medallion vehicles of radio equipment for dispatch services in February, 1987. It is of interest to note that approximately 8000 Black Car radio groups were established in 1987. This very likely included many former yellow dispatch services. The factors cited above, along with changing service needs of passengers in the rapidly growing economy of the '80s, may have encouraged the proliferation of FHV services, which continue to grow.

The TLC is the administrative and regulatory agency for all private car services, both "yellow" and FHV's. Applicants for a "hack license," New Yorkese for "taxi license," register at the TLC. They must be at least 19 years of age and must present a valid New York State Driver's License along with evidence of passing a recent physical examination. The agency then administers an English proficiency test and a fingerprint test.. If he meets all the requirements listed above, the applicant can then sign up for the taxi training program. The up-front cost to the applicant is \$258, which includes a licensing fee of \$62, \$44 to process fingerprints, and \$150 for the standard training program. An extended course for applicants requiring assistance with English is \$275, while a short course for more qualified applicants is \$70. Finally, after passing the final examination of the taxi school and getting a hack license, the new driver has to decide on leasing from a fleet or mini-fleet where the daily cost ranges from \$71 to \$100 for a twelve-hour shift. The fees are higher for Friday and Saturday nights. And if the cabby decides that this is the business for him and decides to buy a medallion, he must start saving his earnings---the current cost of a medallion is \$140,000.

#### New York City Taxi Drivers Institute (NYCTDI)

The New York City Taxi Drivers Institute (NYCTDI) administers the training program on two sites, LaGuardia Community College/CUNY and Federation Employment and Guidance Services (FEGS), in order to accommodate the large number of students and their different requirements in terms of time. Classes are offered on week-days and evenings as well as week-ends. The number of classes scheduled for a given time slot, e.g., Monday-Thursday, depends upon the number of students registered for that particular period of time. Class size ranges from 15-28. Classes are made up primarily of new applicants, which includes a category of "sponsored drivers" who have

been screened by the fleet organization. The latter are permitted to drive prior to getting a hack license; however, the temporary license is taken away if they do not pass the test given at the conclusion of the course. A small number of experienced drivers who do not renew their licenses within the required time period also have to take the training program.

Faculty at the NYCTDI are required to have had experience working in the taxi industry. The initial program was 20 hours long. In January 1990 the program was expanded to 40 hours, which included an 8-hour bus tour to provide prospective drivers with hands-on information about City landmarks and major thoroughfares. The extended program provided an opportunity to increase the time spent on two critical areas in terms of passenger complaints, geography and driver-passenger relations. The school also began to address the provision of services to the handicapped, which included sensitivity training along with physical assistance to a broad spectrum of disabled passengers. Topics covered in the 32-hour Base Program follow:

- Orientation to school and procedures
- Overview of the taxi industry
- Rules and regulations
- Rule violations and penalties
- Traffic and traffic regulations
- Hack Inspector
- Tripsheet, taximeter
- Metered fares and flat rates
- Out-of-borough fares
- Driver -passenger relations; role-playing
- Grid system of NYC
- How to use the 5-borough map
- Finding addresses in NYC
- Central Park
- Airports, access and egress
- Map reading skills
- Water crossing and outer boroughs
- Defensive driving
- Accident avoidance
- Substance abuse
- Driver security

In June 1992 an English Proficiency exam was instituted to assess an applicant's ability to speak and understand "Taxi English," that is language, such as, street names and numbers and names of landmarks. which refer directly to an ability to respond to passenger directions. The English screening instrument, which utilizes a tape recording and a questionnaire, measures the applicant's listening and writing skills as related to taxi specific words and situations, such as, numerical addresses and street names. Subsequently, a three-track program was created to provide optimum training for new entrants. Different tracks were developed in response to the TLC's concern about

drivers who had difficulty communicating with passengers but had sufficient understanding of English to take the training program; it also accommodated requests over time by the Metropolitan Taxicab Board of Trade, which represents the fleet operations, for a shorter program that would entice native or long-term New Yorkers to enter the industry. The three curricula, all of which include the Base Program, or parts thereof as described above, follow:

(1) Extended Course - 80 hours (72 class hours, 8 hour bus tour) - The Base Program is Covered more slowly over a longer time in separate classes to accommodate students with a limited facility in English. The focus is on dialogue and industry vernacular, e.g., "fare", "hail", etc. Although English skills are emphasized this is NOT an English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum; rather English skills are taught and stressed in the context of the curriculum;

(2) Standard Course -40 hours (32 class hours. 8 hour. bus tour);and,

(3) Accelerated Course -14 hours - (7 class hours,7 hour bus tour ) - Prior to entry to the Accelerated Course the applicant must take and pass the Advanced Placement Qualifying test which evaluates knowledge of geography in Manhattan as well as the five boroughs, e.g., directions of one-way avenues, major landmarks; applicants are also required to demonstrate a high level of English proficiency, including reading comprehension and spoken dialogue comprehension. Since there are only 2 or 3 students per week in this category they attend the sessions in the Standard Course that focus on rules and regulations.

The bus tour is conducted by one of the NYCTDI instructors. It covers the following topics:

Observe working taxi drivers to learn to seek out business opportunities;  
Locations of taxi stands, rest stops, points of interest;  
Understanding traffic patterns, such as directions of one-way avenues;  
Major roadways in the outer borough;  
Airports (holding pens, dispatchers, short hauls); and,  
Walking tour of South Street Seaport.

### Methodology

The research design employed for the 1984 study was adapted for the current study. Basic demographic data were collected from students attending the NYCTDI from February-September, 1992. Project staff met with NYCTDI Program Directors on both sites to discuss the administration of the Taxi Driver Survey. Following this orientation, the Program Directors met with their respective faculty members to advise them of the methodology. The Administration Form will be found in the Appendix. Teachers were asked to tell students that the purpose of the study was to get information that would be used to improve the training program. Further, they were asked to stress that the study was carried out by an independent organization which had no

affiliation with the TLC and that the information would be confidential and individual students would not be identified. Surveys were distributed by faculty members at the conclusion of the training at the last class break prior to the final examination. Students were not required to fill out the survey, but the response was significantly high with only a negligible number of surveys discarded due to a lack of information. The questionnaire (see Appendix) was constructed to gain information about the following characteristics of incoming drivers: place of birth, languages spoken, length of time in Metropolitan area, level of education, previous work experience, and other relevant factors. Completed surveys were coded and analyzed by students from The Graduate School and University Center under the direction of the Center for Logistics and Transportation.

## Results

A total of 2,333 questionnaires were completed between February and September of 1992; 926 of these were from LaGuardia, and 1,407 were from FEGS. There were 2,107 men (90.3%) and 143 women (6.1%) in the sample (the remaining 3.6% did not state their gender). The reported ethnic composition of the sample was 982 (42.1%) Asian, 389 (16.7%) white, 362 (15.5%) black, 183 (7.8%) Hispanic, and 330 (14.1%) "other"; the remaining 87 (3.7%) did not answer this question. The ages of the students ranged from 18 to 65, with a mean age of 32.7 (SD = 7.8).

The level of the students' education, as seen below in Table 1, was remarkably high.

Table 1. Years of School completed by Students of the New York City Taxi Driver Institute

Education Level	Number of Responses (n=2137)	Percentage of Total
Less than 6th grade	17	0.8
6th to 9th grade	78	3.6
9th through 12th grade	640	29.9
Through 2 years of college	706	33.0
2 through 4 years of college	408	19.1
More than 4 years of college	288	13.5

Of the 2,137 students answering this question, nearly two-thirds (65.6%) had had at least some college, and 288 (13.5%) of the students had completed more than four years of college. Only 367 students (15.7%) reported that they were currently attending a school other than the NYCIDI.

The response to “place of birth” indicated that only 184 (7.9%) of the students were born in the United States; 2138 (91.6%) were born outside the U.S., and 11 (0.5%) did not respond to this question. Of the 184 born in the U.S., 128 (71.1%) were born in New York State. Of the remaining 22 states mentioned (including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands), no state accounted for more than one percent of the U.S.-born students.

Foreign-born students originated from 91 different countries. (For the purposes of this study, the republics of the former Soviet Union were treated as a group and counted as only one country in order to allow comparability to the 1984 study.) Countries of origin not represented in the 1984 study include the following four countries: Benin ( 2 students), Nepal, Tibet, and Switzerland (1 student each). The countries with the highest number of applicants were Pakistan (26.1%), Bangladesh (14.0%), India (10.374), the Soviet republics (5.5%), Egypt (4.6%), and Haiti (4.2%). Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India, when taken together, account for 50.4% of the foreign-born students. These results are compared with the findings of the 1984 study in Table 2 (below):

Table 2. The Ten Most Frequent Countries of Origin of Students of the New York City Taxi DriverInstitute, 1984 and 1992

1984		1992	
Country	Percentage of total (n=3182)	Country	Percentage of total (n=2333)
1. Haiti	24.9%	1. Pakistan	26.1%
2. Dominican Republic	6.1%	2. Bangladesh	14.0%
3. Egypt	5.2%	3. India	10.3%
4. Korea	4.8%	4. USSR*	5.5%
5. USSR	4.2%	5. Egypt	4.6%
6. Pakistan	4.1%	6. Haiti	4.2%
7. India	4.0%	7. Ghana	1.9%
8. Afghanistan	3.9%	8. Romania	1.7%
9. Romania	3.8%	9. Nigeria	1.3%
10. Colombia	3.7%	10. Morocco	1.2%

\*The republics of the former Soviet Union have been treated as one country for the sake of comparability with the 1984 data.

The students were also asked what languages they speak other than English. Many of the students were multilingual. In cases where more than one language was given, the first one listed was used for the purposes of this analysis. Sixty-six different languages were listed. Ten of these had not been encountered in the 1984 study: Edo (two students), Alere, Ashanti, Chamba, Djerma, Isoko, Konkani, Nepali/Gurkahli, Slovak, and Tibetan (one student each). The most frequent languages were Pakistani/Urdu (22.9%), Bengali (11.9%), French (9.1%), Arabic/Egyptian (7.6%), Punjabi (5.9%), Russian (5.4%), Spanish (5.4%), and Hindi (3.5%). These results are compared in Table 3 with the results of the 1984 study.

Table 3. The Ten Languages Spoken Most Frequently by Students of the New York City Taxi Driver Institute, 1984 and 1992

1984		1992	
Language	Percentage of total (n=3198)	Language	Percentage of total (n=2333)
1. French	26.0%	1. Pakistani/Urdu	22.9%
2. Spanish	3.1%	2. Bengali	11.9%
3. Arabic	5.9%	3. French	9.1%
4. Korean	4.5%	4. Arabic/Egyptian	7.6%
5. Russian	3.8%	5. Punjabi	5.9%
6. Pakistani/Urdu	3.6%	6. Russian	5.4%
7. Chinese	3.3%	7. Spanish	5.4%
8. Romanian	3.1%	8. Hindi	3.5%
9. Farsi/Persian	3.0%	9. Chinese/Taiwanese	1.2%
10. Greek	2.5%	10. Romanian	1.2%

Employment data indicated that 962 (41.2%) of the students were currently employed and 1238 (53.1%) were not working (133, or 5.7%, did not respond to this question). Less than half of the students (983, or 42.1%) had previously worked as drivers.

## Discussion of Results

In 1984, 74% of the new drivers (n=4369) attending the training program over an 8-month period were born outside of the United States, with the greatest number of the newcomers arriving from Haiti (25%), the Dominican Republic (6%), Egypt (5%), Korea (5%), and Pakistan, India, and the Soviet Union (4% each). A updated survey in 1988 of students (n=1954) entering the taxi training program showed that the immigrant population had increased to approximately 86%. The five countries with the greatest number of applicants follows: Haiti (18%), Pakistan (14%), India (10%), Egypt (9%) and Bangladesh (7%). At that time a significant shift in the composition of the incoming driver population occurred with students from the Indian sub-continent comprising 31% of the new drivers in contrast to only 9% in 1984. The 1988 study also surveyed incoming drivers in other urban areas and found that in both Boston and Chicago the mix of natives of the area and new immigrants was approximately 50% for each group. The findings from the current study show that 92% of the entering drivers (n=2333) are foreign-born, and that the number of applicants from the Indian sub-continent have increased to 50% .

Responses to newcomers to the taxi industry as well as to immigrants in any given community range from a nativistic despair at a changing population from some to a wholehearted welcome from others. In an unusual column, in that it was wholly positive toward taxi drivers, John Leo (*U.S. News and World Report*, September 16, 1991) stated unequivocally that for a visitor to New York City, "the most interesting thing you can do is hail a cab and chat up the driver." Mr. Leo wrote about the wide range of backgrounds and experiences of varied drivers. He noted that they were "classic New Yorkers" with all that that entails and even recognized that most drivers knew exactly the right route to take. He then went on to talk about the skills, education, and drive of these new immigrants, anecdotal findings which correlate with the current data which show that approximately 66% of the students had attended college, which was an increase over the 57% reported in the 1984 study. In contrast to Mr. Leo's enthusiastic acceptance, a typical taxi joke heard at Chicago's Second City which commented on the lack of cabs on Ramadan, a Moslem holiday, illustrates a less accepting view towards newcomers to Chicago. Drivers, however, are used to the jokes and the bad-mouthing, although they think it unfair. They are presently much more concerned about the depressed economy which forces them to scramble for fares and the increased violence towards taxi drivers which makes a demanding job even more tension-provoking.

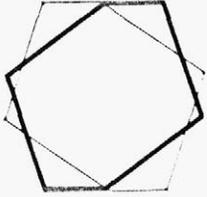
It is essential, as noted above, to recognize the valuable assets newcomers bring to an industry which requires long days and hard work for not very much money---the average take home pay for

a medallion driver is \$515/week (Dao, J., *The New York Times*, December 6, 1992). However, along with the energy and drive that epitomizes many of the incoming drivers, there are problematic factors that must be addressed. As reported above, over half the new drivers come from countries where women are virtually second-class citizens and do not have legal redress, not to mention the basic civil rights that are accepted as the norm by American women. This different, or some would say "distorted" view of women's rights, has led in some instances to a gender gap. Reported incidents of rudeness, verbal and even physical attacks upon female passengers have resulted in an increasing number of revocations of licenses.

The NYTDI faculty and administrators utilize role-playing during the driver-passenger relations module to illustrate the demands of a service industry where job requirements have little to do with the passenger's gender but everything to do with getting him/her to a destination safely and quickly. Therefore, hard data, that is specific numbers indicating where drivers come from, would strengthen the faculty's position in the classroom when they talk about cultural practices and attitudes that are clearly antithetical to service requirements of the taxi industry in New York City. By linking demographic data with the diversity in the classroom, the instructor can directly address the divergent cultural values of the United States vis a vis the students' homelands, enabling potential drivers to adapt their behavior to meet the expectations of their customers, which is essential to their future success as New York cabbies.

## APPENDIX

Page 1: Administration of Taxi Driver Survey  
Page 2: Survey Form



**The Graduate School and University Center**  
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**DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY OF THE TAXI WORKFORCE**  
Administration of the Taxi Driver Survey

*Background*

The Center for Logistics and Transportation is updating its demographic survey of incoming taxi drivers that was carried out in 1984 and again, in a limited survey in 1988. The survey attached was revised to reflect the concerns of the staff of the New York City Taxi Driver Institute (NYCTDI).

Data will be collected for a 6 month period from students completing the NYCTDI program. Preliminary data will be shared with NYCTDI staff as it becomes available. Coding, analysis and evaluation of the data will be carried out at the Center for Logistics and Transportation. Guidelines for administration follow.

*Time Frame.*

Distribution of the survey should begin February 1,1992 (or the first date thereafter) and continue until June 31,1992.

*Introduction of Survey to Students.*

Instructional staff should advise prospective drivers that the survey is being carried out by an independent organization affiliated with The Graduate School and University Center and will have no impact upon their receiving a License. Further, information about the different countries represented in the classrooms of the NYCTDI as well as the wide range of work experience and education of the students will enable the school to adapt the curriculum for the student body. Information is confidential and all data will be coded and pooled so no individual can be identified. Finally, stress that should fill in only the items on the left side of the page. (The right side will be completed by the coders.)

*Distribution of Survey.*

From past experience, faculty have found that the best time to distribute the survey is at the Beginning of the last class break which is prior to the final examination.

Just before the break the instructor tells the class about the survey (see above) and distributes it. Students are asked to return the completed form to him when they come back to the classroom. In some classes, students were given 5 additional minutes to complete the form. To increase the rate of return, at the start of the final session it is most helpful if the instructor reminds the students again to complete and return the survey. To insure consistency, **ALL SURVEYS MUST BE DISTRIBUTED AT THE SAME TIME THROUGHOUT THE 6 MONTH COLLECTION PERIOD.**

*Preparation of surveys for coding.*

Clip together the completed survey forms and date the top sheet on the lower left corner (The coder will date the remaining sheets.) The driver's age will be calculated from the date listed on the survey.

January 29, 1992

LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
New York City Taxi Driver Institute

Section not to be completed by student.

Site.....  
Date 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Last First Middle

Home Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Street City State

Social Security Number: 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

Date of birth \_\_\_\_\_  
Month Day Year

Were you born in the United States? 3 Yes; 2 No

If yes, what state were you born in? \_\_\_\_\_

If no, what country were you born in? \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you lived in the New York area? 2 less than one year; 2 1-3 yrs;  
3 3-5 yrs; 4 5-7 yrs; 5 7-9 yrs; 6 more than 9 years

Sex: 3 Male; 2 Female

Race: 1 White; 2 Black; 3 Hispanic; 4 Asian; 5 Other

How many years of school have you completed?  
2 less than 6th grade; 2 6th-9th grade; 3 9th-12th grade;

College/University: 4 2 years; 5 4 years; 6 more than 4 years

What languages do you speak other than English? \_\_\_\_\_

What language do you speak at home other than English? \_\_\_\_\_

What language do your parents speak other than English? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you presently employed? 3 Yes 2 No

What kind of work did you do on your most recent job? \_\_\_\_\_

Please list work experience/skills: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you worked before as a driver? 2 Yes 2 No

If yes, what did you drive?  
1 chauffeur; 2 livery; 3 bus; 4 truck; 5 other

Are you currently attending a school other than this taxi training program? 3 Yes 2 No

If yes, what is the name of the school? \_\_\_\_\_

What courses are you taking? \_\_\_\_\_