

education today

www.chicagotribune.com/educationtoday



BACK TO SCHOOL

It's never too late to return to college to fulfill your education dreams like Maribel Ireta, left, did. **page 5**

FINANCIAL AID FOR VETERANS

Post 9/11 veterans get a big education boost from the government. **page 3**

advanced learning

Dynamic Duos

Couples juggle schedules, finances to earn degrees simultaneously

If you ask Mike or Trisha Connolly how they balance work, young children and married life all while simultaneously earning their MBAs from Lewis University in Romeoville, the couple is very nonchalant about keeping it all together.

"The juggling act isn't all that difficult," Trisha says. But when they look back at what they have accomplished in the three years they have been pursuing their degrees — completing more than half of their courses, moving to a new home, changing jobs and welcoming children into their family — they admit they sometimes look back and say, "How did we do that?"

The Connollys are not alone. There are many couples that have decided to pursue college educations and advanced degrees at the same time.

And while there are a lot of factors to consider, Mike recommends people stop talking about it and move forward.

"Just get started. Once you start it goes by really fast. Once you get started it's really not that bad," he says.

Meaning and motivation

Trisha's undergraduate degree is in child development and psychology and Mike's undergraduate work was in pre med, but after graduation, the 33-year-old both fell into sales jobs.

"It was always in the back of my mind that I didn't have a business undergrad," says Mike whose MBA concentration is in finance. "I was downsized. They eliminated my position and I took a salary cut. I felt vulnerable and felt by doing this I would be more marketable."

Trisha, who is specializing in marketing, says she knew when she returned to the work force after having children she didn't want to return to sales.

"[Graduate school] opened my eyes to other areas I am good at and to see what is available," she says.

Aaron Hawn, 24, and Christi Zimmer, 22, are planning to be

SEE COUPLES, PAGE 2



istockphoto.com/Alija/



©2008 Jupiterimages Corp.

The RN to BSN boom

Stepping stone paves the way

One of the best things about nursing is its inclusive nature, the way the profession welcomes all qualified new nurses, regardless of their level of education.

Susan Swart, executive director of the Illinois Nurses Association, explains: "Graduates of hospital diploma programs, community colleges or four-year colleges—we all sit for the same licensing exam," she says. "We've all learned the same material and all meet the same clinical standards to begin our careers at the bedside."

And, as the nursing shortage grinds on, employers generally welcome nurses of all educational backgrounds. But what happens once it's time to move up? That's when advancement options clearly favor those

with more formal education. "For a nurse to advance in her career, she'll definitely need a bachelor's degree," says Carmella Moran, director/associate professor in the School of Nursing at Aurora University in Aurora. "Popular clinical specialty areas like oncology that provide certification will require the BSN degree." And a BSN will typically be required for a nurse to be considered for charge nurse or floor supervisor positions, says Swart.

Becoming a nurse educator can be a rewarding career path as well, but the state has set certain educational requirements. "In Illinois, anyone teaching RNs must have a master's degree in nursing or higher," says Swart. "But those with a BSN can teach licensed practical nurses, which gives them a nice option."

According to Mary Pabst, director of BSN partnerships at Elmhurst College, the associ-

SEE NURSING, PAGE 4

Middle skills provide heavyweight careers

Colleges offer programs to fill key job gaps

Are you one of those who believe earning a four-year college degree is the only route to achievement in life? If so, you could be missing out on a rewarding career.

Many skilled positions providing good salaries and benefits require more than a high school diploma, but substantially less than a four-year college degree, said



©2008 Jupiterimages Corp.

Andrea Ray, Chicago-based regional field director with Workforce Alliance, a national coalition of community-based organizations, community colleges, businesses, unions and other stakeholders working toward improving the nation's workforce development system.

"Jobs in the middle of the skilled labor market still have high demand from employers," Ray said, noting her organization projects from 2004 to 2014 there will be up to 1 million openings in these types of middle-skill jobs.

America's backbone

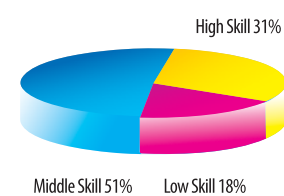
According to Workforce Alliance, these middle-skill

SEE SKILLS, PAGE 4

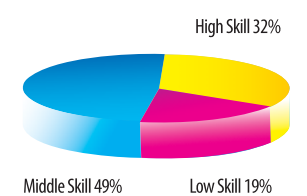
Dominant Force

Middle-skill jobs, which require more than high-school, but less than a four-year degree make up the largest part of America's and Illinois' labor market. All too often, key industries in Illinois are unable to find enough sufficiently trained workers to fill these jobs.

Illinois Jobs by Skill Level, 2004

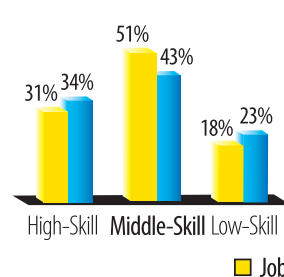


Projected Jobs by Skill Level, 2014

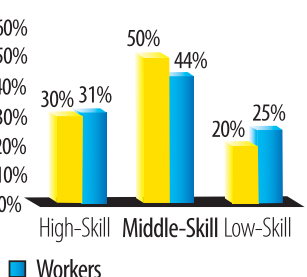


Source: Illinois Department of Employment Security

Illinois' Jobs and workers by Skill Level, 2004



America's Jobs and workers by Skill Level, 2004



Source: U.S. Department of Labor & U.S. Bureau of the Census



Discover unique ways to make a difference.



Visit us online to watch videos and read inspiring personal interviews about how our students, faculty, and alumni are making a difference. And then start thinking about how you can too.

Open House Sessions:
Saturday, November 15, 2008
Saturday, January 24, 2009

Contact us at:
thechicagoschool.edu • 312.329.6666

Weekday, weekend, evening, and online classes available.

Degrees available:
Psy.D. Clinical Psychology
Psy.D. Business Psychology
Psy.D. Applied Behavior Analysis
Ed.S. School Psychology
M.A. Clinical Psychology
– Applied Behavior Analysis Specialization
– Counseling Specialization
M.A. Forensic Psychology
M.A. Industrial and Organizational Psychology
Certificate programs also available.

Chicago
Los Angeles
and Online

TheChicagoSchool[™]
of Professional Psychology
325 N. Wells St • Chicago, IL 60654

SKILLS
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

jobs include police officers, firefighters, nurses, electricians, truck drivers. Others include dental technicians, computer specialists, radiation therapists, auto mechanics, legal assistants, electricians, plumbers and aircraft mechanics. During that 10-year period, the influx of middle-skill job openings, including new jobs and replacement, should account for almost half of all openings in the state, according to a report from Workforce Alliance.

"The problem is there's a gap in our state between the number of jobs available for these workers, and the number of workers who can actually perform these jobs," Ray reported. Fifty-one percent of jobs in Illinois' labor market are classified as middle-skill jobs, but only 43 percent of Illinois workers have the skills to land the jobs, she added.

That gulf is sure to widen if changes aren't made. "Most of the money that goes into funding training and education programs for these jobs has decreased over the last several years," Ray said. "Without increased investments in the programs we do have that train workers for middle-skill jobs, the gap is only going to get worse."

Making the situation more critical is that many of these middle-skill jobs represent the backbone of American society, said Jenny Wittner, Chicago-based associate director of Women Employed, an organization working for the economic advancement of women in low-paid positions.

"These are jobs that keep our communities together, like firefighters, surgical technologists and registered nurses," she said.

Workers in these jobs earn more than just respectable to excellent incomes, said Ralph Martire, executive director with the Chicago-based Center For Tax and Budget Accountability, a bipartisan organization that examines budget and health care policy.

"These are jobs that not only pay a decent wage, but offer benefit packages, with health care coverage and some sort of retirement benefit," he said.

Paths to success

Three main types of training and education can help people position themselves for middle-skill jobs, Ray said. The first is an associate degree, which can lead to a career as a registered nurse, dental technician or computer specialist, for example.

The second, offered by community colleges, community-based organizations and technical colleges, is specialized training to enter a specific field aligned with national or commonly recognized industry standards, and resulting in certificates. This training can lead to careers as firefighters, legal assistants or automobile mechanics, Ray said.

A third pathway, represented by apprenticeship programs, combines classroom work with on-the-job training. Apprenticeships are offered by employers or through labor-management partnerships, which are alliances between employers and unions. Electricians, plumbers and aircraft mechanics are trained through

NURSING
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ate degree in nursing was meant to be a temporary phenomenon. "This is not our first nursing shortage. In the 1950s a federal law allowed more hospitals to be built, which triggered a nursing shortage then too," she says. "The associate in nursing was meant to get hospitals over the hump until traditional four-year nursing schools caught up with the demand, but the degree took on a life of its own."

For those who stopped at the associate degree level but now would like to advance in their careers, an RN to BSN program might be just what the doctor ordered.

RN to BSN programs

These programs, which usually range from 18 to 24 months, are designed to pick up where the diploma or associate program left off. According to Moran, this is a huge improvement over prior degree programs. "Twenty years ago, educators would make BSN students repeat patient care, which disregarded the fact that these were working RNs," she says. "Now, we focus on the fact that our students are already professionals and that the education we provide needs to be above whatever he or she has done before. It's a very targeted approach."

Today's RN to BSN programs also recognize that adult students demand flexibility when it comes to juggling work and family obligations. RN to BSN students typically can't afford to stop working during their program, although the bright side is that many hospitals have tuition assistance programs for employees who work a minimum number of hours. Schools often give students a choice of setting, including when—and how—they complete their coursework.

Virtually every institution that offers a traditional BSN degree will also offer an RN to BSN degree. Some programs are campus-based, some are hospital-based and some are taught either partially or completely on-line. "Look at a couple different programs because there are many different delivery modalities out there — try to find one that suits your lifestyle and learning style," Pabst advises.

It's hard to imagine a downside to an RN to BSN program, though Pabst does point out that the issues common to all adult students can surface. "Adults are terribly fearful of failure, that they're not smart enough, or can't write a paper," she says. "It's hard to go back when you know you might have to give up a child's soccer game or choir concert along the way. We try to flex as much as we can, but you're going to have to give a little on your end as well."

A look at Aurora

The RN to BSN program at Aurora University, which currently has about 185 students, includes 10 classes taught on an eight-week cycle year-round for two years. Each class meets one evening a week at a local hospital. According to Moran, most students attending class at a given hospital will also work there as well, though enrollment is not restricted to hospital employees. "The hospitals see our program as a good recruiting tool," she says.

Moran says that her RN to BSN students enjoy the convenience of working and going to school at the same site. "Once they finish their shift, they head down to a conference room on site. They don't need to go up on the unit and take care of patients

apprenticeships. One of the benefits of pursuing one of these three pathways is that many such programs are occupation-focused, said Carrie Thomas, associate director of Chicago Jobs Council, an organization that helps people living in poverty gain employment. For instance, those receiving the training and education are often taught by people working in the same industries they seek to enter.

How to get started

Among the best training grounds for middle-skill jobs are community-based organizations. Jane Addams Resource Corp., a non-profit community-based economic development corporation in Chicago, is one such entity. It serves low-income workers, but also accepts limited numbers of people who are not low income, said executive director Ray Prendergast. Jane Addams Resource Corp. offers training in running computer numerical control (CNC) machines.

"There's a surprising number of employers looking for CNC machine operators," Prendergast said. "Every machine tool seller tells me employers don't have enough skilled operators to run these machines."

The starting wage for CNC machine operators is \$13 an hour, and highly-skilled workers can move up to become set-up people or programmers, the latter earning up to \$90,000 a year, Prendergast said. People can enter his organization's program without high school diplomas or GED certificates, but must have 8th or 9th grade math skills.

Another source of training is the City Colleges of Chicago (CCC), said CCC workforce development consultant Bill McMillan. The CCC system's seven colleges and four technical centers offer programs in health, transportation, manufacturing, information technology and hospitality/retail. All programs require less than two years training, and produce, among others, registered nurses, physician assistants, CNC machine operators and skilled workers employed in construction trades, McMillan said.

Programs like these that prepare Illinois workers for middle-skill jobs are an outstanding option for young adults who don't want or can't obtain a traditional four-year college education, Martire said.

Making it work

Marta Lopez, a 38-year-old mother of two sons, age 19 and 15, found that third path when she entered and completed the magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) certificate program at Wright College on Chicago's northwest side, which involved a year of classroom education and six months of clinical training. For the past year, she has worked at Lutheran General Hospital as an MRI technologist.

"I'm very happy I did it," she said. "I had worked doing many things before. I had worked as a clerk in a records office, and as a customer service rep. My salary almost tripled from what it was before. And it's not an expensive education." ■

because they've already done that," she says. "Instead, we have them do quality improvement activities, either at their own or another facility."

Aurora's RN to BSN program is so hospital-focused, in fact, that its students need never step foot on the main campus. "Easily two-thirds of each student's program will be at their hospital," says Moran. "The only thing that might not be at the hospital would be a general ed requirement like history or English, and then we work with that student individually to come up with a plan. If our main campus is not convenient for them, they can take those general classes at a community college near their house."

Win-win situation

For some nurses, getting the BSN degree is a stop along the way. Pam Robbins, mid-career nurse and current president of the Illinois Nurses Association, just finished her bachelor's degree recently. She had completed a diploma program and always wanted to go on to get her BSN degree, but then life intervened. "I was always active in my union and when the union president passed away suddenly, I stepped into that role. Union business like filing grievances and negotiating contracts kept me too busy for school," she says. "But my goal is to be able to educate nurses, so I know I need to have my master's and that means I needed to get my bachelor's degree."

Swart, meanwhile, had always had a plan. "Even when I entered my associate program, I knew I would go for my master's, but I needed to get into the workplace as soon as possible for financial reasons," she says. "When I got my bachelor's, I looked at two different programs and ended up choosing the less intense one because I knew I was going on. The bachelor's was always going to be that stepping stone for me."

Not everyone will have such a clear idea of how they want their career to develop, of course, but even nurses who plan to stay at the bedside all their working years will reap the benefits of completing their BSN, including increased prestige and salary, according to the Illinois Nurses Association. ■

meet Steve Midlock
One of USF's amazing faculty members

- Educator
- Top priorities: family and students
- Beetle lover (the Volkswagen kind)

Learn more about Dr. Midlock, professor of education, and the University of St. Francis by visiting www.stfrancis.edu/meet

TAKE YOUR EDUCATION & CAREER TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Engaging mind and spirit™

UNIVERSITY OF ST. FRANCIS
Respect. Service. Integrity. Compassion.

Contact us today at **(800) 735-7500** for more information.
www.stfrancis.edu

REGISTER NOW FOR THE JANUARY 10 CLASS START

IF YOU WANT TO SUCCEED, WE HAVE WHAT YOU NEED.

Our practitioner-based faculty, personalized approach, flexible on-campus and on-line learning options provide graduates with real-life tools to succeed.

You can earn your Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctoral degree in:*

Psychology | Counseling Business | Education

In all, we offer more than 40 undergraduate and graduate degrees across 19 campus locations nationwide. At Argosy University, we don't just teach. Our personal approach will help lead you to **the human side of success.**

ARGOSY UNIVERSITY

Learn more today at argosy.edu or call **800.377.0617**

Argosy University, Chicago | 225 North Michigan Avenue | Suite 1300 | Chicago, IL 60601
Argosy University, Schaumburg | 999 North Plaza Drive | Suite 111 | Schaumburg, IL 60173

*Not all degree levels and programs are available at every location. ©2008 Argosy University® 08-AU-3117 - 10/08

©2008 Jupiterimages Corp.