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Story URL: <http://news.medill.northwestern.edu/chicago/news.aspx?id=142967>

Story Retrieval Date: 11/3/2009 4:09:55 PM CST

### Jobs may outpace workers in some fields by 2016

by JACQUELYN RYAN

Oct 21, 2009

There will not be enough trained workers to fill the anticipated 1 million vocational jobs available in Illinois in the next years, according to a report released Wednesday by The Workforce Alliance and Skills2Compete-Illinois, not-for-profit job advocacy organizations.

The report projects that 45 percent of all available Illinois jobs between 2006 and 2016 will be in the middle-skill level, which generally requires education and training beyond high school but does not require a bachelor's degree. In that period of time the number of these jobs will outpace the number of workers who have the proper training, leaving jobs vacant.

But the report caused at least one local expert to raise a question.

"This [report] does strike me as an accurate picture of where job growth is going to happen," said Robert Bruno, professor of labor and industrial relations at University of Illinois-Chicago. However, "the projections are somewhat hopeful."

Bruno estimates that about 30 percent of the workforce will be composed of middle-skill workers, but said that the number is hard to estimate.

The report does not provide projections for the job vacancy rate. It does point out that between 1989 and 2004, there was a 1.7 percent increase in the number of workers receiving training for a middle-skill job. However, between 2004 and 2020, the report anticipates, the number of workers getting such training will decrease by 2.3 percent.

There was a 9 percent gap in the number of trained workers and the number of jobs in 2007, the report stated.

Middle-skill level jobs include occupations in occupations such as construction, manufacturing, health care assistants and technical engineering.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics, whose statistics were utilized in preparing the report, has projected that the highest percentage increase in total employment between 2006 and 2016 for workers with postsecondary education or training below the bachelor's degree level, will be in the veterinary technologists and technicians occupation, which requires an associate's degree, with an increase of 41 percent. Following that are make-up artists, skin care specialists, physical therapist assistants, dental hygienists and environmental science and protection technicians.

The BLS projects registered nurses will be the largest numerical job increase, with 587,000 additional positions. The next highest growth categories are nursing aides, preschool teachers, automotive service technicians and mechanics, licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses and hairdressers and cosmetologists.

According to [recovery.gov](http://recovery.gov), a government Web site, increased funding by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the economic stimulus program, will continue to generate additional jobs in these fields in efforts to stem the high unemployment rate in the state and nation.

In fact, according to the Web site, at least 287 jobs have been created or saved with stimulus funding in Illinois, which has received more than \$470 million in stimulus contracts,

"If Illinois is receiving billions of recovery dollars to create middle-skill jobs in our state, it would be a waste of resources to not invest in preparing workers for these new opportunities" said Carrie Thomas, of Chicago Jobs Council, a lead partner in the Skills2Compete Illinois campaign, in a prepared statement.

While the Obama administration has provided funds and promoted higher education and vocational training, especially at community colleges, there still may not be enough funds to sufficiently enroll and train people for middle-skill jobs.

Budget cuts to post-secondary education and training mean fewer people have access to the necessary courses, according to the report. In fact, two key state-funded workforce training programs will see their budgets slashed by as much as 50 percent next year.

"Because of the state budget cuts, there are fewer openings than there have been in the past," said Karen Hunter Anderson, vice president of the Illinois Community College Board, which is currently evaluating how many people are on waiting lists at community colleges and adult education centers.

Illinois community colleges have seen record enrollments system-wide this year with a 6.4 percent increase to 380,025 students over

the year-ago period, according to a recent report from the ICCB.

Hunter Anderson said the findings of the report were not surprising and reflect what she has seen in the local colleges.

The recent financial crisis has slashed educational budgets and cuts have depleted their available resources and left them with a shortage of available academic staff to sustain the courses.

“But the community colleges are stepping up to the plate,” said Hunter Anderson. The schools have been providing training for “higher wage and higher need programs” to many students at no cost. They have offset some of the costs through grants and other resources.

While community colleges have received some financial help, adult education did not receive any funds from the stimulus program.

“It’s more and more true that the skill gap is growing,” said Bruno.

Employers are not training their employees as much as they used to, and the job turnover and economic development are not growing fast enough to keep up with the new labor force, he stated.

If there is going to be any real progress in addressing these problems, “it’s going to have come through strategic, conscientious leadership from the government,” Bruno said.

The Joyce Foundation, The Ford Foundation and The Woods Fund of Chicago funded the report. The Workforce Alliance is a Washington D.C.-based coalition of training organizations, community colleges, unions, business leaders, local officials and technical and research organizations. Skills2Compete campaign is a non-partisan campaign promoting workforce training.