



Workforce Training and  
Education Coordinating Board

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## **SKILL GAP: NEW REPORT PREDICTS SHORTAGES IN KEY OCCUPATIONS**

OLYMPIA -- Washington is going to need more bookkeepers, nurses, lab technicians, and aircraft mechanics in the coming years. And while the recession has slowed demand for all occupations, demand for mid-skill jobs could once again outstrip supply by 2013, according to a state analysis.

A new Skill Gap Analysis from the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board) compares future demand for occupations with how many workers are currently being prepared in Washington through public and private colleges and apprenticeship programs. This information provides insight as to which occupational fields should be recruiting new students and increasing educational capacity.

The Workforce Board's research focuses on jobs that require at least one year of post-high school education and training but do not require a bachelor's degree—an essential but sometimes overlooked slice of the job market referred to as mid-level jobs. These jobs typically pay well and often come with benefits, offering Washington residents the chance to earn a living wage.

Topping the list of occupations facing shortages are categories such as accounting and bookkeeping, health care, and installation, maintenance and repair of equipment. These are the fields where demand (job openings) will most likely outpace the supply of newly prepared workers as the economy recovers. The largest potential undersupply will be in bookkeepers, accounting assistants and other accounting professionals with a projected average annual gap of 1,350 between 2012 and 2017.

In general, demand for mid-level workers is not expected to recover to pre-recession levels until 2013—when projected demand for new mid-level workers will be 8 percent above current output.

Some occupations, such as nursing, are in short supply of trained applicants even in this recession. Nurses will continue to be in high demand even though Washington currently produces over 3,000 new nurses per year. If Washington's community colleges and private

schools continue to produce the same number of nurses they do now, the Workforce Board projects an average supply/demand gap of over 1,000 per year between 2012 and 2017.

High unemployment resulting from the recession has put at least one category of skill shortage in question.

"We had a shortage of skilled construction workers before the recession hit and our projection shows we might have another shortage in upcoming years, but it does not account for the great number of currently unemployed workers in the trades who will be willing and able to return to work when the economy recovers," said Rick Bender, President of the Washington State Labor Council and a member of the Workforce Board.

Still, the skill gap analysis has been useful in helping recruit students and expand programs when needed. For instance, in the late 1990s, the Workforce Board identified that Washington suffered from an acute shortage of Information Technology professionals. In response, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges directed funding from the Legislature to boost the number and capacity of IT programs. Today, Washington's production and demand in that occupation is basically in balance.

"While no one has a perfect crystal ball, our analysis at least gives us some tools to anticipate where the shortages might occur before they represent a serious drag on our economy. Washington's employers not only require a skilled workforce but a workforce with enough of the right skills," said Mike Hudson, a project manager with the Association of Washington Business and member of the Workforce Board.

Learn more about the Workforce Board's Skill Gap Analysis at:

<http://www.wtb.wa.gov/skillgap.asp>

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*The Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board is a partnership of labor, business and government, dedicated to helping Washington residents obtain and succeed in family-wage jobs, while meeting employers' needs for skilled workers*