



'Stat Chat' forecasts Virginia job climate

Weldon Cooper Center report reveals Virginia job prospects will be affected by troubled economy

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The nation's current economic woes will affect the number but not the variety of jobs available in Virginia, according to the most recent "Stat Chat" by the University's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service.

The most recent edition of the Stat Chat, which outlines Virginia's population and workforce statistics three times per year, also noted that despite a shrinking job market "employment in Virginia will continue to span a broad range of occupations and will require education at all levels."

The study used data published by the Virginia Workforce Connection, the Virginia Employment Commission, the U.S. Census and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, said Meredith Strohm Gunter, the center's outreach director for demographics and workforce. Research associate Achsah Carrier said the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Virginia Employment Commission both completed analyses of about 800 occupations to determine how many people are employed and how the economy is changing. On the basis of these analyses, the Weldon Cooper Center is able to make projections about the job market, Gunter and Carrier said.

Carrier noted that because of the struggling economy there will be less growth than previously anticipated, but no shift in the range of occupations available.

Gunter emphasized that a broad range of jobs are necessary to sustain Virginia's economy, despite the interest in technological and other "high-end occupations." She said she believes many people place a greater weight on technology-based careers because technology is necessary in every field and at every level of education, from "full-time computer people" like engineers to auto mechanics. Additionally, careers in technology, especially those requiring a higher level of education, provide a foundation for growth in other areas. Gunter said area-populations with technological skills tend to attract business and economic opportunities to that region. According to the report, though, more traditional jobs will remain important — if not more important — in the coming years.

Financial and political leaders also emphasize the "fastest growing jobs," Gunter said, but this emphasis is not necessarily an indication of whether there are openings in a field of choice. For example, the occupation of "Gaming Surveillance Officer" has grown at a rate of 72.5 percent during the past year but only five openings are available annually, Gunter noted. The only other job with a higher rate of growth in Virginia is the "Home Health Aide;" however, there are almost 1,000 annual job openings for that position. The Stat Chat report states that the occupation with the most job openings is retail salespersons, a position with an average of 6,161 annual openings.

In regards to job openings across the board, though, Carrier added that professional and related careers make up about 20 percent of employment in Virginia, which is only comparable to the service sector in size. With sales, office support, management and service occupations, the professional and related careers field is among the largest areas of employment and will continue to be so, Carrier said. Some of the smallest areas of employment, meanwhile, include farming, construction and transportation.

"The 20 largest occupations in Virginia take a very large portion of the pie for all of the occupations in Virginia," Gunter said.

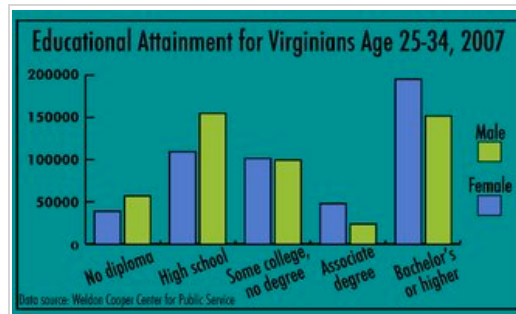
The breakdown of employment among various fields, however, goes beyond counting which occupations see more job openings. Level of education also has a great deal to do with the breakdown, Carrier noted.

"About one-third of jobs are jobs for which a bachelor's degree seems to be the most significant source of post-secondary training," Carrier said, adding that "training at the university and college level is very important, but the majority of employment is not" based on the attainment of a post-secondary degree.

Other areas of interest in the Stat Chat are the status of two changing demographics in the commonwealth, young males and immigrants entering the workforce.

Men ages 25 to 34 are not achieving bachelor's degrees at the rates of their parents or at the same rate as women of the same age range, Carrier said, adding that "this is an issue people are going to have to look at more seriously."

Additionally, Virginia's immigrant population has seen a significant gap between the number of educated and the number of uneducated people entering the workforce, according to the report. Gunter noted that there is a fairly high



Stat Chat
Data source: Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service

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number of immigrants with a bachelor's degree or higher, but there is also a fairly high number of immigrants without a high school degree. She said "regardless of educational attainment in [their] home country," immigrants may need help with recertification and language training to gain employment in their field of choice.



"We can't afford to let swaths of our workforce be unemployed," she said.

One's level of education attainment and one's particular career should not be the most important aspect of employment, Carrier said, adding that the success of Virginia's workforce depends on having qualified employees in all fields.

"We need to plan to have the best possible opportunities across the board," she said. "We are going to need all of these people."



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