



Photo courtesy of Harrah's

Casino gaming

by Patricia Tate

Instead of toiling away in an office, how would you like to work in a casino around people who are having fun? If the lure of luck appeals to you more than the call of the cubicle, a career in gaming might be for you.

Gaming, the playing of games of chance, is a multibillion dollar industry in the United States. Along with casinos, the gaming industry comprises State lotteries and parimutuel wagering on contests such as horseracing.

Gaming establishments are growing rapidly in number and size. In 2000, commercial casinos operated legally in 11 States and created more than 30,000 new jobs—bringing the total number of casino

workers to more than 350,000, according to the American Gaming Association.

This article focuses on gaming occupations in casinos, describing their duties, qualifications and training, and earnings. It also provides details about employment and outlook, some benefits and drawbacks of working in casinos, and sources of additional information.

Gaming occupations

Gaming occupational titles and duties may vary from one establishment to another. Despite differences in job title and task, however, workers perform many of the same basic functions in all casinos. Some positions are associated with oversight and direction—management, supervision, and surveillance and investiga-

tion—while others involve working with the games or patrons themselves, such as tending the slot machines, handling money, writing and running tickets, and dealing cards.

Casino direction and oversight

Like nearly every business establishment, casinos have workers who direct and oversee day-to-day operations. Many job tasks of gaming managers, supervisors, and surveillance officers and investigators do not require interaction with casino games and patrons—but in the scope of their work, they must be capable of handling both.

Gaming managers. Gaming managers are responsible for the overall operation of a casino's table games. They plan, organize, direct, control, and coordinate

Patricia Tate is an economist in the Office of Employment Projections, BLS, (202) 691-5723.

Games of chance provide plenty of opportunities for people willing to work hard in the fast-paced atmosphere of casinos.



occupations

A jackpot for jobseekers

gaming operations within the casino; formulate gaming policies; and select, train, and schedule activities of gaming personnel.

Because their jobs are so varied, gaming managers must be knowledgeable about the games, deal effectively with employees and patrons, and be able to assess financial issues affecting casino growth or decline. These assessment abilities include measuring the profit and loss of table games and slot machines, understanding changes driving economic growth in the United States, and being aware of regulatory requirements—such as those for large currency transactions—affecting the gaming industry.

Preparation for gaming management jobs includes general education and specific occupational training. Some gaming

managers have a bachelor's degree in recreation, hotel management, or a related discipline. Others have casino management certificates earned through programs offered at several educational institutes throughout the country. Trainees at most of these institutes enroll in accelerated programs; existing managers also are eligible to take these classes to sharpen their skills. In addition to requiring a bachelor's degree or certification or both, some casinos also provide in-house training for managers.

Salaries vary by establishment and region. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data show that full-time gaming managers earned a median annual salary of \$46,820 in 1999. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$26,630, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$96,610.

Gaming supervisors. Gaming supervisors oversee gaming operations and personnel in an assigned area. Circulating among the tables, they ensure that all stations and games are attended to for each shift. It also is common for supervisors to interpret the casino's operating rules for patrons. Supervisors may also plan and organize activities for guests staying in their casino hotels. Periodically, they address—and make adjustments for—service complaints.

Gaming supervisors must have leadership qualities and good communication skills. They need these skills both to supervise employees effectively and to greet patrons to encourage return visits.


Most casino supervisory staff have an associate or bachelor's degree. Supervisors who do not have a degree usually

substitute hands-on experience for formal education. Regardless of their educational background, however, most supervisors gain experience in other gaming occupations before moving into supervisory positions because knowledge of games and casino operations is essential for these workers.


According to BLS data, the median annual salary for gaming supervisors was \$34,240 in 1999. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$19,620, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$52,390.

Gaming surveillance officers and gaming investigators. Both gaming surveillance officers and gaming investigators act as security agents for casino managers and patrons. They observe casino operations for irregular activities, such as cheating or theft, by either employees or patrons. To do this, surveillance officers and investigators monitor activities from a catwalk of one-way mirrors located above the casino floor. Many casinos recently have begun using audio and video equipment as well, allowing surveillance officers and investigators to observe these same areas via monitors.

In addition to the keen observation skills required to perform their jobs, gaming surveillance officers and gaming investigators must have excellent verbal and writing abilities to document violations or suspicious behavior to their supervisors. They also need to be physically



Most workers who direct or oversee casino operations prepare for their jobs with relevant experience or training or both.



fit and have quick reflexes because they sometimes must detain individuals until local law enforcement officials arrive.

Surveillance officers and investigators usually do not need a bachelor's degree, but some training beyond high school is required; previous security experience is a plus. Several educational institutes offer certification programs. Training classes usually are conducted in a casino-like atmosphere using surveillance camera equipment.

Salaries for gaming surveillance officers and gaming investigators vary based on an applicant's security experience, the region in which the casino is located, and the establishment itself. BLS data show that full-time gaming surveillance officers and gaming investigators earned a median annual salary of

\$20,330 in 1999. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$15,000, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$30,610.

Casino games and patrons

Some of these gaming occupations demand specially acquired skills—dealing blackjack, for example—unique to casino work. Others require skills common in most businesses, such as conducting financial transactions. In both capacities, these workers interact directly with patrons in attending to slot machines, making change, cashing or selling tokens and coins, writing and running for other games, and dealing cards at table games. And part of their responsibility is to make those interactions enjoyable.

Slot key persons. Slot key persons, also called slot attendants or slot technicians, coordinate and supervise the slot department and its workers. Their duties include verifying and handling payoff winnings to patrons, resetting slot machines after completing the payoff, and refilling machines with money. Slot key persons must be familiar with a variety of slot machines and be able to make minor repairs and adjustments to the machines as needed. If major repairs are required, slot key persons determine whether the slot machine should be removed from the floor. Working the floor as front-line personnel, they are responsible for enforcing safety rules and reporting hazards.

Slot key persons need good communication skills and an ability to remain calm, even when dealing with angry or demanding patrons. Personal integrity also is important because these workers handle large sums of money.

There are no formal educational requirements to enter this occupation, but completion of slot attendant or slot technician training is helpful. As with most other gaming workers, slot key persons receive on-the-job training during the first several weeks of employment. Most slot key positions are entry level, so desire



Photo courtesy of Golden Nugget Laughlin

to learn is important.

BLS data show that median hourly earnings of slot key persons were about \$10.28 in 1999. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$7.02, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$17.83.

Gaming cage workers. Gaming cage workers conduct financial transactions for patrons. They sell gambling chips, tokens, or tickets to patrons or to other workers for resale to patrons. They also receive and convert the gaming chips, tokens, or tickets to currency at patrons' requests. Some cage workers may also accept patrons' credit applications and verify their credit references, enabling patrons to establish in that casino either a check-cashing authorization or credit account.

Because cage workers' duties are performed on the casino floor, these workers must be able to stand for their entire shift. They also must be able to bend, reach, and squat. Because of their constant interaction with patrons, cage workers need a friendly, attentive, professional attitude toward them. Cage workers also have the potentially stressful responsibility of accounting for the money they handle. Posthigh school math or accounting classes are recommended preparation for gaming cage workers.

Median hourly earnings of gaming

cage workers were \$9.57 in 1999, according to BLS. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$7.11, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$13.05.

Gaming change persons and booth cashiers. Gaming change persons and booth cashiers exchange coins and tokens for patrons' money. They may issue payoffs or obtain a patron's signature on a receipt when the winnings exceed the amount held in the slot machine. Some gaming change persons and booth cashiers operate a booth in the slot machine area to provide money to other change persons at the start of their shift. Others count and audit the money in cash drawers.

Gaming change persons and booth cashiers should be in good physical condition because they are on their feet for much or all of their shifts. They also need good manual and finger dexterity for operating personal computers, counting money, and using calculators.

As is the case with most other gaming occupations, change persons and booth cashiers must have good interpersonal skills because of their constant contact with patrons. These workers also must be able to handle the stress of accounting for all the money they issue and receive.

Gaming change persons and booth cashiers usually are trained in house, often

by observing a more experienced worker. This on-the-job training often lasts less than 1 month. Change persons and booth cashiers with experience have the best prospects for being hired.

According to BLS, median hourly



Casino workers attending to games and patrons need excellent communication ability along with specially acquired skills, such as dealing blackjack.



earnings of gaming change persons and booth cashiers who worked full-time in 1999 were \$8.60. The bottom 10 percent earned \$6.08 or less, while the top 10 percent earned more than \$11.97.

Gaming and sports book writers and runners. Gaming and sports book writers and runners assist in the operations of games such as bingo. They scan tickets presented by patrons and calculate and distribute winnings. Some writers and runners operate the equipment that randomly selects the numbers. Others may announce numbers selected, pick up tickets from patrons, collect bets, or receive, verify, and record patrons' cash wagers.

Because gaming and sports book writers and runners work closely with patrons, they need excellent customer service skills. Like gaming change persons and booth cashiers, they also must be able to stand and walk during most or all of their shift.

Gaming and sports book writers and runners must have at least a high school diploma or GED. Most of these workers receive on-the-job training.

According to BLS, the median hourly earnings for book writers were \$7.53 in



Photo courtesy of Atlantic Cape Community College's Casino Career Institute



1999. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$5.79, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$10.35.

Gaming dealers. Gaming dealers operate table games such as craps, blackjack, and roulette. Standing or sitting behind the table, dealers provide dice, dispense cards to players, or run the equipment. Some dealers also monitor the patrons for infractions of casino rules.

Gaming dealers must be skilled in customer service and in executing their game. Dealers determine winners, calculate and pay winning bets, and collect losing bets. Because of the fast-paced work environment, most gaming dealers are competent in at least two games—usually blackjack and craps.

Nearly all gaming dealers are certified. Certification is available through 2- or 4-year programs in gaming or a hospitality related field. Experienced dealers, who often are able to attract new or return business, have the best job prospects. Dealers with more experience are placed at the “high roller” tables.

Median hourly earnings for gaming dealers were \$6.20 in 1999, according to BLS. The lowest 10 percent earned less

than \$5.38, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$9.53.

General qualifications and training

In addition to specific requirements for each occupation, all gaming workers must meet some general requirements. For example, a high school diploma or GED usually is required for entry-level jobs. And applicants for gaming or casino jobs must be at least 21 years old.

All gaming workers are required to have a license issued by a regulatory agency, such as a casino control board or commission. Licensure requirements include photo identification, residency in the State where applicants anticipate working, and payment of a fee. The licensing application process also includes a background investigation.

In addition to a license, all gaming workers need superior customer service skills. Casino gaming workers provide entertainment and hospitality to patrons, and the quality of their service contributes to an establishment’s success or failure. Therefore, gaming workers need

good communication skills, an outgoing personality, and the ability to maintain their composure even when dealing with angry or demanding patrons. Personal integrity also is important because workers handle large amounts of money.

Each casino establishes its own requirements for education, training, and experience. Almost all casinos provide some in-house training in addition to requiring certification. The type and quantity of classes needed may vary.

Many institutions of higher learning offer training classes toward certification in gaming, as well as offering a bachelor’s or master’s degree in a hospitality related field. One example is the Atlantic Cape Community College’s Casino Career Institute in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Using a combination of a large mock casino and classroom instruction, the Institute offers training in games, supervisory programs, slot attendant and slot repair technician work, slot department management, and surveillance and security.

Gaming workers who manage money, such as change persons and booth cashiers, should have some experience handling cash or using calculators or adding machines. In fact, most casinos administer a math test to applicants for such positions to assess their level of competency.

Employment and outlook

An American Gaming Association survey found that in 2000, there were about 355,000 casino gaming workers. These workers were employed in land-based or riverboat casinos in Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, and South Dakota. The largest number worked in land-based casinos in Nevada, followed by New Jersey. Mississippi, which boasts the greatest number of riverboat casinos in operation, employs the most workers in that venue.

Gaming has become an increasingly



Photo courtesy of Golden Nugget Laughlin

popular leisure activity, reflecting growth in both population and disposable income. More domestic and international competition for gaming patrons should result in more jobs for gaming workers. Job growth is expected in established and growing gaming areas, such as Las Vegas, Nevada, and Atlantic City, New Jersey,



Licensure and residency are required for workers in each of the 11 States that permit land-based or riverboat casinos to operate.



and in other States likely to legalize gambling in the coming years.

Job prospects are best for those with a degree or certification in gaming or a hospitality related field, previous casino gaming training or experience, and strong interpersonal and customer service skills.

Benefits and drawbacks

Like any job, gaming work has its good and bad points. One of the advantages is the work environment: the atmosphere in casinos is generally fun filled and often

considered glamorous. In addition, advancement opportunities in casino gaming depend less on workers' previous casino duties and titles than on their ability and eagerness to learn new jobs. For example, an entry-level gaming worker, such as a slot key person, eventually might advance to become a dealer or card room manager or to assume some other supervisory position.

However, casino work also can be physically demanding. Most occupations require that workers stand for long periods; some require the lifting of heavy items. The "glamorous" atmosphere exposes casino workers to hazardous health conditions such as cigarette, cigar, and pipe smoke. Noise from slot machines, gaming tables, and talking workers and patrons may be distracting to some workers, although workers wear protective headgear in areas where loud machinery is used to count money.

In addition, casino gaming occupations are geographically limiting. Casinos operate in only 11 States, and gaming licensure requires proof of residency in the State where gaming workers are employed. But some casino gaming workers do not limit themselves to one State, or even one country: finding jobs on the small number of casinos located on luxury cruise liners, they travel the world while living and working aboard.

Learning more about the game

This article is one of many sources about gaming occupations. For more information, visit your public library for books and periodicals about casinos and the gaming industry.

Available at most libraries is the 2000-01 edition of the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, which describes the duties, working conditions, training, job outlook, and earnings for more than 250 occupations. These occupations include managers, clerical workers, and service workers, whose jobs may be similar to those of some gaming workers. Also available at libraries is the 2000-01 edition of the *Career Guide to Industries*, providing career information about hospitality-related industries such as eating and drinking establishments and hotels and other lodging places. Both resources are accessible online: the *Handbook* at <http://stats.bls.gov/ocohome.htm> and the *Career Guide* at <http://stats.bls.gov/cgihome.htm>.

A related article by Matthew Mariani, "Jobs in Legal Gambling: A New Giant of an Old Industry," appeared in the fall 1996 *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*.

If you live in a State that permits casino gaming, you should also visit or contact the State gaming regulatory agency or casino control commission. States generally have a regulatory agency for each type of gambling allowed. State commissions provide specific requirements for licensure.

For information about jobs in legal gaming establishments or for information about State regulatory commissions, contact:

The American Gaming Association
555 13th St. NW.
Suite 1010 East
Washington, DC 20004
(202) 637-6500
<http://www.americangaming.org>



Photo courtesy of Atlantic Cape Community College's Casino Career Institute