



Workforce

Opportunities in

by Marsha Lien

Increasing diversity in the U.S. workforce is a continuing trend. That's good news for employers and jobseekers alike.

Minorities—including Hispanics or Latinos, blacks or African Americans, and Asians—continue to increase their shares of the labor force. The rates of growth for these groups are projected to be faster than the rate for whites. Between 2002 and 2012, for example, the labor-force growth rate for Asians is projected to be 51 percent, compared with about 3 percent for whites.

Equal-opportunity laws were created to ensure that workers are hired, retained, and promoted without regard to characteristics such as race and ethnic origin. Regulations aside, many employers value having a staff attuned to population diversity. These employers may consider diversity in their organizations to be sound business practice because it allows them to better serve a wide range of customers.

A number of programs encourage the development of

a diverse workforce. Some are general, such as scholarships and grants for minority students in higher education. Other programs are more specific, aimed at increasing the number of minorities in particular occupations. At Howard University in 2002, for example, Secretary of State Colin Powell introduced a \$1 million grant designed to prepare minorities for diplomatic careers.

This article focuses on three occupations—registered nurses, teachers, and lawyers—to describe how diversity is both a reality and a benefit at work. Each occupational description includes resources about scholarships and other programs for minorities. In addition, a general-information section is provided at the end of the article.

Occupational opportunity

Many occupations require that all entry-level workers have specific skills. Beyond that, every worker brings to the job unique life experiences, including those related to ethnic background. Yet minority groups are underrepre-

Marsha Lien was an intern in the Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections, BLS.

diversity:

the melting pot



sented in many occupations.

Minorities make up about 30 percent of the U.S. population, according to the 2000 census. But Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data show that in 2003, about 21 percent of registered nurses, 19 percent of teachers, and 10 percent of lawyers were minorities. This section provides information about these occupations. Included are profiles of the job duties, data (from the BLS Current Population Survey) on earnings and employment, information on job outlook and educational requirements, some reasons that minorities might want to consider these careers, and a few suggestions for ways to prepare to enter them.

Registered nurses

As our society becomes more diverse, healthcare organizations are serving a wider variety of patients. But studies suggest that the healthcare needs of patients from minority groups are not always being met. For example, a 2002 report by the Institute of Medicine, an organization commissioned by Congress to address healthcare dispari-

ties, found that communication barriers between patients and healthcare workers negatively affected the quality of healthcare received by minorities. Other issues, ranging from a lack of information to a dread of medical visits, may cause some people to avoid seeking treatment.

Nurses, as the largest healthcare occupation, are at the forefront of patient care. In addition to the technical skills that minority nurses have, their very presence in the healthcare setting sometimes helps them to play a part in community outreach. "Some Asians might feel more comfortable going into a clinic just because they see I'm Asian," says Maria Nguyen, a nurse consultant for U.S. Customs and Border Protection. "I wouldn't want that to be their primary reason for going, but I'd be happy if it helps."

Nature of the work. Registered nurses work to promote health, prevent disease, and help patients who are ill or injured. They are advocates and health educators for patients, families, and communities. Consequently, they must be able to cope with human suffering, emergencies, and other stresses. "It's a hard job," says Nguyen. "You

need to really care and to really want to help. That will make the difference between a good nurse and bad one.”

Nurses’ specific job duties vary, depending on where they work. For example, Nguyen has worked as both an emergency room nurse and an occupational health nurse. As an emergency room nurse, she provided acute care for patients with health crises. As an occupational health nurse, she provided care to employees at a worksite.

Nursing offers different opportunities within the oc-

cupation or in related medical careers. Some nurses move to the business side of healthcare, using their expertise to manage medical services or to work in marketing, health planning, or quality assurance. Other nurses get additional training to work as advanced practice nurses, including nurse practitioners, college or university faculty, or researchers.

Working conditions for nurses also depend, in large part, on where they work. They may spend considerable



time walking and standing. But whether their jobs are in hospitals, schools, nursing homes, or some other location, most nurses work in well-lighted, comfortable facilities. Providing patient care often requires nurses to be on call and to work nights, weekends, and holidays. Office, occupational health, and public health nurses are more likely than nurses in other locations to work regular business hours.

Earnings, employment, and outlook. According to BLS, registered nurses had median weekly earnings of about \$900 in 2003, meaning half earned more than that amount and half earned less. Those earnings are more than the \$620 weekly median for all workers. Earnings were higher for advanced practice nurses.

There were 1.8 million registered nurses employed in 2003. Job prospects for new nurses are expected to be excellent. Compared with other occupations, registered nurses are projected to gain the largest number of new jobs between 2002 and 2012. More than a million openings for new nurses are expected to result from the need

Nurses are health educators for patients and their communities.

to fill those jobs and to replace experienced nurses who leave the occupation—especially as the median age of the registered nurse population continues to rise. Faster than average growth in the occupation will be driven by an increasing emphasis on preventive care and by technological advances in patient care that allow more medical problems to be treated. In addition, the number of older people, who are more likely than younger people to need healthcare, is projected to grow rapidly over the decade.

Educational requirements. In all States and the District of Columbia, students must graduate from an approved nursing program and pass a national licensing test to obtain a nursing license. All States require periodic license renewal, which may involve continuing education.

There are three main educational paths to becoming a registered nurse: Earning a bachelor of science degree in nursing, earning an associate degree in nursing, and earning a diploma in nursing. Nursing education includes classroom instruction and supervised clinical experience in hospitals and other healthcare facilities.

Bachelor's degree programs are offered by colleges

and universities and usually require 4 to 5 years to complete. Associate degree programs are offered by community and junior colleges and usually take 2 to 3 years. Diploma programs are in hospitals and last 2 to 3 years, but there are only a few of these programs nationwide.

Some career paths are open only to nurses who have a bachelor's or advanced degree. Many nurses with a diploma or an associate degree later enter bachelor's degree programs to prepare for a broader scope of nursing practice. They might work as staff nurses while taking classes to earn a bachelor's degree, perhaps receiving tuition reimbursement from their employers.

Grants, scholarships, and other resources. Numerous programs are available to assist minority students in funding a nursing education. An online resource, www.minoritynurse.com, is a good starting point for finding educational information and scholarship listings.

As part of the Nurse Reinvestment Act, the Federal Government has authorized several programs aimed at increasing the number of qualified nurses and improving the quality of nursing services. Among these programs is the Workforce Diversity Grant Program, which provides scholarships or stipends, exam preparation, and retention activities to financially or educationally disadvantaged students—including racial and ethnic minorities—to enable them to complete nursing education programs. For more information or to apply for a grant online, see bhpr.hrsa.gov/nursing/reinvestmentact.htm. Registering and applying online are strongly encouraged. However, paper applications also can be submitted and are available by requesting the appropriate packet from:

Health Resources and Services Administration
Grants Application Center
901 Russell Ave., Suite 450
Gaithersburg, MD 20879
Toll-free: 1 (877) HRSA-123 (477-2123)

Each of the following associations offers grants, scholarships, or fellowships, including some for minorities, to students pursuing a nursing education.

American Nurses Association
600 Maryland Ave. SW., Suite 100 West
Washington, DC 20024
Toll-free: 1 (800) 274-4ANA (274-4262)
(202) 651-7000
www.nursingworld.org

National Association of Black Nurses
8630 Fenton St., Suite 330
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3803
(301) 589-3200
www.nbna.org

National Association of Hispanic Nurses
1501 16th St. NW.
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 387-2477
www.thehispanicnurses.org

National Student Nurses' Association
45 Main St., Suite 606
Brooklyn, NY 11201
(718) 210-0705
www.nsna.org

Teachers

As the diverse population sends its children to school, many classrooms become a microcosm of society. Public schools, in fact, actually have more minorities than the population as a whole: according to data from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics for the 2001-02 school year, nearly 40 percent of students in public kindergarten through secondary schools were minorities. In addition to academic subjects, students are also learning social skills—including tolerance.

Using varied educational methods, teachers foster a culture of learning in their classrooms. During their formative years, many students look to their teachers as role models. Minority students are no exception, some studies indicate. For example, according to a 2002 Urban Institute report, student achievement was found to be higher among Latino elementary school students if their teachers were also Latino. Studies by the National Education Association and other sources suggest that greater diversity among teachers could boost minority students' attendance rates and participation in school activities—and improve school-parent communication and parental involvement.

Nature of the work. Preschool, kindergarten, elementary, middle, and secondary school teachers act as instructors, facilitators, and coaches in public or private schools.

The repetitive drills and rote memorization exercises inherent in older instructional methods are being replaced with more discussion and experiential learning to help students understand abstract concepts, solve problems, and develop critical thought processes.

Because the age levels of students vary, instructional techniques of preschool, kindergarten, and elementary school teachers differ from those of middle and secondary school teachers. Still, teachers at all levels must be able to communicate well and to understand the different developmental stages of their students. Teachers also need patience and a desire to work with students. They also must be prepared for the nonteaching parts of the

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job, such as recordkeeping tasks; mentor teacher Valerie Nelson says that many new teachers are surprised to discover how much paperwork is involved. When they include school duties performed outside the classroom, many teachers work more than 40 hours per week.

Almost two-thirds of all teachers work at the preschool through secondary school level. Other types of teachers include postsecondary teachers, adult literacy teachers, and remedial and self-enrichment education teachers. Some related occupations are teacher assistants, school administrators, and instructional coordinators. In some school systems, experienced teachers, like Nelson, become mentors to less experienced teachers.

Earnings, employment, and outlook. Teachers' earnings depend, in part, on the age of the students they teach. In 2003, median weekly earnings were about \$490 for preschool and kindergarten teachers, \$770 for elementary and middle school teachers, and \$860 for secondary school teachers; median weekly earnings for all workers in 2003 were \$620. Teachers in private schools generally earn less than those in public schools. Those who teach when school is not in regular session, during the standard 10-month school year, earn additional income. Teachers also receive additional pay in some schools for coaching sports or for supervising students in extracurricular activities. Getting a master's degree or national certifica-



Photo courtesy of U.S. Department of Education

tion often results in more income, as does being a mentor teacher.

There were about 3.7 million preschool through secondary school teachers employed in 2003. Job outlook for teachers varies by geographic area and subject specialty. But overall, excellent job opportunities are projected between 2002 and 2012 because of the large number of teachers expected to retire over the next 10 years, particularly at the secondary school level. Currently, many school districts have difficulty hiring qualified teachers in some subject areas, such as mathematics, science (especially chemistry and physics), bilingual education, foreign languages, and computer science.

Educational requirements. All 50 States and the District of Columbia require that public school teachers be licensed, have at least a bachelor's degree, and have completed an approved teacher education program. Increasingly, States have started to apply performance-

based standards for licensure, which require prospective teachers to pass a comprehensive teaching examination to get a provisional license. Teachers then must demonstrate satisfactory teaching performance over an extended period to obtain a full license. Many States offer alternative licensing programs to attract people from other fields into teaching, especially for hard-to-fill positions.

Grants, scholarships, and other resources. Because each State has its own teaching licensure requirements, financial assistance for students in teacher-training programs usually is administered on a statewide, rather than a nationwide, basis. Most States have scholarships and grants to encourage students to become teachers, and some of these awards are directed specifically to minorities. Check with your career counselor or contact your State's office of higher education for more information. Note, however, that State grants often include a service requirement, so recipients may be obligated to teach in

the State in which their award-related education was funded.

Several States have programs designed to attract minorities to teaching. One example is the Consortium for Minorities in Teaching Careers in Baltimore, Maryland, which identifies, recruits, and prepares precollege minority students to enter college and encourages them to choose a career in teaching. The consortium provides students in high school with an opportunity for hands-on teaching experience in several local elementary schools. For more information, contact:

Morgan State University
School of Education and Urban Studies
Baltimore, MD 21251
(443) 885-3748
www.morgan.edu/academics/special/cmtc/default.asp

The following organizations have information for aspiring teachers:

American Federation of Teachers
555 New Jersey Ave. NW.
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 879-4400
www.aft.org

National Education Association
1201 16th St. NW.
Washington, DC 20036-3290
(202) 833-4000
www.nea.org

Lawyers

From taxation to representation, laws affect nearly every person in our society. Yet few minorities work in the legal field. As the Florida Bar stated during its 2001 All Bar Conference on Diversity, “Diversifying law firms is not only the morally and socially responsible thing to do, but it makes good business sense, and those who are slow to diversify, or refuse to, will soon be left behind.”

Lawyers, also called attorneys, are liaisons between society and the legal system. Increased diversity among lawyers may improve communication between, and interaction with,

members of the legal profession and the clients they serve. This is one reason that efforts to increase minority participation in the occupation are encouraged by national and State bar associations. For example, several of the American Bar Association’s membership sections—including the business law, litigation, and family law sections—have written plans that specify a commitment to diversity.

Nature of the work. Lawyers work as both advocates and advisors. As advocates, they represent one of the parties in a criminal or civil action, either by negotiating a client’s settlement out of court or by presenting evidence and arguing the case in court. As advisors, lawyers counsel their clients about their legal rights and obligations and suggest strategies in business and personal matters.



In either capacity, lawyers must know how to research the laws and judicial decisions that apply to their client's specific circumstances.

Lawyers' jobs may often be stressful, especially when they are trying a case. Most lawyers work in private practice, where they concentrate on either criminal or civil law. A significant number are employed at various levels of government; others work in public-interest jobs. Lawyers do most of their work in offices, law libraries, and courtrooms. They may have to travel to meet in clients' homes or places of business or to some other location, such as a hospital or prison. Their hours of work are commonly irregular, and most lawyers log 50 or more hours per week. Private practice lawyers may spend a lot of time traveling while working on cases. Tax lawyers

and other specialists may have concentrated periods of heavy workloads.

The job of a lawyer is never boring, says Charlene Tsang-Kao, a labor and employment lawyer and a member of the Texas Young Lawyers Association. "There is always a new challenge waiting for you," she says. "You have the opportunity to navigate real-life problems and offer solutions. Good judgment, clear analytical skills, and the willingness to work hard are necessities for the job." Other occupations that require skills similar to those needed by lawyers include paralegals and legal assistants, law clerks, arbitrators, mediators, judges, and hearing officers.

Earnings, employment, and outlook. With median weekly earnings of about \$1,560, lawyers made about 2½ times the weekly earnings for most workers in 2003. Salaries vary widely according to the type, size, and location of the employer for which lawyers work. Lawyers working in the public sector usually

Lawyers counsel clients about their legal rights and obligations.

earn less than those in private practice, and lawyers who own their own practices generally earn less than those who are partners in law firms.

There were 584,000 lawyers employed in 2003. Increases in the population and in the level of business activity are expected to result in average job growth for lawyers during the 2002-12 decade, but competition is expected for jobs with prestigious firms. Willingness to relocate may be an advantage, but jobseekers who relocate may be required to take another State's bar examination. Strong growth areas include tax law, international law, entertainment law, and environmental law. Other strong specialties include healthcare, international trade, intellectual property, and white-collar crime.

Educational requirements. Formal requirements to become a lawyer include earning a bachelor's degree in any subject and a doctoral degree in jurisprudence (which usually takes



another 3 years) and, in most States, successfully completing a written bar examination. The competition for admission to most law schools is intense, and the curriculum is demanding. Education does not stop after graduating from law school, either: most States require lawyers to take continuing education courses each year.

Grants, scholarships, and other resources. Scholarships and other forms of financial assistance are available to students preparing to become lawyers. In addition, many law firms offer grants, scholarships, internships, and career opportunities to aspiring lawyers.

The American Bar Association's Legal Opportunity Scholarship Fund provides several awards of \$5,000 annually to minority students. To learn more or to request an application, contact:

Office of the Fund for Justice and Equality
American Bar Association
321 North Clark St.
Chicago, IL 60610
(312) 988-5415

www.abanet.org/fje/losfpage.html

The Earl Warren Legal Training Program provides scholarships for black students who are entering law school, with special emphasis on students who plan to practice civil-rights or public-interest law. For more information or to request an application (applications may not be requested online or by telephone or by e-mail), contact:

The Earl Warren Legal Training Program
99 Hudson St., Suite 1600
New York, NY 10013
(212) 219-1900

The Association of Trial Lawyers of America's Minority Caucus sponsors the Richard D. Hailey Student Scholarship, open to all first- and second-year African American, Hispanic, Asian American, Native American, and biracial student members of the association. For more information, contact:

ATLA Minority Caucus
1050 31st St., NW.
Washington, DC 20007
Toll-free: 1 (800) 424-2725, ext. 317
(202) 965-3500, ext. 317

Other associations provide information for minority law students, and several offer grants and scholarships. Among these groups are the following:

Hispanic National Bar Association
815 Connecticut Ave. NW., Suite 500
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 223-4777
www.hnba.com

Minority Corporate Counsel Association
1400 L St. NW., 10th Floor
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 371-5908
www.mcca.com

National Asian Pacific American Bar Association
733 15th St. NW., Suite 315
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 421-9039

or

725 S. Figueroa St., Suite 1690
Los Angeles, CA 90017
(213) 955-8022
www.napaba.org

National Black Law Students Association
1225 11th St. NW.
Washington, DC 20001-4217
www.nblsa.org

More information

For indepth descriptions of the occupations mentioned in this article, refer to the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*. The *Handbook* is available in many public libraries and career counseling offices. It also is accessible online at www.bls.gov/oco.

Financial incentives are not available exclusively to students preparing to become nurses, teachers, and lawyers. For people who do not plan to pursue a college degree, for example, apprenticeships provide paid, on-the-job training in a number of occupations. (See "Apprenticeships: Career training, credentials—and a paycheck in your pocket," in the summer 2002 *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*.)

tional Outlook Quarterly, online at www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2002/summer/art01.pdf.) Scholarship and grant programs exist in many other fields of study and at different levels of education. Ask your career counselor for information about financial awards for minority students in colleges or universities, in specific majors, and at undergraduate and graduate levels of study. For a list of print and online resources about grants or other financial aid for minority students in higher education, contact:

Funding Center Supervisor
Social Sciences Collections Coordinator
Michigan State University Libraries
100 Library
E. Lansing, MI 48824-1048
(517) 432-6123, ext. 123
www.lib.msu.edu/harris23/grants/3specpop.htm

Employment programs aimed at increasing workplace diversity include internship, recruitment, and mentoring opportunities. Some, like the grant to prepare minorities for diplomatic careers (mentioned at the beginning of the article), are partnerships with colleges and universities. Other programs are specific to individual employers. Still others serve a job-placement function, matching employers and jobseekers. One example of the latter is Inroads, Inc., which places minorities in internships to prepare them for roles in corporate and community leadership. To learn more about the Inroads internship program, contact:

Inroads, Inc.
10 S. Broadway, Suite 700
St. Louis, MO 63102
(314) 241-7488
www.inroads.org

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