

rapidly and accurately are important. Good interpersonal skills also are vital, because mail distribution clerks work closely with other postal workers, frequently under the tension and strain of meeting dispatch or transportation deadlines and quotas.

Postal Service workers often begin on a part-time, flexible basis and become regular or full time, in order of seniority as vacancies occur. Full-time workers may bid for preferred assignments, such as the day shift or a high-level nonsupervisory position. Carriers can look forward to obtaining preferred routes as their seniority increases, or to high-level jobs, such as carrier technician. Postal Service workers can advance to supervisory positions on a competitive basis.

Job Outlook

Employment of Postal Service workers is expected to decline slightly through 2010. However, many jobs still will become available because of the need to replace those who retire or leave the occupation. Those seeking jobs as Postal Service workers can expect to encounter keen competition, because the number of applicants will continue to exceed the number of openings.

Although efforts by the U.S. Postal Service to provide better service will increase the number of window clerks, the demand for such clerks will be offset by the use of electronic communications technologies and private delivery companies. Employment of distribution clerks and mail processors is expected to decline because of the increasing use of automated materials handling equipment and optical character readers, barcode sorters, and other automated sorting equipment. The expected decline in mail volume also may have a negative impact on the employment of distribution clerks and mail processors.

Several factors are expected to influence demand for mail carriers. The competition from alternative delivery systems and new forms of electronic communication could drastically affect the total volume of mail handled. The Postal Service expects mail volume to increase through 2002, and then decrease through 2010. Most of the decrease is expected to come from first-class and standard mail. The Postal Service expects an increase in package deliveries due to the rising number of purchases made through the Internet by businesses and consumers and to partnerships the Postal Service has made with its competitors. Although total mail volume is projected to decrease, perhaps significantly, the number of addresses to which mail must be delivered will continue to increase. However, increased use of the "delivery point sequencing" system, which allows machines to sort mail directly by the order of delivery, should reduce the amount of time carriers spend sorting their mail, allowing them more time to handle these longer routes. In addition, the Postal Service is moving toward more centralized mail delivery, such as the increased use of cluster boxes, to cut down on the number of door-to-door deliveries. These trends are expected to increase carrier productivity, causing slow employment growth.

Currently the role of the Postal Service as a government-approved monopoly is a topic of debate. Any legislative changes that would privatize or deregulate the U.S. Postal Service may affect employment of all its workers. Employment and schedules in the Postal Service fluctuate with the demand for its services. When mail volume is high, full-time workers work overtime, part-time workers work additional hours, and casual workers may be hired. When mail volume is low, overtime is curtailed, part-timers work fewer hours, and casual workers are discharged.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of postal mail carriers were \$38,420 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$33,620 and \$41,930. The lowest 10 percent had earnings of less than \$26,140, while the top

10 percent earned over \$44,040. Rural mail carriers are reimbursed for mileage put on their own vehicles while delivering mail.

Median annual earnings of Postal Service clerks were \$39,010 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$36,140 and \$41,870. The lowest 10 percent had earnings of less than \$31,980, while the top 10 percent earned more than \$43,590.

Median annual earnings of mail sorters, processors, and processing-machine operators were \$32,080 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$22,560 and \$39,300. The lowest 10 percent had earnings of less than \$18,940, while the top 10 percent earned more than \$42,570.

Postal Service workers enjoy a variety of employer-provided benefits similar to those enjoyed by Federal Government workers. The American Postal Workers Union or the National Association of Letter Carriers, both of which are affiliated with the AFL-CIO, represent most of these workers.

Related Occupations

Other occupations with duties similar to those of postal clerks include cashiers; counter and rental clerks; file clerks; and shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks. Others with duties related to those of mail carriers include couriers and messengers and truckdrivers and driver/sales workers. Occupations whose duties are related to those of mail sorters, processors, and processing-machine operators include inspectors, testers, sorters, samplers, and weighers, and material moving occupations.

Sources of Additional Information

Local post offices and State employment service offices can supply details about entrance examinations and specific employment opportunities for Postal Service workers.

Secretaries and Administrative Assistants

(O*NET 43-6011.00, 43-6012.00, 43-6013.00, 43-6014.00)

Significant Points

- Increasing office automation and organizational restructuring will lead to slow growth in overall employment of secretaries and administrative assistants.
- Job openings will stem primarily from the need to replace workers who transfer to other occupations or leave this very large occupation for other reasons each year.
- Opportunities should be best for skilled and experienced secretaries.

Nature of the Work

As technology continues to expand in offices across the Nation, the role of the office professional has greatly evolved. Office automation and organizational restructuring have led secretaries and administrative assistants to assume a wider range of new responsibilities once reserved for managerial and professional staff. Many secretaries and administrative assistants now provide training and orientation for new staff, conduct research on the Internet, and operate and troubleshoot new office technologies. In the midst of these changes, however, their core responsibilities have remained much the same, although changed from manual to electronic—

performing and coordinating an office's administrative activities, storing retrieving, and integrating information for dissemination to staff and clients.

Secretaries and administrative assistants are responsible for a variety of administrative and clerical duties necessary to run an organization efficiently. They serve as an information manager for an office, schedule meetings and appointments, organize and maintain paper and electronic files, manage projects, conduct research, and provide information via the telephone, postal mail, and e-mail. They also may prepare correspondence and handle travel arrangements.

Secretaries and administrative assistants are aided in these tasks by a variety of office equipment, such as facsimile machines, photocopiers, and telephone systems. In addition, secretaries and administrative assistants increasingly use personal computers to create spreadsheets, compose correspondence, manage databases, and create reports and documents via desktop publishing, and using digital graphics—all tasks previously handled by managers and other professionals. At the same time, these other office workers have assumed many tasks traditionally assigned to secretaries and administrative assistants, such as word processing and answering the telephone. Because secretaries and administrative assistants are often relieved from dictation and typing, they can support more members of the executive staff. In a number of organizations, secretaries and administrative assistants work in teams in order to work flexibly and share their expertise.

Specific job duties vary with experience and titles. *Executive secretaries and administrative assistants*, for example, perform fewer clerical tasks than other secretaries. In addition to arranging conference calls, and scheduling meetings, they may handle more complex responsibilities such as conducting research, preparing statistical reports, training employees, and supervising other clerical staff.

Some secretaries and administrative assistants, such as legal and medical secretaries, perform highly specialized work requiring knowledge of technical terminology and procedures. For instance, *legal secretaries* prepare correspondence and legal papers such as summonses, complaints, motions, responses, and subpoenas under the supervision of an attorney or paralegal. They also may review legal journals and assist in other ways with legal research, such as verifying quotes and citations in legal briefs. *Medical secretaries* transcribe dictation, prepare correspondence, and assist physicians or medical scientists with reports, speeches, articles, and conference proceedings. They also record simple medical histories, arrange



Some secretaries and administrative assistants perform highly specialized work requiring knowledge of technical terminology and procedures.

for patients to be hospitalized, and order supplies. Most medical secretaries need to be familiar with insurance rules, billing practices, and hospital or laboratory procedures. Other technical secretaries who assist engineers or scientists may prepare correspondence, maintain the technical library, and gather and edit materials for scientific papers.

Working Conditions

Secretaries and administrative assistants usually work in offices with other professionals in schools, hospitals, corporate settings, or in legal and medical offices. Their jobs often involve sitting for long periods. If they spend a lot of time typing, particularly at a video display terminal, they may encounter problems of eyestrain, stress, and repetitive motion, such as carpal tunnel syndrome.

Office work can lend itself to alternative or flexible working arrangements, such as part time work or telecommuting—especially if their jobs requires extensive computer use. More than 1 secretary in 7 works part time and many others work in temporary positions. A few participate in job sharing arrangements in which two people divide responsibility for a single job. The majority of secretaries, however, are full-time employees who work a standard 40-hour week.

Employment

Secretaries and administrative assistants held about 3.9 million jobs in 2000, ranking among the largest occupations in the U.S. economy. The following tabulation shows the distribution of employment by secretarial specialty.

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| Secretaries, except legal, medical, and executive | 1,864,000 |
| Executive secretaries and administrative assistants | 1,445,000 |
| Medical secretaries | 314,000 |
| Legal secretaries | 279,000 |

Secretaries and administrative assistants are employed in organizations of every type. Almost 3 out of 5 secretaries and administrative assistants are employed in firms providing services, ranging from education and health to legal and business services. Others work for firms engaged in manufacturing, construction, wholesale and retail trade, transportation, and communications. Banks, insurance companies, investment firms, and real estate firms are also important employers, as are Federal, State, and local government agencies.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

High school graduates who have basic office skills may qualify for entry-level secretarial positions. However, employers increasingly require extensive knowledge of software applications, such as word processing, spreadsheets, and database management. Secretaries and administrative assistants should be proficient in keyboarding and good at spelling, punctuation, grammar, and oral communication. Because secretaries and administrative assistants must be tactful in their dealings with people, employers also look for good interpersonal skills. Discretion, good judgment, organizational or management ability, initiative, and the ability to work independently are especially important for higher-level administrative positions.

As office automation continues to evolve, retraining and continuing education will remain an integral part of secretarial jobs. Changes in the office environment have increased the demand for secretaries and administrative assistants who are adaptable and versatile. Secretaries and administrative assistants may have to attend classes to learn how to operate new office technologies, such as information storage systems, scanners, the Internet, or new updated software packages, or utilize online education.

Secretaries and administrative assistants acquire skills in various ways. Training ranges from high school vocational education programs that teach office skills and keyboarding to 1- and 2-year programs in office administration offered by business schools, vocational-technical institutes, and community colleges. Many temporary placement agencies also provide formal training in computer and office skills. Many skills are often acquired, however, through on-the-job instruction by other employees or by equipment and software vendors. Specialized training programs are available for students planning to become medical or legal secretaries or administrative technology specialists. Bachelor's degrees and professional certifications are becoming increasingly important as business continues to become more global.

Testing and certification for entry-level office skills is available through the International Association of Administrative Professionals and NALS, the association for legal professionals. As secretaries and administrative assistants gain experience, they can earn the Certified Professional Secretary (CPS) designation or the Certified Administrative Professional (CAP) designation by meeting certain experience and/or educational requirements and passing an examination. Similarly, those with one year's experience in the legal field or who have concluded an approved training course and who want to be certified as a legal support professional can acquire the basic designation of Accredited Legal Secretary (ALS) by a testing process administered by NALS. NALS also offers an examination to confer the designation of Professional Legal Secretary (PLS), an advanced certification for legal support professionals. Legal Secretaries International confers the Certified Legal Secretary Specialist (CLSS) designation in specialized areas such as civil trial, real estate, probate, and business law, to those who have 5 years of law-related experience and pass an examination. In some instances, waivers of certain requirements may be available.

Secretaries generally advance by being promoted to other administrative positions with more responsibilities. Qualified secretaries who broaden their knowledge of a company's operations and enhance their skills may be promoted to other positions such as senior or executive secretary, clerical supervisor, or office manager. Secretaries with word processing or data entry experience can advance to jobs as word processing or data entry trainers, supervisors, or managers within their own firms or in a secretarial, word processing or data entry service bureau. Secretarial experience can also lead to jobs such as instructor or sales representative with manufacturers of software or computer equipment. With additional training, many legal secretaries become paralegals.

Job Outlook

Overall, employment of secretaries and administrative assistants is expected to grow more slowly than the average for all occupations over the 2000-10 period. In addition to openings due to growth, numerous job openings will result from the need to replace workers who transfer to other occupations or leave this very large occupation for other reasons each year. Opportunities should be best for well-qualified and experienced secretaries.

Projected employment of secretaries will vary by occupational specialty. Employment growth in the health and legal services industries should lead to average growth for medical and legal secretaries. Employment of executive secretaries and administrative assistants also is projected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations. Fast growing industries—such as personnel supply, computer and data processing services, health and legal services education, and engineering and management—will continue to generate most new job opportunities. A decline in employment is expected for all other secretaries except legal, medical,

or executive. They account for almost half of all secretaries and administrative assistants.

Growing levels of office automation and organizational restructuring will continue to make secretaries and administrative assistants more productive in coming years. Personal computers, electronic mail, scanners, and voice message systems will allow secretaries to accomplish more in the same amount of time. The use of automated equipment is also changing the distribution of work in many offices. In some cases, such traditional secretarial duties as keyboarding, filing, photocopying, and bookkeeping are being assigned to workers in other units or departments. Professionals and managers increasingly do their own word processing and data entry; and handle much of their own correspondence rather than submit the work to secretaries and other support staff. Also, in some law offices and physicians' offices, paralegals and medical assistants are assuming some tasks formerly done by secretaries. As other workers assume more of these duties, there is a trend in many offices for professionals and managers to "share" secretaries and administrative assistants. The traditional arrangement of one secretary per manager is becoming less prevalent; instead, secretaries and administrative assistants increasingly support systems, departments, or units. This approach often means secretaries and administrative assistants assume added responsibilities and are seen as valuable members of a team, but it also contributes to the decline in employment projected for overall numbers of secretaries and administrative assistants.

Developments in office technology are certain to continue, and they will bring about further changes in the secretary's and administrative assistant's work environment. However, many secretarial and administrative duties are of a personal, interactive nature and, therefore, not easily automated. Responsibilities such as planning conferences, working with clients, and transmitting staff instructions require tact and communication skills. Because technology cannot substitute for these personal skills, secretaries and administrative assistants will continue to play a key role in most organizations.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of executive secretaries and administrative assistants were \$31,090 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$24,970 and \$38,370 in 2000. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$20,350, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$46,250. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of executive secretaries and administrative assistants in 2000, were:

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| Computer and data processing services | \$33,720 |
| Local government | 32,100 |
| Elementary and secondary schools | 30,470 |
| Colleges and universities | 29,710 |
| Personnel supply services | 28,020 |

Median annual earnings of legal secretaries, were \$34,740 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$27,650 and \$42,510. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$22,440, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$50,970. Medical secretaries earned a median annual salary of \$23,430 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$19,530 and \$28,120. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$16,510, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$34,510. Median annual earnings of all other secretaries, excluding legal, medical, and executive secretaries, were about \$23,870 in 2000.

Salaries vary a great deal, however, reflecting differences in skill, experience, and level of responsibility. Salaries also vary in different parts of the country; earnings are usually lowest in southern cities, and highest in northern and western cities. In addition, salaries vary by industry; salaries of secretaries tend to be highest in

transportation, legal services, and public utilities, and lowest in retail trade and finance, insurance, and real estate. Certification in this field usually is rewarded by a higher salary.

The starting salary for inexperienced secretaries in the Federal Government was \$17,474 a year in 2001. Beginning salaries were slightly higher in selected areas where the prevailing local pay level was higher. All secretaries employed by the Federal Government averaged about \$33,354 a year in early 2001.

Related Occupations

A number of other workers type, record information, and process paperwork. Among them are bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks; receptionists and information clerks; court reporters; human resources assistants, except payroll and timekeeping; computer operators; data entry and information processing workers; paralegals and legal assistants; medical assistants; and medical records and health information technicians. A growing number of secretaries share in managerial and human resource responsibilities. Occupations requiring these skills include office and administrative

support supervisors and managers, computer and information systems managers, administrative services managers, and human resources, training, and labor relations managers and specialists.

Sources of Additional Information

State employment offices provide information about job openings for secretaries. For information on the Certified Professional Secretary designation or the Certified Administrative Professional designation, contact:

► International Association of Administrative Professionals, 10502 NW Ambassador Dr., P.O. Box 20404, Kansas City, MO 64195-0404. Internet: <http://www.iaap-hq.org>

Information on the Certified Legal Secretary Specialist designation can be obtained from:

► Legal Secretaries International Inc., 8902 Sunnywood Dr., Houston, TX 77088-3729. Internet: <http://www.legalsecretaries.org>

Information on the Accredited Legal Secretary (ALS) and the Professional Legal Secretary (PLS) certifications is available from:

► NALS, Inc., 314 East 3rd St., Suite 210, Tulsa, OK 74120. Internet: <http://www.nals.org>