

# WORKforce

## New Mexico

### Higher Education & the Workforce

In 2006 a good education is no longer just a way for an individual to get ahead. It is also, and increasingly, the best way a state can get ahead – and therefore a real economic priority. A college degree confers specific, calculable benefits on a state's citizens: the average lifetime income of an individual with a bachelor's degree is \$2.1 million, compared to \$1.2 million for those with just a high school diploma. But the benefits realized by the state are just as impressive as those that an individual sees. Not only does a state with a well-educated populace see increased tax revenues from its (better-paid) citizens, it is also able to use the education level of its citizens as a powerful lure for business and industry – a way to build its economy overall.

For that to happen, however, a state must make sure that all of its citizens have access to a college education. Businesses are no longer simply looking for a small, well-educated elite but instead need to be able to draw upon a labor pool that's both broadly educated and diverse. In fact, a report from the Business-Higher Education Forum, a coalition that includes some of the country's top corporate CEOs, states that an educated and diverse population is an essential competitive asset in today's global economy.

In New Mexico, the demand for well-educated employees will only increase over the next several years. In the decade leading up to 2012, healthcare occupations will see growth of 32 percent. Teachers will be in high demand: nearly 12,380 educators (including librarians) will need to be hired. Managers will see their ranks swell by 21 percent; when you add in retirements, over 2,310 openings will need to be filled each year. The growth of these sectors is good news for New Mexico's citizens, since wages for jobs in these areas are significantly higher than the average for New Mexico in general. But entry into these jobs comes with a price tag: most positions in these fields will require a bachelor's degree or higher. The question for New Mexico and other states is how, in a time of tight budgets, to meet the increasing demands on higher education and thereby meet the needs of an increasingly sophisticated economy.

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) has had workforce issues at the top of its agenda since its creation in the 1950s. In fact, WICHE was launched specifically to address the shortage of workforce-training opportunities in medicine, dentistry, and other professional fields. Today, WICHE offers a slew of undergraduate, graduate, and professional options that help the West's states educate and train their citizens, building their economies in the process.

### New Mexico's Occupational Outlook

Employment in New Mexico (including hourly and salaried jobs and self-employment) is projected to grow by 20 percent from 2002 to 2012, adding over 158,020 new jobs to the state's economy and growing the workforce from 808,030 to 966,050. The rate of growth is higher than the 15 percent increase projected for the nation as a whole.

Growth will occur in virtually all sectors of New Mexico's economy, with the largest number of new jobs being generated in lower-paying fields such as retail sales, food preparation and service, and cashiering. However, New Mexico's "top jobs" – those with the strongest employment outlook and high earnings – are almost all professional positions (see Table 1).

**Table 1. New Mexico's Top Jobs\***

Network/Comm. Analysts	Respiratory Therapists
Physician Assistants	Physical Therapists
Postsecondary Teachers	Computer Systems Mgrs.
Network/Computer Admins.	Pharmacists
Database Administrators	Computer Sftwr. Engineers
Dental Hygienists	Cardiovascular Techs.

\* Jobs with the strongest employment outlook (2002-12) and high wages.

Source: New Mexico Department of Labor.

All of the top jobs listed on Table 1 require considerable education and training. Four of them (registered nurse, dental hygienist, respiratory therapist, and cardiovascular technologist) require an associate's degree, while all the rest demand a bachelor's degree or higher.

New Mexico will see strong growth in a variety of sectors in the decade leading up to 2012. Six of the state's top jobs are in fields related to health: registered nurse, pharmacist, physical therapist, physician assistant, dental hygienist, respiratory therapist, and cardiovascular tech. Overall, the state is projected to add over 12,000 new jobs in these and other fields related to health diagnosing and treatment.

The demand for registered nurses will see a 37 percent increase: about 7,100 R.N.s will need to be hired for new posts and to replace those who leave the field. And New Mexico will see strong competition for those nurses: the top five states needing the largest numbers of nurses are all in the West. Physician assistants will see a 51 percent increase in their ranks, with some 400 being hired for new and replacement positions. Pharmacists will log growth of 44 percent, while physical therapists will experience a 42 percent increase. New Mexico will also experience a strong demand for new occupational therapists and other health practitioners. One reason for the increase: the aging of the state's population. New Mexico is seeing rapid growth in its older population: in 2003, 16 percent, or over 306,000, of its citizens were over 60.

Two other essential professionals, managers and teachers, will also see a large number of hires in the decade leading up to 2012, due to new job creation and the need for replacement workers. Some 12,200 new jobs will be created for managers of all types – from CEOs and operations managers to supervisors. Large numbers of teachers at every level from kindergarten through college will be needed. At the primary and secondary levels, more than 6,000 new jobs will be created, with the biggest chunk (over 2,000) slated for elementary school teachers. Over 2,000 new slots in postsecondary education are projected to open up during the decade. In all, some 15,300 hires will have to be made to cover all of education's new job openings and retirements.

As New Mexico's economy changes, so do the kinds of jobs available to New Mexicans. The projections indicate that plenty of jobs will be available for those without formal training beyond high school. However, wages in the sectors hiring those workers – retail sales and food service will be top employers – fall significantly below the statewide mean (\$33,004 a year), and many positions don't provide even a living wage. Over the next several years, workers who have the most education and training will have the best opportunity for high-paying jobs in growing sectors. In addition, a number of professions requiring education beyond the bachelor's degree are expected to see moderate to strong growth (see Table 2).

**Table 2**  
**New Mexico Professional Employment Projections, 2002-2012**

Profession	Number		% Change	Total Openings*
	2002	2012		
All professions	808,030	966,050	20%	352,900
Architects	790	823	4%	33**
Dentists	560	590	5%	30**
Librarians	1,170	1,350	15%	500
Occupational Therapists	630	830	32%	300
Optometrists	110	130	18%	20**
Pharmacists	1,460	2,100	44%	900
Physical Therapists	930	1,320	42%	500
Physician Assistants	650	980	51%	400
Physicians and Surgeons***	4,920	5,920	20%	1,000**
Podiatrists	40	50	25%	10**
Registered Nurses	12,140	16,660	37%	7,100
Veterinarians	420	470	12%	200

\* Includes new jobs and replacements, rounded. \*\* New jobs only. \*\*\*Does not include anesthesiologists.

Source: New Mexico Department of Labor.

## NEW MEXICO & WICHE's Student Exchange

In 2002, 57 percent of New Mexico's new high school grads enrolled in college — and 21 percent of them went to school out of state, according to WICHE's Policy Indicators for Higher Education ([www.wiche.edu/Policy/FactBook](http://www.wiche.edu/Policy/FactBook)). One of the most economical ways for them to do that: our Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE), which allows students to enroll in out-of-state institutions at a reduced tuition level (150 percent of resident tuition). Almost 700 New Mexico students enrolled in WUE in 2005, saving over \$3.6 million and working toward degrees in fields that are essential to New Mexico's economy. Some of the most popular fields of study for New Mexico's students: education, biology, business, hotel/restaurant management, and psychology.

WICHE's Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP) offers students opportunities to train outside of their home state in 14 highly competitive fields: architecture, dentistry, graduate library studies, medicine, nursing, occupational therapy, optometry, osteopathic medicine, pharmacy, physical therapy, physician assistant, podiatry, public health, and veterinary medicine. In New Mexico, employment projections in all these fields are on the rise (see Table 2). Through PSEP, New Mexico students are studying to be dentists, veterinarians, optometrists, osteopathic physicians, and librarians. In general, at least 60 percent of PSEP students return to their home state to practice.

New Mexico students also participate in the Western Regional Graduate Program (WRGP), which offers them the chance to engage in graduate studies and includes 175 distinctive programs in 14 states, such as education, nursing, and business. On the horizon is a distance learning option, NEON (the Northwest Educational Outreach Network), which will provide electronically delivered degree programs in high-demand disciplines, such as a Ph.D. in nursing and a graduate certificate in supply chain management.

## Six Fast-Track Fields

### The Outlook for New Mexico & the Nation

From 2002 to 2012, the economy in New Mexico and the nation will continue generating jobs for workers at all levels of education and training. But there will be an increasing demand for employees with at least some postsecondary education, preferably a bachelor's degree. Nationwide, during a decade that will witness large numbers of baby boomers moving into retirement, 21.4 million new jobs will be created, an increase of 15 percent. However, in some fields, the increase will be more than triple that. Across the country, competition will be especially stiff for physician assistants, who will see their ranks grow by 49 percent, as well as for physical and occupational therapists (whose fields will experience growth of 35 percent) and pharmacists (30 percent). More than 620,000 new nurses will be needed (an increase of 27 percent) and some 14,500 new veterinarians. Below is a debriefing that focuses on trends in some of New Mexico's — and the nation's — fast growing professions.

**Registered Nurses.** Nursing is #1 in terms of growth among occupations requiring some postsecondary education: it will make more new hires in New Mexico in the decade leading up to 2012 than any other job in that category. Working in the largest healthcare profession, registered nurses held 12,140 jobs in 2002 in New Mexico; that number will grow to 16,660 by 2012, a 37 percent increase. Demand for R.N.s is expected to be high for a number of reasons, including the need to replace experienced nurses who leave the field, especially as the median age of the R.N. population continues to rise; a growing elderly population; and an imbalance between the supply of and demand for qualified R.N.s. Nationally, employment of registered nurses is expected to grow by 27 percent in the decade leading up to 2012. Median annual earnings of registered nurses in New Mexico were \$52,310 in 2004; the top 10 percent earned \$69,440 and up (nationally, that number was \$77,170).

**Physician Assistants.** This is the third fastest growing profession in New Mexico among all occupations requiring a bachelor's degree or higher. Physician assistants held 650 jobs in 2002; that number is projected to grow to 980 in 2012, a 51 percent increase. Demand will be strong for P.A.s, particularly in places that have difficulty attracting physicians, such as rural areas and inner city clinics. In addition, physicians and institutions are expected to employ more P.A.s to provide primary care and assist with medical and surgical procedures. Nationally, the number of physician assistants is expected to grow by 49 percent: over 4,000 new physician assistants will be needed each year. Median annual earnings of physician assistants in New Mexico were \$49,190 in 2004; the top 10 percent earned \$82,300 and up (nationally, that figure was \$94,840).

**Pharmacists.** In New Mexico, this is the seventh fastest growing

profession among all occupations requiring a bachelor's degree or higher. Pharmacists held 1,460 jobs in 2002, a number slated to jump to 2,100 in 2012, a 44 percent increase. Competition for pharmacists is expected to be steep over the 2002-12 period due to the increased pharmaceutical needs of a larger and older population. In addition, the number of degrees granted in pharmacy is expected to be lower than the number of job openings created by employment growth and replacement needs. Nationally, the number of pharmacists is expected to grow by 30 percent. Median annual earnings of New Mexico's pharmacists in 2004 were \$82,990; the top 10 percent earned \$108,320 and up (nationally, that figure was \$112,530).

**Physical Therapists.** This is the tenth fastest growing profession among all occupations requiring a bachelor's degree or higher in New Mexico. Physical therapists held 930 jobs in 2002, a number that will climb 42 percent to 1,320 in 2012. Thanks to a rapidly growing elderly population that's particularly vulnerable to chronic conditions requiring therapeutic services — as well as to the use of physical therapists at the workplace, to evaluate worksites, develop exercise programs, and teach safe work habits to employees — the demand for P.T.s will be strong throughout the 2002-12 decade. Nationally, the number of physical therapists is expected to grow by 36 percent. In New Mexico, median annual earnings of physical therapists were \$59,660 in 2004; the top 10 percent earned \$83,710 and up (nationally, that number was \$89,830).

**Teachers.** When it comes to the number of new hires, teaching is one of the top professions among occupations requiring a bachelor's. Primary, secondary, and special ed teachers held 27,060 jobs in 2002 in New Mexico; that number will grow to 33,130 by 2012, a 22 percent increase. In the decade leading up to 2012, New Mexico will also have to find 2,080 new postsecondary teachers for its colleges and universities. In all, the state will have to hire over 1,500 educators at all levels each year to cover new jobs, retirements, and separations. Nationally, the demand for teachers will vary, ranging from 38 percent for postsecondary teachers down to 9 percent for middle school teachers. Median annual earnings ranged from \$36,780 for the state's primary teachers to \$38,960 for secondary in 2004; the top 10 percent earned \$52,960 and \$55,570 and up, respectively (nationally, those figures were \$68,930 and \$72,110).

**Occupational Therapists.** Occupational therapists will see a 32 percent increase in their numbers in the decade leading up to 2012. O.T.s held 630 jobs in 2002 in New Mexico; that number is projected to grow to 830 by 2012. The baby boom's movement into middle and

old age and the resulting rise in the incidence of heart attack and stroke, as well as age-related disabilities, will increase the demand for therapeutic services. Nationally, the number of occupational therapists is expected to grow by 35 percent. Median annual earnings of occupational therapists in New Mexico were \$48,190 in 2004; the top 10 percent earned \$71,150 and up (nationally, that figure was \$83,100).

### **The Regional Outlook**

Seven of the top 10 states in terms of projected job growth are in the West: Nevada, Utah, Idaho, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and California. In the 15 WICHE states, an additional 5.9 million jobs will be added in the decade leading up to 2012. While California has the greatest numerical growth in the region, with some 270,000 new jobs being created each year, the states seeing the fastest job growth are Nevada (41 percent), Utah (31 percent), Idaho (24 percent), and Arizona and Colorado (23 percent). Most of the region's fastest growing professions are in the health and computer sectors.

### **Sources: Workforce Report Data**

All information used in the text and tables of this report is available from the New Mexico Department of Labor ([www.dol.state.nm.us](http://www.dol.state.nm.us)) and the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics ([www.bls.gov/emp](http://www.bls.gov/emp)).

## **WICHE**

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WICHE and its 15 member states — Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming — work collaboratively to expand educational access and excellence for all citizens of the West. By promoting innovation, cooperation, resource sharing, and sound public policy among states and institutions, WICHE strengthens higher education's contributions to the region's social, economic, and civic life.

For more information on WICHE's Student Exchange Programs, contact Margo Schultz at 303-541-0214 or [mschultz@wiche.edu](mailto:mschultz@wiche.edu) or write to:

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