THE ANATOMY OF AN OCCUPATIONAL CLASSIFICATION:

WHAT IT TAKES TO ACCURATELY REFLECT YOUR PROFESSION WITHIN THE BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS

For the benefit of the members of Health Professions Network. Provided by the NATA.

By Timothy Stokes

2952 Stemmons Freeway, Ste. 200
Dallas, Texas 75247
www.NATA.org

The work force is changing rapidly. Jobs are being created and eliminated at an unpredictable rate; the required skills for those jobs – not to mention the pool of qualified candidates – changes just as quickly.

Employers need a reliable way to develop new positions, determine appropriate pay scales and identify qualified professionals. In short, they need the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The BLS compiles a wealth of occupational information, including salaries, working conditions, growth rates and typical job descriptions. It is a valuable resource for employers, for job seekers and for those charged with helping a profession grow.

Data offered by the BLS include:

- Expected employment rates for various positions for the next 10 years
- Average salary ranges
- Typical work environments
- Skills and qualifications needed for a given career
- Career growth rates
- Typical duties
- Required educational background

Reporting Structure Used by BLS

The BLS is broken into two categories: Occupations and Jobs. A job consists of tasks that help improve the company and therefore keep the business running smoothly. An occupation, meanwhile, is the classification in which a worker is placed.

The BLS' occupational classification schemes examine and organize the millions of jobs in the economy into occupations, based on their similarities as determined by the BLS classification principles. For example, teaching is a job, but a teacher's occupation falls in the Education, Training, Library and Museum classification.

Overview

The Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) System was developed in response to a growing need for a universal occupational classification system. The SOC is the result of a cooperative effort of all federal agencies that use occupational classification systems to maximize the usefulness of occupational information collected by the federal government. Such a classification system allows government agencies and private industry to produce comparable data. Users of occupational data include government program managers, industrial and labor relations practitioners, students considering career training, job seekers, vocational training schools, and employers wishing to set salary scales or locate a new plant. It is used by federal agencies collecting occupational data and provides a means to compare occupational data across agencies. It is designed to cover all occupations in which work is performed for pay or profit, reflecting the current occupational structure in the United States.

SOC Classification and Coding Structure

The SOC classifies workers at **four** separate levels of aggregation:

1.) Major group
2.) Minor group
3.) Broad occupation
4.) Detailed occupation
The SOC system is used by Federal statistical agencies to classify workers into occupational categories for the purpose of collecting, calculating, or disseminating data. All workers are classified into one of more than 820 occupations according to their occupational definition. To facilitate classification, occupations are combined to form 23 major groups, 96 minor groups, and 449 broad occupations. Each broad occupation includes detailed occupation(s) requiring similar job duties, skills, education, or experience. General questions concerning the SOC may be sent by http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/forms/soc?/soc/home.htm or faxed to 202.691.6444.

When deciding the appropriate classification for an occupation, the BLS looks at the Standard Occupation Classification Manual (SOC Manual). The SOC Manual classifies workers into occupational categories for the purpose of collecting, calculating or disseminating data. This manual is updated every 10 years. **The updates are based on information received from economic sources and from readers who want their profession added or placed into a different category.** The SOC Manual, now under revision, will be republished in 2010. (The deadline to submit information for the 2010 edition was July 17, 2006.) For the production schedule of the 2020 edition and for other details pertaining to the SOC Manual, check www.bls.gov/soc.

Job Not Listed? UPDATE THE BLS!

The BLS relies on individuals and organizations to provide them with up-to-date career information. If you notice that your job is not listed or is not described accurately, simply send an e-mail to soc@bls.gov or fax your information to 202.691.6444. To speak to a BLS representative, call 202.691.6500 or contact the BLS' Anne Louise Marshall directly at 202.691.5054. The BLS is interested in providing the most thorough and accurate database possible; all feedback is welcome.

UPDATE THE BLS IF:

- Your job is not listed in the correct occupation.
  - To determine if your job has been categorized in the correct occupation, see if the tasks you perform fall in line with the occupation identified by the BLS. Go to www.bls.gov for an explanation of each occupation.
- Your job is not listed at all.
  - Make use of the BLS! This important resource helps attract qualified employees and helps generate ideas when companies are deciding whether and how to add staff.
- You find inaccurate information listed on the BLS.
  - Outdated salary information
  - Inaccurate job description
  - Incorrect information regarding experience needed
  - Inaccurate description of the overall profession

Tips for Offering Updates

The BLS receives a large volume of information from people and organizations that want to change a description of a job or an occupation and from others who would like their occupation added to the list. All information is accepted from all sources: organizations, work force departments, unions and individuals from a profession.

The Standard Occupational Classification Policy Committee evaluates all the data received. If you want to make an impression with the SOCPC, follow these tips from Theresa Cosca, supervisory economist in the Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections Bureau of Labor Statistics:

- Send credible and accurate information.
  - Clearly and accurately, specify the changes you would like. Comments and suggestions are welcomed from all, but the most powerful information comes from government sources and occupational associations. All inquiries are followed up by the SOC to let you know if your information was used or if further information would be needed for your inquiry.
- Leave no grey area in the description of your occupation.
- **Do not miss the deadline!** (Deadlines are found at www.bls.gov/soc/home.htm.)

Another Great Source of Information!

Another location to find valuable career information is the O*NET program www.onetcenter.org. O*NET is one of the nation's primary sources of occupational information. O*NET contains a variety of information on hundreds of occupations with excellent descriptions on the professions. To get their information, O*NET regularly conducts a survey on a variety of employees from all occupations. They also use a large amount of government found information from the BLS. The information gathered from
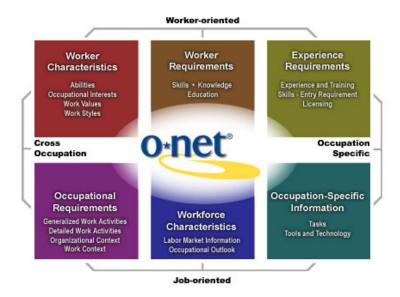
the survey is what creates the O*NET's database. It ultimately provides the basis for the Web sites Career Exploration Tools, which is a group of useful assessment instruments for workers and students looking to find information on a particular career or to just make career change.

Content Model

An occupation has many different characteristics, which set them apart from one another. On O*NET, you can find the differences on their content model. It separates the major parts of an occupation and places them in a category of "descriptors." The model is broken into six different domains:

1.) Worker Characteristics
2.) Worker Requirements
3.) Experience Requirements
4.) Occupational Requirements
5.) Workforce Characteristics, and
6.) Occupation-Specific Information

The model contains a total of 277 descriptors collected by the O*NET program, with more collected by other federal agencies, such as the BLS.

The BLS and O*NET are just a few of the databases workforces can rely on. They are a great source of occupational information for all people and businesses. These sources are dedicated to integrity and objectivity. They are superior among statistical agencies for producing impartial, timely and accurate data relevant to the needs of their users. This makes the BLS and others a prime source of information that can help you get the edge on your desired profession.