Nicole Smith, a professor at the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, is a co-author of a new study looking at job growth and education requirements across the 50 states. (AP)

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Study: Shortage of Educated Workers Looms

By Adrienne Lu, Staff Writer

The U.S. is on track to create 55 million new job openings by 2020, but will face a shortage of five million workers with the education or training to fill these positions, according to a new report by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

"If the U.S. Congress can deal with budgetary challenges, we are on schedule for recovery,” said Anthony P. Carnevale, Director of the Center, a nonprofit research and policy institute. “But we will still face a major shortage of college-educated workers especially as baby boomers retire.”

The study projects overall employment will grow from 140.6 million in 2010 to 164.6 million in 2020. Of the 55 million projected job openings, the study estimates 24 million will be for new jobs and 31 million will result from baby boomers retiring.

The study includes a state report, which breaks down growing and declining occupations in each state, as well as the level of education residents will need to get jobs.

According to the findings, 65 percent of job vacancies will require some postsecondary education and training, up from 28 percent in 1973. The study projects that the financial services industry will create more than 10 million job vacancies by 2020; wholesale and retail trade will create 7 million jobs and government and public education 6.7 million.

Four of the five fastest-growing occupations will require high levels of postsecondary education, the study found: healthcare professional and technical; science, technology, engineering and math; education and community services.
Among the highlights of the state report:

- The District of Columbia will have the highest concentration of jobs (76 percent) requiring postsecondary education, followed by Minnesota and Colorado (both 74 percent).
- The northeastern states will have the highest proportion of jobs requiring bachelor’s degrees and graduate degrees.
- The southern states will have the highest concentration of jobs for high school graduates or dropouts.
- Eleven percent of jobs nationwide will require a master’s degree or higher level of education. In the District of Columbia, 29 percent of jobs will require at least a master’s degree, followed by Massachusetts with 19 percent and Maryland and Connecticut at 16 percent.
- Based on the current levels of educational attainment, all but three states (New Hampshire, Utah and Wisconsin) are projected to have a shortage of workers with the required level of education.

Jon Fansmith, associate director for government relations at the American Council on Education, which represents presidents of U.S. colleges and universities, said the report reinforces a continuation of the long-term trends the council has been seeing over the past few decades: Increasingly more jobs now require specialized skills, training and advanced education.

Higher education institutions have been working to respond to the needs of so-called non-traditional students, Fansmith said, at a time when only 15 percent of students are the “traditional” full-time students aged 18 to 24 living in dorms and dependent on their parents. Schools are offering non-traditional students classes on flexible schedules and providing certificate programs tied to local workforce demands, he said.

Nicole Smith, a senior economist at the center and co-author of the report, said lawmakers who want to help grow the economy should help ensure that students have what they need to get postsecondary education or training. “We also need to create better transparency so that people actually know what to expect from the type of degree that they engage in,” Smith said.