

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT AND CLERICAL OCCUPATIONS IN THE NYC CORPORATE SERVICES SECTOR TRENDS AND ISSUES

A LABOR MARKET PROFILE PREPARED FOR THE
NYC EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING COALITION BY THE FISCAL POLICY INSTITUTE
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Overview

Numerous studies dating well back into the 1980's have analyzed employment restructuring in New York City's leading office-based industries and firms. The conclusions of these studies are remarkably similar; e.g., we seem to be witnessing a long-term secular decline in the number of clerical and "back office" workers required by these firms, and a corresponding increase in the number of professional and technical workers. This decline connects directly to changes in information technology that have computerized many administrative tasks.

However, despite these well-documented changes in workforce structure, 1998 New York State Department of Labor data indicate that over three quarters of a million people work in jobs categorized as "administrative support"¹ occupations within New York City. This is just under 20% of total workers, according to the Occupational Employment Survey. In this profile, FPI examines these administrative and clerical occupations in more detail, with special focus wherever possible on how administrative and clerical occupations intersect with New York City's "corporate services sector."²

The Industry-Occupational Matrix, and Characteristics of Leading Administrative Jobs

The full-page Table 1 displays the top 10 (in terms of employment) administrative support *occupations* found in New York City in 1998. These 10 occupations account for 58% of all administrative workers in New York City. We then indicate the top 10 *industries* (both within and outside of the corporate sector) within which each of these occupations is found.

Table 1 suggests that several "sector" strategies might be useful for New York City employment and training providers interested in finding placements for people trained as receptionists, clerks, and other administrative support jobs. For example, the health care sector and particularly hospitals are very substantial sources of administrative jobs. The same is true of the education sector – both colleges and universities, and K-12 education. Interestingly, the garment/fashion sector also figures into the matrix with some prominence.

¹ This category is distinct from another category called "managers and administrators" that includes true managerial occupations.

² "Corporate services" is a loose definition meant to encompass investment banking houses, law firms, management consulting firms, insurance companies, accounting firms, public relations firms, and other organizations that exist to provide services and specialized knowledge to other firms. Sassen (1991) and others describe this same general category of activities as "producer services." Whatever the definition, this cluster of activities represents by almost any stretch NYC's leading export sector.

Corporate services industries, not surprisingly, also fit prominently into the matrix in Table 1. At least thirteen 3 digit industries that might be described as part of corporate services (shown in bold) fit somewhere into the matrix, and eight of the ten top administrative occupations have at least some concentration within these industries.

More information on these eight occupations is provided in Table 2, below. Appendix A on page 5 provides definitions of each occupation.

Table 2: Characteristics of Administrative Occupations Commonly Found in the NYC Corporate Services Sector

Occupation (Ranked by total # of jobs in NYC)	Mean Hourly Wage/NYC	Projected Growth 1998- 2008/NYC	Most Significant Source of Education or Training
Clerks, general office	\$11.68	9.5%	Short-term On-the-job
Secretaries, ex. Legal/medical	\$15.73	-.53%	Moderate-term On-the-job
Bookkeeping, acct., auditing clerks	\$15.07	-5.1%	Moderate-term On-the-job
Clerical, n.e.c.	\$13.27	7.2%	Short-term On-the-job
Receptionists, information clerks	\$11.34	22.0%	Short-term On-the-job
Legal secretaries	\$20.23	11.7%	Postsecondary vocational
Typists, including word processing	\$14.46	-26.6%	Moderate-term On-the-job
Brokerage clerks	\$17.35	9.7%	Moderate-term On-the-job

Source: Occupational Employment Survey, NYS Department of Labor, 1998. For national education and training data, Bureau of Labor Statistics bulletin 2521 (2000-01 edition).

Several interesting pieces of information emerge about these eight leading administrative support occupations. Perhaps one of the most useful relates to education and training. It is striking that the most significant source of training for seven of the eight positions is the job itself, and this training takes place on a short or moderate-term basis. Only legal secretaries require post-secondary training, but not necessarily a bachelors' degree. Occupations requiring "short-term" training are ones in which average job performance can be achieved in just a few days or weeks by working with and observing more experienced co-workers, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Likewise, "moderate-term" training normally lasts one to 12 months in order to achieve average job performance.

Based on the limited amount of training involved, it would seem that administrative support occupations are relatively well paying compared to other "entry-level" work. Every occupation listed in Table 2 has a 1998 mean wage of at least \$11.25 per hour. On the other hand, it's worth noting that many of these jobs may not be as easy to gain access to or as "entry level" as they seem on paper.

Five of the eight listed occupations are projected to grow between 1998 and 2008. The number of receptionists/information clerks will grow by over 22% during this period. On the other hand, a steep decline (over 26%) is projected for the number of typists/word processors in New York City (interestingly, these typists are heavily concentrated in elementary and secondary schools).

Administrative Support Employment Levels in the Corporate Services Sector

In Table 3, below, we indicate 1998 employment levels for the selected administrative support positions in five corporate sector industries³.

Table 2: Selected Administrative Occupations in Selected Corporate Services Industries

	Security Brokers/Dealers (SIC 621)	Legal Services (SIC 811)	Commercial Banks (SIC 602)	Mgt. & P.R. Services (SIC 874)	Accounting, Auditing, Bookkeeping (SIC 872)	Total
Clerks, general office	5,813	4,154	2,937	1,903	507	15,314
Secretaries, ex. legal/medical	7,765	1,455	1,997	2,582	3,224	17,023
Bookkeeping, acct. & auditing clerks	1,053	2,584	860	1,003	1,951	7,451
Clerical, n.e.c.	1,994	242	1,278	548	252	4,314
Receptionists, information clerks	925	2,677	815	569	520	5,506
Legal Sec's	67	19,915	97	4	0	20,083
Typists, inc. word processing	375	2,218	176	151	498	3,418
Brokerage clerks	11,592	0	2,065	0	0	13,657
Total	29,584	33,245	10,225	6,760	6,952	86,766

Source: Occupational Employment Survey, NYS Department of Labor, 1998. Unadjusted numbers.

We can see in Table 3 that administrative support positions are more concentrated in two of the listed industries – security brokers/dealers and legal services – than the three others. Curiously, the law firms employ more administrative support workers in total than the investment banks, and many more on a proportional basis. This reflects the differing internal employment structure of these two corporate services industries, and the fact that the securities sector has invested very heavily over the past decade or more to automate and speed-up trade clearing and other “back-end” administrative functions.

Overall, the top three occupations listed in Table 3 are legal secretary, non-legal/medical secretary, and general office clerk. Each of these occupations is held by over 15,000 workers just in the five corporate industries above.

Selected demographic characteristics of administrative support workers

What are some of the characteristics of the more than three-quarters of a million people who hold administrative support jobs? This analysis, which draws on data from the US Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey (CPS), by necessity operates at a high level of generalization given the time and space constraints involved in the present document. Nevertheless, the CPS data does provide some interesting insights into worker demographics.

Preliminary analysis of 2001 CPS⁴ demographic data indicates that administrative support workers in New York City are majority female, have at least a high school diploma and often some post-secondary

³ The five industries were selected because they have the highest overall employment of all of the “corporate services” industries found in the matrix on page 2.

⁴ This is a different data source than the Occupational Employment Survey (OES).

education, and work full-time. Slightly over 500,000 administrative support workers were represented within the data that we examined. Specifics are as follows:

- Three-quarters (74.7%) of administrative support workers within the CPS data set were female. Twenty-five percent were male.
- Nine percent of administrative support workers had some high school but had not earned a high school diploma; 36% had earned a high school diploma. Twenty-eight percent of administrative support workers had completed some college-level coursework, while 11% had earned an associates degree. Seventeen percent of administrative support workers had earned a bachelors degree or higher.
- Sixty-six percent of administrative support workers within the CPS data set were U.S. citizens by birth. Seventeen percent were naturalized foreign-born citizens and another seventeen percent were not U.S. citizens.
- Only 7% of administrative support workers in the data set were under the age of 21. Twenty-six percent were in their twenties; while 45% of administrative support workers were in their 30's and 40's. Twenty-three percent of administrative support workers were 50 or older.
- Seventy-six percent of administrative support workers were employed full-time (or at least 35 hours per week).

Appendix A: Occupational Employment Survey Definitions of Selected Administrative Support Occupations

Clerks, general office: Specific duties depend significantly on the type of office involved but can include filing/sorting, typing, data entry, maintaining records, producing transparencies, photocopying, faxing, preparing mailings, proofreading copies, answering telephones, delivering messages, and responding to information requests from the public and other departments.

Secretaries, except legal & medical: Scheduling appointments, giving information to callers, taking dictation, composing and typing routine correspondence (using typewriter or word processor), reading and routing incoming mail, filing correspondence and other records, and other assigned clerical duties.

Bookkeeping, accounting, auditing clerks: Update and maintain one or more accounting records, including those that tabulate expenditures, receipts, accounts payable and receivable, and profit and loss. Specifically, *bookkeeping clerks* handle all financial transactions and recordkeeping; *accounting clerks* post details of transactions, total accounts, and compute interest charges; *auditing clerks* verify records of transactions posted by other workers.

Clerical occupations, n.e.c.: All other clerical duties not classified separately.

Receptionists, information clerks: Answer inquiries and obtain information for general public (e.g., customers, visitors, and other interested parties). Provide information regarding activities conducted at establishment; location of departments, offices, and employees within organization; or services in a hotel. May perform other clerical duties as assigned. Switchboard receptionists not included.

Legal Secretaries: Prepare legal papers and correspondence, such as summonses, complaints, motions, and subpoenas. May review law journals and other legal publications to identify court decisions pertinent to pending cases and submit articles to company officials. Must be familiar with legal terminology, procedures, and documents, as well as legal research.

Typists, including word processing: Use typewriter or word processing equipment to type letters, reports, forms, or other straight copy material from rough draft, corrected copy, or voice recording. May perform other clerical duties as assigned. Exclude keypunchers, secretaries, and stenographers.

Brokerage clerks: Perform clerical duties involving the purchase or sale of securities. Duties include writing orders for stock purchases and sales, computing transfer taxes, verifying stock transactions, accepting and delivering securities, informing customers of stock price fluctuations, computing equity, distributing dividends, and keeping records of daily transactions and holdings.