

# CLASSIFIED JOBS

al

Birmingham's most comprehensive classified • Call any time 205-325-4444 or 800-283-4015 • Online: al.com/birminghamads

## Not your average secretary Administrative jobs on the rise

By Jean M. McLean  
Special assignments writer

They're not called secretaries anymore. The administrative field, which ranges from receptionists to high-level executive assistants, has changed more than titles. Now those who want to progress need advanced training as well as experience.

"The jobs are coming back, but it's very competitive," said Brenda Fischer, president of the International Association of Administrative Professionals, Alabama division.

Changes in administrative support roles require more advanced "hard" skills than before. Those abilities include software proficiency in word processing, database management, Excel, PowerPoint and desktop publishing, Fischer said. Administrators may also manage companies' online content, including social media.

Those seeking higher-paying positions must also have "soft" skills that include communication and problem-solving abilities.

Two-year degrees and certifications are becoming standard. Fischer, executive assistant for Birmingham's Kamber Narrow Fabric Machinery, is a Certified Professional Secretary (CPS) and Certified Administrative Professional (CAP).

Such designations help employers search for qualified workers, said Stephanie Howard, president of Birmingham's Snelling Staffing Services. But those seeking administrative careers should also build experience into their resumes, through part-time work, summer temporary staffing or even volunteer efforts.

Although openings exist, "it's an extremely competitive field right now," geared toward those with both training and experience, Howard said. At the top of the profession, an executive assistant might supervise a group of support personnel or work for one or more executives. Responsibilities at that level might include preparing reports and making presentations.

"The higher administrative jobs are more like mid-management roles," Fischer said.



Workers are paid according to their responsibility. Entry-level salaries will likely be \$10 an hour or less. Executive assistants, who typically have multiple professional designations and extensive experience, may make \$50,000 or more annually.

Administrative workers' skills may be industry-specific, such as health care or law. Some may become specialized in human resources, marketing or another field within their industry.

An emerging market is the role of the virtual assistant, Fischer said. Certification is available for those administrative contract workers who labor at home. They may work for several companies, each of which only needs part-time administrative support.

Beyond degrees or certifications, there are some common qualities among those

who thrive. "They typically like problem-solving and decision-making," said Howard of those who pursue administration as a career. "They like making their boss' job easier. They don't like being bored. They thrive on being busy and fast-paced. They are able to multi-task."

The profession's constant technological changes can be challenging, and those who work at higher levels must be flexible, willing to work under pressure.

To learn more about administrative careers, log onto [www.iaap-hq.org](http://www.iaap-hq.org).

### Find more on al.com

Last month, 1.3 million job searches were conducted on al.com!

Get more career tips and browse recent articles from this section in the archives at [blog.al.com/bhamjobs/index.html](http://blog.al.com/bhamjobs/index.html).  
Some recent headlines:

- *Get back to basics: May be time to recharge job search*
- *Predicting and solving problems: Industrial maintenance jobs abound*
- *Mid-year report: Temporary hiring continues climb*

