

My career

Snack bar attendant

Tamika Dorris



Champaign, Illinois

BLS fast facts: Counter attendants (cafeteria, food concession, and coffee shop)

- May 2012 employment: 434,220 (excludes self-employed)
- 2010–20 projection: 6 percent growth (slower than average)
- May 2012 median wage: \$8.92 hourly, \$18,560 annually
- Typical education and training: Short-term on-the-job training
- May 2012 top employing industries: Restaurants and other eating places, special food services, motion picture and video industries, elementary and secondary schools, and other amusement and recreation industries.

What do you do?

I work in the cafe of an academic building at the University of Illinois. I do it all: grill, cook, work the cash register, work in the dish room, and supervise student workers when my boss isn't available.

But my job is mostly using the grill or the oven to fix precooked foods like grilled chicken breast, canned beef stew, and frozen mac and cheese. Our hard-boiled eggs come already boiled and peeled. In my job, I don't

fix anything that uses a recipe, so all the food I make is already prepared.

How did you get this job?

The specifics about the job were not advertised. It was just advertised as a food-service position. The ad didn't even say where it was on campus. But I wanted to work at the university because it has great benefits, and I wanted to get a foot in the door. Once you get a job at the university, you can move around. There's a lot of opportunity.





I took the civil service test [required for state workers] and got a perfect score. Then I had an interview, and I got the job. That was 4 years ago.

What else prepared you for your current job?

I've always worked in food service, 15-plus years now. I worked over 9 years in the kitchens of two hospitals.

While I was working at one of the hospitals, I earned a food safety certification. I took a 2-day class and had to pass a test at the end. The test covers things like the proper temperature for storing food, procedures for cleaning equipment, and foodborne illnesses. When I passed, I got a certificate from the state public health department.

Having the certification helped me get this job, because I was the only applicant who had it.

What was your first job?

As a teenager, I worked in a fast-food restaurant and discovered two things. One, I liked it. And two, I was comfortable with it. I like cooking, and I like working with food.

Any surprises along the way?

No. My job is everything I was hoping it would be.

What are your future career plans?

I plan to retire from here, and even then, they'll have to push me out the door! I absolutely love my job. I have a wonderful boss and great people to work with.

And I love the customers. Of the 150 who might come in on a given day, we'll only have about 3 who are not in a good mood. But when they see you smile, they cheer up. By the time they leave, they're in a good mood, too.

What's your best advice?

Always give great customer service. If you can't give good customer service, you're not in a good job.

I learned that from working in the hospitals. I would see all these people, these families that had been through so much, and I realized that if you smiled and treated them with kindness, you just made a difference in their day—a positive difference. OOO

Tamika Dorris was interviewed by Kathleen Green, an economist in the Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections, BLS. Kathleen can be reached at (202) 691-5717 or at green.kathleen@bls.gov.