

The Need for Gunsmiths
White Paper
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PGS was originally founded to train veterans returning from World War II in need of employment. Although the school's size has varied throughout the years (including a period of time when classes were held evenings to keep up with the demand), in recent years PGS has experienced an especially high interest in the school's program, accompanied by a corresponding healthy demand for qualified Gunsmiths.

With a current placement rate of 78.4% (29 of 37 available graduates placed in the field), PGS can confirm through both career services activities and research that there is a strong need for graduates of our Master Gunsmithing ProgramTM.

Mrs. Bergman, our career services director, continues to receive requests from gunshops, manufacturers, sporting good stores, shooting ranges and other employers for Gunsmiths. In the past two years, PGS has on average received 60 to 70 phone calls annually from employers seeking a recent graduate.

PGS graduates who are independent gunsmiths report to us that their businesses continue to have substantial gun work. Industry representatives at the NSSF Shot Show and Beinfield Antique Arms Show (both held in January annually) comment on the need for gunsmiths, in part because many are retiring. PGS fields regular calls from the general public, looking for a gunsmith in their area.

Students at PGS are trained to repair, refurbish, restore, modify, accurize (increase accuracy) and customize long guns (rifles and shotguns) and handguns. At the top of their skill sets, they design and build custom firearms from major components (barrel blank, wood blank and serialized action: long guns; frames and slides: handguns), adding special touches such as scopes, adjustable cheek pieces, rifle straps and checkering.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (Occupational Outlook Handbook) does not break out Gunsmithing in its occupation outlook data. PGS researched gun ownership statistics, overall firearm industry status, socio-economic trends, and data from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) to provide evidence of the need for Gunsmiths in the USA.

Statistics on Gun Ownership and Possession

NICS or the (National Instant Criminal Background Check System) is the generally accepted measurement of new gun purchases and an overall accurate indicator of firearm interest.

In the years since the last ACCSC accreditation visit, the number of NICS have steadily increased except for a slight decrease in 2014:

- 2012: 19,592,203
- 2013: 21,093,273
- 2014: 20,968,547
- 2015: 23,141,970
- 2016: 27,538,673

This indicates a continuing upward trend in gun ownership, good news for the Gunsmiths who repair, clean and customize firearms. In fact, the average American gun owner now owns approximately eight firearms, according to a Washington Post analysis done in 2015.

Concealed Carry Permits (CCPs) for handguns increased from 2.7 million in 1998 to 14.5 million for the latest data available in 2016 (John Lott, www.foxnews.com, 9/8/2016).

Overall Industry Statistics: Economic Impact and Employment

One of the major industry associations, the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), recently released statistics in 2016 for the U.S. Firearms Industry. Some of the most relevant findings to PGS:

- Total economic impact increased 168% over eight years: \$19.1 billion (2008) to \$51.3 billion (2016).
- In the same time period: 135,000 added full-time jobs (81% increase) paying average wages and benefits of \$50,423.
- 30,000 new well-paying jobs created over the past three years by the firearms industry.

(According to payscale.com, gunsmiths were paid a median salary of \$39,935 in 2016.)

Socio-Economic Trends

Some of the recent, favorable trends for the firearm industry and related occupations such as Gunsmithing:

- Relocation and expansion of major manufacturers to “gun friendly” states in 2016, with the southern states labeled the “New Gun Valley” according to Shooting Industry’s U.S. Firearms Industry Today 2016 report. Three companies alone added 330 jobs (Remington, Beretta and Sig Sauer), according to the report.
- Growing interest in firearms among people 65 and older, one of the most solidly growing demographics (8/30/16 Kansas City Star newspaper). Recreational target practice and the perceived need for self-protection are the main reasons.
- An increase in women who participate in target shooting from 34 million to nearly 41 million between since 2006, according to the NSSF.
- Overall increase in target shooters of 25% between 2012 and 2014 according to the NSSF, half of them female, and 56% overall that live in urban areas.
- A four-fold jump since 2010 in the number of older American taking basic firearms training courses taught by certified NRA instructors, according to the NRA.
- Yet, many gun owners’ newfound interest in firearms is just beginning. Over the past five years, surveys of gun retail outlets show that 22% of gun sales are from first-time gun buyers, according to the NSSF ([www.america’s 1st Freedom.org](http://www.america’s1stFreedom.org)).

According to Jason Brown of the NRA, “All indications are that Americans are buying more firearms and taking more training classes. The trend has been clear ... year after year. American

gun ownership is growing and has grown over the past eight to 10 years.” (Kansas City Star, 8/30/16)

“The firearm market is robust, complex and has many niches,” wrote Frank Minter at www.americas1stfreedom.org. Our Gunsmith graduates fit into one of these niches, whether employed at a big-box retailer, medium-sized gun shop, large manufacturer or self-employed gunsmith.

ATF Data on Federal Firearm Licenses/Licensing (FFLs)

In 2012, PGS described the U.S. government’s stricter enforcement of regulations on Federal Firearm Licensing (FFL) and the impact on Gunsmithing. FFLs decreased due to stricter regulations, and increased fees and in-person application inspections, in the 1990s.

A smaller number of FFLs are still being issued, but to more professional and committed entrepreneurs, including formally-trained Gunsmiths. PGS’ Semester 4 Business Practice Course includes instruction on obtaining a FFL.

After dropping from a high of 284,117 FFLs in 1992 down to 102,913 in 2001, the number of FFLs has increased gradually, holding at an average of about 140,000 over the last three years (2013-2015). This is good news for the industry and specifically for Gunsmiths, indicating a sustained level of FFLs, amidst a growing number of legal firearms owners in search of qualified sellers and Gunsmiths, who supply firearm maintenance and customization.