



2025 REPORT ON THE MENTOR & APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM (MAP)

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In this report I will provide information on the progress of MJSA's Mentor & Apprenticeship Program (MAP). I will illuminate what has been accomplished, shine a light on potential new directions for pre-apprenticeships, and highlight organizational engagements with MAP.

In 2017 the MJSA Education Foundation began work on a program that would bring back what was once a crucial conduit for new jewelry workers: the apprenticeship. At that time, the United States jewelry industry was beginning to wake up to an unprecedented labor shortage. "Although business was booming for many jewelry manufacturers, designers, and retailers, they all had one key complaint: there was no one to do the work." - Rich Youmans, Director MJSA Educational Foundation.

Many different players in the U.S. jewelry industry contributed to suppression of wages and removal of benefits from bench jeweler jobs. With the breaking of the jewelers' unions in the 1970s, low wages were considered smart business, a necessity in order to compete with offshored, cheap labor of imported goods. Many retailers actively disparage the skill and knowledge of bench jewelers to keep wages low, creating demeaning work environments few workers would choose to accept.

Add to this toxic mess the sexual harassment and discrimination practiced by one of the largest jewelry retailers throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and into the 2000s.



Figure 1: Combined with no clear pathway for career advancement, it leaves little wonder why no one would want such a crappy job.

In the research-based paper presented in 2019 by Charles Lewton-Brain and me to the Santa Fe Symposium® *Jewelers: The Next Generation*, we were able to identify what jewelry industry trade publications had failed to note at the time. Offshoring had gutted the U.S. jewelry industry of manufacturing jobs, which additionally caused a loss of the skills needed to support products after the sale.

“For decades, American companies have been sending manufacturing jobs overseas in pursuit of lower labor costs and higher profits. This trend, known as offshoring, took off in the 1970s and accelerated rapidly in the 1990s and 2000s with the rise of globalization and trade agreements like NAFTA.

“Lured by dirt-cheap wages in developing countries, American corporations, large and small, shuttered factories across the heartland and outsourced production to places like China, Mexico, Vietnam and Bangladesh. Manufacturing towns from Ohio to the Carolinas turned into ghost towns of rusted machinery and shuttered main streets as millions of blue-collar jobs vanished.

“While offshoring has undoubtedly been a boon for corporate bottom lines, many argue it’s been a raw deal for American workers and communities. Not only has it hollowed out the middle class and exacerbated inequality, but it’s left the U.S. dangerously dependent on foreign nations for critical goods. The fragility of these globe-spanning supply chains was laid bare during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Decades of offshoring has not only cost millions of U.S. jobs but has left us at the mercy of countries like China for everything from

medical equipment to microchips,” says Scott Paul, president of the Alliance for American Manufacturing,” in *The Rise and Fall of Offshoring* by Andrew Dewell, CEO North American Aerospace.

For the jewelry industry, the practice of offshoring has been a double-edged sword. With the “hollowing out of U.S. middle class jobs,” the jewelry industry in the U.S. lost manufacturing jobs to cheap imported goods being sold at big-box stores. But more significantly, for a Mom & Pop shop or brick-and-mortar store, there was also the “hollowing out” of a broad swath of their local customer base - the middle-class customer.

COVID-19 exposed offshore supply chain weaknesses and brought many manufacturers around to the opportunity of “reshoring” by bringing manufacturing back to U.S. for production. If the jewelry industry, independent designers, academics, and retailers are to thrive in the U.S. economic environment of high tariffs on imports they must seize this current opportunity to rebuild jewelry apprenticeships as a training pathway.

Bench jewelers are critically necessary for all sectors of the domestic jewelry industry, from large manufacturers in need of staff to independent designers needing the fabrication skills of a master model maker. Regardless of software advancements or printing materials, bench jewelers remain critical in completing the supply chain from mine to retailer. They provide custom services, repair, and maintenance as part of their business plan. “The MJSA program is the only widely available, non-proprietary program in the jewelry industry that offers a complete guide, with educational assistance, to jewelers who want to bring on and train an apprentice bench jeweler,” says Vic Davis of Vic Davis & Associates, a jewelry industry recruiter specializing in the search and placement of bench jewelers/goldsmiths.

Throughout 2022 MJSA’s Apprenticeship Task Force met to discuss techniques, textbooks, video supports, sustainability, and equity to guide training development. Task Force members Alan Revere, founder of the Revere Academy, and Joanna Joy Seetoo, program manager of jewelry manufacturing arts for GIA, both made generous gifts of goldsmith-training videos. These videos, in addition to dozens of curated videos have been edited and are sequentially integrated with the curriculum throughout the apprenticeship program.

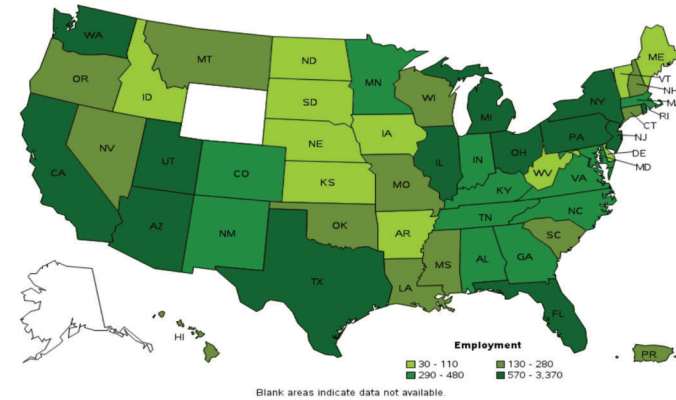
The MJSA Mentor & Apprenticeship Program (MAP) launched in April 2023 included:

- A 2,000-hour curriculum, developed by jeweler/educator Nanz Aalund, author of MJSA Press book *A Jeweler's Guide to Apprenticeships*, with input from a task force of industry leaders. The curriculum offers weekly, step-by-step guidance for training novice jewelers in core bench skills, from measuring and marking to piercing, filing, soldering, and finishing. It also offers an introduction to such general areas as basic metallurgy, casting, responsible material sourcing, and the care/cleaning of gems and jewelry.
- A curated Online Resource Library of technical videos and articles that supplement the in-shop work. It features instruction from such renowned educators as Alan Revere, Charles Lewton-Brain, Kate Wolf, and Melissa Muir. It also received support and contributions from nationally recognized companies, organizations and schools. The Gemological Institute of America (GIA), Rio Grande (a division of the Berkshire Hathaway-owned Richline Group), and Platinum Guild International are major interactive contributors.

Within less than a year (by March 2024) MAP achieved its first milestone when it received approval for National Guidelines for Apprenticeship Standards (NGS) by the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Office of Apprenticeship (OA), which recognized it as a model for developing bench jeweler apprenticeships throughout the United States. NGS status is ranked as the gold standard for apprentice programs according to the DOL website.

Currently, some larger players in the jewelry industry are working to create their own apprenticeship systems by partnering with private and public educational entities. If these private corporations would choose to align their programs with the National Guidelines Standards established by MAP, they could start by implementing these easy steps:

- Provide transparent industry vetting of skill sets and techniques.
- Indicate whether their training systems are incorporating modern principles of technical education.
- Provide transparency on whether their training systems are based on a DACUM.
- Share whether their training systems are designed to provide comprehensive skill training.



*Figure 2: Employment of jewelers and precious stone and metal workers, by state, May 2023.
Map provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.*

While the majority of small jewelry manufacturers and retailers across the country do not have deep enough reserves to initiate programs for multiple apprentices, they are the businesses being most affected as the number of bench jewelers continues to decline. According to the most recent data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are on average 5,400 openings annually for “jewelers and precious stone and metal workers”—the job description identical to that of a bench jeweler. In the coming years there may be more vacancies, due to retirements, while businesses will continue to find it extremely difficult to replace their bench jewelers.

“This is the hardest it’s been in 25 years to find bench help,” says Vic Davis of Vic Davis & Associates, a jewelry industry recruiter. “I typically have eight to 12 quality bench jobs available, and right now, I have 32.”

The pipeline of new jewelers nationwide needs to be replenished, and apprenticeships can again serve that purpose. As noted earlier, with MAP becoming a Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP), it would provide participants with several potential benefits.

RAP programs through the DOL can supply these benefits:

- Participants can apply for federal funds to support an apprenticeship, including Federal Workforce Development Funds for wage support and Federal Student Aid Funds for technical workshop tuition.

- In many states, businesses can qualify for tax credits when training an apprentice as qualified through the WIOA at state level and RAP at federal level.
- Participants gain access to DOL Technical Assistance Centers that can help by offering expertise, customer service, and business support at no charge.

The benefits will break down barriers and pave the way for more jewelers to bring on apprentices. What is critically needed now is to make sure as many professional jewelers and prospective apprentices as possible are aware of the program, its video library of vetted skills, and how it can be implemented.

Once the Mentor & Apprenticeship Program is approved as a RAP, (which may have happened during the publication of this book) the MJSA Educational Foundation will need to ensure that the program spurs a minimum of 20 apprenticeships over the next two years (2025-2026). Happily, MAP is currently engaged with several independent retail jewelers who have in-house manufacturing shops in the Midwest and the Pacific Northwest. These jewelry retail/manufacturers have taken on the challenge of training their own bench jewelers.



Figure 3: Graham Jewelers, with two locations in Minnesota, is participating in MAP with multiple mentors and multiple apprentices within the business.

Left to right: Joel Fentle - Mentor; Trey Nygaard - Apprentice; Marcos Montano - Apprentice; Katie Fredericks - Apprentice; Sarah Ladd - Mentor.

Photo from <https://www.grahamjewelers.com/staff>

In order to reach a broader audience, the MJSA Education Foundation has established several interrelated goals.

First, MAP is to open the door for the next generation to gain the knowledge and skills they need to take advantage of this rewarding career. To that end, MJSA Educational Foundation has developed an ad campaign promoting the program to professional jewelers to encourage mentorship. In November 2023, the MJSA Education Foundation launched a series of videos (funded by a JCK Industry Fund grant) featuring a range of jewelers describing the rewards and benefits of a career in jewelry making and design.

But, for MAP to succeed, it's crucial that word about the program reach a greater audience beyond the immediate industry. The Foundation now intends to expand the "Why I am a Jeweler" series with individual portraits of jewelers in different segments of the industry, and to introduce additional segments that would engage prospective jewelers in a way that's fun and energizing.



Figure 4: Alex Boyd's unique humor and strong design style have won him a large following on social media.

Secondly, as more jewelers initiate apprenticeships based on the MAP curriculum, the Educational Foundation must be prepared for the requirement of maintaining records for each apprenticeship and receive status reports from the mentors. For the Educational Foundation this will require the acquisition of a Learning Management System (LMS) to manage the project submissions, data, and records. A LMS is a software platform that allows users to create, deliver, and manage educational or training programs. They are used in many settings, including schools, businesses, healthcare, and government organizations.



Figure 5: LMS system graphic

As a silver lining for the dark cloud that was the COVID-19 pandemic, the DOL came to approve of online technical classes as viable educational support.

In response to the DOL's approval of online learning, MJSA curated an Online Resource Library of links to the best vetted technical videos and articles that supply fundamental and supportive education for both mentor and apprentice participants. This MAP Links Library resource has been put to use to help future apprentices access their potential. The Black in Jewelry Coalition (BIJC) is to be commended for their initiation of the Future Jewelers Academy in Baldwin NY.



Figure 6: Baldwin High School, Future Jewelers display at the "Rock the Jewels" event in NYC during the 2024—Jewelry Week.

BIJC commissioned this two-year pre-apprenticeship curriculum for jewelry making, designed for high school students. State regulations dictate that classrooms cannot have live torches, but this creative curriculum meets New York State's Superintendent of Public Instruction's educational standards by focusing on cold-connections. The students participate as part of a STEM program (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) through the Career and Technical Education (CTE) department in the Baldwin School district of New York state. In order to support the teachers, MJSA Educational Foundation has given access to the MAP Links Library in order to supplement and support classroom demonstrations. As a trade, jewelry making combines several disciplines—art, math, metallurgy, material sciences, marketing and business—in a way that few other manufacturing businesses do.

MAP also partnered with the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee to assist two of their jewelry students who want to engage in apprenticeships. We are speaking with several college jewelry programs, making the curriculum available to as many teachers and schools as are seeking help with providing relevant training. Moving forward into 2025 there is a projected timeline for the reinvigoration of the "Be a Jeweler" website where more information regarding registration for the Mentor & Apprenticeship Program will be posted on this public-facing website.

- March 2025: Development on BEaJEWELER.com website
- April 2025: Interviews for "Why I'm a Jeweler" profiles begin
- May 2025: List of nationwide jewelry education programs added to BEaJEWELER.com
- June 2025: BEaJEWELER.com website and social media updated, promotional plan in place to begin promoting MJSA's Mentor & Apprenticeship Program
- July 2025: First three "Why I'm a Jeweler" profiles added
- Aug 2025: Apprenticeship Management Program available to mentors and apprentices
- Oct 2025: Second set of three "Why I'm a Jeweler" profiles added and promoted
- Jan 2026: Third set of three "Why I'm a Jeweler" profiles added and promoted

In summation, the progress that has been made since MJSA launched MAP in April 2023 has been astounding. The MAP curriculum and the supporting Links Library of vetted technical

videos and articles received National Guidelines Standards (NGS) designation by the DOL. And the Links Library continues to grow with the addition of many technical videos including Scott Bradford's generous gift of Rhino 3D NURBS training videos and Rémy Rotenier's jewelry illustration videos.

We have distributed MAP training kits to several dozen schools and businesses for their review, with three jewelers already adopting it as the framework for their apprenticeships:

- Hope Jewelers, 135 East Jefferson St., Tipton, IN 46072 (1 apprenticeship)
- Graham Jewelers, 800 Lake Street East, Wayzata, MN 55391, and 2200 Fourth St., White Bear Lake, MN 55110 (2 apprenticeships)
- Green Lake Jewelry Works, 550 NE Northgate Way, Seattle, WA 98125 (1 apprenticeship)
- University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Campus, Wisconsin (2 apprenticeships)

Other jewelry companies have expressed intent to adopt MAP in the coming year. With additional participation and adoption of the Mentor & Apprenticeship Program by the jewelry industry and schools, MJSA staff is prepared to assist with a Learning Management System to help mentors and apprentices in achieving their successful training, and coordinating the certification process.

Other trade organizations like BIJC and AGS are utilizing the MJSA program to initiate additional training within the jewelry field. With such assistance, we expect to launch at least 20 new apprenticeships in the coming two years, and possibly many more as we begin promoting the success of these early adopters.

In 2023 I was approached by Ebba Goring of the Scottish Goldsmiths Trust and Peter Taylor of The Goldsmiths' Centre, London and asked to share the MAP curriculum. Both of these long-established institutions for jewelry training were being asked by their trade members and by their students for a more robust technical skill training. I am very pleased to share this progress report from the Goldsmith's Center on how they are applying the information MJSA/MAP shared:

"The Goldsmiths' Centre's "Jewellery Foundation Programme," [which is based on the shared MJSA/MAP curriculum] has received significant industry backing, with endorsements from the

Goldsmiths' Craft & Design Council (GC&DC), renowned jeweler Stephen Webster, and the jewelry aficionado behind A Thousand Facets.

"This transformative 10-month course is designed for individuals aged 18 and over, offering a foundation in traditional and modern jewelry-making techniques alongside real-world industry experience. The programme is specifically designed to kick-start careers in jewelry-making for the trade, providing entry-level candidates with the technical skills, creativity, and confidence needed to succeed. This endorsement strengthens the programme's reputation as a vital gateway for the next generation of jewelers, with trainees benefitting from project briefs set by industry leaders and valuable feedback from experts. It also highlights a collective commitment to fostering craftsmanship and addressing the industry's skills gap."



Figure 7: Neon sign outside the jewelry arts classroom at Baldwin High School, NY

If the U.S. jewelry industry, independent designers, academics, and retailers are to thrive in the erratic U.S. economic environment of highly tariffed imports, they must seize this current opportunity to rebuild a vetted jewelry apprenticeship system with MJSA Educational Foundation's Mentor & Apprenticeship Program.

REFERENCES

- Bureau of Labor Statistics: <https://www.bls.gov/oes/2023/may/oes519071.htm#nat>

