

## There are jobs out there, but...

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Nicole Berrio, a University of Florida graduate from Lauderhill, landed a full-time job with a top public relations firm in New York.

Less than two months after graduating from the University of Florida with a bachelor's degree in public relations, Lauderhill resident Nicole Berrio started a full-time job with a top public relations firm in Manhattan and is moving into her own apartment this month.

That fact has not necessarily endeared the 22-year-old to her friends, classmates and sorority sisters from Delta Phi Epsilon.

"A lot of people are like, 'I can't believe you already have a job,'" Berrio said. "I did not expect to get a job this quickly. It's been a whirlwind. I do think I lucked out."

But it hasn't been just luck that helped Berrio. She did what college career advisors say are all the right things in what is unquestionably a tough job-hunting market for graduating seniors. She did numerous internships, kept a massive referral list, notified all her contacts of her desire to find a job in New York and made herself available immediately for an interview and offer. Berrio also had a secret weapon in her arsenal — a New York address of a friend to put on her resume.

But there's no question that Berrio is more the exception than the rule. While the job market for new college graduates is improving slightly, it is still difficult to land a full-time job, except in the red-hot fields of healthcare, engineering and information technology (IT), say college career advisors.

As a result, many of those graduating with bachelor's degrees are choosing to continue their studies and obtain graduate degrees or go to law school. Others are taking part-time jobs or starting their own companies.

"Obviously it is a challenging job market," said Jorge Guerra, executive director of workforce education and partnerships at Miami-Dade College. "It all depends on the major and internships. Experience is something all employers look for."

At Miami-Dade College, the largest college in the United States with 174,000 students and seven campuses, so many students want to enter the healthcare field that the college has a waiting list for many of its programs, including physical therapy. IT programs are also filling up, as those

pursuing degrees in IT can also find jobs “rather easily,” noted Guerra.

“I think the job market is starting to come back after the devastating years of 2008 and 2009,” Guerra said. “But there are a lot of differences in what the job market is offering nowadays. A lot of companies are hiring part-timers until things stabilize, and then maybe they will convert the jobs to full-time.”

Jessica Nascimento, who graduated from the University of Florida in May with a bachelor’s degree in telecommunications and a minor in business, quickly discovered how difficult the job market is. Her dream is to edit music videos, but she looked for jobs around the country in television news, to no avail. Even though professors at UF warned Nascimento and her fellow students not to expect “to even be able to pay our electric bills” on their starting salaries, she found the pay being offered was lower than what she could make filming weddings on a freelance basis.

“In general, they were offering \$15,000 to \$20,000 for full-time jobs at news stations,” said Nascimento. “You don’t mind working from the bottom up, but you think, ‘how am I going to support myself.’”

As a result, Nascimento moved back home with her parents in Pembroke Pines and is working as a freelance videographer for a company, Center Peace Cinemas, where she had previously worked for several years. Thankfully, she has no student loans to repay.

Students like Nascimento have a much tougher time landing jobs than those in the stem areas of science, technology and math, say career experts.

“If you major in engineering or IT, you get hired right after graduation,” said Fernando Figueredo, director of career services at Florida International University. “Many even get jobs a semester before graduating.”

The bad news, according to Figueredo, is that salaries are not at pre-recession levels and are lower than what students are expecting. While they anticipated starting salaries in the \$40,000 range, they are typically getting offers in the \$30,000 range, he said.

Students in the liberal arts fields — people like Nascimento — are advised to be as flexible as possible, and to get as many (often non-paying) internships as they can along the way.

The importance of internships cannot be overemphasized by Figueredo and other college career advisors. According to the results of an exit survey of 1,144 graduating seniors recently undertaken by FIU, 60 percent did one internship, 22 percent did two and 18 percent did three. For 65 percent of these students, the internships were unpaid. And here’s the most important statistic, according to Figueredo — 43 percent were offered full-time jobs with the employer after their internship concluded.

“Over and over again, studies have show that internships are the most important factor in determining who gets jobs,” he said.

Case in point: Sarah Honig, a 23-year-old from Hollywood who just graduated with a bachelor’s degree in sports entertainment and event planning from Johnson & Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island. Honig applied for jobs with South Florida hotels, spas and the Miami

Heat, but got no offers. Then, she unexpectedly got accepted into a management training program for Follett, the bookstore chain where she had an internship and then part-time job during college. She starts work next month.

Honig, who has \$38,000 on college loans to repay and will start getting charged \$480 a month in November, is relieved.

“There’s not a lot out there,” she said. “There are jobs where they want you to work for 39 hours a week so you’re not full-time. You’re competing with so many people out there.”

10 fastest growing occupations for college grads in 2014

1. Network systems and data communications analysts
2. Physician assistants
3. Computer software engineers, applications
4. Physical therapist assistants
5. Dental hygienists
6. Computer software engineers, systems software
7. Network and computer systems administrators
8. Database administrators
9. Physical therapists
10. Forensic science technicians

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics