

How to Find a Job Is Changing with Economic Climate

By [Jeremy Maready](#)

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The only thing a college graduate is guaranteed these days is a neatly framed diploma.



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Mary Mittag, coordinator of University of South Florida Polytechnic Career Center, recommends an early start to job-hunting.

The job market for many looks dismal at best in the country's floundering economy where layoffs abound, especially in Florida. And that's for the folks who have jobs.

Still green and anxious to take on the world, college students are running into difficulties in the current job market after they graduate.

So what's a recent college grad to do from getting discouraged?

Mary Mittag, the coordinator of the University of South Florida Polytechnic Career Center, recommends that students start job hunting early as the time to get hired by a company has increased.

"Many students have done it (job hunting) in a hurry," she said. "They didn't put in enough time."

But that's changing with the current economic climate.

"Now I see them (students) spending more time on the process than they used to," Mittag said. "Thank goodness. This is part of their professional growth."

One of the ways to get an edge above the competition is through internships, Mittag said.

"Networking is a huge part of it (job hunting)," she said. "About half of all jobs are found through networking."

Internships, which are often paid depending on the field, provide an extended amount of time for the prospective candidate to be reviewed by an employer, Mittag said. And the internship also allows the student to evaluate their employer and company to see if it is a perfect fit.

"It becomes more of a win, win situation," she said.

Mittag says she discourages students from taking just any job that, while it might pay the bills, won't prove fulfilling.

"Do something that's going to be good for your career," she said. "Find something close to your career aspirations."

Xuchitl Coso, Florida Southern College's director of career development, said talking to school alumni in your career field can also help soon-to-be graduates find an in with a company.

Each month the college sponsors the Career Spotlight Series, where three to four alumni speak about their career fields.

"We like to keep it small," she said. "It allows for networking without the stress of an interview. It's very proactive."

FSC's individual campus departments also work with students to line up internships with local companies, she said.

"I'm really telling companies to sell those internships," she said. "The companies like that. They don't have to make a huge commitment if (the students) come in for three months or six months."

Both Mittag and Coso also say that volunteering in the community is another way for students to network for prospective jobs, especially non profit agencies.

While it might not seem like it for some, there are jobs that are still available in Polk County. You just have to look for them, Mittag said.

Polk's jobless rate shot to 7.8 percent in August, up from 5.2 percent the year before and 7.3 percent in July, according to the most recent figures available from the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation.

August's unemployment rate was the highest in a decade, and the county had 4,700 fewer jobs than it did a year ago.

USF Polytechnic junior Deonte Cooper isn't too worried about job stability once he graduates. He has his eyes set on grad school for psychology.

The medical field has no shortage of jobs.

But before he made the switch to psychology, he was a business major, a field that didn't give him much of a challenge, he said.

Cooper, 27, said the current economy downfalls only reassure him that he made the right decision in changing majors to psychology.

"I've been joking around with my friends who are business majors," Cooper said. "I'll tell them, "Hey the economy isn't looking too good right now. About the time you guys get into your jobs, you're going to have breakdowns and are going to have to see me."

Cooper is currently looking for internships at Tri-County Human Services, Peace River Center and Lakeland Regional Medical Center before he graduates next year.

For those who aren't in the medical field, which has one of the highest job demands, there are still local openings at insurance companies, like State Farm and Geico, along with FedEx and Publix. The restaurant industry and IT fields also have plenty of openings and job security, she said.

But Mittag has hope that the economy will change and more doors will open to the students she is trying to help enter the career world.

"Nothing stays the same forever," she said. "But hopefully it doesn't get worse."

[Jeremy Maready can be reached at jeremy.maready@theledger.com or 863-802-7592.]

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