

Grads find job market tougher than job counselors told them

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Twenty-three-year-old Matthew Bishop got an economics degree from Berry College in May 2006 and he's working as a waiter at Applebee's. David Bowles, 22, graduated from the University of Georgia last May with a degree in finance and is still floating resumes.

Their stories are similar to thousands of members of the "Millennial" generation — roughly youths 30 and younger — who figured degrees would lead to romantic jobs as traveling writers or filmmakers, only to wind up as bank tellers or clerks— or unemployed.

Nobody counts their numbers, but sociologists, psychologists, economists and trend watchers say it's significant, and not likely to decline much until the slumping economy rebounds.

At least 20 percent of youths 26 and younger, like Bishop, are living with their parents, says Bob Schoeni, a labor economist at the University of Michigan, who sees the phenomenon as not all bad.

"More time allows some kids to find a better career match as well as a better marriage partner," he says.

David Morrison, founder of the Twentysomething young adult consulting firm in Philadelphia, says that "despite all the hype about low unemployment, there is a poor job market for entry level employees with college degrees. Companies have downsized and are taking a wait and see attitude."

And young people, he says, aren't eager to grab onto the first job opportunity offered, like their baby boomer parents did.

Melissa Arredondo of Woodstock, has a doctorate in chemistry from Georgia Tech, and earns money shoveling horse dung out of stables. She's been offered jobs, but can't find anything to match her credentials.

"I applied at a liquor store to sell wine," she says. "It paid \$8 an hour, but you had to clean toilets."

Morrison says the Millennials have high expectations, but are learning that the job market is tougher than college counselors told them. Still, he says, they have taken a "long term perspective" and many are jaded because they saw their parents get downsized.

The problem may be most acute in cities considered magnets for young professionals, such as Atlanta, New York, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles and Chicago, says William Frey, a researcher for the Brookings Institution think tank in Washington.

"I'd tell graduates to look into Buffalo or Cleveland — they'd love to have kids with degrees," he says. "Atlanta is more of a degree capital and maybe there is a glut of graduates."

James Cote, a sociologist at the University of Western Ontario, says one reason for their difficulties is that they were told that liberal arts degrees would be sufficient, which isn't true.

"In Canada and in the states, it's common to get a master's degree and run a local Gap store," Cote says. "Colleges aren't teaching kids how to get jobs. We set them up for high expectations, but the young people are going to have to be more active than passive. And there's a lot of competition for the good jobs."

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, a professor of psychology at Clark University in Worcester, Mass., and author of "Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the 20s," says there's a glut of people with master's and doctorate degrees.

"We got over 100 applications for one position here," he says. "But part of the problem is the young people. They don't want just a job that pays a decent wage. They want a job that is an expression of their true selves. But employers don't say, 'Whom can I fulfill today?' So there's a collision in the workplace. I don't think we do a good job of preparing them for the real world."

Part of the problem is that today's grads were reared by work-crazed baby boomers determined to give their children all the advantages, and thereby spoiled them, says Mindy Bingham, owner of a consulting firm called Academic Innovations, who says parents should start teaching their children about the work world in middle school or before.

"I think we are coddling them too much," she says. "And it's become more acceptable for young people to go home after college. When baby boomers graduated from college, we could get an introductory job and make it. That is not the case today. Parents have to help. And the young people need to know that connections and networking are really important."

At Lassiter High School in east Cobb, Carol Pizza runs a career development program, encouraging students to choose vocations they might like to pursue in the workaday world.

Children need to prepare earlier, she says. "Most don't do the research, don't take advantage of what's offered, and randomly select their majors," she said. "These kids need to focus early on jobs, growing occupations, how to prepare resumes and interview. These courses need to be more emphasized."

Chuck Underwood, owner of the Generational Imperative consulting firm in Cincinnati, says Millennials are educated, technology savvy, confident and optimistic. "But from my work with corporations coast to coast, there is a growing hesitation about hiring first-wave Millennials who are pouring into adulthood and beginning their careers."

They're not ready, in general, to make serious commitments, are determined to have fun and want to choose the cities where they'll live.

"Many of them don't want to work the pay-your-dues hours that entry level usually requires," he says. "Many of them are living with their parents and if their new job is the least bit undesirable they can quit without losing food and shelter."

"Millennials are beginning new jobs with wildly unrealistic expectations about pay and advancement, and with a significantly flawed sense of entitlement," he says. Arnett counsels patience and realism.

"It naturally takes some time to find your niche in a highly complex economy," he says. But many parents of these youngsters are worried, and disappointed, says Kate Brooks, director of the liberal arts career service at the University of Texas. She teaches courses for academic credit that attempt to help students figure out what they really want to do and need to be paid.

"Parents often aren't comfortable with starter jobs," she says. "Some fields just don't pay that much, and the students need to know what those are."

Bowles says he's sent out hundreds of resumes, but has had only a few interviews. Bishop has found that "it's not a good time to break into banking, because the industry is having a tough time."

Lauren Hoffman, 27, who has a master's in journalism, found a job just after graduating, but it disappeared when the company downsized. Now she's working for the Boys and Girls Clubs of America. She says she likes it, but is disappointed that she's not involved in fashion, interior design or music.

Experts says the young grads need to be patient.

But that's not so easy, Bowles says.

"All the entry level jobs require one to three year of experience," he says. "But how do you get experience if you don't have any?"