

A summer job used to be a rite of passage for teens. What happened?

[BY MAYA LORA](#)

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WalletHub's analysts compared more than 180 markets in the United States across 21 key metrics. The data set ranges from availability of summer jobs to median income of part-time workers to median rental price. BY WALLETHUB

Natasha Fernandez is determined to be busy all summer long.

Fernandez is 19 years old and finishing up her freshman year at Miami Dade's Honors College. And she doesn't believe in taking breaks to soak up the summer sun. Instead, she's splitting her time between summer classes, an unpaid internship and a job in retail.

She's one of the lucky few. While internships trading work experience for school credit are fairly common, paid summer jobs are few and far between.

[About two thirds of teens sat out trackable summer employment last year](#), according to a Pew Research Center study published in June. In the study, Pew analyzed the employment ratio for Americans aged 16 to 19 for the past seven decades, up to 2018. It found that only about 35 percent of teens were employed last summer — a big drop from 20 years ago, when roughly half of U.S. teens had summer jobs.

This year's teen job stats look like more of the same. In June, 30.9 percent of teens reported being employed, according to seasonally adjusted numbers provided by economist Abbey Omodunbi, citing the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

HARD TO FIND

In Miami, economists and those familiar with the job market say the internet is partly to blame.

<https://www.miamiherald.com/news/business/biz-monday/article232445132.html>

Overall, the total number of jobs is down in retail, where teens once set up shop for the summer, said Omodunbi, who works with the PNC Financial Services Group.



People stand in the lobby for Amazon offices in New York in February 2019. Online retailers like Amazon are leading to the decline in usual brick-and-mortar retail jobs, said economist Abbey Omodunbi. Mark Lennihan *AP*

Fernandez knows plenty about the retail job shortage. Though she has previous experience from an internship at the South Florida Educational Federal Credit Union in Miami Lakes and has worked at her parents' bakery, she couldn't get retailers to give her a shot. She applied at eight stores, including ALDI, Foot Locker and Express, but never heard from any of them.

She even showed extra effort, applying online and then turning up in person to show how eager she was.

"And to this day, no one has answered me back," Fernandez said. "And that's when I was like you know, this is, this is insane."

She eventually landed a job with clothing store Cotton On, where she had an “in.” She was recommended by her cousin, who is a store manager.

Part of the problem for young people like Fernandez: students who land retail jobs often remain as part-time workers throughout the year, according to local employers. One of those managers, Julia Gonzalez of Forever 21 at Pembroke Pines Mall, said that while most of her staffers are students, only five will be leaving South Florida to return to college in the fall.

Increases in technology and automation have also taken many low-skill jobs off the market, said PNC’s Omodunbi, leaving fewer options for all.

Miami’s limited mass transit options can also be a block, said Rick Beasley, executive director of Careersource Florida. Even if a teen from Liberty City or Kendall lands a retail or fast-food job, he or she might not be able to get there without taking several buses.

And while gigging — such as ride-sharing and Instacart shopping — has opened up new options for short-term workers, those jobs often require a car. That creates a barrier for younger teens or those without means, Beasley said.

Another problem: older workers are vying for some of those summer jobs.

David Gindy, the director and owner of Funcamps, said he doesn’t hire anyone under the age of 18. He mostly hires teachers, who are passionate about working with kids, because he runs an accredited camp. About 20 percent of his workers are students — but in college, not high school.

Age also factors in at the Frost Young Musicians Camp, run through the University of Miami. The camp does hire summer workers — but most are college faculty members or professional musicians. All must be at least 22.

Still, some traditional summer job employers in Miami insist they’re still open for business and willing to take on teenage employees.

Each summer, the YMCA hires extra staff — camp counselors, lifeguards and swim instructors — for its pools and summer camps. This year, the number was 300, said

Jackie Roca, the vice president of human relations at the YMCA of South Florida. About 80 percent of those employees will return to school in the fall.

And burger flipping can still pay off for a teen. Fast-food restaurants have long been a staple of the “first job” market. Kristina Montes, a third-generation McDonald’s franchise owner of six locations, said that she looks forward to hiring teens for the summer. Her sister and fellow franchise owner Melissa Montes Blanco said that summer jobs are still essential.

“What I let the new hires know, especially the younger generation, is I let them know that maybe McDonald’s isn’t going to be their final career stop,” Montes Blanco said. “But there’s a lot of skills that you can learn while you’re here.”



Working at fast-food joints like McDonald’s has often been a staple of life for teens entering the job market. Rogelio V. Solis *AP*

For some teens who can afford to take the summer off, the jobs available may not pay enough for them to want to work, said Edward “Ned” Murray, the associate director of the Metropolitan Center at Florida International University.

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“I would say there’s suddenly an abundance of low-wage jobs,” Murray said. Whether they pay enough to offset the lure of time off is another question. “The quality is another issue in terms of wages because people are paid so low. [It] may be that younger workers are looking at ways to make more money than just traditional low-wage occupations.”

INTERNSHIPS

Whether they can’t find a paying job or just want to get a jump on their careers, many students turn to internships.

“More and more students take internships when they can, and that is a positive trend,” said Jaap Donath, senior vice president of research and strategic planning at Miami-Dade’s official economic development organization, the Beacon Council.

To land hers, Fernandez direct messaged Allied Global Marketing, which works with the entertainment industry, on Instagram to get her hands on an application. She ended up landing one of the five available internships. Most of the work is unpaid, though she does earn money for putting on some events. She also gets compensated for gas.



19-year-old Natasha Fernandez works at Cotton On, at Pembroke Lakes Mall in Pembroke Pines, Florida, on Wednesday, July 31, 2019. Charlie Ortega Guifarro CGUIFARRO@MIAMIHERALD.COM

But some students are able to advance their careers and bring in a regular paycheck, too, thanks to organizations — including the Talent Development Network operated out of Florida International University and the Summer Youth Internship Program run by Miami-Dade County Public Schools — aimed at students who can't afford to take an unpaid internship.

The Talent Development Network, a collaboration between several Miami-Dade academic institutions and the Beacon Council, connects college students and recent graduates with career-path internships in Miami. Some 60 percent of students are more likely to land a job post-graduation if they do a paid internship during college, said Caryn Lavernia, assistant vice president for engagement for the network.

The Summer Youth Internship Program connects qualified Miami-Dade public high school students, usually aged 15-18, with five-week summer internship opportunities. The students work 150 hours over the course of the program and make at least minimum wage, said Lupe Diaz, the executive director of the Department of Career and Technical Education, which oversees the youth internship program. This year's program has more than 2,800 participants.

The program teaches students how to act in a professional work environment, said Diaz. And while it may be stressful, Diaz says it is still beneficial.

“This is real world,” Diaz said. “Is it putting any pressure on them? Well, they have to learn how to manage and prioritize.”



Marketing representative for Barlop Business Systems, Michele Lopez, right, asks Andre Cama why he is interested in working sales during a job fair at Shula's Hotel and Golf Club in Miami Lakes, Florida, on Wednesday, July 10, 2019. Charlie Ortega Guifarro CGUIFARRO@MIAMIHERALD.COM

Alexander Pereda, a 19-year-old freshman in the Miami-Dade Honors College, said he's seen fellow classmates suffer from that pressure. Some students have failed classes or under-performed at their jobs and internships because they're juggling so many responsibilities.

"Everyone is looking for the most participatory students and riding that edge always comes with the fear that you could crash out, you could burn," Pereda said.

Fernandez was already juggling a lot between her classes and internship before she took on her job at Cotton On. But she said her internship is flexible and she enjoys being busy.

"You know, maybe I shouldn't be vacationing," Fernandez said of her crowded summer. "Maybe I should be just working, working, working."