

CINDY KRISCHER GOODMAN JUNE 5, 2016 7:00 PM

Great expectations: New grads enter the world of work

New college grads nationwide are seeing the hottest job market since 2009

They want and expect a life outside work and a fulfilling employee experience at the outset of their careers



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As new college graduate Ricshaud Williams looks for a broadcasting job, he has one major criteria: “I want it to be fun and not feel like work. I want it to be something I do with passion.”

Williams, 21, heads out into the working world with a bachelor’s degree in mass communications from Florida Memorial University in Miami Gardens, eager to pay off his student loans but having the same expectations of his first job as most of the Class of 2016: meaningful work, a team environment and a fun workplace culture. Whether the workplace meets these expectations will be potentially game-changing as traditional businesses become more dependent on young workers to take their businesses into the digital age.

“I think we’re going to make a big difference in a positive way,” Williams says.

For the estimated 1.9 million 2016 graduates, the United States is in the hottest job market since 2009, according to National Association of Colleges and Employers. Optimistic graduates are researching future employers online, using apps, and reading employee reviews on websites to find jobs with the right cultural fit. They aren’t necessarily seeking a Google-like workplace where ping-pong and pizza parties abound (although that’s a draw). They want a workplace where people like what they do and create a positive social atmosphere, and they are willing to relocate or take a lower salary for that type of environment, according to a new study of 2,018 college graduates by Accenture Strategy, a global strategy consulting firm.

“They don’t just want to have fun at work, they *expect* to have fun, says Katherine LaVelle, a Washington, D.C.-based managing director of Accenture Strategy. “To them, that’s much more important than salary.

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Accenture also found 2016 graduates want flexibility and a job that doesn't feel like grunt work. They prefer small to mid-size companies where they believe they can make a difference and have better team experiences. This year, the number of new college grads who say they want to work for a big company steadily declined to 14 percent from 20 percent in Accenture's 2013 annual survey. The rest of the grads want to work at medium-sized and small companies, or startups.

Eduardo Padrón, president of Miami Dade College, has seen that interest on his campus with his 2016 graduates. "They are entrepreneurial and creative. They want to experiment. They want to start own businesses. They are not as motivated by becoming rich. They want to make a difference and they want a job that makes them happy," Padrón says.

To find a career that makes them happy, and where they could land a job, most of this year's graduates nationwide chose their majors carefully: Sixty-nine percent reported that they selected their major because they were passionate about that area of study, and 79 percent revealed that they considered the availability of jobs in their desired field of work before selecting their major. Their practical approach seems to have paid off: 21 percent of the class of 2016 accepted a job

before graduation, up from 12 percent last year and 11 percent two years ago.

University of Florida graduate Grant Horvath, 23, entered the workforce last month as an accounting implementation analyst with every intention of maintaining his work/life balance. He has a bachelor's in psychology and a master's in management, both from UF. "I have a set time I leave. I leave my laptop in the office, and my phone is not connected to work email," he says. Yet, he acknowledges that maintaining boundaries may get more difficult as he advances in his career: "There may be a time when I have to take my laptop home, but I'm hoping to extend my office hours to avoid that."

Daniel Harbus, also a 2016 UF grad, not only chose his major carefully — he has a bachelor's in business administration — he resisted grabbing the first job that came his way. When Harbus, who is originally from New York, accepted a revenue management position at a Miami cruise line, he had talked to employees, read online reviews and completed an internship: "I wasn't looking for a modern workplace like Google. I liked the idea of a traditional office, but work/life balance is important. I didn't want to overwork myself doing something I didn't enjoy and I wanted to love the people I work with." Because Harbus realized new workers have a learning curve, a supportive work environment was important, too: "I wanted a boss who understands I am going to learn through experience."

Employers who want young workers may now need to rethink how their workplace is structured. LaVelle says employers will need to focus on the employee experience they deliver as a differentiator to attract today's millennials. Large companies will need to make entry level jobs more "fun" by offering project work that allows for on-the-job learning and the opportunity to work across different roles.

Victoria Villalba interviews candidates on behalf of employers for corporate positions and has changed her approach for entry-level positions: "I used to ask where do you see yourself five years from

now. Today, I ask where do you see yourself in the next year?” Villalba says what she wants to know is, what can employers get from you, and what are your expectations of them? Often, the “fun” experience a new hire expects and the flexibility he or she wants do not match the responsibilities of an entry-level position: “We all teach our children to find a career they are passionate about, something they will enjoy. Maybe we tend not to tell our kids they will have to start at the bottom and work their way up and that some days are not as much fun.”

Accenture recently measured the disparity between graduate expectations and the reality of the working world by polling 2014 and 2015 graduates. It found that many were underemployed in jobs that do not require their college degree, even after a couple of years of work. Villalba offers this explanation: “Some of that may be by choice. They may choose a job that offers them more flexibility than a higher paying office job.”

Horvath, who is from Boca Raton and now working for a Miami firm, says fellow graduates may need to be more realistic with their expectations. “They are expecting to have flexibility in their work hours and the ability to work from spaces other than their office,” he says. “Unless working for start up or a tech company, they probably won’t find that — at least not right away.”

Cindy Krischer Goodman writes on work/life and workplace topics. Connect with her at BalanceGal@gmail.com, [@balancegal](https://twitter.com/balancegal) or visit worklifebalancingact.com.

A GLIMPSE OF THE CLASS OF '16

Here are some facts about the most recent college grads nationwide:

- **A majority of 2016 graduates** (88 percent) expect to land a job in their field of study.
- **69 percent of graduates** chose their area of study because they were passionate about it — and want to work for companies that do good.

- **Graduates are three times** as likely to prefer to work for a small or medium-sized company (44 percent), versus a large company (14 percent).
- **The majority (80 percent)** of the class of 2016 expect their first employer to provide formal training,
- **More than two-thirds (67 percent)** of this year's graduating class used a mobile app to search for or apply for jobs.
- **61 percent of 2016 graduates** think advancements in digital technologies and artificial intelligence will positively impact their work.
- **68 percent of 2016 graduates** completed an internship or co-op.
- **72 percent of graduates** are willing to relocate for a job.

Source: Accenture Strategy U.S. Survey of College Graduates, March 2016.
