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South Florida's private colleges offer jobs as well as retraining

By Marcia Heroux Pounds, Sun Sentinel

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Juan Tetada, 56, was without work for 18 months. His home was about to be foreclosed. But the lender reversed its decision after Tetada told the court he found a job at Florida Career College's new campus in [Boynton Beach](#).

"They saved my life," said Tetada, a former condo maintenance manager who recently was hired as facilities manager at Florida Career College.

Tetada was one of 80 employees recently hired by the college, which specializes in career training for jobs in medical coding and billing, cosmetology and medical assisting.

They benefited from a surge in hiring at for-profit schools, one of the few employment segments to show growth in Florida over the past year.

Private education jobs in [Broward County](#) swelled by 8.2 percent from 2008 to 2009. In South Florida, for-profit universities, including Kaplan University, Florida Career College, Keiser University, and DeVry University, have added students, campus and online educational services.

It has been a boon for many workers in the mortgage, finance, recruiting and other industries that have been trimming jobs in South Florida.

"They are growing, much like community college campuses. When the economy is in a slump, workers look for ways to change their job skills, and colleges add campuses," said Kathy Mizereck, executive director of The Florida Association of Postsecondary Schools and Colleges.

The largest driver of private education job growth in [Broward County](#) has been Kaplan University, which bases its higher education business in Fort Lauderdale. The company, owned by The Washington Post, hired more than 2,800 employees in Florida in 2009. Almost 1,000 of those were in Broward.

And this year, Kaplan continues to expand. It recently opened a "learning center" where remote students can take some classes and find guidance in [Delray Beach](#); a new center is under construction in Plantation.

Of the 900 whom Kaplan has hired so far this year, 350 were for positions in [Broward County](#), said Suzanne Calfee, vice president for human resources for Kaplan University.

Kaplan doesn't disclose turnover numbers, but its hiring has been fueled by growth, Calfee said. Of the 180 jobs now open in higher education, 115 are new jobs.

"We have been hiring in all areas of the university to support that growth: admissions, career services, academic advising and faculty, as well as human resources, finance, and project management," Calfee said.

With major employers in South Florida reducing their work force during the downturn, the local labor pool is rich with talent.

"For most part, we've hired from the local area. Companies leaving the area have been a boon to us," Calfee said

An opportunity to become vice president of student care at Kaplan Higher Education drew Keith Brender, 49, back to South Florida. Brender had worked for 25 years for Alamo rental car, moving to Tulsa, Okla., in 2004 with Alamo's parent company. He took a new job in 2006 with a Philadelphia credit card firm, but was laid off in February.

He heard about the Kaplan job from a friend who previously worked for Alamo and now works for Kaplan. Those personal connections are why Kaplan offers a \$500 reward to employees when a referral is hired and remains at the company for six months.

"They refer people they know can be successful here," Calfee said. "That's an obvious win-win."

Jobs in private education are often attractive to workers for tuition benefits.

Kaplan offers paid tuition for full- and part-time employees who maintain a 3.0 or higher grade point average. Other area colleges offer tuition reimbursement or discounts for their students, or even for education at other schools.

Tuition benefits was one reason Zachary Greenwald, 27, applied for a job in Fort Lauderdale with DeVry University, which offers a master's in business administration through its association with Keller Graduate School of Management in Illinois.

As an admissions representative, he tells students how education can benefit them. "Without a doubt I wouldn't be sitting here at DeVry if it were not for my education," said Greenwald, who has studied in several countries to learn foreign languages.

In 2009, DeVry added six new positions to its South Florida locations, a 5 percent increase from a year earlier. So far in 2010, the university has added nine new jobs in South Florida, according to Joshua Padron, DeVry's South Florida Metro president. About 25 percent of the new jobs are related to the student, he said, including workers in student admissions, financial aid, career services, student life, and student services.

Fort Lauderdale-based Keiser University has had more than a 20 percent increase in students and hired about 1,000 employees in the last 18 months, according to Vice Chancellor Gery Hochanadel. Of workers hired since January, about half have been faculty and the remainder in student support services.

Brendan Shepardson, 24, of Hollywood found a job in April as bookstore associate in Fort Lauderdale for Keiser's online students. He had been looking for work since he graduated from St. Thomas University in May 2009, but was sidetracked when his father fell ill.

"I pursued every single lead I possibly could, even the kinds of jobs you don't expect to pursue if you have a bachelor's degree," he said, recalling one application as a tree-climber for a landscaper.

Lori Alonso, 45, of Miramar, was hired in 2009 as director of student services for Keiser's Pembroke Pines campus after she lost her human resource manager job for a Miami real estate developer.

"There are a lot of transferable skills: recruiting, resume development, interview preparation," Alonso said.

Sabrina Sanders found new work in April as an instructor of medical insurance billing and coding at Everest Institute in Fort Lauderdale. She is one of 110 new employees hired in 2009 by five schools including Everest University in Pompano Beach, which offers advanced degrees, and Everest Institute in Fort Lauderdale, North Miami, Hialeah and Kendall which offer associates and some bachelor's degrees. Everest has hired 83 workers so far this year and still has 46 positions open.

Sanders, 41, lost her medical billing job in February. She said teaching was what she always wanted to do since she was a child. So when her eight-year job ended, she began applying at private universities.

"She's extremely happy," said Bonnie Roberge, human resources director for Everest in Florida. "The students love her."

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