

College Graduates Turning To Tech School For Job Training

Ericka Seastrand graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2008 with a bachelor's degree in consumer science. She beat the pavement for nine months, and the only job she could get was retail sales associate at a mall.

"The market was really competitive," the 26-year-old from West Milwaukee recalled last week. "My degree was a generic business degree - nothing technical or tangible in the skill set. So I decided to get another degree with a hard skill set."

Seastrand is one of a surprising number of 20-somethings who graduated from college in recent years, couldn't find good-paying jobs with their four-year degrees, and enrolled in a technical college to earn a second degree or diploma geared toward specific job opportunities.

In the last three years, 6.4% of the total number of degrees and diplomas awarded at Waukesha County

Technical College went to 20-somethings who self-reported they had at least 16 years of education before enrolling at the technical college, according to data analysis requested by the Journal Sentinel. Twenty-somethings represented 79.5% of all WCTC's grads from 2009 to 2011 who already had bachelor's degrees.

The percentages of 20-somethings with bachelor's degrees who graduated during the same time from other technical colleges in the state - Madison (5.5%), Milwaukee (2.9%), Moraine Park (2.3%) and Gateway (2.1%) - were lower, but still noteworthy.

Connecting college degrees with jobs is a high-stakes challenge as graduates compete for fewer jobs while facing the prospect of repaying hefty student loans because financially strapped parents couldn't help pay for college, and tuition at four-year universities has risen faster than the rate of inflation.