



An open letter to the 2020 Criminal Justice graduates of the College of Community Innovation and Education at the University of Central Florida:

Graduates,

Feel free to take a BIG sigh of relief, because you did it. More importantly, you **EARNED** it. The long nights, weekends, study groups, cramming sessions, extracurricular activities that rounded out your experience at UCF have concluded. School's out and the working world beckons, but are there opportunities for you? Do you feel anxious about graduating into the unknown?

I was in your shoes eleven years ago, except substitute the worldwide pandemic with worldwide financial crisis. I was fresh off an acclaimed internship in Washington, D.C. and I only stepped on campus that spring to attend commencement and don that oh-so-sweet cap and gown. I had lofty expectations for all of the three-letter agencies you could fathom, and I was not backing down from those dreams. Little did I know that the next 365 days would be the longest, most brutal test for my ego.

After graduation, I applied to local, state, federal, private, and military postings and was rejected or waitlisted for all of them. The Orlando Sentinel even wrote [a story](https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/os-xpm-2009-05-08-graduates-story.html) (<https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/os-xpm-2009-05-08-graduates-story.html>) about us underemployed graduates. So, as I awaited more application responses, I swallowed my pride and with clenched teeth put on that beautiful green apron. You guessed it...Publix was my first job after graduation.

In the meantime, I laid very low and was constantly working and submitting job applications. It wasn't until I flew to Baltimore for a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) position that I didn't even want that I began to question my priorities and what was really important to me. Soon after that rejection, I received two leads in Orlando: one federal law enforcement agency and the other from Lockheed Martin (LM). I did my homework for the LM interview but viewed it as prep for my later interview. I was very relaxed because I wasn't seriously considering the job! Both interviews went well, but the feds decided they were no longer considering my application. It was heartbreaking...I felt like I couldn't take another rejection! I had worked too hard in school for this to be my reality. But low and behold, the LM interview went very well and they invited me back for the second round of interviews. Those ended up going very well, negotiations ensued, and I ended up relocating from Florida to Texas. I couldn't believe that the

5th generation joint strike fighter, the F-35 Lightning II was the kickoff to my career as a security professional in the private sector.

I learned a lot about myself and what it took to endure rejection after rejection. It took courage to give up on a life-long dream to end a year-long job search. As previously alluded to, this June marks ten years with LM. I credit ASIS International for expanding my horizons (and my paychecks) in the lucrative world of private security, along with my academic (shout out goes to my UCF professors Mary Ann Eastep, Iryna Malendevych, and Randy Gold!) and professional mentors. I have traveled across the country, lived in very desirable locales, and I get every Friday off (#threedayweekendsforever). LM isn't the job that I was dreaming about when I tossed my cap at graduation, but when I look back over the last decade, I'm content with the choices I made and the dreams I opted to forego.

The pandemic is here and there's nothing you can do about it. The agencies you're looking at may go into hiring freezes just like they did in 2009 when the economy crashed. My advice to you during this turbulent time is to think beyond what you pictured for yourself upon graduation. While I endorse and champion applying for your dream job(s), seeing the door close again and again might be a sign to reconsider your options. You just might stumble into a career you never knew you would love.

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Reid Pearson

Security Manager
Air Dominance Advanced Programs
Missiles and Fire Control
Lockheed Martin Corporation