

Sweet opportunity: SUNY Broome grads start careers at international company

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The next time you enjoy a piece of chocolate or a cup of coffee, think fondly of SUNY Broome graduates Claudio Alberty Marte Ulloa and Luis Santiago Rosario Rijo.

The two have landed jobs with Biocafcao, S.A, an international company that produces, exports and markets cocoa beans, coffee beans and other agricultural products around the world. They'll be based in North Tenares, in their home country: the Dominican Republic.

Claudio and Santiago are graduates from the Scholarships for Education and Economic Development program – known as SEED – and have both an Associate's degree in Individual Studies as well as a certificate in Quality Assurance.

Both work in quality control for Biocafcao. Rijo is in charge of the drying process for the cocoa beans, as well as working on certifications that include organically grown and rainforest-friendly. Ulloa is responsible for logistics at the warehouse, where he oversees the quality of cocoa beans and makes sure that they're up to client expectations.

Both are grateful for the opportunity.

"It's hard for us to find a job, in our country especially," said Ulloa, who spent two months working in a supermarket after returning home. Rijo, on the other hand, initially got a customer service job at the Hard Rock Café, but was pushing for a job in quality control.

Biocafcao employs 11 other SEED graduates who attended college across the United States. When Rijo got the job, they asked him to recommend another quality control candidate and he recommended Ulloa.

"The owner of the company likes to work with SEED students because we are already prepared, and we have the vision to do things and to work hard," Rijo said.

The two share an apartment, paid for by the company along with their food. It's not close to their families – Santiago's family is five hours away and Claudio's two – but they have the opportunity to visit for several days each month. While many graduates search for jobs near their home provinces, SUNY Broome SEED coordinate [Claudia Beebe](#) advised students to be willing to move to other areas for job opportunities, Rijo said.

Employers in the Dominican Republic appreciate the worth of a SUNY Broome degree, according to Rijo. They know it's difficult to attend college in a country where you don't know the language, at least not initially. And, indeed, it was tough.

"It was hard in the beginning to move in with a host family without knowing the language. Every day I cried a lot," Ulloa remembered. "But we have a vision; we go through it to get to our goals. Going through that process is what makes us strong."

And struggles aside, SUNY Broome brought opportunities both professionally and socially. They were members of multiple clubs, including the student branch of the American Society for Quality Control, Lingonet, the International Student Organization and Toastmasters. They met students from all over the world and traveled extensively on the East Coast.

They also honed their skills at internships. Rijo worked at the Southern Tier AIDS Program, where he worked with databases and helped on projects that included a conference. Ulloa worked as a data analyst for Universal Instruments.

"We both come from families with not enough resources. This opportunity really changed our lives," Rijo said of their time at SUNY Broome. "You have to drive hard enough, to work hard. You have your community, your family – you can be an example for them."

**Claudio Alberty Marte Ulloa, right, and Luis
Santiago Rosario Rijo, left**

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