

## Guest column: For-profit, 'career' colleges play vital role in education

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In a society where the haves and have-nots are on increasingly divergent trajectories, education remains a critical path to equal opportunity.

The traditional model of higher education - nonprofit public and private universities and community colleges - is limited in its ability to support this pathway.

In fact, the overcrowding problem is so acute at some community colleges that many students have stopped making progress toward a degree simply because they cannot get access to necessary courses.

#### Reduced access

On top of that, 39 states are cutting their education budgets, reducing access to higher education and, thus, leaving many deserving students out in the cold.

This is one of the main reasons that for-profit colleges have become so widespread - and so critically important to meeting the demands of the emerging new economy.

Over the past two decades, career colleges have increasingly stepped up. Today, their 2.2 million students represent 13 percent of the total college population.

This is why it is ironic that career colleges have recently come under attack.

The Department of Education and certain politicians have chosen to ignore the opportunities and benefits that career colleges provide to students and to the economy. Instead, the department is

planning to make things harder for these students, by proposing a set of regulations that are based on faulty data and even faultier premises.

#### Working moms

The new regulations claim to ensure educational value in economic terms, but economists strongly disagree with this approach.

The effect will be to limit access to, and discriminate against, first-generation college students and non-traditional students - such as working mothers, minorities, veterans and seniors, those who arguably could benefit most from a college education.

Virginia College is a microcosm of the larger phenomenon. Through our 17 campuses and online offerings, we prepare 20,000 students for careers in 17 of the 20 fastest growing job categories in the nation - including medical, technology, business, legal studies, personal care, culinary and design.

In many ways, career colleges are at the forefront of higher education. Recently, we launched the Ecotech Institute, the first college completely devoted to preparing students for careers in renewable energy and environmental sustainability. Frankly, we are preparing the new American workforce.

Our students are largely independent adults and those without significant finances. For us, the existing federal "90/10 rule" always has limited the number of underserved, poor and minority students we could educate. The new rules will further restrict access for these students, given their higher risk of default, potentially lower repayment rates and sporadic earnings.

#### Success stories

But our students are more than statistics. A recent student speaker at the commencement exercises for our other locations told a compelling story.

Shortly after enrolling, tragic life events left her homeless, literally living in her car. Despite that, she continued in school, assisted by her fellow students - as well as by the staff, after they learned her plight.

She eventually graduated with a 4.0 grade point average and went to work at a world-renowned clinic, excelling in her new career.

Another student, displaced by Hurricane Katrina, enrolled at Virginia College. She tells of how the support of the staff and faculty made it possible for her to graduate and be successful in a career that was only a dream before.

In an unfamiliar city, she even called her teacher when she was lost. That is the kind of support and transformation that is being offered by colleges such as ours.

I sincerely hope that the Department of Education and our elected officials do not limit access to students like these and deny access to millions who could most benefit from the type of quality post-secondary education and job readiness that we provide.

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### Excuse me.

By [mikehext](#) | 10/12/10 - 01:09 am



Hi there,

My name is Mike. I'm a veteran of 2 branches in the US Military and a hard worker.

I fell for 2 of these 'helpful' schools. They only thing they helped me with was ruining my life.

Both of these schools made promises of a career in animation/3D animation in the video game/creative/art field.

I worked hard in school. One school gave me an associate degree for the wrong program and no leads into the job market like I was promised. They tried to get me to work for Staples as a copy jockey.

The second one worked hard at just trying to squeeze as much of my government loans from me as they could.

They abused the trust students like me placed in them. They herded us to FASFA like cattle. They encouraged more and more loans. They blurred the line between Federal and Private loans so we wouldn't know we were signing for the bogus private loans.

I had to drop out because they started demanding co-signers.

I tried using the skills I was taught to get a job. I had to do this on my own, the only leads the schools offered were RETAIL OUTLETS available without degrees in NON RELATED fields. The same listings you'd find on monster.com or careerbuilder.com.

Neither delivered school, the only thing I got was a bill from Sallie Mae for \$79,000, and that doesn't even count the \$3999 the Art Institutes (The New England Institute of Art) purposely created to try to keep me on the hook in their deceptive web.

These schools are actively taking advantage of students and leaving them in massive debt for the purposes of federal guaranteed money. They have no loyalty to the students. They have no loyalty to their own instructors.

The only thing these schools have in mind is the investors.

School is NOT a business. It should not be run like one.

You're just bottom feeding for treasure that hides in the gills of us 'fish'. That's all your institutions see us as.

The successes these schools generate are padded/false stats, prettied up to put into commercials to lure the next sucker in.

If your schools were truly the affordable rewarding value that they offer, they would not need federal funding.

This is just more paid hogwash by for-profit shareholders/staff/lobbyists trying to defend their useless existence.

So go on, keep preaching for your 'rights' to churn and burn more of us students. You troll the high schools for more victims.

Those single mothers...those kids that are products of single parents... the minorities... the underprivileged ... you aren't there to help them get an education. You're there to help yourselves to the grants and loans they are entitled to. Churn and burn, it's what you do.

These schools are no better than Section 8 slumlords, jacking up the rent prices and writing off 'private' funding so they can collect more in government funding because even if the student can't pay, Uncle Sam will (and collect with 25% fees on it from the student in the end, because the school know the student can't afford it, but that's up to the government to find out now eh?.)

I'll admit, I was stupid going to an art college thinking there was a career there, but then again, I believed the marketing, because who knew that colleges were scams in disguise? Not me, until NOW. Wow, going to school to get more educated was the dumbest mistake of my life.

Thank you,

Sincerely,

-Mike

\$83,000 in debt thanks to the New England Institute of Art (The Art Institutes, Education Management Corp) and Gibbs College (Career Education Corporation)

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