

War on For-Profit Colleges Reeks Even Worse

Posted By [Neal McCluskey](#) On December 8, 2010 @ 4:03 pm In [Education and Child Policy](#) | [Comments Disabled](#)

As [I've](#) ^[1] [pointed out](#) ^[2] [repeatedly](#) ^[3], though the sector is no doubt rife with waste and home to some dirty-dealers, attacks on for-profit colleges are almost certainly driven by politics and ideology, not educational concerns. Were it otherwise, all of higher education would be taking a beating for its bankrupting waste and widespread failure.

A recent symptom of anti-profit witch-huntery was the [misrepresentation of GAO reporting](#) ^[4] on what "secret shoppers" found while visiting select for-profit institutions. At the time the findings were released I thought the main problem was that members of the media and Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) — who has been leading the crusade against for-profit schools — were using the results to smear the whole proprietary sector when the GAO was clear about examining a nonrepresentative sample of schools. Unfortunately, it turns out the GAO might actually be in on the demonization.

On November 30 — without making any announcement that I could find on its website — the GAO released a [modified version](#) ^[5] of its report, and according to [a comparison](#) ^[6] between the old report and new one by the Coalition for Educational Success, the new version contains several changes that cast its for-profit targets in better light than they first appeared.

One vignette, for instance, originally said that a school's admissions representative told an undercover applicant that she "should" take out maximum federal loans even if she didn't need all the money. The change says the representative told the applicant that she "could" take maximum loans — a pretty big difference.

Another section went from only reporting that a representative told an applicant that the school has graduates making \$120,000 to \$130,000 in a job that, according to the GAO, typically makes less than \$70,00 a year, to reporting that the representative also informed the applicant that she "could expect a job with a likely starting salary of \$13-\$14 per hour or \$15 if the applicant was lucky." \$15 an hour translates into about \$30,000 a year, and completely changes the tenor of the vignette.

According to Stephen Burd of the Center for American Progress, career colleges have been [self-servingly crying](#) ^[7] — or at least whispering — foul over the GAO report for months now. Burd has been a leading for-profit basher, but I'd have been inclined to give only limited credence to concerns about dirty pool, too, until this latest revelation trickled out.

Now, though much needs to be determined about why the myriad changes to the report were made, I wouldn't be terribly surprised to learn that people at the GAO have actually been in on the crusade to demonize proprietary colleges. I also, unfortunately, won't be surprised if no one pays attention to any of this, and the shameless, responsibility-dodging war on for-profits continues unabated.

Article printed from Cato @ Liberty: <http://www.cato-at-liberty.org>

URL to article: <http://www.cato-at-liberty.org/war-on-for-profit-colleges-reeks->

even-worse/

URLs in this post:

[1] I've: <http://www.investors.com/NewsAndAnalysis/Article/540251/201007131904/Politicians-Are-The-Problem-For-Higher-Education.aspx>

[2] pointed out: <http://www.cato-at-liberty.org/dont-look-around-get-the-for-profits/>

[3] repeatedly: <http://www.cato.org/event.php?eventid=7606>

[4] misrepresentation of GAO reporting: <http://www.cato-at-liberty.org/what-part-of-nonrepresentative-dont-profit-haters-get/>

[5] modified version: <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d10948t.pdf>

[6] a comparison : <http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20101207007334/en/Coalition-Educational-Success-Significantly-Revised-Report-For-Profit>

[7] self-servingly crying : http://highereducationwatch.newamerica.net/blogposts/2010/the_career_colleges_campaign_to_discredit_the_gao-40898

Copyright © 2009 Cato-at-liberty. All rights reserved.