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Redacted by HELP Committee

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, June 05, 2009 2:13 PM
To: negreg09
Subject: school

Statement about online school:

I am a former employee at ashford university. I was told to send personal accounts to this email. My job as an enrollment advisor was to sign up new students. Ashford is not motivated by the best interest of students, and they hide it well. In the following I will breakdown key points into more detail based on my experience there..

Ashford profits from student loans:

Ashford is a for profit school and makes a majority of its money on federal loans students take out. They conveniently price tuition at the exact amount that a student can qualify for in federal loan money. There is no regard to whether a student really belongs in school, the goal is to enroll as many as possible. They also go after GI bill money and currently have separate teams set up to specifically target military students. If a person has money available for school Ashford finds a way to go after them. Ashford is just the middle man, profiting off this money, like milking a cow and working the system within the limits of what's technically legal, and paying huge salaries while the student suffers with debt that can't even be forgiven by bankruptcy. We mention tuition prices as little as possible..this may cause the student to change their mind. They are signing for the loan..legally this implies they read everything so we just leave it there

Comission structure:

While it is illegal to pay commission for student enrollment Ashford does salary adjustments..basically the same thing. We are given a matrix that shows the numbers of students we are expected to enroll. We have daily projections, as a team we also have to meet our quotas..and these are high quotas. Turnover is high, most employees don't last more than 6 months, there is fierce competition between employees and teams to meet sales numbers and we will say anything necessary to suck students in. Every 6 months we get a review that looks at how many students we enrolled and what percentage of them finished their first class. As long as they finish their first class we get full credit, and after that they are no longer our problem. Also, they don't even have to pass the class for us to get credit. We just need to make sure they log in 2 separate days a week, 4 out of the 5 weeks of class. Whether they do any work doesn't matter, they just need to log in, then out again to get attendance credit and we get credit for them attending class. The first class is purposely designed to be super easy too..kinda like hooking someone on a drug. If we do well, our salaries go way up, if we don't, our salaries can go back down again. There are people making over 100000 a year who do well..just for enrolling people. Once our team got the most enrollments in a week competition. Our prize was a party at an arcade restaurant where we got food, alcoholic drinks, and game tokens all paid for on company time.....taxpayer money, student loan money.

No regard for the student:

Because we are under so much pressure we are forced to do anything necessary to get people to fill out an application..our jobs depend on it. It is set up like a call center, there is an army of a few hundred of us in 2 big buildings and we dial numbers all day. We are monitored closely, managers listen to our calls, if we haven't been on the phone for a while the system alerts them. It's a boiler room..selling education to people who don't really want it. We are trained specifically on how to work the angle of psychology..we tell students this is the right thing to do, it will make their parents proud, it will make them a role model for their kids, it will help them fulfill lifelong goals. If we don't have a degree they want, we are supposed to convince them that one of ours will work for them anyway. There were times when I found myself deleting numbers out of the system so others wouldn't call them and continue to harass them to finally enroll. These are nice people, they are being manipulated and coerced, pressured into things, and we are working the angle of their lifelong hardships and failures to convince them.

A perfect example:

I was once told to stay overtime because i had person on the phone who might sign up. She was a sick old lady who didnt even know how to use a computer. It took me over an hour to talk her through the online application cuz she didnt even know how to type in a URL address. How is a person like this gonna get a degree online? exactly. My manager knew the situation but it didnt matter. Our team needed to meet a certain quota by the end of the week or she would get extreem heat from people above her. My job would also be in danger..i also had quotas to meet. So..she finally signed up..and took out a loan. The people Ashford preys on are single parents, poor people, people who dont know any better, people easily manipulated. Ashford knows that anyone regardless of credit qualifies for education money..they just need the student to sign the dotted line. This level if deception is disgusting.....and wrong. When someone who can barely afford to live and feed kids as it is, and doesnt even have the time or education to be able to enroll, they drop out. Then what? add 20000 of debt to their problems..what are they gonna do now? They are officially screwed. We know most of these people will drop out, but again, we have quotas, and we have no choice

They hide it well:

It is almost impossible to know the atrocities that take place at Ashford unless you are on the inside, or a former student victim. Durring the 2 week new employee training, we are told to always consider the best interest of the student and how to go through a qualifying process. All the employee literature and documentation also states the same things based on high morals. But, once you get on the sales floor the way they actually conduct business is opposite..and many people quite because of this as well. Instead of qualifying someone by setting an appointment the first question we ask is whether they are in front of a computer and attempt to get them to fill out the application without really even knowing what they are signing up for. Then..they get transfered to a financial aid advisor who gets their loans set up.....another fish pulled out of the river. Take a look at the student drop out rates.....there astounding. maybe because they shouldnt have been enrolled in the first place right? Doesnt matter though, Ashford already made their money, and the student carries the debt.

Money Motivated:

Durring my time there was a lot of buz going around about when Ashford would go public. The managers had special stock options and people were gonna get rich. It was kind of like the enron company situation. It was so obvious. Ashford wanted to boost their numbers as fast as possible, get the student body as big as they could as fast as they could no matter what by the time they go public. And they have gone public now..im sure people became rich. This is big buainess and everyone wants in on it. New schools are starting online programs..throwing them together quickly so they can take advantage of this market while its hot. Many times after the first conversation with someone I would never get a hold of them again because by the end of the day they had already been called by 17 other schools. Leads are bought, everywhere you go online now theres ads promoting online degrees. There a dime a dozen..and useless

The lies:

One of Ashfords key selling points is that they have a main land campus. This means that online students are technically part of the extended studies program. For this reason, we tell them that no one will know they actually did this online..even though its done 100 percent online. Their diplomas indicate that they went to Ashford University, the campus. We tell them that employers will think they actually sat in a real classroom.

Accreditation:

Ashford is regionally accredited..technically. This means they have the same accreditation as schools like yale, etc..and these are the schools we compare ourselves too when talking to students..saying we are as good as them. The question is.....how and why do they have this accreditation? Compare the cirriculum and class requirements of a business degree at Ashford to the same degree at a reputable 4 year land school. A reputable school requires hard math, statistics, business calculus, etc.. Ashford requires one math class....that isnt even really a math class. Its something along the lines of math as it relates to business in the real world. Most of the tests are open book multiple choice, or says..no group work of any kind ever. There is no way to enforce cheating either..which questions the validity of the whole thing. Now.....how is this possible if people werent paid off? People in charge of assessing accreditation and who to award it to and on what strict requirements. It is so obvious there has been lobbying and pay offs to make this possible. Online school is big business..a multi billion

dollar business, and it is now it is using education to [REDACTED] government money.

Imminent disaster:

This has striking resemblance to the mortgage crises doesn't it? It was technically legal at the time, but too many loopholes were being used to manipulate and mislead people, and so many payoffs made this possible. Big business bought their right to rip people off. And what happened? Congress had to step in and shut it down. It became so bad that America is now in a financial crisis because of it..

This could be the next mortgage crises!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Government money is not closely regulated enough, and its made so available that it is abused by online schools who only care about taking it for their own profits, leaving thousands of people with immense debt that they will never be able to pay off. Lives are destroyed. There are good people out there right now who are in debt because I put them in school, and they didn't belong there. I had no choice or I would lose my job, and I was pressured to do anything necessary to make a quota. Ashford will deny it! But this is how it is there, and I think a majority of former employees would feel the same way.

Employers catching on:

Many employers are also quickly starting to figure out that online degrees are for the most part useless and don't compare in any way to a real degree. Some companies won't hire people if the person got their degree online. This is a double hit. People now not only have useless degrees, but have huge debt for getting them. Soon, word will get out more and thousands will be in this position...time and money wasted, and worse off than they were to begin with. I went to San Diego State University. I know exactly what it takes to get a real degree and the work it takes, and the quality of the education. After looking at Ashford's program, it is easy to see how much of a joke it is.....unless you've been paid off..then its ok

Abuse:

If someone asks not to be called anymore we legally can't call anymore. Unless they tell us to stop, we can technically keep calling forever. Some people don't know this and we took advantage of this loophole also. We would call people 20 times a day. There is so much pressure and this puts the employee under an immense amount of stress. When our job depends on enrolling someone by the end of the day words cannot describe the frustration of calling someone who said they were going to enroll, then having them hang up. We were depending on this application.....and them changing their mind may cost us our job. In a situation like this it is human nature to seek revenge, and while I don't think anyone is proud of this, the system is partly to blame for putting us in this situation in the first place. If someone cursed us out, we would very commonly blow up their phone, and have all our other team members do the same to them until they finally turned their phone off. Once their phone was back on..the harassment would continue. I mean..they didn't tell us not to call right? so technically we can keep bugging them.....and they just [REDACTED] us over big time by not enrolling. Our managers were bugging us all day that we need that application from them..saying if we don't get it we would be on one week warning to being fired and on the street jobless in a broken economy unless our numbers went up the next week. We have rent to pay, we need to survive. This creates so much frustration after 8 hours in a cubicle that it is human nature to retaliate within whatever margin we technically can without breaking the rules. This is extremely common at Ashford, and again, I don't think anyone is proud of it.....but its like beating a dog. If u beat it enough it turns mean.....not because it is inherently bad, but because it is in such a vicious cycle of a doomed situation that it must vent that frustration in order to maintain sanity. Most employees don't last, they can't make the ridiculous quotas that Ashford demands. And after 6 months, if u make it that long, your quotas go way up again. They keep only the best, but those that do well are rewarded with high salaries. I would compare Ashford to a slave boat, catching as many victims as possible to take their loan money

The point:

To sum this up, online schools need to be re-examined. Education shouldn't be pushed on someone. If they wanted it they should be coming to us, we shouldn't be telemarketing them. As an enrollment advisor we are supposed to be their mentor, someone they can trust, and that shouldn't be tarnished by our secret motive to stay employed and make money off of them. Our country depends on education, it symbolizes the progress of humanity, it shouldn't be something that sets us back. Because of this, education may soon get a bad reputation..and no one will know who to trust or what is actually credible or not, causing many people to not pursue it all together because of all the horror stories. Education is

meant to give opportunity, not take it away. The scam is so big, and so well covered up. It will soon all collapse on itself leaving a broken economy even more battered. Dont ignore this..its hard to see but its real..and it will happen

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From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, June 10, 2009 3:14 PM
To: negreg09

i emailed a few days ago regarding my experience as a former employee of ashford university. i would like to identify myself to make sure my statement is viewed as credible. my name is brent park. if u have any other questions about this feel free to contact me anytime by email or at Redacted by HELP Committee. thanks

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