

Online Colleges Fight Allegations Of Shady Tactics With... More Shady Tactics

by Carol Scott January 14, 2011 08:45 AM (PT)

Surprise fees? Check. Worthless degree? Check. Tens of thousands of dollars in debt? Double check. A recent Huffington Post investigation turned up some real-life horror stories from former students of Kaplan University, the chain of for-profit colleges owned by the Washington Post Company.

While Kaplan might be one of the most well-known "online colleges" marred by the recent flood of damning evidence about deceptive business practices and Congressional efforts at reform, it's not the only one. The University of Phoenix, Concord Law School and Everest College are all well-known online and for-profit colleges that have been called out by former students for promising easy online degrees but delivering debt instead.

You would think that a damning government report that found deceptive business practices at all 15 of the for-profit colleges investigated -- plus a growing flood of complaints by angry former students and employees -- would make the lucrative online college industry put its tail between its legs and pledge to do right by their students.

But instead, these colleges continue to deny all wrongdoing with shadier and shadier tactics.

The latest? A new, official-looking report is out, attacking a government report that uncovered wrongdoing at for-profit colleges. Who paid for it? For-profit colleges themselves! But you wouldn't know it if you were just reading the press release.

The release for the "report" mentions four paragraphs down that it was commissioned by the Coalition for Educational Success. This benign-sounding group is actually a lobbying group made up of for-profit colleges. *Inside Higher Ed* has the scoop, reporting that the for-profits paid the consulting company to spend 164 hours picking through the government report with a fine-toothed comb.

After just a few hours of looking at the new report, *Inside Higher Ed* found that "a spot check of a few of the report's findings suggested that it had uncovered some flaws in the GAO report -- but also that some of the purported errors identified by the critique were themselves exaggerated or wrong."

There's nothing wrong with the for-profit industry defending itself - but it's disingenuous to pretend that the defense is coming from anywhere but (surprise!) for-profit colleges. (Leave it to the conservative Cato Institute to pick it up and run with it -- its coverage of

the new report doesn't mention anywhere that the Coalition for Educational Success is funded by for-profit colleges.)

Join Change.org members in calling for Washington Post Chairman Donald Graham to step up and commit to ending Kaplan University's shady business practices. And stay tuned to learn how former Kaplan students are fighting back.