

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: STORIES/QUOTES FROM FORMER FOR-PROFIT SCHOOL STUDENTS

The following stories were submitted by for-profit school students to NCLC's Student Loan Borrower Assistance Project (www.studentloanborrowerassistance.org).

S.I., Winsboro, LA, age 43, regionally accredited national chain

"I have been a pharmacy technician for over 20 years. At age 35, I [enrolled] . . . hoping to earn a better job and a better income. My goal is a job in healthcare administration. . . . I graduated . . . in April 2010, with a bachelor of business administration degree. . . . Unfortunately, earning my degree has sent my life in a downhill spiral. I have been unable to find employment with my business degree. . . . In addition, I have only been able to find temporary and part time work as a pharmacy technician [and] I have to commute nearly 200 miles for this current job. I can not find work where I live. I have applied for many job positions—from housekeeping and cashiers to management. [H]iring managers for . . . administrative/management positions tell me I do not have enough experience. I feel my degree has hurt me more the helped me.

As well, my student loan debt has left a tremendous bruise on my personal life. [My boyfriend] has given me shelter through unemployment and he is the only reason I am not homeless at this point. I . . . spend \$400 to \$600 monthly [on] my 200 mile commute to my present employer. . . . Sometimes, I try to save money on lodging . . . by sleeping in my car. The loan payment on [the private loan my boyfriend] co-signed . . . is \$200 monthly. . . . After these expenses, I have little money for food clothes and medical expenses.

I obviously made a grave mistake going to college and trusting my future with our nation's higher educational system.

If my wages are garnished I will not have money to commute to work. One reason I am not finding employment is due to my poor credit record due to inability to pay student loans. Hiring managers in the business administration/management field tell me I do not have enough administration/management experience. Many hiring managers simply ignore my degree. . . .

[The for-profit school] simply taught text book material. They did not teach the hands on skills needed to find employment, such as MS Excel and analyzing business data. [The school] does not provide assistance with internships [or] job place[ment]. When I notified [my campus] that I was unable to find employment with my . . . degree they did not return my phone calls.”

A.M., Chaska, MN, age 27, regionally accredited national chain

Owes \$125,000 in federal and private student loans

“I went [to a for-profit school]. They stated a job placement program (98% job placement rate) along with aid during the last semester and after graduation to help students find jobs. I received emails from my career advisor for about 2 months, then every email I sent her went unreturned. I left school with a \$16,000 federal loan and an \$88,000 private loan. I had 6 months after my graduation until I had to start repayment. In the past 7 years (since graduating) the most I have made at any job was \$14/hour (and this was an accounting job, my major was photography). Now I have 4 part time jobs, only one is photography related and my loans have jumped to \$17,000 for my federal and \$108,000 for my private. . . . I have become hopeless that my loans will ever be at a monthly payment that I can make and still pay for food, gas, and rent. . . . I wish i could tell all of the high school students of the US to research and be careful to check and double check what banks and schools promise, they don’t care about you or your well being, they are only in it for themselves and their company.”

P.R., Littleton, CO, age 60, parent of student, regionally accredited national chain

Daughter owes \$15,000 in private student loans

“My daughter attended . . . [a for-profit school]. The school was purchased by [a large corporation] after she had started her course work. There were obvious changes in the quality of education as soon as the sale was final: teachers were let go; video equipment needed for school projects was not available or repaired; class size increased to the point there weren’t enough chairs for all students enrolled; the building was over-crowded and uncomfortable; required courses were not offered on a regular basis which extended the enrollment period and increased costs, [etc.] My daughter graduated with honors, but she was unable to find work in her field. Her former classmates have encountered the same problem, and none of these kids can pay back the huge [private] loans the college arranged with Sallie Mae. Sallie Mae (SM) made it impossible for my daughter to obtain forbearance or reduce payments during unemployment and under-employment. . . . Despite our best efforts, Sallie Mae turned the debt over to General Revenue Corp., a collection agency that SM reportedly owns. . . . The \$6000 debt has now increased by \$1000 for collection fees PLUS they increased the interest rate to 18.5%.”

M.K., Yorkville, IL, age 28, nationally accredited national chain

Owes \$122,000 in private and federal student loans

“I have been struggling for 8 years now to pay off my student loans and I have not made a dent. Originally my interest only payment from Sallie Mae was to be just over \$1200/month. . . . who can afford that?? . . . And that is interest only, it will take me a life time to pay off a loan like that. I have attempted EVERY repayment option that is available through Sallie Mae and they have denied me, with no reason given. . . . My degree has been no benefit. I blame most of this on the school. . . . They promised that after graduation they would help us find a job. I did not complete a 4 year degree to work in the mall and make minimum wage! I am a single mom, make a below that average living and am struggling each & everyday to make each payment. Since when is it a life long punishment to get an education? Where is the relief . . . ?? The type of job I went to school for has additional requirements that were not provided by my school. I went to school in hopes of becoming a Buyer. There are additional certificates and computer training programs I need to pursue a position like this. They promised the world when enrolling, and in the end every promise was broken.”

M.M., Cleveland, TN, age 41, regionally accredited national chain (online program)

Owes \$68,000 in federal and private student loans

“In 2004, I was coming out of a rather long divorce. I worked in a factory, and I wanted some way of improving my life and my future, I saw an ad for a new program that [a for-profit school] was starting up and I contacted them. They told me about their ‘placement programs for graduates’ and made the program sound irresistible. It was something that I could do and continue to work my regular job, so I took out a loan with Sallie Mae, and got started on the classes. Maybe 9 months into the program, I started to have some reservations about it, it seemed too easy, I expressed those reservations to one of my instructors and they encouraged me to stick with it, and I finished the program in 2008 right at the time of the financial crash when no one was hiring. Luckily, I already had a job, which I still have today no thanks to any experiences or ‘training’ that I might’ve gotten from my time at [the for-profit school]. So, after graduation, I spent a couple of weeks getting phone calls from the ‘placement department’ basically directing me to postings on Careerbuilder.com and other job boards like that for jobs which weren’t even related to the degree which I’d just completed from their organization, and NONE of those jobs paid better than the job which I already had. All of it was a waste!

Frankly, I don’t think that they should offer the types of degrees in areas where there is not an established industry for graduates to be placed in. I interviewed for several positions that were related to my degree, and in ever[y] interview I found that I was having to explain what the degree was, and what the school was. I felt grossly underexperienced to enter a job in that field after graduating the program. Today, I just feel ashamed to even admit to having gone there. I couldn’t even use it to advance into the marketing departments here at the company that I am presently working for after being here for five years!”

D.W., Carteret, NJ, age 56, nationally accredited school with 2 campuses

Owes \$10,000

“I sign up with [a for-profit school], with promise of financial aid for the course I took, Micro Soft Office, the course is barely 6 months long, they offered [me] a student loan of \$3000 . . . and I took it, after completing the course with a B average they told me that if I pass on time the course would be free. I completed the course. later I found out that nothing the school said was true with out my knowing they took out a \$10,000 student loan on my behalf for a less than 6 month course, after passing the course nothing was free, as they said plus financial aid, they did not have [an] internship sit aside for me so I did not get that. What I need to know is how can I stop this from happen to others this school is ripping people off, and the government. Can someone help me with this this is a bad experience, for anyone. Now I’m 10,000 dollars in debt.

[The for-profit school] only teaches the basics, and not how to type, if you come with no knowledge of the keyboard they do not give lesson on it. they promise to train you in (mouse) Micro Soft Office User Specialist with a certificate upon completion, but Graduation is over one to two years after completion, so what they suggest is that you go back and take another course with them in a different field, which is what students are doing, because of a promise of a check every two weeks for attending their school. They also say if you pass you wont have to pay that back, but you do.”

S.S., Fremont, MI, age 37, enrolled in 2003, nationally accredited national chain (online program)

Owes \$65,000 in private and federal loans

“In 2003, my USMC Reserve unit was activate for Operation Enduring Freedom. When I got back, my contract had expired and I was out of the Marines without an option to re-enlist. My job was going to be phased out so I went to a technical school in order to get a technology degree in order to save my job. Their ‘job placement’ programs consisted of job fairs that had entry level positions not in the IT field. The programs did not provide any opportunity for experience (like internships) and was not good enough to get positions that I was told the course would allow me to do.

Since I was in the reserves . . . I did not get any G.I. Bill benefits. When talking to the financial aid department, I was told if I completed 4 years, my student loan payments would be approximately \$200 per month. The first bill I received was for over \$700. I repeatedly tried to work with Sallie Mae, but every time I do, they utilize . . . collection tactics and will do nothing to work with me.”

A.M., Fairfield, CT, age 31, nationally accredited national chain

Owes \$80,000 in private and federal loans

“I took a private student loan to continue my education, after finishing my medical assistant program I was told by my school I was to start making \$18 per hour, that never happened. I graduate in 2005 and now I am making \$15 per hr. and I am working as registrar in the emergency department. Have 2 small children and unemployed husband. I defaulted my private student loan and I am desperate, I don’t know how to handle the situation, I tried in the past, I called American Education Services many time to tell them my situation and ask them to please make my payments affordable but they did not want to hear it. Now I defaulted and who knows what is going to happen. I am struggling to put food on the table for my kids, it is so frustrated. I am so afraid that they will take money from my paycheck and I won’t be able to feed my kids pay my rent my car insurance and all the things I need to make a living.”

S.B., Akron, OH, enrolled in 2008, nationally accredited school with several campuses

“In 2008, when I was 21 years old, I heard about a ‘career school’ . . . that promised a job in the field I studied. At the time I thought this was a great idea. I had no job, was living on my own and since I didn’t do well in High School this school seemed perfect. I visited the school and they gave me a great ‘salespitch’ about their school. They promised an externship, a job, that their ‘National accreditation’ could be used at ANY college or University, that the loan I would receive wouldn’t kick in until six months after graduation and that if I didn’t have a job it wouldn’t affect me. They showed me a ‘document’ of success stories and at the time it sounded ideal for my situation. I would be in school for 9 months and come out making ‘tons’ of money. Who wouldn’t sign up for that?”

The school, hired students to be teachers, we didn’t learn anything as far as hands on medical care. New people were being enrolled every two weeks and no one knew why. I graduated with honors, had a 4.0 GPA and had to find my own interviews. The school NEVER helped me with anything, employers wouldn’t even consider me when they heard I graduated from [the for-profit school]. . . . The school promised to get us an externship and never did. They promised ‘job placement’ and never helped us find a job. . . . We were robbed of a real education . . . It was a joke, a scam and this school should be shut down. And the students should be free from loan burdens since we didn’t even get an education.

[F]ast forward to today (3/24/2013) I’m married, my husband has cancer, I NEVER received a job from a school that promised me one. . . . I take care of my husband who is a disabled Veteran. . . . We live on VA assistance. Now, I’m trying to get into a University to better mine and my husband’s future. . . . I find out from the University I’m trying to get into, that . . . NONE of the work and time I put into the school will be transferred over to the University. How can this be, when [the for-profit school] told me, that I can transfer my transcripts to any school I wanted since they were ‘Nationally Accredited’ . . . The only thing I’m trying to do is better my life, take care of my disabled husband

and try to get out from underneath a loan from a school that lied to me. . . . I didn't purposely default on my loan. I was a victim to a school that did nothing but lie and ruin my life in the long run. It has literally turned into, battle after battle . All I want is a way out."

G.S., Mason City, IA, age 58, enrolled in 2007, nationally accredited national chain

Owes more than \$43,000

"I went to [a for-profit school] to learn how to be a Medical Assistant. . . I had to change from the Medical Assistant to Interdisciplinary Studies, because I couldn't do the clinical. After I graduated, the school didn't help me find a job. I didn't know what type of jobs that Interdisciplinary Studies was for . . . Someone at [the school] said they were going to send me a job packet, but they never did. . . . I work for two temp services with limited hours. I have a lot of trouble keeping up with all of the bills. I recently caught up my heating bill. . . . I think that the degree was worthless and didn't help me at all. I think the loans are pretty expensive and unaffordable. I'm looking for some kind of help to help with the massive debt the student loans created for me—which I can't afford."

A.M., Tucson, AZ, age 33, nationally accredited national chain

Owes over \$100,000 in private and federal student loans

"I graduated from culinary school in 2004. I was told chefs make GREAT money, just sign on the line. After several low paying jobs, I found myself pregnant, unemployed, and out of forbearance options When I asked Sallie Mae for help . . . they told me I could consolidate my loans with a cosigner and a payment of several thousand dollars. With a newborn, I was trying to get back on my feet, and this was not an option. I was told this was my only option. Time passed, and eventually I was served with the legal documents from the law firm my loans were sold to. . . . Today, I take care of my two kids, by myself, and am having 25% of my income from my full time employer garnished. I was under the impression that I would be a 'Chef' when I graduated and I would be making good money . . . no one told me it would be YEARS before I made a living wage."

K.T. North Hills, CA, age 29, nationally accredited national chain

Owes \$59,000 in federal and private student loans

“Before I started my education, I was told by the recruiters that all their students found jobs after graduation. They said that they have job placement program that will help you find jobs. They also said they have a career center that will help students as long as they want. After graduating with AS degree, they wanted me to get my Bachelor. They said it will cost me around \$90k for my Bachelor. I signed up for the Bachelor Program but then I got out before school started because my previous loan was too much for me to pay. The Registrar and many representatives have asked me many times to go for my Bachelor. They said that I shouldn’t worry about the loan because I will get a job after graduating. I accumulated \$50k school loans. After 6 months of graduation, I was unable to find a job. I went back to a community college. Many schools did not accept my credits. However, I was told by the Register that my credits are transferable . . . [the for-profit school] did not help me find a job like they said. They send out weekly emails with job offers but the jobs are not even in related in our fields. . . . For the past 3 years, I’ve been trying to find a job in my field but I have no luck.”

L.C., 34, Holyoke, MA, nationally accredited school with multiple campuses in three states

“My story goes as thus, I attended [a for-profit school] for medical assisting program. Upon enrollment it was said that I would be placed in an externship for training, and that 90% of their students get hired by the offices in which the students get placed. It was also stated that I would be able to find employment as a phlebotomist or an assistant in pharmacies. After getting certified and reworking my resume a few times, I was still unable to find employment. After two and a half years I gave up the pursuit and settled with whatever employment I could find. Then I find out that I would have to take an entire different set of classes and training as well as a different exam, to be eligible for phlebotomy and a pharmacist’s tech. I was informed that students from [the for-profit school] were looked down upon. Most medical offices wanted nothing to do with their students due to lack of experience.”