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Career Schools Provide Real Opportunities To Women

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Maritza Vega of Elmwood Park, a 2001 Northwestern College Graduate.

By Maritza Vega

While Americans have been focused on other things, the Obama Administration has been quietly waging a war on career colleges and universities – a war that could end up destroying necessary opportunities for people like me, and for our children.

Recently, the Department of Education, under pressure from not-for-profit community colleges, education policy institutions and Wall Street interests has proposed a “Gainful Employment” rule that would place a heavy burden on students who decide to go to career schools. These new rules would only target career schools, and could eliminate Federal financial aid to as many as 360,000 students. Many of those students are single mothers like I was – women who depend on the flexibility of for-profit institutions to pursue their dreams while still caring for their families.

When I graduated high school, the prospect of a college education was daunting, despite having a scholarship in hand to a big university in Illinois. As an eighteen-year-old, the cold hallways of a university seemed impersonal and uncaring. I knew that a massive institution couldn’t provide the kind of guidance I would need to find success in the workplace, nor would it provide the smaller classroom sizes that I needed to really learn. After two years of working administrative jobs and now a single mother of one, I finally decided I was ready to pursue higher education, yet the traditional four year universities still seemed unappealing.

Northwestern College here in the Chicagoland area was different. For once, an admission counselor asked me what I wanted to do, not what classes I needed to take. The financial aid office explained the Federal loan process, but was careful to counsel me to accept only as much as I needed, and helped me weigh the pros and cons of using government assistance to pursue my education. I earned my Associates in Computer Programming &

Information Systems, was hired immediately out of school and went on to become known as the “start-up queen” for human resource departments, helping students and businesses across Chicago achieve success. I went on to earn my Bachelors and am in the process of completing my Masters, and currently, I am the executive director of human resources for a major corporation here in Illinois.

If it weren't for the care and concern of Northwestern College's admissions offices, particularly at their Chicago Campus where I attended, my life might have turned out very differently. Now, I counsel my clients to seriously consider hiring graduates of career colleges and universities because I know that they received the kind of personal attention and training that will best benefit a company. I also encourage young women raising families on their own to pursue higher education at these schools.

Further, I am hoping that short-sighted regulations will not prevent my own children from attending a career college – because like me, they also learn better in smaller classes with more individualized instruction. Affording my children true choice in education – including access to career schools – is critical in ensuring they receive the education that best suits them and prepares them for success in tomorrow's job market. I firmly believe that personal attention equates to success, and career schools like Northwestern College here in Chicago, Bridgeview and Naperville, provide just that.

The administration does not seem to understand how their actions will impact the lives of thousands of low and middle-income students who need the flexibility and opportunity that these schools offer. Not to mention, graduates of for-profit schools have a 38% higher completion rate than their counterparts at community colleges, and over the next several years will provide almost 1.6 million new employees to some of the fastest growing industries in America. Driving these institutions out of business would deal a crushing blow to the aspirations of thousands of students who know this is their best option, and negatively impact our economy in the middle of a very difficult time.

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