

Senator Harkin,

My name is Eric Schmitt. I received an email today as a Kaplan Alumni asking me to share my success. Since I am sure Kaplan wouldn't like what I have to say, I am going to tell you. I am a graduate of Kaplan University with a Bachelor of Science in Paralegal Studies with an emphasis in Personal Injury. I attended the Kaplan Campus in Cedar Falls, Iowa as well as utilized the internet campus.

The story of my involvement with Kaplan begins in 2002. I was working at an inbound customer service firm and felt I needed a change. I wanted to change my life for the better and didn't really think a traditional college would work for me, being, at the time, a 27-year-old father of two. I met with the recruiter, who told me all about the campus. It had day and night classes for non-traditional students like myself. I took their entrance exam (which seemed very simplistic, but who was I to judge?), and I chose a major. My choice was between paralegal and accounting. I chose the paralegal path because, after a stint on jury duty, I discovered an enjoyment of the legal process and the interpretation of statute. I was assured this was a good choice since I was promised by the admissions representative that the program had 100 percent placement. My fellow students were an eclectic mix. One student was there because she was bored at home and probably wasn't going to finish her degree, most of the others in night classes were parents looking to make a better life for themselves and their families. What we all had in common was a desire for a better life. In the orientation to Kaplan University all prospective students were asked what their major was and a presentation would show us our average salary for that profession. I remember the paralegal average being thirty to thirty six thousand a year. As part of the presentation one of the school administrators gets up and asks for a volunteer to come to the front of the room. If you are the first volunteer he gives you ten dollars. The moral of this tale is that for taking a risk you will be rewarded. He says we all took the initiative when we enrolled at Kaplan. The

administrator said that since Kaplan had such a great reputation with local businesses that finding work in our fields will be easier. Kaplan had this great education by focusing more of the programs on marketable skills than on general education requirements. I believed him I didn't know better yet.

I did fairly well at Kaplan. I graduated with a 3.76 GPA, I was the President of the Law Club and had the recommendation of most of my instructors. I had only had a few difficulties with Kaplan, such as when, after my first year, it became harder and harder to find the classes I needed to graduate. The same introductory classes were always being offered, and other later requirements were being pushed off. After putting up a petition for the students to appeal to the administration to offer the advanced classes such as law office management we needed in a classroom format, as opposed to self-study, I spoke to the Dean of the college about this. I was chided for the tone of my petition. I explained to him that I wanted to learn in a classroom environment because I wanted these skills not just a letter grade. The Dean explained they needed to keep these introductory classes on the schedule to handle the influx of enrollees. I pointed out that some of us needed this class and only a few others to graduate when the Dean learned of my desire to continue on past my Associates of Arts, I was told of the internet track to continue a paralegal degree and that Kaplan even offered its own online law school in the form of Concord University. It seemed that with a few hiccups that Kaplan could provide everything I needed to fulfill my dream of practicing law. Since my protests had no effect on the schedule, I accepted and adapted and took the classes in my major that I needed to graduate: an independent study meeting once a week with an instructor for an hour. There was a lot of turnover, with students taking a quarter or two off or just never coming back. I had worked full-time doing whatever I needed to do to graduate. I was sure with my grades and references that I would have no difficulties finding a job after graduation. There were a lot of graduates from many programs but not everyone had kept pace their was turnover, a lot of turnover.

My career search didn't go as planned. Since getting my associate's degree, I have had one temporary job using it, which lasted two weeks. I applied in the public sector, the private sector, law offices, banks, credit unions, even bail bond offices. I finally settled for a job doing inbound customer service, the very field I went to college to escape. After spending more than a year out of school, I received a letter from Kaplan that they were now offering their Bachelor of Science in the Paralegal Studies program on campus via the "School within a School" program. School within a School meant that the online class format was still used, but there was a seminar for one hour per week on campus or via conference call. I enrolled, eager to continue my education since it had to have been my fault that I never received an interview. The School within a School program, I don't believe, even lasted a full year into my bachelor's program. The campus seminars were abruptly ended without explanation or acknowledgment. I continued at Kaplan in a fully online education environment. The most important bit of knowledge I gained during this time was from a one term adjunct instructor, who, when I told her of my plan to continue my education through Concord Law School, informed me that the school was not recognized in Iowa for taking the BAR exam. This event opened my eyes to what Kaplan was. I continued on and graduated in 2008 with a 3.16 GPA. The Dean advising me about how Kaplan could further my education apparently didn't know or forgot to mention this little problem.

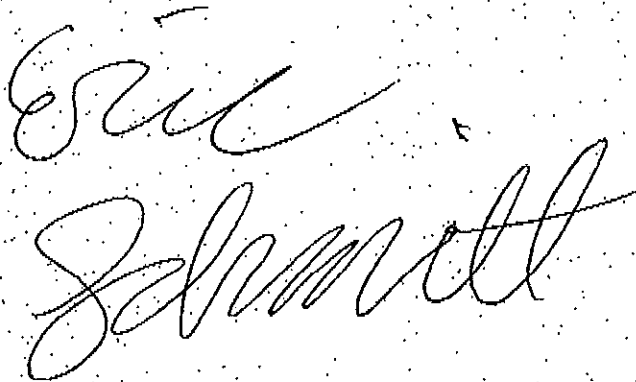
So what is the end of my Kaplan "success story"? In the three years since graduation I have gotten one temporary job working as a drafter on a contract. The job lasted two weeks. I have never had one callback or interview in my field due to the reputation of Kaplan and the graduates it produces. I slowly learned what most employers really thought of the Kaplan degrees and graduates. One of the most telling instances was when an instructor was questioned about why the firm he belonged to didn't hire paralegals from Kaplan. He said that graduates didn't have the skills they needed to work in his firm. I had heard rumors and horror stories all through my education that once Kaplan was done with you they really didn't care what kind of job you found. There were stories of graduates who never found work, or

even that if you tried to transfer that most other colleges refused to accept the credit hours. It wasn't just the paralegal program either. I was recently interning with the head of the local chamber of commerce and when he reviewed my resume, he said it might be in my best interest to remove the name of my school from my resume. I asked him why he said that Kaplan is kind of a joke, they will pass anyone. When it was time for my child support to be reviewed, and I had just lost my \$10.50 an hour job as a janitor, the judge wouldn't lower the amount to what I was currently making because as he said I "would be able to get a job making as much or more with (my) education." After my employment with the 2010 Decennial Census ended, my choices for work were as an assembly line laborer in a pesticide plant or a flagger on road construction for the season. I owe \$40,000 in student loans, and my degree is so specific, it is hard to convince employers I have transferable skills or even to give me an interview to show I have transferable skills. My story is not unique, or even rare, of the dozens of people I met through the paralegal program only four of them have found work as a paralegal. I liken my situation, in abstract terms, to that of a convicted felon. I listened to some people I shouldn't have. I made a mistake. That mistake incurred costs I will have held against me for a long time, I realize it is probably too late for me, but I am sure there are other parents out there looking to make a better life for their family. I just want to make sure they have a real chance at building their future with a real education.

Senator Harkin, and anyone else reading this, I implore you: Do what you can to hold for-profit colleges and universities accountable for the money given to their students for financial aid by ensuring the quality of education, and therefore the employability of graduates produced. In this time of turmoil where citizens of all political persuasions are concerned about the deficit, we, the citizens of these United States, cannot afford to subsidize for-profit colleges as diploma mills, at the expense of the taxpayers and the individual borrowers. The cost to the people, both the American taxpayers as a whole and students personally, is just too high.

Sincerely,

Eric Schmitt

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Schmitt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "E".