

The Honorable Senator Harkin  
Senate H.E.L.P. Committee

February 22, 2012

Dear Senator Harkin,

Thank you for your ongoing investigation of for-profit colleges. I was employed by one of the colleges that became the focus of your Senate investigation. I worked for Westwood College for almost five years. I served in many capacities. I was an adjunct professor for the School of Criminal Justice. I was the full-time assistant to the Academic Dean and the Registrar. And, lastly, I was the campus coordinator for a program known as VIPER. VIPER is an acronym for violence intervention, prevention and emergency response. While I thought that VIPER was being put into place to satisfy the newly enhanced Illinois Campus Security Act of 2009, I later discovered that its creation was just another sad example of what I can only refer to as Westwood smoke and mirrors. In spite of its state mandated compliance, VIPER ceases to exist today. During my five-year tenure at Westwood, I became increasingly concerned about the various levels of fraudulent activities and systemic dishonesties that I personally witnessed. Actually, I became so concerned that I began to keep contemporaneous notes regarding such activities. It is those notes to which I refer to today in order to compose this letter to you.

In order to fully understand the internal makeup of Westwood College, I believe it necessary to share its inception. Westwood College began as a research project or an "experiment" by two graduate students. In essence, the two sought out to determine whether or not they could take the business model concept and apply that concept to a school to turn a profit. I have often times wondered how the students would feel if they knew that they were, in a sense, mere lab rats for an experiment. It is only after trying to comprehend this unusual beginning that one can then start to understand the internal workings of the business of Westwood College.

Having been an educator in the public school system prior to teaching for Westwood College, it became clear to me early on that the college operated quite differently than an institution of learning. Instructors were encouraged and even required to keep their "customers" happy. Members of the admissions team were treated to higher salaries, bonuses and better office accommodations than members of the academic team. There was a constant focus on recruiting and turning a profit rather than on educating. Central administrators located in Denver routinely sent out e-mails containing reports that included retention information for each of the 17 campuses. Local administrators would then point out shortfalls that specific campuses had and action plans would be instituted to improve numbers for the low achievers. This caused further fraudulent activities to occur as no one wanted to be on the low-performing list. One example of such fraudulent activities involved Career Services falsifying student job placement rates. My campus received credit for being the campus with the highest career placement numbers, boasting a 91% success rate for students employed in their field. In fact, that number was only in the 45% range. The campus president even accepted a "prestigious person" award for achieving this feat. This is important because those career placement numbers are used for many different things. First and foremost, they are reported to the accrediting body for the purpose of maintaining accreditation. They are also used to attract and retain students. When these numbers are falsified it means that accreditation was falsely obtained and that students were induced to attend based on false promises. The college routinely engaged in lying about students being employed in their field and even made up exorbitant salaries for students. In fact, a closer look at the annual institutional report shows erroneously that Westwood College and its administrators are the largest employees of Westwood students. To put it more simply, administrators list themselves or their spouses as employees of students, when in fact they are not. One student who had personally contacted me to say that he

was unemployed and had no money for food was listed as a success story in a Westwood newsletter. The article said this student was successfully employed in his field. A closer look at the article showed the employer listed was the student himself! It is also common practice for certain students to be labeled as exempt from reporting. Those students are simply termed as medically unable to work. Of course this is not factual and the students are unaware that they are being reported as such.

Students are routinely lied to by admissions reps and other college employees about transferability of credit and loan terms. Special education students are welcomed in and then the very accommodations that they need to succeed are withheld from them, causing them to fail. When a student does fail a class, Westwood gets two bites at the same apple because the student is charged for the same class twice. Since 99% of the students at the campus I worked at were receiving federal financial aid, it is you and I, the tax payers, who are footing the bill. Prospective students are told they can become judges with a Westwood degree in Criminal Justice. They are promised ballistics classes and time on the shooting range. These promises are all completely false. Computer labs and facilities are inadequate and computers and other media devices are routinely out of order. Students and staff alike were lied to and told that Westwood would be receiving HLC regional accreditation. When that accreditation was not granted, students and staff were not informed for many months. New students were recruited under the guise that regional accreditation was just around the corner, even though administrators knew that this was not the case. I have even heard administrators telling prospective students that a Westwood degree is the equivalent of a Harvard degree and alleging that Harvard, like Westwood, does not have regional accreditation. Military vets are misinformed that their full cost of tuition is going to be covered, including books.

Westwood College attracts personnel by convincing them that the mission of the college is to make college accessible to everyone. It sounds great, doesn't it? To be able to offer opportunities to those students who would otherwise not be eligible to attend college? Sadly, though, those same students are easy to exploit. And exploiting them is what Westwood College does best. Students do not realize that the cost of their degree will be more than five times the amount they would pay at a community college. One way the costs are covered up is by offering five terms a year rather than the traditional two semesters. In this way, Westwood can bill five times a year. Since most people are accustomed to the two-semester protocol, they are unaware that the tuition numbers they are shown for one term will multiple many times over. Westwood also boasts that each student is assigned to a Westwood Success Team. Sadly, such a team does not even exist. The college's latest marketing ploy is their Employment Pledge. Their commercial boasts that they are so confident you'll find work that they will offer to help pay your bills if you don't. What they fail to tell you is what they shared with their administrators and staff prior to rolling this program out. The fine print and eligibility criteria are so burdensome that rarely, if ever, will a student collect on that promise. And if they do collect on it, Westwood limits their assistance to a maximum of \$500 per month for up to six months. A quick look at some of the commercials Westwood College has on You Tube will reveal discriminatory and stereotypical imaging. One such commercial is labeled Road Kill and depicts a southern man seeking to better his life. Another depicts a young black man employed as a slice of pizza.

Administrators routinely "adjust" numbers by demanding that attendance be "rebuilt" or deleted. Students are allowed into classes five weeks into a ten-week term even though it is common knowledge that these students will have little to no chance at passing. When they don't, Westwood just places them in the same class again. Students are charged again and financial aid dollars are wasted. College programs are falsely marketed. Westwood College claimed for many years that its online school was accredited by ACICS, when in fact it was not. Westwood College advertised its Medical Assisting program as CAAHEP accredited, when in fact it was not. The college markets its Medical Assisting program as a degree program when in fact it is a diploma program. A person must be well versed in academic lingo and go several layers deep into the website to uncover that only a few Westwood campuses

offer an Associate degree in Medical Assisting. The other campuses only offer a diploma, which is in all actuality, a certificate. When a student finally does graduate from Westwood College, their degree is withheld from them for any number of silly reasons, such as the student failing to give Career Services a copy of their resume. While employed at the college, there was a drawer full of such degrees held in my department.

If all of this is not bad enough, Westwood College also fails to safeguard the safety of its students, faculty and staff. Just like the other laws and guidelines they fail to obey, they continue to operate outside the laws and guidelines of both The Clery Act and The Illinois Enhanced Campus Security Act. Crimes and threats against students and staff alike go unreported so as to make the campus appear pristine. In the past year, on one campus alone, two students were sexually harassed by Westwood college employees. Faculty members were the victims of unreported theft. Staff members were threatened by students and no action was taken. Two employees even engaged in a shoving match with each other in the presence of an administrator who stood by and did nothing. Should an employee or a student come forward to express their concerns, they are retaliated against mercilessly. Students who post anything unflattering about the college are hunted down and encouraged to withdraw. Staff and faculty are told that they can have no expectation of privacy when employed by Westwood College. Accordingly, their personal *Facebook* and other social media sites are routinely monitored by administrators. I have witnessed students and staff being retaliated against. I myself have also been the victim of such retaliation after I refused to take part in a cover-up to withhold certain documents that the college was under subpoena to produce.

I hope that my story has provided some insight into the internal workings of a broken system. It is my opinion that this system is similar to a pyramid scheme in that it has allowed the share holders at the top to profit greatly at the expense of others. While Westwood would like to have you believe that their illegal practices are not systemic in nature, the truth is that Westwood College campuses all work exactly as they have been set up to work and in perfect unison with each other. I would strongly encourage any student who may be considering Westwood College as an option to reconsider.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patti Howard". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and legible.

Patti Howard