

Testimony of Danielle Johnson
Before the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
“The Federal Investment in For-Profit Education: Are Students Succeeding?”
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First of all, I would like to say that I am very grateful for the chance to tell my story. My name is Danielle Johnson and I live on the Meskwaki Settlement in Tama, Iowa. This is where my husband and children have our home. This is also where I can be close to take care of my grandmother. My mother passed away when I was 8 years old, I never knew my father, and I have no siblings. After my mother's passing, my grandparents raised me. My grandfather died the summer after my 6th grade year, but my grandma continued to take care of me. I graduated from an all Native American high school in Flandreau, South Dakota. This is where I chose to go because I felt more comfortable fitting in and also to be around peers my age.

After high school, I tried to go to college right away but really had no interest. I chose to work and play. I ended up pregnant with my first daughter at the age of 21. I continued working odd jobs but when my child was about 3 years old, I decided it was time to get serious about life and moved away to Waterloo, Iowa to go to college. I was a single mother, living on welfare, trying to get through college, and taking a lot of student loans out. I had been cutting hair ever since I was in junior high for the fun of it, so I thought that it would be a smart idea to get licensed in cosmetology as a source of income. I believed that once I obtained this license, I could do hair on the side while I went back to the community college. It wasn't until after I completed hair school and began working at a salon, that I began to develop pain in my neck and back. After numerous doctor visits, I learned that I could not physically withstand long hours on my feet and that this all stemmed from a 1995 car accident that I was involved in. A car had rear ended mine going full speed on a highway that year but I didn't begin to experience the results until after trying to work full time. This all sent me into a depression for quite some time. I felt all sorts of emotions, as I had spent a lot of time, money and effort on acquiring this schooling only to find out that it seemed all just a waste. After enough of sitting in my pity, I moved back to Tama to try and start over. I moved in with my grandmother in 2000 and found a job working for the tribe. I worked as a personnel assistant for a couple years before I joined the Natural Resources Department as a Soil Technician for another year. Somewhere in this timeframe, I met and married my husband and had my second daughter. He had four from a previous marriage, making us a blended family. We decided that I would stay home with our youngest and did that until she was old enough for school, then went back to work in order to make ends meet.

Over the years, I have continued to care for my grandmother as she has been losing her independence with age. She has been unable to drive for awhile so I've been responsible for getting her to the grocery store, doctor appointments, and any other places that she needs to get to. One day I took her to the Meskwaki Senior Center, where they were having a birthday luncheon. The director from the health clinic was there to speak about the newly built facility that was getting up and running on the settlement. He was describing the different kinds of services they wanted to incorporate there and how they were looking for people from the community to become involved as they wanted to become self-sufficient. One of the things that I thought was a great idea was that they wanted to get a nursing home going. Being that my grandmother is getting up in the years, I wanted to see this happen for her as well as the other

elders in our tribe. Throughout the years, we have had to hire outside help and even send out our elderly to nursing homes where they are not as familiar with others as they are with those they've been in the community with. This way at least they could stay with each other and continue to share their common culture, heritage and language. It was perfect and I wanted to be a part of it.

This is when I first began to form an interest in taking action on what I was seeing. I believe that I am good with people, genuinely care for others, and am capable of building up our tribe. There were some clinic workers there so I voiced my interests with them and they told me that they had new x-ray equipment there but no one to run it. After I got home that evening, I went online and began searching for any local schools that could offer x-ray technician training. There was a place about an hour away in Cedar Rapids, Iowa called Kaplan University. They offered a Medical Assisting (MA) Program and the ad read that if I wanted more information about this then I was to input my contact information. I did just that and the next morning the recruiter called me to come in. I explained what my current situation was and what I was looking for. He told me that their school could accommodate me as most of their students were those who hadn't been in school for awhile, middle aged, family oriented, and people who needed to work on the side. I went in and met with the recruiter shortly thereafter and found out that the MA program would mean that I would probably end up in an office setting, which is not what I was wanting. I came home and talked to my cousin who had some medical background, and she told me that I should try to go for a nursing career. She said that they have more person to person contact, more income, and that I could still get x-ray training.

I called the recruiter back and he told me to come back in and meet with the guy that knew more about the nursing program to see if that was right for me. I went in and met with the Assistant Director of Admissions and he told me that these things were indeed true. I explained to him how we had this newly built facility on our settlement and how I wanted to help my community. He told me that in the beginning of the program I would have to be there and go back and forth more because of the classroom instructing. He said that eventually the classroom setting would taper off and that I would have to do more clinical training. I told him that I was concerned about the gas, time, and what it would take away from my responsibilities at home. The recruiter told me that I could do some of my clinical training there at our facility in Tama. He explained that I would just be in Cedar Rapids mostly in the beginning and then be home more towards the end of my program.

So I went home and set up an appointment with our health director and spoke to him about my ideas. He told me that it was a very demanding program and I told him about how they were going to let me to some of my training there at home. Our health director thought that was a great idea and was even going to talk to the doctor there to let him know to be expecting me as a student somewhere down the road. As I weighed it all out, it seemed worth all the sacrifice. I kept thinking, I just need to keep my nose to the grindstone and it will eventually get easier. The recruiter had even told me that doing my training at the clinic on the settlement would help the transition from me being a student there to being an actual employee. I thought that everybody from the school to the clinic at home was on board and had my goals in sight. I enrolled and so far, I have taken out \$9642.25 in student loans to attend Kaplan University. This is on top of the \$16,640 I still owe for high school and community college.

The first term was indeed very demanding as I had 19 credits hours to complete and pass on top of the daily two hour commute. It seemed like I hardly ever had time to study. I thought

that is was strange that I failed my midterm and final exams in my Anatomy & Physiology class but had yet somehow passed. I was puzzled but yet relieved.

It was at the end of my first term that we received our schedules for 2nd term clinical. They were placing me in Vinton, Iowa. After studying it on the map, I figured it to be about the same distance I was already driving. I let it go for awhile thinking that this was just all part of getting through the first part of my program. Just out of curiosity, I decided that I would go and talk with the director of nursing to see just when exactly I would be able to begin doing my training at home. This is when she broke the news to me that this would not be at all possible. She explained that they already had clinical set up with hospitals in the Cedar Rapids area. She asked me who told me this and I told her how they told me this in the admissions process. She apologized for him and tried to explain how in order for them to do this would mean that she would have to set up an instructor along with a group of girls to go to Tama and that no one would want to do this, nor had they ever done this in the past. As I've progressed through the program and from talking with others, I have found out that this is most common, if not always, protocol with nursing school; you have to have your training in a hospital setting. Being that I had no medical experience before enrolling, I had no way of knowing that this is the way things worked and left me wondering why the director of admissions, whom was also in charge of enrolling students into the nursing program, had failed to share this kind of information with me?

I continued talking with other students, especially those that were further along in the program and began to get a feel for what I was in for. I found out that the time and demands only got more intense and would require more of me being away from home. By 4th term I would have to go back and forth 6 out 7 days a week, and that the classes were going to get more demanding leaving me with less time to study. I couldn't see how I was going to balance it all. I decided I would just cut my losses and try to go to school at Marshalltown Community College (MCC) which is only 15 minutes away from home. The reason I didn't enroll here in the first place was because I was told that it would take longer because of pre-requisites and that Kaplan could get me in and out at a faster pace. I went ahead and got accepted into the fall program at MCC but did not have my official transcripts from Kaplan. I requested that Kaplan transfer them over, but they told me that because it showed that I still owe them that they could not send them for me.

Hindsight, I see how everything happens at too fast of a pace. Our very first day, during orientation, we were trained in CPR within a matter of hours. I am now certified but cannot recall how to do anything and can see how I do not feel confident at all if it came down to trying to save a life. I now feel like I am at a place where I am stuck and have no real future with what I am being taught, or being kept from. I feel like at a place where I don't know how I can continue. I want to but I don't know how. This has been a very disheartening experience and I hope by telling my story can prevent it from happening to anyone else.