

US Education Dept
Negotiated Regulatory Rulemaking Panel
Public Comments
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My name is Stephanie Stiefel. I am here today to tell my story in the hope that what happened to me will not happen to anyone else.

When I was 18 years old and attending the University of South Florida, I attended a career fair to look for employment outside of minimum wage retail jobs. The International Academy of Design and Technology was at this particular career fair, and their counselors spoke highly of their program. I told the counselors at IADT that I was struggling with the large class sizes at USF and they told me that the class sizes at IADT were small and that getting one-on-one time with professors was simple. These counselors also made the program at IADT sound appealing because they said graduating from IADT would provide a promising, lucrative career in big name design firms. At that point, I was interested, so I set up a tour of the school. During the tour, I was told that it was a great school and even if it did not work out, or if I did not like it, all of the classes would transfer to any

other school that I wanted to attend. So shortly after, in October of 2005, I enrolled.

I started taking classes and felt like many of the classes I was taking were just a check in the box. I was not trained on some of the advanced software that was needed for certain projects that were assigned, I was given minimal instructions, and it did not matter if the work that myself and my peers turned in was stellar or just terrible, we would all receive passing grades. There were a few teachers that weren't bad, but then there were other teachers who were always late for class and did not provide any feedback or act as if they cared about teaching or the students at all. In one class, each time I got tests back, I would have the same answer as someone else in my class, but my answer would be counted as wrong and the other person would get the answer correct. There was no consistency in the grading whatsoever. Some of the teachers were not experts in their field as I was led to believe.

I stayed enrolled in the program and was unaware that the problems that I was experiencing during my time at IADT would not lead to a job in interior design. Throughout my time at IADT there were multiple occasions where an alumni

student would come to our class to tell us about how all of their dreams came true from graduating from IADT's Interior Design Program. These stories were all similar; they lived in Los Angeles or New York City and worked in big name design firms as junior designers straight out of school. I had no idea at the time that I would not experience this same success. Looking back, I wonder if these individuals' stories were true, or if they even attended IADT because I did not have the same experiences that they were sharing at all.

IADT told me that they help their students get jobs. After graduation, I moved from Tampa to Los Angeles, and I called IADT's career services office to get career assistance, but was told that since I did not live near the school they would not help me. I applied to every Interior Design related job I could find for both big and small firms. Many firms did not call me back at all, and when I did get an interview, it was always for a receptionist or assistant doing clerical work- jobs that I could have gotten with a high school diploma without going to college. All of these jobs paid minimum wage. I certainly was not able to get one of the jobs making over \$60,000 a year that IADT made me believe I would get coming right out of school. In fact, I found out that I could not be a junior interior designer until I spent a certain amount of time practicing under a licensed interior designer and

became licensed myself. IADT did not tell me any of this and made it seem like I was likely to be working as an interior designer and making more than minimum wage right out of school. To this day, I have not been able to find a career in interior design, and instead work for the Department of Homeland Security as Explosives Detection Canine Handler.

After over a year of applying for interior design jobs, I was forced to take a job working for a family's logistics company my stepfather manages, just so I could pay some of my student loans. The loans became so overwhelming that I made the decision to join the Army to get the benefit of having my loans paid off.

Unfortunately, after joining the Army, I quickly found out that because IADT was not properly accredited, I did not qualify for loan forgiveness. So, I then tried to use my military benefits to start nursing classes and make a plan for my future career. When I tried to enroll, I was told that the general education classes that I took at IADT were not transferrable. I was devastated because I was told that all of these classes would transfer. It turns out that I now have \$140,000 in student loans and a bachelor's degree in interior design that is worth nothing more than a piece of paper.

I am here today to ask the Department of Education to protect students from ending up with a mountain of debt for low quality education and a degree that is worth nothing on the job market.