

Mikeal Swenson, Army Veteran

Testimony

U.S. Education Department

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Hometown: Jacksonville, FL

Good afternoon. My name is Mikeal Swenson. I served in the U.S. Army for 6 and a half years, and I was deployed twice to Afghanistan where I was wounded and earned a Purple Heart. Upon discharge, I enrolled at Full Sail University in 2014, using my GI Bill in their bachelor's program in music production.

I had to drop out of the program after two years because classes were so terrible. I'm now attending a community college that is of much higher quality. Even the Introduction to Music Theory class at my community college taught me more than all four classes on music theory that I took at Full Sail, and one of them was an advanced class. Full Sail set unrealistic expectations for its students and never taught us what we needed to know. For example, students were expected to learn to play the piano in one month. Coupled with accelerated classes that lasted only a month, Full Sail's curriculum was not designed to prepare students for a job because they didn't teach us anything. My instructor at Full Sail also had questionable credentials for teaching. One of them had played in a band, and apparently that alone was enough to qualify him to teach.

When I first talked to Full Sail before enrolling, they connected me with a recruiter who told me he was a former admiral in the U.S. Navy. The recruiter used his military experience and his military rank to gain my trust. He told me Full Sail would pair graduates with employers and provide resources for their job search. I have now learned that nearly every promise made by recruiters was a lie. Because the school was not nationally accredited, credits were not transferable, and post-graduation job assistance was nonexistent. My program at Full Sail only had an 11% graduation rate so I'm not the only one that knew this was a dead-end. After I left Full Sail, all the school did to help with my job search was give me unhelpful leads for jobs unrelated to what I was trained for.

Now I have no GI Bill left and none of my Full Sail credits will transfer, even though I obtained an associate's degree in music production from Full Sail, which granted me the degree years after I dropped out. I feel like Full Sail stole my hard earned education benefits from me. Because of Full Sail's deceptive recruiting practices and poor quality of teaching, I had to start college all over again in my thirties. I have taken out federal student loans to attend community college. People looked down on me because of the worthless degree I got from Full Sail.

I hope the Department of Education considers the painful stories of veterans like me as it develops policies to better protect us from coercive recruiting and worthless degrees. Thank you for your time and consideration.