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Student Veterans Who Attended Westwood are Available for Interviews
Legal Expert also Available

Huge Win for Student Veterans & Other Students
Borrower Defense Relief News - Department of Education Decision Today

The Department of Education announces automatic loan forgiveness for 79,000 students, including veterans, who were unfairly saddled with overwhelming debt after attending Westwood College.

WASHINGTON D.C., August 30, 2022 – The Department of Education announced that students who took out loans to attend Westwood College (from 2002 to 2015) will have their federal student loans discharged without the need to file an application for discharge.

For years, veterans and servicemembers have been targeted by for-profit colleges because of a loophole in federal law that allowed for-profit colleges to count GI Bill funds as private funds to offset the cap they otherwise faced on federal funds.

Westwood, in particular, received $83,637,479 in GI Bill tuition and fees from fiscal year 2009 through fiscal year 2017 at its 18 locations, according to data from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (on file at Veterans Education Success). Using available data, we are able to estimate that in calendar year 2015 (the only year for which data is available), veterans represented 14% of students enrolled at Westwood.

Statement from Della Justice, Vice President for Legal Affairs at Veterans Education Success, who formerly worked as a lead attorney in the Kentucky Attorney General’s office:

“So many veterans have been cheated by predatory education businesses. Westwood was one of the most brazen, aggressively lying to students about the jobs they could get. On behalf of the veterans we serve, we are so relieved that the Department of Education is going to cancel students’ loans. But these veterans are never going to get their GI Bill back and that’s not right. We call on Congress to restore the GI Bill of defrauded veterans.”
If members of the press are interested in talking with veterans who attended Westwood College, please contact jake.fisher@wardcirclestrategies.com.

Such veterans include Warren Hunsinger of Colorado who had his loans from Westwood forgiven under a borrower defense application, and said:

“Finally, after years of stress and waiting, my borrower defense application was approved and my loans from Westwood College were canceled. Having these loans canceled has been a huge weight off of my shoulders as it has allowed me to afford a home for my family and allowed us to move forward with our lives.”

Similarly, Air Force veteran Joshua Queen, whom Veterans Education Success is also helping, testified at the Department of Education’s rulemaking on loan forgiveness for defrauded students:

“I never expected that going to college would be such a negative force in my life. But so far, I have no college degree, very few transferable college credits, and unrelenting student loan debt. I have been trying for years to buy a house, but it just isn’t an option for me with my debt and my credit the way it is. And so many veterans and other students are in similar situations. I ask you to continue to work to protect students from schools like Westwood and to provide robust programs to help defrauded students with their loan debt.

Westwood featured advertisements claiming that they offered “game developer degrees” that helped graduates find work in the gaming industry. After I enrolled, I discovered that Westwood did not actually offer “game developer degrees.” When I applied for game developer positions at companies, my applications were rejected. Furthermore, Westwood claimed that teachers were “industry experts” who would help me get my foot in the door in the gaming industry. I discovered that teachers were inexperienced, and Westwood provided teachers with templates to use for each class. Teachers rarely deviated from this template and were unable to answer basic questions.

In addition, Westwood recruiters lied to me about the transferability of my credits. The school I will be attending this year will be accepting less than 10 of the 102 credits I have previously earned.”

Veterans who have questions can contact Veterans Education Success for free assistance at Help@VetsEdSuccess.org.
Background:

- Veterans Education Success has been at the forefront of advocacy for student veterans. The group played a key role in pushing for the Department of Education to improve loan forgiveness for defrauded students. The Department has announced proposed regulations to improve the "borrower defense" program, and Veterans Education Success played a role in crafting the revised regulations during negotiated rulemaking (formal public input).
- Veterans Education Success has helped thousands of student veterans who were victims of fraud in higher education.
- Veterans Education Success has been a strong voice showcasing the need to help veterans who have been scammed by Westwood College and scores of other schools who preyed on veterans for their GI Bill benefits.
- Before it closed in 2016, Westwood had settled with the U.S. Justice Department (2009), the Colorado Attorney General (2012), and the Illinois Attorney General (2015), agreeing to pay $25.5 million to settle the three lawsuits. The settlements alleged that Westwood had lied to students about employability, job placement, transferability of credits, and costs. The Justice Department settlement further alleged that Westwood had misled the Texas licensing authority about complying with job placement reporting requirements and whether a program complied with professional licensing requirements.
- The investigations of the Illinois and Colorado Attorneys General showed that Westwood misled students about their likelihood of getting a job and the salary they would earn. In Illinois, the college even promised students they could become police officers when the program did not have the accreditation required for a graduate to qualify for the job. The school allegedly purchased search terms like "regionally accredited" to give prospective students the false impression that the school had the accreditation needed for graduates to become a police officer.
- The Illinois Office of Attorney General alleged that Westwood failed to provide students accurate information about their financial aid, and charged students an exorbitant interest rate as high as 18% when it financed the students’ costs.
- The Colorado Office of Attorney General likewise alleged that Westwood failed to follow Colorado’s state financing laws and charged improper financing fees.
- In 2011, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it had withdrawn approval for three Westwood campuses in Texas because of findings of erroneous, deceptive, and misleading advertising and enrollment practices.
- The Department of Education also has canceled federal student loans for students who attended other schools, including Corinthian, ITT, and DeVry, due to its findings that the schools provided false and misleading information to prospective students.