

My name is Patricia Link, I have been asked to tell you about the impact the Art Institute of Pittsburgh Online Division has had on my life, and my concerns regarding decision. Choosing a college is one of the most important decisions you will make in your life, and it is one I did not rush into. My family was faced with a financial crisis that dictated I had to be able to become the primary provider within 3 years. In 2007, I graduated from Thomas Nelson Community College with the intention of getting my bachelor degree in art. I studied college reviews and went on to the Department of Education to get information on institutions and colleges with graphic design programs. After doing all of this research I knew that there wasn't a local college offering a degree in graphic design, but I felt like I had enough information to pick a college offering the degree through an online setting. I never considered the government would be passing along false information that eventually resulted in financial ruin, loss of health, and a government that protects criminals over law abiding citizens.

The Art institutes said they were willing to take the majority of my credits in transfer but tuition was still obscenely expensive. I kept putting off the decision until a recruiter called me and said he knew my husband was on disability. He asked if I knew how long my husband had before he would take up all of the time I would need to dedicate to furthering my studies, one year, two years? I told the recruiter I could not afford the school and he reminded me that my transfer credits would reduce the tuition and said they had many scholarships. He also said that I qualified for government loans that didn't have to be paid until after I graduated. He said graduates of the graphic design program at their school make 40-60 thousand a year. I told him I was concerned with not being able to get one-on-one assistance for a program that was entirely online. He said that wasn't an issue online because instructors are there for you no matter what. I worked with this recruiter to e sign an enrollment agreement, forms to get FAFSA done, and access to catch up with everyone already in class.

The next four years that was supposed to be two turned out to be one false statement after another. During my time at the Art Institutes I came to realize during my last year that they did not care about teaching you the skills you needed to get a job in the field. This became evident when the school could no longer skirt the issue of outdated course content failing to meet both software and technology.

The last 18 months of school I found out the school lied to me about transfer credits, the cost of tuition, and scholarships. Fifteen months before I was supposed to graduate my financial advisor Eric Medsger, called from the Art Institutes. He informed me that I had to pay for the rest of my degree out of pocket. I said no, I was told by Orland Pullen that I would have more than enough for my education due to transfer credits and scholarships. I just need the paperwork for one of those scholarships. He said they didn't have scholarships. I had to liquidate my IRA to come up with the money on the spot.

The next source of great stress occurred 6 months before graduation. I was already putting together a resume and wanted to know where my internship was going to be, so I called and left a message with my student advisor. She called me back and said they had substituted a class for it. This was concerning because it was supposed to provide the hands-on training Orland Pullen said would address my concern for hands on practical experience lost not being on campus. I asked her what happened to actual experience and was told my leadership class replaced it. Then she went on to say I had done everything I would have learned on the job in this class. My response was no I hadn't because I never inspected a print job, worked with anyone to set it up correctly for the printer, learned to price services, or actually learned hands on at all. She said that no firm expected a new graduate to know all of this stuff like a pro and to stop worrying about things I knew nothing about. Now I was faced with no ability to write about work experience on my resume, and that would affect my getting a job.

After graduation, it became apparent that the only priority the Art Institute of Pittsburgh had all along was to bilk the government out of every dime they possibly could because nothing would ever happen to them when they commit fraud. Their crime has exceeded the boundaries of financial ruin, it has also cause physical and emotional damage. My last two classes before graduation were resume and portfolio preparation. I passed those with honors just like I had all of my other classes. I thought I will have a job within 3 months accounting for the wait for my diploma. I dug right in and started sending out my resume to every job that came up Indeed.com, Monster.com, CareerBuilder.com, Glassdoor.com, SimplyHired.com, Jobrapido.com, iHireCommericalArt.com, Snagajob.com, and every other website and local source available; I was determined to get a good job and pay my loans back within 5 years by continuing to live off of my husband's Social Security. This didn't happen and at 5 months I started to panic because in a month I had to start paying my loans back. Then in a panic I went to Craigslist to get any job. I had stopped working while going to school because the work was to demanding to work and go to school. I started applying for all jobs within the art field to include merchandiser, art stores, copywriting, printing companies, and anywhere else I could see using my degree. This went on for 14 months before three different prospects called to do phone interviews. After I was passed up for a job in an interview I called back and asked, "Do you mind if I ask why you didn't pick me?" She said I am sorry we don't hire graduates from the Art Institutes and it isn't just our company it is across the industry. I asked her why, and she said it is because graduates lack the skills needed to fulfill the work within the industry. Graduates fail to meet even the most basic industrial standards for graphic design firms. I was shocked, I said I think I can meet those needs and then she said can you pass an Adobe Creative Suite test, QA a print job, build a website, use WordPress, Python, and Ruby? Do you know how to run a social media campaign? I said most of that is done by a web designer, and she said no graphic design and web design are and have been combined for a long time. She said, "Do yourself a favor. Go get that training with certificates and drop the Art Institutes off of your resume. I just couldn't believe what I was hearing. I got totally depressed and I am still depressed to this day. I worked so hard for so long for nothing. All that time spent teaching myself while at the Art Institutes could have been used teaching myself for far less on Lynda.com and Treehouse. All those dreams of really working hard for a good job where all for nothing because my education was worthless. I wanted to vomit that day and it was the saddest most frustrating day of my life. That night I had anxiety so bad I thought I was having a heart attack. I went to the hospital and they said it was a panic attack. The second time my eye doctor did some test and said I had Grave's, and he felt that the stress in my life was causing it to go from a dormant state to an accelerated illness with visual and cardiac manifestations. My visual loss is permanent. I am only able to see clearly for a maximum of two hours before things start getting blurry. I have put on weight due to stress eating. I have no friends because when people ask me how do you like working as a graphic designer it makes me sick and ashamed to have been made a fool of by this school.

It is shocking to me that a school like this is propped up by federal money. Changing its name will not stop this predatory behavior. 4 years and \$52k later, the only work I'm qualified to do is service-industry work, which my disability makes even more unlikely. If you do the simple math, this means I will never ever earn enough to even come close to paying off these loans.