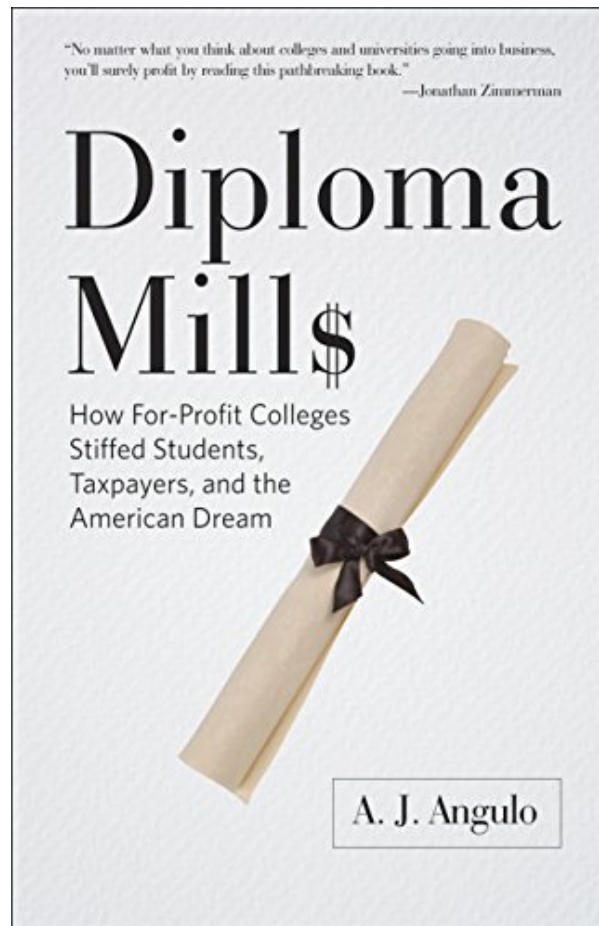


DIPLOMA MILLS BY A. J. ANGULO



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"No matter what you think about colleges and universities going into business, you'll surely profit by reading this pathbreaking book."

—Jonathan Zimmerman

Diploma Mills\$

How For-Profit Colleges
Stuffed Students,
Taxpayers, and the
American Dream



A. J. Angulo

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(Jonathan Zimmerman, New York University, author of *Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools*)

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Diploma Mills brings the complex story of for-profit colleges directly into the mainstream of the history of American higher education where it belongs.

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For-profits have been embraced by those that should question them, and Angulo urges us to think about issues of class and race and how for-profits capitalize and manipulate these forces. This book is essential reading.

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About the Author

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The most significant shift in higher education over the past two decades has been the emergence of for-profit colleges and universities. These online and storefront institutions lure students with promises of fast degrees and "guaranteed" job placement, but what they deliver is often something quite different. In this provocative history of for-profit higher education, historian and educational researcher A. J. Angulo tells the remarkable and often sordid story of these "diploma mills," which target low-income and nontraditional students while scooping up a disproportionate amount of federal student aid.

Tapping into a little-known history with big implications, Angulo takes readers on a lively journey that begins with the apprenticeship system of colonial America and ends with today's politically savvy \$35 billion multinational for-profit industry. He traces the transformation of nineteenth-century reading and writing schools into "commercial" and "business" colleges, explores the early twentieth century's move toward professionalization and progressivism, and explains why the GI Bill prompted a surge of new for-profit institutions. He also shows how well-founded concerns about profit-seeking in higher education have evolved over the centuries and argues that financial gaming and maneuvering by these institutions threatens to destabilize the entire federal student aid program.

This is the first sweeping narrative history to explain why for-profits have mattered to students, taxpayers, lawmakers, and the many others who have viewed higher education as part of the American dream. Diploma Mills speaks to today's concerns by shedding light on unmistakable conflicts of interest long associated with this scandal-plagued class of colleges and universities.

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Most helpful customer reviews

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

The high price to taxpayers of spurious investment in for-profit schools should be no surprise

By Stephen O. Murray

There is a strong tendency for reviewers to focus on the book they think the author should have written instead of how well w/he did at writing what s/he set out to do. There are a large number of aspects of what Winthrop University professor A. J. Angulo (who holds two graduate degrees from Harvard) terms “for-profit colleges and universities (FPCUs) in his succinct history *Diploma Mill*\$.

The book Angulo actually did write is a long-time-frame account of FPCUs in the United States based mostly on published sources of data. This he does very well, recalling (at least to me, since I have read literature on the emergence of professionalization of law and medicine) the absence of professional training before the Civil War and the gradual growth of professional standards and professional education in the “progressive era” (1890-1916). Just how untrained physicians through most of the 19th century were is scary.

Universities were reluctant to add business schools (though one would hardly guess that from the focus on MBAs now!) and for-profit business programs taught good penmanship as well as accounting.

Though FPCUs existed through the 19th century, the real boom fed on the federal money aimed to educate WWII veterans. The enabling legislation (Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944) specifically forbade any attempt to impose national standards and most states showed no interest in establishing the efficacy (in terms of skills or employment related to “training” and “education” funded by the GI Bill). The number of FPCUs jumped from less than 2000 in 1944 to more than 7000 by 1949. A 1950 VA study of allegations of fraud found that 78% were made against for-profit institutions, many of which took the money and ran (aka “fly by night” businesses that disappeared, plus those going into bankruptcies).

That boom (with concomitant education bust) paled before the gold rush by FPCUs following the Higher Education Act of 1965. Those setting up Educational Opportunity grants should have looked at how so much money was diverted from education to marketing and other kinds of administration maximizing profits in the case of the GI bill(s). Actually, no knowledge of this history is necessary to guess that if the federal government insured student loans, institutions would recruit “students” wanting degrees rather than any education and that the profits from guaranteed loans would guarantee recruitment of those who would drop out and default on loans, especially with little or no education actually available to them.

Similarly, anyone with much familiarity with American politics would know that there would be resistance to any objective evaluations (of FPCUs, or of anything else), that there would be concerted efforts to fund Christianist institutions (“Bible colleges”) with tax dollars under the guise of “religious freedom,” and that massive lobbying campaigns would water down any attempts at regulation. The appointment of industry insiders with an aversion to regulating the institutions they had been employed by or would be employed by after leaving office is especially flagrant in the case of the federal education officials appointed by George W. Bush and California ones appointed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, but the examples of US Senators caving in return for fairly negligible favors (not just campaign contributions) from FPCU lobbyists Angulo mentions are very liberal Democrats, Ted Kennedy and Tom Harkin. (After demanding evidence from Reagan’s Secretary of Education William Bennett against one of Kennedy’s contributors, Kennedy publicly accepted that allegations were true.)

If not amazing, it is appalling that FPCUs managed to dilute the requirement that 15% of FPCU income for institutions certified for guaranteed student loans not come from the federal government’s guaranteed loans to 10%. I think that it should be 50+%.

Having tried to stay within the bounds of the book Angulo wrote, I will extend beyond his inquiry to point out (as he occasionally alludes to) that some of the problems of rapidly rising administrative costs and executive salaries (as more and more of the teaching is done by adjuncts who are paid little more than Walmart greeters), grade inflation and general debasement of standards afflict public and private (nonprofit) colleges and universities, too, but the quantitative differences between them and NCPUs are very staggering. Take the \$42 million 2009 compensation for Robert Silberman, CEO of for-profit Strayer Education (in contrast to \$800,000 for the president of Harvard). And the ratio of spending on marketing to that on providing education is similarly off-the-chart for FPCUs in comparison to nonprofit educational institutions.

5 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

The Title is Only the Beginning of its Problems

By Richard Douglas

This book is a fraud, a misdirection. Even if I accept everything the author presented at face value, there are still several problems with the book. In this review I present concerns about the title, the approach, the balance of the account, and the conclusions.

The title, "Diploma Mills," is inflammatory, particularly in how it is applied. This term normally refers to operations that purport to award university degrees from institutions that sound real, but are not recognized as degree-granting. Often no academic work is actually required, just payment of a fee. The diploma (and other faux documents, like transcripts) serves to bolster the holder's false claims of having graduated with the degree indicated. This is NOT what the book is about. Instead, it is an indictment of for-profit higher education. The author considers for-profit schools to be frauds, but starts out his book by perpetrating a fraud in the use of that title.

I also object to the author's approach to the subject. Clearly, he has a conclusion in mind from the beginning

and then presented his case like a prosecutor. This theory-to-evidence approach (deduction) is fine, if you lay the groundwork for why the theory is in place to begin with. Instead, the author just assumes the basic premise, and then sets out to bludgeon the reader with examples supporting it. I wonder, however, what the other case is? Given that for-profit schools have existed for just about as long as traditional universities have in this country, what could possibly be driving that? The author never presents that side of things, merely attributing the operation of these schools to greed and evil. But if he'd taken an inductive (evidence-to-theory) approach, and allowed the complete story to emerge, what might the conclusions have been? Or, given his predisposition, what conclusions might the reader be allowed to form? We can't know from this presentation.

Then there's balance. At least three-quarters of the book is spent on the past history of these schools. While interesting, it's not exactly supportive of the conclusions drawn. Until the rise and pre-eminence of accreditation during the late 19th and through the first half of the 20th centuries, schools training people in trades (including law, medicine, and business, as the author shows us) operated without serious oversight and with full separation from the classical curricula offered by degree granting colleges and universities (which these schools were not). As the universities took over the teaching of these subjects, for-profits were shoved to the side, left with other, non-academic trades to teach. It wasn't until the 1970s (and the University of Phoenix) that we saw the for-profits make a strong move into the academic arena. **BUT THIS WAS A DIFFERENT PHENOMENON!** It wasn't like someone running a barber college decided to morph it into a university. Instead, universities popped up designed to (a) award recognized (by accreditors) degrees and (b) enrich the investors in the university. This had almost nothing to do with trade schools ripping off the GI BILL or the Pell Grant program. Yet the author makes this leap without explanation, as if we're all supposed to just go along. But this concept--for-profit universities awarding degrees--is his real complaint. In fact, trade schools--many of which also accredited by recognized agencies--have operated continuously to present-day. But the author abandons this subject--again, most of the book--as soon as he gets to his real thesis. But I guess he wouldn't have a book, just an article that no one would read.

Finally, his conclusions. Let's stipulate that there has been abuse by even modern-day for-profit schools. (Especially compelling are the low graduation rates and the high default rates on student loans.) Where are the abuses from traditional universities to be discussed? That bunch has been operating as an oligarchy for decades. The vast--VAST!--majority of the current student loan crises stems from students attending traditional, not-for-profit universities (both public and private). Tuition prices far outstrip the pace of inflation, and great questions as to the utility of these degrees in the marketplace are being raised. But the author completely glides past this much larger blight on the American higher education scene. Amazing.

Also, the author ignores the fact that all of the financial aid abuse (his main pet peeve) occurs at schools accredited by agencies recognized by the Department of Education for the purposes of rendering these schools eligible to participate in Federal financial aid. Where is his discussion of THAT? It's not there. And what about the fact that there are several agencies recognized to accredit degree-granting institutions? Three of these, beyond the regional associations, accredit primarily for-profit universities. Two of them, however, seem to do better at it than even the regional associations, with the third being a real problem. Does the author make these distinctions? No.

What about the relative value of degrees awarded by schools accredited by these associations? The author fails to examine this, despite the fact that the real explosion of for-profit schools has occurred in this sector. My own doctoral research and others have indicated there are real differences here--differences that can affect the value of the education received (through the utility of the degrees awarded). But again, the author fails to distinguish among these.

Finally, what about the for-profit schools that are regionally accredited? Sure, the University of Phoenix has come under considerable scrutiny for its recruiting practices, lower graduation rates, and higher loan default rates. But what about its curricula? Do students earn a real degree there? The author seems to dismiss that possibility through the use of the title "Diploma Mills," but never actually explores this question. And what about the number of for-profit universities that are accredited and operating without these problems? Hardly any mention of pioneers like Walden, American Military, and the University of Sarasota (now Argosy University), all of whom seemed to have settled into the accredited higher education sector quite nicely. Oh, and while I'm at it, what about schools specifically set up to address the needs of nontraditional students, but are not-for-profit? How does the not-for-profit National University differ from, say, Strayer University? We'll never know by reading this book.

There is a huge difference between having a bunch of observations and forming them into a carefully crafted thesis. The author fails to make this leap successfully. If you're willing to ignore the authors predispositions, leaps in logic, and conclusions, there are a lot of interesting facts to be had in between. But that's not what we paid for, is it?

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Lots of data, not enough testimony

By John L Murphy

I certainly agree with Angulo's concluding remarks. The "market funded" or "private sector" (as the for-profits try to rebrand themselves lately) sector of higher education does not differ from traditional public or private institutions merely by its shareholders and CEOs. It differs fundamentally, for the imperative to make money diminishes all the other components of the college or university mission.

Academic freedom, the necessity to support quality faculty, the investment in salaries for qualified staff, and the nature of caring for students beyond delivering a bare-bones education during their enrollment are all lacking compared to standard campuses. Angulo accumulates the statistics that prove early on, business schools in the 19th century were gouging their students, and already, the emphasis lay in luring easy targets into the system. Paying up front, as well, guaranteed a steady income for the owners, even if then as now many students soon failed.

While Angulo provides a survey of this system, and how it has worsened as online schools enter, and as campuses are throught up by profiteers to reinvent themselves as market-driven entities, he does not give enough of the personal stories that could have enriched his dry research. Why not interview faculty or admissions staff at these places? Talk to students, such as single moms or veterans, laid-off workers or those fresh out of an inner-city high school, about why they chose such a degree program over a community or state college. The facts are gathered, but not these voices of the more than 10% of enrolled college students in these institutions, who also get almost half of student financial aid (mostly loans) and who (the GI Bill offers a loophole to the 10% federal restriction requirement on non-government financial aid coming in for students, curiously) default at discouraging levels. Angulo feels that for-profits should compete on the market free of federal aid, but his case might have been bolstered if his data had been supplemented by testimony not from Congress or lobbyists alone, but from the cohorts working and enrolling here.

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