

Chairman Brown, Ranking Member Toomey, members and staff of the COmmittee, thank you for the opportunity to share with you my student debt experience.

My name is Jonathan Hammond, and I am a 31 year old native of Salem, Massachusetts. I grew up in a very low-income household, raised by a hard working mother who balanced raising a child while obtaining a Bachelor's degree. At age 22, I followed her footsteps, and at age 27 I completed a Liberal Arts Associate's degree, but had nothing to show for it career-wise. I decided to pursue work in the tech industry as a developer, and clawed my way into the field through odd jobs like selling computers, troubleshooting desktops, fixing 3D-printers and more.

I had been working as a Support Analyst at the cusp of lockdowns in early 2020, and opted to take as many online courses as I could while working remotely. After losing both my grandparents during the pandemic, I decided to pursue an opportunity to continue my education, and I wanted to do so using an educational program that I could attend around full-time work hours and without having a vehicle. I saw ads for a coding bootcamp run at the University of New Hampshire. This program was available online and promised that it would give me the skills to secure a high-paying job in the tech sector, so I enrolled.

Soon after signing on, I found out that this coding bootcamp was not actually run by the University of New Hampshire, but by a for-profit company called Trilogy, which manages the program and pays the University to use its name. I had thought based on the ads for the coding bootcamp that it was provided directly by the school, and I would have been much more skeptical about enrolling if I knew going in that this was a program run by a for-profit company simply using the logo of an accredited institution.

Worse, as my classes began, I quickly realized that this coding bootcamp was of far lower quality than its ad made it seem. The curriculum was rushed and oftentimes shallow and outdated, with mid-program content changes confusing students further. The instructors weren't the ones writing the curriculum code, and they would sometimes have to edit our unit's coding content, mid-class, before teaching it to us. Another time the solution to a difficult homework challenge wasn't correct and had to be fixed by a student, who if not for them, many of us would have struggled even more to understand how to build basic computer applications. Plus, while ads for the boot camp had promised help finding a job, the career services staff at the bootcamp offered very little assistance of substance. They told students like me to message people on LinkedIn to try to find work on our own, and the few job postings I did receive in email were never applicable to me. They were either out-of-state, non-remote jobs, or for entirely different fields unrelated to my cohort.

Frankly, I can't say that I learned more from this bootcamp than I would have by watching free and cheap videos on YouTube and Udemy. This comes from a person who spent several years learning such content on his own prior to the bootcamp, and who continues to do so afterwards as I didn't learn nearly as much about the subject matter I need for work in the field as I would have expected or hoped while enrolled in the bootcamp.

This experience wouldn't have been so hard to swallow if it weren't for how expensive it was. Trilogy's program costs about \$10,000 to attend, and I was advised by the school to finance this cost using a private loan through a company called Climb Credit, which carries a high APR (my loan comes out to totaling around \$13,000 after interest). Trilogy and the University of New Hampshire told me that this was a good option, and I trusted them.

I had to begin paying these loans while I was still in the bootcamp. At the time, the payments weren't so bad, only around \$75 a month in interest. By the time the full payments kicked in earlier this year, they ballooned to over \$330 a month. This is basically the equivalent of a monthly car payment, all for an education that failed to prepare me for even entry level positions. These payments have kept me from having any form of savings, and I definitely can't plan on taking a vacation any time soon either.

I graduated from Trilogy's bootcamp in June 2021. But despite Trilogy and the University of New Hampshire's promises, no job appeared. Instead, I spent 6 months applying unsuccessfully for jobs while having to teach myself the things I was supposed to have learned in the bootcamp I paid for. Ultimately, the current position I have as a Web Solutions Engineer comes from skills in CSS and Content Management Systems that I had known prior to enrolling in the bootcamp. Please note however that I got this role only because I lucked out – I networked with a classmate from the boot camp who introduced me to a recruiter, who helped me find this job. I have been in this role since February 2022.

I want to be totally clear. I did not learn the skills I have or get the job I have because of Trilogy's bootcamp or because of Climb's loans. I feel I got my skills and job *despite* Trilogy's boot camp and Climb's loans. This UNH bootcamp was not accredited. Many course units were wastes of time due to being older and outdated technology. The most important units felt rushed or skimmed over, which is why even today I wouldn't necessarily qualify for roles requiring the skills advertised from this bootcamp. All this coming from somebody who excelled well in the course.

Unfortunately, I am one of the lucky ones. There are plenty of folks like me who were lured into a bootcamp that they trusted because it had a public school's name, who took on a private student loan to attend it because they were told it would all be okay. Bootcamp programs like the one I attended are now under the brands of hundreds of major public and private nonprofit accredited institutions, ranging from local community colleges to flagship state universities. Run by companies that go by the names of Trilogy, Fullstack, Promineo, and more, they target students with flashy branding and big promises, all to make money at student's expense.

Just like me, the students who these companies target have no idea that they are stepping into a web of for-profit educational providers and lenders focused more on revenue than equality of education and career empowerment. Many of my peers have been left with this large debt and with no job or boosted career prospects to show for it. Many reverted to their prior careers just to keep the money flow going.

I am not looking for pity or a loan forgiveness. I just want you to be aware of what is going on with bootcamps and the lenders they rely on, the relationships we are led to believe (such as this being a University accredited bootcamp), and the ones we are deceptively kept unaware of (between Trilogy and Climb Credit). Bootcamps should be a great alternative to unobtainable multi-year in-person education, but right now, people are being misled and taken advantage of.

Thank you for granting this opportunity to share my experience