

Good morning, Chairwoman Foxx and Committee Members. It is an honor to have been invited to testify before the Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training to share my story about my college experience.

Let me begin by sharing a little of my history. I served in the United States Navy from 2001 to 2006 and I was a Sea Bee, which is a civil engineer. During my time in the service I went to countries such as Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Spain, Guam, Iraq, and Kuwait. I was medically discharged from injuries sustained while in service and came back to Miami, where I was originally from. I found a job at a FAA jet engine repair station. Unfortunately, as the economy plummeted, I found myself without a job in 2008. Unable to readily find work, I chose to enroll in college so that I could continue providing for my family. I began to search online for colleges and degree programs, which were of interest to me.

While doing my research, I looked at the Veterans' Affairs website and I found out that Post 9/11 benefits were available and could cover a housing stipend, books, and tuition. This helped with my decision and I knew it was time to go back to school. Although the VA was not involved in my search for schools, they did help me fill out the necessary forms to have my education funded.

Initially, I looked online at different schools in South Florida I felt would best meet my needs. I was looking for a school that had degree programs, which could be completed quickly, would not require a long commute to the school, had a student body that was serious about learning, and classes that would interest me. The main information I was able to obtain online in these searches was what degree programs were offered as well as the college locations. However, I was also able to use the websites to get a feel for the schedules and plans for the various degree programs.

For me, the schedule was important seeing as how I was already in my thirties and had been out of school for a long time so the idea of focusing on three or four classes at once was daunting. After selecting the schools I was interested in, I began to visit the campuses and speak to admissions advisors. I wanted to get a feel for the environments of each individual school and this is hard to gauge solely from school websites. The first school I visited had an admissions representative who spoke too quickly and could not keep my attention. She did not take the time to answer my questions and was forcing contracts my way. At another school I visited I was informed I would need to take general education courses, which would have about thirty students per class.

Class size was an important issue so I began speaking with friends; I was informed classes at a number of my other choices would have anywhere from 50-100 students. Having been out of school for so many years I knew I wanted more individualized attention so I ruled out those colleges. When I discussed my options with my girlfriend, she encouraged me to come up with a game plan and move forward with my education. I went to see a friend of hers at Keiser University who was an admissions counselor. After arriving, he gave me a tour of the college, explained in detail the degree programs offered, how long they would take, and what to expect. After he got to know me, and the fact that I was a veteran, he then took me to financial aid to see about my veteran's benefits. I was not aware of any navigation tools from the Department of Education which is why my decision was based mostly on my visits and the support of my friends and family.

Unlike an experience at another college where I felt I was being pressured into signing paperwork and enrolling, this was not the case at Keiser. Because of the experience during my first visit, I returned a few days later to take my entrance exam and I already knew what to expect from the school if I was admitted. Keiser did everything they could to help fund my education in conjunction with benefits

offered by the VA - the Yellow Ribbon Scholarship and a match by Keiser. I filled out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and obtained a Pell Grant. I was also eventually offered an academic scholarship because of my grades and a military scholarship for being a veteran.

I have been at Keiser University since 2009 and I like everything about the school from the small classes, everyone being required to be in professional attire, and the fact that Keiser is a Level 6 SACS accredited school offering doctoral degrees. I am a firm believer that the environment plays a role in the attitude of the students. Teachers are easily accessible whether you meet with them on campus or email them after hours. I earned my Associate's degree in 2011 with a 3.6 GPA and would never have imagined I could graduate with such a high GPA. I immediately continued my education and went on to obtain my Bachelor's degree; I am happy to tell you I will graduate this coming September. The one class at a time structure allows me to absorb the information presented and with the way the information is continuously delivered over that month it helps me to retain what I have learned, having it become second nature. The University administration is always available to listen to the concerns of students and takes action on issues raised, which is greatly appreciated by the student body because it lets us know our voices are being heard and we are not just a number.

For me, choosing a college was about my academic needs and I did not come by my decision lightly. I considered graduation rates, the number of students in my classes, the length of the degree program since I was receiving funding that would not last indefinitely, accreditation and placement rates. These things would all determine how successful I would be in my chosen career path of criminal justice; my goal from the start has been to be employable. I did not enroll with any unanswered questions and it has made the task of focusing on my studies that much easier.

Madam Chair and Members, thank you again, for the opportunity to speak to you today about my experiences. My hope is that today's discussion about transparency helps make things a little easier for people like me – people with a busy life, children, those who work and veterans. I look forward to any questions you may have.