A provocative history of for-profit colleges and universities.

DIPLOMA MILLS

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

by A. J. Angulo

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.

ADVANCE PRAISE

“A. J. Angulo has produced our first history of the industry, which has a more complex and varied past than any of us imagined. No matter what you think about for-profit colleges and universities, you’ll surely profit by reading this pathbreaking book.”—Jonathan Zimmerman, New York Review of Books

“Diploma Mills brings the complex story of for-profit colleges directly into the mainstream of the history of American higher education where it belongs.”—John R. Thelin, University of Kentucky, author of A History of American Higher Education

“In this timely and engaging book, A. J. Angulo provides a devastating critique of for-profit colleges and universities, the fastest growing sector of American higher education. He shows that the pursuit of a high return on capital spurrs these institutions to invest in marketing more than learning and to target students with the highest educational need and the lowest financial resources.”—David F. Labaree, Stanford University, author of How to Succeed in School without Really Learning: The Credentials Race in American Education

"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."—Marybeth Gasman, University of Pennsylvania, author of Envisioning Black Colleges: A History of the United Negro College Fund

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A. J. Angulo is the Elizabeth Singleton Endowed Professor of Education and a professor of history (by courtesy) at Winthrop University. He is the author of Empire and Education: A History of Greed and Goodwill from the War of 1898 to the War on Terror.

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