

# Archived Information

**Statement of Jon Lamphier,**

**Kaplan University Graduate,**

**To the Secretary's Commission on the Future of Higher Education,**

**San Diego, California, February 3, 2006**

Secretary Spellings, members of the Commission, good afternoon. My name is Jon Lamphier, and I come to you today from New York, New York. I'm here to speak to you today regarding non-traditional education and the future of higher education in America, a topic that has deep meaning to me, and to potentially every young man and woman.

I grew up in Western North Carolina, and graduated in 1994 from Hendersonville High School. I enjoyed being a student, and had nearly a flawless academic record when I left school. Unfortunately, though, the cost of education was too great a burden for my family to bear; I enrolled in the University of North Carolina, but left after one semester when my financing ran out.

I did as many in my situation do in rural America: I enlisted in the United States Marine Corps, where I served for six years. I continued attending college, a little here and a little there, until I left military service in early 2001. Unfortunately, my experiences at such a broad number of institutions did not readily translate into a degree. Moreover, I had married and had a child while in the Marines, and continuing a traditional undergraduate schooling would not have been financially possible.

Marines are trained not to accept defeat, though, and I did find a solution in Kaplan University. As you know, Kaplan offers a non-traditional approach, offering a

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majority of their courses online. I was familiar with the approach, as a number of government agencies with which I had worked use distance learning to their advantage, including the Marine Corps, the Navy, and the National Security Agency. Kaplan had a full-featured program, and seemed well-equipped to meet my educational needs.

I received from Kaplan all the same academic support I had received from traditional undergraduate programs before, and from graduate programs since. University representatives walked me through the process of applying, and helped me explore how my previous coursework would fit into my new degree program. I was assisted with obtaining financial aid, a crucial step given my situation. And Kaplan academic advisor Stephen Bernardo assisted me in everything from selecting courses to balancing my academic and professional workload. I believe the assistance I received not only met but exceeded the experience I have had at many more traditional universities.

I could say the same for the academic experience. My classes typically met once a week online, and most involved guided discussions by the instructors, a format used in many more traditional academic settings to encourage student participation and understanding. Moderate-sized classes of generally about twenty students ensured a diversity of ideas but allowed everyone a chance to participate. The instructors were all very well-qualified for their courses, and generally went above and beyond to help students comprehend the material and apply it.

Where a non-traditional education surpasses a traditional experience really is in the diversity factor. Universities have cited time and again diversity as a crucial ingredient in preparing young minds and exposing them to new and different ideas. Whereas most schools attempt to foster diversity through admitting students with

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different backgrounds and combining them in nearly identical settings, online schooling allows for diversity because students are actually coming from those divergent backgrounds each and every time they attend class. In my courses, I connected with professors at Princeton while working in Atlanta. Some of my classmates were full-time students at Kaplan's Iowa campus, while some were single mothers in Kansas and some were New York City policemen. The effect this has on learning and discussion is enormous, and important – and cannot be duplicated in a traditional setting.

One of the purposes of this Commission is to investigate the accessibility of higher education for less advantaged families. Nontraditional education is one method that addresses this problem, by affording access to higher education to many students for whom the rigors of a more traditional program may simply not be feasible. Rather than be forced to choose between supporting a family and pursuing a degree, online education allows students to pursue both. It acknowledges and accommodates our increasingly mobile society, allowing students to work and attend class even when their geographic location is in flux. It brings flexibility to an area that badly needs it, and ultimately makes college a realistic opportunity for many students that may otherwise have given up their dreams of attending school.

I graduated from Kaplan in 2003, and went on to pursue my law degree at Fordham University School of Law in New York, New York, a top-tier school known nationally for its academic prestige and commitment to public service. I serve there as an editor on both the Fordham Moot Court Board and the Fordham International Law Journal, and have never felt at a disadvantage to my peers – if anything, I have excelled. While in school, I have worked as a law clerk, as a research assistant, and as an intern at

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the Federal Trade Commission, and have performed well in each position. I have relied on the learning I accomplished at Kaplan, and I have not been disappointed.

In May of this year, I will graduate from Fordham with my law degree and sit for the New York State bar exam. I have accepted an offer to begin in August as a Senior Associate with the transaction advisory services team at Ernst & Young. Additionally, I am continuing at Fordham, expecting to achieve an MBA in finance in Spring 2007. None of these accomplishments would be possible – not even remotely – without Kaplan. I encourage the commission to strongly consider nontraditional education as an important step in preparing our nation to meet the academic challenges of tomorrow and better equipping our citizens to compete in the international field.

Thank you.