

# War of words: A look at media and for-profit colleges

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Views on the role of for-profit colleges have been varied, opposing and very public. This debate had played out primarily in the media, and those sentiments were researched and analyzed in *SAGE Open's* "All-Out War: A Case Study in Media Coverage of For-Profit Higher Education".

Using neutral, positive and negative classifications, study author Tim Gramling tracks the life cycle--or rather news cycle-- of the topic of for-profit colleges in US media. The [catalyst](#) for coverage seems to be a May 2010 article in the Philadelphia Inquirer, Gramling notes.

"The immediate aftermath of the Inquirer story was that news outlets in Dayton, Atlanta, and Kansas City repeated the critics' perspective that for-profits were predators taking advantage of low-performing students," wrote Gramling.

An analysis of articles from this time period shows that after months of relatively no coverage, there was a sharp spike in negative coverage for months to come. Gramling notes that the trend shifted in August after the Washington Post, which owns Kaplan University, wrote an article about the for-profit institutions' fight against regulatory action.

"Furthermore, although negative news remained constant at about one story per week, neutral-to-positive stories outnumbered negative ones for the first time," said Gramling.

The battle in the court of [public opinion](#) is still being waged today, and Gramling asserts that it will continue "as long as conservatives and progressives fail to find common ground that places decision making in the hands of students while establishing effective quality control of for-profits."

**More information:** The article "All-Out War: A Case Study in Media Coverage of For-Profit Higher Education" published in SAGE Open, is available free at: [sgo.sagepub.com/content/early/ ... 414732.full.pdf+html](https://sgo.sagepub.com/content/early/.../414732.full.pdf+html)

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