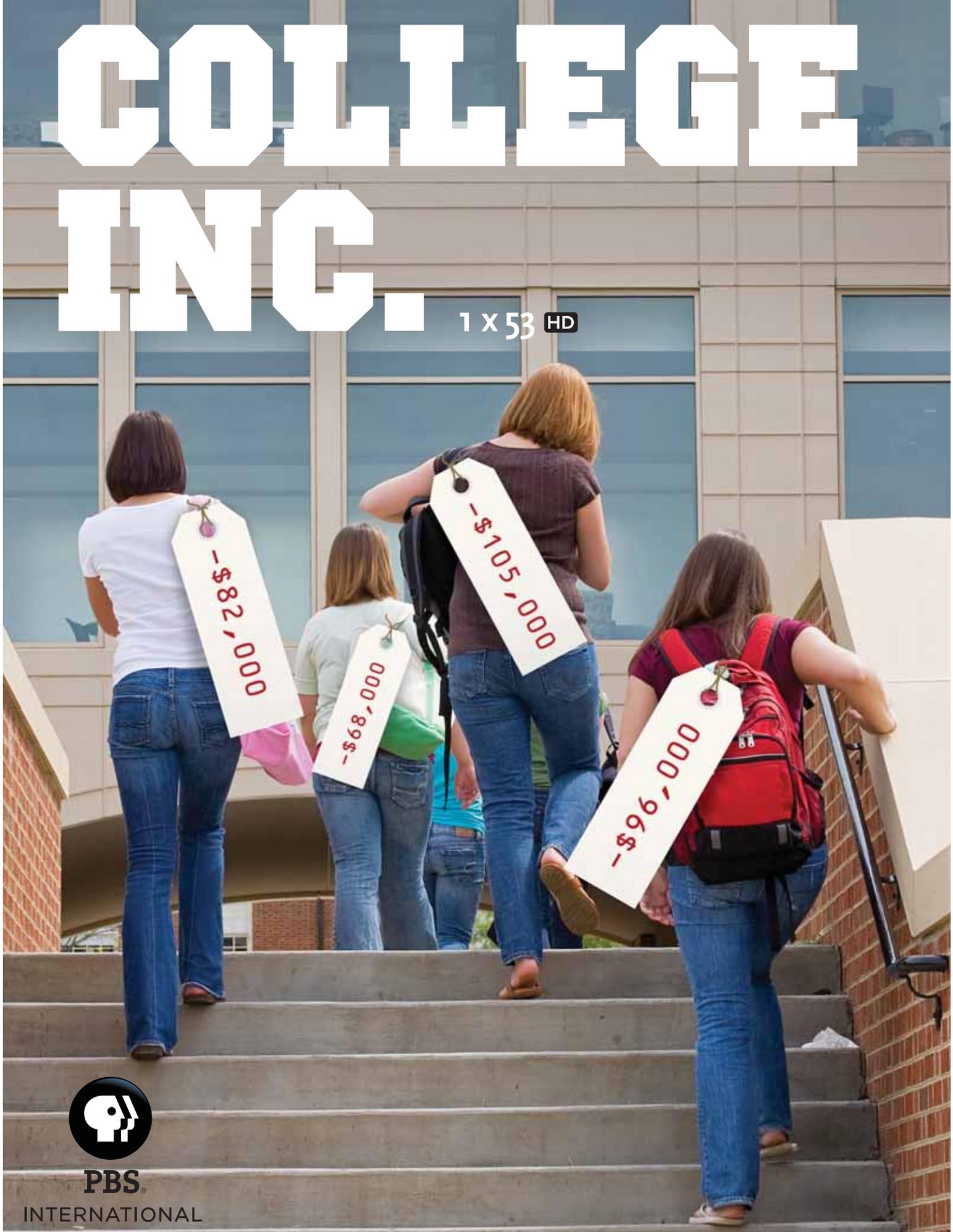


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In an effort to get America back to the top of world college graduation rankings by 2020, President Obama has pledged billions of dollars for higher education. Traditional universities and community colleges are vying for a share of this windfall, but the best placed to exploit it are the country's largest private, for-profit universities. The online courses at the University of Phoenix, ITT Technical Schools, Corinthian Colleges, DeVry University and others are the fastest-growing sector of American higher education. And, urged on by Wall Street, these universities have shown their ability to pull in federal aid dollars. The largest of them, the University of Phoenix, is a \$10 billion business that operates by far the biggest "campus" in America and is the biggest single recipient of student financial aid—\$2.5 billion in 2008 alone.

But are these for-profit universities the most appropriate beneficiaries of new federal investment in higher education? Ever since they were first established in the 1970s, for-profit universities have faced criticism for their high-pressure enrollment tactics, poor academic record, high tuition fees, and have been accused of driving students into crippling debt.

However, these for-profit universities contend that they are far more innovative and responsive to what consumers and employers want than other universities and community colleges. They continue to grow their enrollments at double-digit rates year on year. They claim their growing share of higher education enrollment proves they deliver great value. And recent research shows that for-profits are more likely to get their students to finish degrees than community colleges.

So just what will we be getting for our dollars? Amid mounting controversies, FRONTLINE investigates the opaque and controversial world of for profit universities.

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CREDITS

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