The Anatomy of a Diploma Mill

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* The views herein are that of the author’s, not that of her employers
Do you want to:
- Obtain an degree legally within 48 hours?
- Be confident that your degree is verifiable and attributed? That is your employer May contact any time to the institution that provides you the certificate.
- Get degrees avoiding any COURSE WORK, EXAM or ATTENDANCE?
- Pay a very little amount of money that any such services around the world
- DO NOT want too many identical degrees within the same country or city? (We control certain number of degrees available in different country or city)
- Get a quality university degree that can impress your employers or other people?

We are CONFIDENT that we can help you!

What is special about our degrees?
- All degrees are registered
- Legal and Verifiable
- Accredited by academic accreditation agency
- No coursework, No attendance, No assignment and No Exam,
- Express Delivery Of the Certificates
- Impressive Diploma leather folder and presentation
- Authentic Degree, otherwise Money Return Guaranteed!

We are providing this service since 1999. 11 years of experience in this field.

Associate Degree, USD$ 170
Bachelor Degree, USD$ 190
Masters Degree, USD$ 220
Doctorate Degree, USD$ 260
Professorship, USD$ 310
Fellowship, USD$ 310
Scholarship, USD$ 310
Honorary Doctorate, USD$ 370

Order Your Degree Now!

Source: confidentialdegree.com
Diploma Mills

• Degrees obtained from unaccredited universities in exchange for $
  – Distinct from counterfeiters and distance education
• Est. 200k degrees purchased per year
  – Probably “confer” more degrees per year than any single state except for CA and NY
• Billion dollar industry
• Common purposes:
  – Job qualification
  – Promotions/raises
  – Visa hacking
  – Identity theft
Why are they bad news?

Cut-Rate Diplomas
How doubts about the government's own "Dr. Laura" exposed a résumé fraud scandal.

Bogus Naturopath (Laurence Perry) Convicted of Manslaughter

DIPLOMA MILL NEWS
Member of Accrediting Group Has Ph.D. From 'Notorious Diploma Mill'
How students get caught

• Promoted to prominent position
  – Publish bio online
• Alienated colleagues
• Take on life-or-death responsibilities
• Harp on credentials (“call me doctor”)
• Too many specifics
  – University location
  – Recent dates
• Federal gov’t sweeps
What separates them from real universities?

• In practice: state degree granting rights
  – May be accredited by an under-developed country, or self-signing

• Award degrees based on life experience
  – Few or no teaching facilities

• Degree referral services

• Pay by the degree rather than by credits

• A .edu address is not enough!
What separates them? (con’d)

- In US, degree-granting rights awarded by:
  - Congress,
  - Sovereign Indian tribes
  - States
- >98% of universities licensed by state
- Most fakes register as non-public secular orgs
- Accreditation is voluntary
- DMs exploit this loophole
How do they stay in business?

• Use of the word “accredited” is policed by the FTC
  – Have not enforced law once to date
• It is best to be from Idaho, Hawaii, Montana, or California
  – Or a combination of several states for jurisdictional hopscotch
• Be accredited by a foreign country
  – For style points, bribe their officials
• Many move from state to state as they get busted
The lay of the land

Accreditations ‘R’ Us

W Institute
University of X
Y College
Z University

snazzydegrees.com
toocoolforschool.com

“students”

Accreditation Mill

Diploma Mill

Confidentiality Agreement

Diploma Broker
Tricks of the trade

• Sound-a-likes to prestigious institutions
• Create degrees from defunct universities
• May backdate diplomas
• Flipside: occasionally real schools sell diplomas out the back door.
• Misleading address (floor # → P.O. Box)
• Fake campus pics
• Use anonymous domain registrations
Fake Campus

Blenheim Palace is Winston Churchill’s birthplace.

Source: G. Gollin, UIUC
Zombie Professors

Saint Regis faculty:  
Richard Hoyer  
William Harrison  
Adino Guevara

Source: G. Gollin, UIUC
Bootstrap the process
Case Study: Belford University

• Accredited in United Arab Emirates
  – Mailing address the same
• Administration in Humble, TX, possibly Wyoming
• Website located in the UK
• Probably sells degrees via affordabledegrees.com
• Associated HS is currently subject of a class action lawsuit
So, how do I get a diploma?

- Several sites will sell you whole packages
- Do not disclose the name of the university “for privacy”
- Main requirement: credit card
  - Sometimes ask for an id
  - Mostly for MAD
Tailor your college experience...

Pick a graduation date

Select or invent a major

How was it completed?
Tailor your college experience...

- Buy a transcript
- Select your grades
- Manufacture supporting docs
Tailor your college experience...

Buy letter(s) of reference

Get a student ID

**Shipping Method**
- Registered Air Mail: 2 to 3 weeks (Depending on your location)
- Express Air Mail: 7 days
- DHL or FedEx: 4 days
...but don’t talk about it

• Diploma mills use ToS to deter scrutiny
• Clickwrap requires:
  – Client not a journalist
  – Client not law enforcement
  – Client will not use “public interest” defense
  – Strict confidentiality agreement
  – For personal use only
• Most of these terms are of limited enforceability
Not even trying to look real...

I further understand that The University offers no classes, no curriculum, no lectures, no staff or faculty, no literature, learning materials, testing, or thesis or dissertation review.
How To Identify A Diploma Mill

- Award life experience
- No physical address
- Bare bones website
- Offers wacky majors (i.e., hypnotherapy)
- Will not allow access to theses for grad degrees
- Oregon Office of Degree Authorization list
- No campus visits
- No phone contact w/academic faculty
- “Hinky” copied web page text
“Chains” of universities

Saint Regis University

Robertstown University

West American University

American Capital University

InTech University

Hampton Bay University

Al Qasim University
University Degree Program

BRENTWICK UNIVERSITY
SHELBORNE UNIVERSITY
PARKWOOD UNIVERSITY
ASHFORD University
Westbourne University
University of Ravenhurst
Cat-and-mouse

• Diploma mills are usually charged with:
  – Conspiracy, Mail fraud and/or wire fraud
• Relevant lawsuits
  – St. Clement’s U. vs the state of Maine
  – St. Luke’s School of Medicine vs Gollin, Oregon
• Cyberstalk and malign at least one researcher and his family
• Some actively court legislators to deter regulation
• DMs create a chilling effect to protect business
Operation Gold Seal

• JTF undercover operation in 2008
• Target: St. Regis University
  – Granted degrees from 66 real schools, 121 fakes
    • 1/3 postgraduate, 1/3 high school
  – Bribed officials in Liberia
  – Sold $7.3M worth of degrees over 3.5 years
• 8 defendants; ringleaders sentenced to 3 years in prison for wire & mail fraud
St. Regis Fallout

• “Students” included:
  – Teachers
  – Dept. of Health oncology expert
  – Lots of feds and their contractors
    • Some w/Top Secret clearances
  – White house staffer, State Dept.
  – Author of books on “prescription dosages and nursing care”
  – A police chief
  – A building inspector
Accreditation Mills

• Like a self-signed certificate
• Common tactics:
  – Invent an accreditor
  – Buy approval from an impoverished country
  – Claim to accredit Harvard, etc., w/o their consent
  – Register with the Better Business Bureau
• Not recognized by DoE or CHEA
• Some claim accreditation by submitting Apostille to State Dept.
  – Like getting notarized w/o verifying content
• ~200+ unrecognized accrediting agencies in USA
Additional Information

- George Gollin, UIUC
  - [http://www.hep.uiuc.edu/home/g-gollin/higher_education.html](http://www.hep.uiuc.edu/home/g-gollin/higher_education.html)

- Ezell & Bear: **Degree Mills: The Billion-dollar Industry**

- John Bear, *Bears’ Guide*
  - [http://www.degree.net/diploma-mills/](http://www.degree.net/diploma-mills/)

- Oregon diploma mill list
  - [http://www.osac.state.or.us/oda/unaccredited.aspx](http://www.osac.state.or.us/oda/unaccredited.aspx)

- Pets with diplomas