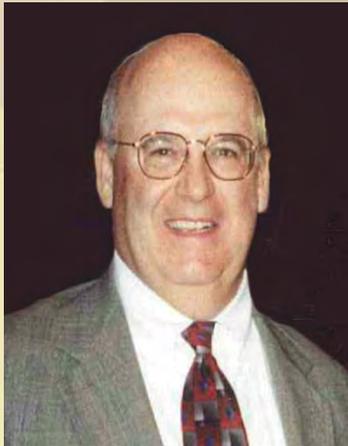


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# The State of Degree Mills

Report Card on U.S. Efforts



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# Defining Diploma Mills

**A.** An organization that sells academic degrees in exchange for minimal work

**B.** An organization that purports to be a bona fide academic institution, but whose true intent is to profit by selling degrees of questionable merit

**Diploma Mills are not legitimate educational institutions by any reasonable person's expectations or definition**

**Diploma Mills flourish because there is a robust market for them, and because society has not yet developed an effective way to combat them.**

# Types of Institutions

## A. The Outright Mills:

sell degrees in exchange for little else but money and life experience documentation.

## B. Cloaked Institutions:

award questionable degrees, but require some work.

## C. The Legitimates:

require considerable academic work, not accredited

**Some of the above in A and B usually lay claim to *unrecognized* accreditation, confusing the public.**

# A Report Card on US Efforts on Diploma Mills

## Public Education

- Accomplished -

1. A **public education program** is well underway.
2. A consumer information section on diploma mills on the CHEA, FTC, DAN TES, and ED websites are now all readily available and are easy to access and use.
3. Media features on diploma mills now appear regularly, e.g., *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, *USA Today*, *Houston Chronicle*, *NBC Nightly News*

# Yet to Accomplish

4. A well-maintained “clearinghouse function” on diploma mills would be very useful. A single national base for concerted national monitoring and corrective action can be established within ED.
5. The term “accreditation” and what it means needs to be continuously explained to the public.  
Higher ed institutions should allow space on their respective websites to educate all viewers on what legitimate accreditation means. A standard set of language can be provided to every university by CHEA.
6. State Departments of Education should be encouraged to supplement what ED does and have websites that inform their citizens on the issue.

# Employer Outreach

## - Accomplished -

1. The U.S. military community's awareness is high on the issue.

DANTES has an excellent powerpoint presentation on diploma scams that can be used as the basis for additional outreach efforts.

2. Through the media efforts of ED, FTC and CHEA, employers and HRD professionals are now more sensitized than ever before on how to identify bogus diplomas.

# Yet to Accomplish

3. Employers should be continuously educated by higher education and government on the extent of the problem and how to identify bogus credentials. Closely working with various corporation-focused associations (e.g., ASTD and NAM) would be useful.
4. Editors of national media should be encourage to *not* accept advertising from known degree mills. Publishers who accept such ads should be targeted with an email campaign from university leaders.

# Higher Education

## - Accomplished –

### 1. Higher education administrators

should contest vigorously in the courts the misuse or misappropriation of their name by bogus operators.

### 2. AACRAO has published a guide to accreditation mills for registrars:

*Accreditation Mills*, by Allen Ezell.

# Accreditation Mills

not only cites case-studies, and undercover operations, but also gives detailed examples of how individuals and groups have made a positive stand in the fight against degree mills and accreditation mills.

Appendices, including a valuable list of state and federal authorities and specific names of false accreditors, can be used to protect institutions from becoming victims of fraud.

3. The CHEA website's national directory of accredited institutions is easy to access and very easy to use and is widely known now. It has been the single greatest weapon in educating the public on which institutions are legitimately accredited and worthy of consumer confidence.

## Yet to Accomplish

4. More sessions on the problem and how to resolve it should be held at various higher education association conferences.

A standard "road show" team might be tasked for two years to appear at a dozen or more different higher ed conferences to bring the "word" to everyone. The road show team could be jointly funded by several higher ed groups.

5. A stand alone, self -instruction online learning

“desk top” learning course of 2-3 hours could be prepared and sent to every registrar in the nation that outlines the problem and drills the viewer on the various tools to identify and handle the issues.

6. More academic research can be undertaken,

in the form of dissertations, on how to resolve the growing problem. Only two doctoral dissertations in history have ever been done on this issue.

7. Higher Ed leaders should move aggressively to protect

the mis-use of the word accreditation and write to the FTC, FBI and DoJ when they spot a fraudulent claim.

8. Bogus accrediting bodies continue to exist

and continue to advertise their lists of phony universities on the Internet.

# Government

## - Accomplished -

### 1. The first line of defense is the State:

states should be encouraged to strengthen their laws and regulations and provide adequate staffing and budget to clean up any problems in their state. Wyoming and Louisiana have strengthened their laws and cleaned up their act by legislating accreditation to remain in the state. DETC alone processed 6 applications from unaccredited Wyoming universities in 2006-07. None achieved DETC accreditation, and all six have left the state or closed.

### 2. Some states are publishing lists of known diploma mills:

Michigan, Oregon and Texas, for example.

### 3. Federal agencies have rooted out employees in their ranks with fake degrees and exposed them.

The resulting media exposés are generating the public exposure to the problem.

4. The Department of Education website

lists all accredited institutions and is easy to access now.

5. Rep. Betty McCollum introduced *The Diploma Integrity Protection Act*.

It is the first federal legislation since the creation of the Internet to directly confront the problem of diploma mills and their fraud schemes.

On Nov. 15, the House Education and Labor Committee unanimously approved a major higher education bill that included the language of this legislation.

If passed by Congress, this bill would empower the U.S. Departments of Education and Homeland Security to stop the use of fake degrees for purposes of federal employment and immigration, and direct the Federal Trade Commission to act against diploma mills that claim to have been recognized as legitimate universities. It would also assemble a commission of higher education, law enforcement and legislative experts to promote federal-state cooperation in the identification of diploma mills and enable efficient enforcement along with swift prosecution.

## Yet to Accomplish

6. The idea of model language on diploma mill legislation might be developed for all states to emulate.

The ECS 1973 *Model State Legislation* should be re-visited, updated and disseminated to all states.

7. Federal agencies charged with protecting the nation against fraud and abuse need to be stimulated to get more aggressive: the Federal Trade Commission, the FBI, the US Postal Inspection Service and the Department of Justice can each be strongly encouraged to revisit this issue and get more active! The problem needs to be elevated in terms of priority and this can come from the White House and ED.

8. There should be a federal statute that protects the word “accreditation” and that would prohibit the use of the term by any institution that does not have accreditation from a nationally recognized accrediting association.
  
9. Since the USA is a net exporter of phony diplomas to the world, involving the Departments of Commerce and State in a cooperative program on this issue would be helpful.
  
10. A national conclave of interested agencies can be convened to develop a master plan to combat diploma mill fraud. SHEEO, NASASPS, VA, ECS and others should be included. The work product would be a coordinated approach to stamping out fraudulent operators.