

COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION
COMBATING SITE-BASED AND DISTANCE-BASED DEGREE MILLS
SUGGESTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

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The following steps can be effective in combating site-based and distance-based degree mills or questionable providers of higher education. Various actors - government, higher education, accreditation, employers, advertisers – all have a stake in avoiding degree mills and their deleterious impact on students and society.

Step 1. Know What Degree Mills Are: Create Tools for Identification

1. Identify key characteristics and common practices of mills
2. Develop and apply definitions of degree mills

Step 2. Stop the Funding for Degree Mills: Deny Government or Private Sector Financial Support

1. Assure that degree mills do not receive public (taxpayer) funds
2. Assure that students attending mills do not receive publicly-funded student aid
3. Assure that students attending mills do not receive employer-funded tuition assistance

Step 3. Inform the Public about Degree Mills: Educate for Awareness

1. Routinely inform the public about how degree mills harm students and society
2. Assure that advertising of higher education is confined to legitimate providers and not degree mills
3. Identify and publicize questionable marketing and recruitment practices associated with degree mills
4. Educate the public about the role of the Internet in making distance-based degree mills readily available

Step 4. Pursue Legal Action Against Degree Mills

1. Encourage and assist with the development of federal, state or local law that make establishing, licensing and operating degree mills illegal
2. Work to make the use of fraudulent degrees (e.g., for obtaining or upgrading employment) illegal
3. Encourage prosecution of degree mill providers and knowing users of fraudulent credentials where appropriate

Step 5. Use Evidence of Quality Provided by Recognized Accreditation and Quality Assurance Bodies

1. Confirm that higher education providers are in good standing with recognized accreditation and quality assurance bodies
2. Use accreditation and quality assurance lists to identify reliable higher education institutions and programs

Step 6. Address Degree Mills Internationally: Contain the Expansion

1. Establish cross-border agreements among countries that discourage the import and export of site-based and distance-based degree mills
2. Work with multinational and regional organizations to enhance awareness of degree mills and provide tools to identify and discourage their use
3. Develop reliable country-based lists of legitimate higher education providers
4. Develop an international list of degree mill characteristics, practices and providers

