Recent Developments with Degree Mills: Accreditation Mills and Counterfeit Diploma and Transcript Operations

This article updates developments regarding Diploma Mills, Accreditation Mills, and Counterfeit Diploma & Transcript operations. It will cover identification & prosecution, to new entities now appearing in these growth industries with annual revenues over one billion dollars. This article will address federal and state laws, a new Federal Diploma Mill definition, trends, resources, and steps that can be taken to prevent these academic frauds.
Significant developments have occurred during the last several years regarding academic fraud and the activities of Diploma Mill (DM), Accreditation Mill (AM), and Counterfeit Diploma and Transcript (CD&T) operations. These fraudulent operations have become more sophisticated and daily ply their wares around the world via the Internet. Although the investigation and public exposure of the manufacture, sale, and use of fraudulent credentials have led to arrests and prosecutions as well as loss of positions and credibility—with international ramifications—these operations still flourish. In spite of success in closing down several of these large operations, the scarcity of public outrage and the lack of consistent action by law enforcement, coupled with anonymity afforded by the Internet, have given the operations new life and the resources they need to flourish worldwide. DMs and CD&T operations have been characterized by some as “whacking a gopher.”

My objective in this article is to encourage your active participation in defending traditional educational standards against these fraudulent operations, many of which blend in with legitimate distance education. You can participate by being better informed as to what is available in today’s market, by being vigilant in your activities, and by promoting and supporting legislative and law enforcement action in these areas. At the same time, strengthen the security and integrity of your own institutional documents to prevent your institution from being victimized. A review of recent events should prove sufficient to persuade you to join in this fight. Remember: Lead by example!

Related recent events include:
- USSS undercover operation “Gold Seal” against operators of St. Regis University, Monrovia, Liberia, and Spokane, WA (and corruption of foreign government officials)
- Explosion in internet DMs offering degrees based wholly on “credit for life experience”
- Increase in number of internet “degree brokers” representing various schools
- Increased number of CD&T Web sites in the Richmond, VA, vicinity
- Creation of numerous new AMs used to support the plethora of new Internet DMs
- Emergence of several “look-alike” organizations designed to confuse the public (e.g., ASCAOR; COHL; DETQ; IDETC; THLC)
- Arrest and conviction (or civil charges against) operators of:
  - LaSalle University, Mandeville, LA;
  - Columbia State University, Metairie, LA, and San Clemente, CA;
  - Trinity Southern University, Dallas, TX;
New state and federal statutes; congressional hearings
Exposure of government officials, educators, law enforcement, and other professionals around the world who were using DM and CD&T credentials
Crackdowns by foreign governments on the manufacture, sale, and use of fraudulent academic credentials
Academic fraud at Touro College, New York City and resulting prosecutions; application/resume fraud leading to downfall of registrar at MIT
Crackdown by National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) on high school DMs, resulting investigations and new regulations

DIPLOMA MILLS

There is a lot of truth in the saying “Where consumers go, business follows” (www.CounterfeitDegrees.com).

Certainly, the current world economic crisis is affecting Internet DM sales. As the world economy has tanked, the dynamics of the job market have changed dramatically; academic credentials are in ever-greater demand for employment purposes. Thousands of new DMs have appeared on the Internet in recent years, offering entire degree programs based on life experience with no, or little new, academic work. Most new “institutions” hide their location and ownership, using street or foreign domain registration, virtual addresses, or a box number at a private mail facility; either no telephone number or a toll-free telephone number (which usually goes directly to voicemail or to a call center) is given; 24x7 access or 24x7 customer support is advertised on many of these Web sites.

Spurious academic documents typically come with certified transcripts, a multi-colored registrar’s stamp, a university seal, and a “verification service;” receipt is promised within seven to ten working days. Payment may be made via E-Gold, credit card, or Western Union; costs typically range from $299 to $2,400. Multiple degree packages (for example, a bachelor’s and a master’s degree) are available, usually at a discount; a 3.2 GPA is the norm, with higher GPAs available for an additional fee. Select schools also use “instant scholarships” to increase their sales. DM and CD&T Web sites utilize various marketing techniques. They resort to the same gimmicks and gadgetry used by legitimate retailers—e.g., coupons, discount codes, holiday specials, two for one (buy one, get one free), multi-degree discounts, and even “as seen on TV.” About the only tactic I have not seen is an “end of year clearance.” Interestingly, we have observed an increase in “related DMs,” for example, when five to fifteen different schools are all being operated by the same parent company. Many “related entities” now offer their own Internet high school, useful for “feeding” new students to their own fake colleges and universities.

Some of these newer DMs include:
- Adams College
- Adison University
- Almeda University
- Andersen University
- Ashington University
- Ashwood University
- Belford University
- Breyer State University
- Bridgewood University
- Bronte International University
- Canbourne University
- Canterbury University
- Capitol University
- ClosedCollegeDiploma.com
- Colton University
- Concordia College & University
- Corlins University
- Earlstown University (a UDP International school)
- Euclid University
- Hartford University
- Hill University
- Irish International University
- Knightsbridge University (Denmark)
- Kingston University
- Landford University
- Lansbridge University
- Lorenz University
- Los Angeles University
- New England State University
- Northfield University
- Penbrook University
- Randford University (www.randford.org)
- Redding University
At the same time, there has been an increase in the number of degree broker Web sites: The broker represents up to 20 different schools; after the buyer details his qualifications and background, the broker will advise as to whether he has been accepted by a particular school. Individuals enter this transaction blind as they are not given the name of their “accredited” school until after they have registered (i.e., paid their money). Some advise, first, that “the policy of not disclosing the name of the university protects you against unscrupulous individuals who do not approve of self-study and lifestyle improvement” and, second, to avoid “bad publicity.” They also tout the fact by not disclosing the name of the school up front; this will prevent future employers from being able to obtain derogatory information about the school. A good example is Degree Express (www.alumniservices.co.uk), which offers “online degrees from accredited universities. No Diploma Mills—Guaranteed.” (The site even offers a 20 percent commission in its affiliate program.) A similar Web site, which states it represents sixteen schools, is www.life-experience-college-degrees.com.

The proliferation of DMs, and particularly those which require some classwork or submission of a research paper, harm legitimate distance learning. In some circles, there already exists skepticism regarding the value of degrees earned through distance learning. DMs only fuel the ongoing debate.

**ACCREDITATION MILLS**

DMs utilize fraudulent accreditation as an advertising and sales tool. They create their own accreditation entity (or rent accreditation from a fellow fraudster) then embellish this “accreditation” on their Web site. Because DMs target the U.S. market, they frequently list the six legitimate regional U.S. accrediting entities, placing their phony accrediting entities among them. It may be difficult for the novice to distinguish the authentic from the fraudulent.

Some of the new unrecognized AMs are:

- **AAUC** American Association of Universities & Colleges
- **AAPS** Association of Accredited Private Schools
- **AAHEA** American Association for Higher Education and Accreditation
- **ABHE** American Bureau of Higher Education
- **ACI** The Accrediting Commission International (Beebe, AR)
- **ACTDE** Accreditation Council for Distance Education
- **AGC-USA** Accrediting Governing Commission of the United States of America
- **AIDE** Association for Innovation in Distance Education
- **APTEC** Accreditation Panel for Online Colleges and Universities
- **BOUA** Board of Online Universities Accreditation
- **CSACDE** Central States Association Council on Distance Education
- **COHL** Commission on Online Higher Learning
- **DETQ** Division of Education Training Quality
- **DGAA** Distance Graduation Accrediting Association (with American flag)
- **ECHOE** European Committee of Home and Online Education
- **GDETGC** Global Distance Education Training and Graduation Council
- **HEASA** Higher Education Accreditation and Standards Association
- **IAAFOE** International Accreditation Association for Online Education
The number of CD&T Web sites offering counterfeit diplomas and transcripts (on generic security paper) in the names of legitimate accredited colleges and universities has increased significantly. Anything and everything is available for sale—from $299 to $1,000—for either an in-stock or custom-made item. Typically, the Web sites display copies of their counterfeit diplomas and transcripts and tout the number of years they have been in the printing business; their sales volume; customer satisfaction; etc. One CD&T was so brazen as to post on its Web site both a group photo of its employees and a picture of the printing operation showing several employees involved in “quality control”—never mind that the diplomas were in the names of your institutions! Once examined, the fraudulent diplomas were shipped in unmarked brown paper.

Numerous foreign countries have been embarrassed by exposure of either CD&T operations operating with impunity from within their borders or of government leaders or prominent businessmen utilizing fake academic credentials. Authorities have conducted numerous raids on either DMs or CD&T operations, sometimes involving large-scale, sophisticated visa and passport operations. As governments have raided actual physical operations and cracked down on their postal systems (targeting incoming payments or delivery of finished products), many such operations either have shut down or have moved to countries where law enforcement is more lax.

In recent years, China has cracked down on several large-scale CD&T operations; as a result, Midlothian, Virginia (a suburb of Richmond) is now the hub of CD&T operations in the United States. At least six current CD&T operations can be traced to Virginia. In the process of conducting research for AACRAO’s new book, Counterfeit Diplomas and Transcripts, and in another instance, I purchased three counterfeit diplomas and transcripts—in the names of AACRAO member schools—from Virginia counterfeiters. I subsequently advised federal authorities of the details of my transactions.

Richmond-area counterfeiters continue to operate despite Virginia legislation, H776, approved on April 23, 2008, creating Virginia statute, Code of Virginia, §§
23-276.1, 23-276.10, and 23-276.12, relating to fraudulent academic credentials. This statute became effective July 1, 2008 and made unlawful the manufacture, sale, exchange, barter, use, or presentment as legitimate any academic credential (degree or transcript) to obtain employment, promotion, licensure, or admission to an institution of higher learning, knowing the same to be false, or to make a false claim regarding accreditation. Violation of this statute constitutes a Class 1 misdemeanor (maximum imprisonment one year). Upon learning of this statute, I hoped it would serve as a model for other states. But lack of implementation appears to have neutered legislative intent.

The Virginia Attorney General's office subsequently issued an opinion that as long as a counterfeiter's Web site indicates that the diploma and transcript being offered for sale are “novelties,” then the business is not violating the law. (This regardless of the fact that the word “novelty” does not appear anywhere on the face [or the reverse] of the diploma or transcript being sold in the name of your institution.) Note that the Virginia Attorney General's office must not have been aware of the federal mail fraud or civil action convictions obtained previously regarding diploma counterfeit operations Alumni Arts, Associated Enterprises, and Buy A College Degree/United Student Services, Inc., wherein the word “novelty” did not appear on the face of any of their counterfeit diplomas.

CD&T Web sites that appear to be hosted by agencies located in Virginia are:

- www.ClosedCollegeDiplomas.com
- www.DiplomaCompany.com (KAD Solutions)
- www.ND-Center.com
- www.NextDayDiplomas.com
- www.PhonyDiplomas.com
- www.PhonyDiploma.com (Document Printing Services)
- www.RealisticDiplomas.com
- www.ReplicaDiplomas.com (Online Ventures LTD)
- www.TjrCompany.com
- www.TrueDiplomas.com

Some of the other CD&T Web sites are:

- www.BackAlleyPress.com
- www.BuyDiplomasOnline.com
- www.DiplomaDoctor.com

LOOK ALIKES

These fraudulent entities are created to confuse the public; sometimes they constitute part of the support network for a DM, adding another layer of apparent legitimacy to an illegitimate operation. The more a Web site insists it is real, the more unreal it likely is. So, the more logos of member accrediting entities or organizations/associations to which it belongs appear on its Web site, the phonier it likely is. This is the purpose of look-alikes and sound-alikes. For example:

- AAHEA (American Association for Higher Education and Accreditation) assumed the identity and telephone number of a previously existing (legitimate) Washington, DC-based organization; it even established a mail drop address in Washington, DC, to hide its true location, in Ocala, Florida.

- ASCAOR (American Society of Collegiate Admissions Officers & Registrars) parroting AACRAO. In fact, it copied some of the AACRAO Web site but in numerous instances forgot to change the acronym and other identifying information.

- COHL (Council of Online Higher Learning) designed to add some fluff to ASCARO ‘accredited’ schools.

- IDETC (International Distance Education Training Council) and

- USDETC (United States Distance Education Training Council), both designed to confuse the public with the real DETC (Distance Education Training Council) in Washington, DC.

- THLC (The Higher Learning Commission), similar to the (authentic) Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.
STATE STATUTES AND CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS
Several notorious DM states have enacted legislation resulting in various DMs ceasing operating or moving to a less stringent state (or offshore). New statutes were passed in Wyoming, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, which are leading to their desired results. As DMs moved from one state to the next (think of migration), the newest "host" state was left holding the bag (in fact, the DM). Now it was the new host state’s turn to be publically embarrassed, in response to which it either could create new legislation or amend old laws. Most recently, DMs have been migrating to Alabama, Hawaii, Idaho, Mississippi, Montana, and Wyoming because of "either no meaningful standards, excessive loopholes, or poor enforcement owing to local policy or insufficient staff" (Oregon Office of Degree Authorization 2009). In addition, ODA states, "Degrees issued by unaccredited colleges in Alabama, Idaho, Mississippi, or Wyoming should be evaluated with great caution. In particular, Mississippi has no oversight standards" (Oregon Office of Degree Authorization 2009). On the other hand, Maine, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, Texas, and Washington are among the states with tougher laws and strict enforcement.

Whenever there is embarrassment in Washington, DC, congressional hearings soon follow: When there was a national scandal in 1924 involving phony physicians practicing medicine throughout the United States, Congress held hearings; after the revelation in 1983 that an Alexandria, Virginia, broker was selling M.D. degrees from a Caribbean medical school, and that many of these degree holders were practicing medicine in the United States, congressional hearings were held. In 1985, hearings stemming from the FBI’s DIPSCAM (Diploma Scam) Operation were held; the president of AACRAO testified. Yet no new legislation resulted from any of these hearings.

Congress remained quiet on matters of diploma fraud until 2003, when the DC press splashed the story that a high-ranking official at the new Department of Homeland Security (DHS) held degrees from Hamilton University, in Evanston, Wyoming (a diploma mill). The whistleblower even bragged on the Internet that he had exposed the DHS official. Government officials were outraged; if this could happen at DHS, what about the rest of the government? At the 2005 congressional hearings, the Government Accountability Office made public the results of its ‘degree audit,’ identifying five targeted schools as diploma mills.

These five schools alone had grossed $111 million from 1995 through 2003; the GAO advised further that it had identified 463 senior government employees (GS-15 and above) claiming to have earned degrees from unrecognized and not regionally accredited schools. The names of these high-level employees were never made public—never mind that 64 of them had been reimbursed more than $170,000 for their educational expenses. Several senators indicated that this was "just the tip of the iceberg." In September 2004, the House Committee on Education and the Workforce held additional hearings; again, no new legislation resulted.

The Higher Education Reauthorization Act of 2008 [HR 4137] was incorporated into the College Opportunity and Affordability Act of 2008, a 1,100-page document passed in July 2008 and signed into law the following month. (Much of the anticipated language relative to DMs had been removed from HR 4137.) The version that was passed indicates that in an effort to assist students, families, and employers, the Secretary of Education is tasked to have information and resources regarding diploma mills (e.g., how to identify and avoid them) on its Web site. The Secretary of Education also is tasked to "continue to collaborate" with officials of the USPS, Federal Trade Commission, Department of Justice (including FBI), IRS, and Office of Personnel Management "to maximize federal efforts to (1) prevent, identify, and prosecute diploma mills; and (2) broadly disseminate to the public information about diploma mills and resources to identify diploma mills."

What can you do to combat academic fraud?
- Become educated on the topic.
- Demand state and federal legislation outlawing all forms of academic fraud.
- Demand enforcement of and prosecutions resulting from such statutes.
- Request that federal law enforcement, irrespective of the agency (e.g., FBI, USPO, USSS), dedicate at least one investigator to work exclusively on academic fraud cases.
- Be proactive regarding counterfeit diplomas and transcripts sold in the name of your school: Demand prosecution!
- Encourage publicity of all instances of academic fraud (this serves as a deterrent).
- Request that your institution use only secure document paper, and limit access to it.

College & University | 47
This law provided a formal federal definition of a diploma mill for the very first time. A diploma mill is:

“An entity that offers, for a fee, degrees, diplomas, or certificates, that may be used to represent to the general public that the individual possessing such a degree, diploma, or certificate had completed a program of post-secondary education or training; and

requires such individual to complete little or no education or coursework to obtain such degree, diploma, or certificate;

and lacks accreditation by an accrediting agency or association that is recognized as an accrediting agency or association of institutions of higher education (as such term is defined under Section 102) by the Secretary pursuant to subpart I of part H of title IV;

or federal agency, state government, or other organization or association that recognized accrediting agencies or association.”

Now, the academic community, the business world, state regulators, and local, state, and federal law enforcement has a definition of a diploma mill on which to base further action. However, one year later, no federal agency has taken any steps regarding DM; rather, it appears to be business as usual. There are more fraudulent entities on the Internet than ever before. Further, neither this definition nor the Bill addresses or defines accreditation mills or counterfeiting operations.

St. Regis University
This is truly the case that was heard ’round the world. “Operation Gold Seal” was a one-year undercover operation by the United States Secret Service (USSS) regarding St. Regis University (SRU), Mead, Washington, and Monrovia, Liberia. Oddly, some state prison sentences handed down against defendants in the Touro College academic fraud even surpassed the federal prison sentences given in the multimillion dollar SRU fund. The USSS is to be congratulated for the manner in which it spearheaded the task force that brought the operators of St. Regis University to justice. The United States Attorney’s Office, Spokane, Washington, is to be commended for authorizing the investigation and prosecuting the guilty parties. Several of the eight defendants are now in federal prison.

Because SRU was Internet based, the USSS purchased diplomas and transcripts from several SRU schools and then established a cover story for its next “student.” (Remember that in this post-9/11 environment, USSS is part of DHS.) The student was a Syrian Army officer with a background in chemistry and chemical engineering; he desired a “quick degree” so he could obtain a job and his H1-B visa. USSS purchased several diplomas for this student and had these credentials ‘evaluated’ for use in obtaining his visa.

The undercover agents then established Randolph Addison Davis Technical University (RADTU), their own fake university, on the Internet. They approached the SRU principals for assistance and to purchase accreditation. On July 7, 2005, a three-hour meeting was held at the Mayflower Hotel, Washington, DC (with audio and video operating). After several hours, in walked the Chief of Mission, Liberian Embassy; he agreed to accept a $5,000 bribe and to travel to Liberia (all expenses paid) in order to obtain accreditation for RADTU.

Internet-based SRU operated from January 2000 until October 2005; it had 37 high schools, colleges, and universities and used 121 Web sites, four credential evaluators, three government accrediting agencies, through eight degree brokers, and sold its wares for $399 to $2,454 per document. SRU sold 10,815 degrees and other academic products to 9,612 buyers in all 50 states and 131 countries. One-half of all diplomas were sold to foreign nationals. SRU targeted Liberia, corrupted its government officials, established its fake university, rented a local space and proceeded to hire local educators to pose as SRU faculty members. They were paid a nominal monthly fee (as long as they made favorable comments about SRU when contacted), set up its own accreditors, and then set out to sell its wares. SRU even established its own medical school, awarding MD credentials. SRU diplomas have
surfaced all over the world. The Federal Grand Jury indictment charges that SRU grossed $7,369,907, with monthly revenues, at its peak, of $1,650,000.

As if this were not enough, SRU officials counterfeited diplomas and transcripts of legitimate United States colleges and universities. They sold 270 documents in the names of 77 different legitimate colleges and universities as well as 1,757 degrees in the names of 121 unrecognized schools to buyers in 29 states and six countries. SRU officials would print and sell anything to anyone.

SRU established new benchmarks for corruption and bribery. This was the first DM racket in which numerous foreign government officials were bribed: $60,000 was paid to officials of Liberia; $100,000 to an unidentified official in India; and undisclosed amounts to officials in Italy and in the Russian Education Ministry. There was an avalanche of publicity surrounding the leak of SRU’s 9,600 “graduates’” names. The list included business, education, and law enforcement officials in addition to at least 350 high-level government employees, including some at the Departments of Defense, Justice, and State, as well as one White House staffer. When asked about future prosecutions of federal employees using fake academic credentials, officials of the Department of Homeland Security and Immigration Customs Enforcement (DHS/ICE) advised that only those employees who used their degrees for personal gain or to obtain a job would face scrutiny. (Are we to assume that any and all others are off the hook? This is hardly the example for our government to set!) A significant number of SRU diplomas were sold to persons in the Middle East.

The global media reaction to diploma mill prosecution and the release of students’ names was unprecedented. Not only did officials in many foreign countries examine the list for their own residents (and government officials), but they also started campaigns to ferret out officials in their own country who were using worthless or fraudulent education credentials. As a result, many countries have instituted their own investigations and are re-examining regulatory controls. Some investigative journalists in China have reported that the world is full of fakes and academic imposters. In our own country, the U.S. Army has identified more than 200 soldiers on the SRU “graduate” list; these individuals are being investigated to determine their intent in using fraudulent credentials. The Army is revamping its human resources command to better detect fake academic credentials.

Other SRU “graduates” exposed were ten Georgia school teachers; one community college president; 76 Chrysler factory employees; two chiefs of police; one police dog; and 14 New York firemen; these are just a few of the SRU graduates who have been exposed publicly. One Deputy U.S. Marshall was charged for having used his SRU diploma to obtain a promotion and salary increase.

University Degree Program

Except in the case of SRU, no federal agency or department has made a concerted effort to tackle the problem of DMs. In 2002, the Federal Trade Commission brought federal civil action against what has been called the “University Degree Program” (UDP), which began operating in 1998 and had at least 22 purported colleges and universities throughout Europe (approximately 30 clones later appeared). UDP established Web sites for each of its colleges and universities as well as for its own accrediting/recognition entities. All of this was overseen by several Americans from Brooklyn, New York (Yad Abraham and others) doing business as University Systems, Wheelie International Limited, and Mountain View Systems through telemarketing offices (“boiler rooms”) located in Jerusalem, Israel, and Bucharest, Romania.

UDP operators perfected the art of spam: several companies sent millions of spam e-mails daily; interested buyers called various telephone message drops located throughout the United States. These messages (“Please leave your name, day and night telephone numbers, and type of degree desired”) would be retrieved by one of the “registrars” located in a “boiler room.” The “prospective student” subsequently would receive a call from the registrar, who started the sales pitch at $2,400, after which a $500 instant scholarship was offered. This was the point at which the real bargaining would begin.

The UDP case should prove quite embarrassing to federal law enforcement. UDP was operated with impunity, with no concern for federal law enforcement. As a result of their millions of spam e-mails, everyone—including individuals on Capitol Hill and in federal law enforcement—knew of its existence. Nevertheless, no active criminal investigation was launched.
Although UDP was by far the largest DM ever identified, federal law enforcement officials might have reacted differently had it sold its products to buyers in the mid-East instead of primarily to U.S. and Canadian residents. As it was, federal law enforcement did not seem to care about this further example of non-violent white-collar crime. Yet UDP sold more than 450,000 diplomas and transcripts, many in medical majors! Where are these “degree holders” today? Are they your health professionals? UDP gross receipts were more than $435,000,000; UDP’s 2003 FTC “disgorgement” for its fake International Drivers Permit scam was a mere $57,000. The overwhelming disinterest of federal law enforcement in prosecuting fraudulent education initiatives is the primary reason we continue to have the DM, AM, and CD&T problem. We applaud the states of Oregon and North Dakota for their passage of new legislation outlawing AMs and hope other states follow their example.

Closer to home, academic fraud at Touro College and at MIT cast a black eye on legitimate higher education, the value of academic credentials, and, certainly, on the honor of registrar’s office personnel. These instances vividly demonstrate why all academic credentials—of students as well as staff—must be verified. Above all, be alert to the possibility of fraud at your own institution.

TRENDS

The federal government likely will continue to be reactive rather than proactive about investigating and prosecuting academic fraud. We appear to be on a downhill cycle in terms of public interest: a school teacher, scientist, minister or even a government employee exposed in the press—perhaps even some local public outrage—but no government action. Apart from local media coverage, we have no reason to expect a concerted national effort to eradicate DMS, AMs, and CD&T operations.

We foresee a progression toward more state oversight regarding DMS: a steady movement by states toward greater restrictions on the award and use of degrees from unaccredited institutions. We hope for groundbreaking state regulation—possibly culminating in federal legislation—regarding both credential evaluators and accrediting entities.

The operators of criminal academic enterprises certainly will use increasingly sophisticated Web sites, sales techniques, production methods, and products, continuing all the while to hide their true origin and location and to project a more international image. As observed with regard to the St. Regis operation, we believe these operators will continue to establish their own accrediting entities as part of their effort to give the illusion of legitimate accreditation and to align themselves with foreign governments, thereby providing the further—and perhaps more dangerous—illusion of “government approval” and legitimacy.

This article provides but a brief introduction to the landscape of fraudulent academic credentials, a billion-dollar growth industry with no end in sight. Fraudulent academic credentials constitute a blight on legitimate, hard-earned academic credentials. Should we fail to put a stop to this—and quickly—then real credentials will continue to lose value.

REFERENCES


About the Author

Allen Ezell is a retired FBI Agent, an AACRAO presenter for the past 25 years, co-author of Degree Mills with Dr. John Bear, and author of AACRAO publications, Accreditation Mills and Counterfeit Diplomas and Transcripts.