



What is a Diploma Mill?

A diploma or degree mill is an entity that sells postsecondary credentials without requiring appropriate academic achievement. In many jurisdictions inside and outside the United States, diploma mills are illegal. These scam operations can be difficult to trace because they usually use mail drops and multiple addresses. Numerous degree mills operate on the Internet, where they often masquerade as institutions of distance learning. Legitimate distance-learning providers are recognized in the countries where they are located, and their status can be verified by contacting the relevant educational authorities. Academic credential evaluators should be suspicious of documents issued by “universities” with addresses that are office suites or box numbers that cannot be verified in any authoritative independent publication. Most degree mills also claim accreditation by one or more fictitious “national,” “international,” “worldwide” or “global” accrediting agencies. Verifying the existence and status of an institution is an essential step when reviewing educational documents.

How to Spot Them

There are several types of diploma mills. Some are outright scams that sell degrees or diplomas without requiring any work whatsoever. Others appear more ambiguous in terms of their legitimacy, offering short-term degrees in exchange for some form of academic work, such as a thesis or dissertation. These organizations, according to experts, are the most dangerous kind of diploma mills because they appear to be legitimate.

If an institution is not accredited by an agency recognized by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) or the U.S. Department of Education, chances are it's a diploma mill. However, accreditation does not necessarily guarantee legitimacy. There are currently 35 accrediting agencies in the United States that are not recognized by the Department of Education or CHEA and that will put their stamp of approval on just about any program with no questions asked. In many cases, the accrediting agencies in question are merely self-serving organizations set up by the diploma mills themselves.

For more information on this subject, check out the following Web sites and articles:

Identifying Degree Mills:

Bahur, Christopher. “Diploma Mills - Fraud in Higher Education.” [DegreeInfo.com](http://www.degreeinfo.com).
http://www.degreeinfo.com/article24_1.html

Bartlett, Thomas, and Smallwood, Scott, "What's a Diploma Mill?" Chronicle of Higher Education June 25, 2004.

<http://chronicle.com/prm/weekly/v50/i42/42a00902.htm>

Bear, John & Mariah. "Degree Mills." Quackwatch.

<http://quackwatch.org/04ConsumerEducation/dm0.html>

Butler, David, "Ivory Tower Rip Offs – How Degree Mills Work." About.com Oct. 15, 2001.

<http://www.elearners.com/resources/diploma-mills.asp>

"Diploma Mills and Accreditation - Diploma Mills." Department of Education.

<http://www.ed.gov/students/prep/college/diplomamills/diploma-mills.html>

"Degree Mills and Accreditation Mills." Maine Department of Education.

<http://www.maine.gov/education/highered/Mills/Mills.htm#oview>

"Education: Avoiding the Diploma Mills." Military.com Education.

http://www.military.com/Education/Content/0,13302,Education_Diploma,00.html

Gollin, George, "Unconventional University Diplomas from Online Vendors." Sept. 2003.

http://www.hep.uiuc.edu/home/g-gollin/diploma_mills.pdf

"Important Questions About Accreditation, Degree Mills and Accreditation Mills." Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

<http://www.chea.org/degremills/default.htm>

Phillips, Vicky, "Top 10 Signs Online Diploma Mills & Degree Mills." GetEducated.com

<http://www.geteducated.com/articles/degremills.asp>

White, Chip, "Warning Signs of a Less-than-Wonderful School." Degreeinfo.com.

http://www.degreeinfo.com/article20_1.html

Articles Discussing Degree Mills:

Armour, Stephanie. "Diploma mills insert degree of fraud into job market." USA Today Sept. 2003.

http://www.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2003-09-28-fakedegrees_x.htm

Bartlett, Thomas, and Smallwood, Scott, "Inside the multimillion-dollar world of diploma mills." Chronicle of Higher Education June 25, 2004.

<http://chronicle.com/prm/weekly/v50/i42/42a00801.htm>

Bartlett, Thomas, and Smallwood, Scott, "The University of Spam." Chronicle of Higher Education June 25, 2004.

<http://chronicle.com/prm/weekly/v50/i42/42a01401.htm>

Bartlett, Thomas, and Smallwood, Scott, "Pssst. Wanna Buy a Ph.D.?" Chronicle of Higher Education June 25, 2004.

<http://chronicle.com/free/v50/i42/42a00901.htm>

Bartlett, Thomas, and Smallwood, Scott, "Maxine Asher has a degree for you." Chronicle of Higher Education June 25, 2004.

<http://chronicle.com/free/v50/i42/42a01201.htm>

Bartlett, Thomas, and Smallwood, Scott, "The hypnotist who married Lana Turner." Chronicle of Higher Education June 25, 2004.

<http://chronicle.com/free/v50/i42/42a01301.htm>

Bear, John. "Diploma Mills: The \$200 million a year competitor you didn't know you had." University Business Sept. 2001.

http://www.degree.net/html/diploma_mills.html

Boykin, Danielle, "Are fraudulent academic degrees making a mark on engineering?" Engineering Times July 2004.

<http://www.nspe.org/etweb/10704diplomamills.asp>

"Faking it." The Economist Aug. 2004.

http://www.economist.com/business/globalexecutive/education/displayStory.cfm?story_id=3079831

"How to recognize bogus diploma mill 'schools'" dcmilitary.com Oct. 2003.

http://www.dcmilitary.com/army/standard/8_21/features/25741-1.html

Ortutay, Barbara. "New degree mills." Bucks County Courier Times Aug. 2004.

<http://www.phillyburbs.com/pb-dyn/news/147-08092004-345069.html>

Robinson, Seth. "Diploma mills lure troops with promise of credits for 'life skills'." Stars & Stripes Sept. 2004.

<http://www.estripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=20980&archive=true>

Sedgwick, Robert. "Diploma mills go digital." World Education News & Reviews July/August 2000.

<http://www.wes.org/ewenr/00july/feature.htm>

Tang, Heather. "State dominates the \$200 million quick-degree industry." Pacific Business News May 2000.

<http://www.bizjournals.com/pacific/stories/2000/05/29/focus1.html#top>

"US report pins down bogus degrees." BBC News May 2004

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/3705909.stm>

About Accreditation:

Council for Higher Education Accreditation, Informing the Public About Accreditation:

http://www.chea.org/public_info/index.asp

DegreeNet: http://degree.net/guides/accreditation_guide.html

Reports/Investigations:

Congressional hearing on diploma mills (May 11 & 12, 2004):

<http://www.credentialwatch.org/reports/mills.pdf>

Federal Trade Commission: <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/conline/pubs/alerts/diplomaalrt.htm> (January 2005)

Federal Trade Commission. Scholarship Scams: <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/conline/edcams/scholarship/index.html>

Federal Trade Commission. Facts for Businesses: <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/buspubs/diplomamills.pdf>

National Council Against Health Fraud Position Paper: <http://www.ncahf.org/pp/dipmill.html>

U.S. General Accounting Office: <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d04771t.pdf>

Degree Mill Listings:

Barret, Stephen. "Be Wary of Non-recognized Accreditation Agencies." Quackwatch August 5, 2005. <http://www.credentialwatch.org/non/agencies.shtml>

Barret, Stephen. "Questionable Schools, an Overview." Quackwatch November 26, 2005 (revised). <http://quackwatch.org/04ConsumerEducation/nonrecorg.html#nonaccredited>

Maine Department of Education: Unaccredited Post-Secondary Educational Institutions: <http://www.maine.gov/education/highered/Non-Accredited/UnaccreditedSchools-112706.pdf>

Oregon Student Assistant Commission, Office of Degree Authorization: <http://www.osac.state.or.us/oda/unaccredited.html>

State of Hawaii: Alerts and Bulletins: <http://www.hawaii.gov/dcca/areas/ocp/udqi/>

State of Michigan: Non Accredited Colleges/Universities: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Non-accreditedSchools_78090_7.pdf

Institutions Listing Approved Accreditation Agencies and Higher Education Institutions in the United States:

Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA): <http://www.chea.org/>

CHEA Links to Licensed or Authorized Institutions by State: <http://www.chea.org/degremills/frmStates.htm>

Department of Education: http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/edlite-accred-recog_associations.html

Department of Education (Office of Postsecondary Education) accreditation agency and HEI search: <http://www.ope.ed.gov/accreditation/Search.asp>

Distance-Learning Consulting Services:

Degree Finders: <http://www.degreefinders.com/>

ELearners.com: <http://www.elearners.com/>

Geteducated.com: <http://www.geteducated.com/index.asp>

Obtaining Authentic Documents:

World Education Services: <http://www.wes.org/ewenr/documentation.htm>