Credential Fraud, Diploma Mills and Accreditation Mills

Document Fraud

• Tampering: Altering an existing document

• Forgery: Creating a document from scratch to look like a real document from a real institution

Document Fraud

• Altered / Manufactured by an individual

• Provided by a service for a fee
  – "Replacement" service
  – "Replica" service
  – "Novelty" degrees
Diploma Mill Fraud

• DMs sell fraudulent academic documents
• Why fraudulent?
  – Intention to misrepresent/deceive
  – Worthless academically
    • Bogus “university”
    • Little or no academic work required

Diploma Mill Red Flags

• Name similar to a real institution
• Only “location” is a Web site, no contact info shown, several DMs on one computer, domain registry disguised
• Quick turnaround time to degree
• “Special offers”, pricing, package deals
• Samples of docs shown on Web site
Diploma Mill Red Flags

• “Faculty” have diploma mill degrees
• Purports to be a “foreign” institution
• “Accreditation” by a bogus body
• Operation runs its own
  – Transcript verification service
  – Accreditation body
  – Foreign credential evaluation service

British Universities?

• Harrington University
• Sherwood University
• Shepperton University
Around the World
with the
“University Degree Program”

AACRAO International Education Services
www.aacrao.org/international
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Accreditation Mills

• Bogus “accreditors” that are not approved by any legitimate quality assurance body in the US or abroad
• May be tied to a diploma mill
• Diploma mills may create their own “accreditors” to appear “legitimate”

Approval of Accreditors in the US

• Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) - www.chea.org

Note: They do not accredit institutions; they review accreditors.
Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)

www.chea.org

- Membership org for institutions (3000+ members)
- Develops standards based on input and interests of membership
- Requires that accreditors consider only institutions that are operating legally.

CHEA Web site Resources

www.chea.org

- Government Relations
- Databases and Directories
- Informing the Public About Accreditation
- Recognition
- Degree Mills and Accreditation Mills
- CHEA Research and Publications
- International Quality Review
- About CHEA
- International Directory
- CHEA Member Services

US Department of Education

www.ed.gov

- Independently develops standards for accreditor recognition.
- Recognition of accreditor allows accredited institutions to participate in federal programs.
- Supports many kinds of institutions: academic, technical, vocational, career, computer schools, job training, etc.
### In Other Countries

#### Legal Recognition

- Ministry of Education / govt. authority
  - Federal / national
  - State / province / canton
  - Mixed
- Legal basis
  - Operational (license to operate)
  - Educational (authorization to teach and award credentials)

### In Other Countries

#### Quality Assurance/Accreditation

- "Quality assurance" relatively new concept
- Several models:
  - Government vs. private sector as accreditor
  - Institution vs. programs
  - One accrediting body vs. several
  - Permanent vs. ongoing

### St. Regis University

Liberia? Accredited?
Scammer says he bribed diplomats

Bill Mole
Staff writer
March 21, 2006

The operator of a Nigerian-based diploma mill and an Arizona man to get three fake-Liberian diplomats were convicted of bribery and straw donations.

Richard John Baskin, a Nigerian businessman, and an Arizona man were convicted of bribery and straw donations.

The Liberian diplomats, who were hired by the public documents, allegedly to bribe the money after agreeing that Liberian Board of Education would provide "accreditation" for St. Regis University.

Federal investigators described the online company as a "fake diploma mill" and one of several diploma mills operated in Mesa, Arizona and other states.
Why is Credential Fraud So Widespread?

- “Credential-conscious” society
- “Degrees” = Dollars
  - Initial hiring, promotion
  - Salary increases based on education
  - Academic level commensurate with professional experience
Low Risk / High Gain

• Easy to obtain
• Low level of scrutiny
• Legal loopholes
  – Weak state laws or weak/no enforcement of existing laws

Why Does This Matter?

• Ethics
• Legal responsibilities
• Practical considerations
  – “Time bomb” ticking on your campus (Students, Faculty, Administration)
  – Dealing with consequences of fraud is a poor use of already-stretched resources

What Can You Do?

• BE PROACTIVE. Be prepared for fraud.
• Educate yourself and your staff
  – Provide resources
  – Establish a standard, consistent approach to application and document review
What Can You Do?

• Policies & procedures that encourage:
  – review of all applicant documentation
  – confirmation of info shown on docs
  – verification of questionable docs
  – follow-up on confirmation of inauthentic docs
• Track cases
• Revise and adjust policies as needed

What Can You Do?

• Act quickly. Fraudsters love inaction.
• Inform
  – state consumer affairs/attorney general’s office
  – state postsecondary education office
  – education colleagues

AACRAO Resources

www.aacrao.org/publications
AACRAO Annual Meetings
Speakers & Handouts
http://www.aacrao.org/meetings/past.cfm

• AACRAO IES Staff
• Allen Ezell and John Bear, co-authors of *Degree Mills* - www.degreemills.com
• Prof. George Gollin, University of Illinois
• Alan Contreras, OR Office of Degree Authorization
• Jack Zurlini, Jr., Asst. Atty. General, WA
• Erik Johansson, Swedish ENIC

Other Resources on Degree & Accreditation Mill Fraud

• AACRAO College and University
• Chronicle of Higher Education
• Inside Higher Education
• Times Higher Education (UK)
• Spokane (WA) Spokesman-Review
• Boston College Center for International Higher Education
• US Government, various offices

AACRAO International Resources
aacrao.org/international
Other International Resources

- Ministries of education (MOE)
- International Association of Universities
  - World Higher Education Database
  - International Handbook of Universities
- MOE-sponsored information networks
- EducationUSA information network

AACRAO International Education Services
www.aacrao.org/international
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At your service!

Do not add to the problem. Be a part of the SOLUTION.