

## HANDS-ON ADMISSIONS: Diploma Mills

### What is a “diploma mill”?

A “diploma mill” or “degree mill” is an organization or individual that

- *produces and sells* diplomas, degrees, transcripts, or other academic records that are
- *meant to give the impression of academic achievement, but really represent little or no study.*

Such credentials are “bogus” – “fakes” that give a false impression of educational achievement.

- Worthless documents from bodies that are not real, or not recognized, educational institutions
- Fraudulent misrepresentations of documents issued by legitimate institutions

### Why is diploma mill fraud a problem?

#### Why is confirming the status of questionable institutions important?

- **Ethical Reasons:** Admission based on unexamined documents supports and rewards fraud. This devalues legitimate education and marks the higher education institution (HEI) as an easy target for fraudulent activity.
- **Legal Reasons:** By not reviewing documents carefully, the HEI could be violating the law. In most countries, being a part of a legal system that regulates credentials gives HEIs legal obligations.
- **Practical Reasons:** When it becomes known that a HEI supports fraud, its reputation suffers, and honest students stay away. Fraud is expensive; it takes resources away from honest applicants, and the process of trying to “fix” a problem case, or rebuild an entire reputation, wastes resources.

### What is the solution? Be PROACTIVE. Be prepared for FRAUD!

- **Take fraud seriously.**
- **Educate yourself** and your colleagues. Learn how to identify, collect and effectively use reliable sources of information. Do not rely on “lists”; learn how to analyze and research documents to confirm their legitimacy.
- **Establish a standard approach to reviewing and evaluating documents.**
- **Include a verification procedure in every case.** The level of research needed to confirm the documentation can vary from case to case, but every institution and document should be confirmed.
- **Establish policies** on fraud and inform your applicants of the consequences of presenting bogus documents.
- **Share information with your colleagues.** We must work together to be a part of the solution!

### How do diploma mills operate? Look for the “red flags”.

Diploma mills operate in many of the same ways that other fraud operations work – *by imitating legitimate activity*. They try to make themselves look “real”, but there are some things to watch out for:

- **Name:** The “institution” has a “distinguished” or “traditional” sounding name, or a name similar to a well-known or legitimate institution.
- **Physical location:** The “university” has a Web site but there is no evidence, or there is conflicting information, about its actual physical address. It uses “edu”, “ac”, or “uk” in the URL, giving the impression of being a US or British institution. The only way to contact the “university” is by emailing your contact information.
- **Recognition:** The Web site includes false, misleading or meaningless claims of “accreditation”, “recognition”, “affiliation”, “membership”, or other types of status that are meant to give the impression of legitimacy, but really mean *nothing* in the legitimate higher education community.
- **Speedy degrees:** The amount of time required to get the “degree” is suspiciously fast. A large amount of credit, or the whole “degree”, is based on “life experience” only; “send us your CV and receive a degree”.
- **Costs:** The Web site shows a “lump sum” cost for the “degree” and “transcripts”. Specific courses, grades, majors, etc. can be “bought”. There are special “deals” or discounts if one “buys now”.
- **Sample documents:** Samples of diplomas and transcripts are shown on the Web site.
- **Groups of diploma mills:** Several “university” Web sites may operate from the same computer. You can do a “who is” search to find the IP (Internet Protocol) address and owner of the Web site, then search for Web sites with the same IP address.

## Diploma mills EXPLOIT issues of recognition and accreditation.

### Some ways include claiming:

- That “accreditation” or “recognition” is not needed, not important, too “subjective” or otherwise “not appropriate”, not in line with the institution’s mission or philosophy, etc..
- “Accreditation” from an unapproved or bogus accreditor.
- To be “accredited” by an entity whose name sounds very similar to that of a legitimate accrediting body.
- To be “authorized” or “recognized by” or “affiliated with” an entity that has no authority in the sphere of education.
- To be “authorized” or “recognized” in a foreign country by a body that has no authority in the sphere of education (or is not recognized by the body that does have authority), or in a country/entity that has no legitimate body for supervising education or supervising higher education. Examples: “National Board of Education” “in Liberia”, a bogus entity; “Hutt River Province” in Australia; “Seborga” in Italy; cantons of Switzerland that have no higher education; several Caribbean islands; some Pacific islands.

## What makes a higher education institution or degree “legitimate”? How do you confirm the status of the institution?

### A. In the United States - Accreditation:

- A non-governmental, voluntary, peer-review process, and a standard for recognition of credits and degrees.
  - *Regional* or *national* accreditation – of the institution as a whole
  - *Professional* or *program* accreditation – of programs of study offered by regionally-accredited institutions
- The process of legally establishing an educational institution is regulated by law in each state. However, having legal permission to operate is NOT equivalent to being “accredited”.
- Accrediting associations are reviewed and approved the US Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). The accreditation status of an institution or program of study can easily be verified by contacting CHEA or the US Department of Education.
- In general, regionally-accredited institutions only accept degrees and credits from other regionally-accredited institutions. This is why “appearing” to be “regionally accredited” is important to diploma mills.

### Resources:

Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA): [www.chea.org](http://www.chea.org) - See links “Degree Mills and Accreditation” and “Database of Institutions and Programs Accredited by Recognized US Accrediting Organizations” on the CHEA home page.

US Department of Education: Office of Postsecondary Education Database of Institutions and Programs Accredited by Agencies and State Approval Agencies Recognized by the US Secretary of Education:  
<http://www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/index.html>; Diploma Mills and Accreditation:  
<http://www.ed.gov/students/prep/college/diplomamills/index.html>

### B. In Many Other Countries – Government Recognition:

- In most countries, education is regulated by national or regional law and governments are responsible for the establishment, funding, operation, administration and supervision of educational institutions. Public institutions, as well as private institutions that have the same legal standing as public institutions, are officially “recognized”.

## Recent Developments: Bogus “Services” Have Expanded

Some diploma mills now also offer:

- US high school diploma / high school equivalency credentials
- Degree and transcript verification services
- Foreign credential evaluation services, if the diploma mill claims to be a “foreign” institution
- *Apostille* services, if the diploma mill claims to be a “foreign” institution

## Electronic Tools for Researching “Red Flags”

- The entity’s Web site – pay attention to the “red flags”
- IP “who is” search to identify the owner of the Web site - [www.samspade.org/](http://www.samspade.org/), [www.whois.org](http://www.whois.org), [www.whois.sc](http://www.whois.sc)
- Location: USA Reverse address search - [www.reverseaddress.com](http://www.reverseaddress.com); US reverse telephone number search – [www.reversephonedirectory.com](http://www.reversephonedirectory.com); UK Royal Mail Web site - <http://www.royalmail.com/portal/rm/home>; Satellite maps (Google Earth)
- Accreditation / recognition - Check resources listed above; cross-reference using official/reliable sources
- “Play the game” yourself – respond to spam, show interest in obtaining a degree, collect and document the information you receive

## Diploma Mill Resources and References

### From the United States:

*Guide to Bogus Institutions and Documents*, AACRAO, 2006 – [www.aacrao.org/publications/](http://www.aacrao.org/publications/)  
Contributors: John Bear, Allen Ezell, Alan Contreras, Jane Yahr Shepard, Eva-Angela Adan, Edward Devlin, Ann M. Koenig, Jessica Montgomery, LesLee Stedman.

*Degree Mills: The Billion-Dollar Industry that has Sold over a Million Fake Diplomas* by Alan Ezell and John Bear  
Prometheus Books, 2005 – [www.degreeemills.com](http://www.degreeemills.com)

*Accreditation Mills* by Allen Ezell, AACRAO C & U Journal, Summer 2005 –  
<http://www.aacrao.org/publications/candu/index.cfm>

*Information Resources Concerning Unaccredited Degree-Granting Institutions*, compilation by Prof. George Gollin, University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, of various resources including news items and public legal documents: <http://web.hep.uiuc.edu/home/g-gollin/pigeons/>

*Unconventional University Diplomas from Online Vendors or Fraud, Corruption and Scandal: Buying a Ph.D.*, by Prof. George Gollin, University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, August 2003. Overview of how diploma mills operate - [http://www.hep.uiuc.edu/home/g-gollin/diploma\\_mills.pdf](http://www.hep.uiuc.edu/home/g-gollin/diploma_mills.pdf)

*Diploma Mills – The \$200 Million a Year Competitor You Didn't Know You Had*, by John Bear, Ph.D., 2001  
[http://www.degree.net/html/diploma\\_mills.html](http://www.degree.net/html/diploma_mills.html)

The *Bears' Guides* published by Ten Speed Press. These guides list many "fake", "substandard" and "dubious" institutions and their equally questionable accreditors. Available from the publisher - <http://www.tenspeed.com> - and many commercial booksellers. Older editions are sometimes available through used book Web sites.

*Transcript Fraud and Handling Fraudulent Documents*, Winter 2005, and *Diploma Mills—Past, Present, and Future*, Winter 2002, articles by Allen Ezell the in AACRAO C & U Journal:  
<http://www.aacrao.org/publications/candu/index.cfm>

*Diploma Mills*. Oregon Student Assistance Commission, Office of Degree Authorization:  
[http://www.osac.state.or.us/oda/diploma\\_mill.html](http://www.osac.state.or.us/oda/diploma_mill.html)

Council for Higher Education Accreditation, USA – [www.chea.org](http://www.chea.org)

US Department of Education, Accreditation - <http://www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/index.html>

US Federal Trade Commission: *Avoid Fake Degree Burns by Researching Academic Credentials*:  
<http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/conline/pubs/buspubs/diplomamills.htm>; *Degree Mills: Degrees of Deception*:  
<http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/conline/pubs/alerts/diplomaalrt.htm>

*Don't Judge a College by Its Internet Address*, Chronicle of Higher Education, Nov. 26, 2004 –  
<http://chronicle.com/free/v51/i14/14a02901.htm>

Special Report: *Degrees of Suspicion* published by Chronicle of Higher Education, June 25, 2004  
<http://chronicle.com/prm/weekly/v50/i42/42a00902.htm>

*Fraud and Education: The Worm in the Apple*, Harold J. Noah and Max A. Eckstein, Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, Inc., 2001

*Degree Duplicity* by Mark Clayton, *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 10, 2003  
<http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0610/p15s02-lehl.html>

*A Case Study in Foreign Degree (Dis)approval* by Alan Contreras, International Higher Education, Summer 2003, Center for Higher Education, Boston College:  
[http://www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/News32/text004.htm](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/News32/text004.htm)

*International Diploma Mills Grow with the Internet* by Alan Contreras, International Higher Education, Summer 2001- [http://www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/News24/text003.htm](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/News24/text003.htm)

*How Reliable is National Approval of University Degrees?* by Alan Contreras, International Higher Education, Fall 2002 – [http://www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/News29/text005.htm](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/News29/text005.htm)

### From Other Countries:

Netherlands: Centre for Information on Diploma Mills - [http://www.diplomamills.nl/index\\_engels.htm](http://www.diplomamills.nl/index_engels.htm)

Sweden: *Bluffuniversitet och falksa examsbevis, Sverige och världen* (Fake Universities and Bogus Degrees, Sweden and the World) by Erik Johansson and Henrik Hansson (in Swedish) -  
<http://web2.hsv.se/publikationer/rapporter/2005/0525R.pdf> - summary in English:  
<http://www.hsv.se/reports/2005/5.7cb94a2910b5ac8d550800033131.html>

Liberia: *Ministry of Education Identifies Illegal Learning Institutions: Government Finally Closes St. Luke* [medical school]:  
[http://www.analystnewspaper.com/moe\\_identifies\\_illegal\\_learning\\_institutions.htm](http://www.analystnewspaper.com/moe_identifies_illegal_learning_institutions.htm)  
<http://allafrica.com/stories/200507200430.html>

Italy: *Italy's Internet Dottores Risk Jail*: [http://www.thes.co.uk/search/story.aspx?story\\_id=2024571](http://www.thes.co.uk/search/story.aspx?story_id=2024571)

## Three Gentlemen of London: The "University Degree Program"

Born 10-20-53, Chicago IL  
University of Palmers Green, London

### Educational Chronology:

Please list all institutions attended beginning with secondary institutions

Name of Secondary School(s)	Location (City / Country)	Dates of attendance	Name of Secondary School leaving certificate, diploma, or examination*	Date completed, or date awarded,
JACKSON HUNTER OF MARY H.S.	Rolling Meadows, ILLINOIS, USA	1968-1971	High School Diploma	1971
Name of Postsecondary Institution(s)	Location (City / Country)	Dates of attendance	Certificates, degrees & exams completed*	Date completed, or date awarded,
SMU in Lexington	Rolling Meadows, USA	07/2002-10/2002	Cart. Award	Dec 2002
UNIVERSITY OF PALMERS GREEN	London, England	1970-1972	MS Project Report	1972
		1975-1977	MS Education Degree	1977
		1972-1975	BA Finance / Acc	1975

\*List credentials using indigenous (original language) terms

Born 8-18-57, Biloxi, MS  
Ashford University, London

### Educational Chronology:

Please list all institutions attended beginning with secondary institutions

Name of Secondary School(s)	Location (City / Country)	Dates of attendance	Name of Secondary School leaving certificate, diploma, or examination*	Date completed, or date awarded,
			GED / US	
Name of Postsecondary Institution(s)	Location (City / Country)	Dates of attendance	Certificates, degrees & exams completed*	Date completed, or date awarded,
Ashford University	London, England	91-95	BA - BUSINESS	JUNE 95
Ashford University	London, England	95-97	MA - International Marketing	JUNE 97

\*List credentials using terms in original language

Born 8-15-71, Moscow, Russia  
University of San Moritz, London

### Educational Chronology:

Please list all institutions attended beginning with secondary institutions

Name of Secondary School(s)	Location (City / Country)	Dates of attendance	Name of Secondary School leaving certificate, diploma, or examination*	Date completed, or date awarded,
Medical College	Moscow, Russia	1986-1990	B.A. Nursing	02/04/90
Name of Postsecondary Institution(s)	Location (City / Country)	Dates of attendance	Certificates, degrees & exams completed*	Date completed, or date awarded,
UNIVERSITY OF SAN MORITZ	London, England	1990-1993	M.S. in Computer Science	06/1993

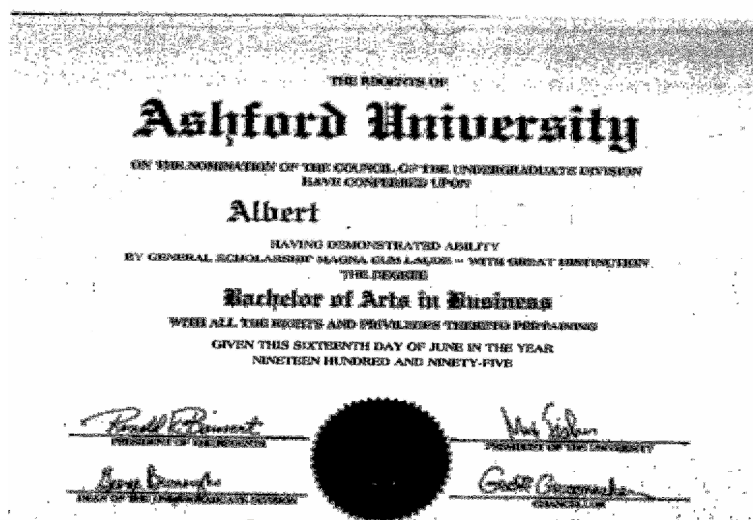
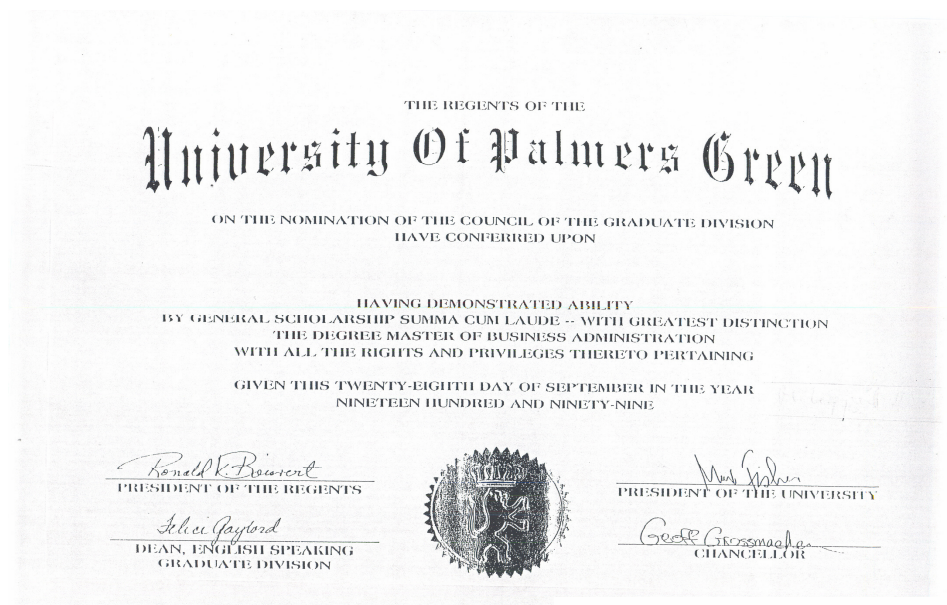
\*List credentials using indigenous (original language) terms

### Some other "University Degree Program" names:

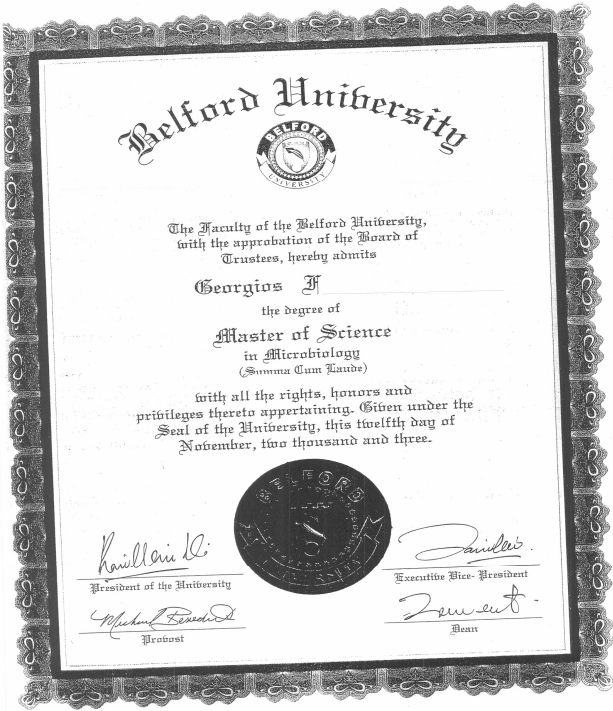
Ashford, Bedford, Brentwick, Carrington, Devon, Devonshire, Dorchester, Dunham, Glencullen, Harrington, Lafayette, Landford, Northfield, Palmers Green, Parkhurst, Parkwood, Ravenhurst, San Moritz, Shaftesbury, Shelbourne, Shepperton, Stafford, Strassford, Suffield, Thornewood, Switzerland (U. of Switz.), Walsh, Westbourne, Western Ohio, Westhampton, Wexford, Wiltshire, Xavier

### To Confirm the Status of Recognized UK Institutions:

"UK Recognised Degrees" - <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/recognisedukdegrees/>



## Belford University: Do You See Any 'Red Flags'?



**Belford University**

Georgios F.  
Name

BF-9611  
Registration No.

December 15, 1974  
Date of Birth

MASTER OF SCIENCE  
(MAJOR: MICROBIOLOGY)

OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT

G P A = 3.93  
(Summa Cum Laude)

Course No.	Description	Cr. Hours	Grade
<b>FIRST SEMESTER</b>			
4244	Ethics and Responsibility	4	A
6523	Mathematical Tools	4	A
6524	Advanced Physics	4	A
6525	English	4	A-
6527	Communications	4	A-
<b>SECOND SEMESTER</b>			
4810	General Biochemistry	5	A-
13900	Pathogenic bacteriology	5	A
13890	Advanced Microbial Physiology	5	A
13895	Advanced Mycology	5	A
13898	Host-Parasite Biology	5	A
<b>THIRD SEMESTER</b>			
5298	Protein Structure	5	A-
4497	Cardiovascular Fluid Mechanics	5	B+
13880	Host-Microbial Interactions	5	A
13897	Algal Ecology	5	A
13892	Advanced Immunology	5	A

[www.belforduniversity.org](http://www.belforduniversity.org)

http://www.belforduniversity.org/university/InsideBelford.html

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Degree

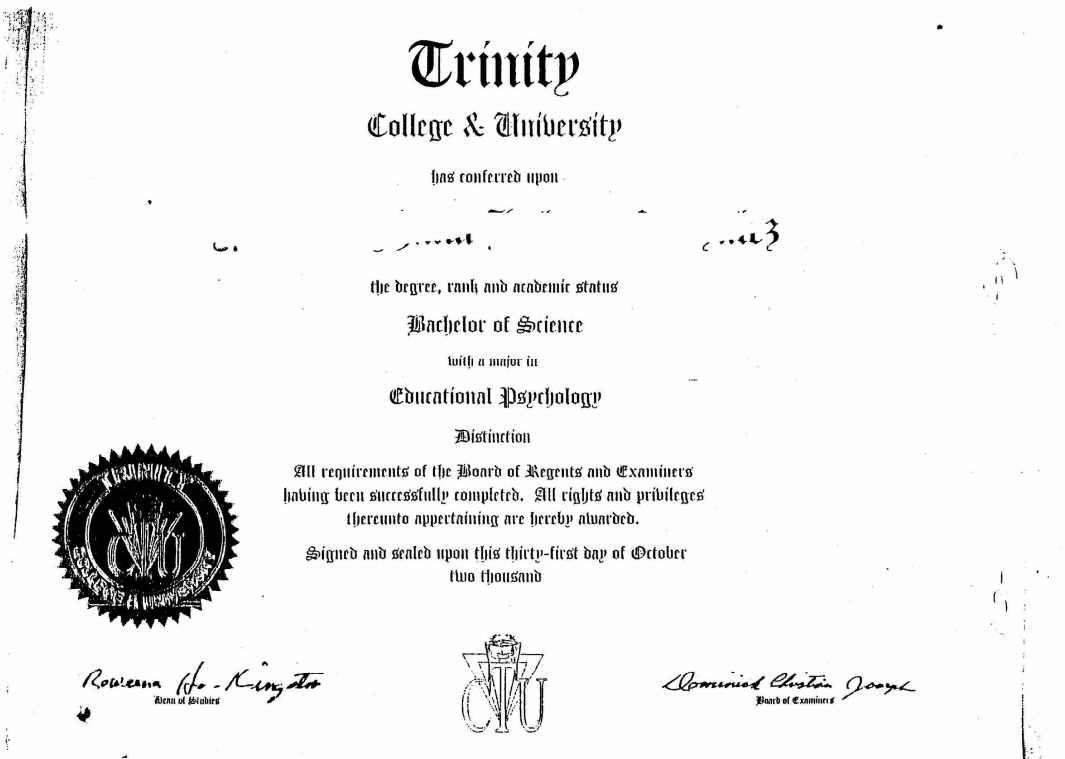
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## Trinity College & University: Where Is It Located?



From  
<http://www.trinity-college.edu/contact.html>

### Contact Information

Toll free in the United States  
(866) 831-4854

Pakistan-English, Arabic & Urdu Languages  
Regional Director & Agent.  
Regional office:  
Suite No. M1 & M2  
21/C, Sunset Commercial Street No.1. Phase IV.  
off. Sunset Blvd. D.H.A.  
Karachi. Pakistan.  
Telephones: 9221-5802497 & 9221-5802498.  
Tele Fax: 9221-5886988  
Mobile Phone: 92-0320-4247200  
email: [bsuleman@super.net.pk](mailto:bsuleman@super.net.pk)

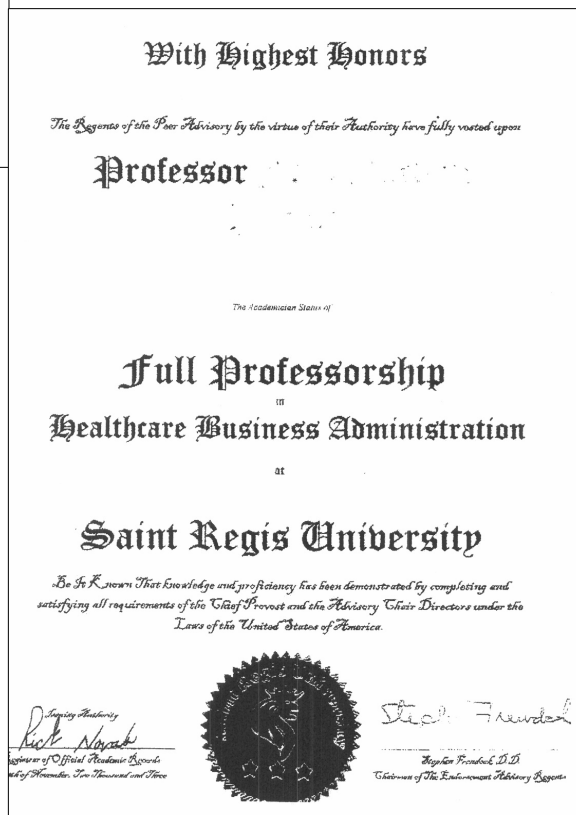
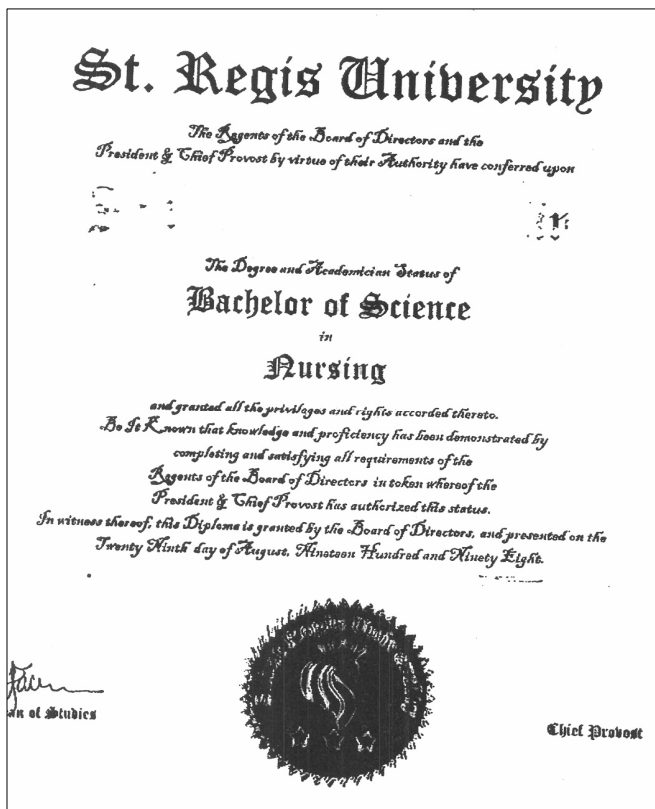
Trinity College & University  
Automated Student Records Retrieval Office Only  
901 Veterans Blvd. Ste. #203  
Metairie, LA. 70005  
Email: [degreehelp@trinity-college.edu](mailto:degreehelp@trinity-college.edu)

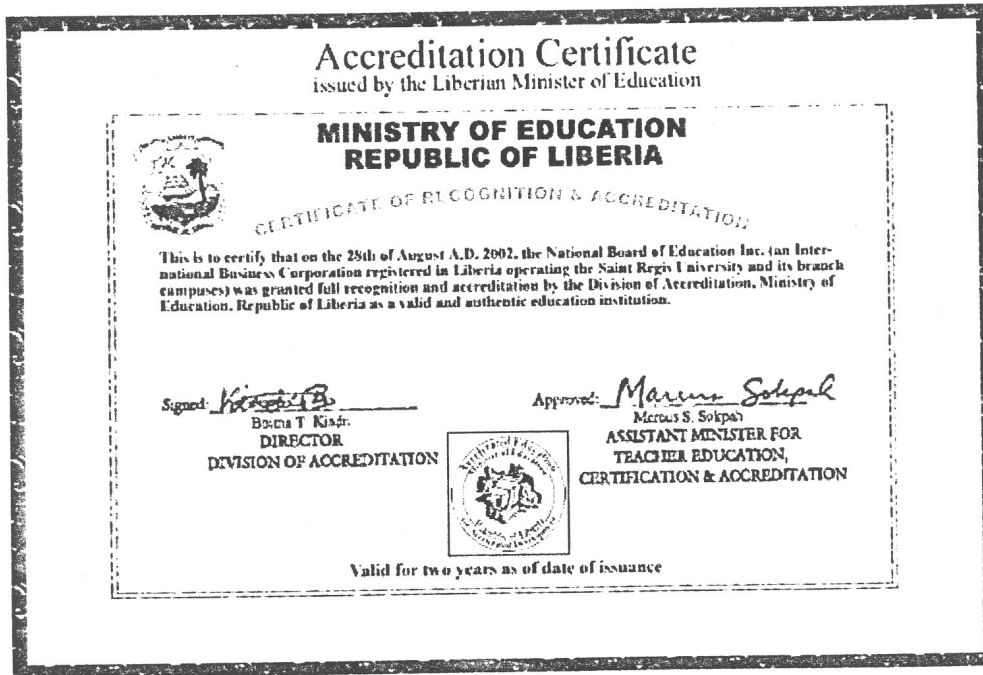
CLARK G. KHADIGE,  
TC&U representative for Lebanon  
E-mail : [cgcjmk@inco.com.lb](mailto:cgcjmk@inco.com.lb)  
Tel : 961 - 3 - 84 94 46  
Address : Al Marsad Street - Dr Maalouf Bldg -  
Achrafieh/Geitawi - Beirut - Lebanon

Toll Free (866) 831-4854  
Email (for verifications): [degreehelp@trinity-college.edu](mailto:degreehelp@trinity-college.edu)  
Fax (for verifications - toll free): 1-866-831-4857

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## “St. Regis University” When “Government Recognition” Is Not What It Appears to Be





Getting Started Latest Headlines

## Indictments accuse eight of running diploma mills

Spokane operation allegedly sold thousands of fraudulent degrees

[Bill Morlin](#)  
Staff writer  
October 6, 2005

For the first time in the United States, federal investigators in Spokane have obtained indictments against eight people accused of operating Internet-based diploma mills, making millions by selling bogus college degrees and "defrauding consumers worldwide."

The 40-page indictment accuses the eight of conspiring to commit wire and mail fraud during the past six years as they operated out of businesses in Mead and Hillyard, and a Post Falls office complex.

Accused masterminds Dixie Ellen Randock and her husband, Steven Karl Randock, both of Colbert, also were indicted for conspiracy to launder more than \$1 million they collected from selling bogus degrees.

The indictment alleges that during the past six years the Spokane-based operation sold "thousands of degrees," using various diploma mills including Saint Regis University, Robertstown University, James Monroe University and Trinity Christian School.

The indictment also seeks criminal forfeiture of the Randocks' late-model Jaguar, their home and acreage at 3127 E. River Glen

**Information**

**U.S. Attorney's hotline**

U.S. Attorney's Office hotline  
for anyone with information:  
(800) 775-6357

## About the Presenter

### Ms. Ann M. Koenig

Southwest Regional Director, Credential Evaluation Services  
AACRAO International Education Services, USA

**Ann M. Koenig** has worked with AACRAO International Education Services since 2002. Over the last 18 years she has worked in three private foreign credential evaluation services in the United States, and held positions in admissions, student records management and academic advising at Cardinal Stritch University (Milwaukee, Wisconsin), the University of Maryland University College program in Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany, Golden Gate University (San Francisco), and the University of California, Berkeley.

Ms. Koenig is an active member of AACRAO, NAFSA: Association of International Educators, and EAIE. She is a contributing author of the new AACRAO *Guide to Bogus institutions and Documents*, published in April 2006, as well as AACRAO's *Foreign Educational Credentials Required, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition* (2004), *A Guide to Educational Systems Around the World* (NAFSA, 1999), and the 1992 PIER Workshop Report *The Admission and Placement of Students from the Republic of Poland*. Her monograph *An Overview of the Educational Systems of Albania* was published by Educational Credential Evaluators, Milwaukee, in 1993.

As a specialist in the regions of east/central Europe and Eurasia, Ms. Koenig is writing the chapter on the educational system of Uzbekistan for an upcoming AACRAO volume on the educational systems of Central Asia.

Ms. Koenig has given numerous presentations on topics related to educational systems, credential evaluation, best practices, document fraud and diploma mills. She works with an international group of researchers from the education, government, security and consumer protection sectors who informally call themselves "the fraud busters" and give presentations and workshops at AACRAO, NAFSA, EAIE and many other conferences. The new AACRAO *Guide to Bogus institutions and Documents* features articles written by Ms. Koenig and her "fraud buster" colleagues.

**AACRAO**, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, was established in 1910 as a non-governmental, non-profit professional membership association. Today it represents more than 9000 individuals working in the areas of enrollment and student records management, from about 2300 institutions in the United States and over 35 other countries. AACRAO International Education Services support the international admissions and student record management work of higher education institutions, through research and publication, training programs, foreign credential evaluation services, and consulting services.

### AACRAO INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION SERVICES

#### Main Office:

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