



HR Resources | Best Practices Series

# HOW TO SPOT A FAKE DIPLOMA

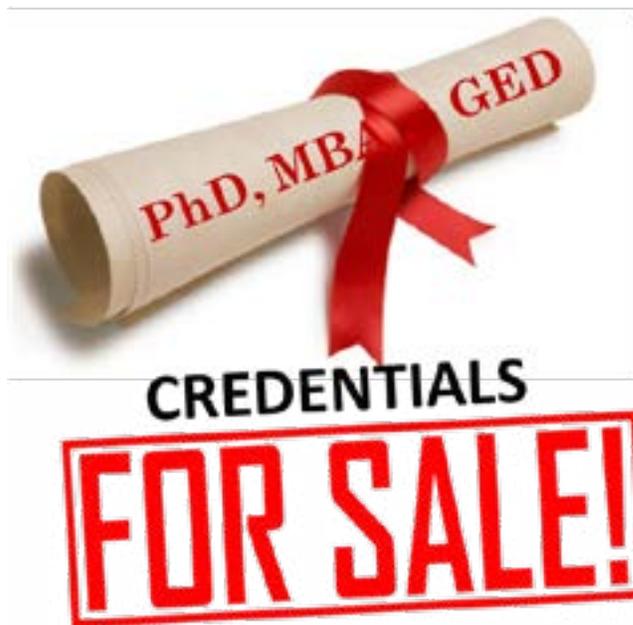


# *Confused about Diploma Mills? We can understand why.*

In the HR world, it is pretty common practice to verify an applicant's educational credentials. Most of the time, the candidate has actually earned the degree they have listed on their resume, but in our industry we see more than our fair share of fake diplomas. Many of these fake documents come from what are known as 'degree mills' or 'diploma mills'.

Diploma mills and degree mills are terms that are used pretty interchangeably, but yes, there is a difference between the two of them. A diploma mill issues fake diplomas from a real college and a degree mill issues a diploma from a fictitious college or university.

The colleges used by diploma mills may be considered an educational institution, but they are not accredited. It is important that a school is accredited because schools that are accredited must follow a strict set of standards and their students must follow a norm for their academics. You wouldn't want to hire an employee who says they have a bachelor's degree, when they completed their program in a few short weeks. They absolutely will not have the experience as someone who actually did earn the same degree from an



accredited school.

Similarly, degree mills are a huge problem when the issuing “school” is not accredited. Many times, the degree provided by a degree mill, will look authentic, the school’s website seems legitimate and there may even be a call center where employees verify the validity of the degree! People actually pay for these services to appear that they are a qualified candidate for your position, but they have done little to no work at all.

George Gollin, a board member of the U.S.-based Council for Higher Education Accreditation, told CNN he estimates that more than 100,000 fake degrees are sold each year in the U.S. alone.

If educational credentials are important to the position you are seeking to fill, then it is imperative that you verify those credentials. But beware, colleges and universities don’t always make it easy to make those verification calls. Most registrars’ offices do not accept phone calls to verify degrees. In many cases, the college has contracted with a third party to manage degree inquiries. You have to pay a subscription fee to receive verifications from these third party vendors.

### **Here’s a couple of statistics to keep in mind:**

- The Society for Human Resource Management states 45% of all resumes contain one major fabrication.
- College and University registrars report that at least 60% of the verifications they receive contain falsified information.
- Over 100,000 fraudulent degree credentials are sold in the United States annually.

## Would You Know the Difference?

A good example of how diploma mills try to get away with issuing fake diplomas comes from the Indiana attorney general's office. During an investigation, state investigators bought an Indiana University Kelly School of Business MBA degree from a diploma mill website, whereas the correct name of IU's business school is the Kelley School of Business.

Embarrassment and public scandal ensue when an employee of a corporation is caught lying about their education credentials.

### Examples of recent headlines:

- An MIT dean never received any college degrees despite claiming to have a bachelor's and a master's.
- Former Notre Dame Head Coach lied about a master's degree and being a football legend in college when he never even played a game.
- A top Norwegian bureaucrat lied about being a registered nurse and having two degrees.
- Bausch & Lomb CEO lied about his MBA degree, but was able to keep his position because he was deemed 'too valuable'.
- RadioShack's CEO lied about having a four-year degree when he only had a three-year degree.
- The CEO of Veritas Software lied about getting an MBA from Stanford. The



company's stock dove when the truth surfaced.

- Yahoo's CEO never earned the computer science degree he claimed he had.

## Higher Education Accreditation

The federal government does not regulate the accreditation of schools; instead this is done by specific agencies. There are two types of accreditation agencies, Regional and National.

Regional accreditation has six major agencies that work within a generalized location. They all have the same standards which they use to determine if a university or college is up to par. This meticulous investigation includes the inspection of the school's academic standards, requirements for admission, opportunity for financial aid and the maintenance of said standards during future examinations. The major Regional Accreditation Agencies in the U.S. are:

- Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools
- New England Association of Schools and Colleges
- North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
- Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
- Western Association of Schools and Colleges

National accreditation is the basically the same as Regional accreditation except it applies to schools that are very specialized. These schools include special trade schools and specific programs, like nursing. They are not limited by location and can also have both national and regional accreditations. There are 52 different National Accreditation Agencies throughout the U.S. Some of the general agencies are:

- Distance Education and Training Council
- Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools
- Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of Technology
- Accrediting Council for Continuing Education and Training
- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
- Council on Occupational Education

Furthermore, there are two types of accreditation for schools; Institutional and Specialized. The more encompassing type, Institutional accreditation, is more general and is granted by reviewing the curriculum. Specialized Accreditation is given to schools that have very specific programs or specialized schools or departments. Many times, if an institution has Specialized Accreditation, it also has Regional Accreditation as well. Some examples of accreditation councils for specialized accreditation include:



- Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology
- American Bar Association
- American Dental Association Commission
- American Veterinary Medical Association
- Association of American Medical Colleges
- Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business
- National Architectural Accrediting Board

The United States Department of Education lists the accrediting agencies on their website at <http://www.ed.gov>.

Just because a candidate provides a diploma does not mean it is authentic. The Human Resources department is usually the front line of defense in protecting your company from a bad hire and thereby protecting your organization's reputation and brand.

## **Red Flags That May Indicate Fraud:**

1. Degrees that were earned in a suspiciously short amount of time - It usually takes at least four years to earn a bachelor's degree. If there is a short gap between the attendance start date and graduation date, it's possible this could be a fake diploma.
2. Credits that were earned based off "life experience" - Accredited colleges only offer course credits based off completed curriculum. When a credit is earned from "life experience" it usually means someone paid for those credits without doing any or very little work.
3. University addresses that go to P.O. Box numbers or suites. A bona fide college will have its own address, with the potential of going to a specific college office.

At Crimcheck.com, we have audited millions of degrees and professional certifications. We are experts at spotting the minor inaccuracies that can lead to catching a fraudulent degree. Our trained investigators know which schools verify degrees independently, and which ones utilize third party providers.

Our educational verification is used to verify colleges attended, duration of attendance, and if the applicant was issued a degree or diploma. Additionally, we can verify if the applicant graduated high school or virtually any trade school in the country.

With the expanding global workforce, the prevalence of employees who have worked or studied abroad the need for international due diligence has increased. Although they take a bit longer, Crimcheck.com can perform international educational verifications as well.

### **Crimcheck.com will verify:**

- Institution attended
- Date of graduation/dates of attendance
- Diploma earned
- Major

Don't let your brand suffer from embarrassment when an educational verification is so simple and cost effective. Crimcheck.com can create a background check package that includes criminal records, sexual offender searches, employment and/or educational verifications that are simple and affordable.

Contact us today to get started at 877-992-4325.

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