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Spotting a Fake Degree

If you're seeking a legitimate, accredited education and degree, beware of diploma mills. Diploma mills are businesses that sell fake degrees to all comers. Often they do not have accredited faculties, classrooms, libraries -- or even a single office building. They exist in cyberspace, in someone's garage, or in rented storefronts that are easily abandoned when the heat is on. Diploma mills only want your money, and offer printed degrees that claim legitimacy but are easily recognized by qualified schools and by businesses where you apply for work. Too often, a person with fake degree is hired and then laid off once the truth comes to light.

Mills Are Frauds

The federal government first began receiving widespread formal complaints of diploma mills in the early 1900s, but the existence of fake degree mills dates back to the time of the Civil War. People with fake degrees are not necessarily prosecuted, but the operators of the mills are charged with mail fraud felonies. Mills are clever, but there are ways to detect them.

There's No Free Lunch

Beware if the school advertises quick degrees with little or no coursework. The imposter may not have a physical address, particularly if it does business online. An online mill may have a .com or .org domain, rather than an .edu extension, but this does not always indicate fraud. Be careful if the school's mailing address and telephone number are in a different state than the campus address. The mill may also offer an undergraduate degree coupled with a graduate degree at a discount price. Look out for diploma "upgrades" or degrees based on flat fees. If you cannot visit the school's physical locale, be sure to research it extensively online.

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