

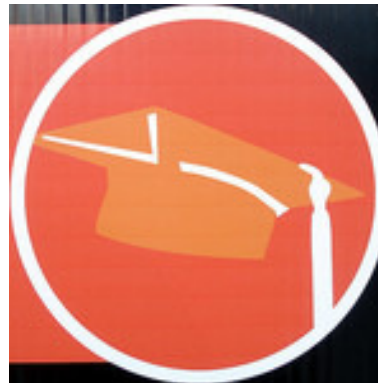


Diploma Mill or Real Online Degree? 10 Ways to Spot the Fake

Diploma Mill Police > [Degree Mills, What They Are and How To Avoid Them](#)
By Vicky Phillips, Chief Education Analyst

A diploma mill, also known as a [degree mill](#), is a phony university that sells college diplomas and transcripts—the actual pieces of paper—rather than the educational experience. Diploma mills are scam colleges that literally crank out fake diplomas to anyone who pays the requested "tuition."

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Diploma mills often promise a fast college degree based on "life experience."

The Get Educated online education team has prepared these **Top 10 Signs of an Online College Degree Mill** to help students protect themselves from this popular online scam.

Don't be fooled by degree mills. Many maintain impressive-looking websites, and all of them advertise heavily online under the attractive terms "fast degree," "life experience degrees," "fast online degree" and "work experience degree."

To protect yourself, look behind the curtain. Flip past the flashy graphics on the website and the promises of an instant degree for the name of the [school's accreditation agency](#).

Then, take the time to verify that the agency is recognized by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) or the U.S. Department of Education.

If you remain suspicious, consult the [Diploma Mill Police](#) for a free accreditation report and to evaluate if your chosen college might possibly be a degree mill.

Top 10 Signs: Diploma Mill vs. Real Online College

1. Your chosen university is not accredited.

Degree mills love to use official-sounding terms to impress potential students. These terms often sound good, yet mean little in terms of educational quality. Be wary of these terms and phrases: "authenticated," "verifiable," "licensed," "internationally approved," "notarized," "recognized by the Pope" and "accredited by UNESCO."

2. Your chosen university is accredited ... but NOT by an agency recognized by the [Council on Higher Education Accreditation \(CHEA\)](#) or the [U.S. Department of Education](#).

The majority of Internet degree mills are "accredited." The problem is that they are accredited by bogus agencies that they themselves have created.

These [bogus accrediting agencies](#)—also known



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as accreditation mills—typically have prestigious sounding names. They often claim to be “worldwide” or “international” agencies and therefore superior to any single agency operating in the United States. Check the Diploma Mill Police’s list of suspicious schools for scam reports and details on the real accreditation status of any online college.

3. Admission criteria consist entirely of possession of a valid Visa or MasterCard.

Previous academic record, grade point average and test scores are deemed irrelevant. Telemarketers and spam emails promise “you cannot be turned down” for a degree.

4. You are offered a college degree based on a “review” of your work experience and faxed resume.

Most degree mills offer what are known as experience degrees. Credit for career experience is a valid option at many universities that deal with adult learners. But the process of evaluating work experience for college credit is complex. No valid distance learning university in the U.S. will award a graduate degree (master’s or doctorate) based solely on a review of work, life or career experience.

5. You are promised a diploma—an instant degree—within 30 days of application, regardless of your status upon entry.

Degree mills are in the business of selling paper—fake diplomas and transcripts. Ergo, they’ll get that piece of paper to you as quickly as possible.

6. You are promised a degree in exchange for a lump sum—typically \$399-\$2,000 for an undergraduate degree and up to \$3,000 for a graduate degree.

Universities do not commonly charge flat fees. They typically charge per credit or per course tuition and fees.

7. Your prospective university has multiple complaints on file.

For trustworthy factual accreditation reports, visit [Get Educated’s Diploma Mill Police](#).

8. Your online “admission counselor” assures you that international online universities can’t be accredited in the United States by CHEA-recognized agencies.

This is a lie.

9. The school’s website either lists no faculty or lists faculty who have attended schools accredited by bogus agencies.

10. The university offers online degrees almost exclusively to U.S. citizens but is conveniently located in a foreign country, quite often a tiny nation that lacks any system of academic accreditation.

Alternatively, there has been a rise in the number of scams where the “university” claims to be located in the U.S., yet specializes in “evaluating” and “awarding” degrees based on an “international assessment process” specially designed to help immigrants wishing to enter the U.S.

Once you have researched an online college for degree mills and evaluated its accreditation

EDITOR'S CHOICE AD

THOMAS EDISON STATE COLLEGE

Undergraduate and graduate programs offered online for busy adults with higher expectations.

[Earn credit for what you for already know. Learn More.](#)

report with help from the Get Educated Diploma Mill Police database, you can make an informed decision.

For more information on how to make sure your college is legitimate, view the Get Educated video "[How To Spot Fake Online College Scams.](#)"

Degree Mill Resources:

- [Online College Degree Mills: How Prevalent Are They?](#)
- [Regionally Accredited Online Colleges vs. Nationally Accredited](#)
- [Cat Earns College Work Experience Degree Online](#)

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[Vicky Phillips](#) was cited in 2009 by US News & World Report as "for 20 years the leading consumer advocate for online college students." In 1989 she designed America's first online counseling center for distance learners on AOL. In 1998 she authored the first print guide to online graduate degrees, *Best Distance Learning Graduate Schools* put out by the Princeton Review. In 2001 she authored *Never Too Late to Learn the Adult Student's Guide to College*. She oversees the best online college rankings and reviews for GetEducated.com.