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THE CHEYENNE HERALD

the local advocacy journal

In depth. Independent. Stories of Local Interest.

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City of Cheyenne Paid for Police Chief's Bogus Mail-Order "Master's Degree"

CHIEF BOB FECHT REQUESTED AND RECEIVED MORE THAN \$2500 FROM THE CITY TREASURER FOR A DIPLOMA WHICH ISN'T WORTH THE PAPER IT'S PRINTED ON

by
Jim Mathewson
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Even back in the good old days ... those halcyon days before the internet ... diploma mills were becoming a royal pain in the bermudas for both employers and legitimate educators.

The recent explosive growth of the internet, however, has meant a geometric increase in the number of on-line scammers armed with little more than a laser printer and the guts of a burglar.

The term "diploma mill" has even found its way into most current dictionaries with unflattering entries such as:

An unaccredited institution of higher education that grants degrees without

ensuring that students are properly qualified ... an institution of higher education whose academic standards are minimal ... an institution of higher education operating without supervision of a state or professional agency and granting diplomas which are fraudulent or, because of lack of proper standards, worthless

Fraudulent or merely worthless?

According to one source, there may be as many as 300 unaccredited diploma mills operating around the world. One such "institution of higher education" is **Lacrosse University**.

Lacrosse's "campus" is apparently located in a strip mall in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. It moved there after the State of Louisiana raised the standards for such

mail-order diploma enterprises.

It's unknown whether **Cheyenne Police Chief Bob Fecht** has ever visited the campus ... er, strip mall ... in Bay St. Louis but it's painfully obvious from an examination of public records in the City Treasurer's office that the City of Cheyenne has paid more than \$2500 for Chief Fecht's **Master's Degree in Criminal Justice** from the unaccredited "school".

Like most diploma mills, Lacrosse University cannot qualify for accreditation by the U.S. Department of Education or any credible accrediting agency ... just one of the pitfalls of having no real campus, no real classes, and no real faculty.

Instead, Lacrosse and others attempt to deceive prospective students by claiming the be certified or accredited by other organizations. For a while, Lacrosse was "accredited" by the World Association of Colleges and Universities, a phony entity created by a woman who couldn't get her own mail-order "college" certified by anyone reputable. She later tossed Lacrosse out for failure to pay her the annual membership fee.



Subject of Federal Investigations

The problem of bogus mail-order diplomas and certifications may not have occurred to the Human Resources Department at the City of Cheyenne, but it has certainly gotten the attention of the United States Government.

Beginning in 2000 and continuing to the present, there have been numerous investigations and studies by Congress, the U.S. Department of Education, the Office of Personnel Management, the General Accounting Office, and several other agencies and departments.

The basic objective for such federal investigations is to determine what effect the dramatic proliferation of mail-order diploma purveyors is having on the federal government's ability to hire legitimately-qualified employees at all levels.

For its part, the GAO ... the federal government's designated financial watchdog ... is more concerned about whether current federal employees are using such phony degrees and certifications to qualify for higher paying jobs for which they may not be qualified.

The problem of bogus schools was brought into sharp focus when it was belatedly discovered that at least two of the nineteen hijackers on September 11, 2001, may have used their enrollment in such bogus degree programs to obtain student visas for easy entry into the country.

More recently, a top official of the Office of Homeland Security was forced to resign when it was learned that one of the degrees which supposedly qualified her for the job was purchased from Wyoming's own Hamilton University, a

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LACROSSE UNIVERSITY - Payment Receipt

P.O. Box 2520
Bay St. Louis, MS 39521
(866) 785-9557 • Fax: (228) 466-9680
Email: finance@lacrosseuniversity.com

Robert Fecht - Student #: 65649

Date	Fee Description	Payment Type	Amount
12/16/03	Tuition	ACH	\$166.00
11/24/03	Grading Fee-AKP - PSM 541	Credit Card	\$166.00
11/17/03	Tuition	ACH	\$166.00
10/15/03	Tuition	ACH	\$166.00
9/15/03	Tuition	ACH	\$166.00
8/19/03	Grading Fee-AKP - PSM 512	Credit Card	\$166.00
8/15/03	Tuition	ACH	\$166.00
7/15/03	Tuition - 07/03	ACH	\$166.00
7/7/03	Grading Fee-AKP PSM 544	Credit Card	\$166.00
6/16/03	Tuition	ACH	\$166.00
5/15/03	Tuition	ACH	\$166.00
4/15/03	Tuition	ACH	\$166.00
3/14/03	Tuition	ACH	\$166.00
2/18/03	Tuition	ACH	\$166.00
2/5/03	Book Order- PSM 514	Credit Card	\$35.00
2/5/03	Grading Fee-EX PSM 514	Credit Card	\$35.00
2/5/03	Ship/Handle Fee	Credit Card	\$3.95
1/14/03	Down Payment Less \$100 Gc	ACH	\$103.00
1/14/03	Set-Up Fee	ACH	\$50.00

CITY CHECK #66219

CITY CHECKS #65869 #64870 #63863

CITY CHECKS #63276 #62542

CITY CHECKS #61556 #61293 #60304 #59433 #59076

CITY CHECK #58472

This receipt was attached to the voucher for the final monthly tuition payment of \$166. That payment was reimbursed to Chief Fecht using City Check #66219. Each of the previous monthly payments ... plus the initial Down Payment, Set-up Fee, and two later charges ... were also reimbursed using checks issued by the City Treasurer's office.

A New Police Chief for Cheyenne

Cheyenne's previous Chief of Police, **John Powell**, announced his intention to retire in June of 2002.

Six months later, **Mayor Jack Spiker** announced that he'd selected Bob Fecht to be the new Police Chief for Cheyenne. Fecht was officially sworn in during the first week of January 2003 following official confirmation by the City Council.

According to the public statements by Mayor Spiker, Fecht had been chosen from among 300 applicants for the job, including other members of the Cheyenne Police Department.

Fecht had been with the department for 12 years prior to being promoted to the top job. Before coming here, Fecht was employed by the police department and a bank in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

Within days after being sworn in as Cheyenne's new Police Chief, Bob Fecht signed up for the Masters in Criminal Justice program at Lacrosse University. The City's many "tuition reimbursement" checks to Fecht started shortly thereafter.

BOGUS MASTER'S DEGREE

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much-discredited "institution of higher education" which claimed to be located in Evanston, Wyoming.

In late 2002 ... about the same time Chief Fecht was being interviewed as a possible replacement for John Powell ... U.S. Senator Susan Collins of Maine got a lot of nationwide publicity as a result of a diploma mill "sting" conducted by the GAO.

Using her name as the "degree seeker", the GAO purchased a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology and a Master of Science degree in Medical Technology from one of the mail-order diploma mills.

It also signed her up for the school's degree verification service which provides potential employers with phony "certified" copies of her official college transcripts.

Senator Collins seemed mildly miffed that the phony transcript created for her by the vendor showed a cumulative GPA of only 3.80.

The B's she supposedly received in Ancient History, Western Civilization, Spanish, and Music Appreciation were okay, but the B in Legal Environment really stung!

Master of Criminal Justice

Like other diploma mills, the Master's in Criminal Justice degree program from Lacrosse University offers credit for previous course work or relevant work experience, but receiving such credits for other work or prior study doesn't lower the cost.

(That's one of the tip-offs that you're dealing with a diploma mill. They almost always charge by the degree, not by the course.)

Chief Fecht was apparently given credit for more than half of Lacrosse's Criminal Justice requirements. As a result, he didn't have to bother with such courses as Organizational Behavior, Sociology of Crime, Managerial Economics, Conflict Resolution, and, irony of ironies, Public Service Ethics.

That left only three courses which required an additional \$35 "grading fee" for each plus the preparation of a 110-page Master's Thesis, for which the City of Cheyenne ultimately reimbursed the \$250 "submission fee".

According to documents in the City Treasurer's files, Chief Fecht bought only one book during his grueling

year-and-a half grind as a Lacrosse graduate student.

The records also show that Chief Fecht's "thesis" ... his final Master's requirement ... was titled "A Study of the Cheyenne Wyoming Police Department's Police-Community Relations".

The City's Tuition Reimbursement Program

The City of Cheyenne has hundreds of employees who are eligible to be reimbursed for classes they take on their own time. It's a nice benefit which too few employees seem to be taking advantage of.

The City's **Personnel Rules and Regulations** prepared by the Human Resources Department spells out the program parameters this way:

"If funded in the Human Resources Office budget, after one year of employment with prior approval from an employee's supervisor, tuition refunds will be granted for any formal course of study given in any accredited school or college pursuant to guidelines established by the Human Resources Office. Only tuition will be reimbursed for a maximum of six hours per year, subject to the employee receiving a final grade of 'C' or better."

More Creative Accounting

Between February 2002 and September 2003, Police Chief Bob Fecht submitted 14 separate requests for reimbursement to cover the cost of his phony Master's Degree in Criminal Justice from Lacrosse. The checks he received from the City totalled \$2504.

Each of Chief Fecht's reimbursement requests was obediently approved by **Rick Abernathy**, the Director of Human Resources for the City of Cheyenne.

A close examination of the 14 reimbursement requests approved by Mr. Abernathy suggests that he and Chief Fecht were apparently

keenly aware that Lacrosse University is **not** an accredited school. The \$2504 was deducted, not from the City's Tuition Reimbursement account, but from other accounts under the control of the Human Resource Director.

Such inappropriate manipulation of public accounts by Rick Abernathy for the benefit of Police Chief Bob Fecht is an insult to every honest employee of the City because **Chief Bob Fecht's Master's in Criminal Justice from Lacrosse is a joke ... and now we all know it!**

CHIEF FECHT'S COURSES FROM LACROSSE UNIVERSITY

Criminal Justice Research (3 credits)

Fundamentals of investigation; duties and responsibilities of the detective; interrogation techniques; search; techniques of protecting the crime scene; collection and preservation of evidence; also modus operandi system; scientific aids and other sources of information; court preparation and case follow-up.

Probation and Parole (3 credits)

This course will cover probation and parole programs and various classes of adult and juvenile offenders, highlighting problems associated with selection and training of officers and their relationships with offender-clients.

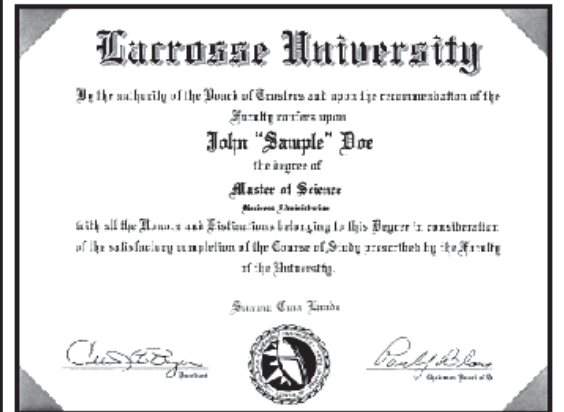
Drugs and Crime (3 credits)

This course approaches the subject of drugs from a multi-disciplinary perspective. Attention is given to the biological, psychological, sociological, and educational implications of drug use and abuse in American society. Special concern will be given to the analysis of the values as theory relate to the development and elaboration of subcultures and countercultures whose lifestyles reflect the use of and/or dependency upon drugs.

Master's Thesis (6 credits)

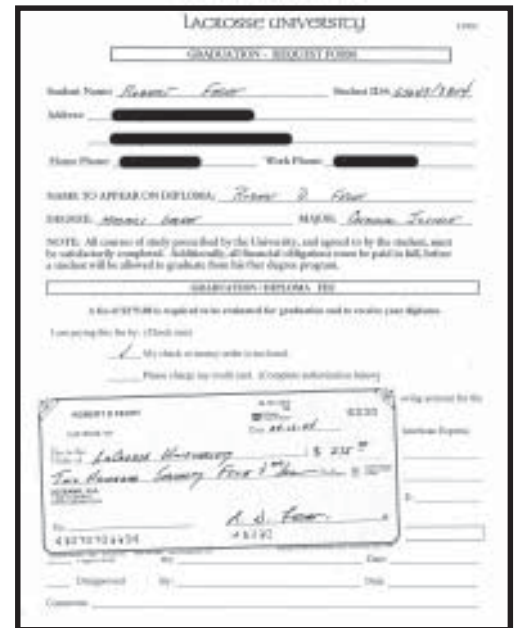
The Master's Thesis consists of an Academic Research Paper prepared by the student in order to reflect his/her own ideas and those of others in a clear, concise, and effective fashion and in correlation with the student's degree major. The Thesis will be prepared in the Turabian (doublespaced) format and is 110 - 125 pages in length, excluding Table of Contents, Bibliography, or Appendixes.

SUITABLE FOR FRAMING ... or POLISHING YOUR SHOES



Like many diploma mills perhaps, Lacrosse University is sensitive to the fact that "graduates" may want to be selective about how they describe their University experience, as evidenced by this notice on their website and in their brochure:

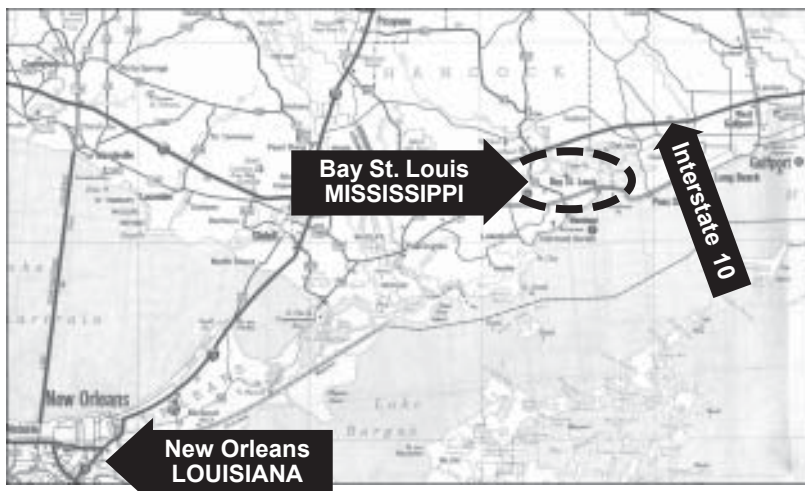
"Diplomas granted by Lacrosse University are of typical university style, and do not reflect how the degree requirements were met (traditionally or externally). This means you decide if you wish to divulge how you earned your degree."



The document above was attached to Chief Fecht's final \$275 reimbursement request for the cost of his "customized diploma" from Lacrosse University.

Chief Fecht had previously requested and received a \$250 reimbursement for submission of his "thesis".

HOW BAD DOES A "UNIVERSITY" HAVE TO BE TO GET THROWN OUT OF LOUISIANA ??



The Bayou State has never been known as a stickler for high standards, but in 2002, the Louisiana legislature changed some rules for the operation of mail-order "institutions of higher education".

As a result, Lacrosse University moved from Louisiana to a strip mall in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, about 50 miles northeast of New Orleans.

The State of Mississippi has apparently attracted several "distance learning" companies forced to relocate when states around the country tighten their requirements for degrees offered through the mail or over the internet.

The area around Bay St. Louis may be developing a reputation of its own, as captured by a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist turned novelist:

"The Gulf Coast could probably be a garden spot, but it isn't. It's a junkyard. Every form of scummy business you can think of can be found between I-10 and the beach, and most every one of them built the cheapest possible building to do the business in. It's like Amarillo, Texas, but in bad taste."

from "THE HANGED MAN'S SONG" by John Sandford

Commentary

WILL POWER -- the character trait which helps a person resist temptations or destructive behaviors

WALL POWER -- the practice of displaying framed objects in an office or home setting to impress or intimidate others

I had never met Police Chief Bob Fecht until a few weeks ago. It was when Dave Featherly, the publisher of **THE CHEYENNE HERALD**, and I went to the Chief's office to talk with him about the City's mismanaged nuisance abatement program and other topics we thought the citizens of Cheyenne might want to know more about.

One of the other areas of concern was the Chief's ill-advised decision to allow the Police Department to be used for political purposes which have nothing to do with real police work. Regular readers of **THE HERALD** may recall the story we did at that time about the inappropriate \$90,000 reappropriation of HUD funds to the Police Department's "abandoned buildings program".

I found Chief Fecht to be a very bright and likable fellow. The fact that he felt he needed to have the City Attorney at the meeting to protect him from me and Dave was a little laughable at first but we soon forgot that the City Attorney was even in the room.

Recently, I sent three separate requests to the Police Chief asking for an opportunity to meet with him for a few minutes. I wanted to talk with him about his bogus Master's Degree from Lacrosse University and why he felt he deserved to be reimbursed by the City for such a hokey diploma.

He refused such a meeting without knowing in advance what the topic or questions would be. I even suggested including the City Attorney and Mayor Spiker himself, but he still wasn't interested.

Frankly, I don't understand why Chief Fecht even started sending checks to Lacrosse University so soon after being named to the top job in the Department. It wasn't a requirement for the position.

And why Lacrosse University, for heaven's sake? It only took Dave Featherly and me a minute or two on Google to learn that Lacrosse is an unaccredited institution which can't get accredited from any reputable agency or organization.

Why is it, then, that Bob Fecht ... supposedly a trained detective ... couldn't find out the same thing on his own? With so many legitimate colleges and universities offering Master's Degrees in Criminal Justice in their "extended studies" programs, why would anyone serious about a law enforcement career give places like Lacrosse University a dime?

As it turns out, Chief Fecht wasn't really giving Lacrosse his own money, at least not for very long. With the help of Rick Abernathy of the City's Human Resources Department, almost all of the money ended up back in Chief Fecht's bank account within a matter of days or weeks.

Let me be perfectly clear ... I don't care even a little bit whether Police Chief Bob Fecht wants to buy a boatload of bogus Master's Degrees or PhD's from places like Lacrosse University.

I don't care if he wallpapers the interior of his home with the diplomas or has them reproduced as Christmas cards. He can probably take them to Kinko's and have them enlarged to the size of Ethiopia, but I don't care.

What I do care about, however, is the fact that he expects the people of Cheyenne to reimburse him for his phony graduate degree from Lacrosse. It isn't worth a bucket of warm spit.

I'm also very interested in Rick Abernathy's role in this little scam. As a human resources professional, he obviously knew that the Lacrosse diploma wouldn't qualify for reimbursement under the City's tuition reimbursement program ... so he found other accounts from which the money could be lifted. Perhaps we should be paying more attention to what's going on down at his end of the hall too.

Police Chief Bob Fecht refused to meet with us in private to discuss this unfortunate decision of his to request and accept more than \$2500 from the City for his worthless diploma. Since I have no other way to communicate with him, I'll say it here ...

GIVE THE MONEY BACK, CHIEF. GIVE THE MONEY BACK!

Jim Mathewson

Jim Mathewson is a resident of Cheyenne
His email address is jmat44691@yahoo.com

Thanks for calling DIPLOMAS-R-US

The Chronicle of Higher Education is a well-respected publication which has been concerned about the problems posed by mail-order diploma mills for many years.

In 2004, the Chronicle did a number of in-depth articles about diploma mills and the sleazy people who create and promote them.

Here is a portion of a telephone conversation between one of the Chronicle's reporters and a diploma mill salesman.

Would it be possible to get a Ph.D. in chemistry?

Well, that would depend on your experience.

I don't actually, personally have any experience in that.

At all, huh?

Well ... I mean, high school. It's not something I know a lot about.

If you are interested in the program, it's very possible that something can be worked out.

Are there other options? Something else might fit me better.

What do you do currently?

I write news articles.

Do you have any other degrees?

I have a bachelor's degree in journalism.

How long have you been in the field of journalism?

About four years.

If you're looking to get ahead based on your four years of experience, we'd probably be able to offer you a degree in journalism.

A Ph.D.?

I don't know about a Ph.D. Maybe a master's, depending on a number of things.

I guess I was pretty attracted to the idea of having a Ph.D., with having "Dr." in front of my name.

Would you be interested in something like that today?

Would that be a possibility?

It all depends, you know. It depends on a lot of things. Our Ph.D. program runs about \$3,000, and our master's program runs about \$2,500.

That's not much of a difference. Seems like it's worth it to go for the terminal degree. Why stop short? That's what I say.

I hear you.

Do you guys offer dual degrees?

Yeah, we could do something like that.

Could you do a dual Ph.D. in journalism and chemistry?

You're really into the chemistry, huh?

I think it's a respected field.

You're going to go off and try to use that degree, huh?

I don't know. Who knows what the future holds? Times are tough. I think you have to have a lot of flexibility when it comes to your job options. Don't you think?

I hear you. Look, you know, with our institution anything is really possible.

TURN THE PAGE FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT MAIL-ORDER DEGREES & DIPLOMA MILLS ... AND HOW THE STATE OF WYOMING IS QUICKLY BECOMING A WORLD LEADER IN BOTH