

# What others say about diploma mills. And, is Lacrosse University a diploma mill?

## Pacific Western University Cited As a Diploma Mill in a Government Investigation

The General Accountability Office of the Federal Government ([www.gao.gov](http://www.gao.gov)), discussed Pacific Western University in report number GAO-04-1096T entitled "Diploma Mills: Diploma Mills Are Easily Created and Some Have Issued Bogus Degrees to Federal Employees at Government Expense". The report was released on September 23, 2004.

Here's a juicy excerpt from the report:

Purporting to be a prospective student, our investigator place telephone calls to three schools that award academic credits based on life experience and require no classroom instruction: Barrington University (Mobile, Alabama); Lacrosse University (Bay St. Louis, Mississippi); and Pacific Western University (Los Angeles, California). These schools each charge a flat fee for a degree. For example, fees for degrees for domestic students at Pacific Western University are as follows: Bachelor of Science (\$2,295); Master's Degree in Business Administration (\$2,395); and PhD (\$2,595). School representatives emphasized to our undercover investigator that they are not in the business of providing, and do not permit students to enroll for, individual courses or training. Instead, the schools market and require payment for degrees on a flat-fee basis.

## Question from A'Man, e.student:

Sir, when you say "In many states the answer is "low standards." Montana, Wyoming, Hawaii and Mississippi are generally considered among the weakest..." What is the basis for this consideration, and how can the Dept. of Education assist these states and low-standard academic entities within them, reach a level of quote un-quote minimal standard?

## Alan Contreras:

States like Montana and Hawaii do not really have an ongoing evaluation process for private colleges. Wyoming allows any entity to call itself religious and then start issuing all sorts of degrees in nonreligious fields (a problem in some other states, too). I am not sure what the problem is in Mississippi but if reptiles like LaCrosse crawl into it, it obviously has limited useful oversight. The U.S. department of Education has essentially no role to play regarding unaccredited colleges, since they are not eligible for financial aid. There is talk of establishing a "model code" for state regulators, that could serve as an example for other states. (Emphasis CH's.)

Almost all of the words on this page come from third-party sources. The purpose is to show Herald readers what others have written about the subject of diploma mills. Readers who want the attribution can e-mail us.

Some of the schools on the Oregon list argue they aren't diploma mills but are the victim of narrow thinking about how a university should operate.

An admission's counselor at Lacrosse University said the school offered a good value to its students who can earn a master's degree in business administration by taking nine correspondence classes and paying approximately \$2,500.

"We're not a diploma mill," said Jennifer, an admission's counselor who would not give her last name. "I promise you that you'll walk away from here learning something. If you want to get something out of our classes, you will. That's the way it works with any class."

The Board of Regents of Louisiana apparently disagreed. The board refused to renew the license for the school to operate in the state. It simply moved its headquarters to Mississippi.

*(Since 2001, when [Louisiana] cracked down on unaccredited mail-order diploma mills, several distance-learning institutions jumped the border and set up shop with a Mississippi address. ...Lacrosse, Columbus and American World universities ..., all of which were once based in Louisiana, now have their headquarters between Picayune and Pascagoula. ... Also unclear is how serious Mississippi is about overseeing the operations in the shadowy but lucrative niche of the education market ... The sudden eruption of diploma mills in Mississippi reprises Louisiana's experience, which in turn echoed what California had been through... By 2002, only seven such universities were left in Louisiana, five of which were denied a license by the state. The Mississippi exodus had begun. ... "When we saw Lacrosse had relocated there we called [Mississippi officials], and there didn't seem to be a whole lot of concern," [said one Louisiana official]. ... )*

## What's a Diploma Mill?

Thomas Bartlett and Scott Smallwood.

While there is no single definition for a diploma mill, warning signs abound...

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), a private group that represents more than 60 accrediting agencies, says that while there is no single, agreed-upon definition, several indicators suggest that an operation may be a diploma mill. For instance: **GIVING DEGREES FOR LIFE EXPERIENCE, LISTING NO FACULTY MEMBERS, and CLAIMING ACCREDITATION FROM A QUESTIONABLE ACCREDITOR.**

**Maxine Asher Has a Degree for You: Of course her university is accredited. She did it herself.** Scott Smallwood

Maxine Asher wanted her American World University to carry the imprimatur of an accrediting agency. So she started an association of like-minded entrepreneurs to offer recognition to themselves ...

In a posh apartment building in the Westwood neighborhood here, a fax machine hums behind the front desk, spitting out pages on distinctive green paper. No one would guess that it's the hub of American World University, an unaccredited institution with more than 7,000 students around the globe ...

If American World were all that Ms. Asher ran, she would be an interesting bit player in her industry. But in 1993, she founded the World Association of Universities and Colleges, an accrediting service unrecognized by the U.S. Department of Education, that gives its imprimatur to a host of alternative institutions.

Almost every day, Columbus University and Lacrosse University, both of which are considered diploma mills by some government regulators, advertise in the back pages of USA Today. In bold type, they tout their accreditation from the association. That makes Ms. Asher a central figure in the shadowy world of unaccredited higher education ...

## Wyoming New Haven For Online Diploma Mills,

David Root, AACRAO Transcript, February 16, 2005.

Wyoming is currently home to eleven online universities, none of which are accredited by any recognized authority. This high concentration of so-called diploma mills is due to the state's loose requirements for who can operate as a center of higher education and grant degrees. Many of these schools offer advanced degrees with little actual academic work. In one case, a government investigator was forty percent of the way to a master's degree in sixteen hours. In another, a student could get credit for a course in hazardous waste management by passing a 100 question, open-book, multiple choice exam ...

Legislation designed to impose stricter guidelines was shelved in December, after two of the state's senators returned from an all expenses paid trip to Dubai and Pakistan, where they were guests on campuses of Preston University, a distance learning school based in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

*(Editor's note: The two senators were Kathryn Sessions of Cheyenne and Jim Anderson of Glenrock, both retired educators.)*

## State mulls online learning,

Associated Press (Mead Gruver), Billings [Wyoming] Gazette, January 30, 2005.

CHEYENNE, Wyo. - The campus of American Capital University has no shady quadrangle, no stately old buildings nor libraries, neither classrooms nor fraternity houses - not even a coed curled up with a textbook in a quiet corner. There's just a middle-age man who sits at a computer in a tiny, undecorated, windowless office in the basement of a downtown building. But in a sense, this fellow - Bill Allen, American Capital University's chief academic officer - has lots of company: Wyoming licenses 10 other online schools that have no mainstream accreditation and maintain only a token physical presence in the state.

Defenders of such schools say Wyoming is forward-thinking for accepting a relatively inexpensive way for working adults to get degrees in their spare time through mail and Internet courses. But others say the state has become a haven for diploma mills...

Because of lax state requirements, more online schools are popping up in Wyoming than anywhere else, according to Steven Crow, executive director of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, the regional school accreditation agency.

"Most other states have enough rigor in how they determine who can operate as a college and grant degrees that it's not as easy for places to get started," he said...

In December, state lawmakers abandoned a bill that would have required private schools to have proper accreditation by 2010. That was after Sen. Kathryn Sessions, D-Cheyenne, and another member of the Joint Interim Education Committee, Sen. Jim Anderson, R-Glenrock, were guests of Cheyenne-based Preston University on an expenses-paid trip to Preston campuses in Pakistan and Dubai.

Sessions supports tougher Education Department rules for distance learning but doesn't think accreditation is necessarily the answer. "I just don't believe that the good should be thrown out with the bad," she said. "And I'm a little bit tired - I know how much money accrediting institutions charge universities and colleges - and I'm a little bit tired that they think they're the end-all."

But Crow and state Superintendent Trent Blankenship, who supported the accreditation bill, said accreditation ensures that a credible third party has reviewed a school. "We don't have to reinvent the wheel on a lot of things," Blankenship said...

A spokesperson for Lacrosse University told a reporter for a local newspaper that they were accredited "through the Association of Distance Learning Programs" and "affiliated with the National Academy of Higher Education." Neither of these organizations (ADLP and NAHE) are recognized by the U.S. Department of Education or Council for Higher Education Accreditation, thereby rendering the accreditation meaningless. ADLP is a "division" of NAHE.

Lacrosse was previously accused of being another bogus accreditor, World Association of Universities and Colleges, but was shut out because they didn't pay the necessary fees (WAUC story) or quit because they provided no service (Lacrosse story).

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