

DEGREE MILLS:

Institutions which knowingly offer substandard programs leading to degrees or other credentials are known as degree mills. These institutions often award credentials based on “life experience” or simply after a customer pays a fee. These credentials cost money but are worth little to nothing in academia and the labour market.

The Council of Higher Education of America and UNESCO in 2009 developed a document entitled: *Toward Effective Practice: Discouraging Degree Mills in Higher Education*. It outlines the following characteristics of degree mills. Any one of the below characteristics should be cause for concern for students, parents investing in their child’s education or employers.

1. When the business offers a credential purely in exchange for payment and nothing else.
2. When money – and only money – is sufficient to obtain a credential at any level and in almost any area of study.
3. When the business practice is accurately described by some or all of the following:
 - Lacks legal authority to operate as higher education institution or to award degrees
 - Requires little if any attendance, either on-site or online
 - Requires little if any coursework or few if any assignments to obtain a credential
 - Does not provide information about location of incorporation, ownership or governance
 - Provides little or no contact information other than a telephone number or email address
 - Publishes false or exaggerated claims of external quality review (accreditation or quality assurance)
 - Issues credentials that are not accepted for licensing
 - Allows entry into graduate or professional programs in the degree/diploma mill’s home country
 - Lists academic staff whose degrees were issued by degree mills or are unable to provide verifiable lists of academic staff and their qualifications
 - Plagiarizes material from legitimate institutions for inclusion on degree/diploma mill websites; and/or
 - Features websites with Internet domain registration that is obscured by a privacy service rather than being publicly accessible.

* PEQAB acknowledges and thanks the Saskatchewan Higher Education Quality Assessment Board for their permission to reprint this document with only minor additions.

* <https://www.chea.org/degree-accreditation-mills>