

COMMERCIAL INVESTIGATIONS LLC

CI TIMES



CI CELEBRATES FOURTH BIRTHDAY

Commercial Investigations LLC celebrated its 4th Birthday on March 8th. CI, located in downtown Troy, NY enters its 5th year in business in the growing background screening industry. Commercial Investigations LLC founding partner and President, Michelle Pyan ran her first background investigation in 1991.

CI opened its doors for business in 2004. Early in 2005, CI became an approved as a member of the National Association of Professional Background Screeners (NAPBS).

“We are actively involved in the Ethics and Accreditation Committee and Client Education sub-committee. CI is continually researching industry changes and potential enhancements to our services,” states Pyan.

Also in 2005, CI entered a partnership with United Iroquois Shared Services (UISS) to offer background investigations to its members. The UISS membership consists of more than 400 hospitals, nursing homes, HMOs, surgery centers, physician groups and other health care providers in Upstate New York.

Commercial Investigations LLC also formed a similar partnership with the Rensselaer County Regional Chamber of Commerce in 2006, offering background investigations at reduced prices as a chamber member benefit.

In 2007 CI launched a new online identification and age verification service for the web. CIconfirmed.com allows users to get “CIconfirmed” and obtain an electronic Certified Identification certificate. Social Networkers and web users can post the CIconfirmed trust mark on their web pages, profiles, auctions and e-mail signatures. Those interacting with them online can simply click on the trust mark to view their Certified Identification certificate to verify their name, year of birth and city/state of residence.

Each year, Commercial Investigations LLC provides thousands of identity, age and address verifications for employers and landlords screening applicants.

“This is a natural extension of our services and expertise. We saw a need and an opportunity to provide a unique solution based on our technical and organizational competencies,” Pyan states. “As more interaction and transactions occur online, there are more instances where anonymity on the web is not desired.”

“A lot has happened in our first four years and we would like to thank our clients and dedicated staff for our success,” says Pyan.

Commercial Investigations LLC assists employers with protecting their employees, customers and overall businesses through Background Investigations and Consulting Services. For more information contact us at 800-284-0906 or e-mail info@commercialinvestigationllc.com.



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CLIENT CLUE

Policy Review

Have you reviewed your background investigations policy lately? Are you aware of all the different types of verification information currently available? Are you using the most current and compliant consent and adverse action forms?

CI maintains each client’s policy and refers to it each time a background investigation request is made. This assures uniform and nondiscriminatory treatment of applicants and current employees.

CI’s staff is always available to discuss your current background investigations policies and procedures to ensure compliance and that you’re meeting your background investigations needs effectively and efficiently. Contact a CI representative today to schedule a complementary policy review.

The College Degree: Fact or Fiction?

Receiving a college degree is supposed to be one of the greatest accomplishments of a lifetime. The excitement of finishing, the feeling of success and the prospect of a bright future ahead are just a few of the benefits that come with a college education. For some, the work that comes with receiving a college education is simply viewed as a requirement of the curriculum. However for other people the work is only a waste of time. How is it possible to receive a college degree without completing the required curriculum? The answer: A Degree Mill.

What Is a Degree Mill?

While there is no agreed upon definition of what a Degree Mill is, Wikipedia defines it as “an organization that awards academic degrees (and diplomas) with substandard or no academic study, and without recognition by official accrediting bodies. These degrees are often awarded based on life experience.” The practices of Degree Mills were first recognized in 1876 by U.S. Commissioner of Education John Eaton, an 1854 Dartmouth graduate who referred to such institutions as a disgrace to American education.

While the practice of obtaining a degree issued by a Degree Mill is by no means original, the industry has been rejuvenated in recent years by way of the internet, soaring these Mills to an estimated billion dollar profit. Perhaps the lure of these Mills is the ease of their accessibility. With just a few clicks of the mouse, you can find your way to institutions such as Belford University or Ashwood University that offer degrees delivered right to your door in just 7 days for about \$450 in fields such as Nursing, Accounting and Information Technology. Further enhancing the lure is that many Degree Mills are now offering verification services that ensure your “credentials” will be verified for inquiring employers or education institutions.

Don't be Fooled by Accreditation.

A standard practice for any established academic institution is to maintain accreditation through an official accrediting body. Degree Mills are clever entities though. Many claim their institutions are fully accredited and therefore offer legitimate degrees. While it is true that many Degree Mills are “accredited,” they are often accredited by bodies that are established by the Mill themselves.

In an effort to validate the legitimacy of accreditation, all legitimate accrediting bodies are required to be registered with either The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and/or U.S. Department of Education (USDE) (*NAPBS Journal, 2008*). The CHEA and USDE are organizations that provide a national advocacy for self-regulation of academic quality through the practice of accreditation, providing scrutiny and certification of the quality of higher education accrediting bodies. This includes specific accrediting bodies focused on areas such as faith-based and career specific agencies and regional accrediting bodies such as liberal arts agencies (*NAPBS, Journal 2008*). It is the duty of the CHEA and the USDE to provide scrutiny to accrediting bodies, ensuring programs comply with the standards expected of institutions of higher education.

My Employees Would Never “Purchase” a Degree!

While it is true that a majority of people would never resort to the use of a Degree Mill to advance their education and career, no employer is immune to the liability of such a degree. In 2004, Laura Callahan, a Senior Director of The Department of Homeland Security, resigned when it was discovered that her Doctorate Degree was issued by Hamilton University, a known Degree Mill located in Wyoming. The mill has since relocated to the Bahamas using the name “Richardson University.”

Similarly, Charles Abell, former Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, obtained his Master's Degree from Columbus University, a Degree Mill which was closed by the state of Louisiana as one of the 12 famous Degree Mills labeled the “Dirty Dozen” (*Irish Times, 1998*). Daniel Matthews, Chief Information Officer for the Department of Transportation, received his Bachelor's Degree from Kent College in Louisiana. The cost? \$3,500. (Continued on page 3.)

∞ INQUIRY SPOTLIGHT ∞

CI's EDUCATION VERIFICATION inquiry assists in determining if an applicant meets the qualifications required of a position and its corresponding job description. Many employers verify the highest level of education completed for all applicants, including high school diploma verification if applicable.

CI's EDUCATION VERIFICATION report provides a side-by-side comparison of applicant-supplied data to verified data. Data elements compared include:

- ✦ degree type
- ✦ field of study
- ✦ GPA
- ✦ start date
- ✦ stop date
- ✦ graduation date
- ✦ reason for leaving

Education is often the most misrepresented piece of information supplied by applicants on a resumes and job applications

This necessitates that a thorough background investigation include an EDUCATION verification.

Characteristics of a Degree Mill

- Lack of accreditation by a body recognized by the CHEA and/or USDE
- Lack of .edu domain name
- Schools website list no faculty information
- Degree earned in weeks rather than months or years
- Tuition paid in a lump sum amount (often between \$500 and \$4500)
- Institution frequently changes addresses and physical location

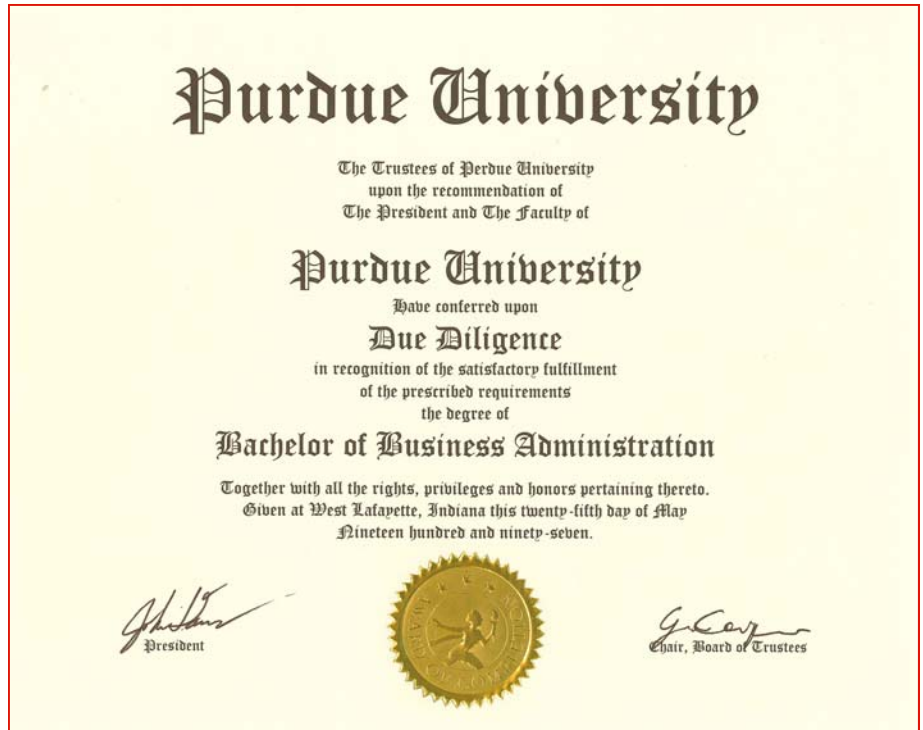
The College Degree: Fact or Fiction? (Continued from page 2.)

What is being done about these mills?

While some states like New Jersey and Oregon have been successful in adopting legislation that combat Degree Mills, most states have been less successful. When the dust settles, a Degree Mill is simply a business that has the same right to operate as the any other business. Legislators in some states have argued that Degree Mills are operating on a fraudulent basis. However as long as no false claims are made with respect to the degree issued, very few of these arguments have been successful. In addition, many states have non-descript laws on the books that infer possessing a degree issued by a Degree Mill is not is crime but rather a constitutional right.

Regardless of the circumstances, it has become clear that fraudulent degrees are everywhere and that identifying such degrees sits solely on the inquiring party, whether it is an institution of higher education or a potential employer. It's an "employer beware" world, so next time someone flashes a degree in front of you, just think of Due, because if he can do it, anyone can!

-Eric Wood/Investigator
Commercial Investigations LLC



COMMERCIAL INVESTIGATIONS LLC

A LICENSED PRIVATE INVESTIGATIVE AGENCY

Dedicated to providing innovative Private Investigative solutions to its clients and working with them to develop tailored services that meet their needs.

Services provided include:

BACKGROUND INVESTIGATIONS

CI provides accurate, timely, cost-effective and fully compliant reports delivered with exceptional client service.

CONSULTING SERVICES

CI assists you in implementing a compliant background investigation process as well as providing assistance in implementing in-house procedures.

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