



What You Need to Know about Diploma Mills

What is a “diploma mill”?

A diploma mill (also known as a degree mill) is a program that awards academic diplomas (or degrees) for substandard or no academic study; and, operates without governmental oversight or recognition by reputable education accrediting bodies.

Two types of diploma mills:

- **Diploma mills that openly sell diplomas for cash:** These programs are “up front” with their clients. They offer customers a diploma for cash only. Both the diploma mill and the recipient know that the diplomas are illegitimate. A lot of these schools operate under various names instead of just one. This allows their clients to select the name of any school they choose.
- **Diploma mills that pretend to be real schools:** These organizations are more complex. They pretend to offer legitimate education/diplomas. Students are often lured in by “life experience” credit and “fast-track” learning. Students have a minimal to no workload and are often awarded diplomas in a short time. Many students graduate from these diploma mills mistakenly thinking they have earned a real diploma.

Diploma mill warning signs:

- It sounds too good to be true;
- No regular attendance is required;
- One can earn a diploma in a remarkably short amount of time;
- Little or no interaction with teachers is involved;
- The activity is not regulated by a government agency or is not accredited;
- It sometimes uses names similar to legally operating schools;
- Large amounts of school credit are promised for “life” or “work” experience;
- Students are charged a flat rate for the diploma, instead of requiring tuition for each subject or class taken;
- The student is given a non-school staff member proctored “take home” test to complete and later return, after which a fake transcript and diploma are issued;
- The program issues a transcript similar to one the student would receive from a traditional public high school. However, it misleadingly lists high school courses and grades for courses never actually taken;
- The diploma looks like one a student who attended four years of traditional public high school classes would receive, implying that its program is overseen or recognized by a state government agency;
- Its address is only a P. O. Box; web; email; or, a residential address; and
- It is not operated by a “bricks and mortar” type education institution.

