

Diploma Mills

Stephen enrolled in a local tertiary institution to pursue a degree in business management. Chris, however, had discovered a university that promised a degree that he could earn from home. Chris was very excited because the university's website also stated that the student could complete the degree in a few months at a cost that was significantly lower than other universities. What more could he want?

A year later, Chris informed Stephen that he had received his Bachelor's degree in Information Systems Analysis and was ready to begin his search for a job. His friend was amazed that he had finished his degree so quickly, as he knew that it could take at least three years, but was happy for him.

Over the next two months Chris attended several interviews and finally received an offer from a firm he longed to be a part of. However,

before he could be hired, the Human Resource Officer indicated that she required a 'Statement on Recognition' from the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago (ACTT) that would tell her whether Chris' university and his qualifications were accredited or recognised. A little puzzled since he felt that he could do the job, Chris telephoned Stephen.

Stephen was able to provide some information on ACTT, having visited the offices prior to starting his degree programme. It was there that he received a 'Statement on Recognition' on the status of both the institution he was studying at and the programme. The information he received on the 'Statement on Recognition' had assured him that his investment would be well worth it.

Having gained an understanding of why the 'Statement on Recognition' from ACTT was so

important, Chris applied for this Statement. He read the Statement expectantly, only to learn that neither the university nor the programme he pursued was accredited and therefore not recognised by ACTT. The first question he asked was, "How could this be?"

ACTT's Customer Service Representative explained the facts to him. The university that awarded him the degree was a 'diploma mill' or 'degree mill'. This, the Representative stated, is an institution that awards academic qualifications without recognition from a legitimate quality assurance agency. She further explained that institutions such as these have little or no academic admission requirements, may state that some or no academic study is necessary, may offer programmes at reduced costs and the option for completion in a few weeks or months.

Chris admitted that these were what had attracted him to the university, and regretted not having done more research. He realised that this would cost him the dream



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job and that he would have to start over. He still wanted to pursue an on-line programme, but was at a loss to know how to proceed.

To help him, the ACTT Representative provided some warning signs to determine what may be a diploma mill. Chris expressed his gratitude and stated that he felt more confident that he would be able to make a wiser choice the second time around. Nevertheless, he was strongly advised to return to ACTT once he decided on a university and a programme, so that he could obtain a 'Statement on Recognition' that would state whether his institution and programme of choice were recognised.

Thinking of higher education? Always check with ACTT first.

How to spot a Diploma Mill

A DIPLOMA MILL

- offers a cheap degree with little or no examinations and promises to be completed in a few months
- has no physical address, but rather a postal box or mail forwarding service or suite number
- has a name that sounds like a legitimate recognised institution

For further information contact The Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago

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What then are the benefits of acquiring a "Statement on Recognition"?

- It confirms whether the institution and the qualifications it awards have been quality assured.
- It states whether the programme has specialised accreditation necessary for membership in a professional body and/or licence to practice.
- It helps facilitate matriculation/entry into another programme.
- It is a requirement for scholarships and financial aid awarded by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.
- It enhances opportunities for employment.

Mutual recognition agreements allow ACTT to issue "Statements on Recognition" on qualifications. ACTT does not accredit qualifications awarded by foreign institutions.

