Introduction
“You are never aware of how little you know until you realize how much is there to be discovered,” famous words I heard long ago but still are so resonant in my mind. They keep reminding me that even though I am not a scientist, the professional world in which I operate has been redefined by researching the obvious to investigating the questionable, the unexplainable and the unknown. It has expanded from the traditional research and analytical exercise of determining the comparability and placement of foreign academic credentials to the investigative task of a sleuth: the investigation of legitimacy. I am thankful to my childhood readings of Sherlock Holmes, which instilled in me the curiosity of looking beyond appearances! This is what the daily task of international credentials analysts or international education professionals calls for no matter where they are in the world, balancing the act of fairly assessing legitimate academic credentials and qualifications while identifying both the obvious and the skillful deceits flooding the market today. Why and where they are coming from is not so much a mystery; but one thing is certain, keeping track of the innovative ways illegitimate documentation continues to evolve is a daunting task. For college personnel in U.S. academic institutions and for professional credential analysts the world over, the detection of fraudulent and illegitimate documents is a constant challenge and not as elementary as Holmes used to remind his long time partner Watson.

Taking into account the investigative road we have taken in this new area of academic credential analysis, a carefully designed methodology or quasi-scientific examination should be considered. This is an effective and reliable approach to analyzing and establishing the legitimacy of documents, beyond the initial reaction that something is wrong (which in many cases is the start of a long journey to uncover the truth). Such an approach allows analysts to conduct a transparent review of the elements physically identified as potentially questionable and lead to evidential confirmation of fraud and/or verification of legitimacy. This should clearly convince all involved, and especially the culprit, that the findings derived from the examination of facts are more than a mere biased opinion, and that the likely analysis of facts by others would conclude with the same results. ¹

Illegitimate Credentials: What, Where, and Why
- WHAT? The dark and hidden path of fraudulent and illegitimate academic documentation is extensive. It includes both international academic credentials altered in a variety of ways, from a simplistic whiteout to a sophisticated creation produced in-house by college personnel in some countries, to identical reproductions of legitimate international diplomas and transcripts, in some instances, created within the US. A recent product on the market is the instant educational gratification invented by the rapidly growing “Diploma Mill” industry. These are American-style documents...
(transcripts, diplomas and related documentation) manufactured, mass-produced and sold to the public.

- **WHERE?** Traditionally, altered international credentials came from countries where public corruption, political instability and changes were fertile ground for such illicit activities. They have been “considered a legitimate excuse” for individuals coming from war-torn countries and dictatorial regimes where it was not always possible to secure legitimate documents. Having their documents “recreated by market educational experts” and “appropriately designed” for foreign export is not considered inappropriate in the minds of many. As for “Diploma Mills” products, they can be openly purchased on Internet, through magazine advertisements, and by dialing 1-800-numbers.

- **WHY?** In today’s world, an emerging public with the desire to gain quick access to postsecondary or tertiary education (inside and outside their native territory), and in search of better professional opportunities and higher pay, are increasingly contributing to the traffic of illegitimate documentation and products acquired through the carefully marketed campaigns of the “Diploma Mill” industry. This has all been made possible by the advances in modern technology, which, while expediting the analytical and investigative work of international credential analysts, has also facilitated the fast production and advertising of illegitimate academic documents worldwide. Opportunities for fraud are currently been enhanced by economically accessible technology that includes laser printers, easy-to-program type fonts and designs, color photocopying, scanning devices, and easy access to academic information through web-based catalogs and institutional web pages, which, in some cases, may include the signature of institutional officials, ready for scanning, copying and reproduction.

The unfortunate reality is that unawareness of the problem (by both employers and educators) and lack of knowledge about the variety of illegitimate documents in the market are allowing these products, with their inherently growing consequences, to impact all aspects of society: economics, education and the general welfare of the public.

**Fraud and Illegitimate Documentation**

The definition of fraud, according to the Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, includes the willful misrepresentation or alteration of a written document (e.g., changing information, inserting new information or appending someone else’s signature) to deceive others. This misrepresentation may include a lie as well as failure to disclose information; it is never considered the result of accident or negligence because of its intended purpose. In the United States, forgery in its many manifestations may be considered a state or federal crime. *(The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 6th ed. Copyright © 2004, Columbia University).*

Based on the possible definitions given by the American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition (2000), an illegitimate document is simply one
similar in appearance to a genuine one but lacking validity. This description fits the reality of the bogus credentials produced by “diploma mills.”

Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, one can define a legitimate and valid document as one issued and forwarded by the official bona fide authority in the traditional format and paper, and containing the appropriate seals or stamps and signatures. In addition, in the case of academic transcripts, they should reflect a study program typical of the educational system that it represents; degrees should have the official validity accorded by national academic and professional authorities overseeing the issuance of academic degrees and diplomas. Any document that does not meet these characteristics should be routinely rejected and/or subject to verification.

Types of Fraud
Based on the aforementioned definition one can identify five basic types of illegitimate or fraudulent documents in international credential analysis:

- **Altered Documents** - are official, legitimate documents that have been altered through omissions, additions, or changes. This alterations may include, but are not limited to, changes in the date of birth, dates of attendance, initial enrollment and graduation dates, grades, curricular content, etc. (See sample credential 1.)
- **Fabricated Documents** - also known as counterfeit documents are created to represent a legitimate or fictitious institution, and/or a program. (See sample credential 2.)
- **Manufactured In-house** - are documents produced by institutional representatives. These include both altered and fabricated documents in the national language or the language of the receiving country and designed “specifically for foreign consumption.” In many cases, grades are inflated; contact hours or credits are doubled, and professional titles or degrees are awarded for programs that represent only completion of a partial or intermediate qualification.
- **Diploma Mills** - produce bogus products (transcripts/diplomas) that although not defined as a fabrication, the study or qualification they claim to represent is illegitimate.
- **Interpretative Translations** - are inaccurate translations of documents which are interpretative in nature and systematically misleading. Samples include the well known (and often unintentional) literal translation of the Latin American high school diploma of *bachiller* into bachelor’s), the conversion of grades into the US grade scale, A-F, and the translation of course titles to comparable subjects in the receiving country to enhance the possibility of transfer credit. (See sample credential 3.)

Other misrepresentations and types of fraud not covered in this article include false bank statements, bogus bank drafts, false letters of recommendation, altered or fraudulent test scores, and bogus or altered official documentation (such as passports, birth certificates etc. usually requested to verify the identity of a credential holder when age discrepancy is a defining factor.)
Where do I begin?
The road map to a quasi-scientific approach to credential analysis and fraud detection begins with four basic questions:

- **Do I have all the documents I need to assess the academic qualifications of an individual?** Always review and compare the self-reported educational history or ladder with the documents received to determine any gaps in educational progression, and whether anything is missing. This should help the analyst establish what documentation is needed to have a complete academic profile. This may include school leaving examinations, certificates, academic transcripts (always use the indigenous terminology to request them) or examination sheets showing all courses attempted and completed, certificates or diplomas earned, course descriptions if you need to determine the level of studies for transfer credit purposes. Arranging all documents in chronological order should also help the analyst determine if it all fits into the specific academic structure, e.g., English, French, etc.

- **Do they make sense chronologically and structurally?** First and foremost, never fail to compare biographical data (date of birth, complete names, and gender) on all documents to make sure that “vital” elements match the person whose application is under review. In some countries, the national identity card number appears routinely on many official records, including transcripts; checking this data element and including it in any verification inquiry could expedite the verification process. All these data elements are important when verifying the authenticity of a document and establishing the rightful owner. When reviewing all the documentation submitted (e.g., applications, examination certificates, transcripts, certificates/diplomas, recommendation letters, etc), make sure they fit chronologically into the progressive path of the individual’s academic life. The educational chronology should be logical, both in terms of the system and the individual’s age. Sometimes, a mismatch between birth, high school graduation and college entrance dates is a clear sign that fraud has been committed.

I recalled years ago finding the light at the end of a dark and hopeless tunnel when a letter of recommendation, indicating asynchronous attendance dates, revealed that a student had never enrolled at the institution; the professor praising his glorious accomplishments had never taught him; and, the diploma held was the workmanship of an unscrupulous university administrator. This was clearly the path of least resistance for the student.

Any gaps in the educational progression of the individual should be justifiable, e.g., academic failure, socio-political disruptions due to military service, university strikes (very common in some countries), wars, natural disasters, etc. These external circumstances that control the fate of a person’s education can also allow you to uncover powerful evidence. For
instance, an individual claiming graduation from an Afghan university presented a university diploma issued on in January of 1980. Historically, this is considered an impossibility because the Russians invaded Afghanistan in December of 1979, and the country’s educational activities resumed under the Soviet regime later on. The current situation in Afghanistan was clearly described in an article written by Herman de Leeuw for the ADSEC Newsletter (08/25/06). An article by the same author appeared in April 2004 on the International Education Research Foundation website explaining the situation with the Kurdish Autonomous Zone of Iraq. The realities of war and socio-economic devastation make it virtually impossible to identify a reliable source to verify academic documentation. However, knowledge of world affairs and educational developments will help you identify documentary anachronisms, such as diplomas with old university names, unchanged country names (e.g., former Soviet republics), historically outdated country emblems (e.g., Polish national emblem), etc. A recent exercise to verify the degree offerings of the University of Yaoundé II in Cameroon revealed that the transcript was fraudulent. The University of Yaoundé was divided into Yaoundé I and Yaoundé II in 1993; and the program/degree presented to me could not have been completed prior to the establishment of Yaoundé II.

Most helpful in this process is knowing educational benchmarks and how each document stacks up structurally in the educational ladder. This is particularly helpful when you are confronted with “transient scholars” who present documents generated through different educational systems. In a recent case, an applicant presented a certificate of completion or lower secondary education and a degree of Licenciado from a national university in the Latin America. The student’s explanation was that the university had made an exception at the time and students were allowed to enter and complete a university degree without completing secondary school. The university confirmed that the alleged degree/titulo had not been issued.

- **Do they appear legitimate and show no manifestations of fraud attempts?** Looks can be deceiving and this is especially true when dealing with “diploma mill” products and other types of bogus credentials. They are the perfect picture of the impeccable academic record but their educational value is only worthy in the eyes of the uneducated beholder. It is important for credential analysts to know the national system of the country they are dealing with and to become familiar with the various types of documents generated by the system to establish the legitimacy of a document: seals, language, emblems, their proper place in the record, etc. A closer look at a credential I recently examined from Cameroon revealed that the university crest had been scanned and super imposed on a plain piece of paper on a mirror image. (See sample credential 4). Besides missing minor details lost in the process of replicating the seal, the words commonly appearing underneath the crest could only be read if you inverted the document. Small details like that make or break a perfect picture.
Transcripts are sometimes given the “original look.” A transcript from the University of Liberia, although signed with original ink (which I managed to test), did not have the feel of the traditional embossed seal. To test it, I placed a blank piece of paper over the transcript and lightly rub a #2 lead pencil over the seal. A “negative” of the seal should appear on the blank paper. In this case, the test failed. The transcript presented to me was a very poor attempt of “extreme make-over.”

The issue of institutional recognition is of high importance, especially in the case of bogus credentials from “diploma mills.” The appearance of the document is deceiving so the logical approach to determine its authenticity is to ask the next question.

• **Have they been issued by appropriate and legitimate authorities recognized within the national education system?** It is important to remember that, both in the US as well as in most other countries, there are official resources listing postsecondary institutions accredited, recognized and authorized by legislative decrees to grant university-level degrees. This information should help determine if the documentation under review represents a “diploma mill” product, an unrecognized institution or degree, or a bogus credential endorsed by the wrong Ministerial authorities. Analysts must be aware of which body is responsible for authorizing institutional recognition, program offerings, and degree awards. Generally, in centralized educational systems outside the United States, a central ministerial authority is in charged. For a list of ministries of education outside the US visit the UNESCO web site: http://www.unesco.org/education/partners/mined/mined.htm/. A list of African ministries of education, including contact address and phone/fax numbers can be found at http://www.unesco.org/education/partners/mined/africa. Direct links to ministries of the Sub-Sahara nations appear on http://www.ibe.unesco.org/Links/africa/.

When reviewing transcripts and diplomas, it is important to remember that not all institutions/studies are recognized by a ministry of national education. In some countries, specialized institutions/studies such as health, agriculture and military sciences are recognized by the corresponding ministerial authorities. Official recognition by a branch of the government, but not the Ministry of Education, may be acceptable. In some countries, private postsecondary education is not recognized, in others the recognition of postsecondary private institutions/programs is approved by a separate entity within the country, such as CONESUP (*Consejo de Educación Superior Privada* - Higher Private Education Council) in Latin America. The website http://www.conesup.net or http://mep.go.cr/carrerasAprobadas.html lists private institutions/programs recognized in Latin America. Currently, many countries are expanding their quality assurance efforts in education and the list of approved or closed institutions from Russia to Southern Africa changes constantly. In El Salvador, the award of law degrees to unqualified
individuals that had not completed programs became a national scandal a few years ago and lead to the suspension of judges who were practicing with fraudulent “titulos.” The Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l’Enseignement Supérieur/CAMES is currently discussing the impact the increasing frequency of fraud is having on the general acceptability of African degrees in the world (Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo cited.) Seventeen nations are participating. These are Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central Africa Republic, Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, Chad and Togo.

When program accreditation (e.g., acupuncture, engineering, medicine) is sought, the analyst needs to be aware that program approval may fall under the purview of the corresponding professional field. For information on engineering program recognition in several countries, such as Australia, Hong Kong, South Africa, or the UK, analysts may want to visit the Institution of Engineers Australia (http://www.ieaust.org.au/), the Hong Kong Institution of Engineers (http://www.hkie.org.hk/), The Engineering Council of South Africa, (http://www.ecsa.co.za/), the Engineering Council, UK (http://www.engan.org.uk/), or the Commission de Titres d’Ingénieurs in France, (http://www.commission-cti.fr/site_flash/fr/index_flash.htm).

This issue of official recognition gets more complicated when schools claim to be affiliated to an institution in the US or any other country. The words chartered, affiliated, operating in cooperation with, internationally accredited or recognized and the term “authorisation provisoire de fonctionnement” (temporary license to function), used recently to described the current status of the Autonomous University of Port-au-Prince in Haiti, may be a clue. This should alert a credential analyst to investigate the legal recognition of any postsecondary institution claiming to be accredited or awarding “accredited degrees.” The claim that an institution is accredited or recognized by an international accreditation agency should also raise questions because accreditation is a national process not a global operation. This issue should be of particular interest to professionals in the study abroad profession because of the program affiliations and exchange agreements constantly sought between higher education institutions. Consultation with national educational authorities should precede any serious considerations for collaborative agreements.

For information on US accreditation, visit http://www.chea.org. The Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) also publishes an annual list of accredited US institutions located both in the US and abroad. It is advisable to check schools with Americanized names and/or US addresses against that list, e.g., "American University of Hawaii-India" at http://www.auh.edu/worldwide.htm#India. A list of regional, national and program accreditors is included in the CHEA publication.

The upcoming publication by John Bear and Allen Ezell, Degree Mills, The
Billion Dollar Industry that has Sold More than a Million Fake Diplomas, available in January 2005), is a guide to this industry and its products and includes a list of more than 200 unrecognized accreditors. For additional information on this topic, analysts may want to visit the Oregon Office of Degree Authorization web site, http://www.osac.state.or.us/oda/index.html/ and a site prepared by Professor G. Gollin, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, http://www.hep.uiuc.edu/home/g-gollin/.

If you are unable to find a satisfactory answer to the four questions listed above, then it is more than just a hunch. The quasi-scientific analysis of questionable credentials has three major facets:

1. Clue Identification
2. Analysis and Investigation
3. Verification of facts

Where is the clue?
The feeling that something is wrong or just a simple hunch is, for the seasoned credential analyst, the beginning of a journey that may lead to an irrevocable truth: you are dealing with some form of fraud. Regardless of your experience in credential analysis, the road to establish the legitimacy of a document begins with the obvious: checking each vital component of the document in question to determine if any of the signs listed below are present.

- Discrepancies/inconsistencies noted in the application for admission
- Evidence of corrected personal data (name, birth date, gender)
- Evidence of white-out, burn-marks, erasures, corrections
- Interrupted/obliterated lines where information is generally typed or printed
- Missing pictures in diplomas or professional identification cards
- Partial seals on the surface of superimposed pictures not on the document surface
- Incompatible type-face in a single document
- Irregular spacing between words or letters, or insufficient space for the text
- Unprofessional language, poor grammar, misspellings
- Questionable paper quality, texture, size (letter or legal), coloration
- Ink color and quality
- Incorrect seals/emblems, colors, shapes,
- Inappropriate or outdated signatures
- Signature aberrations including shading and continuity
- Cultural and anachronistic inconsistencies (dates, institutional name changes, institutional mergers, institutional closures)
- Educational aberrations (hours of study, uncharacteristic grading system, years of study, program cancellations)
- Non-traditional format of transcripts or grade certificates prepared in a language other than the official language of the country where the document originated. Always bear in mind that many countries are currently issuing official transcripts in English: Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Philippines, Thailand,
Canada (except Quebec), Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Egypt, Israel, Oman, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates.

- Numerical aberrations: credits do not add up and overall grade point averages are a mathematical impossibility
- Creative translations showing American grades, American courses titles, an uncharacteristic or exorbitant number of credit or hours per class
- Presence of various unusually high grades in countries where higher grade ranges are virtually nonexistent

During the initial review process, it is important to keep in mind that, although secondary examination certificates (e.g., School Leaving Certificates), transcripts and grade certificates in many countries are preprinted, documents in some parts of the world are still manually prepared using a type writer or world processor. Also, grades are normally hand written in an examination score card or leaving certificate. However, the document format, the preprinted information revealing the authority officiating the examinations and endorsing or approving the conferral of the award, the corresponding signatures and the customary seals are constant and should be reviewed as part of your initial inspection. In many countries, the only official secondary school certificate is given to the student. Familiarity with the appearance and genetic characteristics of the document, among other things might help identify initially if a certificate is official.

**Analysis and Investigation – General Methodology**

- Know the educational system you are working with.
- Compare biographical data (date of birth, name, sex) on all documents to make sure everything belongs to the person whose application you are reviewing.
- Review the self-reported educational data with the documents received to determine whether anything is missing. Request any missing information or documentation using the academic terminology used in the country. If you use your own terminology (e.g., transcript) you may get a manufactured document.
- Question any ‘gaps’ in the educational history.
- Verify whether the institution exists, and if it existed at the time of the award.
- Verify if the student has gone through a name change and that this is properly reflected in the official documentation.
- Find out what body recognizes the institution. Is it from an entity you will accept?
- Check if the program (major/degree) is offered, if it existed at the time it was issued.
- Find out if the duration (three to four years, etc.) or structure (annual, semester, etc.) of the program has changed. This information can be found these days on institutional web sites.
- Confirm that the degree was awarded. In many countries, a transcript or certificate states program completion but there is no reference to degree awarded. Since the award is contingent upon satisfactory completion of
comprehensive examinations, a research or graduation project, and in some instances a period of community work or practical training, the official proof of degree earned must be requested to confirm degree earned. If a degree is claimed, then the evidence is available and universities can confirm it.

- Make sure that the document you are reviewing conforms to previously reviewed documents from the same country, in the same time period, and reflects what your resources indicate they would look like.
- Verify if the degree is issued in one language or is a bilingual document. For instances, some degrees from some African countries may be issued in French and Arabic, French and Somali (e.g., Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia).
- Review all correspondence received and where it was postmarked. In the case of express courier, track the package shipments. The suspicion that academic documents from Somalia were fraudulent a few years ago was confirmed when the express mail package apparently originating in Somalia was from a carrier that had suspended its service to this country.
- Be cautious of applications submitted just before deadlines, making verification almost impossible.

As the saying goes, “Someone else’s lack of planning does not constitute your emergency.”

**Verification Check List**

- If your initial review and suspicion starts with a photocopy, request the original; modern copy machines can produce perfect photocopies that obliterate any vestiges of alterations.
- Write to the issuing institution/awarding authority, including a copy of the document in question, but never the suspected ‘original’.
- Determine who is the appropriate university authority to receive and act on your inquiry (the role of preparing official documents varies and so does the title of the individual (In India is the Controller of Examinations). If original inquiries fail, send the letter to the President, Rector or General Secretary. Overseas advisers are extremely helpful because they can provide valuable information about the educational system and its recognized institutions; most importantly, they can provide you with the address, phone/fax numbers, and e-mail of the appropriate officials.
- Introduce your institution/organization and state the reason for the evaluation and needed verification.
- Outline clearly your observations and ask specific questions about the information you need clarified.
- If your document contains color or embossed seals describe them and ask for confirmation that what you received matches the traditional institutional features.
- Be clear about what information you want to verify (e.g., dates of attendance, accuracy of grades, contact/credit hours, course listings), or received (e.g., confirmation of degree earned)
- Include your contact information and a ‘case reference code’ to be included in the response.
• Indicate the date you wish to receive a response and include your mailing address, fax number and e-mail information. In a few cases, institutions have contacted me to request additional data so that they may conduct investigations to determine if the document was manufactured internally.
• Keep a copy of the verification letter in a separate file in case the response has no ‘reference code.’
• Review your verification file on a regular basis and send a second verification request to an alternate institutional official indicating the date the previous inquiry was sent.
• If you find possible discrepancies, inconsistencies, etc., and/or are unsure about the authenticity of a document, ask a colleague for a second opinion or recommendations on useful tools to proceed with your initial assessment.

When the Outcome is Fraud
In order to handle effectively the resolution of a fraud investigation it is important to:

• Keep a record of your investigation including a descriptive account of the questionable facts, listing your observations and documenting your findings.
• Obtain official verification in writing specifying the type of fraud committed and keep the envelope in which it arrived. For legal purposes, you should ask for an original response even if the quick response arrives via fax or electronic mail. The latter may not be acceptable in a court of law and the origin or the response may be questionable.
• When notifying individuals of your findings, include the same “terminology” used by the institution/officials sending the verification.
• Develop a system to track and identify fraudulent applicants, they have a way of turning up unexpectedly like a bad penny with new records, new stories, and new tricks.

When you are dealing with individuals already on campus:

• Keep a record of your investigation as described above. This is vital in the event you are challenged and legal counsel intervenes.
• Take appropriate action against the offender. From an academic/institutional perspective, you must review and or define your policies and procedures and enforce the penalties. They should not be any different than those used for domestic students.

Helpful Procedures to Prevent Fraud
We cannot stop fraud from happening but we can create the structure and mechanism to guard against it by establishing measures to control and minimize its occurrence:

• Accept only official transcripts whenever possible and degree verification sent directly by the issuing institution in a sealed envelope and postmarked in the foreign country; keep envelopes and stamps. When only one original is
issued, a certified or attested copy by the record keeping authorities in the institution may be used.

- Be aware of scanned color copies; they look real but removable components such as pictures and legalization stamps are not detachable.
- Do not expect notarized copies to be a guarantee of legitimacy or accuracy. The notary does not verify the content and validity of a document, only the authenticity of the signature.
- Accept only official literal translations that mirror the content of the document in the original language. Often times, interpretative translations include the conversion of grades from a numerical to a letter grade, and 80 on a Chinese document is translated as “A.”
- Translations should be done and authenticated by the appropriate authorities in the home country.
- Never use English translations in lieu of original language documents to evaluate and make admissions determinations. Translations should be used as a “road map” to identify and confirm critical information. Remember, for every translation there is an original.
- Generally, there should be no similarity between the fonts used in the original and the translated document if separate sources (the institution and the translator) prepared them.
- Learn to identify key terminology/symbols/characters in the native language document to confirm the accuracy of a translation. Learn the numerical symbols in Arabic, Farsi and Chinese languages to verify numerical accuracy. Identify useful resources (dictionaries, colleagues, faculty, etc.)
- Be aware of which countries issue documents in English. Currently, these countries include Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Philippines, Thailand, Canada (except Quebec), Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Egypt, Israel, Oman, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates. Do not forget that in some countries diplomas are issued in two languages (national and official), e.g., some African nations and former Soviet Republics.
- Develop a customized credential bank to facilitate in-house credential verification.
- Bookmark useful educational web sites that might help you in your research for the truth.

The task of analyzing the legitimacy of academic credentials demands constant awareness of educational changes and world affairs, the ability to network and expand our spheres of operation, and the sharpness of a trained eye to see beyond appearances. Although one should not always operate under the assumption than everyone is guilty of fraud until proven innocent, the reality is that one should recognize as well as question when the picture is not right.

I could have never written this article or pursued my passion for credential fraud detection had it not been for the teaching, mentoring and encouragement received from various colleagues in the field who were always willing to share their findings, experience and wisdom, and who continue to zealously guard the credibility and ethics of our profession. Let’s keep fighting for those who make their education an honest learning experience, not a trip to “Diploma Ville.”
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