

Security Degree Programs and U.S. Accreditation

By Frank White

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Today the security industry has not only a new friend but also a foe in the education system, Universities who offer security related degrees and their accrediting agencies. It is a wonderful opportunity to be able to earn a degree whether it is a Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctorate in the private security field from a valid University, but how do you know the university is valid in the first place? I believe we can all agree that wasting year after year, thousands upon thousands of dollars and our energy on a degree, which turns out to be worthless or at best unrecognized, is something best avoided.

What makes a degree-granting university valid? The answer to this question is accreditation. Many universities will tell you that accreditation is an expensive and a voluntary process, this is true, some will also say that accreditation is not necessary, to that I wholeheartedly disagree! Possessing an unaccredited degree runs numerous risks:

1. Not being recognized by an employer. How many times have you read in job-wanted ads in which employers demand a degree from an "accredited college?" I would venture to guess many times, employers do not want to take the chance that the unaccredited degree holders coming to them for employment bought their degrees instead of working for them. I will admit in some cases depending on the circumstances and the individual employer some people have not been hampered by having an "unaccredited" degree. However many others have had nothing but problems with the credibility of such degrees and securing employment using it as a qualification. Employers and human resource staff are becoming more educated in the matter of accreditation and you run a risk in today's market holding an unaccredited degree.
2. Many, but not all, unaccredited schools have bad reputations and some are outright degree mills. Some unaccredited schools are legal and do their best to be above board. However look at the company that they are in. Even good and well meaning unaccredited schools cannot escape the stigma of being in the same category of degree mills or at best, a less than good school unable to obtain accreditation.
3. If you obtain an unaccredited Bachelors degree there is a high probability of not being eligible for admission into a Master's program offered at an accredited university. Why would you be? You have an unregulated, unaccredited, unrecognized degree, which you could have obtained from a magazine ad just as easily as three years of study and exams. This is the problem of your degree not being accredited (regulated by a proper agency regulated by the proper government department)*
4. If an employer discovers your degree is unaccredited and you presented it to him as a qualification for your position, you may find yourself out of a job and blacklisted very quickly.

Considering the above four points and add that an unaccredited degree with still cost you a few thousand dollars and much of your energy would it not be easier to eliminate these risks by obtaining an accredited degree?

If you answered yes to my question, the next step is how to tell if your university or potential choice for a university is accredited. Accreditation is offered by agencies specifically geared for accrediting universities and colleges. If a school is accredited then their degrees are accredited. Now we have to find out which accrediting agencies are recognized to perform the task of accrediting. Any agency that is: Recognized by the United States Department of Education or/and Recognized by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation located in Washington, District of Columbia is an agency that can be trusted to provide legitimate accreditation.

The schools they accredit are legal and above board, they must be to obtain USDOE or CHEA accreditation, you can count on the school and degrees being validated as recognized and regulated by a proper agency recognized by the appropriate government body.

In the United States, there are two main types of recognized accreditation. One is "Regional Accreditation" (RA) offered by the following agencies: New England, Middle States, Southern, North Central, Western and Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges. This is the highest recognized level of accreditation. Schools accredited in this category would be institutions such as Harvard, Yale and Michigan State University. Degrees from these schools can be transferred to other RA and NA universities for post-graduate study entrance and transfer credits usually without any problems or hassles. The vast majority if not all employers recognize these degrees and degrees from these schools are well recognized and preferred by government/corporate recruiters and universally respected.

The second type of accreditation is "National Accreditation" (NA). These are accrediting agencies which are recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and/or Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) that are not regional accrediting bodies (*I.E. Distance Education Training Council*); they accredit schools which offer perfectly legal degrees. The problem with NA degrees is that even though they are above board they are not always accepted by RA schools for post-graduate study entrance and may be scrutinized and even rejected by some if not most employers in favour of RA degrees. NA degrees are legitimate, they are just not as widely accepted or nearly as respected as RA degrees.

Any accrediting agency with US DOE or/and CHEA recognition will only accredit schools which meet certain high standards of educational study and learning, that is their mandate; Diploma mills cannot gain such accreditation for the obvious reason that they cannot meet such standards. Private non-recognized agencies are not under the same mandate set by the USDOE and CHEA and can therefore accredit any school good or bad under the sun.

Accrediting agencies themselves are not regulated and can operate legally yet be unrecognized. Many schools, which choose unrecognized "accreditation", turn out to be degree mills. Other unrecognized schools may be run in such an improper manner that they are not eligible for accreditation and in many instances are shut down by the presiding government leaving students with debt, no degree or proof they even have the degree. Not all unaccredited (unrecognized) universities and colleges fall into these categories but many do, is it worth the monetary risks not to mention the value of your education and possibly good name?

Universities outside of the United States which are recognized by or who are a part of their nations legitimate education ministry or equivalent body, (I.E. Qualifications Authority) are also considered properly accredited by United States standards. **

Not all unrecognized accrediting agencies are bad nor are all unaccredited universities/colleges bad. Many agencies operate legally and many of the schools are allowed to offer degrees (I.E. religious exemptions). However, such degrees are still unaccredited, employers and post-graduate schools are under no obligation to accept them, and in many cases do not accept such degrees.

College degree programs are new to the world of security and we have opportunities we did not have before. I hope that my article will help potential security degree graduates choose a university or college that will meet their professional and educational needs and will send the message that accreditation by a recognized agency is important.

**post-graduate admission requirements may vary from school to school. If you wish to pursue a post-graduate degree contact the intended post-graduate school to see if your Bachelors or future Bachelors (accredited or not) degree will meet the admission requirements.*

***While this tends to be the standard it is always best to research the institution before drawing conclusions on the legitimacy of any school.*

About the author: Frank White is a private security specialist with over 10 years of progressive experience in the private security industry in a variety of settings from lodging to healthcare security.