

*Unconventional University
Diplomas from Online Vendors:
Buying a Ph.D. From a
University That Doesn't Exist*

George Gollin
University of Illinois
September, 2003


Outline

- First contact with the University Degree Program
- Checking out Parkwood “University”
- Mapping the UDP family tree
- Who’s out there?
- Verifying credentials of a UDP client
- Who else is out there?
- Degrees of fraud
- Notes and more information

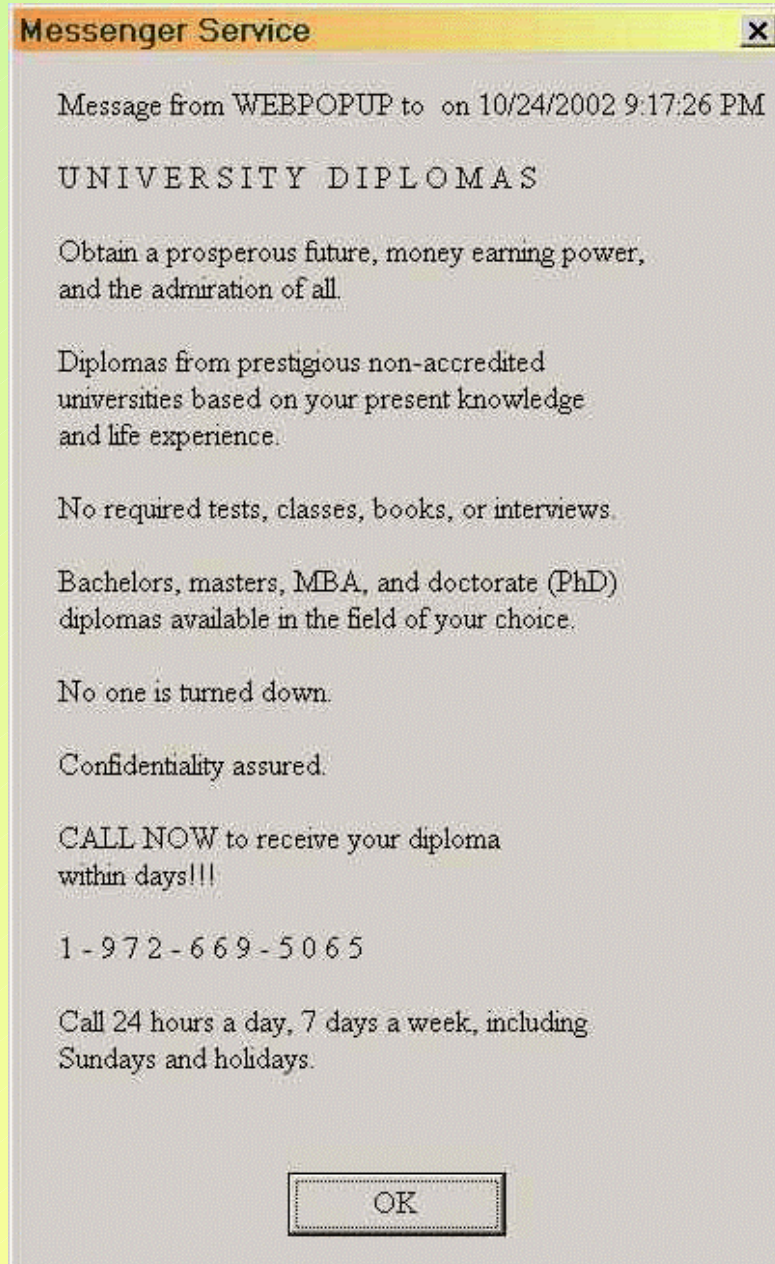
first contact...

Ever have one of
these appear on
your PC's screen?

I called...

 [\(713-559-1760\)](tel:713-559-1760)

to reach the “University
Degree Program.”



“Joseph Kent” returned my phone call.

We discuss (Nov. 2002):

- Who the degree would be for...
- Degree granting institution: Parkwood University
 - “campus is the homes and offices of the students”
 - “credit” for a "student's prior experiences and knowledge.”
 - Parkwood is a “fully recognized distance learning center” [by the “Distance Learning Council of Europe”]

“Mr. Kent” on the phone

- Parkwood not accredited but...

- degree for “business and personal purposes.”
- supporting documentation: “certified copies of transcripts,” “letters of recommendation from their professors,” and a contact address to give to potential employers.
- they’ll only do things which are “legal and ethical.”

- The diplomas...

- “patterned after the UCLA diploma”
- full program (BA, MA, PhD) would cost \$4,400 but I’d get a “significant discount” since only requesting a PhD.

first contact...

So it's probably not a violation of US law...

- Mr. Kent made sure I understood what it meant for a “university” to be “non-accredited.”
- The diploma would arrive very soon (~10 days)

I would be in good company:




More about that transcript

I called UDP again (April 2003), to see what would happen. “Douglas Abbott” returned my call 5/1/03.

How the transcript works: the “professors” on their staff invent courses [and grades!] that would be the classroom equivalents to things I had learned “through life experience.”

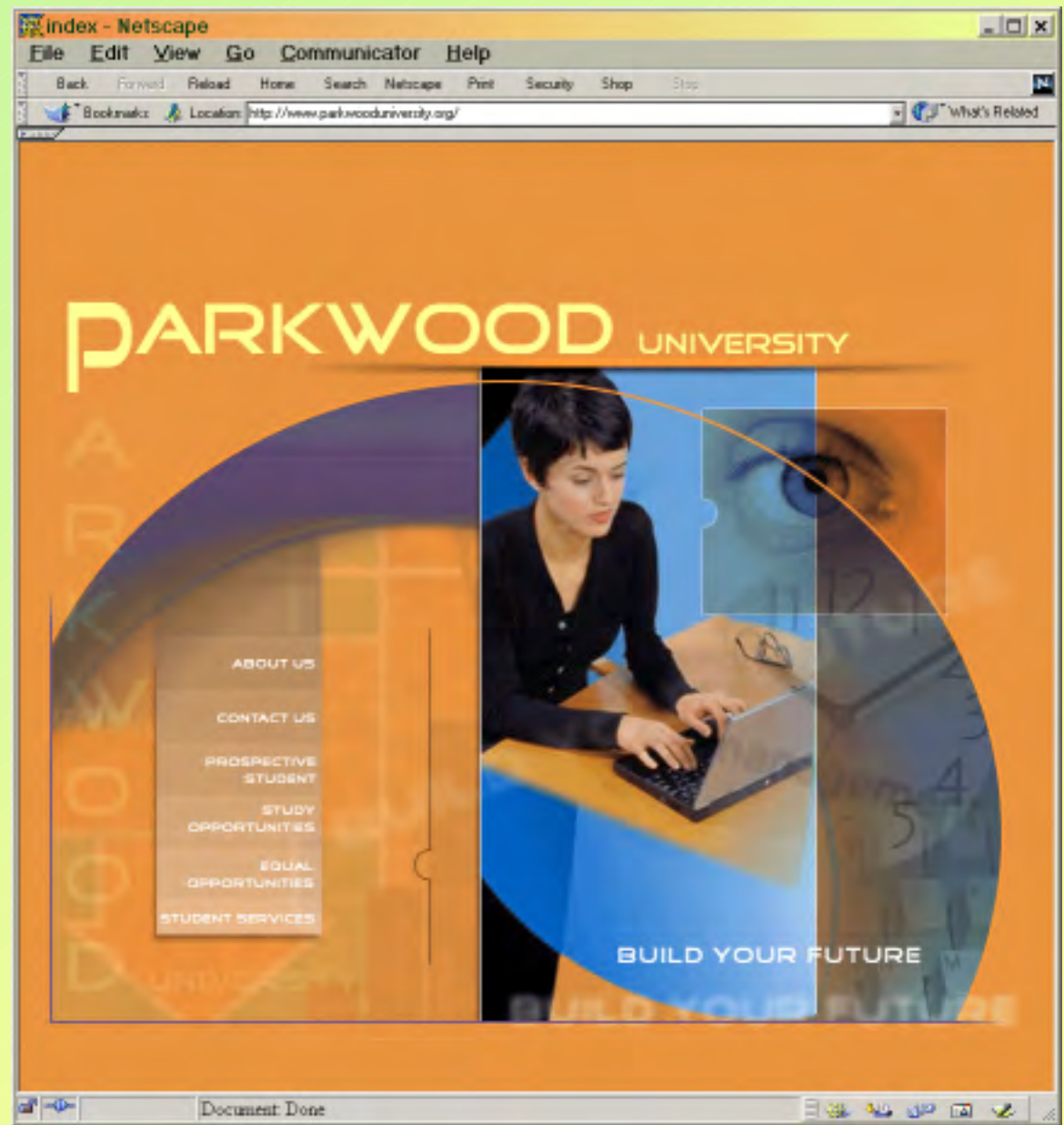
The transcript would not mention “life experience” anywhere. It would be for me to explain all this to a prospective employer if I chose to do so.

So where's Parkwood University?

-  to the rescue! Look for Parkwood...
 - web site: <http://www.parkwooduniversity.org/>
 - no list of faculty or academic officers anywhere.
 - no phone numbers.
 - no mailing address.
 - no departments.
 - no research.
 - only possible contact method: a single email address.

Parkwood University web site home page

Nice graphics!



www.parkwooduniversity.org

Message from “Jonathan Tibbs,”
Parkwood’s president.

Except for an actor, there’s no
significant web presence for
anyone named “Jonathan Tibbs.”

Note opening sentence of
the third paragraph: “Those
of you **whom** are already
with us at...”

More on this later.

www.parkwooduniversity.org/aboutus.html

btnejos - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Back Forward Stop Search Favorites Media Print

Address <http://www.parkwooduniversity.org/aboutus.html> Go Links

[HOME](#) [about us](#) [contact us](#) [prospective student](#) [study opportunities](#) [equal opportunities](#) [student services](#)

[ABOUT US](#)

 [President's message](#)
[Mission statement](#)
[Employment](#)

President's message

Dear students, current and future:

A university education is a valuable asset, which can open doors to worlds of knowledge, enhance one's awareness of the past, present and future, and provide career opportunities that would otherwise be inaccessible. Often, it is the key to providing personal and professional growth.

We are proud of the many business people, engineers and computer professionals whom we number among our successful graduates. Indeed, many employers have found our graduates to be particularly motivated and well qualified.

Those of you whom are already with us at Parkwood University know that our main goal is to provide high quality opportunities to individuals seeking knowledge and a brighter future. To us here at Parkwood, our main concern in meeting that goal has been prioritizing the individual and changing needs of our varied student body. Since our founding we have sought to meet this goal to the best of our ability, and have done so successfully. We understand that adults returning to college, starting college or simply completing their degree, have different needs and time constraints when it comes to higher education. Because of this, the University offers you many conveniences to address the demands of your busy lifestyle.

Associates, Bachelors, Masters and PhD's are available in many fields from our prestigious university. Take advantage of our University's program to meet your educational goals. Most importantly, know that you are not on your own. At every

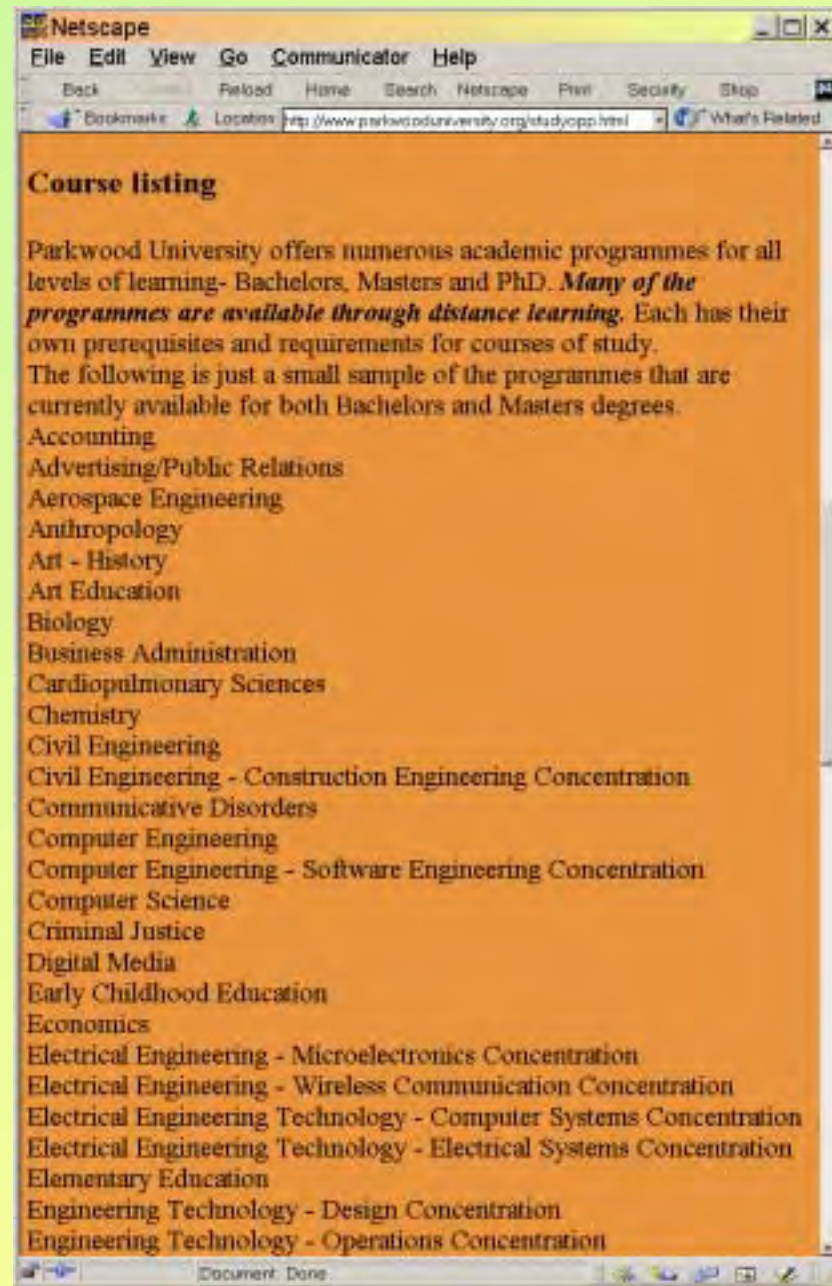
<http://www.parkwooduniversity.org/studyopp.html> Internet

Parkwood University courses of study

Looks impressive, yes?

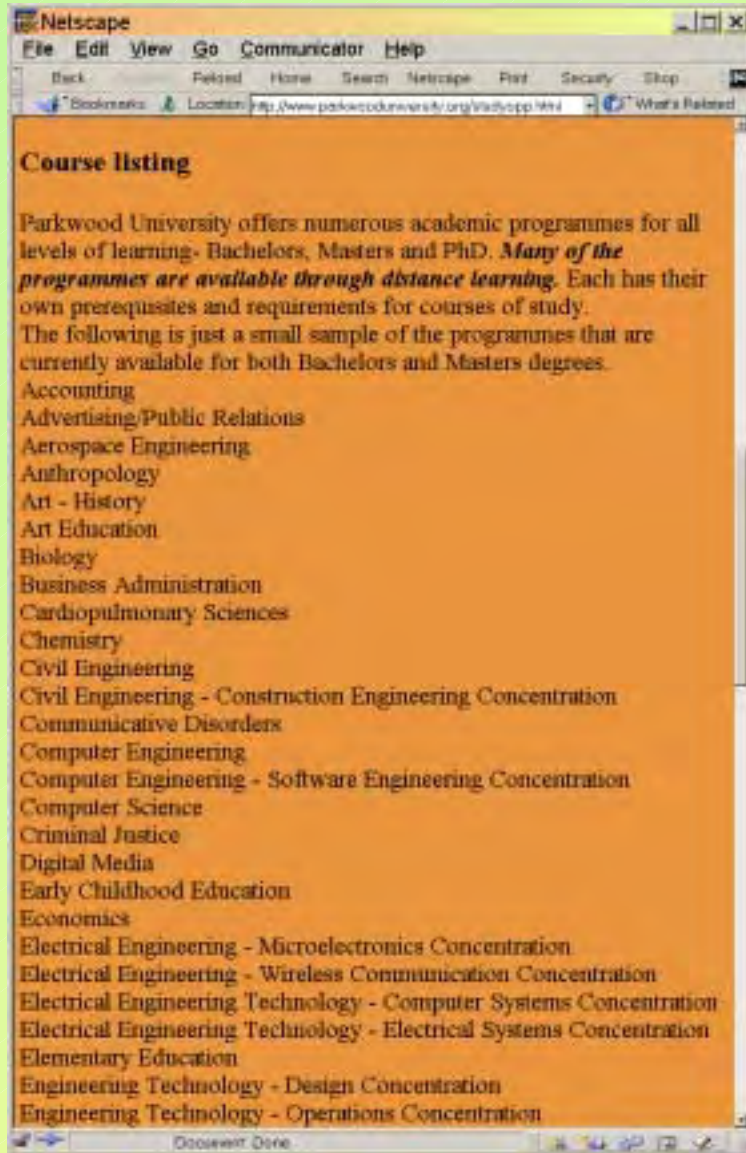
How'd they come up with
the list?

www.parkwooduniversity.org/studyopp.html



They copied it from the University of Central Florida.

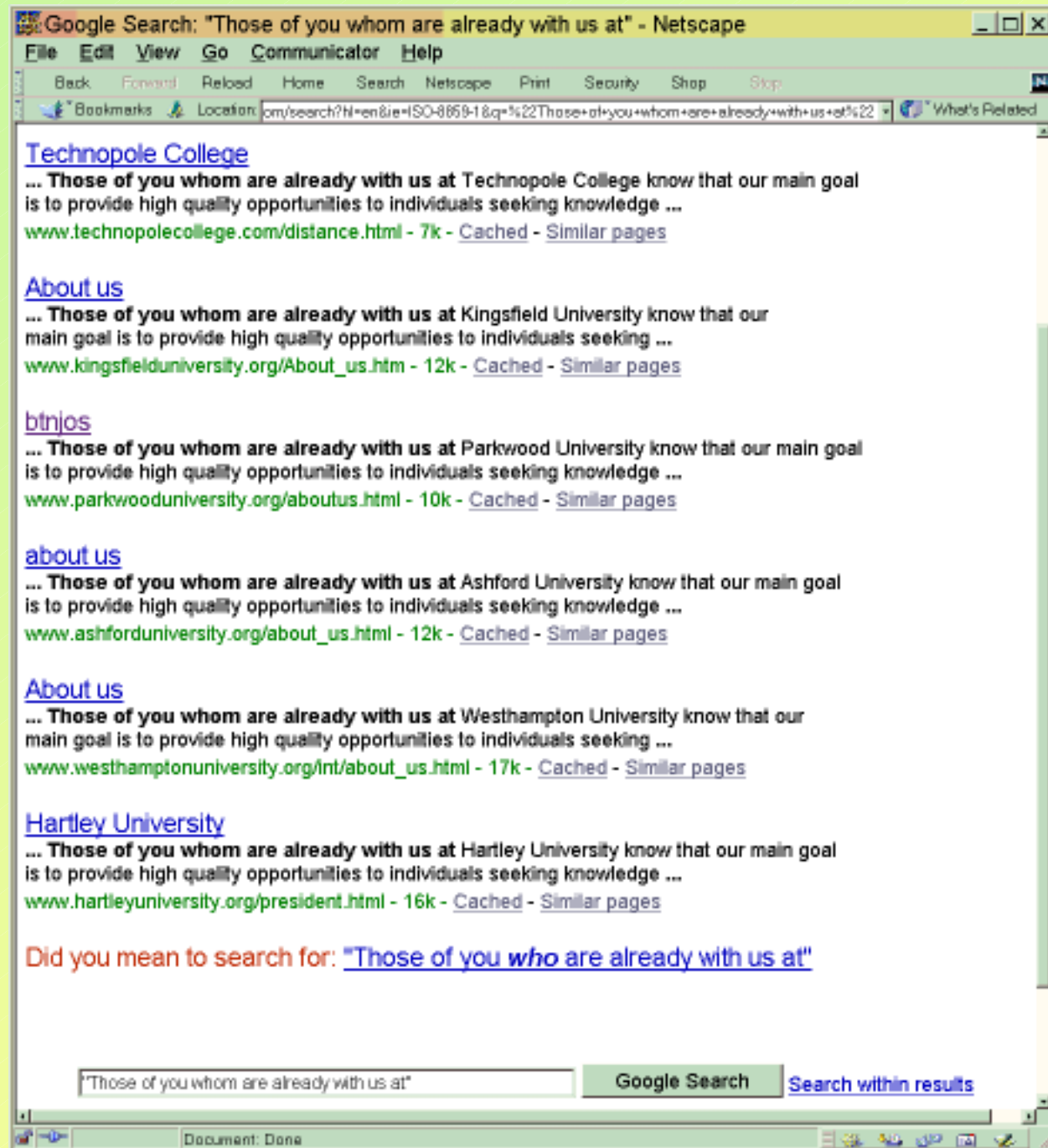
www.parkwooduniversity.org/studyopp.html



www.ucf.edu/catalog/current/UCF_Degree_Programs/

Let's look for clones of Parkwood University

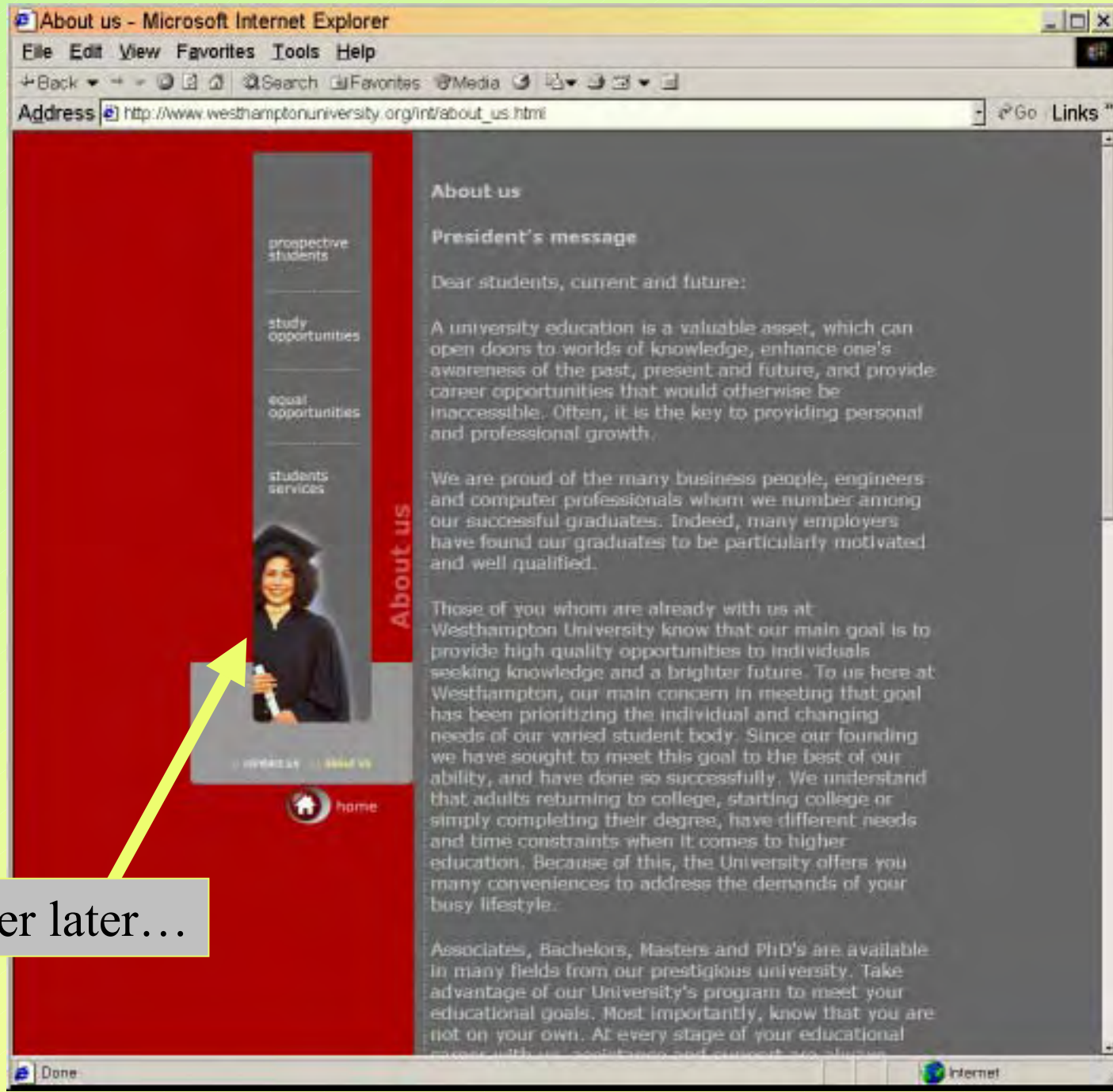
Google.com again.
Search for “Those of you **whom** are already with us at”



Send in the clones!

Westhampton University president's message is ~identical.

http://www.westhamptonuniversity.org/int/about_us.html



you'll see her later...

Everybody must
get cloned!

Hartley University
president's message is too.

<http://www.hartleyuniversity.org/president.html>

Hartley University - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Back Forward Stop Search Favorites Media Print

Address <http://www.hartleyuniversity.org/president.html> Go Links

Hartley University

Providing high quality opportunities for a brighter future.

Home About Us Prospective Students Student Organizations Equal Opportunities Student Services

About Us: President's Message

Dear students, current and future:

A university education is a valuable asset, which can open doors to worlds of knowledge, enhance one's awareness of the past, present and future, and provide career opportunities that would otherwise be inaccessible. Often, it is the key to providing personal and professional growth.

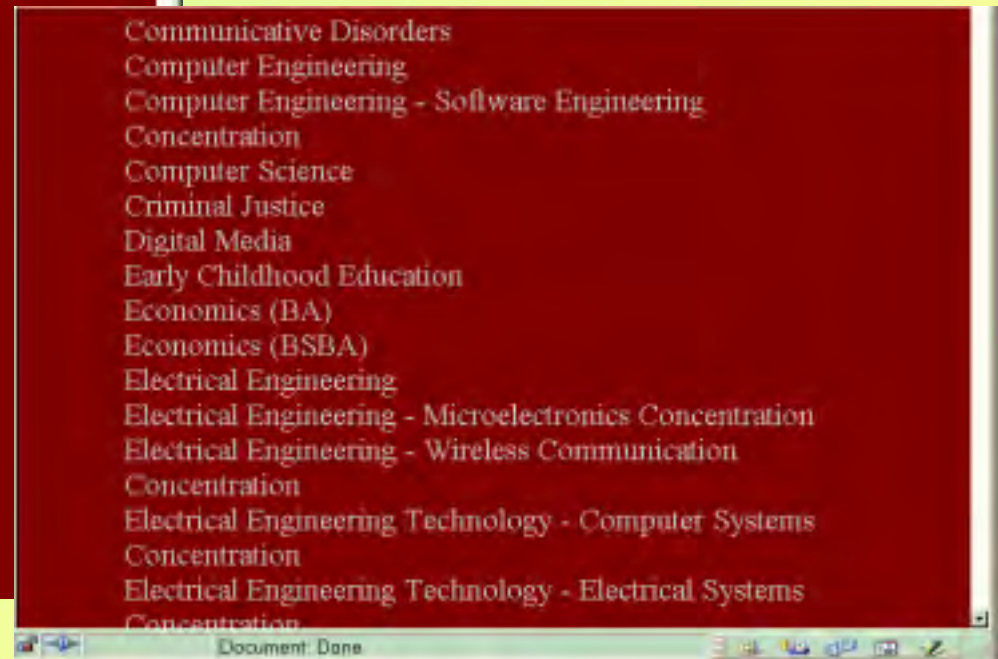
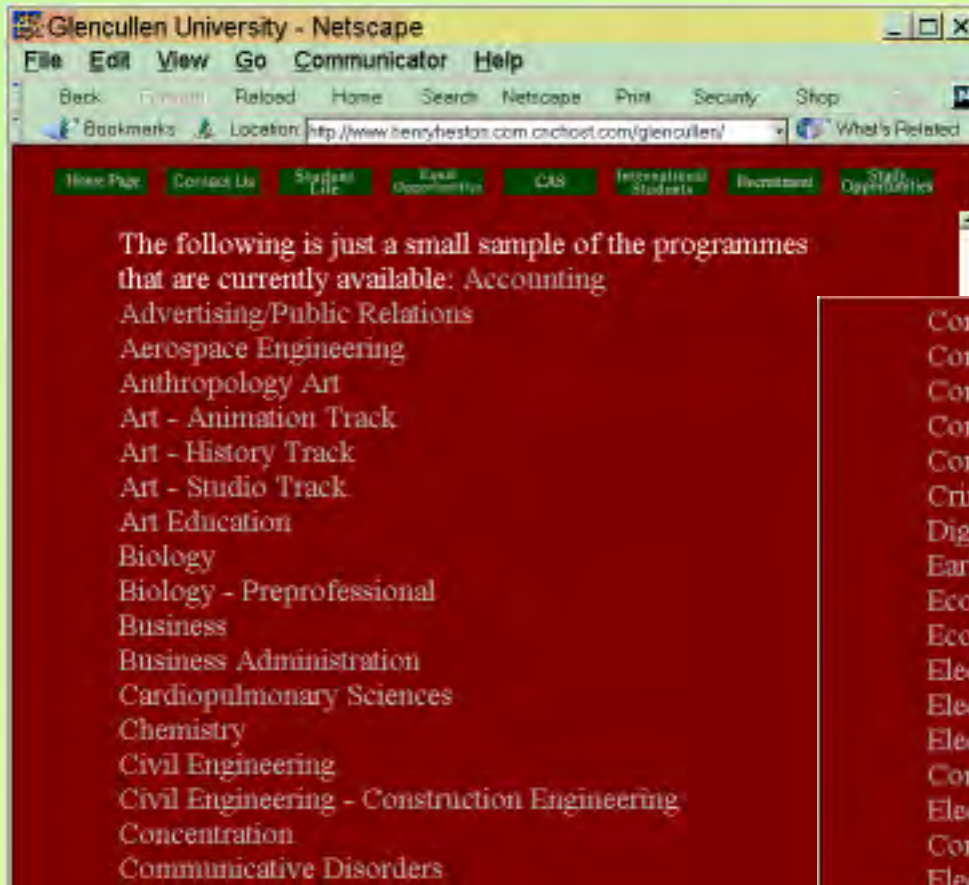
We are proud of the many business people, engineers and computer professionals whom we number among our successful graduates. Indeed, many employers have found our graduates to be particularly motivated and well qualified.

Those of you whom are already with us at Hartley University know that our main goal is to provide high quality opportunities to individuals seeking knowledge and a brighter future. To us here at Hartley, our main concern in meeting that goal has been prioritizing the individual and changing needs of our varied student body. Since our founding we have sought to meet this goal to the best of our ability, and have done so successfully. We understand that adults returning to college, starting college or simply completing their degree, have different needs and time constraints when it comes to higher education. Because of this, the University offers you many conveniences to address

Done Internet

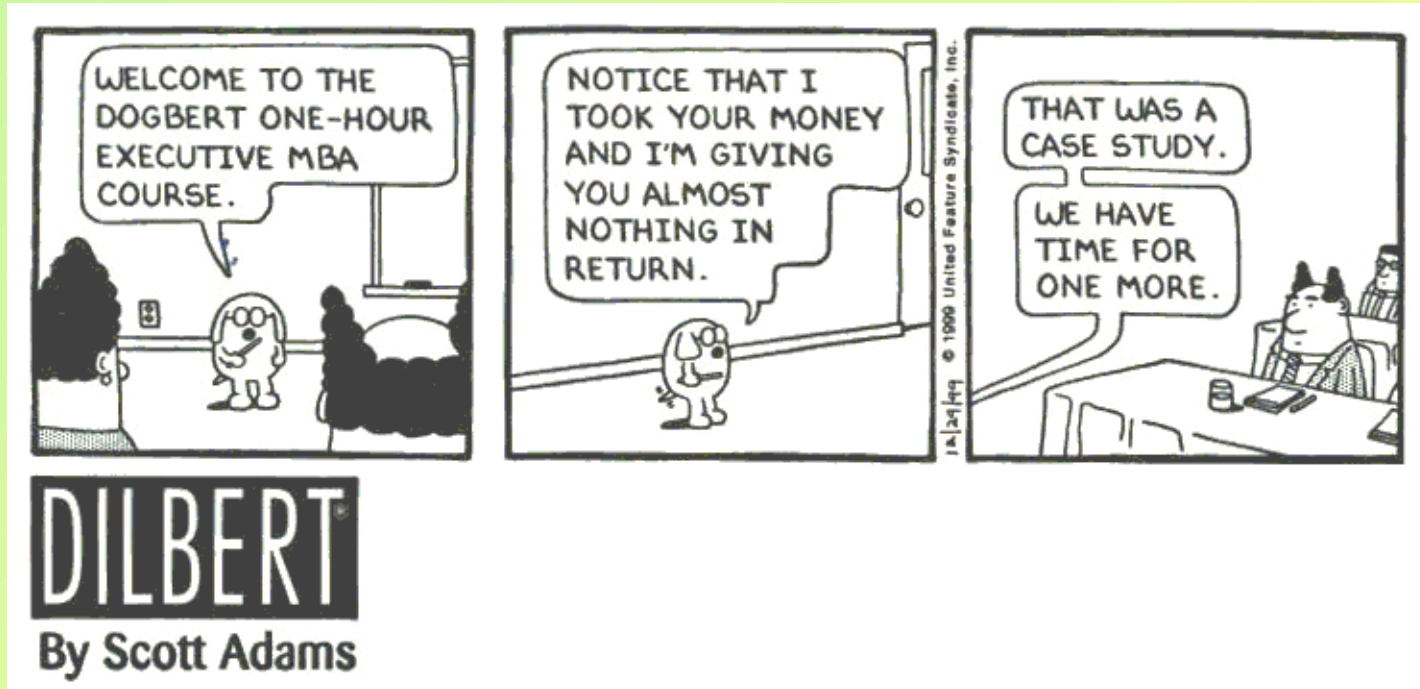
Cloned programs of study

Glencullen programs list is also a University of Central Florida copy.



www.henryheston.com.cnchost.com/glencullen/

Dogbert knows what he's doing



Searches for similar president's message or programs of study: summary

“Those of you whom are already with us at”

Ashford University
Hartley University
Kingsfield University
Parkwood University
Westhampton University

(5)

“cardiopulmonary sciences” +
“operations concentration” +
“design concentration”

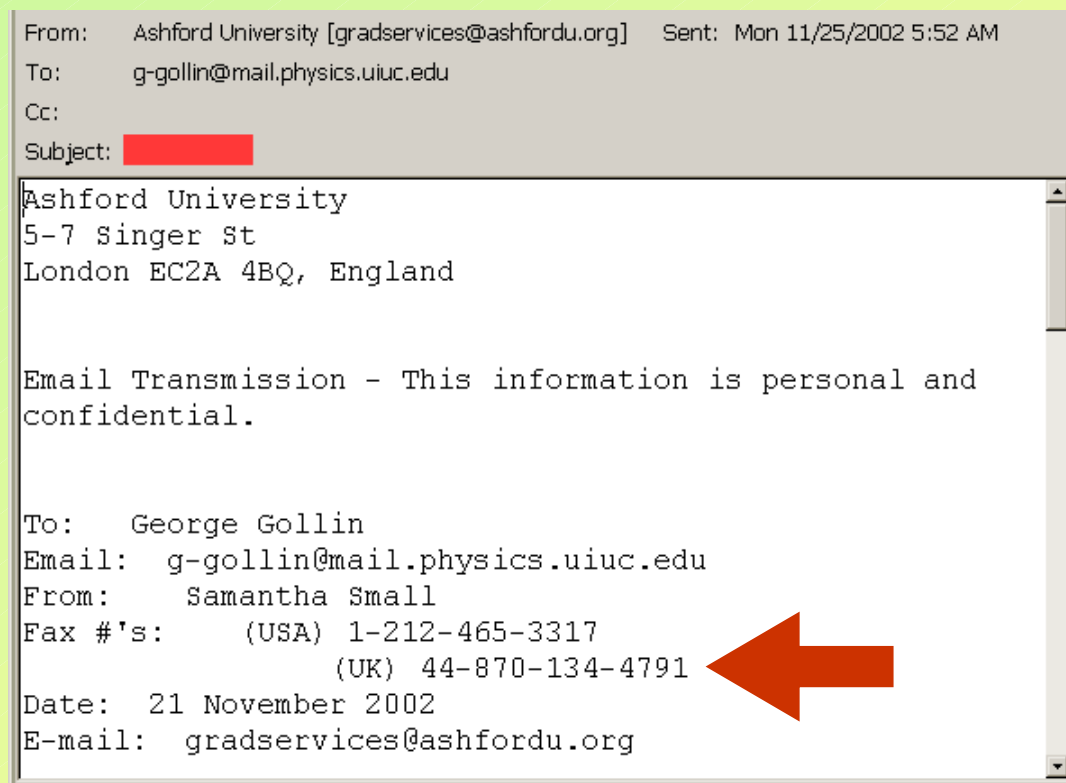
Ashford University
Glencullen University
Hartley University
Kingsfield University
Parkwood University
Thornewood University
University of Ravenhurst

(8)

So far we've found 8...

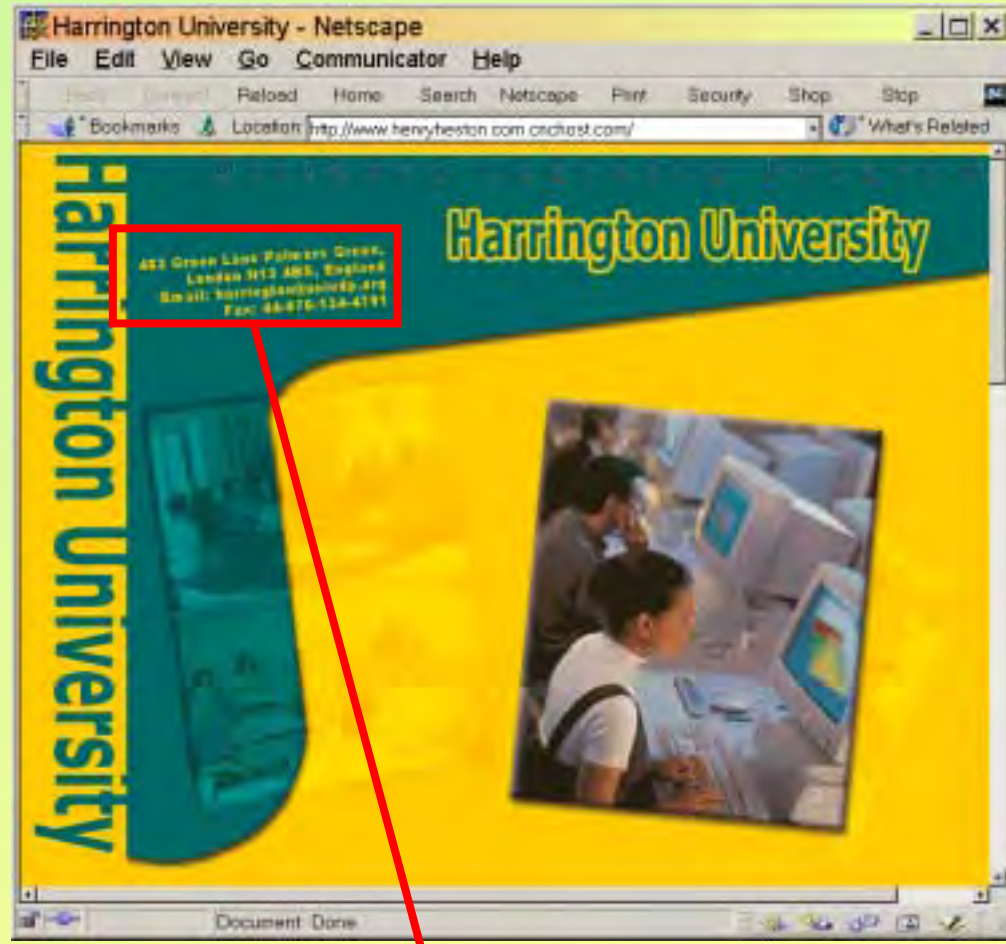
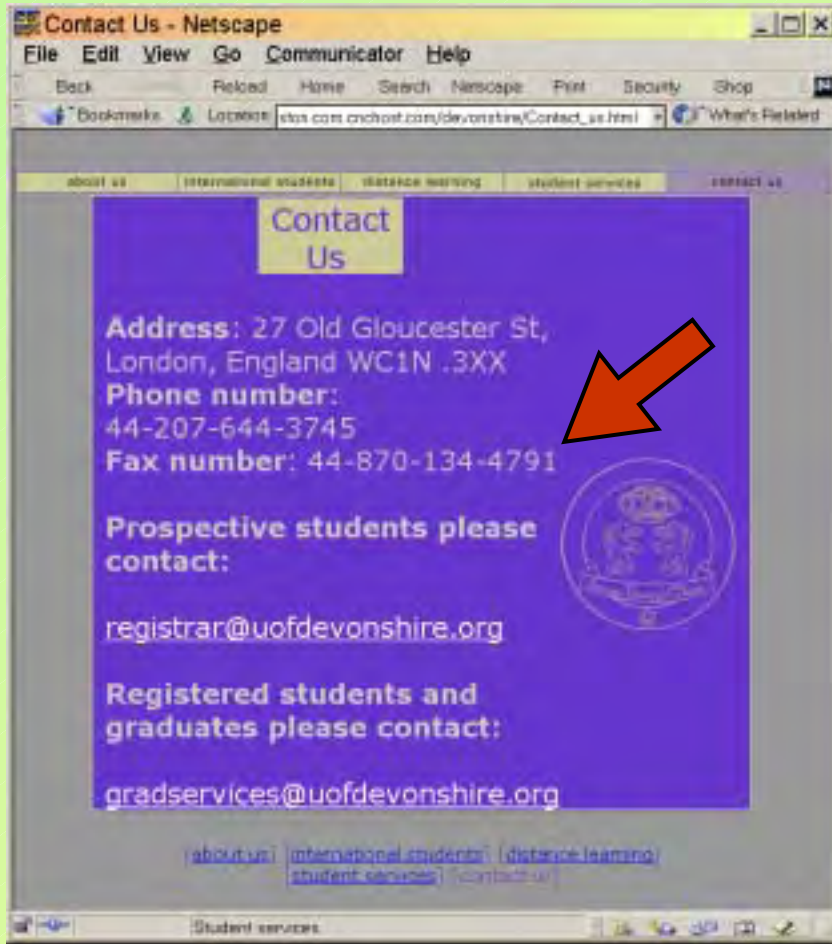
Searching for identical phone numbers

I ran a credentials check on one of Ashford University's customers.
(More on this later.) Note the UK fax number in the reply.

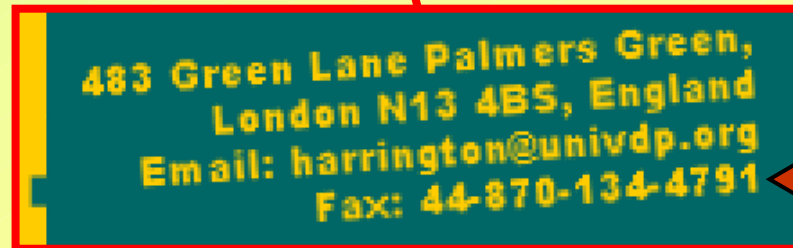


Let's look for that phone number elsewhere...

Searching for 44-870-134-4791



www.henryheston.com.cnchost.com/devonshire



www.henryheston.com.cnchost.com/

Searching for 44-870-134-4791

Note the formatting of the number: as written it's intended for access from overseas. (Inside the UK the number would be 0870-134-4791.)

Ashford University
University of Devonshire
Harrington University

(that makes 10...)

The University of Devonshire page also shows a voice phone number: 44-207-644-3745. Here it is (you've heard the voice before):

 [44-207-644-3745](tel:44-207-644-3745)

Searching for www.henryheston.com

Devonshire and Harrington web sites are in the internet domain www.henryheston.com.cnhost.com. What else can we find there?

University of Devonshire	www.henryheston.com.cnhost.com/devonshire
Glencullen University	www.henryheston.com.cnhost.com/glencullen
Harrington University	www.henryheston.com.cnhost.com
Shelbourne University	www.henryheston.com.cnhost.com/shelbourne

(that makes 11...)

Devonshire, Glencullen, and Harrington are University Degree Program creations. Is Shelbourne one of their creations too?

Yes: Glencullen's and Shelbourne's phone numbers...

<http://www.henryheston.com.cnchost.com/glencullen/>



<http://www.henryheston.com.cnchost.com/shelbourne/contact.htm>

...are identical. Note the email addresses: ...@univdp.org

answering machine does not identify the organization

 [\(+353 1 633 5884\)](tel:+35316335884)

Searching for common mail servers...

Google search for the domain name “univdp.org” turns up Brentwick University, a twin of Shelbourne University.

(that makes 12...)



www.brentwickuniv.org/contact.htm



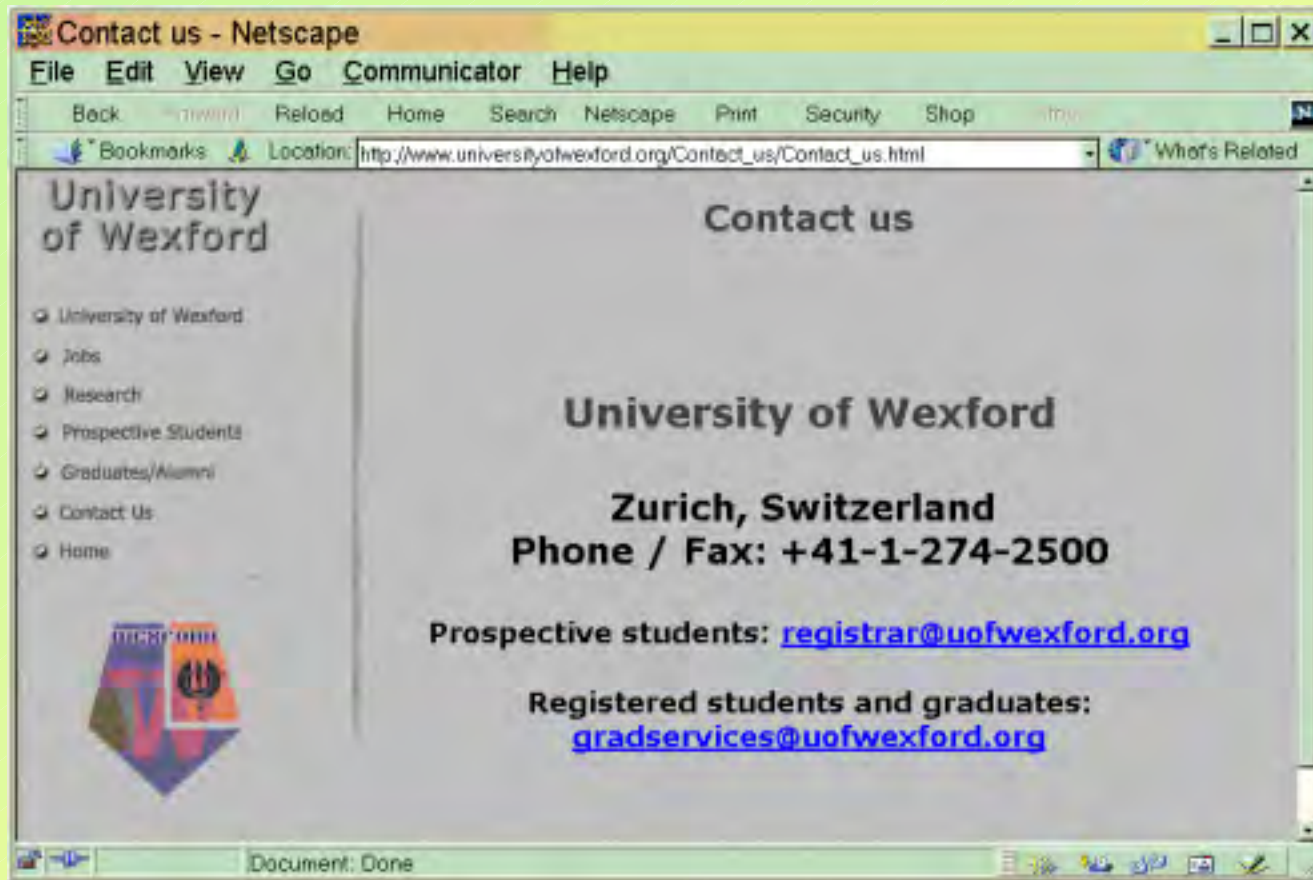
www.henryheston.com.cnchost.com/shelbourne/contact.htm

The Brentwick University phone number is not in service.

Searching for similar “contact us” pages...

Search for “prospective students” + “Registered students and graduates” to find...

(that makes 13...)



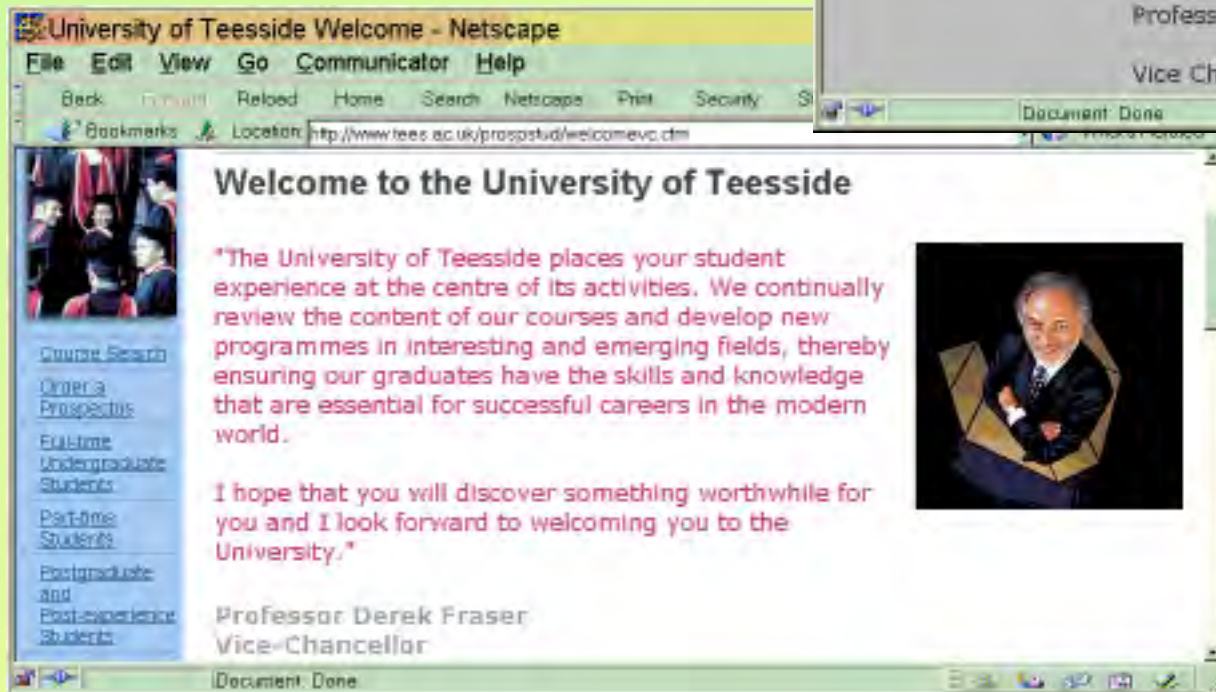
www.universityofwexford.org/Contact_us/Contact_us.html

(Wexford uses the same server as other UDP mills...)

How do they turn out new sites so quickly?

www.universityofwexford.org/Wexford_univ/OliverHill.html

University of Teesside



University of Wexford
By “borrowing”
from real
universities.
(Teesside is real)

www.tees.ac.uk/prospstud/welcomevc.cfm

Some of the “borrowing” is extensive.

www.universityofwexford.org/Wexford_univ/Opportunity_University.html

University of Teesside

The Opportunity University

Since 1993, the University has positioned itself as the 'Opportunity University'. We believe that the current diversity within the British higher education system is a strength and that the University of Teesside should be able to pursue excellence within the context of its distinctive mission and aspirations, which have evolved from its history, academic character, size and social structure.

As befits the Opportunity University, the University continually strives to promote access and widening participation. It seeks to be an open, accessible and inclusive institution, serving the needs of a diverse range of students.

It is both a distinctive feature and a strength of the University that it offers a very broad range of learning opportunities and accredited awards. Courses range from Access programmes and NVQ Level III, through 'small (accredited) bites of learning', to certificate and diploma programmes, ordinary and honours degrees, Masters programmes, postgraduate professional qualifications, doctoral research degrees and higher doctoral programmes.

As the main provider of higher education in the Tees Valley sub region, the University is acutely conscious of its obligations to its regional communities. It already has an extensive range of community outreach initiatives in which learning opportunities are taken into society and the University's commitment to lifelong learning will see those opportunities extended in the coming years. Further, the University has worked in close partnership with further education colleges in the region since 1993 through the University of Teesside Partnership.

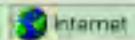
Opportunity University

Since its inception, the University has positioned itself as the 'Opportunity University'. We believe that the current diversity within the Swiss higher education system is a strength and that the University of Wexford should be able to pursue excellence within the context of its distinctive mission and aspirations, which have evolved from its history, academic character, size and social structure.

As befits the Opportunity University, the University continually strives to promote access and widening participation. It seeks to be an open, accessible and inclusive institution, serving the needs of a diverse range of students.

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As a major provider of higher education, the University is acutely conscious of its obligations to the communities to which it serves. It already has an extensive range of community outreach initiatives. The University's commitment to lifelong learning will see more opportunities extended in the coming years.



University of Wexford

www.tees.ac.uk/opportunityuniversity.cfm

This is like playing “whack-a-gopher”

The UDP inventions keep coming and going: by 2/1/03, almost all the UDP creations mentioned so far had disappeared. (More on this later...)

Never fear! UDP continues to create new “universities.” Here’s one whose web pages were created 1/13/03. It seems to be a UDP creation:

Landford University (<http://www.landforduniversity.org/>). Its list of programs of study is also a copy of the University of Central Florida’s.

Its president’s message is taken from the web site of the accredited Cambridge College (<http://www.cambridgecollege.edu/>).

Here's-a-gopher: Landford University

(that makes 14...)



This screenshot shows a Microsoft Internet Explorer browser window displaying the 'About Us' page of Landford University. The browser's address bar shows the URL 'http://www.landforduniversity.org/About_Us.htm'. The page features a blue header with the university's logo and name in a cursive font. Below the header is a navigation menu with links for 'Up', 'Student Services', 'Study Opportunities', 'Contact Us', 'About Us', 'Students', 'Faculty', 'History', and 'Mission Statement'. The main content area is titled 'Welcome' and 'From the President'. It contains a welcome message from the president, Marcus Thorton, expressing hope and pride in the university's journey and its commitment to higher education for talented and motivated working adults. The message concludes with 'The very best of luck to you, Marcus Thorton, President, Landford University'.



This screenshot shows a Microsoft Internet Explorer browser window displaying the 'Welcome from the president' page of Cambridge College. The browser's address bar shows the URL 'cambridgecollege.edu/public/wel_set.cfm'. The page features a blue header with the college's logo and name. Below the header is a navigation menu with links for 'Up', 'Student Services', 'Study Opportunities', 'Contact Us', 'About Us', 'Students', 'Faculty', 'History', and 'Mission Statement'. The main content area is titled 'Welcome' and 'From the President'. It contains a welcome message from the president, Eileen Moran Brown, expressing hope and pride in the college's journey and its commitment to higher education for talented and motivated working adults. The message concludes with 'The very best of luck to you, Eileen Moran Brown, President, Cambridge College'.

Landford's site contains other “borrowed” content...

Mission statement (http://www.landforduniversity.org/mission_statement.htm) resembles Hamilton University's (http://www.hamilton-university.edu/index2_f.html), a non-accredited school (which is licensed by the state of Wyoming)

Front page (<http://www.landforduniversity.org/>) resembles parts of Barrington University's (<http://www.barrington.edu/body.asp>), an internet-only non-accredited school (which is licensed by the state of Alabama) .

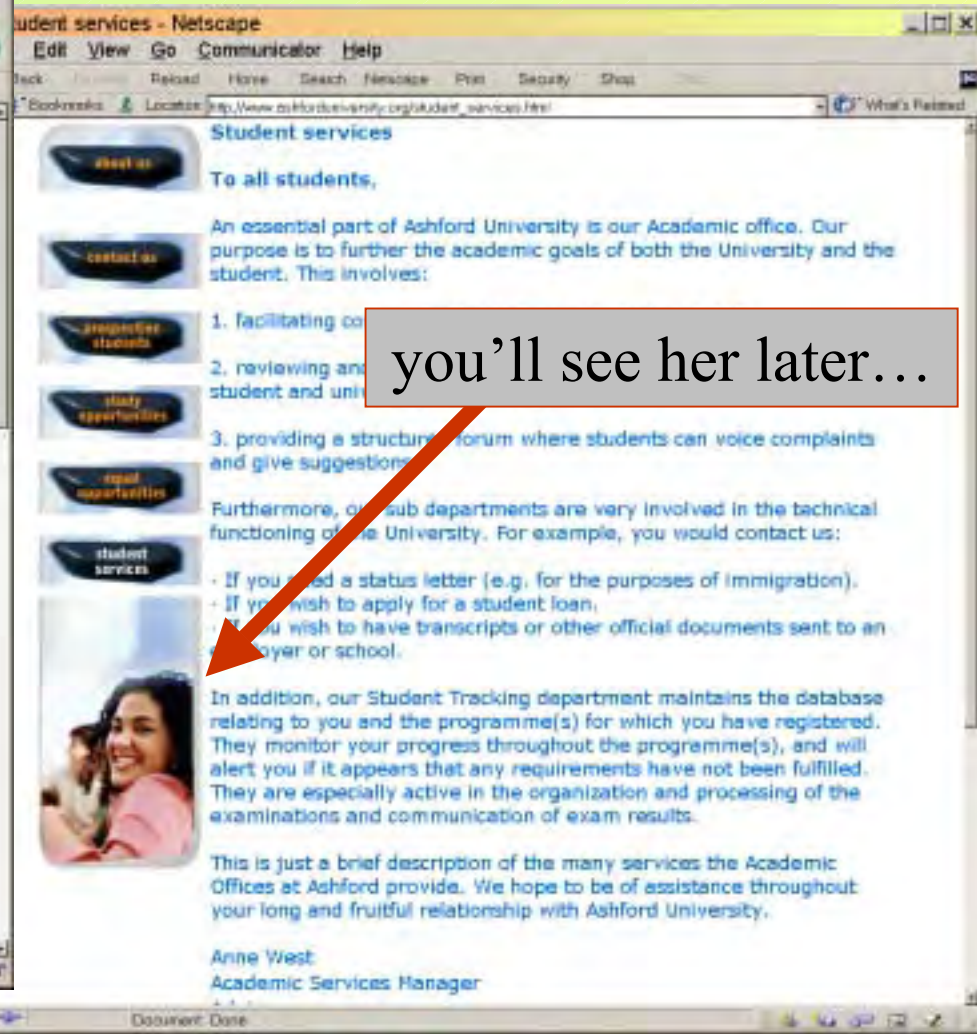
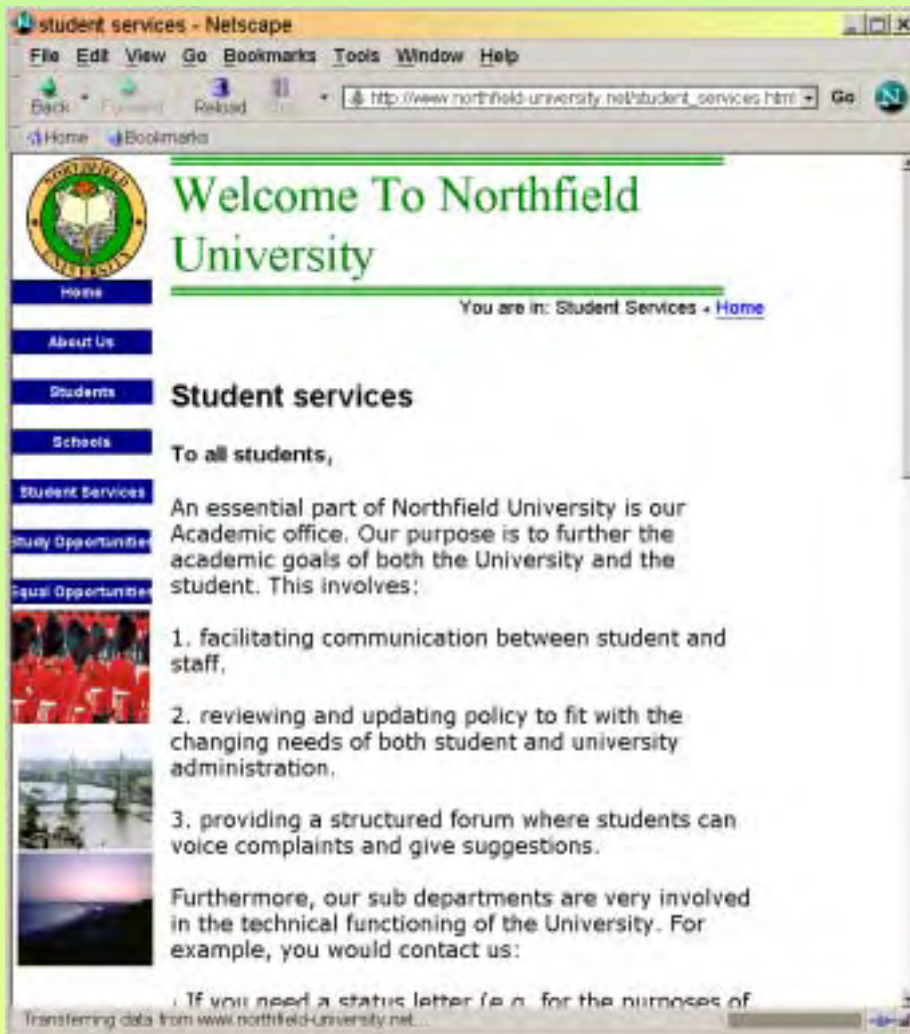
History page (<http://www.landforduniversity.org/History.htm>) resembles parts of California Pacific University's (<http://www.cpu.edu/history.htm>), a distance-learning-only non-accredited school (which is licensed by the state of California) .

I suppose it is faster to cut-and-paste a new web site than it is to write the material afresh.

Here's-another-gopher: Northfield University

Compare Northfield's and Ashford's "student services" web pages...

(that makes 15...)



you'll see her later...

Tod und Verklarung (Death and Transfiguration)

There are numerous reports on the web of University Degree Program solicitations for “study” at

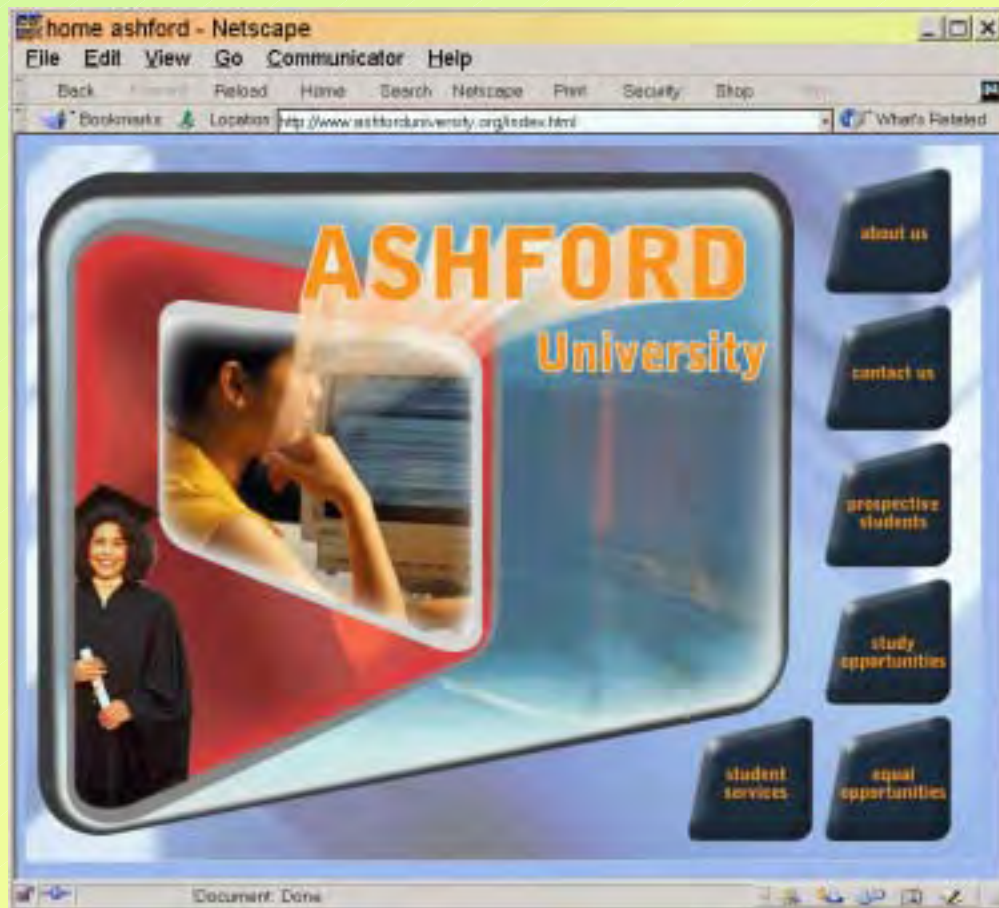
- University of Palmers Green
- University of San Moritz.

Neither has a web site any more.

Some sites get recycled/reincarnated, others do the Lazarus thing, others just disappear.

Westbourne University reborn as Ashford University

Thanks to Google's caching feature...



www.ashforduniversity.org

Westbourne University reborn as Ashford University

student services - Netscape
File Edit View Go Communicator Help
Back Forward Home Search Netscape Print Security Stop
Bookmarks Location: http://www.westbourneuniversity.org/student_services.html What's Related

Student services

about us To all students,

contact us An essential part of Westbourne University is our Academic office. Our purpose is to further the academic goals of both the University and the student. This involves:

supporting students 1. facilitating communication between student and staff.

study opportunities 2. reviewing and updating policy to fit with the changing needs of both student and university administration.

equal opportunities 3. providing a structured forum where students can voice complaints and give suggestions.

student services Furthermore, our sub departments are very involved in the technical functioning of the University. For example, you would contact us:

- If you need a status letter (e.g. for the purposes of immigration).
- If you wish to apply for a student loan.
- If you wish to have transcripts or other official documents sent to an employer or school.

In addition, our Student Tracking department maintains the database relating to you and the programme(s) for which you have registered. They monitor your progress throughout the programme(s), and will alert you if it appears that any requirements have not been fulfilled. They are especially active in the organization and processing of the examinations and communication of exam results.

This is just a brief description of the many services the Academic Offices at Westbourne provide. We hope to be of assistance throughout your long and fruitful relationship with Westbourne University.

Anna West
Academic Services Manager

student services - Netscape
File Edit View Go Communicator Help
Back Forward Home Search Netscape Print Security Stop
Bookmarks Location: http://www.ashforduniversity.org/student_services.html What's Related

Student services

about us To all students,

contact us An essential part of Ashford University is our Academic office. Our purpose is to further the academic goals of both the University and the student. This involves:

supporting students 1. facilitating communication between student and staff,

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This is just a brief description of the many services the Academic Offices at Ashford provide. We hope to be of assistance throughout your long and fruitful relationship with Ashford University.

Anna West
Academic Services Manager

Document Done

I'm back!

www.ashforduniversity.org/student_services.html

How do we tell if they're all really UDP creations?

Many (but not all) of the diploma mill mail servers were really the same computer. It seems likely that most of them are run by the same people. Identify the servers two ways:

1. by “domain name.” For example, in

`g-gollin@mail.hep.uiuc.edu`


`mail.hep.uiuc.edu` is the domain name.

2. by “IP [Internet Protocol] address.” This is rather like a phone number: it is unique to a particular computer.

```
hepux8> nslookup mail.hep.uiuc.edu
```

```
Name:      hepux0.hep.uiuc.edu
```

```
Address:   128.174.118.110
```

 IP address

Identifying the mail servers

More about IP addresses...

Easy-to-remember domain names are mapped to hard-to-remember numerical IP addresses. One computer can have many **domain names** mapped to its single **IP address**.

```
hepux8> nslookup hepux0.hep.uiuc.edu
Name:      hepux0.hep.uiuc.edu
Address:   128.174.118.110
hepux8> nslookup mail.hep.uiuc.edu
Name:      hepux0.hep.uiuc.edu
Address:   128.174.118.110
Aliases:   mail.hep.uiuc.edu
hepux8> nslookup pobox.hep.uiuc.edu
Name:      hepux0.hep.uiuc.edu
Address:   128.174.118.110
Aliases:   pobox.hep.uiuc.edu
```

Look into this...

nslookup query to learn mail server IP addresses...

	Enterprise	mail server	mail server IP address
1	Ashford University	ashfordu.org	216.136.232.176
2	Brentwick University	univdp.org	216.136.232.176
3	Glencullen University	univdp.org	216.136.232.176
4	Harrington University	no email address in site	
5	Hartley University	hartleyuniversity.org	207.150.192.12
6	Kingsfield University	kingsfieldu.org	216.136.232.176
7	Parkwood University	parkwoodu.org	216.136.232.176
8	Shelbourne University	univdp.org	216.136.232.176
9	Thornewood University	thornewood.org	216.136.232.176
10	University of Devonshire	uofdevonshire.org	216.136.232.176
11	University of Palmers Green	no web site	
12	University of Ravenhurst	uofravenhurst.org	216.136.232.176
13	University of San Moritz	no web site	
14	University of Wexford	uofwexford.org	216.136.232.176
15	Westbourne University	westbourneu.org	216.136.232.176
16	Westhampton University	europe.com	62.23.130.195

The (Incomplete) University Degree Program Family Tree as of January, 2003

	University Degree Program	Web site
1	Ashford University	www.ashforduniversity.org
2	Brentwick University	www.brentwickuniv.org
3	Glencullen University	www.henryheston.com.cnchost.com/glencullen
4	Harrington University	www.henryheston.com.cnchost.com
5	Hartley University	www.hartleyuniversity.org
6	Kingsfield University	www.kingsfielduniversity.org
7	Parkwood University	www.parkwooduniversity.org
8	Shelbourne University	www.henryheston.com.cnchost.com/shelbourne
9	Thornewood University	www.thornewooduniversity.org
10	University of Devonshire	www.henryheston.com.cnchost.com/devonshire
11	University of Palmers Green	No web site in evidence.
12	University of Ravenhurst	www.universityofravenhurst.org
13	University of San Moritz	No web site in evidence.
14	University of Wexford	http://www.universityofwexford.org
15	Westbourne University	www.westbourneuniversity.org/about_us.html
16	Westhampton University	www.westhamptonuniversity.org

Did/do any of these places really exist?

Ask the Royal Mail at www.royalmail.com...

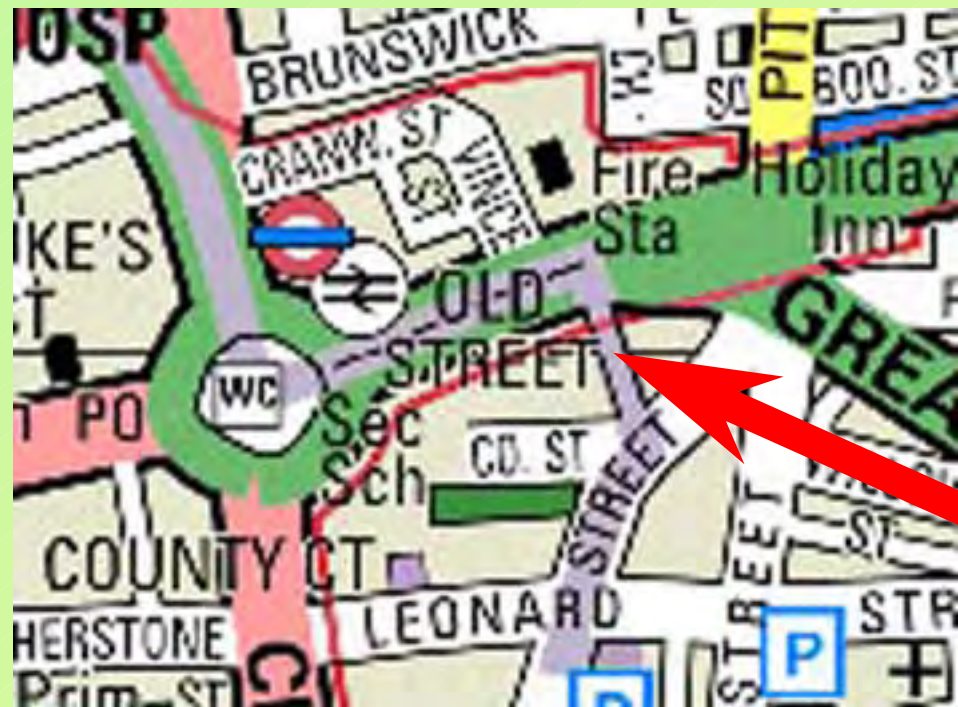
email from Ashford University said the address is 5-7 Singer St.
EC2A 4BQ London.

The screenshot shows the Royal Mail website's address finder interface. At the top, the Royal Mail logo and the slogan 'The Real Network' are visible. The website URL 'www.royalmail.com' is prominently displayed. Below the header, there are navigation links for 'Log on', 'Not registered yet? Click here', 'Contact us', 'Quickfinder', and 'Site and services index'. The main content area features a search bar with the text 'Search' and a 'go' button. To the right of the search bar is the heading 'Address finder'. Below this, a message states 'Delivery point results This search has returned 7 results'. A list of seven addresses is shown, with the third entry, 'E Trading Co, 5-7, Singer Street, LONDON, EC2A 4BQ', highlighted in green. At the bottom of the results list, there are buttons for 'View label', 'English', 'Welsh', 'New search', and 'Help'. Below these buttons are links for 'Terms and Conditions' and 'Enquiry Form'. On the left side of the page, there is a vertical navigation menu with categories like 'Site homepage', 'Personal mail', 'Special Delivery', 'Send mail overseas', 'Personalised stamps', 'Essentials', 'Find a Post Office branch', 'Travel services', 'Moving home', 'Money and banking', and 'Business bills'.

No Ashford University.

Well, maybe the Royal mail is mistaken.

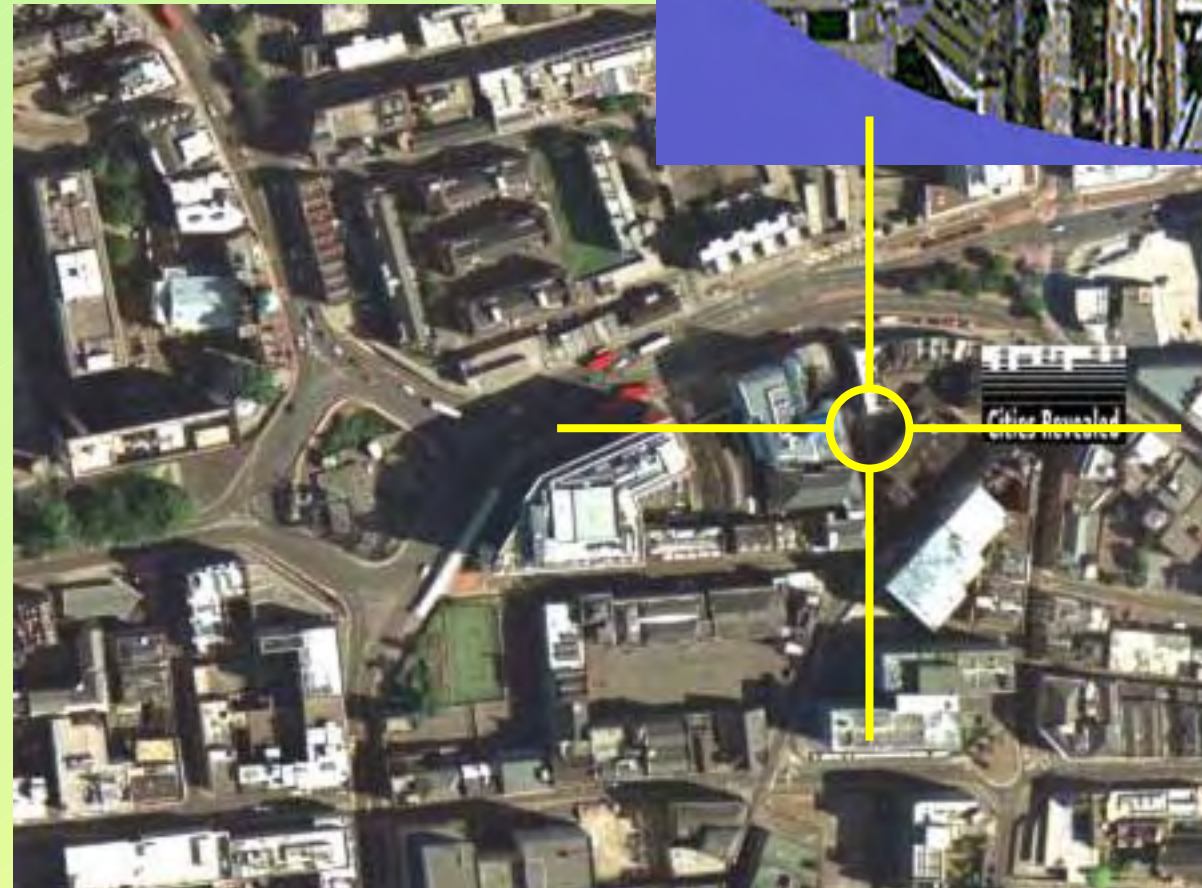
Let's take a look...



...at Singer Street.

Ashford's home
page photo...

<http://www.ashford-university.org/>



I don't think so.

Let's take a look
at street level...

5-7 Singer Street, EC2A 4BQ London



(Friends on sabbatical in London took the photographs.)

Whose names are on the doorbells in the lobby?



Ashford University doesn't exist

Perhaps one of the businesses at 5-7 Singer Street has an “arrangement” to serve as a mail drop for the University Degree Program?

The Royal Mail says these don't exist either.

University of Devonshire
27 Old Gloucester St.
WC1N 3XX London.
...not there.



Harrington University
483 Green Lane Palmers Green
N13 4BS London.

...not there. (Also not anywhere else in N13 4BS postal code.)



But sometimes they say they have campus facilities!

Glencullen University: 23 Waterloo St., Dublin 4, Ireland

- There's no "Glencullen ..." listed in the Dublin online white/yellow pages.
- Glencullen University claims its "Facilities include the sports hall, squash courts, gym, climbing wall, dance studios, tennis courts, boat hard and swimming pool, as well as extensive outdoor sports pitches."

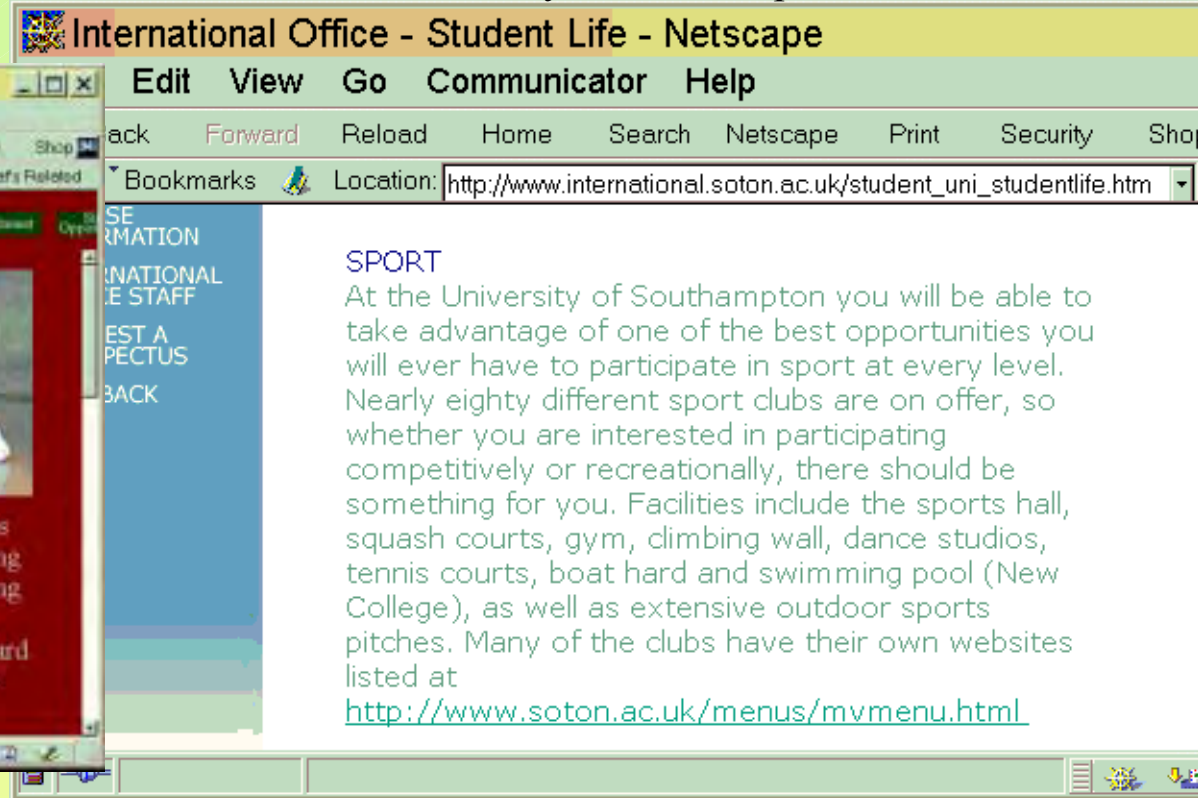
How'd they cook up such an elaborate description of something that doesn't exist?

The same way they concocted their programs of study...

...they “borrowed” it.

Glencullen University

University of Southampton



henryheston.com.cnchost.com/glencullen/

www.international.soton.ac.uk/student_uni_studentlife.htm

(Southampton is a real university)

The real experts

I am an amateur.

The real experts: John Bear and Allen Ezell.

Dr. Bear publishes articles and books on the subject: see <http://circledance.tripod.com/johnbear/id1.html>.

Mr. Ezell was head of the FBI's "DipScam" operation until his retirement in 1992. (He now works in the private sector investigating corporate fraud, but continues to track down diploma mills.)

We share information as we find it.

Greg Ashe (an attorney at the Federal Trade Commission) has been managing FTC efforts concerning some of this. We send him stuff too.

So why'd the UDP yank most of its sites in Jan. 2003?

Because the U.S. Federal Trade Commission burned them, but not because of the diploma mill scam.

INTERNATIONAL DRIVER'S LICENSE

Need a new driver's license? Too many points or other trouble? Want a license that can never be suspended or revoked? Want an ID for nightclubs or hotel check-in?

Avoid trouble, fines, and mandatory driver's education. Protect your privacy, and hide your identity.

..... **TIME TO CALL 212-330-9001**

The United Nations gives you the privilege to drive freely throughout the world.
(Convention on International Road Traffic of September 19, 1949 & World Court Decision, The Hague, Netherlands, January 21, 1958)

Take advantage of your rights. Order a valid International Driver's License that can never be suspended or revoked.

*Confidentiality assured.
No one is turned down.*

We are awaiting your call today!
CALL 212-330-9001
Call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including
Sundays and holidays

If you can't call, we can't help you.

If your phone is currently tied up, please print this page now!

FTC case No. 1:03-CV-00021-RMC
preliminary injunction (filed 1/24/03):

“...www.henryheston.com.cnchost.com,
www.parkwooduniversity.org,
www.thornewooduniversity.org,
www.brentwickuniversity.org,
www.universityofwexford.org,
www.ashforduniversity.org,
www.kingsfielduniversity.org,
www.universityofravenhurst.org,
www.westbourneuniversity.org, www.dlce.org, and any
other Web sites operated by Defendants,... cannot be
accessed by the public...”

(See <http://www.ftc.gov/os/2003/01/unknownpi.pdf>)

(Document image
from Allen Ezell)

About those licenses...here's an
address you've seen before

The Institute for International Licensing

483 Green Lanes, Palmers Green, London, N13 4BS

Phone (United States) 770-496-4304 - Fax (United States) 786-524-2739 - E-Mail ii@london.com

30 September 2002

USA

Dear License Recipient:

Congratulations! This letter is your Proof of Registration and Receipt for your international Driver's License. The fee for registration is US \$200.00, payment of which you made already, completely or partially, through Western Union, your bank, or credit card.

If you make any payments by credit card, please remember that the payment on your credit card statement will be made to:

"Hyacinth, Romania."

Our Institute name will never appear on your statement for two reasons:

1. To protect your privacy.
2. To keep currency conversion costs to a minimum.

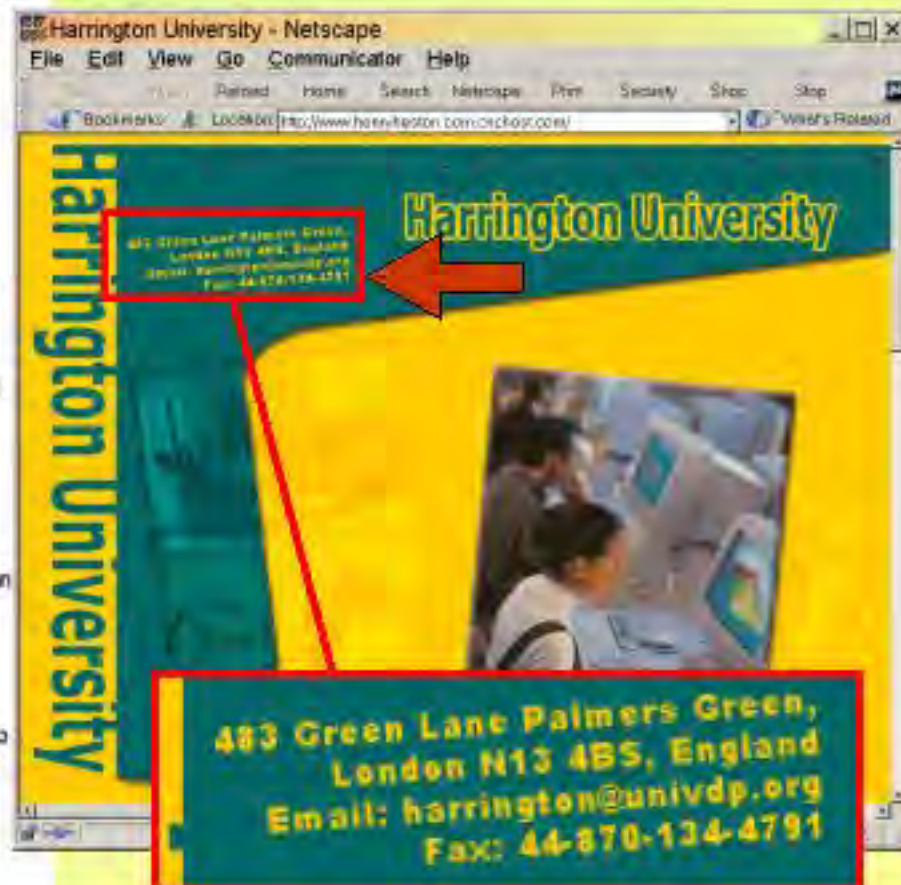
You have been assigned License Number L005320. Please refer to your License Number in all correspondence with the Institute.

Be on the lookout for other benefits available only to license holders.

Note that it is difficult to answer inquiries by phone accurately. Accordingly, to service our license holders better, we require inquiries to be sent by email to ii@london.com or by fax to 786-524-2739. (If you email us or fax us and do not receive a complete response within 72 hours, please call us immediately at 770-496-4304.) Thank you again, and we wish you good fortune in all your future endeavours.

Yours truly,

William McLaughlin, License Registration Manager



Different addresses,
but similar text in the
license scam and
diploma mill letters...

(Document image
from Allen Ezell)

THORNEWOOD UNIVERSITY

"Your Home or Office is Our Campus"

CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS: NICOLAS MAESSTRAAT 68
AMSTERDAM 1071 RC NETHERLANDS

17 December 2001



Dear Diploma Recipient:

Congratulations! This letter is your Proof of Registration and Receipt. The fee for registration is US \$600.00, payment of which you made already, completely or partially, through Western Union, your bank, or Credit Card.

If you make any payments by credit card, please remember that the payment on your credit card statement will be made to:

"Hyacinth, Romania."

Our University name will never appear on your statement for two reasons:

1. To protect your privacy.
2. To keep currency conversion costs to a minimum.

You have been assigned student ID number DP2519810. Please refer to your student ID in all correspondence with the university.

Also included is your FREE prestigious sample diploma and the accompanying paperwork. Your diploma was printed to your exact specifications and is suitable for framing. It will make a fine addition to your awards, honors, and other diplomas. If there is a need for any corrections or changes, please contact the University.

Be on the lookout for other benefits available only to students of our University.

Note that it is difficult to answer inquiries by phone accurately. Accordingly, to service our graduates better, we require inquiries to be sent by email to thornewood@suppe.com or by fax to 815-425-3804. (If you email us or fax us and do not receive a complete response within 72 hours, please call us immediately at 770-492-2994. However this number is for your use only and should not be given out for degree verification purposes.) Thank you again, and we wish you good fortune in all your future endeavors.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Frederick Hansen".

Frederick Hansen, Assistant Dean of Admissions

Dear License Recipient:

Congratulations! This letter is your Proof of Registration and Receipt for your International Driver's License. The fee for registration is US \$200.00, payment of which you made already, completely or partially, through Western Union, your bank, or credit card.

If you make any payments by credit card, please remember that the payment on your credit card statement will be made to:

"Hyacinth, Romania."

Our Institute name will never appear on your statement for two reasons:

1. To protect your privacy.
2. To keep currency conversion costs to a minimum.

You have been assigned License Number [redacted]. Please refer to this number in all correspondence with the Institute.

Be on the lookout for other benefits available only to students of our University.

Dear Diploma Recipient:

Congratulations! This letter is your Proof of Registration and Receipt. The fee for registration is US \$500.00, payment of which you made already, completely or partially, through Western Union, your bank, or Credit Card.

If you make any payments by credit card, please remember that the payment on your credit card statement will be made to:

"Hyacinth, Romania."

Our University name will never appear on your statement for two reasons:

1. To protect your privacy.
2. To keep currency conversion costs to a minimum.

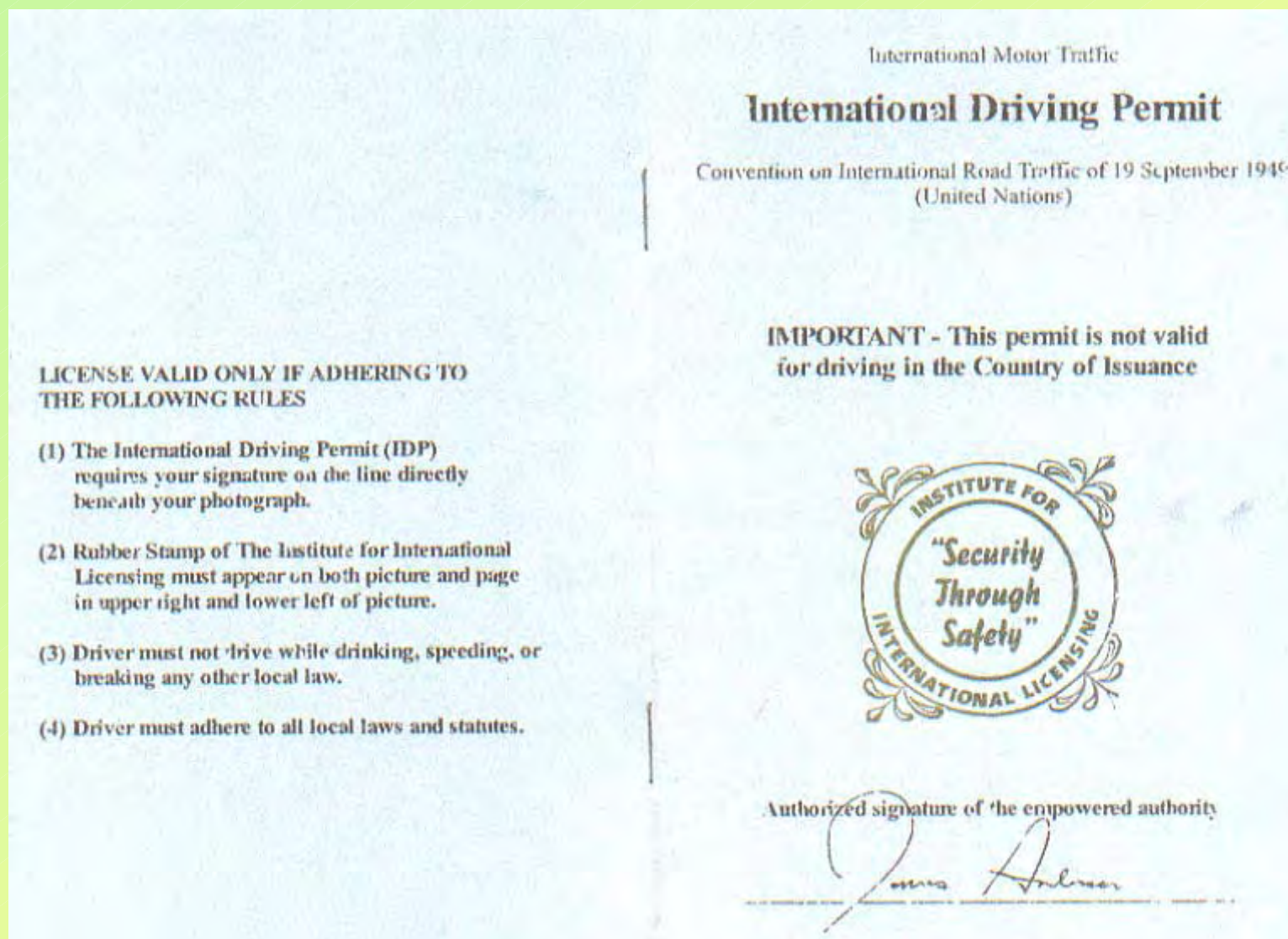
You have been assigned student ID number DP2619910. Please refer to your student ID in all correspondence with the university.

Also included is your FREE prestigious sample diploma and the accompanying paperwork. Your diploma was printed to your exact specifications and is suitable for framing. It will make a fine addition to your awards, honors, and other diplomas. If there is a need for any corrections or changes, please contact the University.

Be on the lookout for other benefits available only to students of our University.

A closeup of
the letters

Here's an example of a fake international license



(Document image from Allen Ezell)

More of the same license

Uppgifter angående föraren:	Tillnamn 1
	Förnamn 2
	Födelseort 3
	Födelsedag 4
	Hemvist 5

Körkortet gäller för nedan angivna slag av motorfordon:

Motorcykel med eller utan sidvagn, linakörmotorfordon och motorcykel på tre hjul, vars tillåtet vikt överstiger 400 kg (900 lbs).	A
Motorfordon, som är avsett för beförande av personer och som, utöver plats för föraren, har högst åtta säteplatser eller som är avsett för beförande av gods och har en tillåten maximalvikt (inkl. överstygande) 3.500 kg (7.700 lbs). Till dylikt motorfordon får kopplas ett till släpfordon.	B
Motorfordon, som är avsett för beförande av gods och vars tillåtna maximalvikt överstiger 3.500 kg (7.700 lbs). Till dylikt motorfordon får kopplas ett till släpfordon.	C
Motorfordon, som är avsett för beförande av personer och som har mer än åtta säteplatser, utöver plats för föraren. Till dylikt motorfordon får kopplas ett till släpfordon.	D
Motorfordon av det slag, som anges under A, C eller D, och för vilka föraren är behörig, med annat än ett till släpfordon.	E

Med ett fordons tillåtna maximalvikt (inkl. överstygande) av fordonets vikt, till det är tillägg ett till släpfordon, vilkas tillåtna maximalvikt överstiger 750 kg (1.650 lbs).

Med maximalvikt (inkl. överstygande) som största last, som tillåts av vederbörlig myndighet i det land.

INRÄKNING AV RÄTT ATT GÖRA BRUK AV INTERNATIONELLT KÖRKORT

Innehavaren är behörig till ett till släpfordon (inkl. överstygande) på grund av:

Myndighetens stiftelse eller tillstånd

Plats: _____
 Dag: _____
 Underskrift: _____

Om stämnet för namn redovis är uttryck, använd annat uttryck avsett för inbördring.

Inbördring (inkl. I-VE)

Permit L005320 Class A, B, C, D and E
 Mark [REDACTED]
 483 Green Lanes, Palmers Green
 London, N13 4BS
 England

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Signature of Driver

Place of Birth: [REDACTED] NM, USA
 Date of Birth: [REDACTED]
 Height: 5'9" - 175 cm
 Weight: 180 lb - 82 kg
 Date of Issue: 29-Sep-02
 Issued at: London, England

Sex: M
 Hair Color: Blond
 Eye Color: Blue
 Valid for Lifetime of Driver

(Document image from Allen Ezell)

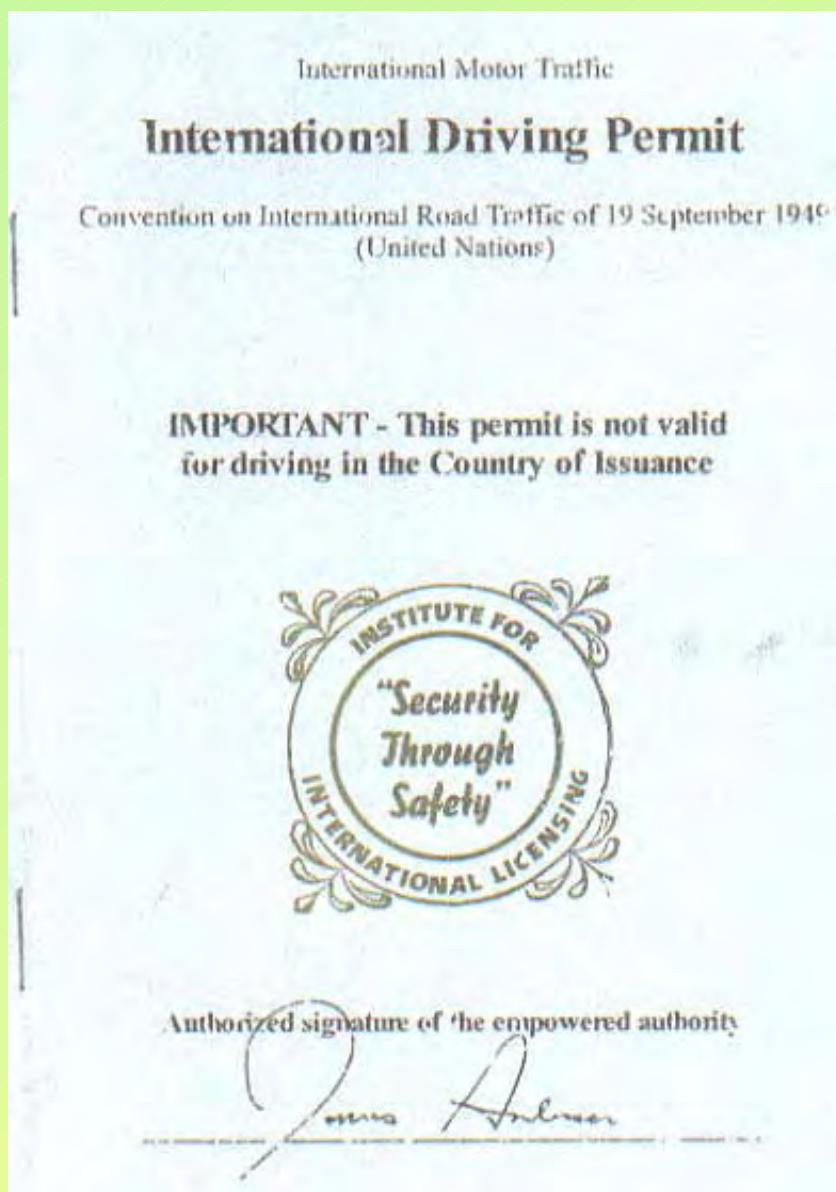
The “licenses” are copies of AAA documents

Such nice looking documents. How’d they come up with such a lovely design?

The same way they cooked up their web sites: they copied someone else’s work.

Ever buy an “International Driving Permit” from AAA before a trip to Europe? They cost \$10 and are valid for a year. Let’s compare...

Fake license on left, AAA driving permit on right



Fake license on left, AAA driving permit on right

Uppgifter angående föraren:

Tillnamn 1
Förnamn 2
Födelseort 3
Födelsedag 4
Hemvist 5

Körkortet gäller för nedan angivna slag av motorfordon:

Motorcykel med eller utan sidvagn, invalidmotorfordon och motorfordon på tre hjul, vars tjänstevikt ej överstiger 400 kg (900 lbs).	A
Motorfordon, som är avsett för befordran av personer och som, utöver plats för föraren, har högst åtta säteplatser eller som är avsett för befordran av gods och har en tillåtn maximivikt icke överstigande 3.500 kg (7.700 lbs). Till dylikt motorfordon får kopplas ett lätt släpfordon.	B
Motorfordon, som är avsett för befordran av gods och vars tillåtna maximivikt överstiger 3.500 kg (7.700 lbs). Till dylikt motorfordon får kopplas ett lätt släpfordon.	C
Motorfordon, som är avsett för befordran av personer och som har mer än åtta säteplatser, utöver plats för föraren. Till dylikt motorfordon får kopplas ett lätt släpfordon.	D
Motorfordon av det slag, som avses under B, C eller D, och för vilka föraren är behörig, med annat än ett lätt släpfordon.	E

Med ett fordonets »tillåtna maximivikt» förstås summan av fordonets vikt då det är färdigt att tagas i bruk, och dess maximilast. Med »maximilast» förstås den största last, som tillåts av vederbörande myndighet i det land, där fordonet är registrerat. »Lätta släpfordon» äro släpfordon, vilkas tillåtna maximivikt icke överstiger 750 kg (1.650 lbs).

INDRAGNING AV RÄTT ATT GÖRA BRUK AV INTERNATIONELLT KÖRKORT

Innehavaren är beörvad rätten att föra motorfordon inom (land).....
på grund av.....

Myndighetens stift eller stämpel

Plats:.....
Dag:.....
Underskrift:.....

Om utrymmet här ovan redan är utnyttjat, använd annat utrymme avsett för »indragning».

Uppgifter angående föraren:

Tillnamn 1
Förnamn 2
Födelseort 3
Födelsedag 4
Hemvist 5

Körkortet gäller för nedan angivna slag av motorfordon:

Motorcykel med eller utan sidvagn, invalidmotorfordon och motorfordon på tre hjul, vars tjänstevikt ej överstiger 400 kg (900 lbs).	A
Motorfordon, som är avsett för befordran av personer och som, utöver plats för föraren, har högst åtta säteplatser eller som är avsett för befordran av gods och har en tillåtn maximivikt icke överstigande 3.500 kg (7.700 lbs). Till dylikt motorfordon får kopplas ett lätt släpfordon.	B
Motorfordon, som är avsett för befordran av gods och vars tillåtna maximivikt överstiger 3.500 kg (7.700 lbs). Till dylikt motorfordon får kopplas ett lätt släpfordon.	C
Motorfordon, som är avsett för befordran av personer och som har mer än åtta säteplatser, utöver plats för föraren. Till dylikt motorfordon får kopplas ett lätt släpfordon.	D
Motorfordon av det slag, som avses under B, C eller D, och för vilka föraren är behörig, med annat än ett lätt släpfordon.	E

Med ett fordonets »tillåtna maximivikt» förstås summan av fordonets vikt, då det är färdigt att tagas i bruk, och dess maximilast. Med »maximilast» förstås den största last, som tillåts av vederbörande myndighet i det land, där fordonet är registrerat. »Lätta släpfordon» äro släpfordon, vilkas tillåtna maximivikt icke överstiger 750 kg (1.650 lbs).

Indragning av rätt att göra bruk av internationellt körkort.

Innehavaren är beörvad rätten att föra motorfordon inom (land).....
på grund av.....

Myndighetens stift eller stämpel

Plats:.....
Dag:.....
Underskrift:.....

Om utrymmet här ovan redan är utnyttjat, använd annat utrymme avsett för »indragning».

Fake license on left, AAA driving permit on right

Permit L005320 Class A, B, C, D and E
██████████
483 Green Lanes, Palmers Green
London, N13 4BS
England


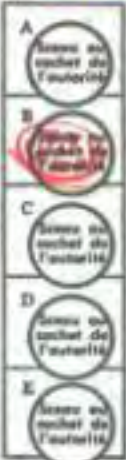


Signature of Driver

Place of Birth: ██████████ ISA
Date of Birth: ██████████
Height: 5'9"
Weight: 180
Date of Issue: ██████████
Issued at: Lo ██████████

Sex: M
Hair Color: Blond
Eye Color: Blue
Valid for Lifetime of Driver

I..... ██████████
II..... ██████████
III..... ██████████
IV..... ██████████



Signature of Driver: ██████████

EXCLUSIONS (aux)

I..... V.....
II..... VI.....
III..... VII.....
IV..... VIII.....

*Ou l'air: validé de point.

Fake license on left, AAA driving permit on right

LICENSE VALID ONLY IF ADHERING TO THE FOLLOWING RULES

- (1) The International Driving Permit (IDP) requires your signature on the line directly beneath your photograph.
- (2) Rubber Stamp of The Institute for International Licensing must appear on both picture and page in upper right and lower left of picture.
- (3) Driver must not drive while drinking, speeding, or breaking any other local law.
- (4) Driver must adhere to all local laws and statutes.

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO HOLDER!

- (1) The International Driving Permit (IDP) requires your signature on the line directly beneath your photograph.
- (2) Your valid U.S. driver's license must accompany the IDP at all times.
- (3) Permit is valid for one year from date of issue.

Back to you-know-whats...

So what happened after the FTC whacked
lots of diploma mill sites?

They came right back!

A few weeks later, Ashford and Westbourne resurfaced with different domain names. (Ashford has two now!)

“University”	site closed by FTC	new site(s)	dates from...
Ashford	www.ashforduniversity.org	www.ashford-university.org www.ashforduniversity.net	8/1/02 2/16/03
Westbourne	www.westbourneuniversity.org	www.uwestbourne.ca	2/6/03

Content of sites is very similar (but not completely identical) to the old sites.

Very resilient, those gophers!

And, of course, there are new gophers too.

“University”	site	site IP address	dates from...
American Austin University	www.aus-edu.org	66.70.20.10	can't tell
Ashford University	www.ashford-university.org www.ashforduniversity.net	63.241.136.202 216.219.254.45	8/1/02 2/16/03
University of Bedford	www.uofbedford.org	63.241.136.203	2/27/03
University of Dunham	http://www.universityofdunham.org.uk/	66.132.45.177	4/28/03
Hartford University	www.hartforduniversity-edu.org	207.155.252.9	3/6/03
Landford University	www.landfordu.org	12.168.32.116	3/5/03
Northfield University	www.northfield-university.net	64.191.36.98	3/30/03
Parkhurst University	www.parkhurstuniversity.org	66.218.79.190	3/12/03
Shaftesbury University	www.shaftesburyu.org.uk	139.81.148.3	2/26/03
Stafford University	www.stafford.ac	139.81.148.3	4/29/03
Strassford University	www.strassfordu.org.uk	139.81.148.3	4/7/03
University of Switzerland	http://www.swissu.org/	198.69.224.150	5/24/03
Westbourne	www.uwestbourne.ca	162.42.208.252	2/6/03
Westhampton University	www.westhamptonuniversity.org	64.70.212.249	6/24/02

Two of the gophers have the same president.

Schools

President's Message

Student Services

Study Opportunities

Equal Opportunities



Dear Students,

Northfield University is proud to be able to offer you high quality education opportunities for your personal and professional growth.

Our degree programs cover all academic levels from an Associate to PhD. Our advisory department offers assistance and support for all of our students, and can develop a degree program that works best for you!

Northfield University's list of successful graduates includes many business people, engineering and computer professionals who are earning competitive salaries in most desirable work environments.

Whether you are beginning a program of academic study, developing new skills for career expansion, returning to complete your education, or taking courses for general knowledge, we are confident that Northfield University can meet your needs.

Let us help you begin your journey to a bright new future.

Sincerely,

Dr. Harold P. Caldwell

President
Northfield University

President's Message Mission & Faculty

Dear Students,

Parkhurst University is proud to be able to offer you high quality education opportunities for your personal and professional growth.

Our degree programs cover all academic levels from an Associate to PhD. Our advisory department offers assistance and support for all of our students, and can develop a degree program that works best for you!

Parkhurst University's list of successful graduates includes many business people, engineering and computer professionals who are earning competitive salaries in most desirable work environments.

Whether you are beginning a program of academic study, developing new skills for career expansion, returning to complete your education, or taking courses for general knowledge, we are confident that Parkhurst University can meet your needs.

Let us help you begin your journey to a bright new future.

Sincerely,

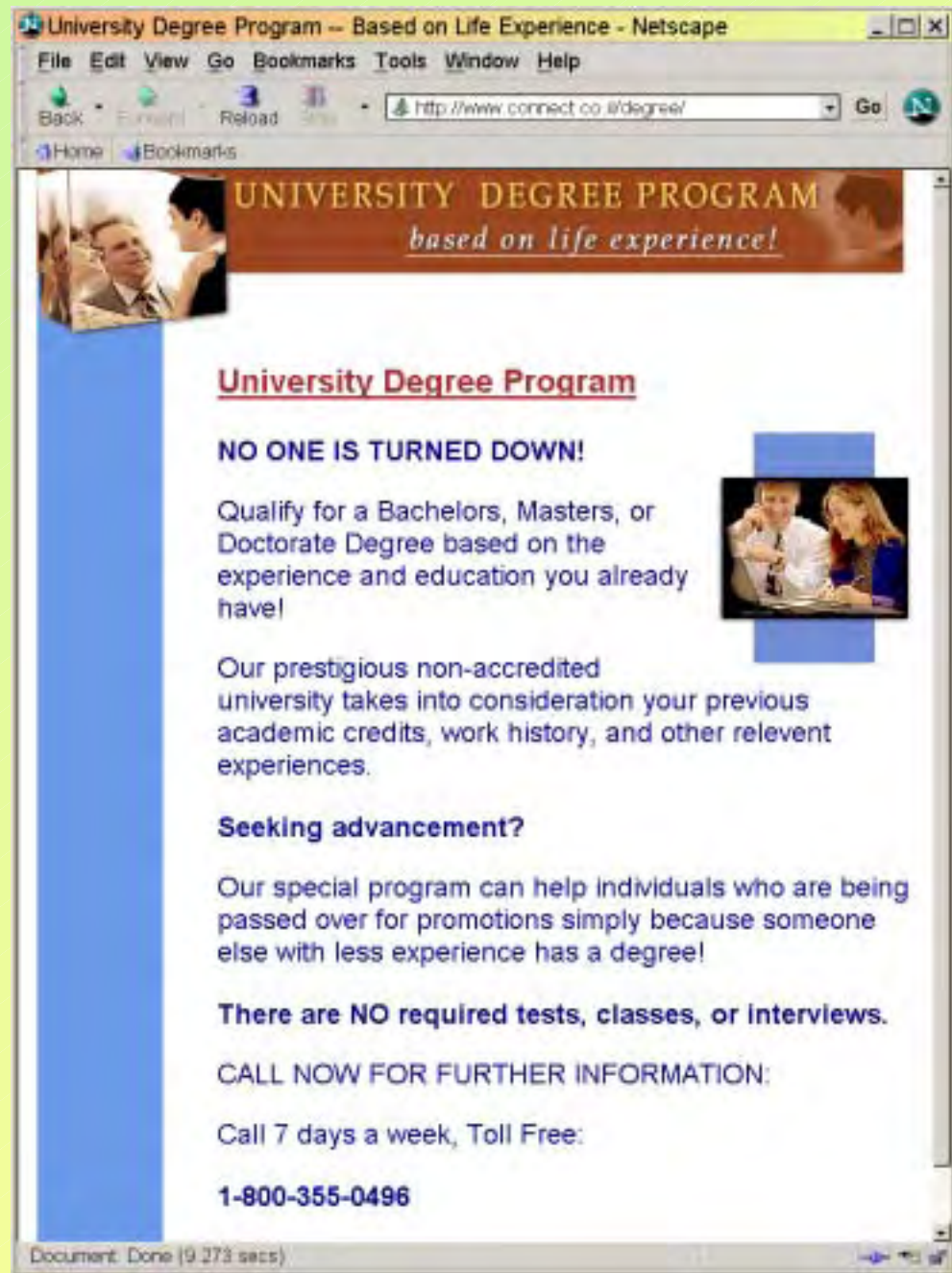
Dr. Harold P. Caldwell

President
Parkhurst University

There's also a UDP web page served by an Israeli internet service provider.

Web access stats are provided by a Dutch tracking service. Like to see who's visiting?

<http://extremetracking.com/open;unique?login=degreexy>



The screenshot shows a Netscape browser window with the title "University Degree Program -- Based on Life Experience - Netscape". The address bar contains "http://www.connect.co.il/degree/". The website content includes a header with the text "UNIVERSITY DEGREE PROGRAM based on life experience!". Below this, there is a blue vertical bar on the left. The main content area features the following text: "University Degree Program", "NO ONE IS TURNED DOWN!", "Qualify for a Bachelors, Masters, or Doctorate Degree based on the experience and education you already have!", "Our prestigious non-accredited university takes into consideration your previous academic credits, work history, and other relevent experiences.", "Seeking advancement?", "Our special program can help individuals who are being passed over for promotions simply because someone else with less experience has a degree!", "There are NO required tests, classes, or interviews.", "CALL NOW FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:", "Call 7 days a week, Toll Free:", and "1-800-355-0496". There are two small images: one of a man in a suit and one of a man and a woman looking at a document. The status bar at the bottom indicates "Document: Done (9.273 secs)".

So who are these people anyway?

FTC case No. 1:03-CV-00021-RMC, amended complaint... (2/21/03):

“**JASON MATTHIEU ABRAHAM**, also known as Yaakov Abraham;

CAROLINE SHALLON, also known as Caroline Abraham also known as Chaya Rochel Abraham;

CHARLES FOGEL also known as Charlie Lewis.”

(These are the folks selling bogus licenses. The FTC complaint is here: <http://www.ftc.gov/os/2003/02/mvslamdcmp.htm>)

Their businesses (named in the FTC complaint):

“...Mountain View Systems, Ltd. is an Israeli company with its principal place of business at 89 Rechov Mea Shearim, Jerusalem, Israel.

...Wheeler International Limited is an [*sic*] Bahamian company with its principal place of business at 89 Rechov Mea Shearim, Jerusalem, Israel and registered office in Nassau, Bahamas...

(<http://www.ftc.gov/os/2003/02/mvslamdcmp.htm>)

Their businesses (named in the FTC complaint):

...Aladdin Travel, Inc. is a North Carolina company with its principal place of business at 3305 Durham Drive, Suite 111, Raleigh, North Carolina and registered office at 1308 Claymore Drive, Garner, North Carolina. Aladdin Travel, Inc. does business as Aladdin Financial Management and **University** Systems.

...S.C. Hyacinth S.R.L. is a Romanian company with its principal place of business at 46 Fabrica de Chibrituri Street, Bucharest, Romania and registered office at 25 C.A. Rosetti Street, Ground Floor, Apartment 2, Sector 2, Bucharest, Romania.”

(<http://www.ftc.gov/os/2003/02/mvslamdcmp.htm>)

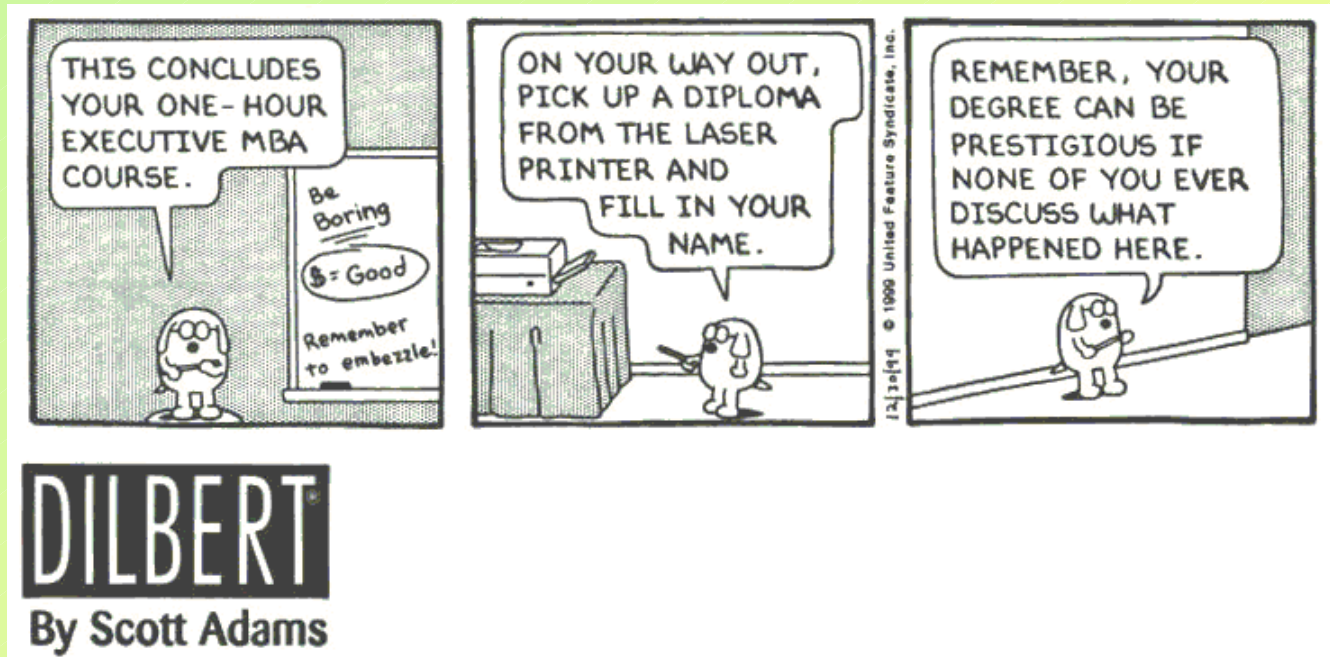
There's more information...

- additional confirmation that the same people are doing the license and degree scams
- estimates of financial intake, number of employees
- how the information was obtained, etc. etc.

There's quite a story here.

Who's out there?

One would think that University Degree Program clients would tend to “lie low”...



How many people would want to expose their bogus credentials to search engines and wandering “internauts?”

The answer is “at least 138.”

Some statistics concerning what was on the web in January, 2003:

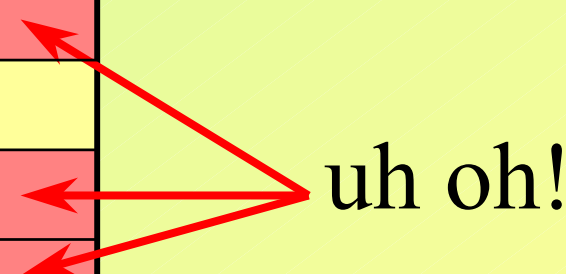
highest degree claimed	number of clients
doctorate	51
master's	42
bachelor's	30
unspecified	15

More stats...

“university”	number of clients
Ashford University	3
Brentwick University	16
Glencullen University	8
Harrington University	39
Hartley University	0
Kingsfield University	1
Parkwood University	6
Shelbourne University	17
Thornewood University	7
University of Devonshire	18
University of Palmers Green	6
University of Ravenhurst	4
University of San Moritz	12
University of Wexford	didn't look
Westbourne University	1
Westhampton University	0

Even more stats...

degree field	number of clients
business/finance	51
education	10
science/engineering	33
healthcare/medicine	6
psychology	12
religion	4
unspecified	22



uh oh!

So... some of our UDP clients have used their degrees to obtain clinical and educational positions. That's serious.

College and university positions held

position held	degree source	comments
College athletic coach	Brentwick	Bachelor's in physical education
University assoc. professor	Harrington	MBA and PhD
Faculty of Health Sciences faculty member	Harrington	Ph.D., Physiology (foreign home institution)
University director of database development	Harrington	Doctorate degree in cognitive psychology
University lecturer	Kingsfield	PhD in progress
College athletic coach	Shelbourne	Master of Science in Rehabilitative Medicine and Physical Therapy
Community college assoc. professor	Shelbourne	Degree not specified
University asst. clinical professor	Devonshire	Ph.D. (also holds a legitimate Pharm.D.)
College asst. professor	Devonshire	D.B.A. (also holds a legitimate Ph.D.)
University assoc. professor	Devonshire	J.D.

Primary and secondary education positions held

position held	degree source	comments
Kindergarten, grade 1 teacher	Brentwick	B.A.
Teacher	Glencullen	Bachelor of Arts degree in Music
Home schooling organization director	Harrington	Ph.D. in Special Education
American international school teacher	Parkwood	B.Ed., MBA
NIH training coordinator	Parkwood	M.S., Life Sciences
Music teacher and violinist	Shelbourne	PhD

Healthcare and counseling positions held

position held	degree source	comments
Forensic psychologist	Ashford	Ph.D. Forensic Psychology
Life coach	Brentwick	Master of Arts in Psychology, Doctorate in Education & Human Development with specialisation in subliminal persuasion techniques
Substance abuse/addiction counselor	Brentwick	Brentwick is referred to as his medical school in a healthcare directory
Family counselor	Glencullen	Ph.D. in Counseling from Glencullen University
Hypnotherapist specializing in weight loss and drug detoxification	Harrington	Ph.D
Clinical psychologist	Harrington	Ph.D. in clinical psychology and a Ph.D. in ministry, divinity and religious studies
Licensed marriage & family psychotherapist and clinical supervisor	Parkwood	Doctorate Degree in Clinical Psychology (Masters is bogus too.)

Verifying credentials of a UDP client

It is alarming to see clinical positions held by untrained people.


Remember the Kitty Genovese murder (New York, 1964)? In the face of potential harm to others we are morally obliged to decide whether or not to act on behalf of the (potential) victim.

What to do?

- call the employer? (but what if it's just a typo on the employer web site?)
- contact the person claiming the diploma mill degree?

Verifying credentials of a UDP client

Early on, I stumbled onto the web site for...

 a Washington DC based criminal research and profiling organization dedicated to aiding Law Enforcement and victims of heinous crimes.

Their Chief Operations Officer's educational credentials include...

Ph.D. Forensic Psychology
- Ashford University
England 1999

Verifying credentials of a UDP client

Apparently, the C.O.O.'s duties include clinical responsibilities:

!!!



This is not a good thing.

Victim and Witness Support

- "First point of contact" to aide in victim and witness management to assist Law Enforcement
- Crisis management and counseling for those effected by violent crime
- Instructing and providing Law Enforcement seminars towards higher quality investigation and victim and witness relations

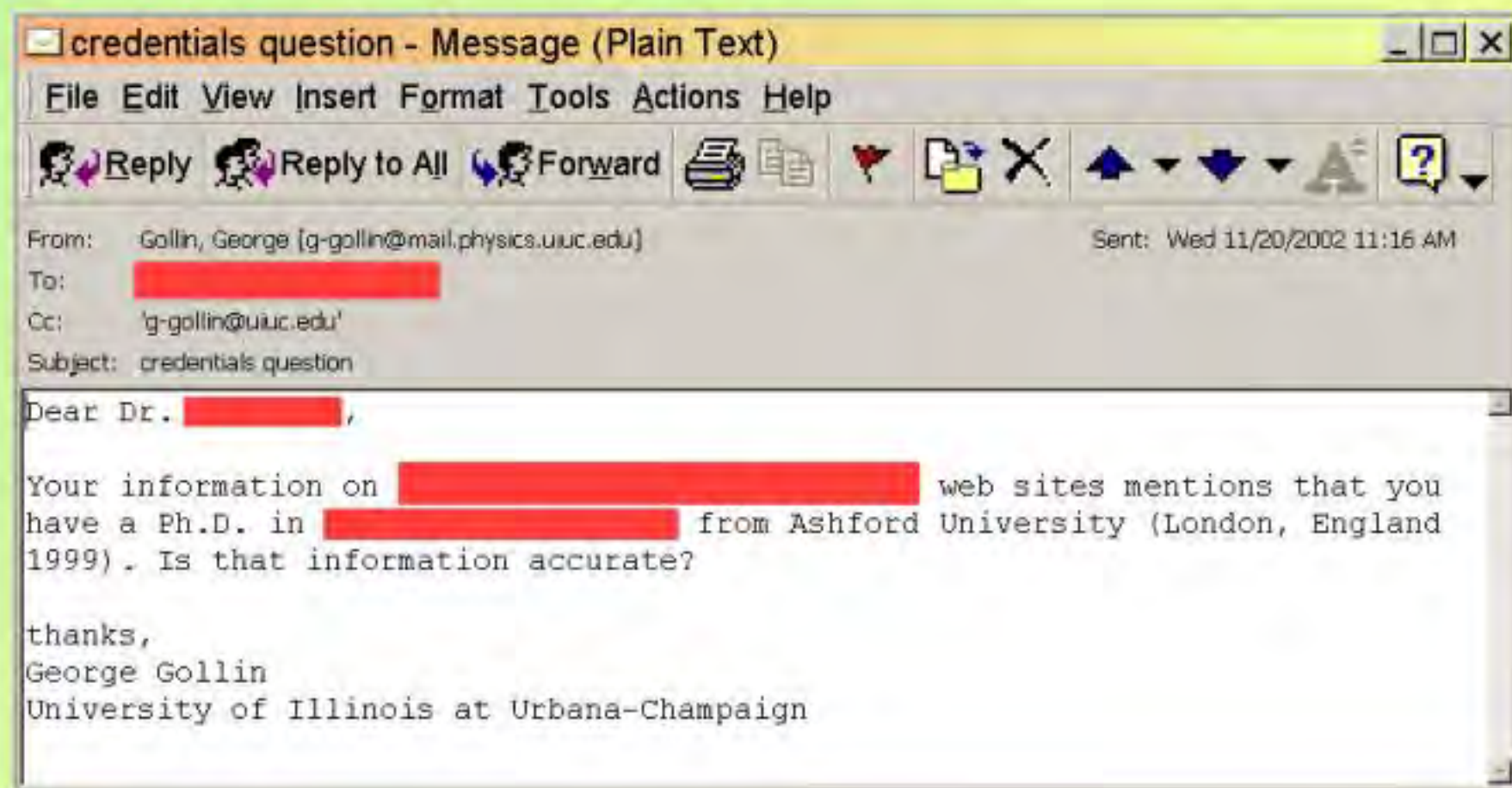
Verifying credentials of a UDP client

But perhaps it's a typo, and the fault of the webmaster?

Contacting the “forensic psychologist's” employer might get him/her in hot water, even if it's just a transcription error.

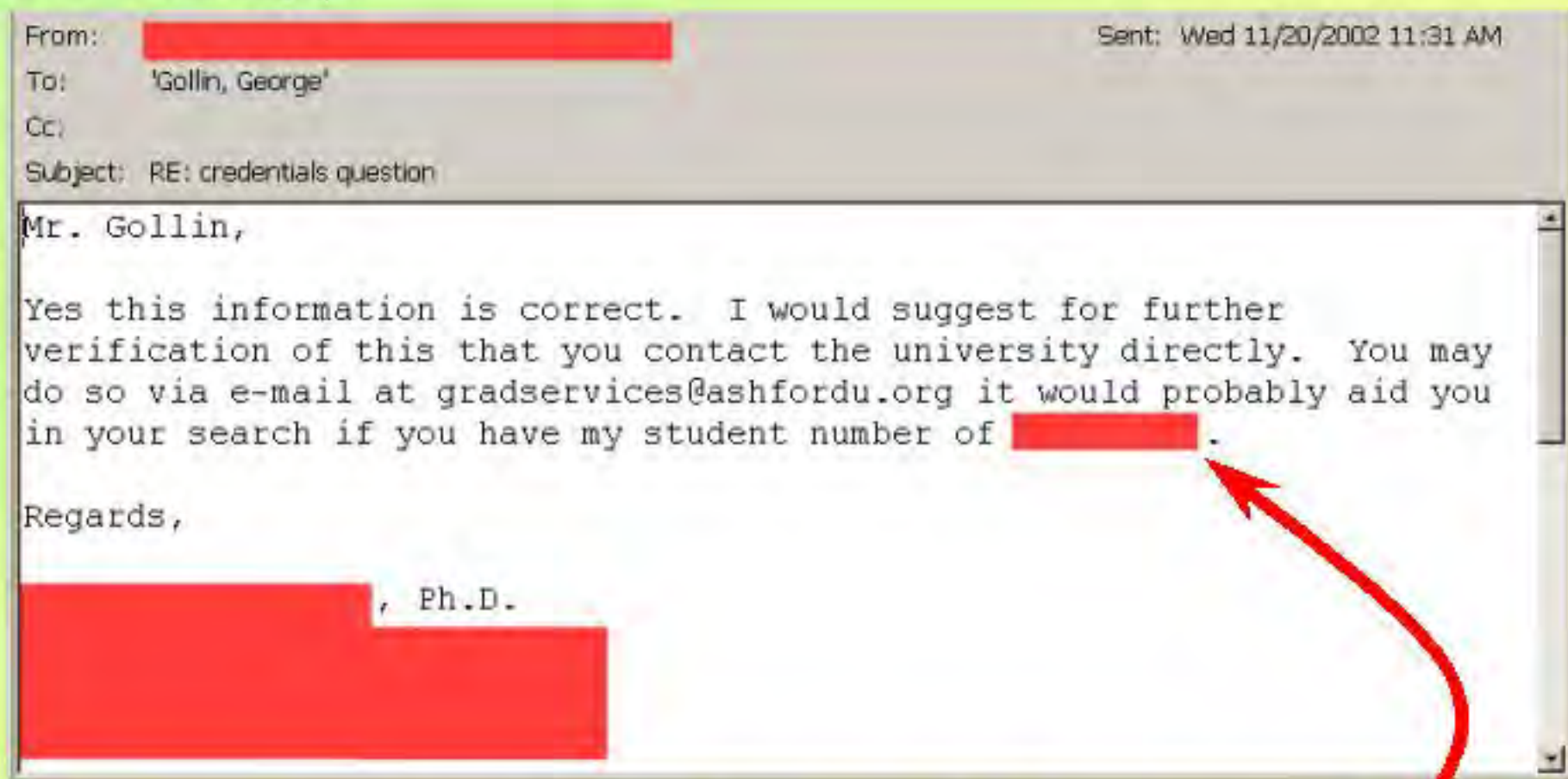
What to do? Well, maybe it's a typo. I sent the forensic psychologist an email message to ask...

Verifying credentials of a UDP client



Verifying credentials of a UDP client

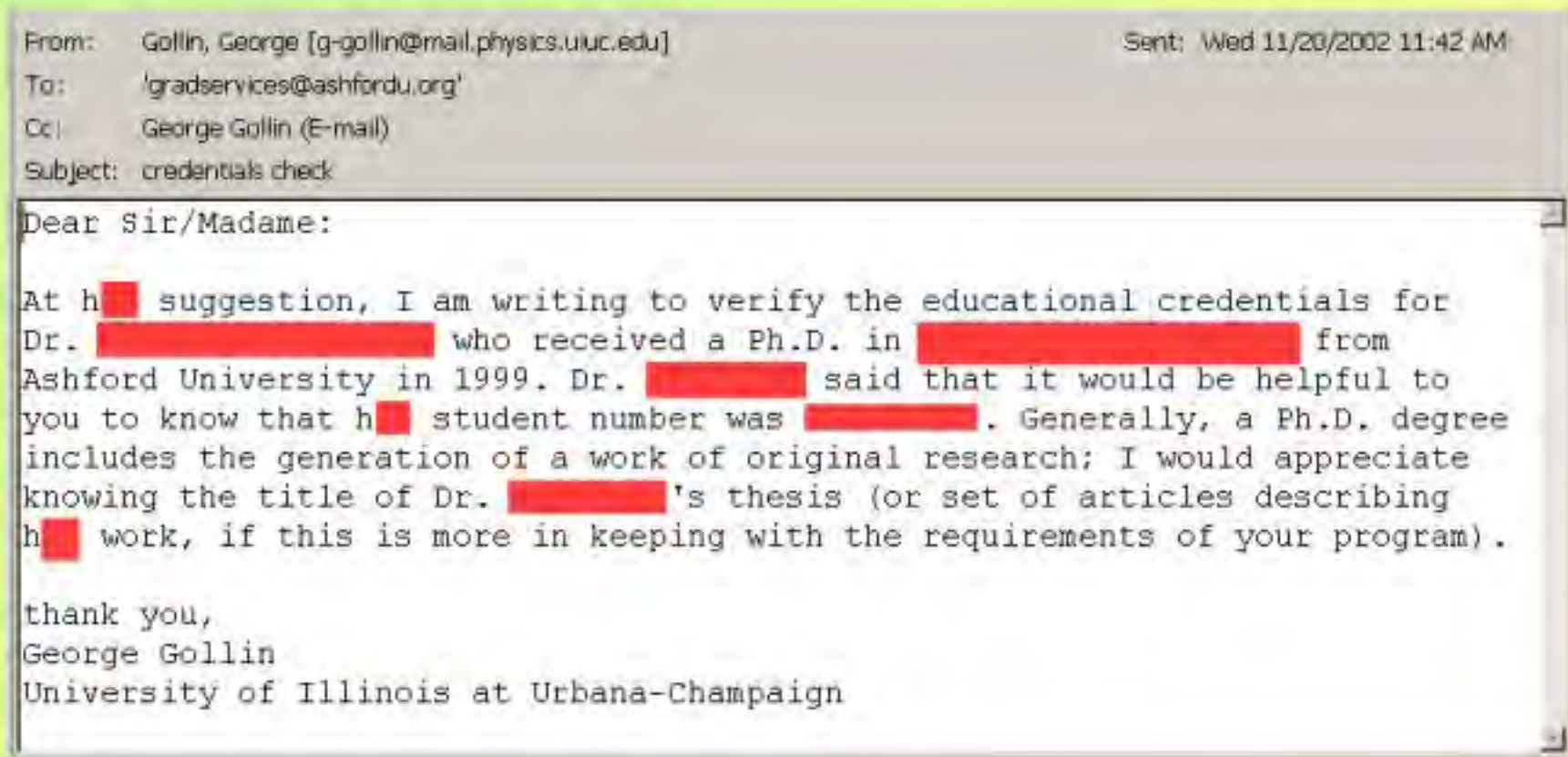
Here's the reply.



This information lets the UDP know that their client has approved the credentials check.

Verifying credentials of a UDP client

So I sent email to Ashford University...



I asked about the thesis title, too.

Verifying credentials of a UDP client

Ashford University replied (email shown on two slides)...

From: Ashford University [gradservices@ashfordu.org] Sent: Mon 11/25/2002 5:52 AM
To: g-gollin@mail.physics.uiuc.edu
Cc:
Subject: [REDACTED]

Ashford University
5-7 Singer St
London EC2A 4BQ, England

Email Transmission - This information is personal and confidential.

To: George Gollin
Email: g-gollin@mail.physics.uiuc.edu
From: Samantha Small
Fax #'s: (USA) 1-212-465-3317
(UK) 44-870-134-4791
Date: 21 November 2002
E-mail: gradservices@ashfordu.org

Regarding [REDACTED] (Student ID #

Verifying credentials of a UDP client

Ashford University reply, continued...

Regarding [REDACTED] (Student ID #
[REDACTED]):

Our records indicate that we awarded h [REDACTED] the
following:

Degree: Doctorate
Degree Field: [REDACTED]
Award Date: December 6, 1999

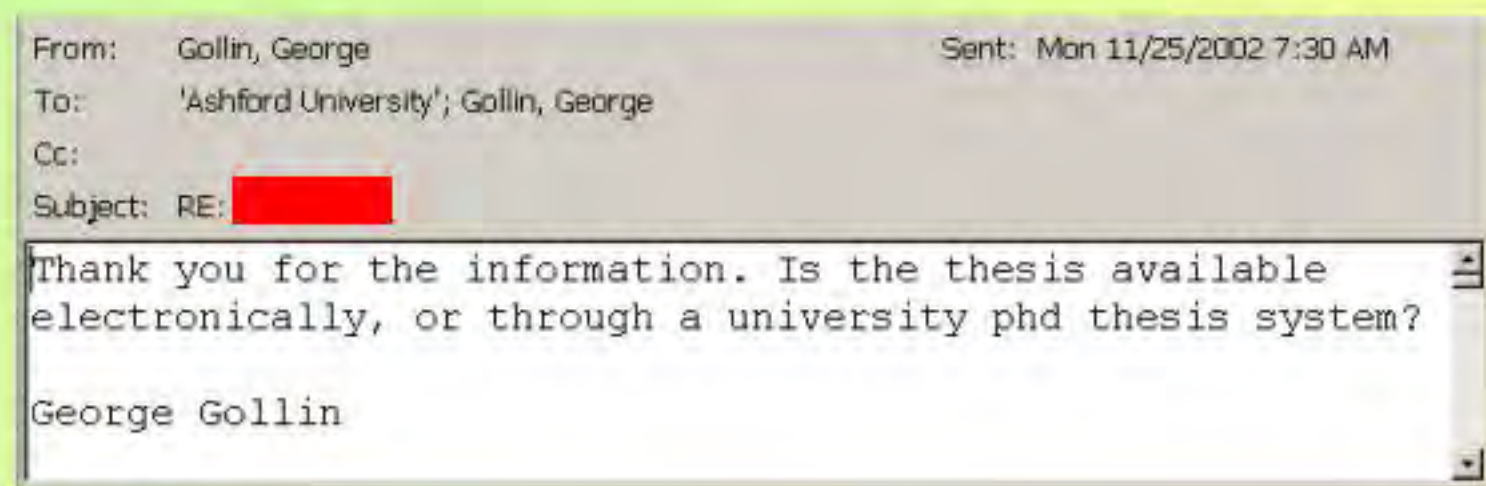
H [REDACTED] dissertation title was [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Samantha Small
Student Archives Manager

Verifying credentials of a UDP client

I wondered what they'd say if I asked to see the thesis...



Verifying credentials of a UDP client

They told me to “bugger off.” (The UDP pretends to be English.)

Dear George,

Dr. [REDACTED] thesis is not available electronically.

Due to the nature of h[REDACTED] work, Dr [REDACTED] has made the request that h[REDACTED] personal information beyond graduation details be held in the strictest of confidence unless [REDACTED] gives permission for their release in person.

Unfortunately we can give no further details regarding h[REDACTED] studies.

Sincerely,

Samantha Small
Student Archives Manager

So what happened next?

The forensic psychologist checked me out (via the web), then sent email asking if I'd be interested in helping them understand crime scene information (*pro bono*, which would be the right way for me to do it) in difficult cases.

I replied sure, OK, if I could be of service, but I don't know much of anything about this sort of thing.

I never contacted the psychologist's employer.

And then, in two steps, Dr. X disappeared.

verifying credentials...

Step 1: the Ph.D. degree disappears

About two weeks later mention of a Ph.D. disappeared from the employer's web site.

Forensic Psychologist - Netscape

File Edit View Go Communicator Help

Back Forward Reload Home Search Netscape Print Security Stop

Bookmarks Location Services What's Related

LAW ENFORCEMENT

CLOSED CASES

ACTIVE CASES

FAMILIES

COMMUNITY/MEDIA

EDUCATION

SUPPORT

ABOUT US

CONTACT US

SEARCH

CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER

is a Washington DC based research and profiling organization dedicated to aiding Law Enforcement and victims of terrorist crimes.

CRITICAL SKILLS

Forensic Psychologist

- **Expanded Study** of Victim Serial Predators
- Interviewing techniques for pre and post trial interviewing
- Comprehensive understanding of psychological factors in Criminal Motivation

Criminal Behavioral Research

- Continuous study of predator behaviors in pre and post offense situations
- Establishing the psychological dynamics of the victim/predator relationship during and after the case
- Analysis of behavior after capture to establish rehabilitation success and likelihood of re-offense

Victim and Witness Support

- "First point of contact" to aide in victim and witness management to assist Law Enforcement
- Crisis management and counseling for those effected by violent crime
- Instructing and providing Law Enforcement resources towards higher quality investigation and victim and witness relations

now

then

Ph.D. Forensic Psychology - Ashford University England 1999

investigation and victim and witness relations

EDUCATION

Co-Author with [redacted]

[redacted] - Due for publication Spring 2003

Ph.D. Forensic Psychology - Ashford University England 1999

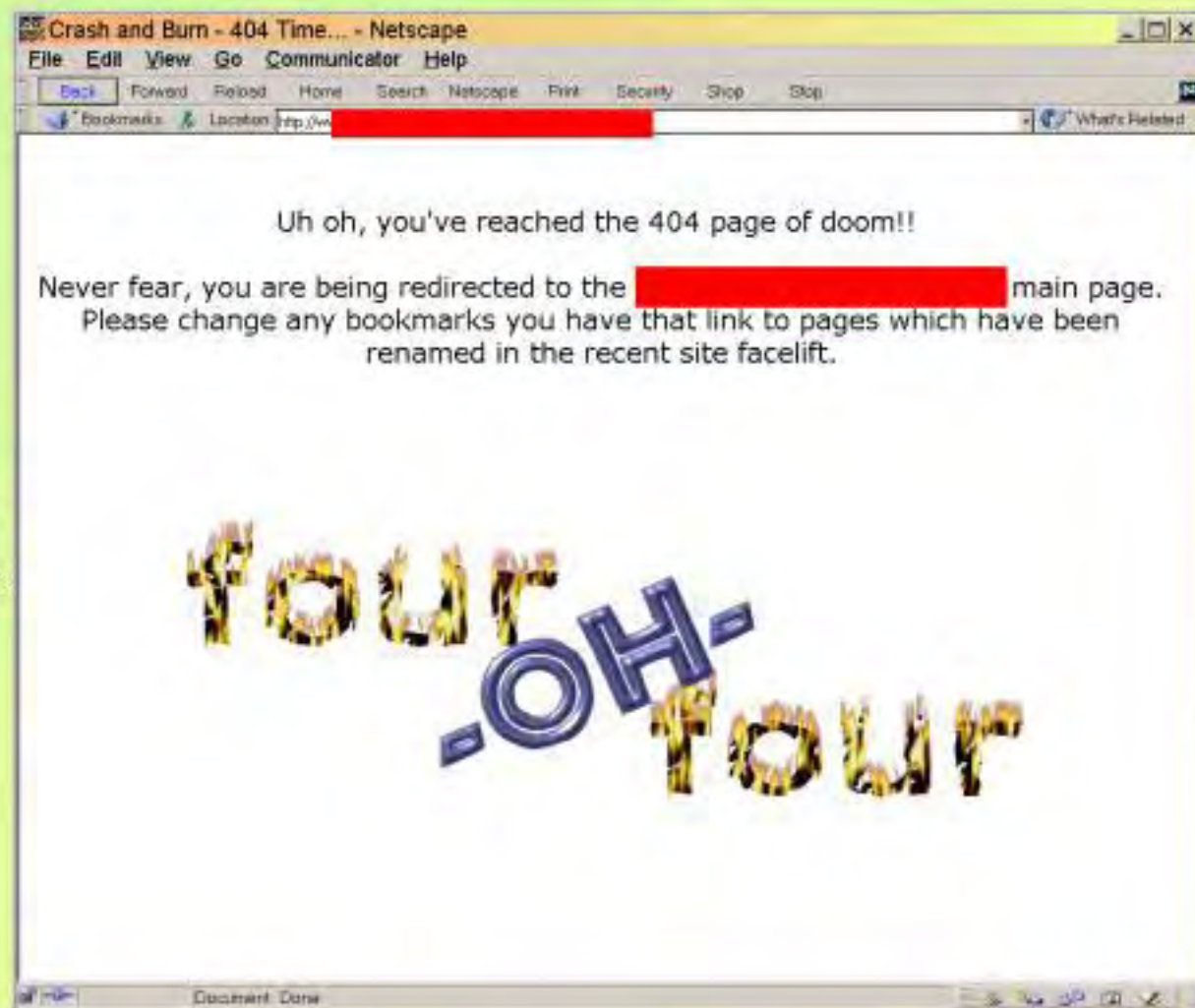
now

then

verifying credentials...

Step 2: the C.O.O. disappears

About a week after that mention of the “forensic psychologist” disappeared from the employer web site.



The name was scrubbed from other pages in which it appeared. (Movie reviews [!!], etc.)

The lesson in this

Someone who knows they've been burned may decide to disappear, perhaps to resurface elsewhere.

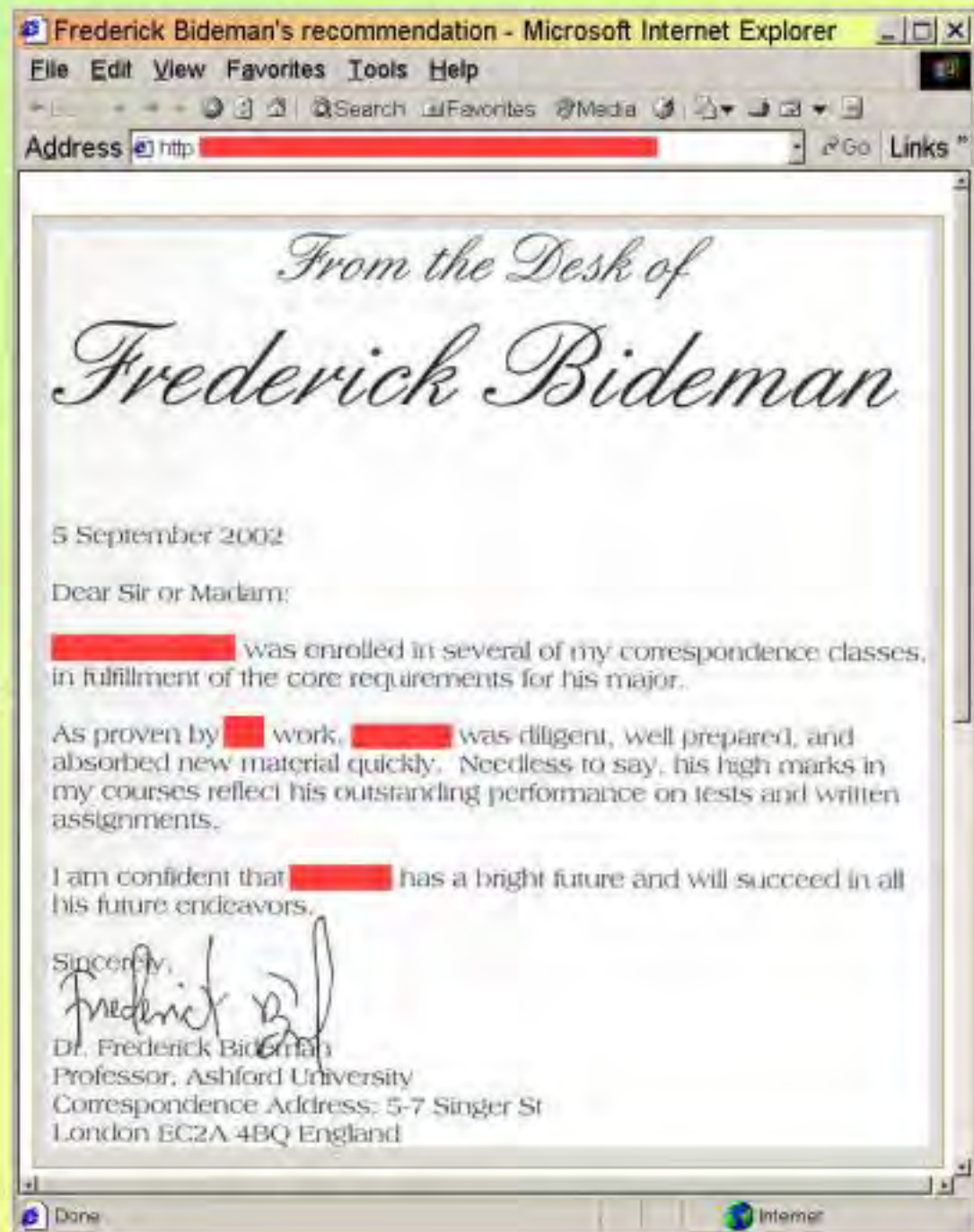
verifying credentials...

One of those letters of recommendation

Another service promised by
the UDP is the creation of
letters of recommendation.

Here's one, posted to the web
by a customer.

Not very informative, is it?
Can you guess the field of
study?



Frederick Bideman's recommendation - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Address <http://> [redacted] Go Links

From the Desk of

Frederick Bideman

5 September 2002

Dear Sir or Madam:

[redacted] was enrolled in several of my correspondence classes, in fulfillment of the core requirements for his major.

As proven by [redacted] work, [redacted] was diligent, well prepared, and absorbed new material quickly. Needless to say, his high marks in my courses reflect his outstanding performance on tests and written assignments.

I am confident that [redacted] has a bright future and will succeed in all his future endeavors.

Sincerely,

Frederick Bideman

Dr. Frederick Bideman
Professor, Ashford University
Correspondence Address: 5-7 Singer St
London EC2A 4BQ England

Done Internet

who else...?

Who else is out there? What to do?

Three examples from those earlier tables...

University asst. clinical professor	Devonshire	Ph.D. (also holds a legitimate Pharm.D.)
College asst. professor	Devonshire	D.B.A. (also holds a legitimate Ph.D.)
Licensed marriage & family psychotherapist and clinical supervisor	Parkwood	Doctorate Degree in Clinical Psychology (Masters is bogus too.)

who else...?

A university asst. clinical professor of medicine

UCSF Pharm.D. is legit but Ph.D. is a UDP fabrication.

What I did...

Ambrose - Netscape
File Edit View Go Communicator Help
Reload Home Search Netscape Print Security Shop
Bookmarks Location [redacted] What's Related

[redacted], PharmD, PhD, FASCP

- Current Title:
 - [redacted]
 - Assistant Clinical Professor of Pharmacy, [redacted]
 - Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine, [redacted]
 - [redacted] sts
- First [redacted]
- Education:
 - Associate of Arts, A [redacted]
 - Bachelor of Science [redacted]
 - [redacted]
 - Ph.D., University of Devonshire, London, England, 2000
- Licenses:
 - L [redacted]
 - C [redacted]
- Specialties
- [Profes](#)

[redacted] phone [redacted]

who else...?

A college assistant professor

Ph.D. is real (but from Southern University, not the non-existent University of Louisiana at Baton Rouge). D.B.A is a UDP fabrication.



College Department of Business Administration and Economics - Netscape

File Edit View Go Communicator Help

Back Forward Reload Home Search Netscape Print Security Shop

Bookmarks Location: [http://www.\[redacted\]edu/bus/news.html](http://www.[redacted]edu/bus/news.html) What's Related

Dr. [redacted] completed a Ph.D. in economics from the University of Louisiana in Baton Rouge and a D.B.A. from the University of Devonshire in the UK. He [redacted]

Copyright 2001 [redacted] College

Document: Done

What I did...

Licensed “marriage & family psychotherapist and clinical supervisor”

The rules in California are clear, and well documented. See http://www.psychboard.ca.gov/laws_regs/laws_regs2002.pdf.

A “psychologist” is licensed by the California Board of Psychology (<http://www.psychboard.ca.gov/>). Doctorate is required “from an approved or accredited educational institution.”

“Approved” (non-accredited) institutions are listed by the California Bureau for Private Postsecondary and Vocational Education (<http://www.bppve.ca.gov/>).

who else...?

Licensed “marriage & family psychotherapist and successful clinical supervisor”

Other California counseling certifications include “Marriage, Family, and Child Counselor” (renamed “Marriage and Family Therapist” in 1999), among other things.

MFCC/MFT licensing requirements defined by California Board of Behavioral Sciences (<http://www.bbs.ca.gov/>): doctors or masters degree required from accredited or approved school. Lists of these are available at <http://www.bbs.ca.gov/MFCSCHL1.HTM> and <http://www.bbs.ca.gov/MFCSCHL2.HTM>.

Links to licensing information for other states can be found at <http://kspope.com/licenseboards.html>.

Licensed “marriage & family psychotherapist...”

Google cache:

M.A. from “La Jolla University” (this is not UCSD)

As far as I can tell, La Jolla Univ. does not exist. It is not on the BBS lists of accredited/approved institutions. It has no listed phone numbers.

Parkwood we know about already.

Welcome To [redacted], M.A., M.F.T. - Netscape

File Edit View Go Communicator Help

Back Reload Home Search Netscape Print Security Stop Stop

Bookmarks Location [redacted] Where Released

[redacted].com

Psychotherapy & Coaching

Services Crisis Therapy Seminars Articles

About Contact Home

Welcome to [redacted].com

Services

Individual Psychotherapy

Couples Psychotherapy

Life Coaching

Executive Coaching

Dr. [redacted] is a licensed Marriage & Family Psychotherapist and successful Clinical Supervisor. [redacted] has a large private practice in [redacted]. She holds a Doctorate Degree in Clinical Psychology from Parkwood University and a Masters Degree in Clinical Psychology from La Jolla University with an emphasis in Marriage and Family Therapy. She has extensive experience treating Depression, Anxiety, PTSD, and Domestic Violence.

[redacted] is the founder and the [redacted]

Conference Group Username: Password: Login

who else...?

Licensed...

This web page is still active.

License verification through BBS:

<http://www.bbs.ca.gov/Web/lookup.htm>

Active license issued in 1996 in spite of unacceptable educational credentials.

Several La Jolla University “graduates” take the MFT license exam every year.

I contacted California BBS. This is in progress...

About- [redacted], M.A., M.F.T. - Netscape

File Edit View Go Communicator Help

Back Reload Home Search Netscape First Security Stop Stop

Bookmarks Location [http://www.[redacted].com/about.html] What's Related

[redacted].com

Psychotherapy & Coaching

Services Online Therapy Services Articles

About Contact Home

About [redacted]

Services

Individual Psychotherapy

Couples Psychotherapy

Life Coaching

Executive Coaching

my Online Therapy

Conference

Password

Log In

QUALIFICATIONS:

- Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist - MFC [redacted]
- Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology - Parkwood University - London, England
- M.A. in Clinical Counseling Psychology - La Jolla University, San Diego, CA.
- Certification of completion of Level I - EMDR training through EMDR Institute
- Certification of completion of 40 hours Domestic Violence training through Battered Women's Alternative & Haven Hills
- Certification in Hypnosis training through Rob Stone Institute, Encino, CA.
- Enrolled in CAMFT

who else...?

Contact from a former UDP staff member

In March, 2003 I started receiving email from someone who said he had worked for the University Degree Program for two and a half years, but was no longer involved with them.

He began sending me information, asking that I disseminate it widely. Included: faxes of a dozen “Diploma Registration Forms” from transactions with customers who had bought degrees, mostly PhD, but in medical fields.

I do not have independent verification of all the information he has sent. With this in mind... here is an example.

who else...?

One of the Diploma Registration Forms

Diploma Registration Form

Customer ID: 124654 ItemID: Agent: 099
 First Name: [REDACTED] Address: 11/24/02
 Bus Phone: [REDACTED] Notes:
 F or Floor: [REDACTED]
 X Mail: No

Invoice Details **Total Amount Customer Owe**

Student ID: 24854 Invoice#: 1022980 Status: Finished Confirmation

Name: [REDACTED] Phone1: [REDACTED]
 Business: [REDACTED] Phone2: [REDACTED]
 Street: [REDACTED] Fax: [REDACTED]
 City: [REDACTED] Cell: [REDACTED]
 State: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]
 Zip: [REDACTED]
 Country: USA

Grand Order Amount	\$2,500.00
Total Amount Paid	\$2,500.00
Balance	\$0.00

Invoices

Invoice #	Sold Date	Sold Price	Commission
1022980	11/24/02	\$2,500.00	\$0.00

1022980 24854 NLI

1

Diploma Information

BA	BS	MA	MS	PhD	Post	CE	MC	ITD	2000/2001/2002
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	December 15, 2000
InvoiceNumber: 1022980 Pharmaceutical Sciences									PHARMACOLOGY 09/01/1022980 Period: 01/00/01
University: MU - [REDACTED]									
Payment Details									December 8, 2000 RECEIVED FROM 09/01/1022980 Period: 11/00/01
InvoiceNumber: 1022980 Medical Chemistry									December 15, 2000 Period: 11/00/01
University: MU - [REDACTED]									
InvoiceNumber: 1022980 General Pharmacy									December 8, 2000 Period: 11/00/01
University: MU - [REDACTED]									
InvoiceNumber: 1022980 Genetic Pharmacy									December 8, 2000 Period: 11/00/01
University: MU - [REDACTED]									

2

Invoice#	Agent	Payment	Paid Date	Method	Phone	Ref. #	Appt	Notes
1022980	099	\$2,500.00	11/24/02	Check/Money Order				Check One

Activity/Comment

Date	Activity	By	Mag	Mag Ref	Issue	Entered By
02/04/03	OK you can bring this invoice we will reprint for you					[REDACTED]

3

who else...?

Diploma Registration Form (1)

Sale date
11/24/02

Diploma Registration Form			
CustomerID: 224654	RomID:	Agent: 199	
First Name: Peter	Last Name: [REDACTED]	SDate: 11/24/02	
Day Phone: [REDACTED]	Fax: [REDACTED]	Notes:	
Even Phone: [REDACTED]	Cell:		
E-Mail: [REDACTED]			
Invoice Details		Total Amount Customer Owe	
Student ID: 24654	Invoice#: 1022980	Status	Finished Confirmation
Name	Peter [REDACTED]	Total Order Amount	\$2,500.00
Business:	[REDACTED]	Total Amount Paid	\$2,500.00
Street:	[REDACTED]	Balance	\$0.00
City:	[REDACTED]	Phone1:	[REDACTED]
State:	NJ	Phone2:	[REDACTED]
Zip:	[REDACTED]	Fax:	[REDACTED]
Country:	USA	Cell:	[REDACTED]
		Email:	[REDACTED]
Invoices			
Invoice #	Sold Date	Sold Price	Discoun
1022980	11/24/02	\$2,500.00	\$0.00
1022980 24654 NJ Peter Cooper			

sale price \$2500

It seems that the form is the transaction log used by the salesperson working in the UDP "boiler room"

who else...?

Diploma Registration Form (2)

“graduation date”: Dec. 2000

Diploma Information						
BA	BS	MA	MS	MBA	PhD	Field
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pharmaceutical Sciences
InvoiceNumber: 1022980				University: NU		
Payment Details						
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Medicinal Chemistry
InvoiceNumber: 1022980				University: NU		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Geriatric Pharmacy
InvoiceNumber: 1022980				University: NU		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Geriatric Pharmacy
InvoiceNumber: 1022980				University: NU		

MS

cum laude

PhD

MS

diploma sent: 1/29/03

PhD

print date: 1/29/03

NU = Northfield University??

who else...?

Diploma Registration Form (3)

Payment date: 1/14/03

Agent

paid by check ("check done")

Invoice#	Agent	Payment	Paid Date	PMethod	PStatus	WI#	CC#	ExpDt	AuthDt	AuthCode	Notes
1022980	199	\$2,500.00	1/14/03	Check/ Money Order	Check Done						

Activity/Comment						
Date	Activity	Activity	Msg	Msg.Src	Done	Entered by:
1/27/03	GS em cust letting him know we will reprint his docu			Email	<input type="checkbox"/>	Kimberly

log of activity and contact with customer

who else...?

So who is this particular guy?

He bought an MS in Pharmaceutical Sciences, a PhD in Medicinal Chemistry, and MS and PhD degrees in “Geriatric Pharmacy.”

His business phone included an extension, so I called (without dialing the extension) and asked the operator for his contact information.

He is a pharmacist in a large health care program in New Jersey.

I asked if he was “Dr. so-and-so” or “Mr. so-and-so.” The operator said he was “Mr., not Dr.”

who else...?

Information on some of the other order forms

subject of highest degree	total cost	degrees purchased	country
Aeronautical engineering	\$360	PhD	U.S.
Law	\$950	BA, MA, MS, MS, PhD	U.S.
Epidemiology	\$960	PhD	U.S.
Medicinal chemistry	\$2500	MS, MS, PhD, PhD	U.S.
Embryology	\$1300	MS	U.S.
X-ray technology	\$1400	PhD	U.S.
Osteopathic medicine	\$960	PhD	Switz.
Plastic surgery	\$1400	PhD	S. Korea
Public health	\$900	MA, PhD	U.S.
Orthopedic surgery	\$1850	MS	Germany
Emergency medicine	\$960	PhD	England
Oncology	\$800	PhD	U.S.

This is terrible.

What else to talk about...

With more time I would also discuss

- college/university accreditation in the U.S. and Great Britain (“recognized” non-governmental agencies *vs.* parliamentary charters)
- bogus accreditation organizations
- other phony distance-learning programs
- diploma forgery
- differences in U.S. and British law (we can’t nail ‘em, but they can)
- legal risks (lawsuits for “tortious interference of contract”)
- strategies for investigation of sham universities and their customers

It is dishonest, and it does matter

The University Degree Program's clients acquire diplomas to misrepresent their level of knowledge and accomplishment to potential customers, licensing boards, students, colleagues, and patients.

With their false credentials, they gain unfair advantage when seeking jobs and promotions.

As alleged by the FTC, these are acts of fraud.

These acts are committed with the intention of gaining corrupt entry into professions where competence, honesty and trust are essential.

It is dishonest, and it does matter

Most of the results reported here concern only those individuals foolish enough to post their status as University Degree Program clients to the web. There are more of them out there!

These diplomas allow an untrained psychologist to offer clinical services to children of murder victims; an under-qualified NIH employee to pose as an expert before groups of schoolchildren; a "marriage and family psychotherapist" with a fraudulently obtained license to train therapists with legitimate credentials.

This is unacceptable.

Notes and more information

Accreditation of Post-Secondary Education Programs

Role of the U.S. Department of Education

The role played by the U.S. Department of Education in the accrediting process is described in their web site at <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/accreditation/>. As explained there,

The United States has no Federal Ministry of Education or other centralized authority exercising single national control over postsecondary educational institutions in this country. The States assume varying degrees of control over education, but, in general, institutions of higher education are permitted to operate with considerable independence and autonomy. As a consequence, American educational institutions can vary widely in the character and quality of their programs.

In order to insure a basic level of quality, the practice of accreditation arose in the United States as a means of conducting non-governmental, peer evaluation of educational institutions and programs. Private educational associations of regional or national scope have adopted criteria reflecting the qualities of a sound educational program and have developed procedures for evaluating institutions or programs to determine whether or not they are operating at basic levels of quality. [USDOE2002]

Notes and more information

The Department of Education does not accredit universities itself. Instead, it

...is required by statute to publish a list of nationally recognized accrediting agencies that the Secretary determines to be reliable authorities as to the quality of education or training provided by the institutions of higher education and the higher education programs they accredit. The Secretary only evaluates accrediting agencies that apply for recognition... [*ibid.*]

It would seem more difficult to block the creation of sham universities in the United States than in the United Kingdom where it is illegal to issue something "which may reasonably be taken to be... a degree" [DfES2002] without government approval.

Regional and specialized accreditation boards

Between 1974 and 1993 the principal non-governmental agency recognized to oversee accrediting in the United States was the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA). After COPA dissolved it was replaced by a temporary organization (the Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation) until the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) was organized in 1997.

CHEA (<http://www.chea.org/>) watches over six regional accreditation boards, which are listed in the following table.

Notes and more information

regional accreditation board	web site	coverage area
Middle States Association (MSA)	http://www.msache.org/	DE, DC, MD, NJ, NY, PA, PR, VI , overseas
Northwest Association of Schools & Colleges (NASC)	http://www.nwccu.org/	AK, ID, MT, NV, OR, UT, WA
North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA; name was changed in 2001)	http://www.ncacihe.org/	AR, AZ, CO, IA, IL, KS, MI, MN, MO, ND, NE, OH, OK, NM, SD, WI, WV, WY
New England Association of Schools & Colleges (NEASC)	http://www.neasc.org/	CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT, international
Southern Association of Colleges & Schools (SACS)	http://www.sacs.org/	AL, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, TX, VA, Latin America
Western Association of Schools & Colleges (WASC)	http://www.wascenior.org/senior/	CA, HI, Pacific basin

Notes and more information

An accredited degree-granting program in the United States is usually one that has been reviewed by one of these six boards: this is the "gold standard" of accreditation in the U.S. Though participation in the accreditation process is voluntary, most schools which maintain programs of high quality do participate.

In addition to the regional accrediting boards, the Department of Education lists a number of "National Institutional and Specialized Accrediting Bodies" which it recognizes as "reliable authorities" concerning the quality of specific programs in higher education. There are organizations that evaluate programs in acupuncture and oriental medicine, distance education and training, marriage and family therapy, medicine, and psychology. The complete list can be found at

<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/accreditation/natlagencies.html>. The Distance Education and Training Council, Accrediting Commission (DETC, with web site <http://www.detc.org/>) lists domestic as well as foreign institutions that request accreditation and meet DETC's standards.

It is not always the case that schools without accreditation from a regional board are to be viewed with suspicion. For example, California established a two-tiered system of higher education after the Second World War in which non-accredited schools can participate. Review and regulation of these schools was codified in the state's *Educational Reform Act of 1989* in part "to counter California's growing reputation as a diploma mill state." [Penman2000] This review function is now carried out by the Bureau for Private Postsecondary and Vocational Education (BPPVE), part of the state's Department of Consumer Affairs. The BPPVE web site is <http://www.bppve.ca.gov/>.

Notes and more information

Evaluation of foreign programs; licensing boards

Through the National Committee on Foreign Medical Education and Accreditation (NCFMEA <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/ncfmea/index.html>), the U.S. Department of Education reviews the standards used by foreign countries to accredit their medical schools, but does not participate in the accreditation process directly.

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES), a British government agency, maintains a list of institutions that have been granted degree-conferring power in the U.K. The information is available at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/recognisedukdegrees/>. None of the "universities" linked to the University Degree Program are on the list. (Several UDP "schools" claim mailing addresses in Great Britain. For example, the University of Devonshire web site <http://www.henryheston.com.cnchost.com/devonshire/> lists "27 Old Gloucester St., London." With its London address, Devonshire should be on the DfES list of recognized programs.)

Notes and more information

Some professions require that practitioners hold licenses from state-approved licensing boards. In California the regulations pertaining to clinical psychologists are codified in Section 2914 of the state's Business and Professions Code. [CBP2002] Links to licensing information for other states can be found at <http://kspope.com/licenseboards.html>. The manner in which degrees from foreign institutions are evaluated by licensing boards varies from state to state. The California Board of Psychology requires "that applicants [for licensure] with degrees from schools outside the US and Canada must provide the board with a comprehensive evaluation of the degree performed by a foreign credential evaluation service that is a member of the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES), and any other documentation the board deems necessary." [CBP2002] The NACES web site can be found at <http://www.naces.org/>.

Organizations that provide accreditation for sham universities

There are a number of suspicious accrediting organizations with presences on the web. The "European Council for Distance and Open Learning" has a web site with URL <http://www.ecdol.org/> and phone/fax numbers +44-208-387-8359 and +44-870-132-8246. (44 is the country code for the United Kingdom, while 208 is a city code for London.) According to AT&T's international services, the first number is not a real phone number; AT&T has no phone listing for the European Council for Distance and Open Learning in the United Kingdom. Dialing the fax number brings up the message "This number is not in use. Thank you for calling. Goodbye." ECDOL's list of institutions includes five created by the University Degree Program.

Notes and more information

Another unsavory accrediting organization is the “Distance Learning Council of Europe” (DLCE) with a real fax number (+44-870-138-6297) but no phone number. It lists six UDP "universities." Its web site is <http://www.dlce.org/dlccenet/dlccenet.htm>.

A third organization is The National Board of Education, Inc. (NBOE) which describes itself as "a comprehensive provider of Degree & Document Authentication & Apostille Services." At their web site (<http://www.nationalboardedu.com/>) they offer "Attestation/Credential Evaluation Services" and explain that "an Attestation Report is a document that attests that your degree or other credential is equivalent to a regionally accredited US or Canadian degree." NBOE has filed its papers of incorporation in Liberia. They explain this by stating "NBOE provides services worldwide, and has found The Republic of Liberia to be the finest example of supportive leadership in educational advancement to all nations." NBOE is not recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as a reliable authority on the quality of educational programs even though many of the programs it "accredits" are based in the United States.

Notes and more information

Verifying academic credentials

We tend to trust colleagues in our professional sphere. However, when job applicants are unknown to us it is sensible to be cautious and to confirm that their credentials and accomplishments are accurately represented.

- Check that the degree-granting institution is legitimate. Contact the relevant regional accreditation board or appropriate state agency to confirm the status of the degree-granting institution.
- Verify that the degree was actually awarded.
- Verify the credentials and affiliations of authors of letters of recommendation. Confirm by telephone that their letters are genuine.

Responding to instances of misrepresentation of academic credentials

When we encounter indications of misconduct that could imperil others, we are obliged to consider whether or not to act. The moral calculation involves a number of factors. How reliable is the information? How great is the risk to others if we choose not to act? How much time will it take? Do we risk being sued in retaliation?

Notes and more information

A first step is to document the misconduct by saving copies of relevant web pages. One way to do this is to produce a screen shot of the page. Holding down the Alt key while pressing the "Print Scrn" key will place a bitmap image of the visible portion of the PC's active window on the clipboard. This can be pasted into a word processor document or Photoshop picture. (The Print Scrn key is usually near the right side of the row of F keys on the keyboard. Converting the bitmap into a GIF or JPG file with Photoshop will reduce the file's size considerably.) Another way is to use Internet Explorer's ability to save a web page and embedded graphics in a folder. From the browser, follow the menu path File → Save As... and select the option Web Page, complete (*.htm, *.html) in the Save as type: box.

The search engine Google.com stores temporary ("cached") copies of web pages that are saved until the search engine revisits the site. If a web page has been changed, the cached file may show the earlier version. This proved useful after I contacted an Ashford University Ph.D. to inquire about credentials: a few weeks later the employer began expunging all mention of the staff member from the web site. (I did not contact the employer.) The cached versions of the pages provided a time-lapse record of the changes.

A query to other search engines such as Altavista.com, Alltheweb.com, and Lycos.com may yield links not returned with the Google.com results.

The "internet archive" at <http://www.archive.org/> stores periodic snapshots of large numbers of web sites, allowing one to view the time-evolution of sites which it has archived.

The Sam Spade site at <http://samspade.org/> contains a number of internet tracking utilities which can be used to learn more about the registration and location of a web site.

Notes and more information

It is worth discussing your findings with a lawyer before proceeding further. (Those of us at universities may be able to find expert advice concerning risks and strategies through our school's legal staff.) There can be differences between what the law actually says and what we assume it will say! It is naïve to expect that placing publicly available information before an employer is an act without risk. If the UDP client is disciplined or fired they might claim "tortious interference of contract" and sue. "Tortious interference of contract" refers to damaging interference by a third party with a contractual relationship between two other parties (the employer and the employee). It is not necessarily the case that a pure heart and an honest voice will guarantee victory in a lawsuit. Here is a selection from a 1998 Arkansas Supreme Court opinion [ARK1998] that discusses the subject.

In 1995, our Civil Instructions Committee met and adopted AMI Civ. 3d 406, which requires that the plaintiff must prove the following five elements to prove interference with contractual relationship or business expectancy:

- (1) plaintiff sustained damages;
- (2) plaintiff had a valid contractual relationship (and/or business expectancy);
- (3) defendant had knowledge of the contractual relationship and/or business expectancy;

[continued next page]

Notes and more information

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(4) defendant by intentional interference induced or caused a disruption or termination of the relationship and/or expectancy; and

(5) the disruption or termination was a proximate cause of the plaintiff's damages.

The foregoing instruction on (and definition of) tortious interference with contractual relationship was based upon a host of Arkansas cases where this court required the elements listed above, but made no mention of any "improper motive" requirement. [ARK1998]

This surprised me: providing factual information that is not selected with an eye towards misleading the employer does not immunize a Good Samaritan against an unfavorable outcome in a lawsuit.

State licensing boards define the required credentials for a number of professions including medicine and clinical psychology. Contact information for U.S. and Canadian psychology licensing boards can be found at <http://kspope.com/licenseboards.html>; some states maintain web sites that include online verification of licenses as well as descriptions of the credentials required for a license. One possible course of action to discuss with a lawyer would be to describe the apparent misrepresentation of academic qualifications to a licensing board. It is possible that the board would function as a buffer between yourself and the employer/employee so that you were not interfering directly with the employer/employee contract.

References and further information

ARK1998: Arkansas Supreme Court, "Dissenting Opinion to Court's Denial of Rehearing," available online at <http://courts.state.ar.us/opinions/1998a/980528/96-1351.html> (1998).

CBP2002: California Board of Psychology, "An Overview of Licensure as a Psychologist," available online at <http://www.psychboard.ca.gov/licensing/license.html> (2002).

DfES2002: Department for Education and Skills (a U.K. government agency), "UK Legislation: The Education Reform Act 1988," available online at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/recognisedukdegrees/ukl.shtml> (2002).

Penman2000: Penman, Doris T., "Approval and Accreditation of Doctoral Programs in Clinical, Counseling, Educational and School Psychology," *California Department of Consumer Affairs Board of Psychology Update*, Issue No. 7, available online at <http://www.psychboard.ca.gov/pubs/01-2000.pdf> (2000).

Raso2000: Raso, Jack, "Just the Doctorate You Ordered," *Priorities for Health*, **12**, available online at <http://www.acsh.org/publications/priorities/1203/doctorate.html> (2000).

References and further information

USDOE2002: U.S. Department of Education, "Accreditation in the U.S.," available online at <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/accreditation/accredus.html> (2002).

The newspaper *The Australian* published an "extensive guide to active, emerging, and recent diploma mills..." on September 2, 2002. The article is available online at http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,5744,5017662%255E23004,00.html.

The web site <http://www.degree.net> contains a large amount of information about accredited distance learning programs and diploma mills.

The online journal *Wired* ran the story "Down by the Diploma Mills Stream" in its August 28, 2002 edition, available at <http://www.wired.com/news/print/0,1294,54596,00.html>.

George Brown's article "Competing for the Cyber-Savvy; challenging the competitor you never knew you had" was shown at the 16th Australian International Education Conference, 30 September – 4 October 2002 (Hobart, Tasmania, Australia). Brown discusses a variety of topics including possible definitions for the terms "degree mill" and "diploma mill."

References and further information

Need a degree in a hurry? Take a look here:

The American College of Metaphysical Theology (<http://www.americancollege.com/>). The "total fee" for a Ph.D. is \$199.

Replacement Diplomas (<http://www.degree-mill.com/>) produces forgeries of diplomas and transcripts from real universities (including medical schools) for \$225.

CollegeDiploma Reproductions (<http://www.geocities.com/collegediploma/>) also forges diplomas and transcripts, but charges \$750.

Cooldegree.com (<http://www.cooldegree.com/>) forges diplomas and transcripts from a mix of imaginary and real universities (\$159), as well as providing "verification" of credentials (\$225) and letters of recommendation (\$20 per letter).

Capitol University (<http://www.capitoluniversity.com/>) charges \$1650 for a masters and Ph.D. and promises delivery "within 3 weeks of enrollment." It is accredited by the "Distance Graduation Accrediting Association" (DGAA; <http://www.accredit.t2u.com/>). The DGAA web site uses remarkably poor graphics.