

# Detecting Forged Credentials

by the staff of WORLD EDUCATION SERVICES, INC.

## Extent of the Problem

Forged academic credentials, while certainly not in the league of an epidemic, remain a chronic and worrisome problem for international admissions officers and others who must accept documents submitted by foreign applicants.

World Education Services, Inc. has evaluated thousands of foreign education credentials, of which only a small number has involved forged documents--a finding which seems to hold true in informal comparisons made with others working in this field.

However, the fear of failing to detect such swindles and becoming known as an "easy mark", keeps even the most experienced evaluator on his toes and the novice in search of expert guidance.

The collective wisdom which WES has gathered on the subject is offered below, as well as some examples of the most interesting forgeries or degree mill documents detected.

## Common Encounters

- a. Forged or altered credentials
- b. Incorrect and misleading translations
- c. Records from non-existing institutions (degree mills)

d. Incomplete records submitted by political refugees

## Warning Clues

The document is poorly copied and covered with stains or burn marks in critical places. (The last name is distinct, but the first name will have been conveniently "soiled" or burned beyond recognition.)

A record stamped "not to be released to student" or "confidential" is submitted to you by the student.

The applicant has lost the original of his/her record.

The type is inconsistent throughout the document because subjects have been added or grades changed. In some cases, crude alterations have been made in longhand, or lines may have been typed in at a slight angle to the computer-generated originals.

Names may have been substituted. Typically, a person will type his name on a sheet of paper, cut it out and paste it across a copy of an original, which he then photocopies; the substitution of names will rarely appear on an original.

Grades listed may be absurdly high, or the number of course hours

claimed to have been carried per semester an improbable load.

The applicant claims to have graduated from an institution but can provide only a letter indicating completion of a program.

Although the applicant has taken external examinations, the certificates have been lost; all he/she has is a statement of attendance or graduation from school.

The document appears to be very American in style, giving subjects, grades and credit hours in U.S. terms, although the education system is different from the U.S. system.

The application is unusually late, making verification difficult, or is accompanied by a long letter from an impressive office--usually located in the U.S.--which may be attempting to lend an aura of officialdom to otherwise unacceptable documents.

## Golden Rules

Do not be rushed into accepting a credential about which you have reservations. It takes time to exchange correspondence.

For every copy of a document, there has to have been an original.

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## FORGED continued

### Verification Check Steps

1. Confirm the existence of the institution through reference sources such as the commonly used books *International Handbook of Universities*, the *Commonwealth Universities Yearbook*, the *AACRAO World Education Series*, etc. If the institution is not listed there, call the appropriate foreign consulate or embassy, either in New York or Washington, and obtain information from the educational or cultural officer. Large international organizations such as the Institute of International Education or AMIDEAST also might have information.

2. Make sure a program actually is offered by a particular school or university. If the previously mentioned references do not list it, write to the foreign institution named, enclosing a copy of the document submitted for verification, and address the letter to the *office* of the person who signed the credential, not to the particular individual.

3. In this age of the fax machine, photocopies must be examined with great care. Look for differences in type faces or in the shading of the type, particularly in the areas listing names or grades. Examine the background for signs that paper may have been pasted over a certain section. If a document looks at all suspicious, ask to see the original. If the document cannot be sent, write to the official body involved for verification.

4. Note that transcripts, diplomas or other credentials must **always** be on a school letterhead.

5. Familiarize yourself with the appearance of credentials you encounter most frequently.

6. Compare dates of birth and dates of graduation for logical progression.

7. If forced to accept documents from countries not diplomatically related to the U.S., such as Cuba, have the applicant sign a form declaring that the information contained

in his papers is true and ask that his signature be notarized. This is more of a deterrent than you might think.

8. Even though a student is transferring from another U.S. school, always request to see his original foreign credentials. Do not rely on someone else's verification of authenticity.

### A Word on Translations

All translations must be accompanied by the document in the original language. Schools will send transcripts directly to you very quickly, so if the student claims otherwise, be suspicious. Even though certain official transcripts translated into English by foreign universities (especially in the Middle East) may look suspect because of irregular typing and bizarre English, their authenticity can be determined by the original transcripts, which will have ink seals, signatures and postage stamps affixed to them.

The name of the institution and of the diploma must be in the original language. Never accept "bachelor of science" or "master of arts" or any U.S. educational nomenclature on a translation as the true rendition of the original. Italian universities issue the *laurea*, the French issue the *licence* and the South Americans the *titulo*, etc. None ought to be translated or it would be impossible to establish an academic equivalency. Institution names should also be in the original language.

### How to Handle Fraud

World Education Services, Inc. clearly states in the terms and conditions of its application forms: "Forged and Altered Documents—When it has been determined that *any* document submitted has been forged or altered in any way, the application will be cancelled, and no evaluation report will be prepared. The documents become the property of World Education Services, Inc. All recipients indicated on the application form will be notified."

However, when investigating

suspicious documents, never use the words "forged" or "altered", no matter how convinced you are of your charge. Always state that a document is being verified for "authenticity", and if found to be fraudulent, simply say that it is "not authentic".

### A Final Warning

Be aware that forged documents tend to originate in the same places, and that the forger, even though previously exposed as such, may keep turning up like the proverbial bad penny.

### Verification Sources

#### BOARDS

There are a number of boards testing at the G.C.E.-school certificate level. The following are addresses for boards whose certificates are the most likely to be presented to U.S. institutions:

(a) **University of Cambridge**  
Secretary  
University of Cambridge  
Local Examinations Syndicate  
Syndicate Buildings  
17 Harvey Road  
CAMBRIDGE CB1 2EU  
United Kingdom

(b) **University of London**  
Secretary  
School Examinations Dept.  
Stewart House  
32 Russell Square  
London WC 1B 5DN

(c) **West African Examinations Council**  
(Candidates from Nigeria)  
Senior Deputy Registrar  
Nigeria  
West African Examinations Council  
P.M.B. 1022, Yaba, LAGOS  
Nigeria

(Candidates from Ghana, Sierra Leone, The Gambia)  
Senior Deputy Registrar

Ghana  
West African Examinations Council  
P.O. Box 917  
ACCRA  
Ghana

(d) The Secretary  
Kenya National Examining Council  
P.O. Box 73598  
NAIROBI  
Kenya

(e) National Examinations Council of  
Tanzania  
P.O. Box 2624  
Dar es Salaam  
Tanzania

See also p. 243 UNITED KINGDOM  
AACRAO:  
World Education Series 1976

### INSTITUTES

America-Mideast Educational and Training Services Inc. (AMIDEAST),  
1717 Massachusetts Ave., N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20036. (202)797-7900.

Institute of International Education,  
809 United Nations Plaza  
New York, N.Y. 10017. (212)883-8200.

### PUBLICATIONS

*Commonwealth Universities Yearbook 1988*, Publications Dept., Association of Commonwealth Universities, John Foster House, 36 Gordon Square, London, England WC1HOPF

American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) World Education Series, 1 Dupont Circle N.W., Suite 330, Washington, D.C. 20036-1110.

For degree mills, read:

*Bear's Guide to Earning Non-Traditional College Degrees* 10th Edition by John Bear, 1988. 323 pp. Ten Speed Press, P.O. Box 7123, Berkeley, CA 94707

## Examples of Unauthentic Documents

*Oxford University  
Oxford, England  
Office of the Registrar*

NAME: [REDACTED]  
STUDENT NUMBER: [REDACTED]  
MAJOR: Higher Accounting  
DEGREE: Bachelor of Business Administration

DUPLICATE OFFICIAL  
GRADE REPORT

Page: 1

SEMESTER	COURSE TITLE	TOTAL CREDIT HOURS ATTEMPTED	TOTAL HONOR POINTS EARNED	SEMESTER GRADE POINT AVERAGE
Fall Semester 1970	English Composition I	3	96---A++	First Class 5.0
	English Composition II	3	91---A++	
	American Literature	3	90---A++	
	History of Western Civilization I	3	95---A++	
	The History of England I	3	90---A++	
	Culture and Institutions of The Middle Ages 4th to the 12th century 3	3	92---A++	
	College Algebra and Trigonometry	3	93---A++	
	Mathematics for Social Science and Business	3	95---A++	
		24	A++	
[REDACTED]	III Literature	3	93---A++	First Class 5.0
	Civilization II	3	90---A++	
	and II	3	95---A++	
	Institutions of The Middle Ages 13th to the	3	91---A++	
	Social Policy	3	92---A++	
	g	3	92---A++	
	3	94---A++		
	25	A++		

"Oxford University" is a degree mill and not a bona fide institution recognized in the United Kingdom. It apparently was intended to be mistaken for the University of Oxford located in Oxford, England, not London. In addition, the grades earned are all a ludicrously high A + +, and courses would not be structured in the manner reported here.

Grade Examples: A++=90-100, A+=85-89, A=74-84, B+=69-73, B=58-68, C+=50-57, C=44-49, P=35-43, F=0-34.

LONDON OFFICE: 16 KENIL WORTH ROAD, PENGE, LONDON SE 20-7QG

REGISTER Susan Sewell

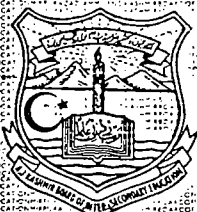


No. 000270 Roll No. 936

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**AZAD JAMMU AND KASHMIR**

**BOARD OF INTERMEDIATE & SECONDARY EDUCATION MIRPUR**



**INTERMEDIATE EXAMINATION**

Group Humanities Attempt First

Session (Spring) 1978

This is to certify that \_\_\_\_\_  
 Son/Brother of \_\_\_\_\_  
 Registered Number 960 - AK - 79  
 of the District Mirpur (AK)  
 passed the Intermediate Examination of this Board, held in May-June 1978  
 as a Regular/Private candidate, obtaining 631 marks out of 1000  
 and has been placed in the 3rd Division.  
 He/She offered the subjects and obtained the marks as mentioned below

Urdu (Compulsory)	228	2 English (Compulsory)	109
Islamic Studies	40	4 Civics	119
History	435	6	XXX

Dated: 15th May, 1979. Secretary

One of the clumsier forgery attempts to reach us: the applicant used white correction fluid on a red-colored background, and then crudely inserted his name and altered the marks before the fluid was dry, using a typewriter face which does not match the original.

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA  
 ACADEMIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

Ref No. 251/8/76

P. O. BOX 25  
 LEGON



TRANSCRIPT OF ACADEMIC RECORD

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Years of Attendance OCTOBER 1976 TO AUGUST 1979  
 Course(s) of Study B.Sc. BIOCHEMISTRY WITH CHEMISTRY

Session	Subjects Studied	Grades Obtained	Results of Examinations
October 1976 to Sept. 1977	Biology Theory and Practical Chemistry Theory and Practical Physics Theory and Practical	B B C	First University Examination in Science, 1977-- PASSED.
The student also passed an examination in African Studies, a requirement for Bachelor's degree courses at this University.			
October 1977 to Nov. 1978	Psychology Philosophy Applied Mathematics Mathematics Biochemistry Theory I Biochemistry Theory II Biochemistry Theory III Chemistry Practical Chemistry (Organic and Inorganic) Theory I Chemistry (Organic and Inorganic) Theory II Chemistry (Organic and Inorganic) Theory III Chemistry Practical	B C C A B B B C A B C+	B.Sc. Part I Examination, 1978-- PASSED.
January 1979 to August 1979	Biochemistry Theory IV Biochemistry Theory V Biochemistry Theory VI Biochemistry Theory VII Biochemistry Theory VIII Biochemistry Theory IX Biochemistry Theory X Biochemistry Practical Microbiology Theory Microbiology Practical Clinical Chemistry Theory Clinical Chemistry Practical Dissertation	A B+ B C+ C B+ B B C+ C A B	B.Sc. Part II Examination, 1979-- PASSED.

Degree/Diploma/Certificate Awarded B.Sc. BIOCHEMISTRY WITH CHEMISTRY  
 Class of Degree SECOND CLASS (HONOURS) CAREER DIVISION Date of Award OCTOBER, 1979  
 Higher Degree/Diploma Awarded \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Award \_\_\_\_\_  
 Done August 12, 1988 For: DEPUTY REGISTRAR (ACADEMIC AFFAIRS)  
 (J. W. Buda)

In this case, the "shell" from the University of Ghana is authentic, and the application was accompanied by a letter allegedly written by the deputy registrar of the institution, which seemed genuine. However, the applicant did himself in by using too elaborate a type face for the subjects and grades. The date also is not shown in the British style (12th August, 1988) used by the University, but in the American style. A check with the university's academic registrar showed that no such student had attended the school, and that the letter purported to be from the institution's deputy registrar also was a forgery.

## University of London



June 1981

## General Certificate of Education Examination

This is to certify that

OF CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY, WILLIAMS COLLEGE (GCE SCHOOL)

obtained the grades indicated in the following subject(s):

ADVANCED LEVEL	(THREE SUBJECTS)
ECONOMICS	GRADE A
PURE MATHEMATICS	GRADE B
APPLIED MATHEMATICS	GRADE A

## University of London



January 1983

## General Certificate of Education Examination

This is to certify that

AT WIRRAL METROPOLITAN COLLEGE, EASTHAM

obtained the grades indicated in the following subject (s):

ADVANCED LEVEL	(ONE SUBJECT)
GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL STUDIES	GRADE E

The 1981 GCE is a very sophisticated forgery which might escape someone unfamiliar with the British system. Compare it with the 1983 GCE, which is authentic. The type face used for the grades and institution name on the forgery does not match the type face used at the bottom portion. The manner in which the information is presented is incorrect. The forgery omits the signature of the Under Secretary of the Department of Education. Finally, a check with the University of London School Examinations Board revealed there is no examination center by the name of Williams College.

Signed on behalf of the University of London

*A.R. Stephenson*

Secretary to the University Entrance and School Examinations Council

Centre No. Cand. No. Date of Birth  
82060 80913 03/10/63

(Explanatory Notes are printed overleaf)

011457

Signed on behalf of the University of London

*A.R. Stephenson*

Secretary to the University Entrance and School Examinations Council

The Department of Education and Science accepts the examination as reaching the approved standard

Signed on behalf of the Department of Education and Science

*A. Summers*Centre No. Cand. No. Date of Birth  
78940 80521 11/04/64

(Explanatory Notes are printed overleaf)

Under Secretary  
038093

## THE WEST AFRICAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

## NOTIFICATION OF RESULT

NAME OF CANDIDATE	NUMBER	DATE OF ISSUE	AWARD
[REDACTED]	11761398	06/06/80	GCE A/LEVEL

NAME AND DATE OF EXAMINATION
GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION ADVANCED LEVEL DEC. 1979

SUBJECT NAME	GRADE	INTERPRETATION OF GRADES
ENGLISH LANGUAGE	4	CREDIT
ECONOMICS	3	GOOD
MATHEMATICS	6	CREDIT
PHYSICS	6	CREDIT
CHEMISTRY	6	CREDIT
BIOLOGY	4	CREDIT
AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE	7	PASS
NO OF SUBJECTS LISTED = 7		

Notice that the type face on the upper portion of the document does not match the type face used for the subjects and credits. Also, a student on an advanced level usually would take no more than three subjects at one sitting. This is an attempt to pass 'O' Level work for 'A' Level.