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16 August 2011

### DISPOSITION MEMORANDUM

**SUBJECT:** (U) Unaccredited Degree: Global Response Staff Officer

**CASE:** 2011-10162-IG

#### ISSUES UNDER INVESTIGATION:

1. (U//~~FOUO~~) Based on a 2008 United States Secret Service investigation that identified an Agency contractor as possessing a degree from a known diploma mill, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) initiated a proactive investigation on 5 August 2008 into Agency staff claiming degrees from non-accredited institutions. OIG matched a list of unaccredited institutions against Agency BIO information to identify any individuals who had provided degree evidence to Human Resources.<sup>1,2</sup> One of the individuals identified, [redacted] presented a bachelor of science "degree" from [redacted] received in [redacted] on his Agency BIO. [redacted] is an unaccredited institution.

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2. (U//~~FOUO~~) OIG reviewed the claims made by [redacted] regarding his degree and the associated education to determine if there were false statements or improper use of an unaccredited degree, and if there was an improper reimbursement for the degree by the Agency.

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<sup>1</sup> (U//~~FOUO~~) The term unaccredited refers to the recognition and acceptability of a degree for use in federal employment as recognized by the Office of Personnel Management. Unaccredited degrees cannot be used to meet the qualifications for federal positions that require a degree. The complete definitions of accreditation are included in the Appendix.

<sup>2</sup> (U//~~FOUO~~) The Agency biographical profile (Agency BIO) is the mechanism for tracking information on individuals who officially declare their education to the Agency by providing proof of attendance. The Agency BIO is made available to hiring managers and used directly in staffing decisions. Only staff employees and former employees were covered by this review because there is no central database on contractor educational records.

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**INVESTIGATIVE EFFORTS:**

3. (U//~~FOUO~~) OIG reviewed [redacted] security file for any degree claims.

4. (U//~~FOUO~~) OIG reviewed [redacted] Official Personnel Folder (OPF) and online Agency BIO.

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5. (U//~~FOUO~~) OIG interviewed [redacted] on 5 September 2008, regarding his unaccredited degree.

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6. (U//~~FOUO~~) OIG obtained and reviewed [redacted] internal job applications and resumes for positions that he held at the Agency as well as his Performance Appraisal Reports.

7. (U//~~FOUO~~) OIG reviewed Agency regulations and relevant laws related to the allegations.

**RESULTS:**

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9. (U//~~FOUO~~) [redacted] holds a bachelor of science "degree" in [redacted] from [redacted] [redacted] had completed courses at other schools, but confirmed that his only "degree" was from [redacted]. In a 5 September 2008 interview with OIG, [redacted] stated that he started at [redacted] in [redacted] and finished in [redacted]. [redacted] estimated the total cost of his degree as between \$2,500 and \$2,900.

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13. (U) [redacted] claimed accreditation by [redacted]



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was never accredited by the US Department of Education.<sup>3</sup>

14. (U//~~FOUO~~) [redacted] initially presented his bachelor's degree information to this Agency in his applicant Questionnaire for National Security Positions (SF-86) dated [redacted] [redacted] included his degree information in his Agency BIO, where it remains.

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15. (U//~~FOUO~~) In an interview with OIG, [redacted] stated that he was advised by the background investigator who conducted his initial applicant background investigation that [redacted] was a diploma mill.

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This information was based on the investigator's travel to [redacted] address in [redacted] as well as subsequent internet research. [redacted]

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<sup>3</sup> (U//~~FOUO~~) According to Title 20 U.S.C. § 1099b (*Recognition of accrediting agency or association*), the Secretary of Education is responsible for recognizing accrediting bodies, which in turn recognize institutions.

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(b)(7)(c) acknowledged that he considered the whole experience embarrassing and was not aware that [redacted] was a fraudulent institution.

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17. (U//~~FOUO~~) [redacted] non-accredited degree does not meet that requirement; however, his resume indicates that he does possess the requisite equivalent experience, [redacted] to qualify for the position in lieu of an accredited bachelor's degree. It is unclear to what extent, if any, that [redacted] listing the bachelor's degree may have influenced the Agency's decision to hire him at the pay grade of [redacted]. No record was present in his personnel file indicating he received a higher grade or step due to his degree.

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18. (U//~~FOUO~~) During his OIG interview, [redacted] acknowledged that his degree consisted of transfer and life experience credit granted by [redacted], and that he had not taken the courses listed on his transcripts through [redacted]

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[redacted] stated that his [redacted] experience more than qualified him for his duties, and that he had obtained his degree through [redacted] because he believed he needed a degree but wished to minimize the cost and time expenditure.

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**DISPOSITION:**

19. (U//~~FOUO~~) While [redacted] is an archetypical diploma mill, requiring neither coursework nor testing, there is no evidence that [redacted] profited from the degree. [redacted] provided information on his

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<sup>4</sup> (U) The Human Resources/Recruitment and Retention Center (RRC) provided information that confirmed individuals who had degrees when applying for jobs that did not require them were given step and, in some cases, grade increases. According to RRC, degrees were only one of the factors considered in grade/step determination and this would only be documented in the hiring notes if they still existed.

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[redacted] degree to be included in his Agency BIO after being informed by background investigators that it was a diploma mill. OIG Deputy Counsel determined there was no criminal or regulatory violation on the part of

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[redacted] Based on the currently available information, no disciplinary action or further investigation is recommended. OIG will notify HR and request [redacted] degree information be removed from his Agency BIO.

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Special Agent

[redacted]

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Supervisory Special Agent

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