

~~SECRET~~

3 May 2011

DISPOSITION MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: (U) Unaccredited Degree: Technical Intelligence Officer

CASE: 2011-10167-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 known, unaccredited institutions against Agency BIO information to identify any individuals who had provided degree evidence to Human Resources.^{1,2}

One of the individuals identified, [redacted] claimed a master's "degree" from [redacted] on her Agency BIO. [redacted] a known, unaccredited institution, is not affiliated with the accredited [redacted]

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

¹ (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.

² (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.

[redacted]
(b)(3) NatSecAct

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

2. (U//~~FOUO~~) OIG reviewed the claims made by [redacted] regarding her 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.

INVESTIGATIVE EFFORTS:

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

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

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

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

5. (U//~~FOUO~~) OIG interviewed [redacted] on 11 August 2008, regarding her unaccredited degree.

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

6. (U//~~FOUO~~) OIG reviewed Department of Justice (DOJ) records related to [redacted] for evidence of reimbursement to [redacted]

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c) (b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

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

RESULTS:

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

8. (U//~~FOUO~~) [redacted] is a [redacted] Staff officer within the [redacted]

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c) (b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

[redacted] has been an Agency employee since [redacted] holds a bachelor of arts degree from [redacted] (a fully-accredited institution) and a master of science "degree" in [redacted]

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c) (b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

[redacted] During her 11 August 2008 interview with OIG, [redacted] stated that she took classes at other schools, but confirmed that her only degrees were from [redacted] and [redacted]

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c) (b)(6)
(b)(7)(c) (b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

[redacted] stated she started at [redacted] in approximately [redacted] and ended in [redacted] [redacted] estimated that the total degree cost [redacted] between \$5,000 and \$7,000.

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c) (b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c) (b)(6)
(b)(7)(c) (b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

[redacted]

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c) (b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

~~SECRET~~

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

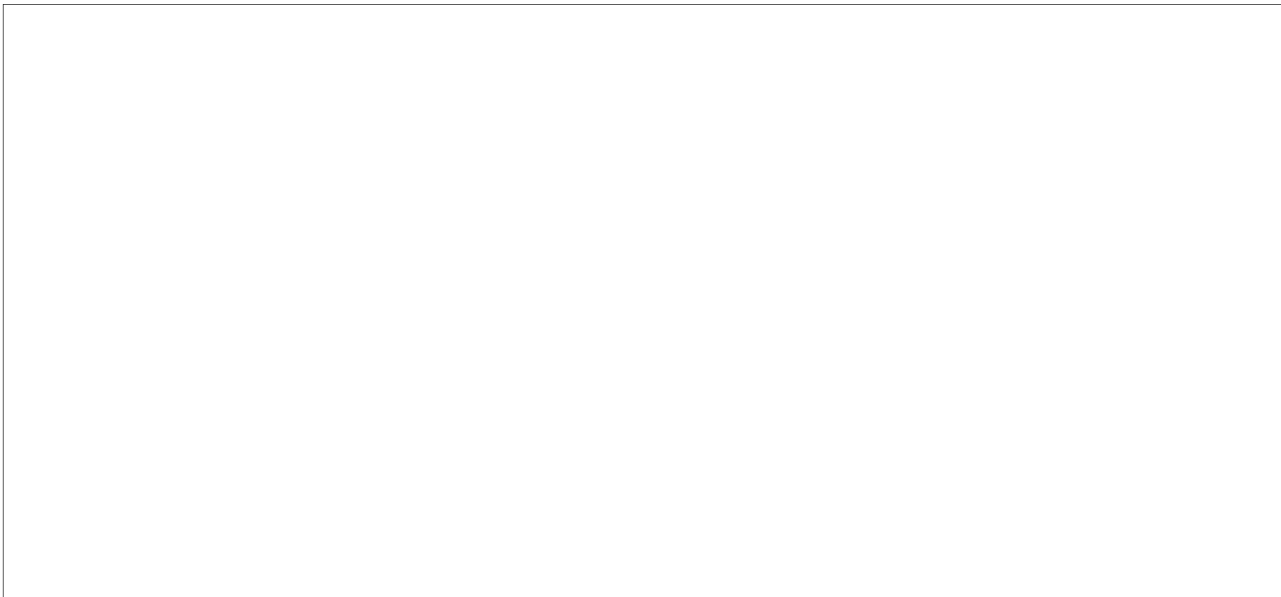
~~SECRET~~



(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

11. (U) Former students identified by [redacted] were informed by DOJ that they had been defrauded and that their [redacted] degrees were not valid. The students were informed in a letter [redacted] that stated in part:

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)



(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

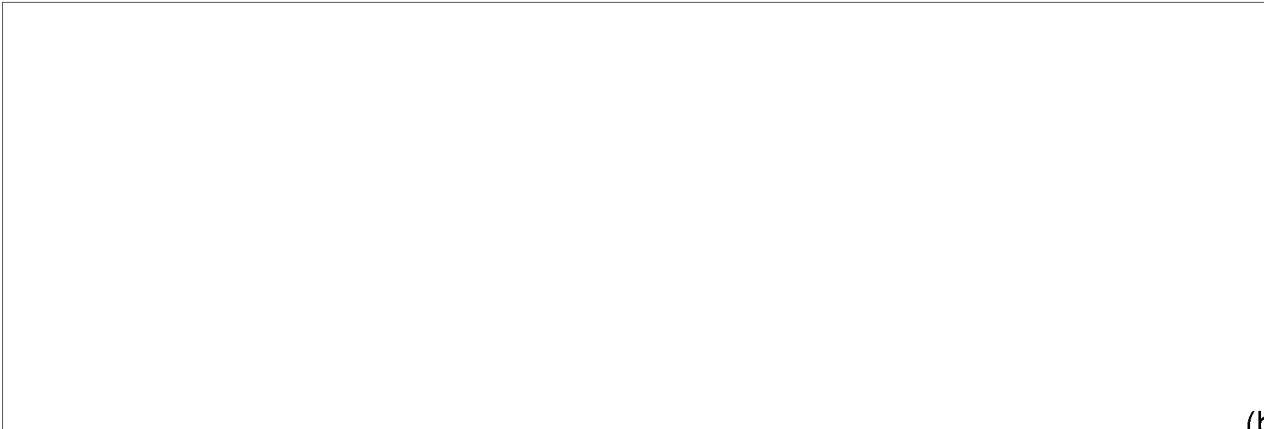
12. (U) [redacted] advertised its degrees in mainstream publications. Students would receive extensive credit for transferred courses as well as extensive "life experience" credit. Students would register for a small number of classes and were asked to purchase and read textbooks for the classes. Students would then submit a paper based on the class topic for

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

grading. For classes taken at the university, students would pay an enrollment fee for each class, and then a separate grading fee for each paper submitted. Since there were no faculty behind the classes, student submissions varied greatly in quality. There was no valid check of the academic work performed.



(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

14. (U//~~FOUO~~) [redacted] presented her direct supervisor with details of her master's program in several performance appraisal reports (PARs) reporting periods. For her [redacted]

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

[redacted] PARs, [redacted] provided details of her progressing studies as part of her evaluations. [redacted] advised her supervisor that she had completed her master's program for the [redacted] PAR period. Her then-supervisor, [redacted] noted the completion of her master's degree as an accomplishment in her PAR.

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)
(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

15. (U//~~FOUO~~) According to records in [redacted] security file, during a [redacted] interview for her background investigation update, [redacted] stated that she received her master of science degree in [redacted] from [redacted]. This statement

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

generated an education check during [redacted] subsequent background investigation. Her [redacted] graduation was confirmed in [redacted] favorable adjudication for that update. [redacted] master's degree information was included in her Agency BIO from [redacted] [redacted] [redacted]

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)
(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

16. (S) In an interview with OIG, [redacted] stated that she did not realize [redacted] was unaccredited until she was told during the interview. She claimed that she enrolled with [redacted] because it offered the [redacted] [redacted] major she wanted, and because she needed to pursue [redacted]

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

(b)(1)
(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(3) NatSecAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

distance learning [redacted]

[redacted] stated that her program took about three years to complete and required work that was of a level-of-difficulty consistent with her undergraduate degree work. [redacted] stated that she completed a significant amount of work, to include a 200-page thesis for one of her courses. In light of all this, she said, she had believed the program to be legitimate until informed otherwise by OIG.

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

17. (U//~~FOUO~~) [redacted] advised that she sought and received authorization for Agency tuition reimbursement of her [redacted] courses, and that the Agency paid all tuition costs. She noted that the Agency did not reimburse fees other than tuition, such as application and graduation fees. [redacted] estimated the amount of her tuition for the program as between \$5,000 and \$7,000.

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)
(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

18. (U//~~FOUO~~) [redacted] stated that she was never contacted regarding a tuition refund in conjunction with the DOJ investigation, nor did she apply for or receive any refund. This was confirmed through a review of the DOJ reimbursement records related to [redacted]

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

19. (U//~~FOUO~~) It is unclear whether [redacted] may have received favorable consideration in promotion or assignment processes due to her having a master's degree, which exceeded the minimum requirement for the positions she has held. When asked during the OIG interview if she had benefited from her [redacted] degree, [redacted] responded that if she did, it would have been only in a general way, that is, by having an advanced degree.

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)
(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

20. (U//~~FOUO~~) Although [redacted] stated that she was unaware of her master's degree's non-accreditation prior to the OIG interview, once informed, [redacted] expressed her concern and asked what steps she should take to rectify the problem. While stressing her surprise and the amount of work she had done, [redacted] accepted the situation and was fully cooperative. She voluntarily provided a quantity of documents from her personal [redacted] file for OIG's use.

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)
(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

DISPOSITION: (b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

21. (U) [redacted] was widely recognized as a fraudulent institution. Though it had "classes" and "coursework," the efforts of students were not evaluated by actual faculty. [redacted]

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

22. (U//~~FOUO~~) Likely because of [redacted] assignments, she was not notified by DOJ of being defrauded by [redacted]. Additionally,

[redacted] provided evidence that she did work toward her master's degree that, while not graded, may have led her to believe it was legitimate.

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

[redacted] did receive Agency reimbursement for the degree. After being notified by OIG that her degree was not legitimate, [redacted] agreed to provide all documents requested and volunteered to take any steps requested to rectify the problem.

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)
(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)
(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

23. (U) There is no evidence of criminal or regulatory violation on the part of [redacted]. Based on the currently available information, no disciplinary action or further investigation is recommended.

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

[redacted]

Special Agent

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

[redacted]

Supervisory Special Agent

(b)(3) CIAAct
(b)(6)
(b)(7)(c)

~~SECRET~~