

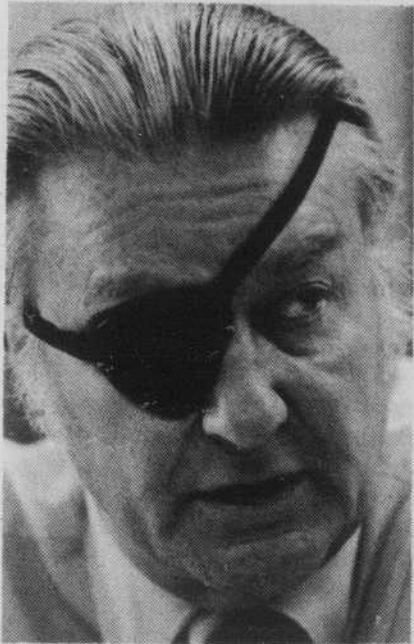
# Diploma firms investigated

By Mike Sims  
Of the Emerald

Firms that create and sell reproductions of college and university diplomas may win the approval of frustrated students but they disturb University Registrar Herb Chereck.

"I'm concerned, and we're concerned as an institution, that someone else is preparing a document that only we should prepare or reproduce," Chereck says.

Dick Hill, vice president for academic affairs, has a stronger opinion of the practice. "It defaces the currency of the in-



Dick Hill

stitution," he says. "We'd have to object strenuously to it."

Chereck is encouraged, however, by an apparent crackdown on such firms. The FBI has been conducting an investigation, known as "Dipscam," into so-called "diploma mills." Part of the investigation, conducted through the bureau's Charlotte, N.C. office, has involved seizure of records belonging to a Grants Pass firm.

According to a brochure advertising Alumni Arts' "Diploma Reproduction Service," the company offers diploma copies "of the highest quality... proudly compared with the originals for beauty, color, paper and exactness of type and seals."

The FBI conducted the Alumni Arts investigation with the aid of Josephine County sheriff's deputies and investigators. Special agent Allen Ezell, who served the warrant authorizing officials to search and take company records and other material, said he could not disclose what materials were confiscated.

Chereck says that there are several circumstances under which a person might want a duplicate diploma. Alumni Arts' brochure states that duplicates are offered to persons whose diplomas have been lost or damaged, or to those who want multiple copies because they have more than one office.

Also, Chereck says that many people who have changed their names request new diplomas reflecting that change. The University will supply a new diploma with the new name if the conferee presents a copy of the court decree ordering the change, Chereck says.

If the person does not have such documentation, the new name will be printed in the appropriate place on the diploma, but the notation "Originally issued under the name of..." will be printed in the lower right corner, Chereck says.

"One of the more important things you have to be concerned with is taking safeguards to ensure that a person asking for a diploma for so-and-so is, in fact, that person," Chereck says.

But Alumni Arts makes no such verification when processing orders, according to its brochure, because many institutions will not verify an individual's status.

This also bothers Chereck. "When our office issues duplicates, we can control who gets them by confirming that that degree was earned by that person," he says.

"Then these reproduction firms come in and say they provide a better and cheaper service, and then anyone can write and say, 'I'm a 1965 graduate of the University of Oregon with a B.A. degree' when it's probably not true."

Ezell says that Alumni Arts has not been ordered to stop doing business, and that its case will be heard by a federal grand jury in North Carolina to determine whether or not indictments for criminal offenses should be handed down.



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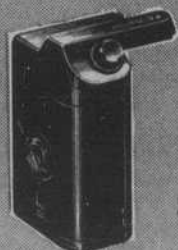
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