

Editorial

This issue of the IJEE addresses several topics in engineering education. There are 61 authors from: USA, Canada, UAE, Spain, South Korea, UK, Serbia, Turkey, Slovenia and South Africa. I wish to thank all the authors for their valuable contributions that I hope will have a very positive impact on the international engineering education community.

On the 17th of May, the New York Times Online and then on the 23rd of May, the New York Times International Weekly published an article with the title: *Fake Diplomas, Real Cash: Pakistani Company Axact Reaps Millions*. It is an investigative report about a company that “. . . makes tens of millions of dollars annually by offering diplomas and degrees online through hundreds of fictitious schools. Fake accreditation bodies and testimonials lend the schools an air of credibility. . . .” The company operates various online universities with interesting sounding names. The web sites are attractive; they include testimonials by actors posing as students and also actors posing as professors. Numerous online degrees are offered, including, according to the report, civil engineering. That report went on to say that a man paid \$12,000 last year for a doctorate in engineering technology. It is particularly alarming that degrees in engineering were sold. Fake diplomas and degrees are not new, but the scale of the Axact operation seems to be unprecedented. It is much bigger even than the one reported in April of last year by the FBI in which five million dollars were collected by selling fake degrees (the report did not indicate whether there were engineering degrees among them).

Such news should be alarming to society at large and to engineering educators in particular. For operations of that nature to exist and grow there must be a tremendous demand for their products; there is serious money involved. Why would anyone be interested in purchasing a fake diploma or a fake degree beyond being comically entertaining merchandise? Are there so many naïve individuals who think that the important outcome of going to school is receiving a multicolor piece of paper with impressive looking seals and signatures; is education itself insignificant? Are there so many naïve employers? Or perhaps many jobs don't really require degree-level education. Or, worse, are the skill and intelligence levels of the degreed and un-degreed individuals indistinguishable to some employers?

The phenomenon of the growing demand for fake degrees requires more than legislative intervention. It calls for study from various aspects including psychological, educational, and societal. It will then necessitate education and reflection. Students, educators, academic and government administrators, and employers need to think deeply about the impact of their decisions and actions that may have helped the unscrupulous.

One should reflect further on the meaning of a degree from *real* institutions. Are some institutions granting degrees that are for all practical purposes becoming less than meaningful? For example, it may happen when professors feel compelled to cater to the disinterested students by diluting the contents of courses and examinations to enable all to pass. This may occur also when *quality* becomes synonymous with putting check marks in the correct boxes on forms. The value of a real degree erodes, yet its price keeps increasing; the door opens to the unscrupulous to profit.

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