

Education Online



Information Technology and Social Life

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Digital Diploma Mills

- David Noble is a critical historian of technology, science and education.
- Writes on the social history of automation. After working at MIT and the Smithsonian Institution he currently teaches at York University in Toronto.
- Digital Diploma Mills - 1998
- Concerned about the rise of online courses, particularly in regard to courses being developed outside the university
- Commercialization of higher education - development of "courseware"
- Push for patents in research segment resulted in less emphasis on the education side
- Online education presented as solution, but Noble feels it will only increase costs

the commoditization of the educational function of the university, transforming courses into courseware, the activity of instruction itself into commercially viable proprietary products that can be owned and bought and sold in the market.

they are becoming the site of production of - as well as the chief market for - copyrighted videos, courseware, CD-ROMs, and Web sites.

1970s- focus on intellectual capital, controlling knowledge

The result of this first phase of university commoditization was a wholesale reallocation of university resources toward its research function at the expense of its educational function.

Experience to date demonstrates clearly that computer-based teaching, with its limitless demands upon instructor time and vastly expanded overhead requirements - equipment, upgrades, maintenance, and technical and administrative support staff - costs more not less than traditional education, whatever the reductions in direct labor, hence the need for outside funding and student technology fees



Digital Diploma Mills

- Promoted by computer/network companies, edutainment and publishing companies, corporate training advocates, university administration (supported by private research foundations), and technozealots
- University as both site of production and market
- Concerned about loss of faculty control
- Constant accessibility, extension of work time
- Online courses could be delivered by less skilled, cheaper instructors; allows university to sell course to other schools.
- Student activities monitored for research purposes
- Rebuttal pits technology as social control vs. technology as democratizing medium

More importantly, they view computer-based instruction as a means of reducing their direct labor and plant maintenance costs - fewer teachers and classrooms - while at the same time undermining the autonomy and independence of faculty. At the same time, they are hoping to get a piece of the commercial action for their institutions or themselves, as vendors in their own right of software and content.

Last but not least, behind this effort are the ubiquitous technozealots who simply view computers as the panacea for everything, because they like to play with them. With the avid encouragement of their private sector and university patrons, they forge ahead, without support for their pedagogical claims about the alleged enhancement of education, without any real evidence of productivity improvement, and without any effective demand from either students or teachers.

What is a diploma mill? "no classrooms," "faculties are often untrained or nonexistent," and "the officers are unethical self-seekers whose qualifications are no better than their offerings."



Rebuttal of Digital Diploma Mills

Advantages of online education

1. younger college students find the interactive, graphical interface appealing;
2. it provides a self-paced, expert-directed, time/place independent environment for learning; and
3. in the hands of an able instructor, the Web fosters the development of critical thinking, problem solving, written communication, and opportunity to work collaboratively.

Hamilton University - legitimate to gain a college degree online?