

'Credentials Mad' Society Called Spur to Unaccredited Colleges

By LINDA CHARLTON

For a variety of reasons, ranging from a "credentials mad" society to a new recognition of untraditional approaches, unaccredited colleges are "springing up all over the place," according to an official of the organization concerned with the accreditation of colleges and universities in this country said yesterday.

"It seems to me that in the last four or five years there's been a noticeable upsurge in this kind of development," said Norman Burns, the executive director of the Federation of Regional Accrediting Commissions of Higher Education.

Although the most effective remedy is believed to be strong-

er legislation by individual states, another possible remedy arises in the recent action of the Federal Trade Commission in issuing a "cease and desist" order to one such college in Ohio, according to Jerry Miller, associate director of the National Commission on Accrediting. The commission is an advisory group.

An extreme example of both academic misrepresentation and remedial action came to light yesterday in Federal Court in Brooklyn. Two Orthodox Jewish rabbis pleaded guilty to using the mails to defraud would-be students in a mythical "Marlowe University." The students paid \$400 to \$500 for degrees they never received.

A New York Times investiga-

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tion has disclosed that some faculty members and advisers of one of the city's largest group-therapy training schools have degrees from accredited institutions. Among them is Philathea College, in London, Ont. The awarding of degrees by Philathea was disclosed by The Times yesterday.

In the United States, which has about 1,600 accredited institutions of higher education, the task of accreditation—described by Mr. Burns as simply a way of assuring "a kind of threshold, some minimum level of accomplishment"—is the function of the six regional boards that make up the federation.

States Are Aware

Accreditation is voluntary unless individual states make it a prerequisite for chartering a college or university either through a regional commission or the state's own education department.

"The states are more and more aware of this problem and are taking steps to deal with it," Mr. Burns said. But there has been "quite an upsurge" in these schools in recent years, he continued.

"What is happening, I'm afraid, is that these institutions are being created under the guise of being 'innovative'—this is the key word today—and they provide a nice haven for people who may be a bit less than careful," he asserted.

"It's easier to sell these degrees because of legitimate efforts to break out of traditional bonds, and recognition of the validity of different approaches."

Mr. Burns noted such relatively new developments in legitimate institutions as the elimination of campus-residence requirements and the acceptance of "more functional kinds of majors—pollution, environment control."

This new freedom, he said, "encourages disreputable operators to move into the field."

"So long as the traditional institution operated within pretty well-defined structures, it was harder to sell [such] degrees," Mr. Burns declared.

Mr. Miller expressed fears that "what they're really going to hurt is the movement toward nontraditional study." He said that the Federal Trade

Commission, taking action in this field for the first time recently, issued a cease and desist order against an Ohio "college" that he said the commission described as "little more than a diploma mill."

Mr. Miller said he knew of schools in which, for fees ranging from \$25 to \$500, "you can obtain all sorts of degrees from a Ph.D. to a doctor of divinity."

"The humorous part is that one used to advertise that for a certain amount you could get a doctorate of divine guidance," he added.

Both men agreed that the proliferation of such bogus schools was a response to what Mr. Miller called "the marketplace demand for credentials."

"I often say," he added, "that I don't pity the students, particularly the American students, who get hoodwinked by these institutions — most of them know darn well what they're buying." He said that he thought some students were indeed deceived, particularly foreign students.

A 'Capable Teacher'

In New York City there was comment yesterday from spokesmen for two institutions, each of whose staffs, The New York Times disclosed, included the holder of a Philathea degree.

George O'Connell, the director of Fordham University's department of university relations, said in a statement yesterday that no member of the full-time faculty held a Philathea degree. The part-time faculty member who does have a Philathea doctorate, the statement said, also has an earned doctoral degree from New York University and "is regarded here as a very capable teacher."

Donald E. Smith, the director of the American Foundation of Religion and Psychiatry, Inc., and its Blanton-Peale Graduate Institute, called the action of Clifton E. Kew, its former director of research, in accepting an education doctorate from a nonexistent "Burton College" and a Ph.D. from Philathea, "quite unacceptable."

Mr. Kew holds a master's degree from Harvard University. He left the foundation by mutual consent June 30, Mr. Smith said, because of a divergence of research interests, and during his 26 years there was highly regarded as a group-therapy specialist.