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## Cal State-Long Beach Heeds Call to Investigate Professors' Online Biographies

By THOMAS BARTLETT

An essay by a film professor at California State University at Long Beach that questions the credentials of his colleagues is stirring controversy on the campus — and sparking investigations.

The essay, written by Brian Alan Lane, an associate professor of film, accuses three of his colleagues in the department of film and electronic arts of having "outright lies or misleading statements of fact" in their online biographies. Mr. Lane said he was pursuing the matter because the university seemed reluctant to do so. He doesn't name names, but, upon closer inspection, at least one of his colleagues listed credentials that don't seem to check out.

In the last week of April, Michael I. Berlin's online university bio listed him as a "graduate from Columbia University's master's program," though it didn't specify which master's program. Two searches of the National Student Clearinghouse database — a service Columbia and many other universities use for degree verification — turned up no Columbia degree for Mr. Berlin. In an interview on April 30, Mr. Berlin stood by his claim, saying he had earned "the equivalent of a master's" from Columbia while completing his doctorate in educational administration at Yeshiva University.

Mr. Berlin's bio also listed him as a psychologist and a member of the American Psychological Association. An official in the membership department of the association, which has 148,000 members, could not find any record of the professor. Mr. Berlin admitted that he was not a member of the association. He also acknowledged writing his online bio. When asked how the credential could have been inserted, Mr. Berlin responded: "You know what? I don't know."

By May 2, however, Mr. Berlin's online bio was changed. The references to the American Psychological Association and to being a "clinical psychologist" were both removed. As for his Columbia degree, Mr. Berlin's bio now says he "took courses" at Columbia. In a brief second interview on that day, Mr. Berlin said Long Beach officials had told him not to answer any more questions and then hung up.

### Accusations of Inflated Credits

Inaccuracies, or even fabrications, in online bios are nothing to take lightly, said Craig Smith, chairman of the Long Beach film department. Mr. Smith declined to comment on Mr. Berlin's situation, but he did acknowledge that the university's academic-affairs office was conducting investigations.

"Students may decide to come to this department based on what they read in those bios, and in that case,

we may be getting into something like fraud," Mr. Smith said.

Another professor is being investigated for possibly fabricating teaching experience, says a source familiar with that inquiry, who asked not to be named because the investigation is in progress. In addition, film professors have been accused of inventing or inflating their professional credits on movie and television projects, according to Mr. Lane, who serves on the television-credits policy committee for the Writers Guild of America.

The university's provost, Karen Gould, confirmed that investigations into the credentials of professors in the film department were under way but declined to comment further.

Mr. Lane, whose essay has spread via e-mail on the Long Beach campus, said he had felt compelled to do something because of what he considered foot-dragging by the university. And he said more revelations were likely. "This is the tip of the iceberg in terms of how this university has mishandled these cases over the years," he said.

A spokeswoman for the university, Toni Beron, rejected that notion. "I think it's very interesting to make an accusation that the university is covering up something that it is investigating," she said.

In the end, Mr. Lane argued, credentials really do matter. "There's right and there's wrong," he said. "We're betraying our fundamental compact with the students if we're not who we say we are."

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