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### **UI to use database for credentials checks**

*By Inga Beyer and Matthew Moss - The Daily Iowan*

UI officials are turning to an online database to quickly check the credentials of applicants for jobs in a new policy aimed at unmasking bogus candidates.

They say the use of the DegreeVerify National Student Clearinghouse will ensure that nobody slips through the cracks, as did at least one UI researcher who falsely claimed to have postgraduate degrees for more than a decade.

"We want to prevent the discovery of fake credentials in the future," Judie Hermsen, the assistant director of UI Human Resources, said Monday. "We want to make sure we hire the most-qualified candidates."

Under the new policy, which goes into effect June 1, university officials must notify candidates during the interview that their employment is contingent on a successful background check. The candidate must sign a release at the end of the interview that allows the departments to perform the check, a move required under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

Those checks will be carried out largely through the clearinghouse, a nonprofit organization that counts 460 colleges and universities as participants.

According to a contract the UI signed in February, the university will access the database free of charge in exchange for giving the database a trove of information about current and former students. All academic information about students will be available from DegreeVerify, including transcripts.

The new policy calls for the credentials check for all faculty hirings, all professional and scientific jobs, and for all other jobs that require a license or specific certification or merit jobs in which the hiring or salary is influenced by a certain credential.

The checks are to be completed no later than 15 days after the worker begins employment. They can be carried out at any time of the day and generally take less than 24 hours to complete.

"Although a number of possible options exist for verifying degrees, the university is committed by contract to DegreeVerify as the first methodology for doing so," said a memo sent last week to campus leaders from Susan Buckley, the associate vice president for Human Relations.

The university will only use the clearinghouse to check the educational credentials, certificates, and licenses of candidates, Hermsen said. The school will directly contact institutions or ask applicants to supply original copies of certificates if their university doesn't participate in DegreeVerify, she added.

UI Business Manager Andrew Ives, who signed off on the contract with DegreeVerify, said the clearinghouse was a "more sophisticated basis for moving these checks along swiftly."

The new policy comes as fake résumés and credentials have surfaced both nationally and locally, Hermsen said. She said UI's problems have not been "on a large scope" in the past, when background checks were up to each department and at times rarely conducted.

Pat J. Palmer, 51, claimed she had a UI doctorate and two master's degrees when she was hired in 1991 as a researcher by the psychiatry department, a Daily Iowan investigation discovered in August 2002. After a job switch 10 years later, a new colleague discovered the fake credentials. She resigned shortly thereafter.

But by that time, she had allegedly embezzled \$53,000 from the university between 1998 and 2000 through

falsified travel vouchers. Authorities recently added a rare charge for misrepresenting her credentials on top of her two counts of first-degree theft and one count of second-degree theft. Her case is slowly moving through the legal system.

When departments believe a candidate has lied or misrepresented a credential, they are to offer "a reasonable opportunity for the individual to provide clarifying information," according to the policy.

Employees who lied will be fired, and such candidates will not be considered, the policy says.

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