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Pentagon check reveals fraudulent degree

Job applicant could have landed position renovating the Department of Defense

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University Police are investigating a man who used a fake university degree to apply for a renovation and construction job at the Pentagon, officials said.

Barbara Hooff, a secretary at the university's Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute, said she received a call Feb. 17 from a Pentagon employee looking to confirm a MFRI bachelor of science degree that appeared with the suspect's job application.

But MFRI doesn't issue degrees; instead, students receive a license indicating they've completed the program. Hooff said she promptly called police.

"It's the first time ever I've seen this happen," Hooff said. "We have two women here who have been here over thirty years and they've never seen this happen."

Police are not releasing any details regarding the suspect's identity, but police spokeswoman Maj. Cathy Atwell said he is not affiliated with the university. The suspect was applying for a job with the Pentagon Renovation & Construction Program, a federal government-run program composed of several different contracting companies renovating the Pentagon.

"We routinely get calls from employers verifying information like whether or not an applicant graduated from the university," said university spokeswoman Cassandra Robinson. But employers usually just ask for transcripts, she added.

Pentagon Renovation & Construction Program spokesman Brett Eaton said he could not identify the suspect because of the large number of job applicants.

"We employ over a thousand people from different contractors," Eaton said. "It's hard to keep track of these things."

Many websites offer fraudulent degrees from higher education institutes. Degree-making kits can be purchased on websites like BackAlleyPress.com, a Chinese site that sells bachelor's degrees for \$235. At the university, an in-state, full-time undergraduate student could expect to pay \$57,468 to finish in four years.

Although the degrees on the website look authentic, Hooff said the one in question "was a pretty bad one."

Anyone found using, making or offering a counterfeit degree in Maryland is subject to a fine of up to \$1,000, six months jail time or both.

