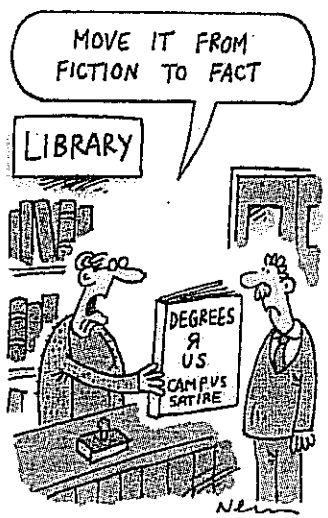
Novelist finds his art imitates life



Louise Radnofsky

The anonymous author of a satirical novel on modern universities has told *The Times Higher* of his amazement at discovering that spoof details and courses in his book have real-life equivalents.

Degrees 'R' Us, published this month by Impress Books, is a sequel to last year's work by the same author, *Campus Conspiracy*. It brings readers back to the fictional St Sebastian's University, where a fiscally savvy new vice-chancellor has abolished chemistry and philosophy degrees in favour of brewing technology, casino management, celebrity studies and exotic dance.

In an e-mail to *The Times Higher*, the author says: "My comic portrayal of the contemporary university turns out to be no joke."

He recently discovered that a business called Degrees 'R' Us operated out of Las Vegas.

And Tulane University in New Orleans lists casino resort management among its courses, with modules in gaming device management, the history of gambling and financial controls.

Brewers can study for degrees at numerous institutions, he said.

Dan Cohn-Sherbok, professor of Jewish theology at the University of Wales, Lampeter, is rumoured to have written the novels. He has been acting on behalf of the author, but admits only to having illustrated the covers for both books. "It must remain a secret who the author is," he said.

The author's e-mail to *The Times Higher* notes: "In *Degrees 'R' Us*, it seemed that life at St Sebastian's had become burlesque. I was wrong. Fiction has been superseded by fact... the absurd, Alice-in-Wonderland world I had created seems almost civilised compared with some of the topsy-turvy values to be found in the real world of higher education today."

Professor Cohn-Sherbok said the author intended to write more stories about St Sebastian's as developments took place in higher education.

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