

EVALUATING INTERNATIONAL CREDENTIALS

A Primer For Graduate Admissions Professionals



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AACRAO Annual Meeting
New York, NY
Wednesday, March 30, 2005

Becoming familiar with various international education credentials is simply a matter of experience. Not only are you responsible for evaluating how credentials equate to the U.S. educational system, you also need to determine if the educational institution is approved by the Ministry of Education (MOE), or other official as a recognized tertiary education institute in its own country. This is where your resources become important. Most U.S. schools keep a list of institutions they have already researched and the school usually has a data base listing the information. This means you are not doing the same research time after time.

For example: If you receive a transcript from a school that you have never heard of, say in Australia, simply begin researching. Look in *Australia: Education and Training*, a book available from AACRAO. If no information is forthcoming, use other resource books. If no information is found in those, use all additional resources.

THE NECESSARY LIBRARY

A beginner can learn to be a dynamite evaluator if the right resources are available. The evaluator can inquire about various private evaluation services or professional organizations (see Resources handout). The evaluator can also refer to numerous resource books, periodicals, dictionaries (see Publications handout) and handouts obtained at conferences.



PUBLICATIONS

A. General

Commonwealth Universities Yearbook. A comprehensive guide to higher education throughout the English-speaking world, excluding the U.S. The very latest information available on over 600 universities in 36 countries or regions of the Commonwealth. Information includes undergraduate and graduate courses; requirements for admission and degrees; full postal address; telephone, telex and fax numbers; e-mail and cable addresses; e-mail formula; World Wide Web URLs; full faculty listings; administrative contact officers; program offerings and an index that includes exchange programs established with universities in other countries, including the U.S. Published annually. Available through Grove's Dictionaries Inc., PO Box 2244, Williston, VT 05495, Tel: 800-972-9892, Fax: 802-864-7626; e-mail: echmilowski@groverreference.com.

The New Country Index: Making Sense of International Credentials. 2004. This publication includes interpretations of the education systems of more than 60 countries from primary education through higher education, plus information on secondary-level studies, teacher

training, commercial education, and technical, vocational, and professional training. Available at <http://www.ierf.org/countryindex.asp>.

Foreign Educational Credentials Required. 2003. Looking for a concise and easily referenced source for information on credentials and other documentation that would be required for entry from a given country to a specified level of study? The fifth edition of *Foreign Educational Credentials Required* indicates, in a convenient and consistent form, the educational credentials which should be available for applicants from over 220 countries. Available through AACRAO.

A Guide to Educational Systems Around the World. 1999. This long-awaited revision of NAFSA's popular 1990 title, *Handbook on the Placement of Foreign Graduate Students*, covers secondary as well as higher education. Editor Shelley Feagles has compiled information on the educational systems of more than 156 countries, from Albania to Zimbabwe. Articles on the new methodology of credential evaluation, interpreting foreign grades, and using the Internet as a research tool provide useful background information for the novice or experienced admissions professional. Available through NAFSA.

The AACRAO International Graduate Admissions Guide. 2003. AACRAO's newest publication provides a hands-on approach to enable you to determine the admissibility of applicants from abroad to your graduate degree and non-degree programs. The companion volume, *The AACRAO International Guide: A Resource for International Education Professionals* (item #0103), covers many important aspects of the international application and admission process, primarily on the undergraduate level. The present book is meant to augment that volume. Both are critical additions to any international education library. While the current AACRAO International Guide is a revision, this volume is a "first" in that it focuses on the graduate admissions process.

International Academic Credentials Handbook, Volume I. 1988. Looseleaf. Summarizes benchmark academic credentials of Australia, Ecuador, Germany, Ghana, Greece, India, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, Mexico, People's Republic of China, Philippines, Switzerland, Taiwan, and Tanzania, with sample credentials and placement recommendations. Available through AACRAO.

International Academic Credentials Handbook, Volume II. 1989. Looseleaf. Summarizes benchmark academic credentials of Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cyprus, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Finland, Indonesia, Jordan, Panama, South Africa, Sweden, United Kingdom, and Zimbabwe, with sample credentials and placement recommendations. Available through AACRAO.

International Academic Credentials Handbook, Volume III. 1992. Looseleaf. Summarizes benchmark academic credentials of Commonwealth of Independent States, Colombia, France, Guatemala, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, People's Republic of China, Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Spain, Thailand, and Turkey, with sample credentials and placement recommendations. Indices for volumes I, II, and III. Available through AACRAO.

International Handbook of Universities. Compiled by the International Association of Universities. Information on over 5,700 university level institutions in 171 countries worldwide. Information includes full address details, names of key personnel, a general description of the institution, full description of academic divisions with number of staff and

students per faculty, information on fees, degrees and diplomas offered, academic year dates and links with other universities. Available through Grove's Dictionaries Inc.

The World Academic Database (2000) on CD-ROM is a combination of the *International Handbook of Universities* and the *World List of Universities*, and includes additional information not found in either of the print directories. Search for information on nearly 14,000 higher education institutions in over 180 countries.. It is available through AACRAO.

World List of Universities. Compiled by the International Association of Universities. Provides quick access to information on over 11,000 universities, other institutions of higher education, and university organizations world-wide, including the U.S. and Canada. Available through Grove's Dictionaries Inc.

B. Single Country Volumes

The Country Guides provide data on the educational systems of more than 30 lesser-known countries, ranging from Afghanistan to Zambia. Each monograph includes a narrative description of the country and its educational system, a flow chart of most-frequently-awarded educational credentials required for consideration at U.S. schools, as well as such specific information as detailed grading scales, sample credentials, and a complete bibliography.

Afghanistan 1995
Burundi 1995
Cameroon 1995
Cape Verde 1995
Central African Republic 1995
Chad 1995
Congo 1996
Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) 1995
Ecuador
Gabon 2000
The Gambia 2000
Guinea 2000
Jordan 2000
Malawi 2000

Mauritania 2000
Mozambique 2000
Myanmar (Burma)
The Republic of Niger 1996
Pacific Islands 1996
Rwanda 1995
Senegal 2000
Seychelles
Sudan 1996
Tanzania 1996
Tunisia 2000
Yemen 2000
Zaire 1996
Zambia 1996

World Education Series (WES)/PIER. The World Education Series was sponsored originally by AACRAO; publications issued by the Joint Committee on Workshops were joint projects of AACRAO and NAFSA; the World Education Series was later published by the Projects for International Education Research (PIER) Committee of AACRAO, NAFSA and The College Board. The PIER collaboration was terminated in 2002 and future studies of international education systems will be published under the AACRAO International Education Series.

Australia 2004
 Brazil 2004
 Bulgaria 1996
 China 2000
 Denmark 1995
 Dominican Republic 1987
 Federal Republic of Germany 1986
 German Democratic Republic
 (Former) 1991†
 Hong Kong 1998†
 Hungary 1990
 India 1998
 Indonesia 1993
 Iraq 1988
 Israel 1993†
 Japan 1989
 Kuwait 1993†

Malaysia 1986
 Mexico 1982
 The Netherlands 1984
 New Zealand 1981
 Norway 1994
 Peru 1983
 Philippines 2001
 Poland 1992
 Romania 2000
 Sweden 1995
 Swiss--Engineering & Economics
 And Business Administration 1991†
 Taiwan 2004
 Thailand 2000
 United Kingdom 1991
 Vietnam 2000

†denotes *Special Reports* that do not include placement recommendations.

ECE Presents. Published by Educational Credential Evaluators, Inc. These provide accurate, easy-to-use information for college and university personnel who make foreign student admissions decisions. Available from ECE, PO Box 514070, Milwaukee, WI 53203-3470, Phone (414) 289-3400, Fax (414) 289-3411, E-mail eval@ece.org.

The Educational System of Finland

The Educational System of Italy.

The Educational System of Kenya.

The Educational System of Spain.

The Educational System of Turkey.

A Guide to Evaluating Educational Credentials from China.

An Overview of the Educational System of Albania.

Other good single country volumes are:

Chinese Universities and Colleges, 3rd edition. 2000. Available through Chinese Education Association for International Exchange, CEAIE Central Office, 37, Damucang Hutong, Beijing 100816, China, Tel 86-10-66416582, Fax 86-10-66416156, Email postmaster@ceaie.edu.cn.

Guide to Higher Education in Africa, 2nd edition. 2002. Contains reliable up-date information on higher education throughout Africa, covering over 800 institutions in 46 African countries. Organized alphabetically by country, each section contains details of national education systems and agencies followed by a listing of all institutions in that

country. Details on university-level institutions include address, contact details, website (new for this edition), all awards offered, special facilities and the size and breakdown of academic staff. Available through Information and Communication Section, Association of African Universities, P. O. Box 5744, Accra-North, Ghana, Phone +233-21-774495/761588, Fax +233-21-774821, email info@aau.org, <http://www.aau.org/announce/ghea.html>

Universities Handbook India. Available through Association of Indian Universities, AIU House, 16 Kotla Marg, new Delhi 110 002, India; Phone 91-11-323-6105, Fax 91-11-323-2131, E-mail aiu@del2.vsnl.net.in , URL <http://www.aiuweb.org>

C. Regional Studies

The following books are good resources about particular regions.

The Admission and Placement of Students from Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen Arab Republic. 1984. Available through AACRAO.

The Admission and Placement of Students from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. 1986. Available through AACRAO.

Admission and Placement of Students from Central America: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama. 1988. Available through AACRAO.

Central America Higher Education Update: A Special Report. 1996. Available through AACRAO.

Newly Independent States and the Baltic Republics: A Directory of Institutions in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan. 1995. Available through AACRAO.

The Soviet System of Education. 1992. Available through AACRAO.

D. Periodicals

ADSEC News Available at <http://www.adsec.nafsa.org/ADSECNewsletter.asp>

Advising Quarterly Available at <http://www.amideast.org/publications/aq/default.htm>

The Chronicle of Higher Education Available at <http://chronicle.com>

ECE Newsletter Available at <http://www.ece.org/main/content=Newsletter>

World Education News & Reviews (WENR) Available at <http://www.wes.org/resources.asp>

E. Other Printed Resources

Language Dictionaries

Webster's New Geographical Dictionary

Catalogs from international and US institutions

Your own Country Files and Evaluation Files

OTHER RESOURCES

A. Professional Organizations

American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
(AACRAO)
One Dupont Circle, Suite 520
Washington, DC 20036-1135
(202) 293-9161
E-mail: info@aacrao.com
Internet: <http://www.aacrao.com>

NAFSA: Association of International Educators (NAFSA)
1307 New York Avenue, NW, Eighth Floor,
Washington, DC 20005-4701
(202) 737-3699
E-mail: inbox@nafsa.org
Internet: <http://www.nafsa.org>

America-Mideast Educational and Training Services, Inc. (AMIDEAST)
1730 M. Street, NW, Suite 1100
Washington, DC 20036-4505
(202) 776-9600
E-mail: inquiries@amideast.org
Internet: <http://www.amideast.org>

B. Networking:

Inter-L Listserv (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/inter-l>)

Campus Resources

Admissions Network (ADSEC Representatives from all NAFSA regions)

Colleagues--As you begin to establish more and more contacts with knowledgeable people, develop a roster of your own.

Professional Evaluation Services (<http://www.naces.org/>)

AUTHENTICITY

Your responsibility as an evaluator is to determine the authenticity of documents. Your familiarity with resources and the appearance of transcripts will become an asset.



FRAUD

For a really excellent paper on fraud from a fraud expert, Eva-Angela Adán, AACRAO International Education Consultant, I will refer you to the following website: <http://www.adsec.nafsa.org/commonpractice.asp>. The paper is titled *The Forensics of Academic Credential Fraud Analysis and Detection*. The following information is a down-and-dirty fraud summary.

Identifying fraudulent documents continues to be challenging for admissions officers and credential evaluators. We need to protect the standards of our institutions of higher learning and comply with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) regulations. Underestimating potential difficulties resulting from admission of unworthy applicants can be disastrous, to the point of losing the institution's authorization to admit foreign students and issue I-20s.

In an effort to protect our standards and comply with USCIS regulations, we try to prevent the accepting of forged documents and recognize misrepresentation, while fostering our desire to internationalize our institutions. This handout covers types of fraud, checklist for detecting fraud, tips to prevent fraud and how to handle fraudulent documents.

To quote a former supervisor of mine, "Quite frankly, fraud can be fun, and when you detect altered documents, you feel a sense of accomplishment." Now, I don't know that I agree with the "fun" part of that statement. (I get a bit stressed when I am trying to decide if a document is official or not.) However, I do agree that one feels a sense of accomplishment when altered documents have been detected!

In talking about fraud, it may seem that we are stereotyping. But, the fact is that most cases of fraud come from a few select countries. U.S. documents are often falsified, too.

A. TYPES OF FRAUD

There is a strong probability that you will receive forged documents at some time. There are several different types of forgery. These include:

1. Forged or altered academic credentials
2. Incorrect and misleading translations
3. Records from nonaccredited schools or degree/diploma mills
4. Falsified or omitted application data

B. CLUES THAT CAN INDICATE FRAUD

Be suspicious of the following things:

1. Applicant claims to have lost the original of his/her record.
2. Applicant claims to have *graduated* from an institution but can provide only a letter indicating *completion* of the program.

3. Although the applicant had taken external examinations, the certificates have been lost and all (s)he has left is a statement of attendance or graduation from school.
4. You know the educational system to be different from the U.S. system, yet the transcript appears to be very American, giving subjects, grades and credit hours in U.S. terms.
5. The application is unusually late, making verification difficult, or is accompanied by a long letter from an impressive office--usually located in the U.S.--which may be attempting to lend an aura of officialdom to otherwise unacceptable documents.

Remember, though, that some forgeries are so sophisticated that only school records themselves will prove whether they are authentic. When I encounter a credential that I feel might be fraudulent, I send it to the issuing institution with a letter asking that institution to review the enclosed document(s) for accuracy, to verify that accuracy, or to send us official copies of the true documents.

D. FRAUD PREVENTION

Here are a few things you can do to prevent admitting students with fraudulent documents:

1. Request that all academic documents are original and in the native language. Also request an English translation. I have attached a list that show the countries from which I work with copies. (Attachment #3) The University of Kansas has begun requesting certified true copies, which they accept from the following agencies: 1.) The student's Embassy or Consulate; 2.) U.S. Educational foundations and commissions; 3.) The Ministries of Education, Culture, Foreign Affairs. (We require that all students admitted on copies, or certified copies, submit official documents upon arrival.)
2. Never use faxed documents. They are easy to alter. (Photocopies also fall into this category.)
3. Even though a student is transferring from another U.S. school, always request to see the original foreign credential.
4. Do not bend under pressure. Take your time and investigate.
5. Do not be pressured by last minute applicants. That is when most of our mistakes occur. If a student is in a rush or pushy, use caution.
6. Make sure colleges and universities in other countries are quality institutions before accepting credentials for graduate school consideration. Schools will be either accredited, recognized, licensed, registered, listed, approved or authorized for academic purposes by the Ministry of Education or a similar government agency at the local, provincial or national level. Accreditation is not the same as in the U.S.

E. HOW TO HANDLE FRAUD

When the appropriate authority in a foreign country notifies you that documents have been “forged” or “faked” you will need to notify the applicant (in writing) or your findings. Be *very careful!!!* Never use the words forged, altered, cheated, fabricated, etc. Use one of the following phrases:

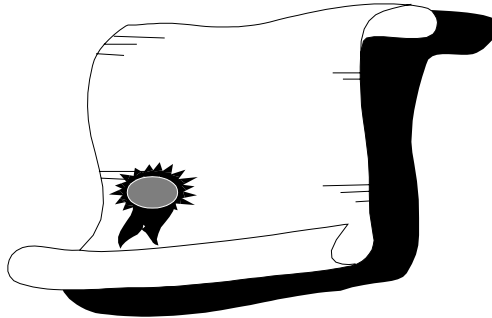
- “We are unable to verify authenticity.”
- “We are unable to validate this document as authentic.”
- “In the opinion of the WAEC this is not an authentic document or result.”
- “Contact the original issuing agency for an original to be sent directly to us.”

If the student is in the pre-admission stage and not on campus, send a letter and *do not accept*. If the student has been admitted or is on campus, consult legal counsel.

Maintain the records on file and establish a mechanism to record falsified documents. (At UI, we don’t have a way of doing this on-line, so the file label is highlighted entirely in yellow. These files are kept indefinitely!)

EVALUATING TRANSCRIPTS

Once all the investigation is completed, it is time to evaluate the transcripts.



A. DETERMINING DOCUMENT EQUIVLENCY

This is where the discussion of “benchmark” credentials comes into play. For every international education credential that comes through your office, you need to decide where it falls in relation to the U.S. educational system. This decision is based on the placement recommendations found in many of the publications you should now have on your shelf AND on the policies established by your institution. If you are the policy maker in this particular area at your institution, great! If not, you need to find out who is and what and where are the established policies regarding international benchmark credentials.

B. CALCULATING GRADES

Conversions will vary from country to country and sometimes from school to school. When generalizing about grading scales, we can break them down into educational systems--the U.S., British, French, etc..

To find the *recommended* grading scales and conversions, simply check the index of your published resources for a “secondary grading scale” or “tertiary grading scale,” and the information is usually easy to find. Sometimes more than one grading scale is listed, and you will want to adhere to your institution’s grading policy.

If recommended grade scales and/or conversions are not found in the published resources you can refer to the World Education Services, Inc. website, where they post the International Grade Conversion Guide for Higher Education. <http://www.wes.org/gradeconversionguide/INDEX.asp>

C. HANG IN THERE

You may often get conflicting information. Don’t be confused by the uncertainty that surrounds this profession. Sometimes there are grey areas, especially when educational systems change (think Bologna Process). Unfortunately, there is no one book of rules to follow. However, the more information you have available to you, the better informed your decisions will be.

D. STAND BY YOUR POLICIES

If you take the time to establish a policy, be consistent! (Until the next big change, of course!)