

World Education News and Reviews**March/April 2004****Feature**

Evaluating the Bologna Degree in the U.S.

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The first Bologna bachelor's degrees were awarded in 2003, which means that European students will soon begin using the new qualifications to gain entry to graduate-level programs in the United States. The Bologna bachelor's is (in most cases) a three-year, freestanding degree designed to prepare students for further study or employment. How then does this new degree compare with the traditional American bachelor's degree? At first glance, there are some fairly obvious similarities between the two: the nomenclature is the same, and both are terminal first degrees leading to either access to the job market or graduate study. At the same time, the degrees are quite different from one another, as we shall see.

In the last issue of WENR we presented an overview of the new Bologna bachelor's degree, comparing and contrasting it with the traditional first degrees in Europe. This article puts the Bologna degree up against the American bachelor's and illustrates how it will be evaluated when presented in the U.S. for graduate study.

The U.S. Bachelor's Degree

In the United States, institutions set degree requirements in terms of credits that are typically distributed over a period of four years. Each year is divided into semesters or quarters. The built-in flexibility of the system allows students to adjust the number of credits they choose to complete annually, so it is possible for students to earn their degrees in less than four years. They can also take longer than four years to complete their undergraduate education if they take fewer credits or attend school on a part-time basis.

Most bachelor's degree programs require the completion of a minimum of 120 semester credits drawn from three areas of study: general education, the major and electives.

General education is unique to the American system of undergraduate education. It is generally known as "the breadth component of the undergraduate curriculum and is usually defined on an institution-wide or college-wide basis. It generally involves study in several subject areas and frequently aims to provide a common undergraduate experience for all students at a particular institution. It has been variously described as the necessary prerequisite for specialized study" (Levine 78).

Students are usually expected to complete their general education requirements early on in their undergraduate studies. Most undergraduates undertake these courses during their freshman and sophomore years before they begin to concentrate on a major.

General education can be offered as either core curricula, distribution requirements or free electives. When it is set in the form of a core curriculum, general education consists of a set of common, broadly based and interdisciplinary courses usually required of all students and consist of subjects in the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. Distribution requirements ensure that students complete their general education by taking a minimum number of courses or credits in specified academic areas drawn from the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. Free electives allow students to take courses outside their major to fulfill the general education requirements.

The quantity of general education varies from institution to institution. However, on average between 40 and 60 percent of U.S. bachelor's degree programs are devoted to general education. The remaining credits are devoted to the major and related subjects.

Comparing the Two Degrees

Even though the Bologna Process has resulted in shorter degree programs that are defined in terms of required credits and introduced a two-tiered (undergraduate/graduate) system, the new European bachelor's is still quite distinct from its U.S. counterpart. Based on the sample "Bologna" bachelor's degrees we examined from Austria and Italy (see previous issue of [WENR](#)), it is apparent that the European degrees are more heavily concentrated in the major -- or specialization -- and that the general education component which is so crucial to U.S. undergraduate education is absent. The new degrees, awarded by traditional European institutions, are undeniably European in character.

Below we have juxtaposed two programs for a bachelor's degree in business administration: one from [Indiana University](#) in Bloomington, and the other from the [Bocconi University](#) in Milan, Italy.

In the Italian program, courses in the major are taken starting in the first semester of study. The entire curriculum is devoted to business and related subjects including mathematics, computer science and foreign languages that are all taught in the same faculty. The sheer number of required courses in business and related subjects indicates that the program is heavily concentrated in the major, which is covered in great depth.

In comparison, the U.S. degree program includes subjects drawn from a wide range of disciplines to fulfill the university's general education and distribution requirements. The Kelly School of Business mandates that students who major in business "take at least 62 semester credits outside of business and economics coursework" in the different departments and faculties at Indiana University. Courses in the major and related subjects constitute 50% of the 124 credits required for the bachelor's degree.

At the same time, the objectives and intended outcomes of both programs are remarkably similar as they aim to equip students with the tools and skills required for employment or for graduate education in their chosen field.

The Kelly School of Business states that its graduates should "possess a broad-based knowledge of business and the business environment and the role that business plays in society; understand the national, international, political, social and economic environment that landscapes a firm's operations; be able to articulate their thoughts orally and in writing and be computer literate; understand and incorporate ethical principles in all processes and decisions; possess an appreciation of the opportunities and problems involved in managing complex organizations; have the skills and capability to work effectively with others in the completion of joint tasks; possess the ability to find and formulate problems, think analytically, and recommend solutions; have the understanding and expertise needed to function effectively in an advanced technological society."

The Bocconi program aims to "give students an understanding of the economic, financial, social, cultural, legal and technological foundations of business, and to equip them with the analytical and decision making tools that will allow them to manage different businesses in a changing environment. Graduates will be qualified for professional and managerial positions in marketing, sales, finance or human resources."

The main differences between the two programs--the number of years of study, the amount of coursework devoted to the major, and the absence of general education from the Italian curriculum--reflect the distinct characteristics of each educational system

The Evaluation

The task for the credential evaluator is to examine the new qualification and determine whether it constitutes sufficient preparation for graduate admission in the U.S. To achieve that end, it is necessary to establish a coherent set of criteria that can be used for comparing the American and European degrees. The main criteria that World Education Services (WES) considers when assessing a degree are the level, structure, scope and intent of the program. Those factors are expressed in terms of: requirements for admission to the program; its contents and structure; and the function that the credential is designed to serve in the home system, respectively. After having considered all the relevant factors, WES regards the new three-year Italian *laurea* as functionally equivalent to a U.S. bachelor's degree.

The number of years of study is merely one of the elements that define the structure of a program. In this particular case, the discrepancy in the number of years between the Italian and U.S. bachelor's degrees is outweighed by the similarities between the two programs.

Failure to recognize the Bologna bachelor's degree solely because it is a three-year qualification would leave U.S. graduate schools no choice but to reject candidates who apply for admission using these degrees, even when their records demonstrate that they have completed more than enough subjects in their discipline, have achieved the same skills and level of knowledge as their U.S. counterparts, and would very likely succeed at the graduate level. Such decisions would not only lack any academic merit, but they would also have profound and negative implications for

international academic mobility.

CONCLUSION

Academic credentials serve as recorded proof of an individual's itinerary and accomplishments within a coherent and unified system of education. Credential evaluation exists first and foremost to facilitate the international mobility of students, scholars and professionals. This ideal is codified in the [Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education](#) in the European Region, adopted in 1997 and signed by 41 countries including the United States. The Convention calls on member states to promote, encourage and facilitate the recognition of credentials earned outside of their borders to encourage the mobility of students and professionals. It also specifies that "Each country shall recognize qualifications as similar to the corresponding qualifications in its own system unless it can be shown that there are substantial differences."

To be effective, credential evaluation must examine the nature, structure and objectives of different systems of education and build the bridges that allow students and professionals to use their educational qualifications internationally.

SAMPLE PROGRAMS

Kelley School of Business (Indiana University)

The bachelor's program at the Kelley School of Business provides a general-education component complemented by the study of business and economics. The application of this principle promotes a balanced program of study while it enables a student with an interest in a professional area of business to specialize in that field.

In addition, all undergraduate programs include courses that ensure the development of a basic understanding of the principles and practices involved in the management of business firms in the dynamic economic, social, and political environment of the world today. Four interrelated, rigorous junior-level courses in marketing management, operations management, financial management, and strategic management, known collectively as the integrative core, are required of all business majors. Consideration is given also to basic trends that are likely to shape the pattern of the business world in the years ahead. Beyond these basic requirements, students are given an opportunity to pursue studies from a wide variety of subject areas.

Graduates of the Undergraduate Program of the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University should have a general knowledge and appreciation of accomplishments in the physical sciences, arts, humanities, and social sciences; possess a broad-based knowledge of business and the business environment and the role each business plays in society; understand the national, international, political, social, and economic environment that landscapes a firm's operations; be able to articulate their thoughts orally and in writing and be computer literate; understand and incorporate ethical principles in all processes and decisions; possess an appreciation of the opportunities and problems involved in managing complex organizations; have the skills and capability to work effectively with others in the completion of joint tasks; possess the ability to find and formulate problems, think analytically, and recommend solutions; have the understanding and expertise needed to function effectively in an advanced technological environment.

BACHELOR'S PROGRAM IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

The course work required for the **B.S. degree in business** consists essentially of three parts:

- I. General-Education Component
- II. Business Component
- III. Electives

GENERAL EDUCATION COMPONENT (62 credit hours)

Kelley School of Business majors must complete at least 62 credit hours outside of business and economics course work.

I. Communications (8-9 credit hours)

- Elementary Composition or an approved English composition option (2-3 cr.)
- Public Speaking (3 cr.)
- Business Communications (3 cr.)

II. Mathematics

- Finite Mathematics (3 cr.)
- Brief Survey of Calculus (3 cr.) OR • Calculus I (4 cr.)

III. International Dimension (6 credit hours)

The international dimension requirement may be fulfilled in any one of the following four ways.

1. Language

A minimum of 6 credit hours of a language at the 200 level or above

2. International Business and Economics

A minimum of 6 credit hours from the following list:

- The International Business Environment (3 cr.)
- International Business: Operations of International Enterprises (3 cr.)
- International Business Law (3 cr.)
- International Finance (3 cr.)
- Public Policy and the International Economy (3 cr.)
- International Marketing (3 cr.)
- Survey of International Economics (3 cr.)
- International Trade (3 cr.)
- International Monetary Economics (3 cr.)
- Economic Development (3 cr.)
- Soviet-Type Economies in Transition (3 cr.)

3. *Approved Overseas Programs*

Participation in any approved overseas program of Indiana University (minimum 6 cr.) will fulfill this requirement. Please see a business advisor.

4. *Area Studies*

Selection of two approved courses (minimum 6 cr.) from one of the following area studies programs:

- African studies
- Central Eurasian studies
- East Asian studies
- Latin American and Caribbean studies
- Near Eastern studies
- Russian and East European studies
- West European studies

Distribution Option

Complete a total of 27 credit hours of course work distributed in the following way:

1. Fifteen (15) credit hours of course work offered by the College of Arts and Sciences in *one* of the areas listed below with a minimum of 6 credit hours at the 300/400 level (with the exception of • Natural and Mathematical Sciences, which requires 6 credit hours at the 200 level or higher):

- Arts and Humanities
- Social and Historical Studies
- Natural and Mathematical Sciences

2. Six (6) credit hours in *each* of the other two College of Arts and Sciences areas not selected for the 15 credit hour requirement.

Field Specialization Option

Students may complete *one* of the field specializations listed below by completing 27 credit hours taking any courses from the departments or schools within the chosen field. At least 6 of the 27 required credit hours must be at the 300/400 level for all but the science and technology field, which requires at least 6 credit hours at the 200 level or above.

1. Communication

- Journalism
- Telecommunications
- English
- Communication and culture
- Speech and hearing sciences
- Physics (P105 and P106 only)

2. Environmental

- Biology
- Chemistry
- Geological sciences
- Public and environmental affairs
- Physics (P120, P201, P202, P211, and P310 only)

3. Global Studies and Languages

- African studies
- American Sign Language
- Central Eurasian studies
- Classical studies (language courses)
- East Asian studies
- French/Italian
- Germanic studies
- India studies
- Jewish studies
- Latin American and Caribbean studies
- Near Eastern studies
- Russian and East European studies
- Spanish/Portuguese
- West European studies

4. Not-for-Profit

- Fine arts
- Jewish studies
- Music
- Philosophy
- Public and environmental affairs
- Religious studies
- Social work
- Theatre

5. Science and Technology

- Astronomy
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Computer science
- Geological sciences
- History and philosophy of science
- Mathematics
- Medical science
- Physics

BUSINESS COMPONENT**I. Fundamentals**

- Business Accounting Skills (1 cr.)
- Introduction to Financial Accounting (3 cr.)
- Introduction to Managerial Accounting (3 cr.)
- The Computer in Business (3 cr.)
- Legal Environment of Business (3 cr.)
- Technology (3 cr.)
- Career Perspectives (2 cr.)
- Introduction to Microeconomics (3 cr.)
- Introduction to Macroeconomics (3 cr.)
- Statistical Analysis in Economics and Business (3 cr.)

II. Junior Year

- Managing and Behavior in Organizations (3 cr.)
- Business and Economic Strategy in the Public Arena (2 cr.)

III. Senior Year

- Business Career Planning and Placement (2 cr.)

IV. Integrative Core (12 cr.): (must be completed with a C or higher)

- Financial Management (3 cr.)
- Strategic Management (3 cr.)
- Marketing Management (3 cr.)
- Operations Management (3 cr.)

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- Financial Management (3 cr.)
- Strategic Management (3 cr.)
- Marketing Management (3 cr.)
- Operations Management (3 cr.)

Business Concentrations

In addition to fulfilling the general-education component and the business component requirements previously listed, students in the Kelley School of Business select one or more of the following concentrations, listed below under their home departments.

Accounting and Information Systems

- Accounting
- Computer Information Systems

Business Economics and Public Policy

- Economic Consulting Track
- Public Policy Analysis Track

Business Law

- Legal Studies

Finance

- Finance
- Finance-Real Estate

Management

- Entrepreneurship [ABSENT]
- International Studies
- Management

Marketing

- Marketing
- Marketing—Distribution Management

Operations and Decision Technologies

- Business Process Management
- Production/Operations Management

THE BOCCONI UNIVERSITY

The Bocconi University of Milan offers a new laurea program in business administration (economia aziendale). The program's objective is to give students an understanding of the economic, financial, social, legal, cultural and technical foundations of business, and to equip them with the analytical and decision making skills that will allow them to manage different businesses in a changing environment. Graduates will be qualified for professional and managerial positions in marketing, sales, finance or human resources.

The program is three years in length and requires the completion of 180 ECTS credits (146 credits in compulsory subjects, 12 elective credits, 12 credits in two European languages, four credits in computer science and six credits for the final project). Students who wish to take English as one of their languages must have achieved a minimum TOEFL score of 550 on the paper test or 213 on the computer-based examination. Other English language tests may be used to show a comparable level of proficiency.

During the first year, students study economics, business administration, law, history, quantitative methods and computer science. In the following years, they take marketing, finance, production, logistics, business organization and accounting. Courses in Italian and English are taken throughout the program.

LAUREA PROGRAM IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION**First Year****FIRST SEMESTER**

- 1) Economic History
- 2) Mathematics (first module)
- 3) Principles of Private Law
- 4) Theory and Principles of Management
- 5) Computer Skills
- 6) First Foreign Language (preparatory modules)

SECOND SEMESTER

- 1) Accounting and Financial Statements
- 2) Fundamentals of Management
- 3) Mathematics (second module)
- 4) Microeconomics
- 5) Principals of Public Law
- 6) First Foreign Language (preparatory modules)

Total first year credits: 62

Second Year**FIRST SEMESTER**

- 1) Accounting and Financial Statements 2
- 2) Macroeconomics
- 3) Organizational Theory
- 4) Statistics
- 5) Theory and Principals of Public Management
- 6) First/Second Foreign Languages (preparatory modules)

SECOND SEMESTER

- 1) Corporate Finance
- 2) Financial Mathematics
- 3) Managerial Accounting
- 4) Marketing (taught in Italian)
- 5) First/Second Foreign Languages (preparatory modules)

Total second year credits: 60

Third Year

FIRST SEMESTER

- 1) Financial Markets and Institutions
- 2) Innovation and Technology Management
- 3) Management Information Systems
- 4) Public Economics
- 5) First Elective Course*
- 6) Second foreign Language (preparatory modules)

SECOND SEMESTER

- 1) Company and Business Law
- 2) Strategic Management
- 3) Second Elective Course
- 4) Second Foreign Language
- 5) Final Work

Total third year credits: 58

Total credits: 180

The editors would like to thank Mr. Lonnie Johnson, executive director of the [Austrian Fulbright Commission](#), and The [Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Culture](#) for their helpful suggestions on Austria's system of higher education.

We would also like to thank Ms. Silvia Capucci, deputy director, CIMEA della Fondazione Rui Italian [ENIC-NARIC](#), for her help on the Italian system of higher education.

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