MAKING SENSE OF ACCREDITATION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA

I) DESCRIPTION OF THE INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

India's education system is influenced by the British model. Primary and secondary education is ten years in duration, followed by two years of senior secondary education (equivalent to completion of senior high school graduation in the United States). Higher education starts after completion of Year 12 and generally requires three years of undergraduate studies to earn the Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), the Bachelor of Science (B.Sc) or the Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com) pass or honors degree. Professional (first) degrees in fields such as agriculture, medicine, engineering, law, dentistry can take between four to five years of study (with six months of additional compulsory internship, where applicable).

Master's degrees are generally of two years' duration, but some courses like the Master of Computer Application (MCA) may require three years' of study. Upon completion of the master's program, students complete an additional year or two of study to earn the Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) degree. The Doctor of Philosophy usually involves two or more years of research following the M.Phil.

Recent years have seen the growth of the Postgraduate Diploma, which is earned after the bachelor's degree and is more professionally-focused and specialized than the Master's degree. These usually require one year of full-time or two years of part-time study upon completion of the first degree. Professional qualifications which award memberships based on a series of examinations are also becoming more popular in India.

II) PRIMARY INSTITUTIONS THAT PROVIDE HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

Universities and its constituent colleges are the main institutes of higher education in India.

Universities-State and Central: Universities are established by State and Central Acts and offer degree courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels. These universities are basically of two types− unitary and affiliating ones. Unitary universities have a single campus and mainly concentrate on graduate education although a few may also provide undergraduate study. Affiliating universities have a central campus and a variable number of colleges affiliated to them. These colleges are located in districts within the jurisdiction of the university and primarily offer undergraduate study and may be government or privately managed. They are, however, all required to follow norms that are laid down by the University to which they are affiliated. The power of granting affiliation status to a college rests with the respective University and is exercised in consultation with the State government. The University (and not the affiliating college) is responsible for determining courses of study, conduct of examinations and awarding of degrees. Among the affiliated colleges there is a special category called *autonomous colleges,* which enjoys great academic freedom in areas of admission, curriculum and method of evaluation. The degree is always issued by the University in question, irrespective of the status of the college.

Deemed to be Universities/Deemed Universities: The Government of India's Ministry of Human Resource Development is responsible for assigning *deemed university* status to certain higher education institutions, based on the recommendations of the University Grants Commission (UGC). These typically specialize in multiple subject areas within a particular area of study and are usually created by the industry. Their university status is conferred based on a long tradition of teaching or specialization and excellence in a particular area of knowledge. Such institutions enjoy autonomy in developing and implementing academic programs and have the power to grant their own degrees, just like regular Indian universities.

Institutions of National Importance: These university-level specialized institutions are funded by the Government of India and are empowered to award degrees. The Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) are the best known among these.

Open Universities: These universities have been established for the sole purpose of awarding academic qualifications through the distance education model. The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) is the best known among them and the only one with national jurisdiction. It has over 150 regional centers around India. Other open universities operate within particular states.

III) KEY GOVERNMENTAL PLAYERS IN THE REGULATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

In understanding how the higher education system is regulated it is important to establish the difference between "accreditation" and "recognition" in India. Until recent years, being "recognized" was the only mode of validating postsecondary institutions. The process involved evaluation of the institution in question by the recognizing agency in order to establish whether it met the standards and norms put forth by the agency. Unlike the usual accreditation process which involves periodic review by the accreditation agency to ascertain if an institution is meeting its objectives and established standards, "recognition" is a one-time process. Recent times have seen the Indian government take initiatives to establish a systematic mechanism for accreditation in order to raise and maintain the quality of Indian higher education.

*University Grants Commission (UGC)***:** This is the apex body that provides recognition for universities in India. In 1956, UGC was established as a statutory body of the Government of India through an Act of Parliament. It is responsible for the determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examination and research within the context of university education in India. It also keeps track of the financial needs of universities and allocates and disburses grants to universities and colleges. The UGC serves as the vital link between the Central and State governments and other institutions of higher learning, and advises them on the measures necessary for the improvement of university education.

Association of Indian Universities (AIU): Though not a regulatory body, AIU is an important autonomous inter-university organization. Most UGC recognized universities and university level institutions are members of the AIU. Some of the major objectives of the organization include establishing equivalence of degrees by Indian and foreign universities (including those that have tie up arrangements with Indian institutions), organizing training and orientation programs for administrators, and representing Indian universities in national and international forums. It is also responsible for developing databases for higher education and it publishes the *Universities Handbook* every alternate year, which contains detailed information regarding all recognized Indian universities and lists each of their affiliated colleges. Importantly, the association also recognizes individual qualifications from certain non-universities such as *Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Indian National Scientific Documentation Center (INSDOC) and National Institute of Drama (NSD).*

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC): This is an autonomous body established by the UGC in 1994 and is primarily responsible for assessing and accrediting colleges and universities in India. Once a UGC recognized institution is deemed eligible for accreditation, the process involves completion of a self-study report followed by a NAAC peer team visit to the institution in order to validate the self-study report. These factors form the basis of the final grade assigned to the institution as well as its certification and accreditation status. A list of accredited institutions can be found on the NAAC website with a letter grade and an institutional cumulative GPA on a four-point scale. While the process remains voluntary for recognized institutions at present, UGC is considering a proposal to make NAAC accreditation mandatory for all institutions under its purview.

All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE): This organization was established in 1987 as a regulatory council to ensure proper planning and development of technical education in India and for maintaining norms and standards in the field. This includes areas of study such as engineering, technology, pharmaceutical sciences, architecture, town planning, hotel management, catering technology and applied arts and crafts. The Council has the authority to establish regulatory measures related to courses, curricula, facilities, etc, grant approval to start new technical institutions and introduce new courses. It can also make recommendations regarding the recognition and de-recognition of institutions and programs through the National Board of Accreditation.

National Board of Accreditation (NBA): Established by the AICTE, this body periodically evaluates technical institutions and programs based on the norms and standards laid down by the Council. The difference between AICTE approval and NBA accreditation is that the former regulates whether the institution meets the initial requirements of functioning as a technical education provider or offering a new program whereas the latter monitors whether the institution has proved its ability to sustain and improve upon assessment criteria and has earned credibility by the end users.

Department of Electronics Accreditation of Computer Courses (DOEACC): In the wake of the rapid growth of private computer training institutes in the 1980s the Government of India's Department of Electronics introduced a comprehensive program of accreditation and external examinations for computer education known as the DOEACC. The program of study offered under DOEACC is approved by AICTE and is conducted by an autonomous body called the DOEACC Society. Student appear for examinations at the 'O', 'A', 'B' and 'C' levels. These are primarily vocational qualifications and usually give access to employment opportunities.

National Board of Examination (NBE): This is an autonomous entity established by the Government of India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare with the prime objective of improving the quality of the medical education in India. The Board conducts graduate and postdoctoral examinations in 54 medical disciplines. Successful candidates are awarded the Diplomate of the National Board certificate which is recognized as the equivalent of graduate and post doctoral degree level qualifications by the Ministry. It also accredits hospitals to ensure that they have adequate manpower and infrastructure to train candidates for these qualifications. Diplomate holders are eligible to be considered for specialists post in any Hospital other than a training/teaching institution.

IV) PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS, QUALIFICATIONS AND REGULATORY COUNCILS
This section differentiates between professional qualifications that are recognized by the Government of India for employment purposes and those that are recognized by the AIU for academic purposes.

All Indian Management Association (AIMA), Indian Institute of Chemical Engineers (IIChE), Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts of India (ICFAI), Institute of Electronics and Telecommunication Engineers (IETE), Institution of Mechanical Engineers: India (IMEI), National Productivity Council (NPC) and *National Council of Cement and Building Materials (NCB)* are some of the leading professional associations that award diplomas and graduate diplomas to students in their field, usually on the basic of performance on qualifying examinations. Academic requirements to qualify for examinations vary but most of these associations fall under the purview of technical education and their programs of study are therefore recognized by AICTE. While some of the associations have special arrangements with individual universities, policies usually differ from one institution to another with regard to recognizing these qualifications for admittance into Master's and PhD programs. All these qualifications are recognized by the Government of India for employment purposes.

Other professional associations such as *Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI)* and *Institute of Cost and Works Accountants of India (ICWAI)* offer successive examinations at different levels, ultimately leading to an association membership. All three memberships are recognized by the AIU as being equivalent to an Indian master's degree (provided the bachelor's degree was obtained first).

Finally, regulatory councils such as *Medical Council of India (MCI), Dental Council of India (DCI) Indian Nursing Council (INC) National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)* and *Pharmacy Council of India (PCI)* are primarily statutory bodies established to maintain the quality of professional education within the country. Members of these councils all have representatives in AICTE and are responsible for setting minimum standards for recognition in their field both as independent bodies and through their representation in the Council. Many of these regulatory bodies are also required to approve the establishment of a new institution in their area of specialization.

V) THE GROWTH OF UNRECOGNIZED AND FRAUDULENT UNIVERSITIES AND INSTITUTIONS PROVIDING HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA
As the demand for higher education has grown in India, so has the proliferation of fake universities as well as unrecognized institutions that offer postsecondary qualifications. According to the UGC, no institution other than a university established or incorporated by under a Central Act or a State Act shall be entitled to use the word "University" associated with its name in any matter whatsoever. The Commission maintains an updated list of fake universities on its website. AICTE maintains a similar e-list of courses and institutions that offer technical education qualifications without obtaining mandatory approval from the Council. It also provides detailed lists of institutions have been accorded registration by AICTE for conducting programs in collaboration with foreign universities/institutions and those that are running unapproved programs.

VI) USEFUL WEBSITES:

a) List of recognized boards of secondary education: http://www.education.nic.in/boards.asp

b) University Grants Commission: http://www.ugc.ac.in/index.html
    Deemed universities: http://www.ugc.ac.in/inside/deemeduniv.html
    Fake universities: http://www.ugc.ac.in/inside/fakealerts.html
    UGC recognized colleges: http://www.ugc.ac.in/inside/ugc_recog_college.html
    Autonomous colleges: http://www.ugc.ac.in/inside/auto_college.html
    Professional councils: http://www.ugc.ac.in/inside/pcouncil.html

c) Association of Indian Universities: http://www.aiuweb.org/
    Members: http://www.aiuweb.org/Members/MembersA.asp

d) The National Assessment and Accreditation Council: http://naacindia.org/
    Accredited institutions: http://naacindia.org/accreditedall.asp

e) All India Council for Technical Education: http://www.aicte.ernet.in/
    Approved institutions and programs: http://www.aicte.ernet.in/ApprovedInstitute.htm

f) National Board of Accreditation: http://www.nba-aicte.ernet.in/about.html

g) Department of Electronics Accreditation of Computer Courses: http://www.doeacc.edu.in/index.jsp

h) National Board of Examination: http://www.natboard.edu.in/index.php

i) Institute of Chartered Accountants of India: http://www.icai.org/

j) Institute of Company Secretaries of India: http://www.icsi.edu/

k) Institute of Cost and Works Accountants of India: http://www.icwai.org/icwai/index.asp

l) Government of India's list of educational institutions: http://goidirectory.nic.in/education.htm

m) Academics in India: http://www.academics-india.com//

UJJAINI SAHASRABUDHE
Credential Evaluator
International Education Research Foundation

SWETHA MUTHANNA
Adviser
EducationUSA

4