



Credentials Evaluation Service

# **Globalization of Foreign Academic Credential Placement Recommendations**

## **Understanding the Globalization of Foreign Academic Credential Placement Recommendations for Graduate Study in the United States, 1932-2015**

Supported by IERF's Sepmeyer Research Grant (2016-17)

*Author:*

*George Kacenga, Director of International Enrollment  
Management at University of Colorado Denver*

This research focuses on the relationship between the increase in international student enrollment in the US and changes in the approaches to the analysis of foreign academic credentials over the past half century.



## **Understanding the Globalization of Foreign Academic Credential Placement Recommendations for Graduate Study in the United States, 1932-2015**

George Kacenga, PhD  
University of Colorado Denver

*As this research came to its conclusions, the 2016 presidential campaign was just getting underway and the current challenges faced by many higher education institutions (HEI) in the form of fallout from the current administration’s travel bans, proposed changes to STEM-OPT, and the real or perceived threats sometimes called the ‘Trump-effect,’ were not realized. Although some HEI’s have reported a decrease in international student enrollment, the commitment by U.S. colleges and universities to the international student community remains potent and steadfast.*

In 2013/14, international student enrollment in U.S. post-secondary institutions rose 8.1% to 886,052 (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2015). A variety of factors contributes to the continuing influx of international students. Some foreign governments (e.g., Brazil, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia) sponsor overseas study in the U.S. Moreover, the quality of U.S. STEM education—Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics—has produced a 2013/14 spike of 6% in students from India (IIE, 2015). In fact, international student enrollment at U.S. post-secondary institutions has seen a steady and significant rise over the last half-century (IIE, 2015). The United States has been and remains the dominant destination for international student enrollment in higher education around the world (Goralski & Tootoonchi, 2015). Appendix A draws from Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development data tracking all tertiary-level education programs. The years reflected in Appendix A support the claim that international student enrollment in the U.S. has increased significantly at post-secondary institutions.

The leading U.S. destinations for international study (e.g., California, New York, and Texas) now derive more than \$1 billion each year from international students (Farrugia & Rajika Bhandari, 2014). In total, international students contributed \$30.5 billion to the U.S. economy through tuition, living expenses, and dependents’ needs in 2014/15 alone (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2015). Each year, NAFSA: Association for International Educators produces a detailed regional, state-by-state, and Congressional district analysis of the economic benefits of spending by international students and their dependents. The state-level data show 2014-15 enrollment statistics, total fiscal contributions, and number of jobs created or supported by international students. And while international students serve a vital economic role, they also inform curriculum development and program offerings for globally conscious campuses. International graduates who remain in the U.S. contribute meaningfully through research innovation, entrepreneurship, cultural exposure, and the impact of their children in

primary and secondary school classrooms (Jennings, 2013; Wadhwa, Saxenian, & Siciliano, 2012).

U.S. states and institutions are looking to maximize their share of the market for international students. There are 27 state-level efforts to make their home turf an appealing student destination. StudyColorado, StudyTexas, and StudyIllinois are examples of state-consortium models. These are organized mostly as non-profit entities with close ties to state governments, all designed actively to promote higher education within the state for the benefit of all post-secondary institutions. New York University, the University of Southern California, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and Columbia University each enrolled more than 10,000 international students in 2013/14. For most states, regional demographic trends inform the actions of the legislators and local leaders supporting these efforts. Declines in state appropriations for higher education, drops in domestic student enrollments, and an increasingly competitive marketplace demand new and creative recruitment strategies. Strategic International Enrollment Management (SIEM) is more than a buzz term as an increasing number of colleges and universities invest in internationalization efforts that recruit international students, encourage study abroad, sponsor overseas faculty exchanges, and generate cross-cultural curricula.

All in all, the impact of global student mobility has been hinted at but not yet fully captured. While the IIE Open Doors Report, NAFSA International Student Economic Value Tool, and the Brookings Institution Geography of Foreign Students in U.S. Higher Education: Origins and Destinations reveal financial parameters, little is known about the lasting impact of overseas experiences on students, academic institutions, and native governments and institutions. From the impact-on-the-student perspective, “one of the greatest challenges in measuring the impact of global student mobility is that much of this movement is individually driven and is the result of students’ own aspirations and efforts” (Farrugia & Rajika Bhandari, 2014, p. 34). Knowledge and learning, mutual understanding, impacts beyond the individual, and equity are cited by IIE as common effects of international study on the international student. From the impact-on-the-educational-institution perspective, research shows that the financial well-being of the university (Choudaha & Chang, 2012) as well as growing demand to attract the brightest minds to secure research grants (Goralski & Tootoonchi, 2015) are dominant factors.

Foreign academic credential evaluation serves as a potential rate-limiter for international supply chains of labor, product, and capital (Bryła, 2015). Because of the general lack of transparency in the credential evaluation process, it is often wrongly assumed that there is a consistent way to interpret foreign credentials. This study will address how globalization, internationalization, marketization, and massification (GLIMM) have changed (a) the demand for/nature of an international labor pool, (b) the consequent role of international higher education in training up an international labor pool, and (c) the consequent resources used for the analysis of foreign academic credentials in supplying an international labor pool. Further,

and consistent with curriculum alignment efforts across borders outside the U.S., this study will show the value in having foreign credential evaluation standards, transparency in methodology, and a set of placement recommendations which U.S. higher education institutions (HEIs) could draw upon.

## **Uncertainty**

This is a moment of institutional and individual uncertainty regarding international education in the U.S. This study contributes to an important area of research in that the autonomous nature of U.S. universities permits an uneven foreign credential interpretation system, with no overarching authority to hold institutions accountable for the application of consistent admissions standards (e.g., analysis of foreign academic credentials, placement recommendations, and grade point average [GPA] calculations). Faculty set the admission criteria for their programs, and these criteria often vary considerably from one program to the next. The interpretations of an international student's academic credentials can also vary considerably as the result of uneven training or resource availability, further contributing to the disparity among evaluations. Placement recommendations stem from various operational approaches to foreign credential evaluation (internal to campus, third-party providers, and professional organizations), resulting in inconsistencies in international student placement from one university to the next, from one program to another on the same campus, and even from one admission committee session to another within the same academic program.

Although international students may have a powerful impact on HEIs' financial bottom lines, international applications often make up only a small fraction of the overall applicant pool. Therefore, most administrators fail either to draft unique policies and procedures or to allocate resources for foreign credential evaluation. Concerns raised by groups like the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) can go unheeded (Daniel, 2016). The resulting absence of overarching structure governing international admissions allows for and even encourages inconsistency, with potentially severe consequences for international students. This chaotic educational environment for both international students and HEIs lend significance to this study.

Even as more than 4.5 million students worldwide pursue tertiary education outside their home countries (OECD, 2015), U.S. HEIs lack codified standards for international admission. "The educational systems across nations are changing, becoming less a public good and more the manifestation of an economic sector that happens to be concerned with knowledge" (Stromquist, 2002, p. 37). Over the past decade, many state governments have shifted their funding priorities and cut resources for higher education. Consequently, public institutions have come to rely increasingly upon tuition revenue as they face intense competition and questions from students and parents about the value and affordability of higher education (Burkhardt, 2005). Creating further volatility is the fact that established measures for predicting

recruitment, retention, and graduation of students are quickly becoming obsolete in an age of extraordinary student mobility and ever-growing demands for services and accountability (Carlyl, 2016). What was once an effort by HEIs simply to enroll academically strong, geographically diverse international students has become an all-out effort to drive up out-of-state/international student enrollments, with a mounting emphasis on employment-centered education outcomes.

Campus administrators are basing enrollment projections on the capacity to respond to student choices and preferences in tandem with a growing commitment to seeing students as customers. However, as HEI priorities are changing, “campus personnel are left to rely on their previous experience with local students to guide their interactions with international students” (Arthur, 2004, p. 6). Globalization has driven higher education from a goods focus to a service focus, and the expectation is that the rate of change and level of uncertainty within international higher education will persist for many years to come. Therefore, for higher education to succeed, it may need to shift focus from a passive approach (i.e., wherein students seek out higher education institutions) to active engagement across borders in three domains: global, emergent, and individual campus enterprise.

### **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This study examined (a) 1932-2015 primary resource materials used for placement recommendations from all regions of the world and (b) potential relationships between those materials and the increasing number of international students in the U.S. during that period. Because investigation of balkanized HEI contexts (e.g., public/private, religious/secular, for-profit/not-for-profit, in-house evaluators/third-party evaluators) would detract from the research question foci, discrete consideration of U.S. higher education subsets (e.g., parochial, military, private) is not within the scope of this study.

The study examined prominent credential evaluation resources across different time frames. Further, the study will review the methodology and placement recommendations for students studying in the U.S. The texts for this survey include Sasnett’s Educational Systems of the World: Interpretations for Use in Evaluation of Foreign Credentials (1952), the World Education Series (1957-1989), the International Education Research Foundation (IERF) Country Index (1971-present), the PIER Country Profiles (1989-2002), and NAFSA’s online Country Profile (2002-present).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Four research questions were posed for this study:

1. What kinds of information do placement recommendations generally provide, and what factors lend credibility to that information?
2. What changes did academic credential placement recommendation styles undergo during the period from 1932 to 2015, and what impact did these changes have on the expectations of credential evaluators?
3. To what extent can the 1932-2015 changes in academic credential placement recommendation styles be linked to the factors of globalization, internationalization, massification, and marketization (GLIMM)?
4. In response to potential dilemmas resulting from the 1932-2015 changes in credential evaluation materials, what approaches have credential evaluators employed?

## EVOLUTION OF FOREIGN CREDENTIAL EVALUATION RESOURCES

For much of the early-20<sup>th</sup> century, credential evaluation was handled by the Foreign Credential Evaluation Service (FCES). However, FCES provided neither the depth of analysis nor the promptness required by admissions offices seeking to enroll international students, and the post-WWII influx of foreign students to the U.S. further necessitated a new administrative field specializing in international admissions (J. S. Frey, 2014). In response, resources to help professionals decipher international applicants' academic records had to be developed. The first comprehensive (i.e., 838 pages) resource of this kind was *Educational Systems of the World* (Sasnett, 1952). The text described primary, secondary, and tertiary education (systems, schools, academic programs, and grading practices) in every independent country and most colonies of the time. It also included specific recommendations for the academic placement of foreign-educated applicants into undergraduate and graduate degree programs in the United States.

### First Wave (1932-1971)

Sasnett's comprehensive publication ushered in the first wave of resource development, during which foreign credential evaluation professionals also relied on smaller publications provided by the Comparative Education Section (SEC) of the U.S. Office of Education. Furthermore, evaluators were assisted by publications, workshops and seminars, and training programs produced by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) and the NAFSA Association of International Educators (once known as the National Association for Foreign Student Affairs), both funded by the Office of Student Support Services (OSSS) in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State. These included AACRAO's *World Education Series* (1955) and IERF's *The Country Index* (1971).

## **Second Wave (1974-1996)**

The second wave of resource development lasted from the 1974 incorporation of World Education Services through the 1996 culmination of *The Milwaukee Symposium*. During this period, the joint AACRAO and NAFSA-sponsored *Projects for International Education Research (PIER)* (1989) was released, and government/non-profit support for these efforts diminished as private companies came onto the scene. With the advent of the second wave, accurate and comprehensive information regarding foreign education systems, institutions, degree programs, grading scales, and placement recommendations have been increasingly difficult to obtain from reliable, professional sources. Many of the materials, either in print or online, come from private credentialing services or professional networks drawing from practitioner experience, not research.

## **Third Wave (1999-present)**

The third and current period of foreign credential-evaluation resource development began with NAFSA's *A Guide to Educational Systems around the World*, published in print in 1999 and edited by Shelly Feagles. Since 2008 NAFSA has also produced updated editions, edited by Susan Whipple, but as individual country profiles in digital format. Before a U.S. international credential evaluator can accurately evaluate documents for use by an academic institution, governmental agency, or professional association, the evaluator must acquire and fairly interpret comprehensive information pertaining to both the applicant's education history/achievements and the issuing organization(s). The Internet has resulted in a proliferation of these documents, which are issued in a multitude of languages, making reliance upon translations inevitable. However, translators are not entirely reliable: accuracy, conscientiousness, and proficiency vary widely. Therefore, evaluator *familiarity* with every language becomes an absolute necessity. Fortunately, the Internet has also allowed for easy access to a comprehensive library of foreign dictionaries. Furthermore, the evaluator needs reliable contacts and an ability to seek out and comprehend information in order to authenticate educational institutions, degree programs, and credentials submitted by applicants (Kacenga, 2016). A deeper exploration of this topic can be found in Kacenga's chapter, "The Systematic Approach to Credential Evaluation and Its Challenges," in the 2015 *AACRAO International Guide: A Resource for International Education Professionals* (pp. 255–263).

The second and third waves of foreign credential evaluation resources have offered different strategies for bringing consistency to policies and procedures governing foreign credential evaluation in higher education. However, the autonomy of higher education institutions in the U.S. has prevented any one authority from imposing best practices. This has created an opportunity for different methodologies as well as different outcomes. Where a U.S. academic institution does not conduct internal evaluations of foreign academic credentials, the burden

and cost of evaluation are shifted to the student, to be submitted as part of the application process. Thus, students can seek generous evaluations of their academic coursework; Internet communities and word-of-mouth advice quickly yield information on which companies provide the most favorable interpretation of foreign education system outcomes. Where the institutions of higher education keep the financial burden of foreign credential evaluation but outsource the activity to a third-party provider, they typically seek a placement recommendation in accordance with the highest likelihood for student success. This means they often look for companies that offer the strictest interpretation of foreign education system outcomes. However, some will seek placement recommendations that are not strict but rather yield the highest potential number of enrollees.

### **The Coming Wave of Foreign Credential Evaluation Resource Development**

Curriculum alignment efforts are becoming more commonplace in many regions of the world. At the core of any curriculum alignment effort is the necessity to establish placement recommendations for education systems and academic credentials across borders and between education systems. This requires a significant amount of transparency, consensus among disparate groups, and consistent application of agreed-upon protocol. A salient example is the Bologna Process, which seeks to align curricula and higher education qualifications throughout Europe and other countries with close economic ties. The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) introduced under the European Union's ERASMUS student exchange program, also helps to facilitate the understanding of foreign education systems and placement within a native system in a manner consistent with commonly held best practices. The Bologna Process and the development of ECTS may be the result of economic or globalization pressure, political agendas tied to the aims of government officials and policy formation, or the natural outcome of internationalization.

### **STUDY OVERVIEW**

Despite the increase in international student enrollment at accredited post-secondary institutions in the United States, there has been very little examination of the foreign credential evaluation practices employed by academic institutions. The increase in international student enrollment in the U.S. appears to be related to changes in the approaches used for the analysis of foreign academic credentials and placements, changes reflected in the three waves of credential evaluation resource development (1932-2015).

I am interested in researching foreign credential evaluation resources made for placement in U.S. post-secondary academic institutions; how changing demands for labor can contribute to better understanding of changes in these resources; and how and why these resources have changed in response to GLIMM. Finally, I will consider schema for standardizing the foreign credential evaluation process, using the Bologna Process as a launch point.

## **Methodology**

The study employs naturalistic qualitative research design with a two-step analysis of the target resource documents: (1) constructivist typological study and (2) substance analysis. Both steps were applied in collecting data to gain a better understanding of (a) the evolution of foreign academic credential resources, (specifically the placement recommendations for entry into graduate studies) and (b) the role of GLIMM factors as influencers of resource evolution. The study is an analysis of text and evaluation style changes over time, not the countries that are the subject of those texts. The conceptual framework for the study analysis is the impact of GLIMM both on U.S. HEI and on foreign academic placement recommendation texts informing admission practices at U.S. HEI. The substantive aspect of the present analysis is that the GLIMM factors best elucidate the development and application of foreign academic credential placement recommendations.

### **DATA COLLECTION APPROACH**

An unobtrusive constructivist approach to gathering data through document analysis allowed for the construction and re-construction of present and past realities. The document analysis took a two-pronged approach, a typological study and an analysis of the documents' substance. The objective of the analysis was to understand (a) what the authors intended for the placement recommendations, (b) how the placement recommendations were used, and (c) what happened as a result of authors changing over time will add to the richness of the study. Thorough analysis of these changes best captured the evolving, dynamic field of foreign credential evaluation.

There are different philosophies for analyzing foreign education systems because there is no definitive way to conduct an assessment. Practitioners can argue indefinitely over the risks and benefits of various approaches (counting years of study, volume of subject-specific coursework, application of severe, or generous grading scale interpretations), but there is consensus about the need for best practices, consistent application, and the importance of making a determination centered on student success. The 1996 Milwaukee Symposium was one such effort to establish best practices, and the recent call by UNESCO for a Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications shows the continued relevance of international dialogue.

### **Document Substance Categorization**

Beyond categorizing important aspects of each resource, this study seeks to capture the substance of each text, how it may have changed over time, and if the GLIMM factors can be attributed to the addition or deletion of information. Through this qualitative research method, the researcher will enter the substance of the credential evaluation resource contents into a

table. Once recorded, an analysis will show the significance of the resource at the time of publication in addition to informing an analysis of trends in the changes these publication underwent over time.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Data were collected to conduct a typology analysis (Hatch, 2002). The five typologies that informed the review of all credential evaluation resources being studied are as follows:

1. Authorship of the publication (i.e., whether the guide was produced by an individual or by a committee, and what the motive was for producing the guide)
2. Funding of the publication (i.e., whether the resource reports its funding source [a private funding source may indicate a profit motivation])
3. Placement-recommendation paradigm (i.e., whether the guide offers [a] a specific placement recommendation for a credential earned in a foreign education system or [b] only a general background is provided, affording the reader the opportunity to make an 'informed,' independent placement recommendation)
4. Methodology behind the placement recommendation (i.e., whether the methodology to derive the placement recommendations is outlined for the reader to consider)
5. Scope of research (i.e., whether the resource [a] represents a thorough investigation of the education system at the primary, secondary, tertiary, professional, and medical levels or [b] provides only a high-level summary)

The analysis of the documents was part of a two-tiered scheme. First, the documents were reviewed and entries marked according to each of the established typologies, paying careful attention to the static timeframe to which each artifact belongs. An investigation into each typology distilled the observations found in each document to brief summary statements (e.g., typology 1, authorship, recorded as individual or committee; typology 2, funding, recorded as for-profit or non-profit). The influences of GLIMM factors (Chan, 2004) were considered as lenses for understanding the static and dynamic changes observed in the artifacts in part two of the study, the substance analysis. Summary tables (See Table 1) record the main ideas from each typology, and the researcher looked for relationships, patterns, and themes within each typology that corresponded to the major themes found during the substance analysis. The data were then revisited to determine if the patterns were truly supported by the data or if patterns existed that were not supported by the data.

**Table 1: Sample Data Collection Table**

Year: 1962					
A Guide to the Admissions and Placement of Foreign Students (Institute of International Education in cooperation with The American Associate of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, World Education Series)					
Typologies:	Authorship	Funding	Placement Recommendation Style	Methodology	Scope
(Sasnett, 1962)	One editor  100+ institutions submitted materials and suggestions.	Institute of International Education (IIE) in cooperation with The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admission Officers (AACRAO) – World Education Series.	Not applicable  The text provides guidance for institutions to make determinations internally, absent country specific information.	Year-counting and benchmarking.  Make a decision based on the likelihood of student success.	Higher education
Substance:	Placement Recommendations	Preface/Intro	Overview	Recognition	Bibliography
	Not applicable	International exchange programs are accepted as a vital and urgent international activity.  Academic success starts with admitting personnel.	An update to a 1957 edition (unavailable)  International students studying in the US help the US to be better understood in other nations.	IIE	Extensive  100+ References

**RESPONSES TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The responses to each of the research questions collectively reveal how the authors of the credential evaluation placement recommendations meant for the tool to be used and how these tools changed over time as a result of how the placement recommendations were actually being used in practice.

**Response to Research Question 1: What kinds of information do placement recommendations generally provide, and what factors lend credibility to that information?**

The data collected from this study demonstrates the wide variety of information collected by different efforts to produce resources over time. From brief pamphlets offering a high-level overview to extensive, comprehensive descriptions of foreign education systems, information has been provided to U.S.-based credential evaluators by researchers in the field or natives of target countries. A challenge noted by many authors, however, is that the comprehensive volumes often took several years to research and produce, which was a significant commitment for a volunteer. Funding the research was also a massive undertaking, undertaken only by those

with a deep passion for the profession. An example from the Sri Lanka Workshop elucidates the challenge:

Funding for the workshops involves many sources. The PIER project has raised approximately \$750,000 over the past twenty years (1986), of which 75% has come from the private sector in the form of foundation, corporate and institutional donations, as well as individual in-kind contributions and exchange-related arrangements. Substantial support frequently has come from host countries. The balance of funds raised has come from U.S. federal government grants (Sweeney & Woolston, 1986, p. viii).

**Response to Research Question 2: What changes did academic credential placement recommendation styles undergo from 1932 to 2015, and what impact did these changes have on the expectations of credential evaluators?**

The evaluation resources underwent several significant changes between 1932 and 2015. The most notable trend is that the earliest resources did not include placement recommendations because much of the necessary research had not yet been done and there was a firm commitment to the sovereignty of each college or university in making autonomous admission decisions. With the increase of international student enrollment, the need and demand for more information increased. The inter-associational texts had placement recommendations starting as early as 1989. ECE publications maintained the philosophy of educating the reader to make an informed decision. Publications including the IERF *Country Index*, the *World Education Series* and AACRAO's *Foreign Educational Credentials Required Text* included equivalency tables that answered many of the questions faced by credential evaluators in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, although the reader was cautioned not to treat the placement recommendation alone as a justification for an admission decision. Career professionals in international education recognized that many credential evaluators were relying on equivalency tables rather than doing research. As a result, many of the resources have returned to a model that excludes equivalency tables, requiring greater effort and more holistic understanding in making admission and placement decisions.

**Response to Research Question 3: To what extent can the 1932-2015 changes in academic credential placement recommendation styles be linked to the factors of globalization, internationalization, massification, and marketization [GLIMM]?**

The answer to RQ3 is evident in (a) the way the credential evaluations resources have evolved, (b) the increase in student mobility into the U.S., and (c) changes in the prefaces and introductions written by the various authors and editors of each text. Globalization refers to the trends happening throughout the world that are beyond any single nation's ability to influence. During the period from 1932 to 2015, international students seeking to study in the U.S. grew

from 25,000 (when records were first kept by IIE Open Doors in 1948) to over a million international students in 2015. The trends identified in this study correlate to the demand placed on U.S. higher education by international students and a developing higher education marketplace throughout the world. This can be recognized in the following points of emphasis embedded in academic credential placement recommendation resources: collaboration across borders; overseas promotion of the American educational model; the primacy assigned (in prefaces and forewords) to proper and equitable placement of students; and the contributions of foreign entities to funding the production of credential evaluation resources. The recognized need for and investment in credential evaluation resources illustrates internationalization within U.S. higher education. The varying exercises to catalog foreign education systems in single volume texts or as individual country volumes in a long series further demonstrates internationalization. The level of detail found in many of the more elaborative volumes reveals a growing demand from credential evaluators for this detailed information. The development of the National Council on the Evaluation of Foreign Academic Credentials for placement recommendation recognition also speaks to the way U.S. higher education was changing in response to the pressures of globalization. The massification of higher education is the recognition of the value of higher education for an advanced society and advanced economy. International students wanted to study in the U.S. to improve their economic capacity upon returning home. The research conducted to understand foreign education systems, often with the support of local governments or community associations, is a result of massification. Massification also connotes the special training and research conducted by the authors and editors revealed by this study, membership and participation in professional organizations, and HEI-level support of staff investing time and resources into the production of credential evaluation resources. Finally, marketization is the shift to a student-as-customer focus rather than the academic institution holding the position of power. The diversity of credential evaluation resources, placement recommendations, and the inconsistency among academic institutions is a direct result of this phenomenon. Each autonomous institution makes admission decisions that best fit their programs and services. Over time, enrollment demands, budgets, and campus economic circumstances shape admission criteria. International admissions is a lesser-known phenomenon on campus and one most subject to interpretation.

**Response to Research Question 4: In response to potential dilemmas resulting from the 1932-2015 changes in credential evaluation materials, what approaches have credential evaluators employed?**

The major issue, as viewed by this researcher, is the capacity for one institution to make different (i.e., program- or evaluator-specific) assessments of the same foreign academic credential. This threatens the integrity of higher education in the U.S., although there is no tangible threat of accreditation audit or fiduciary penalty. Students will recognize tendencies among institutions, and this has the potential to complicate recruiting efforts. The data collected in this study reveal that many well-intentioned evaluators may yet generate many

different interpretations, which continues to be a problem for the in-house credential evaluator. A partial solution lies with proper documentation of and adherence to credential interpretation policies and procedures. Credential evaluation services may also play a role in a solution, although this is not straight-forward. The National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES®) and the Association of International Credential Evaluators, Inc. (AICE) represent many credential evaluation services. However, only a commitment to one specific credential evaluation service, not a select few or any from an umbrella organization, can guarantee consistent interpretation of foreign academic credentials for a college or university.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

In her 2004 article, “International Cooperation in Higher Education: Theory and Practice,” Chan uses globalization, internationalization, marketization, and massification to describe international cooperation in higher education. By adopting this framework and coining the GLIMM acronym, this same terminology serves to advance a macro approach to research broad trends in international higher education. The product of this research also makes clear the necessity for an HEI to have a full understanding of its own strategic objectives, resources, and educational philosophy to be successful for foreign academic credential evaluation in international student recruitment.

This research focused on graduate-level resource texts and credential evaluations. Additional study is necessary to understand undergraduate-level placement recommendations. An unexpected implication of this study is the confounding factor of graduate school culture: whereas in undergraduate admission there is often a strong emphasis placed on retention, as valued by both ranking and accreditation entities, this is not the case in many graduate programs. The culture at the graduate level emphasizes difficulty in the admission process and the rate at which students drop from the program because of the supposed rigor. This culture variation confounds understanding the efficacy of the credential evaluation process. The implications for credential evaluators with professional service organizations or as in-house practitioners are many. Credential evaluators interact with the modern consumerism of higher education by shaping an applicant’s alignment to admission criteria, through customer services in all of its forms, and by providing the lens through which high academic standards are perceived and the manner through which students are supported to achieve those ends. Further, more highly ranked institutions have an incentive to off-load credential evaluation to service providers because they may not be worried about the cost barrier to students and an increasing volume of applications makes in-house evaluation less practical or less important in a market of competing priorities. The size and scope of the resource library also informs an HEI’s decision to provide in-house credential evaluation or to use a third-party provider; the resources available to an evaluator have a profound impact on the perspective and accuracy of a placement recommendation and the value of professional organizations like *The Association for International Credential Evaluation Professionals* (TAICEP) cannot be understated for

creating a network of professionals through which greater access to resource material can be access both in physical form and through the knowledge and experience of colleagues.

Further study is warranted in three additional domains: individual country analysis, national trends, and HEI-specific analysis. The focus of this research was the textual resources themselves. Understanding if and how credential evaluation resources for individual countries or geographic regions changed over time would be interesting in studying student mobility trends over time. Within the U.S., there are very few data on national trend behaviors regarding foreign credential evaluation. Occasional surveys within professional organizations seek to ascertain these trends, but these efforts are rarely scientific and the results are not broadcast widely. It would be useful for HEI leaders to understand national trends regarding (a) the use of credential evaluation services, (b) in-house credentialing and the necessary resources to be successful, and (c) the impact inconsistencies in foreign credential evaluation have on fairness in the enrollment process and admission rates. Finally, surveying the different types of secondary and tertiary institutions to track all of the aforementioned themes correlated to institution-specific characteristics would further help higher education in the U.S. to better understand itself and its needs. Studies of different types of institutions (e.g., private vs. public vs. parochial; military schools vs. non-military; online or virtual delivery; charter schools; magnet schools) facilitate nuanced understanding of how foreign academic credentials have been treated historically in the U.S., the implications of varying credential treatments, and the benefits of adhering to a common, systematic, national approach to foreign credential evaluation.

## **CONCLUSION**

My own thinking has evolved as a result of this research. I had long valued the centralized credential evaluation/recognition systems in most countries around the world. I had believed this centralized clearinghouse simplified the process for the academic institutions, allowed for clarity of student expectation, and improved the overall integrity of international higher education. However, I have now come to realize that such an approach would be antithetical to our system, a system that is admired and desired by students in growing numbers the world over. Even if national standards are created, institutions can and should still make their own admissions determinations, for better or worse. It is a characteristic of our system, and many argue that it is a strength.

Furthermore, I was first trained in the era of equivalency tables and increasing numbers of international student applications. I relied on those tables because they simplified my work, but at the time, I never knew I was forgoing the guidance of the compilers of those tables; like many of the colleagues with whom I spoke at conferences and through online discussion forums, we had never read the texts from cover to cover. Yes, there is a need to establish an institutional consistency regarding foreign credentials and educational systems. And there

certainly is a need to treat our students fairly and reliably. But there is no easy solution, one-stop shop, or magic bullet that will yield this consistency and fair treatment. Ultimately, U.S.-based foreign academic credential evaluation is both a science and an art. In this way, it mirrors and is ideally positioned to serve the U.S.-based higher education system to which it is attached.

In the 1957 *World Education Series* publication on Canada, the author says, “Despite excellent service from the United States Office of Education...there is still a disturbing degree of diversity in the evaluation of foreign student credentials (p. iii).” And through all of the effort of the past half-century, the same can still be said today. The work must continue, but we must not over-correct, or we will sacrifice the individuality and creativity that make our educational system, our credential evaluation process, and our culture unique and vibrant.

Full dissertation available by visiting: <http://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/31826/>

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