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# Evaluating International Credentials in the New Environment

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CGS 46<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting  
Washington, D.C.  
December 6, 2006



# The Context

- ❖ A rapidly evolving higher global higher education environment
- ❖ Increased global competition for the best graduate students
- ❖ International students are very important to U.S. higher education
- ❖ Credential evaluation is fundamental to international academic mobility



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# International Students in the U.S. in 2004/05

**565,321 international students:**

- ❖ **3.4% of total U.S. higher education enrollment**
- ❖ **12% of graduate enrollment**
- ❖ **31% of graduate science and engineering enrollment**



## International Graduate Enrollment in the U.S.

Fields of Study	International Students
Engineering	50%
Physical Sciences	40%
Biological Sciences	25%
Social Sciences	15%
Business	15%



## International Faculty & Scholars in Science & Engineering

- ❖ 38% of Ph.D. degrees awarded in science and engineering
- ❖ 58.9% of Ph.D. degrees awarded in engineering
- ❖ 19% of tenure-track faculty in science and engineering are foreign-born
- ❖ 36% of faculty in engineering
- ❖ 58% of post-doctoral fellows at NIH



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## WES Mission

**The purpose of World Education Services (WES) is to foster the integration of persons educated in foreign countries into academic and professional settings. To this end, WES promotes and facilitates the understanding of educational qualifications through the collection, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of information about educational systems throughout the world.**



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# WENR

World Education News & Reviews

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## The Bologna Process

WENR Articles on the Bologna Process

- [\*A Practical Guide to Bologna Tools and Instruments\*](#) (January/February 2005)
- [\*Evaluating the Bologna Degree in the U.S.\*](#) (March/April 2004)
- [\*The Bologna Bachelor's Degree: An Overview\*](#) (January/February 2004)
- [\*Explaining the Bologna Process to Non-Europeans\*](#) (September/October 2003)
- [\*The Bologna Process as Seen From the Outside\*](#) (September/October 2003)
- [\*The Bologna Process: How it is Changing the Face of Higher Education in Europe\*](#) (March/April 2001)
- [\*Bologna Declaration Addresses Higher Education in European Union\*](#) (January/February 2000)
- [\*Working with ECTS \(European Credit Transfer System\) in the U.S.\*](#)

[www.wes.org/ewenr/bolognaprocess.htm](http://www.wes.org/ewenr/bolognaprocess.htm)



# The Bologna Process

- ❖ An agreement among 45 European countries to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010
- ❖ Named after the initial agreement signed in Bologna in 1999
- ❖ It is not a treaty – does not have the force of law – but countries that sign on agree to change their higher education legislation to implement the Bologna terms.



## Size & Scope

- ❖ 45 countries as of 2005
- ❖ 16+ million students (est.)
- ❖ 4000+ institutions of higher education (est.)
- ❖ Covers the entire European continent from the Atlantic to Vladivostok
- ❖ Includes tiny Vatican City and massive Russia

# Goals of the Bologna Process

- ❖ A system of easily readable and comparable degrees
- ❖ Higher education structured in three cycles: bachelor, master, doctorate
- ❖ Introduction of a standard system of credits (ECTS)
- ❖ Transparent Europe-wide standards in quality assurance
- ❖ Foster European dimension in higher education



## Simply Put the Goal is to:

- ❖ Simplify European qualification systems
- ❖ Improve mobility within the EU and attract students from abroad
- ❖ Ensure consistency and transparency in quality standards for higher education

**It is a 'process' leading to an outcome by 2010.**



# The Bologna Instruments

The Bologna Process is based on common instruments designed to promote transparency and the recognition of degrees:

- ❖ **The ECTS Credit** – a standard measurement for student workload
- ❖ **The ECTS grading scale**, used alongside national grading scales, ranks students with passing grades on a statistical basis: A= top 10%; B= next 25%; C= next 30%; D= next 25%; E = last 10%
- ❖ **The Diploma Supplement**- Issued *jointly with* the final award, presents in a consistent manner and format information on workload, grading scale and the function of the qualification in the home system.
- ❖ **The European Qualifications Framework**



# The European Qualifications Framework

A common framework that defines all degrees in terms of:

- ❖ Level: Bachelor/Master/Doctoral
- ❖ Workload: ECTS Credits by year and level
- ❖ Learning outcomes and competencies expected at each degree level as set forth in the “**Dublin Descriptors**”



# Redesigning Curricula: The Tuning Exercise

Using the framework, institutions are to restructure or “tune” curricula and define them - by discipline and degree level – in terms of

- ❖ what students should know
- ❖ what they should understand
- ❖ what they should be able to accomplish

# Monitoring Progress: The Trends Reports

Prepared by the EUA on the basis of site visits Trends Reports assess the situation on the ground.

- ❖ **Trends I: Trends in Learning Structures in Higher Education (1999) – the baseline**
- ❖ **Trends II: Towards the European higher education area - survey of main reforms from Bologna to Prague (2001)**
- ❖ **Trends III: Progress towards the European Higher Education Area (2003)**
- ❖ **Trends IV: European Universities Implementing Bologna (2005)**

# Trends IV: The State of Affairs in 2005

Based on 62 site visits in 29 countries, found that:

- ❖ Institutions are embracing and coping with reforms but problems remain.
- ❖ The three cycles are becoming a reality but there is still resistance - students are often advised to earn a second degree.
- ❖ Quality assurance broadly accepted
- ❖ Increased but uneven use of the Bologna instruments (ECTS credits & Diploma Supplement)
- ❖ Universities having difficulties with the speed of the changes



## The Major Challenge: Uneven Progress

Implementation varies by region and by country depending on:

- ❖ When the country joined the Bologna Process
- ❖ Local political and economic conditions
- ❖ Educational culture and tradition



## What does it Mean for US Institutions?

- ❖ US has a long tradition of exchanges with Europe
- ❖ 15% of international students in the US are from “Bologna countries” (3<sup>rd</sup> after India and China)
- ❖ A new higher education landscape emerging across Europe
- ❖ 3-year degrees will be the norm in 25 out of 30 OECD countries after 2010
- ❖ Increased competition for international students
- ❖ Many master’s degrees taught in English



## US Experience with the 3-year Degree

- ❖ 3-year degrees from the UK, Israel, Ireland, Singapore, Hong Kong...are usually acceptable for admission to graduate school
- ❖ when US admissions officers speak of “the three-year degree”, they usually mean the bachelor’s degree from India



## Frequently Cited Reasons for not Recognizing 3-year Degrees

- ❖ Length: three-years as opposed to four and/or fewer than a total of 16 years of education
- ❖ Absence of general education taught the post-secondary level
- ❖ Fairness: US students must study for 4 years to earn a bachelor's degree



# Purpose of International Credential Evaluation

- ❖ Ensure the recognition of credentials at their appropriate level
- ❖ Help institutions recruit and admit qualified candidates
- ❖ Promote the academic mobility



# WES Approach to Evaluations

- ❖ WES recognizes that educational systems are inherently different and reflect different traditions
- ❖ WES acknowledges that general education is unique to the U.S. undergraduate curriculum
- ❖ WES adheres to the principles embodied in the 1997 Lisbon Convention on the recognition of educational credentials
- ❖ WES provides functional rather than absolute equivalencies

# Lisbon Convention (1997)

## Section VI – Recognition of higher education qualifications (Article VI.1)

- ❖ “To the extent that a recognition decision is based on the knowledge and skills certified by the higher education qualification, each Party shall recognize the higher education qualifications conferred in another Party, ***unless a substantial difference*** can be shown between the qualification for which recognition is sought and the corresponding qualification in the Party in which recognition is sought.”



# WES Basic Evaluation Criteria

## LEVEL

- ❖ Requirements for admission
- ❖ Institution offering program

## SCOPE

- ❖ Program structure, content and length

## INTENT

- ❖ Purpose and function of credential in the home country



## WES Evaluation Parameters

- ❖ WES assesses credentials in terms of their level and function.
- ❖ WES evaluations are advisory: the final decision rests with the receiving institution.
- ❖ WES does not guarantee that an individual will gain the benefit (admission, employment, licensing) that is sought.
- ❖ Evaluation does not certify an individual's skills or competence.



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# WES Compared Two Degrees

[www.wes.org/ewenr/bolognaprocess.htm](http://www.wes.org/ewenr/bolognaprocess.htm)

## New Italian Degree (Laurea I)

- ❖ Requires maturity certificate for admission
- ❖ Offered by Bocconi University
- ❖ Three years
- ❖ 100% of the program devoted to the major and supporting subjects
- ❖ 180 ECTS credits
- ❖ Grants access to employment or graduate study

## US Bachelor's Degree

- ❖ Requires high school diploma for admission
- ❖ Offered by Indiana University -Bloomington
- ❖ Four years
- ❖ 50% of program in general education and distribution requirements
- ❖ 120+ US semester credits
- ❖ Grants access to employment or graduate study



## WES Conclusions

- ❖ Despite some apparent similarities, the new European bachelor's degree remains distinct from its US counterpart.
- ❖ Studies are still more concentrated in the major.
- ❖ Electives are often taken within the same faculty.
- ❖ The ECTS credit is not based on instructional time but on learning outcomes as defined by the institution or faculty.
- ❖ The degrees are largely similar in their content and intended outcomes.
- ❖ WES considers them to be functionally equivalent



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## Some US Universities that Accept the New 3-year Degree

- ❖ The University of Chicago Graduate School of Business
- ❖ Carnegie Mellon University
- ❖ Columbia University Graduate School of Business
- ❖ North Carolina State University.
- ❖ Purdue University
- ❖ University at Buffalo (SUNY)
- ❖ Wake Forest University Graduate School of Management.
- ❖ Wharton School/ University of Pennsylvania



## WES Policy on Degrees from India

WES regards selected three-year degrees from India as functionally equivalent to a U.S. bachelor's degree.

- ❖ based on the relative standing of the university as reflected by its NAAC grade (A or higher)
- ❖ individual degree holder's performance as indicated by the classification of the degree.



# OBSERVATIONS

- ❖ Education all over the world is in ferment and changing
- ❖ New institutions and credentials are emerging
- ❖ International student and professional mobility is rapidly increasing
- ❖ Credential evaluation must facilitate mobility
- ❖ Evaluation methods and criteria must be updated, made flexible and transparent