

## **The ECE Position on Bologna-compliant Degrees**

### **The Bologna Declaration**

The Bologna Declaration is an agreement originally signed in 1999 and which now covers 46 countries. Its goal is to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. The Bologna Declaration includes the following objectives:

- implement a system of easily readable and comparable degrees
- adopt a two-cycle degree system
- establish a credit system
- promote quality assurance systems
- remove obstacles to the mobility of students

The Bologna Process refers to the implementation of these objectives. In many European countries the two-cycle degree system is being implemented as a three-year first degree program followed by a two-year second degree program. This structure is causing many graduate admissions professionals to examine the admissibility into North American graduate programs of holders of degrees from three-year programs of study.

### **There is no one, single Bologna-compliant degree.**

There are 46 separate signatories to the Bologna Declaration. Each jurisdiction represents a different educational tradition. Each jurisdiction has the right and responsibility to design its degree curricula according to the needs of its society. Significant differences exist in the length and content of Bologna-compliant degrees, both between countries and within countries.

### **Like all other degrees, each European credential must be evaluated on its own merits.**

Credential evaluators take into account differences in length, content, structure, and purpose. Each European degree must be evaluated based on its unique characteristics.

### **There is a difference between determining the equivalence of two degrees and determining the admissibility of a candidate to an academic degree program.**

Determining equivalence involves comparing the characteristics of a degree from one country with the characteristics of a degree from another country. Equivalence is concluded when the characteristics of the two degrees are comparable. This is a subjective decision made by a professional credential evaluator.

Determining the admissibility of a candidate to an academic degree program is made by examining all of the factors that are likely to predict the success of the candidate. One important factor in determining admissibility is the candidate's previous education. Admissibility is a subjective decision made by a professional admissions officer.

These two decisions should not be confused. A candidate who holds a degree is not automatically admissible to an academic degree program. A candidate who is admissible to an academic degree program does not automatically possess a degree.

### **Professionals at each institution must make their own admissions and equivalency decisions based on institutional requirements.**

Admissions professionals must decide if a degree is required for admission to a graduate program. If a degree is required, the equivalence of foreign degrees must be made based on the comparability of the degrees using an institution's normal standards.

If an institution determines that a candidate without a degree is admissible to a program that normally requires a degree for admission, then an exception to normal admission has been made.

Exceptions are acceptable. When making an exception to normal admission standards, there is no need to determine a degree equivalence where none exists.

**ECE makes equivalence statements.**

ECE is a credential evaluation service that provides equivalence statements using ECE's equivalency standards. The evaluation reports are used for further education, employment, professional licensure, and similar purposes. ECE does not make admission recommendations.

**ECE's evaluation reports can be used by educational institutions to make admissions decisions.**

ECE's evaluation reports provide detailed information that allows a reader to determine whether or not a candidate's program of study and educational achievements are appropriate preparation for further education. Admissions professionals at colleges and universities use ECE evaluation reports to determine if candidates meet their requirements for admission.

**ECE staff have provided leadership in sharing information on the Bologna Process for admissions professionals.**

ECE evaluation staff have been active in collecting, analyzing, and sharing information on the Bologna Process. James Frey served as a Member and Chairperson of the Admissions Officers and Credential Evaluators (ACE) Board of the European Association for International Education (EAIE) from 1999 to 2006, and now serves as a member of the EAIE Executive Board, 2006 to 2008. The ACE Board has been a key provider of training and guidance to European admissions professionals with the implementation of the Bologna Process.

Margit Schatzman served as co-chair of the Bologna Process Task Force of NAFSA: Association of International Educators from 2004-06. The Task Force was charged with making recommendations on how to share information on the Bologna Process and on how to facilitate transatlantic dialog about changes taking place in European education. She is currently serving on the ACE Board, 2006 to 2008.

ECE staff members have organized and presented many sessions and workshops on the Bologna Process at meetings of numerous professional associations.

ECE provides evaluation reports and customized training programs to help college and university admissions professionals understand the Bologna Process and to develop policies that meet their institutional requirements.

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