



AICE Minneapolis Symposium

**Setting the Standard for Graduate Admissions:
Three-year degrees and other admissions challenges**

MINNEAPOLIS

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Module I.

Bologna-patterned Three-year Degrees

The Bologna process of 1999 reformed higher education in much of Western Europe. Before the reforms, most countries' higher education systems (with some notable exceptions) were structured to include a long-cycle first university degree which granted access to doctoral programs. The reforms mandated the development of a 3+2 structure, consisting of a three-year first degree, typically referred to as a Bachelor, and a two-year graduate level degree, typically referred to as a Master.

The European three-year Bachelor degree brings about several challenges. Fundamentally, it does not meet the number of years required (four) to be equivalent to a US Bachelor's degree. However, many European countries have or had thirteen-year or longer secondary school programs, which, it can be argued, makes up the difference. Furthermore, graduates of the European three-year Bachelor are often equally advanced in their field of study as their US counterparts because most curricula place a greater emphasis on subjects within the major.

Credential evaluators consider a US bachelor's degree to consist of four years of study. As such, Bologna bachelor's degrees do not meet the minimum standard and are typically evaluated as three years of undergraduate study. Autonomous universities are not held to this mandate. Some admit holders of Bologna bachelor's degrees directly to graduate programs. Others require completion of a bridge program. Others still deny admission to anyone not holding the minimum of a four-year degree.



In this session, the panel will address the issues of secondary preparation, specialization, academic rigor and employment opportunities within the context of three-year Bologna degrees. This discussion will provide guidance to graduate admissions officers and attempt to establish the standards for graduate admissions in the United States.

TOPICS

- Bologna Process overview and historical context (introduction)
 - *Include admission requirements and components of a Bologna bachelor's degree*
- Does the 13+ of secondary education make up the deficit between US Bachelor's degree and Bologna Bachelors?
 - *Not all European secondary programs are 13+ years, and increasingly they are transitioning to 12 years. Theoretically, all graduates from secondary school in any Bologna signatory secondary program are eligible for admission.*
- There is a greater focus on the major subject in Bologna bachelors.
 - *Does this equal to the fourth year of study in the major subject of a US Bachelor's degree?*
- European students generally claim to be stronger academically in their field of specialization than their American counterparts.
 - *Does this make up for the shorter duration of Bologna bachelor's?*
- The perception of a three-year Bologna bachelor's degree is lower than the previous 5-year first degree in the employment market, leading most students to pursue Master's degrees for similar employment opportunities.
 - *Does this have any effect on academic evaluation in the US?*

Module 2.

Three-Year Bachelor's Degree: South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka)



The conflict between some key public universities and the UGC concerning the four-year bachelor's degree came to a head in September 2014. The UGC ordered those institutions that The three-year degree debate from countries in South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka) is one that continues to persist given the steady number of international students seeking graduate degrees at U.S. institutions of higher education. As the second largest exporter of international students to the U.S. after China and its leading source from South Asia, India's three-year bachelor's degree is of particular interest.

India's three-year Bachelor's degree in arts and sciences has been typically a three-year program patterned after the British system. Attempts were recently made by some Indian universities to champion the idea of expanding the three-year program by another year to include a research component and additional courses at the advanced level, particularly in the sciences. These institutions viewed this move as essential if India intends to be competitive globally, especially in scientific research and development.

This push toward expanding the three-year into a four-year degree was met with strong resistance from the University Grants Commission (UGC), India's higher education regulatory and funding had either embarked on offering the four-year bachelor's degree or were already offering them, to abandon the program and revert to the standard three-year programs or lose their funding altogether.

On the other hand, Pakistan, India's neighbor, is taking steps to adopting the four-year bachelor's degree, and reforming its two- and three-year degree programs. Some universities in Sri Lanka, India's other neighbor, are beginning to offer four-year bachelor's degree.

The proponents of India's four-year bachelor's degree, like their counterparts in Pakistan and Sri Lanka, see the additional year as a more holistic approach to teaching and learning, allowing for broad-based training in the humanities and sciences. The abrupt dismissal of the four-year program by the UGC is seen by many of the educators and the institutions India as shortsighted and lacking any serious academic discussion that is supported by convincing facts and arguments. Many foresee that the UGC's resistance toward the four-year degree will only push students away from studying sciences, pursuing careers in sciences and stymieing India's chances in scientific innovation.

While educators in India grapple with the weaknesses and global competitiveness of their three-year Bachelor degree as compared to the four-year Bachelor, a cursory search of graduate admissions requirements of U.S. institutions of higher education show variations in the acceptance of the Indian three-year degree. The three-year Indian bachelor's degree appears to be viewed by some universities as sufficient preparation for admission to graduate school while regarded as insufficient by others. There are U.S. graduate schools and credential evaluation services that consider the three-year Indian degrees from select universities as equivalent to the U.S. bachelor's degree, while others recommend three years of undergraduate credit equivalence.

TOPICS

Three-Year Bachelor's Degree: South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka)

Indian Institution Ranking

Some U.S. institutions and credential evaluation services are considering three-year bachelor degrees as U.S. equivalent based on the ranking of the institution in India.

- *Does the rank of the Indian institution in the country's education hierarchy play a factor in the eligibility of a three-year bachelor's degree holder for graduation admission?*
- *Who determines the ranking of universities in India? And, what are the criteria to determine the ranking of institutions? How is quality control enforced?*

U.S. Perspective on Indian Degrees

Some U.S. institutions and credential evaluators, recognize the three-year Bachelor's degree from India as sufficient preparation for admission to graduate studies.

- *Is the General Education course component of U.S. bachelor degree programs applied to the three-year bachelor degrees from India (given its absence from the Indian bachelor's degree and the argument from some Indian universities supporting its inclusion as part of a "more holistic approach to teaching and learning")?*
- *Is focus to be placed on the Major-specific coursework of the three-year bachelor degree?*
- *Why are the Indian three-year bachelor's degrees assessed based on institution ranking and degree classification, when the same is not true of three-year degrees from other countries?*

Indian Universities Perspective on their 3-year degree

Some institutions of higher education in India (as cited above) have argued on the limitations of the three-year degree and in favor of expanding the degree to four years.

- *If the three-year bachelor degree is seen by some institutions in India as inadequate preparation for graduation school, should this be the deciding factor in determining graduation admission eligibility at U.S. institutions?*
- *Is the UGC's order for universities to revert back to 3yr programs primarily a funding issue?*
- *Are the 3-year Bachelor degrees treated differently than the 4-year degree holders in India? Is the quality of the 3-year Bachelor considered to be less than the 4-year Bachelor degrees in India?*
- *Are holders of 3-year Indian Bachelor degrees at a disadvantage in the employment market compared to holders of 4-year Bachelor degrees?*

Three-year bachelor degree classification

Some U.S. institutions and credential evaluation services are considering three-year bachelor degrees as U.S. equivalent based on the classification of the degree. For example, a three-year bachelor degree First Class with Distinction/Division I is required for admission to some graduate schools.

- *Is the classification of the three-year degree conferred considered a criterion for admission to the graduation school?*

Module 3.

Beyond South Asia and Bologna: Three-year degrees from Australia, South Africa and Israel ...



Three-year bachelor degrees in Australia and South Africa are modeled after the UK educational system. Australian Bachelor's (pass or ordinary) degrees require three years of full-time study or the part-time equivalent. These qualifications include Bachelor of Arts, Science and Commerce, i.e., BA, BSc. and BCom; Bachelor of Applied Science (BAppSc) and Bachelor of Business Administration (BBusAdmin). In Australia, four-year Bachelor's degrees exist in professional fields like Engineering, Education, Law, etc. An Honours degree usually follows an (Ordinary) three-year Bachelor's degree. It comprises one year of study in an area of specialization. Students are typically selected to pursue the honours degree based on academic achievement. The three-year Bachelor's degree is often accepted for access to higher education degrees. An Honours Degree is normally required for access to higher research degrees.

A major part of the history of education in South Africa has to do with apartheid which was first established in 1949. Apartheid became dismantled between 1990 and 1993 and the years since have allowed for all racial groups to play "catch-up" with education. Admission into Bachelor's degree programs is traditionally based on completion of year 12 (standard 10). Students sit for the Senior Certificate Examination (an external examination) as they approach the end of standard 10. The results of these examinations will determine whether one may be admitted into a Bachelor's degree program. In South Africa Bachelor's degrees require three years of full-time study or the part-time equivalent. These qualifications include Bachelor of Arts, Science and Commerce, i.e., BA, BSc. and BCom and the Bachelor of Social Science (BSocSc) degrees. Four to six-year bachelor degrees exist in professional fields like engineering, law, architecture and medicine. An Honours degree usually follows a three-year Bachelor's degree.

It comprises one year of study in an area of specialization. Students are selected to pursue the Honours degree based on academic achievement.

In Israel, admission to higher education requires the Matriculation Certificate (Teudat Bagrut) and the Psychometric Exam, which bears resemblance to the SAT in the USA. Historically, only universities could offer Bachelor's level programs, but that option has long since been extended to colleges. Bachelor's Degree programs in Israel are typically three years in length. Exceptions to this are Bachelor's Degrees in Nursing, Pharmacy, Education and Engineering, which are four years in length and medical and dental degrees which take six years. Degrees are heavily focused on the major field of study, often with little time remaining for electives in unrelated subjects. However, pursuit of double majors is quite common. In contrast to three-year degrees in Europe and South Asia, Israeli three-year Bachelor's Degrees are widely recognized as equivalent to four-year bachelor's degrees in the US. One reason for this assessment is the level of study required to earn the *Bagrut* certificate at the end of High School. The *Bagrut* can be considered to be on the level of the UK's A-Level exams. Undergraduate transfer credit is awarded in the US for *Bagrut* exams in academic subjects completed at the level of 3 or higher (on a scale of 1 to 6). As such, students entering Israeli universities can be considered to have already completed one year of undergraduate level study, covering the typical general education requirements of US universities. In addition, academic requirements in Israel tend to be rigorous. Students are typically older than their peers abroad on account of mandatory military service and the common practice of taking time off to work or travel prior to matriculation. In addition, the number of courses taken per year is generally higher than at US institutions and summers are often spent preparing for exams or writing term papers.

TOPICS

Beyond South Asia and Bologna: Three-year degrees from Australia, South Africa and Israel ...

AUSTRALIA

- Graduates from 3-year Bachelor's degrees are often admitted into Master's programs in Australian universities. This is almost universal for non-research based Master's programs.
 - *Should the same practice be true for US institutions with non-research based Master's programs?*
- What are the employment implications for graduates of Australian 3-year Bachelor's programs in Australia and in the USA?
 - *Australian Bachelor's degrees vary in duration depending on the area of study.*
 - *Are the graduates of 3-year Bachelor's degrees (Arts, Commerce, etc.) prepared to enter the workforce or should these degrees be considered preparatory for the additional training (either an Honours degree or a Master's degree)?*

SOUTH AFRICA

- Since admission to Bachelor's degree programs is based on successful passing of external examinations, better prepared students are admitted.
 - *Would this external examination serve as an extra level of college preparation (such as A-levels in the UK) or as a compensation for uneven level of secondary education in secondary schools (such as CXC exams in the Caribbean)?*
 - *Are graduates of 3-year Bachelor's programs accepted into Master's programs by South African universities?*
 - *What are employment implications for graduates of South African 3-year Bachelor's degrees in South Africa and in the USA?*

ISRAEL

- Should the grades on *Bagrut* exams be taken into account when deciding on whether these exams should be equivalent to college-level academic work?
 - *Should 3-year Bachelor's degrees from Israel be treated differently from 3-year degrees from other countries? Why or why not?*
 - *What are employment implications for graduates of Israeli 3-year Bachelor's programs in Israel and in the USA?*