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Topics: [International Enrollment Management](#)

Sub Topics: [Admission and Placement of International Students and Scholars](#)

With students continuing to choose to pursue higher education in the U.S. it is a necessity for institutions to determine their level of education and to authenticate their certificates or diplomas using consistent standards. Credential evaluation is a challenging process given the global variations in education systems, languages, grading scales, curriculum design, and nomenclature of the courses which can vary by the institution within a country.

Why are Credential Evaluations Required?

Some institutions require students to have their academic credentials verified by third-party evaluation agencies, while some institutions staff credential evaluation as part of their admissions or registrar team. Although several credential evaluating agencies have sprung up over the recent years, the choice of using institutional personnel to perform credential evaluations primarily depends on the number of international students, the countries they range from, and the institutional budget. Regardless of where credential evaluations are done, an absence of universal guidelines for credential evaluations complicates the process. A quick look at conducting these credential evaluations in house and using third party evaluators demonstrates both benefits and challenges.

Advantages and Challenges

In-house credential evaluations

- Cost-effective with volume
- More control over the evaluation process
- Can reduce cost and time barriers for applicants
- Trustworthy across departments and units
- Requires extensive training for all staff involved
- Staff turnover impacts processing times and training costs
- Equivalency can be challenged by applicants
- Requires translation support or process
- Extenuating circumstances can be considered (circumstances faced by the student, such as failed courses, etc.)
- Course by course evaluation can be time-consuming task for staff

GPA evaluations can be considered under holistic admission process
Ability to see trends and patterns at a specific school

Third-party credential evaluations

Dedicated staff
Access to global resources (such as staff in different countries?)
Quick and efficient based on the service type
May provide translation services
Limits institutional control
It is difficult for students and institutions to challenge the report and results
Holistic admission process is not considered, they only evaluate the documents
Variations in evaluations among credential evaluation services
Cost and time is questionable based on each service provider

Source: 2018 NAFSA Annual Meeting Open Meeting note

Best Practice Scenarios

Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Background: Mid-size private institution, 6000 students with around 10% international students	Background: Large public institution, >20,000 students with around 7% international students.	Background: Large public institution, >30,000, 20% international students

Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
<p>In-house credential evaluation: This institution has chosen in-house credentialing to reduce costs to students even though the cost of maintaining credential evaluation is expensive for the institution. The graduate admissions department trains staff on credentialing process. They have control of the application and admission timelines as they conduct the evaluation. This has increased international enrollment as students can apply to the university without additional cost and time.</p>	<p>Both in-house and third-party credential evaluation: This institution has 12 colleges and each college prefers to use in-house and out-house based on the staff training experience and the familiarity with international education systems. However, the graduate school prefers to provide centralized in-house credential evaluation to save time and money.</p>	<p>Third-party credential evaluation: This institution has a large number of international students from over 150 countries. The institution uses third-party credential evaluation due to the high volume of applicants from a variety of countries. Although, it is a cost to the students, the quality of evaluation is crucial for application decision making off-sets the costs for training staff for credential evaluation.</p>

How to Choose the Right Credential Evaluation Service

Institutions, immigration authorities, legal entities, and employers alike require credential evaluation in order to accurately assess the academic qualification of the student, determine U.S. equivalency of credentials, and to authenticate documents. With several credential agencies in play, the crucial question is how to choose the right agency. There are a few important criteria to consider before choosing a third-party evaluation agency.

Agency Affiliation

National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES) and Association of International Credential Evaluators (AICE) are organizations that perform extensive screening and vet the credential evaluation services yearly based on a strict code of ethics. In addition, members of these organizations are recognized by the U.S. Department of State. Before embarking on the process, one should determine if the third-party credential evaluation agency is affiliated with these organizations to receive a credible report.

Training and Experience

It is best to research the training and expertise offered by each agency. Although there may be tall claims, it is best to set aside time to research what they offer, if they cover the required courses or documents, and if they have had prior experience in evaluating such documents. For example, most agencies are familiar with credentials from India and China, however, there is greater concern on evaluating documents from war-torn regions such as Syria, Iraq, or Lebanon. Before engaging a credential evaluator, ensure that they have a sound document policy, have refund policies and accept requests for additional copies at a later date without having to go through the entire process.

Cost

The cost and time taken for evaluation vary with each third-party evaluation agency. Regardless of the agency, it is an expensive process for the student. Costs range from \$175 for a general evaluation to around \$400 for a course-by-course evaluation. Additional fees can be charged for additional evaluations ordered and for a shortened time to process.

References



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