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Understanding Differing Evaluation Perspectives

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LUISS University, Rome, Italy

-Jeanie Bell, University of Colorado Boulder, USA

-Meg Wenger, ECE, Inc., USA

-Monica Hatle-Larssen, NOKUT, Norway



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Understanding Differing Evaluation Perspectives

- ▶ While some of the basics are the same, the needed outcomes can be different. Institutions and agencies have different missions, ranging from determining eligibility to successfully complete a higher degree to eligibility to practice a profession. Various regulations surrounding each type of organization will be included in the presentation.



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Presenters

- ▶ Jeanie Bell, University of Colorado Boulder, USA
- ▶ Meg Wenger, Educational Credential Evaluators, Inc,
Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA
- ▶ Monica Hatle-Larssen, NOKUT, Norway



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Learning Objectives

- ▶ Participants will have an opportunity to learn about how different organizations and agencies view credential evaluation for different purposes, as well as commonalities among them. They will learn how each type of organization or agency fills a specific need, sometimes overlapping.

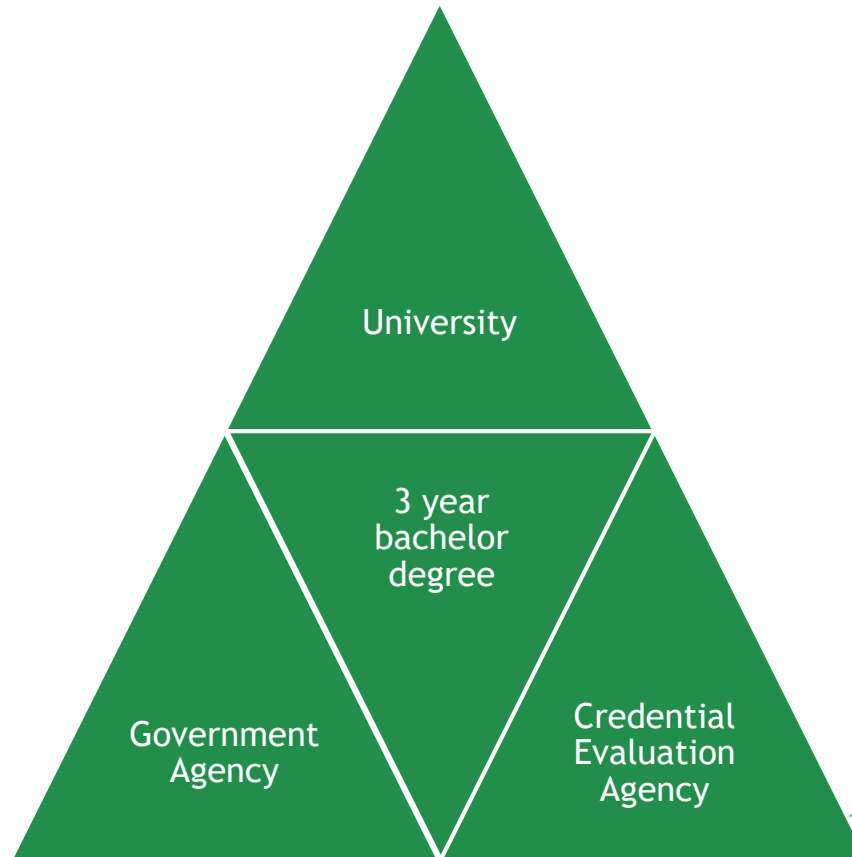




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Same credential, same outcome?





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US Public University

Jeanie Bell, University of Colorado Boulder

- ▶ A public school is a college or university primarily funded by a state government. Public colleges and universities generally are larger than private schools and have larger class sizes. At a public school, you will likely have a larger selection of majors than you would at a private school, with both liberal arts classes and specialized programs.
- ▶ As such, it must follow government requirements.
- ▶ The University of Colorado Boulder is a public university.





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US Public University

- ▶ Why is credential evaluation done at the university?
 - ▶ To fulfill the various regulations and laws governing the activities of the University of Colorado Boulder as a public university.
 - ▶ To meet the needs of the university to recruit and admit qualified students with the potential to succeed through to graduation.
 - ▶ To increase diversity.
 - ▶ To meet a global need for higher education.



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▶ US Federal Regulations

- ▶ The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is a landmark civil rights and US labor law in the United States that outlaws discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.
- ▶ Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which states in part, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”



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- ▶ Accreditation Body Regulations
 - ▶ Engineering - ABET -Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, Inc., is a non-governmental organization that accredits post-secondary education programs in "applied science, computing, engineering, and engineering technology“...
 - ▶ Business - AACSB –Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business provides quality assurance, business education intelligence, and professional development services to over 1,500 member organizations and more than 785 accredited business schools worldwide.



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▶ Board of Regents Laws

▶ Article 7: Students

- ▶ The goal of the admissions policy of the University of Colorado is to provide higher education opportunities to qualified individuals from all segments of the Colorado population and other national and international populations. (7.A.1 Guidelines (A))
- ▶ The admissions decisions of the university seek to identify applicants having a high probability for successful completion of their academic program at the university. (7.A.1 Guidelines (B))
- ▶ Admission is based on evaluation of many criteria; among the most important are:...general level of academic performance before admission to the university, as indicated by the evaluation of work taken at other educational institutions; (7.A.3 Evaluation (B))
- ▶ <https://www.cu.edu/regents/regent-laws>



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▶ Campus Regulations

- ▶ CU-Boulder prohibits *discrimination*, [1] *harassment* and/or related *retaliation* based on *protected class* in admission and access to, and treatment and employment in, its educational programs and activities. [2] For purposes of this CU-Boulder policy, "*protected classes*" refers to race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation, or political philosophy.
- ▶ This prohibition applies to all students, faculty, staff, contractors, patients, volunteers, affiliated entities and other third parties.



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University of Colorado Boulder

- ▶ University of Colorado Boulder Mission
 - ▶ The University of Colorado is a public research university with multiple campuses serving Colorado, the nation, and the world through leadership in high-quality education and professional training, public service, advancing research and knowledge, and state-of-the-art health care. Each campus has a distinct role and mission as provided by Colorado law. - Board of Regents
 - ▶ The purpose of the Office of Admissions is to provide the University of Colorado at Boulder with an appropriate student population that meets the university, campus, and state mandates for high academic quality; the appropriate mix of resident, nonresident, and international students; an increase to the current population of transfer and graduate students, and as diverse a population as possible. - Admissions Work Unit



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- ▶ What need is filled by credential evaluation done at a university?
 - ▶ Fulfilling the Board of Regents mission of the university, “Admission is based on evaluation of ... general level of academic performance before admission to the university, as indicated by the evaluation of work taken at other educational institutions...”
 - ▶ We do in-house credentials. This ensures consistency in evaluations.
 - ▶ Guided by the new TAICEP Guide to Credential Evaluation (August 2017)
 - ▶ #1: Identify the purpose of the assessment (e.g. immigration , employment, education, professional registration or another purpose)



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- ▶ What are the benefits and risks to the institution if you admit someone who is unqualified or who has unverifiable documents?
 - ▶ Public health - very little risk. We don't certify for professional practice unless the student has successfully completed a degree.
 - ▶ Safety - criminal history question is on the application, immigration requirements vetted by US State Department and Homeland Security.
 - ▶ General well-being - someone who is unqualified will not be able to continue much beyond one or two semesters. Want to avoid this as it mainly isn't fair to the student.
 - ▶ Student failure and dropping out could also lead to loss of funding due to declining retention rates.
 - ▶ Institutional reputation - if it's done on a regular basis, you face the possibility of being known for having lax requirements.
 - ▶ Ultimately, the university could lose the ability to issue immigration documents for international students.



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- ▶ 3 year bachelor degree equivalency
 - ▶ US Department of Education does not oversee degree equivalencies.
 - ▶ Higher Learning Commission (formerly North Central Association)
 - ▶ “The institution conforms to commonly accepted minimum programs length: 60 semester credits for associate’s degrees, 120 Semester credits for bachelor’s degree, and 30 semester credits beyond the bachelor’s for master’s degrees. Any variation from these minima must be explained and justified.



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University of Colorado Boulder

- ▶ 3 year bachelor degree equivalency
 - ▶ Not all universities have a centralized admission process.
 - ▶ CU Boulder is somewhat centralized - Office of Admissions oversees equivalency for most graduate departments.
 - ▶ Equivalency will depend on what country issued the 3 year degree.
 - ▶ Higher Learning Commission (formerly North Central Association)
 - ▶ “The institution conforms to
 - ▶ US graduate departments determine admissibility.
 - ▶ Provisional admission is possible if a 3-year degree is not considered to be equivalent to a US 4-year degree.



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Credential Evaluation Agency

Meg Wenger, ECE, USA

The background features abstract geometric shapes in shades of green and blue. On the left, a solid green shape tapers towards the top. On the right, there are overlapping, semi-transparent green and blue shapes that create a layered effect. The central text is white and stands out against the white background.

The Private Evaluation Agency Perspective

History of Foreign Credential Evaluation in the US

- Initially provided by the U.S. Office of Education (which became a branch of the Department of Education), free of charge.
- Responsibility shifted from public to private sector in late 1960s.
- In 1973 the government shut down its evaluation service. It was determined that no governmental oversight was required of private agencies. Non-profit agencies were the first companies established; currently there are more for-profit than non-profit agencies.
- Educational institutions came to rely on external agencies or develop expertise in-house
- National Association of Credential Evaluation Agencies was founded by 8 charter members in 1987. There are currently 19 member organizations.
- It is estimated that there exist more than 50 credential evaluation agencies, some of which are single-person operations.

ECE's Mission and Purpose

- ▶ Our mission is to promote the betterment of individuals' lives and society by ensuring that educational qualifications are fairly and accurately recognized across borders.
- ▶ Our purpose is to promote the personal fulfillment and contributions to society of people educated in other countries

Things Credential Evaluation Companies Do Well...

- Expertise to evaluate any document, issued by any institution, at any time/staff specialization
- Dedication to research
- Publication and presentation
- Training and support provided to other evaluators
- Provide equivalencies



And Things They Don't...

- Inconsistency between companies
- Reports are not universally accepted
- Extra burden and expense to students
- Reports are advisory
- Role is misunderstood - don't make admission decisions
- Don't award degrees
- Cannot always meet a student's expectation of what their degree is worth

Common Pitfalls We See...

- Incomplete application or payment
- Incorrect documents submitted
- Some education omitted for evaluation
- Falsified documents submitted
- Unexpected delays, usually related to one of the above
- Disagreement over evaluation judgment
- Issues with institutions that receive our reports
 - Incorrect information provided to student up front
 - Lack of understanding of report conclusions



NACES (<http://naces.org/>)

- ▶ NACES® is an association of independent, nongovernmental organizations providing credential evaluation services to individuals who have completed part or all of their education outside the United States. NACES® is committed to formulating and maintaining the highest ethical and professional standards in the field of educational credential evaluation.
- ▶ **Membership Criteria**
 - ▶ Members must be private and independent
 - ▶ Senior evaluators on staff with at least five years of full-time experience in foreign student admissions
 - ▶ Evaluators must be professionally active and must share their expertise and research with colleagues through conference presentations, workshops, publications, training sessions
 - ▶ Maintain a current library of standard references in the field of international education with an emphasis on credential evaluation.
 - ▶ Members must follow standards of professional ethics.
 - ▶ Member organizations undergo annual recertification

AICE (<http://aice-eval.org/>)

- ▶ Endorsed Members adhere to the AICE-approved standards. The standards currently focus on criteria for evaluators, recognition of professional expertise as required for professional evaluators, evaluation methodology requirements, and evaluation report outcome requirements. As issues on specific credential arise, the standards are reviewed and updated.
- ▶ AICE holds a monthly Credential Forum discussions for members, and an annual Symposium. Through these events, we make decisions on actual equivalencies, which we store internally, and also use the outcomes to periodically update the standards.
- ▶ The monthly AICE Newsletter, The Standard, publicly shares AICE's position on country specific credentials by offering highlights of the Credential Forum.
- ▶ AICE requires that its Endorsed Members have a policy in place concerning document retention, reissuance of reports once completed, but doesn't impose a strict uniform timeline.

The US Department of Education and NAFSA refer to membership in AICE or NACES as a sign of quality for evaluation services.

Benefits and Risks

- ▶ Ultimate responsibility lies with receiving institution, however,
 - ▶ Consequences for universities and other institutions
 - ▶ Consequences for licensure boards
 - ▶ Consequences for immigration

- ▶ Falsification process
 - ▶ Notifications
 - ▶ Rationale
 - ▶ Time frame

Three-year degree issues

- ▶ We follow the process outlined in the Guide to Credential Evaluation
- ▶ We provide information so that the recipient of the report can make an admissions, employment, or licensure decision
- ▶ The National Center for Education Statistics defines a bachelor's degree as “An award that normally requires at least 4 but not more than 5 years of full-time equivalent college-level work.”
<https://surveys.nces.ed.gov/ipeds/VisGlossaryAll.aspx>
- ▶ We convert the credits so that three years of study is converted to the appropriate range



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Government Organization

Monica Hatle-Larssen - NOKUT, Norway



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NOKUT - Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education

The screenshot shows the NOKUT website homepage. At the top left is the NOKUT logo, followed by the tagline: "– We contribute towards quality assurance and enhancement in education". To the right are language options for "English" and "Norsk", and a search bar with a "Search" button. Below this is a navigation menu with four items: "Foreign education", "Universities / university colleges", "Vocational schools", and "SFU". The main content area features three columns:

- Foreign education:** Includes a globe icon and the text "For those who want recognition of foreign qualifications." Below this are two links: "NOKUT's general recognition" and "Other recognition systems". A prominent purple button says "Apply for recognition", with the note "Only foreign higher education" underneath.
- Universities and university colleges:** Includes a building icon and a list of services: "Centres of Excellence in Higher Education", "Research and analyses", and "The Norwegian Qualifications Framework".
- Vocational schools:** Includes an icon of two people wearing hard hats.

Independent body,
established by the
Universities and Colleges Act
in 2003



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NOKUT - Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education

Quality Assurance

- ▶ Controlling authority for educational activity at all Norwegian Higher Education Institutions
- ▶ 4000-5000 education programs at 190 institutions

Foreign education

- ▶ 8000-9000 applications for general recognition/year from almost all countries of the world

- ▶ 100 employees + 300 independent experts



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NOKUT - Department of Foreign Education

1. Recognition of foreign higher education

- General recognition of foreign higher education qualifications for individual applicants
- Advise to educational institutions, employers and other authorities

2. Information

- Information about different types of recognition procedures in Norway
- Contact point for EU Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications
- Information about educational system in Norway and other countries
- Contact point for the EQF NCP

3. National coordination related tasks

- Advising, coordination, training and supervision
- Maintaining of the GSU-list (Higher Education Entrance Qualification for Foreign Applicants)
- Policy advising with regards to recognition of foreign qualifications and related issues



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NOKUTs general recognition

- ▶ **NOKUT considers:**
- ▶ the status of the educational institution and the qualification in the country where the education was received
- ▶ the length of the program
- ▶ the level of the program

Verification If necessary

- ▶ **NOKUTs decision states:**
- ▶ the length of the program
- ▶ the number of credits the program is worth
- ▶ the corresponding Norwegian academic degree for the program, if any.

NB! Equivalent/comparable, *not* identical

Note: The decision does not say anything about the academic content of an education programme



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NOKUTs general recognition

- ▶ Recognition of foreign higher education as equivalent to accredited Norwegian higher education is regulated by the Act relating to Universities and University Colleges of April 1st 2005 (§ 3-4) and Regulation on quality assurance and quality development in higher education and tertiary vocational education (§ 6-1).
- ▶ *“(2) On application by individuals, NOKUT shall decide whether qualifications awarded by foreign higher education institutions or Norwegian institution not subject to this Act shall be recognized as equivalent to accredited Norwegian higher education.”*



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What is NOKUT's general recognition?

- ▶ General recognition is:
 - ▶ A voluntary recognition of **higher education** acquired abroad
 - ▶ A comparison where the foreign education programme is evaluated against the Norwegian degree structure, i.e. whether it corresponds to a bachelor's degree, master's degree or PhD
 - ▶ A formal decision on recognition



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What is the use of NOKUT's general recognition?

- ▶ NOKUT's general recognition is a tool to help you to establish yourself in the Norwegian labour market. You can use NOKUT's general recognition when **applying for jobs in professions that are not regulated**. It is up to the individual employer if they require you to have recognition from NOKUT or not.
- ▶ The recognition document can also be used as **an aid in salary placement**.
- ▶ In addition, the recognition document may be used in connection with **admission to further studies in higher education**, but you do not normally need recognition from NOKUT to apply for admission to higher education in Norway.



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What are the benefits and risks to the organization if you process someone with less than fully official/unverified documents?

- ▶ Public health - very little risk. NOKUT's recognition is a general recognition, and will not be of any use if a person is applying for a job in a profession regulated by the law

- ▶ Institutional reputation - Any attempt to obtain recognition with fraudulent documents will be reported to the police
 - ▶ NOKUT has specific documentation requirements for specific countries
 - ▶ NOKUT conducts verifications if necessary; routine verification, when the document is not found in an official database, by suspicion



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3 year bachelor degree equivalency

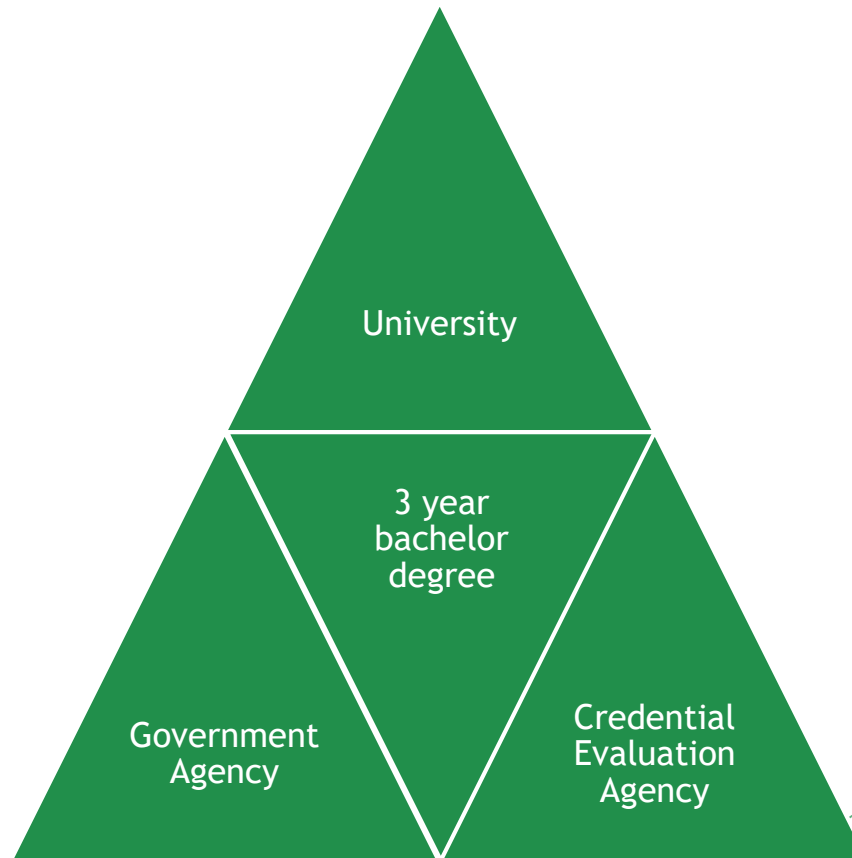
- ▶ The GSU-list (Higher Education Entrance Qualification for foreign applicants) is used by Norwegian universities and university colleges in the admission process to higher education. In addition it is used in NOKUT's assessment of applications for general recognition of foreign education.
- ▶ The list contains information about what type of basic education you must have to qualify for admission to universities and university colleges in Norway. For some countries, you are required to have higher education in addition to secondary education from the country of origin.
- ▶ Equivalency will depend on what country issued the 3-year degree
 - ▶ University College Graduate, 2 year/ 120 ECTS credits
 - ▶ Bachelor's degree, 3 year/180 ECTS credits



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Same credential, same outcome?





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Conclusion

- ▶ Differences/fulfilling a specific need:
 - ▶ University - specific to the city/state/country for one main purpose. Not necessarily a deep review of content (e.g., for graduate admissions, the departments view the content). Different US universities have different missions.
 - ▶ Credential evaluation agency - broader client base, in-depth evaluation of content, professional ability certification.
 - ▶ Government Organization - report has legal standing in the country for university access and labor market.



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Conclusion

- ▶ Similarities/fulfilling a specific need:
 - ▶ All are determining the validity of the individual's academic background, documents, degree equivalency, grade determination, etc.
 - ▶ We all endeavor to bridge the gap between individuals with foreign education or training and assessing how that fits in with our own institution/country advancement access requirements.



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Thank You!

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