



# TAICEP

The Association for International  
Credential Evaluation Professionals®

**OCTOBER  
2025  
EDITION**

# TAICEP TALK

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## **NEWSLETTER TEAM**

**Olivea Dodson,**  
Transcript Research

**Peggy Bell-Hendrickson,**  
Transcript Research

**Tamalene Conlen,**  
Academic Evaluation  
Services, Inc.

**Sully Saucedo,**  
Texas Woman's University

**Megan Gesell,**  
TAICEP

# FROM THE PRESIDENT

Written by Pei Zhu, TAICEP President, 2025

Greetings, members of TAICEP!

As we count down the final days to our 2025 Conference in Croatia, I want to take a moment to express my gratitude to the Conference Committee and the Professional Development Committee for their incredible work in creating a space where members from around the globe can connect, collaborate, and grow. I'm thrilled about what's ahead—and if you haven't registered yet, there's still time to join us in mid-October!

We're thrilled to share the announcement of the TAICEP Leadership Team for 2026! These dedicated individuals will guide our organization into the future, continuing to strengthen our community and advance the profession. Please join me in congratulating and supporting them as they prepare to take on these important roles.

Our community is our greatest strength. The engaging and vibrant discussions on Gaggle and the wealth of expertise our members share are what make TAICEP truly special. This conference is the perfect opportunity to take that camaraderie to the next level. Imagine meeting the colleagues you've collaborated with online and sharing a cup of coffee over nuanced conversations about combating fraudulent credentials. The conference is the premier networking event in our industry, a chance to forge new relationships and strengthen existing ones with credential evaluation professionals from around the world.

And then there is the knowledge. The agenda is packed with workshops, sessions, and plenaries. You'll gain exclusive access to cutting-edge research and best practices, with presenters covering topics ranging from updates in various educational systems to the latest developments in digital technology and artificial intelligence for credential evaluation. You will also hear from Noah Webster Sobe, Chief of Section for Higher Education at UNESCO, on "Global and Regional Qualifications Conventions and Academic Mobility in a Changing World." This is where we learn from each other and collectively prepare for the future of our profession. Together, we'll explore the challenges and opportunities of 2025, particularly as generative AI continues to transform our field.

Speaking of knowledge, we're excited to announce the release of the latest Transnational Education: A Digest of a Work in Progress! This publication reflects the collaborative spirit of our community and offers valuable insights into global trends, emerging challenges, and the critical role we, as credential evaluators, play in this evolving landscape. It is perfect for anyone looking to deepen their understanding of transnational education. Be sure to check it out as part of your professional development toolkit!

A big thank-you to Olivia and the Resources and Knowledge Management Committee, Robert and Megan for their outstanding work in putting together this digest and the newsletter. And to every contributor—thank you for sharing your expertise and generously volunteering your time and effort. Your dedication is what makes our community strong and vibrant.

I can't wait to see you in Cavtat! Please feel free to stop by and say hello—I'd love to hear your thoughts and ideas.

Warm regards,

Pei Zhu

Pei Zhu, President



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# TAICEP HAPPENINGS

## ANNOUNCING THE TAICEP 2026 LEADERSHIP TEAM

We are pleased to introduce the dedicated leaders who will guide TAICEP in 2026.

Please join us in offering a special congratulations to our newly elected members, marked with a star (★), who will begin their terms on January 1, 2026.

### 2026 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- President: **Pei (Peggy) Zhu**, University of Toronto
- Past President: **Christopher Adams**, Indiana University
- President-Elect: **Bettina Sümegi**, ENIC-NARIC Sweden
- Vice President, Standards and Quality: **Shelby Cearley**, Adtalem Global Education.
- Vice President, Membership and Engagement: **Beka Tavartkiladze**, World Education Services ★
- Vice President, Professional Development: **Annetta Stroud**, AACRAO
- Vice President, Resources and Knowledge Management: **Olivea Dodson**, Transcript Research ★
- Director at Large – Nominations and Elections: **Jennifer Singer**, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee ★
- Director at Large – Chair of Collaborative Relations & External Funding Committee: **Taiji Hotta**, Hiroshima University & NIC-Japan
- Director at Large - Digitalization and Artificial Intelligence: **Matthew Cwiklinski**, Educational Perspectives ★
- Treasurer: **Andrew Goss**, Indiana University Bloomington
- Secretary: **Margit Schatzman**, President Emerit, ECE
- Executive Director: **Robert Prather**, TAICEP

### 2026 STANDING COMMITTEE LEADERSHIP

#### Committee for Standards and Quality

- Chair: **David Mihalyi**, AACRAO
- Chair-Elect: **Séverine Kassimou**, Foundation for International Services, Inc. ★

#### Committee for Membership Outreach and Engagement

- Chair: **Jade Jiang Rieger**, ECE
- Chair-Elect: **Chris Lyons**, ECCTIS ★

#### Committee for Professional Development

- Chair: **Susan Whipple**, The Evaluation Company, USA
- Chair-Elect: **Wendy Garcia Guerrero**, International Education Evaluations ★

#### Committee for Resources and Knowledge Management

- Chair: **Rebecca Murphy**, Northeastern University
- Chair-Elect: **Haichen Sun**, International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS) ★

#### Conference Committee

- Chair: **Jennifer Collins**, Georgia Institute of Technology
- Chair-Elect: **Susan Mertz**, Purdue University ★

We are grateful for their commitment and look forward to a productive year of service to our members!



## TAICEP AT UNESCO: A GLOBAL SUMMIT FOR QUALIFICATION RECOGNITION

**Bettina Sümegi**, President-elect of TAICEP participated as an invited observer at the **Second Intergovernmental Conference of States Parties to the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education**, which took place in Paris on June 25-26. Representing TAICEP at this historic dialogue was a significant opportunity for our organization.

### Why is the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education crucial for credential evaluators and TAICEP?

The Global Convention is a fundamental step forward for all who work with qualification recognition, and it is of particular importance to TAICEP's mission. It is the first global UN treaty on higher education, aiming to set out universal principles to ensure that higher education qualifications—and those granting access to higher education—are recognized in a fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory way. The Convention was adopted in November 2019 and entered into force on 5 March 2023. As of April 2025, 38 states ratified it.

As Bettina said in an interview to the Permanent Delegation of Sweden to UNESCO: "The Global Convention allows for much closer cooperation, exchanges and discussion on best practices. While respecting the regional specificities, the work under the convention allows us to speak with one global voice and strengthen the work on recognition and credential evaluation, which is beneficial for all students." For TAICEP specifically, our commitment is to support the goals of the Convention by sharing expertise, cross-border best practices, and building bridges between educational systems.

### What was discussed during the meeting?

The conference addressed several key topics and made important decisions for future work:

**1. Election of the Bureau:** The conference began with the election of the Bureau, where Stig Arne Skjerven was re-elected as Chairperson. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Estonia, Uruguay, Australia, Côte d'Ivoire and Tunisia were elected as Vice Chairs, and Melanie Rosenbaum was re-elected as Rapporteur.

**2. Reports on Global and Regional Conventions:** The heads of the regional conventions presented the state of their conventions, the Addis Convention, the Tokyo Convention, the Lisbon Convention, the Buenos Aires Convention and the Arab States Convention.

**3. Reports from Observer States:** Several countries announced their progress towards adopting or ratifying the global or regional conventions, including Chad, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ireland, Libya and Ghana.

**4. Adoption of the Interim Work Program 2025-2027:** Four main work areas were established: drafting explanatory texts, research, reinforcement of national structures for the implementation of the convention, and capacity building. Questions about other issues to be addressed, such as fraud and AI, were discussed as potential areas for future subsidiary texts through collaboration.

**5. Adoption of Operational Guidelines:** The draft Operational Guidelines were adopted, which shall serve as an interpretation for the Global Convention.

### 6. Proposal for the elaboration of subsidiary texts for the next conference in 2027:

• **Relationship between the Global and Regional Conventions:** A proposal was made to develop a subsidiary text on the relationship between the Global Convention and the regional recognition conventions

• **Quality assurance (including transnational education):** A research paper will serve as the basis for a subsidiary text on quality assurance. The paper emphasized the need for common language, shared quality assurance standards, and how technology can be leveraged for flexible study pathways and addressing academic integrity issues.

• **Recognition of refugees' and displaced persons' qualifications and the development of complementary pathways:** A research paper to serve as the basis for a subsidiary text on this important topic was also examined.

**7. Side event on microcredentials:** A side event discussed the future of microcredentials, highlighting the need for quality assurance mechanisms and challenges with the recognition of microcredentials by employers and educational institutions.

This conference reinforced the importance of a stronger focus on quality assurance mechanisms, recognition of refugee qualifications, and transnational education. All are central areas where credential evaluators and TAICEP have a direct role to play. The meeting also underscored the importance of networks for information exchange and strengthened interregional cooperation in recognition at the global level.

**We look forward to continuing TAICEP's contribution to this crucial global work!**





## TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION (TNE): A DIGEST OF A WORK IN PROGRESS

Navigating the complexities of cross-border education presents unique challenges. This new digest offers essential insights into the various models, quality assurance frameworks, and recognition issues in Transnational Education (TNE), featuring four articles from leading experts in our field.

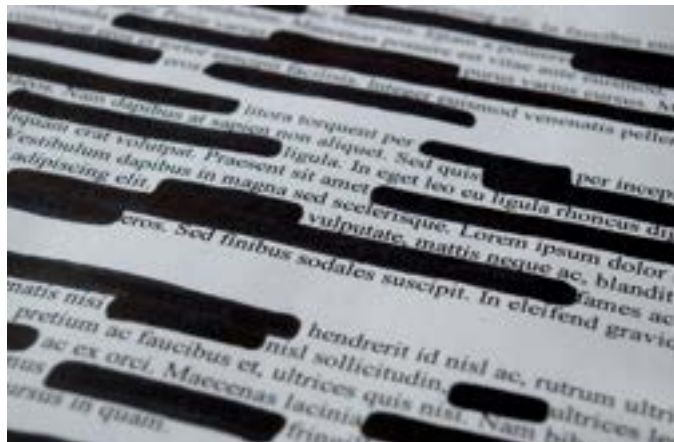
[READ MORE](#)



## GAGGLE EXCHANGES

Some great exchanges have been happening on the Gaggle. If you are not actively using the Gaggle, you are missing out! Here are three examples including, NABTEB, Assistance with IB Diploma Course, and Attestation du Baccalaureat - Morocco.

[READ MORE](#)



## REDACTION OVERVIEW

There seems to still be some confusion on what to redact when sharing samples. We have created this handy guide to assist you. - CRKM

You must remove any personal data that can be used to identify a particular person. Examples include but may not be limited to the following:

- Biographical data. This includes names, addresses, phone numbers, day of birth, national ID, and parents names.
- Pictures, previous education, identifiers such as "has mole on left cheek", "has scar on right hand", etc.
- Institutional specific identifiers such as student ID, roll number, seat number, document numbers, certificate/diploma numbers, etc.
- Thesis titles

Remember that you must redact this information in the original language document AND in translated documents.

# CALL FOR COMMITTEE VOLUNTEERS

*"In 2019, I saw an opportunity to give back to TAICEP and all the members who had helped me. Serving as a Secretary to the Board created relationships I could not imagine ever having, even a year before, and created a rich circle of colleagues who are now friends. Volunteerism at this level is as much for me as it is for TAICEP."*

**Ena Chaisson**

### Committee for Standards and Quality:

Engages in the establishment and maintenance of standards for professional practice. Identifies leading trends in and advances knowledge of credential evaluation practice and develops research standards, frameworks, and processes. Evaluates organizational output to ensure quality.

- **Stephanie Cloninger**, AACRAO  
cloningers@aacrao.org

### Committee for Membership Outreach and Engagement:

Develops and executes membership growth strategies and member engagement and retention initiatives.

- **Yujian (Ivy) Wang**, Purdue University  
wang4684@purdue.edu

### Committee for Professional Development:

Offers relevant, high-quality professional development programs and services to members, such as but not limited to, training, webinars, workshops and conference content planning.

- **Staci Bernhard**, Florida International University  
sbernhar@fiu.edu

All committees are looking for volunteers! Please reach out to them for opportunities.

### Committee for Resources and Knowledge Management:

Organizes and maintains credential evaluation resources as well as develops new resources.

- **Olivea Dodson**, Transcript Research  
olivea@transcriptresearch.com

### Conference Committee:

Responsible for multi-year conference planning and oversight

- **Sully Saucedo**, Texas Woman's University  
SSaucedo@twu.edu

If you cannot commit to a committee, there are several one (or two) time options available: The Conference Committee will need volunteers onsite for several activities and the Committee for Resources and Knowledge Management is always looking for authors!

Additionally, the Institutions, Grading Scales and Credentials database need your help! If you see an entry that you believe is incomplete, please feel free to add the information you know!





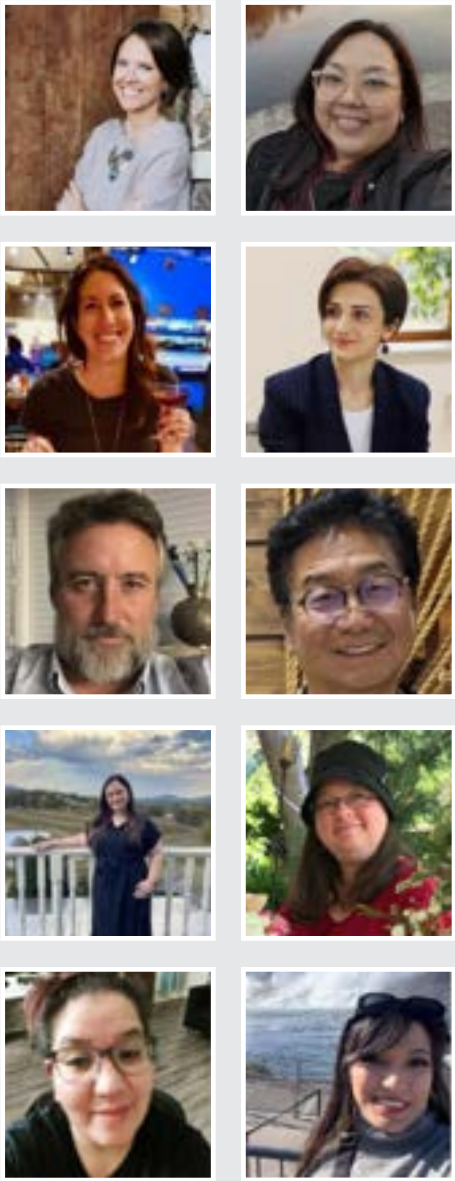
# MEMBER SPOTLIGHTS

**Celebrating the Strength of TAICEP’s Global Community: Welcoming New Voices, Honoring Trusted Expertise.**

TAICEP proudly celebrates the vibrant diversity of our international credential evaluation community—from the fresh perspectives of new members to the enduring contributions of seasoned professionals. As our network grows, we recognize the value of both innovation and experience in shaping the future of our field.

Join us in welcoming new colleagues and honoring those whose dedication continues to inspire collaboration, mentorship, and excellence across the globe.

[READ MORE](#)



# CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

## THANK YOU TO OUR WONDERFUL PRESENTERS

TAICEP extends its heartfelt thanks to our exceptional conference presenters from around the globe. Your expertise, insights, and dedication to the field of international credential evaluation have enriched our community and inspired meaningful dialogue. We also sincerely appreciate the support of their esteemed organizations and institutions such as AACRAO, CIMEA, ENIC-NARIC centers, EducationUSA, UNESCO, and many more.

Your commitment to advancing international education standards and practices continues to shape the future of our profession.

Thank you for making this year’s conference a truly global and collaborative success!



## OPENING PLENARY: UNESCO’S GLOBAL AND REGIONAL QUALIFICATIONS CONVENTIONS AND ACADEMIC MOBILITY IN A CHANGING WORLD

This session will share information on the Global Convention, which entered into force in 2022, and UNESCO’s five regional conventions (Addis, Arab States, Buenos Aires, Lisbon, and Tokyo) and the operational networks that support these interrelated mechanisms.

In opening remarks, the main speaker, Noah W. Sobe, Chief of Section for Higher Education at UNESCO’s Paris headquarters, will explain the work that UNESCO is doing to support the fair and transparent recognition of qualifications. He’ll discuss the role that UNESCO -- including through its regional offices and institutes -- plays in facilitating the global dialogue on recognition, particularly given a world where academic mobility and international cooperation in higher education face new challenges. The opening will be followed by five lightning-round discussants from various entities and regions who will offer two- to three-minute commentaries on how the UNESCO regional and global conventions are relevant. Attendees can explore synergies between their work and the international legal structures and mechanisms designed to backstop recognition work.

## STEP UP TO THE MIC

Step Up to the Mic (microphone) is the networking plenary session at the TAICEP conference. This dynamic, interactive session fosters engagement, knowledge-sharing, and professional connections. The session serves as a platform to discuss emerging trends, policy developments, and innovative solutions. Attendees can step up and share insights, ask pressing questions, highlight challenges, and exchange best practices in an open and collegial environment. With a focus on collaboration and community building, Step Up to the Microphone encourages new and experienced professionals to share their perspectives, making it a valuable space for learning, networking, and shaping the future of the field.

**Beka Tavartkiladze**, Senior Director, Global Education and Knowledge, World Education Services will moderate this plenary session. Special guest plenary speaker **Stig Arne Skjerven**, Senior International Education Advisor at NOKUT, will deliver a presentation, followed by an opportunity for audience participation.

Stig Arne Skjerven is the first elected Chair of the Bureau of the Conference of the State Parties of the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education. He has been instrumental in the work in the various phases of the establishment and implementation of the Global Recognition Convention, including being part of the Expert Group developing the draft, intergovernmental negotiations and leading working groups. He has also twice been elected Chair of the European Network of Information Centers / ENIC Bureau. Skjerven has



*Stig Arne Skjerven,  
Senior International Education Advisor at NOKUT*

also been paramount in the establishment of the Qualifications Passport for Refugees, by the Council of Europe and UNESCO respectively. His experience also covers roles like Norway’s Deputy Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, Director of Norway’s ENIC-NARIC office, Director of Academic Affairs at a Norwegian Higher Education Institution, project management of quality assurance in higher education, various roles involving communication, strategy and policies, and currently global partnership and capacity building in higher education in Norway’s Directorate for Higher Education and Skills.

**TAICEP thanks World Education Services for sponsoring this plenary.**





# 2025 EXHIBITORS

Thank you to our exhibitors for enriching the conference experience and fostering meaningful engagement within our professional community.



# 2025 SPONSORS

We extend our sincere appreciation to our sponsors for their generous support and commitment to the success of this year's conference.

**IELTS**  
Luncheon - \$6,000

**The Evaluation Company**  
Presenters Reception Sponsor - \$5,000

**World Education Services (WES)**  
Plenary Speaker - \$2500

**AACRAO**  
Help A Colleague - \$625

**Foundation For International Services (FIS)**  
Help A Colleague - \$500

**ACREVS (Academic & Credential Records, Evaluation & Verification Service)**  
Help A Colleague - \$500

## HELP A COLLEAGUE

**Dr. Taiji Hotta**  
\$100

**Nancy Katz,**  
Evaluation Service Inc.  
\$500

**Annetta Stroud**  
\$100

**Kathleen Freeman**  
\$300

**Margit Schatzman**  
\$500

**Marybeth Gruenwald**  
\$500



# JOIN GLOBAL LEADERS

This October, the TAICEP Conference in Croatia will bring together credential evaluation professionals from over 80 organizations and 30 countries for an unforgettable experience of learning, networking, and collaboration.

Our attendees represent a truly global and prestigious community, including experts from:

- Universities:**  
Amsterdam University Of Applied Sciences, Blekinge Institute Of Technology, Copenhagen Business School, EPFL Switzerland, ETH Zurich, Swiss Federal Institute Of Technology, Georgia Institute Of Technology, HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, Hanken School Of Economics, Indiana University Bloomington, Kaunas University Of Technology, KU Leuven, Linköping University, Northeastern University, Penn State University, Purdue University-West Lafayette, Radboud University, Rutgers University New Brunswick, Sacramento State University (CSUS), Tilburg University, UC Leuven-Limburg, Belgium, Universita Cattolica Del Sacro Cuore, Universita di Padova, Universiteit Leiden, University Of Basel, University Of Helsinki, University Of Jyväskylä, University Of Lausanne - Switzerland, University Of Miami, University Of Oslo, University Of Padua, University Of Saskatchewan, University Of Torino, University Of Toronto, Comparative Education Service, University Of Turku, University Of Winnipeg, University of St. Gallen, Uppsala University, Waseda University, Texas Woman's University, Western Kentucky University
- National Recognition Centers & ENIC-NARIC Networks:**  
CIMEA-NARIC Italia, Turkish ENIC NARIC Center, Nuffic, ENIC Ukraine, ENIC/NARIC Iceland, ENIC Georgia, Latvia Academic Information Centre, NARIC Ukraine, NARIC-Vlaanderen AHOVOKS, NOKUT, Polish National Agency For Academic Exchange (NAWA), Swedish Council For Higher Education, Norwegian Directorate For Higher Education And Skills
- Government & Quality Assurance Bodies:**  
Center For Student Services And Development, Ministry Of Education, P.R. China (CSSD), South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)
- Testing & Assessment Organizations:**  
Cambridge English, Cambridge International Education, Cambridge University Press & Assessment, Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), IELTS, International Baccalaureate Organization, Pearson
- Professional Associations & Networks:**  
American Association Of Collegiate Registrars And Admissions Officers (AACRAO), Engineers Canada, National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics - NAIA/InCred
- International Organizations:**  
UNESCO, EducationUSA
- Private Companies & Services:**  
AEO Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools, Prospects Hedd, QuadraBay, The CleanSheet Group, Verifdiploma

- Credential Evaluation & Verification Services:**  
Academic & Credential Records, Evaluation & Verification Service, Academic Evaluation Services, Inc., Educational Credential Evaluators (ECE), Educational Perspectives, Nfp, Foundation For International Services (FIS), International Education Evaluation (IEE), International Education Research Foundation (IERF), One Earth International Credential Evaluations, Scholaro Inc., The Evaluation Company, Transcript Research, TruMerit, World Education Services (WES)

Whether you're a seasoned professional or new to the field, this is your chance to:

- Gain insights from global experts
- Explore emerging trends and technologies
- Build lasting professional connections
- Experience the beauty and culture of Croatia

**DON'T MISS OUT!**  
**REGISTRATION CLOSES SOON!**

Let's shape the future of international credential evaluation together. See you in Croatia!



# PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

TAICEP is pleased to offer a series of in-depth pre-conference workshops designed to equip credential evaluation professionals with practical tools, global insights, and specialized knowledge. These sessions provide a unique opportunity to engage with expert facilitators, explore emerging trends, and strengthen foundational practices in the field.

This year's workshops include:

- 1. **Cracking The Code: Mastering Arabic On Educational Credentials**
- 2. **Towards A Fair Future: Align Your Admission Procedures With International Standards**
- 3. **Back To School Special: A Comparative Look At Secondary Education Systems And Credential Evaluation Resources**
- 4. **Setting Guidelines And Processes: Establishing In-House Credential Evaluation**

REGISTER HERE

As a reminder: pre-conference workshops run concurrently and are not included with your conference registration

# EXPERIENCE CROATIA

We've put together a series of articles designed to offer you a deeper understanding of Croatia's spirit, culture, and what awaits you at the TAICEP conference.

- 1. [Croatia Through the Lens of Literature](#)
- 2. [More Than a Meal: Reading the History of Dalmatia on Your Plate](#)
- 3. [Echoes in the Stone: On the Persistence of Culture in Dalmatia](#)
- 4. [A Practical Guide to Experiencing Croatia](#)
- 5. [The Art of Connection](#)

We hope you enjoy reading through these and look forward to seeing you in Croatia!



# CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES

- Sunday** - Pre-Conference Excursion to Dubrovnik
- Monday** - Restaurant Hops for Newcomers (There will be a gluten-free/allergy group)
- Tuesday** - TAICEP Trivia
- Wednesday** - Needle Arts!
- Thursday** - The visit to University of Dubrovnik is **sold out!**

Helpful Links:



- [Get a crash course in Croatian](#)
- [Check visa requirements](#)
- [Find visa requirements](#)
- [Get the conference app](#)
- [Eat, drink, do!](#)

# LET ME SPIN YOU A YARN: THE UNICORN FILES

On Wednesday morning before the conference begins, attendees have the opportunity to join Needle Arts again this year.

## Let Me Spin You A YARN

Greetings, all you TAICEP people who are also fiber artists!

Presenting the 2025 TAICEP Yarn:  
**THE UNICORN FILES**

This yarn is inspired by the kind of academic records that you may only ever see a few times in your career. They are generally rare and elusive files. They may be from a country you rarely see or they maybe from a student with a life story you may never forget. They are the files you review that you will likely never forget.

*Because of laws in the country where this student studied, they would not have access to educational opportunities, especially at higher levels. The student and their family took risks by choosing to enroll in an underground school based out of the United States that was created specifically for the purpose of offering opportunities for students in this situation. The classes meet online in the middle of the night and the students and parents sign confidentiality waivers pledging to not talk about the school.\**

When I thought about files like that, I started thinking about unicorns and how they are typically a unique and uncommon sight in literature and movies. This thought inspired me to choose the colors I did. There are two distinct but comparable colorways: one with pastel colors that are more subdued and one with bolder hues.

The yarn is 100% hand-dyed cotton sport weight (164 yards/50 grams), just like it was last year.

Once you send your donation to the Help a Colleague fund, please send me an email (ajgoss@iu.edu) to let me know how many skeins you want.

Please note that due to logistics, only orders made by those who live outside the U.S. will be delivered at the conference. All U.S.-based members will receive their skeins via mail once I return home from the conference.

*\*The story has been significantly redacted and simplified to protect the confidentiality of the student, their family, and others who may be attending other underground educational institutions.*



# Transnational Education: A Digest of a Work in Progress



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# Acknowledgements

This digest publication is the product of TAICEP’s Committee for Resources and Knowledge Management. TAICEP thanks the following **2025 members of this committee:**

- ❖ Chair: Olivea Dodson, Transcript Research
- ❖ Chair-Elect: Rebecca Murphy, Northeastern University
- ❖ Margaret Wenger, Educational Credential Evaluators (ECE)
- ❖ Emily Tse, TruMerit
- ❖ Tamalene Conlen, Academic Evaluation Services, Inc.
- ❖ Peggy Bell-Hendrickson, Transcript Research
- ❖ Anu Soin, International Credential Assessment Service of Canada (ICAS)
- ❖ Adriaenna Hann, International Education Evaluations (IEE)
- ❖ Jade Jiang Rieger, Educational Credential Evaluators (ECE)
- ❖ Jenna Feeback Longardner, Scholaro, Inc.

## Digest Content:

- ❖ *TNE Terminology* by Emily Tse (TruMerit). Used with the author’s permission.
- ❖ *International Branch Campuses* by Lin Reed, Ph.D. (International Education Research Foundation), and Tara Wessel Swoboda, M.A. (International Education Research Foundation). Used with the authors’ permission.
- ❖ *Assessing Qualifications Awarded Via Special Recognition or Validation*, Ecctis. Used with the author’s permission.
- ❖ *Evaluating Transnational Degrees: Joint, Dual, Franchise, and Validated Programs* by Sara Ahmad (Soka University of America/AACRAO IESC Fellow 2024-25) and Jackie Best (University of Michigan-Flint/AACRAO IESC Fellow 2024-25). Used with the authors’ permission.
- ❖ *Introduction and Conclusion* by Robert Prather (TAICEP). Used with the author’s permission.

## Quality Review:

The 2025 TAICEP Quality Review Group consists of:

- ❖ Chair: Shelby Cearley, Adtalem Global Education
- ❖ Pei (Peggy) Zhu, University of Toronto
- ❖ Bettina Sümegi, ENIC-NARIC Sweden
- ❖ Panambi Abadie, Universidad de la República Uruguay
- ❖ Chris Lyons, Ecctis
- ❖ Annetta Stroud, AACRAO
- ❖ Kenneth Warren, Educational Perspectives
- ❖ Robert Prather, TAICEP

## Formatting:

- ❖ Megan Gesell, TAICEP

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# Transnational Education Overview

Transnational Education (TNE) stands as a continually evolving and complex landscape within global higher education. Also known as cross-border education, TNE encompasses all types and modes of delivery of higher education study programs, sets of courses, or educational services where learners are in a different country from the one where the awarding institution is based. This inherent dynamism, coupled with its rapid expansion, makes TNE an actual “work in progress” that requires ongoing understanding and adaptation from all stakeholders, particularly credential evaluators.

This broad concept can also be defined as providing academic qualifications from educational institutions in one country to students living and studying in another. The Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education further elaborates on “cross-border education” as all educational delivery modes that involve the movement of people, knowledge, programs, providers, and curriculum across borders.

Navigating the varied models, advantages, and significant challenges of TNE, particularly concerning quality assurance and recognition, necessitates a meticulous and informed approach, with credential evaluators playing a pivotal role in ensuring the fairness and consistency of recognition decisions.



## A. Types and Models of TNE

TNE includes a diverse range of models and partnerships, reflecting varied levels of collaboration and resource intensity. Please note that references to institutions and countries are correct at the time of publication and are subject to change.

**Branch Campus or Center:** A Higher Education Institution (HEI) establishes a campus or study center abroad where its faculty deliver teaching. The degree is awarded by the provider HEI or its branch. Examples include New York University (NYU) campuses in Abu Dhabi and Shanghai, Duke Kunshan University in China, and the University of Wollongong in Dubai.

**Franchise Program:** A provider HEI authorizes a partner HEI in another country to deliver its approved study program. The sending institution (franchiser) is responsible for curriculum, degree conferral, and accreditation, while the partner institution teaches the content. The student receives a single degree from the sending institution.

**Validated Program:** One institution (the “sending institution”) evaluates and endorses a curriculum developed and delivered by an international partner. While the sending institution handles accreditation and degree issuance, the international partner has greater flexibility in curriculum design. A key example is the Arab Open University (AOU) offering a program validated by the UK's Open University (OU).

**Joint Degree Program:** Two or more HEIs partner to provide a single collaborative program, resulting in one degree certificate awarded by all participating universities. Students typically study at multiple partner campuses.

**Double/Dual Degree Program:** Two HEIs partner to provide a collaborative program where each HEI awards its own distinct degree, resulting in two separate qualifications. Students study at both institutions with faculty involvement from both.

**Twinning Program/Articulation Agreement:** A provider HEI collaborates with a partner HEI with the provider awarding the complete their studies at the provider HEI's location.

**Distance Delivery:** Programs delivered entirely via distance technology (online) to students in other countries. This mode has grown rapidly, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Off-shore Institutions:** Autonomous institutions established in one country whose organization and content align with the educational systems of another country. Unlike branch campuses, they do not have a direct parent awarding institution in the referenced country (e.g., The American University in Dubai).

**International HE Institutions:** These institutions do not officially belong to any national higher education system and are typically established by international organizations or treaties, like the European University Institute.

**Multinational Corporate Universities:** Launched by large transnational corporations, these institutions offer their own qualifications that do not belong to any national system, often focusing on labor market relevance over traditional accreditation.





## B. Advantages and Drivers of TNE

The expansion of TNE is driven by benefits for all stakeholders:

- **For Provider Institutions:** TNE enhances internationalization, boosts institutional stature, and provides a valuable alternative revenue stream. It also fosters long-term relationships with international peers.
- **For Host Institutions and Countries:** TNE provides access to desirable educational resources, increases educational capacity cost-effectively, and helps meet student demand. It also creates a pathway to the broader economy.
- **For Students:** TNE enables access to top-tier academic programs and prestigious degrees at a potentially lower cost without migrating internationally. This can lead to more opportunities and benefits like fewer visa challenges, rich cultural exchange, and better local job prospects.

## C. Challenges and Concerns in TNE

Despite its advantages, TNE faces significant challenges, particularly concerning quality assurance and recognition.

- **Recognition and Portability:** A major concern is ensuring the international recognition and portability of diverse TNE qualifications.
- **Lack of Coordinated Governance:** There is a notable absence of coordinated governance and regulated policies across the TNE landscape.
- **Transparency and Trust:** Varying levels of transparency and a lack of shared quality assurance frameworks can lead to a lack of trust in TNE operations.
- **Document Identification:** TNE credentials can be hard to differentiate from other foreign credentials, as documents may not clearly indicate the teaching location or TNE arrangement.
- **Quality Assurance Deficiencies:** Not all quality assurance agencies comprehensively check the quality of programs organized in other countries, raising concerns about comparability.
- **Fraud and Misinformation:** The rise of fake colleges, accreditors, and document falsification poses a serious risk. Claims of being “internationally recognized” can be a red flag.
- **Discrepancy between Academic and Professional Recognition:** A qualification might be legally recognized for professional purposes in one country but not be considered academically equivalent for further study due to quality concerns.

## D. Quality Assurance and Recognition Frameworks

Quality assurance provides the essential foundation upon which trust can be built, making recognition possible.

### International Conventions

- **Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC):** This convention establishes that a qualification granting access to higher education in one signatory state should generally do so in others, unless a “substantial difference” is shown. The LRC allows countries to make TNE recognition contingent on national legislation or specific agreements. The Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee adopted the Revised Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education in June 2007, including principles which should be respected in transnational education. ENIC-NARIC offices follow these principles/criteria when assessing any TNE.
- **UNESCO Global Recognition Convention:** This convention, effective March 2023, addresses “cross-border education” and underscores the importance of ensuring no quality differences exist between learners in the home or host country, regardless of delivery format.

### TNE Quality Benchmark (TNE QB)

Developed by Ecctis, the TNE QB is an independent peer-review scheme designed to improve international confidence in TNE qualifications. A successful review grants graduates a Certificate of Comparability and allows the TNE operation to use the TNE QB Quality Mark.

### Key Principles for Quality Provision

- Academic quality and standards of TNE programs should be comparable to those of the parent institution.
- Transparency in information provided to prospective students is crucial.
- Staff must be proficient in their qualifications, teaching, and research.
- The awarding institution is ultimately responsible for the qualification.
- Admission, teaching, and assessment requirements should be comparable to those of programs delivered by the awarding institution.
- In relevant countries, the Diploma Supplement is a vital tool for transparency, clearly indicating the nature of the qualification (e.g., joint degree, TNE arrangement).

## National Approaches to TNE Regulation

Regulations vary significantly across countries. For example:

- Portugal generally prohibits franchise-mode TNE.
- Greece is drafting new legislation for non-state universities, as degrees from its many franchised “Colleges” are not currently academically recognized by the national body (DOATAP).
- Italy requires specific accreditation procedures for foreign institutions operating in its territory.
- Spain regulates TNE through its Organic Law, requiring recognition processes for TNE qualifications to grant professional or academic rights.
- Slovenia requires TNE to comply with national legislation in both the sending and receiving countries.

## E. Role of Credential Evaluators

Evaluating TNE credentials requires a meticulous approach.

### Key Evaluation Questions

Evaluators must ascertain:

- Who awards the degree and do they have proper authority?
- Who teaches the program and what was the mode of instruction?
- Is the degree recognized in both the home and host countries?
- Is the teaching institution recognized?
- Does the issuing institution have the right to operate in the host country?
- What was the specific type of TNE agreement?
- Which HEI issues the official documents?

### Essential Steps

1. **Determine Program Type:** Identify if the credential is from a joint, dual, franchise, or validated program.
2. **Verify Degree Conferral:** Confirm which institution(s) awarded the degree.
3. **Examine Accreditation:** Ensure the awarding institution(s) are accredited and check for program-level recognition.
4. **Reference Location and Curriculum:** Consider where the study took place and who designed/delivered the curriculum.
5. **Check Entry Requirements and Duration:** Compare these with the equivalent program in the awarding institution's home country.

6. **Consider Language of Instruction:** Assess the language, especially if it differs from the awarding institution's primary language.
7. **Utilize Research Tools:** Employ resources available like AACRAO EDGE, TAICEP, ENIC-NARIC, and institutional websites.
8. **Consistency for IBCs:** If an International Branch Campus is accredited and issues degrees through the home campus, evaluators should treat the credentials as they would any other from that institution.

## F. Future of TNE

TNE continues to evolve and expand globally. A significant trend is the shift towards online education, which is less visible than traditional campus-based TNE. This growth is intertwined with the rise of private higher education, which now accounts for over 50% of HE institutions globally and often operates with commercial objectives. Given this expansion, there is a pressing need for clearer and stronger accreditation, quality assurance, and standards from national and international bodies to address emerging regulatory and ethical concerns and to safeguard against fraud.

The following four articles, authored by experts in our field, address the topic of transnational higher education. Please note that the views expressed are those of the individual authors and not necessarily of TAICEP. We hope to add to this collection in the future. TAICEP appreciates these authors and/or their organizations for sharing this information with our community. Please note that since this digest compiles expert articles, some overlap in foundational concepts may occur.





## Article 1: TNE Definitions

*The following definitions are adapted from “Transnational Education: A Primer for Evaluators and Admissions Officers” by Emily Tse (formerly with the International Education Research Foundation [IERF], now with TrueMerit), published in NAFSA’s IEM Spotlight newsletter, April 2017 issue.*

A clear and consistent understanding of terminology is essential when discussing transnational education. This field is filled with specialized terms that can differ in meaning depending on the author or context. Before delving into the complexities and developments within transnational education, it is crucial to establish a solid grasp of the definitions used by authors in this area. Without a shared vocabulary, meaningful analysis and effective communication become challenging, making it all the more important to clarify key terms from the outset.

Below, you will find a list of the different types of articulation agreements and their accepted definitions.

**Articulation:** an arrangement whereby students from a specific program abroad are given direct admission and advanced standing/transfer credit.

**Consortium:** an arrangement among multiple institutions leading to a collaborative degree program. Oftentimes, students may select where to complete their coursework, within program guidelines, among the participating institutions.

**Degree Validation:** an arrangement whereby the provider institution validates a program offered by another institution. Upon successful completion of the program, the provider institution will award a degree to the students of the partner institution because the partner institution typically does not possess degree-granting authority.

**Dual/Double Degree:** two degrees, with one awarded by each partner institution, for one jointly taught program. This arrangement stands in contrast to two degrees studied and earned concurrently by a student at one school.

**Education Free Zones:** an arrangement that grants foreign institutions exemption from federal regulation. These zones are designed to encourage the creation of international branch campuses and other transnational collaborations. A prominent

example is Dubai International Academic City, an international education hub with more than 20 international branch campuses.

**Franchising:** an arrangement whereby the provider institution authorizes a partner institution to deliver a portion of its program or a program in its entirety. The provider institution awards the final qualification because the partner institution typically does not have such authority locally.

**International Branch Campus:** a campus established overseas that offers programs of the educational system of the provider institution’s country. International branch campuses are often featured prominently in international education hubs.

**International Education Hub:** a city or region that has purposefully established itself as a center of higher education and research, combining domestic and foreign institutions and fostering active transnational arrangements. Examples can be found in Kuala Lumpur Education City and EduCity Iskandar, both of which are situated in Malaysia.

**Joint Degree:** one degree awarded for a jointly taught program. The academic records typically bear the signature and seal of both partner institutions.

**Pathway/Foundation/Access Program:** a preparatory program, typically lasting a year, for students who do not readily meet a university’s entry requirements. While usually offered in-country, in the transnational context, these programs are also found outside the home country. Upon successful completion of the program, students are usually guaranteed direct entry to the university’s designated degree program.

**Twinning:** an arrangement whereby the provider institution authorizes a partner institution to deliver a portion of its program. Afterwards, students complete the remainder of the program at the location of (and in the country of) the provider institution, where the final qualification is then awarded. The partner institution typically does not have degree-granting authority.

## Article 2: International Branch Campuses: Credential Evaluation in a Changing Landscape

*This abstract was authored by Lin Reed, Ph.D. (International Education Research Foundation) and Tara Wessel Swoboda, M.A. (International Education Research Foundation)*

### Abstract

As international branch campuses (IBCs) continue to expand and evolve, they present new challenges and opportunities for international credential evaluation. This article explores the growing role of IBCs within U.S. higher education's global strategy, highlighting key trends, successful models, and regional developments. It examines the complexities of evaluating academic credentials issued by IBCs while focusing on questions of institutional accreditation, degree issuance, and documentation standards. Three well-known examples of such IBCs illustrate the diverse models of institutional operations and their implications for evaluators. Insights from institutional leaders underscore the strategic importance of IBCs in global education and the need for evaluators to remain informed and adaptable. The article concludes by emphasizing that accurate evaluation of IBC credentials depends on understanding each campus's structure, accreditation, and academic alignment with the home institution.

### Content

In a year marked by shifts in international education, international branch campuses (IBCs) are once again in the spotlight. As globally recognized U.S. institutions continue to expand their academic models abroad, key questions emerge: Should degrees from IBCs be considered U.S., international, or hybrid credentials? What standards should guide international credential evaluators? And what are the current trends and future directions for IBCs?

Over the past five decades, U.S. institutions have increasingly embraced internationalization—first by enrolling international students domestically, then through joint and dual-degree programs, and eventually by establishing IBCs. These campuses, located overseas but affiliated with U.S. institutions, aim to enhance branding, foster research collaboration, and promote financial sustainability. However, they also present complex challenges, including high operational costs, cultural and regulatory hurdles, faculty recruitment issues, and

potential restrictions on academic freedom.

After a surge in the early 2000s, IBCs saw retrenchment beginning in the 2010s. Nevertheless, several remain highly successful: NYU Abu Dhabi and NYU Shanghai; Duke Kunshan University in China; Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar; Northwestern University in Qatar; the University of Utah Asia Campus in South Korea; and VCUarts Qatar. Most of these campuses are concentrated in East and West Asia and the Middle East.

For international credential evaluators, IBCs present a nuanced task. A typical course-by-course evaluation includes a statement of equivalency, a breakdown of completed coursework, and a conversion of grades. Evaluators must research the institution's status and, if in a university admission role, determine how coursework may transfer or meet eligibility for academic progression.

The method of accreditation and the authority to confer degrees play a central role in how IBC credentials are assessed. Two key documents—the transcript and the degree certificate, both in the original language—are essential. These documents help identify the issuing institution, the credential awarded, and the language of instruction. Supplementary records such as curriculum outlines or attestations of language of instruction can further inform the evaluation.

Degrees may be issued by the home campus, the branch campus, or jointly. For example:

- **NYU Shanghai** graduates are awarded degrees from NYU and list it as their institution of matriculation.
- **Duke Kunshan University** is accredited by China's Ministry of Education and issues joint degrees with Duke University.
- **VCUarts Qatar** issues degrees directly from Virginia Commonwealth University in the U.S., simplifying recognition.



Once the issuing institution is identified, evaluators typically consider:

- Who founded the IBC and when?
- Is the institution accredited? If so, in which country and by which agency?
- Are all programs at the branch accredited, or only specific ones?
- Do the documents reflect the standards of the host country or the home institution?
- Does the curriculum follow the educational model of the home institution?
- Would the student qualify for transfer credit or further study in the home country?
- What is the language of instruction—home or host country?

Some IBCs provide additional guidance to aid evaluators and students. NYU Shanghai recommends including a Registrar's letter when applying to graduate schools because the campus may not appear on all recognized institution lists.<sup>1</sup> Duke University clarifies that not all coursework from Duke Kunshan is automatically transferable, depending on policies of the receiving institution.<sup>2</sup> VCUarts Qatar, by contrast, follows a more straightforward model—its degrees are identical to those awarded in Richmond, Virginia.<sup>3</sup> If an IBC is accredited and issues degrees through the home campus, evaluators are encouraged to treat the credentials as they would any other from that institution.

The more closely the branch adheres to home-campus standards, the clearer the path for credential recognition. As Amir Berbić, Dean of VCUarts Qatar, explains, "Delivering curriculum here in Qatar involves a careful balance. We stay true to the academic rigor and values of our home campus in Richmond, but we also gently adapt our programs to fit the educational landscape of Qatar and the region." He adds, "It's a dynamic process that requires flexibility and ongoing dialogue, especially when it comes to how credentials are understood and evaluated internationally."

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<sup>1</sup> *University accreditation and English proficiency*. NYU Shanghai. (2023, October 27).

<https://shanghai.nyu.edu/campus-life/career/students/university-accreditation-and-english-proficiency>

<sup>2</sup> *Academic programs at DKU*. Duke Office of DKU Relations. (n.d.)

<https://dkurelations.duke.edu/about-dku/academic-programs-dku/>

<sup>3</sup> Undergraduate admissions. VCUarts Qatar. (n.d.).

<https://qatar.vcu.edu/admissions/undergraduate-admissions/>

Looking ahead, U.S. institutions and host countries are actively exploring new destinations for IBCs. Dr. Jill Blondin, Vice Provost for Global Initiatives at Virginia Commonwealth University, sees international partnerships and overseas campuses as vital to expanding the global reach of U.S. higher education. "The Illinois Institute of Technology's (IIT) recent announcement of a new campus in Mumbai—the first U.S. branch in India—is an example of efforts to meet growing demand for U.S. education," she notes.

While not all institutions have the resources to pursue IBCs, trailblazers like IIT could pave the way for others. "U.S. universities will watch IIT's venture closely. If successful, it will certainly inspire more," says Dr. Blondin. New markets, such as Latin America and Africa, are also gaining interest and being actively assessed.

Meanwhile, existing IBCs are evolving into global study hubs for international students pursuing U.S. degrees—often with benefits like lower costs, fewer visa challenges, rich cultural exchange, and greater local job prospects. Duke Kunshan, for instance, received a record-breaking 11,844 applications for Fall 2025 from students in 144 countries, with half from outside China.<sup>4</sup> These statistics challenge the assumption that IBCs primarily serve domestic populations.

Jessica Sandberg, Vice President of External Affairs, U.S. at IDP Education and former Dean of International Enrollment at Duke Kunshan, observed the evolution firsthand. "The early IBC model often replicated the home campus without much regard for local context," she explains. "Today's most successful IBCs are hybrid institutions, blending international curricula with regional expertise to create culturally responsive learning environments. The result is a shared international experience that shapes students into more globally competent and collaborative individuals." At VCUarts Qatar, "We offer a unique educational and cultural environment that encourages students to think globally while working within a local context," says Dean Berbić, "Students learn from faculty who represent more than 15 different cultural perspectives, while maintaining a close connection to their own roots and heritage."

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<sup>4</sup> Duke Kunshan University. (2025, February 13). *Nearly 12,000 students compete for 550 spots at Duke Kunshan - News: Duke Kunshan University*. News.

<https://news.dukekunshan.edu.cn/campus-news/nearly-12000-students-compete-for-550-spots-at-duke-kunshan/>

As IBCs continue to grow and diversify, how their credentials are evaluated will remain a critical topic. Ultimately, the decision for admission, employment, or licensure rests with each reviewing institution. Awareness of IBC trends can help admissions officers and evaluators better understand what documents to request and how to interpret these increasingly complex academic records.

## Article 3: Assessing Qualifications Awarded Via Special Recognition or Validation Agreements

*This article is courtesy of Ecctis.*

Qualifications awarded via degree validation agreements are typically studied in one partner institution but awarded by another. In these instances, the partner institutions do not have the necessary authority to grant degrees or that specific type of degree. Qualifications awarded via special recognition agreements are studied at an institution operating in one country and then recognised by an authority in another. It may be the case that the institution does not have degree-awarding powers in the country of study.

When assessing qualifications awarded via special recognition or validation agreements, it is often not immediately obvious to credential evaluators that students have received their awards through one of these agreements. The final certificate or the transcript will typically hold important clues to determine the accreditation of the institution or programme of study.

For credential evaluators, it will be important to establish whether the notion of degree validation is permitted in the country of award, as well as the legitimacy of the partnership between the provider institution and validating institution. Following this, an understanding of the quality assurance mechanism is crucial, to establish whether it is sufficient to satisfy your country or organisation's requirements for recognising qualifications.

### Examples

Acknowledging that different countries have different mechanisms for awarding degrees, below are several examples illustrating how degrees may be validated or awarded via special recognition arrangements around the world.



## UK

In the UK system<sup>1</sup>, institutions with degree-awarding powers are Recognised Bodies. Recognised Bodies can offer programmes leading to a recognised UK degree and confer the final degree. Institutions must be granted degree-awarding powers by the relevant UK regulators (the Office for Students in England, Scottish Government in Scotland, Welsh Government in Wales, and Northern Ireland Executive in Northern Ireland). By contrast, Listed Bodies offer study programmes leading to a recognised UK degree but cannot confer the final undergraduate or postgraduate degree. A Listed Body must cooperate with a Recognised Body and only the Recognised Body may confer the final degree.

As an example, the University of London is a Recognised Body with degree-awarding powers. In 2006, King's College London received degree-awarding powers from the Privy Council and the first degrees were conferred in 2008. It was awarded official university status in 2024. Prior to this, degrees studied at King's College London were conferred by the University of London<sup>2</sup>.

The Arab Open University (AOU)<sup>3</sup> is a recognised university offering several degree programmes taught via distance and blended learning at branches in Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and Sudan. Several of the Bachelor and Master's degrees are validated via a partnership with the UK's Open University (OU), a Recognised Body in the UK. Reviews are conducted periodically and renewed for a five-year period. Not all programmes offered at the AOU are validated by the OU, as some are national qualifications from the country where the branch is located. If a programme has OU-validation, credential evaluators should expect to receive a final certificate issued by the OU.

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<sup>1</sup> UK ENIC, Guide to the UK education systems\_final.pdf (2023).

<sup>2</sup> King's College London, Our history | King's College London.

<sup>3</sup> The Open University, The Arab Open University | Validation Partnerships (2025).

## India

Affiliated colleges follow a prescribed curriculum and prepare students for final examinations, which are set by the affiliating universities. The University Grants Commission (UGC) provides financial assistance to over 10,000 affiliated colleges across India, many of which also hold accreditation from the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). The final certificate is issued by the validating university, but transcripts can be provided by the university and/or the college. Typically, the university can provide the full degree transcripts, but in some instances, for example for colleges affiliated to the University of Mumbai, the university will only issue transcripts for the final year.

Autonomous colleges, of which there are over 500 in India, receive five-year autonomy from the validating university. NAAC accreditation is compulsory, as is the accreditation from the National Board of Accreditation for autonomous colleges specialising in engineering, technical or management subjects. Degree certificates are awarded by the validating university, with the name of the autonomous college included on the certificate. Colleges that have 15 or more years of autonomy may award their own degrees but must include the validating university's seal on the certificate. Autonomous colleges, as well as the validating university may issue transcripts and provisional certificates.

For credential evaluators, it will be important to verify the NAAC accreditation of the college, whether it is an affiliate or autonomous college, and to understand the validation agreement in place.

## ***Pontifical Institutions Recognised by the Holy See***

The Holy See's Dicastery for Culture and Education manages the accreditation of higher education institutions outside of Vatican City. These institutions are typically ecclesiastical universities, civil universities or standalone institutions. The degrees follow the EHEA degree system and are in pontifical subjects, i.e. theology, philosophy and Canon law. The institutions can be found all around the world and must meet the standards set by the Holy See. Other institutions may seek Dicastery accreditation for programmes offered in pontifical subjects.

The Database of Ecclesiastical Higher Education Institutions records those institutions approved by the Dicastery<sup>4</sup>. Credential evaluators can use this database to determine whether an institution has received recognition.

## Mexico

Mexico's Sistema de Reconocimiento de Validez Oficial de Estudios (RVOE) is managed by the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP). RVOE confirms that a degree course offered by a private institution meets national standards and can be formally recognised within Mexico's education system.

It should be noted that not all private institutions need RVOE. Several prestigious private institutions have been awarded libre (free) status via a presidential decree and therefore their programmes do not need to go through the RVOE process to be recognised in Mexico.

To check whether a course has official RVOE recognition, credential evaluators can check the SEP's platform<sup>5</sup>, and if recognised, a course will have an RVOE number. Without the RVOE number, students might not be able to receive a valid degree, nor receive a licence if they have been studying towards a particular profession.

## American Universities

Around the world, there are numerous American universities, which are typically private institutions that have been accredited by a US accreditation body, rather than belonging to the higher education system in the country where they are located. Examples of this include:

- American University of Bahrain (Bahrain)
- American University of Beirut (Lebanon)
- American University in Bulgaria (Bulgaria)
- American University in Cairo (Egypt)
- American University in Dubai (United Arab Emirates)
- American University of Paris (France)

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<sup>4</sup> Dicastery for Culture and Education, [Search Faculties and Institutions](#).

<sup>5</sup> Secretaría de Educación Pública, <https://sirvoes.sep.gob.mx/sirvoes/mvc/consultas>.

Rather than requiring programme accreditation, which may exist in some of these countries, or validation via a recognised university, these institutions are accredited by a US accrediting body.

Credential evaluators may search the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) database<sup>6</sup> to determine whether an institution, is accredited by a body recognised by CHEA or the US Department for Education.

## Conclusion

As different countries explore the internationalisation of higher education and many are now facing limits on the number of international students it can recruit, it is likely that more institutions will explore validation agreements as a form of transnational education. By being awarded via a validation agreement, it could be argued that this is a more secure way of offering transnational education and providing assurance of the quality of programme being offered, as it must adhere to the standards of the awarding institution.

For credential evaluators, it will be crucial to understand how these arrangements work on a case-by-case basis, how the qualifications are quality assured, and then whether their organisation is able to recognise these types of qualification.

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<sup>6</sup> Council for Higher Education Accreditation, [Browse Databases and Directories | Council for Higher Education Accreditation](#).



## Article 4: Evaluating Transnational Degrees: Joint, Dual, Franchise and Validated Programs

*Written by Sara Ahmad and Jackie Best (IESC Fellows)*

### Introduction

When a credential reached our desk with four university affiliate logos, three university names on the top, and one degree designation at the bottom, we were left with more questions than answers. Which institution(s) conferred this degree? How many degrees were conferred? Is the program accredited, and in which countries? Transnational education (TNE) partnerships have experienced a boom in recent years, driven by numerous factors: technological advancement, globalization, campus internationalization, research collaboration and recruitment goals, government policy incentives, and the student demand for alternative learning options. Transnational programs offer inspiring opportunities for students and educators; however, the increasingly diverse nature of these partnerships can pose a challenge for evaluators.

AACRAO's International Education Standards Council (IESC) Fellowship program provides a unique opportunity for newer credential evaluation professionals - a guided/mentored experience through which to deepen their knowledge, expand professional networks, and contribute to the field of international credential evaluation through hands-on experience in conducting research and presenting findings to the broader community. To address the growing need to update the evaluator's toolbox for skillfully assessing transnational programs, the AACRAO International Education Standards Council (IESC) selected Joint and Dual Degrees as the research topic for their annual [IESC Fellowship](#) program for young professionals. As this year's IESC Fellows, we will share our evaluation tips with the TAICEP community for multiple collaborative partnership types, including joint, dual, franchise and validated degree programs. A webinar presenting our research in detail will be held on Tuesday, November 18 at 2:00 PM EST. The link to register is <https://www.aacrao.org/events-training/event/2025/11/18/default-calendar/joint-and-dual-degrees--findings-of-the-2024-25-international-education-standards-council-fellows>



### Defining Transnational Partnerships

One of the more challenging aspects of assessing transnational education partnerships is their diversity in structure and type. The below definitions, examples and chart are helpful in comparing various program types across important dimensions.

### Joint Degree Programs

A **joint degree** is a single, integrated academic program developed and delivered collaboratively by two or more higher education institutions. Students enrolled in a joint program typically study at multiple partner campuses for a global learning experience and, upon graduation, receive a single diploma that includes the names and logos of all partner institutions. The student will earn one designation (e.g. Bachelor of Arts) from multiple recognizing institutions. Joint degree programs require a high level of cooperation between partner institutions, and additional accreditation may be required for the joint program itself.

**Example:** Charles University (Czech Republic), Leiden University (Netherlands), Jagiellonian University (Poland) and Pompeu Fabra University (Spain) collaboratively offer a Master of Arts in European Politics and Society. The student studies in multiple countries and receives one master's degree co-signed by all partner universities.

### Dual (or Double) Degree Programs

**Dual (or Double) degree** programs offer students the opportunity to complete two distinct degree programs at two different institutions, often in a shorter timeframe than it would take to pursue both degrees separately. Compared to joint degree programs, dual degree programs offer institutions a greater level of autonomy as curricula, tuition, language and degree requirements are at the discretion of each higher education institution. Each institution also issues its own separate transcripts and diplomas.

**Example:** Ritsumeikan University (Japan) and Australia National University (Australia) offer a Dual Degree program where students earn both a Bachelor in Global Liberal Arts and a Bachelor of Asia Pacific Affairs over the course of four years of study. 16 courses are taken on each campus, and overlapping coursework enables



students to receive a separate diploma from each institution.

Franchise Programs

A **franchise program** is a collaboration in which one institution (the “sending institution” or “franchiser”) authorizes an international partner to deliver its curriculum abroad. The sending institution is responsible for curriculum design, degree conferral and accreditation, and the international partner teaches the content to students overseas. In this model, the student will earn a single degree from the sending institution (not the international partner). This model is popular for international branch campuses and when expanding access to established programs in new markets.)

Validated Programs

A **validated program**, sometimes considered a subset of the franchise program model, is a partnership in which one institution (the “sending institution”) evaluates and endorses a curriculum created and delivered by an international partner. Similar to the franchise program model, the sending institution assumes responsibility for accreditation and degree issuance; however, in the validated program model, the international partner designs the curriculum and has much greater flexibility in adapting content to local markets.

**Example:** Arab Open University (AOU) offers a validated Bachelor of Science in Information Technology and Computing in partnership with the U.K.’s Open University (OU). AOU designs and teaches the curriculum, while OU validates it and issues the degree.



Comparative Framework

Feature	Joint Degree	Dual Degree	Franchise Program	Validated Program
Number of Degrees	One degree, jointly awarded by all partner institutions	Two degrees, one from each partner	One degree from the sending institution	One degree from the sending institution
Degree Issuance	One designated institution issues co branded documents (or all partners able to issue co branded documents)	Each institution issues its own diploma and transcript	Sending institution issues diploma and transcript	Sending institution issues diploma and transcript (or sending institution validates int. partner records by sending an additional diploma)
Accreditation	Each partner accredited; joint program may also be accredited	Each institution accredited separately	Sending institution must be accredited	Sending institution must be accredited
Curriculum	Integrated and jointly developed	Separate, with possible overlap and credit-sharing mechanisms	Developed by sending institution, delivered abroad	Developed and delivered by partner, validated by sending institution
Location of Study	Multiple campuses across partner institutions	Each campus, fulfilling each institution's requirements	Delivered at international partner campus	Delivered at international partner campus
Duration	Similar to a standard program	May take longer than one, but shorter than two separately	Similar to a single degree program	Similar to a single degree program





## Tips for Credential Evaluators

- **Determine program type:** The first step in evaluating a transnational credential is to assess the program type. Is this credential a joint, dual, franchise or validated degree program? Follow-up with the institution(s) may be required to make a determination.
- **Verify degree conferral responsibility:** The next step is to confirm which institution(s) awarded the degree. This will set the stage for other important evaluative measures such as accreditation and equivalency.
- **Examine accreditation and recognition:** Ensure that the awarding institution(s) are accredited by relevant regional or national authorities, and check for program-level recognition where appropriate.
- **Reference location of study and curriculum:** Determining location of study and responsible party for curriculum design and delivery may influence decisions related to comparability and transfer credit.
- **Use research tools:** When in doubt, reference AACRAO EDGE, TAICEP, institutional websites and all other resources in your toolkit to make the most informed decisions.

## Digest Conclusion

As you have just seen in these articles, transnational education (TNE) has firmly established itself as a dynamic and evolving force in the global higher education landscape, truly embodying the concept of a 'work in progress'. Its continued expansion, driven by factors like globalization, technological advancements, and the increasing demand for flexible learning options, presents both significant opportunities and complex challenges for students, institutions, and credential evaluators alike. As institutions increasingly explore international partnerships, the diversity of TNE models—from international branch campuses and joint degrees to franchise and validated programs—requires a sophisticated understanding to ensure the quality and portability of qualifications.

A recurring theme throughout the discussion of TNE is the critical importance of robust quality assurance and clear accreditation frameworks. The responsibility for academic standards ultimately lies with the awarding institution, and these standards should be comparable to those of programs delivered on the home campus. However, the lack of coordinated governance and varying national regulations can create inconsistencies, making the evaluator's role more critical than ever. The rise of fraudulent providers and misleading claims of "international recognition" further complicates the landscape, necessitating vigilance and a reliance on established verification tools and conventions like the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the UNESCO Global Recognition Convention.

For credential evaluators, navigating this complexity demands a meticulous and informed approach. Assessors must move beyond a surface-level review of documents and delve into the specifics of the educational arrangement. By systematically identifying the program type, verifying degree-conferral authority, scrutinizing accreditation, and analyzing the curriculum and location of study, evaluators can make fair and consistent recognition decisions. In certain systems, the Diploma Supplement serves as a vital instrument for transparency in this process.

The future of TNE points toward continued growth, particularly in the less visible realm of online and distance education. This expansion is closely linked to the

global rise of private higher education, which often operates with commercial objectives. Consequently, the need for stronger, clearer standards from national and international bodies is urgent to address emerging regulatory and ethical concerns and to safeguard against fraud. As TNE models continue to evolve, the principles of transparency, comparability, and shared responsibility will remain the bedrock of trust, ensuring that these cross-border qualifications are rightfully recognized and valued worldwide.

To aid in the practical application of the insights discussed throughout this digest and to support the meticulous approach required in evaluating TNE credentials, we refer you to some tools and resources in the appendix: the [Evaluator's Checklist for TNE Credentials](#), a [Comparison of Transnational Education \(TNE\) Models](#), and resources in a wiki for TAICEP members. These resources are designed to help you navigate the complexities of TNE qualifications more effectively.



## Appendix 1: Evaluator's Checklist for TNE Credentials

This checklist provides a consolidated guide for credential evaluators to navigate the complexities of TNE qualifications.

### Phase 1: Initial Document Review & Program Identification

The first step is to understand the nature of the credential and the educational arrangement behind it.

- ☐ Determine the Program Type: Is the credential from a:
  - Joint Degree Program?
  - Dual/Double Degree Program?
  - Franchise Program?
  - Validated Program?
  - International Branch Campus (IBC)?
  - Twinning/Articulation Agreement?
  - Distance Delivery Program?
- ☐ Identify the Awarding Institution(s):
  - Who conferred the degree?
  - Which institution's name is on the final certificate and transcript?
  - For joint degrees, are all partner institutions listed on a single diploma?
  - For dual degrees, are there separate diplomas from each institution?
- ☐ Clarify the Teaching Institution:
  - Where did the student physically study?
  - Who taught the program?
  - Was the teaching institution recognized or listed by local authorities?



## Phase 2: Accreditation and Recognition Verification

This phase focuses on the official status and quality assurance of the institutions and the program itself.

- ☐ Verify Institutional Accreditation:
  - Is the primary awarding institution accredited in its home country?
  - For IBCs, is the branch campus accredited, and by which agency (home or host country)?
  - Are all partner institutions in a joint/dual program accredited separately?
- ☐ Check Program-Level Recognition:
  - Does the specific program have required professional or national recognition (e.g., RVOE in Mexico)?
  - Is the program recognized in both the home country of the awarding institution and the host country where the study took place?
  - For validated programs, is the validation agreement legitimate and permitted in the country of award?
- ☐ Utilize Research Tools:
  - Consult resources like AACRAO EDGE, TAICEP, and national bodies (e.g., CHEA in the US, UK ENIC).
  - Review institutional websites for information on partnerships and accreditation.

## Phase 3: Curriculum and Program Comparability

The final phase involves assessing the academic standards and content of the program.

- ☐ Analyze the Curriculum:
  - Who designed and delivered the curriculum?
  - Does the curriculum follow the educational model of the home institution?

- ☐ Compare Academic Standards:
  - Are the admission requirements, program duration, and assessment methods comparable to the equivalent program at the awarding institution's home campus?
- ☐ Assess Language of Instruction:
  - What was the language of instruction?
  - Is it consistent with the primary language of the awarding institution?
- ☐ Review Official Documents for Clues:
  - Examine transcripts and the diploma supplement for any indication of the TNE arrangement, study location, or validating body.
  - For IBC credentials, if the campus is fully accredited and issues degrees through the home campus, the credentials should be treated as any other from that institution.

## Appendix II: Comparison of TNE Models

The following table expands on the various TNE models presented in the digest, offering a detailed comparison across several key features to help clarify the distinctions between them.

Feature	Joint Degree	Dual/Double Degree	Franchise Program	Validated Program	Twinning/ Articulation Program	Branch Campus	Distance Delivery
Number of Degrees	One degree, jointly awarded by all partner institutions.	Two separate degrees, one from each partner institution.	One degree from the sending (franchiser) institution.	One degree from the sending (validating) institution.	One degree from the provider institution.	One degree from the provider (home) institution or its branch.	One degree from the awarding institution.
Degree Issuance	A single co-branded diploma and transcript are issued, bearing the names of all partners.	Each institution issues its own separate diploma and transcript.	The sending institution issues the diploma and transcript.	The sending institution issues the diploma and transcript.	The final qualification is awarded by the provider institution.	The degree may be issued by the home campus, the branch campus, or jointly.	The awarding institution issues the diploma and transcript.
Accreditation	Each partner institution is accredited, and the joint program itself may also require accreditation.	Each institution is accredited separately.	The sending institution is responsible for accreditation.	The sending institution is responsible for accreditation.	The provider HEI holds the accreditation.	The branch campus is accredited through the home institution, but may also have host country recognition.	The awarding institution must be accredited.
Curriculum	An integrated curriculum is developed and delivered jointly by all partner institutions.	Each institution has its own curriculum though there may be overlap and credit sharing.	Developed by the sending institution and delivered by the international partner.	Developed by the partner institution and endorsed (validated) by the sending institution.	The curriculum is designed by the provider HEI.	The curriculum generally follows the educational model of the home institution.	The curriculum is designed and delivered by the awarding institution.
Location of Study	Students typically study at multiple partner campuses.	Students often study at both partner campuses.	The program is delivered entirely at the international partner's campus.	The program is delivered entirely at the international partner's campus.	Students begin at the partner institution and complete their studies at the provider institution's home campus.	The entire program is delivered at the campus established abroad.	Students study online from their own country.

## Appendix III: Additional Resources for TAICEP Members

For TAICEP members, conference recordings, slides, webinars, and Gaggles archives offering further insights into TNE trends, regulatory challenges, and practical guidance for credential evaluators can be found by logging in to the [Transnational Education](#) section in the training area of the TAICEP Wiki.

### A. General Overviews & Recognition Climate

- 2017 TAICEP Rome Conference: **“Cross Border Higher Education”**
  - Description:** This presentation provides an overview of the broader landscape of cross-border higher education, which encompasses various TNE models.
- 2021 TAICEP Virtual Conference: **“Improving the Recognition Climate for Transnational Education Qualifications”**
  - Description:** This resource focuses on strategies and initiatives aimed at enhancing the acceptance and validation of TNE qualifications globally.

### B. Evaluator Guidance & Challenges

- 2023 TAICEP Redondo Beach Conference: **“Evaluating Qualifications from Transnational Education”**
  - Description:** These presentation slides offer guidance and methodologies specifically for credential evaluators on how to properly assess academic qualifications from various TNE programs.
- 2020 TAICEP Virtual Conference: **“TNE: The Challenges for Evaluators”**
  - Description:** This session addresses common difficulties and complex issues faced by credential evaluators when assessing degrees and certificates from TNE arrangements.
- 2019 TAICEP Vancouver Conference: **“The Quandaries of Evaluating TNE Programs & Credentials”**
  - Description:** These slides delve into perplexing scenarios and specific dilemmas encountered during the evaluation of credentials from transnational education programs.
- 4/15/25 Gagger, **“Transnational UK 3-year degree”** PDF



- **Description:** This document likely analyzes the structure and evaluation of three-year bachelor's degrees offered through United Kingdom-based TNE programs.
- 2017 TAICEP Rome Conference: “**International Secondary Schools on Domestic Soil**”
  - **Description:** This resource examines the phenomenon of international high schools operating within a country and presents specific case studies to illustrate the model.

## C. Regional Focus & Trends

- 2/11/25 The Pie News Article: “[Australia strengthens its standing in India through TNE collaboration](#)”
  - **Description:** This article highlights how Australia is leveraging TNE partnerships to enhance its educational influence and relationships within India.
- 2/7/25 The Pie News Article: “[India a major partnership hub as TNE interest booms](#)”
  - **Description:** This article explores the growing trend of India becoming a central location for international TNE collaborations due to a surge in demand and interest.
- 2024, CIMEA, MAREN and AdREN Projects: Transnational Education in the Adriatic and Mediterranean Regions “[Regulation, quality assurance and information provision in 7 countries](#)”
  - **Description:** This report details specific TNE regulations, quality assurance mechanisms, and information transparency in seven countries within the Adriatic and Mediterranean areas.

## D. Policy & Regulation

- 4/9/25 University World News Article: “[TNE expansion: A new frontier in need of stronger regulation](#)”
  - **Description:** This article argues for the necessity of improved and more robust regulatory frameworks to govern the rapid global expansion of transnational education.



# TAICEP

The Association for International  
Credential Evaluation Professionals®

**[answers@taicep.org](mailto:answers@taicep.org)**

**[www.taicep.org](http://www.taicep.org)**