

Advising and Coaching Students with Foreign Degrees and Credentials

Advising and coaching students with foreign degrees and credentials is a complicated and highly individualized process. However, some guiding questions and best practices can be applied to all scenarios.

This guide helps instructors, advisors, and career coaches ask the right questions when working with students whose goals relate to employment, education or entering a licensed profession. Once the student's goals are established, this guide will help determine what kind of degree or credential evaluation process is appropriate.

Start by asking...

...then depending on their answer

What is your goal or purpose in evaluating your degree or credentials?



"Do I need a U.S. high school equivalency (HSE) credential"

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"I want to find or keep a job."

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"I want to evaluate my degree for admission to a college or university."

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"I want to be re-licensed in my professional field"

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WORK WITH THE STUDENT TO ASSESS



Document Access



Costs



Recipients



English



Timeline



Competing Demands



Other skills

OVERARCHING TIPS FOR COMPLETING AN EVALUATION

In some cases, the student will need to use a specific evaluation company. If not, default to a NACES-accredited evaluation company. Each NACES company has different processes and rules. Review the questions below before choosing a company:

How will they accept documents?

Will they need originals? Do they accept copies? Do they require that the institution sends documents directly?

How long will the evaluation report be valid?

Complete the evaluation close to when the student will need it.

If the student does not have to use a specific translation service, default to a certified translator.

Some translators have a certification from the American Translators Association.

Compare cost and timelines for each company.

YOU MAY ALSO HEAR...

“I have a high school diploma (or Associates or Bachelors degree) from another country, do I have to complete a HiSET, GED or HSE program here in the U.S.?”



Too often, students with degrees from other countries are referred to High School Equivalency (HSE) programs (e.g. HiSET/GED), when they could be better served with alternative options that help them to make targeted progress towards career and educational goals. With some exceptions, if a student has a minimum of a high school diploma from another country, they will not need to attain a high school degree in the U.S.

If a student's goals include transition to college, and they have access to their high school diploma and have the English readiness to advance, they would be best served in a college prep. course, college transition class, or advanced ESOL or college placement test prep. class. As much as possible students should utilize their degrees, address any preparation needed, and advance beyond HSE programming. There are a few exceptions:

- If a student has an HSE from another country but is not at the English readiness level for a transitions or college prep class, they may be better served by other ESOL classes or, in some cases, an HSE class.
- If there are no college transition courses available within adult education, community college or otherwise, the HSE course may be the best option for academic preparation.
- If a student cannot access their foreign diploma to prove HSE, they may be able to apply and still take placement tests for admissions to college (e.g. Accuplacer). In another example, students enrolled in an Ability to Benefit (ATB) program would not need a diploma for enrollment. However, policy and regulations are different state to state and institution to institution, and some colleges may require documentation of a HSD/E (high school diploma or equivalent) before enrollment.

Let's take a closer look.



Fernanda completed high school in Brazil and has access to all her documents. Because she took an English intensive in high school, she has the English readiness for a college transitions course. During her intake conversation, you realize that she would benefit from support for transitioning and applying to college, especially to prepare for the college placement test required by the college admissions office. Additionally, she is waiting to have her high school diploma translated and evaluated to indicate equivalency. She enrolls in your college transitions class and, five months later, enrolls in college.

Muhammed has completed high school in his home country and he would like to enroll in an associate's program for accounting at the local community college. He is sure he can access his high school diploma but he has to have it sent. When you do your intake and testing, his English test results indicate that he would benefit from more academic English preparation. You don't yet have a college transitions or college placement test preparation class, so you enroll him in the HiSET class and provide individualized support to help him prepare for the college placement test, and support him in accessing his diploma from his home country.



IF THE STUDENT TELLS YOU:

“I want to find or keep a job.”



Then ask these questions...



Is your employer requiring an evaluation?

Ask the student to find out what evaluation company the employer will accept, and if they need a specific type of evaluation (course by course or equivalency). It could also be important to find out how up to date the report needs to be.

Are you being asked to show you've completed high school?

Many job postings require a high school diploma. A translated foreign high school diploma may suffice, though it varies by employer. Otherwise, the employer may ask for an evaluation report that indicates equivalence to a U.S. high school diploma



Can you afford the process?

The translations and evaluations can be expensive. There are sometimes workforce or community-based programs that may help to offset the cost of this process.

Who should be selected recipients of the evaluation reports?

Find out if there is specific way that employers or companies need to receive the report. Make sure to enter the employer's information as additional recipients of the report if they need to receive it directly.



Do you have other skills required for the job?

While the evaluation will help prove degrees and credentials, it is also important that students have the English, communication, technical, and digital literacy skills required for the job. Additionally, students should have or be expecting work authorization before pursuing this goal.



If the student is moving forward with having a credential evaluated, follow these steps:



STEP 1: Help the student select an evaluation company, if their employer does not require a specific company (See tips on page 1.)

STEP 2: Choose report type (course by course or equivalency, depending on employer need).

STEP 3: Make sure the student has access to all required documents.

STEP 4: Help the student get the documents translated. (See tips on page 1.)

STEP 5: Have the student complete all required fields for the evaluation, and submit documents, as requested.

STEP 6: Help the student enter report recipients including employers, if they need to receive a report directly.

STEP 7: Help the student interpret the report and submit it to their employer.

IF THE STUDENT TELLS YOU:

"I want to evaluate my degree for admission to a college or university."



Then ask these questions...



How does the degree fit within your career goals?

Sometimes a student has the credentials to attain their career goal, and does not need a U.S. degree. If the student is clear on what they want to do with the degree, they can research whether or not they can achieve that goal without a time-consuming and expensive degree.

Do you have time to complete all required coursework?

The student should consider work, family, and other commitments before beginning a course of study. They should review the course load and factor in homework time to see what is possible.



Are you otherwise academically ready?

If not, help the student find adult education classes, college transition programs, or free /low-cost preparatory college classes to make sure they are successful once they start the program.

Can you meet the required English levels for admission?

Admissions often has an English level requirement for students from other countries. If they need more English preparation, refer them to adult education, college preparatory, or other free classes.



Can you afford the program?

Have the student research the program's cost, look into financial resources or aid available, and identify other financial obligations.



If the student is moving forward with having a credential evaluated, follow these steps:

- STEP 1:** Contact the program chair to discuss prerequisites and required courses to determine an individualized pathway.
- STEP 2:** Find out what evaluation company is accepted by the college or university.
- STEP 3:** Determine what kind of evaluation is required (course by course, etc.).
- STEP 4:** Find out what documents the evaluation company needs.
- STEP 5:** Find out how the evaluation company needs to receive documents.
- STEP 6:** Find out where and how reports need to be sent.
- STEP 7:** Complete the evaluation paperwork, submit all documents, and pay for the service.
- STEP 8:** Schedule a meeting with program chair or coordinator to review the evaluation and lay out a course plan to complete the degree.

IF THE STUDENT TELLS YOU:

"I want to be re-licensed in my professional field"



Then ask these questions...



Do you have the time and resources to get re-licensed?

Getting re-licensed is a long, difficult, and expensive process. Each licensed profession has its own state-regulated complex process. See links below.

Have you reviewed short- and long-term goals within this pathway?

Explain that it is possible to re-enter the professional field at a level that does not require a license. This could be a more accessible pathway that allows people to work in their field while pursuing licensure, or as a licensure alternative. Explore alternatives together.



Can you afford the process??

Explain that the evaluations, testing, and application fees could range from \$500 to \$1,700, or beyond.

Do you have the English level required?

Many test administrators or regulating boards require an English language test score of foreign applicants. Review the scores required.



Can you access all required documents, in the way that you will need to receive them?

Make sure students have all required documents. Some evaluations will require syllabi and course descriptions in addition to diplomas, certificates, and transcripts.



If the student still wants to pursue licensure continue to page 6...



Now ask these questions...



Do you have the time to complete required course work?

Remind students that licensure applicants often need to complete additional course work to fulfill the educational requirements to sit for a licensure exam.

Can you complete the required licensure test?

Students should review the required licensure test and take any sample tests, if available, to determine how long they will need to prepare.



Can you complete any apprenticeships or work experience requirements as mandated by the regulating body?

Many licensure pathways require an apprenticeship or work experience. Sometimes these positions are unpaid, competitive and/or difficult to attain.

Once the evaluation is complete, to whom would you submit the evaluation, and how (mail, email, internet, etc.)?

Most boards or test administrators must receive the evaluation report directly from the evaluator. Check all requirements and choose report recipients accordingly.



If the student is moving forward with getting re-licensed, have the student follow these steps:

STEP 1: Research the process and timeline.

STEP 2: Find out which evaluation company they must use to complete the process.

STEP 3: Make sure they have access to all required documents and can access them in the required format.

STEP 4: Complete the evaluation.

STEP 5: Make sure reports are sent to the required places.

STEP 6: Complete English test, if required

STEP 7: Get approval to register for the exam.

STEP 8: Apply to take exam, if required.

STEP 9: Complete exam, if required.

STEP 10: Complete work experience requirement, if applicable.

STEP 11: Submit application for licensure materials to the licensure board, as mandated by state boards.

Credential Evaluations, Licensing, and Pathways for New Americans

Licensure pathways for foreign-trained professionals are state-specific. While Massachusetts does not yet have guides, students and advisors can review the general and state-specific guides cited below to research and understand the process.

Accreditation Services

National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES) provides a list of members offering evaluation services.

Translation Services

American Translator Association (ATA) certification is one of the industry's most respected and recognized credentials.

Support

Global Talent Bridge is a WES (World Education Services) initiative. Resources include:

- **E-Guides for Career Pathways** covers engineering, education, law, information technology, pharmacy, architecture, nursing, accounting, and dentistry, among others.
- **Supporting Skilled Immigrants: A Toolkit for ESOL Practitioners**

Imprint: Immigrant Professional Integration partners with WES to provide support and services to skilled foreign professionals. Resources include:

- **Alternative Careers for Immigrant Professionals** is a guide for assisting immigrants from regulated professions that re-acquiring a license is too time-consuming or costly.
- **Interactive Map of Agencies** shows programs servicing foreign-trained professionals.

National Immigration Forum

- The **Map to Success** is an interactive tool, providing immigrants and other workers with information on select career paths in the U.S.

New Mainers Resource Center (NMRC) is an adult education program serving immigrants, refugees, and employers in the Greater Portland area. Resources include:

- **Credential Evaluations and Professional Licensing** includes Maine guides for engineers, nurses, pharmacists, accountants, lawyers, and teachers.

Upwardly Global has licensing guides and job navigation services for highly skilled foreign-trained professionals. Resources include:

- **Licensing Guides** covers five states (California, Illinois, Michigan, New Hampshire, and New York) for those reentering regulated professions.
- **Find a Job** is an employment program.

English

Burlington English

This leveled, full-package ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) curriculum includes career awareness and integrated ESOL for sectors and WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) programming.

Voxy: English Language Training Designed for Global Teams Solutions for New Americans includes targeted ESOL-specific pathways and/or WIOA-supported programs relevant to New Americans.

Local Massachusetts Resources

African Bridge Network aims to create an environment that enables African immigrants in Massachusetts to leverage their qualifications and experience and maximize their potential.

Bridge Program: Boston University School of Social Work aims to increase the number of professionally trained social workers from culturally underserved and linguistically diverse newcomer populations through a unique structure of support that provides a transitional bridge to graduate academic communities.

Career Advancement for Professionals (CAP) at Asian American Civic Association is an innovative ESOL program that blends online learning, classroom instruction, and job search activities designed to meet the educational and employment needs of immigrants with college degrees from their native countries.

PIÉS Latinos de NECC focuses on three areas: validation of foreign educational credentials, transfer of foreign credits to Northern Essex Community Colleges or other colleges, and academic and professional career counseling.

Welcome Back Initiative at Bunker Hill Community College helps internationally educated nurses become registered nurses in Massachusetts.

Worcester State's Guide to Professional Licensure

The goal of this guide is to clarify the pathways for re-credentialing college-educated immigrants who are working in low-skilled jobs or unemployed.

Policy and Research

Immigrant Learning Center, Inc.

The Public Education Institute does outreach about the economic and social contributions of immigrants in our society and the Institute for Immigration Research conducts research on the economic contributions of immigrants.

Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA)

MIRA support foreign-born workers through policy, education and research, with the goal of helping them obtain professional credentials and licenses as well as acquire necessary English and technical skills to re-enter the workforce.