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By Jeannine E. Bell and Robert A. Watkins

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BOLOGNA

An Opportunity for International Cooperation

TEN YEARS AGO when I started my career in international admissions and recruitment, the idea that Europe would unify its systems of higher education seemed nothing more than a dream. There were whispers and rumors about a process named Bologna, and few of my colleagues believed Bologna would eventually come to fruition. But over time, this phantom has stepped from the shadows and taken on flesh and bone. Now the restructuring of European higher education is all too real—the breadth and depth of the changes are filled both with opportunities and challenges for professionals in North America, and the ethereal phantom has taken on the weight of a leviathan.

It's Not Just About Degree Credentials

The last 12 months have taken the discussions surrounding Bologna to a much-needed higher level. Until 2006 discussions of Bologna at North American institutions of higher education were at a pragmatic or logistic level—that of the credentials analyst or assistant director of admissions—the professionals closest to the ground. Emotions of nervousness, panic, and disbelief mingled as these professionals tried to react to the sparse information provided about Bologna. At the time, the major (and possibly only) question being asked was “Are these ‘Bologna three-year degrees’ equivalent to U.S. and Canadian bachelor’s degrees?”

This is an important question, but one that betrays flaws in our approach to international education: it is overly simplistic in its understanding of both the higher educational systems of North America and Europe and ignores the deeper impacts of Bologna on the very concept of higher education around the world. In fact, pertaining to the latter, the Bologna Process may force the entire world to redefine higher education in the twenty-first century.

That’s a broad belief, but one that I don’t think is too far from true. In many ways, the evolution of higher education in Europe is similar to what was seen in the United States after World War II. The forces

of massification and democratization—of expanding higher education to the masses and developing funding mechanisms to provide access (through tuition and loans)—are taking place in Europe as we speak. The “up-lift” of non-university institution types to university status is similar to what was seen in the United States during the twentieth century as normal schools and colleges became universities and vocational/professional schools became community colleges. This increase in capacity was truly a strength to developing a robust and diverse higher educational system in the United States. It was a great time for higher education, and very organic in its nature. Institutions saw the opportunity to improve their reputation and position themselves to better serve the growing demand for U.S. higher education. The same is possibly happening in Europe.

However, with Bologna, the impact reaches across continental boundaries. In a world “that is flat” according to Thomas Friedman, changes of the magnitude of Bologna can’t help but be global in nature. With 46 signatory countries, Bologna impacts nearly a quarter of the world’s nations directly and the majority of the higher educational systems in developed countries. In addition, part of the initiatives of Bologna is to improve mobility across country borders. It is then, by every definition, designed to be global in nature.



PAUL HART/ISTOCKPHOTO

Getting a Handle on the Process

It's during the past 12 months that we have seen these global issues discussed and tackled by professionals on three continents. Two major symposia have been held involving three major professional organizations that represent educational professionals—NAFSA: Association of International Educators, the European Association of International Education (EAIE), and the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO). At these symposia, professionals from across Canada, Europe, Australia, and the United States have come together to grapple with some of the realities and promises of Bologna. Most importantly, they have started to discuss questions broader than credential compatibility. They have begun much larger discussions about the purpose of higher education within their own countries as well as from other countries. They are beginning to see that this is an opportunity for collaboration and discussion, and possibly even the reinvention of higher education to meet the needs and demands of our students and nations.

It is timely then, that NAFSA's *International Educator* magazine has decided to put together this supplement on the Bologna Process. It is meant, not for the professionals in the trench, but instead as a “primer” for those professionals to use to educate others on their campus—particularly higher level administrators and faculty. It is meant to be used as a spring-board for larger campus (and possibly inter-campus) dialogue to better understand the state of Bologna. By no means is it intended to be comprehensive—arguably, no publication on Bologna could be comprehensive due to the fact that Bologna is constantly evolving. Some might say that is a problem, but I would lobby that the Bologna Process' dynamic nature is one of its strengths. Change in education is vital in a world full of change.

Chris J. Foley

*Director of Admissions
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Not a Product, a Process

In eight years, the Bologna Process has changed the landscape of European higher education more than individual national initiatives did for decades. But it must be seen as an ongoing process to be properly understood.

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS is undoubtedly the ‘Big Bang’ in European higher education, triggering far-reaching transformation in the different countries, which in some cases even go beyond the reach of the Bologna Process itself as national governments seek to redress imbalances in their respective systems,” says Fiona Hunter, international director, Università Carlo Cattaneo, and president of the European Association for International Education (EAIE). “Individual institutions,” according to Hunter, “must be prepared to take full ownership of the change agenda, crafting meaningful responses to the challenges they face in their specific environments. They need to embrace the Bologna Process as an opportunity to develop the right kind of institutional capacity to interpret and realize the reforms, exploiting creativity and available synergies as well as managing conflicting goals and values to ensure the success of the single institution and to make the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) a reality in the years ahead.”

Bologna is a bottom-up process and is not controlled by the European Union or any other central body. Instead it is an organic, complex process with moving targets. Not surprisingly, there are discrepancies, gaps, and contradictions in implementation at the national level, and the methods of implementation and the progress of the Bologna reforms vary greatly among and within the 46 member countries.

Still, when considered as a whole, the progress made on implementing a three-cycle degree structure—bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral—has been commendable. “The Bologna Process is a fascinating reform of higher education and cannot be stereotyped in simple terms,” says Hans de Wit, dean of Windesheim Honours College in The Netherlands. “The process is both top-down (governments initiated) and bottom-up (active involvement of other stakeholders, institutions, and students); harmonizing (in cycles, credits, Diploma Supplements) and diversifying (different types of bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral programs); and European (46 countries involved), national and institutional (driven also by national and institutional agendas and cultures). European higher education is becoming more transparent and clearer in its similarities and differences as a result of the process.”

Bologna Today

According to our European colleagues, Bologna is now in a “homework mode,” with higher education institutions and related groups rethinking and fine-tuning elements of the many objectives and initiatives that were introduced during the past several years. To date, most progress has occurred in the areas of undergraduate access to the next educational cycle and in external quality assurance systems. “The number of students enrolled in courses in the first two cycles has increased significantly and there has been a reduction in structural barriers between cycles,” so noted the ministers of education for the Bologna countries in their “London Communiqué” published in May 2007.

Additionally, there are several policy areas where attention is currently directed, including improving information on the EHEA, enhancing worldwide attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education, strengthening cooperation based on partnership, intensifying policy dialogue, and furthering the recognition of qualifications. The current discussion topics among Bologna member countries include how to emphasize the life-long learning element, and whether the EHEA should remain as a relatively loose intergovernmental structure, or be put on a more formal basis.

Reform: The Need and Impact

The main objectives of the Bologna declaration are to increase mobility and employability in Europe by creating an EHEA to enhance competitiveness of European higher education in the world. To expand the educational system's capacity, the structure itself needs to become more efficient. Students need to graduate on time, and the tools need to be there to manage more students with fewer resources. This need for efficiency has, in part, led to the prevalence of the three-year undergraduate degree structure being implemented by several Bologna countries.

The other side of the coin is that if undergraduate programs are made more efficient, will that threaten student mobility by limiting the opportunities for students to study in other countries? Possibly, but not if the right forms of mobility are utilized, specifically:

credit transfer, curricula with study periods abroad, and highly integrated courses with joint/dual degrees. However, tracking and comparing student mobility in the EHEA is difficult; unlike the United States, Europe does not have comprehensive data on student flows within Europe that is comparable.

Another Bologna goal is to positively influence the social dimension of education in the EHEA by creating participative equity. The social dimension is key to the Bologna Process because Europeans have realized that reforming the system is necessary to allow more young adults to pursue higher education and to potentially correct the poor (class) subsidizing education (via taxes) for the rich (whose children are the only ones able to spend 5–8 years in the higher education system before working). As Europe continues to work toward unity, Bologna will assist in bridging the racial,

social, economic, and gender gaps in access to higher education. However, there is no deadline for the social reform and, like measuring student mobility in the EHEA, there is a lack of data for comparing the social and economic situations of students. To that end, the ministers of education have recommended that the European Commission “develop comparable and reliable indicators and data to measure progress towards the overall objective for the social dimension and student and staff mobility in all Bologna countries” (London Communiqué).

Tools of Transparency

The two Bologna goals of mobility and employability cannot be achieved without a transparent system that allows the 46 participating countries to understand each others' educational systems and specific courses of study. Though formalized by the Bologna

TIMELINE

The Bologna Process

SEPTEMBER 1988 ▶

Magna Charta Universitatum.

Rectors of European Universities sign the Magna Charta Universitatum in Bologna, Italy, outlining the founding principles of what will later become known as the Bologna Process.



PAUL HARTY / SHUTTERSTOCK

1988

1989

1990

1991

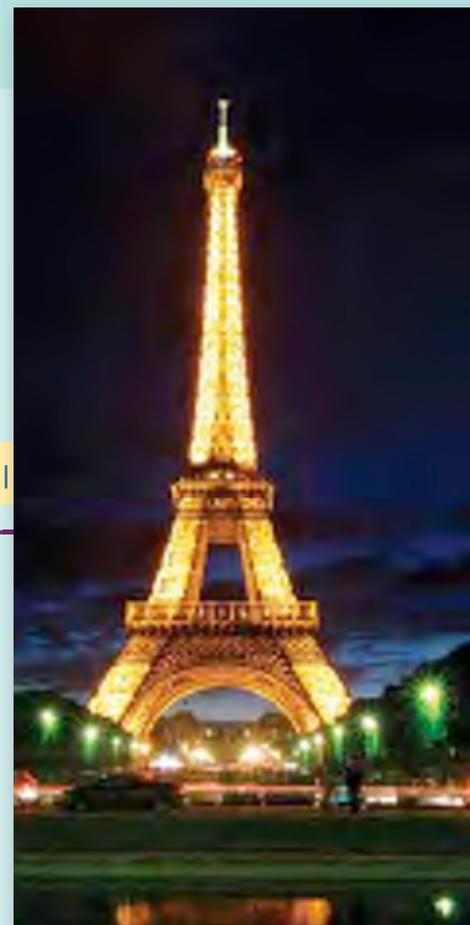
1992



GORD STEVENS / ISTOCKPHOTO

◀ APRIL 1997

Lisbon Convention. UNESCO and the Council of Europe draft the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region. The convention defines the framework for mutual recognition of studies, certificates, diplomas and degrees to promote academic mobility among European countries.



ECTS Key Features 2005

- ECTS is the European Credit Transfer System that began in 1989 as part of the Erasmus program.
- ECTS is a student-centered system based on the workload required to achieve the objectives of a program of study. These objectives should preferably be specified in terms of learning outcomes and competences to be acquired.
- A full-time course of study is 60 ECTS credits per year. It amounts to around 1,500–1,800 contact hours per year, which corresponds to 25–30 student work hours per credit.
- Student workload consists of the time required to complete all planned learning activities both inside and outside of the classroom.
- Credits are allocated to all educational components of a study program and reflect the quantity of work each component requires to achieve its specific objectives or learning outcomes in relation to the total quantity of work necessary to complete a full year of study successfully.
- Credits can only be obtained after successful completion of the work required and appropriate assessment of the learning outcomes achieved.
- The majority of the Bologna European countries have introduced ECTS in their legislation on the basis of this version of the Key Features.

SOURCE: EUROPEAN COMMISSION ECTS USER'S GUIDE



BRUNO ISMAEL DA SILVA ALVES/ SHUTTERSTOCK

◀ MAY 1998

Sorbonne Declaration. In Paris, education ministers from France, Germany, Italy and the UK sign the Sorbonne Declaration. The declaration will become the precursor to the Bologna Declaration.

1995

1996

1997

1998

1999

2000

2001



ROBERT BREMEC/ISTOCKPHOTO

◀ JUNE 1999

The Bologna Declaration. In Bologna, Italy, education ministers from 29 countries sign the Bologna Declaration. The declaration builds on the themes of the Sorbonne Declaration but added focus on transparency and comparability of European degrees and a promise to cooperate in the field of quality assurance.

▲ MARCH 2001

Salamanca Convention. European university representatives gather in Salamanca to take a common position in preparation of their ministers' next follow-up meeting, which will take place in Prague.

Process, the need for transparency was set in motion prior to Bologna with the general unification and economic reform efforts in Europe during the past few decades.

With these points in mind, the purpose of Bologna is not about conformity, but rather about clarifying the complexities of the various higher education systems. To accomplish these ambitious goals, several “tools of transparency” are gradually being implemented: the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the Diploma Supplement, and the recently introduced Qualification Frameworks. These tools are making European students more like their U.S. counterparts—highly mobile because they have comparable degrees and a credit transfer system. As Europeans develop these tools, North American educators will need to learn this new language of higher education in the EHEA.

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)

—The ECTS actually predates Bologna and began in 1989 as part of the Erasmus mundus program*—as a pilot scheme to facilitate academic recognition among partner institutions for the program’s exchange students. In its basic form, ECTS has since evolved into a critical component in the Bologna Process. ECTS is a mathematical formula for calculating the value of credits earned, somewhat analogous to the Carnegie units or semester hour systems in the United States. In the past, the “weight” of a course in European higher education institutions did not commonly report a “course value or weight” on academic records, and it was difficult for external institutions to determine the value of a course in relation to others. This discouraged transferability of courses and thus

Editor’s Note: The Erasmus program is a European Union cooperation and mobility initiative to promote European higher education.

student mobility. By providing a simple, university “currency” for educational coursework, the ECTS is a fundamental tool in achieving mobility among higher education institutions in the EHEA. (ECTS also includes a common grading scale that can be used universally among institutions though that component of ECTS has not yet been embraced by European higher education institutions. European institutions, rather, prefer to use the ECTS grading system only as a tool to enhance readability and transparency of the local grading system.)

Diploma Supplement—The Diploma Supplement, in theory, is probably one of the most useful tools of transparency for Bologna countries, North American higher education institutions, and employers. The Diploma Supplement model was developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe, and UNESCO/CEPES (CEPES is

TIMELINE

The Bologna Process

MARCH 2001 ▶
Göteborg Student Convention. Representatives of the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) formally adopt their position supporting the Bologna Declaration, with a convention taking place in Göteborg.



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SEPTEMBER 2003 ▶
Berlin, the second follow-up meeting. Progress review and recommendation to extend coverage to the links between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area.

1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000



TATIANA53/ SHUTTERSTOCK

◀ MAY 2001
Prague, the first follow-up meeting. National authorities, the European Commission, universities and students get together. Focus of the Process is extended to the realms of lifelong learning and higher education marketing.

the acronym for UNESCO's European Centre of Higher Education or *Centre européen pour l'enseignement supérieur*) to help higher education institutions provide the information that is essential to make a valid judgment about an institution's degree qualifications. It is not meant to, nor should it, supplant a diploma. It is designed with a minimalist approach to information, so that a user is not overwhelmed by the Diploma Supplement but has enough information at hand without having to request additional data.

Qualification Frameworks—Qualification frameworks will, by design, provide a common language to describe qualifications that will help higher education institutions, employers, and individuals compare qualifications across Europe. While still in the initial stages in the majority of countries, they provide a means to articulate the learning outcomes

Diploma Supplement

What Information Is Included on the Diploma Supplement?

- Information identifying the holder of the qualification
- Information identifying the qualification
- Information on the level of the qualification
- Information on the contents and results gained
- Information on the function of the qualification
- Additional information
- Certification of the national higher education system

What a Diploma Supplement Is Not

- A curriculum vitae
- A substitute for the original qualifications or transcript
- An automatic system that guarantees recognition



HENRY E STAMM IV/ SHUTTERSTOCK

MAY 2007

London, the fourth follow-up meeting. Ministers issued the London Communiqué to note the progress made to date. ▼



PHOTOGL/ SHUTTERSTOCK

2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2007

MAY 2005 ▶

Bergen, the third follow-up meeting. Ministers took stock of the progress of the Bologna Process and set directions for the further development towards the EHEA to be realized by 2010.



CHRISTOFFER VIKKA/ SHUTTERSTOCK

by describing what a student knows, understands, and is able to do. Such frameworks are key instruments in realizing comparability and transparency within the EHEA and facilitating mobility. “They should also help higher education institutions to develop modules and education programs based on learning outcomes and credits, and improve the recognition of qualifications as well as all forms of prior learning” (London Communiqué).

Limitations and Expectations

Certainly there are limits to the usefulness of the Diploma Supplement and ECTS, including its grading scale. The Diploma Supplement was not designed to be a tool for U.S. admissions officers, so it is not always useful in the U.S. admissions process. For instance, a Diploma Supplement is not typically issued until a student graduates—long after an undergraduate student

would normally have applied to a graduate program. Also, the Diploma Supplement is not yet consistently issued in the proper format recommended by the European Commission, making it difficult to decipher. In extreme cases, it is incomplete and of little value. And with ECTS, there will be instances of uncertainty about equivalents when higher education institutions grade on a curve. Still, those tools are greatly beneficial in helping clarify the similarities and

THE NETHERLANDS

A Bologna Process Case Study



What one European country has accomplished so far.

IN 2002 The Netherlands became the first Bologna signatory country to legislate the implementation of the three-cycle structure—bachelor’s, master’s, and then doctorate. One of the characteristics of The Netherlands higher education system is that it is a binary system that distinguishes between academic and professional degrees. In the first cycle, the university bachelor is 180 ECTS and a professional bachelor degree is 240 ECTS. For the second cycle, master’s degrees vary between 60 and 120 ECTS. The third cycle, Ph.D. or doctorate, is not yet defined largely because doctorates in Europe were research based rather than taught. More than 513,000 students are enrolled in the country’s 14 research universities (187,000 students) and 44 universities of applied sciences (350,000 students).

Changing Degrees

In principle, the Bologna-compliant bachelor degrees are designed to give access to the labor market by preparing students to enter the workforce without the need for a degree from the second or third cycles. However, in reality, most universities have not yet made their bachelor into the Bologna-compliant “labor-proof” degree; the labor market does not recognize the current academic bachelor degree as evidence of a student being ready to work. On the other and, professional

differences between European credentials and those of the rest of the world.

While the tools, like Bologna itself, are still evolving, it is this further use and implementation of the tools that is expected to improve them. The increasing use of ECTS and the Diploma Supplement has generated improvements in the recognition processes among higher education institutions, though the education ministers note that more progress is needed. Meanwhile, as

more institutions implement Bologna, the best course of action for North American higher education institutions is to work with their European partners to understand the current status of the development and the use of the transparency tools. European higher education institutions have developed very specific skills during the past two decades helping them to track regional changes and to implement the new European transparency tools.

“The Bologna Process is a fascinating reform of higher education and cannot be stereotyped in simple terms.”

By Leonard van der Hout

degrees are accepted by the labor market as proof that graduates are ready for the workforce, but those degrees do not give automatic access to master's courses. (If a professional degree student wants to pursue a second-cycle degree, that student often must take a preparatory program, which is not free and takes between three months to a year to complete.)

Steps Taken

A supranational Dutch/Flemish accreditation organization, NVAO, was established in 2004 to accredit all study programs, and the implementation of the national qualification framework is underway. Although initiatives are underway to create a single European accreditation organization, it is interesting to see that even within the NVAO there are two ways of accreditation: one of Flanders (Belgium) and one for The Netherlands.

In 2004 the Dutch higher education system switched completely to ECTS (60 credits per year). ECTS began as a measure of students' study load (the contact hours and the study preparation hours added up) though it is now also being used as a tool for accumulation of learning outcomes.

The following year the Diploma Supplement was enforced by law, and there is only one acceptable template. As a measure of adherence, a survey done by the Dutch Bologna Promoters in 2006 shows that most higher education institutions in The Netherlands are using a kind of Diploma Supplement but only a small number are using

the correct template. Therefore, in general, one can say that the Bologna Process is in place but not implemented fully on every level.

Looking Ahead

While one of the major Bologna goals is that mobility of students should increase, there are no major signs of that development yet in The Netherlands. The only evidence of Bologna-influenced mobility is at the research universities with the three-year bachelor, where we have seen that mobility is most likely during the master's phase.

For The Netherlands to fully realize the benefits of the EHEA, two major steps have to be taken. First is to ratify the Lisbon convention, which includes reforms that go hand-in-hand with the goals of Bologna. (Due to government changes, ratification has been delayed.) Second, legislation is needed to make joint degrees possible. Joint degrees are a major avenue for increasing mobility within the EHEA and across the Atlantic.

On the national level, the government took a rapid start to tackling Bologna. Now it looks that the Bologna Process is also starting in the universities. Students are getting mobile, programs are redesigned, and problems are being solved. The value of the Bologna Process now has to be proven.

— **LEONARD VAN DER HOUT**, *Dutch Bologna Promoter, Hogeschool van Amsterdam, Netherlands.*

Bologna Isn't Coming to the United States—It's Here.

U.S. Colleges and universities are already accepting degrees from Bologna programs abroad, though most are doing so on a case-by-case basis.

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS, as seen in the rearview mirror of the past 17 years, is now having worldwide ramifications that will bring about a paradigm shift in the way U.S. educational institutions evaluate, admit, and educate students. North American higher education institutions are, in many cases, trying to use current tools to evaluate the Bologna Process, while the Bologna Process has put into play a system based on different views of undergraduate education, newly defined outcome criteria, and a continuing variety of approaches to meet the Bologna goals. It is now incumbent upon U.S. educators to develop a way to understand and make sense of a new paradigm. To that end, understanding the goals of Bologna, as well as how European and North American colleges and universities perceive and relate to those goals, is critical.

Credential Evaluation and Exchange Agreements Impacted

The first area impacted by Bologna was the credentials evaluation world, where there was, and still is at many higher education institutions, uncertainty about what to do with the degrees. The next area to feel pressure from Bologna was the exchange agreement area as a result of the need for credential evaluation for placement of incoming students as well as transfer credit issues for outbound U.S. students. Exchange agreements with joint or dual degree components raised larger issues of equity. Overall, Bologna has many implications for higher education in the United States, with

some institutions more prone than others to being impacted by the changes in Europe. As a group, the so-called “Bologna countries” are the third-most important origination source of international students to the United States after China and India. The impact is hidden, though, because the numbers are spread out among higher education institutions.

The ‘Bologna-Compliant’ Degrees

U.S. colleges and universities are increasing their acceptance of Bologna degrees, the majority of which are the three-year bachelor’s degrees that have raised many questions for admissions offices. However, a survey by the Council of Graduate Studies (CGS) shows that between 2005 and 2006 the percentage of respondent higher education institutions that reported

that three-year degrees from Bologna countries were “not an issue” rose from 41 percent to 56 percent. According to the Council of Graduate Studies, “About 80 percent of the 25 institutions with the largest international

student enrollment, and 70 percent of the largest 50, participated in the survey” (2006 CGS International Graduate Admissions Survey Phase III: Admissions and Enrollment). This also indicates an improvement in the general understanding and acceptance of Bologna; higher education institutions have either developed a policy regarding Bologna or have learned enough about

International Graduate Applications

India	56,397
China	47,617
Bologna Countries	36,746

SOURCE: OPEN DOORS 2006

it to be comfortable with watching it develop and dealing with it as necessary.

A part of that is debunking the notion that there is a universal “Bologna degree.” There are Bologna-compliant degrees, and they are as varied and diverse as the higher education systems throughout Europe. There are, and will be, instances when a U.S. higher education institution does not accept a Bologna degree, but only because a policy has yet to be established for handling those degrees, just as it is true that some Bologna countries still do not accept other Bologna countries’ degrees since not all countries are at the same level of implementation or program quality.

It is, according to Fiona Hunter, international director, Universitario Carlo Cattaneo LIUC, mostly due to the “newness of these degrees and that both the labor market and other academic institutions in Europe still need to become more familiar with them.” However, it is only a matter of time before they do; compliance and full implementation is on the horizon. What matters, according to European higher education institutions, is that acceptance of a three-year bachelor’s degree from a Bologna country should not be based on the number of years but rather on the content of the degree, the level of performance and preparation of the applicant student including secondary school coursework.

Impact on Mobility

The majority of incoming international students in Europe are from other European countries while the majority of outgoing European students to non-European countries are going to the United States. It is unknown if that pattern will change with Bologna, but it is expected that there will be an increasing number of European students in U.S. master’s degree programs. However, despite the goals of improving the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), it is unknown if Europe will attract a larger percentage of U.S. students, though it is possible that more non-Europeans will enter Europe instead of the United States.

Bachelor’s Degree Comparison

U.S./Canadian and Bologna Degree Criteria

U.S./CANADIAN

- requires a minimum of 120 semester credits
- drawn from three areas of study: general education, the major, and electives
- typically completed in four years

BOLOGNA

- requires 180 to 240 ECTS credits
- more heavily concentrated in the major (specialization) than general education
- typically completed in three years to four years

Equity, Competition, and Liability

But while acceptance has improved, other issues affecting U.S. higher education institutions remain at the policy level, specifically in regards to fairness, competition, and liability. For instance, is it fair to admit a three-year undergraduate Bologna student to a U.S. program when U.S. undergrads are required to fulfill a four-year degree? Is it fair to accept a three-year degree from a Bologna program and not to accept a three-year degree from a non-Bologna country such as India? Will the best and brightest international students be swept up by other institutions that have already established a policy for efficiently evaluating Bologna program students? Who will be responsible for such policy decisions on a campus?

Ultimately, it will be up to each institution to create its own policies for dealing with these and other issues as they arise. The decisions should be based on what is in the best interest of each college or university, based on its unique missions and goals. For some, making rapid change may be in the best interest of continuing transatlantic exchanges and dual- and joint-degree programs. For others, such a change may come down to helping the higher education institutions maintain efforts to internationalize the campus, or to best position a university for “competing” for the best and the brightest minds.

As a component of this reengineering process, U.S. institutions will likely find it useful to examine more closely what are their true criteria for admissions, and what do their degrees really require for entry. “In the past, all too frequently, the determinations for overseas degree comparability took place in the International Admissions Office, largely in isolation from the rest of the key stakeholders,” explains NAFSA Bologna Task Force member Robert Watkins, who is also assistant director of admissions, graduate and international admissions, at the University of Texas-Austin. “This was a factor more of the lack of understanding or interest by those other stakeholders in the comparative educational review process.

Two factors, the rapid strides made in Bologna Process implementation and the precipitous drop in overseas graduate applications to U.S. higher education institutions in light of the events of September 11, 2001, have largely contributed to the sudden awareness on the part of senior academic officers on many campuses. This awareness has resulted in much of the impetus to examine how policy is promulgated on individual campuses.” As institutions have made such examinations, it is often revealed that three-year degrees have been accepted in the past. With precedent established, institutions have found it easier to put the three-year degree in perspective and promulgate policies that resolve the equity issue specifically.

Strategies in Dealing with the Bologna Process

By Jeannine E. Bell and Robert A. Watkins

As 2010 begins to draw ever nearer, European and U.S. educators find themselves united in their concern about a single topic: the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Educators on both sides of the Atlantic are concerned about the coming changes as the European Higher Education Area is implemented, but their concerns are coming from differing perspectives. Europeans, naturally, are caught up in attempting to make the agreement work in their individual countries while international educators in the United States frantically ask themselves and others around them, “What are we going to do about Bologna?”

Adapting to the Changes

What is really meant by this question, of course, is “What is *my* institution going to do with the changes in European education wrought by Bologna?” The question ultimately on the minds of the concerned educators over here essentially boils down to one: “How are we going to handle the three-year degree problem?” Will U.S. institutions of higher education craft their policies to address only the new European Bologna degrees, or will this issue lead to a more global assessment of three-year degrees around the world?

First, we should examine the basic components of the process and how those may effect U.S. colleges and universities. We will then focus on the aspects most likely to present challenges to current practices, and finally, investigate ways to address those aspects and strategies that might be employed to address the challenges emerging from the Bologna Process.

A brief recapitulation of the elements agreed to by the original 29 signatory countries (now grown to 46) is in order. In 1999, in Bologna, Italy, the signatory countries of Europe agreed to four basic items designed to enhance student mobility across the European educational landscape:

1. The introduction of a new three-cycle degree structure that would replace the traditional degrees extant in the various countries. These would consist of a first university degree which would then lead to the second, higher degree. The first had to be *at least* three

years in length (notice that it was *not* mandated that the first degree actually *be* three years long) and the subsequent degree would not only enhance the skills learned in the first degree but also prepare the student for the third cycle which would represent the capstone degree of the system and a high level of mastery of the subject field.

2. A system of credits would be adopted to demonstrate progress toward the new degrees and add definition to the courses in terms of weight and value of the individual courses comprising the degrees. The pre-existing ECTS or European Credit Transfer System was the credit system adopted.

3. A uniform and consistent method of rendering the degrees and credits was formulated and dubbed the Diploma Supplement. In its idealized form, the Diploma Supplement was to contain not only the degree and credit information but also a description of the country’s educational system, in English and the national language.

4. Finally, a system of quality assurance or accreditation was to be introduced that would be at the institutional, national, and European level.

The new system would be fully implemented by 2010, though some elements were to be in place at the mid-point (in 2005). The signatory countries would

then meet every two years after that inaugural meeting in 1999 to assess progress and further articulate the elements upon which the group had agreed.

Because the approach to full implementation varies widely among the signatory countries, and the list of sending countries among the applicant pools of U.S. colleges and universities does not generally include Bologna signatory nations among the top ten, even now (mid-year 2006), over half way to full implementation, international admissions officers have not been inundated with the documentary fall-out from Bologna. Indeed, the trickle has been low enough that higher education institutions in the United States have been able to spend some time attempting to research, assess, consult, and discuss at length the challenges to U.S. college admission resulting from the Bologna process.

Fortunately, some of the features of the EHEA changes do not create difficulties at all. The introduction of the Diploma Supplement is widely seen in the United States as a welcome development. Given the wide disparity of documents associated with European universities (from the German Seminarschein to the French Relevé de Notes) a uniform system of rendering courses taken and grades received is of inestimable value to U.S. international admissions officers and credentials evaluators. The systematic use by numerous countries of a single credit system, the European Credit Transfer System also promises greater ease of evaluation, award of transfer credit at the undergraduate level, and calculation of grade point averages that reflect the true weight of an individual course. Now, the credentials analyst must transpose the ECTS credits to U.S. semester or quarter credits but this exercise is much easier when the annual or semester credit amount is a clearly understood figure. As for accreditation, this aspect is so far in the very early stages and the effect has not yet been felt across the Atlantic as has been the case with the Diploma Supplement, ECTS credits, or the new degrees.

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Impact on U.S. Competitiveness

How will the EHEA impact the ability of U.S. institutions to recruit top students worldwide?

A MAJOR GOAL of the Bologna Process is to enhance the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as a destination, as well as enhance the employability of EHEA graduates. Given that two-pronged goal, what does that mean for U.S. higher education institutions' ability to recruit and attract students and, in turn, their graduates' ability to succeed in the labor market? Fear of this competition began in the 1990s and was made all too real in the wake of first the East Asian Economic Crisis and then September 11, 2001, made certain destinations abroad appear more attractive for financial, cultural, and political reasons.

Now, the specter of more students from India and China, in particular, choosing European or Australian systems due to their three-year programs looms large. Even larger, of course, is the concern that China will adopt a Bologna-like program, leading to worldwide higher education mobility based on that system. In the immediate term, this has implications for changes in student flows among countries, but in the longer term it also has implications for global workforce development.

Student Flows

Student flows are sure to be impacted as admissions criteria are changed or not changed, and as Bologna-educated exchange and degree-track applicants look toward which programs best fit their needs. As reported by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 82 percent of some 900 European universities had implemented Bologna compliant degrees, and even though current mobility amongst programs lags behind expectations, it seems only a

matter of time before European students begin crossing borders to enhance their education (“Bologna Conference Highlights Progress and Limits of Europe’s New Degree Cycles,” Volume 53, Issue 39, Page A36).

Currently, most of the incoming mobility in European countries is from other European countries; most of the outgoing mobility from Europe to non-European countries is directed to the United States. With Bologna, in the long run, there may well be increasing numbers of European students in U.S. master’s degree programs but it is unlikely that Europe will attract more U.S. students at that level. At the same time, Bologna will make European higher education more attractive world wide with an expectation that there will be more students from other parts of the worlds coming to Europe for undergraduate or graduate studies.

The Diminishing Lead

Many U.S. institutions receive thousands of graduate applications, and rightly have developed systems of admissions evaluation to handle those applications. To better handle and digest such a load of applications, many institutions use a quantitative methodology for admissions. But it is because of those sophisticated systems, built over the years while the country enjoyed its leadership position, that the United States is victim to the “theory of the retarding lead.”

While Europe, India, and China can develop new systems, such as Bologna outcome-based indicators, U.S. education cannot react quickly enough. When the world starts to change, it is difficult for the leaders in a specific “technology” to adapt and adopt new approaches while others forge ahead quickly, unencumbered by exist-

ing approaches—hence the retarding lead.

To treat admissions more holistically, to evaluate student applications less on numeric criteria and more on qualitative criteria, is the new “technology,” but the practical reality of the job, of the scope and flow, makes it difficult to find new paradigms. “U.S. admissions officers are being challenged,” says Patricia Parker, NAFSA Bologna Task Force member and assistant director admissions, Iowa State University Admissions, “to more thoroughly understand their own degree programs so that they may more clearly discern the comparability of Bologna-compliant degrees.”

Employability

If, as suggested, the Bologna format becomes the standard throughout much of the world, how will non-Bologna and Bologna students fare when competing for jobs? And, in turn, how does it reflect on the non-Bologna and Bologna institutions if and when their graduates find it more difficult to compete?

These questions have implications especially for student exchanges at the undergraduate level. It is reasonable to assume that, insofar as U.S. students are concerned, Bologna should not affect their ability to study abroad to be better prepared for a globalized twenty-first century workforce. The more likely issue is how it may affect undergraduate European students’ ability to study in the United States. Regardless, the laws of economics are likely to prevail: in times of high employment rates, undergraduate students will continue to be lured into the labor market rather than pursuing graduate-level degrees, as they are more prone to do when the employment rates are low.

Implications for the U.S. Curriculum

Bologna is not yet a significant factor for U.S. curriculum on a wide scale, but many U.S. institutions are discussing changes to their curriculum as a result of globalization and other internal factors.

CURRICULUM has many meanings—the actual content of a degree, general education requirements, and the content of specific courses. Bologna is addressing curriculum in Europe with the “outcomes” emphasis, which imparts accountability on the curriculum to allow students to achieve specific outcomes, or proof, of what they have learned. And while there is an increasing emphasis on outcomes in the United States, it is a relatively new discussion among higher education institutions.

“There is a growing interest to learn more about Bologna among international administrators, graduate deans, and admissions officers; however, the primary concerns are still technical issues related to degree structures, acceptance of three-year undergraduate degrees for graduate admissions, and impact on student exchanges. Curriculum discussions beyond what the Diploma Supplement represents are infrequent and certainly few in the United States are discussing how Bologna might impact U.S. curricula,” said Diana Bartelli Carlin, is former dean of the graduate school and international programs at the University of Kansas.

Areas Affected

Where there is some curriculum discussion on the topic of joint/dual degrees and research at the graduate level, and to a lesser extent at the undergraduate level because of programs such as Atlantis*, which can include joint/dual undergraduate degrees. Rather than curriculum changes, discussions on campuses are generally focusing on how to make square pegs (Bologna-compliant degrees) fit into round holes (U.S. degree structure) and be fair to

domestic students who, on the surface, have a longer perceived commitment to the bachelor degree track than their Bologna counterparts.

The one exception is the graduate school where, at both the university level and in national discussions convened by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), academic leaders are thinking deeply about the relationship between the structure of graduate programs and the competitiveness of the graduate enterprise.

Debra Stewart, president of CGS notes, “Our deans are increasingly concerned with developing procedures and standards that yield sustainable international joint degree programs. Discussions range from how to ensure program quality and evaluation to strategies for stabilizing funding and sustaining the partnerships. I am confident that interest in this aspect of graduate program development is on the rise.”

Factors for Change

While Bologna is not yet impacting U.S. curriculum on a wide scale, many U.S. colleges and universities are discussing changes to their curriculum as a result of globalization and other internal factors. The discussions about reforming curriculum have also been ignited by U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, who created the Commission on the Future of Higher Education in September 2005. The commission has raised issues about accountability in undergraduate education, and has also recommended increased federal investment in areas, such as education abroad, critical to the nation’s global competitiveness, and “a renewed commitment to attract the best and brightest minds from across the nation and around the world to lead the next

wave of American innovation” (Spellings Commission Final Report, 2006).

A limiting factor is that, in some ways, the U.S. higher education sector is still content after many years of being considered “the gold standard.” And it is because of that position that campuses need to be educated about Bologna and its worldwide ramifications. If there is an impact on curriculum, it may be that once Bologna is more widely known and understood, U.S. institutions will be able to see what lessons can be learned from curriculum reform in Europe and how that may fit with similar efforts in the United States.

“The international higher education landscape is undergoing substantive transformation as a host of nations are striving to find new and creative ways of meeting the needs and demands of today’s globalized knowledge economy,” observes Christopher Viers, associate dean for international programs and director of the Office of International Services at Indiana University–Bloomington. Viers, a member of the NAFSA Bologna Task Force, sees that trend inevitably affecting curriculum. “The Bologna Process represents transformation of monumental proportion, and may indeed play a key role in influencing future directions not only in the United States but around the globe in terms of the worldwide mobility of students and scholars. As learning and scholarship becomes increasingly borderless, so too will the curriculum.”

**The European Union-United States Atlantis Program is a grant competition conducted cooperatively by the U.S. Department of Education’s Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) and the European Commission’s Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC). The purpose of this competition is to promote a student-centered, transatlantic dimension to higher education and training in a wide range of academic and professional disciplines.*

Just for Credential Evaluators: Dealing with the New Credentials

By Jeannine E. Bell and Robert A. Watkins

IT IS THE NEW DEGREE STRUCTURE that poses the most challenge to U.S. international admissions and credential evaluators. Undoubtedly, the concept of a clear two-tiered (later, when doctoral degrees are more fully integrated, three-tiered) degree structure with one degree leading to another, higher degree predicated on an accumulation of credits and clearly displayed on a standard document should make the U.S. Admissions professional stand up and cheer. The problem, however, is that the majority of the Bologna signatory countries adopted the two cycle model of a three-year first degree followed by a two-year second or higher degree. While the agreement did not specify a name for the proposed new degrees, most of the signatory countries have opted for the terms ‘bachelor’ and ‘master’ to describe the Bologna degrees.

And what, the Europeans ask, is the problem with such a model? The problem is that the vast majority (though certainly by no means all!) of U.S. admissions officers and credentials analysts learned “the trade” using the quantitative model of educational system comparison (pejoratively referred to as “counting years”). Most major university graduate schools (or the admissions offices that support them) require an overseas degree to be four years in duration before that degree-holder is allowed to be admitted to graduate study. The three-year first degree is acceptable *only* when it is preceded by a 13-year primary/secondary system of education (the British model being the most clear cut example of this). When the prior system is 12 years, as it is here in the United States, then a three-year degree from abroad (license from France, or the three-year bachelor’s from India) is not considered sufficiently comparable.

Of course, the quantitative approach fails to provide the opportunity to examine more broadly the questions of individual readiness to do graduate work or the ancillary question of what is missing from the three-year degree that makes it insufficient. General education is done at upper secondary level in European style systems and the concept of electives or additional breadth of course requirements (humanities courses for engineers and computer scientists or math/science for the history and government majors) is not embraced. Instead, the subject-specific three-year degree is steeped in major courses to an extent simply not allowed in U.S. baccalaureate programs but that leads the holder to be exceedingly qualified to study *that* subject in graduate school.

Because of Bologna, these sorts of issues are finally beginning to be addressed by international credential evaluation professionals. More importantly, the issues are being examined by those outside the small field of international credentials analysts. Due to the significant drop in international applications to U.S. schools since 2002, graduate deans, and most particularly graduate business deans, have entered into the discussion of what constitutes sufficient academic preparation for graduate study. Thus, economics intrudes where heretofore academic content, peer institution practice comparisons, and professional practitioner dialogues formally held sway. This economic intrusion may vary widely as well from school to school within the United States, as the percentage of students coming from the EHEA can range from 10 to 40 percent of the institution’s international student population (M. Schatzman, *IIE Networker*, spring 2005, p. 27).

In some instances, institutions simply have made the easy “all or nothing” decision. Those institutions that have always required a four-year bachelor’s degree preceded by 12 years (or even less) of primary/secondary study may well continue that policy regardless of what other institutions might do. These are often public, especially large public institutions. Private institutions, where numbers and recruitment are frequent topics of strategic planning, may prefer to embrace the three-year degrees. Some may choose to alter policy only for Bologna signatory countries, while many more appear ready to widen the Bologna issue to address acceptance of three-year degrees from all over the world.

Practical Suggestions

Several of the schools had some eminently practical approaches to how to accept the new degrees. For those schools that did not commonly accept three-year degrees, some current solutions to processing them were:

- Use appeal processes that were already in place for graduate admission. This could include provisional admission or dean's review;
- Use the experience of existing relationships, such as exchange programs. Schools could consider tracking the record of known programs that currently accept three-year degrees for the exchange program, and extend this acceptance to three-year bachelor's degrees created through the Bologna process;
- Analyze the curriculum of the new programs and make a determination based on this;

- Accept for admission to departments that are in the same field (e.g., history to history, French to French, physics to physics, etc.);

Accept three-year bachelor degrees as adequate preparation for some master's degrees, but not directly into an academic Ph.D. program;

- Require some prerequisites; and
- Have each department decide individually about whether or not to accept the shorter degrees.

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Just for Admissions Professionals

By Patricia Parker

IN SOME WAYS, evaluating Bologna-compliant degree programs is nothing new to those of us in credential evaluation. It's the same job we've always done: we learn all we can about the educational system of a specific country, we understand how the degree program fits in the context of that country's system, and we evaluate whether the program provides adequate preparation for our graduate programs.

Of course, that job is a bit more challenging in this case because the Bologna process is still very much a moving target. Revamping educational structures is a huge process, must involve many players, and the signatory countries are in various stages of that process. Therefore, it's important to understand that what we see today may not be what we'll see tomorrow. Our biggest challenge right now is to "ride the bull," as they say, and just try to stay on top of it all.

Great change, however, provides great opportunities. The scope of this restructuring presents admissions officers with the opportunity to collaborate closely with our institutional faculty and administrators as we begin our assessment of Bologna-compliant degrees. We must involve our faculty in the assessment of the curricula, and our administrators and admissions committees need to

be educated on credential evaluation methodology in order to reach valid decisions for our institutions.

Unfortunately, there is no one "Bologna degree" that we can hold up to our campus colleagues and say, "This! THIS is what we need to assess!" It just doesn't exist—and it won't exist in 2010 either. Each signatory country has its own historical educational structure, pedagogical standards, and societal needs that must be considered while making the changes necessary to meet the Bologna agreement. Therefore, we need to make our informational needs known to our overseas partners so that they can assist us in getting quality information that will help our institutions make good decisions.

PATRICIA J. PARKER is assistant director of admissions at Iowa State University.

Just for Education Abroad Professionals

By David Larsen

ACCURATE, OBJECTIVE, CONSISTENT AND TRANSPARENT TRANSFER of academic credit from one system of higher education to another is a fundamental responsibility and an ongoing concern of all education abroad professionals. It is the assurance that credits earned elsewhere can be brought back to the home institution where they will count in some effective way toward degree completion requirements that convinces students to devote a year or a semester to study in an overseas university and their parents to pay for it. Confidence that meaningful overseas credits exist, that they're earned (rather than being awarded, like lollipops at the barber shop, merely for participation) and that the learning, or the effort, that has gone into acquiring them can be documented and understood and respected by home country faculty has been an elusive commodity for generations—even since education abroad developed beyond an exercise intended primarily for language learners whose increased knowledge was easily evaluated back on the home campus.

Examination of the Bologna Process informs us that other countries also wrestle with these same concerns. Throughout the past decade Europeans have identified key issues—almost all of which are the very same ones that worry us (syllabus content, time in class, classroom activities, independent learning, outcomes assessment) and have successfully resolved many of them. They believe that this long, complex and slow-moving process has been worth the effort because of what it is producing—a highly mobile undergraduate population throughout Europe—western and eastern.

Enormous changes have begun. Academic calendars are changing throughout the participating countries. Under the European Credit Transfer Scheme documents record “credits” in a common European academic currency which, much like the Euro, will facilitate degree awarding on the basis of credit accumulation in a variety of places using a variety of modes. This sounds very American.

But it isn't! It's very European, and it's very deliberately developing before our eyes. The most popular destination for U.S. students going abroad, England (unlike Scotland and Wales), has not yet

climbed fully on board, but pressure to do so is there and there's movement in that direction. Six of the top ten education abroad destination countries for U.S. students (according to *Open Doors 2006*) are European. With Australia and China looking closely at the Bologna Process (and thinking about joining it themselves), that makes eight of the ten.

Whether your focus is on international student exchanges, on direct enrollment of your institution's students, or on the use of outside program providers, these developments are of enormous importance for every U.S. student who enrolls in a Bologna Process institution.

Education abroad professionals in North America need to know what's going on! You can find out from the international admissions colleagues on your campus as well as from some of the organizations (NAFSA, AACRAO, AAIE, EIEA, The Forum, and others) where ongoing monitoring and participation in transatlantic dialogs take place and reliable, current information is available.

DAVID LARSEN is vice president of *Arcadia University Center for Education Abroad*.

Just for Campus Deans and Administrators

By Diana Bartelli Carlin

WHILE THE BOLOGNA PROCESS has been a topic of discussion among international educators and admissions officers for several years and more recently among graduate deans, Bologna is not a common topic for many other campus leaders who will be increasingly affected by the challenges and opportunities Bologna presents. Among the stakeholders to whom international educators need to reach out are research office administrators, academic deans, and directors of graduate studies. Graduate deans are aware of the three-year degree and admissions issues, but many deans may not have moved past those topics to consider the opportunities Bologna presents for joint research and dual or joint degrees; thus, they should not be overlooked in campus discussions on Bologna.

Research administrators need to be aware of the implications of Bologna when faculty apply for grants such as FIPSE/Atlantis or PIRE (Partnerships for International Research and Education) that require joint or dual degrees or collaborative research that could include credit transfers. Before applying for such grants, faculty need to have conversations about exchange agreements and policies within academic units regarding acceptance of three-year degrees. Some grant programs incorporate undergraduate joint degrees. The issues related to granting joint degrees that require three years of work for one partner and four for the other entail a different type of conversation than graduate deans have when considering acceptance of a Bologna three-year degree for graduate study. Working out the details after a faculty member receives a grant can create complications that may prevent delivering what was promised when the grant application was made. International educators can provide a great service to a university's research enterprise by alerting the research office to issues faculty need to consider and steps they

need to take on campus before applying for grants.

Academic deans are very important stakeholders because they can provide the leadership for faculty, admissions officials, study abroad, and international offices in charge of exchanges to develop policy regarding Bologna degrees and acceptance of transfer credits for domestic students studying in Europe.

At some point a wide range of stakeholders need to be involved in campus-wide discussions to develop workable and consistent policies regarding admissions, joint degrees, and transfer credits. Since international educators transcend undergraduate and graduate as well as academic unit lines, they can provide a valuable role in convening administrative stakeholders for informational meetings that lay the groundwork for policymaking.

DIANA BARTELLI CARLIN *is former dean of the graduate school and international programs at the University of Kansas.*

Opportunities and Challenges

Bologna offers much for both sides of the Atlantic, but it also means adjusting to a new set of hurdles.

THERE ARE MANY COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES in the U.S. and European higher education systems as they relate to international cooperation in a global context. It is because of those commonalities and differences that there will be many opportunities and challenges for colleges and universities as Bologna alters academia. Bologna gives institutions an opportunity to expand professional organizations across the Atlantic. No longer is it just academia and researchers who may need to share ideas, but by bringing the educational systems more closely in line with each other, the challenges of accomplishments in the fields of student services, enrollment management, and institutional research can expand through global partnerships.

Commonalities and Differences

One of most significant commonalities is that both systems recognize education as a global commodity, and both systems need to attract increasing number of students, particularly in the fields of science and engineering. Not only are higher education institutions offering “products” that are consumed by students, they are, on the other hand, consumers themselves competing for the best and brightest of students from around the world. Colleges and universities compete for these students against other higher education institutions in their own country, and now they must seek to retain them from foreign institutions.

Historically, U.S. higher education institutions have operated in a highly competitive environment and believe that healthy competition at the institutional level, rather than through central, national planning, leads to the best quality for institutions and for students. Education, then, at its very basic nature is shaped, in part, by the demands of consumers. Another force, massification, has also brought about significant changes and variation in U.S. higher education. “Whereas most other countries have reserved higher education for only its most elite students, the United States has, since the conclusion of World War II, expanded its system of higher education to include a larger proportion of its population,” notes Chris

Foley, director of admissions at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.

In contrast, higher education institutions in most of Europe have not faced a competitive marketplace for students until the late twentieth century. Centralization was more common in the majority of funding for higher education, and privatization did not generally exist. However, along with Bologna, the EHEA has expanded both the number of institutions as well as the number of students enrolled in them. This has led to greater competition among institutions, and the need to recruit more students from abroad. “The universities in Europe will have to adjust to an ever-increasing global education market, with tremendous changes lying ahead of them—a transformation from mass universities into institutions with diverse education goals and strategies, competition for the best in the sciences and technology, the need to operate autonomous and flexible, and the quest for quality and attractiveness,” explains Rolf Hoffman, executive director for the German-American Fulbright Commission. “The Bologna Process has been the main driver for this change. Without it, Europe’s higher education would not be able to position itself successfully in the years to come.”

This has introduced a new facet in the relationship between U.S. and European higher education institutions: the need for both collaboration as well

as competition. While both systems are essentially competing for the same students, there is also a widespread desire on the two sides to work cooperatively and support mobility schemes and joint and double degrees. Education and innovation are best achieved in a collaborative environment.

Governance

The roles of U.S. and European governments reveal distinct differences between the two systems. In the United States, governance of higher education is in the hands of each college or university, which allows for autonomy. There is no federal or central government overseeing or coordinating the system. Individual institutions establish policy and management structures, although public institutions experience more regulation at the state level. U.S. higher education institutions act on their own and not under national or state banners. However, professional schools' accreditation processes provide a type of standard that ensures program quality. While accreditation is not mandatory, most universities participate. The Higher Learning Commission's regional accreditation process produces self-studies guided by broad standards for quality assurance that allow for tremendous flexibility among institutions.

In contrast, in Europe, the governments can mandate changes and policies in higher education. Bologna, however, has as part of its mission, the establishment of accreditation or quality control bodies similar to those in the United States. For example, Germany has already begun a complex means of accrediting its higher education institutions. This may significantly alter the nature of oversight of higher education in Europe.

Access and Mobility

In the United States, access to higher education is often seen as a right rather than a privilege for people; provision for equal opportunity is pursued and social mobility is encouraged. With 70 percent of the adult U.S. population [according to the National Center for Education Statistics], having some higher education experience, access to and support for higher education is seen as a public good. While tuition and fees are levied at almost all institutions and can be quite steep at some, a large number of undergraduates receive

some assistance from the federal government, based on family income. In addition, many students receive need or merit-based awards from higher education institutions on the basis of their preparedness and performance. A developing commonality in the two systems is that, with the advent of Bologna, they both have tools and structures to promote transparency and mobility via a comparable degree structure and system of credit accumulation.

Myths

On both sides of the Atlantic, some myths about the system on the opposite shore have become prevalent. For instance, there is a myth from the U.S. side that there is just one undergraduate “Bologna degree” and that it is a three-year degree. The truth is that there are numerous degree structures, some of which are three-year bachelor's with two-year master's, while others are, but are not limited to, four-year bachelor's and one-year master's. These vary by country and sometimes within countries (Germany).

On the European side, the same can be said for U.S. degrees. While there is a predominant type of degree structure, not all U.S. bachelor's degrees are four-year degrees. The U.S. bachelor's degree is designed to be completed over a four-year period. However, it is technically possible to do the degree in as little as two and a half years, as many students are able to accelerate the completion of their degree through the use of AP exams in high school or by taking courses at two-year higher education institutions either during or after secondary school. Moreover, there is also a view from Europe that all U.S. institutions pretty much operate the same way. The truth is that U.S. institutions may *appear* to operate in similar fashion because transparency tools—common grading system for most institutions and a comparable degree system—fosters compatibility among institutions. In fact, each U.S. institution has unique programs, policies, and procedures.

Input or Output?

Another major difference in the two systems is that the Bologna Process has led to the adoption of ECTS compatible systems in nearly all participating countries, but the critical factor is achieving the *outcomes* defined by Bologna. ECTS is based on a different

concept than U.S. credit hours. In the United States, lecture/class contact hours, the *inputs*, are counted as the key item; the degree is an accumulation of inputs, enumerated in the transcript. (At U.S. higher education institutions, a full-time course of study is generally 30 semester credits per year, which amounts to 450–480 classroom hours, and 900–960 hours of outside preparation, for a total of 1,350–1,440 student work hours per year. Therefore, a semester credit stands for 45–48 total work hours per credit.) ECTS encompasses student effort outside the classroom as well.

According to the European Commission, “ECTS is based on the principle that 60 credits measure the workload of a full-time student during one academic year. The student workload of a full-time study program in Europe amounts in most cases to around 1,500–1,800 hours per year and in those cases one credit stands for around 25 to 30 working hours” (See http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/ects/doc/ectskey_en.pdf). At this point, the broadly accepted “exchange rate” for ECTS to credits is 2:1. “However, that is the picture only at the undergraduate level,” according to Robert Watkins, assistant director of admissions, graduate and international admissions at the University of Texas–Austin and a member of the NAFSA Bologna Task Force. “A more intriguing comparison,” he says, “takes place at the graduate level where suddenly the standard U.S. university load drops from 15 per semester (30 per year) to 9 per semester (18 for the year) and a standard U.S. master’s degree, traditionally referred to in the United States as a ‘two-year degree,’ turns out, in fact, to be a *one-year* degree (36 semester hours or so). The ECTS to U.S. ratio then becomes 4:1. So the real problem is in defining what constitutes a ‘year’ in credit terms when even the U.S. model fluctuates. Therefore, a simple ECTS to semester-hour ratio can be problematic given this lack of definition of a year of study.”

Different Roots, Converging Outcomes

The U.S. system is deeply rooted in the liberal arts tradition, which is in contrast to the specialist track of many European systems. U.S. undergraduate students spend a portion of their first year, and frequently their second year, in general education coursework, consolidating their knowledge in humanities and soft skills and advancing their critical thinking skills. Though this is not always true (programs in engineering, business, and the performing and visual arts may leave little room for non-major courses), it has been a historical foundation of U.S. higher education. However, it should be noted that the current trend in the United States is to find ways to strengthen the liberal arts component to better complement the content of the major, so that students are more focused on solid outputs (e.g., ability to get good jobs, gain entrance to professional graduate programs) than simply getting the traditional “well rounded” education.

On the other hand, it is commonly perceived that this is different from the European system where undergraduate students are fully immersed in specialist studies from day one of their undergraduate studies and even more so at the master level. Most European educational systems believe that general education components should be completed in secondary schools. While there are some programs in the EHEA that are incorporating liberal arts, or general education, into their curricula, Bologna programs largely remain focused on specialization that often prepares European students better for graduate education in three years than U.S. students are prepared in four.

Increasing Student Mobility

Bologna reform of degree structures and subsequent increases in transparency, readability, and rationalization of study programs is bound to bring more mobility within the European Union and between the European Union

and the United States. Roughly 2.5 million individuals pursue higher education outside of their home countries (UNESCO, Global Education Digest 2006) with an anticipated 8 million projected to do so by 2025. So it is not hard to understand why many members of the higher education community believe Bologna will promote vertical international mobility—mobility of students with an undergraduate degree obtained in a given country enrolling in a master course in a different country—as well as horizontal mobility—students moving from the same level of education between countries—via greater study abroad opportunities within a degree program.

That belief is further fortified by the success of the Erasmus program, which, much like Bologna, has incorporated tools of transparency to facilitate mobility. Erasmus, with its more than 1.5 million exchange students, has been undeniably the education success story of the European Union in the last 20 years with implications and benefits well beyond higher education. “Erasmus has shifted cultures as nothing else,” notes John Reilly, former director of the U.K. Socrates-Erasmus Council. The European Union has set the target of 3 million mobile students by 2013 and that target is within reach.

Lacking a Baseline

While that bodes well for the stated goal of enhancing EHEA student mobility through Bologna, unfortunately there is not enough data to measure any impact Bologna has had to date. This missing baseline component could be remedied in the future if Europe begins to collect comprehensive mobility data comparable to the annual *Open Doors* report published by the Institute for International Education (IIE). There is need for collecting and disseminating statistics on higher education mobility at all levels: intra-European Union, Europe to the rest of the world, horizontal Erasmus-like mobility, and vertical/degree mobility. The education ministers in Europe recommended in May

There is a myth from the U.S. side that there is just one undergraduate “Bologna degree” and that it is a three-year degree. The truth is that there are numerous degree structures, some of which are three-year bachelor’s with two-year master’s, while others are, but are not limited to, four-year bachelor’s and one-year master’s. These vary by country and sometimes within countries.

2007 that the European Commission begin devising a way to track and measure such data within Europe.

Helping or Hindering?

Recent statistics indicate that 27,000 degree-mobile U.S. students are studying in the European Union. To facilitate cross-border exchange and student mobility, integration, transparency, and greater regional cooperation are seen as key, all of which are facilitated by the Bologna Process.

However, there is some concern that Bologna may negatively affect horizontal mobility. Before Bologna, the average student spent between five and seven years getting a university degree. In addition, students were often fully funded by the government for all years of higher education. Students had plenty of time to participate in education abroad even without full recognition of the work. In the Bologna system, many degree-track students have to attend a packed three-year bachelor’s degree immediately followed, in most cases, by an equally packed two-year master’s, and as fees are instituted for many programs, there is a financial incentive to complete programs in a timely manner.

It is that tightening of the degree schedule that may make it more difficult for students to go for a semester abroad. This is being addressed by some higher education institutions by mindfully planning and integrating education abroad so that students receive full recognition of work and mobility does not delay time to graduation. Interestingly enough, the “lack of space” in a degree structure is a concern for U.S. colleges and universities in trying to send students abroad.

Joint and Dual Degrees

That concern is helping fuel a growing interest in joint/dual degrees providing for structured mobility within highly integrated joint study programs delivered by two or more higher education institutions in different countries. The market for transatlantic joint/dual degrees at the bachelor’s level is enormous. “Bologna should be viewed as an opportunity for cooperation rather than competition,” notes Diana Bartelli Carlin, former dean of the graduate school and international programs at the University of Kansas and chair of the NAFSA Bologna Task Force. “Atlantis/FIPSE is a good example of how both sides can benefit. The same is true with J-1 scholars to work in U.S. research labs or research programs for U.S. undergraduates in Europe.”

The Atlantis Program, which is jointly administered and funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) and the European Commission’s Directorate General for Education and Culture, facilitates the development of transatlantic dual degrees and encourages U.S. students to go to Europe for one year of study. Specifically, Atlantis supports projects that create organizational frameworks for transatlantic student mobility, including work placements and internships that provide language preparation and full academic credit. While in most cases, courses attended in Europe by U.S. students are conducted in English, a language component is often built into the education program for U.S. students, which gives U.S. students the opportunity to learn a European language and earn credits.

Limitations

There is the tendency in the United States to favor short-term mobility opportunities (e.g., summer school or short two- to four-week experiences). From a European perspective, that is the result of insufficient recognition of study abroad periods, as the short time period doesn’t fully allow the students to reap the benefits of study abroad: international skills, adaptability, understanding, cross-cultural awareness, self-confidence, and language skills. Hence there is a need to promote longer education abroad, ideally of at least one academic semester.

Another obstacle to study abroad for U.S. students is parents who might be afraid to send their children to European countries other than the traditional locations, such as the United Kingdom, Italy, France, and Spain. In addition, some parents do not like the idea of sending their students overseas for periods for which they must pay considerable fees to the U.S. higher education institutions in addition to normal tuition. (However, such a payment structure is not universal among U.S. institutions; many private ones actually charge less when a student is studying abroad.) This is further linked to a perceived risk that the study period abroad may not be fully recognized, with the consequence that the students upon their return to the United States would need to take extra courses and pay extra fees to obtain their U.S. degree.

Benefits for All

On both sides of the Atlantic, the Bologna process is changing higher education. While there are some challenges that both Europe and the United States will encounter due to Bologna forcing institutions to make accommodations, overall, it is a force for positive change. Indeed, the global century has arrived. Educators no longer work within their country’s borders to educate the future—now, working across borders, oceans, and cultures is fast becoming the gold standard.

The Crystal Ball

What will happen in the foreseeable future?

AS THE BOLOGNA PROCESS CONTINUES, there will be many changes to the postsecondary sector. But when will the process be done? There is a stated goal to complete implementation by 2010. The definition of “implementation” in the context of Bologna is that, in 2010, there will be no new students admitted to the old (pre-Bologna) programs. It does not mean that all programs will be Bologna-compliant in 2010. There will be, for many years after, students that are still fulfilling the requirements of pre-Bologna programs. Implementation will occur in different countries at different rates. It may, in fact, be a generation before all the currently agreed upon Bologna reforms are fully in place. While total compliance will take time, Bologna participants note that the curve of adoption is rising sharply, even exponentially, and a critical mass could soon be reached.



Europe's Focus

At the latest biannual meeting of the Bologna countries' education ministers, there was much discussion about what has transpired and what still needs to be done as the goal of implementation nears. The ministers established several priorities for the next two years as well as stressed the importance of the ongoing priorities of the three-cycle degree system, quality assurance, and recognition of degrees and study periods. When the ministers reconvene in 2009, stocktaking reports will shed more light on the progress of mobility, employability of graduates, the Bologna Process in a global context, and the social dimension—all of which will require improvements in data collection so that progress can actually be measured. The ministers, therefore, have requested that the European Commission “develop comparable and reliable indicators and data to measure progress towards the overall objective for the social dimension and student and staff mobility in all Bologna countries. Data in this field should cover participative equity in higher education as well as employability for graduates.”

Mobility and Employability

The two main goals of the EHEA—increasing mobility and the employability of graduates—cannot be realized until the EHEA is fully established. Naturally, it will likely be many years after implementation that enough data is gathered and evaluated to know to what degree mobility and employability have been improved.

The ministers noted during their London meeting that progress on increasing mobility has been made since 1999, but “many challenges remain.” With that in mind, Bologna countries will be taking further action on promoting the mobility of students and staff, including measures for future evaluation. Specifically, they will address issues relating to immigration, recognition, insufficient financial incentives, and inflexible

pension arrangements. While it is the domain of the governments to facilitate the delivery of visas and residence and work permits, the ministers will undertake to work within their governments for progress in that area. Implementing fully the recognition tools and procedures is also on the agenda, as are devising further incentives for mobility for both staff and students, such as encouraging a significant increase in the number of joint programs and the creation of flexible curricula. The ministers also agreed to establish a network of national experts to share information, and help to identify and overcome obstacles to the portability of grants and loans.

The Bologna ministers will also be seeking more detail on how to improve employability in relation to each of these three degree cycles, as well as in the context of lifelong learning. This will involve the responsibilities of all stakeholders, said the ministers:

“Governments and higher education institutions will need to communicate more with employers and other stakeholders on the rationale for their reforms. We will work, as appropriate, within our governments to ensure that employment and career structures within the public service are fully compatible with the new degree system. We urge institutions to further develop partnerships and cooperation with employers in the ongoing process of curriculum innovation based on learning outcomes” (London Communiqué).

What Can U.S. Campuses Expect?

At the most basic and highest levels, U.S. institutions will need to develop strategies for dealing with the outcomes-based degree structure of Bologna. Due to the autonomous nature of U.S. higher education, there will be no “one-size-fits-all” policy from the government or any of the higher education associations, nor will there be individual policies issued by those entities. It will come down to each in-

stitution creating its own policy. And those policies and decisions should be based on what is in the best interest of each institution, based on individual mission statements and goals. Variety, it seems, will still be commonplace, and it is likely that there will be as many shades of “bachelor’s” degrees in Europe as there are in the United States.

“Bologna is about complexity not conformity,” explains Diana Bartelli Carlin, former dean of the graduate school and international programs at the University of Kansas. “European higher education is not monolithic among and within signatory countries. The same is true of the U.S. system as a result of decentralized universities. Thus, it is impossible to establish a set of guidelines or policies to propose that all U.S. universities should use.”

For some higher education institutions, making policy changes may be in the best interest of continuing transatlantic exchanges and joint/dual-degree programs. For others, such change may come down to helping the institution maintain efforts to internationalize the campus, or to best position a university for “competing” for the best and the brightest minds. As a component of this reengineering process, colleges and universities will likely find it useful to examine more closely what are their true criteria for admissions, and what do their degrees really require for entry.

At the NAFSA-EAIE symposium on Bologna in Amsterdam in March 2007, this topic was examined, and what follows are the key areas that participants felt were critical for charting the next 18 months.

More Joint/Dual Degrees and Partnerships

For campus policymakers, the competitive aspect of Europe in a “Bologna-mode” may get the most attention, but the more important step is to realize which opportunities will most benefit the institution. Joint/dual degrees are expected to be where the best opportunities will arise. Those partnerships are easier than in the past due to the tools

of transparency and should be stimulated by Bologna as better information facilitates the creation of joint degrees. Further, campuses should showcase their success stories of joint/dual degree programs and other partnerships, which in turn, will provide guidance for how to pursue new partnerships and possibly stimulate additional ones.

Evaluating Programs

There will be more emphasis on evaluating Bologna-compliant programs, and establishing a system or procedure for handling such evaluations should be done earlier rather than later. While there are uncharted waters ahead, higher education institutions can provide context for their evaluations by reviewing and consulting their own mission statements, as well as that of the partner institutions when evaluating programs. U.S. colleges and universities should also look to their comparable European partner institutions to assist them in the evaluation of *other* European institutions as well, as the intra-Europe information base is being built, albeit slowly. When working with partner higher education institutions, the receiving institution should obtain curriculum outlines (programs of study) with ECTS credits from the partner institutions and have faculty review them.

Evaluating Students

Higher education institutions must be creative and seek to understand the new paradigms and affiliations. As a component of that, policymakers should not look at a transcript in only terms of years but rather at the student's overall preparation, including secondary education. (European education often introduces the general education in the final years of secondary education.)

"This is something that maybe we should have been doing all along," says Ted McKown, director of Kent State's international recruitment and admissions. "When European students reach the postsecondary level, they generally do have a better educational foundation than their U.S. counterparts.

NAFSA's Bologna Process Network

An excellent tool for keeping up-to-date on the current news about Bologna can be found on the NAFSA Web site. The "Special Focus Network: Bologna Process" includes dozens of practice resources and Bologna-related documents, a discussion forum, country-by-country implementation information, and much more. Visit <http://www.nafsa.org/bologna>.

Yes, that's a generalization; there are always exceptions. However, it is also true that the U.S. secondary system is providing varying levels of educational quality. Perhaps the Bologna Process standardizes European tertiary education to the point that we in the United States now have to re-think what is most important from student's viewpoint not what we think is best for the student."

Staying Up-to-Date

Keeping colleges and universities up to date on the Bologna process and what trends are emerging will also be critical. Graduate administrators and graduate faculty on the admissions committees need to be trained. Bologna workshops and seminars offered by professional associations are a source for this training.) Once a policy is formulated and implemented, postsecondary institutions must also re-examine the policy on a regular schedule—similar to what is done for mission statements—to make sure the policy is effective and relevant. As a part of that, sufficient data and information from primary sources must be tracked or otherwise obtained so that the institution can measure the policy's effectiveness.

Beyond Bologna

When 2010 comes, it will mark the final step in the Bologna Process as the new era of the EHEA is ushered in. But the collaboration of the European education ministers will

continue as the EHEA grapples with new challenges as a result of globalization. "We will take 2010 as an opportunity to reformulate the vision that motivated us in setting the Bologna Process in motion in 1999 and to make the case for an EHEA underpinned by values and visions that go beyond issues of structures and tools," so swore the ministers following the London meeting. "We undertake to make 2010 an opportunity to reset our higher education systems on a course that looks beyond the immediate issues and makes them fit to take up the challenges that will determine our future."

Normally, education initiatives are launched and finished within one city, state, region, or nation. Not this time. The Bologna Process offers an unprecedented opportunity: it has created a way for educators in Europe and in other countries to think strategically about working together in one mission: to prepare future generations to better interact with world. How often do institutions have the chance to really evaluate if they are admitting prospective students equitably, preparing graduates for the future and if they are, on the whole, accomplishing their missions?

The status quo tends to sneak up on even the most renowned institutions. Bologna provides educators a chance to look closely into their own institutions to reposition them for the first time within a global context and consider the future that graduates will face on a global scale. For international educators, this unique gift should not be wasted—both thought *and* action are required. Staying up-to-date on changes and adjusting campus procedures is crucial to achieving the promise of Bologna. The year 2010, although it is the final step in the Bologna process, is surely the beginning of an ongoing wave of improvements in higher education in the future as more and more students across the world will cross borders in pursuit of higher education, which will in turn, open even wider doors to greater inter-cultural collaboration and understanding.

www.nafsa.org/bologna

Special Focus Network: Bologna Process

As the Bologna Process moves forward, it will influence global mobility across the globe. This process does not aim to harmonize national education systems but rather to create a global network of institutions.

Category	Count
Faculty Members	40
Executive Deputies	1
Deans/Chairs	3
Administrators	10
Advanced Students	100

http://www.eaie.org/about/bologna_background.asp

EAIE publications

EAIE publishes a range of publications for EAIE members. To view the full text of an article, you need to be a member. To contribute an article, you need to be a member.

EAIE's focus

EAIE's focus is on the mobility of students and staff. EAIE's focus is on the mobility of students and staff.

<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/>

Bologna Process

Welcome to the Bologna Process Website

The website is divided into two main sections: Bologna Process and Bologna Process in the Netherlands.

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna_en.html

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS
Towards the European Higher Education Area

The Bologna Process is a process of reforming higher education in Europe. It aims to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010.

<http://www.eua.be/index.php?id=36>

http://www.eurydice.org/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/DB_Eurybase_Home

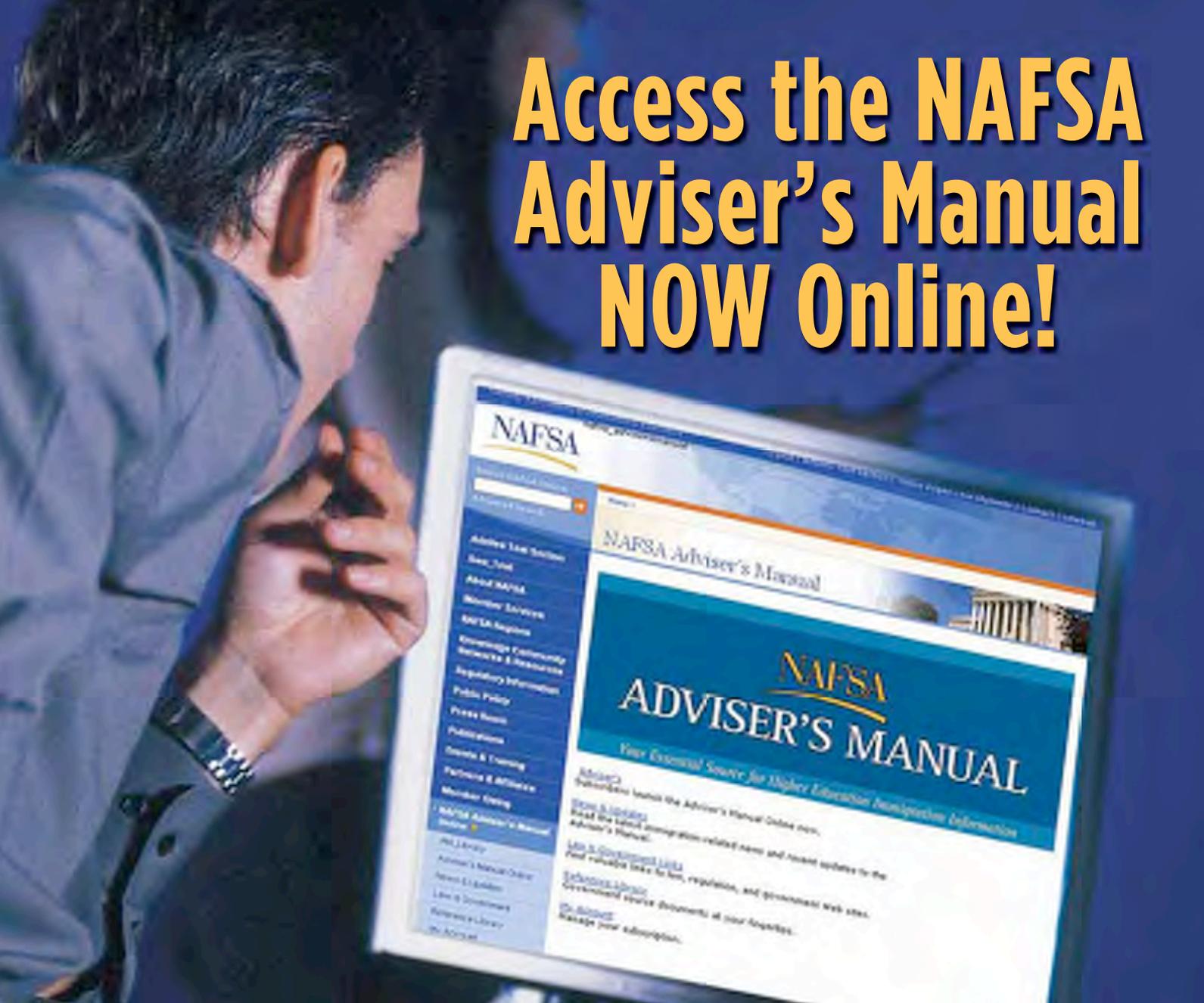
EURYDICE
The information journal on education in Europe

Country	Year	Value
Belgium	2008	1000
France	2008	1000
Germany	2008	1000
Italy	2008	1000
Spain	2008	1000
UK	2008	1000

Strong universities for Europe

The European University Association (EUA) is a leading international organization of universities and university associations. It is committed to the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

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