Building a Resource Library, Part I

Transcript Research

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One of the most interesting aspects of the field of credentials evaluations is that it is always evolving. One of the most difficult aspects of the field of credentials evaluations is the myth of The Big Book. So often, there is an expectation by newcomers and other stakeholders that professionals in our field are able to go look everything up in a single publication (or database). The reality is, however, that there is not a single source that evaluators can access to tell them everything – or even most things – they need in order to do the complex work of international credentials evaluation. International credentials evaluation is knowledge work, and as such, it is critical to have easy and immediate access to that knowledge. It is true that there are several wonderful online subscript databases that consolidate much of the information that was formerly in print publications (UK NARIC, Australia's Country Education Profiles, and AACRAO EDGE, among others). However, unless you work for an organization that requires you to use that resource exclusively, you will need more information.

In an attempt to alleviate the need to start from scratch, I have outlined a basic primer for building a resource library. This includes a number of different types of resources, print and electronic, for varying fees (free versus annual subscriptions of not-insignificant amounts of money). Once you begin the process of creating your own library, you will find it easy to add new information. Getting into the habit of saving new information in an organized fashion will save you hours of research time later.

Why should you build your own resource library? Simply, building a resource library helps you do your job more easily and quickly while also saving you time and energy. You know what information you have already and also have an easy way of adding to your collection of resources.

Before you begin building your library, you should establish some manner of organizing your information. If you have everything in drawers, folders, or binders but cannot access it, you might as well not even have that information. Even if you quickly scan your handouts after coming back from a conference or always save newsletter articles relevant to the field, if you cannot quickly find them when you need them, they serve no purpose.

One method of creating a resource library is to establish folders by country and topic. Take a few minutes and just make a separate folder for each country. Later in this article, I have listed some excellent resources that you can use to start populating your new country folders. Then, as you come across new things, it will take only a few clicks to save this new material, and it will only take that long to find it again. Conference handouts, sample credentials, newsletter and journal articles, message board responses, electronic publications, email responses, and other electronic media are terribly useful but only if you can find them when you need them.

Due to the sheer volume of information I have, my folders are digital and saved to computer so I can access them easily. If you don't want to lose your critical digital library, I recommend external, off-site backups. This can be an external hard-drive that gets swapped out with another one weekly and stored in an off-site location. This can mean saving everything to a remote file server or using an online backup service. You can also save everything to the cloud using a sync service like Dropbox, Google Drive, or Microsoft One Drive, which also offer file-sharing service. Some of the cloud services also allow you to search by text within a document, not just title, and that feature is also very helpful. My goal here is not to advise you on which service; there are already plenty of articles external to our

industry devoted to that topic which will allow you to compare prices and services. My intent is simply to ensure that you prioritize some sort of digital backup to protect your data from catastrophic loss.

Another important aspect of organization your information is identifying your print publications. While more and more publishers and organizations are releasing their information in a digital format, the print resources relevant to our industry from the last 30-40 years (and earlier) are still critical references. Most of us are not working exclusively with 18 year old applicants whose credentials and institutions exactly match the most contemporary information available online. It is a good idea to maintain a list (in your country folder or in another easily accessed location) of your print publications by country so that it is not necessary to remember which countries have accompanying print publications. In my office, we maintain a country-specific list of each publication, which includes not only country-specific publications, such as country profiles, but also regional and global resources. In that manner, we can easily see if a particular country is mentioned in one of the regional or international print publications without having to recall the information from memory.

Later in this article, I will list some of my favorite print and electronic publications. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list by any means but is a good primer for beginning or expanding your existing library. Others have also written on this subject for industry newsletters and journals. In addition, building a resource library has been a regular theme for conference presentations for many years. In fact, my own very first conference presentation was on building a resource library that lead to a handout of hundreds of pages. That later morphed into the now outdated, "Researching International Education Systems and Institutions." I am no longer able to update that 350+ page document but have just released the 2017 version of "Higher Education Authorities" which includes the website for the recognition authorities (Ministry of Higher Education, University Grants Commission, Commission on Higher Education, etc.) that have an internet presence.

At this point, I should mention that one of the most useful things in my own reference library is the recognized institutions lists. Each time I visit a Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) or other higher education authority's website, I save the information to my country folder. Governments change, educational authorities lose their funding or find themselves replaced, websites are redesigned, and the information that was on that website last time might not be there anymore. In addition, institutions themselves may close, merge, or lose their recognition. By having an annual list of what appears on the MOHE website, I can easily track those changes and still access that information even if the website goes down or undergoes a redesign. I simply save the page by using the Print feature in most browsers and choose "Print to PDF" instead of my printer. I do the same thing when I find information on the MOHE website about the education system, education statistics, education sector strategies, accredited programs, closed institutions, grading scales, lists of graduates, and anything else I think might be useful to me later. I do the same thing with the thousands of syllabi, degree plans, catalogs, and other program-specific information from higher education institutions I find.

When I started in the field, many Ministries were not yet online or had rather limited websites. As a result, in conference presentations, I often suggested non-governmental resources such as the *International Handbook of Universities*, the *World Higher Education Database*, and other global resources. While I still include those resources in my library, I access them rarely because I would rather go straight to the source for recognition information. I mean no disparagement to those comprehensive resources, and the WHED is actually in my list of free resources about educational systems. I have simply never taken the time to truly understand what it takes for an institution to be

listed in those resources. In addition, they often list only university institutions, and I frequently work with applicants from non-university higher education institutions. However, when working with older credentials or credentials from countries that have little to no online presence, you may need to look to alternative resources.

The majority of TAICEP members at this time are located at institutions in either the United States of America, Canada, or the European Union. Due to that, I will limit this paragraph to those audiences with no intent to disregard our other members. For evaluators in the USA, EducationUSA advisors are an excellent resource for researching institutions or credentials that fall outside your experience. Their goal is to help international students enroll at educational institutions in the USA, so they have a vested interest in helping you understand the credentials you have been tasked with evaluating. They offer other services to US educational institutions, so if they are new to you, I highly suggest you check them out online. In Canada, the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC) offers detailed information in the form of an evaluator tool kit for Canadian credentials evaluators. The Education Portal includes extensive information about education in the provinces and territories, ranging from qualifications frameworks to credit transfer and articulation. In Europe, the European Network of Information Centres and National Academic Recognition Centres (ENIC-NARIC) advising centers serve a similar purpose for a European audience. The ENIC-NARIC website provides much in the way of information about the educational systems, higher education authorities, and more for all participating countries. In addition, many European countries have a separate ENIC-NARIC website of their own which offers even more comprehensive information useful to the international credential evaluation specialist worldwide.

While it is important to have experts you can reach out to for help, it is also important to start amassing your own credentials database so that you can compare the documents you receive to others. Conference handouts, publications from EducationUSA or ENIC-NARIC advising centers, industry-specific publications and newsletters are all wonderful resources for building your sample library. Several Ministries of Education or examinations councils also provide samples of their credentials online. When you are able to get documents verified, be sure to save those samples and redact the personal information so it can become part of your sample library.

Along those lines, TAICEP offers an ever-growing database of verification resources for members. This database allows you to search by country for hundreds of websites, email addresses, addresses, or other contact information for exam boards, ministries, or higher education institutions. If you come across information that is not yet in the database, please send that information to Annetta Stroud at strouda@aacrao.org so that we can share the information with other TAICEP members.

In addition to everything else, another great tool for the international credential evaluator is the Internet Archive/Wayback Machine. If you're not familiar with it, https://archive.org/web/ is an online repository of stored web pages. That may sound only mildly interesting until you realize that you can search MOHE, university, and other websites related to your job. We use it almost daily in my office. Before I started saving every MOHE site to my desktop computer and cloud computing device, I would use the Internet Archive all the time, and I still use it to try to see if particular institutions were recognized before I started saving the information. The Internet Archive is also incredibly helpful when researching degree plans, admissions requirements, grading scales, standard duration and other institution-specific information related to the credentials you need to evaluate. According to their website, the Internet Archive has preserved 270+ billion webpages from more than 350 million

websites over the last 20 years. Using the Internet Archive is a breeze. You simply go their website, listed above, paste or type the URL for the site you want to search into their search box, and if any of its pages have been archived, you will see a timeline showing the years of historical information they have saved. Obviously not every website or nearly every webpage has been archived, and not every Ministry or university even had a website at the time you need to research, but it is a tremendously useful tool nonetheless. Be sure to save the information you find so you will have it next time, and give generously to the Internet Archive for the excellent service they provide.

To conclude this article, I would like to leave you with a small sampling of some of the resources you can use to begin building your resource library. These lists are not intended to prioritize one organization over another, nor are they even remotely complete lists. This article was intended to help people begin building their resource library so these are the basics. If you are familiar with other resources you think should be shared with TAICEP members, please send them my way at peggy@transcriptresearch.com, and I will add them to our next newsletter! Even better, if you are interested in writing a companion piece to this article for an upcoming edition of *TAICEP Talk*, I would love to hear from you. Please also be sure to check the Resources for Members section of the TAICEP website for more comprehensive lists of country-specific publications, resources, and verification information.

Country Profiles / Country Databases

NUFFIC Foreign Education Systems: https://www.epnuffic.nl/en/diploma-recognition/foreign-education-systems

NAFSA Online Guides to Educational Systems around the World: http://www.nafsa.org/Resource_Library_Assets/Publications_Library/Online_Guide_to_Educational_Systems_Around_the_World/

IQAS International Education Guides: https://www.alberta.ca/IQAS-education-guides.aspx

Euyrdice Descriptions of National Education Systems: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Countries

World Data on Education, Seventh Edition, 2010-2011: http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/document/world-data-education-seventh-edition-2010-11

Ananbin Database / Central Office for Foreign Education (in German): http://anabin.kmk.org/no_cache/filter/bildungswesen.html?tab=third&land=leer

NOKUT's *Landdatabase* Country Database (in Norwegian): http://www.nokut.no/no/Fakta/Databaser-og-oversikter/NOKUTs-landdatabase/

NUFFIC Overviews of Foreign Diplomas: https://www.epnuffic.nl/en/diploma-recognition/overviews-foreign-diplomas

UNESCO World TVET Database: http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/go.php?q=World+TVET+Database

World Higher Education Database: http://whed.net/results_systems.php

ENIC-NARIC: http://www.enic-naric.net/credential-evaluator.aspx

Organization of Ibero-American States: http://www.oei.es/historico/quipu/informes.htm

CIMEA Database of University Systems: http://www.cimea.it/it/servizi/pubblicazioni-e-banche-dati/banche-dati/banca-dati-dei-sistemi-universitari.aspx

Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science: http://ufm.dk/en/education-and-institutions/recognition-and-transparency/find-assessments/general-assessments-for-specific-countries?set_language=en&cl=en

Russian National Information Centre: http://nic.gov.ru/en/inworld/countries

International Education Publications

American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers: http://www4.aacrao.org/publications/catalog.php?category=1#.WJAkBhsrKUk

CIMEA Italian ENIC-NARIC: http://www.cimea.it/it/servizi/pubblicazioni-e-banche-dati/guide-e-pubblicazioni.aspx

Educational Credential Evaluators: http://publications.ece.org/

European Association for International Education: http://www.eaie.org/eaie-resources/library.html

European Commission TEMPUS Programme Publications: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/tools/publications_en.php

International Education Research Foundation: http://www.ierf.org/for-institutions/ierf-publications/

NAFSA: http://www.nafsa.org/Professional_Resources/Publications/

NARIC of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels: http://www.enseignement.be/index.php?page=0&navi=130

NORRIC Reports: http://norric.org/publications/publications

Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education: http://www.nokut.no/en/Facts-and-statistics/Publications/

South African Qualifications Authority: http://www.saqa.org.za/list.php?e=General%20Publications

Southern Africa Regional Universities Association: http://www.sarua.org/?q=sarua-publications