

ALA TASK FORCE ON FOREIGN CREDENTIALING
FINAL REPORT TO COUNCIL

Background

Evaluation of foreign educational credentials has undergone considerable change in the last 30 years and continues to evolve. Prior to the early 1970s the US Office of Education, Comparative Education Branch, provided evaluations of foreign credentials for any purpose - employment, academic admission or licensure. However, in the late 1970s, the General Accounting Office determined that providing evaluations of foreign credentials was not part of the mission of the Office of Education. When the federal government withdrew the evaluation service, a number of independent credentialing agencies appeared. As the number of agencies increased, several of the more established agencies formed the National Association of Credential Evaluators (NACES) in an attempt to encourage standards of good practice among the growing number of credentialing agencies. Of the 14 NACES members, three are not-for-profit: World Education Services, Inc., Educational Credential Evaluators, Inc. and International Education Research Foundation, Inc. The other organization is AACRAO that performs a wide variety of activities for its members of which evaluation of credentials is only one. AACRAO is one of the national policy groups for the review of foreign educational credentials, providing input into official educational negotiations. AACRAO does evaluations of foreign credentials for its members and publishes the materials that other evaluators use.

In 1970 following the ALA LED (Library Education Division) Institute at Wayne State University the Country Resource Panels were established for the evaluation of foreign credentials. They were first under the auspices of the ALA Library Education Division (LED) and then continued after 1978 by the Standing Committee on Library Education that changed its name to Committee on Education in 1995. Under this system, resource people knowledgeable about library and information studies programs in other countries gave an informal opinion as to whether the person's foreign credentials were equivalent to an ALA-accredited LIS degree. The Country Resource Panel ceased in 1996 on the advice of ALA Legal Counsel. At present ALA is referring librarians asking for an evaluation of their international degree in library and information science to two of the not-for profit agencies that evaluate international credentials.

The suspension of the Country Resource Panels led to the establishment of the Task Force on Foreign Credentialing who sought to find a better way to deal with the foreign credentialing issue than the present solution of referring librarians to two of the larger not-for-profit credentialing agencies that do charge a fee for their services. At the 1997 Annual Conference the ALA Council passed the following resolution:

"Therefore, the Committee on Education recommends that ALA Council empower the current Committee on Education Task Force which includes representatives from the Committee on Education, the Committee on Accreditation and the International Relations

Committee as a special Task Force with additional representatives from the ALA Executive Board, ALA Council and other interested committees or units to continue to work on the identification of issues related to foreign credentialing and the development of alternative proposals. The Task Force will report its progress to Council on a regular basis and will finish its work no later than June 1999."

The credentialing issue is a two way street. First of all, recognition for employment is sought from ALA by individuals immigrating to the United States and Canada, by U.S. and Canadian citizens returning home with an LIS degree obtained abroad and from their would-be employers. Second, librarians from the U.S. and Canada need recognition for certification within other countries. As a 501C(3) organization, ALA cannot evaluate individual credentials. A logical alternate route is to identify accredited or recognized graduate library and information science programs in other countries. For example, prior to 1996 ALA had had in place a reciprocity agreement with the United Kingdom and Australia under which we recognized degrees accredited by the official U.K. and Australian accreditation bodies, and Australia and the United Kingdom recognized the MLS from an ALA accredited program including NCATE as meeting the educational requirement for admission to their countries' register of professionally qualified librarians.

ACTION ITEM

The Task Force proposes the following amendment to ALA policy 54.2:

"The master's degree from a program accredited by the American Library Association [or from a master's level program in library and information studies accredited or recognized by the appropriate national body of another country] is the appropriate professional degree for librarians."

The Office of Human Resource Development and Recruitment has begun to collect information on programs accredited or recognized in other countries. In addition to this, the Task Force has presented to the IFLA Section on Education and Training a proposal to identify in each country the accrediting agency(ies) for library and information science programs and to identify the programs that have been accredited at the equivalent of a master's degree level. ALA will keep a register with this information so that potential employers could check this register when persons from other countries or U.S. and Canadian citizens returning home with LIS degrees obtained overseas apply for employment.

The Task Force further proposes that Office of Human Resource Development and Recruitment develop fact sheets both for employers and for librarians with degrees from countries other than the U.S. and Canada that will outline what ALA is doing and how they can proceed.

Submitted by Kay Ann Cassell, Chair, Task Force on Foreign Credentialing