

Standards of Quality for Master's Degree Level Programs in International
Education: Ensuring Quality & Effectiveness

ABSTRACT

Based on a thorough review of institutional websites, published materials and a national survey of readily identified master's level programs in global, international, intercultural, and comparative education, a set of standards and benchmarks are proposed by which such programs may be evaluated and ranked.

David Urias, Ph.D.
Drexel University
Assistant Professor

Darla Deardorff, Ph.D.
Duke University
AIEA Executive Director

John D. Heyl, Ph.D.
International Education Consultant

Date Submitted: July 26, 2007

To solve most of the major problems facing our country today—from wiping out terrorism to minimizing global environmental problems to eliminating the scourge of AIDS—will require every young person to learn more about other regions, cultures, and languages.

Former Secretary of State, Colin Powell, 2003¹

Believe it or not, we can't answer the most critical and basic questions about student performance and learning at colleges and that's unacceptable.

Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, 2006²

Everything depends on the quality of the experience which is had.

John Dewey³

BACKGROUND

At no time in U.S. history has the demand for higher education degrees by employers been greater than it is today. In many fields, an undergraduate degree is now considered a prerequisite, with advanced degrees preferred, for entry-level employment (Dessoiff, 2006⁴ and Spellings Commission⁵). This has resulted in a large increase in the number of students enrolling in master's degree programs across the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the number of students pursuing master's degrees is projected to increase by 9% over the next nine years; rising to over 550,000 by 2013. Moreover, with increasing travel, technology, and trade, the public believes international knowledge is important, students want to possess greater

¹ Colin L. Powell quoted in Asia Society, "Closing the K-12 International Knowledge Gap: Putting the World into World Class Education" (press release, Washington, DC, November 18, 2003).

² Press Release: Secretary Spellings Announces Plans for More Affordable, Accessible, Accountable and Consumer-Friendly U.S. Higher Education System. (2006, September). Available at: www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2006/09/09262006.html

³ Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York: Macmillan, p.27.

⁴ Dessoiff, Alan. (2006). A Key to Master's Degrees. *International Educator, Jan-Feb.*, p. 37.

⁵ Commission on the Future of Higher Education. (2006). Available at: <http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/factsheet.pdf>

international knowledge, and educators increasingly require that students gain internationally relevant skills.⁶

The public expects higher education to provide a high level of foreign language training and a curriculum that helps students gain an understanding of other nations, people, and cultures.⁷

The majority of students surveyed by ACE supported internationalization. More than 80 percent said that understanding other cultures and customs, as well as acquiring knowledge about international issues, would be necessary to compete successfully in the job market... For their part, faculty agreed that they had a responsibility to teach students international skills and knowledge. Sixty-seven percent of all faculty agreed that it was the responsibility of all faculty to provide students with an international awareness of other cultures and international issues.⁸

For example, entry-level administrative positions in international education, the qualifications as posted by recruitment firms, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and the U.S. Department of Education consist of a minimum of a bachelor's degree and "preferably" a master's degree with professional experience. For mid-level administrative positions, one finds a minimum requirement of a bachelor's degree with a preference given to those with a master's degree with professional experience. For individuals who choose to pursue senior administrative positions, qualifications include a master's degree, "preferably" a doctoral degree, and extensive professional experience. As evidenced by the 2005 Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA) survey of Chief International Education Administrators (CIEA), fully 81% of CIEA's have earned a doctoral or master's degree. Beyond U.S. borders, a 2006 European Association for International Education survey on professional development needs in international

⁶ Hayward, F. M., and Siaya, L. M. (2001). *Public Experience, Attitudes, and Knowledge: A Report on Two National Surveys About International Education*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education. See also Siaya, L., Porcelli, M., and Green, M. (2002). *One Year Later: Attitudes About International Education Since September 11*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

⁷ Siaya, L. and Hayward, F.M. (2003). *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education. p. xii.

⁸ Siaya, L. and Hayward, F.M. *op. cit.* p. 9.

education found that 62% of all respondents indicated they have considered obtaining a formal educational degree to improve their current professional status in the field. Within this group 48% are interested in a professional development program and 26% in a master's program. Respondents hail from 81 countries.

Today, leaders are needed in higher education who have studied specific regions of the world outside the U.S. (from a variety of disciplinary perspectives) and who have practical experience living in other countries and cultures. By being aware of global trends and issues in the field of education, future leaders will need to have developed the skills and attitudes that place their institution's educational enterprise in a global context for the benefit of both their students and their varied stakeholders.

In the field of international education, there are expanding employment opportunities. Graduates of these specific master's programs will be qualified to pursue careers in higher education administration, English-as-a-Second Language programs, education abroad, law firms operating internationally, international education associations, accreditation agencies, local community international outreach centers, U.S. government agencies, international development/human service agencies, and non-governmental agencies. Thus, the general trend is an increase in students who are intentionally seeking graduate level degrees in international education.

Over the past two decades, programmatic guidelines for undergraduate international education at U.S. colleges and universities have been presented by several national associations and several academic disciplines.⁹ However, none of these groups

⁹ Association of International Education Administrators. (1987). *Guidelines for International Education at U.S. Colleges and Universities*, American Council on Education. (2004). *Sharing Quality Higher Education*

has ventured into the area of suggesting comparable guidelines at the graduate level. A sign of the lack of any basis for evaluating graduate programs in international education is that the annual *US New and World Report* survey of graduate programs includes no specific global, international, or comparative education master's degree program in its rankings. It should be noted that in the past, senior level leaders in international education came up through the ranks of faculty and now the trend is toward a more professionalized administrative corps, i.e., a greater professionalization and specialized graduate degree is needed. Professionals in international education – whether from a more theoretical or practical orientation - need to be concerned about the quality and availability of what is being taught at the graduate level. Graduates of these programs are most likely to enter either the academic or practitioner side of the profession. They are our colleagues of the future.

PURPOSES OF PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS¹⁰

It is both exciting and unsettling that new educational models and means of delivering educational programs and services are evolving at all levels of higher education. One of the challenges facing American higher education is to develop standards for newly emerging professions, including international education, which have arisen in an era of transition and globalization. Complex challenges include access, federal and state regulation, performance-based funding, issues of the knowledge explosion and intellectual property, and increased calls for definition and review of

Across Borders: A Checklist for Good Practice. American Council on Education. (2004). Lessons Learned in Assessing International Learning., Knight, J. cited in Olson, C. L., Green, M. F., and Hill, B. A (2005). *Building a Strategic Framework for Comprehensive Internationalization*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education, and also see, NAFFSA: Association of International Educators. (2006). International Education Policy For U.S. Leadership, Competitiveness, And Security, available at: www.nafsa.org/

¹⁰ Gratz, M. (2000). High standards for whom? Phi Delta Kappa International. Retrieved November 21, 2005 from: <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kgra0005.htm>

student learning, and for other types of public accountability.¹¹ Standards provide policymakers, educators, parents, students, and the public with the means to monitor, measure, and continuously improve student achievement and college/university program quality.

At the K-12 level, the standard's movement grew out of the century-old debate over tracking, the 50-year-old discovery of the impact of teacher expectations, the 40-year struggle for educational equity, and the timeless desire for highly skilled (but compliant) workers to drive the nation's economic engine. But the role of standards in higher education dates back to 1919 with the formulation of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, a professional association devoted to educational improvement through accreditation; a process intended to strengthen and sustain the quality and integrity of tertiary institutions – the striving for and achieving of excellence in its endeavors. Some may even argue that such practitioner related standards are founded on the Flexner Report of 1910, which established standards for medical education in the U.S.

States began to promote the use of standards in the late 1980s in response to mounting public concern over declines in K-12 student achievement¹², as measured by national and international assessments¹³. This trend raised doubts about the United

¹¹ *Standards for Accreditation and Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Standards for Accreditation.* (2002). Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

¹² *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform. A Report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education*
United States Department of Education by The National Commission on Excellence in Education, April 1983.

¹³ Two international assessment programs collected data on student performance in mathematics and science during the past decade. The 1995 Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) involved 41 nations and studied the performance of fourth and eighth grade students as well as students in their final year of secondary school (12th grade in the United States). Four years later, a repeat study focused on the performance of eighth graders (TIMSS-R) in 38 countries. In 2000, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), organized by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), assessed 15-year-olds from 32

States' ability to maintain the quality of its workforce and compete in the global marketplace. The quality of U.S. educational institutions came to be seen as more important and less acceptable than ever before. The consensus was that schools should be judged more by "outcomes" (student achievement) than by "inputs" (resources, facilities, number of advanced degrees among teachers, etc.). Standards allow the education system to be judged and held more accountable for results. In international education, the American Council on Education has proposed just such outcomes-based criteria at the undergraduate level.¹⁴ Additionally, the 2006 Commission on the Future of Higher Education report states: "There is an urgent need to get the most out of the national investment in higher education, but most of the policies are based on guesswork...without sound data and an improved, more objective approach to accountability that addresses the outcomes of higher education, particularly for student learning, policy is uninformed."¹⁵

A major value of graduate standards is that they provide criteria by which an academic program can judge its educational effectiveness. Whether used for accreditation or program development purposes, standards provide faculty, staff, administrators, and students alike a tool to measure a program's characteristics against a set of well-conceived criteria designed to ensure educational quality and efficacy. Knowing exactly what a program is expected to do makes it more likely stakeholders will mobilize their

countries in reading, mathematics, and science. The 2003 PISA testing of 15 year olds on mathematics showed that U.S. students ranked 24 of 29 OECD countries.

¹⁴ Olson, Christa L., Green, Madeleine F., and Hill, Barbara A. (2006). *A Handbook for Advancing Comprehensive Internationalization: What Institutions Can Do and What Students Should Learn*.

¹⁵ The Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education. (2006). *ISSUE PAPER p.4*. Available at: www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports/miller-malandra.pdf

energies to meet those expectations and provide the means for potential students to make appropriate decisions concerning their future study objectives.

In order to improve the educational system, one must have a set of established and mutually agreed upon criteria to assess the current quality of existing U.S. Master's level, international education programs. Based on a national survey of graduate programs in global, international, intercultural, and comparative education, a set of standards and benchmarks are proposed by which programs may be evaluated and, eventually, ranked.

PROCEDURE

In developing a proposed set of standards and benchmarks, the first task was to identify currently available master's programs in international education. Table 1 lists the 34 U.S. colleges and universities that currently offer a readily identifiable master's level programs with an international focus, such as the traditional international and comparative education degree, but also including more recent intercultural and practitioner-focused programs.

[Insert Table 1 Here]

Table 1: Alphabetical Listing of U.S. Colleges/Universities Offering Master's Programs in International Education

College/University	
1.	American University
2.	Arcadia University
3.	Boston University

4.	Columbia University, Teachers College
5.	Drexel University
6.	Endicott College
7.	Florida International University
8.	Florida State University
9.	George Washington University
10.	Harvard University
11.	Indiana University at Bloomington
12.	Iowa State University of Science and Technology
13.	Lehigh University
14.	Lesley University
15.	Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College
16.	Loyola University Chicago
17.	New York University
18.	Old Dominion University
19.	Penn State University
20.	School for International Training
21.	Stanford University
22.	State University of New York at Buffalo
23.	University of Bridgeport
24.	UCLA
25.	University of Florida
26.	University of Maryland College Park
27.	University of Massachusetts Amherst
28.	University of Minnesota
29.	University of Pennsylvania
30.	University of Pittsburgh
31.	University of San Francisco
32.	University of Southern California
33.	Vanderbilt University
34.	Wright State University

The majority of the international education master's programs offered by the institutions listed in Table 1 additionally offer a specialized concentration in international educational development, peace education, or conflict resolution in an international context or a regional concentration.

A review of institutional websites and published materials conducted by the authors revealed many inaccuracies and inconsistencies in marketing materials currently

available regarding master's degree programs in international education. Many program websites did not include sufficient information regarding their overall higher education programs. In some cases program links were so deeply embedded within institutional website links that specific program information was extremely difficult to find, even by employees at their own institutions.

The authors developed a conceptual framework based on current research and scholarship in international education. To achieve group consensus, surveys were sent during the winter months of 2006-2007 to the 34 colleges/universities housing master's level international and comparative programs, members of AIEA, and members of the American Council on Education's Internationalization Collaborative, a learning community grouping of 77 colleges and universities committed to campus-wide internationalization. After an initial round of the survey participants received a second survey that included their previous responses to individual items, the group's mean response to individual items, and comments from other participants. This approach facilitates a type of "conversation" aimed toward building consensus.

In other words, the survey approach provided a voice for a wide range of individuals and groups. One of the strengths of this particular method is that its iterative process allows participants to contribute and introduce ideas on the first round that can be incorporated into the second round of the survey. The survey was divided into three sections: educational trends, educational assumptions, and actions. The first section, educational trends, was designed to "prime" survey participants as to current contexts and issues surrounding global and international education and then to elicit their assessment of the significance and desirability of the trends. The second section, educational

assumptions, focused on clarifying the knowledge, beliefs, and values brought to master's level degree programs. The third section (actions) was designed to help make decisions about how to address significant trends in light of assumptions about education, or more specifically, global and international education programs at the graduate level. The expert assessment data for these areas come from surveys of knowledgeable individuals in academia and practitioners in each profession. Survey respondents were asked to rate the programs with which they are familiar on a scale of "marginal" (1) to "outstanding" (5). Essentially, we collected information on peer assessment data as well as objective data on entering students, faculty, finances, and job placement that we use to calculate quality indicators.

As previously mentioned, graduate programs in international education have burgeoned in recent years. The focus of these programs and the resources invested in them vary so widely that it appears useful to begin developing criteria by which these programs can be evaluated. This would be particularly helpful to students exploring their graduate options as well as institutions contemplating starting a new program.

PROPOSED PROGRAM STANDARDS/BENCHMARKS/INDICATORS

Based on the *Criteria for Excellence* contained in a 2006 report on preparing school leaders by Arthur Levine¹⁶, President of Teachers' College, Columbia University and the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS)¹⁷, Table 2 identifies the current standards and benchmarks for excellence that have been developed

¹⁶ Levine, Arthur. (2006). *Educating School Teachers*. The Education Schools Project. Funded by The Annenberg Foundation, The Ford Foundation, and the Ewing Marion Kaufmann Foundation. Available at: http://edschools.org/pdf/Educating_Teachers_Report.pdf

¹⁷ Arminio, J. & Creamer, D. G. (2004, Spring). Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS): 25 Years of Promoting Quality in Higher Education. *Leadership Exchange*, pp. 18-21.

through the research as indicators to evaluate master's level global, international, intercultural, and comparative education programs.

[Insert Table 2 Here]

Table 2: Global, International, & Comparative Education Master's Level Program Standards and Benchmarks

STANDARD #1: COLLEGE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM
<i>The home college mission statement reflects the desire to prepare graduate students with the necessary practical skills, knowledge, and experiences to analyze and work within the complex economic, political, cultural, community and global environs that influences education.</i>
BENCHMARKS FOR STANDARD #1:
1. Global learning outcomes are articulated as goals of the college's graduate education.
2. All students are encouraged to develop professional level awareness of the global and/or intercultural issues as a context for understanding the trends and issues in the field of international education.
3. The college's graduate program provides a strong foundation for career advancement, future doctoral studies, and/or executive and senior level positions.
STANDARD #2: SPECIFIC PROGRAM GOALS
<i>Graduates possess skills in developing, analyzing, implementing, and evaluating new educational policies at a variety of institutions/organizations (public and private, non-profit or for-profit, formal or non-formal) to advocate effectively for international education, while exhibiting outstanding leadership, organizational, cross-cultural, interpersonal, and advocacy skills.</i>
BENCHMARKS FOR STANDARD #2:
1. To effectively advocate for international education, graduates possess the following abilities: developing, implementing, and evaluating new educational policies and programs.
2. Students exhibit the following skills: outstanding leadership, organizational, cross-cultural, inter-personal including the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with internal and external groups.
3. Upon program completion, students have in-depth knowledge and skills regarding international education at both public and private (non-profit and for-profit) institutions as well as small, large and multi-campus institutions.
4. Upon program completion, students have an understanding of transformational change and the role of leadership in institutional change.
5. Program goals and objectives are clearly articulated in marketing literature.
6. Appropriate contact persons are identified in marketing literature to assist prospective applicants to learn more about the program.

STANDARD #3: CURRICULUM

The curriculum reflects current, rigorous, coherent materials/methodologies designed to teach the relevant and practical skills/knowledge in the field of international education.

BENCHMARKS FOR STANDARD #3:

1. The curriculum mirrors program purposes and goals.
2. The curriculum is: current, rigorous, coherent, and organized to teach the skills and knowledge and at the various stages of participants' careers.
3. Core courses (required) for the program all include explicit international dimensions.
4. Students who wish to specialize in particular world areas can find depth and breadth in the academic courses.
5. Cognate (non-core) courses are offered regularly and include strong international/comparative content.
6. An internship or study period abroad is a required (or encouraged) part of the program.
7. Students are required to demonstrate proficiency in a second language – whether through advanced coursework or appropriate proficiency testing - by the time they graduate.

STANDARD #4: STUDENT SELECTION PROCESS

The program has documented success in recruiting a diverse and well-prepared student population.

BENCHMARKS FOR STANDARD #4:

1. Specific information that must be provided by prospective students includes: GRE scores, undergraduate and/or other graduate GPA, personal interview, extra-curricular activities, cross-cultural life experience, and a personal essay.
2. Applicants are considered competitive with other Master's programs offered by the college or school.

STANDARD #5: FACULTY COMPOSITION

Faculty reflects the college/university's commitment in meeting its mission and strategic objectives to recruit, hire, and maintain qualified faculty to promote the effective delivery of a high quality education.

BENCHMARKS FOR STANDARD #5:

1. Faculty who teach the core (required) courses in the program are full-time tenured or tenure-track.
2. Faculty who teach the core courses in the program have a primary or secondary interest and/or expertise in international and global education.
3. Faculty possesses active connections with other university faculty in the U.S. and abroad.
4. The student-faculty ratio is low.
5. Faculty are encouraged to mentor and advise students.

STANDARD #6: RESEARCH

Authorship or scholarly activity is original, based on sound research principles, and contributes to the academic field.

BENCHMARKS FOR STANDARD #6:

1. Research carried out by program faculty is of a significant amount, high quality, driven by practice, and useful to practitioners and/or policy makers.
2. Collaborative activities with institutions in other countries affect the experience of students and the curriculum.
3. These collaborative activities involve student participants in international activities such as study abroad or collaboration in transnational research.
4. Academic policies and practices (such as promotion and tenure criteria or faculty development opportunities) emphasize and reward teaching and learning with a global focus.
5. Students are encouraged to join associations as student members, attend conferences, present research, submit research for publication, and network.
6. More than fifty percent of the full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty are engaged in international education-school research during the 2005-2006 academic year.
7. More than fifty percent of full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty have held awards or editorships among selected (international) education journals during the previous academic year.

STANDARD #7: FINANCES

The home college provides adequate financial resources to support curricular offerings, active faculty research, student professional development and program innovation.

BENCHMARKS FOR STANDARD #7:

1. The college or department resources are adequate to support, sustain, and develop the program.
2. The college or department makes funds available to support faculty research in international education.
3. The college or department makes funds available to support student presentations at conferences and other professional development activities with an international focus.

STANDARD #8: STUDENT JOB PLACEMENT

Successful recruitment and placement of students requires cooperation and good judgment from three groups – the college/university, student candidates, and employers. Activities related to the full-time placement and hiring of students are conducted at the highest ethical and professional level. Further is the commitment to ensure the international education profession is accessible to all individuals on a non-discriminatory basis, i.e., the college/university is opposed to discrimination based upon gender, age, race, color, religious creed, national origin, physical disability, marital, parental or veteran status, sexual orientation, or the prejudice of students related to such matters. The program faculty work closely with the campus career center to ensure support or skills needed to secure appropriate internships and/or co-op experiences.

BENCHMARKS FOR STANDARD #8:

1. The university, college, school, or department has academic relationships with numerous national and international associations.

2. Program administrators, faculty, and staff work closely with administrators at other higher education institutions, associations, NGOs, community-based programs, and recruitment firms to assist students with full and/or part-time job placement upon graduation.
3. Internships, co-ops, or other practica frequently lead to entry-level employment in the international education field.
4. In general, more than fifty percent of graduates are placed for full and/or part-time employment in: (Check all that apply) <input type="checkbox"/> NGOs <input type="checkbox"/> Government departments <input type="checkbox"/> National Associations <input type="checkbox"/> Community-based organizations <input type="checkbox"/> Private institution of higher educations <input type="checkbox"/> Public institution of higher educations <input type="checkbox"/> Other:

STANDARD #9: PROGRAM EVALUATION

The college consistently implements and makes public an evaluation that communicates information about the quality of its international program. These evaluations consist of such basic attributes as: quality of curriculum and faculty, financial support for program, student demand for program, and student placement as alumni of program.¹⁸

BENCHMARKS FOR STANDARD #9

1. The program engages in continuing self-assessment and improvement of its performance relative to the global dimensions of graduate education.
2. Program evaluations are planned, conducted, and reported in ways that encourages the likelihood the evaluation addresses/serves the needs of its participants and that follow-through by stakeholders is increased.
3. Program evaluations are outcomes-focused, realistic, prudent, diplomatic, and frugal.
4. The program evaluation is complete and fair in its examination and recording of strengths and weaknesses, along with pertinent limitations made accessible to the persons affected by the evaluation.
5. The quantitative and/or qualitative information collected, processed, and reported in the program evaluation is systematically reviewed for validity and reliability.
6. The program evaluation itself should be formatively and summatively evaluated against the above benchmarks and any other pertinent standards, so that its conduct is appropriately guided and, on completion, stakeholders can closely examine its strengths and weaknesses.

STANDARD #10: UNIQUE PROGRAM FEATURES

The program is uniquely designed to provide opportunities outside of a traditional academic program.

¹⁸ The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1994). [The Program Evaluation Standards](#). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

BENCHMARKS FOR STANDARD #10:

1. The degree program incorporates an interdisciplinary approach into the curriculum.
2. The program integrates leading learning strategies and instructional technologies into course delivery.
3. The environment housing the degree program possesses or has easy access to adequate journal and library holdings in international education.
4. Courses expose students to best practices, current research, software applications, and database management systems.
5. Students demonstrate their knowledge and skill acquisition through individual and group projects.
6. The program requires application of program content, for example, a domestic or international internship/Co-op or via study abroad.
7. Common themes/threads are woven throughout core (required) courses.

CONCLUSION

The authors would like to continue this conversation with colleagues in the international education field. To facilitate that dialogue, an interactive website (at www.aieaworld.org) has been created for deans, program administrators, faculty members, professionals in the field of international education, graduate students, and those interested in program standards/evaluation. The authors specifically seek to learn what stakeholders regard as reliable indicators of quality in a global, comparative, intercultural, and/or international education master's level program. Once it is determined how much weight should be given to each indicator, information will be configured into a rating system that is reasonably objective, methodologically sound, and illuminating in its results. Thus, this effort is a work in progress. By maintaining an active and ongoing dialogue on quality in international education graduate programs, we hope to better define our educational objectives, assist prospective students in our field, and strengthen the academic grounding of our profession.