

When a Degree is NOT a Degree

US International credential evaluators and International Admissions Officers have faced challenges of unofficial credentials in other countries such as the *titulus proprios* degrees in Spain and the *lato sensu* credentials in Brazil. But we have not expected to see similar challenges from France! And especially not from the elite system of higher education institutions known as the *grandes ecoles*. These schools are the higher education alternative to universities in France offering degrees in engineering and business largely (though one can find some specializing in other disciplines like, for example, Sciences Po [Institut d'études Politiques de Paris] which is renowned for its political science programs).

These schools require two years of preparatory study after high school (*Baccalaureat*) called *classes preparatoires* which certainly deserve transfer credit from US colleges and then have three years of study in engineering or business. The former discipline results in the generic *Diplome d'Ingenieur* but also the accompanying *Grade de Master* declaring its equivalence to the French university Master of the L-M-D sequence (*Licence-Master-Doctorat*). The business schools award a *Diplome d'*[name of school acronym such as ESC or *Ecole Superieur de Commerce*] also after three years. Altogether these degrees total 300 ECTS or 150 US semester hours when the *Classes Prep* years are included. All in the field agree this is comparable to the US master's degree.

But now we are seeing 'degrees' called 'Bachelor of (various disciplines mostly business)' and almost always in English. They are awarded by the institution, NOT by the French Ministry of Education, and do not contain 'diplome vise,' the decrees and laws under which the official degrees are constructed and awarded by the Government. They often are awarded after ONE YEAR of study at the *grande ecole* TOWARD the official *Diplome*

d'Ingenieur when, at that point, the student has achieved 180 ECTS. The school is counting the two years of classes preparatoires (120 ECTS) and adding the first year of grande ecole study (60 more ECTS) and calling it a 'bachelor' because it equals the same number of ECTS credits as the university Licence (three years, 180 ECTS). The 'diploma' may also note that it is officially equal to the French university Licence. BUT, this is not an official degree! The Government does not award it like it does all other official degrees (including the official grande ecole degree of diplome d'ingenieur/Grade de Master) nor does it include diplome vise because there are NO laws behind this creature. The Government did not create them so there is no enabling legislation governing them.

So, what is a US evaluator to do? Go to the website, look for the information about the degree in French to see what its French name is. Odds are there will be nothing in French because these are artificially created credentials offered in English. Instead look to make sure it is awarded by the Government with diplome vise and called by the official French degree name and totaling 300 ECTS.

Why do these 'degrees' exist? The same reason that the Spanish titulus propios and the Brazilian lato sensu programs exist...to generate revenue! And you can bet that if the French have joined the game, others will follow!

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