**Guide to International Graduate Admissions**

This guide is designed as a basic overview of MSU’s policies and practices related to international graduate admission. Keep in mind it will be updated as policies and process change, so it’s important that graduate department update their records accordingly as newer versions of this document are sent out via the Grad School listserv.

Please consult this document as you work to admit international graduate students and **before** reaching out for assistance. For challenging cases, please contact the Graduate School or Jane Nickels/Tony McFadden in Admissions. Detailed and complex cases not addressed in this document should be referred to international credential analyst, Dr. Patrick Leahy.

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| General Issue | Specific Problem | Solution |
| Credentials – Degree Award | Admission “Holds” | Applicants who are in the last semester of the equivalent of a US bachelor’s degree program, and have yet to have their degree awarded, may be admitted with a hold for their final transcript and diploma (in the original language and English, if applicable).  Under special circumstances, admissions will admit international students with a hold for an official copy of their bachelor degree diploma. This is typically done in cases where it’s a late admit in the admissions cycle or if the applicant is having unexpected difficulty obtaining their diploma. This is done as long as we have the official transcripts on file (in the original language along with a translation if applicable).  **MSU does NOT have a policy for admitting students without any academic records.** Departments should NOT request a waiver of all academic records OR request a hold for all academic records from the Office of Admissions or the Graduate School. |
| Credentials – Degree Award | Graduate Degrees | Graduate Degrees awarded do not automatically mean they earned the equivalent of a bachelor’s degree. Admission requirements/processes/policies of different institutions are always questionable no matter the location or caliber of the institution. |
| Credentials – Degree Award | Proof of Degree award | Need transcript to clearly show specific degree awarded (in original language) and date of award. English translation as well, if needed. Otherwise, best to request official copy of diploma in original language and English clearly showing the name of the degree awarded and date of award. |
| Credentials - Equivalency | Degree Equivalency: Three-Year Bachelor’s Degrees | MSU requires the equivalent of a four year US bachelor’s degree for admission to graduate programs (master’s or doctoral programs).  A three-year bachelor’s degree plus a two-year master’s degree, earned at official, governmentally-recognized institutions in India or Europe (Bologna Process countries) MSU views as equivalent to a four year US bachelor’s degree. |
| Credentials - Equivalency | Not Acceptable Bachelor Degrees – either international or US-earned | MSU does not treat the following degrees as equivalent to regular, four year US bachelor’s degrees.  **Bachelor of Applied Science**  **Doctor of Veterinary Medicine**  Please consult the international credential analyst for other degree types. |
| Credentials - Equivalency | Postgraduate Diploma | MSU does NOT treat this credential as equivalent to a two-year master’s degree. However, there MAY be an exception to this in the cases of postgraduate diplomas awarded in India. Please consult with Patrick Leahy. |
| Credentials – Official Records | Degree Waivers | For applicants who do not hold the equivalent of a four year US bachelor’s degree, departments may formally request a degree waiver from the Graduate School if they feel the applicant has strong grades, coursework, and/or work experiences. Waiver requests should be sent to the following email address: [approvals@grad.msu.edu](mailto:approvals@grad.msu.edu). Applicants are still expected to provide official copies of all postsecondary transcripts and diplomas (in the original language and with English translations if applicable) at the time of application, in a timely manner. This is so official transcripts and diplomas can be evaluated to determine equivalency, and whether or not a waiver may be needed to admit. |
| Credentials – Official Records | Notarized Academic Records | MSU generally does not accept academic records that have been notarized.  A public notary’s stamp only indicates that she or he viewed the documents. It does not prove the records are official or authentic by the institution the applicant attended.  Exceptions include countries in Eastern Europe that follow an apostille process, where appropriate officials notarize the records to make them official. Official, notarized copies of academic records (transcripts and diploma in the original language and English) should be mailed in an official, university envelope to the MSU department. |
| Credentials – Official Records | Official documents from a third party individual, company, or another university that received them previously? | We do not accept these documents. |
| Credentials – Official Records | Official Academic Records | MSU only accepts official, postsecondary academic records for admission to graduate studies.  Departments should have international applicants submit official copies of their academic records **(ALL postsecondary transcripts and diplomas)** as early as possible in the application process to ensure their applications are processed by central admissions in a timely manner.  Please note that MSU distinguishes between “original” vs. “official” academic records. Original records are transcripts, diplomas, and certificates issued only ONCE to applicants. Typically, applicants have to have their colleges/universities make a photocopy of these documents and stamp the photocopies official. If they are placed by appropriate personnel in official, sealed envelopes (ONE ENVELOPE PER UNIVERSITY/COLLEGE ATTENDED), and received as such, we would treat these documents as official.  **PLEASE MAKE SURE APPLICANTS DO NOT SUBMIT THEIR ONLY ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT, CERTIFICATE, AND/OR DIPLOMA! WE DO NOT RETURN ANY DOCUMENTS WE RECEIVE IN CENTRAL ADMISSIONS!**  **Also, please ensure your department/grad program website reflects this information, to avoid confusion on the part of applicants.**  Transcripts and diplomas are considered official if they are mailed directly from the institution in an official/sealed envelope to the MSU department or if the student brings them into the Office of Admissions in a sealed/official, unopened envelope from the institution that issued the records. Please note that applicants can ask a friend/relative to make the request of their official academic records and pick them up from the institution (in a sealed/official unopened envelope) and mail the envelope (unopened) directly to the MSU department.  Students who apply prior to completing their degrees should submit an official transcript to date. An official final transcript and diploma will be required after the degree has been conferred.  IMPORTANT: Please note that the ENVELOPES in which applicants’ transcripts and diplomas were contained MUST BE sent to the Office of Admissions along with the documents.  If an applicant’s credentials are not the equivalent of a four year US bachelor’s degree (the basic requirement for admission to MSU’s graduate programs), and the department still wishes to admit the student (due to strong grades, coursework, and/or work experiences), a degree waiver is required from the Dean of the Graduate School ([approvals@grd.msu.edu](mailto:approvals@grd.msu.edu)). The department must submit a waiver request to the email address above. If approved, the approved waiver must be sent to the Office of Admissions along with all required documentation (including official copies of ALL postsecondary transcripts and diplomas/certificates awarded). |
| Credentials – Official Records | Refugee applicants and applicants from conflict zones | MSU exercises flexibility in these cases, provided applicants appear to meet basic application guidelines. Credentials should be referred to the international credential analyst who will treat these on a case-by-case basis. |
| Credentials – Official Records | Requesting and Submitting Official Academic Records | MSU does **not** accept the following as official academic records: electronic records, records loose (not in a sealed-envelope), records the applicant has had access to (e.g., mailed in a regular envelope or mailed in a regular envelope from the applicant’s home address), records stamped by a notary (see exceptions above), records that appear to be inauthentic.  Applicants should request official, hardcopies of all their postsecondary transcripts and diplomas. These should be mailed in an official, sealed envelope – one official envelope for each institution attended.  **These should be mailed directly to the MSU department the applicant wishes to enroll in. Departments should save all documentation received (including transcripts, diplomas, translations, etc.) and forward those AND the official envelopes directly to the Office of Admissions for processing. Departments SHOULD SCAN all documents they receive (including envelopes) BEFORE sending them to central admissions. In the unfortunate case that documents get lost in the process, these scans MAY serve as backup copies.**  If the applicant is not currently in the region or country where they attended their education and s/he is unsuccessful in contacting her/his former college by phone or email, a friend/relative is welcome to go to the college and request the official documents from the appropriate personnel. Then the university or the friend/relative is welcome to pick up the official, sealed envelope from (each institution) and mail it (unopened) to MSU. Documents sent in this manner would be treated as official.  Refugees and those who have attended college in conflict zones represent special cases that should be referred to the international credential analyst.  MSU does not accept records already used by another institution.  MSU does not accept credential evaluation reports including using such reports as translations of documents into English. |
| Credentials – Official Records | Two Bachelor Degrees | MSU requires only one bachelor degree (equivalent to a four year US bachelor degree) for admission to graduate programs.  Students should always try to submit ALL official academic records from all postsecondary programs they participated in. However, technically, if a student COMPLETED TWO bachelor degree programs, we would only need official academic records from ONE program UNLESS the student wishes to have TWO bachelor degree posted in SIS.  If the student completed one bachelor degree program overseas and is in the process of completing a second bachelor degree program in the US, in this situation we would technically ask for official academic records from BOTH programs. If there’s some sort of problem obtaining records, we would need records from at least one completed or nearly completed program to process admissions. |
| Credentials – Official Records | Verification of Academic Records | Generally, MSU does not accept verification of unofficial academic records via email. Exceptions may include special cases where applicants are experiencing difficulty obtaining official hardcopies of their documents. Please refer these cases to the international credential analyst, who may determine if email verification is appropriate. If so, he will verify via email. |
| Credentials – Specific Countries | China - CDGDC Process | All admitted students who attended institutions in mainland China need to follow the CDGDC process.  [Grad School Website - CDGDC Process Document](https://grad.msu.edu/sites/default/files/content/forms/CDGDC_Process_Jan16.pdf) |
| Credentials – Specific Countries | Iran | Applicants should be sure to request official copies of the following: 1) The original language (Farsi) and English language transcript and 2) bachelor degree (karshenasi) diploma in the original language and English. This should be done early in the application process to ensure we receive the documents in a timely manner. Only documents received in official, sealed envelopes (unopened) from each university or appropriate ministry will be accepted as official.  Applicants are welcome to work with a friend/relative in Iran (as is the case in any country) to assist in requesting official documentation. The university or the friend/relative is welcome to mail the official documents in an official, sealed envelope (unopened) directly to the MSU department. |
| Credentials – Specific Countries | Syria | Applicants who attended institutions in Syria may have a great deal of difficulty obtaining their academic records. The international credential analyst should be contacted to assist applicants/departments through our policies/processes. |
| English Language | English Language Proficiency Tests | For applicants who studied in countries where English is not a dominant language, they are required to take an English Language Proficiency Test and submit official scores to MSU.  A list of countries MSU considers English-speaking, and thus no test is required, is featured on the Graduate School website: <https://grad.msu.edu/english-language-competency>  Also included on this website is information on automatic and non-automatic English language proficiency waivers.  Acceptable English Language proficiency tests include: TOEFL, IELTS, MELAB, MSUELT, PTE A (Pearson).  MSU does NOT accept TOEFL ITP tests.  TOEFL scores must be sent to MSU electronically by ETS. Paper-based TOEFL scores are acceptable as long as they are officially received (sent directly from the testing agency in an official, sealed envelope). The official envelope should be saved. The hardcopy test score and the envelope should then be forwarded to admissions.  IELTS and other acceptable English proficiency test scores can be submitted in hardcopy form as long as the original document is sent directly from the testing agency in an official envelope. Again, hardcopies of acceptable English proficiency test scores AND official envelopes should be saved and forwarded to admissions.  Special note: Unusual cases will be reviewed by central admissions.  --  If there are no test scores in SIS, or if the student’s test scores are below the requirement for provisional admission, the department must submit an English Language Proficiency Waiver Request to the Dean of the Graduate School for approval. The approved waiver should be submitted with the other required documentation (see “international applicants – required documentation to be submitted to the office of admissions” on the grad school website). See <https://grad.msu.edu/english-language-competency> for English language competency information, including the waiver procedure. Some automatic English proficiency waivers may be granted by the Office of Admissions. Please refer to the URL above. Test scores are valid for up to two years prior to the start of the enrollment semester.  \*\*SPECIAL NOTE – Departments may request higher level ELP test scores for admission. Departments should ensure they “check” the correct box in the RAF form (Admit, Admit Provisional English, etc.). University admissions does not have the ability to verify every case. |
| English Language | Translations and Original Language | All official academic records (transcripts and diplomas) not issued in English must be accompanied by a word-for-word, line-by-line, English translation done by an official translator. Similarly, departments should make sure applicants request original language academic records as well as English language versions from non-English speaking countries.  Please note if a degree is indicated as a “bachelor” degree in an English translated document, this LIKELY DOES NOT prove the degree is the same as a four year, US bachelor’s degree.  Official translations can be done by the university that issued the applicant’s official academic records or a certified translator in the applicant’s country. All translations should be based on the official documents. Translations can be included with the official documents in the official, university-sealed envelope. Alternatively, translations can be done off of official records by an American Translator’s Associated-certified translator in the US (e.g., [www.7clingo.com](http://www.7clingo.com) in Lansing). The website for the American Translators Association is: [www.atanet.org](http://www.atanet.org)  Departments are welcome to assist applicants in paying for translations.  MSU only accepts official, hardcopy translations mailed in either official, university envelopes (along with the official, original language academic records) OR in an official, translation company’s envelope. MSU does NOT accept electronic/scanned translations as official.  To see if a translator is ATA-certified, enter their certification number into the following website:  <http://www.atanet.org/certification/check_certifications.php> |
| International Graduate Admissions | Affidavit of Support | The affidavit of support must include the signature of the sponsor. The dollar amount must meet the current I-20 funding requirement. The form is valid for up to a year prior to the start of the enrollment semester. |
| International Graduate Admissions | Curriculum | Departments should generally ensure applicants’ they wish to admit participated in rigorous and appropriate academic undergraduate programs. This helps to ensure proper preparation for graduate studies.  Departments may also wish to check the university/college website to ensure the degree program they participated in at the time of their studies actually exists. |
| International Graduate Admissions | Departments Submitting Documents to MSU Office of Admission via campus mail | If the documents are directed via campus mail to the international credential analyst, Patrick Leahy, please note his name, 426 Auditorium Rd, Rm 250, Office of Admissions, as well as the words “personal and confidential.” All other documents directed to admissions will go directly to processing. |
| International Graduate Admissions | Financial Proof – Bank Statement | The account holder’s name must be in English. The account holder’s name must match the sponsor’s name on the Affidavit of Support. The dollar amount on the account holder’s statement must meet the current I-20 funding requirement. The bank statement is valid for up to a year prior to the start of the enrollment semester. |
| International Graduate Admissions | Further Information on International Graduate Admission | See the Grad School website:  <https://grad.msu.edu/>  [Graduate Program Directors and Secretaries Resources](https://grad.msu.edu/fsresources/graduatesecretary)  [International Applicants](https://grad.msu.edu/internationalapplicants) |
| International Graduate Admissions | Grades | Departments should ensure they have local grade scales and their US equivalents for different institutions and/or countries, to determine grades and GPA equivalencies for all international applicants they wish to admit. If they do not, they should contact the international credential analyst for guidance. |
| International Graduate Admissions | Recommended Action Form (RAF) | Electronic recommended action form with two signatures for GAMS users. 1) Signature of the Department Head, Committee, or Graduate Program Director. 2) Signature of the Dean. |
| International Graduate Admissions | Resources | The following are online resources that may assist in international graduate admissions:  To determine if an educational institution is officially recognized: the World Higher Education Database (WHED): <http://whed.net/home.php>  The Graduate School at MSU:  <https://grad.msu.edu/events/international-graduate-admission-session-departmental-staff>  <https://grad.msu.edu/english-language-competency> |
| Transfer Credit | Transfer Credit | For applicants who attended international colleges and universities as undergraduates and then transferred to an accredited US institution, and the transfer classes/credits are present on the undergraduate transcript, we would generally NOT require official transcripts from the institution the applicant transferred from, unless the documentation appears questionable in some way.  Similarly, for applicants who studied abroad while they were in their undergraduate programs, and transferred credit into their undergraduate program, we would NOT require official transcripts from the study abroad institution, unless warranted.  It may be possible for MSU graduate students to transfer credit from graduate study abroad or previous graduate programs. The determination is made firstly by the department and then the registrar’s office (with the input of admissions, if needed). To be considered transferable, credit from international programs should be earned at officially recognized college and universities. |

**International Graduate Admissions Process Suggestions for Graduate Programs:**

In order to expedite and ease the process of admitting international students, the following are suggestions departments may wish to consider as they are looking to avoid delays or problems.

1. Graduate programs may wish to request **official** academic records from international applicants EARLY in the admissions cycle, as example, as they are applying. This may help avoid problems and delays later in the cycle, if they are having difficulties requesting official copies of their academic records.
2. Alternatively, graduate programs may wish to admit international students at the departmental/programmatic level based on unofficial documents, yet make it clear they will not be fully admitted to the university until official copies of their academic records are received. This would help avoid “losing” applicants yet make it aware we are willing to work with them through the admission process.
3. Graduate programs should be aware that grade scales range greatly across the world, and are subject to change with educational reforms. Up to date information on international grades and their US equivalents are kept in our office. Please contact Dr. Patrick Leahy ([leahypat@msu.edu](mailto:leahypat@msu.edu)) for the latest grade scale information, to ensure appropriate review of international applicants by departments. **Of course, always first consult the transcript to see how a particular institution or program approaches grades to determine equivalency.**
4. Graduate departments are welcome to contact Dr. Patrick Leahy to conduct an informal review of international academic records (scanned copies via email or in person with hardcopies) to assess whether or not an international applicant would meet our international credential policies.