

DEGREE DOCUMENT FAQ

- **Q: Can I have my degree evaluation or transcript mailed to your office?**

A: In general, it should **not be necessary** to have any of your degree documents sent directly to our office. Instead, we recommend that you have your transcript or degree evaluation sent to your address, and that you upload a scan of it to our server. You may also forward them or have them sent to us at attorneys@chenassociates.com. We understand that some universities or degree evaluators may require that your documents be sent in physical form to a third party, and will not provide them directly to you. In that case, you may provide our address.

- **Q: I found a degree evaluation provider from naces.org, but there are several different options I can select from. What should I choose?**

A: Many degree evaluators offer both general evaluations and course-by-course evaluations. For the purposes of qualifying as an advanced degree professional, a general evaluation should be sufficient. A course-by-course evaluation is typically more in-depth than a general evaluation, and is fine to submit as well. However, we typically recommend requesting only a general evaluation (sometimes referred to as a “document-by-document” evaluation).

It is also quite common for degree evaluators to offer different services that look at either the Canadian or the US equivalency of a degree. You should make sure that you request that the **US equivalency** of your degree be evaluated. If your evaluation does not state your degree’s US equivalency, you should request another degree evaluation.

- **Q: My university does not issue transcripts for my degree. What can I provide instead?**

A: It is common for some graduate programs to not issue transcripts, particularly if formal coursework was not a main component of the program. Thankfully, a transcript is not the only document that can be submitted to serve as an official academic record. A few alternatives are listed below:

1. **A letter from the registrar.** In place of a transcript, a signed and dated letter from your university's registrar confirming the degree that you earned, your area of study, the duration of your studies for the degree, and the conferral date for the degree. If the registrar cannot be reached, then a similarly-qualified official, such as the director of graduate studies or the head of your program, should be able to sign a letter instead.
 2. **A diploma supplement.** Some universities issue a detailed diploma supplement instead of a transcript. In general, most diploma supplements should be an acceptable alternative to a transcript.
 3. **A certificate of studies.** Some universities may issue a certificate containing much of the information normally found in a transcript or letter from the registrar. Depending on the content of the certificate, it may be safe to use as an official academic record.
- **Q: I have a document that my university issued along with my diploma, but I am not sure if it is a transcript. What exactly is a transcript?**

A: A transcript is a record of studies that lists the courses taken by a student and tracks the student's academic performance. Transcripts are frequently issued upon request from the registrar's office, and may come in a sealed envelope. For I-140 cases, USCIS **does not require** that transcripts be furnished in a sealed envelope.

Ideally, a transcript will show a degree's conferral date, but this is not always the case. So long as a transcript confirms that the degree's requirements have been met, it should be fine to submit.

- **Q: I have a transcript or other record that was issued shortly before my degree's conferral. Is this okay to use?**

A: We strongly recommend that all academic records be issued and dated **after** a degree has been conferred; otherwise, they may appear incomplete. A good rule of thumb is to make sure that the conferral date on the diploma is earlier than the printing date listed on the transcripts. If the only official transcript you have is from before your degree's conferral, then you should request an updated one from your university's registrar. This is especially true if your transcript also does not confirm that your degree has been awarded or that you have met the degree's requirements.

- **Q: My university won't issue my official diploma until after I have paid off my student loans or completed a term of service. Do I have to go through all this trouble just so I can submit an official diploma with my NIW?**

A: Not necessarily. There are a number of ways you can qualify as an advanced degree professional, and most of our clients in this situation **do not** need to go through the process of paying off their loans just to obtain their official diploma. See if one of the alternatives below applies to you:

1. **Claiming a different advanced degree.** If you hold multiple advanced degrees, any of them could potentially be used to qualify you as an advanced degree professional. While we usually recommend claiming the highest degree (often a PhD), any graduate-level degree (MS, MA, MBBS, etc.) should work for the purpose of qualifying as an advanced degree professional, so long as the necessary evidence can be provided.
2. **Submitting a provisional diploma.** If your university issued a provisional diploma, we may be able to submit it in place of an official diploma. However, filing with one carries a chance that USCIS will issue an RFE asking for the official diploma. You should always bring your attorney's attention to any provisional diplomas you may plan on providing and should weigh the risks and the benefits of filing with one. The content and wording of the provisional diploma may affect the chances of an RFE being issued, so it is important to upload a clear scan of your provisional diploma for our review and confirmation.
3. **Claiming a Bachelor's degree and 5 years of experience.** If you are able to provide your diploma, transcript, and degree evaluation (if earned outside of the United States) for a Bachelor's degree, and have obtained at least 5 years of experience in your field following your graduation, then you may be able to qualify as an advanced degree professional without providing documentation for a graduate-level degree. Please note that although we can include any time you spent in a PhD program toward the required 5 years of experience, we have noticed that a small group of immigration officers require that the experience be full-time (at least 35 hours per week).
4. **Claiming exceptional ability instead of an advanced degree.** If you are able to provide your diploma and transcript for a Bachelor's degree and your credentials meet certain requirements, then we could potentially argue that you have "exceptional ability." To claim exceptional ability, we need to show that you meet at least 3 out of 6 regulatory criteria. Because there are more requirements that

need to be met when claiming exceptional ability, filing with this case type may increase the chances of USCIS issuing an RFE (Request for Evidence). Therefore, we would recommend instead pursuing one of the above alternatives whenever possible.

- **Q: My diploma/transcript bears a stamp stating that the contents of the translation have not been verified. Is this going to be an issue?**

A: Degree documents from some countries (most often Iran) may bear stamps from both the person who translated the documents into English and the government office that certified them. In some cases, the certification stamp may note that its purpose is not to evaluate the translation's contents but instead to verify the document's authenticity. We have seen a small number of officers mistake this stamp for the translation stamp, and issue RFEs questioning the legitimacy of the translation. Therefore, we typically recommend re-translating any documents bearing a certification stamp containing language that might be interpreted as undermining the original translation's veracity.

A translation can be performed by a professional translation service (many degree evaluation providers also offer translation services). Alternatively, you or someone you know who is fluent in both English and the original language can perform a translation. In that case, it is important that the translator sign an affidavit attesting to the accuracy of the translation. **Please see our document translation FAQ for more information.**

- **Q: I have multiple advanced degrees. Do I need to submit documentation for all of them?**

A: In order to qualify as an advanced degree professional, you should submit a diploma, official academic record, and degree evaluation (if earned outside the US) for at least **one advanced degree**. Any degree above a Bachelor's degree should be able to satisfy this requirement. If you hold more than one advanced degree, submitting documentation for multiple degrees should not be necessary, but also should not be harmful. If any of your advanced degrees were earned from an accredited institution of higher learning in the US, then you should not need to request a degree evaluation for any foreign degrees you may also hold. For example, if you earned a Master of Science degree from a US institution and later earned a PhD degree in your home country, submitting your diploma and transcript for your MS degree should generally be fine, and would circumvent the need

for a degree evaluation.

- **Q: My transcript and diploma list different conferral dates. Will this be an issue?**

A: We recommend submitting documents that are consistent with regard to your degree's conferral date. If you believe that your diploma and transcript each list a different conferral date, please let us know and please upload these documents for our review. If we determine that the conferral date is indeed inconsistent, we may recommend that you contact your university's registrar to either obtain a revised transcript or a letter that clarifies the discrepancy.