



Changes in German Education Provide Opportunities for Collaboration between Credentialing Agencies

Recent changes to German physical therapy education brought about opportunities for the credentialing agencies that use the Federation's Coursework Tool (CWT) as well as representatives from the Canadian Alliance to begin to work together on issues related to credentialing of foreign educated physical therapists.

Physical therapy education in Germany has long been taught only at the vocational secondary level. In December 2008, staff from the International Education Research Foundation (IERF), a credentials review agency for foreign educated physical therapists, approached the Foreign Credentialing Commission on Physical Therapy (FCCPT) to ask if they had seen any of the new documents coming from some German universities. It seemed that German universities had begun awarding bachelor's degrees in physical therapy.

As a result of this information, the FCCPT hosted a webinar/conference call in January 2009 to look at how credentialing agencies should handle the German university graduates' coursework. Four of the five U.S. credentialing agencies along with Canadian Alliance staff participated in this discussion, and agreed upon a policy for working with these documents.

In February 2009, the FSBPT Foreign Educated Standards (FES) Committee sponsored a workshop to look at standards for credentialing of foreign educated physical

therapists. At this workshop, informal discussion between all five credentialing agencies solidified the suggestion to the committee regarding German universities' physical therapy programs.

Recommendation on German Physical Therapy Bachelor's Degrees

Their recommendation was to accept credits issued by the German universities if the applicants: 1) were issued the university bachelor's degree in physical therapy, 2) completed primary and secondary education of at least 12 years and 3) passed one of the secondary leaving examinations required for admission to an institution of higher education in Germany.

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At its March teleconference, the FSBPT Foreign Educated Standards Committee reviewed the issue and recommended that jurisdictions utilize the criteria proposed by the credentials agencies since they have the expertise and experience in comparing foreign education with education in the United States.

Background Information

Historically, physical therapy education in Germany was provided within the vocational secondary educational system, and the programs were not a part of the higher edu-

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education system. Entrance requirements for these vocational secondary physical therapy programs varied, but completion of ten years of primary and secondary education appeared to be the minimum requirement. For these reasons, U.S. and Canadian credentials review agencies have not evaluated these credentials or considered awarding higher education credit for them.

However, German *Fachhochschulen* (specific German Universities that focus mainly on applied or practical majors) have begun awarding bachelor's degrees in physical therapy. Students must first complete a three-year vocational program at a school for physical therapy that is affiliated with the University program. Students admitted to the *Fachhochschule* physical therapy program are awarded 90 *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System* (ECTS) credits for this work. They must then complete an additional three semesters (worth an additional 90 ECTS credits) at the *Fachhochschule* to receive a Bachelor of Science degree in physical therapy.

Now that German universities are offering college credit for these courses, the U.S. and Canadian credentialing agencies' policies of not awarding higher education credit for these courses needed to be revisited. FCCPT hosted a conference call in January 2009 to review how credentialing agencies should handle the German university graduates' coursework. Four of the five credentialing agencies who are licensed to use the FSBPT Coursework Tool (CWT) along with the Canadian Alliance staff participated in this discussion and agreed upon a policy for working with these documents.

All five U.S. credentialing agencies attended a recent workshop hosted by the FSBPT Foreign Educated Standards committee. In informal discussions, the attendees agreed to accept credits issued by the German universities

if the applicants: 1) have been issued the university bachelor's degree in PT, 2) had completed primary and secondary education of at least 12 years and have passed the one of the secondary leaving examinations required for admission to an institution of higher education in Germany.

The ECTS credits awarded for completion of the physical therapy program by the *Fachhochschule* will be converted to US semester credits in higher education. These candidates will therefore receive credit for completion of three years of study. The standard conversion is two ECTS credits to one U.S. semester credit.

The three-year German bachelor's degree in physical therapy will fall short of the minimum required credits for equivalency to a first professional degree in the U.S. Nevertheless, students who earn the new bachelor's degree may now receive credit for work completed as

part of their vocational secondary physical therapy education that would not have been granted before. This will allow German physical therapists to complete supplemental higher education to meet U.S. substantial equivalency.

Non-university graduates will still not be considered for educational equivalency. Students who entered the vocational secondary program with anything less than a secondary leaving credential that would permit entrance to higher education in Germany and then went on to complete the bachelor's degree at the university of applied science, will similarly not receive credit for work completed at the vocational secondary level.

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