The History and Development of the
American International Recruitment Council (AIRC)
on the Occasion of its Fifth Anniversary [1]

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The American International Recruitment Council (AIRC) was created in an era of considerable growth in demand for increased international student recruitment by U.S. colleges and universities. As demand increased, many institutions began searching for new strategies. One strategy in particular, the use of commissioned-based international student recruitment agencies, was not well understood, and in fact was largely shunned, within the U.S higher education community.

Today, AIRC has grown into a nationally recognized and highly respected StandardsDevelopment Organization—which has certified sixty-eight recruitment agencies. AIRC has also assumed a dual role as the only higher education association concerned solely with international student recruitment and as a leader in training institutions and agencies on maintaining quality standards in their partnerships.

The Historical and Cultural Context

Commission-based international student recruitment agencies have existed at least since the 1980s. As early as 1986, D.G. Blight noted the need for specialized services to bring together the supplier of educational services with the consumer.[2] At the time, Blight was CEO of IDP, a development organization owned by the Australian universities. Over the ensuing years, Blight built IDP into the largest international recruitment agency in the world, and transformed Australia into a premier destination for fee-paying international students.

During these years of development, Australia faced many challenges relative to the integrity of agency-based recruitment. The interests of students were starkly challenged by unscrupulous recruitment practices, which threatened the integrity of Australia's higher education system and economy, if left unaddressed. These challenges resulted in national legislation to protect international students, as consumers of education services. The Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 (ESOS Act) established a National Code of Practice for

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[1] Throughout this paper, we have tried to acknowledge the many leaders – both from educational institutions and from agencies – who have contributed their effort to the success of AIRC. Our apologies to those whose names may have been inadvertently omitted.

[2] D.G. Blight, "Importers, Exporters and Brokers," Education as an International Commodity (Roselyn R. Gillespie and Colin B. Collins, eds.), Australian and New Zealand Comparative and International Education Society, 1986.

<u>Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students</u>, "to provide nationally consistent standards for the conduct of registered providers."[3] Today, nearly half of the international students in Australia arrive with the assistance of commission-based agents, and every Australian institution depends heavily on agents for their global recruitment needs. The ESOS Act and its associated standards have contributed significantly to Australia's success in global recruitment.

Since the early 2000s, many other countries, particularly Anglophone providers of higher education, have jumped on the agency recruitment bandwagon. The United Kingdom, New Zealand, Ireland and Canada, are among the most aggressive adopters and have all had substantial increases in their number of international students during the past ten years. Total international student enrollment in Australian institutions of higher education, for example, increased by 85% between 2002 and 2012, from 125,000 to 231,000 students.[4] Similarly, Canada saw an increase of 60% in the number of international students in higher education between 2004 and 2012, to 260,000.[5] By comparison, the total number of international students in U.S. institutions of higher education increased by only 30% between 2002-03 and 2011-12, from 586,000 to 764,000 students.[6] These three countries—Australia, Canada, and the U.S.—used many strategies to recruit international students, but the use of commission-based recruiting agencies played a very substantial role in Australia and Canada.

The United States, however, stood singularly apart from these developments. Despite an embrace by some continuing education programs, ESL providers and specialized career colleges, the use of agents was shunned by most institutions for recruitment into degree programs, particularly undergraduate programs. The reasons for this were rooted in the culture and traditions of U.S. higher education, and were reinforced by widespread misunderstanding of U.S. federal regulations. As a result, the proportion of all international students who leave their home countries and travel abroad to study in the United States has been declining steadily for many years, while the proportion for other countries, particularly Anglophone ones, has been increasing. The United States continues to be the largest destination of international students in the world, but its relative advantage has been eroding and will likely continue to decline unless more effective strategies of international student recruitment are implemented. While commission-based agents will never be the only tool available, it is an essential tool and arguably the most productive one.[7]

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[3] Australian Education International. https://aei.gov.au/Regulatory-Information/Pages/Regulatoryinformation.aspx

[4] Australian Education International. https://aei.gov.au/research/International-Student-Data/Documents/INTERNATIONAL%20STUDENT%20DATA/2012/2012%20Time%20Series%20Graph.pdf

[5] "Canada Opening Doors to Record Number of International Students," in *CIC News: Canada Immigration Newsletter.* http://www.cicnews.com/2013/07/canada-opening-doors-record-number-international-students-072646.html.

[6] Institute of International Education, Open Doors Data (2013): http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Enrollment-Trends/1948-2012

[7] According to the Institute of International Education (IIE), in 2001, 28% of all students studying abroad in the world were enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities. By 2010, only 20% were in the United States. In 2012, for the first time in decades, the proportion of international students in the U.S. was below 20%. More significantly, the United States used to account for more than 40% of all international students studying abroad in the world for many

Within the U.S. there were two specific influences which greatly contributed to negative perceptions on the use of agency based recruitment: one related to the influence of a key national association, and the other related to misunderstandings of federal law.

First, due to the U.S. tradition of local control of education, historically the strongest influence on educational policy comes from education associations rather than government agencies. Within the world of U.S. associations, the National Association of College Admission Counseling (NACAC) has the greatest influence on Americans understanding of admission and recruitment practices. NACAC is an important and venerable organization that was created in the 1930s to professionalize American domestic *undergraduate* recruitment practice.[8] The vast majority of undergraduate institutions in the United States are NACAC members.

NACAC's key role in setting guidelines for U.S. admissions policy is through its Statement of Principles of Good Practice (SPGP). Adherence to the SPGP is mandatory for institutional members of NACAC. Prior to September 2013, however, NACAC's SPGP stated, under Mandatory Practices (section I.A.3), that Members must agree to: "[N]ot offer or accept any reward or remuneration from a secondary school, college, university, agency, or organization for placement or recruitment of students."

Because the SPGP was *mandatory* for members, non-compliance was perceived by most institutions to entail significant risks, the foremost being exclusion from the hundreds of domestic high school recruiting fairs which NACAC organizes and which dominate American undergraduate recruitment channels.

The above-referenced section of the NACAC SPGP was based primarily on a provision in the Title IV of the 1965 Higher Education Act (HEA) which prohibited incentive-based recruitment. What was not commonly known, however, was that the law had an explicit carve-out for international students. The complete text of this carve-out is below:

> (b) By entering into a program participation agreement, an institution agrees that –It will not provide any commission, bonus, or other incentive payment based directly or indirectly upon success in securing enrollments or financial aid to any person or entity engaged in any student recruiting or admission activities or in making decisions regarding the awarding of title IV, HEA program funds, except that *this limitation does not apply to the recruitment of foreign students residing in foreign countries who are not eligible to receive title IV, HEA program funds.*[9] [italics added]

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years. For example, 41% of all international students were enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities in 1970 and 43% in 1985 (according to UNESCO). Today the number is below 20% and declining.

[8] It is important to note that NACAC's influence on continuing, executive, professional or graduate education has always been negligible.

[9] U.S. House of Representatives, <u>Higher Education Act of 1965</u>. http://www.house.gov/legcoun/Comps/HEA65_CMD.pdf

Because the culture of *domestic* recruitment was strongly influenced by the Title IV provision, and because NACAC's SPGP did not acknowledge the carve-out and was so categorically opposed to commission-based recruitment, the vast majority of undergraduate admissions officers were understandably reluctant to embark on a controversial and new approach to recruitment.

Early Rumblings

Although agency-based recruitment was largely shunned by U.S. undergraduate recruitment officers (due to NACAC's historic position), it had taken hold years earlier among ESL providers (both independent and institution-affiliated), as well as many continuing, executive and specialized program providers wishing to grow international enrollment. As the 2000s progressed, some colleges and universities began to tiptoe quietly into using agency recruitment as an additional international student recruitment tool. By the mid-2000s, developments were approaching a tipping point.

One key example was Ohio University (OU) which began working with agents in late 2005. Very quickly, it became evident that agency recruitment was becoming the most productive tool in OU's toolbox.[10] Recognizing the controversial nature of this practice (OU's undergraduate admissions office was understandably concerned about NACAC's SPGP), combined with the complexity of working with agents and OU's lack of experience, Josep Rota[11] reached out to experienced hand Cagri Bacgiolu, who directed Arkansas State University's international student recruitment activities and had previous experience as a student recruiter in Turkey, as well as to the University of Cincinnati (more below). Having a primary concern for the well-being of prospective students, OU soon required agencies with which it worked to sign a rigorous code of ethics, as well as to visit the university for extensive preparation and training.

Similarly, in late 2005, the University of Cincinnati (UC) was also considering launching a commission-based agency recruitment strategy.[12] Prior to initiating this activity, UC contacted NACAC to seek clarification, given the contradiction between the SPGP and Title IV. In response to UC's inquiry, David Hawkins, NACAC Director of Public Policy, wrote "[NACAC's] SPGP does not specify whether its ban on commission payments applies to recruiters of foreign students. However, the ban on commission payments is binding for NACAC member institutions. One practical limitation on the enforcement of our restriction is the fact that federal law, which bans 'commissioned sales in admission' domestically, specifically exempts recruiters of foreign students." Based on NACAC's acknowledgement of its difficulties enforcing a contradictory policy, the University of Cincinnati decided to proceed with agency-based recruitment, making a commitment to doing so publicly, transparently, and with a commitment to globally developed standards.

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[10] Ohio University saw a 58% increase in the number of international students enrolled between 2005 and 2008.

[11] Vice Provost for International Affairs at Ohio University.

[12] This initiative was led by Vice Provost for International Affairs Mitch Leventhal, who previously had worked for IDP from 2001-2004.

UC launched its agency strategy in early 2006. Contemporaneously, Josep Rota became chair of the Ohio International Consortium (OIC) – the association of international offices at the twelve public universities in Ohio, reporting to the Ohio Board of Regents. At OIC meetings, Mitch Leventhal of UC argued in favor of the professional and coordinated use of international recruitment agencies, and others such as Rota, George Burke (Cleveland State), Mark Rubin (Kent State) and David Ayres (University of Akron), joined in supporting a cooperative approach to agency-based recruitment aimed at protecting students.[13] Very quickly other institutions became converts, as it was clear that a collective approach to professional practice was emerging, and that both OU and UC were beginning to show significant positive results.

Under Rota's leadership, the OIC reached out to private institutions in Ohio, and independent institutions such as Findlay University and Otterbein College, as well as community colleges such as Lorain County Community College were welcomed into the emerging collective strategy. In 2007, the Ohio Board of Regents endorsed the use of commission-based agents.

Very quickly, colleges and universities beyond Ohio started to request guidance on agency based recruitment. Concerned that a rush to agency recruitment by inexperienced institutions could lead to disaster, Mitch Leventhal began holding informal workshops in which he detailed approaches to working with agents while maintaining high ethical standards.

The Genesis of AIRC

In early 2008, Leventhal was approached by Cheryl Darrup-Boychuk, who asked him to write an article for NAFSA detailing how to responsibly use agents and protect student's interests. The resulting article, The Legality and Standards of Commission-based Recruiting, appeared on the NAFSA website in spring 2008.[14] It remains on the website and has become a seminal document tied to the development of AIRC.

Legality and Standards argued that standards were essential for institutions working with agents, but that none existed to guide U.S. institutions. In the absence of standards, Leventhal enunciated the principles which guided UC's efforts, arguing that Americans should sail in Australia's student protection slipstream until such time as American agency recruitment standards emerged. The "Cincinnati Principles" became a beacon for other institutions to follow, and sent a signal nationally that change was truly afoot.

Momentum and interest were growing. Rumors began circulating that certain national organizations were alarmed by an emerging movement to utilize agents. At the 2008 NAFSA Conference in Washington, DC, the word was that several informal side meetings were being convened to which a number of national organizations were invited, including NACAC, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), the American Council on Education (ACE), and a variety of other organizations, as well as

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[13] Several institutions, most notably Ohio State, expressed significant concerns and objections regarding the use of agents.

[14] NAFSA, Legality and Standards. http://www.nafsa.org/_/File/_/agents-legality_standards.pdf

individual advocates of a continued ban on agents. None of the emerging national leaders in the pro-agency camp were invited. Repeated inquiries into the nature of these meetings resulted in the same response: "they are meeting to *do something* about agency-based recruitment."

It was during this moment – when a number of the future founders were feeling excluded from what appeared to be an organized national dialogue – when the idea of AIRC emerged. Already, Leventhal had advocated standards and proposed guidelines. Now, the idea emerged to "beat them at their own game" – to establish an organization that utilized best practices from the long history of American accreditation, and which exceeded existing regulatory practices, to create a rigorous certification process for international student recruitment agents.

The Cincinnati Principles – Guidelines for Success in Recruiting

From Legality & Standards of Commission-based Recruiting (2008)

If your institution is serious about changing course, consider these principles as you plan your new international recruitment strategy.

1. Work with well-established commission-based agents who already work with the Australian universities.
2. Refuse to work with agents who exclusively charge students.
3. Always check the references of agencies under consideration.
4. Demand that agents operate as though the ESOS Act applies to your U.S. institution.
5. Embrace best practices that are already in place, and do not re-invent the wheel.
6. Utilize the Australian agency agreement with as few modifications as possible.
7. Work within the established operating framework with which agencies are familiar and comfortable – adapt your admissions and marketing practices to the new reality.
8. Establish a dedicated international admissions office to coordinate agency relationships and support their efforts.
9. Do not appoint more than three agents in any given country, and avoid appointing fewer than two.
10. Collaborate with your local competitors – embrace *co-opetition* – the result will be economies of scale in an expanding market with accelerated benefits for all.

Mitch Leventhal, Josep Rota (Ohio University) and George Burke (Cleveland State University) were the three who were present at the moment the American International Recruitment Council (AIRC) concept was born. Minutes later, Markus Badde (ICEF) wandered by, and the three explained to him the infant plan. Badde offered to help with a financial donation to cover the legal costs of incorporating and becoming a legally recognized standards body. AIRC began to crawl within one hour.

AIRC's Infancy and Development

Formal incorporation of the American International Recruitment Council (AIRC) took place several weeks later.[15] The founding board was comprised of the three individuals who were the legal signatories as "incorporators": Leventhal (Chair and President), Rota (Vice President) and Burke (Treasurer). Soon after, the founding board expanded to five and became the "first" board, including Joe DeCrosta (Duquesne University) as Secretary and Dave Anderson (ELS).

The first board designed the bylaws to enshrine certain principles. Foremost among these was that the organization must be "controlled" by U.S. accredited post-secondary institutions. At the same time, however, it was believed that AIRC must embrace certified agencies as true partners, and that they must therefore have voice on the board. Thus, a provision was made to reserve at least one board seat for an AIRC certified agency member. The first board also believed that AIRC must have democratic governance, and so it was determined that board terms would be three (3) years with staggered terms and annual elections, starting in 2010, such that by 2012 AIRC would have a fully elected board. In 2012, Mitch Leventhal was the last of the original board members to cycle off the board. Over time, the board was also expanded to seven members in order to provide greater opportunity for participation for both institutions and agencies. But the board has also had significant continuity of leadership; Stephen Foster of Wright State has led AIRC as president for three of AIRC's five years.

At the insistence of Marjorie Peace Lenn (see below), the first board also built a wall of separation between the governing board and the Certification Board which had been designated as an independent jury for making decisions on certification. Although Certification Board members, comprised of AIRC institutional members, would be appointed by the board of directors, all Certification Board deliberations would be entirely insulated from governing board influence. This was done to preserve the confidentiality and impartiality of the certification board's work, as well as to ensure due process for all agencies committed to AIRC certification.

Leventhal had a long-standing professional relationship with Marjorie Peace Lenn, executive director of the Center for Quality Assurance in International Education (CQAIE).[16] Building upon her tenure as the Vice President of the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation, Lenn had become a leading expert on international accreditation processes and cross-border accreditation. Lenn agreed to work with AIRC to develop its standards and certification process, as well as to manage certification once operational.

During the summer of 2008, Leventhal and Lenn met with Geoffrey Bannister, founder of The Forum on Education Abroad.[17] Bannister explained that The Forum had registered as a Standard Development Organization (SDO), but had not taken the extra step of becoming a certifying agency. He urged AIRC to become an SDO and to establish a certification process

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[15] AIRC was registered as a 501(c)(3) corporation in 2008.

[16] John Deupree, who later became executive director of AIRC, was a board member of CQAIE.

[17] Geoff Bannister is now president of Hawai'i Pacific University.

which would be rigorous and enforceable. The AIRC Board supported Bannister's recommendation and plans to register as an SDO with the U.S. Federal Trade Commission and U.S. Department of Justice were initiated.

AIRC Board Membership 2008-13				
1st - 2008-09 (self-appointed)	**2nd - 2009-10**	**3rd - 2010-11**	**4th - 2011-12**	**5th - 2012-13** (fully elected)
Mitch Leventhal Chair & President (University of Cincinnati)	*Mitch Leventhal* Chair & President	**Stephen Foster** Chair & President (Wright State University)	**Stephen Foster** Chair & President	**Stephen Foster** Chair & President
Josep Rota Vice President (Ohio University)	*George Burke* Treasurer	*Mitch Leventhal* Vice President/ Treasurer	*Mitch Leventhal* Vice President	**Mary Marquez Bell** Vice President/ Treasurer
George Burke Treasurer (Cleveland State University)	*Joe DeCrosta* Secretary	**Mary Marquez Bell** Secretary (SUNY College of Old Westbury)	**Mary Marquez Bell** Treasurer	**John Pomeroy** Secretary (SUNY Albany)
Joe DeCrosta Secretary (Duquesne University)	*David Anderson*	*David Anderson*	**Ross Jennings** Secretary (Green River Community College)	**Ross Jennings**
David Anderson, (ELS)	**Stephen Foster** (Wright State University)	**Norman Peterson** (Montana State University)	**Norman Peterson**	**Norman Peterson**
	Pia Wood (University of Tennessee)	*Pia Wood*	*Pia Wood*	† **Mark Lucas**
		† **Mark Shay** (IDP)	† **Mark Lucas** (iae Global)	† **Wang Wei**, (Wiseway Global)
† Agency Representatives		*Appointed Members*	**Elected Members**	

Institutions began joining AIRC and outreach was started to agencies which might be supportive of the certification process. It was decided that a meeting should be convened in September 2008, to include several member institutions and interested agencies to discuss various possible standards frameworks and other aspects of operations. Mentor International in Bangkok hosted this meeting, which included Ian Bushell and Gary Haeger of Mentor International, David Shi of EduGlobal (China), Ravi Lochan Singh of Global Reach (India), David Arredondo (Lorain County Community College), Vicki Seefeldt West (Ohio University) and Mitch Leventhal. This meeting validated that the general concept and framework were sound.

In the meantime, Marjorie Lenn was developing a standards framework. This was done by drawing elements from every standards document pertaining to agency recruitment that could be obtained. This included not only the Australian ESOS framework, but also emerging British standards, as well as those of the many members of the Federation of Education and Language Consultant Associations (FELCA), including agency associations such as the Japan Association of Overseas Studies (JAOS), Thai International Education Consultants Association (TIECA), Korea Overseas Studies Association (KOSA), Brazilian Educational & Language Travel Association (BELTA), Association of Australian Education Representatives in India (AAERI), and many others.[18] Lenn collated all of the standards, searched for standards common for all, and identified gaps that had not been addressed. By October, a complete draft of the standards and certification process were ready for review.

All institutional members of AIRC were invited to its first membership meeting, specifically to review and discuss the draft standards. In addition, major associations, including NACAC, were invited to attend and participate.[19] None did. Most did not respond. Some would only participate if others agreed to do so first. In essence, none of the major national associations wanted to associate themselves with an upstart organization that was swimming against the established current.

As planned, AIRC institutional members met officially for the first time on October 29, 2008, at the University of Cincinnati. Twenty-nine institutions sent representatives to this important meeting.[20]

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[18] Federation of Education and Language Consultant Associations (FELCA). http://www.felca.org

[19] In addition to NACAC, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), American Council of Education (ACE), Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU), American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), Institute of International Education (IIE) and NAFSA were invited to observe and participate in the standards development process.

[20] From the beginning, AIRC's membership reflected the diversity of U.S. accredited post-secondary education, including English language institutes, community colleges, public and private institutions, and even proprietary institutions.

**Founding Institutions Represented at the AIRC Standards Meeting
at the University of Cincinnati on October 29, 2008** [†]

Arkansas State University – Jonesboro	Otterbein University
Bellarmine University	St. Norbert College
Boise State University	Schiller University
Cleveland State University	Shawnee State University
Drexel University	Tiffin University
Duquesne University	University of Akron
ELS Language Centers	University of Cincinnati
Golden Gate University	University of Colorado-Denver
Lorain County Community College	University of North Dakota
Montana State University	University of Texas at San Antonio-ESL
Murray State University	Upper Iowa University
North Dakota State University	Urbana University
Northern Kentucky University	West Virginia University
Northern Michigan University	Wright State University
Ohio University	

[†] *A list of institutional representatives can be found at the end of this article.*

For a full day, each standard was explained and discussed. Members were informed of the need to identify every possible issue during the months to follow, preceding a vote of the membership on the standards. By federal law, in order to become a Standard Development Organization, AIRC was required to have a unanimous vote of the entire membership, with no nays or abstentions.

The 2008 meeting exemplified what would become a tradition of broad member participation in the AIRC process which has typified the organization since this its earliest days. Following that meeting, a nineteen member *Founding Standards Committee* was formed, with Claudia Espinosa (Wright State University) and Sam Skinner (University of Hartford) as co-Chairs.

Members of the Founding Standards Committee, 2008-2009	
Claudia Espinoza (co-Chair)	Wright State University
Samuel Skinner (co-Chair)	University of Hartford
David Anderson	ELS Language Centers
David Arredondo	Lorain County Community College
Michael Basile	Murray State University
Elizabeth Chaulk	Northern Kentucky University
Marguerite Dennis	Suffolk University
Lindsey Fulcher	University of Cincinnati
Gary Haeger	Mentor International
Steve Harper	Independent Consultant
Jim Kelim	University of Texas-San Antonio, ESL
Marjorie Peace Lenn	Center for Quality Assurance in International Education
Mitch Leventhal	University of Cincinnati
Grace Poling	Ohio Wesleyan University
Josep Rota	Ohio University
Mark Schroeder	University of Toledo
Ravi Lochan Singh	Global Reach
Steve Thewlis	Golden Gate University
Eddie West[21]	Ohlone College

In December 2008, the board appointed a smaller ad hoc *Standards & Certification Committee (S&C)*.[22] Members included Mitch Leventhal, George Burke, Dave Anderson, Ravi Lochan Singh, Elizabeth Chaulk and Sam Skinner. The S&C Committee was charged with "closely reviewing the draft [standards], identifying problems and issues…, and bringing [the standards] to a form which the group believes is ready for final approval by the general membership." The S&C Committee worked closely with Marjorie Lenn to bring the standards to their final state, in time for the membership vote which was scheduled to take place prior to the May 2009 NAFSA Conference in Los Angeles. The S&C Committee was disbanded once the standards were adopted. Going forward, maintenance of the standards would become the responsibility, first and foremost, of the AIRC Certification Board.

The AIRC membership vote on standards took place during April and May 2009. At that point AIRC had 52 member institutions – all voted in support of the standards, without exception.[23] AIRC had successfully met the criteria for becoming a federally recognized

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[21] Eddie West is now Director of International Initiatives at NACAC.

[22] Note the similarity in names between the larger Standards Committee and the smaller Standards and Certification Committee. Both were created as time constrained *ad* hoc committees to organize around specific tasks. As the organization matured, a more natural and consistent organizational structure emerged.

[23] AIRC Certification Standards. http://airc-education.org/LiteratureRetrieve.aspx?ID=66731

Standard Development Organization, and announced the launch of the certification process at NAFSA in Los Angeles.

AIRC immediately became fully operational. The Center for Quality Assurance in International Education (CQAIE), under the leadership of Marjorie Lenn, was contracted to manage certification. John Deupree, a CQAIE board member, was hired as Executive Director on a part-time basis in early 2009 to guide the administrative aspects of the association as a whole.

The Certification Process

The AIRC Certification Process was designed to include six (6) steps:[24]

Application – In order to initiate the process, the agency would submit a detailed application along with a non-refundable deposit. AIRC then contracts with a third-party investigation firm to examine the company and all owners of the company holding 20% or more of its stock. This investigation would include checks of court proceedings, newspaper articles and online sources, and other media. Depending on outcome, the applicant would either proceed forward or be eliminated at this point. Due process procedures were developed so that agencies would have an opportunity to explain issues uncovered, prior to a progress decision being made.

Professional Development – Agencies would study an AIRC developed guide to U.S. post-secondary education, and develop internal processes to assure that all staff had familiarity with the unique attributes of the U.S. system.

Self-Study – Agencies would undertake a self-study, explaining how each AIRC standard is addressed within their particular business context. In areas where the self-study identifies a gap or performance deficit, the agency would explain what steps were being taken to rectify the situation.

Comments – The public at large would be invited during the application phase to make comments on any applicant based on perceived violation of, or adherence to, any specific AIRC standard.

External Review – Agencies would submit to an external review from a trained reviewer from one of AIRC's member institutions. Such review would include, but not be limited to, review of all aspects of business management (including document management), one-on-one interviews with key staff and student clients, and inspection of facilities, including selected branch operations.

Certification Board – Once the previous steps had been completed, the Certification Board would review the complete dossier. Possible outcomes include *certification, conditional certification* or *denial of certification.*

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[24] The certification process has not been modified since launch.

An essential element of the certification process would be enforcement. Violations of the standards would have consequences. AIRC would investigate all non-anonymous confidential complaints received, and in cases of serious violations of the standards would reserve the right to revoke certification of an agent, including appearance on AIRC's online de-certification list for a period of five years. It is this ultimate threat that would give AIRC the *teeth* that prior regulatory schemes (in Australia, the UK and elsewhere) lacked. It was reasoned that agencies which voluntarily paid the not insubstantial costs of certification and membership, submitted to external inspection and were now part of a larger community of practice, would be far less likely to risk public humiliation than those not engaged in the AIRC process.

In order to manage the certification process (including oversight of certified agencies), a Certification Board (CB) was established in the fall of 2009, initially with Marjorie Lenn as Chair.

Members of the First AIRC Certification Board, 2009*
*Affiliation at the Time

Marjorie Peace Lenn (Chair)	Center for Quality Assurance in International Education*
Derrick Alex	University of Colorado-Denver
Barry Bannister	Green River Community College
George Beers	Foothill College
Geraldine de Berly	Syracuse University
Roberta Freedman	Clark Hill PLC
Mandy Hansen	Northern Arizona University
John Hishmeh	Council on Standards in International Education Travel
Elaine Jarchow	Northern Kentucky University*
Shamus McGrenra	St. Francis University
Josep Rota	Ohio University*
Marcelo Siles	Northern Michigan University
Sam Skinner	University of Hartford
Eddie West	Ohlone College*

A small group of agencies was identified as willing to pilot the standards – to become the first agencies to undergo the AIRC certification process. Efforts were made to identify agencies known to be reputable operators, from a variety of countries. In the end, eight were selected to participate. All successfully achieved certification on December 4, 2009, and became AIRC's first agency-certified members. These agencies, headquartered in seven countries, had operations in 32 countries and included 50 branch offices.

Agency Pilots – First AIRC Certified Agencies, 2009	
Agency	**Headquarters**
EDU Danmark	Denmark
EduGlobal	China
Global Reach	India
IDP	Australia
IEC Online	Germany
Mentor International	Thailand
Study Overseas	United Kingdom
WE Group	United States

As AIRC's visibility increased, several education service companies asked to have a formal way to be engaged with the organization. A new membership category was created to accommodate this request, and Hobsons, i-Graduate and ICEF became founding Sustaining Members. These organizations provided additional financial resources which were essential in the early days, before a significant membership base had been built. Later the Sustaining Members category was changed to that of Corporate Sponsor.

During 2009 and 2010, Lenn and Deupree worked together to make certain that every aspect of the certification process worked properly. Unbeknownst even to her closest intimates, however, Marjorie was terminally ill. She passed away suddenly, but not before she had put AIRC on a solid footing, with standards and a process which is world class and which has withstood significant outside scrutiny. AIRC would not have come into being without the expertise of this remarkable, tenacious and determined woman.[25]

Following the death of Marjorie Lenn, the AIRC board voted to directly manage certification operations. Elaine Jarchow, who had chaired the Certification Board, became the Director of Certification. Jennifer Wright, who had worked with Lenn at CQAIE, became AIRC's second full time employee and eventually took over the duties of directing the certification process.

Based on the results of the pilot certification process, and due in part to the passing of Marjorie Lenn, the AIRC board engaged Steven Crow in 2011 to undertake a review of the AIRC standards and certification process. Crow had recently retired as the President of the North Central Higher Learning Commission and was a well-known authority on higher education accreditation. Crow's review recommended a number of modest revisions to the standards and certification process. Just as importantly, his review provided credible reassurance that AIRC was abiding by the highest standards in higher education quality assurance. In 2011 the Board appointed an *ad hoc* Standards Revision Committee which made further recommendations which

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[25] In honor of Lenn's contribution to AIRC, her passionate commitment to integrity in recruitment, and her abiding passion for the rights of students, the AIRC Research Committee administers the annual *Marjorie Peace Lenn Award* for undergraduate or graduate research on international student recruitment issues.

were unanimously adopted by the Board on January 4, 2012. These recommendations included a shift from a three (3) year certification to a five (5) year certification, an annual report requirement, and a probationary status for agencies found to be in violation of AIRC Standards. New standards were added to prohibit commissions tied to financial aid and scholarships, to increase agency accountability for sub-agents, and to strengthen standards regarding authenticity of credentials.

AIRC Standards Revision Committee, 2011

Josep Rota (Certification Board Liaison)	Ohio University
Mandy Hansen	Northern Arizona University
Hilka Leicht	IEC – International Education for Global Minds
Carol Mandzik	SUNY Oneonta
Ravi Lochan Singh	Global Reach
Sam Skinner	University of Hartford
David Stremba	INTO University Partners
Steve Thewlis	Golden State University

Opposition to Agency-based Recruitment Mobilizes

While AIRC membership and certified agencies continued to grow, official recognition by key national associations remained elusive. The United States Department of State staked out a particularly hostile position. In September 2009, the State Department issued its *Policy Guidance for EducationUSA Centers on Commercial Recruitment Agents*, a document which is factually challenged in its characterization of agency recruitment practice.[26] To this day, the State Department actively discourages foreign students from using agents and has refused to engage with AIRC.[27]

Within NACAC and in the higher education media an increasingly emotional debate raged. A very vocal faction called for the expulsion of all institutions which were flagrantly disregarding the SPGP. Others were concerned that such a wholesale expulsion would have unpredictable consequences. Nobody was sure how many members were discreetly using agents, but expulsions might extend well beyond those NACAC members who were also involved with AIRC. In early 2011, NACAC announced that it would take action by summer. It was clear that the intention was to expel members, and exclude them from domestic marketing opportunities managed by NACAC. But even in spite of such serious possible consequences, a number of AIRC-affiliated institutions publicly affirmed that they would continue to engage in practices that were producing results, including the use of agents.

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[26] U.S. Department of State. http://www.educationusa.info/pdf/Policy_Guidance_for_EducationUSA_Centers.pdf

[27] Ironically, during this period, the United States Department of Commerce U.S. Commercial Service launched its *Gold Key* service, whereby they match-make institutions and agencies for a fee.

At this point, AIRC leaders began wondering whether NACAC might be treading into even murkier waters. If there were no viable alternatives to NACAC's high school recruiting fairs, and NACAC blackballed AIRC members and others who worked with agents, might that not constitute a restraint of trade? AIRC therefore retained two separate law firms to investigate the matter independently. The firms of Pepper Hamilton and Cozen O'Connor concluded that NACAC, as a trade organization with significant market dominance, would probably be in violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act if NACAC punished members who were engaged in legal activity by effectively excluding them from a unique domestic marketing channel controlled by NACAC itself. AIRC shared these legal opinions with NACAC.

At the same time, AIRC mobilized its members to write to the NACAC board imploring it to avoid a schismatic event. Because so many of NACAC's members were openly aligned with AIRC, APLU President Peter McPherson contacted NACAC leaders and counseled them to slow down. He suggested that NACAC form a Commission of experts to examine the problem and suggest a solution. In its wisdom, NACAC considered all of this input and stepped back from the precipice. It announced the formation of the Commission on International Student Recruitment "to begin studying international student recruitment practices and to address the associated, long-running controversy over the use of commissioned agency."[28] To its credit, NACAC appointed AIRC board member Norman Peterson (Montana State University) to the Commission.[29]

Commission meetings were polarized and contentious. Public hearings were held, during which federal policy inconsistency was exposed when the U.S. Departments of State and Commerce expressed diametrically opposing views, to the consternation of the Commission.[30] AIRC was among those organizations invited to present testimony. In the end, the Commission's report, issued in May 2013, attempted to satisfy all parties. But at its core, the report counseled *against* punishing institutions which use commission-based agents. This outcome was a watershed for AIRC, since it was clear that the worst outcome would probably be avoided. But still, the NACAC Assembly had to vote on next steps.

AIRC Members are Vindicated

In September 2013, the NACAC Assembly voted, by a 2 to 1 margin, to go beyond the somewhat equivocal recommendations of the Commission. NACAC reversed its historic position on agency-based recruitment. The new SPGP stated that members would agree to

> …not offer or accept any reward or remuneration from a secondary school, college, university, agency, or organization for placement or recruitment of students in the United

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[28] Report of the Commission on International Student Recruitment, NACAC, May 2013.

[29] Ross Jennings of Green River Community College was also appointed to the Commission, to provide a community college perspective. Several months into the commission's life, Jennings was elected to the AIRC board of directors, so AIRC then had *two* board members participating.

[30] NACAC Commission on International Student Recruitment.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVVfvl8YqWY&playnext=1&list=PLF72BA6ADAED0EAD1&feature=results_main

States. *Members who choose to use incentive-based agents when recruiting students outside the U.S. will ensure accountability, transparency and integrity.*[31] [italics added]

NACAC's call for accountability, transparency and integrity aligns perfectly with the work AIRC has undertaken since its inception.

NACAC's change in position is the culmination of an eight year campaign fought largely from *outside* of that organization, by institutions which were largely long-time NACAC members but who were committed to accelerating professionalization of the industry, and represents a major vindication of those institutions, as well as the AIRC concept. Increasingly, U.S. institutions, such as the State University of New York, are requiring AIRC certification as a pre-requisite for contracts.

Today, as we celebrate AIRC's fifth birthday, AIRC has grown into the dual role of both an international certifying body and an educational association. The organization has 220 institutional members – many of whom are also long-standing members of NACAC. In addition, AIRC has six Pathway members (a relatively new category created in response to market innovations) which include another 19 institutional partners. Sixty-eight agencies have been certified. These agencies operate in 89 countries and 294 cities.[32] AIRC's annual conference serves as an opportunity for these members to come together and jointly discuss standards and best practice.

Throughout the process, not only have agencies shown their willingness to embrace a rigorous set of standards and open themselves to outside scrutiny, but they have also proven to be invaluable contributors to national and international dialogues on ethical recruitment practice. AIRC's work on creating a dialogue around standards in international recruitment has been so successful that the organization has now expanded its focus to include professional development and best practice guidelines for educational institutions, as well as agencies.[33]

An Editorial Afterword from the Authors

As we reflect on the history of AIRC's evolution and success, the authors believe that we must all think about where AIRC is going next. AIRC was founded, primarily, by NACAC member institutions. Today, AIRC's membership is still largely composed of NACAC members. These common members can play a critical role of bridging the two organizations, so that U.S. higher education has the critical support it needs to remain competitive into the next century. We believe this united effort can help bring contending parts of the U.S. federal government together, so that in the coming years both the U.S. State Department's EducationUSA and the U.S. Commercial Service may both become more effective and essential as a new global paradigm for recruitment emerges.

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[31] NACAC. http://www.nacacnet.org/about/Governance/Policies/Documents/SPGP_9_2013.pdf

[32] Data is accurate as of November 15, 2013. A complete list of members can be found at www.airc-education.org.

[33] AIRC Best Practice Guidelines for Institutional and Pathway Members.
http://www.airc-education.org/_literature_123692/AIRC_Institutional_Best_Practices_Guidelines

APPENDICES

**Institutional Representatives Attending the
AIRC Standards Meeting
at the University of Cincinnati on October 29, 2008**

Marjorie Peace Lenn	Center for Quality Assurance in International Education
George Burke	Cleveland State University
Joe DeCrosta	Duquesne University
Dave Anderson	ELS Language Centers
Dan Jones	Hobsons
Kathleen Steele	Hobsons
Steve Harper	Independent Consultant
David Arredondo	Lorain County Community College
Norm Peterson	Montana State University
Michael Basile	Murray State University
Jim McCoy	Murray State University
Kerry Spiering	North Dakota State University
Elaine Jarchow	Northern Kentucky University
Elizabeth Leibach	Northern Kentucky University
Elizabeth Chaulk	Northern Kentucky University
Josep Rota	Ohio University
Thomas Stein	Otterbein College
John Lorentz	Shawnee State University
Ratee Apana	University of Cincinnati
Mitch Leventhal	University of Cincinnati
Jon Weller	University of Cincinnati
Ron Cushing	University of Cincinnati
Tom Canepa	University of Cincinnati
Lindsey Fulcher	University of Cincinnati
Brittney Huntley	University of Cincinnati
Mary Watkins	University of Cincinnati
Victoria Beard	University of North Dakota
Pia Wood	University of Tennessee-Knoxville
Thomas Fauquet	Urbana University
Stephen Foster	Wright State University
Claudia Espinoza	Wright State University
Michelle Streeter-Ferarri	Wright State University

AIRC Certification Board Membership 2009 – 2013			
2009-10	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**
Elaine Jarchow, Chair (Northern Kentucky University)	Josep Rota, Chair	Geraldine de Berly, Chair	Barry Bannister, Chair
Derrick Alex (University of Colorado – Denver)	Derrick Alex	Derrick Alex (Pacific University)	Derrick Alex
Barry Bannister (Green River Community College)	Barry Bannister	Barry Bannister	George Beers
George Beers (Foothill and De Anza Colleges)	George Beers	George Beers	George Burke
Geraldine de Berly (Syracuse University)	Geraldine de Berly	George Burke	Geraldine de Berly
Roberta Freedman (Clark Hill PLC)	Marquerite Dennis (Suffolk University)	Mandy Hansen	Mandy Hansen
Mandy Hansen (Northern Arizona University)	Roberta Freedman	Carol Mandzik (University of Maine)	Jeet Joshee (California State University,-Long Beach)
John Hishmeh (CSIET)	Mandy Hansen	Terry O'Donnell (Commission on English Language Accreditation)	Carol Mandzik
Shamus McGrenra (St. Francis University)	Shamus McGrenra	Josep Rota	Josep Rota
Josep Rota (Ohio University)	Josep Rota	Marcelo Siles (Old Dominion University)	Marcelo Siles
Marcelo Siles (Northern Michigan University)	Marcelo Siles	Samuel Skinner	Yusef Ugras (LaSalle University)
Samuel Skinner (University of Hartford)	Samuel Skinner		
Eddie West (Ohlone College)	Eddie West		