Artificial Intelligence in International Admissions: Emerging Opportunities, Risks, and Implementation Realities

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly influencing higher education operations, creating new opportunities and challenges for international admissions and credential evaluation. While existing discussions have focused primarily on AI applications in higher education, limited research has explored how AI is being implemented in international credential evaluation.

This white paper examines emerging AI practices through survey questions and interviews with professionals from higher education institutions and credential evaluation organizations. Findings highlight current applications, including communication support, workflow automation, translation, document processing, optical character recognition (OCR), transcript analysis, and GPA calculation. Across organizations, AI is viewed as a tool to enhance efficiency and support professional expertise rather than having the ability to replace human judgment.

The interviews reveal key considerations for responsible AI adoption, including data privacy, ethical governance, accuracy, human oversight, and organizational readiness. These case studies provide early insights into how international education professionals are navigating AI implementation and preparing for the future of AI-enhanced admissions and credential evaluation.

Introduction

Existing discussions and research on artificial intelligence in higher education have primarily focused on its role in the student application screening and admissions process rather than

international credential evaluation. Recent developments demonstrate that institutions are exploring AI applications to support admissions operations, including essay review, application screening, transcript analysis, and administrative efficiency.

For example, the Associated Press reported that some institutions have begun exploring AI-powered tools to assist with reviewing application materials and analyzing student submissions. At Virginia Tech, an AI-powered essay reader was introduced to help process a large volume of applications and support faster decision-making. However, institutional leaders emphasized that AI was intended to assist admissions professionals rather than replace human decision-makers. As Virginia Tech's Vice Provost for Enrollment Management Juan Espinoza noted, "Humans get tired; some days are better than others. The AI does not get tired. It doesn't get grumpy. It doesn't have a bad day. The AI is consistent" (Associated Press, 2025).

Research on AI and admissions has also highlighted both opportunities and challenges associated with AI-assisted evaluation. Studies examining AI and holistic review suggest that computational tools may help institutions analyze large volumes of application information while also raising important questions about fairness, transparency, and potential bias. Alvero et al. (2019) examined the use of computational approaches in holistic admissions review and found that applicant characteristics could be inferred from admissions essays, suggesting the importance of carefully auditing both human and AI-supported evaluation processes.

The increasing availability of generative AI has also transformed how students engage with the admissions process. Research and practitioner discussions have examined student use of AI for

brainstorming, editing, and drafting application essays, raising questions about authenticity, equity, and the changing role of personal statements in admissions. A 2024 white paper by Foundry 10's Digital Technologies and Education Lab found that generative AI has changed how students approach college applications, particularly in areas such as essay writing and college advising, while highlighting ethical considerations surrounding AI use in admissions. Based on a nationwide survey of 523 high school students and 425 teachers, the study found that students were using AI for personal essay writing and college advising, while teachers were also adopting these tools to assist with recommendation letters. The researchers additionally explored ethical concerns surrounding authenticity, fairness, and perceptions of applicants who use AI in their application materials (Rubin et al., 2024).

Professionals in the field of credential evaluation require specialized expertise in interpreting educational systems, verifying academic documents, assessing institutional context, and applying professional judgment across countries and regions. New and emerging AI tools such as optical character recognition, automated document processing, translation tools, and AI-assisted transcript analysis appear to offer potential in supporting credential evaluation professionals as well. This research paper aims to look at how credential evaluation and admissions professionals relate to existing and emerging AI tools and how they are changing work environments while working to offer the highest possible accuracy, privacy and industry standards. Understanding how credential evaluation organizations and international admissions professionals are experimenting with AI can provide insight into effective implementation strategies, governance frameworks, and ethical considerations unique to global higher education.

Credential Evaluation in International Admissions Overview

What is Credential Evaluation?

Credential evaluation is the methodical and rule-governed assessment of educational qualifications earned in one country or system of education to determine their comparability in another country or educational system (Also see: ACEI, 2023). In international admissions, this means reviewing academic records such as academic transcripts, diplomas, certificates, and academic support documents to establish whether the documents and academic achievements can be recognized in the host country. During evaluation, it is determined if the issuing institution is recognized or accredited, which level and duration of study the credential represents in the country of origin, how it compares to similar qualifications in the receiving system (for example, a U.S. bachelor's degree), and, depending on the credential at hand, the process determines how individual courses and grades convert for transfer credit.

In the United States, credential evaluation and related equivalency decisions are not governed by a central unit or ministry. The responsibility for the evaluation lies with admissions offices and registrar’s offices at the respective academic institutions. The evaluation can also be supported through independent credential evaluation agencies. Many academic institutions and credential evaluation agencies are members of professional organizations such as the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES) or the Association of International Credential Evaluators (AICE). Standards and best practices for the evaluation process are outlined and provided by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers

(AACRAO) and other professional associations. These organizations provide professional training opportunities and other relevant resources.

Internationally, the European Network of Information Centres and National Academic Recognition Information Centres (ENIC-NARIC) networks under the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the UNESCO Global Convention, for example, provide guidelines and support for the evaluation of credentials. AACRAO and other U.S. organizations work closely with the international networks as well, which supports the international focus and allows organizations to stay updated and informed about new country-specific developments and other evolutions in the field in general.

The Impact of AI Tools on Credential Evaluation

Credential evaluation is needed for admission decisions, transfer credit evaluations, and in the professional setting for employment decisions, for example, which is why accuracy is a very important aspect. It involves the review of large amounts of often multilingual records that differ in structure and must be carefully and strategically reviewed. Due to the nature and high volume of the work, currently existing AI tools, including but not limited to Optical Character Recognition (OCR) and data extraction, machine translation, information retrieval, first-pass screening of documents, and applicant-facing chatbots that answer routine application questions, are already in use in many areas of the field. These tools largely serve the purpose to support professionals in the field, to streamline processes, and to allow professionals to focus on other important aspects of their roles rather than simply managing data, data entry, and other associated tedious tasks.

A Brief Look at AI Technologies

1. Current AI Applications in Admissions

The AI tools that are currently in use or being considered for admissions work mostly belong in the following areas: machine learning models that find patterns in historical data, natural language processing tools that read and generate text, computer vision tools that have the capability to interpret document images, and generative AI tools that are based on large language models. In practice, these tools are utilized in admissions offices for document analysis and data extraction, machine translation of academic records, fraud and anomaly detection, as well as workflow automation such as status updates and data entry. In addition, AI tools are used for support with communications, including chatbots, and they are also utilized for assistance with drafts, decision-making based on summaries of files, as well as predictive analytics for enrollment management.

2. AI Across the Field of Admissions

The same tools are already being applied across various admissions processes. These constantly emerging and developing processes include predicting student markets and finding recruitment leads, personalizing marketing and communications, managing partnership portfolios, automating application processing and document workflows, matching applicants to programs, and supporting students through chatbots, reminders, and automated alerts. Some institutions are also already experimenting with AI-assisted reviews of application materials such as essays or

video essays, using natural language processing and sentiment analysis, for example. This means that AI is not a single admissions tool but rather a support function across different aspects of the profession. The main function for AI tools appears to be to support functions and make some of the more tedious or time-consuming processes easier to manage to provide better customer service to prospective and current students and their families.

3. How These Tools Are Relevant for Credential Evaluation

The already existing AI tools also expand to the credential evaluation process. AI tools accelerate the step of verifying institutional recognition and accreditation status. For example, OCR converts transcript images into structured data. In addition, automated grade conversion and AI-supported GPA calculator tools are offering additional evaluation and advising support. Some evaluation agencies have already started building their own AI-supported platforms aiming to maximize the support these tools can offer based on experience and as we learn how the tools interact with specific needs. Image analysis supports screening for altered or fabricated documents. However, the consensus is that human oversight and insight remain important. Based on our interviews, tools promising fully automated evaluations have consistently underperformed in demonstrations and cause concern due to high error margins. Credible AI products work best in tandem with the credential evaluation expertise behind them.

Emerging AI Tools

AI tools are being developed in many areas, and the admissions and credential evaluation space is no different. This is largely influenced by the general need to speed up, manage, and

streamline existing processes and offer faster evaluation times. These advancements are reshaping how some of the work in Admissions and Credential Evaluation is approached and how foreign documents, for example, are assessed, evaluated, and processed.

That said, existing and emerging AI tools can assist with interpreting, analyzing, or validating credential information. However, there are continued questions about accuracy and privacy related to these tools. Users who have adopted these tools to enhance their processes are aware and have implemented specific steps to comply with privacy rules and to confirm processing is accurate. These tools are, therefore, part of the broader technological transformation affecting credential evaluation and international admissions and may increasingly interact with AI systems.

AI development related to credential evaluation includes digital and verifiable credentials, which are concerned with how educational records and qualifications are issued, transmitted, authenticated, and verified. This development alters the initial steps of verification for credentials. Standards for this include the W3C Verifiable Credentials standard, Europass Digital Credentials, EMREX, and the institutional networks of the Groningen Declaration. It means a change from inspecting paper documents toward verified and trusted data exchanged directly between institutions. This would reduce the opportunity for fraud and the need to retype data from documents that follow different standards and organization.

This means that AI technologies are rapidly developing and being tested across the field. Some examples of new AI technologies:

1. **Machine Learning** is where algorithms are trained on specific sets of data and processes to simulate what a human would do, produce, or decide as next steps. This means collecting necessary datasets, using algorithms to look for and learn patterns in the data, applying the discovered patterns to new data, and then refining the model to reduce errors and to enhance the process. Patterns in existing data are very important for these tools to produce the best outcomes.
2. **Large Language Models (LLMs)** utilize machine learning in that they utilize existing data to understand and generate text that is like text that is produced by humans. This is also a process where many examples result in better outcomes and where accuracy improves over time. As always, humans should continuously check the output for accuracy and relevance.
3. **AI agents** are tools that are capable of completing multi-faceted jobs and tasks such as assembling evidence across several sources. These tools change the use of AI tools from single tasks to the automation of whole processes or workflows. Everyday examples of AI agents are goal-based agents such as GPS systems, model-based agents such as robot vacuum cleaners, and learning agents such as streaming platforms. In the credential evaluation realm, AI agents combine several available tools to offer more complex support, assisting with whole processes rather than individual steps of a process.
4. **Fraud detection** utilizes machine learning to identify suspicious activity related to tasks, documentation, and related materials. These systems establish what the baseline is for the processes in question, and then they measure new documents or materials against this established baseline, flagging any activity that causes room for questioning or concern.

5. **OCR/Multimodal document analysis** is an AI tool that has the ability to read text, layout, stamps, and seals during one review. This kind of tool is able to review complex academic documents and promises to enhance accuracy of data extraction as well as detection of potential fraud in complex academic documents.
6. **AI-assisted evaluation tools** are used to assess and improve existing processes. For example, Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools can recognize and produce human-like language output more efficiently as they develop. These tools are helpful in supporting professionals and speeding up existing processes.

There are also existing and developing technologies that encompass and incorporate several of the above-mentioned AI tools. Examples include GPA Calculators, which utilize Machine Learning, NLP, OCR, and Predictive Analytics to support staff in the field as well as students and families. GPA calculators are impressive tools, and they are constantly being enhanced and improved upon to incorporate a wider range of data and offer the best available calculations for professionals and customers alike. Many professionals, students, and families in the Admissions process are utilizing GPA calculators for their daily work.

All of these tools are under development but progressing rapidly as the need for these tools is large across the field. Early adopters and developers are providing feedback about their function, usefulness, and availability while also looking at additional needs in their work and in the field, which is supporting the AI tool development further. “Each person interacting with an AI becomes a developer by proxy and should act according to the role designated by their employer, including the context in which they work.” (AICE, 2024)

Human Oversight

None of these new, developing, and potentially exciting technical developments bring the ability to eliminate human oversight and insight when it comes to evaluation of credentials and admissions processes. Human oversight, knowledge of the field, as well as emotional and rational human insights for evaluation and decision-making, have been and will continue to be essential across the field.

In most cases, roles and the focus of individual positions may continue to change. Humans working with AI can expect less focus on the repetitive tasks and data entry while moving toward a higher focus on complex evaluation, development of policy and governance, and quality assurance of the data generated by AI tools. The Council of Europe working group's practical guidelines and training modules for credential evaluators point in the same direction: the profession's task is to integrate these technologies deliberately, with human oversight designed in from the start (Council of Europe, 2026).

Survey Study: AI in International Admissions

This survey was conducted as part of our 2026 International Education Standards Council Research Fellowship. The IESC Fellowship research examined the current and emerging use of AI in international admissions and credential evaluation. The goal was to gather insights and perspectives from colleagues across the field. Survey findings were initially presented at the 111th AACRAO Annual Meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana, in April 2026.

The survey consisted of 13 predetermined questions. Ten of the questions were multiple-choice questions that gathered participant demographic information as well as information about use and implementation of AI tools. There were also three open-answer questions that gathered insights and opinions about the impact of AI tools as it currently stands and how it may develop in the future. Question topics and answers are included in the Initial Survey Findings section below.

Initial Survey Findings

1. Data and Survey Method

The survey responses were collected between February 10 and March 20, 2026. A total of 78 responses were recorded, but four responses were removed during data review—this included two survey-preview submissions and two test responses. Based on this, our final survey participant sample consisted of 74 responses. Survey participants were a self-selected sample of international education professionals across organizations. That said, the survey findings show a trend based on the participant responses only. For conclusions that encompass more information about the field, additional research would be necessary.

2. Survey Participants

Our participants represented various functional areas of the international education field: higher education admissions (43%), credential evaluation agencies (24%), registrar's offices (15%), government entities (7%), and research/academia (4%), with the remainder in related roles (7%).

Three-quarters (76%) were based in North America, followed by Europe (9%), Africa (8%), Asia (5%), and Other (2%). Notably, a majority of respondents were 35 or older (79%), with the largest of that group aged 45–54 (26%), emphasizing the participant group's experience and professional insight into the field.

3. Current Use of AI Tools

About 80% of respondents (59 of 74) reported using AI in their professional work for at least one aspect of their work. The most common functions where AI was utilized were document processing, including OCR (32%), and outreach and communications such as chatbots, videos, infographics, and flyers (28%); the third most common category was customer service (24%). Credential evaluation tasks such as credential or grade conversion (16%) and predictive analytics (11%) followed behind the other areas. ***Please note:*** *Participants were instructed to select all AI tools they use. Because multiple selections were permitted, percentages are not mutually exclusive and may total more than 100%.*

At the time of the survey, participants seemed to be in a learn-and-explore state; extensive use of AI tools was still rare, with only one respondent reporting the use of AI tools for admissions decisions. AI tools were not reported as having been used for financial aid decisions. The optional write-in responses added aspects such as translation of academic documents, research or search for information, proofreading and polishing, or summarizing of communication or notes.

4. AI Tools and Platforms

In this area, generative AI tools came first for participants. ChatGPT was the most widely used platform (63%), followed by Microsoft Copilot (45%), Google Gemini (25%), and Claude (8%). A good portion of the survey participants (29%) named other tools, which included tools such as Slate AI, CollegeVine, NotebookLM, and DeepAI. Some participants also mentioned the use of in-house models, which can be tailored toward specific needs. Other AI tools may be under consideration and are possibly being studied to learn more about, or to see what others are gravitating toward. ***Please note:*** *Participants were instructed to select all AI tools they use. Because multiple selections were permitted, percentages are not mutually exclusive and may total more than 100%.*

5. Institutional Approach

Institutional adoption of already existing AI tools appeared to be in the early stages for most survey participants, which goes along with the observation that professionals are looking to learn about options and what they can do for the individual and the field. Looking at the participant responses for this question, 25% described their institution as exploring or piloting AI tools and 18% reported limited implementation in specific areas, while only a single participant reported broad or strategic integration across admissions. About 18% of participants reported being unsure of their institution's approach, which emphasizes the exploratory stage that the field appears to be in. Roughly 37% of participants answered that this question was not applicable to them—this response related mostly to evaluation agencies and government entities. The remaining 2% of participants stated that their institution employed a broad or strategic implementation of AI tools.

Among the 32 survey participants who reported being affiliated with higher education or admissions, 38% reported their institution as exploring or piloting and 28% reported limited implementation, while none of the participants reported a broad integration at their institution. Considering that many participants (more than 50%) either found the question not applicable or did not know their institution's approach, seems to be an indication of how early in the process the professional field appears to be when it comes to consideration and implementation of AI tools. There appears to be much uncertainty and learning that is required as we move forward collectively.

6. Policy Decisions

Institutional governance of AI tool utilization related to Admissions/International Admissions appears to be under development for many institutions, while individuals are more exploratory in using the tools to better understand how they work and what they can do. About half of survey participants reported either a formal AI policy already in place (25%) or a policy under development (28%); 18% reported informal or case-by-case guidelines, and 21% reported no governance discussions at all. The remaining responses stated either that they were "waiting to learn from peer institutions or professional associations" (4%) or they stated that none of the suggested answers applied to them (4%).

Responsibility for AI adoption decisions appears to be shared or cross-functional for about 26% of survey participants. This is followed by the responsibility residing with IT or institutional research (20%) and enrollment management leadership (18%). For 10% of survey participants, the international admissions team holds primary responsibility for making AI tool utilization policy decisions or suggestions. The remaining participants stated that this question was not

applicable to their institution or organization (21%) or that another entity held responsibility (5%).

7. Human Oversight

This is the most communicated expectation related to the use of AI tools for professional work. The majority of survey participants shared the strong expectation of human oversight. Trust in AI tools is not common, which is often based on negative experiences and experiences that other professionals may have shared. Approximately half of the participants (46%) believe that AI tools should be utilized in an advisory role only, while 51% of participants would accept work generated with AI support only as long as a requirement for human review remains. Only about 3% of participants endorsed full AI tool automation for the professional setting. This general consensus on the continued need for human judgment closely mirrors the responses we received in the case study interviews, for which we have included responses below. (See Qualitative Interviews: Case Studies.)

8. AI Implementation Challenges

When asked about the most significant challenges to implementing AI, participants cited data accuracy and standardization (68%), followed by legal, compliance, or privacy risks (54%), ethical or equity concerns (45%), staff training and change management (42%), institutional culture or resistance to change (36%), and cost or resource constraints (32%).

These challenges appear to be at the forefront when evaluating and deciding on the use of AI tools in the professional setting. Many participants communicated a “wait-and-see” approach,

while others felt that they needed to explore and learn as much as possible about existing tools to not “fall behind.”

9. Open-ended Questions

The three open-ended questions showed three different schools of thought among the survey participants. When asked if organizations should invest in AI research now or wait to see what others conclude, responses ranged from being proactive ("AI is here to stay. We need to be proactive, not reactive.") over staying cautious ("Wait and see. Too many demos, not enough reliable results.") to skeptical responses questioning the value that AI tools could possibly add to professional work. Across the responses, three broad groups showed:

i) The first group were concerned survey participants who communicated hesitations regarding reliability, privacy, ethics, as well as environmental concerns.

ii) The second group included participants who were interested in AI but described limited availability of time, cost, or training. Institutional policy also was a big factor for this group.

iii) Third, there were also participants who were already using different AI tools in their current workflow. These participants found the available tools supportive and beneficial in their work, and they expressed a willingness and interest to learn about other AI tools.

Across the three groups of survey participants, there was general agreement that the accuracy of work completed using AI tools is in need of continuous verification. Participants further agreed that institutions and organizations need to set clear policies for all professionals utilizing these

tools, as well as make training available for these tools to set the groundwork for best practices and results.

10. Potential Role Changes

When asked how the utilization of AI tools in admissions and credential evaluation might change the role of international admissions and credential evaluation professionals over the next three to five years, participants were also split into three camps. A small group communicated that it was their expectation for AI to ultimately fail or for it to be a short-lived phenomenon ("I think right when everyone least expects it, it will crash worse than the .com crash"), with some participants showing strong concern that "it will eliminate jobs."

The second group of participants expects a very modest impact of AI tools in the professional setting. The most that the tools should be expected to do is preliminary tasks such as institutional research and simple reading of documents. This group communicated concern that academic credentials are too contextual to receive any valuable support from a machine.

The largest group of survey participants expected AI to stay and to restructure the work, but not to eliminate jobs. This group foresees streamlined processes, automation of time-consuming research and data entry, and a shift in the professional role away from administrative, repetitive tasks toward analytical, strategic, and more student-facing work. The idea of a redistribution of work rather than a replacement of professionals is consistent with our case studies' responses and other reading on the topic.

Additional Survey Outcomes

1. Geographic Location

Participants who are based outside North America appear somewhat more likely to be utilizing AI tools for at least one professional function (94%, based on the number of participants outside of North America) compared to North American participants (75%, based on the number of participants that reported participation from within North America). However, participants not located in North America appeared to be more cautious about the role of AI. About 59% of international respondents thought of AI tools as serving an advisory role only, compared with 42% of participants from North America.

Based on the survey responses, North American institutions appeared somewhat more invested and advanced in their structured exploration of AI tools and their proposed services, given that nearly all respondents reported active piloting or limited implementation of available tools. Given the small international subgroup, these differences may require additional research and evaluation to determine whether they are warranted.

2. Participant Age

Generally, there may be an expectation of younger professionals being slightly more supportive of and responsive to the use of various AI tools. Our survey data did not support this assumption. Survey participants who fell into the 35–54 (82%, based on the number of relevant participants) group and the 55 and older (81%, based on the number of relevant participants) group seemed to

report higher rates of AI use compared to survey participants who belonged to the group aged 18–34 (60%, based on the number of relevant participants).

This observation is on par with experiences shared by our case study interviewees, where mid- and late-career professionals seem to be actively engaging with and exploring AI tools, while younger professionals do not seem to show the same drive and interest. It is possible that seniority and involvement in the decision-making for AI tool adoption have an impact on how invested a professional is into the AI tool research. However, other factors could certainly have an impact. The sample size of survey participants in the younger age group needs to also be considered.

3. Type of Institution and AI Use

Based on our survey responses, professionals working in registrar's offices (91%, based on the number of participants who identified with the respective area) and those associated with evaluation agencies (83%, based on the number of participants that identified with that area) reported the highest utilization of available AI tools. Comparatively, admissions participants reported a somewhat lower (72%, based on the number of participants that identified with the professional area) rate of adoption.

This suggests that patterns also differ based on the type of organization a participant is associated with. That said, admissions participants were the most likely to report active institutional exploration or piloting of AI tools, while government and research respondents reported the highest rate of formal AI policies, and evaluation agencies appear to work using case-by-case

guidelines. This appears to be consistent with the smaller organizational structures described in our case studies.

4. Formal Policies Versus Use

Looking at the survey responses in general, it seems that the individual use of AI tools, either in an exploratory or in a professional setting, appears high (80% of survey participants) compared to the professionals who report that a formal policy governing the use of AI tools is in place (25% of survey participants). Considering this, in addition to the almost complete consensus and expectation of human oversight when AI tools are involved, this suggests that AI tool governance, training, and quality-assurance outlines need to be considered more expeditiously to meet the curiosity about AI tools that appears to be evident. With more insights and widespread user experience, decisions about which tools to utilize and in which setting may also become more second nature.

Qualitative Interviews: Case Studies

To better understand how AI is being adopted across international admissions and credential evaluation, we interviewed professionals from a diverse range of higher education institutions and credential evaluation organizations, including public universities, private evaluation agencies, and organizations specializing in international academic records.

Although organizations are at different stages of AI adoption, three common themes emerged. Participants consistently viewed AI as a tool to enhance productivity and support professional

expertise rather than replace human judgment. Current applications include communication support, information organization, translation, document processing, optical character recognition (OCR), workflow automation, and emerging credential evaluation applications such as transcript reading and GPA calculation. Across organizations, participants emphasized the importance of balancing innovation with ethical governance, data privacy, accuracy, and institutional oversight.

The interviews also highlighted that AI adoption is an organizational change process as much as a technological one. Successful implementation requires staff engagement, transparency, continuous learning, and clear recognition that AI serves as a decision-support tool rather than a substitute for professional expertise.

While AI research and practice in enrollment management have increasingly focused on admissions processes, AI applications in international credential evaluation remain relatively under-researched. These case studies contribute to this emerging conversation by documenting early institutional practices, implementation strategies, challenges, research interest, and opportunities. Together, they demonstrate that regardless of organizational size or technical capacity, responsible AI adoption depends on maintaining human expertise, ethical governance, and continuous adaptation as technology evolves.

1. Interviewee: Andrew Popelka, Associate Director of Client Services at the Academic Credentials Evaluation Institute, Inc. (ACEI).

    1.1. **Current AI Adoption.** The ACEI has adopted a flexible approach to artificial intelligence, allowing staff members to select AI tools that best support their individual workflows. To encourage responsible experimentation, the organization provides employees with ChatGPT subscriptions while continuing to evaluate additional AI capabilities. Popelka currently uses AI to assist with developing PowerPoint presentations, organizing content, and improving overall productivity. Beyond administrative tasks, ACEI is actively implementing AI to enhance credential evaluation processes, including OCR for transcript reading and AI-assisted GPA calculation. These initiatives are intended to increase operational efficiency while supporting, rather than replacing, professional evaluators.

    1.2. **Governance, Ethics, and Risk Management.** Protecting student privacy remains a central consideration in ACEI's use of AI. Popelka emphasized that confidential or personally identifiable information is never entered into public AI platforms. Instead, documents are carefully cropped or redacted before use to ensure compliance with privacy regulations, including the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). This cautious approach reflects the organization's commitment to leveraging AI responsibly while maintaining the confidentiality and integrity of student records.

    1.3. **AI Evaluation and Implementation Process.** ACEI is a relatively small organization of approximately 10–15 employees with more than 30 years of experience in credential evaluation. The organization's size allows for an agile

evaluation process, with new AI tools typically reviewed within five to seven business days. Decisions regarding adoption are generally made in collaboration with the executive leadership team. While initial evaluations can occur quickly, implementation timelines vary depending on project complexity. For example, the concept of AI-assisted transcript reading and GPA calculation originated approximately one year ago, with active implementation beginning about six months later. This phased approach allows the organization to validate new technologies before integrating them into operational workflows.

1.4. **Staff Adoption and Organizational Culture.** ACEI has generally experienced positive staff engagement with AI adoption by allowing employees the flexibility to determine which tools best fit their work. Interestingly, Popelka observed that, within his organization, more experienced professionals have demonstrated greater enthusiasm for adopting AI technologies, while some young professionals have been less inclined to rely on AI, preferring to complete tasks independently. This observation suggests that willingness to adopt AI may be influenced by individual work styles and professional perspectives rather than age alone.

1.5. **Future Research Interest.** Popelka expressed interest in continued learning research examining AI applications within international credential evaluation, particularly regarding emerging technologies and vendor claims related to efficiency and sustainability. He noted the importance of independently validating the effectiveness and broader impacts of AI-powered credential evaluation tools as the technology continues to evolve.

1.6. **Key Takeaway.** Although AI has significant potential to improve efficiency in credential evaluation, Popelka believes its role should remain complementary to professional expertise. As he summarized: "AI is an excellent supplemental tool for credential evaluation, but it can never replace human evaluators." His perspective reinforces a recurring theme across the interviews: while AI can automate repetitive tasks and enhance productivity, critical analysis, professional judgment, and contextual evaluation remain essential components of international admissions and credential assessment.

2. Interviewee: Matt Cwiklinski, Director of Evaluation Services at Education Perspectives

2.1. **Current AI Adoption.** Educational Perspectives has taken an exploratory yet technically sophisticated approach to artificial intelligence, particularly within its credential evaluation and certification services. Cwiklinski has experimented with a variety of AI technologies, including Google's AI tools, Gemini, and locally hosted LLMs. Rather than relying primarily on commercial AI platforms, he has focused on developing and testing local AI models that provide greater control over data and system performance. Within the organization, AI is being explored as a means of improving operational efficiency and automating repetitive tasks while supporting, not replacing, the expertise required for credential evaluation. Multiple staff members contribute to AI development efforts, with specialized roles dedicated to experimenting with local language models and software development for AI applications.

2.2. **Governance, Ethics, and Risk Management.** Privacy, ethics, and accuracy remain central considerations in Educational Perspectives' AI strategy. Cwiklinski emphasized that uncertainty surrounding where data is stored and how it is processed represents one of the greatest concerns when using cloud-based AI platforms. As a result, the organization has shown growing interest in local AI models that offer greater transparency and control over sensitive information. This emphasis on responsible AI reflects the organization's recognition that credential evaluation requires high levels of accuracy, accountability, and trust. AI-generated outputs must therefore be carefully reviewed and validated before they are incorporated into professional practice.

2.3. **AI Evaluation and Implementation Process.** As Director of Evaluation Services, Matthew serves as the primary technical lead for AI implementation within the organization. He oversees the evaluation of emerging technologies, trains different AI models, and guides experimentation across multiple AI initiatives. Although the company employs approximately 16 people, AI development is collaborative, with dedicated colleagues focusing on large language models and AI software development. Implementation timelines vary considerably depending on project complexity. Simple AI solutions can be evaluated and deployed within a few hours to days, while more substantial enhancements often occur over the course of a week to several months. Matthew noted that the AI landscape evolves so rapidly that technologies and implementation strategies frequently change throughout the development process,

requiring organizations to remain flexible and continuously reassess their approaches.

2.4. **Staff Adoption and Organizational Culture.** Strategic decisions regarding AI adoption ultimately rest with the organization's President, Bernard Ramos. However, Cwiklinski plays a central advisory role, and leadership relies heavily on his technical expertise and recommendations when evaluating new AI technologies. This collaborative decision-making structure enables Educational Perspectives to balance executive oversight with technical innovation.

2.5. **Staff Adoption and Organizational Culture.** Staff adoption of AI has been moderate and continues to evolve. Cwiklinski observed that many employees were initially resistant to incorporating AI into their workflows, particularly due to concerns about the reliability and verification of AI-generated information. Questions such as "Who is checking the AI's work?" reflected a broader desire to ensure that AI-assisted processes maintained the organization's standards for accuracy and quality. Over time, however, staff have become more comfortable experimenting with AI, and individuals are finding different ways to integrate the technology into their daily responsibilities. Rather than replacing professional expertise, AI is increasingly viewed as a tool that can augment existing workflows while maintaining human oversight.

2.6. **Future Research Opportunities.** Cwiklinski expressed interest in continued research examining how AI can both improve operational efficiency and deepen understanding of the technical foundations behind machine learning models. He emphasized that organizations should not only focus on adopting AI tools but also

invest in understanding how these technologies function in order to make informed implementation decisions.

2.7. **Key Takeaway.** Reflecting on the future of artificial intelligence in credential evaluation, Cwiklinski emphasized the growing importance of secure, organization-controlled AI environments. His perspective highlights an emerging trend within credential evaluation organizations: “The future of AI is local for credential evaluation.” While AI offers significant opportunities to improve efficiency, locally deployed models may provide greater privacy, transparency, and control than public cloud-based systems. As AI capabilities continue to mature, organizations are increasingly seeking solutions that balance innovation with data security, professional accountability, and human expertise.

3. Interviewee: Aleks Morawski, Director of Evaluation Services at Scholaro Inc

3.1. **Current AI Adoption.** Scholaro has integrated artificial intelligence into several operational workflows with the primary goal of improving productivity and efficiency. Current AI applications include language translation, workflow automation, quality assurance, and other administrative tasks that help streamline credential evaluation processes. Rather than replacing evaluators, AI is used to reduce repetitive work and allow staff to focus on higher-value analytical tasks. The organization views AI as a productivity-enhancing tool that supports existing workflows while preserving the expertise and judgment of professional evaluators.

3.2. **Governance, Ethics, and Risk Management.** Scholaro places a strong emphasis on responsible AI implementation, particularly regarding data security, privacy,

and accuracy. Because credential evaluation involves sensitive student records, the organization does not use current student data to train AI models. Human oversight remains a fundamental safeguard throughout every stage of the evaluation process, ensuring that AI-generated outputs are reviewed before being incorporated into official decisions. The organization also maintains human override capabilities for AI-assisted recommendations, reinforcing that final evaluation decisions always remain under the authority of trained credential evaluators. Security, accuracy, and the protection of student information are central considerations when developing or adopting new AI tools.

3.3. **AI Evaluation and Implementation Process.** AI development is led by Scholaro's in-house technical team, which evaluates new technologies based on current organizational priorities and operational needs. Proposed AI solutions are reviewed collaboratively, incorporating input from technical staff, evaluators, and other stakeholders before advancing to leadership for final approval. As a relatively small organization of approximately 20–40 employees, Scholaro is able to move quickly from concept to implementation. New AI initiatives typically progress from initial idea to production within two to four weeks, allowing the organization to adapt rapidly as AI technologies continue to evolve. Morawski noted that this agility provides an advantage over larger institutions, where longer approval processes may delay adoption and make it more difficult to keep pace with rapid technological change.

3.4. **Staff Adoption and Organizational Culture.** Staff adoption has been supported by maintaining evaluator authority throughout AI-assisted workflows. Evaluators

retain the ability to override AI-generated recommendations, reinforcing that professional expertise remains the foundation of credential evaluation. Morawski observed an interesting difference in adoption patterns among staff. Within Scholaro, more experienced evaluators have generally been more enthusiastic about adopting new AI tools, while newer evaluators tend to approach AI more cautiously and ask additional questions about how the technology works and how it should be applied. He encouraged professionals at all career stages to remain curious and critically evaluate AI tools rather than accepting their outputs at face value.

3.5. **Future Research Interest.** While AI continues to improve operational efficiency, Scholaro views responsible implementation as equally important as technological advancement. Maintaining transparency, protecting student data, and ensuring meaningful human oversight are essential to sustaining trust in AI-assisted credential evaluation.

3.6. **Key Takeaway.** Morawski emphasized that AI should strengthen, not replace, professional expertise. By combining technical innovation with evaluator oversight, organizations can improve efficiency while maintaining the accuracy and integrity required for international credential evaluation. His perspective reinforces a recurring theme across this study: AI is most valuable when it augments human judgment, safeguards sensitive data, and supports informed decision-making rather than automating final evaluative decisions.

4. Interviewee: Chris Adams, Associate Director, International Admissions Operations at Indiana University

4.1. **Current AI Adoption.** Adams oversees international admissions operations, including credential processing. His institution currently uses Smart Panda for OCR and transcript processing, a technology that has been in use for several years. While AI-supported transcript processing is already used on the domestic side, the international admissions team has not yet adopted AI for international credential evaluation. Instead, the institution is currently exploring how AI models could be trained and applied to international credentials.

With approximately 10,000 international applicants whose credentials have historically been evaluated manually, the potential for AI to improve efficiency is significant. However, the institution is taking a cautious approach before extending AI-supported processing to international credentials.

4.2. **Governance, Ethics, and Risk Management.** Data privacy and security are key considerations in evaluating AI applications. Adams noted that existing transcript processing is designed to protect student information under FERPA, and institutional data is not shared with external AI tools.

Any broader implementation of AI requires approval and collaboration across multiple levels of the institution, including senior administration, the provost, faculty council, and Information Technology. This multi-stakeholder process reflects the institution's emphasis on ensuring that AI adoption meets both institutional and regulatory expectations.

4.3. **Staff Adoption and Human Oversight.** AI adoption currently differs between domestic and international operations. On the domestic side, AI-assisted transcript processing is supported by a team that reviews the output, maintaining human oversight throughout the process. On the international side, the five staff members responsible for credential evaluation continue to process international credentials manually, with no immediate plan to implement AI.

This cautious approach reflects the complexity of international credentials and the need to establish confidence in AI-generated evaluations before introducing the technology into high-stakes international admissions processes.

4.4. **Future Research Opportunities.** Adams expressed interest in learning more about how AI models are trained, how training resources are structured, and how institutions can establish processes to obtain approval from all relevant stakeholders. Understanding these implementation and governance questions may be just as important as developing the technology itself.

4.5. Key Takeaway. Adams emphasized the importance of approaching AI with both optimism and caution: “AI certainly has potential, and we need to be cautious, not just assume AI will solve all the problems. It’s a tool; assess the capacity before implementing.”

His perspective reinforces a central theme across the case studies: AI should be evaluated based on an organization's readiness, capacity, data environment, and specific operational needs rather than adopted simply because the technology is available.

5. Interviewee: Hala Abou Arraj, PhD, Registrar, Idaho State University

5.1. **Current AI Adoption.** Idaho State University is in the early stages of integrating artificial intelligence into administrative operations. Dr. Abou Arraj currently utilizes several generative AI platforms to improve day-to-day productivity. These tools are primarily used to enhance professional communication and to support policy research by collecting, organizing, and synthesizing information from multiple sources. While AI has demonstrated value in improving individual efficiency, the Office of the Registrar has not yet committed to purchasing an AI solution. Leadership continues to evaluate available platforms and determine which tools best align with institutional needs and long-term strategic priorities.

5.2. **Governance, Ethics, and Risk Management.** As AI adoption expands, the Idaho State University Office of Registrar has prioritized responsible implementation through established governance processes. The university's legal counsel has developed institutional guidance for the ethical use of AI, providing employees with expectations surrounding appropriate use, privacy, and responsible decision-making. When evaluating new AI technologies, the institution emphasizes several key considerations, including how data will be used, where information will be stored, and whether proposed tools meet institutional privacy and security standards. Rather than focusing solely on functionality, the evaluation process balances innovation with regulatory compliance and risk management.

5.3. **AI Evaluation and Implementation Process**. The university follows a structured, cross-functional review process before adopting new AI technologies.

Initial proposals are reviewed by the Information Technology (IT) office, followed by legal counsel and cybersecurity specialists to ensure compliance with institutional policies, data protection requirements, and security standards. Decisions are made collaboratively through a task force representing these stakeholder groups. Even when funding is available, moving an AI concept from exploration to implementation typically requires at least six months. This extended timeline reflects the iterative nature of evaluating new technologies, addressing stakeholder concerns, and ensuring that institutional safeguards are in place before deployment.

5.4. **Staff Adoption and Organizational Culture.** Staff response to AI has generally been positive, particularly when employees recognize clear opportunities to improve efficiency. Within the transfer evaluation team, for example, three of the four evaluators expressed enthusiasm about AI's potential to streamline workflows and reduce repetitive administrative tasks. One evaluator, however, approached the technology more cautiously. Rather than observing differences based primarily on age or years of experience, Dr. Abou Arraj noted that willingness to adopt AI appeared to be influenced more by individual personality and openness to change. Regardless of enthusiasm levels, she emphasized that AI implementation should be accompanied by thoughtful oversight and careful evaluation to ensure responsible use.

5.5. **Future Research Interest.** Looking ahead, Dr. Abou Arraj identified AI-enabled data integration between community colleges and four-year institutions as an area deserving further research. Improved data bridges could enhance transfer

articulation, streamline credit evaluation, and support more efficient student mobility, particularly for institutions serving diverse and international student populations.

5.6. **Key Takeaway.** Reflecting on the evolving role of artificial intelligence in higher education, Dr. Abou Arraj emphasized that adaptability will be essential for institutions navigating technological change. As she summarized: "We have to keep up with change, adapt to change, and change is constant in higher education, especially in international admissions." Her perspective underscores a recurring theme across institutions: successful AI implementation depends not only on selecting the right technology but also on establishing effective governance, engaging stakeholders, and cultivating an organizational culture that embraces continuous learning and responsible innovation.

6. Interviewees: Tanmay Yadav, Co-Founder & CEO at Trential, and John Sherman, Chief Growth Officer at Trential

6.1. **Current AI Adoption.** TruEnroll is an AI-powered transcript processing and credential evaluation platform developed by Trential. TruEnroll combines AI-powered document processing, grading normalization, fraud detection, and credential verification to make international credential evaluation faster and more scalable while supporting human review. The platform leverages multimodal large language models (MLLMs) to support appropriate workplace applications. Rather than positioning AI as a replacement for enrollment professionals, TruEnroll views technology as a way to augment existing workflows and enable university staff to work more efficiently.

6.2. **Governance, Ethics, and Risk Management.** Because TruEnroll operates in an environment involving sensitive personal information, data privacy and informed consent are central to its approach. Drawing on practices from the background screening industry, the organization emphasizes obtaining appropriate consent and providing disclosures throughout the data-collection process, and clearly informing individuals about how their information is collected and used.

6.3. **AI Evaluation and Implementation Process.** AI adoption at TruEnroll is designed to be relatively agile. Business and stakeholder teams identify potential technologies and opportunities, while final implementation decisions are made by Yadav and Sherman. The organization can move from evaluation to implementation within approximately a few days when a tool meets its needs. This rapid timeline reflects the company's ability to experiment with emerging technologies and quickly determine.

6.4. **Staff Adoption and Organizational Culture.** TruEnroll's staff has generally demonstrated a high level of openness toward AI adoption, particularly among its younger employees who are under 30.

6.5. **Future Research Opportunities.** Looking ahead, TruEnroll identified global curricular matching as an area with significant potential for AI development. AI could potentially help institutions compare academic curricula across countries and educational systems, supporting more efficient international admissions, transfer evaluation, and academic advising.

6.6. **Key Takeaway.** Yadav and Sherman emphasized that AI is becoming an enduring part of the higher education technology landscape and can provide meaningful

benefits when implemented thoughtfully. Their perspective centers on using AI to augment human capabilities and create new ways of working rather than replacing professionals. “AI is there to stay, and it will definitely be helpful if used wisely,” Yadav said. For international enrollment, emerging applications such as analytics, communications, counseling, and global curricular matching may offer opportunities to improve efficiency while enabling professionals to focus on more complex, human-centered aspects of their work.

Potential Benefits, Risks, and Limitations of AI in International Admissions

1. Potential Benefits

AI has the potential to offer significant opportunities to improve the efficiency, consistency, and quality of international admissions and credential evaluation processes for institutions. As colleges and universities experience a large volume of international applicants from diverse educational systems, admissions officers and operations staff face growing challenges related to application and document processing. As new information becomes available and studies are updated frequently, a lack of training and refresher courses could cause information to become outdated quickly, potentially leading to inaccuracies in credential knowledge and advice. Some countries might also have limited information on their institutional websites or may not find relevant information on the education ministries worldwide, which poses added challenges. AI has the potential to address these challenges in many ways by serving as a screening tool that

enhances administrative efficiency while allowing admissions professionals to focus on complex cases that require more research and deeper study.

One of the primary benefits of AI in international admissions is its ability to automate repetitive and time-consuming administrative tasks. AI-powered systems can extract data from transcripts, verify application completeness, classify documents, and respond to routine applicant inquiries through chatbots or virtual assistants. Automating these time-intensive processes reduces administrative workload, shortens application processing times, and enables admissions staff to dedicate more attention to holistic application review and offer personalized student outreach and advising practices. This increased operational efficiency is particularly valuable during peak admissions cycles, when institutions must process large volumes of applications within limited timeframes.

If the AI model is well-trained, machine learning and natural language processing technologies can assist by extracting course information, translating academic documents, recognizing grading scales, identifying degree types, and suggesting preliminary credential equivalencies. These capabilities help standardize routine aspects of credential evaluation and reduce inconsistencies that may arise from manual data entry or varying interpretations of international academic systems. Admissions officers may find the added consistency helpful, considering that humans could apply slightly different evaluation standards based on potentially fluctuating personal capacities. However, AI tools alone do not offer the same human and emotional input that an admissions counselor can. That said, rather than replacing professional credential evaluators, AI

tools function as an assistive technology that improves accuracy and efficiency while leaving final determinations and evaluation to trained professionals.

Another important benefit of AI is its ability to support data-driven decision-making and enrollment management. By analyzing historical enrollment data, AI can identify patterns that inform recruitment strategies, predict enrollment yield, and optimize scholarship allocation. These predictive analytics enable institutions to allocate resources more strategically and make evidence-based decisions that support institutional enrollment goals.

AI additionally contributes to improving the integrity and consistency of admissions processes. Advanced algorithms can identify anomalies within application materials, such as altered transcripts, inconsistent academic records, or potentially fraudulent documentation, allowing admissions professionals to investigate suspicious cases more efficiently. AI can also apply institutional policies consistently during preliminary application reviews, helping ensure that procedural requirements are administered uniformly across applicants.

Despite these considerable benefits, the successful implementation of AI in international admissions requires careful attention to ethical considerations. Researchers have emphasized the importance of maintaining human oversight to address concerns related to algorithmic bias, transparency, data privacy, and accountability. AI systems should support, not replace, the professional judgment of admissions officers and credential evaluators. A human-in-the-loop approach ensures that complex cases, contextual factors, and holistic admissions decisions

continue to benefit from expert evaluation while leveraging AI to improve administrative efficiency.

2. Risks

While AI offers considerable opportunities to improve efficiency and consistency in international admissions and credential evaluation, its implementation also presents significant challenges and ethical concerns. International admissions decisions often involve complex academic, cultural, and contextual factors that cannot be fully captured through automated systems. Potential risks include algorithmic bias, lack of transparency, data privacy concerns, overreliance on automation, and the possibility of disadvantaging applicants from diverse educational backgrounds.

One of the most widely discussed concerns is algorithmic bias. AI systems learn from historical data, and if those data reflect existing inequities, the algorithms may unintentionally reproduce or amplify those patterns. For example, predictive models trained on previous admissions decisions may favor applicants from educational systems, geographic regions, or schools that have historically demonstrated higher enrollment or academic success, while disadvantaged students from emerging markets or less familiar international schools. Such outcomes could reinforce existing disparities rather than promote equitable access to higher education. Because international applicants come from diverse educational systems with varying grading practices, curricula, and academic standards, biased algorithms may oversimplify or misinterpret credentials that differ from the data on which the models were trained.

Another significant concern is the lack of transparency in many AI systems. Advanced machine learning models often function as "black boxes," making it difficult for admissions professionals, applicants, and institutional leaders to understand how specific recommendations or predictions are generated. Limited transparency may reduce trust in admissions processes and complicate institutional accountability, particularly when applicants seek explanations for admissions or credential evaluation outcomes. In higher education, where fairness and procedural integrity are fundamental principles, institutions must be able to explain how decisions are made and demonstrate that applicants have been evaluated consistently and appropriately.

Data privacy and information security also present important challenges. International admissions offices routinely collect highly sensitive personal information, including biographical information, academic records, standardized test scores, financial documentation, passport information, and immigration-related materials. AI systems require substantial amounts of data for training and operation, increasing the responsibility of institutions to ensure compliance with privacy regulations such as FERPA, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and other national data protection laws. Data breaches, unauthorized access, or misuse of applicant information could expose institutions to legal, financial, and reputational risks while undermining applicants' trust.

Overreliance on automation represents another potential risk. Although AI can efficiently process routine tasks, admissions and credential evaluation frequently require professional judgment that considers contextual information beyond what algorithms can analyze. Academic achievements may be influenced by differences in educational opportunities, political instability,

economic hardship, natural disasters, or unique characteristics of national education systems. AI may not adequately recognize these contextual factors, potentially resulting in inaccurate evaluations or inappropriate recommendations. Excessive dependence on automated systems may also reduce opportunities for admissions professionals to apply their expertise when reviewing complex or atypical cases.

For all of these listed possible risk factors, scholars generally recommend a human-in-the-loop approach to AI implementation in international admissions and credential evaluation. Rather than replacing admissions professionals, AI should function as a decision-support tool that enhances efficiency while preserving human oversight, professional expertise, and ethical accountability. Institutions should regularly audit AI systems for bias, ensure transparency in automated processes, protect applicant data, and establish clear governance policies regarding AI use. By recognizing both the capabilities and limitations of AI, higher education institutions can adopt technologies that improve administrative effectiveness while maintaining fairness, equity, and public trust in international admissions and credential evaluation. Considering that these are all crucial concerns, institutions and agencies that implement AI tools in their daily operations have also spent significant thought and resources to ensure that data privacy and information security concerns are met while utilizing these tools to offer the customer service experience that they envision.

3. Limitations of AI in International Admissions

One of the primary limitations of AI is its dependence on the quality, quantity, and representativeness of the data used to train machine learning models. AI systems perform most

effectively when trained on large, standardized datasets; however, international admissions operations encompass applicants from hundreds of countries, each with distinct educational structures, grading systems, curricula, languages, and credential formats. Many educational systems are underrepresented in available training data, limiting AI's ability to accurately interpret unfamiliar qualifications or recognize changes in national education policies. As a result, AI-generated evaluations may be less reliable when assessing applicants from emerging educational systems or institutions with limited historical data.

In addition, AI technologies have limited capacity to exercise ethical reasoning, professional discretion, and interpersonal judgment. Admissions decisions often require balancing institutional policies with individual circumstances while considering fairness, equity, and the broader mission of higher education. AI cannot independently evaluate competing ethical considerations, interpret institutional values, or engage in meaningful dialogue with applicants and educational partners. Likewise, it cannot replace the relationship-building responsibilities of admissions professionals, including advising prospective students, collaborating with international school counselors, and addressing complex applicant concerns. These interpersonal dimensions remain essential components of successful international admissions practices and cannot be replaced by AI tools.

Taken together, AI can improve operational efficiency by automating routine tasks and providing decision support, but it lacks the contextual understanding, adaptability, and professional judgment necessary for comprehensive international admissions evaluation. This underlines the continued need for human intervention and oversight, as has been mentioned by survey

participants as well as interviewees alike. While data is an important piece of the admissions process and credential evaluation, professional decisions aren't based on data alone and must be guided by human understanding, reasoning, and consideration.

Best Practices for Institutions (Practical Realities)

Best practices look at ideal recommendations while also acknowledging the practical realities that admissions offices face, including staffing constraints, budget limitations, the rapidly changing nature of AI technologies, and the diversity of international educational systems. At the same time, institutions must recognize practical realities such as limited financial resources, staffing shortages, evolving technologies, and the complexity of global education systems to be best prepared for future workload realities and customer service expectations in a busy and continuously changing professional field.

An important first step is understanding the institutional committee that holds responsibility for researching AI tools for the institution as a whole, and to talk to the head of operations, who oversees the possibility of implementation. This will aid in understanding opportunities and options while taking the institution's policies, goals, and leadership guidelines into consideration. Larger institutions often need more time before new tools can be considered and implemented, while smaller institutions could have shorter lead times for implementation decisions, but the overall process of consideration will differ also depending on size and organizational structure of an institution.

While learning about options and possibilities, institutions should establish comprehensive AI governance policies before implementing AI-powered tools. These policies should clearly define which admissions functions may be supported by AI tools, identify processes that require human review, and establish standards for accountability, transparency, and data security. Regular scheduled and defined audits should be conducted to evaluate AI tool performance, identify potential biases, assess accuracy across diverse educational systems, and ensure compliance with institutional policies and legal requirements. Governance structures should involve regular input from admissions professionals, credential evaluators, information technology staff, institutional leadership, and legal or compliance officers to ensure that multiple perspectives are included in an informed AI tool implementation.

Professional development is another critical component of successful AI tool adoption. Admissions professionals should receive ongoing training not only on how to use AI technologies effectively but also on their limitations, risks, and appropriate applications. Developing AI literacy enables staff to critically evaluate AI-generated recommendations, recognize potential errors, and make informed decisions when human judgment is required. As AI technologies continue to evolve rapidly, continuous learning will become an increasingly important competency for admissions and credential evaluation professionals to ensure the continued quality of professional output and customer service expectations.

Institutions should also recognize that AI implementation is an ongoing process rather than a one-time technology purchase. AI models require continuous monitoring, periodic retraining, and regular updates to reflect changes in international education systems, grading practices,

institutional recognition, and admissions policies. Feedback from admissions staff should be incorporated into system improvements, and institutions should establish mechanisms for evaluating whether AI tools actually improve efficiency, accuracy, and applicant experience. Measuring outcomes through key performance indicators—such as application processing time, evaluation consistency, staff workload, applicant satisfaction, and error rates—can help institutions determine whether AI investments produce meaningful operational benefits. Ultimately, successful AI implementation depends on balancing technological innovation with professional expertise. Institutions should adopt AI selectively, focusing on applications that improve operational efficiency while preserving fairness, transparency, and individualized review. By combining responsible governance, continuous staff development, strong data protection practices, and ongoing human oversight, colleges and universities can leverage AI to strengthen international admissions and credential evaluation while maintaining the integrity and equity that are fundamental to higher education.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that AI is rapidly becoming an important component of international admissions and credential evaluation. Although organizations differ in their size, technical capacity, and pace of implementation, there is broad agreement that AI has the potential to improve operational efficiency by automating repetitive tasks, organizing information, enhancing communication, supporting document processing, and assisting with credential evaluation workflows. "AI is being used in supportive roles—including automated translation, document verification, fraud detection, and information searching—while maintaining human oversight

and ensuring that final decisions remain with credential evaluation professionals." (Council of Europe, 2026)

Across all interviews and survey responses, participants consistently emphasized that AI should serve as a tool to augment, not to replace professional expertise. Whether in university admissions offices or credential evaluation organizations, human judgment remains essential for interpreting complex academic records, applying institutional policies, ensuring fairness, and making final admissions or evaluation decisions.

Another significant finding is that successful AI adoption depends as much on governance as on technology. Organizations described increasingly formal review processes involving information technology, legal counsel, cybersecurity professionals, executive leadership, and technical specialists. Privacy, data security, transparency, and accuracy were identified as foundational requirements before AI tools could be deployed, particularly given the sensitive nature of international student records. Several participants also noted growing interest in locally hosted AI models and secure implementations that provide greater control over institutional data. The interviews further revealed that organizational culture plays a critical role in AI implementation. While enthusiasm for AI is widespread, adoption patterns vary among individuals and organizations. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of providing opportunities for staff to experiment with AI, ask critical questions, and understand both its capabilities and limitations.

Looking toward the future, participants expressed considerable optimism about AI's potential to transform international admissions and credential evaluation. Areas identified for continued research and innovation include automated transcript analysis, GPA calculation, document authentication, transfer articulation, multilingual translation, secure local language models, and data integration between educational institutions. At the same time, interviewees acknowledged that many of these applications remain in the early stages of development and will require ongoing validation, collaboration, and ethical oversight before widespread implementation.

Collectively, these case studies and the earlier survey illustrate that the future of AI in international admissions is not defined solely by technological advancement, but by the thoughtful integration of technology with professional expertise. Institutions that successfully adopt AI technologies will be those that invest not only in new tools, but also in governance frameworks, staff professional development, ethical decision-making, and continuous evaluation.

Glossary

Artificial Intelligence (AI): It means making computer systems do tasks that normally need human thinking. It lets machines learn from data, spot patterns, solve problems, and make choices.

Case Study Methodology: An in-depth research design that examines a single bounded system, such as a person, group, organization, or event, using multiple sources of qualitative or quantitative data.

Credential Evaluation: A professional assessment that converts foreign academic degrees, diplomas, and transcripts into their U.S. or Canadian educational equivalents.

Data extraction: The process of retrieving raw, unstructured, or structured information from various primary sources, such as websites, documents, or databases, so it can be moved, processed, or analyzed elsewhere.

Ethical Considerations in AI: The ethical concerns surrounding artificial intelligence encompass bias and discrimination, a lack of transparency and accountability, massive privacy violations, widespread labor and copyright issues, and environmental degradation from power-hungry data centers.

Human-in-the-loop (HITL): HITL refers to a process where humans actively participate and are involved in the system's workflow, supervision or decision making.

Information retrieval: The process of finding and accessing relevant information from databases, documents, or other sources, often using search or AI-powered tools.

I**nternational Admissions:** The processes involved in recruiting, evaluating, admitting, and enrolling students whose educational backgrounds are from outside the institution's primary educational system.

International Education: The field encompassing educational activities across national borders, including international student recruitment, admissions, study abroad, partnerships, and global engagement.

Optical Character Recognition (OCR): Technology that converts text from scanned documents or images into machine-readable text, enabling information from transcripts and other documents to be processed electronically.

Machine translation: Technology that automatically translates text from one language to another. It can support communication and document review in international admissions but may require human verification.

Multimodal Large Language Models (MLLMs): MLLM is a large language model that can process and reason across multiple types of data called modalities such as text, images, audio, video, and sensor data.

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