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Report on the Status of Euclid University and the International Utility of its Degrees

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Organization of Report

We treat Euclid University and the Euclid Consortium as separate but related entities, consistent with their own practice and the documentation provided. The question of degree-granting authority for the two entities is considered separately, in part because the entities themselves describe such a separation. Euclid University, also known as Pôle Universitaire Euclide, is the entity with which we are primarily concerned.

Underlying principles

We begin with a brief look at the general environment of standards in which an evaluation of Euclid must take place.¹ There are certain basic principles² used in the evaluation of college degrees issued in one country for the purpose of determining their use in another country. These principles are as follows.

1. The individual degree holder must have earned the degree lawfully under the standards of the nation. That is, the degree must not have been acquired through fraud, purchase or other nonacademic means.
2. The entity issuing the degree must have been granted the legal authority to issue degrees in its own name under the laws of at least one nation in which it is located.
3. The laws of the nation in which the degree-granter is located must be such as to ensure that degrees issued by its colleges are of sufficient quality and value for their stated purpose.
4. Those laws must have been applied in actuality to the degree-granting entity. That is, the approval must be demonstrably based on the college's merits and not the result of bribery, coercion or other factors unrelated to the college's academic programs.

¹ For more detail on the processes and norms of degree evaluation, see Creola Johnson, Degrees of Deception: are consumers and employers being duped by online diploma mills and universities? 32 *Journal of College and University Law* 411-490 (2006) and Credentialism and the proliferation of fake degrees: the employer pretends to need a degree; the employee pretends to have one. 23 *Hofstra Labor and Employment Law Journal* 269-343 (2006). See also Complexities in Legislative Suppression of Diploma Mills. 21 *Stanford Law and Policy Review* 1 (2010), George Gollin, Alan Contreras and Emily Lawrence. A good source for international degree problem-solving is Evaluation in the Shadowlands: When government approval isn't worth the paper it is forged on. Chapter in American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admission Officers (Washington, DC) handbook on credential evaluation, 2006. A good compendium of information about the subject of fake degrees is Allen Ezell & John Bear, Degree Mills (2005). See also Joan Van Tol, Detecting, deterring and punishing the use of fraudulent academic credentials: a play in two acts, 30 *Santa Clara Law Review* 791-827 (1990), a case-based guide to what kinds of fakery actually happen. For a broad look at academic corruption issues, see Vincent Johnson, Corruption in education: a global legal challenge, 48 *Santa Clara Law Review* 1 (2008). The unique problems created by fake accreditors are set forth in Allen Ezell, Accreditation Mills (2007). This small book is not widely available and must be ordered directly from the Am. Assn. of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO). A good technical guide to evaluation of degrees and transcripts called Guide to Bogus Institutions and Documents has also been issued by AACRAO.

² These are codified in a slightly different form in Oregon Administrative Rules 583-050-0014(3) as follows:

- (3) A claimant of a non-U.S. degree issued by a degree supplier not accredited by a U.S. accreditor may submit to the Office information proving that the supplier issuing the degree has the following characteristics.
- (a) The supplier is operating legally as a degree-granting institution in its host country.
 - (b) The host country has a postsecondary approval system equivalent to U.S. accreditation in that it applies qualitative measures by a neutral external party recognized in that role by the government.
 - (c) The supplier has been approved through the demonstrable application of appropriate standards by the host country's accreditor equivalent.
 - (d) All degrees issued by the supplier are legally valid for use and professional licensure within the host country.



5. All degrees issued by the entity in its own name must be valid for use for their stated purpose inside the nation in which they were issued.

These are norms used by government and private evaluators in the United States and are recommended for use elsewhere. For purposes of this report, we are concerned with items 2 through 5 of those noted above, as we are not evaluating a specific degree user, but a degree supplier.

The nature of degree-granting authority

The grant of degree-granting authority is a government monopoly. That is, the authority to issue degrees can only be obtained from a government, whatever the structure of that government may be.³ The laws of nations differ sufficiently that the actual requirements for obtaining degree-granting authority may be very stringent in one nation and very weak in another. The nature and content of degree programs also differs from nation to nation. That is one reason why degrees are not considered commodities and cannot be automatically transferred across national boundaries and used the same way that they were in their nation of origin. International compacts ameliorate this situation somewhat, but such compacts are only appropriate in situations in which there is enough similarity of standards and practices among nations.

In general, any claim by an entity that it is a degree-granting college, when that claim includes no proof of a government charter or license that expressly grants the authority to issue degrees in its own name, can be ignored, as such entities are fraudulent and best described as degree mills.

This general standard does not apply to educational entities that do not issue degrees. The rule thus does not apply to non-degree diplomas, certificates and a broad spectrum of educational activities that do not result in or lead to the award of a degree. The standards that are used for international degree evaluation are therefore not restrictions on educational activity or learning, they are purely limits on the issuance of *government-backed credentials* in the form of degrees. Another way of putting it is that there is no private right to issue degrees, because degrees are by definition credentials representing the standards imposed by a specific government. Educational credentials that are not degrees are not controlled in the same way.

Finally, the meaning of "government" for purposes of applying this general standard is not universally identical because the way that nations regulate colleges varies. Many countries have a highly centralized national approval process, some devolve the approval to semi-autonomous states and some have processes that might be described as hybrids. A few countries, e.g., the United States, Canada and Australia, devolve the authority to license colleges to their constituent provinces or states. Also, this report necessarily includes a discussion of international organizations as though they were exercising certain powers of governments.

³ We have enclosed with this report a copy of *The Legal Basis for Degree-granting Authority in the United States*. Although based in U.S. law, it contains some useful general references.



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The term “accredit”

The United States is the only large country that splits postsecondary qualitative oversight between states and private membership associations called accreditors; it is important to keep in mind that the term “accreditor” in the U.S. always refers to a nongovernmental entity, and that such organizations cannot authorize a college to exist or offer degrees.

The term “accredit” is used all over the world to mean different things, and before treating the term as having a particular meaning it is necessary to examine what it means in the particular context in which it is used. Some of the Euclid documents use the term with the apparent meaning “approve,” authorize or license. Other documents are more obscure.

Degree-granting by international entities

Degrees are government-backed credentials. All valid degrees issued in the past few hundred years have been issued solely under the legal authority of specific national governments or, in a few cases, their designee subnational states. We are unaware of any legally binding decision by any judicial or other governmental body to the effect that an international entity can grant degrees in its own name without authorization from at least one nation-state. Historically there was no such thing as a purely international degree-granting entity.

Nonetheless, the United Nations and some European nations have established four degree-granting entities that apparently obtain their entire degree-granting authority from the U.N., one of its subsidiary bodies, or a consortium of European states. We consider this practice to be procedurally unfortunate, academically risky and generative of a high potential for confusion and dispute. Nonetheless, it has been done.

Euclid very recently was added to this list, maintained by the International Association of Universities, apparently on the basis of the opaque tangle of Memoranda of Understanding and similar documents under which it operates. In our view, the collection of MOUs and related documents are not sufficient to unambiguously establish a degree-granting entity. This is discussed further below.

Degree Authority of the Euclid Consortium

The Euclid family consists of two related entities. Documentation suggests that the first established of these was the entity called the “Consortium.” It was apparently intended to serve as a vehicle through which the University of Bangui and others could offer degrees outside their nations of origin. To the extent that it performs this function for those colleges and any others, it is of no further interest in this evaluation because it issues no degrees in its own name. It is simply a storefront for various legitimate degree suppliers. Euclid University recognizes this in its web site and other recent materials.

For this reason we are not spending more time discussing the Consortium as an entity. In its role as a conduit for educational programs offered by legitimate nationally approved degree providers, it affronts no educational norms in its structure or intent. Likewise, its name appears on no degrees that do not carry the name of Bangui or another legitimate provider, so it is essentially irrelevant.



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Therefore we can set aside any materials and discussions related to the Consortium, except insofar as it is frequently mentioned in the supporting documents and therefore serves to muddy the waters.

Degree Authority of Euclid University

Euclid University appears to be a California-based operation that uses a forwarding service in Belgium and perhaps from elsewhere while offering degrees primarily in Africa and south Asia. It also claims to have an office in Pakistan and in Washington, D.C., piggybacking on the Consortium's offices, and apparently an office at the University of Bangui in the Central African Republic.

Euclid University was apparently brought into existence by an executive decision within the ownership of the original Euclid Consortium, which appears to consist primarily of Laurent Cleenewerck in Trinidad, California and Syed Zahid Ali in Pakistan, with perhaps some involvement by others. The original *consortium* agreement with Bangui and the University of N'Djamena in Chad does not and in fact could not create Euclid University, as one university cannot license and authorize another. Only a government can do that.

That is also why any relationship with Universite Libre, a Belgian entity with obscure degree authority, is irrelevant. A Belgian university, real or fake, cannot create a valid degree-granter in another country.

National Authority: The MOU cluster

Euclid presents a lot of documents that purport to establish it as a degree-granter. The most common language used is that which appears below in the shaded box:

usefulness of the programs offered, EUCLID already is and shall continue to be chartered to confer diplomas, degrees and completion certificates accredited by the ministries of education of the Participating Parties. EUCLID, a member of the Euclid Consortium, receives the ongoing mandate to facilitate universal access to higher education and to foster the acquisition of knowledge and competencies under the supervision of the ministries of Education and Foreign Affairs of the Participating Parties.

Afin d'assurer l'utilité internationale des formations offertes, EUCLIDE est autorisée à conférer des diplômes, titres et certificats accrédités par les ministères de l'Education des Parties Participantes. EUCLIDE, membre du Consortium Euclide, reçoit le mandat de faciliter l'accès universel à l'éducation supérieure et de promouvoir l'acquisition du savoir et des compétences sous la supervision des ministères de l'Education et des Affaires Etrangères des Parties Participantes.

None of the MOUs can create a degree-granting institution because they appear to relate to an entity based in another country. The MOUs refer to Euclid's authority as "accredited by the



Ministries of Education of the Participating Parties". However, it is not clear that Euclid actually *has* such degree-granting authority from any of those ministries, and **the MOUs don't establish that authority, they simply refer to its hypothetical existence in member nations.** We are concerned that this chain of MOUs amounts to a shell game in which the various nations refer back and forth to a degree-granting authority as though it exists, when in fact none of the nations has granted that authority and listed Euclid with UNESCO as a degree-granting university.

If Euclid wants to prove that its MOUs are useful, it needs to show that it has national authority from at least one nation, otherwise the assemblage of MOUs is without meaning because they are simply cross-referencing each other. Also, some of these nations are clearly incapable of overseeing a university, so any reference to them as "chartering" or "accrediting" is without meaning. **Three of the nine MOU nations have no true universities of their own, nor any oversight structure for universities, which strongly suggests that they viewed their participation in the MOU chain-letter as recognizing authorization issued somewhere else – but there is no somewhere else.**



As of the May, 2011 update of the IAU list of universities, *none* of the nine Euclid "chartering" nations shown on the college's web site list Euclid as a degree-granting institution in lists that they filed with the International Association of Universities. We see no evidence that is sufficient by itself, or in combination with other documents or other sources, to support a claim that Euclid has degree-granting authority in its own name sufficient to operate as a free-standing degree-granter in a given nation.

The only possible exception is that of the Central African Republic, which in some documents states that Euclid University is an entity separate from the University of Bangui, and in other documents refers to it as connected to that university. **Euclid has provided to Accredibase a document that is apparently from the IAU list of international entities, but that by itself cannot establish that Euclid is a Central African Republic college, because the IAU is not a government and because the CAR itself doesn't list it as a college in the IAU database.**

Other nations, such as Chad, also refer to Euclid as offering joint programs with recognized universities, which is really the Consortium model, not Euclid itself. This documentation is far too confusing and ambiguous to be the sole basis of a determination of national authorization as a degree-granter.

There is some evidence that several nations intended to grant Euclid the authority to issue degrees valid in their countries under an international partnership agreement. However, the materials supporting this conclusion are somewhat tangled and not always clear. The main problem is that these documents include language (shown above) that could be read to mean that each nation assumed that Euclid was approved to issue degrees in another nation, and was simply recognizing that approval for its own needs, via a sort of reciprocity concept. However, in order for this kind of academic chain-letter to have any validity, there needs to be at least one "home" nation that has definitively chartered or licensed Euclid as a degree-granter in a clear, unambiguous way, unless the intent is to establish the college as an international provider. That appears to be what Euclid claims to be.



Euclid's claim of establishment by an international body

It is not clear that Euclid claims to be authorized to issue degrees by a specific country, despite the web of cross-referencing MOUs, which appear to lead nowhere. The entity appears to take the position that it has degree-granting authority as a partnership-based degree-granter serving the needs of its member states, without a campus in any of them or being listed through UNESCO by any of them, and **that its listing by the International Association of Universities as an international university establishes it as an internationally approved degree-granter.** The questions we must ask are therefore:

1. Can an international body create a legitimate degree-granting institution that otherwise exists in no country at all, and
2. Has that happened in Euclid's case?

Euclid was listed by UNESCO/International Association of Universities in the same category as the United Nations University and the European University Institute sometime in the past year. It appears on that list on the IAU web site, as of the "2012" listing, and Euclid provided Accredibase with a paper document that appears to be from hard copy of the same listing, with expanded information.

We must therefore ask what that list means and what are the consequences of a college being on that list, which consists of only five providers, three of which are effectively internal U.N. entities and the fourth a European consortium with support from several governments. Several questions arise from this situation under question 1:

- a. Can a group of nations establish a degree-granting entity?
- b. Does such an entity have to have a physical presence anywhere on the ground?
- c. Does such an entity require IAU listing to become a valid degree-granter?
- d. Does IAU listing automatically make such a consortium college a valid degree granter?
- e. Who is responsible for qualitative oversight of such an entity?
- f. Are degrees issued by such an entity automatically acceptable outside its member states?

Based on our understanding of the way education fits into international structures, we think that the answers are as follows.

- A. If nations can establish and "charter" degree-granters, then we see no reason why groups of nations can't. Thus the answer to question "a" is YES. However, any authority that the U.N. has to charter colleges comes from its member nations, not from its status as an international organization.
- B. We see no reason why a degree-granter has to have a continuing physical presence anywhere in order to provide legitimate educational services, so the answer to question "b" is NO.



- C. IAU listing is merely a list, not an authoritative grant of powers, so the answer to number “c” is NO.
- D. Question number “d” is NO for the same reason as “c”.
- E. The responsibility for qualitative oversight of any degree-granting entity lies with the *governments* that created it, not with its own ownership or directors, therefore the member nations of any partnership are responsible for ensuring that its degree provider meets standards that those governments set and enforce.
- F. Degrees are never automatically acceptable outside the nation that gave the degree-granter its authority, so the answer is clearly NO. Even in the United States, degrees issued by colleges licensed to issue degrees in one state are not necessarily usable in other states. Degrees issued by a college created by a partnership of nations are therefore not necessarily valid for use outside the member states.

Because there is no actual oversight body responsible for the degrees issued by Euclid, we think that the IAU listing of Euclid as an international university results from a misunderstanding of the nature of its legal status within the nations involved in the MOU cluster. We do not think that the MOU cluster establishes a degree-granter, and there is some evidence that not all of the national documents provided by Euclid are valid. In particular, Senegal has expressed doubt about whether the documents issued under its name are valid. We think that the IAU has accepted Euclid’s status in error. This error should be corrected pending an appropriate investigation by international authorities.

Consequences of the Euclid structure

The final step in determining the validity of any degrees issued by Euclid University is to filter what we know about the entity through the partnership picture noted above and through the normal principles for evaluating degrees discussed at the beginning of this report. Thus:

1. **The individual degree holder must have earned the degree lawfully under the standards of the nation. That is, the degree must not have been acquired through fraud, purchase or other nonacademic means.**

We have no such case, so this is not an active question.

2. **The entity issuing the degree must have been granted the legal authority to issue degrees in its own name under the laws of at least one nation in which it is located.**

The material provided contains insufficient documentation that the entity Euclid University is a degree-granting institution in any one nation under its own name. Examples of such documentation would include a valid charter or license that takes the same form as those issued to other colleges or universities in the home nation of the college. We would expect any legitimate college offering degrees at the bachelor’s level or above to be listed with the IAU, and Euclid is not listed by any nation.



In this case, the “home nation” is somewhat obscure. The college appears to be administered from Laurent Cleenewerck’s home at 873 Kahlstrom Ave, Trinidad, California 95570, although it may have offices in the CAR, Pakistan and Washington, D.C. There is no evidence that it has any operational presence as a degree-granting institution in any other nation besides these. Its Belgian business license is a front for the California address and has no other visible function, according to research done by Accredibase.

Euclid, under the name Pôle Universitaire Euclide, is listed by the IAU solely as an international organization, but without any reference to whether it has degree-granting authority in its own name or from what nation, other than the fact that it supposedly operates out of the U. of Bangui. It is therefore not possible to determine from that listing whether the “Pôle” entity claims to have degree-granting authority or whether this listing simply refers to the older Euclid Consortium. IAU appears to refer to Euclid University as a label for programs developed under the original Consortium, but calls it both a chartered university (without saying what nation issued the charter) and an intergovernmental organization.

If we treat the entity as an unaccredited U.S. provider (which would not be listed in the IAU Handbook), we must then ask whether it holds a license to grant degrees from any U.S. state, the federal government or Indian tribe. There is no evidence of this in the material provided. It was not on the list of approved California degree-granters on August 31, 2011.

Given that **Euclid does not have an unambiguous charter from a specific nation**, we must therefore consider the effect of its apparent establishment by an international agreement. Certainly a group of nations can establish a university if they choose to, and all of them recognize its degrees and treat the university as genuine for domestic purposes. However, it is not clear that Euclid was established this way.

The lack of a formal charter or founding document equivalent to those used for other universities in the MOU nations that actually *have* universities is fatal to Euclid’s assertion of authority. The failure by any MOU nation to list Euclid with UNESCO as a chartered degree-granter is also a significant factor in leading us to conclude that **Euclid is not a degree-granter for international purposes**.

The fact that the **IAU erroneously listed Euclid as an international degree granter** cannot establish it as one because the IAU is not a governmental agency capable of chartering a university itself, so its listing has no legal effect.

3. The laws of the nation in which the degree-granter is located must be such as to ensure that degrees issued by its colleges are of sufficient quality and value for their stated purpose.

As of August 31, 2011, Euclid on its web site claims to be accredited as a degree-granter by the ministries of education of the following nine nations:

Burundi	Sierra Leone
Central African Republic	Timor-Leste
Comoros	Uganda
Saint Vincent & Grenadines	Vanuatu
Senegal	



This is a slightly different list than Euclid has used elsewhere, but we will treat it as the current list because it is the one currently on the Euclid web site. We have not read the laws of these nine nations, but we think certain basic assumptions can be made, subject to correction.



First, according to the IAU, upon which Euclid relies for its claim of an international authority, **there are no domestic universities in the usual sense of the term in the Comoros, Saint Vincent/Grenadines or Vanuatu.** It is therefore extremely unlikely that those nations have any capacity whatsoever to determine whether an entity wanting to issue degrees has the capacity to do so. Any “accreditation” by ministries of education in such places is therefore purely nominal, a kind of courtesy recognition perhaps intended to create international reciprocity. Of the other six Euclid consortium nations, Timor-Leste has one university, the CAR has two, Sierra Leone two, Burundi six, Uganda 18 and Senegal 19.

Therefore only a few of the MOU nations even have the capacity to oversee a college. There is insufficient evidence that any of them issued Euclid a charter in the usual way.

- 4. Those laws must have been applied in actuality to the degree-granting entity. That is, the approval must be demonstrably based on the college’s merits and not the result of bribery, coercion or other factors unrelated to the college’s academic programs.**

No evidence of an independent evaluation and appropriate oversight of Euclid by any government has been provided. The various MOUs and ministry approvals that Euclid claims to have do not, by themselves, provide any evidence of how the member nations oversee the college, or even if they do.

- 5. All degrees issued by the entity in its own name must be valid for use for their stated purpose inside the nation in which they were issued.**

No evidence of the use of Euclid degrees on the same terms as other degrees issued by colleges in the MOU nations has been provided.

Absent an acceptable set of responses to these principles, degrees issued by Euclid should not be accepted outside its own Partnership nations because there is no way to know whether degrees issued by Euclid can be treated as comparable to degrees issued in other countries. Whether the degrees are allowable for use inside the Partnership is a purely local matter that does not involve any international evaluation.



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Conclusions

Validity of Euclid degrees

Any entity that claims to have degree-granting authority has an obligation to provide proof of that authority. The original Euclid Consortium did not claim to have degree-granting authority in its own name and therefore that issue need not be discussed.

Degree-granting authority can only come from a sovereign nation or an appropriately assigned subunit of such a state or a body assigned that authority by a state. Euclid University (also known as Pôle Universitaire Euclide) claims to have degree-granting authority under a multi-government agreement authorizing it to issue degrees.

Assuming that international organizations and groups of nations have the legal authority to establish degree-granters, a concept that has not been tested in law to our knowledge, but which appears to be accepted by the United Nations and some European nations, Euclid University still needs to provide proof that it is a degree-granter under a multi-national agreement. Whether this is the case cannot be determined from the available material because no charter comparable to the charters of other universities has been provided. MOUs and similar material cannot replace a charter or formal authorization in the same form as used for other universities in at least one member nation.

Nonetheless, Partnership nations may allow use of Euclid degrees for some purposes inside their nations, subject to the laws of those nations.

International use of Euclid degrees

It is unknown whether the partnership member nations have sufficient academic standards or oversight over the quality of Euclid's programs. It is unknown whether all degrees issued by Euclid solely in its own name are accepted within its member nations. Because of this incomplete information, degrees issued by Euclid should not be accepted outside its Partnership nations until these questions can be answered to the satisfaction of educational authorities in any other nation where such degrees are presented for use.

In order for Euclid degrees to be treated *internationally* (that is, outside its Partnership nations) as equivalent to degrees issued under the authority of nations, it is necessary for Euclid to prove the following.

1. That it has a standard charter or authorization to issue degrees comparable to charters for other authorized universities in at least one Partnership nation.
2. That the Partnership documents have the legal effect of establishing a degree-granting entity under the laws of the nations that signed them.
3. That the nations that established Euclid have sufficient academic standards and oversight to show that their authorizations are meaningful.
4. That all degrees issued by Euclid are valid for use in all of the member nations, or, if authorization or charter is claimed for only one nation, within that nation. Such evidence



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would include, for example, the acceptability of Euclid degrees as faculty credentials for teaching in the nation's other universities or qualification for any kind of screened employment.

It is Euclid's obligation to provide this information if it wants its degrees to be accepted outside its member states. When Euclid provides adequate answers to these questions, its degrees can be considered for wider acceptability, but not before.

Of course, no nation is ever obligated to accept degrees issued in another nation unless compelled to do so by treaty or agreement, and no employer, agency or individual can ever be compelled to accept for use a degree which, in their opinion, does not meet their needs, whether or not covered by an agreement or treaty.

END.