



## **Making Your Foreign Education Count in the U.S.: Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education-World Education Services Workshop at Westchester Community College**

The April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2010 CCCIE-WES Credentialing Evaluation Workshop held at Westchester Community College was a very well-attended and helpful event, according to Teresita Wisell, CCCIE Executive Director. She noted that many highly skilled immigrants in the U.S. are frustrated in their attempts to work in their given fields in this country, and become either unemployed or underemployed.

According to the Migration Policy Institute, more than 1.3 million college-educated immigrants in the U.S. are unemployed or working in unskilled jobs well below their skill and educational level. Many immigrants may not be familiar with U.S. employment culture and job search skills, lack professional networks, and lack U.S. work experience. In some cases, limited English skills present a problem, and their academic credentials and professional skills/experience are not recognized in this country.

Wisell noted this is the second Credentialing Evaluation Workshop sponsored by CCCIE and WES. The first Credentialing Evaluation Workshop took place last December at Northern Virginia Community College, in Annandale, VA, also attracting large crowds. “We find there is a tremendous need for this kind of service, and we intend to organize additional seminars at several community colleges in response,” she said.

### **No central U.S. government evaluation agency**

There is no central government agency or single standard for U.S. evaluation of foreign degrees, certificates, or licenses. Each institution or agency sets its own rules regarding recognition and acceptance, which can be confusing to immigrant students, said Paul Feltman, director of community engagement at World Education Services, a New-York based nonprofit that provides evaluation services. Feltman noted that while licensing is required for some professional activities, it is not always necessary. There may be related fields that are more easily accessible—even though they may not be in the career in which immigrants have their degrees.

He suggested volunteering or internships as a way to re-enter career fields or try new fields, build networks, and gain U.S. workplace experience. Taking courses to update job skills or gain new skills or improve English language skills can also improve chances of finding employment.

Laura Milhaven, WCC's director of admissions, provided an overview of the college's associate degree and certificate programs and the requirements for foreign-educated students interested in receiving transfer credits to attend WCC. An important resource for immigrant students is WCC's English Language Institute, which serves about 4,000 students per year from over 100 countries, according to Eileen McKee, ELI's assistant director. The Institute serves the needs of general learners and learners preparing for college or university study, holds multi-level ESL classes at the main Valhalla campus and 12 other Westchester locations, and offers a variety of class schedules. Among its offerings: free beginning-level classes at libraries and community organizations, and workplace ESL in a variety of workplaces in collaboration with WCC's Professional Development Center.

### **Informal Evaluations**

After the plenary session, individuals were invited to review materials and ask questions at information tables provided by WES and WCC. In addition, a WES evaluator and WCC staff briefly reviewed photocopies of immigrants' academic credentials in order to give them an idea of their U.S. equivalency and provide information about having their records officially evaluated for academic or professional purposes.