

The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers and NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators

A Framework for Extending the Transcript (DRAFT June 2015)

What are we recording and why?

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Overview

In response to increasing funding pressures and a growing emphasis on better equipping a diverse population of students with the skills needed to succeed in the 21st century, institutions of all types are increasingly pursuing new alternatives to the delivery of education. Competency-based education and direct assessment have attracted a great deal of interest recently among educators and policy-makers, but there are many operational considerations that must be addressed when considering these new pedagogical approaches.

AACRAO and NASPA have been working to bring together registrars, student affairs and other higher education professionals to identify emerging practices in identifying, collecting, and documenting, student learning and enabling intuitions' to officially assert (and communicate) them on behalf of the student.. Our goal has been to create a framework to guide the development of new recording models and operational considerations for higher education registrars and other professionals to share with their campuses, faculty and academic leadership. These will include examples where institutions have augmented traditional transcripts to present additional information, often in a digital format, as well as those who are creating supplemental documents to include other forms of student learning. Guidance for implementation of these models, including validation of non-classroom experiences, student information system considerations, ways to minimize negative impacts to students who transfer, and finally enhancing the multiple ways students and alumni may wish to present themselves will also be a focus.

The current framework for the academic transcript at colleges and universities resulted from the convergence of academic practice over many years and has largely served as an academic record. The notion of documenting non-traditional learning, learning outcomes and competencies, and co-curricular experiences is at a very nascent stage in higher education. Considerable innovation is taking place at colleges and universities as faculty explore how best to identify and record learning that students are experiencing, create new delivery models and assignments, and develop assessments and rubrics to measure student learning. Rather than attempting to create standards in this rapidly evolving arena our work should focus on identifying emerging practices, addressing impediments to innovation and offering creative options for campuses to deliver and document student learning.

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An Extended Transcript Framework :

Academic
Transcripts

Learning
Outcomes and
Competencies

Co-Curricular
Experiences

Considerations

The framework should include a clear set of definitions for campuses to use.

- There is considerable variation in the terminology used to describe the practices associated with competency and outcome-based education. A basic set of definitions will help avoid confusion when creating transcripts and student records.

Campuses must evaluate and determine what they wish to include as part of an extended student record.

- What additional learning activities are recordable? How do we identify the learning that is taking place? Under whose authority? How do we measure what the learning is and how significant it is?
- Is there a universal way to convey or assign value to the mastery of demonstrable skills or competencies, or the acquisition of knowledge or what are considered the key elements of the learning that is occurring?

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Student records should be made available in a digital format.

- Digital transcripts and student records provide greater flexibility to capture and display the detail needed to adequately represent outcomes, competencies, and co-curricular experiences.
- Students as consumers expect more immediate fulfillment of their requests, which cannot be as easily accomplished with mailed paper transcripts.
- To facilitate business process efficiency and student mobility student transcripts and records exchanged between educational institutions should be made available in one of the current electronic formats such as PDF, EDI or XML.
- Student transcripts meant for employer use should ideally be prepared using interactive technology that offers the user the option to “drill down” deeper into the document as appropriate. New and evolving technology could also support student transcripts sent as data to online portfolios.
- If these formats are not available, or do not adequately serve the purposes of the intended constituencies, campuses should be prepared to produce the documents in a PDF format. If the campus intends for the report/document to be officially issued and verified it will need to use a secure PDF platform. It is anticipated that the transcript or record could be delivered either in a format that allows the employer to use an affordable technology to obtain needed info (e.g. clickable links) or via the established PESC standards for institution-to-institution exchange.
- If the university is not planning on issuing a traditional academic transcript it will be important to assure that the competency or other reports be issued in a secure manner and considered official for purposes of transfer, employment or acceptance to other gainful activities, exactly like the current transcript.

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Given the importance of student transfer in our educational landscape, campuses that are developing competency- based programs should continue to provide students with a more traditional academic transcript in addition to any competency- based reports or records.

- Students will likely find difficulty transferring from a competency-based program to a more traditional course-based program- particularly if they transfer before completing the CBE program- if all they can provide is a record of the program competencies. If campuses do not provide a traditional transcript they should be prepared to field questions from the student and receiving institution as they try to place the student appropriately.
- Having information available on sources such as websites and in catalogs would help to provide the transfer institution additional resources by which to accurately place the student and determine transfer credit.
- Alternatively, there could be services constructed to capture, search and interpret information that may be relevant for the translation of expanded records being issued by institutions.

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While there are examples of campuses using their digital academic transcript to capture and display competencies and learning outcomes, institutions may also want to consider recording these in a separate, but aligned, document.

- Academic transcripts that attempt to capture program-level competencies and outcomes can become complex. This is an area where we look to additional work. Campuses may want to consider separate documents to record learning outcomes and competencies while maintaining the more traditional, but digital, academic transcript. Campuses considering documenting co-curricular experiences may wish to record these on a separate document as well.
- Records could be considered in a modular fashion, allowing the requestor to call for that which will show what and how much was learned, accurately, comprehensively and understandably.

One model currently being developed is for campuses to create a separate academic transcript, a separate outcome/competency report, and a separate co-curricular experience report, but there could be significant benefits for students, employers, and other audiences for a document that pulls these three documents together.

- The Higher Education Achievement Report or HEAR in the UK is an example of what is commonly referred to as a diploma supplement and includes sections on program outcomes and extra curricular experiences as well as the more conventional academic transcript. There is room for innovation in this area. (<http://www.hear.ac.uk>)

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The Academic Transcript

The academic transcript in US higher education has evolved over time and guidance has been developed by AACRAO to help provide some consistency in the document. While it may not be necessary for the academic record to serve as the repository of learning outcomes or competencies, there are some improvements that can be made to help insure smoother student transitions from one institution to another or into the workplace. These enhancements are only reasonably possible if student transcripts are shared electronically.

For example, institutions might consider including course descriptions as part of their academic transcripts by including links to these descriptions from the course titles and number on their electronic transcript or a link to the course catalog from the electronic transcript. Recently the P-20 Electronic Standards Council (PESC) has a promising development in the Education Course Inventory. This is a data specification that can capture the level, content, and description of a course, making it much easier to facilitate the transfer of credit. Institutions should designate one central location that serves as a hub for elements such as course descriptions so that linkages will be possible. It will be important to assure that the location is maintained and updated appropriately, and that older records are archived, so as to assure the data contained in the link remains accurate. Consideration for records retention policies is also a component with these types of linkages.

An institution could also include linkages to course learning outcomes on the transcript if it chose to do so or may have this information available on the university website or other accessible source.

This same concept could be utilized in additional documents such as competency reports by providing linkages within the document that provide access to further information.

Also, there should be a call to fully record other academic activities that are at present being missed by most institutions, or are being awkwardly reported as courses when they are not. Internships, research opportunities, study abroad activities and community-engaged learning programs, when supervised properly by faculty deserve attention in the 21st century record.

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Questions:

1. Should these digital academic transcripts include links to course descriptions or course learning outcomes?
2. Where should campuses keep their course descriptions for the transcript link? On their website? In their digital catalog? In a word document?
3. How can local and cloud-based services be utilized?

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Recording Competencies and Learning Outcomes

An emerging practice for campuses developing competency-based programs or who wish to display program-learning outcomes is to create a document or record separate from their academic transcript. Unlike the academic transcript which documents course work completed to date without displaying what courses remain for the degree (since course selection can vary from student to student earning the same degree), the competency or outcome record could display all of the competencies or outcomes required for the course, program or even the institution and indicate whether the student has satisfied each competency or outcome. Schools may choose to use a met/not met mark or some other variation (e.g. high mastery, mastery, not yet mastered) and must assure that the explanation of the mark is included in the document.

In many respects the competency or outcome record could resemble a degree audit in that it could show the program-level competencies (think of these as requirements or clusters of requirements) and whether or not the student has completed each program level competency or outcome. These outcomes or competencies may consist of several sub competencies that will be achieved by various tasks and assessments. In a digital format the record can display what courses, assessments, or rubrics were used to satisfy each competency or outcome. Ideally these would be displayed at the individual student level, particularly if the combination of courses, assessments, and rubrics can vary from student to student. In cases where the individual assessments or demonstrations of learning “roll up” into a competency which then “rolls up” into a program level requirement or competency cluster, utilizing a digital document would allow for expanding and collapsing detail via interactive functionality. Program level competencies can be provided in a link next to the name of the program that the student is pursuing or has earned.

As an example, schools following the Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile could use the “Categories of Learning” as the program level outcomes. Under each of these Categories of Learning are numerous proficiencies that make up that category, and these can be documented on this record. A digital format allows for links to richer information such as the courses, assessments, and rubrics that lead to these proficiencies.

(<http://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/dqp.pdf>)

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Other examples to consider: Western Governor's University, Northern Arizona, Southern New Hampshire.

Questions:

1. Where are the competencies or learning outcomes retained at the institution? What tool will be used to document these? Will students have access to that system? What types of systems are currently being used to store competencies and assessments (e.g. Salesforce? MS Office? Learning Management Systems?).
2. Can the competency/outcome record be created out of the degree audit? Can you run both courses and competencies out of the degree audit?
3. How do we automate the creation of a competency/outcome record?
4. Are there some standards/guidelines that need to be developed in this area, both for transcribing and for records management?

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Creating a Co-Curricular Experiences Record

There is growing interest on many campuses in creating a means of representing student involvement and achievement outside of the classroom. Experienced based learning has become more widespread in recent years, with many institutions accepting experience based elements as legitimate and valued component of their educational programs (Moore, 2013). Unlike a student portfolio where the student selects the content of the portfolio, campuses that are considering creating a co-curricular record must decide what activities or experience should be included in this record. Of primary concern is how will these experiences be validated, who will do the validating, and what qualifies as a legitimate sources of knowledge that should be retained on an academic credential? Will the institution allow a mix of validated and non-validated elements or limit the co-curricular record to only validated areas?

The HEAR report from the UK includes a section on student extra-curricular experiences. This section of the HEAR report has the most variation in format from campus to campus as they develop approaches to record these experiences. At the University of Sheffield, their Section 6 of the HEAR report (the section used to capture extra-curricular experiences) includes both recognized campus activities as well as achievement demonstrated through the evaluation of a portfolio. The portfolio review considers achievement in the areas of volunteering, cultural and social awareness, enterprise, job and work experience, and community involvement.

Academic related co-curricular activities could include such activities as study abroad, undergraduate research, service learning, leadership experience and internships. In 2010, NACE conducted a survey that indicated that graduates that took part in an internship program were more likely to receive a job offer than those who did not do an internship. This same population also received higher salaries than non-internship students. However, it is important to note that institutional culture and mission should provide the framework for the co-curricular elements included on a secondary transcript. Other examples of co-curricular practices include student employment, leadership, diversity, community-based learning, and many more.

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In addition to identifying the data, quantifying the information is equally important if the goal of the transcript is to provide a more “complete” picture of the student experience. Examples may include using the number of hours to quantify service to an outside organization or hours spent working a summer internship. Another example may to add student employment on-campus and quantify that by paid hours worked in a given term.

Universities that are considering a co-curricular transcript should consider the following questions:

1. What activities should be included in the co-curricular record?
 - a. Validated experiences that are verified by the institution.
 - b. Non-validated experiences that are self-reported by the student.
2. For those activities that are validated, who will validate these experiences?
3. Does the student need to provide consent for everything that appears in this record? If a university chooses to have non-validated elements on the transcript how will those items be submitted and recorded? (Or is there a separate section of the co-curricular record for non-validated, self-reported activities, so the reader of the record can treat them however they deem appropriate?)
4. A common concern is that non-traditional students, particularly adult students with family and work obligations, don't have the time to participate in many of the activities that will be recorded in the co-curricular report. How do campuses construct this report to enable non-traditional students to display co-curricular experiences?
 - Are there experiences that are more common for non-traditional students that could be validated through portfolios, prior learning assessments based on their work, military experiences, etc?
 - Would they be able to record non-university sanctioned activities here, such as serving on boards, volunteer activities, etc?
 - Could a protocol be created at a university to review and validate these experiences?

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5. Where are these experiences recorded and maintained at the campus? What are the policies surrounding retention of data for this type of transcript?
6. If institutions build experience based components into the curriculum, would transfer students be able to transfer these components to meet degree requirements?
7. What about standardization of high impact practices to pave the way electronic data exchange?

Other Approaches

1. Badges or certificates? Can these be components of degrees or made available to students to document other skills or proficiencies to enhance their degrees?
2. Shorter credentials (nano or micro-credentials and degrees) with defined learning outcomes that can be combined and lead to degrees or certificates?
3. Visual transcripts? Translations of data into a visual image that students can use in social media.