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## Foreword

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The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) has long been concerned with the integrity, ease of interpretation, and technological and privacy aspects of transmission of transcripts.

The *AACRAO Academic Record and Transcript Guide* is only one of numerous resources developed by AACRAO to assist its members. The list of references, following the Glossary, highlights the pertinent ones.

The Association was founded in 1910. At the second Annual Meeting, held in Boston in 1911, a committee was appointed to “give further consideration to the problem of devising a uniform blank for the transfer of a student’s record.”

While initial efforts were focused upon the development of a uniform transcript blank for most colleges and universities, the aim since 1942 has been to agree on essential items of information which should be included.

Those essential items were listed in the 1945 *Guide* and in the 1947 reprint. The 1949 *Supplement*, reissued in 1950, added brief explanations or definitions for each item. The 1952 revision included discussions of transcript evaluation, forged transcripts, transcripts for teacher licensing needs, and a bibliography.

Additional changes in the 1959 *Guide* included advances in transcript design made in cooperation

with the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification. Significant contributions to this *Guide* were abstracted from a report entitled “The Recording and Reporting of Student Disciplinary Records”—a report that was developed jointly with and adopted by AACRAO, the American College Personnel Association, the National Association of Women Deans and Counselors, and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. Recommendations of the Association of Graduate Deans were also considered as to the arrangement of essential items.

The 1965 *Guide* included a formal resolution of the State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification concerning the acceptance of a transcript as a document to facilitate teacher certification. This *Guide* also incorporated the recommendations of the Committee on Improvement of Student Personnel Records of the Council of Graduate Schools of the United States, and addressed the use of “reproducing equipment” for transcripts. This edition also included modifications of essential transcript items, with explanations, and contained as an appendix “A Guide to Good Practices in the Recording and Reporting of Student Disciplinary Records”—a guide which was replaced by the 1970 AACRAO statement entitled *Release of Information About Students: A Guide*.

Through the 70s and 80s the *Guides* reflected the changes brought about by the passage of the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974* (FERPA), as amended, and also contained information and recommendations on continuing education and nontraditional education records. They differentiated between the content of academic records, the content of academic transcripts, and the content of other institutional records. They also responded to an increased need for security awareness by including, as an appendix, a self-audit of record and transcript policies and practices. Another appendix provided sample transcript forms to aid colleges and universities planning for revision of basic records systems and transcript production.

The 1996 *Guide* built on the distinction between academic records and academic transcripts by listing all components according to their suitability to appear on the transcript, or only in the database. It began using a four-level scale to evaluate each component for suitability for transcript and/or database: Essential, Recommended, Optional, or Not Recommended. This edition identified “disciplinary action” as an item that should be maintained by the institution in its database, but which should *not* appear on the academic transcript. Reflecting a new interest in the electronic exchange of data, the 1996 *Guide* added such a chapter. Other new features in the 1996 edition included an expanded section on nontraditional courses, a sample transcript key, and a suggested reading list.

The 2003 *Guide* updated the discussion of database and transcript components in chapter 3; addressed the current impact of FERPA and the USA PATRIOT Act on the release of student educational records; updated the discussion of fraudulent transcripts, security of records, and Continuing

Education Unit (CEU) Records; and explained two standards for electronic transcript exchange: EDI and XML.

The 2011 *Guide* developed the discussion on best practices for electronic data storage and security training for staff, and included the results of a 2009–10 Survey of the AACRAO membership on current transcript practices and opinions. Information and Recommendations about technologies such as the PDF, newer XML, Internet, email, document imaging, and student information systems were woven throughout the chapters.

Certain practices were the center of extensive discussions (and slight modifications) by the *Academic Record and Transcript Guide* committee:

- \* Notation of SSNs, academic and disciplinary actions, and course mode of delivery on the transcript;
- \* Requirements for change of name and gender;
- \* Issuing duplicate and replacement diplomas; and
- \* Student option for issuing transcripts that show only a specific degree and supporting coursework when a student has attended both undergraduate and graduate or professional divisions within the same institution.

The Academic Record and Transcript Guide Task Force who edited the current *Guide* continued the discussion of these evolving issues and included, for the first time, a discussion of the extended transcript concept. This is a suggestion by professionals in the student affairs arena to expand the role of the transcript beyond the record of a student’s academic performance in higher education to include co- and extra-curricular activities in which a student may have participated.

# *An Introduction to the Academic Record and Transcript*

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## Historical Perspective

The office and functions of the registrar date back to the great medieval universities of Bologna, Paris, and Oxford (Quann 1979, 2). As early as the twelfth century, the beadle was an official who proclaimed announcements, exacted fines, and helped the academic operation run smoothly.

The first academic officer with the title of “registrar” was appointed in 1446 at Oxford University (Quann 1979, 5). That officer’s duties were “to give form and permanence to the university’s public acts, to draft its letters, to make copies of its documents, and to register the names of its graduates and their “examinatory sermons.”

In the United States, at the first institution of higher education (Harvard College, established in 1636), the registrar’s academic recordkeeping function was initially a part-time duty assigned to a faculty member. The position rapidly became professionalized, however, as student enrollment in colleges grew. Along with the college president, the treasurer, and the librarian, the registrar was among the first administrative officers to become a specialist (Quann 1979, 6). Among institutions belonging to the Association of American Universities, fewer than 10 percent had registrars as of 1880,

but 25 percent had designated them by 1890, as had 42 percent by 1900, and 76 percent by 1910—the founding year of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars (AACR), now the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) (6–7). (AACRAO added “and Admissions Officers” in 1949.)

The modern-day Office of the Registrar exists to serve the needs of students, to respond to requests of the faculty and administration for data, and to safeguard the integrity of the institution’s records and degrees.

## Evolution of the Transcript Out of the Academic Record

In the nineteenth century, a college or university “student information system” consisted of two ledger books. One was a compilation of class rosters, with final examination and course grades posted by each name. The other was the “matriculants’ book,” with demographic information about each student, often: the home county, the parents’ names, and the student’s religious denomination.

Since all students followed the same curriculum, transcripts were not needed, and few were prepared. The registrar simply noted the degree received or, if the student did not graduate, the number of years

of study completed. Such certifications were usually prepared as letters, in response to a request for information.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, spurred by the new elective system of course offerings and by the introduction of major and minor fields of study, colleges and universities began to shift the focus from the graduating cohort to the individual student. Records now consisted of a separate page for each student—a page which combined demographic information with a compilation of the student’s individualized set of courses. All the pertinent information about any one student was contained on one ledger page. In the early years of the twentieth century, the ledger page became a record card. This document became known as the “permanent record card.” The permanent record card was the major database of its day—a repository of much miscellaneous information related to the student.

The transcript is that extract of the student’s record which reflects his or her academic performance at the institution. After World War II, with the increase in student enrollment, registrars often photocopied the permanent record card to serve as a transcript. Even in an era when privacy requirements were not yet codified in federal and state law, this was not an optimum system.

## The Academic Record and Transcript Today

Today, registrars remain tasked with preserving the integrity of an institution’s academic records. The use of student information systems, Internet, email, and document imaging have made it easier to produce and promptly disseminate information from a student’s academic record and the student’s transcript upon receipt of an authorized request. Nevertheless, registrars and records professionals are challenged to reconcile two competing demands: the need to provide accurate information promptly to various constituencies and the need to safeguard privacy.

In the *AACRAO 2016 Academic Record and Transcript Guide*, we have tried to educate the reader of the differences between “database,” and “academic record or transcript,” and make some distinctions based on the historical evolution of those concepts. Additionally, current issues that pertain to the maintenance and representation of academic records are explored. Fifty-four database and transcript components are presented, along with recommendations as to whether their use is Essential, Recommended, Optional, or Not Recommended in the database and/or on the transcript.

We hope that this work will be of immediate and continuing use to registrars and information professionals in a variety of settings and at all stages of their careers. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the issuing institution to be certain that their records and academic transcripts are appropriate, contain at the least the essential data elements specified in this publication, and are consistent with the local, state and federal legal guidelines under which the institution operates.

## Chapter Summaries

In order to facilitate easy use of this *Guide*, we here present a brief overview of each chapter.

Chapter One addresses current issues which continue to be worthy of discussion based upon practical concerns and/or changes in our culture, including the notation of disciplinary actions on the transcript and recording name and gender changes. Each issue is reviewed as a sub-section of the chapter.

In Chapter Two, we provide a list of data elements that will be helpful to records and registration officers in maintaining the distinction between information that is appropriate to be maintained in the database and the smaller subset of information that is appropriate to be placed on an official transcript. Note that in Appendix C, we present a “Self-Audit” exercise concerning what should, and should not be, included on transcripts.

In Chapter Three, we present a concise guide to the transcript key. We list 20 items that are essential to be included in the key, and seven optional items.

Note that we also present and explain the highlights of a survey that AACRAO conducted in the winter of 2014–15, concerning current institutional practice (Appendix A) and registrars' opinions as to what they considered to be best practice for an institution of their type (Appendix B).

Chapter Four is an expanded and updated discussion of the transcription of nontraditional work. It draws a distinction between identifying the origin of the coursework (recommended) and identifying the mode of delivery (not recommended). It discusses the transcription of various types of nontraditional learning including experiential and co-curricular learning, credit by examination, distance learning, study abroad, military education, corporate education, external degree programs, competency-based education, and continuing education. It also includes examples of how these can be transcribed onto the transcript.

Chapter Five updates the discussion of transcript services. It includes a discussion on best practices

surrounding transcript requests, security features for transcripts, how FERPA, the USA PATRIOT Act, and the Solomon Amendment impact the release of student education records, as well as a discussion on electronic data exchange.

Chapter Six discusses the physical and electronic security of records, security training for staff, and additional safeguards and challenges in maintaining the integrity of student records.

Chapter Seven is devoted to identifying and preventing transcript fraud. In this chapter you will find a succinct summary of best practices to use when safeguarding the authenticity of a transcript or identifying a fraudulent document.

We also include eight appendices, including the results of the survey on transcript practices and best practice opinions, AACRAO's best practices for PDF transcript exchange, the results of the student identity preferences survey, a Self-Audit checklist, the Extended Transcript Framework, and sample electronic notifications for transcript exchange.

Finally, we also include an expanded and updated Glossary, an updated and annotated list of references, and an index.