Consultation Topics

Section 2: Toward a 2015 ARUCC Transcript Guide

Subsection 2.1: The Role of the Transcript

Considerations:

The consultation questions in this section are intended to focus on what "should" be the role of the transcript at Canadian universities, colleges, and institutes in light of current thinking and practice and emerging trends.

The community confirmed many of the core principles in the 2003 ARUCC Transcript Guide; however, there were some points of disagreement on specific transcript components and practices. Further, there was evidence that the emergence of alternate artifacts (e.g., the co-curricular record, transfer credit statements, and competency-based learner records) were causing some discussion. Generally, the Phase 1 findings suggest there is an interest in encouraging and supporting the creation of additional and separate artifacts to document alternate forms of achievement. International examples where this has occurred were shared in the final Phase 1 report to expand the conversation such as the Diploma Supplement from Europe, the UK Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) document, and the Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement (AHEG). Canadian institutions and academic colleagues are examining many alternate approaches; therefore, it is important to clarify the role of the transcript as potentially one component in this compendium of institutional artifacts.[1] The questions below are in addition to those asked in the first Phase and are intended to further confirm thinking and clarify discrepancies; the outcomes along with those from Phase 1 will underpin a broader understanding of the role of the transcript in a future Guide.

Online Survey Questions:

The following questions are embedded within the online survey accompanying this Consultation Document. They are provided below to facilitate advance reflection.

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[1] Those interested in developing standards for the co-curricular record may be interested in the upcoming CCR/T Summit in British Columbia (see http://www.cacuss.ca/cgi/page.cgi/_article.html/CACUSS_News/Co-Curricular_Record_Transcript_Summit_2015).

1. Should the role of the transcript be redefined? If yes, how and what principles should underpin this redefinition?
2. Indicate your level of agreement with each of the following transcript standard principles. A transcript should (note: these are in addition to those already confirmed in Phase 1)…
    i. Depict academic achievement of relevant academic milestones.
    ii. Demonstrate the issuing institution's adherence to quality assurance.
    iii. Facilitate student mobility through different institutions and programs by ensuring clarity.
    iv. Reflect regulations approved by the academic body of the issuing institution.
    v. Ensure transparency about relevant milestones in a student record related to the credential the student is pursuing.
    vi. Be sufficiently comprehensive.
    vii. Be coherent, easy to understand, and supported by a comprehensive transcript key/legend.
3. Identify your level of agreement with the following statement: Student achievement outcomes from programs reviewed by institutional academic governing bodies that are subject to academic quality assurance review should be the only items reflected on the transcript. What is the rationale for your position?
4. What other documented outcomes regarding learner achievements should be published on a transcript? What is the rationale for your position?
5. If approved by the institutional academic governing body, which of the following should be represented on a transcript: Bridging programs offered as part of an approved certificate, diploma, or degree; Non-credit bridging programs that are not part of an approved certificate, diploma, or degree; Bridging programs that combine credit and non-credit studies and that are not part of an approved certificate, diploma, or degree; Non-credit learning of relevance to the academic record (e.g., Academic Honesty tutorials, Ethics tutorials); Credit-based work integrated learning/experiential education. What is the rationale for your position?

Background:

Some of the findings from Phase 1 suggest mainly confirmation regarding the role, purpose, and content of a transcript; however, there are apparent differences of opinion. It is worth noting the definition for a transcript varies somewhat by organization (see Table 1 for examples). Therefore, as part of this consultation process, we are seeking more specific direction and consensus from the community regarding the scope of the academic transcript.

The rationale for this discussion stems from the changes emerging in the Canadian postsecondary world. Game changers and new research are affecting core understandings of what a transcript represents and the role it plays. In Phase 1, we learned that the growing focus on learning outcomes and competency-based education is challenging the concept of the credit hour. Providing demonstrable and vigorously verified evidence of achievement of quality markers that have been approved by academic governing bodies within institutions generally represents the lens of an institutional view of the role of a transcript. Dr. Kate Ross, Associate Vice President and Registrar at the University of British Columbia suggests a transcript also serves another purpose: "It tells the story of a student's academic learning experience at your institution." Which story it should tell varies by institution and, as confirmed by Phase 1 findings, should be determined by institutional history, evolution, policies, and regulations (87% agreed or

strongly agreed with this position in Phase 1). Further, 93% confirmed the transcript should represent a complete and accurate history of achievement of academic history for a student.

As another lens on this topic, Matthew Pittinsky recently published an opinion piece in the Educause magazine, *Credentialing in Higher Education: Current Challenges and Innovative Trends* (Mar/Apr, 2015),[2] which we encourage people review when reflecting on the role of a transcript.

The international emphasis on student mobility and the necessary data portability is further impacting the transcript world. Data exchange is being enabled by significant technology advances; the opportunity to share pieces of a student record has become easier with the advent of this new world. Initiatives such as the Groningen Declaration, an international cause to advance partnership across geographical boundaries to facilitate student and data mobility,[3] and the North American Postsecondary Electronic Standards Council (PESC) which is supported by the Canadian PESC User Working Group are two such examples that are changing the conversation around exchange of student data. These are important influencers. As an additional pressure, the complexity of the issue is affected by the number of "users" of the transcript data: students, educational institutions (for admission and assessment purposes), allied accrediting bodies (for industry standards assessment), and, to a lesser extent, employers (to ascertain the educational readiness, fit, and capabilities of potential employees).

All participants were offered the opportunity to comment on the principles and protocols entrenched in documents such as the ARUCC Transcript Guide.

A number of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that transcripts should:

- *Only be released upon student request or court order (97, 95%);*
- *Be a high level document highlighting academic achievement and relevant academic milestones (79, 78%);*
- *Be determined by institutional history, evolution, policies, and regulations and be subject to legal constraints (88, 87%);*
- *Contain a student's complete academic history at a particular institution (95, 93%);*
- *Not represent a subset of a student's academic record (73, 73%);*
- Not contain co-curricular information (43% agreed or strongly agreed; 30% disagreed or strongly disagreed).

Respondents were invited to provide further clarification or commentary regarding the scope of a transcript. Examples provided included emphasizing the importance of separating the academic transcript from the co-curricular summary (perhaps through creation of a secondary supplement), ensuring the transcript contained sufficient information to support an accurate interpretation of a student's educational history (with examples provided), and to consider exploring the creation of some form of diploma supplement similar to what is available in Europe and other regions.

Duklas et al. (2014). ARUCC PCCAT Phase 1 Report, p. 78.

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[2] https://www.educause.edu/ero/article/credentialing-higher-education-current-challenges-and-innovative-trends
[3] http://www.groningendeclaration.org/

Table 1: Sample of Definitions for Transcript in use in Canada

Transcript	The transcript is a subset of the student's academic record. The transcript should contain a complete and accurate history of the academic path of a given student in a particular postsecondary institution. Its content and format are determined by institutional history, evolution, policies and regulations and are subject to legal constraints.
Transcript	An official document that identifies courses taken (title and course number), credits and grades achieved, and credentials or qualifications earned.
Transcript	A record issued by an institution of a student's enrolment, course completion, credits acquired, grades, credential completion, and any other academic activity. An official transcript is certified (e.g., by signature and/or seal) by the institution. It is normally sent directly, by mail or electronically, to another institution on the student's request
Transcript	An official transcript is the original record verifying enrolment and achievement, and certified (e.g., by signature and/or seal) by the institution. It is normally sent directly, by mail or electronically, on a student's request.
Transcript	Document issued by a college or university or other authorized body that legally reports a student's cumulative academic record, courses and credits taken, grades or achievement levels obtained, and credentials earned
Transcript	A subset of a student's educational record at a given point in time, issued by a postsecondary institution, which reflects the student's complete and accurate educational history at the issuing institution. The transcript is considered official when it has been verified as issued by a competent issuing authority. Authentication criteria may or may not include direct transmission from institution to institution and presence of an institutional seal.

Subsection 2.2: Specific Transcript Components

Considerations:

In Phase 1, the community provided a tremendous amount of detail about specific transcript components. There is much in the findings that will guide the establishment of standards in the future Guide. They also requested an alternate format for the final Guide – as an online, searchable database rather than a printed publication or a PDF document.[4]

With respect to standards related to specific transcript components, the community signaled a desire for more guidance in the areas of college, graduate, transfer, and inter-institutional partnerships. Also requested were standards that more obviously transcended institutional type and sector or jurisdiction. While numerous specific examples were provided for transfer and inter-institutional partnerships, it was somewhat harder to explicitly identify the gaps for the other areas noted above.

The questions in this section are intended to elicit confirmation for what will be noted in the final Guide as "Essential," "Recommended," "Optional," and "Not recommended."

Online Survey Questions

The following questions are embedded within the online survey accompanying this Consultation Document. They are provided below to facilitate advance reflection.

For your convenience and to assist you with the next few questions, a comparison between the 2003 ARUCC Guide, the 2011 AACRAO Academic Record and Transcript Guide, and the planned recommendations for the new ARUCC PCCAT Transcript Guide are provided in a Transcripts Standards Comparison Database.

6. What is your opinion regarding the future recommendations for the various transcript component and student record system categorizations in the following database: http://b5.caspio.com/dp.asp?AppKey=95ca300006abb17d64624fa3b1aa

    *   The future recommendations for both the transcript standards and the student record system seem appropriate.
    *   Refinement of transcript component recommendations is required in the following areas:___
    *   Refinement of student record system recommendations is required in the following areas:__
    *   The following items should be added: ___

7. The search categories in the Transcript Standards Comparison Database…(Response Categories: make sense; should be refined as follows….)

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[4] The development and related testing of the future Guide is not addressed in this Consultation Document as it will be created at a later date. Therefore, questions related to its usability are not contained in this Document.

Background

In Phase 1, we found much currency in the work of past registrarial colleagues and academic leadership as represented by the level of agreement with the standards and thinking within the 2003 ARUCC Transcript Guide, including the continued relevance of some of the foundational principles. However, the shift in the educational landscape in the last decade coupled with an increase in technology tools led institutional colleagues to advocate for an updated national transcript guide that was available in a user-friendly and practical format. Colleagues further noted a number of gaps or requests for enhancements including, but not limited to, a need to the following:

- represent more equitably all postsecondary options in Canada;
- reflect more fully courses, activities, and programs taken at the graduate/postgraduate levels;
- re-examine the relevancy and currency of 2003 Guide recommendations regarding which elements should or should not appear on a Canadian postsecondary transcript in light of current legislative or social policy frameworks or protocols, balanced with broader institutional or collective jurisdictional goals;
- update or clarify terminology and language used in the Guide;
- provide best practice recommendations on how to reflect courses or learning from outside of the institution and for which credit was transferred;
- explore best practices on reflecting inter-institutional partnerships on a transcript; and,
- provide examples of transcript legends, supplements, and an "ideal" transcript template.

Phase 1 identified the following themes:

a. There appears to be variation in practice among universities and colleges in Canada regarding what is included on an official transcript, how it is displayed, and what information is available on institutional websites describing policies and practices with respect to transcripts (ARUCC PCCAT Phase 1 Report, 2014, p. 66).

b. Workshop participants pointed to terminology used in the Guide that was rapidly becoming obsolete such as "correspondence courses" or "Electronic Data Interchange (EDI)," and which needed to be updated. In addition, they identified a need for the Guide to address how changes in traditional classroom delivery of courses: distance education, online or blended delivery, as well as the proliferation of MOOCs should or should not be reflected on a transcript (p. 68).

c. Institutions are challenged by how to navigate and create joint transcripts and to reconcile different transcript expectations and practices of institutional partners, especially in the international realm (p. 68).

d. The community has called for greater detail on best practices such as those for transfer credit, partnerships, grading, progression, academic history, co-curricular records, legends, etc. (p. 69).

e. Some non-university participants found the current Guide to be too university focused and would appreciate it be expanded to enhance the presence of colleges and CEGEPs (p. 69).

Duklas et al. (2014). ARUCC PCCAT Phase 1 Report, 2014

Subsection 2.3: Transcript Operating Principles

Considerations:

It is unlikely that a move from the traditional transcript model is likely to occur in Canada in the near future. Therefore, the following questions are intended to facilitate an expanded conversation regarding the longevity of the academic information on a transcript, potential policies regarding retroactivity including expunging information from student records, and notating withdrawal and probation on transcripts.

It is worth noting that the 2003 ARUCC Transcript Guide indicates the following: "Expunging a student's academic record contradicts the basic principle that the transcript should be a complete and historically accurate image of the academic record…[further]…policy changes affecting the transcript of the academic record should not be applied retroactively" (p. 21). Although it occurred selectively, Phase 1 indicates that a significant percentage of institutions expunge or retroactively change records which stands in contrast to the 2003 Guide.

The Phase 1 survey findings also indicate varied withdrawal and probation annotation practices on institutional transcripts. Withdrawal notations occurred for reasons of academic performance (56% report this permanently; 8% report it with a time limit; 35% do not report it); academic misconduct/dishonesty (23% report this permanently; 28% report it with a time limit; 47% do not report), and non-academic discipline (8% report this permanently; 15% report it with a time limit; 72% do not report it). With respect to academic misconduct, the 2003 ARUCC Guide recommends that disciplinary action be recorded on the transcript unless the disciplinary action results in interruption of studies (suspension, expulsion) in which case it is essential (although details of the offense should not be shown). The ARUCC Guide does not endorse recording disciplinary action for non-academic misconduct *unless* the disciplinary action results in the interruption of studies (suspension, expulsion) in which case it is essential (again, details of the offense should not be shown).

In the 2011 AACRAO Guide, they cite best practice recommendations (p. 23) as follows (underlining added):

> *Disciplinary action(s) resulting in a period of probation, suspension or dismissal should not be recorded on an official academic transcript. <u>Academic</u> performance or other <u>academic</u> reasons resulting in a period of probation, suspension or dismissal should be preserved as an option for an institution to record on an official transcript. The institution may choose to represent the status of the individual by citing three status options referenced above, or the institution may opt to note a students' "academic ineligibility to re-enroll." Noting "ineligible to re-enroll" without a specific qualifier, such as "disciplinary" or "academic" is not recommended. [sic]*

The rationale provided indicates that the transcript and the record are no longer one and the same document; therefore, "maintaining documentation of an action that affects a student's status and recording it on the academic transcript are two separate and distinct activities…" Thus, "it was no longer necessary to record academic and disciplinary probation, suspension, dismissal or ineligibility to re-enroll on the official transcript…In recent years, some have called for a return to presenting disciplinary actions on transcripts, citing the need for an official transcript to reflect an unabridged account of a

student's enrollment and academic history. Given legal concerns and student privacy rights, however, AACRAO has not endorsed this concept" (pp. 23-24).

Online Survey Questions:

The following questions are embedded within the online survey accompanying this Consultation Document. They are provided below to facilitate advance reflection.

8. Should the future Guide re-emphasize a commitment to avoiding retroactive application of policy changes to a transcript? Should the future Guide re-emphasize a commitment to avoiding expunging data from the student transcript?

9. What core principle(s) should govern best practice in this area particularly if the practical evidence suggests retroactive changes to student records occurs (selectively) at a number of institutions in Canada?

10. If it is known that an institution engages in this practice beyond the rare exception, what implications does this have for how transcripts are received, assessed, and perceived by other institutions when students apply for further studies?

11. Is there a chance that retroactive removal of information from a student transcript would impede student mobility and perceptions of an institution's commitment to academic quality?

12. Provide a rationale for your responses above.

13. Does your institution report academic misconduct on a transcript? For those institutions that do report academic misconduct on transcripts, what reasons and/or rationale underpin this approach?

14. Does your institution report non-academic misconduct on a transcript? What rationale underpins your institution's approach?

Background:

Phase 1 survey respondents confirmed the validity of many of the core transcript definitions and principles. However, these statements carry nuances that need to be explored further with the postsecondary community in Phase 2 in order to establish a sustainable framework of principles that will underpin and guide current as well as future transcripting approaches.

As one example, the 2003 Guide uses the following as the definition for 'transcript' (underlining added):

> The <u>transcript is a subset of the student's academic record</u>. The transcript should contain a complete and accurate history of the academic path of a given student in a particular postsecondary institution. Its content and format are determined by institutional history, evolution, policies and regulations and are subject to legal constraints (p. 20).

Yet, 73% of Phase 1 respondents indicated that the transcript should *not* be a subset of the academic record. The corollary would be that the transcript *should* reflect a student's entire academic record. How this gets interpreted and implemented points to the importance of clarifying our definition of the transcript, the student record system and other artifacts in play in registrarial offices so that the roles of each are well understood.

Further, there is strong belief that the transcript should display all academic credentials earned at a school; retroactive changes or application of policy is largely viewed as undesirable (although the practice is evident). Most indicated partial transcripts are not distributed. However, we learned in Phase 1 that institutions are sometimes faced with student requests to create partial transcripts to facilitate particular external employment or accreditation needs. In some select examples, when this practice occurred, the institution ensured a 'mention' was made in the transcript that it represented a partial picture. In those cases, the guiding principle of transparency was perceived to have been preserved. Further, select institutions have formal protocols in place to allow this practice.

As another example, we found that institutions wishing to implement redemption opportunities for students argued that removing and partitioning a previous poor academic record can, at times, facilitate a student's future chance of success. As the transcript is seen by many to be a trusted document that reflects an institution's detailed attention to sustaining its academic standards, these situations are sometimes perceived to be problematic. Select institutions may also have auditable protocols that prevent this approach. Retroactive changes also sit in contrast to the standards recommendations entrenched in the ARUCC 2003 Guide and the 2011 AACRAO Guide, both of which are representative of institutional quality assurance.

> *Most of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the 2003 ARUCC Transcript Guide principles although there appeared to be some ambiguity around the concept of a receiving institution being the verifier of what constitutes an official transcript.*
>
> - *73% disagreed or strongly disagreed that a transcript should represent a subset of a student record.*
> - *77% agreed or strongly agreed that the transcript should represent a historically accurate image of the entire academic path of the student; therefore, results should not be expunged.*
> - *89% indicated that a transcript should display all academic credentials and reflect the entire academic experience.*
> - *85% agreed or strongly agreed that a transcript practice of allowing retroactive policy changes should not be allowed.*
> - *87% of the respondents indicated they did not engage in distributing partial transcripts.*
> - *66% considered the transcript official only when verified by a receiving institution.*
> - *81% indicated a transcript's official status is determined by both the sending and receiving institution.*
> - *93% indicated the transcript is a "trusted" document of a student's academic experience at a particular institution and all efforts to undermine this trust should be avoided.*
>
> Duklas et al. (2014). ARUCC PCCAT Phase 1 Report, pp. 78-79.

Retroactive altering of the record or expunging information from student transcripts is not perceived as a routine practice in Canada; however, findings from Phase 1 indicate 66% removed courses from transcripts as a result of successful appeals. Those institutions that have experience in this area outline considerations where the practice is considered appropriate: in the case of administrative error; under extraordinary circumstances beyond the student's control; or for legal reasons. Further, transparency, coherency, and qualitative explanations were recommended when altering a student record. From one perspective, retroactivity seems to erode the preservation of the transcript artifact as a 'trusted' document; from another perspective, it may be the best approach if it is to the benefit of the student and happens very selectively.