

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.

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.

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.