

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. Academic performance or other academic 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 student’s “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.

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. Provide a rationale for your responses above.
6. 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?
7. 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 transcribing approaches.

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

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 (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.

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.

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.