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Foreword

Throughout its history, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) has been concerned with the integrity, ease of interpretation, and technological and privacy aspects of transmission of transcripts. At the core of AACRAO's mission is serving and advancing higher education by providing leadership in academic and enrollment services. Ensuring that academic records can be shared and interpreted effectively between institutions is key to the success of our students.

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

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 on developing a uniform transcript blank for most colleges and universities, the goal since 1942 has been to agree on essential items of information which should be included.

Those essential items were first listed in the 1945 version of the *Guide* and that list has been reviewed and expanded with each edition of the document. As transcripts became more complex and technology changed, AACRAO consulted with other associations to ensure the recommendations were comprehensive and reflected current thinking in higher education. Collaborations included topics such as teacher certification, student disciplinary records, methods of transcript reproduction, and items essential to a variety of institutions receiving transcripts.

The passage of the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974* (FERPA), as amended, created a new focus for AACRAO's guidance on transcripts, and coincided with the emergence of continuing education and nontraditional education records. The guidance differentiated between the content of academic records, the content of academic transcripts, and the content of other institutional records.

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 introduced a four-level scale to evaluate each component for suitability for the transcript and/or the 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. Today, that advice has changed and it is recommended that some form of notice of disciplinary actions be provided (on the transcript or otherwise) to receiving institutions.

Subsequent issues of the *Guide* included information about the USA PATRIOT Act, electronic transcript exchange, continuing education unit (CEU) records and other timely topics. The 2011 *Guide* included the results of a 2009–10 survey of the AACRAO membership on current transcript practices and opinions. Member surveys are an important component of each new edition.

The authors focus on certain practices and changes in this publication:

- Notation of academic and disciplinary actions on the transcript;
- Requirements for change of name and gender;
- Recording of co- and extra-curricular activities in an extended transcript;
- Recording of chosen names and pronouns;
- Reissuance of diplomas; and
- Prior learning assessment.

The Academic Record and Transcript Guide Task Force members who edited the current *Guide* continued the discussion of these evolving issues and relied on recent AACRAO surveys and studies on transcript practices, student identity, and prior learning assessment to learn how practices are changing and developing.

An Introduction to the Academic Record and Transcript

Nora McLaughlin
REGISTRAR, REED COLLEGE

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 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.)

Today's Office of the Registrar exists to advance the mission of the institution by serving the needs of students and faculty, responding to requests of the faculty and administration for data, and ensuring 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.

Because all students followed the same curriculum, transcripts were unnecessary, 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 information related to the student.

The transcript is that extract of the student's record which reflects their 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 responsible for 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 2020 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-nine 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. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the issuing institution to be certain that their records and academic transcripts are accurate, contain the essential data elements specified in this publication, and are consistent with relevant 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 worthy of discussion based upon practical concerns and/or changes in our culture, including the notation of disciplinary actions on the transcript, the recording name

and gender changes, and the extended transcript. Each issue is reviewed as a sub-section of the chapter.

In Chapter Two, we provide a list of relevant data elements and identify the distinction between information that should be maintained in the database and the subset of information that is appropriate for the official transcript. Appendix B, "Self-Audit Checklist" (on page 111) offers further guidance by means of a "Self-Audit" exercise concerning what should, and should not be, included on transcripts. We also present and explain the highlights of the latest survey on transcript practices that AACRAO conducted in 2019, concerning current institutional practice (*see* Appendix A, "U.S. Higher Education Official Transcript Practices" [on page 81]) and registrars' opinions as to what they considered to be best practice for an institution.

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

Chapter Four is an 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 and legal considerations. It includes a discussion of best practices for transcript requests, advice on electronic data exchange, security features for transcripts, as well as how FERPA, the USA PATRIOT Act, and the Solomon Amendment affect the release of student education records. This chapter also includes updated information on withholding transcripts and responsibilities for records when an institution closes.

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 summary of recommended practices for safeguarding the authenticity of a transcript and identifying a fraudulent document.

We also include nine appendices, including the results of the survey on transcript practices, AACRAO's best practices for PDF transcript exchange, AACRAO Work Group reports on both student identity preferences and disciplinary notations, the Extended Transcript Framework, and a sample confidentiality agreement for staff.

Finally, we also include an expanded and updated glossary, an updated and annotated list of references, and an index. We hope this information will assist higher education professionals in their work to ensure the accurate, timely, and secure sharing of information to advance our students' goals.