

Appendix A

Guidelines for Medical Schools Regarding Academic Transcripts

An academic transcript is a certified document intended for use by parties outside the educational institution and is an unabridged summary of the student's academic history at that institution. It is distinguished from the larger body of information that may be contained in the student's educational or academic record. The educational or academic record is an internal document that also reflects the student's unabridged academic history at the institution but that may contain additional data useful internally yet not needed externally.

1. Medical schools are encouraged to follow the recommendations of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) as published in Academic Record and Transcript Guide. Where the medical school is part of a university, schools are encouraged to consult with the university registrar to ensure that the medical school transcript is in compliance with university requirements.
2. The academic transcript should reflect the total, unabridged academic history of the student at the institution. All courses should be recorded in the academic period in which the course was taken and graded.
3. Essential elements of an academic transcript include: name of institution, location of institution, name of student, terms of attendance, withdrawal date, course identification number and title, credit hours for each course, unit of credit, grade in each course, summary of transfer credit accepted and the name of the institution from which the credit is accepted, any instances of academic suspension or dismissal and the date, title of degree awarded, date degree is conferred, program studied (i.e., medicine), date of issuance of the transcript, and date of last entry to the transcript. Name changes should be recorded on transcripts only while the individual is enrolled and the name can be changed concurrently in the AAMC database.
4. Each student should have a unique identification number that is recorded on the transcript.
5. The following items are not recommended for inclusion on the academic transcript (although the institution may wish to retain some of these items in the educational or academic record): student's address, place of birth, gender, ethnicity, marital status, religious preference, disability, and INS status; secondary school data; prior postsecondary school data; academic probation; class rank.
6. Medical schools should record on a transcript only that academic information under the purview of the school's faculty of medicine. Consequently, United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE) results and election to Alpha Omega Alpha (AOA)

should not be included on the transcript. However, honors awarded by the school's faculty, either in course or at graduation, may be included on the transcript.

7. It is essential that the transcript include notation of any academic suspension or dismissal since this is an academic action that interrupts the student's continued enrollment. Similarly, a suspension for academic misconduct (e.g.; plagiarism) should be included on the transcript. While an institution may want to include academic probation in the educational database, it is not desirable to include this status on an academic transcript since the definition of academic probation varies from school to school. Thus, the item serves no useful purpose on an academic transcript which, by definition, is intended for use outside the school. In any event, if academic probation is included on the transcript, it is vital that this term be clearly defined in the transcript legend or key.

8. Where a student is dismissed, the transcript should record the initial date of dismissal. If there is a subsequent appeal, the result of this appeal and the date of this decision should be recorded, as well. If the student is permitted to continue in the curriculum pending the outcome of an appeal, this should be noted on the transcript with a footnote.

9. In the case of a student who is a candidate for two degrees (e.g., M.D./Ph.D.), courses which are given combined or dual credit toward both degrees should be so noted.

10. The transcript should include the title and number for each course taken by the student and should show the academic period in which the course is taken. Both required and elective courses should be courses that have been developed and approved by faculty following the school's procedures for approval of courses. All courses, including elective courses, should have an identification number, title, and course description and appear in the school's bulletin or elective handbook, or both. In the case when a student is currently enrolled, courses that the student is taking are listed with an indication that these courses are in progress.

11. The transcript should include a legend that explains the grading system, symbols, inclusive dates for grading systems where changes have occurred, honors, unit of credit, notation of courses in progress. If the school requires a passing score on USMLE for promotion and/or graduation, this policy should be included in the transcript legend. Additionally, the legend should include the accreditation status of the school, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) disclaimer, and an explanation of how the authenticity of the transcript can be determined.

12. Issuing official academic transcripts is a central and unique function of the registrar's Office. Transcripts should be issued only upon written request of the student/alumnus/a who has properly identified himself/herself with an ID card, driver's license, or signature on a request form or letter. Telephone and e-mail requests for transcripts should not be accepted because security and authenticity cannot be ensured.

- a. A transcript is issued only at the written request of the student or alumnus/a or a specified third party whom the student or alumnus/a has authorized, in writing, to obtain a transcript for a specific stated purpose. The request must be signed and dated; the third party must be specified and the release must state that the school may release the student's/alumnus' transcript for that purpose.
 - b. A transcript ceases to be an "official" transcript if it is copied or faxed. An original transcript must not be transferred to a third party since doing so violates FERPA.
 - c. The registrar's office must maintain a Transcript Transmittal Record for each student/alumnus. This record must show the date and party to whom a transcript is sent and the purpose for which the transcript is issued. Transcripts issued to the student or alumnus/ should say "Issued to the Student" rather than "Unofficial Transcript" since the latter could be altered easily.
 - d. If the school has a policy that requires withholding transcripts for default on student loans or other reasons, that policy should be stated clearly in both the bulletin and the student handbook. Transcript holds for financial reasons should be limited to charges that relate directly to the education that is reported on the student's/alumnus' academic transcript.
 - e. If there is an institutional charge for issuing a transcript, this fee should be modest.
 - f. Faxing a transcript should be avoided unless there is an urgency that requires immediate transfer of a transcript. If a transcript is faxed, it is important that proper procedures for the transcript request be used (#12.a.) --- a properly signed fax request may be accepted. Additionally, a transcript that is faxed should be considered "unofficial" and used only until an original can be sent. A cover memorandum should describe the document as confidential information intended for the exclusive use of the addressee.
13. Where a transcript is to be transmitted electronically (e.g., ERAS, SPEEDE), it is recommended that the system used require that the sending and receiving stations be authenticated.
14. Schools are encouraged to take a number of steps to protect the institution from fraudulent transcripts. The use of special paper, multicolored pens for the registrar's signature, metered postage rather than postage stamps, and inclusion of a physical description of the transcript in the transcript key are helpful ways to improve security. Additionally, it is recommended that the transcript include an institutional statement regarding the school's plans to pursue vigorously all allegations of security breaches with respect to transcripts.

15. The educational record database and academic transcripts should be stored in a secure, fireproof location. Access to the database and to the area where documents and equipment (records, stationery, and the school seal and signature equipment) are stored should be limited to authorized personnel only.

16. A medical school should have a disaster plan for the secure storage and recovery of educational records and academic transcripts that may be damaged or destroyed in the event of a catastrophic disaster. Normally, this entails the identification of a remote location where duplicate records are maintained. It is important for the school to develop an appropriate protocol for the regular duplication and transfer of records to the remote location.