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Revised Guidelines for Medical Schools Regarding Academic Transcripts

An academic transcript is a certified document that represents an unabridged summary of a student's academic history at an educational institution and is intended for use by parties external to the institution. It is distinguished from the larger body of information which may be contained in the student's educational or academic record at the institution. The educational or academic record is an internal document or set of documents or database that also reflects the student's unabridged academic history at the institution; it may contain additional data that are useful internally, although not needed externally. All student education records are protected under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

1. Medical schools are encouraged to follow the recommendations of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) as published in its 2003 Academic Record and Transcript Guide (available at: www.aacrao.org). Where the medical school is part of a university, consultation between the medical school and university registrars is encouraged 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 courses were taken and graded.
3. The academic transcript should be “authentic,” i.e., it should reflect all official grades received by the student for all courses attempted at the “home” institution and at “away” institutions in completion of the degree program, including grades that result from remediated or repeated courses. For example:
 - A designation of “Incomplete” should be recorded for a course when the student has not completed some component of the course and the reason for non-completion is acceptable to the instructor (e.g., absence from a class or examination due to illness or a serious personal emergency). A designation of Incomplete should not be used as a temporary “placeholder” when the student’s prior performance in the course has been unsatisfactory.
 - A grade of “Fail” should be recorded for a course in which the student has not demonstrated competency or did not complete at a satisfactory level the course requirements outlined in the course syllabus. A grade of Fail in a course should be a permanent grade; it should not be replaced on the transcript by a subsequent passing grade after the course has been remediated or repeated, even if the passing grade is accompanied by a special notation. The practice of replacing a grade of Fail on the transcript with a subsequent grade of Pass is inconsistent with total and unabridged grade reporting.

4. The essential elements of an academic transcript include the:
 - name (and any former name) of the institution
 - location of the institution
 - name of student
 - terms of attendance and the course(s) taken in each term
 - withdrawal date
 - identification number and title for each course
 - credit hours for each course
 - units of credit
 - grade in each course
 - name and location of colleges or universities previously attended
 - title(s) of all degree(s) awarded by the institution
 - date(s) of degree conferral
 - program(s) studied (i.e., medicine)
 - date(s) of issuance of the transcript, and
 - date of last entry to the transcript.

A name change should be recorded on a transcript only if the name change occurs while the student is enrolled.

5. Each student should have a unique identification number that is recorded on the transcript.
6. The following items are not recommended for inclusion on the academic transcript (although the institution may wish to retain these items in the student's institutional educational or academic record): the student's
 - address
 - place of birth
 - gender
 - racial and/or ethnic self-description
 - marital status
 - religious preference
 - disability status
 - U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) status
 - secondary school data
 - prior post-secondary school data
 - placement on academic probation
 - class rank.
7. Medical schools should record on a transcript only that academic information which is entirely under the purview of the school's faculty of medicine. Consequently, results of the United States Medical Licensing Examinations (USMLE) and election to Alpha Omega Alpha (AOA) Honor Medical Society should not be included on the transcript. Honors that are awarded by the school's faculty, either in a course or at graduation, may be included on the transcript.
8. While an institution may want to include the notation of a student's placement on academic probation in its educational database, inclusion of this status on the student's academic transcript is not desirable because the definition of "academic probation" varies from school to school. Thus, inclusion of this status serves no useful purpose on an academic transcript which, by definition, is intended for use outside of the school. If, for some reason, academic

probation is included on the transcript, this term should be clearly defined in the transcript legend or key.

9. Academic suspension or dismissal of a student should be recorded on the academic transcript. Decisions about the academic suspension or dismissal of a student are based on an assessment of the student's performance vis-à-vis the school's "technical standards" for admission, continuation, and graduation in the areas of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and professional behavior. In accordance with AACRAO recommendations, disciplinary suspension or dismissal of a student should not be recorded on the academic transcript, since no detailed supporting information is included on the transcript and the inclusion of a notation about disciplinary suspension and/or dismissal would be non-specific and thus punitive. On the other hand, also in accordance with AACRAO recommendations, schools have the option to record a status of academic suspension or "ineligibility to re-enroll" on the transcript because course grades would presumably serve as supporting information. Only the final decision (after all appeals have been exhausted) about an academic suspension should be included on the transcript.
10. In the case of a student who is a candidate for more than one degree (e.g., M.D./Ph.D., M.D./M.P.H), participation in the combined program should be noted on the transcript.
11. All courses, including elective courses, should have an identification number, title, and course description and appear in the school's academic bulletin or elective handbook, or both. When a student is currently enrolled in a course, that course may be listed on the academic transcript with an indication that the course is "in progress."
12. The transcript should include a legend that explains:
 - the school's grading system(s) and symbols
 - the inclusive dates for grading systems, when changes in the grading system have occurred
 - honors
 - units of credit, and
 - notation of courses in progress.

If the school requires a student to either record a score on, or pass, the USMLE Step examination(s) 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, a Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) disclaimer, and information regarding how the authenticity of the transcript can be determined.

13. Issuing official academic transcripts is a central and unique function of the Registrar's Office. Transcripts should be issued only upon the written request of the student or graduate who has properly identified himself or herself with an identification card (e.g., a driver's license) or a signature on a request form or letter. Telephoned and emailed requests for transcripts can be accepted if the transcript is being sent to another educational institution. If the school has a secure authentication system for current students and graduates, electronic transcript requests can be accepted.
 - a. A transcript is issued only at the written request of the student or graduate or a specified third party whom the student or graduate 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 form must state that the school may release the student's or graduate's transcript for that purpose.

- b. A transcript ceases to be an "official" transcript if it is photocopied or faxed. With the exception of a transcript that is transmitted through a residency application service (e.g., the Electronic Residency Application Service [ERAS]), an original transcript must not be transferred to a third party, since doing so violates FERPA regulations.
 - c. The Registrar's Office must maintain a Transcript Transmittal Record for up to one year. This record must show the date on which and the party to whom a transcript was transmitted and the purpose for which the transcript was issued. A transcript issued to the student or graduate should be identified as one "Issued to the Student" rather than as an "Unofficial Transcript" since the latter designation can be easily altered.
 - d. If the school has a policy that requires withholding transcripts due to default on student loans or other reasons, that policy should be stated clearly in both the school's academic bulletin and 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 or graduate's academic transcript.
 - e. If there is an institutional charge for issuing a transcript, this fee should be modest.
 - f. The faxing of a transcript should be avoided unless there is an urgency that requires immediate transfer. If a transcript is faxed, it is important that proper procedures for the transcript request be used (see #13.a., above); a properly signed faxed request may be accepted. Additionally, any transcript that is faxed should be considered to be unofficial and used only until an original transcript can be provided. A cover memorandum should accompany the faxed transcript to describe the document as confidential information intended for the exclusive use of the addressee.
14. Where a transcript is to be transmitted electronically (e.g., for the Electronic Residency Application Service [ERAS] or Electronic Data Interchange [SPEEDE]), it is recommended that the system used require that the sending and receiving stations be authenticated.
 15. 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, and metered postage rather than postage stamps, as well as the 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.
 16. The school's educational record database and academic transcripts should be stored in a secure and fireproof location. Access to the database and to the area where documents and equipment (i.e., records, stationery, and the school seal and signature equipment) are stored should be limited to authorized personnel only.
 17. A medical school should have a disaster plan for the secure storage of its educational records and academic transcripts and for their recovery in the event of damage or destruction resulting from a catastrophic disaster. Typically, this plan entails the identification of a remote location where duplicate records are maintained. It is important that the school develop an appropriate protocol for the regular duplication and transfer of records to the remote location.

Information on the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is available at the U.S. Department of Education www.ed.gov/offices/OII/fpco. Informal requests for technical assistance and advice may be emailed to FERPA@ed.gov or telephoned to 202-260-3887

The American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) Academic Record and Transcript Guide was referred to in creating this document. Information on AACRAO publications is available at: www.aacrao.org.

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