

## Association of American Medical Colleges

### Guidelines for Medical Schools Regarding Academic Transcripts

The Guidelines for Medical Schools Regarding Academic Transcripts, originally approved in February 1997 by the AAMC Executive Council, was written by the Committee on Student Records to assist medical school records officers in developing and implementing medical school policies relating to the content and presentation of academic transcripts for enrolled students, former students, and graduates.

The guidelines listed below are not intended to be exhaustive; rather, they are designed to assist records professionals in the composition and representation of the institution's academic transcript.

The American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) Academic Record and Transcript Guide was referenced while creating this document. Record custodians are encouraged to review the AACRAO's publication in full ([www.aacrao.org](http://www.aacrao.org)). Additionally, records officers are well advised to consult (1) their institutional general counsel's office regarding institution-specific record-keeping requirements, (2) their state's Division of Archive and/or Department of Higher Education regarding student record-keeping laws (3) the Department of Education (4) the Department of Higher Education and (5) their state medical licensing agency regarding specific state record-keeping requirements when developing school policies, as the requirements of these entities supersede these Guidelines.

For purposes of this publication, an academic transcript is defined as a certified document that represents an unabridged summary of a student's academic history at an educational institution and is intended for use within an institution and by parties external to the institution. It is distinguished from the larger body of information which may be contained in the student record at the institution. All student education records are protected under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

#### **Transcript Guidelines:**

1. Medical schools are encouraged to follow the recommendations of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) as published in its 2016 Academic Record and Transcript Guide (available at: [www.aacrao.org](http://www.aacrao.org)). When the medical school is part of a university system, consultation between the medical school and the University Registrar is encouraged to ensure that the medical school transcript is in compliance with university, local, state and federal requirements.
2. The academic transcript should reflect the total, unabridged academic history of the student at the institution. All courses should be recorded on the academic transcript whether attempted and/or completed. The courses should be listed in the academic period(s) in which they were attempted and/or completed. For example:

- A grade of “Withdrawal” should be recorded for a student who attempts a course but is permitted to withdraw from the course after the institution’s add/drop period has ended and prior to the institution’s course withdrawal deadline.
- A grade of “Incomplete” is considered a temporary grade. With permission of the instructor, a grade of Incomplete should be recorded for a student who has not completed a required component of the course by the course end date. A designation of Incomplete should not be used as a placeholder grade when the student’s performance in the course has been unsatisfactory and remediation is required.
- A grade of “Unsatisfactory,” “Marginal Pass,” “Fail” or an equivalent grade should be recorded for a course in which a student has not demonstrated mastery of the course requirements outlined in the course syllabus. Grades of “Unsatisfactory,” “Marginal Pass,” “Fail,” etc., are permanent grades; these grades should not be removed or replaced on the transcript after the course has been remediated or repeated, even if the passing grade is accompanied by a special notation. The practice of removing or replacing grades of “Unsatisfactory,” “Marginal Pass,” “Fail,” etc. on the academic is inconsistent with the representation of an unabridged record.

3. The essential elements of an academic transcript include the:

- name (and any former name) of the institution
- location of the institution
- name of student
- unique identification number
- name and location of colleges or universities previously attended (if awarding transfer credit)
- accepted transfer credits
- terms of attendance
- identification number and title for each course within each attempted term
- credits for each course
- units of credit
- grade earned in each course
- title(s) of all degree(s) awarded by the institution
- date(s) of degree conferral
- program(s) studied (i.e., medicine)
- permanent withdrawal date
- date(s) of issuance of the transcript, and
- date of last entry to the transcript.

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 record): the student’s

- addresses (mailing and email)
- 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
  - entrance test scores
  - national board exam scores
  - prior post-secondary school data
  - placement on academic probation
  - disciplinary action
  - honors and distinctions external to the medical school
  - extracurricular activities
  - class rank.
4. Deciding how to represent a student or former student's name on the academic transcript is the prerogative of each institution. When establishing school policy, the institution may wish to consult with the following parties: the parent university; the institution's general counsel; the state Department of Higher Education; the federal Department of Education and/or other accreditation agencies.
  5. 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, numerical results of the United States Medical Licensing Examinations (USMLE) and election to Alpha Omega Alpha (AOA) Honor Medical Society or Gold Humanism Honor Society (GHHS) should not be included on the transcript. Honors that are awarded by the school's faculty, either within a course or at graduation, may be included on the transcript.
  6. While an institution may want to include a notation of a student's academic probation status in its educational database, inclusion of this status on the student's academic transcript is discouraged because the definition of "academic probation" varies from school to school. Reference to this status serves no useful purpose on an academic transcript which, by definition, is intended for use outside of the school. If academic probation is included on the transcript, this term should be clearly defined in the transcript legend or key.
  7. Academic suspension or academic 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 academic performance vis-à-vis the school's curriculum.
  8. In accordance with AACRAO recommendations, disciplinary probation, suspension or dismissal of a student should not be recorded on the academic transcript with a "disciplinary" qualifier since no detailed supporting information is included on the transcript and the inclusion of a notation about disciplinary suspension and/or dismissal would be nonspecific and potentially punitive. This also includes probation, suspension or dismissal due to lapses in professional behavior. In any of these instances, the transcript should merely indicate that the student was suspended or dismissed without indicating the nature of the action.
  9. In the case of a student who is a candidate for more than one degree (e.g., M.D./M.B.A., M.D./M.P.H, M.D./J.D., M.D./Ph.D., etc.), participation in the combined program should be noted on the transcript.
  10. All courses offered by the institution and presented on a student's academic transcript

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."

11. The transcript should include a legend that explains:
  - the school's name, address and contact number(s)
  - the school's grading system(s) and symbols
  - the inclusive dates for grading systems, when changes in the grading system have occurred
  - graduation honors
  - units of credit, and
  - notation of courses in progress, if not represented in the body of the transcript.

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.
12. Issuing official academic transcripts is a central and unique function of the Registrar's Office. Transcripts should be issued only with the express permission of the student or former student who has completed identification authentication procedures (i.e. written or electronic signature, authenticated portal login, etc.)
  - A transcript is issued only at the request of the current student, former student or a specified third party whom the student or former student has authorized to obtain a transcript for a specific stated purpose. The third party must be specified, and the release form must state that the school may release the student's or former student's transcript for that purpose.
  - To minimize potential fraud, a transcript issued directly to the student or former student should be identified as "Issued to the Student."
  - An institution that issues "unofficial" transcripts should define the characteristics of an unofficial transcript on their website and/or transcript legend (i.e. issued on white paper, labeled as "unofficial," etc.)
  - A transcript ceases to be an "official" transcript if it is photocopied, faxed or replicated in an unofficial way.
  - The Registrar's Office must maintain a record of transcript transmittals in accordance with their institution's retention and disposal policies. This record must show the date on which and the party to whom a transcript was transmitted, as well as the purpose for which the transcript was issued, if known.
  - If the school has a policy that requires withholding transcripts due to a student's failure to fulfill institutional obligations, such as an outstanding balance, a default on a student loan, or other reasons, the policy should be stated clearly in both the school's academic catalog and student handbook.
13. Schools must implement security measures to minimize fraudulent representation of the school's academic transcript, such as: security paper, multicolored ink for the registrar's signature, embossed seal, inclusion of a physical description of the transcript in the transcript key, and institutional contact information.
14. When a transcript is transmitted electronically (e.g., for the Electronic Residency Application Service [ERAS], Visiting Student Application Service (VSAS), Medical

Institution Document Upload Service (MIDUS) and/or Electronic Data Interchange [SPEEDE]) or via email, appropriate security measures should be implemented to ensure a student's privacy rights are upheld.

15. The school's educational records, including transcripts and regardless of media type, must be stored in a secure location. Access to the student information system and to the physical area where documents and equipment (i.e., records, transcript security paper, letterhead stationery, and the school seal and signature equipment) are stored should be restricted to authorized personnel only.
16. A medical school must have a disaster plan for the secure storage of its educational records and academic transcripts. 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 <http://familypolicy.ed.gov/?src=fpco>. Informal requests for technical assistance and advice may be emailed to [FERPA@ed.gov](mailto: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](http://www.aacrao.org).

Approved by the AAMC GSA Steering Committee May 2016