
NHSC OCCASIONAL PAPER

10

**Home Study
Academic
Transcripts**



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NUMBER 10

Home Study Academic Transcripts

by

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Introduction

In today's electronic age, institutions are required to collect large volumes of data in order to respond to the ever-increasing demands for accurate and succinct information about a student's academic experience. The availability of low cost hardware and software puts computerized record-keeping within the reach of every institution. The accrediting standards of the Accrediting Commission of the National Home Study Council also require that institutions maintain academic records permanently, and today's technology makes this task readily achievable.

Further, increasing numbers of home study graduates and alumni go on to seek academic degrees at other, e.g., collegiate, institutions. A well-executed set of academic records and a well-crafted transcript are invaluable aids to these students. An estimated 2 out of 3 home study graduates eventually go on to seek acceptance of their home study work at other, often educational, institutions. In addition, job advancement and job hiring can hinge on the contents and sometimes the physical appearance of an academic transcript.

In a home study environment, academic transcripts have not, historically, been viewed as very important. But they are gaining importance today because they are coming to be viewed as "sales tools" to be used by graduates in obtaining acceptance of their home study work by employers and registrars.

The more "official" and "traditional" that a transcript appears to collegiate registrars or employers, the more likely it is to be accepted. Well-crafted transcripts can serve as "sales tools" since they can favorably impress corporate trainers and tuition reimbursement officers which may result in residual sales of courses to that company.

In other words, a well-designed transcript is an excellent alumni service

and a subtle marketing device that every school should be providing today.

Definition

When discussing the record-keeping function of an institution, a distinction should be made between the terms “academic record” and “transcript.”

An “academic record” is an internal document or electronic image maintained by the institution’s registrar that reflects the unabridged academic history of the student at that institution. It is a chronological listing of the student’s total quantitative and qualitative learning experiences and achievements and may include any personal information pertinent to the student.

Information peripheral to the immediate academic experience, such as personal characteristics and experience, family background (including parent name and address), secondary school background, aptitudes, personal interests, entrance examination scores, non-academic awards or honors may also be included in the academic record, but should **not** be incorporated into the transcript.

Because the academic record reflects the total academic experience of a student at an institution, the undergraduate and graduate records of a student should be part of the same document. If both graduate and undergraduate courses are reported on a single page, the courses that apply to an undergraduate degree should be clearly identified and distinguished from courses leading to a graduate degree.

A traditional “transcript,” on the other hand, is information taken from the student’s more extensive academic record at the request of the student or former student. The transcript may be a facsimile of the academic record or a subset of the academic record that minimally,

includes the extent and quality of all work attempted at the institution issuing the transcript. A transcript is a legal document which contains the signature of an institution's certifying official, the embossed institutional seal, and the date of issue.

Whether transcripts are hand copied, photocopied, or computer generated, it is the responsibility of the issuing institution to be certain that the document transmitted as a transcript is appropriate for the use intended, that it contains at least the essential data elements specified, and that it is consistent with the legal guidelines under which the institution operates. After reviewing many transcripts, the members of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) developed a "Guide" which states the minimum standards for academic records and transcripts. Most of the points below were taken from the *Academic Record and Transcript Guide* published by ACCRAO, and some have been adapted for a home study school situation.

Components of a Transcript

A transcript should be easy to read and interpret. Titles, abbreviations, column headings, and general format should be periodically reviewed for clarity. If abbreviations are used, care should be taken to ensure that they are meaningful and intelligible.

According to ACCRAO's *Academic Record and Transcript Guide*, the following are elements of a transcript:

Essential=(E), Recommended=(R), Optional=(O)

• Identification of the Institution

1. Name (E)
2. Location: City, State, ZIP (E)

3. Accreditation Statement and Printed NHSC Seal (O)

• **Identification of the Student**

4. Name (E)
5. Address (O)
6. Date of Birth (O) (R)*
7. Place of Birth (O) (R)*
8. Identification Number (R)

• **Basis of Admission**

9. Secondary School Graduation or Equivalent
 - a. Name, Location of School (O) (E)*
 - b. Date of Graduation (O) (E)*
 - c. High School Equivalency Examination (O)
 - d. Individual Approval (O)
10. Previous Education
 - a. Name, Location of Institution (E)
 - b. Period of Attendance (O)
 - c. Degree or Certificate Received (E)
 - d. Year Degree Conferred (E)

• **Record of Work Pursued**

11. Dates of Attendance (E)
12. Course Identification (E)
13. Amount of Credit (E)
14. Term Grade and Grade Point Average (E)
15. Term Grade Points (R)
16. Cumulative Credits, Grade Points, Grade Point Average (E)
17. Narrative Evaluation (if no grades recorded) (E)

* For correspondence schools

- 18. Notation of Type of Credit (E)
- 19. Demonstrated Competencies (E)
- 20. Transfer Credits Accepted
 - a. Courses, Credits, and Grades (O)
 - b. Credit Summary (R)

• **Academic Status**

- 21. Good Standing (O)
- 22. Academic Probation (O)
- 23. Academic Suspension or Dismissal (E)

• **Statement of Graduation**

- 24. Degree Received (E)
- 25. Date Conferred (E)
- 26. Program or Major (E)
- 27. Minor (R)
- 28. Honors and Distinctions (E)
- 29. Professional Certification Requirements (R)

• **Supplemental Information for Graduate Students**

- 30. Satisfactory Completion of Institutional Qualifying Examinations (O)
- 31. Advancement and/or Admission of Candidacy (O)
- 32. Title of Thesis and/or Dissertation (O)

• **Last Entry Notation (R) (E)***

The “Last Entry Notation” is a line that states “End of Transcript.”
By including this notation no one can add more entries.

* For correspondence schools

An institution should check with the state Department of Education in the state in which it is domiciled to find out what elements the state requires to be included in a transcript.

Institutions using the social security number for the student number prior to 1975 may continue its use; however, institutions not using the social security number as a student number prior to 1975 should seek legal counsel before doing so. If the social security number is used, you must have the student's permission to use it, and it should be labeled on the transcript as "Student Identification Number."

All institutions should be concerned about the potential for age discrimination when a student's date of birth is released to a third party.

Credit awarded for remedial or other courses that are not generally applicable to approved degree programs of the institution should be clearly identified.

A transcript should reflect the current major and degree or certificate objectives of the student. However, the transcript must clearly differentiate between pursued and achieved degrees, and between degrees and certificate programs.

The recording institution bears the responsibility for ensuring that the recipients of a transcript can make informed and reasonable evaluations of the educational experience.

A critical policy question facing home study educators is how to issue meaningful transcripts for "non-degree" certificate programs. The best guidance is that academic, degree level semester credit must **not** be assigned to clearly "non-degree" or less than postsecondary studies. Only in cases where an institution can reasonably document that a course of study is clearly degree credit-worthy should academic credit be assigned. Even then, the institution must have a documented proce-

ture to show how credit has been assigned which might include such things as proctored exams, acceptance of work by other accredited postsecondary institutions, etc.

NHSC accredited institutions are eligible to submit their “non-degree” postsecondary level courses to the American Council on Education for evaluation for a college credit recommendation. ACE’s Program on Non-collegiate Sponsored Instruction (PONSI), for a fee, evaluates home study courses and publishes a *National Guide* listing the amount of college credit that they believe the course(s) are worth. While registrars are not bound to follow PONSI’s credit recommendations, hundreds of colleges and universities do accept them.

Thus, NHSC institutions which seek to assist their graduates in gaining acceptance of their “non-degree” certificate home study work are able to turn to PONSI for a worthwhile service. Also, PONSI credit has proved to be a valuable marketing point in presenting reasons to prospective students on why they should enroll: “Our correspondence course in Accounting has been recommended for six undergraduate semester hours at the lower division level”

Demonstrated competencies, that is, extra curricula or experiential experiences for which academic credit is awarded, should be specifically labeled to identify this special type of credit. Examples include military experience, life experience, performance on the College Level Examination Program (CLEP), Advanced Placement (AP), Proficiency Examination Program (PEP), other nationally standardized examinations, and institutional examinations.

Although continuing education records may be integrated with a student’s total academic record, a separate transcript should be issued listing experiences for which Continuing Education Units (CEU) or other “certificate level” units are awarded. As a cautionary note, CEUs should never be presented as “academic” credits; CEUs should be clearly labelled as such on any transcript.

Issuing Transcripts

In accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 as amended (FERPA), transcripts normally are issued only at the request of the student. A signed transcript request form or letter transfers the legal burden of the signer and protects the institution/ registrar in case of forged signatures. Telephone requests should not be accepted because of the difficulty of verifying the requestor's identity.

The face of each page of the transcript should include the following items: 1) certifying officer's signature, 2) embossed seal of the institution, 3) date of issue, 4) FERPA statement, 5) "ISSUED TO STUDENT" when applicable.

The FERPA statement reads as follows: "In accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, as amended, this information is released on the condition that you will not permit any other party to have access of this information without the written consent of the individual whose record it is."

Other Information

A "key" or "legend" should accompany each official transcript issued for the convenience of the reader of the transcript. The key should be printed on the back of the transcript paper stock, whether it is computer generated or a photocopy, so that it is a part of the transcript itself rather than a separate sheet which could be easily detached and misplaced or supplanted.

The key should contain:

1. Name and location of the institution, branch name and location, if applicable.
2. Institutional name or location changes.

3. Telephone number of the Office of the Registrar.
4. Accreditation statement—indicating the name of all accrediting associations which have approved the particular programs/institution.
5. Definition of enrollment terms (semester, quarter, other).
6. Calendar system or lessons or assignments in each course.
7. Unit of credit used (e.g., semester hour, quarter hour, CEU, etc.).
8. Grading systems used.
9. Method of grade point average calculation.
10. Institutional policy on recording courses attempted or courses passed.
11. Institutional policy on withdrawals, incompletes, repeated courses.
12. Course identification system including indication of level, department abbreviations, etc.
13. Explanation of any unique or unusual policies or programs, e.g., any proctored examinations, any special lesson projects required in course.
14. Dates of changes in above items.
15. Method of certification as an official transcript (colored paper stock, embossed seal, etc.).

Transcript Forgeries

The increasing frequency and sophistication of transcript forgeries and alterations today make it incumbent upon institutions to ensure that outgoing transcripts are uniquely identified and incoming transcripts are

meticulously screened. Below are a few ways you may be able to deter forgery, but unfortunately, most registrars have found that if someone is determined to forge a transcript, they will find a way:

- Use a colored ink signature plate, and indicate the color of ink on the plate or in the Key.
- Use a seal that is clear enough to be read and has a design not easily duplicated, such as the institutional emblem.
- Use a type font which cannot be easily reproduced.
- Use special paper, such as “banknote” or “safety weave” papers, to prevent alterations and unauthorized copies.
- Print important certification statements, seals, headings, etc., in a special light blue ink which cannot be photocopied.
- Mark the envelope in which the transcript is mailed “Official Transcript.”
- Use a photocopier which reduces the type size 25%, thereby making alterations more easily recognizable.

As guidance in detecting possible “phony” transcripts, check the following:

- Transcript was sent directly from the Office of the Registrar of the issuing institution.
- Envelope is postmarked in the city where the institution is located.
- Envelope has an institutional meter mark (except foreign) rather than a postage stamp.

- Transcript has a recent date of issue (usually within the last 10 days, except foreign).
- Clarity and authenticity of signature and seal is examined.
- Consistency in type font, format, etc., is checked.
- A file of detected forgeries should be maintained since experience indicates a high frequency of repetition. When discrepancies are detected, communicate directly with the registrar at the issuing institution.

A transcript is a legal document and should be treated as such.

Security of Records

Keeping student records secure is very important. There are many aspects involved in security of student records:

Physical Security: specific efforts must be made to ensure that the records office is physically secure from theft, vandalism, fire and flooding.

Staff Security: The staff must be reminded to be cautious about discussing office matters outside the office. For the protection of the staff/student employee and for records' security, internal audits of the records of those who either have or are attending the institution should be conducted on a regular basis.

Supplies and Equipment: Forms, stationery, institutional seal(s), diplomas, signature and certification stamps, and other supplies and equipment must be located in secure places during working hours and even more secure locations when the office is closed.

Electronic Data Storage: Maximum security protection must be designed into data processing systems. Backup tapes of data, security dump tapes, and extra copies of microfilm should be stored in secure off-campus locations as a safeguard against destroyed or damaged tapes (or disks), system failure, and any man made or natural disasters.

Computer generated transcripts, letters, certifications, and other similar, critical output should be protected by stringent data processing systems security, specified office security techniques, and audit trail processes.

Safeguards: The ability to make changes in the academic record should be limited to staff directly responsible for establishing and maintaining the institution's academic records.

Strict audit trails on all record entries and changes must be developed and maintained. A copy of all grades awarded and grade changes processed should be returned to faculty for confirmation.

Students have the right to receive transcripts unless they have an outstanding financial obligation to the institution. Transcript requests should be in writing. The transcript should be labeled "Issued to Student." The institution is not obligated, however, to provide students with copies of transcripts or source documents from other institutions unless state laws dictate otherwise.

All information about students is confidential and should be treated as such. Only the following individuals or agencies have a right to be furnished with a student's transcript without the written consent of the student:

1. Faculty and administrative officers of the issuing institution who have a legitimate need and interest in the student's educational welfare.

2. Parent(s) or legal guardian(s) of the student provided the parent or guardian can establish the student's dependency as defined by the Internal Revenue Code of 1954, Section 152.
3. Federal and state agencies listed in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, as amended (FERPA).
4. Department of Veterans Affairs.
5. Nationally recognized accrediting associations.


Institutions may release, without written consent, information identified as public or "Directory Information," provided the student has been given reasonable opportunity to refuse disclosure of such information.

The records of disclosures and requests for disclosure are considered a part of the student's academic record file and must be retained as long as the academic record file is retained by the institution.

Summary

For more information on academic records and transcripts, please write to the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, One Dupont Circle, N.W., Suite 330, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Sample Transcript

	<p>NHSC SCHOOL 1601 18th Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20009</p>	<p>ACCREDITED BY THE ACCREDITING COMMISSION OF THE NATIONAL HOME STUDY COUNCIL</p>		
Permanent Academic Record				
SENT TO:	NAME AND ADDRESS:			
DATE SENT:	DATE FIRST ENROLLED:			
COURSE CODE	COURSE TITLE	SEMESTER HRS.	GRADE	DATE COMPL.
STUDENT IN GOOD STANDING UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED				
<p>UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF THE FAMILY RIGHTS AND PRIVACY ACT, INFORMATION ON THIS DOCUMENT IS CONSIDERED CONFIDENTIAL AND MAY NOT BE RELEASED TO A THIRD PARTY WITHOUT THE STUDENT'S WRITTEN CONSENT.</p>			<p>VALID AS OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT WHEN BEARING RAISED SEAL AND SIGNATURE</p>	

Sample Transcript

(Courtesy Educational Institute of AH & MA)

About the Editor

Sally R. Welch has been with the National Home Study Council for more than 20 years. She joined the Council as the Assistant to the Accrediting Program Coordinator in 1974, and she was the Director of Publications from 1976 until 1992 when she was named Assistant Director.

In 1979, Sally graduated Summa Cum Laude from the University of Maryland with a B.S. degree in Journalism. She received a M.A. degree in Publications Design in 1989 from the University of Baltimore. Sally has authored, co-authored and edited numerous NHSC publications, including NHSC Occasional Paper Eight: *Getting the Most PR for Your School*, and NHSC Occasional Paper Nine: *The Effectiveness of the Home Study Method*.

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