

Open Forum: Disciplinary Notations on Transcripts – AACRAO Annual Meeting, April 2017

Based on growing interest by AACRAO members, new and proposed state legislation, and increased accountability of colleges and universities, the Transcript Disciplinary Notations Work Group was established by the AACRAO Board of Directors. The Work Group was charged to develop guidance for AACRAO members regarding the use of disciplinary notations on transcripts for institutions that are considering the practice, or are required to do so by legislation. Chaired by Kristi Wold-McCormick, Registrar from the University of Colorado Boulder, the group is comprised of ten AACRAO members who represented diverse institutional types, positions and geographic locations.

The Work Group considered:

- Whether or not there is a Work Group and/or industry consensus regarding placing such notations on transcripts;
- The pros and cons for an institution to consider in deciding about such placement;
- The development of institutional policies and practices, regardless of the decision of whether or not to post such notations;
- If posting on the transcript, the types of disciplinary infractions that might be noted;
- If posting, options and suggestions for the wording of disciplinary notations;
- The retention and removal of transcript notations;
- Alternatives for providing notifications of disciplinary suspensions or other safety concerns to transfer institutions without the use of transcript notations; and
- FERPA and legal considerations related to disclosures.

Key Recommendations from the Work Group:

1. Recognizing that the most egregious acts of misconduct may result in the separation of the student from an institution, and may indicate a pattern of behavior that might be repeated at a subsequent institution, **some form of notice should be provided to a receiving institution when a student has committed serious behavioral misconduct** (e.g. as defined by the Clery Act).
2. **The academic transcript is an appropriate means to support communication about serious student misconduct.** A student's standing that impacts his or her eligibility to continuously enroll at an institution affects academic progress and, as for this reason, is deemed transcript appropriate.
3. As with academic probations and warnings, disciplinary probations and warnings for more minor violations that don't result in a mandatory separation from an institution should not be formally noted on official transcripts or otherwise disclosed to another institution.
4. Institutions should align as closely as possible in their use of standardized terms and definitions for various student sanctions or penalties for misconduct. Such separations generally are denoted by commonly used and understood language, including:
 - *Expulsion or Dismissal* – a permanent separation from the institution
 - *Suspension* – a temporary separation, often for a specific period of time, from the institution with the option of a possible future return
5. In cases of suspension, dismissal and expulsion (or the equivalent), transcript notations should include the following:
 - The general type of infraction -- behavioral (e.g. disciplinary) or academic
 - The department responsible for issuing the student separation from the institution
 - Effective dates or date/term ranges of student separation from institution, if applicable

6. Institutions may record a '*Pending Conduct*' statement on transcripts while an investigation or hearing is planned or underway. The use of a hold to block the release of an official transcript until the investigation concludes may be preferable.
7. A special notation may be placed on the transcript when a student is permitted to withdraw while an investigation is underway. The standard suspension/expulsion notation should replace this special notation if the student is found in violation of the code and that the special notation be removed if the student is found to not be in violation. The use of a hold to block the release of a transcript until the investigation concludes may be preferable.
8. Transcript notations should be placed at the end of the semester/term in which the sanction occurs. Transcripts legends (keys) should offer further explanation, as needed, and provide the reader with instructions on how/where to obtain additional information.
9. If a college or university decides to not record disciplinary notations on official transcripts, the following alternatives might be considered by an institution:
 - *Student Conduct Transcript*
 - *Dean's Certification Letter*
 - *Transcript Insert*
10. All institutions should have comprehensive policies and business processes that clearly document expected codes of student conduct, infractions, institutional review panels, sanctions, due process (appeal hearings), recordation and disclosure practices, and specific verbiage related to the retention and removal of transcript notations.
11. Educational institutions that receive transcripts with disciplinary notations should have comprehensive and consistent admissions procedures in place to handle applicants with active sanctions at other institutions. No institution should apply negative consequences to a student whose record includes a disciplinary notation on his/her transcript without seeking or considering additional information.

Next steps:

- April/May, 2017: The Work Group considers feedback from the Open Forum session at the Annual Meeting, along with any additional feedback from AACRAO members via the AACRAO website or to members of the Work Group directly.
- May, 2017: The Work Group finalizes its report and recommendations and submits those to the Board and, in turn, the membership.

Additional comments/feedback:

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