

The Elon Experiences Transcript and integration to the academic transcript

Elon University & Parchment submission to the PESC Best Practices Competition

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Executive Summary

For many years, registrars have been asked, and often pressured, by faculty and students to document more information on the official academic transcript, presenting a challenge for those of us responsible for maintaining the integrity of the data. One common request is to identify course attributes, such as service learning, diversity-themed, online, hybrid, and study abroad courses, among others. As registrars, many of us struggle constantly to maintain consistency in the face of faculty and student demands for a more comprehensive credential that documents the student academic experience in greater depth. While historically student systems have limited our ability to provide experiential depth to the transcript, Parchment has enabled us to take the technology of producing compressive student records to a new level.

Given this pressure for more detailed documentation, some institutions have begun to develop ways to extend the traditional academic transcripts, including co-curricular, competency-based, and data-enabled eTranscripts. Matthew Pittinsky, Ph.D. CEO of Parchment and faculty member at Arizona State University notes, “Co-curricular and competency-based transcripts innovate at the level of content and substance, extending the academic transcript.” Today’s society is increasingly credential focused and innovations are paving the way to address the growing need to thoroughly document the student experience; whether as supplements to, or overtime the successor to the traditional transcript.

These transcript extensions are having a direct impact on how employers and graduate schools view our students. David Blake, the Chief Human Resources officer at Oregon State University, has argued, “an employer needs to see the ‘experiences’ gained by a potential job candidate and not just a random list of courses taken.” Furthermore, he observes, “traditional student transcripts tell us what kind of classroom learning has taken place, but they don’t capture all the different ways in which a student gains knowledge, skills, and abilities. In today’s work world, experiential learning is just as important as academics” (CUPA-HR, 2014).

The Elon Experiences Transcript

Institutions have adopted many different approaches in determining the categories for programming the co-curricular transcript. Created in 1994, the Elon Experiences Co-Curricular Transcript (CCT) seeks to enhance documentation of the student experience by recording participation in five key program areas: leadership, service, internship, global engagement, and undergraduate research. These areas incorporate extensive experiential learning and collectively reflect values that deepen the student experience.

Experiential education at Elon University is managed by the Elon Experiences Advisory Council (EEAC). Over the past two decades, Elon has seen considerable growth in student participation in experiential education, in contrast to the national trend Kuh (2008) has identified. While Elon has endeavored to expand experiential education, national participation in high-impact experiential practices has remained flat over the last few years, with only service-learning experiencing modest growth (Kuh, 2013, p. 5), as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Elon Student Participation in High-Impact Experiences

High-Impact Experiences	2008 Elon	2009 Elon	2010 Elon	2011 Elon	2012 Elon	2012 National Participation
Internships	79%	84%	84%	89%	87%	49%
Leadership	41%	41%	42%	45%	46%	--
Service Learning	89%	87%	83%	79%	82%	48%
Study Abroad	71%	71%	70%	69%	72%	14%
Undergraduate Research	14%	17%	18%	18%	21%	20%

Embedding Experiential Learning into University Culture

At most universities, co-curricular programs are managed within offices responsible for student affairs, engagement, and leadership. Databases that compile student activity information often reside within these units and therefore record creation and maintenance is also housed in these units. However, a stronger connection between academic and student affairs offices may enhance the overall quality and facilitate the effective dissemination of this data.

Leadership is a central tenet of Elon's success. Each of the five key experiential program areas is coordinated by a professional staff member in collaboration with a faculty development fellow. Together these leaders recruit faculty and staff with the necessary expertise to staff, implement, and document the experience. For example, the study abroad area is led by the Dean for Global Education in conjunction with a senior faculty member who has extensive experience in study abroad course development. This model is replicated for four of the five experiential areas supported by the university. The fifth area, undergraduate research, is coordinated entirely by faculty and has a faculty director who serves as the unit head.

Experiential learning is further strengthened through the contributions of an Experiential

Education Advisory Council that includes the director of the core curriculum, an administrator of a scholarship program dedicated to funding experiential education, and members from the other offices responsible for administering experiential learning requirements. The Council is chaired by the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs.

Integrating the CCT to the Academic Transcript

With today's technologies, students should not have to go multiple places to obtain documents that paint a full picture of their academic experiences, presenting a workflow that left the experiences transcript infrequently utilized. To address these concerns and encourage the exchange of experiential information, Elon partnered with Parchment to bridge the gap between the CCT and the academic transcript. Working with Parchment to modify the transcript ordering system allows students to "opt-in" to receive a copy of their CCT along with their traditional academic transcript. With the new ordering system in place, Elon saw orders for CCT transcripts increase from 3 to 727 in the first year the technology went online.

Combining the two transcripts with different data is no small feat. Co-curricular transcripts have historically looked very different than the traditional academic transcript. For the documents to be released as one academic document, an agreement of what would be perceived as "best practices" in the field of academic credentials had to be followed. Data standardization that fit the limits of character length and description was followed throughout the document. While no standard unit of measurement exists for co-curricular transcripts, depth was captured using time (hours) and location (global experience and internship), and title (leadership and research). Additionally, while the look and feel of the new transcript was standardized to match the academic transcript, verbiage highlighting that Elon validates the information stored on the CCT was added to the front along with the statement that the, "Elon Experiences Transcript is not an official academic transcript."

To combine the documents into one certified PDF it was imperative to revise both transcripts to have a similar look and feel, with appropriate legends on the back of each transcript (second page of the PDF). Similarly, Elon needed to differentiate the two transcripts to provide clarity to receivers. To do this, we elected to use different colored transcript paper for each of the two transcripts, academic in maroon and experiences in gold.

Figure 1: Elon Academic Transcript

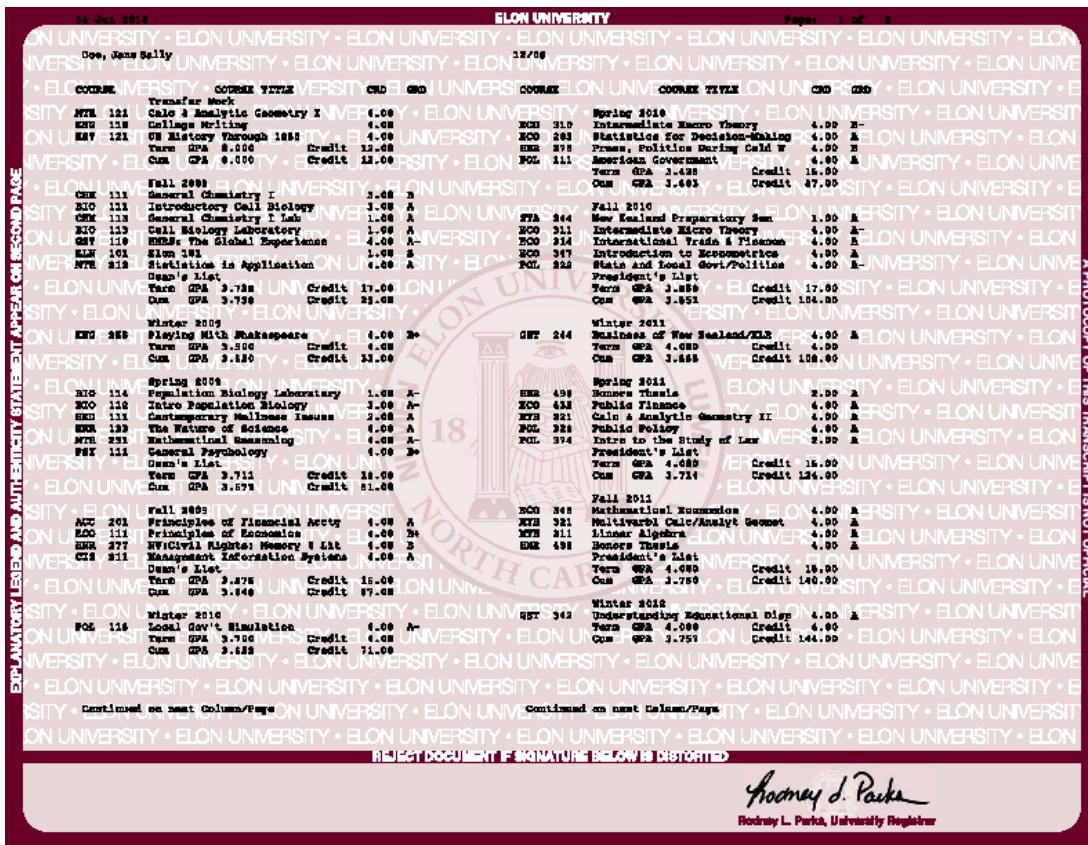
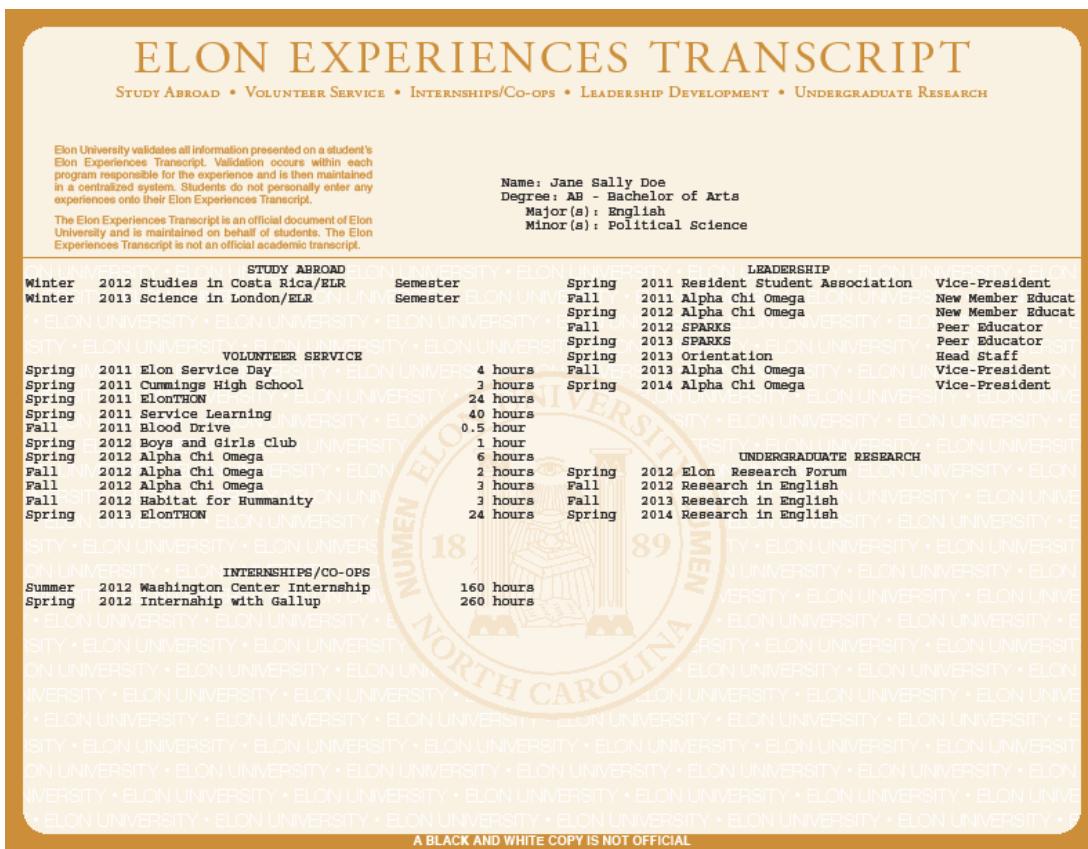
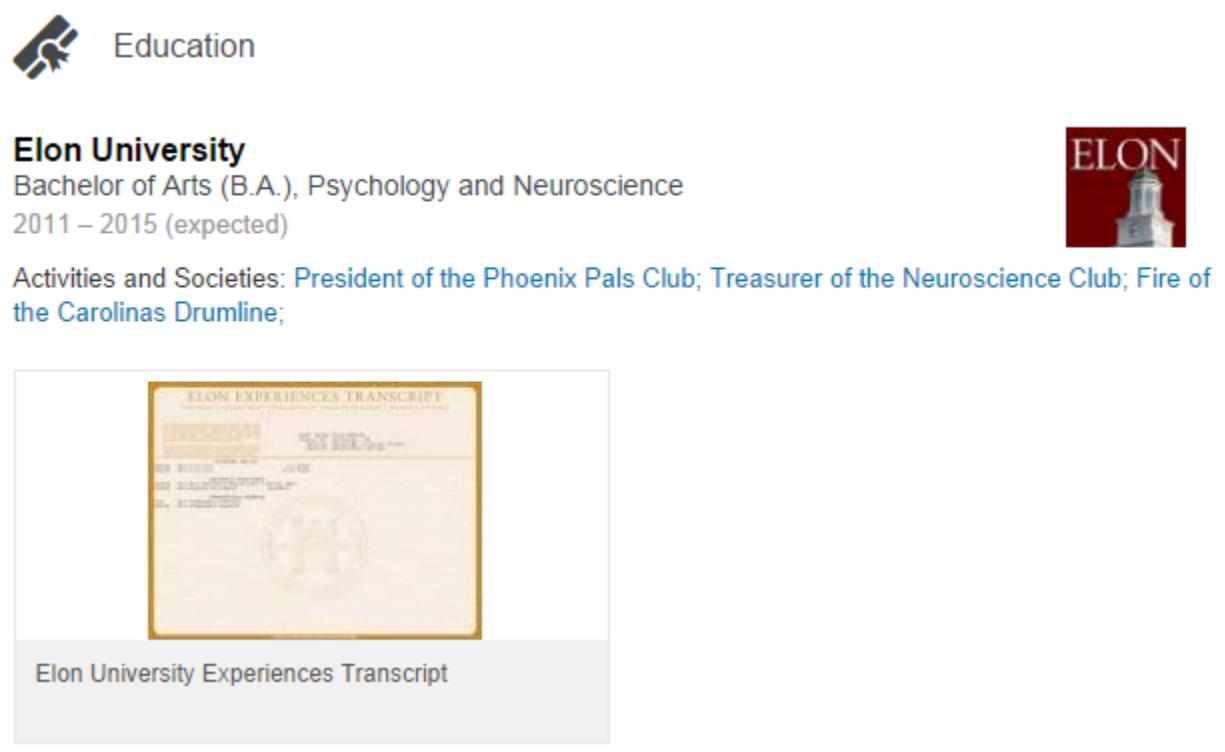


Figure 2: Elon Experiences Transcript



Educating the campus community was also a concern, as students and alumni began calling the Registrar's Office asking about the differences between the academic and experiential transcripts. It was crucial to disseminate information pertaining to the transcript types. Around the same time, students were given the ability to view an unofficial version of both transcripts online and encouraged to "build" their CCT the same way they would build their academic transcript. Brochures titled, "The Power of the Elon Experiences" were disseminated to students, faculty, and staff to highlight the importance and use of the CCT. Additional changes implemented by Parchment allowed students to order a CCT independently from the academic transcript and to use the CCT to market themselves on social media sites such as LinkedIn.

Figure 3: Transcript linked to social media account



The image shows a LinkedIn profile for an individual. In the 'Education' section, it lists 'Elon University' with a degree in 'Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), Psychology and Neuroscience' from '2011 – 2015 (expected)'. To the right of the education section is the Elon University logo. Below the education section, under 'Activities and Societies', are listed 'President of the Phoenix Pals Club; Treasurer of the Neuroscience Club; Fire of the Carolinas Drumline;'. At the bottom left of the profile is a thumbnail image of an 'Elon University Experiences Transcript'.

A Focus on Data Standards

Knowing the history associated with XML transcript exchange from the early 2000's, the rewrite of the CCT to match the academic transcript focused on uniformity and synthesized data standards found on the academic transcript. While acknowledging we are a few years away from being able to transmit CCT's via XML, the data is formatted in a way that anticipates the exchange of standards-based experiential data, following the XML implementation guide used for transcripts. Because CCT's tend to follow institutional culture in design, a schema with flexible user defined extensions will be necessary to facilitate data transfer. Some standardization with unit of measurement and common experiences seems plausible. Using the academic transcript as a guide for character length and general layout of experiences should make the data easier to convert. As institutions work to standardize and define common data that make up core experiences electronic data transfer should occur naturally.

On the Horizon

During the Fall of 2014, Elon began to aggressively market the CCT to incoming first-year students through an introductory seminar (Elon 101). The Registrar's Office has worked with the Student Professional Development Center to educate students on how to market themselves effectively using the new experiential transcript on social media platforms.

Deepening the descriptions of the data stored on the CCT is underway and students are being more proactive in having information recorded on the transcript through approved mechanisms.

One of the most difficult challenges is assessing the response to and value of the co-curricular transcripts for employers, alumni, and graduate and professional school admissions offices. Administrators often wonder to what extent students submit copies of the CCT to employers and what outcomes these new transcripts yield from hiring officials. In Fall 2014, the Registrar's Office began reaching out to corporate partners and other recipients of the CCT for feedback on the document. While results are in a fledgling status, initial responses have been generally positive.

As other institutions begin to consider combining the two transcripts, concern over the data standardization and data integrity will arise. Registrars have already expressed concern about relinquishing some control over what information is stored and released, how information gets entered into the student system, what data standards exist for those wanting to build a CCT and who has the authority to view and release the information. These are all significant questions that PESC is positioned to address in the near future. When it comes to a CCT, what works well for one institution may not be a panacea for all, but the movement to build and release a CCT electronically has clearly taken the nation by storm. We still have a number of questions worth considering, but in the end, we are long overdue to provide a meaningful credential to our students that accurately convey the depth and breadth of their entire student experience.

References

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