School of Record

Guidelines for Institutions and Peer Reviewers

Introduction

Colleges and universities may award credit to students for academic work completed abroad in programs not operated by their home institutions. Students may take courses at overseas institutions not accredited by U.S. accreditors—though they may be accredited locally—or may participate in programs offered by independent providers that are not accredited. Students then often need to transfer that coursework to their home institutions in the United States to earn credit toward their major or degree. Such transfer is often facilitated by what is termed a "School of Record."

A School of Record is an institution accredited in the United States that documents and awards credits for courses or programs taken by students at non-U.S.-accredited institutions or through independent program providers who collaborate with U.S.-accredited institutions to transcript coursework taken abroad. The accredited institution that transcripts such coursework acts as a School of Record. As an example, if the University of ABC, a U.S.-accredited institution, transcripts and awards credits to students for courses or programs taken abroad via the Danish Institute for Study Abroad, a non-accredited program provider, the University of ABC acts as a School of Record.

(Many students who study abroad participate in programs operated by their home institutions, or through consortial arrangements with other institutions that are accredited by a recognized accreditor, with credit allotted and transcripted by those institutions. These School of Record guidelines are not applicable to such programs.)

It is incumbent upon the School of Record to verify the academic integrity of these courses or programs it transcripts as a School of Record to validate their quality before awarding credit. The guidelines are based on HLC's Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices. They are intended to ensure academic integrity and transparency at institutions that act as Schools of Record in the transcription of coursework taken abroad by students. They are also intended to ensure that institutions that act as Schools of Record have appropriately trained personnel for evaluating such courses or programs, do so in conformity with high academic standards, and have established processes for evaluation that are applied in a consistent fashion.

Related HLC Requirements

Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

In fulfilling its mission, the institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible

Core Component 2.A Integrity. Actions taken by the institution's governing board, administration, faculty and staff demonstrate adherence to established policies and procedures.

Core Component 2.B Transparency. The institution presents itself accurately and completely to students and to the public with respect to its educational programs and any claims it makes related to the educational experience.

Criterion 3. Teaching and Learning for Student Success

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness in fulfilling its mission. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location or other differentiating factors.

Core Component 3.A Educational Programs. The institution maintains learning goals and outcomes that reflect a level of rigor commensurate with college-level work, including by program level and the content of each of its educational programs.

Assumed Practice A. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

A.5. The institution makes readily available to students and to the public clear and complete information including:

c. Its policies on acceptance of transfer credit and prior learning, including how credit is applied to educational program requirements. (Except for courses articulated through transfer policies or institutional agreements, the institution makes no promises to prospective students regarding the acceptance of credit awarded by examination, credit for prior learning, or credit for transfer until the institution has conducted an evaluation of such students' credits in accordance with its transfer policies.).

Assumed Practice B. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support

B.1. Programs, Courses, and Credits

f. The institution has policies and procedures for ensuring that all courses transferred and applied toward educational program requirements demonstrate equivalence with its own courses required for that educational program or are of equivalent rigor.

B.3. Support Services

b. The institution maintains timely and accurate transcript and records services.

Assumed Practice C. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

C.2. The institution evaluates all academic credit that it transcripts, including what it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning. The institution has clear policies for evaluating and accepting credits awarded by other education providers and may rely on credit evaluation undertaken by responsible third parties. The institution refrains from the transcription of credit from other institutions or providers that it will not apply to its own programs.

Quality Assurance

Considering the Criteria and Assumed Practices, s these five elements are critical in the evaluation and acceptance of credit by an accredited institution acting as a School of Record:

Academic Standards

The institution acting as a School of Record ensures that the coursework it intends to transcript meets its own academic standards. This expectation includes any standards that sub-units of the institution, such as departments, may have regarding their courses or educational programs in addition to or independent of institutional standards.

Faculty and Staff Qualifications and Evaluations

The institution acting as a School of Record ensures that the faculty and staff who evaluate courses taken abroad are qualified to evaluate such courses and are appropriately trained; for example, in international curricula and faculty credentials to conduct the evaluations. In evaluations to award appropriate credit, faculty and staff pay attention to such matters as course or program objectives, course outlines and syllabi, contact or credit hours, assignments and outcomes. The School of Record assesses the quality of academic resources at the program site (such as instructional facilities, libraries, databases, technological capacity, etc.) in the evaluation process.

Academic Programs

The coursework transcripted at the School of Record is in an academic discipline offered at that institution. An institution acting as a School of Record should either refrain from transcripting coursework in disciplines not offered at the institution or use a legitimate external evaluator for evaluating such coursework. Additionally, an institution acting as a School of Record has policies ensuring academic integrity if it records courses or programs that include, as applicable, internships, independent study, directed research, service learning, credit based on prior learning, etc.

Transcripts

The institution acting as a School of Record has clear protocols for the transcripting of such coursework. The transcripts include notations as to the source of the coursework and specific designations of titles, grades, credits, etc. of the courses.

Transparency

The institution acting as a School of Record performs its responsibility in a transparent fashion. The transparency responsibility carries within it, but is not limited to, the obligation to ensure that credit transcription policies and processes are clearly and publicly articulated to students before they commence the courses or programs. These policies include any fees, timeframe for such transcription, any limitations whereby all or part of the coursework would not be accepted, and any other matters that might be relevant to students and institutions receiving the transcripts. Finally, the School of Record identifies its current partners (non-U.S.-accredited institutions or independent program providers) with whom it collaborates in this relationship on its public webpage(s) dedicated to School of Record information.

When School of Record Activities Are Reviewed

If an accredited institution is acting as a School of Record, evaluation of the institution's School of Record activities will occur at least at the time of an institution's comprehensive evaluation but may also be a subject of examination at other times if the School of Record activities become a matter of concern.

Questions?

Contact your staff liaison.