



University of Tennessee, Knoxville
**TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative
Exchange**

Academic Policy Committee Reports

Graduate Council

10-13-2022

Academic Policy Committee Report - October 13, 2022

Graduate Council

Follow this and additional works at: https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_gcacadpol

Recommended Citation

Graduate Council, "Academic Policy Committee Report - October 13, 2022" (2022). *Academic Policy Committee Reports*.

https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_gcacadpol/89

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Council at TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Academic Policy Committee Reports by an authorized administrator of TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact trace@utk.edu.

REPORT OF THE ACADEMIC POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING
Thursday, October 13, 2022
3:30 – 5:00 p.m., Zoom Meeting

Committee members present: Siris Laursen (Chair), George Fields (GSS President), Rodica Frimu, Melissa Hines, Adam Love, Allyson Neal, Mohammed Mohsin, Phyllis Thompson (proxy for Katherine Montgomery), Chris Pickart.

Other attendees: Amy Cathey (proxy for Bruce Behn, HCB), David Cihak (CEHHS), Dixie Thompson, Carl Collins, and Catherine Cox (Graduate Council Liaison).

Agenda Item:

1. Discussion of policy related to submission of official transcripts from all previous institutions

Dixie Thompson called the Zoom meeting to order at 3:30 p.m.

D. Thompson:

Background: In January 2021, the Academic Policy Committee voted to provide an opportunity for academic units to ask for exceptions for students who could not provide us all their original transcripts. Leading up to that vote, APC had a couple of discussion meetings where data was reviewed from other universities benchmarking what our SEC peers and others were doing concerning official transcripts. Discussion items were:

- For accrediting standards, we want to make sure we are getting official transcripts, so we are not putting ourselves at risk in awarding graduate degrees for students who have not completed an undergraduate degree.
- Some units communicated they need to see the official transcripts, even where no degree was awarded.

The compromise APC reached in 2021, was to keep the policy as it is. But, for those units that do not need to review every transcript, we inserted an exception clause for them.

For today's meeting, the College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences is asking that we review this policy again for possibly any modifications.

D. Cihak:

I appreciate the work from APC in reviewing this policy in 2021 and looking at it again today. With UT's Strategic Vision and with having policies that focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, we believe requiring official transcripts from every institution becomes quite burdensome on many students, when official transcripts can cost \$10.00 or higher. Especially, for those students who may have attended many community colleges.

We are proposing to allow each college to make that decision. If additional transcripts are needed, let each college reach out to those students. We are 100 percent in agreement that official transcripts are needed where the student earned their undergraduate or graduate degree. But, to submit official transcripts from those community colleges can cause a financial barrier for those that attended multiple community colleges or for our military families.

D. Thompson: For undergraduate work, there may be some room for compromise. But for applicants that have taken graduate work at another institution, we need those official transcripts. Especially, if they intend to transfer any of those courses or use them to meet degree requirements. Let me ask this for those that are attending today. When applicants have attended multiple institutions at the undergraduate level, do units look at that work?

A. Cathey: For HCB, for undergraduate transcripts, we look primarily to see that the applicant received an undergraduate degree from an accredited institution. If there are transfer hours on that transcript, we do not require they submit those transcripts. The older the transcript, the harder it can be to acquire an official copy. For us, we look at the official transcript from the degree granting institution.

D. Thompson: Thank you, Amy. Another question for the group. For transfer courses where no grades appear on the transcript, for the person in your unit that is evaluating those transcripts, they have no way of knowing if that calculus or statistics course was passed with a grade of D or a grade of A. Is this a problem?

A. Cathey: Our interpretation of that is if the degree granting institution believed the student had what it took to provide that undergraduate degree and they are an accredited institution, we would not for our programs, reach back and ask for an official transcript.

L. Meschke: Not all transfer courses may show up on the degree-granting institution. For Public Health admissions, when reviewing the transcripts, we are looking for either a statistics or biostatistics course on their transcript. If they do not have that background, we require they take a statistics course prior to being admitted. I guess they could notify us that they took a stats course and then provide us the official transcript.

A. Cathey: For most of our programs, we are evaluating and verifying that the student has an undergraduate degree from an accredited institution. That it is a 4-year degree, not a 3-year degree and that the published GPA that was used is an acceptable GPA. We are making our admission decision based on essays, letters of recommendation, and professional readiness. We are looking more at degree verification than evaluating the depth of the curriculum the student took as an undergraduate. I realize this will be different with other programs. Other programs may need to see the depth of the curriculum that is part of that undergraduate transcript.

S. Laursen: Yes, in my department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering, we are very much interested in the grades earned. That is hyper critical. A grade of D versus a grade of A, in a critical core undergraduate class, is viewed night and day with respect to the capability of a student coming into a graduate program. For us, we definitely need that high resolution of understanding to make that admission decision for the success of the student and our department.

R. Frimu: For the Department of Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures, we are similar. We want to make sure our students have good proficiency in the language they want to pursue their doctoral degree in. We also would probably not accept someone who received a grade of D in their foreign language. But, we also require writing samples and letters of recommendation.

S. Laursen: Should we discuss how this can be misused? Have students misrepresented their degree?

D. Thompson: Yes, we had a student who was admitted to a program based on unofficial transcripts which did not show the degree conferral. He said he was earning his degree during the summer. He was admitted in fall and gave excuses as to why he could not obtain the official copy and asked for an extension, which we gave him. So, he has taken classes fall and now is taking classes for spring. That next fall semester, still no transcript and we found out he never graduated from the University of Kentucky. And, we have given him two semesters of graduate work.

D. Thompson: I am not opposed to changing this policy. But as we think about changing it, for any change we have to do a risk reward analysis and make sure we don't put wording in there that creates unintended bias or consequences. We need a university standard and then if we have some additional requirements at the unit level, we will have to determine how that will work within the admissions flow. I ask this group to go back and talk with your colleagues and get some feedback to bring to our next meeting. We can then begin to look at some language for potential changes if that is how the group is leaning. This may be causing barriers for some people, so I think it is legitimate to try and find solutions. I also want to make sure we don't create something that will be unmanageable for my team in Graduate Admissions or something that will cause criticisms or lack of fairness. We meet again on November 10. Bring your ideas and feedback from your units to the November meeting. This will give us plenty of time to revise the language for the next Graduate Catalog.

On a different topic: At our next meeting, the Graduate School will bring forward a change to the language on admissions for international students. A discrepancy was found between policy for domestic vs. international students that needs to be corrected. We will ensure that the Center for Global Engagement gives approval to any proposal before bringing it forward. We anticipate having this catalog cleanup language ready for the next APC meeting.

I really appreciate everyone's ideas and input today and how we can work together to help our students.

Meeting adjourned at 4:22.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Cox
Graduate Council Liaison