

Guidelines for School of Record Relationships

The Forum on Education Abroad

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Introduction

The Forum on Education Abroad (with input from the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admission Officers/AACRAO) has developed these guidelines for School of Record (SOR) relationships, with the goal of providing support both to institutions serving as Schools of Record and to those who benefit from their services.

In U.S. higher education, the SOR relationship is essential for ensuring high academic standards in education abroad. SORs play a key role in ensuring that many U.S. undergraduates have an academically rich educational experience abroad, and receive appropriate credit for academic work completed abroad. A common option for U.S. students choosing to study outside the U.S. is to participate in programs offered by independent program providers. Some program providers are not eligible for accreditation by the regional accrediting bodies in U.S. higher education. However, many institutions require an official transcript from a U.S. accredited institution to grant students credit for their academic work abroad. To address this requirement, independent program providers may partner with accredited higher education institutions which provide the transcript documenting academic work abroad. The accredited institutions providing the transcript act as Schools of Record. Serving as an SOR requires considerable administrative and academic oversight, and a School of Record may attach a fee commensurate with its services.

The guidelines below are based on the Forum's *Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad* and *Code of Ethics for Education Abroad*, which provide guidance for every aspect of education abroad programming. The guidelines below have been developed by focusing on how the *Standards* and *Code of Ethics* apply specifically to School of Record relationships. They should be viewed as a supplement to the *Standards* and the *Code*. This set of guidelines reflects the substantial services and benefits that SOR relationships provide to independent program providers and to students earning academic credit on their programs, identifies core responsibilities in the relationship between SORs and program providers, and articulates the role of the home institution.

Definition of Terms

Academic Credit: A defined measure of academic accomplishment that is used to determine a student's progress toward a degree, a certificate, or other formal academic recognition.

Credit Conversion: The process of determining the number of credits an institution should award to a student for courses taken abroad or at another U.S. institution with a different credit system (for example, European credits to U.S. credits).

Study Abroad Program: An education abroad enrollment option designed to result in academic credit. Several study abroad programs may be housed at the same location or center. Simultaneously, an educational institution or an independent program provider may offer distinct programs at a location.

Federal Student Aid: Financial aid emanating from programs administered by the U.S. government (Pell grants, campus-based aid, Stafford loans, and PLUS loans).

Home School (or Home Institution): The educational institution in the U.S. where an education abroad student is a continuing student, usually working toward the completion of a degree.

Host School (or Host Institution): The institution that the education abroad student attends while abroad.

Program Provider (or Independent Program Provider, or Third-Party Provider, or simply Provider):

An institution or organization that offers education abroad program services to students from a variety of institutions. A program provider may be a college or university, a nonprofit organization, a for-profit business, or a consortium.

School of Record (SOR): A U.S. accredited institution of higher education that officially documents and awards credits for programs or institutions that are not accredited in the U.S., verifying appropriately all elements necessary for such official documentation. Normally a fee is associated with this service.

Transcript (or Grade Transcript): Document produced by an educational institution showing the courses, credits, grades, and degrees earned by a specific student at that institution. Most institutions issue both official transcripts (produced on official paper and/or with official seals, and often mailed directly to another institution) and unofficial transcripts (often issued directly to the student on ordinary paper and/or available on the web).

Transfer Credit: Academic credit earned at another institution and accepted in lieu of resident credit toward the degree at a student's home institution.

Guidelines for School of Record Relationships

1. Responsibility to the Student

A. The School of Record Relationship and Student Enrollment Status

Students are informed when a School of Record is required for academic credit, and the role of the School of Record is clearly explained. The relationship between the SOR, program provider and home institution is transparent. There is official written verification of the enrollment status of the student at both the SOR and the home institution during the education abroad program. This includes clear language on the type of enrollment status to ensure that the student can complete his or her primary degree at the home institution upon return from an education abroad program.

- i. How is the student informed about the role of the School of Record?
- ii. What is the official enrollment status of the student while abroad?
- iii. Does the student status, if visiting, special or admitted student, allow the student to return to the home institution to complete his or her primary degree?
- iv. By what means does the program provider provide verification of enrollment both to the student, the student's home institution and the SOR?
- v. What entity on the home campus determines the official status of the student while abroad (e.g. academic advisor, department chair)? What policies ensure that home campus enrollment requirements are met while the student is abroad?

B. Financial Aid

Students are provided with comprehensive guidelines on the regulations and procedures related to financial aid eligibility.

- i. How does the home institution ensure that the student is registered as a full-time student at the home institution so that the student's loans do not go into repayment?
- ii. What are the home institution's guidelines with respect to the distribution of financial aid for a student requesting a School of Record transcript?
- iii. How does the contractual agreement between the program provider and the home institution regarding the processing of financial aid and payment to the program provider ensure that a reasonable timeline will be followed?

C. Academic Record

Home institutions and students are made aware of how credits, grades, and class designations/titles will be transcribed. There are established policies that determine the time period required for processing and releasing official grades and the transcript to the student and the home institution. The SOR will maintain the permanent record. There is appropriate communication by the registrar at the SOR on what aspects of a student's record can be discussed with home institution officials.

- i. How is the student provided with a clear explanation of the purpose of an SOR transcript, the protocols involved, and any associated fees necessary to request a transcript?
- ii. What is the timeline provided to the student for the required paperwork that an SOR has established as necessary for validating the student's academic work overseas?
- iii. What is the agreed-upon timeline among the SOR, Home Institution, Host Institution and the Program Provider for the timely issuing of a transcript at the end of the academic program?
- iv. What notice is provided to the student regarding the process for requesting their SOR transcript in the future?
- v. What is the policy for how a student may request a transcript from the SOR in the future?

D. Fees

Students are made aware at the time of application of any and all fees for an SOR's services, and of any associated requirements and benefits.

- i. How is the student provided with clear and timely information regarding any and all fees for an SOR's services?
- ii. How is the student informed of the services and benefits provided by the SOR?

2. Academic Oversight

A. Academic Credit

There are clear criteria established for awarding academic credit. Grade and credit conversion tables are accessible to students and faculty.

For the School of Record:

- i. How are the individuals who review academic offerings trained in education abroad standards of good practice?
- ii. If the SOR does not offer coursework in a particular academic discipline, how does it evaluate that coursework?
- iii. How does the transcript include the appropriate codes, such as the course code and number, physical location and department?

For the Home Institution:

- iv. What are the home institution's policies regarding credit earned abroad on a provider program? For example, is the credit viewed as in-residence credit or transfer credit?
- v. What is the home institution's policy regarding whether the credit is seen as fulfilling a general elective or a specific requirement?
- vi. How does the home institution periodically review and update credit transfer policies?
- vii. How does the home institution ensure that credit transfer policies are clearly explained to students prior to their embarking on the program?
- viii. How does the home institution ensure that the policies are clearly articulated by academic and education abroad advisors, departments, and other campus faculty and staff?

For the Program Provider:

- ix. If the academic courses are offered by an overseas degree-granting, accredited institution, by what means does the program provider verify accreditation by the local government or local accreditation body?
- x. If the academic courses are offered through direct enrollment at a host university, how are the grade and credit conversion scales determined and agreed upon?
- xi. If the academic courses are offered by a study center, how does the program provider supply full details of the course outline and syllabus, contact hours, objectives, credit hours, assignments, and outcomes to ensure that a proper level of credit and appropriate course level can be determined?

B. Assessment and Review of the Academic Program by the School of Record

Procedures are in place for the regular review of all new and existing curricula, faculty and academic policies by specially-designated staff and faculty at the SOR, with provision for site visits to and reviews of education abroad programs. Staff and faculty are adequately trained for evaluating education abroad programs, and adequate funding is in place to ensure that reviews are thoroughly and regularly

conducted. Assessment measures for academic and advising services and facilities are in place at the SOR to determine that they adequately support student learning and the academic goals of the program.

- i. What are the appropriate training and/or guidelines for the appointed faculty to review academic courses?
- ii. How are the evaluation instruments designed to evaluate the special characteristics of the experience abroad?
- iii. How are all program courses appropriately evaluated?
- iv. How and how often are all courses reviewed on site?
- v. How and how often are new and substantially revised syllabi at a study center or program reviewed and approved by the designated authority such as appropriate academic departments and/or academic committees?
- vi. How similar are the protocols for approval of off-campus academic courses and on-campus academic courses at the SOR?
- vii. How does the approval process take into account how service-learning or internship components are integrated with academic coursework abroad, particularly when this is not the case for on-campus courses?
- viii. How and how often are academic facilities at the program site (classrooms, library, technology support) reviewed and assessed by the SOR to ensure that they are appropriate to the program's mission and goals?
- ix. What are the expectations regarding the financial arrangements of the SOR site reviews (refer to the *Code of Ethics for Education Abroad*, Appendix A, Program Site Visits)?
- x. How adequate are staffing and funding to the completion of reviews?
- xi. What are the schedules for reviews of the approval processes of a program offered through the SOR?
- xii. What is the ongoing process to receive and review student course evaluations?
- xiii. How and how often are the credentials of faculty who teach on the program reviewed?
- xiv. How does the SOR make recommendations regarding faculty appointments and assignments based on these reviews?