The Interstate Passport Initiative is a grassroots-originated effort by academic leaders in the WICHE states\(^1\) to develop policies and practices supporting friction-free transfer for students between institutions in the WICHE region. Students who master all Learning Outcomes in the General Education block transfer Passport would not have to repeat academic work that addresses any of the Passport Learning Outcomes. This initiative proposes a set of related regional projects that would take place during an approximate five-year time span.

The first project, launched in October 2011, is The Interstate Passport Initiative: Focusing on Learning Outcomes to Streamline Transfer Pathways to Graduation, a pilot project funded for two years by the Carnegie Corporation of New York with the goal of determining the feasibility and the process of developing the Interstate Passport. This initial effort seeks to forge general education core block transfer agreements, based on the Essential Learning Outcomes, among 28 institutions in the five partner states: California, Hawaii, North Dakota, Oregon, and Utah.

The Essential Learning Outcomes—a quartet of targets that a college curriculum should aim to foster in students in order to prepare them for work, life, and strong citizenship—were developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ Liberal Education and America’s Promise, known as LEAP, and are already being adopted at a variety of institutions and some higher education systems.

During the two years of this first phase project, faculty will define the learning outcomes to be included in the general education core, registrars will determine how to indicate completion of the Passport block on the student’s academic record, and registrars and institutional research officers will recommend methods to track the academic progress of Passport students. Subsequent stages of the Passport project will use the methodology established in the two-year pilot to incorporate learning outcomes from general education areas beyond the core into the Passport block, and to gather and analyze the tracking data on the academic progress of the Passport students.

The pilot partners are initially concentrating on the learning outcomes in the lower-division general education core, because it is a common denominator among institutions, and so provides the best opportunity for the successful development of an interstate Passport during the two years of the pilot project. Faculty leaders in the pilot institutions have agreed that for this pilot project the scope of the general education core will consist of oral communication, written communication, and quantitative literacy.

The resulting regional block transfer agreement is expected to demonstrate a proof of concept for the development and implementation of a new transfer framework—one based on learning outcomes rather than courses and credits—that could streamline pathways to graduation by eliminating students’ repetition of academic work. Future phases of the project will incorporate additional learning outcomes into the Passport block and monitor the academic progress of Passport students.

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) serves as the project manager and fiscal agent. A Pilot State Facilitator has been appointed in each of the five partner states to lead the intrastate efforts and to collaborate in the interstate work to achieve a regional Passport agreement.

**The Registrars’ Role**

In the spring of 2012, the Pilot State Facilitator in each of the partner states enlisted faculty and charged them with determining what constitutes achieving the Passport’s selected learning outcomes at their institution and how it equates for transfer to/from other participating institutions. During the summer of 2012, a Passport Task Force on Student Tracking was assembled by convening selected registrars and institutional researchers from the pilot institutions and others in the West. This Task Force was asked to develop methods for the two tracking requirements of the pilot project:

1. Ways for a sending institution to signify on a student’s record that he or she has achieved the learning outcomes in the Interstate Passport Gen Ed Core Block so that this requirement is recognized as fulfilled by a participating receiving institution.
2. Ways for participating receiving institutions to track Passport student success and compare it with that of students transferring without the Passport and with native students. Receiving institutions would send reports to sending institutions to use in their continuous improvement work.

In undertaking this work, the Task Force was informed by background information related to the transcript and student record from the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO). According to AACRAO, the transcript is an extract of a student’s record which reflects his or her academic performance at an institution. Items considered essential for inclusion on a transcript are academic activities that result in credits, grades and credentials, such as degrees. AACRAO distinguishes between a database and a transcript, indicating that a database may contain many items which are either optional, or not recommended for inclusion on the transcript (AACRAO 2011 Academic Records and Transcript Guide). See [http://www2.aacrao.org/transcript/index.cfm?fuseaction=show_view&doc_id=4988](http://www2.aacrao.org/transcript/index.cfm?fuseaction=show_view&doc_id=4988)

**Guiding Principles and Assumptions**

The Student Tracking Task Force worked within the following parameters established by the Passport Advisory Board, the Pilot State Facilitators and their faculty representatives:

- The Passport will be a GE block transfer framework based on LEAP learning outcomes, not courses and credits.
• The Passport GE Block will roll out in a number of stages as the faculty from Passport institutions adds more learning outcomes, either singly or as additional blocks. The first version will be a proof of concept.
• The first version of the Passport will include the lower division general education core learning outcomes associated with written communication, oral communication, and quantitative literacy.
• The number of courses and credits required to achieve a version of the Passport will vary from one institution to another. For example, a student may achieve the first version of the Passport at Institution A with nine credits. Although 12 credits would be required of native students at Institution B, a student from Institution A could transfer with the Passport and meet all the general education core requirements. S/he may be required to take an additional three credits to graduate or meet some other requirement, but not in general education core.
• Students may achieve the Passport in different ways at different institutions. These may include course completion, test scores, eportfolio and/or other ways deemed appropriate by the Passport institution’s faculty.
• The number of institutions participating in the Passport Initiative will grow as this new transfer model wins acceptance and more learning outcomes are included in the block.
• The solutions must work across different student information systems and work for both paper and electronic student records. They may require minor customization for different platforms.
• The solutions should be simple and easy to implement. They should not require vendor modifications at this time.
• The notations on the student’s record will make sense to registrars at non-Passport institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Task Force makes the following recommendations responding to the two objectives for recording and tracking Passport students.

Objective 1: Show on a transcript that learning outcomes have been met.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Institutions indicate that a student has achieved the Passport by choosing to use one or more of the following options as preferred by the registrar:

• Adding a comment on the transcript using a standard format.
• Posting a pseudo course on the transcript.
• Creating an additional record to accompany a transcript.

Observations: In choosing one or more of the options above, the Task Force suggests that registrars consider the following advantages and potential issues.

A. COMMENT: A comment can be added to the transcript to let a transcript processor know about the Passport, when it was achieved, and where to find additional information about it.

Advantages

• Easily read by transcript evaluators reviewing paper transcripts.
• Easy to post manually.
• By making the comments self-explanatory, the transcript key will not need to be modified.
• Institutions choosing this option could easily move to one of the other options later.

• An automated process can be created to identify the learning objectives and then add the comment (and/or add the pseudo course) to the transcript.
  o Utah State, a Passport institution, has volunteered to write a script for its Banner system to identify the learning objectives and add a comment. It will share this program with other Banner institutions.
    ▪ Because this would be written as a separate program it should not be an issue as upgrades are done to the Banner application. This will not be a modification to Banner; it will be a separate process that accesses the Banner Oracle database.
    ▪ The program will have the following sections:
      1. As part of the “end of term” process, it would check to see if the student has already acquired the passport and if not test to see if the criteria are met. [This will have the most differences among institutions. USU will document its criteria well so that it can be modified to meet individual institutional requirements. Initially, the criteria may be limited to courses but as academic leaders identify other criteria (such as test scores, portfolios, experiential learning), the program can be modified to include these.]
      2. This section will add a comment to the transcript. This should be the same for all Banner schools but the comment itself could be modified if needed.

Potential Issues
• Difficult to query for reporting (need to move over this bullet column).
• Conversion to other formats could be problematic.
• May be limited to one line of text at some institutions.
• If not automated, may be time consuming to post and prone to human error.

B. PSEUDO COURSE: A pseudo course can be added to the academic history to indicate achievement of the Passport. Institutions not using EDI or XML based transactions would not be required to use the pseudo course.

Advantages
• An automated process can be created to identify the learning objectives and then add the pseudo course to the transcript.
• May be used to automate some functionality at some institutions, e.g., equivalency tables or degree audit.
• Easily used for reporting purposes.
• Institutions choosing this option could easily move to one of the other options later.
• Could work with EDI and EXL transcript exchange.
• This method would enable receiving institutions to load pseudo courses directly into their SIS to be processed against their articulation rules.
Potential Issues

- Not identified as good record keeping practice by many institutions.
- May not be allowed under many institutional faculty policies.
- May not be easily automated at many institutions or require additional programming support.
- Could be confusing to transcript recipients who are not Passport institutions, i.e., businesses and grad schools, etc.
- If only the pseudo course is used the transcript key will need to explain the meaning of the course and give a web reference.
- May require the transcript key to be updated and official transcript paper be reprinted.

C. SUPPLEMENTARY RECORD: An additional record can be created to accompany a transcript sent to Passport Institutions.

Advantages

- Banner institutions could create another level or PeopleSoft another career or transcript type to send an additional transcript recording all Passport outcomes.
- A participating institution could perform the system-set up to automate and share it with other institutions.
- Could be sent with the transcript to Passport institutions only thus not creating additional questions or confusion for the reader.
- Could be manually produced by institutions who do not wish to create an additional level, career, or transcript.
- Provides for the fewest possible conflicts with faculty policy at pilot institutions.
- Would work with EDI and XML transcript exchange.
- Space for the description would not be as limited as on a regular transcript.
- Easily seen and understood by transcript evaluators.
- Will be easy to discontinue if process changes or Passport discontinues.

Potential Issues

- Some institutions may not want to create an additional level or transcript.
- This process would be somewhat manual, but may eventually be able to be automated based on the type of information system.
- The names of institutions participating in the Passport would have to be coded into the systems and updated to indicate sending the special transcript.
- A second level transcript may require a lot of work by institutions.
- Institutions choosing this option could not move to one of the other options later without a lot of difficulty.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Comments on the transcript regarding the Passport be posted in the standard format including the version of the Passport, the date it was achieved by the student, and the website where more information is available as shown in the following example:

WICHE Passport Phase 1
Oral and Written Communications;
And Quantitative Literacy
RECOMMENDATION 3: A standard title for the pseudo course that will work for all institutions—identical to the first line of the standard comment—be used to identify the Passport and its version. (Note Banner allows a maximum of 29 characters for a course title. Example: WICHE Passport Phase 1)

- The title will not conflict with actual courses. It would have zero credits and a P grade.
- Other considerations in developing the pseudo course:
  - Where the pseudo course fits alphabetically in the catalog listings. It may be good to have it first or last (ZZZ for example).
  - Special characters should be avoided.
  - Careful consideration must be given to the prefix and the course number as some institutions may use 3 digits and others 4 digits.
  - It would be best to add this as an institutional course in the semester that the criteria are met. This allows tracking students before receiving the passport vs. after receiving the passport. By adding it as an institutional course, the receiving institution knows which institution issued the passport.
  - The title of the course should be consistent with all institutions and should be descriptive. Example might be “WICHE Passport Phase I”.

RECOMMENDATION 4: For subsequent versions of the Passport, the (1) comment, (2) pseudo course, and (3) supplementary record should be named in a consistent fashion.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Institutions participating in the Passport project include information about it in their student catalog.

RECOMMENDATION 6: WICHE provide information for registrars on its website defining the Passport, what constitutes each version and its date range, and a list of participating institutions and the date they were approved for Passport status.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Passport partners raise awareness about the Passport by making presentations at AACRAO and other conferences, and by sending emails to registrars.

Objective 2: Tracking Passport students for continuous improvement of participating institutions.

Observations: In developing its recommendations, the Task Force made the following observations:

A receiving institution will see a comment and/or a pseudo course, or a supplementary transcript from the sending institution. Regardless of how the passport is noted, the receiving institution can enter a pseudo course in the transfer work from the sending institution. Those using EDI/XML can have the course entered automatically.
Using a pseudo course to record a passport from another institution allows the receiving institution to note the sending institution that awarded the passport and the semester it was awarded. A pseudo course in transfer work does not have the same issues of having a pseudo course that is an institution-based course. That is, there is not a need to have something in the institution catalog about the course and there does not need to be an entry on the transcript key.

This method will provide all of the information to do comparisons of graduation rates, GPA and other statistics: comparing students with the passport and those without the passport. Registrars can also do the reports by the sending institution and can compare the results from the various sending institutions as well as to those of native students. They can also do reports comparing students that transfer from the various institutions who have completed the passport vs. those who transfer without completing the passport. They can also track students’ success up to the point they get the passport and their progress after getting the passport. All the information needed to produce reports will be available and the reporting process will be similar to that currently used for various cohorts.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** Request academic leadership, in consultation with their institutional research staff, specify
- Information they want included in the institutional reports.
- How frequently the reports should be run and shared.
- Information they want included in aggregate reports published on the WICHE site.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** Reconvene the Task Force to
- Create templates for the various reports.
- Develop guidelines for the reporting and sharing process.
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