

# Student Affairs Today

Best Practices and Strategies for Student Affairs Professionals

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## SNAPSHOTS

### COMPLIANCE

Review our experts' advice for upholding conduct codes while respecting free speech rights. **Page 6**

### MANAGING YOUR OFFICE

Cultivate leadership characteristics. **Page 7**

### YOU BE THE JUDGE

Could university officials be liable for campus police actions? See if you can guess how the court ruled in this month's highlighted legal case. **Page 8**

### LAW & CAMPUS

Review summaries of court cases and agency rulings. **Pages 9–11**

### LEADERS & INNOVATORS

Lisa Erwin, vice chancellor for student life and dean of students, University of Minnesota Duluth, offers advice for advocating the value of student affairs. **Page 12**



## Student Conduct

### Transcript notations can help institutions reduce foreseeable risk

While most institutions (84%) make transcript notations when a student is ineligible to re-enroll for academic reasons, only a few (29%) note suspensions or dismissals for disciplinary reasons. That's according to a recent survey by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers.

Barbara Fienman, a higher education interim management consultant, and Jeff Cullen, director of student judicial programs at the University of Maryland Baltimore County, are on the Association for Student Conduct Administration's Transcript Notation Task Force. Laura Bennett is president-elect of ASCA. Here, they discuss their recommendations on this issue:

**Q: What's the background of transcript notations?**

**A:** Registrars have become more concerned about ethical practice and standardization among institutions. AACRAO publishes an *Academic Record*

**Continued on page 3.**

## Mental Health

### Respond to growing psychological concerns among student-athletes

*By Claudine McCarthy, Editor*

ORLANDO — Imagine if your athletics colleagues receive a call from a coach about a student-athlete talking about harming himself or others, or a student-athlete seeming depressed or anxious. If they know or suspect a student-athlete has a psychological issue, do they ignore it or reach out?

Many athletics departments don't have plans for recognizing or referring student-athletes with psychological concerns — but that needs to change, according to Timothy Neal, sports medicine consultant with TLN Consulting. He also served as chair of an interassociation task force on student-athletes' mental health spearheaded by the National Athletic Trainers' Association.

"This issue has far-reaching impact. We need plans and policies to not only

**Continued on pages 4–5.**

**Continued from page 1**

and *Transcript Guide* containing best practices for registrars and records. The 2011 edition states, “Disciplinary action(s) resulting in a period of probation, suspension, or dismissal should not be recorded on an official transcript.”

But many conduct officers — many of whom have some role in evaluating the suitability of a transfer applicant’s character when they have disclosed a previous criminal conviction or disciplinary matter at the previous institution — take a different view on transcript notations. ASCA’s Transcript Notation Task Force recommended that “all institutions place notations on their transcripts indicating when a student is ineligible to re-enroll as a consequence of disciplinary action at that institution.”

**Q: What purpose would transcript notations of disciplinary suspensions or dismissals serve?**

**A:** A relatively small number of students are suspended or dismissed for disciplinary reasons each year. At UMBC, six times as many students are suspended annually for academic under-performance as compared to disciplinary suspensions. When students are disciplinarily suspended, the underlying reason is typically serious, such as behaviors that harm others (assault, sexual assault, robbery, arson, drug distribution, etc.). If students are separated from one institution because they pose a risk or threat to campus safety or the continuity of campus operations, many conduct officers believe there should be some flag on the official transcript that alerts a future receiving institution that additional investigation into an applicant’s fitness to matriculate may be warranted. For open enrollment institutions, this information is helpful in determining if any limitations should be placed on a student’s enrollment (such as a registered sex offender prohibited from taking classes near a campus child care center).

For example, a student may be charged with violating institutional rules for the theft of another student’s laptop. That student may accept responsibility or be found responsible at a hearing and subsequently suspended for two semesters or more. The student could then submit an application for admission to another institution. If there’s no notation on his transcript and the receiving institution doesn’t ask about disciplinary actions at the sending institution, that student could easily enroll at a new institution where he could continue the same pattern of theft. But if a notation is on his transcript, then the college could open up a dialogue with the applicant, ask

for more information about the reason for the separation, and make an informed decision about the applicant’s suitability to enroll.

**Q: What role does the admissions application play in identifying prior misconduct?**

**A:** Some colleges ask questions on the admissions application about an applicant’s previous criminal history and/or if the student has ever been suspended or dismissed from another institution. As long as the college reviews this material, and the student is honest on the application this may be an adequate substitute for a transcript notation. But having both processes in place is what we would recommend because not all institutions ask for this information and not all applicants are honest.

**Q: How long do you recommend notations remain on transcripts?**

**A:** The transcript notation should remain on the transcript minimally for the duration of the underlying institutional sanction. This may be a defined period for a disciplinary suspension or the notation may be permanent in the case of a dismissal or expulsion. Some institutions have post-appeal processes such as a petition to expunge a transcript notation that would enable the institution and the student to re-visit the transcript notation and remove it, if such action is warranted.

**Q: Are transcript notations a permanent negative indicator that limit opportunity?**

**A:** There are many reasons why a student may be ineligible to re-enroll: insufficient progress toward degree, unpaid library fines or campus parking tickets, poor grades, failure to furnish proof of immunization, a pending plagiarism charge, etc. A generic notation such as “ineligible to re-enroll” appended to the end of a transcript and removed when the underlying conditions have been met doesn’t inherently damage a student’s reputation. A transcript serves as a record of a student’s progress at the institution and noting eligibility to re-enroll is an accurate representation of that relationship.

Some institutions have an open access mandate and may not concern themselves with an applicant’s criminal history. Other institutions have a philosophy of enabling “second chances.” However, receiving institutions deserve an opportunity to evaluate a transfer applicant on the full spectrum of characteristics, including the known or foreseeable risks.

We suggest you investigate your institution’s practice on transcript notations and consult your institution’s attorney to determine what makes the most sense in managing your institution’s risk. ■