TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

Academic Transcript: "Record of Everything the Student Has Forgotten"?

Stanford's Registrar says fewer and fewer employers are requesting transcripts these days. The reason?

> The old-school version, with its list of abbreviated course titles, credit hours, and grades, might as well broadcast, "Here is a record of everything the student has forgotten," says Mr. Black, who is also associate vice provost for student affairs. (Stanford Registrar Thomas Black, as quoted in Mangan, 2015)

At a recent meeting of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, attendees heard from three hiring professionals at three separate businesses who said they no longer even look at academic transcripts. According to their opinions about academic transcripts, they're not useful for conveying any information that's valuable in making a decision about a new hire (Mangan, 2015).

Even scarier, almost one in five employers in a 2013, 400-employer survey said colleges and universities "inadequately prepare students/decrease standards," the second most frequent response to the question about reasons for decreases in professionalism among college graduates (Polk-Lepson Research Group, 2013, p. 24).

Perhaps employers are less trusting that information on a transcript tells them the most important things they want to know in making a new hire decision.

It's true — there's no place on an academic transcript where you can see whether the student is likely to exhibit professionalism in the workplace.

Two questions arise: 1) What attributes *do* employers want to know about when making a hiring decision? 2) How can they tell if a new hire is likely to possess those attributes?

One answer comes from Google Chairman Eric Schmidt, who said in 2014, "It looks like the thing that separates out the capable students from the really successful ones is not so much their knowledge…but their persistence at something" (Ferenstein, 2014).

Again, where on the academic transcript is "persistence" shown? According to the head of Google, that's more important to him than the grades or degree a job applicant has.

Notice that both these desired characteristics in a new hire, professionalism and persistence, are beyond-disciplinary skills that also connect with seeing beyond a limited perspective. In addition, millennials are also sometimes stereotyped as possessing a sense of entitlement (Doan, 2014) that translates into poor professionalism and a failure to see a job through to the expected stage of completion, still another characteristic not shown on an academic transcript.

Many employers are saying that colleges and universities are doing a poor job of preparing graduates to possess such needed skills. Further, some of these employers are now underscoring the importance of these skills as being so important that they'd rather know about them than even look at academic transcripts.

Granted, this may be an extreme stance taken by only a few big-name employers, but the sentiment about recent college graduates not being prepared for the workforce due to the absence of critically important beyond-disciplinary skills is no recent phenomenon. It has been showing up on employer surveys for many years. (For example, click *here* to see the June 2013 *TT-S* Snapshot, "Employers Find College Transcripts of Limited Use in Evaluating Potential.")

This continuing conversation about what colleges *should* be doing to help students prepare for the workplace compared to what they are *not* doing really highlights the importance of Transformative Learning (TL) experiences being designed into the curriculum. For whatever reason, it seems — according to these conversations — that postsecondary institutions have been on a downward trend in this area for 15 years or more.

If that's true, then whatever was happening 15 years ago, when employers more frequently agreed that colleges were helping students develop beyond-disciplinary skills like professionalism and motivation is not happening to the same degree now.

This is why the intentionality of planning in potential TL experiences is critically important for colleges and universities. And if it's true that entering college-aged freshmen have changed in ways that make them more needful of developing these skills, then all the more reason for mindfulness and intentionality in building the environments and activities where students can do this learning.

It's also true that if the above is important, it's equally important than institutions assess how well they're helping students succeed in this area.

There simply has never been a bigger mandate for Transformative Learning as a necessary part of a college education. Whether TL may go by that name or by the name of the liberal arts education ethos, integrative learning, or any other moniker, societal needs and student needs are today placing UCO and all postsecondary institutions smack in the middle of a nexus wherein making important changes is necessary.

For everyone.

The UCO answer to challenge is the Student Transformative Learning Record process.

References

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