

Notes from "Talking About Teaching" session:  
"Hampshire Transcripts: Implications for Writing Evaluations"  
April 21, 2010

*Note: The comments here are meant to capture key points of discussion and presentation plus the general tenor of the exchange.*

**Discussants: L. Brown Kennedy and Roberta Stuart**

**Bobbie Stuart** opened the program speaking of the Division II transcript as a showcase of the concentration. She was particularly focused on the order of presenting Divisional work in the transcript, the use excerpts in Division II transcripts, and the use (by student request) of "additional" full evaluations. At the present time, faculty vary widely in their methods of writing Division II evaluations and in their choice of whether to use excerpts.

The group discussed:

**1. What should the role of excerpts be?**

- Excerpts were originally approved by the faculty for use in Division I evaluations only. They are not designed for "transcripting" purposes and tend to make Div II evaluations very long and repetitive. They lack the specific information needed at the Division II level especially for graduate-school bound students. (Feedback suggests that the rich information we provide does help students with graduate-school admission in many cases and our high rate of graduate-school admission is crucial for the college. Though NB: Faculty are writing Division II evaluations for a mixed external audience as well –employers as well as grad schools.)
- It is not practical to have two styles of evaluation since 100 and 200 level courses are used at both the Division I and Division II levels and need to provide an adequate and consistent picture for students who want to transfer from Hampshire after either the first or second year (and prior to receiving Divisional evaluations).
- At both levels, the evaluation also needs to also serve the "internal" audience of student and advisor, providing concrete criticism or encouragement beyond the level needed for a summative evaluation.

**Proposal:**

- Change the evaluation to one medium-length summary evaluation (possibly 1500 characters maximum), written for the purpose of the transcript and with an external audience in view. This would be the "top" evaluation on the HUB form and the only one required.
- Allow a second HUB box labeled "additional comments for students and advisor." These would not come up to be "checked" for automatic inclusion in the transcript but could be used as additional information by advisors and chairs (and cited as one does comments on papers).

**Brown Kennedy** then introduced a second topic:

2. **What is “successful completion”?** Is it important to record whether each class was completed, as well as what the quality of the work was? How do we record or evaluate poor work? She brought up the past debate (largely focused on Division I) as to whether there should be a “pass/fail” (actual or de facto) that shows on the transcript. We have a Division I that is now based on course completion. However we do not want the Division II to be entirely course-based, and there is an appropriate place in the Division II evaluation for the inclusion of work done in the context of courses that were not technically “completed.” (The primary positive example is the course that becomes in effect an independent study or research project.)

#### Discussion

- Some faculty use the rubric “eval/ no eval” as a pass/fail equivalent. Others strongly believe that completed work should be evaluated (and therefore under current practice) recorded as “eval” even if it is of very poor quality (i.e. not “successful” or “passing”) and that negative evaluations are crucial feedback. Some faculty contend that all work should be evaluated whether or not the student completes the course and that the evaluation itself should state that the work was incomplete.
- None of these variant practices really are reflected in the rubrics on the transcript course list. Does that matter?
- Bobbie Stuart noted that not many students transfer after Division II, but some do. Anyone reading the Division II transcript should be able to know if the student’s work was complete and successful.
- Both the course list on transcript and the listing of excerpts are ways (deliberately redundant) of recording course work. Now excerpts are at the option of the Division II chair. Laura Wenk asked if graduate schools should receive the full list of excerpts or not?

#### **Other issues and recommendations**

##### **Re: the Division II evaluation:**

- The distinctions between “Summary of Concentration” and “Chairpersons Comments” are unclear. The course list is confusingly placed
- Do we need a description of the concentration, or not?
  - Lynn Miller felt strongly that the summary should come first, and this should include a summary of the evaluation comments Chris Jarvis said that we need a statement of what the Division II work is, and that need not be evaluative.
- The “related courses” listed in the Division II evaluation are computer-generated, so that it is difficult to change their location and/or order of listing, according to Bobbie Stuart. (Students determine in consultation with their committee what courses are to be included, but the arrangement is no longer at the discretion of the chair, making it impossible to group classes by field, for example or to visually clarify which are “core” and which are “additional” classes.)

- The course list should follow the evaluation, not interrupt it, so that the core of the evaluation itself can appear on the first page and be seen immediately by a reader. (Charlene, who has been at Hampshire for 30 years, was unaware that the related courses are listed very near the beginning of the transcript. She had been listing them herself later on the form. This is an indication of how disconnected faculty have been from understanding the form of the transcript and the importance of educating everyone to a more uniform process.)
- The narrative portion of the Div II evaluation should be limited to two pages and Deans should encourage faculty to observe this limit.

**Proposals for Immediate action:**

- There was general agreement that the transcript should read in reverse chronological order – from the present to the past – beginning with Division III up front.
- This group feels the need for a committee to rework the Division II evaluation and the order of the transcript – the ECF should ask the EPC to take this up promptly in the fall.
- Alan Goodman will bring up the issue of the Division II transcript at the Deans’ meeting, coming up soon.

Other notes:

Alan Goodman spoke about how the student chooses which complete evaluations to include at the end of the transcript and questioned this practice

Bobbie believes that the students have a right to their evaluations if they ask for them. (It is perhaps necessary to allow students to add their full course evaluations if they wish, but the transcript should be designed to be accurate and coherent without them.)

Any student asking for advice on the transcript should be advised not to include all evaluations, as this would create a 20-page transcript, which grad schools would find cumbersome, plus excerpts would then be redundant.

Faculty never voted to use excerpts on the Division II transcript and the Hub has been illegally excerpting!

There is near consensus that the 900 character limit is impractical if there is to be a one-length evaluation rather than the present system of “real “ evaluation and excerpt.

Questions that the Division II transcript should address: what is the quality of the work, and how was the Division II framed?

Should the “Summary” of the concentration be a description or an evaluative summary; or should it be presented in two paragraphs: a description of the Division II followed by a summary of the qualitative evaluation, then details

### **Summary notes:**

Bobbie believes that grad schools *are* getting a good picture of each student, despite all this controversy about the format of the transcript. However, she is uncomfortable about the fact that we allow students to choose which evaluations should be included.

Students are often told “what you do shows up on the permanent record”, so that they will take their work more seriously. Not allowing the inclusion of full evaluations (as they are now written) would be problematic.

Alan suggested the faculty be polled about whether excerpts can be dropped from the transcript. Charlene said faculty would not agree to be polled without extensive discussion on the topic first. Perhaps this issue could be discussed within the schools, and then brought to a faculty meeting.

Clearly, the issue of the existing format of the Division II transcript is a hot one, and much more time and discussion need to take place. Bobbie also made clear the limitations of the current technology – the need to dovetail the systems of data management, datatel, and printing – coupled with the reality that 40 years of transcripts have been done in a particular way, change will be very hard, and there is a limited supply of the special paper (for one page of info) as it is apparently very expensive.

So, there is the problem of finding consensus from faculty on the order of things listed on the transcript, whether or not to include evaluations, and what the summary should include (among other issues). Then all of these changes need to be worked into the current system technologically so that the transcript can be modified to present a new look. A daunting challenge – but this group in attendance seems to be involved and perhaps committed to making this happen! The Dean of Faculty is on board about the importance of this – so that is a good beginning. Bobbie Stuart stands ready to implement the changes as soon as faculty can agree on exactly what those will be.