Electronic Transcript Exchange

Benefits and Experiences of
Early Postsecondary Adopters

Produced October 2012

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Acknowledgements

Additionally, we would like to thank the following colleges and universities for participating in the development of this white paper:

o Arizona State University	o Central Carolina Community College
o University of Arizona	o College of Charleston
o University of Vermont	o Auburn University
o Tulane University	o James Madison University
o Purdue University, West Lafayette	o University of Colorado, Boulder
o Purdue University, Indiana	o Berklee College of Music

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Higher Education – A Time to Implement Best Practices

Higher education faces significant economic pressures as institutions stay focused on delivering a quality, student-centered education. The financial climate underscores the importance for institutions to fundamentally rethink existing practices in ways that can improve operating efficiency, modernize productivity, improve customer service and provide access to enhanced data to sharpen assessment efforts.

"Total state support for higher education declined 7.6% from 2011 levels. Overall, state spending on higher education, following the distribution of recovery-act money for three budget years, is now nearly 4 percent lower than it was in 2007"

-The Chronicle of Higher Education

Despite some optimism that the economic environment may be improving, the pace of recovery is slow. It will likely take several years for institutions to experience some level of meaningful rebound of resources. Total state support for higher education declined 7.6% from 2011 levels. Overall, state spending on higher education, following the distribution of recovery-act money for three budget years, is now nearly 4 percent lower than it was in 2007.[1]

In this environment, institutional leaders search for innovative solutions that provide budgetary relief and advance institutional priorities. Many institutions share similar priorities including modernizing operations through the application of technology, enhancing security of student data, and converting large amounts of data into refined and real-time analytics. In support of these priorities, institutions, specifically registrars and admissions departments, are actively evaluating and adopting technology that supports the electronic exchange of student transcripts.

As Eduventures' research supports, the electronic student transcript is a viable, tested solution that has the potential to deliver multiple benefits, including costs savings, to institutions for both sending transcripts through the registrar and receiving transcripts through admissions.

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[1] State Support for Colleges Falls 7.6% in 2012 Fiscal Year, The Chronicle of Higher Education, January 2012

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Electronic Transcripts – Insights From The Field

The electronic exchange of student transcripts refers to a technology-based method of exchanging transcripts between postsecondary institutions and other constituents, including students, alumni, graduate schools, high schools and employers. This data delivery option is a value-added solution for both senders (registrars) and receivers (admissions), and represents a marked improvement to the traditional paper and postage delivery method.

"It is manifestly obvious to the members of the task force that electronic transcripts are no longer a concept awaiting definition. They are here to stay".

-The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers

Some readers may recall the widely read publication "A Business Case for the Electronic Exchange of Student Records" (1997) that provided a detailed cost-benefit analysis for institutions considering implementing electronic student transcripts. In that publication, the stated cost for an institution to receive and process a high school transcript was $6.95 while the estimated cost for a registrar to send a transcript was cited as $2.94. This study provides an updated perspective on that analysis.

Eduventures' conversations with university registrars and admissions officials from 12 diverse institutions[2] highlight the multiple benefits of leveraging this technology. These conversations underscore how two major functions of a university, the registrar and admissions functions, can experience both direct and indirect benefits through the implementation of electronic transcripts.

Following the completion of the interviews, institutional leaders cited, to varying degrees, one of three reasons they adopted electronic transcript capabilities; 1) to achieve cost savings within their department, 2) to improve customer service for

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[2] The interviews represented 9 public and 3 private universities/colleges. Of the 12 interviews, 7 represented the Registrar perspective while 5 held leadership roles in admissions/enrollment management. The institutions were diverse both in terms of geographic location with total enrollments ranging from 4,000 to 70,000.

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students and alumni in delivering these services and/or 3) to improve operational efficiency. In addition, leaders expressed interest in capitalizing on the analytical and tracking capabilities that are inherent in the e-transcript platform.

The findings presented in this white paper further reinforce the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (ACCRAO) findings in 2010 that sending and receiving electronic transcripts is a technology that is being adopted by many institutions. In ACCRAO's Electronic Transcript Task Force Report, the members concluded that *"it is manifestly obvious to the members of the task force that electronic transcripts are no longer a concept awaiting definition. They are here to stay"*. [3]

To date, institutions enjoy clear benefits and see emerging potential benefits further down the road as they become more experienced in utilizing this technology within their organization. Below are specific case examples that highlight how institutions have benefited from implementing electronic transcripts. The case illustrations are intended to distinctly highlight these benefits from the Receiver and Sender perspective.

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[3] ACCRAO – appointed Electronic Transcript Task Force Report, 2010

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Receiving Electronic Transcripts – Case Studies

> ### Colorado University-Boulder – Undergraduate Admissions
>
> - Boulder, CO
> - Four year public, 33,000 total enrollment
> - Receive 85,000 transcripts annually (graduate, undergraduate and transfer)
> - Estimated that 28,500 transcripts, or 34%, are received electronically

Reason for Adoption:

Initially, the CU-Boulder undergraduate admissions office adopted electronic transcripts at the request of guidance counselors from partner high schools. The ability of these high schools to send transcripts was viewed as a significant benefit from the guidance counselor perspective. In addition, CU-Boulder wanted to create the ability to track transcripts more effectively and in a manner consistent with the goal of becoming a paperless campus.

Benefits:

The Admissions Office accepts electronic transcripts from two sources; pdf files sent directly from a high school and through a third party vendor service agreement. Currently, approximately 50% of undergraduate applicant transcripts and 10-15% of transfer and graduate student transcripts are received electronically. The institution has experienced multiple benefits including the elimination of major processing bottlenecks during peak times, reducing storage requirements for physical records and an increase in data security and confidentiality.

"Directing applicants to send transcripts electronically with their application is creating an instantaneous service and processing of the application."

-Matthew Lopez
Associate Director of Admissions

The elimination of major bottlenecks in the processing of applicant transcripts was a huge win for operations staff and applicants. There are 22,000 applications and two

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application deadlines for first-time freshman applicants – the reality of the application process is that 60-70% of applicants wait to submit their materials within three days of the deadline. So, receiving over 13,000 applications within three days of the deadline created a huge bottleneck in the process and significant stress for the operations staff.

Adopting the capacity to receive electronic transcripts allowed them to bypass a lot of their manual processes. Matthew Lopez, Associate Director of Admissions, commented that *"the transcript doesn't have to go through campus mail, they don't need the staffing in place to do the very mundane process of opening mail, looking up students, identifying who they are, sending the document to scanning and completing the capturing process….all of which take considerable time. Directing applicants to send transcripts electronically with their application is creating an instantaneous service and processing of the application"*.

CU-Boulder has also begun to redeploy staff to other functions and priorities within the admissions program. Staff is now beginning to be cross-trained across different areas of the operation. This requires them to be more flexible in how they view their work day. *"Gone are the days where processing staff are 'siloed'…because of the platform, it allows us to work smarter, and not harder necessarily"*.

The additional unanticipated but welcomed benefits of receiving transcripts electronically have included the ability to more quickly complete an applicant's admission file. This processing improvement has allowed admission counselors earlier access to review and make a decision on each applicant. Also, CU-Boulder finds this process offers a more secure way to exchange and store transcript data; the platform has provided them the capability to integrate useful templates to generate analyses that a paper process simply cannot produce.

 "The admissions world has changed ---today it is all about competition, satisfaction and customer service ---it is a mutual selection process. We are selecting them in terms of their academic merits but they are definitely selecting us ---they are being a consumer and there are a lot more consumers these days than there were even five years ago. Their satisfaction with us is part of the process and their decision".

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> **James Madison University (JMU) – Undergraduate Admissions**
>
> - Harrisburg, VA
> - Four year public, 19,434 total enrollment
> - Receive 70,000 high school and transfer student transcripts annually
> - 27,5000 transcripts, or 29%, are received electronically.

Reason for Adoption:

High school districts initially requested the admissions office to accept pdf transcripts as a means for them (high schools) to save money on paper and postage costs. However, the admissions leadership team at the university was also hopeful there would be secondary internal benefits to their operation. Specifically, they were optimistic there would be improvements in the management of a high volume of application records in a more secure way.

Benefits:

Michael Walsh, Dean of Admissions, affirmed that JMU has been receiving electronic transcripts (pdf files) for the past three years and is optimistic they will have implemented a full data exchange process by 2014. At the present time, approximately 50% of their high school transcripts are received electronically.

Since adopting the capacity to receive transcripts electronically, JMU has realized processing efficiency gains within their operation. In the past, they received 10 tubs of mail each day during the first two-three weeks of January, for a January 15th application deadline. By the time each piece of mail was opened, processed and duplicates accounted for, the processing of all transcripts and preparation of applicant files wasn't completed until as late as the third week of February. This time-intensive process has been vastly improved as a result of adopting electronic transcripts. Today, the processing of applicant files is complete by the first week of February. This is a 2-3 week savings in processing time, which is especially noteworthy given an increase of 7,000 applications during this same time period.

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JMU has also been successful in redeploying admissions staff members to higher priority functions within their department. This is the result of the impact that receiving electronic transcripts has had on the work flow of processing applicant records. Walsh estimates that approximately 80% of the team has experienced a positive change in their jobs and he has seen a drop in the processing error rate and misfiling of applicant records. The transcript codes associated with how they track electronic records have greatly aided in reducing these issues.

> *"Staff morale has improved greatly as staff are working less hours and are far more engaged in effecting process improvements within the program."*
>
> *-Michael Walsh*
> *Dean of Admissions*

From a cost savings perspective, the admissions office experienced a $22,000 reduction in overtime expenses in 2011. The majority of these cost savings resulted from dramatically reducing processing bottlenecks at peak times during the admission cycle due to the shift in transcript volume from paper to electronic. This overtime reduction occurred even though application volume increased during this period of time.

Other indirect benefits have included the positive impact on staff morale. Walsh stated that "*staff morale has improved greatly as staff are working less hours and are far more engaged in effecting process improvements within the program*".

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Tulane University – Undergraduate Admissions

- New Orleans, LA
- Four year private, 12,144 total enrollment
- Receive approximately 33,000 high school transcripts annually
- 21,000 high school transcripts, or 64%, are received electronically

Reason for Adoption:

The admissions office adopted the capability to receive transcripts electronically (pdf) to help meet present day student expectations. Laurie Lagonegro, AVP for Enrollment Management states that *"our department has been using 20th century methods in the 21st century; students expect things to be there immediately and if we couldn't immediately affirm this, they would have the school fax or mail another transcript – so it was really inefficient; they may be sending a transcript to us 3-4 times when it was really unnecessary but because we were so paperbound, it took us a while to get the data into the system."*

Benefits:

Tulane began receiving electronic transcripts in 2009 through a third party provider retained by high schools in their recruiting network. From 2010 to 2011 the receipt of electronic transcripts went up by approximately 50%. From 2011 to 2012 it went up an additional 36%. As they complete the implementation of an imaging service, they expect a continued increase in electronic transcript volume moving forward.

Traditionally, their admission operation required a large number of student workers to help process high volumes of applicant transcripts. Since converting to pdf transcripts, they are significantly decreasing the number of student workers for the 2013 admissions cycle. This is a result of the large reduction of mail processing required. They have had as many as 35 student workers in the past. For 2013, that number has been reduced to 7, which has also generated some cost savings for their operation.

With the efficiency gains in processing electronic transcripts, Lagonegro projects that they will experience overtime savings this fall during peak processing times. Also, with

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the change in work flow, they have saved an estimated $25,000 (not including benefits) by not filling an administrative support position that was vacant.

Tulane has also experienced the unanticipated benefit of improved work flow between operations staff and the admission counseling staff. These two groups reside on different floors which created inefficiencies in exchanging application information. With the adoption of receiving transcripts electronically, and by quickly associating them with each applicant's file, the admission counseling staff no longer depends on operations staff to provide them this information as this information is now readily available. The e-transcript technology allows them easier access to this type of query and eliminates the need to make these requests to operations staff.

Key Benefits of Receiving Electronic Transcripts – Admissions Perspective

➢ Ability to assist high school guidance counselors by accepting transcripts electronically – this makes the process more efficient at the point of application origination

➢ Cost savings in staff time previously used to handle and process large volumes of mail (especially at peak deadline times in the admission process)

➢ Efficiency gains in preparing completed applicant folders for review by admission counselors

➢ Enhanced applicant ability to track status of transcript (without calling or emailing) – this enhancement is a direct benefit for applicants and the consequent admissions experience they have with the institution

➢ Improved staff satisfaction

➢ Provides revenue potential for institutions that support a transcript fee schedule

➢ Provides tracking and analytical capabilities to aid assessment of college choice patterns and outcomes of recruiting efforts

➢ Supports institutional sustainability priorities and "going green" practices

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Sending Electronic Transcripts – Case Studies

University of Vermont (UVM) – Registrars Office
- Burlington, VT
- 4 year public, 13,000 total enrollment
- 13,877 transcripts sent since January 5th, 2012
- 4,455, or 32%, were sent electronically

Reason for Adoption:

Students were demanding that the Registrar provide a secure, electronic service for them to request their academic transcripts. The student body viewed this is an obligation the university had to each student. The University took their request seriously and began the process of adopting the capacity for the electronic exchange of transcripts.

Benefits:

The University implemented the capacity to send transcripts electronically in January, 2012. The University Registrar at UVM has found that the number of requests for electronic transcripts has really skyrocketed compared to the traditional hard copy transcript. In seven months, UVM experienced a 32% shift in its annual transcript sending volume from paper to electronic format.

Prior to electronic transcripts, there was a 3 – 5 day turnaround time for the Registrar to generate and deliver a transcript to a student, alumnus or designated recipient. Today, the delivery time has been reduced to 24 hours. In addition, before electronic transcripts, there was a $5 fee to expedite the transcript, but now, with a 24 hour turnaround time, this fee has been eliminated. UVM has observed a noticeable decrease in phone and email traffic related to transcript inquiries and believes students are very happy with this service enhancement. UVM was able to make this transition

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during a period of growth where they experienced a 26% increase in students and a 41% increase in sections offered without having to change their staffing model.

Beyond the improvements in turnaround time, the Registrar states that his reliance on electronic transcripts will change significantly. *"I am never going to buy transcript paper again...I have 180,000 sheets of transcript paper in my vault in perpetuity now because it will all be electronic before I get through this paper batch"*. To date in 2012, the Registrar has experienced a 67% reduction in paper costs due to changes in the paper vendor and in the transcript format to a single page mailer. UVM projects an additional 15% savings as the shift to electronic transcripts continues to grow over time. This does not account for additional savings generated from postage and envelope expense. In terms of operating budget, the school has realized 10% savings to date, or $9,000. Of the savings realized thus far, the majority has been reallocated to upgrade staff salaries in recognition of the new tasks they would be focused on as roles shift over time. Staff had already been cross-trained on other functions across the office which will help make this transition a little smoother.

> *"I am never going to buy transcript paper...I have 180,000 sheets of transcript paper in my vault in perpetuity now because it will all be electronic before I get through this paper batch"*.
>
> -Keith Williams
> University Registrar

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Purdue University, West Lafeyette – Office of the Registrar

- West Lafeyette, IN
- Four year public, 40,000 total enrollment
- Receive 65,000 transcripts from high school transcripts, undergraduates and transfers annually
- Send between 150,000 – 175,000 transcripts annually

Reason to Adopt:

While not yet implemented, Purdue University recently decided to invest in a system that will allow for the delivery of electronic transcripts. After performing due diligence, they project benefits in three key areas - student satisfaction, reduction of direct costs, and ability to redeploy staff to other functions in the office.

Projected Benefits:

Bob Kubat, University Registrar and staff from the office and student systems support area, studied the possible benefits of adopting the electronic delivery of transcripts for Purdue.

In the first year, they expect that 20-30% of the current volume of transcripts will convert to e-transcripts. In terms of numbers, this translates to between 30,000 - 45,000 transcripts being sent electronically, with greater volume expected over time as larger numbers of students and alumni become more aware of this beneficial service.

Purdue forecasts approximately $50,000 in annual savings. At a cost of $1.79 to produce each transcript (including postage, paper and envelope expenses), a 20% volume shift to electronic transcripts from a total volume of 150,000 transcripts annually, will generate meaningful savings for the Registrar's operating budget.

Following successful implementation, Kubat plans to reallocate some staff to other areas of the operation that require different skills and more attention. Specifically, he expects some additional staff time going to improving customer service, maintaining

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the degree audit programs of study, and improving the efficiency of the imaging records process.

In addition, Purdue feels that adopting the capacity to send transcripts electronically will improve the overall security of student and alumni academic records. In the traditional model of sending transcripts through the mail, once the transcript leaves the Registrar's office, there is limited security. With electronic transcripts, Purdue believes security is improved as it sits on the institutional server and there are options for tracking these records.

Key Benefits of Sending Electronic Transcripts – Registrar Perspective

➢ Cost savings in transcript paper, postage, envelopes and staff time

➢ Operating efficiency gains in administering and managing the transcript process

➢ Improved service to students – online requesting of transcripts eliminates need for students to visit Registrars' office and streamlines the process; this ultimately benefits student job searches and post-graduate admissions processes

➢ Improved security of student academic records

➢ Ability to shift staff to higher priority roles

➢ Improved service to alumni – greatly enhances ease of transcript ordering

➢ Supports institutional sustainability priorities and "going green" practices

Early Adopters Well Positioned to Manage for the Future

As institutions look to the future, many commented that they could see emerging applications of electronic student records exchange, beyond the transcript. Overall, institutions feel that having a platform in place now will allow them the flexibility to adapt and leverage these future applications. In short, having adopted this technology today, institutions have created the infrastructure to capitalize on other value-added functions that emerge in the next few years.

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A summary of these potential emerging applications for the electronic exchange technology include:

o Build capabilities to analyze data generated from the electronic transcript system in order to examine trends, patterns and student decision-making. This can help institutions examine college choice and recruiting-for-fit outcomes, as well as job search and post-graduate behaviors based on student profile data to further help to understand the transfer-out decisions of current students.

o A preference or requirement by employers that job applicants submit their transcripts and other application materials electronically. Interviewees cited the investment banking firm Goldman Sachs and the Federal Government as examples of organizations that may be moving in this direction.

o In an effort to deter fraudulent employment applications for higher education positions, one institution cited that their Human Resource department was studying the impact of requiring applicants to have their educational institutions forward electronic transcripts to verify their educational credentials.

o To provide a strategic tool to aid in compliance with evolving and undefined Department of Education reporting requirements and desire to connect/track student progress over time.

Key Takeaways - The Case for Adoption

Eduventures' conversations with the twelve institutions that participated in this study yielded the following key takeaways:

➢ Institutions adopted this technology for one of three primary reasons including i) to improve student satisfaction, ii) to achieve operational process efficiencies, and iii) to realize cost savings.

➢ In the early stages of implementation, annual cost savings to date ranged from $9,000 to $50,000. Many leaders acknowledge that the full extent of savings is still unknown but the areas where savings have been realized include overtime budgets, staffing, work study and miscellaneous items including paper, postage and envelopes.

    o For example, one institution reported $22,000 savings in overtime expenses; another reported $25,000 savings in staff costs.

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- Institutions expressed interest in leveraging the analytical and tracking capabilities inherent in the e-transcript platform. These capabilities can provide detailed analytics to assess an institution's recruiting outcomes, track student achievement, and better understand graduate decision-making.

- The majority of institutions have been able to redeploy staff to other higher priority issues within their programs. In some cases, staff have become more focused on customer service tasks, project work, and improving the efficiency of key processes with the department.

- Institutions believe the adoption of this technology has improved student satisfaction and staff morale. Students are benefiting from a streamlined transcript ordering process that meets their turnaround time expectations. Staff spends less time on mundane paper processing tasks and shifting to more complex and higher priority tasks within their departments.

Given that budgetary constraints and pressure to innovate in higher education are so prevalent, institutions should evaluate the opportunity to adopt this solution for their campus. Electronic transcripts provide multiple direct and indirect benefits to two major functions within the university (admissions and the registrar) and across the two landmark stages of the student lifecycle (acceptance and graduation).

For receivers of electronic transcripts, institutions would be wise to examine the benefits their programs may realize including cost savings, operational modernization gains, and analytical capabilities, among others. For senders of electronic transcripts, Registrar offices should evaluate the extent to which improved security, cost savings, revenue potential, and gains in customer service could benefit their operations.

As part of the initial feasibility and review process, institutions should start by considering an approach that involves joint discussions with leaders of the Registrar's Office, Admissions and Information Technology to explore the system-wide benefits of adopting this technology in an integrated, strategic manner.

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About Eduventures

Eduventures has worked in the education sector for more than twenty years. Today, Eduventures partners with more than 300 institutions of higher education to deliver the research and strategic guidance necessary to support strong decision-making on campus. By supporting each of our clients in the broad challenges they face on campus, we have become the industry leader in higher education research and consulting.

Please contact us at contact@eduventures.com or (857) 221-9815 if you would like more information about how we can help you.

About Parchment

Parchment is the leader in electronic transcript (e-transcript) exchange. More than 9,000 high schools (over 30 percent of the U.S. secondary school market) and postsecondary institutions have exchanged 4 million transcripts using the *Docufide* by Parchment™ SaaS platform. Beyond providing the cost and operational efficiencies of electronic transcripts, Parchment works with learners and institutions around the world to unlock the value of transcript and credential data – helping people collect, promote, and share their education credentials in simple and secure ways. Founded in 2003, Parchment Inc. is a venture-backed company headquartered in Scottsdale, Ariz. with offices in Roseville, Calif., Washington, D.C., and Denver. For more information, please contact info@parchment.com or (480) 719-1646.

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