

edTech rEvolution Leaders

Comprehensive Learner Record: Exploring A New Transcript for Lifelong Learning

The higher education transcript, in its traditional sense, may finally be getting a facelift. As we soar into the second decade of the 21st century, changes in the way higher education verify degrees are on the horizon, making evidence of learning more meaningful to students, employers, and institutions.

Besides coursework, which often includes assignments and exams aligned to learning outcomes, quantified with grades and a transcript, there are also rich experiences that lie in the trenches, beyond the classroom, and outside the transcript spotlight. These co-curricular experiences are scattered across universities, making them more difficult to centralize, unpack, and align to outcomes.

Co-curricular activities are present across campuses of all shapes and sizes. Many activities are structured as participant-driven, but there are often no mandatory next steps or direct assessment. Yet, employers want to hire learners who have the 21st-century skills that contribute to their value proposition. The challenge for higher education is to not only provide ways for students to build these skills but to translate them for students to share with employers.

Although not new to education, a Comprehensive Learner Record (CLR) is a dynamic, real-time portfolio, which is both a display of curricular, co-curricular, and experiential artifacts of learning, and a digital skills "wallet" that is verified by the institution and linked to learning outcomes aligned to today's employability skills. It holds the evidence of learning, behind the degree program and presents it in a more meaningful way to employers. Through CLR, digital evidence of students' outcomes, across all aspects of learning are visible to learners and shareable to employers, not locked away in files, notebooks, learning management systems, registrars, study abroad offices, or student life.

Historically, the onus is on the learners to sort through and compile their activities to share these

"The value of a university experience especially for traditional 18-24 year-old students is as much the co-curricular world that they live in. How they are involved in clubs and organizations, the internships they have, the jobs they end up taking on, the skills they learn outside the classroom, are all part of that individual growth that really makes the whole. And so one of the things that was really appealing to me about the Comprehensive Learner Record (CLR) is that it's going to be that manifestation for allowing us to tell the story of the value of university education. At least for UMBC, I am looking at the CLR long term as being a way that we sort of highlight the tenets of a UMBC education and UMBC experience for our undergraduate and graduate students."

— **Jack Suess**, Vice President of Information Technology and CIO, University of Maryland Baltimore County

experiences in a practical format with employers. Transcripts don't tell their whole story. And despite universities offering diverse experiences for students to practice these valuable skills outside of the classroom, many fall short when it comes to presenting what the students learned in a clear format. University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC), through its collaboration with employers and the Greater Washington Partnership, is taking the lead in providing opportunities for university experiences and employer skills to align using curriculum mapping and CLR.

The Greater Washington Partnership (GWP) brings together business leaders who share a commitment to the future success of the region from Baltimore to Richmond. As a collaborative partner, UMBC provides opportunities for students to build the knowledge, skills, and abilities through coursework and co-curricular activities aligned to GWP. This is where UMBC has decided to start its CLR initiative.

"We are building out some modules that will allow students to go through content associated with different competency areas to complete a formative assessment as they go through those modules, which then end with one final summative assessment. For each competency area, they will be awarded a credential for that competency, a badge. Each of those badges will then stack to the overall generalist credential, which will appear in the CLR, and they can share out with their social media platforms."

—**Sherri Braxton, Sc.D.**, Senior Director of Instructional Technology, University of Maryland Baltimore County

"What's getting us to move forward with the Comprehensive Learner Record is that in our region we have a set of employers that are very large through the Mid-Atlantic Region. And when you look at this when you have Northrop, Amazon, Lockheed, Capital One and then a variety of other large employers all wanting to see certain skills for students that they are going to be hiring this is something that is allowing us to be saying, 'Alright, how can we show these employers that in fact the skills that they are identifying, the knowledge, skills, and abilities that they want to see in students, are ones that these students actually have,'" said Sues.

Using an intentional mapping structure of outcomes aligned to employability skills, co-curricular engagement complements and even augments, coursework. The university can verify mastery of skills, link them to competencies, and issue micro-credentials such as digital badges that students can share with employers and digitally display on CLR. For institutions like UMBC to have a mechanism to support co-curricular learning as self-paced non-credit as well as in-class learning—and fuse those learning outcomes—is equally critical. CLR transparently unpacks the skills behind the credential for both the student and the employer.

"And thinking about some of the programs where it's K-12, community college, university; because we know with our Montgomery County partners, they have some programs that start in 10th grade where students are going to go into certain areas while they're in high school, they are also taking courses at the community college, they graduate from high school, they may already have 30 credits in the community college, they go Montgomery County Community College and then to UMBC; how we structure a plan to be tracking all this, and how we are informing the students to optimize their pathway through these three institutions is a really interesting problem that something like the Comprehensive Learner Record can really be helpful in," said Sues.

But getting to this end game is a shift for universities. Pivoting to a structure where CLR holds all of the students' learning across experiences before they enter the university (prior learning), during their learning journey, and after program completion (lifelong learning), one has to engage the keepers of these experiences. This is where an intentional approach to engaging these stakeholders is essential.

Dr. Susan Donat, director of curriculum and assistant director of assessment at Messiah College in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, uses the *Model of Leadership for Sustained Change*, reaping momentum from current successes and using it to ignite new initiatives that include pragmatic co-curricular assessment for learning.

Donat believes that her biggest successes in moving CLR forward on her campus is through igniting

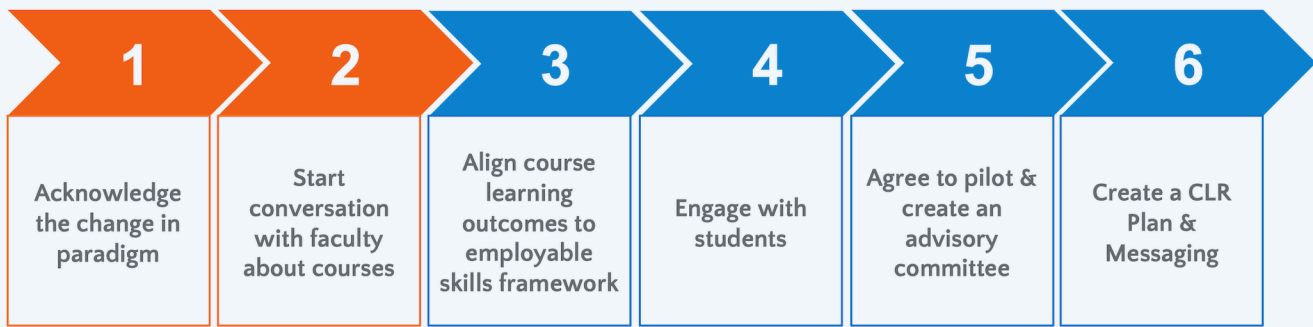
"Our biggest challenge is that it is a change in paradigm; it is a change in process. People are used to just having a flat transcript, and we are asking them to conceive of a different way to articulate what students can know and do. People are almost on board because they see the value of something like a LinkedIn, but it is more than that. We want to be able to certify the learning."

—**Susan Donat, Ph.D.**, Assistant Director of Curriculum and Assessment, Messiah College

conversations with faculty and staff and leveraging the momentum of using an assessment platform system where the campus has been able to not only visualize the data but analyzes the data more richly than ever before.

"We are able to identify first of all what matters most to our faculty and what matters most from the distinctiveness of their programs that might not be captured on an existing transcript, and that's a new avenue of thought."

CLR Best Practice Continuum



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—**Sherri Braxton, Sc.D.**, Senior Director of Instructional Technology, University of Maryland Baltimore County

Even though further along in maturity of its co-curricular assessment structure, UMBC’s Braxton believes that it is those conversations that are enabling the CLR initiative to take root. “This is a very new idea; people are just starting to understand badges on some campuses, and now we are talking CLR and pathways, there’s got to be a real education and awareness program that goes along with these initiatives, so people understand the how, the why the so what. What’s in it for students, what’s in it for the institution, what’s in it for employers, and that will get buy-in as you go through the process.”

The **Comprehensive Learner Record** standard, being developed by some of the most innovative leaders in K-12, higher education, and educational technology, is helping to make this 21st-century transcript a reality. The defined standard will include interoperability and access to artifacts of learning. This tells the whole story of a learner’s journey of acquiring knowledge, skills, and abilities aligned to future employment. These verifiable records are explicitly displayed on the CLR with the potential to be available on mobile and—with a click of a button—posted prominently on job sites and social media

such as LinkedIn. This structured method of documenting the learning journey will also pave the path towards more effective and Artificial Intelligence-based applications where jobs and opportunities will find learners, not the other way around.

As a next step, institutions need to decide when and how CLR can be implemented and who will be the change agents leading the way. Registrars and student life seem to be natural spaces, but programs that offer experiential learning such as business, health professions, media arts, and education programs are equally primed to lead CLR on their campuses.

Educational technology that is nimble enough to provide the end-to-end process of CLR across multiple avenues of learning must be firmly engaged in the collaborative process across higher education. Working in tandem with universities and colleges, edtech vendors can serve as partners in helping to move CLR forward.



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