
Student Transformative Learning Record (STLR): Displaying Student Success and Work-Readiness

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Abstract

University of Central Oklahoma's Student Transformative Learning Record (STLR) leverages the LMS to assess coursework and co-curricular, informal learning experiences beyond an A-F grade. Students build their STLR Snapshot to show growth in five core employability soft-skill areas and display them in a streamlined way to back up their resume.

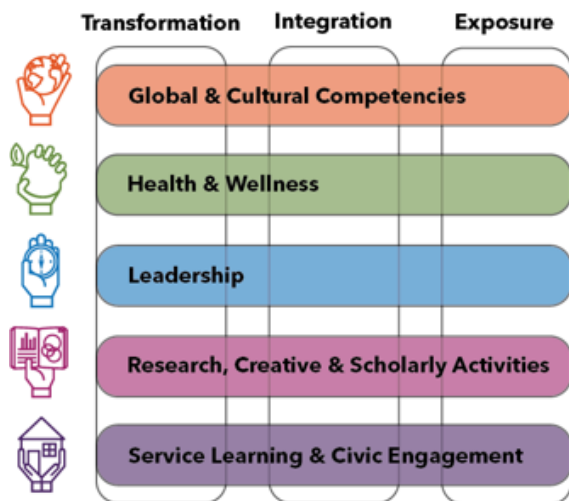
What is the Student Transformative Learning Record?

The Student Transformative Learning Record (STLR) is a concept, process, assessment method, and student tool displaying career-readiness developed by the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO)--a regional, yet metropolitan located, teaching-focused institution of approximately 16,000 students, located in Edmond, Oklahoma (suburb of Oklahoma City). Transformative Learning (TL) itself is a holistic student development learning theory coined in 1978 by Jack Mezirow of Columbia Teacher's College. UCO applied TL as university-wide framework to track how a student develops through their time at the university as they move towards becoming a successful, independent, work-ready graduate (or continues on to graduate school) (Mezirow, et. al., 2000; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). Setting a UCO specific definition of Transformative Learning was critical to creating a campus-wide standard to measure students' growth. At UCO (2015), Transformative Learning:

- develops beyond-disciplinary skills
- expands students' perspectives of their relationship with self, others, community, and environment.

In other words, students need to develop skills and values beyond just their expertise in a major field of study (e.g. chemistry, modern languages, teacher education, etc.) in order to be successful in the real world. Students need to be prepared to: understand their own motivations and goals; how to relate and work with others; see themselves as part of a larger group around them (within an organization, those living near them, and beyond their own demographic and personal background of experiences); and their role in the environment surrounding them (sustainability questions of the world of which they inhabit/affect, emotional/psychological/healthy organizational eco-systems, or other factors within a broad application of the term).

Historically, American universities only track and record growth in general education and a specific discipline on the academic transcript. While a traditional academic transcript reveals students' transformation in Discipline Knowledge, STLR captures students' exposure to and growth in five other areas of UCO's Central Six Tenets that address the skills/values needed to be successful (University of Central Oklahoma, 2019).



UCO Central 6 Tenets of Transformative Learning

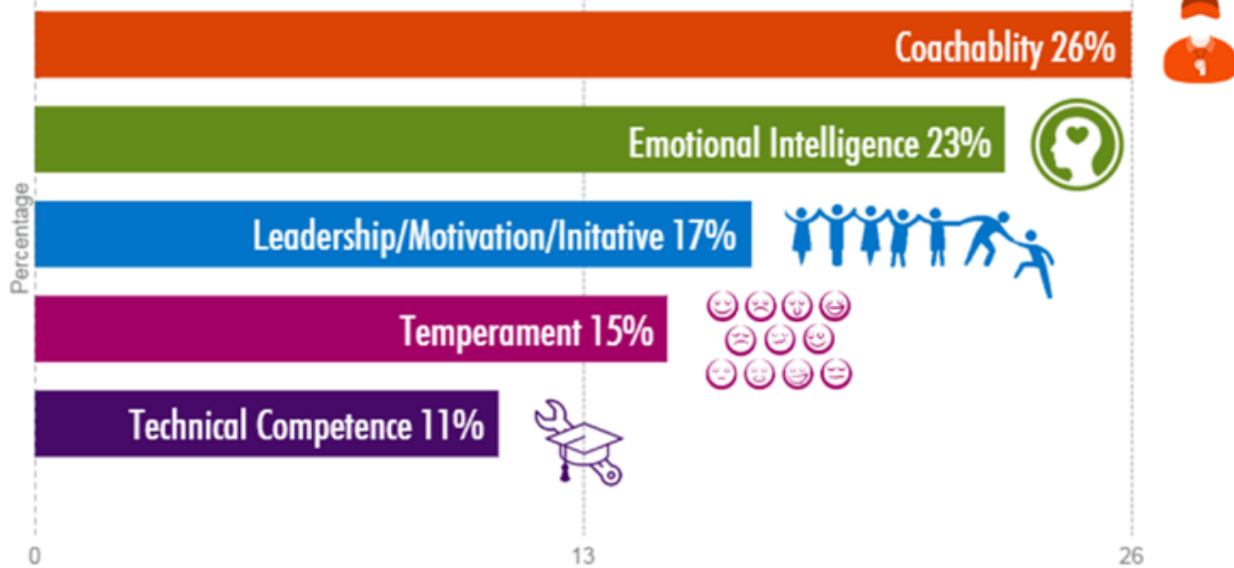
To measure student perspective-expansions, the STLR program trains UCO faculty and staff in TL theory and the use of a campus-wide STLR rubric. Inspired by the American Association of Colleges and Universities' (AAC&U, 2013) V.A.L.U.E. (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) rubrics, the STLR rubric was developed by a group of about twenty UCO faculty across disciplines and assessment professionals with student learning outcomes linked back to the V.A.L.U.E rubrics. The STLR rubric assesses if the student was only exposed to the tenet, are they integrating tenet knowledge to other situations, or is the student now embodying the tenet in their life with evidence of transformation in behavior, speech, ability, or identity. Upon graduation, students who have achieved a level of "Transformation" in one or more tenets receive graduation cords in the associated tenet color. The STLR rubric is UCO's way of measuring and recording students' Transformative Learning growth across these five tenets expressly and concisely in the way employers want.

Employers at the local level through the UCO STLR advisory board (University of Central Oklahoma, 2015-2019) and across the nation say they do not use the information from traditional academic transcripts to decide who to hire, they primarily rely on reviewing resumes. The employer's Human Resources or hiring department may review the academic transcript to verify a student did in fact graduate and with the required credentials for the field or job, but the hiring manager often will not even look at it when choosing who to interview. Employers say they cannot tell from an academic transcript that for example, even if a student took and did well in an international management class, that it translates to being skilled in working with people from varying backgrounds or accurately demonstrates leadership characteristics. Employers say they have many candidates with required qualifications (completed degrees) in their respective fields, but are looking for new hires who have beyond-discipline specific skills (NACE 2016, 2018; Hora for NACE, 2017; Soffel, 2016).

What Employers Want Beyond the Transcript

In a study by Hart Research Associates for the American Association of College and Universities, the top five areas causing new hires not to succeed (not fired in every case; not performing as desired) were, in order and by percentage: 1. Coachability (26%): the ability to accept and implement feedback from bosses, colleagues, customers and others; 2. Emotional Intelligence (23%): the ability to understand and manage one's own emotions, accurately assess others' emotions, and work with others accordingly; 3. Leadership/Initiative/Motivation (17%): sufficient drive to achieve ones full potential, excel in the job, and take initiative with or without being asked; 4. Temperament (15%): attitude and personality suited to the particular job and work environment; and 5. Technical Competence (11%): functional or technical skills required to do the job (Hart Research Associates for AAC&U, 2014; Murphy, 2015).

TOP 5 REASONS NEW HIRES FAIL



(AAC&U, 2013; Leadership IQ, 2015)
<http://bit.ly/1VZv1RE>



In order to better prepare students, give students a tool they can use to stand out among other graduates, ensure UCO is tracking and measuring outcomes for accreditation associated with the University's mission framework of Transformative Learning, the STLR program launched in 2015. Initially, students tracked their STLR progress on a custom digital dashboard built in the learning management system (LMS). To see an example of the initial dashboard, see author's (Kilbourne, now Farrell) 2017 DLA published conference proceedings paper (p. 123). Starting in November 2017, students could access, organize, and print an un-official PDF copy of their STLR progress in a tool called the STLR Snapshot seen below. As of September 2018, students can request an official copy through the university's Parchment transcript request portal (Parchment, 2019).

STLR Snapshot Tool

UCO Student Transformative Learning Record (printable PDF) Snapshot example (2019) showing credit earned in three of five possible STLR tenets (see paper's first page for list of all five areas):

In 2015, UCO was asked to be part of the pilot cohort. Based on recommendations from Lumina, NASPA, AACROA, and UCO STLR leadership, students can customize and choose what STLR achievements to show or not disclose. The recommendation of allowing students to choose or not choose to disclose certain achievements is rooted in two main aspects: 1. intentionality for the STLR Snapshot to be asset-based and student motivational rather than deficit based and 2. to protect students from potential discrimination.

First, the document is intended to be asset-based by showing students' strengths and growths. The tool was not intended to negatively portray a student as does a deficit model such as the A-F grading scale on the academic transcript. For example, if the student did not achieve credits in an area, particularly in early stages of STLR, where opportunities were not as widespread, it could be perceived as if the student is low achieving. Yet in actuality, any achievements for UCO students have done more than what is required. Students who have any STLR credits are going above and beyond, seeking opportunities to differentiate themselves compared to what is required of most graduates of any institution. At UCO, STLR participation or non-participation is not a graduation requirement and therefore driven by student personal motivation to achieve more or less credits. The A-F grading scale and traditional academic transcript perpetuate the idea that only students who achieved the highest marks are the best candidates for jobs. Employers, overwhelmingly disagree and believe transcript grades alone are not an accurate representation of a successful employee. However, the negative, deficit focus of the academic transcript negatively impacts students' core belief of their capability to complete college and succeed, serving as more of a de-motivator of student success than a motivation that celebrates their success.

Second, certain areas of students' achievements such as within Global and Cultural Competencies could cause students to become victims of illegal, but possible hiring or placement discrimination. For example, if a student was an officer in the LGBTQIA+ student chapter, they may not wish an achievement related shown because it might "out" them to parents/guardians, hiring organizations, or other groups where they are not comfortable sharing such information. Or, if a student was particularly active in student government and demonstrated leadership through activism related to a particular end of the political spectrum, such information could be seen negatively by opposite party affiliates.

The Lumina NASPA AARAOA project provided multiple sessions to meet with the twelve-institutions from across the U.S. between July 2015 and December 2016, on-campus site visits from NASPA and AACRAO consultants mentioned above, and attendance at a Lumina Foundation convening to introduce the new comprehensive student record models in November 2016. The project institutions selected were chosen based on special attention to those that served non-traditional students, adult learners, residential students, commuters, under-represented groups, veterans, under-prepared, and highly selective students. Other institutions included were: Borough of Manhattan Community College of New York, NY; Brandman University of Irvine, CA; Dillard University of New Orleans, LA; Elon University of Elon, NC; Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) of Indianapolis, IN; LaGuardia Community College of Long Island City, NY; Stanford University of Palo Alto, CA; University of Houston Downtown of Houston, TX; University of Maryland University College of College Park, MD; University of South Carolina of Columbia, SC; and the University of Wisconsin Extension and Wisconsin Colleges of Madison, WI and all extension campuses (Lumina, 2019).

STLR Assessment Rubric

Beginning in summer 2015, all faculty teaching a first-year success course, student affairs programming staff, and a group of faculty from a prior smaller pilot completed training by the author (around 125 individuals total) to incorporate the STLR rubric to measure students' achievements in one or more of the five tenets shown on the first page of this paper. As of the end of February 2019, approximately 665 faculty from all colleges and staff have been trained by the STLR staff (now three assistant directors) to implement and assess for STLR.

STLR-trained faculty and staff assess students in a rubric tool in the LMS. The official UCO STLR Rubric (the same rubric is used across any STLR experience) utilizes the competency structure tool in the LMS with a customization for UCO that allows the dome, overall university course structure to track achievements across any course shell within the entire system. Usually this capability only is tracked within a particular course, program, or college. To do so across any area of the University, in both curricular and co-curricular experiences, is unique to the UCO STLR program. In co-curricular settings, faculty and staff request a LMS course shell to be set up for student organization groups, out-of-class independent projects (research or otherwise), on-campus internships, campus events, etc. The faculty or staff overseeing the co-curricular activity enrolls the students involved into the course shell, has students submit a learning reflection artifact, and assesses the students using the STLR Rubric in the course shell. For curricular course shells, the faculty assess an assignment aligning with the STLR tenets using the STLR rubric tool in addition to any academic transcript related grade assigned. Faculty can assess with the STLR Rubric and their own separate grading rubric in the same assignment submission space. The LMS grading screen can handle multiple rubrics for the same submission. If they are not using a grading rubric, they can assess with the STLR rubric and put in their numerical points grade in the corresponding field of the assignment space. For STLR, faculty and staff are asked to provide formative feedback to the student in the rubric tool on why the student received a particular STLR level. See a screenshot example below (UCO, 2019):



Conclusion

To respond to growing employer demand, students at the University of Central Oklahoma, through the Student Transformative Learning Record (STLR) program build beyond-discipline specific employability skills and showcase them to employers on the STLR Snapshot, an official document backed by the university. The tool helps them keep track along the way of what to include on their resumes. Students can attach their unofficial or official STLR Snapshot PDF with their resume or cover letter to apply for job, provide in supporting documents with a graduate school application, or upload to their own e-portfolio. Overall, UCO STLR graduates quickly show employers how they are prepared and ready to succeed in any job. For more information on STLR, visit stlr.uco.edu.

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