



## CASE STUDY:

# A college transcript that tells the whole story

Elon University uses experiential data to propel students to success

For most students, success after graduation depends on their ability to show an employer that the knowledge and skills they learned in college make them the best fit for the job. But before they get an interview, how do graduates show a complete picture of their college experience in a one- or two-page academic transcript?

When employers review the co-curricular transcript of a recent graduate from Elon University in North Carolina, they see a digital, interactive document, called the Elon Experiences Transcript (EET) that comprises a carefully articulated, comprehensive account of the skills learned through coursework, service and global education experiences, and focused interests meticulously tracked across an integrated student information system. It gives the employer a clearer picture of what the applicant accomplished in his or her four years of college.

“Our primary purpose is to create a student-centered culture that prepares all learners with the ability to transition directly to the workforce,” says Rodney Parks, University Registrar at Elon. “We’re not just providing the



**ELON**  
UNIVERSITY

A private, 4-year liberal arts institution based in Elon, North Carolina, serving approximately 6,700 enrolled students.

### Challenge

Elon sought to modernize its student transcript service and needed a way to collect, integrate, and interpret a massive amount of data.

### Result

Intent on helping to increase student retention, engagement, and success after graduation, by providing students an innovative electronic transcript that stands out from the crowd, Elon now has a trove of highly detailed student data—stored in Colleague® by Ellucian—that’s unlocking breakthrough insights and analytics for the benefit of students, faculty, and administrators.

skills, but the ability for students to embrace the idea that they're ready to take that next step and transition beyond Elon."

Elon University boasts some of the nation's top rates of first-year student retention and four-year graduation, at 89% and 81%, respectively. Since 1994, Elon has implemented what's called a co-curricular transcript, which is different from a traditional transcript in how it accounts for a truly complete picture of the knowledge, skills, and accomplishments of each student, focusing on skills learned through formative experiences.

In the last three years, that co-curricular transcript evolved into the Elon Experiences Transcript (EET), which is tightly tied to student data tracked in Elon's highly integrated student information system, Colleague® by Ellucian. From the beginning of their time at Elon, students work closely with advisers and faculty members to develop their transcripts. The work students do in class projects, in every volunteer or service experience, is measured and expressed as professional, competency-based skills. From day one, students are pushed to think strategically about their degree goals and familiarize themselves with how their educations translate to measurable, valuable skill competencies.

Students can also use the system to embed into the body of the transcript their published papers, project or presentation files (such as videos, images, or slides), and even the logos of the organizations they worked or volunteered for. And as the transcript system continues to evolve, Elon has also begun working with employers to help define job requirements and develop job descriptions that match the skills offered in degree programs.

"The technology we've implemented further enhances and deepens the cumulative learning experience of college," says Parks. "These transcripts paint the student very differently than traditional transcripts."

For years, institutions have tried to teach students to curate learning portfolios in a way that articulates their learning and experience the way the EET does. But it's time-consuming for a student to do all the legwork, and they're not the experts in learning outcomes that faculty members and administrators are. A truly student success-focused institution is one that can, and should, track and translate learning outcomes for the student, and do everything possible to make sure students are aware of those outcomes.

"We're getting a historically immense amount of data, all contained in Colleague. The system gets better by the day as new data is constantly being imported."

**RODNEY PARKS**, University Registrar, Elon University



“The experiences transcript highlights my ability to take what I learned in the classroom and apply it,” says Stephanie Ntim, a junior at Elon.

Or as Parks puts it, the EET helps students tell their stories.

## With a trove of student data, powerful analytics emerge at Elon

“Over time, Elon has deepened its experiential learning requirements for all students,” says Parks. “We want to develop comprehensive students who aren’t just reading and then taking tests, but who have to learn and demonstrate measurable, competency-based skills in everything they do. All faculty and advisers are trained in this kind of curriculum development, and it all comes out as data inputs for the system.”

Since Elon stores all student data for transcripts in one place, that same system enables reporting and analytics for academic program development. That helps administrators improve degree programs and courses by offering the skills and requirements students need. It also allows them to drill down to degree-path experiences by demographic. Using never-before-seen models for measuring student success, they’ve been able to see, for example, that a higher number of co-curricular experiences for minority students correlates to substantially higher GPA.

The deans’ offices can mine the system to see, for example, just how crucial it is for first-generation minority students to have leadership development opportunities, or to see which faculty members and advisers foster the most engaged students and the highest retention rates.

“Those metrics are giving us a historically immense amount of data,” says Parks, “all contained in Colleague. The system gets better by the day as new data is constantly being imported.”

As Parks emphasizes, there’s buy-in and transparency to this culture at every level of the institution. Faculty members understand that the data can help them teach more complete courses and be better teachers. Leadership knows that analytics can help them improve performance within departments and schools, and design better end-to-end experiences for every type of student. And everyone from faculty members to administrators to IT staff is empowered to experiment and innovate with new solutions.

“It’s no longer a shot in the dark when someone wants to implement something new based on a new learning method or new administrative practice,” says Parks.



“Because we’ll see measurable results, we’ll know when something’s working or when it’s not—and we can do a better job knowing when we need to try something new.”

You’re starting to see big flagship schools take on these practices,” says Parks, who estimates he received around 80 phone calls in 2017 from other institutions—public and private, large and small—looking for guidance on how to implement their own versions of experiential transcripts.

Of course, every institution needs to adapt to this model in their own way. Elon has a unique culture with unique students, as does every institution. Schools wishing to implement the student-centered innovations at Elon have to adapt them to the tools and culture they have, or that they need.

Today, higher education is more focused on students being successful in the workforce than ever before. And funding is increasingly tied to competency- or outcomes-based academic programming. Those are industry-wide shifts that are starting to speed up.

“For all of us to be this student-centered in higher education, to drive down costs and make our students successful in the workforce,” says Parks, “we need to start moving faster, take on innovations like these, and stop acting like it’s 1950.”



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**STEPHANIE NTIM**, Student



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