# Chapter 12
# What's Missing From the College Transcript?
## How Employers Make Sense of Student Skills

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## ABSTRACT

*This chapter describes a qualitative study of how organizations use information to evaluate and hire graduating students into entry-level positions from one pre-professional undergraduate program. The study investigates how campus recruiters and hiring managers make sense of student job applicants' cognitive, non-cognitive, and technical abilities from data presented in résumés, academic transcripts, and through various interview techniques. The findings provide insight into the opportunities and challenges to incorporating alternative representations of learning—Comprehensive Learner Records—into the recruitment and hiring process. The findings also reveal how information about learning and learners is used to establish pipelines for recruiting and hiring recent college graduates. The study informs the design of future assessment and credentialing infrastructures, with the goal of expanding how "learning" is measured, defined, and represented in higher education to enhance diversity, equity, and opportunity for learners.*

## INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most common use of a college degree is to gain access to employment, but as a credential, what information does the college degree convey, what is the value of this information for employers during the hiring process, and how might introducing new sources of information into the hiring process benefit students and employers alike? In the U.S. education system, the standard information provided to potential employers by students about their college degree programs is a grade point average (GPA), courses taken, and academic major (the specific degree earned), all information that can be verified through a transcript and the National Student Clearinghouse. In this way, the college degree asserts that a student has spent the required amount of time in a specified set of courses or other learning experiences at an accredited higher education institution and performed at an acceptable level throughout. This chapter reports on a study that explores how employers make sense of this standardized information about student academic performance, and what role it plays in decisions about hiring students, if at all. We explore the characteristics employers seek in job candidates and whether or not those characteristics are represented by GPAs or transcripts (they are generally not), and we consider the opportunities and challenges presented by one example of Comprehensive Learner Records (CLRs), a type of innovative transcript envisioned by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators with support from the Lumina Foundation, that provide richer and more varied information than the standard GPA and course listings. A goal of the work discussed in this chapter is to promote equity in the credentialing of learning through systems that allow for representations of learners' abilities and accomplishments that go beyond what is currently captured through the college degree, transcript, and GPA. To frame this study, we begin with a discussion of issues related to traditional transcripts and the challenges associated with innovating assessment systems.

## The Problematic Nature of a Credential Based Only on Grades and Course Credit Hours

The traditional metrics for determining when any particular student has earned a college credential is problematic, producing only limited information about any particular student. Traditionally, all that can be discerned from the fact that someone holds a degree is that they completed a specified course sequence at an acceptable level of quality (typically a minimum performance level in each required course) and completed a specified number of credit hours. Not surprisingly, employers end up not looking closely at transcripts, because they don't necessarily provide much differentiating information between students. Much of the differentiation occurs at the time of admission; simply getting into a college or university often does more to establish the qualifications of graduates than any value added during the college experience (Arum & Roska, 2011).

From the employer's perspective, traditional college records actually reduce information about learners. Imagine two students, one who excels at computing, and another at writing. The first student got an A in a coding class, and a C in a humanities class. The second student's performance was the reverse. But both have a GPA of 3.0 based on these two courses. The transcript would reveal these differences, but only if the employer looks closely. And many don't; according to our university's registrar, requests for transcripts have declined precipitously in the last decade. Additionally, wide variation between both disciplinary and institutional assessment practices, and grade inflation in general, challenge the idea that

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