Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)
October 17, 2008
Non-traditional No More:
Policy Solutions for Adult Learners
State Leaders Meeting
Denver, Colorado

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Earn College Credit for What you Know. (CAEL Publication)
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Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)

A term used by colleges and universities to describe the process of earning college credit, certification or advanced standing, from learning acquired through a student’s work, training, volunteer experiences, and personal life” (Colvin, 2006, p. 192).
PLA Purposes for Ready Adults

**Supporting**
- Supports degree completion
- Saves money
- Provides validation for training, certifications
- Allows students to spend time on new learning and residency requirements

**Shaping**
- Supports experiential learning or *learning how to learn from experience*
- Shapes ability to re-learn and re-interpret experience
- Provides advising-education/career
PLA Methods

**National/Local Exams**
- AP
- CLEP
- DSST
- Excelsior
- College’s Challenge
- Exams (Customized)

**Credit for Training Certifications**
- ACE
- Military

**Experiential Learning Assessments “Portfolio”**

**Common Features:**
- Credit bearing preparation courses
- Submission of narratives, documents and evidence of learning
- Assessment by trained faculty
- Cost for assessment, not credit awarded.
- Recorded on official transcript.
66% Colleges Surveyed offer Experiential Learning/Portfolio Method
(2006 CAEL Survey- 272 colleges)
Ready Adults: Advising is “Key”

- Robert
  Transfer+Portfolio Assessments
  +National Testing
  +Challenge Exam

- Linda
  Transfer+ACE+
  Portfolio Assessment
PLA Advising Location-
57% Registrar’s Office
(2006 CAEL report)
Recommendations for Ready Adults

1. There are standards for earning credit for college-level learning (“no guarantees”).
2. Limitations on Number/Type of Credit-Not Always Transferable
3. First, must be admitted. Second, receive academic advising to check for duplication and strategize options for earning credit.

Institutions: Reasonable Policies for Ready Adults

1. Allow academic amnesty policies (previous “F’s don’t transfer or figure into GPA)
2. Fine-tune Prior Learning Assessment policies according to CAEL and Regional Accreditation Standards (see Resources).
3. Inform advisors from all levels of the institution.


Pennsylvania Policy:
* http://www.paworkforce.state.pa.us/about/lib/about/pdf/skilled_workforce_budget_support/pennsylvania_pla_report_from_cael.pdf

National standardized exams
- *www.collegeboard.com*
- *www.getcollegecredit.com*
- *www.excelsor.edu*

ACE
*www.acenet.edu/nationalguide*

CAEL (offer Online PLA training)
*www.cael.org*

CAEL Partner Sites (Janet Colvin “Contact Us” person)
*www.nactel.org* (Telecom)
*www.epceonline.org* (Energy)

CHEA web site: see Degree Mills/Accreditation Mills
*http://www.chea.org/
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Legitimate Practices vs Diploma Mills</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Students</strong> earn credit for learning that is validated.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. Credit awarded for learning that is the equivalent of college-level.</strong></td>
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<td>*<em>3. Restrictions on <em>/type/level.</em></em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4. Assessors trained subject matter-experts and assessment experts.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1. Students</strong> buy credit for ‘resume’ review.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. Credits awarded for “lifetime” experience at any level.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3. No restrictions.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>4. Credits assigned by marketers.</strong></td>
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1. Credit or its equivalent should be awarded only for learning, and not for experience.

2. Assessment should be based on standards and criteria for the level of acceptable learning that are both agreed upon and made public.

3. Assessment should be treated as an integral part of learning, not separate from it, and should be based on an understanding of learning processes.

4. The determination of credit awards and competence levels must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic or credentialing experts.

5. Credit or other credentialing should be appropriate to the context in which it is awarded and accepted. (con’t)
6. If awards are for credit, transcript entries should clearly describe what learning is being recognized and should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.

7. Policies, procedures, and criteria applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available to all parties involved in the assessment process.

8. Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.

9. All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions they perform.

10. Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served, the purposes being met, and the state of the assessment arts.
Middle States Association Commission (Regional Accrediting Body) PLA Standards (15 total)

1. Make clear basic principles and values held by the institution regarding credit for prior learning.

2. Provide explicit guidelines as to what is considered college-level learning.

3. Make clear that credit can be awarded only for demonstrated college-level learning.

4. Specify, as clearly and unambiguously as possible, the standards of acceptable performance in each academic area.
5. Specify what form the claim for credit should take, e.g. course equivalent, competency list.

6. Insure that evaluation of learning is undertaken by appropriately qualified persons.

7. Indicate the appropriate form such as semester hours, course units, etc; the evaluator’s credit recommendation should take.

8. Specify which degree requirements may be met by prior learning.
9. Specify how credit for prior learning is recorded.

10. Define and articulate roles and responsibilities of all persons connected with the assessment process.

11. Develop procedures to monitor and assure fair and consistent treatment of students.

12. Develop clearly stated assessment policies and descriptive information for students, faculty, administrators, and external resources.

13. Include provisions for periodic re-evaluation of policies and procedures for assessing learning and awarding credit.

14. Advise students that the institution cannot guarantee the transferability of prior learning credits to another institution.

15. Develop evaluation procedures of overall prior learning assessment program to ensure quality.
Academic Amnesty - A Reasonable Second Chance for Ready Adults

Policies that allow students to transfer *passing* grades/course work and *not* transfer failing grades. No credit is given for failing grades; subsequently, students are not ‘punished’ by a lowered grade point average (GPA).

- Used for admitted students.
- May have restrictions (e.g. a gap in years)
- Private and For-Profit Institutions frequently use these policies (Transfer “C-” or better credit only)