An Introduction to CAEL’s Virtual Prior Learning Assessment Center

WICHE
Non-traditional No More
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Adult Learning: A National Priority

- Great and growing need for the nation’s workforce to acquire more postsecondary credentials to compete

- Many emphasizing the importance of greater **success** and **persistence** among college enrollees:
  - President Obama
  - Lumina Foundation for Education
  - Individual States
Adult Learning: A National Priority

- 9 states are ‘on track’ to meet the competitive benchmark of 55% of adults with college degrees by 2025
- 9 more states could meet the benchmark if they improved performance to match the best-performing states
- 32 states unable to meet the benchmark, even if they match the best state performance with traditional college-age students at each stage of the educational pipeline
The U.S. Skills Gap

Report Released June, 2010 by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce:

• U.S. “on a collision course with the future”
• By 2018, our economy will have jobs for 22 million with college degrees, but a shortage of nearly 8 million
• By 2018, 63% of jobs will require postsecondary training
Main sources will have to be tapped to rectify this shortfall:

- Adults (25-64) who never completed high school – 21 million
- Adults with high school diplomas but no college—46 million
- Adults with some college but no degree—32 million
Factors Affecting Adult Participation

Affordability

Accessibility

Aspiration
How Can PLA Help?

What Is PLA?

The evaluation for college credit of the knowledge and skills one gains from life experiences (or from non-college instructional programs) including:

- employment
- travel
- hobbies
- civic activities
- volunteer service
- military service
How Can PLA Help?

PLA Methods

- Standardized exams
  - Advanced Placement (AP)
  - College Level Examination Program (CLEP)
  - Excelsior College Exams
  - DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSST)
- Challenge exams
- Evaluation of non-college training (e.g. corporate or military)
- Individual student portfolios
Why PLA?

- A College Board study of 1500 adults rated “credit for prior learning policy” as more important than “small class size” or “availability of financial aid.”

- A KY telephone survey indicated that the opportunity to earn credit for prior learning is one of 3 motivators for adults with some college but no degree.
How Can PLA Help?

CAEL Study of PLA and Student Outcomes

- Just-completed, 48-institution study of PLA and academic outcomes (funded by Lumina Foundation)

- 62,475 total adult students in our sample (adult = age 25 or older)

- Increased Graduation Rates, Greater Persistence, and Shorter Time to Degree
How Can PLA Help?

▷ Effect on Graduation Rates

![Bar chart showing the effect of PLA on graduation rates](chart.png)

- Did not earn degree or credential: 78% (46,881) vs. 44% (15,594)
- Earned Bachelor's Degree: 0% vs. 13%
- Earned Associate's Degree: 1% vs. 6%
- Other: 15% vs. 1%
Credit Accumulation, No Degree Earners

- Earned fewer than 10% of credits for degree: 1%
- Earned 10-19% of credits needed: 12%
- Earned 20-39% of credits needed: 16%
- Earned 40-59% of credits needed: 13%
- Earned 60-79% of credits needed: 18%
- Earned 80% or more of credits needed: 22%

Did not earn PLA credit (n=23,101)
Did earn PLA credit (n=1,800)
Persistence – Number of Credit-Earning Years

Did not earn PLA credit (n=34,056)

Did earn PLA credit (n=2,625)

Number of Years in Which Credit Was Earned (May Be Non-Consecutive)
PLA students earning bachelor’s degrees saved an average of between 2.5 and 10.1 months of time.

PLA students earning associate’s degrees saved an average of between 1.5 and 4.5 months of time.
Need for More PLA

- Other CAEL research, completed in 2006, indicated that only 66% of higher education institutions offered the portfolio method of assessing experiential learning.

- Many institutions that do have a policy for assessing portfolios serve very few students annually.
PLA for Community Colleges

Spring, 2010 CAEL study of community colleges shows a need for PLA.

- 88 respondents from two-year institutions are included in results
- Additional phone interviews with 15 of those respondents
Sample question: Do you have younger adults who come to your institution with some technical training that they have learned on the job?

- I don’t know: 7%
- No: 2%
- Yes, probably: 39%
- Yes, definitely: 52%
Sample questions: If you could evaluate this prior learning from technical training and tie it to courses, could there be greater use of PLA at your institution?

- I don’t know: 9%
- No, probably not: 7%
- My institution already does this: 38%
- Yes, definitely: 14%
- Yes, possibly: 32%
Scaling Up the Use of PLA

CAEL Virtual PLA Center

- Developed with a planning grant from Lumina Foundation for Education
- ACE and College Board partnering on project
- CAEL will draw upon faculty experts nationwide for teaching portfolio development course and reviewing adult students’ portfolios
The Pilot Phase

With funding from Lumina Foundation for Education, the Kresge Foundation, and the Joyce Foundation, CAEL has begun the two-year pilot phase of the Virtual PLA Center project.
CAEL’s PLA Center

The Center will:

• Use on-line platform

• Help students earn all forms of PLA credit

• Offer basic on-line advising

• Offer an on-line PLA course

• Assign portfolios to faculty evaluators, who have been trained by CAEL
CAEL’s PLA Center

- Credit recommendations from the Center’s faculty experts will be sent on ACE transcript to colleges, as ACE already does today with military and corporate training.
Whom Will It Serve?

- Individuals already enrolled in community colleges or four-year institutions
  
  • Provide support for postsecondary institutions that have no existing PLA programs
  
  • Augment existing PLA programs at some postsecondary institutions
Whom Will It Serve?

- **Unaffiliated individuals** not yet in college or having started but never finished college
  - Active duty military and veterans
    - Document and certify skills from their military careers
  - Workers in transition or lower-income workers
    - Workforce Investment Boards might send workers to document skills from previous jobs and have that learning evaluated by faculty
Whom Will It Serve?

▷ Employers and industry groups

- To pursue the further credentialing of their employees
- To document learning that has already been completed and identify skills gaps
Why Colleges Are Interested

▷ Lack of a PLA program at their institution
▷ Existing program cannot keep up with high volume of portfolio submissions
▷ Lack of personnel to adequately staff their PLA program
▷ Lack of credentialed faculty to review submitted portfolios in certain fields
▷ Interest in streamlining their process through increased capacity and speed
▷ Reliance on CAEL’s Center as an interim resource while the institution prepares to launch or expand its own PLA program on campus
Pilot Institutions

▷ CAEL is seeking involvement from two- and four-year institutions for pilot launch of the PLA Center

▷ CAEL has already received letters of interest from institutions and statewide educational consortia
Criteria for selection of pilot colleges or systems:

- Colleges will agree to treat PLA credit recommendations as they do other transfer credit.
- Colleges will agree to refer five adult students to CAEL each of the two years to participate in the PLA Center process.
- Institutional administrators support the effort.
Questions?

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