

CAEL Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Research Highlights, 2012

PLA and Academic Outcomes

In 2010, with data from 48 postsecondary institutions and more than 62,000 adult learners, CAEL found that students with PLA credit had better academic outcomes, particularly in terms of graduation rates and persistence, than other adult students (Klein-Collins, 2012).

Graduation Rates Higher for Students with PLA Credit. More than half (56%) of PLA students earned a postsecondary degree within seven years, while only 21 percent of non-PLA students did so (Figure 1). PLA students in this study had better graduation rates than non-PLA students:

- regardless of institutional size, level (two-year or four-year) or control (private for-profit, non-profit, or public)
- regardless of the individual student's academic ability or grade point average
- regardless of the individual student's age, gender, or race/ethnicity
- regardless of whether or not the individual student received need-based financial aid

Persistence Better for Students with PLA Credit. Examining the progress of students who did not earn a degree, CAEL found that more than half of all PLA students who had not yet earned a degree by the end of 2008 (56%) had accumulated 80 percent or more of the credits towards a degree over a seven year period; only 22 percent of non-PLA students with no degree had made similar progress towards their degrees. (Klein-Collins, 2010).

Average PLA Credits Earned

In CAEL's 2010 study, we found that students who earned PLA credits earned an average of 17.6 of those credits, the equivalent of more than five 3-credit courses. The subgroup of PLA-earning students who earned bachelor's degrees between the time of their matriculation in 2001 and 2008 had an average of 20.1 PLA credits; those who earned an associate degree during that time period had an average of 10.5 PLA credits (CAEL, 2011, August).

Cost Savings from PLA

The cost savings for students using PLA can be significant. CAEL's 2010 study examined several tuition and PLA fee scenarios and found that an adult student who earns 15 PLA credits can save from a low of around \$1,605 at a large public university to a high of around \$6,000 at other institutions (Klein-Collins, 2010).

Time Savings from PLA

In the 2010 CAEL study, PLA students earning bachelor's degrees saved an average of between 2.5 and 10.1 months of time in earning their degrees, compared to non-PLA students earning degrees. PLA students earning 13-24 PLA credits saved an average of 6.6 months, and those earning 49 or more PLA credits saved an average of 10.1 months.

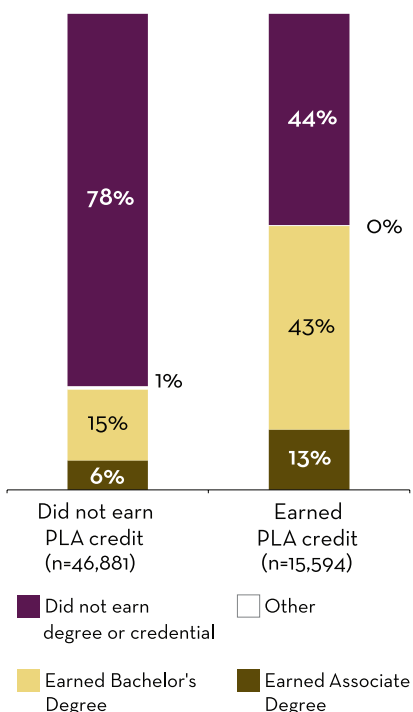
PLA and the Underserved

Among PLA students and non-PLA students identified by race/ethnicity in our study, we found that for each racial/ethnic group, graduation rates for PLA students are higher than non-PLA students. The most dramatic difference was for Hispanic students at the bachelor's degree level; Hispanic PLA students earned bachelor's degrees at a rate that was almost eight times higher than that of Hispanic non-PLA students.

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Figure 1. Degree Completion by PLA Credit-earning for All Students

Source: Klein-Collins, R. (2010). *Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success*. CAEL.





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PLA and Employers

CAEL and Prometric interviewed 19 employers to learn what they knew about PLA and how they viewed its value to their employees, their companies, and their tuition assistance programs:

- The cost savings from PLA were seen by employers as a value both to the company and to its employees, with slightly higher perceived value for the company.
- The time savings that results from PLA was seen by employers as valuable to both the company and to its employees, with slightly higher perceived value for the employees.
- When asked about their internal training programs' potential for college credit, employers in IT, healthcare, and manufacturing said that some of their in-house training did have content that was comparable to what is found in college courses (CAEL & Prometric, 2012, February).

Interest in PLA

In a 2010 CAEL survey of 88 community colleges, respondents saw a lot of potential demand for PLA:

- Over half of the respondents (52%) know that they have student populations who come to their institutions with technical skills and knowledge learned on the job that could be assessed for college-level credit. An additional 39% reported that they probably have students in this category.
- 68% think the institution should be expanding PLA options in the future.
- 72% think they will be seeing increased demand for PLA in the future (Brigham & Klein-Collins, 2010, July).

PLA as Recruitment Strategy

In 2007, the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education contracted with Stamats, a national higher education research and marketing firm, to conduct a telephone survey of 233,000 Kentucky adult residents age 25-40 who have attended a public postsecondary institutions and still reside in the state, but are not currently enrolled in college. Stamats presented a list of college services for adult students and asked if those services would increase their interest in returning to college. The respondents were most interested in credit for prior learning, accelerated academic programming, and financial aid – in that order (Stamats, 2007).

Sources

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