



Kansas Credit for Prior Learning Guidelines

**A Best Practices Guide for Assessing Prior Learning at Public
Postsecondary Institutions**

**Prepared by the Kansas Credit for Prior Learning College Steering Committee
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Introduction

The Kansas Board of Regents is committed to a 10-year strategic agenda for the state's public postsecondary education system. Entitled *Foresight 2020*, the plan sets long-range achievement goals that are measurable, reportable, and ensure the State's postsecondary education system meets Kansans' expectations. The three strategic goals for *Foresight 2020* are:

1. Increase higher education attainment among Kansans
2. Improve alignment of the State's higher education system with the needs of the economy
3. Ensure state university excellence

One means by which to increase the attainment of postsecondary credentials, especially among adult students, is to award postsecondary course credit for demonstrated knowledge and skill equivalent to the learning outcomes established for postsecondary-level courses.

Credit for Prior Learning Purpose Statement

In recognition of the need to evaluate learning which has taken place outside the higher education classroom, the Kansas Board of Regents offers these guidelines to Kansas public universities and community/technical colleges. Each public university and college in Kansas is encouraged to use the guidelines to establish, document, and regularly update policies for evaluating prior learning and awarding appropriate postsecondary credit aligned with its institutional mission. Institutional CPL policies should protect the integrity and credibility of CPL, meet accreditation standards, and be available to students, faculty, and other stakeholders.

Goals of CPL include:

- Supporting *Foresight 2020* to increase the credential attainment rate among Kansans
- Aligning CPL in Kansas with Higher Learning Commission criteria
- Enhancing accessibility, consistency, and transparency of CPL
- Elevating the importance of and encouraging appropriate use of CPL
- Increasing student enrollment through the use of CPL
- Defining measures with which to evaluate the effectiveness of CPL

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I. DEFINITIONS AND FORMS OF CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING

The list below is provided for convenience and to avoid conflicting definitions for CPL terminology. It is not intended to be exhaustive. Kansas institutions may consider adopting these common definitions for their own communications, policies, and internal purposes to simplify and improve the student-user experience.

Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) - A comprehensive term used to describe credit awarded for learning gained outside a traditional postsecondary academic environment. “Prior Learning Assessment” (PLA) is also used to describe CPL. CPL involves the evaluation and assessment of an individual’s learning obtained through activities such as working, participating in employer training programs, serving in the military, studying independently, completing advanced secondary level coursework, studying open source coursework, volunteering or doing community service. CPL may take the form of postsecondary credit, certification, or advanced standing toward further education or training. Postsecondary level credit is the optimal outcome.

- A. **Advanced Placement (AP) Exams** - A series of standardized exams developed by the College Board. College credit is awarded based on exam score. The exams usually follow standardized high school courses generally recognized as being equivalent to undergraduate college courses.
- B. **American Council on Education (ACE) and ACE Guides** - Major coordinating body for higher education institutions in the U.S., providing third party, unbiased credit equivalency recommendations among other services. ACE Guides are credit recommendations for formal instructional programs and examinations offered by non-collegiate agencies (including civilian employers, the military, professional associations, and other workplace related-training).
- C. **Career Pathway** – Organized groupings of rigorous academic and career related courses leading from education to employment, that identify each step, skill, educational requirement and aptitude needed to be successful within any specific career.
- D. **College Level Examination Program (CLEP) Exams** - Tests of college material offered by the College Board and designed to measure college-level competence achieved outside the college classroom. Course credit is given to students earning a satisfactory score on the CLEP exam indicating successful mastery of course outcomes.
- E. **Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)** - Expert in the field of prior learning policy and practice. Publish guidelines for quality – 10 Standards for Assessing Learning (Appendix A).
- F. **Crosswalk** - A diagram illustrating various learning pathways to degree programs.
- G. **Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Educational Support (DANTES) Subject Standardized Tests (DSSTs)** - Examinations available for civilian and military

personnel that allow a student to demonstrate proficiency of college level knowledge and skills.

- H. **Evaluation of Local Training** - Individual colleges' program evaluations of non-collegiate instructional programs.
- I. **Excelsior College Examination Program (ECE)** – Proficiency examinations for college credit (UEXCEL) in select subject areas and programs (ECE) offered by Excelsior College, NY. Formerly known as Regents College Exam or ACT/PEP Exams.
- J. **Institutional Exam or Course Challenge Exams** - An examination for a particular course that an academic program or department may utilize to give students credit for a course. A student will work directly with the individual program or department to learn about the availability and cost of institutional course examinations.
- K. **International Baccalaureate Programs (IB)** - An internationally accepted qualification for entry into institutions of higher education, much like the AP program. It is a demanding two-year curriculum culminating with final examinations. Credits are awarded to students who achieve a minimum score on the exams. Graduates of the IB program must demonstrate competency in languages, social studies, the experimental sciences, and mathematics. In addition, the program includes three core requirements that are included to broaden the educational experience and challenge students to apply their knowledge and understanding. To receive a diploma, students must achieve a minimum score of 24 out of a possible 45 points, as well as satisfactorily complete the creativity, action, and service requirements.
- L. **Learning Counts** - A resource developed by the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) to guide students in preparing a portfolio to demonstrate their lifelong learning and receive a transcript with college credit recommendations.
- M. **Locally Evaluated Industry and Workplace Credit** - Individually evaluated non-collegiate instructional programs, such as those for apprenticeship, certification, professional licensure, and other local workplace training that demonstrate competency required for degree or certificate programs. CPL credit may be awarded based on evaluation by trained faculty in the student's program, awarded based on recommendations in the ACE Guide, and/or awarded as part of a student's portfolio.
 - 1. **Apprenticeship:** Apprenticeship is a combination of on-the-job training and related technical instruction in which workers learn the practical and theoretical aspects of a highly skilled occupation. Apprenticeship programs may be sponsored by individual employers, joint employer and labor groups, and/or employer associations.
 - 2. **Certification:** Certification (usually by a third party industry group) is a designation that is obtained once the student is qualified to perform a particular task or job. Certification differs from licensure in that certification is an

employment qualification and not a legal requirement for practicing a profession.

3. **Professional Licensure:** “Permission to practice” granted by a governmental entity. Licensure is a legal status. Professional licensure restricts practice of the profession to individuals who have met specific qualifications in education, professional experience, and/or have successfully passed an examination.
- N. **National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS)** - Coordinating services based on teams of college faculty evaluators and subject matter experts who conduct extensive reviews of education and training programs offered outside of the traditional college classroom and translate them into college credit equivalencies. Education and training by corporations, unions, religious organizations, and proprietary schools have been evaluated. Cooperating postsecondary institutions grant college credit based on credit recommendations and in accordance with their own transfer policies.
- O. **Portfolio Review Credit (or portfolio assessment credit)** - Credit awarded as a result of review of a portfolio prepared by the student to demonstrate learning acquired outside of the classroom and that is relevant to the student’s educational program. A portfolio may include documentation such as certificates of training, work samples, awards and honors, job descriptions, performance evaluations, samples of work product, evidence of self-directed learning, and resumes to validate equivalent learning outcomes are met. A portfolio course may be offered by the institution to assist the student in preparing a quality portfolio.
- P. **Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)** - See definition of CPL above.
- Q. **Prior Military Training Credit** - College credit for military training awarded through American Council on Education (ACE) College Credit Recommendation Service or through direct evaluation of the student’s military service school transcripts.
- R. **Residency requirement** - An institutional requirement that students earn a specified number of the final credit hours necessary for a degree or certificate from the granting institution. Residence credits may not be earned through test-out, transfer or other CPL means.
- S. **Right Skills Now** - Component of National Association of Manufacturers – Manufacturing Skills Certification System, which includes nationally portable, industry-recognized certifications combined with for-credit education programs. The education pathways are directly aligned to career pathways in manufacturing.
- T. **Thomas Edison State College Examination Program (TECEP)** - Tests for college credit offered by Thomas Edison State College, NJ.

II. ENROLLMENT REQUIREMENTS

CPL should be awarded only for degree seeking students who have enrolled in an institution.

III. NUMBER OF CREDITS AND CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING LIMITS

- A. Institutions should have clear policies outlining the maximum allowable credits for prior learning as a reasonable proportion of the credits required for degree completion. CPL policies should align with the Higher Learning Commission criteria and consider maximum CPL awards within degree requirements.
- B. In establishing maximum allowable credits, institutions should maintain structures and practices to ensure consistency with:
 - 1. Institution requirements
 - 2. Program requirements
 - 3. Program accrediting agency requirements

IV. VALIDATION STANDARDS FOR CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING

A. Validation Methods

Kansas public higher education institutions should award CPL in accordance with the Higher Learning Commission criteria for accreditation (www.hlcommission.org), recommendations of this Guidebook, ACE (www.acenet.edu), CAEL standards (Appendix B), and the CPL Quality Check List (Appendix C). CPL should be awarded on a course-by-course basis when the prior learning is equivalent to the learning outcomes in the postsecondary course. Institutions should include in their policy and practice a quality assurance process, documented standard intake processes, CPL advising and guidance from trained advisors, and standard transparent policies.

B. National Exams for Postsecondary Credit

- 1. Institutions should evaluate the competencies measured in national standard exams and award appropriate credit when the competencies are equivalent to the learning outcomes of college courses and the student has met or exceeded the standards.
- 2. Institutions should consider the following national exams. The list is not meant to be exhaustive. If additional exams are deemed valid and appropriate by the institution, they should also be considered.
 - a. College Board College Level Examination Program (CLEP)
 - b. Advanced Placement (AP)
 - c. International Baccalaureate Diploma Program advanced courses (IB)

- d. DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSSTs)
- e. Excelsior College Examinations (UEXCEL & ECE)
- f. General Education Development (GED)

C. Credit Recommendation Services

1. Institutions should follow the recommendations for credit equivalency provided by nationally recognized, reputable credit recommendation services and award credit when the learning outcomes are equivalent to those of the institution's postsecondary courses, and where applicable, approved system-wide transfer courses.
2. Recommendations from the following services should be considered:
 - a. American Council on Education (ACE) National Guide to CollegeCredit for Workforce Training
 - b. American Council on Education (ACE) Military Guide
 - c. National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS)
 - d. Right Skills to Work by the Manufacturing Institute, National Association of Manufacturers (NAM)

D. Industry-recognized Credentials

Institutions should award appropriate CPL for industry certifications that are equivalent to learning outcomes in postsecondary courses.

E. Individual Portfolio Assessments

1. Institutions should provide portfolio assessment options to award credit for prior postsecondary-level learning.
2. Portfolio assessments should be evaluated by trained faculty using national standards established by CAEL or other nationally-recognized sources. Postsecondary institutions should use quality portfolio checklists and/or a professional portfolio service.
3. Students should be counseled on the suitability of portfolio CPL and provided guidance or instruction on preparing quality portfolios.

F. Institutionally Prepared Exams

Institutionally prepared exams may be used to award credit when equivalent, consistent learning outcomes are met. Institutions should ensure exams developed by an individual faculty member or faculty teams are valid, reliable and objective. Institutional exams should be monitored and controlled; content protected for security and use; and proctored responsibly. The assessment criteria (passing grade, competencies measured etc.) need to be determined prior to examination. Grading, required record-keeping, and transcription methods for institutionally prepared exams should also be pre-determined and implemented consistently.

V. QUALITY CREDITS THAT APPLY TO DEGREE

Credit awarded for prior learning is documented, evaluated, and appropriate for the level of degree awarded and in full compliance with the criteria of the HLC. Academic credit will be awarded only for degree seeking students who have enrolled in an institution and:

- A. CPL shall be applied and used as course credit equivalencies.
- B. CPL should apply toward majors, minors, concentrations, general education requirements, and electives that count toward the degree or program certificate being sought in the same manner as traditional courses.
- C. CPL should satisfy prerequisite requirements in the same manner as course equivalencies at the institution.

VI. TRANSFERABILITY OF CREDITS FOR PRIOR LEARNING

It is recommended CPL awarded and documented in a student transcript at any regionally accredited institution whose policy follows the Kansas CPL Guidelines and complies with the Higher Learning Commission criteria and Kansas State Statutes should be accepted as credit toward a degree or program certificate at all Kansas public postsecondary institutions.

VII. FEES ASSESSED TO STUDENTS

- A. Costs to students for establishment of credit should be comparable throughout the state system and should reflect the actual costs for institutional administration of the CPL evaluation (e.g., actual test fee for a standardized national test plus an administrative fee that covers the actual costs for test proctoring; actual costs for faculty time in portfolio evaluation, etc.).
- B. Fees should be based on the assessment service performed and not determined by the number of credits awarded. Tuition cannot be assessed for CPL.

VIII. DATA TRACKING AND EVALUATION

- A. Institutions should ensure that credits awarded for prior learning are recorded in the student information system. The type of credit for prior learning should be denoted in the institutional student database. The data associated with the credit should include the course identifiers and description of the articulated course, semester (term) for which the credit is applied, credit hours awarded, and the actual date awarded by the institution.
- B. Institutional CPL data will be tracked and reported in Kansas Higher Education Data

System.

IX. INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

- A. Institutions should publish on their websites full information regarding their CPL policies and fees to students. Institutions may use additional methods to make consistent information accessible to students regarding CPL credits, policies and the number of students receiving CPL credits. Information should be updated at least annually.
- B. The KBOR website should include links to all institutions' CPL web pages.
- C. A CPL Fact Sheet on the web from each institution should include:
 - a. General Institutional Policies and link to CPL
 - b. Types of CPL offered
 - c. Credit limits for CPL
 - d. Fees
 - e. How CPL credit appears on transcript
 - f. Acceptance of transfer CPL credits
 - g. Point of contact, phone number, and email for CPL

X. CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING GUIDEBOOK REVIEW

The Kansas CPL Guidebook should be reviewed by the System Council of Chief Academic Officers on an annual basis and updated or revised as needed by the Kansas CPL Task Force. The Board Academic Affairs Standing Committee should review and approve the CPL Guidebook in preparation for the Board of Regents. KBOR will annually audit adherence of CPL Guidebook to Board policies.

Appendix A

THE 10 CAEL STANDARDS FOR ASSESSING LEARNING

As the nationally recognized body on prior learning assessment and the only body recognized by all regional accreditors for PLA, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning's (CAEL) Standards for Assessing Learning have become the foundation for most PLA programs. Kansas colleges and universities may use these standards as a guide.

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.
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.

Fiddler, M., Marienau, C., Whitaker, U. *Assessing Learning: Standards, Principles, and Procedures 2nd*. Chicago: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 2006.

Appendix B

CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING QUALITY CHECKLIST

1. CPL is awarded in compliance with the criteria for accreditation of the Higher Learning Commission, Kansas Board of Regents policy manual, state statutes, and the Kansas CPL Guidebook.
2. CPL is awarded for college level learning that is equivalent to learning objectives or outcomes in college courses and is not based on time or experience.
3. Enrollment procedures are structured to benefit students, encourage appropriate application of CPL, and avoid artificial barriers.
4. The number of CPL credits accepted for degree or program completion is a reasonable portion of credits and the maximum allowable is established with thoughtful evaluation of program requirements.
5. CPL awards in a college or department are consistent with policy across the institution.
6. Where possible and appropriate, standardized national exams are used for CPL.
7. CPL awards advance the student towards degree or program completion.
8. The institution accepts CPL awarded at other accredited Kansas institutions when applicable.
9. CPL fees are reasonable and aligned with actual costs incurred by an institution to deliver the service.
10. CPL fees are based on assessment services performed and not on number of credits awarded.
11. Fees assessed to transcript CPL credits are consistent with fees to transcript other transfer courses.
12. CPL is transcribed in accordance with state guidelines and allows for institutional analysis of success and statewide data collections.
13. Professional development and training are provided to all personnel associated with CPL including intake counselors, advisors, faculty, and other student services personnel.
14. CPL policies, types, programs, fees, etc., are published and widely available to students.
15. All policies and procedures for CPL are transparent and consistent.
16. Continuous improvement processes are in place to improve the students' experience.