



A RESOURCE  
GUIDE FOR  
STATE LEADERS

2012

# State Policy Approaches to Support Prior Learning Assessment

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## Introduction

According to Lumina Foundation, the U.S. needs to educate nearly 800,000 more college graduates each year from now until 2025 to meet the growing needs of the workforce. Increased enrollment in—and successful completion of—postsecondary learning programs is critical to achieving that goal. Prior learning assessment, or PLA, can help more workers complete training and degree programs sooner by giving them college credit for knowledge and competencies they've gained outside of the classroom. PLA can save students time and money, and the boost in credit-earning might also have a motivating effect for some students. CAEL's multi-institutional study, *Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success*, found that students with PLA credits were *2.5 times more likely to persist to graduation* than students without PLA credits. (See Appendix C to access the full report.)

State leaders are increasingly aware of PLA's value in helping adult learners complete a degree faster and at a lower cost. These leaders may also recognize that formal assessment and recognition of college-level learning through PLA can positively impact the performance of various state systems:

- the higher education system, which strives to improve degree completion and productivity;
- the economic development system, which depends upon a skilled and credentialed workforce to attract and retain employers in the state;
- the workforce development system, which recognizes the importance of skills and credentials in the employability of the state's citizens; and
- the career and technical education system, which can benefit from having its programs recognized as college-level, when appropriate, to open new opportunities for lifelong learning and eventual degree completion.

This guide is intended to serve as a resource for state leaders who wish to promote PLA policy, whether through new higher education regulatory language or through legislation. It includes:

- Factors for Consideration: what state leaders should consider when developing a custom strategy for promoting PLA;
- Examples of State Support for PLA: promising approaches being implemented at the state level across the country;
- State Case Studies;
- Sample State Policy (Appendix A);
- Snapshots of PLA in the States (Appendix B); and
- Additional Resources (Appendix C).

## DEFINING PLA

Prior Learning Assessment is not just one method or tool. It includes methods such as:

- **individualized student portfolios** or portfolio assessments, conducted by individual colleges or CAEL's LearningCounts.org, a national online prior learning assessment service;
- **evaluation of corporate and military training** by the American Council on Education (ACE); ACE publishes credit recommendations for formal instructional programs offered by noncollegiate agencies, or the ACE Guides;
- **program evaluations** done by individual colleges of noncollegiate instructional programs that award credit for those who achieve recognized proficiencies, or the Evaluation of Local Training;
- **challenge exams**, or customized exams offered by some colleges to verify learning achievement; these may be current course final exams or may be other tests developed at the department level for assessing general disciplinary knowledge and skill; and
- **standardized exams** such as Advanced Placement Examination Program, or AP Exams, offered by the College Board; College Level Examination Program, or CLEP Exams, also offered by the College Board; Excelsior College Exams (formerly Regents College Exams or ACT/PEP Exams); and The DANTES Subject Standardized Tests, or DSST Exams, conducted by the Chauncey Group International, a division of Thomson Prometric.

## Factors for Consideration

Before examining the various strategies to advance PLA policy, there are several factors to consider about your state's current PLA policy and practices. These factors include the accessibility, consistency, transferability and transparency of PLA offerings at colleges and universities in your state.

Because PLA policies can be very different across institutions, an important first step is to gather information about current PLA availability and usage. Below are some of the questions you might want to consider asking of your college and university and system administrators:

### 1. The Specific PLA Policies and Practices at Colleges and Universities

- a. Is PLA offered by the institutions?
- b. What PLA methods are used to evaluate prior learning and award credit? *As noted above, there are several methods for assessing prior learning, and policies may vary based on the methods.*

- c. What are the costs for PLA, including any fees? *Costs typically include the assessment itself, transcription or posting fees, and other administrative costs. They can vary widely among institutions and systems. They can also vary by PLA method.*
  - d. How are credits earned through PLA reflected on the student transcript?
  - e. Do institutions apply their PLA policies and practices across all divisions and departments, or do policies vary within institutions?
  - f. Can PLA credits be applied to degree/major requirements? *Many PLA credits become wasted credits because of institutional and system policies that limit their application only to general education and elective requirements. For other institutions, specialized degree completion programs targeted at adult students may enable more recognition of PLA credits. Making this information available and easy for students to understand is very important.*
  - g. Is there a cap on the number of PLA credits that can be earned by the student?
  - h. Can PLA credits count toward residency requirements? *Most schools have a requirement that a student take a certain number of credits at the home institution. Some institutions allow PLA credits to count toward the residency requirement; others do not.*
  - i. What are the transfer policies for credits earned through PLA? *Because of accreditation requirements and internal policies, institutions generally have a cap on the number of PLA credits that can transfer from other institutions, or they may not accept any PLA credits in transfer.*
  - j. Is there consistency among institutions within the state system? *In many states, each institution sets its own PLA policy, leading to inconsistency and confusion for today's mobile students.*
2. **Authority.** How are PLA policies decided? Are there any statewide PLA policies? How often are they reviewed? States are increasingly considering statewide policies to encourage consistency and ease of transfer of PLA credits.
  3. **Impact.** Do institutions or systems regularly track the usage of PLA by students? Are there data showing overall PLA usage, and usage within specific degree programs?
  4. **Transparency.** How do your state residents find out about PLA opportunities? For example, is information about the PLA opportunities and policies easy to find on your colleges' websites? Is there a single point of contact for PLA at each college? If your state has a strategy for increasing the number of adult students with degrees and credentials, a website devoted to this policy and transparency of information related to PLA is an important communication tool.

5. **Champions.** Are there other PLA champions in your state, including other legislators, leaders at the higher education institutional or system level, workforce agency, veteran affairs department, business and industry groups, etc.? These champions can help you build the case for improved PLA policies and practices and potentially serve as subject matter experts.
6. **Barriers.** Are there any existing policy barriers to PLA? For example, can PLA costs be covered under any state financial aid or workforce programs?

Determining the answers to the above questions will require investigation and cooperation from key stakeholders, including your higher education commission, two- and four-year institutions/systems and other interested parties such as the workforce system. If this information is not easily accessible, you may want to start with creating a taskforce that can focus on how and where to collect it. The answers will help you gain a fuller picture of the current status of PLA policy and practice in your state as you craft an updated PLA policy.

## Examples of State Support for PLA

CAEL and HCM conducted a limited scan of state policies that support PLA and discovered a wide range of approaches. PLA policy can be crafted through legislation or regulatory language. Policies can address a variety of issues regarding PLA in a given state and can address a number of different topics, such as:

- establishment of PLA policy;
- transparent institutional policies;
- assessment processes and methods;
- fees;
- transfer of PLA credit;
- transcription and credit recognition;
- veterans;
- raising awareness and encouraging student PLA participation;
- capacity building; and
- workforce system and PLA.

Each of these topics is explained in greater detail below, along with references to sample states with policies addressing that particular topic. *See Appendix B for additional information on these state policies and links to the legislation.*

## Establishment of PLA Policy—and a Note on Institutional Autonomy

State policy initiatives often need to start with simply establishing that a policy on PLA exists. States vary in their approaches to this issue. Most state policy directs the state's higher education system to develop PLA policies, rather than stipulating what a systemwide policy for PLA should be. This approach reflects long-standing recognition that higher education policy is best determined by the higher education system or by individual institutions. For example, **Colorado** legislation directs institutions as follows: "Beginning in the 2013-14 academic year, each public institution of higher education shall adopt and make public a policy or program to determine academic credit for prior learning." **Washington** state legislation similarly directs the state board of community and technical colleges to "develop policies for awarding academic credit for learning from work and military experience, military and law enforcement training, career college training, internships and externships, and apprenticeships."

Higher education systems themselves also may take steps to establish a comprehensive and consistent statewide PLA policy. As with the legislative approach, a system may choose to encourage, rather than dictate, the establishment of a PLA policy. **Minnesota** State Colleges and Universities, for example, has a policy stating, "Each system college and university shall provide students with a means for evaluation of prior learning and shall develop policies and procedures consistent with Procedure 3.35.1 Credit for Prior Learning."

Other higher education systems do dictate the systemwide policy. **Colorado's** State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education states, "The State Board supports the concept of life-long learning to meet the retraining, upgrading, and personal enrichment needs of students. It is the policy of the Board that a student's experience outside the college classroom shall be evaluated for college credit at the student's request."

In determining the appropriate level of prescription and incentives for legislation, legislators need to balance the legitimate autonomy of the higher education system and institutions with the need to drive timely change to create comprehensive PLA policies and services. This analysis requires an understanding of what moves higher education policy on the ground in your state, including the willingness of higher education and individual institutions to work as a system and take the lead to create effective PLA policy.

## Transparent Institutional Policies

In addition to establishing a policy, legislation and regulatory language can address the transparency of those policies to students. This is to ensure that students have access to information about what PLA methods are used at each institution, what degree programs accept PLA credit, what the specific policies are regarding the transfer of PLA credit, PLA credit limits, limits on applying PLA credits to major requirements, whether PLA credits count toward the residency requirement and so on. For example, transparency is specifically mentioned in the policies of **Colorado, Minnesota, Alabama and Oregon**. (See Appendix B.)

## Assessment Process/Methods

State policies can be very specific in defining which methods of PLA are considered to be accepted. Some states define this very narrowly. For example, **Maryland** and **West Virginia** have state policies only on CLEP exam credit, and **Virginia** and **South Carolina** have specific policies regarding International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) exams.

**Minnesota's** system policy stipulates that all colleges and universities must "provide opportunities for an admitted student to demonstrate college-level learning through nationally recognized examinations" such as CLEP, IB, AP and others, and it requires colleges to accept the credit recommendations from ACE, but it allows individual institutions to decide whether to offer other PLA methods such as portfolio evaluation. **North Dakota** defines "additional forms of degree credit" as including standardized examination, challenge examination, evaluated noncollege coursework, portfolio evaluation and "articulated credit."

**Alabama** legislation provides guidelines for PLA, along with details on how portfolio assessment is to be administered. The detail addresses staff training, who should be assessing the portfolio, and the circumstances in which the portfolio assessment process is appropriate.

## Fees

Some state systems stipulate what their colleges and programs should charge for PLA services. **Oklahoma** provides some basic guidelines, in that "Costs to students for establishment of credit should be comparable throughout the State System, and should reflect as closely as possible the actual costs for institutional administration of the program." **Minnesota** system policy provides similar guidelines but adds that fees may also be charged for entering the credits awarded into the transcript. **Colorado** policy stipulates, "The evaluation fee to be charged will be determined by each college, but shall not exceed 50% of the standard tuition rate." **Alabama** policy specifies that the charge for portfolio review shall be \$25 for each portfolio (one portfolio for each course for which credit through experiential learning is requested), and students seeking credit "through examination or nationally recognized guidelines are not charged a fee for PLA or for credits awarded through PLA."

## Transfer and Articulation of PLA Credit

One challenge for students earning credit through PLA is the reality that many institutions will not accept such credit in transfer. **Oklahoma's** policy addresses this problem directly by stipulating that institutions must accept each other's PLA credits in transfer: "Credit for extrainstitutional learning, once recorded at a State System institution, is transferable on the same basis as if the credit had been earned through regular study at the awarding institution." In addition, Oklahoma's policy states that institutions must accept PLA credit that is awarded and transcribed by other accredited institutions.

Similarly, many students who have participated in non-credit programs may find that the learning from those programs is at the college level and can be evaluated for credit through PLA. **Oregon's** policy directs the system to "develop articulation agreements when patterns of academic credit for prior learning are

identified for particular programs and pathways.” Similarly, **Hawaii** policy establishes a “college-credit equivalency program” that awards college credit for courses taken at a high school, business school, trade school, adult education school or military training program if that course is equivalent to courses offered for credit in the University of Hawaii system.

### Transcription of PLA Credit

States may choose to specify how PLA credit is presented on a student’s transcript. **Minnesota**’s policy states that “Credit awarded for prior learning or earned by examination may be noted either in the term when it was earned or in the transfer section” and that the type of special credit must be noted in parentheses immediately below the course. This is how many institutions choose to list PLA credit on the student transcript.

However, some institutions list PLA credit as “transfer credit” because it is seen as fundamentally the same idea: credit for learning acquired outside of that institution. This is an option that state leaders could consider including in policy directives as well. In considering this option, they need to take into account how transfer credits are currently being treated by institutions to identify any potential challenges with adopting this approach.

### Veterans

There has recently been a great deal of state legislation that has focused on recognizing the skills and other learning that veterans have acquired through training and experience in the military.

Some states require commissions or boards to develop the policies. For example, **Texas** legislation “requires a commission to identify, develop, and support methods to maximize academic or workforce education credit awarded by institutions of higher education to veterans and military service members for military experience, education, and training obtained during military service.” **Idaho** policy stipulates that the Board of Education, the Board of Regents of the University of Idaho, the Board of Trustees of certain community colleges and the State Board for Professional-Technical Education “shall develop policies relating to the award of academic credit for certain military education, training or service; and to provide that each of the professional and occupational licensing boards within the Department of Self-Governing Agencies may accept certain military education, training or service toward the qualifications to receive licensure, certification or registration.” **Louisiana** and **Florida** have passed similar legislation. **Ohio, Oregon** and **Virginia** have passed similar measures.

Other states require institutions to adopt policies to award credit for learning acquired through the military. **Indiana** and **Minnesota** both require state institutions to adopt policies to award credit to veterans with military course credits, based on ACE recommendations. Indiana’s policy also requires the Commission for Higher Education to establish uniform guidelines for state educational institutions to follow when implementing the requirements. Indiana further allows occupational or professional licensure boards to issue a license, certificate, registration or permit to a military service applicant or military spouse who meets certain requirements, or to issue a temporary practice permit or provisional license while the military service applicant or military spouse is satisfying certain requirements as determined by the board.

## Raising Awareness and Encouraging Student PLA Participation

Just because an institution offers PLA does not necessarily mean that students will know about it or know how to ask for it. **Minnesota's** Graduate Minnesota initiative is designed to support college completion in the state and specifically recommends PLA to students as a way to accelerate degree completion. (See <http://www.mnscu.edu/graduateminnesota/accelerated.html>.)

**Oregon's** legislation directs the higher education system to set goals for increasing student participation in PLA and establish an advisory group to track progress in meeting those goals. (Similar legislation was passed in **Washington** state.)

## Capacity Building

State policy can also be used to build the capacity of PLA offerings at colleges and universities. **Oregon's** legislation directs the system to "improve prior learning assessment practices across all institutions of higher education" and "create tools to develop faculty and staff knowledge and expertise in awarding academic credit for prior learning and to share exemplary policies and practices among institutions of higher education. (Similar legislation was passed in **Washington** state.)

## Workforce System

The examples so far have focused primarily on the higher education system's use of PLA. In addition, states should also consider crafting policy that encourages or directs the workforce system to promote and support PLA in its own programs. In **Indiana**, the State Workforce Innovation Council (SWIC) introduced a resolution to encourage the use of PLA for Workforce Investment Act participants and directed the Department of Workforce Development to develop and implement guidance regarding the proper usage of PLA within the WorkOne system. The resolution was passed unanimously by SWIC on Dec. 15, 2011, paving the way for PLA to be used as a key workforce development strategy in the state. The state is now interested in developing a PLA "locator" to help Work One staff identify appropriate candidates for PLA.

## State Case Studies

The following looks more closely at Washington, Tennessee, Pennsylvania and Vermont as they explore various policy options to encourage PLA.

### Washington State: The Taskforce Approach

Several states have passed legislation that orders the formation of a taskforce or working group to assess PLA practices in the state and develop policies and procedures. This interim step is viewed by legislators as a way to motivate the key players in PLA—higher education institutions, government and employers—

to take action without a prescriptive mandate. States that recently passed this type of legislation include Washington, Oregon and Colorado. The activities in Washington are summarized below.

In 2010, the Washington State Legislature passed a bill ([http://apps.leg.wa.gov/documents/billdocs/2009-10/Pdf/Bills/Session Law 2010/6357-S.SL.pdf](http://apps.leg.wa.gov/documents/billdocs/2009-10/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Law%202010/6357-S.SL.pdf)) that required the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) to work with other stakeholders to develop policies for awarding academic credit for experiential learning. Other stakeholders included the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, business leaders and representatives from higher education institutions. It was the intent of the legislature that transparent policies be developed and that PLA activities be consistently applied at all Washington institutions of higher learning. A consultative workgroup met and focused its initial work on inventorying current PLA practices. In late 2010 a report was submitted to the legislature with proposed policies and procedures.

Legislation in 2011, codified as ESSHB 1795 ([http://apps.leg.wa.gov/documents/billdocs/2011-12/Pdf/Bills/Session Law 2011/1795-S2.SL.pdf](http://apps.leg.wa.gov/documents/billdocs/2011-12/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Law%202011/1795-S2.SL.pdf)) and reaffirmed in 2012 by ESSHB 2483 ([http://apps.leg.wa.gov/documents/billdocs/2011-12/Pdf/Bills/Session Law 2012/2483-S2.SL.pdf](http://apps.leg.wa.gov/documents/billdocs/2011-12/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Law%202012/2483-S2.SL.pdf)), was more direct in its approach. It required the HECB, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, the Council of Presidents, the four-year institutions of higher education, the private independent higher education institutions, and the private career schools to work together to achieve the following goals:

- increase the number of students who receive PLA credits;
- increase the number and type of PLA credits that count toward a major or earn a degree, certificate or credential, while ensuring quality;
- develop transparent PLA policies and practices in awarding academic credit for prior learning;
- create PLA tools to develop faculty and staff and share exemplary policies and practices;
- develop articulation agreements; and
- develop outcome measures to track progress on goals.

ESSHB 2483 defined Prior Learning as “the knowledge and skills gained through work and life experience; through military training and experience; and through formal and informal education and training from in-state and out-of-state institutions including foreign institutions.”

Pursuant to the legislation, the PLA working group, which is coordinated by the HECB and the SBCTC, has been meeting quarterly to address the goals in the legislation. Its first achievement was to create a directory of principal points of contact at each Washington higher education institution who have responsibility for PLA services. In a 2010 survey, fewer than half of the institutions reported a PLA point of contact. This new directory has helped to create more accountability at each institution and increase accessibility to PLA services for students.

The working group then created coding procedures for community and technical colleges to track increases

in the number of students receiving PLA credit and increases in the number of PLA credits that count toward their major, degree, certificate or credential among Washington community colleges. It is also reviewing the issues of grading PLA and reciprocity agreements among institutions. Work-based and other common training programs have been reviewed and a template for each career cluster developed to assist in establishing program articulations. There are plans for a second statewide PLA workshop later this year. Finally, the group has been in contact with representatives of its regional accrediting body regarding revisions to policies that limit acceptance and transcription of experiential learning course credits.

The working group is tackling a wide range of important PLA issues, including coverage of PLA under financial aid and how to make PLA more accessible to veterans. For more information on the working group activities, see: <http://wa-priorlearningassessment.wikispaces.com/>

James West, associate director of policy, planning and research at the Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board, who co-leads the workgroup, observed several lessons of the group to date.

1. **Encourage broad workgroup participation.** The broader the workgroup representation, the better the conversation. Representatives from all sectors have been invited: public/private, nonprofit/for-profit/military, workforce and unions, department of labor, apprenticeship programs.
2. **Invite legislative staff participation.** Staff members have acted as a conduit directly to the legislature, helping the workgroup interpret legislative intent, informing the legislators of progress and improving transparency between the higher education system and legislature.
3. **Engage both faculty and college administrators.** PLA is faculty-driven in Washington, and college administrators implement policy and help to create workable procedures that benefit students and the institution.
4. **Keep open communication.** The group has a robust wiki for workgroup participants to share information and work together on issues. The wiki is public so information about the group's goals and progress is widely accessible.
5. **Maintain momentum.** As Jim West noted, "System change takes time. It is important to manage expectations while continually making progress." The group has created interim progress markers to keep the momentum going. Meetings are time-consuming, but face-to-face work is where progress is made.

*"System change takes time. It is important to manage expectations while continually making progress."*

Jim West

## The Tennessee Model: Creating Incentives for Transformational Change

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) has introduced transformational change through a powerful model that has brought all constituencies to the table. The Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010 recognized the state's pressing need to improve its degree completion rates and offer residents

the opportunity to return to college in preparation for new and different jobs. Tennessee's comprehensive approach included a change in its funding formula to focus on degree progression and completion. The unique funding formula provides for funding based upon:

- number of graduates and successful transfers;
- number of students who pass progression milestones (such as completing 12, 24 and 36 credit hours at the community colleges and 24, 48 and 72 credit hours at the universities);
- premium funding for students 25 years old or older and for Pell-eligible students who progress and ultimately graduate; and
- other funding incentives aligned with institutional mission.

A Complete College America Grant in 2011 funded a newly formed taskforce, led by THEC with representation from 21 of the 22 public institutions and both higher education systems with the support of the governor's office. The grant has a large PLA focus that led to the formation of the PLA taskforce, staffed by CAEL and THEC, with a primary purpose of developing high-quality PLA standards and promoting increased accessibility to PLA options for students. All Tennessee public higher education institutions were invited to participate.

Cooperation and collaboration between the schools is remarkable. After one year, the taskforce is already seeing an increase in interest in PLA at the institutional level. THEC staff members have been invited to speak to eight institutions, student advisors, faculty, chief academic officers, presidents, student services professionals and professional organizations on the statewide initiative in only the past four months. The taskforce recently completed comprehensive recommendations for PLA policy statewide, which THEC will encourage the systems and institutions to adopt. In the summer of 2012 it will also launch a PLA website where students will be able to find everything needed to make informed decisions.

#### PERFORMANCE FUNDING AND PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT

The current funding model in most states does not incentivize institutions to help students access and utilize PLA. Instead, schools are given funding for the the number of students enrolled rather than the number who complete. This means that institutions lose money when students progress and complete more quickly, even though PLA is cheaper for students and institutions and helps students succeed. Having funding systems that focus on degree progression and completion, like the one in Tennessee, means that it is in institutions' interest to help students access and utilize this tool that increases student success and decreases time to degree.

To improve PLA advising services, college advisors (academic, career, admissions) from primarily public colleges and universities were trained to increase their understanding of how PLA works and how best to advise students about its benefits. PLA training regarding portfolio assessment was also provided by CAEL to faculty throughout the state.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of the taskforce's work was to actually find all of the institutional policies (including acceptable CLEP scores, credit caps, residency requirements and more) so that they could identify not only the variability from school to school but the need for updated policies. The more information the taskforce compiled, the more institutions began changing/updating policies even before recommendations could be issued. For example, the chief academic officers of the state community college system adopted a new CLEP policy in April 2012 that set standardized cutoff scores, hours awarded and course equivalencies, and addressed the transferability of CLEP credit between institutions. In the near future, they will also consider standardizing AP, IB and ACE credit recommendations.

Tennessee will host three PLA summits in September 2012 to gain even more traction in the employer community. A goal is to encourage employers to add coverage of PLA expenses to their tuition assistance programs and to discuss additional innovative ways they can support their employees' pursuit of a postsecondary credential. In late August 2012 THEC is partnering with several local workforce investment boards, as well as the Tennessee College Access and Success Network, to host a one-day PLA workshop for more than 100 One Stop Career Coaches. With participation by CAEL, they will provide information and resources for serving adult clients who want to return to school.

The taskforce already has learned valuable lessons.

1. **Start with champions but don't ignore others.** The taskforce is made up of representatives who have a strong commitment to PLA. Their job is to make the case to the nonbelievers at their institutions and systems.
2. **Align with and leverage complementary policy agendas.** In Tennessee, the college completion agenda provided the perfect jumping-off point for PLA policy.
3. **Make the time to talk with all of the stakeholders.** The taskforce has made a concerted effort to engage everyone, including administrators, faculty, advisors, workforce development professionals and business, so everyone gets on the same page about PLA.
4. **Frame the conversation about PLA.** The taskforce is careful not to create anxiety for faculty and staff about more work due to a new service but rather frames PLA as an existing service that needs better clarity.

*"The governor's support of PLA has laid the foundation for a comprehensive PLA system as a part of a larger degree completion agenda in Tennessee."*

Jessica Gibson

*director of College Completion Initiatives, Tennessee Higher Education Commission*

## The Pennsylvania State System Model: Transforming to a Culture that Respects Prior Learning of Adult Students

The Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) is in the process of creating a transformative culture to re-engage adults in higher education for the purposes of workforce development, degree and credential attainment, and accelerated degree completion. PASSHE Universities are collaborating with each other as well as partnering with CAEL to ensure consistent and effective approaches to how it works with adults to review their past experiences to determine if college level learning may have been acquired. After about a year of conversations with CAEL, PASSHE's leadership and university chief academic officers are moving forward in two fundamental ways:

- It will provide extensive training to all campuses on how to best assist adults in re-engaging in higher education. This includes identifying all of the unique characteristics of adult students and their vast experience that likely has led to college-level knowledge. This training will provide all personnel with the tools they need to provide PLA guidance. The training will be delivered over the next twelve months both face-to-face and using technology.
- It will engage in a partnership with CAEL's LearningCounts.org that includes a special discounted rate for both the non-credit and for-credit courses that help students build portfolios to be assessed for college credit.

*"The PASSHE-CAEL partnership represents a major step forward in the State System's efforts to make it easier for returning adult students to have options for obtaining credit for their prior learning. This partnership is based on PASSHE having the ability to make options known and available to students to determine whether they are eligible and can obtain credit for that learning. PASSHE is serious about making more options available for returning adult students to complete their degrees. We are very excited about again being a leader in helping the Commonwealth achieve its goal of ensuring that an educated workforce is available for employers."*

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John Cavanaugh

*Ph.D., Chancellor, Pennsylvania State System  
of Higher Education (PASSHE)*

Lessons to date include:

- **Respect college learning, no matter the source.** The process PASSHE Universities have undertaken around PLA has led the schools to agree that the institutions need to be prepared to consistently address, acknowledge, and respect learning that students bring with them from massive open online courses, CLEP, AP, Military, and Work Experience, etc. By doing this, they will bring about a culture of respect for returning adult students.
- **Rigor and consistency is possible with outside portfolio assessment.** PASSHE’s work has also helped them recognize that CAEL 100’s approach to Prior Learning Portfolios is more than a collection of resumes, seat time, and training plans. It also requires students demonstrate acquisition of knowledge and competencies as they pertain to credits in a discipline. CAEL’s Assessors have faculty experience.

### The Vermont Model: One Systemwide Provider Approach

In 1975, the Vermont State Colleges (VSC) system created its Office of External Programs administered by the Community College of Vermont (CCV). The Office of External Programs is responsible for all assessment of prior learning in the VSC system, including course challenges, CLEP, assessing corporate training for credit, the Assessment of Prior Learning class and the portfolio process. The Assessment of Prior Learning class is a semester-long, three-credit course that guides students through the creation of a portfolio documenting their college-level learning from experiences. The portfolios are then submitted to standing committees of four faculty members who assess them and recommend the level of college credit assigned. Students can earn as much credit as they can demonstrate learning for, for the cost of a three-credit class and a \$300 fee to cover the faculty time to assess the portfolio. Eighty percent of students who take the class complete it successfully and earn an average of 30 credits. The credit awarded is fully transferable and recognized throughout the Vermont State Colleges system and at some independent institutions in the state.

*“Sound institutional support and the variety of PLA options at the Vermont State Colleges have empowered our adult students for over 35 years.”*

Gabrielle Dietzel  
*coordinator of assessment services,  
 Office of External Programs*

To date, more than 7,000 Vermonters have gone through the program earning credit for their college-level learning gained outside the classroom. State leaders have learned some lessons.

1. **Have one institution offering systemwide PLA.** That makes the portfolio process effective and efficient. Students can transfer the credit anywhere in the system.
2. **Transcribe PLA as transfer credit.** For institutions outside of the VSC system, students are sent out with a transcript as transfer credit. Most colleges in Vermont accept the credit.

3. **Use data to prove the effectiveness of PLA.** This legacy program has documented its graduates successfully completing subsequent course work for more than 35 years. Using data can help make a program sustainable and create buy-in.
4. **Build buy-in by including detractors in the process.** Involve leaders and faculty in the process. Recruit them to serve on standing committees or have them observe and provide training.

As illustrated above, state leaders are increasingly turning their attention to systematic statewide policies that support and promote high-quality PLA. This resource guide is meant to provide state leaders with questions for consideration about PLA and a high-level look at how states are working to move statewide PLA policy. It also provides case studies that go into some detail about particular promising models. State policy is still evolving in this area, and in the following appendices CAEL and HCM have provided a model state policy for PLA, additional information on existing state policies and additional resources for policymakers.

## Appendix A: Credit for Prior Learning Model Policy

This sample policy is intended to serve as a resource for state leaders as they develop or refine their policy on prior learning assessment. Leaders may adapt the content to reflect their own state's individual circumstances.

### Purpose of Policy

The State of [XXXX] is committed to fostering an educated and skilled workforce, which is essential for economic prosperity and meaningful work for its citizens. Increased enrollment in – and successful completion of – postsecondary learning programs is critical to achieving that goal. Prior Learning Assessment, or PLA, can help more workers complete training and degree programs sooner by evaluating an individual's existing knowledge and competencies for college credit. For the purposes of this section, "prior learning" means the college-level knowledge and skills gained through work and life experiences, such as employer training programs, independent study, non-credit courses, the military, civic activities, and volunteer service.

In recognition of the need to evaluate learning which has taken place outside the formal higher education structure, the State XXXXX [applicable body such as State Regents] has adopted the following policy. The State System must provide a consistent, transferable and comparable means through which students may be awarded credit for prior learning.

State System policy should assure academic rigor according to the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning's (CAEL) national standards for the assessment of college-level learning derived from experiences that may lead to awarding of college credit. It is equally important to provide for the uniform transfer of credit for prior learning among institutions of the system. State System institutions should develop institutional policies for evaluating prior learning and for awarding credit consistent with this policy. These policies should include provisions for oversight and periodic evaluation to protect the integrity and credibility of this program.

### Policy and Procedures

**Enrollment.** Students eligible to receive credit for prior learning must be enrolled or eligible to re-enroll at the awarding institution.

**Number of Credits.** The number of prior credits accepted by institutions should be limited only by the residency requirements of the regional and other accrediting bodies recognized the U.S. Department of Education and the student degree plan.

**Validation Methods.** State System institutions awarding credit for prior learning should assess prior learning credit on a course-by-course basis or competency-based system if the institution uses such a system for evaluating learning. The following guidelines and methods are the minimum sources acceptable for validating prior learning for awarding credit:

1. Credit recommendations listed in the American Council on Education (ACE) National Guide to College Credit for Workforce Training and the ACE Military Guide.
2. Credit recommendations listed by National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS).
3. Credit demonstrated by successfully passing national for-credit examination programs such as: DSST Exams, Excelsior College Examinations, UExcel Exams, The College Board College Level Examination Program (CLEP) and Advanced Placement (AP) exams. The state system will adopt a policy that identifies the subject areas and minimum scores of CLEP and AP exams accepted among all state institutions.
4. Upper-level courses in the International Baccalaureate Organization Diploma Program.
5. Degree-relevant prior learning credit awarded and transcribed by other similarly accredited institutions.
6. Individual portfolios using CAEL or other standardized guidelines.
7. Individual portfolios evaluated by CAEL's national on-line prior learning assessment service, LearningCounts.org.
8. Industry-recognized certifications.
9. Institutionally prepared examinations. Institutional validation procedures should be objective to the extent that external evaluators would reach the same conclusion given the material reviewed, consistent with CAEL's guidelines. Score requirements for institutionally prepared examinations shall be consistent among State System institutions.

## Application

1. Prior learning credits shall be applied to meeting degree or program requirements in the same manner as credits earned at the awarding institutions.
2. The application of credits for prior learning for satisfaction of residency requirements shall be consistent among state institutions.

**Transferability.** Once recorded at a State System institution, prior learning credit is transferable on the same basis as if the credit had been earned through regular study at the awarding institution.

**Fees.** Prior learning assessment credit and transcribing fees to students must be transparent throughout the State System. Fees shall be determined in accordance with CAEL standards and reflect actual assessment and administrative costs, irrespective of the number of credits awarded.

**Tracking.** All state institutions will track data on the number of students with credit for prior learning, number of credits for prior learning, type of assessment methods, associated costs to the student, which will be reported to the State XXXXX on an annual basis. In addition, institutions' degree completion data collection will examine the relationship between degree completion and prior learning credit earnings by students.

**Information and Dissemination.** Policies and general information about the availability of credits for prior learning will be made widely available to current and prospective students, including information on each state institution's website and/or a system website for purposes of transparency. All state institutions will post on their websites or in the manner in which they typically communicate information to the student body and prospective students the following information:

- the number of students who receive prior learning credits,
- the number of prior learning credits awarded each year,
- the course title or subject areas or competency areas in which the credits were awarded, and
- the validation methods used. Faculty, administrative staff and student advisors will also receive information about policies regarding credit for prior learning on an annual basis.

**Compliance.** This policy shall apply at all institutions in the State System. Institutions may use different standards or use other validation methods to meet these standards for specialized accreditation attainment in accordance with institutional mission. However, if different standards or other validation methods are to be used pursuant to this section, the institution must document in writing the reasons for this variance in advance and submit it to the State XXXXX.

*This policy is also recommended for the consideration and use by independent institutions so that standards of education relating to credit for prior learning awarded by advanced standing examination may be comparable for students at all institutions of higher education in the state, enabling transferability and portability.*

**Review.** This policy shall be reviewed on bi-annual basis by the State XXXX.

## Appendix B: Snapshots of PLA in the States

Below are existing PLA policies and legislation collected through an informal scan by CAEL and HCM Strategists. The scan looked for legislation passed between 2008 and 2011 as well as higher education policies in the College Productivity Strategy Lab states. Additional legislation and policies were added where there was professional knowledge. This list is not meant to be comprehensive.



### ALABAMA

#### 706.01: Credit Awarded Through Non-Traditional Means: General

**Summary:** Outlines various ways that credit from outside of an institution can be awarded including AP, CLEP, ACT/PEP, DANTEs, Challenge Exams, ACE PONSi/CREDIT, ACE/MILITARY, portfolio review by a prior learning assessment specialist at a college, or through other statewide programs identified by the Department. (All System institutions will accept for credit a score of 3 or higher on Advanced Placement subject examinations.) (Guidelines for implementation of this policy should be established by the Chancellor.)

**Status:** Effective 04/24/2008.

**Links:** <http://www.accs.cc/Policies/706.01.pdf>

[http://www.accs.cc/guidelines/706.01\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.accs.cc/guidelines/706.01_Guidelines.pdf)



### ALASKA

#### Board of Regents Policy P10.04.070: Non-Traditional Learning

**Summary:** Each Major Administrative Unit (MAU), in recognition of the validity of credit for experiential learning, credit for prior learning, and credit by examination, may provide students the opportunity to apply for such credit in subjects which fall within the institution's regular curriculum.

**Status:** Adopted: 02/16/1996.

**Link:** <http://www.alaska.edu/bor/policy-regulations/>

 **COLORADO*****BP 9-42: State Board policy relating to credit for prior learning at Colorado Community Colleges***

**Summary:** A policy by the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education that states a student's experience outside the college classroom shall be evaluated for college credit at the student's request. This policy applies to the eleven state system community colleges.

**Evaluation of credit for learning shall be based on the following criteria:** (1) identification of learning through one of the following methodologies: portfolio, institutional challenge exam, standardized testing, or published guide, (2) the learning is college level, (3) the learning has been properly evaluated, (4) the credit awarded for prior learning must meet system-wide procedural standards.

The evaluation fee to be charged will be determined by each college, but shall not exceed 50% of the standard tuition rate.

**Status:** Readopted in 8/2001.

**Link:** <http://www.cccs.edu/sbccoe/Policies/BP/PDF/BP9-42.pdf>

***HB 1072***

**Summary:** This legislation requires state colleges and universities to adopt policies for awarding academic credit to students for prior learning, such as professional experience or military training. The policies must be in place by the 2013-2014 academic year.

**Status:** Signed by the governor 3/2012.

**Link:** [http://www.statebillinfo.com/bills/bills/12/1072\\_enr.pdf](http://www.statebillinfo.com/bills/bills/12/1072_enr.pdf)

**Fiscal Analysis:** "State expenditures - Most state institutions of higher education have an existing PLA process. For these schools, the bill has no fiscal impact, as they are already compliant. For any school that does not have an existing process, some effort must be made to offer PLA to students; however, since many models exist for creating a program, this effort is anticipated to be small, and can be accomplished with existing resources."

**Link to the state revised fiscal impact note:** [http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2012a/csl.nsf/fsbillcont3/845EEEEEA117B030387257981007E03A0?Open&file=HB1072\\_r1.pdf](http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2012a/csl.nsf/fsbillcont3/845EEEEEA117B030387257981007E03A0?Open&file=HB1072_r1.pdf)



## FLORIDA

### HB 347: College Credit for military training and education courses

**Summary:** This legislation requires the Board of Governors of the State University System and the State Board of Education to adopt regulations and rules that enable veterans to earn college credit for college-level training and education acquired in the military.

**Status:** Signed by the governor 4/27/2012. Effective 7/2012.

**Links:** <http://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2012/0347/BillText/er/PDF>

<http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Bills/billsdetail.aspx?BillId=47488>

**Fiscal Analysis:** "According to the Board of Governors and the State Board of Education, the bill has no fiscal impact to the State University System or the Florida College System."

**Link:** <http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Documents/loaddoc.aspx?FileName=h0347z1.KINS.DOCX&DocumentType=Analysis&BillNumber=0347&Session=2012>



## HAWAII

### HB 2639

**Summary:** Amends the University of Hawaii College-Credit Equivalency Program to include professional service in the U.S. armed forces. Requires the program to develop a learning assessment to determine eligibility.

**Status:** Enacted 4/9/2012. Effective 7/1/2012.

**Link:** [http://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session2012/bills/HB2639\\_HD2\\_.htm](http://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session2012/bills/HB2639_HD2_.htm).

Should also include the original language of the credit equivalency program.

**Link:** [http://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/hrscurrent/Vol05\\_Ch0261-0319/HRS0304A/HRS\\_0304A-0802.htm](http://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/hrscurrent/Vol05_Ch0261-0319/HRS0304A/HRS_0304A-0802.htm)



## IDAHO

### SB 1299

**Summary:** Adds to existing law relating to military education training and service to provide that the State Board of Education, the Board of Regents of the University of Idaho, the Board of Trustees of certain community colleges and the State Board for Professional-Technical Education shall develop policies relating to the award of academic credit for certain military education, training, or service.

**Status:** Enacted 3/23/2012. Effective 7/1/2012.

**Link:** <http://legislature.idaho.gov/legislation/2012/S1299.htm>

**Fiscal Note:** "There is no fiscal impact to the general fund."

### Board Policy K. Prior Learning

**Summary:** Each institution will establish its own policies and procedures for evaluating and awarding prior learning credit, subject to general Board policies. (Award of credit for AP, CLEP, challenge courses, ACE approved military education or experience, and competency testing)

**Status:** Effective April 2002.

**Link:** [http://www.boardofed.idaho.gov/policies/documents/policies/iii/iii\\_k\\_prior\\_learning\\_04-02.pdf](http://www.boardofed.idaho.gov/policies/documents/policies/iii/iii_k_prior_learning_04-02.pdf)



## INDIANA

### Indiana State Workforce Innovation Council (SWIC) Resolution

Formal resolution to encourage the use of PLA for WIA participants; see <http://www.in.gov/dwd/files/swic/Resolution-PLA-121511.doc>

Policy document that provided guidance to local and regional Workforce Investment Boards on implementation and how WIA training funds can be utilized for PLA activities.

### HB 1116

**Summary:** Requires a state educational institution to adopt a policy to award educational credit to an individual who successfully completes courses that are part of the individual's military service; meet the standards of the ACE for awarding academic credit... requires that the commission for higher education adopt rules that establish uniform guidelines for state educational institutions to follow when implementing the requirements.

**Status:** Enacted 3/14/2012.

**Link:** <http://www.in.gov/apps/lisa/session/billwatch/billinfo?year=2012&session=1&request=getBill&doctype=HB&docno=1116>

### HB 1135

**Summary:** Requires state educational institutions to grant postsecondary level academic credit to students who receive a satisfactory score on an advanced placement exam.

**Status:** Enacted 3/18/2010.

**Link:** <http://www.in.gov/apps/lisa/session/billwatch/billinfo?year=2010&session=1&request=getBill&docno=1135>

### Policy 2011-14: Department of Workforce Development Policy on Using Workforce Training Funds for Prior Learning Assessment

**Summary:** Policy to provide guidance on how Workforce Investment Funds can be utilized to provide prior learning assessments to eligible participants enrolled in occupational training.

**Status:** Effective March 30, 2012

**Link:** [http://www.in.gov/dwd/files/DWD\\_Policy\\_2011\\_14.pdf](http://www.in.gov/dwd/files/DWD_Policy_2011_14.pdf)

The State Workforce Innovation Council (SWIC) and the Indiana Department of Workforce Development (DWD) place a high value on prior learning assessment, and believe that investing in PLA may save Workforce Investment Act participants time and funds as they participate in occupational skills training funded by the Workforce Investment Act.



## KENTUCKY

### Council Policy 13 KAR 2:025 College preparatory education (AP credit)

**Summary:** Kentucky state law requires the Council to disseminate an administrative regulation requiring public postsecondary educational institutions to grant academic college credit toward graduation for students taking AP courses and scoring three (3) or higher on the AP exam.

**Status:** Effective the 2003-2004 school year.

**Link:** <http://www.lrc.state.ky.us/kar/013/002/025.htm>

**LOUISIANA****HB 500**

**Summary:** An act to require that each college/university board should adopt by 1/1/2012, a policy requiring each institution to award educational credits to a student at the institution who is also a veteran, for courses that are part of the student's military training or service and that meet certain academic standards; to limit tuition and mandatory attendance fee amounts applicable to a student who is not a resident of the state and who is a veteran.

**Status:** Signed by the governor 6/2011. Became Act No. 191.

**Link:** <http://www.legis.state.la.us/billdata/streamdocument.asp?did=760100>

**Fiscal Analysis:** "There is no anticipated direct material effect on governmental expenditures as a result of this measure. The provisions of the proposed legislation requiring higher education boards and institutions to accept military education courses will not significantly impact expenditures because these credits are already accepted in most cases according to the Board of Regents.

**Link:** <http://www.legis.state.la.us/billdata/streamdocument.asp?did=759568>

**MARYLAND****MD Higher Education Commission Regulation - Credit for Prior Learning**

**Summary:** An institution may grant credit for prior learning or experience based upon successful completion of an acceptable standardized examination such as the College Level Examination Program.

**Status:** Adopted.

**Link:** [http://www.mhec.state.md.us/higherEd/COMAR/COMAR\\_CH\\_02\\_Web.pdf](http://www.mhec.state.md.us/higherEd/COMAR/COMAR_CH_02_Web.pdf) (Page 31)

**MINNESOTA****Subdivision 2 of Statute 197.775: Higher Education Fairness (as related to veterans)**

**Summary:** Minnesota State Colleges and Universities must recognize courses and award educational credits for courses that were part of a veteran's military training or service if the courses meet the standards of the American Council on Education or equivalent standards for awarding academic credits. (The statute

also calls for state colleges and universities to treat a veteran as a Minnesota resident for purposes of determining the veteran's undergraduate tuition rate and lays out procedures relating to delayed payment of tuition.)

**Status:** Enacted in 2006.

**Link:** <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=197.775>

### *Policy 3.35: Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board Policy relating to credit for prior learning*

**Summary:** The policy requires that colleges and universities (1) provide opportunities to students to demonstrate college-level learning gained in non-credit or experiential settings, (2) develop or update institutional policy in accordance with system policy, (3) comply with Statute 197.775, Higher Education Fairness, and (4) disseminate information about prior learning assessment opportunities to students.

**Status:** Adopted in 2008. Implemented in 2009.

**Links:** <http://www.mnscu.edu/board/policy/3-35.pdf>

<http://www.mnscu.edu/board/policy/335.html>

"While policy 3.35 provides an overarching framework for prior learning assessment, Board policies also are in place for three nationally recognized examination programs that grant credit for prior learning - AP, International Baccalaureate, and CLEP."

### *Procedure 3.29.1 College and University Transcripts Part 4: Notation of Credit Awarded for Prior Learning or Earned by Examination*

**Summary:** Institutions may award credit earned by means other than actually taking a course at the institution. These may include "testing out" of a course by taking a locally designed test, CLEP or AP tests, DANTES or International Baccalaureate. Credit awarded for prior learning or earned by examination may be noted either in the term when it was earned or in the transfer section. If placed in the term section, the type of special credit must be noted in parentheses immediately below the course.

**Link:** <http://www.mnscu.edu/board/procedure/329p1.html>

 **NORTH DAKOTA*****SBHE Policy 403.6: Course Challenges and Prior Learning Credit and 441***

**Policy 403.6 Summary:** “Institutions may allow students to earn course credits without enrolling in the course offering by evaluating their competency with locally developed tests or other proficiency assessments.” Effective 2/22/2002.

**Policy 441 Summary:** This policy defines degree credit and additional forms of degree credit related to prior learning assessments including: standardized examinations (exs. CLEP, AP, DSST, IB) [NDUS Procedure 403.7.4 Common Credit-By Exam Guidelines]; challenge examinations [SBHE Policy 805.3]; evaluated non-college coursework (such as previous military training for veterans).

*Policy 403.7.4 Common Credit-by-Exam Guidelines*

**Status:** Effective 1/4/2012.

**Links:** <http://www.ndus.edu/makers/procedures/ndus/default.asp?PID=454&SID=56>

<http://www.ndus.edu/makers/procedures/ndus/default.asp?PID=323&SID=56>

 **OHIO*****Board of Regents Statewide Policy: Awarding of College Credit for Military Training/Experience***

**Summary:** This policy recognizes prior learning acquired through military training, experience, and coursework and is recognized across all Ohio public institutions.

**Status:** Signed by the chancellor in 4/2011. Scheduled to be fully implemented by fall 2012.

**Links:** <http://www.ohiohighered.org/sites/default/files/dir-2011-004.pdf>

<http://www.ohiohighered.org/transfer/military>

System Policy: Awarding of College Credit for College-Level Examination Program (CLEP)

**Summary:** Awards college credit for nationally recognized testing programs; recognizes prior learning for military veterans, nontraditional students, and many others.

CLEP exams are free for active military service members. Veterans may seek reimbursement. Exam fee is \$77.

**Status:** Implemented.

**Link:** <http://www.ohiohighered.org/transfer/military>

**OKLAHOMA**



Policy 3.15: State Regents for Higher Education Policy on Credit for Extrainstitutional Learning

**Summary:** This policy requires State System institutions to develop institutional policies for evaluating extraintitutional learning and for awarding credit consistent with this policy. (Extraintitutional learning applies to learning acquired from work and life experiences, independent reading and study, and participation in formal courses sponsored by associations, business, government, industry, the military, and unions.)

**Acceptable methods for validating extraintitutional learning for awarding credit include:** ACE guidelines, AP exams, individual portfolios, International Baccalaureate Program, etc. (This policy applies to all institutions in the State System. "Institutions may establish higher standards or use other validation methods to meet these standards by submitting approval requests to the State Regents for approval.")

**Status:** Approved 7/1972. Last revision 6/2006.

**Link:** <http://www.okhighered.org/state-system/policy-procedures/2011/AA%20Procedures%20Handbook%20December%202011.pdf> (Policy can be found on pages 100-102.)

Costs to students for establishment of credit should be comparable throughout the State System, and should reflect as closely as possible the actual costs for institutional administration of the program. Institutional charges for evaluating extraintitutional learning, by means other than nationally developed examination, shall be based upon the actual costs of the evaluations. Charges for administration and recording of credit for extraintitutional learning based on nationally developed examinations shall be at the rate established by the national testing agency for the particular test. No other charges shall be made for the administration or recording of this credit.

K. Credit for extraintitutional learning, once recorded at a State System institution, is transferable on the same basis as if the credit had been earned through regular study at the awarding institution.

**OREGON****SB 275**

**Summary:** This bill requires the board of education at each community college district to develop standards and give credit for education and training obtained by veterans that meets the standards adopted by the board.

**Status:** Passed and signed by the governor in 2011. Effective 1/2012.

**Link:** <http://www.leg.state.or.us/11reg/measures/sb0200.dir/sb0275.en.html>

**Fiscal Analysis:** "Minimal fiscal impact, no statement issued."

**Link:** <http://www.leg.state.or.us/comm/sms/SMS11Frameset.html>

**HB 4059**

**Summary:** This legislation directs the Higher Education Coordinating Commission to carry out goals relating to academic credit for prior learning by students. Goals include increasing the number of students who receive academic credit for prior learning, increasing the number and type of academic credits accepted for prior learning, developing transparent policies and practices in awarding academic credit for prior learning, improving prior learning assessment practices across all institutions of higher education, and more.

**Status:** Signed by the governor 4/2012. Effective 7/2012.

**Link:** <http://www.leg.state.or.us/12reg/measpdf/hb4000.dir/hb4059.intro.pdf>

<http://www.leg.state.or.us/comm/sms/SMS11Frameset.html>

**SOUTH CAROLINA****Advanced Placement Credit Award Policy**

**Summary:** "Each public institution shall give credit in appropriate courses for scores of three or better on pertinent AP exams..."

**Status: Approved:** 1/1985.

### International Baccalaureate Credit Award Policy

**Summary:** "Each public institution of higher education within the state shall adopt and implement a policy by Fall 2008 for the acceptance of International Baccalaureate credit for first-time freshman students who have scored '4' or above on any higher-level IB course examination."

**Status:** Approved: 10/2007.

**Link:** [www.che.sc.gov/AcademicAffairs/APIB\\_Policy.pdf](http://www.che.sc.gov/AcademicAffairs/APIB_Policy.pdf)



### TENNESSEE

#### Board of Regents Policy 2-01-00-04: Awarding credits earned through extra-institutional learning to community colleges and universities

**Summary:** Authorizes each community college and university to develop procedures that allow for the recognition of equivalent extra-institutional learning processes that include the awarding of credit or advanced placement.

**Status:** Enacted 3/2006.

**Link:** <http://www.tbr.edu/policies/default.aspx?id=994>

*Note: This policy is currently undergoing strengthening and updating. For more information see the Tennessee Case Study.*



### TEXAS

#### SB 1736

**Summary:** This legislation pertains to the establishment of the College Credit for Heroes Program and requires a commission to identify, develop, and support methods to maximize academic or workforce education credit awarded by institutions of higher education to veterans and military service members for military experience, education, and training obtained during military service.

**Status:** Signed by the governor 6/17/2011.

**Links:** <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/tlodocs/82R/billtext/pdf/SB01736F.pdf#navpanes=0>

<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=82R&Bill=SB1736>

**Fiscal Analysis:** “No significant fiscal implication to the State is anticipated... Based on the analysis of the Texas Workforce Commission and the Higher Education Coordinating Board, it is assumed that duties and responsibilities associated with implementing the provisions of the bill could be accomplished by utilizing existing resources.”

**Link:** <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/tlodocs/82R/fiscalnotes/html/SB01736I.htm>



## VIRGINIA

### HB 195: Higher Education Military Experience Course Credit

**Summary:** Requires the governing boards of each public institution of higher education, in accordance with guidelines developed by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, to implement policies that award academic credit to students for educational experience gained from military service.

**Status:** Enacted 3/8/2012.

**Link:** <http://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?ses=121&typ=bil&val=hb195>

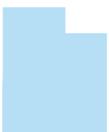
### S 209/S 1077

**Summary:** Requires the governing boards of each public institution of higher education to implement policies to grant a minimum number of undergraduate semester credit hours to entering freshman students who have successfully completed the IB diploma program or AP exams.

**Status:** Enacted 4/1//2010 and 3/15/2011.

*Additional note: A presentation to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia on 3/20/2012 mentioned the recommendation “standardize procedures for providing credits for prior work experience.”*

**Link:** <http://www.schev.edu/schev/AgendaBooks/2012March/Presentations/AdultLearnerPresentation.pdf>.



## UTAH

### Board Policy 470-9: To establish the credit by examination policy

**Summary:** “The Board of Regents accepts as valid the concept of credit by examination without equivalent previous college coursework. Because of the variety of testing programs, the domain of individual departments and General Education, the following specific policies shall apply: Examinations that replace

specific coursework; departmentally devised examinations; external standardized examinations; advanced placement examinations... students may demonstrate that they have specific subject matter credit through the Prior Learning Assessment developed by the Council of Adult and Experiential Learning. Institutional departments should evaluate and accept such credit if it meets institutional and departmental standards.”

**Status:** Implemented. Revised 3/25/2011.

**Link:** <http://higheredutah.org/sbr/policy/pdf/R470.pdf>



## WASHINGTON

### SSB 6357

**Summary:** The legislation directed the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) to consult with a variety of specific stakeholder groups and develop policies for awarding academic credit for learning from work and military experience, military and law enforcement training, career college training, internships and externships, and apprenticeships.

**Status:** Signed by the governor 3/2010. Effective 6/2010.

**Link:** <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/documents/billdocs/2009-10/Pdf/Bills/Senate%20Passed%20Legislature/6357-S.PL.pdf>

**Fiscal Analysis:** “The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) anticipates that due to pre-existing policies recognizing most of these experiences for credit where appropriate, any consultation with the SBCTC would likely be accomplished within current resources.”

**Link:** <https://fortress.wa.gov/ofm/fnspublic/legsearch.asp?BillNumber=6357&SessionNumber=61>

### HB 1795

**Summary:** Required the Higher Education Coordinating Board, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, the Council of Presidents, the four-year institutions of higher education, the private independent higher education institutions, and the private career schools to work together to improve the administration of PLA statewide.

**Status:** Passed 2011.

**Link:** <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/documents/billdocs/2011-12/Pdf/Bills/Session Law 2011/1795-S2.SL.pdf>

## HB 2483

**Summary:** Reaffirmed HB 1795 to establish a taskforce to address the following goals:

- Increase the number of students who receive PLA credits;
- Increase the number and type of PLA credits that count towards a major or earn a degree, certificate, or credential, while ensuring quality;
- Develop transparent PLA policies and practices in awarding academic credit for prior learning;
- Create PLA tools to develop faculty and staff and share exemplary policies and practices;
- Develop articulation agreements; and
- Develop outcome measures to track progress on goals.

It also defined Prior Learning as “the knowledge and skills gained through work and life experience; through military training and experience; and through formal and informal education and training from in-state and out-of-state institutions including foreign institutions.”

**Status:** Passed 2012.

**Link:** [http://apps.leg.wa.gov/documents/billdocs/2011-12/Pdf/Bills/Session Law 2012/2483-S2.SL.pdf](http://apps.leg.wa.gov/documents/billdocs/2011-12/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Law%202012/2483-S2.SL.pdf)



**WISCONSIN**  
Veterans

“All UW institutions offer evaluations of military transcripts and service. In addition, credit can be earned at the discretion of the academic department using various exam and non-exam methods.”

**Link:** <http://www.wisconsin.edu/audit/Credit4PriorLearn.pdf>

**CLEP:** All UW System campuses award credit for satisfactory scores on at least one or more of the 34 CLEP exams.

**Link:** <http://uwhelp.wisconsin.edu/testing/credit.aspx>

**AP credit:** Scores of 3, 4, and 5 on the College Board Advanced Placement examinations will be accepted for degree credit by all University of Wisconsin System Institutions. Each Institution will determine whether course equivalent credit or credit in the major should be granted and the AP score required to grant credit for those purposes.

**Status:** Adopted 1991. Effective 1992.

**Link:** <http://www.wisconsin.edu/bor/policies/rpd/rpd4-11.htm>

Other PLA policies differ at each college - CLEP, AP, Veterans, military experience, portfolios, etc.



## WEST VIRGINIA

*West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission -  
Procedural Rule Title 133, Series 16: CLEP*

**Summary:** Students in West Virginia state colleges and universities may be awarded credit for the successful completion of any or all of the CLEP Subject Examinations presently offered or developed in the future.

**Status:** Effective 6/22/2002.

**Link:** <https://www.wvhepc.org/resources/133-16.pdf>

*Additional note: Relating to veterans - there is currently no system-wide policy - hoping to pass legislation in the future*

## Appendix C: Additional Resources

### Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success

*Rebecca Klein-Collins*

With support from Lumina Foundation for Education, CAEL collected data on 62,475 students at 48 higher education institutions that offer prior learning assessment (PLA). The report presents our findings on the comparison of PLA students with non-PLA students in terms of earned degrees, persistence and time to degree.

[http://www.cael.org/pdfs/PLA\\_Fueling-the-Race](http://www.cael.org/pdfs/PLA_Fueling-the-Race)

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### CAEL Prior Learning Assessment Services

<http://www.cael.org/Whom-We-Serve/Colleges-and-Universities/Prior-Learning-Assessment-Services>

Provides basic information on PLA, CAEL's quality standard for PLA, information about online portfolio assessment initiative LearningCounts.org, and faculty/staff PLA professional development opportunities.

### LearningCounts.org

A national online PLA service offering portfolio development services to expand capacity of colleges and universities wanting to offer PLA portfolio option to students. [www.learningcounts.org](http://www.learningcounts.org)

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### American Council on Education (ACE) Credit Recommendation Service

<http://www.acenet.edu/AM/Template.cfm?Section=CCRS>

### ACE Military Guide Online

<http://militaryguides.acenet.edu/>

### A Transfer Guide: Understanding your Military Credit Recommendations

This guide is based on the simple principle that if you have a clear understanding of your military transcript and basic information about transfer policies and issues, you can more successfully navigate your way through the process of transfer credit for military training and experience. This publication will serve as

your resource for understanding military credit recommendations, transcripts, and their use when you wish to transfer to an academic institution.

[http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/MilitaryPrograms/Transfer\\_Guide.htm](http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/MilitaryPrograms/Transfer_Guide.htm)

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### Degree Completion Beyond Institutional Borders

by Rebecca Klein-Collins, Amy Sherman, and Louis Soares

This paper, published in partnership with the Center for American Progress, discusses the ways in which higher education has made efforts to recognize learning and remove other institutional barriers to credit and learning portability. Solutions discussed include articulation and transfer agreements, prior learning assessment, degree completion institutions, and competency-based models.

[http://www.cael.org/pdfs/124\\_degree\\_completion\\_beyond\\_borders](http://www.cael.org/pdfs/124_degree_completion_beyond_borders)

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### Earn College Credit for What You Know

offers the latest, most current information on prior learning assessment (PLA) for adult learners, professionals, evaluators, administrators, faculty and training managers. Prior learning assessment is a valid, yet underused, process of evaluating and recognizing learning that helps adults to earn credit for knowledge acquired through work, training, volunteer and union activities, hobbies and other life experiences.

<http://www.kendallhunt.com/cael/>

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### Assessing Learning: Standards, Principles, and Procedures

Since CAEL first published Urban Whitaker's book *Assessing Learning: Standards, Principles, and Procedures* in 1989, the landscape of higher education and adult learning has changed dramatically. While respecting the Whitaker framework and the fundamental principles, authors Morry Fiddler and Catherine Marienau have added important perspectives and contexts that bring the assessment of learning to new venues, including work-based learning and non-credit-based learning. This second edition provides an updated set of standards for the assessment of learning and the awarding of credit for learning gained from experience.

<http://www.kendallhunt.com/store-product.aspx?id=4333>

## Availability, Use and Value of Prior Learning Assessment within Community Colleges

*Cathy Bringham, PhD and Rebecca Klein-Collins*

This report presents the findings of an exploratory study of how prior learning assessment (PLA) is used and viewed within community colleges. The results are from a 2010 survey of select community college administrators.

[http://www.cael.org/pdfs/123\\_pla\\_communitycolleges](http://www.cael.org/pdfs/123_pla_communitycolleges)

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## The Learning That Maturity Brings: An Analysis of the Value of Prior Learning Assessment for Mature Learners, February 2012

In this research brief, CAEL showcases findings from our 2010 PLA study by age group. The data show that mature learners with credit earned through PLA truly excel. Compared with younger students with PLA credit, mature learners with PLA credit earn a higher average number of credits through PLA, have higher graduation rates, and require a shorter time to earn a degree.

[http://www.cael.org/pdfs/PLA\\_Mature\\_Learner](http://www.cael.org/pdfs/PLA_Mature_Learner)

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## Employer Views on the Value of PLA, February 2012

This CAEL research brief, produced in partnership with Prometric, presents highlights from conversations with 19 U.S. employers representing a range of industries on the topic of PLA. The conversations address the value of PLA to workers and corporations, as well as employers' views on PLA as an allowable expense within their tuition assistance programs.

[http://www.cael.org/pdfs/PLA\\_Employer\\_Research](http://www.cael.org/pdfs/PLA_Employer_Research)

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## Moving the Starting Line Through Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), 2011

This research brief provides an analysis of the average number of credits students earn for what they already know. It offers information on the average number of PLA credits earned by a subgroup of 4,905 students in our sample, looking at how the average number of credits differs by institution type and by students of various demographic groups.

[http://www.cael.org/pdfs/PLA\\_research\\_brief\\_avg\\_credit](http://www.cael.org/pdfs/PLA_research_brief_avg_credit)

### *Underserved Students Who Earn Credit Through Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Have Higher Degree Completion Rates and Shorter Time-to-Degree, 2011*

In this research brief, CAEL showcases findings from our 2010 PLA study by race/ethnicity and income – two demographic categories often used to define underserved student groups. The data show that black non-Hispanic, Hispanic and low-income students with PLA credits have better academic outcomes than similar students without PLA credits. The positive findings for low-income, black non-Hispanic and Hispanic students suggest that awarding college credit for significant life learning could be an effective way to accelerate degree completion, while lowering the cost, for underserved student populations.

[http://www.cael.org/pdfs/126\\_pla\\_research\\_brief\\_1\\_underserved04-2011](http://www.cael.org/pdfs/126_pla_research_brief_1_underserved04-2011)