



SUCCESS
CENTER
for
CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

**CREDIT FOR
PRIOR LEARNING
INITIATIVE**



Credit for Prior Learning

A framework of policy components to consider



Introduction

Many students enter community colleges with skills and knowledge gained outside of college classrooms. They hold industry certifications, are graduates of public service academies, and were trained for military service occupations, for example. Credit for prior learning (CPL) is credit awarded for validated college-level skills and knowledge gained outside of a college classroom. A significant base of research suggests that students are more likely to complete—and save time and money in the process—when they receive credit for prior learning. In 2017, the California Community Colleges began to explore how to expand CPL to increase completion and improve equity in support of the [Vision for Success](#).

The Lumina Foundation provided funding to help the Chancellor's Office, in partnership with the Foundation for California Community Colleges, expand CPL. The initiative—led by Vice Chancellor Alice Perez with the support of the Success Center—convened a statewide CPL Advisory Committee to inform recommendations. The committee comprised 24 stakeholders from within the system including appointees from the Academic Senate, faculty, articulation officers, counselors, administrators, and other roles, and representatives from California State University and University of California. To help guide the Advisory Committee, the initiative team proposed a framework of components that are typically addressed by policies at the state, district, or institution levels. The initiative team provided background on each component, contextual information related to California's higher education systems, policy alternatives to address the component, and examples of how other states address the component. The CPL Advisory Committee used this information as a basis for discussions at four meetings during 2018 and 2019.

This report largely reflects what was provided to California's CPL Advisory Committee as these stakeholders considered policy alternatives for the California Community Colleges, although some of the California-specific context has been removed. The report has been developed as a resource for other systems, offering a framework of components that can be addressed in state, system, or institutional policies to create a comprehensive approach to credit for prior learning.¹










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¹ The state examples listed in this report (including from California) were current as of the writing of our memos for the CPL Advisory Committee, June 2018-March 2019

Credit for Prior Learning

Policy Framework Components

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The following sections in this report 1) explain why these components are relevant to helping students earn credit for prior learning and 2) offer examples of how these components are addressed in policies from various higher education systems across the country.

² Note: Although the initiative team identified faculty and staff development as a critical component in its policy framework, the California CPL Advisory Committee did not address this component in its work. Therefore, this report does not provide background or state examples.



Definition of Credit for Prior Learning

Other states and their postsecondary systems have different approaches in terms of what they define as credit for prior learning (CPL). Having a clear definition helps determine the types of guidance that should be encompassed in state or system policy. For example:

- In **Washington**, RCW 28B.77.230 defines 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.”
- **Colorado** defines CPL as “college level knowledge or skills that have been attained outside a traditional academic environment and that have not been previously evaluated for or awarded college credit.”
- **Tennessee** CPL policy includes “learning gained outside a traditional academic environment.”
- In **Wisconsin**, “CPL refers to the granting of credit for subject matter mastery that has been accumulated from outside the degree granting institution. Some examples include transfer credit, articulated high school credits, and learning through work or other non-classroom experience.”
- **Virginia** defines CPL as transfer credit from regionally accredited colleges and universities; and skills and knowledge gained in nontraditional educational /training programs (military, industry, state and federal government), and through work, volunteer activities, participation in civic assignments, travel, independent study, and similar life experiences.

The following definition of credit for prior learning was proposed for consideration by the CPL Advisory Committee:

Credit for Prior Learning is academic credit granted for demonstrated college-level skills and knowledge gained through learning experiences outside of a college classroom.

Students’ knowledge and skills might be gained through experiences such as:

- Industrial training
- State/federal government training
- Volunteer and civic activities
- Apprenticeships, internships, work-based learning, or other industry-based experiential learning
- Military training

This CPL definition does not include knowledge and skills already assessed and awarded credit through formal education at regionally accredited in-state and out-of-state institutions or at foreign institutions.



Policy Standards

Ideally, policies are rooted in principles that reflect the mission, values, and culture of an institution and the students it serves. Too often, according to the American Council on Education (ACE), institutions have informal CPL practice in place of a clear policy framework, or they have vague policies that make practice implementation difficult for colleges and students to navigate. The following credit for prior learning policy standards were devised by ACE to help institutions ensure that their developing or existing CPL policies are comprehensive and maintain academic quality.³ These standards were provided as a starting point for consideration by the CPL Advisory Committee.

Standard One: Philosophy and Academic Framework

CPL policy is grounded in the institution's philosophical and academic framework and is consistent with institutional mission, goals, and approaches to learning.

Standard Two: Integrity

CPL policy ensures that all stakeholders (including institutional representatives, students, and any external contributors) promote integrity in the evaluation and documentation of prior learning.

Standard Three: Faculty Qualifications and Engagement

CPL policy assures the involvement of qualified faculty or other subject matter experts.

Standard Four: Student Services

CPL policy assures that students receive effective services.

Standard Five: Credit Management

CPL policy clearly identifies how credits are organized and applied to student records.

Standard Six: Planning, Resources, Improvement

CPL policy assures current and continuous improvement by providing sufficient infrastructure to support policy implementation.

³ Brewer, Patricia and Lakin, Mary Beth. (2018). Credit for Prior Learning: Putting Standards for Policy in Place. American Council on Education: Washington, D.C. Retrieved from <https://www.plaio.org/index.php/home/article/view/135/173>



Prior Learning Assessments

Prior learning assessment (PLA) is the process by which many colleges evaluate for academic credit the college-level knowledge and skills an individual has gained outside of the classroom, including from employment, military training/service, travel, civic activities and volunteer service.

Forms of Assessment: The common practice across states and institutions is that more than one type of PLA is offered to students to demonstrate college-level skills and knowledge. This memo groups prior learning assessments into three categories:

1. **Standardized tests** are externally assessed exams and include tests such as the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP), DSST (formally known as DANTES Subject Standardized Tests), Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate. AP and IB exams are most commonly used to assess prior learning among high school students to accrue college credit prior to high school completion. Common assessments for adult and military/veteran students include CLEP, DSST, and the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT); they are less universally accepted across institutions, despite data supporting their accuracy. Many states with statewide CPL policies established statewide cut scores for standardized tests. When cut scores are determined locally, students do not know what credits are likely to transfer and apply to their chosen degree. Colorado and Ohio, for example, have adopted statewide cut scores for standardized tests that are equivalent to their guaranteed transfer courses.
2. **Locally developed assessments**, sometimes called challenge exams, are a norm across the country. Typically, state-level policy directs these assessments to be developed and evaluated by faculty subject matter experts, and determinations of credit are made based on the alignment of assessed skills to one course's student learning outcomes. The exam can either be in written form, a demonstration of skills, or a portfolio. Portfolios are internally assessed and are a commonly used method for assessing learning that is not easily aligned to one course's student learning outcomes. Many systems offer low-unit portfolio development courses to students. States such as Colorado and Indiana (Ivy Tech) have an [assessment process policy](#) to standardize a statewide practice for developing valid and reliable portfolio preparation.
3. **Published guides or third-party evaluations**, such as those published by the American Council on Education (ACE) and the National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS), review military and workplace training and credentials and make credit recommendations to colleges based on the college-level skills and knowledge conferred in the training. Veterans applying to college can request a Joint Services Transcript, which indicates all training and occupational information from their military service and includes credit recommendations by ACE. Many states and institutions recommend using these guides for credit decisions. The drawback to third-party evaluations is that they require additional work to review and cross-walk them against student learning outcomes in a particular course. However, many systems create repositories to share cross-walks so that once faculty complete one, it can be employed across colleges and reduce duplication of effort. Most statewide policies support the use of these guides, and many have systems in place to assist local faculty to manage the process. Some states have created efficiencies to reduce duplication of effort, such as state-level matrices for cross-walks from prior learning to courses with reciprocal designations or to program pathways from industry certifications.

Many states develop a general policy that sets goals and principles for students to have equitable CPL opportunities but leaves specific methods of assessment and processes to individual colleges. Determination needs to be made regarding the level of prescriptive detail included in the policy. Specific questions include:

- What types of assessments will be accepted? Will any of these be required for all colleges, or will determination be left to local colleges?
- Will the policy recommend considering the credit guidance of ACE and NCCRS?
- What language should be included to preserve faculty decision-making responsibility? States with long-standing, successful PLA policies typically allow faculty to be the final arbiters of credit equivalency questions.

State Policy Examples for Assessments

CALIFORNIA

California Community Colleges (CCC)

California Code of Regulations, Title 5, Section 55050 on Credit by Examination sets the expectation that colleges will provide students the opportunity to earn credit for a course by exam, and guidance on how they may do so. California Code of Regulations, Title 5, Section 55052 on Advanced Placement (AP) Examinations sets the expectation that students with certain cut-scores on AP exams will earn credit for courses as specified by discipline faculty in a cross-walk agreed upon at the system level.⁴

The Academic Senate issued several resolutions in support of credit by exam and adopted a white paper on credit by exam, “Awarding Credit Where Credit is Due.” The paper suggests that the term “exam” is not limited to written assessments—faculty may choose a method of assessment that is best suited to the student and the content.⁵

California State University (CSU)

The CSU system offers guidance on systemwide acceptance of AP, International Baccalaureate (IB), CLEP, and Defense Language Proficiency Test exams.⁶ The system also offers guidance on the use of ACE credit recommendations to award credit for military training in Executive Order 1036.⁷

4 California Code of Regulations

[https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Browse/Home/California/CaliforniaCodeofRegulations?guid=IBBB97A40D48411DEB-C02831C6D6C108E&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=Default&contextData=\(sc.Default\)](https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Browse/Home/California/CaliforniaCodeofRegulations?guid=IBBB97A40D48411DEB-C02831C6D6C108E&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=Default&contextData=(sc.Default))

5 <https://asccc.org/papers/awarding-credit-where-credit-due-effective-practices-implementation-credit-exam>

6 <http://www.calstate.edu/acadaff/codedmemos/ASA-2019-03.pdf>

7 <https://calstate.edu/EO/EO-1036.html>

University of California (UC)

The University of California offers guidance on systemwide acceptance of AB and IB exams. The system does not award credit for CLEP exams.⁸ The system will consider lower-division credit for military training when there is an aligned, equivalent UC course.⁹

HAWAII

Hawaii¹⁰ has a systemwide university and community college policy on prior learning assessments. Hawaii's policy as it pertains to assessments, reads as follows:

The options for granting credits include:

1. Credit by Examination (CE) - Students who feel competent that their background/learning experiences have adequately prepared them in certain subject areas may challenge instructor-prepared examinations. The credit by examination must be approved by appropriate faculty and/or Division Chairperson.
2. Equivalency Examination - Standardized national exams may be equated to equivalent courses. The equivalency examination must be approved by appropriate faculty and/or Division Chairperson. Examples of such examinations include the following:
 - a. AP–Advanced Placement Examination
 - b. CLEP – College-Level Examination Program
 - c. DSST–DANTES Subject Standardized Tests
 - d. IB – International Baccalaureate
3. Portfolio-based Assessment - Prior learning must be documented in writing with evidence of the concepts learned and the achievement level attained. The documenter must also provide a background of his/her credentials and why he/she has the expertise to be a documenter in the field. The prior learning must be verified by content experts, i.e., supervisor, co-workers, personnel staff. Credit for such prior learning must be approved by appropriate faculty and/or Division Chairperson.
4. Non-Collegiate-Sponsored Education Credit - This evaluates learning from courses completed in non-collegiate settings (e.g., professional licenses, labor union courses, agency training programs, professional workshops, and military courses) whose course content is equivalent to offerings from a college. The non-collegiate-sponsored education credit must be approved by appropriate faculty and/or Division Chairperson. Examples of such education credit include the following:
 - a. Military (e.g., Army ACE Registry Transcript System (AARTS), Sailor Marine ACE Registry Transcript (SMART))
 - b. American Council on Education (ACE) College Credit Recommendation Service
 - c. Professional Licenses or Industry Certifications (nationally- or state- certified professionals)

8 AP exams: <http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/counselors/files/ap-satisfy-admission-and-igetc-req.pdf>.

IB exams: <http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/counselors/exam-credit/ib-credits/index.html>

9 UC: http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/counselors/files/Transfer_Credit_Practice.pdf

10 http://uhcc.hawaii.edu/OVPCC/policies/docs/UHCCP_5.302-Prior_Learning_Assessment_Program.pdf

COLORADO

Colorado¹¹ includes many of the PLAs listed above in their community college system policy on prior learning assessments. Colorado's policy allows Colorado's institutions to use the methods as they choose, so as not to preclude any one way, but to not give a lot of guidance on the operational details for accepting these methods. For example, a part of Colorado's state policy on prior learning assessments reads as follows:

“Pursuant to §23-1-125 (4), C.R.S., “Competency testing. On or before July 1, 2010, the commission [Colorado Commission on Higher Education] shall, in consultation with each public institution of higher education, define a process for students to test out of core courses, including specifying use of a national test or the criteria for approving institutionally devised tests. Beginning in the 2010-11 academic year, each public institution of higher education shall grant full course credits to students for the core courses they successfully test out of, free of tuition for those courses.”¹²

The Colorado State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education's prior learning assessment credit policy¹³ reads as follows:

“Methods for Awarding PLA Credit: Approved methods available for awarding PLA Credit include: Standardized Tests, Institutional Challenge Examinations, Published Guides, Portfolios and successful completion of a CCCS approved Colorado Department of Corrections CTE certificate program.”

Colorado also has state guidance¹⁴ on PLAs which includes a credit crosswalk matrix associated with standardized testing and third-party evaluations. The key to the matrices is that they are developed and approved by subject matter experts and then accepted by system colleges without further evaluation.

MINNESOTA

Minnesota's policy pertaining to prior learning assessments is as follows:

Subpart B. Methods of assessing credit for prior learning included in this procedure.

Credit for prior learning includes a broad range of nationally recognized and locally developed examinations as well as the portfolio review or competence demonstration. Board of Trustees policies and procedures exist for three of these nationally recognized examination programs that are referenced in this procedure: Advanced Placement examinations; (3.15, 3.15.1); International Baccalaureate (3.16, 3.16.1); and College Level Examination Program (3.33, 3.33.1).

Part 3. Implementation of Procedure 3.35.1. Each system college and university shall implement a policy and procedure on credit for prior learning that includes the components listed below.

11 <https://highered.colorado.gov/publications/policies/Current/i-partx.pdf>

12 <https://highered.colorado.gov/publications/policies/Current/i-partx.pdf>

13 <https://www.cccs.edu/policies-and-procedures/system-presidents-procedures/sp-9-42-prior-learning-assessment-credit/>

14 <https://internal.cccs.edu/wp-content/uploads/documents/PLAMannual.pdf>

Subpart A. Prior Learning Assessments.

1. **Nationally recognized examinations.** Each system college and university shall provide opportunities for an admitted student to demonstrate college-level learning through nationally recognized examinations.
 - b. Credit by examination. The college or university policy shall specify the type of credit by examination opportunities available to an admitted student. It shall also specify which courses qualify for credit by examination. The list of available credit by examination opportunities include, but are not limited to, the following options.
 - i. Examination programs mandated by Minnesota Statutes and Board of Trustees policy.
 - Advanced Placement (AP) examinations;
 - International Baccalaureate (IB) examinations;
 - College Level Examination Program (CLEP) examinations
 - ii. Other nationally recognized examination programs.
 - Thomas Edison College Examination Program (TECEP);
 - Excelsior examinations, New York University Foreign Language Proficiency (NYUFLP);
 - National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI);
 - DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSST)
2. **Course-specific examinations designed by college or university faculty.** Each system college and university may provide opportunities for an admitted student to demonstrate college-level learning through course-specific examinations designed by college or university faculty. The college or university shall specify which courses are available to an admitted student for credit by faculty-designed examination.
3. **Credit by portfolio review and/or competence demonstration.** The college or university may offer a student the opportunity to earn college credit through portfolio review and/or competence demonstration, and, if so, it shall specify which courses and in what areas qualify for credit by portfolio review and competence demonstration. At system institutions offering this option, a student shall have the opportunity to submit evidence as appropriate to his/her degree program in specified areas of college-level learning for prior assessment. A system college or university may offer a course designed to teach a student how to prepare an effective portfolio; the institution may decide whether a student shall be required to take this course as a prerequisite to presenting a portfolio for evaluation. A student who is required to take such a course shall be provided an opportunity to appeal this requirement. If a system college or university elects to not offer assessment of learning through portfolio review or competence demonstration, the institution shall make available to students a list of system colleges and universities that offer this option to students.
4. Prior learning shall be assessed by faculty in the academic discipline appropriate to the student assessment request as determined by college or university policy and procedure.

5. Each system college and university shall grant credit to a student who earns an institutionally determined score or higher on national examinations, including but not limited to DANTES, TECEP, and NOCTI. Minimum scores for earning credit set by the college or university shall be easily accessible and available to students.
6. Each system college and university policy shall state that credit for prior learning shall be granted according to the standards and equivalencies of the American Council on Education or the equivalent.



Awarding and Transcribing Credit for Prior Learning

A key consideration related to CPL is how and when to award credit and how credit is reflected on a student's transcript. Transcription policies are critical as they can impact a student's progression towards timely completion and can impact access and equity across diverse socioeconomic populations. Examples outlined here will demonstrate what is typically articulated in state policy versus campus/district policy and suggest stakeholders who should be involved in decision-making. The models described come from the examples listed in the state examples section: Tennessee, Colorado, Hawaii, Minnesota. The questions typically answered in state policy include the following:

CPL CREDIT LIMITS

Whether there should be a limit on how many CPL credits a student can earn speaks, in part, to what is traditionally called the "residency requirement" in regard to transfer credit. Most institutions have guidance, usually associated with accreditation, on what percentage of earned institutional credit (residency credit) is necessary for the institution to reasonably confer a degree. The number is expressed in percentages to take into account certificate and degree programs that vary in required number of credits for completion. Institutions will sometimes assign CPL credit limits to particular programs of study with the idea that students need more of the particular instruction offered by the college or because the program of study accreditation requires it (as in the case of Nursing). One of the advantages of a system-level policy on this is that students will be able to choose colleges based on program offerings and location, rather than trying to find the colleges that will give them the most CPL toward a degree.

CREDIT FOR GENERAL EDUCATION AND CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION RATHER THAN ELECTIVES

Students, especially those who are bringing in learning from the military, are at risk for negative financial aid implications if they are given too many elective credits, either through CPL or transfer. The credits they accrue, however they are earned, are counted against the 150% financial aid satisfactory progress metrics and can create a situation where a student is unable to finish a program because their funding is denied due to excess credits. Electives are less likely to transfer from institution to institution and will especially impact those moving from the 2-year to 4-year schools. For those reasons, state policies typically encourage colleges to award general education or career technical education credit when awarding CPL, rather than elective credits.

AWARDING CREDIT PRIOR TO OR AFTER COURSE REGISTRATION

Best practice in the field suggests that students should be allowed to challenge courses for CPL prior to registration and without limitation in terms of prior resident credit requirements. The practice of requiring students to in some way "prove" their motivation by accumulating resident credit first or by registering for the course and then, quickly, testing out before the end of the drop period, creates significant barriers for students. It can discourage adults from using the CPL option because the cost and risks to financial aid. Critically, it can discourage students from enrolling at all because they lack the self-efficacy to move through the college gauntlet.

TRANSFER OF CPL CREDIT BETWEEN SYSTEM COLLEGES

When significant barriers exist to the easy transfer of credits, colleges are less likely to engage in the process for fear of disadvantaging their students; they do not want to advise a student to earn CPL credit only to have the student be required to repeat a course at their next community college or at the four-year level. Best practices associated with this embed transfer policy guidance at the state or system level. In Colorado, students who transcript credit in guaranteed pathways courses (general education) at any public institution have a guarantee that the credit will transfer to all other public institutions in the state, no matter how it was earned. Systems may also opt to require transfer between their own colleges, whether the credit is guaranteed to move to non-system colleges, to create transparency for their students.

NOTING CPL ON TRANSCRIPTS AND IN STUDENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Noting CPL on transcripts is different than noting CPL in student information systems. The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admission Officers identifies the tracking of CPL credit in student information systems as a best practice and cites the Department of Education Dear Colleague letter (DCL ID: GEN-14-23) in regard to Title IV funding to make the case. The citation is included in a report from a survey of AACRAO's international membership to see how colleges offer and track CPL credit. The data from student information systems is especially important to track the assessment, evaluation and decision-making processes related to CPL, as well as tracking student outcomes.

With respect to noting CPL on transcripts, AACRAO supports noting that credit was earned for prior learning, as not doing so hinders transparency and can create mistrust between institutions. Others suggest that noting credit without a CPL designation can be advantageous to students in that the credit will be less likely to be challenged by receiving institutions.

State Policy Examples for Awarding and Transcribing Credit

CALIFORNIA

California Code of Regulations Title 5 Section 55050 Credit by Examination governs many of the questions presented here for California Community Colleges (CCC), but only for one method of PLA: locally developed exams (which the system calls "credit by examination"). The parts of the law relevant to this category state:

- (e) The student's academic record shall be clearly annotated to reflect that credit was earned by examination.
- (f) Grading shall be according to the regular grading system approved by the governing board pursuant to section 55023, except that students shall be offered a "pass-no pass" option if that option is ordinarily available for the course.
- (g) Units for which credit is given pursuant to the provisions of this section shall not be counted in determining the 12 semester hours of credit in residence required for an associate degree.

CCC students do not earn grades for standardized exams or credit determinations made using third-party evaluations/recommendations.

TENNESSEE

The institutional process for awarding credits through Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) by TBR community colleges must be in compliance with the *Recommended Standards in Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Policy and Practice of Tennessee Public Colleges and Universities* (August 7, 2012).

1. The Standards ensure transferability of PLA credit, include identification of types of PLA credits available, *instruct campuses on the transcription of PLA credit*, and establish common standards for portfolio review.
2. The Standards are available, in their entirety, as Exhibit 1 to TBR Guideline A-030 Articulation Among Community Colleges.

When awarding credit under this provision, the institution should use a recognized guide or procedure for awarding the credit for extra-institutional or life-long learning.¹⁵

[The policy lists recognized guides and procedures]

Tennessee Standards for Policy and Practice (TN PLA Task Force)

Requirements for PLA credit to be awarded: Academic credit will be awarded only:

- a. For students who have been admitted to an institution.
- b. After the student has consulted with an advisor about the possibility and advisability of seeking credit for PLA.
- c. For students who have declared an academic program.
- d. For courses directly applicable to curriculum requirements of the declared program.
Changing majors will result in a reassessment of the applicability of the PLA credit.

The number of CPL credits allowed. Typically, the number of CPL credits allowed follow whatever the institutional policy is on Transfer credit. This is typically noted as a percentage of credit rather than a number.¹⁶

COLORADO

[Prior Learning Assessment Credit Policy](#) | BP 9-42

Statewide Minimum PLA Credit standards shall be based on the criteria delineated below:

1. The prior learning shall be assessed in accordance with national standards and best practices as outlined in [The PLA Credit Manual](#).
2. Prior learning shall be assessed and awarded through: Portfolio, Challenge Exam, and Standardized Testing, the use of Published Guide or through the use of the PLA Credit Matrix in the PLA Credit Manual.

¹⁵ Italics added for emphasis.

¹⁶ See <https://www.ohiohighered.org/sites/ohiohighered.org/files/uploads/PLA/TN%20Recommendations%20for%20Standards%20in%20PLA%20-%20Final%20Version%201.pdf>

3. The prior learning shall be college level.
4. **The credits earned through accepted PLA credit methods shall be treated equally in their application and use in course equivalencies.**
5. The PLA Credit granted shall be accepted as transfer credit by all of the State System community colleges.
6. The knowledge and skills being assessed shall be relevant to the student's program of study and meet current program requirements.

With regard to the award of credit through acceptable PLA Credit methodologies:

1. Credit shall be awarded.
2. Credit shall apply towards specific degree or certificate requirements.
3. Transcripts shall note credit/no grade.
4. No FTE shall be generated for credit under this policy.
5. The cost of assessing student learning for PLA Credit shall be standardized across all State System community colleges as determined by the President or designee.
6. PLA Credit shall not be utilized to fulfill institutional residency requirements.

WASHINGTON¹⁷

Award of Credit for Prior Learning

This occurs when a student's prior learning outcomes are assessed and determined to be the equivalent of expected learning achievement for a course or courses within the institution's regular curricular offerings, and if the award of credit aligns with the student's education pathway.

Faculty

In its accreditation standards, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities defines the faculty role in assessing student learning outcomes. Standard 2.C.5 states, "... Faculty with teaching responsibilities take collective responsibility for fostering and assessing student achievement of clearly identified learning outcomes" and, 2.C.7 states, "Credit for prior experiential learning, if granted, is...granted only upon the recommendation of appropriately qualified teaching faculty."

Eligibility

Students eligible to receive credit for prior learning must be enrolled at the awarding institution.

Applicability

Assessing and awarding academic credit for prior learning is appropriate for courses which are both:

- Currently offered by the institution which will award the credit,
- And which will contribute to the completion of the student's certificate or degree pathway.

¹⁷ <https://www.wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2017.ACPL%20Handbook.pdf>

Number of Credits

The number of credits for prior learning accepted by institutions may be limited by the residency requirements of the institution, requirements of the regional and other accrediting bodies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, and the student's degree plan or career goals. The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities limits credits in the category of prior experiential learning (portfolio assessment) to no more than 25 percent of the credits needed to earn a certificate or degree.

Assessment and Validation

Institutions may award credit for learning which is determined to match a significant percentage (as stated in the policy of the awarding institution) of the stated learning outcomes for the course for which the credit will be awarded.

Application of Credits

Schools may apply academic credit for prior learning to degree or program requirements in the same manner as credits earned through course completion at the awarding institution.

MISSOURI

Missouri's policy states:

At least one credit hour must be successfully completed and transcribed into the student's records before any CPL credit can be awarded, applicable to the degree program at each individual college.¹⁸

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.¹⁹

WISCONSIN²⁰

Each WTCS college will adopt policies and procedures for awarding CPL that are consistent with State Board policy and procedures established by the System Office. Colleges should ensure the availability of their policies and procedures on CPL in college publications and websites. Each WTCS college's CPL policy must address:

1. Minimum Grade Requirements
 - a. College policies and/or procedures will require that only postsecondary credits awarded a minimum 2.0 grade point on a 4.0 scale qualify for transfer as CPL to a WTCS college from a nationally or regionally accredited institution of higher education. District policies and/or procedures shall specify that high school credits require a minimum 3.0 grade point on a 4.0 scale to qualify for transfer as CPL to a WTCS college.

18 See Missouri's Credit for Prior Learning Model (2013), pg. 4: <http://www.mowins.org/uploads/7/6/3/2/76321365/updated-missouri-credit-for-prior-learning-policy-adopted-03.06.2013.pdf>

19 See Minnesota State Colleges & Universities' Procedure 3.29.1: <https://www.minnstate.edu/board/procedure/3-29p1.pdf>

20 <https://mywtcs.wtcsystem.edu/initiatives-policies/initiatives/credit-for-prior-learning>

2. Impact of Transferred Credits on College Transcripts and Grade Point Calculations
 - a. **College policies and/or procedures will specify how awarded CPL will appear on college transcripts, including whether awarded credit will carry a letter grade and identify when awarded credit counts in computing student grade point averages.**
3. CPL Costs
 - a. College policies and/or procedures will include information on expected costs for students seeking CPL.
 - b. PLA fees across the WTCS are consistent as agreed to by WTCS College Presidents (See PLA).
4. Consistency Within a College Across Program Areas
 - a. College policies and/or procedures shall include consistent approaches across program areas within the technical college for awarding CPL that ensure equitable treatment of students.
5. Time Limits
 - a. Time limits will not restrict CPL credit awarded unless a college has documented a specific programmatic reason for time limits.
6. Maximum CPL
 - a. College policies and/or procedures will require that applied associate degree or associate degree students complete 25 percent of the required technical studies (or liberal arts credits for students enrolled in liberal arts transfer programs) while enrolled as postsecondary students at the technical college that will award the postsecondary degree
 - b. College policies and/or procedures will require that technical diploma students complete 25 percent of occupational-specific credits while enrolled as postsecondary students at the technical college that will award the postsecondary degree.
 - c. College policies and/or procedures will not establish requirements beyond the 25 percent of credits required for completion at the technical college that will award the postsecondary degree or diploma.
 - d. College policies and/or procedures will specify that this requirement applies to students who qualified for CPL because they completed a state-approved Youth Apprenticeship program.
7. Appeal Process
 - a. College policies and/or procedures will identify a process by which students who request CPL may appeal institutional decisions about the awarding of CPL.

HAWAII

UHCCP # 5.302 Prior Learning Assessment Program November 2013²¹

V. Procedures

Participating UH campuses will establish procedures for granting PLA credit in each of the common options listed in Part III. In determining its procedures, each campus at a minimum shall ensure that:

- a. **Courses for which credit are granted based on PLA will be recorded as Credit by Examination (CE) or Credit (CR) as appropriate (Attachment B).**
- b. **Courses for which credit are granted based on PLA will be accepted to fulfill applicable certificate/degree requirements.**
- c. **Limitations to the number of CE credits allowed will be based on current Western Association of Schools and Colleges recommendations.**
- d. **Criteria for awarding credit should be demonstrated mastery of student learning outcomes at a “C” level or higher.**

²¹ http://uhcc.hawaii.edu/OVPCC/policies/docs/UHCCP_5.302-Prior_Learning_Assessment_Program.pdf



Transparency, Accessibility, and Student Supports

Transparency

Transparency refers to ways in which all stakeholders are informed about credit for prior learning (CPL). For students, it means that information about the CPL policy, processes, and approved prior learning assessments at the college are available, up to date, and accurate. If information is contained on a website, it should not be difficult to find. Communication of CPL policy and processes should be consistent across all college divisions and departments. For faculty, transparency means that they know their college's CPL policy, how to access CPL resources to support their capacity to do prior learning assessment, how to advise students regarding CPL, and how to grant credit. In addition, the path from assessment to awarding of credit must be standardized across the institution and apparent to all stakeholders, including students and college faculty and staff.

Accessibility

All students should have equitable access to CPL. This means that CPL is available to all students through consistent policies and processes and with consistent resources. CPL is accessible to the largest number of students when prior learning assessment is offered for all experiences through which a student might gain college-level skills and knowledge—including, for example, workplace training, military training, industry certifications, high school dual enrollment, standardized exams, civic and volunteer experiences, apprenticeships, and work-based learning.

In addition, potential students should also have access to information about CPL and the assessment process. It is important to establish processes that do not create barriers and have minimal “hoops,” such as requiring multiple sign-offs. Students should know how to access CPL and how to access resources to support their efforts. The information should be accessible in an intuitive way, tailored to the student population. For example, a college with a high number of veterans and military students should communicate in ways that resonate with veterans, leveraging resources tailored for this population such as Veteran's Resource Centers.

In addition, CPL is more accessible to students when credit is offered for general education and program courses first, and for electives second. In this way, the credit can more efficiently shorten the student's time to degree and will avoid unintended consequences of credit accrual on financial aid. CPL is also most accessible to students when the cost is minimal, particularly because financial aid cannot be used. In many states, students are only charged to cover the costs associated with administering the process. Accessible CPL processes also include a grievance process for students, so that the standards and expectations are understood and they have a mechanism for grieving a decision if they feel it was not in keeping with the standards. It is also important to document the assessments within student records, so that if faculty are questioned on the validity of the assessment, they have the documentation to show what the outcomes were and why decisions were made.

Well-informed faculty and staff who are knowledgeable about CPL procedures and their roles and responsibilities are central to accessibility. All stakeholders at colleges should understand their roles and responsibilities related to CPL and should be supported in them. Stakeholders should have equitable access to resources to operationalize CPL for all students such as, for example, cross-walk matrices for standardized testing and/or industry credentials. Accessible CPL policies include communication about professional development plans and location of resources, communication strategies to support implementation and policy review, and strategies to keep stakeholders informed of changes in policy and procedure.

Student Supports

Student supports for CPL include both academic and social supports to enable equitable access. To ensure equity of opportunity, states that have developed CPL policies require colleges to have consistent guidelines related to process, requirements, and awarding of credit. Supporting students in their pursuit of CPL includes helping them understand the academic value of what they know from life and work, strengthening a sense of belonging in college by validating their skills and knowledge, and encouraging them to continue a path to a certificate or degree. Lack of student supports can result in students taking courses that they do not need to take (occupying seats that could be open to other students), and increasing time spent to complete degree(s). There are additional implications to financial aid, veteran's benefits, and cost to the system.

Colleges with effective CPL policies often centralize CPL advising with faculty counselors or ensure close communication about CPL between non-faculty advisors and faculty counselors, to help ensure quality counseling in the process. Providing a counselor as students pursue CPL helps the student avoid unintended consequences of CPL, such as going over the unit cap for financial aid or for veteran's benefits. In addition, making inquiries about students' past work and life experiences as a regular part of on-boarding can help counselors guide students into CPL assessment processes. Many students receive counseling from non-faculty advisors such as in Veteran's Resource Centers and adult re-entry centers. Many colleges also offer students courses to help them create portfolios that demonstrate the academic value of their skills and knowledge.

Guidance and support

In many states, including Colorado, Tennessee, Washington, Minnesota, and others, guidance and state-level support is provided to colleges to assist them in creating transparent processes and to support their ability to communicate their CPL policies.

Examples of guidance and support provided in other states include:

- A process flow as part of system-wide guidance, indicating when and how a student can make a request, how it is responded to and by whom, etc.
- A repository for staff/faculty to share assessments, credit crosswalks (such as from industry certifications to degree programs), templates (such as forms for students to request assessment), practices, and tools could be developed.
- Staff and faculty advising can be enhanced by creating mentor-student relationships. Both staff and faculty can play critical roles in helping students understand an institution's CPL policies and procedures.
- A comprehensive information website that links resources across different learning providers, and helps students learn about the CPL process and what they might be eligible to receive in terms of credit.
- Professional development for faculty and staff to understand how to implement CPL processes and set expectations. For example, faculty and staff at institutions offering a portfolio option should receive professional development on portfolio assessments.

State Policy Examples for Transparency, Accessibility, and Student Supports

CALIFORNIA

California Code of Regulations, Title 5, Section 55050 states that the governing boards of each community college shall adopt and publish policies and procedures pertaining to credit by examination. Each college has its own procedures related to evaluating students' prior learning. Legislation has also affected the transparency and accessibility of CPL on campuses. Assembly Bill 2462, chaptered in 2012, resulted in a study that demonstrated that credit has been granted based on prior military experience for 102 courses across the system. A July 2016 advisory listed the courses and encouraged stakeholders at colleges to review them as potential courses for which they will grant CPL, consider developing a prior learning committee, and facilitate consultation between offices of instruction and student services to acknowledge students' prior learning. A law (Senate Bill 466, chaptered in 2015) clarifies to stakeholders at nursing programs that they must evaluate students' credit for prior military experience or risk negative action by the Board of Registered Nursing. Nursing programs must communicate with their veteran and military students. Some colleges have informally honed their CPL practices and found ways to communicate with their unique population of students, such as through Veteran's Resource Centers.

TENNESSEE

Tennessee’s policy references a more detailed “standards” document that specifically indicates that students must receive advising regarding PLA and will be awarded credit only after declaring an academic program. An excerpt from the standards is below.

Requirements for PLA credit to be awarded

Academic credit will be awarded only:

- a. For students who have been admitted to an institution.
- b. After the student has consulted with an advisor about the possibility and advisability of seeking credit for PLA.
- c. For students who have declared an academic program.
- d. For courses directly applicable to curriculum requirements of the declared program. Changing majors will result in a reassessment of the applicability of the PLA credit.
- e. Opting out of accepting.

COLORADO

The State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education has also developed a comprehensive [prior learning assessment credit policy](#) that emphasizes transparency, equity and access.

Policy Statement

The State Board recognizes the value of prior learning in the achievement of academic goals. It is the policy of the Board that a student’s college level learning shall be evaluated for college credit at the student’s request. **Students have the right to clear and concise information concerning how Prior Learning Credit (PLA Credit) might help them reach their academic goals.**

[A PLA Credit Manual](#) provides guidance to college staff and faculty.

State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education

[Prior Learning Assessment Credit Policy](#)

BP 9-42

[. . .] Statewide Minimum PLA Credit standards shall be based on the criteria delineated below:

- The prior learning shall be assess[ed] in accordance with national standards and best practices as outlined in [The PLA Credit Manual](#).
- Prior learning shall be assessed and awarded through: Portfolio, Challenge Exam, and Standardized Testing, the use of Published Guide or through the use of the PLA Credit Matrix in the PLA Credit Manual.
- The prior learning shall be college level.

- The credits earned through accepted PLA credit methods shall be treated equally in their application and use in course equivalencies.
- The PLA Credit granted shall be accepted as transfer credit by all of the State System community colleges.
- The knowledge and skills being assessed shall be relevant to the student's program of study and meet current program requirements.
- With regard to the award of credit through acceptable PLA Credit methodologies:
 - Credit shall be awarded.
 - Credit shall apply towards specific degree or certificate requirements.
 - Transcripts shall note credit/no grade.
 - No FTE shall be generated for credit under this policy.
 - The cost of assessing student learning for PLA Credit shall be standardized across all State System community colleges as determined by the President or designee.
 - PLA Credit shall not be utilized to fulfill institutional residency requirements.

Procedures

The system president shall promulgate [procedures](#) as necessary to implement this policy.

WASHINGTON

Raising PLA participation is an articulated goal established in state legislation (language below) for the Student Achievement Council, (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). All goals include:

Revised Code of Washington [28B.77.230](#)

Academic credit for prior learning—Goals—Work group—Reports.

1. The council, 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 shall collaborate to carry out the following goals:
 - a. Increase the number of students who receive academic credit for prior learning and the number of students who receive credit for prior learning that counts towards their major or towards earning their degree, certificate, or credential, while ensuring that credit is awarded only for high quality, course-level competencies;
 - b. Increase the number and type of academic credits accepted for prior learning in institutions of higher education, while ensuring that credit is awarded only for high quality, course-level competencies;
 - c. Develop transparent policies and practices in awarding academic credit for prior learning;
 - d. Improve prior learning assessment practices across the institutions of higher education;
 - e. Create tools to develop faculty and staff knowledge and expertise in awarding credit for prior learning and to share exemplary policies and practices among institutions of higher education;

- f. Develop articulation agreements when patterns of credit for prior learning are identified for particular programs and pathways; and
- g. Develop outcome measures to track progress on the goals outlined in this section.

OHIO

[The Ohio Articulation and Transfer Policy](#)

Introduction and Background

A strategic resource of the State of Ohio is its diverse approach to college-level learning opportunities which students may access from many entry points to advance their education for personal and professional improvement. Making this resource more reachable produces a more educated citizenry, which is foundational to improve both the quality of life and economic vitality of Ohio. Developing this resource through the strong leadership of faculty and administrators ensures the continuing high quality of learning that occurs at Ohio public institutions.

To advance this interest, the many state-assisted²² and independent colleges and universities and career-technical institutions operating in Ohio offer an array of courses, programs, certificates, undergraduate degrees, and certification and licensure opportunities. Students use these resources in a wide variety of ways—choosing a few courses, a few terms, a certificate, a full degree, or multiple degrees to meet their educational goals. Research shows that nearly 40,000 undergraduates transfer among Ohio’s public institutions of higher education each year.

[. . .] D.2. APPLICATION OF TRANSFER AND ARTICULATED CREDIT

Application of credit is the decision process performed by the receiving institution to determine how the credits it has accepted and recorded on the student’s official academic transcript will or will not apply toward program and degree requirements. While the receiving institution makes this decision, it will do so within the parameters of this Policy.

The following guidelines and requirements shall govern the application of transfer and articulated credit:

f. Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)

To help students earn postsecondary certificates and degrees and to make Ohio more competitive in a global economy, public universities, colleges, and adult career-technical institutions will advance and promote the awarding of credit to students for prior learning based on transparent, consistent, and rigorous statewide standards. Institutions will transcript, apply, and transfer credits awarded on the basis of statewide standards.

²² Historically the term “state-assisted” was used to describe Ohio higher education institutions that received public funding; however, throughout this document, the word “public” is being used.



Transfer

Students save time and money when all the credit they have been awarded is recognized and applied toward their certificate or degree. Therefore, a primary concern of student-focused stakeholders is ensuring that CPL is eligible for transfer from one institution to another as the student moves through their higher education pathway. The student benefits most when CPL credits are accepted at transfer destinations in the category in which they were awarded (i.e., general education, program courses, and electives). Transfer cannot always be ensured by a policy, because faculty at campuses within and across systems control curriculum and the award/transfer of credit for their students. However, there are various policy actions that systems and individual institutions have taken to smooth student transitions without creating unintended barriers. This memo is designed to surface the questions associated with primary decision points for receiving institutions and to offer information on the way that various states and institutions have addressed them.

DECISION POINT: ACCEPTING CREDIT FOR TRANSFER BETWEEN SYSTEM COLLEGES

Will CPL credit be treated the same as other credit that is considered for transfer between colleges in the same system?

The practice of accepting credits for transfer between colleges that are part of the same system is common. But this practice in relation to CPL can vary in scope from the acceptance of all credit to acceptance of only some credit depending on the CPL method or course type. Systems that share common course numbering often accept all transcribed credit since course content and expected outcomes are shared between colleges. Colleges in a system with varied curriculum might limit which credit is accepted and/or require further evaluation at the receiving institution before credits are accepted. The latter practice can be costly and time consuming for students if they are required to retest for the same credit.

DECISION POINT: ACCEPTING ALL METHODS OF CPL ASSESSMENT

Will the method of CPL assessment used by the sending institution influence which credits will be accepted at the receiving institution?

When considering whether to accept credit, institutions might consider the method of assessment. Some might deem certain methods more reliable than others. Some might place more confidence in those that are standardized and normed by third-party vendors. Others may not consider the method of assessment important if the assessor is qualified to make the credit award. These considerations will vary among campuses. Existing transfer policy can sometimes affect this decision point; if institutions already have transfer policies related to standardized testing, for example, the CPL policy will likely have to reflect those. Decisions related to this question will also impact how the credit is recorded on the transcript and to what extent the method of assessment is identified.

DECISION POINT: ACCEPTING ALL CPL CREDIT AS IT APPLIES TO DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

Will the course for which CPL was awarded influence whether the credit will be accepted in transfer?

This practice varies widely across the field. Some institutions decide to allow students to challenge any course for CPL, including general education core, program specific, and non-academic courses. Some limit their CPL opportunities to non-general education courses, some to only general education courses. When these same institutions look at receiving CPL credit in transfer, they tend to use their own awarding criteria to decide which credits to accept. The student may be negatively affected if the varied requirements are not well communicated. Existing articulation and transfer agreements may also influence the decision-making process. For example, existing articulations may specifically call out courses that must be earned in residence or, conversely, may specifically state that they will accept all of the designated credits, however they were earned.

DECISION POINT: REQUIRING FURTHER ASSESSMENT AT THE RECEIVING INSTITUTION

Will the student be required to undergo additional evaluation/certification prior to the transfer of CPL credit?

Since the value of CPL for students is the decreased cost and time required to complete a credential or degree, any transfer policy that requires duplicated assessment or coursework will diminish that value. Some colleges require a locally developed assessment in addition to whatever was required to earn the CPL. In others, it is a matter of producing official transcripts for standardized testing or showing original documentation of the CPL assessment. The decisions made regarding this practice may be influenced by actual or perceived accreditation requirements or by the relative trust in the program that conferred the credit. Whatever the reason, the requirement for students to be reassessed is not supported by the data that show students with CPL succeed in subsequent courses, regardless of CPL method, at a rate greater than those who take the course in residence.

DECISION POINT: ALIGNING POLICY

How might the various policies associated with this practice be aligned between sending and receiving institutions?

The development of shared CPL policies across institutions in a public system is considered the most student friendly practice when it comes to CPL transfer. When policy associated with cut scores, grades, credit awards, and assessment are shared, institutions are able to create well communicated pathways for students and to eliminate duplication of assessments. Without this type of policy, a common practice in aligning CPL transfer is the development of multiple articulation agreements, usually between two institutions and often supported through specific learning divisions or departments. The promulgation of these agreements, and subsequent confusion they can cause, is the natural consequence when they are the only way to solidify transfer pathways. The maintenance and evaluation of articulations is not always well defined and can lead to miscommunication if not well managed. In the absence of broader reaching policy, though, they are often the only mechanism for supporting the student as they move through their education pathway.

DECISION POINT: COMMUNICATING WITH STUDENTS

How and when will this information be communicated to students to maximize their ability to transfer credit?

Students who are on a designated transfer pathway will benefit from this information early in their enrollment so that they can make decisions that won't hold them up in the future. The academic advisor role is important here. The workload for that position is significantly affected by the complexity of the transfer policy. If there is no clear policy or procedure regarding acceptance of CPL credit for the receiving institution, it will be to the students' benefit to have a strong line of communication with both the local advisor and the admissions office of the expected transfer institution. For many students this process will not happen until after they are enrolled and, sometimes, after they change programs. Again, the advisors will be the ones to field their questions and help them navigate the path to transfer. Clear, easily accessible information is always best.

State Policy Examples for Transfer

CALIFORNIA

Every California Community College (CCC) district sets policy on transfer of credit between community colleges. In CSU, a coded memorandum provides clear guidance on how credit granted in community colleges for CSU-approved standardized external examinations (such as AP, IB, and CLEP) will be accepted.²³

²³ <http://www.calstate.edu/acadaff/codedmemos/ASA-2019-03.pdf>

COLORADO LAW

A 2017 Colorado law (HB 17-1004) requires the governing board of each institution of higher education to adopt, make public, and implement a PLA policy for awarding academic credit for college-level learning acquired while in the military. The policy adopted by the governing board must require each campus to use the American Council on Education's recommendations on the Joint Services Transcript and, at its discretion, assign appropriate credit. Further, the institutions shall provide specific guidance to active duty and veteran military members in selecting a program of study and optimizing PLA credit. Finally, the institutions *shall accept in transfer from other state institutions PLA credit awarded for courses with guaranteed-transfer designation.*

COLORADO COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

Prior Learning Assessment Credit Manual | Transfer PLA credit from other CCCS colleges

In accordance with SP 9-42 Section IV A, "Within the system: PLA Credit must be accepted for transfer amongst colleges provided that the credits apply to a degree or certificate program at the institution the student is entering." Colleges should transcribe this credit as they would any other transfer credit from CCCS colleges.

NORTHERN VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE²⁴

Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) strives to provide students with opportunities to receive CPL while still maintaining the academic integrity of NOVA's academic programs. The policies are consistent with Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges principles, and with Virginia Community College System policy. This manual describes the current mechanisms for obtaining CPL at NOVA. The term "credit for prior learning" generally refers to the granting of college credit for learning gained in nontraditional ways. This manual also provides procedures for granting various kinds of credit earned at other colleges and universities in this country and abroad.

[...]

Section 1: Credits earned in regionally accredited postsecondary institutions.

Credit is generally acceptable for transfer if it is earned from a college or university that is accredited by the Commission on Colleges or the Commission on Higher Education of one of the nine regional accrediting agencies in the United States and is comparable to coursework required in the student's NOVA curriculum.

Credits earned at postsecondary institutions without regional accreditation do not transfer to NOVA even if the institution is accredited through a different commission such as a national accrediting organization or specialized and professional accreditors. However, in some cases where a postsecondary institution offers specialized educational opportunities (e.g., culinary institutes) and the institution is empowered by a state to award associate's degrees or above, NOVA faculty may pre-approve the recommendation to award equivalent transfer credit for courses within a specific discipline. Courses which have been specifically evaluated and will be accepted for transfer are listed in this manual; only credit earned after the date specified in the review will be accepted.

²⁴ <https://www.nvcc.edu/prior-learning/index.html>

Courses will be transferred at full credit value. Totally dissimilar and unrelated courses will not be grouped together to fulfill NOVA sequential course requirements. To be considered equivalent to a specific NOVA course, transferred courses must be the same number of credits (or more) than their NOVA counterparts. NOVA maintains a transfer course equivalency database, which NOVA faculty may access.

TENNESSEE²⁵

Transferability of PLA credits

How PLA credits are to be treated in transfer between Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) and University of Tennessee (UT) institutions:

Students who transfer to a TBR or UT community college or university may have their PLA credits transferred to that institution as long as the credits are applicable to the degree or certificate the student has declared and the transfer institution's policy grants credit for that type of PLA credit. However, item B (below) still applies in the event that the receiving institution does not grant credit to its native students for that type of PLA credit.

PLA credit awarded at one institution, which meets common general education core requirements, and/or Tennessee Transfer Pathway requirements, must be accepted as transfer credit toward the degree if the student transfers to a TBR or UT institution in Tennessee, in accordance with Transfer Guarantee policies related to the general education core or the TTP.

When credit has been awarded for standardized examinations or by credit recommendation services, institutions are strongly encouraged to accept PLA credits in transfer based on the student's transfer transcript from other TBR or UT colleges and universities.

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SYSTEM ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY 135 (V) (FORMERLY ACIS 6.0)

V. Credit for Prior Learning

E. Transfer of Credit for Prior Learning

Undergraduate credit for prior learning that is internally reviewed, assessed, and transcribed as a course equivalent by one UW institution will be evaluated for transfer credit by all UW institutions in accordance with the Transfer Credit Principles found in Section III and the Principles of Accommodation found in Section IV of this policy.

The receiving institution will determine the course equivalent credits they will grant to the student and how the credit will apply to the degree, guided by existing institutional policies.

UW institutions will advise students that the receiving institution will review credits transferred and determine how the credit will apply to the degree.

²⁵ <https://policies.tbr.edu/system/files/exhibits/Exhibit%201%20Recommendations%20for%20Standards%20in%20PLA.pdf>

Students who are awarded credit on the basis of external standardized assessment should be informed that in the event of transfer, they should expect the receiving institution to reevaluate the original exam score transcript. The receiving institution will determine if, and how, such credit will be applied to the degree in accordance with applicable institutional and UW system policy.



Finance

Background

Related to credit for prior learning (CPL), “finance” refers to the costs and benefits of CPL to both students and institutions.

COSTS OF CPL

Stakeholders at colleges need resources to build and sustain CPL processes and practices and must establish to what extent, if any, the costs of CPL assessment will be shared by the students. The cost of implementing a CPL policy typically includes professional development, process development, and communication at each college. The ongoing costs are related to the time spent by counselors to determine eligibility for CPL and time spent by faculty (instructional and counseling) in activities that include: developing and/or administering local assessments of prior learning; reviewing transcripts or other documentation of prior learning; consulting third-party credit recommendation guides (such as the American Council on Education Guide to Military Credit) to determine credit; and assessing portfolios and skills demonstrations.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT OF CPL

The major benefits to students who successfully engage in CPL assessments include a reduction in cost and the time required to complete a degree or credential. To maximize this benefit, the costs of CPL that might be passed on to students should be kept low and directly associated with the real costs of the evaluation, not the price of tuition/credit.

Studies on the return on investment (ROI) of CPL have shown several benefits to the institution, including:²⁶

- Students whose transcripts include CPL register for more credits at the awarding institution than those without CPL credit, resulting in higher enrollment.
- Students whose transcripts include CPL are two to three times more likely to complete degrees than their non-CPL counterparts. This has a direct and positive impact on completion metrics that are increasingly tied to funding.

To maximize the ROI, colleges sometimes engage in activities that create efficiencies of effort and reduce the impact of CPL on existing practices. These might include sharing forms or templates for assessments, creating a repository of crosswalks to articulate credit from common trainings such as military or workforce to college courses, utilizing campus-based testing centers for credit by exam, or using electronic tools that reduce the time required for advising.

²⁶ Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success (Boston: CAEL, 2010), <https://www.cael.org/pla/publication/fueling-the-race-to-postsecondary-success>.

COVERING CPL COSTS

There are varied ways that colleges cover the costs of CPL programs. These might include:

- Fees for the administration of all tests and assessments, to create a revenue pool.
- Including CPL evaluation tasks in faculty and staff contracts.
- Giving faculty release time on their contracts or awarding extra duty pay to conduct assessments.
- Utilizing general apportionment dollars, with an expectation of gains through increased enrollment.

In “PLA Is Your Business” the authors identify “five basic types of fees associated with the different methods of prior learning assessment (PLA): assessment fee, administration fee, review of transcript / training fee, transcription fee, and course/workshop fee.”

(<https://www.cael.org/pla/publication/pla-is-your-business>)

It is important to note that any fees assessed to students for CPL cannot be covered by federal financial aid (Title IV).

With respect to cost of CPL to students, colleges working to promote CPL strive to keep the CPL cost to students, if any, to a minimum.

State Examples of Finance

CALIFORNIA

California Code of Regulations Title 5 Section 55050 Credit by Examination stipulates that a “district may charge a student a fee for administering an examination pursuant to this section, provided the fee does not exceed the enrollment fee which would be associated with enrollment in the course for which the student seeks credit by examination.” CPL for standardized exams such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and CLEP does not entail a cost for students beyond the exam fee.

WISCONSIN TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM

Prior learning assessment fees across the WTCS

The PLA fee structure, which goes into effect no later than the start of the 2017-18 academic year, is standard across all WTCS institutions. All students seeking CPL will be charged the standard PLA fee. PLA fees are not waived for military veterans. If two types of PLA are needed, only the higher fee of the two is charged. The PLA fee is a flat fee to cover incurred administration and evaluation costs, and is not tied to a number of course credits. The PLA fee structure will be reviewed every three years.

Type of PLA / PLA Fee

PLA Test \$50.00

PLA Skill Demonstration \$90.00

PLA Portfolio \$90.00

University of Wisconsin System Administrative Policy 135 (formerly ACIS 6.0)

V. Credit for Prior Learning

[...]

D. Notwithstanding Board of Regents Policy Document (RPD) 4-11, 4-17, and 7-2, each institution will retain the prerogative to establish proficiency score levels, courses for which credit by examination is deemed appropriate, limitations of credit allowed, policies regarding testing fees, and other related policies that are consistent with the characteristics, ability and achievement of the particular student body at the institution.

COLORADO COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

Prior Learning Assessment Credit Manual

Colorado Community College System policy mandates a standard cost for PLA credit across all state-system community colleges. CCCS's PLA Credit Manual establishes costs for each type of evaluation in the matrix below. The Portfolio Assessment fees below are ONLY for evaluation. Where a college offers a portfolio course, tuition and fees associated with that course are not part of the PLA Credit Cost Matrix and are left to the discretion of the institution.

| PLA Credit Cost Matrix | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Standardized Test | Published Guide | Challenge Exam | Portfolio Assessment |
| No cost for transcript evaluation. Testing fees may apply. | No cost for transcript evaluation. | \$45.00/credit | \$65.00/credit |

SUNY EMPIRE INDIVIDUALIZED PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT

The Individualized Prior Learning Assessment (IPLA) fee is changing to a \$700 flat fee effective for the spring 2019 term, for which registration opens on October 9. (Note: this is roughly 80 percent of the cost of a three-unit course for in-state students).

The fee charged at the time a student's individualized PLA request is accepted at the office of academic review and is nonrefundable once the request is accepted. If a student has been charged any amount for individualized PLAs under the previous IPLA fee tiered structure, they will not be charged an additional IPLA fee. For example, if a student has requested eight credits of individualized PLAs and paid a \$350 IPLA fee in the past, that student will not be charged again for additional PLAs. Students who were charged the previous Individual Evaluation Fee (IEF) are also exempt from the IPLA fee.

We have discontinued other grandfathering of fees based on first matriculation date. Only students who have previously paid any IPLA or IEF fees will not be charged for additional assessments.

Note: all costs reported are as of December 2018

Policy Review

Policy review refers to putting in place a process to review how policies and procedures are impacting students, whether sufficient resources have been efficiently allocated, and whether any changes can be made to improve outcomes. The ultimate goal in review would be to ensure that credit for prior learning (CPL) policy is helping to increase certificate and degree completion and students' success in the workforce, and to reduce achievement gaps and the acquisition of unneeded credits.

Many other states with CPL policies have established review processes, though they vary (see examples below). Because effective policy review is predicated on having data to analyze, most states and/or systems with review processes require their institutions to collect data on CPL. A 2015 study by the American Council on Education interviewed leaders and practitioners from seven institutions to explore common challenges, successful strategies, and innovative CPL practices. The study identified "inadequate data collection" among the challenges that institutions faced when trying to sustain CPL practices. In some states, the mandate for a review process is included in state or system policy. Sometimes, it's a process mandated at the campus or district level.

A process for policy review would specify the key questions to be answered as part of a review. These could include questions related to impact, such as:

- How many students earned CPL?
- How many CPL units were granted?
- What has been the potential impact of CPL on their persistence and completion?
- Has enrollment changed with the expansion of CPL?

Other questions could explore the process for students and faculty, with qualitative questions such as:

- How do students experience the CPL process?
- Have we succeeded in transparency and ease of access goals?
- What is the process like for faculty/staff?
- Have we provided enough resources and professional development to help them understand the value proposition of CPL and to conduct prior learning assessments?

Identifying specific questions and the data necessary to answer them is an important step in the process of implementing CPL policy. Quantitative data to measure impact on student success indicators will require that data collection systems are set up when the policy goes into effect. An additional consideration might be whether the system needs an advisory committee to continue to guide CPL policy and procedure. Some states require that the committee or working group develop the policy review process and report on the results. In order to ensure that CPL is helping the system meet its intended goals, it is important that the system establish a concrete review plan at the time of implementation.

State Policy Examples for Policy Review

WASHINGTON

Revised Code of Washington [28B.77.230](#)

1. The council, 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 shall collaborate to carry out the following goals:
 - a. Increase the number of students
 - b. who receive academic credit for prior learning and the number of students who receive credit for prior learning that counts towards their major or towards earning their degree, certificate, or credential, while ensuring that credit is awarded only for high-quality, course-level competencies;
 - c. Increase the number and type of academic credits accepted for prior learning in institutions of higher education, while ensuring that credit is awarded only for high quality, course-level competencies;
 - d. Develop transparent policies and practices in awarding academic credit for prior learning;
 - e. Improve prior learning assessment practices across the institutions of higher education;
 - f. Create tools to develop faculty and staff knowledge and expertise in awarding credit for prior learning and to share exemplary policies and practices among institutions of higher education;
 - g. Develop articulation agreements when patterns of credit for prior learning are identified for particular programs and pathways; and
 - h. Develop outcome measures to track progress on the goals outlined in this section.
2. The council shall convene the academic credit for prior learning work group.
 - a. The work group must include the following members:
 - i. One representative from
 - ii. the council;
 - iii. (One representative from the state board for community and technical colleges;
 - iv. One representative from the council of presidents;
 - v. Two representatives each from faculty from two- and four-year institutions of higher education;
 - vi. Two representatives from private career schools;
 - vii. Two representatives from business; and
 - viii. Two representatives from labor.
 - b. The purpose of the work group is to coordinate and implement the goals in subsection (1) of this section.
3. The council shall report progress on the goals and outcome measures annually by December 31st.

TENNESSEE

[Awarding Credit through Extra-Institutional Learning to Community Colleges](#)

The institutional process for awarding credits through Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) by TBR community colleges must be in compliance with the Recommended Standards in Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Policy and Practice of Tennessee Public Colleges and Universities (August 7, 2012).

[Recommended PLA Policy and Practice, Tennessee PLA Task Force](#)

Internal Procedures for Maintaining Transparency and Consistency

1. Periodic review of PLA policies—Institutions are to review PLA program policies and procedures at least every five years corresponding with each institution’s SACS Ten-Year Re-Affirmation and the Five-Year Review. The review should involve evaluating all aspects of PLA policy, procedures, and portfolio audits, for consistency with state, regional and national practices. Additionally, institutions are encouraged to report a PLA.

Program Profile detailing

- a. Volume of PLA credits awarded annually (per PLA subcategory and total).
- b. Average volume of PLA credits per award.
- c. PLA recipient data including, but not limited to, a demographic summary of PLA recipients (age, race, and GPA) as well as measures of recipient success (per PLA subcategory and total).

OHIO

[Articulation and Transfer Policy](#) (which contains PLA)

The Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) and the Ohio Articulation and Transfer Network (OATN), working in close cooperation with the OATN Oversight Board and the Advisory Council, shall develop an assessment and validation system to measure Policy effectiveness. Research helps provide validation and also identify needs for policy adjustments and process improvement. The ODHE and OATN will establish and manage short- and long-term plans to monitor transfer system effectiveness. Plans will include ongoing surveys and research to assess and validate the structure, process, outcomes, and overall effectiveness of statewide and institutional articulation and transfer policies.

Certain policies and legislation may require measuring Policy effectiveness within a set time period. ODHE and OATN will keep these requirements in mind when determining research and evaluation plans.