The Door is Open for Prior Learning Assessment...Can it Come In?

2017 AZTransfer Summit

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In this session...

- Progress, plans, and challenges of our district’s Prior Learning Assessment Advisory Group
- Statewide efforts and legislation shaping PLA policy in Arizona
- Best practices and benefits of PLA

How can you apply Maricopa’s experiences to your institution’s PLA policies and practices in order to support access and degree completion for all students?
What is Prior Learning Assessment?

Evaluation of college-level learning that a student has acquired outside of a formal college course, for college credit.
Prior Learning Assessment Methods

Articulated transfer credit through formal statewide and/or institutional **articulation agreements and transcript evaluation**

**Standardized exams** - AP, CLEP, UExcel, Cambridge International, ACT/PEP, DANTES/DSST

Evaluation of corporate and military training using **published guides**, such as the American Council on Education (ACE) and the National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS)
Local Evaluation of Training – colleges/departments evaluate non-collegiate instructional programs that award credit for those who achieve recognized proficiencies

Challenge exams or customized exams offered by some colleges to verify learning achievement — could be current course final exams or other tests developed by academic departments

Individualized student portfolio assessments conducted by individual institutions or a third party like CAEL’s LearningCounts (national online prior learning assessment service)

Study at non-regionally accredited institutions…
Online and Open Educational Resources (OER)…Licenses…
Certifications…Non-credit courses…Professional experience…
Seminars…Workshops…In-service training…Volunteer work
Prior Learning Assessment

Competency Based Education
What is Competency Based Education?

A design strategy for curricula and courses

Focus is on what students have learned, not where or how long the learning takes place (default standard is credit hours for classroom time)

Designed to improve the quality of education because of the emphasis on demonstrated skills and learning outcomes
Why Is Prior Learning Assessment Important?

- Facilitates access for 'non-traditional' students
- Acknowledges value of learning outside a formal setting
- Enables students to progress to other education and training programs
- Eliminates unnecessary repetition of material already familiar to the student
- Enhances students' pride and self-esteem for what they have accomplished as learners
- Enhances students' understanding of learning as a lifelong process.
- Shortens the time necessary to earn a qualification
PLA Supports Student Success & Degree Completion

56% of PLA students earned a postsecondary degree within 7 years (compared to 21% of non-PLA students).

PLA students saved between 2.5 and 10.1 months earning their Bachelor’s degrees compared to non-PLA students.

Hispanic students who had earned PLA credits graduated with bachelor’s degrees at a rate nearly 8 times higher than Hispanic students without PLA.

Adult learners who were awarded credit through PLA:
- graduated at higher rates
- took more college courses
- were more persistent in enrollment
- completed degrees in less time

Source: CAEL- Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success
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<th>Best Practices for Prior Learning Assessment</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Colorado</strong></td>
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<td>Legislation supporting PLA:</td>
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<td>Establishment of policies</td>
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<td>Transparency</td>
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<td>Affordable fees</td>
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<td><strong>Texas</strong></td>
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<td>Texas College Credit for Heroes</td>
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<td>Dallas County Community College District-</td>
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<td>“Project OnRamp”</td>
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<td><strong>Pennsylvania</strong></td>
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<td>Pennsylvania Community College Collaboration:</td>
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<td>College Credit Fasttrack</td>
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<td>Funded under $2.5 million Trade Adjustment</td>
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<td>Assistance Community College and Career</td>
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<td>Training (TAACCCT) grant</td>
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Statewide Approach to Prior Learning Assessment

Faculty Articulation Task Forces work toward establishing standard exam scores and equivalencies (legislation on AP & IB, less formal efforts to also align CLEP, DSST and Cambridge).

SB 1267 requires community college districts and the Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR) to develop policies to award academic credit to current or former members of the U.S. military.

HB 2707/SB 1538 provides financial incentives to high schools and teachers whose students pass selected college credit exams while in high school.

Continued development of AAS pathways - Students can transfer an AAS degree as a block toward fulfilling the requirements of a BAS degree.
Credit for Prior Learning/Prior Learning Assessment at the Maricopa Community Colleges

- Articulated Programs-AZ statewide transfer system, private/out-of-state/online institutions, skill centers
- Credit By Evaluation-military, departmental
- College-Level Equivalency Examinations

Maximum of 30 credits toward an associate degree, including a maximum of 20 credits toward the Arizona General Education Curriculum (AGEC)

Internal Credit by Exam and Evaluation = tuition cost/credit hour ($86)
Progress-To-Date

- Established a PLA Advisory Group

- Internal and external (statewide and nationwide) PLA inventory surveys conducted for ideas, awareness, and benchmarking

- Examined internal best practices to help identify opportunities for improvement

- Changed policies related to the evaluation of coursework from non-regionally accredited institutions and non-traditional academic sources
Joint Statement - AACRAO & CHEA:

“Institutions and accreditors need to assure that transfer decisions are not made solely on the source of accreditation of a sending program or institution. While acknowledging that accreditation is an important factor, receiving institutions ought to make clear their institutional reasons for accepting or not accepting credits that students seek to transfer.”

U.S. Department of Education:

“All accrediting agencies recognized by the USDE are deemed to be reliable authorities on institutional quality and integrity. The USDE makes no distinction between national or regional accreditors regarding their reliability in ensuring institutional quality.”
# Three New Things We Have Learned

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<th>1</th>
<th>PLA is underutilized within the system</th>
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<td><strong>Colleges are unfamiliar with PLA policies and practices</strong></td>
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<td>Policies and processes are buried under administrative regulations and not widely promoted</td>
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<td>PLA can be cost-prohibitive</td>
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<th>Policies were seen as discriminatory and penalizing</th>
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<td>Policy of only considering credit in transfer from regionally-accredited institutions can be considered a discriminatory practice.</td>
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<td>Over-applying military experience as general electives negatively impacts students</td>
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<th>System does not have the infrastructure to scale up</th>
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<td>We have solely focused efforts in creating pathways <em>out of</em> our colleges. We need to redirect efforts to develop “access pathways” <em>into</em> our colleges in support of learner mobility.</td>
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Working on…

- Facilitating the review of new and existing prior learning exams and credit equivalencies
- Developing a PLA website for current and prospective students
- Submitting additional policy recommendations in support of clear and effective PLA business practices
- Creating a PLA awareness campaign to gain faculty support
- Focusing on students transferring into Maricopa through “access” pathways
Challenges

- Faculty concerns about rigor, varied viewpoints/perceptions
- Fear of loss of credits/work, loss of control of curriculum, “dumbing down or selling credit”
- Varied levels of understanding create miscommunication
- Previous methods of review and data entry varied, no oversight
- Limited resources and infrastructure
Lack of staffing and centralized support (resources, technology, etc.) comparable to peer institutions that have a robust, sophisticated approach to CPL policies and practices

Cost can be prohibitive

Transferability & applicability of credits/inconsistency among how institutions evaluate and award prior learning credit

Specialization (professional accreditation standards)
What’s Next For Us?

- Create a CPL Value Statement
- Submit Credit for Prior Learning policy recommendations for the Catalog Common Pages
- Invite CPL national consultants to participate in Information Sessions to help support a CPL awareness campaign for faculty and staff to build greater buy-in
- Establish business practices for development, review, oversight, and maintenance of Credit for Prior Learning decisions
- Facilitate the review of new and existing Credit for Prior Learning exams and equivalencies
- Design and establish a Credit for Prior Learning website with easy access for current and potential students
Traditional approaches like 2+2 models, dual enrollment programs, & direct instruction do not solve a nontraditional problem.

Many students are disillusioned with traditional higher education -- and many employers are dissatisfied with the graduates from traditional colleges.

There is a finite number of traditional students-- focus on adult learners and employers, market driving needs, career preparation, and flexible formats.

Higher education needs to be more responsive, and agile to support the needs of changing learner demographics.

“Old ways won’t open new doors.”

– Author unknown
• A college classroom is the only place to learn.
• PLA is a way to “sell credit” to students.
• Students who are awarded PLA credit are not sufficiently prepared for subsequent study at a college or university.
• PLA will negatively impact enrollment in certain classes.
• PLA students have low success rates.

“Preconceived notions are the locks on the door to wisdom.”
– Mary Browne
“Be an opener of doors”
– Ralph Waldo Emerson

- Understand what type of PLA options are at your college.
- Learn where these options housed and administered.
- Improve the promotion and presentation of these options for students.
- Revise policies that may hinder acceptance and application of PLA policies.
- Maintain regular information-sharing and training sessions across campus constituencies, including staff, faculty, and administrators.
- Keep the momentum as transfer advocates.
“Don’t stare at the closed door and miss the open window.”
– Author unknown

What you can do now...
- Focus on small wins and opportunities.
- Begin with improvements within your institution.
- Move toward engagement as opposed to consensus.
- Identify faculty champions.
- Promote your PLA options.
- Leverage university partnerships that are PLA friendly.
- Start with career and technical (AAS) programs.
“The door is there, and the key is in your hand.”

– Jiddu Krishnamurti
Resources

http://www.cael.org

http://www.acenet.edu/higher-education/topics/Pages/Credit-for-Prior-Learning.aspx


