The New World of PLA: Re-examining Your Prior Learning Assessment Program

The National Institute for the Assessment of Adult Learning
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Atlantic City
Workshop Plan

- Trends in Higher Education and PLA
- Explore common PLA practices
  - Across institutions
  - Historical context
  - Institutional Philosophy
- Examining your own program practices
  - Institutional philosophy, mission and policies
- Evaluating your program
- Your next steps
Trends in Higher Education & PLA

- Open Educational Resources (OER)
  - Untethered Learning
  - MOOCs
  - Open Courseware
  - Badges
- Workplace Development
- Role of PLA
  - Evaluating by exams
  - Evaluating by professional learning evaluations
  - Evaluating by individual portfolio
Where do your institutional PLA practices fall in the continuum?
Drives all practice
- Philosophy often goes unstated
  - What do you think are the philosophical underpinnings at your institution?
  - Are they shared across all constituents?
- Connects Mission to Policies
  - What are your policies?
  - How do they align with your philosophy? Mission?
Variations in PLA Practices

- Evaluation Criteria: Course Match vs. Non-Course Match
- Application of Credits: Concentration vs. Electives
- Policies & Support: Integrated vs. Add On
- Evaluators: Faculty vs. Outside Experts
- Assessment Process: Blind Review vs. Interviews
What type of prior learning credits will be accepted toward the degree?

- Standardized exams
- Military
- Pre-Evaluated Credits (ACE, NCCRS, Own Institution)
- Course Challenge
- Individualized Prior Learning Assessment Portfolio
  - Own Institution
  - Other Institutions or Organizations
Common PLA Practices

- 64% assess across all academic disciplines
- 74% use course match, 44% use non-course match PLA
- 63% use pre-evaluated learning standards established by own institution
- 96% use individualized learning portfolios
- 85% use exams/standardized tests
- PLA credits are used toward:
  - 96% electives
  - 89% curriculum requirements
  - 85% general education
  - 19% residency requirements

From Hoffman, Travers, Evans & Treadwell (2009) Five Critical Factors Study
The PLA Evaluation Process

What is Evaluated?
- Portfolio only
- Portfolio and interview
- Interview only
- Other - Performance, Tests, Demonstrations

How many Evaluate?
- Individual evaluators
- Panel of evaluators

Whose Authority awards the credits?
- VP/AVP Academic Affairs
- Program Chairs
- Faculty Committees
- Others
Applying the Credits to The Degree

How many credits can be used toward the degree?
- Residential Credits
- Advanced Standing Credits?

Which Disciplines Accept PLA Credits?
- Across all academic disciplines
- Only in specific areas

How are the credits used in the degree?
- Elective credit
- Curriculum/program requirements
- General Education
- Advance Standing
- Residency requirements

How are the credits transcribed?
- PLA credits
- Institutional Credits
- Transfer Credits
Measuring Learning

- Match to own institution’s courses/Learning Outcomes only
- Match to other institutions’ courses/Learning Outcomes
- Assess learning without specific course match but to outcomes or expectations

What are the academic structures used to ensure quality and integrity?
Traditional Portfolio

1. A workshop or course
2. Learning essay
3. Supporting documentation
4. Portfolio

Traditional Assessment of Prior Learning
PLA portfolio

Written Essay
• Learning Description
• Career history/resume
• Student autobiographical statement
• Student’s statement of goals

Course/credit request
• Outcomes/ Course Descriptions
• Course Designations

Supporting documentation
• Student’s Degree curriculum
• Student transcripts
• Copies of Licenses, Certificates, etc.
• Examples of Work
• Letters of Support
Who are the Evaluators?

**Who**
- Internal academic faculty
- Faculty from other institutions
- External content experts

**Qualifications**
- Advanced degree or equivalent expertise in appropriate areas
- Areas of Specialization
- Understanding of curriculum and teaching experience
- Currency and/or work experience in the field
- Philosophy toward PLA, non-traditional modes of evaluating learning, and working with adult learners
Who does the evaluations? Who needs training?

- Faculty
- Staff
- Evaluators/Content Experts
Training Topics

- Overview of whole process
  - Institutional policies and publications
  - National Standards
  - Process in developing a request
- Expectations of Evaluator & Student
- How to evaluate college-level learning
- How to interview the student (if applicable)
- How to write an evaluator report
  - How to document the learning
  - How to justify recommended credits & designations
What must an evaluator submit to the college?

- Recommendation Report, with Justification
- Course title, credits, and credit recommendations
- How is the report used?
- How does it become part of the student’s academic record?
Program Feedback and Evaluation Process

Who
- Students
- Faculty
- Evaluator

How
- Surveys
- Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Outside Evaluation
How is your program fairing?
Especially in today’s open learning world....
CAEL’s Ten Standards for Assessing Learning

1. Credit or its equivalent should be awarded only for learning, and not for experience.
2. Assessment should be based on standards and criteria for the level of acceptable learning that are both agreed upon and made public.
3. Assessment should be treated as an integral part of learning, not separate from it, and should be based on an understanding of learning processes.
4. The determination of credit awards and competence levels must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic or credentialing experts.
5. Credit or other credentialing should be appropriate to the context in which it is awarded and accepted.
6. If awards are for credit, transcript entries should clearly describe what learning is being recognized and should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.
7. Policies, procedures, and criteria applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available to all parties involved in the assessment process.
8. Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.
9. All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions they perform.
10. Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served, the purposes being met, and the state of the assessment arts.

Examining Your Program

Five Critical Factors

- Institutional Philosophy, Mission & Policy
- Institutional Support
- Program Parameters - Practice
- Professional Development
- Program Evaluation
### Analyzing Your PLA Program

Combine the 5 Factors and the 10 CAEL Standards

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<tr>
<th>THE TEN CAEL STANDARDS</th>
<th>Institutional Mission and Commitment</th>
<th>Institutional Support</th>
<th>PLA Program Parameters</th>
<th>PLA Evaluator Development</th>
<th>Program Feedback and Evaluation</th>
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Work in groups of 2-3
- Look at the 5 x 10 grid (from article)
- Look at the list of practices

How could you use this to assess your program?

How does your program embrace changes in Higher Education?
Your Next Steps

- Examine your program in more depth
  - How does it fair with the 5 x 10 grid?
  - How are you doing to work with unteathered, self-authored students?
Comments? Questions?

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