Developing a PLA Program: Nuts and Bolts

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Presented by Terry Hoffmann to the National Institute

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Issues in Program Development

Group Activity
PLA Program Development Overview Phases

- Pre-Planning Development Phase 1
- Planning Phase 2
- Launching Phase 3
- Assessing Phase 4
Phase 1: Pre-Planning

- PLA Vision, Priorities and Mission
- Needs Assessment and analysis
- Who are your students?
- How will this program meets their needs?
- What budget are you working with?
- What resources would you have access to?
Phase 2: Planning

- Explore PLA Options
- Identify the Options that best fit your needs
- Do you have an existing program or are you starting a new program?
- How would you want to enhance the existing one?
- Look at your resources and analyze the feasibility of the “best fit” model options
- What personnel, equipment, materials, technology will you need?
Phase 3: Launching

- What does your program look like?
- How is the system organized?
- How will you deliver it?
- How will you market it?
- How will you evaluate PLA and who are the assessors?
- Do personnel need training?
- What is your support infrastructure?
- What communication pathways are in place?
Phase 4: Assessing

- What and who are you assessing?
- What types of program evaluation and feedback will you offer?
- What is the impact of this program on the institution, student, administration, assessor and accreditation source? How will you know?
- What is the larger impact on the community, military, etc?
- What are the holes in the program? How can you resolve those issues?
Five Stage PLA Program Development Process Model

1. Exploring the PLA Options
2. Analyzing the Options’ Pros/Cons
3. Designing the Program
4. Implementing the Program
5. Evaluating the Program

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Stage 1: Exploring the PLA Options
Exploring the Types of PLA Taken in Transfer or Assessed at your Institution

- PLA Assessment Options can include:
  - Standardized Testing and Exams
  - Institutionally created exams
  - Standardized Testing – CLEP, DANTES, ACT/PEP
  - Advanced Placement Tests

- Other Assessments:
  - Portfolio Evaluation – paper/e-portfolios, course match, objectives/outcomes/competency-based, academic area-based
  - ACE, DANTES or PONSI credits for corporate or military training
  - Licenses, Certifications, Non-Credit Courses
  - NCCRS (National College Credit Recommendation Service)
  - Independent Study
  - Moocs, Badges
  - Other
Exploring the Types of Prior Learning Delivery Options

- For each model, ask yourself what infrastructure do you need to support it and is it feasible for your institution? Check out resources.

- Classroom Model
- Web Model
- Hybrid Model
- Mentor Model
- Individualized Model
Stage 2: Analyzing the PLA Options/Pros and Cons
Analyzing the Options’ Pros/Cons for Your Institutional Needs

- Do you have institutional support for your options? Which ones were used in the past?

- Are you providing enough options for adult learners? What are you missing?

- Are you ready to move from paper-based delivery to web-based? If so, what will you need to achieve the migration?
What PLA are you accepting/assessing?

Transfer credits?
- Standardized tests
- Portfolios from other schools? Learning Counts?
- Corporate, Government agency training credits like: state police, fire fighters, etc.
- Technology certifications
- Real Estate licenses
Stage 3: Designing the Program
Designing the Program

- Accreditation
- Institutional Needs
- Outreach
- Academic Quality
- Administration
- Program Assessments
Accreditation: Quality Standards

It is critical that you know the guidelines from your accreditation board(s), for example:

- Middle States Accrediting Board
- State Higher Education Guidelines
- Council for Adults in Experiential Learning (CAEL) guidelines.
“Recognition of college-level learning, no matter how or where attained, adds another dimension to an institution’s offerings by acknowledging the learning achievement of returning adults, by facilitating the progress of students already enrolled, and by conserving educational resources.”
Institutional Needs

- Resources
- Infrastructures
- Support systems
- Retention
- Impact on institutional system
Retention Efforts

Retention efforts can include:
1. An orientation process
2. Skills assessment and counseling
3. Computer training
4. Academic support and advising
5. Instructional materials
6. Mentors for students and faculty
7. Web technical training and support
Student PLA Benefits

- Receive individual attention
- Validates life learning outside the classroom
- Develop writing, computer, critical thinking and analysis skills
- Exercise the reflective review process needed for critical thinking and lifelong learning
- Can use their portfolio for work, personal or academic endeavors
- Financially efficient for students and employers
Outreach Efforts

- Marketing to your populations
- Developing Networking Relationships
- Feeder systems
- Admissions
- Orientation
- Counseling/Advising
Academic Quality

- Develop or review best practices
- Create consistency in academic criteria
- Develop or use instructional materials
- Hire and train qualified coaches and mentors
- Provide instruction for expert assessors
- Develop online, hybrid and classroom formats to address access, flexibility and learning styles issues
- Provide opportunities for feedback and assessment
- Perform research to explore patterns and adjust program accordingly
PLA Quality Issues

- Differentiation between implicit and explicit learning
- Writing quality needed to adequately articulate learning
- Quantity of knowledge delineated
- Scope and depth of learning
- Applied learning vs. theoretical understanding
- Presentation
- Course match and Academic Area knowledge
Faculty Training

- Standardize course
- Roles definition
- Consistency in quality standards
- Efficiency in course delivery
- Effectiveness of learning outcomes
- Increase retention and student success
Assessor Training Model

- 1 ½ day sessions
- Experiential learning philosophy
- Learning and personality styles
- Peer Guidance
- On-going evaluator training and feedback
- Evaluator Manual
- Written practice exercises
- Peer norming
- Identifying explicit learning
- Instructive student feedback
- Feedback to course faculty
Stage 4: Implementing the Program
Portfolio of Life Learning

- Goals: Personal, Career, Educational
- Chronological Table of Life Events/Resume
- Autobiography
- Targeted Courses
- Competencies

- Academic narratives usually in areas of Business management, Communications, Computers, Natural Sciences and Behavioral Sciences
- Documentation samples
Online and Web-Enhanced Classroom Management

- Provide sample on-line portfolios
- Create rubrics
- Give access to course objectives and syllabi
- Share faculty web course techniques
- Require on-line weekly due dates for each section of portfolio
- Grade each written section of portfolio
- Utilize an on-line writing center
- Pace the student throughout the process
- Provide web resources
- Conduct course assessments
- Standardize course and syllabus
Web Site Access

- Students can access PLA site on the web
- Links are available to
  - Orientation with student and faculty video bites
  - Sample web course
  - Application
  - Advising
  - Admission
  - Registration
  - Staff Directory
Online and Class Best Practices

- Provide sample on-line portfolios
- Create rubrics
- Motivate students through interactivity
- Give access to course objectives and syllabi
- Create group projects
- Share faculty web course techniques
- Require on-line weekly appointments

- Grade each written section of portfolio
- Provide focused coaching individually and in groups
- Utilize the on-line writing center
- Pace the student throughout the process
- Provide useful exercises
- Provide web resources
- Conduct course assessments
- Standardize course and syllabus
Pre-Course Retention Efforts

- PLA website
- Mandatory orientation
- Printed instructional materials
- Sample web course
- Web boot camp
- Advising
- Skills assessment

- Faculty web training
- Course faculty training
- Evaluator training
- Evaluator manual
- Administrative interventions
- Faculty peer mentors
In-Course Retention Efforts

- Instructional materials: Student manual and video
- Web course
- Web-enhanced class
- On-line sample portfolios
- Peer Mentors
- Evaluators
- On-going faculty training
- Academic Advising
- Technical support
Post-Course Institutional Retention Efforts

- Administrative guidance
- Incompletes
- Evaluator feedback
- Credits earned toward degree for life learning
- Resource referrals
- Appeals
- Advising
- On-going Faculty Evaluator training
- Student evaluations
Faculty Role Development

- Syllabus construction
- Learning Styles
- Personality Styles
- College-level learning
- Coaching methods
- Identifying Explicit Learning
- Retention strategies
- Technology tricks
- Writing process
- Plagiarism
- Grading
- Administrative role
- Time management
Faculty Roles in Student Success

- Direct the Student’s process throughout the course
- Provide accurate and complete information
- Respond in a timely manner
- Give students supportive and detailed feedback on a regular basis
- Contact students you haven’t heard from
- Be positive and encouraging...give them hope
- Your role is active and dynamic
Faculty Communication Site

- Provide teaching status and schedule
- Create discipline specific groups
- Create course faculty groups
- Promote communication between instructors and assessors
- Post forms
- Ask questions
- Attend online faculty training sessions
- Access useful course materials posted by faculty
- Share tips
- Post updated institutional information
Administrative Issues

- Policy development
- Budget support
- Institutional support
- Technical support
- Scalability models
- Efficient resource use
- Program assessment
- Quality assurance
Portfolio Process

- Skills assessment
- Student orientation
- Instructor/mentor guidance
- Peer mentor support
- Portfolio development
- Identification of college-level learning (institutionally defined)
- Supportive evidence of knowledge and practical application

- Instructor/mentor review/results
- Assessor review/results
- Gate keeping quality and duplication of credits
- Application of PLA credits to degree program
- Appeals process/complaints
- Program assessment
Portfolio Management Process

- Coordination Screen
- Orientation
- Application
- Registration
- Student Data
- Instructor Assignment
- Assessor Assignment
- Assessor Evaluations
Coordination Screen

- Allows user to see any aspect of the portfolio management process at a glance and get current statistics for
  - Student enrollment per semester, class
  - Student completion per semester or over years
  - Total credits earned per student, semester, years
  - Number of portfolios received, to assessors and returned
  - Status of late portfolios with explanations
  - Hire instructors and assessors
  - Check faculty work load
Orientation Screen

- Schedule orientations in classroom
- Identify students who have attended
- Track retention rate of those who did well and attended orientation and those who didn’t attend
- Track how many attending online orientation and applied to program
- Orientation follow-up feedback/interview
Application to PL Program

- Students can apply after the orientation online
- Application data is transmitted directly to the database
- Takes placement tests for writing if student does not have college writing courses
- If student meets criteria, staff approves application online and email is automatically generated
Registration Screen

- If application is approved, then permission is automatically given online to register for the program
- Students can register for the PLA instruction online
- Each course has a designator or section number
- Students can check course enrollment and faculty
- Faculty biographies are available
Student Data Screen

- Personal information
- Academic information
- Evaluation of Transfer Credits
- Targeted Courses
- Payment or fees
- Portfolio Submission and status dates
- Incomplete contracts/status
- Final Award Letter
- Applied to Transcript
- Comments
Course Instructor/Mentor

- Hire faculty per course or per student
- Track statistics on faculty timeliness, student complaints, PLA activities, retention rates
- Review history for completion rates
- Audit portfolios periodically
- Read student evaluations
Assessor Screen

- Review assessor work history and availability
- Hire assessor according to academic area
- Track timeliness and accuracy
- Review assessor’s training history
- Review evaluation reports for quality of feedback
- Review credit awards for quality and accuracy
- Get statistics on number of credits awarded, academic areas and credits denied
Evaluating the Program

- Student evaluations
- Instructor/mentor evaluations from assessors
- Assessor evaluations from Gatekeeper staff
- Program evaluation from students, faculty and staff
- Evaluation from support resources
- Accreditation assessments
PLA Research


PLA Research


References


References


Thank You!

Please contact me, if you have any questions:

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