Identifying Roadblocks and Possible Solutions to Incorporating Flexible Prior Learning Options into Degree Programs
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Movements Impacting Institutions and PLA Programs....

- Political goals to educate our workforce efficiently and effectively while keeping costs down and including PLA
- “Going Green” and incorporating technology
- Competing in the marketplace especially with other schools who can offer more PLA credit options, less tuition and who have more funding
- Moving outside the traditional models – “Direct Assessment” moving away from the credit-hour and impact on financial aid
- Targeting course/degree offerings to the workforce and employers
- Innovations in education to expedite degrees (e.g. course modules and competencies instead of course credits)
- Others?
Searching for New Models…
Lots of Questions…

- We’re told we have to have PLA, now what?
- We are course-based so how do we use PLA? Do we need a new model just for PLA or can we make it fit?
- How do we move beyond standardized testing for PLA?
- What do we do with MOOCS, Badges, Modules, Competencies and how do we weave the into our system…or do we start over?
- Who is going to monitor PLA? The departments? A central office?
- How do we connect learning from experience to courses?
- What is beneficial about using competencies instead of credits to earn a degree?
- What do the accrediting agencies expect of us?
- Are there any Best Practices?
- Others?
Possible Innovations to Expand Flexible PLA and Degree Options...

- Incorporate new flexible degree options (e.g. accelerated plans using PLA, competency-based modules)
- Promote student centered learning with option to design their own degree
- Increase access through online delivery systems
- Provide a mentor for the whole experience
- Create retention plans that include veteran students to partner with
- Encourage students from the start through Orientations to know their options to earn a degree
- Provide options with “Direct Assessment”
- What innovations can you think of?
What is Direct Assessment....

- “A direct assessment program is an instructional program that, in lieu of credit hours or clock hours as a measure of student learning, utilizes direct assessment of student learning, or recognizes the direct assessment of student learning by others. The assessment must be consistent with the accreditation of the institution or program utilizing the results of the assessment.”

- Source: U.S. Government Printing Office


Inside Higher Ed
“Direct Assessment” Models Overview

Klein-Collins & Baylor (2013) “Meeting Students Where They Are: profiles of students in competency-based degree programs”

Summary: Studied competency based education (CBE) programs across multiple institutions and found they can consist of:

- “direct assessment” models – competency-based assessments (e.g. tests, portfolio, problem-solving scenarios, case studies, projects, independent study, apprenticeships, certifications, licenses, MOOCS, Badges)
- Flexible delivery formats (online, 24/7, open resources, face-to-face, hybrids, videos)
- Self-paced, no timelines
- Guided study, mentors, coaches
- Peer interactions
- Employer input in creating competencies
- Online resources with/without books
- Assessments when either competency or module completed
- Can retake competency

Samples of Working Models for Competency-Based Education

- Westminster College (Utah)
- Southern New Hampshire University
- Western Governor’s University (Utah & National)
- De Paul’s School for New Learning
- University of Maryland University College
- Excelsior College’s School of Nursing
- Capella University
Western Governor’s Model…pay for time not the credit

- Pay for blocks of time every 6 months – flat rate
- Competencies completed as needed– especially with PLA
- Project have multiple competencies
- Transcript it all as coursework
- Graduate with competencies which they say are course equivalents
- Offer Bachelors and Master’s degree that are CBE
- Human Resources requires 123 competencies with 6 bodies of knowledge: strategic management, workforce planning, human development, compensation and benefits, employee and labor relations, occupational health, safety, and security
- [http://www.wgu.edu/why_WGU/competency_based_approach](http://www.wgu.edu/why_WGU/competency_based_approach)
Westminster College, Utah

- Degrees totally competency based in Business and Writing areas and Masters in BusAdmin
- Based on project model that translates to a Module. (e.g. Business Administration degree has 5 projects and costs $7,152/project or $596/credit hour.
- Mentor stays with each student until graduation
Transcripting Competency-Based Learning

- Can be organized into projects or modules that are aligned to courses or credits
- Even if other institutions are still using credits, it works for articulation – perhaps course equivalents are easier to transfer?
- User-friendly
- How will competencies work with Financial Aid?
- What issues do you see with this if any?
PLA and MOOCS, Badges, etc.

- Massive Open Online Course
  - [http://www.extension.harvard.edu/open-learning-initiative](http://www.extension.harvard.edu/open-learning-initiative) - free Harvard Open Learning courses
  - [http://oyc.yale.edu/](http://oyc.yale.edu/) - free Yale Open Learning courses
  - Eliademy ([https://eliademy.com/](https://eliademy.com/)) You can create your own free classroom
  - Prior learning can be gained from any experience whether self-study, training, etc. The issue is how to apply the learning. Can one create examples of how to use the theory or information and generalize it to another setting.
  - Can this be incorporated into your PLA program? Check them out and see what you think.
Potential Roadblocks to Implementing Innovation Solutions for PLA…

- Institutional support
- Institutional image - concern over it watering down the degree
- Who sets the criteria for a course or module? The academic department or the student?
- Quality control issues
- Are the benefits worth it for our institution?
- Do we have the infrastructure?
- What are the costs involved?
- How long will it take to get on board?
- Others?
Group Discussion

- What kinds of PLA options are available right now at your institution?
- Are there new options you would like to see implemented?
- Identify some roadblocks to creating more flexible PLA options for students at your institution.
- What are some potential solutions to overcoming the obstacles?
- Discuss with your group.
PLA Research


PLA Research


References


References


I enjoyed our time together…
Thank You!

Please contact me if you have any questions.

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