NJ PLAN, the New Jersey PLA Network: the Need, the Benefits, the Challenges

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The NJ Prior Learning Assessment Network (NJ PLAN)

NJ PLAN is a New Jersey-centered consortium of higher education institutions designed to provide access to prior learning assessment programs and services for adult and non-traditional learners on a statewide scale.
NJ PLAN’s Objectives

• increase learners’ access to assessment of their prior learning;
• increase the number of learners who use this process in their quest for certificates and degrees;
• enhance assessment without replacing the educational and assessment systems that currently exist at individual institutions;
• model exemplary practices for incorporating returning learners into college programs;
• provide an efficient and cost-effective method for offering PLA;
• increase the number of NJ residents with college credentials to enhance their career opportunities and improve the labor market in the state;
• and, ultimately, increase the numbers of postsecondary credentials and degrees awarded in New Jersey.
Objectives Summarized

- Access
- Increased scale and efficiency
- Share knowledge and best practices
- Lower costs
- Economic benefits for the state
PLA Methods

• Credit-by-Exam: CLEP, DSST, TECEP
• Portfolio Development & Assessment
• Program review: training, licenses, certifications
• ACE and NCCRS
How does NJ PLAN work?

Evaluations of prior learning are administered through Thomas Edison State College

• Based on alignment with course learning outcomes—designed by faculty from NJ and nearby institutions

• Students demonstrate mastery of the learning outcomes they would have achieved in the equivalent course

• Portfolios: Subject-matter experts review students’ completed portfolios or other documentation
PLA-100 and PLA-200

• PLA-100: Intro to Prior Learning Assessment
  – 1-credit, 4-week course focused on exposing students to ways of earning credit for what they already know
  – Topics covered include: What is college-level learning, and do I have any? What are learning outcomes? Bloom’s taxonomy and other models

• PLA-200: Intro to Portfolio Development
  – 2-credit, 8-week course focused on developing a portfolio
  – Topics include articulation of goals, documentation and evidence, mapping knowledge to courses and curriculum
  – End result is at least an outline of portfolio
  – Completed portfolio sent to Subject-Matter Experts for review

• Courses meet General Education requirements
  – Information Literacy, Communication, Lifelong Learning
What can students earn credit for?

http://www.njplan.org/pla/index.php
# Training, Licenses, Certifications

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<th>Credits</th>
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<td>Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR) Certification from HRCI</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uniform Certified Public Accountant (CPA) Exam</td>
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<td>• Hub Supervisor Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Integrad – Managing Performance Training</td>
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## Sustainable Energy/Green Building

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<td>International Ground Source Heat Pump Association: Accredited Installer Workshop</td>
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<td>Mechanical Insulation: Insulator Energy Appraisal Professional (IEAP) Certification</td>
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www.tesc.edu
What are the benefits of NJ PLAN?

- Recent studies: learners who earn college credit through PLA 2.5 times more likely to graduate.
- Provides opportunity to take more advanced coursework.
- Gives students the means to persist and to graduate.
- Can help students complete a degree at significant cost and time savings.
- Integrates work and academic experiences.
Benefits for institutions

• Opportunity to share best practices
• Assessment skills and training
• Increased efficiency
• Easier articulation and transfer of credits
• Better service to adults, veterans, non-traditional
NJPLAN: Part of the Degree Completion Landscape At Rowan University

Rory McElwee
Associate Vice President for Student Retention
State-designated public research institution with campuses in Glassboro, Camden and Stratford, New Jersey, that offers bachelor’s through doctoral programs to over 14,000 students

- Pillars: Quality, Affordability, Access, Regional Economic Engine

- Undergoing rapid expansion on myriad fronts: Enrollment, research, diversity, & more

- Kiplinger’s 100 Best Value Colleges

- Social Mobility Index, 2nd in the nation
• Freshman retention rate: 88%
• 4-year/6-year graduation rate: 47%/67%
• Transfer retention rate: 90%
• 4-year transfer graduation rate: 75%

Better rates than national averages for similar institutions

- Is this the best we can do?
Focus on Degree Completion: Six Initiatives

• Centralized professional advising model
• Bachelor of General Studies Program
• Online coursework expansion
• Streamlined reenrollment process
• Project Graduation Quest
• NJPLAN: New Jersey Prior Learning Assessment Network
New: Degree Completion Specialist

• Identify students still at Rowan at risk of stop-out
• Initiate PGQ University-wide
• Explore partnerships with employers and other organizations to increase regional college completion rates
• Serve as NJPLAN liaison
• Advise for BGS & reenrolling students
NJPLAN at Rowan

• Why join NJPLAN?
• Relevant policies:
  – Must complete at least 30 credits at Rowan
  – Must meet all degree requirements
  – PLA credit is treated as transfer credit
• Students referred to TESC for PLA will be advised and tracked to ensure credits will apply as intended
Process for NJPLAN referral

✓ Advisors refer to Degree Completion Specialist
✓ Explain the NJ PLAN program and PLA process
✓ Determine likelihood of candidacy, including outstanding requirements & advisor consultation
✓ Refer to liaison at TESC
✓ Tracking and ongoing communication with the student & advisor
Observations about PLA to date

• “Life experience” ≠ documented college-level learning acquired out of classroom
• Desire for entire degree/ program alignment & admissions standards
• Very happy for the opportunity, but few have proceeded
• Need to publicize more on campus
• State-wide NJ PLAN strengthens opportunities & credibility
NJ PLAN at New Jersey City University

An Enhanced Focus on Serving New Jersey’s Returning Adult Learners
NJ PLAN During NJCU’s Transition

• NJCU is more than a “teachers’ training college”
• The redefining of NJCU’s role and purpose
• NJCU as an economic driver
Three Keys to NJCU’s Success

• West Campus (currently under construction)
• School of Business (scheduled to open this fall)
• Division of Professional and Lifelong Learning – includes NJ PLAN / Credit for Prior Learning
Keys to NJ PLAN’s Success at NJCU

• Coordinating all Credit for Prior Learning activities through a ‘point office’
• Targeting new marketing and advertising initiatives towards adult learners
• Incorporating recruitment efforts into NJCU’s enrollment management strategy
• Tracking Credit for Prior Learning Activities
Why does NJ PLAN work for NJCU?

- More adult learners will build up the overall enrollment pool
- Intimate connection with NJ’s economic development strategy
- Links higher education with employers and those seeking career advancement via NJ PLAN
Why does NJ PLAN work for NJ?

• The “Price is Right”
• Unparalleled value for employers and job seekers alike
• Strong consolidated approach
• Total statewide coverage