PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT HANDBOOK

NORTHEAST RESILIENCY CONSORTIUM

Achieving the Dream™

Community Colleges Count

Nan L. Travers, Ph.D.

ABOUT US

The Northeast Resiliency Consortium (NRC) is a group of seven community colleges—Passaic County (NJ), Kingsborough (NY), Housatonic (CT), Bunker Hill (MA), Capital (CT), LaGuardia (NY), and Atlantic Cape (NJ) community colleges, organized in partnership with Achieving the Dream and joined with other strategic partners including the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The consortium was created in the wake of recent natural and man-made disasters. These disasters serve as powerful reminders that catastrophes can come in all shapes and sizes, and when least expected, can disrupt a community's infrastructure and civic life.

The consortium was awarded $23.5 million from the U.S. Department of Labor's Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Career and Training (TAACCCT) program to develop education and training programs to support the development of a skilled and resilient workforce. Resiliency is defined as an individual's persistent development and application of knowledge, skills, and resources that effectively help one adapt to change and overcome adversity.

The goal of the NRC was to enhance the capacity of colleges to accelerate learning, ensure that students attain industry-recognized credentials, foster innovative employer partnerships, use new technologies, and deploy robust support services. The consortium and its partners are working to build regional capacity for helping trade-impacted, unemployed persons, veterans and other workers in obtaining the skills, competencies, and credentials needed to transition into in-demand occupations and to successfully advance along a career pathway in IT, healthcare, or energy/environment.

The following booklet is for use with the community college partner members of the Northeast Resiliency Consortium.

Northeast Resiliency Consortium Partners

Atlantic Cape Community College, New Jersey (http://atlantic.edu)
Bunker Hill Community College, Massachusetts (http://www.bhcc.mass.edu)
Capital Community College, Connecticut (http://www.ccc.commnet.edu)
Housatonic Community College, Connecticut (http://www.housatonic.edu)
Kingsborough Community College, CUNY, New York (http://www.kbcc.cuny.edu)
LaGuardia Community College, CUNY, New York (http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu)
Passaic County Community College, New Jersey (http://www.pccc.edu)

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IntraScope, LLC
January, 2015

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT (PLA)

HANDBOOK FOR THE NORTHEAST RESILIENCY CONSORTIUM

by Nan L. Travers, Ph.D.

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Chapter 1

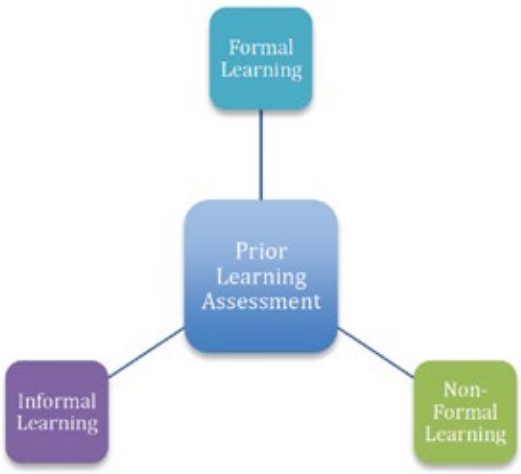
Introduction to Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) and the Northeast Resiliency Consortium

> ***"Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is the award of academic credit based on the evaluation of verifiable college-level learning achieved outside of the traditional academic environment" (State University of New York PLA Policy Recommendation Report, 2014).***

Prior learning assessment (PLA) is known by many different names across the world. Some of the other commonly used terms are: Assessment of Prior Learning (APL), Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), Credit for Prior Learning (CPL), Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLA), Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and the Validation and Accreditation of Experience (VAE).

In the United States, prior learning has been assessed primarily for academic credits, but in many other countries the recognition, validation and accreditation includes workplace certifications. For some countries, PLA is solely for workplace credentialing, while many other countries use PLA processes for both academic and workplace credentials.

The source of prior learning can be classified in three categories: formal learning, non-formal learning and informal learning. Formal learning is acquired through formal guided learning situations, such as classroom training or non-accredited educational courses. These learning situations usually follow a structure with well-defined learning outcomes. Non-formal learning is also guided but is usually within workshop or less-structured settings. Informal learning is often referred to as experiential learning, or learning that has not had structure, and is often self-guided or developed.



Many people gain verifiable college level learning from areas* such as:

- Work experiences
- Licenses, certifications and other credentials
- Military training
- Seminars, workshops and in-service training or placements
- Continuing professional education
- Non-credit courses
- Study at institutions not formally accredited
- Learning through on-line and Open Educational Resources (OER), such as MOOC's
- Volunteer work in the community
- Hobbies and recreational activities
- Independent reading and research

** This list provides examples and is not exhaustive.*

*The key to PLA is that the learning must be **validated** at a **college level** to receive academic credits.*

Types of Prior Learning Assessment

Prior learning assessment falls into three categories: Transfer Credit, Pre-evaluated Learning and Individualized Portfolio Assessment. Many do not consider Transfer Credits as a form of PLA, but it is learning that has occurred prior to the student entering the institution that must be reviewed, verified and credentialed by the receiving institution. The academic process employed to determine the integrity and how the credits fit the curriculum is the same for transfer credit as for all other forms of PLA.

Pre-evaluated learning refers to those types of PLA that have been evaluated prior to students engaging the assessment. Examples of this type are: standardized exams (e.g., CLEP, AP); military training and occupations evaluated by the American Council on Education; corporate and industry training or certifications evaluated by the American Council on Education (ACE), the National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS) or some regionally accredited institution (e.g., SUNY Empire State College, Thomas Edison State College). Some of these institutions have recently formed the Consortium for the Assessment of College Equivalency (CACE); member institutions share practices and credit recommendations. In addition, institutional challenge exams could be considered pre-evaluated learning in that the exam is based on pre-existing assessments and outcomes. *Appendix C* provides a list of standardized exams and evaluation organizations.

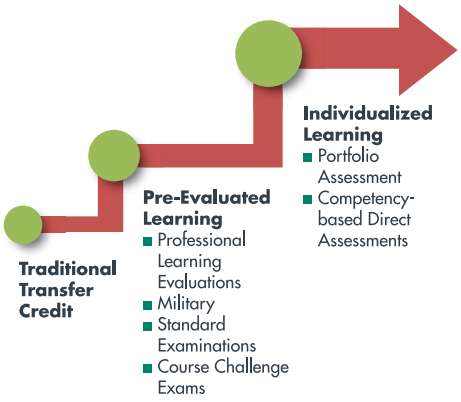
Individualized portfolio assessment is the process by which students articulate and document their learning in a portfolio. This learning is often documented against course outcomes or program competencies. Faculty-level evaluators then assess this portfolio for college credit. Most institutions require a course or a workshop to support the students through the process.

Non-Credit Courses and PLA

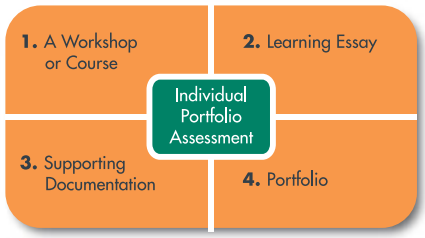
Another area worth mentioning is the assessment of and the assessment for non-credit courses. Many non-credit courses have components that are college-level learning or are completely at a college level. Some institutions offer academic courses through the non-credit, workforce development or continuing education divisions for a variety of reasons. Some use the non-credit division to test out new ideas before they go through curricular review. Some provide courses at the workplace or for special requests that are similar to the academic side but may not have gone through a curriculum committee. Some institutions have a continuing education division that may provide its own academic curriculum. Regardless the reason, many times these courses may be college level and could go through the PLA process. In addition, sometimes portions of the course are college level and the portfolio assessment process may reveal that the student has some learning that can be awarded credit.

The PLA process can also be used within non-credit courses. Some courses are provided as a means to certifications and licenses. PLA can play a role in documenting learning towards those certifications. It can also be used to determine how much students already know and any gaps in knowledge. As a diagnostic tool, PLA can provide very important information and reduce the need to cover some of the materials.

Types of Prior Learning Assessment



Traditional Portfolio Assessment of Prior Learning



Prior learning assessment can also play an important role in developmental education. Usually, students have some knowledge of the topics but are missing other areas. Before they can proceed to courses that lead toward a degree, they need to demonstrate an understanding of the topics. The portfolio assessment process is ideal for documenting what is known and what is missing and track when a student has acquired the knowledge. This process can also be used for pre-college pre-requisites. In this way, PLA becomes a pedagogical method of helping students learn more about their knowledge and identify gaps.

Historical Roots in the United States

In the United States, prior learning assessment has been around for over **80 years** (Travers, 2011). Beginning with the College Entrance Examination Board in the 1930's, standardized exams, such as the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) and Advanced Placement (AP), have been used to determine if students had college level knowledge in certain areas. At the close of World War II, in order to help veterans return to work and become college educated, the American Council on Education (ACE) began the assessment of learning acquired through military training and different occupations for college credit recommendations. About 20 years later, ACE also began assessing learning acquired through industry training and certifications.

There are other historical markers for PLA. Also in 1945 the Educational Testing Service (ETS) began administering their college level examinations. In the 1970's, many adult-serving institutions began individualized portfolio assessment processes for prior learning. In 1971, the Commission on Non-Traditional Study was formed and then in 1974 the Cooperative Assessment of Experiential Learning was developed, which later became the organization known now as the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL).

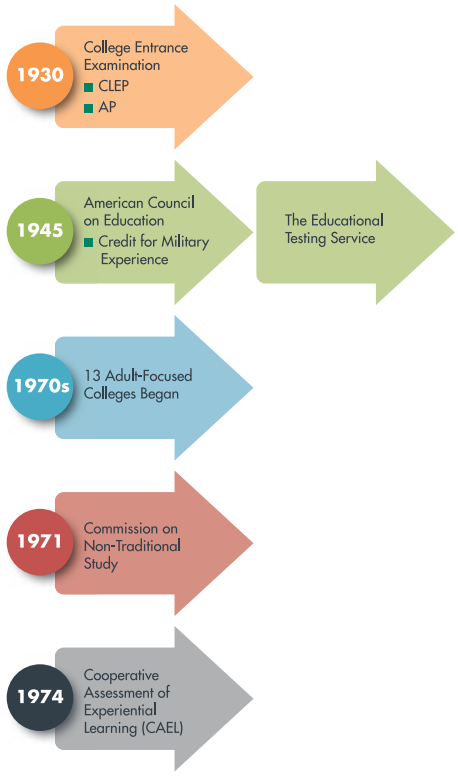
Today there is a significant movement of prior learning assessment across higher education in the United States. As part of the college completion agenda, President Obama challenged higher education to increase the number of completed college degrees across America (http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education). He has set the goal that by 2020, the United States would have once again the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. The Lumina Foundation, the largest private foundation contributing to higher education, has taken up President Obama's challenge and has set the goal to increase the proportion of Americans with high-quality degrees, certificates and other credentials to 60 percent by the year 2025.

Research on Prior Learning Assessment

From 1974-1978, a research study was conducted by CAEL to examine adult learner practices at 50 institutions in the United States. Through extensive interviews, project pilots and assessor training, a series of working papers were written and an additional 80 projects launched. This work was then synthesized into CAEL's Ten Standards for Assessing Learning. Most institutions using PLA employ these standards.

In a review of PLA research, Travers (2011) identified three research themes: PLA Program Practices, Institutional Outcomes and Student Outcomes. Research on program practices revealed that there is a lack of institutional understanding of PLA, especially with the faculty. The research also indicated that many institutions had little or no professional development addressing PLA overall or specific concerns faculty had such as assessment integrity and workload. In addition, very few institutions engage ongoing, formal program reviews.

PLA Early Years in the U.S.



Why PLA? Why Now?

PLA offers all learners the ability to:

- Earn Credit for learning gained outside of the classroom.
- Complete their degrees sooner at a lower cost

Degree Completion Agenda

- President Obama challenged every American to commit to at least one year of higher education or post-secondary training.
- President Obama set goal that by 2020, the United States would once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.

Lumina

- Increase the proportion of Americans with high-quality degrees, certificates, and other credentials to 60% by 2025.

From Research to Standards

CAEL Project (1974-1977)

- Interviewed students, faculty, administration, at 50 institutions on adult learner practices and prior learning assessment
- Pilot projects and assessor training initiatives were launched via mini-grants to various institutions
- Results were written up as a series of working papers and piloted in more than 80 institutional projects
- CAEL organized meetings twice a year to disseminate research findings and gather further feedback

CAEL's Ten Standards for Assessing Learning

PLA students seeking an associate degree were 2.1 times more likely to complete than non-PLA students.

PLA Program Practices

PLA Policies
- State
- Regional Accreditation
- Institution

Program Structures
- Barriers
- Enablers
- Best Practices

Assessment Practices
- Credit application
- Assessment Processes

Faculty Development

Program Review

- ✓ Program practices vary
- ✓ Lack of institutional understanding overall
- ✓ Faculty concerns about integrity
- ✓ Lack of faculty awareness
- ✓ Lack of professional development for faculty and assessors
- ✓ Almost no programs had formal review

Research on PLA: Institutional Outcomes

Single Institutional Studies
- Retention, Persistence, Graduation Rates
- GPA
- Career Opportunities, Salary Increases

CAEL Study (2010)
- Examined student data from 48 institutions, across US and Canada
- Significant increases based on PLA participation
- PLA students had higher graduation rates,
- Persisted longer and,
- Took more credits at institution than non-PLA counterparts

Research on PLA: Student Outcomes

Participation in PLA increases students':
- Reflection
- Problem-solving and tacit knowledge
- Self-regulated/self-awareness/self-direction
- Study skills
- Understanding of the role of faculty/members

Travers (2011) defined institutional outcomes as those for which institutions measure on student success, such as retention, persistence, graduation rates, GPA, etc. Many single institutional studies indicated that participation in PLA programs improved each of these measures. In 2010, CAEL examined student data (N= 62,475) from 48 institutions and found that PLA participation showed significant increases in persistence and graduation rates (Klein-Collins, 2010).

Overall, Klein-Collins (2010) reported that PLA students had higher rates of degree completion than non-PLA students regardless of size, level or type of institution. For an associate degree, PLA students were 2.1 times more likely to complete their degree than non-PLA students; for bachelor degrees PLA students were 2.6 times more likely to complete their degree than non-PLA students. The data also indicated that even if they did not complete their degrees, PLA students persisted for longer and took more credits than their counterparts. For example, the number of PLA students who continued after the first year was 63 per cent versus 40 per cent of the non-PLA students. In addition, 56 per cent of the PLA students who had not completed a degree by 2008 had completed 80 per cent of the credits needed, compared to 22 per cent of the non-PLA students. PLA students also had a slightly higher grade point average. One interesting result was that PLA participating students took more courses at the institution then non-PLA students. That means that not only did the students gain credits for their prior learning, but they also continued their studies, engaged in more institutional courses and completed their degrees in less time then non-participating students.

Student outcomes refer to those qualities that develop or change resulting from student engagement in PLA. Research (Travers, 2011) indicates that PLA engagement increases students abilities to reflect, problem-solve, use tacit knowledge, self-regulate learning and improve study skills. One study reviewed found that students had a better understanding of the role of faculty and advisors.

Resources for current PLA research includes:

Books

Harris, J., Breier, M, & Wihak, C. (2010). *Researching the Recognition of Prior Learning: International Perspectives.* National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE): Bristol, UK.

Harris, J., Wihak, C., & Van Kleef, J. (2014). *Handbook of the Recognition of Prior Learning: Research into Practice.* National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE): Bristol, UK.

Journals/Articles

Prior Learning Assessment Inside Out: An International Journal on Theory, Research and Practice in Prior Learning Assessment www.plaio.org

Prior Learning International Research Centre (PLIRC) document database http://ideasketch.tru.ca

Organizations/Conferences

Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), www.cael.org. For publications and research: http://www.cael.org/Research-and-Publications.

National Institute on the Assessment of Adult Learning (NIAAL): Thomas Edison State College of NJ, www.tesc.edu/national-institute.

Prior Learning International Research Centre (PLIRC), http://tru.ca/distance/plar-ol/plirc.html.

Canadian Association of Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA), http://capla.ca.

Chapter 2

The Five Critical Factors of PLA Programs

Based on research (Hoffman, Travers, Evans & Treadwell, 2009; Travers, 2013) the Five Critical Factors of PLA programs are essential to be in place for quality programs:

- Philosophy, Mission & Policies – the philosophy, mission and policies of an institution that support PLA
- Institutional Support – including financial, administrative, faculty and technology
- Program Practices – the ways in which students can engage in PLA and apply the credits to the curriculum
- Professional Development – types of professional development activities for faculty, administration and PLA program professional staff
- Program Evaluation and Improvement – the types of evaluations in place to ensure a quality program and guide improvements

Appendix A provides a list of questions for institutions to explore in each of these critical factors areas. The following chapters explore each of these factors in more depth.

Chapter 3

PLA Philosophy, Mission and Policies

The alignment of philosophy, mission and policies is essential for successful PLA programs. Every practice has underlying philosophies that shape how policies are interpreted and established. Understanding these philosophies are important because it helps understand different attitudes toward PLA and why practices do or do not occur.

Institutions need to examine the alignment of the institutional philosophy and mission with PLA policies. There needs to be a clear alignment that supports using PLA credits to meet curricular requirements.

In the same way, the alignment of practices with policy is also essential. Do the policies support the practices and do the practices support the policies?

Travers (in press) has identified four PLA philosophical areas: redress, access, lifelong learning, and credentialing. The following charts provide viewpoints and counterpoints for each philosophical area with corresponding emphasis on policy. These different approaches to PLA are important to understand as people within the institution may hold varying viewpoints. By examining these different approaches, an institution can recognize how existing policies and practices have been shaped or need to be shaped. Each of these approaches is valid, but some may be more prevalent within any one institution's culture.

A key question for institutions to ask itself is: *In what way can these different perspectives be embraced within the PLA policies and practices?*

Redress: The basic philosophical tenet of redress is that by recognizing knowledge that has not previously been taught in the curriculum, the curriculum can expand from its traditional structure. This is especially important when students have current and even cutting-edge industry knowledge that has not yet been incorporated into the curriculum. In other words, the faculty can learn about workplace learning and industry needs through the assessment of student's knowledge.

Access: The philosophy of access provides an avenue into higher education for individuals who may be excluded otherwise. Prior learning assessment recognizes verifiable college-level learning, regardless of the source and the student. That means that a student who has had work experience, but no college, could have advanced standing in her studies, thus reducing costs and time to completion.

Redress: Focus on New Knowledge

Viewpoint

- All knowledge (beyond a secondary level) has the potential to be part of higher education
- PLA allows for an expansion of knowledge in higher education though the student.

Policy: Learning can be assessed regardless of when, where, or how it was learned.

Counterpoint

- Only sanctioned knowledge is part of higher education.
- PLA is assessed against standards that reaffirm existing tenets.

Policy: Assessed prior learning must match existing curriculum.

Access: Focus Is on Inclusion

Viewpoint

- All people have the potential to learn in higher education
- PLA is provided through all disciplines and applied towards all degree requirements.
- PLA can be used as admissions criteria and placement within the system.

Policy: PLA is open to all learners.

Counterpoint

- Only those people who meet specified criteria are accepted into higher education.
- PLA is restricted to only specific disciplines and/or degree requirements.
- PLA is not part of admisssions or placement criteria.

Policy: Assessed prior learning must match existing curriculum.

Lifelong Learning: Focus Is on Development

Viewpoint

- Higher education is developmental and transformative.
- PLA provides opportunities to explore personal, educational, and professional goals.

Policy: Students are supported through various resources workshops, courses, and/or advisement.

Counterpoint

- Higher education is a path to a means.
- PLA provides a way to meet degree requirements.

Policy: PLA is used to meet degree requirements.

Lifelong Learning: The developmental aspect of prior learning assessment has been considered a hallmark for the process. As stated earlier, research has indicated that participation in PLA can improve students' learning skills. Some faculty recognize that the process in itself constitutes college-level learning and the course offered to teach the PLA process is credit bearing.

Credentialing: Focus Is on Goal Obtainment

Viewpoint

- The purpose of higher education is to acquire credentials, especially for workplace development.
- PLA provides ways to validate and accredit learning toward credentials.
- Through PLA, individuals leverage existing knowledge, competencies, and skills to move into or progress within a field.

Policy: Students are supported through various resources workshops, courses, and/or advisement.

Counterpoint

- Higher education is to acquire credentials; restricted to formally recognized knowledge.
- PLA is constrained to prior knowledge measured through standardized means (e.g., CLEP) and/or applied only to noncore elements of the credential (e.g., electives).

Policy: PLA is restricted to selected disciplines or through limited means.

Credentialing: A credentialing perspective is focused on PLA as a vehicle for obtaining degrees and certifications in higher education. In many other countries, PLA is also used to obtain industry certificates and licenses. A credentialing perspective provides ways in which PLA can be used to meet degree requirements.

Chapter 4

Institutional Support of PLA

Institutional support spans multiple areas:

- Financial
  - Program support
  - Student support services
  - Student financial incentives
- Administrative
  - Philosophy and messaging
  - Placement of PLA program within the institutional structure
- Faculty
  - Curriculum development that accepts PLA
  - Advising students
  - Assessing learning
- Technology
  - Student information system set up for recording and transcribing credits
  - PLA Management systems
  - E-Portfolio or other system for portfolio process

Business Model

The business model is an important feature of the institutional support factor. An institution needs to figure out the costs involved and how these costs are covered. Depending on the type of PLA, there are different types of costs to consider. The following table indicates tasks associated with each type of PLA and, thus, have associated costs. Institutions need to consider who is responsible for these tasks, if additional staffing is needed and who oversees the process and outcomes. Chapter 6, Professional Development on PLA includes a description of the various constituents involved in the PLA process. This description can be used to determine workload in the business model as well.

	Institutional Transcripts	Military Transcripts	Standardized Exams	Pre-evaluated Professional Learning Evaluations	Challenge Exams	Individual Portfolio Assessment
Transcript Review	X	X	X	X		
Student Advising	X	X	X	X	X	X
Course/ Workshop						X
Faculty Assessors					X	X
Credit Acceptance	X	X	X	X	X	X
Credit posting	X	X	X	X	X	X

Setting student fees depends upon the costs associated with each type of PLA. Usually, when an institution accepts transcript or pre-evaluated credits, there are no fees charged to the student. Most institutions charge a fee for challenge exams and portfolio assessment. Usually a challenge exam fee is a flat fee per exam. For portfolio assessment there are two models that are typically used: flat rate or a scale rate based on requested credits.

Fees ***should not*** be charged for the amount of credits assessed, as institutions could be accused of assessing certain amounts of credits in order to collect the fees. By charging on the number of credits that a student requests, the student has control of the charges. Regardless of the number of credits requested or awarded, the faculty evaluators still have to evaluate the learning based on the request, so the workload cost is related to the number of credits requested.

Rarely do institutions charge a fee per credit for posting on the transcript. This is controversial in the PLA world and institutions should have a strong justification as to why students would be charged for each credit to post on a transcript after they have been charged for the assessment. In addition, if an institution charges a posting fee, it should be the same fee regardless of the type of credits.

The business of conducting PLA is not lucrative, and to keep the cost to the student low, it can even be a money-looser. However, offering PLA opportunities can financially make up the difference in other ways. For example, some institutions use PLA as a recruiting tool. There are students who choose to attend because they have learning that can be recognized. Based on the research, PLA participation increases persistence and graduation. PLA students also take more credits at the institution. Each institution needs to decide the profit or loss margin that they can afford by balancing the direct costs within existing structures.

Faculty evaluator stipends also vary institution to institution. On average, institutions pay between $100-150 per portfolio, although the range can be as low as $75 and as high as $250. Some institutions calculate the assessment process into faculty workload.

Examples of Portfolio Fees

Example 1: Flat fee of $350 per portfolio.

- 100 Students X 1 portfolio X $350 = $35,000
  100 Evaluators X $125 per portfolio = $12,500
  Balance = $22,500

Example 2: $350 for the first 8 credits requested, $300 for each additional 8 credits requested.

- 100 Students X $350 up to 8 credits each = $35,000
  100 Evaluators X $125 per portfolio = $12,500
  Balance = $22,500
- 50 students with up to 8 credits and 50 students with up to 16 credits = (50 X $350)+ [(50 X $350)+(50X$300)] = $50000
  100 Evaluators X $125 per portfolio = $12,500
  Balance = $37,500

Chapter 5

PLA Program Practices

Probably the most variable area of PLA is in its program practices across institutions. The chart in *Appendix A* provides detailed questions to consider regarding institutional practices. Overall key areas for consideration are:

- Which students can use PLA?
- Which programs will accept PLA credits?
- How can the credits be used within the degree?
- How are students supported through the process?
- Who is involved in the verification and credit award process?
  - Who are the evaluators?
  - Who reviews the evaluators' credit recommendations?
- What are the standards against which learning is evaluated?
- How are integrity, consistency and equity in the PLA options maintained across the institution?

Assessing Learning

Assessing learning is a rigorous academic process, regardless if it is the assessment of classroom learning or prior learning. The standards by which an institution uses to assess learning is an important consideration. Unfortunately, this is a topic that is not well explored at most institutions. Often the belief is that faculty know how to assess and assess well; however, many pattern assessments on what they themselves experienced. A natural time to broaden the discussion about assessment in general is when instituting PLA.

When prior learning is assessed, both the student and the institution have responsibilities. Students are asked to reflect, self-assess and articulate and demonstrate their learning. This takes skills that students are not normally asked to engage in the classroom assessment process. Institutions need to think through how students will be supported throughout the process to be the most successful.

Since prior learning assessment is the verification of college-level learning, the institution needs to examine what they mean 'to verify' and what is meant by 'college level.' Clear processes and standards need to be developed in order to ensure the equity and integrity of this academic process. The institution needs to be able to recognize students' learning, assess it and provide credentialing mechanisms.

The following are considerations in establishing practices and standards for different types of PLA.

- **Transcript credit** – what are the standards used to determine when transfer credits are acceptable? Typically, when another institution has undergone regional accreditation, this is enough to determine that the credits are transferable. Other transcript cases are:
  - *International transcripts* – although some schools assess international transcripts on their own, more commonly an external agency is used for this assessment. Evaluating international transcripts is a specialty and takes considerable study to understand the educational system

of each country under review. The National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES) (http://www.naces.org) is a member association of international credit evaluation organizations. They have strict standards that members must follow, and therefore act similarly to an accreditation organization. When using a service, make sure it is a NACES member. Also, be sure to review what information is reported by the organization and that it matches your needs; not all services provide the same information.

- *State Approved Institutions* – Institutions are not regionally accredited, but have gone through the state approval process can be considered for transfer credits. Some institutions accept transfer credits from their own state approved institutions, while others may accept credits from all state approved institutions. Each state has a process by which an institution has to document their policies and processes similarly to an accreditation process. Some states are more arduous than others, but all states require a fairly rigorous process.
- *Partnership Institutions* – Some institutions closely examine the educational process of partner institutions that are not regionally accredited and make a determination to accept credits as part of the articulation agreement. If considering this process, examine your regional accreditation and state-approval standards to get guidance on some aspects that you may want to explore. Basically you want to make sure that there is a sound business model and equity and integrity in the educational delivery and assessment processes. A question to ask is: *How close are their processes to our own institution?*

- **Pre-Evaluated Learning** – Most organizations that produce standardized exams or evaluate training and occupational learning provide their process publically. Check the websites for information (see *Appendix C*). If you can't find the information, call the organization; they want institutions to use their evaluations so are usually forthcoming with the information. Sometimes it is hard to get hold of the exams due to confidentiality, but in those cases a copy of older exams or sample questions with a description of areas covered are available.
- **Professional Learning Evaluations** – Evaluating training, licenses, certificates and other related workplace learning provided by an organization that is conducted by your institution.
  - *Appendix B* has an example of the process used by SUNY Empire State College, which has aligned its processes with those used by the American Council on Education (ACE), National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS), and other member institutions of the Consortium for the Assessment of College Equivalency (CACE).
  - *Appendix C* lists information on ACE, NCCRS, and CACE member institutions.
- **Challenge Exams** – These exams are institutionally developed and should follow the same standards used to evaluate both classroom learning and individualized portfolio assessment.
- **Individualized Portfolio Assessments** – These assessments are used when students have learning that is not evaluated by the other PLA methods or when the institution decides a portfolio process is more appropriate. For example, a student who has learned principles of management through work experiences may be better served to do a portfolio assessment to demonstrate contextual knowledge rather than to take a CLEP exam in the same topic.

  Traditionally, there have been two approaches to conduct portfolio assessments: course match and non-course match. More recently, with the movement toward competency-based education, a third approach is to assess based on outcomes or competencies. Each are discussed further:

  - *Course matched assessments* require a close analysis of the course that the student is challenging to determine the criteria by which the student is assessed. In many ways, this is a type of course challenge assessment.

Instead of an exam, the student uses a portfolio to articulate and document the learning. This type of assessment requires the student to have information on the course, including the objectives and/or course outcomes and be guided on how to demonstrate the equivalent learning.

The difficulty of this approach is that the student's learning may not fit exactly the course. As a result, some students are told they do not have the learning when their learning may still fit the goals of the course. This can be frustrating for students, especially if the system is rigid and will not recognize learning that sits outside of the exact match. Philosophically, this sits in the counterpoint side of redress (see section on philosophical approaches to PLA).

Another note on course matching – classroom assessments often do not require the in-depth examination of learning that is expected of a portfolio assessment. In the course matching process, remember that the student is asked to demonstrate an equivalent learning to those students attending the course, not surpass them. Although portfolios are considered usually on a pass/fail system, the question to consider is: *Does the portfolio student demonstrate equivalent learning to at least a passing grade in the course?*

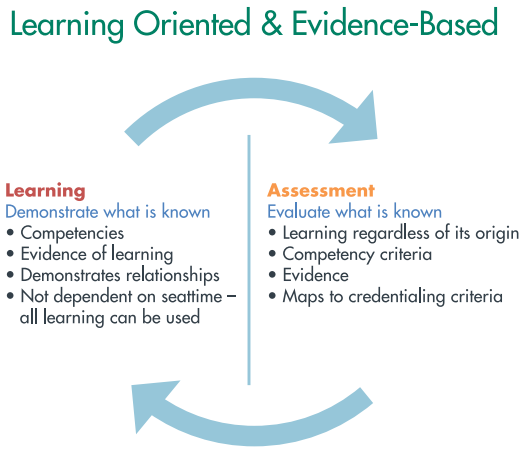
- *Non-course matching assessments* do not require an exact match to an existing course. Instead, the emphasis is on assessing the college-levelness of the learning. This process provides more flexibility to recognize learning that may sit outside of a particular course, but still fits within program goals. It does require more flexibility in the curriculum. Philosophically, this is a redress approach whereby new knowledge can be used within the curriculum. For example, if a student is pursuing an Information Technology degree and has been working in industry, there may be current knowledge that the student has that is not yet reflected in the curriculum. By allowing that student to go through the portfolio assessment process, not only is the student recognized but also the faculty learn about advances in the field.

  The difficulty of this approach is that the learning is harder to identify and assess. When expected learning is already thought through in a course structure, it is much easier to give the student the criteria and determine if they demonstrated a match. With non-matching, the process must have clear expectations and ways to guide the student through the process while allowing a more open-ended result.

- *Competency-based assessments* are, in many ways, a cross between the course match and non-match processes. They provide assessment criteria without requiring a specific match to a course syllabus but rather to the expected outcomes or gained competencies.

  Competency-based assessments are viewed as being learning oriented and evidence-based. Students learn about what they know through the process and develop a better understanding of themselves as learners. The assessment process is oriented to helping students become better learners.

- *Evidence-based assessments* dive deeper into understanding what is known. Instead of responding to pre-determined assessment results, students are required to document their learning through evidence. The movement with e-portfolios supports an evidence-based assessment process, whereby students use the portfolio process to demonstrate and provide evidence of their learning.



Other types of learning-oriented evidence-based assessments already in the institutions:

- Institutional and program accreditation
- Academic program reviews
- Faculty tenure process
- Some academic programs (e.g., education programs)

Global Learning Qualifications Framework

The Global Learning Qualifications Framework (GLQF) is competency-based framework for assessing college-level learning, regardless of its source. This project was funded by the Lumina Foundation and was based on substantial research spanning data collected from over 90 different countries qualifications frameworks. *Appendix D* provides an overview of the framework.

The GLQF uses eight learning domains, each with lower level and upper level competencies to determine if the learning is college level. In parallel, each domain has a set of questions for students to help prompt the articulation and demonstration of their learning. In the pilot work, these questions were provided in a template for students to use while preparing their PLA portfolio.

Institutions are encouraged to revise the GLQF to fit their specific needs. For example, if the institution wants to use a course match structure, the questions can be adapted to meet the course objectives. If the institution uses non-matching processes, the GLQF provides some structure for students and evaluators without requiring specific matching. Some faculty in the pilot work stated that the GLQF has helped them re-examine the courses that they teach, as well as helped them assess prior learning.

Chapter 6

Professional Development on PLA

The role of professional development across all constituents involved in prior learning assessment (PLA) is essential. The constituents involve a large array of individuals who are involved with PLA at some level. The following describes the key functions in relation to the knowledge needed around PLA programs. Although some of these functions may be the responsibility of someone other than mentioned, the roles and responsibilities listed are key to successful PLA programs.

Section I –Professional Development Constituents

There are some professional development topics that are consistent across all constituents:

- The philosophical background of why the college is engaging in PLA.
- Policies and procedures of the PLA process.
- Overview of different PLA techniques and sources of learning.
- Overview of how PLA can meet learning outcomes and be applied to credentials.

The following describes the roles and professional development considerations for each constituent.

- **Administration.** The administration provides leadership with regard to the philosophy behind PLA and why the institution choses to provide PLA options for its students. In addition, this leadership includes making sure that policies support PLA, practices align with policy, and adequate allocations of resources are available to support PLA. The administration is also responsible for determining the business model for PLA. As a result, the administration needs a fundamental understanding of the background, research and trends in PLA, as well as the impact of the PLA program on student retention and completion.
- **Advisors.** The advising role occurs at many levels:
  - *Recruiters* – need to understand the benefits of PLA and the potential sources of credits for students through the PLA process as a recruiting tool.
  - *Admissions* – in addition to the recruiter level, Admission staff also need to understand sources of PLA while reviewing incoming academic documents and how to gather information regarding workplace learning, specialized training, etc. shared during the admissions process.
  - *Academic Advisors* – in addition to the recruiter and admission levels, academic advisors (either as faculty or as professional staff) need to understand how to guide students through the PLA process. This includes understanding potential candidates for the various types of PLA, guiding students through the process, translating the academic credit equivalencies and helping students apply the awarded credits to their curriculum. Academic advisors also need to know how to evaluate learning, with a particular focus on determining if the learning is college-level and determining learning outcomes, in order to advise students on the process and pre-screen potential credit awards.
- **Student Services.** Student services offices also need professional development in PLA:
  - *Registrar's Office* – needs to know how to post the credits and work within the student information system with 'non-course' data and equivalency tables. In addition, needs an ability to look up PLA

credit recommendations for standardized exams, military credits and industry-based training and licenses/certifications, and make academic decisions on the transfer of these credits (if within the purview of that office).

- *Financial Aid Office* – needs to know how to handle any financial aid allowances and implications for using PLA credits toward a degree. For some programs, PLA can be indicated as part of the normal costs of attending, but this requires that every student in the program engage PLA at the same level. The federal financial aid department has just approved some experimental sites to determine a better model for funding PLA through federal funds.
- *Business Office* – needs to know how to handle the billing side of PLA, including when PLA costs are covered through third-party payers (e.g., employers).
- *Learning Center* – needs to assist students preparing for standardized examinations and other forms of standardized PLA options. If individualized PLA portfolio development is part of the PLA process, the Learning Center also needs to help students reflect, articulate and document their learning. Some learning centers provide the service of being a testing center for standardized examinations.

- **Institutional Support Offices:**
  - *Marketing Office* – needs to have a solid understanding about PLA and its processes to ensure appropriate, consistent and frequent messaging to students and the community.
  - *Technology Office* - The technology office pays a critical role in implementing a PLA program at any institution. The student information system needs to be prepared to accept, store, transfer and report on any PLA data. Tracking mechanisms need to be in place to manage the PLA process, especially if there is an individual portfolio process. Some institutions use course management or ePortfolio systems to support the individualized portfolio process.
  - *Institutional Research* – needs to have a grasp of the types of data to be collected and how to report on data representing the impact of PLA on student persistence and completion. The IR office will also need to be involved in the evaluation process of the PLA program.
  - *Outcomes Assessment* – needs to understand how PLA outcomes become integrated into the institution's standard outcomes assessment processes. In addition, faculty and students need guidance on how to interpret PLA outcomes to integrate into existing curriculum.

- **Evaluators.** Evaluators (a.k.a. assessors) are involved in some types of PLA offerings, such as challenge exams and individualized portfolio development. Assessors need to know how to evaluate learning, with a particular focus on determining if the learning is college-level and determining learning outcomes. In addition, skills are needed to determine best titles for the learning; credits to be awarded; and any specific designations, such as meeting general education, liberal arts & science, or advanced learning requirements. Assessors can be internal or external to the institution.
  - *Internal evaluators* – need a solid understanding of the curriculum and assessment processes. Typically, internal faculty develop challenge exams, which requires skills in test development and topic assessments. Often an assumption is made that faculty know the institution's PLA program, but this is not always the case; thus, at least a review is needed so that the internal assessors are aware of the college's processes.
  - *External evaluators* –Typically, external assessors are employed to assess individual portfolios in areas that the internal faculty may not have expertise. If the external evaluator is not from higher education, they need professional development on assessing learning and assessing college-level learning. In addition, external assessors need a background in PLA and why it is important. They also need a solid understanding of the college's PLA processes, roles and responsibilities, and expectations of the different constituents.

- **PLA Program Oversight.** There are different responsibilities within the PLA program oversight:
  - *Academic Integrity* – The academic integrity of the PLA process and the application of the credits requires those involved have an in-depth understanding of college-level learning, learning outcomes and curricular design. If there is an individualized portfolio process, there also needs to be oversight of the evaluation process, including the evaluator qualifications and acceptance of the assessment results, to ensure academic quality. Often Department Chairs, Deans or Academic Affairs administration are in these roles, although the PLA program director may be authorized to accept credits.
  - *PLA Program Director* – Although not always at a director level position, the function of directing a PLA program has its own professional development needs. This role serves as the PLA expert at the institution.
  - College-wide Professional Development - Usually the program director is responsible for ensuring all others involved in the process understand their roles and responsibilities and have an adequate background in PLA to meet these expectations; in other words, this role is responsible for the professional development on PLA college wide.
  - Program Administration - This role needs to know how to run a program, including how to track progress, evaluate the program and report on student data, learning outcomes and the budget.
  - Evaluator Recruitment and Training- If evaluators use portfolio assessment, they need to be recruited and trained (see above).
  - Academic Awareness and Integration – This position provides the college with leadership in the academic interpretation and application of PLA credits. This includes latest trends and research in the field. It also requires that this role know the various sources, interpretation and applications of PLA, and can translate this knowledge into the culture and processes of the college.
  - Communication – This role needs to be a key source for communicating all aspects of PLA and assuring that the college community is well informed about policies, practices and outcomes.
  - Student Advocacy and Preparation – At the center of the PLA processes is the students. This is why PLA is being provided as an option. The program director provides leadership for the advocacy of students being able to use PLA credits toward their credentials. In addition, successful programs provide a variety of student supports throughout the process, including workshops, information sessions, etc. If portfolio assessment is part of the PLA options, additional supports need to be in place to ensure students understand how to reflect upon, document and articulate their learning. This role is responsible for providing student supports to ensure students are ready for and understand their responsibilities in the PLA process.
- **Students.** Students need professional development regarding PLA. We usually don't think of communicating about an academic feature as professional development, but it is. Often students are employees within industries and can provide valuable information on latest developments that can inform the curriculum. Also students provide referrals to other potential students. The better students are informed regarding PLA and its processes, the greater advantage it is to the institution.
- **Partners.** Many possible sources for PLA are from workplace training and development. PLA can function as a way to develop partnerships, especially if curriculum development is part of the partnership agreement. Partners need to understand the fundamentals of PLA in order to determine how it would benefit their employees. In addition, some partnerships will pay the costs of conducting PLA and therefore need to understand in what they are investing.

Section II – Types of Professional Development

Research (e.g., Travers, 2011) has indicated that many PLA programs lack extensive professional development. This can lead to confusion about the process and a lack of understanding of its potential to support degree attainment. Hoffman, Travers, Evans and Treadwell (2009) found professional development can occur in many different ways: formally or informally, community-based or individually, but most programs only offered a limited number of options. PLA professional development programs should provide many different opportunities over time. Even well-seasoned PLA constituents can use additional professional development opportunities to remain current with the field.

The following list gives different professional development possibilities. This list is not exhaustive, but provides some suggestions that can be combined to create a robust program.

Formal

- Workshops
- Webinars
- Focus Groups
- Study Assignments with Discussions (e.g., assign an article to discuss as a group)
- Research Teams (e.g., each team takes a topic related to PLA and does research to report back to the group or each takes a question and conducts some research to provide a better understanding of culture and practices within the institution).

Informal

- Group discussions (e.g., Brown Bag lunch discussions)
- Written communications (e.g., emails, brochure, newsletters)
- Meeting announcements (e.g., 5-minute topic introduction at college meetings)
- On-line community space
- Team meetings
- Encouraged "water cooler" discussions

Section III – Strategies for Professional Development

Professional development programs need to be purposeful, with multiple ongoing venues. Overall, the strategies proposed in this section involve more of an action research perspective; involving constituents directly in the background research and determining best approaches for PLA. These types of strategies help individuals learn more about the process and make well-informed decisions and choices about the PLA possibilities. There are a variety of strategies that can be used, but the following provide some suggested ways that have been found to be successful.

Strategy 1 – Addressing Fears and Concerns

People cannot complain about something unless they feel that what they care for is in some type of jeopardy or violation (Kegan & Lahey, 2002). This quality actually benefits a professional development program, because it provides an enormous amount of information pertaining to the needs of the audience. If you can get the participants to examine their fears or concerns and identify the underlying assumptions, often you can help a group think

about the conflicting assumptions and solutions to reduce this tension. For further information on this approach, please read *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work: Seven Languages for Transformation* (Kegan & Lahey, 2002). The most common fears/concerns around PLA are that it will impact workload or that there is a lack of integrity, which usually stem from a general lack of understanding or trust.

Strategy 1.a: Study the impact of PLA on workload.

- Increase in workload is one side of this concern. Administration needs to think through how to appropriately staff the PLA functions. As a professional development strategy, use teams to examine the workload involved in PLA programs and provide administration with program staffing models. These discussions should involve representatives from all the PLA related offices and functions. This process will enable those involved to have an in depth look at what it takes to run a program and also develop commitment to the processes.
- The fear that PLA will take away from the teaching load is a typical complaint from faculty. In the CAEL study (Klein-Collins, 2010), one of the findings showed that those students who participated in some form of PLA tended to take more courses at the institution than their counterparts. Often this finding surprises faculty, as it counters what they were expecting. Research is important to understand the patterns, including PLA impact on workload. Create some faculty teams to look at persistence data at your institution.
  - Explore the types of courses that are being addressed through PLA. Is there a change in course enrollments? If so, which courses are impacted the most? Does PLA free faculty to teach other courses?
  - Examine persistence rates and see how they compare to the CAEL study *Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success* (Klein-Collins, 2010).
  - Use team-generated questions to look at patterns of workload, student success and PLA.

Strategy 1.b: Examine Integrity.

The prior learning assessment process is an academic process and therefore needs to be held to the same standards as any other academic program. The integrity of a PLA program is essential and everyone should feel secure about how learning is being assessed for credit awards. The best strategy to ensure this confidence is to provide transparency to all aspects of the program, as well as ensure that there is an evaluation of the program and its impact on student success. All practices and evaluation results need to be transparent to everyone involved.

One strategy is to use the Five Critical Factors model (Hoffman, Travers, Evans and Treadwell, 2009; Travers, 2013), which was developed through a study on 34 institutional PLA programs. Travers (2014) has further developed the model to include key questions for institutions under each of the five critical factors: Philosophy, Mission & Policies; Institutional Support (Financial, Administrative, Faculty & Technology); Program Parameters (ways in which students' learning is assessed and applied to their credentials); Professional Development; and Program Evaluation and Feedback (see Appendix A for a full listing of the questions for each critical factor).

Professional Development Programs need to address all five critical factors of a PLA program to ensure that everyone understands the ways in which the program is administered. By using the questions: who, what where, when, how, why and resources, constituents can get a full understanding of the program. Since each audience has their own unique needs to understand the PLA program, these questions can be modified based on the audience. The

point is that by asking targeted questions, integrity can be determined and transparency obtained. In addition, key areas for program improvement can also be identified.

As part of the Northeast Resiliency Consortium work on developing common PLA standards across the member institutions, the document *PLA Policy and Practice Considerations for Enhancing Your PLA Program and Developing the Northeast Resiliency Consortium Common PLA Standards* (*Appendix A*) began in the fall of 2014. Each institution is completing this document to use further for identifying commonalities across member institutions and to strengthen its own PLA practices. The initial questions and completed responses can be used as a professional development tool.

- One strategy is to take the completed *PLA Policy and Practice Considerations* document (*Appendix A*) and have teams: 1) verify their portion of the responses, 2) develop additional questions pertaining to their area, and 3) complete the document based on their generated questions. Through this type of college-wide activity, all constituents become part of the program development process and areas that need enhancement can be identified and addressed. In this way, community ownership is established around program development.
- Further professional development can be created through the results of this completed document, which now is a full record of the PLA program. Information about the PLA program can be extracted from the document and shared through various professional development venues and communications.
- The completed *PLA Policy and Practice Considerations* document also provides insight into areas that advanced professional development needs to address. For example, a common area that emerges from this type of work is the need for further professional development in the areas of outcomes assessment and assessing college-level learning. By using the results from the completed document, more in-depth questions can be developed to determine key areas for advanced development.
- Have faculty examine the various PLA source evaluations and compare against equivalent course assessments. For example, the American Council on Education (ACE) has information on the evaluation process on anything that they have assessed. They also encourage faculty to sign up to sit on the evaluation teams; all ACE evaluations are conducted by faculty from across the United States.

Strategy 1.c: Build general understanding and trust.

Basically, by addressing the previous two areas, a more general understanding and trust of the PLA program can be established. To further development of a general understanding and to create trust in the process, continual communication is needed. For example, some strategies could be to:

- Provide ongoing workshops on different aspects of the PLA process.
- Have regular communications around PLA key points and developments. For example, the college newsletter could contain a PLA facts section to help people remember the facts and not the myths about PLA.
- Encourage regular faculty discussions around assessing learning in general and PLA more specifically.
- Connect with other institutions that provide PLA opportunities. Learn about their processes, successes and weaknesses. Determine ways to improve current practices based on these findings.

Strategy II – Defining College-Level Learning

Fundamental to the integrity of any academic program is the degree to which the assessments are able to capture the student learning at a college level.

Many institutions have developed overall learning outcomes or definitions of a college-educated person, but rarely have they defined what college-level learning means operationally. As part of a Lumina Foundation funded project, the Global Learning Qualifications Framework (GLQF) (www.esc.edu/suny-real) was developed to provide an operational definition of what is college-level learning (See Appendix D).

This work examined over 90 different countries qualification frameworks, along with Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) and the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) work on the Essential Outcomes of a liberal arts education and the related VALUE rubrics. From this meta-analysis, the GLQF was developed and organized around three overarching constructs: knowledge, engagement and integration, which provide learning outcomes under eight learning domains. In addition, the GLQF provides student prompts to enable the student to document their learning against the framework.

The GLQF can also be used as a professional development strategy. The framework provides a comprehensive blueprint of what constitutes college-level learning at the introductory (lower) and advanced (upper) levels. Faculty can use the GLQF to examine and align assessment strategies.

- Have faculty explore the GLQF, the DQP and the VALUE Rubrics and develop their own operational definition of college level learning.
- Use the GLQF, or other frameworks of choice, to examine their own curriculum and assessments and use this to compare to PLA options.
- Determine ways to use the GLQF, or other frameworks, to assess PLA options.

Section IV – Individual College Approaches

At the Northeast Resiliency Consortium meeting October 22-24th, 2014 in Atlantic City, teams began plans to implement PLA professional development at their individual colleges. The following are examples of these plans:

Research

- Examine common characteristics across 'real world' knowledge and 'traditional academic'.
- Create a survey to learn about perspectives, beliefs and basic knowledge; build understanding of and beliefs about PLA.
- Identify all constituents on campus impacted by PLA at all levels.
- Explore ways in which assessments are conducted across different venues.
- Examine differences across PLA and transfer credits.
- Analyze data of PLA participants and completers versus non-PLA participants.
- Examine workload issues with faculty.
- Develop a cost/benefit analysis of the entire PLA process.

Partnerships

- Train with partner institutions (e.g., Charter Oak State College of CT for Capital Community College).
- Include PLA options within articulation agreements and partnership agreements.

Communication

- Develop communication plan, including newsletter articles, emails, etc.

- Provide programming at faculty-development day, department meetings and other college meetings
- Follow-up with faculty who express interest
- Develop communication materials for students
- Work with marketing and admissions to inform students well about the process upfront.
- Share information about process and importance to the college community

Support

- Make sure to address needs of different populations (e.g., ESL, adult learners)
- Provide full training with adjunct faculty
- Provide training to learning center staff and other PLA constituents

Technologies

- Develop PLA structures within ePortfolio systems, including assessment rubrics
- Work with IT department to ensure systems can work with PLA information and data can be collected

Chapter 7

PLA Program Evaluation

The evaluation of prior learning assessment programs is often overlooked, yet it is as important as any other academic program. The important point to remember is that a PLA program is an academic program and needs to be held to the same standards of excellence. Therefore, the program needs to undergo similar evaluation processes as expected of all other academic programs. The following are areas to consider in evaluating a PLA program.

- Student data
  - The numbers of students served and completed in the program
  - The number of credits obtained
  - Retention and degree completion rates
  - Success rates in following courses
  - Impact on college enrollment
  - Comparisons to non-PLA students
  - Comparisons within PLA student groups
- Satisfaction and recommendations for improvement
  - Student
  - Faculty
  - Evaluators
  - Other offices
- Professional Development
  - Faculty
  - Staff
  - Other offices
- Impact on partnerships
- Cost analysis of the program

The results of many of the PLA professional development activities can be used as part of the PLA program evaluation plan. For example, if data is being collected as of a research approach to professional development, those results can be used to also evaluate the program or be used as baseline data for future analyses.

Appendices

Appendix A

PLA Policy and Practice Considerations for Enhancing Your PLA Program: Developing the Northeast Resiliency Consortium Common PLA Standards

These questions were used, in combination with responses from earlier survey, at the Northeast Resiliency Consortium meeting, Oct. 2014 in Atlantic City. Currently institutions are verifying the information gathered and will have a completed document once finished. The completed document can then be used within each institution as part of the professional development activities.

Philosophy, Mission, Policy		
Program Factor	Critical Questions	Your Institution
Philosophy	What is the philosophy regarding PLA at your campus?	
	In what ways does your philosophy embrace PLA?	
	Do you have a definition for College Level Learning?	
Mission	Does the mission support prior learning to be assessed for credits in your programs?	
Policies	Do you have PLA policies in place? If yes, when were they developed? Please attach	
	How do your academic policies support PLA?	
	How do your transfer policies support accepting PLA credits?	
	How do your FA policies support the cost of PLA?	

Institutional Support		
Program Factor	Critical Questions	Your Institution
Financial Support/Business Model	What types of financial supports need to be in place?	
	How are the administrative functions covered?	
	How are the costs for PLA advising and ongoing supports for students covered?	
	How will evaluators be compensated for individualized assessments? For Professional Learning Evaluations? For Course Challenges?	
	What types of charges will students need to pay for PLA services?	
	PLA Applies to Financial Aid limits?	
Administrative Support	In what ways is the administration supportive?	
	What are the messages that the administration shares with regard to PLA?	
Faculty Buy-In	What do the faculty believe regarding PLA?	
	In what ways are they supportive or not supportive?	
Technology	What systems will support the student? What systems will track the progress? What systems will post the credit on the transcript?	

Program Parameters – Types of PLA Credits		
Program Factor	Critical Questions	Your Institution
Which students can use PLA credits?	Matriculated Non-Matriculated Certificate programs Admissions and placement GPA requirement	
Is PLA at your college industry specific?		
What types of PLA assessments are accepted?	How does your college now offer Prior Learning Assessment?	
	College Transfer	
	Articulation Agreements	
	Standardized exams	
	Military Credits (ACE)	
	Pre-Evaluated Credits (ACE, NCCRS)	
	Pre-Evaluated Credits – Institutional Professional Learning Evaluations (PLE)	
	Course Challenge	
	Individualized Prior Learning Assessment	

Program Parameters – Advising Students		
Program Factor	Critical Questions	Your Institution
How do students learn about PLA opportunities?	Recruiters Admissions PLA point of contact PLA office	
Who advises/supports students on PLA throughout their program options	Enrollment advisors/counselors Faculty Advisors Course Faculty	
What types of student support programs are in place to assist students with PLA?	Learning Centers Test Preparation/Application Learning Essays and documentation (portfolio)	
Which offices are involved in PLA at some level?	Admission's Office Registrar's Office Testing Center Learning Center PLA Center/Office	
Which offices verify PLA credits?	Transfer Military Standardized examinations ACE/NCCRS evaluated credits Individualized PLA	Designated person to verify all military credits?
Do you offer special programs for students on PLA?	Workshops Information sessions Credit course (for individualized PLA)	

Program Parameters – Use of PLA Credits		
Program Factor	Critical Questions	Your Institution
Whose authority awards the credits?	Chief Academic Officer or Designee Program Chairs Faculty Committees Individual Faculty Others?	
What guidelines are used to evaluate learning?	ACE recommendations College outcomes other	Uses ACE to establish acceptable testing scores?
Which Disciplines Accept PLA Credits?	All academic disciplines Only specific disciplines	
How many total credits can be used toward the degree?	Limited number Advanced Standing Credits Residential Credits	
Do some PLA credits have priority over others?	Are some types accepted over other types or given priority? Are there a different number of credits allowed toward the degree based on type?	
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 Institutional Credits Transfer Credits	
What is recorded in the permanent record?	Student Portfolio Evaluator Report Academic recommendation/decision	

Program Parameters – Individualized PLA		
Program Factor	Critical Questions	Your Institution
What is the process by which students have individualized learning evaluated?	How do they make a request to have their learning evaluated? How do they go through the process? How are they assessed?	
How are students supported?	Advising (Pre-Assessment / Post-assessment) Workshop/ Credit-bearing Course Peer Network	
Informational Materials	Website Brochure How-to Guide Templates	
What is required in a PLA request?	Learning/ Written Essay Supporting Material & Other Documentation Course, credit and credit designations Alternative modes of documentation – ePortfolios, Concept Maps	
What is required in the Learning/Written Essay?	Learning Description / Learning Reflection Career history/resume Student autobiographical statement Student's statement of learning and employment goals	
What evidence of learning is required?	Student's Degree curriculum Student transcripts Copies of Licenses, Certificates, etc. Examples of Work Letters of Support	
What is used to structure the academic quality of the request?	Specified Outcomes/ Competencies Course Descriptions/ objectives / outcomes Unspecified outcomes/competencies (Open)	
Definition of Academic Learning Expectations	Definition of College-Level Learning Academic Expectations	
Which definitions/ outcomes/ competencies are being used for the assessment criteria?	Internal to institution only External to any regionally accredited institution External to any institution globally External to specified parameters	
How is the evaluation conducted?	Portfolio only Portfolio and interview Interview only Other- Performance, Tests, Demonstrations	

Program Parameters – Institutional Professional Learning Evaluations (PLE)		
Program Factor	Critical Questions	Your Institution
Outreach to organizations	Who is responsible for outreach? For business side of model (contract development, collection of fees)? For academic review side of model (assessment)?	
What is the process by which organizations request to have workplace learning evaluated?	Formal Request Partnership Development Memo of understanding	
Who evaluates the professional learning?	Faculty committee Outside experts	
What is the evaluation process?	Required materials Site visit Interviews Comparative analysis Learning Outcomes/ Competencies College-level Learning	
Who reviews the credit recommendation?	Chief Academic Officer or Designee Program administrator Program Chair Faculty Committee	
Whose authority awards the credits?	Chief Academic Officer or Designee Program Chair Faculty Committees Individual Faculty Others?	

Program Parameters – Course Challenge		
Program Factor	Critical Questions	Your Institution
What is the process by which students request a course challenge?	Formal Request Informal Request Advisement around request Approval of request	
Who creates the course challenge?	Program Chair Faculty Committee Individual Faculty	
Who administers/monitors request?	Program Chair Faculty Committee Individual Faculty	
Who evaluates the learning?	Program Chair Faculty Committee Individual Faculty	
Who reviews and accepts the credit recommendation?	Chief Academic Officer or Designee Program Chair Faculty Committee Individual Faculty	
Whose authority awards the credits?	Chief Academic Officer or Designee Program Chair Faculty Committees Individual Faculty Others?	

Professional Development		
Program Factor	Critical Questions	Your Institution
Who are the Evaluators?	Internal Academic Faculty Faculty from other institutions External Content Experts	
How many evaluate the learning? **Individualized PLA** **Professional Learning Evaluation** **Course Challenge**	Single evaluator Single evaluator with request for additional Multiple evaluators, independently Panel/team of evaluators	
Qualifications of the Evaluators	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	
What must the Evaluator Submit to the College?	Recommendation Report with justification Course title and credits, with designations	
What Topics are Covered in the Training?	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 document the learning How to justify recommended credits & designations How to write an evaluator report	

Program Evaluation		
Program Factor	Critical Questions	Your Institution
From whom do you seek feedback?	Students Faculty Evaluator	
How is feedback acquired?	Surveys Interviews Focus Groups Outside Evaluation Persistence/Completion Rates	
In which Northeast Resiliency Consortium programs of study will your college offer PLA?		
Contact Information		
Point of Contact		

Appendix B

Criteria and Procedures for Professional Learning Evaluations (PLE) at SUNY Empire State College

An Empire State College professional learning evaluation (PLE) is a college-credit recommendation developed by Empire State College (ESC) for college-level learning acquired outside a college or university. An ESC matriculated student who presents the necessary documentation may incorporate the recommended credit into an ESC degree program proposal, subject to any other applicable academic policies. All ESC professional learning credit recommendations are available to any matriculated student in the college.

Proposal for Professional Learning Evaluation or Renewal

Organizations seeking approval for a professional learning evaluation must work with a lead person from Empire State College. This person will assist the organization in preparing for the proposal process and be responsible for compiling and submitting the proposal. An initial discussion should be conducted between the individual(s) initiating the proposal and the Director of Collegewide Academic Review to ensure that the request is appropriate and not in conflict with other college initiatives. An ESC professional learning evaluation or renewal will not be considered if the program or training is currently evaluated by the National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS, formerly NPONSI) or the American Council on Education (ACE).

After the initial consultation with the Director of Collegewide Academic Review, a formal written request is submitted to the Office of Academic Affairs through the Director of Collegewide Academic Review. The proposal needs to address the following criteria:

- Justification as to why the organization has not, or is not pursing American Council on Education (ACE) or The University of the State of New York National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS) evaluation.
- Frequency of individualized prior learning assessments conducted for the proposed professional learning evaluation or the number of past credits awarded for the ESC PLE approaching renewal.
- The potential number of students (current or prospective) who have completed the training (even if concentrated at one center/program).
- The monetary costs associated with creating and maintaining this professional learning evaluation (e.g., compensation for the individuals on the evaluation team, travel costs, etc.). An explanation of the cost benefits compared to individual prior learning evaluations should be included.
- A justification of potential benefits (e.g. Marketing, Relationships) to the college.
- Evidence of stable program administration and sustainability.
- Additional supporting materials can be included.

The Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs has final approval of a proposed professional learning evaluation or renewal. This decision is made in consultation with others (e.g., Deans, Director of Office of Collegewide Academic Review, etc.), as appropriate.

Criteria for Professional Learning Evaluations and Renewal

Empire State College professional Learning evaluations hold to high standards for the assessment and verification of student learning. The college bases approval for credit recommendations on the following criteria:

1. College-level learning is reflected in the program/credential content and credit recommendation is not based merely on attendance.
2. Delivery of the program/credential content is consistent across instructor, location, time period, etc.
3. Learning is verified and documented in a way that meets college registrarial standards.

An ESC professional Learning evaluation must indicate the date that the evaluation occurred, a start date whereby a student who successfully completed the training would be eligible for the credit, and a renewal date. All evaluations are reviewed minimally every five years. If the review committee determines that a different evaluation cycle should be implemented, then justification needs to be included within the report.

If the learning becomes evaluated by NCCRS or ACE then the ESC PLE is superseded by the new credit recommendation and effective time period. A student is eligible for the credit recommendation that corresponds with the exhibit date, duration of study and designated instructional location.

Procedures for Conducting Professional Learning Evaluations or Renewals

The Evaluation Team

The Office of Collegewide Academic Review coordinates the professional learning evaluation team and its work. The Director of Collegewide Academic Review appoints the evaluation team and the chair, in consultation with the Office of Academic Affairs.

The team includes a Director of Academic Review, two or three Empire State College faculty members from different centers with expertise in the area being evaluated, and a subject area expert from outside the college. The outside subject area expert can be solicited from other postsecondary institutions, professional and educational associations or noncollegiate organizations.

Evaluation Procedures

The evaluation team reviews and assesses:

- Learning content (e.g., curriculum)
- Educational or training materials,
- Instructional activities,
- Consistency in instructional delivery,
- Credentials and qualifications of course developers and instructors,
- Assignments or other activities expected of students both in and out of a classroom,
- Length of training,
- Learning evaluation or assessment procedures, and
- Registrarial integrity and verification procedures for individuals completing the training or courses.

The particular evaluation procedures depend upon the level and nature of the learning being developed, the types of instructional activities or events involved, and the means employed to judge the student's grasp of the learning being evaluated.

The evaluation team should conduct site visits where training or courses are delivered, examine appropriate mediums of instructional delivery, and consult with personnel directly involved in the program delivery. Such personnel are in a position to provide valuable information and assistance that could aid the review team in their determination of college-level learning and possible credit designations. For programs delivered in non face-to-face environments, site visits need to be adapted as appropriate.

The Written Evaluation Report

The written evaluation report is an in-depth description of the review process that documents the team's findings and provides a credit recommendation. In addition, the final report informs the decision-making process for college approval. The final report will include the following components:

1. Organization Overview: A clear description of the organization, including the organizational history, mission, and structure; the location(s) of instructional delivery, with website; constituents served; summary of specific training being evaluated; and the sustainability of the program.
2. Investigative Methods: An outline of the steps the evaluation team followed in the evaluation process.
3. Observations: This is the team's opportunity to detail their observations, including:
   a. Site visit findings.
   b. Documents reviewed.
   c. Specifics of the learning content, such as the specific skills, knowledge and learning outcomes that comprise each component.
   d. Brief description of the learning experience, objectives, learning outcomes, and methods of instruction.
4. Evaluative Criteria: A description of the criteria that the team established to determine the academic integrity of the offerings and how these criteria were applied to assess reasonable undergraduate command of the learning components under consideration.
5. Recommendation: A summary of the review team's findings with justification for credit recommendation, including any specific credit designations as appropriate (e.g., liberal, advanced, general education designation, etc.). If the committee decides to recommend no credit, then justification must be included in the written report.
6. Start and renewal date: The team's recommendation for a start date, whereby a student who successfully completed the training would be eligible for the credit, and a renewal date. All evaluations are reviewed minimally every five years. If the review committee determines that a different evaluation cycle should be implemented, then justification needs to be included within the report.
7. Verification Procedure: Identify the record keeping procedures, including exact documentation that represents appropriate verification of student's learning. The team should also provide the source of official documentation.
8. Concerns: Other issues, such as potential redundancy within the program being evaluated or potential overlap with learning obtained through other means.
9. Review Team Qualifications: A list of the review team members and their qualifications.

Upon Submission of Written Report

1. The Director of Collegewide Academic Review reviews the report, seeks any necessary clarifications, and makes a recommendation to the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs.
2. The Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs may consult with any appropriate stakeholders in the decision-making process. The Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs is responsible for final approval of the credit recommendation.
3. Once approved, the Director of Collegewide Academic Review publishes the recommendation in the *Resources and Criteria* and circulates the information to the college community. Additionally, the Office of Collegewide Academic Review maintains the original copy of the final report and recommendation.

Resources and Criteria

The following information, summarized from the original report, will be published in Resources and Criteria:

1. Organization overview: Brief description of the organization, history, mission, location, constituents served, summary of specific training being evaluated, and contact information.
2. Date: Start date, end date and review date.
3. Learning Description: Brief description of the learning experience, objectives, learning outcomes, methods of instruction and credit recommendations including any specific credit designations as appropriate (e.g., liberal, advanced, general education designation, etc.).
4. Verification Procedure: Identify the exact documentation required to verify the student's learning and the procedures for obtaining official documentation.

Organization Expectation

The organization is expected to provide the review team documentation, such as but not limited to: course syllabi, instructional materials, proficiency tests or examinations, staff qualifications, expectations for student preparation, techniques used to evaluate student performance and access to site locations for a visit.

Personnel from the organization being evaluated should be directly involved throughout the evaluation process. Such personnel are in a position to provide valuable information and assistance that could aid the review team as they determine college-level learning and possible credit designations.

Appendix C

Resource list for Standardized Exams and other Pre-Evaluated Learning

Typical Standardized Examinations

- **College Level Examination Program (CLEP) Exams—** Developed by the College Board, with ACE credit recommendation
- **Advanced Placement (AP) Exams—**Developed by the College Board and evaluated by ACE for college level credit recommendation
- **DSST Credit by Exam Program—**Administered through Prometric, college level exams, with ACE credit recommendation.
- **UExcel Excelsior College Examination Program—**A credit-by-exam, computer based program offered through Excelsior College
- **Thomas Edison College Examination Program (TECEP)—**A credit-by-exam, computer based program offered through Thomas Edison State College of New Jersey
- **New York University Proficiency Testing in Foreign Languages—**Proctored college-level exams in more than 50 languages
- **Challenge Exams—**Local tests developed by a college to verify learning achievement

Typical Pre-evaluated Learning

- **American Council on Education (ACE)—**Evaluated college and graduate level learning acquired through formal learning experiences in organizational and military occupational and training settings.
- **National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS)—**Evaluated college level learning acquired through formal learning experiences in organizational settings.
- **Consortium of the Assessment of College Equivalency (CACE)—**Six institutional consortium for sharing PLEs
- **Individual College Professional Learning Evaluations** (see *Appendix B* for an example process)
- **Individual College Challenge Exams**

Appendix D

The Global Learning Qualifications Framework (GLQF)

The Global Learning Qualifications Framework (GLQF) was developed through a Lumina Foundation grant to create a framework to assess verifiable college-level learning acquired outside of the traditional educational environment. Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is a process by which learning gained through sources external to higher education is assessed for academic credit. Traditionally applied to learning acquired through workplace settings and life experiences, PLA has expanded to include sources from open educational resources (OER) and Internet research.

As part of the Open SUNY initiative, SUNY Empire State College led the development of the Global Learning Qualifications Framework (GLQF). This project ran for two years (September 2012-December 2014), with the goal to develop a comprehensive framework for assessing learning acquired outside the traditional academic environment. The first year of the project included extensive research on different frameworks describing expectations of learning and/or degrees in higher education from around the world. These findings were compiled and developed into a framework. The second year of the project focused on using the framework with students (both within an institution and from OER sources) to assess their college-level learning.

In the first year, the project team researched 'what constitutes college-level learning.' The initial work examined Lumina's Degree Qualification Profile (DQP) and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Essential Outcomes of a Liberal Education and their related VALUE rubrics. Additional research added over 90 different countries' degree qualifications frameworks to the data set (See full list at the end of Appendix D). The team conducted a meta-content analysis to determine similar and dissimilar structures of an undergraduate education across the various frameworks.

The resulting GLQF is organized under three overarching constructs: Knowledge, Engagement and Integration. The learning is then organized under eight learning domains: Specialized Knowledge, Applied Knowledge, Integrated Knowledge, Communication, Information Literacy, Ethical Responsibility, Sociocultural and Civic Engagement, and Learning Engagement. Each learning domain is subdivided into two levels of learning descriptors (lower level and upper level), for a total of 80 learning descriptors in the framework. Those listed at a lower level are equivalent to learning acquired at an associate degree and those listed at an upper level are equivalent to learning acquired at a bachelor's degree.

Parallel to the learning descriptors are student prompts: questions to help students reflect upon, document, and articulate their learning in relationship to the learning descriptors. There are a total of 55 questions that span the learning domains. Responses to these can be at either the lower (introductory) or upper (advanced) levels. Not all questions are needed. They are presented as examples of the types of questions that can help prompt students to think about their learning and respond in ways that are easier to assess for college/university level learning.

In addition to the questions, each learning domain has corresponding examples of evidence. This section is provided to help students, faculty and evaluators think about different types of evidence that can be used to document learning. This list is not exhaustive, but in fact is just a beginning. Over time, the hope is to collect more and more types of evidence to include for others to use.

The following section provides the GLQF in a 'flat format': each learning domain is listed with the learning descriptors, student prompts and examples of evidence. This format lacks the interrelationships across the domains. The graphic attempts to illustrate that these domains are highly interrelated through the constructs of knowledge, integration and engagement.

The Global Learning Qualifications Framework

Integration

Integration is the process of reflecting on, synthesizing and combining knowledge in order to make sense of, unify and share information within collaborative and evolving environments.

Knowledge

Knowledge is the culmination of facts, information, concepts, principles, skills and competencies that a person acquires through experiences and education that result in the theoretical and practical understanding of an area.

Engagement

Engagement is the process of purposefully interacting with, attending to, developing a relationship with and interest in an object study, community, project, and/or assortment of tasks.

The following section provides the detailed information on each learning domain.

Specialized Knowledge

Definition: Specialized knowledge includes a range of factual, theoretical and practical knowledge, as well as competencies and skills in a particular discipline or profession. Students use their specialized knowledge to understand the field and its interconnectedness and limits.

Questions to Consider About Specialized Knowledge

- What are my accomplishments in my area?
- What skills and competencies have I gained?
- What different techniques and approaches have I learned over time?
- What are some of the theoretical concepts that go along with the practices in my area?
- What are some of the principles involved in my knowledge? How have these principles impacted the ways I think about or use my knowledge?
- When I apply my knowledge, what are the reasons behind its application?
- What are the historical roots of my area? How have these impacted the field? How has it changed over time?
- What do I understand now that I did not understand when I first started learning about my area?
- What is new and exciting in my field?
- What main ideas would I need to teach someone else so that they can learn this area?

Examples of Evidence of Specialized Knowledge

- certificates, licenses
- certifications of completion or participation
- badges
- non-credit courses: open courses, MOOCs, workshops
- reports, publications, charts, graphs
- analyses
- multi-media examples: videos, images, audio
- work samples
- awards

Lower-level Specialized Knowledge

- builds on prior knowledge, skills and competencies
- demonstrates use of broad and specific knowledge, skills and competencies
- demonstrates use of relevant theories, methodologies, practices and quantitative applications
- analyzes information and constructs a coherent argument to address concerns and/or solve problems
- demonstrates an awareness of the changing boundaries of knowledge in a specific field.

Upper-level Specialized Knowledge

- demonstrates advanced knowledge of and critical insight into the theories, principles and practices in a field
- applies appropriate methods, tools, and quantitative applications for various purposes and settings
- evaluates factual knowledge and uses appropriate strategies to solve problems in complex and varied applications
- integrates and synthesizes knowledge gained from various sources
- demonstrates an awareness of innovations in the field.

Applied Knowledge

Definition: Specialized knowledge includes a range of factual, theoretical and practical knowledge, as well as competencies and skills in a particular discipline or profession. Students use their specialized knowledge to understand the field and its interconnectedness and limits.

Questions to Consider About Applied Knowledge

- How have I used or applied this knowledge? If I haven't used or applied this knowledge, do I know how the knowledge would be used or applied?
- How have I solved problems in this area in an academic setting?
- How have I solved a problem at work or home using what I have learned?
- Can I both describe and demonstrate procedures or tasks in this field?
- Have I developed or revised procedures to address a problem/situation? Have I applied those same procedures to another problem/situation? Can I explain how and why related procedures can be used in different settings or circumstances?
- Can I describe how I can plan out a procedure or task? Can I strategize next steps? Can I anticipate different possible outcomes from these plans?
- Do I know the historical roots of this topic area and understand how this has impacted the topic over time?

Examples of Evidence of Applied Knowledge

- practicum certificates
- reports, publications, charts, graphs
- analyses
- multi-media examples: videos, images, audio
- work samples
- flowcharts, mind maps, concept maps
- written set of procedures
- designs, drawing, schematics, blueprints, layouts
- models, prototypes
- awards

Lower-level Applied Knowledge

- applies relevant concepts and theories within particular contexts
- applies technical and professional knowledge in the analysis and resolution of practical issues
- analyzes and interprets theoretical, technical and research information and applies it to specific situations
- investigates, evaluates and responds to defined or routine problems drawing on relevant theoretical and practical knowledge.

Upper-level Applied Knowledge

- applies theoretical knowledge and practical experience when investigating, solving and/or preventing complex issues or problems, using multiple methods and sources of information
- develops and evaluates new solutions in tactical, strategic and creative ways
- manages processes in unfamiliar and changing contexts, recognizing that the application of strategies and/or problem solving are situational.

Integrated Knowledge

Definition: Integrated knowledge connects, relates and unifies concepts in various situations. Students integrate their knowledge by exploring, identifying, organizing and synthesizing ideas and information to assess experiences and solve problems.

Questions to Consider About Integrated Knowledge

- How have I applied this knowledge in different situations or environments or outside its usual context?
- What outside knowledge from other areas have I applied to this topic?
- How does what I know fit into the field as a whole?
- What are other viewpoints concerning this topic? In what ways has my own knowledge changed in light of other viewpoints?
- How have I analyzed different issues and applied this analysis to new situations or to solve different problems?

Examples of Evidence of Integrated Knowledge

- work samples
- flowcharts, mind maps, concept maps
- designs, drawing, schematics, blueprints, layouts
- models, prototypes
- multi-media examples: videos, images, audio
- research analyses and reports
- new ideas, innovations, inventions, creative products
- applications in unique ways
- grants
- partnerships
- awards
- event planning

Lower-level Integrated Knowledge

- gathers, reviews, analyzes, organizes and interprets relevant information to solve problems
- synthesizes and integrates new knowledge with previous knowledge and experiences
- evaluates the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems using well-established ideas and techniques
- demonstrates understanding of how knowledge can be relational and connected across contexts.

Upper-level Integrated Knowledge

- interprets relevant information and creates relational connections to solve problems across various contexts
- synthesizes, integrates and applies knowledge in new and creative ways and/or to form new perspectives and/or solve problems
- utilizes knowledge and strategies from one field or situation to solve problems in another

Communication

Definition: Communication is the exchange of ideas and beliefs to develop connections and knowledge. Students communicate though various modalities of delivery (written, oral, visual, technical) to present, explain, critique and/or respond to pertinent information, ideas, problems and solutions with appropriate audiences.

Questions to Consider About Communication

- How have I shared information with others around this topic?
- What types of reports or presentations have I prepared to share information about this topic?
- How have I taught other people procedures, tasks or concepts around this topic and explained why they are used or thought about in these ways?
- If I haven't taught, in what ways would I frame my knowledge to teach the topic?
- How have I engaged in discussions about this topic and shared my thoughts, opinions and information?
- How have I shared critical perspectives or new strategies with others regarding the topic?

Examples of Evidence of Communication

- multi-media examples, such as videos, images, audio (YouTube, Podcast, or others)
- websites, blogs
- presentations, reports, publications, charts, graphs, PowerPoint slides, press releases, white papers
- designs, drawings, schematics, blueprints, layouts
- models, prototypes
- collaborations, partnerships, teamwork
- event planning
- teaching others, conducting trainings

Lower-level Communication

- identifies and uses appropriate communication means based on the purpose and audience
- communicates knowledge in a content area accurately, coherently and clearly, informed by key concepts, techniques and developments in the field
- uses diverse and appropriate means of communication, including written, oral, visual and/or technology-facilitated methods
- demonstrates an awareness of and sensitivity to the needs and requirements for communicating with various audiences
- engages in active listening and relevant discussions with individuals and/or groups.

Upper-level Communication

- accurately and reliably communicates to develop authority and credibility
- communicates original perspectives and own voice on information and concerns within an area
- appropriately communicates content-area knowledge to address various situations
- conveys complex information clearly to diverse audiences
- facilitates dialogue among individuals or groups with various opinions or knowledge.

Information Literacy

Definition: Information literacy is the ability to navigate, gather, aggregate and evaluate information from a wide range of resources to answer questions and solve problems. Students interpret and synthesize information to assess its validity and relevance to meet individual and group needs.

Questions to Consider About Information Literacy

- What are the types of resources available to me to learn more about my topic? In what ways have I used these resources?
- If I had questions, where would I go first to find answers? Second? Why?
- How did I find resources about my topic? How did I evaluate them for accuracy, relevance, etc.?
- When did I need to evaluate a situation or solve a problem, but needed more information? What did I do?
- How have I conducted research or investigated resources to learn more about my topic?
- How have I been able to shape, engage and interpret ideas around my topic?
- How have I analyzed situations and information to gain better critical perspectives or to develop new strategies?
- How have I used quantitative information or data to improve my understanding of the topic?

Examples of Evidence of Information Literacy

- research
- data analyses
- reports, publications
- charts, graphs, spreadsheets, databases
- assessing knowledge, competencies, skills of others
- expert-reviewed work, peer-reviewed work
- collaborations, partnerships, teamwork
- annotated bibliographies
- resource examples or lists
- social bookmarking sites, RRS feeds

Lower-level Information Literacy

- collects and interprets information and relevant data from a wide range of resources to answer questions and/or solve problems
- applies information to create and communicate knowledge to meet group needs
- evaluates the quality, relevance, currency and accuracy of information
- identifies and differentiates between various sources and selects appropriate information for the situation, problem or question
- differentiates between opinion and factual information
- uses feedback to improve the presentation and sharing of information
- uses numeracy and mathematical functions to collect, organize and analyze data.

Upper-level Information Literacy

- evaluates information sources for validity, quality, bias, commentary and authorial strength
- recognizes that values and beliefs are embedded in all information
- recognizes that information can change and evolve, especially dynamic online content
- identifies and assesses the impact of different media types and sources on how information is created, communicated and used
- recognizes self as a producer as well as a consumer of information
- uses and cites information effectively in documenting resources and/or the development of original content
- collaborates in gathering, developing and sharing information to meet group needs
- uses numeracy and mathematical functions to integrate information, create new information and share this information with others.

Ethical Responsibility

Definition: Ethical responsibility is the ability to recognize, interpret and act upon multiple principles and values according to the standards within a given field and/or context. Students explore various complexities, dynamics and issues surrounding behavior and ethical practices in order to understand best ways to make decisions and resolve issues at personal, group and societal levels.

Questions to Consider About Ethical Responsibility

- How did I learn about the ethics in this field? What do I agree/disagree with?
- How do I exemplify the ethics and principles in this field? How I have I taught them to others?
- How have I handled a situation in an ethical or unethical manner? How did it challenge me?
- How did I form my own code of ethics? Who influenced this? How do I determine right from wrong?
- How do I assess ethical and unethical behavior in myself and others?

Examples of Evidence of Ethical Responsibility

- collaborations, partnerships, teamwork
- service learning
- volunteerism
- social/political action activities, community advocacy, social advocacy
- leadership roles
- ethical training certificates
- teaching others, conducting trainings, leading workshops
- development of policies, practices, standards, criteria, organizational mission
- examples of ethical dilemmas and solutions

Lower-level Ethical Responsibility

- demonstrates an understanding of a range of principles, standards and values involved in making ethical decisions and the application of knowledge
- engages in decision making according to the standards of practice and ethics of the field
- communicates situations, information and outcomes to others accurately and based on ethical standards of the field
- reflects upon one's own actions and implications in situations and takes responsibility for actions while working with others and/or solving problems.

Upper-level Ethical Responsibility

- recognizes different perspectives and analyzes situations to provide best solutions under particular circumstances according to the standards of practice and ethics of the field
- develops an ethical framework based on the field's standards of practice and takes responsibilities for decision making and actions based on this framework in various and unpredictable contexts
- participates in the formation of mission, vision and values in a field or organization
- assesses the impact of different activities on the environment, society and the field and develops a sense of social responsibility while making judgments and decisions on these activities.

Sociocultural and Civic Engagement

Definition: Sociocultural and civic engagement expands viewpoints and provides awareness of and appreciation for diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Students collaborate and engage in reflective interactions with others and the public community, which mutually examines assumptions and expectations.

Questions to Consider About Sociocultural and Civic Engagement

- In what ways has my work helped others? How has it contributed to my civic life?
- In what ways have I discussed ideas and issues with others? What is the nature of these discussions? How have I shared my thoughts, opinions and information?
- How do these discussions impact the ways I think about the topic or use my knowledge?
- How have I shared critical perspectives or new strategies to others regarding the topic?
- What knowledge did I gain about working with or for other people? How has working in teams broadened my knowledge?
- How have my perspectives changed over time and what impacted those changes?
- What challenges have I encountered working in groups with diverse people? How did I overcome those challenges?
- What groups am I involved in and how has this involvement impacted my knowledge and understanding of the topic?

Examples of Evidence of Sociocultural and Civic Engagement

- collaborations, partnerships, teamwork
- service learning
- volunteerism
- social/political action activities, community advocacy, social advocacy
- leadership roles
- assessment of other's work
- events (non-profit, community)
- teaching others, conducting trainings, leading workshops

Lower-level Sociocultural and Civic Engagement

- demonstrates insight into one's own identity and biases and the influence they have on understanding and interacting with others
- expresses an internalized, personal worldview
- demonstrates acceptance for and willingness to learn from diverse perspectives and backgrounds with different social/community groupings and audiences
- works effectively with individuals and groups in multiple environments
- engages in respectful discourse with individuals and in groups with varying viewpoints
- volunteers or participates in the local and global community.

Upper-level Sociocultural and Civic Engagement

- gains new perspectives on one's identify and biases based on experiences and interactions with others and the community
- analyzes critical factors impacting cohesion while working with individuals and groups to facilitate effective and respectful interactions
- predicts and determines the impact of one's own behaviors and actions and their implications in different social/community groupings and audiences
- provides leadership to encourage acceptance for and willingness to learn from others with diverse perspectives and backgrounds
- provides leadership and encourages others to engage in respectful discourse and collaboration with individuals and in groups with varying viewpoints
- analyzes political/non-political, public/private, and local/global policies, practices and decisions to draw conclusions or take action

Learning Engagement

Definition: Learning engagement is the ability to motivationally and behaviorally engage in an effective learning process. Students take responsibility for choices, utilizing feedback, assessing personal behavior and analyzing appropriate responses to engage with learning opportunities and take action for improvement autonomously.

Questions to Consider About Learning Engagement

- In what ways do I figure out how I learn and use that information to improve my learning or performance in this topic?
- How have I grown in my learning over time? How do I continue to grow? Do I set goals to learn more about this topic? What are my goals?
- How do I use feedback from others to improve my knowledge or performance?
- What are different approaches or viewpoints in this area? Am I open to different approaches and viewpoints?
- How do I use different perspectives to improve my own understanding of the topic?
- In what ways have I become more creative in or more informed about my work?

Examples of Evidence of Learning Engagement

- educational, professional and/or personal goals, plans
- feedback
- websites, blogs
- learning resources
- communities of learning, social networking
- employee performance plans and reviews
- badges
- ePortfolios
- philosophy statements

Lower-level Learning Engagement

- identifies and evaluates gaps in own knowledge, skills and abilities and engages strategies for improvement
- develops learning goals and strives to meet those goals
- utilizes feedback into learning goals and strategies for further learning and improvement
- completes tasks and learning objectives independently
- actively participates in and accepts accountability and responsibility for own learning and work.

Upper-level Learning Engagement

- can identify and evaluate limitations in own knowledge, skills and abilities and how those limitations may influence one's perspectives, analyses and interpretations
- actively participates in and accepts accountability and responsibility for own learning and work with the goal of continuous improvement
- utilizes feedback to build effective strategies for improvement
- monitors and appropriately adjusts own behaviors and learning needs while engaging novel situations and/or interactions with others
- builds upon learning goals to engage in continuous and lifelong learning.

Key questions around using the GLQF

There are some key questions that have emerged with testing and sharing the GLQF.

Does a student need to demonstrate every learning domain of the GLQF?

The team recognizes that not every student will have learning that fits easily into every one of the learning domains. Some learning topics may have more knowledge in certain areas and not as much in other areas. For example, a very technical area might have greater learning in the specialized knowledge and applied knowledge areas and perhaps less in the sociocultural and civic engagement domain. In the same way, a human services topic may have significant learning in the sociocultural and civic engagement domain, but may have less in another area.

In using the GLQF, one should not think of it as a check-off list, but rather to look at the combined knowledge, engagement and integration of the demonstrated learning domains. If a learner has lots of very specialized knowledge but can't apply it or show how it is integrated, can't communicate it or understand its relationship to others or society, or doesn't have an understanding of the ethical ramifications of that learning, then perhaps the learning isn't at a college/university level. However, if some of these other aspects are partially there or demonstrated at a lower level, then the learning may exist at the introductory college/university level. In contrast, if the learning spreads across the different domains and is fairly integrated and can demonstrate learning that is described in the upper level learning descriptors, then most likely the learning is at a more advanced level.

The team considered creating a profile document to use with the GLQF, but decided that it might restrict the flexibility of the framework. Users may want to consider this, however, if they prefer to have a visual of the learning in relationship to the learning descriptors.

How much learning is needed to demonstrate that it is equivalent to college/university level learning?

Parallel questions to this are: when is there not enough learning to call it college/university level, and when is learning just enough learning to call it college/university level? To answer these questions, the overarching constructs of Knowledge, Engagement and Integration need to be considered once again. There needs to be enough learning to demonstrate that the interplay between Knowledge, Engagement and Integration exists. This is more difficult to quantify but it can be qualified. When examining the learning at the learning descriptor level, the descriptors give key indicators of the ways in which the learning demonstrates knowledge, engagement and integration.

Measuring that learning does not exist is much easier than measuring when learning does exist. Whenever we measure any construct, the definition of that construct places a boundary separating that which is defined and that which is not being defined as part of the construct. Construct validity is the degree to which there is agreement on what is being defined inside that boundary. Cronbach and Meehl (1955) indicate that for every construct there is a nomological network, those constructs that are related to the construct in question that also give meaning to that original construct. When assessment strategies focus in on only a limited definition of that construct, it restricts the field by which the assessed learning can belong. Much of learning that is gained through sources external to the classroom maybe part of the nomological network, but may not fit well inside a restricted construct definition originating from within the classroom setting. As a result, it is easier to assess if learning sits outside of the defined field, than if it sits inside.

The GLQF is designed to assess a larger nomological network, thus increasing the construct field. Therefore, when using the GLQF learning descriptors, one can better verify the demonstrable learning by using a collection of descriptors. When is there enough learning to consider it college level? When there is enough learning that can be described within the nomological network. If very few descriptors are addressed, most likely there is not college level learning. This is still a judgment call, but the judgment is based on a collective agreement on the constructs.

How can the assessed learning be equated to a credit system?

Until higher education has an operational definition of what constitutes a credit's worth of learning, the assignment of credits to assessed learning will remain variable. One typical approach is to look at the learning documented in relationship to what is taught in a typical course in this area. The assessor has to come up with his or her own measurement of the quantity of learning. Another way is to think about the how many learning descriptors are addressed in relationship to the ways in which knowledge, engagement and integration exist within the learning. The more of each, the more credits the learning is worth. The more complexity that is documented, the more credits the learning is worth.

Can the GLQF be used to assess all sources of learning?

The GLQF was designed to assess college/university level learning regardless of the source of that learning. That also includes classroom learning, as well as external sources such as open educational resources, workplace learning, personal research, etc. The sources are endless.

GLQF Template Questions for PLA ePortfolios

I. General Information about Your Topic

Title/ Topic for Application: _____

If you have a specific title along with proposed credits, level and liberal or non-liberal, please provide that information. (This should be provided before you submit to an evaluator.) If you don't have a title yet, you can leave this blank for now.

II. Describing Projects & Activities

Projects and Activities
Describe a project/activity and how you engaged in it.

Describe What You Learned
Describe at least three things you have learned from this project/activity.

Describe How You Learned
How did you go about learning the skills/information you needed to complete this project/activity? If this learning happened over time, give a sense of the time period.

III. Learning from Challenges

Challenges or Difficulties
What parts of this project/activity were challenging? What made it challenging?

Research and Learning: Providing Evidence
What did you have to learn or research in order to complete this project/activity?
What types of evidence can you provide to demonstrate your learning?

Description of Experience
Please give a brief description of the experience (or case study) you will use. (Note the questions below will expand on this experience.) Why is this experience important in demonstrating your knowledge?

IV. Digger Deeper into My Learning

Using Procedures
Have you developed/revised procedures to address this challenge? If not, move on to the next question. If so, please describe. And, have you applied these procedures to another situation? Have you been able to anticipate different outcomes from applying these procedures to a new situation?

Teamwork
If this experience involved working with other people, what knowledge have I gained from working with or for other people? How has working with teams broadened my knowledge of this topic?

Research and Learning: Providing Evidence
What did you have to learn or research in order to address the experience you described?
What types of evidence can you provide to demonstrate your learning?

Evaluate the Experience
How did this specific experience work for you? Assess your performance as a participant in this case study.

Reflection
What did you learn from this experience?

Interests
What are some things that interest you in this area?

Applying in New Ways
Describe how you have applied or would apply your learning in this area to other/new situations.

New Ideas
What are some new ideas that you have had or tried in this area?

Perspectives
How have your perspectives changed over time and what impacted these changes?

Sharing Your Topic
If you were to explain this topic to someone else, list five main categories you'd need to cover.

Making Connections
Identify frequently used key terms for the topic you have been discussing. You may want to review some textbooks or other related resources on this topic to gather these key terms. Define them in your own words.

Ethical Aspects
For this topic, are there ethical aspects that you have explored? If there a code of ethics, how did you learn about it? If not, explain how you addressed ethical considerations connected with this topic?

Please provide any additional information that you feel would be helpful for the evaluator to know about your learning.

Countries Included in Global Learning Qualifications Framework (GLQF) Research

The policies, procedures and qualification frameworks of more than 90 countries were researched in the development of the GLQF.

Andorra
Angola
Antigua and Barbuda
Australia
Bahamas, The
Barbados
Belgium
Belize
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Botswana
Brunei Darussalam
Cambodia
Canada
Chile
Croatia
Czech Republic
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Denmark
Dominica
Egypt
Estonia
Fiji
Finland
France
Gambia, The
Georgia
Germany
Greece
Grenada
Guyana
Haiti
Hungary
Ireland
Italy
Jamaica
Jordan
Kiribati
Lao People's Democratic Republic
Latvia
Lesotho
Liechtenstein
Lithuania
Madagascar
Malawi
Malaysia
Maldives
Malta
Mauritius
Montenegro
Montserrat
Morocco
Mozambique
Myanmar
Namibia
Netherlands
New Zealand
Norway
Pakistan
Papua New Guinea
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Romania
Russian Federation
Samoa
Saudi Arabia
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Singapore
Slovakia
Solomon Islands, The
South Africa
Spain
St. Kitts and Nevis
St. Lucia
St. Vincent and the Grenadines
Swaziland
Sweden
Switzerland
Thailand
Tonga
Trinidad and Tobago
Turkey
Tuvalu and Vanuatu
United Arab Emirates
United Kingdom
United Republic of Tanzania
United States - Lumina
United States - AAC&U
Zambia
Zimbabwe

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This workforce solution was funded by a grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration. The solution was created by the grantee and does not necessarily reflect the official position of the U.S. Department of Labor. The Department of Labor makes no guarantees, warranties, or assurances of any kind, express or implied, with respect to such information, including any information on linked sites, and including, but not limited to accuracy of the information or its completeness, timeliness, usefulness, adequacy, continued availability or ownership.

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