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Educational Session

2313 - The PLA Revolution To Support Transfer Students

Matriculation Trends and Issues, Credits and Degree Pathways

The pandemic has made it more difficult for students to continue their educational pursuits. Institutions need to create flexible, customizable solutions that provide options to complete work - enter Prior Learning Assessment (PLA). PLA can help onboard students, fulfill missing credits, and accelerate completion and transfer. While PLA is not a new concept, it is essential that every institution make PLA happen to meet transfers where they are in their educational journey.

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The PLA Revolution To Support Transfer Students

National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students

February 24, 2022



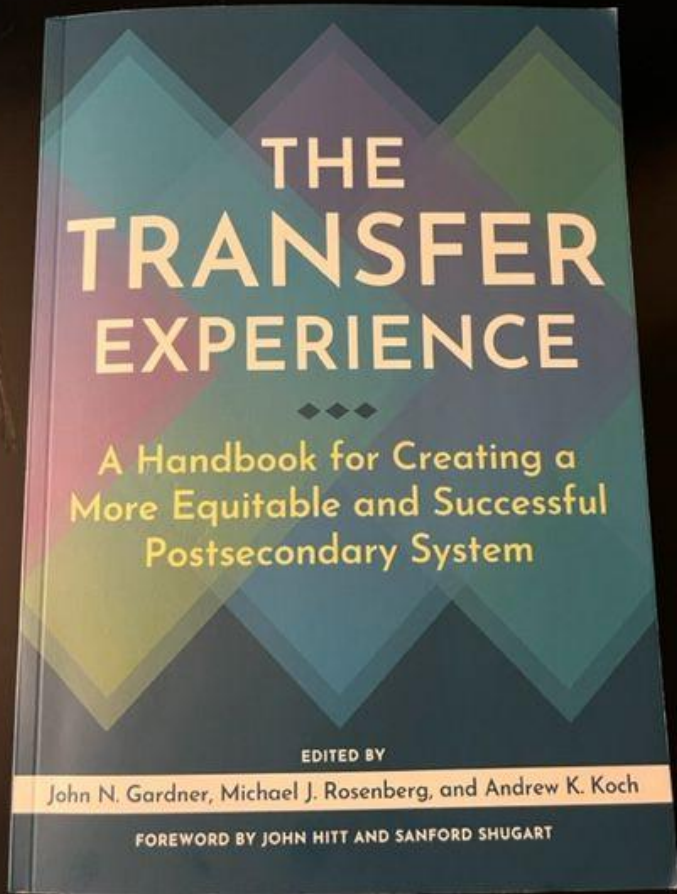
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If you always do
what you always
did, you will always
get what you always
got.

—Unknown

STUDENT JOURNEYS

JANET ADVANCES IN HIGH-WAGE CAREER

Janet completes an IT pathway in systems networking and earns a Network+IT certification while in high school. After graduation, she decides to apprentice as a systems networking specialist, which leads to immediate employment upon completion, plus additional industry-valued credentials she can build on in the future. She decides to go back to school to earn a higher level credential.

CHRISSEY FAST-TRACKS POSTSECONDARY ED

After graduation, Chrissy enrolls at a nearby community college as a sophomore and completes an internship coordinated by the local chamber of commerce. She earns an associate degree in an engineering pathway program with a partnering university. She is admitted to the university as a junior and is on-track to graduate with a Bachelor in Science Engineering before she turns 21.

JACK RE-ENROLLS IN COLLEGE

Jack's advanced manufacturing job is eliminated due to automation. He holds a bachelor's degree and decides to re-enroll in a local community college to earn an AAS in Nursing. Having a degree before, he takes advantage of their prior learning program to start a micro-cert at his local community college.

TERMINOLOGY: PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT (PLA)

The process for recognizing and awarding credit for college-level learning acquired outside of the classroom.

Conceptual premise(s):

- College-level learning can take place in many environments.
- Institutions should equitably recognize learning wherever it occurs.
- Students should not have to take courses for content they have already mastered.
- Recognized learning is equal, no matter the modality.
- The focus is on the “what” not the “who” and “where.”

TYPES OF PRIOR LEARNING

PLA is the evaluation of **verifiable** learning gained through:

- Standardized exams (AP, CLEP, IB, DSST, Cambridge)
- “Challenge”/department exams
- Work experiences
- Licenses, certifications and industry credentials
- Military training
- Online and Open Educational Resources (OER)
- Seminars, workshops, in-service training
- Continuing professional education
- Non-credit courses
- Ed platforms (Study.com, Straighterline, etc.)
- Transfer credit

BUILDING THE CASE FOR PLA

**Supports Student
Success**

Source: The PLA Boost: Results from
a 72-Institution Targeted Study of
Prior Learning Assessment
and Adult Student Outcomes

PLA Boosts Credential Completion Rates for Adult Students

- 17% Increase in completion rate for adult students when controlling for other factors (and Hispanic, community college and pell grant students saw ever greater completion rates).

PLA Saves Adult Students Time and Money

- \$1,500 to \$10,200: Estimated adult student savings through PLA, depending on sector.
- 9 to 14 Months: Estimated adult student time savings in earning degrees, with 12 or more PLA credits.

Institutions Also Benefit through Better Retention

- 17.6 Additional credits earned by students with PLA compared to non-PLA students.

BUILDING THE CASE FOR PLA

**Diversity, Inclusion,
and Equity**

- Creates equity within the transfer process by recognizing learning from other environments including other academic institutions.
- Recognizes the diversity of learning experiences and achievements.
- Builds inclusion by welcoming all prospective learners no matter where they started their pathway to completion or how they earned their credit along the way.
- Can include college-level learning from a variety of contexts, including learning gained from civic engagement, service learning, work-based learning, community-based social justice projects, and other unique and valuable experiences not typically considered for PLA.

BUILDING THE CASE FOR PLA

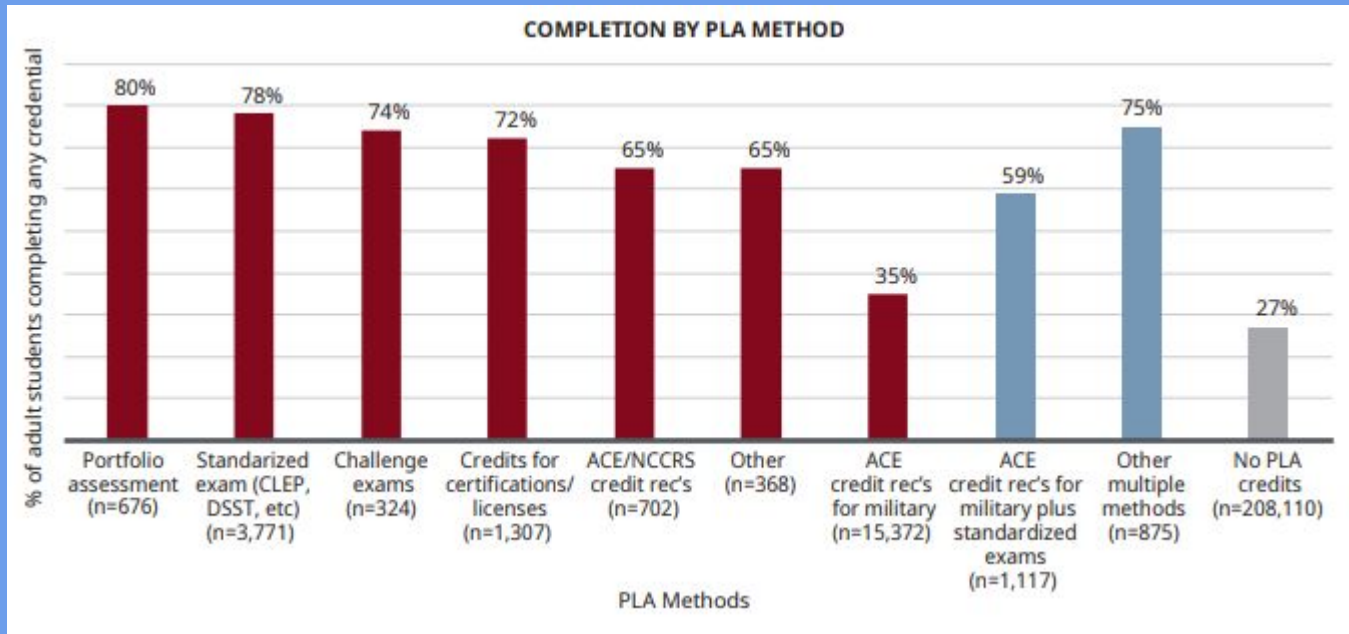
Workforce And Industry Needs

- According to consumer research from Strada Education Network and Gallup, 33% of American adults without degrees are more likely to seek additional education directly from an employer, rather than from a college or university.
- PLA bridges competencies and traditional coursework to move students more quickly to a relevant credential and to advance in their respective careers.

Most students who work while enrolled report that their jobs are not related to their courses of study. Awarding credit for prior learning is one strategy colleges can use to better bridge students' work and academic experiences.- [Make It Count: Recognizing Prior Learning For Workforce Development \(ACT\)](#)

- According to a CAEL survey, 91% of participating college and university administrators say that students enter their institutions with workplace learning worth college credit, and 72% think the demand for PLA will increase in the future.

PRIOR LEARNING IN PRACTICE



Source: Rebecca Klein-Collins, et al. 2020, “The PLA Boost,”
The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning &
the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

<https://www.luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/the-pla-boost.pdf>

BUILDING THE CASE FOR PLA

**PLA Principles Are
Similar To Those Of
Transfer Articulation**

- Learners should not be required to repeat and pay for competencies already achieved, regardless of the modalities.
- The evaluation of courses submitted by the sending institution for transfer to the receiving institution is based on the content and learning objectives/competencies.
- The transfer articulation process should be efficient, transparent, predictable, and sensitive to student needs.
- Articulation is built on standards and trust.

The same principles apply to PLA.

**Moving from “Why”
to “How”**

CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS WITH PLA

- Concerns about transferability and applicability at other colleges and universities
- Concerns about rigor—how it compares to traditional instruction
- Fear of loss of control of curriculum, “selling” credit
- Perception that awarding credit for PLA will lower enrollment in courses (i.e.competition)
- Concerns about impact on accreditation
- Transfer credit bias
- Negative perception of prior learning from external sources
- Varied levels of understanding create miscommunication
- Seat time vs. content learned

RECOMMENDATIONS TO REVOLUTIONIZE PLA AT YOUR INSTITUTION

- Analyze the Current PLA Infrastructure
- Engage Faculty and Staff
- Onboard Students Onto Guided Pathways Using PLA Methods
- Institute a PLA Center for New and Reentry Students
- Expand Institutional and Statewide Policy to Include Multiple Methods for Awarding PLA Credit
- Establish a Baseline Data Report

MORE SPECIFIC CALLS TO ACTION(S)

- Find out what data are available on PLA and how they're used. Develop common reporting templates and metrics.
- Identify components of PLA scaling where efficiencies of scale across system are possible (e.g. professional development, certification/licensure crosswalks, market research, message testing).
- Build a community of allies by sharing the benefits of PLA with colleagues in all areas—business office, enrollment management, academic and student affairs, etc. Stay current on PLA research and share progress with these allies.
- Develop intentional steps to ensure PLA is equitable.
- Balance “credit for what you already know” with “receive credit for demonstrating college-level learning.”

SUMMARY

- Institutional policies that support the blanket denial of transfer and PLA credits create barriers to inter-institutional mobility.
- PLA must be equitable, accessible and affordable for students to fully benefit.
- PLA increases degree and certificate completion among adult learners and veterans, who often come to our institutions with college-level learning. It also contributes to social justice, supporting historically-underrepresented race/ethnicity groups, first generation and low-income students.
- Trust and collaboration among college and university partners are critical in maximizing the benefits of PLA for students.
- A one-size-fits-all traditional approach for awarding credit is not working for all learners. ***It's time to make PLA a reality!***

REFLECT & RESPOND

Are PLA options available and promoted as a key part of degree programs and transfer pathways?

Is PLA part of your statewide transfer conversations?



Yes



Not Sure



No



Sort of



Haha! Good one!

Let's Start a PLA Revolution



You say you want a
revolution
Well, you know
We all want to change the
world
You tell me that it's evolution
Well, you know
We all want to change the
world... *(for transfers)*

Revolution - The Beatles