

**PLA WITH A PURPOSE**  
**Portfolio Working Group**  
**Structure, Timeline & Outcomes**  
**DRAFT**

### **PLA with a Purpose Overview**

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) comprises a number of time-tested approaches that evaluate whether learning acquired by adults outside the traditional classroom can count for college credit, certification, or advanced standing toward further education or training, moving them toward completion of their chosen educational path. **PLA with a Purpose** is a statewide initiative aimed at working collaboratively with Ohio's colleges, universities, and adult career-technical centers to promote promising practices and common standards for the assessment and purposeful connection of prior learning to training, certificate, and degree programs.

In addition to developing and advancing best practices and standards, **PLA with a Purpose** seeks to: (1) energize campus and adult career-technical center leaders, administrators, and faculty about the importance of PLA, (2) identify policy levers for and potential barriers to scaling PLA practices across Ohio's schools, and (3) create data elements for tracking PLA use and student outcomes, and (4) launch a statewide campaign to promote PLA to potential learners.

### **Why pursue this initiative now?**

Students who use PLA can save time and money by not having to take courses in subjects where their competence can be documented. Recent PLA research indicates that use of PLA motivates adult learners to continue and ultimately complete their training and degree programs.

From another perspective, PLA also is a strategy for providing Ohio businesses with a ready supply of the skilled workers they need, particularly in high-skill, in-demand jobs in industries that have been identified as strategically important to Ohio's continued economic recovery. In this regard, PLA is part of a larger effort to give Ohio a competitive edge in the fierce competition for business investment and job creation.

A survey conducted of Ohio's public colleges and universities in 2012 found that Ohio's schools are using a shared set of PLA methods, providing a foundation upon which to identify effective practices and common standards statewide. The three most common PLA methods are:

- portfolio-based assessment;
- evaluation of military training and service; and
- credit by examination.

**Who is participating in this project?**

The **PLA with a Purpose Network** is an advisory group of leaders from Ohio's colleges, universities, adult career-technical centers, and the IUC and OACC.

The **PLA with a Purpose Working Groups** are comprised of administrators and faculty from Ohio's colleges, universities, and adult career-technical centers. Each Working Group examines a variety of assigned PLA topics in the three areas of (1) portfolio-based assessment, (2) evaluation of military training and service for college credit, and (3) credit by exam (e.g., CLEP).

**STATEWIDE GUIDE: Best Practices for the Assessment and Purposeful Connection of Prior Learning**

The Network and Working Groups will contribute to the creation of a statewide guide that promotes promising practices and common standards for the assessment and purposeful connection of prior learning to training, certificate, and degree programs.

Content for the guide will be developed by three Working Groups. Using a template, the Working Groups will give careful consideration to PLA best practices that could inform a preferred model(s) for use in Ohio. In addition to completion of the template, the Working Groups are encouraged to document other items that could be of value in the creation of the guide, e.g., guiding principles and common definitions. The Tennessee Prior Learning Assessment Task Force included a Prior Learning Assessment Value Statement in its 2012 policy report titled *Recommended standards in prior learning assessment (PLA): Policy and practice for Tennessee public colleges and universities*. For your reference, the Value Statement is provided in Appendix I.

## Portfolio Working Group

Portfolio-based assessment is a PLA method in which students develop a structured, individualized portfolio (paper or electronic) that documents their learning experiences outside the traditional classroom and is then assessed to determine whether academic knowledge and skills have been acquired – and an equivalent number of credits can be assigned. Faculty members with appropriate content expertise evaluate the portfolio to determine credit equivalencies. Institutions often offer a portfolio-development course for students. The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) provides portfolio-based assessment services, including evaluation of student portfolios completed through LearningCounts.org. In Ohio, there are a number of permutations on the methodology used to develop and evaluate portfolios.

The Portfolio Working Group will work collaboratively to:

- (1) examine promising practices being used;
- (2) consider how the identified promising practices can inform preferred model(s) for use in Ohio at the campus level and/or statewide;
- (3) explore implementation of the model(s), including quality assurance, cost, transferability, evaluation, and the purposeful connection of prior learning credit to training, certificate, and degree programs; and
- (4) make recommendations about implementation for campuses and/or the state.

### Questions for consideration:

- How are credits earned through portfolio-based assessment reflected on the student transcript?
- Do institutions apply their portfolio-based assessment policies and practices across all divisions and departments, or do policies vary within institutions?
- Can portfolio-based assessment credits be applied to degree/major requirements?
- What are the costs for portfolio-based assessment, including any fees (costs typically include the assessment itself, transcription or posting fees, and other administrative costs)?
- Is there a cap on the number of portfolio-based assessment credits that can be earned by the student?
- Can portfolio-based assessment credits count toward residency requirements?
- What are the transfer policies for credits earned through portfolio-based assessment?
- How can the inconsistencies in portfolio-based assessment offered among institutions in the state be addressed (e.g., scores and subjects)?
- Do institutions regularly track the usage of portfolio-based assessment by students?
- How do students find out about portfolio-based assessment? Is there a single point of contact at the institution?
- Are there any existing policy barriers to the use of portfolio-based assessment?

**Key Milestone Dates for Portfolio Working Group**

(Note: Meetings may be added or subtracted when needed and as determined by Co-Chairs/WG)

**July**

Co-Chair Meeting Thursday, July 25, 9:30AM – 10:30AM  
Network Meeting (template agreement) Thursday, July 25, 11:00AM – 1:00PM

**August**

Portfolio WG Meeting (at OBR) Friday, August 2, 9:30AM – 11:30AM  
Portfolio WG Conference Call Thursday, August 22, 1:00PM – 2:00PM  
Co-Chair Conference Call Wednesday, August 28, 9:30 – 10:30AM

**September**

Portfolio WG Meeting (at OBR) Tuesday, September 10, 9:30AM – 11:30AM  
Portfolio WG Conference Call Monday, September 23, 3:30PM – 4:30PM  
Co-Chair Conference Call Thursday, September 26, 9:30AM – 10:30AM

**October**

Templates submitted to Co-Chairs & OBR Monday, October 7th  
Co-Chair Conference Call Friday, October 18, 9:30AM – 10:30AM  
Network Meeting (at OBR) Wednesday, October 23, 9:30AM – 11:30AM  
Submit final templates Wednesday, October 30th

**November**

Circulate draft of guide Wednesday, November 13th  
Portfolio WG Conference Call Monday, November 18, 2:00PM – 3:00PM  
Co-Chair Conference Call Tuesday, November 19, 9:30AM – 10:30AM  
Submit final edits to Co-Chairs & OBR Monday, November 25th

**December**

Co-chair Conference Call Tuesday, December 10, 9:30AM – 10:30AM  
Network Conference Call to discuss draft Monday, December 16, 9:30AM – 11:00AM  
Final draft to OBR Monday, December 23rd

## APPENDIX I: TENNESSEE'S PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT VALUE STATEMENT

The public colleges and universities of Tennessee value the diversity of their students. This diversity includes the unique experiences, interests, and intellectual pursuits that lead to the acquisition of knowledge that may be at the college level. College-level learning is the same, whether acquired in the traditional college classroom or through non-collegiate sources. This equivalency is validated by academically sound and rigorous prior learning assessment methods.

Tennessee's public community colleges and universities employ prior learning assessment aligned with their respective institutional missions, academic integrity, and student educational attainment and success.

The acceptance of PLA credits must be in accordance with the standards detailed in this document. PLA credits awarded by any TBR or UT institution are equivalent to the same credits awarded by any TBR or UT institution for traditional classroom-based college-level learning.

Additionally, the transferability of these credits between public community colleges and universities is consistent with, but not limited to, the Tennessee Transfer Pathways framework.

Further, it is intended that the PLA Value Statement is in alignment with TBR and UT institutional missions; therefore, the standards in this document provide guidelines for the transcription and transfer of PLA credit at public institutions. Minor variance may occur based on an institution's mission statement as revised under the 2010 Complete College Tennessee Act, specialized program accreditation, licensure, or degree requirements.

The use or non-use of PLA credits by an institution or department must be consistent with this value statement and, in accordance with the standards of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), adhere to principles of good educational practice. The identification of the forms of PLA credit used by an institution/department should be documented and available to students, faculty, and other stakeholders "through publications that accurately represent the programs and services of the institution." Institutions (or departments, if their policies differ from or are more specific than those of the institution) must also maintain documentation of the processes and rationale for the use or non-use of PLA credits.