

PLA WITH A PURPOSE
PLA Network
Structure, Timeline & Outcomes

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 representing 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 and reviewed and revised based on input from PLA Network members. Using a template that is approved by the Network, the Working Groups will give careful consideration to PLA best practices that inform a preferred model(s) for use in Ohio. In addition to completion of the template, the Working Group and Network members are encouraged to document other items that could be of value in the creation of the guide, e.g., guiding principles and common definitions.

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.

Military Working Group

Evaluation of military training, experience, and coursework is a PLA method in which college credit may be awarded by using the American Council on Education's (ACE) credit recommendations and/or local evaluation of the student's military transcripts by institutional faculty and staff. Many University System of Ohio institutions are already awarding credit for learning acquired through the military that have been recognized by the ACE.

During the 2010-2011 Academic Year, all 36 Ohio public colleges and universities became members of the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) Consortium. As members, all institutions are committed to providing friendly academic policies for servicemembers and veterans, which includes the recognition of prior learning through military training, experience, and coursework. In 2011, the Chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents signed the Directive 2011-004 to begin the statewide effort in awarding college credit for military training, experience, and coursework that was recognized by the ACE. The directive instructed University System of Ohio institutions to utilize the ACE Guide Online when evaluating military training, experience, and coursework for a course equivalency and to work with students to apply prior learning toward their degree requirements where applicable.

Furthermore, in June 2013, Governor John R. Kasich signed the Executive Order 2013-05K, directing state departments, boards and commissions to streamline the state licensing process to take into account relevant military education and to direct the Chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents, in collaboration with presidents of the University System of Ohio, to simplify the process for awarding college credit for military education for servicemembers and veterans.

Credit by Examination Working Group

Credit by Examination is a category of PLA methods that includes nationally recognized exams offered by third parties and exams created and given by individual higher education institutions. A 2012 survey of Ohio institutions found that two methods of credit by examination are most used in the state:

(1) College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) and (2) departmental or other exams.

- **College-Level Examination Program (CLEP)** – This program offered by The College Board allows students to demonstrate mastery of introductory college-level material through 33 examinations administered in the subjects of Business, Composition and Literature, History and Social Sciences, Science and Mathematics, and World Languages. CLEP exam takers include adults just entering or returning to school, military service members and traditional college students. While most universities and many two-year schools in Ohio offer CLEP, the number of subject exams available at each institution, as well as the qualifying scores, varies greatly.
- **Departmental or Other Exams** – Colleges and universities often provide the opportunity for students to obtain credit for a course offered at the institution by taking a departmental or specific program exam (a.k.a., challenge or “test out” of a course). Institutions create the exam and award credit for a minimum score, which is usually set by an academic department or instructor. The exams typically represent the final exam that the student would ordinarily take at the end of the course. These exams provide flexibility in assessing a student’s knowledge base for a specific course(s) and offer assurance that the student is successfully prepared for the next level in the discipline/profession. A variety of such assessments exist on campuses and provide another means of equating past learning to course work and credit for adult students returning to the classroom. These exams are sometimes also called “institutional challenge examinations.”

The three Working Groups 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 by Working Groups and Network:

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

Role of the Network:

The Network will represent the campus and career center perspective during the initiative. The network will provide feedback on: recommendations from the three working groups; drafts of the document, *Best Practices for the Assessment and Purposeful Connection of Prior Learning*; communication strategies for reaching out to students; and the development of a data system that better tracks students with PLA credit. The Network will also assist in sustaining PLA momentum once the best practices document is released.

Key Milestone Dates for Network**August**

Co-Chairs Conference Call Wednesday, August 28, 9:30AM – 10:30AM

September

Co-Chairs Conference Call Thursday, September 26, 9:30AM – 10:30AM
discuss templates due Oct 7

October

Templates submitted to Co-Chairs & OBR Monday, October 7th

Co-Chairs Conference Call Friday, October 18, 9:30AM – 10:30AM

Network Meeting Wednesday, October 23, 9:30AM – 11:30AM
Location: Ohio Board of Regents

November

Circulate statewide guide draft Wednesday, November 13th

Co-Chairs Conference Call Tuesday, November 19, 9:30AM – 10:30AM

Submit final edits to Co-Chairs & OBR Monday, November 25th

December

Revised draft circulated Thursday, December 5th

Co-Chairs conference call Tuesday, December 10, 9:30AM – 10:30AM

Network Conference Call to discuss draft Monday, December 16, 9:30AM – 11:00AM

Final draft submitted to Co-Chairs & OBR Monday, December 23rd