

PLA WITH A PURPOSE
Credit by Examination Working Group
Structure, Outcomes, & Timeline

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.

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 Credit by Examination Working Group will work collaboratively to:

- (1) examine promising practices being used in CLEP, departmental exams, or other nationally recognized exams;
- (2) consider how the identified promising practices could 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:

- What types of nationally recognized exams (e.g., CLEP, DSST, Excelsior) are accepted? For each exam, what are the acceptable cut-scores and number of credits awarded? How can inconsistencies in subject and score acceptance and credits awarded among institutions be addressed?
- How are credits earned through credit by examination applied to degree/major requirements? Are there any degree programs for which credit cannot be applied?
- Are departmental or institutional challenge examinations offered? Are these examinations used for placement purposes only or is credit awarded for successfully passing them? If credit is awarded, what type of credit is it?
- What are the costs for credit by examination, including any fees (costs typically include the assessment itself, transcription or posting fees, and other administrative costs)?
- How many credit by examination credits may students apply toward degree requirements? Is there a cap?
- How are credits earned through credit by examination reflected on the student transcript?
- How do students find out about credit by examination? Is there a single point of contact at the institution?
- What are the current credit by examination institutional policies? How often are the policies reviewed? Do the institutional policies apply across all divisions and departments or do they vary within institutions? How are the policies communicated?
- What are the transfer policies for credits earned through credit by examination?
- What are the existing policy barriers to the use of credit by examination?
- Do institutions regularly track the usage of credit by examination by students?

Key Milestone Dates for Credit by Examination 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

Credit By Exam WG Meeting (at OBR) Thursday, August 1, 9:30AM – 11:30AM
Credit By Exam WG Conference Call Thursday, August 22, 9:30AM – 10:30AM
Co-Chair Conference Call Wednesday, August 28, 9:30 – 10:30AM

September

Credit By Exam WG Meeting (at OBR) Monday, September 9, 9:30AM – 11:30AM
Credit By Exam WG Conference Call Monday, September 23, 2:00PM – 3:00PM
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
Credit By Exam WG Conference Call Monday, November 18, 11:00AM – 12:00PM
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.