

Credit for Prior Learning: Responses to Questions Asked by the EAC [3/19/08]

Trends in CPL and Portfolio Usage

There is no centralized monitoring of CPL programs, so it is impossible to provide hard data on the number of students served and credits awarded. However, based on our survey of 17 community colleges, additional college-based research, and consultation with CAEL and ACE, CPL and Portfolio programs have either maintained their level of students served over many years, or are growing. These reported trends are consistent with the demographic and educational trends documented in the Subcommittee's report. The portfolio continues to be one form – and often the main form – of Credit for Prior Learning, but with few exceptions, colleges (and especially community colleges) offer a range of options for granting credit, including **examinations** (challenge, advanced placement, CLEP, DANTES); **credential or certification** from a non-traditional sources; and **portfolios**.

Estimated Number of Students Served Annually

Most programs investigated indicate that about 3% of enrolled students earn some kind of CPL, but the percentage is dependent on how many programs and disciplines offer CPL. CTE programs are more likely to offer CPL. The Community College of Vermont (CCV) system has been serving over 6000 students in their portfolio system for over 30 years (averaging over 200 per year). In many programs, the Portfolio CPL is the smallest program, but in others, like CCV, the Portfolio program is the largest.

ACE, which administers the AARTS and SMART (military) transcripts, noted a significant rise in transcripts processed during calendar year 2006 and 2007, as indicated in the table:

Year	# AARTS Transcripts	AARTS Yearly diff	Percent Increase	# SMART Transcripts	SMART Yearly diff	Percent Increase
2006	175,420			95,793		
2007	239,613	64,193	37%	98,873	3,080	3.2%

CAEL published a report in 2006 based on a survey of 272 colleges that indicated continued expansion of college and university Assessment of Prior Learning Programs with increased use of the portfolio system. The main points of note in the report, "Prior Learning Assessment – Current Policy and Practice in the U.S.," include:

- The most common way that institutions helped prepare students for experiential learning assessment was through individualized advising (83%), a student handbook or guidebook (63%), pre-screening qualification prior to actual preparation (54%), and a credit-based course available in a variety of formats (47%).
- The most commonly cited evaluative criteria used to determine credit during an experiential learning assessment was course matching of learning outcomes (87.4%), followed by the presence of faculty with subject area expertise (79.8%), the balance between theoretical and practical learning (79.0%), and formal definitions of college-level learning outcomes (76.5%).

CPL Applied Only to College-Level Learning

CPL is universally credit for "college level learning," and so as such does not apply to developmental education. A student who has no college level writing and mathematics courses, however, could take a CLEP exam for college level English composition and math, and some

colleges offer alternatives of demonstrated work-based skill development for entry into CTE programs.

Costs of CPL Office & Fee Structures

The structure and financing of a CPL office varies considerably, with community colleges offering the best comparable models for PCC. Administrative costs would need to be calculated on the basis of the number of programs and disciplines included in the CPL program and the number of students served. Following are some general guidelines:

- **CPL Staff:** Recommend a Coordinator (Academic Professional) with training and experience in adult education to direct the program, plus an assistant to handle the administration related to examinations, portfolio reviews, and transcription. A comprehensive program could eventually require full-time for both positions, but one option would be to initiate a limited program of self-selected programs and disciplines, with a percent time for the Coordinator and Administrative Assistant calculated to serve the projected needs of students in those programs and disciplines. As additional SACs opt in and as the number of students served increases, the staff time could be comparably increased. Students should be able to access the office from every campus, so it would be recommended to establish a rotating office schedule. Staff should receive CAEL training.
- **Location of CPL Office:** While traditionally, CPL offices have been housed in Offices of External Learning or Continuing Education, the trend is to house them within the Registrar's Office.
- **Prior Learning Assessment & Portfolio Courses:** Typical CPL classes are offered for credit (usually 3 term credits), and in a distributed learning format (hybrid-ITV-online combinations). Instructors should be trained by CAEL and have training and experience in adult learning. FTE from the courses should cover instructor costs and contribute to the CPL overhead. Pre-requisite for the PLA-Portfolio class would be WR121 (or equivalent demonstrated through Compass, CLEP or other examination).
- **Fee Structure:** The CAEL and ACE staff we consulted with recommended setting the Prior Learning Assessment fee schedule to include a graduated system, based on the amount of work required for each assessment instrument. So, a simple waiver could remain at the current \$10 fee, with the next step up being Certificate or License Review; CLEP, DANTES and other standardized examinations based on cost to PCC, plus an administration fee; challenge examinations possibly \$100 each (or based on a percent of the course tuition/fee costs); and Portfolio Assessment about \$220 to 250.

CAEL recommends against a per-credit structure or additional per-credit fees for posting the credits, so that credit awarded is based entirely on the quality of the portfolio, performance on a test, or demonstrated equivalence of a certificate, license, or non-traditional credit.

- **Faculty Assessment Stipends:** Challenge exam creation and assessment, and Portfolio assessment stipends could be calculated as a percentage of the fee charge (which in turn would be calculated on the basis of the work involved). The Faculty project hourly rate of \$26.90 could be used, with maximum portfolio assessment hours. CCV keeps a pool of over 200 qualified portfolio assessors and pays them only \$200 to

assess 8 portfolios (along with a seminar with colleagues and a lunch). Other community colleges pay \$100/portfolio, or a similar rate.

Limits on Credits Granted

Community colleges tend to require that the student be registered and have received a small number of credits before enrolling in a PLA-Portfolio class. In some cases, a limit is set on a combination of CPL and transfer credits, with most colleges having some kind of resident hours required.

Following are the Northwest Commission of Colleges and Universities standards:

Policy 2.3 Credit for Prior Experiential Learning

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities recognizes the validity of granting credit for prior experiential learning, provided the practice is carefully monitored and documented. Credit for prior experiential learning may be offered under the conditions enumerated below. This policy is not designed to apply to such practices as CLEP, Advanced Placement, or ACE-evaluated military credit. Credit for courses taken from non-accredited institutions must be addressed pursuant to [Policy 2.5 Transfer and Award of Academic Credit](#).

- a. Policies and procedures for awarding experiential learning credit must be adopted, described in appropriate institutional publications, and reviewed at regular intervals.
- b. Credit for prior experiential learning may be granted only at the undergraduate level.
- c. Credit may be granted only upon the recommendation of teaching faculty who are appropriately qualified and who are on a regular appointment with the college on a continuing basis.
- d. Credit may be granted only for documented learning which ties the prior experience to the theories and data of the relevant academic fields.
- e. Credit may be granted only for documented learning which falls within the regular curricular offerings of the institution.
- f. An institution that uses documentation and interviews in lieu of examinations must demonstrate in its self-study that the documentation provides the academic assurances of equivalence to credit earned by traditional means.
- g. Credit for prior experiential learning should not constitute more than 25% of the credits needed for a degree or certificate.
- h. No assurances are made as to the number of credits to be awarded prior to the completion of the institution's review process.
- i. Credit may be granted only to enrolled students and is to be identified on the student's transcript as credit for prior experiential learning.
- j. Policies and procedures must ensure that credit for prior experiential learning does not duplicate other credit awarded.
- k. Adequate precautions must be provided to ensure that payment of fees does not influence the award of credit.

The CAEL 2006 report noted that, "The Oregon University System's Joint Boards Articulation Commission recommends that compliance with the Northwest Association of Schools and

Colleges (NASC) and CAEL standards related to proficiency-based assessment be required for credits granted for prior experiential learning or other options.”

SACs Likely to Embrace CPL

Most CTE programs already use forms of CPL, and CLEP, DANTES, and other credits are available for general education disciplines. We expect that some CTE programs would adopt the Portfolio option first, with other programs following as they see the benefits of the option. By centralizing all forms of CPL, PCC can more effectively track the number of students and credits offered, and publicize all the options through the PCC website and through other means.

Even without the details of how the CPL and Portfolio system would work, SACs indicated an interest in exploring CPL options. If the proposed system were explained, we could survey SACs again to determine those that would like to learn more and decide whether to join the process from the beginning.

At the suggestion of some members of the EAC, the CPL Committee will raise the issue with the CTE Program group to provide some estimate of the number of programs likely to opt into a CPL system.

Effect of CPL Credit on FTE Reimbursement

CPL Credit is transcribed as course titles and number of credits, so no SAC would be credited with FTE. However, granting CPL credits has been proven to be an effective student recruitment tool, resulting in increased numbers of students completing certificates and degrees – a strong incentive for programs and disciplines to offer CPL for some courses.

Financial Aid

Some Credit for Prior Learning expenses, including CPL-Portfolio courses and assessment fees are reported to be eligible for financial aid reimbursement for most students in the community colleges surveyed. Actual per credit or transcription fees, however, would not be eligible for financial aid. In any event, CAEL, ACE and others recommend against a per-credit awarded or per-credit transcription fee.