

An Examination of Prior Learning Assessment Participation and Guidance at Four-Year Universities

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Abstract

Amid the push to increase educational attainment nationally is the growing embrace of strategies that create greater efficiency to graduate both traditional and nontraditional learners. One such advancement is the assessment of prior learning that happens outside the confines of the college walls. This study examined data from a Hanover Research report prepared for Indiana State University (ISU) about the participation of 20 Midwestern public nonprofit institutions in prior learning assessment (PLA) for college credit. The authors used the report to explore application of the four most common delivery methods for PLA including portfolio assessment, credit by exam, military education credit, and corporate and professional credentialing. ISU synthesized the best practices for PLA and made tangible adjustments to processes and procedures that will allow the university to be responsive to the aims of the Indiana Commission for Higher Education in a manner that has rigor and academic integrity. Based upon the findings, a task force has been successful in moving PLA practice forward to address institutional issues including the need for new students, retention of existing students, and greater degree completion of adult learners at ISU.

Keywords: prior learning assessment, adult learners, nontraditional students, persistence, degree completion programs

Introduction

Colleges and universities in the United States and abroad are under unprecedented scrutiny. While the demographics do not align with a full pipeline of traditional-age students transitioning from high school to college, universities are scrambling to maintain or grow enrollments. Indicative of this demographic shift is a spate of national college completion initiatives (e.g., Complete College America, The Graduate! Network, Institute for Higher Education Policy, Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities) focusing attention on the need to help more students complete a postsecondary credential. Adult students (25 years and older) are a particularly important group because they now comprise more than 50% of all part-time higher education enrollments, and more than 33% of total higher education enrollments in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). However, these adult learners persist at lower rates than that of traditional-age students (Justice & Dornan, 2001; Noel-Levitz, 2011; Soares, 2013).

With over 31 million Americans having some college and no college degree, prior learning assessment is strategically poised to bridge the gap to graduation for those who started academic programs last year or long ago (Shapiro et al., 2014). Now more than ever, the changing economic landscape prompts the need for postsecondary credentials. Indiana State University is positioned as a leader among 20 regional peer institutions to examine current PLA policy and practice based upon their many years of work assessing prior learning. This study is relevant to a wide array of institutions striving to provide a meaningful response to student needs through examination of data on PLA policy and practice at regional peer institutions.

This type of analysis is particularly significant given today's dynamic and ever changing workforce. Since the 1970s, the earnings of high school educated workers have declined, while the average wage difference between college educated and high school educated workers has widened. The shift from a manufacturing to an

information technology economy has propelled employer demands for high-skilled workers: Nearly two-thirds (65%) of U.S. jobs will require some form of postsecondary education by the year 2025 (Lumina, 2017). Although the U.S. economy will have 22 million jobs for college graduates by the year 2025, an additional three million graduates will be needed to fill these positions (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2008), 53.8% of men and 61.1% of women between 25 and 29 years old have some postsecondary education but no degree. These 31 million American adults represent an important demographic for meeting national goals for degree attainment (Shapiro et al., 2014). Currently, adult students comprise over 30% of higher education enrollments (Brown, 2002; Choy, 2002; Kasworm, 2003, U.S. Department of Education, 2017). In this study, Indiana State University used research of peer institutions and other national findings on PLA implementation to demonstrate how an entire university system can produce meaningful change in policy and practice to recruit, retain and accelerate graduation for its adult learner population.

Nontraditional and Adult Learners Literature Review

Adult learners are “nontraditional” students in that they begin or continue their college studies at age 25 or older. Compared to their traditional counterparts, adult students are more likely to balance multiple life roles, such as part- or full-time employee, spouse or partner, parent, caregiver and community member (Osam, Bergman, & Cumberland, 2017; Ross-Gordon, 2011). Due to their increased responsibilities, adult students face unique challenges on their path to earning a degree and therefore persist at lower levels than their traditional-age counterparts. Indeed, approximately 50% of students seeking a bachelor’s degree are not enrolled three years later (Choy, 2002). Unfortunately, the majority of research on retention strategies has focused on traditional-age college students (Wlodkowski, Maudlin, & Campbell, 2002). To address this gap in the literature, Bergman, Gross, Berry and Shuck (2014) examined factors theorized to affect adult persistence, including student entry characteristics, internal campus/academic environment and external environment variables. Availability of PLA, educational aspirations toward higher degrees, institutional responsiveness to student needs, financial means to complete the degree, and familial encouragement were significantly associated with a higher likelihood of persistence. Campus environment factors explained the greatest amount of variation in student persistence. This finding suggests that campus policies supportive of adult needs may promote student success and mitigate risk factors for attrition (Bergman et al., 2014). One such policy is the incorporation and acknowledgment of college-level and creditworthy learning through PLA.

Adult Degree Programs/Accelerated Programs

Adult degree completion programs (ADCPs) aim to meet the needs of working adults with 60 or more college credit hours who reenroll in college after an extended period of time to complete a baccalaureate degree (Taylor, 2000). Institutional policies facilitate degree attainment by allowing students to complete their program in fewer than two years. To accommodate the needs of students, these institutions have adopted adult-friendly practices, such as distance (online) courses, evening and weekend class schedules, a shorter semester/quarter time frame, and formation of student cohorts. ADCPs are designed to prepare adults to assume occupations in fast-growing, high-skill workplace settings such as vocational, business, governmental, health care and industrial fields. ADCPs also appeal to adults who want to advance their career training but do not have the required bachelor’s degree (Taylor, 2000). To accelerate the path to the degree, adult learners in ADCPs may elect to test out of classes via College-Level Examination Programs (CLEP) and DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSST). To accommodate nontraditional students with unique skills and abilities, colleges have utilized prior learning assessment or assessment of prior learning (APL) to evaluate experiential knowledge and skills acquired outside the classroom. Students may earn college-level credit through work experience, employer training, military training, volunteer or community service, or civic engagement. Through PLA, students can apply college-level credit toward a degree.

PLA Participation and Practice

Credit for prior learning has been in place in United States higher education since World War I to provide increased employment access to veterans (Lakin, Nellum, Seymour, & Crandall, 2015). Over the past 70-plus years, PLA opportunities have filtered to adult learners who seek retraining in response to social and economic changes. Colleges and universities have expanded PLA offerings, including course-specific PLA (Bergman & Herd, 2017). Course-specific PLA includes credit by examination, such as CLEP and DSST. Students demonstrating mastery and proficiency can earn valuable college credit and obtain advanced

standing in their program of study.

The second major PLA process includes credit by portfolio compilation. Students submit a formal review documenting their past learning and achievements (Hart & Hickerson, 2009). Although the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) provides national standards for awarding credit for college-level learning (Younger & Marienau, 2017), the portfolio process and content may differ across institutions and programs. Structured and specific PLA courses incorporate theoretical frameworks to guide students' organization of prior learning experiences. These constructivist models require students to recall and reflect on past learning experiences. Through essays, autobiographical narratives and critical analysis, students connect past learning to specific course objectives and competencies. Participants of the portfolio process testify to the valuable outcomes, such as a sense of accomplishment and increased self-esteem (Jimenez, 2015; see also Jimenez's "invited paper" in this issue of *PLAIO*). Jimenez (2015) conducted in-depth phenomenological interviews to understand student experiences of the portfolio process. In reevaluating their learning, participants reported a challenging and transformative learning process whereby they categorized and synthesized past learning and found connections between that learning and transferable skills. In effect, past learning provided a springboard for current and ongoing learning. The process is active, transformative, and the portfolio legitimizes transferable skills that can be applied to workplace settings. Some institutions have resisted the portfolio process, questioning the academic rigor of this nontraditional approach. In response to the claim of lack of standards by some, researchers have brought transparency to this process. Hoffmann (2013) reviewed 12 institutions and found that portfolios were comprised of reflective essays, critical analysis, documentation and academic standards. Portfolios included goal statements, biographical statements and resumes to justify learning outcomes.

PLA Research

Travers (2011) identified the paucity of rigorous, peer-reviewed research on PLA. More recently, however, studies have begun to examine PLA's influence on students' educational outcomes. The seminal CAEL report, *Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success*, reported on data from 62,475 students at 48 postsecondary institutions (Klein-Collins, 2010). Not only did students with PLA credit save time toward their degree (an average 2.5 to 10.1 months for bachelor's degrees and 1.5 to 4.5 months for associate degrees), PLA students had higher graduation rates compared to students without PLA credit. In fact, more than 56% of PLA students earned a postsecondary degree, whereas only 21% of non-PLA students did so (Klein-Collins, 2010). Higher graduation rates did not depend on institutional factors (size, level or control), individual factors (student's age, gender, race/ethnicity or GPA) or financial aid status. Even for students who did not earn a degree within seven years, over half (56%) of the PLA students had accumulated 80% or more of the credits needed to complete their degree; only 22% of non-PLA students without a degree made similar progress. The study also found that PLA students had higher GPAs compared to their non-PLA counterparts.

While the CAEL study included multiple forms of PLA, other research has focused on the portfolio process. In a recent study, Rust and Ikard (2016) found that students at a large public institution who completed a portfolio had higher graduation rates compared with the national rate for PLA students. Compared to peers within the same institution, portfolio students earned a higher average end-of-course grade and significant increase in cumulative GPA at graduation. PLA may be beneficial for adults at risk for attrition due to systemic factors. Klein-Collins (2011) examined the data from the 2010 CAEL multi-institution study by race/ethnicity and found that graduation rates for PLA student were higher for each racial/ethnic group, particularly for Hispanic PLA students at the bachelor's degree level. She concluded that PLA provides substantial cost savings and serves as an important strategy for empowering underserved adults to fulfill their goals for degree attainment.

Methodology

Data on PLA practice were collected and analyzed from a 2016 benchmark report prepared by Hanover Research (see supplementary file) to enhance effective processes and procedures used to acknowledge credit for prior learning at Indiana State University. Specifically, information on PLA policy and practice from 20 Midwestern public four-year universities was analyzed and presented in the study by Hanover Research. These data were then benchmarked against the CAEL report (Klein-Collins, 2010) to understand the updates to PLA policies and practices for institutions in ISU's geographic region. As mentioned, the review of practices and participation of the respective institutions was guided by conceptual work done in previous studies. In this section that follows, the methods used to obtain and analyze the data are presented. After this, the findings are

discussed in tandem with the literature review to illustrate the direct implications for revision and expansion of PLA policy and practices at Indiana State University. While the CAEL study (Klein-Collins, 2010) provided a broad view of 48 postsecondary institutions' PLA participation, the Hanover Research (2016) report, gave ISU an up-to-date perspective on current practices, which allowed ISU to enhance its PLA policy and practice universitywide.

Sample and Procedures

Data were collected from 20 universities in the Midwestern United States, and formed part of an executive report generated for Indiana State University (Hanover Research, 2016). The institutions were selected based upon geographic location, as well as their proclivity to offer some form of PLA. Institutions ranged from having over 30,000 students, down to just over 12,000 students. All institutions in this study are considered public, nonprofit universities and many are affiliated with university systems in their respective states, including ISU. Information was collected on the four primary vehicles of PLA: portfolio assessment, credit by exam (CBE), military education credit, and other PLA formats such as corporate trainings and professional credits. This data was secured by Hanover Research's review of university websites and follow-up email and phone conversations to secure accurate PLA participation, practices and guidelines in relation to this comparative analysis.

Findings

The Hanover Research report sought to inform the Indiana State University task force established by ISU's provost to closely examine best practices for the award of credit for prior learning, and make recommendations on processes and procedures that will allow the university to be responsive to the aims of the Indiana Commission for Higher Education. The task force was composed of faculty and staff from six units across campus, and included university counsel to provide support for any legal considerations related to curriculum and accreditation. The charge of the committee was to examine the current approaches to the examination of credit for prior learning at ISU in comparison to that of 19 other peer institutions in the region.

Descriptive and frequency statistics were used to understand the number of PLA methods used by the institutions over a two-year period. Below is a comparison of percentages of participation between CAEL's *Fueling the Race* (Klein-Collins, 2010) findings and the findings from the 20 universities from the Hanover Research (2016) report. It should be noted that only two of the 20 universities from the Hanover Research report participated in CAEL's *Fueling the Race* study.

Table 1 PLA Methods Offered by Participating Institutions, 2009 and 2016

PLA methods	Percentage of institutions, 2009 CAEL survey	Percentage of institutions, 2016 Hanover Research study
Standardized exams (e.g., CLEP, DSST, Excelsior)	94%	100%
Portfolio assessments	88%	75%
ACE-evaluated military training programs	81%	85%
ACE-evaluated corporate training programs	77%	80%
Institutional challenge exams	65%	60%
Institutionally-evaluated training programs	63%	70%

The tabulated information shows that standardized exams represent the most common method of PLA (94%-100%). Portfolio assessments followed closely behind, with 88% of institutions in 2010 reporting they give credit for portfolios, and 75% of institutions from the 20 Midwestern universities from the Hanover Research report. While the 2010 *Fueling the Race* research displayed a higher percentage of portfolio assessment options, CAEL was able to incorporate a broader array of institutions beyond the public, nonprofit universities.

As Klein Collins (2015) posited, institutions are grappling with the PLA value proposition to seek clarity on why individual institutions engage in PLA policies and practices while ensuring that there are good checks and balances for program integrity. Hence, there was no significant difference between the use of American Council on Education (ACE)-evaluated military credit (81%) in the CAEL study, and the use of military-based ACE evaluations for articulation of college credit in the Hanover Research report (85%). Similarly, ACE-evaluated corporate credit was used 77% of the time in the 2010 CAEL study, and 80% of the time by 20 Midwestern public institutions in 2016. This finding displays a positive trend in the utilization of the ACE's assessment procedures for awarding college-level and creditworthy learning from outside the confines of the college walls. The ISU task force made particular note of the ACE recommendations for both military and corporate learning. It cited the importance of giving credit where credit is due to its current and prospective students. With moderately lower percentages of participation, institutional challenge exams, and specifically, evaluated training programs, displayed percentages between 60-70% participation. While this form of evaluation is not used as widely as PLA portfolios, CLEP and DSST, or ACE-evaluated training, it is a viable option for adults to demonstrate mastery of core content in specific curriculum required by many academic programs. Hence, ISU's task force for PLA is engaging in further review of institutions that offer challenge exams in order to gauge their effectiveness and implementation alongside other PLA evaluation options.

Next, the task force committee executed an inventory of the prior learning assessment activities that were already in place across the university to determine how PLA-friendly ISU was in relation to the 20 benchmarked universities. A brief recap of those Indiana State University policies is detailed below:

Transfer: Indiana State accepts credits from regionally-accredited institutions up to:

- Bachelor's degree: 90 credits.
- Master's degree: 9-15 credits dependent upon the length of the program.
- Doctorate: No institutional maximum; there are program-specific limits.
- Educational Specialist degrees: 39 graduate credits.

Credit by Exam: Indiana State awards undergraduate credit for acceptable scores on the following standardized exams:

- Advanced Placement (AP) examinations.
- College-Level Examination Program (CLEP).
- DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSST).
- Excelsior College examinations.
- International Baccalaureate (IB).
- Nonnative (Foreign) Language Placement Test.

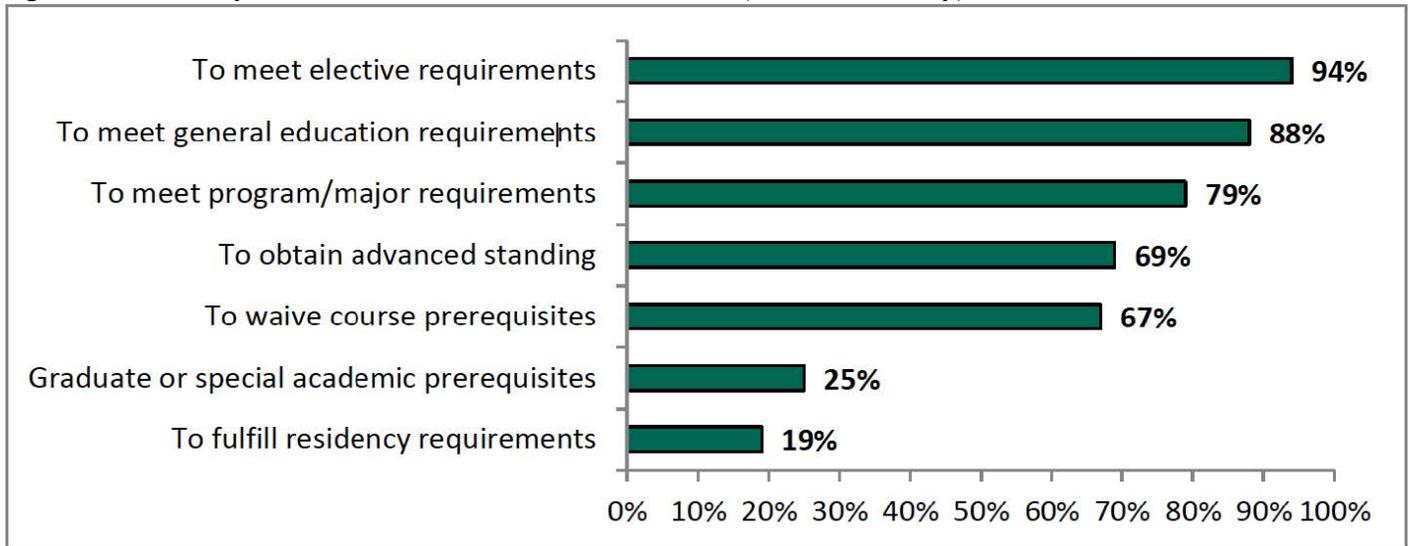
Assessment of Prior Learning: Indiana State awards both graduate and undergraduate credit for prior learning through the following assessment methods:

- American Council on Education credit recommendations for military and industry training.
- Departmental challenge exam.
- Portfolio assessment.

Credit from all of these nontransfer sources is limited in the aggregate, as well. The maximum for bachelor's degrees is 63 credits and 30% of the required hours for graduate degrees. There are also limits on the combination of transfer and credit for prior learning credits.

When compared to the CAEL *Fueling the Race* study (Klein-Collins, 2010), the use of PLAs varied from institution to institution; however typically, PLA credits are used to fulfill elective requirements (see Figure 1). The data showed that 19% of institutions from the national study allowed PLA credits to count toward fulfilling residency requirements, which is another current practice that the task force highlighted as another adult-friendly benefit at ISU. PLA credits were also shown to have an upper limit to how many could be applied toward a degree. Within this 48-institution dataset, the convention was 30-32 credits for an associate degree and about 64 credits for a bachelor's degree.

Figure 1 Ways in Which PLA Credits Can Be Used (National Survey)

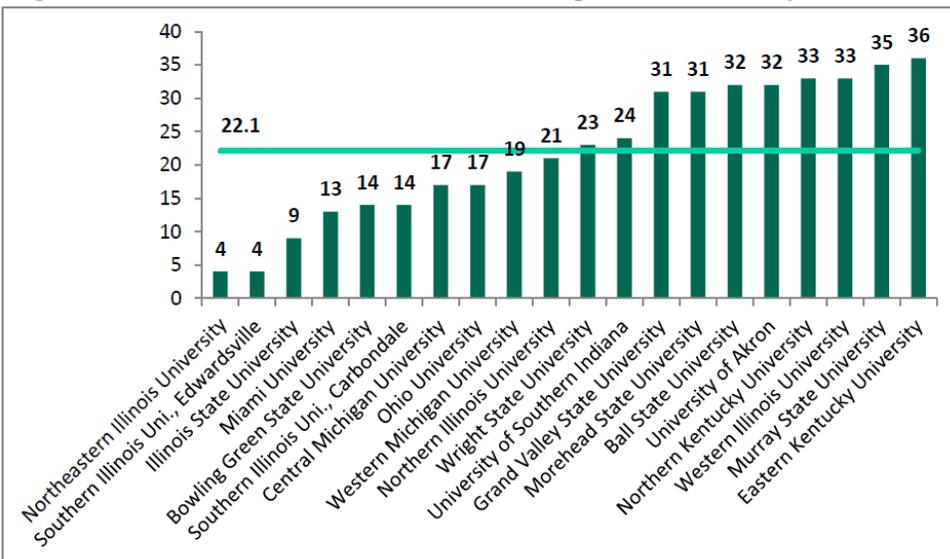


Source: Klein-Collins as cited in Hanover Research, 2016, p. 6 (figure re-created by Hanover Research).

When comparing ISU to the regional benchmarked institutions in the Hanover Research (2016) report, the data showed that 15 of the 20 institutions offered academic credit through a portfolio process. The number of credits allowed was also shown to vary, ranging from 3 credits, to a full-fledged degree program. Additionally, in some institutions, the portfolio option was limited to certain programs, while in others it was available campuswide. The variance in the number of credits indicates a difference in practices across the 20 institutions. Navigating portfolio assessment can be tricky, and in many cases results in an extra workload for faculty and staff. Consequently, the ISU task force established a standard template for portfolio submissions. Also, ISU is conducting follow-up with peer institutions and other regionally-accredited universities to determine standard pricing practices for transcribing portfolio credit and faculty evaluation of portfolios.

In this analysis, the most popular form of PLA was credit by exam, particularly through standardized testing. All the institutions in this study accepted credits obtained via CLEP and AP examination, although the number of courses accepted for CLEP varies widely. Institutions accepting CLEP credit are free to accept individual exams and not accept others. CLEP provides 33 exams, with a total of 37 possible course awards. Institutions in this review on average accepted 22 of the 37 possible awards for CLEP credit as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Count of CLEP Awards Accepted for Credit by Institution



Source: Hanover Research, 2016, p. 10.

Military credit was also found to be a popular vehicle for PLA in the Hanover Research report. Every institution within the data set offered some form of credit for military education. Of the 20 institutions, 18 in particular, were found to be members of Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC), an organization that promotes the maximization of proper award of academic credit for military training. Another interesting finding from the 20 institution comparison was that military students were found to be more likely to earn PLA credit as compared to non-military PLA students. Only one institution accepted alternative PLA methods that took the form of corporate training. Consequently, ISU is engaged in a review of all CLEP and DSST exams that are currently accepted by all majors across campus. It is posited that the Hanover Research report indicates a willingness to incorporate additional CLEP and DSST exams into accepted test out options at peer institutions. Therefore, ISU must consider additional CLEP and DSST options to boost their accepted CLEP options over the median of 22.1 as reported by the Hanover Research (2016) study.

Discussion and Implications

PLA offers students the opportunity to receive academic credit for college-level learning received outside the traditional higher education system. Although it is sometimes described as “credit for experience,” PLA is designed to acknowledge and quantify *learning* received outside the confines of the college walls. The data from the Hanover Research (2016) report had direct implications for practice and participation at Indiana State University. As a result of the 20 public institution analysis, ISU was able to embed new PLA language into its philosophy, mission and policy handbooks at the institutional level. Specifically, PLA is now an integral element of ISU’s commitment to be “adult friendly” in its assimilation of returning adults to the academic setting. The policy for PLA review and assessment has also made its way into the undergraduate catalog.

The PLA task force has determined that Indiana State University has a “very CPL[credit for prior learning] friendly” policy framework with significant potential to offer students alternative ways to earn credit for college-level learning they have acquired outside of the college classroom. However, as a practical matter, there are currently few processes and procedures in place to facilitate PLA activities, and little effort to publicize those opportunities to students and potential students. Responsibility for promoting PLA is spread across several units and it is not clear which unit is the lead.

Recent marketing studies demonstrate that PLA is a significant factor for posttraditional students in choosing a school. Additionally, there is literature that supports the premise that students who are awarded PLA are more likely to persist to graduate. Given its PLA-friendly policies, Indiana State University believes it is positioned to become a leader in PLA among Indiana public universities if they continue to translate those policies into practice. Fully exploring the demand for PLA could be a significant driver of transfer enrollment and degree completion. Toward that end, the task force made the following recommendations.

Recommendations

- The university will create a website specifically for all forms of credit for prior learning and link to a new website for transfer students and other prospective adult learners considering ISU.
- The PLA website should contain a comprehensive list of all CLEP, Advanced Placement, DSST and other exams we accept for credit, and it is expected that the list be kept current.
- That the university, through the Office of Research, create a process for the periodic review of new and/or changed exams (CLEP, Advanced Placement, DSST, etc.) to be evaluated for transfer credit.
- That the university amend the evaluation of the PLA process to require that each approved recommendation be considered for course equivalency and inclusion in the transfer table, rather than as a one-off event. For example, if a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) instrument rating is accepted for satisfying a course requirement in aviation, that can be codified as an equivalency and entered into the tables for future use.
- That the university review current procedures and practice on determining transfer course articulation. The task force specifically recommended that the department that houses the equivalent course make the determination and that the course then be entered into the transfer tables. This eliminated the situation where a transfer course had to be reevaluated when a student changes major and aligned the decision-making authority with the most knowledgeable department.
- That Academic Affairs create a standard template for portfolio assessment submissions.
- That the university upgrade the priority of replacing the Transferology website to “urgent.”

- That the university will pursue CAEL training and certification training for portfolio assessment. The number of faculty to be certified is still to be determined.
- That the university establish a standard stipend for evaluation of portfolios or development of a challenge exam.
- That the university, with the assistance of outside experts, conduct a workshop for faculty that explains the rigor of the American Council on Education evaluation process.
- That the University College Council conduct a thorough evaluation of the ACE Alternative Credit Project with the goal of accepting alternative credential for courses where the learning objectives/competencies are a good fit.
- That the university should designate a lead organization to coordinate and champion its PLA efforts (Indiana State University, 2017, p. 5).

The Hanover Research (2016) study provided evidence-based data to the university administration at ISU confirming other benchmark public institutions were engaged in PLA practice. Consequently, the ISU senior staff is now more open to the concept and is promoting its practices at recruitment events and other off-campus partner programs. ISU has incorporated formal acknowledgement of broader PLA practices by incorporating forms for departmental assessment of prior learning on its student services website. This additional explicit mention and promotion of PLA is a change that was not previously supported until after the Hanover Research report data was shared with the senior leadership and deans across campus. Leaders on campus have cited an incremental shift in the positive perception of PLA.

At the program level, PLA has been enhanced through additional communication and collaboration with partner institutions. The forms and rubrics used to document prior learning alongside the 12 task force recommendations for PLA at ISU have been revised to incorporate new language that other benchmark institutions are using on their various campuses. Specifically, the processing form submitted to the registrar for credit articulation has been adjusted to create a more seamless and transparent process for all adult students. This small adjustment of language on a form has led to less confusion from administrative offices on campus that are offering PLA. This change has also provided a clearer view of when credits are posted for current adult students. While additional collaboration and professional development are ongoing, the tangible improvement of practices and participation in PLA is noticeable on ISU's campus.

Conclusion

Although, PLA has existed for decades, primarily in the form of credit by exam, in recent years, more higher education institutions are looking at PLA as a way to increase enrollment, retention and graduation rates (Fain, 2012). This case study provided an overview and corresponding analysis of current participation among 20 Midwestern public, non-profit universities. Among the major findings of this study was the affirmation that credit by examination was the most common form of PLA at these traditional institutions. Also, in line with national trends, the vast majority (18 of 20) institutions that participated in this research have formal articulation agreements to accept American Council on Education credits from Joint Service Transcripts. Also, portfolio assessment is becoming a commonly offered option at many institutions as outlined by this study. However, it typically occurs in department level offices in "boutique programs."

While PLA is gaining additional exposure and participation at a wider array of American colleges and universities, common practice is not standardized in any specific way. Future research should continue to expand the evaluation of diverse higher education institutions that have implemented PLA, and explore the variability of how credit is assessed and awarded. If this empirical work can result in more streamlined and consistent practices by high-quality colleges and universities, PLA will expand and much of the present skepticism will dissipate as a result of the growing body of knowledge about this topic. In the narrative of this case study, one can glean tangible approaches to enhancement of existing or burgeoning PLA policies and practices at a wide array of institutions. The authors of this case study are particularly encouraged by the *Fueling the Race* 48-institution study produced by CAEL (Klein-Collins, 2010) and the follow-up report, *PLA is Your Business* (Klein-Collins, 2015), in which data and a business model are outlined for greater broad-based PLA incorporation in colleges and universities. Furthermore, the National Degree Completion Movement led by the Lumina Foundation, Complete College America, the Graduate! Network, Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) and many others have allocated a range of resources to advancing degree attainment through acknowledgement of

recognized, validated learning of all sorts. Alongside the regional analyses conducted by researchers to understand the nature, participation, practices and policies put forth by various institutions, there is positive momentum and promising new data about an uptick in degree completion. Consequently, we hope that traditional, and specifically adult-serving programs like the one cited here at Indiana State University, unite to find commonality toward high-quality evaluation of college-level and creditworthy learning from outside the confines of the college walls. The learner in a traditional higher education context can benefit from new reflections triggered by PLA work or high-impact experience on the degree pathway (Heinrich & Rivera, 2016). If institutions continue to examine the standard PLA practices being used by more and more institutions, this will surely result in enrollment gains, retention improvements, and happier and more engaged graduates.

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