

*The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) “Ten Standards for Assessing Learning” (2006) includes the following (Standard IX): “All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions they perform.” How does your institution (your PLA/PLAR program) **promote** this expectation, particularly the reciprocal responsibilities of the individual (i.e., assessors, advisors, administrators) and the institution? And, in addition, how is this standard **enforced**?*

**Morry Fiddler from the DePaul University School for New Learning and member of the PLAIO board responds:**

At the School for New Learning (DePaul University, Chicago), the process of assessing students’ learning from their experiences has been subsumed into a broader category of “independent” learning that embraces the nexus of prior learning, current learning, prior revisited to become “new” learning, and other variations on the concept but still compatible, certainly, with a discussion of PLA(R) practices. The responsibility for advising, coaching the development of evidence and assessing/evaluating falls primarily to two categories of faculty: resident (also designated as “faculty mentors”) and professional advisors (individuals who serve as community-based “experts” to a student’s program, helping him or her to shape a “focus area” of study and its integration into the larger degree design and requirements). Professional advisors are selected by the student, vetted by the faculty mentor and usually serve on a one-time basis over a period of a few years until the student graduates (or slips away from his or her program).

Standard IX sets out a mutual expectation for assessors and staff to seek, and administrations to provide, assessment training and development for everyone involved in the assessment processes. For resident faculty, one of the expectations codified into the guidelines for tenure and promotion is a demonstration of a capacity to assess students’ learning in a multiplicity of contexts, including “prior learning.” While there are occasional “training” activities for faculty sponsored by the college, the primary responsibility for development has rested with each individual faculty/assessor with accountability manifested as one element among many in the tenure review process. Professional advisors (whose contribution to a student’s program is premised most often on not being a full-time academic) learn assessment by association with the faculty mentor, and utilize whatever skills they may bring to the table as professionals with no formal accountability but for the opportunity for occasional feedback from the student’s faculty mentor.

The college has adopted four qualities for feedback and assessment: clarity, integrity (in regard to criteria), flexibility and empathy. In addition, at the undergraduate level, there are criteria articulated for the demonstration of competencies, and at the graduate level, there are generally applicable criteria for assessment – all of which apply to the assessment and evaluation of independent/prior learning and all of which are expected to be the guideposts for each assessor. These serve more as self-regulating touchstones for the realization of Standard IX than as the systematic basis for continuous improvement and monitoring.

At the level of administrative acumen and development of the assessment “system,” there are those charged by role with accountability, but formal development expectations by the individual or the administration, as Standard IX calls for, are not explicit.

## **Gabrielle Dietzel from the Office of External Programs (OEP), Vermont State Colleges and member of the *PLAIO* board responds:**

The Vermont State Colleges have offered prior, college-level experiential learning assessment since 1976. The process has three steps:

1. Students enroll in the “Assessment of Prior Learning” (APL) 3-credit course, taught by trained faculty members, usually at the statewide Community College of Vermont (CCV). Here, students learn to complete an extensive portfolio that articulates and documents their learning. Students may request college credit for courses/credits in any curricular area.
2. Portfolios are evaluated by four faculty members in an “Advanced Standing Committee” that may, by consensus, award or not award credit, change titles and change credit amounts. Awarded credit is transcribed by the Office of External Programs as Vermont State Colleges transfer credit.
3. Students request transcripts to be sent to the college they attend. Most colleges in Vermont accept VSC transfer credit.

Individuals involved in the process are:

- The coordinator of assessment services who oversees the program;
- Academic advisors/admissions counselors who identify potential students;
- Faculty teaching the APL course;
- Faculty evaluators assessing portfolios.

The coordinator of assessment services oversees training and professional development for the above groups.

- *The CAS* attends national and regional development conferences such as the CAEL Conference, the “National Institute,” and meetings of a regional PLA consortium as time and finances allow.
- *Academic Advisors* at the 12 centers of the Community College of Vermont are visited regularly by the CAS in either individual meetings or at staff meetings. She shares updates and answers questions regarding academic issues related to APL. The semi-annual central training day for newly hired advisors always includes an hour-long presentation by the CAS to explain and discuss the APL program.
- *APL teaching faculty* are supported by an annual faculty conference, continuous contact with the CAS, class visits, a frequently updated faculty handbook, and other PLA related materials both in print and online shared by the CAS.
- *Faculty evaluator* training is more individualized. Potential evaluators are identified by the CAS, come from all colleges around the state, and are usually trained in the following steps: initial conversation about APL with the CAS, reading and preliminarily assessing a portfolio by utilizing the APL “Evaluator Handbook” that specifies evaluation criteria (based on CAEL Standards), and observing an Advanced Standing Committee. This is followed by a second conversation with the CAS. A faculty evaluator might then be invited to participate on a committee.

\*\*\*

### **... And for *PLAIO* #3 (spring 2013):**

Please consider submitting your “answer” to this question, responses to which we will include in *PLAIO* #3 – our issue dealing with the theme of **Open Learning, Open Educational Resources and PLA/PLAR**.

*We imagine that in the coming years, more and more students will come to our institutions having taken advantage of access to a rich array of resources (indeed, sometimes whole courses – thus, sponsored learning but learning not yet assessed) now available to them.*

*How will your institution tackle the challenges of evaluating student learning gained as a result of the use of these “open educational resources”?*

Your response need be no more than **300** words. (Please make sure that your “answer” includes a brief description of your PLA/PLAR system.)

[PLAIO.org](http://PLAIO.org)