

IC
1/9/10

Assessing and Awarding Credit for Prior Learning

(Commonly referred to as Prior Learning Assessment or PLA)

What is Prior Learning?

From ESSHB 1795, Section 28, passed by the 2011 Washington State Legislature:

For the purposes of this section, prior learning means the knowledge and skills gained through work and life experience; through military training and experience; and through formal and informal education and training from in-state and out-of-state institutions.

What is Prior Learning Assessment?

Prior Learning Assessment is a means of determining whether or not the knowledge, skills, and abilities a student has gained through prior learning match the knowledge, skills, and abilities a student would gain by completing a specific course.

When Does Prior Learning Equate to Course Credit?

If outcomes of prior learning = outcomes of a specific course
then credit may be awarded for prior learning

PLA: A 3-Step Process

1. A student applies for prior learning credit for a course offered at a college or university.
2. An assessment (written exam, practical activity, portfolio, or other, as appropriate) is administered to determine whether or not the student has achieved the course **outcomes**.
3. If the student has achieved the outcomes for the course, through prior learning, the student may be awarded credit for the course.

Credit for Prior Learning Does...

- Shorten the student's time to degree or completion of certificates.
- Improve student retention and completion rates.
- Acknowledge the diversity of methods of learning which result in achievement of learning outcomes.

Credit for Prior Learning Does Not...

- Include awarding credit without assessment of the student's prior learning.
- Apply if prohibited by specific industry licensure or certification.

For further information, contact Jim West, JimW@HECB.WA.GOV or Noreen Light, nlight@sbctc.edu

Summary of Recent Legislation Regarding Assessing and Awarding Credit for Prior Learning

Passed by 2010 Legislature (SSB 6357)

SBCTC to convene work group and provide report.

- 1) Develop policies for awarding academic credit for learning from work and military experience, military and law enforcement training; career college training, internships and externships, and apprenticeships.
- 2) The policies shall address, but are not limited to, issues regarding verification, accreditation, transfer of academic credit, licensing and professional recognition, and financial aid.
- 3) To the greatest extent possible, the policies shall provide for consistent application by all institutions of higher education and a basis for accurate and complete academic counseling.
- 4) Policies developed by the state board for community and technical colleges along with recommendations shall be submitted to the appropriate committees of the legislature by December 31, 2010.

Passed by 2011 Legislature (ESSHB 1795, Section 28)

For the purposes of this section, "prior learning" means the knowledge and skills gained through work and life experience; through military training and experience; and through formal and informal education and training from in-state and out-of-state institutions including foreign institutions.

HECB to convene work group and provide report.

- 1) Increase the number of students who receive academic credit for prior learning and the number of students who receive credit for prior learning that counts towards their major or towards earning their degree, certificate, or credential, while ensuring that credit is awarded only for high quality, course-level competencies;
- 2) Increase the number and type of academic credits accepted for prior learning in institutions of higher education, while ensuring that credit is awarded only for high quality, course-level competencies;
- 3) Develop transparent policies and practices in awarding academic credit for prior learning;
- 4) Improve prior learning assessment practices across the institutions of higher education;
- 5) Create tools to develop faculty and staff knowledge and expertise in awarding credit for prior learning and to share exemplary policies and practices among institutions of higher education;
- 6) Develop articulation agreements when patterns of credit for prior learning are identified for particular programs and pathways; and
- 7) Develop outcome measures to track progress on the goals outlined in this section.

10
1/9/12

2.C.7: Education Resources—Prior Experiential Learning

(Credit for prior experiential learning, if granted, is: a) guided by approved policies and procedures; b) awarded only at the undergraduate level to enrolled students; c) limited to a maximum of 25% of the credits needed for a degree; d) awarded only for documented student achievement equivalent to expected learning achievement for courses within the institution's regular curricular offerings; and e) granted only upon the recommendation of appropriately qualified teaching faculty. Credit granted for prior experiential learning is so identified on students' transcripts and may not duplicate other credit awarded to the student in fulfillment of degree requirements. The institution makes no assurances regarding the number of credits to be awarded prior to the completion of the institution's review process.)

Tacoma Community College (TCC) grants credit for prior experiential learning based on clearly stated and widely published policies and procedures as directed by college faculty.

The college serves a diverse community of learners, including adults who have acquired previous learning through work experiences, training, or independent study. In order to recognize the accomplishments of these learners, the college has a formal policy for awarding credit for prior experiential learning.¹ This policy is published in the College Administrative Manual and is available to college employees on the employee portal.

The following guidelines are applied to the evaluation of prior learning:

- Credit is awarded when students demonstrate college-level learning that combines theory and practice, not for work experience alone.
- Credit must be linked to established learning outcomes of specific courses in the college's program of study, and must be consistent with instructional standards for these courses.
- As content specialists, college faculty assess prior learning associated with courses in their disciplines and recommend appropriate credit awards. Credit is granted only on the recommendation of faculty.
- No more than 25% of credits awarded for a degree may be from prior learning assessment.

The awarding of credit for prior experiential learning varies from program to program as determined by program faculty. Instructional programs recognize non-traditional evidence for prior experiential learning in three areas:

Nationally Recognized Exams²

- Advanced Placement
- International Baccalaureate
- CLEP/DANTES

¹ Link CAM, Prior Learning Assessment in K drive (2.C.1-8).

² Specific policies for each exam noted in College Administrative Manual (link to *CAM Prior Learning Assessment* in K drive (2.C.1-8)).

Articulation Agreements

- Tech Prep³
- College in the High School
- Servicemen's Opportunity College (SOC)

Other Options

- Certifications and Licenses
- Departmental Challenge Exam
- Portfolio Review
- Work-related Training

Nationally recognized exams: Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and CLEP/DANTES all provide students opportunity to earn credit toward degree programs. Descriptions of these policies are located in the college *Catalog*.⁴

Articulation agreements: TCC maintains articulation agreements with 16 school districts and skill centers (Tech Prep), College in the High School, and Service Member's Opportunity College. College in the High School consists of articulation agreements with regional school districts to provide high school students college credit for completing approved courses in their high schools.⁵ TCC is a participant in the US Department of Defense's Service Member's Opportunity College which intends to increase access to higher education for military personnel. This program allows military personnel to transfer and apply military credits to an Associate in General Studies degree at TCC.⁶

Other options: Challenge Exams are available to TCC students in the areas of Computer User (CU) and Information Technology (IT).⁷ TCC's portfolio review process allows students to submit Prior Experiential Learning Petitions to be reviewed by appropriate disciplinary faculty members, and if approved, forwarded for approval to the division dean.⁸ Certifications, licenses, and work related training is also considered within the portfolio review process.

TCC's prior experiential learning practices are rigorous and comply with the standards of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. With the exception of credit awarded for exams, prior experiential learning credit is noted on student transcripts as the equivalent TCC courses. Credit is generally not awarded for courses that are not offered by Tacoma Community College. If the PLA experience can be shown to have direct application to a student's technical program, however, it may be posted as elective credit. In some cases, the college may waive prerequisite courses as an alternative to awarding credit for prior experiential learning. In these cases, credit is not posted to student transcripts.

³ *Tacoma Community College Tech Prep Articulation Agreements* for 16 school districts and skill center partners available for review in TCC evidence room, May 2-4, 2012.

⁴ *Tacoma Community College Catalog 2011-2012*, 28-30.

⁵ Link *College in the High School MOU* in K drive

⁶ *Tacoma Community College Catalog 2011-2012*, 29-30; <http://www.soc.aascu.org/socconsortium/Default.html>

⁷ Link *Student Course Challenge Form* in K drive

⁸ Link to *Prior Learning Assessment Petition, 2 Examples* in K drive

Prior experiential learning credits are generally posted with grades of S, for satisfactory. An exception to this practice is made for credit based on articulation agreements, for which grades are assigned as stipulated by the agreements. Prior experiential learning is identified on student transcripts in the form of a notation of *PLA* (prior learning assessment) following the course title.

Prior experiential learning credit awarded in the “Other Options” category identified above requires students be enrolled during the quarter the learning assessment is made. Credit is then posted to transcripts following the academic quarter in which the assessment is completed. Prior experiential learning credit is not used to calculate FTE, nor considered in determining student enrollment status or financial aid awards.

Prior experiential learning is self-supported through fees, based on the number of credits for which students apply. Students for whom credit is not awarded, do not receive refunds. Students are encouraged to meet with prior experiential learning advisors before applying for assessment.

Recently, the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) organized several workgroups to address issues of efficiency throughout the SBCTC system. One area of study is prior experiential learning. SBCTC has published policy and procedure recommendations intended to create greater consistency and cooperation across the state in awarding prior experiential learning credit. These recommendations with an action plan are found in the report, *Instruction Commission Efficiency Report, July 15, 2011*.⁹

⁹ Link to *IC Efficiency Report* in K drive.

