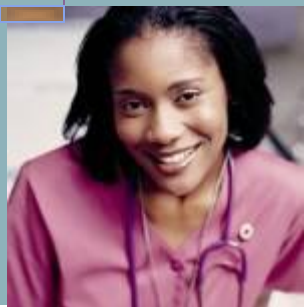




Prior Learning Assessment: An Important Tool for Success

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CAEL

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What Is Prior Learning Assessment?

The evaluation for college credit of the knowledge and skills one gains from life experiences (or from non-college instructional programs) including employment, travel, hobbies, civic activities and volunteer service



A Brief History

- CAEL's History with PLA:
 - 1974 – Research Project at ETS
 - 54 reports in first 3 years
 - 1979 – American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, American Council on Education, and Council for Higher Education Accreditation endorse PLA & CAEL Principles



A Brief History

- 1985 – 1st Ed. “*Earn College Credit for What You Know*”
- 1989 – “*Assessing Learning: Standards, Principles & Procedures*” Whitaker
- 1996 – National PLA Survey “*Prior Learning Assessment: A Guidebook to American Institutional Practices*”
- 2000 – Launched On-line PLA Certification Program in collaboration with DePaul University



A Brief History

- 2001 – American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, American Council on Education, and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation reissue endorsement of CAEL Standards
- 2006 – 4th Ed. “Earn College Credit for What you Know”
- 2006 – 2d Ed. “Assessing Learning: Standards, Principles and Procedures” Fiddler, Marienau, Whitaker
- 2006 – National Survey of PLA Policies and Practices



A Brief History

- 2009-10 – Comprehensive study of PLA and learner outcomes
- 2009-2010 – Development of the plans for a Virtual PLA Center
- 2010 – Survey of the use of PLA in community colleges, especially among students younger than 27 years of age

All of the above funded by Lumina Foundation for Education



Why PLA Today?

Pipeline of young college graduates will not be enough to meet future workforce skills demands



Why PLA Today?

For the U.S. to be competitive, we must educate:

- Adults (25-64) who never completed high school – 21 million
- Adults with high school diplomas but no college—46 million
- Adults with some college but no degree—32 million



Why PLA Today?

PLA addresses

Accessibility

Affordability

Aspiration



Some State Initiatives

Kentucky: “Double the Numbers”

- Adults who started but never completed a bachelor’s degree
- Adults with an associate’s degree who want to complete a bachelor’s degree
- High school graduates with no postsecondary experience
- GED completers with no postsecondary experience



Some State Initiatives

Louisiana: “CALL” (Center for Adult Learning in Louisiana)

Partnerships between institutions to reach out to adults with some college but no degree. One focus is PLA.



Some State Initiatives

Minnesota

Legislation: Each system college and university shall provide a student with timely and readily accessible information about opportunities for credit for prior learning in official publications, such as the college catalog, Web sites, and advising materials and a timely decision regarding the evaluation process.



Some State Initiatives

Oklahoma: “Reach Higher”

Degree completion program

“Earn Credit Through Prior Learning Assessment” Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (Web site)



Some State Initiatives

Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania PLA Consortium

A group of higher education institutions that have agreed to abide by, fully implement, and oversee the Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) General Guidelines developed by the Department of Education with cooperation from over 30 higher education institutions non-profit groups, and the Department of Labor and Industry



Fundamental Elements of Experiential Learning

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities:

- credit awarded for experiential learning that is supported by evidence in the form of an evaluation of the level, quality and quantity of that learning;
- published and implemented policies and procedures defining the methods by which prior learning can be evaluated and the level and amount of credit available by evaluation;



The Pennsylvania PLA Consortium

- published and implemented policies and procedures regarding the award of credit for prior learning that define the acceptance of such credit based on the institution's curricula and standards;
- published and implemented procedures regarding the recording of evaluated prior learning by the awarding institution;
- credit awarded appropriate to the subject and the degree context into which it is accepted; and
- evaluators of experiential learning who are knowledgeable about the subject matter and about the institution's criteria for the granting of college credit.



The Pennsylvania PLA Consortium

Members (2009-10)

- 13 Community Colleges
- 6 Pennsylvania State System Higher Education Universities
- 2 State-Related Universities
- 9 Private Licensed Schools
- 33 Private Colleges & Universities



Benefits of PLA

What Do We Know?

- PLA motivates students
- PLA saves time
- PLA saves money
- Portfolio PLA develops skills



CAEL's 2009 PLA Study

What We Wanted to Know

- Do adults who earn PLA credit have better graduation rates, compared with those who do not earn PLA credit?
- Do they have better persistence?
- Do they earn their degrees in a shorter period of time?



Who Participated

48 postsecondary institutions that:

- serve many adult learners
- offered PLA credit earning options between 2001 and 2008



The 48 Institutions

- 41 four-year, 7 two-year
- 22 public, 24 private not-for-profit, 2 private for-profit
- Range in size from under 1,000 students to more than 20,000
- From all regions in the US, with heaviest representation from Mid-East, Great Lakes, Plains and Southeast
- 46 US institutions, 2 Canadian



What PLA Options Counted?

- Standardized exams (e.g., CLEP, DSST, AP, Excelsior)
- Externally-evaluated training program (e.g., ACE)
- Institutional challenge exams
- Portfolio assessment
- “Other”



Penn State and PLA

If you have prior college-level learning experiences — at another college or university, in the military, in the workplace, through self-study, or in high school — your academic adviser can help you identify how alternative credit acquisition can apply toward meeting your degree goals. At Penn State we're ready to help you explore your options. Contact a campus [adult learner advocate](#) to learn more. Based on your program of study requirements, here are some of the ways you may be able to earn college credit:

- [Credit by transfer from another institution](#)
[Credit by examination](#)
[Credit for training in the military](#)
[Credit for training in business, industry, and government](#)



The Students

- 62,475 total adult students in our sample (adult = age 25 or older)
- 15,594 (25%) had earned PLA credit between 2001 and 2008



PLA and Student Demographics

- Higher percent of male (29%) than female students (22%) earn PLA credit
- Higher percent of white, non-Hispanic (33%) and Asian (40%), compared to black, non-Hispanic (24%) or Hispanic (15%)
- Slightly higher rate of PLA earning among those aged 35-54, compared to younger and older groups



Summary – Graduation Rates

- **PLA students in this study had better graduation rates than non-PLA students:**
 - Regardless of institutional size, level (two-year or four-year) or control (private for-profit, non-profit, or public)
 - Regardless of the individual student's academic ability or grade point average
 - Regardless of the individual student's age, gender, or race/ethnicity
 - Regardless of whether or not the individual student receives financial aid



Ways We Measured Persistence

- Credit accumulation towards an associate's or bachelor's degree
- Number of years in which the student earned credit between 2001-2002 and 2007-2008



Total Credits Earned at Institution

Average for All PLA Students

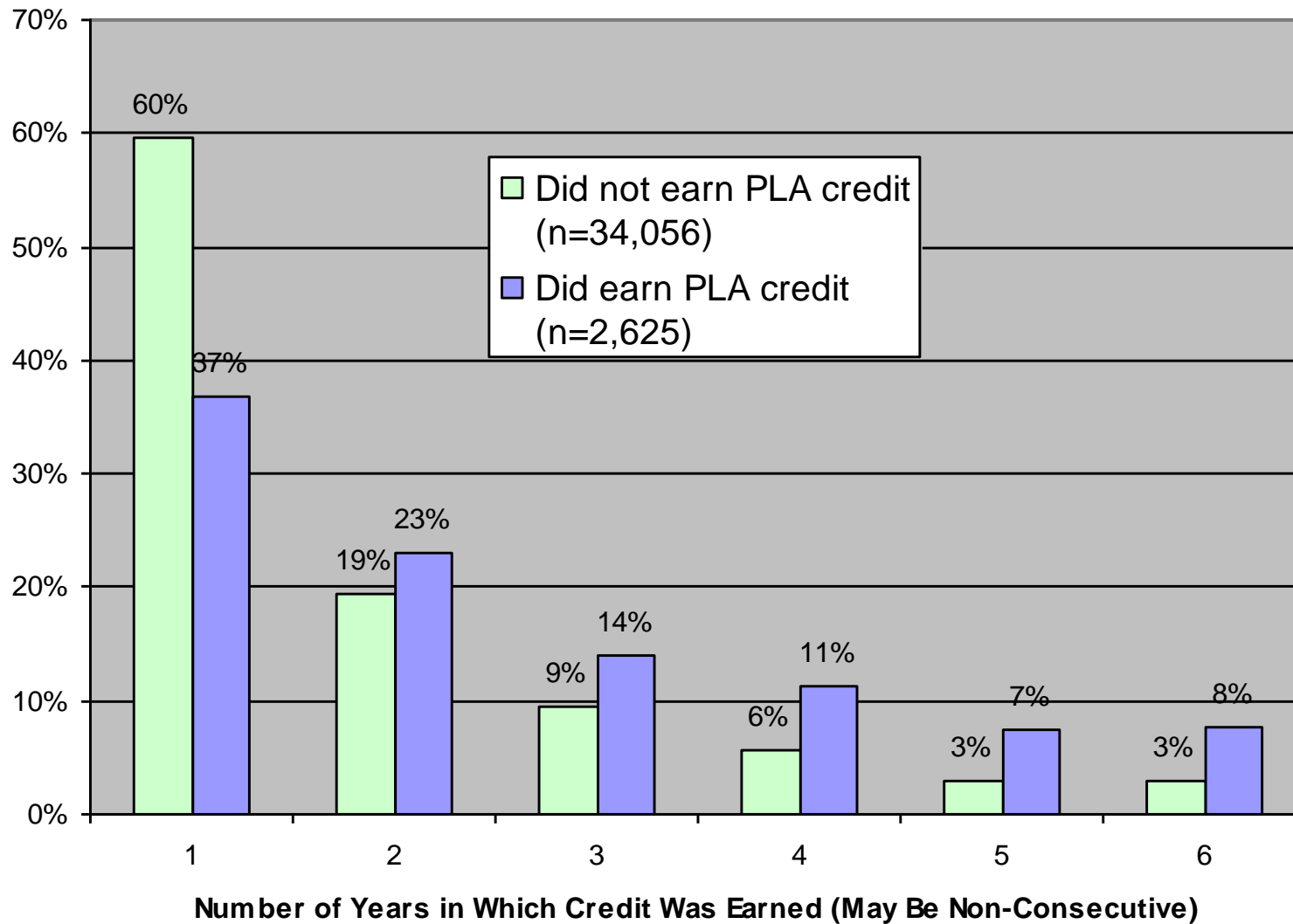
53.7 credits

Average for All Non-PLA Students

43.8 credits



Persistence – Number of Credit-Earning Years





Summary – Time to Degree

- **PLA students earned bachelor's degrees in a shorter periods of time compared with non-PLA students** – a difference of between 2.5 and 10.1 months, depending upon the number of PLA credits earned.
- **PLA earners with associate's degrees** saved an average of between 1.5 and 4.5 months of time in earning their degrees, compared to non-PLA students earning associate's degrees.



Community Colleges & PLA

CAEL's 2010 Survey:

- What are community colleges currently doing with regard to PLA? What PLA options are offered?
- Can students younger than 27 benefit from PLA?
- How do the respondents view PLA at their institution in terms of future value and demand?



PLA Options Offered

Among community college respondents

- 64% offer portfolio
- 90% accept CLEP, 93% AP
- 85% provide challenge exams
- 82% accept ACE military evaluations
- 49% accept ACE corporate evaluations



PLA and Younger Students

Candidates for prior learning assessment:

Among community college respondents, 91% believe that adults under age 27 come to the institution with some technical training that they have learned on the job.



The Future and PLA

38% of responding community colleges already use PLA evaluations for younger adults who have learned technical skills on the job; another 46% think PLA could be used more with this group.



The Future and PLA

Among community college respondents:

- 68% think the institution should be expanding PLA options in the future.
- 72% think they will be seeing increased demand for PLA in the future.



Scaling Up The Use of PLA

CAEL Virtual PLA Center

- To be launched in July, 2010
- Planning grant from Lumina Foundation for Education
- ACE and College Board partnering on project
- CAEL will draw upon faculty experts nationwide for teaching portfolio development course and reviewing adult students' portfolios



Scaling Up The Use of PLA

CAEL Virtual PLA Center

- VPLA Center will use on-line platform developed by AcademyOne
- Credit recommendations from CAEL VPLA Center faculty experts will be sent on ACE transcript to colleges, as ACE already does today with military and corporate training



Who Will It Serve?

- **Individuals already enrolled in community colleges or four-year institutions**
 - Provide support for postsecondary institutions that have no existing PLA programs
 - Augment existing PLA programs at some postsecondary institutions
- **Unaffiliated individuals** not yet in college or having started but never finished college
- **Employers and industry groups**



Pilot Institutions

- CAEL is seeking involvement colleges and universities for pilot launch of VPLA Center
- CAEL has already received letters of interest from nearly 50 institutions



Pilot Institutions

- Criteria for selection of pilot colleges or systems:
 - Colleges will agree to treat PLA credit recommendations as they do other transfer credit
 - Colleges will agree to send CAEL a group of adults to participate in the VPLA Center process
 - Colleges are adult-serving and adult learner-friendly



Contact

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