

# Fundamentals of Prior Learning Assessment

February 6, 2017  
Edwardsville, Illinois



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## CAEL's Overarching Goal:

**Meaningful Learning, Credentials, and Work for Every Adult**

For more than 40 years, CAEL has been linking adults' lifelong learning with credits and careers

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## UNIT 1: An Introduction to Prior Learning Assessment

Upon completion of this workshop, you will be able to:

- Identify and explain the principles and value of experiential learning
- Apply the CAEL principles of best practice in prior learning assessment
- Describe and utilize the steps, tools, and procedures in the PLA process with an emphasis on portfolio development
- Articulate the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the PLA process
- Illustrate and employ the administrative principles of prior learning assessment
- Advocate to various audiences the value of prior learning assessment
- Bypass Workshop 1 in the CAEL Online PLA Certification Program and, with successful completion of an assessment exercise, begin with Workshop 2 (see Appendix C for details).

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## New Focus on PLA

The recent focus on increasing college completion and enriching the workforce has led to an emphasis on PLA as an effective strategy linked to both goals.

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## The Time Is Right

Who is addressing adult degree completion and PLA?

- Departments of Education and Labor
- Individual States
- Philanthropic Organizations
- Chambers of Commerce
- Individual Institutions




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## College Completion Matters

In a report released by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce

- **By 2020, 65% of all jobs will require postsecondary education and training beyond H.S.**
- **At current rate of production, U.S. will fall short by 5 million workers with postsecondary credentials**



Source: Recovery: Job Growth and Educational Requirements through 2020, Georgetown University, Center for Education and the Workforce, June 2013.

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## Adult Completion Matters

- Pipeline of young college graduates not enough to meet workforce skill demands
- Adult learners integral to achieving completion goals
- With baby boomers' retirements, knowledge and skills gaps grow
- More than 22% of working population has some college, but no degree
- Nearly half of all traditional students who start college do not complete

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## Exercise 1: A Self-Reflection on Knowledge and Education

- Pages 9-10 in your workbook

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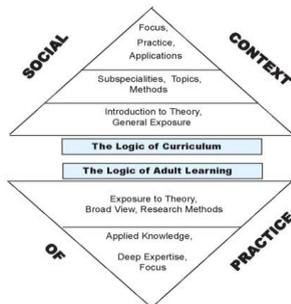
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## The Logic of Curriculum v. The Logic of Adult Learning



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## Theoretical Perspective

- Adults are always learning
- Life experience provides rich resources for learning
- Some of that learning may be college creditable
- **Where** learning occurs is irrelevant
- **That** learning occurs is what counts
- Experiential learning brings great value to the institution
  - Broader base of knowledge
  - More voices and perspectives

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## Assumptions About Adult Learners — Andragogy (Knowles, 1970)

- Adult learners strive toward self-directedness
- Life experience provides a resource for learning
- Adults prefer active, engaged learning, learning that is experiential
- Adults prefer learning that has an immediate application—serves a purpose

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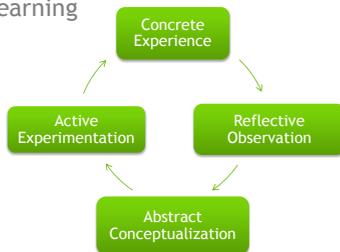
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## Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory & Self Directed Learning



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## A Bit More On What the Research Says



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## Who Is Using PLA?

### 414 Institutions responded to ACE's 2012 PLA Survey

- 92% approved use of one or more PLA methods
- National proficiency exams, such as CLEP or DSST, are the most frequently used form of PLA (83%) followed by ACE military credits (77%)
- Local portfolio and ACE CREDIT awards were used by over 25% of survey respondents
- PLA used at all degree levels, associate to doctoral

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## Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success

### 2010 CAEL Report

- Longitudinal study of PLA outcomes
- 48 Institutions participated
- Outcomes related to all PLA methods
- 62,475 adult students (25 years or older)
- Increased **graduation** rates and **persistence**: these students took *more* courses than adult students who did not receive credit for their prior learning
- Decreased **time to degree completion**



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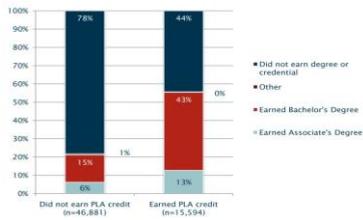
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## PLA Effect on Graduation Rates



Associate degree students are 2 times more likely to persist to graduation

Source: Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success. CAEL, March 2010.

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### Fueling the Race Study: Key Findings

Outcomes	PLA Students	Non-PLA Students	Notes
Degree-earning rates	56%	21%	Regardless of institution size or level, individual academic ability or GPA, age, race, gender, or income.
Graduation Rates (3.0+ GPA)	66%	35%	
Graduation Rates (2.0-2.9 GPA)	44%	28%	
Graduation Rates for Remedial Students	20%	5%	

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### Fueling the Race Study: Key Findings

Outcomes	PLA Students	Non-PLA Students	Notes
More persistent credit accumulation	56% of PLA students had accumulated at least 80% of the credits for their degree.	22% of non-PLA students had accumulated at least 80% of the credits for their degree.	Those who had not graduated.
Retention of first year students	63%	40%	
Time saved	2.5-10.1 months saved on average	N/A	Depends on how many PLA credits they are awarded
GPA (% of students above 3.0)	70%	64%	PLA itself is usually Pass/Fail

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## Fueling the Race Study: Key Findings

Average institutional credits earned	
PLA Students	Non-PLA Students
53.7 average credits	43.8 average credits

\*Does not include PLA credits (so, these are only faculty-taught, tuition-bearing hours).

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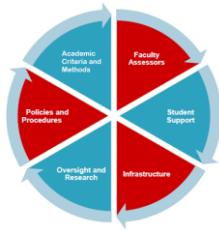
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## Components of a Healthy PLA Program




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## Quality Standards (2017)

1. Credit or competencies are awarded **only for evidence of learning**, not for experience or time spent.
2. Assessment is integral to learning because it leads to and **enables future learning**.
3. Assessment is **based on criteria** for outcomes that are clearly articulated and shared among constituencies.

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## Quality Standards cont'd

4. The determination of credit awards and competency levels are made by appropriate subject matter and credentialing experts.
5. *Assessment advances the broader purpose of access and equity for diverse individuals and groups to support their success.*
6. *Institutions proactively provide guidance and support for learners' full engagement in the assessment process.*

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## Quality Standards cont'd

7. Assessment policies and procedures are the result of **inclusive deliberation** and are **shared with all constituencies**.
8. Fees charged for assessment are **based on the services** performed in the process rather than the credit awarded.

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## Quality Standards cont'd

9. **All practitioners** involved in the assessment process pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions they perform.
10. Assessment programs are regularly **monitored, evaluated and revised** to respond to institutional and learner needs.

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## Methods of Assessing Prior Learning




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## What Is PLA?

A set of *well-established, researched, and validated methods* for assessing non-collegiate learning for college credit.

A process that allows learners to demonstrate knowledge and skill in a particular field or fields and have that learning evaluated for college credit.

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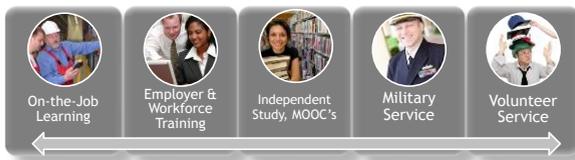
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## Sources of College-Level Learning




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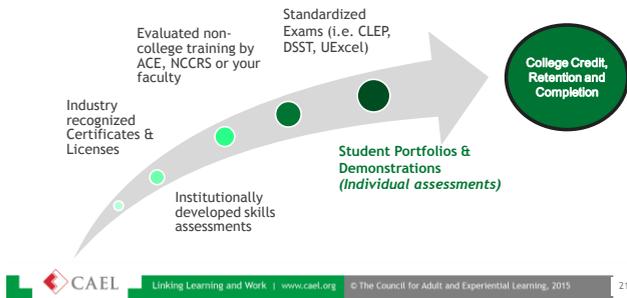
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## PLA Methods




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## Methods of Assessment

### Four Approaches to PLA

1. Evaluated non-college programs
2. Nationally recognized standardized exams
3. Challenge exams
4. Portfolio




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## Provide It!




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## Evaluated Training: ACE

American Council on Education (ACE)

Program Evaluations (faculty driven)

- Military Programs
- Corporate Programs (ACE CREDIT®)

Evaluation Activities

- Evaluate formal military training and occupational specialties
- Evaluate formal workplace training courses, certifications, apprenticeship programs, government agencies, examinations, and MOOCs

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## National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS)

- Formerly National PONS!
- Evaluates training programs offered by corporations, unions, religious organizations, and proprietary schools
- Over 1,500 cooperating colleges and universities consider granting college credit based on NCCRS recommendations and in accordance with their own transfer policies
- Conducted by the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York

<http://www.nationalccrs.org/>

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## Local Evaluated Training

- College faculty assess local employer-provided training or union apprenticeship programs
- College faculty evaluate and articulate college's own noncredit courses/programs to credit courses/programs
- Colleges establish credit awards and, in some cases, develop course crosswalks for industry certifications:
  - Florida Department of Education Gold Standard Career Pathways Articulation of Industry Certification to AAS/AS Degree

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## Other Assessment Methods



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## CLEP

### CLEP - College Level Examination Program

- Nationally recognized
- Annual average of 185,000+ exams administered
- 30% of CLEP administered to **military service** members
- 2,900 colleges grant credit for CLEP exams
- \$80 CLEP Exam fee
- More than **600 faculty** contribute to the development of and standard-setting for CLEP examinations.
- Standing **faculty committees** oversee ongoing test development, shape content, review data, set exam policies.

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## Advanced Placement Exams

- Produced by the College Board
- 34 exams in 19 subject areas
- 2012: 3.7 million exams were taken by more than 2 million students at over 18,000 high schools
- More than 3,800 colleges & universities annually receive AP Exam scores. Most 4-year colleges in U.S. provide credit or advanced placement for qualifying scores
- ACE-reviewed and recommended for college credits

<http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/home>

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## DSST: DANTES Subject Standardized Tests

### Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Support (DSST-DANTES)

- Developed for the military, available to civilians
- 38 exams for upper and lower division courses
- Administered by Prometric
- Recognized by over 2,000 colleges and universities for awarding of college credit for passing scores
- ACE-reviewed and recommended college credit for all exams

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## UExcel® & Excelsior College Examinations (ECE)

### UExcel Excelsior College Examination Program

- Credit by examination program offered by Pearson VUE at thousands of test centers globally
- UExcel currently offers over 50 exams in five subject areas: Business, Humanities, Natural Sciences/Mathematics, Social Sciences and History, and Nursing

### Excelsior College Exams (ECE)

- Specifically for Excelsior College associate and bachelor degree program nursing students with prior clinical experience

<http://www.excelsior.edu/>

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## Challenge Exams

- At discretion of institution
- Uses locally-developed tests/exams
- May be existing final exams
- Used by 57% of postsecondary institutions



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## Prove It!

- Prior Learning Portfolio
- Demonstration of Skills



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## Individualized Assessment

- **Learning Portfolio:** Most common individual approach to demonstrating college-level learning
- **Other Methods:** Simulations or demonstrations, formal presentations, performance demonstrations, and faculty interviews
- **Course-Match Approach:** Most often used, with growing use of discipline or competency-based approach to documentation and evaluation of learning portfolios for college credit
- **Discipline-Specific Faculty:** Critical to portfolio and other individualized assessments

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## Portfolio Assessment

### What is a portfolio?

- Formal communication prepared by a student as part of a petition requesting credit or recognition for learning outside of a college classroom
- Must make case for credit by identifying learning clearly and succinctly - usually through a learning narrative
- Provides sufficient supporting information and documentation so that faculty can use it as basis for evaluation

A portfolio course or noncredit workshop is usually used to help students prepare portfolios.

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## Scale—LearningCounts.org

- College credit predictor and access to a college credit specialist
- PLA portfolio development course
- Individualized portfolio assessment
- Credit recommendation

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## Learner Path and Advisor Role

### CASE Study

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## Learner Path and Assessor Role

### CASE Study

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## Parking Lot

### Final Reflections and Questions

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## Thank You!

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## The Learner's Path and the Advisor's Role CASE Study

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## The Learner Path's and the Assessor's Role CASE Study

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## The Institution's Path: Gaining Buy-In and Positioning PLA at Your Institution CASE Study

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# Ongoing Learning

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# Parking Lot

## Final Reflections and Questions

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# Thank You!

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