

ASSESSING PORTFOLIOS FOR COLLEGE CREDIT

*A CAEL Professional Development
Workshop for SIU Edwardsville*

Participant Workbook



WELCOME

These webinars are designed to introduce you to prior learning assessment and how to assess portfolios for evidence of learning for college credit. Research (Klein-Collins, R., 2010) indicates that students who earn prior learning assessment (PLA) credits are more likely to persist, take more courses over time, and achieve their academic goals than students who do not earn PLA credit. In fact, PLA is being recognized by many state higher education departments as an important strategy in improving degree completion at both the associate and baccalaureate degree levels.

Portfolio assessment is often the PLA method that most concerns institutions. Ensuring academic integrity in portfolio assessment is essential and colleges and universities are charged with this responsibility. The webinars will outline all of the elements of the assessment process for portfolios, the quality principles that support it, and the best practices that have emerged over the past 40 years of portfolio assessment research and practice.

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) is the nation's leading expert in PLA. Its quality principles are recognized by all of the regional accrediting bodies as the standard for assuring quality in PLA. Today's workshop will explore all aspects of portfolio assessment, including providing hands-on assessment practice with real student portfolios.

Let's get started!



Please do not reproduce this publication or any portions of it without express written permission from CAEL. For permission, please contact the office of the VP for Higher Education Services at CAEL.

Table of Contents

Welcome	1
Workshop Agenda	3
Exercise #1: Prior Learning Assessment Take-Aways	4
Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Refresher	5
PLA Methods	6
PLA Research - Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success (2010)	8
PLA Methods Paradox	10
Brushing-Up on Adult Learners	10
Vella’s Twelve Principles for Effective Adult Learning	12
Bloom’s Taxonomy	13
Elements of the Portfolio.....	14
CAEL Quality standards for Assessing Learning	17
The Important Role of the Assessor	18
Determine legitimacy of the Claim	18
Assess the Portfolio.....	18
Check the quality of the writing.....	18
Review of the Documentation	19
Score the Rubric	19
Written Feedback.....	19
“Close but not quite there” assessments	19
Final Review	19
Example of an Assessor’s Written Feedback	20
Self-Assessment.....	21
Other Portfolio Assessment Resources	23
Works Cited.....	23



WORKSHOP AGENDA

The Big Picture	CAEL's Leadership in PLA
Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none">~ Review of Agenda ~ PLA Purpose and Methods~ Elements of the Portfolio	Quality Assurance Basics
The Practice of PLA	Quality Standards
Role of the Assessor <ul style="list-style-type: none">~ The critical role of SMEs~ Assessment Practitioners~ Quality of student writing	The critical role of learning outcomes Creating and Using Rubrics
Practice	
Review and assessment of Portfolio 1 Elements of Good Feedback	Bill's Portfolio
Practice	
Review and assessment of Portfolio 2 Identifying good student candidates for portfolio assessment	Susan's Portfolio



EXERCISE #1: PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT TAKE-AWAYS

1. Please complete the following worksheet.
2. Work with the colleagues at your table to compile a comprehensive list of all of your PLA questions, issues and concerns.
3. **Work together to rank order your items starting with the most important.**

Choose a spokesperson to announce your TOP TWO concerns or issues.

Be sure to explain why you chose the two issues that you did and what you hope to gain from this workshop to address the issue (or the “take-away”).* If your issues are the same as a group that reports out before you, drop down to your next two most important issues to avoid duplication.

Rank Order	Prior Learning Assessment Concern or Issue	Most Important Take-Aways*
Most Important	<i>For Example: Concern about lowering standards in PLA to increase graduation rates</i>	<i>Quality Assurance Process</i>
Least Important		



PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT (PLA) REFRESHER

PLA is the process for recognizing college level learning acquired outside of the traditional college classroom. Faculty and subject matter experts (SMEs) determine if the learning is equivalent and comparable to a specific college-level course. Students may have acquired college-level knowledge from a number of sources such as:

- Work experience
- On-the-job training programs (formal and informal)
- Professional development courses and workshops
- Hobbies and volunteerism
- U.S. Military
- Free online learning opportunities from MOOCs (massive open online courses), Khan Academy (individualized lessons), YouTube, and other free resources on the web
- Self-directed study such Civil War History, art, religious study and more

For standardized tests and published credit recommendations (ACE and NCCRS), faculty determines if the recommendations align with curricula to articulate the credit recommendations.

For portfolio, challenge exams, individual assessments, and evaluating local training and education programs, faculty play a direct role in determining assessing for college credit awards.



PLA METHODS

Standardized Tests

Instruction-based: These include AP and IB exams. Students receive instruction prior to taking the exam

Non-instruction-based: These include CLEP, DSST, and UExcel (Excelsior College) Exams. Students prepare independently and then take the exam in a proctored setting.

These exams are nationally normed and validated. They are developed with content experts and psychometricians.

Credit Recommendations For Military, Employers, Business & Industry

These recommendations are based upon the American Council on Education (ACE) and/or the National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS) evaluations of training and education programs. Credit recommendations are published for programs that have been evaluated as college-level.

For the U.S. Military - ACE provides credit recommendations for standardized military training and education programs that they have deemed equivalent and worthy of college credit.

Challenge Exams

Challenge exams are faculty-developed for students who wish to “test out” of a course. Unlike most final exams, they are designed specifically to serve as the only assessment of the course’s learning outcomes.



Faculty-Evaluated Training/Education Programs in Local Community

Occasionally faculty at local colleges and universities will evaluate a local employer's training program for course equivalencies or as elective credit.

Portfolio Assessment

A student's formal written request for recognition of learning, the portfolio requires the student to make the case for having acquired learning that is equivalent and comparable to a course or set of competencies. The student must also provide evidence (documentation, work products, videos, letters of verification from employers/experts, certificates, and CEU transcripts, for example). The portfolio is assessed by a faculty subject matter expert to determine if the portfolio is worthy of college credit.

Performance Assessment

Sometimes, particularly for technical courses or courses that require certain skills, a performance assessment is most useful. The student will demonstrate the skill for the faculty assessor either by video or in a face-to-face assessment. Skills such as welding, fine art, dance, nursing clinical skills, music, advanced manufacturing, may be better assessed via a performance assessment. A performance assessment may also be an interview of the student by the faculty expert.



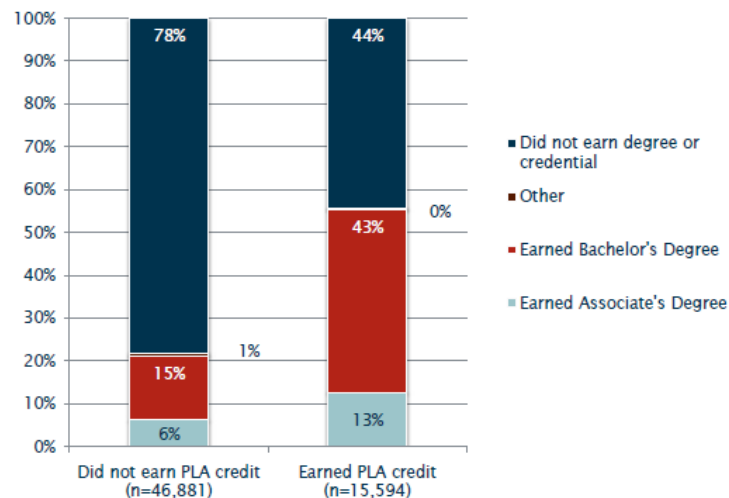
PLA RESEARCH - FUELING THE RACE TO POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS (2010)

Research (Klein-Collins, R., 2010) indicates that students who are granted college credit through PLA are more likely to complete a certificate or degree.

Researchers examined the records of 62,475 students (25 years old or older) from 48 different colleges and universities to analyze academic outcomes over a seven-year period. The students were divided into two groups (1) students with no PLA credits on their transcripts and (2) students who had PLA credits (any PLA method). The students who had PLA credits on their transcripts in this study had much higher degree-earning rates than non-PLA students. At the associate degree level, PLA students graduated at twice the rate of the non-PLA students. For the baccalaureate level, the graduation rate was 2.5 times greater for the PLA students.

- 43 percent of PLA students earned a bachelor's degree, compared to only 15 percent of non-PLA students
- 13 percent of PLA students earned an associate's degree, compared to 6 percent of non-PLA students

Figure 1. Degree Completion by PLA Credit-earning for All Students



<http://www.cael.org/research-and-publications/colleges---universities>

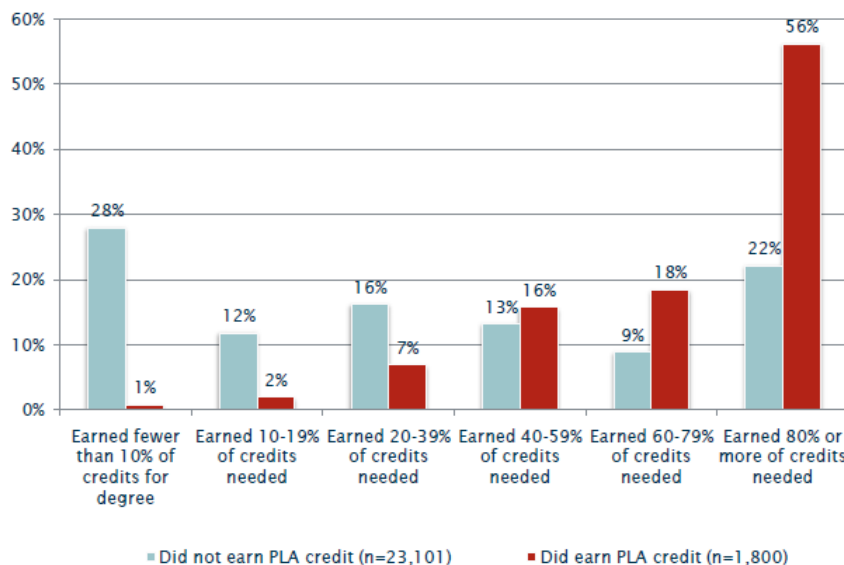


Noteworthy is that PLA students in this study had better graduation rates than non-PLA students:

- regardless of institutional size, level (two-year or four-year) or institutional type (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 received financial aid

PLA students in this study who did not earn degrees were more persistent in terms of credit accumulation than the non-PLA students. More than half of all PLA students who had not yet earned a degree by the end of 2008 (56%) had accumulated 80 percent or more of the credits towards a degree between 2001-2002 and the end of 2008; only 22 percent of non-PLA students with no degree had made similar progress towards their degrees.

Figure 2. PLA and Persistence by Total Credit Accumulation, No Degree Earners





PLA METHODS PARADOX

Faculty Involvement	PLA Method	Level of Faculty Acceptance
None	AP Tests	High
None	DSST, CLEP and UExcel Exams	Generally accepted (particularly CLEP)
Low	ACE Credit Recommendations for Military Service Members	Growing acceptance
Low	ACE and NCCRS Credit Recommendations for Professional/Employer Training and Education Programs	Less known Varying levels of acceptance
High	Portfolio and Individualized Assessment	Lowest level of faculty understanding and acceptance

BRUSHING-UP ON ADULT LEARNERS

Adult Learners are driven by a need to know (Knowles, 1970)

- ✓ They want to take responsibility for their own learning. They may not at first value or understand the importance of academic advising. They also may not be interested in anything outside of making progress toward the degree.
- ✓ They tend to vote with their feet!
- ✓ If needs are met, they'll stay engaged. If needs are not met, or information doesn't seem to fit with what they think they need, then they will "check out."
- ✓ They tend to be pragmatic.
- ✓ They prefer active and experiential learning.



Adult Learners are interested in practical solutions and current application.

- ✓ If a theory can be “pegged” to the adult’s experience, then it will be reinforced and fit into the adult’s consideration set. In other words, they need theory to be linked to reality (and the portfolio is the perfect learning vehicle).
- ✓ They learn better when content reflects life experiences or enables them to apply what they’ve learned or discuss how their experiences relate to the content.
- ✓ They need to clearly understand why this is important for them (and their career/life aspirations). So, being able to see “the what, why, and how” as relevant, **including how they will be assessed** is extremely important to them.
- ✓ Project-based learning, experiential learning, self-directed learning, and action learning are four tenants of adult learning theory.

Adult Learners may not have a positive memory of their last formal education experience.

- ✓ They want their experience and knowledge to be respected and valued. If it is at the college-level, awarding PLA credit or enabling them to move quickly or skip material they already know is highly validating and motivating.
- ✓ They prefer to be treated as colleagues. They resist if they believe information is being forced on them or they do not have the opportunity to think critically about what is being presented.
- ✓ They are at different life stages, which may have an impact on their college work such as caring for an elderly parent, having a sick child, or feeling added pressure on the job.
- ✓ Their experiences will be filters for how they hear, see and interpret their learning. It is important to help the students become more self-aware and reflective. **All learners are individuals.**

*Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember.
Involve me, and I will understand. Confucius, circa 450 BC*

VELLA'S TWELVE PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE ADULT LEARNING

Jane Vella (Vella, 2002) advocates that these 12 principles for effective adult learning apply across cultures. She initially published 50 principles. These principles are what she calls the basic principles that are “deeply interconnected, intrinsically related one to the other.” She states that a key basic assumption is that adult learning is best achieved through dialogue (Vella, 1995).

Dia means “between.” *Logos* means “word.” So, dia + logos = “**the word between us.**”

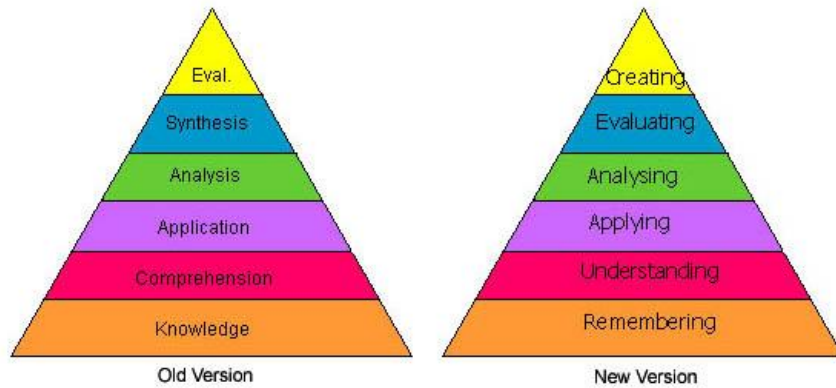
This dialogue principle is based on Malcolm Knowles’ work (Knowles, 1970) that theorizes that adults by virtue of the years of experience have much to contribute and relate that they should be able to be “in dialogue” with any teacher. In other words, the teacher is not viewed as “over” the adult but of equal stature. With their life experiences, they can have a conversation with a teacher on any subject and will learn new “knowledge, attitudes, or skills best in relation to that life experience (Knowles, 1970). Vella’s 12 principles and practices are considered ways to begin, develop and nurture the dialogue:

1. Needs Assessment: Participation of the learners in naming what is to be learned
2. Safety in the environment and the process: In creating the context for the learning we can also make the context safe for the learner.
3. Sound relationships: Between the instructor/professor and the learner among learners
4. Sequence of content and reinforcement
5. Praxis: **Action with reflection or learning by doing**
6. Respect for learners as decision makers
7. Ideas, feelings, and actions: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of learning.
8. Immediacy of the learning
9. Clear roles and role development
10. Teamwork and use of small groups
11. Engagement of the learners in what they are learning
12. Accountability: **how do they know they know?**

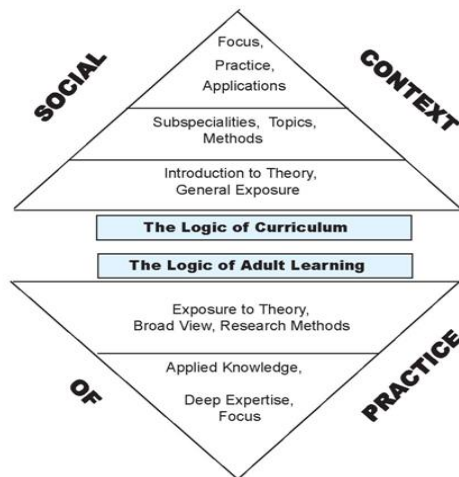
Vella believes that you cannot exclude any of these principles and practices when working with adult learners (Vella, 2002).



BLOOM'S TAXONOMY



Bloom's Taxonomy is one of the most helpful visual tools for considering the level of learning in assessment (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & and Krathwohl, 1956). The base of the triangle is lower level work, generally considered high school level. The middle section (Applying and Analyzing) is essentially college level (100 to 200 level); whereas evaluating and synthesis are considered upper division (300 to 400) college level. We often think of “creating” located in yellow on the newer version of the taxonomy as graduate level.



Adults often learn as practitioners first. Therefore, their experiential education starts out highly focused and applied. Portfolios provide a view into adult learning styles. As their education progresses, they add breadth to their learning and enjoy discovering the theory or conceptual framework behind what they have experienced.



ELEMENTS OF THE PORTFOLIO

1. **Statement of Authenticity** - Students are often required to sign a statement of authenticity to certify that the portfolio is original work and that plagiarism has not occurred. Often, institutions require an academic advisor sign-off as well.
2. **Introduction** - The student writes about her/himself and provides an overview of why s/he is petitioning for credit via the portfolio. The student may also include a resume or other credentials that provide additional context for the portfolio.
3. **Course Identification** - The student will provide the name of the course, course number, institution (if not your own), and the regional accrediting agency. Ideally, the student will provide a link to the college's website so that you can confirm that the course selected is being offered by a regionally accredited institution. The student should provide the learning objectives or outcomes for the course (as outlined in the course syllabus). Sometimes, when a student uses an institution where s/he is not a student, it is difficult to obtain a syllabus. So, the student must rely upon the course description (often topical in nature) as a guide for developing the portfolio.
4. **Narrative** - The Narrative is where the student makes a case for credit for the course(s) selected. The Narrative is similar to a term paper and should include citations (when applicable) and use APA style when required. This case will include addressing all of the learning outcomes, competencies or topics with specific information about:
 - ✓ How and where the student learned the course content
 - ✓ How the student has applied the learning
 - ✓ How various theories and academic concepts underpin and relate to the learning
 - ✓ How the student has used reflection to use the learning in new ways
 - ✓ How the student understands the relationship between experience and learning derived from experience

- ✓ How the Narrative statements link to the provided documentation

5. **Documentation/Evidence** - While the Narrative serves as the learning claim or petition for credit, the documentation provided by the student serves as the evidence that what s/he has written and claimed can be backed up by evidence. Documentation might include:

- ✓ **Letters of Verification:** (These are generally from employers/supervisors) - The letter must point to specific skills, competencies, and behaviors that are referenced in the Narrative. These are not the same as a letter of recommendation.
- ✓ **Work Products:** Examples of the student's actual work products might include spreadsheets, articles written, PowerPoints, a strategic plan, or other samples showing the student has attained the learning or competencies referenced in the Narrative.
- ✓ **Videos or Audio Recordings:** These may show the student giving a presentation at a professional meeting, or doing a radio interview, or performing a specific task.
- ✓ **CEU and Professional Development Certificates and Transcripts:** For students who are real estate agents (for example) or regularly participate in profession development, these documents generally provide good evidence on a topic in the course. Sometimes, students may have taken a non-credit community college course that formed the basis for some of the learning referenced.
- ✓ **Websites:** Some students have created websites for organizations or for themselves that may showcase particular skills.



6. **Assessment Deadlines:** Know when the portfolio assessment is due back from you. Ensure you can make the deadline before agreeing to do the assessment. Students are very anxious when they submit portfolios. They will want to know when they will find out the results. It is important to meet or surpass their expectations.





CAEL QUALITY STANDARDS FOR ASSESSING LEARNING

- I. Credit or competencies are awarded only for evidence of learning, not for experience or time spent.
- II. Assessment is integral to learning because it leads to and enables future learning.
- III. Assessment is based on criteria for outcomes that are clearly articulated and shared among constituencies.
- IV. The determination of credit awards and competency levels are made by appropriate subject matter and credentialing experts.
- V. Assessment advances the broader purpose of access and equity for diverse individuals and groups to support their success.
- VI. Institutions proactively provide guidance and support for learners' full engagement in the assessment process.
- VII. Assessment policies and procedures are the result of inclusive deliberation and are shared with all constituencies.
- VIII. Fees charged for assessment are based on the services performed in the process rather than the credit awarded.
- IX. All practitioners involved in the assessment process pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions they perform.
- X. Assessment programs are regularly monitored, evaluated and revised to respond to institutional and learner needs.

(Source: *Assessing Learning: Quality Standards and Institutional Commitments*. Donna Younger and Catherine Marienau, CAEL: 2017.)



THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF THE ASSESSOR

<p>Determine legitimacy of the Claim</p> <p><i>Note: For many Portfolio Assessment programs, a PLA director/coordinator will check to make sure the portfolio is worthy of an assessment before it is given to an assessor.</i></p>	<p>Check course description and learning objectives/outcomes and competencies</p> <p>Check for statement of authenticity and/or whether the portfolio has been checked for plagiarism (turnitin.com)</p> <p>Check documents and artifacts</p>
<p>Assess the Portfolio</p>	<p>Use a rubric</p> <p>Use the performance standards on the rubric as your guide for determining if all of the course outcomes/objectives have been addressed satisfactorily.</p> <p>Does the student describe learning from experience, as opposed to just the experience itself?</p> <p>Is the learning at the college-level?</p> <p>Has the student demonstrated reflection in her/his writing?</p> <p>Has the student linked theory to practice?</p>
<p>Check the quality of the writing</p>	<p>Depending upon your rubric and the values your faculty has determined, is the writing at college level?</p> <p>Has the student used the APA style and citations as appropriate?</p> <p>Has the student linked her/his evidence to his/her learning claims?</p>



Review of the Documentation	<p>Is the evidence provided sufficient?</p> <p>Does it make sense?</p> <p>Are the artifacts useful and legitimate?</p>
Score the Rubric	<p>Has the student done well enough to be awarded credit?</p> <p>Should credit be awarded or denied?</p> <p>Generally, no partial credit is awarded.</p>
Written Feedback	<p>Provide written feedback that provides another mechanism for the student to continue to learn (both positive and critical feedback).</p> <p>Keep the tone neutral or positive.</p>
“Close but not quite there” assessments	<p>Is the portfolio good enough that with a slight revision, credit can be awarded? If so, are you willing to give the student the feedback and review the portfolio again in the next week? Occasionally, a student just slightly misses the mark. When a student is really close to the credit award, an excellent assessor will tell the student what needs to be done (sometimes it’s as simple as adding another piece of documentation), so the student gains the opportunity to re-submit the portfolio.</p>
Final Review	<p>Determine if credit is awarded or denied.</p>



EXAMPLE OF AN ASSESSOR'S WRITTEN FEEDBACK

QSO 340 Project Management

I have reviewed your Learning Narrative and was impressed with the successes you have made in your work experience. The objective of the Narrative is to document the equivalent of college level learning.

Thank you for sharing your varied background and extensive work experience. You provided documentation to support your portfolio including your Narrative, Transcript, and PMI Certification. The documentation somewhat articulates the learning derived from the courses you took, the things you know, and what you have learned on the job. I see that you have PMI certification, for example; but I don't know anything about the scope and nature of the projects you have managed. You might have added more documentation that specifically talks to the programs and projects you have managed, such as work examples and a description of the successes and challenges that you have faced related to Project Management.

For the most part, your Narrative was thorough, well organized, and followed a logical sequence. I liked the way you organized your Narrative clearly around the course objectives.

Your Narrative describes concepts you learned and what you know, but doesn't provide relevant examples to fully demonstrate this learning and how you learned by experience. You did not cite any specifics about your experience or provide concrete examples. You demonstrated a clear ability to apply theory, but didn't really tie this well to your experience. You did not demonstrate an ability to apply your learning to other contexts. You did not really discuss how this knowledge has been transferred to other environments. You may have these abilities but it is not described in the Narrative.

Finally, your communication in the Narrative is at an acceptable level, including strong thesis statements and arguments that follow a logical order, but there were numerous syntactical and word choice errors and omissions.

The documentation provided supports awarding credit for QSO 340 Project Management. You possess the skills necessary for mastery of the requirements of this course.



SELF-ASSESSMENT

Please mark the boxes that are closest to matching your answer to the statements.

	3	2	1	
	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	My Comments
Portfolio assessment is a valid means for determining if a student has college-level learning.				
The quality standards help assure academic integrity in the process.				
I understand the importance of using a rubric for the assessment.				
The assessment should provide the student with an opportunity to learn more.				
Written feedback to the student is as important as the ratings.				
Student portfolios should be held to a standard of "C" or better level work.				
I see the relationship between a good syllabus that has clear learning outcomes and more accurate assessments.				



I recognize the relationship between how portfolios are developed and how adults learn.				
Portfolios should only be assessed by faculty subject matter experts.				
I would like to assess portfolios.				



OTHER PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT RESOURCES

Please pick up the book **Earn College Credit for What You Know** by Janet Colvin, published in collaboration with CAEL, by Kendall-Hunt Publishing Company (2006). This book is useful in that it is written as a “how to” for students. It is often the “book of choice” for portfolio assessment courses and workshops.

Another important book is **Assessing Learning; Standards, Principles, & Procedures** by Morry Fidler, Catherine Marienau, and Urban Whitaker, also published in collaboration with CAEL by Kendall-Hunt Publishing Company (2006). This book is a handy reference for better understanding the quality principles for assessing, as well as other portfolio assessment and PLA issues from a faculty perspective.

WORKS CITED

- Bloom, B., Engelhart, M., Furst, E., Hill, W., & Krathwohl, D. (1956). *Taxonomy of the educational objectives: The classification of educational goals. Handbook 1: Cognitive domain*. New York: David McKay Company.
- Klein-Collins, R. (2010). *Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success*. Chicago: CAEL.
- Knowles, M. (1970). *The modern practice of learning*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Vella, J. (2002). *Learning to listen: learning to teach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Younger, D and Marienau, C. (2017). *Assessing Learning*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt .