Multi-State Advanced Manufacturing Consortium

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Awarding Credit for Prior Learning in a Competency Based Curriculum

Document Summary

What it does: This document describes an improved model for granting students credit for prior learning in technical college degree or certificate programs. This document outlines a high level methodology for doing so, and contains two sample models, along with a sample template for capturing a student's prior learning experience.

Who it's for: College Faculty and Administrators

M-S AMC Present and Preferred State: Awarding Credit for Prior Learning

PRESENT STATE → PREFERRED STATE ("New Model")

PRESENT STATE	PREFERRED STATE ("New Model")
▪ Pace of learning set by instructor	▪ Pace of learning set by skills acquisition
▪ Success grounded in hours & <u>theory</u>	▪ Success grounded in <u>competence</u>
▪ Emphasis on (memory) recall	▪ Emphasis on information application
▪ Generalized outcomes Based	▪ Performance Based Objectives (PERFORMANCE BASED OBJECTIVE) Based
▪ Instructor dependent content	▪ Instructor <u>in</u>dependent content
▪ Initial Assessment	▪ Initial Assessment
– Results in placement	– Results in placement & aligned credit
▪ Program – Measures classroom competence	▪ Program – Validates on-the-job competence

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Model I

The last fifty years have produced tremendous advances in communications, information and industrial technologies. In response, Industry and Education must adapt new methods of serving their customers as well as relating to one another. The amount of time spent in a lecture/lab environment (credit hour system) needs to relate more closely to the pay for skill (competency system) found in the industrial workplace.

Industry is reticent to pay for training a highly mobile workforce, choosing rather to pay a higher wage for an employee with proven competencies in their field of employment.

Education is continuing to deal with financial cut backs in state and federal support and is not as able to easily fund equipment upgrades and professional development of instruction.

Various grants, state employment services and industry are now seeking ways to enable competency based education to be built into the lecture/lab environment of community colleges in order to move students into job ready employment more quickly.

Definition: Competence is the knowledge, skills, capabilities, judgment, attitudes, and values that individuals are expected to possess and apply in the work place.

Definition: Performance Based Objectives are knowledge and skill elements of competency based education that are, specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound.

One means of accelerating students to employment is to encourage students to seek advanced placement in curriculum by demonstrating course competency from prior learning.

It is important to use competency-based assessments to measure a student's knowledge and ability gained from prior training/courses or gained through work experience, against previously defined competency standards (benchmarks).

This must be done through various methods of assessment. An assessment provides a means for the student and the college to determine the achievement of learning outcomes, skills and competence in course content.

There are various representative forms an assessment might take.

- Exemption exams
- Performance Based Objective Assessment Rubric
- Student portfolios
- AMTEC assessments
- Amatrol assessments
- NIMS Assessments
- NCCER assessments
- Professional licensing

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- Some other forms of assessment methods include standardized tests (DANTES and, CLEP), oral examinations, ACE, course challenge, evaluation of case studies as well as others.

Once a student has successfully completed assessments of various competencies contained in a curriculum course, credit may be awarded.

- Assessment of the learning outcomes should be the responsibility of faculty members who are content specialists as the awarding institution deems appropriate. The names and qualifications of those making the assessment should be documented. A Performance Based Objective assessment rubric may be used as the tool for evaluation of credit for prior learning.

- A recommendation to award credit should come from faculty (or faculty committee of 2-3) that are designated, appropriately qualified and who are on a regular appointment with the college on a continuing basis. The recommendation should then be forwarded to the Dean or Department Chair for approval and sent to the Registrar or according to college procedures,

- Credit should be awarded for college level learning that combines theory and practice attained through experience.

- The number of credits to be awarded should be determined by the institution and based on identified criteria (learning outcomes, etc.).

- Credit should be awarded for demonstrated learning appropriate to the subject, course or, program offered at the awarding institution.

- Fees should be established by each institution, published by each institution and consistently applied.

- Grades or Credits could be assigned to credit for prior learning awards and sent to Registrar to be entered accordingly on student's transcript.

Information regarding credit for prior learning could be included in course catalogs and other marketing materials that are available to students and the public in general.

There should be a central point of contact for students in order to ensure uniformity of information and the explanation of the process. Advisors and career center professionals should be educated about competency based education requirements and the credit for prior learning process so that they can refer students to the point of contact as needed.

Industry participation through Advisory committees needs to continue, as a part of the continuous improvement process to provide input into the competencies in college curriculums for awarding credit for prior learning.

It is the College's responsibility for supporting staff and faculty in the acquisition and maintenance of expertise in prior learning assessment services and providing opportunities for sharing information and expertise with other institutions.

A general survey has indicated that some colleges allow up to 25% of credit for prior learning to be applied to a program of study but, this is strictly at the discretion of the colleges.

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Model II

Credit for Prior Learning recognizes that college level learning may occur outside of the college/classroom setting and that colleges should have a means of reviewing and evaluating those competencies to award credit to students.

It is recommended that the faculty advisor evaluating a student applying for credit for prior learning be familiar with (Competency Based Education – CBE and Performance Based Objectives – PBOs) for the course in question.

Colleges should have detailed policies and procedures for awarding credit for prior learning. This and all information pertaining to Credit for Prior Learning could be published in the college catalog, on the website and other appropriate sites. This could ensure that incoming students and the general public are aware of the option to seek credit for prior learning.

Credit can only be awarded for those courses directly applicable to curriculum requirements at the college of enrollment and to the student's declared certificate or degree program as outlined in college catalog.

A student may apply credit for prior learning to fulfill all degree/certificate requirements except for mandatory institutional requirements.

- Students can initiate the process by meeting with the credit for prior learning faculty advisor. This person could meet with students individually or have scheduled workshops where the information on the guidelines and the process for awarding credit is thoroughly explained and if the student is deemed eligible an application can be initiated at that point. Students can also choose to review the Performance Based Objective Assessment Rubric to determine if the course in question is something that they can possibly test out of.
- Students would pay all applicable fees prior to submitting the application.
- Students could submit an application to petition the faculty review committee (2-3 designated faculty) to take a course examination or to review a portfolio of documentation of prior learning activities relevant to the coursework. Evidence of prior learning may include licenses, certifications, and examples of demonstrations of skills.
- The course examination should be equivalent to the comprehensive final exam and it may be written, oral, demonstration or a combination of all three.
- The faculty review committee/subject matter experts may evaluate and determine if the student has met the competencies of the course or has provided sufficient documentation to demonstrate attainment of the learning outcomes.
- If successful, the recommendation to award credit should be forwarded by the faculty review committee to the Dean or Department Chair for approval and sent to the Registrar or according to college procedures for inclusion on the student's transcript.

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* SAMPLE DOCUMENTS *

Credit for Prior Learning Self-Assessment Form

Name:

Address:

City:_____   State:_____   Zip Code:_____

Phone (home):

Phone (work):

Phone (cell):

College of Enrollment:

Degree / Certification Program:

List courses for which you are requesting prior learning credit:

Prefix	Number	Title	Credits
1.			
2.			
3.			

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4.

5.

6.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES: (This section should be as detailed as possible. Please attach additional sheets to this form if necessary.)

TRAINING: May include correspondence courses, seminars, conferences, workshops, continuing education, formal military training, clinics, television/radio courses, etc., acquired knowledge or skills.

1.

2.

3.

JOB/WORK EXPERIENCE: Include position or title, length of time in position, acquired skills.

1.

2.

3.

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VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE: Church, Community, Politics, and Schools, include length of time, duties and, skills acquired.

1.

2.

3.

INDEPENDENT LEARNING: Independent research, projects (e.g. self-taught computer skills, extensive reading, public writing and/or speaking, foreign languages, business owner/operator) include length of time and skills acquired.

1.

2.

3.

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES: (e.g. acting, theater production, music performance, travel/tours include acquired knowledge.)

1.

2.

3.

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RELATED LICENSES OR CERTIFICATES:

1.

2.

3.

MEMBERSHIP IN RELATED ORGANIZATIONS:

1.

2.

3.

*These forms may vary depending on college Self-Assessment Policy

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Faculty Review Committee (SME's) review the existing curriculum from trainings held at companies, organizations and, apprenticeship programs. Faculty should evaluate the courses one by one and establish equivalencies for each course based on the college's curricula. Faculty review committee should recommend award full or partial credit for each class.

Model II

When developing new courses for manufacturing education Special Topics courses could be developed that focus on competency as the dominant metric for assessing learning and, not the credit hour. With this competency based framework learning outcomes could be standardized for credit and non-credit courses so that non-credit learning could be easily measured for its applicability to academic credentials.

Faculty could create an assessment for the Special Topics courses based on the college curriculum. A student may test out of a course if she/he passes the examination. These assessments will test for knowledge and/or demonstration of the specific skills that are taught in each course. College credit is applied upon recommendation of the faculty/faculty review committee.

A central point of contact at each college could be trained in competency based education assessment

Gaps in Service

In realizing that there is a great deal of learning that happens outside of the classroom in environments like:

- The work place
- National exams such as AP, IB, CLEP, DSST
- Military training
- Independent study
- Professional certifications and licenses
- Community activities
- Volunteer service

Just to name a few. It becomes evident that colleges and universities are not reaching and enrolling the vast numbers of adult and non-traditional learners that they could enroll. Making consistent efforts to reach out to adults with the prospect of receiving college credit for learning that they have already attained could entice adults to come back to college. Providing opportunities to receive credit for prior learning could potentially reduce the time that it would take a student to complete a credential and, could substantially reduce the cost associated with enrolling (tuition etc.) in a college. These are both factors that could prove to be very influential in an individual's decision to pursue a credential or to continue through to certificate/degree completion.

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All of the colleges in the M-SAMC offer some way to award credit to students for prior learning but, none of them offer it to significant numbers of students on a consistent basis or conduct a large variety of evaluations.

There are many reasons why the Prior Learning option is not presented to students at the point of advising. For many institutions the cost of conducting some kinds of evaluations can be cost prohibitive. Training faculty to review and assess portfolios can be an expensive undertaking as well. There is the issue of skepticism by faculty with regard to awarding credit for learning acquired outside of the classroom. And at a higher level, it is not just the number of students that are enrolled that directly impact the amount of funding that (public) colleges receive, it also the number of classroom hours those students take. Ultimately, colleges do not see awarding credit for learning acquired elsewhere as in their best interest.

In light of the projected skills gap, all of this needs to change and in a fairly short period of time. With the push to get a post-secondary credential into the hands of more Americans, credit through prior learning assessments offers an opportunity to adults that colleges should not overlook. Colleges consistently using prior learning assessments is a win, win for both the college and for the student. The student is beginning college with college credits that are awarded based on knowledge that they have already gained which will shorten the time to credential attainment and, reduce the overall monetary cost of attending college. The college is enrolling a student that has a great incentive to stay in school and to graduate as a result of having been awarded the credit for prior learning.

Not tapping into learning that adults have gained outside of the classroom overlooks this entire population of potential students. In essence these are potential workers that could fill the gap that currently exist between the number of jobs that require some kind of post-secondary credential and the number of people that are currently available to fill those positions.

With most educational institutions facing sharp decreases from public funding sources it makes sense for more educational institutions to consider awarding credit for prior learning. Schools should create or implement prior learning assessment policies and begin to identify and implement adult friendly policies to recruit adult learners interested in seeking such credit.

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Desired State

Community colleges typically play a significant role in training the workforce in their communities. Therefore, it is important that members of these communities are aware of all of the services that are offered by the community college in the local area. In addition to being the practical college of choice for many graduating seniors in their communities, Community colleges are fast becoming the college of choice among adult learners because of the option to receive Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) using Prior Learning Assessments (PLA) that community colleges now offer.

Community colleges have expanded their marketing programs and services to include the local office of employment and training, community service agencies, veteran's service centers, industry partners (to a greater extent) and the general public. The target population for community college recruitment has been expanded to include adult learners, a segment of the population that was not previously targeted for most certificate/degree programs. Increases in student enrollments can increase the college's potential to become more self-sustaining (relying less on public funds) and fiscally sound.

In light of this new outlook, a focus on learning has been incorporated into all community college promotional materials to communicate the value that the college places on ALL learning, including learning outside of the traditional educational environment. The application process has been re-configured to allow prospective students the opportunity to learn more about the option to receive Credit for Prior Learning (CPL).

- Students submit application for admission (in person, online, mail)
- (Include on application; definition of Credit for Prior Learning, CPL and the question, Will you be seeking CPL?)
- Submit transcripts
- (Include copies of certifications, licenses, etc. if seeking CPL)
- Apply for financial aid (optional)
- Take the placement test
- Attend student orientation (Info about Competency Based Education and CPL included in presentation)
- Advising (Approaches to Competency Based Education and CPL discussed)
- Registration
- Pay for Classes by the deadline.

There are multiple approaches to PLA including, competency based assessments (AMTEC) portfolio based assessments, ACE, AP Exams, CLEP Exams, DSST, ACT/PEP Exams, NCCRS, and Challenge exams. Any or all of these approaches can be incorporated into college PLA policies and, trained or certified staff or faculty should be designated to administer the assessments.

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An option for colleges that don't want to provide PLA service in-house is the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL). Through an affiliated network, CAEL offers colleges and universities an opportunity to participate in a centralized system where by students can submit corporate and non-credit training results, standardized test, etc. to a national group of highly qualified faculty and subject matter experts who will review the information and assess them for college credit. CAEL can also assist with college faculty professional development by providing guidance to faculty in how to accurately assess prior learning, or in the creation or improvement of Prior Learning Assessment policies.

The ideal situation for colleges to award credit for prior learning and for non-credit training/courses is to use industry validated competency based assessments. However, when no such assessment exists or the college cannot afford to use such assessments the LearningCounts program www.learningcounts.org through CAEL gives colleges a cost effective way to give students the credits that they have earned.

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