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Revised Recommendations and Next Steps for Prior Learning Assessment in the University of Maine System

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REVISED RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS FOR PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT IN THE UNIVERSITY OF MAINE SYSTEM

UMS PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT TASK FORCE

The University of Maine System (UMS) Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Task Force makes the following slightly revised recommendations to the University of Maine System Credit Transfer Project Steering Committee and the University of Maine System Chief Academic Officers.

The Recommendations and Next Steps below form a protocol that the UMS PLA Task Force recommends piloting for a period of four years, at which time the participating institutions will review their efficacy. The University of Maine System institutions may apply these recommendations beyond UMS at their discretion.

The Task Force also includes a *Glossary of PLA Terms* excerpted from *The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)*, so that UMS sister institutions may communicate clearly, using commonly accepted terminology within the PLA field.

Recommendation 1, General Transfer of Prior Learning Assessment Credit:

The University of Maine System PLA Task Force recommends that credits awarded through Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) options - *Testing, Portfolio, Credential Review, Military Credit, and others* - at any University of Maine System (UMS) institution will be recognized for credit at all UMS institutions. Equivalent credit will be awarded consistent with the MaineStreet transfer course equivalency table (matrix), and if not in the transfer course table (matrix), then evaluated according to each institution's protocols for reviewing transfer credit. Institutional maximum caps may be applied per PLA option (portfolio, military, and so on). See the attached UMS survey of current PLA options available on each campus.

The UMS PLA Task Force also recommends the creation of a publicly viewed UMS webpage that would make information and resources about Prior Learning Assessment and PLA transfer options immediately accessible to the university community.

The Next Steps for General Transfer of Prior Learning Assessment Credit:

SYSTEM-WIDE

- To expand the existing System-wide PLA Working Group into a Task Force, consisting of UMS faculty, administrators, and staff that would serve as a PLA governance body and would continue to coordinate the PLA transfer options for UMS.
- To help the UMS institutions incorporate competency-based assessments in their evaluations of student learning as it relates to Prior Learning Assessment and transfer credit.

- To create a public webpage within the UMS website that publishes Prior Learning Assessment and PLA transfer options to the System community.

INDIVIDUAL CAMPUSES

To create PLA Transfer Working Groups specific to each of the individual University of Maine System Campuses, which will:

- Implement, in the ways each campus deems appropriate and consistent, the recommendations for all the PLA options listed in this document.
- Evaluate newly submitted PLA Transfer requests for course competency equivalencies at their campuses.
- Collect data regarding PLA Transfer Credits reviewed and awarded by their individual institutions in anticipation of the four-year review of the UMS PLA Transfer Credit pilot.

Recommendation 2, Credential Review:

The University of Maine System PLA Task Force recommends that the University of Maine System institutions share information on the resources available to review and evaluate credit awarded for external training and credentials through Prior Learning Assessment.

The Next Steps for Credential Review:

- To develop a database *internal* to MaineStreet that catalogs course equivalents within the University of Maine System for credentials and external trainings.
- To create and maintain an *internal* website that will provide resources and information helpful for each UMS institution to review and evaluate external trainings and credentials.

Recommendation 3, Military Credit:

We recommend that all University of Maine System institutions award credit for learning that occurred during U.S. military service based on the recommendations of the American Council on Education (ACE). Courses at the upper and lower baccalaureate levels will be the only courses considered for transfer credit at this time. No duplicate credit can be awarded. All students with military service will receive credit for basic training according to guidelines specific to each university.

The Next Step for Military Credit:

- To develop a database *internal* to MaineStreet that catalogs the military transcript courses and trainings acceptable for credit at the University of Maine System institutions.
- To form a PLA Task Force *ad hoc* committee to assist in the development of the Military Credit internal database and to develop and document a consistent approach to evaluating military transcripts for credit across the Campuses.

Recommendation 4, Academic Portfolio Assessment:

The University of Maine System PLA Task Force recommends that the institutions of the University of Maine System use the Academic Portfolio Assessment processes and policies, which are in line with the Best Practices published by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL). Credits earned through PLA Academic Portfolio Assessment at one UMS institution will be accepted by any other institution within the University of Maine System. If a portfolio has been assessed for equivalent course credit, then its transfer is automatic. If the portfolio has been assessed for elective credit, then it may be reviewed at the receiving institution.

The Next Step for Portfolio Assessment:

- To form a PLA Task Force *ad hoc* committee, consisting of appropriate UMS Campus faculty, administration, and staff to develop common Academic Portfolio Assessment practices, which will allow all UMS institutions to use a consistent process, compatible with CAEL, and to set comparable standards for student submissions and faculty assessment.

Recommendation 5, Standardized Tests:

Standardized tests such as Advanced Placement (AP), CLEP, DSST, and the International Baccalaureate (IB) will be accepted for credit at all University of Maine System institutions. Other standardized tests may be presented for credit consideration at the appropriate institution.

The Next Step for Standardized Tests:

- To work toward agreement among the UMS campuses on common cut-off scores for the tests, and
- To publish the commonly agreed upon scores and test policies regarding each of the above standardized tests for public viewing, both on MaineStreet and on our UMS PLA public website.

GLOSSARY OF PLA TERMS

The following terms are often used when talking about Prior Learning Assessment. Since these terms are also used in many other disciplines, it is useful to define them using the exact words of The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), which sets national standards and best practices for PLA.¹

academic year – the time period of academic instruction that is divided into semesters, quarters, or trimesters.

ACE - American Council on Education. ACE “provides leadership on key higher education issues and influences public policy through advocacy, research, and program initiatives.” (<http://www.acenet.edu>).

adult Learner – In most institutions, a student over the age of 24 who often attends college part time, is financially independent from parents, has a job outside of school, and delays enrollment in postsecondary education beyond the first year after high school graduation (from *Adult Learners in Higher Education*, CAEL, 2007); as distinguished from the “traditional” student who is 18-24 years old and enters college immediately after high school.

articulation agreement – Agreements among colleges or programs regarding the transfer of credit. For example, a four-year college may have an articulation agreement with a two-year college to seamlessly transfer a student’s credit.

assessment - The process of evaluating a student’s learning; when referring to prior learning assessment (PLA), the process through which college-level credit is awarded or denied.

CAEL – The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (<http://www.cael.org>) links learning and work. CAEL works at all levels within the higher education, public, and private sectors to make it easier for people to get the education and training they need. CAEL publishes the standards for the assessment of learning that colleges use to create policies and procedures for their learning assessment programs.

challenge exam – An examination written by instructors at their respective colleges that is given to learners to assess whether their learning equates to a college course. The challenge exam may be similar in content to the final exam given in a course.

college-level – A determination made by faculty, colleges, and accrediting bodies. Course competencies and outcomes (what is learned as a result of the course), course objectives, course descriptions, and course syllabi assist in recognizing the type, depth, and breadth of learning that is considered college-level.

CLEP – The College-Level Examination Program, a national program that provides standardized examinations in a number of subject matters allowing students to earn college credit for their learning (<http://clep.collegeboard.org>).

competencies or competency – When referring to prior learning assessment, competencies are used in awarding credit or degrees based on learning outcomes rather than on time spent.

DSST – Formerly known as DANES (Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support) Subject Standardized Tests, DSST is another national program like CLEP that provides examinations in subjects (different from CLEP) allowing students to earn college credit for their learning. (<http://www.getcollegecredit.com>).

experiential learning – Direct learning or learning through work, hands-on experience, or community service.

prior learning assessment (PLA) – A term used by colleges and universities to describe the process of earning college credit from learning acquired through a student’s work, training, volunteer experiences, and personal life. Also known as assessment of prior learning (APL), prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR), and flexible assessment (a term used in the UK.).

PLA academic portfolio – A formal communication presented by a student to the college as part of a petition requesting credit or recognition for learning outside the college classroom. The portfolio must make its case by identifying learning clearly and succinctly, and it must provide sufficient supporting information and documentation so that faculty can use it, alone or in combination with other evidence, as the basis for their evaluations (Lamdin, 1992, p. 84).

The portfolio is the package used in assigning academic credit for learning with written explanations that demonstrate competency targeted to a specific area, with documentation that supports that learning in that subject and at the college level. Students ““leaven the mix with ample portions of reflection...The learning is not complete until the learner has some understanding of what both the theory and the practical experience mean.” (Whitaker, 1989, p. 14).

¹Quoted from: Colvin, Janet. *Earn College Credit for What You Know*. CAEL. 5th Ed. Chicago, IL: Kendall-Hunt Publishing Company, 2012. 199-207.

The University of Maine System Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Task Force

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