



Credit for Prior Learning: Best Practices for Kansas Public Institutions

A Guide to Prior Learning Assessment in Kansas

June 2014

Prepared by the Kansas Credit for Prior Learning College Steering Committee
In partnership with Jobs for the Future

Introduction

The Kansas Board of Regents is committed to a 10-year strategic agenda for the state's public postsecondary education system. Entitled *Foresight 2020*, the plan sets long-range achievement goals that are measurable, reportable, and ensure the State's postsecondary education system meets Kansans' expectations. The three strategic goals for *Foresight 2020* are:

1. Increase higher education attainment among Kansans
2. Improve alignment of the State's higher education system with the needs of the economy
3. Ensure state university excellence

One means by which to increase the attainment of postsecondary credentials, especially among adult students, is to award postsecondary course credit for demonstrated knowledge and skill equivalent to the learning outcomes established for postsecondary-level courses. Such credits are awarded based on an assessment of students' prior learning. A formal Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) policy provides consistent quality, accessibility and standard methods for earning credits for prior learning and a structure for awarding those credits.

In recognition of the need to evaluate learning which has taken place outside the higher education classroom, the Kansas Board of Regents offers this guidebook to Kansas public universities and community/technical colleges. The purpose of the recommended standards and policies in the guidebook is to ensure that students in Kansas seeking postsecondary CPL have a consistent and transparent means by which to advance towards a credential or degree regardless where they obtain their education. Each public university and college in Kansas is encouraged to review the guidebook and establish policies for evaluating prior learning and awarding appropriate postsecondary credit aligned with its institutional mission. Institutional CPL policies should adhere to principles of good educational practice and be documented and available to students, faculty and other stakeholders through publications that accurately describe the CPL policies and services. Institutions should also ensure they regularly evaluate their CPL processes to protect the integrity and credibility of CPL and meet their regional accreditation standards.

Goals of CPL include:

- Supporting *Foresight 2020* to increase the credential attainment rate among Kansans
- Aligning CPL in Kansas with Higher Learning Commission standards
- Enhancing the student experience with CPL in terms of accessibility, consistency and transparency
- Elevating the importance of and encouraging appropriate use of CPL
- Increasing student enrollment through the use of CPL
- Defining measures with which to evaluate the effectiveness of CPL

The Board was awarded a grant from *Jobs for the Future* (JFF) in March 2013 for the purpose of assisting more adults to complete college. The grant was part of the Adult Completion Policy Project funded by the Lumina Foundation. This guidebook is the outgrowth of work supported by that grant and completed by the Kansas Credit for Prior Learning College Steering Committee (See Appendix A) with technical assistance and guidance from JFF.

Credit for Prior Learning Purpose Statement

The Kansas Board of Regents is committed to fostering an educated and skilled workforce, an essential component for economic prosperity for the state, its communities and individuals. Increased enrollment in – and successful completion of – postsecondary education is critical to achieving that goal. Credit for Prior Learning (CPL), also referred to as Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), can expedite adults’ completion of postsecondary education programs by evaluating an individual’s existing knowledge and competencies and awarding college credit as appropriate.

For the purpose of this guidebook, “prior learning” includes the postsecondary-level knowledge and skills gained through work and life experiences, such as employer and military training programs, industry certifications, non-credit postsecondary-level courses, and civic or volunteer experiences. CPL encompasses both credit for prior learning and advanced standing for prior learning. Obtaining credit for prior learning is the optimal outcome of a prior learning assessment.

The Board of Regents advocates appropriate use of CPL for its benefits to students, institutions, and the state. As employers continue to increase requirements for higher-order technical, problem-solving and critical thinking skills, it is important for the workforce to be educated at the postsecondary level. A CPL program recognizes the credit-worthy education and training that takes place outside of traditional educational pathways and offers students the opportunity to apply that training and education toward obtaining a postsecondary credential. Having that credential, in turn, positions the student for career promotion, may contribute to job security and may enable the student to compete more effectively in the global economy. Postsecondary education institutions also benefit from CPL as students complete degrees in less time thus increasing efficient use of resources. In addition, colleges and universities can utilize CPL as a recruitment tool and as a means of meeting the needs of adult students. Communities benefit by having residents with postsecondary credentials who form a highly-skilled, qualified workforce.

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I. Definitions and Forms of Credit for Prior Learning

The list below is provided for convenience and to avoid conflicting definitions for CPL terminology. It is not intended to be exhaustive. Kansas institutions may consider adopting these common definitions for their own communications, policies, and internal purposes to simplify and improve the student-user experience.

- A. **Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)** – A comprehensive term used to describe learning gained outside a traditional academic environment. “Prior Learning Assessment” (PLA) is also used to describe CPL. CPL is learning and knowledge students acquire while working, participating in employer training programs, serving in the military, studying independently, volunteering or doing community service, or studying open source courseware. CPL is the evaluation and assessment of an individual’s learning obtained outside a formal academic setting. CPL may take the form of college credit, certification, or advanced standing toward further education or training. Obtaining college-level credit is the optimal outcome. CPL is *not* confined to **portfolio assessment**, which is simply one type of CPL (as are CLEP tests, ACE evaluations, challenge exams, etc., defined below).
- B. **Advanced Placement (AP) Exams** – A series of standardized exams developed by the College Board. College credit is awarded based on exam score. The exams usually follow standardized high school courses generally recognized as being equivalent to undergraduate college courses.
- C. **American Council on Education (ACE) and ACE Guides** –Major coordinating body for higher education institutions in the U.S., providing leadership on 3rd party, unbiased credit equivalency recommendations among other services. ACE Guides are credit recommendations for formal instructional programs and examinations offered by non-collegiate agencies (including civilian employers, the military, professional associations, and other workplace related-training).
- D. **College Level Examination Program (CLEP) Exams** – Tests of college material offered by the College Board and designed to measure college-level competence achieved outside the college classroom. Course credit is given to students earning a satisfactory score on the CLEP exam indicating successful mastery of course material.
- E. **Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)** – Expert in the field of prior learning policy and practice. Publish guidelines for quality – 10 Standards for Assessing Learning (Appendix B).
- F. **Crosswalk** – A diagram illustrating various learning pathways to degree programs.
- G. **Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Educational Support (DANTES) Subject Standardized Tests (DSSTs)** – Examinations developed by the Chauncy Group International and administered by Prometric that allow a student to demonstrate proficiency of college level knowledge and skills. Now available for civilian and military personnel.
- H. **Evaluation of Local Training** — Individual colleges’ program evaluations of non-collegiate instructional programs.

- I. **Excelsior College Examination Program (ECE)** – Examinations for college credit offered by Excelsior College, NY. These were formerly known as “Regents College Exams” or “ACT/PEP Exams.”
- J. **Institutional Exam or Course Challenge Exams**– An examination for a particular course that an academic program or department may utilize to give students credit for a course. A student will work directly with the individual program or department to learn about the availability and cost of institutional course examinations.
- K. **International Baccalaureate Programs (IB)** – An internationally accepted qualification for entry into institutions of higher education, much like the AP program. It is a demanding two-year curriculum culminating with final examinations. Credits are awarded to students who achieve a minimum score on the exams. Graduates of the IB program must demonstrate competency in languages, social studies, the experimental sciences, and mathematics. In addition, the program includes three core requirements that are included to broaden the educational experience and challenge students to apply their knowledge and understanding. To receive a diploma, students must achieve a minimum score of 24 out of a possible 45 points, as well as satisfactorily complete the creativity, action, service requirement.
- L. **Learning Counts** – A resource developed by the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) to guide students in preparing a portfolio to demonstrate their lifelong learning and receive a transcript with college credit recommendations.
- M. **Locally Evaluated Industry and Workplace Credit** – Individually evaluated non-collegiate instructional programs, such as those for industry certification, professional licensure, apprenticeship, and other local workplace training that demonstrate competency required for completion of degree or certificate programs. CPL credit may be awarded based on evaluation by trained faculty in the student’s program, awarded based on recommendations in the ACE Guide, and/or awarded as part of a student’s portfolio.
 - 1. **Apprenticeship:** Apprenticeship is a combination of on-the-job training and related technical instruction in which workers learn the practical and theoretical aspects of a highly skilled occupation. Apprenticeship programs may be sponsored by individual employers, joint employer and labor groups, and/or employer associations.
 - 2. **Certification:** Certification (usually by a 3rd party industry group) is a designation that is obtained once the student is qualified to perform a particular task or job. Certification differs from licensure in that certification is an employment qualification and not a legal requirement for practicing a profession.
 - 3. **Professional Licensure:** “Permission to practice” granted by a governmental entity. Licensure is a legal status. Professional licensure restricts practice of the profession to individuals who have met specific qualifications in education, professional experience, and/or have successfully passed an examination.
- N. **National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS)** - Coordinates teams of college faculty evaluators and subject matter experts to conduct extensive reviews of education and training programs offered outside of the traditional college classroom and translates them into college credit equivalencies. Education and

training by corporations, unions, religious organizations and proprietary schools has been evaluated and cooperating postsecondary institutions grant college credit based on credit recommendations and in accordance with their own transfer policies.

- O. **Portfolio Review Credit (or portfolio assessment credit)** – Credit awarded as a result of review of a portfolio prepared by the student to demonstrate learning acquired outside of the classroom and that is relevant to the student’s educational program. A portfolio may include documentation such as certificates of training, work samples, awards and honors, job descriptions, performance evaluations, samples of work product, evidence of self-directed learning, and resumes to validate that equivalent learning outcomes are met. A portfolio course may be offered by the institution to assist the student in preparing a quality portfolio.
- P. **Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)** – See definition of CPL above.
- Q. **Prior Military Training Credit** – College credit for military training awarded through the American Council on Education (ACE) College Credit Recommendation Service or through direct evaluation of the student’s military service school transcripts.
- R. **Residency requirement** – A requirement that students earn a specified number of the final credit hours necessary for a degree or certificate from the granting institution. Usually residence credits may not be earned through test-out, transfer or other CPL means.
- S. **Right Skills Now** - Component of National Association of Manufacturers – Manufacturing Skills Certification System, which includes nationally portable, industry-recognized certifications combined with for-credit education programs. The education pathways are directly aligned to career pathways in manufacturing.
- T. **Thomas Edison State College Examination Program (TECEP)** – Tests for college credit offered by Thomas Edison State College, NJ.

II. Enrollment Requirements

CPL should be awarded only for degree seeking students who have enrolled in an institution.

III. Number of Credits and Credit for Prior Learning Limits

- A. Institutions should have clear policies outlining the maximum allowable credits for prior learning as a reasonable proportion of the credits required for program completion. CPL policies should align with the Higher Learning Commission criteria and consider maximum CPL awards up to residency requirements (75 percent of total program credits).
- B. In establishing maximum allowable credits, institutions should maintain structures and practices to ensure consistency with:
 - 1. Institution requirements
 - 2. Program requirements
 - 3. Program accrediting agency requirements

IV. Validation Standards for Credit for Prior Learning

A. Validation Methods

Kansas public higher education institutions should award CPL in accordance with the Higher Learning Commission standards (www.ncahl.org), the recommendations of this Guidebook, CAEL standards (Appendix B), and the CPL Quality Check List (Appendix C). CPL should be awarded on a course-by-course basis when the prior learning is equivalent to the learning outcomes in the postsecondary course. Institutions should include in their policy and practice a quality assurance process, documented standard intake processes, CPL advising and guidance from trained advisors, and standard transparent policies.

B. National Exams for Postsecondary Credit

1. Institutions should evaluate the competencies measured in national standard exams and award appropriate credit when the competencies are equivalent to the learning outcomes of college courses and the student has met or exceeded the standards.
2. Institutions should consider the following national exams. The list is not meant to be exhaustive. If additional exams are deemed valid and appropriate by the institution, they should also be considered.
 - College Board College Level Examination Program (CLEP)
 - Advanced Placement (AP)
 - International Baccalaureate Diploma Program advanced courses (IB)
 - DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSSTs)
 - UExcel Exams
 - Excelsior College Examinations

C. Credit Recommendation Services

1. Institutions should follow the recommendations for credit equivalency provided by nationally recognized, reputable credit recommendation services and award credit when the learning outcomes are equivalent to those of the institution's postsecondary courses, and where applicable, approved system-wide transfer courses.
2. Recommendations from the following services should be considered. If additional credit recommendation services are deemed valid and appropriate by the institution, they may also be considered.
 - American Council on Education (ACE) National Guide to College Credit for Workforce Training
 - American Council on Education (ACE) Military Guide
 - National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS)

- Right Skills to Work by the Manufacturing Institute, National Association of Manufacturers (NAM)

D. Industry-recognized Credentials

Institutions should award appropriate CPL for industry certifications that are equivalent to learning outcomes in postsecondary courses.

E. Individual Portfolio Assessments

1. Institutions should provide portfolio assessment options to award credit for prior postsecondary-level learning.
2. Portfolio assessments should be evaluated by trained faculty using national standards established by CAEL or other nationally-recognized sources. Postsecondary institutions should use quality portfolio checklists and/or a professional portfolio service.
3. Students should be counseled on the suitability of portfolio CPL and provided guidance or instruction on preparing quality portfolios.

F. Institutionally Prepared Exams

Institutionally prepared exams may be used to award credit when equivalent, consistent learning outcomes are met. Institutions should ensure exams developed by an individual faculty member or faculty teams are valid, reliable and objective. Institutional exams should be monitored and controlled; content protected for security and use; and proctored responsibly. The assessment criteria (passing grade, competencies measured etc.) need to be determined prior to examination. Grading, required record-keeping and transcription methods for institutionally prepared exams should also be pre-determined and implemented consistently.

V. Quality Credits that Apply to Degree

Credit awarded for prior learning is documented, evaluated, and appropriate for the level of degree awarded and in full compliance with the criteria and standards of the HLC.–Academic credit will be awarded only for degree seeking students who have enrolled in an institution and:

- A. For courses directly applicable to curriculum requirements. Changing majors should not result in reassessment of previously awarded CPL.
- B. CPL shall be applied and used as the course credit equivalencies.
- C. CPL should apply toward majors, minors, concentrations, general education requirements, and electives that count toward the degree or program certificate being sought in the same manner as traditional courses.
- D. CPL should satisfy prerequisite requirements in the same manner as course equivalencies at the institution.

VI. Transferability of Credits for Prior Learning

CPL awarded and documented in a student transcript at any regionally accredited institution whose policy follows the Kansas CPL Guidelines and complies with the Higher Learning Commission criteria should be accepted as transfer credit toward a degree or program certificate at all Kansas public postsecondary institutions.

VII. Fees Assessed to Students

- A. Costs to students for establishment of credit should be comparable throughout the state system and should reflect the actual costs for institutional administration of the CPL evaluation (e.g., actual test fee for a standardized national test plus an administrative fee that covers the actual costs for test proctoring; actual costs for faculty time in portfolio evaluation, etc.).
- B. Fees should be based on the assessment service performed and not determined by the number of credits awarded. Tuition fees should not be assessed for CPL.
- C. Fees for recording CPL in student transcripts should be consistent with fees for other transfer credits.

VIII. Data Tracking and Evaluation

- A. Institutions should ensure that credits awarded for prior learning are recorded in the student information system and on the transcript as transfer credit. The type of credit for prior learning should be denoted in the institutional student data base. The data associated with the credit should include the course identifiers and description of the articulated course, semester (term) for which the credit is applied, credit hours awarded, and the actual date awarded by the institution.
- B. Data definitions and metrics used to evaluate CPL should be consistent statewide and aligned with the metrics for approved system-wide transfer course articulations among all institutions. Evaluation metrics shall include measures for quality and effectiveness of CPL.

IX. Information Dissemination

- A. Institutions should publish on their websites full information regarding their CPL policies and fees to students. Institutions may use additional methods to make consistent information accessible to students regarding CPL credits, policies and the number of students receiving CPL credits. Information should be updated at least annually.
- B. The KBOR website should include links to all institutions' CPL web pages.

- C. A CPL Fact Sheet on the web from each institution should include:
1. General Institutional Policies and link to CPL
 2. Policy differences in departments
 3. Use of CPL (general, major, elective)
 4. Programs accepting CPL
 5. Types of CPL offered
 6. Credit limits for CPL
 7. Fees and other costs
 8. Portfolio assessment policies
 9. Student facts – number of CPL earners, number of CPL hours earned
 10. Transfer of CPL credits within institution
 11. Appearance of CPL credits on transcript
 12. Acceptance of CPL credits from other institutions
 13. Institution contact information for CPL

X. Credit for Prior Learning Guidebook Review

The Kansas CPL Guidebook should be reviewed by the System Council of Chief Academic Officers on an annual basis and updated or revised as needed. The Board Academic Affairs Standing Committee should review and approve the CPL Guidebook in preparation for the Board of Regents. KBOR will annually audit adherence of CPL Guidebook to Board policies.

Appendix A–Kansas Credit for Prior Learning Steering Committee

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Appendix B

The 10 CAEL Standards for Assessing Learning

As the nationally recognized body on prior learning assessment and the only body recognized by all regional accreditors for PLA, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning's (CAEL) Standards for Assessing Learning have become the foundation for most PLA programs. Kansas colleges and universities may use these standards as a guide.

1. Credit or its equivalent should be awarded only for learning, and not for experience.
2. Assessment should be based on standards and criteria for the level of acceptable learning that are both agreed upon and made public.
3. Assessment should be treated as an integral part of learning, not separate from it, and should be based on an understanding of learning processes.
4. The determination of credit awards and competence levels must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic or credentialing experts.
5. Credit or other credentialing should be appropriate to the context in which it is awarded and accepted.
6. If awards are for credit, transcript entries should clearly describe what learning is being recognized and should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.
7. Policies, procedures, and criteria applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available to all parties involved in the assessment process.
8. Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.
9. All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions they perform.
10. Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served, the purposes being met, and the state of the assessment arts.

Fiddler, M., Marienau, C., Whitaker, U. *Assessing Learning: Standards, Principles, and Procedures 2nd*. Chicago: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 2006.

Appendix C

Credit for Prior Learning Quality Checklist

1. CPL is awarded in compliance with the criteria for accreditation of the Higher Learning Commission, Kansas Board of Regents policy manual, state statutes, and the Kansas CPL Guidebook.
2. CPL is awarded for college level learning that is equivalent to learning objectives or outcomes in college courses and is not based on time or experience.
3. Enrollment procedures are structured to benefit students, encourage appropriate application of CPL and avoid artificial barriers.
4. The number of CPL credits accepted for degree or program completion is a reasonable portion of credits and the maximum allowable is established with thoughtful evaluation of program requirements.
5. CPL awards in a college or department are consistent with policy across the institution.
6. Where possible and appropriate, standardized national exams are used for CPL.
7. CPL awards advance the student towards degree or program completion.
8. The institution accepts CPL awarded at other accredited Kansas institutions.
9. CPL fees are reasonable and aligned with actual costs incurred by an institution to deliver the service.
10. CPL fees are based on assessment services performed and not on number of credits awarded.
11. Fees assessed to transcript CPL are consistent with fees to transcript other transfer courses.
12. CPL is transcribed in accordance with state guidelines and allows for institutional analysis of success and statewide data collections.
13. Professional development and training are provided to all personnel associated with CPL including intake counselors, advisors, and other student services personnel.
14. Faculty and deans are provided professional development for quality practices in evaluating equivalent learning outcomes for national standard exams, institutional exams, portfolios and all assessment methods.
15. CPL policies, types, programs, fees etc. are published and widely available to students. All policies and procedures for CPL are transparent and consistent. Continuous improvement processes are in place to improve the students' experience.