

Prior Learning Assessment Workgroup: 2014 Progress Report

www.wsac.wa.gov/reports-and-publications

RCW 28B.77.230

PRIOR LEARNING & PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT (PLA)

Prior learning is defined as the knowledge and skills gained through work and life experience, military training and experience, and through formal and informal education and training from in-state and out-of-state institutions including foreign institutions.

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is the process used to evaluate previous life experience for academic credit. PLA can be accomplished through standardized tests, course challenge examinations, portfolio assessment, and crosswalks between military and work-based learning and college courses.

CROSSWALKS

A crosswalk is a matrix that is used to compare industry- or military-based learning outcomes with outcomes for specific college courses. An example is comparing the outcomes for Basic Law Enforcement Academy training with criminal justice coursework. The following are just a few examples of crosswalks developed by some of our postsecondary institutions.



Industry/Military-Based Program	Academic Program and College
Washington State Basic Law Enforcement	Criminal Justice Program—Highline College
Military Policy Training	Administration of Justice Program—Highline College
CompTIA A+ Essentials Certificate	Information Technology Program—Green River Community College
Various apprenticeships	Multi-Occupational Trades Program—Wenatchee Valley College
NASBITE Global Business Professional Certificate	International Trade, Transportation, and Logistics Program—Highline College
American Registry of Radiologic Technologists (ARRT) Advanced Certificate Exam	Allied Health Imaging Program—Bellevue College

HIGHLIGHTS

There were significant increases over last year in both the number of students receiving PLA credit and the number of credits awarded.

- **12,987** students received academic credit for prior learning that counted toward their major or earning their degree or certificate. This is an increase of 182% over last year.
- **306,308** academic credits were accepted by colleges and universities toward degrees, certificates, or credentials. This is an increase of 261% over last year and equivalent to approximately 6,800 annual full-time equivalent students.

ABOUT THE COUNCIL

The Washington Student Achievement Council is a nine-member council and cabinet-level state agency that provides strategic planning, oversight, and advocacy to support increased student success and higher levels of educational attainment in Washington.

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UPDATE

The workgroup's focus this year was on awarding academic credit to returning veterans for military training. Some of the workgroup's significant accomplishments this year include the following:

1. Gathering and reporting Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) participation data from community and technical colleges as well as public and private baccalaureate institutions.
2. Providing examples of college and university websites that provide better information about PLA practices, and encouraging institutions to incorporate best practices.
3. Initiating a PLA listserv and expanding the information available on the PLA workgroup wiki.
4. Hosting the fourth annual PLA conference in November 2014 with a focus on implementing SSB 5969—an act related to awarding academic credit for military training. The conference provided an opportunity for over 120 attendees from 50 different institutions to review PLA progress to date, improve practices to serve veterans, and share best practices.



In addition, colleges expanded the number of crosswalks comparing industry- or military-based learning outcomes with specific courses in college.

NEXT STEPS

The workgroup continues to develop sample processes and practices for achieving legislative goals that ensure more adult learners efficiently move through postsecondary education and enter the workforce well-prepared.

1. Assist colleges with implementation of SSB 5969 - Awarding Academic Credit for Military Training – requiring each institution to adopt a policy to award academic credit for military training before December 31, 2015 and submit this policy to the PLA Workgroup.
2. Work with Centers of Excellence to expand crosswalks between military and industry training and college programs through PLA pathways.
3. Expand and improve PLA communication across the system.

BACKGROUND

Legislation passed in 2011 required the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) to convene a PLA Workgroup. The workgroup was tasked with coordinating and implementing seven goals, described in statute, to promote the award of college credit for prior learning (RCW 28B.77.230). The workgroup does not set policy—it facilitates collaboration and communication across our system to implement the seven goals established by the legislature.



Increasing Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is one strategy to achieve Washington's educational attainment goal of at least 70 percent of Washington adults earning a postsecondary credential by 2023. Awarding college credit for prior learning increases access and opportunity for Washingtonians, which strengthens the competitiveness of our workforce.