

Prior Learning Assessment Workgroup: 2015 Progress Report

www.wasc.wa.gov/assessments-prior-learning

RCW 28B.77.230 and 28B.10.057

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

Crosswalk refers to a matrix used to compare industry- or military-based learning outcomes with outcomes for specific courses in a college. The following are just a few examples of crosswalks developed by some of our postsecondary institutions.



- **Highline College**—Basic Law Enforcement Academy training compared to Criminal Justice coursework.
- **Pierce College**—Homeland Security Emergency Management Center of Excellence - Criminal Justice, Public Safety, Security, Cybersecurity, and Homeland Security Emergency Management.
- **Yakima Valley College**—Nine departments building industry crosswalks.
- **Community Colleges of Spokane**—Architecture, Automotive, Business and Business Technology, Computer Application Technology Training, Computer-aided design and drafting (CADD), and Computer Information Systems, Fire Science and Fire Officer.
- **Green River College**—CompTIA A+ Essentials Certificate through the Information Technology program.
- **Bellevue College**—American Registry of Radiologic Technologists (ARRT) Advanced Certificate Exam through the Allied Health Imaging program.
- **Wenatchee Valley College**—Various apprenticeships through the Multi-Occupational Trades program.

HIGHLIGHTS

Both the number of students receiving PLA credit and the number of credits awarded continues to increase.

- **17,759** students received academic credit for prior learning that counted toward their major or earning their degree or certificate. This is an increase of 37% over last year.
- **363,126** academic credits were accepted by colleges and universities toward degrees, certificates, or credentials. This is an increase of 19% over last year and equivalent to approximately 8,070 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. Applying new data collection practices for reporting PLA participation from community and technical colleges as well as public and private baccalaureate institutions.
2. Providing workshops, webinars, and examples to assist colleges and universities develop policies and practices for awarding academic credit for military training to meet the requirements of SSB 5969.
3. Hosting the fifth annual PLA conference in November 2015 with a focus on implementing SSB 5969—an act related to awarding academic credit for military training. The conference provided an opportunity for 110 attendees to improve practices to serve veterans, learn of new initiatives to link veterans to academic programs, and share best practices.
4. Collecting policies and practices for awarding credit for military training from colleges and universities as required by SSB 5969 (codified as RCW 28B.10.057).




NEXT STEPS

The workgroup identified priority actions that will be the focus of its work in 2016, key among them being continued efforts to maximize credits for all returning adults through PLA, especially veterans.

1. Convene the sixth annual statewide PLA Conference.
2. Continue to assist colleges with implementation of SSB 5969.
3. Expand crosswalks through PLA pathways.
4. Improve access to PLA information, especially for veterans.
5. Clarify PLA credit transfer between institutions.
6. Integrate apprenticeship information and data in workgroup activities and reports.

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.