



Prior Learning Assessment

Discussion & Recommendations for MUS Two-Year Colleges

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1. Montana's Public Two- and Four-Year Institutions of Higher Education Prior Learning Assessment Table

It was acknowledged that Montana's two-year public colleges have a wide assortment of Prior Learning Assessment options available on their campus including:

- a. Tests: CLEP, Advanced Placement, challenge exams from academic depts., other
- b. ACE recommendations: Military, workforce education & training
- c. Evaluated non-college programs with local employers
- d. Portfolio workshop or course
- e. Individualized assessments

2. Marketing PLA options in Montana?

- Invest in promoting what we have, like we did for on-line programs; newspaper ads, listing all campuses that have PLA available.
- Invest in educating the public about what PLA is; most people don't know what it is; use layman's terms.
- Make sure we clearly explain that PLA documents learning (not training hours).

3. What makes sense for Montana?

- Portfolio Assessment Challenges
 - Campus has information on portfolio assessment in the college catalog; example cited where only one portfolio assessment went through in 17 years of PLA on the books.
 - Portfolio assessment is intensive on the faculty side.
 - Timing is important; no faculty on contract in the summer to do assessment.
 - Lot of work on students' part; in-depth commitment.
 - Student doesn't always have enough valid material to get credit.
 - Faculty need continual training in assessing prior learning.
 - Need to consider a student seeking a two-year credential. If students don't jump on PLA right away and get a quick turn around on assessment, they may lose

out. They need to know very quickly if prior learning applies to their program of study.

- For evaluating common core courses, portfolio assessment would require that each proposed course equivalency would have to be vetted with academic standards committee.

4. Possibilities

1. Pilot an awareness campaign.
2. Best ways to advance portfolio assessment-
 - a. Increase Number of Campuses Offering Portfolio Assessment. Offer seed money for additional Montana Colleges to do PLA.
 - b. Have one college become the portfolio assessment center
 - c. Work with LearningCounts.org
 - For options b. and c., having a single evaluation provider would improve consistency and transferability options.
 - Having LearningCounts.org would provide a ready-made pool of faculty experts.

5. Challenges to Consider

If we have initial funding for any initiative, how do we plan to sustain?

Does Learning Counts cause the student to lose the face-to-face contact?

6. Other

Credit for Prior Learning Handbook (see Colorado Credit for Prior Learning Handbook example). Should we create a handbook for the state of Montana?

State Policy/System Approaches (see CPL Resource Guide)

- Does MUS have any policies on PLA? Sue will check
No, we do not have any specific policies on PLA