



UTAH SYSTEM OF
HIGHER EDUCATION

MEMORANDUM

TAB A

November 20, 2020

Credit for Prior Learning

Credit for Prior Learning (also referred to as Prior Learning Assessment or PLA) is an ongoing priority of the Academic Education Committee. PLA is a means of recognizing and providing credit for knowledge, competencies, and skills that students have acquired through formal or informal education outside a traditional academic environment or at the initiative of the individual learner. The experience may be acquired through a variety of settings such as participation in employer training programs, military service, independent study, and sometimes through advanced high school coursework. Prior learning assessments can save students time and money as they work on their degrees and can be especially beneficial for adult students. The Utah Board of Higher Education wants to provide students with more options for demonstrating college-level learning from their previous educational, work, or life experiences in order to help them complete their degree requirements as quickly as possible.

Prior learning assessment requirements in state law

In 2019, the State of Utah adopted a new section of state code outlining requirements for the Board of Higher Education to create plans, policies, and reporting related to credit for prior learning. See le.utah.gov/xcode/Title53B/Chapter16/53B-16-S110.html

Those requirements and the status of the Board in complying are as follows:

1. By November 2019, the Board shall establish policies that provide minimum standards for all institutions regarding prior learning assessments and their transferability.
 - a. STATUS: The language in Board Policy R472, *Credit for Prior Learning*, mirrors and expands upon the language in the state code. It was adopted by the Board in November 2019.
2. The Board shall develop a plan for advising and communicating with students and the public about credit for prior learning and report it to the Legislative Interim Committee by November 2019.
 - a. STATUS: That plan, presented in an Issue Brief in November 2019, included the website, data tool, and institutional plans that are enumerated separately below, as well as:

- a. The formation of the systemwide Prior Learning Committee in October 2019 comprised of representatives from each USHE institution. The committee's role, as outlined in policy, is to ensure:
 - i. that students know their PLA options, that faculty and key staff (like advisors) are trained on the types of prior learning assessments available for students at their institution, and that institutions consider ways they might expand the kinds of assessments available to students at each of the USHE institutions;
 - ii. the creation of the "USHE Prior Learning Assessment Quality Standards and Best Practices Handbook" to guide institutional implementation of the new policy;
 - iii. the preparation of institutional implementation plans; and
 - iv. the centralization of PLA information pages on institutional websites to guide students through their options for earning credit for prior learning.
3. The Board shall (a) create and maintain a website that provides statewide information on prior learning assessments and credit for prior learning.
 - a. STATUS: This information is available at ushe.edu/initiatives/prior-learning-assessment
4. The Board shall identify a software or data tool that will support the Board in communicating with students regarding common course numbering, articulation of credits, and transfer of credits for prior learning.
 - a. STATUS: The tool adopted by the Board is the [Utah Transfer Guide](#)
5. By May 2020, institutions shall report the steps they will take to implement the policy, provide training for faculty and staff, and communicate to students about credit for prior learning.
 - a. STATUS: Those plans were reported through the Prior Learning Committee in February 2020 and are in progress.
6. The Board shall establish minimum scores and maximum credit for each standardized exam specified in statute (i.e., Advanced Placement, CLEP, and DSST).
 - a. STATUS: Over 30 faculty major committees worked across institutions to recommend minimum scores, maximum credits, and course equivalencies for standardized exams and these recommendations were approved by the Board in October 2020.
7. An institution shall annually report to the Board on (a) each form of prior learning assessment for which the institution provides credit for prior learning; and (b) the total amount of credit for prior learning the institution provides to students.

- a. **STATUS:** Institutions first reported the forms of PLA available on their campuses in December 2019 and those reports and the total amount of credit they have awarded for prior learning will be updated annually.

Forms of prior learning assessment offered at USHE institutions

Statute and Board policy require the institutions to recognize several forms of prior learning assessments, and the following forms are available within the System:

- ***Nationally recognized standardized exams.*** In addition to the exams specifically mentioned in statute—Advanced Placement, College-Level Examination Program, and DAN TES Subject Standardized Tests—USHE institutions also recognize International Baccalaureate exams, foreign language exams like the BYU Foreign Language Assessment Tests, and University of Utah MLA tests. ACT Subject Exam scores can also provide credit for some course requirements, depending on major.
- ***Assessments performed by respected national organizations,*** such as the American Council of Education, the National College Credit Recommendation Service, and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning.
- ***Faculty-determined institutional assessments,*** including challenge exams.
- ***Individual assessments,*** such as portfolio assessments or individual performance assessments.
- ***Program evaluations,*** completed by an institution, of non-collegiate programs or training courses to recognize proficiencies.
- ***Locally evaluated industry and workplace credit.***
- ***Recognized licensure or industry assessments*** such as Federal Aviation Administration exams, NCLEX Nursing assessments, and Peace Officer Standards and Training.
- ***Third-party or industry certifications*** such as NOCTI, CompTIA, IC3, Microsoft, Cisco, etc.

Not all options are available at all campuses, as institutions are not obligated to assess prior learning in subjects that are not part of their institutional offerings. Undergraduate students must be admitted and enrolled at a USHE institution to be eligible to be awarded credit through prior learning assessments. All institutional prior learning assessment policies, services, and procedures must comply with the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities standards, as well as any specialized or program accreditation guidelines. Some limitations may be also imposed by the residency requirements of the regional and other accrediting bodies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

Board policy specifies that if a student successfully demonstrates college-level learning through a prior learning assessment, institutions shall award credit and transcript it as credit for prior learning. Once recorded on a transcript by a USHE institution, credit earned for prior learning is transferable within the System on the same basis as if the credit had been earned through regular study at the awarding institution.

Commissioner's Recommendation

This is an information item; no action needed.