



January 15, 2021

## Updates to the Prior Learning Assessment Policy, R472

In 2019, the Utah Legislature passed [H.B. 45, Higher Education Credit Amendments \(53B-16-110\)](#) requiring the Utah System of Higher Education to establish policies that provided minimum standards for all institutions regarding accepted forms of prior learning assessments, awarding credit for prior learning, and institutional procedures for prior learning. In November 2019, the former USHE Board of Regents enacted [Policy R472](#), which established minimum standards and processes for awarding prior learning credit. After a year of implementation, it was clear that the policy needed to provide additional details on:

- Communication to faculty, advisors, and current and prospective students regarding standards and costs related to credit for prior learning and prior learning assessments;
- Required training of faculty and advisors on prior learning assessment standards and process; and
- Portfolio-specific prior learning assessments.

These more detailed standards are included in the attached draft of the updated Policy R472.

### Commissioner's Recommendations

The Commissioner recommends that the Board approve the proposed updates to Policy R472.

### Attachments:

## R472, Credit for Prior Learning<sup>1</sup>

**R472-1 Purpose:** The Utah Legislature, the Governor and the Utah Board of Higher Education have identified higher education as a key to economic prosperity and quality of life. One of the Board's top priorities is ensuring students complete a certificate or degree as quickly and affordably as possible. One proven method to increase completion rates and keep the cost of attendance low is awarding credit through prior learning assessments (PLA). This policy establishes the process and minimum standards by which students attending USHE institutions may earn academic credit through prior learning assessment.

### R-472-2 References

- 2.1 Utah Code §53B-16-105, Common Course Numbering—Credit by Examination Transferability of Credits—Agreement with Competency-Based General Education Provider
- 2.2. Utah Code §53B-16-107, Credit for Military Service and Training – Transferability – Reporting
- 2.3 Utah Code §53B-16-110, Credit for prior learning—Board plan and policies—Reporting
- 2.4 Regent Policy R470, General Education, Common Course Numbering, Lower Division, Pre-Major Requirements
- 2.5 Regent Policy R471, Transfer and Articulation of Credit (pending approval)
- 2.6 Regent Policy R473, Standards for Granting Academic Credit for CTE Course Work Completed in Non-Credit Instructional Formats)
- 2.7 Recommended Standards in Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Policy and Practice for Tennessee Public Colleges and Universities (2012)<sup>2</sup>

### R472-3 Definitions

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<sup>1</sup> Adopted November 15, 2019

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[https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/server\\_files/files/Recommendations%20for%20Standards%20in%20PLA%20-%20Final%20Version%201-1.pdf](https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/server_files/files/Recommendations%20for%20Standards%20in%20PLA%20-%20Final%20Version%201-1.pdf). This policy draws heavily from the Tennessee System of Higher Education's Recommended Standards.

**3.1 “Advanced Placement (AP) Exams”** A series of tests developed by the College Board initially for AP High School courses.

**3.2 “American Council on Education (ACE) Guides”** Published 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).

**3.3 “College Level Examination Program (CLEP) Exams”** Tests of college material offered by the College Board.

**3.4 “Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Educational Support Subject Standardized Tests (DSSTs)”** DSSTs are examinations administered by Prometric. While originally being restricted to active and retired military personnel, these tests are now available to civilians.

**3.5 “Excelsior College Examination Program (ECE)”** Formerly, Regents College Exams or ACT/PEP Exams, these are examinations for college credit offered by Excelsior College, NY.

**3.6 “Institutional Course Challenge Examination Credit”** A course-specific examination which academic programs may provide and by which students may demonstrate college level competency and receive credit for the course.

**3.7 “International Baccalaureate Programmes (IB)”** The International Baccalaureate is an internationally accepted qualification program for students who have completed a specific two-year high school curriculum and demonstrated competency through exams in languages, experimental sciences, social sciences, and mathematics.

**3.8 “Program Evaluations/Evaluations of Industry and Workplace Experience”** – Evaluations of non-collegiate instructional programs, such as but not limited to those for industry certifications, professional licensures, apprenticeships, and other workplace trainings that demonstrate competency required for completion of degree or certificate programs,

**3.8.1 “Apprenticeship”:** Apprenticeship is a combination of on-the-job training and related instruction in which workers learn the practical and theoretical aspects of a highly skilled occupation. Apprenticeship programs can be sponsored by individual employers, joint employer and labor groups, and/or employer associations.

**3.8.2 “Certification”:** Certification is a designation an individual earns outside an institution of higher education that ensures the individual is qualified to perform a task or

job. Certification differs from licensure in that certification is an employment qualification and not a legal requirement for practicing a profession

**3.8.3 “Professional Licensure”:** Professional licensure protects the public by enforcing standards that restrict practice to individuals who have met specific qualifications in education, work experience, and exams. Licensure is a means by which “permission to practice” is regulated. Licensure is required by law for some professions.

**3.9 “Portfolio Review (or portfolio assessment)”** Assessment of samples of a student’s individual work related to the specific skills, theoretical background, and content knowledge of a particular course or courses which are evaluated by department faculty. Students prepare a portfolio to demonstrate and measure learning acquired outside of the classroom. Portfolio samples must include documentation such as work products, writing samples, performances, artwork, evidence of self-directed learning, and resumes, etc. and may require demonstration of critical thinking and disciplinary application.

**3.10 “Prior Learning”** Knowledge, competencies, and skills aligned with academic outcomes that are acquired through formal or informal education outside a traditional academic environment or at the initiative of the individual learner, including through participation in employer training programs, military service, and independent study.

**3.11 “Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)”** A proven, validated process through which faculty subject matter experts evaluate a student’s previously learned competencies in a particular field and grant college credit when appropriate. The process may be performed by USHE faculty or by faculty at other institutions contracted by a national third-party assessor, such as the American Council on Education (ACE), the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), and the National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS).

**3.12 “Prior U.S. Military Training Credit”** College credit for military training and service as recorded in the student’s Joint Services Transcript.

**3.13 “Thomas Edison State College Examination Program (TECEP)”** TECEP exams are tests for college credit offered by Thomas Edison State College, NJ.

**3.14 “Transfer Credit”** Credit earned at a post-secondary institution of higher education and recorded on a student’s official transcript. Recorded transfer credit is evaluated by the receiving institution to determine if it is accepted or not and to determine how accepted credit applies to degree requirements. Credit awarded by a USHE institution will transfer to other USHE institutions with applicable academic programs.

**3.15 “System Transfer Guide”** A USHE-licensed, online tool that enables students to assess credit transferability between USHE institutions.

**3.4 “Operational Costs”** The costs to institutions to administer and evaluate credit for prior learning.

#### **R472-4 General Standards**

**4.1** USHE institutions must develop a robust program for PLA in accordance with the standards of this policy.

**4.2** PLA credits awarded by any USHE institution are equivalent to the same credits earned at any USHE institution for traditional classroom-based college-level learning. PLA credits will transfer as equivalent among USHE institutions consistent with Board Policy R470—Common Course Numbering, Lower-Division, Pre-Major Requirements, Transfer of Credits, and Credit by Examination.

**4.3** Institutions shall award or deny PLA credits consistent with this policy and in accordance with the standards of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU).

**4.4** Credits awarded through prior learning assessments are for demonstrated college-level learning articulated to recognized college courses and programs, as determined by faculty/subject matter experts. It is not credit awarded simply based on experience. The assessed learning outcomes must reflect an appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing, and synthesis of learning to demonstrate its relevance to degree programs and its alignment with course content, rigor, and quality of the awarding institution and across all USHE institutions.

**4.5** Institutions must vigorously communicate to students the availability of and process for earning credits via PLA.

#### **R472-5 System Responsibilities**

**5.1 Prior Learning Committee:** The Commissioner of Higher Education shall appoint a Prior Learning Committee to establish and maintain minimum standards for all USHE institutions for awarding PLA established in this policy. The committee will annually review methods of PLA through which institutions award credit and the total amount of credit for prior learning the institution awarded to determine trends, student academic outcomes, and update this policy to meet its purpose. The committee will also ensure information technology systems will consistently record and track data collected related to prior learning, as well as enable accurate reports.

**5.2** The System Transfer Guide will provide system-wide and institutional information on how credit awarded through prior learning assessments will transfer within the system.

**5.3** The Board shall annually review institutional policies and processes to ensure they comply with this policy.

## **R472-6 Institution Responsibilities**

**6.1 Institutional PLA Policy:** Institutions shall establish policies on awarding credits for learned acquired in extra-institutional settings (structured and non-structured) through prior learning assessments that remove restrictions to access, expand the range of educational opportunities, and record awarded credits on the student's transcript.

**6.2 Implementation:** USHE institutions are responsible to implement credit for prior learning within the context of their missions, roles, student needs, and academic programs. Each institution's chief academic officer or designee is responsible to oversee credit awarded for prior learning. Institutions shall comply with this policy and provide students with prior learning assessment opportunities as deemed appropriate by its faculty. Institutions will work with the Board to support all prior learning assessment efforts.

**6.3 Communication to students:** Institutions shall inform students of opportunities to earn college credit via PLA through advising, institutional websites, catalogs, and the Utah Transfer Guide. Institutions shall provide students at minimum the following information:

- 6.3.1** Accepted forms of prior learning assessments;
- 6.3.2** How credit is awarded for prior learning;
- 6.3.3** Potential impacts on financial aid;
- 6.3.4** Transferability of credit for prior learning among institutions;
- 6.3.5** How prior learning is transcribed; and
- 6.3.6** Costs associated with PLA and earned credit.

**6.4** Each institution must maintain a central landing page on the institutional website to provide information on all available PLA options and explain the processes for requesting assessments, how credit is awarded for prior learning, and the appeals process.

## **6.5 Training**

**6.5.1** Institutions' chief academic officers and chief student affairs officers are responsible for providing training on PLA methods, standards, costs, transcription requirements, and processes to faculty, advisors, registrars, bursars, and other support staff.

**6.5.2** Institutions shall train faculty on designing and implementing portfolio-specific prior learning assessments.

**6.5.3** Institutional training programs for faculty and staff should include:

**6.5.3.1** Guides for Portfolio development and format

**6.5.3.2** Application of Portfolio assessment rubrics

**6.5.3.3** Institution-specific practices (administrative, etc)

**6.5.4** Reviewers also should have opportunities for ongoing professional development in portfolio assessment in order to maintain validity and reliability of assessments

#### **R472-7 Reporting**

**7.1** Institutions shall annually report to the Board each form of prior learning assessment through which they provide credit, the total amount of PLA credit the institution awarded students, the number of students who have been awarded credit for prior learning, and updates to institutional policies and procedures.

**R472-8 Accepted Forms of PLA** Institutions shall award credit for prior learning from the following sources:

**8.1** Learning acquired through extra-institutional settings, including military service.

**8.2** Nationally recognized, standardized exams, including:

**8.2.1** Advanced Placement (AP);

**8.2.2** College-Level Examination Program (CLEP);

**8.2.3** DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSST); and

**8.2.4** Excelsior College Examination Program (ECE)

**8.2.5** International Baccalaureate (IB)

**8.2.6** Thomas Edison State College Examination Program (TECEP)

**8.3** Nationally recognized organizations, including:

**8.3.1** American Council of Education (ACE);

**8.3.2** National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS); and

**8.3.3** Board-approved postsecondary associations.

**8.4** Faculty-determined assessments for each institution, including:

**8.4.1** Course Challenge Exams;

- 8.4.2 Portfolio Assessments;
- 8.4.3 Individual Performance Assessments; and
- 8.4.4 Program evaluations of non-collegiate programs or training courses to recognize proficiencies; and
- 8.4.5 Evaluations of industry and workplace credit.

#### **R472-9 Awarding Credit**

**9.1** When a student successfully demonstrates college-level learning, institutions shall award credit and record the credit on the student’s transcript. Institutions are not obligated to assess prior learning that does not articulate with courses they offer.

**9.1.1** Awarded credit will be recorded on the transcript as “Credit for Prior Learning”;

**9.1.2** The form of PLA method will be recorded on the transcript;

**9.1.3** Credit will be recorded as the awarded institution’s course including prefix & number, title, and credits awarded.

**9.2** Credit earned through prior learning will apply toward appropriate general education, degree, or certificate requirements and should not be awarded if it duplicates credit already earned. Upon transfer within the USHE, a student may present a transcript from a USHE institution to a receiving USHE institution to determine the applicability of credit to the student’s chosen major. The receiving institution shall evaluate the credit to be transferred pursuant to board policy. This information should also be marked in the Utah Transfer Guide where possible.

#### **9.3 System-wide minimum scores and maximum credits for standardized exams:**

USHE Faculty Major Committees shall meet to make recommendations on the minimum scores/maximum credits and course equivalencies for which students may receive credit for AP, CLEP, DSST, and IB exams and other nationally recognized exams when applicable; those recommendations are forwarded to the Utah Board of Higher Education for approval. These minimum scores, maximum credits, and course equivalencies are standardized across the USHE institutions and will be retained following transfer to another USHE institution.

**9.4 Transparency of the award/denial of PLA credit:** Institutions must adhere to the following procedures when a student has applied for PLA credit:

**9.4.1** Portfolio and performance assessments: Assessor must provide to the student a rationale for the amount of credit awarded and a written explanation of the portfolio evaluation, regardless of outcome.

**9.4.2** Other forms of PLA credit: If credit is denied for a course equivalency, an explanation or justification must be made available to the student. Where system-wide course equivalencies have been established, they must be honored by institutions.

**9.5 Appeals:** Institutions shall establish and communicate a process for students to appeal PLA credit determinations. When practicable, institutions' appeals processes should closely mirror existing academic appeals processes for traditional and transfer courses.

**9.6 Applicability to a student's major:** Institutions should advise students about expectations and limitations of credit for prior learning. In particular, institutions should work with students to identify possible alignment of their previous experiences with academic programs, advise them on requesting prior learning assessments, and advise students to pursue credit for prior learning that aligns with general education requirements or courses within a student's major, but not for credit that would be extraneous to their degree or that duplicates credit they have already earned.

**9.7 Credit for Current and Former Military Personnel:** Pursuant to Utah Code 53B-16-107, all USHE institutions shall provide written notification to each student applying for admission that the student is required to meet with a college advisor in order to receive credit for military service and training. Upon student request, USHE institutions will provide credit based on a review of recommendations from a Board-approved postsecondary association to include the American Council on Education and other sources as may be deemed appropriate by the institution. To receive credit under this provision, current and former military personnel must meet with an academic advisor to discuss applicability of credit to program requirements, possible financial aid implications, and other factors that may impact attainment of the student's educational goals, such as competencies that are transferable to a course of study. Upon transfer within the USHE, a student may present a transcript from a USHE institution to a receiving USHE institution to determine the applicability of credit to the student's chosen major. The receiving institution shall evaluate the credit to be transferred pursuant to this policy. To receive credit under this provision, current and former military personnel must meet with an academic advisor to discuss chosen major. The receiving institution shall evaluate the credit to be transferred pursuant to this policy.

**9.7.1 Processes for Evaluation of Credit for Current and Former Military Personnel:** Representatives from USHE institutions who have responsibility for veterans' services shall meet at least annually to review institutional policies and practices relative to awarding credit for current and former military personnel with the goal of maintaining consistent system-wide practices for evaluating and awarding credit pursuant to Section 9.5.

**9.7.2** For ACE-evaluated military credit, students must request and submit to the institution an official transcript/ACE Guide.

**9.8 Portfolio Assessment:** Portfolio assessments are particularly variable and complex in their procedures. Unlike other forms of PLA, portfolio assessments place the greatest burden on the individual institutions to develop procedures and evaluate the credit, while also making the most demands on students to demonstrate their learning. Institutions should develop processes for students to petition for and receive credit for knowledge and skills related to particular courses or courses of study for which there are not existing PLA options and for which a portfolio would be a viable option. That process should include the following elements:

**9.8.1** Designating advisors or mentors who can work with students wanting to petition for credit to help them examine their previous learning experiences, identify their college-level knowledge, and determine if that knowledge fits within their degree plan.

**9.8.2** Assigning a faculty member, a department chair, or dean to determine whether a portfolio or other type of individualized prior learning assessment would be most suitable for demonstrating content mastery for particular courses within the student's degree plan. If a portfolio is the best option, the student and the faculty member will identify the specific skills, theoretical background, and content knowledge of the associated course or courses and the types of work samples or documentation of college-level knowledge the student should prepare to demonstrate proficiency, in alignment with the recognized competencies and expected learning outcomes of the course.

**9.8.3** Opportunities for students to request feedback from the faculty member as they prepare their portfolios.

**9.8.4** Once a student submits a portfolio, the faculty member or a faculty assessment committee reviews it and determines whether the portfolio merits awarding course-equivalent credit.

**9.8.4.1** Only faculty academically qualified in the relevant discipline and who are appropriately credentialed should be assigned to assess portfolios.

**9.8.5** Institutions should clearly inform students of the following and provide them with examples:

**9.8.5.1** What a portfolio is – its length, the work involved, and required documentation

**9.8.5.2** What level of writing skills will be required

**9.8.5.3** That portfolio development is a self-directed activity

**9.8.5.4** That a portfolio is not a resume – it must include documentation of college level skills, theoretical background, and content knowledge and application of that knowledge to demonstrate achievement of commonly recognized student learning outcomes for the course and the critical thinking, problem solving and decision-making appropriate to the discipline

**9.8.5.5** That they may not earn any credit for their portfolio if it does not demonstrate adequate proficiency in the subject matter.

## **9.9 Portfolio process guidelines**

**9.9.1** For course-specific assessment, the portfolio should document the achievement of commonly recognized student learning outcomes for that course. The use of the term “commonly recognized” is meant to avoid student-created learning outcomes that are not usually tied to discipline program outcomes or specific course outcomes in accredited institutions and thus may not be appropriate for a discipline or a specific course in that discipline.

**9.9.2** The resulting portfolio, and subsequent evaluation rubric, should incorporate the following:

**9.9.2.1** Identification of critical learning events experienced by the student

**9.9.2.2** Breadth and depth of new knowledge and skill(s) acquired

**9.9.2.3** The relationship of new knowledge and skill(s) with appropriate theory/concepts associated with academic discipline and degree program

**9.9.2.4** The application of new knowledge and skill(s)

**9.9.2.5** Critical thinking, problem solving and decision-making skills appropriate to the course level.

**9.9.2.6** Supportive documentation to verify competency.

**9.10 Institutional Course Challenge Exams:** Institutional course challenge exams are developed by department faculty or curriculum teams and may be administered through campus testing centers or academic departments. Departments determine which courses can be challenged; the minimum standards that must be met for demonstrating adequate mastery of the course learning outcomes, skills, and knowledge; and exit competencies based on those minimum

standards. Institutions should clearly identify processes for students to prepare for the assessment, for example, by consulting with a designated faculty member in the department to discuss course content and the feasibility of taking the course challenge exam and how to prepare for the exam.

**9.11 Workplace training evaluations:** Institutions may opt to use credit recommendations from third-party faculty evaluators such as the American Council on Education (ACE) for workplace evaluations (ACE Guides) or they may individually evaluate programs. Institutions may develop assessments for workplace experience through partnerships with local employers, where appropriate, and should identify when industry certificates, professional licensure standards, and apprenticeships can equate to course credit in particular programs.

#### **R472-10 Eligibility**

**10.1** Undergraduate students must be admitted and pursuing a credit-based academic program at a USHE institution to be eligible to earn PLA credits. Students may be required to be admitted to a major for some awards of credit for prior learning.

**10.2** The number of credits awarded through prior learning may be limited by the residency requirements of accrediting bodies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, the student degree plan, and university graduation requirements.

#### **R472-11 Transferability**

**11.1** Once recorded on a student's transcript by a USHE institution, credit earned for prior learning is transferable on the same basis as if the credit had been earned through regular study at the awarding institution.

#### **R472-12 Cost**

**12.1** Prior learning assessment fees must be transparent and reflect only the operational cost of administering a PLA program. Institutions may not charge tuition for the number of credits awarded.