



Credit for Prior Learning Initiatives at Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) Degree-Granting Institutions

The Utah Board of Higher Education (UBHE) is committed to providing students with many options for demonstrating college-level learning from their previous educational, work, or life experiences to help them complete their degree requirements as quickly as possible. Consequently, it has worked intensively for the last few years to simplify students' ability to earn academic credit for knowledge and skills acquired outside of higher education settings, such as through performance on national standardized exams in college subject matters or military or work experience. The UBHE's Policy R472 and the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) Prior Learning Assessment Quality Standards and Best Practices Handbook provide guidelines for institutions to follow to ensure students can access opportunities to demonstrate they can perform the essential student outcomes of specific college courses that are part of their intended major pathways and that the credit they earn through prior learning assessments will be transferable between institutions. Policy R472 also requires annual reporting to the Board's Academic Education Committee on system and institutional efforts to provide credit for prior learning.

Why focus on credit for prior learning?

Prior learning assessments can save students time and money as they work on their degrees. There is a strong correlation between credit for prior learning and increased completion rates, and prior learning assessment (PLA) can also be an important tool for closing equity gaps. For example, [a national study](#) of more than 230,000 adult students at 72 colleges and universities found that 49% of students who received credit for prior learning completed a degree or certificate compared to only 27% of their peers. Easing the process by which students earn credit for prior learning is also beneficial to institutions, as it often pays for itself in increased retention. [A recent WICHE/CAEL study](#) found that students who earn PLA credit take 17 more course credits at the institution that granted it than do students without PLA. Streamlining the processes for students to earn credit for their prior learning [becomes especially important](#) as the economy shifts, and workers will be required to reskill and upskill continually. They will need to do so as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Credits earned 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 granted 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. It is marked as the equivalent of a recognized, often commonly numbered, course and is transferable to other USHE institutions.

System Progress on Credit for Prior Learning Strategic Initiatives

The Board of Higher Education has identified key initiatives related to credit for prior learning, some of them outlined in state code (HB45, 2019) and others recommended by the Academic Education Committee of the Board and the USHE Prior Learning Committee. Those key initiatives are reflected in Policy R472, “Credit for Prior Learning,” which the board amended in January 2021. Policy R472 asks for a progress report to be made to the Board’s Academic Education Committee each year, including updates on the following:

Ongoing coordination across degree-granting institutions

- The creation of a USHE Prior Learning Committee. The committee was organized in 2020 and is comprised of representatives from each degree-granting institution. Committee members meet regularly along with staff from the Commissioner’s Office. They have the primary responsibility at their institution to ensure that options for PLA are communicated to students and that information is easily accessible, that faculty and key staff (like advisors) are trained on the types of prior learning assessments available for students at their institution, and that the institution is implementing plans to expand the kinds of assessments available to students.
- A system approach to PLA also requires close collaboration between faculty, staff, and academic leadership within USHE institutions. The Commissioner’s staff regularly share progress on PLA efforts with the UBHE Board Transfer Council (BTC), the Utah Transfer and Articulation Committee (comprised of transfer advisors and individuals from registrar’s offices who work on transcribing PLA), Chief Academic Officers who oversee institutional faculty, the General Education Task Force which ensures the transferability of general education courses and their equivalents, and USHE Faculty Major Committees that have responsibility for determining the alignment of assessments for prior learning with USHE course equivalents.

System-wide agreements on course equivalencies for prior learning assessments

- In 2020, the board approved the first round of recommendations from USHE Faculty Major Committees regarding national exam minimum score and course and credit equivalencies for AP, CLEP, and DSST exams; IB exams were added in 2021; and exam equivalency determinations are updated on an annual basis when prompted by faculty requests or changes to exam content.
- Registrars meet to share information on how to transcribe CPL. They have also engaged in software product discussions that can be compatible throughout the USHE system. Registrars are including a PLA link in their department webpages. Some institutions are moving to a complete online CPL application system and doing away with paper trails;

Institution-created assessments

- Institutions are in the early stages of working with faculty/subject matter experts to develop more personalized assessments for students as needed, especially where national assessments are not available. These assessments should also be transcribed as the equivalent of recognized courses and should transfer across the system. When needed, the assessments may be developed in consultation with USHE faculty major committees. These more personalized assessments may include:
 - Challenge exams;
 - Portfolio assessments;
 - Individual performance assessments;
 - Locally-evaluated industry and workplace credit.

Student-centered communications

- State code and Board policy require a central USHE PLA information page for students and for public education and higher education staff. The PLA page provides information on standardized credits and course equivalencies for national exams and links to institutional web pages. That system-level information is available at <https://ushe.edu/initiatives/prior-learning-assessment/>. Tables listing the course equivalencies for national standardized exams are updated annually.
- The Board is required by state law to identify and use a single data tool that will allow students to explore how credit for prior learning would apply for transfer. This tool is the Utah Transfer Guide, which includes information on course and credit equivalencies for national standardized exams.
- State code requires institutions to make information on PLA easily accessible to students. This past academic year, all eight degree-granting institutions have worked to increase the visibility and access to their prior learning websites, but these pages must be updated regularly. The websites are much easier to access than they have been in the past. They are linked to admissions, registrars, and advising websites. They contain much clearer information, and list the steps a student takes to learn about and apply for credit for prior learning:
 - <https://academics.dixie.edu/prior-learning-assessment>
 - <http://faculty.slcc.edu/provost/curriculum/pla.aspx>
 - https://snow.edu/offices/registrar/credit_prior_learning.html
 - <https://www.suu.edu/hss/pla/>
 - <https://admissions.utah.edu/prior-learning-credit/>
 - <https://www.usu.edu/admissions/information/credit>
 - <https://www.uvu.edu/cpl/>
 - https://www.weber.edu/Records/prior_learning.html
- USHE annually communicates PLA options, especially the course equivalencies for national assessments, to the Utah State Board of Education, high school counselors, UCAC advisors, and

other groups who work directly with students. Institutions are expected to provide the same information directly to their primary feeder high schools.

Training for key institutional administrators (including admissions, academic, and transfer advisors) and faculty on Prior Learning initiatives

- The Commissioner’s office will be providing training to key institutional leadership teams at a system PLA Conference on May 18, 2022. Utah Valley University is generously sponsoring the conference via grant funding it has received to help establish best practices for credit for prior learning. USHE institutions will each send leadership teams of up to ten representatives who will use the conference time to enhance their existing credit for prior learning policies and implementation plans. Team members will include registrars, advisors, staff from diversity offices, faculty, senior academic officers, student affairs officers, and media/website staff. The Prior Learning Committee has held two planning meetings and invited speakers from the American Council on Education and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education to provide training on CPL best practices. Institutional team work will include planning for academic advising, course transcripting, diversity and inclusion efforts, portfolio assessments, and training plans for other institutional staff.
- Institutional leadership teams will continue to provide similar training and guidelines for faculty and staff on their campuses.
 - Chief Academic Officers have been updating existing institutional PLA policies and procedures. They are working with academic departments to streamline and update PLA processes and accessibility for students, including portfolio design and mentoring.
 - Advisors are receiving training on new student PLA orientation and how to advise and encourage students to apply for CPL where applicable. At some institutions, incoming students are being surveyed on PLA so advisors know which students to encourage to apply for CPL credit.
 - Faculty are beginning to develop more institutional challenge exams. They are also learning about national standards for assessing workplace learning. Portfolio assessment is being revised, and in some cases, is being implemented for the first time.

Next Steps

The greatest challenge institutions face at this time is that PLA has to be done efficiently to award students for their hard work. This means policies need to be clearly accessible and understood and the process for evaluating credit and awarding credit has to be transparent. To do this requires a whole new way of thinking for faculty in disciplines who have never done work experience assessment, portfolio assessment, and other forms of non-conventional academic assessments. It also requires close cooperation with advisors and registrars to make sure that procedures employed have broad support and everybody’s role in the CPL process is clear and doable. This requires sharing ideas and practices within and among institutions in the state. For the 2022-23 academic year, a great deal of attention will be focused on the following CPL priorities:

1. Completing institutional Credit for Prior Learning website updates and communication and outreach to students;
2. Institutional training of academic advisors on CPL;
3. Faculty engagement in development of portfolio, work experience, and other relevant CPL assessment standards;
4. The Commissioner's office working with registrars on transcribing standards for CPL;
5. Continued sharing of best practices among USHE institutions.

Annual Report on the Amount of Credit for Prior Learning Earned within the System

Institutions are asked to report annually to the Board on each form of prior learning assessment for which the institution provides credit and the total amount of credit for prior learning the institution provides to students. Systemwide, over 33,000 students earned more than 264,000 credits for prior learning during the last year. This includes credit earned through standardized exams, portfolios, work experience, and other forms of PLA. It is likely that other credit for prior learning was also earned but not reported because all institutions are just beginning the process of determining how to establish data collection techniques. For example, some academic departments grant credit for work completed in an occupational capacity in conjunction with conventional coursework, a form of assessment that registrars may not be aware is occurring at their institutions. Standardizing reporting will require close cooperation between faculty and staff.

**Total # of Students Receiving Credit and Total Credits Awarded, USHE
AY 2020-21**

Institution	Total Students Receiving Credit	Total Credits Awarded
SLCC	1,804	12,555
Snow	956	4,760
SUU	1,714	14,769
UU	5,484	72,512
USU	10,920	66,490
DSU	799	5,514
UVU	9,395	65,299
WSU	2,693	22,278.5
Total	33,765	264,177.5

Credit Awarded through Standardized National Exams

Institution	AP: Students	AP: Credits	IB: Students	IB: Credits	CLEP: Students	CLEP: Credits	DSST: Students	DSST: Credits	ACT: Students	ACT: Credits
SLCC	756	9,185	9	156	89	596	0	0	222	666
Snow	143	1,409	0	0	137	1,283	0	0	657	1,974
SUU	639	7,739	15	213	10	81	0	0	710	2,511
UU	2,548	48,319	169	4,438	8	39	0	0	2,151	16,453
USU	4,685	44,540	53	395	48	231	3	9	4,835	14,511
DSU	336	3,108	1	24	16	72	0	0	329	987
UVU	2,081	22,657	14	128	51	346	4	18	5,001	15,008
WSU	746	8,824	20	358	26	129	4	30	1,132	3,396
Total	11,934	14,581	281	5,712	385	2,777	11	57	15,037	55,506

A note on whether to anticipate growth in credit through national standardized exams associated with advanced high school coursework: with the growth in availability of Concurrent Enrollment (CE) across the state, many students are opting to take actual college courses in high school instead of taking high school AP or IB courses and then hoping to score enough on a single high stakes exam to earn college credit. USHE sees an advantage to CE courses over PLA for high school students, because CE provides them with actual college experience and students are ensured of being exposed to all of the essential learning outcomes that prepare them for subsequent coursework. As Concurrent Enrollment grows, we may see a modest drop in total credits awarded for AP and IB examinations, as high school counselors in some districts are already encouraging students to take CE courses instead of other advanced coursework options. CE is also generally less expensive than the cost of standardized exams.

More modest levels of credit for prior learning were earned through DSST and other exams for military personnel and veterans (see also the associated Credit for Military Service and Training report, which measures the number of credits earned by veterans and members of the military through all means of CPL).

Standardized Military Credit

Institution	DD214 Students	DD214 Credits	METC Students	METC Credits
SLCC	5	5	0	0
Snow	0	0	0	0
SUU	0	0	0	0
UU	8	32	0	0
USU	0	0	0	0
DSU	0	0	0	0
UVU	0	0	0	0

WSU	11	76	12	515
Total	24	113	12	515

Portfolio assessments

Several institutions have developed portfolio assessment procedures to grant CPL. The methods they use to assess portfolios have been shared with the other USHE institutions as we begin to develop strategies for all institutions to establish and encourage portfolio assessments for prior learning.

Granting credits for course completion at technical colleges is another form of credit for prior learning that helps students move into degree pathways. With the merger of the tech colleges and the degree-granting institutions, the Board is transitioning technical colleges from clock hour to credit hour models and working out course and program alignments in ways that will allow for standardized transfer between tech colleges and degree granting institutions in the near future. In addition, the creation of common transfer pathways at degree-granting institutions and articulation of course content between degree-granting institutions and tech colleges will increase the amount of tech college credit awarded at degree-granting institutions, but it will show as transfer credit instead of credit for prior learning.

Portfolio and Technical College Membership Hour Articulations

Institution	Portfolio Students	Portfolio Credits	TCM Students	TCM Credits
SLCC	11	83	0	0
Snow	14	82	0	0
SUU	147	1,477	0	0
UU	0	0	0	0
USU	0	0	0	0
UT	3	12	1	30
UVU	0	0	76	90
WSU	0	0	335	4,523
Total	175	1,648	520	6,610

Policy Implementation and Training

What has your institution done to establish or modify existing policy or to adjust procedure in regards to prior learning assessment?

SLCC	Salt Lake Community College reviewed and substantively revised institutional policy that structures awarding credit to students who bring prior learning experiences to the college. The updated policy is scheduled for Board of Trustees approval this spring with a Fall Semester 2022 implementation date.
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Snow	Snow has their guidelines listed on their webpage . In addition, they are currently designing a PLA assessment course for students who have other types of PLA they would like to demonstrate. It will be a portfolio-based assessment, and if it involves credit from a specific department, the department chair will be involved. Rubrics are also being designed.
SUU	SUU is still in the process of responding to the legislative change in statute and corresponding change to the Board of Higher Education policy. As such, we are: (i) embarking on a policy change to respond to these state-wide changes, (ii) discontinuing our practice of offering PLA 3920 credit, and (iii) replacing this PLA course with an alternative that complies with state law and Board policy.
UU	<p>The <i>Source of Record</i> is how the credit awarded for prior learning is recorded on a student's Utah academic transcript:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test/Other credit: credit posted to a student's transcript in the <i>test or other credit</i> statistics prior to institutional recorded courses • Internal credit: courses are posted within the term it was earned as Utah credit
USU	<p>1-Surveyed all academic departments to verify how all PLA credit is currently being awarded;</p> <p>2-Worked directly with USHE and UTAC to update articulations for the recent standardization of PLA credit (AP/CLEP/IB);</p> <p>3-Developed and implemented internal checks to verify annual updates from USHE major committee meetings moving forward;</p> <p>4-Reviewed existing policies for all forms of PLA and have had continued conversations on ways to improve transferability;</p> <p>5-Developed earned admissions pathway to aid prospective students in being fully admitted to USU. Through this pathway students can earn PLA credit.</p>
DSU	DSU revised their Policy 523: Extra-Institutional Credit to align with USHE Policy R472, which was approved by the DSU Board of Trustees in April, 2020.
UVU	A university committee, a team of Associate Deans, Faculty Senate, Staff and students developed Policy 525 which was approved by the Board of Trustees, June 2021 . We also created a CPL policy https://policy.uvu.edu/getDisplayFile/5ef4dfa9bc6e2b201de3cfe3 and established a website https://www.uvu.edu/cpl/ Conversations are happening across campus, structure and systems are being developed, software is being researched, the process of transcribing portfolio credit has been significantly reduced, a portfolio creation support course has enrollments every semester. A CPL clearinghouse is being compiled, and there is a push to add CPL information to every academic program web page by the end of the calendar year.
WSU	Weber State University has well established policies for prior learning. However, focus is being directed towards portfolio reviews to develop a consistent process and procedure.

How has your institution gone about implementing your prior learning policy and/or in streamlining prior learning assessment?

SLCC	<p>Over the past two years, SLCC charged a collaborative work team to analyze prior learning assessment (PLA) best practices, create basic design principles, and develop an approach for a scalable and formalized college-wide PLA structure. Recommendations from the team, in addition to changes in statute and policy at the system-level, now guide SLCC's PLA implementation. A director for PLA will be hired and situated in academic affairs to lead PLA activities. The PLA director will collaborate with the Faculty Development Center to engage with and train faculty members on both developing authentic assessment metrics (such as challenge exams) and assessing student provided evidence of prior learning (such as skills demonstration or portfolio review). SLCC will also select an academic advisor experienced and trained in PLA for student support. Implementation of policy and training to support students, faculty, and staff will be active Fall Semester 2022.</p>
Snow	<p>Most of this has been moved to the registrar's office for management and analysis. We have also hired an AVP of online development, and she is collaborating with the registrar on these cases.</p>
SUU	<p>SUU has developed a comprehensive "clearinghouse" page for all avenues of earning credit for prior learning (see: https://www.suu.edu/credits/). Based on new state law and new Board policies, SUU is discontinuing their PLA 3920 course and replacing it with a different approach to awarding credit. SUU is also developing policies that correspond to this change.</p>
UU	<p>Prior Learning Evaluation at UU:</p> <p>A-Military Credit: Students are awarded credit based on their Joint Services Transcript (JST) or DD-214 documentation.</p> <p>B-Credit by Exam: 1) Advanced Placement (AP); 2) College Level Examination Program (CLEP); 3) International Baccalaureate (IB).</p> <p>C-Language Proficiency Credit: Students who are fluent in a foreign language and have NEVER taken a lower-level class in that language are usually eligible to purchase credits to fulfill the BA Language Requirement or obtain additional credits toward the total semester credit hour requirement. (Includes BYU-FLATS).</p> <p>D-Challenge Course Exam: Students may challenge a Utah course by taking the final examination for the course with the approval of the department chair and director of admissions. Challenge exams are provided to students who, through life experience, have knowledge equivalent to university courses, and to students who attended a school with limited transferability.</p>
USU	<p>A-USU allows incoming students to complete an online survey to inform USU if they are participating in certain forms of PLA. This allows incoming students to fulfill prerequisites prior to arriving at USU;</p> <p>B-Ensuring students are informed about PLA policies and procedures is critical to the success of USU's institutional goals. USU has focused on informing incoming/prospective students about these opportunities in various ways. Incoming freshman and transfer students</p>

	<p>participate in online orientation. In module 2, students are introduced to the registration process. Additional information regarding common PLA options have been added to the module, along with a link to the informational website. Incoming students are encouraged to meet with academic advisors during the orientation process. Utilizing best practices, advisors inform students about PLA opportunities. Advisors also explore the potential academic impacts with students and make referrals to appropriate campus departments.</p>
DSU	<p>DSU developed a process for seeking PLA credit that included two pathways, both of which require a portfolio: a) seeking credit for a single course; and b) seeking a block of elective credit. Within the second path there is also a short form in lieu of a portfolio for those learners who have taken DSU non-credit courses through our partner entities such as Pluralsight and have earned DSU badges. DSU set up a website and assigned a staff PLA mentor who helps walk learners through the appropriate path and connect with appropriate people.</p>
UVU	<p>Informational outreach at UVU has been accomplished through policy 525, a new website with an intake process, and intentional presentations to department advisor/leadership teams. Departments are creating strategic plans to expand CPL offerings. An intentional portfolio course UVST 1100 is developed to serve UVU students in portfolio development and review. Academic advisors were trained in CPL principles and current state of CPL offerings in a self-paced course in summer 2020.</p>
WSU	<p>Streamlining PLA is a priority for WSU. The focus for this year is to move from a paper-based system to an online form. Additionally, moving the process to an online environment will allow for more efficient and timely processing. Furthermore, the online forms can easily be updated so that they are accurate in their processing. WSU is engaging with SmartSheets to develop this technology.</p>