Prior Learning Assessment in the Montana University System

Update from the PLA Council

September 15, 2016
Prior Learning Assessment

• Many potential students come to higher education with some form of college-level prior learning.

• PLA is a set of established, validated methods for assessing non-collegiate learning for college credit.

• With BOR Policy 301.19 (approved Sept. 2015), the MUS strives to standardize and make the most efficient use of PLA for our students.
• Per Policy 301.19, Commissioner Christian received nominations and appointed a PLA Council.

• Council is composed of faculty, and personnel from admissions, advising, veterans, registrar, and financial aid offices, and from OCHE.

• Purpose of the Council is to aid in the implementation of the Board-approved PLA policy.
Council Timeline and Activities

- First online meeting January 2016
- Four face-to-face meetings
- Facilitated appointment of PLA Liaisons on each campus
- Organized stakeholder meetings with PLA Liaisons on each campus
- Solicited feedback from stakeholders on what aspects of PLA are working, and what needs improvement
Feedback-Guided Year 1 Priorities

• Encourage construction and vetting of unit-specific PLA Policy/Guideline documents

• Enable methods for Tracking, Transcription, and Transfer of PLA credits

• Research and recommend PLA fee structures

• Enhance visibility and outreach, especially to veterans organizations

• Explore partnerships with the Montana workforce that include apprenticeships and internships
Impact of PLA on Active and Returning Military Personnel

- Encourages military personnel to return to school
- Validates and accredits learning and training acquired in service
- Mitigates unintended consequences
- Gets vets into challenging classes appropriate for their experience level
- Initiates the relationship between faculty and students
PLA Council Year 1 Summary

• Established lines of communication with campuses

• Made measurable progress on Year 1 Priorities
  • Policies
  • Tracking, Transcription, Transfer
  • Fees
  • Outreach
  • Collaboration with workforce learning
Challenges and New Opportunities

- Raise PLA awareness on campus
- Raise PLA awareness in the community
- Provide regular PLA training to:
  - Admissions/recruitment personnel
  - Advisors
  - Veterans’ offices
  - Financial aid offices
  - Faculty
2016 PLA Council

• Stephen Lodmell (Chair) - University of Montana, Missoula
• Joel Sims - Great Falls College MSU
• Bill Ryan - Highlands College of Montana Tech
• Michael Schulz - UM Western
• Katherine Williams - MSU Northern
• Ann Ellsworth - MSU Bozeman
• Garth Sleight, Miles Community College
• Dena Wagner-Fossen, Great Falls College MSU
• Ron Larsen, MSU Bozeman
• Clifford Coppersmith, City College of MSU Billings
• Ricki Jones, UM Western (vacant as of July, 2016)
• Elizabeth Engebretson, Student Representative
• Ex-Officio
  • Shawn Grove, VETS Office Director
  • Lexy Fisher, TAACCCT Grants (vacant as of Sept, 2016)
• Susan Jones, OCHE
• John E. Cech, OCHE