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
  o 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.
  o Portfolio assessment is intensive on the faculty side.
  o Timing is important; no faculty on contract in the summer to do assessment.
  o Lot of work on students’ part; in-depth commitment.
  o Student doesn’t always have enough valid material to get credit.
  o Faculty need continual training in assessing prior learning.
  o 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
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*