



STATEMENT ON AWARDING CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING IN ILLINOIS

In the 2021 strategic plan for higher education in Illinois, *A Thriving Illinois*, increasing prior learning assessment of students to award credit for prior learning (CPL) was identified as a critical way to recruit, retain, and graduate adult students. This recommendation is supported by extensive national research into the effects on students when they're offered prior learning assessment (PLA) opportunities such as professional credential review, academic program challenge exams, or portfolios that lead to awarding course credit. In their set of PLA 'boost' reports issued in 2020, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) pointed directly to how receiving CPL saved students considerable money and time in pursuing their education. Students awarded CPL also pursued more overall credit hours and demonstrated higher levels of persistence and program completion, compared to students at institutions without PLA systems or offering limited PLA options (Klein-Collins, Taylor, Bishop, Bransberger, Lane, & Leibrandt, 2020). Yet while recently conducting a large-scale project on developing a competency-based PLA instrument for use by Illinois' early childhood teacher preparation programs, Donovan and Brennan (2022) learned in focus groups with Illinois registrars and academic affairs officers from community colleges and universities that relatively minor amounts of PLC are being awarded statewide, across all majors.

The main theme of *A Thriving Illinois* is a call for all institutions to examine their practices through an equity lens and to redesign them accordingly. The national PLA 'boost' report (Klein-Collins et al., 2020) also points to how when BIPOC and low-income adult students had equitable access to PLA methods, their program completion rates were significantly higher than those of their non-PLA receiving peers. These

higher rates were seen especially among Hispanic (71% vs. 24%), Black (40% vs. 17%), and low-income (55% vs. 27%) adult students. Given these national findings, the Faculty Advisory Council Working Group on Prior Learning Assessment and Credit urges the IBHE to work in coordination with the ICCB to develop a task force of faculty and administrators that engages Illinois institutions in the following:

- Conducting a review of their extant PLA/CPL-awarding practices and policies, including their rates of awarding prior learning credit for each major, according to student demographics;
- Analyzing their acceptance of CPL in transfer, by major and student demographics; and
- Creating a statewide system of policies and practices that mandate transferability of CPL awarded through processes similar to those of the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI).

The Illinois Department of Employment Security (2022) forecasts that through 2030, jobs in Illinois requiring postsecondary education will grow faster than those that do not. Considering the projected initial college enrollment cliff for institutions of all types (Boeckenstedt, 2022), creating and implementing robust, integrated PLA and CPL approaches within and among institutions will be a way to increase enrollment, retention, and graduation of the educated workforce Illinois needs. More importantly, the Illinois higher education system will be demonstrating its recommitment to the work of equity called for in *A Thriving Illinois*.

References

Boeckenstedt, J. (2022). Will your college survive the demographic cliff? Chronicle of Higher Education. Blog post. Accessed from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/will-your-college-survive-the-demographic-cliff>

Donovan, M.A. and Brennan, A. (2022). The early childhood competency-based virtual reality PLA Project. Presentation, College Changes Everything Annual Conference, July [online].

Illinois Department of Employment Security. (2022). Learn more, earn more: Illinois' high-demand, high-wage occupations through 2030. November.

Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P. and Leibrandt, S. (2020). The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes. CAEL and WICHE. Accessed from <https://www.cael.org/news-and-resources/new-research-from-cael-and-wiche-on-prior-learning-assessment-and-adult-student-outcomes>

Statement ratified for forwarding to the IBHE Board and Agency administrative staff by the Faculty Advisory Council on June 16, 2023.