

TOPIC: RECOMMEND APPROVAL OF INCLUSIVE PROCESS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A STATEWIDE PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT POLICY

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I. SUMMARY

This action item recommends the Commission approve a process, which includes the Department, stakeholder councils, faculty, administrators, and other appropriate individuals at institutions of higher education as well as interested parties, to create a comprehensive, statewide Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) policy. When completed, the policy will provide greater consistency and transparency that can assist students in achieving their goals and the state in achieving Commission Master Plan Goals 1 & 3 to increase degree completion and close achievement gaps. It also recommends a course of action that will be inclusive, deliberative, and provide all public institutions of higher education with ample opportunities for input. Last, one of the main goals directing this work is to ensure that PLA credits earned at one public institution will be accepted in transfer and apply to equivalent general education requirements at any receiving public institution and to unify equivalently applied cut scores for major and elective credit to the greatest extent possible.

II. BACKGROUND

Revisions since February 13, 2015

Based on feedback from the Commission and stakeholder groups, the following revisions were made to this action item since it was presented to the Commission as a discussion item at its February 13, 2015 meeting:

1. The title was revised to highlight the fact that the Commission is being asked to approve an inclusive process with goals that will lead to a Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) policy for Colorado. The CCHE is not being asked to approve a policy at this time.
2. In Section II, under Colorado Policy Barriers, #6 was revised to clarify that, although students may not be awarded credit for a passing score on a CLEP World Language exam, they would not be required to take an introductory World Language course when they are already proficient in that language.
3. Under A Recommendation, PLA and Colorado, three phases were established. Phase 1 lays out goals and tasks that would ensure all types of PLA credit transfer and apply to general education (gtPathways) requirements. It contains common cut scores for standardized exams. While it does not require every institution to award credit for every type of PLA (e.g., workforce credit and portfolio review), the goal is for every institution to transfer in and apply PLA credit awarded and applied to general education (gtPathways) requirements at another Colorado institution to its own

- general education (gtPathways) requirements, without the need for students to resubmit test scores or other documentation. It also proposes a sample format for making cut scores and application of PLA credit transparent and consistent across institutions (see Appendix E: Sample Format for Standardized Exam Cut Scores).
4. Under A Recommendation, PLA and Colorado, Phase 2 establishes a data gathering, analysis and recommendation process for individual institutions to determine cut scores and applicability of PLA credit to course equivalencies in the major. The attempt will be to unify equivalently applied cut scores for major and elective credit where appropriate, though it will not be a requirement. Phase 2 also contains a goal for institutions to support military/veteran student success.
 5. Under A Recommendation, PLA and Colorado, Phase 3 establishes reporting, transcripting, communication and periodic review goals, which are based on best practices from other states with similar policies.
 6. Under A Recommendation, PLA and Colorado, a Constituent Review Team is proposed to take the place of the previous Task Force. A timeline is suggested with target dates for various deliverables as certain phases and tasks are completed. The earliest deliverable will be completion of Phase 1, Goal 1 with a target date of December 2015. The last deliverable will be completed in Phase 3 by December 2016.
 7. Finally, the Staff Recommendation was revised to reflect that staff is asking the Commission to approve this process in order to develop a statewide prior learning assessment policy. It should be noted, however, that while the majority of members of Academic Council support this recommendation, there was not consensus.

Senate Bill 10-003 charged the Commission with developing a master plan for Colorado higher education, which states in part, the master plan must

...include accountability measures that will demonstrate that students receive high-value and high-quality educational services that are provided with the efficiency necessary to reduce attrition and increase retention and enable students to attain their degrees in a reasonable period of time, and to help ensure students achieve post-graduation success.

This proposal is the next step in implementing the Colorado Commission on Higher Education's (2012) master plan, [*Colorado Competes*](#). The research shown herein demonstrates that the development of appropriate policies can reduce attrition, increase retention, enable students to achieve timely completion, and reduce costs.

National Trends

Colorado is not alone in this endeavor. The Lumina Foundation (2014), one of the main national organizations assisting states to achieve their goals, has as its own goal for the year 2025 to have 60 percent of Americans hold a college degree, certificate or other high-quality postsecondary credential. This is in line with the Commission's master plan target to reach 66 percent postsecondary credential attainment for Colorado citizens. According to HCM Strategists (2014),

twenty-two other states have set similar goals. The Lumina Foundation asserts, and it is backed up by the research that will be highlighted below, that meeting these goals entails three necessary requirements: 1) Base postsecondary credentials, including degrees, on learning; 2) Create smarter pathways for all students; and 3) Make higher education accessible and affordable to all who need it (pg. 4). Department staff agrees with these requirements and notes that state higher education executive officers in other states are also working towards them. The following is a brief description of the Lumina Foundation's (2014) requirements and the work already underway to meet them in Colorado:

1) Base postsecondary credentials, including degrees, on learning.

"...learning outcomes must be transparent to employers, to educational institutions, and to students themselves" (pg. 4). This requirement is in line with Colorado's gtPathways general education content and competency criteria that are currently undergoing revision by faculty and Directors of Assessment. This revision of gtPathways content and competency criteria, into clear learning outcomes, will facilitate the creation of assessments, which can be used to evaluate students' prior learning, thus creating more opportunities for students to get credit for the learning they have already completed and can demonstrate.

2) Create smarter pathways for all students.

"All learning should count, and all students should know what they can do next with the skills and knowledge they have acquired... [these pathways] should recognize and validate learning obtained in other settings, such as the military and in the workforce; [and] they should facilitate students' smooth transfer between and among various institutions" (pg. 4). This is in line with Colorado's gtPathways general education curriculum and twenty-eight statewide transfer articulation agreements, which can shorten the time it takes to earn a degree.

3. Make higher education accessible and affordable to all who need it.

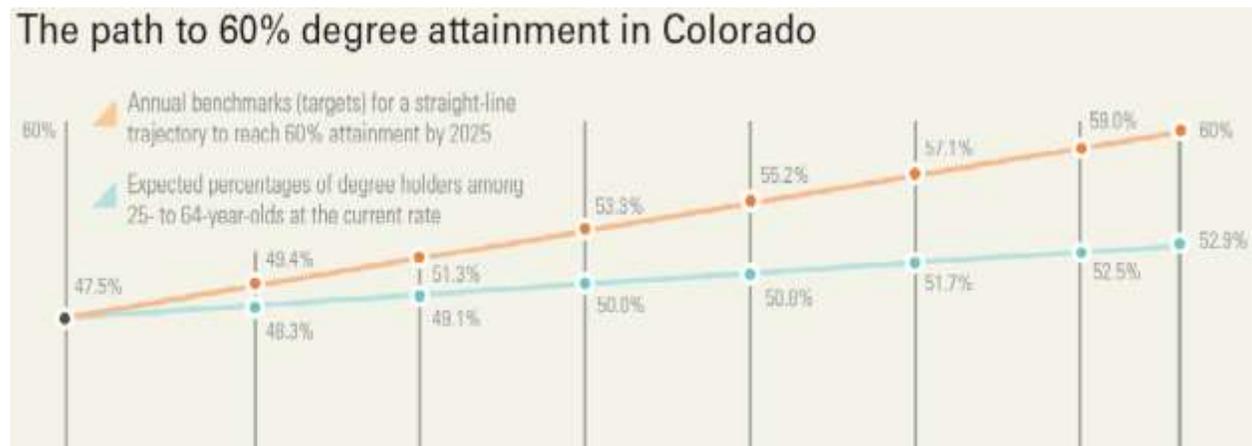
By creating opportunities for Colorado students to earn college credit for the competencies they have mastered and, by guaranteeing the application of that credit to receiving institutions' equivalent degree requirements when students transfer, the state can help incent students to enter higher education, can shorten time to completion and will save students money on tuition and other expenses related with seat time-based coursework.

Adult Learning

A statewide Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) policy can help Colorado achieve its goals, especially when it comes to attracting adults with some college, but no degree, back to higher education. According to the Lumina Foundation (2014, pg. 34), there are 651,179 Colorado residents, ages 25-64, with some college, but no degree. Given that Colorado must increase degrees awarded to meet its goal (Figure 1 below), and given that adults with some college but no degree are a significant proportion of the population (22.98%), a statewide PLA policy should

contain provisions that will attract these individuals back to higher education to complete their credentials.

Figure 1: The Path to 60% Degree Attainment in Colorado



Lumina Foundation (2014, pg. 34). *Note: The Commission's goal is 66%.

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)

Jamie P. Merisotis, President and CEO, Lumina Foundation (2014) explains,

...within the higher-ed system, there is growing acceptance of learning obtained outside the classroom, such as in the workplace or the military. In addition, many new competency-based approaches are being pioneered nationally. These programs and institutions award credit, not merely because students have spent a certain amount of time enrolled in courses, but because they have demonstrated genuine learning. Sectors beyond higher ed are responding to the challenge and embracing change as well. Industry groups are stepping up efforts to offer or refine their own methods for assessing and certifying students' learning and fitness for jobs. (pg. 1)

Learning obtained outside the classroom can be assessed and documented through a wide variety of types of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA). The State of Tennessee's (2014) PLA website concisely explains the rationale for and defines different types of PLA:

- Prior learning assessment (PLA) is a powerful resource to help you earn a college degree through demonstrating learning that takes place through work, employer training programs, military service, independent study, and voluntary or community service.
- PLA is beneficial for working adults, individuals with families, learners who have substantial work or service experience and can demonstrate college-level learning, and those who have delayed college and are ready to take the next step toward a college degree.

Common forms of PLA include, but are not limited to:

- I. Standardized Exams
 - a. Advanced Placement (AP) Exams – 35 exams in 5 general education areas
 - b. College Level Examination Program (CLEP) Exams - CLEP exams are 33 exams in 5 different subject areas offered by the College Board. Most CLEP tests cover lower level and introductory knowledge of certain subjects, many of which fall within general education requirements. The cost is typically \$80-90 per exam. For more information visit <http://clep.collegeboard.org/>
 - c. DSST Credit by Exam Program - Formerly known as the DANTES Program, tests knowledge of college material through 38 exams in 6 subject areas for upper and lower division credit. Originally only available to military personnel, DSST exams have been made available to the general public for a fee of \$80 per test.
 - d. International Baccalaureate Program Exams
- II. Challenge Exams
 - a. Course Challenge Exams - Local tests developed by faculty, or standardized exams like CLEP adopted by faculty, to verify learning achievement for a particular course. This is the type of competency testing required by §23-1-125(4), C.R.S., mentioned above.
- III. Nationally Recognized Published Guides
 - a. American Council on Education (ACE) CREDIT (Workforce-based credit recommendation service) - This is a service offered through ACE to recognize learning that takes place in the work place in the form of training (corporate, nonprofit, government, etc.) to transfer toward a college degree at participating institutions. Over 600 businesses, agencies, and organizations have had their training evaluated by ACE resulting in thousands of evaluated courses. Students request that ACE compile the details of the training that they have taken into an ACE transcript. The credit is kept on file through ACE and transferred by transcript to institutions, which means that students may need to request the transcripts to apply this credit. The first transcript costs \$40, with copies costing \$15 each. Samples of training programs include those offered through McDonald's and Wal-Mart.
 - b. ACE Military Credit - This is a service offered through ACE to recognize learning that takes place in the military through coursework or apprenticeships. The courses are offered through the military, but ACE records the credit through its transcript service. Learning is also documented through crosswalks from specific jobs, such as with the Joint Services Transcript (JST).
- IV. Individual Assessment
 - a. Portfolio-based Assessments - A portfolio is a compilation of documents or other evidence that demonstrates college-level learning. These are reviewed by faculty at the institution and credit is awarded based on their assessment of the portfolio. The [Council for Adult and Experiential Learning \(CAEL\)](#) also provides this service for a fee through its "[Learning Counts](#)" program.

Though all these forms of PLA are available, not all Colorado institutions make them fully available to students. And for the more commonly accepted forms of PLA, like AP credit, institutions' minimum cut scores are inconsistent making it difficult for students to know if the credit will transfer and apply to students' chosen degree programs upon transfer. Colorado could eliminate this issue by creating common statewide cut scores; however, we know that faculty are concerned that PLA credit may not be as rigorous as seat time credit and that students may not be adequately prepared for subsequent coursework. It's important to note that there is recent research to inform policymakers' decisions from other states and institutions (AACRAO, 2015). That research will be described below.

Current Status in Colorado

Colorado Public Institutions of Higher Education

Appendix A: Colorado Institutions' PLA Policies shows which forms of PLA Colorado institutions currently accept and contains links to the institutions' PLA policies. Colorado's fifteen public, 2-year institutions award all forms of PLA to some extent and follow the Colorado Community College System's *Credit for Prior Learning Handbook*. Of Colorado's 4-year institutions, CSU-Global Campus appears to award the most PLA. CSU-Global Campus reports the majority of general education credit that is transferred from alternative means is CLEP, DSST, AP, or its own competency based exams. They report that as of October 31, 2014:

- 72 students have passed 80 Competency Based Exams (CBE) with 212 credits awarded (122 exams were attempted, 61% passed on the first attempt and 71% passed on the second attempt); and
- Even more students than above have received CLEP credits towards their degrees; and
- 126 students have received passing scores on 374 Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) portfolio projects with 1,123 credits awarded.

Adams State University reported in December 2014 it receives two to three portfolio review requests per month and that, typically, the content in the portfolio does not align with the content in a specific ASU course. ASU provides portfolio reviews free of charge to the student, but reports that it places a financial challenge on the institution because of time it takes to review a portfolio.

As pertains to veterans in particular, CU Denver created a "credit package." A CU Denver representative reported,

A significant factor in our credit package for veterans is that we ended up with a general education, foreign language proficiency, experiential learning, and elective credit package; all of which depends on the extent of the military rank and overseas deployment. (Personal Communication, January 29, 2015)

Those numbers are reflected in the table below along with other data that CU System has been collecting on PLA credit awarded since fall 2010. Table 1 below shows the number of credits awarded, or waivers given, by CU campus by type of PLA.

Table 1: CU System PLA Credits Awarded or Waivers Given by Campus by Type of PLA

Prior Learning Credit	Boulder	Colorado Springs	Denver Anschutz	Total
Advanced Placement	12,989	3,520	2,189	18,698
International Baccalaureate	1,459	226	413	2,098
College Level Examination Program	90	171	163	424
Veteran’s Affairs / Military Experience Program (CU Denver) / Military Credit (CU Boulder)	203	(Policy approved May, 2014)	265	468
Defense Language Institute	58			58

As Appendix A and the information provided here show, Colorado’s public institutions of higher education award and accept PLA credit, at least to some extent, for most types of PLA. In fact, Colorado institutions award more types of PLA than many of the institutions in the states that will be highlighted later in Appendix B. There is always room for improvement, however. An area to improve in Colorado is inconsistency between institutions’ policies and procedures, which leads to confusion amongst students and advisors and is probably one of the main causes for loss of credit in transfer (as will be explained below). Another concern is that the policies may be unnecessarily restrictive in how PLA credit can be applied and often are not explained sufficiently. For instance, one institution’s challenge exam policy, as stated in its course catalog, is, “Students interested in challenging a Liberal Arts Core course should contact the appropriate program to determine the availability of a challenge examination.”

Colorado Policy Barriers

Though Colorado institutions offer a good deal of PLA, several policy and practice barriers remain and hinder degree completion. One of the biggest barriers occurs during transfer. Unfortunately, credits awarded previously by one institution are sometimes not accepted in transfer by the receiving institution, even though those credits probably meet degree requirements at the receiving institution. Also, research indicates that adults who believe they have skills they can demonstrate, but are not given the chance to demonstrate it and earn credit towards degree requirements, feel “put off” by higher education institutions and delay returning to school. The following barriers are examples that result from inconsistencies in Colorado statute and Commission policy:

1. Commission Policy I, L allows four-year institutions to set their own cut scores for PLA, which results in some students losing credit upon transfer even though they followed the statewide transfer articulation agreement and were awarded an associate degree. In one scenario, a student gets a score of 3 on the AP Biology exam, is awarded 3 credits for Introductory Biology by a community college, the student transfers but the receiving four-year institution informs the student they require a score of 4 on that AP exam, so the student loses those three credits and they have to take extra coursework. Even though

Introductory Biology is a gtPathways-approved course, and the implication is that it is guaranteed, in reality it is sometimes not guaranteed.

2. This loss of credit also happens in the case of International Baccalaureate because some institutions have higher cut scores for IB exams than others.
3. The fact that all institutions are currently allowed to set their own cut scores on prior learning assessments obfuscates and makes moot some of the guarantees in the Student Bill of Rights [§23-1-125(1), C.R.S.], which states, “(d) Students have a right to know which courses are transferable among the state public two-year and four-year institutions of higher education; (e) Students, upon completion of core general education courses, regardless of the delivery method, should have those courses satisfy the core course requirements of all Colorado public institutions of higher education; [and] (f) Students have a right to know if courses from one or more public higher education institutions satisfy the students' degree requirements...”
4. Colorado Revised Statute §23-1-125(4) states, “(4) Competency testing. On or before July 1, 2010, the commission shall, in consultation with each public institution of higher education, define a process for students to test out of core courses, including specifying use of a national test or the criteria for approving institutionally devised tests. ...Beginning in the 2010-11 academic year, each public institution of higher education shall grant full course credits to students for the core courses they successfully test out of, free of tuition for those courses.” However, staff believes students don’t know about this law, institutions do little to advertise it and few students are given the opportunity to test out.
5. Though Colorado Revised Statute §23-1-125(4.5), created in 2012, states that, “Beginning in the 2013-14 academic year, each public institution of higher education shall adopt and make public a policy or program to determine academic credit for prior learning,” this law did not result in significant change. All institutions already had policies on credit for prior learning. However, some institutions don’t accept some forms of PLA and place burdensome restrictions on others. Another problem is that there is no standard, statewide cut score for standardized exams and this leads to loss of credit and probably keeps some students out of school or leads them to private and proprietary institutions, most of which have more generous policies on PLA.
6. Last, Colorado GEAR UP program students, many of whom are literate in languages other than English, are not benefitting from PLA to the extent they should. In fall 2014, 178 students in 12 high schools were given CLEP exams in Spanish and/or French. In total, 168 students (94%) earned scores that should enable them to receive college credit of at least 3 credit hours. Several Colorado public higher education institutions, however, do not apply to degree requirements the credit earned for an ACE recommended passing score on the CLEP World Languages exams: Adams State University, Colorado School of Mines, University of Colorado Boulder, and University of Colorado Denver. The result is that Colorado GEAR-UP students who have tested high enough (according to the published ACE recommended cut scores) to earn between 3 and 12 credits would not have those credits apply to degree requirements, though they may fulfill admissions and world language proficiency requirements. The program will test up to 100 more students during spring 2015. Colorado GEAR UP serves first generation, low-income students, many of whom are underrepresented minorities. As has been observed by Colorado GEAR UP staff, and confirmed in research by Klein-Collins and Olson (2014), helping

these students achieve college credit, and have it applied to degree requirements where appropriate, for knowledge they already have gives them confidence to succeed and saves them time and money toward degree completion.

Considerations for Colorado

A comprehensive, statewide policy on Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) would either eliminate or significantly reduce these barriers to receiving credit for demonstrable learning, successful transfer and application of credit, and degree completion. Such a policy would seem to be the next logical step in augmenting Colorado's guaranteed transfer (gt) pathways curriculum and statewide transfer articulation agreements. Other states have expanded PLA offerings at their institutions and have adopted statewide cut scores for standardized exams, the effect of which is to truly guarantee the transfer and application of credit. Appendix B: Other States' PLA Policies & Cut Scores show how other states are leading the way and setting examples so there is no need for Colorado to "reinvent the wheel." For example, the following states accept a 3 on every AP exam: Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio and Wisconsin (as well as California State University System). The following accept a 3 on almost every AP exam but require at least a 4 on some, usually in science, math & World Languages: Oregon, South Carolina, South Dakota and West Virginia. All these states also set 4 as the minimum on most IB exams and 50 for most CLEP exams. Though not in place long enough to have many years of longitudinal data, the available research from some of these states indicates that students who earn PLA credit are adequately prepared for subsequent coursework.

III. STAFF ANALYSIS

Students and institutions would benefit from such a policy, not just because it will serve students, but because it can also boost the institutions' performance. The Lumina Foundation (2014) reports, "As innovative approaches are developed — approaches that focus on the student and learning, not on institutions and seat time — new, sustainable financial models are needed as well to assure education systems can meet demand" (pg. 4). One financial incentive for Colorado's public institutions of higher education to award PLA credit is the new performance funding model (HB 14-1319) of which one measure is, "Allocates funding to institutions based upon completed courses as measured by completed student credit hours." If institutions awarded PLA credit where due, then students would accumulate more credit and boost the institution's performance.

Based on the research reported here, as well as the data from other states that have set common cut scores, Department staff concludes that it would benefit the students of Colorado to set statewide cut scores on PLA exams, like AP, IB and CLEP and for institutions to publish how credits earned through PLA will be applied. Staff also recommends requirements to ensure the application of PLA credits awarded at one institution are accepted in transfer and applied appropriately to degree requirements at receiving institutions.

Expected Challenges

As Regier (2014) and Lakin et al. (2015) have found, there will likely be concerns from faculty that credit earned through PLA does not provide equivalent preparation (in content, skills and rigor) as the same course taught on campus. During the original vetting of this idea, discussions with stakeholder groups focused almost entirely on the issue of common cut scores and concerns that some institutions will have to lower the score they require. Department staff believes the recommended course of action for creating this policy, which will be inclusive and deliberative, will provide faculty with ample opportunities for input. Also, Department staff will provide faculty and others with the research referenced in this agenda item, which provides data on common cut scores and how students perform in subsequent coursework, as well as how other institutions have accomplished effective PLA practices (Lakin et al., 2015). Another concern from faculty may be that their program accreditors do not allow them to award PLA credit or accept it in transfer. Because of this concern, department staff contacted accreditors to seek correct information on program accreditation requirements.

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC), the regional accreditor for Colorado's institutions of higher education, allows institutions to award and accept in transfer, credit earned through online coursework and prior learning assessment, as long as the institution has in place a system for ensuring quality and consistency in the evaluation and awarding of such credit. According to a representative at HLC (personal communication), and a research brief from CAEL (2014), the only requirement is HLC's "Assumed Practice B.1: Programs, Courses, and Credits: g: The institution has a clear policy on the maximum allowable credit for prior learning as a reasonable proportion of the credits required to complete the student's program."

Besides HLC, as the *regional* accreditor, Department staff corresponded with seventeen *national* accreditors of the most common college programs, such as Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET), Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International) and Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) to name a few. Of these seventeen program accreditors, only one (Council on Social Work Education, CSWE) places any restrictions on the awarding or transfer of PLA credit and they added "[We are] currently in a standards revision process and are looking at this standard given the increase in prior learning and direct assessment programs" (email communication, 11/25/2014). CSWE's restriction on PLA credit, however, applies only to coursework in Social Work, not general education courses. All of the accreditors' emailed responses are on file in the Academic Affairs office and the compiled results of the queries are available in Appendix C: Responses on PLA and Online Coursework from Accrediting Organizations Recognized by Council for Higher Education Accreditation and University of Colorado Denver's Schools of Health.

Because faculty frequently cite graduate programs, especially those in health, as having restrictions on PLA credits, department staff queried all five of University of Colorado Denver's Schools of Health and found they do place some restrictions on Prior Learning Assessment credit in applicants' undergraduate prerequisite coursework. It should be noted, however, the restrictions are imposed by the faculty in those schools and are not requirements of the program accreditors. (See, again, Appendix C: Responses on PLA and Online Coursework from Accrediting Organizations Recognized by Council for Higher Education Accreditation and University of Colorado Denver's Schools of Health). Thus, any comprehensive, statewide policy that could increase the number of credits awarded for PLA should also address the possibility

that students with PLA credits on their transcripts may be negatively impacted by restrictive admissions policies of some graduate programs, especially in health-related fields. The process for developing and implementing a statewide prior learning assessment policy that Department staff envisions, however, will include faculty and admissions representatives who can speak to these concerns.

Research from National Organizations and Colorado Institutions

Colorado Research

Jennifer Schneider (2014), Learning Research Analyst at Colorado State University, studied CSU full-time, first-time undergraduates' first year GPA and AP exam scores. She found that higher scores on AP exams are correlated with higher GPA. But more importantly she found that as long as a student scored at least a 3 on an AP exam, it was sufficient for them to pass subsequent coursework. Schneider also compared students' performance in MATH 161: Calculus for Physical Scientists II based on how they earned credit for its prerequisite course, MATH 160: Calculus for Physical Scientists I. She found:

- 64.3% of students passed MATH 161 if they took MATH 160 at another 4-year institution;
- 63.6% of students passed MATH 161 if they scored 3 on the AP Calculus exam.

Schneider's research is important because it indicates that no matter what passing score a student got (3, 4 or 5) on the AP exams considered, the fact that a student *took* an AP course and the corresponding exam matters more than what score they got on it, insofar as students passed subsequent coursework. Less selective institutions generally accept a 3 to award credit for AP but when students transfer to more selective institutions, they often lose that credit because the faculty at the more selective institutions believe that a score of 4 or 5 is required to demonstrate adequate preparation. This research indicates that a minimum score of 3 is probably adequate in most cases and this is also supported by research from other states that have adopted 3 as the statewide cut score, as well as College Board's own research on college performance of students who take AP in high school.

National Research: Advanced Placement

College Board administers the Advanced Placement (AP) course and exam program and studies the correlation between students who take AP exams and how well they do in subsequent college coursework. All of College Board's data indicates that high school students who take AP exams have higher mean grades in subsequent coursework than their peers who do not take AP exams and that exam takers (for most AP exams) who achieve a score of at least 3 (out of 5 possible) attained the same or higher grades in subsequent courses and achieved higher GPAs in the subject area of the AP exam that was completed.

Patterson, et al. (2011), completed a study on the correlation of AP exam takers and college performance that included 110 four-year institutions and 195,099 first-time, first-year students who enrolled in college in fall 2006. They report:

For seven of the nine subject areas, students with a mean AP Exam grade of 3 or better significantly outperformed the reference group of non-examinees in the relevant subject area. The two subject areas where students earning a 3 failed to outperform non-AP examinees — art and music and computer science — were also those with the smallest AP participation rates. In four of the nine content areas (mathematics, history, English, and world language), students whose mean AP Exam grade in the subject was a 2 significantly outperformed non-AP examinees in that discipline in terms of expected [GPA]. (p. 33)

Patterson, et al.’s findings are consistent with the other research on AP exam takers’ college performance, much of which is referenced in Patterson, et al.’s Introduction on pp. 4-7 of their report. The fact that students who score a 2 or higher on most AP exams significantly outperform non-AP examinees in that discipline, makes a statewide cut score of 3 seem reasonable for most AP exams.

A statewide cut score of 3 on AP Exams also has the potential to greatly benefit students of color and low socio-economic status students. Data for 2014 from all Colorado high schools, pulled by College Board staff and sent in a personal communication (January 28, 2015) to department staff, is shown below in Table 2. The data reveals that students of color are more negatively impacted by higher cut scores on AP exams than are white students. It also shows that as the cut score goes up, the percent of students who pass significantly decreases.

Table 2: Race & Ethnicity and Low Income Pass Rates by AP Cut Score

For the following test takers:	The % who scored a 3 was:	The % who scored a 4 dropped to:	The % who scored a 5 dropped even further to:
White	44%	34%	22%
Hispanic	50%	33%	17%
African American	58%	29%	13%
Low income	54%	31%	15%
Overall (CO)	45%	34%	22%

It is important to note that students’ of color and low income students’ pass rates for scores of 4 and 5 are lower than the overall pass rates for all Colorado students combined. This means that where AP scores are set higher than necessary, it adversely affects students of color and low income students more than it does white and wealthier students.

National Research: CLEP

[College Board](#) (2005), which also administers the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) exam program, surveyed 3,365 students who earned CLEP credit between July 2003 and June 2004. They found:

- 70% said their CLEP credits made a difference in their ability to finance tuition and other fees;
- 91% said CLEP made a difference in helping them complete their degrees;

- 47% said their CLEP credits made a difference in their decision to enroll/remain at the institution; and
- 62% said the institutions' policy to accept CLEP credit or not would affect their decision to apply/enroll at the institution.

Barry (2013), for College Board, identified 13,256 students who obtained a degree and took at least one CLEP exam. Barry found that CLEP students, compared to other students:

- graduated nearly one semester earlier, enrolled in fewer semesters, graduated with approximately 1.5 fewer credits, and have GPAs approximately 0.15 points higher than non-CLEP students (pg. 9);
- these differences were more pronounced for A.A. students than for B.A. students (pg. 10);
- there was no significant difference between CLEP and non-CLEP students on subsequent math GPA (pg. 13); and
- CLEP students had subsequent English course GPAs that were approximately 0.18 points higher than non-CLEP students (p. 13).

These findings are especially important for community college students because the research showed that the differences were more pronounced for them than for B.A. students. While B.A. students also benefited from CLEP, the salient point for four-year institutions is that they should guarantee the transfer and application of CLEP credit for the community college students they receive in transfer.

National Research: Council for Adult & Experiential Learning

The Council for Adult & Experiential Learning (CAEL, 2010) analyzed data on 62,475 students at 48 institutions of higher education and concluded "...that PLA students had better academic outcomes, particularly in terms of graduation rates and persistence, than other adult students (these results were confirmed by Hayward and Williams in 2015). Many PLA students also shortened the time required to earn a degree, depending on the number of PLA credits earned" (p. 7). Types of PLA included in this study were CLEP, DSST and Excelsior exams; ACE-evaluated corporate and military training; institutionally-evaluated training programs; challenge or "test out" exams; and portfolio assessments. Briefly, it reported the following:

Graduation Rates:

- "43 percent of PLA students earned a bachelor's degree, compared to only 15 percent of non-PLA students;" and
- "13 percent of PLA students earned an associate's degree, compared to 6 percent of non-PLA students" (p. 7).

Persistence:

- "More than half of all PLA students who had not yet earned a degree by the end of 2008 (56%) had accumulated 80 percent or more of the credits towards a degree between 2001-

2002 and the end of 2008; only 22 percent of non-PLA students with no degree had made similar progress towards their degrees;”

- “PLA students (both degree-earners and non-degree earners) earned an average of 53.7 credits in institutional coursework (as opposed to credit accumulation from PLA credits or transfer credits), compared to an average of 43.8 credits by non-PLA students;” and
- “PLA students in this study who did not earn degrees had stronger patterns of annual enrollment and credit earning than non-PLA students who did not earn degrees.”

Time to Degree:

- “PLA students earning bachelor’s degrees saved an average of between 2.5 and 10.1 months of time in earning their degrees, compared to non-PLA students earning degrees. PLA students earning 13-24 PLA credits saved an average of 6.6 months, and those earning 49 or more PLA credits saved an average of 10.1 months.” (p. 8)

PLA also holds great promise for assisting veterans. According to the CAEL study, “Two-thirds (67%) of the students with military service histories earned PLA credit compared with two-fifths (40%) of students who are coded as non-military” (p. 31). As far as other student demographics, CAEL reports:

- Gender: “Both male and female students showed similar patterns of degree-earning, with PLA students of both genders earning degrees at a rate that was almost three times higher than the rate of non-PLA students” (p. 48);
- Age: “PLA earners in every age group had higher graduation rates than non-PLA students. The difference in graduation rates was highest for those aged 55 and older... but even the youngest learners (aged 25-34) with PLA credit had graduation rates that were more than twice those of non-PLA students in the same age group” (p. 49);
- Race/Ethnicity: “...graduation rates for PLA students [of color] were higher than non-PLA students. The most dramatic difference was for Hispanic students at the bachelor’s degree level; Hispanic PLA students earned bachelor’s degrees at a rate that was almost eight times higher than that of Hispanic non-PLA students. Decreases in average time to degree were apparent for [black, Hispanic and white students]... with the most dramatic decreases for black PLA students” (pp. 50-51); and
- Financial Aid: “Financial aid recipients earning PLA had dramatically higher graduation rates than their non-PLA counterparts (72% compared to 16%), and their graduation rates were also higher than students who did not receive financial aid” (p. 52).

In another study (Klein-Collins, R. and R. Olson, 2014) that focuses on Latino students’ experiences with PLA, the authors describe how PLA can accelerate degree completion for adult Latino students. The authors state, “Latino students were more likely to earn PLA credit in the area of foreign language” (pg. 2) and “Both institutional representatives and Latino students discussed PLA as a practice that empowers and validates” (pg. 4).

Besides benefits to students, institutions that offered PLA also reported benefits to the institution itself. For instance, administrators at these institutions responded in interviews that:

- “...PLA can be a tool for recruiting adult students” (p. 23);
- “With the adult market, students that are savvy customers are asking for these policies. For them it’s an indication of how adult friendly you are” (p. 23);
- “Alumni who do [portfolio] PLA feel closer ties to the college. They’ve had more conversations with their mentor... The student ends up having a lot more contact with individuals in an intimate way. When you talk about what you know, you have been valued in a different way. We have healthy alumni giving” (p. 23); and
- “The PLA process gives faculty a chance to see how higher-level learners think about topics and course materials” (p. 23).

CAEL’s research is important because it demonstrates that a comprehensive PLA policy can help Colorado increase degree completion and close achievement gaps, especially for adults, students of color and low income students.

Florida’s Policy and Research

Seven states, and the California State University System, have mandated a common cut score of 3 for AP exams. Florida is one of those states. Matthew Bouck, Director, Office of Articulation at Florida Department of Education, wrote a report titled “Performance on Advanced Placement Examinations and in Subsequent Postsecondary Coursework” in May 2012 (on file in the Academic Affairs Office). Per Florida statute, students who obtain a minimum score of three on an AP exam are guaranteed credit for the corresponding general education college-level course and to have that credit transfer and apply to all institutions’ equivalent general education requirements. Prior to this legislation, and as in Colorado currently, there were concerns regarding student preparation for subsequent coursework with AP exam scores of three. Bouck analyzed performance in subsequent coursework for students earning credit through AP exams. He reports:

Students who complete Advanced Placement examinations with a score of three to five generally achieve at least passing scores in subsequent coursework. AP student grade point averages in subsequent coursework are generally higher than the grade point averages of students who complete the equivalent course in class, and then complete the subsequent course. These data indicate that no changes are needed to the Advanced Placement [state policy that sets 3 as the minimum score]...based solely on student performance in subsequent coursework. (p. 1)

That is, any impact of setting Florida’s statewide AP exam cut score at 3 was so minimal that it did not necessitate any changes to state policy.

Ohio’s Policy and Research

Ohio is another state with a mandated cut score of 3 on AP exams. Shoumi Mustafa and Paula Compton, University System of Ohio, wrote a report titled “The Advanced Placement (AP) Policy: Impacts on Academic Outcomes at 4-Year Universities” in August 2013. Ohio Board of Regents (OBR) directive 2008-010 to University System of Ohio institutions included the following AP policy requirement: “A score of 3 or higher will provide credit at any institution.

The credit must count toward graduation and will meet a general education requirement if the course to which the AP credit is equivalent fulfills a requirement at the receiving institution.”

Mustafa and Compton report:

The AP policy did not influence academic outcomes of AP policy beneficiaries at 4-year university main campuses; estimated policy impacts on GPA, attempted hours, proportion of completed hours, and completion rates in sequential courses were all numerically small and statistically insignificant. Importantly, the no-impact results apply also to separate sub-groups of policy beneficiaries, e.g., students with AP test scores of 3, 4, and 5, or students attending different USO campuses. These results imply that students receive equivalent learning outcomes with scores of 3, 4, or 5 in an AP test or by completing the corresponding course in a USO 4-year university main campus.

Furthermore, they conclude:

The no-impact result shows that the AP policy did not influence academic outcomes of the beneficiaries of the AP policy, validating the fundamental underpinning of the AP policy that learning outcomes associated with AP test scores of 3, 4 and 5 are equivalent to the learning outcomes associated with the corresponding college courses. The no-impact results also highlight the beneficial role of the AP policy: the guarantee of college credit under the AP policy provides students increased potentials for saving resources, time and money, while their academic standards remain unchanged.

In sum, the extant research on PLA, including standardized tests with common cut scores, demonstrates that PLA can have a positive impact on student success, degree completion and affordability without sacrificing quality.

A Recommendation

PLA and Colorado

In furtherance of the Commission’s Master Plan Goals 1 & 3 to increase degree completion and close achievement gaps, the Academic Council (AC) and CDHE staff recommend a phased process to establish consistency where possible for purposes of student transfer of gtPathways equivalencies; followed by a more in-depth study of policies and practices surrounding Prior Learning Assessments (PLA) in Colorado. The Department, stakeholder councils, and institutions of higher education in Colorado share the values of: 1) helping students, families and advisors understand degree requirements, transfer of credits, pre-collegiate testing and credit options, and the relationship between preparation and student success; 2) promoting and supporting timely progress towards graduation across the state institutions of public higher education; and 3) understanding student success holistically, not only to assist students in reaching their full human potential, but to build our economy. The Department staff has presented research indicating that PLA, in some instances, may encourage timely graduation for specific populations of students. However, PLA must be applied in a way that supports the degree and the students’ educational goals, and ensures adequate preparation for subsequent

coursework. With these values in mind, AC and staff recommend that the Commission set the following process goal regarding Prior Learning Assessment (PLA):

Process Goal: Thoroughly examine the current spectrum of PLA practice in Colorado. Within given statutory role and mission, identify the types of PLA most important to meeting the Colorado Competes goals. The overall goal is to: support student success with appropriate improvements to institutional PLA policies, greatly improve transparency and communication of policies to all stakeholders; ensure that PLA credits earned at one public institution will be accepted in transfer and enable students to fulfill eligible equivalent gtPathways categories at any receiving public institution. Application of PLA credit toward major requirements will be examined as part of a discipline-based faculty review process at each receiving institution. Institutions will work holistically to maximize student success from PLA.

Implementation

The implementation will be driven by goals and associated tasks. The tasks will be guided by the Academic and General Education Councils with support from the CDHE and will involve significant input from disciplinary faculty and other stakeholders. The tasks outlined below serve as the starting point, but may be refined as the project evolves. Academic and General Education Councils will collaborate with CDHE to develop the timeline for these tasks.

Phase 1: Establish a PLA policy that guarantees the 1) transferability of credit within the gtPathways curriculum for purposes of fulfilling general education requirements and 2) transferability of credit based on Portfolio Assessment and published guides with application to general education degree requirements and 3) without the need for students to resubmit test scores or other documentation.

Goal 1: Establish common cut scores for standardized assessments, such as AP, CLEP, DSST and IB, and follow ACE's recommended amount of military and workforce credit, for purposes of creating transferability among public institutions for credits to be applied toward fulfillment of gtPathways curriculum categories. For example, if a student earns a 3 on the AP English Language and Composition exam, that student will have fulfilled the GT-C01 category of gtPathways at any public institution of higher education in Colorado. The receiving institution would determine the exact course equivalency depending on courses that are used to fulfill the GT-C01 requirement at that institution. (See Appendix E: Sample Format for Standardized Exam Cut Scores). (Responsible group – individual institutions, faculty discipline experts, guided by General Education Council and/or Academic Council)

The following institutions:

- Colorado Community College System (13)
- Fort Lewis College
- Adams State University
- Western State Colorado University
- Metropolitan State University of Denver
- Colorado State University – Global Campus
- Colorado State University – Pueblo

have agreed to present faculty with and work toward acceptance of the following cut scores for gtPathways/general education credit:

- AP – 3
- IB – 4
- CLEP – ACE recommended cut scores
- DSST – criterion referenced cut scores provided by DSST;

and have agreed to work with faculty toward accepting ACE’s recommended military and workforce credit where applicable to gtPathways courses.

Goal 2: Integrate into the transfer equivalency process institutional mechanisms that allow transfer of credit that has been awarded by another institution based on Portfolio Assessment and apply that credit to appropriate general education degree requirements. (Responsible group – individual institutions)

Goal 3: Consistent with §23-1-125(4), C.R.S., each public institution defines a process to test out of a course “including specifying use of a national test or the criteria for approving institutionally devised tests.” (Responsible group – individual institutions and GEC)

Task 1: Institutions share best practices, costs and challenges.

Task 2: Each institution specifies and makes public (CDHE can coordinate for consistency) its policy for complying with §23-1-125(4), C.R.S, which states in part, “...each public institution of higher education shall grant full course credits to students for the core courses [gtPathways/general education] they successfully test out of, free of tuition for those courses.” This will include the ability to test out of and receive credit for all gtPathways requirements (e.g., every category in the 31-credit gtPathways curriculum).

Goal 4: Examine the PLA offerings for active military and veterans across Colorado public institutions. Understand on an institutional basis what has supported student military/veteran success. Where appropriate expand/enrich the PLA offerings for military and returning veterans. (Responsible groups – Individual institutions and GEC)

Task 1: Gather data from public institutions on programs supporting PLA for veterans, e.g. DSST, ACE military transcripts, together with student performance. See Task 1.

Task 2: Compare Colorado practices with those in other states and analyze where new/modified practices may be appropriate.

Task 3: Based on the data and analysis of Task 1, and 2, develop suggestions for improved PLA offerings for veterans appropriate to institutional admission selectivity and role and mission.

Goal 5: Limit the number of PLA credits accepted by institutions only by the residency requirements of the regional and other accrediting bodies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

Goal 6: Make PLA credit available to students without any requirement that the student first complete any coursework or residency requirements;

Phase 2: For purposes of transferability of PLA credit as it applies to the major, each individual institution will determine cut scores and course equivalencies for accepting PLA as transfer credit for their majors. A data gathering, analysis, and recommendation process will support these decisions.

Goal 1: Credits earned at state public institutions through PLA meeting a receiving institution's requirements for a major shall transfer and immediately be applicable to the major. Given the faculty and institutional responsibility for defining and awarding majors, each Baccalaureate granting institution will establish and publish conditions for applicability of credit for PLA toward meeting requirements of the major. Institutions will re-examine cut-scores for AP, IB, DSST and CLEP, driven by institutional data. (Responsible groups – Individual institutions)

Task 1: To support effective discussion of transfer of AP/IB credited courses as it applies to majors, all two-year and four-year public institutions will examine their own current AP and IB cut-scores and student performance data associated with those scores. Data will be analyzed by subject area, indicate student performance in the first subject area course, whether AP/IB credit was given, student performance in the following subject area course, distinguish student performance by grade category and include DFW performance. Additionally, this data should indicate if the course was used for major, elective or general education credit. The time-to-degree and final GPA of each student who skipped a course in their major based on AP or IB, compared to time-to-degree and GPA of students who did not apply AP or IB credit to a major course(s).

Where possible for the institution, data should go back five years. (Responsible groups – Individual institutions with support from DAG)

Task 2: Gather data on use of CLEP scores along with student performance data – See Task 1. (Responsible groups – Individual institutions)

Task 3: Based on the results of Tasks 1 and 2, analyze the effect of various AP, IB and CLEP cut scores on student success across different student demographics, institutional selectivity and role and mission, and specific use of PLA (major, elective, gen ed credit). Compare results to national data and note any important differences. (Responsible groups – Individual institutions with support from DAG)

Task 4: Based on the analysis in Task 3, bring faculty subject experts together to discuss transferability of AP, IB and CLEP for major credit and generate recommended practices. (Responsible groups – Individual institutions report scores to CDHE for recording on the common template, such as that in Appendix E).

Phase 3: Reporting, Transcribing, Communication and Periodic Review Goals

Goal 1: Develop mechanisms to consistently transcript PLA credit (Responsible groups – registrars and advisors with input and oversight from AC).

Goal 2: Develop an effective, common reporting model for PLA containing all policies from all public institutions. This reporting will be done online at the CDHE and each institution will link to this common form from their websites. The key outcome of this goal will be significantly improved communication to all interested parties. (Responsible groups - AC and CDHE with input from DAG)

Goal 3: Develop focused communication mechanisms, perhaps by notations in web-based course catalogs that highlight for students where, because of PLA policies, there may be differentiated transfer of PLA credit between institutions. (Responsible groups - AC and CDHE)

Goal 4: Ensure that fees for PLA are transparent and reflect actual costs, including faculty and staff time, and any appropriately amortized infrastructure cost. (Responsible group – AC, with input from institutions)

Goal 5: Once a student has matriculated at an institution, apply the eligible PLA credit to the students' record in a timely manner, in order to support degree completion. (Responsible group – AC)

Goal 6: Form an advisory group for each IHE to: track progress in meeting student success goals and the effect of PLA on student success; to develop tools and faculty/staff knowledge in awarding PLA; consider how to use PLA as a workforce development strategy; track number and type of PLA credits awarded, types of assessment and associated costs to students (Klein-Collins, 2014). (Responsible groups - AC, DAG and CDHE)

Goal 7: Periodically revisit PLA policies as they evolve in Colorado and in national practice, including changes in AP courses and exams, experience with PLA, and changing student demographics. We suggest an eight-year review cycle following changes made through the outlined process. (Responsible groups – AC)

Constituent Review Team

While Academic Council, General Education Council, the state public institutions and their faculty, and the CDHE will accomplish the major work in the Goals, we recommend a Constituent Review Team (CRT) to provide periodic review of the process and recommendations. We suggest that the CRT be composed of two members of Academic Council, two members of the General Education Council, two representatives from the Data Advisory Group [for each of the preceding groups there will one representative of a 2-yr institution and one representative of a 4-yr institution], one member of the CCHE, one workforce/veteran representative and one representative of parents.

Suggested Timeline:

The overall flow of the process has three major steps, aligned to the phases of work.

Phase 1: Target Date – Goal 1, December 2015; Goal 2, 3, and 4, March 2016

Goal 1 - Establish common cut scores for standardized assessments, such as AP, CLEP, and IB for purposes of creating transferability among public institutions for credits to be applied toward fulfillment of Pathways curriculum categories. (See Appendix E: Sample Format for Standardized Exam Cut Scores).

- Most institutions have already agreed to present faculty with and work toward acceptance of the cut scores and credit recommendations in Phase 1, Goal 1 above. Institutions that have not yet completed this will define a work plan for accomplishing this task.

Goal 2 - Integrate into the transfer equivalency process institutional mechanisms that allow transfer of credit that has been awarded by another institution based on Portfolio Assessment and apply that credit to appropriate general education degree requirements.

Goal 3 - Consistent with §23-1-125(4), C.R.S., each public institution defines a process to test out of a course “including specifying use of a national test or the criteria for approving institutionally devised tests.”

Goal 4 - Examine the PLA offerings for active military and veterans across Colorado public institutions. Understand on an institutional basis what has supported student military/veteran success. Where appropriate expand/enrich the PLA offerings for military and returning veterans.

Phase 2: Target Date – March 2016

Goal 1: Credits earned at state public institutions through PLA meeting a receiving institution’s requirements for a major shall transfer and immediately be applicable to the major. Given the faculty and institutional responsibility for defining and awarding majors, each Baccalaureate granting institution will establish and publish conditions for applicability of credit for PLA toward meeting requirements of the major. Institutions will re-examine cut-scores for AP, IB, DSST and CLEP, driven by institutional data.

Phase 3: Target Date – December 2016

Reporting, Transcribing, Communication and Periodic Review Goals

- Academic Council takes up recommendations as they arise for goals 1-7 and presents to the Constituent Review Team (CRT), then CRT to CCHE.

CRT Engagement: Given the analysis of data and recommendations from the AC and GEC, engage the CRT to review all data, analysis and recommendations. The CRT will request any additional data, analysis, raise questions on recommendations and provide a review of the process to date.

Subsequent to final CCHE recommendations Goals 1-7 will be completed by December 2016.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Commission approve this inclusive process for the development of a statewide prior learning assessment policy.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY

***Note:** Pertinent parts of the following statutes have been **underlined and put in bold** to help identify statutory authority for the policy recommendations herein.

C.R.S. §23-1-108. Duties and powers of the commission with regard to systemwide planning

(7) (a) ...The statewide degree transfer agreements shall include provisions under which state **institutions of higher education shall accept all credit hours of acceptable course work for automatic transfer** from an associate of arts, associate of applied science, or associate of science degree program in another state institution of higher education in Colorado. The commission shall have final authority in resolving transfer disputes.

C.R.S. §23-1-108.5. Duties and powers of the commission with regard to common course numbering system

(5) **All credits earned by a student in any general education course** identified as corresponding with a course included in the course numbering system [gtPathways] **shall be automatically transferable among all higher education institutions** upon transfer and enrollment of the student... **The commission shall adopt such policies and guidelines as may be necessary for the implementation of this section. Each governing board shall modify its existing policies as may be necessary to accept the transfer of these credits.**

C.R.S. §23-1-113.2. Department directive - admission standards for students holding international baccalaureate diplomas

(2) (a) The department shall ensure that each governing board of a state-supported baccalaureate and graduate institution of higher education in the state adopt and implement, for each of the institutions under its control, a policy for the acceptance of first-time freshman students who have successfully completed an international baccalaureate diploma program.

(b) Each governing board shall report the policy adopted and implemented pursuant to paragraph (a) of this subsection (2) to the department and shall make the policy available to the public in an electronic format.

(c) **Each governing board shall set the number of credits the institution may grant to a student who has successfully completed an international baccalaureate diploma program.** Except as otherwise provided in paragraph (d) of this subsection (2), **the number of credits granted by an institution shall be, at a minimum, twenty-four semester credits or their**

equivalent. Each governing board **shall identify the specific general education or elective requirements** that the student satisfies by having successfully completed the international baccalaureate diploma program and shall outline the conditions necessary to award the credits.

(d) Each institution may determine the level of student performance necessary to grant the credits, as measured by a student's exam performance in the specific courses constituting the international baccalaureate diploma program. **An institution may only grant less than twenty-four semester credits or their equivalent if the student has received a score of less than four on an exam administered as part of the international baccalaureate diploma program,** in which case the number of semester credits or their equivalent granted by the institution shall be reduced accordingly.

(3) The provisions of this section shall not apply to any institution of higher education that has entered into a performance contract with the commission as an exemplary institution of higher education.

C.R.S. §23-1-125. Commission directive - student bill of rights - degree requirements - implementation of core courses - competency test - prior learning

(1) Student bill of rights. The general assembly hereby finds that students enrolled in public institutions of higher education shall have the following rights:

(a) **Students should be able to complete their associate of arts and associate of science degree programs in no more than sixty credit hours or their baccalaureate programs in no more than one hundred twenty credit hours** unless there are additional degree requirements recognized by the commission;

(b) A student can sign a two-year or four-year graduation agreement that formalizes a plan for that student to obtain a degree in two or four years, unless there are additional degree requirements recognized by the commission;

(c) Students have a right to clear and concise information concerning which courses must be completed successfully to complete their degrees;

(d) **Students have a right to know which courses are transferable among the state public two-year and four-year institutions of higher education;**

(e) **Students, upon completion of core general education courses, regardless of the delivery method, should have those courses satisfy the core course requirements of all Colorado public institutions of higher education;**

(f) **Students have a right to know if courses from one or more public higher education institutions satisfy the students' degree requirements;**

(g) **A student's credit for the completion of the core requirements and core courses** shall not expire for ten years from the date of initial enrollment and **shall be transferrable...**

(3) Core courses. The department, in consultation with each Colorado public institution of higher

education, is directed to outline a plan to implement a core course concept that defines the general education course guidelines for all public institutions of higher education. The core of courses shall be designed to ensure that students demonstrate competency in reading, critical thinking, written communication, mathematics, and technology. The core of courses shall consist of at least thirty credit hours but shall not exceed forty credit hours. Individual institutions of higher education shall conform their own core course requirements with the guidelines developed by the department and shall identify the specific courses that meet the general education course guidelines. Any such guidelines developed by the department shall be submitted to the commission for its approval. In creating and adopting the guidelines, the department and the commission, in collaboration with the public institutions of higher education, may make allowances for baccalaureate programs that have additional degree requirements recognized by the commission. If a statewide matrix of core courses is adopted by the commission, the courses identified by the individual institutions as meeting the general education course guidelines shall be included in the matrix. **The commission shall adopt such policies to ensure that institutions develop the most effective way to implement the transferability of core course [gtPathways] credits.**

(4) Competency testing. On or before July 1, 2010, the commission shall, in consultation with each public institution of higher education, define a process for students to test out of core courses, including specifying use of a national test or the criteria for approving institutionally devised tests. Beginning in the 2010-11 academic year, each public institution of higher education shall grant full course credits to students for the core courses they successfully test out of, free of tuition for those courses.

(4.5) Prior learning. Beginning in the 2013-14 academic year, each public institution of higher education shall adopt and make public a policy or program to determine academic credit for prior learning.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A: Colorado Institutions' PLA Policies

Appendix B: Other States' PLA Policies & Cut Scores

Appendix C: Responses on PLA and Online Coursework from Accrediting Organizations
Recognized by Council for Higher Education Accreditation (www.chea.org) and
University of Colorado Denver's Schools of Health

Appendix D: Florida Articulation Coordinating Committee Credit-by-Exam Equivalencies

Appendix E: Sample Format for Standardized Exam Cut Scores

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Appendix A: Colorado Institutions' PLA Policies

(x = institution accepts/awards this type of credit to some extent)

Institution/System w/ hyperlink to policy	AP	IB (required by statute)	CLEP minimum score(s)	Challenge Exams (required by statute)	DSST	ACE- Workforce Credit	ACE – Military Credit	Defense Language Institute	Portfolio- Based Assessments
CCCS, Aims CC & Colo. Mtn. College	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
Adams State U.	x	x		x			x		x
Colo. Mesa U	x	x	x	x	x		x		x
Colo. School of Mines	x	x		x					
Colo. State U	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
CSU-Global Campus	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
CSU-Pueblo (page numbers refer to catalog linked here)	x (p52, 64-65)	x (p52, 68- 69)	x (p52, 65-66)	x	x (p67)		x (p20)		x (p55)
Ft. Lewis College	x	x	x	x	x		x		
MSU Denver	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
UC Boulder	<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>	x			x	<u>x</u>	
UC Colo. Springs	<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>		<u>x</u>		
UC Denver	x	x	x	x	x		x		<u>x</u> pharmacy grad program only
U. Northern Colorado	x	x	x	<u>x</u>	x	x	x		
Western State Colo. U	x	x	<u>x</u>	x			x		

Appendix B: Other States' PLA Policies & Cut Scores

Key:

Underlined text is a hyperlink to that state's laws, policies and other pertinent information.

Red font is an explanation of how PLA credit must be applied to students' degree programs.

State/System	AP minimum score(s)	IB minimum score(s)	CLEP minimum score(s)	Challenge Exams	DSST	ACE-Workforce Credit	ACE – Military Credit	Portfolio-Based Assessments
Alabama	3	Legislation provides guidelines for various forms of PLA.						
Arizona Sec 19 (ARS 15-1626) and Sec 21 (ARS 15-1782)	Currently implementing common equivalencies for each cut score.							
California State University	<u>3</u>	4 on half, 5 on half	50					
<u>Florida</u>	3	4	50		Not required to award credit for these types of PLA but required to accept it in transfer if awarded at another IHE.			
	IHEs must award the minimum recommended credit for the course or course numbers listed, even if they do not offer the course. PLA credit has to apply to a specific course, cannot simply be awarded as elective credit.							
Hawaii Section 304A-802, HRS	Establishes a college-credit equivalency program at the university and the community colleges to award college credits for students who have successfully completed – at a high school, business school, trade school, adult education school, or military training program – courses that are equivalent to courses offered for credit in the University of Hawaii system. Credits may also be awarded for work or other experiences at the discretion of the university.							
Indiana IND. CODE §21-42-3-1	<u>3</u>			Requires equal credit for testing out			Requires acceptance of ACE credit recommendations for veterans	
Kansas Board of Regents policy			Credits awarded by one IHE must be transferable to all	Allows for this				
<u>Kentucky</u>	3		50					

State/System	AP minimum score(s)	IB minimum score(s)	CLEP minimum score(s)	Challenge Exams	DSST	ACE-Workforce Credit	ACE – Military Credit	Portfolio-Based Assessments
13 KAR 2:025								
PLA credits apply to specific courses that fulfill degree requirements on the most part, or elective credit in some instances.								
Louisiana S.B. 09-285/Act 356	Uniform cut scores and course & credit equivalencies in development.							
Maryland MD Higher Ed. Comm.	New regulations were adopted to lift existing caps on the use of credit-by-exam and other competency-based methods of assessing student learning among Maryland higher education institutions (March 2014).							
Minnesota MnSCUBoard Policy 3.35.1	<u>3</u>	Required	Required			Requires acceptance of ACE credit recommendations		
Montana MBRHE policy				Developing standards				
Nevada BOR, Title 4, Ch. 14, Sec. 22				Developing standards				
North Dakota SBHE Policy 403.7.4	3 on all except: 4 on AP Literature and Composition, 4 on AP Biology, & 4 on AP Chemistry	4, except 5 on Physics	Credit by Exam Chart states CLEP is no longer accepted but lists cut scores mostly of 50	Common guidelines for this	Not accepted: Prin. of Physical Science I, Tech. Wrting, & Prin. of Public Speaking			
All credit applies to Gen Ed requirements.								
Ohio	<u>3</u>		In development				Requires	

State/System	AP minimum score(s)	IB minimum score(s)	CLEP minimum score(s)	Challenge Exams	DSST	ACE-Workforce Credit	ACE – Military Credit	Portfolio-Based Assessments
Board of Regents Policy							acceptance of ACE credit recs.	
If PLA credit meets Gen Ed or other major and degree requirements it must apply to that. Otherwise, can apply to elective credit.								
Oklahoma	All institutions must accept each other’s PLA credits in transfer. Costs to students for PLA credit should reflect as closely as possible the actual costs for administration.							
Oregon	3 on half, 4 on half							
Institutions will identify specific course articulations for their campus.								
Pennsylvania	HB 14-2076 , currently going through PA General Assembly, calls for “uniform standards for determining academic credit for prior learning.”							
Rhode Island			Requires acceptance of ACE Credit Recommendations for CLEP					
South Carolina	3 on most, 4 on several	4						
Required to award credit for the course, the content of which, parallels that of the examination.								
South Dakota	3 on almost all, 4 on several							
Required to award credit for a specific course.								
Tennessee PLA Documents and Technical Assistance	When awarding credit under this provision, the institution should use a recognized guide or procedure for awarding the credit for extra-institutional or life-long learning and lists, for example, ACE, CAEL, College Board’s recommended AP scores and so on.							
PLA credits apply toward majors, minors, concentration, gen ed and electives that count toward the degree or certificate.								
Utah Utah Code Title 53B, Chapter 16, Section 105	3	IHE determines.	50	IHE determines.				
Policy specifies which PLA exams should fulfill which gen ed requirements.								

State/System	AP minimum score(s)	IB minimum score(s)	CLEP minimum score(s)	Challenge Exams	DSST	ACE-Workforce Credit	ACE – Military Credit	Portfolio-Based Assessments
Vermont	Vermont State Colleges (VSC) designated one institution—the Community College of Vermont (CCV)—to conduct all prior learning assessment for the system, including administering CLEP, assessing corporate training for credit and administering the Assessment of Prior Learning (APL) class. The APL class is a semester-long, three-credit course that guides students through the process of describing and documenting their experiential learning in a portfolio. A committee of faculty and professionals reviews each portfolio and recommends the amount of credit to be awarded. There is no cap on the number of credits students can earn based on their demonstrated learning. Credit can be transferred to any other VSC institution and some independent institutions. More than 7,000 Vermonters have participated, and 80 percent of those who complete the APL class complete it successfully and earn an average of 30 credits. Costs include a three-credit course at CCV plus a \$300 fee to cover reviewers’ time.							
Washington SB 10-6357 HB 11-1795 Washington Revised Code 28B.10.053	Each institution shall create and publish a list of its courses that can be satisfied by successful proficiency examination scores or demonstrated competencies for lower division general education requirements or postsecondary professional technical requirements. To the maximum extent possible, institutions of higher education shall agree on examination qualifying scores and demonstrated competencies for the credits or courses under subsection (3) of this section, with scores equivalent to qualified or well-qualified. . . . must recognize the equivalencies of at least one year of course credit and maximize the application of the credits toward lower division general education requirements that can be earned through successfully demonstrating proficiency on examinations, including but not limited to advanced placement and international baccalaureate examinations. Example: Central Washington University Must fulfill lower division gen ed or career and technical education requirements.							
West Virginia WV Higher Education Policy	3 on almost all, 4 on several							
	When the AP exam is in the area of the student’s major, the institution will award credit toward the major or core curriculum, but the IHE may require a higher score than 3 on an AP test if the credit is to be used toward meeting a course requirement for a major in the department.							
Wisconsin	3							
	IHE will determine whether course equivalent credit or credit in the major should be granted, as well as the AP score required to grant credit for those purposes.							

Sources:

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**Appendix C: Responses on PLA and Online Coursework from
 Accrediting Organizations Recognized by Council for Higher Education Accreditation
 (www.chea.org) and University of Colorado Denver’s Schools of Health**

*Note: CHEA does not have a blanket statement or policy prohibiting or discouraging accreditors from allowing programs to accept or award credit for prior learning. In fact, CHEA is working on a Quality Platform that accreditors may use if they would like to help institutions in their review of extra institutional offerings in which students have participated (like PLA). -- Jan Friis, Vice President for Government Affairs

Accrediting Organization	Allows Online Coursework, including Science Courses w/ Labs	Allows awarding of credit by Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)
Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International)	YES	YES
Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET)	YES	YES
Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC)	YES	YES
Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN)	YES	YES
Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE)	YES	YES, however it likely would not shorten program seat time requirements
American Dental Education Association (ADEA)	YES	YES
American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS), a division of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC)	YES	YES
American Psychological Association (APA)	YES	YES
American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA)	YES	YES
Association of Technology, Management, and Applied Engineering (ATMAE)	YES	YES
Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)	YES	YES
Commission on Opticianry Accreditation	YES	YES
Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism and Related Professions (COAPRT)	YES	YES

Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)	YES	NO, but only for Social Work coursework. CSWE explains, “[We] are currently in a standards revision process and are looking at this standard given the increase in prior learning and direct assessment programs.”
International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education (IACBE)	YES	YES
<i>National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences (NAACLS)</i>	YES	YES
Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA-COPRA)	YES	YES

University of Colorado Denver’s Schools of Health:

School	Allows Online Coursework, including Science Courses w/ Labs	Accepts Credit Awarded through PLA in undergraduate pre-requisites
University of Colorado School of Dental Medicine	YES	AP
University of Colorado School of Medicine	YES	AP and IB
University of Colorado School of Public Health	YES	YES
University of Colorado Denver Skaggs School of Pharmacy	NO	AP – YES CLEP - NO
University of Colorado College of Nursing	YES	AP – YES (some courses) CLEP – YES (some courses) IB – adopting guidelines currently

Appendix D: Florida Articulation Coordinating Committee Credit-by-Exam Equivalencies

Exam	AP Exam Score of 3	AP Exam Score of 4	AP Exam Score of 5	Comments
Art History	ARH X000 (min. 3 credits)	ARH X050 and X051 (min. 6 credits)	Same as 4	
Biology	BSC X005C or BSC X005/X005L (min. 4 credits)	BSC X010C or BSC X010/X010L (min. 4 credits)	BSC X010C or BSC X010/X010L and BSC X011C or BSC X011/X011L (min. 8 credits)	
Calculus AB	MAC X311 (min. 4 credits)	Same as 3	Same as 3	
Calculus BC	MAC X311 (min. 4 credits)	MAC X311 and X312 (min. 8 credits)	Same as 4	The BC exam includes a <i>subscore</i> for the AB portion of the exam for Calculus AB credit. Colleges should regard the subscore on the BC exam the same as an AP Calculus AB Exam score.
Chemistry	CHM X020C or CHM X020 /X020L (min. 4 credits)	CHM X045C or CHM X045/X045L or CHM X040/X045L (min. 4 credits)	CHM X045C or CHM X045/X045L and CHM X046 or X046/X046L (min. 8 credits)	
Chinese Language and Culture	One semester of intermediate-level language (min. 3 credits)	Two semesters of intermediate-level language (min. 6 credits)	Same as 4	No literature credit
Computer Science A	CGS X075 (min. 3 credits)	Same as 3	Same as 3	CGS X075 is unique to this exam. Exam content changes frequently.

Source: <http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/5421/urlt/0078391-acc-cbe.pdf>

APPENDIX E: SAMPLE FORMAT FOR STANDARDIZED EXAM CUT SCORES

(This is intended to be an EXAMPLE of how such a table might look in the event that all IHEs accepted a 3 for a given AP exam for purposes of gtPathways credit only. It does NOT assume that IHEs currently accept a 3 for gtPathways credit.)

*This form would “live” on CDHE’s website, could be updated easily and frequently by CDHE staff, and all institutions would link to it. There may also be a way to indicate on this form which course, and under what circumstance, the credit would apply to a major. For instance, if a student gets a score of 5 on the AP exam for English Language & Composition, at Fort Lewis College (FLC) an asterisk could indicate the course will apply to the major as well (see example below).

AP Exam Credit and Cut Scores for Colorado Public Colleges & Universities

Any course with a Guaranteed Pathways (GT) notation is guaranteed to transfer and apply to [gtPathways general education requirements](#) in any Liberal Arts & Sciences associate or bachelor degree at any Colorado public college or university. A list of degrees that do not contain the gtPathways curriculum and to which these courses may not apply is listed [here](#). These courses may also apply to major and elective credit, at the institution’s discretion. Students are strongly encouraged to seek advising from the institution at which they are currently enrolled and to which they plan to transfer.

English - Advanced Placement (AP) Exams [Course Prefix(es), Number(s), and Credit Hours Awarded]															
AP Exam	Score	Aims, CCCS & CMC	ASU	CMU	CSM	CSU	CSU – Global	CSU – Pueblo	FLC	MSU Denver	UCB	UCCS	UCD	UNC	WSCU
English Language & Composition	3	ENG 121(3) GT-COI	ENG 101(3) GT-COI	ENGL 111(3) GT-COI	X	CO 130(3) GT-COI	GT-COI	ENG 101(3) GT-COI	COMP 126(3) GT-COI	ENG 1010 (3) GT-COI	WRTG 1150(3) GT-COI	ENGL 1310(3) GT-COI	ENGL 1020(3) GT-COI	ENG 122(3) GT-COI	ENG 102 (3) GT-COI
	4	ENG 121(3) GT-COI							COMP 150(4) GT-COI						
	5	ENG 121(3) GT-COI							*COMP 150(4) GT-COI						

AP Exam	Score	Aims, CCCS & CMC	ASU	CMU	CSM	CSU	CSU – Global	CSU – Pueblo	FLC	MSU Denver	UCB	UCCS	UCD	UNC	WSCU
English Literature & Composition	3														
	4														
	5														
History & Social Sciences - Advanced Placement (AP) Exams [Course Prefix(es), Number(s), and Credit Hours Awarded]															
AP Exam	Score	Aims, CCCS & CMC	ASU	CMU	CSM	CSU	CSU – Global	CSU – Pueblo	FLC	MSU Denver	UCB	UCCS	UCD	UNC	WSCU
Comparative Government & Politics	3	POS 225(3) GT-SS1													
	4														
	5														