

Policy Standards for Learning Recognition

Background

Many people have achieved college-level learning gained through work experiences and training, serving in the military, taking non-credit course work, engaging in community service and volunteer activities, and studying independently such as through open educational resources and the internet. Some of this learning has been documented through formal certificates, licenses and other types of credentials, or through standardized examinations. Many sources, such as the American Council on Education (ACE) or the National College Credit Recommendation Services (NCCRS), have evaluated this learning using rigorous assessment methods pulling on the expertise of faculty across the country. Individual institutions have also developed processes, such as challenge exams and portfolio assessment, to evaluate learning acquired outside of their traditional classrooms. Learning recognition includes all the ways that an institution recognizes, verifies, and credentials learning acquired outside the traditional classroom.

Learning recognition is an academic assessment process through which individuals document verifiable college-level learning acquired outside of the traditional learning environment for academic credit. This is an academic process and the procedures must maintain the same quality, integrity and equity as any other academic program at the institution in order to award equivalent credit. The following standards are developed to help colleges develop policy that ensures the quality, integrity, and equity of the learning recognition process.

The standards are organized around Five Critical Factors for PLA Programs (Hoffman, Travers, Evans & Treadwell, 2009; Travers, 2013), which include:

- Philosophy, Mission and Policy
- Institutional Support
- Academic Integration
- Professional Development
- Program Evaluation

Additional external resources referenced in developing these standards included regional accreditation associations' policies and the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) Ten Standards for Assessing Learning (see page 5 for the CAEL standards).

Philosophy, Mission, Policy

The alignment of philosophy, mission and policies is essential for successful learning recognition opportunities. Every practice has underlying philosophies that shape how policies are interpreted and established. There needs to be a clear alignment of the institution's philosophy, mission and policies to support using learning recognition credits to meet curricular requirements.

Standard 1: The Colleges' philosophy and mission support the award of recognized learning credits toward program requirements. The basic principles of the college regarding credit for learning recognition are clear and communicated to all constituents.

Standard 2: The College has a policy in place to support the award of learning recognition credits toward program requirements. The policy includes, but is not limited to:

- The methods by which learning can be evaluated, including the level and amount of credit available by evaluation.
- The ways in which the credits can be applied to program requirements based on the college's curricula and standards.
- Definition of college-level learning.

Standard 3: Policies, procedures and criteria applied to learning recognition activities, fee structure, any pertaining financial aid practices, and provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available to prospective and enrolled students, as well as faculty and staff involved in the assessment process, and be included in academic catalogs and college websites.

Institutional Support

Institutional support must be sufficient to ensure the quality and integrity of the learning recognition opportunities. Institutional support includes the financial structure and business model, institutional buy-in, marketing, technology, and student supports.

Standard 4: Designated person or personnel at each college will be assigned to coordinate learning recognition activities, either as a primary or secondary responsibility. This role will be responsible for:

- Communicating clear and accurate information concerning learning recognition options, policies and procedures to students, faculty, and staff;
- Ensuring evaluation activities are conducted with integrity and equity;
- Maintaining accurate records of learning recognition activities; and
- Providing and/or organizing professional development opportunities across the college.

Standard 5: Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the learning recognition process and not determined by the amount of final credit awarded.

Academic Integration

External learning can be identified and assessed in a variety of methods to determine if academic credit should be awarded towards program credentials. Common methods include, but are not limited to, standardized examinations, evaluated military and professional learning credits by the American Council on Education (ACE), the National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS) and regionally accredited institutions, individualized prior learning portfolio assessments, and institutional challenge exams. Policy should include the types of learning recognition accepted, the ways in which those credits can be applied to the academic program, and provide guidance that insures the learning recognition process is of quality, has integrity and is equitable across students.

Standard 6: Learning recognition credit is granted for verifiable college-level learning, but not for only the experience itself. This means that the learning acquired through the experience is what is evaluated for credit, not just participation in the experience.

Standard 7: The assessment process should be treated as an integral part of learning, not separate from it, and should be based on an understanding of learning processes.

Standard 8: Credit or other credentialing should be appropriate to the context in which it is awarded and accepted. The source of learning should not determine the acceptance of that learning, rather the results of an assessment method.

Standard 9: Ways in which the learning recognition assessment outcomes (e.g., recommended credits) can be applied to program requirements should be in accordance with institutional, system, state and accreditation regulations and made public to students, faculty and staff.

Standard 10: The evaluation of external learning applied to academic requirements should be based on the same criteria used to evaluate student learning expected for all credit and non-credit bearing programs. When learning recognition awards are for credit, the assessment must be at the level of acceptable college-level learning. Assessment criteria need to be clear, explicit and at the appropriate level for its application that are both agreed upon and made public to students, faculty and staff.

Standard 11: The evaluation of learning recognition outcomes must be conducted by the faculty or equivalent subject matter experts, whose competencies have been reviewed by procedures parallel to those employed by the college for full-time, part-time, and/or adjunct faculty.

Standard 12: Whose academic authority (faculty and academic administration) learning recognition credits are awarded must be determined and make explicit the procedures for this award.

Standard 13: When learning recognition awards are for credit, transcript entries should clearly describe what learning is being recognized, similarly to all other transfer and institutional credits. Because of the nature of assessing external learning, care should be given to avoid recognizing redundant learning.

Standard 14: Student supports and academic advising should be provided to all students regarding learning recognition opportunities. Although an individual may request evaluation of their verifiable learning at any time, learning recognition should be considered early enough to ensure maximizing its benefits toward the desired program.

Professional Development

The role of professional development across all constituents involved in learning recognition is essential. The constituents involve a large array of individuals who are involved with learning recognition at some level.

Standard 15: All personnel involved in the assessment of external learning must be adequately trained for the role that each contributes to the learning recognition process. Those involved in the assessment procedures need professional development on evaluating learning acquired external to the traditional academic environment. All learning recognition personnel need to pursue continuing professional development for the functions they perform.

Program Evaluation

The evaluation of learning recognition programs is often overlooked, yet it is as important as any other academic program. The learning recognition program is an academic process and needs to be held to the same standards of excellence and undergo similar evaluation processes as expected of all academic programs (credit or non-credit).

Standard 16: Institutions need to monitor, review, evaluate, and revise learning recognition processes and practices regularly in accordance to campus policies for all standard academic program reviews.

Standard 17: Institutions need to collect and analyze data pertaining to students meeting the expected outcomes of the learning recognition process.

The Council of Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)
Ten Standards for Assessing Learning

Source: <https://www.cael.org/ten-standards-for-assessing-learning>

- 1) Credit or competencies are awarded only for evidence of learning, not for experience or time spent.
- 2) Assessment is integral to learning because it leads to and enables future learning.
- 3) Assessment is based on criteria for outcomes that are clearly articulated and shared among constituencies.
- 4) The determination of credit awards and competence levels are made by appropriate subject matter and credentialing experts.
- 5) Assessment advances the broader purpose of equity and access for diverse individuals and groups.
- 6) Institutions proactively provide guidance and support for learners' full engagement in the assessment process.
- 7) Assessment policies and procedures are the result of inclusive deliberation and are shared with all constituencies.
- 8) Fees charged for assessment are based on the services performed in the process rather than the credit awarded.
- 9) All practitioners involved in the assessment process pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions they perform.
- 10) Assessment programs are regularly monitored, evaluated and revised to respond to institutional and learner needs.