Maximizing Credit for Prior Learning in a Data-Informed Ecosystem

ACE® American Council on Education®

Vantage Point CONSULTING

This tool was developed for **colleges and universities** that are ready to implement or scale credit for prior learning (CPL) to support working learners. Institutions should use this tool as a self-assessment exercise for strategic planning. The matrix identifies lanes of responsibility by function (e.g., academic engagement) and enables campuses to estimate their current level of practice based on the descriptions.

Leaders and cross-functional teams can then identify gaps and plan strategic efforts to move toward effective, sustainable CPL practices. Colleges and universities that demonstrate effective practices are best positioned to enroll, empower, and graduate underserved adult learners.

Institutional Functions	New/Emerging Stage	Developing Stage	Effective Practice Stage
	Has a basic understanding of prior learning with demonstrated institutional interest	*Begins to deepen understanding of prior learning across the institution and develops standard policies, practices, and procedures*	*Has broad and deep understanding of prior learning and acknowledges its role in equity and postsecondary pathways; sustains systematic and accessible CPL practices*
Academic Engagement	Determination of prior learning credit by pockets of faculty; grants credit awards on an ad hoc basis in response to requests	Provides professional opportunities for faculty and staff, including conferences and research; encourages faculty to include CPL activities in annual reviews; implements other incentives	Supports prior learning across institution; actively involves faculty in crafting policy and practice, such as crosswalks and articulations; creates venues for information sharing across the institution; invests in automation for standardized tasks (e.g., credit awards for known experiences) to optimize human resources for new assessments
Student Support and Outreach	Accepts prior learning on ad hoc basis in response to requests; CPL options are not yet fully transparent or well coordinated across institution	Shares CPL policies and options on website and through orientations and advising	Informs students of prior learning options before admission; uses all types of communication tools to share information with students; provides transparent and up-front guarantees of credit awards for prior learning; proactively grants CPL credit awards
Institutional Supports	Identifies policies, processes, practices, and governance structures that will help meet institution's CPL goals	Establishes policies and practices; puts people, resources, and structures into place to manage programs	Executes new, data-informed policies and refines practices in a continuous improvement process; shares best practices and benchmark data with peers; engages effectively with ecosystem partners; supports CPL for student success
Technical Capacity/Data	Collects best practices on how to manage CPL data but may not fully integrate CPL data and processes in SIS platforms	Records, tracks, and collects data related to CPL credit awards systematically; consistently tracks equivalency decisions; expects technical proficiency in roles and responsibilities	Manages, tracks, and shares CPL data internally and externally for maximum transparency; uses historic data to make proactive CPL awards; automates standardized tasks (e.g., credit awards for known experiences); provides ongoing training to encourage technical proficiency
Ecosystem Engagement	Researches and identifies best practices for partnerships with state-level entities, workforce boards, employers, other institutions, or credential providers; initiates and sets foundation for relationships with partners	Establishes a regular meeting cadence with ecosystem partners to share data, understand needs or requirements, and remove barriers to collaboration	Maintains tight alignment and collaboration between partners that supports direct-hire pipelines, custom training, and upskilling options for learners