





Prior Learning Assessment Taxonomy

Purpose of the Tool

Prior learning assessment (PLA) awards credit to individuals who demonstrate mastery of college-level content. Most colleges offer multiple forms of PLA to appeal to their students' wide range of experiences and abilities. However, many qualified students choose not to use these options because of unclear policies.

This tool outlines the key characteristics of various forms of PLA. With modifications to reflect institution-specific policies, college administrators can adapt this chart into a resource that allows incoming students to self-select the form of PLA that best aligns with their experience and goals.

Prior Learning Assessment Taxonomy				
	 Standardized Exams	 Course Challenge Exams	 Evaluated Training, Certification, or Licenses	 Portfolio Assessments
Format	Credits offered for multiple-choice tests that assess mastery of college-level content	Credits offered for exams developed by department, similar to course finals	Credits offered for standardized training from approved non-academic institution	Credits offered for skills documented through résumés, essays, projects, letters, etc.
Skills Assessed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General education skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical skills General education skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional skills General education skills
Relevant Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classroom study Independent study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work experience Classroom study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Military training Apprenticeship or licensure training Standardized corporate training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work experience Extracurricular learning
Additional Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Test-taking skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Test-taking skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transcript from training provider 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong writing skills, Portfolio course (at some institutions)
Assessor	Exam provider (e.g., College Board, ETS) ¹	Faculty	Faculty or third-party organization (e.g., ACE, NCCRS) ²	Faculty or third-party organization (e.g., LearningCounts, KNEXT)
Time to Earn Credits	90–180 minutes long, depending on provider	Typically no more than 3 hours	No additional time investment	Up to 15 weeks for portfolio completion
Number of Credits Available	Typically 3 credits per exam passed	Typically 3 credits per exam passed	Typically 3–40 credits, depending on training	Typically 3–15 credits, depending on experience
Cost to Student	\$80–\$91 per exam, depending on provider	\$20–\$100 per exam, depending on institution	\$40–\$45 transcript fee, if ordered from third-party organization	\$100–\$1,000 total, depending on course provider and assessor

1) The College Board administers the Advanced Placement (AP) and College Level Examination Program (CLEP) tests, and ETS administers the DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSST).

2) The American Council on Education (ACE) evaluates military training and corporate training. The National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS) evaluates training programs offered by corporations, unions, religious organizations, and other entities.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.