



## RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

# Advising and Prior Learning Assessment to Equitably Support Student Completion

Maricopa Community Colleges · April 30, 2021

Patrick Lane · Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

# Welcome and WebEx Instructions

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- Mute your mic when you're not speaking. Turn your camera on to interact with the presenters and others.
- This session is being recorded.
- Post your questions and comments in the chat box.
- Use reactions to show everyone what you think.
- Please complete the session evaluation at the end.
- Materials, recording, and presentation will be shared after the session.

**The Let's Talk CTE Series is brought to you by MCCC's Workforce and Economic Development and Office (WEDO).**

# Agenda and Session Outcomes

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## SEGMENT ONE:

- Understand the latest research on prior learning assessment and be able to use it at their institutions to further scale prior learning assessment.
- Identify potential challenges in ensuring prior learning assessment policy and practice improves student outcomes and does so equitably.

## SEGMENT TWO:

- Link national-level recommendations for scaling prior learning assessment to statewide and institutional goals, policies, and practices.

# What is WICHE?



# Today's Themes

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1. Research
2. Equity
3. Practice
4. Collaboration & Discussion



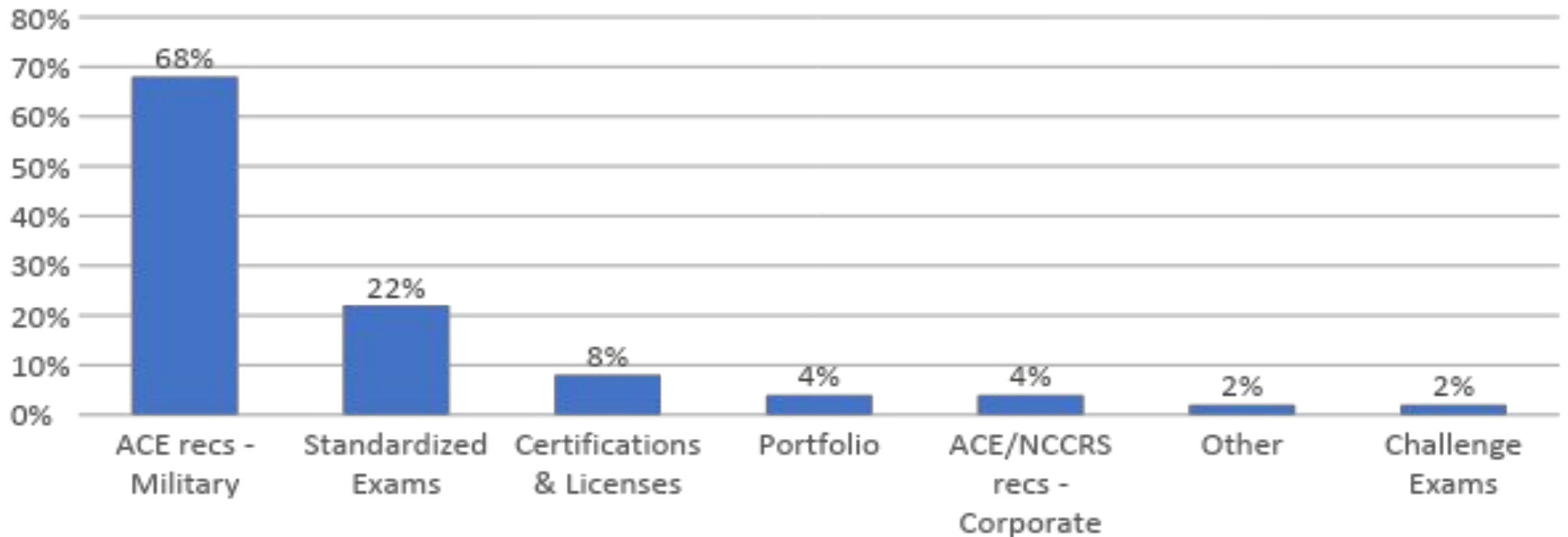
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# Background and Context

# Terminology – Prior Learning Assessment

- The **process** for recognizing and **awarding credit** for college-level learning acquired **outside of the classroom**.
- Conceptual premise(s):
  - College-level learning can take place in many environments.
  - Institutions should equitably recognize learning wherever it occurs.
  - Students should not have to take courses for content they have already mastered.
  - Recognized learning is equal, no matter the modality.

# What is PLA in practice?



Source: Rebecca Klein-Collins, et al. 2020, "The PLA Boost," The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning & the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education



# COVID-19 pandemic

- The perfect storm...
  - Severe economic impacts and job losses
  - Major shifts to workforce demand

...usually leads to booms in 2-year enrollment.

- This time may really be different



# New Research Findings

Stop me if you've heard this before...

# 2020 research study



CAEL

WICHE



**72**

participating institutions



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Academic records from more than

**230,000**

adult students



**30**

community colleges included in  
the main analysis

# Topline results: The boost to credential completion

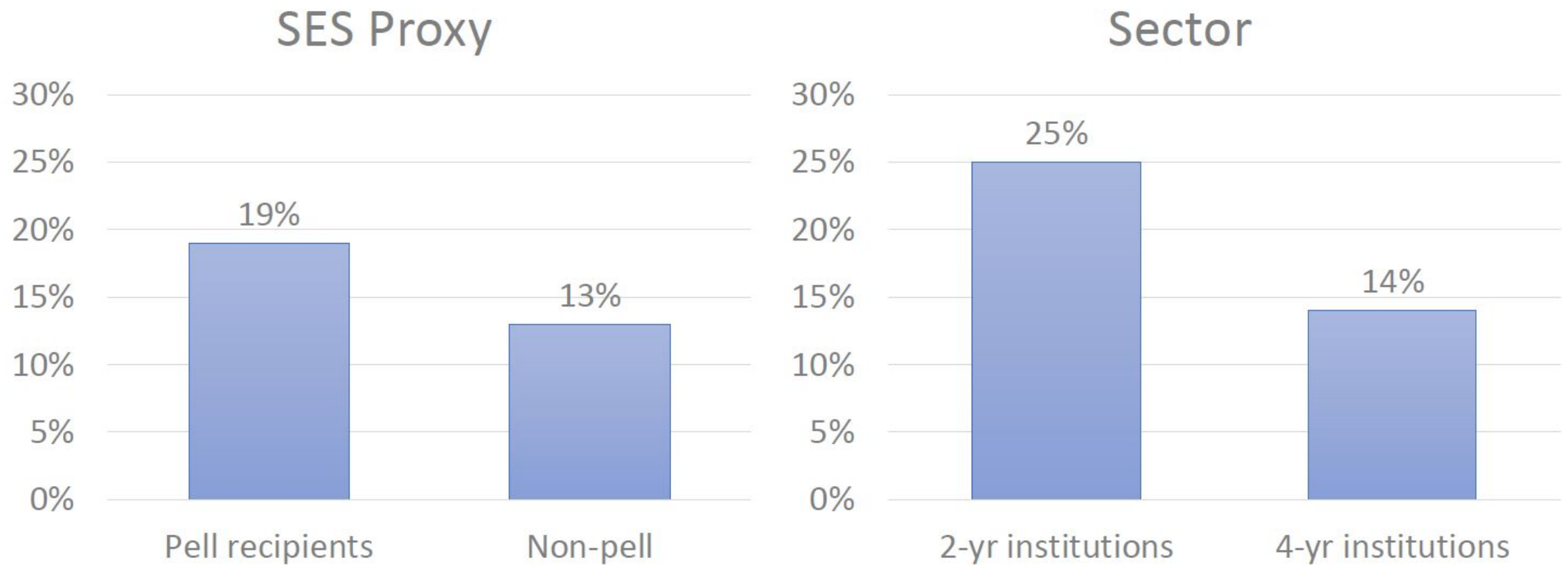
Controlling for student and institutional factors...

Credit through PLA increases the likelihood of adult student credential completion by:

- 17% -- All PLA methods

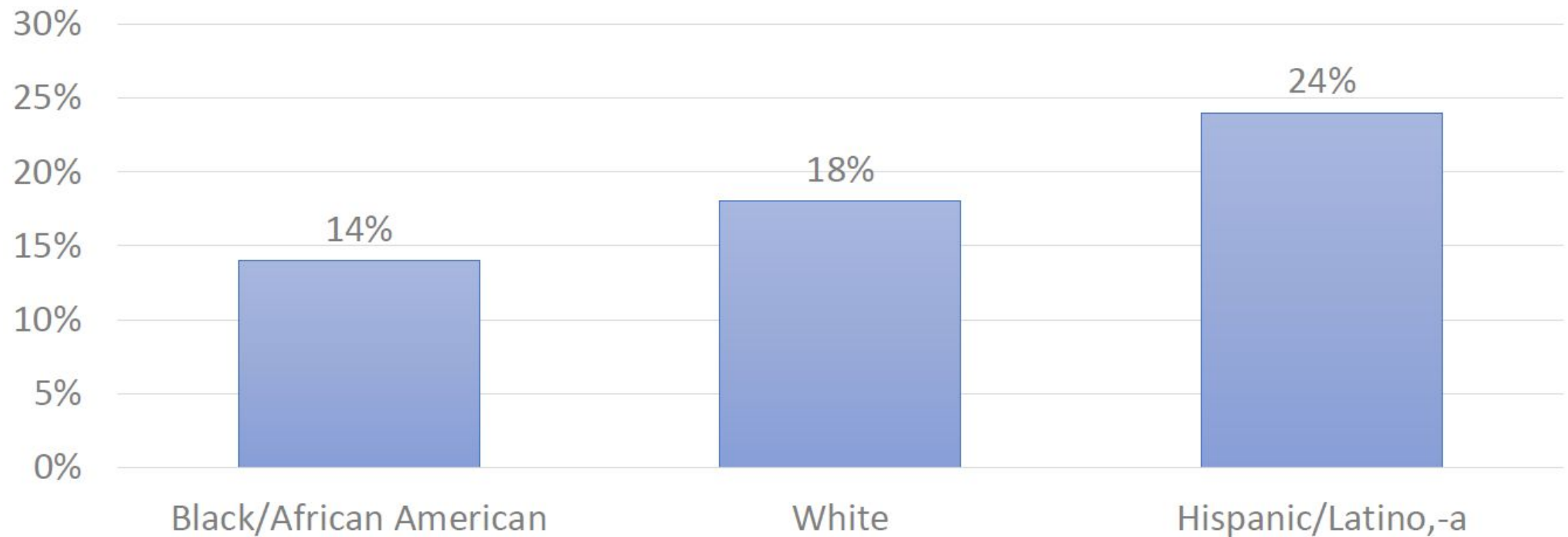
- 30% -- Methods other than ACE credit recommendations

# Digging deeper - PLA boosts



# Digging deeper - PLA boosts

Completion Boost by Race/Ethnicity



# Methodological interlude

- Potential for sample bias
- Propensity score matching
- Institutional requirements
  - Multiple methods of PLA for a decade
  - Data system capabilities
- Discussion: How does your institution stack up?

# Discussion Questions – Your Institutions

Answer with WebEx Reactions:



Yes



Not Sure



No



Sort of



Haha! Good one!



# Discussion questions – Your institutions

1. Does your institution track PLA usage at the student level?
2. Does your institution analyze PLA usage at the student level?
3. Could you produce metrics for the success of PLA recipients vs. non-recipients?
4. Could you disaggregate by race/ethnicity & SES?

# Discussion questions – Your institutions

- In the chat box, please add the key research questions, metrics, or other data and information that would help you in efforts to scale OER on your campus.
  - EXAMPLE: PLA recipient performance in subsequent courses.

# Now, the less good news...PLA usage among adults 25+

Student Groups	PLA Uptake: All methods	Non-military methods
Asian Adults	8%	4%
Black/African American Adults	6%	2%
Hispanic/Latino, -a Adults	8%	5%
White Adults	8%	4%
Other/Multiracial	7%	2%
Nat. Hawaiian/Other P.I.	4%	2%
Am. Indian/Alaska Native	6%	3%

# Now, the less good news...PLA usage among adults 25+

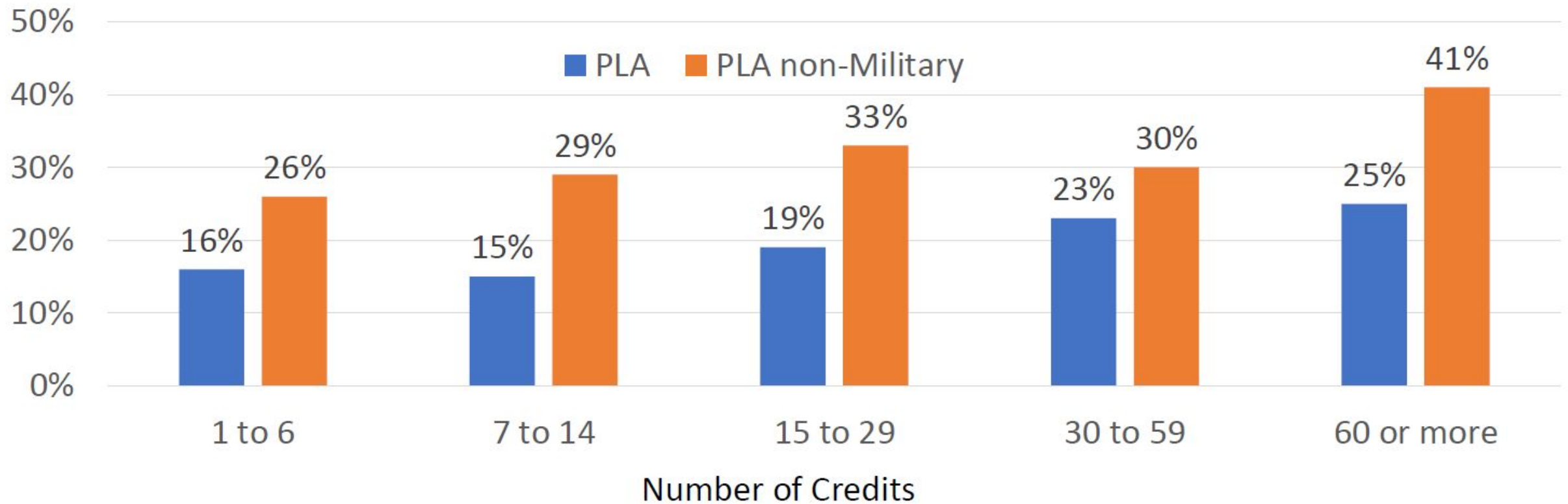
Institutional Category	PLA Uptake: All methods	Non-military methods
Two-year Institutions	4%	2%
Four-year Public	14%	5%
Four-year Private	7%	7%
For-Profit	13%	4%
MSIs	4%	3%
Non-MSIs	11%	4%

# Other findings

- Time to degree: Avg. improvement of 14 months
- Cost savings: Est. \$1,480 at 2-year institutions (obviously dependent on tuition/fees, etc.)\*\*\*!!!
- “Dosage” effects: Little difference in “boost” at lower levels of PLA.

# Dosage effects

Avg. Marginal Effect on Credential Completion



# The business case for PLA

- Myth: granting PLA credit hurts institutional budgets by “giving away” credits that students would otherwise pay for.

- Truth: PLA recipients took an average of 17.6 more credits at their institution than non-recipients.



# Moving from “Why” to “How”

Recommendations from CAEL, WICHE, and a host of others



# High-level recommendations

- Communication, communication, communication
- Intentional and systematic PLA advising
- Business planning to sustain PLA
- “Regularization” of PLA

# Advising - Key findings

## **Advisors play a critical front-line role in helping students navigate the PLA process**

- Effective advisors play the role of translator and liaison between students and faculty/staff.
- *"It's hard for the student to understand that we're the messenger. We end up being that person who has to explain it, when a lot of times we're not faculty first. We're the student affairs professionals first."*

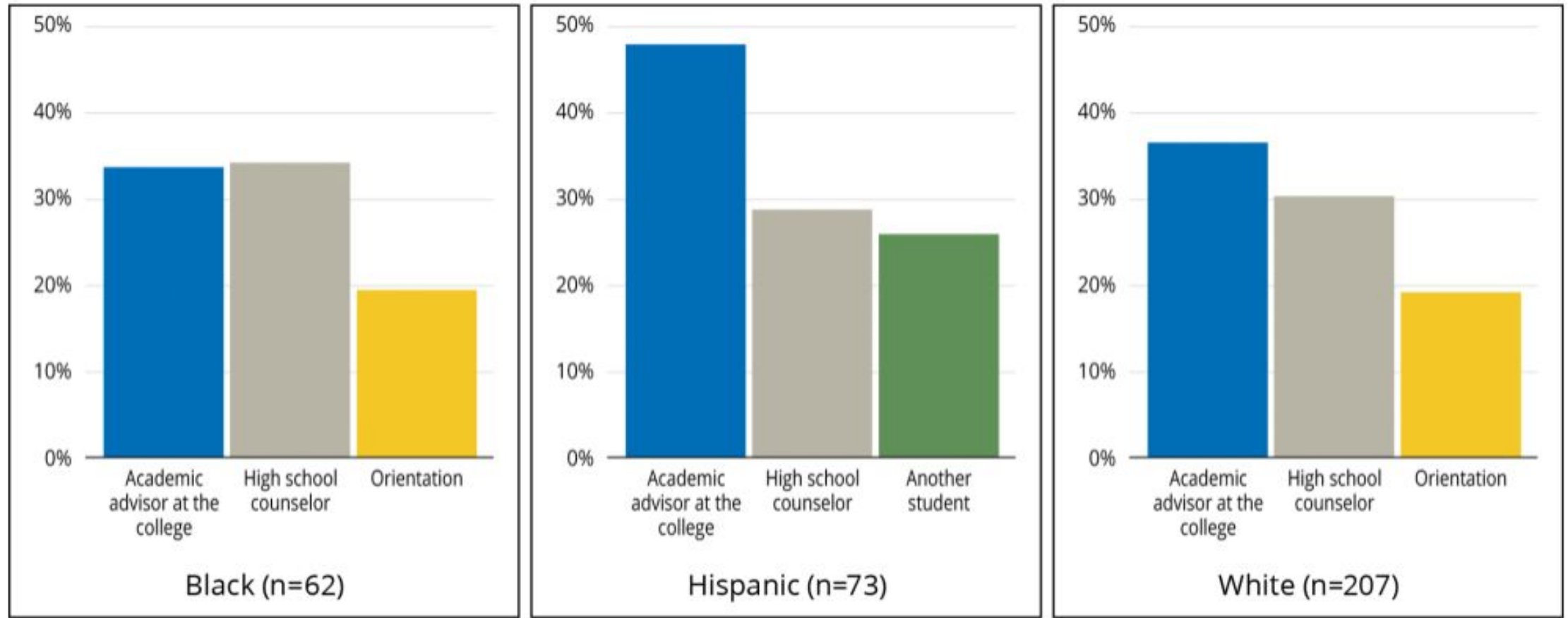
## **Students may not know about PLA options available**

- Access to PLA is like getting into **"a secret club."** There is a need to proactively identify candidates for PLA and initiate advisor conversations.

## **Methods of PLA should be more inclusive of all learner experiences and preferences**

- *"Every student that comes to us is not a blank slate. Every student comes to us with learning, no matter the age."*

# How do students find out about PLA?

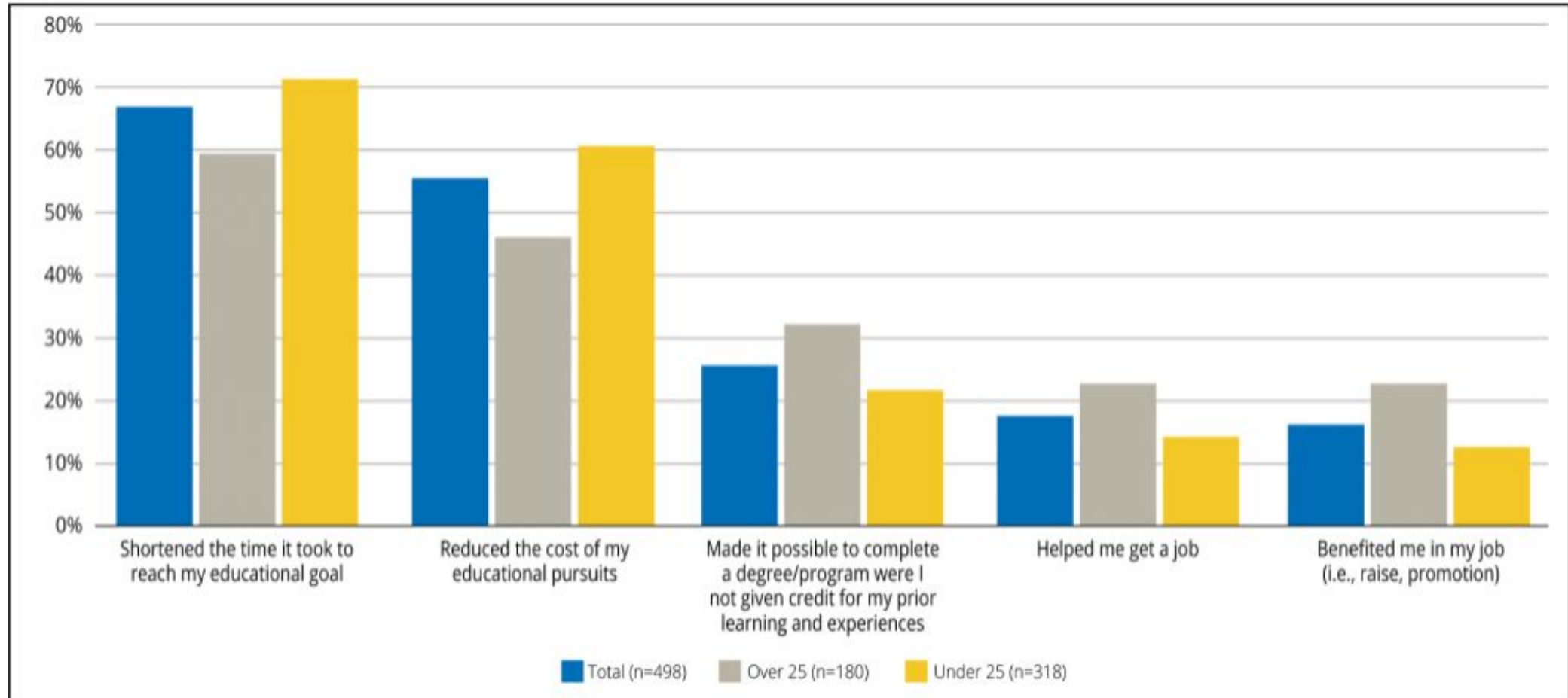


Source: Sarah Leibrandt, "PLA from the Student's Perspective," Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

# Additional findings

- Students over the age of 25 are LESS LIKELY than students under the age of 25 to learn about PLA from:
  - Other students
  - Family members
  - Orientation.

# Student perceptions of PLA benefits



Source: Sarah Leibrandt, "PLA from the Student's Perspective," Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

# How do/will students at your institutions find out about PLA?

- Websites – How effective is this as an outreach method?
- Emails to students – Tracking and data?
- Advising – What systemic processes are in place? De-biasing professional development?
- Word-of-mouth?
- Will any of this work? HOW WILL YOU KNOW?!?

# Discussion questions - Advising

- Do you have professional development modules for advisors focused on PLA?
- Do you have mechanisms for faculty to refer students to PLA-focused advisors or offices?
- Do your advisors undergo training on implicit bias?
- Do you have systematic approaches to conveying information through the advising process?

# Discussion questions - Communication

- In the chat box, add a brief description of any innovative approaches you use for PLA outreach.



# How will you sustain PLA?

Cost	Price
Program administration	Student fees
Faculty compensation	Fee supports/waivers
Professional development	Appropriate differentiation
Outreach	Not based on credits awarded

# Aspirational PLA business model – Core principles

1. Equitable
2. Provide fair compensation to faculty
3. Balance cost and price (sustainable)
4. Regularly assessed and adapted

# Business models – Additional reading

1. **Oklahoma Regents Policies on PLA (See policy 3.15)**  
<https://www.okhighered.org/state-system/policy-procedures/2014/2014-Policy%20chapter%203.pdf>
2. **Northeast Resiliency Consortium PLA Handbook:**  
[https://www.achievingthedream.org/system/files\\_force/resources/plahandbooknrc\\_oct\\_2017.pdf?download=1](https://www.achievingthedream.org/system/files_force/resources/plahandbooknrc_oct_2017.pdf?download=1)
3. **Penn State System PLA Guidance:** <https://priorlearning.psu.edu/pla-right-me>
4. **National Resource Center for Prior Learning** – Key factors for successful prior learning programs:  
<https://nrcpl.org/five-critical-factors/>
5. **CAEL – PLA Is Your Business: Pricing and Other Considerations for the PLA Business Model**  
[https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/617695/2015\\_PLA\\_Business\\_Model-FINAL.pdf](https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/617695/2015_PLA_Business_Model-FINAL.pdf)

# Discussion questions – Business models

- Do you have a fully developed business model for sustaining an effective PLA program?
- Does your business model fairly support faculty/staff contributed time and effort?
- Does your business model support program administration?
- Does your business model provide fee support for low SES students?

# Assessment models

- Method dependent(!)
- Should be replicable, equitable, transparent, and sustainable
- Portfolios usually the most complex
  - Course for portfolio development
  - Faculty training on assessment (more for replicability and consistency)
  - Compensation

# Recommendations revisited – Call to action(s)

- Embed PLA throughout pipeline
- Assess and adjust
- Communicate
- “Systematize”
- Sustain
- Connect to employers
- Promote equity
- Collaborate

# More specific calls to action(s)

- Find out what data are available on PLA and how they're used. Develop common reporting templates and metrics.
- Identify components of PLA scaling where efficiencies of scale across system are possible (e.g. professional development, certification/licensure crosswalks, market research, message testing).
- Build allies in business office, enrollment management, etc.
- Develop intentional steps to ensure PLA is equitable.
- Expand community of allies.
- Balance “credit for what you already know” with “receive credit for demonstrating college-level learning.”



# Segment Two:



Statewide and Institutional Goals, Practices, and Policies





# Role of CTE in Statewide Attainment Goals\*

- Count ALL Credentials of Value towards Attainment: States should recognize these credentials in their attainment targets.
- Leverage Secondary CTE to Meet Statewide Attainment Goals: States should include the expansion of CTE pathways and meaningful college and career advising systems as part of their attainment strategy.
- Support Postsecondary CTE as a Platform for Credential and Degree Attainment Postsecondary students enrolled in CTE programs have an average attainment rate of 56.8 percent (counting credentials, certificates and degrees at two-year institutions), well above the average graduation rate for two-year institutions.
- Bring CTE to the Table as a Partner: A statewide attainment goal can and should serve as the driver of a state's economic and workforce vision, of which CTE must be a part.

\*Adapted from Advancing CTE's The New Fact Sheet on the Role of CTE in Statewide Attainment Goals

# Statewide PLA Activities

Existing	Desired
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Aligned standardized exams</li><li>• Created a Prior Learning Community of Interest</li><li>• Developed a partial list of institutional PLA decisions</li><li>• Re-examining statewide policies limiting PLA application</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Expand PLA methods and decisions (standardized exams, industry recognized credentials, military credit, non-credit, challenge exams, portfolios, etc)</li><li>• Remove policy barriers related to acceptability and applicability (e.g.. AGECE)</li><li>• Create a robust statewide repository of PLA decisions to support transparency, advising, and mobility</li><li>• Collect statewide data and report trends and outcomes related to PLA</li></ul>

# Challenges and Concerns

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**Transferability** - “Faculty Driven Model” If the universities trust our faculty in the transfer arena, why not PLA

**Hiring Qualifications** - “Evaluation is focused on the “**What**” not the “**Who** or **Where**”

**Seat Time** - “ Seat Time vs. Content Learned” Achievement should be measured in terms of mastering competencies, rather than the traditional measure of 'length of time to learn it'

**Competition** - PLA negatively impacts enrollment. **FALSE!** PLA contributes to access, retention, persistence and completion

# Ideas to Advance Statewide Prior Learning Assessment

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**Align Policy:** Provide greater consistency and transparency of PLA policy

**Streamline Practices:** Articulate PLA decisions to support learner mobility as well as degree completion

**Improve Awareness and Access:** Ensure that students are advised of the several ways that they may have their prior learning assessed for award of academic credit and they have access to resources that house decisions

**Enhance PLA Student Experience:** Improve current services for students related to transcript and PLA evaluation

**Expand Use of Data:** Analyze data reporting to inform policies and practices

# Maricopa Community College as a Case Study: Year One

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- Analyzed infrastructure to identify gaps and areas of opportunity
- Revamped PLA policies
- Educated key stakeholders
- Incorporated PLA in transfer and university conversations
- Tracked success to inform and enhance future efforts
- Designated an area to “own” PLA
- Created Transfer Credit and Articulation Services Department

# Maricopa Community College as a Case Study: Current

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- Build standard processes related to transfer credit/PLA
- Perform extensive research of curriculum from outside institutions
- Create and maintain standard equivalencies (credit and non-credit) that are documented and automated for district-wide use
- Support for student services staff; assist with evaluation backlog, provide training resources, conduct ongoing training sessions, etc.
- Collaborate with all stakeholders to identify needs and concerns related to transfer credit
- Collaborate with Instructional Councils and Program Directors to assist with equivalency decisions for non traditional credit

# Maricopa Community College as a Case Study: Current

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- Work with the Instructional Council and faculty experts to expand PLA decisions
- Develop website for employees
- Create Dynamic Forms
- Create Marketing Campaign
- Track and Report PLA Success
- Create Transfer Credit Task Force

# Pima Community College as a Case Study

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- Created a Veteran's Articulation Guide with 2,196 ACE approved military courses and occupations linked to 256 Pima classes covering 23 instructional departments.
- Developed a PLA electronic workflow process that awards and documents student credit in a paperless environment.
- Modified our existing Administrative Procedure to better serve students allowing 75% of a degree or certificate to be earned via PLA.
- Developed and supported materials, including a comprehensive PLA Handbook and Pima PLA webpage.
- Awards PLA credit via Portfolio, Non-Credit to Credit, Challenge Exam, and Business and Industry certification and licensure.



# Faculty Call To Action: Your Move!



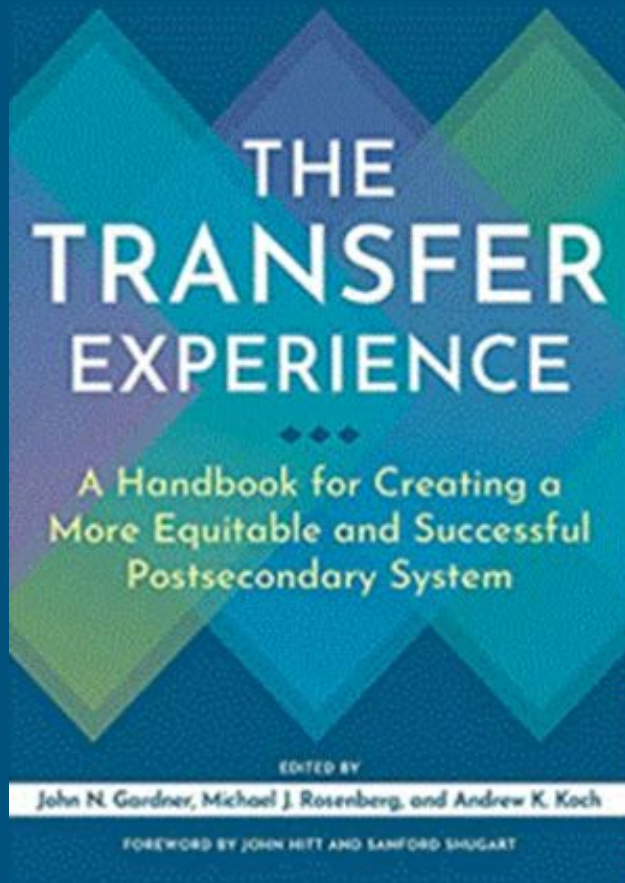
- Determine PLA equivalencies and applicability
- Target industry, micro, or other credentials and “stack and weave” them as part of guided pathway or accelerated program models
- Create PLA crosswalks to certificates and degrees
- Treat transfer credit from other accrediting bodies equal
- Discuss PLA at annual ATF Meetings
- Collaborate with your institutional leadership, administration, and support staff to facilitate requests, document decisions, and answer questions you may have about PLA

# Call To Action: Your Move!



- Stay engaged and keep the momentum
- Focus on small wins and opportunities
- Understand what type of PLA options work for your program
- Be open and responsive to PLA requests
- Help others understand the benefits and address any misconceptions
- Be a PLA advocate!

**Behind every request is a learner hoping to continue their education.**



“Transfer is a vital mechanism for closing the racial and income equity gaps in higher education, as well as an unnecessarily complex issue that too often leaves students stranded on their academic journeys. I share the authors’ holistic philosophy of the transfer student experience and particularly appreciate their emphasis on the student’s pre-transfer academic preparation. This handbook is an essential tool for ensuring these students are propelled to degree completion.”

- *Janet L. Marling, Executive Director, The National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students - University of North Georgia*

<https://styluspub.presswarehouse.com/browse/catalog?SearchString=transfer%20experience&page=1>

# PLA Inventory (excerpt)

## Prior Learning Assessment Services for Students

- ❑ Oversight and location for PLA is established.
- ❑ Brochures, online information, etc., are available and easily accessible to students seeking PLA options, and staff who are in direct contact with students who PLA may benefit.
- ❑ Equivalencies established through PLA methods are available online and are regularly maintained and updated.

## Institutional PLA Policies, Practices, and Assessment Standards (Adapted from CAEL's Key Assessment Standards)

- ❑ Formal PLA policies are listed in the official catalog and publicized to students.
- ❑ Evaluation processes, systems and/or pathways are in place to ensure that learning is of high quality, aligned to transparent, assessable learning outcomes, and that the credit has the potential to be applied toward a degree or certificate (not just toward elective credits).

## Inter-Institutional and Industry Partnerships and Collaboration

- ❑ Ongoing collaboration occurs among statewide transfer partners to work toward alignment and transferability of PLA decisions.
- ❑ Institutional policies related to PLA at two- and four-year colleges in the state are jointly monitored.

# Contact Info and Thank You

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**Session Evaluation**

# Resource Slide

[The PLA Boost: Results from a 72-Institution Targeted Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Adult Student Outcomes](#)

[WICHE Landscape Analysis](#)

[AZTransfer PLA Community of Interest](#)

[The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning \(CAEL\)](#)

**SAVE THE DATE: 2021 CAEL Annual Conference**

San Diego & Online      Nov 17-19, 2021