CAEL's Online PLA Certification Program

Today’s session will...
- Describe the content
- Highlight the online design
- Provide information on who has benefited from the PLA Online Certification Program
  …So that you may decide if this program would be of benefit to you, others that you know, and/or your institution/program/business

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CAEL’s Online PLA Certification Program

Online PLA Program

4 Workshops
- 6-7 weeks each
- Completion in 6 months

Two Certifications…
- Professional Achievement as a Prior Learning Assessor… Workshops I & II
- Mastery in Prior Learning Assessment… Workshop III & IV
Content of the program...

PLA — the practice of awarding (academic) credit for learning acquired outside of the institution

Based on the:

- **10 Standards**
  - 5 Academic/5 Administrative
- **6 Steps**
  - w/ associated principles
  - …articulated by Urban Whitaker in *Assessing Learning: Standards, Principles, and Procedures* (CAEL, 1989) and endorsed by CAEL.

Initially authored by Drs. Catherine Marienau & Morry Fiddler (School for New Learning/DePaul University) and recently revised and redesigned in a project led by James Moore (Division of Lifelong Learning, DePaul University).

Basic Premise….

A PLA program and PLA activities (assessing, advising, administering, etc.) are a series of decisions…

Awareness of and agreement on a set of standards and principles provides a structure and source for those decisions while not prescribing choices that are contextual.

Workshops are intended to elevate the range of those decisions and provide an arena to practice them… as well as consider alternatives.

A Brief History of PLA…

Convergence of 4 events in the 1970’s:

- Colleges/universities began receiving requests to assess the learning that adult students achieved outside of an academic setting
- Several institutions perceived that adult learners would be the ‘new’ clientele of post-secondary education
- Demographics suggested that 18 y.o. enrollments would be proportionately declining vs. adult enrollments
- American Council on Education began assessing military training for academic credit

PLA History II

1974: 3 year collaboration among Educational Testing Service & group of about 10 colleges – the Cooperative Assessment of Experiential Learning (CAEL)… to examine if there were best practices re valid and reliable assessment of prior learning
PLA History III

Project Outcomes:
- An initial set of principles… (since revised)
- CAEL became… CAEL – Council for Adult and Experiential Learning
- Essentially 4 Strategies for Measurement of Learning emerged:
  - Standardized exams (e.g., DANTES, CLEP)
  - Challenge exams
  - Guidelines for assessment (ACE PONSI)
  - Individual assessment
    - Portfolios, focused evidence(s), recognition of certificates of achievement

PLA Now… & into the Future

- About 90% of postsecondary institutions offer at least one form of PLA
- PLA is worldwide
- And… legislatively by national governments in Canada, Australia, and South Africa
- Expanded to graduate education
- And expanding to professional associations

As the interest and experience with PLA has grown….

- ACPL – Assessment of Prior Certificated Learning (UK)
- APEL – Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (Ireland; US)
- APL – Assessment of Prior Learning (UK)
- PLA – Assessment of Prior Learning (US, Canada)
- PLAR – Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (Canada)
- RPL – Recognition of Prior Learning (Australia, South Africa)
- …”Alice’s Restaurant”

All things evolve….
The IV Workshops

**Workshop I**: What is the Landscape of PLA?
- PLA for PLA…

**Workshop II**: From the Landscape to the Map of PLA

**Workshop III**: Administering and Assuring Quality of PLA Programs

**Workshop IV**: A Plan for the Development or Improvement of a PLA Program

Experience of the workshops…

A series of activities…

…a combination of a progressively developing case study(ies), issues, readings, and discussion among practitioners of all levels of experience & responsibility in their organizations

Feedback, commentary, underlying ideas, alternatives, contexts, nudges… …from an online ‘consultant’

As the interest and experience with PLA has grown….

Issues, decisions, practices, implications for curriculum, uses, relationships between students & institutions, acceptance/skepticism, strategies, systems, applications, marketing,…

…have diversified as well
Recurring Theme: 10 Standards of PLA

**Academic…**
- Credit should be awarded only for learning & not for experience
- College credit should be awarded only for college-level learning
- Credit should be awarded for learning that (demonstrates…) theory and practical application
- Determination of competence levels & of credit awards made by appropriate… experts
- Credit should be appropriate to the academic context in which it is accepted.

**Administrative**
- Credit awards and their transcripting should be monitored to avoid duplications
- Policies & procedures should be fully disclosed & available
- Fees should be for assessment not for amount of credit awarded
- All personnel…should receive adequate training… and professional development
- Assessment programs should establish… review and continuous improvement processes

**Intended Outcomes & Competencies…**
- Understand principles of experiential learning, including the value of experiential learning for adults
- Apply the steps and procedures in the PLA process
- Determine college-level learning gained from experience
- Apply principles of best practice in PLA
- Apply administrative principles of PLA within the context of your organization
- Articulate to various audiences the value of PLA

**Why Online?**
- Geographically disperse audience
- Cost effective professional development (vs in-class)
- Audience learns at it’s own pace
- Audience requires flexible scheduling
- Efficient learning mechanism (little and often)
- Promotes assessing and contribution
Issues

- Distance Learning teaching methodology is quite often seen as binary (right/wrong)
- Usability and Technology barriers
- High expectations (Amazon production values)
- Student procrastination

DePaul Audit 2004

- Student Motivation: DePaul students identified schedule flexibility as the primary driver of their decision to enroll in distance learning
- Faculty Effort: Faculty say they spend more time teaching online than they do on campus, but they feel the time is well spent

Student Satisfaction

Students are quite satisfied with distance learning at DePaul; 75% say that they learn as much or more in online classes as on campus

Lessons Learned

- Personalization
  - Daily communication
- Online is more work (for student and facilitator) - but worth it
- Structure
  - Enforce (appropriate) deadlines
- Do not focus on the technology - focus on usability
- Person - Environment
  - Online does not work for everyone
  - Encourages deliberate learners
Out with the old...

And in with the new

Who Has Benefited?
- Advisors
- Faculty
- Program Managers
- Training Managers
- Entrepreneurs
- Administrators
- Program Developers
- Grad Students

Reprise… PLA Online Certification Program
- To build a common language
- Agreements on standards and principles
- A ‘conversation’ on the role and value of learning from experience in higher learning
- Increase the legitimacy of PLA processes
  - As a recognition of adults’ realities as learners in contemporary life
  - “Leading” with assessment as an integral element of learning
Interested…?

- Who the workshops and program has served….
- Details of signing up
  - www.learning.depaul.edu/pla/

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