

# THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

## Faculty

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### 3-State Project Will Explore Prior-Learning Assessment on Statewide Basis

*By Lindsay Ellis*

Public-college systems in Montana, Ohio, and Texas will work with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning in a two-year effort to promote prior-learning assessment, the council announced on Tuesday.

Prior-learning assessments typically benefit adult, nontraditional students, who can earn course credits for expertise they have gained from experiences like working, taking online courses, or serving in the military. To evaluate such experiences, the council uses [LearningCounts.org](http://LearningCounts.org), an online service partly supported by the Lumina Foundation, which provided a \$1-million grant to the council to test the feasibility of a statewide approach.

The three state groups are the Montana Commission on Higher Education, which oversees 16 colleges and universities in the Montana University System; the Ohio Board of Regents, which oversees about 60 colleges and universities as well as adult-education and technical-training centers; and the Texas A&M University System. The systems vary in their use of prior-learning assessment, said Amy E. Sherman, the council's associate vice president for policy and strategic alliances.

She noted that colleges in Montana have examined policies on prior-learning assessment at training sessions and summits.

The Ohio system has held working groups with faculty members and administrators to discuss the assessment of students' portfolios, which document their expertise, and issues specific to veterans as part of a state effort called PLA With a Purpose, said Brett A. Visger, the board's associate vice chancellor for institutional collaboration and completion.

Many administrators understand and like the idea of prior-learning assessment, but faculty members have more varied perspectives, Mr. Visger said. While some are enthusiastic, others fear it will turn their institution into a "credit mill" or remove students with rich life experiences from classrooms, he said.

James R. Hallmark, the Texas A&M system's vice chancellor for academic affairs, said that shortening the time to degree completion would save money for both students and the state, lower pressure on classroom capacity, and help the economy by bringing students into the work force sooner.

Over the next few weeks, the council will set plans with the state systems, said Rebecca J. Klein-Collins, the council's senior director of research.


Representatives from each state system will meet in San Diego on November 5.


Because the council typically works on an institution-by-institution basis to promote prior-learning assessment, statewide efforts will expand its research to multi-institution adoption.

"We'll be documenting the process of how that happens," she said, "and what kinds of issues are considered, what kinds of activities are part of that effort, and what challenges may arise.


Educating adults through prior-learning assessment will further the Lumina Foundation's goal of lifting the percentage of Americans with college credentials to 60 percent by 2025, the foundation said.

8 comments ★ 0



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[archman](#) · 8 days ago

Ah yes, the race to see who can crank out a college degree in the cheapest and fastest way. Because that is what Higher Education is all about. Disappointing.

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It is not about a race. It is about recognizing learning where it takes place so that students do not have to spend time and money "learning" content they already know.

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22228715 · 7 days ago

I worked for an adult degree program within a university in the early 1990s. We offered credit for life experience, with competency demonstrated by a portfolio project (just because you were a \_\_\_ for 10 years doesn't mean you were good at it.) In my experience, the portfolios took approximately the same effort as assignments in a structured 3-credit course would have, and sometimes involved wonderful insights into experience that the student would not have otherwise made. But the portfolios could, indeed, be done in a month or less versus the butt-in-chair time over three months.

1 ^ | v Reply Share >

archman → 22228715 · 7 days ago

Yes, a good portfolio \*may\* replace traditional assessment. That portfolio \*may\* even be an original work that the student did themselves. It \*may\* even be screened by actual faculty with the time and qualifications to assess it, rather than (the more common) box-checking clerical staff. There are many well known abuses and problems with competency based credit, that seem to be chronic. These issues will only be magnified if efforts to ramp up competency-based credit are carried out with the existing proposals, which are for the most part vague, "leave the details out", and displaying poor quality control.

2 ^ | v Reply Share >

soapy → archman · 7 days ago

What you seem to be implying is that the current traditional model is working so well?

Students sitting in classroom \*may\* actually learn when the faculty is talking, the faculty member \*may\* actually spend serious time and thought on reading students' assignments and grade accordingly...

To use your words: There are many well-known abuses and problems with the traditional classroom model that seem to be chronic.

Investigating a new model that would indeed recognize students' individual skills and competencies may offer an alternative and a more individualized program. With all this planning around each student, the grades, the skills, and the diploma one receives might actually be more meaningful, rather than so generic.

But I do agree with you on one point: the details are critical here to make this a success in the students' interests and not a complete flop.

3 ^ | 1 v Reply Share >

archman → soapy · 7 days ago

When you take one form over the other, you will find that one model blows the pants off of another regarding its reliability.

1 ^ | v Reply Share >

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jwertheim · 7 days ago

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) believes that "Higher Education is all about" learning. That's why we have developed and disseminated 10 standards (see them at <http://www.cael.org/Whom-We-Se...> to provide quality

and rigor in prior learning assessment. The first of the standards emphasizes the importance of assessing learning and not merely experience. Adhering to all 10 standards, as LearningLounts.org does, protects academic integrity and ensures that the learning evaluated is equivalent to college-level learning acquired in the classroom.

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badger74 · 3 days ago

Maybe shooting all the lawyers first was a mistake. Should have been the education establishment and their theory of the year.

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