

Colorado Helps Advanced Manufacturing Program

Prior Learning Assessment Implementation and Early Outcomes

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RUTGERS

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INTRODUCTION

The focus of this brief is the redesign of the policy, practice, and implementation of prior learning assessment at the six CHAMP colleges within the CCCS system, one four-year non-system CHAMP college (Metro State University), and other non-CHAMP schools, such as Arapahoe Community College. Early outcomes are also presented. These colleges were chosen for discussion in this brief because each had a representative present on the CHAMP prior learning assessment subcommittee. Colorado colleges have used prior learning assessment as an alternative means for awarding academic credits for over 40 years, but historically its use lacked uniformity within the system. Institutions varied in the extent to which students had knowledge about prior learning assessment, in students' access to assessment, cost of assessment, and in how prior learning assessment was administered. During the first two years of the CHAMP grant, CCCS and participating colleges developed policy and practice recommendations for prior learning assessment use through the prior learning assessment subcommittee. During year three of the grant, these changes were beginning to be implemented at colleges. This brief looks at the development, implementation, and dissemination of this redesign by the consortium-level prior learning assessment subcommittee, and discusses early implementation efforts and outcomes at nine state colleges.

BACKGROUND

A primary goal of CHAMP was to redesign the credit for prior learning policies and use within the system and state. Credit for prior learning protocols recognize and grant academic credit for the skills and knowledge that individuals have gained outside the classroom. Credits for prior learning are especially helpful for returning students who left school without graduating but have gained significant experience in the workplace since then. Additionally, credit for prior learning can be awarded for certain types of specialty training, such as military schooling. Receiving credits for prior learning can shorten the time that it takes to complete a certificate or degree program. A diversity of students come to Colorado community colleges at various stages of their lives and careers. Prior learning assessment is a way for students to validate the significant learning they bring with them, accelerating the process of reaching their academic and professional goals.

Legislation/Policy

In 2001, a higher education student bill of rights was passed in the Colorado legislature. The law stipulated, among other things, the establishment of a process for students to test out of core classes by successfully sitting for a challenge exam. In 2012, this directive was amended to provide for credit to be awarded for prior learning. These higher education policies reflect the state's recognition of students' real-life experience. Since 2009, CCCS has awarded over 120,000 credits through assessment methods such as challenge exams and portfolios. Through the CHAMP grant, CCCS is working to revise and improve upon this policy and the use and acceptance of prior learning assessment in the state.

SUBCOMMITTEE

To review and revise the prior learning assessment policy, grant administrators established the prior learning assessment subcommittee, composed of representatives from the consortium colleges, affiliates from CAEL, and industry representatives. The subcommittee was created early in 2014 and first met in February 2014. It was tasked with reviewing existing Colorado community colleges prior learning assessment policies and developing potential revisions to suggest to policymakers. The subcommittee ensured that all suggested policy revisions were aligned with the Colorado Students' Bill of Rights¹ and reviewed existing policies to ensure that they were aligned with it as well. Their work was informed by research; in cooperation with CAEL, the SC spent a great deal of time examining the prior learning assessment policies and practices of other states and institutions. In one of its first actions, the subcommittee created a vision statement about a proposed approach to prior learning assessment. The statement was meant to help define a purpose for the subcommittee going forward and to serve as a guidepost for the members' actions and policy revisions.²

Because of discussion at the subcommittee meetings and online collaboration, the subcommittee recommended several changes to the Colorado Community College System policies (System President's Procedure 9-42 and State Board Procedure 9-42). The recommendations were aimed at revising the Board policies in alignment with the vision statement of the subcommittee. Overall, the recommendations sought to improve the experience that students have with prior learning assessment and the process of assessment review. They included changes to the wording of the policy to ensure that the language focused on the students' learning and "learning experiences" and that learning is related to the student's program of study. The changes further reiterated the statements of principle in the Students' Bill of Rights and made clearer the guidelines that institutions could potentially use to determine a student's prior learning. The subcommittee also drafted an outline for a revision of the Prior Learning Assessment Handbook—renamed the Prior Learning Assessment Manual—for faculty and staff at the participating schools. The revised manual contained information on what prior learning assessment is, standards for implementation, and an explanation of how students can benefit from credit for prior learning. The manual was completed and finalized in fall of 2014 and updated in spring of 2017.

Subcommittee Goal/Purpose

The subcommittee's primary goals were to review existing policies at each college relative to prior learning assessment and to develop a prior learning assessment manual. Before the efforts by the state to create more uniform prior learning assessment procedures, colleges had been

¹ House bill number (HB01-1263)

² Subcommittee vision statement: "A diversity of students can come to Colorado community colleges at various stages of their lives and careers and are able to validate the significant learning they bring with them, accelerating the process of reaching their academic and professional goals. College level prior learning is validated by academically sound and rigorous prior learning assessment methods."

using American Council on Education (ACE) credit review to provide their students with credits for prior learning. However, the review was costly, and some schools did not use it. Other schools' faculty wanted to do reviews themselves, rather than accept competencies they did not review. Implementation differed between the system and non-system schools and with respect to College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) credit, as well as between some two-year and four-year institutions. Moreover, the subcommittee found that many colleges were not making the availability of prior learning assessment options clear to their students. During the first year of the CHAMP grant, the subcommittee assessed the existing policies, looked at how those options could be made more available to students and tried to identify the barriers in the institutions that kept those policies from working.

In the second year of the grant, the subcommittee began to formally meet to develop the prior learning assessment manual. Also, guidelines were developed for a portfolio process in which participating institutions would conduct a complete assessment of a student's knowledge of specific courses or student needs. During the second year, the subcommittee also discussed discrepancies between what two-year and four-year colleges accepted for CLEP tests and scores and used this to encourage schools to expand their prior learning assessment offerings and to standardize what institutions accepted relative to CLEP and other tests.

Subcommittee Formation

In forming the subcommittee, CCCS leadership chose representatives from colleges across the state, including both CHAMP and non-CHAMP schools, system and non-system schools, industry, community colleges and one four-year college. Each school's representative was the person who historically worked with prior learning assessment at that respective school. This was someone from the school's testing center, a registrar, or someone holding a specialized role specifically for prior learning assessment, such as a "PLA Specialist." Each representative had something to offer the subcommittee regarding his or her respective knowledge about prior learning assessment. For example, Arapahoe Community College's testing center coordinator was included in the subcommittee because of her background and involvement with students testing out of classes and converting knowledge to credits through CLEP and DSST (formerly Dantes Subject Standardized Tests) tests. Her knowledge of typical costs associated with testing, the testing process, and how ACT/SAT placement scores are evaluated and translated to cut scores was beneficial to the subcommittee. MSU's PLA specialist was part of the subcommittee to offer the perspective of a four-year university. She described her involvement in the subcommittee:

We looked at the handbook that the community colleges had been using and all their policies and broke everything down, and it was really a lot to go over, like word, by word, by word. My role was just to, I guess, talk as the transfer school, the view from the faculty from our school, just to kinda say, "Well that's cool. That might work for you, but I don't think that's going to work for us because of the culture of a four-year school. So you might want to think about this instead of just this."

Pikes Peak Community Colleges' subcommittee representative was chosen because of his involvement with the schools' military population relative to prior learning assessment. The colleges' huge military and veteran population gives him a unique perspective on how this specific population's needs relative to prior learning assessment can be served.

All subcommittee representatives brought with them a unique and specific experience that helped increase the understanding of the subcommittee as a whole regarding various aspects of prior learning assessment. The goal of the subcommittee was to create one manual appropriate for all schools across the state—including two- and four-year schools. Throughout the process, subcommittee members agreed that they ended up with a much better understanding of prior learning assessment than they had previously. One member summed this up when she stated: "I think we broadened our PLA understanding by leaps and bounds."

Process/Collaboration

The subcommittee met in person about once a month. Subcommittee representatives broke into individual workgroups, with each group working on a specific element of prior learning assessment, such as creating uniform matrices and developing shared cut scores. During each meeting, workgroups presented on their progress to the subcommittee. A major theme throughout the process was collaboration. One member stated that:

Everybody that was there and engaged in this respected each other. So very thoughtful conversations, good strategies put in place. People wanted to come to agreement. So it wasn't a matter – we didn't have division, in my opinion, there, of, "Oh, no, you can't do it that way." ...There was no contention in the group.

Another said: "The committee itself... worked very well together. ...Everybody respected each other's opinions. ...There was good communication, and I don't want to say urgency, but focus on hitting our target of having this put together in a timely manner." Another representative commented that the mutual respect of the subcommittee group really helped everyone bring their own skills to the table: "It was easy to work together. I mean, because of that respect, we knew that, "Hey, you're great with this data," and they would bring it to the table."

Aside from the monthly meetings, the subcommittee also collaborated and communicated via a Basecamp site. The website allowed subcommittee members to post questions and view others' comments. One subcommittee member stated:

Basecamp was hugely successful for posting questions. A lot of work got done there. And I think everybody loved that piece of it. ...It was the way to easily get things fixed. So you could look at people's comments immediately. And the people that had questions about it, they could address it immediately and it didn't slow anybody else down. If you didn't have questions, you just, "Oh, great, that's good to know, move onto the next thing." So I think, to me, that was a tremendous asset for the group. It

helped tremendously in cutting down the number of meetings [we had] to have. So much of the discussion could happen right there.

Challenges

The subcommittee's goal of coming up with prior learning assessment protocols that work for schools across Colorado was certainly challenging. There was a considerable amount of communication among the workgroups to discuss variation across the schools and how to address it. For example, one subcommittee representative discussed how CLEP exams were accepted by some schools and not others. Some schools had challenge exams that other schools did not honor. And likewise, some schools accepted cut scores that others did not. These issues became challenges for students if they decided to transfer to another school after receiving credit for prior learning. Workgroups tackled these issues, developing compromises and coming to a consensus about each.

Several subcommittee members stated that the most challenging issue for the group was the inability of the members to make real change. The purpose of the group was to suggest change, rather than make it. In many cases, subcommittee members mentioned to EERC team members that they were frustrated they were not able to make changes at the subcommittee level. All suggested changes were turned over to the Department of Higher Education and were also "ran by" four-year schools for comment after the subcommittee work was completed. Because some members felt the prior learning assessment process historically has been complicated by some four-year schools in the state, this concerned many members.

COLLEGES

After meeting as part of the subcommittee, representatives and CCCS leadership were tasked with introducing the variations in policy to the respective colleges. Once the manual was finished and approved, it was handed down to the colleges for use in aligning college practices with the manual's suggestions. This was no small task, as much training was needed for college staff, faculty, and advisors, and many colleges had to shift their past practices to align them with the new suggested practices.

Variance in Prior Learning Assessment before redesign

For the past 40 years, Colorado schools have been offering credit for prior learning without central agreed-upon processes. This has meant that schools have developed their own protocol, processes, and procedures for how prior learning assessment is done. Because of this, there was significant variation between colleges in how prior learning assessment was approached prior to the state efforts to redesign and standardize the process. For example, some schools predominantly offered CLEP or DSST tests. Some allowed students to submit portfolios, while others did not. Some schools would offer credit for cut scores of 4 on a challenge test, while others would offer credit for cut scores above 5. Schools also varied in what they would charge

students for prior learning assessment. Arapahoe, for example, changed \$35.00 per credit for a student to test for an Arabic class, where Community College of Denver charged \$62.00 per credit. Red Rocks Community College charged \$13.00 per credit for students to challenge courses. Schools also varied considerably in the numbers of students who received credit for prior learning, as well as the populations they served through prior learning assessment. For example, Pike's Peak, located near a military base, has historically served as many as three or four times as many students receiving credit for prior learning as other schools, most of them from military backgrounds. The subcommittee helped bring these differences to light. One representative commented on this, saying "The one thing that we did find when we were working with this committee is that we are doing so many things differently across the system." Another said, "I think that we started to see that there were different processes being used by different colleges and that there was a need for us to come together."

As the subcommittee worked to identify variances and offer new standardized practices, most schools adopted a model where the subcommittee member became that schools' prior learning assessment "expert." Students with questions about prior learning assessment would be funneled to the resident subcommittee member or equivalent expert on campus. This became the primary model as schools started to assess how prior learning assessment would be implemented on their respective campus as standardization began.

The process of creating the manual and suggesting standardized practices for prior learning assessment moved slowly, but by the end of year two, the subcommittee had submitted suggested changes. By fall of 2014, the Prior Learning Assessment Manual and changes suggested by the subcommittee had been approved. By Fall 2015, the Board Policy had been approved.

Implementation and Changes

Although implementation at individual colleges was still in its early stages when this brief was written (summer of 2017), most CHAMP consortium colleges had established a plan for moving forward and had begun to make changes. One of the biggest first steps was to introduce the concept to faculty, advisors, and other staff who may have been previously unaware of prior learning assessment. CAEL helped with this process by offering trainings and webinars, and subcommittee members also brought back important information from their workgroups. Most schools focused on educating faculty and advisors and giving general information sessions to staff. One subcommittee member stated that the change in awareness relative to prior learning assessment at her school was noticeable: "The awareness has changed for sure among everyone, among advisors, faculty, department chairs. ...I think it's becoming more incorporated just in the language of the campus and faculty meetings. People are starting to understand what it is." Several subcommittee members told EERC staff that having school leadership on board with changes was the most important factor in faculty and staff embracing the efforts. Many felt that some faculty were unwilling to make changes unless direction came from leadership.

Interviewees told EERC staff that major contributors to progress within individual schools were institutional buy-in and third-party credibility. The more college leadership were on board with the changes, the faster the changes took place at the individual school. In addition, some schools brought in CAEL representatives, system leadership, or representatives from the American Council of Education to meet with faculty and staff and give trainings on prior learning assessment. These schools, such as MSU, found that external credibility lent an expertise that couldn't come from within the college and increased the acceptance of change, especially among faculty.

The first change most schools were making was to develop a plan for informing students of the option to receive credits for prior learning. Most schools did not advertise prior learning assessment as an option for students prior to the state's efforts to standardize it. Statewide, most schools reported developing marketing plans including informing general advisors of available prior learning assessment options, creating brochures and posters, and adding information to school websites. Most school staff members felt that informing students of their options to receive credit for prior learning would help boost enrollment. One staff member said:

It allows us to say, here, you can see yourself as a college student because of this. ...We have one more tool to help our non-traditional students see themselves doing college. And that's the most impactful thing to me. I want to have an arsenal of ways to show people [how] to get their education.

Another subcommittee member spoke of marketing as the first step in rolling out the PLA changes at her college: "It's in process. We talked about presenting it at student orientation. It will be on the website. There'll be a poster campaign, a brochure campaign, just to increase awareness of it."

Red Rocks Community College found that an increase in marketing had already made a difference in the number of students attempting prior learning assessment: "PLA has always been around, and we've always done several thousand dollars a year doing PLAs. But there has been an increase, and I think it's more the marketing and the specific targeting that we're trying to do..."

One of the biggest changes across colleges in the state has been adherence to the state-wide statute that institutions must allow students to challenge any Guaranteed Transfer (GT) course, a challenge testing rule. All colleges across the state are required to offer a challenge option to students—where students can take a learning assessment in lieu of taking classes for GT credit. While there are several options for how a student could challenge a course, schools are most comfortable with challenge testing. If a student passes the challenge test, they are granted credit for that course without completing the course material. Challenge testing, however, requires each school to have a test in place for its general education classes. While many schools had challenge tests, most did not have them for every general education class, and some schools had very few at all. Initially, a change suggested by the subcommittee was to create a test bank of

challenge tests that schools across the system would use. This would not only create more available tests for students without faculty having to create challenge tests for every subject, but would also standardize challenge tests across the state. A student challenging English 121 at Pike’s Peak would then be taking the same test as one challenging the same class at Pueblo. However, faculty pushback halted creation of the test bank. Faculty pushback largely centered on concern over tests not being rigorous enough. Faculty creating a challenge test for the test bank were theoretically vulnerable to negative input by other faculty members once the test was part of the bank. Peers at other colleges could “judge” whether they considered the test valid. There was also disagreement about where the test bank would be located. Disagreement over the test bank is likely partly attributed to the fact that even though the colleges are all part of the same state (and most are part of the system), they are also individual, independent colleges, and a tension exists between cooperation and competition.

Instead of a central testing bank, schools decided to create their own challenge tests. In many cases, schools choose to informally share challenge tests between them and an informal network has emerged. However, since the choice is theirs and the process is informal, faculty are more comfortable with this.

Similarly, a suggestion at the consortium level to create and publish crosswalks for faculty-evaluated workplace training such as ACE recommendations and joint services transcript information was met with faculty pushback. Faculty were willing to compile the information but did not want it published. Instead, samples of past credit crosswalks are being compiled voluntarily and will be posted on the PLA website by the end of the grant period.

Legislation passed this year (2017) is heralding another change consortium-wide. Each institution in the state is now required to develop its own policy in which ACE credit will be cross-walked for students in the military. This will prevent institutions from granting military credits as elective credits only. It will require institutions to grant credits for knowledge gained while in the military as counting toward a specific course required for a degree, such as a general education course, rather than elective credits. Institutions are required by the legislation to review ACE credit carefully. Once this step is complete, it should open the door for more far-reaching and careful review of prior learning-to-credit crosswalks rather than the simple assigning of credit as counting toward electives.

Another change some schools had begun to implement was a more widespread and standardized acceptance of portfolios. Many schools never accepted portfolios prior to the efforts of the subcommittee to standardize the process. Staff at one system school—PCC—told EERC they were moving more toward encouraging students to create robust portfolios now than to take standardized tests.

Collaboration

Early implementation at individual colleges required a significant amount of collaboration within each school. In most cases, the subcommittee representative brought back information and helped educate administrators, faculty, and staff at the college, but lacked decision-making capacity. Subcommittee members thus acted as conduits of information at their respective schools and suggested internal changes, but did not actually make changes. In most cases, they collaborated extensively with others to figure out the best plan for implementation at their individual school. For example, one subcommittee member described her meeting with leadership and staff at the school to decide how “to set this up so that the information is communicated effectively out to our three campuses.” Others stressed their work with faculty chairs as being incredibly important relative to implementation. This was mostly because of buy-in. She noted that “even if I can get one-third of our Chairs to buy-in, then they can help me with the other two-thirds.” Most subcommittee representatives said the implementation process at the individual colleges started “very slow and frustrating,” but eventually, through collaboration, faculty and staff began to “open up more” to the changes.

As schools began to implement changes and offer more/various forms of prior learning assessment (depending on the school), collaboration also occurred between colleges. For example, at CCD, one student needed two credits to finish her Associate of General Studies degree, and she wanted to use Arabic for those two credits—a language she already knew and spoke. CCD had the course in its catalog but had not offered it for five years or more. To allow the student to challenge the class, staff at CCD had to find a school that was currently offering the course. Arapahoe Community College was currently offering the class, so staff at both colleges worked together to create a challenge exam for the student. CCD’s subcommittee member described the intense collaboration required to make the situation work for the student:

So we had to bring in HR. We had to bring in the Dean over Arts and Humanities. We had to bring in the Chair. We all had to come together so that we could get this challenge exam created so that this student could have these two credits satisfied with her PLA experience.

The adherence to prior learning assessment policies and procedures has translated to a significant amount of up-front work for each of the Colorado schools. This is especially true relative to creating challenge tests and allowing students more latitude to apply prior learning in areas individual schools may not have previously allowed. One staff member described this process:

So sometimes we have to bend over backwards, be very creative in what we have to do, but it is here to say, and we have to make this work for the students. It’s not a simple question as “Do I have to do this?” It’s more or less “How do I do this to make it work for the student? Where does it begin?” They’re very serious about this across the system.

Through collaboration, schools could share the workload and develop ways to work together for the benefit of students.

Faculty Reception

Faculty reception of the changes in prior learning assessment varied across the system. It also varied considerably within colleges, as faculty in some departments seemed more willing to accept prior learning assessment than others. Some faculty was reticent to encourage prior learning assessment because they felt it would detract from full-time enrollment, numbers of students enrolling, and tuition dollars for the school. Others also felt that academic rigor would suffer, and the school would simply become a “diploma factory,” handing out diplomas for students that were not doing their learning at the school.

Other faculty members were ‘on board’ with offering prior learning credits through CLEP and DSST tests—standardized tests—but were hesitant to accept portfolios as a method of prior learning assessment. Faculty who were not evaluating portfolios were often reticent to accept the credit, since they were unsure of the process and rigor, while faculty who were asked to review portfolios felt the time required was often too much for their workload. Some faculty also felt that learning “on the job” was different than learning in the classroom, and that prior learning should not be translated to credits unless it is rigorously tested and proven equivalent. Another challenge some schools had in terms of faculty acceptance of prior learning assessment had to do with multiple people being involved in the teaching process. At some schools, concurrent or dual-enrollment was common, and in effect, high school teachers were teaching college-level classes. When students apply for prior learning assessment, they are tested on their “mastery of the material” whether through standardized tests, challenge tests, or portfolios.

Some faculty feel dual-enrollment students cannot have a full mastery of the material if they have been taught by high school teachers. Likewise, some faculty members at four-year universities feel the same if students are taught by community college instructors. The best way to counter this reticence, most interviewees thought, was to “bring [the concept] in slowly with the right people to make sure that it’s done well.” And to make sure that “as this rolls out, faculty are comfortable with what’s happening and how it’s gonna happen on their campus,” as well as “what the rules of engagement are.”

Most schools started with faculty that were excited about the concept of prior learning assessment and let these faculty members talk to others who were perhaps less accepting. One subcommittee member said it was easier to “let [the excitement] ripple out” and occur more naturally than it was to “push too hard with faculty.” Another said:

We’re trying to create – we have a model here with our faculty of what I call the vanguard model. We get faculty to volunteer as a vanguard, and then they disseminate that positive experience. And you can get most faculty on board in that way.

Most leadership and staff at individual colleges felt that faculty reaction to prior learning assessment was ‘all over the board’ at their respective schools. One representative described this at her school:

There are some faculty members who are completely on board. They are excited about it and just ready to do whatever needs to happen, which is great. There are some faculty members who don't care. We'll just call it that. It doesn't affect them, and they're not interested in even thinking about it. There are some [faculty] Chairs who—it makes them nervous. They are worried that yes, it might be good for the students. It might be good for the college as a whole. But it lowers their program numbers.

Even though implementation was still in its early phases at most schools at the time this brief was written, there were already some shifting opinions among faculty members. Many faculty members were beginning to see the benefit of prior learning assessment and some of those who were previously skeptical were beginning to embrace the concept. When asked what they thought perpetuated these shifts, most subcommittee representatives and other school staff members felt the education about prior learning assessment at each of the colleges had played a large role in perpetuating the change. One staff member said:

I think the exposure has changed their opinion. So, so much talking about it, so much of having steps. So that does definitely help. Having information about how it actually is different and how it will – really does improve graduation rates. I think that information has changed that opinion more than anything else. Because at the end of the day, they just want to do the right thing for students, too. But we need to have good solid data to back that up that this is the right thing for students. Now that we have that most faculty are – they're getting there, if they're not already there.

Some schools also chose to contract with external contractors to take the burden off faculty, especially relative to portfolio assessments. A staff member at CCD spoke to this:

We contracted with Learning Counts to do portfolios assessment at least for this year. I think that will continue for the next few years. It just takes a while to get up to speed, and we didn't want to delay students access because we're still getting up to speed on how portfolio assessment should work.

Student Impact

When asked what benefit there was to changing the prior learning assessment process, most staff interviewed agreed that it was a benefit to the students. One said:

Mostly it's good for our students. Actually, that is the only reason. It's good for our students because it gives them credit which gives them – it improves their retention. It improves their graduation, and that's good for our students which means it's good for us.

Another said:

I see a good thing happening as a result of PLA and more people signing on for it when they know that it's less expensive than actually paying the tuition. They can get it done and finish up their education a lot quicker for a lot less money.

Although implementation was still early, some schools were already seeing a gradual increase in students aware of and applying for, prior learning assessment. One staff member commented that she had hoped to see more students applying for prior learning assessment and that she was hoping students would spread the information through word-of-mouth: "We didn't think that the floodgates would open. My experience with these things is that there was a trickle and it's not until students are talking to students that we'll really see it take off."

On the other hand, most schools were not yet prepared to have a huge influx of students interested in credit for prior learning. At most schools, general advisors were still being trained on how to approach prior learning assessment and did not fully understand how to advise on it. In addition, discussing options with students and fully understanding their prior learning experience(s) required a significant amount of time and discussion, something general advisors do not always have time to do, especially during high-priority registration periods. Most schools had one or two people in charge of prior learning assessment at their respective school, and students with questions about prior learning credits or with extensive work histories were funneled to these "resident experts" for help. While this was working for small numbers of students inquiring about prior learning credits, it was widely acknowledged that this system would not work for larger quantities of interested students. At most schools, training for advisors and registration staff was underway at the time this brief was written. In addition, an online tool called PLACredit.com tool will help schools become more efficient with the process once training for the tool is complete. CCCS is planning to roll out training shortly. One school, RRCC, was effectively using the tool at the time this brief was written.

While adult learners of all backgrounds can theoretically benefit from prior learning assessment, the population most impacted is likely to be students with a military background. As previously mentioned, Pike's Peak—located near a military base—has historically had a high population of military students, and has a rich history of granting prior learning credits to students with military training. After the subcommittee met and the manual was created, more schools began to offer—and advertise—credit for prior learning for students with military backgrounds. Military training can often translate directly to college-level coursework, and thus military students can be great candidates for prior learning assessment. Because military transcripts are different than college transcripts, however, the translation process can be tedious and require specialized knowledge on behalf of the college representative. Education and training about the process had already increased the ability of Colorado colleges to assess students with military backgrounds.

EARLY STUDENT OUTCOMES

To assess early outcomes of the changes to prior learning assessment and implementation efforts by institutions, EERC analyzed student data for CCCS schools in the state of Colorado. While the above narrative has focused on CHAMP schools, prior learning assessment outcomes data analysis was completed for all 13 schools in the system. Using data provided by CCCS on its students' registration history and academic profiles, we focus on students enrolled in CCCS colleges between spring 2014 and spring 2017. Outcomes data is based on a study sample of 251,417 unique students in CCCS schools during this timeframe. Among them, a little over three percent (N= 7,809) had earned prior learning credit in one of the CCCS institutions. We refer to students receiving prior learning assessment credit as PLA students and students who did not earn PLA credit as non-PLA students.

This report uses student data from the following thirteen CCCS colleges, which vary in school size, student population served, and the number of programs offered. The colleges are:

- Arapahoe Community College (ACC)
- Colorado Northwestern Community College (CNCC)
- Community College of Aurora (CCA)
- Community College of Denver (CCD)
- Front Range Community College (FRCC)
- Lamar Community College (LCC)
- Morgan Community College (MCC)
- Northeastern Junior College (NJC)
- Otero Junior College (OJC)
- Pikes Peak Community College (PPCC)
- Pueblo Community College (PCC)
- Red Rocks Community College (RRCC)
- Trinidad State Junior College (TSJC)

Outcomes are divided into three sections: 1) prior learning assessment methods offered by each school, 2) student enrollment information for students who received an assessment for prior learning, and 3) a focused look at students who graduated with prior learning assessment credit versus those without.

Prior Learning Assessment Methods

Credit for prior learning experiences were assessed and awarded through four major methods; each of which could be fulfilled by several assessment instruments.

Methods and Assessment Instruments:

- ***Portfolios***
 - Credit is awarded through the development of a portfolio
 - Evaluation is performed by a subject-matter expert or panel of experts

- ***Published Guides***
 - The American Council on Education (ACE) non-collegiate guide for industrial and corporate training programs
 - ACE credit recommendations as published in *The Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services*, used to evaluate military training and learning experiences
 - Other published guides developed by nationally recognized organizations

- ***Challenge Exams*** developed by institutions
 - Equivalent to a comprehensive final exam,
 - May be written, oral, demonstration-based, or a combination of all three
 - Evaluated by an area dean or a designated subject-matter expert

- ***Standardized Exams***
 - College-level Examination Program (CLEP)
 - Excelsior College exams—formerly the American College Testing Proficiency Program (ACT-PEP/RCE/EXCELSIOR),
 - Defense Activity for Nontraditional Educational Support (DANTES)
 - Advanced Placement (AP)
 - International Baccalaureate (IB)

Assessment methods offered in each CCCS college differed as some schools used only one while others used a combination of assessments. Table 1 presents the methods used by each of the 13 CCCS institutions. Eight out of the thirteen colleges used all four methods (ACC, CCA, CCD, FRCC, PCC, PPCC, RRCC, TSJC). Standardized exams were well-accepted among CCCS colleges: all 13 schools used some form of standardized exam for prior learning assessment. One school, NJC, used standardized exams as its only method of assessing prior learning credit. OJC used a combination of standardized exams and challenge exams—these methods were also used by most of the colleges. NJC was the only institution that did not use challenge exams as a means for awarding prior learning credit to students in the study sample. Small colleges such as CNCC, NJC and OJC did not use published guides to award prior learning credit. Portfolios were the least commonly offered method among all CCCS schools. Still, nine out of the thirteen colleges in the consortium assessed prior learning using this method.

Table 1. PLA methods offered in CCCS, by school

CCCS College	Challenge exams	Portfolios	Published guides	Standardized exams	Number of PLA methods offered
ACC	X	X	X	X	4
CCA	X	X	X	X	4
CCD	X	X	X	X	4
CNCC	X	X		X	3
FRCC	X	X	X	X	4
LCC	X		X	X	3
MCC	X		X	X	3
NJC				X	1
OJC	X			X	2
PCC	X	X	X	X	4
PPCC	X	X	X	X	4
RRCC	X	X	X	X	4
TSJC	X	X	X	X	4

PLA assessments by method

Between spring 2014 and spring 2017, CCCS had carried out 22,800 prior learning assessments, of which almost half were conducted via published guides (47.9 percent).³ 38 percent of the prior learning credit evaluations were done by standardized tests, and 12 percent by portfolios. Although almost all consortium schools offered challenge exams, only two percent of all PLA credits earned in the past three years were conducted via this route.

Table 2. PLA assessments, by method

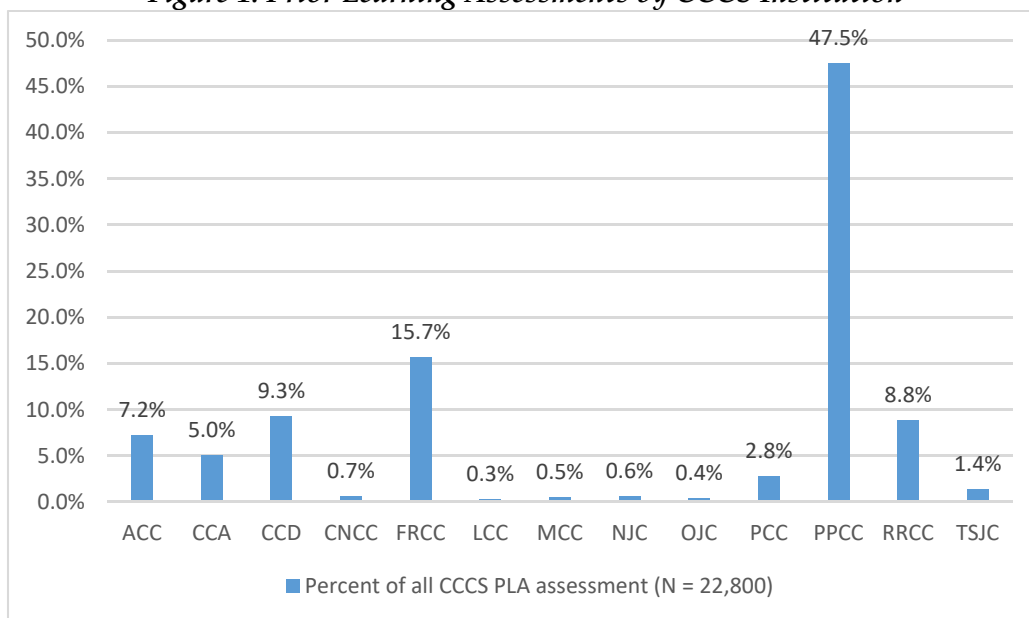
PLA method	Number of assessment	Proportion of assessment via PLA method
Challenge exams	461	2.0%
Portfolios	2812	12.3%
Published guides	10931	47.9%
Standardized tests	8596	37.7%
Total	22800	100.0%

³ PPCC represents a majority of this data; the school has a large population of military students that it assesses for prior learning through published guides.

Prior Learning Assessment by Institution

The number of PLA assessments completed varied among CCCS schools. Some institutions carried out more assessments than others. PPCC conducted almost half of all the prior learning assessments in the system (47 percent, see Figure 1). This is due to a large population of military students at the school. PPCC was followed by FRCC, which conducted around 16 percent. Between 5 to 10 percent of all prior learning assessments were carried out in ACC, CCA, CCD, and RRCC. Other small schools, such as CNCC, LCC, MCC, NJC, OJC, and TSJC, had few assessments, likely due to the small size of enrolled student populations and low demand compared with larger schools such as PPCC and FRCC.

Figure 1. Prior Learning Assessments by CCCS Institution



Although most CCCS colleges offered multiple methods of PLA, schools varied in how often they used each PLA method. PLA tools were not equally likely to be used across the schools at which they were offered. On the contrary, each school had a preferred choice of PLA tool—one that was used substantially more often than all other available options.⁴ Nine CCCS colleges used standardized exams as their primary method for assessing prior learning credits. The frequency of use ranges from 54 percent (ACC) to 100 percent (the sole PLA method of assessment at NJC). Although almost half of CCCS prior learning assessments were conducted via published guides, the method is not widely adopted across CCCS schools but rather focused at a few. PPCC served a large student population with military experiences and background which likely results in the 73 percent of the PLA evaluations conducted by published guides. CNCC and PCC focused more on portfolio assessments. Over half of their PLA evaluations were done through this method (61.5% and 54.6% respectively). Thirty-seven percent of prior

⁴ These frequencies were calculated by the number of times each method was used divided by the total number of PLA assessments in each school. A student can earn prior learning credits using multiple methods.

learning assessments were also done with portfolios at TSJC; however, the school also used standardized exams and published guides. Of all available prior learning assessment methods, Challenge exams were used least often in CCCS colleges, accounting for only two percent of all PLAs in CCCS schools. This may change over time, as schools are still in the process of conforming to the state-wide rule that each general education subject should have a challenge exam associated with it so students can easily challenge the course. It is feasible that with more challenge exams available, schools will increase the number of assessments conducted with challenge exams.

Table 3. PLA assessments by PLA method, by school

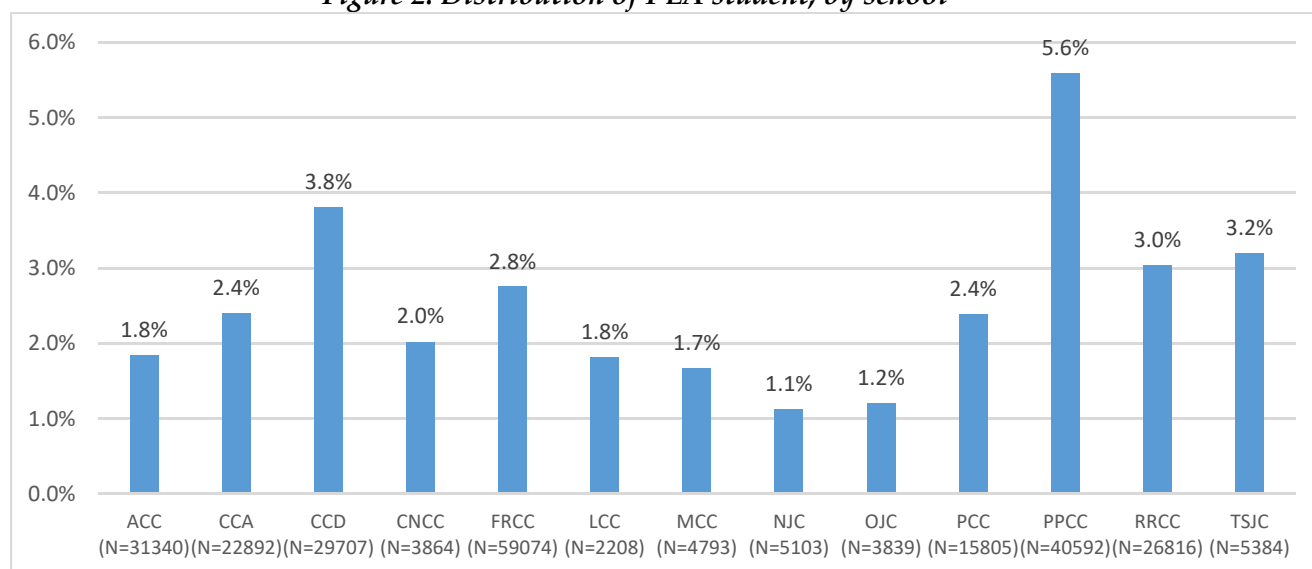
CCCS College	Challenge exams		Portfolios		Published guides		Standardized exams		Total N of assessments
	N assessments by college	% total assessment in school	N assessments by college	% total assessment in school	N assessments by college	% total assessment in school	N assessments by college	% total assessment in school	
ACC	48	2.9%	57	3.5%	649	39.6%	885	<u>54.0%</u>	1639
CCA	20	1.8%	95	8.3%	227	19.8%	804	<u>70.2%</u>	1146
CCD	35	1.7%	46	2.2%	269	12.7%	1769	<u>83.5%</u>	2119
CNCC	14	9.5%	91	<u>61.5%</u>	-	-	43	29.1%	148
FRCC	120	3.4%	35	1.0%	1401	39.2%	2021	<u>56.5%</u>	3577
LCC	6	10.3%	-	-	5	8.6%	47	<u>81.0%</u>	58
MCC	2	1.8%	-	-	2	1.8%	106	<u>96.4%</u>	110
NJC	-	-	-	-	-	-	127	<u>100.0%</u>	127
OJC	3	3.3%	-	-	-	-	89	<u>96.7%</u>	92
PCC	147	23.0%	349	<u>54.6%</u>	42	6.6%	101	15.8%	639
PPCC	9	0.1%	1486	13.7%	7940	<u>73.3%</u>	1397	12.9%	10832
RRCC	54	2.7%	538	26.9%	292	14.6%	1119	<u>55.9%</u>	2003
TSJC	3	1.0%	115	<u>37.1%</u>	104	33.6%	88	28.4%	310
Total	461	2.0%	2812	12.3%	10931	47.9%	8596	37.7%	22800

ENROLLMENT OF STUDENTS AWARDED PRIOR LEARNING CREDITS

Demographic characteristics by school

As shown in Figure 2, the percentage of students earning prior learning credits varied across schools. In general, larger CCCS colleges—such as ACC, CCA, CCD, FRCC, PCC, PPCC, and RRCC—had higher percentages of students assessed for prior learning credit (of these larger schools, only ACC assessed fewer than 2 percent of students for prior learning credit.) In contrast, most of the smaller colleges—CNCC, LCC, MCC, NJC, OJC, and TSJC—had fewer than 2 percent of students assessed for prior learning credit. Of the smaller colleges in our study, only at CNCC and TSJC did students assessed for prior learning credit make up more than 2 percent of the student population. The school that had the lowest proportion of students assessed for prior learning was NJC (1.1 percent), where standardized testing was the only method of assessment offered. The college with the highest proportion of PLA students (5.6 percent), was PPCC, which offered three different assessment options. This indicates that a broader array of assessment options may result in more students being assessed for prior learning, as different options may appeal to students in different situations.

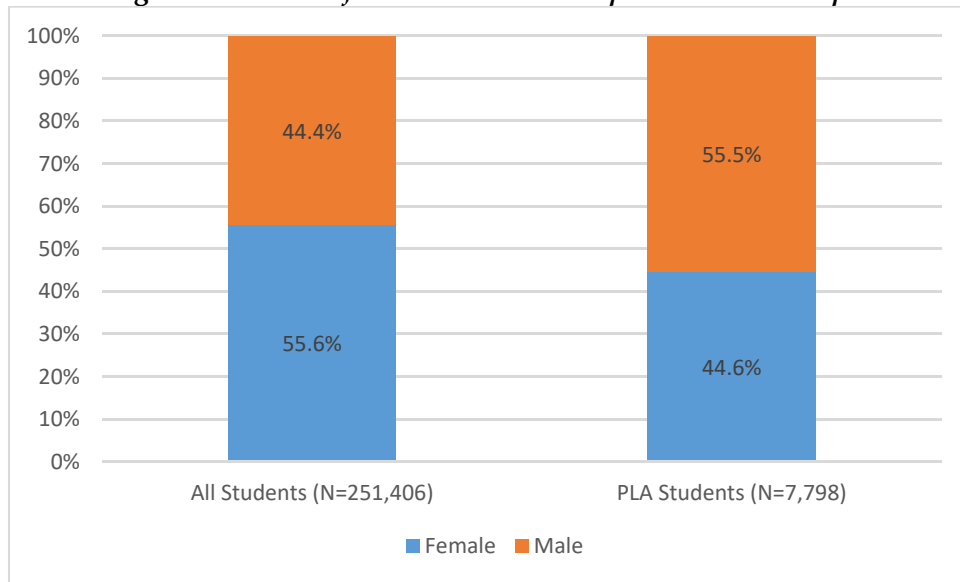
Figure 2. Distribution of PLA student, by school



Gender

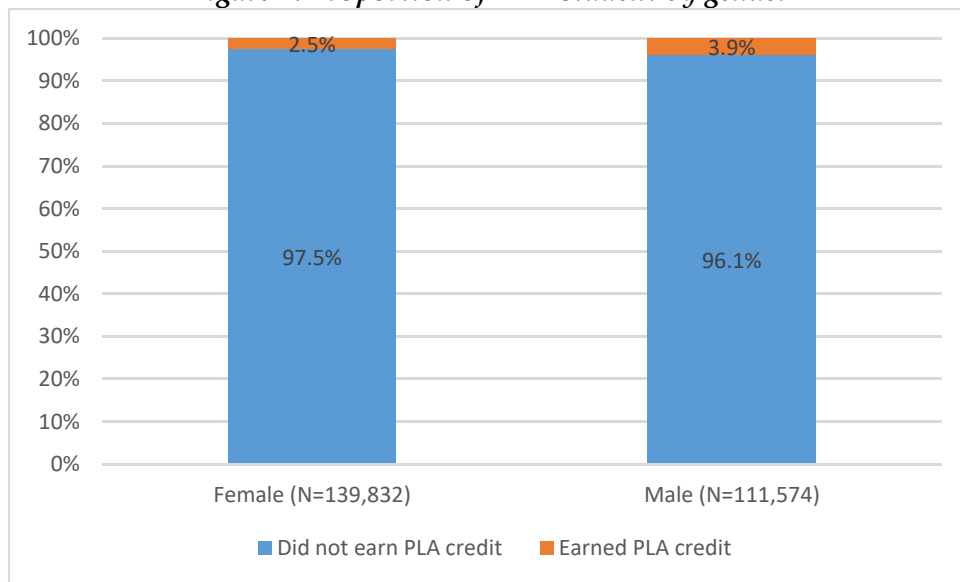
Figure 3 compares the gender distribution of the full sample with that of the population of PLA students. While 56 percent of CCCS students were female, females made up a smaller percentage—only about 45 percent—of PLA students. Thus, female students were underrepresented in the PLA population.

Figure 3. Gender of students in all sample and PLA sample



Although the proportion of students earning PLA credit was low, male students were more likely to have earned PLA credit (3.9 percent) compared with female counterparts (2.5 percent) (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Proportion of PLA student by gender



Race/ethnicity

The majority—about 60 percent—of CCCS students in our sample were white (non-Hispanic). About 18 percent were Hispanic, 6 percent were black (non-Hispanic), just over 3 percent were

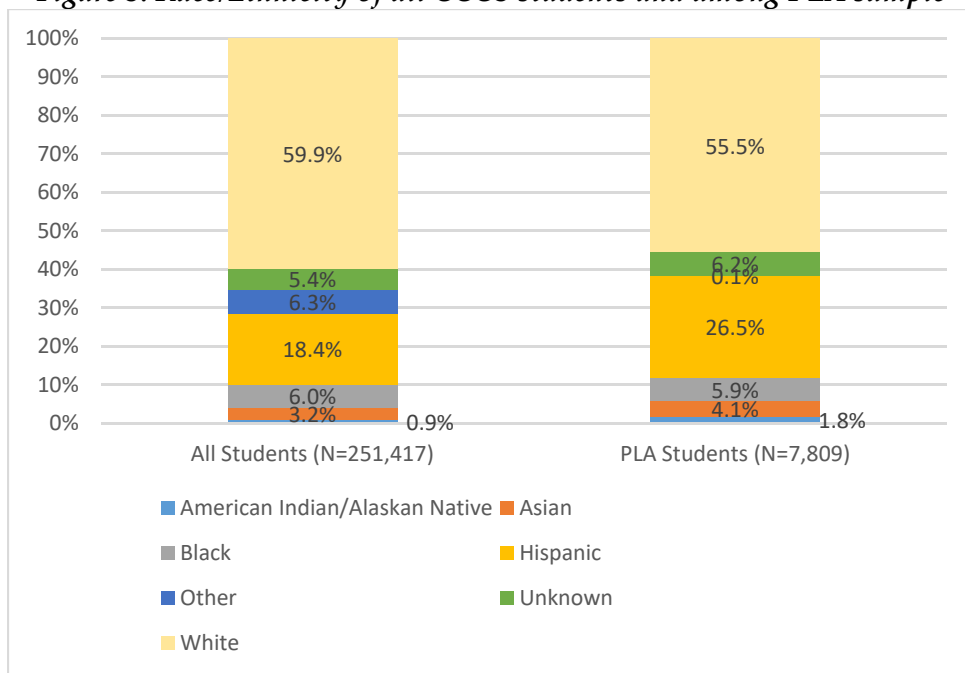
Asian, and almost 1 percent were American Indian/Alaskan Native⁵ (Figure 5). These groups were not proportionally represented in the PLA sample.

The distribution of PLA students shows that the percentage of white PLA students (55.5 percent) was slightly lower than the percentage of white students in the full student population. Students of other race/ethnicity were less represented in the PLA sample than in the full student population (1 percent vs. 6.3 percent).

Conversely, a disproportionately higher proportion of Hispanic students (about 27 percent in the PLA sample compared to 18 percent in the full sample) and American Indian/Alaskan Native students (0.9 percent of the full population vs. 1.8 percent in the PLA sample) were found in the PLA sample. The proportion of black students was about the same in the PLA sample as in the full sample (about 6 percent in both samples). The proportion of Asian students was slightly higher than that for the full population (4.1 percent in the PLA sample vs. 3.2 percent in the full sample).

Comparing the racial distribution of the full sample and the PLA sample, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian/Alaskan Native students were over-represented in the PLA sample compared to the CCCS student population. The proportion of black students in the PLA sample aligns with their distribution in CCCS. Students in other racial groups were much less represented in the PLA population.

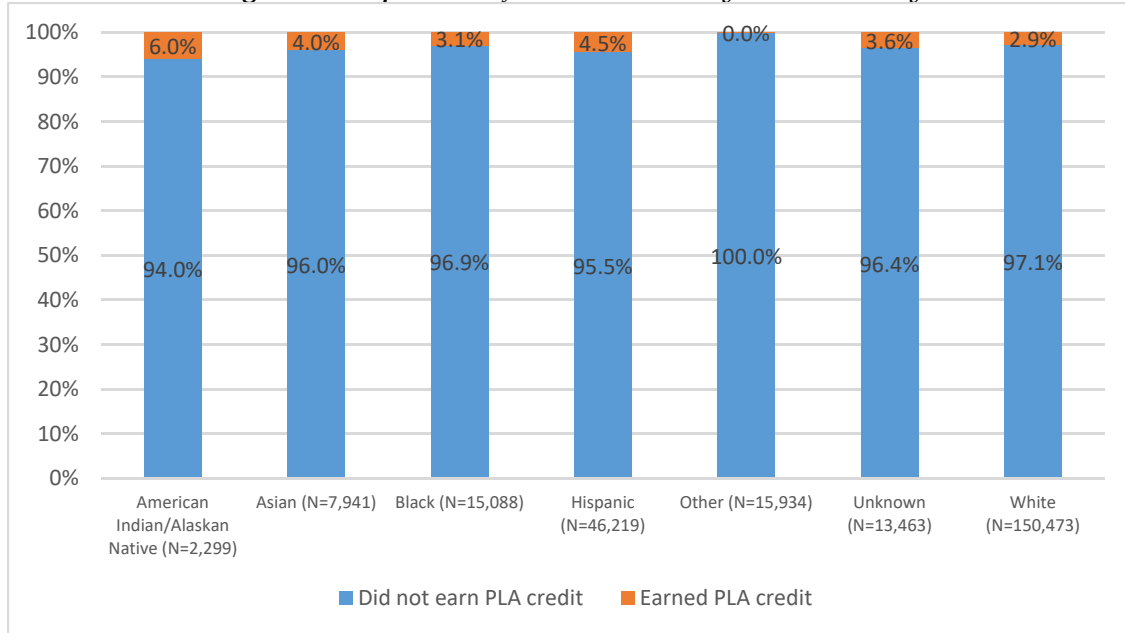
Figure 5. Race/Ethnicity of all CCCS students and among PLA sample



⁵ This is the term used in the data set.

Among all CCCS students, 3.1 percent earned credit for prior learning. Comparing different racial/ethnicity groups, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, and Hispanic students had a higher than average rate of PLA earning (over 4 percent). Black students and white students respectively earned credit for prior learning at a rate that is close to the average for the entire student population (3.1 percent and 2.9 percent respectively, Figure 6).

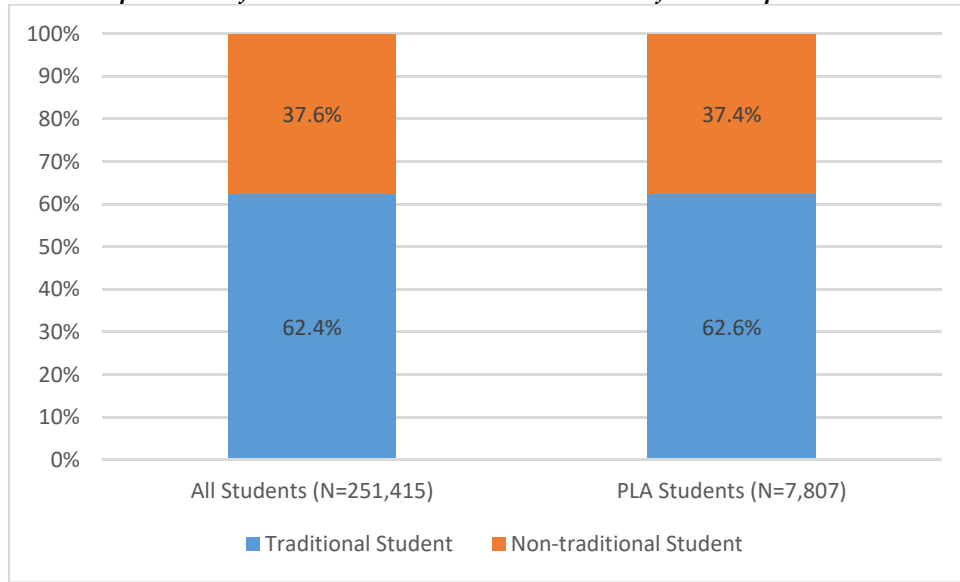
Figure 6. Proportion of PLA students by race/ethnicity



Nontraditional Adult Students

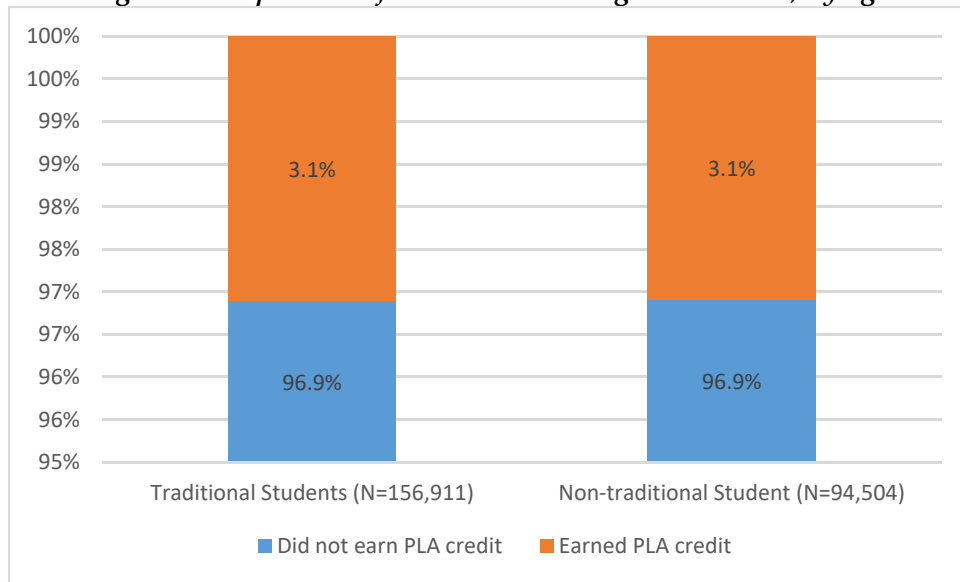
The age distributions of students in the overall CCCS and PLA samples are similar. The average age of CCCS and PLA students were both 25. Like the CCCS full sample, around 37.5 percent of the PLA sample were non-traditional students (age 25 or older, Figure 7).

Figure 7. Proportion of non-traditional student in the full sample and PLA sample



Around three percent of both the traditional and non-traditional students received PLA credits. Therefore, the likelihood of earning PLA credits was similar for both the adult students and their younger counterparts (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Proportion of students receiving PLA credits, by age



Financial Aid Status

As shown in Figure 9, about 32 percent of CCCS students were eligible for financial aid. In the PLA sample, however, we find that a lower proportion of students (about 19.5%) reported being eligible for financial aid. Moreover, when we compare the PLA rate of students who were eligible for financial aid against the PLA rate of those who were not eligible for financial aid—as

illustrated in Figure 10—we find that economically disadvantaged students were less likely to be assessed for prior learning credits than those who were better off financially (1.9 percent vs. 3.7 percent, respectively).

Figure 9. Proportion of financial aid recipients in the full and PLA sample

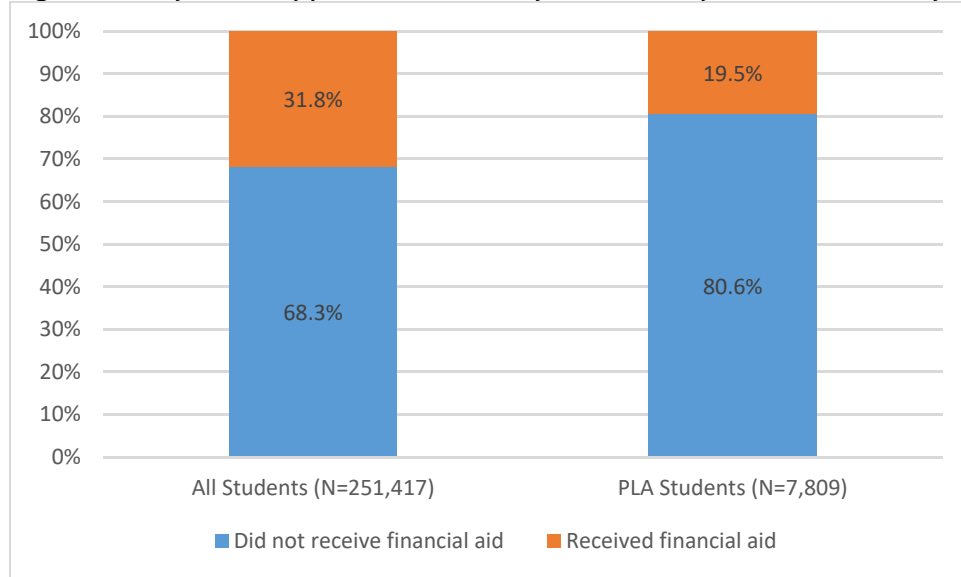
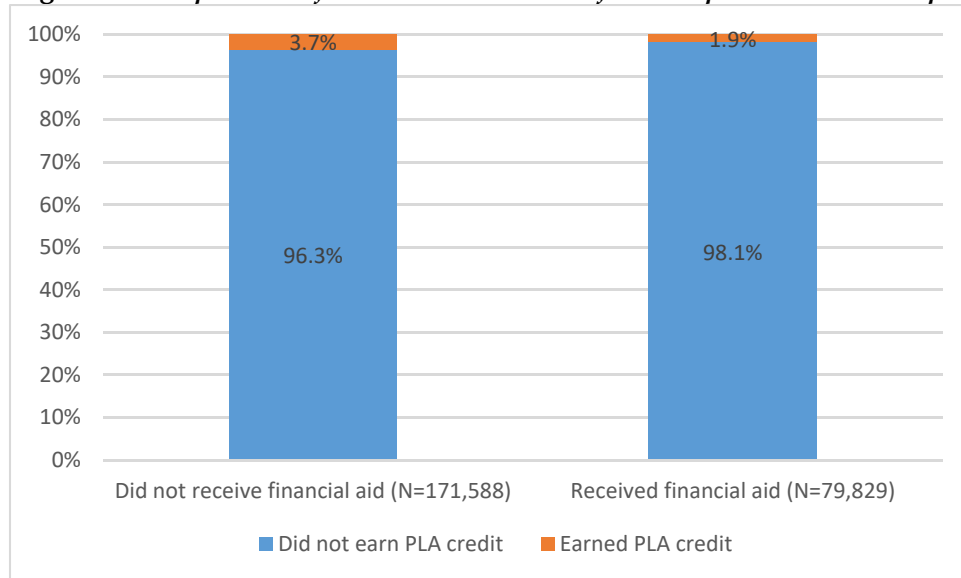


Figure 10. Proportion of PLA students in the full sample and PLA sample

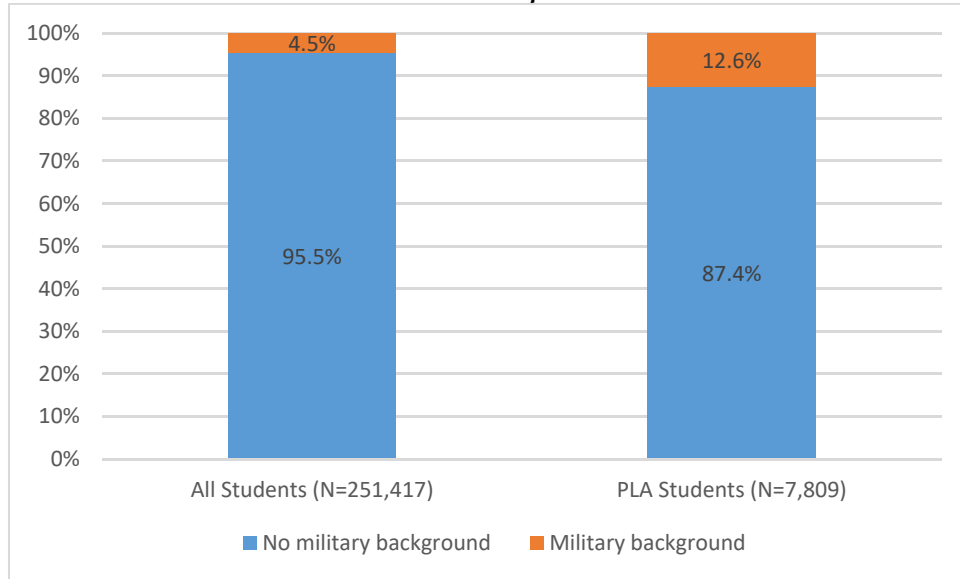


Military background

Since CCCS datasets did not differentiate students who failed to report military background from those who did not have a military background, we assumed students without an indicator for military services did not have a military background. Of the CCCS full sample, around 5

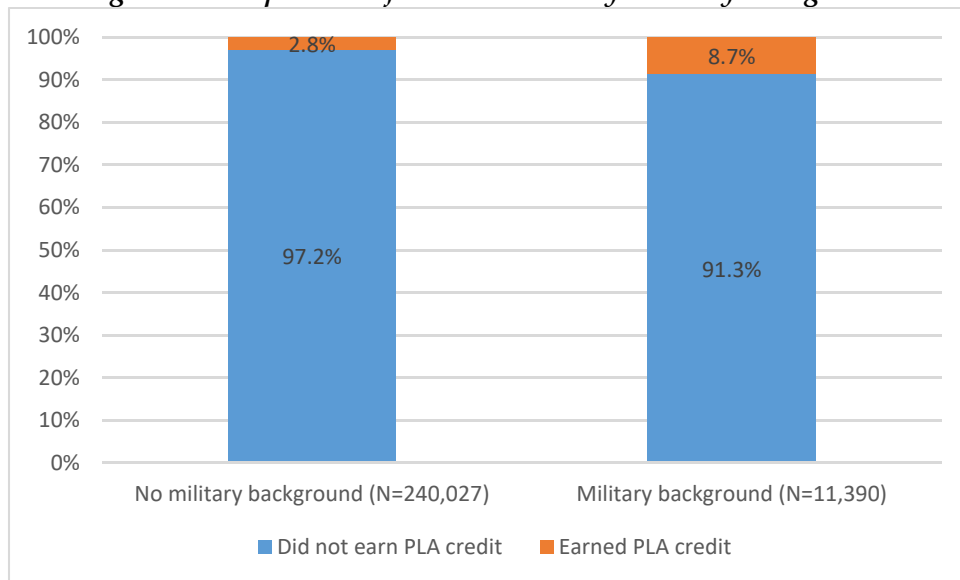
percent had a military background. The rate was much higher in the PLA sample—around 13 percent of PLA students had military background/experience (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Proportion of students with military background/experience in the full sample and PLA sample



Only about three percent of students without military background/experience earned PLA credit compared with almost nine percent of students who had military background/experience. Most of the students with military experience were from PPCC, which is located close to several military bases in Colorado.

Figure 12. Proportion of PLA students by military background



PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND PROGRAM COMPLETION

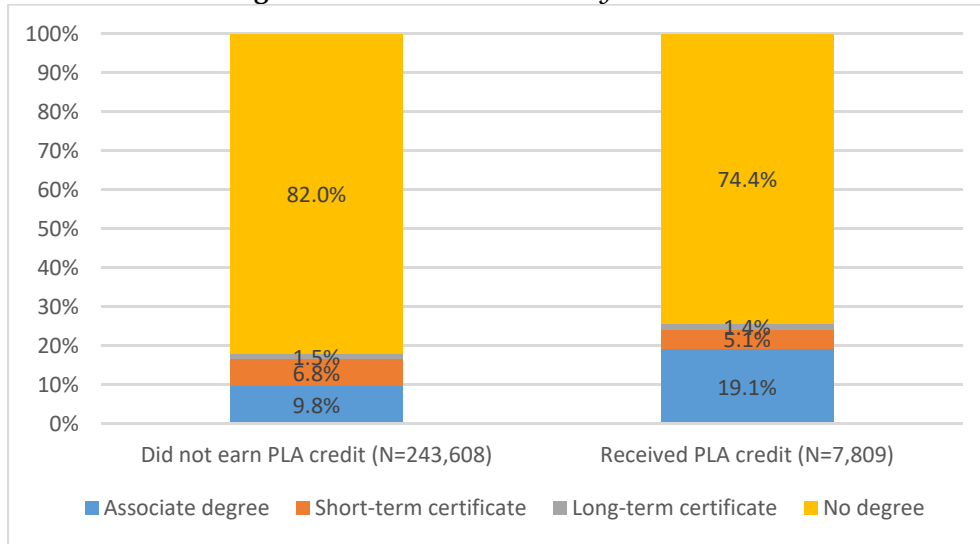
An important question for this study is whether earning PLA credits improves a students' graduation rate. Are PLA students more likely to graduate than non-PLA students? For graduation outcomes, we considered three types of credentials awarded in CCCS: 1) associate's degrees, 2) long-term certificates, which require 1-2 years to finish, and 3) short-term certificates, which usually take less than 1 year to complete. Analysis of student graduation outcomes and prior learning assessment status confirms the positive relationship between prior learning credits and program completion.

Graduation rates of PLA and non-PLA students

Figure 13 presents credential completion rates for PLA students and non-PLA students.⁶ Graduation rates for PLA students were considerably higher for non-PLA earners. The overall graduation rate (regardless of the type of credential) for PLA students was around 26 percent while that of the non-PLA students was around 18 percent. Considering graduation rates by the type of credential, a larger proportion of PLA students received associate's degrees than non-PLA students: over nineteen percent of PLA earners completed associate's degrees compared to 9.8 percent of non-PLA students. The rate of graduation for students earning a long-term certificate was similar regardless of PLA status. About 1.5 percent of non-PLA students and 1.4 percent of PLA students received a long-term certificate (if they did not earn an associate's degree). Finally, about seven percent of non-PLA students earned a short-term certificate, compared with five percent of the PLA earners. The difference in earning a short-term certificate by PLA status is small.

⁶ Many CCCS students earned multiple credentials. Students may have earned both an associate's degree and one or more short-term or long-term certificates during the study period. For this part of the study, we prioritized the credentials with more credit requirements and length in the order of associate degree, long-term certificate, and short-term certificate. For each completer, we only considered one credential.

Figure 13. Graduation rate by PLA status



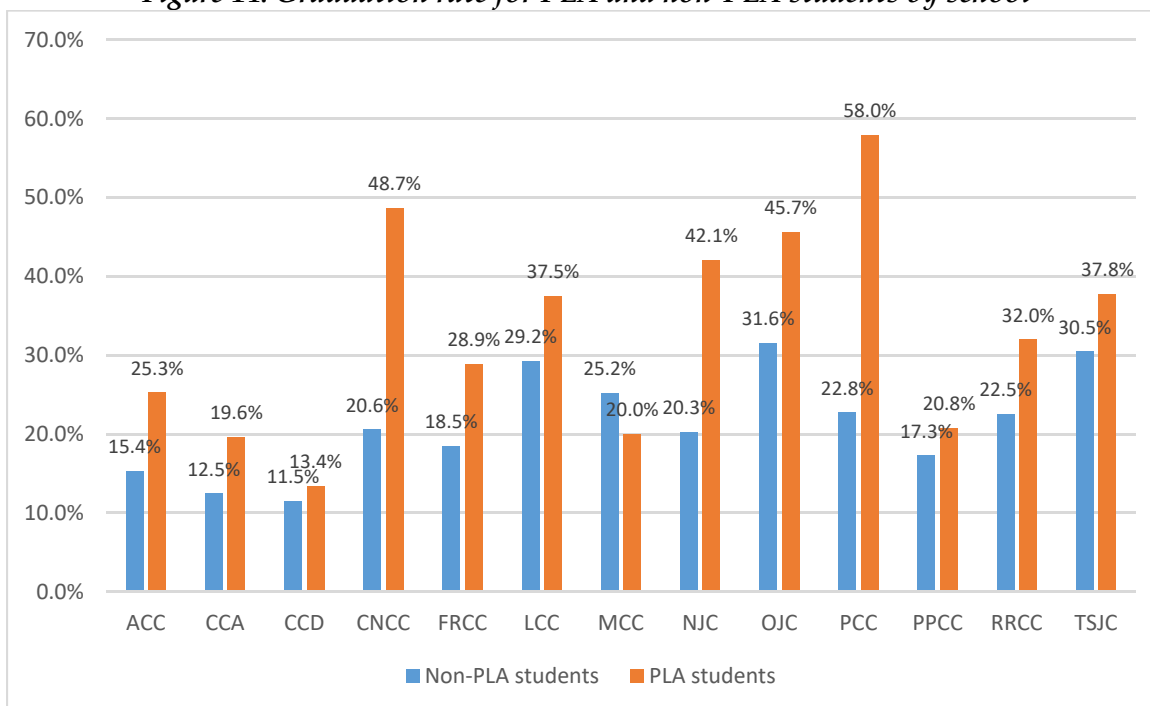
Graduation rate of non-PLA and PLA students by school

In the CCCS population, PLA earners graduated at a much higher rate than non-PLA earners. Here we examine whether the strong association between PLA credit-earning and students’ graduation rates differed by college.

Figure 14 presents the graduation rate of non-PLA and PLA students in each CCCS institution. Except for MCC, PLA students in each of the 13 CCCS colleges had a higher completion rate than their counterpart non-PLA earners. Nevertheless, the impact of PLA credit on program completion differed by school. At CNCC, NJC, and PCC, we found graduation rates among PLA students were twice as high as those for non-PLA students. Graduation rates of PLA students were over 10 percentage points higher compared to their counterpart non-PLA students at ACC, FRCC, OJC, and RRCC. The difference in graduation rates between PLA and non-PLA students was small at CCA, CCD, LCC, PPCC, and TSJC, ranging from 2 to 8 percentage points. Graduation rates of PLA students at MCC were 5 percentage points lower compared to non-PLA students (20 percent vs. 25.2 percent).

The influence of PLA credits in promoting graduation varied by CCCS school, suggesting that variations in assessing, applying, and implementing PLA may result in different graduation rates at CCCS colleges.

Figure 14. Graduation rate for PLA and non-PLA students by school



Prior Learning Assessment and graduation rate by student demographics

We also examined how the positive relationship between earning credit for prior learning and graduation rate may vary by a student’s demographic background. Addressing this question may help influence future prior learning assessment regulations and policies targeting students from various backgrounds such as minorities and the economically disadvantaged.

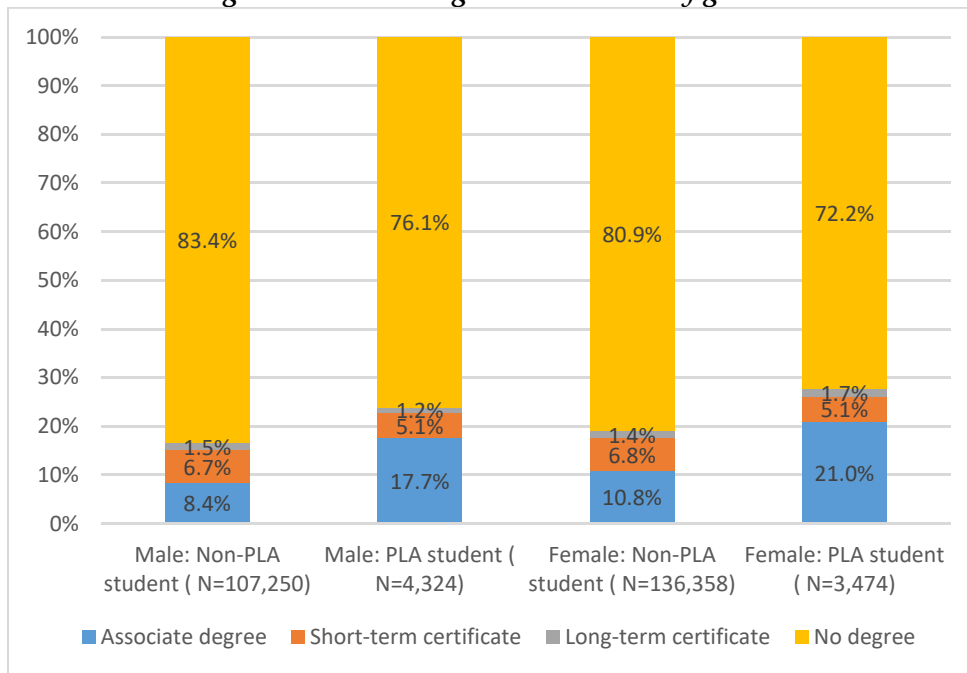
Gender

The positive association between earning credits for prior learning and graduation rate was observed and consistent for both male and female students. Prior learning credit earners of both sexes graduated at a rate that was 7 percentage points higher than the rate of non-PLA earners. Figure 15 shows that among male prior learning credit earners, 24 percent earned a credential compared with only 17 percent of male non-PLA earners. Female PLA earners had an even higher graduation rate: 28 percent graduated compared with only 19 percent of their non-PLA-earning counterparts.

The difference in graduation rates between PLA- and non-PLA-earning students was due in large part to the difference in associate’s degree completion rates. PLA earners had a much higher associate’s degree completion rates than non-PLA students. Both male and female PLA students received associate’s degrees at a rate that was more than twice as high as that of their non-PLA counterparts: almost 18 percent of male PLA students received associate’s degrees, whereas only 8 percent of male non-PLA earners did so. Female PLA earners had an even

higher graduation rate among students pursuing associate’s degrees: Nearly 21 percent earned associate’s degrees while only about 11 percent of non-PLA-earning females did so. However, graduation rates for certificate programs, especially 2-year certificate programs, were more similar among male and female students regardless of whether they earned PLA credits (for 2-year certificates: 1.5 percent vs. 1.2 percent for male non-PLA and PLA students, and 1.4 percent vs. 1.7 percent for female non-PLA and PLA students). Around seven percent of non-PLA earners, regardless of gender, graduated with a short-term certificate while the rate was around 5 percent for PLA students regardless of gender.

Figure 15. PLA and graduation rate by gender



Race/ethnicity

When examining the graduation rates of PLA earners and non-PLA earners by race/ethnicity, we found that for each race/ethnic group, graduation rates for PLA earners were higher than those of non-PLA earners (See Figure 16 and Figure 17). The biggest differences between the PLA and non-PLA groups within categories of race/ethnicity were found in the graduation rates of students who received associate’s degrees. The graduation rates of white, black, and Asian PLA earners were approximately two times as high as those of their non-PLA counterparts. The difference between Hispanic PLA and non-PLA students was only slightly less dramatic as that of white, black and Asian groups—around 14 percent of Hispanic PLA earners graduated with associate’s degrees, a rate that was about 5 percentage points higher than that of non-PLA-earners (8.6 percent).

Figure 16a. PLA and graduation rate, by race/ethnicity

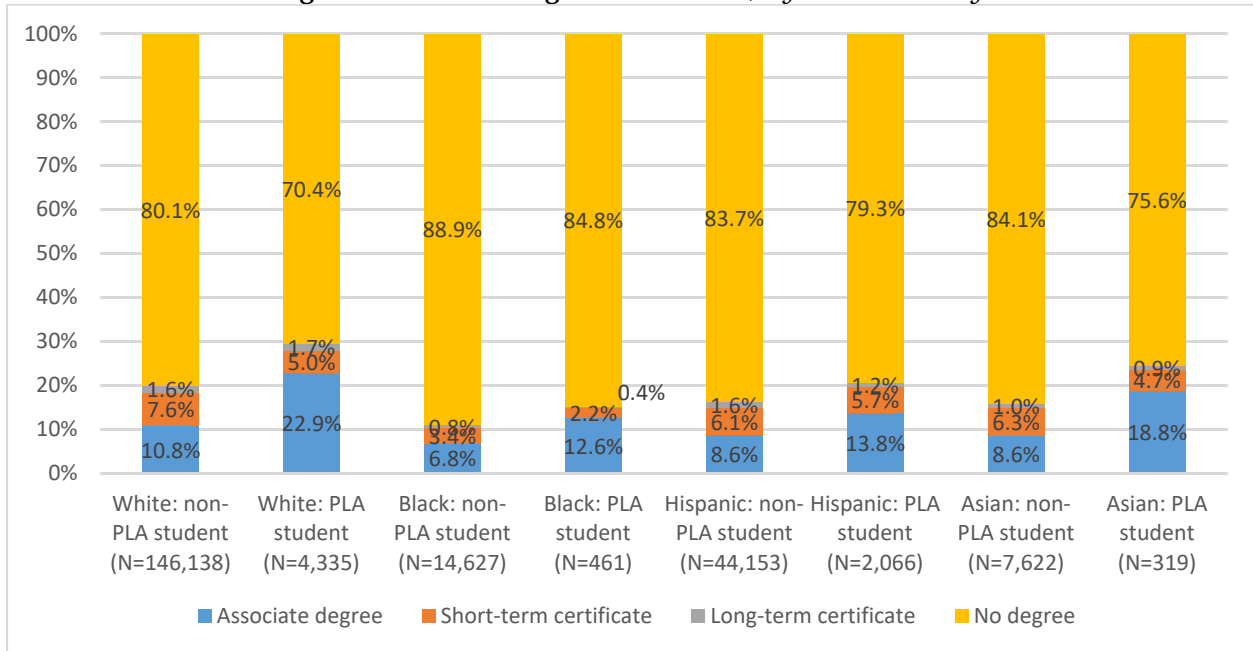
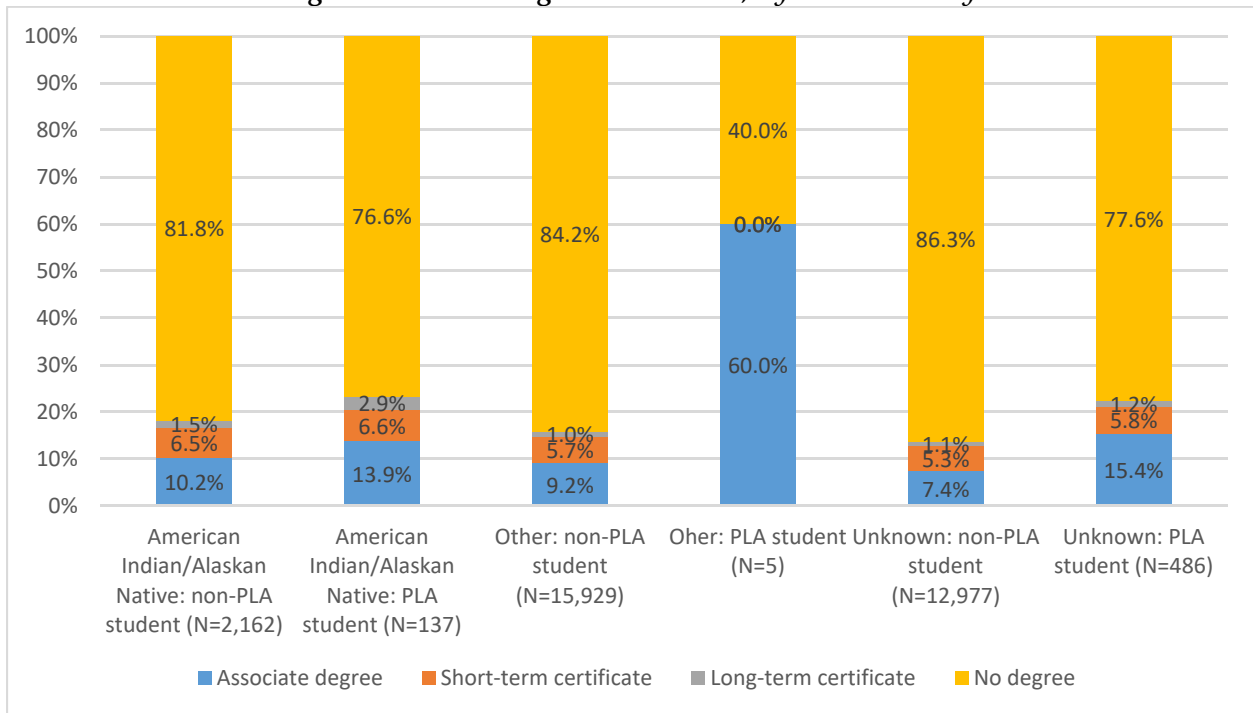


Figure 17. PLA and graduation rate, by race/ethnicity



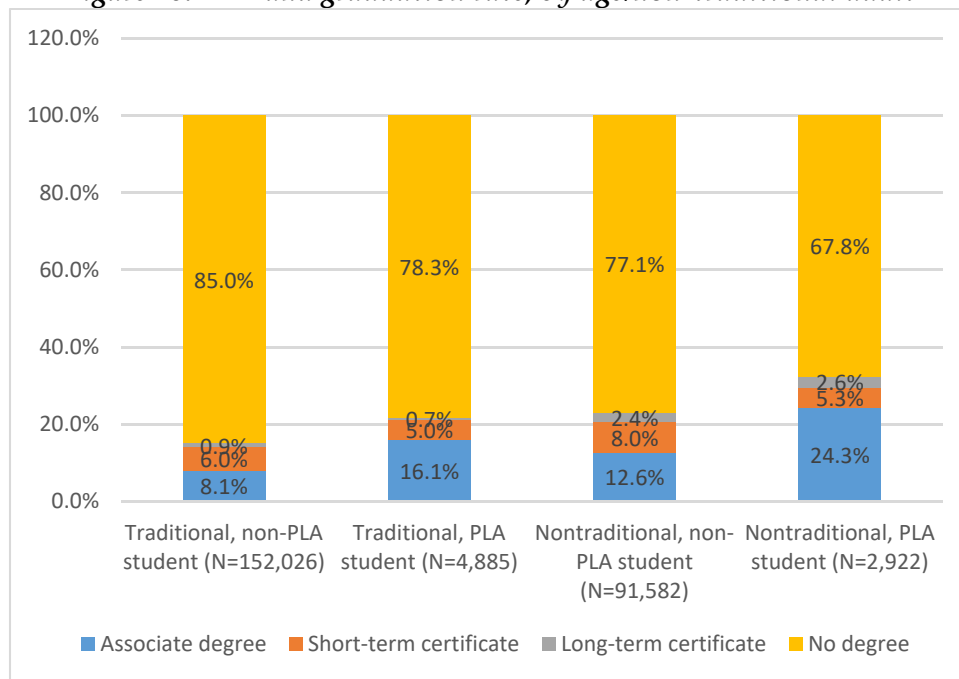
Non-traditional adult students

When evaluating the relationship between PLA and graduation rates by students’ age, we found students who earned PLA credit had higher graduation rates than non-PLA earners regardless of their age (Figure 18). The proportion of students graduating among traditional

students with PLA credits was about 8 percentage points higher than that of the non-PLA counterparts. Non-traditional PLA students had even higher graduation rates of around 32 percent which was over 10 percentage points higher than that of the non-traditional non-PLA students.

Much of the difference in graduation rates can be attributed to the difference in the associate’s degree completion rates between PLA and non-PLA students. For both traditional and non-traditional students, graduation rates for associate’s degrees among PLA students were twice as high as those of their non-PLA counterparts. The differences between graduation rates for students of different age groups pursuing certificates were minimal.

Figure 18. PLA and graduation rate, by age/non-traditional adult



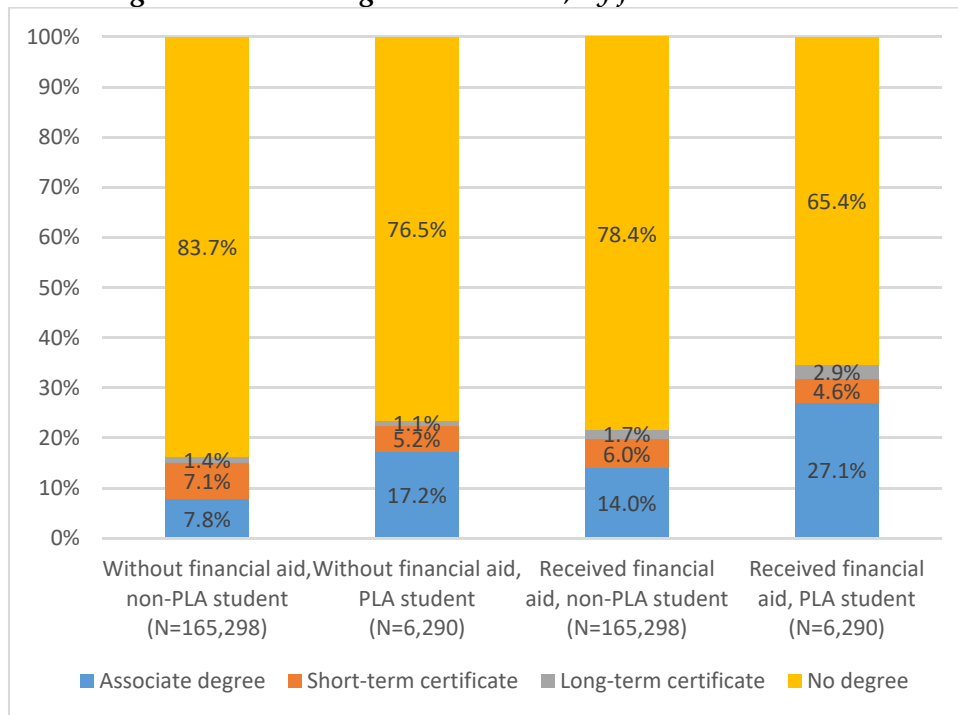
Financial aid status

As shown in Figure 19, among students who qualified for financial aid under the Federal Pell Grant program, PLA earners had higher graduation rates than non-PLA earners (35 percent compared to 22 percent). Among students who were ineligible for financial aid, PLA earners also graduated at higher rates than non-PLA earners (23 percent of PLA earners graduated compared to around 16 percent of non-PLA earners).

Graduation rates were higher among PLA students who were eligible for financial aid than they were among those who were ineligible for assistance. Prior learning credit earners eligible for financial aid graduated with associate’s degrees at a rate of 27.1 percent on average compared to 17.2 percent of PLA earners ineligible for financial aid. Among non-PLA earners, economically disadvantaged students also had higher graduation rates than their more financially secure

counterparts across all degree types. For example, nearly 14 percent of non-PLA-earners who were eligible for financial aid received associate’s degrees, whereas only about 8 percent of those who were ineligible for financial aid did so. Such associations were also discovered among students earning long-term certificates. Overall, we found that prior learning credit earners who were eligible for financial aid had higher graduation rates than those who were not.

Figure 19. PLA and graduation rate, by financial aid status



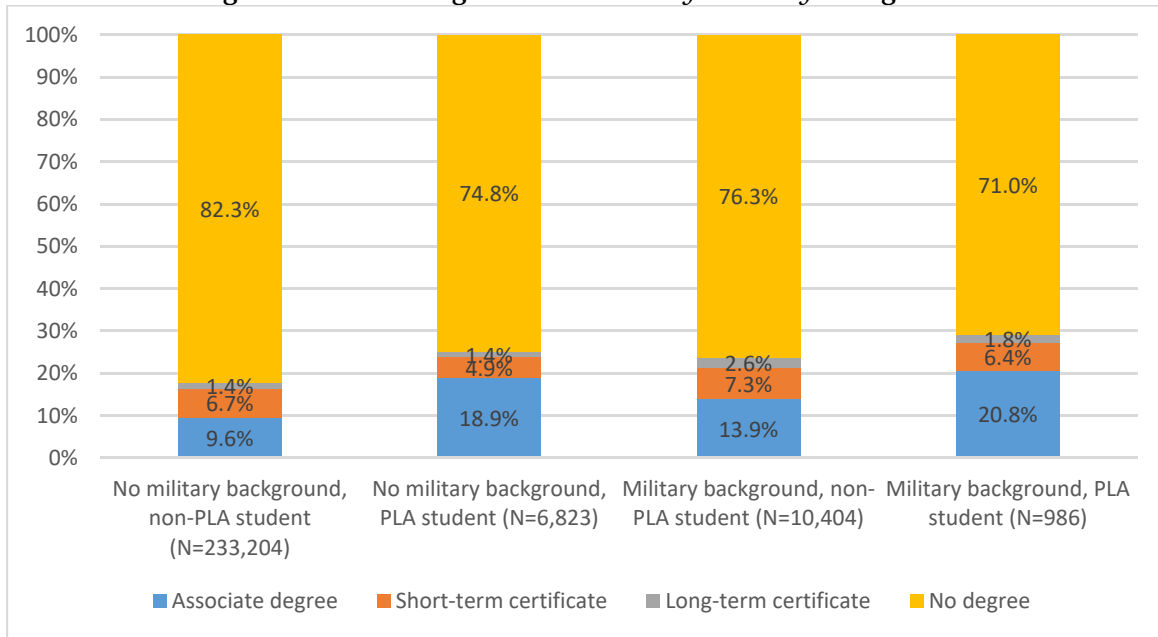
Military background

We also examine the association between PLA credit-earning and graduation rates by students’ military service experience. Our data show that regardless of military background, students who earned PLA credit graduated at a higher rate as compared to students who did not earn PLA credit (Figure 20).

Among students who did not report any military experience, 25 percent of PLA earners successfully earned a credential as compared to only 18 percent of non-PLA students who did so. However, as shown in Figure 20, the difference in graduation rates between PLA earners and non-PLA earners who had military experience was less noticeable. Among students, with a military background graduation rates were higher for PLA earners than for non-PLA earners (29 percent vs. 24 percent). Most of the difference in graduation rates between students who earned prior learning credit and those who did not can be attributed to the difference in graduation rates of associate’s degree programs. The difference in graduation rates between PLA-earning and non-PLA-earning students with no history of military service was significant

(18.9 percent vs. 9.6 percent, respectively). The difference in graduation rates among students who had some military background was also large; about 21 percent of prior learning credit earners vs. around 14 percent of non-PLA-earners. PLA credits thus had a slightly stronger association with graduation rates among non-military-affiliated students.

Figure 20. PLA and graduation rate by military background



Summary

Although schools have just begun implementation of the improved prior learning assessment policy at the institutional level, it is evident that prior learning assessment is beneficial to students. Both qualitative and quantitative data indicate that prior learning assessment helps students achieve higher graduation rates. At this point, it is difficult to tell if more students are using prior learning assessment than previously, but those that are using it are achieving associate’s degrees at a higher rate than their counterparts without prior learning credits.

NEXT STEPS

For most colleges, early implementation was focused on faculty/staff/advisor training, plans for marketing to/recruiting students, and solidifying detailed plans for roll-out at each respective school. Some schools had begun a “pilot” of the changes to prior learning assessment by having one or two “experts” handle all prior learning credit inquiries and applications. Next steps for most schools involve continued training for faculty and advising staff, rolling out marketing, and beginning to spread the duties of prior learning assessment to other staff and advisors. Other next steps include several at the consortium level. Now that individual institutions have implemented the redesigned prior learning assessment policy and some time has elapsed, system staff have recognized that there is still some variance in how schools have aligned with

the improved policy. While all schools have implemented the changes, some are doing a better job of adhering to the changes than others. For example, some schools have done a better job at reporting data than others, and most are not using the tools created during the grant period, such as the PLACredit.com tool. Additionally, some schools are doing a better job of awarding meaningful credits through prior learning assessment than others. By pulling data at the system-level, staff can see that some institutions have higher rates of completion among those with PLA credits than others—an indication that some schools are not awarding general education credits rather than elective credits for prior learning assessment. Next steps for both of these issues include better communication from the system to individual institutions. Representatives from the system plan to visit each institution again to work on adherence issues and to further educate staff about data entry tool usage, credit crosswalks, and etcetera. The visits will help to clarify what institutions need to do to adhere to the policy and help increase compliance.

In addition, the system has received a Colorado Department of Labor and Employment grant to help increase enrollments in credit programs in advanced manufacturing in the state. One strategy of the grant will involve prior learning assessment. A goal of the grant is to ensure that each college that sponsors or provides non-credit training opportunities has an individual to interact with those training participants about what a CCCS college can offer them—including prior learning assessment. As a strategy of the grant, the CCCS PLA director will provide additional training to colleges and employers. Training for colleges will ensure that each college has staff who can have conversations with students about past training they have received and how that may convert to credit. Training for employers will ensure that employers fully understand the benefits of prior learning assessment and how training can be adapted to credit. This grant will scaffold some of the work of the TAACCCT grant relative to prior learning assessment.