

## QuickPath PLA Project Overview

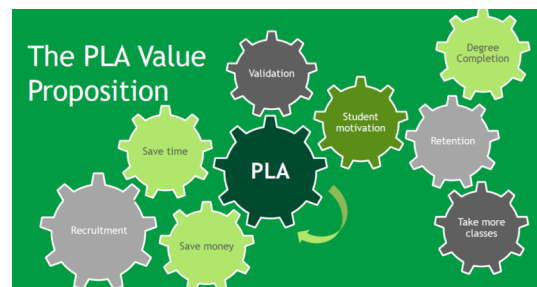
With [Innovation Award funding](#), West Hills Community College District (WHCCD) is expanding its Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) methods to include Portfolio Assessment. This project intends to expand access and services to students at WHCCD and achieve institutional goals related to growing enrollment of adult learners, increasing completion and persistence, and reducing time to degree/certificate.

PLA refers to the alternative methods for awarding college credit. The common PLA methods at California community colleges include [Credit by Examination 5CCR §55050](#), [Advanced Placement 5CCR §55052](#), the [College Level Examination Program \(CLEP\)](#), and military credit recommended by the [American Council for Education Military Guide](#).



The research focused on PLA reveals it as a common practice in higher education and one that positively influences student persistence and completion. The American Association of Collegiate Registrar and Admissions Officers (2014) conducted a [60 Second Survey](#) and found 83% of institutions indicated accepting at least one type of credit for prior learning. A [2010 study](#) performed by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) of more than 60,000 student records at 48 institutions compared students with and without PLA credit. The key findings: PLA usage was greatest among the 35-44 age group followed by the 45-54 group; 56% of PLA students earned a post-secondary degree compared to only 21% of non-PLA students; 56% of PLA students and 22% of non-PLA students who had not earned a degree in the timeframe of the study had earned 80% of the credits needed toward their degree; students who earned PLA credit completed their associate degree in an average of 40.1 months compared to students who completed in an average of 44.6 months without PLA credit.

The research on PLA supports the view that alternative methods for earning college credit helps students complete, persist, and reduce time to degree/certificate. The data also suggest PLA methods are sought after by adult learners. **The QuickPath PLA Project intends to expand on these services with Portfolio Assessment and leverage them to create pathways for students to achieve their educational goals quickly.**



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## Portfolio Assessment

Portfolio Assessment allows students to demonstrate their knowledge as it relates to the learning outcomes of a specific course using both narrative and artifacts as evidence, rather than through proctored multiple-choice exams. Faculty subject matter experts evaluate student portfolios to determine their proficiency in meeting the learning outcomes of the course. The nature of the assessment invites students to reflect on their past experiences and discover the foundational knowledge and skills developed through workplace experience, training, volunteering, or informal study.

With the addition of Portfolio Assessment, the QuickPath project intends to provide adult learners with an option to demonstrate their knowledge through a reflective process, thereby acknowledging college-level knowledge can be gained prior to arriving at a college or university.

## Opportunities and Challenges

The QuickPath PLA Project aligns with the Vision for Success as it aims to reduce equity and achievement gaps related to access and completion of underserved populations including part-time students and adult learners. Working adults often have responsibilities preventing them from enrolling full-time and taking courses through traditional routes. Still, they gain college-level knowledge in the workplace. Providing a way for students to demonstrate what they already know creates additional points of access and enables them to achieve their educational goals whatever their life circumstances.

Further, the QuickPath project supports Guided Pathways. Guided Pathways will allow students to view their full program of study, thereby making it easier for students to identify the courses which they already possess competency. By improving the navigation of a program of study and creating alternative ways for students to earn course credit, students will enroll in the courses they need and will not have to relearn material. In this way, the QuickPath project compliments Guided Pathways in reducing unnecessary unit accumulation and improving access and completion.

### The opportunities

- Aligned with Goals 1, 3, 5, and 6 of Vision for Success
- Builds on the Guided Pathways framework
- Supports students pursuing CTE programs
- Enhances access and services for part-time and adult learners
- Increases completion and persistence
- Reduces time to degree/certificate and unit accumulation

### The challenges

- Developing PLA policies and procedures within the boundaries of Title 5
- Developing a sustainable funding model for operating with a PLA program
- Addressing questions related to faculty workload and compensation
- Creating standardized practices for articulating PLA credit within CCC
- Engaging CSUs and UCs in articulating PLA credit

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## Strategies for Scaling PLA

The lessons learned through the planning and preparation related to the QuickPath PLA Project are many. The following are identified system-level items which would support colleges in serving students through PLA.

- Standardized PLA language
- Guidance for writing institutional PLA policies and procedures
- Guidance on residency requirements for degree and certificate programs of study
- Guidance on PLA credit max for degree and certificate programs of study
- Recommendations for setting PLA assessment fees
- Standardized notation of PLA credit for academic records
- Guidance on articulating PLA credit within CCC system
- Professional development on PLA and Portfolio Assessment
- Professional development on evaluating Joint Service Transcripts and writing curriculum crosswalks with ACE Military Guide
- Funding for long-term PLA program sustainability
- Developing CLEP testing centers at colleges
- Recommendations for CLEP similar to AB1985
- Templates for colleges to use when creating PLA routing documents
- PLA marketing materials