

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT

A British Columbia Update — February 1995

BCCAT activities reflect growing PLA interest

Interest in, and knowledge of, prior learning assessment has been growing among post-secondary educators in British Columbia. Mature students, facing the need for upgrading and re-training, have sought opportunities to have their previous learning assessed so that they can receive credit for what they already know, and can proceed from that point to acquire the additional knowledge and skills they require to achieve their educational or career goals.

The B.C. Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT) has been facilitating discussions and developments, seeking to ensure appropriate levels of consistency within the B.C. system, establishing standards and guidelines to ensure that credibility and quality are retained, providing training for the effective implementation of PLA, and funding pilot projects.

Council's role in PLA is directed by its PLA Steering Committee, chaired by Susan Witter, a Council member, and Dean of Continuing Education at University College of the Fraser Valley. Other Council members on the committee are Richard Vedan, from Langara College, representing College and Institute Educators' Association, and Ken Harvey, from School District #39. Thelma Brown, Camosun College, Dr. Roy Ferguson, University of Victoria, Professor Bob Will, University of British Columbia, Susan Brain, Open Learning Agency, Beverley Miller, Douglas College, and Gary Morrison, BCIT, complete the membership. This committee seeks to improve access to appropriate levels of education and training through the implementation of assessment strategies which provide valid and reliable indicators of learning. The assumption is made that demonstrated rigour in

PLA assessments will encourage institutions and employers to accept "PLA credits" on the same basis as credits awarded for conventional instruction.

Expectations for the availability of PLA appear to be growing, not only within branches of provincial and federal governments and related agencies and organizations, but also among groups of employees. Recently, a group of teacher assistants in one B.C. school district negotiated access to PLA and retraining as part of their collective agreement. At present, PLA projects in B.C. focus on services for persons in health and human service, computing, industrial technology, adult education, and hospitality/tourism, but interest is expanding in a broad range of disciplines and fields. The British Columbia Labour Force Development Board is urging institutions, employers and unions to work together to ensure that PLA and complementary relevant training are accessible to the labour force.

INSIDE . . .

<i>Training for PLA Implementation</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>An Inventory of PLA Activity</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>System Planning</i>	<i>4-5</i>
<i>At the Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>PLA Handbooks</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>PLA Contacts Directory</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Next Steps for PLA in B.C.</i>	<i>8</i>

BRITISH COLUMBIA COUNCIL ON ADMISSIONS & TRANSFER

902 - 549 Howe Street, Vancouver, BC V6C 2C2
Telephone: 604-683-0504 / Fax: 604-683-0576

Training For PLA Implementation

Council guidelines specify that "all personnel in PLA (assessors, student advisers, instructors of portfolio development / career / educational planning courses, administrators) have appropriate skills and knowledge." To this end, the Council has provided a number of workshops and training sessions.

On October 27 and 28, 1994, 50 participants worked with two resource persons, Paul Zakos and Ron Conlon from Loyalist College, Ontario, to develop skills in assessing portfolios. At that session, Dr. Frank Gelin, Executive Director of the Council, reaffirmed the commitment to Standards and Guidelines so as "to bring credibility to this whole endeavour of Prior Learning Assessment." Virtually all participants reported that the two day session was relevant and helpful, and many are now using the skills acquired in the assessment of portfolios at their own institutions. They also advised the Council regarding further training needs. The number of applicants for this session exceeded the available spaces — an indication of the interest and of the commitment to developing sound assessment practices.

Spring Training '95

The Council has scheduled an intensive three-day training session, on March 15, 16, and 17. The resource person is Ms. Susan Simosko, a name well-known because of her experience in PLA, and in education of PLA practitioners. Her extensive writing includes, among others, two popular books: *Accreditation of Prior Learning: A Practical Guide for Professionals*, and *Assessing Learning: A CAEL Handbook for Faculty*. The first day's session is "An Introduction to PLA;" Day 2 is "Assessing Clients;" and Day 3 has two streams, one for those who provide orientation and support for candidates and the other for those who provide administrative and policy support for PLA. Contact persons at each institution have the information, and registration forms. Once again, participation is limited. (NOTE: These sessions were filled by mid February, and a "wait list" has been established) These training sessions are provided by the Council on Admissions and

Transfer with funding provided by the Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour.

National Conferences

The federal government, through **Human Resource Development Canada (HRDC)** is offering a national conference on PLA in Ottawa, October 23-25, 1995. The conference title is "Crediting the Past - Investing in the Future," and will include presentations from national and international leaders, and reports of projects and initiatives in each of the Canadian provinces. The B.C. Council on Admissions and Transfer is represented on the steering committee, and is encouraging as many as possible from B.C. to participate in that event.

HRDC has a significant interest in PLA. In October 1994, it published its first national Newsletter on PLA, providing basic definitions and descriptions of the process, and describing the PLA initiatives in each Canadian province and territory. Copies of the newsletter are available from Daniela Baggio-Fletcher (Fax: 819-994-0202).

The **First Nations Technical Institute** is presenting its Sixth Annual Prior Learning Assessment Conference: in Belleville, Ontario, May 31 to June 2, with the theme, "Charting the Future - Is PLA enough." The registration fee is \$300. Preconference workshops on May 30 and 31st include: Writing and Measuring Learning Outcomes, Program Evaluation for Credit, Open Learning, Joint-Venture Employability Programs, and Making the Transition from Measuring Classroom Learning to Measuring Experiential Learning. More details and registration forms are available from Ainsley Scott, FNTI, R.R. 1, Deseronto, Ont., K0K 1X0. Phone 1-800-267-0637.

A sub-committee is considering the possibility of fibre optic delivery of a PLA workshop, perhaps even this May or June. If you have access to fibre optic technology in your region and are interested in this possibility please call Lloyd Morin at 655-3842.

An Inventory of PLA Activity in B.C.

The Council has recently assembled information regarding the extent of PLA practice among post-secondary institutions in B.C. For many years, institutions have been providing challenge exams; and recently some have undertaken special projects to enhance their PLA services through portfolio assessment. Through funding provided by the Innovations Fund in the Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour, the Curriculum and Professional Development Centre, the Council On Admissions and Transfer, and Employment Canada, a number of PLA projects have been completed and others are underway.

Fifteen colleges and institutes and two public universities offer challenge exams as one form of prior learning assessment. Over 400 challenges were reported over the past 12 months in colleges, institutes and universities. Eight institutions report some provision for credit to be awarded through portfolio assessment. Seven institutions now have a person identified as PLA coordinator or facilitator.

Nine institutions report major PLA projects, totalling an investment of nearly \$490,000:

INSTITUTION	DISCIPLINE AREA(S)	PROJECT CONTACT
BCIT	Computer System Technology	Ken Takagaki
Camosun College	Early Childhood Education, Community Social Worker	Thelma Brown
Capilano College	Music Therapy, Applied Business Technology, other	Stephanie Forsyth
Douglas College	Range of Human Services, Faculty Excellence Program	Beverly Miller
Malaspina University-College	Range of Human Services	Maria Gomes
Northwest Community College	Industrial Technology Program	Larisa Tarwick
Open Learning Agency	Handbooks for students and faculty	Susan Brain
Selkirk College	Hospitality/Tourism	Cindy McLeod
University College of the Fraser Valley	Adult Education Degree, others	Chelene Koenig

A copy of a detailed summary of the PLA Inventory is available from the contact person listed for each institution. See page 7.

System Planning

On January 27th, about 30 PLA practitioners, registrars and administrators from the colleges and institutes currently involved with PLA projects met to discuss implementation issues and strategies. Some notes of their reported experiences which follow may be helpful for those who are embarking on PLA:

PLA Promotion/Marketing

To date, most of the PLA projects have focused on specific program areas, with information distributed through known contacts, or to students who have submitted applications to the program. However, among the means of communication used to promote PLA were: the local newspaper, the *Vancouver Sun*, Continuing Education brochures, college calendars, information sheets, direct mailing, word of mouth, and speeches and presentations. Participants noted the importance of not promoting beyond the capacity to respond — neither “over-selling” nor premature promotion are desirable. However, because the concepts within PLA are new for many, there remains a large task of consumer information.

Student Orientation

Participants emphasized the importance of candidates understanding what is involved in the assessment process. Most offer a short information session (1½ to 3 hours), and in some cases, attendance is mandatory before proceeding with further PLA preparation. Typically, the orientation session is provided by a team including counselling and program staff, and often includes a package of written materials. Many use the handbooks which have been developed by the Council's committee on PLA.

Portfolio Development Courses

All institutions participating in the January meeting offer some form of instruction to assist candidates in preparing documentation of their learning for presentation in a “portfolio.” Various models and curricula are being tried, with versions varying from 15 hours to 60 hours. Where these also include objectives related to career and educational plan-

ning and other learning and analytical skills, the courses typically provide three credits, and students pay the regular tuition charged for credit courses. During the “pilot project” stage, some are offering these courses without fee, and some through contract with an employer or agency. The OLA offers a portfolio development course by distance education, but has few candidates.

Learning Outcomes

One of the challenges facing PLA practitioners is the identification of the learning expected in the course listed in the institution's calendar, so that the learning outcomes determined through prior learn-

The institution awarding the credit should be able to demonstrate that the assessment used was reliable, valid and, therefore, credible as an indication of student experiential learning.

ing assessment can be matched against the requirements of the course for which credit is being sought. Some are working with faculty in the appropriate departments to develop supplements to existing course outlines which make the required learning outcomes more explicit than they have been in the past.

Where the assessment purpose is to determine whether *industry occupational* standards have been met, college equivalents may not always be relevant, but the college may work in collaboration with industry representatives to clarify knowledge and skill requirements. The college or institute may then develop contractual relationships with an industry to provide the supplementary training required to move the individual from present levels of learning to those required for employment or certification. The linkage between accurate assessment and clearly stated intended learning outcomes was emphasized.

Challenge Exams

One of the most used instruments for PLA is the challenge exam. Some institutions have offered these assessments for many years but have not incorporated these within their policy or procedures for PLA. Pilot projects to date have frequently concentrated on portfolio assessment. However, many recognize that their PLA services include a full range of assessment options, to be selected as the situation warrants, and that both portfolio and challenge exams will be included within their institutional policies governing service delivery, fee assessment, student records, etc.

Student Transcripts

Council guidelines suggest that student transcripts should identify those credits awarded as a result of a PLA assessment. The institution awarding the credit should be able to demonstrate that the assessment used was reliable, valid and, therefore, credible as an indication of student experiential learning. The registrars debated alternate transcript practice and rationale at some length. Some maintain that, because other grades and credits on the transcripts don't show the particular delivery method by which the student learned the material or achieved the required outcomes, learning which has occurred experientially and has been assessed by the professionals of a B.C. public post-secondary institution should not be discriminated against by those who might receive the student in subsequent studies or in employment. Other registrars maintain that it is their responsibility to explain as accurately as possible what the student has undertaken and achieved and that ethical practice requires that they identify PLA credit on the transcript. In this case, the onus is on the receiving institution or employer to provide its own rationale for how it accommodates such credit.

The transcript issues should continue to be discussed at professional meetings of college, institute, and university registrars, within articulation committees, and among senior officials concerned with student services and instructional policies. Clarity

and consistency on this matter will serve the students best as they move throughout the B.C. system.

Funding

The PLA practitioners and institutional administrators believe that the "hard case" can be made for the financial support of PLA in the post-secondary institutions, and observed that PLA appears to be consonant with government objectives in education, and with training in the workplace and in institutions, both public and private. A large appetite for PLA is emerging in a number of sectors, requiring a continuation of financial support for development of cost-effective and credible assessment strategies and materials. Operating grants are also seen as essential to enable the ongoing service to be maintained. While recognizing that all the funding is not likely to come from a single source, institutions will ask the provincial government to provide grants to ensure that their "FTE production" through PLA is acknowledged, and to maintain the capacity to make PLA services available to those private and public employment sectors who face radical restructuring of their workforce.

The practical economic advantages of avoiding the use of instructional spaces by people who already have the required knowledge and skills . . . should become evident.

Institutions may be required to demonstrate that they can provide a volume of PLA service which makes an appreciable impact upon the number of available training spaces available in the system. The practical economic advantages of avoiding the use of instructional spaces by people who already have the required knowledge and skills, and of expediting their entry to productive work should become evident. PLA can provide effective bridging of private and public sectors, and of institutions and

the workplace. The government objectives of greater efficiency and productivity would seem to be well served by effective PLA. Those present at the meeting recognize their role in providing the evidence for such a position, and will continue to urge government agencies to provide the level of funding needed to prevent the demise of a potentially powerful strategy in education and training in B.C.

The Council on Admissions and Transfer does not advocate for special funding for any particular aspect of post-secondary education, but is committed to facilitating quality services to students which enhance access to and transfer within the system. The advocacy for funding will be led by those institutions who perceive PLA as a significant component of their service delivery. As long as the Council maintains the role of system coordination for PLA, meetings of those involved, such as the one held on January 27th, appear to be an appropriate means of sharing concerns and solutions and developing recommendations for institutional and system policy.

At the Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour. . .

Devron Gaber is the Director within the post-secondary division who is responsible for PLA. Norma Kidd, Manager of Developmental Programs; Jean Campbell Manager of Social and Equity Programs, and Don Kwas, Acting Coordinator, Urban Colleges are also very involved in the support of PLA initiatives.

The Ministry staff has been working in co-operation with the Council committee, and has supported the development of PLA through funding pilot projects and training.

The Ministry encourages post secondary institutions to develop policies regarding PLA which are consistent with the standards and guidelines published by the Council.

We Are Moving!

Please be advised that the B.C. Council on Admissions and Transfer will be moving its office location, effective March 27, 1995. Our new address and phone numbers will be as follows:

B.C. Council on Admissions & Transfer
902 - 549 Howe Street
Vancouver, BC
V6C 2C2

Telephone: (604) 683-0504
 FAX Number: (604) 683-0576

Electronic mail for Franklin Gelin,
 Executive Director and Co-Chair:
fgelin@bcit.bc.ca

PLA Handbooks Available...

Two useful handbooks developed by the Council's PLA Committee, are available from the Open Learning Agency at a price of \$3.00 each, plus G.S.T.

- "Prior Learning Assessment in British Columbia: A Guide to Earning Credit for Your Skills and Knowledge."
— for students/clients.
- "Prior Learning Assessment in British Columbia: An Orientation For Post-secondary Institutions."
— for faculty and staff.

Order these handbooks from:
OLA Marketing Department
P.O. Box 82080, Burnaby, BC V5C 6J8
Phone: 431-3210
Toll free: 1-800-663-1653
Fax: 431-3381

PLA Contact Persons Directory

This directory of PLA contact persons is updated to January 31. All PLA practitioners are encouraged to share their "working papers" with others in the system, and to enquire of others where shared experience may be helpful and cost-efficient.

The PLA Contact Person at your institution is your first source of Council discussion papers and newsletters as well as information regarding training sessions, etc,

B.C. COUNCIL ON ADMISSIONS & TRANSFER

Lloyd Morin, Consultant
Phone: 655-3842 / Fax 655-3842
27 - 10457 Resthaven Drive
Sidney, BC V8L 3H6

B.C. INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Val Karpinsky, Acting Registrar
Phone: 432-8215 / Fax: 430-1331
3700 Willingdon
Burnaby, BC V5G 3H2

CAMOSUN COLLEGE

Thelma Brown, Dean, Health & Human Services
Phone: 370-3179 / Fax: 370-3177
3100 Foul Bay Road
Victoria, BC V8P 5J2

CAPILANO COLLEGE

Stephanie Forsyth, Dean,
Career/Vocational Education
Phone: 984-4994 / Fax 984-1758
2055 Purcell Way
North Vancouver, BC V7J 3H5

CENTRE FOR CURRICULUM & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Lynn Pipes, Curriculum
Development
Phone: 387-6065 / Fax: 387-9142
5th Floor, 1483 Douglas Street
Victoria, BC, V8W 3K4

COLLEGE OF NEW CALEDONIA

Rachael Donovan, VP, Academic
Phone: 561-5802 / Fax: 561-5828
3330 - 22nd Avenue
Prince George, BC V2N 1P8

DOUGLAS COLLEGE

Bev Miller, Director, Child, Family
and Community Services
Phone: 527-5135 / Fax: 527-5095
700 Royal Avenue
New Westminster, BC V3L 5B2

EAST KOOTENAY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Larry Szalanski, Vice President

Phone: 489-2751 / Fax: 489-8253
2700 College Way
Cranbrook, BC V1C 5L7

EMILY CARR INSTITUTE OF ART & DESIGN

Maurice Yacowar, Dean, Academic
Phone: 844-3805 / Fax: 844-3801
1399 Johnston Street
Vancouver, BC V6H 3R9

JUSTICE INSTITUTE OF B.C.

Larry Goble, President
Phone: 228-9771 / Fax: 660-1875
4180 West 4th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V6R 4J5

KWANTLEN COLLEGE

Geoff Dean, Director, Trades & Vocational Division
Phone: 599-2942 / Fax: 572-3452
12666-77th Avenue
Surrey, BC V3W 2M8

LANGARA COLLEGE

Linda Arnold, Dean, Instruction
Phone: 323-5375 / Fax: 323-5555
100 West 49th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5Y 2Z6

MALASPINA

UNIVERSITY-COLLEGE

Carol Matthews, Dean, Instruction
Phone: 741-8776 / Fax: 741-2224
900 5th Street
Nanaimo, BC V9R 5S5

MINISTRY OF SKILLS TRAINING AND LABOUR

Norma Kidd, Manager,
Developmental Programs
Phone: 387-6182 / Fax: 356-8851
838 Fort Street
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

NORTH ISLAND COLLEGE

Linda Ruhlen, Associate Dean,
Human Services
Phone: 286-8941 / Fax: 286-8900
14800 Elm Street
Campbell River, BC V9W 3A6

NORTHERN LIGHTS COLLEGE

Paul Dampier, Registrar
Phone: 784-7518 / Fax: 782-5233
11401-8th Street
Dawson Creek, BC V1G 4G2

NORTHWEST COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Larisa Tarwick, Manager, Program
Support
Phone: 635-6511 / Fax: 635-3511
Box 726
Terrace, BC V8G 4C2

OPEN LEARNING AGENCY

Susan Brain, Advisor
Phone: 431-3039 / Fax: 431-3381
4355 Mathissi Place
Burnaby, BC V5G 4S8

OKANAGAN UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Deborah Matheson, Admissions
Officer
Phone: 762-5445 / Fax: 862-5466
1000 KLO Road
Kelowna, BC V1Y 4X8

SCHOOL DISTRICT #39

Ken Harvey, Director, Career & Continuing Education
Phone: 733-1893 / Fax: 733-7903
1595 West 10th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V6J 1X6

SELKIRK COLLEGE

Richard Hallett, Dean, Educational
Support
Phone: 365-1275 / Fax: 365-3929
301 Frank Beinder Way
Castlegar, BC V1N 3J1

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Nick Heath, Director, Admissions
Phone: 291-3647 / Fax: 291-4969
SFU, Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Bob Will, Professor, Economics
Phone: 822-2919 / Fax: 822-5915
UBC, Vancouver, BC V6T 1W5

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF THE CARIBOO

Colin James, Associate Dean of
Science
Phone: 828-5000 / Fax: 828-5450
900 College Drive
Kamloops, BC V2C 5N3

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF THE FRASER VALLEY

Chelene Koenig, Educational
Advisor
Phone: 853-7441 / Fax: 855-7618
33844 King Road
Abbotsford, BC V2S 4N2

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

VP Academic
Phone: 960-5555
Box 1950, Station A
Prince George, BC V2L 5P2

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

Roy Ferguson, Child & Youth Care
Phone: 721-7983 / Fax: 721-7218
PO Box 1700
Victoria, BC V8W 2Y2

VANCOUVER COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Laraine Niewinski, Registrar
Phone: 871-7042 / Fax: 871-7458
1155 East Broadway
Vancouver, BC V5N 5T9

Next Steps For PLA In B.C.

Where do we go from here? More institutions and agencies are becoming involved, and the diversity of clients' backgrounds is increasing. One might anticipate an increasing expectation of PLA services being available in more post-secondary institutions and in more programs and discipline areas. Recommendations for future actions could include:

1. Coordination

In the interests of consistency and efficiency it is important that persons, institutions and agencies involved in developing PLA work together and maintain awareness of the assessment strategies and delivery mechanisms which can be shared.

Some provincial coordination will facilitate quality service at the local and regional levels, and greater consistency in the system.

2. Training

Increasing demands for training will require more provincial sessions, and alternatives for delivery regionally and by distance education. The development of training strategies and resources will require some continued funding and activity.

3. Quality

Continuing attention to "quality" controls to ensure the credibility of PLA processes is required. The assurance of quality in the assessment is the basis for ensuring acceptance of the credits earned through PLA.

4. Transfer

Ongoing dialogue is required toward the acceptance of PLA credit for transfer on the same basis as credits awarded through conventional delivery modes.

5. Cost Effectiveness and Funding

PLA services must emerge which provide a sufficient "volume" of activity for the expenditure to ensure that the process is cost-effective both for the client and for the institution and funding agencies. Commitments from all funding sources must be confirmed to ensure that the service remains viable.

6. Expansion

PLA services will be expanding into additional disciplines and career areas.

7. PLA in Industry

PLA and "top-up" training must be developed to meet specified occupational standards. (Note: Lee Doney, chief executive officer of the B.C. Labour Force Development Board, has identified these needs in such areas as forests, mines, finance, and health. He encourages post-secondary institutions to take the initiative in developing partnerships with business and industry, unions and employers, to provide creative responses, tailored to occupational standards and learner needs.)

8. Training Program Evaluations

Training programs provided in the workplace, need to be evaluated and rated for PLA credit toward college/institute/university credentials.

Prior Learning Assessment: A British Columbia Update, February 1995
 © 1995, British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer.
 Copying and further distribution of this newsletter is permitted.

**BRITISH COLUMBIA COUNCIL ON
 ADMISSIONS & TRANSFER**

902 - 549 Howe Street, Vancouver, BC V6C 2C2
 Telephone: 604-683-0504 / Fax: 604-683-0576