

And the Subject is PLA

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The first question that often comes up as it relates to PLA is what is PLA and why is it important to our academic mission. In the next few paragraphs, I will attempt to answer this question and describe how we are striving to incorporate Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) into the academic mission of the Business Department at Harold Washington College (HWC).

Simply stated, Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is "Credit for prior learning". Per Illinois House Bill-2404, it is the evaluation and assessment of a student's life learning through employment, training, and experiences outside of an academic environment from which skills that comprise terminal objectives are mastered to an acceptable degree of proficiency for college credit, certification, or advanced standing toward further education, or training.

PLA can be offered/ evaluated using various tools to measure the student's learning. Examples of these methods are:

- Standardized Exams – Exams developed at the national level such as CLEP, IB, AP, etc.
- Institutional Challenge Exams – Local exams developed by college faculty
- Articulation Agreements – Partnerships, Industry Crosswalks (Professional Licenses, Certifications)
- Portfolio Review – Documentation provided by student to display proficiency

National research on PLA has highlighted two important benefits of Prior Learning Assessment. One benefit is that PLA helps in the removal of barriers to learning and employment opportunities in underserved communities while enhancing academic engagement and program completion rates.

At both the District level and college level, CCC and HWC have begun to incorporate Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) into our academic mission and HWC's Business Department have begun a partnership with Continuing Education and Career Services to identify relevant degree and certificate programs that would benefit from Prior Learning Assessment and build appropriate assessment tools. To that end, at the Business Department assessment level, we have taken the following steps:

- Identified programs with high potential for PLA and are developing PLA evaluation tools. Examples of programs selected are Digital Marketing and Cybersecurity.
- Identifying potential PLA opportunities to appeal to non-traditional learners. We are attempting to do this via our current academic programs (Paralegal, CPA Prep, Human Resources Certificate programs), academic and industry stakeholders, apprenticeship programs and Continuing Education.
- Piloting a PLA Institutional Challenge Exam for our Business 111, Introduction to Business course in Spring 2022 and
- Completion by three Business Department faculty, including our Business Assessment Committee liaison of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) Prior Learning Assessment professional development training. This training will assist us in the development of PLA portfolio review rubrics and establishment of Faculty PLA assessor guidelines.

Our work on the PLA initiatives is still ongoing but we are coupling what we have learned with the rubrics we are building associated with COOP/ internship course student learning outcome development as well.