Military Prior Learning Assessment Policies and Practices at the Illinois Postsecondary Institutions

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**PLA** is a set of *well-established, researched, and validated methods* for assessing non-collegiate learning for college credit.

The process allows learners to *demonstrate knowledge and skill* in a particular field or fields and have that learning *evaluated for college credit*.

PLA targets adult learners.
Research shows outcomes for adult students with PLA are better than adults with no PLA credit:

- Higher GPAs
- Shorter time-to-degree
- Better retention rates
- Better completion rates
- Take more regular courses
Military PLA Takes Many Forms

- Military transcript review
- Standardized tests
- Student portfolios

College Credit
Military Transcript Review

- A military transcript documents training and coursework completed during military service
- American Council on Education (ACE) Military Evaluations Program evaluates formal military training and Military Occupational Specialties (MOS)
- ACE guidelines are used by many colleges and universities
- Usually no cost for military transcript review, though some institutions may charge a fee for posting credits to a student’s transcript
Overview of Military Transcripts

Joint Services Transcript (JST)

- Army
- Navy
- Marines
- Coast Guard

Request a transcript at: https://jst.doded.mil
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Military course ID</th>
<th>Course title</th>
<th>Date course taken</th>
<th>Academic subject in which credit is recommended</th>
<th>Recommended credit hours</th>
<th>Course description</th>
<th>Course level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0210C</td>
<td>MC-1606-0010</td>
<td>13-NOV-2009</td>
<td>Terrorism Awareness By Correspondence:</td>
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<td>Marine Corps Institute, Washington, DC</td>
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<td>MC-1401-0009</td>
<td>13-NOV-2009</td>
<td>Personal Financial Management by Correspondence</td>
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<td>Marine Corps Institute, Washington, DC</td>
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Scan of Policies and Practices at Illinois Institutions
88% of Institutions Surveyed Award Credit for some form of PLA

- Grand Total: 88% Yes, 2% No, but considering, 8% No, and not considering, 2% No, and don't know if we are considering
- 2-year Private, for-profit: 75% Yes, 25% No, but considering
- 2-year Private, non-profit: 100% Yes
- 2-year Public: 100% Yes
- 4-year Private, for-profit: 100% Yes
- 4-year Private, non-profit: 86% Yes, 9% No, but considering, 6% No, and not considering
- 4-year Public: 80% Yes, 20% No, but considering
- Graduate Private, non-profit: 25% Yes, 75% No, but considering
- Other Private, for-profit: 100% Yes
To provide a time-saving avenue for degree completion
85% 80% 75% 80% 88%

To provide a cost-effective avenue for degree completion
83% 82% 80% 80% 79%

To encourage greater student persistence toward a degree
82% 80% 75% 75% 79%

To fulfill our mission to serve adult learners
79% 79% 75% 75% 74%

To offer a way for students to avoid class work that would be redundant
76% 67% 73% 67% 75%

To recruit students
51% 48% 49% 48% 53%

To allow students to bypass prerequisites and register for upper-level residence courses that are more academically challenging and better suited to their educational needs/abilities.
53% 63% 53% 63% 50%

To keep up with the offerings of our competitors
25% 77% 24% 23% 0%
We want our graduates to have learned primarily or exclusively through instruction from our faculty and/or similar faculty at regionally accredited colleges and universities.

We have professional accreditation requirements that do not allow for PLA.

We primarily serve traditional-aged students who are not likely to have a lot of learning from work or other life experiences.

We do not have the administrative capacity to offer PLA.

Other (please specify)
Most institutions offer a variety of Military PLA options

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credit Type</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>2-year Public</th>
<th>4-year Private, non-profit</th>
<th>4-year Public</th>
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<tr>
<td>CLEP Exam Scores</td>
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<td>DSST Exam Scores</td>
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<td>UExcel Exam Scores</td>
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<td>Thomas Edison State College Examination Program (TECEP)</td>
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<td>AP Exam Scores</td>
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<td>ACE Credit Recommendations for Military Training and Occupations</td>
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<td>ACE Credit Recommendations for Corporate and Other External Training</td>
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<td>ACE or NCCRS Credit Recommendations for MOOCs or Other Non-Credit Courses</td>
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<td>Credit Recommendations Based on Your Own Institution’s Review of Corporate</td>
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<td>or Other External Training</td>
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<td>Institutional or Departmental Challenge Exams</td>
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<td>Portfolio Assessment (Internally Managed)</td>
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<td>Portfolio Assessment by a Third Party (e.g., LearningCounts)</td>
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<td>Performance Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Credit for Certifications</td>
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<td>Credit for Licenses</td>
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<td>Credit for Apprenticeship Training</td>
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<td>Community College of the Air Force Credit (CCAF)</td>
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<td>Credit for Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty (DD 214)</td>
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Most institutions set credit limits, though these limits are not consistent across institutions or PLA methods.

90% Of Illinois institutions surveyed said that they have limits on the number of PLA credits that can count towards a degree.

PLA Credits Limits
Standardized exams (e.g., CLEP, DSST, UExcel, AP)
- To meet general ed req's: 88%
- To meet program/major req's: 67%
- To meet elective req's: 57%

Institutional or departmental challenge exams
- To meet general ed req's: 91%
- To meet program/major req's: 65%
- To meet elective req's: 57%

Portfolio assessment
- To meet general ed req's: 87%
- To meet program/major req's: 61%
- To meet elective req's: 56%

This varies by area of study
- Lower division
- Upper division
- Graduate
- Certificate programs
The ways that credit could be applied to a degree plan varied by method.

- ACE credit recommendations for military training and occupations
- Community College of the Air Force credit (CCAF) - To meet general ed req’s
- Credit for Discharge from Active Duty (DD214) - To meet general ed req’s
- Credit for Discharge from Active Duty (DD214) - To meet program/major req’s
- To meet elective req’s

The percentages indicate how credit was applied:
- 57% for ACE recommendations for military training and occupations
- 74% for CCAF
- 40% for DD214
- 33% for DD214
- 84% for general education
- 86% for program/major
- 78% for elective

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Most institutions have formal PLA policies that are reviewed regularly, although fewer have PLA policies specific to student veterans.
A minority of institutions have staff dedicated to veterans or PLA

- 0.3 FTEs: 1 2-year Public
- 0.5 FTEs: 2
- 1 FTE: 2 4-year Private, non-profit
- 2 FTEs: 3
- 3 FTEs: 3
- More (25 FTEs): 1

Legend:
- 2-year Public
- 4-year Private, non-profit
- 4-year Public
A number of Institutions handle credit in ways that may be problematic for student financial aid.

- We post all credits from review of the JST to the student transcript
- We only post credits to the student transcript if they will count toward the degree
- I don’t know
Institutions largely do not know faculty opinion of PLA for military students

- Most or all faculty understand and embrace military PLA.
- Some faculty understand and embrace it; others do not.
- Adult learner-focused faculty embrace it; general faculty do not understand it.
- Very few faculty understand military PLA.
- I don’t know
Recommendations for Greater Alignment

1. **Increase overall access to all PLA methods.** There was considerable variation in the methods of PLA available at each institution, and only 5 of the 17 listed methods were offered by more than half of the participating institutions. This is of particular concern for the four year institutions, which lag behind 2-years in the types of military PLA offerings available to students.

2. **Adoption of formal policies.** Formal policies for accepting PLA credit should be adopted by all institutions, especially 4-year private, non-profits, which reported the lowest rate of formal policies. In addition, formal policies should be subject to regular review cycles within institutions in order to promote consistency and transparency.

3. **Dedicated resources for military or veteran PLA.** Half of institutions reported that they have no dedicated resources for military or veteran PLA. These resources are vital for helping military students maximize the credits that are awarded for their training.
4. **Training for and dialogue with faculty around PLA and student veterans.** Twenty percent of institutions reported that faculty do not understand military or veteran PLA issues well, and 41% of institutions didn’t know how to describe the faculty’s views of PLA for military or student veterans. There’s a need for more training and dialogue to address concerns and promote acceptance of military PLA.

5. **Policy to protect against transcription of excess credits.** Twenty-three percent of institutions post JST credit as a block whether it is used or not. This is a policy that should be addressed since financial aid rules might prevent students with a large number of excess credit from getting financial aid. All institutions should adopt a policy that protects against excess credits, which can negatively affect financial aid.

6. **Data analysis.** Data analysis is important to understanding the ways in which military students are using PLA and identifying ways in which the institution can further help these students. Forty-one percent of institutions reported that they do no analysis of PLA outcomes, and 31% don’t know what is done. Schools should adopt policies and procedures to track comparative outcomes for PLA students, military students, and students in the general population.
Recommendations for Greater Alignment

7. **Application of PLA to the degree plan.** Results of this survey show that PLA is applied to degree plans in a great variety of ways and with a certain level of inconsistency across institutional types. Colleges should adopt policies to carefully consider how PLA credits are applied to the student degree plan.

8. **Carefully consider credit limit policy.** Reported variance in credit limit policies shows that there are huge differences in the number of military or veteran PLA credits that can be brought to different institutions. Institutions should consider the HLC rules governing PLA credit limits when creating these policies, and clearly post this information so that students can access these limits easily.

9. **Advising.** Schools need to ensure that advisors are knowledgeable about PLA, since this seems to be a primary way that PLA options are communicated to students. In addition, there is a need to look at other ways of communicating PLA options to students so that those that are not regular contact with advisors can also be made aware of these options.
Questions?

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