Comparing Competency Based Assessment Practices: Implications for Credit Award, Transcription, and Transfer

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Session Discussion Elements

Prior Learning Assessment and UW Flexible Options Direct Assessment – What are they and what’s the difference?

Why are competency-based programs important?

What are the challenges to operations and transfer?

Considerations for Success
What is PLA?

The evaluation of college-level learning outcomes that an individual attained outside of the university classroom.

The translation of prior learning competencies to a university standard of measurement of learning associated with a course and credits.
Common PLA Formats

PLA Formats Relevant to Non-Traditional Age Students

- Individualized student portfolios or interviews
- Departmental challenge exams
- Credit for military or corporate training (ACE Recommendations)
- DSST credit by exam (f.k.a. DANTES)
- College Level Examination Program (CLEP)
- Advanced Placement
- International Baccalaureate (IB)
Demonstrate How PLA is Comparable to Assessment that Takes Place in the College Classroom

**Quality Practices Align**
- Determination of credit award is made by appropriate academic subject matter or credentialing experts.
- Evaluators hold an advance degree in a relevant field or discipline.
- Programs are regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated and revised.
- Methods in place to monitor authenticity of materials submitted.
- Monitor reliability and validity of assessment.

**Similarities**
- Evaluate the same learning outcomes and competencies.
- Advise students as to what competencies they must demonstrate to pass a course.
- Inform students of resources available to them.
- Formative and summative evaluation.
- Quality of feedback promotes learning.

**Differences**
- Student previously acquired the content through external formal or informal learning opportunities.
- Faculty member/IAS does not deliver content.
- Student may provide documentation of competencies, rather than demonstration of competencies.
What is UW Flexible Option?

A portfolio of degrees and certificate programs offered in a self-paced, competency-based format

Prior learning & experiences shape the educational experience. Emphasis on what you know rather than how much time was spent learning

Students make progress by mastering competencies and passing assessments

Quality based on existing faculty and departments

Student-Centric; optimal blend of technology and human touch

UW System Partnership – multi-institutional approach. 3 institutions, 4 degrees, one certificate, and new partners slated for 2014
## Flex vs. “Traditional” HE Modality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Flex</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester-based</td>
<td>3-month subscription periods, new start every month, 12 SPs in year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Courses taken with other students</td>
<td>Self-paced</td>
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<tr>
<td>Credit earned by completion of course</td>
<td>Credit earned by passing assessments that demonstrate mastery of competence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faculty member instructs students as a group</td>
<td>Faculty members design competency sets, students work individually following an Individualized Learning Plan</td>
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<td>Traditional roles for faculty, advisor</td>
<td>New roles—academic success coach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administrative systems designed for semester-based instruction (registrar, financial aid, bursar, etc.)</td>
<td>New operations and strategies for every aspect of student-related administrative and support systems</td>
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Student-Centric Approach - Operations and Relationships Reinvented

Students receive personalized service and assistance from the point of first contact through graduation

Each student works with a “Flex Team”: Outreach Specialist, Admissions Advisor, Academic Success Coach, direct connections to SMEs

Wrap-around, 360 degree support

**Flex v1.0**
- Centralized recruitment, admissions, ACS
- Campus-based registrar, bursar, financial aid
- Use of existing SIS
- Modified records/transcript

**Flex v2.0**
- Centralized recruitment, admissions, registrar, bursar, financial aid
- New CRM, SIS expanded
- More authentic competency based curricula
- New kind of transcript
### How Flex is Comparable to Assessment that Takes Place in the College Classroom

#### Quality Practices Align
- Determination of mastery and credit earned is made by appropriate academic subject matter or credentialing experts
- Competency sets are created by same faculty who teach course in traditional campus environment
- Academic programs must meet same standards as brick and mortar counterpart
- Methods in place to monitor authenticity of materials submitted
- Monitor reliability and validity of assessment

#### Similarities
- Evaluate the same learning outcomes and competencies
- Advise students as to what they must complete to earn credit
- Inform students of resources available to them
- Formative and summative evaluation
- Quality of feedback promotes learning

#### Differences
- Student may have previously acquired the content through external formal or informal learning opportunities
- Faculty member/IAS does not deliver content, nor directly engages with student
- Academic success coach provides information, academic advising, CS feedback, coaching, mentoring
Differentiating Between Competency-based Assessment Models

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Prior Learning Assessments</th>
<th>UW Flexible Option</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit of measure</strong> – course / credit</td>
<td><strong>Unit of measure</strong> – competency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPL applies to an array of credentials</td>
<td>Oriented to specific academic credentials or competency sets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point-in-time assessments</td>
<td>Continuous assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit limits may apply</td>
<td>Oriented to specific academic credentials</td>
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</table>
Why are PLA and CBE Important?

PLA and CBE may help individuals graduate...
CAEL National Study of PLA and non-PLA/CBE Students

- Did not earn degree or credential
  - 78%
- Other
  - 1%
- Earned Bachelor's Degree
  - 43%
- Earned Associate's Degree
  - 6%


Slide courtesy of CAEL
Why are PLA and CBE Important?

CAEL National Study of PLA and non-PLA/CBE Students

By 2018, 61% of jobs in Wisconsin will require PSE. (National Average in 2018 63%)
Challenges Facing PLA Efforts, UW Flexible Option

Recognition of legitimacy

Quality of practices

Transferability

Employer recognition of quality and worth

Meaningful transcription

Tuition model makes sense

What can we do?
Theories of Transferability

Transfer policies fall along a continuum.
Source of assessment matters.

Original source data required.

Acceptance dependent on available documentation.

Acceptance dependent on perceived reliability and validity of tool.

Acceptance dependent on articulated learning outcomes.
Transcription and Documentation
Based on AACRAO, ACE, CHEA Joint Statement, CBE best practices

Sufficient Information

The sending institution has a responsibility to furnish sufficient information for the receiving institutions and potential employers to judge the quality and the quantity of the student’s work.

Balanced

Transfer decisions should be student-centered, striving for appropriate balance among fairness, consistency, flexibility, good educational practice, and academic program integrity.
PLA Transcription Recommendations

CPL be recorded as a course equivalent whenever possible.

Placement of credit by PLA appear at the top of the transcript.

Institutions establish and integrate methods to collect student-level data.

The institution maintains assessment record.
CPL internally assessed and transcribed as a course equivalent by one UW institution will be evaluated for credit transfer credit by all UW institutions in accordance with the Transfer Credit Principles and Principles of Accommodation. (ACIS 6.0, Sec. III and IV)

The receiving institution will determine the course equivalent credits they will grant to the student and how the credit will apply to the degree, guided by existing institutional policies.
UW Flexible Option Transcription Recommendations

- Evaluation of previous college coursework follows same process as brick and mortar/online counterparts
- Evaluation of previous college coursework reflected in both traditional and Flex language
- Competencies, competency sets, equivalent courses and credits reflected on transcript
- Clear understanding and reflection of mastery and indications of such
- Grading schemes, repeat policies determined by campus partners
CONSIDERATIONS FOR SUCCESS

Build confidence in assessment principles

Measure college-level learning and evidence of mastery

Nourish partnerships

Assess the landscape
Build Confidence in Assessment Principles

Methods measure college-level learning and evidence of mastery

Assessment measures are comparable to assessment that takes place in the college classroom

Multiple levels of learning and variance in proficiencies can be utilized across all fields

Stated learning outcomes and competency sets must meet the same high standards of rigor as their brick and mortar equivalent

Quality Assumptions
Measure College-Level Learning & Evidence of Mastery

Clearly define the college-level learning outcomes

- What are the associated course or curricula?
- What are the relevant sequences.

Determine how mastery will be demonstrated

- How will learning be documented?
- What is the required level of proficiency?

Sort inputs from outputs

- Grant credit for learning obtained through experience, not the experience.
- Disentangle learning activities from learning outcomes.
MOUs, system, and institutional policies must clearly articulate roles, responsibilities, expectations, and agreed upon goals and objectives.

Partners must be change agents - organized, invested, innovative, open and flexible.

Employers must be provided with clear understanding of value of PLA and UW Flexible Option.

Programs, competencies and PLCs must reflect marketplace needs and industry standards.

Outcomes must be clearly communicable and meaningful.
Assess the Landscape

- Identify, review and align transfer policies with goals and objectives
- Identify stakeholders and innovators, change agents, leaders, followers & associated actions required for each
- Identify academic policies, practices, processes, and which require formal action to adjust

- Identify operational structures and processes, determine which support success and which present barriers to goals and objectives
- Establish timelines, milestones, resources, expertise, gaps, and adjust as needed
- Inclusiveness and engagement, garner continuous and broad feedback, responsiveness critical
- The End Goal -
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