

## **Prior Learning Assessment Recommendations—Draft**

Post-traditional students (those who delay entry into postsecondary education past the completion of high school or high school equivalency) have accumulated knowledge and skills that often can equate to college-level learning. It is of the utmost importance for Mohawk Valley Community College (MVCC) to untangle Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) protocols and procedures given the community's changing demographics and the College's disproportionate number of traditional-aged students as compared to its community college-peers.

PLA provides MVCC with dual opportunities (1) the ability to deliver concise completion pathways to populations of learners who are currently underserved by the College & (2) college-wide recruitment and enrollment growth.

Recommendations to streamline and strengthen MVCC's PLA processes are described in the text that follows and drew upon the practices of the following institutions: SUNY Adirondack CC, SUNY Albany, Alfred State, Binghamton University, SUNY Brockport, SUNY Broome CC, Buffalo State College, University at Buffalo, SUNY Canton, Cayuga CC, Clinton CC, SUNY Cobleskill, Corning CC, SUNY Cortland, SUNY Delhi, Dutchess CC, Empire State College, Farmingdale State, FIT, Finger Lakes CC, SUNY Fredonia, Fulton Montgomery CC, Genesee CC, Herkimer College, Hudson Valley CC, Jefferson CC, Maritime College, Monroe CC, Nassau CC, SUNY New Paltz, Niagara CC, SUNY Oneonta, Onondaga CC, Orange CC, SUNY Oswego, SUNY Plattsburgh, SUNY Potsdam, SUNY Purchase, Rockland CC, Schenectady CC, Stony Brook University, Tompkins-Cortland CC, Ulster CC, Westchester CC, Utica College, and Bellevue University

### **Transfer Credit**

The current transfer policy identifies that "...grades of "P" or "S" are acceptable only for Physical Education courses and for College Foundations Seminar." Given that "...transfer courses are assigned a grade of "T" and are not used in calculating the students' GPA," this committee recommends a change in policy to allow for the transfer-in of "P" and "S" grades for all cases where a transferred "P" is equal to a "C" or higher.

Additionally, it is important for the College to create a mechanism that enables prospective students to have their transcript(s) from their transfer institution(s) unofficially reviewed for course equivalencies prior to when they make their decision to attend the College as a way to clarify their pathway and to help them make an informed enrollment decision. While this happens informally already, it is important to systematize this practice to provide transparency for prospective students and to ensure that records of the unofficial review are maintained.

Moreover, where possible, Academic Affairs should collaborate with the Center for Corporate & Community Education and other non-credit training providers (i.e. work-based training programs) to develop seamless non-credit to credit pathways for students. Hopefully, it is possible to utilize existing transfer equivalency processes for this purpose. Otherwise, this committee recommends developing a novel means to fulfill this necessity.

### **Credit by Exam**

The following mechanisms exist to provide students with an alternative method of obtaining college credit by exam: (1) standardized exams are built into the College's transfer tables (i.e. CLEP, DSST, etc.) & (2) the College allows for the design and administration of in-house equivalency exams.

While these are laudable, there is still much room for improving the accessibility of this alternative credit awarding pathway for students.

In the short-term, this committee recommends for the College to implement the following:

1. Permit non-matriculated students to receive college-credit by examination. Although in many/most instances it will not make sense for a non-matriculated student to pursue credit via this pathway, this committee has been unable to uncover a student-centered rationale for the limitation.
2. Make a concerted effort to build-out the standardized exam equivalencies (i.e. CLEP, DSST, etc.).
3. Create a means to avail College support structures to help students prepare for challenge exams (i.e. CLEP, DSST, etc.) inclusive of enabling students' use of Learning Commons resources to help with online educational platforms (i.e. edX, MODERN STATES, Straighterline, etc.).
4. Proactively create in-house proficiency exams for the College's skills-based courses to increase the accessibility of in-house exams as an alternative means for students to obtain college credit.
5. Locate all course challenge exams in a centralized location on campus (potentially, the Assessment and Testing Center) and empower the individuals overseeing the identified location with the ability to administer (or coordinate the administration of) the challenge exams at their discretion once an interested student has met the challenge exam's eligibility requirements.
6. While this committee values the accessibility of challenge exams, it also strongly believes that most students will benefit from a conversation with somebody who is abreast of the implications of challenging an exam prior to exam implementation; therefore, this committee recommends mandating a discussion with a Student Support Advisor (or similar) as a prerequisite for challenging an exam.
7. Widely publicize the standardized test equivalencies and available challenge exams on a newly created PLA webpage and in the College catalog so there is complete transparency for students.
8. Reassess the challenge exam fee structure (Note: this will require conversation/collaboration with the Professional Association). Currently, the fee to pursue an in-house challenge exam is set at two-thirds of the part-time tuition rate for the course in question likely because a faculty member is compensated to develop, administer, and assess the challenge examination. By developing a catalog of challenge exams, the amount of work associated with administering each challenge exam will decrease and therefore, this committee recommends a proportional decrease in the fee collected.

As a longer-term goal, the College should work to create a consortium with its peer institutions to help with the development of a comprehensive library of challenge exams and to better ensure the transferability of student credit obtained through examination. This committee recommends charging a workgroup, office, and/or individual with creating and formalizing this consortium.

### **Credit for Experiential Learning**

The College presently allows for students to convert their experiential learning into credits through its *Credit for Experiential Learning* (CEL) policy. This mechanism is infrequently utilized by students likely because it is not streamlined and appropriate student support structures are not in place to enable its use. Additionally, faculty and academic administrators have not received portfolio review training or calibration and therefore, scoring is inconsistent. Furthermore, the existing policy restricts students to seek credit for individual (or groups of) course(s) rather than providing the flexibility of awarding credit for prior college-level learning without necessitating that the credit awarded be equated to MVCC courses.

To improve student access to CEL, this committee recommends the following short-term actions:

1. Removal of the current limitation that prevents students from earning more than 25% of their program graduation requirements by CEL.
2. Create a 1-credit hour CEL course that:
  - a. Helps students reflect on their prior college-level learning and culminates in the creation of a prior learning portfolio.
  - b. Replaces CF100 in students' programs enabling the pursuit of CEL to both be financial aid eligible and act as a step on their completion journeys.

3. Create a committee with diverse membership (i.e. faculty, academic administrators, student affairs representatives, etc.) that is tasked with reviewing CEL portfolios to make credit recommendations.
  - a. For the immediate, the credit recommendations should be equated to individual courses.
  - b. In the longer-term, a mechanism should be created to provide students with credit for all of their prior college-level learning regardless of whether the College has a corresponding course or not. Additionally, processes to equate these credits directly to program learning outcomes should be created. (Note: The *Design, Analysis, and Assessment of Learning* workgroup's recommendations will likely have to be implemented before the preceding recommendation can be pursued.)
4. Create or utilize an existing training program to prepare members of the aforementioned portfolio review committee in the intricacies of portfolio review to better ensure consistency in and appropriateness of the review process.

As a note, this committee believes that the team tasked with implementing these recommendations should pay particular attention to creating a CEL timeline that will work for students. For example, the implementation team should outline (1) a deadline for students to enroll in the CEL course (this may not align with other course registration deadlines), (2) the optimum calendar length of the CEL course, (3) the amount of time allotted for committee review of portfolios and the awarding of credit. This committee believes that it is essential for the said timeline to be aligned with our existing course registration timeline so students pursuing CEL can make informed decisions when registering for courses in the semester subsequent that of their portfolio creation/review.

### **Student-facing Process**

Even given the best PLA procedures, their successful implementation is dependent upon both the students awareness of and the ease to which students can navigate said procedures. This committee believes that the following recommendations should be enacted for the purpose of ensuring student accessibility to PLA.

1. Create and maintain a robust PLA webpage that has visibility on and is a single click away from the College's main website and is displayed on the admissions webpage.
2. Allow individuals to initiate all PLA processes from the PLA website. Sample process flow is on the proceeding page.

Note: Since these processes will require a student identification number for tracking purposes, potentially the non-matriculated application (or similar) can be utilized to create M# for individuals who do not otherwise have one.

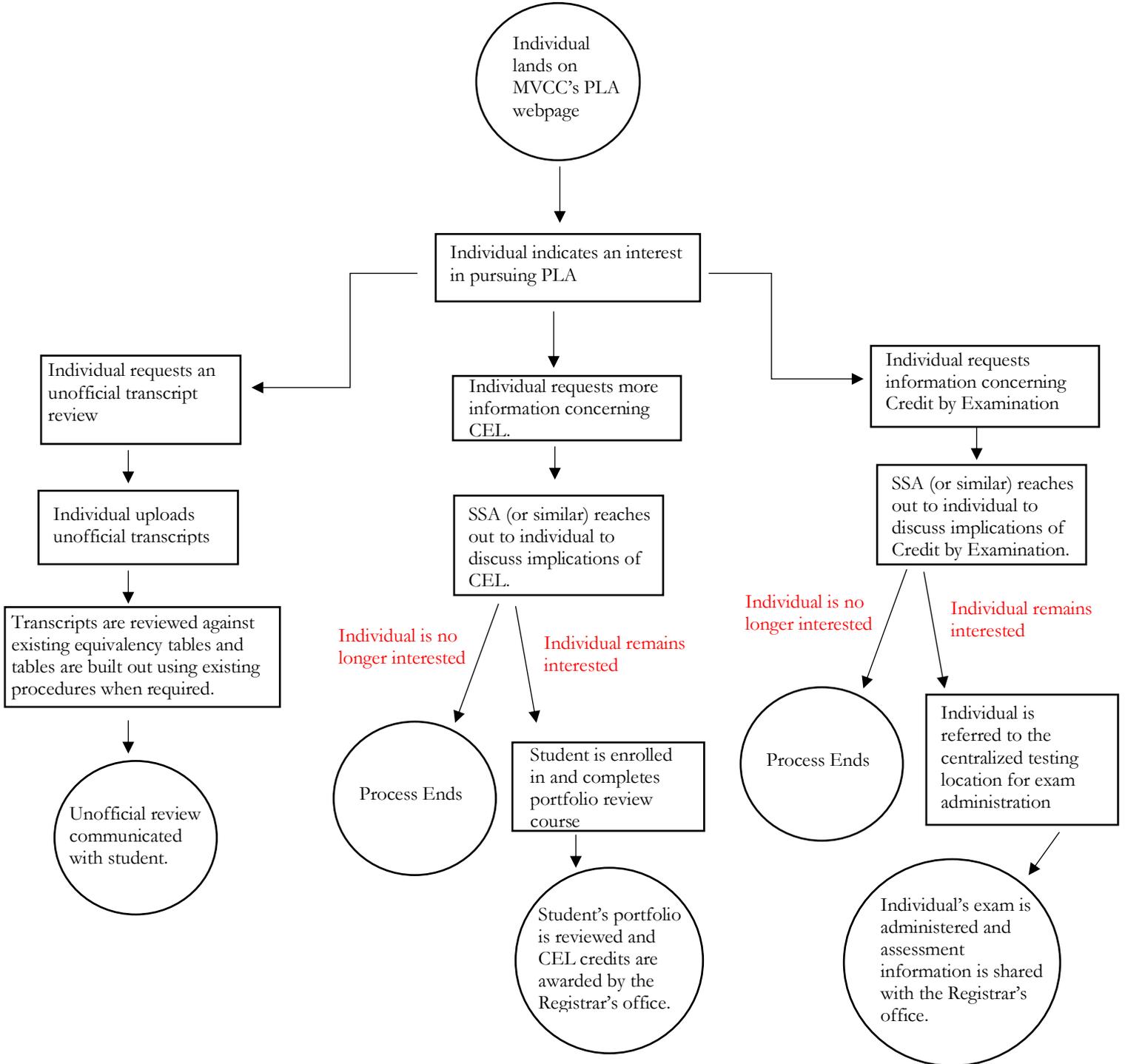
3. Create and implement a communication plan (with student friendly language) that allows the College to push out to students who identify an interest in pursuing CEL and/or credit by exam as a way to help the students receive additional information on and navigate the College's PLA processes.

\*\*\*Sample PLA webpage\*\*\*  
 Note: this requires much additional development

Enter Name \_\_\_\_\_ M# \_\_\_\_\_ Pin \_\_\_\_\_  
 Not a student? Start here (hyperlinked to non-matriculated application)

Click the following that you are interested in pursuing.

1. Unofficial Transcript Review
2. Credit for Experiential Learning
3. Credit by Examination



### Summary of Recommendation

#### Transfer Credit:

1. Allow for the transfer-in of “P” and “S” grades for all cases where a transferred “P” is equal to a “C” or higher.
2. Enable prospective students to have their transcript(s) from their transfer institution(s) unofficially reviewed for course equivalencies prior to when they make their decision to attend the College.
3. Develop seamless non-credit to credit pathways for students.

#### Credit by Exam:

1. Permit non-matriculated students to receive college-credit by examination.
2. Build-out the standardized exam equivalencies.
3. Avail College support structures to help students prepare for challenge exams.
4. Create in-house proficiency exams for the College’s skills-based courses.
5. Locate all course challenge exams in a centralized location on campus (potentially, the Assessment and Testing Center) and empower the individuals overseeing the identified location with the ability to administer (or coordinate the administration of) the challenge exams at their discretion once an interested student has met the challenge exam’s eligibility requirements.
6. Mandate a discussion with a Student Support Advisor (or similar) as a prerequisite for challenging an exam.
7. Publicize the standardized test equivalencies and available challenge exams on a newly created PLA webpage.
8. Reassess and right-size the challenge exam fee structure.
9. Create a consortium with peer institutions to help with the development of challenge exams.

#### Credit for Experiential Learning:

1. Remove the current limitation that prevents students from earning more than 25% of their program with CEL.
2. Create a 1-credit hour CEL course that helps students reflect on their prior college-level learning, culminates in the creation of a prior learning portfolio, and replaces CF100 in students’ programs.
3. Create a committee with diverse membership (i.e. faculty, academic administrators, student affairs representatives, etc.) that is tasked with reviewing CEL portfolios to make credit recommendations.
4. Develop a mechanism to provide students with credit for all of their prior college-level learning regardless of whether the College has a corresponding course or not.
5. Create or utilize an existing training program to prepare members of the aforementioned portfolio review committee in the intricacies of portfolio review