

# **Prior Learning Assessment Workgroup: 2015 Progress Report**

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**December 2015**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Legislation passed in 2011 required the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) to convene a Prior Learning Assessment Workgroup. The workgroup was tasked with coordinating and implementing seven goals, described in statute, to promote the award of college credit for prior learning (RCW 28B.77.230).<sup>1</sup> Awarding college credit for prior learning increases access and opportunity for Washingtonians, which strengthens the competitiveness of our workforce.

The workgroup does not set policy—it facilitates collaboration and communication across the system to implement these seven goals. WSAC submits an annual report to the Legislature on workgroup progress in carrying out the seven goals.

This report summarizes progress made in 2015 and also outlines a work plan of activities to be conducted in 2016.<sup>2</sup> This year the workgroup focused on awarding academic credit to returning veterans for military training. Some of the workgroup's significant accomplishments this year include:

- A. Applying new data collection practices for reporting PLA participation from community and technical colleges as well as public and private baccalaureate institutions.
  - Both the number of students receiving PLA credit and the number of credits awarded continued to increase:
    - **17,759 students** received academic credit for prior learning that counted toward their major or earning their degree or certificate. This is an increase of 37% over last year.
    - **363,126 academic quarter credits** were accepted by colleges and universities toward degrees, certificates, or credentials. This is an increase of 19% over last year and equivalent to approximately 8,070 annual full-time equivalent students.
- B. Providing workshops, webinars, and examples to assist colleges and universities develop policies and practices for awarding academic credit for military training to meet the requirements of SSB 5969.<sup>3</sup>
- C. Hosting the fifth annual PLA conference in November 2015 with a focus on implementing SSB 5969—an act related to awarding academic credit for military training. The conference provided an opportunity for 110 attendees to improve practices to serve veterans, learn of new initiatives to link veterans to academic programs, and share best practices.

The workgroup has identified priority actions that will be the focus of its work in 2016, key among them being continued efforts to maximize credits for all returning adults through PLA, especially veterans.

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<sup>1</sup> The statute is available at <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28B.77.230>.

<sup>2</sup> Previous reports are available at <http://www.wsac.wa.gov/PreparingForCollege/PriorLearningCredit>

<sup>3</sup> This legislation is available at <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28B.10.057>.

## Contents

Background .....	1
Introduction .....	1
What is Prior Learning and Prior Learning Assessment?.....	2
Progress on Legislative Goals: 2015 .....	3
Goal 1 and Goal 2 .....	3
Goal 3 and Goal 4 .....	4
Goal 5 .....	7
Goal 6 .....	8
Goal 7 .....	10
2016 Workgroup Next Steps .....	10
Convene the Sixth Annual Statewide PLA Conference.....	10
Continue to assist colleges with implementation of SSB 5969.....	11
Expand crosswalks through PLA pathways .....	11
Improve access to PLA information, especially for Veterans.....	12
Clarify PLA credit transfer between institutions .....	13
Integrate apprenticeship information and data into workgroup activities and reports..	13
Conclusion.....	13
Author Contact Information .....	14
Acknowledgments .....	14
Appendix A: Prior Learning Assessment Workgroup.....	15
Appendix B: Examples of College Progress in 2015 .....	20
Bellingham Technical College.....	20
Highline College .....	20
Olympic College.....	20
Pierce College.....	21
Spokane Community Colleges .....	22
Yakima Valley Community College .....	22
Eastern Washington University.....	23
Evergreen State College .....	23
Seattle Pacific University.....	24
Western Governors University Washington.....	24

## BACKGROUND

In December, the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) submitted the [2015 Roadmap Update](#) to the Governor and Legislature. The report measures progress towards our educational attainment goals:

- All adults in Washington, ages 25–44, will have a high school diploma or equivalent.
- At least 70 percent of Washington adults, ages 25–44, will have a postsecondary credential.

The report shows the overall attainment gain is inadequate to meet the state’s goals by 2023. Due to changes in the economy and population, enrollment levels have dropped. These are serious challenges, and the report makes clear that the attainment goals will be beyond reach without substantially higher levels of postsecondary enrollment and completion.

The Roadmap Update highlights two areas needing particular attention:

1. High school completion and postsecondary access and completion for historically underserved and underrepresented populations.
2. Postsecondary recruitment, retention, and completion for working-age adults.

We need many more working adults to obtain a postsecondary credential to reach the state’s attainment goals. Without a postsecondary credential, workers are more at risk of unemployment and underemployment.

Increasing the use of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) can help working-age adults complete meaningful degrees, certificates, and credentials more quickly. According to the [some college no degree report](#), roughly 700,000 Washington adults have earned some college credit but haven’t completed a degree. And over 65 percent of them have a year or more of college credit. PLA is one strategy that can help Washington meet its educational attainment goals by 2023.<sup>4</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Granting college credit based on assessment of a student’s prior learning in the workplace, military, or through other life experiences can have positive impacts on increasing educational attainment in Washington. Effective prior learning policies:

- Ensure access by helping to make college more affordable, reducing the cost of a degree through the award of course credits for knowledge and skills developed through prior learning.
- Enhance learning by linking military and work-based learning to college courses, and encourage adults to earn postsecondary credentials.

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<sup>4</sup> The 2015 Roadmap Update is available at <http://www.wsac.wa.gov/2015-roadmap-update>.

- Prepare for the future by increasing awareness of postsecondary opportunities.

Legislation passed in 2011 required WSAC to convene a Prior Learning Assessment Workgroup. The workgroup is tasked with coordinating and implementing seven goals described in statute to promote the award of college credit for prior learning (RCW 28B.77.230).<sup>5</sup>

Additional legislation was passed by the legislature in 2014 that requires each institution to adopt “a policy to award academic credit for military training applicable to the student’s certificate or degree requirements.” Our 2015 PLA Conference focused on development of policies to meet this requirement, discussed further under Goal 4 below.

## **What is Prior Learning and Prior Learning Assessment?**

Prior learning is defined in Washington as the knowledge and skills gained through work and life experience; through military training and experience; and through formal and informal education and training from in-state and out-of-state institutions including foreign institutions.

Prior learning assessment (PLA) is the process used to evaluate previous life experience for academic credit. PLA can be accomplished through standardized tests, course challenge examinations, portfolio assessment, and crosswalks<sup>6</sup> between military and work-based learning and college courses.

Some PLA methods cost a student more than others, but any PLA credit-earning method will typically cost less than tuition to enroll in the equivalent course. In addition, when PLA credit is earned, it may allow the student to enroll in, or advance to, higher-level courses.

The PLA Workgroup does not set policy—it facilitates collaboration and communication across the system to implement the goals and develop transparent policies and practices in awarding academic credit for prior learning. WSAC submits an annual report to the Legislature on workgroup progress in carrying out the seven goals.

### **Prior Learning Assessment in Washington**

Currently every college and university in Washington offers some form of prior learning assessment. The PLA [website](#)<sup>7</sup> provides general contact information, legislative background, and definitions of PLA as used in Washington. In addition, the WA-Prior Learning Assessment [wiki](#)<sup>8</sup> is a comprehensive resource for PLA in Washington.

### **Prior Learning Assessment Workgroup**

The PLA Workgroup consists of 78 representatives from a broad range of postsecondary education boards and councils, community and technical colleges, public and private baccalaureates, career colleges, legislative staff, public safety commissions, other state

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<sup>5</sup> The statute is available at <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28B.77.230>.

<sup>6</sup> A crosswalk refers to a matrix used to compare industry- or military-based learning outcomes with outcomes for specific courses in a college. (Example: Basic Law Enforcement Academy training compared to Criminal Justice coursework).

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.wsac.wa.gov/assessments-prior-learning>

<sup>8</sup> <http://wa-priorlearningassessment.wikispaces.com/>

agencies (labor and industry and health), the workforce, apprenticeship program administrators and the military.<sup>9</sup> Staff from the Legislature are able to monitor activity and progress through workgroup participation. The workgroup is co-chaired by one representative from the community and technical college system and one from the public baccalaureates.

## PROGRESS ON LEGISLATIVE GOALS: 2015

The enabling legislation for the workgroup (RCW 28B.77.230) lays out seven goals for prior learning assessment in Washington. To address these goals, the workgroup met twice in 2015, electronically on several occasions, and convened the fifth annual statewide PLA Conference on November 6 at Central Washington University. The workgroup continues to make progress on the goals identified in legislation.

### Goal 1 and Goal 2

- 1. Increase the number of students who receive academic credit for prior learning; and the number of students who receive credit for prior learning that counts towards their major—or towards earning their degree, certificate, or credential—while ensuring that credit is awarded only for high quality, course-level competencies.*
- 2. Increase the number and type of academic credits accepted for prior learning.*

This is the first year data was collected using a comprehensive method based in part on a new policy for non-traditional learning finalized by The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC).<sup>10</sup> The new coding policy aligns with concepts recommended by the workgroup and with reporting systems used previously by public baccalaureate institutions. The coding policy and method of collecting data presents the first systematic approach to establish clarity and standardization while complying with accreditation, national practices, and existing student management systems.

The categories below reflect the definition of prior learning as outlined by Washington's legislature. Campuses reported both the number of students receiving PLA credit and the number of academic PLA credits awarded as outlined in Table 1 below. We anticipate further refinements and more robust reporting of data as campuses familiarize themselves with this new data collection format.

In summary, for academic year 2014-15 (summer 2014 through spring 2015):

- **17,759 students** received academic credit for prior learning that counted toward their major or earning their degree or certificate. This is an increase of 37% over last year.
- **363,126 academic quarter credits** were accepted by colleges and universities toward degrees, certificates, or credentials. This is an increase of 19% over last year and equivalent to approximately 8,070 annual full-time equivalent students.

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix A for a list of Workgroup members

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.sbctc.edu/college/it/CreditforNon-TraditionalLearning-PLA-Final03052015.pdf>

Table 1: 2014-15 Summary of Prior Learning Assessment

2014-15 (summer 2014 through spring 2015)	Type of Credit	Number of Students Awarded	Number of Credits Awarded
Testing	Advanced Placement (AP)	10,949	134,281.5
	International Baccalaureate (IB)	784	13,974.0
	Cambridge A-Level Examinations	115	4,007.5
	DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSST)	10	41.0
	College Level Exam Program (CLEP)	277	2,093.0
Prior Experiential Learning	Portfolio Review (college level credits)	518	2,933.0
Extra-institutional Learning	American Council of Education (ACE) (military course completions)	666	15,859.7
	Occupational Crosswalks (Military MOS, others)	287	3,543.5
	Individual Industry Cert (e.g. NCLEX-RN)	395	4,864.0
Course Challenges	Credit by Exam	417	4,004.0
Other	Other Competency-based	3,341	177,525.0
Total number of students and credits (all sources)		17,759	363,126.2

Reporting campuses indicated they only award PLA for courses and credits that count toward credentials; and that all credit awarded is for high quality, course-level competencies. Differentiation by PLA credit award type will allow us to monitor progress on these goals by category as we move forward.

## Goal 3 and Goal 4

3. *Develop transparent policies and practices in awarding academic credit for prior learning.*
4. *Improve prior learning assessment practices across the institutions of higher education.*

The workgroup focused on assisting campuses with implementation of SSB 5969,<sup>11</sup> passed by the legislature in 2014. This legislation requires each institution to adopt “a policy to award academic credit for military training applicable to the student’s certificate or degree requirements.” Several events to develop these policies occurred in 2015. The workgroup posted supporting materials for these events on the workgroup [wiki](#)<sup>12</sup> under *Resources*.

<sup>11</sup> Codified as RCW 28B.10.057 and available at <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28B.10.057>

<sup>12</sup> <http://wa-priorlearningassessment.wikispaces.com/>

- Amy Sherman, Associate Vice President for Innovation and Policy for the Council of Adult Experiential Learning (CAEL) met with the PLA Workgroup on January 20, 2015 to discuss strategies for success in serving students who are veterans.
- Andy Brucia (from our PLA Workgroup) gave two presentations sponsored by the Veterans Training and Support Center. The first addressed how colleges could use the *Joint Service Transcript* to meet the requirements of SSB 5969. This training covered the details of this law, provided a walk-through of the Joint Service Transcript and credit recommendations, and provided examples of how colleges could meet the requirements of the new law. The second session addressed using the Joint Service Transcript to assist veterans with writing resumes and attaining jobs.
- The workgroup initiated conversations with the American Council of Education (ACE) in early 2014 to discuss possible training on the Joint Services Transcript. Subsequent to these conversations, ACE held two webinars—*Mapping Military Training and Occupations to Postsecondary Credentials*—in June 2015 that specifically addressed objectives identified during our 2014 Conference and through the PLA Workgroup. The webinars received almost 1,000 views nationally. Both the webinars and the resulting questions and answers hold a wealth of information as we develop policies to serve Veterans and meet the requirements of SB 5969.
- ACE’s Veterans’ Programs hosted two webinars that provided the opportunity to learn more about preparing veterans for leadership and success in higher education and bridging the civilian-military understanding of military service. The free November 12 webinar on the *Warrior-Scholar Project (WSP)* allowed college and university faculty and administrators to learn more about the initiative and hear directly from Warrior-Scholar Project staff and former program participants. The Warrior-Scholar Project offers an intensive college preparation course free of charge and is designed to ease enlisted veterans' transitions from military service to college. In addition, ACE hosted a webinar titled *The Telling Project: Bridging the Civilian-Military Understanding of Military Service*. This webinar provided participants an opportunity to learn about [The Telling Project](#), a national performing arts non-profit organization that employs theater to deepen our understanding of the military and veterans’ experiences.<sup>13</sup>
- Previously, PLA was added to an existing reciprocity agreement within the Community and Technical College (CTC) system. The reciprocity agreement allows CTCs to give students credit for individual courses, even if the course does not have an exact equivalent, and even if it is awarded through prior learning credit. The courses must meet certain requirements at the sending college to be considered to have met that requirement at the receiving college for a similar transfer degree.
- WSAC developed a complaint process that may be used to assist students experiencing difficulties with, among other issues, credit transfer with military and other PLA credits. In 2015, no issues related to prior learning assessment were reported to WSAC.

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<sup>13</sup> American Council of Education webinars are available for review at <http://www.acenet.edu/Pages/default.aspx> .



- Examples of individual college improvements in developing transparent policies and practices are available in Appendix B.
- Our 2015 PLA Conference focused on developing policy to meet the requirements of SSB 5969. The conference is discussed below.

### **Fifth Annual PLA Conference**

The PLA Workgroup held its fifth annual statewide PLA Conference on Friday November 6 at Central Washington University. The conference supports campuses as they implement PLA and in turn helps students complete their degrees and certificates. PLA is one strategy that can contribute to meeting Washington’s educational attainment goals as outlined in the 2015 WSAC Roadmap Update.<sup>14</sup>

The focus of this year’s conference was support for veterans and implementation of SSB 5969 – Providing and Awarding Credit for Military Training. The event was attended by 110 faculty and staff representing over 40 colleges and universities. All conference materials are available on the workgroup [wiki](#).<sup>15</sup>

The theme of this year’s conference was *Collaboration – We are in this together for our Students*. We added a popularly attended pre-conference orientation for those who were new to PLA in Washington. WSAC’s State Approving Agency staff provided updates on the intersection of PLA and Veterans Administration Educational Benefits. Examples of military Occupational Services Pathway Mapping were provided by representatives of Pierce College as they introduced [WACareerPaths.com](#).<sup>16</sup> We reviewed campus development of policies to meet legislative requirements for serving Veterans through PLA, and heard from Spokane Falls Community College faculty about a PLA campus survey. We also held two breakout sessions—one addressing concerns about coding, tracking, and reporting PLA data and understanding American Council of Education (ACE) recommendations, and the second a review of various prior learning assessment methods. These methods included building crosswalks between training and college course work and portfolio review courses.

Participants were encouraged to attend as teams made up of representatives from instruction, administration, and Veterans Services. Teams met and discussed campus presentations describing how PLA services are provided for veterans and other students on their campuses. Examples of information from several colleges are provided in Appendix B, including Pierce College’s Career Pathway work and Olympic College’s crosswalks.

### **Presentations in Washington**

PLA Workgroup progress was shared by workgroup members through several forums and presentations, including:

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<sup>14</sup> The 2015 Roadmap Update is available at <http://www.wsac.wa.gov/2015-roadmap-update>.

<sup>15</sup> <http://wa-priorlearningassessment.wikispaces.com/>

<sup>16</sup> More information about these innovative pathways is available in Appendix B and on the PLA wiki.

- Washington State Senate Higher Education Committee
- Council of Military Educators of Washington State
- WSAC Committee on Academic Affairs and Policy
- Intercollege Relations Commission
- Joint Transfer Council
- Washington Council for High School/College Relations
- Washington Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admission Officers
- Councils of the Washington State Community and Technical Colleges
  - Instruction Commission
  - Articulation and Transfer Council
  - Workforce Education Council
  - Advising and Counseling Council

Workgroup and legislative updates were provided upon request to the American Council of Education (ACE), the Council for Adult Experiential Learning (CAEL), the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

## Goal 5

5. *Create tools to develop faculty and staff knowledge and expertise in awarding credit for prior learning and to share exemplary policies and practices among institutions of higher education.*

### Handbook

A subcommittee is currently working on updating the *Prior Learning Assessment Handbook* for faculty and staff. The revised version will be available in early 2016.<sup>17</sup> This handbook, a result of cross-sector collaboration by PLA Workgroup members, will include new materials developed by the workgroup and across the system over the past year. Handbooks are available for free on the [WA-Prior Learning Assessment](#)<sup>18</sup> wiki.

Components of the handbook include:

- A. Definitions, purpose, and limitations of PLA.
- B. Methods of assessment.
- C. Coding PLA in Washington
- D. Sample policies processes and practices, including:
  1. Assessing and Awarding Credit for Prior Learning (General Policy).
  2. Sample Fee Models.
  3. Legislation, standards and guidelines.

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<sup>17</sup> The *PLA Handbook* is available under a Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial Share Alike 3.0 Unported License.

<sup>18</sup> <http://wa-priorlearningassessment.wikispaces.com/>

4. Accreditation standards.
5. Inter-college Reciprocity Policy for the Community and Technical Colleges.
6. Examples of PLA policy and practices from Washington colleges and universities, including Veterans policies for military training.
7. Evaluation of prior military training, including examples of promotional materials for student veterans.

## Wiki

Colleges in Washington made substantial progress improving PLA awareness. Washington PLA maintains an up-to-date [wiki](#) webpage that includes all activities and documents of the workgroup and is open for everyone to view.<sup>19</sup> The wiki has a wealth of information for campuses across Washington to use as they develop the application of PLA on their campuses. The American Council of Education (ACE) and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) regularly review materials on our wiki and refer other states to these resources.

## Listserv

Activity on the PLA listserv increased in 2015. Listserv members shared news and provided answers to questions across the system. PLA information is shared across other system listservs that cater to different groups – registrars, faculty, veterans and student services personnel. WSAC added PLA links to its student, family, and educator website—[www.readysgrad.org](http://www.readysgrad.org). The site offers education consumers access to PLA information.

## Goal 6

6. *Develop articulation agreements when patterns of credit for prior learning are identified for particular programs and pathways.*

The workgroup developed a model template for crosswalks between work-based prior learning and community and technical college courses. This template is included in the faculty handbook. The process is coordinated through the CTC Centers of Excellence.

Colleges made progress in crosswalk development in 2015. Several examples are described in Appendix B and highlighted here:

- Bellingham Technical College agreed to evaluate Registered Apprenticeship (RA) completion certificate transcripts as per our policies and procedures. All transcripts will be from RA programs that have been evaluated by third-party evaluators such as the American Council on Education (ACE).
- Highline College continues its innovative practices. The Military, Basic Law Enforcement Academy and Child Development Associate Occupational Crosswalks provide students with pre-assessed options for a simple and accessible process. An SBCTC-funded Hospital Employee Education and Training (HEET) grant was extended for another year for the medical assisting program.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://wa-priorlearningassessment.wikispaces.com/>

- Olympic College uses crosswalks and other previously determined equivalencies to determine credit for knowledge and skills gained through work and life experience, and those gained through education or training at non-regionally accredited institutions. Examples include American Council on Education (ACE) recommendations for Armed Forces schools, Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support Subjects Standardized Test (DANTES SST) scores, and the College Level Examination Program (CLEP).
- Pierce College hosts the Homeland Security Emergency Management (HSEM) Center of Excellence (CoE), one of 10 sector based centers hosted at colleges with sector based expertise. The HSEM CoE developed a prior learning assessment model (crosswalk) based on Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) that it is using with its six career pathways: Criminal Justice, Public Safety, Security, Cybersecurity, and Homeland Security Emergency Management.
- At Yakima Valley College, nine departments are participating in building industry crosswalks and/or course challenges. A comprehensive system is being developed to evaluate military transcripts and insure our veterans receive credit for what they already know.
- Spokane Community College found that PLA crosswalks are an attractive option for many professional technical programs. The following programs created crosswalks:
  - Architecture
  - Automotive
  - Business and Business Technology
  - Computer Application Technology Training, Computer-aided design and drafting (CADD), and Computer Information Systems
  - Fire Science and Fire Officer.
- Examples of other crosswalks developed between common prior learning opportunities and college courses include:
  - CompTIA A+ Essentials Certificate through the Information Technology program at Green River College
  - American Registry of Radiologic Technologists (ARRT) Advanced Certificate Exam through the Allied Health Imaging program at Bellevue College, and
  - Various apprenticeships through the Multi-Occupational Trades program at Wenatchee Valley College

## Career Pathways

Of special note, is the leadership Pierce College is providing for a statewide Career Pathways project (see Appendix B for further detail). This project uses the Washington Career Pathways (WACAPA) tool to build program maps for active and transitioning military in short program areas that lead to high demand jobs. This project is called *VIE-25* (Veteran Industry Education) and was launched at the military transition summit in September. Each of the seven colleges within a 25 mile radius of Joint-Base Lewis/McChord have identified as many as 10 programs that fit these parameters:

- Employment ready in 6 months or less.

- Top industries with maximum job availability and career growth.
- Convenient training locations.

[Washington Career Paths](http://wacareerpaths.com/)<sup>20</sup> is a new site designed to triage a user directly to resources that best fit their situation whether they are in high school, transitioning to a new career, looking for a specific educational program, needing resources to pay for their education, or searching for a new job. The site provides a direct link to Military Pathway resources and the VIE 25 initiative as well as linking directly to each college's landing pages for program pathway maps and resources.

The next step is to expand VIE-25 to each of the various military installations in Washington State with the goal of becoming a best practice example for other states to follow.

## Goal 7

7. *Develop outcome measures to track progress on the goals outlined in this section.*

RCW 28B.77.230 directs the Academic Credit for Prior Learning Workgroup to develop outcome measures for tracking progress on the goals. Outcome metrics are continuously under review and results are reported in Goal 1 and Goal 2 above.

## 2016 WORKGROUP NEXT STEPS

### Convene the Sixth Annual Statewide PLA Conference

Participants in this year's annual conference were asked to provide input on what the workgroup should address in 2016. Following are suggestions from conference attendees:

1. Participants overwhelmingly appreciate opportunities to gather across sectors and campuses and learn from each other how to improve and expand PLA. Growth across the system is enhanced by presentations, conversations, and teambuilding as a result of the conference.
2. Participants would like more of the same information as PLA continues to evolve. We have new faculty and staff entering the system every year and to continue progress in implementing PLA across the state, we need to constantly review where we've been, what we are working on now, and where we want to go in the future. Sessions for newcomers or providing information about PLA and VA educational benefits, new campus initiatives, and breakout sessions for faculty and staff should be included.
3. Develop more collaboration across the system to help campuses lessen the work load and provide better service to students seeking PLA. For example, continue development of an online portfolio review class that many campuses can use.

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<sup>20</sup> <http://wacareerpaths.com/>

4. Identify ways to encourage chief administrative officers on campuses to see the value in expanding PLA opportunities for Veterans and other returning adult students. This includes sharing the value of PLA for student success and completion.

## **Continue to assist colleges with implementation of SSB 5969**

SSB 5969 required each institution to adopt a policy to award academic credit for military training before December 31, 2015 and submit this policy to the PLA Workgroup.

### **Actions**

1. The workgroup will review submitted policies, develop a sample, post it on the PLA Wiki, and include it in the PLA Faculty Handbook. The workgroup will also review institutional procedures for receiving necessary documentation to identify and verify the military training course or program that an individual is claiming for academic credit; and how colleges are making this information available to Veterans. Best practices will be extracted from procedures and provided for campuses to implement if interested.
2. Investigate the feasibility of convening a statewide College Level Examination Program (CLEP) Workshop. This workshop for college faculty and staff will improve understanding and expand the use of CLEP examinations for service members and other returning students.

CLEP examinations are developed by the College Board (the organization that develops AP and SAT tests). These examinations are accepted for college credit by 2,900 colleges and universities across the U.S., including 35 in Washington. CLEP examinations are used extensively by service members prior to separation from the military to demonstrate college-level mastery. Examinations are federally funded through Defense Activity for Non Traditional Education Support (DANTES).

3. Maintain relationships with state resources for informing and serving veterans including:
  - Military Transition Council established by Governor Inslee's Executive Order 13-01<sup>21</sup>
  - Workforce Education Council
  - Department of Health

## **Expand crosswalks through PLA pathways**

Crosswalks are a pathway between industry and education that can lead to increased educational attainment for Washingtonians in the workforce. The workgroup will support Centers of Excellence to expand crosswalks between military and industry training and college programs through PLA pathways. Life-long learning, alignment with apprenticeship programs, veteran alignment programs, and credit for prior learning are all components of pathways that parallel goals of the workgroup.

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<sup>21</sup> [http://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/exe\\_order/eo\\_13-01.pdf](http://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/exe_order/eo_13-01.pdf)

## Actions

1. Provide assistance to Centers of Excellence Directors and consortium member colleges to support PLA components of crosswalk development.
2. Work directly with the Centers of Excellence to expand current crosswalks to other institutions, expand the number of crosswalks, and compile data on all crosswalks currently available. Post a compiled list of crosswalks in a central location.

## Improve access to PLA information, especially for Veterans

The workgroup will continue to increase transparency and consistency of information available to students, stakeholders, faculty and staff across the system. General and target audiences will include: students, faculty, veterans, and the public. Increasing transparency about PLA practices on campuses is a priority.

## Actions

1. Improve clarity and statewide alignment of search terms for prospective students attempting to find and compare opportunities for non-traditional learning on campus websites.

Results of recent web searches for PLA and veterans information on college websites using a variety of search terms indicate progress has been made but there remain opportunities for improvement. These reviews found inconsistent terminology across campuses, suggesting a need to align terms.

2. Develop a single medallion, logo, or button to be used on the main landing page of campuses specifically for veterans and their families to access PLA and other veteran-specific information. A checklist, which will help veterans access services, will be developed and included on this web link.
3. Create a best practice template for sharing information about PLA with students in the recruitment process, during new student orientations, and via online and in-person advising modules. Develop a checklist for the admission process so advisors know the up-front questions related to military and non-military PLA. This will help veterans use their benefits correctly, maximize the benefit of previous training, and facilitate completion of certificates and degrees.
4. Develop brochures to explain alternative credit options (including PLA and JST options) for the following audiences:
  - Veterans
  - Other returning students
  - Staff/faculty
5. Increase the amount and reach of consistent PLA information available online. Post and link to information across sector websites, including those of state agencies, campuses, apprenticeship programs and industry.
6. Finalize the *PLA Handbook for Faculty and Staff* update that includes templates of policies and practices that institutions can use to develop their own policies.
7. Investigate options for developing an integrated PLA communications plan in Washington. The plan should include how information will be distributed across all

levels within institutions (i.e. to vice presidents and other decision-makers on campuses), students, veterans, and other Washingtonians.

8. Continue to develop use of the PLA Listserv<sup>22</sup> and maintain the current wiki.

## **Clarify PLA credit transfer between institutions**

A continuing question in the workgroup is how PLA credits will transfer from one institution to another. The community and technical college system has included PLA credit in their reciprocity agreement between colleges, creating a clear process for the movement of PLA credits from one institution to another. Coding refinements developed by the community and technical colleges have clarified how the various forms of PLA credit are included on their transcripts.

### **Actions**

1. Clarify with baccalaureate institutions how the various types of PLA credit are used at the receiving institution.
2. Collect information on transfer policy related to PLA and include in the 2017 Transfer Report produced by WSAC.

## **Integrate apprenticeship information and data into workgroup activities and reports**

The workgroup would like to include more information about apprenticeships and the number of individuals participating in and completing programs in Washington. The Workforce Education Council, Department of Labor and Industry, and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges are all resources for integrating this information into the PLA report.

## **CONCLUSION**

The PLA Workgroup's progress over the past four years has brought increased awareness of the value students with prior learning bring to campuses. Granting college credit based on assessment of a student's prior learning is a strategy to achieve Washington State's postsecondary educational attainment goal: at least 70 percent of Washington adults, ages 25-44 will have a postsecondary credential by 2023.

Washington State will need continued collaboration, integration, and focus to improve educational attainment. Making progress on our next steps in 2016 will help colleges and universities, working with labor, industry and the military, increase educational attainment for all Washingtonians.

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<sup>22</sup> To subscribe, go to <http://listserv.wa.gov/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=WA-PLA&A=1>



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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The author wishes to thank workgroup co-chairs Craig Rickett from Spokane Falls Community College and John Neace from Eastern Washington University. Special thanks goes to Andy Brucia, past co-chair who, although no longer employed by a college in Washington, participated in workgroup activities and continued the development of PLA in Washington through presentations and workshops addressing the assessment of military experience for credit.

In addition, all workgroup members and staff on each campus who have worked tirelessly to expand awareness of PLA in Washington deserve acknowledgement. Tivoli Sharp, WSAC Academic Affairs Administrative Assistant, deserves special thanks for tracking and compiling data from colleges and universities for this report and for maintaining our PLA Wiki.

## APPENDIX A: PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT WORKGROUP

Organization	Representative (F=faculty)	Position
Workgroup Co-chairs		
Spokane Falls Community College	Craig Rickett (F)	Instructor, Communication Studies; PLA Coordinator
Eastern Washington University	John Neace	Senior Director & ITDS Chair, Interdisciplinary Studies
Postsecondary Education Boards and Councils		
Washington Student Achievement Council	Jim West	Associate Director
Washington Student Achievement Council	Noreen Light	Associate Director
Washington Student Achievement Council	Laura Bach	Assistant Director, State Approving Agency for Veterans Education and Training
Washington Student Achievement Council	Mike Ball	Director, State Approving Agency for Veterans Education and Training, Associate Director, Degree Authorization
Washington Student Achievement Council	Maddy Thompson	Director of Policy & Government Relations
State Board for Community and Technical Colleges	Joyce Hammer	Director of Transfer Education
State Board for Community and Technical Colleges	Bill Moore	Policy Associate, Project Director
Council of Presidents	Paul Francis	Executive Director
Council of Presidents	Cody Eccles	Associate Director
Council of Presidents	Julie Garver	Associate Director for Academic Policy
Workforce Training Board	Nova Gattman	Legislative Liaison / Policy Analyst for Adult Workforce Issues
Independent Colleges of Washington	Violet Boyer	President & CEO
Independent Colleges of Washington	Chadd Bennett	Director of Research & Outreach

## Appendix A

Organization	Representative (F=faculty)	Position
<b>Baccalaureate Institutions</b>		
Seattle University	Rick Fehrenbacher	Director, Continuing, Online & Professional Education
Washington State University	Mary Wack	Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education
City U of Seattle	Jodey Lingg (F)	Program Manager, PLA Director
City U of Seattle	Kathy Yackey	Registrar
University of Washington Seattle	Janice DeCosmo	Associate Dean, Undergrad Academic Affairs
University of Washington Tacoma	Karl Smith	Assoc. Vice Chancellor, Chief Admissions Officer
The Evergreen State College	Leona Walker	Admissions
Western Washington University	Steven Vanderstaay	Vice Provost Undergraduate Education
Central Washington University	Lucas Rucks	University Center Director
Central Washington University	Steve DuPont	Assistant Director, Government Relations
Central Washington University	Lindsey Brown	Registrar
Central Washington University	Rose Spodobalski-Brower	Associate Registrar
Central Washington University	Antonio Sanchez	Assistant Director, Government Relations
WGU Washington	Lucas Kavlie	Associate Provost, Compliance & Accreditation
<b>Community and Technical Colleges</b>		
Bellevue College	Rebecca Cory	Associate Dean of Instruction
Edmonds Community College	Pamela LeMay	Director, Special Academic Programs
Cascadia College	Erik Tingelstad	Dean for Student Learning
Clover Park Technical College	Cindy Mowry	Director of Enrollment Services
Whatcom Community College	Beth Tyne (F)	Faculty, Social Science. Learning Contracts
Highline College	Jennifer Johnson (F)	Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator

## Appendix A

Organization	Representative (F=faculty)	Position
Community and Technical College-Articulation and Transfer Council (Bellevue College)	Joyce Carroll	Associate Dean of Instruction
Community and Technical College Workforce Education Council (Whatcom Community College)	Linda Maier	Dean, Workforce Education Instruction
Community and Technical College Workforce Education Council (Highline College)	Alice Madsen	Academic Affairs/Instruction
Community and Technical Colleges-Instruction Commission, Joint Transfer Council Co-Chair (Spokane Falls Community College)	Jim Minkler	Vice President of Learning
Everett Community College	Maureen O'Shaughnessy	PLA Program Manager
Lake Washington Institute of Technology	Sharon Buck	Dean, Industrial Technology
Center of Excellence for Careers in Education (Green River College)	Jamie Wells	Director
Center of Excellence for Homeland Security Emergency Management (Highline College)	Linda Crerar	Director
Center of Excellence for Construction (Renton Technical College)	Shana Peschek	Director
Faculty Association of Community and Technical Colleges (Clover Park Technical College)	Phil Venditti (F)	Speech Communications Faculty
Green River College	Denise Bennatts	Director of Enrollment Services
South Seattle College	Mary Beans (F)	Lead Faculty-BAS Professional Teacher Education
Pierce College	Anne White	Registrar/Dean of Enrollment Services & Financial Aid
Pierce College	Tami Walsh	Evaluations

## Appendix A

Organization	Representative (F=faculty)	Position
Pierce College	Kelly Benson	Dean, Military Program Student & Enrollment Services
Lower Columbia College	Tamra Bell	Director, Work-based Learning & External Outreach
Lower Columbia College	Brian Sharp	CES Manager
Yakima Valley College	Lisa Dominguez	Non-Traditional Learning Credit Coordinator
Wenatchee Valley College	Pam Kelley	Curriculum & Instructional Affairs Coordinator
<b>Career Colleges</b>		
Northwest Career College Federation	Gena Wikstrom	Executive Director
Northwest Career College Federation	Jeff Engh	Director
Everest College, Tacoma	Brian Lee	Academic Dean/Director of Education
<b>State House and Senate Staff, other state agencies</b>		
Senate Higher Education	Clint McCarthy	Committee Staff Coordinator
Senate Higher Education	Evan Klein	Counsel
Senate Majority Caucus	James Crandall	Staff Counsel
House Higher Education Committee	Megan Mulvihill	Research Analyst
House	Sean Flynn	Staff Counsel – Office of Program Research
House Democratic Caucus	Chris Thompson	Senior Policy Analyst
House Republican Caucus	Brad Sherman	Policy Analyst
Department of Labor and Industry	Jody Robbins	Apprenticeship
Department of Public Health	Tommy Simpson	Health Services Consultant, Military Programs Manager, Health Systems Quality Assurance (HSQA)
<b>Public Safety</b>		
Criminal Justice Training Commission	Anthony Anderman	Eastern Regional Training Manager

## Appendix A

Organization	Representative (F=faculty)	Position
<b>Military/Department of Defense</b>		
Regional Liaison NW - Department of Defense	Mark B. San Souci	Department of Defense Advisor
Veterans Resource - Independent	Andy Brucia	Past Co-Chair PLA Workgroup
<b>Workforce and Apprenticeship</b>		
Spokane Area Workforce Development Council	Mark Mattke	Executive Director
SkillUp Washington	Susan Crane	Executive Director
Service Employees International Union Healthcare NW Training Partnership	Nancy Dapper	Project Manager – Workforce Intelligence & Integration
State Apprenticeship Coordinator Association and Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee	Peter Lahmann	State Apprenticeship Coordinator
Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers	Tony Lewis	Representative
American Federation of Teachers WA	Bernal Baca (F)	Government Relations
WA State Building and Construction Trades Council	Terry Tilton	Assistant Executive Secretary
Spokane Regional Labor Council	Beth Thew	Secretary-Treasurer

## **APPENDIX B: EXAMPLES OF COLLEGE PROGRESS IN 2015**

Colleges submitting data for this report were also asked to submit brief progress updates on their campus for 2015. Following, in their own words, are examples of activities to support PLA on Washington campuses.

### **Bellingham Technical College**

In 2014-15 Bellingham Technical College (BTC) implemented their revised Non-Traditional Credit policy and procedures.

Program instructors in Business and Computer Information Systems piloted the procedure in Fall 2014 and adjustments were made to streamline the process for Winter Quarter 2015. Instructors are now confident in the process and we are seeing an increase in a variety of PLA credit.

Also, BTC applied and was approved to join the national Registered Apprenticeship-College Consortium (RACC). By joining this consortium (operated by the Departments of Labor and Education), BTC agreed to evaluate Registered Apprenticeship (RA) completion certificate transcripts as per our policies and procedures. All transcripts will be from RA programs that have been evaluated by third-party evaluators such as the American Council on Education (ACE).

### **Highline College**

Innovation in PLA practices at Highline College continue to grow. The Military, Basic Law Enforcement Academy and Child Development Associate Occupational Crosswalks provide students with pre-assessed options for a simple and accessible process.

The SBCTC Hospital Employee Education and Training (HEET)-MA program was funded for another year, aiding working medical assistants. 92 incumbent workers were able to take advantage of this program to complete requirements for state certification, allowing job retention and advancement. Occupational crosswalks and individual industry certifications were used extensively. Encouraged by the collaboration on this project, Yakima Valley Community College has initiated a new PLA system which will be accessed through Canvas.

Inspired by OSPI's *Earn World Language Competency Credits* and with approval by our World Languages faculty, Highline has implemented a PLA system using Standards-based Measure of Proficiency (STAMP) testing. Students can test at the college testing center to gain up to ten world language credits.

### **Olympic College**

When possible, Olympic College uses crosswalks and other previously defined equivalencies to determine credit for knowledge and skills gained through work and life experience, and those gained through education or training at non-regionally accredited institutions. Examples include American Council on Education (ACE) recommendations for Armed Forces schools, Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support Subjects Standardized Test (DANTES SST) scores, and the College Level Examination Program

## Appendix B

(CLEP). When no such equivalency has been established, credit for such knowledge and skills is evaluated on a case-by-case basis by a faculty advisor in the discipline. Upon recommendation by a faculty advisor, students may verify prior learning by vertical challenge, credit by examination, or other demonstration of course competencies.

## Pierce College

### Career Pathways in Washington

Pierce College is providing leadership for a statewide Career Pathways project. This project uses the Washington Career Pathways (WACAPA) tool to build program maps for active and transitioning military in short program areas that lead to high demand jobs. This project is called *VIE-25* (Veteran Industry Education) and was launched at the military transition summit in September. Each of the seven colleges within a 25 mile radius of Joint-Base Lewis/McChord have identified as many as 10 programs that fit the parameters:

1. Employment ready in 6 months or less
2. Top industries with maximum job availability and career growth, and
3. Convenient training locations.

The schools have created visual “Roadmaps” to display the career pathway, to inform the viewer of the wage and skill progression in that field, and to provide access to information that links to prior learning opportunities available to veterans. The next step is to expand *VIE-25* to each of the various military installations in Washington State with the goal of becoming a best practice example for other states to follow.

Washington Career Paths <http://wacareerpaths.com/> is a new site designed to triage a user directly to resources that best fit their situation whether they are in high school, transitioning to a new career, looking for a specific educational program, needing resources to pay for their education, or hunting for a new job. It is hoped that this resource will create win-win situations by connecting the needs of the site visitor with the existing resources about workforce needs. The site provides a direct link to Military Pathway resources and the *VIE 25* initiative as well directly linking to each college’s landing pages for program pathway maps and resources.

Washington career pathways work is also tied to multiple initiatives including the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) which requires system pathway development with engaged employers. Guided pathways are part of the college completion initiative that recommends step-by-step roadmaps and intrusive guidance to improve student success and shorten time to graduation and employment in demand areas. Pathways engage employers, define and align competencies, credential existing skills and provide direct connection to high demand jobs.

The Homeland Security Emergency Management (HSEM) Center of Excellence (CoE) is one of 10 sector based centers hosted at colleges with sector based expertise. The HSEM CoE developed a prior learning assessment model (crosswalk) based on Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) that it is using with its six career pathways: Criminal Justice, Public Safety, Security, Cybersecurity, and Homeland Security Emergency Management. Criminal Justice was selected as the pilot and the COE developed a “Guide to Establishing Military Pathways” to frame the work. The goal is to assist military personnel in receiving credit for



## **Appendix B**

their military training and experience that will accelerate their pathway to earning certificates and degrees.

The pilot established a Criminal Justice (CJ) program coordinator work group, researched and gathered the needed Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) and training information, and is in the process of establishing a “floor/minimum credits” recommended crosswalk. Challenges include the depth and breadth of CJ/HSEM, the fact that military MOS change often which causes inconsistencies in what can be applied to the crosswalk, and in many cases only partial credit can be awarded which creates gaps. Criminal Justice workgroup meetings continue to address these challenges and work on the identification and agreement of a common core curriculum that crosswalks military outcomes and could be used by CJ programs statewide.

## **Spokane Community Colleges**

Community Colleges of Spokane (CSS) values the college-level knowledge students may have acquired outside the traditional college classroom. Students may have acquired this knowledge through past work, independent reading and study, training programs or in-service courses, volunteer service, cultural or artistic pursuits, hobbies and recreational pastimes, community or religious activities, organizational memberships, adult education, non-credit courses, study abroad, military training not evaluated for credit by the American Council of Education (ACE), or other experiences.

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) enables students to articulate this knowledge and potentially earn credit for it. Methods for evaluating prior learning include Advanced Placement examination (AP); Armed Forces-Military Education and Experience evaluation (ACE); Articulation; Challenge examinations; College Level Examination Program (CLEP); DANTES Subject Standardized Test (DSST); Industry Training, Certifications and Licensures evaluation; International Baccalaureate examination (IB); and PLA Portfolio evaluation.

Students who have been accepted to attend Spokane Community College, Spokane Falls Community College, or the off-campus centers, are eligible for prior learning assessment consideration. No assurances of the number of credits awarded can be made prior to CCS review. While evaluation may occur before starting coursework, credit will be granted only once the student has completed 10-quarter credits in residence at CCS. The student may request additional information at [pla@ccs.spokane.edu](mailto:pla@ccs.spokane.edu).

## **Yakima Valley Community College**

Yakima Valley Community College, through Title V grant funding, has hired a dedicated faculty member who is coordinating the PLA effort. In partnership with the Registrar, the PLA coordinator has established an Advisory Committee and three work groups made up of administrators, faculty and staff, to develop student processes, faculty training, and policy revision. This will create a student-friendly campus-wide PLA system. The WA State PLA Workgroup recommendations for definitions, Non-Traditional Learning Credit (NTLC): Credit by Testing, Course Challenge, and Extra-Institutional Learning have been adopted as have the recommendations for transcribing PLA credits.

## Appendix B

There are currently nine departments participating in building industry crosswalks and/or course challenges as well as a comprehensive system to evaluate military transcripts to insure our veterans receive credit for what they already know. A student Canvas Course and Faculty Training Course have been developed as tools for communicating the NTLC (PLA) opportunities. Explore the Canvas courses at

- <https://yvcc.instructure.com/courses/1142101>
- <https://yvcc.instructure.com/courses/1135713>

The college website and catalog have been updated and will continue to be monitored for accuracy and accessibility. YVCC is piloting several course challenges and crosswalks and collecting data to assess self-sustainability. Here is the link to our webpage - currently under review for student-friendly language - <http://www.yvcc.edu/admission/Pages/Non-Traditional-Learning.aspx>.

## Eastern Washington University

The Interdisciplinary Studies Program at EWU offers alternatives for students seeking degree programs which provide a broad background applicable to a variety of careers. The program has three options: liberal arts, prior learning and interdisciplinary studies.

This program and its options are intended to serve:

- Students who prefer a broad liberal arts concentration (Liberal Arts).
- Students who have acquired substantial specialized training and experience outside the academic classroom (Prior Learning).
- Students who wish to complete an interdisciplinary option using two or three academic disciplines (Interdisciplinary).

### Prior Learning Option

EWU has been awarding credit for prior learning through the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies Portfolio Assessment Program since 1979. Students participating in this program are able to utilize their career experiences toward elective credits in their Interdisciplinary Studies degree. The process to have career experiences evaluated is done by enrolling in the ITDS 300 Portfolio Development course which guides you through the development of your portfolio.

## Evergreen State College

At Evergreen we know that vital learning takes place outside of the classroom. With the Prior Learning from Experience program, students can get credit for what they have learned in the workplace or the community.

Credit may be offered for learning experiences that are equivalent to college level. Past participants have received credit for:

- Developing plans for wetlands remediation
- Union administration and organizing

## Appendix B

- Human resources management
- Developing and managing a domestic violence program
- Marketing and graphic design
- Running a small business
- Grant-writing and nonprofit management

## Seattle Pacific University

SPU accepts many forms for PLA credit, including ACE recommendations for work completed in the military. It is critical that all forms of PLA be identified as such on students' transcripts in order to:

- Present an accurate academic history;
- Ensure that accreditation standards are upheld at the awarding school and any schools to which the student may transfer;
- Allow assessment of whether or not PLA credits accurately reflect students' preparation for subsequent coursework;
- Allow assessment of whether or not PLA credits shorten time to degree completion and/or increase persistence;
- Enable schools receiving transfer students with PLA awarded elsewhere to apply their own institutional standards regarding acceptance/awarding of PLA.

## Western Governors University Washington

In partnership with Western Governors University (WGU), WGU Washington is proud to offer VA benefits-approved education programs under the Montgomery GI Bill. Reserve and National Guard members may also qualify based on their own GI Bill guidelines. Eligibility and disbursement amounts will vary depending on a number of factors, including their term of military service, years of service, and other factors. WGU has multiple programs set up to help veterans and active military members. All military member's application fees are waived upon the initial application process.

Our Military Mobilization Policy allows active duty military students and spouses of active military members who must withdraw due to documented military mobilization to be readmitted to WGU in the same Satisfactory Academic Progress status as the term from which they were required to withdraw. Attempted units for the term of withdrawal will only be counted for those assessments successfully completed during the term.

In regards to receiving credit for military experience, neither Western Governors University nor WGU Washington provides credit for military experience. However, students waive certain requirements based on ACE-reviewed military experience. Students may also waive requirements based on DANTES and CLEP exams. A full transcript review is always required, as well as an assessment to measure their applied education and compatibility with WGU Washington's learning environment. If students have served in any branch of the military they should be able to obtain a military transcript—WGU's VA department can direct them to the online resources to request it.