Adopted: November 27, 2007

ACADEMIC SENATE
of
CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY
San Luis Obispo, CA

AS-658-07

RESOLUTION ON PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT: *PROPOSAL TO EXPAND CAL POLY'S CREDIT FOR PRIOR COLLEGE-LEVEL LEARNING*

WHEREAS, Cal Poly Continuing Education and University Outreach has submitted the attached proposal for granting credit through portfolio development by its Adult Degree Program students; and

WHEREAS, This proposal is similar to procedures used by other universities granting adult degrees and follows the national standards developed by the Council for Adult & Experimental Learning and U.S. Department of Education; and

WHEREAS, The Academic Senate Instruction and Curriculum committees have reviewed this proposal and found it similar to existing campus policy and worthy of adoption; and

WHEREAS, This proposal applies only to students in the Adult Degree Program; and

WHEREAS, The granting of credit will be determined by a faculty committee that will be compensated for its work; therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the attached document, *Proposal to Expand Cal Poly's Credit for Prior College-Level Learning to include Assessment of Prior College-Level Learning through Portfolio Development*, dated May 25, 2007, be approved by the Academic Senate of Cal Poly.

Proposed by: Academic Senate Curriculum Committee
Date: October 1, 2007
Revised: October 9, 2007

Proposal to Expand Cal Poly's Credit for Prior College-level Learning

to include
Assessment of Prior College-level Learning through Portfolio Development
May 7, 2007
Revised May 21, 2007
Revised May 25, 2007

Introduction

Colleges and universities began awarding academic credit for college-level learning acquired outside the traditional classroom in the 1960's. The practice gained acceptance in the 1970's and became standardized in the early 1980's. Prior Learning Assessment, or PLA, is the process of identifying, articulating, measuring, and accrediting learning that is acquired outside the traditional classroom and frequently prior to enrollment in college.1 Writing in 1976, Willingham noted the important role Prior Learning Assessment was playing in the reform of higher education because it was "directed to the extension of educational opportunity, enhancement of lifelong learning, and the improvement of the relationship between education and work." 2 "In one sense, the recognition of students' college-equivalent knowledge was seen as an act of simple fairness: if experienced adults had gained academically equivalent learning through work, volunteer activity, and independent study, that learning should be formally acknowledged." 3 The awarding of academic credit for college-level learning acquired outside the classroom is now a standard practice in higher education and recognized by all regional accrediting associations, including the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. Campuses of the California State University were first authorized to award credit for prior learning in 1981 under Executive Order 365.

As the practice of awarding credit for prior college-level learning gained acceptance, national standards were adapted for guiding colleges and universities. The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), with initial funding from the U.S. Department of Education, became the recognized leader in both promoting and standardizing the practice. As an organization dedicated to advancing adult learning in the United States, CAEL remains a leader in this field. The policies and procedures advanced in this proposal incorporate the best practices learned over the past 30 years of experience. 4

For many years, Cal Poly has recognized learning acquired outside the formal college classroom through a variety of practices. Students receive Cal Poly academic credit for training or educational programs that they completed and that are included the American Council of Education's:

- Educational Credits and Credentials' Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services; and/or
- National Guide to Educational Credit for Training Programs.

Credit is awarded for successful completion of subject examinations through the:

- College-Level Examination Program; and the
- University's challenge examination program.

Assessment of learning gained through work and other experiences acknowledges what students

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1 Rose, A.D., and Leahy, M.A. Assessing Adult Learning in Diverse Settings: Current Issues and Approached, New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 75, Fall 1997, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.
2 Willingham, W. "Critical Issues and Basic Requirements." In M. Keeton (ed), Experiential Learning, Rational, and Assessment. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1976.
3 Rose, A.D., and Leahy, M.A. Assessing Adult Learning in Diverse Settings: Current Issues and Approached, New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 75, Fall 1997, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.
4 www.cael.org/pla.htm

"learned-by-doing" in a manner that makes it possible for them to incorporate that knowledge into their course of study. It reflects learning acquired through multiple life experiences in the same way we currently recognize the importance of learning through practical "hands-on" applications.

The Proposal

This proposal calls for the broadening of Cal Poly's policy for assessing and accrediting college-level learning acquired outside the traditional classroom to include the assessment of learning through student prior learning portfolios. A Prior Learning Portfolio describes and documents the quality and level of a student's learning as compared with identified course learning outcomes. The proposed process is founded on nationally established and accepted standards and criteria, as outlined by M. Fiddler, C. Marienau, & U. Whitaker.5 These standards are:

1. Credit or its equivalent should be awarded only for learning; not for experience.
2. Assessment should be based on standards and criteria for the level of acceptable learning that are both agreed upon and made public.
3. Assessment should be treated as an integral part of learning, not apart from it, and should be based on an understanding of the learning process.
4. The determination of credit awards and competence levels must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic or credentialing experts.
5. Credit or other credentialing should be appropriate to the context in which it is awarded and accepted.
6. If awards are for credit, transcript entries should clearly describe what learning is being recognized and be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.
7. Policies, procedures, and criteria applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available to all parties involved in the assessment process.
8. Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.
9. All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions they perform.
10. Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served, the purposes being met, and in the state of the assessment arts.

The proposed Prior Learning Portfolio Development process is intended for adult students who have career and other life experiences likely to lead to the acquisition of college-level learning. **This option will only be available to matriculated students in the Adult Degree Program working toward the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies degree**. The Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies is the only major available to ADP students. Students enter Cal Poly at the upper division level having already acquired at least 90 academic units. They thus have classroom experience and an understanding of the level of knowledge that is expected in a college course. The Prior Learning Portfolio Development process will be faculty-based with tenured or tenure-track faculty serving as assessors.

Students who express interest in writing a Prior Learning Portfolio will enroll in a non-credit Prior Learning Portfolio Development Seminar which will be designed specifically to enable them to

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5 Fiddler, M., Marienau, C., Whitaker, U., Assessing Learning: Standards, Principles, and Procedures, 2ed., Chicago, The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2006.

understand the concepts, theories and policies pertaining to the portfolio development process. **Key learning outcomes of the Prior Learning Portfolio Development Seminar will be the understanding of the difference between learning and experience, how learning is acquired and how it is integrated into a larger contextual framework.**

Faculty who express interest in serving as portfolio and course assessors should participate in the Faculty Assessor Workshop which introduces them to the central concepts of assessing learning by experience, academic quality assurance, developing learning outcomes, and Cal Poly's specific policies and procedures. A guidebook covering the central material included in the workshop will also be available to faculty. The portfolios will initially be reviewed by Continuing Education to assure all required elements are included and the portfolio is ready to be reviewed. The portfolio is then forwarded to the appropriate faculty member who normally teaches the course for which prior learning credit is requested. The faculty member reviewing the course indicates if credit is appropriate and then submits it to the department chair/head for approval. The portfolio is then returned to Continuing Education for processing.

Procedures Governing the Development and Assessment of a Prior Learning Portfolio

1. Only Cal Poly students matriculated in the Adult Degree Program may request units through the assessment of a prior learning portfolio.
2. Assessment will be on a per course basis. Students must be able to document that what they have learned is equivalent to the learning outcomes of a credit course offered at Cal Poly.
3. Credit can be earned only for undergraduate courses.
4. The assessment fee paid by students will be based on the number of units to be assessed and not for the number of academic units awarded. The fee must be approved by the Campus Fee Approval Committee.
5. Faculty serving as portfolio assessors will be compensated for their service. Compensation will be determined based on the fee approved by the Campus Fee Approval Committee and approved by the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs.
6. Students can request assessment of college-level learning only for content-regulated courses with predetermined learning outcomes and not for independent study, special topics, internships and/or other courses for which learning outcomes are not specified. Students can not request credit for courses with the Interdisciplinary Studies (IS) prefix since their major is Interdisciplinary Studies.
7. Units awarded through the assessment of a prior learning portfolio will be noted as credit only. No grades or partial credit will be assigned.
8. Units awarded will be noted on students' transcript as "units awarded through the assessment of prior learning" or similar text and listed on a per course basis by course prefix, number, and title.
9. A maximum of 16 units may be awarded through the assessment of a prior learning portfolio. This conforms to the existing university Credit/No Credit policy.
10. Units awarded through the assessment of a Prior Learning Portfolio will not count toward residency in the Adult Degree Program or residency at Cal Poly.
11. Students must prepare and submit their Prior Learning Portfolios within their first four quarters of being admitted to, and enrolling at Cal Poly. Students already matriculated will have four quarters to submit their portfolios from the quarter after this proposal is approved.

In summary, the expansion of Cal Poly's existing credit for prior college-level learning program to include portfolio development is a reflection of our "Learn by Doing" educational philosophy. It

recognizes college-level learning that was acquired through real life experiences including work, professional service, and other means. The addition of a portfolio process will increase access for older adult students and add one more opportunity to recognize the college-level learning they have already obtained.

Proposal for Prior College-level Learning Assessment
Through Portfolio Development

Questions and Answers

Question What is the age range of students seeking credit for prior college-level learning?

Answer It is anticipated that the majority of the students seeking credit for prior college-level learning will be between 35-45 years of age.

Question What is the difference between the Adult Degree Program and the Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies?

Answer The Adult Degree Program (ADP) is an academic unit within Continuing Education. Students in the ADP earn the Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies degree. ADP students can not transfer to any other program at Cal Poly and Continuing Education offers all classes in the evening or on weekends. Classes are taught by regular Cal Poly faculty approved by their respective academic department. For additional information see: www.adultdegreeprogram.calpoly.edu

Question The proposal says students can earn up to 16 units though credit for prior college-level learning. Will all students earn this many units?

Answer No. The number of units awarded will depend on the individual student. Some students will have acquired more learning than others through their work and overall life experiences. While there are no national statistics on the average number of credit hours awarded, it is anticipated that for students who do choose to develop a prior learning portfolio, the number of units will be between 8-12 or 2-3 courses.

Question What will students use to document their learning?

Answer Accepted forms of documentation include publications, brochures or flyers of students' exhibits, shows or performances, position descriptions, certificates of completion, licenses, certificates of training, letters from supervisors or employers, presentations, business plans developed, marketing plans and training programs developed. In all cases, documentation must speak directly to the learning for which credit is being requested and how that learning was acquired. Credit can not be awarded simply for experience.

Question What are some of the benefits of developing a Prior Learning Portfolio?

Answer There are many benefits for students and faculty who engage in the development and assessment of Prior Learning Portfolios. For students, it means not having to take courses for which they already have acquired the expected learning outcomes. This can reduce their time to degree completion. It can also be a significant self-examination process whereby students can formally document a lifetime of learning. For both students and faculty, the portfolio development process facilitates a greater understanding of how learning is acquired and the connections between experience,

knowledge, and learning. For faculty, the process of learning how to assess prior college-level learning, and the actual reviewing of portfolios, helps clarify essential learning outcomes for individual courses. It is an excellent vehicle for helping faculty clarify the connection between learning experiences (assignments) required for a course and the expected learning outcomes.

Question Will faculty be compensated for assessing a portfolio?

Answer Yes. Faculty will be compensated for reviewing portfolios. The compensation will be established as a part of the overall prior college-level learning assessment package prepared for the Campus Fee Advisory Committee. The Campus Fee Advisory Committee must approve the per unit assessment fee prior to a specific determination of what faculty will be compensated. The amount of compensation must also fall within CSU and CFA contract guidelines which address additional compensation.

Question How is the Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies program reviewed?

Answer As a regular academic program of Cal Poly, the Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies is on the same five year academic review process as any other program.

Question Will this option change in any way the current policies and procedures which govern challenge examinations?

Answer No. As regularly matriculated students, ADP students can currently request a challenge examination for a course following existing Cal Poly policies.

Question Will faculty be required to participate?

Answer No. Participation is completely voluntary. However, faculty who would like to serve as assessors must complete the Prior College-level Learning Portfolio Assessment Workshop. There is no fee to participate.

Question Do other Universities have programs like the one being proposed?

Answer Yes. The assessment of prior college-level learning through portfolio development is an accepted process in higher education. Standards have been set and regional accrediting organizations endorse its use. A review of existing programs demonstrates that no two programs are actually alike. Each institution is free to develop the program that best fits its mission and goals. If evidence from over 30 years of experience at other institutions can be applied to Cal Poly, our process will mature and grow over time. Cal Poly will review and modify its process and procedures as it gains experience and better understands how learning is acquired and the learning needs of adults.

Question What are the typical elements included in a prior learning portfolio?

Answer The elements required in a prior learning portfolio vary by institution. Typically they include: 1) A personal background essay including learning goals and degree statement; 2) Resume or vitae; 3) Competency/credit course request; and 4) Documentation of learning for each competency/credit course request. Continuing Education will develop

a writing guide for the development of a prior learning portfolio which will be included in the Prior Learning Portfolio Development Seminar.

Proposal for Prior College-level Learning Assessment
Through Portfolio Development

Sample List of Colleges and Universities with Similar Programs

Ohio State University – Credit through Evaluation of Experiential Learning

New York University – Credit through Prior Learning Assessment

Syracuse University – Credit through Prior Learning Assessment

University of Maryland – Credit through Prior Learning Assessment

University of Rhode Island – Credit through Prior Learning Assessment

DePaul University – Credit through Prior Learning Assessment

University of Indianapolis – Credit through Prior Learning Assessment

University of Massachusetts – Credit through Prior Learning Assessment

CAL POLY

SAN LUIS OBISPO
CA 93407

State of California

Memorandum

To: Bruno Giberti
Chair, Academic Senate

Date: January 7, 2008

From: Warren J. Baker
President

Copies: W. Durgin
D. Parks
D. Conn

Subject: Response to Academic Senate Resolution AS-658-07
Resolution on Prior Learning Assessment: *Proposal to Expand Cal Poly's Credit for Prior College-Level Learning*

Based upon consultation with Provost William W. Durgin, this memo acknowledges receipt and approval of the above-referenced resolution.

Please extend my thanks to those who worked on developing this proposal. I look forward to its implementation and the effect it will have on this student population.