

To: PLA/CBE Task Force
From: TJ Rivard, University Transfer Office Director
Date: 12/04/13
RE: Charge

Introduction

As institutions need to find ways to cut student costs and increase degree attainment, colleges, universities, and state governments are engaged in experimenting and implementing methods to make the acceptance and transfer of credit easier. As a result, creating options for students to attain credit has become a focus for many of these entities. These options include more traditional types of prior learning assessments (PLA's), such as portfolios, CLEP exams, DSST (formerly DAN TES) exams, ACE recommendations and local processes that determine competency. The above are usually connected directly to credit hours.

However, the Federal Government recently approved the use of federal financial aid for competency-based education (CBE) without requiring it to be attached to credit hours. In addition, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) has also accredited CBE programs. Presently, there are not many institutions that participate in this endeavor; however, some that are offering CBE are among mainstream institutions, such as the University of Wisconsin and Northern Arizona University. In addition, some CBE coursework is offered online, crossing state borders and allowing students in Indiana and perhaps on our campuses to pick up this coursework. Indiana University must think carefully about the implications for students before refusing to accept PLA/CBE coursework that is supported by federal financial aid.

It is likely that we will see more and more of this credit on transcripts from students requesting admission onto our campuses and from matriculated students who are taking additional credit hours from these institutions either in the summer or online.

In addition, the acceptance of PLA and CBE arise increasingly in the form of state mandates. For example, the Indiana General Assembly through the Indiana Commission for Higher Education is implementing a statute that will require institutions to transfer military course credit as recommended by ACE. Legislation that includes ACE credit recommendations for military occupations will likely not be far behind; although, these are presently translated into credit hours through ACE recommendations.

Whether by way of PLA or CBE, there is a change in the way that education is being delivered across the country. More and more universities, community colleges, and states are exploring alternative ways to deliver coursework and award credit to make a post-secondary education accessible, affordable, and efficient. It is significant to note that almost all of our campuses have accepted a form of PLA credit for many years in the form of CLEP, DAN TES (DSST's), and portfolios, and it may be particularly important for some campuses to have the flexibility to develop, offer, and accept this credit with the support of their sister campuses, particularly as their regional competitors engage in establishing multiple pathways toward their degrees. As a result, it is important for Indiana University to establish policies and guidelines in two areas:

- 1) The acceptance of PLA/CBE credit internally as well as via transfer, and
- 2) The development and offering of PLA/CBE credit.

Need for Consistency

The need for consistency raises a number of concerns for the University and for the campuses:

1. In the past, there were so few students who transferred (or attempted to transfer) PLA/CBE credit that each campus could address these credits on a case-by-case basis. However, as more and more students receive these credits from a variety of regionally accredited institutions and as these students move from one IU campus to another, a lack of consistency in how these credits will count will be counterproductive for the student and to our own goal of delivering a quality experience and education. Establishing a policy or policies that will guide the campuses in how to accept this credit will avoid many of the issues that students may encounter otherwise when they move from one IU campus to another.
2. As campuses attempt to be competitive, devising methods for offering CBE/PLA to students beyond credit in general studies may become an important factor in attracting, retaining and graduating students in the future, particularly students who fall within certain demographic parameters. The need for campuses to be competitive and flexible in the delivery of coursework may become imperative, particularly perhaps at the regional campuses. The IUPUI campus has begun to create avenues for students to use PLA's toward credit in their degree programs, and this may be a logical place to begin an assessment of rational policies for our campuses.
 - a. As an aside, this may also offer the opportunity to partner with ITCC on creating parameters for accepting PLA/CBE credit through a portfolio system, devised and administered through ITCC, following learning outcomes designed by IU faculty.
3. Not all PLA/CBE credit can, or should, be considered equal. It is logical that the discussion may need to examine awarding credit for PLA/CBE credit in different ways, dividing the discussion into several parts, because conclusions for how to codify the acceptance of CLEP, DSST, or other forms of credit that have been transcribed for years on the campuses may be very different from conversations with regard to how to translate a competency-based transcript into credit hours and the methods for assessing it – that is, if the credit is to be accepted on the campuses.
4. Legislation on military credit and the need to ensure that our veterans and active-duty military receive appropriate credit will and should be a priority for Indiana University. In addition, students directly associated with the military should be assured -- as much as possible -- that if they engage in intercampus transfer that their credits will be accepted in the same ways.

Charge

The PLA/CBE Task Force will develop recommendations that will be forwarded to appropriate academic and administrative bodies for consideration as University policy and/or practice, concerning the above four areas which include but are not limited to:

- Transfer of CBE/PLA credit from other regionally accredited institutions
 - Partnerships with PLA/CBE programs or institutions
 - Statement and/or policy on the acceptance of MOOC Credit
- Intercampus Transfer of PLA/CBE Credit
- Development of PLA/CBE credit on IU campuses
 - Expanded portfolio process
 - CLEP and DSST scores

- Fees for PLA/CBE Credit – allocation within schools? Local control?
 - Modules, certificates, badges, etc.
- Other items that need to be considered