Enhancing Accessibility and Inclusion: The 2024 Landscape of Credit for Prior Learning in U.S. and Canadian Higher Education

By:
Wendy Kilgore, Ph.D.
Senior Director of Research, AACRAO
Acknowledgment

AACRAO is grateful for the 399 individuals who participated in this survey about credit for prior learning at higher-education institutions in the United States and Canada. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

We would also like to extend our gratitude for our partnership with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) in supporting this research. Their support enabled AACRAO to share the survey with the CAEL membership, and they provided subject-matter expertise.

CAEL is a national, nonprofit membership organization that works to improve education-to-career pathways for adult learners. CAEL brings together organizations that support adult learners to provide these organizations with tools and solutions needed to serve this population effectively. For 50 years, the organization has helped align education programs with labor-market needs and worked to develop sustainable policies and processes that support partnerships, all while underscoring the value of lifelong learning.

Since CAEL’s founding, it has supported and advanced institutional and public policies that recognize prior learning — the learning that students bring to their postsecondary studies from work, military, and life experiences. The organization is known for its expertise in credit for prior learning as well as for the tools and professional development that practitioners use to develop their own CPL programs. CAEL is also recognized for its leadership in CPL research, notably its studies on the impact of CPL on adult student outcomes, the most recent of which was conducted in partnership with WICHE (see https://www.cael.org/resources/research/the-pla-boost), and on issues of ensuring equity in CPL access and adult student success.

CAEL views this new research with AACRAO on current CPL policies and practices in higher education as critical for helping all colleges and universities understand how they might start or expand their CPL offerings in support of their adult learners. Established in 1974, CAEL is Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Workplace™ certified and is part of Strada Collaborative, a mission-driven nonprofit organization. Learn more at cael.org and stradacollaborative.org.
Executive Summary

Undergraduate credit for prior learning (CPL) is an important aspect of today’s higher-education landscape. This report presents an in-depth look at the current state of undergraduate CPL in the United States and Canada. The primary objective of the report is to foment dialogue and action toward a more inclusive, effective higher-education system that recognizes and values the diverse experiences and knowledge of learners. Highlighted is the way educational institutions acknowledge and integrate learning that occurs outside traditional academic environments. The last exploration of this landscape was conducted in 2019, in partnership with the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) as part of their recognition of learning initiative.

CPL bridges the gap between nontraditional learning experiences, such as professional work, community service or military engagement, and formal academic achievement. This connection makes higher education more accessible and inclusive, and ensures it remains relevant and practical in a rapidly changing world.

The challenges and successes in implementing CPL within educational institutions are explored in this report. Issues related to institutional policies, mechanisms for assessing and awarding credit for prior learning, staffing, technology and learner awareness are examined. These are valuable insights for those in the education sector, from policymakers to educators and administrators, who work toward a more adaptable, reflective educational system.
Data Highlights
Survey results offer important data for higher education. These results include the following:

- 82% of the responding institutions offer one or more CPL pathways to learners
- Among those with at least 3 years of data:
  - 46% report an increase in the CPL pathways offered over the 3-year period
  - 48% observed an increase in the evaluation of learning for prior credit and/or number of credits awarded through CPL pathways
- 54% will not accept CPL in transfer, independent of whether CPL is offered at the institution
- 67% charge a fee for one or more types of CPL; few offer financial assistance to offset any fees
- 71% of institutions require a learner to be admitted to the institution before CPL can be evaluated for credit; 13% do not and the remaining 16% report, “maybe, it depends on a number of factors”
- 85% set a limit on the amount of credit awarded through CPL that may be applied to a credential
- Institutions offering CPL have found outcomes that include enhanced degree completion, learner progression and a reduction in the overall cost of education for learners
- Institutional challenges revolve around resource intensity, staffing constraints and little systemization in evaluation, policy and practice, faculty buy in and institutional awareness of CPL

Report findings serve as a resource for understanding the current state of CPL and how it can be further developed. The information and perspectives offered here aim to encourage more educational institutions to embrace CPL, paving the way for a comprehensive system that values all forms of learning.

To address challenges and expand CPL opportunities, examination of survey data leads to the following recommendations:

- foster a culture that values learning in all its forms
- allocate sufficient resources
- develop clear and consistent policies and procedures
- provide training and professional development for staff and faculty
- improve communication and outreach efforts
- invest in technology solutions
- promote and support the transferability of CPL credit
- assess and evaluate the impact of CPL on learner success
- disaggregate data to understand disparate impacts and access
## Contents

- **Introduction** .................................................................................................................. 1
  - AACRAO’s Prior CPL Research ......................................................................................... 3
  - 2024 Framing Questions .................................................................................................. 3
- **Results** .................................................................................................................................. 4
  - Institutions with CPL Practices and Policies .................................................................. 4
    - Successes and Benefits Associated with Offering CPL to Learners ...................... 5
    - Challenges Associated with CPL Processes ............................................................... 6
    - Learning Sources Eligible for CPL Evaluation and CPL Pathways .................. 8
    - Conditions Needed to Expand CPL Pathways and Learner Uptake ................... 10
    - Applicability of Awarded CPL by Credential-Level and Program Requirements .................. 10
  - Recorded or Not Recorded on the Learner’s Transcript ................................................... 14
  - How CPL is Recorded on a Learner’s Transcript ............................................................ 14
  - Fees ........................................................................................................................................ 17
  - Learners Most Likely to Take Advantage of CPL Pathways ........................................ 21
  - Learners Least Likely to Take Advantage of CPL Pathways ....................................... 22
  - Learner Awareness, Application and Evaluation Methods .......................................... 24
  - CPL Staffing Levels .............................................................................................................. 26
  - Responsibility for Assisting Learners with Individualized Assessments and Completing Evaluations ............................................. 28
  - Faculty Engagement With, and Compensation For, CPL .............................................. 29
  - Technology ........................................................................................................................... 31
- **Institutions without CPL Pathways** .................................................................................. 32
  - Institutions that Do not Offer CPL and Are not Considering Doing So ............ 32
  - Considering Offering CPL Pathways .............................................................................. 32
- **CPL in Transfer** .................................................................................................................. 33
  - Conditions Necessary for Accepting CPL in Transfer ......................................................... 33
  - Transcript Practice for CPL Awarded at Another Institution ........................................ 35
  - Reasons for not Accepting CPL in Transfer ................................................................. 36
  - CPL Pathways for Graduate and/or Professional Learners ......................................... 37
- **Closing and Recommendations for Practice** .................................................................. 38
  - On Promoting the Recognition of CPL in Transfer ......................................................... 40
- **Appendix A: AACRAO Professional Proficiency - Evaluating Prior Learning** ................. 42
- **Appendix B: Types of Assessment Mechanisms by CPL Pathway** ............................... 43
- **Appendix C: Transcript Practice Details by CPL Pathway** ........................................ 44
- **Appendix D: Other Calculation Methods Used for Assessing CPL Fees and Fee Types Charged by CPL Pathway** ................................................................. 47
- **Appendix E: Fees by CPL Pathway Among Those That Charge Fees** ....................... 49
Introduction

AACRAO has a longstanding interest in exploring the extent and methods by which institutions evaluate and grant academic credit for prior learning and leveraging this insight to provide professional-development resources. AACRAO has created resources to guide individuals and institutions to adopt innovative practices and policies for credit for prior learning (CPL), with a strong emphasis on promoting student success. For example, AACRAO identifies the effective management and understanding of CPL as a critical professional proficiency for those handling academic records. As outlined by AACRAO, this proficiency includes a comprehensive set of knowledge, skills and ethical professional standards (Appendix A).

The following were terms were provided by CAEL. They are used here with their permission here and have been lightly edited. The definition for credit for prior learning (CPL) is as follows.

Credit for prior learning (CPL): Assessment mechanisms colleges, universities and other education or training providers use to evaluate learning that occurred outside traditional academic environments. Used to grant college credit, certification or advanced standing toward further education or training. It may also be called prior learning assessment (PLA), recognition of prior learning and/or recognition of learning.
The following are the various pathways through which CPL can be evaluated. Each of the pathways contains one or more assessment mechanism.³

**Individualized assessment:** Portfolio of learning acquired through work or life experiences and noncredit learning for faculty with subject-matter expertise. Used to assess and determine the amount of credit awarded. Assessment may also be in the form of a skill simulation/demonstration or an interview.

**Faculty-developed exam, not standardized at the institutional level:** Allows a student to earn credit for a specific course by taking a comprehensive examination, such as challenge or departmental exam.

**Standardized examination:** Includes Advanced Placement (AP), College Level Examination Program (CLEP) exams, International Baccalaureate (IB), DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSST) and others.⁴

**Evaluation of noncollege programs:** Includes American Council on Education (ACE) recommendations, National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS), military credit and national certifications developed to meet industry/professional standards.

**Conversion of institutional noncredit to credit:** Any instance in which an institution converts successfully completed noncredit to credit, which can subsequently be applied to a degree or other recognized credit-based credential.

---

³ The use of the term pathways is an editorial choice by AACRAO.
⁴ It is important to note while this study includes AP/IB in the definition of standardized exams as a mechanism to assess CPL, AP/IB is not available as a form of CPL for returning adult learners for postsecondary life and work experiences.
AACRAO’s Prior CPL Research

AACRAO has conducted regular surveys on institutional CPL practices and policies, often in collaboration with organizations, such as WICHE, while using CAEL content for guidance, with resultant reports in 2014, 2015, 2017 and 2019. These surveys have provided insights into CPL implementation through the years. All reports are available through the AACRAO research webpage and in the book, AACRAO 2016 Academic Record and Transcript Guide, available through the AACRAO Bookstore.

The December 2014 survey was a 60-Second Survey focused on adult learners and CPL. It revealed 83% of the 966 responding U.S. institutions offered CPL through various pathways and assessment mechanisms for learners. In 2015, a broader survey was conducted. Results influenced the recommendations in AACRAO’s 2016 Academic Record and Transcript Guide. That survey found 88% of institutions awarded credit for prior learning. A 2017 survey further explored transfer-credit policies; at that time less than half of the respondents had an explicit policy for CPL in transfer.

In 2019, AACRAO invited U.S. member institutions serving undergraduate learners to complete a more extensive survey. The survey gathered descriptive data on institutional CPL practices and policies, as well as respondents’ views on equity, access and CPL’s impact on learner success. It featured separate sections for institutions that use CPL and those that do not. A second related 2019 survey included responses from over 1,000 current college learners about their CPL experiences. These findings were reported as well.

The 2024 survey reproduces and builds upon the 2019 institutional-practices survey. The learner survey has not been repeated at this time.

2024 Framing Questions

The survey design was shaped by the following questions.

- What are the various pathways available to evaluate CPL?
- What are the policies, processes, staffing and technology associated with CPL evaluation and awarding of credit?
- Are there any issues of equity associated with the application and availability of CPL across the learner populations served?
- How, if at all, has credit earned through CPL impacted learners’ postsecondary success?
- To what extent do institutions accept credit earned through CPL in transfer?
- How are learners made aware of CPL pathways?
- What barriers exist to implementing CPL pathways at institutions where there are no opportunities at this time?

5: https://www.aacrao.org/research-publications/research
6: https://www.aacrao.org/research-publications/online-bookstore
7: Canadian institutions were not part of this sample.
Results

This report breaks down into eight categories the key elements involved in awarding credit for prior learning at educational institutions. These categories include:

- successes and challenges associated with offering CPL
- learning modes eligible for CPL evaluation
- available CPL pathways for learners
- how CPL credits apply to credential requirements
- recording of CPL on academic transcripts
- support resources (human, technical, data) needed to offer CPL
- fees associated with CPL
- demographics of learners who are most, and least, likely to benefit from CPL opportunities

Additional content examines acceptance of CPL credits from other institutions, explores why some institutions do not offer CPL pathways and discusses why other institutions are implementing or considering CPL pathways.

Nearly 400 U.S. and Canadian undergraduate-serving, degree-granting institutions participated in the survey. The breakdown is as follows:

- 60% are comprehensive institutions
- 24% are lower-division-only institutions
- 14% are undergraduate-only institutions
- 2% represent systems and other categories of institutions
- 61% are public institutions
- 95% are U.S. institutions

Institutions with CPL Practices and Policies

Eighty-two percent of U.S. and Canadian institutions offer one or more pathways to earn CPL. It is statistically more likely for public and/or lower-division-only institutions to offer CPL. Currently 9% of institutions surveyed do not offer CPL in any form and are not considering doing so; 6% are considering offering CPL. Three percent are in the process of adding CPL pathways for learners. Among those with data available, in the last 3 academic years, 38% of those offering CPL have increased the number of pathways used for recognizing prior learning, 3% have decreased the number of methods and 59% have remained the same.
**Successes and Benefits Associated with Offering CPL to Learners**

Institutions report various successes and benefits associated with offering CPL. Self-reported data were distilled into following CPL success-and-benefits themes, in no particular order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enhanced degree completion and progression</strong></td>
<td>Credited with accelerating degree completion and increasing the number of completers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cost reduction</strong></td>
<td>Seen as a way to reduce the overall cost of education for learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Empowerment and appreciation</strong></td>
<td>Appreciated among learners because it values and recognizes knowledge gained outside traditional classroom settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recruitment tool</strong></td>
<td>Acts as an effective recruitment tool, particularly for adult learners and professionals, leading to increased enrollment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time savings</strong></td>
<td>Provides learners with accelerated pathways to completion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Broader recognition of learning forms within the institution</strong></td>
<td>Growing acceptance within some institutions in recognizing various forms of learning, including work experience, military training and indigenous knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Improved retention and persistence</strong></td>
<td>Improved retention rates among learners who use CPL.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diversity and equity</strong></td>
<td>Tool for increasing educational access and diversity, providing more equitable opportunities to learners from various backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Challenges Associated with CPL Processes

Among the institutions with perceived procedural barriers or challenges to CPL, responses reveal a wide range of challenges associated with implementing and scaling CPL pathways and/or assessment mechanisms in higher-education institutions. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort to build faculty support, allocate sufficient resources, streamline policies and procedures, and improve communication and awareness among all stakeholders. Themes found within the open-ended responses include the following.

**Faculty buy in and resistance:** Some faculty members are skeptical about the rigor and value of CPL, while others are reluctant to devote time to developing and assessing CPL options. Concerns about the impact of CPL on enrollment and job security are also mentioned.

**Lack of resources and staffing:** Lack of time, staff and funding can be major challenges in administering CPL. Reviewing portfolios, evaluating nontraditional learning experiences and providing learner support are time-consuming tasks requiring dedicated personnel. Some responses indicate a need for a centralized CPL office or coordinator to streamline processes, ensure consistent implementation across the institution and improve efficiency.

**Inconsistent policies and procedures:** Inconsistencies may be found across different departments or colleges within the same institution. The lack of standardization can lead to confusion for learners and staff, as well as disparities in CPL pathways. Developing valid, reliable methods for assessing and evaluating nontraditional learning experiences can be challenging. Institutions report difficulties in creating standardized rubrics, ensuring consistency in portfolio evaluations and determining the appropriate level of credit to award for various types of prior learning.

**Limited awareness and understanding:** Learners and institutional staff may have limited awareness and understanding of CPL options and processes.
**Technology and system limitations:** Inadequate technology and student-information systems (SIS) can hinder the efficient management and tracking of CPL. Some institutions report challenges with integrating CPL data into their existing systems, leading to manual workarounds and increased administrative burden. A lack of data systems for CPL means an institution may not have good insight as to who is using CPL and how, or whether there may be inequities in access to CPL.

**Transfer and articulation issues:** The lack of consistency in CPL policies across different colleges and universities can be challenging. As noted in the executive summary, 54% do not accept CPL awarded at another institution. This can create barriers for learners who wish to transfer or to continue their education elsewhere.

**Cost and financial considerations:** Institutions grapple with the costs associated with administering CPL, including fees for assessment, faculty compensation and potential loss of tuition revenue. Some respondents mention the need for financial assistance or scholarships to help learners cover CPL fees.\(^9\)

**Regulatory and accreditation requirements:** Navigating regulatory and accreditation requirements related to CPL can be arduous. Respondents mention difficulties in determining the appropriate number of CPL credits to award while ensuring compliance with state and federal regulations, and aligning CPL policies with accreditation standards.
Learning Sources Eligible for CPL Evaluation and CPL Pathways

A new data point for this year’s survey is tied to a question about sources of learning most often seen as eligible for CPL-related evaluation. See Figure 1. Military experience is the most recognized source of learning associated with opportunities for CPL and self-taught learning the least recognized. Each source of learning may be evaluated by one or more CPL pathway.

Figure 1: Learning Sources Eligible for Evaluation Through the CPL Process (all that apply)
Many institutions report offering multiple evaluation pathways for recognizing CPL. See Figure 2. The evaluation of noncollege education and training is the most common pathway for CPL offered, followed closely by standardized exams. Appendix B contains the types of assessment mechanisms in use within the first three CPL pathways listed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: CPL Pathways Available (all that apply)

- Evaluation of noncollege education and training: 91%
- Standardized exams: 90%
- Individual assessments: 80%
- Faculty-developed exam, not standardized at the institutional level: 65%
- Conversion of institutional noncredit to credit: 31%
Conditions Needed to Expand CPL Pathways and Learner Uptake

Several procedural challenges associated with CPL are identified as conditions that need to be addressed to expand CPL pathways, assessment mechanisms and learner uptake. Open-ended responses suggest expanding CPL opportunities requires a multifaceted approach that involves engagement and support from various stakeholders, including faculty, leadership, staff and external partners.

Many institutions recognize the need for resources, policy improvements, data-driven decision making, faculty buy-in and a culture that values learning in all forms. The successful expansion of CPL will depend on the ability of institutions to address these diverse factors and create a comprehensive strategy that aligns with their mission and goals.

Other institutions highlight the need to address financial considerations, such as the potential loss of tuition revenue, the cost of administering CPL and the availability of financial assistance for learners seeking CPL. Developing sustainable financial models and fee structures for CPL is seen as important for its expansion. The importance of partnerships and collaboration with external stakeholders, such as employers, community organizations and other educational institutions, was also recognized as necessary to expand CPL opportunities. This includes aligning CPL with industry certifications and developing articulation agreements.

Applicability of Awarded CPL by Credential-Level and Program Requirements

The majority of institutions allow CPL to be applied to more than one type of undergraduate credential, including emergent incremental credentials. See Figure 3.

Figure 3: Applicability of CPL by Undergraduate-Credential Level (all that apply)

- Bachelor’s degree: Undergraduate, graduate and/or professional 92%, Undergraduate Only 96%, Lower Division Only 96%
- Associate degree: Undergraduate, graduate and/or professional 51%, Undergraduate Only 54%, Lower Division Only 47%
- Credit-based certificates: Undergraduate, graduate and/or professional 39%, Undergraduate Only 77%
- Postbaccalaureate certification/program: Undergraduate, graduate and/or professional 15%, Undergraduate Only 17%, Lower Division Only 16%
- Incremental credentials (Micro, Alternative, Nano): Undergraduate, graduate and/or professional 4%, Undergraduate Only 8%, Lower Division Only 8%
- Adult and continuing education: Undergraduate, graduate and/or professional 19%, Undergraduate Only 31%, Lower Division Only 19%
- Career and technical education: Undergraduate, graduate and/or professional 8%, Undergraduate Only 17%, Lower Division Only 13%
- Noncredit programs/certificates: Undergraduate, graduate and/or professional 7%, Undergraduate Only 8%, Lower Division Only 8%
Institutions report CPL may often be applied across a broad spectrum of program requirements. See Figure 4.

Eighty-five percent of institutions limit the accumulation and applicability of credits earned through CPL. Limits are tied to the number of credits, a percentage of the credits required for a credential, a combination of the two and/or some other limit. See Figure 5. Factors influencing the number and percentage of awarded CPL credits vary across institutions, and they can be internal (institutionally-driven), external or both; however, they generally fall into the following categories.

**Institution-wide policies and limits:** A common theme is the influence of specific institutional policies on CPL credit limits. These include:

- a set maximum number of CPL credits for different degree levels, such as associate vs. bachelor’s degrees
- variations in CPL-credit limits between undergraduate and graduate programs
- residency requirements mandating a minimum number of credits to be completed at the institution
- specific credit limits for CPL, often expressed as a percentage of the total program credits or a fixed number of credits
- differing limits for first-year and transfer learners
Accreditation and systemwide standards: Many institutions follow guidelines set by accreditation bodies or systemwide policies, which often cap the number of CPL credits that can be applied to a degree. This includes:

- alignment with accreditation standards dictating a maximum percentage of CPL credits
- state or systemwide policies that standardize CPL-credit limits across institutions

Degree and program specifics: The type of degree or program influences CPL-credit limits. This includes:

- specific program regulations setting maximum CPL credits
- differences in CPL credits allowed for career/technical vs. liberal-arts degrees

Faculty and governance decisions: Several responses highlight the role of faculty or institutional governance in setting CPL policies, such as:

- faculty or departmental decisions on CPL credit limits
- policies approved by boards or governance bodies

Miscellaneous factors: Other factors mentioned by respondents include:

- the type of CPL, such as portfolios, exams, military credit
- historical precedents and unreviewed policies
- the nature of the learning or experience being assessed for CPL
Several accrediting bodies in the United States have standards related to credit for prior learning. Below are some examples.

**Higher Learning Commission (HLC):** HLC states, “The institution has a clear policy on the maximum allowable credit for prior learning as a reasonable proportion of the credits required to complete the student's program. Credit awarded for prior learning is documented, evaluated, and appropriate for the level of degree awarded.”

**Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE):** MSCHE makes the following statement “The Transfer of Credit, Prior Learning, and Articulation Agreements Policy and Procedures holds institutions accountable for consistency, fairness, and transparency in transfer of credit decisions. The Commission remains flexible and allows institutions to determine their own policy and procedures with regard to transfer of credit, so long as the institution strives for appropriate balance among consistency, fairness, flexibility, good educational practice, and academic program integrity. The new policy encourages institutions to minimize the loss of credits for students. It also encourages the consideration of new and innovative methods or sources for learning and alternative assessment methods.”
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU): NWCCU does not have a specific limit on CPL credits but requires member institutions to have clear policies in place regarding the awarding of such credits.12

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC): SACSCOC requires that, “The institution awards degrees only to those (undergraduate) students who have earned at least 25 percent of the credit hours required for the degree through instruction offered by that institution.”13

In summary, factors influencing CPL-credit limits are diverse and multifaceted, ranging from institutional policies and accreditation standards to program-specific regulations and faculty decisions. Individual institutions are generally free to set limits on CPL credits that are more restrictive than limits set by their accrediting bodies. Additionally, some specialized accrediting agencies, such as those in nursing or engineering, have their own guidelines regarding CPL credits.

Recorded or Not Recorded on the Learner’s Transcript

Whether credit is recorded on a learner’s transcript at all varies by the pathway, assessment mechanism and/or other factors. This practice also vary from institution to institution.

While 86% of institutions record all credit awarded through CPL methods on a learner’s transcript, 13% record only some of the credit. Whether or not it is recorded varies by the method and/or other factors. The remaining 1% of institutions do not record CPL credit on a learner’s transcript. In general, each institution adopts its own approach to recording and annotating CPL credit on learner transcripts.

How CPL is Recorded on a Learner’s Transcript

CPL-credit-transcript practices may vary by program, college or department, or by CPL pathways at a single institution. The data highlight a highly heterogeneous set of transcription practices. The most common practices are recording the number of CPL credits awarded (54%) and recording a matched-course with a pass-fail grade as transfer credit (50%). See Figure 6.
Many open-ended responses further highlight the variety of CPL transcript practices used at different institutions. However, some common themes and practices emerge.

**Special-grade categories:** Some institutions record CPL as a specific course on the learner's transcript with a pass/fail grade or a special grade designation, such as "CR" (credit), "PC" (pass with a C or better), "PR" (transfer credit), "or VE" (verified experience).

**Specifying the source of the credit:** Some institutions specify the source of the credit, such as national testing programs, military experience or other recognized sources.

**Credit without a grade:** Some institutions record CPL as credit without an associated grade; this does not impact a learner's GPA.

**Separate transcript section:** A few institutions record CPL in a separate section of the transcript, such as "Other Credits" or "Extra-Institutional Credit," sometimes with a special grading system like S/U (satisfactory/unsatisfactory).
As referenced above, the type of credit awarded such as residential, transfer, block or other type, for CPL also differs by the CPL pathway and/or assessment mechanism. See Appendix C. With the exception of grading associated with faculty-developed exams, more than half of institutions do not assign a grade for CPL credits. A different outcome is noted if the pathway is recorded on a transcript at all. See Figure 7.
Fees

In addition to any fee charged by a vendor associated with a standardized test, 67% of institutions assess an additional fee for CPL. Methods used to calculate the fee for CPL can vary by the CPL pathway and/or assessment mechanism as well as by the number of credits awarded. See Figure 8.

Figure 8: General Methods Used to Calculate the Charge for the Number of Credits Awarded through CPL (all that apply)

- A cost per credit hour less than that of our tuition: 34%
- Flat fee regardless of the number of credits awarded, but may vary by the type of CPL evaluation/method used: 25%
- Flat fee regardless of the number of credits awarded and the type of CPL evaluation/method used: 24%
- CPL fees can vary by department, subject, college, program, or evaluation/method used. Our institution does not have a standard practice: 8%
- A cost per credit hour equal to that of our tuition: 8%
- Other: 22%

The open-ended responses from the 22% who selected “Other” as a response choice are grouped as follows: course-based and credit-based fees, exam-based fees, portfolio-based fees and miscellaneous descriptors. Whether fees beyond any standardized vendor fee are charged to a learner also varies by the CPL pathway:

- 63% report no additional fee beyond the vendor fee for standardized exams
- 11% report no fee associated with individual assessments
- 14% report no fee associated with nonstandardized-faculty-developed exams
- 61% report no fee associated with the conversion of institutional noncredit to credit
- 38% report no fee associated with the evaluation of noncollege education and training

It is more common for institutions to assess fees for the evaluation of individual assessment and faculty-developed exams. Appendix E includes details of other types of calculations and the specific types of fees tied to each CPL pathway.
Financial assistance to offset CPL fees is uncommon, but when available, it varies slightly among the CPL pathways. See Figure 9. A third of respondents agree institutional fees associated with the evaluation of CPL are a barrier for some learners.

**Figure 9: Availability of Financial Assistance by CPL Pathway**

- **Standardized exams**: 9% is available, 91% is not available
- **Individual assessments**: 17% is available, 83% is not available
- **Evaluation of noncollege education and training**: 10% is available, 90% is not available
- **Conversion of institutional noncredit to credit**: 17% is available, 83% is not available
- **Faculty developed exams**: 10% is available, 90% is not available
Quality Assurance

Most institutions have one or more methods for ensuring the quality of CPL policies and practices; 10% do not have any quality assurances in place. Among the majority, most have internally established guidelines, regularly review policies and processes, and follow guidelines of the accrediting body. See Figure 10.

Figure 10: Quality Assurance Processes for CPL Policies and Practices (all that apply)

- Internally-established guidelines: 85%
- Regular review of CPL policies and practices: 65%
- Quality-assurance guidelines of our accrediting body: 56%
- CAEL’s Ten Standards for Assessing Learning: 41%
- Other process: 5%
Use of Data to Understand CPL Uptake and Impact on Learner Success

Most institutions have access to data to measure the volume of CPL being awarded at any given time and/or have the ability to use data to measure the impact of CPL on learner success. See Figure 11. Eighteen percent do not have access to data for either purpose. Among those with at least 3 years of data, 48% have seen an increase in the evaluation and/or awarding of CPL, 44% have remained unchanged and 8% report a reduction in the evaluation and/or awarding of CPL credit.

After analyzing open-ended responses to the question, “What does your institution’s data tell you about the effect of recognizing prior learning/CPL on completion rates?” several themes emerged. They are as follows:

- an observed positive impact on completion rates
- increased retention and persistence
- reduced barriers and costs
- the ability to help recruit and support specific learner populations
Others respondents made the following observations about the influence of CPL on completion rates.

**Limited data or analysis:** Limited data or no data on the impact of CPL on completion rates. Some institutions acknowledge the need to track and evaluate data to understand the effects of CPL.

**Minimal impact or low utilization:** Minimal impact on completion rates due to the limited number of learners taking advantage of these options or the low number of credits awarded through CPL.

**Correlation vs. causation:** There is often a positive correlation between CPL and completion rates; some responses highlight the ongoing discussion about direct causation. Respondents question whether CPL directly influences persistence or if learners who pursue CPL are already more motivated and likely to succeed.

While the extent of impact varies, the majority of responses indicate recognizing prior learning through CPL has a positive effect on completion rates, retention and overall success of learners.

**Learners Most Likely to Take Advantage of CPL Pathways**

Based on the responses provided, several learner groups were identified as being most likely to take advantage of CPL pathways.

**Returning adult learners and adult learners:** Returning learners or those with significant work experience are among the most common groups to benefit from CPL. They often have professional experience, industry certifications or other forms of prior learning that can be assessed for CPL.

**Military veterans:** Many institutions recognize military training and experience through the American Council on Education (ACE) recommendations or the Joint Services Transcript (JST).
**Recent high-school graduates:** Graduates who have taken Advanced Placement (AP) or the International Baccalaureate program (IB)\(^{1/2}\) are often able to earn college credit through CPL.

**Learners in specific fields or programs:** Certain fields, such as IT/technical programs, law enforcement, emergency medical services and nursing, are more likely to provide CPL due to specific training, certifications and/or work experience.

**Academically prepared learners and high-achieving learners:** These learners are more likely to take advantage of CPL opportunities, particularly through standardized exams, such as AP, IB or CLEP.

**Socioeconomic and demographic factors:** Learners from higher socioeconomic backgrounds or those with family members who have experience with higher education may be more aware of CPL options. Learners from more affluent backgrounds or those attending schools with a wide variety of AP and IB courses (i.e., more likely to be well-funded schools) are more likely to take advantage of these opportunities.

**Self-advocating and assertive learners:** Learners who are assertive, curious or able to self-advocate are more likely to seek out, and benefit from, CPL opportunities.

While these groups are most frequently mentioned as those most likely to benefit from CPL, many institutions are working to expand CPL opportunities and awareness. Targeted are those learners from underrepresented backgrounds or those who may benefit most from the time and cost savings associated with CPL.

**Learners Least Likely to Take Advantage of CPL Pathways**

A few learner groups were identified as were identified as the least likely to take advantage of CPL opportunities. Several themes are the inverse of those identified as most likely to be able to take advantage of CPL.
**Traditional college-aged learners:** This population will take advantage of CPL pathways, such as AP and IB, if the opportunities is available. Those entering directly from high school, without significant work or life experience or the opportunities listed above, are less likely to have prior learning opportunities available that would qualify for CPL.

**Learners from lower socioeconomic backgrounds:** Learners from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be less likely to take advantage of CPL opportunities. This may be due to a lack of awareness of CPL options, limited access to advanced coursework in high school, such as AP or IB courses, or fewer opportunities to gain significant work experience or industry certifications before entering college.

**Learners in certain academic programs:** CPL opportunities may be more limited in some academic programs, particularly liberal arts or more traditional fields. Learners in these programs may have fewer opportunities to earn CPL compared to those in technical, professional or applied fields.

**Learners who are not self-advocates:** Learners who are not assertive or who do not actively seek out information about CPL may be less likely to take advantage of these opportunities.

**First-generation-college learners:** May be less likely to take advantage of CPL opportunities. This may be due to a lack of familiarity with the higher-education system and/or available options for earning credit.

Some respondents do not know, or are unsure about, which learners are least likely to benefit from CPL opportunities. This uncertainty suggests some institutions may not have robust data collection or analysis processes in place to identify which groups are least likely to take advantage of CPL. Improving data collection and establishing processes for regular review of that data could help institutions better understand and address potential barriers to CPL access and find ways to increase participation for different learner populations.
Learner Awareness, Application and Evaluation Methods

Part of an institution's CPL sphere of practice is making learners aware of CPL pathways, policies and processes. An institution's web page and catalog are the two most common methods of informing learners of CPL opportunities. A CPL-specific information session is the least likely source of information. See Figure 12.\(^{15}\)

**Figure 12: How Learners are Made Aware of CPL Pathways (all that apply)**

- On the institution's web page: 69%
- In the catalog: 69%
- Admissions: 62%
- Faculty: 53%
- Registrar: 49%
- Student success: 34%
- Academic affairs: 33%
- At orientation: 26%
- Workforce development: 16%
- Student handbook: 14%
- Direct outreach through text or email: 13%
- Social media posts: 10%
- CPL information session: 6%
- Other: 14%

15: The survey did not prompt respondents to provide other sources for learners to become familiar with CPL.
Entry points through which learners apply for CPL and submit evidence for evaluation vary, but most institutions use email as the method for both. See Figure 13. Other methods include Google forms, a learning-management solution, advising and one-on-one consultations. Methods can vary by CPL pathway, assessment mechanism and/or program.

Figure 13: CPL Evaluation Entry Point and Method for Providing Evidence for Evaluation (all that apply)

- By email: Entry point 64% (72% total)
- In person: Method for providing evidence for the evaluation 51% (46% total)
- Through a secure portal: Entry point 26% (34% total)
- By mail: Method for providing evidence for the evaluation 33% (17% total)
- Through a purpose-built technology: Entry point 14% (15% total)
- Other: Method for providing evidence for the evaluation 18% (13% total)
CPL Staffing Levels

Respondents were asked about the number of full-time-equivalent employees (FTE) who support CPL at their institution. Information was sought about individuals who support CPL full-time and any faculty, staff or administrator who supports CPL over the course of a year. Thirty percent of respondents report less than one FTE for CPL, 45% have between one and four FTE for CPL and 24% have five or more. Figure 14 details these data by institution size.

Figure 14: Full-time Equivalent (FTE) Staff, Faculty and/or Administrators Involved in Evaluating CPL on an Annual Basis by Institutional Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional Size</th>
<th>Less than 1 FTE</th>
<th>1 FTE</th>
<th>2-4 FTE</th>
<th>5-7 FTE</th>
<th>8-10 FTE</th>
<th>More than 10 FTE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 1,000</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000 - 2,499</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,500 - 4,999</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000 - 9,999</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000 - 19,999</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,000+</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
More than half of respondents agree the number of FTE assigned to support CPL at their institution is sufficient, which is a decrease from two-thirds who believed the same in 2019. Twenty-seven percent of institutions have a committee dedicated to CPL.

Figure 15: Level of Agreement with "The number of FTE involved in CPL evaluation is sufficient to support the volume of CPL requests" by Institutional Size

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Under 1,000
- Strongly agree: 42%
- Somewhat agree: 12%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 31%
- Somewhat disagree: 8%
- Strongly disagree: 8%

1,000 - 2,499
- Strongly agree: 36%
- Somewhat agree: 28%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 22%
- Somewhat disagree: 11%
- Strongly disagree: 3%

2,500 - 4,999
- Strongly agree: 24%
- Somewhat agree: 27%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 21%
- Somewhat disagree: 15%
- Strongly disagree: 12%

5,000 - 9,999
- Strongly agree: 18%
- Somewhat agree: 36%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 11%
- Somewhat disagree: 29%
- Strongly disagree: 7%

10,000 - 19,999
- Strongly agree: 10%
- Somewhat agree: 25%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 35%
- Somewhat disagree: 15%
- Strongly disagree: 15%

20,000+
- Strongly agree: 5%
- Somewhat agree: 35%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 20%
- Somewhat disagree: 30%
- Strongly disagree: 10%

16: Note: The institutional samples from 2019 and 2024 are not a 1:1 comparison.
Responsibility for Assisting Learners with Individualized Assessments and Completing Evaluations

Ninety-eight percent of institutions have one or more sources of support to help learners complete their portfolio or other individualized assessment. See Figure 16. Faculty are engaged in this process at more than half of institutions and are more likely to be involved in the evaluation/assessment process for portfolios or other individualized assessments. See Figure 17.

Figure 16: Responsibility for Helping Learners Complete their Portfolio or Other Individual Assessment (all that apply)

- Faculty: 57%
- Academic advisor: 44%
- CPL coordinator or other CPL dedicated: 36%
- The Registrar: 25%
- Academic affairs: 20%
- Self-help based on website resources: 15%
- Admissions: 12%
- Student success: 8%
- Workforce development: 4%
- Self-help based on specialized software: 2%

Figure 17: Responsibility for Assessing/evaluating Portfolios or other Individual Assessments (all that apply)

- Faculty: 84%
- Academic affairs: 19%
- CPL coordinator or other dedicated staff: 19%
- The Registrar: 17%
- Subject matter expert consultants: 10%
- Academic advisor: 8%
- Admissions: 2%
- Workforce development: 1%
Faculty Engagement With, and Compensation For, CPL

Forty percent of respondents agree faculty are aware of CPL options for learners, 21% are neutral on the topic and 38% state they are not aware of options. Forty-one percent agree faculty are aware of the CPL benefits for learners, 26% are neutral and 33% state they are not aware of CPL benefits.

Although faculty are largely responsible for evaluating/assessing portfolio and other individualized assessments, 66% report there is no formal training for anyone responsible for these processes. Nineteen percent of institutions provide formal training for everyone involved in the process, 6% provide it to most and 9% provide it for some. Faculty are made aware of CPL options for learners through several channels. See Figure 18. Some respondents note there is no systematic way faculty are made aware of CPL options, and others noted the catalog and policies as sources of information.

Figure 18: How Faculty are Made Aware of CPL Availability (all that apply)

- From their academic leadership: 59%
- Word of mouth: 54%
- From students requesting CPL: 52%
- Other faculty: 45%
- They find out on their own from resources on our website: 36%
- Direct outreach through text or email: 27%
- Standardized training for all faculty: 13%
Sixty-five percent of institutions do not provide additional compensation for faculty who conduct CPL evaluations. Among those institutions that do, the compensation rubric varies. See Figure 19. Other compensation-calculation methods are based on time-sheet submission, credits requested, regardless of the outcome, or a flat fee based on the number of credit hours evaluated. Among those who provide a flat fee, 28 respondents provided that dollar value; the weighted average is $118.57.

Figure 19: Compensation Rubric for Faculty Who Conduct CPL evaluations (all that apply)
Technology

The survey included a question that focused on technology employed to support CPL. The type and scope of technology used in CPL support have a significant impact on the capacity to assess the influence of CPL on learner success. Fifteen percent report the CPL process is entirely manual. Among the 85% using one or more technologies to support CPL, 93% indicate using the Student Information System (SIS) for CPL support. Fewer than 33% use additional technologies, such as learning-management solutions, reporting systems, custom CPL solutions or artificial-intelligence-based solutions. See Figure 20.

Figure 20: Technology to Support CPL
Institutions without CPL Pathways

Eighteen percent of institutions do not offer any CPL pathways for undergraduate learners. Among the 18% of institutions not offering CPL pathways, 50% are not considering doing so, 33% are considering it, and 17% are in the process of implementing opportunities.

Institutions that Do not Offer CPL and Are not Considering Doing So

Institutions that do not offer CPL, and are not considering doing so, proffer several reasons for their decision. Some cite difficulty in evaluating prior learning experiences when they do not align with traditional academic courses. Others mention their accrediting bodies do not allow for CPL or life-experience credit.

The current student population at some institutions, often consisting of younger, traditional-aged students, is another factor that makes CPL less relevant. Additionally, the time-intensive nature of portfolio review and the lack of faculty resources to perform adequate evaluations are noted as barriers.

Some institutions have a more traditional educational philosophy that values classroom-based learning experiences over the recognition of prior learning. In a few cases, institutions have discontinued CPL programs due to concerns about the integrity and rigor of the process.

Considering Offering CPL Pathways

According to responses, 24 institutions are considering offering CPL pathways. One primary reason is the desire to attract and better serve adult learners and nontraditional students, particularly those enrolled in online programs. The increasing number of adult learners in their market, along with the proximity to military bases, has prompted some institutions to explore CPL as a means to assist these learners. Additionally, market demand and requests from community partners have influenced the decision to consider CPL. Some institutions are evaluating the practices of competing universities and responding to state task force recommendations.

The changing demographics of the learner population, coupled with the need to revamp workforce programs and recognize learning from prior work experience, have further contributed to the consideration of implementing CPL opportunities. These institutions are considering various pathways described in this report in this ranked order: evaluation of noncollege education and training, standardized exams, individual assessments, faculty-developed exams and the conversion of institutional noncredit to credit.
Implementing CPL Pathways Now

Another 10 institutions are currently implementing CPL pathways; some institutions are implementing more than one. One institution is responding to a statewide-system initiative, one is seeking an enrollment gateway, another aims to be more transfer friendly, one seeks improvement in the equity of degree attainment and another wants to serve their adult learners better. The evaluation of noncollege education is being implemented by seven, individual assessment and standardized exams by six and faculty-developed exams and the conversion of institutional noncredit to credit by five.

CPL in Transfer

Survey data revealed 54% of institutions do not accept CPL awarded by other colleges or universities in transfer. This lack of consistency in CPL policies across institutions can create significant barriers for learners who wish to transfer or continue their education elsewhere. Challenges related to the transferability of CPL credits and the absence of a unified approach to CPL among different colleges and universities are frequently mentioned in survey responses.

Conditions Necessary for Accepting CPL in Transfer

Among the 46% of institutions that accept CPL awarded at another institution in transfer, 32% have no restrictions about acceptance. The other 68% indicate acceptance of CPL depends on a number of factors. All in the “yes (without conditions)” or “it depends (on various factors)” response categories were asked the conditions under which CPL evaluated by another institution is accepted in transfer without re-evaluation. See Figure 21 on the following page.
Several other conditions were mentioned under which credit awarded through CPL is accepted in transfer without re-evaluation. These CPL-credit acceptances include:

- credit awarded by institutions within the same state or university system; some states and systems have policies requiring the acceptance of CPL credits from member institutions
- credit is transcripted as a specific course or with a grade by the awarding institution
- credit is awarded through standardized exams, such as AP or CLEP, and the learner has achieved a sufficient score as determined by the receiving institution
- credit is part of an earned associate degree or a specific articulation agreement between institutions
- credit is awarded within a certain time limit established by the receiving institution
Transcript Practice for CPL Awarded at Another Institution

More than half of institutions record CPL in transfer as a specific course recorded with a pass/fail grade as transfer credit, but practices vary. See Figure 22.

Figure 22: How CPL from Other Institutions is Recorded on the Receiving Institution’s Transcript Among Institutions Accepting CPL in Transfer (all that apply)

Other transcript-annotation methods include recording credit as transfer credit based on the equivalent assigned by the former school, using a specific designation, such as "TC" for credit transfer exemption, or assigning a grade of "TR" or "CR" to indicate transfer credit. In some cases, transferred CPL may be recorded with a letter grade or as a specific course, depending on how it is presented on the originating institution's transcript. Additionally, the transferred CPL may be noted as satisfying certain general-education or statewide core requirements.

The exact method of recording transferred CPL can vary depending on an institution's policies and the type of CPL being transferred. Different transcript practices are similar to how CPL awarded at an institution is transcripted.
Reasons for not Accepting CPL in Transfer

There are many reasons more than half of the institutions in this sample do not accept CPL awarded at another institution in transfer. These include the following.

**Concerns about integrity and rigor:** Many institutions cite concerns about the consistency and rigor of CPL evaluation methods across different institutions. Institutions prefer to assess prior learning based on their own standards, policies and course-learning outcomes to ensure credit awarded aligns with their institutional requirements.

**Lack of documentation and verification:** Institutions often require original documentation, such as official transcripts, test scores or portfolios, to evaluate CPL. They may not accept CPL awarded by another institution without access to the primary materials used in the assessment process.

**Institutional policy and faculty discretion:** Not accepting CPL in transfer is a matter of institutional policy or faculty decision making.

**Uncertainty about the transferability and applicability of CPL credit:** An institution may be unsure how the credit was originally evaluated or whether it aligns with their own course equivalencies and degree requirements.

**Lack of CPL transfer processes:** Institutions may not have established policies or processes for accepting CPL in transfer or staff are not familiar with how to handle these credits.

**Accreditation and licensure requirements:** For specialized programs, such as nursing, an institution may not accept CPL in transfer due to accreditation or licensure requirements that necessitate completion of specific coursework.
**Institutional philosophy and tradition:** Some institutions do not accept CPL in transfer because it conflicts with their educational philosophy or traditional approach to teaching and learning. They may prioritize classroom-based instruction or have concerns about the academic integrity of prior learning assessment.

Several respondents indicated the reason their institution does not accept CPL in transfer is unknown or unclear to them. This suggests a need for greater clarity and communication about institutional policies and practices related to the transferability of CPL credit.

**CPL Pathways for Graduate and/or Professional Learners**

This report focuses on data about undergraduate CPL practices. However, the survey did include one question about CPL pathways for graduate and/or professional learners. Among the institutions that serve this population, 43% report having CPL pathways for these learners. The pathways are described as follows:

- **Matching undergraduate practices:** Several institutions apply the same CPL policies for undergraduate and graduate learners, albeit with different credit limits and evaluation criteria.

- **Industry licenses and certifications:** Many institutions align CPL with industry-specific licenses or certifications, particularly those at, or above, the graduate level. This often applies to fields such as accounting, law enforcement, military and health professions.

- **Professional experience recognition and program specific opportunities:** Some programs recognize professional experience, such as teaching or nursing, as a form of CPL. Certain graduate programs offer unique CPL opportunities, such as specific credit for professional-development programs, microcredentials or completion of high-level military training.
Work experience and competencies: Work experience is frequently considered for graduate-level CPL, especially when it aligns with specific competencies or program requirements.

Standardized examinations and assessments: Institutions often use standardized exams, such as departmental exams or ACE/NCCRS recommendations, to assess graduate-level learning for CPL.

Portfolio assessment: Portfolio submissions can allow learners to demonstrate knowledge and skills relevant to their graduate program. These demonstrations often have more stringent requirements compared to undergraduate levels.

Course waivers based on higher-level learning: Graduate students with advanced learning in a topic may be able to waive certain required classes.

CPL opportunities for graduate and professional learners vary and are often tailored to the specific needs and standards of the graduate program. There is common emphasis on aligning CPL with professional experiences and industry standards. Some respondents indicate there are stricter limits on the number of CPL credits that can be applied to graduate programs compared to undergraduate programs.

Closing and Recommendations for Practice

The 2024 AACRAO survey on institutional credit for prior learning (CPL) practices and policies provides valuable insights into the current state of CPL at U.S. and Canadian undergraduate-serving, degree-granting institutions. Findings highlight the successes, challenges and opportunities associated with offering and expanding CPL pathways. Institutions that offer CPL report numerous benefits, including:

- enhanced degree completion and progression
- cost reduction for learners
- empowerment and appreciation for nontraditional learning experiences
- improved recruitment and retention
- broader recognition of diverse forms of learning

However, challenges remain, such as faculty buy in and resistance, lack of resources and staffing, inconsistent policies and procedures, limited awareness and understanding, technology and system limitations, and transfer and articulation issues.
To address these challenges and expand CPL opportunities, institutions should consider the following recommendations.

**Foster a culture that values learning in all forms** and engages faculty, leadership, staff and external partners in developing and implementing CPL policies and practices.

**Allocate sufficient resources**, including dedicated CPL staff, funding and technology, to support the expansion of CPL opportunities and streamline the processes.

**Develop clear, consistent, transparent policies and procedures** for evaluating and awarding CPL credit; ensure these policies align with the institutional mission, accreditation standards and state regulations.

**Provide training and professional-development opportunities** for faculty and staff involved in CPL assessment and advising to ensure consistency, rigor and equity in the evaluation process.

**Improve communication and outreach efforts to raise awareness of CPL options** and benefits among learners, faculty and staff, with a particular focus on underrepresented and underserved populations.

**Invest in technology solutions that facilitate the integration of CPL data into student-information systems**, support efficient tracking and reporting, and enable data-driven decision making.

**Promote the transferability of CPL credit** by collaborating with other institutions, state systems and external partners to develop articulation agreements, align CPL policies and eliminate doubts about the rigor and consistency of CPL evaluation and awarding of credit practices.

**Develop systems for consistent data collection, tracking and reporting on CPL** to help leadership and program managers understand CPL usage by method, area of study, and student demographics. Regular examination of disaggregated data will help institutions understand where to focus improvement efforts, including addressing equity gaps.

**Regularly assess and evaluate the impact of CPL on learner success**, including completion rates, time to degree and cost savings, and use this data to inform continuous improvement efforts.
On Promoting the Recognition of CPL in Transfer

An important consideration regarding the acceptance of CPL credits in transfer is the potential difficulty in differentiating CPL credits from other credits earned at an institution. As the survey data reveals, there is significant variability in how institutions interpret and record CPL credits on learner transcripts. Many institutions do not clearly distinguish CPL credits from traditional coursework, while others may use various notation methods, such as special-grade designations or separate transcript sections.

The lack of consistency in transcript practices can create challenges for receiving institutions when evaluating transfer credit. It may be difficult to enforce this policy consistently if an institution does not accept CPL credits in transfer and if the sending institution's transcript does not differentiate credits awarded through CPL. As a result, receiving institutions may unknowingly accept credits in transfer that do not align with their own policies or standards.

Institutions should view the acceptance of CPL credits in transfer as an opportunity to support learner success and promote lifelong learning. By recognizing and valuing the diverse learning experiences learners bring with them, institutions can create a more inclusive, equitable higher-education system that meets the needs of all learners, particularly those from underrepresented and underserved populations.

Collaboration and communication between sending and receiving institutions are key to promoting the successful transfer of CPL credits. Institutions should work together to develop agreements and align their CPL policies and practices, ensuring learners can transfer credits seamlessly, without unnecessary barriers. This collaboration can also help build trust and confidence in the rigor and quality of CPL assessments across institutions. Key to this process is ensuring that each institution's CPL policies and practices — including methods of assessment and criteria for awarding credit — align with quality standards and are transparent to students, faculty and receiving institutions.
Promoting the acceptance of CPL credits in transfer requires a commitment to transparency, consistency and collaboration. By working together to establish common standards and practices for recording and transferring CPL credits, institutions can create a more equitable, efficient system that values and recognizes diverse learning experiences. This can help support learner success, enhance workforce development and contribute to the overall vitality of the workforce.

In closing, by implementing the recommendations in this report, institutions can create a more inclusive, equitable, effective system of higher education that recognizes and values the diverse learning experiences of all learners. Expanding CPL opportunities has the potential to transform lives, enhance workforce development and contribute to the overall success and vitality of our communities.
Appendix A: AACRAO Professional Proficiency - Evaluating Prior Learning

**Content knowledge requirements:** Knowledge of institutional catalog and degree pathways; knowledge of national best practices on the assessment of prior learning; knowledge and understanding of the Joint Statement on Transfer Credit, the AACRAO Transfer Student Bill of Rights, the AACRAO Institutional Bill of Rights and Responsibilities, AACRAO’s Guide to Best Practices: Awarding Transfer and Prior Learning Credit, the American Council on Education (ACE) National Guide, the ACE Military Guide, and common sources of credit for prior learning (CPL) including College-Level Examination Program (CLEP), Advanced Placement (AP), and International Baccalaureate (IB); familiarity with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and other national CPL organizations; and experience with academic programs, degree and general education requirements, course articulation, and degree audit systems.

**Skill requirements:** Excellent skills in research, critical thinking, and analysis; attention to detail and documentation; deep understanding of curriculum and program outcomes; ability to exercise judgment and find solutions to complex problems; strong communication and project management skills; technical facility to work in degree audit and curricular management systems; and ability to develop and maintain effective collaborative working relationships with others.

**Ethical requirements:** Commitment to consistency, equity, and fairness in application of policies to serve the best interests of the student, and current knowledge of CPL best practices and organizations.
Appendix B: Types of Assessment Mechanisms by CPL Pathway

Assessment Mechanisms Used to Award CPL for Noncollege Education and Training (all that apply)

- ACE Military training: 86%
- Joint Services Transcript (JST): 84%
- ACE CREDIT - education, workplace and training: 69%
- Internal evaluation of technical or professional certification: 63%
- Internal evaluation of technical or professional licensure: 58%
- ACE Military occupations: 55%
- Internal evaluation of technical or professional apprenticeship: 45%
- Assessment of other training by our own institution (e.g., for nonprofit, volunteer, or local business training): 41%
- Internal evaluation of badges: 19%
- NCORS workplace and volunteer training or other NCORS credit: 16%
- Use of other consultant or vendor to evaluate credit for certifications, apprenticeships, licenses, or non-credit training: 14%
- Other methods for evaluating military training: 13%

Standardized Exams Used to Recognize Prior Learning (all that apply)

- Advanced Placement Examination Program (AP): 97%
- College Level Examination Program Exams (CLEP): 96%
- International Baccalaureate Exam (IB): 84%
- DSST Credit by Exam: 72%
- University of Cambridge International Exam (Cambridge): 28%
- ACT: 25%
- SAT: 24%
- Cambridge Advanced International Certification of Education (AICE): 11%
- College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB): 9%
- ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview: 8%
- NYU Foreign Language Proficiency Exam: 6%
- Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination Program: 4%
Other standardized exams include:

- GRE
- DLPT
- Excelsior College Exams
- Advanced Level (A-Level)
- Project lead the Way (PLTW)
- ACTFL
- Assessment of Performance Towards Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL)
- Seal of Biliteracy Avant STAMP 4S
- CPS exams
- Canadian / Ontario / College specific
- BYU FLATS
- Saylor
- Local institute advanced standing exam
- World Languages department standardized exam for language proficiency and placement

Other individualized assessments include:

- review of credentials
- curriculum vitae
- documents
- projects
- assignment
- case study
- proof of licensure
- proof of a Sponsored Professional Training completion, plus a short "credit rationale paper" showing proof of learning to go to faculty subject matter experts for evaluation of learning
- if no specific training, such as comptia, pmp, hrmp etc., a longer-form experiential essay to go to faculty subject matter experts for evaluation of learning
- company training
- combination of methods
- assessment determined by faculty who work with the learner; could include a variety of tools
- articulation agreements with police academies and other organizations
Appendix C: Transcript Practice Details by CPL Pathway

Transcript Credit Type by CPL Pathway

- **Standardized exams**
  - Transfer credit: 78%
  - Residential credit: 18%
  - Not recorded on the transcript: 5%

- **Individual assessments**
  - Transfer credit: 56%
  - Residential credit: 41%
  - Not recorded on the transcript: 3%

- **Evaluation of noncollege education and training**
  - Transfer credit: 71%
  - Residential credit: 23%
  - Not recorded on the transcript: 5%

- **Conversion of institutional noncredit to credit**
  - Transfer credit: 66%
  - Residential credit: 29%
  - Not recorded on the transcript: 5%

- **Faculty-developed exam**
  - Transfer credit: 43%
  - Residential credit: 53%
  - Not recorded on the transcript: 4%

- **Other method**
  - Transfer credit: 68%
  - Residential credit: 23%
  - Not recorded on the transcript: 9%
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credit assigned by CPL Pathway</th>
<th>Course equivalency credit</th>
<th>Block credit</th>
<th>Other type of credit</th>
<th>No credit is assigned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>standardized exams</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-college education and training</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Individual assessments         |                          |              |                      |                       |
| portfolio assessment           | 76%                       | 14%          | 10%                  | 0%                    |
| skill simulation               | 71%                       | 10%          | 17%                  | 1%                    |
| skill demonstration            | 78%                       | 9%           | 12%                  | 2%                    |
| interview based assessment     | 74%                       | 10%          | 12%                  | 3%                    |

Another type of credit assigned tended toward mostly elective credit, with some using unclassified credit or general-education credit.
Appendix D: Other Calculation Methods Used for Assessing CPL Fees and Fee Types Charged by CPL Pathway

Course-based and Credit-based Fees

- a fee per course
- a flat fee, and a low cost per credit
- per-credit fee plus any testing materials, if necessary
- per-credit-hour fee for assessment, not awarded credits
- no charge per credit hour to avoid appearance of purchasing credit
- $10 per credit hour, max 12 credit hours
- zero cost for some types, with a $70 or $80 processing fee per course

Exam-based Fees

- all CPL forms are free, except credit by exam, which is charged as regular tuition
- no fee if the exam is failed; charged only if passed
- cost per exam varies
- specific fees for faculty-developed credit by exam (nonstandardized, such as CLEP
- flat per-credit fee for challenge exams only
- in-house or third-party exam fees are passed to learners
- fees apply for credit by challenge
- some exams have specific costs
- departmental exam fees: $75 plus $25 per credit hour

Portfolio-based Fees

- fees apply for portfolio
- flat fee for portfolio evaluation
- $300 for portfolio submission, $10 per credit hour awarded
- flat fee per course awarded through life experience credit
- portfolio fee based on credits earned at $50 per credit
- portfolio assessment: $50
Miscellaneous Fee Descriptors

- varied fees systemwide, working on standardization
- additional review cost: $150
- learners required to complete specific experiential learning courses
- $300 for processing and evaluation
- no charge for ACE, IB, AP, CLEP, etc.
- no fee for training agreements
- formula based on assessment time and consumables
- material fees can be charged
- fees waived for Mirror, VA and articulated credit
- no charge for state matrix-listed items
- no cost for recognized exams (AP, IB, professional licensure), military credit, noncredit courses
- fee for AP/CLEP/Military direct assessment, flat fee, less than tuition
Appendix E: Fees by CPL Pathway Among Those That Charge Fees

Non-vendor Fees Associated with Awarding CPL for Standardized Exams Among Those that Charge an Additional Fee (all that apply)

- Fee for the administration of the exam above what is charged directly by the testing vendor: 56%
- Flat fee to post the results and/or credits to the learner's record: 24%
- Fee based on tuition per credit hour and the number of credits awarded and posted to the learner's record: 13%
- Non-tuition-based fee tied to the number of credits awarded and posted to the learner's record: 10%
- Variable fees based on a number of factors (subject, department, student level, course level, program): 3%

Fee Types Associated with Awarding CPL Based on Individualized Assessments Among Those that Charge Fees (all that apply)

- Fee for the evaluation of the individual assessment: 61%
- Fee based on tuition per credit hour and the number of credits awarded and posted to the learner's record: 19%
- Non-tuition-based fee tied to the number of credits awarded and posted to the learner's record: 14%
- Flat fee to post the results and/or credits to the learner's record: 13%
- Fee for an optional course or workshop to help the learner prepare what is needed for the individual assessment: 11%
- Variable fees based on a number of factors (subject, department, student level, course level, program): 4%
- Other: 8%
Fees Associated with Awarding CPL Based on Non-standardized-faculty-developed Exams Among Those that Charge a Fee (all that apply)

- Fee for developing and administering the test: 47%
- Fee based on tuition per credit hour and the number of credits awarded and posted to the learner's record: 23%
- Flat fee to post the results and/or credits to the learner's record: 15%
- Non-tuition-based fee tied to the number of credits awarded and posted to the learner's record: 11%
- Variable fees based on a number of factors (subject, department, student level, course level, program): 3%