

Optimizing Credit for Prior Learning

Advancing Educational Mobility and Learner Completion



The Case for Credit for Prior Learning

In today's evolving learning economy, many undergraduates are post-traditional learners—working adults, parents, and veterans—who bring a wealth of knowledge and skills acquired through workplaces, military service, and life experiences. Credit for prior learning (CPL) provides a critical pathway to validate this extra-classroom learning by awarding academic credit.

A Strategic Partnership for Comprehensive Support

AACRAO Consulting and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) have partnered to offer comprehensive CPL consulting services. Both organizations have a shared mission to support higher education institutions and adult learners, ensuring students can navigate the on- and off-ramps between education and employment.

Despite its benefits, awareness and use of CPL options are limited. Only 11% of post-traditional learners receive CPL credit. The lack of institutional information, complex application or portfolio review processes, and challenges in transferring CPL credits remain significant barriers for learners.

This partnership bridges the gap between academic evaluation and administrative execution. Organizations like CAEL specialize in working with faculty and staff to develop effective CPL policies and determine appropriate academic credit for work, training, and licensure. However, these academic decisions must be supported by strong administrative processes—which is where AACRAO Consulting excels, providing expertise in collecting, recording, and applying credit to degree requirements.

The Proven Value of a Robust CPL Ecosystem

A well-implemented CPL program delivers measurable Return on Investment (ROI) for both learners and institutions:

- Institutions generate more tuition revenue because learners with CPL credit go on to earn 17.6 more traditional course credits, generating subsequent tuition income for the institution.
- Accelerated Completion & Cost Savings: Post-traditional learners with CPL credit save an average of \$1,500 to \$10,200 and reduce their time to degree by 9 to 14 months.
- Higher Graduation Rates: CPL increases the likelihood of credential completion by more than 17%, with a 19% increase for Pell grant recipients and a 24% increase for Hispanic learners.
- Powerful Recruitment Tool: For 84% of likely-to-enroll prospective learners, the ability to receive college credit for life experiences influences their choice of institution.



Joint AACRAO Consulting & CAEL Approaches for Evaluating and Awarding CPL

Our integrated approach aligns the entire CPL lifecycle: from Pre-Intake (readiness and current state) and Intake (policy development and portfolio creation) to Evaluation (faculty review and credit assignment) and Record (transcribing and application of academic policy).

Consulting services include:

1. Adult Learner 360 (AL360) Assessment & Adult Learner Summit

Understanding your adult learners is the first step toward institutional effectiveness.

- The AL360 Assessment: CAEL deploys paired questionnaires to adult learners and faculty/staff to conduct a gap analysis. This identifies institutional strengths, disconnects, and areas required to better attract and retain adult learners.
- The Summit: CAEL conducts a full-day summit convening institutional leaders to review the AL360 findings and develop a collective action plan. AACRAO Consulting serves as a vital resource during this phase to support your administrative units.

2. Institutional CPL Policy Creation & Refinement Review

Whether you are building a CPL policy from scratch or refining an existing one, our joint team provides a highly detailed review resulting in a thorough analytical report and actionable recommendations.

- CAEL's Role: Subject matter experts compare your policies to national best practices and on-the-ground experiences.
- AACRAO Consulting's Role: Consultants ensure the new policies are congruent with your institution's grading policies, repeat course policies, and graduation/degree requirements.

Delivery: This service includes a one-day site visit (virtual or in-person) with key constituents, followed by a collaborative workshop to navigate challenges, assign responsibilities, and create an implementation roadmap.

3. CPL Process Mapping Workshop

Process mapping visually illustrates your institution's CPL workflow to identify areas of friction, opportunity, and efficiency.

- Collaborative Design: In this all-day session, we facilitate cross-departmental discussions to uncover problems in communication and routing.
- Administrative Optimization: AACRAO Consulting focuses heavily on establishing secure intake of materials, recording awarded credit, clearing degree prerequisites, and properly transcribing CPL credit in your student information system.

4. Build Resources and a Training and Mentorship Structure

- Leverage existing CAEL training to create an effective, stackable individual professional development curriculum.
- Utilize a modular pathway model that considers both the individual's role within the institution and the type of institution they serve.
- Incorporate CAEL training that can be adjusted to focus on faculty or administrators at four-year institutions versus those who serve at two-year community colleges.

The partnership between AACRAO Consulting and CAEL

By combining AACRAO's century of expertise in enrollment management and administrative processes with CAEL's unparalleled focus on adult and experiential learning, your institution can build a transparent, navigable, and equitable CPL ecosystem. Together, we can transform prior learning into your institution's strongest asset for recruitment, retention, and student success.