

## 2020 Report to the Oregon Legislature

HOUSE BILL 4059 (2012)

CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING



Photo courtesy of Chemeketa Community College, 2018

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## 2013-2018 PROGRESS AND KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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### A. Introduction

House Bill 4059 (2012) aimed to reduce obstacles for Oregon residents in receiving academic credit for prior learning. The legislation intended that HECC take action to:

- 1) Increase the number and type of academic credits accepted for prior learning,
- 2) Increase the number of students that receive such credit.

Additionally, the legislation directed specific operational goals, including requirements that HECC:

- 3) Develop transparent policies and practices in awarding academic credit to be adopted by the governing boards,
- 4) Improve prior learning assessment practices across all institutions of higher education,
- 5) Create tools to develop faculty and staff knowledge and expertise in awarding such credit, and sharing exemplary policies across institutions,
- 6) Develop articulation agreements when patterns of academic credit pathways are evident, and finally,
- 7) Develop outcome measures to track progress on these goals.

The legislation required broad representation to lead this effort. It designated that members for the CPL Advisory Committee be appointed from the sectors listed below, and authorized HECC to appoint additional members based upon a demonstrated interest in and knowledge of prior learning programs.

Public Universities	Labor
Community Colleges	For-profit Institutions
Independent Not-for-Profit Institutions	Business Community
Student of Two-Year or Four-Year Institution	

Although funding was not associated with the bill, the Higher Education Coordinating Commission worked diligently with their Oregon post-secondary community counterparts toward these goals. Detailed reports of the committee's work is outlined in earlier reports to the Legislature, available on HECC's [website](https://www.oregon.gov/highered/research/Pages/reports.aspx).<sup>1</sup> Significant progress towards the goals of the legislation was made during the 2013-2018 time period, as described below.

### B. Early Accomplishments

#### 1) Constituent Involvement: CPL Pilot Project.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oregon.gov/highered/research/Pages/reports.aspx>

HECC staff initiated and facilitated the CPL Pilot Project (2014), which involved fourteen institutions: community colleges (11), public universities (1), private, for-profit (1), and private, not-for-profit (1). This project involved HECC staff who worked with the schools for over two years to convene institutional cross-functional teams, develop an implementation plan and timeline, identify professional development/training needs and identify costs associated with implementing CPL Standards. This project helped build the foundational knowledge underpinning the Committee's work for the first five years.

## **2) Development of Statewide Standards.**

The first version of state standards for CPL was distributed in 2013, and with substantive statewide input from higher education institutions, staff, faculty and students, the HECC subsequently released an enhanced and updated version in 2017. Currently, the Standards are accompanied by a 'Frequently Asked Questions' document which addresses the predominant, reoccurring questions raised over time with HECC. Initially, the two documents were widely distributed to Oregon public and private universities and community colleges as well as through Oregon institutional professional membership groups; currently they are posted for reference on HECC's website<sup>2</sup>.

## **3) Environmental Scans.**

The CPL Advisory Committee, staffed by HECC, conducted two environmental scans to collect data on credit for prior learning across Oregon's higher education landscape. The first scan focused on implementation practices across Oregon's institutions, which led to development of policy and procedures that enabled a more consistent process (i.e., the Learning Standards). The second scan sought to define how Oregon's post-secondary schools were responding to HB 4059, how they were implementing CPL and the challenges they perceived to be associated with offering CPL. The findings highlighted the complexity, confusion, challenges and barriers perceived by institutional members.

**4) Developmental Technical Assistance.** Extensive outreach to faculty/staff from Oregon institutions through presentations at various college student, staff and administrator events.

**5) Improved Understanding of CPL Data and Collection.** The Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development (now the HECC's Office of Community Colleges and Workforce Development) instituted initial requirements for tracking and submitting CPL data in 2012. Stakeholders (including agency staff, college registrars, and college institutional researchers) then agreed upon standards and methods for meeting these requirements. Ongoing discussions and educational sessions served to coalesce understandings of the primary CPL forms and in 2013, the first Standards for Credit for Prior Learning were completed and distributed.

By mid-2017, the CPL Initiative took on the revision and distribution of the Revised Standards for CPL. Subsequently, the advisory committee planned less frequent meetings for late 2017 while

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.oregon.gov/highered/policy-collaboration/Pages/credit-prior-learning.aspx>

HECC staff worked to realign the mission of the committee with emerging state needs. By early 2018, committee meetings lacked sufficient member/attendees to move forward on plans or to reach a necessary quorum for decisions. Through 2018, data coding continued and staff assistance was provided to the colleges, as needed, to aid in compliance with the Revised Standards. However, other operational activities waited as efforts proceeded toward the completion of the Adult Attainment and Education Goal.

Community colleges continue to report challenges in coding, entering and submitting CPL data as required for HECC's standardized reporting. CPL data for this report was available for only nine community colleges this year and last. Additionally, staff are more likely to have taken steps to simplify data entry, such as combining various forms of CPL and entering it under the most generic 'Other' code, rather than separately. College staff members have highlighted the need for funding to allocate personnel to make systems changes. For example, a standardized college process for evaluating learning outcomes and awarding credit for frequent situations in that locale might be helpful. Even the complex details for military education are simplified by evaluation from the American Council on Education with credits documented on the Joint Services Transcript (JST). The college does not need to evaluate the learning outcomes for each student but rather, only reviews the JST to identify eligible credits to award based on its own credit acceptance policies.

## EMERGING PERSPECTIVES: TRADITIONAL VS ADULT LEARNERS

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The original Oregon 40-40-20 goal applied primarily to young adults who would realize the goal as they exited secondary or postsecondary education. In contrast, it did not articulate an explicit focus on older adults who may need a workforce-relevant credential to enter or advance in the workforce. In order to focus attention on the need of Oregon adults to reskill and earn credentials of value, development began on a new attainment goal specifically for adults, through a designated Adult Attainment Workgroup. Oregon's Adult Education and Attainment Goal (2018) reads as follows:

Oregon anticipates more than 120,000 additional jobs requiring post-secondary training or education between now and 2030. In order to meet this need, 300,000 additional adult Oregonians should earn a new degree, certificate or credential valued in the workforce during that time. Because Oregon has substantial attainment gaps among minority, low income and rural Oregonians, the state will also commit to reducing those attainment gaps by half during the decade. *[Emphasis added.]*

Thus, the new adult attainment goal led to convening the Adult Learner Advisory Committee (ALAC). As the Committee's Charter and work plan developed, it became clear that the work of the CPL committee could be incorporated into the work of the ALAC as one of several strategies for increasing adult attainment. Due to the fact that the CPL Advisory Committee was created by statute,

a formal integration will require legislative action. Additional planning and discussion for such an integration still needs to take place.

However, the Adult Attainment Goal, and the related charter for the Adult Learner Advisory Committee both articulated a re-envisioned concept; that is, the ‘credential of value’. Such credentials may include certificates or associate/baccalaureate degrees from accredited colleges and universities, but also apprenticeships or on the job training approved by workforce boards. Such a credential is defined “as one that (a) adds value for employees and employers, (b) has measurable metrics, (c) leads to a family-wage job, and (d) is transferable.”<sup>3</sup> This opens a new opportunity to focus specifically on adult populations (25-64) that stand to benefit heavily from applying Credit for Prior Learning credits toward their desired credential. First, the age of the targeted adult population increases the likelihood of having education and/or experience that may be relevant to the credential being sought. Assuming that educational providers develop metrics by which such education and/or experience may be equitably assessed enables the potential CPL to be applied toward a relevant credential. Second, these credentials are intended to be workforce-oriented, in that they “add value for employees and employers” which implies that there may be a wider range of technical and professional skills that are college-level that may benefit from an organized, collaborative approach to developing standardized assessment metrics.

Thus, while the Adult Learning Advisory Council is investigating and more closely defining the credential of value, the HECC staff’s work will proceed to improve the colleges’ capacity to identify, offer, evaluate and award credit for various and relevant prior learning, particularly relevant to adult learners. Much of this work will require identifying colleges with particular expertise in specific fields of study, assessment methods, efficient operational processes for coding and data entry, and communication practices for policies and requirements needed by potential applicants for CPL.

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<sup>3</sup> “House Bill 2311: Establishing Oregon’s Adult Attainment Goal” found at this [link](#) -HECC website.

## INSIGHT FROM THE CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING DATA

Although the data is still limited by number of colleges (nine) submitting data, the eight years of data helps illustrate problems in data coding and/or data entry. For example, in Table 1 below, the letter A in the far left column denotes colleges that have four years or more of missing data within the years of 2012-13 through 2016-17. This most likely indicates inaccurate data coding or poor data entry systems rather than an actual absence of any CPL credits earned. The colleges marked with the letter B are both larger colleges with similarly sized student bodies. Yet the difference in number of reported credits illustrate consistency *within* each college's system but inconsistency *across* colleges. Thus, this snapshot view of data is an example of how HECC may identify opportunities for intervention to improve the system.

**Table 1: Number of Total Credits for Prior Learning, Reported by Year**

Colleges	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13	Total
A Blue Mountain	153	240	126	602					1,121
Central Oregon		6	1	15	5	13	7	10	57
B Chemeketa	8	20	40	24	20	56	48		216
B Clackamas	3,766	5,892	7,096	7,579	7,093	6,364	8,510	6,030	52,329
A Columbia Gorge			1						1
A Linn Benton								3	3
Portland	1,363	3,639	3,984						8,986
Rogue	157	148	68	292	404	1,389	652		3,110
Southwestern	722	678	610	190	419	314	47	306	3,286
A Umpqua	8		9				96		113
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>6,177</b>	<b>10,622</b>	<b>11,935</b>	<b>8,702</b>	<b>7,941</b>	<b>8,136</b>	<b>9,360</b>	<b>6,349</b>	<b>69,220</b>
<b>LESS:</b>									
<b>Military</b>	<b>3,643</b>	<b>5,128</b>	<b>5,970</b>	<b>6,100</b>	<b>6,223</b>	<b>5,830</b>	<b>6,779</b>	<b>4,562</b>	<b>44,233</b>
<b>Adv Placement</b>	<b>1,164</b>	<b>3,478</b>	<b>4,168</b>	<b>1,096</b>	<b>827</b>	<b>973</b>	<b>1,565</b>	<b>1,104</b>	<b>14,375</b>
<b>Intl Bacc Exam</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>963</b>
<b>CPL NET</b>									
<b>*TOTAL</b>	<b>1,286</b>	<b>1,705</b>	<b>1,478</b>	<b>1,430</b>	<b>846</b>	<b>1,313</b>	<b>961</b>	<b>631</b>	<b>9,649</b>

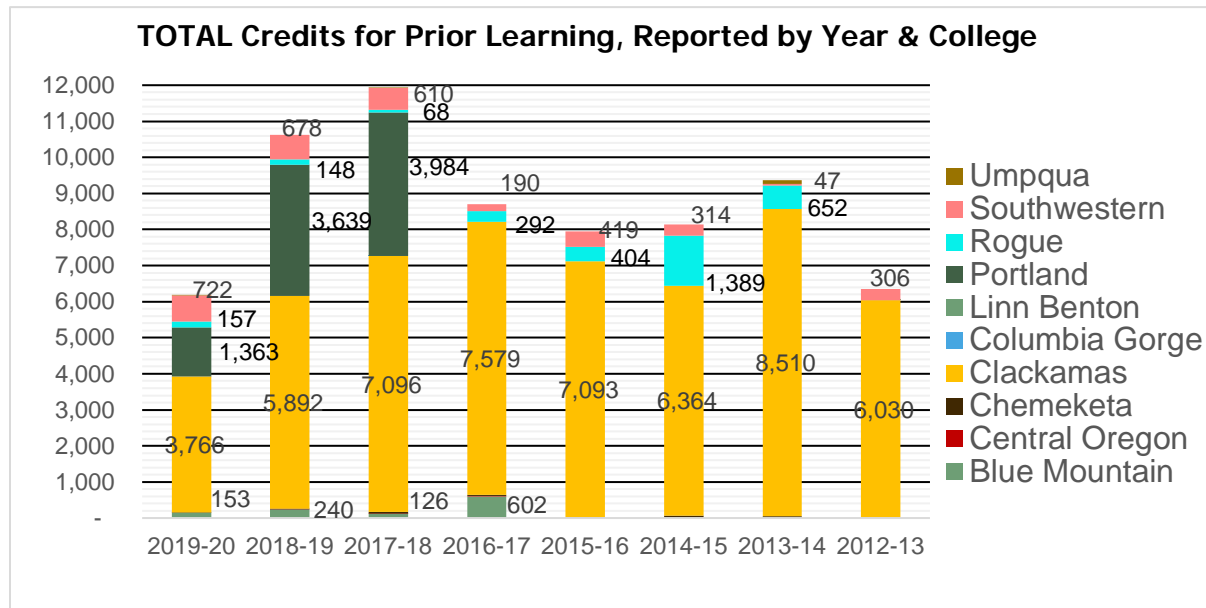
\* Includes remaining CPL forms such as portfolio reviews, challenge exams, industry or professional certifications or licensing (with required exam), or on the job training.

Individual colleges' areas of strength and opportunity in serving students are evident in the data across various forms of CPL. However, and perhaps more importantly at this time, the data as seen through these charts further suggests a lack of standardization across the college community in tracking the CPL achievements of students.

1. Total Credits for Prior Learning.

Clackamas Community College leads in total credits awarded for prior learning with over 52,000 credits, accumulated by sizable numbers in each of the last eight years. Clackamas' total for participating students represents over 54% of all participating students over the last eight years.

However, Clackamas' numbers are significantly influenced by the large number of credits awarded from ACE evaluation of military service, which was 79% of all credits the college awarded. Those with military credits earned an average of 33 credits apiece; however, the remaining students received an average of 8 credits each.

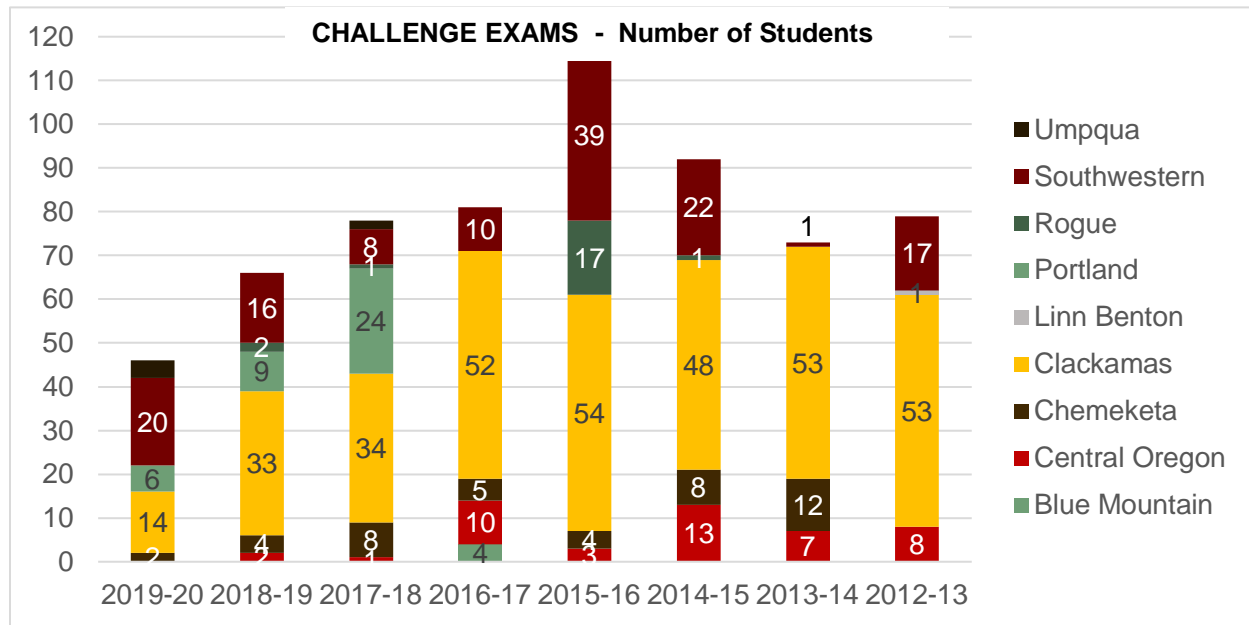
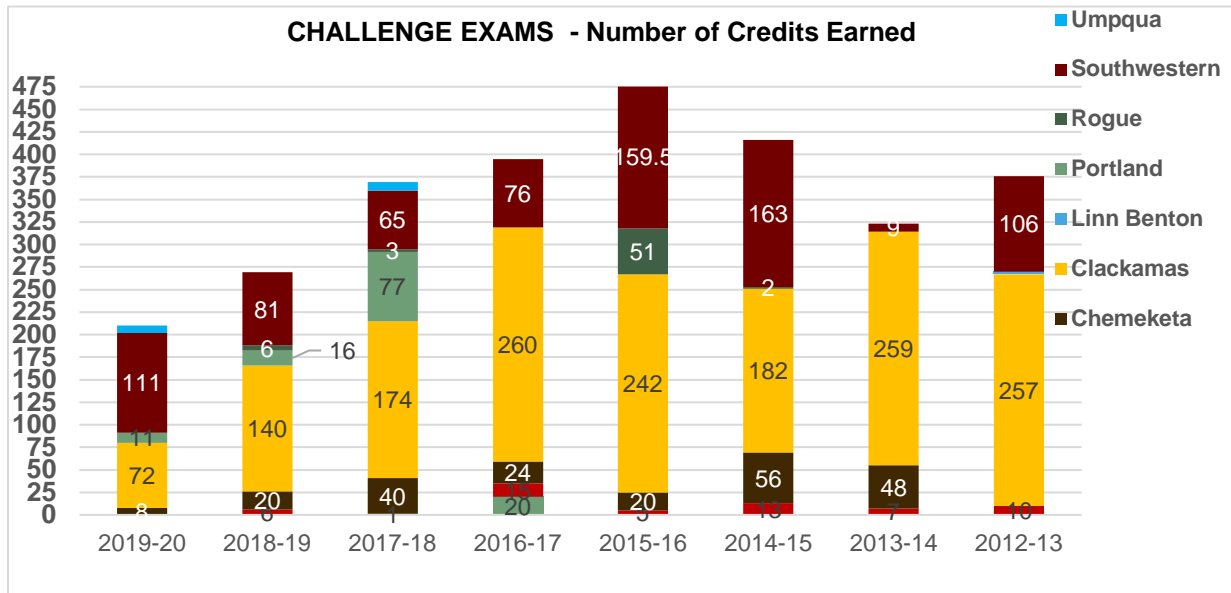


2. Challenge Exams

Challenge exams are the method by which a student may request assessment to determine if their knowledge meets learning outcomes for specific courses. A challenge exam may involve performance, a portfolio assessment, or other testing methods. Clackamas Community College and Southwestern Oregon Community College together represent 75% of the number of students and 83% of the earned credits awarded from successful challenge exams used as a means to earn credit over the last eight years.



Southwestern demonstrated an increasing rate in both the number of credits earned and the number of participating students over the last three years; Clackamas demonstrated a decreasing rate in both categories over the same period.

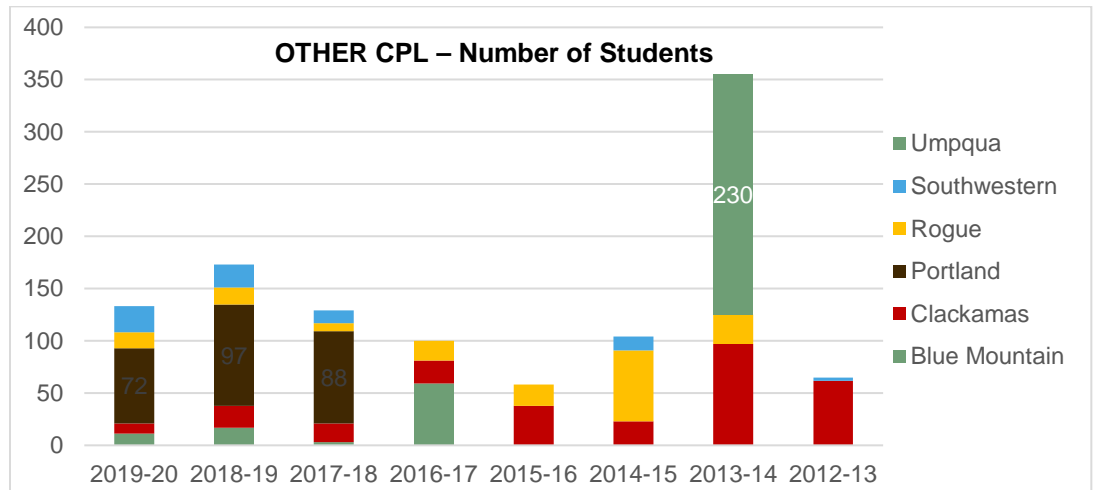
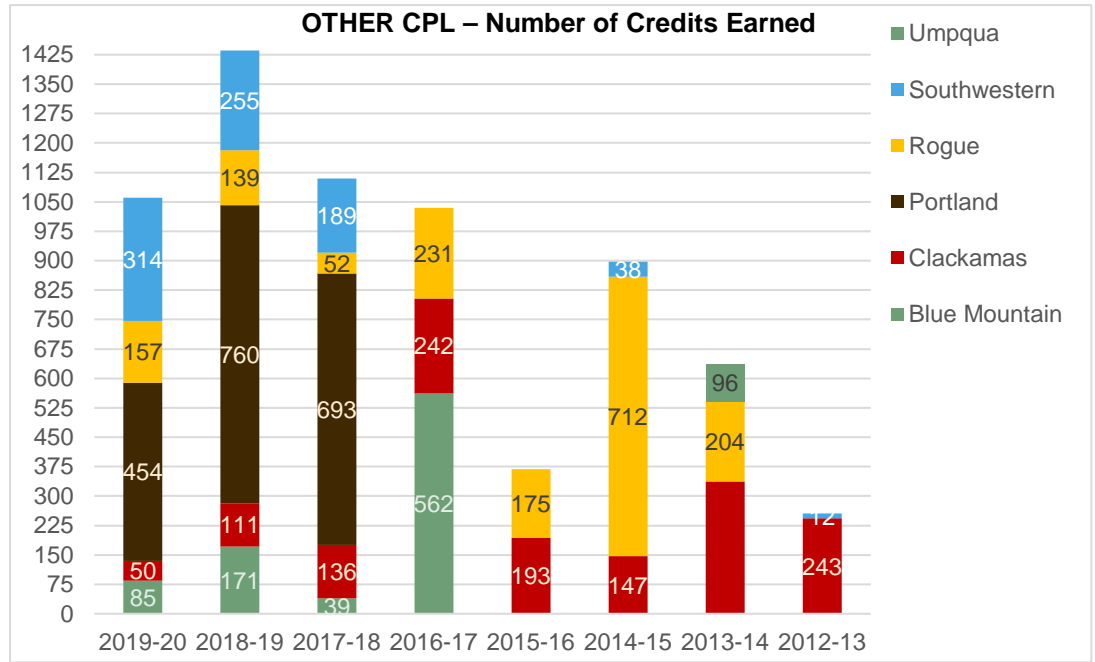


### 3. Other CPL

This category should include only the less frequent CPL types, including professional licenses (i.e., a journeyman’s card) or technical certifications (i.e., software expertise). However, several colleges’ staff have described using this category as a catch-all for a number of CPL types that have assigned codes, such as the IB (International Baccalaureate), AP (Advanced Placement), CLEP (College Level

Exams), and military service equivalent credits. Future work will be needed with colleges to address how to code and enter CPL credits efficiently into their student information systems.

Clackamas and Rogue Community College have been offering this coded category of CPL consistently since 2013-14. However, Portland only started within the last three years and in those three years, PCC has seen a significant increase in credits with a slightly lower rate of increase in the number of students for those years.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

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1. Initiate efforts to increase colleges' shared understanding and application of CPL codes and systems, whether individually or through staff development opportunities.
2. Develop reference material to identify CPL opportunities that potentially exist within Oregon-specific credentials of value, as compiled by the Adult Learning Advisory Committee. Each CPL opportunity should also identify the most appropriate means of assessing achievement of its intended learning outcomes (exam, portfolio, etc.) and include any details or recommendations (e.g., code types, coding processes, or point of data entry) that may help streamline efforts at colleges. Pursuing or awarding CPL credit across Oregon should be a clear, standardized, and documented process, rather than one that is inconsistently used and frequently recreated.
3. As work progresses to simplify student transfer across Oregon institutions, investigate and initiate efforts to also transfer all CPL credit awarded on the basis of an appropriate assessment at the original college or university.
4. Continue assessment of university and college current level of meeting the 2017 CPL Standards relative to website information.
5. Conclude survey tool to assess perceptions of institution's progress on implementation of CPL. Include advising, registrar, chief academic officer and faculty senate chair.

