



TO: Chief Executive Officers
Chief Instructional Officers
Chief Student Services Officers
Academic Senate Presidents

FROM: John Stankas, Vice Chancellor, Educational Services and Support, Academic Affairs, Equitable Student Learning, Experience & Impact Office

RE: Credit for Prior Learning – Updated Guidelines and Reporting Requirements

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide updated guidance on credit for prior learning (CPL) implementation and requirements for reporting due April 15, 2024.

Background

In March 2020, the [California Code of Regulations \(CCR\) title 5, section 55050](#) related to CPL requirements was updated to promote quality, integrity, and equity in the award of credit and to provide more equitable access to programs for students. These revised CPL regulations affirmed consistent and equitable practices that enable students to obtain credit for validated college-level skills and knowledge gained outside of a college classroom.

Guidance released in August 2020 clarified components of the revised CPL regulations and provided recommendations to support local implementation of CPL policy (see [ESS 20-300-001 Guidance and System-wide Policy Advisory for the Approved California Code of Regulations, title 5 section 55050, Credit for Prior Learning \(CPL\), Effective March 20, 2020](#)). Specifically, the memo expanded on the definition of CPL, highlighted the amendments to the CPL title 5 sections, clarified what CPL Assessments may charge a fee and provided some guidance on local policy implementation.

By December 31, 2020, districts certified their compliance with CPL regulations (CCR, title 5 section 55050(n)), submitted their CPL policy language, and confirmed that the policies were included in their college catalog and posted to their websites (see [ESS 20-400-002 Guidelines for Submission of the Credits for Prior Learning \(CPL\) District Policy Certification due December 31, 2020](#)).

Need for Updated Guidance

Since the release of the past guidance memos, inconsistent interpretation and application of title 5 section 55050 has led to questions related to the relationship between CPL and alternative

methods for awarding credit, as well as whether the practice for awarding CPL for area credit is allowable.

In addition, colleges and districts have expressed the need for guidance on the data submission requirements to report findings to the Chancellor’s Office as part of the 3-year deadline to assess CPL policy (CCR title 5, section 55050(l)).

Updated Guidance

Clarifying the Definition of CPL and Alternative Methods for Awarding Credit

CCR Article 5 Alternative Methods of Awarding Credit is comprised of CPL, articulation of high school courses, advanced placement (AP) exams, international baccalaureate (IB) and/or college level examination programs (CLEP). While the new credit for prior learning policy is found in the same article as other traditional forms of alternative methods of awarding credit, it is important to understand those policy provisions are distinct and are separately coded in the Chancellor’s Office Management Information System (COMIS) under data element [SY 02: Student Credit Assessment Method](#). The regulations for awarding credit for standardized exams like AP, IB, and CLEP as a form of prior learning assessment existed before the new CPL policy was established and those regulations remain in effect. These forms of prior learning assessment provide credit for academic learning experiences. In contrast, the new CPL policy provides an opportunity to align learning and skill development that has occurred **outside of the classroom** to course requirements. As memo ESS 20-300-001 clarifies:

Credit for prior learning is college credit awarded for validated college-level skills and knowledge gained outside of a college classroom. Students' knowledge and skills might be gained through experiences such as:

- *Military training*
- *Industry training*
- *State/federal government training*
- *Apprenticeships, internships, work-based learning, or other industry-based experiential learning*
- *Validated volunteer and civic activities (e.g., Peace Corps)*

CPL excludes knowledge and skills already assessed and awarded credit through formal education at regionally accredited in state and out-of-state institutions.

Therefore, in alignment with regulations, colleges should consider AP, IB, and CLEP as alternative forms of awarding credit specifically for academic learning experiences and credit for prior learning as learning and skills development outside of the classroom.

Awarding Credit for Prior Learning for Course Credit and Area Credit

CCR, title 5, section 55050 and policies adopted for CPL require that CPL is awarded for courses in a program or general education requirements but does not specifically identify general education area credit. This is in line with best practices in other states, community college faculty input, and to ensure credit for transfer. CPL for courses rather than general education areas reflects students' learning outcomes and not a general notion of equivalence. Systemwide articulation guidance requires course-to-course articulation for transfer credit, which would support applying CPL to courses accepted for transfer. Also, in line with section 55050(d) and prior guidance, consult the American Council on Education (ACE) credit recommendations when assessing prior learning experience for Joint Services Transcripts. Awarding credit for courses rather than a general education area aligns students' skills and knowledge to those courses leading to a credential or degree.

While the practice of awarding area credit is not noted in the regulations, colleges must have provisions in their CPL administrative policy (see CCR, title 5, section 55050(n)) that describes how the institution confers area credit. When crafting local policies for awarding general education area credit ensure the impact on students is clearly communicated, especially if the area approval is not equivalent to transfer area approval. Extra care should be devoted to student communications, counselor and admissions and records professional development, and published caveats for this situation. If colleges confer general education area credit, they should consider entering into local and regional higher education partnerships through clearly defined memorandums of understanding. Colleges should coordinate locally with administrators, faculty, counselors, articulation officers, veterans' benefits coordinators, and other credit for prior learning personnel to update CPL administrative policy if needed.

Therefore, colleges must award CPL for course credit in alignment with their policy and under specific circumstances may award CPL for general education area credit given local policies, practices, and memorandums of understanding.

Required Action: Reporting

Implemented in August 2021, the [Student Credit for Prior Learning Data Elements \(SY\)](#) incorporated four new data elements into the Chancellor's Office Management Information System (MIS). Due one month following the end of each term, colleges submit one record for each combination of student and course for which a student was assessed for CPL. For more information on the domain and data format, see the [MIS Data Element Dictionary for Student Credit for Prior Learning Data Record](#). This data will help inform the effectiveness of CPL as a strategy to close equity gaps and improve persistence and completion.

In addition to the MIS term data submissions, districts must report findings on their students' qualitative assessments of the CPL policies and procedures to the Chancellor's Office every 3 years (CCR title 5, section 55050(l)). To share your institution's findings, [**click this link and complete the Credit for Prior Learning Report**](#). This report asks for your college's CPL contact, current CPL practices, and a summary of how your college assessed students' perceptions of CPL policies and procedures. See the attachment for a copy of the survey questions. Responses must be received by April 15, 2024.

Additional Resource

Past memos, recordings, and resources can be found in the CPL community of the California Community Colleges Vision Resource Center. In addition, here are some links to more information.

- [Link to the Data Element Dictionary: Student Credit for Prior Learning Data Elements](#)
- [Link to the Credit for Prior Learning Initiative](#)
- [Link to the Credit for Prior Learning Toolkit](#)
- [Link to the Mapping Articulated Pathways project \(formerly the Military Articulation Platform\)](#)

If you have questions, please contact Michael "Billy" Wagner, CPL Specialist at mwagner@cccco.edu.

cc: Dr. Sonya Christian, Chancellor
Dr. Daisy Gonzales, Deputy Chancellor
Dr. Aisha Lowe, Executive Vice Chancellor, Equitable Student Learning, Experience, and Impact
Erin Larson, Dean, Educational Services and Support
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Articulation Officers

Attachment: Credit for Prior Learning Required Reporting

The following questions appear in the Credit for Prior Learning Report due to the Chancellor's Office by April 15, 2024. [Click this link to complete your institution's Credit for Prior Learning Report now.](#)

1. **College Name:**<Drop Down>
2. **Does your college have a CPL Coordinator?** Yes/No
 - a. **CPL Coordinator Information:** First Name, Last Name, Title, Email Address, Phone (optional)
3. **Does your college have a CPL Counselor?** Yes/No
 - a. **CPL Counselor Information:** First Name, Last Name, Title, Email Address, Phone (optional)
4. **Does your college have any other CPL Lead?** Yes/No
 - a. **Other CPL Lead:** First Name, Last Name, Title, Email Address, Phone (optional)
5. **Does your college/district have a CPL Policy?** Yes/No
 - a. **Please upload the district/college CPL policy as a PDF document.** <Upload>
6. **Which types of CPL does your college offer?** (check all that apply)
 - (A) Locally developed assessment by portfolio or other methods
 - (B) Locally developed assessment by exam
 - (C) Advanced Placement (AP)
 - (D) International Baccalaureate (IB)
 - (E) College Level Examination Program (CLEP)
 - (F) Industry certification
 - (G) Military training (excluding CLEP)
 - (H) Other - Write In:
 - (I) Other - Write In:
 - (J) Other - Write In:
 - (K) We do not offer CPL
7. **Does your college award CPL for general education areas, not tied to a specific course?**
Yes/No/Unsure
8. **Does your college have challenges reporting CPL using the existing Management Information System data elements?** Yes/No/Unsure
9. The governing board of each community college district shall review the credit for prior learning policy every three years and report both quantitative and qualitative findings to the Chancellor's Office (CCR, title 5 section 55050 (l)). Please ensure the [quantitative data elements](#) have been submitted through MIS.

Does your college have student-completed qualitative assessments of your CPL policies to report? Yes/No

Potential qualitative components may include student perspectives of the following in relation to your college's CPL policies.

- Awareness of the CPL policies
- Navigability of the CPL policies
- Availability of the various types of CPL
- Timeliness of CPL processing and
- Satisfaction of the CPL policies, both generally and in-reference to the aforementioned components
- CPL Success Stories
- CPL Barrier Stories

a. Please upload a summary of the qualitative assessments by students of your college's CPL policies. <Upload>

10. Please provide any comments on credit for prior learning policies and practices your institution in the section below. <Open response>