



OAKLAND  
COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE

# Credit For Life Experience

*Final Report*

Requested by

The College Academic & Student Services Council  
Oakland Community College

Prepared by  
The Office of Institutional Research  
August 1999

Oakland Community College  
Credit For Life Experience Assessment  
Final Report  
1999

### Introduction

- The following document contains information designed to assist the College Academic & Student Services Council in developing a Credit For Life Experience Assessment Policy. This information was obtained in the manner outline in the *Credit For Life Experience: Preliminary Report* (June 1999), which will be attached to this report.
- This report contains a brief literature review and abstract. Information gathered from community colleges with experiential learning policies is also reported. Organizations and universities were also contacted. There is a final assessment, gathered from notes taken by The College Academic & Student Services Council.

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### Literature Review

- The following is a list and brief abstract of the most recent literature that pertains to experiential learning. Please note that the Office of Institutional Research has these documents available. Copies can be obtained by contacting Mark Woods at 248.615-3759 or call the main office at 248. 471-7746.

Flint, T. (1999). Prior learning assessment: A status report. Assessment and Accountability Forum, Spring 1999.

- This article looks at surveys of 1135 institutions regarding prior learning assessment. Standardized testing is still the most popular form of assessment (CLEP, AP testing, etc.). The article goes on to discuss the idea of CAEL™ credit for life experience through the development of a student portfolio.

Holtzclaw, L. R. (1984). Self-acquired competency: Student participants reaction to the process of crediting learning from life experience, Lifelong Learning.

- This article briefly discusses various positive and negative attitudes held by various students (n=64) at Indiana university in regard to obtaining credit for life experience. Those who received credits had positive attitudes toward the program, while those who received fewer credits generally held rather negative attitudes toward the program. Those who received credits noted an increase in self-esteem. CAEL was mentioned as a service provider.

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**ICPAC Information Series, College credit for past education and life experience,  
Bloomington, IN.**

- This document is designed to provide basic information to students at Indiana University on the process of obtain credits for life experience and prior education. Eight categories of life experience are discussed, designed by J. Bear and M. Bear (Bears' Guide to Earning College Degrees Nontraditionally, 1996). These categories include work; homemaking; volunteer work; non-credit learning; travel; recreational activities and hobbies; reading, viewing, listening; and discussions with experts. Several methods of determination of eligibility are discussed. These include creating a portfolio, standardized tests (CLEP, PEP, GRE, etc.), and prior education (other college, professional certification, workplace training).

**Creating your life's work portfolio: An interactive career and life planning workbook,  
JIST (eds.), 1998. Indianapolis, IN.**

- Comprehensive workbook designed to take a prospective student through the stages of creating a portfolio in preparation for prior learning credits. Students fill out the workbook as they read about various avenues of lifelong learning.

**Ludden, L. L. (1996). Back to school: A college guide for adults, JISTworks, inc., IN.**

- Outlines various avenues toward returning to school. Seems like a motivational piece. Pp. 101-124 discusses prior learning assessment and other methods of obtaining credit without having to take a specific course. A list of proficiency testing centers are listed at the end of the chapter.

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### Contact With Community Colleges

- As noted, there are at least four noted community colleges that employ some form of Credit For Life Experience assessment. These colleges include Grand Rapids Community College, Kellogg, St. Clair, and Lansing. These schools were contacted and asked various questions revolving around how credits are assessed and implemented. It seems from contact with individuals from the various colleges, there seems to be no real sense of institutionalization. Credit is assessed by department chairs and recommendations are made. Credit will then appear on transcripts. Some testing occurs. Below is the individual colleges' policy.

#### Grand Rapids Community College

- Students are given the option of testing out of courses. National tests (CLEP) and GRCC based test (challenge). If successful, then they pay 40% of the total for the credits. Credit appears on transcript. Students pay for each test.
- GRCC does not keep track of these students.

#### Kellogg Community College

- Lifelong Learning not involved with degree completion.  
Offer work seminars such as debt free living, sign language, water aerobics
- Credit for Life Experience—process  
Obtain syllabus  
Assemble proof  
Take to dept. chair  
Chair makes determination
- \$55 processing fee, credit granted is free, however, appears on transcript as credit by exam or credit by experience. There are noted issues with transferability.

#### St. Clair Community College

- Student will take documentation from employers to the department chair. After review (usually in a technical trade), the chair will make a recommendation to the Registrar (Robert Durkee). If credit is approved, it will be placed on transcript as work experience credit and is free of charge.
- For liberal arts cases, CLEP tests would be employed, though this case has not arisen.

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- There is no set policy for credit from experience. This is to maintain flexibility for the individual case.

Lansing Community College

- LCC requires 20 credits taken at LCC before graduation.
- Experiential learning: \$25 fee. Packet is sent to particular department and reviewed. If credit is granted, students pay a flat rate for the credits and it appears on transcript as experiential learning credit.
- Comprehensive Exam: student can take exam for a particular course and if the student passes, s/he will receive credit for the course as if the student
- took the course. Students pay a flat rate for the course.

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### Contact With Experiential Learning Organizations

- The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL). Among other CAEL provides consultation in adult higher education through Consulting Services for Enhancing Adult Learning (CSEAL). Attached to this summary are various documents that can be obtained through their website ([www.cael.org](http://www.cael.org)).
- CAEL provides literature on Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), which is the equivalent to Credit for Life Experience. Tom Flint, Vice-President for Lifelong Learning at CAEL, can be contacted to learn more about PLA and CSEAL's consulting.
- Various documents exist on Prior Learning and Credit for Past Experience. The Indiana Career and Post-secondary Advancement Center (1998) published a document that separates eight categories of life experience:

- work
- home-making
- volunteer work
- non-credit learning
- travel
- recreational activities and hobbies
- reading, viewing and listening
- discussions with experts.

- In addition, there are several ways of validating these experiences for credit, which include:

- Prior learning assessment
- prior learning portfolio
- standardized tests
- non-standardized tests

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Assessment of Area Universities' Acceptance of Experiential Credits

- There are problems associated with credits obtained from life experience. In particular, these credits may prove problematic in transferring to four-year colleges and universities.
- OCC must address this issue. There are two possible solutions:
  1. Place the onus on the student to investigate the transferability of life experience credits
  2. Report credits on transcripts as course credit (without making note of assessment of experiential credit)
- Of course there are problems associated with these solutions. The first solution may make it difficult for students who may not know where they intend to transfer. As it stands Michigan State will not accept any credits unless it is obtained as course credit.
- The second solution raises ethical issues. Is it a problem to universities to not report these credits as life experience credits?
- The following list of colleges represents the universities that Oakland Community College students most often transfer to, according to the Graduate Follow-up Survey (obtained from the IR Department archives).
  1. **Eastern Michigan University**— if course credit is listed with experiential learning noted as the manner in which it was obtained, then EMU requires that the student take the transcript to the department and present an explanation of what experiential learning credits constitute. The department will then make the decision.
  2. **Michigan State University**— will not accept experiential learning credits of any kind.
  3. **Oakland University**—does not accept experiential learning credits.
  4. **Walsh**-- at this point, Walsh does not accept experiential learning credits. May look at the credits if a portfolio analysis was attached (though not at this time).

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5. **University of Michigan (Dearborn)**— will accept experiential credits if the credits are assigned to specific courses and the student obtains an associate's degree. However, the student can only use those credits to obtain a bachelor's degree in General Studies.
6. **Wayne State University**— will only accept credit from courses taken at Oakland Community College

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Credit for Life Experience Final Assessment

- The Committee is not interested in using the portfolio. This effectively voids Sinclair Community College's input on the matter. It would be logical to assume that standardized tests are preferred.
- A seminar format was discussed. It seems almost as time consuming as the portfolio. In fact, a portfolio would be created during this seminar and assessed. The only difference is that the portfolio and assessment would be performed en masse. While this appears convenient for the staff, it may be extremely difficult to gather students who are seeking credit for their life/ work experience together.
- A standardization process was discussed by the committee. Seminar or workshop (like CMU's) allows for subjectivity. A list of courses that one could test out of sounds promising. This allows for a certain number of courses waived and keeps students from debating the decisions made by appointed judges of these portfolios.
- CEU's are interesting, but may not transfer well to universities, as indicated above. Appears to be a lot of work for little credit, which would probably not be appealing to students. Cost seems a valid issue.

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Appendix A

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Preliminary Report  
Including Preliminary Outline of Methods

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  - work
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  - travel
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  - reading, viewing and listening
  - discussions with experts
- In addition, there are several ways of validating these experiences for credit, which include:
  - Prior learning assessment
  - prior learning portfolio
  - standardized tests
  - non-standardized tests
- Other documents suggest a course in which adults document prior experiences, then apply these experiences for college credit.

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- According to CAEL, there are several community colleges in Michigan that have successfully implemented a Lifelong Learning program. This includes Grand Rapids Community College, Kellogg Community College, St. Clair County Community College, and Lansing Community College.

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Preliminary Outline of Methods  
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Credit for Life Experience  
Outline of Methods

In looking at the idea of a Credit for Life Experience program, there are a number of avenues to follow. At this point, it would be beneficial for Oakland Community College to look at the blueprints from other community colleges. The following is a brief description of the research methods:

1. Literature review—Through various databases (e.g. ERIC) and academic journals, identify those articles that deal with Credit for Life Experience. It is understood that various programs and researchers will have variations to the same theme (i.e. Credit for Life), however, it should be relatively simple to identify any parallels and is necessary to examine them.
2. Identify those community colleges (or any adult continuing education or higher education program) that has instituted a Credit for Life Experience program. Once identified, these colleges will be contacted. Questions to be asked would include:

How do you handle credit to those individuals who have achieved success in the field they are now trying to obtain a degree in?

What are some of the problems/ issues you run into with this program?

What are the relative costs/ benefits to your institution? The students?

How do your Credit for Life Experience students transfer into other institutions? Are there problems with the life experience credits received when transferring to a larger school? Do you have any kind of agreements with a local institution with your program?

What we would like to discover is how the program was implemented, what kind of problems occur, what are the benefits to the school and to the students, and any costs that might not have been foreseen.

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3. Contact organizations and ask them for recommendations on how things work (e.g. CLEP). This will provide us with further background and more insight on how to implement this program.
4. Investigate how area institutions accept these programs. Not only are community colleges contacted, but a number of other colleges, especially in the area (e.g. Eastern Michigan University, Oakland University, Wayne State University) to see what kind of support we can expect from this program.