

# **Prior Learning Assessment: An Opportunity for LIS Education**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Higher education continues to experience challenges arising from changing demographics and perceptions of the value of higher education. Prospective students want flexibility in how they pursue higher education. Programs must adapt to meet the changing needs and expectations of the audiences they serve. This is equally true for programs offered by library and information science schools. In an increasingly competitive educational environment where traditional student populations are shrinking, higher education institutions must be agile and proactive (Grawe, 2021).

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) or Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) recognize the students may bring knowledge and skills that are not documented as credit-bearing learning experiences from higher education institutions. The idea of PLA and CPL is not new. The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) (<https://www.cael.org/>) has advocated for PLA and CPL for more than 40 years. Learning can take place through nontraditional instructional outlets. Work-related and military experiences also provide learning opportunities for which evidence may be available. Central to PLA and CPL is rigorous assessment. This assessment can take multiple forms, including portfolio evaluation, examinations for learning achievement, or equivalency determination of non-credit learning experiences. A recent study on PLA for adult learners concluded that PLA is associated with better student outcomes, including higher credential completion, cost savings and time savings (Klein-Collins et al., 2020). The panel topic addresses the conference theme by focusing on learning, practice and competencies.

Many students applying to undergraduate or graduate programs at LIS schools bring work or non-credit experiences in areas such as information technology, librarianship or archival studies that are germane to the areas they plan to study. Should these applicants be provided the opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge they bring for admission consideration, course exemptions or credit recognition?

The objective of this juried panel is to begin a dialogue on the place of PLA in library and information science programs. After a brief introduction to PLA concepts, the panelists will

discuss PLA initiatives in their schools. This will be followed by a discussion with the audience during the second half of the panel on questions that arise when considering the adoption of PLA. These questions include:

- 1) What are the potential benefits of, and concerns with, offering PLA options to prospective undergraduate and graduate students?
- 2) Which programs offered by LIS schools lend themselves to PLA?
- 3) How much credit should be provided to students for demonstrating prior learning?
- 4) What are the most effective approaches for assessing prior learning?
- 5) Can PLA make LIS programs more inclusive, and can it serve as an effective recruitment tool?

The following presenters will participate on the panel:

Dietmar Wolfram (Moderator), Head of School and Associate Dean, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's School of Information Studies (SOIS) will provide a brief overview of PLA and methods of assessment.

Louise Spiteri, Professor, School of Information Management, Dalhousie University will discuss how Dalhousie's School of Information Management (SIM) moved from an ad hoc process to an official PLA process for admission assessment for their Master of Information (MI) program, and how this has allowed SIM to broaden the students entering the program. The presentation will also discuss the experience of students who have entered this way.

Sarah Beth Nelson, Assistant Professor, School of Information Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, has led the University of Wisconsin System School Library Education Consortium where students can submit a portfolio to demonstrate prior learning in order to be exempted from three of the courses required for school library licensure.

Chad Zahrt, Assistant Dean, School of Information Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee will outline how SOIS has been providing elective credit for non-credit workshops in relevant information technology areas to incoming students in the Bachelor of Science in Information Science and Technology program.

Tomas A. Lipinski, Professor, School of Information Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, will describe how SOIS is addressing the challenge of recognizing the knowledge of incoming MLIS students who bring substantial experience working in the field and how this may be assessed.

## References

Grawe, N. D. (2021). *The agile college: How institutions successfully navigate demographic changes*. JHU Press.

Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes*. Revised. Council for Adult and Experiential Learning.

<https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Report%20CAEL%20WICHE%20-%20October%202020.pdf>

## **ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS**

education programs/schools; curriculum; standards.

## **AUTHOR KEYWORDS**

prior learning assessment; nontraditional students; undergraduate education; graduate education.

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