



Adult-Serving Programs and Policies at New England's Institutions

Results from NEBHE's Guide to Adult-Serving Colleges and Universities Survey: **Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) and Transfer Policies**

Adults over 25 years old represent approximately one quarter (25.6%) of New England's enrolled undergraduate population. However, New England's colleges and universities are largely perceived as traditionally structured, serving students aged 18-24. While four-year institutions, in particular, are geared more toward younger students, many institutions in the region are implementing programs and policies to better serve adult learners who hold additional professional, personal and familial responsibilities.

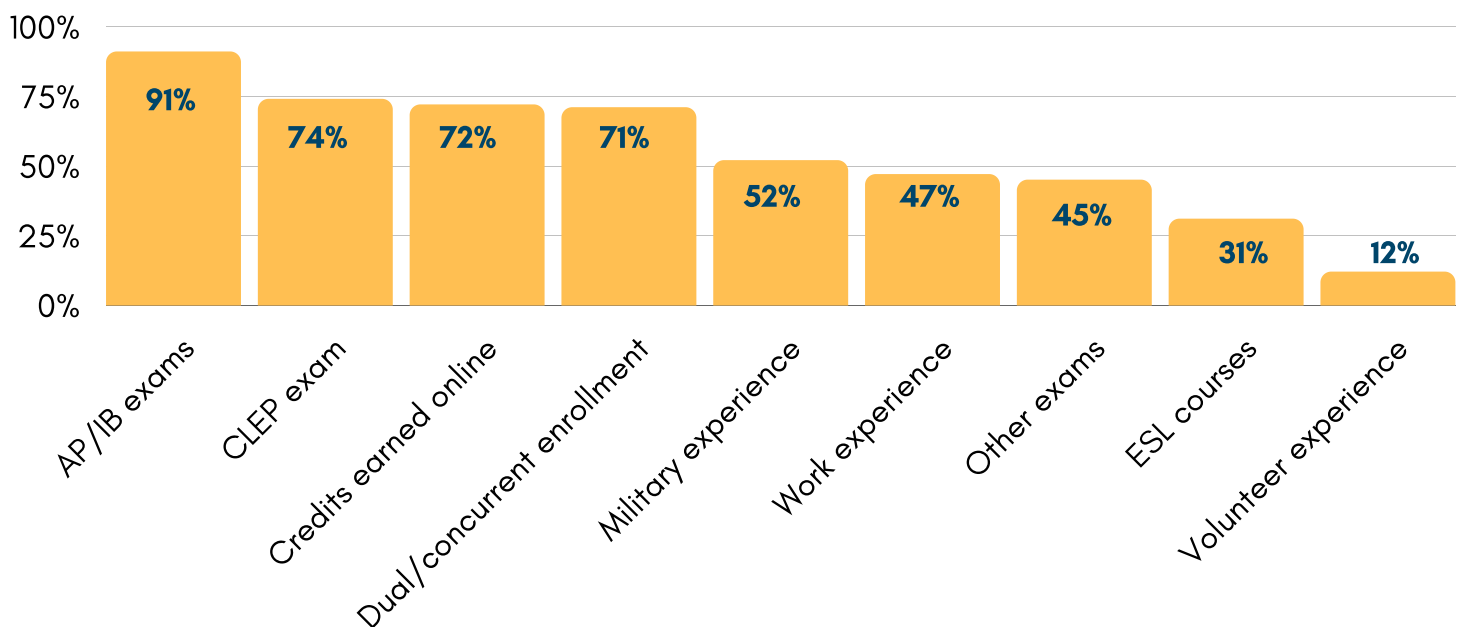
In August 2021, NEBHE surveyed the region's nearly 185 undergraduate institutions about programs, policies and services available to our adult learner population. This was the second iteration of what will be a biennial survey. So far, 73 institutions have responded (a near 40% response rate).

Below are data related to **prior learning assessment (PLA) and transfer policies**. While these items are also available to traditionally-aged undergraduate students, they provide additional security for adult learners juggling work, life and academic commitments.

T R A N S F E R

98% of responding institutions have a minimum grade requirement to transfer and just over half (52%) require higher grades for individuals transferring into specific programs/majors (i.e. engineering).

Aside from college credits from another institution, what kinds of credit do institutions in New England accept from individuals who wish to transfer?



PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT (PLA)

48 (42%) of responding institutions track how many students utilize PLA. Of these institutions, only 14 contributed to the below data.

What is PLA?

PLA refers to any method by which institutions assess incoming students' prior learning experiences and award academic credit as a result

Academic year 2020-21

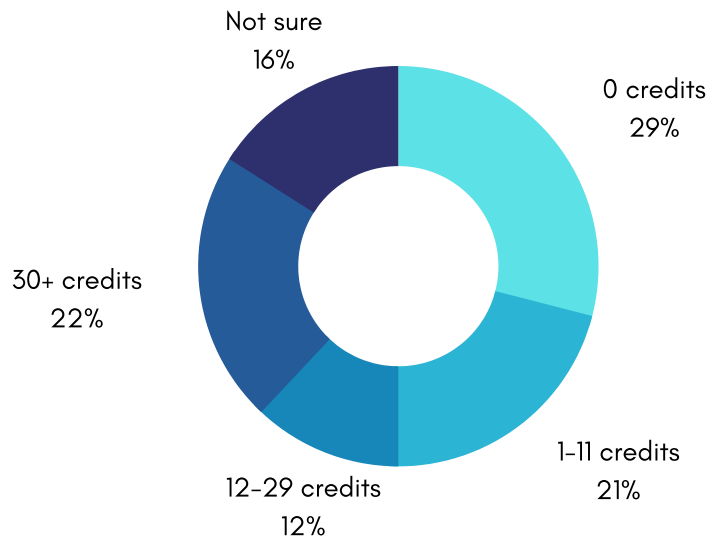
Average number of students who utilized PLA <i>Per institution</i>	165
Average number of credits awarded per student <i>Per institution</i>	9.3
Median number of total credits awarded through PLA <i>Across all responding institutions</i>	2,304.6

OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH

Only 18% (7) of responding institutions provide financial aid for fees associated with PLA. Offering waivers, discounts or scholarships to help cover the cost of PLA fees could significantly increase the amount of incoming students who utilize PLA. For reference, some institutions in New England charge an assessment fee (can be up to \$500) as well as a fee for every credit awarded (can be up to \$100 per credit). For adult learners with extensive work and life experience, receiving financial assistance for PLA fees could mean the difference between paying for a full credential pathway and accelerating their time to credential while reducing costs.

ANALYSIS

In spring 2020, NEBHE, in partnership with Maguire Associates, administered the Adult Learner Survey to over 2,000 adults in the region, representative of each state. The survey demonstrated that very few individuals (8%) have experience with PLA despite the fact that the majority of respondents had earned some college credit in the past. The ability to apply previous college experience, in combination with competencies gained through life and work, could drastically shorten adults time to degree. In fact, 1 in 2 respondents, when educated about broader recognition of learning policies, stated that they'd be more likely to consider pursuing a credential.



Supporting this conclusion, the Adult Learner Survey also asked whether broadened PLA policies and programs that would more broadly recognize learning experiences, no matter where they occurred, would affect respondents' future college decisions. Over half of respondents (54%) said they would be more likely to consider attending college in their state if their learning experiences (i.e. from work, volunteering, life) were eligible to be assessed for college credit. Broadened prior learning assessment policies, therefore, would yield increased enrollment, shortened time to credential and more accessible and affordable pathways to advanced careers. Moreover, adults' receiving credit for their work experience signals validation and value from the institution. For more about how broader recognition of prior learning can benefit New England's adult learners, explore NEBHE's [All Learning Counts New England](#) initiative.

Did you know...

A few colleges and universities in New England already do award credit for non-academic experiences through institution-specific assessment programs or through more traditional methods like portfolio courses, challenge exams or faculty evaluations. Most commonly, adult-focused institutions and completion colleges like **Husson University, Bay Path University and Charter Oak State College** work with applicants to translate competencies gained outside of an academic setting to college credit.

[See more survey results here!](#)

[Explore NEBHE's Adult Learner Fact Sheets here](#)