



UTAH SYSTEM OF
HIGHER EDUCATION

GENERAL REPORT

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Annual Report on Credit for Prior Learning at USHE Degree-Granting Institutions (2021-22)

The Utah Board of Higher Education has adopted an ambitious strategic plan to increase the number of Utahns accessing higher education, earning a credential, and being positioned for meaningful careers, productive lives, and engaged citizenship. An important completion tactic in that plan is focused on helping students earn college credit for learning they may have acquired outside of traditional academic settings so that they can move efficiently through their degree programs without taking courses covering knowledge and skills they already have mastered. Prior learning may have occurred through participation in employer training programs, military service, independent study, or non-collegiate courses designed to help students pass standardized assessments of college-level knowledge and skills. Ensuring that students can earn credit for prior learning is also an affordability tool since students do not have to pay tuition for courses they earn credit for through prior learning assessments (PLA). Credit for prior learning is also a priority for the Utah Legislature, as reflected in [Utah Code 53B-16-107](#), which asks the Utah System of Higher Education and its institutions to standardize the awarding of credit for prior learning across all eight degree-granting institutions.¹

[Utah Code 53B-16-109](#)² and [Board Policy R472](#) also require each institution to provide an annual report to the Board of Higher Education on each form of prior learning assessment utilized and the total amount of credit for prior learning each institution provides to students. [Utah Code 53B-16-107](#)¹ additionally requires the Board to report a specific subsection of credit for prior learning annually, the number of credits awarded for military service and training by each institution of higher education, to the Department of Veterans and Military Affairs.

In accordance with these requirements and practices, the degree-granting institutions within the Utah System of Higher Education submitted their data on the number of students awarded credit for prior learning and the number of credits they earned during the 2021-2022 academic year to the Office of the Commissioner. The institutions also reported on their efforts to implement other requirements of state code, Board policy, and the strategic plan tactic and their plans to increase the visibility, transferability, and efficiency of credit for prior learning within the System. During the 2022 academic year, students

¹ Utah State Legislature, Utah Code 53B-16-107, Credit for military service and training–Notification–Transferability–Reporting, <https://le.utah.gov/xcode/Title53B/Chapter16/53B-16-S107.html>.

² Utah State Legislature, Utah Code 53B-16-109, Interstate reciprocity agreement regarding postsecondary distance education courses, <https://le.utah.gov/xcode/Title53B/Chapter16/53B-16-S109.html>.

earned approximately 228,000 credits through prior learning assessments, saving them an estimated \$93,934,841.63 in tuition and fees.

Principles of the Board's Credit for Prior Learning Policy

Certain key principles underlie the Board's policy on credit for prior learning, including:

1. **Meaningful application of credit:** The Board intends for credits awarded for prior learning to count meaningfully toward degree programs. Prior learning should be reflected on students' transcripts as equivalent credit to specific courses so that the credit can apply toward major coursework, general education, prerequisite fulfillment, or other requirements.
2. **College-level competencies:** Credit is only granted for assessments that measure college-level competencies, as determined by college faculty (either within USHE or national pools of faculty), that are aligned with the essential learning outcomes of specific courses as determined by USHE Faculty Major Committees.
3. **Standardization and transferability:** Wherever possible, course alignment for specific prior learning assessments should be to a specific course so students receive the same credit at all USHE degree-granting institutions. For the most commonly used learning assessments, Faculty Major Committees determine the minimum scores required to earn credit and the commonly numbered courses and credit amounts that students will receive across the System. Credit earned through prior learning assessments is transferable between all USHE degree-granting institutions.
4. **Multiple assessment options:** Students have access to multiple routes for earning credit for prior learning, including:
 - a. Standardized national exams like the Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), College Level Examination Program (CLEP), and military exams (DSST, DD4, etc.)
 - b. Institutionally-designed course challenge exams
 - c. Workplace training evaluations and licensures
 - d. Portfolio assessments or individualized assessments of students' work
5. **Transparency and access:** Information about options for earning credit for prior learning should be accessible on institutional websites, via advisors, USHE's website, and communications with the Utah State Board of Education, high school counselors, and Utah College Advising Corps (UCAC) advisers. As the faculty committees determine the alignment of exam scores with commonly numbered courses, the Commissioner's office updates information for institutions' chief academic officers, admissions offices, registrars, and other groups. They also publish exam equivalencies online for students and in the Utah Transfer Guide, share them with the Utah State Board of Higher Education, high school and college adviser organizations, and in professional development webinars.
6. **Affordability:** Institutions do not charge students tuition for the course credits they receive through prior learning assessments and may only charge minimal fees to cover the costs of

individualized assessments. (The costs for national standardized exams are determined by the companies providing the exams.)

7. **Shared efforts:** Wherever possible, USHE degree-granting institutions will work together to construct credit for prior learning policies, create and share professional development for faculty and staff, design shared assessment and intake tools for students, and, if possible, determine a process for sharing a pool of faculty assessors.

Credit Earned for Prior Learning within the System

Systemwide, around 31,573 students earned more than 227,958 credits for prior learning during the 2022 academic year at USHE degree-granting institutions. This includes credit earned through standardized exams, personal portfolios, work experience, and other types of assessments. Likely, other credit for prior learning was also earned but not reported as such because all institutions are just beginning to determine how to establish data collection techniques. For example, some academic departments grant credit for work completed in an occupational capacity in conjunction with conventional coursework, a form of assessment that registrars may not know is occurring at their institutions.

This is a decrease of 1,778 students receiving credit for prior learning and a decline of 26,228 credits awarded from the previous academic year. This pattern was anticipated in the 2021 academic year report, as the number of Utah high school students taking Concurrent Enrollment courses rather than Advanced Placement (AP) or other options increased. In the 2022 academic year, 46,155 students earned 341,155 credits through the Concurrent Enrollment program, an increase of 2,239 students and 17,406 credits from the previous year.³

Nationally, the impact of the coronavirus pandemic also resulted in fewer students taking exams and in students earning lower scores on standardized exams in 2021-22 than they did in previous years. According to the Utah State Board of Education and ACT, 3,401 more students took the ACT in 2021 than in 2020, but composite scores declined from 20.6 to 19.9.⁴ While the state report on patterns in AP scores for 2022 has not yet been released, it is also expected to show a decline in the number of Utah students awarded college credit for AP scores and the total amount of college credits awarded for AP scores.⁵ Utah State University is the only institution reporting an increase in students receiving credit for prior learning and in the total number of credits received from 2020-21 to 2021-22. All other institutions saw a decline in the number of students awarded credit and in the total number of credits awarded in 2021-22 compared to 2020-21.

³ Concurrent Enrollment reports data one year later than our data for national exam in order to conform with IPEDS data reports required by the U.S. Department of Education.

⁴ Utah Average ACT Score Drops in 2022, but Still Tops National Average, October 12, 2022. <https://schools.utah.gov/file/ae9fdc48-7d39-4bed-937b-9dcb9740a83a>.

⁵ National and state AP statistics are released one year later than ACT scores.

Total # of Students Receiving Credit & Total Credits Awarded, 2020-21 & 2021-22 Academic Year				
Institution	Students Receiving Credit 2020-21	Students Receiving Credit 2021-22	Total Credits Awarded 2021-22	Total Credits Awarded 2022-23
SLCC	1,804	1,259	12,555	12,413
Snow	956	831	4,760	3,654
SUU	1,714	1,678	14,769	10,718
U of U	5,070	4,570	62,521	54,531
USU	10,920	12,538	66,490	67,629
Utah Tech	799	720	5,514	5,114
UVU	9,395	7,766	65,299	55,250
WSU	2,693	2,211	22,278.5	18,649.5
Total	33,351	31,573	254,186.5	227,958.5

The majority of credit for prior learning that students receive comes from national standardized exams such as AP, CLEP, IB, etc. In addition to these traditional national exams, USHE awarded 4,035 students 40,956 credits for equivalency college work completed in third-party certifications, institutional challenge exams, national certifications, foreign language proficiency assessments, and Excelsior College and Thomas Edison State College examinations.

Many students earn between nine and 18 foreign language credits due to learning a foreign language. USHE institutions use the Brigham Young University Foreign Language Aptitude Test, the most commonly administered throughout the United States, to assess language aptitude. The number of USHE students seeking credits for foreign languages will likely continue to grow from year to year because of the increasing number of young men and women serving missions for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Major committees and individual degree-granting institutions have reviewed the Excelsior and Thomas Edison exams. These exams are not accepted in a standardized way across the System because the exam content and rigor of the courses are generally considered inferior to AP, IB, CLEP, and college coursework in USHE. Degree-granting institutions award credit after the specific course content and individual student assignments are reviewed by appropriate faculty members in the discipline on a case-by-case basis, similar to a portfolio assessment.

Credit Awarded through Standardized National Exams, 2022 Academic Year								
Institution	AP: Students	AP: Credits	IB: Students	IB: Credits	CLEP: Students	CLEP: Credits	ACT/SAT: Students	ACT/SAT: Credits
SLCC	727	9711	7	113	103	453	254	762
Snow	132	937	9	188	4	18	634	1902
SUU	616	5682	3	90	18	125	687	2460
U of U	2246	41178	102	2856	21	87	2009	6027
USU	6565	45825	41	377	60	282	4688	14064
Utah Tech	380	3403	3	59	9	33	260	777
UVU	1954	18966.5	14	190	34	220	3491	10632
WSU	724	8283	7	136	16	163	777	2331
Total	13,344	133,985.5	186	4,009	265	1,381	12,800	38,955

Experiential Credit, 2022 Academic Year						
Institution	Language Students	Language Credits	Certification Students	Certification Credits	Challenge Exam Students	Challenge Exam Credits
SLCC	20	192	14	246	16	82
Snow	50	596	0	0	0	0
SUU	158	2188	0	0	30	99
U of U	71	922	113	3390	3	10
USU	782	3152	0	0	158	617
Utah Tech	57	728	2	6	0	0
UVU	544	5132	399	7356	971	6688.5
WSU	221	2310	92	1144	0	0
Total	1,903	15,220	618	12,136	1,178	7,496.5

Other National Exams, 2022 Academic Year						
Institution	National Certification Students	National Certification Credits	Excelsior College Students	Excelsior College Credits	Thomas Edison Students	Thomas Edison Credits
SLCC	0	0	0	0	0	0
Snow	0	0	0	0	0	0
SUU	0	0	0	0	0	0
U of U	0	0	0	0	0	0
USU	0	0	0	0	0	0
Utah Tech	0	0	0	0	0	0
UVU	0	0	2	30	4	45
WSU	14	72.5	0	0	0	0
Total	14	72.5	2	30	4	45

Military Credit

[Utah Code 53B-16-107](#) outlines specific procedures for students to receive credit for military training and service. It states: "An institution of higher education ... shall provide written notification to each student applying for admission that the student is required to meet with a college counselor in order to receive credit for military service and training as recommended by a postsecondary accreditation agency or association designated by the Board if:

- a. credit for military service and training is requested by the student; and
- b. the student has met with an advisor at an institution of higher education ... at which the student intends to enroll to discuss applicability of credit to program requirements, possible financial aid implications, and other factors that may impact attainment of the student's educational goals."¹

A student may present a military transcript to a USHE institution of higher education for evaluation to determine the applicability of credit to the student's program of study. Once assessed by one USHE institution, the credit should be transferrable to the other degree-granting institutions.

The number of students seeking military credit for course equivalency work increased by almost 15 times in 2021-22 compared with the previous year: 552 students earned 7,771 credits in 2021-22 compared to 36 students earning 628 credits in 2020-21. This number can be variable because it measures students who earn military credits in cohorts and depends on how many servicemen and servicewomen are in cohorts on a year-to-year basis.

Military Credit								
Institution	Joint Service Transcript Students	Joint Service Transcript Credits	DD214 Students	DD214 Credits	METC Students	METC Credits	DSST: Students	DSST: Credits
SLCC	83	755	3	3	1	9	0	0
Snow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SUU	8	74	0	0	0	0	0	0
U of U	3	53	2	8	0	0	0	0
USU	104	670	0	0	0	0	1	3
Utah Tech	7	86	0	0	0	0	0	0
UVU	257	5649	0	0	0	0	1	3
WSU	25	83	35	169	0	0	3	9
Total	487	7,370	40	180	1	9	5	15

Portfolio assessments

Students who presented portfolios for credit increased by 25% over last year, but the number remains low. In addition, most of the portfolio credit awarded was not for prior learning but for work done while students were already enrolled in college courses. Creating shared processes and assessments for portfolios will be one of the top priorities of the Prior Learning Committee in the coming year, which should significantly benefit adult students. The committee will also examine shared work around assessments of occupationally-based learning. In states such as Texas and Tennessee, where credit for prior learning has been awarded regularly for non-traditional students, there is a great deal of encouragement and cooperation with employers who see the benefits of higher education for students without college training or who dropped out of college and entered the workforce before completion.

Portfolio Assessments, 2022 Academic Year		
Institution	Portfolio Students	Portfolio Credits
SLCC	22	22
Snow	2	13
SUU	158	1586.5
U of U	0	0
USU	0	0
Utah Tech	2	22
UVU	0	0
WSU	0	0
Total	204	1,643.5

Technical College Articulations

Granting credits for programs completed at technical colleges is another form of credit for prior learning that helps students move into degree pathways. With the merger of the technical colleges and the degree-granting institutions into one System, the Board is transitioning technical colleges from clock hour to credit hour models and working out course and program alignments to allow for standardized, systemwide articulations in the near future. In addition, the creation of common transfer pathways at degree-granting institutions, articulation of course content between degree-granting institutions and technical colleges, and the use of common course numbering system will increase the amount of technical college credit recognized by degree-granting institutions as transfer credit instead of credit for prior learning. Credits articulated into degree-granting institutions from technical colleges increased by 391 from the 2021 academic year.

Technical College Articulations, 2022 Academic Year		
Institution	Technical College Students	Technical College Credits
SLCC	9	65
Snow	0	0
SUU	0	0
U of U	0	0
USU	139	2639
Utah Tech	0	0
UVU	95	338
WSU	297	6991
Total	531	6,991

Key actions in the 2022 academic year in support of the Board's Strategic Plan

1. **Ongoing faculty work to align standardized exam assessments with commonly numbered courses within the System.** One of the first requirements of the new state code and the Board's strategic plan was for institutions to standardize the minimum scores required to earn a specific number of credits in commonly numbered courses across all degree-granting institutions. The labor-intensive work to align all AP, IB, CLEP, and DSST exams was completed by USHE Faculty Major Committees in various disciplines during the 2020 and 2021 academic years. However, based on additional information for a handful of existing exams from organizations like the College Board and the International Baccalaureate program and the introduction of some new exams, Faculty Major Committees continued to review exams and establish minimum scores and credits awarded for commonly numbered courses aligned to them. This year, the Faculty Major Committees also began evaluating Cambridge Exams, an international program similar to AP and IB, because various Utah high schools are starting to incorporate Cambridge Exams into their high school curriculum.
2. **Systemwide training for key institutional faculty, staff, and administrators (including admissions, academic, and transfer advisors) and work on developing institutional prior learning initiative strategies.**

In May 2022, Utah Valley University hosted a full-day professional development and collaboration conference on credit for prior learning on behalf of the USHE Prior Learning Committee. Each institution brought a team of faculty, staff, and administrators from multiple offices on campus who worked together on their institutional credit for prior learning plans. Leaders from the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning and the Competency-Based Education Network led discussions on best practices for increasing

the number of students taking advantage of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) opportunities and getting faculty, staff, administrators, and students engaged in the PLA process.

Following the conference, the USHE Prior Learning Committee reflected on areas identified in the conference where collective action and shared services are needed to increase outreach and improve the quality of PLA within the System and at the institutional level. Those joint efforts will be the focus of their work in the Academic Year 2023 and are listed in the Next Steps section.

3. **Update to the USHE Credit for Prior Learning Handbook.** Based on the outcomes of the UVU PLA Conference and recommendations from the Prior Learning Committee, the Academic Affairs Team in the Commissioner's office updated the USHE PLA Handbook, which contains a review of policies, procedures, and best practices for faculty, staff, and administration in all aspects of PLA work. CAOs and members of the Prior Learning Committee reviewed the Handbook.

4. **Institutional Policy Implementation and Training**

- *Establishing or modifying existing policy or adjusting procedures for credit for prior learning.* All degree-granting institutions have created an institutional PLA policy.
 - Utah Tech, Southern Utah University, Utah Valley University, and Salt Lake Community College have new policies that are either complete or in the revision process.
 - The University of Utah, Weber State University, and Utah State University have taken existing procedures and worked to streamline and simplify processes for students, faculty, and staff who administer PLA, making the process less cumbersome.
 - Snow College created a PLA assessment course to help students identify their areas of prior learning and prepare portfolios for assessment by faculty teams. They also created a portfolio evaluation plan so students can seek credit for prior learning by preparing and presenting portfolios to faculty evaluators.
 - Southern Utah University is piloting programs in computer science and aviation (where many adult learners have learned industry skills that enable them to earn credit for prior learning). They hope this will remove barriers and streamline PLA practices that benefit the university.
 - Weber State University is focusing on advisor training so that students not only have written information available but have experts trained on spotting opportunities for credit for prior learning in student backgrounds. Weber is also dropping fees to simplify the PLA process.
- *Streamlining existing PLA processes*
 - Several institutions are working with IT offices to streamline PLA's application and information-gathering processes. The larger universities (U of U, USU, WSU, UVU) have a greater capacity to consider ways to make the process electronic, and they will

be sharing their findings with all other institutions. As forms and information on PLA become automated, it is hoped that computers will help university offices identify students with experiences that could earn academic credit.

- Almost all institutions are working more deliberately to identify PLA opportunities in the day-to-day work of college offices: admissions, advising, registrar's offices, and academic departments.
- Some institutions are adding staff to perform PLA duties. Salt Lake Community College has added a permanent director position for PLA. Other institutions have added staff to facilitate greater student outreach through advising and admissions, particularly in identifying students who may benefit from PLA opportunities.
- Nearly all institutions are working to provide better guidance and training to faculty in portfolio evaluation.
- Finally, almost all institutions have an institutional Prior Learning Committee established by their chief academic officer. Representatives on these committees include staff from admissions, advising, registrar's offices, military affairs offices, adult learner offices, student services, and faculty from academic departments. CAO representatives chair these committees.
- *Institutional PLA websites*
 - Most institutions have vastly improved their PLA websites in the past academic year.
 - Some institutions have included assessment checklists to aid students in the PLA process. They have included details on portfolio preparation, forms to request CPL review, appeal decisions, and provided contact information for individuals who can assist students in all aspects of the prior learning assessment process.
 - In addition, the website upgrades have led to much clearer catalog sections on PLA.
 - A few institutions have used electronic tracking to determine how often the PLA site is accessed. They have learned that their website may still be too obscure for students. This has prompted them to find ways to market their website better so students have greater access to PLA information. It also underscores the importance of academic advisors being the first line of PLA information as they get to know and encourage students in face-to-face and virtual meetings.
 - *Institutional PLA websites:*
 - Salt Lake Community College: faculty.slcc.edu/provost/curriculum/cpl.aspx
 - Snow College: snow.edu/offices/registrar/credit_prior_learning.html
 - Southern Utah University: suu.edu/credits/
 - University of Utah: admissions.utah.edu/information-resources/prior-learning-credit/
 - Utah State University: usu.edu/admissions/information/credits
 - Utah Tech University: academics.utahtech.edu/prior-learning-assessment/
 - Utah Valley University: uvu.edu/cpl
 - Weber State University: weber.edu/Records/prior_learning.html

- *Faculty and staff training*
 - Utah State University emphasized its "Front and Center" speaker series to inform and train faculty and staff on the needs and processes of PLA. They also utilized a weekly newsletter to send frequent updates and helpful information about PLA.
 - Most institutions are making special efforts to train academic advisors in PLA since they are the individuals who have the greatest access to students regarding identifying relevant life experiences that could translate into credit for prior learning.
 - Utah Valley University leaders from the Provost's Office visited each academic department to encourage and train faculty in PLA best practices.
 - Snow College used its fall back-to-school conference to focus on PLA training.
 - Salt Lake Community College provided specialized training for deans, associate deans, department chairs, student affairs offices, admissions offices, and orientation teams. It is organizing all offices and academic departments to create rubrics for assessing PLA at each appropriate level.
 - Utah Tech will send a team to the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning meetings to better learn PLA best practices and duties.

Next Steps and Deliverables for the 2023 Academic Year

The Commissioner's office, the Council of Presidents, and the Prior Learning Committee have set the following targets for the 2023 academic year:

- On January 13, 2023, the Board of Higher Education approved a request from the Council of Presidents to explore course-sharing platforms and a shared intake tool to help students identify options for earning credit for prior learning. These tools will help the institutions create a pool of faculty subject matter experts interested in performing portfolio assessments for individual students, work-based learning assessments on behalf of the System, and other shared services.
 - **Deliverable:** The Board requested that the presidents be prepared to identify possible vendors via a Request for Proposals process before the end of the calendar year 2023.
- To prepare the Request for Proposals, the Prior Learning Committee has created a working group to focus on developing intake and management procedures and necessary processes for gathering student information, managing and recording PLA determinations, posting grades according to a systemwide standard, and providing a common credit allocation process for students who receive credit for prior learning, so their home institution can transcript it properly.
 - **Deliverable:** The working group will forward recommendations to the Prior Learning Committee by May 15, 2023.
- A second Prior Learning Committee working group will draft standard portfolio evaluation processes. Accordingly, institutions, departments, and faculty know PLA best practices and the necessary components of a solid portfolio evaluation program that might be performed at individual institutions or via the shared intake assessment tool and consortia of faculty subject

matter experts. The working group will be comprised of faculty members, administrators, and representatives from the Commissioner's office.

- **Deliverable:** the subcommittee will submit its recommendations to the PLC by May 15, 2023.
- Once the working groups' recommendations are in place and, additionally, if a shared services tool is identified, the Prior Learning Committee and the Commissioner's academic affairs team will revise [Board Policy R472, *Credit for Prior Learning*](#), to reflect those decisions. They will vet the policy changes with the Council of Chief Academic Officers of degree-granting institutions before sending the recommended policy revisions to the Academic Education Committee of the Utah Board of Higher Education.
 - **Deliverable:** Spring 2024.
- **Deliverable:** The Prior Learning Committee and the Commissioner's academic education team will begin organizing systemwide training guidelines that will apply at the System and institution level in September 2023.