Subsection 3.3: Prior Learning Assessment (PLAR)

Considerations:

Phase 1 of the ARUCC PCCAT study identified significant variation of practice across the country with both transcripting prior learning and with the level of transparency. Phase 1 also highlighted the existence of an online transfer credit database in the US overseen by AACRAO. This platform explicitly identifies which institutions offer PLAR and further follows a standardized format. This database provides a level of transparency that does not currently exist in Canada.

The development of transcription standards for PLAR represents a complementary activity to support Canadian Association of Prior Learning Assessment's (CAPLA) work. Therefore, the researchers for the ARUCC PCCAT project will be consulting with CAPLA leadership and inviting their input into this consultation process.

The following consultation questions to the institutional sector are provided to facilitate that consultation.

Online Survey and Workshop Questions:

The following questions are embedded within the online survey accompanying this Consultation Document. They are provided below to facilitate advance reflection.

1. Identify your level of agreement with the following statements:
   - PLAR results should be explicitly identified on the institutional transcript
   - PLAR results do not need to be explicitly identified when the assessment is conducted by the institution's subject matter expert/faculty assessor, using established course learning outcomes and reliable evaluation processes to assure quality.
   - PLAR results should be eligible for transfer credit assessment
2. Provide a rationale for your responses above.
3. Are there other considerations and/or potential research that the researchers should explore to help inform development of promising national practice for transcripting PLAR and assessing it for transfer credit?

Background:

The work of the ARUCC PCCAT National Transcript Standards and Transfer Credit Nomenclature Project complements the work of the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA). This organization has been in existence since the mid-90s and is considered a national leader in the field of Prior Learning Assessment (PLAR). The association and its website[1] provides access to international networks and a wealth of resources for those with interest in Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition, including resource manuals for practitioners, links to PLAR journals and policies across Canada, training modules, webinars, and a glossary which informs the Terminology Guide published by the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC).[2] We encourage respondents to the Phase 2 consultation call to review some of this material when reflecting on the questions provided.

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[1] http://capla.ca/
[2] http://terminologies.cicic.ca/app/

In recognition of CAPLA's leadership in this area, it is appropriate to acknowledge the association's definition for Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition:[3]

> *PLAR/RPL stands for Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition of Prior Learning.*
>
> *Prior learning assessment and recognition defines processes that allow individuals to identify, document, have assessed and gain recognition for their prior learning. The learning may be formal, informal, non-formal, or experiential. The context of the learning is not key to the process as the focus is on the learning. PLAR processes can be undertaken for several purposes, including self-knowledge, credit or advanced standing at an academic institution, for employment, licensure, career planning or recruitment.*
>
> *Some organizations in Canada use PLAR to describe processes associated with assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning only. Tools such as challenge exams, demonstrations, structured interviews, simulations and portfolios can be used alone or in combination, for experiential learning and competency assessment in such instances.*

In 2013, CAPLA launched a project to "create pan-Canadian Quality Assurance guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to guide and enhance assessment of immigrants through RPL across contexts, contribute to organizational effectiveness, and promote labour force development."[4] This work will result, in part, in the launch in October 2015 of a Quality Assurance manual for prior learning assessment which will be based on pan-Canadian standards. The focus on quality assurance and the development of related standards to evaluate both informal and non-formal learning is critical and a foundational component of CAPLA's work. This is a principle that aligns with the thinking that emerged in Phase 1 findings. Of relevance to Phase 2 is a hoped for goal of achieving consistency in approach and standards related to transcription.

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[3] CAPLA. (2015). What is Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition (PLAR)/ Recognition for Prior Learning (RPL)? Retrieved March 30, 2015 from http://capla.ca/what-is-pla/

[4] http://capla.ca/quality-assurance/pan-canadian-project-description/