

Feedback From Learners:

A Second Cross-Canada Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition

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Dr. Eleanor Conlin,
Project Coordinator

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the early 1990s, many postsecondary institutions in Canada have undertaken prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) to support their academic programs and services. Although numerous benefits for institutions and learners have been demonstrated over the years, implementation has been a rocky road with concerns about academic integrity, costs, quality, and potential learner failure often taking the focus. Experience and research are helping us to address these issues and to understand how PLAR is impacting learners and institutions across Canada.

This research study is an extension of the report, *A Slice of the Iceberg: Cross-Canada Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition* (1999). Our primary purpose is to create the clearest possible picture of adult learner views on prior learning assessment and recognition by reporting on the perspectives of both PLAR and Non-PLAR learners (adult learners who were oriented to PLAR but did not proceed with assessment) and to use this information combined with the results of our literature review to identify what needs to be done to improve and expand PLAR in Canada. Our findings are strengthened by analysis of the database created during the first Cross-Canada Study of PLAR and expanded to include eight years of data on over 7,200 PLAR learners and 14,000 assessments at the seven partner institutions.

In February 2002, two surveys were sent to PLAR and Non-PLAR learners by the partner institutions: College of the North Atlantic in Newfoundland, Collège Ahuntsic in Quebec, Conestoga, Fanshawe and Mohawk Colleges in Ontario, Red River College in Manitoba, and Douglas College in British Columbia. Based on analysis of 1,034 surveys received from PLAR learners and 395 surveys received from Non-PLAR learners, data on demographics, learners' educational and employment backgrounds and status as students were analyzed. We also examined how learners learned about PLAR, their motivation for considering college and for taking an interest in PLAR, and the impact of PLAR – both benefits and barriers. We learned about the helpfulness of several aspects of the PLAR process, the difficulties experienced, learners' reasons for not proceeding with PLAR, and what would have to change before they would proceed with assessment. Learners also shared their perspectives on how to market PLAR.

Overall, we found that ninety-three percent (93%) of PLAR learners expressed satisfaction with their PLAR experience and 96% would recommend PLAR to others. It helped them to stay in the programs

and to graduate. Forty-three percent (43%) of Non-PLAR learners are still considering PLAR and 78% would recommend it to others.

Many of the perspectives of military personnel who had obtained PLAR through the Collegial Studies program at Collège Ahuntsic were similar to those of non-military PLAR learners. The Collegial Studies program establishes equivalencies between military programs and similar college programs in Quebec. The purpose of surveying military personnel was to obtain additional information on who is using Collège Ahuntsic's PLAR service and to learn from the military about the value of PLAR in their military and civilian lives. We also wanted to know the benefits of and barriers to PLAR, and how PLAR could best be marketed to members of the Canadian Armed Forces across Canada.

When the longitudinal data are reviewed in conjunction with the survey data, we are provided with solid evidence on PLAR. This profile leads us to several conclusions and recommendations that also raise some important issues that are addressed from the study partners' perspectives. The following is a summary of the 26 conclusions and 15 recommendations presented in this report.

Conclusions

- Over the long term, PLAR has grown nationally, but in the colleges it has fluctuated considerably and no clear trend at any single institution is apparent. The number of assessments at the partner institutions remains low given the number of years they have been conducting PLAR, their size, and the national growth in the numbers of mature adults attending postsecondary institutions.
- PLAR and Non-PLAR learners are similar demographically and in their motivation for considering college and undertaking PLAR – to gain credit while working, save time and money, and take fewer courses.
- Basic PLAR methodology (e.g.: challenge exams, portfolio assessment) has stood the test of time. PLAR learners found the process to be reasonable irrespective of method. However, scrutiny and revision across the recognizing learning field must continue to be a priority as we explore additional ways to measure prior learning while maintaining academic integrity.
- PLAR is an important factor in learners' decisions to return to school, remain in their program, and graduate – a valuable retention strategy.
- The primary source of PLAR learners' prior learning is the workplace.

- Assessment activity tends to be centered on programs in a small number of disciplines, in programs delivered on a part-time or continuing education basis. PLAR learners are likely to be female, in their mid-thirties and employed full-time. They acquire PLAR credits mostly through challenge exams. PLAR learners' grades are higher than traditional students, their failure rates are lower and they graduate sooner.
- The most common benefit of PLAR is the value it gives to adults' prior learning. It also improves self-confidence, eliminates the need to sit through unnecessary classes, saves part-time learners money, and lightens their course loads.
- Partner institutions report that with the exception of the Canadian military, anticipated growth of PLAR in the workplace did not materialize over the eight years of the two studies. Learners report that employer financial support for PLAR is low.
- PLAR is a very satisfactory experience for adult learners who complete the process. Non-PLAR learners often perceive it as too time-consuming and complex.
- Student and community awareness of PLAR is low. Marketing of PLAR is inadequate.

The commitment to PLAR by the federal government appears to be strong and reflect a genuine effort to implant the principle of PLAR into new models of labour force and economic development. However, it is the study partners' view that PLAR's success would be greatly enhanced if provincial governments, which have jurisdiction over educational institutions, increased their commitments (including financial) to recognizing prior learning.

Recommendations

In preparing our recommendations we have reflected carefully on what we and other institutions can do to ensure that PLAR is woven into the fabric of our organizational activities. To this end, we have compiled a list of suggested and actual practices derived from feedback from learners and PLAR experiences at several of the partner institutions (See What Needs to be in Place for Good Practice in Part Five). Our recommendations are based on statistical data gathered in this study and also on the partners' collective experience, expertise, and knowledge of the broad policy context in which PLAR operates. We realize that these recommendations will apply more to some organizations than others. The following is a summary of the 15 recommendations made in this report.

Postsecondary Institutions

- As publicly funded institutions, colleges have a responsibility to communicate with the public about their programs and services. To increase access to PLAR, we recommend that community colleges in Canada modify their public marketing and communication practices and ensure that PLAR is fully integrated into their internal and external communication plans and materials such as newsletters, program calendars and brochures, websites, contract training materials, education fair handouts, public marketing and student recruitment presentations.
- College faculty have been identified as an effective source of PLAR information. We recommend that colleges in Canada assess PLAR awareness among faculty to ensure they have sufficient and accurate information about PLAR, how it works in their institutions and how to share it with students.
- We recommend that colleges only involve personnel who are knowledgeable about PLAR in conducting assessments and providing specific learner feedback and accessible advising services. As PLAR increases, proactive, targeted professional development for faculty, admissions and counseling staff need to be conducted on a continuing basis to maintain the current quality and satisfaction levels reported by learners.
- We need to continue to scrutinize and develop our methods of prior learning assessment. We recommend that institutions not only explore the use of less time-consuming and complex alternatives to current methods but also ensure that PLAR orientation information/sessions provide comprehensive information on available methods and benefits of the PLAR process, particularly to individuals who are not students at the time of their inquiries into PLAR.
- It is our recommendation that colleges target workplaces that employ their graduates and create better linkages with them to enhance participation by workers not yet connected to academic institutions. Offering workplace training assessment services to employers using credible course/program review processes would increase PLAR opportunities for workers and strengthen partnerships with workplaces.

Public Policy Makers

- We recommend that provincial and federal governments expand their PLAR public awareness and education and training marketing activities to include PLAR in all related promotional and public information materials on education and labour force development.
- The assessment of prior learning of military personnel in Quebec has been very successful. It is our recommendation that the Department of National Defense increase its marketing of PLAR services in all other provinces and territories to inform more military personnel of the opportunity to obtain civilian academic credit. More extensive use of education fairs would publicize the availability and benefits of PLAR.
- We recommend that federal and provincial governments conduct internal consultations and ensure that the public servants responsible for labour force development programs fully understand PLAR and incorporate it into all relevant programming.
- Student assessment fees are not sufficient to sustain PLAR and already pose a barrier for some learners. We recommend that provincial governments revise their PLAR funding policies and establish arrangements through which PLAR delivery is financially viable for institutions and affordable to learners.

Adult Learners

- We strongly recommend that adult learners become familiar with PLAR, reflect on its relevance to their own learning and employment situations and be assertive about obtaining PLAR where appropriate.

Workplaces

- Workplaces could play a much more significant role in the recognizing learning process. We recommend that employers and unions take concrete steps to help workers learn more about PLAR and how it might contribute to their continued learning and employability.

- Business and industry should initiate to consultations and collaboration with colleges and universities to establish PLAR practices and bridging programs for workers.

Summary

We are living in a time when public policy makers are paying extraordinary attention to Canada's international competitiveness, its skill shortages, its need to increase labour mobility, skills portability and the promotion of lifelong learning. Labour force projections make it clear that we need more effective methods to recognize skills and knowledge that have been acquired in different institutions, workplaces and countries.

Adult learners and institutions actively engaged in PLAR tell us it is an excellent method of achieving knowledge and skills recognition, improving educational motivation and promoting further learning. At the same time, the funding arrangements under which many institutions currently operate make it difficult to make PLAR financially viable (Aarts et al, 1999). There are limited funds if any, directed to faculty training or assessment method and tool development. Many institutions are filled to capacity with traditional-aged learners and adult learners are not a priority. It is in this conflicted context that PLAR currently operates in Canada.

Based on their experience and expertise, the study partners believe that the current situation must change and all organizations involved in Canadian education and labour force development should embrace PLAR. Our conclusions, recommendations, and areas identified for future research demonstrate that important and serious learning is going on in a very wide range of non-traditional/non-institutional settings. Community colleges should be at the forefront of innovative collaboration and linkages with other stakeholder groups (workplaces, governments, voluntary organizations, community organizations) as learning providers and partners in recognizing learning. PLAR should be a central part of those linkages. There are many opportunities for stakeholder groups to work together in the design, and delivery of PLAR services and in PLAR research. The partners hope that this report will assist postsecondary institutions, public policy makers, adult learners, and workplaces to improve their understanding of PLAR and its impact on learners and to engage in it with commitment.

PREFACE

The Cross-Canada partnership on PLAR has now completed its second research study on prior learning assessment and recognition of colleges in Canada. The first study's focus was on institutional PLAR activity. Since the study's publication in 1999, the partner institutions have implemented many of its recommendations and hope that other organizations have been able to do the same. In 2000, a CD-ROM version of the data collection tool was made publicly available along with a detailed user manual that any institution may obtain at no charge if they wish to collect their own data on PLAR. These materials are available from the study partners. In 2001, this second Cross-Canada study of PLAR on learner feedback was initiated.

Part One of this report presents the historical background to the study and its purpose and overall structure. A literature review focuses on recent academic research on PLAR that involves learner perspectives, and forms the backdrop for many of this study's findings.

Part Two presents the results of the survey and the analysis of the data. Broad methodological limitations are discussed and limitations of particular data are presented as each study finding is reported. This part of the report also explains our rationale for collecting learner feedback and for selecting a survey as the methodology to accomplish our goals.

Part Three presents a description of the workplace training evaluation services operated by Collège Ahuntsic in Quebec for the Canadian Armed Forces. The program's history and the evaluation process are outlined followed by a description of data collection methodology and data analysis in this study. Results and observations on learner perspectives are provided in the same format as non-military PLAR learners in Part Two. Methodological limitations on collecting data on military personnel are presented.

In Part Four, presentation and analysis of institutional PLAR data collected over eight years provide a clear picture of where and how PLAR has unfolded at the partner institutions over the long term. This section addresses the characteristics of PLAR learners, assessment methodology and activity levels, the types of programs in which PLAR is active and data on learner academic success.

Part Five synthesizes the study's findings based on our literature review, the survey results, analysis of the longitudinal data and the collective expertise of the study partners with respect to their institutions' PLAR activities. The section also positions PLAR within the broader policy and labour market contexts in which PLAR operates. Twelve recommendations are directed to several stakeholder groups including postsecondary institutions, public policy makers, adult learners, and workplaces. Topics for future research are also suggested.

Among the extensive appendices included with this report are detailed accounts on the study's development, structure, partner institutions, contact information for inquiries and CD-ROM copies of the report, and an executive summary of the first Cross-Canada Study of PLAR.

PART ONE:

INTRODUCTION

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Since the early 1990s, many postsecondary institutions in Canada have undertaken prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) to complement their academic programs and services. These activities often began as pilot projects funded by provincial and federal governments. Although many benefits for institutions, workplaces, and learners have been demonstrated over the years, implementation has been a rocky road with concerns about academic integrity, costs, quality, and potential learner failure often taking the focus. Experience and research are helping us to understand how PLAR is impacting learners and institutions across Canada.

As we search for new ways to expand and improve PLAR, it is important to evaluate our past efforts and to ensure that the positive impacts of PLAR are understood by everyone. It is also important to improve systems for recognizing learning. This study offered the study partners a chance to examine PLAR in Canada over the last decade. It is the first large-scale opportunity to find out what learners are saying about PLAR.

This research study is an extension of the Cross-Canada Study of PLAR completed by the authors in 1999. In that report, the PLAR activities of seven colleges across Canada were analyzed in detail. The result was the first, large-scale look at how PLAR was unfolding in Canadian postsecondary institutions. The study's report, *A Slice of the Iceberg: Cross-Canada Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition* provided new insights into institutional activities including a limited look at adult learners' perspectives of PLAR through student focus groups. (see Appendix A for Executive Summary *A Slice of the Iceberg*).

The findings of the first study indicated that PLAR is an academically sound practice that contributes to adult learning. It successfully links informal learning to formal learning. It improves adults' confidence in their own knowledge and skills and it enhances the chances of continuation of learning over the long term. PLAR also appeared to contribute to adult learners' employability. The information provided by the students in the study's focus groups inspired the study partners to collect more evidence on how adult learners experienced PLAR. Students indicated strong support for PLAR and the benefits they had

derived from it. They also provided information on how the colleges' rigid "lock step" program delivery structures can create scheduling problems, impair learners' opportunities to shorten their programs, reduce costs and lighten their course loads. Focus group participants also indicated a need for greater public awareness and PLAR marketing.

In 2000, the study partners resumed their collaborative investigation into PLAR in Canadian colleges and formed a second Cross-Canada partnership comprised once again of Collège Ahuntsic, Quebec; College of the North Atlantic, Newfoundland; Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning (Conestoga College ITAL), Ontario; Douglas College, British Columbia; Fanshawe College, Ontario; Mohawk College, Ontario; and Red River College, Manitoba (see Appendix B for complete list of study authors and contact information). A brief historical overview of PLAR at each of these institutions can be found in *A Slice of the Iceberg: Cross-Canada Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition*.

In the spring of 2001, initial work establishing the purpose, structure and methodology for this follow-up study commenced.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The primary purpose of this study is to create the clearest possible picture of adult learner views on prior learning assessment and recognition. We have done this by reporting on the perspectives of both PLAR and Non-PLAR learners (adult learners who were oriented to PLAR but did not proceed with assessment) and by synthesizing these results with our review of the research literature and our findings on institutional activities over eight years. This study does not directly investigate other uses of PLAR such as its applicability to employment, occupational mobility, or foreign credential assessment. All of these topics could be the subjects of valuable future research.

This report will be made available to postsecondary institutions, policy makers, workplaces, occupational bodies and adult learners with the hope that they will incorporate the results into their PLAR planning and learner/worker related activities. The partners also intend to use the study's results in their own PLAR planning processes. The report has been produced on CD-ROM on which we have included a copy of the first study, *A Slice of the Iceberg: Cross-Canada Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition* (1999).

STUDY STRUCTURE

The colleges were selected for this study based on their successful involvement in the first Cross-Canada Study of PLAR, their willingness to participate in this second research project, and the need to expand the pre-existing database. Dr. Douglas Hart from the University of Toronto, an expert in surveys and statistical research was invited to act as academic advisor to assist in the development of the survey instrument and the evaluation and presentation of the results. The coordinator of the first Cross-Canada Study of PLAR, Joy Van Kleef provided consulting advice and prepared this final report. Two digital data specialist companies were retained to assist in the data collection, survey design, and analysis. Funding for the project was provided by Human Resources Development Canada.

The study partners recruited an advisory committee comprised of representatives of various sectors across Canada (see Appendix C for committee membership list). Several members had served on the advisory committee for the first study. The committee met twice with the partners and communicated on-line to provide valuable advice on project focus, survey structure and questions, data analysis, and report distribution.

A memorandum of understanding was completed by all partners to ensure that project commitments were understood by participating institutions (see Appendix D). Conestoga College ITAL took on the role of coordinating the project and managing the finances. Communications among the partners were undertaken through e-mail, teleconferences, and in-person meetings.

Objectives established for the project were refined as follows:

1. Obtain additional information on:
 - Learner demographics, and program and course activities
 - Barriers encountered by learners during the PLAR process
 - Whether PLAR was a factor in learners' decisions about returning to school
 - The role PLAR played in helping learners achieve their goals
 - The role PLAR played in shortening the time learners spent in school
 - Sources of learners' experiential learning
 - How useful PLAR credit was in the workplace
 - Whether credits obtained through PLAR by military personnel are transferable to other postsecondary institutions

- Why some learners did not proceed through the process after orientation
- 2. Determine strategies for improving PLAR at participating colleges
- 3. Research, identify and recommend community marketing strategies for PLAR
- 4. Identify new emerging trends in PLAR

To achieve these objectives, several research activities were undertaken throughout 2001 and 2002. Some tasks were undertaken concurrently.

- A literature review was conducted of adult learner perspectives regarding PLAR over the past decade (January to October, 2002).
- Adult learners who had experienced PLAR over a three-year period (1998/99 – 2000/01) were surveyed (August 2001 to April, 2002).
- A sample of adult learners who had been oriented to PLAR over the same three-year period but had not proceeded with an assessment, were surveyed. Throughout this report these learners are called Non-PLAR learners (August 2001 to April, 2002).
- A sample of military personnel who obtained PLAR through workplace training evaluation by Collège Ahuntsic was surveyed (August 2001 to April, 2002)
- The 5-year database developed during the first Cross-Canada Study (1999) was expanded to eight years (1993/94 to 2000/01). This database includes demographics on the total PLAR populations and all PLAR courses, programs and disciplines selected by adult learners at the partner colleges (October 2001 – October 2002)
- Brief institutional profiles were prepared on each college for the year 2001/02 along with short narratives updating readers on PLAR activities and trends at each of the partner institutions since the first study (see Appendix E). (August – October 2002).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The research literature on PLAR is largely limited to small studies of its practical application at specific postsecondary institutions. Although there has been some research conducted on PLAR at Canadian postsecondary institutions, most of these studies have been conducted in the United States and their

results are published in government-funded reports and graduate students' theses and dissertations. PLAR literature is often descriptive, presenting institutions' experiences in implementing PLAR including program activities, financing practices, and the perspectives of internal stakeholder groups – faculty, administrators, and students. Analysis and recommendations are most often focused on individual institutional activity and reform.

This current study builds on the current body of knowledge of PLAR and adds to our understanding of the nature and impact of PLAR in the Canadian context. Since this report is about adult learner perspectives on PLAR and the experiences they have had at their postsecondary institutions, we have devoted most of this literature review to research that addresses who these learners are and what their PLAR experiences indicate. Many of these studies are quite recent and their results begin to demonstrate an interesting pattern of demographics of PLAR learners, and the benefits and barriers associated with PLAR in postsecondary education.

Demographics

Demographics reveal that the majority of adult learners who undertake PLAR are women between the ages of 30 and 54 years (Aarts et al, 1999; Burris, 1997; Douglas College, 1996, 2000; Mullen, 1995; Pearson, 2000; Freers, 1994; Snyder, 1990). Approximately 87 - 100 % of PLAR learners are “white” (Brobst, 1986; Freers, 1994; Snyder 1990). English is a PLAR learner's first language. The vast majority of PLAR learners are employed. Reports on whether their employment is primarily full-time or part-time are mixed but their status as students is mostly part-time (Brobst, 1986; Douglas College, 1996; Harriger, 1993; Mehalls, 1986; Raulf, 1992). Based on these studies which varied in number of participants from as few as sixteen students to several hundred, it is difficult to reach any solid conclusions on how PLAR learners may differ from the general population. However, it would appear that within the PLAR population, visible minorities, persons whose first language is not English, and unemployed adults may be underrepresented.

The research literature also indicates that PLAR learners' past experience with postsecondary education is limited and they have been out of school for some time. In a study of 169 learners over the age of 25 years, Swift (1985) found that the majority had little or no college experience and in a study of 186 learners whose average age was 40 years, Freers (1994) reported that 43% of PLA participants had not attended college. Douglas College also studied the educational backgrounds of its PLAR learners and found almost

50% had one year or less formal postsecondary education (Douglas College, 1996). Douglas College also determined that 75-80% of their PLAR learners had more than five years of employment in their fields related to their assessments (Douglas College, 1996, 2000).

The majority of PLAR learners in Canada are already enrolled in a program at the time of their prior learning assessment (Aarts et al, 1999; Douglas College, 2000) sometimes because institutional policies stipulate that program enrollment is a PLAR pre-requisite. How recently they have returned to education and how similar they may be to learners in the general student population is unclear from the literature. This study helps to answer these questions.

The research also indicates that PLAR learners are good students. Mullen (1995) found that PLAR learners over the age of 35 years performed at higher academic levels than students between 18 and 34 years who had not accessed PLAR. Female PLAR learners also performed at higher academic levels than male PLAR learners. Aarts et al (1999) also found that PLAR learners performed at higher academic levels than learners who had not experienced PLAR. Lennox (2000) reported no significant difference in the academic performance of non-traditional learners admitted to graduate school through PLAR and graduate students who met formal entrance requirements. Snyder (1990) reported that PLAR learners in his study were more self-motivated and goal-directed than traditional students.

Benefits Associated with PLAR

Educational Benefits

Learners consistently report several key benefits to prior learning assessment and recognition. It saves them time (Aarts et al, 1999; Lamdin, 1992; Swift, J. 1985); it saves them money (Aarts et al, 1999; Fisher, 1991; Freers, 1994; Harriger, 1993; Lamdin, 1992; Swift, J. 1985); it improves their self-confidence (Aarts et al, 1999; Smith, P. 1986; Snyder, G. 1990), and increases their motivation to complete their studies (Aarts et al, 1999; Freers, 1994; Harriger, 1993; Idyll, 1993; Kent, 1996; Lamdin, 1992; Raulf, 1992; Snyder, 1990; Thomas, 2001). Of particular interest are learner reports that the savings of time was more important than the saving of money (Raulf, 1992; Thomas, 2001).

Freers (1994) concluded in her study that 97% felt that PLAR also confirmed that an important benefit of PLAR is the valuing of their prior learning. This finding supported Marks and Dewees' (1984) conclusions

from a study of over 300 students that PLAR represents a respectful recognition by an institution that adult learners should not be required to repeat old learning. Freers (1994) also found that 73% of respondents felt that PLAR had helped them define their educational goals.

Mullen (1995) found that students who participated in PLAR had more effective study habits and attitudes than students who did not. Factors included in the study were student behavior in relation to promptness in completing academic assignments, lack of procrastination, freedom from wasteful delay and distraction, studying procedures, attitudes toward teachers and their classroom behavior and methods, and acceptance of institutional objectives, practices, and requirements.

In terms of retention, Billingham & Travaglini (1981) found five factors that were predictive of success in a program. One of these factors was the number of credit hours transferred into the program or obtained through credit for prior experiential learning options. This finding is supported by Pearson (2001) when he studied several hundred part-time students eligible to apply for PLA credits over a ten year period to determine if participation in the PLAR portfolio process is predictive of persistence. His findings indicated a strong association between portfolio and student persistence with PLAR doubling the odds of persistence for an average student. Higher graduation rates among PLAR learners were also found by Aarts et al (1999).

With respect to learner motivation, a number of studies address PLAR's role in learners' returning to school, staying in their programs and achieving graduation. Thomas, Collins and Plett (2001) reported learner feedback that PLAR was a significant factor in learners' decisions to return to formal education. On the other hand, Raulf (1992) found that the PLAR program had no influence on learners' decisions to return to school. Studies have shown that learners' decisions to seek PLAR were closely tied to their reasons for returning to college – reasons that were most often related to enhancing their employment situation (Aarts et al, 1999).

There is growing evidence that PLAR helps learners to attend school, achieve personal growth, and graduate and a few studies address the scope of individual learner PLAR activity, for example the percentage of credits per student awarded through PLAR (Evans, 1999). Douglas College (1996) has reported that no learners in their study acquired more than 6 courses through PLAR. Aarts et al (1999) found that although awards ranged from one to more than eight college courses, the median was 2.3 courses per learner. Additional research on this subject is part of our study.

Employment-related Benefits

In addition to educational benefits PLAR learners report employment-related advantages. After conducting interviews with PLAR learners about their views on PLAR and its effect on their career and jobs, Smith (1986) concluded that PLAR helped learners to develop a clearer understanding and greater control over their lives. Their credential had “become an economic credential as well as an academic one” (p.70). In a study of 186 adult learners, Freers (1994) supported this notion in her report that 70% of respondents reported a greater number of employment opportunities as a result of the PLAR process and 55% attributed PLAR to their obtaining a better paying job. Sixty-nine percent (69%) anticipated an increase in the amount of salary that they would probably earn in their lifetime as a result of the process. Interestingly however, 64% felt that the process had not been a factor in the advancement of their specific careers.

There does not appear to be any specific research studies on how useful PLAR has been in Canadian workplace settings although 48% of respondents to a survey by Douglas College (1996) reported that PLAR had made a difference to them on the job. This would be a valuable subject for future research in Canada.

The partners were able to locate very few research studies providing quantitative data on sources of prior learning. The extensive survey conducted by the New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (1999) is one of the few exceptions. Although there is a general perception that most prior learning originates in activities such as employment, community work, and independent study, this too would be a valuable subject for additional research.

Barriers Associated with PLAR

Barriers faced by adult learners considering or engaging in PLAR are very similar to those which they face in returning to formal postsecondary education. Livingstone et al (1999) and Castle (2001) found that barriers to formal education included courses held at inconvenient times or places, family responsibilities and little available time made it difficult to participate. Respondents also felt that courses were too costly.

Cross (1981) has written extensively on barriers to education including prior learning assessment and offers a useful framework for discussing barriers to PLAR. Cross suggests that there are three types of

barriers: situational, institutional, and dispositional. Situational barriers are circumstances that have a negative impact on the lives of adult learners, such as lack of financial resources to attend college. Institutional barriers are day-to-day operating procedures of an education provider, such as limited course offerings and rigid class schedules. Dispositional barriers could also be called psychological barriers such as a learner's lack of self-esteem (Cross, 1981).

Barriers faced by learners before and during the PLAR process are reasonably well documented and can be easily referenced by using Cross's categories. Important situational barriers have been identified in the literature as lack of time and money to undertake PLAR, the pressures of home responsibilities, fatigue, and the lack of child care, transportation, place to study, and family emotional support (Cross, 1981).

There are multiple institutional barriers to PLAR. They include low awareness of PLAR among administrators, faculty and students (Aarts et al, 1999, Raulf, 1992, Thomas, 2001), insufficient information such as course outlines, calendars and sample portfolios (Kent, 1996), lack of feedback from faculty following assessment (Thomas, 2001), inconsistent policies and their application (Harriger, 1993, Thomas, 2001), PLAR availability limited to specific programs or a percentage of a program (Freers, 1994, Raulf, 1992), inadequate availability of classes at times accessible by adult learners (Harriger, 1993), poor attitudes by faculty as well as faculty concerns about personal workloads and the integrity of the PLAR process (Harriger, 1993, Raulf, 1992). These studies reveal a wide range of barriers to effective prior learning assessment. Very few are identified by more than one or two research studies but their combined results suggest that many postsecondary institutions have not embraced the concept of prior learning assessment nor have they taken a systemic approach to PLAR.

Dispositional barriers include low learner self-confidence, (Topping, 1996) concerns about age and classroom environments, perceptions that PLAR is too difficult, time-consuming (Kent, 1996), and undervalued by institutions and employers (Fisher, 1991).

In summary, research literature on PLAR has increased over the past decade and several studies address the characteristics and perspectives of PLAR learners. They show a consistent profile of the PLAR learner and a range of benefits and barriers to PLAR that are the subject of their recommendations. The limitations of these studies are found not in the quality of their inquiry but in their size and scope. Nevertheless, they provide rich information on PLAR and its impact on learners and institutions that we have been able to draw on to strengthen our own investigation.

PART TWO:

FEEDBACK FROM LEARNERS

Robin's Story – Community Living Practitioner

My name is Robin and I am a community living practitioner, working for a large community living non-profit society. I have worked many years in the “social service” field and the last 9 years in particular have been in community living. As a result I was aware I have accumulated a lot of knowledge and skills over approximately a 20-year period. While I have never pursued a post secondary diploma I have taken courses, workshops, conferences and some credit courses to make sure I stayed current in my field.

Several years ago the executive director of our non-profit society became involved in the development of occupational competencies for the field; and hard on the heels of that came the provincial requirement for formal accreditation of agencies.

As a result of the work on occupational competencies done by some of my colleagues, I became aware of the opportunity to participate in a PLAR workplace-based assessment project developed and facilitated by my college. That was when I realized that I could earn academic credit for what I know and can do—essentially, for the job related learning that I had accumulated during my career.

As a result of the process, I earned 28.5 credits towards a Certificate. As a result of undertaking PLAR I have the option of continuing with a Diploma that I can then transfer into a Baccalaureate Program. It all takes time and effort, but PLAR has increased my career and post secondary opportunities.

Since completing PLAR, I've had great opportunities at the Society I work for. I now supervise 14 staff in a group home that provides intensive adult care to 4 adult clients, and I had the opportunity last year to take a 6-month position as a manager of training and support services. I've also been part of a field practitioners group that has been invited to assist my college in the development of an on-line assessment tool. I'd really like to see a streamlined and more student friendly approach that will encourage other practitioners to take advantage of PLAR.

PLAR is not the easy route and I'd only recommend it to those who have experience and are willing to put in some time and effort but it was probably one of the best things I've done for myself.

PART TWO: FEEDBACK FROM LEARNERS

PURPOSE OF DATA COLLECTION

The purposes of collecting data on learner perspectives on PLAR were to improve our knowledge of how well PLAR is operating in our colleges, and examine the impact it is having on adult learners. Our motives developed out of the first Cross-Canada Study of PLAR, where we received valuable but limited feedback through learner focus groups on the benefits and barriers learners experienced in undertaking PLAR. Subsequent research indicated that there have been one or two small Canadian studies on learner perspectives but no research that involved large numbers of learners or obtained the views of people who consciously decided not to undertake PLAR after learning about it. We wanted to explore if there were differences between these two groups that would account for their decisions to participate or not participate in PLAR. We decided to collect more precise data on learner perspectives, on a larger scale, and make it widely available.

"Institutions should arrange other students as mentors."

Focus Group
Participant, *Slice of the Iceberg* (1999)

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

A glossary providing explanations of terms used in this study was developed to ensure consistent use of terminology (see Appendix F). Given our desire to obtain the perspectives of as many learners as possible, we determined that the most viable data collection method would be a survey. Merriam and Simpson (1995) report that surveys are the most extensively used data-gathering technique and although this technique has limitations in terms of the depth of the data obtained and in achieving high response rates, many potential weaknesses can be pre-empted by careful planning, design, and piloting. The descriptive nature of survey research permits the collection of accurate, representative information without the need to adopt the narrow, often unachievable parameters of experimental research. Surveys also permit exploration, which can result in the discovery of unanticipated variables and

"Of all data-gathering techniques available to the researcher, the survey, either written or oral, is used most extensively."

Merriam and Simpson
(1995)

relationships between variables. Although survey research cannot be used as a precise, predictive tool in real life situations where circumstances are constantly changing, this was not a problem for the partners. Our primary aim was to shed some light on past phenomenon and identify potential relationships between variables for future consideration.

Workload, financial resources, and the large size and geographical distribution of our potential respondents, influenced the selection of a mail-out questionnaire as our data collection tool. We were aware of the importance of a carefully crafted questionnaire and its inherent limitations in terms of obtaining in-depth responses from participants. However we decided that on balance, a mail-out questionnaire was the most feasible tool in these circumstances. Since low response rates are a common problem with mail surveys, we allocated resources to allow for telephone follow-up calls to non-respondents.

Two questionnaires were developed in the fall of 2001: one for adults who had undertaken PLAR and one for adults who had received some orientation to PLAR but did not pursue assessment (hereinafter called Non-PLAR learners). The PLAR learners' questionnaire included 37 multiple-choice questions including some special options for adult learners in the military (hereafter called military personnel). The Non-PLAR learners' questionnaire consisted of 19 multiple-choice questions. An open-ended invitation for comments was also extended to both groups of learners. Key definitions were incorporated into the text of both questionnaires. Direct quotes from respondents are presented throughout this report.

Most partner institutions piloted a draft of the PLAR learner questionnaire using focus groups, individual interviews or e-mails in the winter of 2001/02. Douglas College and Mohawk College piloted the Non-PLAR learner questionnaire. In February 2002, a total of 3,051 questionnaires were mailed to persons who had undertaken PLAR between 1998/99 and 2000/01 at the seven partner institutions: Collège Ahuntsic, College of the North Atlantic, Conestoga College ITAL, Douglas College, Fanshawe College, Mohawk College and Red River College. Questionnaires were sent to 1,016 Non-PLAR learners at five partner institutions: Conestoga

"Generally it is preferable to design questionnaires in a closed form if the research problem permits."

Merriam and Simpson
(1995)

College ITAL, Douglas College, Fanshawe College, Mohawk College and Red River College. College of the North Atlantic and Collège Ahuntsic were not able to collect data on Non-PLAR learners, as they do not keep records of learners who investigate PLAR but decide not to proceed with assessment. See Appendix G for copies of the PLAR and Non-PLAR learner questionnaires.

Following initial receipt of responses, a campaign to contact non-respondents by telephone was conducted in an effort to improve response rates. Collège Ahuntsic and Douglas College were able to follow up by telephone for all 3 years. Other partner colleges conducted the telephone follow-up for the most recent year of the study (2000/01). Questionnaires were collected by each institution and following a pre-determined deadline, were sent to a digital data specialist firm for data compilation and analysis. Because college students are often transitory, a substantial number of questionnaires were returned undeliverable. As a result, a cooperation rate was calculated for both PLAR and Non-PLAR learners by subtracting the number of identified undeliverable questionnaires from the total mail-out (all years) and re-calculating the response rate on this basis. Essentially, a cooperation rate establishes a response rate based on the number of persons deemed likely to have received the questionnaire and to have had the opportunity to respond. For additional details on our methodology, see Appendix H.

Data Analysis

Data analysis commenced in April, 2002. The questions in the PLAR learner and Non-PLAR learner questionnaires were divided into six groupings that correspond to the objectives of the study:

- Characteristics of PLAR and Non-PLAR learners
- Learning about PLAR
- Learner motivation
- Benefits of PLAR
- The PLAR process
- Marketing PLAR

"Good survey research practice rests on a foundation of solid methodology. One key component of any scientifically reliable methodology is the clear and consistent reporting of the methods utilized. "There are so many ways of calculating response rates.....Among the more common terms utilized [is] cooperation."

American Association of Public Opinion Research (2000)

The partners analyzed PLAR and Non-PLAR learner responses in each group. Data were analyzed at the national and institutional levels. Additional detailed analysis was conducted where individual institutional data varied markedly from the national data. Particular attention was paid to linking related data results from analysis of the two questionnaires as well as the longitudinal data in the 8-year database. Because PLAR procedures for the military are unique to that population, data collection and analysis of military learner perspectives were conducted separately and are reported in a separate section of this report (See Part 3). However for each research activity, participants combined their expertise to make findings and observations.

Methodological Limitations

Although the level of PLAR activity is likely higher at some of the institutions in this study than at most Canadian colleges, we believe the range of PLAR activities is reasonably representative.

Survey response rates were not as high as we had hoped (37% for PLAR learners and 39% for Non-PLAR learners) thus limiting the degree to which the sample groups statistically represent the general PLAR and Non-PLAR populations of the partner institutions. Time and financial pressures enabled us to conduct only a limited telephone follow-up campaign and as with all tracking studies, it was difficult to locate respondents. The calculation of cooperation rates makes allowances for those not reached by the surveys.

Establishment of the Non-PLAR learner sample group was particularly challenging. Depending on the type of databases available at each college, the selection of Non-PLAR learners was limited in some cases to those who had contacted the college within the previous year; other colleges had databases that permitted them to collect data on contacts that took place over longer time periods. The composition of the colleges' Non-PLAR sample groups therefore may have varied, and the distribution of the Non-PLAR sample population was less standardized than the PLAR sample population. These factors limit the validity of the Non-PLAR survey results.

There was evidence that a few questions were interpreted in unintended ways by some respondents such that they reported taking part in activities not in fact offered at their institutions. This may have been partly due to ambiguities in the questions, the length of the questions or differing learner experiences with PLAR. The Non-PLAR questionnaire was closely modeled after the PLAR questionnaire. Piloting this questionnaire by all of the partners rather than a few might have alerted us to flaws in the wording of some of its questions. This threatened to compromise the quality of the data for these items. However, the partners used their collective knowledge of the PLAR programs at their institutions to flag items that appeared to be misinterpreted.

RESULTS AND OBSERVATIONS

This section of the report presents the results of our surveys using charts, tables and narrative observations. Narrative observations cite the relevant question numbers in each questionnaire so that readers may review the precise wording by referring to Appendix G. Most charts and tables include the number of responses for each item so that response rates are clear. Responses are expressed as a fraction of the total number of responses or respondents. Explanations are provided in legends as needed. Due to rounding, total percentages may not equal 100% but range from 99% to 101%. Data and analysis of PLAR learners in this section of the report exclude Collège Ahuntsic because the circumstances of military personnel who undertake PLAR are unique and must be examined separately to identify and analyze relevant factors. Data and analysis of Non-PLAR learners exclude Collège Ahuntsic and College of the North Atlantic for reasons previously explained under the sub-heading of Data Collection.

All PLAR learners at the partner colleges were included in the survey if they had completed an assessment within the past three years. From the institutions included in this section of the report we received a total of 1,034 completed questionnaires representing a response rate of 37%. Response rates by college varied from 28% to 46%. The cooperation rate was 43%.

Colleges located Non-PLAR learners by searching student and course records, mailing lists, and alumni records. Some colleges had multi-year records; others only retained the previous year's contact list for students who had been oriented to PLAR but had not registered for assessment. As a result, each college's share of the Non-PLAR sample reflects a number of factors besides level of PLAR activity. We received a total of 395 questionnaires from Non-PLAR learners at five institutions representing a response rate of 39%. Response rates by college varied from 30% to 43%. The cooperation rate was 51%. Table S-1a and 1b presents final cooperation rate results by college for both PLAR and Non-PLAR learners.

Table S-1a: Cooperation Rate by College for PLAR Learners

MAIL SURVEY RESULTS						Unable to Locate By Phone*	Co-Op Rate**
College	Mailouts	Returns	Response Rate (%)	Returned Address Unknown Undeliverables	Response Rate (%) Net of Undeliverables		
Conestoga	150	69	46.0	7	48.3	10	51.9
Douglas	91	35	38.5	6	41.2	18	52.2
Fanshawe	933	262	28.1	104	31.6	46	33.5
Mohawk	912	355	38.9	70	42.2	20	43.2
North Atlantic	237	88	37.1	15	39.6	20	43.6
Red River	728	225	30.9	69	34.1	35	36.1
Total	3051	1034	36.6	271	49.5	149	43.4

Note: *Not in service, moved, wrong number, cannot locate number.

**Cooperation Rate refers to Response rate net of undeliverables and telephone not at location.
Collège Ahuntsic data is reported in Part Three of this report.

Table S-1b: Cooperation Rate by College for Non-PLAR Learners

MAIL SURVEY RESULTS						Unable to Locate By Phone*	Co-Op Rate**
College	Mailouts	Returns	Response Rate (%)	Returned Address Unknown Undeliverable	Response Rate (%) Net of Undeliverables		
Conestoga	464	188	40.5	6	41.0	63	47.6
Douglas	53	23	43.4	8	51.1	8	62.2
Fanshawe	114	42	36.8	21	45.2	14	53.2
Mohawk	224	93	41.5	18	45.1	27	52.0
Red River	161	49	30.4	18	34.3	12	37.4
Total	1016	395	38.9	71	41.8	112	50.5

Note: *Not in service, moved, wrong number, cannot locate number.

**Cooperation Rate refers to Response rate net of undeliverables and telephone not at location.

College of the North Atlantic and Collège Ahuntsic did not collect survey data from Non-PLAR learners.

Characteristics of PLAR and Non-PLAR Learners

To learn more about who PLAR learners are and how they may differ from Non-PLAR learners, we analyzed data on participants' gender, age, designated demographic group status, and recent educational and employment histories including student status, pre-college and employment status and the sources and extent of respondents' prior learning. In this section of the report we compare those who undertook PLAR (PLAR learners) with those who made some investigation of PLAR but did not proceed with assessment (Non-PLAR learners). We also make selective comparisons of PLAR learners with the general student populations at participating colleges.

"PLAR helped me to achieve my goal. I needed a credit and I already knew the material. As a young, single mom, saving time and money are important. Thank you."

PLAR Learner

Gender

Women are more strongly represented among PLAR learners (80%) than Non-PLAR learners (67%), but both groups have more females than the college student populations as a whole. The proportion of women among PLAR survey respondents varies somewhat across institutions (from 75% female at Red River College to 88% female at Douglas College). This is considerably higher than the findings of the first Cross-Canada study (65% - although Ahuntsic had a very high percentage of males in its PLAR population that skewed the statistics somewhat), and the female proportion of the partner colleges' general student populations (54%).

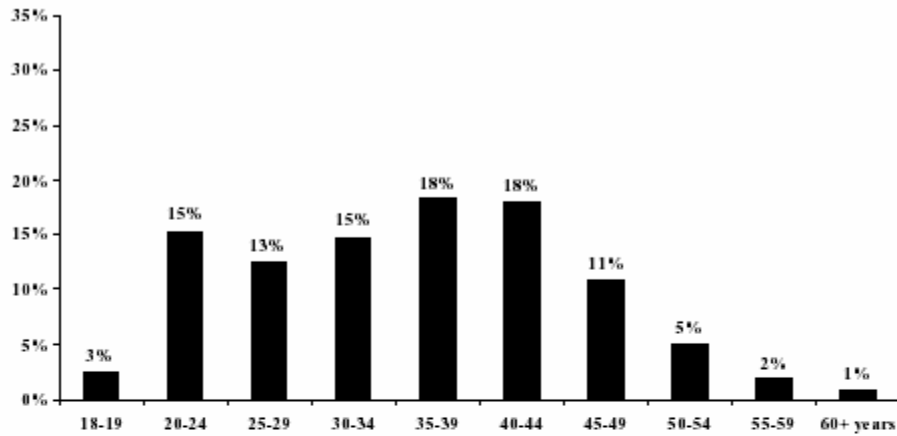
A cross-referencing of this data with program data in the eight-year database indicates that this gender distribution is the result of high PLAR activity in programs with large concentrations of females in their general populations (e.g. Nursing, Early Childhood Education).

Age

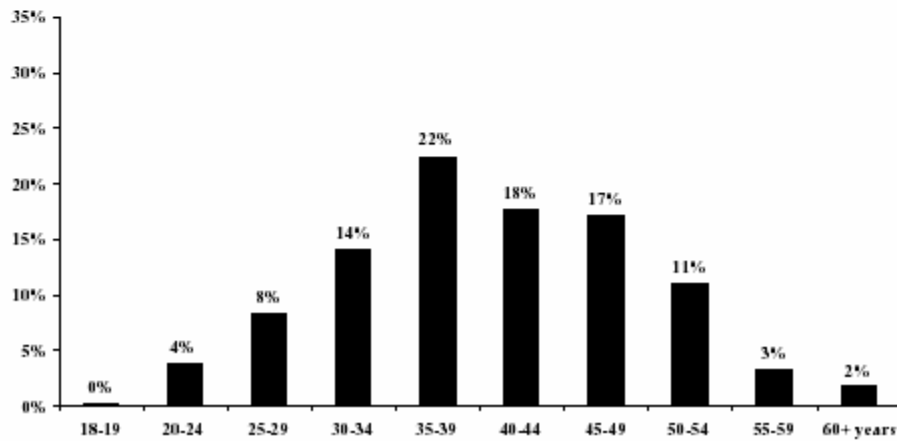
Approximately 70% of PLAR learners are over the age of 30 years at the time of their assessment. The average age of a PLAR learner is 33 years (Questions PLAR 37). These results support earlier studies' findings that it is mature students who find PLAR most attractive. Charts S-1a and 1b present the age distribution of PLAR and Non-PLAR learners.

Charts S-1a and S-1b: Age Distribution of PLAR and Non-PLAR Learners

PLAR



Non-PLAR



Designated Demographic Group Status

Many advocates for PLAR argue that PLAR is of particular benefit to groups whose life circumstances make access to postsecondary education particularly difficult. These include visible minorities, aboriginal people, persons with disabilities, single parents, rural residents and those whose first language is other than English. The majority of PLAR and Non-PLAR respondents did not identify with any of these designated demographic groups although of those who did respond, the Non-PLAR learners appear to be slightly more diverse. Although we cannot make any firm conclusions on the extent to which PLAR is serving members of designated groups since data on their presence in the colleges' general populations are not available, our results indicate that 55% of PLAR learners did not identify with any of these groups. This suggests that participants either chose not to self-identify or that PLAR is not being accessed by members of the designated populations to the same degree as members of the mainstream population. Comparative data in this area and any significant research on PLAR's role in increasing access to education would be helpful for those interested in using PLAR as a tool to better serve adult learners in these groups. Table S-2 presents the results of this inquiry for both groups (Questions PLAR 35, Non-PLAR 18).

"I have a young family and a full-time job in rural Ontario. I did not have to leave my job to finish my field work."

PLAR Learner

Table S-2a: Designated Demographic Group Identification

PLAR			
<i>Response</i>	Responses	Respondents	Percent
Rural resident	194	1012	19%
First language is not English	115	1012	11%
Single parent	98	1012	10%
Visible minority	91	1012	9%
Aboriginal person	25	1012	2%
Person with disabilities	25	1012	2%
None of the above	558	1012	55%

Table S-2b: Designated Demographic Group Identification

Non-PLAR			
<i>Response</i>	Responses	Respondents	Percent
Rural resident	49	387	13%
First language not English	46	387	12%
Visible minority	35	387	9%
Single parent	30	387	8%
Person with disabilities	24	387	6%
Aboriginal person	9	387	2%
None of the above	237	387	61%

Educational History

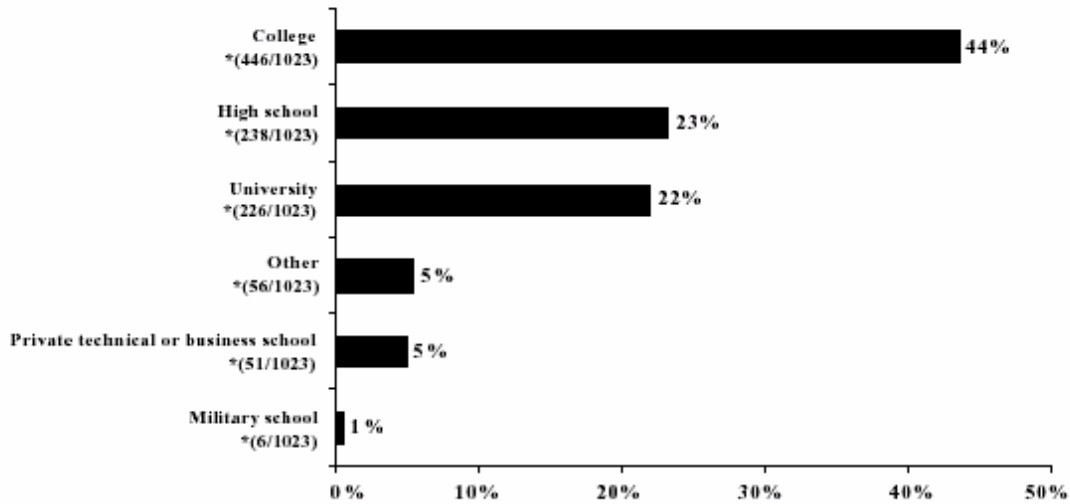
There is basically no difference between the educational histories of PLAR and Non-PLAR respondents. In both groups, 23% had attended/completed high school. Sixty-five percent (65%) of PLAR and (66%) of Non-PLAR learners attended or completed college or university prior to inquiring about PLAR. Charts S-2a and 2b present a breakdown of learner responses. (Questions PLAR 1, Non-PLAR 1)

“Even though I am a university graduate, PLAR gave me the opportunity to “jump start” the pursuit of specific skill training for a new occupation.”

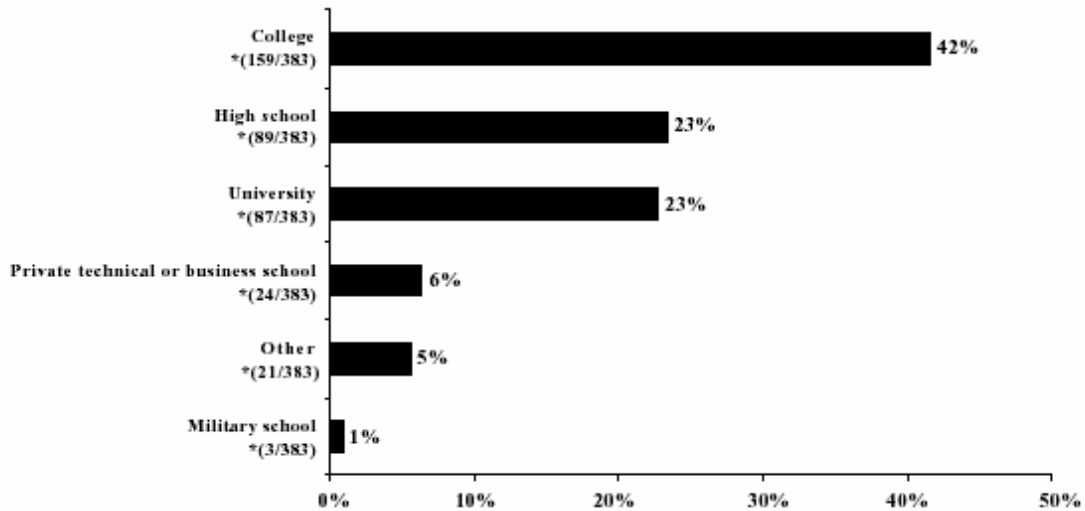
PLAR Learner

Chart S-2a and S-2b: Last Institution Attended/Completed by PLAR and Non-PLAR Learners

PLAR



Non-PLAR



*Note: Number of responses/respondents

Status as Students

Most PLAR learners begin the PLAR process as registered students (89%). Twenty-four percent (24%) of respondents were full-time students, 16% were part-time

students, and 57% were continuing education/professional development students. (Question PLAR 11).

Although we did not collect precisely the same data on Non-PLAR learners, we did ask them about their student status at the time of their PLAR orientation and at the time they completed the questionnaire. The majority of Non-PLAR respondents were not registered as students when they were oriented to PLAR (54% - Question Non-PLAR 8). Neither were they registered as students at the time they completed the questionnaire generally more than a year after their PLAR orientation (69%). Question Non-PLAR 15).

These data suggest that Non-PLAR learners decide not to participate in PLAR and at the same time decide not to enroll in school. We investigate their reasons for non-participation later in this report but it appears that learners already actively engaged as students are more likely to undertake PLAR.

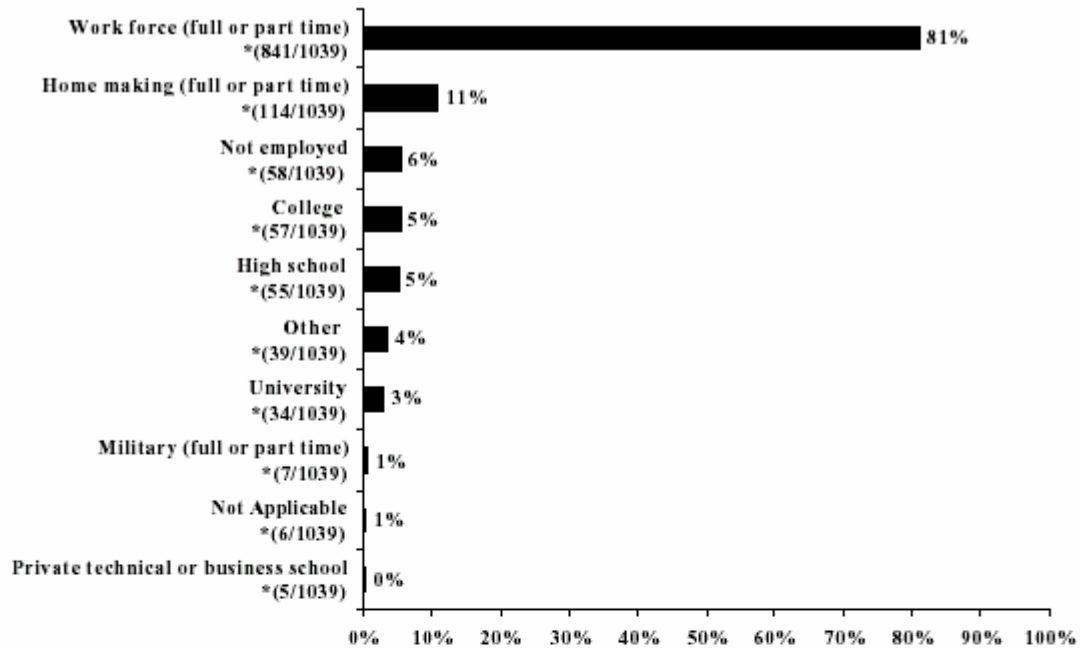
Employment Status

PLAR and Non-PLAR learners have similar employment status. Eighty-one percent (81%) of PLAR respondents were in the workforce on either a full-time or part-time basis in the year prior to attending their college. Eight percent (8%) reported being enrolled in postsecondary education during this period (Questions PLAR 2).

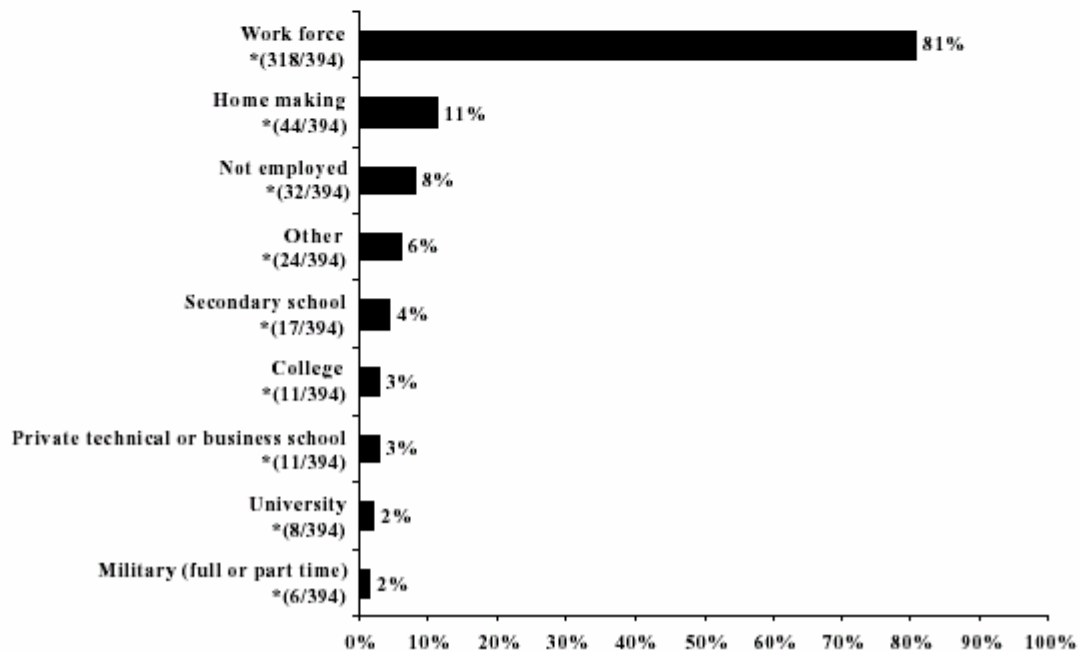
Eighty-one percent (81%) of Non-PLAR respondents who did return to school were also in the workforce on either a full-time or part-time basis in the year prior to attending their college. Twelve percent (12%) reported being enrolled in postsecondary education during this period. Chart S-3a and 3b presents PLAR and Non-PLAR learner activities in the year prior to attending their college.

Chart S-3a and S-3b: PLAR and Non-PLAR Learner Activities in Year Prior to Starting/Returning to College

PLAR



NonPLAR



*Note: Number of responses/respondents

A large majority of PLAR learners are employed at the time of attaining their PLAR credit with 55% employed on a full-time basis and 31% on a part-time basis. (Question PLAR 36). These results support the findings of several research studies and suggest further that the majority of students who undertake PLAR are recent returnees to postsecondary education with concurrent participation in the workforce, most likely on a full-time basis. Fifty-nine (59%) of Non-PLAR learners were employed full-time at the time of completing the questionnaire and the majority had not returned to postsecondary education since their PLAR orientation (Question Non-PLAR 15).

Sources and Extent of Prior Learning

All respondents consider work experience and on-the-job training the most important sources of prior learning (81%) but women cited other sources more often than men. For example, almost four times as many women reported independent learning as a source of their prior learning. Six times more women referenced other sources such as seminars/conferences/workshops. Eighteen percent (18%) of respondents (all female) reported volunteer work as a source of prior learning compared to only 2% of respondents (all male).

About half of PLAR learners have more than six years of work or on-the-job training tied to their PLAR credits (47%). Thirty-four percent (34%) of respondents associated their PLAR credits with one to five years of work or on-the-job training. These results combined with the age profiles and employment histories of PLAR learners suggest that PLAR is currently serving a mature, working population with knowledge and skills from several years of work and on-the-job training that can be credited academically. Charts S-4 and S-5 present respondents' feedback on their sources of prior learning and their years of related work and on-the-job training.

"This is an excellent means to advance through college using life and employment experiences, while still having the ability to work full-time."

PLAR Learner

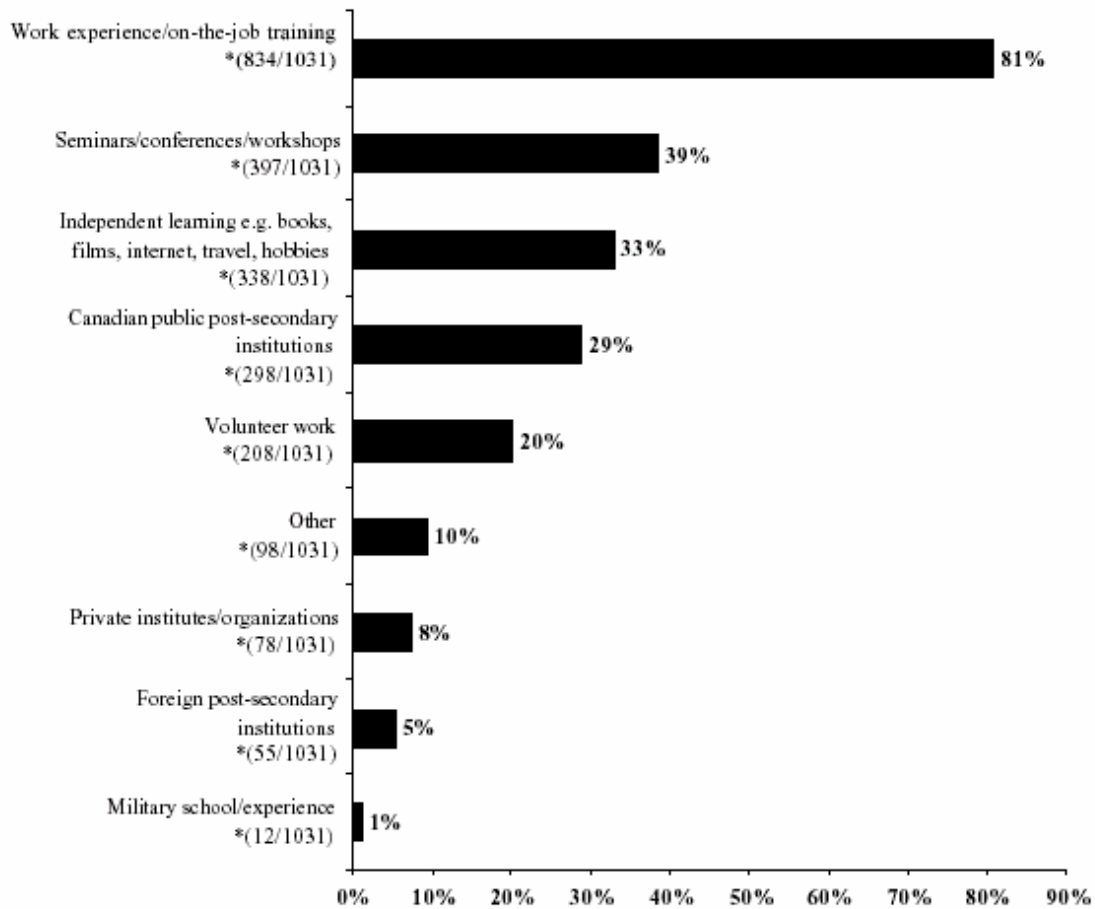
"Over 13 years experience in varying settings and treating patients with a variety of conditions..."

PLAR Learner

"My PLAR was earned in the workforce and that was the only way I earned any credits."

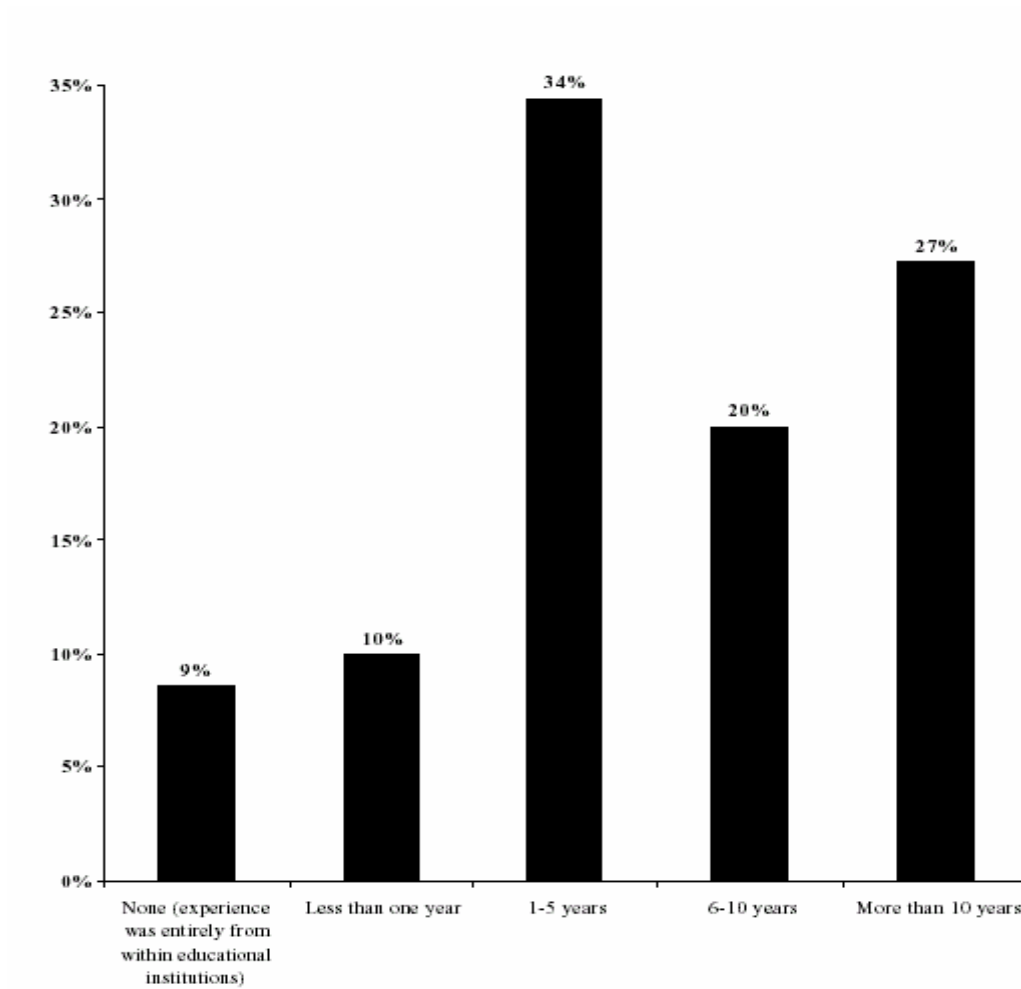
PLAR Learner

Chart S-4: PLAR Learners' Sources of Prior Learning



*Note: Number of responses/respondents

Chart S-5: Years of Work and On-the-Job Training Associated with PLAR Credits



Summary of Characteristics of PLAR and Non-PLAR Learners

While the data collected on PLAR and Non-PLAR learners are not wholly parallel, the similar nature of their ages, designated demographic group status, educational and employment histories combined with the data analysis on their gender suggest that they are demographically similar. The only significant differences are their status as students at the time of their PLAR orientation and some differences in their typical age.

How People Learn about PLAR

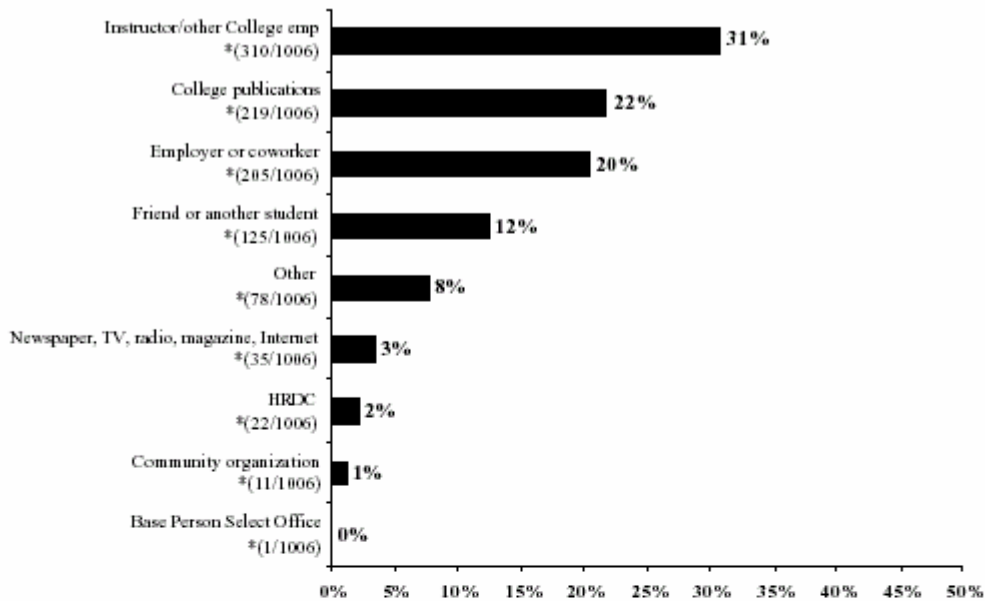
The partners wanted to know more about how people come to learn about PLAR, at what point they investigate it, and what methods of PLAR orientation they think are the most satisfactory. What we found supports our current anecdotal understanding of how PLAR is communicated. The majority of PLAR respondents learned about PLAR from an instructor or other college employee (31%), college publications (22%), or from an employer or co-worker (20%). These findings support Freers' (1994) research in which word of mouth was found to be a commonly used method of learning about PLAR. Very few PLAR learners cited government, community organizations or the public media as initial sources. This is consistent with current PLAR practice as these groups tend not to be involved in PLAR awareness-raising. Given that Non-PLAR learners were non-students at the time of their inquiries into PLAR, their sources were quite different with only 17% citing college personnel as sources of information and considerable reliance on college publications at 49%, friends at 11% and employers/co-workers, government and the public media each at 5%. (Questions PLAR 4, Non-PLAR 4). Chart S-6a and 6b present learners' responses in greater detail.

"I never heard of PLAR until my [teacher] came to my place of employment."

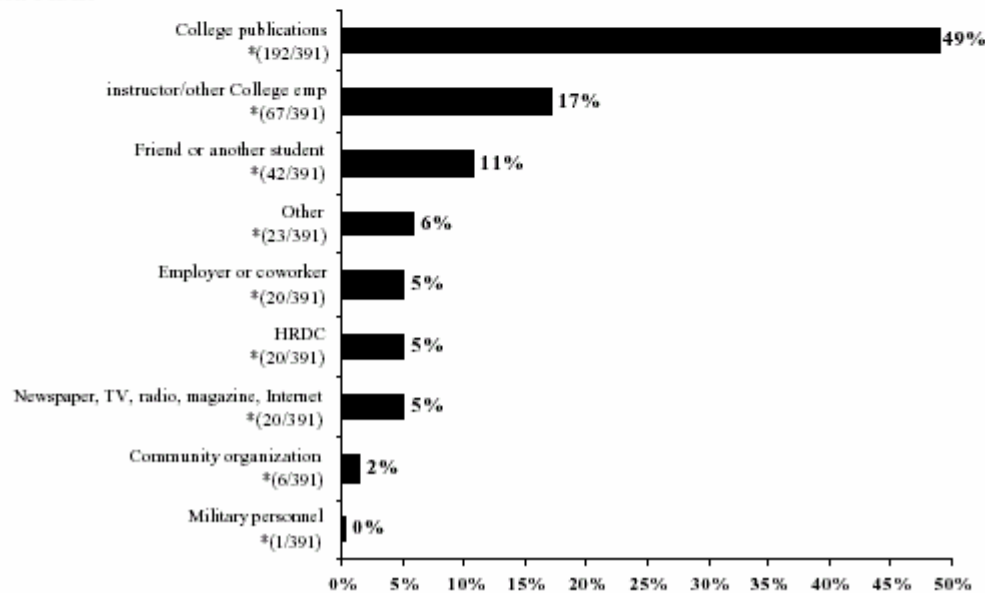
PLAR Learner

Chart S-6a and S-6b: How Learners Found out about PLAR

PLAR



Non-PLAR



*Note: Number of responses/total respondents

PLAR learners generally investigated PLAR before attending any classes (44%). However, twenty-nine (29%) looked into it after classes had started or after completing all other courses (10%). While it is encouraging to see that many learners

have early access to PLAR information, this result also suggests that almost 30% of learners are not finding out about PLAR before enrolling in courses. This suggests that there is still considerable room for improvement in informing learners about PLAR and about course content early in their college experience (Question PLAR 6).

Satisfaction with PLAR Orientation

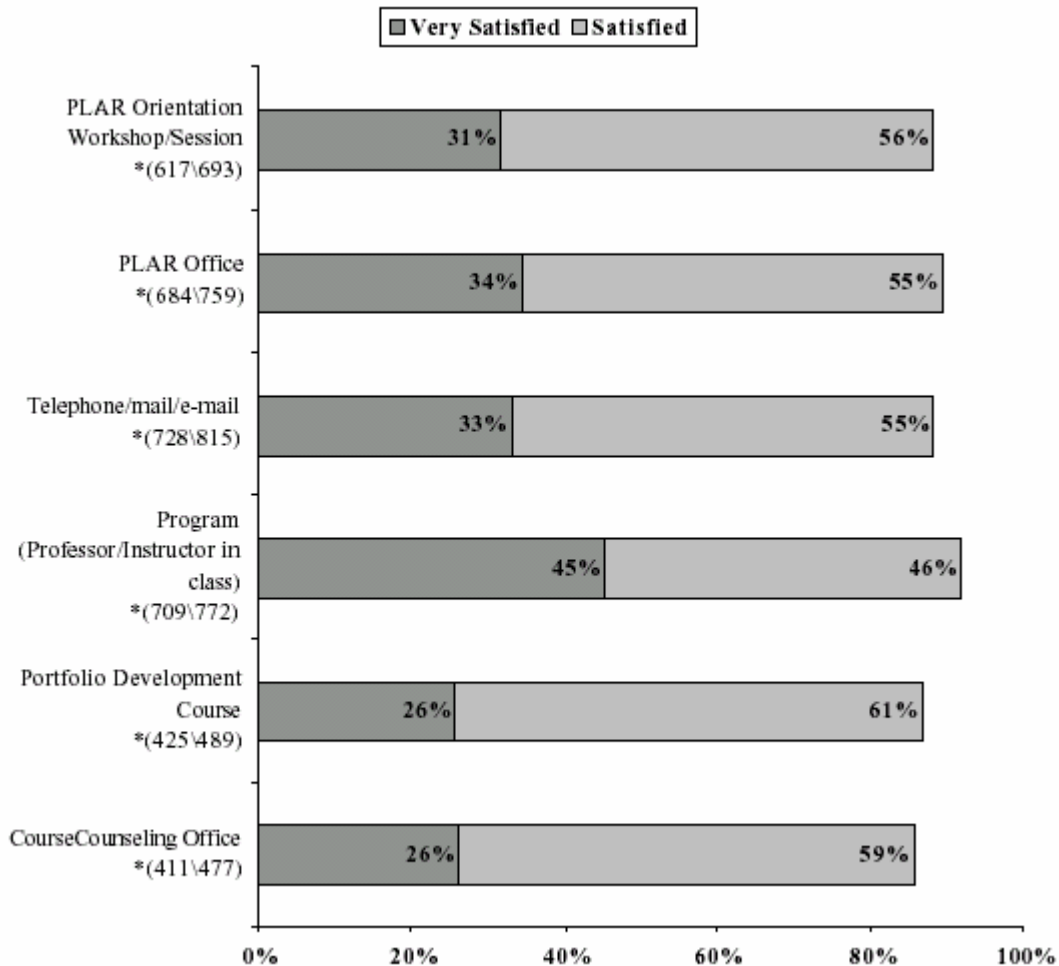
Partner colleges make available some form of orientation as a means of providing the public with introductory information on PLAR. Group sessions may be held in the evening or on weekends; individual interviews may be held in person or by telephone, and most institutions provide information packages. In the first Cross-Canada Study of PLAR, 72% of PLAR learners received orientation. In this study, learners appear highly satisfied with all six methods of orientation. Course instructors (91%) and the college PLAR office (89%) are the two most satisfactory methods identified by PLAR learners. Non-PLAR learners also rate high satisfaction levels with orientation services; however the college PLAR office (87%) and PLAR workshop orientation sessions (84%) are considered the two most satisfactory methods.

These findings confirm that both groups of learners are satisfied with existing PLAR orientation methods and suggest that personal contact with college staff appears to receive highest marks. Chart S-7 presents data on their ratings of six different methods of orientation (Question PLAR 9).

"I was only aware of PLAR because my teacher told me about it. No other way."

PLAR Learner

Chart S-7: Satisfaction Levels Regarding PLAR Orientation



*Note: Number of responses/total responses

Learner Motivation

Although adult education research is inconclusive about what motivates adults generally to return to education there is a correlation frequently made between participation in organized learning activities and a life transition event(s). Aslanian and Brickell (1980) found that 87% of the learners in their survey cited a life transition, such as a job promotion or loss, birth of a child or bereavement as their reason for participation. In additions, 56% of those in transition cited career

"It's a very good experience for me to join this PLAR. The motivation that I have for myself to finish what I want is overwhelming."

PLAR Learner

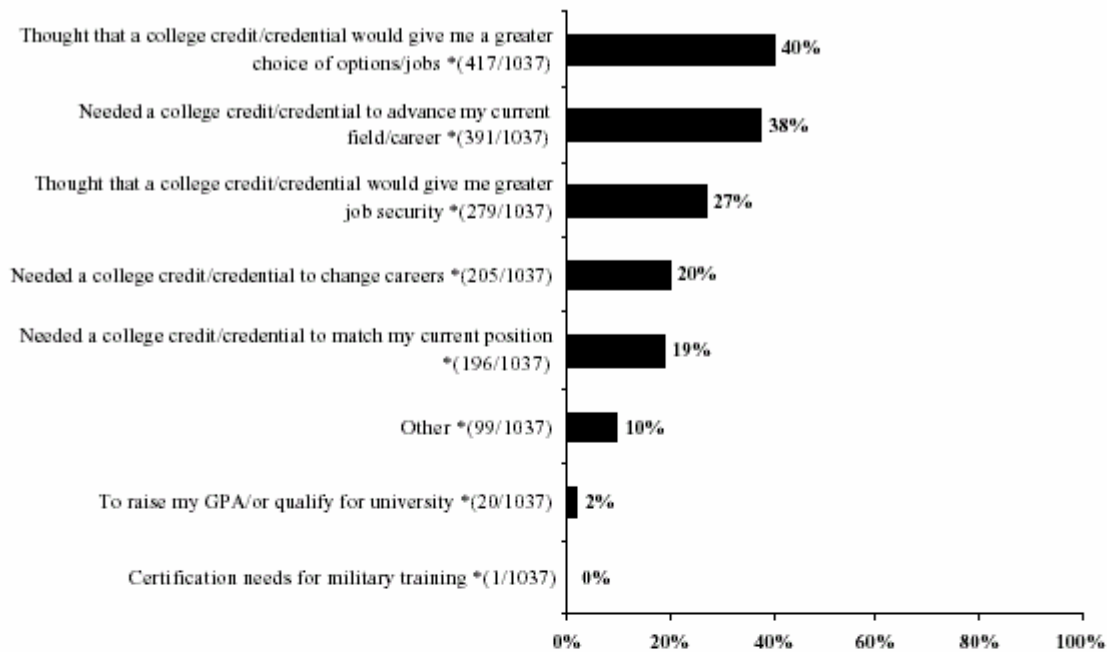
transitions as the trigger for participation suggesting that most adults participate in education to maintain or improve job status. In this current study, we hope that finding out more about what motivated learners to undertake additional education and PLAR will help institutions and policy makers to identify incentives for more learners to participate in PLAR, and to identify barriers.

PLAR and Non-PLAR learners have similar views on why they decided to return to/consider college. Their responses strongly indicate employment-related motives rather than education-related motives. Only 2-3% view college as a way to improve their GPA or gain access to university. The most common reason given by both groups is to obtain a greater choice of jobs (PLAR learners 40%, Non-PLAR learners 50%). PLAR learners who were part-time students felt that this reason and their need for a credential to advance their current field/career were the main reasons for considering college.

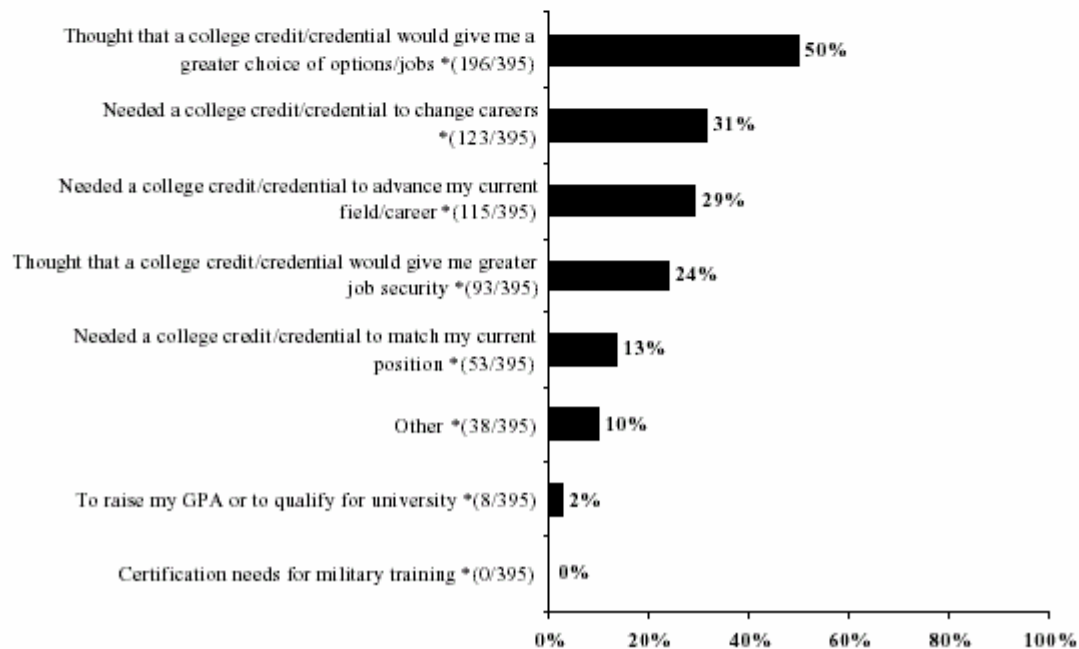
Among the least common reasons for considering college was the need for college credit to match their current position (19%). This relatively low proportion of respondents selecting this option combined with high proportion citing that PLAR will assist respondents to advance or obtain new jobs and careers, suggest that both PLAR and Non-PLAR respondents recognize the need to continue learning to be successful in their fields. Chart S-8 presents the range of PLAR and Non-PLAR learner responses to this question (Questions PLAR 3, Non-PLAR 3).

Chart S-8a and S-8b: PLAR and Non-PLAR Learner Reasons for Considering College

PLAR



Non-PLAR



*Note: Number of responses/total respondents

Impact of PLAR on Learners

PLAR learners consider PLAR to be an important factor in their decisions to return to school (74%). They also view PLAR as an important factor in their remaining in (72%) and successfully completing their programs. These responses support existing research on the positive impact of PLAR on learner persistence (Billingham & Travaglini, 1981, Pearson, 2000). Seventy-eight percent (78%) of PLAR learners reported that PLAR helped them to graduate (Questions PLAR 24, 25). Sixty-two percent (62%) of Non-PLAR learners also reported that the availability of PLAR was an important factor in helping them to consider college (Questions PLAR 21, Non-PLAR 5). These findings suggest that PLAR can be a significant motivational tool for adult learners and could play an important role in postsecondary retention and recruitment strategies.

When asked about their reasons for taking an interest in PLAR, all learners also responded similarly. The overwhelming reason for both groups is that they had a chance to gain credit for what they had learned from life and work experience and at the same time, continue working. In addition they were interested in using PLAR to save time, money, and to take fewer courses. These reasons verify focus group observations in the first Cross-Canada study and are consistent with what learners have been reporting anecdotally for some years. Table S-3 presents the top five reasons for each group (Questions PLAR 5, Non-PLAR 9).

"It makes sense, why waste time and money on a topic or course that you already know. I attended college to further my education, not review it!"

PLAR Learner

Table S-3: Top Five Reasons for Taking an Interest in PLAR

PLAR			
<i>Response</i>	Responses	Respondents	Percent
I thought I had a good change of gaining credit for what I learned through life and work experiences	669	1035	65%
To continue working while pursuing PLAR	377	1035	36%
To save time	310	1035	30%
To take fewer courses	289	1035	28%
To save money on my education	243	1035	23%

Non-PLAR			
<i>Response</i>	Responses	Respondents	Percent
I thought I had a good change of gaining credit for what I learned through life and work experiences	313	398	79%
To continue working while pursuing PLAR	164	398	41%
To save time	153	398	38%
To take fewer courses	129	398	32%
To save money on my education	126	398	32%

Recommending PLAR to Others

PLAR learners find PLAR to be a very satisfactory experience (93%) and a large majority report that they would recommend PLAR to others (96%). Although the majority of Non-PLAR learners do not intend to pursue PLAR in the future, 78% say they would recommend it to others. Only a small minority of Non-PLAR learners considers it very unlikely that they would not recommend it (4%). (Questions PLAR 30, 31 Non-PLAR 13).

Our analysis of the data up to this point in the report, shows striking similarities between PLAR and Non-PLAR learners. They are motivationally similar and they have come to learn about PLAR through similar means with which they have expressed considerable satisfaction. There is little indication as yet, why some learners decide to pursue PLAR and others do not.

Benefits of PLAR

Respondents' reasons for taking an interest in PLAR were expressions of anticipated benefits. To determine the benefits actually realized by our respondents, we asked PLAR learners several specific questions. They were presented with 18 potential benefits of PLAR and asked to select all the ones they had experienced.

The most commonly reported benefit of PLAR is that it confirms the value of adults' prior learning (73%). Respondents rated this affective impact over many other more practical benefits suggesting that institutions may be underestimating the personal impact PLAR has on adult learners. This finding is supported by feedback we received in the first Cross-Canada Study of PLAR and also lends support to Freers (1994) earlier finding that learners in her study found this to be a key benefit of PLAR.

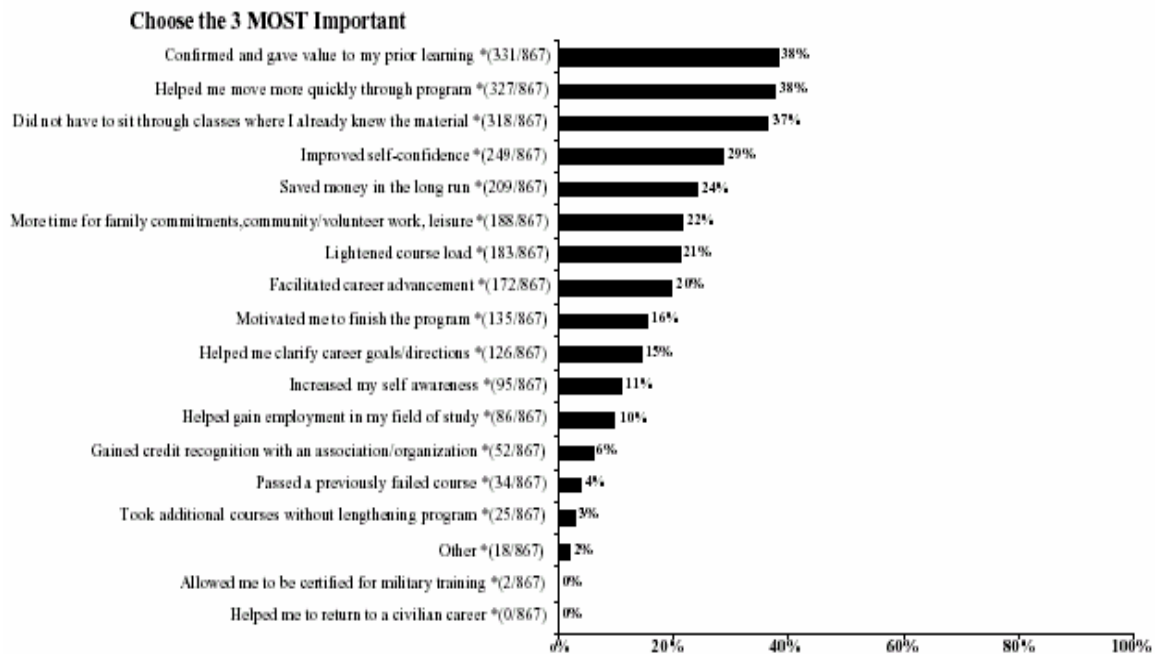
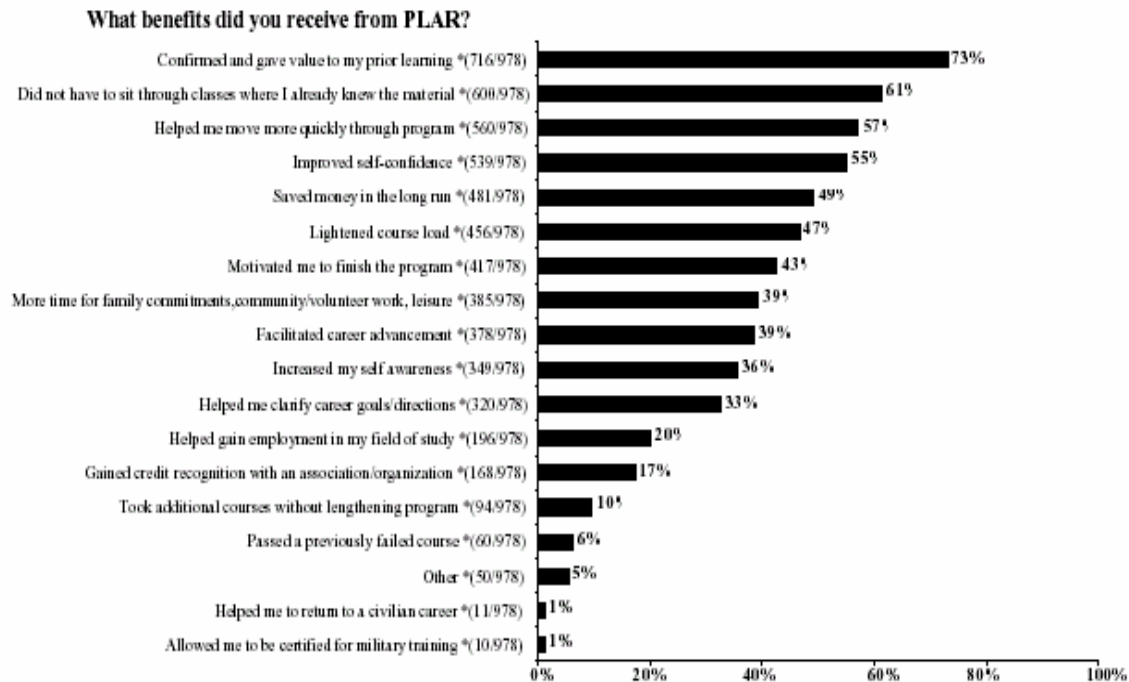
Learners also report that because of PLAR, they did not have to sit through classes where they already knew the material (61%). Credit for prior learning helped them move more quickly through their program (57%) and improved their self-confidence (55%). It saved learners money in the long run (49%) and lightened their course loads (47%).

Although responses were more evenly distributed when respondents were asked for the three most important benefits, the three most common benefits were also considered the most important: the value PLAR confirms and gives to adults' prior learning; the fact that they did not have to sit through classes where they already knew the material; and the help PLAR provided in assisting learners to move more quickly through their program. Chart S-9 presents the complete list of learner responses on the benefits of PLAR (Question PLAR 29a).

"My PLAR experience was outstanding. I was able to transform my work experience into credits. ...[It] allowed me to fast track my diploma and gain the financial and professional recognition of my many years of work and life experiences."

PLAR Learner

Chart S-9: Benefits of PLAR



*Note: Number of responses/respondents

When PLAR benefits are examined in conjunction with the reported reasons for taking an interest in PLAR, a similar pattern emerges. Obtaining credit for learning acquired outside the classroom, saving time and money, reducing course loads and continuing to work while pursuing college credit were the most common reasons for taking an interest in PLAR. These data suggest that learners do gain important benefits from PLAR and that their initial expectations are fulfilled.

What PLAR Learners Say about the PLAR Process

Over the last decade, many colleges in Canada have developed formal policies and procedures to govern their PLAR activities. The kinds of supporting materials provided to learners, the methods used to assess learning and the type of feedback given following assessment are elements of best practices for PLAR. Issues such as the fees charged, the location and scheduling of assessments, the skill levels required to undertake an assessment, and the time it takes to conduct and hear back about an assessment also have an impact on learner access and success. We asked PLAR learners about these issues in a series of questions that provide a glimpse at how useful learners view current institutional practices. Non-PLAR learners also had valuable information to contribute on why they did not pursue PLAR and what would need to be changed for them to consider PLAR in the future.

“PLAR was very time consuming. It took an incredible amount of work and assessment but was worth it in the long run.”

PLAR Learner

Learner Involvement in Determining Assessment Method

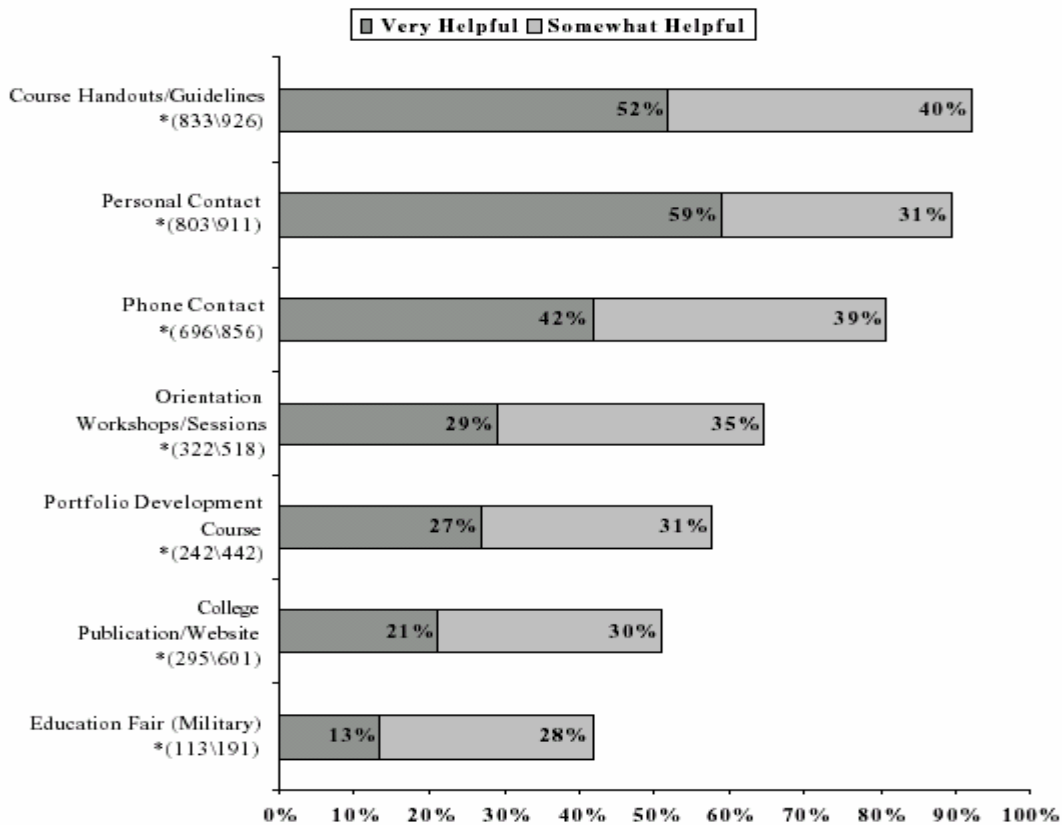
Some adult learners have good ideas about how they might best demonstrate their prior learning and therefore we wanted to know whether learners had input with faculty in determining assessment methods. The majority of learners (72%) reported that the method was chosen for them. Fourteen percent (14%) stated that they could choose between 2 or more methods and 13% reported that they were given the opportunity to recommend a method (Question PLAR 12). These findings suggest that the majority of faculty assessors/advisors do not incorporate learner participation in selecting PLAR assessment methods. There may be several reasons for this but future research on faculty practices and the extent to which learner input can be used to complement faculty assessment expertise may assist in identifying

additional appropriate opportunities for learner participation in selecting assessment methods. A high majority of learners (90 – 92%) did feel that the assessment process allowed them to demonstrate their learning. Unfortunately, we did not ask learners specifically about their views on the appropriateness of the assessment methods they used, and a question to this affect would be a good one to add to future surveys.

Helpfulness of Information and Assistance Items

PLAR learners find most college PLAR information services to be highly satisfactory. Course handouts/guidelines (92%), personal contact (90%), and telephone contact (81%) were most frequently reported as helpful. Chart S-10 presents learner responses to this question (Question PLAR 13).

Chart S-10: Helpfulness of Information and Assistance Items



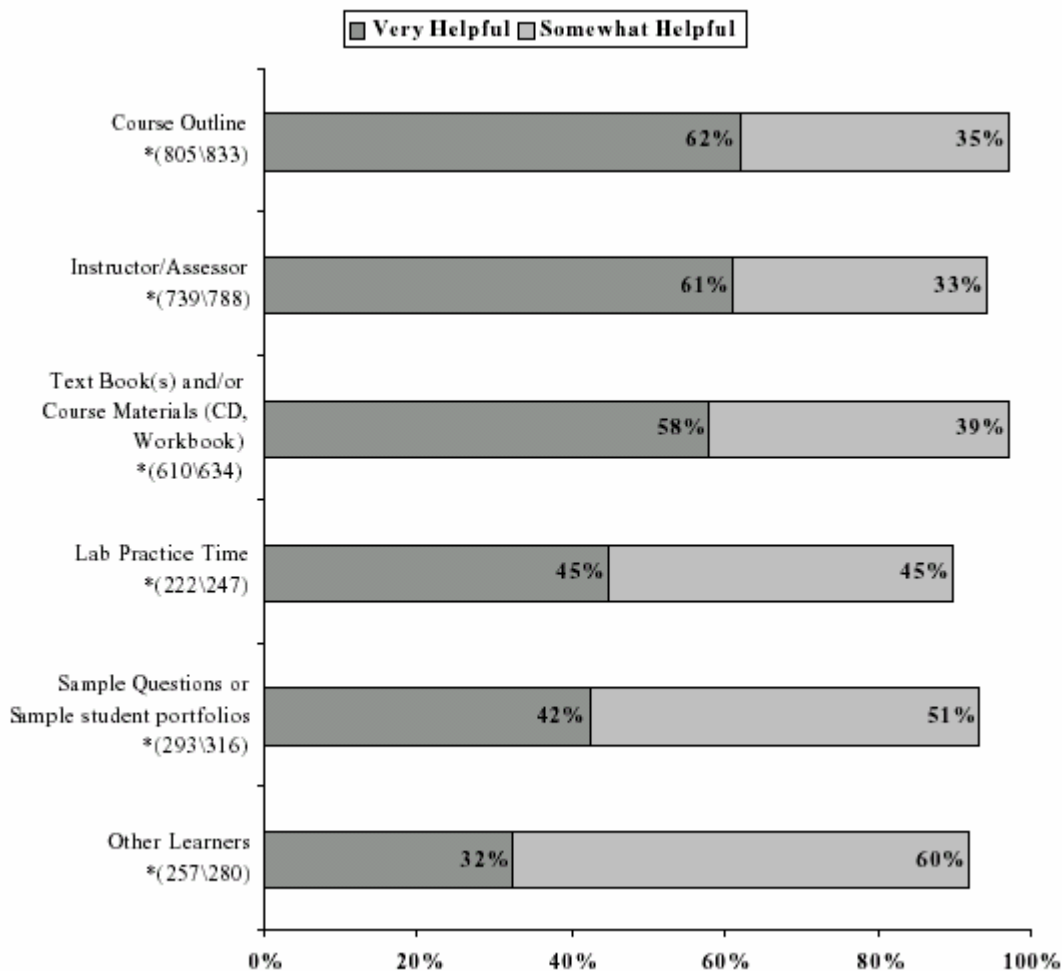
*Number of responses/total responses

Mohawk College is excluded from data on orientation/workshop sessions

Helpfulness of Supports in Preparing for Assessment

Similarly, PLAR learners cite several types of supports helpful in preparing for their assessments. Three types of support were selected more frequently than any others: course outlines (97%), textbooks and other course materials (97%) and instructors/assessors (94%). Other institutions may wish to examine their own support systems for PLAR learners to see if making these items readily available could make improvements. Chart S-11 presents a full breakdown of the data (Question PLAR 14).

Chart S-11: Helpfulness of Supports in Preparing for Assessment



*Number of responses/total responses

Financial Support

Most PLAR learners pay for their own assessments (66%). Only 21% reported that their employer paid the assessment fee. These data combined with our findings that 86% of PLAR learners are employed at the time of their assessments (55% on a full-time basis), suggests that most employers do not financially support the PLAR activities of their workers. A notable exception is Fanshawe College, which has undertaken a strategic approach to actively recruit support from local employers. Forty-four (44%) of Fanshawe's learners reported that their employers financed their assessments. (Question PLAR 10).

"Challenge exams are great if the opportunity is presented."

PLAR Learner

Assessment Methods

PLAR learners are highly satisfied with the elements of each assessment method. Again, these results suggest that PLAR is meeting the expectations of adult learners. Table S-4 presents learner responses. (Questions PLAR 15, 16, 17).

Table S-4: Learner Responses Regarding the PLAR Process

Percentage (%) of Respondents Who Strongly Agreed and Agreed that:			
Opinion	Challenge	Demonstrate	Portfolio
The process was easy to understand	93	95	88
Advice or support was clear and helpful	89	93	90
Resource materials were useful	91	93	87
Examples presented were clear	87	91	86
The advisor was able to assist me effectively	-	-	87
The process for providing evidence was reasonable	-	-	90
The process met my needs	91	92	-
Overall the process allowed me to demonstrate my learning	90	92	92

Note: Not all options were provided for all items. No data was collected for items indicating a dash in the data column.

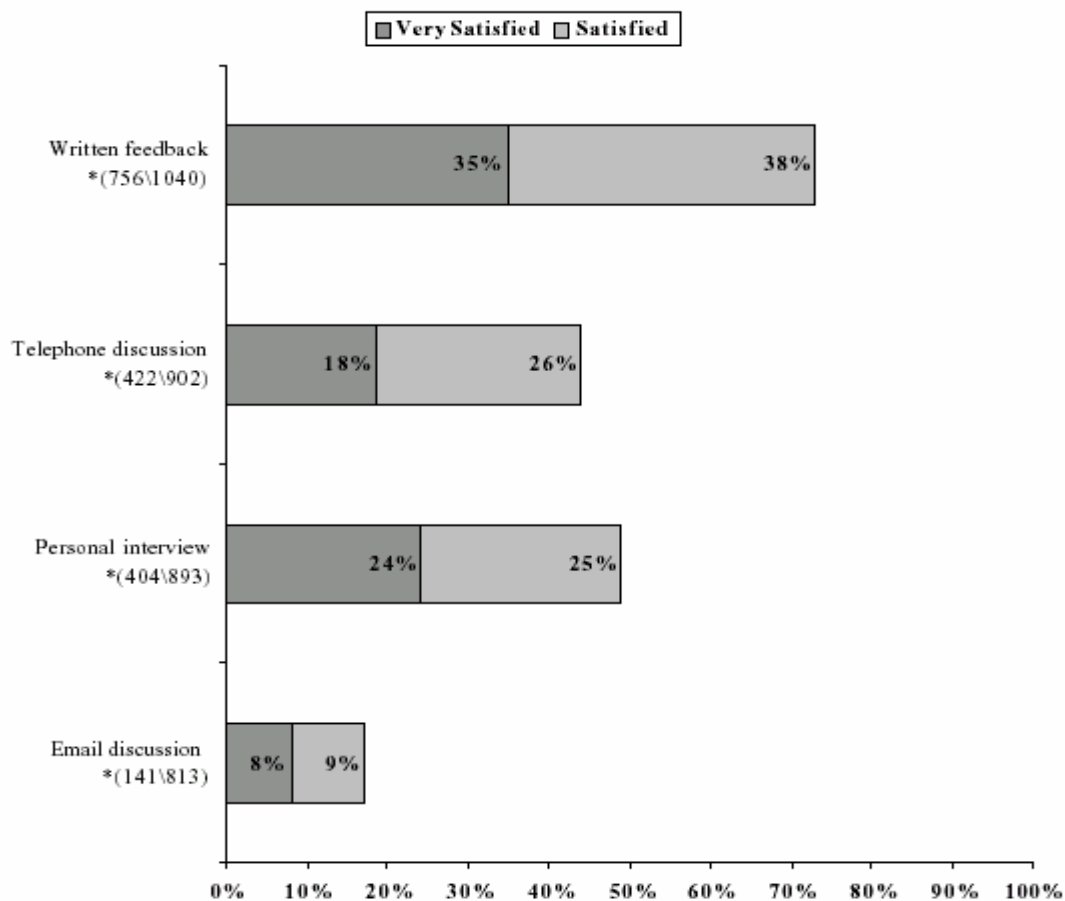
Assessment Feedback

Overall the learners were satisfied with the “type” of feedback they received. However, we did not ask them if they had received information regarding the extent or level of their learning or if they had expected this. Written comments from a few learners indicated they would have liked to receive more specific feedback. This would be an excellent question to ask faculty and learners more about in future surveys. Chart S-12 presents a summary of the results.

“I would have liked ...a phone call or letter regarding how well a person might have done on an exam or essay as well as where they might have improved these things instead of a piece of paper mailed with a grade.”

PLAR Learner

Chart S-12: Satisfaction Levels for Feedback on Assessment Results



*Number of responses/total responses

Other Elements of the Assessment Process

Learners were asked to rate the level of difficulty they experienced with several elements of the assessment process. These included the length of the assessment process, the level of assessment fees, the information made available, the location and scheduling of assessments and the reading and writing skills required for assessment.

PLAR learners find assessment fees and the length of the assessment process as posing the greatest difficulty during the PLAR process (39% and 38% respectively). While the majority of learners experienced no difficulty with these elements of the assessment process, it was by no means across the board (with the exception of reading and writing skill requirements). These findings suggest that colleges should review their practices particularly with respect to assessment fees, the length the assessment process, and the location and scheduling of assessments. The finding that 33% of learners experienced difficulties in obtaining information during the PLAR process is inconsistent with the results of other questions posed to PLAR learners (see learner views on assessment methods, helpfulness of supports and PLAR information services). We have no explanation for this inconsistency. Chart S-13 presents a summary of the learners' responses (Question PLAR 20).

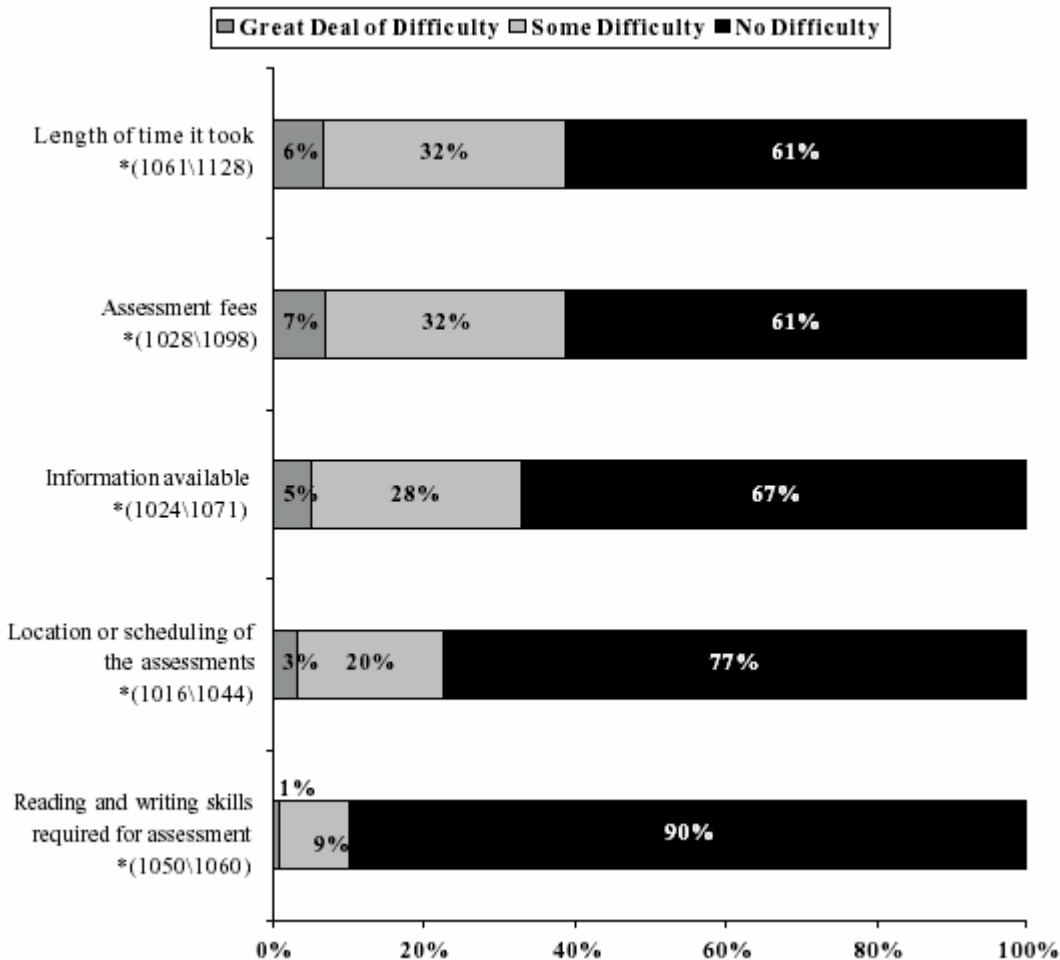
"[The] PLAR process as currently available is too complex; should be significantly simplified."... "The PLAR concept is great; however I think the reality of it is a bit confusing for the over-40 potential learner. I feel the process should be made simpler and more encouragement [should be given] to those going through life/ career challenges."

PLAR Learners

"I do not agree with the fact that I had to pay [the course fee] to have my portfolio assessed... I would have agreed to pay a reasonable assessment fee"... "I had to pay for the course twice."

PLAR Learners

Chart S-13: Difficulties during the PLAR Process



*Number of responses/total responses

Very few PLAR learners experience any disadvantages in subsequent courses resulting from their prior learning assessment (49 learners or 6%). Of these 49 learners, 37% felt that they lacked the depth of knowledge/skills for subsequent courses. Twenty-nine percent (29%) felt like outsiders and 20% were required to wait for a seat in their chosen program to become available because of the lock-step design of postsecondary programs (Questions PLAR 22, 23).

"I have since transferred to [a university] and my PLAR course is not transferable. Although it was only 1 course, it would be nice if all colleges/ universities were on the same page. I feel disadvantaged from doing PLAR and losing the credit once leaving college."

PLAR Learner

Finally, PLAR learners were asked about their experiences in transferring PLAR credits and enrolling in other programs since their assessment. Sixty percent (60%) had not applied to enroll in another program and eighty-nine percent (89%) reported that they had not tried to transfer their credits. These results are not surprising given that this was only a 3-year study and 30% of survey participants had not yet graduated (Questions PLAR 26, 27, 28). It is worth noting that in some provinces there has been a recent increase in the extent to which college PLAR credits are recognized by universities (e.g. British Columbia using block transfers). These issues are important to consider for future research if we want to fully understand the contribution PLAR makes to education in the long term. Some of these factors were studied by Freers (1994) who found that 88 % of study participants went on to achieve an undergraduate degree or higher level following completion of the PLAR process in a college.

"The PLAR process as currently available is too complex; should be significantly simplified."

Non-PLAR Learner

Non-PLAR Learners' Experiences with the PLAR Process

Many learners investigate PLAR and decide not to pursue it. Because their perspectives are also critical to understanding the effectiveness of current services, what we do well, and what we need to do better, Non-PLAR learners were asked several questions about their experiences with PLAR.

"I have problems getting course outlines ...because I work full-time and can't contact the right dept.."

Non-PLAR Learner

Although forty-three (43%) of Non-PLAR learners reported that they would consider PLAR in the future, the majority had decided that they would not undertake PLAR (57% - Question Non-PLAR 11). We asked this latter group to tell us why they would not consider PLAR in the future by selecting from a list of 13 potential reasons (Question Non-PLAR 10). We learned that many of these adult learners decided that it was not at a good time for their family or themselves (37%); PLAR was too time-consuming (38%); it was too complicated (35%). The partners believe that personal and family circumstances are important contributing factors to non-participation and are consistent with reasons often provided by adults considering a return to postsecondary education in general. These findings suggest that for many people existing PLAR processes just won't work for them. However, colleges

wishing to increase adult learner participation in PLAR should continue to simplify the process and make PLAR and college programs more accessible to busy adults.

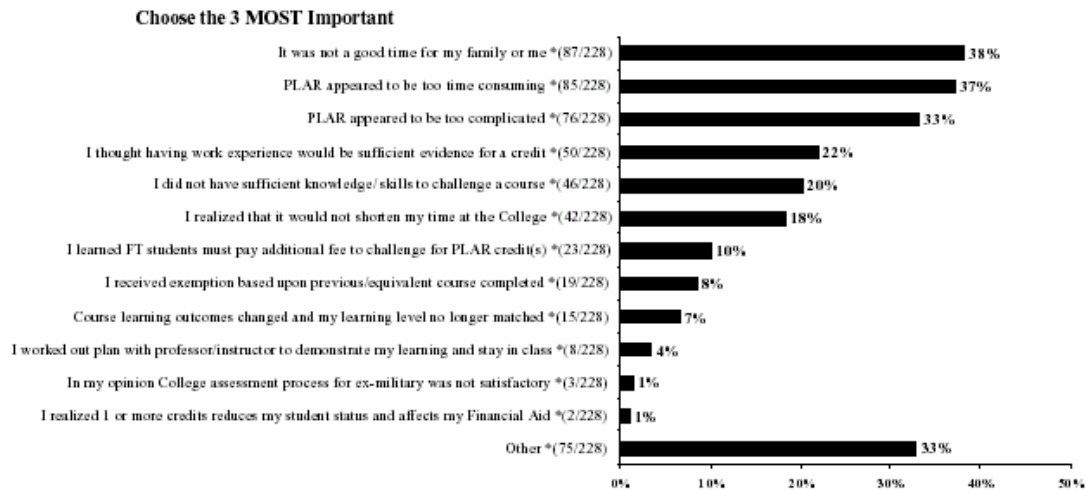
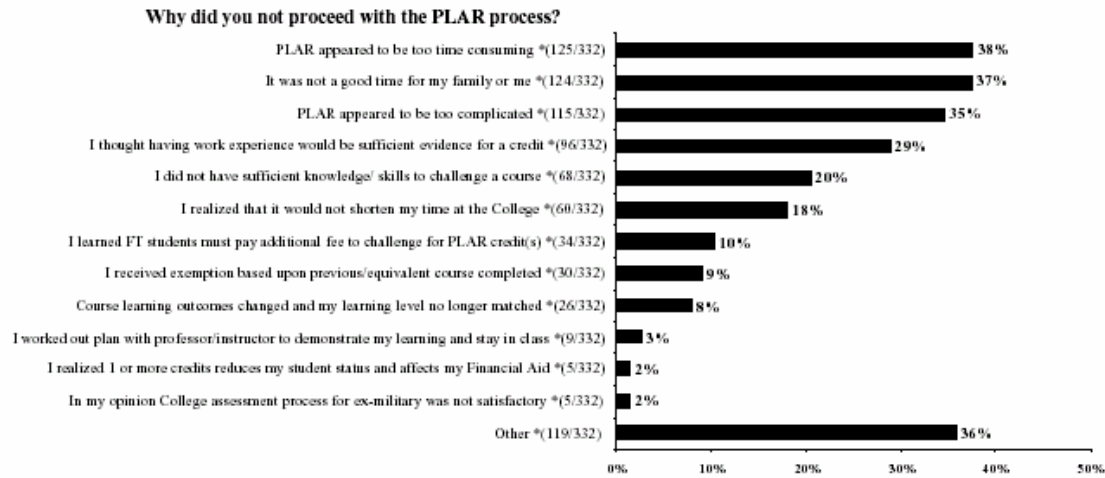
Almost 30% of respondents report that when they had first inquired about PLAR, they had thought that experience alone would be sufficient evidence to be awarded credit. Twenty percent (20%) felt that after learning about PLAR, they did not have sufficient knowledge to successfully challenge a course. These results suggest that there are some valid reasons why people should not undertake PLAR and that it is important to provide clear information about the process at an early stage to allow learners to make informed decisions (Question Non-PLAR 10).

A high percentage of Non-PLAR learners indicated that they also had “other” reasons for not pursuing PLAR (36%). We did not capture a wide enough range of reasons why learners may decide not to pursue PLAR, such as plain curiosity or the cost of assessments. Future studies should try to discern what these might be so that fuller responses can be made. Chart S-14 summarizes respondents’ reasons for not proceeding with PLAR (Question Non-PLAR 10).

“When attempting to keep a high marks average, the PLAR risk to reward trade-offs is too high. In a full paid course you have a clearer view of what might be on the final exam. With PLAR you are a bit in the dark and could wind up paying 1.5 times for the course if you miss your desired mark range.”

PLAR Learner

Chart S-14: Reasons for Not Proceeding with PLAR



*Note: Number of responses/respondents

What Would Have to Change

Non-PLAR learners report that for them to consider PLAR in the future their college would have to simplify the PLAR steps/process (45%); assessment fees would have to be reduced (36%); and their personal circumstances would have to change (36%) (Question Non-PLAR 12). These results are consistent with learner responses to Question 9 indicating that saving money was an important reason for Non-PLAR learners to take an interest in PLAR, and with Question 10 in which learners reported that they did not proceed with PLAR because it was too complicated, time consuming or it was not a good time for their family or themselves. Most of these findings support earlier suggestions that if colleges wish to increase access to PLAR services, they will need to find ways to better respond to the concerns and circumstances of busy adults. Twenty-one percent (21%) of respondents selected “other” factors that would have to change. In future studies the additional factors should be added to this question to achieve a clearer response pattern. Forty-three percent (43%) of Non-PLAR learners said that they are still considering PLAR. (Question Non-PLAR 11). Chart S-15 presents the results.

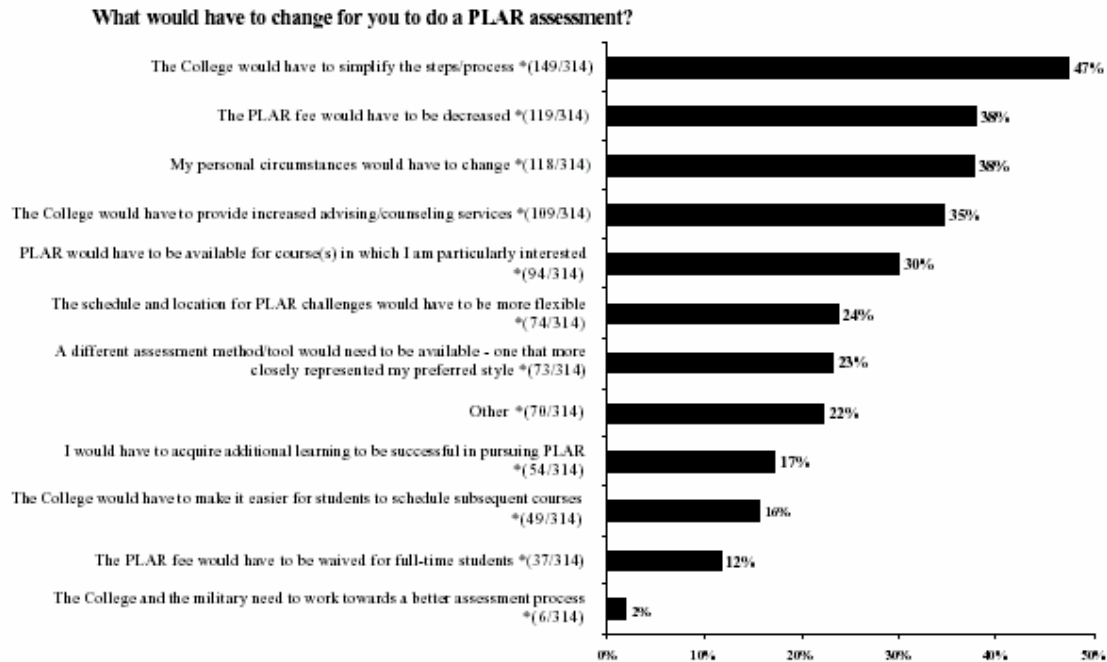
“PLAR is more trouble than it is worth.”

“I would happily continue with PLAR if I had more time or could use work time to complete it..”

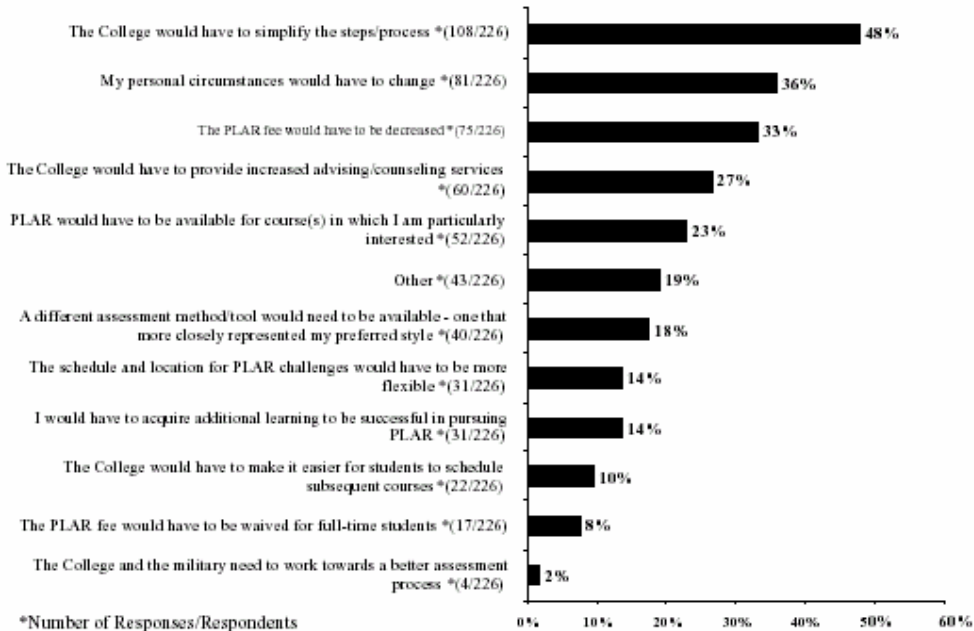
“Make it available to rural students.”

PLAR Learners

Chart S-15: What Would Have to Change to Undertake PLAR



Choose the 3 MOST Important



*Number of responses/respondents

Marketing PLAR

Colleges offering PLAR have historically posted information in their publications such as brochures, posters and program calendars. Some effort has been made to use PLAR as a recruitment tool since PLAR provides several benefits to returning adult students. However, most PLAR learners in this longitudinal study are students who are already enrolled in courses or programs. Colleges need to find better ways to attract not only more enrolled students to PLAR but also more individuals who are considering a return to formal education (e.g. sending PLAR information to workplace human resource departments).

PLAR learners consider PLAR brochures and the distribution of course outlines (81% respectively) as the best methods of marketing PLAR. They also consider instructors/professors describing PLAR in class and distributing brochures (78%), the work of PLAR Centres in the college or community (78%), and internet/college websites (75%) to be effective methods of spreading the word. Interestingly Non-PLAR learners also selected these five methods plus the use of PLAR orientation sessions the most often. Publication of these findings will hopefully encourage all institutions to review and improve their PLAR marketing activities. (Questions PLAR 32, Non-PLAR 14). Tables S-5a and 5b present the learners' overall ratings.

"PLAR is great but it needs to be advertised more."

PLAR Learner

"There should be a list of student names- like a fraternity; so one can call for peer consulting..."

"More information should be made available on the website..."

"There should be a PLAR office on all campuses...."

"I didn't see PLAR anywhere except in course material..."

"Put the PLAR brochure in the orientation packages designed for full-time students..."

"Make PLAR part of the college orientation program."

PLAR Learners

Table S-5a and S-5b: Best Methods of Spreading the Word about PLAR

PLAR				
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor/Very Poor
Instructor/Professor describing PLAR in class and distributing PLAR brochures	39%	39%	13%	9%
Course Outlines	33%	48%	14%	6%
Internet/College Website	32%	43%	18%	7%
PLAR Centre located in College/Community	29%	49%	16%	7%
PLAR Brochure	26%	55%	13%	6%
Program Orientation Sessions	26%	41%	23%	11%
PLAR materials available in the workplace	23%	38%	20%	18%
PLAR featured at job fairs	22%	41%	22%	16%
PLAR posters in college and community	20%	45%	22%	13%
PLAR student ambassadors for school and community events	11%	36%	30%	22%
PLAR radio and television ads	10%	34%	25%	31%
Military Newspaper	10%	37%	34%	19%
Military Education Fair	10%	41%	31%	18%
Billboards	9%	37%	30%	25%
Non-PLAR				
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor/Very Poor
Internet/College Website	30%	38%	27%	6%
Course Outlines	24%	41%	27%	8%
PLAR Centre located in College/Community	23%	41%	24%	11%
PLAR featured at job fairs	20%	33%	29%	18%
Instructor/Professor describing PLAR in class and distributing PLAR brochures	20%	44%	23%	12%
Program Orientation Sessions	19%	45%	23%	12%
PLAR materials available in the workplace	19%	33%	22%	26%
PLAR Brochure	18%	55%	21%	5%
PLAR posters in College and Community	14%	36%	31%	19%
PLAR radio and television ads	11%	24%	27%	38%
Billboards	9%	21%	37%	33%
Military Education Fair	8%	30%	43%	19%
PLAR student ambassadors for school and community events	6%	28%	34%	33%

Learner responses to this and other questions combined with the results of recent studies give us a number of reasons for suggesting that PLAR should be marketed more vigorously. First, learner reports support other recent findings that PLAR is significant contributor to student retention and graduation. Secondly, increasing PLAR services contributes to the efficient use of student spaces by removing students who do not need to be in the classroom while at the same time filling adult learners' needs for credentials that advance their careers. Marketing PLAR more assertively can open up opportunities for colleges to deliver programs to business and industries wanting to encourage workers to increase their knowledge and skills. Finally, increasing the volume of PLAR through marketing would make PLAR more affordable for institutions under current funding formulae.

"More brochures, advertising, knowledge of PLAR in the workplace would be beneficial ..."

PLAR Learners

"[PLAR] should be advertised; I found out by mistake – thank goodness!"

PLAR Learners

Overall Rating of PLAR

Ninety-three percent (93%) of PLAR learners report overall satisfaction with their PLAR experience and 96% indicate they would recommend PLAR to others. These results suggest that where PLAR is operational, the colleges are meeting PLAR learners' expectations. Forty-three percent (43%) of Non-PLAR learners said they are still considering PLAR and 78% said they would recommend PLAR to others. These results suggest that if barriers identified by Non-PLAR learners were addressed, adult learner participation in college PLAR programs would increase.

Profile of a Typical PLAR Learner

The typical PLAR learner is an English speaking, white, female aged 33 years. She has past postsecondary education and has only recently returned to college. She now attends college or university through part-time studies or continuing education. She is also employed on a full-time basis and through work and on-the-job training, has acquired more than five years of prior learning related to her program of study. She found out about PLAR while a student and decided to undertake assessment because she could obtain academic credit for her prior learning while continuing to work full-time. She could also save time and money by taking fewer courses. She learned about PLAR either through college personnel and publications or through her workplace.

The availability of PLAR was an important factor in her decision to stay in her program and it helped her graduate from the program. She found that PLAR had many benefits the most important of which were that it confirmed and gave value to her prior learning, helped her to move more quickly through her program, lightened her course load, saved her money and improved her self-confidence. The PLAR process created no disadvantages with respect to her subsequent studies. She is satisfied with the results and would recommend PLAR to others.

Profile of a Typical Non-PLAR Learner

The basic demographics of the typical Non-PLAR learner are similar to the PLAR learner. She is also an English speaking, white, female between 35 and 45 years old. She has past postsecondary education but is not enrolled in a college program. She is also employed full-time. She decided to investigate PLAR because she thought she could obtain academic credit for her prior learning while continuing to work full-time. She also thought she could save time and money by taking fewer courses. She learned about PLAR through college personnel and publications or through friends. The availability of PLAR was an important factor in her consideration of returning to college. However, she found that her personal commitments around work and family were too great. She also perceived PLAR to be too time-consuming and complicated. One or more of these factors led her to decide not to pursue PLAR and she is not likely to change her mind. If she were to pursue PLAR, her personal circumstances would have to change and the college would have to offer her a simpler, less costly process. She would be willing to recommend PLAR to others.

These profiles of PLAR and Non-PLAR learners help us to understand who is most likely to access PLAR, who is not and why. Program design and marketing decisions by postsecondary institutions can then be made with this data in mind.

PART THREE:

**PLAR AND THE MILITARY – WORKPLACE
TRAINING EVALUATION**

Marcel's Story – Environmental Health and Safety

I enrolled in the army in 1972 in Montreal after completing grade 9. I served in the Armed Forces for 20 years during which time I was involved in all kinds of training at many different schools.

In July 1992, I retired from the Armed Forces and in 1999 contacted my College to find out if I could obtain civilian academic credit for my military training as a medical assistant. Following an assessment I received credit for 22 college courses (57 credits). I went to work for an oil company and traveled in Canada and USA through the 1990's. In 1999, while working in Louisiana, I contacted the University of New Orleans who advised me that they would help me pursue a bachelor's degree. I developed a portfolio, which included my military training, as well as all the courses, seminars, lectures and my professional designation training. Following another assessment, the University of New Orleans granted me two and one half years worth of university credit for my prior learning. In March 2001, I graduated with a university degree in environmental health and safety.

PART THREE: PLAR AND THE MILITARY – WORKPLACE TRAINING EVALUATION

THE SERVICE

Collège Ahuntsic offers a variety of educational services to Canadian military personnel through the Canadian Forces Community College Program (CFCCP). The CFCCP's goal is to give military personnel, their families, and civilian Department of Defense personnel, greater access to college education. It is a gateway, as well as an orientation service and it provides support to persons pursuing postsecondary studies.

The service contract between the Canadian Armed Forces and Collège Ahuntsic includes all costs related to assessment of military training equivalency: a part-time counselor, and the per diems and transportation costs incurred by expert team (usually 3-5 people) travel to Canadian Armed Forces bases a Cross-Canada where the training is given. The Quebec Ministry of Education does not finance this activity. The military personnel who sign up for the Collegial Studies Program of the Canadian Forces must pay a \$50.00 file study fee. No other fee is levied to provide equivalencies for training and files remain open for updates without further fees.

The goal of the Collegial Studies Program is not to evaluate the military program itself, but to establish equivalencies between military programs and similar college programs in Quebec. Therefore, the decisions made must not be taken as judgments on the value of the evaluated programs, but as identification of the common points between them. The educational assistance provided includes all relevant information concerning the following.

- Occupations and study programs in Quebec (150 collegial study programs that lead directly to the job market).

- Assessment of academic and military files for recognition of equivalencies for occupations and courses as well as training undertaken at other colleges and universities.
- The choice of a program or course at any Quebec college of General and Professional Education (CEGEP) and information on pre-requisites from secondary education, the admission quota and other relevant information.
- A study program profile: what courses must be completed in order to graduate from a college in Quebec.
- A Collegial Studies confirmation letter that recognizes the value of college training in terms of full - time study years. When a diploma has not yet been awarded, this letter may serve as a supporting document when searching for employment.
- Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition on an individual basis

The service offered by Collège Ahuntsic includes a comparative analysis of the training programs offered in the military to equivalent civilian college programs in Quebec. In most cases, credit award requests are successful. New categories of military professional groups are analyzed every year.

HISTORY OF THE SERVICE

The evaluation method used in this process was developed by the American Council on Education in order to evaluate the training offered by the U.S. Army in 1945 following World War II. This method places emphasis on the conditions in which training is given, not only on the analysis of the course content.

Following the establishment of PLAR services at Collège Ahuntsic, and in order to implement rigorous but fair assessment procedures of military training in Canada, the College sent a study team to the American Council on Education in the spring of 1986 to become familiar with their model of evaluating military training. In 1986-1987, Collège Ahuntsic experimented with evaluation by jury consensus. The first experiment took place at the Borden military base in Ontario and compared the training of military police to the police-training program at Collège Ahuntsic.

Since that date, the Collège has coordinated the assessment of various military training programs including electronics technician, paramedical technician, combat arms, administration, accounting, cartography and others. As of 2001, the Collège

has conducted evaluations of 71 military occupations for equivalency in 28 different programs. In each case, a faculty team from different CEGEPs met with the military personnel responsible for the project at the military base where the training was carried out. Equivalencies were established between specific training programs for military occupations and similar civilian occupations at the college level. To date, more than twenty CEGEPs have participated in this initiative to award credit for military training equivalency.

The primary military contact is the Base Personnel Selection Officer (BPSO), which maintains a catalogue of course equivalencies that is updated annually. The role and responsibilities of the BPSO are related to all the aspects of the professional life of military personnel. As specially trained personnel, they recruit and evaluate members of the military for specific occupations. They help military personnel to change occupations, return to school, select programs, take retirement etc. In other words they serve as gateway to career and personal enhancement. One of their responsibilities is to inform the military personnel of programs offered by the Department of National Defense. One way of doing this is through Education Fairs. Most Canadian Forces Bases across Canada hold Education Fairs once a year. Collège Ahuntsic participates as often as possible.

THE PROCESS

Criteria must be respected in the choice of assessors: they must have broad knowledge of the objectives of their program and courses and be aware of PLAR practices regarding non-college training programs. The evaluation procedure includes the following steps:

- Identification of the military occupation to be evaluated. The occupations are determined by the Department of National Defense.
- Pre-assessment. There are minimum documentation requirements for each program; its objectives, duration, content, teaching material and evaluation method. Military instructors are an important part of this process.
- Initial comparative analysis of the program. If the elements for comparison are not sufficient, the procedure can be halted at this stage and a detailed pre -

assessment report is written. If the elements that allow comparison to a CEGEP program are present, an assessment committee is set up (experts in the occupation at the college level).

- Assessment session: a detailed analysis is conducted onsite at the military school where the training is given. The instructors of the military program and college program specialists conduct the evaluation. The on-site visit generally takes about 2 days. At the completion of the evaluation, consensus must be reached regarding equivalencies to be awarded. Generally, consensus is reached very quickly among the experts whose participation along with specialists from different colleges ensures objective assessment.
- Production and presentation of an analysis report and an equivalency table.
- Collège Ahuntsic awards automatic equivalencies to all eligible military personnel who apply to their college.

PURPOSE OF DATA COLLECTION

The first Cross-Canada Study of PLAR examined Collège Ahuntsic's military program evaluation activities for the year 1996/97. Demographic data, the level of PLAR activity and the programs and disciplines accessed by military personnel, were examined. The purpose of surveying military personnel is to obtain additional information on who is using Collège Ahuntsic's PLAR service and to learn from the military on: the value of PLAR in their military and civilian lives, the benefits of and barriers to PLAR, and how PLAR could best be marketed to members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Collège Ahuntsic's participation in this study focused on the collection of PLAR data on military personnel for the same three years as the other study partners (1998/99-2000/01). Because Collège Ahuntsic conducts all program reviews for the Canadian Armed Forces in Quebec the activities recorded in this study are highly

representative of PLAR program review in that province. Military personnel do not undergo individual assessment but are granted credit automatically as a result of the program review process described earlier in this section of the report. The perspectives of these respondents are reported separately in this chapter because of the distinct nature of the PLAR process used to assess their learning. For reasons of efficiency the partners decided that the same questionnaire would be sent to military personnel as to all other PLAR learners, so additional options for military personnel were added to several questions. The questionnaire consisted of 37 multiple-choice questions on learner demographics, their sources of learning about PLAR, the benefits of and barriers to PLAR and how to improve PLAR. An open-ended invitation for comments was also extended (see Appendix G). Collège Ahuntsic established a final list of questionnaire recipients by searching student and course records, mailing lists, and PLAR databases.

Telephone reminders were scripted and a campaign to contact non-respondents was conducted. Collège Ahuntsic contacted non-respondents from all three years of the study and all respondent activity was recorded. Following a second mail-out, completed questionnaires were provided to a computer specialist firm to compile the results. The partners reviewed results in detail.

Data Analysis

Data analysis of military personnel's perspectives followed the same procedures as analysis of data on non-military PLAR learners. The partners analyzed the survey data through meetings, teleconferences and e-mail discussions. The questions were divided into six groupings:

- Characteristics of PLAR learners
- Learning about PLAR
- Learner motivation
- Benefits of PLAR
- The PLAR process
- Marketing PLAR

Following completion of data analysis, the partners met with the advisory committee to obtain comments and advice on additional findings.

Because there were a substantial number of questionnaires that were undeliverable, a cooperation rate was calculated for Collège Ahuntsic in the same manner as the other study partners. A cooperation rate establishes a response rate based on the number of persons who had an opportunity to respond. The cooperation rate was determined by subtracting the total number of “unable to reach” non-respondents in 2000/01 from the total number of questionnaires mailed. The result was used to calculate a response rate from those who were reasonably deemed to have received the questionnaire.

Methodological Limitations

Because Collège Ahuntsic conducts all military workplace-training evaluations for the Canadian Armed Forces in Quebec, the PLAR population in this study is highly representative of the military PLAR population in Quebec. The partners do not contend that the study population reflects the PLAR military population in the rest of Canada.

As is the case with the non-military PLAR respondents, the military respondents represent a self-selected sample that chose to respond to the survey. The Canadian Armed Forces are a highly mobile population and many potential respondents could not be located despite the assistance of the Department of National Defense. As a result, the relatively low response rate limits the degree to which respondents represent the PLAR military population. However, the co-operation rate among military personnel was substantially higher than the non-military group’s average (52% compared to 43%).

Interpretation of some of the data was limited by flaws in the wording of some questions and the fact that some respondents appear to have interpreted some of the questions differently. Other questions were not relevant to military personnel. In addition, a number of questions pertaining strictly to military personnel could have been added. These difficulties may have been avoided if the questionnaire had been piloted or if a separate questionnaire had been used for PLAR military personnel.

Recommendations for revising the survey for future studies have been made in Appendix G.

RESULTS AND OBSERVATIONS

As in the chapter on non-military PLAR learners, this section of the report presents the results of the survey using charts, tables and narrative observations. Narrative observations cite the relevant question numbers in each questionnaire so that readers may review the precise wording by referring to Appendix G. The partners used their considerable knowledge of the PLAR programs at their institutions to flag and adjust analysis where it appeared that respondents did not fully understand options in some of the questions. Most charts and tables include the number of responses for each item so that response rates are clear. Responses are expressed as a fraction of the total number of responses or respondents. Explanations are provided in legends as needed. Due to rounding, total percentages may not equal 100% but range from 99% to 101%.

PLAR military personnel who had received academic equivalencies during the study period (1998/99-2000/01) from Collège Ahuntsic were included in this analysis. A total of 610 questionnaires were mailed and 203 responses were received. This represents a response rate of 33%. Taking into account surveys that were returned “address unknown” as well as non-respondents who subsequently could not be reached by telephone, a final response rate of 52% was established (based on cooperation rate formula – see Glossary). Table M-1 presents Collège Ahuntsic’s response data and cooperation rate calculation.

Table M-1: Military Personnel Response Data and Cooperation Rate

MAIL SURVEY RESULTS						
Mailouts	Completed Returns	Response Rate (%)	Returned Address Unknown (Undeliverables)	Response Rate (%) Net of Undeliverables	Unable to Locate By Phone*	Co-op Rate**
612	203	33	122	414	100	52

Note: *Not in service, moved, wrong number, cannot locate number.

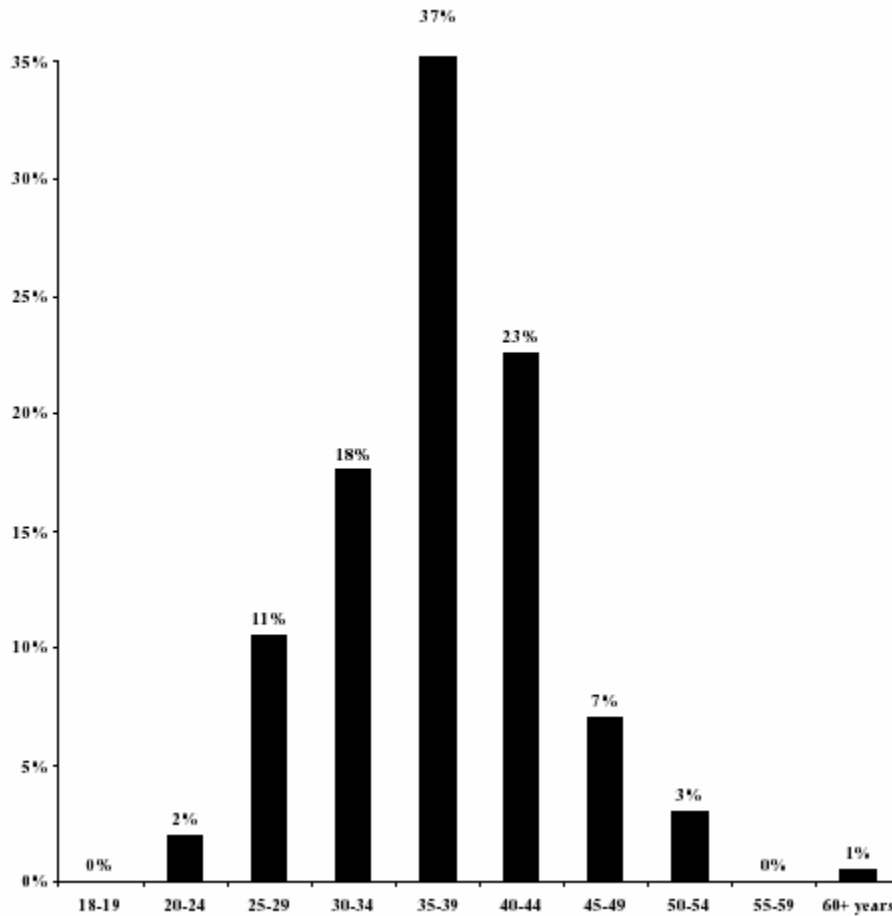
**Cooperation Rate refers to Response rate net of undeliverables and telephone not at location.

Characteristics of Military Personnel

Gender, Military and Employment Status, Age

Demographic data confirm the earlier Cross-Canada study findings that military personnel who undertake PLAR are predominantly male (87%). This gender breakdown is consistent with the general military population (88 % male) and continues to reflect the reality that PLAR is occurring in college programs related to occupations that traditionally have had high concentrations of men. The majority of respondents were active members of the military (62%) at the time they attained their PLAR credits. The rest were retired from the military. Since almost all respondents were employed full-time (90%), these findings indicate that PLAR military personnel who retire tend to be employed on a full-time basis in civilian jobs. Approximately 78% of military PLAR personnel were between the ages of 30 – 45 years. This is consistent with the fact that on average, military personnel in Canada are 38 – 42 years of age when they retire (Questions PLAR 33, 34, 36, 37). Chart M-1 presents an age breakdown of respondents.

Chart M-1: Age Breakdown of Respondents at Time of Assessment



Designated Demographic Group Status

To determine the extent to which PLAR is being used by designated demographic groups to access postsecondary education, we asked PLAR respondents if they were visible minorities, aboriginal people, persons with disabilities, single parents, rural residents or those (in English Canada) whose first language is other than English. Results indicate that the majority of respondents were not members of any designated demographic group, with one exception: fifty-one percent (51%) of respondents reported that English was not their first language compared to 28% of the general military population. Based on the experience of the study partner from Collège

Ahuntsic, this data likely means that French was the first language of most of those respondents. The high percentage of French language respondents reflects the significant investment the Department of National Defense has made in facilitating the transfer of military training of French-speaking Canadians into civilian educational and occupational contexts. Table M-2 presents a breakdown of respondents' designated demographic group membership (Question PLAR 35).

Table M-2: Respondents' Designated Demographic Group Identification

Response	Percent
First language is not English	51%
Rural resident	18%
Single parent	5%
Visible minority	2%
Person with disabilities	2%
Aboriginal person	1%
None of the above	36%

Educational and Employment History

Many respondents are career military personnel. It is not surprising therefore that the last type of educational institution that 48% respondents attended before inquiring about PLAR was military school. Twenty-eight percent (28%) attended high school and approximately 21% of the personnel had attended college or university. Before actually returning to college, 63% were actively employed in the military on either a full-time or part-time basis.

"PLAR has opened doors in my field (aviation). I am actually employed at Bombardier."

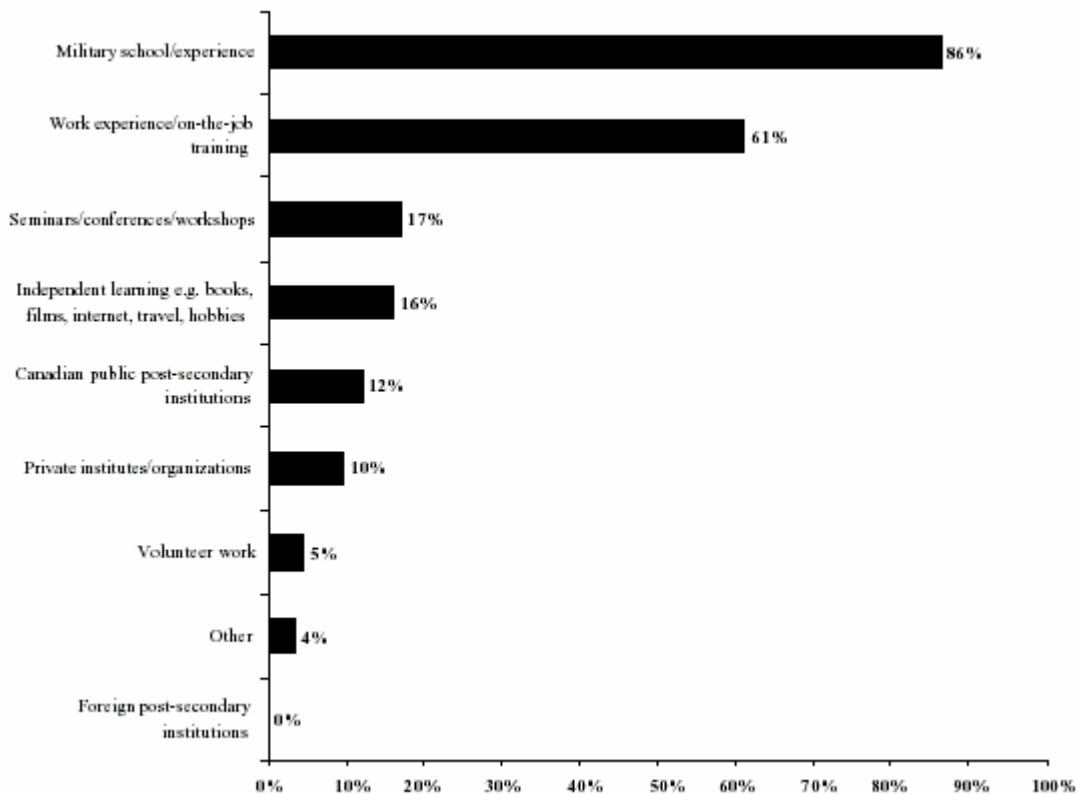
PLAR Learner

Sources and Extent of Prior Learning

Eighty-six percent (86%) of respondents identified military school/experience as important sources of their prior learning. This was followed by 61% of respondents citing work experience/on-the-job training as important sources. These high percentages are consistent with the training system within the Canadian Armed

Forces where military school typically includes on-the-job training. Chart M-2 presents the reported data respondents' sources of prior learning (Questions PLAR 1, 2, 7, 8, 11).

Chart M-2: Respondents' Sources of Prior Learning

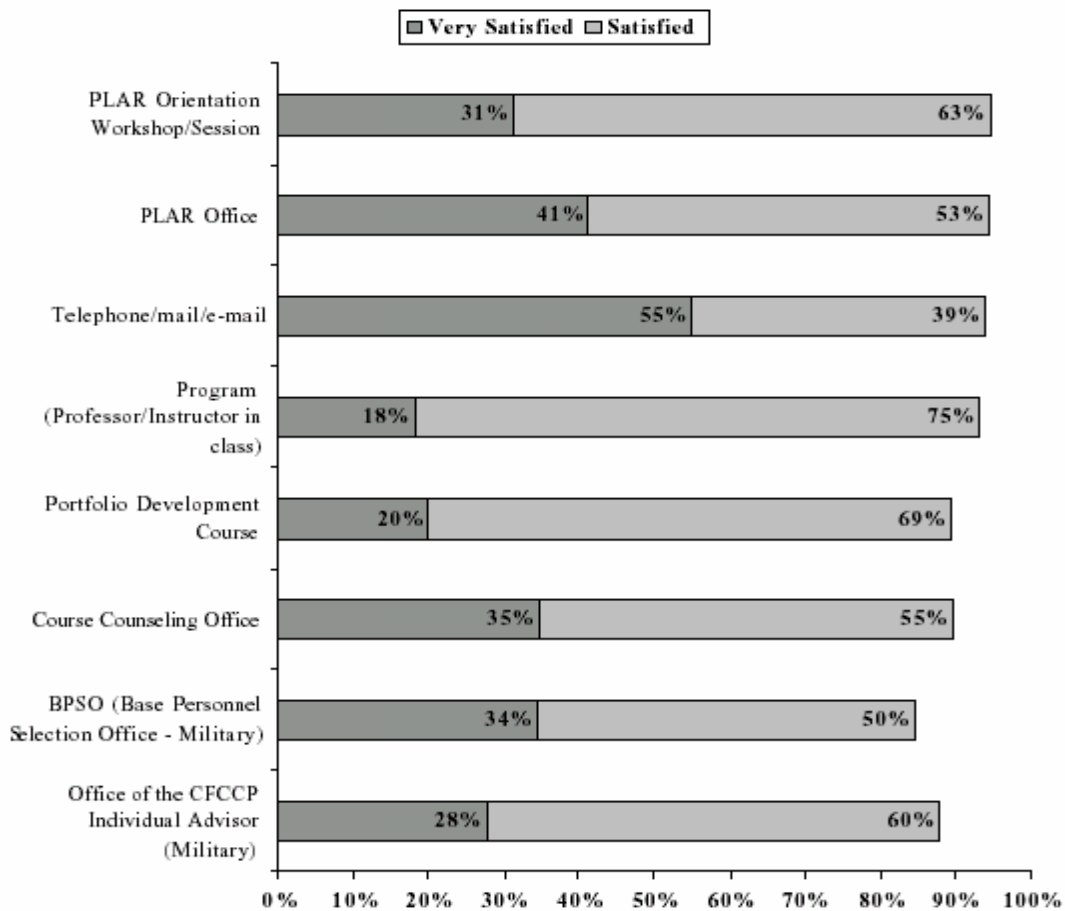


The majority of PLAR military personnel associated their PLAR credits with more than ten years experience (60%). This finding is consistent with the demographic data on age indicating that a high percentage of these personnel are between the ages of 30 and 45 years (78%).

How Military Personnel Learn about PLAR

In addition to receiving marketing information on PLAR (which is discussed later in this section of the report under Marketing), military personnel may subsequently be provided with PLAR orientation. Orientation is conducted upon request by telephone interview with Collège Ahuntsic or personal interview at a BPSO. In asking respondents about their satisfaction levels with various methods of PLAR orientation, eight options were provided. Respondents reported very high satisfaction levels with orientation services and responses to each are summarized in Chart M-3 (Questions PLAR 4, 6, 9).

Chart M-3: Satisfaction Levels with Method of PLAR Orientation



Note: data analysis indicates that some respondents did not understand the question as they indicated satisfaction with services that are not available to the military.

Military Personnel PLAR Motivation

Motivation to Consider College and PLAR

When asked why they decided to consider college, most military respondents reported they were motivated by employment related factors, the most significant being the need for a credential to change careers (33%) or advance in their current careers (30%). Sixty-five percent (65%) of respondents indicated an interest in PLAR to help them return to or prepare for a civilian job. Fifty-nine percent (59%) also felt that they had a good chance of gaining credit for what they had learned through life and work experience. This is similar to non-military respondents 59% of who reported the same motivating factor.

The high level of importance that respondents gave to PLAR in their decisions to return to school and stay in their programs is likely related to the high number of credits that college programs award to military training. For example, through the PLAR program review process, most military personnel in Collège Ahuntsic's Techniques Ambulancières were awarded up to 50% of their program based on their qualification level. These findings also suggest a high level of understanding by military personnel of the importance of credentials when they return to civilian life and the contribution that PLAR can make in helping them to achieve their employment-related goals. (Questions PLAR 3, 5, 21, 24).

Impact of PLAR on Military Personnel

The majority of respondents (64%) reported that the availability of PLAR was an important factor in their decision to return to school and 57% said that PLAR was an important factor in remaining in their program. When asked whether PLAR helped them graduate from their college program 21% of respondents said yes. However, 34% said that this question was not applicable to them as they were not going for a credential and just wanted the course credit. This is quite different from responses of non-military PLAR learners but is consistent with the demographic data that indicate that the majority of PLAR military personnel are still actively engaged in

"As a military, I wanted to be certified to apply for a civilian job."

Military Personnel

"Excellent work....[PLAR] did help me proceed with my career."

Military Personnel

"A lot of us have to leave the military at 40 years old and we need to go back to a civilian job."

Military Personnel

the military and are not yet in need of a college credential to obtain civilian employment. Ninety-five percent (95%) of respondents stated that they were satisfied with their entire PLAR experience and 99% said that they would recommend it to others. (Questions PLAR 25, 29, 30).

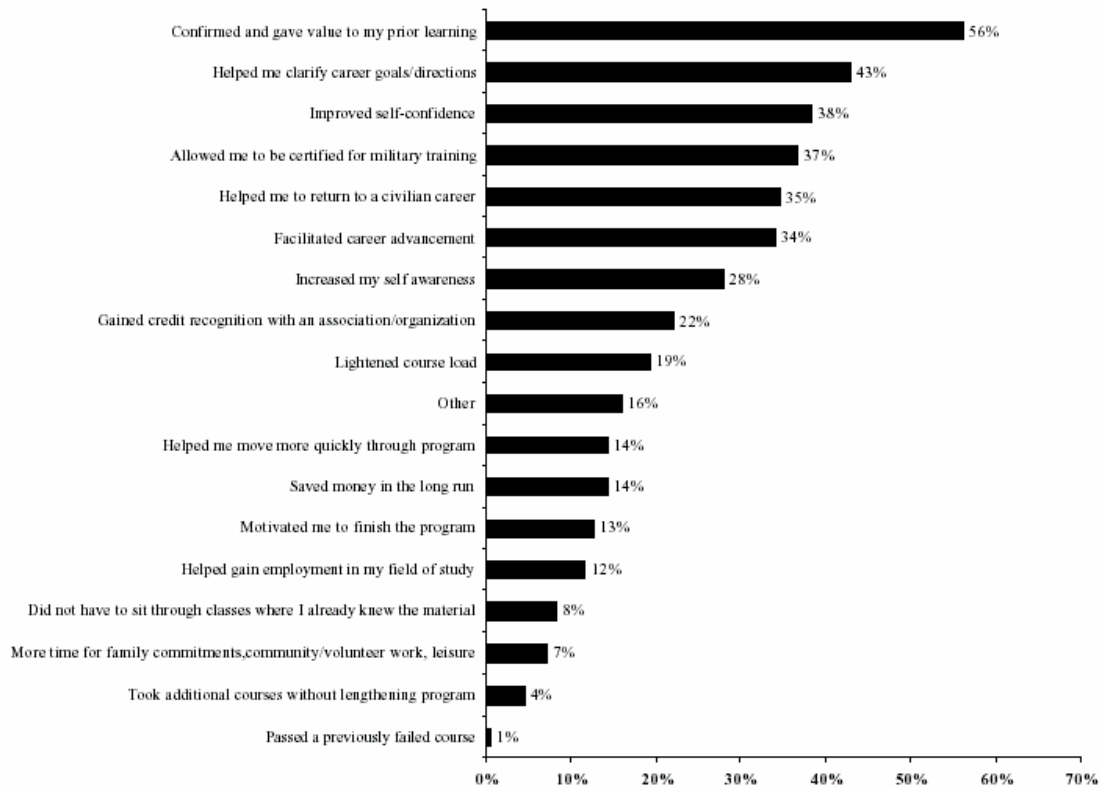
Benefits of PLAR

To our knowledge this study is the first to investigate Canadian military PLAR personnel's perspectives on the benefits they derive from PLAR. The data collected indicate differences in the value that military and non-military PLAR learners place on PLAR (Questions PLAR 29). When asked to choose the most important benefits, five factors emerged above all others. The most significant benefits of PLAR were that it helps respondents return to a civilian career; it confirmed and gave value to their prior learning; and it allowed them to be certified for military training. Clarifying career goals and improving self-confidence were also considered important. Unlike non-military PLAR learners, lightening course loads, reducing costs were not important issues for military personnel. These differences are due to differences in the administration of military and non-military PLAR programs. For example, the Department of National Defense funds all PLAR for military personnel so cost is not an issue. Chart M-4 presents the benefits of PLAR identified by respondents.

"The credits granted for my aviation training gave me the opportunity to choose my career when I left the military. Thank you and go on with this work."

Military Personnel

Chart M-4: Benefits of PLAR



What Military Personnel Say About the PLAR Process

Helpfulness of Supports in Preparing for Assessments

Respondents were asked to rate several supports used by educational institutions and the military to provide information during the PLAR process (Question PLAR 14). These included course outlines, instructors/assessors, textbooks and course materials, lab practice time, sample questions or sample portfolios, and other learners. Most respondents also felt that the questions on supports provided did not apply to their circumstances (Questions PLAR 15 – 18). In retrospect, it may have been more appropriate to prepare a separate questionnaire for military personnel that eliminated these questions.

"I just had to fill in the form, send the documents with my payment and I received my transcript."

Military Personnel

Assessment Feedback

When asked about their satisfaction with the feedback given regarding the results of their assessment, respondents indicated a high degree of satisfaction with written and telephone feedback (72% and 59% respectively) and the absence of any feedback using personal interviews or e-mail discussions (71% and 79% respectively). These findings accurately reflect the process used by the military to provide feedback (Question PLAR 19).

Other Elements of the Assessment Process

Across the board, 79%-89% of respondents reported no difficulty or “not applicable” with respect to the length of the assessment process, the amount of the assessment fee, the information made available, the location and scheduling of assessments, and the reading and writing skills required for assessment. Ninety-six percent (96%) reported “not applicable” or feeling no disadvantage in any subsequent courses as a result of obtaining credits through PLAR (Questions PLAR 19 – 23).

In response to questions about participants’ academic activities following PLAR, the vast majority of respondents indicated that they had not enrolled in any other program of study since doing PLAR; neither had they tried to transfer the credits they acquired through PLAR to another educational institution/association or organization. This is similar to responses from non-military respondents. Fifteen (15) respondents reported that they had transferred credits. Almost half of these were to colleges within the same province (likely Quebec) (Questions PLAR 26, 27, 28). There is anecdotal evidence that military personnel experience difficulties in transferring military equivalencies to postsecondary institutions outside of Quebec. Investigation of the cause, level and impacts of these difficulties would be a valuable area for future research.

*“Unfortunately, too many
militaries do not ask for this
service before they retire.
They do not know the
possibilities; they do not
have the information.”*

Military Personnel

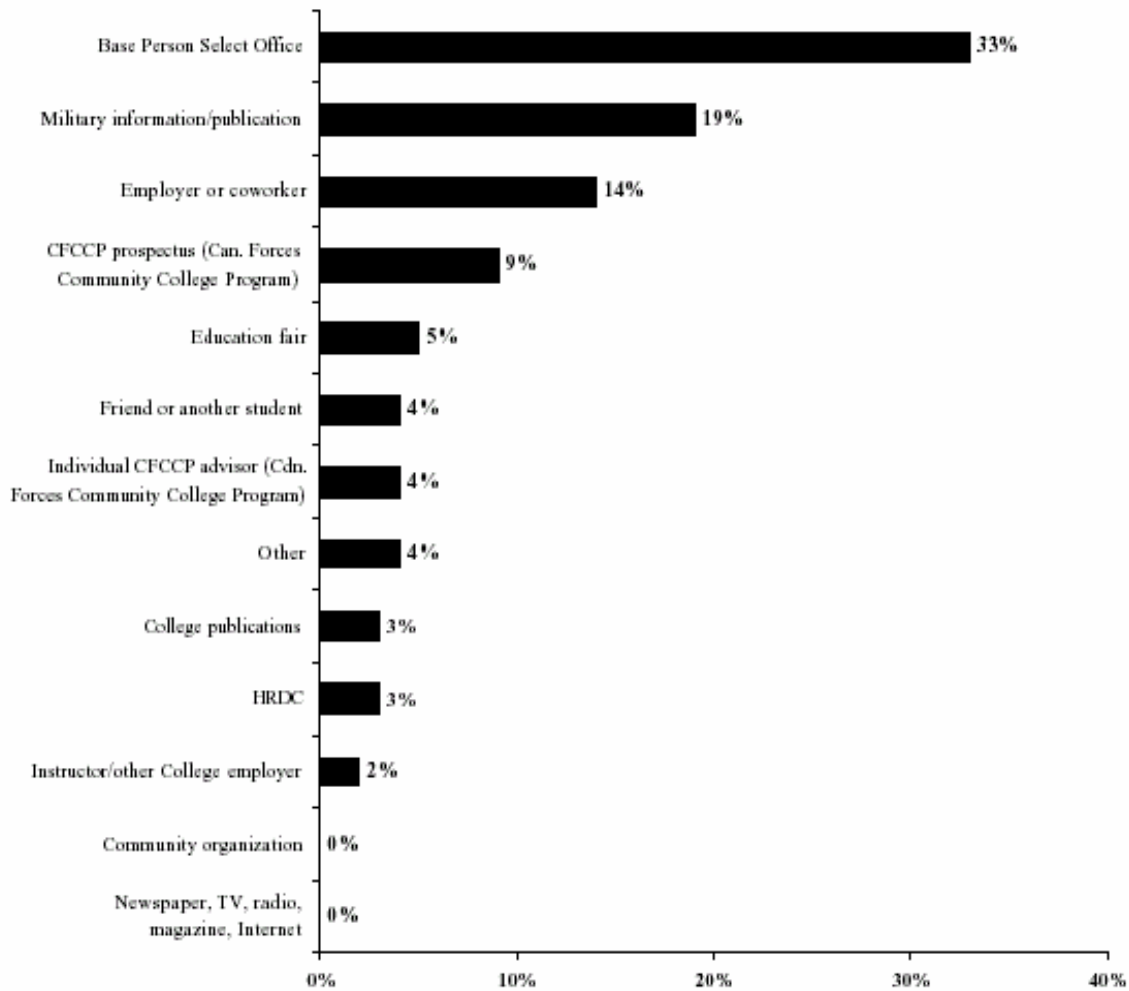
Marketing PLAR with the Military

One of the challenges in implementing PLAR is finding affordable, effective ways to reach potential users. Collège Ahuntsic employs several marketing strategies to inform military personnel about PLAR and to encourage them to engage in the process. The study partners hoped that by asking military respondents about how they learned about PLAR and what methods of marketing would be effective in spreading the word, colleges could plan their marketing strategies more effectively.

How Military Personnel Found Out About PLAR

Since most PLAR military personnel are employed full-time within the military and receive financial support for their training activities, they rely on military programs and services for information relating to education and credentials. There are several ways in which military personnel find out about PLAR. The most common source of learning about PLAR among military respondents is the Base Personnel Selection Office (33%) which is the primary source of information on all matter related to training opportunities. The 5% rating given to the use of Education Fairs is instructive for future planning as the study partner Collège Ahuntsic considers these fairs to be excellent venues for marketing PLAR. This perspective appears to be shared by the respondents as noted in responses to marketing questions reported later in this section of this report. Chart M-5 presents respondent feedback on how they found out about PLAR.

Chart M-5: How Military Personnel Found Out About PLAR



Best Methods of Spreading the Word about PLAR

Participants were asked to rate each of eighteen methods presented, and then select the three best methods. Education fairs held on many military bases were considered the best possible venues to spread the word about PLAR. In the ratings of individual items, ninety percent (90%) of participants thought the fairs would be good or excellent. Coupling this with the feedback on Question 4 in which 5% of respondents reported learning about PLAR through an education fair suggests that this is a desirable but under-utilized venue for PLAR marketing.

Making information available through military newspapers (86%), PLAR brochures (81%), and at job fairs (76%) also received high marks. Seventy-two percent (72%) of respondents thought that PLAR written materials being made available in the workplace would be a good or excellent way of reaching personnel. Interestingly, 72% of respondents also felt that the Internet would be a good or excellent way to market PLAR. At the present time, the Internet is not used by the military for this purpose. Overall, education fairs, military newspapers and PLAR brochures were considered the best methods of informing personnel about PLAR (Question PLAR 32). These methods are very different from the methods used and recommended by non-military PLAR respondents (see Tables S-5a and S-5b). Table M-3 summarizes the results.

Table M-3: Best Methods of Spreading the Word about PLAR

PLAR				
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor/Very Poor
Military Education Fair	61%	29%	6%	5%
Military Newspaper	53%	33%	9%	5%
PLAR featured at job fairs	39%	37%	15%	8%
PLAR Brochure	38%	43%	16%	2%
PLAR materials available in the workplace	36%	36%	13%	15%
Program Orientation Sessions	24%	40%	27%	9%
Internet/College Website	22%	50%	16%	12%
PLAR Centre located in College/Community	19%	33%	24%	24%
Instructor/Professor describing PLAR in-class and distributing PLAR brochures	19%	36%	28%	17%
PLAR radio and television ads	15%	31%	24%	31%
PLAR student ambassadors for school and community events	12%	22%	26%	31%
Billboards	11%	27%	40%	22%
PLAR posters in College and Community	10%	36%	39%	15%
Course Outlines	7%	30%	36%	27%

Profile of a Typical Member of the Military Who Accessed PLAR

The typical member of the military who has accessed PLAR is an English or French-speaking, white, male, aged 38 years, with more than ten years of prior learning acquired in the military. He has attended military school in the past and is currently employed in the Canadian Armed Forces on a full-time basis. He is not currently attending college but has obtained his credits through Collège Ahuntsic's program review process. He intends to retire before the age of 50 years knowing that credits acquired through PLAR will help him obtain an academic credential and join the civilian workforce, also on a full-time basis. He learned about PLAR through the Base Personnel Selection Office and PLAR's availability was an important factor in his decision to seek college credits. He found that PLAR confirmed and gave value to his prior learning, helped to clarify his career goals and improve his self-confidence. The program review process caused him no difficulties and he is very satisfied with the results. He would recommend PLAR to other personnel and suggests spreading the word about PLAR through education fairs, military newspapers and PLAR brochures.

PART FOUR:

LONGITUDINAL DATA ANALYSIS

Audrey's Story – Child and Youth Worker

If someone had asked me six or seven years ago if I would be returning to school, I would have laughed. At that time, I was getting dangerously close to forty, had two teenagers, a full time job and a business on the side. Returning to school was the furthest thing from my mind.

When the school board I was working for amalgamated and restructured how they were delivering service for students with behavioural challenges, I was presented with a golden opportunity. I was hired for one of the Child and Youth Counselor positions. Realizing the scope of this opportunity, I seized the moment and approached a college to discuss how my mixture of university credits and work experience could be translated into credits toward a Child and Youth Worker (CYW) Diploma.

I achieved credits in the CYW program utilizing a variety of methods. I received 6 exemptions (4 from university credits and the other 2 were courses I accessed via Internet through Ontario Learn). I have successfully challenged 11 courses (10 through portfolio, 1 through challenge exam). I took 10 courses on campus in the evenings. While it has taken me three years to cover everything in the program on a part-time basis, the time factor really was of my own choosing. Had I not had other obligations in my life, I could have gone through the challenges sooner. That however is the beauty in the flexibility of the PLAR process. I will be graduating from the CYW Diploma program this winter and will be moving on to a B.A. program. My experience as an adult student has been a rewarding one. I feel it has opened many doors for me that might otherwise be closed.

PART FOUR: LONGITUDINAL DATA ANALYSIS

PURPOSE

The database established during the first Cross-Canada Study of PLAR is a comprehensive repository of all PLAR activity at the seven partner institutions over a five-year period between 1993/94 and 1997/98 (data collection on military activity was limited to 1996/97). It includes extensive demographic, program, course and academic performance data on 3,519 PLAR learners and 12,000 traditional students. The analysis of that data was on a scale never previously achieved in PLAR research. The findings contributed substantially to our understanding of institutional PLAR activity in Canada and of the academic success of PLAR learners.

The partners were of the view that expanding the PLAR component of the database would extend our knowledge of how PLAR is evolving in postsecondary institutions. The result is an eight-year database on PLAR learners and their program and course activities at six postsecondary institutions across Canada. It now includes data on 7,292 PLAR learners, and the 14,198 PLAR assessments they undertook in 2,547 different courses, 345 programs, and nine discipline categories. The information contained in this repository is available for institutional planning and public education. It will help us all to build on a growing body of evidence on the impact of PLAR on institutions and adult learners.

METHODOLOGY

The infrastructure of the first Cross-Canada database required only minor adjustments to the data collection tool to accommodate the additional data for this study. Data on three years of PLAR activity (1998/99 to 2000/2001) at six of the seven partner institutions were collected and added to the existing 5-year database of all seven institutions. Data on non-military PLAR learners from Collège Ahuntsic

were not collected for this most recent three-year period. The types of data in each of the 5-year and 3-year segments of the eight-year database are different, primarily because only data on PLAR learners and their courses and programs were collected for the 3-year segment. Queries were run to produce statistics, tables and charts that replicate much of the first study on PLAR learner demographics, program and course activity. Details on the data collected in each segment are provided in Appendix I. This is followed by a detailed report on data collection and entry procedures for each of the data fields used in the 3-year study segment (see Appendix J). For a complete list of data collection and entry procedures used in the 5-year segment, see the report, *A Slice of the Iceberg: Cross-Canada Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition* (1999).

RESULTS AND OBSERVATIONS

The following data and analysis relate to information collected on PLAR learners at six institutions over an eight-year period and one institution for a five-year period. Because data were collected by Collège Ahuntsic for only the first five years, all reported data in this section of the report are lower than actual by an estimated 220 learners (based on average number of learners during the first five years) and the activity that they would be reasonably be expected to generate.

To identify significant changes and trends, the study partners analyzed the two time frames of the study separately – first the original 5-year study results and then the newly entered 3-year data. We have limited our chart and table presentations to the eight-year time frame and refer to exceptions and trends as required in the text. The presentation of this data parallels the first Cross-Canada Study of PLAR so that readers may easily refer to that report to obtain similar data for the first five of the eight years.

Statistical data on PLAR learners relate to:

- Gender
- Age
- Student status
- Course activity

- Program activity
- Discipline activity
- Academic success

The total number of PLAR learners in the database is 7,292. In the three years since the first Cross-Canada study, an annual average of 1,093 learners have undertaken PLAR. This represents a 55% increase from the average of 704 learners annually in the five-year study. This is a positive sign that PLAR has grown; however, close examination of the PLAR populations at and across institutions reveals significant fluctuations in participation levels over the eight years. For example, in 2000/01 the number of PLAR learners at Conestoga College ITAL remain close to 1995/96 levels although up from 1998/99. Participation at Douglas College has dropped since its peak in 1996/97 although non-credit assessment to meet workplace and licensing requirements remain active as does development work in relation to occupational competencies and assessments conducted in the workplace. Fanshawe College experienced growth until 1999/00 but then fell in 2000/01 to the level of the previous year. Mohawk College has largely remained stable during the eight years but 2000/01 participation levels were only 10% higher than in 1993/94. North Atlantic fluctuated constantly between 1993/94 and 1997/98 but has since been on the rise though small in number. Red River College also experienced mid-period fluctuations but has experienced consistent learner growth since 1997/98.

There are a number of factors that may have contributed to the fluctuations of PLAR participation levels at the partner institutions including: reductions in funding for PLAR, increases in student assessment fees, academic program closures, the introduction of new occupational licensing requirements, the initiation or termination of assessment-generating projects, changes in the positioning of PLAR functions within institutions, faculty remuneration practices, PLAR marketing practices, and the attrition of trained leadership and staff. Data analysis suggests that whatever the reasons for the fluctuations, caution should be exercised in identifying trends in PLAR participation.

It is the partners' view that even with increases in participation at most of the partner institutions in 2000/01, these numbers are still low given the size of these institutions

and the national growth in the numbers of mature adults attending these postsecondary institutions in Canada. We need to learn why there is not more PLAR activity; are institutional costs the major reason? If not, what are the reasons beyond cost? We also need to determine what specific actions can be taken to improve adult learner participation. Table L-1 presents the number of PLAR learners at all seven institutions for each of the applicable eight years of the study. The learners in this table have been counted once for every year that they undertook a prior learning assessment. (Note that these figures differ from the Total Number of PLAR Learner Course Enrolments in the first Cross-Canada report because that report tables the number of enrolments in traditional courses as well as PLAR courses).

Table L-1: Total Number of PLAR Learners by Year

Location	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	All Years
Ahuntsic	47	82	106	108	23	-	-	-	366
Conestoga	11	59	74	57	61	40	41	77	420
Douglas	20	62	123	166	89	44	27	33	564
Fanshawe	3	27	98	91	159	247	441	254	1320
Mohawk	314	284	297	296	241	309	333	350	2424
North Atlantic	34	10	14	33	17	52	80	127	367
Red River	217	193	208	233	154	204	255	367	1831
Totals	646	717	920	984	744	896	1177	1208	7292

Characteristics of PLAR Learners

Gender

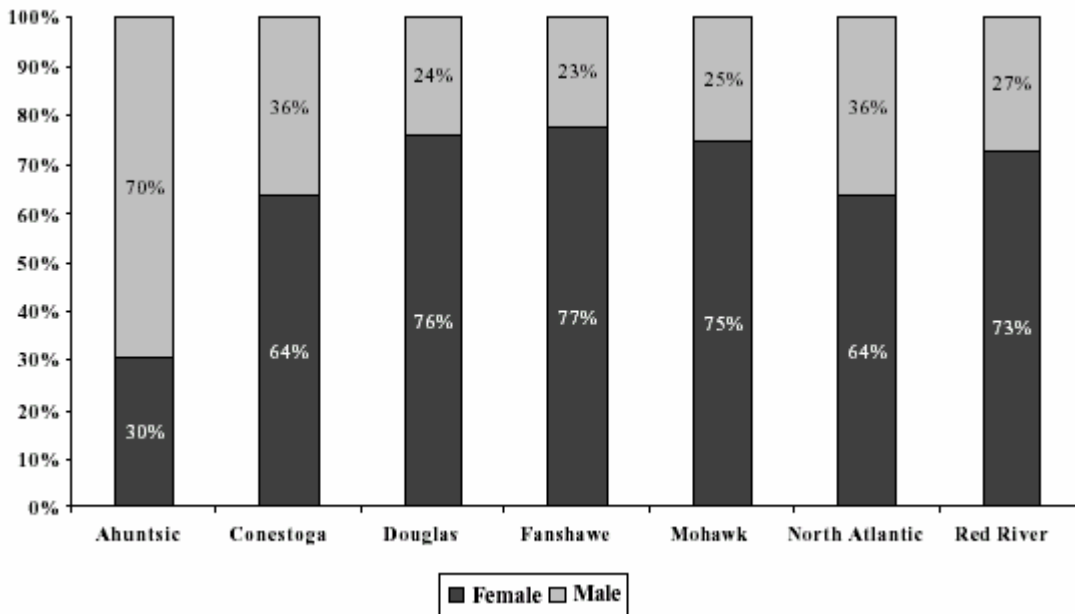
Consistent with the findings of the literature review, data analysis confirms that most PLAR learners are female. The first Cross-Canada Study reported that 65% of PLAR learners were female and gender breakdown at most of the institutions appeared to be program driven in that most programs in which PLAR was active, related to

occupations in which there were traditionally high concentrations of women (e.g. Nursing, Early Childhood Education). The PLAR learner gender breakdown was very similar to the gender breakdown of traditional students in the same programs. Over the eight-year study period female representation remained relatively constant at 66% of the PLAR learner population. This is substantially higher than in the Canadian general population (51% female). Table L-2 presents a percentage breakdown of PLAR learner gender by institution.

Table L-2: Gender Breakdown of PLAR Learners by Institution

Female	Male
66%	34%

By Location



Note: Larger locations have more data and their effect is a disproportionate skewing of the national values. To make these values more representative they are calculated by averaging the percents for the institutions thereby giving all of them an equal "weight."

At most partner institutions the proportion of female PLAR learners is also higher than their own general populations. The exception, Collège Ahuntsic had high PLAR

activity in programs such as Ambulance Services, in which there were high concentrations of males. Table L-3 compares the 2000/01 gender breakdown of PLAR learners and the general population of each study partner institution.

Table L-3: Gender Breakdown of PLAR Learners and Partner Institutions' General Populations (2001)

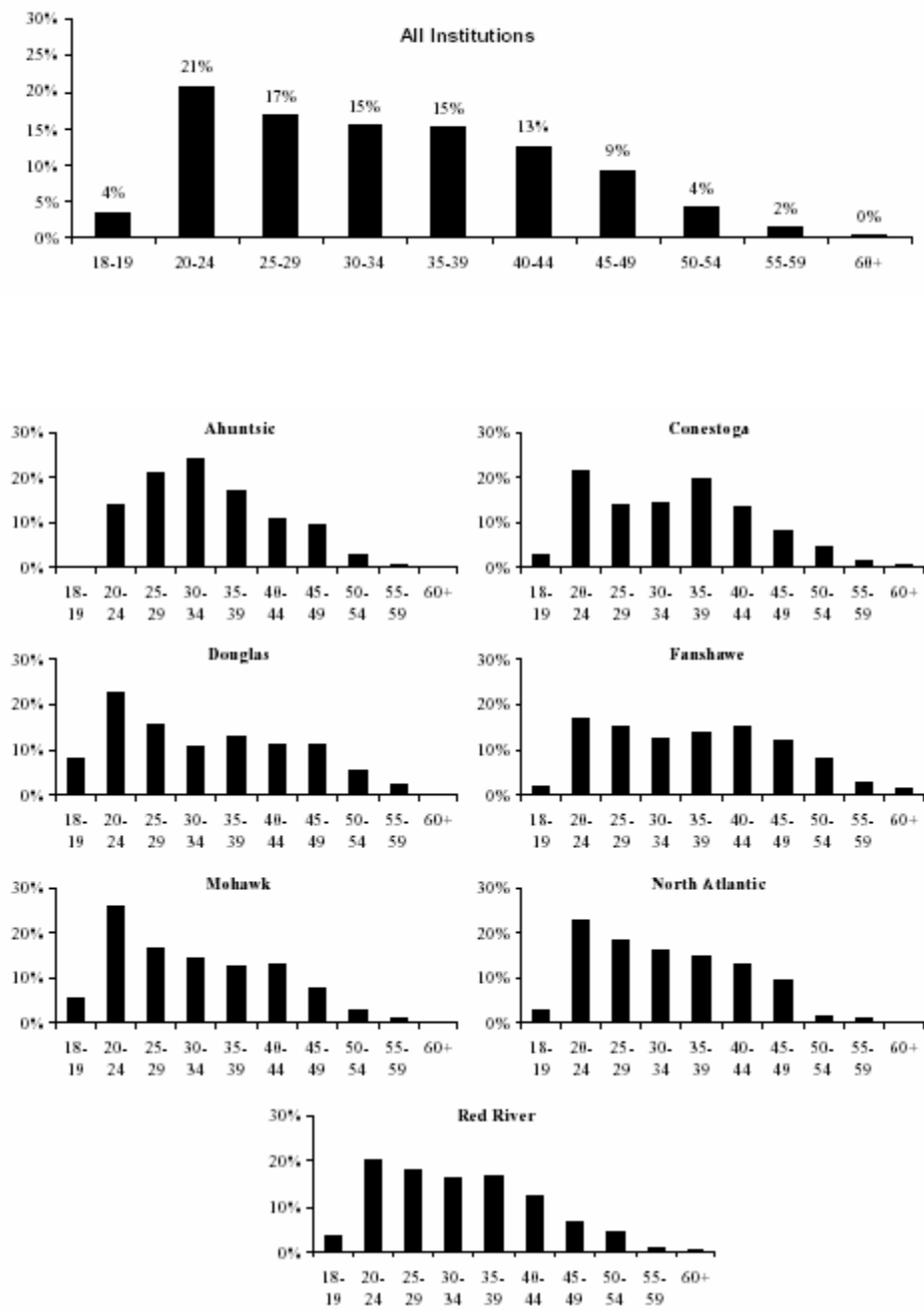
College	PLAR Male %	General Population Male %	PLAR Female %	General Population Female %
Ahuntsic	70	55	30	45
Conestoga	36	52	64	48
Douglas	24	36	76	64
Fanshawe	23	50	77	50
Mohawk	25	44	75	56
North Atlantic	36	0	64	0
Red River	27	62	73	38

Age

Longitudinal data indicates that most PLAR learners (60%) are mature students over the age of 30 years. Anecdotal reports to this effect over the last 20 years have been more recently confirmed by quantitative research (Freers, 1994). These results are also supported by our survey of PLAR learners in which 70% are over the age of 30 with an average age of 33 years. Close examination of age groupings by institution indicates considerable fluctuation. The most we can conclude from this data is that most PLAR learners are over the age of 30 years and that PLAR activity tends to drop off after age 35 years. Thus it appears that almost 70% of the prior learning that is being credited is learning acquired within 20 years of reaching adult status (over 19 years of age). This finding is supported by our earlier observations in this report that Non-PLAR learners tend to be older than PLAR learners. The implications of these findings require additional research.

Chart L-1 presents the age distribution of PLAR learners. A more detailed breakdown of the age categories of learners is provided in Appendix K.

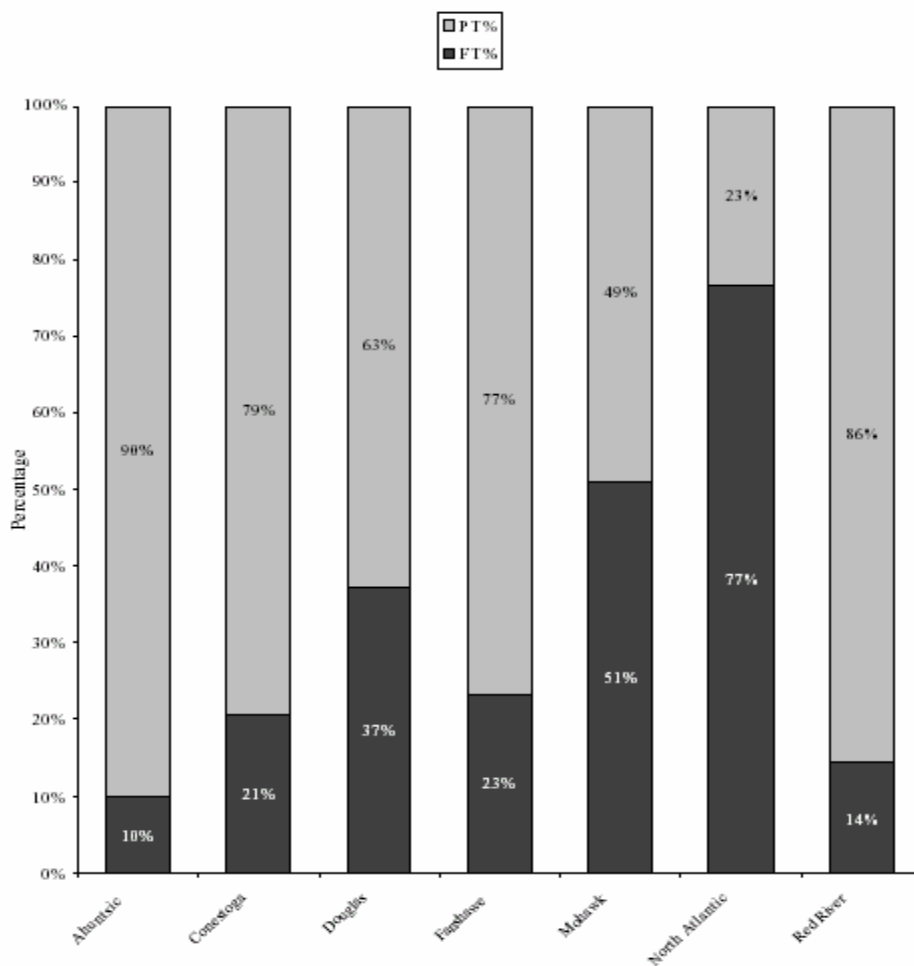
Chart L-1: Age Distribution of PLAR Learners



Student Status

A majority of PLAR learners are part-time students (66%) similar to the 65% of PLAR learners in our survey. These results are relatively consistent across institutions with the exception of College of the North Atlantic, which only offered PLAR to students in full-time programs during the first five years of the study period. This data suggests that if part-time students are those who can avail themselves of PLAR most often, institutions implementing PLAR need to ensure that their services meet the needs of part-time learners. Chart L-2 presents PLAR learners' student status at each institution over eight years.

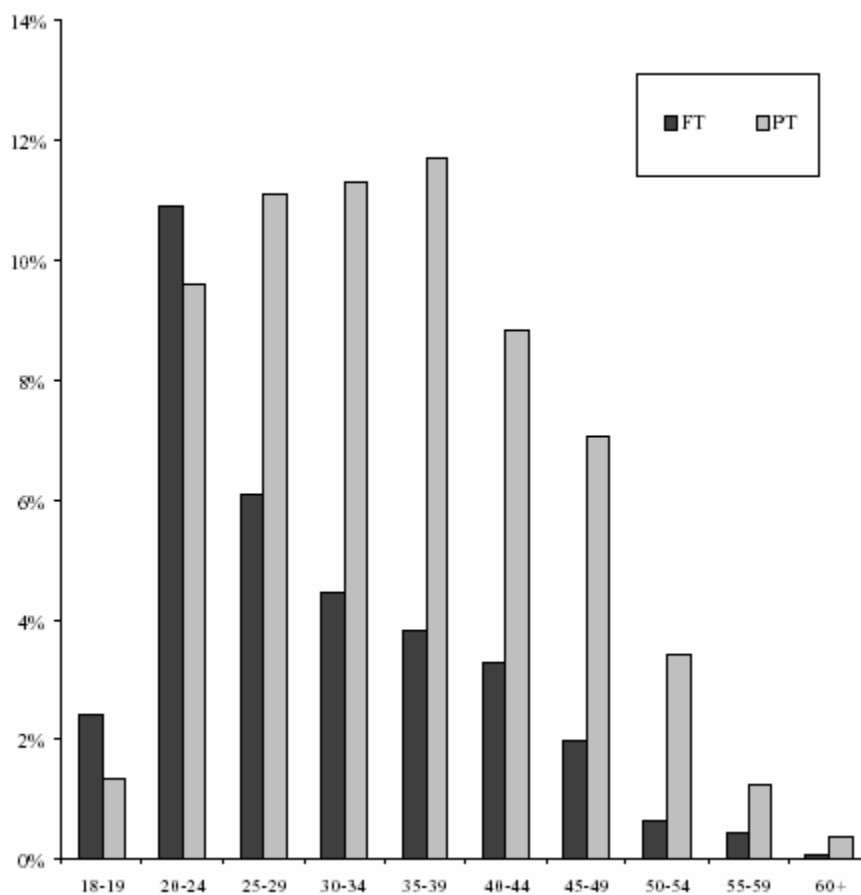
Chart L-2: Status of PLAR Learners at Each Institution



Note: See Glossary for definitions of full-time and part-time

We also looked at the student status of PLAR learners by age grouping. It confirms what we already know anecdotally: the older PLAR learners become, the more likely they are to be part-time rather than full-time student. Seventy-five percent (75%) of PLAR learners over the age of 30 year were part-time students. Chart L-3 presents PLAR learners' student status by age category.

Chart L-3: Student Status by Age Category



Note: Larger locations have more data and their effect is a disproportionate skewing of the national values. To make these values more representative they are calculated by averaging the percents for the institutions thereby giving all of them an equal "weight."

Because of the percentage of full-time PLAR learners who were 20 - 24 years of age (21%), we further investigated this group. Since these learners are younger than institutions' traditional PLAR target group and younger than in most PLAR studies, we were interested to learn more about their sources of prior learning and program

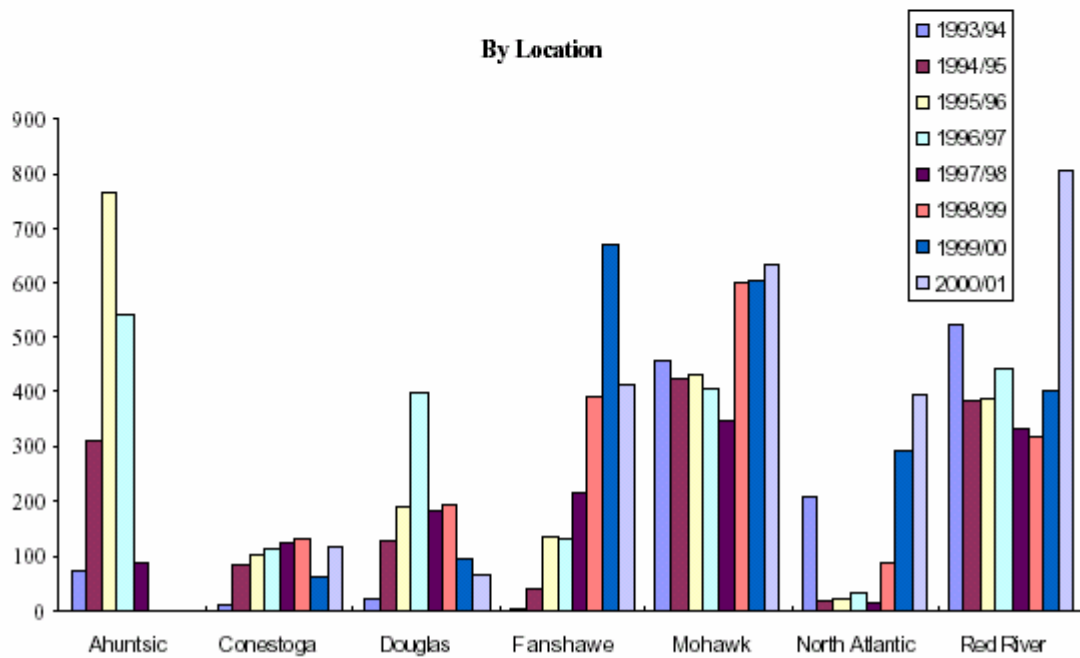
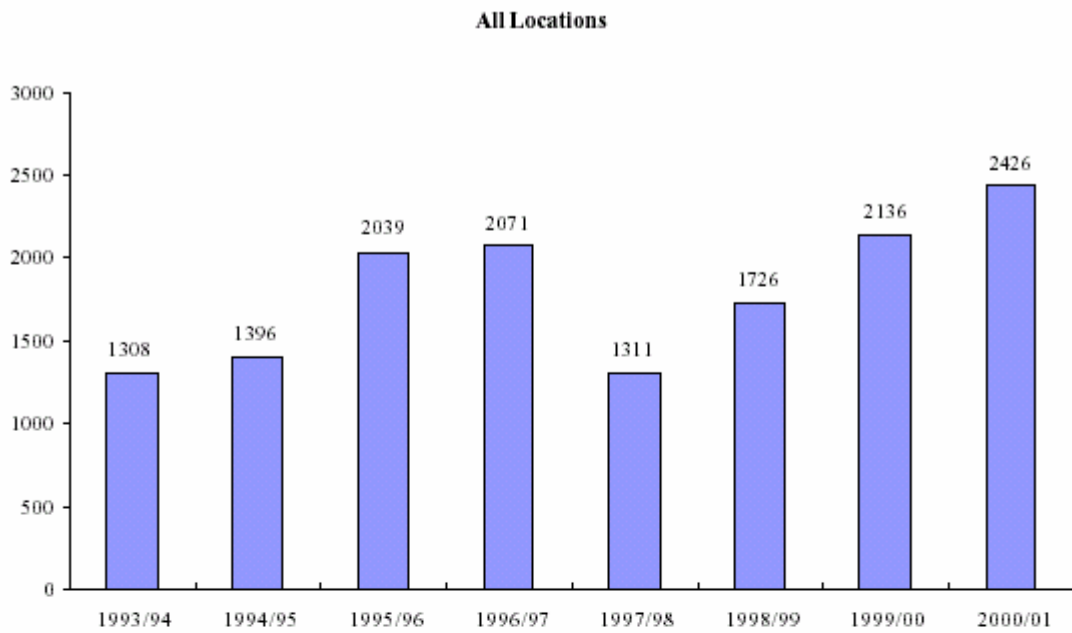
focus. We found that this group of learners is comprised of full-time, primarily female students in business and human services programs. However, why they participated in PLAR at higher rates than other age groups is not clear. The partners believe that PLAR activity among these young learners may be due to the need to meet new licensing requirements, obtain credit for university learning not covered by credit transfer, the need to make up for previously failed courses, and/or a higher level of PLAR awareness among PLAR learners who are full-time students with frequent contact with college services.

Lower participation by full-time learners in other age groups may be due to the rigid lock-step schedules of full-time programming that are difficult for many mature adults to accommodate along with work and family responsibilities.

PLAR Assessments

Institutional assessment activity has modestly increased overall over eight years. The total number of PLAR assessments was 14,198 with an average of 1,775 assessments annually over the eight years. This compares to an average of 1,582 assessments annually in the five years of the first Cross-Canada study. On an institutional basis, assessment activity has fluctuated considerably; since 1998/99 assessments increased at four institutions and decreased at two institutions. As a result, a clear trend in the level of PLAR assessment activity is not apparent. Chart L-4 presents the total and annual number of PLAR assessments at each institution over eight years (5 years for Collège Ahuntsic).

Chart L-4: Number of PLAR Assessments by Year



Number of Assessments per PLAR Learner

Historically, there have been concerns expressed by postsecondary institutions that learners would attempt to obtain inordinately large amounts of credit through PLAR. If these assessments were successful, then the question arose as to whether credentials eventually awarded to PLAR learners would be representative of those institutions. This study combined with the first Cross-Canada study confirms that approximately 60% of PLAR learners had only one assessment and 75% had two assessments or fewer. Table L-4 presents the details.

Table L-4: Number of Assessments per PLAR Learner

	Number of Assessments per PLAR Learner								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9>
Ahuntsic	29%	10%	8%	6%	4%	4%	2%	3%	35%
	88	30	24	18	12	11	5	8	106
Conestoga	64%	18%	7%	5%	1%	1%	0%	1%	4%
	238	66	27	17	2	4	1	2	14
Douglas	61%	14%	9%	3%	2%	2%	2%	1%	5%
	327	76	49	17	10	9	12	7	27
Fanshawe	76%	13%	5%	2%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%
	981	164	65	28	9	12	6	4	15
Mohawk	71%	16%	6%	2%	1%	1%	0%	1%	3%
	1579	352	135	43	17	14	6	17	57
North Atlantic	50%	15%	8%	7%	4%	3%	2%	2%	10%
	164	49	26	22	13	10	6	8	32
Red River	66%	16%	5%	3%	2%	2%	1%	1%	4%
	1059	256	75	45	35	37	17	23	60
Avg. Percent	60%	14%	7%	4%	2%	2%	1%	1%	9%
Number of Students	4436	993	401	190	98	97	53	69	311

Note: Larger institutions have more data and their effect is a disproportionate skewing of the National Percent values. To make these values more representative they are calculated by averaging their percents for the institutions thereby giving all of them an equal “weight”.

Methods of Assessment

Five commonly used methods of prior learning assessment are – portfolio assessment, challenge exams, demonstrations, standardized testing and workplace training evaluation. Two of these methods, standardized testing and workplace training evaluation (also called program review) are for the most part, not practiced by postsecondary institutions in Canada. Evaluation of military training is primarily conducted by Collège Ahuntsic and is reported as program review in a separate chapter of this report (see Appendix F for definitions of each assessment method).

In this study the most common method of assessment was the challenge exam (tests, projects, assignments) at 54% of all assessments. This is slightly lower from the first Cross-Canada study (57%). Noteworthy are an increase in the number of portfolio assessments (23% up from 15%) and a drop in the number of demonstrations from 27% to 23%. However, more detailed analysis of the data on the use of demonstrations and challenge exams indicates no clear trend.

The first Cross-Canada study suggested that an area of significant potential growth in PLAR is in workplace training evaluation.

The possibility of growth is supported by the experience of American postsecondary institutions reporting in the Boe and Whittaker (1992) survey that 64.8% of institutions accepted recommendations made by the American Council on Education with respect to workplace training evaluation. Based on many years of experience in PLAR, two partners noted that the future growth of PLAR, if any, would lie not in individual applications but in cooperative activities between workplaces and institutions. (Aarts et al, 1999)

This growth does not appear to have occurred at any of the institutions since the evaluation of workplace training programs by the partner institutions was so low (less than 2%) we have not reported it in the chart. It should be noted however, that most of the partner institutions did not collect data on this method of assessment because of its low incidence at their institutions and the difficulty in obtaining accurate data. This is an area that requires additional research.

Table L-5: PLAR Assessments by Method

Course Assessment Date	Assessment Methods		
	Portfolio Assessment	Demonstration	Challenge Exam
1993/94	23%	23%	54%
1994/95	16%	28%	57%
1995/96	19%	30%	60%
1996/97	13%	28%	59%
1997/98	24%	20%	56%
1998/99	34%	15%	51%
1999/00	31%	18%	50%
2000/01	33%	20%	47%
All Years	23%	23%	54%

Note: Fanshawe College included demonstrations under the Challenge Exam column. As a result, statistics in the Demonstration column are slightly lower than actual figures. Statistics in the Challenge Exam column are slightly higher than actual figures. Large institutions have more data and their effect is a disproportionate skewing of the National Percent values. To make these values more representative they are calculated by averaging the percents for the institutions giving all of them an equal "weight".

As was the case in the first Cross-Canada study, some assessments involved more than one method in order to cover the range of knowledge and skills presented by learners. It was not possible to collect accurate data on the number of methods used per assessment due to record-keeping practices that tended to document only the primary method of assessment.

PLAR Program Activity

PLAR learners had assessments in 2,547 courses in 345 programs and there was no discernable program pattern to activity across institutions. In the first Cross-Canada study, it was anticipated that there would be programs that the partner institutions would have in common. This did not occur during the 5-year study and it did not happen in the subsequent three years. Only in two programs, was there common PLAR activity in more than two colleges - Early Childhood Education (6 colleges) and Personal Support Worker (3 colleges) between 1997/98 and 2000/01. Almost no programs were common to more than two institutions. The most common type of

program where PLAR credits were granted was a one-year certificate program. Table L-6 presents the top ten programs over the eight years and their discipline, length, program status, credential and number of assessments at each institution. Some assessments were conducted for general education course credits, which may or may not relate directly to the learners' vocational training. These courses are sometimes called service/support courses and are completed by learners enrolled in a wide range of programs. In this study, assessments for these courses have been included in learners' vocational programs of study.

Table L-6: Top Ten Programs by Institution

Program Name	Length	Discipline	Status	Type	Assmts
<u>Ahuntsic</u>					
Techniques Ambulancières	1½ Academic Years	HS	FT	A	1107
Cheminement Par Cours	1½ Academic Years	O	B	A	238
Imagerie Ultrasonore Cardiaque	1½ Academic Years	HS	B	A	58
Imagerie Ultrasonore Abdominale Et Pelvienne	1½ Academic Years	HS	B	A	55
Instrumentation Et Contrôle	1½ Academic Years	T	B	A	33
Techniques De Radiothérapie	1½ Academic Years	HS	B	A	33
Techniques Policières	3 Academic Years	HUS	B	D	31
Techniques Juridiques	1½ Academic Years	HUS	B	A	28
Sureté Industrielle Et Commerciale	1½ Academic Years	O	B	A	21
Imagerie Ultrasonore Foetale	1½ Academic Years	HS	B	A	20
<u>Conestoga</u>					
Recreation & Leisure Services	2 Academic Years	HUS	B	D	183
Microsoft Applications Certificate	<1 Academic Year	B	FT	C	34
Continuing Education	<1 Academic Year	O	PT	C	32
Critical Care Nursing	2 Academic Years	HS	PT	PDC	20
Early Childhood Education	2 Academic Years	HUS	B	D	19
Teacher/Trainer Of Adult Learners	1 Academic Year	O	PT	C	15
Cardiac Care	1 Academic Year	HS	PT	PDC	14
Business Administration - Accounting	3 Academic Years	B	FT	D	14
Windows Applications Certificate	2 Academic Years	B	PT	C	13
Business Administration - Management	3 Academic Years	B	FT	D	10
Business Administration - Marketing	3 Academic Years	B	FT	D	10

Table L-6: Top Ten Programs by Institution...continued

Program Name	Length	Discipline	Status	Type	Assmts
<u>Douglas</u>					
General Studies	2 Academic Years	GS	B	D	418
Community Support Worker	2 Academic Years	HUS	B	D	167
Financial Services	1½ Academic Years	B	B	C	105
Child And Youth Care Counsel	2 Academic Years	HUS	B	D	94
Therapeutic Recreation	2 Academic Years	HUS	B	D	77
Home Support Worker	1½ Academic Years	HUS	B	C	63
Resident Care Attendant	2 Academic Years	HUS	B	D	51
Science	2 Academic Years	SC	B	D	27
Health Information Systems	2 Academic Years	AA	B	D	22
General Business	1½ Academic Years	B	B	C	21
<u>Fanshawe</u>					
Personal Support Worker	1 Academic Year	HS	B	C	81
Fitness And Health Promotion - Dir. Indp. Study	2 Academic Years	HUS	B	D	78
Personal Attendant	1 Academic Year	HUS	B	C	43
Child And Youth Worker	3 Academic Years	HUS	B	D	40
Developmental Services Worker	2 Academic Years	HUS	B	D	38
Pre-Health Science	1 Academic Year	HS	B	C	23
Early Childhood Education	2 Academic Years	HUS	B	D	22
Environmental Eng. Tech'N Waste Mgmt	2 Academic Years	T	B	D	13
Business - Marketing	2 Academic Years	B	B	D	12
Theatre Arts - Technical Production	2 Academic Years	AA	B	D	12

Table L-6: Top Ten Programs by Institution...continued

Program Name	Length	Discipline	Status	Type	Assmts
<u>Mohawk</u>					
Nursing	3 Academic Years	HS	FT	D	699
Early Childhood Education	2 Academic Years	HUS	B	D	169
Office Administration - Executive	2 Academic Years	B	FT	D	167
Business Applications For Windows	1 Academic Year	B	PT	C	155
Pharmacy Assistant	1 Academic Year	HS	B	C	133
Competence In The French Language	1 Academic Year	AA	PT	C	122
Business Computer Applications	1 Academic Year	B	PT	C	120
Library And Information Technician	2 Academic Years	AA	PT	C	99
Office Administration - Medical	2 Academic Years	B	FT	D	97
Business Administration	3 Academic Years	B	B	D	92
<u>North Atlantic</u>					
Early Childhood Education (Distance Education)	2 Academic Years	AA	FT	D	695
Computer Support Specialist	2 Academic Years	T	FT	D	50
Mining And Mineral Processing	2 Academic Years	O	FT	D	32
Office Administration	1 Academic Year	B	FT	C	27
Business Administration	1 Academic Year	B	FT	C	27
Applied Business Information Technology	1 Academic Year	T	FT	D	26
Computer Studies Co-Op	3 Academic Years	B	FT	D	24
Office Administration - Executive	2 Academic Years	B	FT	D	16
Programmer Analyst (Co-Op) - Networking Option	3 Academic Years	T	FT	D	14
Programmer Analyst (Networking Option)	2 Academic Years	T	FT	D	13

Table L-6: Top Ten Programs by Institution...continued

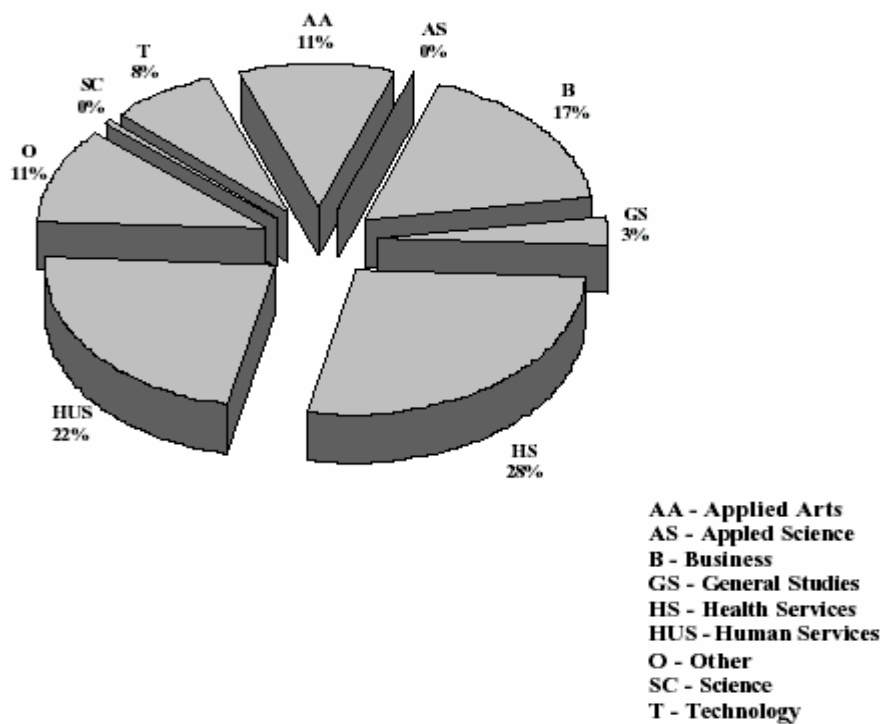
Program Name	Length	Discipline	Status	Type	Assmts
<u>Red River</u>					
Early Childhood Education	2 Academic Years	HUS	B	D	1059
Nursing	2 Academic Years	HS	B	D	494
Microcomputer Applications	1 Academic Year	B	PT	C	299
Health Care Aide -E	1 Academic Year	HS	PT	C	268
Health Care Aide/Unit Clerk	1 Academic Year	HS	PT	C	172
Business & Admin Studies	1 Academic Year	B	PT	C	153
Child & Youth Care Worker	1 Academic Year	HUS	P	C	152
Certificate In Adult Education	1 Academic Year	AA	PT	C	141
Admin Studies	1 Academic Year	B	PT	C	74
Manufacturing Technician	2 Academic Years	T	FT	D	65

Part-time programs were assigned program lengths equal to what the lengths would be if the programs were delivered on a full-time basis. Courses in C. E. or part-time studies that had no associated programs, have no program lengths.

Disciplines

The partner colleges' programs were categorized under nine disciplines: Applied Arts, Applied Science, Business, General Studies, Health Sciences, Human Services, Science, Technology, and Other. Although PLAR was offered in Science and Applied Science programs at some of the partner institutions, no assessments were conducted. The "other" category, comprising 11% of assessments were primarily continuing education courses that were not institutionally linked to particular programs or disciplines at the time of assessment. Most assessments were conducted in Health Sciences (28%) and Human Services (22%). The drop in Health Sciences assessments from 35% during the 5-year study is likely due to a move from a Nursing diploma program to a joint degree program for Nursing at Red River College and Mohawk College and the resulting phase-out of the diploma nursing programs. Chart L-5 presents the percentage of assessments by discipline.

Chart L-5: Percentage of Assessments by Discipline



PLAR Learner Academic Success

There have been concerns expressed by academic institutions that PLAR might impair adult learners' subsequent academic success. One of the most important findings of the first Cross-Canada study was that PLAR learners perform at a higher level than traditional students. They have higher grades, lower attrition rates, lower course failure rates, and higher graduation rates than students who do not undertake PLAR. Other research has linked PLAR to student persistence, finding that PLAR learners are several times more likely to complete their academic programs than Non-PLAR learners (Freers, 1993; Pearson, 2000).

To report on students' academic success, we standardized reporting of PLAR learners' academic performance because grading systems used by the partner institutions vary. Table L-7 presents the numeric system and its conversion formula.

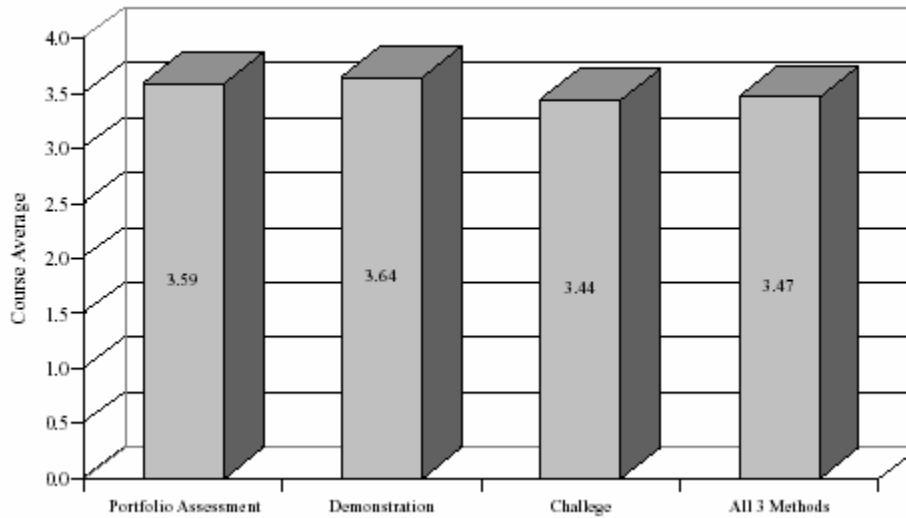
Table L-7: Conversion Table for Grades in Courses Acquired through PLAR

Numeric Designation	Letter Grade	Number Grade
4	A+, A, A-	80-100%
3	B+, B, B-	70-79%
2	C+, C, C-	60-69%
1	D+, D, D-	50-59%

PLAR Course Grades

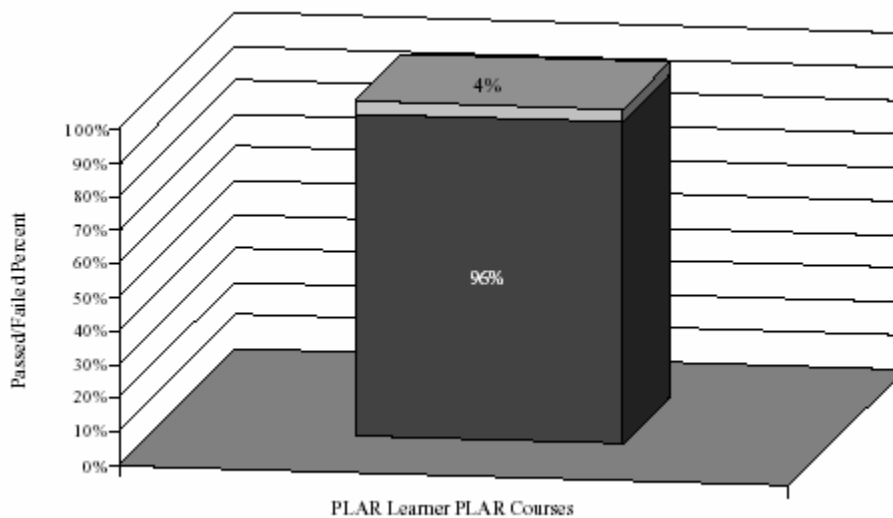
Over the eight years, PLAR learners consistently performed satisfactorily in their PLAR courses attaining grades well in the B range. These grades did not appear to be affected by method of assessment. Chart L-6 presents PLAR learners' average grades based on the three primary assessment methods used by the partner institutions.

Chart L-6: Average Grades of PLAR Learners in PLAR Courses



The percentage of courses in which PLAR learners were successful also remained high over the eight years at 96%. These results combined with the data on learner grades from the first Cross-Canada study confirm that adult learners' prior learning has academic value at a postsecondary level. Chart L-7 presents the percentage of courses in which PLAR learners were successful. Douglas College and Collège Ahuntsic have been excluded from this calculation, as they do not record data on unsuccessful assessments (Note: Douglas College reports that although they do not record this data, the numbers are likely very low since attention to learner success is incorporated early in the PLAR process.)

Chart L-7: Percentage of Courses in Which PLAR Learners Were Successful



PLAR Learner Graduation Rates

The persistence of PLAR students is noteworthy. Over the eight years of the study, 42% of PLAR learners graduated from their programs. In the first five years of the study, 41% of PLAR learners and 36% of traditional students graduated.

Summary of Longitudinal Data Analysis

The data in this section of the report tell us that PLAR in Canadian colleges fluctuates but is growing slowly. Assessment activity tends to be centered on programs in a small number of disciplines: in programs delivered on a part-time or continuing education basis. PLAR learners are likely to be female, in their mid-thirties. They acquire a few courses through PLAR mostly through challenge exams. PLAR is concentrated in one-year certificate and two-year diploma programs mostly in Health Sciences and Human Services. PLAR learners' grades are higher on average than traditional students, their failure rates are lower and they graduate sooner. The five-year data also demonstrated that PLAR learners take more courses over the long term than traditional students.

When the longitudinal data is reviewed in conjunction with the survey data, the above-noted picture is strengthened, providing us with solid evidence of PLAR and PLAR learners at some of the most PLAR-active postsecondary institutions in Canada. This profile leads us to several conclusions, which are presented in the next section of this report.

PART FIVE:

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Mohamad's Story – Social Service Worker

I immigrated to Canada from Lebanon eight years ago with my wife and three children. I was working as a Social Service Worker for the Red Cross in Lebanon. My responsibilities included referring handicapped people to a rehabilitation center for artificial devices and helping needy families solve problems such as obtaining medicines. I was also the Coordinator for the Swedish Rehabilitation team, assisting them with integration into the Lebanese culture and community. Within months of coming to Canada, I began volunteer work at several local community agencies: Settlement Integration Services Organization, Participation House and the Red Cross.

I have a degree in Social Sciences and Sociology from the University of Lebanon. When I came to Canada, my credentials were evaluated as being equivalent to a Masters degree in Canada, specializing in Social Sciences. Even though I possessed the professional qualifications required for entry into Canada, I was advised to obtain a Canadian credential. I would have received several credits if I had chosen to enroll at University, but instead I opted for the part-time Social Service Worker Program. I appealed to both the full-time and continuing education departments for the maximum number of exemptions.

Through the PLA process, I was granted credit for two of the field placements based on my volunteer work in Canada, which helped to shorten my program by two semesters. I am presently working part-time as a Special Needs Worker with the Health Sciences Center. I have one course left to take and will be graduating from the program in the spring of 2003. My family has grown to six children and I hope to obtain full-time employment with the Ontario Works Dept.

PART FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The learners' perspectives presented in this report have provided us with new and rich information on how PLAR is operating in several Canadian colleges. The longitudinal database expands our understanding of institutionally-based activity and student success. This section of the report presents our conclusions and recommendations and raises some important issues that should help position PLAR for the future: what needs to be in place to offer efficient, effective PLAR in Canadian postsecondary institutions? Where does PLAR fit into our evolving world of lifelong learning? How does it relate to other initiatives in education and labour force development?

Overview

The use of PLAR in the seven Canadian colleges is slowly increasing and research conducted over these past eight years has enhanced PLAR's credibility as a sound academic practice, a contributor to quality of life, and an effective tool for human resource development.

Conclusions

PLAR and Non-PLAR Learners

1. Data analysis confirms that PLAR and Non-PLAR learners are demographically similar with respect to gender, age, designated demographic group status, and their educational and employment histories. With the exception of military learners, the majority of both groups are female, typically between the ages of 35 and 45 years. Non-PLAR learners are more likely to be older than PLAR learners. The majority of both groups are not members of any designated demographic group. PLAR and Non-PLAR learners are mostly part-time students, employed full-time. They are similar in their motivation for considering college - to increase job and career

advancement opportunities. They share the same reasons for taking an interest in PLAR – to gain credit while working, save time and money, and take fewer courses.

One of the few differences between the two groups is their status as students. The vast majority of Non-PLAR learners were not students at the time of their PLAR orientation or at the time of the survey - more than a year after their orientation. A large proportion of PLAR learners were attending college or university programs prior to inquiring about PLAR. The media through which they all learn about PLAR are similar with any variation likely associated with their access to college sources. PLAR learners primarily access colleges' internal sources of information while Non-PLAR learners access more public media.

Barriers to PLAR

2. Some Non-PLAR learners feel that their personal and family circumstances do not allow them to participate in PLAR. Research tells us that similar factors also deter adult learners from returning to college at all.
3. Some Non-PLAR learners perceive PLAR to be too time-consuming and complex. Other individuals have initial misconceptions thinking for example, that experience alone will be sufficient evidence to award credit. Still others realize that they do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to be successful in an assessment. These results demonstrate the importance of providing comprehensive information as early as possible in learners' introduction to PLAR and college programs since some PLAR assessments are neither time-consuming nor complex (e.g. challenge exams) and others which may be more involved (e.g. portfolios) are reported by learners to be well worth the effort.
4. Survey analysis also indicates that assessment fees are too high for some learners, and more student advising and counseling services are needed to support PLAR assessment preparation.

Sources of Prior Learning

5. The primary source of PLAR learners' prior learning is the workplace. Women report many more sources of prior learning than men, including higher rates of independent learning, seminars, conferences, workshops, and volunteer work.

6. PLAR is currently serving a mature, working population with knowledge and skills from several years of work and on-the-job training. About half of PLAR learners have more than six years of work or on-the-job training tied to their PLAR credits.

PLAR's Role in Helping Learners Achieve their Goals

7. PLAR is an important factor in learners' decisions to consider college. It is also important to PLAR learners remaining in their program. These findings are supported by learner feedback and analysis of the longitudinal data.
8. PLAR learners are very successful learners. Their pass rates in PLAR courses have remained high over the study's eight years at 96%. This compares with traditional students pass rates in the first Cross-Canada study of 91%.
9. PLAR learners consistently perform satisfactorily in their PLAR courses and subsequent Non-PLAR courses attaining grades well in the B (3.5+) range.
10. PLAR learners' graduation rates have remained high at 42% over eight years. This compares with 36% for traditional students in the first Cross-Canada study.

Benefits of PLAR from the Learners' Perspectives

11. Learners gain important benefits from PLAR. The most common is the value it confirms and gives to adults' prior learning irrespective of assessment method. This benefit exceeded other more practical benefits in importance such as cost and time savings; this finding suggests that in not proactively marketing PLAR, some postsecondary institutions may be unaware of the important personal impact PLAR can have on adult learners.
12. In less fundamental terms, PLAR further helps learners by eliminating the need to sit through classes where they already know the material; it saves learners money in the long run and lightens their course loads. Using PLAR helps learners to stay in their programs and graduate – a valuable retention strategy.

13. PLAR can shorten the length of time it takes to complete a program on a part-time basis. However, 20% of Non-PLAR learners did not pursue PLAR at least in part because they did not think it would shorten their programs. We do not know if these learners were intending to attend college on a full-time or part-time basis. However, we do know that the rigid lock-step schedules of full-time programming limit PLAR's effectiveness in reducing the time it takes to complete a program.

Usefulness of PLAR Credit in the Workplace

14. Partner institutions report that anticipated growth of PLAR in the workplace did not materialize over the eight years of the two PLAR studies. With the exception of the assessment of military training, the number of assessments that involved the evaluation of workplace training programs was almost non-reportable (under 2%).
15. Employer financial support for PLAR is low.

Transferability of Military Personnel's PLAR Credits to Other Postsecondary Institutions

16. Almost no military personnel attempted to transfer their PLAR credits to other postsecondary institutions. Therefore, the transferability of these credits could not be determined.

Institutional PLAR Activity Based on Longitudinal Data Analysis

17. Overall, PLAR activity has grown in these 7 colleges in the 8-year period but due to wide fluctuations in participation levels no clear trend is apparent. The number of assessments at the partner institutions remains low given the number of years they have been conducting PLAR, their size and the national growth in the numbers of mature adults attending postsecondary institutions.
18. Assessment activity tends to be centered on programs in a small number of disciplines, in programs delivered on a part-time or continuing education basis. PLAR learners are likely to be female, in their mid-thirties, and employed full-time. They acquire a few courses through PLAR mostly through challenge exams. PLAR is concentrated in one-year certificate and two-year diploma programs mostly in Health Sciences and Human Services. PLAR learners' grades are higher on average than traditional students, their failure rates are lower and they graduate sooner.

The five-year data also demonstrated that PLAR learners take more courses over the long term than traditional students.

19. Basic PLAR methodology (eg: challenge exams, portfolio assessment) has stood the test of time. PLAR learners found the process irrespective of method to be reasonable and easy to understand. Advice and support were clear and helpful, resource materials were useful and overall, the process allowed learners to demonstrate their learning. However, scrutiny and revision across the recognizing learning field must continue to be a priority as we explore additional ways to measure prior learning while maintaining academic integrity.
20. PLAR is a very satisfactory experience for PLAR learners and of sufficient value to be recommended to others. PLAR orientation, information and assessment support services operated by the partner institutions were reported to satisfy the needs of both PLAR and Non-PLAR learners.

Strategies for Improving PLAR at Participating Colleges

21. Survey results indicate that most faculty do not invite learners to participate in selecting PLAR assessment methods. Although most learners expressed satisfaction with the PLAR process, colleges may be able to identify less time-consuming and complex assessment methods if candidates have an opportunity to provide input.
22. Although PLAR learners indicate overall satisfaction with the “type” of feedback they receive following their assessments, qualitative data obtained in response to the last question in the survey suggests that partner colleges should review their assessment processes (length of assessment, scheduling, location) and their feedback processes to ensure they are meeting learners’ needs.

Marketing Strategies for PLAR

23. Methods of spreading the word about PLAR that involve personal contact with college staff that are knowledgeable about PLAR are important elements of good information dissemination strategies.

24. PLAR brochures and the distribution of course outlines are the best methods of marketing PLAR. Instructors/professors describing PLAR in class and distributing brochures, PLAR Centres in the college or community, and internet/college websites are also effective methods of spreading the word.
25. Since government, community organizations and the public media were rarely reported by learners as sources of information on PLAR more extensive use of these resources would address the considerable need for more information cited by both PLAR and Non-PLAR learners.
26. Greater use of PLAR brochures, education fairs and military newspapers would be effective ways to spread the word about PLAR within the Canadian Armed Forces.

What needs to be in Place for Good Practice

The increase in PLAR activity, albeit fluctuating, suggests that PLAR has perhaps secured a toe-hold in partner college operations. Commitment from the federal government appears to be strong and reflect a genuine effort to implant the principle of PLAR into new models of labour force and economic development. However, it is the study partners' view that PLAR's success would be greatly enhanced if provincial governments, which have jurisdiction over educational institutions, increased their commitments (including financial) to recognizing prior learning.

The following compilation of suggested and actual practices derived from feedback from learners and PLAR experiences at several of the partner institutions clarifies what needs to be in place for PLAR to flourish.

- An increase in number of adult learners must be an institutional goal
- Full integration of PLAR in academic activity in all programs
- Comprehensive institutional PLAR policies and procedures and compliance
- Sufficient funding to make PLAR financially viable to deliver
- Fair remuneration for faculty assessment activities
- Human and material supports that include training for faculty who conduct assessments and support staff who interact with students
- Programs and courses designed on the basis of learning outcomes
- PLAR methods and tools designed to achieve maximum demonstration of relevant learning

- Encouragement of all learners to assess their learning in the context of their personal and career goals
- PLAR orientation, advising, and other resources available for learners
- Feedback on assessments provided by all assessors
- Affordable assessments
- Targeted PLAR marketing strategy consistent with an institution's strategic plan

The closer we are able to come to achieving these practices, the more we can help build a society founded on a belief in lifelong learning.

The Role of PLAR in Our Evolving World of Lifelong Learning

The study partners believe that from a broad perspective, the context in which PLAR operates is an important factor in understanding if PLAR is achieving its potential. We are living in a time when public policy makers are paying extraordinary attention to issues related to Canada's international competitiveness, its skill shortages, its need to increase labour mobility and the portability of skills, the promotion of lifelong learning, and the need for better integration of education and economic development. Human Resources Development Canada's projections on the attrition of skilled workers over the next decade and the contribution that immigration will make to our labour force growth (100% by 2011), make it clear that we need more effective methods in place to recognize skills and knowledge that have been acquired in different institutions, workplaces and countries.

There is growing recognition that we simply cannot afford to continue re-teaching people things they already know and can do. The costs of not recognizing the talents of our population have been presented in the report, *Brain Gain: The Economic Benefits of Recognizing Learning and Learning Credentials in Canada* (Bloom & Grant, 2001) by the Conference Board of Canada (\$4-\$6 billion in lost revenues per annum). The federal government's recent report, *Knowledge Matters: Skills and Learning for Canadians* (2002) also presents strong support for PLAR and the role that it plays in helping us to continue learning throughout our lives. "PLAR is a 'gap' in our educational system (p. 41)."

At the same time, the funding arrangements under which many institutions currently operate make it difficult to make PLAR financially viable (Aarts et al, 1999). There are currently limited funds if any, directed to faculty training or assessment method and tool development. Many institutions are filled to

capacity with traditional-aged learners Adult learners are not a priority despite their obvious relevance to labour force and economic development. It is in this conflicted context that PLAR operates in Canada.

Based on their experience and expertise in PLAR at local, provincial, national and international levels, the study partners believe that the current situation must change if PLAR's potential contribution to education and labour force development is to be realized. We know that adult learners have acquired years of knowledge and skills that go unrecognized. We have learned from adults who have undertaken PLAR that it facilitates their return to learning, increases their confidence, contributes to their sense of their own value, and motivates them to increase their skills for a variety of employment-related reasons. We have heard from institutions that even though PLAR does not account for high proportions of credit, PLAR learners are high academic achievers. Their high pass and graduation rates make PLAR a good educational investment and reveals PLAR as an effective retention tool.

It is the partners' view that although the use of PLAR for academic credit continues to be an under-serviced activity at many institutions, there are many adult learners who have prior learning worthy of credit which, if awarded would enhance the quality of their lives and increase their contribution to the Canadian economy. For these and the many other reasons presented throughout this report, all organizations involved in Canada's social and economic development should embrace PLAR.

Recommendations

In developing the following recommendations we have considered feedback from learners and we have reflected carefully on what we and other institutions can do to ensure that PLAR is woven into the fabric of our organizational activities. Our recommendations are based on the statistical data gathered in both Cross-Canada studies and also on the partners' collective experience, expertise, and knowledge of the policy context in which PLAR operates. (For more information on the study partners see Appendix B).

We realize that these recommendations will apply more to some organizations than others. Nevertheless, we hope they can be used by all institutions seeking growth and renewal as well as to expand PLAR into other contexts: personal development and planning, occupational licensing and mobility, university level learning and foreign qualifications assessment. In keeping with the first Cross-Canada Study of PLAR we direct our recommendations to the various stakeholder groups that are in a position to take action. We have also re-visited the first study's recommendations with a view to reiterating continued need.

Postsecondary Institutions

1. Institutions are important links between postsecondary education and the community. They are keepers of academic credentials, a key currency for employment. As publicly funded institutions, they have a responsibility to communicate openly with the public about their programs and services. To increase access to PLAR, we recommend that community colleges in Canada modify their public marketing and communications practices and ensure that PLAR is fully integrated into their newsletters, program calendars and brochures, websites, contract training materials, education fair handouts, and public marketing and student recruitment presentations.
2. At the same time, our research shows that many PLAR learners come from within the college community. Institutions therefore also have a responsibility to market PLAR internally. College faculty and staff have been identified as an effective source of PLAR information. We recommend that colleges in Canada assess PLA awareness among employers to ensure they have sufficient and accurate information about PLAR, how it works in their institution, and how to share it with students.
3. We recommend that colleges only involve personnel who are knowledgeable about PLAR in conducting assessments and providing learner feedback and accessible advising services. As PLAR increases, proactive, targeted professional development for faculty, admissions and counseling staff should be conducted on a continuing basis to maintain the current quality and satisfaction levels reported by learners.
4. We recommend that institutions take into greater account the views of PLAR candidates in selecting the assessment method that best measures the learning to be measured and provide learners with specific feedback, written or verbal, about the content and level of learning achieved in relation to the learning outcomes being evaluated.
5. Methods of prior learning assessment should continue to be scrutinized developed. We recommend that institutions investigate and make available to other institutions information on the use of new and refined methods of assessment. We also recommend that institutions ensure as early as possible, that PLAR orientation information/sessions provide comprehensive information

on available methods and benefits of the PLAR process, particularly to individuals who are not students at the time of their PLAR inquiries into PLAR.

6. It is our recommendation that colleges target workplaces that employ graduates of their programs and create better linkages with them to enhance participation by workers not yet connected to academic institutions. Offering workplace training assessment services to employers using credible course/program review processes would increase PLAR opportunities for workers and strengthen partnerships with workplaces.

Public Policy Makers

7. Public policy makers also have a role to play in ensuring public awareness of PLAR particularly with respect to education/training and labour force development. Human Resources Development Canada has undertaken a role in this over the past decade by supporting conferences, projects, public consultations and community PLAR centres such as the PLA Centre in Nova Scotia. A few provincial governments such as Saskatchewan and Manitoba are currently involved in promoting public awareness but much more needs to be done especially in heavily populated provinces and those that receive large numbers of immigrants. It is our recommendation that local, provincial, and federal governments expand their current public awareness and education and training marketing activities to include PLAR in all related promotional and public information materials on education and labour force development.
8. The assessment of prior learning of military personnel in Quebec has very successful. We recommend that the Department of National Defense increase its marketing of PLAR services in all other provinces and territories and inform military personnel of the opportunity to translate their military training into civilian academic credit.
9. We recommend that education fairs be used more extensively by the Department of National Defense to publicize the availability and benefits of PLAR.
10. It is also our recommendation that federal and provincial governments conduct internal consultations to identify all programs that involve education and labour force development, and ensure that the public servants responsible for these programs fully understand PLAR and

incorporate it into all relevant programming. For example, PLAR could be established as a condition for project funding in strategic skills initiatives and provincial and local labour force development agreements.

11. Assessment fees are not sufficient to sustain PLAR and already pose a barrier for some learners. We recommend that provincial governments revise their PLAR funding policies and establish arrangements (formulae, FTE's etc.) through which PLAR delivery is financially viable for institutions and affordable to learners.

Adult Learners

12. We strongly recommend that adult learners become familiar with PLAR, reflect on its relevance to their own learning and employment situations and be assertive about obtaining PLAR where appropriate.

Workplaces

13. Learners have told us that their workplaces are important sources of prior learning. It is our view therefore that workplace could play a much more significant role in the recognizing learning process. We recommend that employers and unions take concrete steps to help workers learn about PLAR and how it might contribute to their continued learning and employability. Existing workplace communication networks such as newsletters, websites and committees could help to accomplish this without significant cost. Professional development for human resource personnel could also be conducted in PLAR and its implications for workplaces.
14. It is our recommendation that workplaces access the training roster established by the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA) to obtain expert consulting and training expertise in PLAR.
15. It is also our recommendation that business and industry take some of the initiative to consult and collaborate with colleges and universities to establish PLAR practices and bridging programs for workers.

Areas for Future Study

During the course of this study, several issues were raised that would be valuable topics for future research. The following is a summary of the items noted earlier in this report.

1. This study does not examine PLAR in any detail with respect to non-credit academic programs, occupational mobility, employment, or foreign credential evaluation. All of these areas could be the subjects of valuable future research.
2. Considerable anecdotal evidence that military personnel experience difficulties in transferring military equivalencies to postsecondary institutions outside of Quebec suggests that investigation of the cause, level and impacts of these difficulties would be valuable for future research.
3. There is a dearth of research on how useful PLAR has been in Canadian workplace settings. Although obtaining more information on this was one of this study's objectives, we were not able to make any findings on the basis of the limited data available. Additional research on this topic is needed.
4. Research and pilot projects within institutions on faculty PLAR assessment practices might assist in identifying new assessment practices as well as the appropriateness of methods currently used.
5. The gender breakdown of PLAR learners raises the need for a deeper understanding of why more females than males access PLAR would enhance planning, recruitment, and program design.
6. Written comments from a few learners indicated they would have liked to receive more specific feedback following their assessment. Assessment feedback would be an excellent topic for faculty and students in future surveys.
7. The three-year study period for the survey was not long enough to determine the extent to which PLAR learners were able to transfer PLAR credits to other programs or institutions either prior to or following graduation. The issue of transferability is however, important to consider for future research if we want to fully understand the contribution PLAR makes to education in the long term.

8. We did not capture a wide enough range of reasons why learners may decide not to pursue PLAR. Future studies should try to discern what these might be so that fuller responses can be made. For example, why is PLAR not promoting access of disadvantaged groups to college education? What role does PLAR play in Non-PLAR learners' decisions not to enroll in college?
9. PLAR continues to have low activity in technology programs. Investigation of why this is the case is warranted.
10. An update on PLAR activity at Canadian universities would bring clarity to the extent to which PLAR is undertaken at these institutions. This research would be relatively simple and straightforward to undertake.

These conclusions, recommendations, and areas for future research demonstrate that important and serious learning is going on in a very wide range of non-traditional/non-institutional settings. Community colleges should be at the forefront of innovative collaboration and linkages with other stakeholder groups (workplaces, governments, voluntary organizations, community organizations) as learning providers and partners in recognizing learning. PLAR should be a central part of those linkages. There are many opportunities for stakeholder groups to work together in the design, and delivery of PLAR services and in PLAR research. The partners hope that this report will assist postsecondary institutions, public policy makers, adult learners, and workplaces to improve their understanding of PLAR and its impact on learners and to engage in it with commitment.

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PART SIX:

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Executive Summary:

A Slice of the Iceberg: Cross-Canada Study of PLAR (1999)

The Cross-Canada Study of PLAR has been conducted by a partnership of six colleges, one college of general and professional education (CEGEP) and an independent PLAR consultant. Funded by Human Resources Development Canada, the Study has undertaken an approach similar to case study research to investigate PLAR activities at seven institutions across-Canada from 1993/94 to 1997/98. This report attempts to present valid and reliable research in a format that is readable and interesting to a broad audience of institutions, public policy makers, adult learners and workplaces.

The partnership is comprised of College Ahuntsic (CEGEP), Quebec, College of the North Atlantic, Newfoundland; Conestoga College, Ontario; Douglas College, British Columbia; Fanshawe College, Ontario; Mohawk College, Ontario; Red River College, Manitoba; and an independent PLAR consultant from Ontario.

Research on adult learning is extensive. The works of Allen Tough, Malcolm Knowles, David Kolb and others, form the foundation of many modern adult education and assessment practices. The title of this report is based on a metaphorical “iceberg” created by Tough (1976) which is now a symbol used by many Canadian adult educators. It depicts the concept that only a small percentage of adult learning is recognized in our society but most learning exists below the surface where it is more difficult to identify, assess and recognize in any formal way. Little is known about the nature of informal learning and its relationship to formal learning. Although PLAR is one bridging mechanism claimed by proponents to increase recognition of informal learning, there has been little research conducted in Canada on PLAR and its impact on learners and institutions. Much of the evidence of PLAR’s efficacy is based on limited, anecdotal accounts of the experiences of individuals and specific projects.

The purpose of the Cross-Canada Study of PLAR is to elicit valid information on PLAR in Canada and to observe whether PLAR lowers the waterline on the “iceberg” by increasing recognition of informal learning. It is hoped that the information provided will assist institutions, governments, adult learners and

workplaces with their decision-making on the funding, development, delivery, use and evaluation of new and existing PLAR services.

Through a combination of statistical data collection, analysis and focus groups, the Study has gathered extensive information on: characteristics of PLAR learners, PLAR activities, the impact of the PLAR experience from the learners' and institutions' perspectives, and the costs of PLAR. Observations are made on how PLAR learners compare with traditional students in post-secondary programs with respect to demographics and academic achievement.

Phase One of the Study commenced with a literature review. Although there has been little formal research on PLAR in Canada, and limited international literature, findings are consistent that PLAR is a sound academic practice that benefits adult learners and institutions. This Cross-Canada Study of PLAR builds on these studies. Phase One also included the development of a preliminary methodology, which helped the partners determine whether the project was feasible.

Research

At the beginning of Phase Two, the partners established a pan-Canadian advisory committee to provide overall advice and provide feedback at each stage of the Study. Six research objectives were established.

They were to:

- Create a comprehensive database of PLAR learners and their academic activities over a 5-year period as well as a sampling of traditional students
- Identify characteristics of PLAR learners
- Identify PLAR activities at participating institutions
- Analyze the effects of PLAR on learners and participating institutions
- Assess the costs of credits/courses achieved through PLAR
- Compare the costs of credits/courses produced through PLAR with the cost of credits/courses produced through traditional course delivery

These objectives have been achieved through: statistical data collection of academic activities of all PLAR learners and a sampling of traditional students at each institution from 1993/94 to 1997/98, focus group sessions with assessors and former PLAR learners, and financial analysis on the costs of PLAR and traditional course delivery.

A central data repository has been established containing a 72-megabyte database on the college-level courses and programs taken by more than 3,500 PLAR learners from 1993/94 to 1997/98 (partial year for some institutions). Quantitative data include information on 7,900 assessments in over 1,400 courses as well as the 40,000 courses and over 360 programs PLAR learners took through traditional delivery. Data on a sampling of almost 12,000 traditional students in 58 programs have also been included for the purpose of comparison with the PLAR learners. The records of over 237,000 courses taken by traditional students are included. College Ahuntsic has compiled additional data with respect to PLAR assessment of military training programs in 1996/97. Qualitative data were compiled from focus groups of 65 PLAR learners in 22 programs and 50 assessors from 37 programs.

Analysis

The statistical data, focus group reports and institutional information are analyzed and synthesized in this report. Two levels of PLAR activity are examined: the national and institutional levels. Three types of analysis are conducted: descriptive analysis involving descriptive data findings, comparative analysis involving findings related to two or more sets of data and interpretive analysis involving the integration of several data findings. The analysis is conducted in relation to two time frames: annual and the five-year study period. Limitations on the Study's data collection and data analysis activities are reported.

The analysis of quantitative and qualitative data in this Study provides Canada's first national picture of the individuals who are accessing PLAR and of the institutional activities involved in assessment for credit. It also provides some clues for future research about learners who are not accessing PLAR and the reasons for their absence. Institutional profiles provide a useful snapshot of the context in which PLAR was operating at the mid-point of the study period and a series of Glance at Us Today reports link the study period to what is happening in PLAR at the time of publication (1999).

Key Findings

The Study results show that:

- Adult learners did have educationally relevant, college-level prior learning that could be successfully assessed and recognized within post-secondary educational settings. PLAR learners were successful students.

- The evidence indicates that PLAR learners earned solid grades in their courses acquired through PLAR and in their courses delivered through traditional delivery. Their average course grades were as high or higher than the average course grades of traditional students in the same programs. Their pass rates were higher. They took more courses than traditional students and graduated at a higher rate. Their graduation grade point averages were slightly higher.
- PLAR strengthened adult learners' confidence in their own capacities to learn and motivated adults to pursue further education.
- PLAR represented important efficiencies for part-time adult learners by shortening their programs, reducing course loads and reducing costs. It was particularly beneficial to part-time students who decided to return to education to achieve employment-related training and occupational credentials.
- A motivating factor behind support for PLAR at all participant institutions was a strong faculty-based commitment to adult learning.
- PLAR can be effectively used as a marketing tool to attract learners requiring training for employment or occupational certification. It is also an effective tool to market college programs to potential students over the age of 30 years.
- The low numbers of PLAR learners and programs, in which PLAR was accessed over the five-year study period, are disturbing signals that delivery of PLAR assessments under the same financial arrangements has not been economical for some institutions.
- The public policy focus on PLAR diminished at some institutions over the study period and resulted in a reduction in resources for PLAR development.
- Although there are exceptions, the "new learner" who would not attend college if it were not for PLAR, may not have materialized to the extent originally anticipated.
- Lack of agreement and clarity around remuneration for conducting assessments had a detrimental effect on learners and on faculty support for PLAR.
- Further diversification of assessment practices and tools would help learners more fully demonstrate their knowledge and skills.
- Early benefits from PLAR training within institutions diminished over time at some institutions due to restructuring, attrition, budget cuts and emphasis on other reform initiatives. There is a need for renewed emphasis on PLAR training that supports faculty in developing new assessment practices that are cost efficient and valid measurement tools.
- Opportunities for full-time learners to benefit from PLAR through shortened programs; lighter course loads or lower costs were impaired by rigid "lock step" program delivery structures and government regulations that eliminate eligibility for student assistance.
- There is a need for greater public awareness of PLAR and marketing strategies geared toward workplaces, occupational associations and sectoral organizations.
- Improved transfer of credit mechanisms across institutions and jurisdictions would enhance PLAR's capacity to facilitate recognition of prior learning. Evaluation of military training conducted by Collège Ahuntsic for example, could be transferable if linkages across institutions were enhanced.

- There is a need for further research into several issues cited but not addressed in this Study including, more comprehensive financial analyses, the role PLAR plays in motivating learners to return to formal study, cross-institutional comparisons within jurisdictions, short-term and long-term incentives to provide PLAR and the role of volunteerism in providing PLAR services.

Recommendations

Institutions

Should undertake a review of PLAR services and assessment practices using the findings of this report as a basis for discussion and action to:

- Ensure that written policies and procedures are implemented and practiced by all program administrators and faculty.
- Ensure that written information on PLAR procedures as well as criteria for earning credit is readily available to learners.
- Provide PLAR training to all new, full-time and part-time faculty as well as existing faculty who conduct assessments, focusing particularly on learning outcomes and authentic assessment practices.
- Resolve faculty concerns regarding fair and consistent assessor remuneration practices.
- Market PLAR vigorously with workplaces and occupational bodies to increase PLAR activities within a context of strategic partnerships in training and education.
- Review institutional PLAR facilitation practices to evaluate the impact of centralization vs. integration of PLAR services
- Integrate PLAR into educational reform activities and institutional strategic plans.
- Conduct research into PLAR with a view to contributing to a growing body of knowledge on the relationship between formal and informal learning and the impact of PLAR on institutions and adult learners in Canada.
- Develop course registration/credit systems to facilitate flexible delivery thus allowing students with prior learning to complete programs sooner.

Public Policy Makers

Undertake a review of this report and use it as a basis for discussion and action to:

- Revise current public policy and the role of government in supporting PLAR in post-secondary institutions (for example, allowing Registered Educational Savings Plan funds (RESP) to be accessed for post-secondary PLAR, and permitting PLAR learners to retain their eligibility for student assistance).
- Support PLAR and apply that support to provide funding to institutions to the same degree that traditional course delivery are supported.
- Support initiatives that promote PLAR research, assessment tool development and assessor training.
- Assist institutions to improve mechanisms for facilitating transfer of credits across institutions and provinces. For example, credits acquired through the evaluation of military training should be transferable from one province to another.

Adult Learners

Read this Study report and be aware of the benefits of PLAR to:

- Reference this Study in supporting requests for recognition of prior learning
- Be assertive in requesting recognition for prior learning
- Maintain career portfolios that contain evidence of knowledge and competencies acquired outside of formal learning activities
- Commit to lifelong learning, building on prior learning whenever possible

Workplaces

Study this report with an aim to:

- Be proactive in requesting that PLAR be incorporated into training provided by educational institutions.
- Maintain complete records of in-house training and participation
- Encourage the use of documented portfolio evidence for recruitment, promotion and other career opportunities
- Develop strategic partnerships with education and training providers

In summary, PLAR is an academically sound practice that contributes to adult learning. It successfully links informal learning to formal learning. It improves adults' confidence in their own knowledge and skills and it enhances the chances of continuation of learning over the long term. PLAR contributes to learners' employability.

Partner institutions' clear commitment to the notion of PLAR has meant that they have delivered services despite significant financial loss relative to traditional course delivery. PLAR's future depends on adequate support from public policy makers and on the development of demand from sources external to the institutions. If PLAR has a legitimate place in improving employability and occupational competency, it will likely be through strategic partnerships between institutions and business and industry. It is the hope of the Study partners that institutions and policy makers will use this report to re-examine their positions on PLAR and take action to reduce barriers to learners and enhance institutional services to learners and their external communities.

In the interest of facilitating future research into PLAR, the Cross-Canada Study partnership has agreed to make the database and the data collection tool used in this project, available to any post-secondary

organization in Canada for non-profit purposes. At the time of printing this report, discussions for finding a “home” for the database and the tool were in progress. In these ways, areas of interest not raised in this report can be independently explored and efforts to learn more about the impact of PLAR on learners and institutions can continue beyond the life of the Study.

Appendix B

Study Partners

Sandra Aarts

Sandra currently works as a PLAR consultant. She was a full-time faculty member at Fanshawe College, London, Ontario from 1975 to 2000. In 1993, she was hired as Fanshawe's first PLAR facilitator and was responsible for designing and implementing a PLAR service for the College. She also designed and implemented distributed learning opportunities for adults, including online portfolio development and video conferencing.

Sandra is a study author for *A Slice of the Iceberg: Cross-Canada Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition*. She is currently a member of the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment. In 2001 Sandra received a Canadian Recognizing Learning Award in recognition of outstanding achievement in the field of Prior Learning Assessment and Qualification Recognition.

Deborah Blower

Deborah Blower is the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) Facilitator at Red River College (RRC) of Applied Arts, Science and Technology in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. She has been extensively involved in the design and implementation of PLAR practices at RRC since 1983 - first in the Early Childhood Education Diploma program and since January 1995 as the college PLAR Facilitator. Deborah is currently the Past Chair of the Board of Directors for the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA) having served as the Chair from 1997–2002. She has also served as Chair and past Chair of the Manitoba Prior Learning Assessment Network (MPLAN) and on the Board of Directors of the Manitoba Prior Learning Assessment Centre from January 1998 to March 31, 2001. She currently is a member of Manitoba's Provincial PLAR Program Team Committee.

She has presented at numerous conferences, facilitated workshops and training seminars on PLAR at the international, national, provincial and local levels for educators, business, industry and other organizations; authored a chapter "Canada: the Story of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition" in the recently published book, *Experiential Learning Around the World* (1999), written articles for journals and

instructed courses in PLAR and portfolio development. Deborah is currently responsible for the development and implementation of a two-level PLAR Practitioner Training Initiative.

In October 2001, Deborah received a Canadian Recognizing Learning Award in recognition of her achievements in the field of PLAR. As a PLAR practitioner, curriculum developer and college instructor, she is deeply committed to the advancement of the recognition of prior learning processes.

Roberta Burke

For the past 12 years Roberta has been the Coordinator of the Credit for Prior Learning (PLA) Office at Mohawk College in Hamilton, Ontario. She is responsible for implementation and quality assurance of the policies and procedures relating to PLAR at her College, including faculty training, and the review of workplace training. She has developed and delivers a portfolio development course, including an independent study option. Roberta has been on faculty at the College for 22 years and continues to provide career and educational counseling for adult learners.

Roberta is a past member of the Board of Directors for the Canadian Association of Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA) and was a founding member of the Ontario PLA Network. Roberta has facilitated workshops and provided consulting services on PLA, program review and outcome based education, for many institutions across Canada such as: BC Admissions and Transfer, Ontario Council of Regents, Canadian Technology Human Resources Board, Gulf Canada, Canadian Steel Trade and Employment Congress, Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, Halifax Community College, and College of the North Atlantic. She played a leadership role in the development and delivery of a "train the trainer" program for PLAR practitioners within the Ontario College system.

Roberta received a Canadian Recognizing Learning Award in recognition of outstanding achievement in the field of PLAR; an honorary diploma from First Nations Technical Institute for encouraging implementation of PLAR and improving access to post secondary education for adult learners; and the Presidents Award for Excellence from Mohawk College for outstanding achievement.

Roberta is one of the authors of the Cross-Canada Study of PLAR, a major Canadian research project. In addition, Roberta has written articles for the CAEL Forum News and the Career Planning and Adult Development Journal.

Eleanor Conlin, Ed.D.

Eleanor Conlin is the PLAR Consultant and Chair of Academic Research and Educational Services at Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning in Kitchener, Ontario. Eleanor was responsible for the implementation of the cross-college PLAR system at Conestoga and orienting the community at large. In 1998, she completed the move to a decentralized model for PLAR in order to integrate more fully, PLAR into the day-to-day culture of the college.

In her current position, Eleanor assists with research and implementation of new initiatives and conducts background research through the use of inquiry, focus groups, questionnaires, and interviews. Eleanor also researches system-wide issues and develops position papers on various academic issues for the internal and external college community. She was a member of the core team successfully developing four applied degree proposals for her College. Eleanor is a study partner for *A Slice of the Iceberg: Cross-Canada Study of PLAR* and the coordinator of this current study.

Eleanor is a founding member of both the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment and the Ontario Prior Learning Assessment Network. She is a published author for several professional journals, and a national and international workshop leader. Eleanor has a nursing education background and holds a B.A.S. from York University, a M.Ed. from Central Michigan University, and an Ed.D. from Florida's Nova Southeastern University. In October 2001, Eleanor was awarded the Canadian Recognizing Learning Award at the Recognizing Learning Conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Ginette Lamarre

Ms. Lamarre is a PLAR advisor for the client groups and companies at the Bureau de Liaison avec des Entreprises at Collège Ahuntsic. She is also Coordinator for the Canadian Forces Community College Program, which includes responsibility for the certification of armed forces personnel in military occupations to provide them with recognition toward programs at Collège Ahuntsic.

Ms. Lamarre began her involvement in PLAR in 1985. Since that time she has had responsibility for many PLAR developmental projects for FIRAC (Fonds de l'implantation pour Reconnaissance des Acquis au Collegial), particularly the establishment of counseling guidelines for new PLAR candidates. She has contributed to the development of two user guides for PLAR.

Ms. Lamarre has also taken on the responsibility for the training of provincial PLAR stakeholders. She has coordinated many projects for the development of PLAR assessment tools, particularly in civil engineering and in communication and the hearing impaired. Ms. Lamarre has served as a guest speaker at many conferences, training sessions as well as employers and professional associations. She is currently a member of the Board of Directors of the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment.

Wilhelmina McCrossan

Wilhelmina McCrossan is Faculty Liaison to the PLAR Assessment Service at Douglas College in New Westminster, British Columbia. She has coordinated and participated in key College and provincial PLAR initiatives including workplace-based assessment as it relates to both access to post-secondary education and career mobility. Wilhelmina has developed manuals and websites that are currently in use by PLAR students.

Wilhelmina became a Douglas College faculty member in 1989. After beginning her teaching career in Scotland she immigrated to Canada, and after working in private industry for a number of years found her way back to teaching. She has experience teaching in both public and private post-secondary institutions. In early spring 2003, she will add an MA in Organizational Management to her existing credentials.

Joy Van Kleef

Joy is an independent consultant in prior learning assessment and recognition and other areas of adult learning. She has worked with governments and postsecondary institutions across Canada in training, project management, research, writing, and policy development for over 20 years. Joy has been actively involved in the development of PLAR in Canada since 1992 and was the Coordinator of the first Cross-Canada Study of PLAR and principle writer of the report, *A Slice of the Iceberg: Cross-Canada Study of PLAR*. She is also the principle writer of this report. Joy is a member of the Training Committee of the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA) and currently enrolled at St. Francis Xavier University's Master's in Adult Education program through which she finally completed her portfolio in 2001!

College of the North Atlantic

Two persons at College of the North Atlantic participated in the preparation of this report: Mr. Dorm Chipp initially represented the College but following his retirement he was replaced by Mr. Brian Tobin.

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Appendix C

Advisory Committee Membership

Maria Desjardins

Maria Desjardins has been the Coordinator PLAR at Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) since January 1999. With David White, Director of Portfolio Implementation, she is responsible for implementing NSCC's Strategic Direction One: Portfolio Learning. Maria went to NSCC from the PLA Centre where she was the Program Specialist. Previously, she had spent over fifteen years facilitating Language and Life Skills in both post-secondary and community (NGO) settings. As well, she facilitated bridging courses at Mount St. Vincent and St. Mary's Universities for five years.

Maria has a BA from St. F.X., an M Ed from St. Mary's and is presently writing a thesis for an MA (Research) in Adult Education.

Louise Gordon

Louise is currently the Acting Executive Director of the Manitoba Council on Post-Secondary Education, an arms length agency of the Manitoba Department of Advanced Education and Training. The mandate of the Council is to plan and coordinate the development of a post-secondary education system in the province that promotes excellence in and accessibility to education, supports the coordination and integration of services and facilities and promotes fiscal responsibility. Prior to assuming the position of A/Executive Director, Louise was the Council's program coordinator, responsible for the approval of all new college and university programming in the province.

Louise has worked in the field of adult education and training, literacy and post-secondary education for most of her career. Her interest in Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition came as a result of seeing many of the people with whom she worked with develop skills through their work and training experiences, but who were unable to obtain formal credentials for this learning. As a result of this experience, Louise has worked to advocate for the development of Prior Learning Assessment services in all publicly-funded post-secondary institutions.

Louise has been on the steering committee for all PLAR national forums and was instrumental in developing the proposal and arranging the funding for the former Manitoba PLA Centre. She holds an MSW from the University of Manitoba.

Mia Gordon

Mia Gordon is currently Vice President, College Development and Senior Administrator at the David Lam Campus and Thomas Haney Center, at Douglas College, New Westminster, British Columbia.

In her capacity as Vice President, Mia is responsible for six major functional areas: Institutional Research and Planning; Human Resources; Center for Learning and Development; Communications and Marketing Office; the Community and Contract Services Department; Educational Liaison and Community liaison, especially with the K-12 system.

She has worked with Douglas College since 1984, as Dean of Labour Relations and College Development, as a Dean for Educational and Student Services, as Director of Student Services and Developmental Education and as a Counselor. Actively involved in the facilitation of PLA pilot projects at Douglas College over the past five years, including chairing a cross college PLA taskforce for two years, Mia has been a member of advisory committees to several provincial PLA projects, and has worked with our internal P.D. Committee to design and facilitate PLA workshops and seminars for college employees.

Bonnie Kennedy

Bonnie Kennedy has been an adult educator for most of her professional life. She began teaching adults at night school at Sir Sandford Fleming College in the mid 1970's and later worked as a Coordinator in Continuing Education, Women's Programs and Labour Adjustment. After many years as a member of the teaching faculty, she became the College's Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator in 1991. As part of that role, Bonnie was responsible for the development and promotion of PLA through policies, procedures, marketing strategies and training, as well as for the facilitation of portfolio development courses. She initiated articulation agreements and PLAR pilot projects with community partners such as General Motors, Binney & Smith and Human Resources Development Canada.

Bonnie left the College in 1998 to assume the lead for Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition at the Canadian Labour Force Development Board (CLFDB) in Ottawa. After the CLFDB closed in 1999, Bonnie became the Interim National Coordinator for the Canadian Information Centre for International

Credentials (CICIC) and in the summer of 2000, she took on the role of Project Manager for the 2001 Recognizing Learning Conference in Halifax.

Bonnie is a trustee with the Trillium Lakelands District School Board and the Acting Executive Director of the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA)

Douglas Myers

Douglas Myers has been Executive Director of the PLA Centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia since June, 1996. Most of his career has been spent in university continuing education at Dalhousie University where he was Dean of Henson College of Public Affairs and Continuing Education from 1986-94.

Born in Toronto, Douglas completed his doctorate at Edinburgh University and taught at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, before retiring to the land of his fore parents. He has participated in, studied and written about efforts to shift the political economy of higher education, with particular reference to adult learning and social change; to improve and sustain Canadian studies and support for cultural industries; and to develop self-employment/micro-enterprise training as a key component of regional and community development.

Liz Robinson

Liz Robinson has been the Executive Director of the Hamilton Training Advisory Board - a community-based organization mandated to provide workforce development services on a local level – since its inception in 1997. Prior to that she managed a literacy network in Hamilton.

She holds a Bachelor and Masters degree from McMaster University and continued studying for several years toward her doctorate in social sciences. Currently, Liz is finishing her Level II certificate in the Economic Development Program at the University of Waterloo. Having completed much of her formal education as an adult student, Liz is committed to the principle of lifelong learning.

Liz has three sons and lives in the community of Dundas just outside of Hamilton, Ontario.

Appendix D

Memorandum of Understanding

BETWEEN

CONESTOGA COLLEGE
&
COLLEGE OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC
&
COLLEGE AHUNTSIC
&
MOHAWK COLLEGE
&
FANSHAWE COLLEGE
&
RED RIVER COLLEGE
&
DOUGLAS COLLEGE

KNOWN AS THE CROSS-CANADA PARTNERSHIP ON PLAR

WHEREAS:

The above-noted parties are a partnership established to conduct a Cross-Canada Study of PLAR Part II: A Survey of PLAR Learners;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

The partners acknowledge that their organizational objectives are complementary in the area of providing prior learning assessment and recognition to adult learners. All partners agree to collaborate to conduct research into PLAR at their institutions and across partner institutions.

SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES:

The partners shall apply jointly to Human Resources Development Canada for the funding of a research study of PLAR. Conestoga College of Applied Arts and Technology shall sign the agreement with HRDC and assume the responsibility of managing partner of the finances and coordination of the study. All partners will participate in the study in accordance with the activities outlined in the enclosed/attached proposal.

Date: _____

College Administration

Printed Name

College Study Partner

Printed Name

Appendix E

Cross-Canada Study of PLAR Institutional Profiles (2000/01), Updates, and Trends

Institution Name	Ahuntsic	Conestoga	Douglas	Fanshawe	Mohawk	North Atlantic	Red River
Founded	1967	1967	1970	1967	1966	1997	1938
Location	Montreal, Quebec	Kitchener, Ontario	New Westminster, British Columbia	London, Ontario	Hamilton, Ontario	Newfoundland and Labrador	Winnipeg, Manitoba
Student Enrolment	7,200 full-time 1,900 part-time	4467 full-time 32,682 part-time	3632 full-time***** 6056 part-time***** Year: Continuing Education 14,206 Contract Training 1,500+	12,494 full-time 40,159 part-time+++	7,794 (F2000) 8,433 (F2001) full-time	12,000 full-time	7937 full-time 23,500 part-time
Fields of Study	General Studies Human Studies Sciences, Technology	Access and Preparatory Studies, Health Sciences and Community Services; Business; Engineering Technology; Applied Arts; Information Technology	Child, Family Community Studies; Commerce and Business Admin.; Health Sciences; Humanities & Social Sciences; Language, Literature and Performing Arts; Applied Sciences and Technology	Applied Arts, Business & General Studies; Health Sciences; Human Services; Technology	Applied Arts and Access; Business; Health Sciences and Human Services; Engineering Technology	Academic/Access, Applied Arts/Business, Engineering Technology, Health Sciences, Industrial Education/Trades, Information Technology, Natural Resources	Applied Arts; Applied Sciences; Business; Community Services; Developmental Education; Health; Aboriginal and Teacher Education; Trades and Technology
Number of Programs	32	102 full-time 56 part-time	54	93 full-time 73 part-time	79 full-time 161 part-time	90 full-time	110 full time 164 part time
Full-time Staff	559	578	466	807	758 total	1,100 faculty and support staff	900 staff
No. of Campuses	1	4	3	5	4	17	8
Tuition Fees by Program	None for full-time students	\$1,716	By Credit	\$1,717	\$2,097	\$1,452	\$1796

Institution Name	Ahuntsic	Conestoga	Douglas	Fanshawe	Mohawk	North Atlantic	Red River
Tuition Fees by Course	\$2.00 per hour	\$186 (45 hrs) \$4.13/hr	\$46 per credit	\$182 (45 hrs.)	\$193 (39 hrs)	\$230	\$249 (40 hours)
Total Budget	\$50 million	\$76.5+ million	\$54million	\$97 million	\$89 million	\$70 million	\$77 million
PLAR Start Date	1985	1993	1994	1994	1986 policy		1980
Assessments Completed	Not available	1998/99 - 150 1999/00 - 107 2000/01 - 98	1998/99 – 1999/00 – 2000/01 –	1998/99 - 398 1999/00 - 714 2000/01 - 375	1998/99 - 351 1999/00 - 361 2000/01 - 415	1998/99 1999/00 2000/01	1998/99 - 320 1999/00 - 404 2000/01 - 808
Assessment Fees	\$2.00 per course hour	\$96 per course \$4.13/hr if less than 21 hr course	\$46.25 per credit	Up to \$77.00 per course or \$100 program advanced standing fee	\$96.00 per course (F2001)	\$50 per course	\$60 per portfolio assessment; \$50 per challenge to a max. of \$200 per course; \$30 per hour for demonstration to a max. of \$150 per assessment plus cost of consumables (note: possible to have more than one assessment per course)
PLAR Funding Sources	Provincial Ministry, Assessment fees	Provincial Ministry, Assessment fees	Provincial Government, College, Assessment fees	Provincial Ministry, Assessment fees	Provincial Ministry, Assessment fees	College budget, Assessment fees	Provincial Government, Assessment fees
Formal PLAR Policies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Residency Policy	No	25%	50%*	25%	25%	25%	25% (or less with Dean approval)
Transcription Policy	Yes, Grade	Alpha Grade or Pass/Fail	Same as traditional with addition of (PLAR) notation; Fail, Incomplete and Withdraw not recorded	Alpha Grade or Credit, Pass/Fail	Alpha Grade or CR, Credit		Grade or CR (credit)

Institution Name	Ahuntsic	Conestoga	Douglas	Fanshawe	Mohawk	North Atlantic	Red River
PLAR Committee	Yes	Not active. Reassembles on an as-needed basis	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
PLAR Staff	5 part-time advisors	1 Consultant - Part-time 3 Liaison Officers - Part-time	P-T Faculty Liaison 1 Assessment Coordinator (Credit PLAR part of duties)	1 part-time Facilitator	1 full-time Coordinator 1 part-time support staff (24 hrs)	No	1 full time Facilitator, 1 part time support staff
PLAR Office	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
PLAR Budget	\$30,000	Not tracked	\$59,600	\$4,000	\$129,000.	Not available	\$77,000
Basis for Assessment	Course-based	Course-based	Course/Credit – based****	Course-based or Program	Course-based	Course-based	Course and program based
PLAR Professional Development	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	As required	Yes
Assessor Compensation	Part of normal workload plus contracts for evaluation	\$50 per hour for 2 hours for development; up to 2 hours at \$50 per hour for assessment	\$100 per assessment***	Incorporated into workload; part-time were paid on an hourly basis	Part-time contract	Part of regular workload	Part of normal workload; or hourly instructor rate. Con. Ed/Distance Ed-hourly instructor rate.
PLAR Orientation	Yes	Yes	PLAR Office Info. Package Program	Yes	Info Package, in-person, by phone or mail	As required	Yes
PLAR Availability	All programs	All programs	All programs	All programs	All programs	All programs	All programs

Douglas: * As of 2002 has changed to 25% “Instructional Requirement”
 *** \$150 per 3 credit course excepting “Challenge” which is \$100 where a new tool is developed and \$50 where an existing tool is used.
 ***** Douglas College courses average 3 credits per course but range from 2 to 12 per course.
 ***** At fall stable enrollment date
 +++ These figures represent course enrolments.

PLAR UPDATE AND TRENDS

Collège Ahuntsic

The Ambulance program for regular students has increased by 233% (from 3 groups to 10). PLA has an increase of 48% mostly due to the PLA for military in the Ambulance program. The newly created Bureau de Liaison avec les Entreprises (replacing the services sur mesure) has an international mandate to recruit new students from different countries. In 2000-01 we registered 9 regular students from China and 19 are coming this year. In the Military program we are now official partner with the Canadian Forces Medical School Services (Borden) and we give the full training in the Ambulance program.

College of the North Atlantic

College of the North Atlantic adopted a policy for prior learning Assessment in June of 1998. This policy provides students with every opportunity to receive credit for past learning experiences through a comprehensive, systematic process of evaluation. The College's policy includes a 25% residency requirement. Students attending College of the North Atlantic have access to PLAR at each of the College's 17 locations.

College of the North Atlantic is dedicated to providing quality programming and to maximizing access opportunities for students who wish to avail of training. In light of changing demographics and increasingly rapid technological change, the continued availability of PLAR challenge remains an important part of the College's philosophy. The College's Prior learning Assessment policy, as well as various related procedures, will be revisited and adjusted on a regular basis in order to provide all reasonable opportunities for the acknowledgment of prior learning opportunities.

In the future, the College's delivery of PLAR services will, no doubt, be examined in an effort to ensure consistent PLAR services are available at each of the 17 campus locations. In additions, there will be further examination of the professional development needs of individuals involved in the provision of PLAR services.

The future will also include a closer review of the services available to PLAR learners who have acquired considerable skills through specific industrial work experiences. A growing number of these individuals will likely avail of opportunities for skill enhancement. It will be important to ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to provide reasonable credit for past skills acquisition while, at the same time ensuring program credibility and quality assurance. The development of such procedures will require close liaison with appropriate industry representatives

Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning

During the years 1998-2001, there was a decline in the number of PLAR assessments due to several factors ranging from employee changes, fluctuations in the level of support, internal procedural changes and changes to program requirements. In January 2002, a Vice President Academic position was created and filled. The incumbent is supportive of PLAR and currently is reviewing College PLAR policies, procedures and fees. It is anticipated that this will result in increased PLAR activity across the College.

Douglas College

In 1998, as part its strategy to position PLAR as a standard service to learners, the College developed a long-term plan for PLAR. Part of this plan was to pilot a PLAR Assessment Service for both credit and non-credit activities. After three years, the Service was integrated into the Office of the Registrar. In 2001, the College PLAR policy was revised to include a reduction in the residency/“instructional requirement”. Learners may now request PLAR for up to 75% of a program.

The number of learners requesting PLAR is gradually increasing following a decline during several years of development and planning. Some of this interest is being generated by: (1) externally accredited professions such as nursing that are receiving government funding to explore PLAR; and, (2) by sub-sectors that are exploring ways to rapidly “professionalize” groups of employees that until recently did not require formal post secondary credentials.

The evolution of PLAR for academic credit at the College has moved roughly in parallel with that of the province. PLAR credit is gradually becoming more widely accepted and some universities in British Columbia now accept transfer PLAR credit where that credit forms part of an Articulation Agreement.

It is also worth noting that PLAR at the College now encompasses activities for purposes other than the awarding of academic credits as follows: (1) non-credit assessments that enable individuals to demonstrate standards set by a professional organization or specific employer; (2) workplace-based assessment as it relates to workforce mobility within and across occupational sub-sectors; and (3) on-line piloting of assessment of occupational competency.

Fanshawe College

From April 1, 2000 to March 31, 2001 162 portfolio assessments and 213 challenges were conducted. The Student Information System continued to allow us to capture prior learning assessments for both Advanced Standing and Advanced Credit Applications. As a result, there was a more accurate account of PLAR activity and government revenue.

The revised prior learning assessment fee structure implemented at Fanshawe College August 31, 1998 continues to be in effect, i.e. full and part-time students may apply for an Advanced Standing Assessment based on a combination of formal learning from another recognized post-secondary educational institution and prior learning from experience (previously only formal education from a recognized post-secondary institution was considered for Advanced Standing designation). The fee for this service was \$100. In order to apply for Advanced Standing, students applied to the program of their choice through the Ontario College Application Service (OCAS). The fee for this service was \$65. Part-time students who were seeking credit in more than 25% of program content applied for Advanced Credit based on prior learning from experience and/or formal academic learning. The fee for this service was \$100. Registered full-time post-secondary students were required to pay \$25 for each course challenged by a method other than portfolio. Portfolio assessments for full-time post-secondary students remained at \$77 per course challenge. All other students paid \$77 per course challenge regardless of the challenge method.

Since March of 1997, the Administrative Assistant of the School of Health Sciences, Human Services and General Studies assumed the role of PLAR Liaison Officer and performed most functions of the former PLAR facilitator. On-going (twice monthly) orientation sessions are held for individuals seeking information about the PLAR service, including the assessment process.

Future Directions

In the Fall of 2001, a comprehensive analysis and review of PLAR was done and as a result, various recommendations have been made and are in process of implementation. The intent is to revitalize PLAR over the next few years and significant growth is anticipated. As a first step, the College has approved for the 2002/03-budget year a PLAR Advisor to be co-located with the Pre-Admissions Advisor in the Registrar's Office. Additional recommendations made in the PLAR report call for action plans from each academic division at the College. Internal and external marketing and awareness campaigns are projected. The PLAR portfolio development course will continue to be offered and a thorough review of all PLAR-related college policies, procedures and fees is planned.

Mohawk College

Status of PLAR Office

In 2001, the College decided to eliminate the PLAR Coordinator's position as a budget reduction strategy. To facilitate this transition, the College has struck a taskforce to make recommendations as to how PLAR services will be maintained. The PLAR Coordinator will remain in the position at least until March 31, 2003. The Taskforce, reporting to the Director of Student Development, has created a vision of a Recognition of Learning Center that will combine exemptions based on transfer credits and articulation agreements, as well as the assessment of prior experiential learning into one location.

Changes to Diploma Nursing

The Collaborative BSC in Nursing was offered for the first time in Sept 2001 and a phase out of the current Diploma Nursing and Practical Nursing Certificate Programs began. As a result PLAR was also suspended in these two programs. Approval has been given to change the duration of the Practical Nursing Program from a three-semester certificate program to a two-year diploma program. It is anticipated that PLAR will be offered in the Practical Nursing Program when the new curriculum has been developed.

Trends

There has been a noticeable increase in the number of students who are accessing PLAR for a previously failed course. An Academic subcommittee of College Council has been meeting to develop guidelines for supplementals.

Red River College

Since 1998, Red River College (RRC) has moved forward with PLAR implementation. Three key initiatives have played an important role in the enhanced PLAR activity and practice. First, the development of the RRC PLAR Strategic Plan (1999-2004) - this Plan provides the guidelines for the integration, implementation and expansion of PLAR across the College over a five-year period (1999-2004). PLAR is viewed as an integral part of academic design, delivery and curriculum renewal to promote and increase learner success. The PLAR Strategic Plan outcomes continue to be achieved in 2002/03.

The second key initiative was the implementation of the Manitoba PLA Centre (1998-2001). Initiated by RRC, the former Manitoba Department of Education and with funding from the Winnipeg Development Agreement (WDA)-HRDC, the PLA Centre provided PLA advisory services, implemented PLAR demonstration projects and provided consulting services to post-secondary education, business and industry to support the development of PLAR programs and services. This successful project spawned the development of the third key initiative, a provincial Policy Framework for PLAR (November, 2001). This province wide PLAR strategy focuses on three cornerstones: to increase capacity for PLAR in post-secondary institutions, expand PLAR advising services in Adult Learning Centres (ALCs) and employment centers throughout Manitoba and implement workplace and industry related PLAR projects. This new provincial strategy will impact significantly on RRC PLAR practices as more adult learners gain awareness of PLAR through province-wide PLAR services and a new website: www.plarinmanitoba.ca.

As a result of these three initiatives, RRC has implemented and continues to develop new PLAR projects and practices. Recognized as a leader in PLAR Practitioner training, RRC has received provincial funding to develop and implement two levels of PLAR training—PLAR Foundation Training (basic) and PLAR Practitioner Training (advanced) for both on site and online/distance delivery. All PLAR training provided by RRC and Manitoba Advanced Education and Training, ensures equivalency of learning and skills for PLAR practitioners across the province. Both training courses may be completed for College credit recognition.

A PLAR Practitioner DACUM (Develop a Curriculum) process was conducted in October 2001. This PLAR Practitioner DACUM, the first in Canada has been used to validate current PLAR training and to develop the new advanced level. The online PLAR Foundation Training will be implemented in the Fall,

2002. On site training is currently offered on a regular basis. The PLAR Practitioner Training (advanced) will be piloted for on site delivery in November 2002 with online delivery in the spring of 2003. With RRC's PLAR training, Manitoba continues to increase its cadre of qualified PLAR practitioners.

In 1999-2001, RRC implemented a PLAR program outcomes approach in three programs: Manufacturing Technician Diploma, Hotel and Restaurant Administration and Software Development Diploma (SDD). This approach allowed experienced workers to complete PLAR to program outcomes vs. a course-by-course basis. A number of College programs are interested in pursuing development of PLAR in this way.

Through the College's PLAR department, an enhanced PLAR advising function has been implemented as part of the Program Information and Academic Advising Centre. With additional provincial funding allocated to PLAR, a full time PLAR Advisor is responsible for pre-enrolment and enhanced PLAR advising, PLAR orientations and information services for the College's internal and external clients, individual and group sessions for development of professional portfolios and portfolios for credit review.

PLAR processes and practices continue to be developed and implemented in both full and part time College programs. The College PLAR Facilitator coordinates the PLAR development funds and provides resource assistance.

Manitoba's Provincial Policy Framework for PLAR supports the growth of PLAR practices in post-secondary institutions, community and the workplace. RRC's PLAR system will continue to expand in the next few years.

Appendix F

Glossary

Assessment

A process of evaluating prior learning.

Assessment fee

A fee charged by an institution for assessing prior learning.

Assessor

A subject matter expert who assesses prior learning to award college credit.

Challenge

A written examination, test, project, or assignment prepared by faculty, often supervised by an invigilator.

Continuing education

Courses offered by colleges on a part-time basis and usually delivered in the evenings, on weekends or by distance education. They may be credit or non-credit courses.

Cooperation rate

The number of persons who responded to the surveys expressed as a percentage of people deemed likely to have received the survey and had an opportunity to respond.

Course

A unit of study leading to a post-secondary diploma or certificate.

Credit

A measured unit of recognized learning. A course may have one or more credits.

Credential

A qualification earned at a college/CEGEP including, attestation (1 yr), certificate (1/4 – 1 ½ yrs), citation (1/2 yr. or 1 ½ yrs.), two-year diploma, three-year diploma or post-diploma certificate.

Demonstration

A performance of skills completed by an individual learner and witnessed by an assessor. It includes but is not limited to structured interviews, product assessments, role-plays, simulations, presentations, oral examinations and workplace demonstrations.

Disciplines

1. Business (B)
2. Health Services (HS)
3. Human Services (HUS)
4. Applied Arts (AA)
5. Technology (T)
6. Applied Sciences (AS)
7. General Studies (GS)
8. Science (S)
9. Other (O)

Facilitator

A person designated by the institution to co-ordinate all PLAR activities including research, training, orientation, advising, marketing and possibly assessing.

Faculty/Staff PLAR training

Training and orientation activities to improve college personnel's familiarity, knowledge and skills with respect to PLAR.

Feedback

Information provided to learners on the extent to which their prior learning assessment met required learning outcomes.

Focus Group

A small group of individuals brought together to discuss selected topics and provide their perspectives, attitudes and opinions. Sessions are lead by a moderator and recorded and analyzed against pre-established objectives.

Institutional profile

An overview of the colleges/CEGEP in terms of size, programs, policies and procedures and PLAR activities.

LCC Alpha designation

The first letter of each institution's name is used as an alpha identifier assigned to each learner for the purpose of data collection and analysis.

Learning

Acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes that result in a change in perspective or behaviour.

Learning outcome

A statement describing what a learner should know and be able to do in order to be granted academic credit.

Non-PLAR learner

A person who investigated PLAR but decided not to proceed with an assessment.

PLAR advisor

A faculty or support staff person responsible for providing advice to PLAR candidates.

PLAR learner

An individual who has attempted to obtain college credits through PLAR

PLAR orientation

The receipt of information on PLAR by way of group session, telephone interviews, individual interview, video, or PLAR information package.

Portfolio

An organized collection of materials developed by a learner, which records and verifies learning achievements and relates them to educational requirements.

Portfolio assessment

The evaluation of documented learning in a portfolio against the required learning of college/CEGEP courses.

Prior learning assessment and recognition

A process of identifying and measuring learning acquired outside known public educational institutions for recognition through academic credit. *(For the purposes of this Study, PLAR does not include formal transfer of credit mechanisms)*

Program

An approved group of related postsecondary credit courses leading to a college certificate, diploma or Declaration of Academic Achievement.

Program review

Assessment of workplace training programs including military training to determine their equivalency to college courses that could lead to college credits for workers or military personnel. Often referred to as workplace training evaluation.

Response rate

The number of persons who submitted surveys expressed as a percentage of the number of people who were sent surveys.

Service/support courses

Generic courses such as communications, math, general education, or computers delivered in addition to vocation-specific courses.

Simple averaging

A calculation that totals data values such as percentages for each institution and then averages the result. This procedure is used when there are components that are proportionately much greater than others and would result in a disproportionate skewing of the data if weighted averaging was used.

Standardized test

A written test that has been tested for its reliability and validity over time.

Student status in a program

Full-time - the learner is enrolled in courses, which constitute not less than 60% of a full course load per semester.

Part-time - the learner is enrolled in courses, which constitute less than 60% of a full course load per semester.

Successful completion of assessment

The granting of college credit as a result of assessment.

Tuition

A fee paid by a student to take a course or program.

Weighted Averaging

A calculation that divides a total sum of all data values by the number of data values without taking into account the proportion represented by the average of all data values for each component.

Workplace training evaluation

An evaluation of in-house workplace training programs to determine their equivalency to college courses that could lead to college credits for workers (also see Program Review).

Appendix G

Questionnaires Sent to PLAR and Non-PLAR Learners; Observations and Recommendations Regarding Future Surveys

SURVEY FOR PLAR* LEARNERS

*For the purpose of this study, Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) refers to challenge, portfolio and demonstration.

Instructions: 1) Make heavy dark marks.
2) DO NOT use check marks to select boxes.
3) If you erase, please erase completely.
4) Please do not make any other marks on this form.

Please fill in boxes like this: ☐ ☒ ☐ ☐

1. What was the last type of educational institution you attended/completed, before inquiring about PLAR at this college?

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ High school | ☐ University |
| ☐ Private technical or business school | ☐ Military school |
| ☐ College | ☐ Other |

2. What were you doing the year before starting/returning to college? (Select *all that apply*)

- ☐ Work force (full or part time)
☐ Not employed
☐ Home making (full or part time)
☐ High school
☐ College
☐ University
☐ Private technical or business school
☐ Military (full or part time)
☐ Other

Additional option for military:

- ☐ Not applicable

3. What motivated you to consider college? (Select *all that apply*)

- ☐ Needed a college credit/credential to match my current position
☐ Needed a college credit/credential to advance my current field/career
☐ Needed a college credit/credential to change careers
☐ Thought that a college credit/credential would give me greater job security
☐ Thought that a college credit/credential would give me a greater choice of options/jobs
☐ To raise my GPA/or qualify for university
☐ Certification needs for military training
☐ Other

4. How did you first learn about PLAR? (Select *only one*)

- ☐ Friend or another student
☐ Instructor or other College employee
☐ Employer or coworker
☐ HRDC (Human Resources Development Canada)
☐ College publications
☐ Community organization
☐ Newspaper, television, radio, magazine, Internet
☐ Other

Additional options for military/ex-military only:

- ☐ Education fair
☐ Military information/publication
☐ BPSO (Base Personnel Selection Office)
☐ CFCCP prospectus (Canadian Forces Community College Program)
☐ Individual CFCCP advisor (Canadian Forces Community College Program)
☐ Other

5. What was your reason(s) for taking an interest in PLAR? (Select *all that apply*)

- ☐ I thought I had a good chance of gaining credit for what I have learned through life and work experiences
☐ To take fewer courses
☐ To fix problems with my program like a failed course or a final course needed for graduation
☐ To save money on my education
☐ To continue working while pursuing PLAR
☐ To save time
☐ To complete requirements for an association/organization
☐ To obtain career direction
☐ Other

Additional option for military:

- ☐ To return or to prepare for a civilian job

6. When did you investigate PLAR?

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Before attending any classes | ☐ After completing all the other courses |
| ☐ After classes had started | ☐ Other |
| ☐ During a break from studies | |

7. What were the sources of your prior learning? (Select *all that apply*)

- ☐ Work experience/on-the-job training
☐ Seminars/conferences/workshops
☐ Independent learning e.g. books, films, internet, travel, hobbies
☐ Volunteer work
☐ Canadian public post-secondary institutions
☐ Foreign post-secondary institutions
☐ Private institutes/organizations
☐ Military school/experience
☐ Other

8. How much experience, outside educational institutions, did you have in the area most closely associated with your PLAR credit(s)?

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Less than one year | ☐ More than 10 years |
| ☐ 1-5 years | ☐ None (experience was entirely from within educational institutions) |
| ☐ 6-10 years | |

Note: PLAR Orientation is the receipt of information about PLAR by way of group session, telephone interview, individual interview, video, or PLAR information package.

9. Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you were with each of the ways in which you were oriented. (Select *all that apply*)

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
PLAR Orientation Workshop/Session	☐	☐	☐	☐
PLAR Office	☐	☐	☐	☐
Telephone/mail/e-mail	☐	☐	☐	☐
Program (Professor/Instructor in class)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Portfolio Development Course	☐	☐	☐	☐
Counseling Office	☐	☐	☐	☐
BPSO (Base Personnel Selection Office - Military)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Office of the CFCCP Individual Advisor - Military	☐	☐	☐	☐

nlm021

10. Who paid your PLAR assessment fee? <table style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td>☐ I did</td> <td>☐ Union</td> </tr> <tr> <td>☐ Family member</td> <td>☐ Bursary or scholarship</td> </tr> <tr> <td>☐ Employer</td> <td>☐ A College department</td> </tr> <tr> <td>☐ Employment insurance</td> <td>☐ Department of National Defense</td> </tr> <tr> <td>☐ Social assistance/services</td> <td>☐ Department of Indian Affairs</td> </tr> <tr> <td>☐ Student financial assistance</td> <td>☐ Other</td> </tr> </table>	☐ I did	☐ Union	☐ Family member	☐ Bursary or scholarship	☐ Employer	☐ A College department	☐ Employment insurance	☐ Department of National Defense	☐ Social assistance/services	☐ Department of Indian Affairs	☐ Student financial assistance	☐ Other	Note: Demonstration: A performance of skills completed by an individual learner and witnessed by an assessor. It includes but is not limited to structured interviews, product assessments, role-plays, simulations, presentations, oral examinations and workplace demonstration.																																																																																				
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11. What was your status in the program when doing PLAR? ☐ Full-time, (60% or more of full-time course load) ☐ Part-time day, (less than 60% of full-time course load) ☐ Continuing education or professional education ☐ Not applicable	16. If you participated in a <u>demonstration process</u>, please indicate if you agree or disagree, and how strongly, with each of following statements. <table style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <th></th> <th>Strongly Agree</th> <th>Agree</th> <th>Disagree</th> <th>Strongly Disagree</th> <th>Not Applicable</th> </tr> <tr> <td>Process was easy to understand</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Advice/support provided was clear and helpful</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Resource materials were useful</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Examples presented were clear</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Process met my needs</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Overall the skill demonstration process allowed me to demonstrate my learning</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> </table>		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable	Process was easy to understand	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Advice/support provided was clear and helpful	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Resource materials were useful	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Examples presented were clear	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Process met my needs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Overall the skill demonstration process allowed me to demonstrate my learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐																																																						
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Overall the skill demonstration process allowed me to demonstrate my learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐																																																																																												
12. To what extent were you involved in determining the methods that would be used to assess your prior learning? ☐ I could recommend a method ☐ I could choose among 2 or more assessment methods ☐ The method was chosen for me Additional option for military: ☐ Accreditation Process	Note: Portfolio: An organized collection of materials developed by a learner, which records and verifies learning achievements and relates them to educational requirements.																																																																																																
13. How helpful were each of the following in obtaining the information needed during the PLAR process? (Select "Did not use/not applicable" as appropriate.) <table style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <th></th> <th>Very Helpful</th> <th>Somewhat Helpful</th> <th>Not At All Helpful</th> <th>Available But Did Not Use</th> <th>Not Applicable</th> </tr> <tr> <td>Course Handouts/Guidelines</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Personal Contact</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Phone Contact</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>College Publication/Website</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Orientation Workshops/Sessions</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Portfolio Development Course</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Education Fair (Military)</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> </table>		Very Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Not At All Helpful	Available But Did Not Use	Not Applicable	Course Handouts/Guidelines	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Personal Contact	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Phone Contact	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	College Publication/Website	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Orientation Workshops/Sessions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Portfolio Development Course	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Education Fair (Military)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	17. If you participated in a <u>portfolio process</u>, please indicate if you agree or disagree, and how strongly, with each of the following statements. <table style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <th></th> <th>Strongly Agree</th> <th>Agree</th> <th>Disagree</th> <th>Strongly Disagree</th> <th>Not Applicable</th> </tr> <tr> <td>The portfolio process was easy to understand</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Advice/support provided was clear and helpful</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Resource materials were useful</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Examples presented were clear</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>The Advisor was able to assist me effectively</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>The process for documentation/providing evidence of my learning was reasonable</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Overall the portfolio process allowed me to demonstrate my learning</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> </table>		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable	The portfolio process was easy to understand	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Advice/support provided was clear and helpful	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Resource materials were useful	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Examples presented were clear	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	The Advisor was able to assist me effectively	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	The process for documentation/providing evidence of my learning was reasonable	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Overall the portfolio process allowed me to demonstrate my learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
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Note: Challenge: a written examination, test, project or assignment prepared by faculty, often supervised by an invigilator. 15. If you participated in a <u>challenge process</u>, please indicate if you agree or disagree and how strongly, with each of following statements. <table style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <th></th> <th>Strongly Agree</th> <th>Agree</th> <th>Disagree</th> <th>Strongly Disagree</th> <th>Did Not Use</th> </tr> <tr> <td>Process was easy to understand</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Advice/support provided was clear and helpful</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Resource materials were useful</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Examples presented were clear</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Process met my needs</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Overall the challenge process allowed me to demonstrate my learning</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> </table>		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Did Not Use	Process was easy to understand	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Advice/support provided was clear and helpful	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Resource materials were useful	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Examples presented were clear	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Process met my needs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Overall the challenge process allowed me to demonstrate my learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	19. How satisfied were you with the feedback given regarding the results of your assessment? <table style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <th></th> <th>Very Satisfied</th> <th>Somewhat Satisfied</th> <th>Dissatisfied</th> <th>Very Dissatisfied</th> <th>No Feedback Given</th> </tr> <tr> <td>Written feedback</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Telephone discussion</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Personal interview</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>E-mail discussion</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> </table>		Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	No Feedback Given	Written feedback	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Telephone discussion	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Personal interview	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	E-mail discussion	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐																								
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20. How much difficulty, if any, did each of the following cause you, during the PLAR process? <table border="0"> <tr> <td></td> <td>No Difficulty</td> <td>Some Difficulty</td> <td>Great Deal of Difficulty</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Length of time it took</td> <td>☐ 1</td> <td>☐ 2</td> <td>☐ 3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Assessment fees</td> <td>☐ 1</td> <td>☐ 2</td> <td>☐ 3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Information available</td> <td>☐ 1</td> <td>☐ 2</td> <td>☐ 3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Location or scheduling of the assessments</td> <td>☐ 1</td> <td>☐ 2</td> <td>☐ 3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Reading and writing skills required for assessment</td> <td>☐ 1</td> <td>☐ 2</td> <td>☐ 3</td> </tr> </table>		No Difficulty	Some Difficulty	Great Deal of Difficulty	Length of time it took	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	Assessment fees	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	Information available	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	Location or scheduling of the assessments	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	Reading and writing skills required for assessment	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	27. Have you tried to transfer your PLAR credit(s) to another educational institution/association/organization, other than where it was originally obtained? (Select only one) ☐ Yes, full credit given ☐ Yes, partial credit given ☐ Yes, no credit given ☐ No, I have not tried to transfer ☐ Other Options for military/ex-military personnel only: Have you tried to transfer your PLAR credit(s) to an educational institution/association/organization? ☐ Yes, full credit given ☐ Yes, partial credit given ☐ Yes, no credit given ☐ No, I have not tried to transfer ☐ Other																																	
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21. How important was the availability of PLAR to your decision to return to school? ☐ Very important ☐ Not very important ☐ Somewhat important ☐ Not at all important	28. If "Yes" to the previous question, to which of the following institutions/associations/organization did you transfer PLAR credits? ☐ College in the same province ☐ College in another province ☐ University in the same province ☐ University in another province ☐ Associations/organizations ☐ Other																																																									
22. As a result of obtaining credits through PLAR, did you feel disadvantaged in any subsequent courses? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not applicable	29. What benefits did you receive from PLAR? <table border="0"> <tr> <td></td> <td>Select all that Apply</td> <td>Choose the 3 MOST Important</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Improved self-confidence</td> <td>☐ 1</td> <td>☐ 1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Confirmed and gave value to my prior learning</td> <td>☐ 2</td> <td>☐ 2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Helped me move more quickly through program ...</td> <td>☐ 3</td> <td>☐ 3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Motivated me to finish the program</td> <td>☐ 4</td> <td>☐ 4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Allowed more time for family commitments, community/volunteer work, leisure</td> <td>☐ 5</td> <td>☐ 5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Facilitated career advancement</td> <td>☐ 6</td> <td>☐ 6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Increased my self awareness</td> <td>☐ 7</td> <td>☐ 7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Helped me clarify career goals/directions</td> <td>☐ 8</td> <td>☐ 8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Saved money in the long run</td> <td>☐ 9</td> <td>☐ 9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Lightened course load</td> <td>☐ 10</td> <td>☐ 10</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Did not have to sit through classes where I already knew the material</td> <td>☐ 11</td> <td>☐ 11</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Passed a previously failed course</td> <td>☐ 12</td> <td>☐ 12</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gained credit recognition with an association/organization</td> <td>☐ 13</td> <td>☐ 13</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Helped gain employment in my field of study</td> <td>☐ 14</td> <td>☐ 14</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Took additional courses without lengthening program</td> <td>☐ 15</td> <td>☐ 15</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Allowed me to be certified for military training</td> <td>☐ 16</td> <td>☐ 16</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Helped me to return to a civilian career</td> <td>☐ 17</td> <td>☐ 17</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other</td> <td>☐ 18</td> <td>☐ 18</td> </tr> </table>		Select all that Apply	Choose the 3 MOST Important	Improved self-confidence	☐ 1	☐ 1	Confirmed and gave value to my prior learning	☐ 2	☐ 2	Helped me move more quickly through program ...	☐ 3	☐ 3	Motivated me to finish the program	☐ 4	☐ 4	Allowed more time for family commitments, community/volunteer work, leisure	☐ 5	☐ 5	Facilitated career advancement	☐ 6	☐ 6	Increased my self awareness	☐ 7	☐ 7	Helped me clarify career goals/directions	☐ 8	☐ 8	Saved money in the long run	☐ 9	☐ 9	Lightened course load	☐ 10	☐ 10	Did not have to sit through classes where I already knew the material	☐ 11	☐ 11	Passed a previously failed course	☐ 12	☐ 12	Gained credit recognition with an association/organization	☐ 13	☐ 13	Helped gain employment in my field of study	☐ 14	☐ 14	Took additional courses without lengthening program	☐ 15	☐ 15	Allowed me to be certified for military training	☐ 16	☐ 16	Helped me to return to a civilian career	☐ 17	☐ 17	Other	☐ 18	☐ 18
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23. If "Yes" to the above question, which of the following describes how you felt disadvantaged? (Select all that apply) ☐ Lacked depth of knowledge/skills for subsequent course(s) ☐ Felt like an outsider among my class mates who already knew one another from earlier courses ☐ Had to wait for a seat in the program to become available ☐ Other	26. Have you enrolled in another program of studies since doing PLAR? (Select only one) ☐ Yes - another college program ☐ Yes - a university program ☐ No - have not applied to enter any other programs or courses ☐ No - could not get into another college program ☐ No - could not get into a university program ☐ Other Options for military/ex-military personnel only: Have you enrolled in a post secondary educational institution since doing PLAR? ☐ Yes, college ☐ No, I have not ☐ Yes, university ☐ Other																																																									
24. How important was PLAR to you remaining in your program? ☐ Very important ☐ Not very important ☐ Somewhat important ☐ Not at all important																																																										
25. Did PLAR help you to graduate from the certificate or diploma program for which you obtained PLAR credit? (Select only one) ☐ Yes, it helped me graduate ☐ Have not graduated yet ☐ Transferred to another program ☐ Not currently enrolled as an active student in my program (stepped out for a time) ☐ Have no plans to finish the program ☐ Could not get admitted into the program even after receiving my PLAR credit ☐ Not applicable - I did not want a certificate or diploma, just a course credit ☐ Other																																																										

30. Overall, how satisfied were you with your entire PLAR experience? ☐ Very satisfied ☐ Satisfied ☐ Dissatisfied ☐ Very dissatisfied	34a. Are you a member of the active military? ☐ Yes ☐ No 34b. Are you a retired military person? ☐ Yes ☐ No																																																																																																									
31. Would you recommend PLAR to others? ☐ Very likely ☐ Likely ☐ Unlikely ☐ Very unlikely	35. With which of the following do you identify yourself? (Select <i>all that apply</i>) ☐ Visible minority ☐ Person with disabilities ☐ Aboriginal person ☐ Rural resident ☐ Single parent ☐ First language is not English ☐ None of the above																																																																																																									
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SURVEY FOR NON PLAR* LEARNERS

*Learners who were oriented to the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition process but who have chosen not to participate in the process to this date. For the purpose of this study PLAR refers to challenge, portfolio and demonstration.

Instructions: 1) Make heavy dark marks.
2) DO NOT use check marks to select boxes.
3) If you erase, please erase completely.
4) Please do not make any other marks on this form.

Please fill in the boxes like this:



1. What was the last type of educational institution you attended/completed, before inquiring about PLAR at this college?

- ☐ High school
- ☐ Private technical or business school
- ☐ College
- ☐ University
- ☐ Military school
- ☐ Other

2. What were you doing the year before starting/returning to college? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Work force
- ☐ Not employed
- ☐ Home making
- ☐ Secondary school
- ☐ College
- ☐ University
- ☐ Private technical or business school
- ☐ Military (full or part time)
- ☐ Other

3. What motivated you to consider college? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Needed a college credit/credential to match my current position
- ☐ Needed a college credit/credential to advance my current field/career
- ☐ Needed a college credit/credential to change careers
- ☐ Thought that a college credit/credential would give me greater job security
- ☐ Thought that a college credit/credential would give me a greater choice of options/jobs
- ☐ To raise my GPA or to qualify for university
- ☐ Certification needs for military training
- ☐ Other

4. How did you first learn about PLAR? (Select only one)

- ☐ Friend or another student
- ☐ Professor/instructor or other College employee
- ☐ Employer or coworker
- ☐ HRDC (Human Resources Development Canada)
- ☐ College publications
- ☐ Community organization
- ☐ Newspaper, television, radio, magazine, Internet
- ☐ Military personnel
- ☐ Other

5. How important was the availability of PLAR in helping you consider college?

- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Somewhat important
- ☐ Not very important
- ☐ Not at all important

Note: PLAR Orientation is the receipt of information on PLAR by way of group session, telephone interview, individual interview, video, or PLAR information package.

6. Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you were with each of the ways in which you were oriented. (Select all that apply)

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
PLAR Orientation Workshop/Session	☐	☐	☐	☐
PLAR Office	☐	☐	☐	☐
Program (Professor/Instructor in class)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Portfolio Development Course	☐	☐	☐	☐
Counseling Office	☐	☐	☐	☐
BPSO (Base Personnel Selection Office)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Office of the CFCCP Military	☐	☐	☐	☐

7. How long ago was your orientation to PLAR?

- ☐ Less than 6 months
- ☐ 6 months to one year
- ☐ More than 1 year

8. What was your status when you were oriented to PLAR?

- ☐ Full-time, (60% or more of full-time course load)
- ☐ Part-time day, (less than 60% of full-time course load)
- ☐ Part-time, evening or continuing education
- ☐ Not enrolled in a program at the time

9. What was your reason(s) for taking an interest in PLAR? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ I thought I had a good chance of gaining credit for what I have learned through life and work experiences
- ☐ To spend less time on my education
- ☐ To take fewer courses
- ☐ To fix problems with my program like a failed course or a final course needed for graduation
- ☐ To save money on my education
- ☐ To continue working while pursuing PLAR
- ☐ To save time
- ☐ To complete requirements for an association/organization
- ☐ To obtain career direction
- ☐ Other

10. Why did you not proceed with the PLAR process?

- ☐ I am currently preparing to proceed with PLAR (Go to Question 13)

	Select all that Apply	Choose the 3 MOST Important
I did not have sufficient depth of knowledge and skills to successfully challenge a course	☐	☐
I thought that just having work experience would be sufficient evidence for a credit	☐	☐
I worked out a plan with my professor/instructor to demonstrate my learning and stay in class	☐	☐
I realized that it would not shorten my time at the College	☐	☐
I realized that one or more credits would reduce my student status and therefore would affect my student financial aid	☐	☐
I learned that full-time students had to pay an additional fee to challenge for PLAR credit(s)	☐	☐
PLAR appeared to be too complicated	☐	☐
PLAR appeared to be too time consuming	☐	☐
The course learning outcomes had changed and my learning level no longer matched	☐	☐
It was not a good time for my family or me	☐	☐
In my opinion the College assessment process for ex-military persons was not satisfactory	☐	☐
I received an exemption based upon previous/ equivalent course completed	☐	☐
Other	☐	☐

Please complete both sides.

non021

11. Are you still considering PLAR? ☐ Yes ☐ No	15. What is your present status? (Select <i>all</i> that apply) ☐ Full-time College student ☐ Part-time College student ☐ Full-time University student ☐ Part-time University student ☐ Working full-time (35 hours or more/week) ☐ Working part-time (less than 35 hours/week) ☐ Not working, looking for a job ☐ Not working, not currently looking for a job ☐ Retired from military service and looking for a civilian job ☐ Retired from military service and not looking for a civilian job ☐ Other																																																																																																		
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Thank you for taking time to complete this survey.

B - Observations and Recommendations Regarding Future Surveys

We encourage others to use our survey to collect data on PLAR. We have listed some of our observations and recommendations to benefit those who might use them.

PLAR SURVEY

General Comments

With respect to methodology, the telephone follow-ups might have been more effective if they had been conducted before the second mail-out. New telephone numbers and addresses might have been obtained.

Each respondent should have been given an identifier number so that survey results could be linked to programs in the database.

Since long-term trends did not emerge from the Non-PLAR sample group, a future strategy may be to limit the Non-PLAR survey to one year in the study period thereby better standardizing procedures.

In retrospect, it would have been more effective to prepare a separate questionnaire for military personnel who undertook PLAR in Quebec. This would have permitted the elimination of questions that did not apply to military personnel and also the addition of other military-specific questions that were not part of these surveys. However, a separate questionnaire is also likely to be more costly and challenging to integrate with results from companion surveys.

The wording of several questions could be improved. Potential new questions also emerged from respondents' answers and should be considered for future surveys. The following are our observations and recommendations:

Improvements to Questions

Question 9:

Although a definition of PLAR orientation was provided on the questionnaire, its wording and the wording of the question itself may have caused some learners confusion as to whether PLAR orientation by definition involved a workshop or session.

Question 9, 15, 16, 17, 19:

Some respondents replied regarding items that do not exist at their institutions. This suggests that they either did not fully understand the questions or summarily checked off their general level of satisfaction/agreement for all sub-questions.

Question 12:

Asking learners if they would prefer to be involved in choosing the method of assessment would be valuable in a future questionnaire.

Question 13:

Data analysis indicates that some respondents rated information sources not offered at their college suggesting that they may not have understood some elements of this question. Thus we have not interpreted these items.

Questions 14 to 17 had too many components. Different question structures to obtain the same data should be explored.

Question 14:

The conclusions we could draw from this question were limited because learner reports that they did not use a particular support may simply have been because they used supports noted in other sub-questions. Thus dissatisfaction with individual supports could not be clearly identified.

Potential New Questions

How did learners feel about the appropriateness of the methods used in their prior learning assessments?
What were learners' highest levels of educational attainment at the time of their assessment?

Did learners receive specific feedback directly from faculty? What kind of feedback? This question could be also asked of faculty.

What are PLAR learners' marital status?

Do PLAR learners have dependent children living at home?

What do PLAR learners think of the cost of their assessments?

Non-PLAR Survey

Overall Comments

Respondents appeared to have no difficulty answering the questions.

Improvements to Questions:

Question 6:

Some respondents replied a level of satisfaction with orientation services that did not exist at their institutions. This suggests that they either did not fully understand the sub-questions or summarily checked off their general level of satisfaction for all sub-questions. In addition, although a definition of PLAR orientation was provided on the questionnaire, its wording and the wording of the question itself may have caused some learners confusion as to whether PLAR orientation by definition involved a workshop or session.

Question 10b:

Additional options for response should be added to this question to capture more reasons why learners did not pursue PLAR – for example, the cost of assessment.

Question 12b

Twenty-two (22%) of respondents selected “other” factors that would have to change before they would consider undertaking PLAR. Additional options for response should be added to this question to capture more factors that would have to change for respondents to pursue PLAR (e.g. curiosity, risk).

Question 14:

This question had too many components.

Potential New Questions

Was the cost of PLAR a factor in their decisions not to proceed with assessment?

Why did you decide not to return to college? Responses could then be linked to responses on their decision not to pursue PLAR.?

What are the sources of your prior learning? We only posed this question to PLAR learners?

Appendix H

Detailed Study Methodology

METHODOLOGY

Survey Data Collection

It was determined that data in two primary subject areas would be collected: data on PLAR and Non-PLAR learners' perspectives of the concept of PLAR and its impact on them as learners, and data on their perspectives of their institutions' PLAR program structures and procedures.

Two questionnaires were developed during the fall of 2001. The glossary developed for the first Cross-Canada Study was modified to include additional terminology used in both surveys (see Appendix G). The first questionnaire was designed for adult learners who had participated in PLAR at six of the partner institutions from September 1, 1998 to August 31, 2001. Red River College used July 1, 1998 as its start date for data collection as that is the start of their fiscal year. The PLAR learners' survey consisted of 37 multiple-choice questions on learner demographics, their sources of learning about PLAR, the benefits of and barriers to PLAR and how to improve PLAR. The 38th and final item invited general comments (see Appendix G for sample questionnaire).

The second questionnaire was designed for adult learners who had had some orientation to PLAR but had decided not to proceed. Data was collected at five of the seven partner institutions. Two institutions did not keep records of Non-PLAR learners and had no way of identifying them. Due to differences in available data, the time frames used for this data collection varied by institution from Conestoga College ITAL, which collected data from all three years to Douglas and Mohawk colleges which collected data from one year. However, all data collection pertained to learners who had been introduced to PLAR between September 1998 and August 31, 2001. Methods of obtaining the data varied depending on administrators' abilities to identify and track these potential students/learners. The Non-PLAR learners' survey consisted of 19 multiple-choice questions on learner demographics, sources of learning about PLAR, barriers to pursuing PLAR and how to improve the PLAR process. A 20th and final item invited general comments (see Appendix G for sample questionnaire).

A draft of the PLAR learner survey was piloted by each partner using various methods: focus groups, individual interviews or e-mail surveys. From a set of pre-set questions, participants were asked about their experiences in completing the survey. A pattern emerged from the responses and formed much of the basis for modifying both surveys. The Non-PLAR learners' survey was not piloted by some of the partners. The design consultants formatted the final version of both surveys.

The partner institutions identified survey recipients by searching student and course records, PLAR orientation records and mailing lists, and PLAR databases. In the spring of 2002, a total of 3,663 questionnaires were mailed to PLAR learners and 1,016 questionnaires to Non-PLAR learners. The following protocol for administering and monitoring the surveys was followed.

A letter introducing the project accompanied initial questionnaire mail-outs to all participating learners (see Appendix L for sample letter). An incentive of a cash draw was offered for which all respondents were eligible if they replied before an early-bird deadline. Recipients and all responses were recorded using customized Survey Tracker forms (see Appendix M for sample forms) or hard copy reports. Addresses on questionnaires that were returned unopened were researched further for updated addresses and re-mailed wherever possible.

Telephone reminders were scripted and a campaign to contact non-respondents was conducted in April 2002. Financial restrictions prevented the partners from contacting non-respondents from every year of the study so the most recent year, 2000/01 was selected. All respondent activity was recorded using a computer-based reporting system designed for data analysis. Efforts were made to contact 1,187 PLAR non-respondents at the six institutions that collected data and 602 Non-PLAR non-respondents at the five institutions that collected Non-PLAR data. Completed questionnaires were then provided to a computer specialist firm to compile the survey results. Initial results were reviewed in detail by the partners in the summer of 2002 and tabulation errors were recorded and returned to the computer specialist firm for correction.

Data Analysis

Final results were reported to the partners in the summer of 2002. They held two two-day meetings with their academic advisor and report writer to conduct an initial analysis. The questions in both surveys were divided into six groupings: characteristics of PLAR and Non-PLAR learners, learning about PLAR, learner motivation, benefits of PLAR, the PLAR process, and marketing. PLAR and Non-PLAR learner

responses in each group were analyzed concurrently where appropriate. Data were analyzed at the national level as well as at the institutional level. Additional detailed analysis was conducted where individual institutional data varied markedly from the national data. Because PLAR procedures for the military are unique to that population, data collection and analysis of military learner perspectives were conducted separately. However for each research activity, participants combined their expertise to make findings and observations. Demographic data from the survey were also compared with the newly developed eight-year database. The partners subsequently collaborated by e-mail to confirm findings and then met again to complete the data analysis. Following completion of this data analysis, the partners met with the advisory committee in the fall of 2002 to obtain comments and advice on additional findings. A draft report was prepared in October 2002 and revisions continued until December 2002. The final report was submitted for French translation in January 2003 and printing in both languages was completed in March 2003.

Because there were a substantial number of questionnaires that did not appear to reach their targets, a cooperation rate was calculated for both PLAR and Non-PLAR learners. A cooperation rate establishes a response rate based on the number of persons who had an opportunity to respond. The cooperation rate was determined by subtracting the total number of “unable to reach” non-respondents in 2000/01 from the total number of surveys mailed and using the result to calculate a response rate from those who were reasonably deemed to have received the survey. Each partner institution tabulated its own data on the number of telephone reminders and survey returns which were then combined to establish the institutional and national cooperation rates.

The cooperation rate stated in this report likely underestimates the true level of participation among PLAR and Non-PLAR learners who actually received our questionnaires. For all years we were able to identify those who had been lost through changes in address by noting the mail surveys returned as undeliverable. However, current residents might not have taken the time to mark the envelope “Not at this address” or similar and return it to the mail system. Our telephone follow-up was designed in part to uncover the undeliverables not flagged in the postal returns. However, most of the partners were only able to do follow-up calls with non-respondents from the 2000/01 cohort due to limited financial resources and the large size of their surveys. Thus we missed many of the “invisible” undeliverables in the earlier two years. Moreover, the proportion of undeliverables was likely higher in these years than for the 2000/01 cohort; the longer the time elapsed, the more likely it would have been that people had changed residences.

Appendix I

Data Fields Used in First and Second Cross-Canada Studies

DATA FIELD	5-YEAR DATABASE (1993/94 – 1997/98)	3-YEAR DATABASE (1998/99 – 2000/01)
PLAR LEARNER INFORMATION		
Student number	Y	Y
Learner Cross-Canada alpha designation	Y	Y
Learner Cross-Canada Index Number	Y	Y
Gender	Y	Y
Date of birth	Y	Y
PLAR orientation	Y	N
Portfolio course completion	Y	N
Status of portfolio course	Y	N
PLAR PROGRAM INFORMATION		
Student status	Y	Y
Program enrolment date	Y	N
Program code	Y	Y
Program name	Y	Y
Program discipline	Y	Y
Program length	Y	Y
Program type	Y	Y
Program status	Y	Y
Number of courses required by program	Y	N
Number of credits required by program	Y	N
Graduation status	Y	Y
Graduation grade basket #1	Y	Y
Graduation grade basket #2	Y	Y
Year of graduation	Y	Y
Tuition paid	Y	N
Tuition type	Y	N

PLAR COURSE INFORMATION		
Alpha	Y	Y
Course record number	Y	Y
Course status	Y	Y
Course name	Y	Y
Course number	Y	Y
Course length	Y	N
Course level	Y	N
Course credits	Y	Y
Course completion date	Y	Y
Assessment method(s)	Y	Y
Assessment for a single course?	Y	N
Assessor paid	Y	N
Payment method	Y	N
Payment amount	Y	N
Assessment fee	Y	N
Assessment fee amount	Y	N
College application fee	Y	N
Course grade basket #1	Y	Y
Course grade basket #2		Y

Note: Y = Yes; N = No

The 5-year database also contains extensive data on traditional students. See *A Slice of the Iceberg: Cross-Canada Study of PLAR* (1999) for details.

Appendix J

Detailed Data Collection and Entry Procedures for Longitudinal Database

1. Sources of Information

Six partner institutions added to the 5-year database (1993/94 – 1997/98) data on PLAR learners, their programs and courses for the period 1998/99 – 2000/01. Data from College Ahuntsic includes the first five years only.

2. Data Collection Procedures

Learner/Student Data (Overview)

Data on PLAR learners were compiled in custom-designed Access databases from all partner institutions. The data collection tool was modified following the first Cross-Canada study to improve data quality assurance. Written guidelines on parameters of each data field were used. Institutional data were combined into a central data repository. Up-to-date copies of the repository were kept on disk at all times. The central database was held by the digital data specialist who conducted queries and reports to identify data entry errors. All errors were reviewed with partner institutions and corrected data were re-submitted.

Data Items:

Gender Field

The data collection tool permitted data entry through a drop down box of three possible items - M, F and N/A (information not available). Data on gender was available on all learners and students at all institutions.

Date of Birth

Data on date of birth were entered by d/m/y. Modifications had to be made to some institutions' data that were not submitted in this format. The age of each learner was calculated by determining the age of each learner/student once for each year in which they were at the institution during the study period and then averaging the result by the number of years.

Data on date of birth were available from all institutions but not for all learners/students.

3. Data Validation and Verification

Queries and error reports were prepared to identify data errors. All errors were corrected by the institutional partners or the digital data specialist.

Program Data (Overview)

The digital data specialist reviewed program data for data entry errors using queries and error reports. Inconsistencies in institutions' interpretation of data field definitions were identified and corrected with the assistance of the partners.

Data Items

Student Status

Student status data was entered into the data collection tool using the options of PT (part-time) and FT (full-time) for every student based on enrolment in their course or program. Queries and error reports were run to confirm appropriate and complete data entry.

Program Code

A program code was assigned to each program. It allowed program data to be linked to the appropriate courses where learners and students had multiple program enrolments during the study period. These codes were selected and entered by data entry staff at the partner institutions. Program codes were reviewed using queries, error reports and visual reviews to identify inconsistencies in code data. Corrections were made centrally.

Program Name

Data on program names were entered by the institutions and reviewed centrally through queries, error reports and visual reviews to correct inconsistencies, spelling and spacing errors and identify missing data. A few programs have the designation N/A instead of a name where assessments undertaken by learners for reasons other than to obtain college credentials.

Program Discipline

Nine discipline categories were used to group programs. Data were reviewed centrally through queries, error reports and visual reviews to correct inconsistencies, spelling and spacing errors and identify missing data.

Program Length

Six program length categories were initially established. These were revised and reduced to five categories during the early stages of data analysis and the data was revised using mass queries. Wherever possible, part-time programs were assigned program lengths equal to what the lengths would be if the programs were delivered on a full-time basis. Program length categories were: <1 Academic Year, 1 Academic Year, 1 1/2 Academic Years, 2 Academic Years, and 3 Academic Years.

Not all partner institutions were able to accomplish a conversion of the length of part-time programs to full-time equivalence. As a result many part-time programs have not been assigned a program length. To accommodate this difficulty data analysis relying on program length has been restricted to full-time programs.

Program Type

Six types of credentials were listed at data entry options for data entry. This information was not extensively used in the analysis. The categories were: attestation, certificate, citation, diploma and post-diploma certificate.

Program Status

Data on program status were entered using the options of FT (full-time), PT (part-time) or B (both) to indicate the availability of the program to adult learners and students. Errors sometimes occurred when data entry clerks confused student status with program status. These errors were identified through queries and corrected centrally.

Graduation Status

Data indicates whether the learner or student had graduated from their program(s) through data entry options of Y, N and N/A (not applicable). Data fields left blank were interpreted as a No.

Course Data (Overview)

Data Items

Course Status, Name, Number and Credits

Data was reviewed by the digital data specialist for inconsistencies and spelling errors. Data was reviewed with the institutional partners and corrected centrally.

Course Completion Date

The course completion date was the academic year in which the course was transcribed or recorded in the student record.

Assessment Method

Several methods were available. Fields were challenge, demonstration, portfolio assessment, standardized test, workplace training evaluation and assessment of military training). More than one method could be checked for each assessment. Limitations on the precision of this data are based on the lack of information on precise methods used at one institution.

Course Grade Basket #1

Numeric grades were devised to accommodate institutional differences in grading. They were assigned to all recorded courses by learners/students during the study period using data entry options of 1 - 4. The digital data specialist reviewed both grade baskets to eliminate duplication and data entry errors. Error reports and visual reviews of the data were conducted.

Course Grade Basket #2

Options included: P (pass), M (mastery), UF (unsuccessful PLA), WI (withdrawn), and E (exemption/transfer of credit). Only one grade basket could be completed for each course. The digital data specialist reviewed both grade baskets to eliminate duplication and data entry errors. Error reports and visual reviews of the data were conducted.

Appendix K

Detailed Table on Age Distribution of PLAR Learners by Institution

	Age Categories (Percents and Number of Students)									
	18-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60+
Ahuntsic	0%	14%	21%	24%	17%	11%	9%	3%	1%	0%
	1	51	77	88	63	39	34	11	2	0
Conestoga	3%	21%	14%	14%	20%	13%	8%	4%	2%	0%
	12	86	56	57	79	53	32	18	7	2
Douglas	8%	23%	15%	11%	13%	11%	11%	5%	2%	0%
	43	125	84	58	70	62	62	28	13	2
Fanshawe	2%	17%	15%	13%	14%	15%	12%	8%	3%	1%
	24	224	198	166	182	201	161	104	41	19
Mohawk	5%	26%	17%	14%	13%	13%	8%	3%	1%	0%
	122	590	380	325	287	291	175	64	25	7
North Atlantic	3%	23%	19%	16%	15%	13%	9%	1%	1%	0%
	11	83	67	59	53	46	34	5	3	0
Red River	4%	20%	18%	16%	17%	12%	7%	4%	1%	0%
	60	333	293	267	276	203	107	69	18	4
All Locations	4%	21%	17%	15%	15%	13%	9%	4%	2%	0%
	273	1492	1155	1020	1010	895	605	299	109	34

Note: the ages of PLAR learners were determined by establishing the sum of their age for every year in which they had PLAR and taking the average. The overall average age of PLAR learners was determined by totaling the average age of learners at each location and dividing it by the number of locations thereby giving all locations an equal “weights.”

Appendix L

Sample Letters Sent to Survey Participants by Each College Partner

Dear Adult Learner (PLAR learners)

You have been selected to participate in the Cross-Canada Study on Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR). For the purpose of this study PLAR refers to portfolio, challenge or demonstration. **If you complete and return the survey by the date specified you will be entered into an incentive draw for \$200.00!**

Seven Canadian community colleges and HRDC (Human Resources Development Canada) are participating in this study. College is one of the seven. The purpose of this study is to gather information that will assist in building upon best practices in the delivery of PLAR services and in making improvements for current and future learners who are seeking recognition for what they already know and can do. The final report will be available in the College LRC in the spring of 2003.

We need your help. Please take a few minutes to complete the enclosed survey. The completed survey should be returned as soon as possible in the envelope provided. **Individual responses will be kept confidential.**

In an effort to encourage full participation, we are providing incentive prizes. Each survey is numbered. This number will be used for the incentive draw and as a means to follow-up with non-respondents.

Those who return the completed survey by March 13th will be entered into a draw. The winner of the draw will receive \$200.00.
Those meeting the final deadline of March 27th will have been entered into another draw. The winner of this second draw will receive \$150.00.

Both draws will be held at _____ on Monday April 12th, 2002. The winners will be notified by telephone. Please take time to complete the survey today!

Good luck and thank you for completing the survey!

Sincerely,

(Each college partner)

Dear Adult Learner (Non-PLAR learners)

You have been selected to participate in the Cross-Canada Study on Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR). For the purpose of this study PLAR refers to portfolio, challenge or demonstrations. **If you complete and return the survey by the date specified you will be entered into an incentive draw for \$200.00!**

Seven Canadian community colleges and HRDC (Human Resources Development Canada) are participating in this study. College is one of the seven. The purpose of this study is to gather information that will assist in building upon best practices in the delivery of PLAR services and in making improvements for current and future learners who are seeking recognition for what they already know and can do. The final report will be available in the College LRC in the spring of 2003.

To date, our records show that while you enquired about PLAR, you have not proceeded with the process. Part of this study is to investigate reasons for adults choosing not to make use of this service. We'd like to know how the College could have been more helpful and for this we need to hear from you.

We need your help. Please take a few minutes to complete the enclosed survey. The completed survey should be returned as soon as possible in the envelope provided. **Individual responses will be kept confidential.**

In an effort to encourage full participation, we are providing incentive prizes. Each survey is numbered. This number will be used for the incentive draw and as a means to follow-up with non-respondents.

Those who return the completed survey by March 13th will be entered into a draw. The winner of the draw will receive \$200.00.
Those meeting the final deadline of March 27th will be entered into a second draw. The winner of this draw will receive \$150.00.

Both draws will take place at _____ in Kitchener April 12th. The winners will be notified by telephone. Please take time to complete the survey today!

Good luck and thank you for completing the survey!

Sincerely,

(Each college partner)