

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

ADVISING & SUPPORTING CANDIDATES



module 2

P R I O R L E A R N I N G A S S E S S M E N T I N B R I T I S H C O L U M B I A

ADVISING & SUPPORTING CANDIDATES

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This module provides assistance to advisors who would like to introduce or improve the advice and support PLA candidates receive. The session presents a range of different strategies for working with candidates individually, in groups, and in different contexts.

At the end of this module, participants should be able to:

- Provide information, advice and support to PLA candidates systematically, cost-effectively and in a manner appropriate to different candidate groups.
- Design a range of strategies for providing services, including use of technology, to PLA candidates individually and in groups.

Recommended Reading

Matthews, C. "Prior Learning Assessment in British Columbia," *Learning Specialist Association of BC Digest* 12 (1): 3-6. 1997.

Simosko, S. *Prior Learning Assessment and Educational Reform: A Vision for Now*. Victoria: Centre for Curriculum and Professional Development and British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer, 1995.

Simosko, S. and C. Cook. *Accreditation of Prior Learning: A Practical Guide for Professionals*. London: Kogan Page, 1996.

Facilitation Plan

9:00 am:	Warm-up
9:20 am:	Support for Candidates
9:30 am:	Advisor Roles & Responsibilities
10:30 am:	Break
10:45 am:	Skills, Knowledge & Abilities
11:15 am:	Support for Larger Groups
12:00 pm:	Lunch
1:00 pm:	Good Practice in Advising
2:30 pm:	Break
2:45 pm:	Personal Look at Advising
3:15 pm:	Wrap-up

You can introduce the schedule for the module based on your own ideas or patterned after the suggested plan. The timing for each part of the module is included as a guide. It can, of course, be adjusted to fit your circumstances. A full day is ideal, but the module can be adapted, depending on the needs and range of knowledge of workshop participants. Review the plan of the module with the participants, confirming when breaks will be, the time the day will end, and any other “housekeeping” details that are necessary.

Warm-up

It is important to begin the day by having participants meet, introduce one another (this includes you, the facilitator), and have some interaction. Purposes need to be clarified.



Activity

Options for introductions include:

- Going around the room and asking people to introduce themselves and respond to a question that fits the day, such as:

“What brought you here today?”

“What are you hoping to learn here today?”

“What experience and knowledge of PLA do you bring with you?”

- Have participants divide into pairs and ask each other questions toward the goal of introducing their partner to the group. The questions can focus on their knowledge of PLA, their perception of where their institution is at, their hopes and fears for the module, or any of the questions listed above.



Review the purpose of the module with the participants (T1, T2).

- ! *If participants have been involved with other PLA sessions, they are familiar with the Parking Lot. Review the concept of the “parking lot” flip chart that is used for short-term storage of out-of-context or contentious ideas. At the conclusion of the day, any items remaining in the Parking Lot should be analysed to determine how they should be addressed.*

Before beginning activities, note the important role of advising and supporting candidates through the PLA process:

- Key function for an effective PLA service
- Institutional interface between the PLA candidate and the assessor
- Key position to the recruitment of PLA candidates and preparation of candidates for assessment

In planning your comments for the module, keep in mind that most workshop participants will be seeking clarification about the role of the advisor. Most workshop participants will come to the role with previous institutional experience in another capacity. It will be useful throughout the day to point out the ways the role of PLA advisor is different from that of institutional advisor, counsellor, admissions officer or instructor.

Key functions of PLA advisors:

- Support candidates to meet their PLA goal, rather than assisting with the resolution of personal issues through therapeutic interventions
- Work with candidates to prepare for the assessment process, rather than solely providing information and receiving documentation
- Assist candidates to make decisions regarding their involvement in PLA and their credit request, rather than judging whether the candidate has the requisite knowledge and skills

Introduce this session by reinforcing the point that it is the PLA advisor who interfaces between the candidate and the assessor. The PLA advisor also assists the candidate to prepare for the assessment. In order to do a good job, the PLA advisor needs a clear vision of what the needs of candidates are and what the advisor's role is in meeting these needs. This clarity will assist the advisor to make decisions regarding allocation of time and resources, maintain an appropriate balance of responsibility with candidates and faculty assessors, and explain the advisor role and the PLA process to the institution and the community.



Activity

Ask the participants to divide into groups of four or five, ensuring you have at least four groups. Provide each group with felt pens and flip-chart paper. Ask each group to record the results of their work so that it can later be used to report.

Ask each group to begin with the following activity:

- Think of someone in your field or discipline who might request credit for what she or he already knows and can do
- Answer the question, "What will this individual (PLA candidate) need to be successful?"
- Write responses to these questions on a flip chart

When the activity is complete, ask groups to review their list and label who should be responsible for meeting the needs previously identified:

- Candidate
- Advisor
- Assessor
- Institution
- Someone else
- Joint responsibility

Ask groups to share briefly their work with the full group.

Ask for a volunteer to record on a new flip chart labelled "Advisor Roles & Responsibilities" all areas identified by the groups as belonging to the advisor or jointly held with the advisor and another partner.



When the reporting is complete, use transparencies **T3** to **T7** to review the six stages of the PLA Model and the possible responsibilities of the Advisor in each of these stages. Ensure that participants are aware that this information is in their workshop package as a handout (**H1**).



Break

15 minutes

This session can be introduced with the reflection that we have examined the needs of the PLA candidates and the role of the PLA advisor/support person. The missing piece in this analysis is determining what skills, knowledge and abilities the individuals filling these roles need to have.



Activity

Ask participants to divide into new groups of four to five persons, ensuring you have at least three groups. Encourage circulation and new grouping of workshop participants.

Inform participants that they have 10 minutes to examine the question of what skills, knowledge and abilities a PLA advisor needs to do a good job from the perspective of:

1. The PLA candidate
2. The post-secondary institution that employs them
3. Faculty assessors

Assign one perspective to each group.

Review the lists with the large group to identify the sets of skills, knowledge, and abilities common to all three perspectives. Identify those that are unique and any that may be missing.

Close the session by making the point that PLA advisors can have very different professional backgrounds, since they typically come from either an instructional or a student-service background. Whatever the background, an advisor brings transferable skills in each of these three main areas.

Introduce this session by commenting that up to now we have been focusing on the advisor role. Another important aspect to examine is the strategies to be used by the advisor to deliver the service. One-on-one advising and consulting can be very time-consuming and is not cost-effective. One thing to consider is providing services to groups.



Activity

Engage the participants in a discussion of finding ways to advise candidates in groups.

Facilitate the group through the following questions:

- How do we work in groups and for what purposes? (Link this to the six stages of the PLA Model.)
- What place does technology have in the advising process?
- What do you think of the innovations proposed in *Prior Learning Assessment and Educational Reform: A Vision for Now?*

Now consider effective ways of using technology. Divide the group into small discussion groups (four to five participants) and pose the following questions, asking them to capture their key points on a flip chart:

- What forms of technology could be used for individuals and groups of candidates?
- What are some of the challenges and barriers to advising using technology?
- What are some of the strategies to overcome those barriers?

Ask the smaller groups to share key points with the large group. Ask them to share what implications the use of technology may have for their institutions.



Lunch

60 minutes



Using the transparency **T9**, introduce the participants to the stages of an effective interview. These stages, identified by Simosko (1996), may all be covered in one session or may need to be spread over a number of sessions, depending on the complexity of the potential credit request and the needs of the candidate. When reviewing the stages, encourage discussion by asking workshop participants for their input on what to actually do at each stage:

- What is the focus?
- What kinds of questions are appropriate?
- What type of climate needs to be set?
- What materials and resources might an advisor need?



Follow up with handout **H3**. Then inform participants that they will be involved in several role-playing situations that will illustrate points of good practice (**H2a**).



Activity

Ask for four volunteers to role-play an initial interview with a PLA candidate; two to act as advisors and two as candidates.

- Inform the volunteers that the role-play will last approximately 10 minutes
- Provide the candidates with handout **H2a** that describes their role
- Ask them to wait outside while preparing for the role-play



In front of the group, share the two different advisor scenarios outlined in the handout **H2b**.

- Have the two volunteers choose one scenario each
- Ask the participant who chose Advisor 1 to remain in the room
- Ask Advisor 2 to prepare and wait outside
- Inform the advisors not to share the advisor scenarios with the candidates waiting outside

Take a few minutes to set up Advisor 1 prior to bringing in the first candidate:

- Set up a chair and a “desk” where the advisor will sit.
- Engage the workshop participants and Advisor 1 in a discussion of how to set up this interview for this scene.
 - How should the physical environment be set up?
 - How might the Advisor’s emotional state impact the interactions with the candidate?

Divide the audience into two groups of observers:

- Ask one side to focus on the Candidate and whether he or she is getting what s/he needs.
- Ask the second side to focus on identifying the points of good practice and stages of effective advising.

Invite the Candidate in, and allow the interview to be enacted for approximately 10 minutes. When the actors have finished, applaud, and ask them to return to the audience.

Ask Advisor 2 to come into the room, then:

- Ask the participants to assist you and Advisor 2 to set up the scene.
 - How will the desk and environment be set up?
 - In what ways might the Advisor’s enthusiasm and commitment impact her/his behaviour?
- Remind the workshop participants of their task to identify points of good practice, stages of effective advising, and whether candidate needs are being met.

Invite the second Candidate in, and allow the interview to again be enacted for approximately 10 minutes. When they have finished, applaud, and ask them to return to the audience.

Begin identifying the learning from this activity. Ask:

- What each of the Candidates experienced in the interview
- What each of them felt
- What the observers noticed
 - What worked?
 - What didn’t?
 - What can the whole group add to the lists?

Ask the participants who were tasked with identifying points of good practice and engage them and the whole group in creating a list of “Points of Good Practice.” Ask participants what learning they acquired about each stage, keeping in mind that it is unlikely that each stage was covered in the role-play.

To close, review the Points of Good Practice. Reinforce the importance of responding to each PLA candidate with focused listening so as to appropriately assess what this unique person wants and needs.



Break

15 minutes

Personal Look at Advising

35 minutes

This last session will be a reflection exercise for each participant. It will focus on each participant's professional development in regard to the PIA Advisor role.



Activity

Ask participants to use the handout **H4** to individually address the questions listed. Provide participants with 10 minutes to work on their individual assessment and plan.



Once participants have developed their own plan, ask them to share their assessment and plan with a partner.

In a large group, briefly ask willing participants to share their assessments and plans.

End this session on a positive note. If you have time at the end of the day, offer participants an opportunity to move around the room and to connect with anyone they worked with that day who offered them a new idea or perspective, or simply someone they enjoyed working with. An alternative is to ask, as a large group, that each participant “evaluate” their day with a quick comment.

Make sure that you:

- Review the purpose of the session
- Address the Parking Lot of issues
- Remind participants to complete and submit the evaluation form

Role of the Advisor in PLA

Stages

Activities

1. Pre-entry: Focused on providing potential candidates with information on the service, and in assisting them to determine whether they want to proceed.

Organize and provide general information, individually and in groups, for potential PLA candidates.

Develop and distribute brochures and promotional material in collaboration with the PLA Coordinator, program faculty, and recruitment and information offices.

2. Candidate Profiling: Focused on assisting the candidate to reflect on what she or he knows and can do, and linking this to course or program learning outcomes.

Assist candidate to accomplish this task using the service delivery options adopted at the institution, (individual appointments, group workshops and courses, video and guide, teleconferencing).

Develop resources to support the advising function, (forms for application and credit request, contract regarding action plan and timeline).

Develop resources that clearly outline program or course learning outcomes in collaboration with program faculty and PLA Coordinator.

Liaise with PLA Coordinator and Admissions/Registration/Records Office to promote smooth transition for candidate.

3. Gathering & Generating Evidence: Focused on the candidate gathering evidence to support his or her credit request.

Assist the candidate to accomplish this task using the service delivery options adopted at the institution, (individual appointments, group workshops and courses, video and guide, teleconferencing).

Develop resource materials that outline appropriate sources of evidence and provide guidelines for gathering and presenting evidence, in collaboration with program faculty and/or PLA Coordinator. Any specific evidence required by program faculty should be identified.

H1a



Stages

Activities

4. Assessment: Focused on the completion of the assessment process by assessor(s) and candidate

Assist the candidate to prepare for the assessment by providing information and support by reviewing the completed portfolio or profile, receiving the portfolio or profile, and forwarding to the faculty assessor(s) and/or PLA Coordinator.

Liaise with the faculty assessor(s) or program coordinator and the admissions/registration/records office to ensure a smooth process.

5. Credit: Focused on the recording and awarding of credits that result from the assessment.

Be available to the candidate to discuss the results or trouble-shoot any system problems.

Liaise with faculty assessor and Records Office to ensure smooth process.

6. Post-assessment Guidance: Focused on integrating what has been learned through the PLA process with the candidate's personal and professional goals

Review with the candidate the effectiveness of the PLA process and identify possible next steps.

Liaise with program faculty and institutional advisors to remain updated on educational and training possibilities.

Develop evaluation tools to receive feedback from the candidate, in collaboration with program faculty and PLA Coordinator.

Good Practice in Advising

The Potential Candidate

You are approaching an advisor about PLA. You have worked for 15 years in retail and have been promoted to manager of the store. You are wondering about PLA, and if there is any chance that you might receive any credit towards courses in a business program. You have taken many seminars and workshops in management and have excellent referrals from your head office. You are feeling very hesitant because you have never attended college and are extremely nervous about this whole process.

Take a deep breath and knock on the advisor's door.

Activity: Good Practice in Advising

Advisor 1

You are a PLA advisor. Lately, though, you don't seem to get much work done. There have been too many "potential" candidates knocking on your door. They do not seem to be motivated, wanting to find out about PLA and what they may be able to get for nothing. You would just like to be able to get your proposal on work-based PLA finished when you hear a knock on the door.

You feel frustrated at another interruption to the proposal writing and panic that it will not be ready on time. You are worried and preoccupied as you greet the potential candidate.

Advisor 2

You are a PLA advisor. For you, it has been an exciting time. You hold a strong belief in the whole concept of assessing and recognizing an individual's prior learning. There are all kinds of potential candidates wanting to find out about the PLA field. You believe that there is much learning going on outside the classroom, and that it is about time that it was recognized within your college.

You are working on a proposal for work-based PLA when there is a knock on your door. You have no problem changing gears. You mentally review the basic stages that need to be accomplished in an initial interview and are ready to go.

Stages of an Effective Advising Process

Whether working with PLA candidates individually, in groups, or utilizing other service options, the following stages are essential components of the advising process.

- 1) Welcome/rapport building:
 - Goal is to help candidates feel comfortable and ready to proceed
 - Introductions/clarification regarding manner to address each other
 - Informal, pleasant, well-organized environment
- 2) Establishing the candidate's aims in seeking PLA:
 - Goal is to ensure candidate has clear and realistic expectations of the PLA process
 - Provision of information on the PLA process and options available
 - Overview of differences in roles of advisor, faculty assessor
 - Clarification of candidate aims, and assessment of whether PLA will likely fit
- 3) Reflecting on the candidate's experience and accomplishments:
 - Goal is to identify the candidate's experience and accomplishments which relate to the aims identified in the previous stage
 - Posing of questions, open-ended and closed, to encourage reflection
 - Focused listening and responding in ways that assist making linkages between experiences
 - A coherent picture of the candidate's experience and accomplishment should result
- 4) Linking candidate profile to recognition/credit sought:
 - Goal is to link the candidate's profile to the recognition/credit being requested
 - Provision of information and learning outcomes or course outlines for specific courses that could be linked to the candidate's profile
 - Provision of encouragement and guidance (non-prescriptive)
 - A decision on the specifics of a candidate's credit request should result
- 5) Matching specific skills and knowledge to learning outcomes/course objectives:
 - Goal is to match candidate's knowledge and skills to specific learning outcomes and to identify appropriate evidence that is available, or that could be generated
 - Candidate examines, in-depth, the requirements of the specific course credits he or she is requesting
 - Provision of information on the kinds of evidence that could be acceptable
- 6) Developing an action or assessment plan:
 - Goal is to commit to paper the candidate's plan for continuing with the process
 - Usually includes an outline of the proposed credit request, possible sources of evidence, and a target completion date
 - Provision of information on any services or material available to support the candidate in attaining his or her goal

Personal Planner

a) What have I learned about myself and about PLA today?

b) What are my personal professional development needs in regard to PLA advising?

c) What do I need to do to enhance my own practice as a PLA Advisor?

d) What are my institution's needs? How can I influence my own institution?

e) In relation to what I have learned today, what is the one thing that I will do differently when I return to my department/division?



H4

Purpose

- ✓ **Improve the advice and support PLA candidates receive**
- ✓ **Present a range of different strategies for working with candidates**



Advising & Supporting Candidates

At the end of this module, participants will be able to:

- ✓ Provide information, advice and support systematically and cost-effectively
- ✓ Design a range of strategies for providing services



Pre-entry

- ✓ **Provide information to candidate**
 - Organize and provide general information
 - Develop and distribute brochure and promotional material

T3



Candidate Profiling

- ✓ **Assist candidates to identify knowledge, skills and abilities, and link those to learning outcomes**
- Use institutional services
- Develop general resources and those outlining clear expectations



Gathering of Evidence

- ✓ **Candidate gathers evidence to support credit request**
- Assist candidates to access institutional services
- Develop resource guidelines for gathering and presenting evidence

T5



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Assessment

- ✓ **Assessment completed**
- Support and provide information to candidate
- Liaise with faculty assessor



Credit

- ✓ **Record and award credits/recognition**
- Troubleshoot any system concerns
- Liaise with faculty assessor and records office



T7

Post-assessment Guidance

- ✓ **Integrate PLA learning with personal and professional goals**
- Evaluate PLA process with candidates
- Liaise with program faculty

T8



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Stages of an Effective Interview

- ✓ **Welcome**
- ✓ **Establish aims**
- ✓ **Reflect on experiences and accomplishments**
- ✓ **Link profile to credit sought**
- ✓ **Match skills and knowledge to standards**
- ✓ **Develop an action or assessment plan**

T9



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