

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEMS FOR SUPPORTING LEARNERS

module 7

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

INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEMS FOR SUPPORTING LEARNERS

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Introduction to This Module

30 minutes

This module will develop the basis for a work-plan for the implementation of PLA in the participants' institution. This will be achieved through activities that:

- Examine the institutional culture in regard to commitment to educational change and reform
- Establish the requirements for institutional structures and services necessary to support the reform changes

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

- Identify the services necessary to support PLA
- Identify and obtain commitment from individuals who will be impacted by the introduction or expansion of PLA services
- Develop a beginning work-plan for modification to organisational structures and services for the implementation of PLA.

! *The intended participants are institutional administration, faculty and staff. Participants should have an introductory knowledge of PLA as a concept. Consider using an external facilitator for this workshop; one who is knowledgeable about PLA in BC and change in post-secondary education institutions.*

Recommended Reading

Canadian Labour Force Development Board Consultation on Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), July 1996.

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

"Training for What?" British Columbia Labour Force Development Board, Victoria: 1995.

Facilitation plan

9:00 am:	Warm-up
9:30 am:	Assumptions
9:45 am:	Required PLA Services
10:20 am:	Break
10:35 am:	Key Players & Their Issues
11:15 am:	Work-plan Development
12:15 pm:	Wrap-up

You can introduce the plan 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. 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.

Additional materials

- Institutional Mission Statement
- Institutional Organisation Chart

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. You will need to address the expectations, potential challenges, and issues that participants may have about the module. This will assist you in further planning and adapting the module.



Activity

Choose one or more of the following activities to ease into the session:

- Ask participants to introduce themselves, the area they work in and the institution they represent.
 - Ask participants to rate their knowledge and skills with PLA on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 is the highest).
 - Ask participants to raise their hands to indicate the rating they have given themselves: 1 to 3, 4 to 6, 7 to 10? Ask those who rated themselves between 7 and 10 where and how they have experienced PLA. Point out to the full group that these individuals will be excellent resources during the workshop.
 - Ask participants to each give you one expectation that they have of the session. Write the list of expectations on flip-chart paper, and refer to the list periodically and at Wrap-up.
-



In this module, you will be examining the institutional structures and services related to PLA delivery. This will involve an examination of the reporting relationships and work-related responsibilities required for the delivery of flexible, high-quality PLA educational services to learners. Review the purpose of the module with the participants (**T1, T2**).

Ensure that participants are aware that this session is not intended to develop a work-plan but rather to develop a sound basis for a work-plan.

- ! *If participants have been involved with other PLA sessions, they are familiar with the Parking Lot. Review the concept of the “Parking Lot” sheet 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.*

Take a moment to clarify the terminology that will be used in this module:

- Institutional policies (academic policies)
- Procedures (such as the sequence of events that a new student would follow to get advice regarding his or her candidacy for PLA)
- Structures (institutional organisation structures)

Ask the group for more examples. Do they agree with the definitions provided?

- ! *Some individuals may become concerned about the current lack of resources, and anticipated further decreases in funding. They may become resistant to a discussion of needed changes since they are concerned about resource availability.*

Remind the participants that implementation of these changes may also involve using existing funding differently than in the past. Undoubtedly, there will be participants at the session who have had experience using limited resources creatively and wisely. Draw from their experience. It is best to express these concerns now and to clear the air so that participants can focus on their task at hand.



It is easy to allow the participants to slip into a discussion of the “but ifs” that prevent institutional changes. Discuss the transparency “A Few Givens” (T3) and lead them through a short and focused interpretation of the kinds of concerns and issues the group must put aside for the duration of their work with you. Stress that positive, controlled change is possible and everything can be improved—even an environment where everything seems to be changing rapidly.

Here are some comments to guide you in the discussions:

Resources

They will always be scarce, so we have to determine ways to explore alternative ways of doing things.

Costs

We should continually look for ways to minimise expenditures and make the best use of available resources.

Climate of change

Change is constant in our lives. We are always in transition and it will continue. We need to look for ways to change what we do with a minimum of disruption to learners and employees.

Thinking differently

We need to learn to approach our problems differently so we look for opportunities and solutions rather than dwelling on the difficulties presented by continuous change.

Building on success

There are many areas where we have been successful in the past. We must look for the characteristics of successful ventures and attempt to incorporate them into our new methods.

Continuous improvement

We need to recognise that a process can always be improved, and we need to integrate this into our thinking and our actions.

Have a brief discussion of the meaning of PLA and the current involvement of PLA-related activities within the institution. Advise the participants to ask for clarification where terms are unclear.

Try to involve everyone in the discussion by asking participants individually for input:

- Suggest how they can expect PLA to benefit the learners/people with whom they work
- Discuss what their institutional needs are to proceed with PLA

Try to focus the group to build on recognised institutional strengths and to establish the ways in which PLA already exists and will be expanded at this institution. Begin by leading the group through a short discussion of what the institution is known for and where you collectively think the future directions and challenges will lead. List the strengths in bullet form on a flip-chart sheet, and then post it on the wall. Next, have the group identify where PLA is likely to lead the institution. Once again list these items in bullet form on a flip-chart sheet. Put this on the wall as well.

- ! *It is important to keep this discussion brief and focused. It should focus the group on the “heart and strengths” of their institution.*

The objective of this session is to identify the diversity of learners/candidates that are likely to use PLA, and to build a list of services that they will require as they move through the institution.

Remind the group that candidates access PLA-related services for a variety of reasons and that they may have widely different needs.



Activity

In order for us to identify the required PLA services we need to know:

- Varying needs of candidates
- Ways we support learners for successful completion of their studies

In this next activity participants will have an opportunity to explore both.



Begin by dividing the group into pairs. Distribute the short vignettes of PLA candidates on handouts **H1a** to **H1i**. Ask pairs to determine the candidate needs, record the needs on flip chart paper, and describe these needs to the larger group when reconvened.

In addition, ask each pair to determine the list of services required by this candidate. Ask each pair to underline the services that are listed and not available at the institution (flexible child-care services, week-end workshops and so on). It is important to begin the listing of services from the point of first contact with the institution—the list of services should end when the candidates have acquired their credential.

Ask each group to name their candidate and to place a unique icon at the top of the sheet to identify the candidate. Let the pairs know that the presentation is to be made in the first person, so a representative (chosen by each pair) will introduce the candidate and describe the candidate's needs. A typical introduction will go as follows:

"My name is [make one up] and I . . . [read from card]. My needs are . . ."

Ask the group to present the needs and services required of this candidate.

Many candidates will require common services. The objective of this activity is to eliminate redundancy so that you end up with a single list of services that includes all of the services required by a wide variety of PLA candidates but does not have any service repeated.

Make up one list of PLA services on a flip-chart, to be used as reference material at a later point in the module. Post this in the room.

There may be a point where participants note that existing institutional policies may be impacted or affected by the introduction of PLA (such as residency requirements, compensation for assessors, PLA fees, etc.) It would be helpful to keep a list of “potential institutional policy changes.” Post it on the wall and add to it as the session progresses.



Break

15 minutes

Key Players & Their Issues

40 minutes

In the previous session participants identified services that are important to the many different types of PLA candidates.



Display transparency **T4**. Ask the group for confirmation of the job titles and make any changes on the transparency.



Activity



The following exercise provides participants with an opportunity to identify the issues that are important to individuals who must provide those services.

Divide the group into pairs once again. (Use different pairs from last time.) Assign each pair one of the Key Players from the list shown on transparency **T4**.

Distribute sheets of flip-chart paper. Ask each pair to write their key player on the top of the sheet and then to list as many issues that are important to this individual as possible. Remind them to restrict their list to those issues related to the provision of the PLA-related services identified.

Once they have finished listing the issues for their Key Player have them post the sheets on the wall.

- ! *You may run out of participants before the list of Key Players is exhausted. If this happens, as soon as one pair finishes their list of issues, assign a second Key Player to them.*

Reconvene and ask a spokesperson from each group to present the issues. Walk the group through each list.

Ask for confirmation that the items belong on the list and involve the provision of services required by PLA candidates.

Previously the group identified all of the services required by different types of PLA candidates and all of the PLA-related issues that are important to institutional personnel at all levels in the organisation that will have a bearing on the provision of the required PLA services.

The following activity will enable participants to:

- Determine what changes need to be made in existing services to provide support to PLA candidates
- Develop beginning strategies to provide the required services
- Address the important issues for Key Players



Activity

Divide participants into groups of three to four people and assign a required service from the sheets prepared previously. Place a tick mark beside the service on the flip-chart sheet

Distribute flip-chart paper to each group to act as a worksheet. Referring to the issues that are important to the different stakeholder groups in the institution, draft strategies to provide the required service.

Also ask participants to make a list of all potential policy changes that are affected by these strategies (e.g. fees for services, residency requirements, compensation for assessors, etc.)

When the groups have completed the service, have them turn in their sheet, get another service, and place a tick mark beside the new service. Continue until all services have been addressed

- ! *As the facilitator, it is important that you circulate among the groups and keep the discussion moving forward (or use the Parking Lot).*

Once all the issues have been addressed, reconvene as a large group. Read out each proposed solution, and make any modifications required for the solution to be implemented. Be sure to identify whether each service is:

- ✓ Presently available within the institution
- ✓ A new service to be provided
- ✓ Available elsewhere
- ✓ Not available and not to be provided

Retain these suggestions since they will form the basis for the work-plan. These sheets, with any modifications, will be provided to the host institution at the conclusion of the module.

Keep adding to the list of “potential institutional policy changes” as well.

Congratulate participants on their hard work. Ask participants for a commitment to attend a module to participate in planning, with their PLA Coordinator, the initial implementation of PLA at the institution.

Make sure that you:

- Review the purpose of the module
- Review the activities related to PLA services, Key Players and their issues, the beginning of an institutional work-plan for PLA, and any potential institutional policy changes
- Obtain commitment from participants to write up and distribute the work to all participants
- Address the remaining Parking Lot issues
- Distribute the evaluation form for the module

Candidate 1

Mature student returning to learning after many years. She has considerable family responsibilities (one toddler and a boy in Grade 2), is a single parent and has clear career goals as well as many years of non-formal job training.



H1a

Candidate 2

Applicant for entry-level program in Marketing. He has several years of employment and travel, but is presently on student loans and working in the day.

H1b



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Candidate 3

Secondary school graduate who believes that he already possesses the skills and knowledge required for particular credits in his chosen program based on his achievements while in high school.



H1c

Candidate 4

Laid-off lumber mill worker who needs counselling and retraining. He has limited funds, lacks high-school graduation. Since he has no previous post-secondary experience he is very unsure of his ability to succeed in a post-secondary setting, but has no employment prospects in the foreseeable future.

H1d



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Candidate 5

Russian immigrant who has studied English literature on his own for most of his life and would like a degree in English.



H1e

Candidate 6

Social service worker who has worked in the field for 10 years and wants instruction in current practices, as well as access to a related credential.



Candidate 7

A recent high-school graduate who has helped to operate her parents' store for the past 10 years. She has performed the bookkeeping activities associated with the store for the last three years and assisted with buying decisions. She now wants to enter the Small Business Management program and receive formal credit for her knowledge.



Candidate 8

Senior executive on college advisory committee who wishes to transfer a certificate from another college and challenge a number of senior courses in a career diploma program.



H1h

Candidate 9

Foreign refugee student who claims to have a degree in Computer Science but has no credentials to support this claim. The student needs Canadian credentials to assist in finding a job related to her field of expertise.

H1i



A Few Givens

- ✓ Resources
- ✓ Costs
- ✓ Climate of change
- ✓ Thinking differently
- ✓ Building on success
- ✓ Continuous improvement

H2



Key Players

- ✓ President
- ✓ Vice-president
- ✓ Registrar
- ✓ Deans
- ✓ Counsellors
- ✓ Program advisors
- ✓ Registration staff
- ✓ Program heads
- ✓ Faculty
- ✓ Students
- ✓ Employers
- ✓ PLA Coordinator

H3



Purpose

- ✓ **To develop the basis for a work-plan for the implementation of PLA within the institution**

T1



Institutional Systems for Supporting Learners

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

- ✓ Identify services necessary for PLA
- ✓ Obtain commitment from individuals
- ✓ Develop a beginning work-plan for PLA

T2



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A Few Givens

- ✓ **Resources**
- ✓ **Costs**
- ✓ **Climate of change**
- ✓ **Thinking differently**
- ✓ **Building on success**
- ✓ **Continuous improvement**

T3



Key Players

- ✓ **President**
- ✓ **Vice-president**
- ✓ **Registrar**
- ✓ **Deans**
- ✓ **Counselors**
- ✓ **PLA Coordinator**
- ✓ **Program advisors**
- ✓ **Registration staff**
- ✓ **Program heads**
- ✓ **Faculty**
- ✓ **Students**
- ✓ **Employers**

T4



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