

**A SPRING 2003 SNAPSHOT:  
THE CURRENT STATUS OF  
PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION (PLAR)  
IN CANADA'S PUBLIC POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS: PART ONE**

Prepared for the  
Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC)

by  
Bonnie Kennedy  
A/Executive Director  
Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA)

May 2003

Support for this project was generously provided by:



**Human Resources  
Development Canada**

**Développement des  
ressources humaines Canada**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Project Overview</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Research Activity</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>2. Provincial/Territorial Snapshots</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Alberta</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>British Columbia</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Manitoba</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>New Brunswick</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Newfoundland and Labrador</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>Northwest Territories</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>Nova Scotia</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>Nunavut</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>Ontario</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>Prince Edward Island</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>Quebec</b> .....	<b>33</b>
<b>Saskatchewan</b> .....	<b>35</b>
<b>Yukon</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>3. Focus Group Process</b> .....	<b>40</b>
<b>4. Survey Results and Analysis</b> .....	<b>42</b>
<b>5. Annotated Bibliography</b> .....	<b>66</b>
<b>6. Conclusions</b> .....	<b>75</b>
References	

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The authors would like to acknowledge and thank the following individuals who participated in this project.

### **For assistance with the development of the survey instrument and the facilitation of regional focus groups:**

Western Region: Dr. Angie Wong, University of Saskatchewan

Central Region: Dr. David Livingstone, OISE/UT

Eastern Region: Dr. Douglas Myers, Halifax PLA Centre

Special thanks go to Nancy Tam, Saskatchewan Learning, Liz MacLennan, College University Consortium Council (Ontario), and Sam Scully, Halifax PLA Centre Board of Directors for providing the venues for the focus groups.

Appreciation goes to Kathleen Massey, President of the Association of Registrars of Universities and Colleges of Canada (ARUCC) for her assistance with locating electronic databases of registrars.

### **For advice regarding project plans, survey questions, and report drafts:**

Thanks to the Executive Committee and the CAPLA Board of Directors.

Maria Desjardins, CAPLA Chairperson (Nova Scotia Community College)

Lois Morin, CAPLA Vice Chairperson (Manitoba Advanced Education and Training)

Deb Blower, CAPLA Past Chairperson (Red River College)

Sandra Aarts, CAPLA Secretary/Treasurer (Consultant)

Ginette Lamarre (College Ahuntsic)

Gary McNeely (Brandon University)

Doug Myers (Halifax PLA Centre)

Johanna Oehling (National Seafood Sector Council)

Bill Pigrim (Government Access Information Network)

Angie Wong (University of Saskatchewan)

### **For contributions to the provincial/territorial snapshots:**

Alberta: Lucille Walter

British Columbia: Susan Simosko

Manitoba: Gail Hall

New Brunswick: Leonce Chiasson

Newfoundland and Labrador: Cyril Farrell,

Carmel Wyse

Northwest Territories: Loretta Foley

Nova Scotia: Douglas Myers

Nunavut: Geraldine Hunter

Ontario: Barbara Handler

Prince Edward Island: Debbie Pineau.

Quebec: Marc Leduc

Saskatchewan: Nancy Tam

Yukon: Carol Leef

**For the annotated bibliography:** Joy Van Kleef

**For document layout and database development:** Susan Curtis

**For survey distribution and analysis:** Clear Picture Corporation

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 1999, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) released *A Report on Public Expectations of Postsecondary Education in Canada*. The report identified the following six key themes that would guide future research:

- quality
- accessibility
- mobility and portability
- relevance and responsiveness
- research and scholarship
- accountability

### ***Regarding ‘accessibility’ at the system level ...***

Non-financial barriers to the access and mobility of qualified individuals (e.g., insufficient recognition of non-traditional learning, recognition of credentials from other institutions) are identified and removed. (*Public Expectations*, Appendix 1, p 5)

### ***Regarding ‘mobility and portability’ expectations that students obtain credit for prior learning as they transfer between programs, institutions, and the labour market — at the system level ...***

Qualification and prior learning recognition: Qualifications are portable and are recognized across regional and jurisdictional boundaries, with credit for equivalence. Knowledge and skills acquired in other settings are recognized. (*Public Expectations*, Appendix I, p 7)

In addition, recognition of prior learning was considered the process that responds to learners, employers, and the community and to broader issues of social inclusion and accountability. Accordingly, in order to address the ‘responsiveness’ theme, CMEC commissioned this study on prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) as the first part of a two-part PLAR Project: Part One was to include an inventory of provincial/territorial policies, initiatives, and best practices; Part Two, an analysis and assessment of current systems and of practices and models within Canada and abroad, and recommendations for next steps. This study, entitled *A Spring 2003 Snapshot: The Current Status of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition in Canada’s Public Postsecondary Institutions*, represents Part One.

## **Project Overview**

In February 2003, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) contracted with the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA) to undertake Part One of the PLAR Project, a study of the current state of prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) in Canada’s public postsecondary institutions. The intention was to provide the starting point upon which further research could be built — an inventory of existing policies, practices, and programs.

CAPLA was given three months (February to May 2003) in which to complete all components of the study. The elements included:

- the development and administration of an electronic survey to registrars in all public postsecondary institutions in Canada
- focus groups
- an annotated bibliography of recent PLAR research in Canada
- a one-page overview of PLAR activity in each of the provinces/territories

## **Research Activity**

The short timeline for the study led CAPLA to use a focus group approach at the beginning of the process, in order to develop and refine the survey tool. Accordingly, they facilitated focus groups during the month of March in Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Nova Scotia. Participants in the focus groups included academic and administrative staff from colleges and universities. This iterative process was designed to ensure that the questions in the proposed survey made sense to their intended audience and to build interest in the project as a whole.

During this period, work commenced on creating the electronic database of all registrars in Canada's public postsecondary institutions. This undertaking was by far the most challenging aspect of the study, given the absence of one reliable and current source of information (see Study Limitations on page 7). Advice received from the survey company was that the personal e-mail address of each registrar was preferable to a general e-mail address. Therefore, considerable time and resources had to be dedicated to this activity.

In addition to the development of an electronic survey and the administration of that survey to registrars, local snapshots were being prepared by contacts in each province and territory. Contributors were either government contact persons with responsibility for PLAR or consultants. They were asked to provide information on existing government PLAR policies, major PLAR initiatives and examples of projects, research, or initiatives within local colleges and universities. The summaries (longer than one page in some cases) contained only highlights of current PLAR activity.

An annotated bibliography of PLAR research and reports since 1998 was also being developed at this time.

## **Data Collection**

After the electronic survey was vetted by the focus groups and the e-mail addresses were compiled, a survey development and analysis company (Clear Picture Corporation) was hired to format, construct, and distribute the survey. The electronic survey, available in both French and English, was sent to all registrars (n=251) on April 7, 2003, and the extended deadline for completion was May 2, 2003. (The deadline was extended from April 25 to give participants extra time to submit and to make allowances for the Easter break.) A welcome letter, explaining the purpose of the survey and inviting registrars to participate, introduced the

survey questionnaire, and the instructions clearly defined what was meant by PLAR\* so that confusion about definitions would be kept to a minimum. Two electronic reminders were sent out and, in some cases, follow-up telephone calls were made to prompt completion of the survey.

The survey was divided into four sections:

- Institutional Support
- Learner Support
- Faculty and Staff Support
- Future of PLAR at Your Institution

Ample space was provided for personal comments throughout the survey. Concern that the time of year might affect response rates was noted; however, little could be done about the timing, given the project's deadline. Despite the time of year and other inhibiting factors such as 'bouncebacks,' the survey response rate was 32%. The institutions that sent personal e-mails to the A/Executive Director of CAPLA explained that they were not going to participate in the electronic survey because there was no current PLAR activity.

Two researchers from the survey company were contracted to provide an analysis of the survey data.

### **Study Limitations**

This study is limited by the following:

- the 90-day time constraint, which affected virtually all aspects of the study's design and implementation
- the difficulties in compiling a reliable database of the personal e-mail addresses of registrars and the short time given those registrars to complete the electronic survey (less than 4 weeks) which may have contributed to the low response rate of 32%
- the basic nature of a short snapshot design, which impacts the depth and comprehensiveness of the study
- the degree to which informed non-learners could respond to learner-directed questions

Suggestions that the electronic database include verification of the personal e-mail addresses of registrars were impractical because existing databases were found to be out-of-date. Even with confirmed addresses, those registrars using auto response would be nullified, as would the mailboxes that were at capacity. Contacting each institution personally proved to be time-consuming because many institutions have adopted voice-mail prompts. The development of a current and accurate database of e-mail addresses, given their changing nature, remains a challenge for electronic survey distribution.

-----  
\* For the purposes of this study, PLAR was defined as all processes (advising, assessment, evaluation, transcription) associated with informal learning acquired by adults through employment, on-the-job training, volunteer work, independent study, military service, credit for workplace training and other life experiences, which are evaluated against the learning outcomes of a program or course through the use of a challenge test, demonstration, case study, or portfolio assessment.

Although beyond the researcher's control, CAPLA received an e-mail communication from a private postsecondary institution, pointing to the problem of excluding private colleges and universities from the study.

In spite of the above cautionary remarks, the survey results and their analysis identify the key issues for PLAR, indicate areas for further investigation, and notably provide a benchmark for a new level of discussion on the topic in Canada's public postsecondary institutions.

## **2. PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL SNAPSHOTS**

### **Introduction**

In February 2003, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada contracted with the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA) to prepare an information base on the current policies and practices of provincial and territorial PLAR systems. Given the short timeline, CMEC and CAPLA agreed that the research should include a snapshot of the particular policies and programs in each jurisdiction, an electronic survey prepared with the assistance of focus groups, and analysis of the survey results, and an annotated bibliography.

Contacts in the provinces/territories were approached by CAPLA and suggested guidelines were conveyed. In some cases, a consultant developed the snapshot. In other cases, a government representative responsible for the PLAR initiative provided the information. The snapshot was intended to provide an overview of:

- policies on PLAR in government departments
- major PLAR initiatives within the broader community
- examples of PLAR projects/studies/initiatives at colleges and/or universities

The individuals contacted were asked to name and briefly describe the policy, program, or initiative and to provide full contact information.

The introductory letter on the following page was sent to registrars.



## PLAR SNAPSHOT REQUEST

Thank you for undertaking the job of providing PLAR information on your province. As you know, the provincial/territorial snapshots will be part of a study that the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA) is undertaking for the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC). The study will include:

- an annotated bibliography of current PLAR research in Canada
- two focus groups (Saskatchewan and Ontario) for the purpose of vetting survey questions amongst college and university faculty and staff, to determine the appropriateness and focus of the inquiry
- administration of an electronic survey in April 2003
- snapshots of the provinces and territories regarding their policies and initiatives

All of the one-page snapshots of the provincial/territorial situation will be compiled on March 24 and CAPLA will submit them to CMEC by March 31. The snapshot can include current activity as well as proposed plans for the future.

The snapshot is intended to provide an idea of:

- policies on PLA/RPL in all provincial/territorial departments (i.e., education, immigration, labour force development)
- any major PLAR initiative(s) in the broader community that may affect the province/territory
- examples of PLA projects/research studies/initiatives at the colleges or universities

Because of the limited space, there will probably be room for only a few descriptive sentences of each policy, program, or pilot. Therefore, please put the contact information (a Web site address or phone number) for the initiative right after it is cited, so that interested readers can contact the appropriate person or site, if they need more information.

We would also be very appreciative if we could count on your help (or that of your designate) with follow-up calls to registrars in your province/territory, once the electronic questionnaire is distributed in April. These 'reminders' to complete the survey will prompt those who have forgotten, which will improve our overall response rate. We expect that those calls will be required around April 23, as the survey deadline is April 25, 2003.

Many thanks for your help with this project, on behalf of CAPLA.

## ALBERTA

### Provincial Policy

Alberta Learning encourages the recognition of learning not only when it leads to credentials (formal) but also when it does not (informal). While Alberta has no official policy on the recognition of prior learning, this approach to lifelong learning is solidified in the Campus Alberta Policy Framework, which identifies key factors that underlie the importance of the recognition of prior learning. In addition, Alberta Learning encourages PLAR through Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training, the International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS), the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT), and inclusion of portfolio development in high school curriculum.

Provincial policy allows challenges for credit (no maximum limit) for senior high school courses.

<http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/educationguide/pol-plan/polregs/adobe/191.pdf>

### Additional PLAR Initiatives and Related Activity

Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training has well-developed policies and procedures for the recognition of prior learning whether obtained through formal learning or experiential training. Learners may apply to take challenge examinations in order to acquire advanced standing in their apprenticeship program. Apprentices may also receive advanced standing through the recognition of their prior work experience by their employer. [http://www.tradesecrets.org/working\\_in\\_alberta/prior\\_learning.html](http://www.tradesecrets.org/working_in_alberta/prior_learning.html)

The International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS) of Alberta Learning provides educational assessments of credentials received in countries outside of Canada. IQAS evaluates educational credentials and issues assessment certificates that can be used for employment, for admission into postsecondary institutions, and for professional licensing bodies in Alberta and across Canada. IQAS has served other provinces directly or has served to demonstrate methodology to them as they set up their own processes for the recognition of foreign credentials.

<http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/iqas/iqas.asp>

### PLAR in Postsecondary Institutions

The Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT) established an Advisory Committee on PLAR, drafted and published *Principles and Standards for the Recognition of Prior Learning* in the *Alberta Transfer Guide* in 1995 (updates in 1998 and 2001), and compiled *Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition: Policies and Procedures at Selected Post-Secondary Institutions* to illustrate ways in which different kinds of Alberta postsecondary institutions have responded to learners' needs for recognition of prior learning — including informal or experiential learning — for credit toward a credential. The formal policies and/or guidelines of the following Alberta postsecondary institutions are included in the inventory:

Athabasca University	Keyano College
University of Alberta	Lethbridge Community College
University of Calgary	Mount Royal College
Northern Alberta Institute of Technology	NorQuest College
Southern Alberta Institute of Technology	Olds College
Grande Prairie Regional College	Portage College
Grant MacEwan College	Red Deer College
	The King's University College

While not included in the 2001 inventory, the two institutions that have subsequently submitted their policies to ACAT for inclusion in the next revision are Bow Valley College and Lakeland College.

Contact: **Marilyn Patton**, [marilyn.patton@gov.ab.ca](mailto:marilyn.patton@gov.ab.ca) or **Lucille Walter**, [Lucille.walter@gov.ab.ca](mailto:Lucille.walter@gov.ab.ca) or call (780) 422-9021

Athabasca University has a Centre for Learning Accreditation to coordinate assessments and recommend accreditation of external training programs, which has served as an example to other Canadian and international postsecondary institutions in terms of demonstrating best practices for PLAR. <http://prior-learning.athabascau.ca/>

## Projects and Partnerships

Alberta Human Resources and Employment has published a CD-ROM and workbook entitled *Creating a Career Skills Portfolio*.

The *Alberta Framework of Essential Competencies for Working, Learning and Living*, which is a vital document helpful in portfolio building, was recently authorized for use in some K–12 programs.

The Central Alberta Technology Preparation Consortium of schools and colleges includes portfolio development as a condition of high school graduation with a Tech Prep Diploma. It is also in the process of developing a database of agreements with postsecondary institutions for credit transfer of selected Tech Prep courses.

## Future Projects

ACAT is to review postsecondary policies and practices last compiled in 2001, and is reactivating the ACAT Advisory Committee on PLAR in the fall of 2003.

On February 13, 2003, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) signed an agreement to sponsor a multi-year research and demonstration project at Mount Royal College that will study the impact of a comprehensive, systematic method of PLAR to improve access to nursing education programs and rates of graduation and employment of nurses.

Contact: **Marion McGuire**, Program Director, PLAR, (403) 240-6074, [mmcguire@mtroyal.ab.ca](mailto:mmcguire@mtroyal.ab.ca)

## BRITISH COLUMBIA

### Provincial Policy

Many colleges and universities in British Columbia have embedded prior learning assessment and recognition options directly into their program offerings. It appears that six years of supporting PLAR infrastructure development within the postsecondary system have paid off. An informal survey of all public postsecondary institutions was conducted through a province-wide Listserv and just under half responded with positive news about their progress with PLAR. A number of these are described below.

### Additional PLAR Initiatives and Related Activity

The Ministry of Advanced Education reports that it provided \$640,000 during 2002–03 for PLAR initiatives. This funding helped institutions to cover the costs of assessing and granting credit, training coordinators, and meeting other associated costs; it also provided support for PLAR “enhancement grants” to improve and increase the delivery of PLA services within the postsecondary system.

Contact: **Dawn McKay**, (250) 387-6182, [Dawn.McKay@gems8.gov.bc.ca](mailto:Dawn.McKay@gems8.gov.bc.ca)

### PLAR in Postsecondary Institutions

**British Columbia Institute of Technology:** Learners can earn PLAR credits in virtually every technology certificate and diploma program at BCIT and in some degree programs. Learners and others can consult <http://www.plar.bcit.ca/> for specific details. (The Web site will be revised in the summer of 2003.)

Contact: **Pat Pattison**, (604) 434-5734, [Pat\\_Pattison@bcit.ca](mailto:Pat_Pattison@bcit.ca)

**Camosun College:** Learners can earn credits through PLAR in many program areas. Because of resourcing/workload issues the College reports that it is in “maintenance mode,” that is, not any creating new program offerings. However, learners are still actively earning PLAR credits in numerous program areas.

Contact: **Paul Merner**, (250) 370-3000, [merner@camosun.bc.ca](mailto:merner@camosun.bc.ca)

**College of the Rockies:** PLAR credit is offered in several different programs including Human Service Worker, Early Childhood Education, and Teacher Assistant as well as in some trades programs. In addition, two individuals recently earned PLAR credits in Canadian History.

Contact: **Elke Airone**, (250) 489-2751, [AIRONE@cotr.bc.ca](mailto:AIRONE@cotr.bc.ca)

**Justice Institute of British Columbia:** All academies/divisions at the JI (except the Paramedic Program, which is working on a policy) offer PLAR opportunities. Learners can request up to 50% of their credits through PLAR for the programs to which they are being admitted. The JI remains strongly committed to the implementation of PLAR as an essential component of its programs.

Contact: **Val Peachey**, (604) 525-5422, [vpeachey@jibc.bc.ca](mailto:vpeachey@jibc.bc.ca)

**Kwantlen University College:** Learners can earn PLAR credits in all program areas. The Education Council has required that PLA be embedded in all courses. Prospective learners and others can consult [http://www.kwantlen.ca/programs\\_courses.htm](http://www.kwantlen.ca/programs_courses.htm) for more information.

Contact: **Alice Macpherson**, (604) 599-2512, [training@kwantlen.ca](mailto:training@kwantlen.ca)

**Malaspina University College:** PLAR assessments were completed in more than 30 program areas during 2001–2002. These program areas included fields as diverse as Philosophy, Applied Business Technology, and Community Support Worker. In addition, MSU has developed a number of articulation agreements with non-credited training programs. In addition, one of its priorities has been to offer PLAR in apprenticeship trades programs.

Contact: **Carol Joerin**, (250) 755-8752, x 2697, [joerinc@mala.bc.ca](mailto:joerinc@mala.bc.ca)

**Open Learning Agency:** PLAR can be earned in several program areas, including Home Support Attendant, Practical Nurse Refresher, and Social Service Worker Program.

Contact: **Diane Reed**, (604) 431-3268, [dianer@bcou.ca](mailto:dianer@bcou.ca)

**Royal Roads University:** Learners can earn credit and recognition through two vehicles at RRU. They can gain “advanced standing” through “flexible assessment” for entry into a program of study and can earn “transcriptable” credit for a specific course based on the specified learning outcomes. Flexible assessment learners continue to perform as well or slightly better than their peers who had more traditional academic backgrounds.

Contact: **Sherman Waddell**, (250) 391-2564, [Sherman.Waddell@RoyalRoads.ca](mailto:Sherman.Waddell@RoyalRoads.ca)

Three other provincial efforts are worth noting:

- PLAR for nurses  
Contact: **Patricia Gauchie**, (250) 598-3774, [pgauchie@telus.net](mailto:pgauchie@telus.net)
- PLAR for immigrants  
Contact: **Collin Mercer**, (604) 775-0665, [Collin.Mercer@gems9.gov.bc.ca](mailto:Collin.Mercer@gems9.gov.bc.ca)
- The use of learning and practice portfolios with pharmacists as part of a new professional development and quality assurance program developed by the College of Pharmacists of BC  
Contact: **Doreen Leong**, (800) 663-1940, [dleong@collegepharmacists.bc.ca](mailto:dleong@collegepharmacists.bc.ca)

## MANITOBA

### Provincial Policy

In November 2001, the Manitoba government released *A New Policy Framework for Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)*. Its comprehensive objective is to increase the expertise in and use of PLAR across the province. As part of that, the implementation strategy is to link PLAR with other key provincial labour market strategies for effective training, college expansion, Aboriginal training and education, and immigration.

The strategy has three cornerstone areas of activity: to increase capacity in postsecondary institutions; to expand PLAR advisory services throughout the community through the broad network of Adult Learning Centres and Employment Centres; and to increase PLAR activities in industry through business and labour regulatory bodies, sector councils, and apprenticeship. The strategy is based on integrating the work being done in these three areas of PLAR activity.

The implementation also tracks progress in four impact areas — Apprenticeship, Aboriginal Education and Training, recognition of foreign credentials, and recognition of prior learning in the secondary school system. The fiscal year 2001–2002 was the first of a 3-year funding commitment of \$3M to the refocused PLAR strategy.

**Year 1** of the ambitious three-year implementation plan began with training and familiarization amongst those offering PLAR services and those who can most benefit from PLAR.

**Year 2** is Model Development (process/tool).

**Year 3** is scheduled as a time to increase the use of PLAR with the public and to promote the use of PLAR.

As part of the strategy and planning, the two departments — Manitoba Education and Youth, and Advanced Education and Training — have set the following goals:

- decentralizing PLAR activities and supports
- linking the various PLAR activities taking place in universities and colleges, adult learning and employment centres and the workplace
- expanding the network of PLAR practitioners
- evolving from a project-focus to a systemic approach to developing the practice and application of PLAR across and among areas of learning
- cost-effective delivery

Contact: **Sandi Howell**, Manitoba Advanced Education and Training, (204) 945-1682, [showell@gov.mb.ca](mailto:showell@gov.mb.ca)

## **Additional PLAR Initiatives and Related Activity**

Manitoba has initiated the development of a government-wide strategy to address qualification recognition of highly skilled immigrants. A Minister's Committee is in place, and a provincial consultation process is in the final stages with the report of the Committee to be submitted by the end of May 2003.

Contact: **Ximema Munoz**, (204) 945-5978, [xmuno@gov.mb.ca](mailto:xmuno@gov.mb.ca)

To enhance quality practice and expand the network of qualified PLAR Practitioners, Red River College (RRC) has developed and implemented 2 levels of PLAR training; PLAR Foundation (40 hours) and PLAR Practitioner (40 hours – advanced level). Facilitated by RRC and the provincial department of Education Training and Youth, it is available to all postsecondary institutions, Adult Learning Centres, Employment Centres, community groups and other organizations. The PLAR Foundation Training is also offered on-line and a distance delivery model for the PLAR Practitioner course is being developed in 2003. Over 160 individuals completed the Foundation training in the '01-'02 year.

Contact: **Deb Blower**, (204) 632-2065, [dblowner@rrc.mb.ca](mailto:dblowner@rrc.mb.ca)

The Manitoba Prior Learning Assessment Network (MPLAN), has over 100 members throughout the province, and provides a full program of professional development, sharing of resources and expertise, and networking throughout the year.

Contact: **Gail Hall**, (204) 475-7064, [inkaproj@mb.sympatico.ca](mailto:inkaproj@mb.sympatico.ca)

## **PLAR in Postsecondary Institutions**

The Council on Post Secondary Education (COPSE) is a key participant in the development and implementation of the provincial framework for PLAR.

### ***Colleges***

Red River College (RRC) in Winnipeg, Assiniboine Community College (ACC) in Brandon, and Keewatin Community College (KCC) in The Pas and Thompson, all have institutional policies and procedures on PLAR in place. St Boniface College (UStB) and Winnipeg Technical College (WTC) are in the development stage of policies and procedures. The policies and procedures of the colleges are in place at home campuses and regional campuses.

**Assiniboine Community College** has policies in place and has specific courses available for PLAR.

Contact: **Bonnie Proven**, (204) 725 8700, ext 6615, [Proven@Assiniboine.net](mailto:Proven@Assiniboine.net)

**Collège universitaire de St-Boniface** has introduced a PLAR Coordinator position for student support for all programs.

Contact: **Lorraine Roch**, 204 237-1818, ext 402, [LoRoch@ustboniface.mb.ca](mailto:LoRoch@ustboniface.mb.ca)

**Keewatin Community College** has a new PLAR Coordinator position, which supports community PLAR as well as institutional processes. KCC has additional regional campuses throughout the north with the same policies and procedures in place.  
Contact: **Joanna Sargent** (204) 677-6674, [jsargent@keewatincc.mb.ca](mailto:jsargent@keewatincc.mb.ca)

**Red River College** has implemented PLAR since 1980, with a PLAR office since 1995. RRC has extensive development and implementation of course/program PLAR processes and support materials, and provides enhanced PLAR advisory services. RRC delivers PLAR Training (PLAR Foundation and PLAR Practitioner courses) and professional Portfolio Development courses, conducts assessments for workplace training and has participated in two cross-Canada PLAR research studies.  
Contact: **Deb Blower**, (204) 632-2065, [dblower@rrc.mb.ca](mailto:dblower@rrc.mb.ca)

**Winnipeg Technical College** is currently developing an institution-wide PLAR system across their college, high school, industry based training and continuing education programs.  
Contact: **Sherry Sullivan**, (204) 989-6575, [shesul@wtc.mb.ca](mailto:shesul@wtc.mb.ca)

### ***Universities***

**Brandon University** has institutional policies and procedures in place and has integrated PLAR into all Schools and Faculties, as well as providing support services for faculty and students.  
Contact: **Gary McNeely**, (204) 727-7413, [mcneelyg@BrandonU.CA](mailto:mcneelyg@BrandonU.CA)

**University of Manitoba** has initiated a project in the Certificate in Adult and Continuing Education (CACE) program as a model for Continuing Education Division programs. The project has initiated the development of program and course learning outcomes across the CACE consortium of U of Victoria, U of Saskatchewan, U of Alberta and U of Manitoba.  
Contact: **Sherry Sullivan**, (204) 474-7988, [sulliva0@ms.umanitoba.ca](mailto:sulliva0@ms.umanitoba.ca)

**University of Winnipeg** has institutional policies and procedures for PLAR in place for admission purposes for non-traditional students, for transfer credit eligibility for non-traditional postsecondary education, and for university credit toward a degree. U of W has initiated a new program, the Advanced Diploma in Leadership in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), a collaborative model of the Division of Continuing Education, Faculty of Arts and Science, and PLAR.  
Contact: **Barb Read**, (204) 786-9767, [b.read@uwinnipeg.ca](mailto:b.read@uwinnipeg.ca)



## **NEW BRUNSWICK**

### **Provincial Policy**

In New Brunswick, the Université de Moncton, University of New Brunswick, and the New Brunswick Community College have had policies on prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) for quite some time. It is possible, depending on the institution, to obtain between 25% and 100% credit toward a degree through PLAR.

In each postsecondary institution, a PLAR Coordinator coordinates the PLAR process and serves as a resource, the primary point of contact who follows up with students and faculty. The faculties are responsible for the actual assessments.

Most postsecondary institutions have information on PLAR on their Internet Web page, including access to a guide and an application form on-line. The Université de Moncton and the University of New Brunswick also have a print copy of the PLAR guide for distribution to anyone interested. Institutions are looking for ways to make the process simple, easy, and accessible to all. The New Brunswick Community College is undertaking an orientation program that will provide greater opportunities to students and the population to become better informed about PLAR services.

### **Additional PLAR Initiatives and Related Activity**

The Department of Training and Employment Development is preparing a PLAR strategic plan in order to respond to New Brunswick's Prosperity Plan. This initiative will bring many departments together to identify issues, goals, and deliverables.

Business and Industry are looking at PLAR to identify the skills and competencies that their employees need in the workforce and as a means of enhancing the training of their employees. The University of New Brunswick is in the process of preparing to extend its PLAR services to include workplace training assessments.

### **PLAR in Postsecondary Institutions**

The New Brunswick Community College is considering a partnership with Athabasca University to deliver a portfolio course. Another project being discussed is a pilot that will provide applicants with a tool for self-assessment to assist them in identifying their competencies in the health care field and their lack of knowledge and skills in relation to the curricular requirements.

University of New Brunswick is actively participating in the Learning Assessment and Recognition Network, a Campus Canada initiative. UNB's association with and contribution to the establishment of national assessment benchmarks will provide increased flexibility to faculties and encourage new learners to apply.

Prior learning assessment and recognition is growing in the province, and many institutions, businesses, and government departments are looking at PLAR as part of their new initiatives.

For further information, you may contact the following persons:

Dr. **Judith Potter**: University of New Brunswick, (506) 453-4852

**Denise Savoie**: Université de Moncton, (506) 858-3236

**Léonce Chiasson**: Department of Training and Employment Development,  
New Brunswick Community College Branch, (506) 453-2169

## NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

The provincial public postsecondary education system in Newfoundland and Labrador is comprised of a university, a public college, and the Centre for Nursing Studies. Prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) is in various stages of use within each of these institutions.

The **College of the North Atlantic** has implemented a policy guiding the practice of PLAR. Campus faculty and staff have been trained in the application of the policy. To date, the level of general requests for assessment of prior learning has been minimal. However, great success has been achieved in the application of the PLAR policy when used to provide applicants in an Early Childhood Education distance program with credit for the learning that applicants had acquired from previous experience. Applicants requesting credit for prior learning in this program area are required to complete a portfolio, which is then assessed by content experts to determine the level of credit to be awarded.

The **Marine Institute** has no institutional policies in place, although the Institute wishes to move forward in this area in the future. To date, no concrete timeframe has been identified.

The **Centre for Nursing Studies** also has a policy on PLAR, and it is applied as requested by students. The Centre anticipates that, with an aging population in the province, they will get more requests for such services in the future.

**Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN)** is in the process of revising its policy governing PLAR, which it has used for many years, for example, to give credit to persons entering the Bachelor of Vocational Education and, more recently, to credit those entering the Bachelor of Post Secondary Education. Specifically, those who have a specified period of business or industry experience and previous training in a certificate or diploma level program and want to enter these programs as students are awarded up to 30 hours credit toward the degree requirements.

**Apprenticeship and Certification Board:** A board policy is in place to assess prior learning activities. Its purpose is to provide the opportunity for a prior learning assessment to be conducted with individuals seeking certification in a designated occupation where learning has been acquired through previous experiences. While there is no limit to the amount of credit that can be awarded based upon prior learning, journey person certification still requires the individual to pass the Interprovincial Standards (Red Seal) Program examination. Methods of assessment include: the development of a portfolio, examinations, performance evaluations, simulations, interviews and/or submission of documentation.

**Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board of Newfoundland and Labrador:** During 2000, the Board received financial assistance from LMDA to implement a PLAR pilot project. Its purpose was to determine the feasibility and benefits of awarding land-based credits for skills acquired from traditional informal education to professional fish harvesters through standardized assessments. Based

upon the initial success of the pilot project, a large-scale PLAR undertaking was implemented. This second study, conducted in 2001, included 202 applicants and 1,012 PLAR assessments. The assessments resulted in some fish harvesters moving from one certification level to the next while others achieved credits toward their future certification levels. (Professional fish harvesters in NL have three levels of certification — Apprentice, Level I, Level II).

## **NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**

The Government of the Northwest Territories currently does not have a policy on prior learning assessment and recognition. (PLAR)

The **NWT Apprenticeship Program** grants credits to three categories of applicants entering an apprenticeship:

- Graduates of a technical or technology program may be granted time credit and technical training credit.
- Graduates of an approved pre-employment, pre-apprenticeship or vocational high school course may be granted time credit and are allowed to write first level examinations.
- Individuals with previous work experience may be granted time credit on the recommendation of an Apprenticeship Training Officer with prior approval of the employer, and they may be eligible to write the first level examination.

**Aurora College** 's Board of Governors passed a PLA policy in 1995 which states that "Aurora College shall use Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) to recognize past learning to meet admission requirements for a Program and/or to obtain credit for one or more courses within a program." Principles and Procedures have also been developed.

Contacts:

President **Maurice Evans** at [mevans@auroracollege.nt.ca](mailto:mevans@auroracollege.nt.ca) or phone (867) 872-7009

Government: Dr. **Loretta Foley**, Office of Deputy Minister, at (867) 920-6240

## NOVA SCOTIA

### Provincial Policy

The Department of Education, in its working paper *Skills Nova Scotia: Strong Workforce, Bright Future* issued in June 2002, set the following as a key objective: “to develop and implement prior learning assessment and recognition processes and tools.”<sup>1</sup>

That working paper contained a number of references to lifelong learning and reflected the incorporation of the principles and practices of PLAR into the department’s major new initiative, the **Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning (NSSAL)**. Through NSSAL, adult learners can use credits gained through PLAR toward their Nova Scotia High School Graduation Diploma for Adults. The adult high schools, the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC), and Université Sainte-Anne–Collège de l’Acadie who deliver credits toward high school completion also have their own PLAR policies for the benefit of the adult learner. NSSAL also recognizes the Certificate of Apprenticeship and grants 6 elective credits toward the completion of the High School Graduation Diploma for Adults.

Along with the creation of the NSSAL and the Nova Scotia High School Graduation Diploma for Adults, the Adult Learning Program’s curriculum was designed in such a way as to recognize the prior learning of adults. The curriculum allows adults to be placed at different starting points, depending on their prior learning of the subject.

The Department of Education’s **Apprenticeship Program** has incorporated PLAR for many years. Recently, they have developed a new policy that provides credit for prior learning for up to 70% of the completion of the required technical training.

The **Nova Scotia Department of Community Services** took an early lead in this field, establishing, in 1997, a partnership with the **PLA Centre** (see below) through which it provided leadership training in PLAR to its professional staff who, in turn, have delivered PLAR support and services to Social Assistant Recipient clients. The results, in terms of increased self-confidence, motivation, labour market engagement and participation in further education and training, have been striking.

The Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC), with 13 campuses across the province, is the first postsecondary institution in Canada to declare itself a **Portfolio College** <[http://www.nsc.ca/admissions/portfolio/what\\_is\\_portfolio.asp](http://www.nsc.ca/admissions/portfolio/what_is_portfolio.asp)> and to seek not only to use PLAR/RPL as a ‘bridge’ for entry to its programs but also to integrate those principles and practices into all aspects of College offerings. The Government of Nova Scotia recently announced a \$123 million expansion plan to increase the capacity of NSCC to serve the skills and learning needs of Nova Scotians.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See *Skills Nova Scotia: Strong Workforce, Bright Future* (Nova Scotia Department of Education, June 2002), Objective 4, page 27

<sup>2</sup> See [www.nsc.ca](http://www.nsc.ca)

Both the College and the Department of Education — along with the Department of Community Services — work in partnership with each other and with the **PLA Centre** ([dmyers@placentre.ns.ca](mailto:dmyers@placentre.ns.ca)). The board of directors of the Centre, established in Halifax in 1996, represents five universities, the NSCC, and a broad range of communities including the business, labour, and voluntary sectors. The Centre has provided professional development programs that have certified over 175 PLAR Practitioners across the province and has initiated innovative PLAR programs with a wide range of adult learners in transition.<sup>3</sup>

### The Institutional Picture

Across the ten universities in Nova Scotia, PLAR exists in various forms, although more unevenly across this sector. Several universities — including the Atlantic School of Theology (AST), Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU), the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD), and the University College of Cape Breton (UCCB)<sup>4</sup> — have comprehensive institutional policies in place, and actively use PLAR principles and practices in recognizing the ‘experiential’ as well as the accredited ‘formal’ learning of adults for the purposes of admission, placement, and advanced standing.

Other universities<sup>5</sup> may have ‘permissive’ regulations and/or ad hoc processes that may recognize the prior learning of adults seeking entry or advanced standing. Sometimes particular faculties, schools, or departments will have a greater interest in PLAR than others. The **School of Public Administration at Dalhousie University** makes extensive use of a ‘learning portfolio for academic purposes’ to enable candidates with non-traditional, experiential qualifications to be considered for its mid-career MPA (Management) Program.

As elsewhere across the country, it seems fair to say that, while PLAR development is uneven and partial across and within universities, some institutions are taking an active lead in this field, and most are more aware and interested than previously. It is to be hoped that the forthcoming CMEC survey will provide a more comprehensive and detailed account of this situation and will correct any inaccuracies that this initial ‘snapshot’ may inadvertently contain.

---

<sup>3</sup> See [www.placentre.ns.ca](http://www.placentre.ns.ca)

<sup>4</sup> AST uses PLAR primarily for mid-career adults who wish to undertake pastoral care programs. Similarly, NSCAD uses PLAR for graduates who wish to return for further study. MSVU offers an undergraduate elective course in ‘portfolio development’ for credit. UCCB has a PLAR Coordinator in Student Services and provides PLAR support in workplace, extension, and distance learning settings.

<sup>5</sup> These include Acadia University, Dalhousie University, Saint Francis Xavier University, Saint Mary’s University, Université Ste Anne (along with Collège de l’Acadie) and the University of King’s College.

## NUNAVUT

### Territorial Policy

Currently the Department of Education does not have a policy on PLAR. However, the department is working toward developing a policy as a part of a broader strategy for adult education and learning.

Contacts: **Bruce Rigby**, [brigby@gov.nu.ca](mailto:brigby@gov.nu.ca), **Geraldine Hunter**, [ghunter@gov.nu.ca](mailto:ghunter@gov.nu.ca)

**Nunavut Arctic College** has a written policy as stated below:

***Policy:*** Nunavut Arctic College shall use Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) to recognize past learning to meet admission requirements for a program and /or to obtain credit for one or more courses within a program.

***Principles:***

1. Nunavut Arctic College accepts that prior learning shall be formally recognized.
2. PLA may be applied toward academic credit, toward the requirements of training programs, and for occupational certification.

Nunavut Arctic College has in place administrative procedures and an application process for those interested in PLAR. They are currently developing an implementation plan.

Contact: **Linda Pemik**, [pemik@nac.nu.ca](mailto:pemik@nac.nu.ca)



## ONTARIO

### Provincial Policy

During the 1992–93 year, the Ontario Council of Regents for Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology established the PLA Advisory Group to guide the implementation of PLA in Ontario's Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology. In January 1993, PLA was formally introduced to the college system when 25 colleges received funds to subsidize one position for a three-year period to develop policies and processes and to build systems for PLA services.

The Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition Policy framework was based on advice from the Council of Regents after extensive consultation and released to the college system in July 1997. As of April 1, 2003, the PLAR policy was incorporated into the Minister's new Framework for Programs of Instruction. According to this policy, PLAR is to be made available for as many credit courses as possible in programs of instruction in which enrolment is eligible for funding through the General Purpose Operating Grant (GPOG). A resource document is also available for colleges to consider when implementing PLAR. Funding for PLAR is provided through the GPOG and is detailed in the Enrolment and Graduate Reporting Operating Procedure. Fees for PLAR are outlined in the Minister's Binding Policy Directive on Tuition and Ancillary Fees and the related operating procedure. Colleges currently charge a range of fees up to a maximum of \$127 per individual course challenge in 2003–04. Therefore, 100 audited PLAR assessments result in one funding unit in terms of college revenue.

Contact: **Jane Kirkwood**, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) at 416-325-2874, [Jane.Kirkwood@edu.gov.on.ca](mailto:Jane.Kirkwood@edu.gov.on.ca) and [Nelsa.Roberto@edu.gov.on.ca](mailto:Nelsa.Roberto@edu.gov.on.ca)

### Samples of PLAR in Colleges

Despite funding constraints, all colleges continue to provide PLAR services as reported to the Ministry for funding purposes.

**Confederation College:** Prior Learning Assessment is available at Confederation College for all part-time and full-time students and prospective students. Challenge exams are used most frequently. For certain types of courses, such as field placements, students submit a PLAR portfolio. Type of assessment is determined by the faculty expert/assessor, based on the course learning outcomes.

Contact: **Trish McGowan**, PLA Facilitator, (807) 475-6416, [mcgowan@confederationnc.on.ca](mailto:mcgowan@confederationnc.on.ca)

**Fanshawe College:** The PLAR advisor has evening hours, is situated in the Registrar's office, and acts as liaison with the academic divisions. The Portfolio Development courses are very successful and are currently being adapted to work with foreign-trained professionals. A PLA committee still exists at Fanshawe. The previous PLA Facilitator, Sandra Aarts, now Secretary-Treasurer of the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA), was instrumental in obtaining funding to set up CAPLA's on-line community of practice.

Contact: **Cheryl Morris**, PLAR Advisor, (519) 452-4445, [cmorris@fanshawec.ca](mailto:cmorris@fanshawec.ca)

**Humber College**, after broad internal consultation, updated PLAR resource materials for the community and for PLAR faculty assessors, in print and on the Web. It has the highest number of portfolio assessments in Ontario. Humber believes that supporting PLAR principles and processes in colleges assists in the delineation of and access to learning pathways for students at multiple entry points — from apprenticeship to postgraduate programs. PLAR is viewed as one component of an overall framework for recognition and transfer of academic credit.

Contact: **Barbara Handler**, PLAR Co-ordinator, Counselling, 416-675-6622, ext. 4524, [barbara.handler@humber.ca](mailto:barbara.handler@humber.ca)

**Mohawk College** has provided strong leadership in PLA training for PLA facilitators and faculty since the early 1990s. Mohawk was one of the six College partners in the Second Cross-Canada Study on PLAR: Feedback from Learners. Through Business and Economic Development, Mohawk facilitated a program review incorporating PLAR principles for the **Ontario Aerospace Council**. As a result of financial restraints, the PLA Coordinator's position will be eliminated in the fall of 2003. PLA activity remains constant and the College will continue to provide PLA services to students while exploring alternative models of delivery.

Contact: **Roberta Burke**, PLAR Co-ordinator, Credit for Prior Learning Office, (905) 575-1212, ext. 2395, [roberta.burke@mohawkcollege.ca](mailto:roberta.burke@mohawkcollege.ca)

**Niagara College**: Program work experiences, field placements and co-op work terms are being evaluated through PLA. Group testing for over 400 students for entry-level computer course has been successful. Niagara recommends 40 PLA challenges rather than 100 PLA challenges for one funding unit.

Contact: **Michelle Pugh**, Facilitator, PLA and Peer Services, (905) 735-2211, ext 7491, [mpugh@niagarac.on.ca](mailto:mpugh@niagarac.on.ca)

## PLAR in Universities

Although there is no common agreement, understanding, or overall policy framework, some PLAR activities are taking place.

See the link for the program-specific project for nurses and other PLAR resources at the University of Ottawa <http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/info/regist/Regi3170e.pdf>

Contact: **Suzanne Doucette**, Co-ordinator, (613) 562-5800, ext. 844  
[sdouc@formation-iip.ca](mailto:sdouc@formation-iip.ca)

Contact: **John Michel**, MTCU Universities Branch, 416-325-4237  
[john.michel@edu.gov.on.ca](mailto:john.michel@edu.gov.on.ca)

The **Council of Ontario Universities** (COU): In 1995, the COU established a Working Group on PLA to determine the status of PLA/PLAR in professional programs that are linked to regulated professions. After receiving reports on seven pilot projects undertaken by five universities in 1998, "Council accepted the Working Group's report and endorsed the principle of prior learning assessment and its use where appropriate at member institutions." <http://www.cou.on.ca>

The **College-University Consortium Council (CUCC)** was established in 1996 to further a more seamless continuum of postsecondary education in Ontario. The CUCC has significant potential to address system wide Ontario articulation and PLAR questions and issues.

Contact: **Liz McClennan**, 416-244-2311, ext. 2029, <http://www.cou.on.ca/cucc>

### **PLAR in the Secondary School System**

New PLAR policy is scheduled for implementation in the 2003–04 school year. Under PLAR policy for mature students, up to 16 credits for Grade 9 and 10 may be granted to a mature student at the discretion of the principal, following individual assessment. Mature students may earn 10 of the 14 remaining Grade 11 and 12 credits needed to meet diploma requirements in three ways: through the challenge process, through the equivalency process, or by taking the courses. Mature students will earn a minimum of four Grade 11 and 12 credits.

Contact: **Mary Smart**, Ministry of Education, 416-325-5732

### **PLAR Survey Course in Teacher Education program at OISE**

In this innovative elective course in the pre-service program, students survey recent PLAR literature in Canada, create a challenge process and portfolio outline, and focus on the implications of implementing PLAR policy at the secondary school level in Ontario.

Contact: **Sara McKittrick**, OISE/ UT, 416-923-6642, ext. 2411, [smcitrick@oise.utoronto.ca](mailto:smcitrick@oise.utoronto.ca)

### **Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MCTU)**

#### **Access to Professions and Trades (APT) unit**

Contact: **Shamira Madhany**, MTCU, 416-326-6216

The Ontario government established its Access to Professions and Trades initiative in 1995, to promote access to the labour market for **qualified skilled immigrants**. The Access to Professions and Trades Unit works with key partners, including occupational regulatory bodies, employers, educational institutions, and community agencies serving immigrants, to develop programs and policies that facilitate recognition of international qualifications and experience. <http://www.equalopportunity.on.ca>

Internationally trained individuals may have difficulty gaining access to their regulated occupations because their qualifications are not understood or fully recognized. The Ontario government has funded development of PLAR tools and processes to evaluate the skills and experience of internationally trained midwives and physiotherapists, and a skills demonstration test has been developed as an alternative to a written test for automotive service mechanics who are seeking a Certificate of Qualification.

MTCU is supporting development of “bridge” training projects to expedite licensing and accreditation for employment in sectors with strategic skills shortages. These projects develop ways for employers, regulatory bodies, and educational institutions to assess the existing skills and competencies of applicants and provide training and workplace experience that will help people move quickly into the labour market without

duplicating what they have already learned elsewhere. Bridging projects develop sustainable models that can be replicated by other organizations and occupations.

There are currently sixteen projects underway in strategic sectors of the labour market including biotechnology, engineering, manufacturing trades, health care technologies, information technology, midwifery, nursing, pharmacy, and teaching. Among these projects are sectoral initiatives in which individual groups of regulators, employers, and educators are taking leadership roles to encourage others in their sectors to develop and enhance access policies and programs for internationally trained individuals.

Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters is preparing a guidebook for employers that will set out the business case for hiring internationally trained individuals and provide practical tips on how employers can recognize and integrate the skills of internationally trained workers to meet their business and skill needs.

The Steering Committee of Ontario Regulators for Access is developing a toolkit to encourage other Ontario regulatory bodies to develop and enhance access initiatives within their organizations.

The Colleges of Ontario Network for Education and Training (CON\*NECT) is leading development of a system to optimize the role of the colleges in the integration of skilled immigrants into Ontario's workforce. The new system will enable internationally trained individuals to retrain or upgrade without duplicating their previous learning.

Funded in part by MTCU, **World Education Services (WES) Canada** (416-972-0700 or 1-866-343-0070 or [www.wes.org/ca](http://www.wes.org/ca)) evaluates academic credentials from 180 countries and compares them with similar Ontario educational qualifications. WES has expanded its service to provide the World Education Data Base (WEDB), an on-line service with information on 25 international education systems, to assist secondary schools with placement of immigrant students.

## Research Networks in Ontario

**New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL)** at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto <http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/depts/sese/csew/nall>

NALL is a national research network funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to study informal learning and its relation to formal and continuing education throughout the life course ([www.nall.ca](http://www.nall.ca)). The **Prior Learning Assessment Group** of NALL completed the following projects: *Developing an Annotated Bibliography for PLAR*; *Determining the current status of the provision of PLAR in Canada and Abroad*; *Developing a "Values" document for PLAR*; *Exploring the current and future use of PLAR*. The NALL Web site houses the most comprehensive PLAR database in the world and links to PLAR information on several continents.

Contact: **A. Thomas**, [AThomas@oise.utoronto.ca](mailto:AThomas@oise.utoronto.ca)

Researchers from OISE/UT received funding from SSHRC through the Initiative on the New Economy program. Dr. **David Livingstone**, Director of the **Centre for the Study of Education and Work**, is leading a project called "The Changing Nature of Work and Lifelong Learning in the New Economy." He is working with more than 30 partners from labour organizations, teacher federations, private corporations, and universities in

Canada, the U.S., Australia, and Europe to create reliable evidence about actual existing adult learning practices in the Canadian workplace. The project will include a national survey and related case studies.

Contact: Dr. **David Livingstone**, (905) 923-6641, ext. 2703,  
DLivingstone@oise.utoronto.ca

### **Cross-Canada Studies of PLAR**

Three Ontario colleges (Conestoga, Fanshawe, and Mohawk) participated recently with other Canadian colleges, one college of general and professional education (Cégep), and an independent PLAR consultant ([vankleef@sympatico.ca](mailto:vankleef@sympatico.ca)) to complete the **Second Cross-Canada Study of PLAR: Feedback from Learners**. The purpose of the study was to report 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 to identify what needs to be done to improve and expand PLAR in Canada. The 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. The study results are to be launched at the **Recognizing Learning Forum** in Winnipeg in October 2003.

Contact: Dr. **Eleanor Conlin**, Conestoga College, [econlin@conestoga.on.ca](mailto:econlin@conestoga.on.ca)

**Other Resources in Ontario** dealing with recognition activities for immigrants:

**Maytree Foundation**, 416-944-2627, [romidvar@maytree.com](mailto:romidvar@maytree.com)

**Caledon Institute for Social Policy** – see the paper *Fulfilling the Promise: Integrating Immigrant Skills into the Canadian Economy*, by Naomi Alboim and The Maytree Foundation (Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, April 2002.) 56 pp.  
[alboim@qsilver.queensu.ca](mailto:alboim@qsilver.queensu.ca)

**Fulfilling the Promise Database**, an extensive on-line resource identifying ideas and initiatives for improving labour market access for skilled immigrants.  
<http://www.maytree.com/RefugeeImmigrantProgram/Publications/PublicationsAbstracts/FulfillingPromise.html>

## **PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND**

### **Provincial Policy**

#### **Statement of Support**

The P.E.I. Department of Education supports in principle and encourages the building of interconnected learning communities through the formal recognition of prior learning.

In recognizing the value of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), which includes Qualifications Recognition (QR), we believe that:

- the recognition of prior learning is fundamental to a lifelong learning culture.
- all learning should be recognized or considered for recognition by educational, professional, and work organizations.
- standards and criteria for practice are essential in order to maintain high quality services and programs.
- the success of PLAR is dependent on partnerships that include but are not limited to postsecondary institutions, business, labour, all levels of government, education, professional and/or occupational associations.

Contact: **Barb MacNutt**, Manager of Literacy Initiatives Secretariat, (902) 368-6286, bemaconnutt@edu.pe.ca, PEI Department of Education, Continuing Education and Training, PO Box 2000, Charlottetown, PEI, C1A 7N8

### **Additional PLAR Initiatives and Related Activity**

**Workplace Education, PEI**, officially launched “Prior Learning Assessment Services” in 1999. They offer individual and group portfolio development sessions, the PEI PLAR Practitioner Certification Program, which requires a 30-hour training component followed by a practicum which must be completed within the year following the training component. Current Workplace Education PEI activities include:

- assisting the local community college in developing PLAR implementation strategy for their trades programs
- developing a working model for the implementation of PLAR activities into the PEI Apprenticeship Process
- assisting the local community college in piloting portfolio development as a career development tool for a PEI high school transitions program, 2003
- assisting high school students in a PEI high school to develop portfolios as a component in the Academy of Travel and Tourism Program
- WEP PLAR Coordinator participating on a National Steering Committee to develop a facilitator’s guide for community-based instructors to assist them in integrating essential skills into the Manitoba Learner Certification Program

Additional PLAR services under Workplace Education PEI include: conducting organizational needs assessments; disseminating PLAR information; providing consulting services to employers, organizations and postsecondary institutions.

Contacts:

**Barb MacNutt**, (902) 368-6286, <bemacnutt@gov.pe.ca>, Manager of Literacy Initiatives Secretariat, PEI Department of Education, Continuing Education and Training, PO Box 2000, Charlottetown, PEI, C1A 7N8

**Gaelyne MacAulay**, (902) 888-8022, <gmacaulay@pei.sympatico.ca>, Field Officer and PLAR Services Coordinator, Workplace Education PEI, Government Services Office, 109 Water Street, Summerside, PEI, C1N 1A8

## PLAR in Postsecondary Institutions

Activities include:

- assisting Holland College in developing a PLAR policy paper and implementation strategy; two summer workshops with instructors at Holland College on portfolio development; the Academic & Learning Innovations Unit is conducting a College-wide PLAR pilot project, beginning with the Learning Management Program.

Contacts:

Dr. **Sandy MacDonald**, (902) 566-9684, <smacdonald@hollandc.pe.ca>, Director of Education Services, Holland College 140 Weymouth Street, Charlottetown, PEI, C1A 4Z1

**Michael O'Grady**, (902) 566-9512, <mogrady@hollandc.pe.ca>, Curriculum Consultant, Holland College 140 Weymouth Street, Charlottetown, PEI, C1A 4Z1

**Jenna Boon**, Manager, Trades and Technology, <gboon@hollandc.pe.ca>

Web site information: <<http://www.hollandc.pe.ca/>>.

- assisting UPEI faculty interested in exploring PLAR.

Contacts:

Dr. **Clive Keen**, Director of the Institute for Life-Long Learning, UPEI, <ckeen@upe.ca>, 550 University Avenue, Charlottetown, PEI, C1A 4P3

Ms. **Karen Smythe**, (902) 566-0439, Registrar, UPEI, <registrar@upe.ca>, 550 University Avenue, Charlottetown, PEI, C1A 4P3

Dr. **Vianne Timmons**, (902) 566-0412, VP Academic Development, UPEI, <vtimmons@upe.ca>, 550 University Avenue, Charlottetown, PEI, C1A 4P3

Web site information: <<http://www.upei.ca/>>.

- assisting la Société Éducative de l'ÎP-É in understanding the PEI statement of support, the PLAR policies for PEI postsecondary education institutions and how PLAR is being implemented in order to encourage the development of their own policy; through a Memorandum of Understanding, Francophone PSE students have access to programs of Collège de l'Acadie, Nouvelle Écosse (Wellington, PEI site is similar to a satellite office) and thus there is already awareness of the PLAR policies and adherence to those policies established: <<http://www.socedipe.org/>>

- assisting the PEI Apprenticeship Board in defining a role for PLAR in the Apprenticeship process.  
 Contacts:  
**Gaelyne MacAulay**, (902) 888-8022, <gmacaulay@pei.sympatico.ca>  
 Field Officer and PLAR Services Coordinator, Workplace Education PEI,  
 Government Services Office, 109 Water Street, Summerside, PEI, C1N 1A8  
**Craig Norton**, (902) 368-6425, <cgnorton@gov.pe.ca>,  
 Manager of Apprenticeship Training, PEI Department of Education, Continuing  
 Education and Training, PO Box 2000, Charlottetown, PEI, C1A 7N8
- PLAR development projects in two Island high schools, one in partnership with the High School Transitions Program at Bluefield High School/Holland College, and the other with the Travel and Tourism course at Kensington High School
- Holland College is working with Bluefield High School staff, the Department of Education, and the Eastern School Board to deliver a transition program. The College is responsible for developing curriculum with the project partners and they are involved in researching the effectiveness of the employability skills courses offered. The intention is to guarantee program seats for the fall of 2003 to successful students.  
 Contacts:  
**Gaylene Carragher**, (902) 629-7032, <gcarragher@hollandc.pe.ca>,  
 Holland College, 140 Weymouth Street, Charlottetown, PEI, C1A 4Z1  
**Allan Cotton**, (902) 675-7480, <adcotton@edu.pe.ca>,  
 Bluefield High School, North Wiltshire RR#2, PEI, C0A 1Y0  
 Web site: <<http://www.edu.pe.ca/bluefield/Holland.htm>>



## QUEBEC

### Government Policy

In 2002, the Government of Quebec adopted its Action Plan for Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training,<sup>6</sup> which mandates a number of measures in the area of prior learning/skills recognition (PLR), with the overall objective of creating a diversified array of enabling mechanisms to ensure access to PLR services in every region of Quebec. Some of these measures are directly relevant to higher education:

- Create an interministerial PLR coordinating group to ensure consistency and to energize work on recognition of skills wherever and however acquired.
- Clearly enshrine the right to PLR in college education regulations and establish explicit accountability for PLR in the sector.
- Consolidate a workplace professional certification system that will henceforth include PLR with a view to valuing and formally recognizing skills acquired on the job.
- Place PLR high on the education sector agenda and seek appropriate ways to meet the public's key PLR needs.
- Develop a school- and workplace-based approach to recognizing skills acquired by categories of workers, in order to meet efficiently the PLR needs of a number of individuals in similar situations.
- Fast-track school- and workplace-based PLR for immigrants in order to facilitate their integration in society and the labour force.
- Emphasize credentialed, portable training in labour force training development programs (under the Development of Manpower Training Act)<sup>7</sup> to facilitate PLR.

### Immigrant Issues

The Ministère des Relations avec le Citoyen et de l'Immigration (MRCI) offers comparative evaluations of non-Quebec diplomas and formal studies against Quebec school system benchmarks.

### CEGEPs

Under college education regulations, each CEGEP must include in its institutional assessment policy a PLR mechanism leading to course waivers, equivalencies, or substitutions for students.<sup>8</sup>

In the area of vocational and technical education, the Ministry of Education has developed the following approach:

- Adopt a common approach for secondary-level vocational training and college-level technical training.

---

<sup>6</sup> *Plan d'action en matière d'éducation des adultes et de la formation continue*, Government of Quebec, MEQ, 2002, 40 p.

<sup>7</sup> *An Act to foster the development of manpower training*, Quebec Statutes and Regulations, c D 7.1.

<sup>8</sup> *College Education Regulations*, Ministry of Education, articles 21-22-23 and 25.

- Create more flexible PLR tools that match different types of training better.
- Enhance accessibility to PLR services by making these tools available on an Internet site.

The ministry is conducting a pilot project involving 14 CEGEPs to test materials developed for a specific technical training program. Even before the end of the pilot, some CEGEPs have asked for the approach to be extended to two other programs.

## **Universities**

PLR in the university sector is a decentralized process at the department/faculty level, that respects the academic autonomy of each institution. In addition, all universities in Quebec have signed the Pan-Canadian Protocol on the Transferability of University Credits, which provides that

- the transfer student is deemed admissible and has been presented with an offer of admission.
- the transfer student has achieved a passing grade in his/her course(s) and has obtained grade levels that would normally be required of continuing students.
- the credits earned are related to the program of study in which the transfer student will register, or the credits can be counted as electives for the program of study.

## SASKATCHEWAN

### Provincial Policy

#### **Provincial Framework for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**

In the fall of 2003, the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board (SLFDB) submitted the *Provincial Framework for RPL in Saskatchewan* to Saskatchewan Learning with the recommendation that government adopt the Framework as official policy. Many of the actions listed in the Framework have already been undertaken to varying degrees. In May 2003, key stakeholders attended a planning session to discuss the formation of a provincial coordinating group for RPL that would oversee the implementation of the Framework. The Framework outlines the vision, guiding principles, the role of stakeholders and a comprehensive action plan organized under three major objectives:

#### **Goal One: Demonstrate leadership**

- 1.1 Coordinate planning and support for RPL services
- 1.2 Conduct and share research on best practices and benefits of RPL
- 1.3 Increase awareness of RPL services and benefits

#### **Goal Two: Deliver high quality, accessible, and relevant RPL services in Saskatchewan**

- 2.1 Integrate RPL processes into employers' human resources management practices
- 2.2 Adopt RPL as a service provided by Saskatchewan educational institutions and training providers
- 2.3 Use RPL as a means to support labour mobility from other provinces and countries
- 2.4 Incorporate RPL into the career and employment services provided by community-based organizations and government departments/agencies

#### **Goal Three: Demonstrate accountability**

- 3.1 Evaluate RPL services and outcomes

To obtain a copy of the Framework document see:

[http://www.slfdb.com/recognition\\_of\\_prior\\_learning/](http://www.slfdb.com/recognition_of_prior_learning/)

Contact: **Nancy Tam**, (306) 933-5324, [ntam@sasked.gov.sk.ca](mailto:ntam@sasked.gov.sk.ca)

### Additional PLAR Initiatives and Related Activity

#### **RPL Web Page**

An RPL Web Page has been developed for the Saskatchewan Learning Web site to provide a centralized on-line "information forum" for various stakeholders to access RPL-related documents, resources, and materials in Saskatchewan, with contact information and/or Web links. See: <http://www.sasklearning.gov.sk.ca/P/rpl>

## **Sector-Based PLAR Projects**

The **Job Start/Future Skills Sector Partnerships Program** (Saskatchewan Learning) has provided funding for industry sectors interested in exploring PLAR as a strategic human resources planning tool. Three sectors (early childhood education, nursing and immigrant/refugees) have completed projects that explore how the recognition of prior learning (RPL) can be utilized to develop a skilled workforce. The final reports were distributed in the fall of 2003. Preliminary discussions exploring other RPL-related initiatives are currently underway in the following sectors: health, water and wastewater workers.

Contact: **Gladys Hill**, (306) 787-1404, [gladys.hill@sasked.gov.sk.ca](mailto:gladys.hill@sasked.gov.sk.ca)

The **Saskatchewan Outfitters Association** (SOA), through funding under the Sector Partnerships Program, established a partnership with industry and five provincial organizations. The SOA has led the development and piloting of a PLAR process designed to certify individuals and businesses involved in the province's outfitting industry. The PLAR process identifies seven outcomes that are measured through an open book exam, an interview by industry assessors and by providing evidence of compliance.

Contact: **Hal Stupnikoff**, (306) 763-5434, [soa@sasktel.net](mailto:soa@sasktel.net)

The **Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association** PLAR committee has developed a framework for a Competence Assessment Process (CAP) for registered nurses seeking licensure as Nurse Practitioners in the province. Evaluation of a candidate's portfolio is a key component in the CAP framework.

Contact: **Shirley McKay**, (306) 359-4245, [smckay@srna.org](mailto:smckay@srna.org)

## **International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS)**

Since 1995, the Government of Saskatchewan has negotiated an inter-provincial agreement with the Government of Alberta to have the International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS) evaluate foreign credentials and issue certificates of comparison to Saskatchewan's educational standards. Under the terms of this contract, the Government of Saskatchewan funds the base costs for the delivery of this service and Saskatchewan residents pay assessment costs directly to IQAS. IQAS certificates are advisory in nature and facilitate the decision-making role of employers, educational institutions and professional licensing bodies. In partnership with IQAS, a new brochure has been distributed (summer 2003) as part of a provincial communications strategy to build awareness about IQAS and its services. See: <http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/iqas/iqas.asp>

Contact: **Nancy Tam**, (306) 933-5324, [ntam@sasked.gov.sk.ca](mailto:ntam@sasked.gov.sk.ca)

## **PLAR in Public Postsecondary Institutions**

### **Saskatchewan RPL Referral Guide: Pathways for Learning Recognition**

Saskatchewan Learning created an on-line RPL Referral Guide to streamline referral pathways for counsellors/advisors by providing access to centralized information on RPL opportunities in the provincial learning system. The checklist and flowchart for

RPL advising is one of the key components in the guide. It also outlines information streams for effective referrals, including first points of contact at institutions.

A broad range of institutions (27) from kindergarten to grade 12 and the postsecondary education/training sector contributed to the third edition of the guide. For information on RPL-related institutional policies regarding qualification recognition (QR), credit transfer (CT), and prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR), see:

[http://www.sasklearning.gov.sk.ca/P/rpl/docs/RPL%20Referral%20Guide\\_3rd%20edition.pdf](http://www.sasklearning.gov.sk.ca/P/rpl/docs/RPL%20Referral%20Guide_3rd%20edition.pdf)

### **Saskatchewan Learning's Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition Enhancement Funding Initiative**

#### ***Progress Report, March 2002***

In the fall of 2000, Saskatchewan Learning launched the PLAR Enhancement Funding Initiative to advance PLAR in the postsecondary learning system. This report provides a detailed background of the initiative and a description of each pilot project, and charts the progress of 11 PLAR pilots undertaken in 2001–02 in conjunction with the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board (SLFDB)'s PLAR Services Project (October 2000–March 2002). The PLAR Services Project provided ongoing resource support to pilot Coordinators and led the preparation of the Progress Report. See:

<http://www.slfdb.com/plar/whatsnew/PLARreport.pdf>

For additional information, see the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board (SLFDB) – PLAR Services Project Final Report and Toolkit at:

<http://www.slfdb.com/plar/plar-report.pdf> or contact [slfdb@slfdb.com](mailto:slfdb@slfdb.com).

#### ***Final Report, March 2003***

This report (a companion document to the Progress Report) presents a synopsis of 11 PLAR pilots undertaken at various postsecondary institutions, including an integrated discussion of lessons learned and best practices. The pilot projects comprise a range of activities aimed at building institutional capacity for PLAR such as developing an on-line database for PLAR-Ready courses, PLAR assessment tools, and portfolio processes. The findings provide insight, from an institutional perspective, on effectively implementing PLAR processes. Samples of tools/materials developed are also included in the report. See:

[http://www.sasklearning.gov.sk.ca/P/rpl/docs/Enhancement\\_plar\\_03\\_19.pdf](http://www.sasklearning.gov.sk.ca/P/rpl/docs/Enhancement_plar_03_19.pdf)

### **Saskatchewan Learning PLAR Professional Development Fund**

Ten learning institutions are coordinating 12 professional development activities for faculty/staff/community designed to enhance institutional capacity to deliver PLAR services for learners. These activities will be undertaken in the fall/winter of 2003.

Contact: **Nancy Tam**, (306) 933-5324, [ntam@sasked.gov.sk.ca](mailto:ntam@sasked.gov.sk.ca)

### **Online Guide for Facilitators of Portfolio Development**

Saskatchewan Learning is designing an *Online Guide for Facilitators of Portfolio Development* (projected launch in spring 2004) to support/enhance the expertise of various stakeholder groups seeking to deliver portfolio development workshops to

diverse client groups. The Guide will provide a contextual framework for utilizing portfolios as a multi-purpose tool with the aim of providing an array of sample activities/formats that can be “mixed and matched” according to the identified goals and needs of the participants. It is anticipated that workshops will be delivered to further orient stakeholders to the portfolio development process and the online portfolio guide.

Contact: **Nancy Tam**, (306) 933-5324, [ntam@sasked.gov.sk.ca](mailto:ntam@sasked.gov.sk.ca)

### **PLAR: Applications for an Aboriginal Model of Holistic Learning**

In the winter/spring of 2001–02, four PLAR sessions with an Aboriginal cultural perspective were co-sponsored by Saskatchewan Learning, the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board, and several postsecondary institutions. These sessions focused on integrating PLAR and portfolio development into a model of holistic education based on traditional Aboriginal cultural knowledge and the Aboriginal definition of *holistic learning*. This process challenges the learner to develop the knowledge, skills, and qualities to become a whole person. A transcript of proceedings of a one-day seminar delivered by Diane Hill at Joe Duquette High School is available at <http://www.tyendinaga.net/fnti/prior/diane>

Contact: **Nancy Tam**, (306) 933-5324, [ntam@sasked.gov.sk.ca](mailto:ntam@sasked.gov.sk.ca)

### **Saskatchewan Universities PLAR Project**

The Saskatchewan Universities PLAR Project (1998–99) investigated the implementation of PLAR at the university level under the leadership of Dr. Angie Wong. The University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina jointly initiated several pilot projects, a series of professional development workshops and organized a provincial symposium under the umbrella of PLAR. For additional information, see: <http://www.extension.usask.ca/ExtensionDivision/resources/PLAR/index.html>

Contact: **Dr. Angie Wong**, (306) 966-5564, [Angie.Wong@Usask.ca](mailto:Angie.Wong@Usask.ca)

## **YUKON**

### **Territorial Policy**

The Yukon Government's Advanced Education Branch supports the training and development of PLAR at Yukon College.

### **Additional PLAR Initiatives and Related Activity**

June 2003: PLAR training planned at Yukon College for instructors, administrators, admissions staff, HR people, policy makers. Modular approach will be taught by CAPLA personnel and will provide credit in the Adult Learning Program from Red River College.

### **PLAR in Postsecondary Institutions**

**Yukon College** offers a variety of opportunities to challenge courses. Advanced credit is offered for courses taken through other institutions. A small number of programs encourage portfolio development for PLAR credit. More than 22 students have now received 5 to 15 credits based on field placements or experience.

Contact: **S. Beckman**, [sbeckman@yukoncollege.yk.ca](mailto:sbeckman@yukoncollege.yk.ca)

### 3. FOCUS GROUP PROCESS

#### Development of a PLAR Electronic Survey Instrument through a Focus Group Approach

CAPLA developed preliminary questions that provided the starting point upon which further refinements were built. The three focus group facilitators — Dr. Angie Wong (Saskatchewan), Dr. David Livingstone (Ontario), and Dr. Douglas Myers (Nova Scotia) — later expanded upon the set of questions, and a draft document was prepared for the first focus group in Saskatoon.

The three focus groups took place during the last 10 days of March 2003 and resulted in feedback from stakeholders in western, central, and eastern regions of Canada. In all cases, the focus groups coincided with other events already taking place, which reduced additional demands on people's time and maximized their investment in travel costs. The use of CAPLA's pan-Canadian network facilitated such efficiencies. The number of focus group participants ranged from 12 to 23 individuals, and all of the groups had college and university faculty and staff in attendance.

The first focus group was held in conjunction with the launch of Saskatchewan's *Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Referral Guide*, March 19–20, 2003 (following the first celebration in Regina in which the Honourable Judy Junor, Minister of Learning participated). The *Referral Guide* was developed to streamline referral pathways for counsellors/advisors by providing access to centralized information on learning recognition opportunities in the provincial education/training system. The guide serves as a valuable resource for both learners and advisors who require an understanding of the three components of RPL — qualification recognition, credit transfer, and prior learning assessment and recognition.

A breakfast focus group, facilitated by Dr. Angie Wong from the University of Saskatchewan was held in Saskatoon prior to the Referral Guide Workshop on March 20. Dr. Wong led the participants through a discussion process that resulted in modifications to the survey questions. The revised draft formed the basis for discussions at the next focus group, which took place the following week in Ontario.

The Ontario focus group dovetailed with the College University Consortium Council (CUCC) Forum taking place in Toronto on Monday, March 24, 2003 at the Bank of Montreal's Institute for Learning. Coincidentally, the focus of the Forum was college/university transfer and the keynote speaker was Dr. David Livingstone from OISE/UT. Dr. Livingstone's address was entitled "Transferability of Prior Learning in Postsecondary Education: Problems and Prospects." Dr. Livingstone agreed to facilitate the Ontario focus group, which took place immediately following the close of the forum. A light supper was provided. Of the three events, this focus group attracted the largest number of participants, with 23 people attending. Suggested modifications to the survey were noted, and recommendations were relayed to the final focus group event in Nova Scotia, which took place 48 hours later.



The PLA Centre in Halifax was the location of the final focus group on Wednesday, March 26, 2003. The Centre was hosting its monthly Board meeting, and CAPLA was invited to use the opportunity to arrange a focus group session directly following the Board meeting. Refreshments were provided. Members of the Board of Directors were joined by other stakeholders, and the focus group was facilitated by the Centre's Executive Director, Douglas Myers. Suggested improvements and new ideas were recorded and later integrated into the questionnaire.

The iterative process that was used to build the survey tool was an effective way to improve both its wording and format.

## 4. SURVEY RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The CAPLA 2003 Survey was conducted in April 2003 to examine various issues regarding the implementation of PLAR policies in colleges, universities and university-colleges. Several issues were uncovered, including a need for increased targeted funding and improved resources for overburdened faculty and staff.

The survey showed that while PLAR respondents believe in the credibility of the process and feel that it benefits learners, there is a lack of institutional support and, in some cases, faculty resistance to the fundamental purpose of recognition of prior learning. Some survey respondents reported that the policies currently in place require some clarification because they sometimes lead to confusion and inconsistencies in PLAR implementation.

In general, the individuals currently involved with PLAR appear to be very committed to the cause, and believe it is valuable — although they also note areas of improvement required in PLAR implementation and much work that could be done. Most of the issues are not concerned with whether or not PLAR should exist, but are concerned with how to make it work better for the institution, the learners, and the faculty.

The main areas identified for future focus are:

- dedicated funding for PLAR policy implementation
- more consideration regarding incentives required in all institutions to promote PLAR funding, including funding for staff positions dedicated to PLAR
- increased information regarding, and promotion about, PLAR processes and procedures, as they are viewed to be somewhat complex by both learners and administrators

## **OVERVIEW**

Prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) involves all processes (advising, assessment, evaluation, transcription) associated with informal learning acquired by adults.

For example, the knowledge and skills obtained through employment, on-the-job training, volunteer work, independent study, military service, credit for workplace training and other life experiences, which are evaluated against the learning outcomes of a program or course through the use of a challenge test, demonstration, case study, or portfolio assessment, would qualify as PLAR.

This study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of current PLAR policies, as well as to determine how the PLAR mechanism works at various postsecondary institutions across Canada. A number of issues in the areas of Institutional Support, Learner Support and Faculty/Staff Support were assessed. Survey participants also gave feedback on the Future of PLAR at their Institutions.

This study did not examine transfer credit or articulation practices between institutions through official transcripts.

## METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANTS

The survey was conducted over a three-week period in April 2003. Participants were invited to participate in the Web-based survey via e-mails containing a link to the survey. The data were gathered and reported by a third-party survey vendor, Clear Picture Corporation, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of responses.

Of the approximately 251 e-mail invitations that were sent, 81 recipients participated in the survey, yielding a participation rate of 32%. While this participation rate may seem low, there is no way of knowing whether this is the *true* participation rate, as it is unknown whether all e-mails were received by the intended recipients. In other words, these numbers do not include invitations that were known not to reach their destination.

This participation rate is consistent with other surveys conducted with a similar population under similar conditions. Thus, while survey responses should be interpreted with some degree of caution and cannot be said unquestionably to represent the entire population, the participation rate is acceptable. Any trends associated with the results are probably representative of the group as a whole, and can be used to draw reasonable conclusions about the state of PLAR in Canadian postsecondary educational institutions.

A detailed summary of survey participation by institution can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1: Survey Participation by Institution**

Institution	n	% of total
College	42	51.9
University	29	35.8
University-College	8	9.9
Did Not Reply*	2	2.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100.0</b>

\*\*Did Not Reply" refers to survey respondents who completed the survey, but did not indicate to what type of institution they belong.

Please note that the results from the university-college group are represented in all tables within this report. However, due to the small number of respondents from university-colleges (as a result of a smaller pool of institutions of this type in Canada), caution must be taken in interpreting results.

A detailed summary of survey participation by province can be found in Table 2. Please note that results in this report will not be presented on a provincial level, as most provinces have small numbers of schools and could be easily identified, compromising respondents' confidentiality.

**Table 2: Survey Participation by Province**

<b>Location</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Alberta	14	17.3
British Columbia	11	13.6
Manitoba	5	6.2
New Brunswick	2	2.5
Newfoundland and Labrador	3	3.7
Northwest Territories	0	0
Nova Scotia	5	6.2
Nunavut	0	0.0
Ontario	26	32.1
Prince Edward Island	1	1.2
Quebec	10	12.3
Saskatchewan	3	3.7
Yukon	0	0.0
n/a	1	1.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

### PLAR Policy and Admissions

**Table 3** shows the percentage of institutions with a formal PLAR policy in place, or plans to institute a policy. Universities fall well below colleges and university-colleges in terms of having a formal institutional PLAR policy in place. In colleges, almost three-quarters had a policy in place, and of those that did not, most had plans to institute a policy. Universities and university-colleges were much less likely to have plans to institute a policy in the future. The existence of a policy or plan to institute a policy in the future was the greatest difference between colleges and universities within the survey.

More than half of the schools within each type of institution used informal PLAR practices in 2002. In fact, universities reported more informal PLAR policies than formal policies, indicating that there may be a need to institute a formal policy in many universities. Because only 21% of universities indicated future plans for PLAR policy implementation, this seems to be an area that should be explored in further detail. It appears as though universities are conducting PLAR activities without the assistance of formal policies.

The high percentage of colleges using informal PLAR practices is also interesting. It cannot be determined by this study whether the use of informal practices is in addition to, or in lieu of, the formal policies.

**Note:** **Table 3** and all the remaining tables in this report (unless otherwise indicated) depict the percentage of “Yes” responses. Participants answered either “Yes” or “No” or “Don’t know” to survey questions.

**Table 3: PLAR Policy and Admissions**

Q#	Question	Coll	Univ	Univ-Coll	Total
1.1	Do you have a formal institutional policy on PLAR that has been passed by the Senate or a Board of Governors?	73.8	31.0	62.5	57.5
1.1.1	If a PLAR policy is not in place, are there plans to institute one in the future?	81.8	21.1	0.0	41.2
1.1.3	Are there other PLAR policies, procedures, and/or informal practices that are used in specific programs within your institution?	59.5	53.6	62.5	57.5
1.2	Do learners have to be admitted into the institution before they can apply to have their prior experiential learning assessed?	50.0	52.2	62.5	53.3
1.3	Are there particular policies for the admission of adult learners into specific programs?	71.4	69.2	25.0	65.4

With regard to admissions, the difference between institutions regarding whether learners must be admitted prior to assessment is relatively small. About half of all

colleges and universities, and slightly more university-colleges, require learners be admitted to their schools before they can be assessed for prior learning.

While 71% of colleges and 69% of universities have policies concerning the admission of learners into programs, only 25% of university-colleges have such policies. In most colleges and universities, respondents indicated that the policy they used was a “mature student admission policy.” No university-college mentioned use of a similar policy in their institution.

There is an interesting gap between the existence of a formal PLAR policy in universities (31%) and the existence of a policy for admission of adult learners into specific programs (69%). This gap is almost non-existent for colleges. This discrepancy can be interpreted in several ways; however, the comments generated by the survey shed some light on why this might be the case.

In general, the comments suggest that colleges appear to be more positive about crediting prior learning. Universities are more skeptical about the validity of prior learning assessment, and there is a worry that crediting prior learning experiences can negatively impact the value of a degree as well as the reputation of the institution. Some university respondents indicated that the “degree [is] less respected if high content of PLAR -based credits” and “the reputation of their [learners’] degrees might be affected.” It appears as though the difference in PLAR policy existence between colleges and universities may be due to underlying fundamental beliefs about the value of recognizing prior learning.

### PLAR Support and Infrastructure

As depicted in **Table 4** below, colleges have a good deal more staff and resources than do university-colleges, and especially universities. Less than half of all universities had a PLAR office/coordinator, academic counsellor or program/faculty advisor, but more than half of all colleges had the same staff or services. These findings are supported by comments given at the end of the survey, where respondents were asked to list things that would improve their institution’s approach to PLAR. In addition to funding, both colleges and universities felt that the PLAR approach would be improved by the addition of dedicated staff and resources.

**Table 4: PLAR Support and Infrastructure**

Q#	Question	Coll	Univ	Univ-Coll	Total
1.4 Are there any of the following people and/or services in place to provide support for implementing the PLAR policy?					
1.4.1	PLAR Office/PLAR coordinator	50.0	38.5	57.1	46.6
1.4.2	Academic counsellors	67.6	26.9	42.9	51.4
1.4.3	Program/course faculty advisors	75.7	42.3	62.5	63.0
1.5 Is there an infrastructure in place to collect and record data such as:					

1.5.1	The number of entries/requests for PLAR services	43.9	23.1	50.0	37.7
1.5.2	Assessment outcomes	77.5	32.0	62.5	61.3
1.5.3	Completion rates	52.5	32.0	25.0	44.0
1.5.4	Other data	37.5	34.8	14.3	33.9

**Table 4** also reports the results for PLAR infrastructure within the institutions. Again, colleges report more infrastructure than universities, particularly with regard to collecting data around assessment outcomes, where there is a 45% difference between colleges and universities. University-colleges fall somewhere between colleges and universities, with the exception of the recording of completion rates, where only 25% of university-colleges report collection of this information.

A comment analysis was conducted on open-ended questions regarding the questions addressed in Table 4. A number of colleges reported that PLAR data were recorded on their Student Information Systems (SIS). No specific structure or data capture system was mentioned by any university respondents. The results revealed in the comment analysis support that PLAR data are best collected when people and infrastructure are already in place, and can “piggyback” on existing methods of data storage.

### Number of PLAR Assessments

**Table 5** shows whether the number of assessments has increased, decreased, or stayed the same over the past two years. It appears as though some respondents replied inconsistently to this question as, intuitively, the results should total 100%. Regardless, it is the trend of the responses that is important.

In general, the pattern indicates that PLAR assessments have either increased or stayed the same within colleges and universities. The number of college assessments has increased to a greater extent than university assessments. While a small number of colleges report that their assessment numbers have fallen, half of university-colleges indicate that their number of assessments have fallen in the past two years.

**Table 5: PLAR Assessments**

Q#	Question	Coll	Univ	Univ-Coll	Total
1.6 If your institution tracks PLAR assessments, has the number of assessments in the past two years:					
1.6.1.	Increased	58.1	36.4	80.0	55.3
1.6.2	Stayed the same	55.0	40.0	0.0	51.5
1.6.3	Decreased	16.7	0.0	50.0	13.6

**Table 6** shows the number of PLAR assessments conducted in 2002. It is interesting to note that institutions tend to either administer a low or a high number of assessments. Seventy per cent (70%) of institutions conducted 50 or fewer



assessments per year, while 10% of institutions conducted more than 300 assessments per year. The remaining institutions are spread among the remaining categories.

**Table 6: Number of PLAR Assessments in 2002**

Number of PLAR Assessments	%	# of Institutions	# of Colleges	# of Univ	# of Univ-Colleges
1 to 50	70.4	57	24 (44%)	26 (47%)	5 (9%)
51–100	6.2	5	4 (8%)	1 (20%)	0
101–150	8.6	7	4 (58%)	1 (14%)	2 (28%)
151–200	2.5	2	2 (100%)	0	0
201–250	1.2	1	1 (100%)	0	0
251–300	1.2	1	1 (100%)	0	0
Over 300	9.9	8	6 (75%)	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>8</b>

\*Two institutions participated in the survey but did not indicate institution type. Thus, they were not included in the three columns in which institutions are broken out. Percentage of total assessments is included in parentheses.

Close to three-quarters of institutions conducted less than fifty assessments in 2002. Only three of 29, or 10%, of universities conducted more than 50 PLAR assessments (and 17% of university-colleges). However, 18 of 42 colleges, or 43%, conducted more than 50 assessments. This figure is quite interesting and seems to indicate that there is more formal PLAR assessment occurring in colleges than in universities or university-colleges.

### How PLAR Assessments Are Recorded

Survey respondents were asked “*How do you record PLAR credits on transcripts?*”

*College* — When asked how they recorded PLAR credits on transcripts, of 41 respondents who commented, 14 (34%) indicated that they recorded PLAR credits “the same as other credits.” Ten (24%) recorded PLAR credits as “CR,” while 4 (10%) recorded PLAR credits as “transfer credits.” There were various other responses unique to each college; please refer to the comment report to view these responses.

*University* — Unlike the college respondents, there were no trends evident among universities in terms of how PLAR credits are recorded. Many universities indicated that they do not record PLAR on transcripts at all. Again, please refer to the comment report for details.

*University-College* — The responses for university-colleges were across the board. Some record PLAR credits as “Prior Learning Credits,” and some as “transfer credits,” as well as various other titles.

Because previous results showed that there was a relatively large amount of informal assessment taking place, it is possible that the recording of PLAR credits is also done

in a more “informal” manner. (That is, assessments are not recorded according to terminology based on a particular policy.) It may be faculty’s ability to generate advanced standing that leads to fewer responses not only for this category, but also for the question regarding how many assessments institutions conduct.

## LEARNER SUPPORT

### Learner Access to PLAR

**Table 7** shows how learners access information about PLAR policy and procedures. College and university learners access PLAR information via Web sites most, followed by PLAR practitioner or advisor.

There is an interesting difference between colleges/university-colleges and universities with regard to institutional calendars. More than 85% of learners in the former group access PLAR information in the calendars, but more than 30% fewer in the university group access information in that manner. Once again, this may point to a decreased willingness on the part of universities to accept PLAR initiatives and perhaps a fundamental resistance to even an acknowledgement of prior learning.

**Table 7: How Learners Access Information About PLAR Policy and Procedures**

Q#	Question	Coll	Univ	Univ-Coll	Total
2.1.1	Web site	89.5	82.4	71.4	85.9
2.1.2	Print-based brochure	68.6	52.9	69.0	62.7
2.1.3	Institutional calendar	86.5	52.5	85.7	80.3
2.1.4	A PLAR practitioner/advisor	76.9	70.6	66.7	74.6
2.1.5	Community contacts	40.6	33.3	33.3	37.0
2.1.6	PLAR orientation sessions	22.3	25.0	0.0	21.1
2.1.7	Other	61.5	45.5	66.7	57.5

An analysis of comments related to this question did not fully corroborate the quantitative findings presented in **Table 7**. Comments indicated that colleges also appeared to use advisors (e.g., program, student, PLA faculty, academic) to a greater extent to disseminate information about PLAR. Universities were more likely to offer access via materials, as opposed to staff, such as by university handbooks. PLAR access to information in university-colleges was sometimes done by word-of-mouth, or direct access with registrars.

## Learner Assessments

**Table 8** shows that, once again, colleges have more policies in place than other institutions. However, few institutions reported that their policies specified how much time it would take to design, initiate and undertake an assessment. This is an interesting finding, supported by comments made in other parts of the survey. Those comments indicate that many assessors find the process to be cumbersome and time-consuming.

**Table 8: Learner Assessments**

Q#	Question	Coll	Univ	Univ-Coll	Total
2.3	Is there a policy that requires all courses or programs to use learning outcome statements to describe what a learner is expected to know and do as a result of completing a particular course or program?	71.8	26.1	50.0	54.3
2.3.1	Are course learning outcomes available to those interested in PLAR?	67.5	36.8	33.3	56.7
2.4.1	Do your institutional policy and procedures specify how much time it will take to design, initiate and undertake an assessment?	19.5	10.5	0.0	16.2
2.4.2	Do your institutional policy and procedures specify how much time it will take to provide feedback to PLAR candidates after the assessment has taken place?	32.7	22.2	0.0	27.7
2.6	Does your institution offer courses for learners to prepare for portfolio-assisted assessment?	31.7	13.6	42.9	26.4

## Fees

**Table 9** shows that a greater number of colleges and universities charge assessment fees than application or admission fees. More colleges in general charge fees than universities, but this may be because colleges are more likely to have formal PLAR policies in place.

The fact that colleges charge an assessment fee for assessments, and that they see the number of assessments increasing, suggests there is value to the learners, as well as institutions, as a result of a formal PLAR process.

**Table 9: PLAR Fees**

Q#	Question	Coll	Univ	Univ-Coll	Total
2.5 Does your institution charge PLAR fees for the following services?					
2.5.1	Application/admission fee	57.9	38.9	50.0	53.2
2.5.2	Assessment fee	80.0	50.0	50.0	67.6
2.5.3	Other fee	13.3	0.0	0.0	10.4

## FACULTY AND STAFF SUPPORT

### Faculty Training, Resources and Incentives

**Table 10** indicates that once again, colleges are more supportive of PLAR than universities. Though PLAR training and institutional assistance is low for all institutions, it is lowest in universities.

Regarding outside sources of expertise, respondents appeared to be quite familiar with knowing where to go for additional PLAR information. College responses included “PLAR provincial policy framework Web site and resources,” “other institutions,” “PLAR Web site,” “PLAR colleagues,” as well as “CAPLA.” As outside sources, some universities listed “other institutions which have implemented PLAR,” “PLAR centre in Halifax,” “other institutions,” and “assessors from professional organizations.” A respondent from a university-college indicated “other institutions which have implemented PLAR are good sources of information and expertise.”

**Table 10: Faculty Training and Resources**

Q#	Question	Coll	Univ	Univ-Coll	Total
3.1	Do faculty and staff receive training and assistance from the institution in their roles and responsibilities as PLAR advisors and assessors?	50.0	38.1	50.0	47.7
3.1.1	Are there other PLAR sources of expertise outside the institution upon which your faculty and staff could draw?	70.3	58.3	50.0	63.8
3.2	Are faculty and staff provided with resources (i.e., flexible assessment tools, adult learning strategies) that illustrate and promote good practice in PLAR?	37.8	18.2	50.0	32.8

There were varied comments regarding question 3.2 in **Table 10** above. Some colleges indicated that faculty receives illustrations of good PLAR practices from the PLAR Administration Guide, while two universities listed that they receive this information from a faculty handbook. However, the fact that only 18% of universities reported receiving a resource that illustrates good PLAR practices is alarming, and is suggested as an item to address.

**Table 11** indicates that the major form of incentive is financial compensation, as well as “other.” However, even this number is quite low, as less than a third of institutions offer any kind of incentive at all. Just over 20% of colleges offer release time to faculty, but no universities or university-colleges indicated that they did so. Few institutions offered research opportunities as an incentive to faculty and staff.

**Table 11: Faculty Incentives**

Q#	Question	Coll	Univ	Univ-Coll	Total
3.3 Does your institution encourage faculty and staff to engage in the PLAR process via incentives?					
3.3.1	Release time	20.5	0.0	0.0	12.7
3.3.2	Research opportunities	2.9	4.8	0.0	3.2

3.3.3	Financial compensation	29.7	27.3	50.0	31.8
3.3.4	Other	12.9	10.0	33.3	13.0

In general, universities offer very little to faculty and staff as an incentive to engage in PLAR processes. It may be the case that PLAR compensation is not really a factor, as faculty may perceive their PLAR responsibilities to be part of their jobs.

### Faculty Assessment Methods

Challenge exams are the most popular method used to assess prior learning, particularly in colleges and university-colleges, as shown in **Table 12**. Portfolios are also frequently used methods by colleges. There is a large discrepancy between colleges and universities on the use of presentations, with far greater use in colleges. Colleges, as well as university-colleges, also appear to use a wider variety of assessment methods than universities.

**Table 12: Faculty Assessment Methods**

Q#	Question	Coll	Univ	Univ-Coll	Total
3.4 Are faculty assessors using a variety of assessment methods to evaluate prior experiential learning?					
3.4.1	Portfolio	81.1	60.0	83.3	75.0
3.4.2	Demonstration	89.5	27.8	66.7	69.8
3.4.3	Case studies	42.9	11.1	40.0	33.9
3.4.4	Presentations	83.3	17.6	60.0	62.7
3.4.5	Challenge exams	94.7	50.0	83.3	80.3
3.4.6	Other	25.0	23.1	60.0	28.9

Portfolio assessment was found to be quite prevalent, especially for universities, where they appeared to be even more popular than challenge exams (60% versus 50%). Faculty members rely on exams to assess all learners, including those in traditional classrooms, and it would appear intuitive to assume that exams would be a favoured method to assess PLAR learners as well.

Though most prevalent overall, portfolios are a less common method of student assessment in university settings compared to colleges and university-colleges, and potentially more difficult and/or time consuming to assess. It would be interesting to explore this finding further.

## **FUTURE OF PLAR AT YOUR INSTITUTION**

### **Significant Incentives for PLAR Implementation**

This section will address the aggregated results of qualitative responses to open-ended questions. Selected verbatim comments are included, and indicated by quotation (") marks. Please review the comment report for verbatim responses to these questions.

#### ***The Institution***

Overall, survey respondents from all institutions indicated that the three most significant incentives for the implementation of PLAR from the institution's perspective were:

- 1) learner recruitment to the institution
- 2) addressing adult learner needs
- 3) increasing institutional access to learners

When separated out according to institution, the top two incentives were slightly different.

#### ***College***

- 1) learner recruitment
- 2) increased funding

"PLAR meets the needs of changing student demographics. It is a process that contributes to the efficiency of the educational system and eliminates redundant training."

#### ***University***

- 1) learner recruitment
- 2) increasing institutional access for learners

"Attracts highly qualified students."

#### ***University-College***

- 1) addressing adult learner needs
- 2) learner recruitment

"Responsibility to the learner and the community. We owe applicants the opportunity to be placed at their optimal level. Training should not be repeated. When learners succeed, we succeed."

Clearly, the top incentive for institutions to implement PLAR policies and practices is in the recruitment of students to the institution.

### **The Learners**

Overall, survey respondents from all institutions indicated that the three most significant incentives for the implementation of PLAR from the learner's perspective were:

- 1) Decreasing time to degree/diploma
- 2) Recognizing prior learning
- 3) Eliminating duplication of work/courses

When separated out according to institution, the top two incentives were in agreement across all institutions, in accordance with the overall results.

#### **College**

- 1) decreasing time to degree/diploma
- 2) recognizing prior learning

"Facilitates and expedites learning."

#### **University**

- 1) decreasing time to degree/diploma
- 2) recognizing prior learning

"Recognition for skills acquired/abilities."

#### **University-College**

- 1) decreasing time to degree/diploma
- 2) recognizing prior learning

"Opportunity to complete diploma or certificate more quickly."

"Formal recognition of experiential knowledge."

The incentives for learners to participate in PLAR were reported to be the same, regardless of institution. Decreased time to degree or diploma was the most frequently stated incentive, followed by recognition for prior learning. These are significant incentives, and in and of themselves are worthwhile and support PLAR initiatives.

### **The Faculty**

Overall, survey respondents from all institutions indicated that the three most significant incentives for the implementation of PLAR from faculty's perspective were:

- 1) PLAR policies promote assessment
- 2) Addressing student needs
- 3) Financial incentives

#### **College**

- 1) PLAR policies promote assessment
- 2) Addressing student needs

"Driver for review of assessment practices and outcomes-based criteria."

"Respect and assist students to achieve their educational goals."



**University**

- 1) PLAR policies promote assessment
- 2) Diversity of students in class

“Allows assessment of learner level and readiness.”

“Committed students in programs”

“Range of learners, diversity in the classroom.”

**University-College**

- 1) PLAR policies promote assessment
- 2) Addressing student needs

“S’il reçoit une compensation pour le travail de faire une RDA si ce travail est très exigeant.”

“The ability to help students to succeed. This somewhat altruistic concept is a main attraction of working in a postsecondary environment.”

When separated out according to institution, the top incentive was the same for colleges, universities and university colleges: PLAR policies drive assessment. While both college and university-colleges indicated that addressing student needs was the second most significant incentive, universities indicated that the diversity of students in class as a result of PLAR was the second most significant incentive.

Many of the comments made in this section speak to the level of commitment and the real desire of some faculty to make a difference in students’ learning. Most of the responses were positive and indicated a desire by faculty to assist student learning in any way they could.

**Significant Disincentives for PLAR Implementation**

As before, this section will address the aggregated results, after a comment analysis. Selected verbatim comments are included, and indicated by quotation (“”) marks. The comment report provides verbatim responses to these questions.

**The Institution**

Overall, survey respondents from all institutions indicated that the three most significant disincentives for the implementation of PLAR from institution’s perspective:

- 1) Cost of running program/revenue loss
- 2) Loss of credibility of degree
- 3) Lack of time

When separated out according to institution, the top disincentive was the same for all three institution types.

**College**

- 1) Cost of running program/revenue loss
- 2) Lack of time

“Potentially reducing tuition revenues and government funding.”

“Aucune ressources humaines ayant cela comme tâche principale.”

“Extra workloads related to preparing and evaluating.”

**University**

- 1) Cost of running program/revenue loss
- 2) Lack of credibility of degree

“Loss of credibility of degree because of acceptance of credits from non-traditional learning experiences.”

“Finding resources to do evaluations.”

“Not financially self-supporting.”

**University-College**

- 1) Cost of running program/revenue loss
- 2) Faculty resistance

“Time taken to do the assessment is unstructured and undetermined. This makes it harder to adjust workloads.”

“Le coût associé à l'infrastructure d'évaluation.”

The top disincentive for PLAR implementation was cost of program/loss of revenue.

The loss of revenue refers to the fact that students are able to obtain credit for courses for which they did not have to pay tuition. However, the second most significant disincentives differed across institution types. Colleges indicated that they did not have enough time or people to tackle the additional work required to implement PLAR policies. Universities had a real issue with PLAR's impact on the credibility of degrees offered by their schools. Similarly, university-colleges had issues with faculty resisting participation in PLAR.

**The Learners**

Overall, survey respondents from all institutions indicated that the three most significant disincentives for the implementation of PLAR from learner's perspective were:

- 1) More preparation than originally thought
- 2) Cost
- 3) Lack of knowledge/support/awareness

There was agreement across all three institution types that the most significant disincentive for learners was that it took much more time to prepare for PLAR than they had expected, followed by the perceived high cost of the program.

**College**

- 1) More preparation than originally thought
- 2) Cost

“Process is more complicated and time-consuming than may have anticipated.”

“Some students view the course cost is too high.”

“Lack of knowledge of all aspects of PLAR.”

**University**

- 1) More preparation than originally thought
- 2) Cost

“Commitment of time to process.”

“Cost of PLAR it too high.”

**University-College**

- 1) More preparation than originally thought
- 2) Cost

“Si les coûts sont trop élevés.”

“Work involved in preparing is greater than anticipated.”

“Lack of support during process.”

A number of respondents from each of the institutions also indicated that “confusion” and “complexity” regarding the PLAR process was a significant disincentive to participation.

**The Faculty**

Overall, survey respondents from all institutions indicated that the three most significant disincentives for the implementation of PLAR from faculty’s perspective were:

- 1) Lack of time
- 2) Work overload
- 3) Cost/no compensation

There were some differences among institutions on disincentives of PLAR implementation from the faculty perspective.

**College**

- 1) Lack of time
- 2) Work overload

“Time to prepare and assess students.”

“PLAR assessment becomes an “add-on” to their already busy workload.”

**University**

- 1) Lack of time
- 2) Credibility of assessments/evaluations

“Taking time from teaching and research.”

“Distrust of PLAR processes, results, reputation.”

**University-College**

- 1) Cost/lack of compensation
- 2) Work overload

“Lack of adequate remuneration or incentives to participate in PLAR.”

“Lack of recognition of assessment workload.”

An interesting difference that consistently emerges from analysis of this survey data is that universities find the PLAR process to lack credibility. Perhaps it is the nature of university education or the lack of understanding the rigor associated with the PLAR process that causes this unease. Universities in general have goals that focus on research, in addition to education. Colleges are more focused on educating students in a manner that will help them with their particular line of work. The assessment of experiential learning is much more compatible with goals of a college than goals of a university.

It is also interesting that universities are more likely to question the credibility of assessment practices, yet are also less likely to have policies in place that could ensure consistent application and validity of practices. Since most respondents seem to believe that “policy drives application,” adoption of formal PLAR policies might help more systematic, broader implementation of PLAR practices in universities.

**Impact of Items on Integration of PLAR**

**Table 13** below depicts the impact of items on the integration of PLAR. Respondents answered this question as having “significant impact” or “no impact” on their institutional cultures.

As expected and supported by the comments, targeted government funding would potentially have a significant impact on at least half of all institutions, regardless of type. Colleges would experience the most significant impact.

Internal spending priorities and mandated policies and procedures would have a significant impact on at least half of all colleges, universities and university-colleges as well, but to a lesser extent than targeted government funding.

**Table 13: Impact of Items on the Integration of PLAR**

Q#	Question	Coll	Univ	Univ-Coll	Total
4.3 What impact would the following three items have on the integration of PLAR into your institutional culture?					
4.3.1	Targeted government funding	83.3	50.0	50.0	69.1
4.3.2	Internal spending priorities	52.8	45.8	50.0	51.5
4.3.3	Mandated policies and procedures	51.4	56.5	66.7	56.1

### **Demands for PLAR**

Survey respondents were asked in which specific programs demands for PLAR are the highest. Responses were analyzed separately for each of the three institutions, as the curricula they offer are significantly different.

#### **College**

- 1) Business
- 2) Health care (e.g., nursing, paramedicine)
- 3) Early Childhood Education
- 4) Computer skills
- 5) Human services
- 6) Technology
- 7) Education

#### **University**

- 1) Business
- 2) Health care
- 3) Human services (e.g., social work)
- 4) Information technology/computers
- 5) Education

#### **University-College**

- 1) Business
- 2) Social work
- 3) Early Childhood Education
- 4) Computers

### **Improvement of Institution's Approach to PLAR**

Survey respondents were asked to list three things that would improve their institution's approach to PLAR. What was interesting is that though the comments were analyzed separately for college, university and university-college, the things

listed were common across all institutions. Four major areas emerged: funding, dedicated staff, implementation of a policy, and institutional support.

The results are presented in a general format below, as they are not specific to any one type of institution. The verbatim comments presented are indicated in quotation marks.

### ***Funding***

Funding was the item listed most frequently for colleges, universities and university-colleges as something that would help them improve their approach to PLAR. While the majority of responses were general (e.g., “funding”), some respondents did specify the purpose of the funding. Most frequently, it was funding for additional human resources.

College “Designated funding for PLAR”

College “More funding for infrastructure and training”

College “Additional funding to ensure appropriate administration”

University “Secure and ongoing funding for the provincial funding body”

University-College “Funding for dedicated resources, especially an advisor/ administrator to help figure out how to do it and who to do it with”

### ***Dedicated Staff***

Colleges, universities, and university-colleges all reported that dedicated staff were needed to improve implementation of PLAR at their institutions. While university respondents were general in their request, indicating that they needed staff, college respondents were more specific. College respondents, as well as university-college respondents, requested a coordinator to help them run their PLAR programs.

College “A full-time staff person dedicated only to PLAR. Currently there is one part-time staff person who has multiple responsibilities, one of which is PLAR.”

College “Continued allocation of resources for PLAR advising services”

University “Sufficient staff to advise and assess”

University “Increase in PLAR staff hours (again a matter of \$\$\$)”

University-College “More resources to undertake PLAR assessment”

University-College “Funding for a PLA Co-ordinator position”

### ***Policy Implementation and Clarification***

A number of colleges and universities indicated that they either needed to have a policy to begin with, or needed a more clear policy. University-colleges did not indicate that this was a need for them. Where policy is lacking, there appears to be duplication of effort, as well as confusion about how to handle PLAR issues.

College “Readily available PLAR policies; information so we don’t have to reinvent the wheel”

College “Clearer policies, both Ministry and Institutional”

University “Widely adopted university guidelines for PLAR”

University “Clear policy”

### ***Institutional Support***

Institutional support was another prominent area that respondents indicated would improve their institution's approach to PLAR. The support referred to here goes beyond "tangible" support, such as funding, and refers to more intangible methods of supporting PLAR. There appears to be a lack of understanding by the greater academic community that PLAR policies exist, and how important and valuable of a policy it is to many learners.

PLAR success is dependent on institutional support and our findings are that incentives to faculty are few and far between. If an institution does not fundamentally value a particular program or policy, it is less likely to support it via tangible methods.

College "Greater institutional response and support"

College "Understanding ("buy-in") of the academic community"

University "Support for implementation from government or mandated policies"

University "Explicit commitment by senior administration to creating a policy framework"

University "Communication about PLAR and its importance"

University-College "More support for time spent by faculty on assessments"

## **CONCLUSIONS AND PRIORITY AREAS**

This survey of colleges, universities and university-colleges in Canada in regard to their PLAR policies and practices yielded several interesting results, and also possible target areas on which to focus in order to improve PLAR implementation. This final section will discuss conclusions of the report. Priority areas are included, where appropriate.

### **Similarities and Differences in PLAR Approach among Colleges, Universities, and University Colleges**

It was interesting to note that some PLAR issues are relevant to each type of institution, while other issues are particular to only one institution. In further examination of policy and potential changes, the impact on the colleges and universities should be examined together, as well as separately.

### **Lack of Clarity in Policies**

Many survey respondents indicated that policies, when in place, were not as clear as they could be. Learners and faculty and staff could all benefit from policy clarification.

**ACTION AREA:** There appears to be a great deal of work warranted in the area of PLAR policy. This requires a detailed examination of current policies that is beyond the scope of this report.

### **Use of Informal PLAR Policies**

The survey found that there are a number of informal PLAR practices being undertaken. Further research could investigate the reasons for this: are the current policies inadequate? Are the current policies so cumbersome that faculty/staff choose to circumvent them? Is there a lack of infrastructure to support PLAR implementation? It is unclear why so much assessment is informal, but it is quite likely to be a combination of the reasons listed above, as well as a lack of information about PLAR policies. It would be interesting to note whether the frequency of informal assessment would decrease, in favour of formal assessment, as a result of an informational campaign designed to promote understanding of PLAR policies.

**ACTION AREA:** Gather information on what types of informal PLAR practices are being implemented, and why. This could be done via focus groups, interviews, etc.

### **Requests for Targeted Funding**

All institutions face the challenge of needing more funding and staff, balancing faculty workloads, and meeting the needs of students. A number of institutions have requested funding for a full-time PLAR coordinator. If PLAR's governing body wants to ultimately increase PLAR assessments and the program as a whole, it should consider providing funding for this position. Currently, there is a sense that institutions are overburdened.

**ACTION AREA:** Consider provision of funding for coordinator positions, where needed.



## **University Issues Regarding Credibility of PLAR Program and Policies**

There are some credibility issues evident in the university setting that are less likely to appear in colleges. As mentioned previously in the report, this uncertainty about the validity of the PLAR approach in universities may be explained by the fundamental goals of a university. Additionally, the type of knowledge-based learning offered by a university (e.g., analytical thinking) may require more time-consuming and expensive assessment than more skills-based learning associated with colleges. Emphasis placed on research in most universities probably serves to put PLAR, which is a learner qualification issue, as a lesser priority, compared to many other issues.

**ACTION AREA:** Consider further investigation as to why some universities are uncomfortable with the concept of offering credit for prior learning. Could be done using focus groups, interviews, etc.

## **A Need to Compensate Faculty Better**

The quantitative results show that faculty, regardless of type of institution, are not heavily compensated, if at all, for their work with PLAR programs. It is not clear whether or not PLAR processes are considered to be part of the normal workload for faculty. Though financial compensation may not always be feasible, institutions should examine other options for faculty incentives, such as reduction of workload.

**ACTION AREA:** Explore other incentives/compensation for faculty participation in PLAR.

## **A Need to Provide Resources to Faculty**

Many survey respondents indicated that they could use more information, resources and training to implement PLAR processes more effectively. For example, many university respondents indicated that they did not have access to resources that illustrate or promote good practices in PLAR implementation. If formal training is not possible, it should be ensured that each institution has access to, at a minimum, various written materials to which faculty and staff can refer.

**ACTION AREA:** Ensure that training and PLAR resources that are currently in existence get into the hands of faculty and staff who require them. Update those resources if necessary.

## **A Real Desire to Help Students**

In analyzing the verbatim comments of survey respondents, it was apparent that the majority of respondents care deeply about their learners and their work. They want to do what they can to ensure that learners are recognized for their prior learning experiences.

## 5. ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

This annotated bibliography is an excerpt from a bibliography being developed on PLAR research by **Joy Van Kleef**.

Aarts, S., Blower, D., Burke, R., Conlin, E., Ebner Howarth, C., Howell, B., Lamarre, G., Van Kleef, J. (1999). *A slice of the iceberg: Cross-Canada study of prior learning assessment and recognition*. Toronto: Cross-Canada Partnership on PLAR.

In examining the PLAR services of seven colleges across Canada over a five-year period, this study reveals a comprehensive profile of adult learner demographics, course and program PLAR activities, methods of assessment used, and PLAR learner academic success compared with learners who did not undertake PLAR. Institutional PLAR policies and practices as well as costs are analyzed. This report provides details on the methodology used in the study and offers researchers access to the database and use of the computer-based data collection tool for future research.

Aarts, S., Blower, D., Burke, R., Conlin, E., Lamarre, G., McCrossan, W., Van Kleef, J. (2003). *Feedback from learners: Cross-Canada study of prior learning assessment and recognition*. Toronto: Cross-Canada Partnership on PLAR.

This sequel to *A slice of the iceberg: Cross-Canada study of prior learning assessment and recognition* study examines the perspectives of adult learners on PLAR at seven colleges across Canada. Over 1,000 adults who undertook prior learning assessment and approximately 400 adults who investigated PLAR but decided not to proceed are surveyed for their views on the quality and value of the process, the methods used, sources of their prior learning, their motivation and their perspectives on cost and marketing. Of particular note is the data on the extent to which PLAR was a factor in learners' decisions to return to school and graduate. Learner perspectives on barriers to effective use of PLAR are also identified.

Barker, K. & Belanger, C. (1999). *Status of PLA/PLAR in professional programs in universities: Spring 1999*. Toronto: Queen's Printer.

This status report examines the implementation of PLA/PLAR in 100 professional programs in Ontario universities, and the application of PLA/PLAR for foreign-trained professionals as applicants for those programs. The report also provides a brief literature review, an environmental scan, and recommendations for next steps.

Bélanger, C. & Mount, J. (1998). Prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) in Canadian universities. *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 28, (2-3), 99-120.

The authors of this study report on the results of a 1997 survey of Canadian universities and their involvement with PLAR. A 25-item questionnaire is used to determine the profile PLAR has within institutions, institutional perspectives on its appropriateness at the university level, and anticipated directions within the university. The results indicate an openness of the university community toward the PLAR concept but reluctance to implement it. The authors contend that broadly speaking, universities appear to prefer to not have PLAR as part of the landscape. The authors present practical and pedagogical benefits of PLAR and urge universities to respond before alternative education providers seize the opportunity.

Blinkhorn, K. (1999). *Prior learning assessment: An investigation of nonsponsored learning for college credits*. Doctoral dissertation, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

This exploratory case study examines adult learners' perceptions of prior learning, specifically in the transfer of their prior learning towards formal education programs. Blinkhorn interviewed six adult learners who undertook portfolio development and three adult learners who were eligible for PLAR but did not pursue it. He found that all nine learners understood and made meaning from their prior learning. The students who pursued PLAR had definite views on the importance of their prior learning and its academic recognition. They reported development of cognitive skills while engaged in the portfolio development process. Their way of viewing their own learning also changed. The students who did not pursue PLAR made different meanings of their prior learning. They reported that their prior learning influenced their approach to their college studies, particularly the importance of both theoretical and practical knowledge. Blinkhorn concludes that despite the benefits of PLA, resistance from institutions that feel it will require relinquishment of some of their teaching functions makes it doubtful that institutions will embrace PLA.

Bloom, M. & Grant, M. (2001). *Brain gain: The economic benefits of recognizing learning and learning credentials in Canada*. Ottawa: Conference Board of Canada.

This report examines the scope and social and economic impacts of inadequate learning recognition programs in Canada for people with prior learning gained through work, life experience and foreign postsecondary education. Employers, postsecondary institutions and households were surveyed by telephone to obtain information on perceptions of credentials and the "system's" failure to recognize non-credentialed and foreign-credentialed learning. Prior learning assessment is identified as the second biggest learning recognition problem in Canada. The study provides an overview of institutional barriers to recognition and presents options for action to offset Canada's brain drain to the United States. Options range from gradations of reform based on existing best practices to large-scale innovations.

Carette, M., Cleary, P., Gallacher, J., Jokinen, L., Merrill, B., Whittaker, R. (2002). *Social Inclusion Through APEL: the Learners' Perspective*. Dublin: Centre for Social and Educational Research.

This comparative report presents the findings of a project on Accreditation for Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) and social inclusion from the perspectives of 110 adult learners in five countries: England, Finland, France, Scotland, and Spain. Using documentation review and one-to-one interviews, the project examines how APEL operates in these countries and whether it can be linked to strategies for social inclusion. The authors identify four key issues: the limited extent of APEL activity, APEL as a transformative mechanism, APEL and social inclusion, and APEL and the issue of flexibility. The report's primary conclusion is that APEL can be used to promote social inclusion but that lack of national frameworks for APEL and the need for greater political will are among the main reasons for its limited use in the countries included the study.

Castle, D. (2001). *A profile of prior learning assessment candidates and its implications for PLA policy and procedures at the University of Guelph*. Unpublished report. University of Guelph, Office of Open Learning.

Reporting on a survey of 102 individuals across Canada who had expressed interest in or were judged to be likely candidates for the Criminal Justice and Public Policy Bachelor of Arts Program at the University of Guelph, this study develops a profile of the typical non-traditional applicant expected to apply to the program.

The relevance of PLA to these prospective candidates are examined and possible reasons for widening public awareness of PLA are advanced. The applicant profile is then used to make recommendations that a local version of the University's Senate Policy supporting the concept of PLA be adopted by the College of Social and Applied Human Sciences. It is further recommended that all College personnel be educated about the Senate PLA policy and its benefits for students, the College and the University. Researchers argue that the next step is to develop procedures to make the existing policy operational, commencing with a consultation process within the College on how PLA can best meet students' needs and how workplace experience can be equated with course content.

Day, M. (2000). *Developing benchmarks for prior learning assessment and recognition: Practitioner perspectives*. Belleville: Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment.

The result of a federal government-funded research project on PLAR, this report provides a brief overview of PLAR initiatives in Canada and examines them in relation to standards established by the Training and Development Lead Body (TDLB) in the United Kingdom. Findings are that practices in Canada are comparable to those outlined by the benchmarks in the UK. The report also outlines the results of focus groups held to examine the implications of establishing national benchmarks for Canadian PLAR practitioners. Recommendations on next steps are provided.

Day, M., Zakos, P. (2000). *Developing benchmarks for prior learning assessment and recognition: Guidelines for the Canadian PLAR practitioner*. Belleville: Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment.

In this report the authors present a self-assessment tool designed to encourage reflective practice and a holistic approach to PLAR by practitioners. A series of indicators of successful practitioner performance and a scale for determining one's level of competence are provided. These practitioner guidelines stem from a PLAR benchmarks study conducted by the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment also in 2000.

Douglas College. (2000). *The learners' perspectives on prior learning assessment: Results of a provincial survey of PLA students*. Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, British Columbia.

Using a PLA quality assurance kit, thirteen colleges administered a questionnaire to survey students who had received credits through prior learning assessment over a two-year period. Responses on student demographics, credits sought, satisfaction, barriers encountered, and prior learning assessment practices formed baseline data for determining effectiveness of PLA operations in British Columbia colleges.

Evans, S. (1995). *A study of the knowledge, perceptions and benefits of prior learning assessment for awarding college credit at Cabot College*. Unpublished master's thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Using a written questionnaire to collect data, Evans addresses a significant information gap for postsecondary institutions by examining perceptions held by college faculty and management staff on prior learning assessment. Evans provides a descriptive report on participants' perceptions of the value of non-college learning for academic credit, best assessment methods, past practices, and credit award issues regarding transcription, credit decision-making and the benefits of PLA for students and the College. The report also suggests factors that might have contributed to some of the results.

Gereluk, W. (2001). *Labour education in Canada today. A report from learning labour: A prior learning assessment and recognition project*. Athabasca University, Centre for Work and Community Studies.

This study provides an overview of labour education in Canada and raises issues regarding the possible application of PLAR. Analysis is conducted of a representative sample of documentation from labour education courses and a series of face-to-face interviews with education officers and union leaders. Gereluk concludes that while the substantial learning that takes place in Canadian labour education should be creditable by formal educational programs at postsecondary institutions, labour organizations are not interested in doing this if the differences between the two types of education, particularly the inherent social purpose of labour education would create pressure to provide a greater emphasis on individual participation in labour activity for individual gain.

Human Resources Development Canada. (2002). *Canadians speak: On innovation and learning*. Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada.

This report provides an overview of the conclusions and recommendations of thirty-three regional summits held across Canada to respond to issues in four areas: children and youth, postsecondary education, the adult workforce, and immigration. The perspectives of Canadian organizations (academic communities, governments, small and medium-sized enterprises, industry sectors, business and labour organizations, aboriginal groups) and young Canadians are summarized in response to the federal government's Innovation Strategy (2002). The main priorities that generated consensus across organizations are also presented.

Human Resources Development Canada. (2002). *Knowledge matters: Skills and learning for Canadians*. Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada.

As a companion report to *Achieving Excellence: Investing in People, Knowledge and Opportunity*, this report published by the federal government officially establishes Canada's skills and learning challenges as national priorities. The document synthesizes the results of a series of national roundtables and discussions with educational stakeholder groups and suggests policy directions, national goals, and milestones to be reached over the long term in four areas: children and youth, postsecondary education, the adult workforce and immigrant integration. In each area, HRDC reports on the current situation, what needs to happen and how the federal

government can contribute to the enhancement of skills and learning in Canada. They note that insufficient PLAR capacity is an important gap in Canada's learning infrastructure and contend that recognition of informal and non-credit learning would motivate more adults to gain additional skills and remove significant barriers to participation and mobility in the labour market.

Kennedy, B. (2001). *Halifax declaration for the recognition of prior learning*. Halifax: Human Resources Development Canada.

Based on the results of a survey and other consultations with participants at the Canadian National Recognizing Learning Conference, this declaration was produced as a legacy outcome of the conference. It articulates three principles in support of the recognition of prior learning: PLAR is fundamental to a lifelong learning culture; all learning should be recognized or considered for recognition by educational, professional and work organizations; and all Canadians including immigrants should have the right to have their prior learning assessed and recognized. Four areas of activity necessary to realize these principles are identified. They include the provision of dedicated funding; the establishment of national standards and criteria for PLAR practice; the identification of and support for national leadership, advocacy and support; and support from the federal government to develop and sustain learning recognition initiatives. The declaration expresses participants' commitment to the principles and actions noted in the document.

Lennox, J., & Philip, L. (2000). *A comparative analysis of the academic performance of graduate students admitted under the special-case provisions at York University*. Unpublished report. York University, Faculty of Graduate Studies.

This study examines York University's practice of admitting graduate students who do not meet the minimum academic entrance requirements of the Faculty of Graduate Studies but who have prior learning which appears to be equivalent. Researchers examine what if any differences there are in the academic performance of these students compared with students who had met the normal admission requirements. Factors include gender, status as part-time or full-time students, degree completion rates, and the average time to degree completion in several disciplines. Academic performance is found to be relatively comparable.

Livingstone, D. (1999). Exploring the icebergs of adult learning: Findings of the first Canadian survey of informal learning practices. *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, 13(2).

This article provides empirical estimates of the extent and distribution of self-reported learning activities in the current Canadian adult population based on a country-wide survey. The basic finding is that most Canadian adults are spending a great deal of time in learning activities, most of this in informal learning on their own. The major implications are that Canada is an increasingly knowledge-based society in any reasonable sense of the term and that informal learning should be more explicitly taken into account in shaping educational, economic, and other social policies. As well, adult educators should take this detectable informal learning into greater account to develop more responsive education opportunities.

Pearson, W. (2000). *Enhancing adult student persistence: The relationship between prior learning assessment and persistence toward the baccalaureate degree*. Doctoral dissertation, Iowa State University at Ames.

This study investigates the possibility of an association between the portfolio form of prior learning assessment (PLA) and student persistence. Building on two earlier studies, Pearson examines several hundred part-time students eligible to apply for PLA credits over a ten year period to determine if participation in the PLA portfolio process is predictive of persistence. Findings indicate a strong association between PLA and student persistence with completion of the portfolio process doubling the odds of persistence for an average student.

PLA Centre. (2001). *The PLA centre story: five-year report*. Unpublished report. Halifax: PLA Centre.

This report summarizes and reflects on the 5-year history of the Halifax PLA Centre. It describes the Centre's range of PLA services to adult learners and provides quantitative data on its activities over the period. The authors identify five key factors that were crucial to the Centre's success, paying particular attention to the value and impact of learners' portfolio development. The Centre's accomplishments are also positioned in the wider public policy context around the importance of learning in meeting society's challenges.

Praxis Research and Consulting. (2002). *Impact evaluation of the PLA centre learning portfolios programs*. Unpublished report. Halifax: PLA Centre.

Using several research methods to collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data, the authors present user perspectives on the impact of the Halifax PLA Centre's portfolio development programs. Personal and employment-related impacts are highlighted. Portfolio learning is found to generate major psychosocial benefits, improved employment, incomes and career prospects. These outcomes are viewed as inter-connected particularly with respect to the positive effect of improved self-esteem and self-presentation on employability. The report makes several suggestions for improvements to the Centre's programs and their availability, administrative operations and program evaluation capacity.

Saskatchewan Learning Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition Enhancement Funding Initiative: *Progress Report: March 2002*

In the fall of 2000, Saskatchewan Learning launched a PLAR Enhancement Funding Initiative to advance PLAR in the postsecondary learning system. This report provides a detailed background of the initiative, a description of each pilot project and charts the progress of 11 PLAR pilots undertaken in 2001-02 in conjunction with the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board (SLFDB) PLAR Services Project (October 2000 – March 2002). The PLAR Services Project provided ongoing resource support to pilot Coordinators and led the preparation of the Progress Report. See: <http://www.slfdb.com/plar/whatsnew/PLARreport.pdf>.

For additional information, see the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board (SLFDB) – PLAR Services Project Final Report and Toolkit at: <http://www.slfdb.com/plar/plar-report.pdf> or contact [slfdb@slfdb.com](mailto:slfdb@slfdb.com).

Saskatchewan Learning Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition Enhancement Funding Initiative: *Final Report March 2003*

This report (a companion document to the Progress Report) presents a synopsis of 11 PLAR pilots undertaken at various postsecondary institutions, including an integrated discussion of lessons learned and best practices. The pilot projects comprise a range of activities aimed at building institutional capacity for PLAR including: developing an online database for PLAR-Ready courses, PLAR assessment tools and portfolio processes. The findings provide insight, from an institutional perspective, on effectively implementing PLAR processes. Samples of tools/materials developed are also included in the report.

See: [http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/P/rpl/docs/Enhancement\\_plar\\_03\\_19.pdf](http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/P/rpl/docs/Enhancement_plar_03_19.pdf)

Smith, G. (1999). *Profiling prior learning assessment candidates and policy implications at the University of Guelph*. Unpublished report. Guelph: University of Guelph.

In this project, the University of Guelph's School of Hotel and Food Administration investigates the applicability of PLA to a blended Bachelor of Commerce program planned for delivery with Humber College commencing 2000. The purpose of the study is to develop a clear understanding of the type of non-traditional student who might be attracted to the program, to assess the relevance of PLA to those students, and to recommend steps the University should take to produce a set of academically valid, reliable, time-efficient and cost effective PLA procedures for the Bachelor of Commerce program.

Responses from 254 survey respondents are analyzed by researchers and a profile the type of adult student to expect as an applicant from the program emerges. Researchers conclude that integration of PLA into the blended Bachelor of Commerce program is warranted and several recommendations for initial stages of implementation are made.

Stowe, S. (2000). *Prior Learning Assessment*. Unpublished report. University of Toronto, Atkinson College.

This description-based study focuses on prior learning assessment at Canadian universities. It provides a brief historical overview of prior learning assessment internationally, PLA's conceptual foundation, the primary methods of assessment, and PLA's benefits. Issues arising from possible integration of PLA into academic activities including policies and procedures are presented. The report also briefly describes programs at Canadian universities known to have undertaken PLA – Athabasca University, Dalhousie University, University of Guelph, Ryerson University, University of Windsor, and University of Winnipeg. More detailed information on PLA at the University of Maryland, an institution widely known for its PLA activities is also presented. The study concludes that Canadian universities pay little attention to PLA although spokespersons in many believe that it should be implemented.

Thomas, A. (1998). The tolerable contradictions of prior learning assessment. In S. Scott, B. Spencer, & A. Thomas (Eds), *Learning for life: Canadian readings in adult education* (pp. 330-342). Toronto: Thompson Education Publishing.

In this article Thomas argues that the introduction of PLAR into our traditionally closed system of education challenges the previously inextricable relationships between teaching, evaluation and learning and in so doing liberates learning from education. He



contends that consistent with PLAR, formal teaching is not the only method through which important learning takes place; evaluation recognizes that and dismisses the when and where of learning in favour of outcomes; and learners have power over their own learning. Thomas expresses the hope that from integration of innovations such as PLAR into mainstream educational activities, there will emerge a future form of education that is an acknowledged combination of learning acquired from both instruction and other sources of teaching.

Thomas, A. (2000). Prior learning assessment: the quiet revolution. In A. Wilson & E. Hayes (Eds), *Handbook of adult and continuing education* (pp. 508-522). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Thomas takes a philosophical look at how prior learning assessment challenges our formal education system by exposing the distinction between learning and education and by demonstrating that important knowledge is created outside the formal educational system. He examines PLA as a process, a movement, and an ideology and through these lenses argues that PLA has the potential to place learning instead of education as the central focus of universities. Thomas also discusses the important role that adult educators can play in managing such a fundamental change in our educational system.

Thomas, A., Collins, M. (1999). *Prior learning assessment "values" statements*. Toronto: Centre for Education and Work, Department of Social and Equity Studies in Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

This document is a collection of short essays by a variety of authors and reflects perspectives on PLAR from different sectors – business, professions, colleges, equity groups, labour, secondary education and small business. The essays describe the authors' experiences with PLAR initiatives and offer statements of the values associated with PLAR as well as some of the risks. PLAR is generally viewed as desirable initiative that provides access to formal education by individuals and groups normally excluded. All authors noted that cost arrangements for PLAR are poor, cost savings are invisible, and there is a need for increased cooperation between all players including learners.

Thomas, A., Collins, M., Plett, L. (2001). *Dimensions of the experience of prior learning assessment & recognition*. Toronto: University of Toronto.

The authors of this small study explore the experience of PLAR users at universities and colleges and uncover evidence to suggest that greater public awareness of PLAR is needed. The researchers also found the students in the study to be highly self-directed and that time and cost were the two most profound savings associated with PLAR. The authors concluded that PLAR has the potential for producing students capable of gaining greater self confidence and control of their own learning.

Training and Development Associates. (1999). *Reaching our full potential: Prior learning assessment and recognition for foreign-trained Canadians*. Ottawa: Canadian Labour Force Development Board.

Commissioned by the Canadian Labour Force Development Board prior to the cessation of the Board's operations, this study uses written surveys, literature searches, interviews, focus groups and case studies to report on the status of prior

learning assessment and recognition in Canada and to identify problems associated with using PLAR to better integrate foreign-trained persons into the labour force. The report provides a useful historical overview of the motivations and events that led to the establishment of PLAR programs in Canadian postsecondary institutions, professional regulatory bodies and workplaces. It also makes several short-term and long-term administrative recommendations for improving learning recognition programs across the country. The experiences of four other countries are also surveyed.

University of Ottawa. (1998). *Final report to COU PLA working group on 1997-1999 learning assessment and recognition – faculty credentialing phase*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa.

This document presents the result of a project in which a new provincial nurse practitioner program was introduced in Ontario in 1995/96. It reports on modifications made to the PLA process in order to offer program faculty a one-time opportunity to be credentialed, and to begin developing an ongoing PLA process within the Nurse Practitioner program. The report includes information on the development of a protocol agreement between the Faculty and the University Registrar's Office, application requirements, course and program portfolio requirements, guidelines for applicants, and the design and delivery of an orientation workshop and associated materials for portfolio assessors.

Wong, A. T. (1999). *Prior learning assessment: A guide for university faculty & administrators*. Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan University Extension Press. ISBN 0-88880-401-6.

This guide introduces prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) as both a concept and a tool that has potential benefits for colleges and universities. It describes the history of the movement and recent initiatives in Canada, assessment methods, the role and responsibilities of the faculty assessor, principles of good practice when attempting to integrate PLAR into the teaching-learning system, and financial strategies for sustaining PLAR services. Profiles of adult learners and concrete examples of documenting prior experiential learning are included. Readers are provided with a range of professional development resources, including links to Internet-based resources.

Wong, A. T. (2000). *University-level prior learning assessment and recognition: Building capacity for institutional response*. Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan research report.

This report provides an overview of the Saskatchewan Universities PLAR Project, a joint research project of the University of Saskatchewan and the University Regina funded by Saskatchewan Learning between 1998 -2000. It provides an overview of nine pilot projects from nine disciplinary areas, and summarizes the benefits achieved and the barriers perceived by the teams. The report recommends four strands of activities to incrementally build Saskatchewan universities' capacity for institutional response to the PLAR challenge: (1) learning from the experience of other universities; (2) providing structured faculty development activities; (3) partnering with the community, employers and professional associations to support PLAR; and (4) ensuring a shared vision.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Although the survey response rate was low, one must ask whether or not a greater response rate would have significantly altered the findings. If confirmation of the findings is required, the funding bodies could consider a longer, more comprehensive study in the future, in which postsecondary institutions are questioned in greater depth about their approach to adults returning to school and whether and how they recognize and assess the prior learning of these adult students. In the meantime, we have found both the data and the personal comments of survey respondents to be a rich source of information that warrants further investigation.

### Reflections on Provincial and Territorial Snapshot Contributions

In reviewing the provincial and territorial snapshots, it is clear that many provinces and territories have focused their PLAR activity (policies and programs) within the education sector (high schools, apprenticeship, colleges and universities) in anticipation that spillover into the community and/or the workplace will occur. Many important initiatives have gone on over the years and exciting new programs continue to emerge. Some unusual highlights and new activity have been identified below.

In Manitoba, what is striking is the comprehensive way that PLAR has been planned, in terms of policy and implementation, in education and training as well as in immigration and other areas of the labour force. This appears to be a rather unique approach for Canada, that may affect not only the sustainability of PLAR in colleges and universities, but its integration into the broader community.

In Prince Edward Island, a Statement of Support has been developed regarding the recognition of prior learning, along with special PLAR initiatives through Workplace Education PEI. In Nova Scotia, the Halifax PLA Centre's leadership as a community-based collaboration including 6 postsecondary institutions has been instrumental in moving the PLA agenda forward, through partnerships with the Department of Community Services and other agencies. The region is also well known for its use of portfolios for employment, workplace development, and academic access. Recently, a government working paper, identifying prior learning assessment and recognition processes and tools as a key objective, was cited. In New Brunswick, the Department of Training and Employment Development is preparing a PLAR strategic plan to complement the other activities going on within the education sector. Nunavut is in the process of developing territorial PLAR policies and processes as part of a broader strategy for adult education and learning.

In addition to having a PLAR policy for colleges, Ontario has significant learning recognition and bridging programs for skilled immigrants who move into the province. Contributions through the New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL) research and as partners in the two Cross-Canada Studies that looked at PLAR over eight years for over 7,000 learners in seven colleges across Canada are noteworthy. Quebec has a Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training. In

addition to having targeted programs for immigrants, they have developed learning tools for the workplace and recognition and accreditation for the military.

The Ministry of Advanced Education in British Columbia has provided \$640,000 in 2002–03 for PLAR initiatives. In addition to PLAR, certain postsecondary institutions have focused on programs for immigrants and professional bodies such as nurses and pharmacists. In addition to the assessment of formal credentials through the International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS), Alberta has PLAR in postsecondary, high school, and apprenticeship programs. The Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT) is considering the re-activation of its PLAR Advisory Committee.

The Yukon has planned extensive PLAR training in June 2003 at the community college and the Northwest Territories continues to support PLA through college activities. Newfoundland and Labrador's Fish Harvesters PLAR project was a successful example of using PLAR for certification within a sector. New interest in PLAR is reported at the Marine Institute, and ongoing recognition activities are occurring in postsecondary institutions.

Saskatchewan Learning has undertaken some major policy and project initiatives in cooperation with the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board. Their Provincial Framework for RPL is currently being refined. (Saskatchewan defines the recognition of prior learning as having 3 components: qualification recognition (QR); credit transfer (CR); prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR). Again, such joint ventures involving both the formal educational structures and partners in the labour force hold promise for fundamental change in our perceptions of where learning takes place and how recognition and assessment activities are delivered.

In Saskatchewan and Manitoba, government commitment and funding support have helped to provide the catalyst for dramatic innovation. Snapshot accounts from British Columbia and Ontario of initiatives undertaken in the mid 1990s also suggest that direct government support for PLAR in the postsecondary system in the former case and in the college system in the latter, did much to develop and promote an adult learning recognition culture inside the institution. Further research will be needed to ascertain the effectiveness of short-term, project-based funding for initiatives such as PLAR, given that PLAR represents a significant departure from the usual way of doing things. (Sustained and reliable funding models such as those used to support French language learning in school boards across Canada may be useful as incentives to develop non-traditional initiatives such as PLAR).

## Reflections on the Annotated Bibliography

The most notable aspect of past research in PLAR is its consistency with CAPLA's current findings and recommendations. For example, in the report *The Status of PLA/PLAR in Professional Programs in Ontario Universities: Spring 1999*, a respondent comments: "Applied Science at Queen's has been using PLAR since 1967 at least, but without giving it a title" (p 46). This sentiment is expressed in similar ways in the electronic survey results (Clear Picture p. 6) in responses pertaining to informal PLAR systems. It is also noted in the college study, *A Slice of the Iceberg: Cross-Canada Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (1999)*, stating that "the actual number of unrecorded assessments is unknown" (p. 14).

Further investigation of the 'underground PLAR phenomenon' may be useful, in order to determine the extent to which faculty assessors handle PLAR requests unofficially and the reasons why such bilateral arrangements are preferable to more formal ones. In the event that formal policies do not exist, this phenomenon is more easily understood.

Associated with this issue is the more fundamental one of institutional PLAR policy and its implications for practice. In all classifications, faculty reported on the importance of PLAR policy to its implementation (Clear Picture, p.18). One explanation of this finding could be the role that policies might serve in legitimizing PLAR activity within the institution. One would assume that if policies existed, PLAR advocates would have an easier time trying to facilitate its use among adult learners and professional colleagues. Support for the development of college and university policies on PLAR may be one of the less complicated recommendations that can be explored.

Other similarities exist in areas such as incentives or disincentives. Barker and Belanger (1999) reported that the fact that programs are over-subscribed calls into question how university faculty perceive the necessity of promoting the use of PLAR. Although respondents in the electronic survey (Clear Picture p.17) considered that recruiting more students was an incentive for implementing PLAR, it is somewhat contradictory, given that the postsecondary system in some jurisdictions is at or over capacity. Further investigation will be needed to clarify this situation, as it may be tied to the desire of institutions to meet the needs of traditional and non-traditional learners alike. Other cost/benefit issues (learner assessment fees, faculty time, inadequate funding, and attitudinal barriers such as concern around rigor of assessment and academic quality) remain unchanged from former studies. The lack of information and the need to broaden the understanding of PLAR were cited by many respondents.

Another example that past findings coincide with current results can be seen in the area of PLAR awareness. How to communicate about PLAR to Canadians who know nothing about it and who have no current attachment to a college or university should be an area of further investigation. The current study suggests that community contacts do not have much access to PLAR. That finding was borne out in Thomas (2001) where PLAR learners "encountered PLAR by accident" (p. 25). It may be that publicizing PLAR more broadly in the community will reveal whether there is sufficient interest to warrant the investment of public funds in a PLAR program.

The issue of dedicated and sustained funding dominates most discussions regarding the future of PLAR in Canada. It appears in virtually all the recommendations that speak to the future of PLAR in postsecondary institutions. The reasons why PLAR is an important and worthwhile process go beyond institutional recruitment and faculty attempts to meet the needs of their students. It is a public policy concern that touches on community access to educational institutions, economic development, social inclusion, lifelong learning, and systemic reform.

Further investigation into the success of long-term integration models in Canada and other countries is required if there is a desire to embed PLAR into the consciousness and culture of Canada's public postsecondary institutions.

Further interpretation of the results of this study will be required. Possible areas for ongoing discussion and research include:

- a template for institutional policies and procedures
- access to PLAR resources and training
- promotional activities for university practitioners through existing networks
- further examination of perceptions and challenges related to the credibility of assessment, streamlining the PLAR process, giving away credits, confronting PLAR as a cumbersome process
- the financial implications
- the association between confusion about the process and the lack of available information about it
- the transcription and notation controversy regarding the transparency of PLAR credits versus 'a credit is a credit is a credit'
- the apparent increase in the use of portfolio assessment
- the role of an intermediary to advocate and support non-traditional learners in PSE

Canada's experience with prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) over the past twenty years could be described as a kaleidoscope of policies, projects, passion, and pragmatism. There have been stellar initiatives in many sectors that have elevated the practice of PLAR to new heights. Dedicated PLAR champions have battled for the recognition of adult learning within resistant organizations and institutions. Labour shortages have propelled the recognition of prior learning into an economic reality using the 'business case' to illustrate its utility. Portfolio development has shown great promise for career management, personal growth, and certification in the knowledge economy. Creative pilot projects have captured our interest and have produced great short-term results. The many colours, shapes, and sizes of learning recognition and assessment in Canada speak to the efforts of many dedicated people, organizations, and governments.

What remains is a history of recognition achievements that have tested the efficacy of an innovative assessment process and challenged some very fundamental beliefs about learning. The desire and determination to entrench PLAR as a matter of public

policy into the organizational culture of our postsecondary institutions remains in the hands of our educational leaders.

**Follow-Up**

Part Two of CMEC's study, *Assessing Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) Systems and Practices across Canada*, will be available in summer 2004.

## References

Barker, K. & Belanger, C. (1999). *The Status of PLA/PLAR in Professional Programs in Ontario Universities*. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

Cross Canada Partnership on PLAR. (1999). *A Slice of the Iceberg: Cross Canada Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition*. Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada.

Jackson, L. & Caffarella (1994). "Experiential Learning: A New Approach." In *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

O'Banion, Terry. (1997). *A Learning College for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Phoenix: American Council on Education.

Thomas, A., Collins, M. & Plett, L. (2001). *Dimensions of the Experience of Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition*. New Approaches to Lifelong Learning. Toronto: OISE/UT

Thomas, A.M. (2000). "Prior Learning Assessment: The Quiet Revolution." In Wilson & Hayes (Eds.), *The Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.