

THE PLA **Boost**

Results from a 72-Institution Targeted Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Adult Student Outcomes

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Learn More About Adult Learner

CAEL's Annual Conference • Nov 4-6, 2020

This year: all virtual and free registration for CAEL members

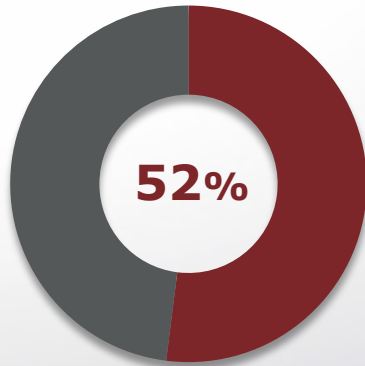
<https://conference.cael.org/>

Free Self-Paced Micro-Course:

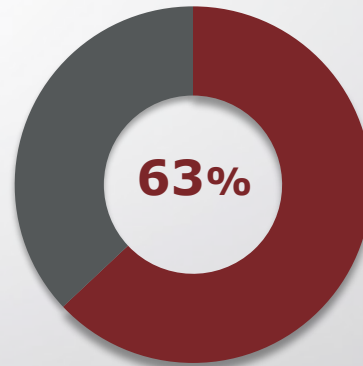
Roadmaps to Success: Understanding and Serving Your Adult Learners

<https://conference.cael.org/microcourses/>

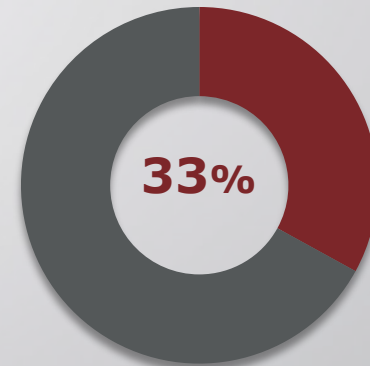
Most Americans have been affected, and many will look to education



Have lost jobs,
hours, or income



Are worried about
losing their jobs



Believe they would need more
education or training to
replace a lot job



The Impact of COVID-19 on Employment – From Strada Center for
Consumer Insights Public Viewpoint Surveys, March-25-May 13, n=5,529

Recognition of Learning →

Prior Learning Assessment/Credit for Prior Learning

Methods

- Standardized exams (e.g., CLEP exams, DSST exams)
- Challenge exams
- Portfolio assessment
- ACE credit recommendations for military training
- ACE/NCCRS credit recommendations for corporate or other training
- Institutional review of training (certification, licenses, apprenticeships, corporate training, etc.)

The Basics about the Study

72 →

participating institutions

Academic records from more than

230,000

adult students



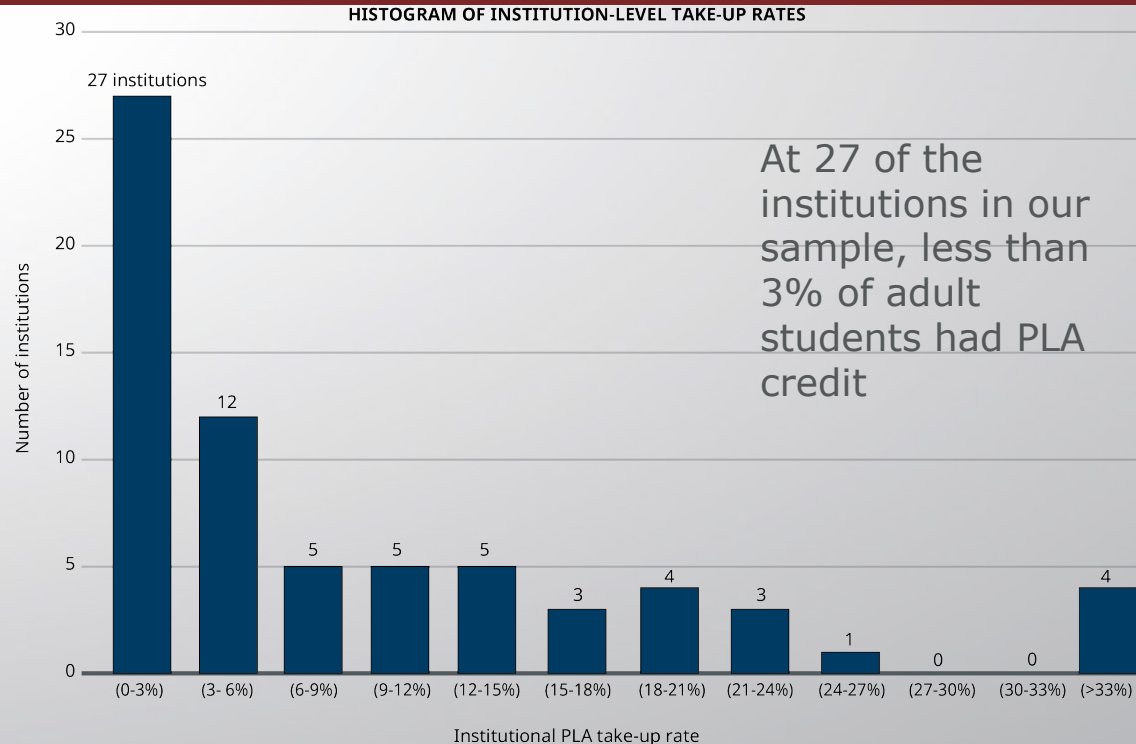
30

community colleges
included in the
main analysis

PLA Usage: Take-Up Rate

Overall Share of
Adult Students
with
PLA Credit
(Take-up Rate)

11%



At 27 of the
institutions in our
sample, less than
3% of adult
students had PLA
credit

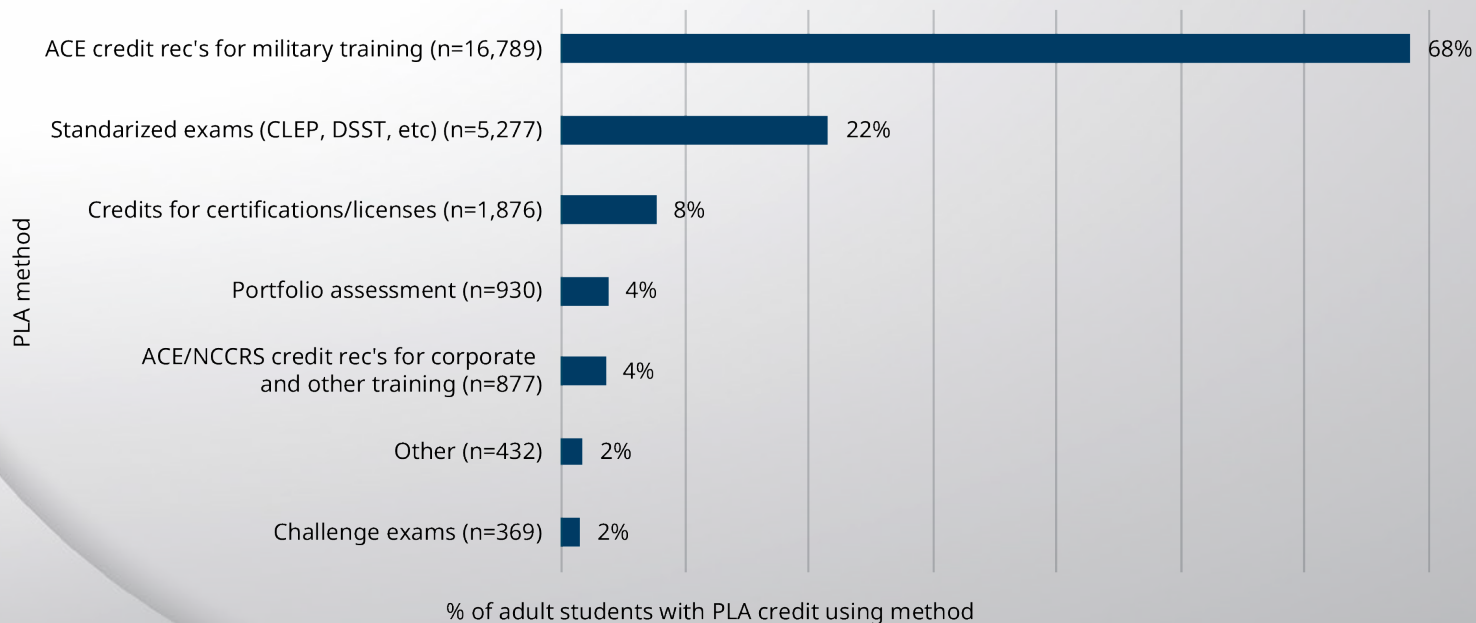
PLA Usage: Average Number of PLA Credits Earned

24 PLA credits earned

Average PLA credit earning =
at least a half-year or more of a
full-time semester's worth of study

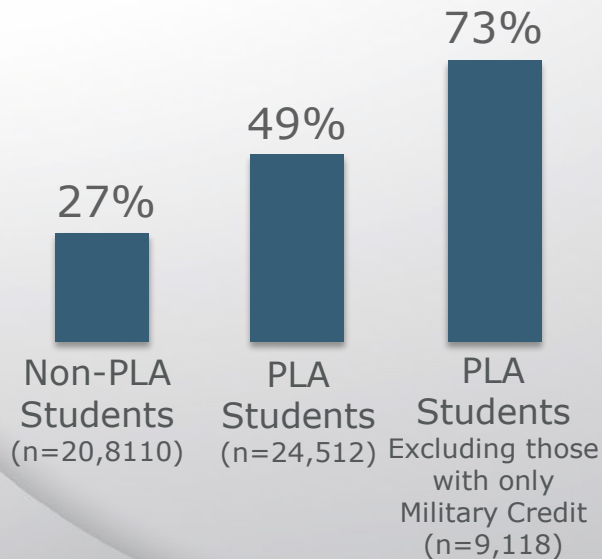
PLA Usage by Method

USAGE OF EACH PLA METHOD



Key Finding: Credential Completion

PLA Boosts Credential Completion Rates for Adult Students



Using Propensity Score Matching to Isolate the Impact of PLA

The PLA boost for adult student completion when controlling for other factors:

17%

All PLA methods

30%

Methods that were not ACE credit recommendations for military

Isolating the Effect of PLA

Methodological Approach

- **Propensity Score Matching**
 - ✓ Statistical technique to simulate the selection process into PLA
 - ✓ Matching technique: nearest neighbor (max 2), .25 SD caliper, & with replacement)
- **Effect Heterogeneity**

Matching Variables Used in PLA Analysis

Matching Variables (i.e., covariates)

- Race/ethnicity, Age, Gender, Pell Recipient, Below 200% Poverty Indicator, Transfer Credits, Major, Dev Ed Participation, First-Term GPA, & Institutional-Level Fixed Effects

Sneak Peak: Quick PSM Overview

Step 1: Generate propensity score that ranges from 0-1: $p_i = \Pr(T_i = 1 | \chi_i)$

Step 2: Conduct Matching of treatment (PLA) & control (NON-PLA(simple example))

PLA	.64	.39	.56	.61
NON-PLA	.37	.52	.64	.60



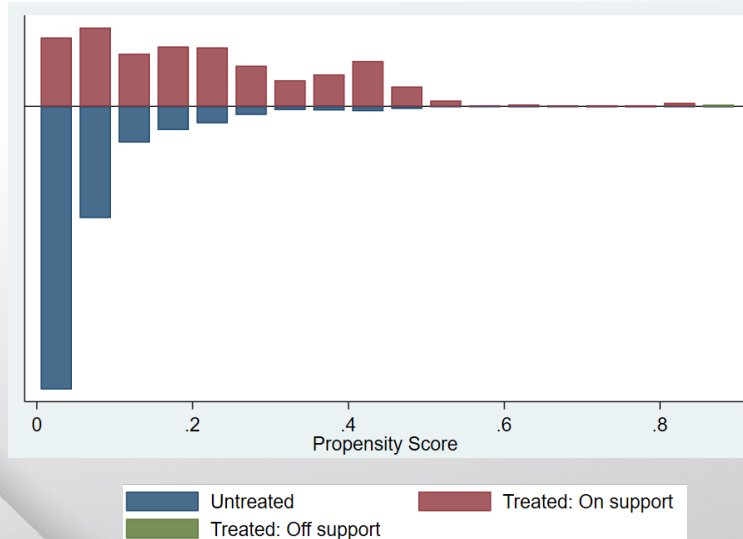
Step 3: Check for Overlap & Covariate Imbalance

- Can assess if systematic differences between PLA & NON-PLA groups using simple t-tests

Step 4: Estimate the Average Treatment Effect on the Treated (ATT)

PSM Common Support & Covariate (Im)Balance

Common Support Assumption



Example of Covariate (Im)Balance: First Semester GPA

	Before Matching	After Matching
PLA	3.10	3.10
Non-PLA	2.56	3.10

Translation: After matching, there are no systematic differences on observed variables between the treatment and control group, which allows us to isolate the effect of the treatment (i.e., PLA).

Table A. Propensity score matching analysis shows that there was strong positive PLA effect on credential completion for all student and institutional subgroups at the participating institutions, and that effect increased when examining credit from PLA-non-military methods

Boost to Degree Completion from PSM Estimates:

- **Overall PLA: 17%**
- **PLA-non-military: 30%**

	PLA effect size (SE)	PLA-non-military effect size (SE)
Overall	.17 (.005)	0.30 (.007)
Student-Level Categories		
Student had received one or more Pell Grants	.19 (.007)	.33 (.010)
Student had not received a Pell Grant	.13 (.007)	.26 (.011)
Black	.14 (.018)	.28 (.027)
White	.18 (.012)	.23 (.015)
Hispanic	.24 (.021)	.32 (.026)
Institutional Categories		
2-Year Public	.25 (.014)	.36 (.019)
4-Year Public	.14 (.010)	.20 (.016)
4-Year Private	.18 (.033)	.18 (.031)
For-profit	.16 (.006)	Results not significant
Minority-serving institution (MSI)	.33 (.022)	.42 (.025)
Not MSI	.16 (.005)	.30 (.008)

SE=Standard error, which is an indication of the reliability of the mean (measure). A small SE (relative to the reported effect size) is an indication that the mean effect size is a more accurate reflection of the actual population mean. A larger sample size will normally result in a smaller SE.

Additional PSM analysis results can be found in Appendix D.

Table A. Propensity score matching analysis shows that there was strong positive PLA effect on credential completion for all student and institutional subgroups at the participating institutions, and that effect increased when examining credit from PLA-non-military methods

Effect Heterogeneity:

- Pell Recipients: **19%**
- Hispanic Students: **24%**
- Black Students: **14%**
- 2-Year Institutions: **25%**
- MSIs: **33%**

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Key Findings:

PLA Saves Adult Students Time and Money

\$2,224 to \$11,587

Estimated adult student **savings** through PLA, depending on sector

7 to 12 Months

Estimated adult student **time savings** in earning degrees,
with 12 or more PLA credits

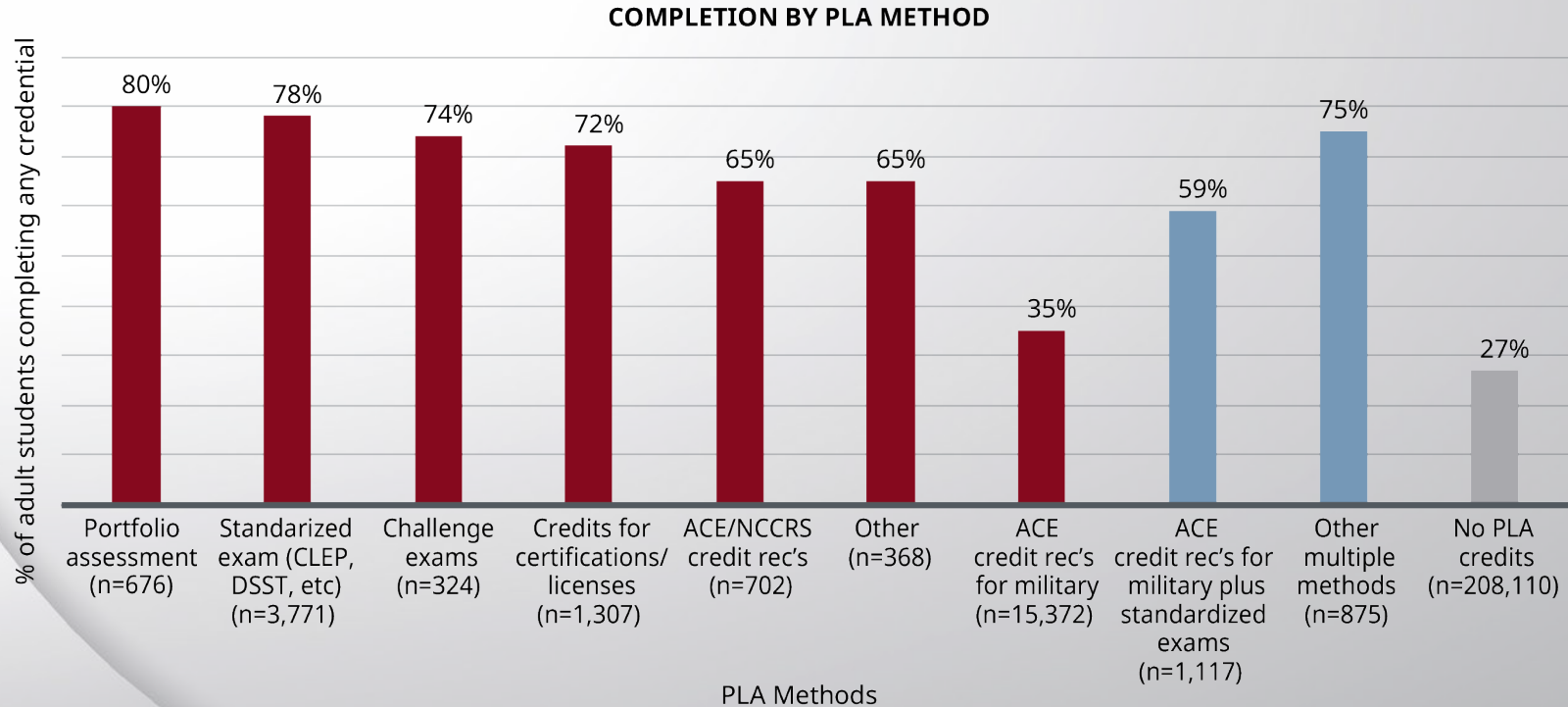
Key Findings:

Institutions Also Benefit

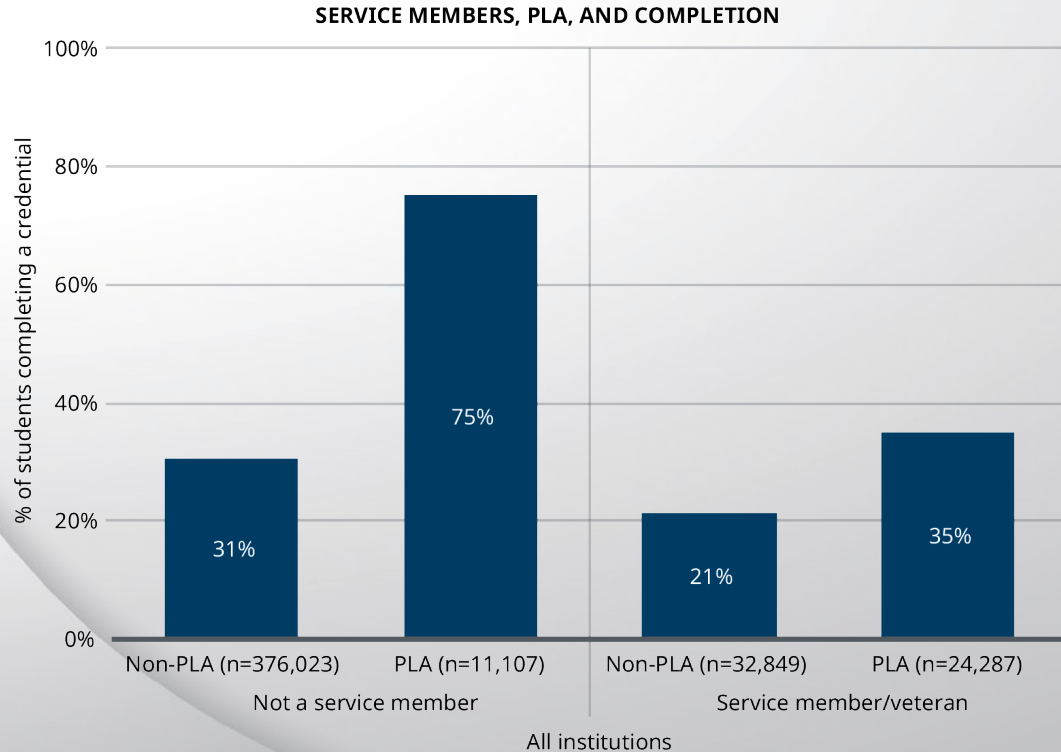
17.6 More Credits

Institutions also benefited from PLA—
on average, PLA students took 17.6 more course credits
than non-PLA students.

Figure 22. Adult student credential completion by PLA method



Service Members, PLA, and Completion



Service members with PLA credit had higher completion rates compared with those without PLA credit*

This includes service members of all ages, not just those 25 and over.

Potential to Affect Equity in Educational Attainment?

	PLA Boost to Completion
Black Adults	14% ▲
Hispanic Adults	24% ▲
White Adults	18% ▲
Pell Grant (Low Income)	33% ▲
Adult at Community College	25% ▲

However, PLA was used by ONLY about 1 in ten adult students

11% of entering adult students earned credit for college-level learning acquired outside of the classroom through PLA.

And PLA usage was lowest for adult students who were:

- Black
- Lower-income
- Enrolled at community colleges

Implications and Recommendations: Equity Challenges

	Take-up rates All methods	Non-military methods
Asian Adults	8%	4%
Black Adults	6%	2%
Hispanic Adults	8%	5%
White Adults	8%	4%
Other/Multiracial	7%	2%
Pell Recipient	7%	3%
Non Pell	16%	6%

- Institutional equity
- Technology
- Systemic and formal processes

Implications and Recommendations

- Communication and transparency
- Data and evaluation
- Proactive and systemic advising

Learn More

To read the full report and access other related materials:

www.cael.org/pla-impact

To read more about WICHE's Recognition of Learning/PLA research series:

<https://www.wiche.edu/key-initiatives/recognition-of-learning/>