

# Equity Paradoxes in *The PLA Boost*



## Opportunity Unrealized for Some Students despite the Potential for Improved Credit Completion

Previous research from the **Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)** and the **Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE)** found that prior learning assessment/credit for prior learning (PLA/CPL) has a positive effect on adult student credential completion, but Black and lower-income adults receive PLA/CPL at lower-than-average rates and, therefore, are less likely than other students to benefit from the completion boost.

### OUR NEW ANALYSIS OF THE SAME DATASET PRODUCED ADDITIONAL FINDINGS OF NOTE:

- Adult Pell Grant recipients showed a greater-than-average completion boost from PLA/CPL credit-receipt — particularly Black adult students.
- PLA/CPL credit receipt by Black service members is closer to parity — the disparity in PLA/CPL credit receipt largely exists among non-service member students
- The lowest PLA/CPL credit rates in this study were seen among non-service-member adult students. Black non-service members consistently had the lowest PLA/CPL credit-receipt rates in this study.

### Institutions interviewed for this deeper exploration offered some possible factors that could explain the PLA/CPL disparities or Black and/or lower-income adult learners in our sample:

- **Cost:** PLA/CPL related assessment fees are not covered by Pell Grants or other federal financial aid.
- **The amount and nature of outreach, marketing, and support:** Adult learners may not be hearing about PLA/CPL at the right time, or they may need additional encouragement and support.
- **Adaptivity of institutional policies and processes:** Prevailing PLA/CPL opportunities may be focused on a limited set of learners' labor market experiences or programs of study.
- **Individual adult learner self-confidence:** Some adult learners may have lower confidence in themselves as learners, leading them to believe that PLA/CPL does not apply to them.

### There are many ways that institutions can take action to address some of the barriers this analysis revealed.



Prioritize equity in the design of PLA/CPL programs.



Develop financial supports for low-income students or provide PLA/CPL free of charge.



Improve PLA/CPL communications to students.



Embed PLA/CPL systemically in advising and curriculum.



Improve data infrastructure and analysis to understand where equity gaps exist.



Provide PLA/CPL offerings for learning that occurs in a wide range of occupations.



Scale processes for simpler PLA/CPL crosswalks between industry-developed skills and academic programs.

To ensure that PLA/CPL offerings are designed for the full diversity of today's students, institutions may need to consider a range of changes or enhancements. Making sure that all students have access to PLA/CPL — and ensuring equitable use and impact — are important ways to continue PLA/CPL's social justice history in this new millennium.

Access the full *Equity Paradoxes* report at [www.cael.org/news-and-resources/PLA-CPL-equity](http://www.cael.org/news-and-resources/PLA-CPL-equity).

Access *The PLA Boost* report at [www.cael.org/PLA-impact](http://www.cael.org/PLA-impact).