

NEWS RELEASE

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DEAC and The Presidents' Forum Release Report on the State of Alternative Credentials at Adult Learning Institutions

First-of-its-kind study explores key definitions and reveals five common themes focused on competency-based education (CBE), prior learning assessment (PLA), alternative credentials, the importance of reliable data, and traditional vs. non-traditional learning

For contemporary learners, the path to higher education degree attainment frequently involves a myriad of credit alternatives—from MOOCs and micro credentialing (badges), to non-credit bearing certificate programs and various other opportunities. As these alternatives evolve, institutions are challenged with treating these experiential learning experiences as credit-bearing.

Within this environment, the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC) and The Presidents' Forum partnered with the Online Learning Consortium (OLC) to conduct a study examining the state of alternative credentials at adult learning institutions. The result is "Alternative Credentials in Higher Education: PLA 2.0," a 30-page report, authored by Dr. Jill Buban, senior director of research & innovation at OLC. The study offers insights into how alternative credentials are defined and used at adult learning institutions.

"Beyond the province of anecdotal accounts of student experiences, little is known about how institutions accept and document alternative learning opportunities and whether the opportunities result in meaningful progress toward degree completion," said Leah K. Matthews, executive director, DEAC. "This report is intended to provide a better understanding of how adult learning institutions address students who possess alternative credentials and seek to apply these experiences to a degree."

"Alternative credential opportunities offer convenience, flexibility and affordability—features that are valued by adult learners and that may propel adult learners toward degree attainment," said Tina Goodyear, COO, The Presidents' Forum, The Council of Experts, Excelsior College. "This report should serve as a useful tool for education planners, policy makers, administrators, researchers and government leaders to help shape future ideas about how to serve adult learners in their quest for degree attainment and student success."

For the research, OLC used a multiple case study approach offering in-depth information about the state of alternative credentials at six adult-friendly institutions in the U.S. Through a cross-study analysis, five themes emerged, including competency-based education (CBE), prior learning assessment (PLA), alternative credentials, the importance of reliable data, and traditional vs. non-traditional learning.

"In the interviews conducted, it was clear there is passion about serving adult learners," said Kathleen Ives, CEO and executive director, OLC. "That passion will be well-served through thoughtful consideration of the role of alternative credentials in degree attainment."

OLC's Dr. Buban will present highlights from the research at the 91st Annual DEAC Conference, April 23-25, in San Antonio, Texas.

This report is recommended for those working in higher education, including those who work directly at higher education institutions, those who work in accrediting bodies or the government-related agencies, organizations associated with higher education, the media, and individuals who champion alternative ways of learning.

Complimentary access to the report is available [online](#).

ABOUT DEAC

The Distance Education Accrediting Commission is a private, non-profit organization founded in 1926 that operates as a national accreditor of distance education institutions. Accreditation by DEAC covers all distance education activities within an institution and it provides accreditation from the secondary school level through professional doctoral degree-granting institutions. Visit <http://www.deac.org> for more information.

ABOUT THE PRESIDENTS' FORUM

Established in 2004, The Presidents' Forum is a collaboration of accredited, national, adult-serving institutions and programs which have embraced the power and potential of online education. The Mission of the Presidents' Forum is to advance the recognition of innovative practice and excellence in online learning. This is accomplished by providing a venue for leaders in higher education and stakeholders to share their knowledge and learn from others' best practices. Visit <http://www.presidentsforum.org> for more information.

ABOUT OLC

The Online Learning Consortium (OLC) is the leading professional organization devoted to advancing the quality of online learning worldwide. The member-sustained organization offers an extensive set of resources for professional development and institutional advancement of online learning, including, original research, leading-edge instruction, best-practice publications, community-driven conferences and expert guidance. OLC members include educators, administrators, trainers and other online learning professionals, as well as educational institutions, professional societies and corporate enterprises. Visit <http://onlinelearningconsortium.org> for more information.

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