



MyExperienceCounts – Massachusetts Community College Website that Supports Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) through Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)

Website: <https://myexperiencecounts.mass.edu/home>

Summary of Innovation: Individuals, especially adult learners, applying to community colleges often have accumulated learnings from work, life and military experiences as well as documented through prior examinations or other evidence of competency attainment. The process of assessing whether college Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) can be granted is referred to as Prior Learning Assessment (PLA). CPL can reduce the costs of college education and accelerate the student to successful program completion.

MyExperienceCounts (MEC) is a website for applicants to any of the fifteen Massachusetts community colleges that guides the individual through a CPL Wizard to prepare a standard portfolio of their prior experiences and learnings. The MEC website assists students to identify potential areas of CPL related to their interest in associate degree or certificate programs at the community college of their choice. The Wizard allows the applicant to create a user account and develops a CPL petition that is transferred to the college of choice. A college advisor/liaison who is a CPL specialist then contacts the applicant and follows through with a formal review of the petition.

There is no cost to student applicants to use the MEC website or to submit applications/portfolios. Once determined eligible for CPL, the student is usually responsible for a fee per CPL credit which is less than the tuition cost for such credits. There are a few types of CPL that are often provided at no charge – e.g., for those with military experience or advanced placement credits. The CPL fee schedule is specific to each community college and disclosed to the applicant as part of the MEC submission process.

The elements of the online CPL portfolio include:

- selected college and up to three degree/certificate programs;
- work experiences, with occupation and length of time at job;
- military experience;
- national examinations¹ – AP, CLEP, DSST, Excelsior;
- certificates, licenses, continuing credit courses;
- training courses provided by your employer;
- prior credit or noncredit college experience;
- proficiency in languages other than English; and
- professional skills/subject matter knowledge from informal study, volunteering, hobbies, etc.

¹ AP-Advanced Placement; CLEP-The College Board's College Level Examination Program; DSST-DANTES Subject Standardized Tests; Excelsior-tests offered by Excelsior College, NY, through an arrangement with Pearson.

The information provided in the portfolio may also prompt the CPL specialist to suggest to the applicant other PLA methods, e.g., departmental or challenge exams for specific courses that have been developed and customized by faculty of the specific college.

The MEC application/website was developed and tested during the lifetime of the GPSTEM PLA/CPL workgroup, from December 2015 through about June 2017. The website went live in September 2017.

Targeted Population of Learners: Any prospective student may use the MEC website for potential CPL opportunities, but a target population is adult/non-traditional learners.

Partners: The MEC website was developed with funding from the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training grant² for the Guided Pathways to STEM (GPSTEM) project of the Massachusetts Community College Consortium, with Massasoit Community College as the lead grantee. A software development firm, fivestar*, designed the application, based, in part, on recommendations of the GPSTEM workgroup on PLA/CPL led by North Shore Community College.

Bringing the Innovation to Scale: The development and maintenance of the MEC website has been supported by the GPSTEM grant, which ends September 30, 2018. The community college consortium has committed to sustaining the MEC website after the grant, with North Shore Community College as the lead/system administrator. There are a range of potential sources of funding to be explored, from other grant sources to consortium membership fees.

There has not been a statewide marketing campaign for the website but a GPSTEM-supported marketing tool kit has been provided to colleges to assist their local efforts to make applicants aware of MEC.

Individual colleges continue to work on integrating the MEC website with their local CPL processes and their college websites. An ongoing challenge is to maintain procedures to ensure that there is the most up-to-date information on programs of study, CPL fee schedules, local CPL liaisons and crosswalks of courses by type of CPL.

² This website was 100% supported by funding from the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training grant to the Massachusetts Community College Consortium, awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, Grant #TC-26450-14-60-A-25.