

Equity in Success



College Credit for Veterans and Working Adults Through the MAP Initiative

ISSUE

There are over 62 million working adults in the United States who do not have a certificate or an associate degree. Of those 62 million, three million are Veterans. California is home to 436,000 Veterans and 6.8 million working adults. Most Veterans have training, certification or experience equivalent to college coursework which could qualify them for up to a year of credit for prior learning.

However, Veterans qualify for only 36 months of Post 911 GI Bill educational benefits which is

not enough to fund a four-year degree. In fact, 25 percent of surveyed Veterans dropped out because their benefits ran out. At the same time, working adults face financial aid limitations that make a college degree completion seem unreasonable. Fifty-two percent of those surveyed believe a good job is not attainable. At the same time, 69 percent said that a degree or certificate would provide a strong advantage and 84 percent said a credit for prior learning offer would strongly influence their choice to attend college. Sadly, fewer than 11 percent ever receive any credit and

far less than that in the California public higher education systems.

Upfront offers of credit for prior learning can be a powerful incentive to attend college and have been shown to increase enrollment of first-time college goers; double completion rates; shorten time to completion by 9 to 14 months; save state funding; preserve financial aid for higher degree attainment; lower debt; improve career advancement¹—all at little to no additional cost to taxpayers. Honoring prior learning by mapping credit for prior learning

¹ Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., Leibrandt, S., Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), ... Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE). (2020). The PLA Boost: Results from a 72-Institution Targeted Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Adult Student Outcomes. Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. Website: <https://www.cael.org/news-and-resources/new-research-from-cael-and-wiche-on-prior-learning-assessment-and-adult-student-outcomes>



	15 UNITS CPL LEADING TO ASSOCIATE'S	PRESERVATION OF FUNDS & SAVINGS	20-YEAR IMPACT	TARGET	PRESERVATION OF FUNDS & SAVINGS	20-YEAR IMPACT
CALIFORNIA	VETERANS	26,115	135,000	10,000	\$261.2M	\$1.4B
	WORKING ADULTS	14,653	115,000	100,000	\$1.5B	\$11.5B
USA	VETERANS	26,115	135,000	50,000	\$1.3B	\$6.8B
	WORKING ADULTS	14,653	115,000	500,000	\$7.3B	\$57.5B

to college and career pathways may be the solution colleges, students and industry partners are looking for to foster upward mobility, close skills gaps, reverse enrollment declines, and reduce crippling student loan debt.

In fall of 2022, there were at least 23,566 Veterans and active-duty military enrolled in the California Community Colleges system. If just 10,000 were awarded a semester of credit (15 units) leading to an associate degree, the annual preservation of funds, savings and impact would total \$1.66 billion. In 2022, nationwide there were 822,775 service members in higher education. If just 50,000 were awarded the same credit, the impact would be \$8.1 billion savings.

If 100,000 California working adults were attracted to college

with offers of 15 units of credit for prior learning, the impact would total \$13 billion. For 500,000 US working adults, the total exceeds \$65 billion.

Each year approximately 200,000 service members transition from military to civilian life. Transition stress is a significant factor that disproportionately affects younger Veterans - ages 18 to 34. Post-9/11 Veterans are more likely to say they struggled with lack of structure in civilian life and felt disconnected from family or friends. Some surveys indicate over 60 percent report difficulty adjusting to civilian life. Forty-five percent report feeling that their military skills and experience are often dismissed by civilian educators and employers .

The promise of higher education is reported as the number one

motivation for service members. More than 70 percent of service members state that their time in the service promoted their interest in higher education, training, certification or licensing programs. While service members are clear in their desire and preparation for higher education, they also cite significant barriers to completing their educational goals, including financial burdens (56 percent), family obligations (28 percent), benefits expire (25 percent), disability and wellness issues (23 percent), and job and school conflicts (22 percent).

The positive impacts of credit for prior learning go beyond academics and economics.

Studies indicate a link between education and the suicide hazard rate. Those with fewer years of

² Kintzle S, Et al. The State of the American Veteran. p.6

education (i.e., high school or non-high school graduate) had a significantly higher hazard of suicide when compared to those with a bachelor's degree. The hazard rate is 4.5 times higher for transitioning service members - 17 to 19 years of age - and 2.5 times higher for those 25 to 29.

These figures highlight the importance of a warm handoff to higher education. Easing the transition by offering upfront credit for prior learning that respects prior training and fosters a sense of belonging for those entering higher education will help reduce these barriers and hazard rates.

BACKGROUND FOR CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING

While the use of Advance Placement/International Baccalaureate exams to incoming college students from the K-12 system is quite common, the use of credit for prior learning for other populations is rare in higher education in California. In the last decade many states and institutions of higher learning have updated policies and regulations to encourage and even compel colleges and universities to consider articulating appropriate credit for prior learning for their programs of study. While it has been rare for working adults to receive any credit for prior learning, most Veterans receive just two to three units of college credit for their military training, even though most qualify for significantly more based on the credit recommendations listed on their Joint Services Transcript. The American Council on Education has evaluated thousands of military occupations and courses and makes credit recommendations for college

course credit. Though the American Council on Education offers a similar system for industry learning, it is not comprehensive and does not include state specific certifications, licenses or apprenticeships. Unfortunately, the credit is not linked to courses at local colleges. To guarantee that Veterans receive the credit they deserve, each college course needs to be matched or articulated and approved by faculty with one or more of the 5,000-plus American Council on Education credit recommendations. This task is further complicated by rank-and-file faculty and administrators at colleges who have limited understanding of credit for prior learning or how to make, approve, store, share and transcribe the myriad articulations possible. Even for colleges that focus on articulating their courses to American Council on Education credit recommendations, there is no system to share those articulations with other colleges and universities to which students might transfer or take additional classes. There is also no system to facilitate working adult credit for industry certifications. Each college also has a unique class numbering system which prevents large-scale sharing of articulation decisions. Lastly, institutions are less likely to grant credit for prior learning for fear it will not be honored at a transfer institution.

THE CALIFORNIA MAP INITIATIVE

The Riverside Community College District hosts the California Mapping Articulated Pathways Initiative, leading the effort to deploy credit for prior learning in California's 116 community colleges. The Mapping Articulated

Pathways project began in 2017 as a strategy to increase Veteran access as part of the Norco College Veteran Initiative. The Phase I design and beta testing was made possible by California Assemblymember Sabrina Cervantes, District 60, and the California Latino Legislative Caucus which sponsored an appropriation to expand access to higher education for Veterans by implementing Mapping Articulated Pathways and by developing a regional Veterans Resource Center at Norco College. In 2018, the project (Phase II) was adopted by the 12 member colleges of the Inland Empire Desert Regional Consortium. In 2021, Assemblymember Cervantes and the California Latino Legislative Caucus sponsored a \$2 million appropriation to begin funding Phase III to scale mapping articulated pathways statewide.

In 2022, the California Mapping Articulated Pathways Initiative was formed to lead the effort to maximize credit for prior learning for Veterans and working adults statewide. In February 2022, the MAP 2022 Cohort of 55 colleges was formed, and in 2023, it was further expanded to 76 colleges dedicated to maximizing credit for prior learning. In 2024, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office incorporated the Mapping Articulated Pathways Initiative as a key component to its Vision 2030 Strategic Plan and supports scaling the project to each California community college and nationally. Provided that funding permits, the Mapping Articulated Pathways team will onboard the remaining 40 in-state community colleges.



REQUESTS

The District is asking state and federal leaders to scale the Mapping Articulated Pathways program nationwide to ensure that working adults and Veterans get the college credit they deserve (up to one year of credit) for their prior learning.

- **State Funding:** Authorize \$6 million in annual funding to scale Mapping Articulated Pathways statewide. The District submitted this request to the California Community Colleges Board of Governors and it is included as one-time funding in the Governor's 2024-25 budget. The funding will support expansion of the mapping articulated pathways to 116 California community colleges plus participating

California State University and the University of California institutions. Ongoing funding is requested beginning with the 2025-26 budget year;

- **Federal Funding:** Authorize \$15 million in annual funding to scale Mapping Articulated Pathways to the 936 community colleges in the US and then to the remaining 690 regionally accredited public colleges and universities; and
- Complete the development of Mapping Articulated Pathways resources, including the development of a national Mapping Articulated Pathways Service Center to support students and colleges seeking credit for prior learning; development of a national common course numbering system; a national credential

repository; a national competency framework linking academic courses to industry and military certifications and training, and integrations with related state and federal systems such as Department of Defense Credentialing Opportunities On-Line, American Council on Education Military Guide, American Council on Education National Guide, Department of Labor, and Skills Bridge to ensure a seamless path from service to higher education/training to career.

California can lead the nation in solving this longstanding systemic inequity for working adults and Veterans by empowering community colleges across the country.