

CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING

A Counselor's Guide to Educational Planning, Advising, and the Referral Process

COUNSELING & STUDENT SUCCESS RESOURCE

Developed by California Community College counseling faculty serving as subject matter experts in support of the California Community Colleges Credit for Prior Learning Initiative.



California
Community
Colleges

Credit for Prior
Learning Initiative

Why CPL Belongs in Educational Planning

Title 5 § 55050(e)

The policies adopted by the governing board of a community college district pursuant to this section **shall require that a student, as a component of their educational planning process pursuant to California Education Code section 78212, be advised of credit for prior learning opportunities** and referred to the college's appropriate authority for assessment of prior learning.

Paradigm Shift

Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) is part of the educational planning conversation for all students. It is an integrated counseling component that validates student experience, reduces redundant coursework, preserves financial aid eligibility, and decreases time-to-completion.

Six-Step CPL Educational Planning Model

STEP	ACTION	DESCRIPTION
1	ASK	- Ask every student about prior learning experiences as a standard part of counseling session intake: - AP/IB/CLEP - military service - work training - industry certifications - Licenses - Apprenticeships - self-directed study
2	IDENTIFY	- Identify which prior learning may align with local college courses and discuss the best fit for CPL types such as: - credit by exam - industry credentials - authenticated competencies - Ensure that the CPL being discussed is in alignment with student academic and career goals.
3	DISCUSS/ COUNSEL	- Discuss the potential value of pursuing CPL with the student and if it: - reduces coursework - saves time and money - accelerates progress toward their goal - Discuss potential implications: - financial aid - transfer - grading implications
4	CONNECT	- Connect the student to the appropriate CPL personnel, department, and resources (College CPL website / MAP Landing page). - Explain the process at the college for formal evaluation of prior learning.
5	ASSIST	Assist the student in gathering and submitting documentation, forms, or materials required to complete the CPL assessment process.
6	PLAN	- Plan the student's educational path around confirmed CPL credit. - Update the educational plan/program map to reflect an accurate, efficient route to completion.

Counselor Responsibility

Counselors serve as a gateway to CPL awards and must ensure that students are informed of CPL opportunities at the onset of the educational planning process. Proactively exploring prior learning early in the process ensures that non-traditional and working adult students do not spend time and financial resources taking courses that cover material they have already mastered.

- Refer students to appropriate CPL personnel at the college
- Ensure that the awarding of CPL credits is an expedient and seamless process for students
- Confirm that CPL credits are in alignment with the student's career and transfer goals

CPL Questions to Ask in the Educational Planning Process

TOPIC	QUESTIONS TO ASK	WHY IT MATTERS
Career and Educational Pathway	<i>What are your career and educational goals?</i>	• Determines whether awarding CPL actively supports the student's career and educational pathway and completion timeline. • Connects prior learning directly to the student's declared program requirements and major electives.
Transfer Considerations	<i>Are you considering transfer to a CSU, UC, out-of-state, or private institution?</i>	• Identifies potential transfer considerations, as four-year university CPL acceptance policies vary. • If the student's goal is to attend UC, discuss that UC only accepts CPL received through AP, IB, or Credit by Exam. UC will review military transcripts after transfer.
Examinations	<i>Have you successfully passed standardized examinations such as AB, IB, CLEP?</i>	• Identifies potential credit depending on exam type and career and educational pathway.
Prior Experience	<i>Can you share details about your work experience, professional training, military service, or any certifications you have acquired?</i>	• Identifies potential college-level learning and military service credits (JST) early in the appointment.
Skills & Knowledge	<i>What specific skills or knowledge do you believe you've gained through those experiences that may align with college-level learning?</i>	• Helps identify specific experiential learning that may align directly with student learning outcomes for potential CPL assessment.
Credentials & Licenses	<i>Do you hold any industry certifications, licenses, or credentials?</i>	• Identifies potential credential-based CPL, industry articulation agreements, or standardized credit.

Counselor CPL Quick Check

- ☐ Asked student about prior learning (military, work, exams, AP/IB CLEP)
- ☐ Identified potential CPL options/course matches
- ☐ Informed student of required documentation
- ☐ Reviewed financial aid, grading, and transfer implications
- ☐ Provided CPL resources (personnel, website, MAP Landing page)
- ☐ Referred student for formal CPL assessment
- ☐ Updated Student Educational Plan with applicable CPL credits

CPL May Not be the Right Choice

Advise Students of the potential impact of CPL

Awarding CPL is not always a best fit for students. Counselors must advise of potential implications before a student officially accepts CPL.

Potential Impact	Description
Transfer Limitations	● UC: Accepts AP, IB; credit by exam; military reviewed after transfer ● CSU: Accepts AP, IB and CLEP; credit by exam; industry credentials and military ● Private and Out of State: Varies by institutions
GPA and Competitive Impact	● Transfer ● Selective admission programs ● Prerequisites ● GPA requirements ● Degree or certificate requirements ● Other educational goals ● Pass/no-pass or with a letter grade and how this impacts GPA
Financial Implications	● CPL affects Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP), time-to-degree, and lifetime eligibility limits for federal aid programs such as Pell Grants. ● Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) for Veterans may also be affected.
Degree Applicability	● Ensure CPL fulfills specific major requirements, general education, or prerequisites, rather than just accumulating excessive elective credits that are non-applicable.

Quick Reference: SEP Requirements

Summary of § 55524, as amended (2026)

Requirement	Description
Who	All non-exempt* students receive a plan — abbreviated or comprehensive
What	Comprehensive plans map course, program, prerequisite, and support-service requirements to the student's goal
When	Comprehensive plan due before the end of first academic year (or sooner)
How	Delivered electronically, kept accessible, and reviewed as needed
Accountability	Students may file a complaint under § 55534(a) for non-compliance

*Exemptions apply to students with degrees; attending for non-degree purposes; completion of assessment, orientation and counseling services at another CCC, taking a mandated course, or special-admit status (i.e. K-12).

Credit for Prior Learning Types

CPL TYPE	DESCRIPTION
Standardized Examinations	External examinations typically recognized by colleges and universities as measuring competencies comparable to those achieved in baccalaureate level courses or general education areas. Examination examples: • Advanced Placement (AP) • International Baccalaureate (IB) • College Level Examination (CLEP)
Credit by Exam (Cx)	Faculty-determined examinations used to assess sufficient mastery of the content identified in the Course Outline of Record All real-time assessments shall be considered credit by exam. Examination examples: • Written • Oral • Performance • Skills demonstration
Joint Service Transcripts (JST)	The JST is an official document describing military training, courses, and occupations and includes ACE credit recommendations. While service members in the Air Force and Space Force may have a JST, Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) is regionally accredited and has its own transcript. CCAF transcripts are evaluated through the local college's external transcript evaluation process.
Authenticated Competencies	Credit is awarded based on verified evidence of college-level knowledge, skills and competencies gained through prior learning or experience and evaluated for alignment with college course outcomes. SY02 Examples: • Compilation of multiple assessment methods • Resumes • Validated work documentation • Performance records such as photos, videos, or awards
Industry-Recognized Certifications & Documented Trainings	Industry recognized certifications include licenses and credentials for verified professional skills and training. Examples: • California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) • Firefighter I or Firefighter II Certificate • American Welding Society D1.1 SMAW Qualified Welder • Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA)

CPL Types and Applicability to the General Education (GE) Patterns (2026)

CPL TYPE	CSU GE Breadth	IGETC	Cal-GETC	Local GE & Major (CCC)	Associate Degree for Transfer
EXTERNAL EXAM CREDIT					
Advanced Placement (AP)	Yes- Score of 3+ ¹	Yes - Score of 3+ ²	Yes -Score of 3+ ³	<i>Per ESS 23-20 & local policy</i>	Yes ⁴ Check UC/CSU major req.
International Baccalaureate (IB)	Yes- Score 4+ (5+ HL) ¹	Yes -Score 5+ (HL) ²	Yes -Score 5+ (HL) ³	<i>Per ESS 23-20 & local policy</i>	Yes ⁴ Check UC/CSU major req.
College Level Exam Program (CLEP)	Yes	No	No	<i>Per ESS 23-20 & local policy</i>	Yes CSU GE only – not Cal-GETC/IGETC
OTHER TYPES OF CPL					
Credit by Examination (Cx)	Yes	Yes ²	Yes ³	<i>Per local policy</i>	Yes UC/CSU accepts CCC-transcribed Cx
CPL – Military Credit	Yes	No	No	<i>Per local policy</i>	Yes CSU GE only – not Cal-GETC/IGETC ⁵
CPL – Industry Credential	Yes	No	No	<i>Per local policy</i>	Yes CSU GE only – not Cal-GETC/IGETC ⁶
CPL – Portfolio Review	Yes	No	No	<i>Per local policy</i>	Yes CSU GE only – not Cal-GETC/IGETC ⁶

The information in this chart is subject to change. For detailed information regarding AP, IB, and CLEP please refer to the [Cal-GETC Standards](#), [IGETC Standards](#), CSU Guidelines: [Executive Order 1036](#), [External Exams](#), [Military CPL](#) and local processes.

Sources

1. [CSU External Exams](#)
2. [IGETC Standards](#)
3. [Cal-GETC Standards](#)
4. [Article 1 B.3.b: Credit for Examinations](#)
5. [Article 4 B.3: Credit for Education, Training and Service Provided by the Armed Forces of the United States](#)
6. [Article 3 B.2: Credit for Prior Learning Acquired Outside of Traditional Higher Education](#)

Counselor Tip — Supporting Documentation

Encourage students to bring supporting documentation that can help identify potential CPL opportunities to the initial counseling appointment such as:

- Exam scores
- Military transcript (JST)
- Validated work documentation
- Industry credentials/licenses
- Resume
- Foreign transcripts (check for Cx)
- Performance records (photos, videos, awards)

MAKE CPL PART OF THE PLAN

Ask every student. Identify prior learning. Connect CPL to the student's goal. Refer for assessment. Reflect the benefit in the SEP. The goal of awarding Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) is to provide students with meaningful, usable college credit that supports their academic and career goals while delivering financial, programmatic, and intrinsic benefits.

Credit for Prior Learning Counselor Quick Reference

THE 6-STEP CPL MODEL

#	STEP	DO THIS
1	ASK	Ask every student about prior learning: military, AP/IB/CLEP, Credit-by-exam, work training, certifications, licenses, apprenticeships, self-study.
2	IDENTIFY	Match experience to CPL type: exam credit, industry credential, authenticated competency, military or other.
3	DISCUSS/COUNSEL	Discuss time and money savings and advise on potential implications for financial aid, transfer, and grading.
4	CONNECT	Refer to CPL personnel, department, and the college CPL/MAP webpage.
5	ASSIST	Support student with CPL local college processes, gather documentation, and how to submit required forms.
6	PLAN	Update the Student Educational Plan (SEP) to reflect awarded CPL credit.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE STUDENT

- ☐ What are your educational and career goals?
- ☐ Are you considering transfer to a CSU, UC, out-of-state, or private institution? **⚠ UC only accepts CPL received through AP, IB, or Credit by Exam.**
- ☐ Tell me about your work experience, professional training, military service, AP/IB/CLEP, or certifications.
- ☐ What specific skills or knowledge from those experiences might align with college-level learning?
- ☐ Do you hold any industry certifications, licenses, or credentials?
- ☐ Which past work experiences relate to your current career goal?

DOCUMENTATION TO REQUEST

- Exam scores
- Military transcript (JST)
- Validated work documentation
- Industry credentials/licenses
- Resume
- Foreign transcripts (check for Cx)
- Performance records (photos, videos, awards)

IMPLICATIONS TO REVIEW

FINANCIAL AID	TRANSFER	DEGREE APPLICABILITY
- No aid disbursement for CPL credits - Counts toward completion, not current-term enrollment status - Refer to financial aid office for individual cases - Consider SAP maximum timeframe	- Verify policy with receiving institution - Varies by CSU / UC / private / out-of-state - Check P/NP grading implications	- Confirm credit fulfills a specific major/GE requirement - Avoid awarding excessive units - Check prerequisites, GPA, selective admission rules

COUNSELOR QUICK CHECK

- ☐ Asked student about prior learning (military, work, exams)
- ☐ Identified potential CPL options/course matches
- ☐ Informed student of required documentation
- ☐ Reviewed financial aid, grading, and transfer implications
- ☐ Provided CPL resources (personnel, website, MAP Landing page)
- ☐ Referred student for formal CPL assessment
- ☐ Updated Student Educational Plan with applicable CPL credits

CPL TYPES & GENERAL EDUCATION APPLICABILITY (2026)

CPL TYPE	CSU GE Breadth	IGETC	Cal-GETC	Local GE & Major	Assoc. Degree for Transfer
Advanced Placement (AP)	Yes – 3+	Yes – 3+	Yes – 3+	Per ESS 23-20 & local policy	Yes — check major req.
Intl Baccalaureate (IB)	Yes – 4+ (5+ HL)	Yes – 5+ (HL)	Yes – 5+ (HL)	Per ESS 23-20 & local policy	Yes — check major req.
CLEP	Yes	No	No	Per ESS 23-20 & local policy	Yes — CSU GE only
Credit by Exam (Cx)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Per local policy	Yes — UC/CSU accepts
Military Credit	Yes	No	No	Per local policy	CSU GE only
Industry Credential	Yes	No	No	Per local policy	CSU GE only
Authenticated Competencies	Yes	No	No	Per local policy	CSU GE only

Reference: Ed code 78093.2, Title 5 § 55050, and Title 5 § 55524