



**TO:** Chief Executive Officers  
Chief Instructional Officers  
Chief Student Services Officers  
Academic Senate Presidents

**FROM:** Aisha Lowe  
Vice Chancellor, Educational Services & Support

Dolores Davison  
President, Academic Senate for California Community Colleges

**RE:** Guidance and System-wide Policy Advisory for the Approved California Code of Regulations, title 5 section 55050, Credit for Prior Learning (CPL), Effective March 20, 2020

---

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide policy guidance on the amendment to title 5 of the California Code of Regulations, § 55050, Credit for Prior Learning (CPL), as well as comprehensive recommendations to support the local implementation of CPL policy.

To support and achieve the requirements enacted in statute and the goals identified by the Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) Advisory Committee, the Board of Governors unanimously approved an amendment to [title 5 § 55050](#), Credit for Prior Learning. The amended title 5 regulation became effective March 20, 2020.

Credit for Prior Learning is an important strategy to assist California Community Colleges in achieving the goals of the *Vision for Success*. The revised CPL regulations affirm consistent and equitable practices that enable students to obtain credit for validated college-level skills and knowledge gained outside of a college classroom.

This policy reform requires districts and colleges to provide students more consistent and equitable access to prior learning assessments, to promote quality, integrity and equity in the award of credit, and make programs more accessible to millions of students without certificates or degrees.

This guidance memorandum includes the following:

- CPL Definition
- Amendments to CCR title 5, § 55050, Credit for Prior Learning
- CPL Assessment Methods
- Local Policy Implementation Guidance

### **CPL Definition**

The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office adopts the following definition of CPL and encourages colleges to adopt the same language following local decision-making processes:

*Credit for prior learning is college credit awarded for validated college-level skills and knowledge gained outside of a college classroom.*

*Students' knowledge and skills might be gained through experiences such as:*

- *Military training*
- *Industry training*
- *State/federal government training*
- *Apprenticeships, internships, work-based learning, or other industry-based experiential learning*
- *Validated volunteer and civic activities (e.g. Peace Corps)*

*This CPL definition does not include knowledge and skills already assessed and awarded credit through formal education at regionally accredited in state and out-of-state institutions.*

### **Amendments to CCR title 5, § 55050, Credit for Prior Learning**

Summarized below are the amended sections of regulation 55050, for which compliance is mandatory. Additional guidance is provided within bulleted text. Attached with this memorandum is a copy of the complete text of the amended regulatory language, along with the Credit for Prior Learning Implementation Toolkit, which provides tools for policy development and implementation.

Title: The amendment to the regulation incorporated a revision to the title of section 55050. The previous title of the regulation was *Credit by Examination* and the amended title is *Credit for Prior Learning*.

CCR, tit. 5, § 55050 (a): The governing board of each community college district shall adopt and publish policies pertaining to credit for prior learning. The policies shall be transparent and accessible to all stakeholders, published at least in college catalogs. Procedures for students to attain credit for prior learning shall include, but not be limited to, credit by examination, evaluation of Joint Services Transcripts, evaluation of student-created portfolios, evaluation of industry-recognized credential documentation, and standardized exams.

CCR, tit. 5, § 55050 (b): The governing board may grant credit to any student who satisfactorily passes an assessment approved or conducted by proper authorities of the college. For purposes of this section, "assessment" means the process that faculty undertake with a student to ensure the student demonstrates sufficient mastery of the course outcomes as set forth in the course outline of record. "Sufficient mastery" means having attained a level of knowledge, skill, and information equivalent to that demonstrated generally by students who receive the minimum passing grade in the course.

CCR, tit. 5, § 55050 (c): The nature and content of the assessment shall be determined solely by faculty in the discipline who normally teach the course for which credit is to be granted in

## Guidance and System-wide Policy Advisory on Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)

August 14, 2020

accordance with policies and procedures approved by the curriculum committee established pursuant to section 55002. The faculty shall determine that the assessment adequately measures mastery of the course content as set forth in the outline of record. The faculty may accept an assessment conducted at a location other than the community college for this purpose.

CCR, tit. 5, § 55050 (d): Credit may be awarded for prior experience or prior learning only for individually identified courses with subject matter similar to that of the individual's prior learning, and only for a course listed in the catalog of the community college. Colleges shall consider the credit recommendations of the American Council on Education pursuant to Education Code section 66025.71. Upon a student's demonstration of sufficient mastery through an examination or assessment, an award of credit should be made, if possible, to California Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum, California State University General Education Breadth, and local community college general education requirements or requirements for a student's chosen program. Award of credit may be made to electives for students who do not require additional general education or program credits to meet their goals.

- CPL must be tied to a course so that faculty can assess prior learning according to a course's student learning outcomes. If the college does not offer a course aligned with the student's learning, faculty can work with faculty at another college on the assessment or refer the student to another college for assessment. Faculty must grant credit first in General Education (GE) or program areas, and grant credit in electives only as a last resort. This ensures that the credits help advance students towards certificates or degrees.

CCR, tit. 5, § 55050 (e), Credit by Examination: The determination to offer credit by examination rests solely on the discretion of the discipline faculty. A separate examination shall be conducted for each course for which credit is to be granted. Credit may be granted only to a student who is registered at the college and in good standing, and only for a course listed in the catalog of the community college.

- *This section draws a distinction between Credit by Exam and other methods of CPL assessment.*

CCR, tit. 5, § 55050 (f): The student's academic record shall be clearly annotated to reflect that credit was earned by an assessment of prior learning.

- In designating these notations, districts should ensure local policy aligns with title 5 section 55052, which requires that credit earned through an advanced placement examination be specifically notated as such.

CCR, tit. 5, § 55050 (g): Grading shall be according to the regular grading system approved by the governing board pursuant to section 55023, except that students shall be offered a "pass-no pass" option if that option is ordinarily available for the course.

CCR, tit. 5, § 55050 (h): Units for which credit is given pursuant to the provisions of this section shall not be counted in determining the 12 semester hours of credit in residence required for an associate degree.

## Guidance and System-wide Policy Advisory on Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)

August 14, 2020

CCR, tit. 5, § 55050 (i): A district may charge a student a fee for administering an examination pursuant to this section, provided the fee does not exceed the enrollment fee which would be associated with enrollment in the course for which the student seeks credit by examination.

- While districts may charge a fee for examinations (as defined in the “CPL Assessment Methods” section below), districts should keep student equity in mind when determining fees and ensure fees do not limit access to CPL by placing an undue financial burden on students.

CCR, tit. 5, § 55050 (j): The policies and procedures adopted by the governing board of a community college district pursuant to this section shall require that a student, upon completion of their educational plan pursuant to California Education Code Section 78212, shall be referred to the college's appropriate authority for assessment of prior learning if the student is a veteran or an active-duty member of the armed forces, holds industry-recognized credentials, or requests credit for a course based on their prior learning.

- Colleges must put into place a process to automatically refer students to faculty for assessment of prior learning if they meet one of the three conditions.

CCR, tit. 5, § 55050 (k): The policies for assessments adopted by the governing board of a community college shall offer students an opportunity to accept, decline, or appeal decisions related to the award of credit, and in cases of credit by exam, pursuant to sections 55021 and 55025.

CCR, tit. 5, § 55050 (l): The governing board of each community college district shall review the credit for prior learning policy every three years and report findings to the Chancellor's Office. Findings shall include data disaggregated by gender and race/ethnicity including the number of students who received credit for prior learning, the number of credits awarded per student, retention and persistence rates of students earning credit for prior learning, completion data (for certificate, degree, and transfer) for students earning credit for prior learning, and qualitative assessments by students of the policies and procedures.

- Data domain/element structures are being incorporated into the Chancellor's Office Management Information System (MIS) to support data reporting requirements. Additional guidance from the Chancellor's Office, including a survey tool to support the qualitative data collection requirement, is forthcoming.

CCR, tit. 5, § 55050 (m): The governing board of each community college district shall incorporate policies pursuant to section 55052 on College Board Advanced Placement examinations and any other districtwide policies governing the award of credit for prior learning to create a comprehensive credit for prior learning policy.

- This CPL policy does not supersede existing policies on advanced placement, international baccalaureate, or other standardized exams.

## Guidance and System-wide Policy Advisory on Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)

August 14, 2020

CCR, tit. 5, § 55050 (n): By December 31, 2020, the district shall certify in writing to the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges that the policies required by this section have been adopted and implemented.

- The Chancellor's Office will administer an electronic form for districts to certify compliance with this section. The certification process will require: 1) submission of the CPL policy language, and 2) districts to confirm that each community college campus within the district has posted its CPL policy in the college catalog and on its Website. The Chancellor's Office will review the district certifications to ensure alignment with Title 5, § 55050, and provide guidance to districts where policies are not aligned.

### CPL Assessment Methods

Qualified discipline faculty shall determine the CPL assessment that is appropriate for the student based on their experiences, and credit should be determined by qualified faculty who conduct the CPL assessment. Title 5 § 55050 requires districts and colleges to make various methods of CPL assessment available to students. **For the purposes of charging a fee**, the policy distinguishes two different categories: "assessment" and "examination."

#### ***Examination: A fee can be charged***

*Credit by examination* is a process whereby discipline faculty administer a locally developed exam to determine whether a student can demonstrate sufficient mastery of the learning outcomes of that class. The college may charge a fee.

#### ***Assessment: A fee cannot be charged***

This type of assessment can include a student developing a portfolio or completing a skills demonstration that is evaluated by faculty. This can also include faculty evaluating a Joint Services Transcript, or developing a "cross-walk" in which they assess the competencies a student achieved in a prior learning experience and determine whether they match the student learning outcomes of a course. College faculty can consult credit recommendations made by the American Council on Education (ACE) in assessing prior learning experiences. Once a faculty member has assessed a standard/common training, the credit recommendation can be made available for other faculty to consider for other students with identical credentials to prevent duplication of assessment and encourage consistency in credit for identical experiences. Students cannot be charged a fee for these types of assessments (this includes standardized tests, such as Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), CLEP, Defense Language Proficiency Test, or others).

### Local Policy Implementation Guidance

While the regulation is a first step in creating a more equitable, statewide approach to CPL, many decisions are left to local discretion so that colleges can contextualize support for students. The Chancellor's Office is providing resources and support through:

1. *Pilots*. Two pilots were launched to help operationalize CPL. In a joint initiative of the Chancellor's Office and Academic Senate, approximately 20 faculty across seven disciplines created "cross-walks" that examine outcomes from military- and industry-related prior learning experiences and recommend credit in aligned courses. In addition,

## Guidance and System-wide Policy Advisory on Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)

August 14, 2020

Palomar College is a pilot site for college-wide CPL implementation. Resources from these pilots are being shared in a CPL Implementation Toolkit on the CPL Community of the Vision Resource Center. Join the community at [visionresourcecenter.cccco.edu](https://visionresourcecenter.cccco.edu) to access resources, connect with colleagues, and share practices and challenges.

2. *Data.* Details will be forthcoming about a data element for MIS related to CPL. In the meantime, colleges are encouraged to build into their policy a process of continuous improvement using data. Title 5 § 55050 requires that every college track and report data related to CPL every three years (see details above).
3. *Transfer.* The Chancellor's Office and Academic Senate continue to collaborate with our intersegmental partners to ensure that CPL is accepted for transfer. Colleges are encouraged to also work with their local four-year partners to ensure transfer of credit.

If you have questions, please contact Chantée Guiney, CPL Specialist ([cguiney@CCCCO.edu](mailto:cguiney@CCCCO.edu)).

cc: Eloy Ortiz Oakley, Chancellor  
Dr. Daisy Gonzales, Deputy Chancellor  
Marty Alvarado, Executive Vice Chancellor  
CCCCO Staff

### Attachments:

Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges, Revisions to Title 5 Regulations of Curriculum and Instruction, §55050 (March 20, 2020)

Credit for Prior Learning Implementation Toolkit (August 2020)