

Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee and Education Committee  
JOINT PUBLIC HEARING ON  
Military-friendly Educational Programs and Policies

Wednesday, June 20, 2012  
North Office Building Hearing Room One  
Harrisburg, PA  
9:00 a.m. - Noon

*Testimony by Representatives of The College Board*

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Introduction

Good morning Chairwoman Baker, Chairman Piccola, and honorable members of the committees. Thank you for inviting us here today to discuss the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) and how it has been helping members of our U.S. Armed Forces, as well as other adult students, achieve educational success for more than four decades.

The College Board is a not-for-profit membership association whose mission is to connect students to college success and opportunity. Founded in 1900, the association is composed of 6,000 schools, colleges, universities and other educational organizations. Each year, the College Board serves seven million students and their parents, 23,000 high schools, and 3,800 colleges through major programs and services in college admissions, guidance, assessment, financial aid, enrollment, and teaching and learning. The College Board is committed to the principles of excellence and equity, and that commitment is embodied in all of its programs, services, activities and concerns.

The College Board is very much a presence here in Pennsylvania. The Middle States Regional Office – which serves all schools and colleges in Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania – is located in Bala Cynwyd, Montgomery County. Meanwhile, our nationally-renowned team of psychometric researchers is based in Newtown, Bucks County. Additionally, Messrs. Lingenfelter and Parmele are both Commonwealth natives from Luzerne and Centre counties, respectively, as well as veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces.

CLEP Program Overview:

The College-Level Examination Program® (CLEP) was established by The College Board in 1967. The program consists of 33 introductory-level college subjects across 5 disciplines that validate knowledge learned through independent study, on-the-job training, or experiential learning and translates that into college credit. It is one of the most widely accepted Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) programs in the country and is recognized for credit by 2,900 colleges and universities.

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) allows colleges to assess learning that students have acquired outside of the classroom. PLA credit helps students progress toward achieving a degree with greater efficiency and success. In fact, recent research by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) indicates

that students who earned credit through PLA had better academic outcomes, particularly, in terms of persistence and completion rates than non-PLA students.

CLEP exam development, content, and policy are overseen by standing committees of 600 college and university faculty from institutions nationwide. Additionally, the American Council on Education (ACE) evaluates and makes recommendations for college-level equivalencies. These examinations, in turn, help students save time and money while achieving their postsecondary education goals. For example, the nominal cost of \$77 for a CLEP exam yielding 3 college credits pales in comparison to current tuition charges at any postsecondary institution.

Recent surveys of CLEP examinees revealed that 70% said CLEP made a difference in their ability to finance their degrees and an impressive 91% indicated CLEP made a difference in their ability to complete their degrees. CLEP is most popular with adult students and military personnel, and 45% of all CLEP examinees are first-generation college students.

Approximately 200,000 CLEP exams are administered annually at 1,700 college and university test centers as well as selected U.S. military installations. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania currently has the fifth highest number of CLEP examinations with 4,500 annually while the states of Texas, Florida, New York, and California each have nearly twice as many participants as Pennsylvania.

In summary, the CLEP program is advancing the College Board's non-profit mission to connect students to college success. As such, CLEP promotes success, access, and completion.

**Success** – Students passing CLEP perform as well as or better than their peers in subsequent course work

**Access** – CLEP allows capable students to move ahead, opening seats in introductory classes

**Completion** – CLEP students complete their degrees at a higher rate than students not earning credit-by-exam

#### Department of Defense Relationship

CLEP enables veterans, military personnel and qualified spouses to receive college credit and save time and money with all of the available 33 exams.

Veterans can use their GI Bill benefits for CLEP exams. Exam fees of \$77 per test and administrative fees, which are typically \$20 - \$30, can be fully reimbursed depending on the candidate's benefits election. Veterans are eligible to take CLEP exams at any of the 1,700 testing centers at colleges and universities. Veterans can also make the most of their GI Bill benefits by earning college credit for a much lower cost and applying their remaining funds toward needed courses. Earning college credit quickly provides flexibility to veterans in managing the complex demands of jobs, families, and college-level course work.

Military personnel (Active Duty, Reserve, and National Guard), spouses, and some civilian employees are given free access to CLEP exams through the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES). DANTES mission is to support the off-duty, voluntary education programs of the Department of Defense and to conduct special projects and development activities in support of education-related functions of the Department.

Eligible military candidates and dependents who take a CLEP test will have the \$77 exam fee funded by DANTES for the first attempt per test title. If the candidate does not score high enough on the test to earn college credit, then they have the option to retest at their own expense at a later date. DANTES also provides free study guides to candidates to assist their preparations for the exams.

Service members and dependents traditionally take CLEP exams on a military installation or a college/university near to an installation that is specifically approved to administer CLEP exams for DANTES. There are no administrative fees charged to candidates testing at these locations. The College Board and DANTES have recently launched a pilot program with an expanded network of college/university test centers in the United States through which DANTES will fund the exam fee and administrative fees.

#### Prior Learning Assessment Policy & Practice

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is the process by which many colleges evaluate college-level knowledge and skills gained outside the classroom. PLA uses credit by examination, i.e., credit for learning acquired in extra-institutional settings and portfolio assessment. It is built on the principle that the awarding of academic credit for prior learning, based on demonstrated competencies and criterion-referenced assessments, is sound academic practice.

The recent study funded by the Lumina Foundation for Higher Education and conducted by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) called *Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success* examined the records of 62,475 students ages 25 and above who entered one of 48 colleges and universities in 2001. Of those students, one quarter (n=15,594) earned some type of PLA credit by 2008, the study reported. Moreover, after charting the students' academic progress over the course of seven years, researchers found that PLA students had better academic outcomes than non-PLA adult students. Students with PLA credits also performed better across nearly all types of institutions and all demographics, earned more institutional credits, and took fewer remedial courses overall.

"The average time to degree decreased as the number of PLA credits earned increased. ... When looking at various student subgroups, and at students from different types of institutions, we found PLA student graduation rates that were sometimes three or four times higher than non-PLA students," according to the study, which also found that standardized tests, such as CLEP and the College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) Program, were the most commonly offered PLA option among participating institutions.

And yet despite the overwhelming evidence that PLA increases college completion rates, not all postsecondary education institutions and systems account for the learning equally. The most common practice is for individual faculty members and academic departments to determine which PLA credits can be accepted, for what, and the determining cut score. These determinations may or may not be in line with the American Council on Education (ACE)'s recommendations or any decision based in evidence of data.

#### State & University System PLA Policy Examples

Pro-active states and state university higher education systems have taken action to ensure consistent use, transferability, and evidence-based practice as it pertains to accepting and crediting validated Prior Learning Assessments. For example, the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education passed a Dual Credit Policy for all Kentucky Public Postsecondary Institutions on April 20, 2012 (see attached) that ensures uniformity and transparency for all students seeking proper acceptance of their prior learning. Moreover, the California State University system of 23 universities enrolling 417,112 students passed a

policy of Systemwide Credit for External Examinations in 2010 to ensure fair treatment to students seeking validation of prior learning, while also relieving enrollment capacity pressures. And most recently, Massachusetts Senate Bill 2254 signed into law on May 24, 2012 directs all Massachusetts public institutions to develop and communicate PLA policies consistent with ACE recommendations.

### Conclusion

The College Board has been assisting adult students, military personnel and veterans with their postsecondary education objectives via the CLEP Program for 45 years. We seek to continue to do so while ensuring that these students receive appropriate credit for their validated prior learning. As such, we encourage the Senate of Pennsylvania to examine the existing PLA policies and related completion initiatives in Kentucky, California, Florida, Colorado, Tennessee, and Massachusetts to obtain further insight and inspiration to bring such uniformity of service to all adult students – military, veteran, and civilian – to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

### Source:

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. *Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success: A 48-Institution Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Adult Student Outcomes*, 2010, pages 24, 32, 36, 57.