## CALL TO ACTION

As outlined by the American Council on Education, "many colleges and universities evaluate the college-level knowledge and skills an individual has gained outside of the classroom for college credit. This evaluation is called Credit for Prior Learning (CPL), but it may also be referred to as prior learning assessment or experiential learning."

Types of CPL can include training received in the military, workplace training, professional certifications, credit by exam, national exams such as Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB), along with community-based experiences such as civic activities and volunteer service.

Two policies in the California Code of Regulations guide the award of CPL: Credit by Examination (Title 5, Section 55050) and AP exam credit (Title 5, Section 55052). Additionally, SB1071 requires the California Community College (CCC) system to implement a consistent policy to award credit for veteran and military students using their Joint Services Transcripts (JST) and AB1786 requires an initiative to expand the use of course credit at CCC for students with prior learning.

If an individual is able to receive credit for prior learning, this can help shorten their time to a degree and/or reduce their economic burden through savings in tuition. Within education settings, CPL acts as an incentive to accelerate academic progress. Holistically, capturing learning that happens outside of formal education also allows an individual to showcase their skills gained in a variety of settings, which conveys a much fuller picture to potential employers. The growing need to capture learning everywhere it occurs is currently being driven by a desire to shift away from a history of bias in hiring practices and a global movement, now mirrored in many states, toward a "skills-first" hiring approach, both of which will be explored in the May Task Force meeting.

The types of artifacts that count toward verified learning is expanding, and the wide array of sources for issuing those artifacts is growing beyond what has been traditionally captured on transcript documents. This is the concept put forth in the "Freedom to Succeed" press release

accompanying the Governor's [Executive Order](#), which urges the state of California to focus on "removing barriers to employment for diverse communities…and removing silos and increasing connection between education systems and the workforce."  In order to do this, updated technology is required to capture and transmit verified data in the format of a comprehensive [Learner and Employment Record (LER)](#). In California, a "Career Passport" is the proposed solution for moving beyond a traditional academic transcript and expanding into a digital, verified record of an individual's comprehensive learning, skills, and accomplishments. CPL serves as a bridge between documenting skills within an academic context and the broader objectives of a Career Passport to document skills for employers.

## PROBLEMS TO SOLVE

The problem to solve with CPL is twofold, both in education and workplace settings. Students who have certified knowledge in nonacademic or noncredit contexts, such as in adult learning programs or with third-party issued credentials, are struggling to get credit toward their academic pathway. Job seekers, without a means to capture and showcase their learning that occurs outside of traditional transcripts, are unable to share their relevant certifications and skills through a secure, verified source.

These problems are heightened in light of rising costs in education, a greater income-to-debt ratio across the United States, concerns about individual data security, and a growing body of certifications of nonacademic learning that is currently hard to categorize and verify.

## PROBLEM TO SOLVE:
## STUDENTS LACK AWARENESS ABOUT HOW CPL CAN MAP TO COLLEGE CREDIT

Similar to confusion that can arise around financial aid eligibility and options, many incoming students do not know about CPL and the experiences they have that may be translated into academic credit.  Students may not be alerted about CPL after they enroll, and students don't know that some colleges offer more CPL opportunities than others. Even with existing CPL opportunities, delays may occur as students become aware of their options, gather required documentation, and meet with college staff to have their requests evaluated. These delays can have a significant impact on the student's educational plan, such as enrolling in courses that they may have already satisfied through unevaluated CPL. As with other guidance around the college application and acceptance process, students would need support through a structured process that prompts for possible CPL activities and leads them through follow-up activities.

# Capturing Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)

## PROBLEM TO SOLVE: COLLEGE FACULTY LACK CAPACITY AND SUPPORT TO CATEGORIZE AND EVALUATE NEW OR INCOMING FORMS OF CPL

Students in California bring with them a variety of work and learning experiences, making the process of CPL evaluation an often time-consuming one for college faculty. Additionally, California's colleges and universities provide a wealth of learning opportunities that are not typically captured and shared on academic transcripts, such as digital badges, work-based learning, noncredit and extension courses, and portfolios. Each institution has its own process and policy for documenting student participation and outcomes and for how this information is shared. Given this growing body of artifacts of learning, many prior learning qualifications have not yet been evaluated for articulation, so the burden falls on colleges and faculty to understand the types of artifacts that are being collected and submitted in order to determine if they represent equivalent forms of learning to existing coursework on the campus.

## PROBLEM TO SOLVE: LEARNERS LACK A STREAMLINED WAY TO SHARE CPL DOCUMENTATION AND TO DOCUMENT LIFELONG LEARNING THAT MAY OCCUR IN WORK-BASED SETTINGS, THROUGH SKILLS-TRAINING PROGRAMS, AND IN COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTEER SETTINGS

Official transcripts must function in a format that can be used as a learner transitions into different locations for education and employment opportunities. Yet, learning is now occurring in a variety of contexts in addition to formal education settings, and throughout an individual's lifetime. Currently, there is no statewide, endorsed solution or interoperable set of platforms that allow individuals to continue to collect their learning throughout their lifetime in a format that ensures verified, secure data that can be easily used by receivers.

## OVERVIEW OF RELATED TOOLS

Starting within the lens of the state, the Mapping Articulated Pathways (MAP) initiative serves as a best practice example for tracking CPL in a manner that can scale across education segments. It is important to note the MAP vision is equitable access to higher education through CPL, leading to social mobility and career advancement, which means they have designed an approach that is transparent and shareable. The MAP platform was developed to initially serve the California Community Colleges to allow them to compare their courses to military courses and professional experiences and create equivalencies based on the credit recommendations made by the American Council on Education Military Guide, The National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS), and other recommending agencies. These equivalencies become articulations when they are approved by discipline faculty. They are then stored in

MAP and [made accessible](#) to faculty, educational counselors, advisors, working adults and veterans, and personnel at other colleges and universities. This searchable repository allows colleges to streamline their CPL process without having to start from scratch for every articulation, and allows them to proactively recruit potential students if they make connections with the programs, training organizations, and entities issuing these external forms of verified learning.

On a national scale, [Credential Engine](#) provides a suite of web-based services including a centralized Credential Registry to house up-to-date information about all credentials. Credential Engine created the Credential Transparency Description Language (CTDL), a common description language to enable credential comparability, and a platform to support customized applications to search and retrieve information about credentials. Similar to the work MAP is doing in California, Credential Engine is working with states to create registries that allow searchable, transparent databases of credentials the states have determined are both verified and valuable artifacts of learning. In updates from early 2024, they showcased the following initiatives:

» **Texas** is working towards establishing the state's first credential library so all credentials can be made transparent and available to all Texans. Texas published over 3,100 credentials and corresponding learning opportunities, and more.

» **Indiana** has published over 3,000 credentials to the Credential Registry, including all certificates and degrees offered by the public institutions, which are powering career exploration and course-planning tools. They have also published 222 high schools as credential providers, all offering college-level certificates earned through dual credit.

» **The American Council on Education** published over 10,000 transfer value credit recommendations from their [National Guide](#). This data helps people seeking higher education opportunities to get the most value out of their prior learning achievements.

As these examples show, just as there is variety in the types of CPL, there are many different artifacts associated with that learning, including credentials, certificates, and transfer credit recommendations. Many states are currently focusing on creating [open-access repositories](#) as a means to better link the learning done outside formal education settings to equivalent learning done inside formal education settings in order to streamline college to career pathways.

The California Electronic Transcript Data Standard, enacted by [Assembly Bill 1056](#) in 2012, established a similar standard for California-specific community college transfer data that is

## DESIGNING SOLUTIONS

### Leverage MAP and Credential Engine to build a statewide library of CPL opportunities

As CPL expands to encompass a broad variety of eligible learning experiences, a shared inventory of CPL decisions and opportunities across all postsecondary segments would serve to provide transparency, consistency, and more equitable awards of credit to prospective and current students. Establishing a common repository and language for state-recognized credentials would support a more efficient review of students' CPL requests, allow colleges to leverage previous faculty's work to evaluate CPL (e.g., using Common Course Numbering to apply CPL to all colleges with similar courses), and maintain an inventory that grows alongside evolving education and career pathways.

### Enhance the use of existing college planning tools by embedding CPL opportunities

MAP allows students with military experience to upload their Joint Service Transcript, view a report to see aligned course credit available at selected colleges (via the MAP inventory), and connect with those colleges for a review of their military credentials. A new student portal will soon allow students to search for other types of CPL opportunities in the MAP inventory. Other college planning tools could be enhanced to provide students with access to this same information, ideally in context with their other educational planning activities, showcasing what CPL is and where opportunities exist. For example, tools that provide students with program coursework maps might highlight where a course could be satisfied through approved CPL at those institutions. Having access to this type of planning information would support students making more informed educational decisions, as well as provide enhanced recruitment for students that may not be aware of the time and cost savings associated with their prior experience.

### Build awareness and expedite evaluation processes by capturing CPL information at the point of application

By starting the CPL evaluation process early, ideally through the admissions application process, students can be made aware of CPL opportunities and prepare to submit their prior experience to campus evaluators. Today, students already provide information about common CPL (e.g., AP exams and military experience) within college admissions applications. Applications could be further enhanced to prompt students to search for and to request evaluation for other types of approved CPL as the inventory of opportunities grows (e.g.,

industry certifications, credit by exam), getting a head start on the collection and delivery of required documentation and expediting the evaluation process to improve onboarding guidance.

## Establish consistent approaches for documenting and sending CPL-related credentials

### *Consistently document CPL decisions*

To better facilitate college admissions and articulation activities across all postsecondary segments, a common transcript standard for documenting CPL decisions and the application of course credit should be considered as part of the updated postsecondary transcript standard (currently in development). Much in the same way eTranscript California could be enhanced through connecting students' transcripted coursework to ASSIST to identify each class' transfer status, it could also link to MAP CPL records so that receiving institutions are able to review information about the related prior learning.

### *Consistently document non-academic learning experiences happening within postsecondary institutions*

Additionally, the transcript standards workgroup could address non-traditional credentials offered at the college itself, to meet two needs: (1) so that these credentials can be effectively documented for students' possible CPL evaluations at other institutions and (2) so that it can be delivered in a reliable format to the student's comprehensive LER. California's colleges and universities provide a wealth of learning opportunities that are not typically captured and shared on academic transcripts. For example, these may include digital badges, work-based learning, noncredit and extension courses, and portfolios. Each institution has its own process and policy for documenting student participation and outcomes and for how this information is shared. As these types of co-curricular activities gain more utility in both CPL and employment contexts, it will become more important to have a shared approach for documenting the activity, its related competencies, and student-specific information.

### *Enable eTranscript California to deliver non-traditional credentials to employers and LERs*

Alongside transcript data standards for sending information to academic institutions, ensure that eTranscript California can send records of competency-based credentials to a variety of receivers, including employers and LERs.