



## FACT SHEET

**Adult Learner**—may be 24 years of age or older; a veteran of the armed services or active-duty; returning to school after four or more years of employment, homemaking, or other activity; a person who assumes multiple adult roles, such as parent, spouse/partner, and employee.

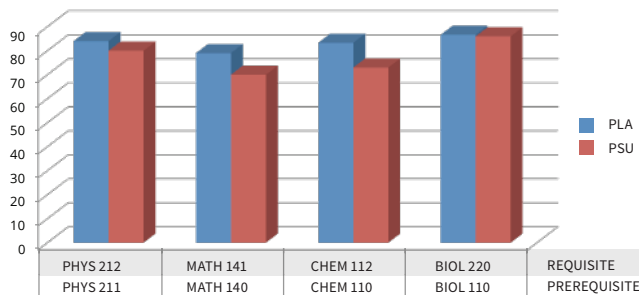
### Using Prior Learning Pathways as Prerequisites: Student Success in Subsequent Courses



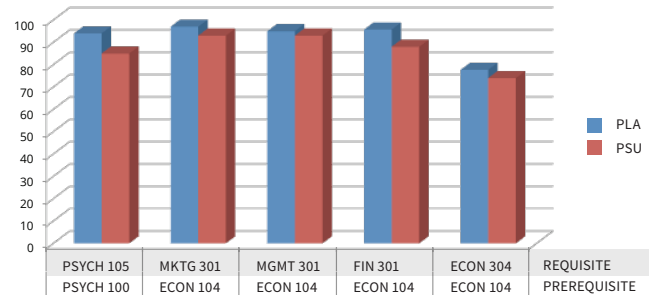
David Koelle earned 57 PLA credits, completing his bachelor's degree in half the time it normally would have taken.

This study examined how successfully students performed when they used a prior learning pathway for a prerequisite course before taking the subsequent course. The study compared students who took the prerequisite course at Penn State or transferred the course in from another college or university, or completed some other prior learning, such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, or Penn State Credit by Exam. The study includes all undergraduates from summer 2007 to summer 2014 at any Penn State location.\*

**% of students earning an A, B, or C in the requisite STEM course**



**% of students earning an A, B, or C in the requisite non-STEM course**



\*Data provided by Andrew Watters, Analysis and Planning, Office of Undergraduate Education

### Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Office Opened October 2014

The Provost approved opening the PLA office in October 2014, naming Dr. Michele Rice as director, to

- provide leadership for the University-wide efforts in PLA
- collaboratively develop processes for implementation and administration of PLA
- work with faculty and professional staff to develop criteria, tools, and record-keeping for PLA
- work with admissions, the registrar, and advising staff to promote a widespread understanding of PLA policies and processes and the role that prior learning can play in student success
- plan and coordinate activities and communications on PLA opportunities to prospective and current students, faculty, and staff
- serve as the primary point of contact on PLA for students, faculty, and staff
- make use of applicable data to examine, understand, and improve the prior learning process, including the academic progress and degree completion by students who have made use of PLA
- co-chair the Commission for Adult Learners standing committee on PLA

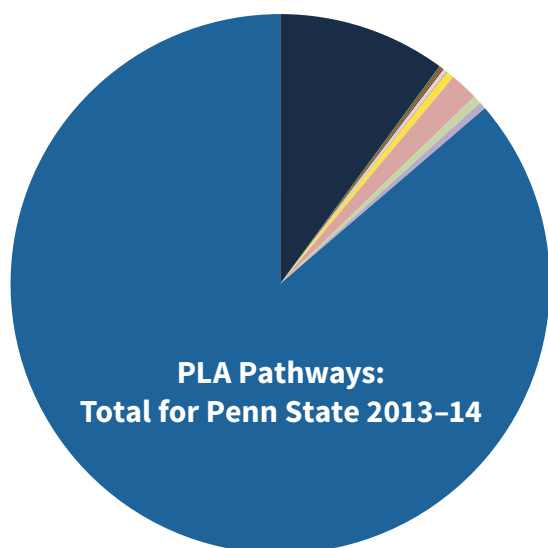
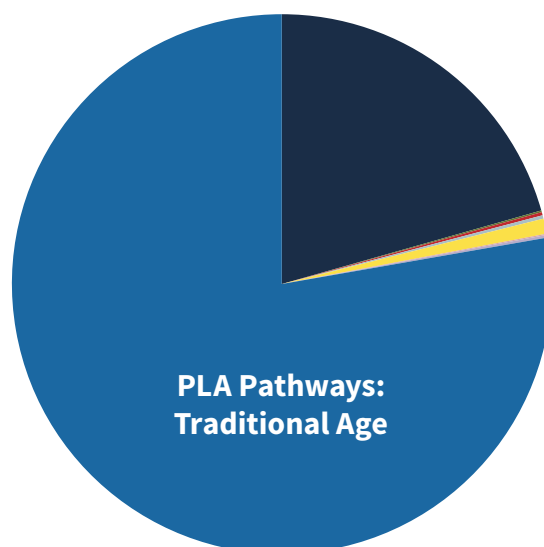
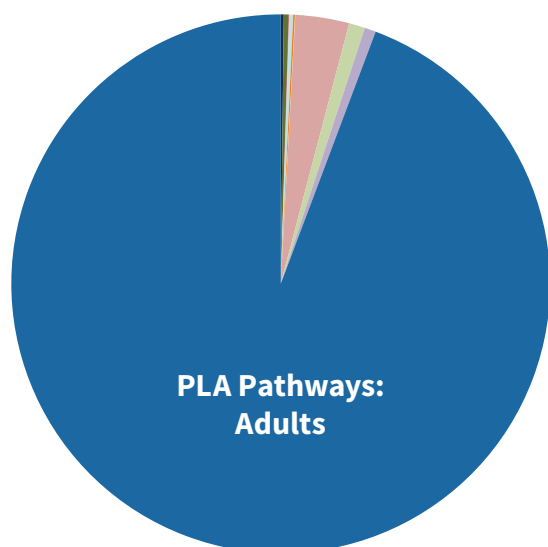
## Prior Learner Assessment at Penn State

Penn State recognizes that college-level learning can occur in a variety of ways, such as working, participating in employer training programs, serving in the military, or studying independently. The University can award credit through assessment of that prior learning, using exams such as CLEP, AP, and DSST; courses taken at other colleges and universities; or a portfolio.

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning demonstrated in the 2010 study “Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success” that students who earned credits for prior learning had better academic outcomes, shortened time to acquire their degrees, better graduation rates, and reduced costs.

The charts below show the prior learning pathways to credit used by adult learners, traditional-age learners, and all Penn State students for the 2013–14 academic year.\*

*\*Data provided by Julie Cross and Jodi Harris, Outreach Analytics and Reporting*



- ACE Recommendations
- Advanced Placement
- CLEP
- Credit by Exam
- Credit by Portfolio
- DSST
- International Baccalaureate
- Military
- Military Transfer
- Nursing Block Credit
- Transfer Credits