

Meeting Student and Institutional Needs Through Credit for Prior Learning



Prior Learning Assessment Supported as a Best Practice by the Complete College Georgia Initiative

University of North Georgia (UNG) is a unique institution. Established in January 2013, the university is the result of a consolidation merging the North Georgia College and State University (NGCSU) and Gainesville State College. Gainesville State College had taken an active role in an Adult Learning Consortium in Georgia. Chaudron Gille, associate vice president for University Affairs and Academic Services, had been deeply involved in this work at the time the institutions consolidated. Her counterparts at North Georgia College and State University had been actively engaged in the Soldiers to Scholars initiative and that program's work on the assessment of prior learning. NGCSU also operated a large and innovative testing center and used the CLEP® exam program to address students' needs and deliver expanded opportunities.

Gille explained, "Going into our consolidation, both institutions had some history of really moving toward support for prior learning assessment. That helped us when we aligned our academic policies and set test scores for awarding CLEP credits. Together, we determined that adopting national Exam for Acceleration (EA) standards was the preferred policy, and UNG administrators supported that recommendation because it benefitted veterans, returning students, and all students. That support paved the way for buy-in from faculty and academic affairs administrators as well."

Around the same time, the state of Georgia launched its Complete College Georgia initiative; a critical component of that program was addressing the needs of adult learners in underserved population in part by shortening the time to a degree. CLEP and other exams were seen as valuable supports in facilitating that process.



It's really wonderful to have that kind of endorsement at a system level, saying this [CLEP and other assessments of prior learning] is recognized as a best practice — this is a game changer — to have the system discussion going on about adult learning, about prior learning assessment, about new models, and about serving our veterans, because that systemwide discussion gave us momentum to advance things more quickly on our campuses. That policy framework was very helpful to us."

Chaudron Gille

Associate Vice President for University Affairs and Academic Services

Promoting CLEP® Exam Opportunities: A Systemwide Priority

The University of North Georgia promotes CLEP exams using a consistent and integrated approach. CLEP exams are featured on the university's websites and in its centers for adult learners and veterans. The university has also used grant funds to purchase libraries of CLEP-preparation materials in every exam subject. The materials are accessible in the adult learner lounge area and in the on-campus military resource center. Clubs for adult students and veterans also make the test-preparation materials available.

Providing information about CLEP exams is well integrated in UNG's advising program as well. Gille provided an example of this, explaining, "When our adult learners consult with the Center for Adult Learners & Military, known as CALM, the center director meets personally with students to evaluate everything they bring to campus, including their military credits, their prior learning, and their prior work experiences. This helps us determine whether we can articulate credits directly or advise the student to take CLEP exams. In some cases, when students have taken AP® courses in high school but either did not take the AP Exam or perhaps did not score high enough to earn credit, we point these students toward CLEP.

This not only saves the student time and money, but the University of North Georgia benefits as well. Why? Gille explained that the university has grown rapidly and that has put some pressure on course availability. If students are able to earn credits for the core courses they need, this can free up room for other students, who otherwise may have had to postpone taking specific courses. It's a classic "win/win" for both students and the institution.

15 to Finish: Another Initiative Where CLEP Plays a Role

As part of its degree completion agenda, the University of North Georgia launched the 15 to Finish campaign, encouraging students to take 15 hours of course work each semester. CLEP exams can give students the flexibility to earn credits for prior learning and still achieve the 30 credit hours they need each year to complete their degrees in a timely way.

Making the CLEP Message Ubiquitous

Gille said, “We’ve embedded the CLEP message in our advising processes and procedures and in the work we do with special populations. We communicate that message to faculty and staff, emphasizing the benefits to students and to our university. This results in more people becoming aware of CLEP and talking about it. We’ve built CLEP into our materials and conversations, so students see the ways they can obtain credit and we promote that to all of our students.”

She further explained, “We have real synergy around CLEP and our other Complete College Georgia initiatives. I travel the state and talk to people. They want to know how we at UNG have been able to achieve our results. I think one of the things that people tend to underestimate is the importance of our internal marketing and communications, and the need to collaborate with other units internally. Our CLEP momentum is larger than our testing centers. We’ve collaborated with the student affairs team that reaches out to the adult learners in the military and returning veterans. We’ve collaborated with advising centers and their staff. We also make sure that CLEP information is included in new student orientation programs. We’ve worked with Academic Affairs and directly with academic departments to assure them, by using peer data, about using nationalized standards for granting credit.”

University of North Georgia Best Practices at a Glance

- Align academic policies to support prior learning assessment and credit
- Promote prior learning assessment and credit opportunities aggressively using both internal and external channels
- Develop and maintain systemwide policy support for prior learning assessment and new models of support for adult and nontraditional learners
- Use formal and informal channels to keep the lines of communication open about CLEP exams and their benefits to both students and the institution.

Executive Summary

The University of North Georgia was formed through the consolidation of North Georgia College and State University and Gainesville State College, two of the top-performing schools in the University System of Georgia. Today, UNG is composed of four campuses, united in their mission to focus on academic excellence and on academic and cocurricular programs that develop students into leaders for a diverse and global society. UNG is a University System of Georgia leadership institution and is the Military College of Georgia. With more than 15,000 students, UNG now ranks as Georgia's sixth-largest public university and offers more than 100 programs of studies ranging from certificate and associate degrees to professional doctoral programs.

For more information, visit clep.collegeboard.org.