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Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) Persistence: A Canadian Post-Secondary Comparison

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Introduction

The Secwépemc people have a phrase, *Metéltwecw-kt Es Knúcwetwecw-kt*, meaning "Everyone come together to help one another" (Secwepemc Cultural Education Society, 2017). This was the case for two researchers in Canada, one in the French-speaking province of Quebec, Champlain College-Saint Lambert, the other in the western English-speaking province of British Columbia, Thompson Rivers University (TRU). Both worked in prior learning assessment and wanted a better understanding of how to enrich student persistence, specifically the interactional and interventional strategies that promote persistence with students engaged in prior learning assessment to gain their qualifications. In 2018, both researchers initiated projects to explore the factors that influenced learners' persistence in their respective schools. When they learned of each other's research and compared their two projects, they found both similarities and contrasts in their findings. Each wanted to better understand the variables that positively and negatively impacted persistence rates, using these findings to influence PLAR (prior learning assessment and recognition), or RAC (recognition of acquired competencies) in Quebec, systems, tools, and policies. Through this comparison, they also realized there was a lot to learn from one another's research, and that through the discussion of these findings, they helped one another better understand this research as part of a meaningful whole. In the spirit of coming together to help one another, the researchers also thought others might value this information, hence this article.

The following article begins with a brief literature review, a summary of each research project, comparing and contrasting the similarities and contrasts, and ending with final lessons learned. This paper contributes to the discussion on facilitating student persistence through the validation of prior learning experiences.

Literature Review

From the literature, it is clear that factors that affect student persistence are myriad and that the interplay of these factors is complex and individualized. Pre-enrollment characteristics have been shown to affect student persistence (Retention Study Group, 2004; Thayer, 2000; Robbins et al, 2004) and academic-related study skills may exert a stronger influence on student persistence than students' prior level of education (Robbins et al, 2004). Factors identified that are outside the influence of the college are financing and outside family/social support. Students who have financial constraints and have to work while studying are more likely to drop out (Mohr, Eiche & Sedlacek, 1998; Tinto, 2004) and a supportive social and family network aids student persistence (Robbins et al, 2004; Park and Choi, 2009; Sandler, 1999). Within the realm of factors that are within the influence of the college, there is consensus that social and academic integration are important predictors of student persistence (Swail, 2004; Habley, 2004; Retention Working Group, 2004). There is also a growing body of work showing that for nontraditional students, which is very much the case for PLAR (prior learning assessment and recognition) students, academic integration into the life of the post-secondary institution is of great importance (Nippert, 2000; Tinto, 1997). It is within the sphere of on-campus interactions, particularly if the classroom utilizes active and collaborative learning approaches, that supportive peer support structures, quality student-faculty interactions, perceived high-quality educational experiences, and personally relevant courses act to facilitate student persistence. In addition, students benefit from high-quality, responsive academic advising and in and out-of-class interactional and interventional strategies that boost student self-efficacy to facilitate persistence with their studies.

Although some of the factors that can affect student persistence are outside the influence of the post-secondary institution, it is also clear that while the nontraditional, adult student is present on campus there is fertile ground for the implementation of interactional and interventional strategies that may promote persistence.

Study 1: Champlain College-Saint Lambert Persistence Study

Context

Champlain College-Saint Lambert is a publicly funded English-language college (*college d'enseignement général et professionnel* (CÉGEP)) in Montreal. Its PLAR (Recognition of Acquired Competences (RAC)) services are offered through its continuing education department and allow adult Quebec residents to have their knowledge, skills, and abilities assessed towards government-accredited college-level attestations (AECs) and diplomas (DECs). Champlain has nine vocational qualifications that can be awarded through the PLAR/RAC process. RAC services are designed for adult, non-traditional students and allow an individualized pathway toward a government qualification.

The purpose of the Champlain research project was to understand the variables that positively and negatively impact PLAR persistence within a technical Transportation & Logistics (T&L) qualification. Two service models were investigated. The Cohort model involves an intensive 17-week full-time training/evaluation process. The Individual model involves a part-time (evenings/weekends) training/evaluation process over a year. In essence, the Cohort model is designed to facilitate students in finding employment/entering the T&L workforce, while the Individual model aims to facilitate career advancement in the field of T&L. Both models utilize the same web-based pedagogical materials, pedagogical advisor, faculty team, and challenge assessment tasks. Historical internal college data showed that 73.7% of Cohort and 54.6% of Individual students persisted to complete the T&L qualification. The research hoped to better understand the variables that positively and negatively impacted these rates and use these findings to enhance our PLAR/RAC service models.

The PLAR/RAC process is an evaluation process and is guided by the principles and processes set out by the ministry of education, which also funds the process. The ministry's objective is that as much of the qualification be achieved through the RAC process as possible. This process can involve credit transfer, but primarily involves the demonstration of knowledge, skills, and abilities against the competencies of a qualification. This is achieved through evaluation tasks designed and evaluated by subject matter experts. The process starts with an information session to see if the qualification meets the learners' needs. To be accepted into the service, the learner must then complete a self-assessment and be interviewed by a subject matter expert. If accepted, the learner's competencies are evaluated until the qualification is achieved. Brief training sessions are offered but are not mandatory. The primary objective is for students to have their prior learning, from any context, evaluated towards a college-level qualification.

Methodology

The research investigated three research questions: whether there were differences in pre-enrolment characteristics and reasons for accessing the Cohort and Individual service models; whether candidate perceptions of factors that aided or inhibited candidate persistence could be identified; and whether there were differences in candidate perceptions for these factors between the Cohort and Individual groups. A mixed methods approach was used. A survey tool was administered to 388 students and 199 respondents comprised the sample. The survey collected pre-enrolment characteristics, reasons for accessing the service model, and included four-point Likert-type items for persistence factors. Survey open-ended responses were content analyzed for emergent themes. It was possible to delineate three sub-groups in the data: Cohort-Persistent (graduated or actively working towards qualification), Individual-Persistent (graduated or actively working towards qualification), and Non-Persistent (not graduated or actively working towards qualification). Survey responses informed the semi-structured interview design. Three students from

each sub-group were selected for a balance of gender, service access time, education level, and country of origin and interviewed. The survey responses, open-ended questions emergent themes, and semi-structured interview responses were triangulated and the sub-groups were compared using descriptive statistics.

Findings and Discussion

Student Pre-Enrollment Characteristics

Students from the Cohort-Persistent, Individual-Persistent, and Non-Persistent groups have different pre-enrollment characteristics. This is to be expected as the Cohort and Individual services are designed to cater to the needs of candidates with different employment statuses and training needs.

Reasons for Accessing PLAR (RAC) Services

Students from the Cohort-Persistent, Individual-Persistent, and Non-Persistent sub-groups have different reasons for accessing the PLAR services.

Table 1

Reasons for Choice of Service Model

Reasons ***Sub-Groups***

(multiple answers permitted)

Frequency	**Cohort-Persistent**	**Individual-Persistent**	**Non-Persistent**
Career Advancement/Promotion	33	**41**	**8**
Maintaining Employment	5	8	0
Finding job in T&L sector	**89**	**35**	**8**
Professional development	**56**	**46**	**9**
Personal development	36	33	**9**
Converting experience to North American context	**59**	28	**4**

* Ranking: 1 = red, 2 = blue, 3 = green

Their reasons are generally consistent with the objectives of the Cohort and Individual service designs. These findings suggest that the advice given by the pedagogical advisor

during the admissions/validation process allows students to choose the service model that best meets their training and career development needs.

Factors within Control of Champlain/Factors outside of Control of Champlain

A pattern emerges that the factors within the control of the college have a greater positive influence on student persistence than the factors outside the control of the college for the Cohort-Persistent, Individual-Persistent, and Non-Persistent sub-group respondents.

Table 2

Persistence Factors Within and Outside College Control Averages

Criteria	***Sub-Groups***		
Average (A)	**Cohort-Persistent**	**Individual-Persistent**	**Non-Persistent**
	A	**A**	**A**
*Factors **within** the control of the College*	3.56	3.56	3.34
*Factors **outside** the control of the College*	2.91	2.87	2.71

In particular, the greatest reported positive influences on candidate persistence for all three sub-groups are support from the pedagogical advisor and support from content specialists (faculty).

Table 3

Pedagogical Advisor, Content Specialist, Administrative Team, and Website/Training, Averages

Criteria	***Sub-Groups***		
Average (A)	**Cohort-Persistent**	**Individual-Persistent**	**Non-Persistent**
	A	**A**	**A**
Pedagogical Advisor	3.74	3.76	3.40
Content Specialists	3.53	3.58	3.44
Administrative Team	3.53	3.50	3.36
Website/Training	3.52	3.56	3.28

This research suggests that, regardless of service model, the Champlain College T&L PLAR/RAC team is providing a training and evaluation process that satisfies the training needs and career objectives of a large majority of the students. These findings are consistent with the literature that quality student-faculty interactions act to facilitate student persistence.

The greatest challenges to persistence were personal situations, work commitments, and home life for the Cohort-Persistent, Individual-Persistent, and Non-Persistent sub-group respondents.

Table 4

Candidate Satisfaction with Home Life, Work Life, Service Cost, and College Location

Survey Item	***Sub-Groups***					
Average (A)	**Cohort-Persistent**		**Individual-Persistent**		**Non-Persistent**	
	n	**A**	**n**	**A**	**n**	**A**
Home Life						
Overall my family was a valuable resource to help me progress	94	3.27	74	3.27	13	2.85
Overall my friends were a valuable resource to help me progress	93	3.19	73	3.10	13	3.07
My home life made progression difficult (reverse coded)	95	2.13 (2.87)	70	2.24 (2.76)	13	2.38 (2.62)
A personal situation made it difficult to progress (reverse coded)	94	2.27 (2.73)	71	2.48 (2.52)	13	2.71 (2.29)

Survey Item	***Sub-Groups***					
Average (A)	**Cohort-Persistent**		**Individual-Persistent**		**Non-Persistent**	
	n	**A**	**n**	**A**	**n**	**A**
Work Life						
My employer supported my progress	77	2.35	68	2.84	12	2.17
My work commitments made it difficult to progress (reverse coded)	76	2.13 (2.87)	70	2.50 (2.50)	13	2.69 (2.31)
Overall my work peers were a valuable resource to help me progress	81	2.54	68	2.59	12	2.42
Financial Considerations						
The cost of the service made it difficult to progress (reverse coded)	94	1.78 (3.22)	70	1.80 (3.20)	13	1.46 (3.54)
College Location						
Overall the location of the college made it difficult to progress (reverse coded)	93	1.88 (3.12)	70	1.93 (3.07)	13	1.85 (3.15)

These findings are consistent between survey Likert item responses, open-ended question emergent themes and semi-structured interview reports. Moreover, these findings are mostly consistent with the literature. Rovai (2003) reported from the work of Parker and Greenlee (1997) “that, in order of importance, financial problems, followed by family

complications, work schedule conflicts, and poor academic performance were the most important factors that explained why students did not persist" (p. 7). In addition, Rovai, reporting on the work of Tinto (1993), states that "additional demands on the time of nontraditional students such as life crises, e.g., sickness, divorce, loss of a job, etc., can adversely affect persistence" (p. 10). Rovai (2003) concludes that "[R]egardless of students' academic preparation and existing skills, if they cannot pay for college, make adequate child care arrangements, or adjust their work schedules, they are unlikely to persist in school" (p. 13).

Sub-Group Persistence Factors Variation

The findings of this research show that the variation in reported satisfaction with peer support and peer motivation facilitation to aid persistence between the sub-groups may be explained by the design of the Cohort and Individual service models. Cohort-Persistent respondents benefitted from greater contact time with peers to facilitate social and, in some part, academic integration into the college compared to the Individual-Persistent respondents and 9 out of 12 of the Non-Persistent respondents who accessed the Individual service model. Higher levels of social and academic integration, which are within the control of the college, have been shown, from prior research, to facilitate persistence.

Of the factors that are outside the control of the college, Individual-Persistent respondents reported more benefits from employer support than Cohort-Persistent respondents, and all sub-groups reported that college location, for the majority, had little effect on persistence. The factors of home life, personal situations, and work commitments affected, to some extent, a minority of all sub-group respondents. The negative effect of these three factors on persistence was least for the Cohort-Persistent respondents, more for Individual-Persistent respondents, and most for the Non-Persistent respondents.

Implications for Practice

This research shows that candidates reported satisfaction levels with all elements of the training that are within the control of the Champlain T&L PLAR/RAC Team are high for both the Cohort and Individual service models; and, regardless of service model choice, personal situations, home life, and work commitments, which are outside the control of the Team, can adversely affect candidate persistence. The findings of this research suggest areas where the Transportation & Logistics PLAR/RAC Team could help to remove some of the barriers to persistence. To enhance the engagement and progression of candidates accessing the Individual service model, the Team should investigate ways to increase social integration. To counter the potential negative effects of content specialist unprofessionalism reported by some respondents, a more consistent reporting mechanism on content specialist performance was enacted by the continuing education team via a simple candidate feedback form on the website. This information allows the pedagogical advisor to more effectively support the work of the content specialists (faculty)

and offer suggestions and strategies to adapt to students' training needs. To alleviate the negative influence of college location for, in particular, the Individual service model, a blended approach to this service could be initiated. Due to COVID, both service models transitioned to synchronous training delivery via Zoom. This modality allows more students to attend Tuesday evening training sessions at-a distance after finishing work and better accommodates work/family commitments with training access for both training models.

Student suggestions to update the website resources, improve navigation and clarity, add more exercises and improve the videos were investigated and addressed. In addition, a detailed "how to study, how to succeed" guide was created to facilitate candidate progression and persistence with the AEC. This includes how to use the website resources to prepare for evaluations and self-study and how to maximize the impact of the training sessions. It was designed for students who rarely attend training sessions, completing the AEC mainly or in some cases purely through self-study.

AEC programs are specifically designed for adult students to develop the knowledge and skills to enter the workforce in a particular domain. The findings in this research, although consistent with the literature, are limited to the Transportation & Logistics AEC PLAR/RAC services at Champlain College Saint-Lambert. Further research should be conducted within other PLAR/RAC programs at the College and other colleges to confirm or deny the validity of these research findings.

Study 2: Tru Persistence Study

Context

Thompson Rivers University (TRU) is a comprehensive teaching and research university in western Canada, serving over 27, 000 students. One of the unique programs offered at TRU is PLAR (Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition). PLAR offers students an individualized path to and through higher education that is inclusive, open, and accessible. PLAR is essentially a process that identifies, documents, assesses, and grants credits for prior informal and non-formal learning. This prior learning often comes from on-the-job work and training, industry-based training, continuing studies, volunteer work, and private study. In the 2021/22 fiscal year, 368 TRU students participated in PLAR and were awarded 14,446 credits.

The purpose of the TRU research project was to understand the variables that positively and negatively impact PLAR persistence. We knew from internal statistical analysis that approximately 77% of students who began the PLAR process did not complete it. We wanted to better understand the variables that positively and negatively impacted these rates and use these findings to control what we could such as our PLAR systems, tools, and policies.

This research explored three of the four PLAR paths:

1. **Competency-based PLAR**: Students identify and discuss their learning through a customized portfolio describing learning from life and work experiences relative to TRU's Institutional Learning Outcomes, arranged into 8 categories: communication, teamwork and leadership, information gathering and organization, problem-solving and decision making, numeracy, critical and creative thinking, independent learning and intellectual maturity, and applied knowledge and skills. PLAR advisors support students in the creation of their portfolios. Credit awards range from as low as six (two courses) to as high as 75 (2.5 years of credit).
2. **Course-based PLAR:** Students petition for specific course credit, following the course learning outcomes. Through portfolios, they describe their learning, reflect on the course theory, and provide evidence to support their learning claims.
3. **Challenge Exams:** Assesses a learner's existing knowledge for a particular course. The exams are summative in nature and align with course learning outcomes.
4. **Credit Bank:** Allows students to receive credit for pre-assessed training from select employers, private trainers, and continuing studies programs. OL's Strategic Partnership team initiates, develops, and documents these articulated agreements, working closely with the Director, PLAR.

Methodology

In 2018, TRU embarked on a research initiative to explore the variables that impact PLAR persistence at TRU. This research methodology was a mixed method administering a 31-question survey to over 645 PLAR alumni of which 176 were completed. Next, the research team conducted 14 interviews. The primary reason for selecting a mixed method, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies, was to increase the breadth of understanding and to enhance the rigor and reliability of the findings. Quantitative methods included administering the survey to TRU PLAR students who had completed PLAR between 2007 and 2018. Analyzing the open-ended survey responses and text from the interviews included inductive coding, identifying keywords, phrases, and subjects that emerged. The data was then chunked to identify patterns and interrelating themes. Independent parallel coding with a second researcher was conducted next to help ensure thoroughness of findings. From here the data were summarized, interpreted, and further triangulated with survey findings.

Discussion/Implications for Practice

This section begins with some basic demographics, the type of PLAR pursued, and the reasons participants gave for exploring PLAR, followed by how far they progressed, and

concludes with the three key categories that emerged from the research (Processes and Policies, Support, and Personal Factors).

The vast majority, 99%, of survey respondents self-reported being over the age of 26, with 32% over the age of 46. Forty-seven percent of respondents self-identified as female, 26% as male, and 26% chose not to respond to this question. Most respondents, 98%, identified as Canadian citizens, with 13% identifying as Indigenous, 10% as non-Caucasian, and 77% as Caucasian. Respondents in the interview were of similar age to survey participants, three identified as male, and 11 identified as women. Most respondents identified as Canadian citizens, with one identifying as Indigenous.

The three PLAR paths research participants pursued were competency-based (61%), course-based (28%), and challenge exams (5%). The remainder did not recall which PLAR they pursued. For interview respondents 11 participants shared that they pursued competency-based, one participant pursued course-based, and two participants were unsure of the type of PLAR they pursued.

When survey participants were asked, "how important the following factors were in motivating you to explore PLAR" with three choices (could select as many as applied), they responded:

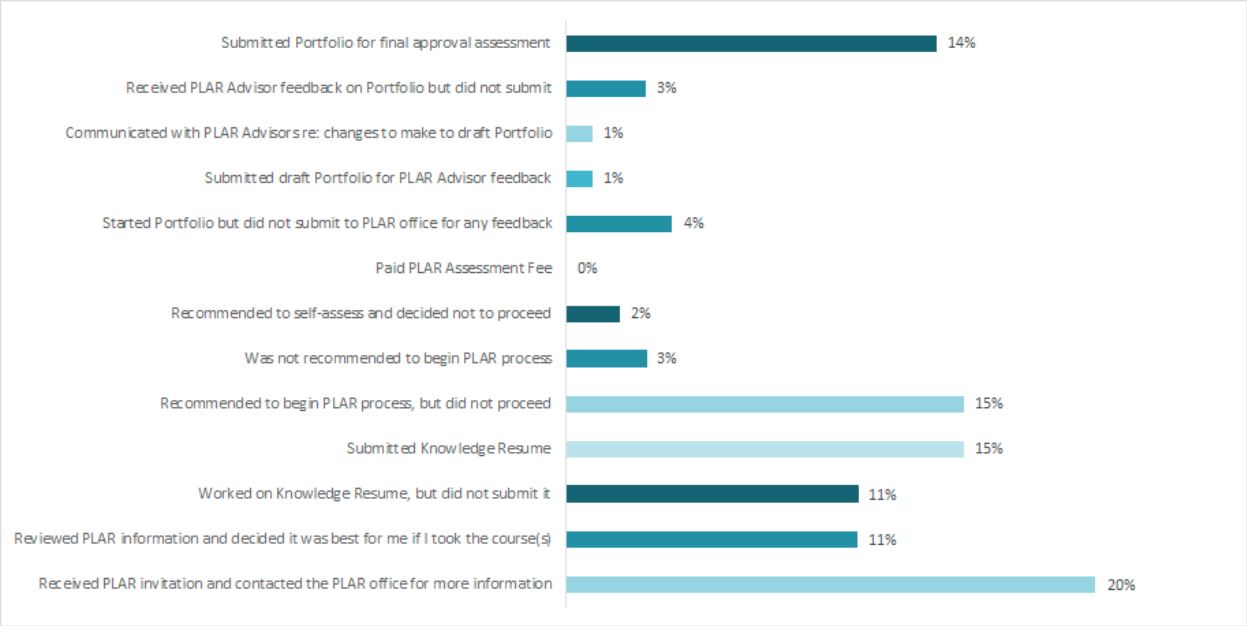
- 89% (survey) and 14% (interview) responded it was a cost-effective way to gain academic credit.
- 82% (survey) and 29% (interview) responded it was a way to reflect on self-learning, self-validation, and self-development.
- 74% (survey) and 86% (interview) responded it was a way to improve career options.

Prior to this research, we believed most people considered PLAR for career advancement reasons. Learning this was the lowest ranked of the three options helped us understand motivation and persistence more fulsomely. This impacted our practice, including changes to marketing, website content, and student feedback.

When asked how far into the PLAR process they progressed, survey participants had 13 options to select from, beginning with receiving a PLAR e-mail invitation, with escalating levels of progress, and ending with "submitted portfolio for review and final approval assessment." The following chart illustrates how far into the PLAR process participants ventured, showing 77% left before paying fees.

Table 5

How Far into the PLAR Process Participants Ventured



Further exploration showed that fee payment is a strong determiner of PLAR persistence as once students committed to PLAR by paying their fees (23%), they have a high degree of persistence, with 82% completing PLAR or planning to complete PLAR. Students that completed PLAR made suggestions on how we could better support them in their portfolio development. For example, one student commented, "*coming to this is like you get on the dock, they give you everything and then they kind of push you out and that is where I am right now so I have to navigate my way back to port*." This feedback was echoed by others leading us to develop multiple how-to handbooks, add numerous resources to the learning management system, implement more regular check-in with students, and enhance communication.

The remaining research findings shared some of the most important information on PLAR persistence. As mentioned, 77% of students who started the PLAR process didn't get to the point of paying their fees. For this group, three categories of variables emerged that provided exceptional insight into persistence, including (a) PLAR Processes and Policies, (b) PLAR Support, and (c) Personal Factors.

Processes and Policies

Students exploring PLAR shared six reasons why they didn't pursue PLAR related to processes and policies:

(1) They were uncertain of the PLAR advantages (33%).
(2) They felt overwhelmed and confused with the numerous next steps in PLAR (62%).
(3) They were concerned about no guarantee of credit (54%).

(4) They didn't have confidence their prior learning was worth university credit (35%).
(5) PLAR was too much work (37%).
(6) Some referenced that the fees were too high (32%).

Regarding the PLAR advantages, one participant wrote, "*It's very vague on exactly what I would get out of it*." As discussed earlier, we know the main reasons students pursue PLAR. Since completing this research, we have adjusted our messaging, sharing how PLAR can be a cost-effective way to gain academic credit, how it offers a path towards self-learning, self-validation, and self-development, while also being a way to improve career options. We can also share some recent research on how PLAR positively impacts self-confidence, self-awareness, self-efficacy, and greatly advances career development.

Participants also offered feedback on feeling overwhelmed and confused with the numerous PLAR steps, and for many, this meant not continuing with PLAR. Participants communicated that we could make PLAR less confusing by breaking the process into smaller, more manageable pieces, providing more visual aids, and less text-heavy communication – all of which we have done.

Participants also shared that not having assurances that the hours they put into PLAR and the payment of fees would result in at least some credit award discouraged them from pursuing PLAR. What isn't shared with students is that over 99% of students who complete PLAR are awarded credits. We are looking for ways to communicate this success rate.

Participants also shared they didn't have confidence their prior learning was "worthy" of university credit. This feedback led to the development of PLAR readiness tools to provide students with a better understanding of how their prior learning aligns with TRU expectations for credit.

Another area related to policies and practices from the research was the work involved in doing a PLAR portfolio or challenge exam. Many students expressed, *"it would be easier to take the class(es)."* This is a faulty assumption. For most students studying for a challenge exam or building a portfolio is less work and time than taking the course(s). For example, students have shared that it can take between 60 and 100 hours to complete a competency-based portfolio. Whereas taking a traditional three-credit course can take upwards of 120 hours to complete, factoring in instruction (39 hours per three-credit course) and additional research, study, and assignment time per course (ranging between 80-200 hours depending on the course and the student). Even with these rough numbers, you can see how receiving just six credits can save students dozens of hours.

Some participants also commented on the PLAR fees being too high. For most students, this is not the case, and doing PLAR is less expensive than taking the course(s). For example, a student in the Bachelor of General Studies can potentially receive 75 credits (equal to 25 three-credit courses) at a cost of $750 CAD, whereas a three-credit course

averages $500 CAD. We will include how PLAR saves both time and money in future messaging to potential students.

Support

Potential PLAR students also shared (62%) that they wanted more support and information *before* committing to PLAR. As one participant shared, "*I was so lost in the details, I didn't know where to start or who to ask for help*." These findings led us to enhance our website, create less text-heavy emails, and open access to PLAR Advisors. Opening access required us to put caps on competency-based PLAR, the most time-consuming path. This cap ensured students had the timely support they needed. The downside of the cap is that we now have a waitlist of over 100 students. The PLAR credit-course, currently going through TRU approval processes, should alleviate the waitlist.

Personal Factors

The three variables that rose to the top of this category were the availability of personal time, adequate writing skills to articulate their prior learning, and sufficient evidence to support their prior learning claims.

The time in this category relates to personal time, in that many students worried they did not have the time to do the PLAR work (53%). Most students shared that in addition to working full-time, they also had other commitments such as family caregiving responsibilities and volunteer commitments. These factors proved to be the most difficult for TRU to control/influence. We cannot create time for participants. What we have shared were strategies participants who completed PLAR used to build time into their daily routines. As one participant shared, "*I worked every lunch on my PLAR, and a few hours each Saturday morning before the kids got up. This time really added up and made all the difference*."

The second variable in personal factors was the ability to reflect on (35%) and articulate their prior learning in writing (18%), the predominant way to express learning in all three PLAR paths referenced in this article. To help alleviate this concern we have promoted the multiple writing support options that students may access, highlighting access to PLAR Advisors and the TRU Writing Centre.

The third variable in the personal factors was evidence, with 29% of participants expressing concerns that they did not have the documents to support their learning assertions. To help address this concern, we have provided examples of evidence that most individuals have access to such as reference letters, samples of work, performance reviews, workshop descriptions, corporate announcements, etc.

Champlain College-Saint Lambert and Thompson Rivers University Similarities and Differences

These studies were conducted at a similar time, using similar methodologies, focused on gleaning insights into student persistence in PLAR services. Although they are in different contexts, one at a university and one at a pre-university college level, it is possible to compare and contrast their findings.

Both sets of students have comparable ages, gender compositions, and value the use of PLAR services to enhance career perspectives. Variations emerge with regards to nationality with TRU students being primarily Canadians and Champlain students comprising far more permanent residents; primarily due to the nature of its Cohort services targeted at newcomers. TRU students also have more PLAR pathway options with only 5% choosing challenge exams compared to almost 100% of PLAR credits being awarded through challenge exams at Champlain. Both sets of students reported the importance of advisor support and the need for high-quality information at every stage to guide students through the PLAR process. At Champlain, where training is part of the process, students also valued the support and guidance of faculty to aid their progression. Students at TRU will soon have a PLAR course to provide this missing support.

Interestingly, in both contexts, the cost of the services was not seen as a major inhibiting factor, which is contrary to the findings in the literature. However, both sets of students also reported major inhibiting factors to their persistence. These findings are in agreement with the literature and primarily fall in the category of "factors outside the control of the college". In particular, personal situations, home life, and work commitments can adversely affect candidate persistence.

Both post-secondary institutions have used the findings of their research to independently adapt their services to facilitate student persistence. These resulted in the development of "How to" handbooks, the upgrading of online resources, and improved communication channels between all members of the PLAR teams and students.

Final Lessons

It is clear from both studies that high-quality advisor support is key to PLAR student success. It is also clear that consistent communication between all stakeholders in PLAR services and clarity of information is paramount at all stages of the process. This allows stakeholders to identify and negotiate solutions to potential roadblocks and maintain student motivation to facilitate persistence. This comparison confirms much of the persistence research, which allows PLAR practitioners to identify the potential obstacles to student persistence. This paper classified persistence factors into "within the control of the college" and "outside the control of the college." The authors believe that many of the "within" factors that inhibit student persistence can be contextually mitigated if appropriate

policies, procedures, strategies, and resources are deployed. The authors hope that this paper contributes to the discussion on facilitating student persistence through the PLAR process.

Our sincere hope in sharing these two research projects is that we are honoring the Secwépemc way of *Metéltwecw-kt Es Knúcwetwecw-kt*, meaning "Everyone come together to help one another." It is through this ethos that we believe we can share our findings for the betterment of our most valuable resource: the people of Canada.

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About the Authors

Andy Brown coordinated the Transportation and Logistics (T&L) RPL services at Champlain for 12 years and continues to teach in the T&L Program. After three decades plus of teaching, he is still fascinated by the teaching/learning interface. His research interests include factors that aid/inhibit RPL candidate persistence, RPL assessment and transformative learning as a by-product of the RPL process. Andy has been on CAPLA's Board as a member, Vice Chair and Chair since December 2020. He is excited to collaborate with the Board to continue to meet CAPLA's mission to its membership and the wider pan-Canadian and international RPL community.

Susan Forseille is the Director of PLAR at Thompson Rivers University with 23-years experience as a career-educator, PLAR advocate, and an enthusiastic researcher. She has been privileged to work in, and conduct research around, multiple intersections of career development, prior learning, and education. She holds a Bachelor of Arts from Simon Fraser University, a MEd from Thompson Rivers University, and is currently completing her PhD with the University of Leicester. Susan is the Chair of the British Columbia Prior Learning Action Network (BCPLAN) and an active board member of the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA).