



The Employer Toolkit: Making Degrees Count for You

Provided by My Degree Matters Colorado

MDM CO Partners:

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Administered by



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Question

***What are the
“Right
Degrees”?***

Answer

***Degrees that
support your
pipeline.***

***Degrees that
teach the
skills you
need.***

About this Toolkit

We created this toolkit with the knowledge that degrees are necessary for your company and your workforce- but even more importantly, that the **RIGHT degrees are essential.**

We want to provide the resources you need to support your employees as they continue their education.

Your support of education and degree completion will:

- improve job performance
- build a more robust talent pipeline with the skills and expertise you need
- increase your ability to recruit new employees
- reduce turnover among your current workforce
- create a more loyal and engaged workforce

This is only the first version of the toolkit. It will continue to grow, so be sure to come back to see what's new.

This toolkit includes:

1. Overview -- the Degree Completion Competition
2. What Degrees Mean for You
3. What College -- What Program?
4. College Information for Students and for the Public
5. Paying for College
6. Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)

It's time to get started!

The Competition

My Degree Matters Colorado – Count Me In!

Colorado has long been known for its “brain gain,” meaning that we rank high among other states in the number of our residents with college degrees, and yet we face shrinking high school graduation and college completion rates for Colorado residents. Simply put, we’ve been importing workers with degrees, depending on people to move here with their college education completed; we are not growing the number of degrees among our residents.

This strategy won’t work any longer- we need too many degrees in the next 5 to 10 years. We need to rely on ourselves for our own economic security.

The **Denver-Broomfield-Aurora** metropolitan area is one of 57 cities competing to increase degree completion within a 2 year period. The prize for the area that shows the highest percentage of increase in degree completion is \$1 million. The competition, slated to end in the summer of 2014, is sponsored by [CEOs for Cities](#), and is known as "The Talent Dividend."

What is the Talent Dividend?

- For every 1% increase in degree completion in Denver-Broomfield-Aurora, there is a \$1.8 billion benefit that comes to our region.
- It’s a matter of dollars and cents: the more educated our population is, the more successful we all are.



This competition only begins to address the larger issue of a prepared workforce for the state of Colorado-- but it’s a start. For both the long and short term, it’s what we need to do to **stay competitive** as a state. We’ve brought together colleges and universities, the Colorado Department of Higher Education, and local organizations and businesses, all to support this same goal.

Can we count you in? Register on [My Degree Matters CO](#)

What Degrees Mean for You

“Degree completion” is a national goal, but achieving this goal is a boon not only for states and institutions. **Everyone wins.**

Winner #1:

The person who earns a degree: it’s often the fulfillment of a lifetime dream and helps secure further and better employment and stability.

Winner #2:

The company that person works for: college graduates are generally higher performers, better problem solvers, and more loyal employees. And if it’s the **RIGHT** degree, employers can create a more robust talent pipeline.

Winner #3

The community: a more educated population is good for all of us; it means a stronger and more secure economy.

Our focus in this toolkit is **you**, Winner #2, the employer. There are ways you can make degree completion work for you and for your company. We want you to contribute to degree completion among your workforce, but we encourage you to go a step further, to think about the **RIGHT** degrees for you and your company.

Start with these questions:

- Where is your company going?
- What positions do you need to fill, and what skills are needed to fill them?
- Can you fill these positions today?

Let us help you



Steps 1, 2, 3, and 4 -- Here We Go!

Step 1

- ✓ Identify the skills that you need.
- ✓ Get a career map in place- we no longer have a “ladder” economy- career paths go left, right, up and down.
- ✓ Make sure your employees know about your commitment to education.

Step 2

- ✓ Find the college programs that prepare your current employees and those you’ll need tomorrow
- ✓ If these programs don't exist yet, identify the colleges you want as your partners to create the right curriculum

Step 3

- ✓ Do you have a tuition assistance policy?
- ✓ Make sure your tuition assistance policies support the degrees you need.
- ✓ Make sure your policies cover Prior Learning Assessment (see page 9).

Step 4

- ✓ Communicate all of this to your employees.
- ✓ Communicate this to your supervisors and managers.
- ✓ Everyone needs to be on board!

And VOILA!

degree completion that wins for Colorado and works for you at the same time.

What College -- What Programs?

Ok, now it's time to dig in. You need to have a plan for your company's growth.

1. Appoint someone to be the lead - but don't shy away from doing some of this research yourself.
2. Involve your senior staff – what degrees and what programs will help? The goal is to create a list of options.
3. Which colleges offer what you need? Local colleges? Local community colleges? Online programs?
4. If there are no colleges that offer what you need today, maybe they'll create it for you (and with you).
5. It's great that you know these things, but ask yourself: do your employees also know this?
6. Step into their shoes – and begin to share information.

Feeling a bit overwhelmed?

Don't worry!

In the next few pages, we'll outline resources and ways you can support employee education.

General College Information for Students and the Public

We're lucky to live in Colorado where we have [College in Colorado](#): it's a one-stop-shop for everything college.

College in Colorado is a My Degree Matters CO partner and they've made a commitment to consistently provide the best and most accurate information on college to you, your employees, and the community.

Take a look at some of their [resources](#)!



Paying for College

The first place to start is employer-sponsored tuition assistance -- do you have it?

If you do have it, do your employees know about it?

How many use your program? Are they focused on pursuing the RIGHT degree?

Tuition assistance is an investment in your company's future- spread the word!

Don't forget the other ways to support your employees as they look to continue their education:

- ❖ In Colorado there are several different ways to pay for college.
 - The [College Opportunity Fund](#) is available to all Colorado undergraduate students- and you don't need to attend school full time (perfect for your employees!).
 - Is your employee a member of the Colorado National Guard, or a military veteran? They're eligible for specific grants and scholarships- sometimes for a full ride!
- ❖ Remind your employees to apply early for financial aid- nothing is worse than finding the perfect scholarship, and realizing you just missed the deadline.
- ❖ The [Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#) (FAFSA) is key- it serves as the application for most federal and state financial aid- you and your employees cannot afford to ignore it. We recommend your employees fill out and submit the FAFSA as soon after January 1 as possible- the earlier it's received, the better their chances for financial aid.
- ❖ Many adult learners believe that there are no scholarships or aid available to them. Not true! Most scholarships are not limited by age- especially scholarships specific to programs or interests.
- ❖ [College in Colorado](#) has a great scholarship finder, to help your employees pick the grants and aid that work best for them, and their interests.
- ❖ Don't discount smaller scholarships- \$500 may not seem like a lot when looking at the overall cost of an education, but every bit counts!

Prior Learning Assessment

(One of education's best kept secrets)

Did you know that there is a way for your employees to earn college credit for what they've already learned –

- ✓ in other colleges courses
- ✓ in training in the workplace
- ✓ by serving in the military
- ✓ through volunteer work
- ✓ through accessing the myriad of open source coursework on the internet

That's Prior Learning Assessment.

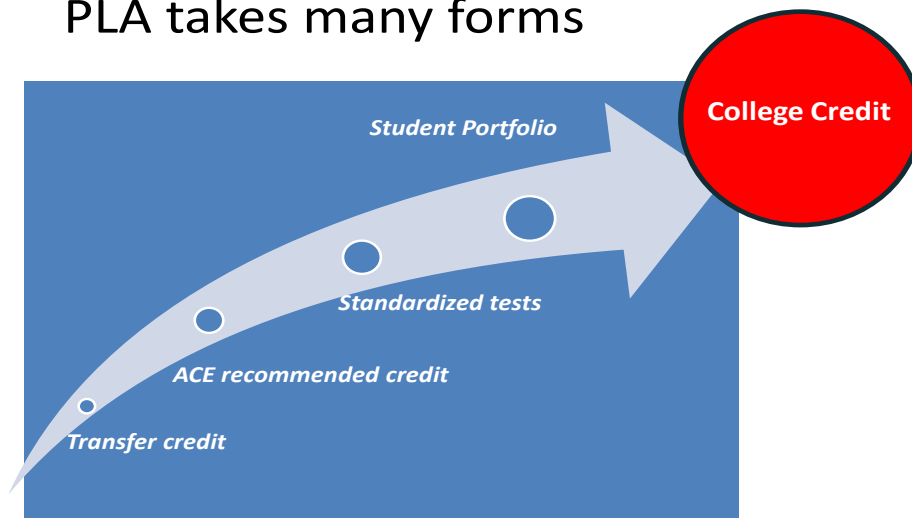
As of 2012, it's now law in Colorado that every state-funded college or university in Colorado has to have a system in place to award and recognize Prior Learning Assessment.

This is not "gimmie" college credit. This is not cheap credit leading to cheap degrees -- the kind you find in airline magazines advertising "earn your degree in a week" programs.

Since 1974, CAEL has conducted research and studies validating Prior Learning Assessment. It's a standardized process of awarding credit for life-learned education. When learning is documented and evaluated, it's legitimate and accepted by colleges and universities across the country.

It can save you a lot of money, and save your employees a lot of time.

PLA takes many forms



If you offer Tuition Assistance, make sure PLA is eligible.

Sample tuition policy language

In the section of policy outlining what is eligible include a subsection on Credits Earned via Assessment:

- *Fees for tests including CLEP exams, DSST exams, and exams available through Excelsior College are eligible for payment under this policy.*
- *Fees for awarding credits based on recommendations for military and workplace formal education and training evaluated by the American Council on Education are eligible for payment under this policy.*
- *Fee for obtaining college credit through preparation of a portfolio documenting college level learning, including the cost of a portfolio development course, the cost of portfolio evaluation and the cost of posting earned credits to the transcript are eligible for payment under this policy.*

If your policy has a repayment section, you may want to include the following language on repayment:

- *Employees who take CLEP, DSST, Excelsior College exams or enroll in a credit-bearing portfolio assessment class and do not pass will be required to repay the fees incurred.*

Hints

- Communicate the value Prior Learning Assessment to your employees; it saves everyone time and money.
- Every adult student returning to college should ask about Prior Learning Assessment.

More PLA resources

- A “how” and “why” guide: [Prior Learning Assessment for Employers](#)
- Research on the value of PLA for employers: [Research: Why Employers Value PLA](#)
- [Earn College Credit for What You Know](#), now out in paperback

Visit www.learningcounts.org

Bringing Prior Learning Assessment to
the desktop of every person



Ways you can support education at the workplace



Some college; no degree?

- Are any of your employees close to a degree? Encourage them to finish.



Tuition assistance

- If you offer it, make sure your employees know about it.



Education advocate

- Identify an education guru (someone who knows policies and resources)



Educational resources

- Provide access to learning tools: colleges, financial aid, courses, PLA



Career map

- Make sure your employees know where you're headed and what degrees and credentials they need to get there



College fair

- Host a college fair in your cafeteria or lobby



On site classes

- Are there courses that a group of your employees want or need? Consider bringing the class onsite.



Learning cohorts

- Going to college is sometimes easier when you have a "buddy;" encourage learning cohorts



Flex time

- Maybe you don't have Tuition Assistance, but you can provide flexible hours for employees who want to go to school



Recognize achievements

- There are lots of ways to recognize degrees and certificates: personal email, special lunch, newsletter article, opportunity to advance



Education advising

- Bring an educational or career advisor to your company to help employees plan



Use of computers

- Can your employees use your computers "off hours"? It helps!



Other?

- Get creative! This list is just the beginning of what you can do.

Notes