



CAPELLA UNIVERSITY

Expanding horizons: Exploring alternative assessment formats

CAEL 2009 International Conference

Capella University
Sara Leiste and Kathryn Jensen
November 18th, 2009

- Course development process at Capella University
- Capella University PLA Template structure
 - Competency-based template format
 - Scenario-based template format
- Faculty Review
 - Faculty Review section on petition template
 - Faculty Review Guide
 - Maintaining quality Faculty feedback
- PLA Lab

Background about Capella

- Online institution
- Offers PLA in all undergrad and some graduate programs
- PLA must match to existing courses at Capella
- Exploring PLA in General Education



Background about Capella

- Course content and competencies are standardized
- Competencies written first
- Course content is developed second
- The competencies in PLA assessments are the same as in the course.



Course Development process at Capella University

- Courses are designed according to pre-defined competencies.
- Learners taking course are assessed against the competencies.
- Two main roles in course development
 - Subject Matter Experts - expertise with the specific competencies.
 - SME selects course materials and writes content.
 - Course designer/developer - structure and design of the course, assessments and learning activities.

Capella University Petition Template Structure

- Learner contact information
- Introduction questions
- Narrative and supportive documentation
- Faculty review section:
 - Reviewer scores learner on each competency
 - Determines whether the petition is approved or denied

Competency-Based template

- Template has been refined over time.
- Changes are based on experience with learners.
 - Simplifying the language.
 - Clarification of documentation appropriate to the assessment
 - Clarification of faculty review scoring, feedback requirements, and expectations.
- Our goal has always been to balance:
 - guidance and clarity of expectations
 - openness to different expressions of learning.

Competency-Based Petition Template

- Competency-based templates use competencies that have been developed in the curriculum process.
- PLA Staff incorporate competencies into our blank PLA template model:
 1. Learner contact information
 2. Supporting documentation
 3. Learner's responses to each competency
 - What do you know?
 - What have you done with this knowledge?
 4. Faculty review section

Scenario-Based Template

- Competency-based approach was not working for certain learners, especially undergrad IT.
 - Answered questions with years of experience rather than description of their knowledge.
 - Difficulty differentiating *outputs* vs. *inputs* (learning vs. experience).
 - Able to explain their experience and abilities.
 - Did not address competencies or learning.
- Scenario-based templates were developed to enable them to demonstrate learning
 - Respond to a scenario that they might encounter on the job.

Scenario-Based Petition Template

- Developed by the SMEs and course developers.
 - Curriculum department develops course competencies.
 - The SMEs develop a scenario and other requirements that incorporate the competencies of the course.
 - The Scenario-Based PLA template consists the following sections:
 - 1. Learner contact information**
 - 2. Learner's responses to scenario**
 - 3. Artifacts and documentation of experience**
 - 4. Faculty review section with rationale and decision**

Guidelines for Faculty Reviewers

PLA is a learning process, as well as an assessment process. (CAEL Standard III)

For each competency, the reviewer provides feedback.

- Same type of feedback they would give in the courseroom.
- Explains the gaps between requirements and demonstrated achievement.

Best practices for feedback:

- Compare demonstrated learning to competencies
 - not to previous petitions or to learners in the course.
- Feedback should focus on:
 - Learner's demonstration of knowledge,
 - Connections between and among ideas,
 - Extensions of ideas or concepts beyond the original learning context.
- Be specific with both praise and criticism.

Faculty Review Section

Faculty Review:

***Scoring Guidelines.** Put an X in the appropriate box. **Include a rationale so the learner can understand your rating.**

Use the following scale:

- 4 – mastery of the competencies *exceeds* expectations
- 3 – mastery of the competencies *meets* expectations
- 2 – mastery of Learning the competencies *minimally meets* expectations
- 1 – mastery of the competencies *marginally meets* expectations *or does not meet* expectations

The learner has earned credit if the average score is 3 or better.

BUS3050 – Principles of Organizational Communication	Demonstration of competencies (1=poor, 4=distinguished)				Rationale
	1	2	3	4	
Competency 1: Analyze business communication situations.					
Competency 2: Analyze the interrelationships of communication within organizational systems.					
Competency 3: Communicate effectively.					

Disposition and final feedback from Faculty Reviewer

Disposition:

- Recommend granting credit
- Do not recommend granting credit
- Need more information

Additional Comments:

Faculty Representative(s) Signature and date (can be electronic signature)

- The final part of the petition review is the overall disposition and final feedback.
- Reviewer recommends granting credit, denying or requesting more information.
- Provides overall feedback on the petition.

Granting or Denying Credit on the Petition Templates

Credit is granted in the following circumstances:

- Demonstrated mastery of the competencies.
- Appropriate balance between theory and skills.
- Supporting evidence is authentic, sufficient and appropriate.

- When reviewers cannot recommend credit, they will request further information. PLA staff help the learner understand the gaps in the petition.

The recommendation to deny credit is used when:

- Second submission is inadequate,
- Demonstrated misunderstandings or non-understanding of competencies, or
- Academic honesty violation.

Faculty Reviewer Guide

- We developed a Faculty Reviewer Guide to help reviewers understand:
 - CAEL principles that shape Capella University's PLA program
 - Credit for Prior Learning Policy at Capella University
 - Benefits of PLA
 - Lifecycle of each PLA and where they fit into it
 - Learner experience in PLA
 - The review process
 - Reviewer Expectations:
 - Feedback examples
 - Feedback standards
- New reviewers receive a copy of the Guide.
- Each review is monitored to ensure clear, adequate feedback and a strong rationale for the decision.

Prior Learning Assessment helps learners with each step of the PLA process

- Brings learners together
- Uses familiar Courseroom environment
- Provides resources
- Learning Units explore approaches to petitioning successfully
 - Unit 1: Assessing qualifications and pre-writing
 - Unit 2: Supporting evidence and documentation
 - Unit 3: Writing the petition
 - Unit 4: Submitting the petition
- Feedback from PLA expert
- Examples of successful petitions
- Reduces anxiety about the process and viability
- It's free to learners

Discussion questions

- We have explained the two approaches to PLA that we use.
 - Can you see one of these, or a variation, working at your institution?
 - Do you have feedback on either approach?
 - Questions for us?

Thanks!

If you have any questions please contact us at PLA@capella.edu

Thank you!

Sara Leiste, MS

Kathryn Jensen, MBA