SUCCESS STORY
Columbus State University, Georgia

SNAPSHOT
Columbus State University (CSU) in Georgia is located 100 miles southwest of Atlanta and ten miles from the Alabama border. CSU is a diverse school enrolling approximately 8,200 students. It offers an extensive curriculum covering 46 undergraduate and 42 graduate degrees and works closely with the greater Columbus community to understand and meet the needs of local employers.

CHALLENGES
Approximately 25-30% of students at CSU are non-traditional students older than 25 years of age who are returning to school to improve their skills and obtain a college degree in hopes of furthering their job prospects. Dr. Tara Underwood, Chair and Associate Professor of Health Science for the Department of Health, Physical Education, and Exercise Science, explains, “basic jobs require at least a bachelor’s degree of some sort. Obtaining a bachelor’s degree is an indication that you’re able to start an academic program and finish successfully. Earning a degree is also an indication of your willingness to grow and develop within a particular profession.”

CSU enrolls a fair number of military and retired military students because of its proximity to Fort Benning, one of the largest Army bases in the United States. Many of these students have a lot of on-the-job training in a particular occupation specialty in addition to extensive physical training. They would like to receive credit for these experiences as “it is frustrating for a student to be enrolled in a class to in order to hear lectures concerning subjects that they’ve actually had real-world training on,” says Dr. Underwood.
SOLUTION

CSU offers a wide variety of programs to help non-traditional students acclimatize to college life. An Adult Re-Entry program provides counselors, tutoring, and networking opportunities for non-traditional students. Military students receive additional support services through the Veterans Affairs Office, school admission personnel, and advising staff who work on site at Fort Benning. In addition, the school has established procedures for accepting Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) of up to 60 semester hours for an undergraduate degree and 30 semester hours for a graduate degree.

All students are assigned an academic advisor upon enrollment who can guide them through the CPL process. Academic advisors are typically faculty members, but some programs such as nursing and teacher education have dedicated advising staff members. All requests for CPL require departmental chair approval.

CPL requests for military experience are based on recommendations from the American Council on Education (ACE). ACE recommendations are made after a thorough review of military coursework that includes the length of the course, the content covered, learning objectives, and assessment outcomes. To receive credit, students submit their Joint Services Transcript (JST). They can obtain up to 21 hours of credit in many degree programs. CSU does not receive many requests for credit for industry certifications. When they do, the school generally relies on the ACE recommendations but each department must approve the credits before they are applied towards a degree.

Students can also receive academic credit by passing national or university exams or by submitting a portfolio of relevant experience. The portfolio should include documentation of: (1) any professional courses taken; (2) certifications earned; (3) on-the-job training curriculum; and (4) employer verification of the content that was included in the training and how many hours it took to complete the training. Although CSU does not charge a fee for portfolio review for credit, very few students have taken advantage of this program.

TAKEAWAY

With the cost of college rising, CPL programs are becoming more important than ever for students with previous work experience who wish to pursue an educational degree in their occupational area. “I think the role of Credit for Prior Learning will help them transition through their desired degree program at a much quicker and efficient manner,” concludes Dr. Underwood. At CSU, this is especially true for military and veteran students. By offering a robust CPL program and working closely with employers in the surrounding community, CSU is successfully satisfying the needs of both the students and the employers.

Learn more about how your institution can offer Credit for Prior Learning at www.pearsonhighered.com/credit-for-prior-learning and acenet.edu/CEAI.