**Descriptive Analysis of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) Procedures at UCW**

**Project Title:** Fortunately, all these procedures are well stipulated at the University of Canada West (UCW), as expounded below.

**Objective:**

However, the present project aims to identify and outline the procedural approach to Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) at UCW. The analysis intends to outline and describe the tasks, functions, and activities associated with assessing prior learning as they relate to giving academic credit to learners. Analyzing this framework will be relevant in determining the potential advantages and disadvantages of UCW's PLAR policy concerning non-traditional learners and some improvements that can be made in the evaluation process.

**Dataset:**

This descriptive analysis is based on the documentary analysis of the PLAR procedure document known as Policy 9022p. This document describes the responsibilities of the students, the Registrar's Office, the Department Chair(s), the Reviewers, and the Admissions Appeal Committee. The remaining information in the policy includes procedural timelines, examples of evidence that a consumer would be expected to provide to be granted credit and definitions of the terms used in the policy.

**Key features of the dataset include:**

* Policy Information: Policy number, date approved and date the policy is expected to be reviewed.
* Stakeholders and Responsibilities: The roles of participants include students, the Registrar's Office, the Departments of Finance, the Department Chair(s), the Reviewers, and the Admissions Appeals Committee.
* **Types of Evidence:** Institutionally appropriate means that prior learning is shown, including evidence through a portfolio, certificates, exams, and work experience.
* Assessment Process: A discussion of the differential approach involving steps of assessment such as preliminary assessments, the conduct of research on evidence, and the decision-making steps.
* **Appeals Process:** How one can appeal for his or her decision made by PLAR.
* **Definitions:** Provide a definition for and redefine some of the essential terms, including assigned credit, course challenge, portfolio, transfer credit, and unassigned credit.

**Methodology:**

1. **Data Collection and Preparation:** The first method used in this analysis entailed sourcing all the necessary documents that explained the various procedures followed at UCW regarding PLAR. This included the full procedural document (Policy 9022p) and related policies and academic-related policies such as admission and credit transfer. The data was sorted according to the stakeholders, the sources of evidence recognized, and the activities in the assessment and award of PLAR.

Data preparation was reading the text to define the policy's significant aspects. While identifying key actions, they were further subdivided to develop a procedural timeline ranging from an application made by the students to the final one made by the Registrar's Office.

1. **Descriptive Statistics:** Descriptive analysis was made to identify the stakeholders' responsibilities, and the activities involved in each of them. For instance, students must produce all required documents regarding the PLAR application, while the Registrar's Office is supposed to process the initial application. The Department Chair(s) and Reviewers are the drivers of the actual assessment of the evidence granting academic credits to the applicant.

Further, the distribution type of the research investigated the nature of student's evidence and determined the regularity of proof of prior learning. This includes portfolios, skills certifications and knowledge acquired through non-formal education or work experience. Time frames were also determined for each procedure process, such as the time taken to peruse the evidence submitted by students and to announce the final decision.

1. **Data Visualization:** To describe the work on the development of PLAR and the participation of various actors, several drawings were made:

* **Pie Chart:** An example of how the data was presented is a pie chart that depicted the distribution of responsibilities of the various stakeholders of PLAR assessments. That was useful to emphasize for whom this workload is intended and how much each participant is engaged in the process.

A pie chart with different colored sections

Description automatically generated

* **Bar Chart:** A bar chart was then developed to illustrate the variety of evidence submitted for PLAR, which may include portfolios, exams, and certificates, amongst others.

A graph of green bars

Description automatically generatedA graph of a graph showing a number of green bars

Description automatically generatedA graph showing a number of people

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

1. **Stakeholder Segmentation:** Based on the PLAR process, the roles of the stakeholders were categorized as follows: Students, Registrar's Office, Chairs of Academic Departments, Reviewers and Admissions Appeals Committee. Each segment's roles were broken down to identify their individual roles and responsibilities. For example, in the Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan, students are tasked with constructing an array of the Learning Outcomes Portfolio. At the same time, the Department Chair(s) and Reviewers are primarily concerned with assessing the presented documentation. It also helped identify the general flow and identify the specific areas where there could be possible enhancements in the administration of the tasks.
2. **Insights and Findings:** From the descriptive analysis of the PLAR process in UCW, the following specific findings were observed:

* **Bottlenecks in the Process:** This can become a potential problem: the time the students spend preparing their portfolios. This is because the portfolio application's success level largely determines the portfolio's extent. With the time students take to compile all the necessary documents, the time spent assessing the portfolio often lags.
* **Common Forms of Evidence:** Portfolio was the most dominant mode of assessment among the students, especially those seeking credit for previous learning experiences. However, exams are also used, particularly when the student wants to show that he or she possesses knowledge per the learning outcomes of a particular course.
* **Role of Department Chairs and Reviewers:** Department Chairs and Reviewers play essential roles in safeguarding the academic credibility of the PLAR process. Assessing whether credit should be given or not helps keep the academic standards of the UCW high and, at the same time, accommodates learners with prior learning experiences.

1. **Recommendations:** The following recommendations are made to the UCW, based on the findings of the analysis to help improve the PLAR process:

* **Streamlining Portfolio Submission:** This could be translated to the fact that, to minimize the number of hours students devote to preparing their portfolios, UCW should expand on the instructions and samples that would enable students to structure the evidence most effectively. Also, workshops or advising sessions on such students' portfolios could be provided as an application for PLAR.
* **Improving Communication:** An exemplary communications network should always be between the Registrar's Office, the Department Chairs involved and the students when implementing PLAR. Implementing a tracking system whereby the student can track the progress made on their PLAAR application would also demystify the process.
* **Incorporating Technology:** Portfolios could be submitted and assessed electronically, saving much time. Technological aids enable students to upload their portfolios electronically and allow faculty to review the uploaded portfolio from a distance, which would probably accelerate the assessment process.

**Tools and Technologies:**

* Various AWS services were applied to work on the data, such as analysis, cleaning and arrangement.
* Charts and graphs were made with Excel or Python using pandas.

**Conclusion:**

This descriptive analysis aims to assess the general feasibility of PLAR application at UCW and identify the procedure of PLAR process at UCW, the major stakeholders involved, and the kind of evidence stipulated. Thus, by getting a clearer understanding of the above elements, UCW can make the right decisions.