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Receiving Credit for Job Experience

Started in January, Learning Counts is a project of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, the American Council on Education and the College Board, in which older students take an online course that teaches them to prepare a portfolio that shows what they have learned from work and life experience. The portfolios — one for each subject area in which they are seeking credit — are then submitted to an outside evaluator, who decides whether they should get academic credit.

So far, about 80 colleges, including Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland and Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, have agreed to accept those credit recommendations, and to give students three credit hours for the portfolio-creation course.

Kim Bove, 39, a student at Widener University near Philadelphia with three children, a full-time job and nearly two decades of work experience, got 12 credits in about six weeks with Learning Counts.

Ms. Bove started college at Pennsylvania State University, transferred to Widener her junior year, then dropped out. Last year, she re-enrolled at Widener, to complete the bachelor's degree she hoped would lead to better jobs — and, she said, make her a better role model for her children.

"I took a class on supervision, something I'd done for 16 years, and I felt like I could have taught the class," said Ms. Bove, who works for a pharmaceutical company. "I took the portfolio course, which taught me how to reflect on what I'd learned from my experience, and put together a 40-page document that I submitted to the evaluator. Now I'll be able to get my degree next year."

Ms. Bove's documentation included a narrative describing how, in her managerial jobs at country clubs, she had used the same skills that would be taught in courses on effective planning and organization, supervising staff and effective leadership. She included photos of the facilities and recommendations from her employers.

Ms. Bove paid \$500 for the course and \$250 for the portfolio evaluation.

"I want my kids to go to college the traditional way, because I still think every young person should have that, to learn about learning, and have the whole social aspect of living on their own," she said. "But for me, it was a great choice."