Faculty Assessment Guide
for
Prior Learning Credit

College of Adult and Lifelong Learning
Prior Learning Assessment Program

The Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Program in the College of Adult and Lifelong Learning will provide the opportunity for students to demonstrate their college-level learning obtained through experiences outside of the classroom that may lead to course credit. The University of Toledo recognizes the validity of prior learning as a growing number of students enter college with prior learning from experiences.

The Prior Learning Assessment Program adheres and maintains best practices in assessing prior learning as recommended by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL).
PLA Program Definitions

The following definitions are adopted from the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and their publication *Assessing Learning* (Fiddler, Marineau, & Whitaker, 2006).

**Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)** – A process by which an individual’s learning from experience is assessed and evaluated for purposes of granting credit.

**Experiential Learning** – Learning that has been gained as a result of reflecting upon the events or experiences in one’s life in contrast to formal education.

**Sponsored Experiential Learning** – Preplanned learning experiences offered by a postsecondary institution. Examples: co-ops, field work, practicums, internships and field placement.

**Non-sponsored Experiential Learning** – Organized events or unplanned results of life or work experiences; skills and knowledge gained through unstructured events and experiences. Examples: work experience, training seminars and workshops, community and volunteer activities and outside interests.

**Portfolio** – A collection of evidence in support of a person’s claim for credit through a prior learning assessment process

**Portfolio Development** – The process of identifying and creating documentation or other evidence of learning to be organized for presentation in support of a claim(s) for credit via a prior learning assessment process.

**Learning Outcome** – A statement of measurable (or anticipated) learning that describes what a person should know and/or be able to do as a result of a (formal or informal) learning experience.
Ten Standards for Assessing Learning

1. Credit or its equivalent should be awarded only for learning, and not for experience.

2. Assessment should be based on standards and criteria for the level of acceptable learning that are both agreed upon and made public.

3. Assessment should be treated as an integral part of learning, not separate from it, and should be based on an understanding of learning processes.

4. The determination of credit awards and competence levels must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic or credentialing experts.

5. Credit or other credentialing should be appropriate to the context in which it is awarded and accepted.

6. If awards are for credit, transcript entries should clearly describe what learning is being recognized and should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.

7. Policies, procedures, and criteria applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available to all parties involved in the assessment process.

8. Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.

9. All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions they perform.

10. Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served, the purposes being met, and the state of the assessment arts.
Prior Learning Assessment Policies and Procedures

College credit will be granted only for documented, authenticated and demonstrated college-level learning outcomes and not for experience alone. **College-level learning** is defined as demonstrated achievement of learning outcomes, theoretical and/or applied, that match the depth and breadth of the content of a college course or curriculum objectives.

To participate in the PLA program a student must be currently enrolled and registered at The University of Toledo. Students are required to meet with their Academic Adviser to confirm the PLA credit can be applied to the student’s degree program prior to beginning the process of obtaining credit. A student’s prior experiences will be measured through learning outcomes and is subject to the expertise of the faculty assessor. Students who need assistance in determining if their learning is eligible in obtaining credit can meet with the PLA Adviser/Coach.

**PLA Methods**

Credit may be obtained by demonstrating learning through the following assessment methods,

- **Standardized Testing** - Students demonstrate college-level learning through nationally recognized examinations. The University of Toledo accepts examination scores from Advanced Placement (AP) examinations, College Level Examination Program (CLEP), DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSST) and International Baccalaureate (IB) examinations.

- **Credit by Examination** – Students demonstrate college-level learning through course-specific examinations created and evaluated by faculty assessors from the department/school in which the course is offered.

- **Non-sponsored Collegiate Learning** – Students have demonstrated college-level learning in an educational setting. In most instances, this credit would be
equivalent to specific courses or transcripted as transfer credit. Examples: industry certifications such as A++, CISCO, etc. Also, American Council on Education (ACE) recommended college credit and military credit is accepted.

- **Experiential Learning Portfolio** – Students demonstrate college-level learning by submitting a collection of evidence that documents the match between their experiential learning and learning outcomes of a specific course offered at The University of Toledo. The Portfolio is submitted to a faculty assessor to be evaluated for credit.

- **Other** – as approved by the faculty assessor, PLA director and /or Faculty Advisory Committee
  - For example, competence demonstration may be used to measure learning outcomes through documentation review, candidate interview, performance assessment, product review, a combination of these measures, or other means.

**PLA Credit Limitation**
A student may earn up to 30 total semester credit hours through Portfolio and/or Credit by Exam toward a baccalaureate degree and 15 total hours toward an associate degree. Maximum hours earned toward a certificate program will depend on the program and will be determined by the department chair. Additional prior learning credits may also be awarded through methods such as CLEP (College Level Examination Placement), AP (Advanced Placement), DSST (DANTES Standardized Subject Testing), other accepted standardized testing, ACE (American Council on Education) recommendations, or transferred from other colleges. Individual colleges and/or departments may impose separate PLA credit limits from all methods for their own programs and degrees. Students should check with their college advising office for limitations.
Credits earned through any PLA method do not fulfill college residency requirements. Credit can be earned only once for the same course. Transcripts from other institutions and documentation from other sources of learning will be cross-checked. Undergraduate credit may only be earned through prior learning assessment. Graduate courses are ineligible.

**Grading and Transcription of PLA Credit**

Prior Learning credit earned through Portfolio or Credit by Exam is to be posted during the term in which the credit is granted. The faculty member and/or academic department granting Prior Learning Assessment credit determines the grade for the credits to be awarded. The course title, grade or PS along with either the Portfolio or Credit by Exam distinction will be transcripted to the student’s record.

**Appeals Process**

If a student is not granted credit for a Portfolio, he or she may resubmit it by the end of the next full semester from the time of receiving the evaluation results. The resubmitted Portfolio must have been substantially revised in content, and contain an addendum detailing revisions. The student must also have an appeals process form on file in the PLA office. A Portfolio may not be resubmitted more than once and the same assessment process will be followed. Any Portfolios submitted under the appeals process will also be reviewed and approved by the Faculty Advisory Committee. If a student is not granted credit through Credit by Exam, it will be at the discretion of the department chair if a second exam may be administered.

Student concerns regarding the assessment process need to be submitted in writing and will be addressed by the PLA Director, representatives of the Faculty Advisory Committee and the Dean of the College of Adult and Lifelong Learning.
Assessment Fees and Processing
The student fee for the assessment process is $30 per credit hour to be assessed. This fee only covers the assessment of the prior learning and does not guarantee credit will be granted. Assessment fees are non-refundable.

All students petitioning for assessment of credit will need to complete a Petition for Prior Learning Assessment form or Credit by Exam form. Students submit their assessment fee, completed Portfolio and Prior Learning Assessment form to the PLA director. The PLA director will not distribute any Portfolios for assessment nor will Credit by Exam be administered until fees have been paid in full.

A recording fee of one half the current per credit hour in-state tuition rate is assessed for those courses a student has recorded on his or her transcript. By completing the Petition for PLA or Credit by Exam form, the student agrees to be financially responsible for the recording fee assessed on their University billing account. The University of Toledo policies on billing and student accounts will apply to any outstanding balances and will be subject to late fees. Students should check with Rocket Solutions Central for policies and applicability of financial aid funds for PLA credit.

Portfolio Development Course
The Portfolio Development course, AL 2010, will be required for students who are pursuing credit through the Portfolio method. This three-credit hour course will prepare students to create a Portfolio ready for assessment. It will be a graded course and the student must complete a Portfolio to pass the course.

In the Portfolio Development course, students will reflect on their prior learning, document their knowledge, skills and ability, and explain how competency in a given learning outcome was developed. They must grapple with the distinction between learning and experience, and they must recognize that they may or may not have gained an adequate knowledge base of the theories and concepts underscoring particular discipline areas. Ultimately, competency must be conveyed by means of a
completed Portfolio so faculty assessors may determine whether or not learning outcomes have been demonstrated. The process of teaching students to separate learning outcomes from experiences is the task of the Portfolio instructor, but the burden of proof for this task rests with the student.

**The Evaluation Process**

A course-equivalency credit model will be adopted and students will need to demonstrate and document their college-level learning toward course objectives and learning outcomes of University of Toledo courses. Credit cannot be obtained for courses outside of The University of Toledo. Faculty assessors will be identified and assigned through the Chair of the Department in which the class is offered and/or the college representative of the Faculty Advisory Committee. Faculty will make available syllabi for those courses in which students can seek credit by submitting to the syllabi repository. Faculty assessors will work with the PLA Director or Adviser and student to determine which assessment method would be most effective to demonstrate and document the learning outcomes of each course. Some subjects and content areas lend themselves to competence demonstration rather than written assessment. In instances when performance is clearly the best criterion of a learning outcome, it will be arranged through the PLA office in consultation with the faculty assessor.

A faculty assessor/evaluator will use the criteria to base evaluation on either accreditation standards of their college or degree program or based on their degree program outcomes and assessment guidelines.

The PLA Office will make arrangements with the faculty assessor/evaluator for delivery and pick-up of the student Portfolio along with necessary forms and signatures. The amount of time needed to complete an assessment of a portfolio may depend on a number of factors including the type of course, contents in the portfolio, semester schedule or number of courses requested for assessment. Once a faculty assessor has
received a portfolio to assess, we request the credit recommendation form be completed and the PLA Office contacted within 45-60 days.

**Faculty Evaluator Assessment Options**
The faculty evaluator will possess expertise in the course subject matter and in most cases will have taught the course for which the student is seeking credit. The portfolio will be evaluated as though it were the body of work for an actual college course.

The faculty evaluator has the following assessment options upon review of the portfolio:

1. To accept the experience and award full credit. The evaluator will complete the credit recommendation form and provide detailed feedback to the student.

2. To assess and determine the experience as too limited or not college-level and award no credit. The evaluator will complete the credit recommendation form and provide detailed feedback to the student.

3. To request additional information or clarification because the experience, although appropriate for credit, is inadequately articulated. The evaluator will complete only a portion of the credit recommendation form and notify the PLA office. The faculty evaluator may discuss with the student where deficiencies lie and the student will have the opportunity to submit an addendum.

**Credit Recommendation Form** – available through the PLA office.
**Documentation and Evidence of Learning**

Documentation provides evidence of learning and verifies a learning experience. There are two types of documentation: direct and indirect. Direct documentation can be defined as original work created, produced, written, designed, or composed by a student. Examples of direct documentation include reports, Web sites, computer designs, art objects, or video performances. Indirect documentations are documents produced by others that support or attest to a student’s learning. Indirect sources include certificates, meeting minutes, testimonies, performances evaluations, articles, contracts or letters of verification. Depending of the petitions’ subject matter, students should use a combination of both types. Student should retain a copy of all submitted documentation for their records. (Colvin, pp. 140, 141)

Types of PLA Documentation*

- Awards
- Certificate
- Transcript
- Statements from employers, teachers, trainers,
- Diploma
- Job descriptions
- Syllabi
- Letters of recommendation
- Congratulations on high performance
- Promotion evaluations
- Evidence of promotion
- Samples of work
- Evidence of suggestions adopted
- Explanation of tasks performed
- Explanation of ranking, rating, or classification system in company
- Performance standards for acquiring license
- Memberships in professional or trade organizations
- Membership requirements for professional /trade organizations
- Scores on licensing exams
- Military records
- Commendations
- Programs of performances
- Newspaper and magazine clippings
- Letter of collaboration from co-volunteers, clients served, supervisors
- Amounts of assignments
- Amount of time spent on outside assignments
- Letter attesting students was enrolled in course
- Learning outcomes or objectives of course
- Evidence of completions
- Course descriptive
- Number of didactic hours
- Number of clinical or practicum hours
- Resume
- Proof of enrollment
- Exhibits such as photographs, videotapes, etc.

*Adopted from Lourdes College and Thomas Edison State College.
Models of Learning

For students who pursue a portfolio for course credit, the PLA Office recommends that each portfolio submission be based on the learning theory of David Kolb’s Experiential Learning Model. If the faculty assessor recommends another format, model or has specific requirements, students should follow the faculty member’s guidelines. The format below only serves as a recommended format to assist as a guideline for the theoretical basis of the portfolio and does not guarantee credit will be granted.

Kolb’s Model
Within the narrative portion (body) of the portfolio, students should address each Kolb’s stages with one aspect of their learning experience. Four stages make up Kolb’s Model. In the Concrete Experience – student describes what they did and learned. In Reflection & Observation – student details what they noticed and observed about the experience. In Abstract Conceptualization – student lists rules, theories and concepts that apply to their experience. Finally, in Active Experimentation – student shares what happened as a result of their learning experience. Students can learn more about Kolb’s model in his book “Experiential Learning” (1984). Students will also learn more about Kolb’s Model in UT’s portfolio class. Students can discuss this and other portfolio issues with the PLA Advisor should the student experience difficulty.

* Definitions of Kolb’s stages adopted from Colvin, J. Earning College Credit for What you Know (2006).

Bloom’s Taxonomy
In constructing a narrative portfolio of their learning experience, students should relate their learning experience with each component of Benjamin Bloom’s Taxonomy. Six concepts make up the taxonomy or learning model. Each concept embraces a unique and important aspect of learning. The six are: Knowledge, Understanding, Application, Analysis, Evaluation, and Innovation. Within the narrative part or body of the portfolio, students should address each concept with one aspect of their learning experience. Students can discuss this with the PLA Advisor should they have difficulty.