Prior Learning Assessment Inquiry Packet

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Frequently Asked Questions

What is prior learning?

Prior learning is defined as articulated college level learning, including knowledge, skills and competencies, acquired from work and life experience. Experience may include volunteer work, travel, independence acquisition of knowledge, participation in courses sponsored by associations, unions, business, government, industry, and the military as well as participation in certification programs and professional development courses.

What is prior Learning Assessment (PLA)?

Prior learning assessment is an alternative credit option, a process, and an opportunity for reflective examination.

1. PLA is an alternative credit option offered by Eastern Michigan University.
    a. Other alternative credit options are described in the Undergraduate Catalog http://catalog.emich.edu/.
    b. Information about the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) is found at http://www.emich.edu/uacdc/students/placementtesting.php and http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/clep/about.html
2. PLA is a process; the prior learning assessment process involves the following steps:
    a. Work directly with a Faculty Advisor to determine if the learning you have done through your life and work experience can translate to the learning outcomes in a course you need to complete your degree.
    b. Write portfolio(s) and compile documentation to present for review
    c. Register portfolio(s) and pay assessment fee ($250) per course assessment
    d. Receive evaluation(s) by faculty assessor(s) from PLA Advisor
    e. Receive awarded credit recorded as "CR" (credit) on transcript six to eight weeks after the close of the term in which the credit is awarded.
3. PLA is an opportunity for examining past experiences and reflecting on learning acquired as a result of experience. Students define and describe the learning acquired from experience in appropriate language and document the experience. The learning statement and the documentation are presented in a portfolio to demonstrate mastery of college-level writing skills as well as comprehension of the material, skills, and knowledge presented in the course for which credit is sought.

Are portfolios in a standard format?

Yes. The portfolio format requires the following elements:

1. Cover page with standard information
2. Table of Contents
3. Chronological Record
4. Resume (optional)
5. Goals Statement (educational goal(s) and career goal(s))
6. Course information (catalog course description and course syllabus)

7. Learning Statements
8. List or Index of Documentation
9. Transcripts
10. List of Assessment Requests

When can students submit portfolios for assessment?

Students can submit portfolios for assessment any time prior to graduation, but should be aware that evaluation for credit could take several months.

Who evaluates the portfolios?

Faculty in the appropriate department(s) evaluate the portfolios and determine whether to award credit for the course(s) requested. All credit awarded is course specific and is determined by the designated faculty assessor.

Is there a maximum amount of credit that can be awarded for prior learning at EMU?

Yes. A maximum of 30 credit hours may be earned via all forms of alternative credit.

Are credits earned through portfolio-assisted Prior Learning Assessment accepted as transfer credit at other colleges?

Portfolio-assisted Prior Learning Assessment credits are recorded as "CR" on the transcript and credit is determined by transfer institution.

How does credit earned through PLA apply toward a degree?

Credit earned through portfolio-assisted Prior Learning Assessment applies toward any degree for which the courses are appropriate (i.e. courses that fit the student's approved program of study). Since Prior Learning Assessment credits are recorded as "CR" they do not alter the student's grade point average.

Do all departments participate in portfolio assisted prior learning assessment?

No. Department participation in portfolio assisted prior learning assessment is voluntary. Departments also may limit participation to specific programs or courses.

What are reasons for denial of credit?

Common reasons for denial of credit include:

- Evidence presented is inadequate.
- Learning statement is too brief.
- Evidence does not support knowledge of topics in course description.
- Learning statement is unclear about how student's knowledge was acquired.
- Authenticity of evidence is unclear.
- Course requested is inappropriate for evidence presented.

Can I earn graduate credit through PLA?

Prior Learning Assessment is limited to undergraduate programs only. See your program advisor to investigate other options available to you.

Prior Learning Assessment Process

Admission

Student must be admitted to Eastern Michigan University as a degree seeking student.

Determination of Learning/Course Alignment

Student works with a Faculty Advisor to determine which course(s) best align with student learning. Student may request syllabi from department for review.

Portfolio Preparation and Compilation

The student prepares portfolio (2 copies) for assessment. All portfolios must follow the required format.

Portfolio Registration

The student presents completed portfoliosfor review of format. Upon successful format review, the student completes appropriate portfolio registration forms.

Portfolio Distribution

Portfolios are distributed to faculty assessor(s) by PLA Advisor.

Portfolio Assessment (by Faculty Assessor)

Faculty assessor evaluates portfolio and may interview student or request additional demonstrations of competence.

Faculty assessor completes Credit Recommendation and evaluation forms.

Portfolio Retrieval

Faculty assessor notifies the PLA Advisor when portfolios and forms are ready for pickup.

Receipt of the approved Credit Recommendation Form triggers transcription of credit.

Notification of Credit Award or Denial

The PLA Advisor notifies the student of credit award or denial and notifies the Office of Records and Registration of awarded credit for posting to the student's record.

Description of Portfolio Components

The components of the portfolio are:

1. **Cover Page:** The cover page is the first impression of the portfolio (representing the student) that the assessor receives. Printing should be clear and well-spaced. Color and graphics are not required but may be used at the student's discretion. The cover page identifies the process (Prior Learning Assessment), the course sought, and the department to which the portfolio is being submitted. The cover page may provide contact information about the student; students may place contact information on a sheet in the front pocket of the portfolio binder to insure privacy.

   The cover page must contain the following information:

   a. Prior Learning Assessment Portfolio (Identify process)
   b. Department/School (Identify department/school)
   c. Course Name and Number (Identify course for which credit is sought)

   The remaining information should be included inside the front cover on a contact sheet inside:

   a. Student name
   b. Student number
   c. Student contact information
      i. Mailing Address
      ii. Telephone Numbers (work, cell, home)
      iii. E mail address

2. **Table of Contents:** The table of contents will assist your portfolio evaluator in quickly accessing the various components of your portfolio. List each section and the beginning page number. Include the Index of Documentation (or List of Documentation) in the Table of Contents.

3. **Chronological Record:** The chronological record introduces the student to the assessor and provides a framework for the material presented in the learning statement and the documentation. "Chronological" requires that events be listed in order by date.

   Choose a style: outline or narrative. The outline style is recommended. The chronological record reinforces the sequence of events and material presented in learning statement. The chronological record differs from a resume by including relevant personal milestones (i.e. death or illness of parent causing interruption of education or work) or significant events (military service, company downsizing) causing change in employment. Disclosure of personal events (i.e. divorce, illness) is optional.

   Choose a starting point; graduation from high school is a common starting point. A sample of a chronological record using an outline format follows:

Date	Event
May 1990	Graduation from Maryville High School, Maryville, Ohio
May 1990	Customer Service Representative, Sears Department Store, Toledo, OH
June 1991	Marriage and move to Milan, MI
July 1991	Customer Service Representative, Sears Briarwood, Ann Arbor, MI
Sept. 1991	Enrolled part-time in Washtenaw Community College thru Dec. 1992
March 1993	Birth of child – suspended attendance at WCC
Sept. 1993	Re-enrolled in Washtenaw Community College
June 1995	Graduation from Washtenaw Community College Associate's degree

4. **Resume** (optional): Including a current resume is appropriate.
5. **Goals Statement:** A statement of educational and career goals. The educational goal should identify the name of the undergraduate degree sought (i.e. Bachelor of Science in Technology Management) and include plans for completion of the degree as well as any plans for study at the graduate level. The career goal should include plans for use of the degree in your current field or in another field. The Goals Statement may be one paragraph or a brief paragraph for each goal.
6. **Course Information**
    a. Course Description - The course description may be obtained from the current on-line Eastern Michigan University catalog (http://catalog.emich.edu).
    b. Course Syllabus - The course syllabus may be obtained by e mailing a request to the PLA Advisor. Requests for syllabi should not be made during the first two or the last two weeks of a term (see Academic Calendar http://www.emich.edu/registrar/calendars/index.php)
    c. Syllabi requests must include the
        i. Name of the Department
        ii. Course Prefix & Number
        iii. Course Title
        iv. Catalog Year

    Syllabi may change every term; a current course syllabus should be used.
7. **Learning Statement:** The Learning Statement is the major component of the portfolio and describes your experience and identifies the learning acquired. Identify experiences with appropriate detail (who, what, where, when, why, and how). Reflect on the learning acquired and how the learning has been applied. Before writing the learning statement, read the catalog course description and review the syllabus and the required text for the course. It is your responsibility to show that the learning you have acquired through experience and training is equivalent to the learning acquired by a student taking the course for which you seek credit. By identifying and describing the learning you have acquired in an articulate, persuasive learning statement you illustrate to the assessor that you have command of the subject and of college level writing skills.

Be sure to:

a. Address topics listed in course description
b. Address subjects listed in the syllabus
c. Review required text and address relevant topics
d. Choose a style (narrative, outline, essay) and be consistent
e. Describe experiences concisely as background for learning
f. Identify learning, competencies, skills, roles (required and acquired)
g. Note how knowledge, skills or values were applied
h. Use appropriate tone. Use an expository not a conversational tone.

Learning Statements range from 5 to 20 pages. Spell check will not detect homonym errors. Grammar check does not always comprehend context. Select someone to proofread your portfolio for spelling and grammatical errors.

8. **List/Index of Documentation:** Documentation is evidence of experience, direct and indirect, including appropriate work products. Compile of list of documentation for the learning statement labeled "List" or "Index of Documentation". Decide on a referral system (letters or numbers or a combination of both). Label each document clearly. The assessor should be able to turn immediately from the learning statement to supporting documentation. Be consistent. Choose a clear referral system that permits easy access to the documentation supporting the learning identified in the learning statement then maintain that system throughout the learning statement.

   NOTE: Do not submit original documents. Copies of documents are included in departmental portfolio. Only the List(s)/Index (Indices) of Documentation, not copies of the documentation, are included in the Master Portfolio.

9. **Transcripts:** Include transcripts from all colleges/universities attended.

   For the Eastern Michigan University transcript, you may use the tabulation of credit available via your "my emich" account.

Master and Departmental Portfolios

Students submit one Master Portfolio and a Departmental Portfolio.

1. The Master Portfolio contains one copy of each portfolio component and a list of documentation. This copy remains in the Prior Learning Assessment Office for at least seven years.
2. The Departmental Portfolio contains one copy of each portfolio component and copies of all documentation. This copy is reviewed by the faculty assessor and returned to the student after review.

Technical Tips

- Portfolios should be word processed in a clear font using 12 point type.
- Edit carefully for an error free portfolio. Errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling may have an adverse effect on the awarding of credit.
- Choose a three-hole binder with inside pockets to hold forms.
- Choose a labeling system that is easy to read and understand.
- Use of sheet protectors is optional.
- Review previously approved sample portfolios available from PLA Advisor.
- Check with the department about the preferred reference style for papers and use that style.
- Resources:
    - Halle Library Resources: http://www.emich.edu/halle/help_instruction.html
    - Purdue Online Writing Lab: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/

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Registration for Portfolio Assisted Prior Learning Assessment

First Name:		**Last Name:**	
EID#:		**Telephone:**	
Email Address:			
Mailing Address:			
City, State, Zip:			
Major:		**Expected Graduation:**	
PLA Portfolio for class (Prefix & #):			

Please read then sign the following statement:

- ☐ I acknowledge that the material in this portfolio honestly and accurately reflects my life, learning and work experiences.
- ☐ I authorize the Prior Learning Assessment office to charge my student account in the amount of $250.00 for each portfolio for which I submit for approval.
- ☐ I authorize the university to verify statements and documentation by soliciting information from persons or sources referenced in my portfolio. I authorize a release of any and all information from appropriate sources which can reasonably be expected to confirm information that I have submitted in support of my portfolio requesting credit for prior learning. This authorization is valid during the time in which I am developing my portfolio and during its consideration for credit for prior learning.
- ☐ I give notice that the information submitted is true and correct. I understand that falsifying any information or document will result in revocation of credits granted and possible dismissal from the University.
- ☐ I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that credits earned through the portfolio assessment process are applicable to my degree program.
- ☐ My signature indicates that I have read and that I understand the Prior Learning Assessment registration information.

Signature: _____Date: _____