GRAND RAPIDS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT

PLA

STUDENT GUIDE

May 2013
What is Prior Learning Assessment?

Adults who are returning to a learning environment often possess skills and knowledge gained through life experiences. For example, some adults have obtained skills while in the military, through hobbies, friends, television, or books. Colleges not only respect the various learning that adults have acquired, but also award college credit for it when it proves to be similar to what is taught in the classroom. Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) helps adults to receive credit for learning they may have acquired through life experiences. PLA is a process of defining, documenting, measuring, evaluating, and granting credit for learning acquired through various experiences. (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2000)

What methods are available to translate learning into college credit?

Examinations
Advanced Placement Program (AP)
College Level Examination Program (CLEP)
DANTES Examination Program
SCC Proficiency Examinations
Challenge Examinations

Program Evaluations
Articulation Agreements
American Council on Education Military Evaluations
American Council on Education College Credit Recommendation Services

Portfolio Assessment
Prior Learning Assessment
STUDENT SECTION

Introduction

Prior learning Assessment (PLA) is an academic process of identifying, documenting, and awarding college credit for a student’s previous knowledge and skills gained from prior learning. Assessment of prior learning experiences that occur outside the traditional borders of a college should verify that the same academic outcomes are found when compared to college-level courses. These experiences could occur through employment, volunteer work or personal development. With appropriate portfolio documentation college students may request college credit for their alternative learning experiences. The portfolio serves as the tool to document these experiences. Credits earned through PLA may help students to reduce the amount of in-class time required to earn a degree. Students must analyze past experiences and determine which Grand Rapids Community College course(s) matches their prior learning. This task will take commitment in order to succeed in earning credit hours through this methodology. PLA does not replace transfer academic credit that has been received in other institutions. Contact the Office of the Registrar [www.grcc.edu/registrar](http://www.grcc.edu/registrar) to obtain more information about transfer credit.

To receive college credit students must meet the following criteria:

- Learning must have taken place prior to the portfolio submittal.
- Students must document, to the appropriate faculty assessor, that the knowledge they possess matches the course objectives of the course for which they are requesting college credit. The faculty assessor then matches learned competencies to specific course and/or course objectives.
- PLA cannot replace an existing method of obtaining credit(s) at the college, such as College Level Examination Program (CLEP), Challenge Examinations, DANTES, & Advanced Placement Programs.
- All PLA portfolios must be completed and submitted three months prior to planned graduation.

Prior learning credit does not meet the residency 15 hours required by GRCC and does not qualify for financial aid. Prior learning portfolio assessment receives credit, but no letter grade. Therefore, PLA credit is not included in GPA. Because PLA credit may not be accepted by transfer institutions, it is the students’ responsibility to determine transfer eligibility of PLA credits.

Students are not eligible for prior learning assessment if they have failed the course for which they are seeking credit.

The framework for the PLA was created by utilizing the David Kolb’s Model of Experiential Learning which consists of four components:

- Description of concrete experience
- Reflection of those experiences
- Development of concepts based on those reflections
- The ability to use those concepts in life experiences
The cost for Portfolio Assessment is $150 per course, regardless of credits granted.

For more information contact:
Brent Spitler
Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator
Phone 616-234-4897
Email: bspitler@grcc.edu

CONFIDENTIALITY OF PORTFOLIO

During the PLA process the portfolio may be viewed by office staff and faculty assessor for academic purposes only. If a student signs a PLA Release Authorization form, specified parts of the portfolio may be used by students, teachers, or in the classroom for educational purposes only. However, all personally identifiable or proprietary information will be removed from the portfolio.

The student must not include in the portfolio any material that may violate the school or the legal and moral right to privacy of any individual or organization.
STUDENT’S PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT PORTFOLIO CHECKLIST

✓ Student shares interest in PLA with advisor

✓ Student reviews transcript with advisor

✓ Student reviews academic goals, and if transferring, determines if transfer institution will accept prior learning credits.

✓ Student refers to college catalog to review credit awards established under the Testing and Placement Office to make certain no challenge exam, etc. exists that matches their skill(s) learned

✓ Student reviews course objectives available on line at www.grcc.edu/pla or with department head

✓ Student schedules meeting with Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator

✓ Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator forwards assessor recommendation to the assistant dean

✓ Student pays non-refundable evaluation fee at Cashier’s Office

✓ Student submits two (2) copies of final portfolio to the Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator, located in ATC-212

✓ Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator submits two (2) copies of final portfolio to assessor

✓ Assessor reviews portfolio, schedules meeting with student (if necessary), and specifies credit award to the Registrar and Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator

✓ Assessor notifies student of results
PORTFOLIO PREPARATION

1. Student schedules meeting with the PLA Coordinator (Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator) to discuss PLA eligibility. Meeting will be held on GRCC’s main campus.

2. Student consults with their academic advisor.

3. Student identifies the general discipline and course for which they feel their learning is worthy of college credit.

4. Student reviews course objectives for courses they are requesting PLA credit, and determines whether their previous learning meets the course objectives. An academic advisor can assist student with this process.

5. Student submits two (2) copies of the final portfolio to the Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator (Applied Technology Center-212). Faculty assessment may take four to six weeks. After the assessor determines the credit award, the portfolio and evaluation form will be returned to the Prior Learning Assessment Office. The credit hours awarded will appear on the transcript and indicate a PLA designation. Submission of a portfolio does not guarantee a credit award. Final decision for credit(s) awarded rests with the assessor.

6. The student may appeal the assessor’s decision. The portfolio may be submitted to another faculty assessor for a second assessment. With this information, a decision on the appeal will be made. The Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator involved in the process will make a decision, which is final. The student will meet with the Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator to determine if he/she can resubmit evidence. Students approved to resubmit their portfolio are responsible for reimbursing the second faculty assessor at the rate of three (3) clock hours.
DETERMINING COLLEGE-LEVEL LEARNING

- Student identifies the course or subject area for which they feel they have gained prior learning.
- Student illustrates all four stages of Kolb cycle of experiential learning.
- Student determines if they feel their learning is worthy of college-level credit. Keep in mind that the prior learning must demonstrate theoretical and practical understanding of the subject matter; simply providing documentation of hours of experience is insufficient.
- Student provides the faculty assessor documentation which exemplifies the previously learned skills coincides with the course objectives for which they are requesting credit(s). This process requires a detailed narrative with a supporting appendix. The supporting appendix may include employer letters and/or certificates.

Examples of Necessary Evidence

- Direct Documentation
- Indirect Documentation

Student(s) should be prepared to authenticate all submitted evidence.

1. Post-secondary schools licensed but not accredited academically which might include business or theological institutions.

   Supporting Evidence:
   - Transcripts—must be official
   - Record of assignments
   - Number of hours on assignments, in class, or clinical/practicum
   - Evidence of successful completion
   - Diplomas

2. In-service training, company or professional courses, workshops, or conferences.

3. Continuing education courses supporting evidence:
   - Continuing Education Units (CEUs). Note: CEUs do not equate to credit

4. Work experience/testimonials from third parties must be original and include dates, credentials of author, and signature on letterhead.
Examples of Necessary Evidence (Continued)

5. Supporting Evidence:
   - Job description
   - Letters of commendation
   - Letters of verifications from superiors, peers, patients
   - Promotion evaluation
   - Evidence of suggestions adopted
   - Licenses
   - Scores of licensing exams
   - Membership in professional or trade organizations
   - Military separation
   - Bill of sales
   - Work samples
   - Certifications

6. Community Services
   Supporting Evidence:
   - Commendations or awards
   - Newspaper and magazine clippings
   - Letter of verification from co-volunteers
   - Hobbies or recreational

7. Other Supporting Evidence
   - Books published
   - Pictures painted
   - Music written
   - Programs performed
   - List of books read
   - Patents obtained
   - Countries visited
   - Mementos from countries lived or visited
   - Speeches given
   - Writing samples
   - Audio-visual presentations
   - Proposals written
   - Conversations with experts
   - Courses taught
   - Workshops presented
   - Grants written and funded
THE PORTFOLIO

Obtaining college-level credit for prior learning can be challenging. Therefore, the student(s) should make sure that they couldn’t acquire credit by an existing method such as transfer credit, CLEP exam, Challenge exam, etc. See college catalog or the GRCC website, grcc.edu/testing, for list of possibilities. The student seeking credit must remember that the proof rests with him/her.

Part I of the portfolio will describe learning in the subject area focusing on knowledge and skills. For each course objective the student should make a statement indicating how, when, and where they obtained this knowledge. This may include jobs, home activities, volunteer activities, non-credit courses, seminars, travel, recreational activities, readings, and conversations with experts. The student should estimate the amount of time in which the experience(s) took place and under whose supervision. An explanation of the student’s role/position in relationship to others must be documented along with the name and title of the person who supervised the student. Examples and illustrations may be used to support the document. The most important part of the portfolio is the student’s summary which brings the requested PLA course and the learning experiences together.

Part II of the portfolio is the documentation process. The student should assume that the assessor does not know them personally. Therefore, thorough documentation of the learning experience is essential. The student should not include irrelevant or too many documents, as this will be an inappropriate use of the assessor’s time. Underline or set apart statements that directly correlate to the course in which you are attempting to show prior learning. Any valuable documents, licenses, letters, or commendations should be photocopied for the portfolio (Do not include originals). Other types of documentations such as pieces of equipment or pottery should be photographed, made into slides, or scanned into graphic files.

Part III of the portfolio consists of letters of verification. This is not a letter of recommendation. The steps for obtaining letters of verification are to ask the person to prepare a written statement verifying your experience. The letter should address how the person has directly observed you obtaining the prior learning. The letter should generally address how your experiences verify the content of the courses in which you are asking to receive prior learning credit. The student will achieve better results if he/she outlines the description of the learning for the person verifying the learning experience. The “verified” must identify their relationship to the student, and provide their qualifications as the verifier of experience. The letter must be written on company, organizational or institutional letterhead. The verifier or person writing the letter should be informed that several people will read the portfolio; and the portfolio is considered public information. A sample letter of a verification request is included to assist the student.
EXAMPLE
LETER/ REQUEST FOR PRIOR LEARNING DOCUMENTATION

June 30, 2013

Mr. Louis Fenton
Human Resources Manager
Fenton Tool and Die
XXXX Louis Drive
Grand Rapids, MI 49501

Dear Mr. Fenton:

I am currently a student at Grand Rapids Community College and would like to earn college credit for my previous work experience as a Tool and Die Maker. Consequently, I am in need of your assistance in obtaining documentation for those skills.

I would be most appreciative if you would forward a letter to me addressed to Brent Spitler, Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator, Grand Rapids Community College indicating whether or not I have demonstrated the skills and knowledge in the following areas:

- Horizontal and Vertical Mills
- Surface Grinders
- Lathes
- EDM Machines

Thank you in advance for taking time from your busy schedule to honor my request. Please feel free to contact me at (your home phone number) or (your cell phone number or work number) should you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Your First and Last Name
Your Home Address
Your Home Phone
Your Cell Phone or Work Phone Number
PORTFOLIO FORMAT

The portfolio must be typed, organized, grammatically correct, and complete. The pages need to be numbered and include references to appendices. *Please keep in mind that the portfolio must have a professional appearance.*

SECTION I:
Complete request for Prior Learning Portfolio evaluations which can be obtained from the Prior Learning Assessment Office, Applied Technology Center-212.

SECTION II:
Approval form of Prior Learning Credit for faculty assessor comments

SECTION III:
Resume

SECTION IV:
This section must list each course objective with student’s narrative response exemplifying why credit should be granted for previous learning obtained. The narrative must be supported with appropriate evidence.

SECTION V:
Request for credit (what you are asking for)

SECTION VI:
Appendix, supporting documents, and materials labeled as Appendix A, Appendix B, etc.

*The student must make two copies and submit them to the Prior Learning Assessment Office, 212ATC.*
Information Release Form

Date: _______________  Student #: ______________________________ 

Student’s Name: __________________________________________________________

Address: _________________________________________________________________

City: ______________________ State: __________________ Zip: ___________________

I, __________________________ authorize you to release information in regards to my training, job and responsibilities to Grand Rapids Community College staff or their representative on request for the purpose of assessing my prior learning credentials.

This release is valid until revoked at my request.

_______________________________________     ______________________________
Student Signature     Date

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I hereby revoke the above information.

_______________________________________      ______________________________
Student Signature     Date
Student’s Name: _______________________ Student’s ID Number: ________________

Address: __________________________________________________________________

Home Phone: __________________________ Cell Phone: ______________________

E-mail Address: ________________________ Work Phone: ______________________

Curriculum: __________________________________________________________________

Faculty Advisor: __________________________________________________________________

Course Title & Number: __________________________________________________________________

Other credit(s) earned in the same discipline. Include all transfer credits, CLEP, Challenge exam, PLA, and earned credits:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

PLEASE ATTACH RELEVANT COURSE DESCRIPTION (S) TO THIS FORM AND SUBMIT THEM WITH TWO (2) COPIES OF YOUR PORTFOLIO.

Assessor will complete review of portfolio and return results in approximately four (4) weeks.
PLA
Prior Learning Assessment
Student Payment Form

Name _______________________________________

PLA Submitted
For Class Number* _______________________________________
*One form for each class

Student Number _______________________________________

Student Address _______________________________________

Email _______________________________________

Phone Number _______________________________________

Fee $150.00

Please bring this form (*one form for each class) to the Cashier's Office (154 Main Building) with payment

Cashier’s Office Name (printed) ________________________________

Cashier’s Office Signature ________________________________

Date ___________________________________________________

When this form is complete please bring back and put with your paperwork
To:            College Registrar

From:          ____________________________, Faculty Assessor

(Please Print)

Date:          __________________________

Re:            Approval of Prior Learning Credit

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Student’s Name:                  ________________________________________

(Please Print)

Student’s ID Number:              ________________________________________

(Please Print)

Based on my assessment of the above student’s Prior Learning Portfolio.

☐ I recommend the following award of credits:

☐ I do not recommend the following award credits:

Curriculum:                      ________________________________________

Course Number:                   ________________________________________

Course Title:                    ________________________________________

Explanation of portfolio evaluation including rationale for credit awarding/denying:

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Total semester hours awarded:

Faculty Assessor: ____________________________ Date: ________________

Please return this form to the Prior Learning Assessment Office, 212 ATC