

# Understanding Student Use of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) 2024

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# Just the Facts of Prior Learning Assessment

- Prior Learning Assessment of experiential learning allows accepted students to seek credit by documenting real-world performance, college-level knowledge and outcome-based competence acquired outside a classroom setting.
- Prior learning credits may apply either toward the academic major or required elective coursework in the bachelor's degree. A maximum of 21 prior learning credits may be sought and awarded. These credits are not part of the 36 credit residency for the bachelor's degree. Residency for majors and minors may not be met through PLA.
- PLA Workshop Required: Student Workshops are offered each month via Zoom. During these sessions the students are guided through the process of how to choose a course description and how to document their learning for each petition for credit. **Participation in a PLA Development Workshop is required.** The student could contact their academic advisor to learn about how to participate in a workshop or look on the portal page.

## Some more facts of Prior Learning Assessment

- Student must be accepted and have a Degree Works evaluation submit materials. All official transcripts for any transfer credits should already be on file. Petitions cannot duplicate any coursework completed at Concordia or transferred in.
- We use the College Course Model – students compare their learning to a course from an accredited university and provide documentation about their learning
- A per credit evaluation fee (\$80) is charged for PLA submissions and is put on the student's account at the time of committee review. This evaluation fee is not returned if credits are not awarded. This fee is also ineligible within the university financial aid process.
- The Prior Learning Assessment Committee reviews submissions in the month following the student submission. Students will be notified by university email of the committee's decision. Credits denied may be resubmitted for reconsideration in certain cases. If the Prior Learning Assessment Committee requests a revision to a submitted petition, there is no new fee assessed.
- Petitions should be submitted only for the number of credits needed. Credits awarded through Prior Learning Assessment are extremely unlikely to be transferrable to another school and will not necessarily transfer to another program within CU.

## Our Responsibilities

Higher Learning Commission Assumed Practices “Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct” requires us to make clear and complete information available to students and the public about our policies on transfer credits including how we apply such credits to degree requirements. “The institution makes no promises to prospective students regarding the acceptance of credit for prior learning until [we] have conducted an evaluation of a student’s credits.”

Higher Learning Commission Publication of Transfer Policies requires that “An institution shall demonstrate that it has transfer policies that are publicly disclosed and that such policies include, at a minimum:

(3) Written criteria used to evaluate and award credit for prior learning experience including, but not limited to, service in the armed forces, paid or unpaid employment, or other demonstrated competency or learning.”

<https://www.hlcommission.org/Policies/publication-of-transfer-policies.html>

## Where to Find Information

- Prior Learning Assessment Transfer Credit policies Registrar's Office. <https://www.cuw.edu/about/offices/registrar/credit-transfer.html>
- Admissions page <https://www.cuw.edu/admissions/transfer-admissions/transferable-credits.html>

These pages will be updated at the end of August to eliminate "physical activity or development" core credits as an allowed category.

- Catalog detail is under **Transfer Credit Policy and Options**
- On the portal, search for "Non-traditional Approaches to Earning Credit." This page is available to students, staff and faculty. This page includes our PLA policies, the PLA development manual, examples, and information on how to sign up for a workshop.

## Where to Start with Students

Admissions or advisors (faculty and staff) start with the current Degree Works Profile for the student. Determine whether the student needs elective credits. Discuss with the student what possible experiences they have had outside the classroom that might equal college level learning and might be equivalent to a course that is offered in higher education. Amount and depth of learning must be compared to credit hour policy.

If they wish to explore PLA for a major course, the student should speak to their department or program chair about the alignment of their prior learning with one or more courses in the program. Some program accreditors do not allow PLA for major courses.

Keep in Mind that since PLA is transfer credit, all residency requirements apply. Bachelor's students currently must

- **Complete 36 residency credits at CU**
- **Complete 12 credits of the major at CU**
- **Complete 6 of the credits of minor at CU**
- **Complete least one course at CU in their final semester.**

# Overview for Students

## Prior Learning Assessment Process

- **Step 1 Review** college level learning outside the classroom. Identify and explore whether PLA would be allowed for major courses in your program, if you need electives, etc. Attend Workshop.
- **Step 2 Match** learning to an accredited college course description (CU course for a major or minor )
- **Step 3 Describe** the learning in Stated Learning Outcomes and several page Narrative
- **Step 4 Document** the learning through a witness letter from a superior who evaluated your work and provide a second form of documentation
- **Step 5 Complete** all the documents, edit, and compile into one PDF for each petition
- **Step 6 Submit** completed petition(s) to the Blackboard organization so that Committee can review.

# Student Step 1 - Review



Make a list,  
choose  
appropriate  
areas to develop  
further

- **Reflect** on your experiences. Make a list of your jobs and significant experiences that included learning.
- **Exclude** learning that overlaps with course or credit experiences taken at CU and those for which you received college credit that transferred in from another school.
- **Include only college level:** If you have substantial work experience or have completed projects in a volunteer or community context, was it college level?
  - Did you use these skills in your learning and application of that learning?  
analysis, synthesis, evaluation
- **Exclude** experiences where you no longer have contact with supervisors or those in authority over projects who could now write a letter describing your performance
- Non-accredited courses must be accompanied by recent application and a letter from someone who evaluated this (not the instructor)
- **Choose** those areas with significant hours of learning to match the semester credit hours sought - 45 hours per credit at minimum



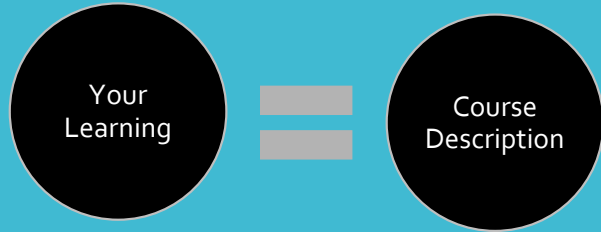
# Step 1 Review

## Example Experiences

- Tanya Johnson is an Accelerated Learning student at Concordia in the Business Management Major. Tanya has been working for the last 6 years as an administrative assistant in the marketing department of ABC business. She completed and transferred in 60 credits from a two-year school where she studied marketing. Tanya's list includes
- *non-accredited business college credits in* office procedures, computer programs like Word and Windows
- *On-the-job experiences* placing advertisements as directed by her supervisors at her current job
- *Workplace certificate* for completing non-credit learning modules in team building, collaboration, and virtual team communication
- *Workplace computer training* for financial/budgeting and meeting scheduling programs used at ABC business.
- *Customer service skills* at her prior job at a sandwich shop
- *Volunteer work at her church:* Teaching Sunday School for one year and becoming a first communion sponsor

Name of Experience	Is this college level?	Align with a Course Description/ Academic Content?	Does this overlap with transfer credit?	Am I still in touch with supervisor / authority to write a letter?	Linked w/ other experience to show depth/breadth	Is the quantity of learning sufficient (45 hours/credit)
Non accredited college course	Possibly	Yes but need more depth	no	no	this is required here	Maybe
Advertising placements	yes	partially	no	yes	yes	Maybe
Team building certificate	yes	yes	no	yes	Yes, current work experience over last four years	Depending on how much application
Computer training	Possibly	possibly	no	No, only certificate	Would have to be more current	maybe
Customer service at sub shop	Might be	Only with a lot more	Probably not	no	Yes, if also currently being applied	
Sunday School	probably	Theology	no	yes	no	no

## Step 2: Match

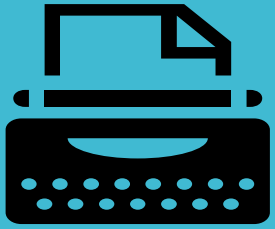


Find a course description that matches your learning

### For each petition

- Find a course description that matches your learning
- The Course Description must be from
  - An institution which is regionally accredited in the U.S.
  - A program leading to a degree, not a diploma program
  - An institution using semester credits rather than quarter credits\*
- Even if the number of credits connected to the course description is higher, no more than 5 credits can be sought for one petition. You can seek the number of credits in the course description, or fewer. You cannot seek more credits than you need.
- \*You may use a course description from a quarter-credit school, but you should translate it to semester hours by dividing quarter hours by 1.5 before you develop the portfolio.

# Step 3 Describe



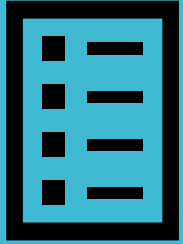
For each petition,  
describe your learning  
through

- a) stated learning outcomes and
- b) a 3-5 page narrative

## For each petition – write two descriptions of your learning

- 1. **“Stated learning outcomes”** to match the course description
  - (starting with an appropriate verb) [1 page long, double spaced]
- 2. A **three to five page “narrative”** that explains in detail how you learned this content in one or more contexts (workplace, volunteer or community context)
- Reviewers will look for alignment between the course description, the stated learning outcomes, the narrative, and the documentation
- REVIEW all your writing to be sure it is college-level – this should be exemplary work. Reviewers are looking for excellent writing and no typos!

## Step 4 Document



For each petition, you need two forms of documentation (one must be a letter )

For each petition *Note that each petition must have a letter.*

- **Form 1)** a witness who writes a letter (see format), preferably a supervisor, which describes and evaluates your learning in the petitioned area, and provides his or her e-mail, phone and postal address.
- **Form 2)** the second form of documentation can be another letter from a different person (from a different context) or a direct form such as
  - a document which demonstrates your skill and can be identified as your work product.
  - a certificate of completion (i.e. non-credit training course)
  - A copy of your work of art, musical score, photograph, newspaper article
- The second form cannot be an employment review form or a recommendation letter that was not written specifically for the PLA petition purpose. See more information in the manual.

## Step 5 Complete



- a) Create Cover Sheet
- b) Credit Petition Form
- c) Organize all materials for each petition into a PDF
- d) Submit to Learning Management System
- e) Contact Coordinator

Review all your writing and edit for college-level writing.

For each petition, develop a cover sheet with your contact information and Foo#

**Complete Credit Petition Form** with the course title of the course description, the dates over which you completed the learning, the school and catalog year of the course description and number of credits you are petitioning for.

**Organize materials for** each petition in a single digital PDF: cover sheet, credit petition form, catalog course description, the stated learning outcomes, narrative, and two forms of documentation.

When completed, submit to Learning Management System course. Contact coordinator that you have done this.

## Step 6 Submit



a) Submit to Learning Management System

b) Contact Coordinator to indicate you have submitted

c) Student Account will be charged

When you attend the Workshop, we add you to the Blackboard/LMS organization and explain how to find it.

Submit the one PDF for each petition in the appropriate drop-box (Petition 1, Petition 2, etc.) A per credit evaluation fee (\$80) is charged to the student's account for the number of credits sought at the time of submission. This evaluation fee is for review of the petitions and is not returned if credits are not awarded.

# Committee Review and Student Notification

The petitions are assigned for review at the end of each month, and the PLA Committee will meet in the following month. Submissions made in June, for example, are reviewed in July.

You will receive information about whether your credits have been accepted or you need to revise your submission via email after the PLA Committee reviews your petition(s).

Petitions may be denied due to lack of alignment between course descriptions and supporting materials, or because there is insufficient documentation that the learning addressed the course description, was of a sufficient amount compared to the credits sought, and at college level.

You may, in many cases, resubmit your petition and revised supporting materials for further consideration. There is no additional fee if you are re-submitting a petition in the same content area.