

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) PORTFOLIO Instructions

Many students return to the college campus with years of experience through their work, professional and military training, self-study, hobbies, and community activities, as well as various tests such as Dante's, CLEP, proficiency exams, Advanced Placement and certificate programs resulting in learning that occurs outside the classroom. Such learning occurs on many levels. To receive credit for learning occurring outside the college classroom, the student must substantiate that the knowledge is college-level.

As an adult returning to college, you have many life and work experiences from which you have learned. Is the learning college-level? Can it be applied to your degree program? Assume, for example, you manage your own business. You have experience in human resources, planning, scheduling, marketing, and customer service. You can explain not only what you have done on the job for the past ten years, but the reasons for your actions and your knowledge and skills in these areas.

Getting Credit for Life Experience

The following types of prior learning experience can be considered for advanced standing at CCAC. Please be aware that CCAC students must complete at least 30 credits at CCAC to be eligible for an Associate Degree (Exception: students entering in Fall 2014 and after may earn the General Studies or Liberal Arts degree with only 21 credits in residence). Students earning a Certificate or Diploma are required to complete a minimum of one-half of the credits required for graduation at CCAC. Advanced standing credits, including portfolio credit, may make up the balance of credits once the residency requirement has been met.

Non-Traditional Learning Options to Consider:

- CLEP, AP, USAFI & ACE Approved Military or Corporate Training. If students who have met CCAC standards for the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) and/or Advanced Placement Tests (AP) of the College Entrance Examination Board and/or taken courses in the United States Armed Forces Institute (USAFI) or American Council of Education (ACE) approved military training, they may apply to have these tests/courses count toward credit graduation at CCAC.
- Credit by Examination. Students who feel that they can demonstrate knowledge equivalent to what is taught in a college class may petition the appropriate academic dean for the privilege of taking a special examination for college credit. There is a fee for such exams and they are offered at scheduled times during the year. Students may not take CBE if they have already taken the courses at CCAC.
- Portfolio Development. A student may develop a portfolio to gain college credit. Portfolios are submitted through the www.ccfasttrack.org website.

Before you begin portfolio development, you should make sure that you are not eligible to receive college credit towards your program of study through the other options listed above.

To begin the process of maximizing credit from external sources you should follow the steps listed below.

- Make sure all your college transcripts have been submitted to the Office of Admissions.
- Submit an [Application for Credit Transfer](#) form to the Registration Office if you have attended another college and wish for us to evaluate your transcript.
- If you have taken examinations for college credit, submit official copies of your scores to the Director of Registration. If you are planning to take examinations, review the College Catalog to make sure you know what will count for credit. Discuss with your academic advisor what courses can be challenged through examination. Always verify your eligibility with the Director of Registration prior to taking these exams.
- See the [CCAC Advanced Standing webpage](#) for more complete information in requesting evaluation for other forms of prior learning.

These essential first steps ensure that program requirements are met, there is no duplication of credit, credit will apply in the desired degree program areas and all appropriate options are used.

How to Begin Portfolio Development

To receive credit by portfolio, you must be a former or current student at CCAC, or plan to complete at least one course at CCAC within the next two years.

Your first step should be to examine the CCAC syllabus and learning outcomes for the course(s) for which you are intending to seek credit. You will find course syllabi at <http://webapps.ccac.edu/MasterSyllabi/>. The syllabus outlines the learning objectives for the course for which you want credit. Your portfolio will need to describe and present evidence of your past learning that meets the course objectives outlined in the syllabus.

Make sure you have reviewed the “How It Works” page on the ccfasttrack website at <https://www.ccfasttrack.org/Home/HowItWorks>. Don’t forget to watch the video tutorial and download the Portfolio guidelines:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VrnRG2qh1AY&feature=youtu.be>
- <https://www.ccfasttrack.org/content/documents/Portfolio%20Guidelines.pdf>

What Is A Portfolio?

A portfolio is an organized collection of essays and documentation demonstrating your learning through work and life experiences. Through the portfolio, you show that the knowledge you have gained through experience is equivalent to college training. In gaining academic credit through your experiences outside the college classroom, you must be able to identify and document your experiences and learning. Since you do not earn academic credit for experience alone, you must meet the challenges of analyzing the learning and finding parallels with the CCAC curriculum.

Each portfolio you submit must include the following major sections/documents:

- Reason for petition
- An expanded resume
- A personal essay outlining your goals, competencies and a learning narrative

- Supporting documentation (including letters of verification, copies of certificates, demonstrations, awards, portfolios, etc.), that provides evidence of your experience and learning.

Major Components and their Requirements:

Reason for petition

You will write a concise summary of the reasons for petitioning for portfolio credit.

Expanded Resume

The expanded resume should include the following information:

1. Name
2. Educational background/experience
3. Employment history
4. Relevant specialized training (e.g., CPR training, training in the use of specific software programs, etc.)
5. Relevant life experience (e.g., volunteer work, practical experience with software programs, managing a social organization, etc.)
6. References

The resume should include annotations that briefly explain how specific work experiences constitute creditable learning experience.

The resume should contain cross-references—i.e., references to sections of the narrative or documentation in which an evaluator can find further evidence of the learning in question.

Personal Essay

Your 2-5 page Personal Essay should do a number of things:

- Explain what your long-term career and educational goals are.
- Explain what you have accomplished in terms of those goals.
- Explain what you have left to achieve.
- Identify the knowledge and competencies you have achieved through experiences, relative to the course objectives.
- Describe how your portfolio, as a demonstration of prior learning, supports your goal of attaining the major/degree you have chosen.

The essay should include a Learning Narrative that includes the following:

- A statement of how prior learning relates to your degree plan.
- A detailed description of your experience.
- A detailed discussion of the learning that took place and why/how that learning relates to the course(s) or course area in question.
- An Annotated Bibliography.

Some general expectations to keep in mind:

- The focus of your narrative will be on the learning experience.
- Where possible, incorporate evidence from a range of sources (e.g., textbooks, interviews, syllabi, other programs, etc.).
- You will be attempting to persuade/argue that your learning parallels learning you would acquire in the course area(s) (i.e., you are not just describing your learning and hoping it fits).
- You should integrate theory and application—i.e., discuss what you have learned and how you have learned it, while showing that it is relevant learning.
- Please remember that you will be providing a separate narrative/portfolio for each major course area in which you will be seeking credit.

The style of writing is important. The learning narrative is not a term paper, and is written in first person, essay form. You are describing your experiences and the learning that resulted from them. You can organize your learning narrative chronologically or under subcategories, using learning outcome guidelines provided by your portfolio advisor.

In general, the length of the narrative ranges from 3-5 pages; length will vary depending upon individual experience and the learning involved.

Supporting Documents

Documentation is the evidence you present for each section of your portfolio, supporting your learning experiences. You can use direct and indirect documentation. Direct documentation, such as a work product, is usually the strongest supporting evidence of your learning experiences and outcomes. However, Letters of Verification from Employers or Experts who can verify your learning are also crucial.

Gear your documentation to the specific course area or subject area in which you seek credit. Label it for easy review. Make sure it is connected to the learning you are trying to demonstrate.

Examples of the types of documentation you could submit include the following:

- Job descriptions and/or classifications
- Licenses and certificates
- Newspaper and magazine articles about your accomplishments
- Descriptions of training courses you have completed
- Awards, citations and commendations
- Programs of your performances / exhibits
- Letters of verification
- Brochures or other published materials you have prepared
- Links to websites that document your work
- Links to video and audio files for performances and presentations

All portfolio contents will be submitted electronically through the ccfasttrack website. To preserve the content and appearance of your documents, it is advisable to export your word-processed documents to pdf format before uploading to the system.

You may also add external links to the Supporting Documentation to provide evidence of artistic performances or presentations of your work.

Portfolio Submission

You will submit all portfolio components electronically through the www.ccfasttrack.org website, once you have paid the fee for portfolio review.

Portfolio Evaluation and Evaluation Criteria

When the PLA Assessor (a CCAC faculty member) evaluates a portfolio, he or she wants to see:

- Current skills and knowledge.
- Knowledge applicable in other circumstances outside the specific job or context in which it was learned.
- Learning that includes major principles applied in a given field.
- Familiarity with trends and what experts in the field have said.
- Knowledge that can be measured and evaluated.
- Poor writing will result in a negative assessment of your portfolio. You must demonstrate college-level writing skills for college-level credit. Proofread, revise and edit. Critique for organization, clarity, completeness, and technical accuracy.

If you decide to move forward with portfolio submission, go to www.ccfasttrack.org to start the process. If you have questions, submit a message to your PLA Advisor on the website.