



COLLEGE OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC

OPERATIONAL PROCEDURE

TOPIC: PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT & RECOGNITION

Policy No.	LS-208-PR	Division	Learner Services
Supersedes	n/a	Board Policy Ref.	n/a
Related Procedure	LS-208	Effective Date:	August 20, 2008 (R3)

PROCEDURE

1.0 Definitions

Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition is a process that involves the identification, documentation, assessment and recognition for credit of learning acquired informally. This may include work and life experiences, training, independent study, volunteerism, travel, hobbies, etc. Application of this policy is limited to learning that is not recognized through the normal credit transfer mechanism established between post secondary institutions.

2.0 Purpose of Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition (PLAR)

- A. PLAR will remove barriers and open doors to adult learning.
- B. PLAR will formally recognize the skills and knowledge learners have acquired outside a formal classroom.
- C. PLAR will award credit, where appropriate, for post secondary level learning that leads to a recognized credential.
- D. PLAR will avoid having learners unnecessarily repeat learning.
- E. PLAR may increase the learner's access to College programs.¹
- E. PLAR may shorten the time required to complete the program of study.
- G. PLAR may reduce overall costs to the learner.

¹ This does not mean that the learners, by accessing PLAR, will skip the waiting list position. This statement means that it may be possible for learners to access courses through PLAR and that if they are granted credit for first semester courses, they may be granted advanced standing into the second semester.

3.0 Methods Used to Assess Prior Learning & Recognition

A. Challenge Examinations

The examination is probably the most common method used for assessing prior learning. Similar to a course final examination, a challenge examination used for assessing prior learning should be generic in nature and address all the learning outcomes of the particular course(s) it is measuring.

B. Learning Portfolio

A learning portfolio is a compilation of the learner's educational, employment, and personal history which must consist of two or more of the following:

- **Competency Essay**

The competency essay is a written report which clearly describes learning statements about what the learner knows, how the knowledge was acquired, examples of how the learning was applied and documentation to validate the learning.

- **Performance Evaluation/On-Site Evaluation**

Performance evaluation or on-site evaluation is used when the assessment of learning involves the measurement of one's ability to perform certain tasks or competencies in a given area. If a real situation is not possible, (on-the-job observation) a simulated situation may be created.

- **Interview/Oral Examination**

An interview may be used to counsel a learner who is seeking PLAR. An interview may determine if a learner has the learning required to be successful in challenging for credit. A more structured interview (oral examination) may also be used to assess learning specific to a course for possible credit award. This method is helpful for those who have difficulty writing.

- Product Assessment

This method enables the learner to provide samples of work or products that provide proof to verify that learning has occurred. For example, a brochure created or an article written for a newspaper publication may be used as a product piece.

- Non Credit Course/Programs

The learning outcomes or curriculum of a non credit course can be assessed for equivalency with credit course(s). As a result, learners may receive credit or partial credit if the learning is deemed to be equivalent.

4.0 The PLAR Advisory Committee(s)

A PLAR Advisory Committee will be established at each campus or district (as determined by the VP of Academic and Learner Services) to:

- 1) Assist in the implementation of PLAR policy.
- 2) Build on the existing policy, monitoring its effectiveness and recommending changes where necessary.
- 3) Prioritize programs for which PLAR could be implemented and assist in the selection of a faculty contact person from each program.
- 4) Act as a resource committee and promote awareness of PLAR among divisions of the College.
- 5) Assist in the on-going evaluation of PLAR procedures at the College.

Membership on the PLAR Advisory Committee will include:

- 1) Representatives from each Campus;
- 2) A learner representative;
- 3) A representative from the Learner Services Office;
- 4) Chair - as appointed by the VP of Academic & Learner Services.

5.0 Administration Guidelines

The administration of assessment for prior learning will be standard and will be conducted in accordance with the following principles and guidelines:

- A. Credit will be awarded for learning gained from experience and not for the experience itself.
- B. Credit will be awarded only for learning (theoretical and practical) that is considered to be college level; that is, meeting the following criteria:

- i) The learning will be assessed on an individual basis for relevancy with current principles, standards and practice.
 - ii) The learning will have a theoretical and, where applicable, practical component. In the latter, the learner will demonstrate the integration of theory into practice.
 - iii) The learning will be relevant/appropriate to the course being challenged for credit.
 - iv) All aspects of learning will be presented and measured, either written, oral, or practical. Measurement will be in relation to appropriate competency statements/learning outcomes which refer to specific theory, aptitude, skill or group of skills.
 - v) The learning will be applicable outside the specific context from which it was learned; i.e., theory, aptitude or skills will be transferable from one situation to another.
 - vi) The prior learning will be equivalent to the learning outcomes of the program; i.e., students' learning outcomes will not be measured against those of other learners but rather against the outcomes of the program.
- C. Learning will be assessed by persons knowledgeable in the specific course content being challenged.
- D. Other than through a challenge examination, learners challenging for credit will demonstrate learning outcomes through two or more of the methods described in Section 3.3.
- E. The passing grade for any form of PLAR will be the normal passing grade for that course.
- F. When a competency essay is used as an assessment method, the academic department will establish minimum requirement levels, in terms of proportions of course objectives. These course objectives will be evidenced by the essay and will identify other methods of assessment to be used in conjunction with the essay.
- G. All personnel involved in assessment of prior learning will have their role clearly defined.

- H. All personnel involved in teaching a portfolio development course will receive orientation and adequate training in their role.
- I. Course outlines and learning outcomes will be made available to learners challenging for credit toward a particular course.
- J. An assessment fee will be established by the Finance Office and will be charged for each course challenged.
- K. Credits will be awarded for Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition and will be recorded on the learner transcript as an exemption or as a mark.
- L. The PLAR portfolio will be kept confidential. The portfolio will only be accessible to those involved in the assessment procedure until such time as it is returned to the student.
- M. Whenever possible, Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition will be carried out prior to the learner beginning any course work. However, it is also recognized by the College that the adult learner is a lifelong learner who often participates in many learning activities each year. Therefore, the learner may challenge for additional credit beyond the initial assessment. Registered learners applying for PLAR for courses offered in the semester in which they are registered should make application by the end of the third week of the semester in which they are registered.
- N. The portfolio and other works will be the student's own. Any evidence of plagiarism will be dealt with in accordance with college regulations.
- O. Appeals regarding awarding of credit or those dealing with alleged breach of Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition policy will be made in writing to appropriate college administration. If not resolved at this level, the College's appeal process (Policy SS-203) will apply.
- P. Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition procedures will be monitored on an ongoing basis, with continuous review/evaluation to make necessary revisions to reflect current practice and changing needs.
- Q. The maximum number of credits that can be awarded through the Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition process is 75% of the number required to complete the certificate/diploma.

6.0 Conducting the Assessment

Roles and Responsibilities of the Faculty Assessor - the discipline specific specialist who will evaluate and assign a credit for prior learning:

A. Define the Criteria

The faculty assessor will identify the learning outcomes for the particular course; i.e., what would be expected of the learner who completes the course

B. Determine the Assessment Methods

If the course content involves theory and practical material, the assessment method used should assess both theory and practical components. The assessment method(s) used should be generic for the person challenging. For example, if the method is a challenge exam, there should be no references or questions made to certain text books. The questions should be devised to determine knowledge in that area through work or life experiences, but standards should be kept.

If the assessor is unsure of what assessment methods to use, refer to the assessment methods used to evaluate a traditional student. The assessment method should contain the same information as the assessments used for traditional learners but be condensed and refined so that it could be completed within a reasonable period of time. The assessment method should be realistic and appropriate to the learner. Recognition for physical barriers, age, cultural and language differences should be considered.

C. Complete the Assessment

The learning acquired will be measured against the learning outcomes of the particular course being challenged.

D. Quantify

Where possible, measurement of learning will be quantified using the College's standard marking system

E. Record the Observation

The "Challenge Assessment Form" will be completed by the assessor and submitted to the Registrar's representative on the campus.

7.0 Application for Consideration of Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition

1. Learners wishing to receive credit for prior learning will make application through the Registrar’s representative on the campus (see attached for copy of the College’s application form).
2. Assistance in the completion of the application will be available from the Learner Services Office.
3. A fee will be charged for each course for which a prior learning assessment is requested except for those enrolled in a full-time program.
4. All appropriate information relating to Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition will be published in the College Calendar and on the College website.

8.0 Fee Assessment

- There will be no charge for Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition for Learners who are enrolled on a full-time basis and whose status will remain full-time after the credit is awarded from the course in which PLAR was granted.
- Part-time learners will be assessed \$50.00 per course for each PLAR assessment.

Approval History	
Approved by President	April 30, 1998
Revision 1	June 18, 1998
Revision 2	August 30, 2002
Revision 3	August 20, 2008
Next Review	August 2011