

Assessment of Prior Learning

Portfolio Development, Process, and University Resource Information



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Think of APL as a way to save time and money in your quest for a college degree

Ferris State University believes that college level learning can occur in many places other than a classroom. As you are looking to further your education, we encourage you to investigate our Assessment of Prior Learning (APL) program that can help you receive college credit for learning acquired on the job, in the military, in the community, and through independent study. Hundreds of Ferris State University courses have been examined to determine how a student can be awarded credit for prior learning of the material.

How does the APL program work?

Basically there are two ways to earn credit—either by taking a proficiency examination or through the development of a portfolio.

What is the difference between Transfer Credit and Prior Learning Assessment?

Transfer of academic credit involves the examination of educational credentials from an accredited educational institution, presented by the student in the form of a transcript and course outlines for the purpose of awarding Ferris State University credit. Prior Learning Assessment is the assessment and evaluation of learning acquired through work/life experiences against course learning outcomes for which credit is being sought.

What is a proficiency examination?

A proficiency examination is a course competency assessment or an academic test taken by a student to determine whether the student has met the learning outcomes of the course. These proficiency exams include, but are not limited to Ferris department exams, CLEP, and DANTES. The student passing the examination is regarded as having information and skills necessary and is awarded credit for the class. No grade is given.

What is a portfolio?

A portfolio is a collection of information that has been accumulated about a learner's past experiences and accomplishments. It is a useful tool for organizing life experiences into a manageable form for assessment. Normally, a portfolio contains descriptions of learning with supporting documentation to verify learning claimed. A portfolio is not only a product, it is a process by which prior learning experiences can be translated into educational outcomes, documented and assessed for academic credit.

How do I apply for an assessment?

You can schedule times to take proficiency exams in a variety of ways, depending upon your campus location. If you are enrolled at one of Ferris' off-campus sites (such as Grand Rapids, Flint, or Traverse City), simply contact the local Ferris office. If you are an on-campus student, a call directly to Institutional Research & testing Services, or the department offering the course for which you are seeking credit, is how to begin the process.

What is the Prior Learning Assessment fee structure?

- The cost to complete the portfolio process is \$250 for one to five (1-5) credit hours assessed * and \$50 for every credit assessed * thereafter.

- A \$65 fee * is required to begin the portfolio process and is then applied to the total cost for portfolio assessment.
- The cost is \$25 per credit hour * to complete a proficiency examination.

*All costs were approved by the Student Fees Committee July 2000 and are subject to change.

How is my portfolio evaluated?

Portfolios are sent to the Assessment of Prior Learning program office to begin the evaluation process. The APL specialist assembles a portfolio review committee of faculty and practitioners to evaluate each portfolio.

Do I have to be admitted to Ferris to take APL?

Yes. You must be an admitted student in order to participate in the APL.

Do I have to be a Michigan resident?

No, there is no state residency requirement.

Do I have to be a degree-seeking student to take APL?

No. Although most students go on to earn associate or bachelor degrees, there is no requirement to enroll in a degree program. Students use APL to advance their careers, qualify for pay raises, meet personal goals, or simply to identify what they know at the college level.

Where can I take Assessment of Prior Learning?

Assessment of Prior Learning is offered at all Ferris State University locations.

How many credits can I earn through APL?

There are a maximum number of 60 credits that can be earned through the APL process. Your credit award will depend on the college-equivalent knowledge and skills you have acquired and on how well you articulate and document what you know and can do.

How long does the process take?

From start to finish, the process will take from as little as a few weeks (proficiency exam) to as long as seven to ten months (portfolio).

What fields qualify for college credit?

Students can earn credit for many subjects covered in a college curriculum. Students have earned credit in business, education, social services, office administration, manufacturing, nursing, and a host of other fields.

Who can I call for more information?

On the back panel of this brochure is contact information that you will need as you pursue the APL process. Any one of these contacts will be happy to talk with you about starting the Assessment of Prior Learning.

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- Portfolio process
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- Documenting course learning outcomes
- Documentation
- Preparing your portfolio
- Assembling your portfolio
- Portfolio assessment checklist

3. Ferris State University Personnel Resources

Portfolio

Description of a portfolio

A portfolio is a detailed document developed by the learner which articulates and verifies the learning acquired through work and life experience. This learning may be equivalent to the learning outcomes in a college course(s), to competencies in the workplace, etc.

Developing a portfolio

University assistance for portfolio development can be provided through individual advisement from the Assessment for Prior Learning Specialist or program faculty.

Benefits of the portfolio process

- Extremely learner centered
- Enables learners to recognize their own skill and knowledge development
- Allows learners to present knowledge from their own perspective
- Enables learners to organize and articulate knowledge from a variety of learning experiences by...
 - Taking inventory – Where are they?
 - Setting goals – Where do they want to go?
 - Documenting learning – What have they done?
 - Verifying learning – How can they prove it?
 - Preparing an educational/career plan – How do they get there?
- Increases the learner's self-esteem and self-confidence
- Validates learning gained through work and life experiences
- Identifies program areas requiring further study
- Assists the learner with career development and educational planning
- Encourages the learner to develop life long learning strategies
- A Portfolio can be used for employment purposes
- A Portfolio is a planning tool for further learning

Portfolio Process

Step 1 – Identify

(Learner)

Identify college-level learning acquired through work and life experience.

Step 2 – Articulate

(Learner)

Explain how and what parts of the learning are related to the course outcomes.

Step 3 – Document

(Learner & Evaluators)

Verify or provide evidence of learning.

Step 4 – Measure

(Faculty)

Determine the depth and breadth of learning required

Step 5 – Evaluate

(Faculty)

Decide whether the learning meets the required acceptable standard and determine its credit equivalency.

Step 6 – Transcribe

(Institution)

Record the credit or recognize the learning.

Assessment of Prior Learning

| PROCESSES IN CREATING A PORTFOLIO | PORTFOLIO PRODUCT |
|---|---|
| 1. Describe life and work experiences | Chronological record, resume |
| 2. Identify learning from life and work experiences | Learning statements/outcomes |
| 3. Express the learning as it relates to a course/program | Learning statements/outcomes, learning narratives |
| 4. Relate learning to overall career and educational goals or plans | Career and educational plan, goals/plan |
| 5. Compile evidence to prove learning and one's ability to perform | Documentation |

Assessment of Prior Learning

ELEMENTS OF A COMPLETED PORTFOLIO

- Title page
- Table of contents
- Letter of Introduction
- Career and educational goals/ plan
- Resume
- Learning outcomes, narrative
- Documentation

DOCUMENTING COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES IN YOUR PORTFOLIO

THIS SECTION OF YOUR PORTFOLIO INCLUDES:

1. Assessment of Prior Learning Request for Credit Form (See Sample)
2. Course Match Narrative

Write a narrative for the learning outcomes that have been identified in the course where you are seeking credit. The appropriate faculty assessor will review this narrative carefully and therefore it is crucial that it be well written and supported by sufficient evidence of your learning. A well-written narrative will convey motivation, competence, and ability to communicate.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Write a short introduction to your narrative identifying the course you have selected and describing the learning the narrative will prove (see the sample provided).
2. Take each of your learning outcomes that match the course outcomes and write a paragraph for each outcome explaining:
 - What you know
 - How you learned it and how it relates to your learning outcome(s)
 - How you apply this learning in other contexts (some clear examples would be helpful)
 - How this relates to university/college level learning
3. Write a short conclusion summarizing your learning and relating it to the course learning.

The Course Match Narrative will be used with appropriate proof/documentation to determine the amount of credit you receive for your learning. It must be consistent, concise, clear, and descriptive. There is no set length for the narrative. Generally, a narrative is approximately 3 to 5 pages in length. Complete as many pages as is necessary to describe your learning.

SAMPLE

Portfolio Development *Assessment of Prior Learning Request for Credit Form*

Student name: _____ Student #: _____

College: _____

Program: _____

Course in which Assessment for Prior Learning is being requested:

Include Course name and number

Personal Learning Outcomes Identified:

List:

Learning outcomes that reflect the course objectives.

Begin each outcome statement with:

I can.....

I am able to.....

You may attach a list instead. Be sure to note that here. Attach your course narrative to this form.

Sources of Documentation:

List:

All your "coded" documentation.

Portfolio Development
Assessment of Prior Learning Request for Credit Form

Student name: _____ **Student**
#: _____

College: _____

Program: _____

Course in which Assessment of Prior Learning Credit is being requested:

Personal Learning Outcomes Identified:

Sources of Documentation:

DOCUMENTATION

Documentation is the evidence that supports the prior learning described in your portfolio. Its purpose is to prove that the identified learning has occurred and has been demonstrated. Just as traditional students prove their learning through assignments, research papers, projects, tests, etc., you too must verify or confirm your learning. Thus, all of the learning that you are claiming should be substantiated in some way. This documentation is used by the assessor to determine if you have proven your learning outcomes, so the documentation you submit supports your identified learning as well as validating your work and life experiences.

When considering documentation that you may want to use...put yourself in the APL assessor's shoes. What kinds of evidence or proof would you look for if you were to make a judgment for credit? What would convince you, as an APL assessor, that someone has the learning required for a course? What kinds of documentation or proof would allow the APL assessor to award credit based on demonstrated prior learning? An APL Assessor will compare your learning to the learning outcomes of his/her course.

➤ Documentation usually falls into two categories:

1. *Direct Documentation*
2. *Indirect Documentation*

1. DIRECT DOCUMENTATION

This refers to the products, reports, plans, performances that you, the learner, have created. It is usually the strongest evidence source because it is something you did or created yourself, something that was produced in whole or in part by you and therefore you must have learned from it. Not only will this documentation validate your learning, but it will also help you to realize how much learning you have accomplished and the wealth of information you've accumulated.

EXAMPLES OF DIRECT DOCUMENTATION

- Reports, assignments.
- Management reports.
- Articles or stories.
- Audio/video tapes of speeches, training demonstrations or performances.
- Brochures, manuals.
- Computer programs.
- Work samples, products.
- Journal articles.
- Curriculum or lesson plans.
- Workshops, lectures, training designed/developed by the learner.
- Poems, plays.
- Blueprints
- Drawing, sculptures, paintings.

2. INDIRECT DOCUMENTATION

This documentation refers to the evidence about you and your accomplishments. This is third party validation/verification of your learning. The best sources of indirect documentation are letters written by qualified individuals who can verify your learning. Usually the people who provide this documentation are your employers, co-workers, business partners, etc. For obvious reasons, it is best not to use family or close friends to verify your learning.

The key word to keep in mind with indirect documentation is “**verification**” that is...not just a recommendation or references but verification that learning has occurred.

EXAMPLES OF INDIRECT DOCUMENTATION

- Letters written on learner's behalf by employers, teachers, business partners, members of professional organizations, etc. (i.e. verification of learning letters)
- Promotion evaluations, evidence of promotion
- Awards, letters of commendation, medals, official recommendations, licenses
- Formal performance appraisals, job evaluations completed by supervisors
- Official records documenting completion of training programs, transcripts of examination results or courses passed, certificates/diplomas
- Newspaper or magazine articles about learner's accomplishments
- Course descriptions or course outlines from post-secondary education, union training, on the job training, workshops/seminars, descriptions for work, community, volunteer work
- Written descriptions of work exhibited or performed by learner (i.e. job descriptions which include tasks performed, classification, etc.)
- Books read, bibliography, descriptions of books
- Membership in trade professional organizations, unions
- Licenses and performance standards for acquiring licenses
- Scores on licensing examinations
- Military records
- Letters of corroboration from co-volunteers, clients served, supervisors, etc.

There are many types of indirect and direct documentation that can be used to support your learning. Some examples are better than others. Please avoid using the following sources of weak documentation.

- General performance appraisals that are not specific about what you did or the specific skills and knowledge demonstrated
- Job evaluations that only state you were a "good" employee
- Newspaper or magazine articles about events you participated in but don't mention you specifically
- Letters from family, friends who have been used as a personal reference

VERIFICATION OF LEARNING LETTERS

One of the best sources of indirect documentation is a verification of learning letter written by someone who can verify your learning for the specific learning outcomes you've identified. When you ask for a verification of learning letter, keep in mind the following:

- The person verifying your learning must have observed you directly.
- One person may verify more than one of your learning experiences so the letter should comment directly on each area of learning.
- The letter should describe the learning experience, identify the learning acquired and address the quality as well as the quantity of learning.
- The person writing the letter needs to identify his/her relationship to you (i.e. supervisor, co-worker) as well as his/her qualifications.
- The letter should be written on official company/organization letterhead and must be dated and signed.

Your request for a verification of learning letter may involve an initial contact to confirm the verifier's willingness to participate in the process. Providing guidelines helps to ensure that you get the specific validation that you are seeking. A letter, such as the attached example, could be sent.

SAMPLE LETTER

REQUESTING VERIFICATION OF LEARNING

FORMAT FOR LETTER REQUESTING VERIFICATION OF LEARNING

Current Address

Zip Code
Date

Documenter's Name, Title
Company/Organization Name
Current Address
Zip Code

Dear **FULL NAME** (Avoid Sir, Madam):

Introduce yourself. Remind person of the nature of your relationship (i.e. what you did (title)) where (location within company/organization) and when (dates).

Explain why you need a letter and how it will help you. Ask him/her to follow the enclosed guidelines when completing your request.

Provide a list of clearly written learning outcomes (i.e. learning identified) for each area that you believe the documenter can attest to.

Thank him/her for assisting you.

Ask that the letter be sent to you in the enclosed, self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Sincerely,

(Sign your letter)

Type your full name.

Note: you will need to include a stamped, addressed envelope for the verification letter. Include a copy of "Guidelines for Writing Verification Letters" when sending request to Documenter.

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING VERIFICATION LETTERS

It would be helpful if your reply could follow these guidelines:

1. Please send your written evaluation on letterhead stationary if possible. If you do not have letterhead, please include your address and daytime telephone number in case you need to be contacted for clarification.
2. Please describe your present position and pertinent past experiences as they relate to the field.
3. Identify our working relationship (e.g. co-worker, supervisor, etc.).
4. State specifically what learning (i.e. competencies, skills or knowledge) you are able to verify. Describe when and where you observed this learning. If you are unable to verify some of the learning, please note this and provide a reason (s) why you are unable to do this.
5. Describe my specific knowledge and competencies in your own words. Please comment on the skill level performed and the amount of supervision required.
6. Please evaluate how effectively I've demonstrated the learning by using statements such as average, above average, exceptional, etc. Provide examples if possible.
7. Please send your verification letter back to me in the envelope included and keep a copy for your records.

I realize that this is an imposing task and thank you in advance for your cooperation in assisting me. Your accurate evaluation will be most helpful in verifying the learning identified.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Your name:

Phone:

Fax:

PREPARING A PORTFOLIO

Portfolio development includes choosing the parts of the portfolio that will be included in your completed package and assembling the portfolio for submission. Please review the parts of the portfolio.

1. **Title Page**—Introduces you to the assessor(s)
2. **Table of Contents**—Directs the assessor(s) to the appropriate sections of your portfolio
3. **Letter of Introduction**—Summarizes why you are applying for credit
4. **Chronological Record**—Summarizes the major experiences and/or education you have acquired
5. **Education and Career Goals/Plan**--Summarizes your education/training and career goals with your plans for pursuing them
6. **Academic Transcripts**—Includes any post-secondary level training or education you have received
7. **Resume**—Describes your qualifications in terms of your skills, education/training and work history
8. **Learning Outcomes and Course Match Narrative**--Describes how you meet the learning outcomes of a course(s)
9. **Documentation**—Documents which prove or verify your learning

Please note: Always make a photocopy of your complete portfolio before sending to be assessed.

ASSEMBLING YOUR PORTFOLIO

Title Page

The portfolio title page provides introductory information and includes the following:

- The name of the college/university/company/organization to whom you are submitting your portfolio
- Your name and address, appropriate phone, fax number and email address
- Your student number, if applicable
- A declaration of accuracy and verification
- The date of submission of the portfolio

A sample of a title page has been included for your reference (Sample—Title Page).

Table of Contents

The table of contents is a map of the information included in the portfolio. It should include the major headings of your portfolio and the page numbers on which they can be found. A sample of a table of contents has been included for your reference (Sample—Table of Contents).

Letter of Introduction

The letter of introduction for a portfolio is very similar to that which accompanies a resume. It functions as a formal introduction of you and stimulates the reader's interest in your portfolio. It is imperative that you link your prior learning to the learning required in a course if you are seeking credit, or a prospective position if you are seeking employment. A sample letter of introduction has been included for your reference (Sample—Letter of Introduction).

Sample Title Page

Portfolio of Assessment for Prior Learning

Submitted to:

Program: Management

Ferris State University

Submitted by:

Name: XXX XXXX

Student #: 12345

**Address: 123 Anywhere Street
Big Rapids, MI 49307**

**Phone Numbers: (204) 166-1234 (home)
(204) 211-9876 (work)**

Fax: (204) 166-4321 Email: XXX@XXX.com

I declare that all of the information in this portfolio is accurate and true.

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Sample Table of Contents

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Letter of Introduction..... | 1 |
| Education and Career Goals/Plan..... | 2 |
| Academic Transcripts..... | 3 |
| Resume..... | 4 |
| Learning Outcomes and Course Match Narrative for (Name of Course) Course..... | 8 |
| Documentation Index..... | 10 |
| Documentation..... | 21 |

Sample Letter of Introduction

123 Anywhere Street
Big Rapids, MI 49307
August 23, 2008

Early Childhood Education
1349 Cramer Circle, BIS 607
Big Rapids, MI 49307

Dear Mary:

I respectfully submit my portfolios for evaluation of my prior learning. Through these portfolios, I hope to receive credits for five courses in the Early Childhood Education Program at Ferris State University (FSU).

I am currently a family day care provider and licensed for eight children aged 12 weeks to 12 years. I have been caring for children for 12 years and have found it to be a very gratifying and rewarding experience. In addition, my active participation on the board of the Family Day Care Association of Mecosta County (FDCA) since 1990 and my professional development and training activities have offered opportunities for my professional growth and the promotion of my career.

In the 12 years I have been in the child care field, professional growth has always been a priority. I have taken every opportunity to attend workshops and conferences, both as a participant and facilitator, to keep abreast of current theory and practice. My professionalism has been furthered through my service in the FDCA, the community and at FSU in the Family Day Care Provider training and Early Childhood Education Programs. In addition, I have been honored with the publication of two of my articles in "Today's Parent" and a number of newspaper articles. In 1992, I graduated from the Family Day Care Provider Training Program and shortly after began the Child Care Experiential Learning Program at FSU. I have completed the first year of this program. It is with this commitment to professional growth that I am submitting my portfolios for your assessment of prior learning credits for the second year of the Early Childhood Education Program.

I thank you for your time and careful consideration of my portfolios. Please do not hesitate to contact me for any clarification of the information I have presented.

Sincerely,
XXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX
Name Typed

PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

As you assemble your portfolio for assessment, ensure that you can answer yes to each of the following questions.

- _____ Does the title page identify the course by name and number, and the program of study toward which you want the credit to apply? If you are submitting your portfolio for employment purposes, does the title page identify the employment position you are seeking?

- _____ Does the table of contents clearly identify all the parts of the portfolio?

- _____ Have you included a letter of introduction explaining and linking your prior learning to the learning required in a college/university course, or to an employment position?

- _____ Have you included your educational/training and career goals?

- _____ Have you included your transcripts (if applicable)?

- _____ Have you included your resume?

- _____ Have you addressed each of the major outcomes of each course outline?

- _____ Does your narrative detail the learning that was acquired and describe the experience in which the learning took place?

- _____ Have you photocopied your originals? (Never hand in your originals.)