ASSESSMENT OF PRIOR LEARNING HANDBOOK

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

Office of Transfer and Secondary School Partnerships

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Contents

Assessment of Prior Learning Defined

College-level learning can occur outside of the classroom. Ferris State University's Assessment of Prior Learning (APL) program may allow students to earn college credit for learning acquired on the job, in the military, in the community, or through independent study. Many courses have been evaluated to determine if and how a student may be awarded credit for prior learning. Students may take a proficiency examination or develop a portfolio to earn APL credit.

In either case, Assessment of Prior Learning grants credits based on learning gained through experience, not the experience itself.

Prior Learning Defined

There are a number of criteria that are evaluated when determining if a student's prior learning meets the requirements for college credit. Applicants must:

- Communicate effectively and describe prior learning.
- Show that prior learning experience was general and applicable to various situations.
- Demonstrate how prior learning experience was an intentional pursuit of information, perspectives, skills or knowledge.
- Combines theory and practice (portfolios must contain evidence of relevant knowledge, skills, and theory that were gained through the experience).
- Submit prior learning evaluation and documentation.
- Demonstrate learning that is in-depth and goes beyond the average knowledge needed to accomplish a task.
- Demonstrate that prior learning credit fits in the student's Ferris State University program.

Eligibility for APL

Students must be admitted to Ferris State University before seeking APL credit. Students do not need to be enrolled in a degree-seeking (Associate's or Bachelor's) program to earn APL credit. Many students use APL to advance their careers, qualify for pay raises, or meet personal goals. APL is offered at all Ferris State campuses.

Earnable Credits

Students may earn up to 60 credit hours through APL. The credit awarded will depend on the student's college-equivalent knowledge and the skills he/she has acquired. Credit is also awarded based on the student's ability to articulate and document his/her knowledge.

Students can earn APL credit for many programs including business, education, social services, office administration, manufacturing, and nursing. Please contact the APL office regarding programs offering APL credit.

Timeline for Earning APL Credits

Depending on the type of APL assessment used, the timeline for earning credit varies. Students taking proficiency exams may be awarded credit within a few weeks. Students submitting portfolios should expect to wait 7 to 10 months before they receive credit.

Fee Structure

The cost to complete the portfolio process is $250 for a one to five credit hours course and $50 for each additional credit hour assessed. A $65 fee is required to begin the portfolio process. This $65 fee is applied to the total cost of portfolio assessment. The cost for a proficiency exam is $25 per credit hour.

Payment of APL fees does not guarantee credit will be awarded. Fees must be paid prior to the assessment and/or portfolio review.

Applying for Assessment of Prior Learning Credit

Students wishing to apply of APL credit should consult with their program advisor to determine if APL credit may be awarded for a particular course(s). If the faculty approve, the student should complete the Assessment of Prior Learning application and mail the completed form to the Associate Provost of Retention and Student Success at the address listed below:

Dr. William Potter
Associate Provost for Retention and Student Success
Ferris State University
820 Campus Drive, ASC 1016
Big Rapids, MI 49307
Phone: (231) 591-2428
Fax: (231) 591-3060
Email: potterw@ferris.edu

Proficiency Examinations

Definition

A proficiency examination is a course competency assessment or an academic test taken by a student to determine if the student has met the learning outcomes of a course. Proficiency exams include, but are not limited to:

- Ferris State academic department exams
- College-Level Examination Program (CLEP)
- Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES)

Students who are able to demonstrate requisite skills and knowledge on a proficiency exam may receive credit that can be used to fulfill specific course requirements. Students will receive credit on their transcript; however, no letter grades are given for proficiency exams.

Earning APL through a Proficiency Exam

Before taking a proficiency exam, the student should consult with the academic college that they are interested in attending to determine if proficiency credit is appropriate. Students enrolled at the Ferris State campus in Big Rapids should contact the Office of Institutional Research and Testing at 231-591-3628 or email Testing_Office@ferris.edu. Students enrolled at one of the Ferris Statewide sites should contact their local Ferris Statewide office. Statewide site contact information can be found at http://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/statewide/quicklinks/contact.htm.

Portfolios

Definition

A portfolio is a collection of information that has been accumulated about a learner's experiences and accomplishments. Most portfolios contain descriptions of learning with supporting documentation to verify the knowledge or skills that the student declares to have, and should represent the equivalent of an FSU course's learning outcomes. A portfolio is a process by which prior learning experiences can be translated into educational outcomes and are documented and assessed for prior learning credit. Students should consult with the appropriate academic department before submitting a portfolio. More detailed information about portfolios is included in the appendix of this document.

Developing a Portfolio

Students should consult the APL office or program faculty before beginning the portfolio process. Portfolio requirements are different for each academic department. Students are advised to keep a complete copy of the final portfolio for their own records.

Evaluations

Portfolios should be sent to the Assessment of Prior Learning office to begin the evaluation process. The APL staff will assemble a portfolio review committee of faculty and practitioners to evaluate the portfolio.

Process

Overview
1. The student should contact the APL office prior to beginning the prior learning process.
2. Students must meet with the degree program faculty to identify potential college-level learning acquired through work and life experience.
3. The student and faculty should discuss what parts of the prior learning experience are relevant to the related course outcomes.
4. Students must provide examples and evidence of prior learning in the portfolio.
5. The faculty member should discuss the depth and breadth of learning required.

6. The faculty member should evaluate the student's portfolio to determine if it meets the required accepted standards and determine its credit equivalency.
7. If the faculty member determines the portfolio fulfills course credit requirements, the record of the credit will be transcribed on the student's official FSU Transcript.

Creating the Portfolio

1. The student creates a chronological record and resume that describes his/her life and work experiences.
2. The student develops learning statements and outcomes by identifying learning from life and work experiences, and expressing those experiences as it relates to the relevant course and academic program. It is often helpful to review the syllabus for each course to identify required outcomes.
3. The student develops a career and education plan and sets goals to relate the prior learning to overall career and education ambitions.
4. The student provides documentation in the form of a portfolio which includes evidence of the student's knowledge and ability to perform.

Elements of a Portfolio

Please view the appendix for a complete listing of elements to be included in a portfolio.

Contact Information

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Non-Discrimination Statement

Ferris State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion or creed, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, marital status, veteran or military status, height, weight, protected disability, genetic information, or any other characteristic protected by applicable State or federal laws or regulations in education, employment, housing, public services, or other University operations, including, but not limited to, admissions, programs, activities, hiring, promotion, discharge, compensation, fringe benefits, job training, classification, referral, or retention. Retaliation against any person making a charge, filing a legitimate complaint, testifying, or participating in any discrimination investigation or proceeding is prohibited.

Students with disabilities requiring assistance or accommodation may contact Educational Counseling & Disabilities Services at (231) 591-3057 in Big Rapids, or the Director of Counseling, Disability & Tutoring Services for Kendall College of Art and Design at (616) 451-2787 ext. 1136 in Grand Rapids. Employees and other members of the University community with disabilities requiring assistance or

accommodation may contact the Human Resources Department, 420 Oak St., Big Rapids, MI 49307 or call (231) 591-2150.

Inquiries or complaints of discrimination may be addressed to the Director of Equal Opportunity, 120 East Cedar St., Big Rapids, MI 49307 or by telephone at (231) 591-2152; or Title IX Coordinator, 805 Campus Dr., Big Rapids, MI 49307, or by telephone at (231) 591-2088. On the KCAD Grand Rapids campus, contact the Title IX Deputy Coordinator, 17 Fountain St., Grand Rapids, MI, (616) 451-2787 ext. 1113.

Appendix

Portfolio Elements

The following elements are required for each portfolio submitted for Assessment of Prior Learning Credit.

1. Title page
2. Table of Contents
3. Letter of Introduction
4. Copy of APL application
5. Chronological Record
6. Career and education goals/plans
7. Academic Transcripts
8. Resume
9. Course Learning Outcomes
10. Documentation
11. Sources

Continue reading for more details on each element.

Title Page

The Title Page introduces the student to the Ferris State APL assessors. The following information should be included:

- Ferris State University
- The name of the academic program
- The student's name
- The student's contact information (address, phone number, fax number, and email address)
- The student's FSU identification number
- The date of the portfolio's submission
- Accuracy statement with date and student signature (Ex: "*I declare that all of the information in this portfolio is accurate and true.*")

Table of Contents

The Table of Contents will be used by the assessors to the appropriate sections of the portfolio. It is a map of the information contained in the document. The Table of Contents includes the major headings of the portfolio and the page numbers where the information may be found.

Letter of Introduction

The Letter of Introduction is a formal introduction of the student and summarizes why the student is applying for APL credit. This letter also serves as a link to the prior learning and the course's learning outcomes.

Chronological Record

The Chronological Record summarizes the major experiences and/or education the student has acquired.

Education and Career Goals/Plans

The Education and Career Goals/Plan is a summary of the student's education, training and career goals. The section also includes the student's plan for pursuing these goals.

Academic Transcripts

The student should include any transcripts from post-secondary training or education he/she has received.

Course Learning Outcomes

The Course Learning Outcomes section of the portfolio should include the Assessment of Prior Learning Request for Credit Form (see page) and the Course Match Narrative. This section describes how the student has met the learning outcomes for the course.

Course Match Narrative

Students are required to write a narrative for the learning outcomes that have been identified for the course the student is requesting credit for. The faculty assessor will review the narrative. The narrative should be well written and supported by sufficient evidence of the student's learning. It should convey motivation, competence, and the ability to communicate. The focus of the narrative is not autobiographical, it should focus on analyzing the student's learning in the context of the experience.

This will be used when determining the number of credit hours a student receives for learning. The narrative should be clear, concise, and descriptive.

There is no set length for the narrative, but generally it is three to five pages long. Students should complete as many pages as necessary to describe their learning and discuss how the learning is connected with the course and degree requirements.

Course Match Narrative Outline

1. A short introduction identifying the course the student has selected for APL and describing the learning that the narrative will substantiate.
2. The student should write one paragraph for each course outcome. Each paragraph should describe the following:
   a. What you know
   b. How you gained the knowledge/how did you learn and how this learning/knowledge relates to the course's learning outcomes
   c. How this learning applied in other contexts (provide clear examples)
   d. How this learning relates to university-level learning
3. A short conclusion summarizing your learning and relating it to the course learning.

Helpful Tips

Ask yourself the following questions when writing your narrative:

- What did the student learn that he/she did not know before?
- What skills did the student need to develop to acquire that knowledge?
- What can the student do now that he/she could not do before?

- Why did the student feel required or compelled to learn more than he/she knew when he/she began the experience?
- How did the student begin learning what he/she needed to know?
- How did the student apply theoretical learning in practice?
- What work of the influential thinkers in the field did the student study?
- How did the student integrate or test learned concepts in practice?

Documentation

Documentation is the evidence used to support the student's prior learning described in the student's portfolio. The purpose of documentation is to prove the acquired learning has occurred and been demonstrated. Traditional students prove their learning through assignments, research papers, projects and tests. Therefore, students submitting an APL portfolio must verify and confirm their learning and be able to demonstrate it. Documentation will be reviewed by faculty to determine if the student has demonstrated learning in the area of the course learning outcomes.

There are two main categories of documentation: direct and indirect.

Direct Documentation

Direct documentation includes products, reports, plans, and performances that the student has created. This is a very strong source of evidence as the documentation was created by the student. Examples of direct documentation include reports, assignments, articles, brochures, manuals, computer programs, products, journal articles, lesson plans, workshops, lectures, poems, blueprints, drawing, sculptures, or audio/video tapes of speeches, training demonstrations and performances.

Indirect Documentation

Indirect documentation is a third-party validation/verification or learning. Indirect documentation refers to letters written by qualified individuals who can verify your learning. Good sources of indirect documentation include employers, co-workers, and business partners. This type of documentation is a verification that the learning occurred, and not just a recommendation or reference.

Examples of indirect documentation include letters written on the student's behalf by employers, teachers, business partners, or members of professional organizations. Other examples are promotion evaluations, awards, letters of commendation, formal performance appraisals, job evaluations, newspaper articles, course outlines from secondary learning/union training/workshops/seminars, job descriptions, books read, bibliography, membership in professional organizations, licensing examination scores, and military records.

Letters of personal reference are not acceptable forms of documentation. However, verification of learning letters may be a strong addition to a student's portfolio.

Principles of a good verification of learning letter include:

- The person verifying the learning must have observed the learner directly.

- One person may verify more than one of the student's learning experiences. Therefore, the letter should specifically address each area of learning.
- The letter must describe the learning experience, identify the learning acquired, and address the quality and quantity of learning.
- The person writing the letter should identify his/her relationship to the learner, such as supervisor or co-worker
- The person writing the letter should relate his/her qualifications.
- The letter should be printed on the company or organization's official letterhead.
- All letters must be dated and signed.

The student should contact the potential verifier to confirm his/her willingness to compose a letter. The student should provide guidelines to the letter writer to ensure the student receives the validation sought.

Guidelines for requesting a verification of learning letter are listed below:

- Explain why the letter is needed
- Include the principles of a good verification letter listed above
- Provide a clear list of learning outcomes for each area to be verified by the writer
- Request letters be returned to the student requesting APL credit
- Include the Guidelines for Writing Verification Letters with your request (please see page in the Appendix)
- Include a self-addressed stamped envelope for the writer to return the letter to you

Sources

The portfolio should contain a formal list of sources and references.

Assessment of Prior Learning Request for Credit Form

A copy of your course narrative must be submitted with this form.

Student Information	
Student Name:	
FSU Student ID #:	
FSU Program:	
FSU College:	
FSU Academic Advisor:	
Course for which Assessment for Prior Learning Credit requested:	
Course Name:	
Course Number:	

I authorize the above-named student to submit a portfolio for Assessment of Prior Learning for the classes listed on this form.

_____   _____
Academic Advisor Signature   Date

_____   _____
Department Head Signature   Date

Identify Personal Learning Outcomes
- *Please list your learning outcomes that reflect the course objectives. Begin each outcome statement with "I can…" or "I am able to…".*
- *You may submit additional pages if necessary.*

Sources of Documentation
- *Please list all of your "coded" documentation.*

Ferris State University Guidelines for Writing Verification of Learning Letters

Ferris State University has developed the following guidelines for individuals writing Verification of Learning letters to assist our students in obtaining Assessment of Prior Learning Credit. Thank you for your assistance in helping this student pursue the option of credit for learning outside of the college classroom.

Please keep in mind the following guidelines when writing a Verification of Learning letter:

- Send your written letter on letterhead stationary
- Please include your address and daytime telephone number in case we need to contact you for clarification
- Describe your present presentation, job duties, and pertinent work experiences as they relate to your field
- Identify your working relationship with the Assessment of Prior Learning Credit applicant
- Based on the learning outcomes given to you by the student, describe what learning (such as competencies, skills or knowledge) you are able to verify. State when and where you observed this learning. If you are unable to verify any learning outcomes, please state why you are not able to comment on the particular outcome.
- Describe the student's specific knowledge and competencies in your own words. Include the student's skill level and the amount of supervision required.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the student's learning and knowledge by using statements such as "average," "above average," "exceptional," etc. Provide examples.
- If applicable, state that the learning is college-level and intentional, and that the student should earn college-level credit. The learning should be beyond a day-to-day or average knowledge in the subject area.
- Return the verification letter in the self-addressed stamp enveloped that was included in the request
- Keep a copy of the verification letter for your records

Portfolio Assessment Checklist

- ☐ The title page identifies the academic program of study and the course name and number
- ☐ The table of contents clearly categorizes all of the sections of the portfolio
- ☐ The letter of introduction explains and links the students' prior learning to the course outcomes
- ☐ The portfolio includes the student's education and career goals
- ☐ If applicable, the portfolio includes academic transcripts
- ☐ The student's resume is included
- ☐ All of the major course outcomes have been addressed
- ☐ The narrative details the learning that was acquired and describes where the learning experience took place
- ☐ A complete copy of the student's portfolio has been made for the student's own records

Application for Assessment of Prior Learning Portfolio

Full Name:	
FSU Student ID #:	
Email Address:	
Phone #:	
FSU Academic Program:	
FSU Academic Advisor:	
Course(s) Applying for APL Credit:	
Portfolio Due Date:	