

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

WISCONSIN & ANN ARBOR

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Development Manual

12800 N Lake Shore Dr Mequon, WI 53097
4090 Geddes Road Ann Arbor, MI 48105

Updated August 2024

Use this manual in combination with the current PLA Policies document

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Credits: Building Blocks in Academia	4
Reflecting, Explaining, and Verifying	5
Worksheet: Reflecting, Explaining, and Verifying	8
Identifying Course Descriptions	9
Expressing Learning Outcomes	10
Narrative Description of Learning	11
Documenting Your Learning	12
Prior Learning Assessment Documentation Letter	13
Collect, Review and Submit PLA Materials	15
The PLA Committee Review	16
Appendices: Forms and Templates	17

Prior Learning Assessment: An Introduction

This Prior Learning Assessment Development Manual and Workshop are designed to help you prepare and document learning experiences outside the classroom for consideration. The purpose of a Prior Learning Assessment submission is to document learning that has already occurred. This learning must be college level learning in order to be considered for review. Students need to be aware that some courses, while offered at colleges and universities, are considered to be below college level, and therefore those course descriptions should not be used as comparison to your prior learning in your petition. Some examples of these would be keyboarding, word processing, office procedures, operating systems, web 1, telephone techniques, cake decorating or basic auto mechanic courses.

During the process of this workshop, you will **REVIEW**

Reflect on activities and experiences in your life history

Explain history with a timeline or life map

Verify learning outcomes from growth experiences

Identify related course descriptions

Express learning with learning outcome statements and

narrative **W**itness learning outcomes with documentation

Participating in the **REVIEW*** process will lead to more than acquiring credit for experiential learning. The process itself is a learning experience in that you will learn a great deal about whom you are and who you want to be. Participating in this process can be one of the most satisfying activities engaged in during your adult years. *The acronym **REVIEW** was developed by Concordia University Wisconsin and Ann Arbor to describe its own process which has counterparts in many colleges and universities throughout the world.

Credits: The Building Blocks in Academia

In the system of higher education in the United States, the standard measure of academic achievement is the semester credit hour. One credit traditionally equals 15 hours of classroom contact and 30 hours of independent study or personal preparation. The standard three semester credit-hour course requires 45 hours of class time and 90 hours of preparation.

Some colleges and universities are on the quarter system. If a course description from one of these institutions is used, be aware that quarter credits are reduced by one third when converted to semester credit. The majority of colleges and universities, like Concordia, are on the semester system.

Credits earned for electives through the prior learning assessment process will appear on your transcript in a block entitled "Credits Awarded for Prior Learning." Any credits earned which fulfill a major requirement will be shown as a transfer for that course.

Reflecting, Explaining, Verifying

On the following worksheet, you will **REFLECT** on experiences and activities, which have taken place in your life since high school. You will be developing a list of places visited, non-credit courses taken, training programs attended at church or work, books read, hobbies mastered, offices held, functions performed in the military, volunteer services performed, etc.

For each one, you will **EXPLAIN**: 1. What you did, and 2. What you have learned. Look for learning which represents college level skills, knowledge or attitudes.

The final step will be to **VERIFY** your college level learning.

Use as many additional sheets as you need to complete this project. Remember, not all learning is college level learning. The pages which follow provide vocabulary that you can use to describe your higher-level learning.

<i>Primary level:</i>	recognition, recall
<i>Secondary level:</i>	comparison and contrast, application
<i>College level:</i>	analysis, synthesis, evaluation

If you took a certificate course which did not include the college level processes, or you attended a non-accredited institution, you can combine that pre-college learning with the experience you gained afterward when you used your skills in the real world. Together, pre-college instruction and real work experience can give you the experiences of analysis, synthesis and evaluation, which equate to college level learning and can therefore be documented in a petition for prior learning credit. The pre-college /non-accredited institution instruction transcript could be one of the two forms of documentation, but you would also need a letter explaining how you applied that knowledge that follows the requirements for documentation described later in this manual.

Adapted from Susan Simoske's *Earn College Credit for What You Know*. Washington, D.C.: Acroposis Books, 1985. pp 49-50

The Complexity of Knowledge and Competence

In general, the credit you receive through the assessment of prior learning is directly related to the *complexity* of your knowledge, regardless of *how* you learned a particular subject. From simple facts and names at your first level of knowledge, you may have progressed to more complicated skills like analysis, comparison, and evaluation. This may help you to describe your learning using the following guidelines:

How Do You Define the Specifics of your Learning?

- Do you know the *terminology* of the field?
- Do you know the *specific* facts?
- Do you have knowledge of *conventions*?
- Do you have knowledge of *trends and sequences*?
- Do you have knowledge of *criteria*?
- Do you have knowledge of *methodology*?
- Do you have knowledge of *principles and generalizations*?
- Do you have knowledge of *theories and structure*?

Verbs that help you answer these questions:

(I can) **relate ** record ** name ** list ** define ** recall ** repeat**

How Do You Convey What You Know?

- Can you *translate* what you know?
- Can you *interpret* what you know?
- Can you *extrapolate* from what you know?

Verbs that help you answer these questions:

(I can) **restate ** identify ** tell ** discuss ** locate ** express ** describe ** report ** explain ** recognize ** review**

How Can You Apply Your Knowledge?

(I can) **schedule ** sketch ** illustrate ** operate ** employ ** practice ** apply ** use ** demonstrate**

How Can You Analyze Your Knowledge?

- Can you analyze elements of the subject field?
- Can you analyze *relationships* in the field?
- Can you analyze *organizational* principles?

Verbs that help you answer these questions:

(I can) **distinguish ** solve ** diagram ** analyze ** appraise ** inspect ** calculate ** test ** question ** debate ** relate ** compare ** experiment ** contrast ** inventory ** criticize ** examine ** differentiate**

How Can You Synthesize What You Know?

- Can you *produce* a unique communication about this field?

- Can you *develop* a plan or a proposed set of operations?
- Can you *derive* a set of abstract relations?

Verbs that help you answer these questions:

(I can) **compose ** assemble ** organize ** collect ** manage **
propose ** construct ** prepare ** design ** create ** plan
** formulate ** arrange ** set up**

Can You Evaluate What You Know?

- Can you make judgments based on *internal evidence*?
- Can you make judgments based on *external evidence*?

Not all of these questions and verbs will apply to what you know. But by using what seems to apply to your own field of knowledge and experience, you will be well on your way to identifying what it is you really know.

Worksheet: Reflecting, Explaining and Verifying

<u>Year</u>	<u>Activity/Experience</u>	<u>What I Did</u>	<u>Learning Outcomes</u>
-------------	----------------------------	-------------------	--------------------------

[Duplicate additional sheets as needed]

Identifying Course Descriptions to Describe Learning Outcomes

Concordia uses the College Course Model to identify learning outcomes. For elective credit petitions, you are required to find a course description for a college level course from the catalog of a regionally accredited institution. (No technical diploma credit or pre-college course descriptions allowed. For a major or minor course you will be using the Concordia course description and possibly the syllabus.

Course descriptions must contain specific learning outcomes within a definite content area that student can compare to his or her learning. It must closely approximate the learning outcome stated for a given growth activity. If you are using a course description from a print catalog, photocopy or screen capture the entire page. If the catalog is online, also provide the URL to the catalog. If the catalog is online, provide a copy of the institutions homepage or the page that discusses the accreditation along with the course description.

If you can demonstrate mastery of learning at a higher level, course descriptions with prerequisites may be used. Graduate level course descriptions may be used as long as documentation verifying the acquisition of this knowledge can be provided (i.e. stated learning outcomes, narrative of the outcomes and letters from witnesses. The credit awarded through the PLA process is always undergraduate credit.

Expressing Learning in Stated Learning Outcomes

Stated learning outcomes are used to state what you know or can do as a result of an experience. (The stated learning outcomes could be thought of as similar to the goals/objectives of a module.)

This list is preceded by “As a result of my experience in (subject of the petition) I have acquired knowledge and skills and understanding through learning to:

- **write** in a concise manner that is understood by a mass market
- **use** a computer midi-linked to a recording system and keyboard
- **relate** Latin & Greek terms to familiar English words
- **select** word elements to create difficult medical terms
- **manage** support for Learning Disabilities classrooms
- **prepare** lesson plans for computer and academic instruction
- **choose** multiple strategies for peer conflicts and anger control
- **distinguish** several types of Exceptional Education students
- **formulate** proposals to solicit community involvement in the school
- **assess** types/grades of businesses to call on to increase sales
- **evaluate** which products sell quickly in different economic areas
- **analyze** which products and brands are needed for various ethnic backgrounds
- **identify** and reiterate the basic ownership rights and sources of law in the United States, including the distinction of real property and personal property
- **set up** the various contracts involved in the listing, purchase, sale and conveyance of real estate.
- **compare** the role, type and advantages/disadvantages of real estate mortgage loans
- **assemble** a form and contingency manual, including the requirements for supervision of a salesperson’s use of forms
- **appraise** operational policy including a policy and procedures manual
- **understand** and identify hiring criteria specifically, needs determination, personnel selection, equal opportunity, and workers’ compensation

It is required that you provide a one-page, double-spaced listing of learning outcomes for each petition. Refer back to pages 7 and 8 for suggested words to help convey the message that college level learning did take place.

Narrative Description of Learning

A two to three page, double-spaced narrative description of the growth experience is required for each petition. The function of this narrative is to give the assessor a context from which to evaluate your stated learning outcomes for the course description for which credit is being sought.

This narrative should:

- tell the assessor the *circumstances* under which this learning took place
- the *amount of time* expended
- the *reason* for participating in this activity
- the *growth* which was realized through the learning activities
- the *applications* which have been made of this learning

The Narrative must be specific on what you did to accomplish the stated learning outcomes – not just generalities. After an introductory section, organize the narrative and describe how the experiences and knowledge were gained, including what was learned related to each of the stated learning outcomes, as well as when and where it was learned.

Documenting Your Learning

Witnessing knowledge and skills is a very important part of the prior learning assessment development process. Concordia recognizes direct and indirect sources of documentation.

Two pieces of documentation are required for each petition. In all cases you will need at least one letter.* In other documentation, be sure your name is mentioned specifically in the documentation.

Direct documentation may include:

- reports prepared by you or in which you made major contributions
- journalism--newsletters, news articles with your by-line
- photographs you took which relate to the credits requested, i.e. documenting a trip as a medical volunteer
- writing you have had published or plays that have been performed, audio or audiovisual tapes are often included as well as church bulletins with your name in the credits
- art work or musical scores

Indirect documentation may include:

- letters* written by supervisors/managers, superiors, church or community leaders who can verify the activity, but preferably not co-workers
- certificates of completion for workshops, training programs or seminars
- transcripts of work completed at non-regionally accredited institutions
- newspaper articles in which you and your accomplishments or contributions are mentioned; could include pictures of you as a participant in a play

Use the worksheet on page 18 to organize your documentation and to monitor its progress.

*See next page for details regarding verification letters.

Prior Learning Assessment Documentation Letter

The following criteria must be followed when using a letter for documentation:

- The letter should be written on organization letterhead, or include all the information about the name of the organization, and full mailing address and telephone number of the location at which they observed your work/learning. The author must also provide his or her mailing address and current phone and email address.
- One individual may document your learning for more than one course description; however, a different letter must be written for each petition they are documenting because the knowledge, skills, and experiences will differ for each petition.

Your letters of documentation must clearly state your involvement/contributions to the project. Because securing sources of documentation can be time-consuming, make sure you give yourself six weeks to complete this aspect of the process.

The letter needs to be specific, not a general letter of recommendation, or an annual performance review. The letter must include the following components:

- A description of your position at the time this person observed you or worked with you, i.e. Sue Johnson was a Marketing Specialist.
- A description of the author's relationship to you. For example, that he or she was your supervisor, and the situations in which he or she observed you. Also, an indication of the dates of the observation and the length of time you worked together, i.e. From July 2019 through September 2021, Sue Johnson held the position of Marketing Specialist and reported directly to me. At the time I was Director of Marketing for XYZ Corps, at XX full address.
- An indication of your competence, skills, and knowledge in the areas outlined in the course description. The abilities must be listed specifically. It is helpful if you provide a copy of the course description you are using and a copy of your Stated Learning Outcomes to help identify the specific abilities that you are asking be documented in the letter.
- An evaluation of how well you performed using such adjectives as average, above average, exceptional, etc. A comparison between your abilities and the abilities of others that have held similar position is helpful.

It is recommended that you provide the person(s) drafting the letters with the format on page 17, a copy of the course description, and your Stated Learning Outcomes and narrative to assist them with your request.

**[Format for Documentation Letter]
(Letterhead)**

Date

Concordia University Wisconsin
Prior Learning Assessment Committee
Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching
12800 N. Lake Shore Drive
Mequon, WI 53097
Re: (student's name here)

Dear PLA Committee,

I am pleased to write this letter in support of (student name) who is seeking college credit for (title of course description/credit petition).

The letter needs to be specific, not a general letter of recommendation or performance review. It must include the following components:

1. A description of your position at the time this person observed you or worked with you, i.e. Sue Johnson was a Marketing Specialist.
2. A mention of his or her relationship to you. For example, that he or she was your supervisor, and the situations in which he or she observed you. Also, an indication of the dates of the observation and the length of time you worked together, i.e. From July 2022 through June 2024, Sue Johnson held the position of Marketing Specialist and reported directly to me. At the time I was Director of Marketing for XYZ Corps at XX full address.
3. An indication of your competence, skills, and knowledge in the areas outlined in the course description. The abilities must be listed specifically. It is helpful if you provide a copy of the course description and a copy of your Stated Learning Outcomes to help identify the specific abilities that you are asking to be documented.
4. An evaluation of how well you performed using such adjectives as average, above average, exceptional, etc. A comparison between your abilities and the abilities of others that have held similar position is helpful.

Sincerely,
Signature

Print Name

Address, phone and e-mail

Collect, Review and Submit Your Materials

Having worked through the **REVIEW** process, you are now ready to develop your prior learning assessment materials for review by the faculty on the Prior Learning Assessment Committee of Concordia University Wisconsin and Ann Arbor.

The current process requires the prior learning assessment materials to be presented electronically and submitted in the University Learning Management System. Develop one PDF of all the materials related to each petition, starting with a cover sheet with your complete name, F00#, and your contact information. Create a separate PDF for each petition.

Professionalism is very important in your presentation. Have someone proof the material you are submitting for grammar, spelling, and coherence. Remember that you are petitioning for college-level credit and your work should reflect college-level quality and achievement. The credits for which you are petitioning are valuable. If you are petitioning for 21 credits, that would equate to taking seven three-credit courses.

The format of your Prior Learning Assessment submission should follow this outline:

For each petition, develop one PDF that includes the following:

- a. Cover Sheet with your name, F00# and contact information
- b. Petition Form
- c. Course description with name of institution and catalog year
- d. Stated learning outcomes (one full page, double spaced)
- e. Narrative description of learning outcomes (2-3 pages, double spaced)
- f. Two Pieces of Documentation (letters, certificates, etc.) One must be a letter.

Be sure to keep a copy of all materials submitted. Submit your material to Concordia Prior Learning Assessment Committee (currently through a site in our Learning Management System).

As your materials are prepared for review, the \$80.00 per credit review fee will be added to your student account.

The PLA Committee Review

The Prior Learning Assessment Committee meets once a month at which time they review the prior learning assessment submissions received by the 1st of the prior month. The committee communicates the decision to the student, the advisor, and to the Registrar to be applied to the student's transcript.

In case a credit petition is denied, the student has two options — 1) make revisions per the suggestions of the committee or 2) submit a totally new credit petition.

Prior learning assessment submissions should be submitted *at least six months before the anticipated graduation date*. This will allow time for review and revision or resubmission if credits are denied.

If a credit petition is revised, there is no additional charge. If a totally new petition is submitted, payment in the amount of \$80.00 per credit is to be submitted with the re-submission.

Reasons for denial of credit may include:

- course descriptions not from a school which is regionally accredited;
- course descriptions that do not match the stated learning outcomes or narrative;
- learning outcomes and or narrative lack detail
- the narrative or the outcomes fail to demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge and growth, or enough substance or time to warrant credits sought
- letters of documentation are letters of *recommendation* and do not state college-level learning or the contribution and growth of the student in the experience
- learning outcomes do not demonstrate college level knowledge and skills
- letters do not contain all required elements such as full contact information
- when we attempted to contact the author of a letter, the contact information was incorrect or they could not confirm what was in the letter.

Appendices: Forms and Templates

1. Prior Learning Assessment Sample Cover Page

2. Petition Form

Prior Learning Assessment

Your Name
Address
City, State, Zip
Phone
Email
Your Major/Program
Your F00 number

Date Completed

[This is a sample cover page for each petition]

Prior Learning Assessment Petition Form

Name _____

Student ID# F00 _____

I am seeking credit for the following: _____

Title of Course _____

Date(s) of learning activity _____

[If a major course, use the Concordia description] _____

Provide the following for the course description:

Institution Name/Dept _____

Course Number and Catalog Year _____

The course listed above must be from an accredited institution and must not duplicate any previous or subsequent coursework, any other means of awarding credit such as CLEP or DSST exams (either requested or completed), or another prior learning assessment submission.

I am seeking _____ credit hours **Electives – Major – (circle one)**.

I am submitting evidence in support of this petition in one PDF. It includes:

- a. Credit Petition Form
- b. Bulleted list of Stated Learning Outcomes
- c. Course description from an accredited institution
- d. Narrative Description of Learning Outcomes (2-3 pages)
- e. Two forms of documentation:
 - i. One letter
 - ii. A second letter or one other form of documentation

[Use a separate Credit Petition Form for each course description for which you are seeking credit]