

Concordia University Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Policies

The Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) process is an approach to earning credit which allows undergraduate students (at both campuses and online) to seek credit for demonstration of learning outside the classroom setting. The following limitations and policies apply to this process.

How Many PLA Credits Allowed and for Which Requirements?

- Admitted, degree-seeking undergraduate students may seek to earn up to 21 semester hour credits for properly documented college-level learning acquired outside a college classroom.
- Prior learning credits, if awarded, may apply either toward the academic major or required elective coursework within the bachelor's degree (with some exceptions). Core courses may not be met through Prior Learning Assessment.
- Students may only petition for the number of credits needed, according to an official Concordia evaluation of transfer credits and determination of program requirements.

PLA Does Not Contribute to Residency Requirements

PLA credits awarded are considered transfer credits which do not contribute to the residency requirement. The thirty-six residency credits must be completed at Concordia, and cannot be met by Prior Learning Assessment. Any specific residency requirements, such as within majors and minors, may not be met through PLA. Students who have already transferred in the maximum number of credits do not qualify.

PLA May Not Apply When Students Change Majors or Programs; PLA Does Not Transfer to Other Universities

Credits achieved through PLA are usable only within the context of a particular Concordia undergraduate degree program and are not independently transferable to other institutions.

- There should be no assumption that these credits will transfer to any other postsecondary institution or even between majors or programs at Concordia.
- A student who transfers to a different major may no longer need PLA credits in the categories sought under the prior major.
- If a student returns to Concordia after an absence and the new requirements for the student's program changes due to re-admission under a later college catalog, the PLA credits will be reviewed again under the requirements of that catalog and may not apply.

Context of Prior Learning

- The prior learning experiences for which petitions are developed may include knowledge gained through experience, seminars and workshops through employment, through supervised volunteer experiences in a non-profit organization, or learning completed at non-accredited institutions which did not transfer.
- Experience used as support of learning must be outside the context of secondary school learning experiences, whether curricular or co-curricular

The Amount and Level of Learning

- The learning used for the PLA process must be college level.
- The student must be able to demonstrate an amount of college level learning which is appropriate to the credits sought, using the Concordia Credit Hour Policy formula of at minimum 42 hours of learning per credit. For example, a student seeking three credits in PLA would be demonstrating between 126 and 144 hours of total work, including application of the learning.

When to Submit PLA Petitions

- Students must attend a PLA Workshop before petitions may be submitted. Information about the Workshops is located on the Portal page “Non-traditional Approaches to Earning Credit.”
- Students should not submit petitions until all other transfer credit documentation has been submitted and an official evaluation of degree and program requirements created.
- Students who may transfer to another school or change majors may want to wait until these decisions are made to consider PLA.
- At the latest, students must submit the Prior Learning Assessment materials no later than 6 months prior to their anticipated graduation date.

The PLA Review Fee

- The fee charged is for review of the petitions and materials submitted for Prior Learning Assessment, not a fee for the credit itself. When materials are submitted, the review fee will be charged to the student’s account. During the 2024-2025 Academic Year, the review fee is \$80 per credit.
- There is no refund of the review fee if materials submitted are not sufficient to demonstrate the extent and amount of learning appropriate for the course descriptions and credits sought. There are no refunds of fees

if the credit is not needed when a student changes majors, returns after an absence, or there is a reduction in program requirements for some other reason.

- Normally, this fee is not explicitly covered by Financial Aid.

College Course Model

The PLA model in use at Concordia is the College Course Model, which involves the student petitioning for an appropriate number of credits using college-level course descriptions that match the learning the student has accomplished and seeks to demonstrate.

- Students equate their previously acquired knowledge or skill to the learning outcomes and course description of a specific college course from a regionally (institutionally) accredited college or university in the United States.
- The course descriptions used in the Prior Learning Assessment process
 - a) must be from college-level courses from regionally accredited colleges and universities in the U.S.;
 - b) may not overlap with the academic content of other courses or experiences accepted in transfer, or credits for courses already taken or required to be completed within the Concordia degree. This does not apply to courses not yet completed but required in the major when the petition is to fulfill a major requirement;
 - c) for a major requirement, the course description used should be the required Concordia course, or must be approved by the department overseeing the major and the course as equivalent to the major course;
 - d) are limited to five credits, regardless of what a course description states. The maximum number of credits which may be awarded for a given course is five (5). This means that if the course description used is for eight (8) credits, only five (5) credits may be sought and granted through this process. The student may, however, petition for fewer credits than any course description states;
 - e) may be graduate course descriptions, though these will likely require a higher level of learning to be demonstrated to match learning to the course description.

Materials to submit to demonstrate prior learning

For each petition for credit, the student must provide all of the following:

- A petition form showing the number of credits sought, the dates during which the learning occurred, the course name and number including the university or college and the catalog year of the course description being used;
- A list of learning outcomes they write, called stated learning outcomes, that describe their college-level learning as it relates to the course description being used;
- A copy of the course description to which they are comparing learning, which shows the institution and the catalog year
- A narrative description of the learning and the context in which it occurred
- Two evidentiary documents that support the learning, one must be a letter from an individual who was in a position to evaluate their work
- A review fee of \$80 per credit is charged to the student's account, which is not refundable if the credit is not awarded.

What Happens During and After Review of Your Submissions

Petitions and their supporting documentation are evaluated by an internal committee, the Prior Learning Assessment Committee. The members of this committee possess expertise in a variety of subject areas and are qualified to review petitions assigned to them.

If petitions are denied by the Prior Learning Assessment Committee, sometimes they can be revised and resubmitted under the initial fee.

- If the denial is due to inappropriate course descriptions, insufficient supporting documents and documentation, or incomplete alignment of all the elements of the petition, revisions are allowed to be submitted under the initial fee.
- Petitions denied due to overlap with credits transferred in may not be revised under the initial fee. A petition to fulfill a major course not yet taken would not be denied for overlap with courses already completed at Concordia, but any other petitions denied due to overlap with the students' program may not be revised under the initial fee.

Credits earned through Prior Learning Assessment appear on the student's transcript with the name of the required course fulfilled when applied to a specific requirement, or in a block of credits awarded for "Prior Learning Assessment" when elective credits are awarded. Elective credits do not fulfill any major requirements.

Further information is available to enrolled students on the Concordia portal under “Non-traditional Approaches to Earning Credit.”

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