

# **Alabama Community College System**



## **Prior Learning Assessments**

### **Guide**

**April 2016**



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## Introduction

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is a means for a student to receive college level credit for learning that took place in a non-traditional learning environment, such as on-the-job training, military training, professional development seminars, volunteerism, and experience in-field. PLA relies heavily on aligning learning gained through experience with outcomes found in traditional courses of higher education. State Board of Education Policy 706.01(Appendix B) and the Guidelines for Policy706.01 (Appendix C) provide guidance for awarding credit through non-traditional means.

Colleges in the Alabama Community College System (ACCS) have the prerogative to accept transfer credit that has been determined to be acceptable for application to its programs. When making that determination, the college must document that the credit awarded represents collegiate coursework relevant to the associated program in scope, depth, and time consistent with course content and level of instruction. Student competencies must be at least equivalent to those of students enrolled in the college's own programs of instruction, and with coursework taught by faculty members qualified to teach at the appropriate level.

PLA applies only to non-academic transfer courses. Credit awarded through nontraditional means for academic transfer courses may be awarded by examination or nationally recognized guidelines (AP, CLEP, ACT/PEP, DSST, Challenge Exams, ACE PONS/CREDIT, ACE/MILITARY) or through other statewide programs identified by the Department of Postsecondary Education.

It is the official policy of the ACCS, including all institutions under the control of the State Board of Education, that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, disability, sex, religion, creed, national origin, or age, be excluded from participating in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program, activity, or employment. (State Board Policy 701.01: Program Policy 04-24-08)



## Process Overview

These process steps are not intended to be prescriptive but rather a model to be adapted by your institution to ensure optimum management and student opportunities.

- The student must be admitted at the institution and meet all requirements for the program in which course credit for prior learning is being sought.
- The student must make application to the institution for prior learning through the PLA Specialist.
- The PLA Specialist will guide the student through the process and will be the point of contact for all questions concerning PLA.
- Students are referred to an instructor in the area of the student's interest to recommend evaluations necessary to determine the student's level of expertise in the course(s).
- An instructor will evaluate the student's knowledge, skills, and experience in the program field to determine if the student should be considered for PLA credit.
- Upon completion of evaluations, the candidate will be informed of recommendations for award of credit or course work needed.
- All documentation of the PLA process, including evaluation results must be maintained in the student's file by the PLA specialists and other college officials as necessary.



# Responsibilities

## **PLA Specialist**

The PLA Specialist will be appointed by college administration and trained in the PLA process. The PLA Specialist is the applicant's advocate during assessment and will relay any requests and/or instructions from the evaluator(s). Their responsibilities include:

1. Orient the applicant to the requirements and processes for PLA and completion of the application.
2. Keep student informed of progress and apprise them of the results.
3. Coordinate with evaluators for all necessary assessments.
4. Ensure that timely reporting to applicant is maintained.
5. Maintain PLA documentation and statistics for reporting purposes.

## **Student**

1. Meeting with the PLA Specialist.
2. Completing the PLA application.
3. Providing any documentation that supports application for PLA.
4. Taking all knowledge and skill evaluations required.
5. Paying any associated fees.

## **Evaluators**

1. Determines student's knowledge and skills and recommend any required written and/or skill evaluations.
3. Administers relevant evaluations and recommends course credit based upon the student's evaluations.
3. Forwards relevant documentation to PLA Specialist for further processing.

# Appendix A

## Suggested Forms



# Prior Learning Assessment Candidate Application

We recognize that learning occurs in a variety of ways such as: employment, training, and other experiences. You may be eligible for college credit for your prior learning so please fill out this form to begin the process and see how much college credit you may have already earned.

When you have completed this application, submit it to the PLA Specialist for processing.

**NOTE:** Alabama State Board Policy 706.01 states, "Not more than 25 percent of total credit required for any program may be awarded through nontraditional means."

<b>Student's Name:</b>	_____	<b>Date</b>	_____
<b>Student Number:</b>	_____		
<b>Address</b>	_____	<b>Phone #</b>	_____
	_____	<b>Email</b>	_____

High School or GED completion - Yes  No       Veteran - Yes  No

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Applicant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



# Prior Learning Assessment Applicant's Knowledge Testing Schedule

**Student's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Student Number:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Evaluator:** Enter recommended knowledge assessments for the PLA candidate and forward to the PLA specialist.

Recommended Test(s)

Check here if application for PLA credit not recommended at this time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Evaluator's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date





# Prior Learning Assessment Recommendations

**Student's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Student Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Evaluator:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Evaluator:** Please attached copies of all evaluation documentation and return to the PLA specialist.

**NOTE:** Total hours recommended for PLA credit cannot exceed 25% of the total number of credits required for an award. (Board policy 706.01)

Course Number and Title:	Credit Hours

Check here if application for PLA credit not recommended.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Department Chair's Signature Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Instructional Officer's Signature Date

# Appendix B

State Board Policy 706.01

## State Board Policy 706.01: Credit Awarded Through Non-Traditional Means: General

1. College credit may be awarded through nontraditional means (i.e., credit awarded for prior learning from which the skills that comprise courses – terminal objectives – are mastered to an acceptable degree of proficiency).
2. Credit awarded through nontraditional means for academic transfer courses may be awarded by examination, nationally recognized guidelines (AP, CLEP, ACT/PEP, DANTES, Challenge Exams, ACE PONSI/CREDIT, ACE/MILITARY) or through other statewide programs identified by the Department.
3. All System colleges will accept for credit a score of 3 or higher on Advanced Placement subject examinations.
4. Credit awarded through nontraditional means for non-academic transfer courses may be awarded through portfolio review by a prior learning assessment specialist at the college, through statewide articulation agreement for career and technical students or other statewide programs identified by the Department.
5. Not more than 25 percent of total credit required for any program may be awarded through nontraditional means. Credit awarded through nontraditional means is not applicable toward the minimum of 25 percent of semester credit hours that must be completed at the institution granting the degree as referenced in State Board of Education Policy 715.01.
6. Nontraditional credit is not applicable for the 25 percent semester credit hours that must be completed at the institution granting the degree.
7. Guidelines for implementation of this policy shall be established by the Chancellor.

# Appendix C

## Guidelines for State Board Policy 706.01

# GUIDELINES FOR POLICY 706.01: CREDIT AWARDED THROUGH NON- TRADITIONAL MEANS: GENERAL

## 1. General

- A. The Alabama Community College System recognizes that learning occurs in a variety of ways. Individuals can develop mastery of course competencies through employment, training, and other experiences, which is termed “prior learning.” Credit can be awarded for prior learning from which the skills that comprise courses (terminal objectives) are mastered to an acceptable degree of proficiency and the individual documents skill mastery.
- B. Each institution shall publish in its catalog, website, and other appropriate sites the procedures for students to earn credit for prior learning. Institutions shall have detailed policies and procedures for prior learning assessment (PLA) and the awarding of credit for prior learning, and shall communicate these procedures in appropriate institution publications. Institutions shall regularly monitor, evaluate, and, if necessary, revise prior learning assessment activities in response to changes in the needs of individuals and in the state of assessment. Each institution shall submit its policies, procedures, and other applicable materials (e.g., forms, applications for PLA) to a committee appointed by the Chancellor for review and approval. At a minimum, these procedures should include a listing of the types of documentation acceptable to the institution, the dates of inclusion for which prior learning will be acceptable, and the name and phone number of the PLA specialist.
- C. These guidelines are not applicable to secondary/postsecondary articulation agreements or dual enrollment.

## 2. Awarding Credit Through Prior Learning Assessment

- A. Credit for prior learning can be awarded only after the assessment of prior learning experiences and only for documented learning that demonstrates achievement of all terminal objectives for a specific course or courses. A portfolio should be developed for this process. (See Appendix A for Guidelines for Assessing Portfolios for Evidences of Experiential Learning.)
- B. Course credit earned through prior learning shall be noted on the student’s transcript as having been awarded through PLA.

- C. Credit for academic transfer courses awarded through PLA may only be awarded by examination or nationally recognized guidelines (AP, CLEP, ACT/PEP, DANTEs, Challenge Exams, ACE PONSI/CREDIT, ACE/MILITARY). Credit (April 2008) for experiential learning (portfolio review) may not be awarded for academic transfer courses.
  - D. In the process of determining if credit can be awarded for prior learning, institutions shall charge students only for the cost of the PLA services and not for the amount of credit awarded.
  - E. There shall be a charge of \$25 for each portfolio review to assess experiential learning for credit. Documentation must be provided for each course for which credit through experiential learning is requested, and the \$25 fee applies to each review of the documentation (e.g., individual is charged \$50 if the person is seeking credit through experiential learning for two courses, and thereby requires portfolio reviews in relation to those two courses). Students seeking credit for academic transfer courses through examination or nationally recognized guidelines are not charged a fee for PLA or for credits awarded through PLA.
  - F. Not more than 25 percent of total credit required for any program may be awarded as a result of PLA. Credit awarded through PLA does not count toward the minimum of 25 percent of semester credit hours that must be completed at the institution granting the degree as referenced in State Board of Education policy 715.01.
  - G. Before receiving credit through PLA for a course, an individual must meet enrollment requirements of the course. This enrollment requirement is waived only for prerequisites for which a student is also seeking credit, if, in fact, that credit is being awarded.
  - H. Credit may not be awarded twice for the same learning.
3. Procedures for Prior Learning Assessment
- A. The student must enroll at the institution and meet all admission requirements for the program in which course credit for prior learning is being sought.
  - B. The student must make application to the institution for prior learning assessment and credit for experiential learning.
  - C. At least one person from each institution shall be trained in the standards, principles, and procedures of PLA (institution PLA contact). This person must successfully complete PLA training provided by the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education. This person shall provide related

training and technical assistance to other institution personnel having PLA responsibilities.

- D. In the portfolio assessment process, an instructor of a course for which credit for experiential learning is being sought shall evaluate the student's work and training experiences in the program field and determine if the student should be (April 2008) considered for PLA. Evidence of experiential learning may include certifications, licensures, and examples or demonstrations of skills possessed. If the student is deemed a candidate for PLA, the instructor shall recommend the student to the institution PLA contact (or conduct the PLA if the instructor is trained to do so) and specify the course(s) for which the student may be eligible to receive credit for experiential learning.
- E. Portfolio assessment by itself may be used for PLA only when the following methods cannot be used: course challenge exams, College Level Examination Program (CLEP), American College Testing Proficiency Examination Program (ACT/PEP), Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Support (DANTES), American Council on Education's Program on Noncollegiate Sponsored Instruction (ACE/PONSI), College Board Advanced Placement (AP) Program, American Council on Education College Credit Recommendation Services (ACE/CREDIT), or American Council on Education Military Program (ACE/ MILITARY).

APPENDIX A of Board Policy Guidelines

**GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSING PORTFOLIOS**  
**FOR**  
**EVIDENCE OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING**

1. A portfolio is a detailed summary of an individual's experiences applicable to college-level learning. The portfolio includes a description of experiences and the skills learned from these experiences. The portfolio includes a brief life history, statement of individual's career goals, description of experiences (work and non-work related) and related learning matched to courses for which credit is being sought, and any supporting documentation (e.g., licensures, certifications, continuing education units, training records, employer statements).
2. Faculty in the applicable program will assist the institution PLA contact in evaluating a portfolio for college equivalent learning and recommend the awarding of appropriate college credit based on demonstrated competencies. The faculty evaluator recommends the appropriate course to be credited and number of credit hours that will appear on the student's transcript.
3. Portfolios/records shall become a permanent part of the student's record.