

## Prior Learning Assessments

### Policies and Procedures

For many adults, getting a jump on earning college credit is critical to pursuing and completing a degree. Many adults with years of work experience can earn academic credit for the knowledge gained from some of those experiences. Through a process called Prior Learning Assessment (or PLA), potential students can pursue many opportunities outside the traditional or online classroom to earn college credit and to accelerate their time to degree completion.

PLA is the process of earning credit for college level learning acquired through work, training, volunteering, or personal experiences. It offers students the opportunity to earn college credit for knowledge and skills attained through educational or prior learning experiences.

The information that follows (as well as the links provided) offers descriptions of the types of PLA opportunities that are available through Northeastern State University's College of Extended Learning (or CEL). All requests for PLA must have the approval of the dean of the CEL.

1. College Level Examination Program (CLEP) Tests
2. College Course Departmental Exams
3. DANTES Subject Standard Tests (DSST)
4. American Council on Education (ACE) College Credit Recommendation Service (CREDIT)
5. Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training (CLEET)
6. Portfolio Assessments

#### **1. College Level Examination Program (CLEP) Tests**

The College Level Examination Program, or CLEP, is administered by the College Board and is the most widely accepted credit by testing program in the U.S. CLEP tests are administered in a testing center. Successful scores on a CLEP exam can be converted to credits in specific courses at many colleges and universities, including NSU. The link provided will take you to the CLEP site where you can review information about the tests and fees, register for an exam, and review credit policies relating to the program please visit <http://clep.collegeboard.org>.

#### **2. College Course Departmental Exams**

Some colleges and universities may allow a prior learning assessment candidate to test out or challenge a particular course based upon their prior academic or work experience. These course examinations vary greatly from college to college because each academic department decides which courses will have a challenge exam. The cost (fees for the test, generally less than the cost of the course, are charged for each examination) and the opportunity to take course challenge examinations may not be available at all colleges. While some may grant credit for passing an examination, many will simply waive a particular

course requirement or allow a person to begin study at a higher level. Contact the dean for the CEL regarding the availability of challenge examinations at NSU.

### **3. DANTES Subject Standard Tests (DSST)**

For years, military servicemen and women have been able to obtain college credit through DANTES for their military training. DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSST) were originally developed for the military, but are now available to all students. Testing subject areas include Business, Math, Physical Science, Humanities, Social Science, and Applied Technology. Follow the link provided for more information about these test programs. [www.getcollegecredit.com](http://www.getcollegecredit.com)

### **4. American Council on Education (ACE) College Credit Recommendation Service (CREDIT)**

The American Council on Education's CREDIT program assists adults in securing credit for learning activities outside the traditional college and university. The program reviews examinations and training offered by business, labor unions, professional organizations, schools, and government agencies and assesses the equivalent credit that an individual might earn for those experiences. [www.acenet.edu](http://www.acenet.edu)

### **5. Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training (CLEET)**

The principal mandates of CLEET include providing basic peace officer certification; ensuring that all certified officers in the city, county and state levels have access to annual continuing education; maintaining a healthy number of reserve peace officers; and taking care of licensing of people working in the state's private security industry. Please inquire with CEL dean regarding transfer of CLEET credits into the chosen degree program. [www.ok.gov/cleet](http://www.ok.gov/cleet)

### **6. Prior Learning Experience through Portfolio Assessment**

The College of Extended Learning has developed a portfolio assessment model for NSU, which utilizes the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) Ten Standards for Assessing Learning. Portfolio assessment requires the applicant to document one's knowledge and learning experiences through a college--defined portfolio process. Students selecting the portfolio assessment method of prior learning assessment will conduct a thorough review of their previous experience and document the college--level learning through a portfolio and have it assessed for college credit. Students will be required to submit separate portfolios for each course they are having assessed, as well as pay the application fee for each portfolio submitted.

College--level learning means the credits are not granted for life experiences but rather for the knowledge and learning the student has attained and can demonstrate for those prior learning experiences. [www.cael.org](http://www.cael.org)

## General Information about the Portfolio Assessment

Portfolio Assessment credit, often referred to as extracurricular credit, is credit earned through assessment of prior learning and will only be placed on the permanent record after it is validated by the successful completion of twelve or more semester hours of academic work at NSU. Credit earned by portfolio assessment is designated on the transcript by a “P” for passing. Extracurricular credit through assessment of prior learning is not considered residence work nor will it count toward financial aid eligibility.

### Portfolio Defined

A portfolio is a formal written communication presented by the student to the dean of the College of Extended Learning at NSU requesting credit for learning outside college classes. The portfolio is to demonstrate the student holds the knowledge and/or training otherwise intended to be learned in a particular class. The portfolio must be designed to clearly identify knowledge and/or training as well as provide sufficient supporting information and documentation so the faculty and designee experts can evaluate the knowledge.

In addition to the use of the portfolio to document knowledge appropriate for college credit, it can be used as a valuable tool to demonstrate knowledge for professional positions or further educational opportunities. **College credit is awarded for the LEARNING documented in the portfolio, not for the EXPERIENCE represented.**

### Portfolio Credit

Adults learn constantly with many returning adult students having developed some type of college level learning away from the traditional classroom on the job, in relationships, through reading, travel, hobbies, and prior learning events. Adults who want the college to grant them credit for courses for college level learning still have to find a way to document what they know in order to get the necessary college credit. **A maximum of 12 credit hours (pending degree) are accepted through the CEL prior learning assessment program.**

### Costs of Portfolio Assessment

A non-refundable \$100.00 application fee is charged for each portfolio application submitted. For example, a student requesting credit for four courses (or 12 credit hours) must pay \$400.00 and submit four separate portfolios. The application fee(s) must be paid in full to the NSU Office of Business Affairs with proof of receipt prior to submission of portfolio.

### Portfolio Assessment Appeals

NSU’s College of Extended Learning may not accept appeals regarding final interpretation in granting of portfolio credit.

### **Preparation of a Portfolio**

For each course to be assessed, the student applicant must provide a cover page that includes the following information:

1. Course title and description from the Northeastern State University catalog, the number of credits, and the date of the catalog publication.
2. A typed essay based upon the course objectives which describes the experience, evidence and rationale used as the basis for documenting the student's learning of the applicable course material.
3. A list of the items of evidence presented by the student to document his/her learning.
4. Attach applicable items of evidence.

The student applicant must be very specific in selecting items documenting the learning indicated in the course description. It is suggested the student applicant obtain a course syllabus from the NSU website or the CEL office to examine the class objectives and activities used to obtain the knowledge. While the methods of the College of Extended Learning students obtaining the knowledge may be different than those designed for a traditional class, reading the syllabus may be useful in stimulating understanding of the intention of the course description and planning the portfolio contents.

### **Essay Purpose and Format**

The PLA essay's purpose is to demonstrate the student's learning compared to the requirement of a three-credit college course. The essay must clearly document the student has achieved college level learning comparable to a specific college course. Students requesting credit for a three-hour course should prepare an essay that is three to five pages in length, double-spaced. It is recommended the student utilize the word count feature in Microsoft Word (or similar programs) – aiming for a minimum of 1,500 words (not including the course description, documents, extensive quotation, or embedded examples), and that they use a 12-point font such as Times or Garamond. Not all PLA essays will have references, but if references are included, students must follow American Psychological Association (APA) style.

### **Items of Evidence for Portfolio**

Items of evidence should be completely personalized based on each student's prior experiences and learning. However, a list of suggestions follows to help in planning the portfolio. Note that each student will select items appropriate for his/her personal documentation of learning; all the items listed below are not required for every portfolio, even though just one item will not be sufficient documentation.

**ALL PORTFOLIOS WILL BE INDIVIDUALIZED BASED ON EACH STUDENT'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCES.**

Items that may be included:

1. Detailed and expanded resume with a thorough description of duties, responsibilities and time spent in each position, as well as specific learning (knowledge, skills, and dispositions) that occurred during employment.
2. Letter of documentation from applicable supervisor. This letter should be very specific matching work experience with learning concepts from the course.
3. Certificates of training programs.
4. Credentials of trainers sponsoring training programs.
5. Licensure or professional certification held.
6. Video or CD clips of performance.
7. Documents or other items produced by the student. These may include manuals, presentation outlines, presentations, memos, marketing pieces, examples of development and organization and other written items.
8. Transcripts of previous educational work.

**Steps in Portfolio Preparation**

1. Meet with the CEL dean to discuss the intention to prepare a portfolio. At this meeting, a plan and timeline will be developed and clarified for portfolio content. The student may be referred to a syllabus or a faculty member at this point.
2. Prepare the portfolio. Items of evidence must be placed in one of these formats (or a combination thereof): folder, notebook, flash drive or CD. Original items, such as certificates, diplomas, or signed endorsements must be presented for verification. Originals will be returned. The portfolio should be complete but succinct. Volume will not be considered in assessment.
3. Submit the portfolio to the dean for the College of Extended Learning.
4. The portfolio will be assessed utilizing rubric methodology by the CEL dean and a minimum of two faculty members from the specified department. An independent subject--- matter expert may be utilized as well.
5. Additional information may be requested of the student during the review process.
6. A period of three weeks is anticipated for a complete portfolio process review.

**College of Extended Learning**

**Rubric for Prior Learning Assessment Portfolio Submissions**

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Assessor: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (print)

Assessor: \_\_\_\_\_ Pass: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (sign)

Course Title and Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Course Description: \_\_\_\_\_

**Criteria for Satisfactory grade of Pass:** Candidates must score at the minimum level of “satisfactory” in each element of the rubric.

Item	Target	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
<b>SOURCES OF LEARNING (EXPERIENCES)</b>			
<b>Documentation and description of experiences as a basis for PLA portfolio submission as presented in essay.</b>	Essay succinctly narrates and describes the significance of the candidate’s relevant learning experiences and establishes the candidate as qualified to write on the subject.	Essay identifies specific learning experiences to establish a connection between the candidate’s learning and course content. Details regarding the dates, locations, and context of these experiences are included and are supported in the accompanying documentation.	Essay is vague and includes only a description of experiences without establishing a connection between the candidates learning and the course content. Details regarding the dates, locations, and context of these experiences are omitted or not supported in the accompanying documentation.
<b>EVIDENCE OF LEARNING (COMPETENCIES)</b>			
<b>Evidence (overall)</b>	Evidence provided demonstrates the candidate has met the course learning outcomes at a mastery level through prior learning.	Evidence provided demonstrates the candidate has met the course learning outcomes at an acceptable proficiency level through prior learning.	Evidence provided shows exposure to content but does <u>not</u> make the case that the writer has met course learning outcomes through prior learning.

<p><b>Evidence aligned with specific learning outcomes</b></p>	<p>Candidate evidence of each learning outcome listed in the course description and course syllabus is demonstrated through more than one artifact or multiple means.</p>	<p>Candidate provides adequate and appropriate evidence of each learning outcome listed in the course description and course syllabus.</p>	<p>Candidate evidence is not clearly aligned with specific learning outcomes or evidence lacks performance elements and merely highlights time spent with activities or exposure to concepts with no performance evidence.</p>
<p><b>QUALITY OF PRESENTATION OF SUBMISSION</b></p>			
<p><b>Essay</b></p>	<p>The essay demonstrates the candidate’s mastery and proficiency in learning comparable to the applicable college course.</p>	<p>The essay demonstrates the candidate’s learning comparable to the applicable college course.</p>	<p>The essay does not demonstrate the candidate’s learning comparable to the applicable college course.</p>
<p><b>Writing Traits/                  Presentation Organization;                  Grammar/Mechanics;                  Formatting; Source                  Integration</b></p>	<p>Entire submission is coherent and fluid in its presentation and adheres to college---level expectations as demonstrated by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• being generally free of errors <u>and</u></li> <li>• formatting reflects professional writing <u>and</u></li> <li>• giving credit to resources used in developing evidence (where applicable) <u>and</u></li> <li>• professionally organized, presented</li> </ul>	<p>Entire submission is coherent in its presentation and adheres to college---level expectations as demonstrated by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• errors that do not compromise the comprehension of the response <u>and</u></li> <li>• formatting appropriate with minor errors <u>and</u></li> <li>• giving credit to resources used in developing evidence (where applicable) <u>and</u></li> <li>• professionally organized, presented</li> </ul>	<p>Some or all of the submission lacks coherence and fails to meet college---level expectations as demonstrated by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• serious, persistent errors that compromise the comprehension of the response <u>or</u></li> <li>• formatting not professional <u>or</u></li> <li>• not giving credit resources used in developing evidence (where applicable) <u>or</u></li> <li>• lacking organization</li> </ul>

## College of Extended Learning

### Notice of Portfolio Credit

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

The above student has provided all necessary documentation reflecting her/his mastery of the following course:

Course Number \_\_\_\_\_

Course Title \_\_\_\_\_

Credit Hours \_\_\_\_\_

Reviewed by:

Faculty Member \_\_\_\_\_

Faculty Member \_\_\_\_\_

Resident Expert \_\_\_\_\_

College dean \_\_\_\_\_

Department Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Dean CEL \_\_\_\_\_