



ON EARNING ACADEMIC CREDIT FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Understanding the Terms

In order to begin the process of evaluating prior learning experiences, you should first understand the following terms:

Prior Experiential Learning: is any prior learning experience that was not part of a college or university course and does not--in or of itself--carry academic degree credit. Learning can take place in a variety of settings including, but not limited to, the following:

- On-the-job training
- Military training
- Volunteer work
- Conventions and conferences
- Continuing education courses
- Teaching
- Hobbies and recreational activities
- Community/religious service
- Travel
- Seminars and workshops
- Training programs or in-service courses
- Independent research
- Awards, publications, or memberships

Experiential Learning Credit: is credit (semester units/hours) awarded based on learning gained through work or life experiences. An institution can only award credit based on how well students demonstrate what they have learned through their experiences.

Portfolio Assessment: is the way students verify that they have learned or developed knowledge through their experiences. Students must demonstrate how their learning experiences are equal to those earned by classwork at a "traditional" residential college or university.

How Credit is Awarded

A collegiate institution cannot award credit for life or work experience. Credit awarded for experiential learning is based on the depth and quality of "learning" that is derived from the life or work experience.

Credit is awarded based on measurable learning outcomes. Students must demonstrate: a) that they have acquired specific knowledge or skills; b) how they acquired the knowledge or skills; c) how the knowledge or skills can be viewed as equivalent to those gained in a college-level course. By offering proof that the knowledge or skills were acquired they become eligible to earn academic

credit.

Portfolio Assessment

As students develop their portfolios, they begin a journey of self-exploration and self-acknowledgment. They will better understand how and what they have learned through their experiences. Their portfolios will become instruments that they can also use in job interviews and performance evaluations.

The portfolio must convince faculty members that their learning experiences resulted in college-level learning. The more documentation they provide, the more research they undertake, the more they revise and review what they've written, the better the likelihood they will convince faculty that they deserve experiential learning credit.

How Portfolio Assessment Works

First, a student should choose an area in which he or she has acquired college-level knowledge and skills. For each area, the student must find a course description from a well-known resource such as:

- a catalog from an institution accredited by a recognized accrediting agency
- American Council on Education (ACE) Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experience in the Armed Services: www.militaryguides.acenet.edu
- American Council on Education (ACE) National Guide to Educational Credit for Training Programs: www2.acenet.edu/credit

The description needs to match the acquired knowledge and skills. The student should submit a portfolio for each area in which credit is sought. Since most courses are awarded three semester credits, a student will probably earn three semester credits for each portfolio submitted.

How Much Credit Can Be Awarded?

Perelandra College requires 120 total semester credits for the Bachelor of Arts degree, 30 of which must be completed "in residence" at Perelandra College.

The Master of Arts degree requires 36 total semester credits for the Master of Arts degree, 27 of which must be completed in residence.

The maximum allowable for experiential learning is one fourth of the degree total, or 30 for the BA, 9 for the MA.

Duplication of Credit

A student should not submit a portfolio that duplicates course work previously completed.

Transferring Experiential Learning Credit

Experiential learning credit may or may not transfer to satisfy course requirements at other institutions. When transferred, it is usually applied toward a student's elective requirements. Most institutions prefer to award similar types of credit using their own procedures. Any experiential

learning credit that a student receives will appear on the official college transcript and will show that a degree requirement has been met. The credit will be marked as credit for "Portfolio Assessment" and will specify the content area. Letter grades are not assigned to experiential learning credits. A student will receive a "CR," which stands for "credit," and the number of semester credits earned. If a student does not receive credit upon submission of a portfolio, no entry will be noted on the official college transcript.

The Evaluation Process

Step One: Student Submits a Portfolio for Assessment

A student must submit a portfolio for each subject in which credit is requested. An advisor will check to see if all the necessary forms submitted are complete and that the content of a student's portfolio is clear and understandable. If the portfolio is lacking any supporting documentation, the advisor will inform the student of what remains needed.

Step Two: Portfolio is Reviewed by a Faculty Member

If the application is complete, the advisor will forward the portfolio to a faculty member with expertise in the subject area. The faculty member will check to see that the student has:

- submitted a clear and organized portfolio;
- submitted all of the required documents;
- demonstrated a balance between theory and practice;
- based the substance of the portfolio on measurable learning outcomes; and
- demonstrated that the learning achieved reflects college level learning and writing skills.

Step Three: Faculty Awards or Denies Credit

After reviewing all the documentation and the entire portfolio as measured against the above criteria, the faculty member will award or deny credit. Students are given copies of the evaluation forms with the faculty member's comments. Because submitted portfolios become the property of the institution, students should make copies of all documents before submitting.

Students may appeal credit denial in writing, stating their reasons for appealing, within 30 days. A committee reviews the appeals and makes a final decision on disputes regarding the awarding of credit.

Writing a Portfolio

Students should be encouraged to enhance their portfolio by giving it a personal flavor. Not only should it be grammatically correct, it should also show the student's personality and knowledge in the field.

The following elements should be included:

- Cover Sheet
- Application
- Letter of Purpose
- Copies of College Transcripts

- Table of Contents
- Life History
- Chronological Time-Line
- Career and Life Goals Statement
- Competency Statement

The portfolio must be typewritten, doubled-spaced, numbered sequentially, and submitted in duplicate. Each of the above sections should be clearly identified. They should contain only information and evidence specifically related to proving the acquisition of learning.

Although students may use the following as a guide, they should elaborate and design their presentations in any way they choose.

- **Cover Sheet:** The cover sheet includes the basic personal information. If a student is submitting more than one portfolio, this should be noted on the cover sheet.
- **Application:** The Experiential Learning Application for Portfolio Assessment includes the student's name, social security number, address, phone numbers, and date.
- **Letter of Purpose:** This is a cover letter, which introduces the student to the evaluator and states what he/she is requesting for credit. This letter should be brief and to-the-point.
- **College Transcripts:** Students should include unofficial copies of transcripts from all previously attended institutions. This gives the evaluator an idea about the types of courses that the student has taken and in what areas he or she has knowledge. The evaluator may not have access to the student's file. Since the evaluator needs to have a complete picture of the student's past experiences, copies of academic transcripts are helpful.
- **Table of Contents:** The inclusion of an accurate "Table of Contents" assures that the evaluator can quickly find and review the material.
- **Life History:** This is a written narrative about three different areas of a student's life: personal, career, and education. This narrative, which may be written in free-form style, should show how the student's thought processes and learning have developed.
- **Career and Life Goals Statement:** This personal statement will describe a student's career, personal, and educational goals. This statement shows the evaluators how students specifically intend to continue their learning and reach their goals. They may describe goals that they have set in the past, include information on how they achieved these goals, and mention their goals for the future. The statement should be written as an essay that includes an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.
- **Competency Statement:** This involves several parts:
 1. **Selection of a Course Description:** Course descriptions can be found in any regionally or nationally accredited college or university catalog, the institution's catalog, or in the ACE Guides. The description should be for a course currently taught and for which credit is given. For every course objective listed in the course description, a student needs to show how he or she has met this objective through documented learning experiences. A student may choose a course description that matches a core requirement in the degree program, or one that covers an area not

currently being offered by Perelandra College. However, the area must still be related to the degree program. In this case, the credits a student earns will apply to elective requirements.

Students should choose a course description of a course at the level for which they are trying to earn credit. Within the “Competency Statement” section, students should include photocopies of the course descriptions and the cover of the catalogs from which the descriptions were found. Photocopies must show: 1) Catalog year(s); (2) School name/Agency name; and (3) Course description as it appears in the catalog.

2. Learning Background: In this section, the student explains how and where learning experiences were obtained. The student must convince the evaluator that experiences led to measurable learning outcomes. The student may use a “Life-Line” to show at what point in his or her development important learning took place and to detail what accomplishments derived from the learning.

3. Learning Outcomes: In this section, students relate their learning to the specific description they have chosen. Because many course descriptions are shortened versions of the course objectives, it may help if students obtain and use the course syllabus and cite the objectives listed in the syllabus as their learning outcomes, if those objectives accurately reflects their experience.

When developing learning outcomes, keep in mind that the statements must:

- persuade an evaluator that the student has accomplished specific learning outcomes;
- clearly show what the student can do and what the student knows;
- demonstrate a balance between theory (knowledge) and practice (skills acquired); and
- show that they have gained knowledge that can be applied to specific situations.

4. Evidence: After the “Learning Outcomes” section of the Competency Statement, students will provide the documentation that supports their prior experiential learning. A good rule of thumb is to provide documentation for each learning outcome. The documentation should confirm learning, not merely experience. The following are sample items used to document prior experiential learning:

- awards, letters of commendation
- book lists/materials read
- completed class assignments
- course description or outline
- course transcripts
- description of requirements for licensure/certification
- evidence of completion
- explanation of tasks performed
- explanation of ranking or classification
- job descriptions
- licenses/diplomas
- membership requirements for professional organizations
- membership in professional organizations
- military separation papers
- military records
- notes taken in class
- performance evaluations

- performance standards for acquiring licenses
- publications
- scores on licensing exams
- syllabi
- third-party verification letters
- verification of enrollment letter
- work projects (proposals, reports, schematics)

Copies of diplomas, licenses, certification or registrations should be notarized as a “true copy of the original.” All of the evidence should be clearly identified to show which learning outcome is documented.

Third Party Verification Letters

The best proofs of learning outcomes are third-party verification letters written by immediate supervisors, past employers, work associates, community leaders, or other individuals with firsthand knowledge of a student’s abilities and his/her learning experiences.

Verification letters should be written on official letterhead, signed and dated. The individual should include: (1) his/her relationship to the student and length of time of relationship; (2) qualifications for verifying a student’s prior experiential learning; and (3) an identification of the student’s competencies, rather than of the types of tasks a student has completed.

Letters should be submitted for each learning outcome claimed.

Evaluating Portfolios

The faculty member chosen to evaluate a portfolio will have the appropriate credentials and/or expertise in the content field. When evaluating a portfolio, the faculty member will:

- determine if the course description adequately describes learning outcomes for the specific course cited;
- evaluate the scope of the student’s experiential learning;
- assess the process by which the student rationalizes experiential learning as being equivalent to college-level learning outcomes; and
- determine whether the evidence submitted clearly supports that learning occurred.