

We live in a world that tends to focus on one's education as their primary source of learning. The reality is that formal education is only one part of our learning and skill development. Simply put, it's learning and knowledge gained while living life.

## What is PLA?

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is a term used to describe learning that a person acquires outside a traditional academic environment.

## How does PLA work?

The process involves the assessment and evaluation of an individual's experiential learning for the purpose of granting college credit, certification, or advanced standing towards further education or training.

## Why is PLA important?

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in PLA from postsecondary institutions, government officials, and the philanthropic community as a way to support higher rates of adult degree completion.

With an increased emphasis on college completion and adult learners, PLA can be a tool to help adult learners succeed and graduate.

## What are the sources of learning PLA considers?

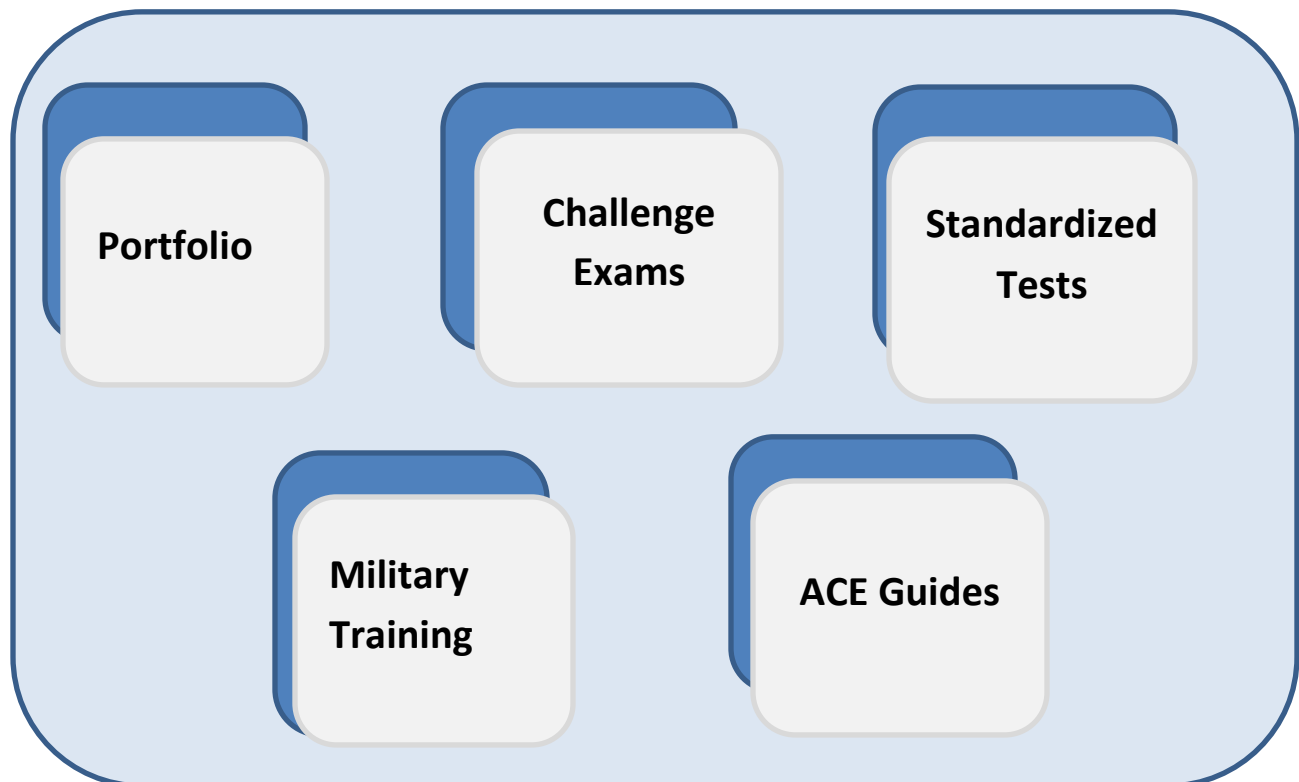


**Important skills come from our work (whether paid or volunteer), our hobbies, and all of our experiences. We are all learners and we are constantly adding to our skills and knowledge in everything we do. The challenge is to recognize this learning ourselves, and then to be able to prove to others that we have certain skills and competencies. This record of learning is then presented in a way that others can recognize and value. This is where PLA comes in.**

## What PLA Methods are used to evaluate college-level learning?

Evaluating learning and measuring it are critical steps in the PLA process. In the classroom, faculty relies on a variety of tools and procedures to assess students' learning. Measuring learning that takes place outside of the classroom also uses multiple types of assessment, which most often fall into one of four categories:

- Evaluations of non-collegiate programs
- Nationally standardized exams in specified disciplines
- Faculty-developed challenge exams for the institution's own course
- Individualized assessment like learning portfolios



## Who may benefit from PLA?

The assessment of prior learning is primarily for students who have been out of school for several years and who are entering or returning to college to earn an Associate Degree or Technical Certificate.

## What prior learning is considered college-level?

Prior learning is considered college level that is at the level of achievement equal to subject areas traditionally taught in colleges, commonly recognized among colleges, and is acquired after high school and expected for professional acceptance.

## Does GCC have a PLA policy?

Yes. Please see GCC's PLA Guidelines for more details.

## What categories can PLA be awarded?

There are two broad categories:



Credit by Exam



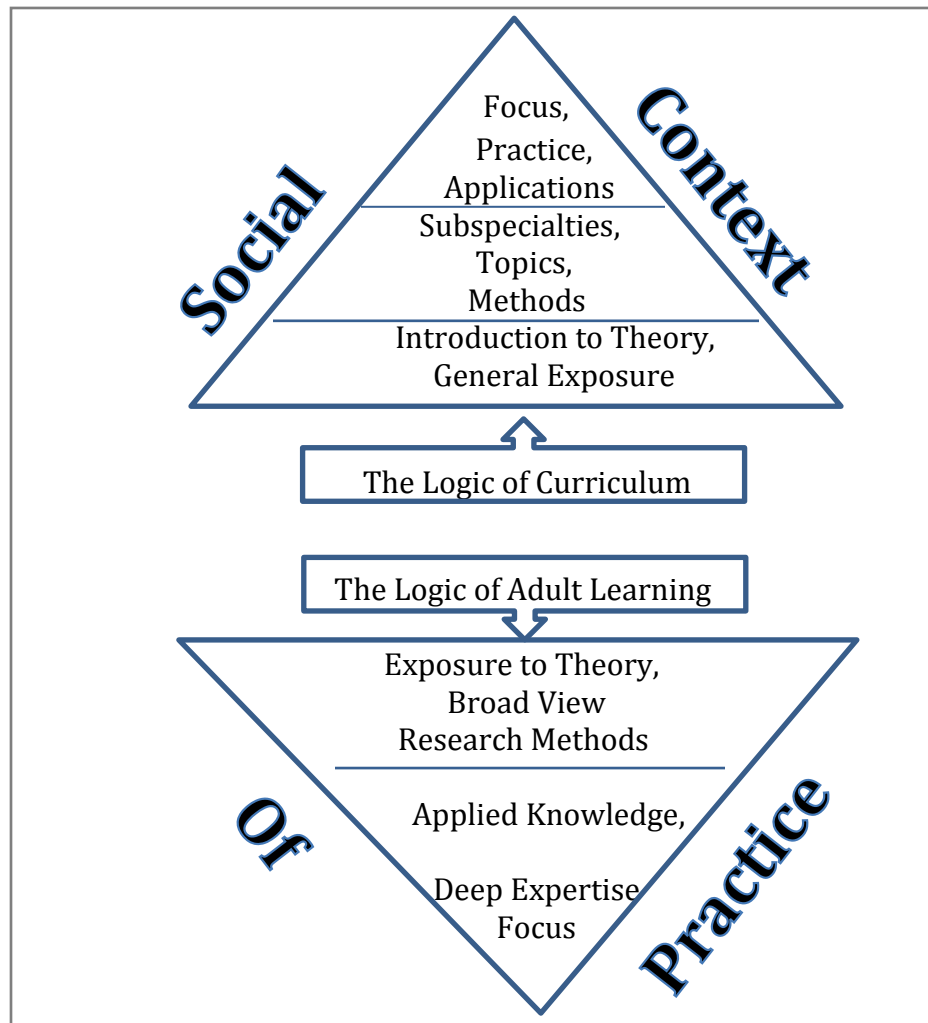
Portfolio Assessment

## What is the link between the theory of experiential learning and prior learning assessment?

A number of perspectives provide the link between theories of experiential learning and the assessment of students' prior learning for college credit:

- Adults are actively engaged in learning in many venues in their lives.
- Adults bring that learning with them when they enter a higher education institution
- Some learning that takes place outside of educational institutions can be recognized as college level though it is not organized in the same way.
- Students have a right to get credit for college-level learning no matter where that learning was acquired.
- All of that knowledge brings value to the institution by broadening the base of human knowledge and bringing more voices and perspectives into dialogue.

The challenge in acknowledging the rich experience base of students as the starting point for learning is that higher education is organized with a different starting point in mind. Most college courses are designed to first introduce concepts and principles associated with a discipline and then lead to the application of course content in experience after mastery of the concept and content. College level is often designed "from theory to practice" while life learning often occurs "from practice to theory".



## What opportunities does PLA provide for students?



To document prior learning



To get college credit



To finish a degree



To increase career potential



To change careers

## When is PLA credit awarded?

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 identified learning outcomes for a specific course or courses.

## What is the eligibility for PLA?

To be eligible to petition for PLA, the student must be currently enrolled and in good-standing at GCC or be eligible for re-admission to the college.

## Is there an assessment fee for PLA?

Yes. An Assessment Fee is charged upon submission of the PLA Request Form to the office of the Registrar. A student's documentation, whether examination scores or portfolio will be assessed once the fee is paid.

## What are the Assessment Fees associated to PLA?

PLA fees cover are for administrative and assessment costs incurred by the college and are not for "purchase of credit". The fees are non-refundable if any petition for credit is denied. The fees are:

20%

- Per Assessment Request

\$25

- Prevailing Resident Tuition Rate

\$75

- Per Paper or Computer-Based Exam

\$100

Per Practical Exam