

STANDARDS IN CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING



Introduction

The purpose of these standards is to outline the terms and conditions under which Guam Community College will award and/or transfer credits toward a degree or certificate based on Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), and to provide consistent and accessible methods for students to earn these credits. These terms and conditions apply to the entire institution, including all departments and colleges. Exceptions, considered on a case by case basis, must be approved by the Academic Vice President.

PLA is a term used to describe the assessment of college level learning for college credit that is gained outside a traditional academic environment. There are many different forms that PLA can take, but college credit for PLA must only be awarded for an individual's demonstrated learning and knowledge at the college level.

Since 1992, Guam Community College has recognized prior learning as a legitimate means of earning college level credit for college level learning towards a degree or certificate as stated in the college catalog. In November 2013, a small team from GCC attended the Council on Adult Experiential Learning (CAEL) International Conference to learn more about PLA and how to improve GCC's use of prior learning for student success. The result is this document as well as a policy that defines and directs GCC in the application of PLA at the college.

Prior Learning Assessment Value Statement

Guam Community College values the diversity of its students. This diversity includes the unique experiences, interests, and intellectual pursuits that lead to the acquisition of knowledge that may be at the college level. College-level learning is the same, whether acquired in the traditional college classroom or through non-collegiate sources. This equivalency is validated by academically sound and rigorous prior learning assessment methods.

Guam Community College employs prior learning assessment aligned with its institutional mission, academic integrity, and student educational attainment and success.

The acceptance of PLA credits must be in accordance with the standards detailed in this document. PLA credits awarded by GCC are equivalent to the same credits awarded by GCC for traditional classroom-based college-level learning.

Further, it is intended that the PLA Value Statement is in keeping with GCC's institutional mission; therefore, the standards in this document provide guidelines for the transcription and transfer of PLA credit at GCC.

The use or non-use of PLA credits by an institution or department must be consistent with this value statement and, in accordance with the standards of the Association of Community Colleges and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), adhere to principles of good educational practice. The identification of the forms of PLA credit used by GCC will be documented and available to students, faculty, and other stakeholders through publications that accurately represent the programs and services of the institution. GCC will also maintain documentation of the processes and rationale for the use or non-use of PLA credits.

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Definitions and Accepted Forms of PLA

The list below is provided for convenience and to avoid conflicting definitions for PLA terminology. It is not intended to be exhaustive. However, all institutions must adopt the same common definitions below for their own communications, policies, and internal purposes.

- A. **Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)** – PLA is a term used to describe learning gained outside a traditional academic environment. Put another way, it is learning and knowledge students acquire while living their lives, such as by working, participating in employer training programs, serving in the military, studying independently, volunteering or doing community service, and studying open source courseware. In short, PLA is the evaluation and assessment of an individual's life learning for college credit, certification, or advanced standing toward further education or training. PLA is *not* confined to **portfolio assessment**, which is simply one type of PLA (as are CLEP tests, ACE evaluations, challenge exams, etc).
- B. **Advanced Placement (AP) Exams** – A series of tests developed by the College Board initially for AP High School courses. This is also a type of early postsecondary educational opportunity.
- C. **American Council on Education (ACE) Guides** – Published credit recommendations for formal instructional programs and examinations offered by non-collegiate agencies (including civilian employers, the military, professional associations, and other workplace related-training).
- D. **College Level Examination Program (CLEP) Exams** – Tests of college material offered by the College Board. In some circumstances, this is also a type of early postsecondary educational opportunity.
- E. **Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Educational Support (DANTES) Subject Standardized Tests (DSSTs)** – DSSTs are examinations administered by Prometric. While originally being restricted to active and retired military personnel, these tests are now available to civilians.
- F. **Evaluation of Local Training** – Program evaluations of non-collegiate instructional programs administered by individual colleges.
- G. **Excelsior College Examination Program (ECE)** – Formerly, Regents College Exams or ACT/PEP Exams, these are examinations for college credit offered by Excelsior College, NY.
- H. **Institutional Course Challenge Examination Credit** – An academic program may allow students to receive credit for a course by taking a Challenge Exam for that course. The student must contact the individual program or department to learn about the availability and cost of course challenge examinations.
- I. **International Baccalaureate Programs (IB)** – The IB Programme is an internationally accepted qualification for entry into institutes of higher education, much like the AP program. The Diploma Program is designed for students aged 16 to 19; it is a demanding two-year curriculum leading to final examinations. Graduates of the IB program must demonstrate competency in languages, social studies, the experimental sciences, and mathematics. In addition, the program has three core requirements that are included to broaden the educational experience and challenge students to apply their knowledge and understanding. To receive a diploma, students must achieve a minimum score of 24 out of a possible 45 points, as well as satisfactory participation in the creativity, action, service requirement. This is also a type of early postsecondary educational opportunity.
- J. **Locally Evaluated Industry and Workplace Credit** – Institutions may individually evaluate non-collegiate instructional programs, such as those for industry certifications, professional licensures, apprenticeships, and other local workplace trainings that demonstrate competency

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required for completion of degree or certificate programs. PLA credit can be awarded based on evaluation of the training or certification by faculty members in the student's program, based on recommendations in the *ACE Guide*, or as part of a portfolio. Not all training that can be possibly assessed for college level credit is incorporated in industry certifications, professional licensures, apprenticeships:

- a. **Apprenticeship:** Apprenticeship is a combination of on-the-job training and related instruction in which workers learn the practical and theoretical aspects of a highly skilled occupation. Apprenticeship programs can be sponsored by individual employers, joint employer and labor groups, and/or employer associations.
 - b. **Certification:** Certification is a designation earned by a person that ensures the individual is qualified to perform a task or job. Certification differs from licensure in that certification is an employment qualification and not a legal requirement for practicing a profession.
 - c. **Professional Licensure:** Professional licensure protects the public by enforcing standards that restricts practice to qualified individuals who have met specific qualifications in education, work experience, and exams. Licensure is a means by which "permission to practice" is regulated. Licensure is required by law.
- K. **Portfolio Review Credit (or portfolio assessment credit)** – A portfolio is prepared by the student to demonstrate and validate credit for learning acquired outside of the classroom and must be relevant to the student's degree program. Program faculty will use rubrics to evaluate the student portfolio, which will include documentation such as certificates of training, work samples, awards and honors, job descriptions, performance evaluations, samples of artwork, evidence of self-directed learning, and resumes. A portfolio course may be offered by the institution.
- L. **Prior Military Training Credit** – College credit for military training may be awarded through the American Council on Education (ACE) College Credit Recommendation Service or through direct evaluation of the student's service school transcripts. For ACE evaluated credit, students must request and submit to the institution an official transcript from ACE in order to receive PLA credit, and the training must be evaluated by ACE and included in the *ACE Guide*.
- M. **Thomas Edison State College Examination Program (TECEP)** – TECEP exams are tests for college credit offered by Thomas Edison State College, NJ.
- N. **Dual credit program** – "A postsecondary course, taught in a high school by certified secondary instructors, the successful completion of which prepares a secondary student to sit for a postsecondary challenge examination, administered under the supervision of postsecondary faculty or a consortium approved certified secondary instructor. The student's score on the challenge examination shall be used by a postsecondary institution for evaluation to determine the granting of postsecondary credit towards a diploma or a certificate or an associate or baccalaureate degree." This is also a type of early postsecondary educational opportunity.
- O. **Dual Enrollment** (as defined by GCC's Dual Enrollment Accelerated Learning or DEAL program) is a GCC program in which a secondary student is enrolled in a postsecondary course creditable toward high school completion and a postsecondary diploma or certificate or a certificate or associate degree at GCC.
- P. **Dual Credit** (as defined by GCC's Dual Credit Articulated Programs of Study or DCAPS program) is a GCC program wherein CTE students may receive postsecondary credit for their

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CTE coursework under specific conditions. A \$30/credit fee is proposed for evaluations of coursework in excess of 9 credits that is awarded to a student as result of the DCAPS program.

Standards for Awarding PLA Credit

A. Requirements for PLA credit to be awarded: Academic credit will be awarded only:

- a. For students who have been admitted to an institution.
- b. After the student has consulted with an advisor about the possibility and advisability of seeking credit for PLA.
- c. For students who have declared an academic program.
- d. For courses directly applicable to curriculum requirements of the declared program. Changing majors will result in a reassessment of the applicability of the PLA credit.

B. Opting out of accepting types of PLA:

- a. These standards for awarding PLA credit summarize terms and conditions through which opportunities will be provided for students to receive credit toward their college degrees. An institution can opt out of granting credit based on a particular type of PLA, except where prescribed by law. However, every institution which offers a particular type of PLA credit will follow these recommended standards.
 - i. Note: A list of some of the more commonly accepted forms of PLA are listed in Part I of this document for convenience. This list is not exhaustive, and therefore, this policy is not limited to only those forms of PLA listed. It is anticipated that new types of PLA will continue to be developed.
 - ii. Note: Additional types of PLA credit may be identified and incorporated into this policy or may be offered by individual universities and community colleges.

C. Parameters for awarding PLA:

- a. *External* - Any credits awarded for PLA, must be in accordance with the standards, practices and policies of the Guam Community College. If a program accrediting agency imposes a specific maximum for PLA credit, that maximum will be honored for that program.
- b. *Internal*
 - i. For institutions that set a maximum number of credits that can be earned through PLA (any combination), this maximum should be no more than the number of credits required for the completion of a certificate or associate degree program less the credits required by the College's residency requirement.
 - ii. No other limitations are to be placed on student eligibility for PLA credit, such as minimum age or work experience. However, institutions should adopt prudent practices for ensuring that potential PLA students are those who are most likely to be able to successfully demonstrate their prior learning.

D. How PLA credits may be used in a student's academic program: PLA credits apply toward general education requirements, technical requirements and electives that count toward the degree or certificate being sought in the same manner as traditional courses. PLA credits shall not be treated differently in their application and use than their course equivalencies or

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appropriate block credit. PLA credits also satisfy prerequisite requirements in the same manner that their course equivalencies do at that institution.

Transcription of PLA Credits

- A. **Transcription Standards:** PLA credits shall appear on student transcripts in the following ways:
- a. **Prior Learning Portfolio** – Students may demonstrate college-level knowledge of a subject that they have acquired outside a traditional college classroom (work, community service, or other experiences) through the development of a portfolio. PLA credit may be awarded through portfolio assessments:
 - i. **Course Equivalency Credit:** Prior learning which is assessed based on the documented achievement of course specific learning outcomes will be recorded as that course. Prior learning will be assessed based on a pass/fail evaluation and will be assigned a “CR.” No Quality Points will be awarded to count toward GPA.
 - b. **College Level Exam Program (CLEP)** – Students may earn college credit for certain examinations administered by the College Level Exam Program. To receive credit for a CLEP test, a minimum score (based on institutional or system policy) must be earned (see Catalog for details). CLEP credit will be recorded as course specific credit with a transfer grade of “TR”. No Quality Points will be awarded to count toward GPA. CLEP credit will be identified as transfer credit from the College Level Exam Program.
 - d. **Advanced Placement** – Course credit for successful completion of Advanced Placement examinations administered by the College Entrance Examination Board to high school students will be granted to students presenting Advanced Placement examination grades of three or higher. A letter grade of “CR” will be assigned for credit granted. No Quality Points will be awarded to count toward GPA.
 - e. **DANTES Subject Standardized Test (DSST)** – Students may earn college credit for acceptable scores on the DANTES Subject Standardized Test based on institutional or system policy. If no such policy exists and an institution accepts DSST credit, then college credit shall be awarded based upon the credit recommendations and minimum scores recommended by the American Council on Education by default. Students should submit an official DANTES transcript for review. A letter grade of “CR” will be assigned for credit granted. No Quality Points will be awarded to count toward GPA.
 - f. **Military Credit** – Credit awarded for completion of services schools will be governed by recommendations at the baccalaureate or associate level from the current Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experience in the Armed Services. Military transcripts, for example SMART or AARTS, must be presented to the Office of Admissions. Upon presentation of a copy of the veteran’s report of separation (DD Form 214), the following credit may be awarded:
 - 1. Six semester hours credit in health and physical education or physical education and military science is granted for a minimum of three years, eleven months, and twenty days of reserve or National Guard service in the armed forces of the United States. Veterans who have fewer than three years, eleven months, and twenty days will be awarded one semester hour credit for each year of reserve or National Guard duty. A letter grade of “CR” will be assigned for credit granted. No Quality Points will be awarded to count toward GPA.
 - 2. Credit will be awarded for formal service schools based on recommendation from the Office of Educational Credit of the American Council on Education after consultation with an academic advisor. All documentation supporting service-

related educational experiences should be filed with the Admissions Office. A letter grade of “CR” will be assigned for credit granted. No Quality Points will be awarded to count toward GPA.

3. Veterans with less than one year of continuous full-time service who have completed basic training while on active duty will be awarded credit as recommended in the Guide to Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services. A letter grade of “CR” will be assigned for credit granted. No Quality Points will be awarded to count toward GPA.
- g. **Occupational and Workplace Training** – Credit awarded for completion of workplace (corporate, volunteer, government, etc.) training may be awarded based on recommendations by nationally recognized college credit recommendation services or the individual evaluation and determination of a college or university. A letter grade of “CR” will be assigned for credit granted. No Quality Points will be awarded to count toward GPA.
 - h. **Institutional Course Challenge Examinations** – An institutional course challenge examination may be available to students who have knowledge of a subject area not covered by standardized exams (e.g., CLEP). Students should consult the college catalog and their academic advisor as this method of earning prior learning credit is institution-based.
 - i. **Other forms of PLA** – Students may earn college credit for additional forms of PLA not mentioned above according to institutional or system policy. A letter grade of “CR” will be assigned for credit granted. No Quality Points will be awarded to count toward GPA.

Internal Procedures for Maintaining Transparency and Consistency

- A. **Periodic review of PLA policies** –Institutions are to review PLA program policies and procedures at least every five years in alignment with the college’s accreditation cycle. The review should involve evaluating all aspects of PLA policy, procedures, and portfolio audits, for consistency with state, regional and national practices. Additionally, institutions are encouraged to report a PLA Program Profile detailing
- a. Volume of PLA credits awarded annually (per PLA subcategory and total)
 - b. Average volume of PLA credits per award
 - c. PLA recipient data including, but not limited to, a demographic summary of PLA recipients (age, race, and GPA) as well as measures of recipient success (per PLA subcategory and total).
- B. **Program transparency** – Every effort should be made to ensure that policies, electronic, and printed materials in the following areas are published and presented in a clear and transparent manner and made readily available for prospective students, current students, faculty, academic administration, potential employers of students receiving credit from assessment, and the general public:
- a. Description of Program
 - b. Catalog language
 - c. WEB pages and other social media
 - d. Program definitions
 - e. Student qualifications
 - f. Expectation on student participation
 - g. Tuition
 - h. Any and all fees or other associated costs (with a clear estimation of the costs involved for the student)
 - i. Uses of PLA credit
 - j. Limitations of PLA credit
 - k. Transferability of PLA credit
 - l. Transcription of PLA credit
 - m. Appeals procedures and related information
 - n. Assessor qualifications
 - o. Marketing materials
 - p. Advertising
 - q. Student advising
- C. **Transparency of the award/denial of PLA credit:**
- a. When a student has applied for PLA credit, the following procedures must be followed:
 - i. Portfolio: Assessor must provide reasoning for amount of credit hours awarded or a written explanation provided for evaluation of portfolio regardless of outcome.
 - ii. ACE, CLEP, and other forms of non-portfolio PLA credit: If credit is denied for a course equivalency, an explanation or justification must be made available to the student.
- D. **Appeals**
- a. Institutions are encouraged to develop and communicate a process for appealing PLA decisions (e.g., credit awarded, review process). In cases where the appeals processes mirror applicable institution procedures for appeals in traditional courses, language should be explicitly included to note that PLA credit can be appealed following the same process. i. In many cases, however, the point where a student begins his or her

appeal may not be practical when considering how PLA credit is awarded. For example, many institutions require that a student discuss the matter with his or her instructor at first. This may be impractical if the student is unaware as to who has evaluated his or her portfolio or if a student wants to appeal the course equivalency of a CLEP exam. In such cases, institutions should indicate the first steps that are unique to PLA students.

- b. Recommendations and scoring by ACE, CLEP, and other external bodies are under the auspices of the evaluation body and cannot be appealed at the college/university level. Students should be directed to the appeals procedures for each testing agency or credit recommendation service.
- c. Revision of portfolio – Students may submit revised portfolios upon recommendation of the assessor after receiving recommendations for improvement or reasons for credit denial. Institutions should decide upon their own policy for portfolio resubmission.

Portfolio-Specific Standards for Prior Learning Assessment

Portfolio assessments are a unique form of prior learning assessments. They are particularly variable in their form and complex in their procedures. Unlike other forms of PLA, it places the greatest burden on the individual institutions to develop procedures and evaluate the credit, while also making the most demands on students to demonstrate their learning. Due to these characteristics, these standards were devised specifically for this type of PLA.

A. Student eligibility and expectations for portfolio assessment

- a. Portfolio assessment applicants shall be motivated, self-directed students with significant, demonstrable, and documentable experiential learning. Institutions may also set certain course prerequisites. However, no other specific eligibility requirements shall exist, including age requirements.
- b. Portfolio assessment student applicants should be pre-screened before entering the portfolio process using an institutional or state-provided screening mechanism to ensure the students have realistic expectations about the process and the necessary skills to successfully complete the process.
- c. Students should be clearly informed of
 - i. What a portfolio is – length, work involved, documentation required
 - ii. What level of writing skills will be required
 - iii. What formal documentation will be necessary
 - iv. The number of hours required to successfully complete a portfolio
 - v. The fact that portfolio development is a self-directed activity
 - vi. The fact that a portfolio is not a resume – it must include documentation of college level learning as well as experience
 - vii. The fact that institutions may have additional requirements such as completion of specific courses or hours of instruction before students may enter the process.
 - viii. The fact that limitations may exist on how many hours a student can earn or how they may be used.
 - ix. The fact that the learning to be assessed must apply to a specific degree program and not contribute the unnecessary accumulation of credit hours.
 - x. The fact that they may not earn any credit for their portfolio.
- d. Students should be properly advised as to expectations and limitations of portfolio assessments. In particular, it should be emphasized to students that portfolios cannot cover material that has already been assessed for college credit (duplicating credit) and that the portfolio only covers credit that could possibly be used in his or her specific degree program.

B. Portfolio process guidelines

- a. Prior Learning Assessment is rooted in the notion that legitimate, college level learning can be achieved outside the traditional classroom setting. Standard, academically rigorous processes of assessing prior learning have been established by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) (see appendix A) and have been recognized by regional accrediting bodies, national discipline-specific accrediting bodies, and by the American Council on Education (ACE). Portfolio development and assessment should adhere to established and approved processes.
- b. For course-specific Portfolios, two recognized processes should be observed to ensure academically rigorous and consistent assessment.

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- i. For course-specific assessment, the Portfolio should document the achievement of commonly recognized student learning outcomes for that course.
- ii. The use of the term “commonly recognized” is meant to avoid student created learning outcomes that are not usually tied to discipline program outcomes or specific course outcomes in regionally accredited institutions and thus may not be appropriate for a discipline or a specific course in that discipline.
- c. Portfolio development may be done as a self-paced process or as the outcome of an assessment course. The self-paced development format also include a structure and guidelines for portfolio development as well as available interaction with a portfolio development expert and, when appropriate and possible, with the assessor.
- d. The resulting portfolio, and subsequent evaluative rubric, should incorporate the following:
 - i. identification of critical learning events experienced by the student
 - ii. breadth and depth of new knowledge and skill(s) acquired
 - iii. the relationship of new knowledge and skill(s) with appropriate theory/concepts associated with academic discipline and degree program
 - iv. the application of new knowledge and skill(s)
 - v. critical thinking, problem solving and decision-making skills
 - vi. where appropriate, supportive documentation.

C. Fees and costs associated with portfolio assessment – If an institution or group of intuitions intends to charge students any fees or costs associated with portfolio assessment, these fees must be clearly publicized and made available to the student before enrollment. Such information should provide the student with a clear estimation of the costs involved. All fees will be charged in accordance with approved fee structures approved by the GCC Board of Trustees.

D. Assessor training and requirements

- a. Assessment of portfolios for course-specific prior learning should be completed by appropriately credentialed faculty/staff approved by the institution granting the assessed credit, academically qualified in the assessed discipline and institutional knowledge to assign and document credit appropriately.
- b. Assessing faculty/staff, should meet the Portfolio Reviewer Qualifications listed below:
 - i. Subject Matter Expertise
 - 1. Educational experience and credentials appropriate to faculty position (e.g. based on ACCJC or other accrediting body guidelines)
 - 2. Experience teaching the discipline
 - 3. Knowledge of relevant college-level course objectives and outcomes
 - 4. Knowledge of overall curriculum and degree requirements
 - 5. Evidence of disciplinary writing skills and ability to mentor writing in the discipline
 - ii. Pedagogical Expertise of Assessor
 - 1. Training/application in writing and assessing goals, objectives and learning outcomes

2. Training in matching evidence of college level learning with learning outcomes demonstrated in portfolios
 3. Experience with reflective practice or reflective writing
 4. Teaching and learning philosophy that includes a commitment to the value of experiential learning
- iii. Training in consistency of process at the host institution
1. Ideally includes completion of a nationally recognized training course or workshop, or a local adaptation thereof by an institutional individual who has undergone the training (e.g. CAEL certification).
 2. Should an institution embark on their own training program it should include
 - a. Guides for Portfolio development and format
 - b. Application of Portfolio assessment rubrics
 - c. Institution-specific practices (administrative, etc)
 3. Reviewers also ideally will have opportunities for ongoing professional development in portfolio assessment in order to maintain validity and reliability of assessments
- iv. Institutional credentials sufficient to recommend award of credit

Appendix A - The 10 CAEL Standards for Assessing Learning

As the nationally recognized body on prior learning assessment and the only body recognized by all regional accreditors for PLA, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning's (CAEL) Standards for Assessing Learning have become the foundation for most PLA programs. Therefore, all PLA programs GCC should conform to these standards.

1. Credit or its equivalent should be awarded only for learning, and not for experience.
2. Assessment should be based on standards and criteria for the level of acceptable learning that are both agreed upon and made public.
3. Assessment should be treated as an integral part of learning, not separate from it, and should be based on an understanding of learning processes.
4. The determination of credit awards and competence levels must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic or credentialing experts.
5. Credit or other credentialing should be appropriate to the context in which it is awarded and accepted.
6. If awards are for credit, transcript entries should clearly describe what learning is being recognized and should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.
7. Policies, procedures, and criteria applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available to all parties involved in the assessment process.
8. Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.
9. All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions they perform.
10. Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served, the purposes being met, and the state of the assessment arts.

