

Prior Learning Assessment

Youngstown State University

Policies and Procedures

Spring 2023

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Youngstown State University

Prior Learning Assessment

Introduction

Through rigorous evaluation, Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) measures student learning that has occurred outside the college classroom to determine whether it is appropriate for college credit. It, then, applies an equivalent number of college credits to the learning. Credits earned through PLA are connected to learning outcomes, not measures of seat time. PLA is sometimes called experiential learning or credit for prior learning (CPL).

PLA is a process that enables students to demonstrate what they have learned outside the classroom and translate that learning into college credit. PLA validates learning acquired through corporate training programs, extensive volunteer activity, workplace experience, civic engagement, non-traditional learning environments, training sponsored by professional organizations and by governmental agencies, just to name a few. PLA credit is awarded for college-level learning (knowledge, skills, and competencies) that students have obtained as a result of their prior learning experiences.

Student must demonstrate their mastery of the knowledge in order to earn college credit. Students can demonstrate prior learning by: performance on standardized tests or department challenge exams; documentation and evaluation of evidence of trainings and certifications; or demonstration of learning through work, program evaluations of non-credit instruction done by individual colleges and universities, and evaluation of apprenticeship training (in collaboration with trade associations).

General PLA Guidelines

1. To apply for PLA credit, an individual must be eligible for admission to Youngstown State University and must be pursuing a certificate, associate, or bachelor's degree at the time of application.
2. PLA credits satisfy prerequisite requirements in the same manner as their course equivalencies at Youngstown State University.
3. PLA credit can only be awarded when a student is enrolled in traditional, online, or distance education courses through Youngstown State University. The credit will be officially awarded 15 days after the first semester in which the student is registered.
4. Students may not apply for PLA credit for a course in which they are currently enrolled, for a course for which they have earned a failing grade, or for a course they have audited.
5. **PLA credit at Youngstown State University receives a grade of "CR" (Credit). Awarded PLA credit is recorded by the University Registrar or his/her designee. No quality points are earned, and such credit does not enter into grade point**

average determination. When a student is awarded PLA credit, with a grade of CR, the credit may be applied to his or her major or minor areas of study. Other guidelines associated with the awarding of CR credit are not applicable to PLA credit hours.

6. A student who intends to transfer and use YSU PLA credit to meet degree requirements at another institution should consult the transfer institution to see if the PLA credit meets their requirements. Unlike other Ohio Department of Higher Education initiatives, PLA is not a statewide transfer initiative, and Ohio public colleges and universities are not required to award PLA credit. Most institutions have a process for PLA, but you are not guaranteed to receive credit if you pursue this option.

A student who has not earned college-level credit in a subject area may take a standardized exam (CLEP, DSST, and department challenge exams) for courses offered by Youngstown State University. Payment of a processing fee for exams is required. When registering for a test, students incur two fees, an exam fee assessed by College Board and a YSU administrative charge by the Comprehensive Testing Center.

7. To award PLA credit, the appropriate faculty member will assess for mastery level based upon the learning outcomes for the credit and course that the student is seeking. When petitioning for PLA credits for a student, the department will attach all documentation including copies of certification, letters from supervisors/employers, resumes, and licensures to the request.

8. All work assessed for PLA credit must meet a minimum of “C” level proficiency; the “C” level must be determined by faculty members in order to maintain academic integrity and rigor. All materials associated with PLA credit become the property of Youngstown State University.

9. PLA credit does not count toward Youngstown State University’s residency requirements:

Final hours – The last 20 semester hours leading to an associate degree and the last 30 semester hours leading to a baccalaureate degree must be completed at YSU. (In the pre-forestry, pre-law, and pre-medical curricula, which allow the student to earn final hours in absentia, the last 30 semester hours prior to the period of absence must be spent at YSU.)

Concentration area/Major hours – A minimum of 16 semester hours in the concentration area for the associate degree and a minimum of 16 semester hours of credits within the major in a baccalaureate degree must be earned in residence.

Upper-division hours – A minimum of 21 semester hours of upper-division credit for the baccalaureate degree must be earned in residence.

Additional college requirements – Additional residency requirements may be specified by individual colleges.

Evaluating Experiential Learning

Many adult (non-traditional) students may underestimate the value of learning that has occurred during their life experiences. Each day that a person works, engages the community, serves others, reads, and performs other activities provides opportunities for him or her to learn valuable and quality knowledge. Some of this knowledge may approximate college level learning, and such learning can be evaluated and may be awarded college credit.

Sites Where Learning Outside the Classroom Can Occur:

- Jobs
- Workshops
- Seminars
- Religious Organizations
- Travel/Study Abroad
- Civic Involvement
- Work-Related Training
- Professional Licenses
- Professional Certifications
- Professional Memberships
- Industry recognized credentials
- Non-credit bearing classroom learning
- Volunteer Services

The documentation a student presents to demonstrate the mastery of learning varies by course and may include: a self-assessment; awards; honors; examples of documents developed; examples of materials made (like a machine part); an essay explaining knowledge and experience; documents developed at work; documents developed during a civil engagement; certificates showing completion of workshops; or certificates showing completion of a seminar offered by professional organizations, business, industry, or government agencies, resumes, licensures, supporting documentation from supervisors.

Appropriate Application of PLA Credit

PLA credit may be awarded in the following ways:

- The primary goal is to award direct course credit equated to courses with specific learning outcomes.
- Learning may be equated to an internship/clinical experience.
- PLA credit for study abroad or for international students studying at YSU will be awarded PLA 2600 or PLA 3700 to replace a Social and Personal Awareness course in the general education model (based upon the course LASS 3780: Lifetime Learning).

Steps for Students to Follow to Secure Academic Credit for Life Learning:

1. Contact an academic advisor or department chairperson for information on starting the PLA process.
2. The chairperson or academic advisor must complete the request process through the PLA workflow app. The link to the PLA workflow app is listed below.

<https://apps.powerapps.com/play/e/legacy-6899ac4e-1ab2-4a5d-8574-16bf70800cba/a/3060b0d6-e4a7-4b6d-8f58-11c108244ec3?tenantId=38728a17-9707-4f49-8c9b-279c1a4038c1>

3. If the experiential learning matches a designated course, the student will be informed of and awarded the course(s) and credit(s) granted by the department. The academic advisor will also be notified of credit awarded.
4. If the student's prior learning does not match a specific course or discipline-related experience, the request is rejected and no credit is awarded. The student will be informed of the final department decision.

Roles of YSU Personnel and Appeal Process

Faculty Members

- Develop learning outcomes for specific courses (as needed).
- Assist chairpersons in deciding how to apply PLA credit.

Chairpersons

- The chairperson will determine who, based upon the expertise of the faculty

members, should be assigned to evaluate learning related to PLA credits. If the faculty member declines the assignment, another faculty member will then be selected.

- The chairperson or chairperson designee will serve as a tie breaker (if needed).
- The chairperson will work with the student to determine how the awarded credits fit into the curriculum and 4-year plan.

Role of the PLA Coordinator

In order to help standardize the PLA process for students, PLA information is centralized in a designated PLA office and administered by a PLA Coordinator. The PLA Coordinator or designee will be responsible for responding to student questions, providing a point of entry from which students begin the credit by exam process, developing and maintaining a PLA website, and collaborating/coordinating with departments and the Comprehensive Testing Center in updating and establishing policies and reviewing materials.

The coordinator assists in the ongoing development and implementation of the University's Prior Learning Assessment policies and procedures. The coordinator will conduct the initial evaluation of submitted materials for PLA credit and consult the appropriate faculty for a full evaluation and administration of credits. Essentially, the coordinator will act as a liaison between departments and the offices on campus responsible for the recording and application of PLA credits. The role of the coordinator will also include assessing the PLA program and serving as the check and balance system to be sure that credits are being awarded systematically, fairly, and appropriately.

PLA Committee Members (Appeal Process)

- The PLA Committee serves as the appeal body for students in cases in which procedures or evaluation may have been handled improperly. A student's appeal must be filed with the PLA Coordinator within 30 days of the decision to either award or to not award credit. Failure to recommend credit does not constitute improper procedure.
- The PLA Committee serves as the appeal body to ensure credits are awarded fairly to students.

Restrictions on Awarding Credit

- A student will not be awarded credit for being a client or resident of an agency or organization.
- A student may not request credit for an academic course that he or she enrolled in and

failed to pass.

- Students may not request credit for the same experiences multiple times from different departments.
- Credits are awarded based upon meeting course learning outcomes. Years of experience does not necessarily meet the learning outcomes for a specific course or discipline. **For example, babysitting for ten years would not automatically qualify a student for credits in the Early Childhood Education program.** A student's experience must have a direct correlation to the credits being awarded.

Credit by Exam

Standardized and Department Challenge Exams

Any student who believes he or she is qualified to earn college credit based upon experience, previous training, or noncredit coursework may request credit by examination. The examination will be thorough and in keeping with the established goals and objectives of the course(s) and the overall academic program. Theoretical knowledge will be tested by faculty recommendation through common acceptable measures (i.e., paper and pencil, computerized, etc.) with the possibility of a skills component. Both written and skills testing may be required to insure “course rigor” is maintained and achieved.

Exams

Youngstown State University offers standardized exams and department challenge exam testing.

Standardized Exams refer to college-level examinations delivered by a third-party vendor that allow students to receive college credits in certain courses. Two common types of standardized exams accepted at YSU are:

CLEP – College Level Examination Program – CLEP exams assess proficiency in general education through 33 tests. Most CLEP exams cover lower level and introductory knowledge in these primary areas: mathematics, writing, communications, and science.

DSST (formally called DANTEs Subject Standardized Tests) – DSST examinations test knowledge in both lower and upper-level college material through 38 tests in six subject areas.

In addition to Standardized Exams, YSU also offers **Department Challenge Exams**. Developed by YSU faculty members, these exams measure a student’s mastery of the learning outcomes associated with a particular course.

Department Challenge Exams - Currently-enrolled students may demonstrate their ability and knowledge in a particular subject area by taking a special examination (through the appropriate academic department). The exams are based upon established learning outcomes. Students may be provided with a recommended reading list and/or a study guide to prepare for the examination.

Students are required to pay a fee per credit for a departmental challenge exam. Fees must be paid to the Office of the Bursar in Meshel Hall. Proof of payment must be issued to the department in which the exam is being administered prior to scheduling the exam. Approval to take the departmental challenge exam must be sought prior to paying for the exam.

The chairperson or faculty member awarding credit for the course must submit proof of payment when awarding credit through the PLA share point app.

Standardized Exams:

Youngstown State University only accepts 14 of the 33 CLEP exams available to students. If the faculty members in a department deem the CLEP exam in their discipline does not meet academic rigor, then the faculty members or a subgroup of the faculty members may develop a challenge exam to replace the CLEP exam. Testing will be administered at the testing center and forwarded to the department for grading.

Department Challenge Exams:

The following individuals should be notified when an academic department develops a challenge exam: department chairperson, dean of the college, manager of the YSU Comprehensive Testing Center, and the members of the PLA Committee. Testing will be administered at the testing center and forwarded to the department for grading. **All university processing fees are waived for active military and university veterans.**

Additional Guidelines, Exam Specific

1. Students may NOT take a CLEP test, department challenge exam, or other credit by exam opportunity for any course in which they are currently enrolled or have previously been enrolled and earned an evaluative grade (A-F, AU, INC, NF, CR, NC).
2. Students who have already received credit for coursework for a subject in which the courses are sequential may not receive academic credit by means of CLEP, department challenge exam, or other credit by exam opportunity for an earlier prerequisite course.
3. Students pursuing a baccalaureate degree may earn up to a maximum total of 30 semester hours via credit by exam (CLEP, AP, departmental exams, etc.). Students pursuing an associate degree may earn a maximum total of 15 semester hours via credit by exam. Students who wish to take more than the maximum permitted may petition their college dean for a waiver of this limitation. Students who have earned more than the maximum permitted credits by exam (e.g., AP and/or CLEP) before attending YSU will be granted academic credit, provided such credit meets YSU standards.
4. Students should consult with their academic advisor for further information regarding the applicability of CLEP, department challenge exam, or other credit by exam opportunity toward specific degree requirements.

5. According to College Board policy, students wishing to retake a CLEP exam must wait three months before retesting. This policy is subject to change based upon College Board policy.

Exam Processes and Fees

Students requesting Standardized Exams must pay the non-refundable third party vendor fee for CLEP, DSST, etc. plus a non-refundable university processing fee.

Students who are interested in the CLEP program register for a CLEP exam via the Comprehensive Testing Center (CTC) webpage at www.ysu.edu/testing. Information on the two-step process for test registration can be found by clicking on “credit by exam” and following the outlined instructions. When registering for a test, students incur two fees, an exam fee assessed by College Board and a YSU administrative charge by the Comprehensive Testing Center.

Once a YSU student has successfully completed a CLEP exam and met the qualifying score, an official transcript is sent from College Board to YSU’s Records Office and the student is awarded credit for the course associated with the exam on his/her academic transcript.

Appeals

Students may not appeal the grade of the exam.

Closing Comment on Standardized Exams

Currently, the YSU Comprehensive Testing Center offers a wide array of professional exam certifications via partnerships with professional testing companies such as Pearson Vue, Castle, Comira, Prov, and Kryterion. These certifications, among others, could provide additional PLA opportunities for students attending YSU. Departments interested in this option should contact the Comprehensive Testing Center to discuss these opportunities.

Future Concerns/Tasks

The PLA Policies and Procedures Manual at Youngstown State University is a living document. The primary task of the PLA Committee is the approval of the *PLA Policies and Procedures* manual.

PLA Committee (Membership): The membership of the PLA Committee is made up of selected individuals who represent faculty and staff from each of the academic colleges.

Promotion Strategies The success of PLA depends upon several key items being in place. Additional crosswalks need to be discussed, evaluated, and developed. PLA initiatives need to be promoted to the university community, to the public wishing to enter YSU, and to the students enrolling in programs at YSU.

PLA Policy Review Dates by Academic Senate: The PLA Policies and Procedures Manual must be reviewed during spring semester every three years (next evaluation period: Spring 2026.)

PLA Committee Members 2022 – 2023

Kevin Ball, Associate Provost (Co-Chair)

Molly Burdette, Assistant Director of Degree Completion and Credentialing Facilitator

Mary Collier, Director of Student Services-Williamson College of Business Administration

Joy Christiansen-Erb-Associate Dean-Cliff College of Creative Arts

Dana Davis, Chairperson and Associate Professor of Social Work

Amy Gordon, Comprehensive Testing Center Manager

Robert Korenic, Associate Professor-Civil and Construction Engineering Technology

Alan Tomhave, Associate Dean and Professor of Philosophy- Beeghly College of Liberal Arts,
Social Sciences and Education

Kim Verdone, Manager of Degree Audit and Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator (Co-Chair)

