Prior Learning Assessment Student Handbook

Ramapo College of New Jersey

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INTRODUCTION

What is prior learning?

Undergraduate students at Ramapo College of New Jersey are eligible to apply for, and may acquire credit for, knowledge that they have gained outside the traditional academic setting through work, training, community service, and other accomplishments. The process of Prior Learning Assessment involves: 1) a meeting with a faculty member who confirms that the prior learning for which the student wishes credit meets the learning outcomes of a particular program or course; and 2) the development of a portfolio or other documentation to demonstrate those learning outcomes.

What is Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)?

PLA is a process through which students identify areas of relevant learning from their past experiences, demonstrate that learning through appropriate documentation, and submit their materials so that they can be assessed and possibly awarded academic credit for a specific RCNJ course whose outcomes are met by the student's prior learning.

The Council of Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) defines PLA as follows: "The assessment of learning attained through experiences irrespective of the time and place in which they occurred" (Fiddler, et al. *Assessing Learning*, 2nd edition, p.12).

Who is eligible to participate in PLA?

PLA is available to all undergraduate students but is used primarily by adult learners. RCNJ defines an adult student as someone who is financially independent, meaning that s/he meets any of the criteria noted below:

- Is at least 25 years of age by September 1st of a given academic year
- Is married
- Is a veteran
- Has dependents other than a spouse
- Is an orphan or ward of the court

Students who have significant learning experiences outside of a traditional college curriculum, but who do not meet the above criteria may also be eligible to participate in PLA and should confer with the Director of the Degree Completion Program (DCP) for final determination.

Non-degree seeking students are not eligible to participate in PLA.

How many credits may student earn through any form of prior learning?

Credits awarded through PLA portfolio are treated as transfer credits. Transfer credits are comprised of transfer courses from a previous institution, CLEP credits, and PLA portfolio credits. Undergraduate students who have already reached the maximum amount of 80 transfer credits or who would exceed the transfer credit maximum through PLA may not earn credits through a PLA portfolio.

What are some ways of earning credits for prior learning?

CLEP: CLEP exams are nationally standardized credit by exam tests recognized by most institutions of higher education across the nation. The College-Level Examination Program gives students the opportunity to receive college credit for what they know, by earning qualifying scores on the appropriate examinations. Ramapo College is a CLEP Test Center that offers testing for students currently enrolled at the institution:

Before submitting a CLEP registration form, Ramapo students must first complete an Off-Campus Study Request Form, available at https://www.ramapo.edu/studentsuccess/off-campus-study-request/. Students should also review the most current list of the CLEP exams for which the college awards credit and the minimum score required by Ramapo College for CLEP tests, available at https://www.ramapo.edu/testing/clep-subjects/. The Center for Student Success is located in the Academic Complex, Wing D, Room 207.

ACE Credits: The American Council on Education (ACE) is an organization that provides guidance to colleges and universities on the acceptance of credit. RCNJ is a member of ACE and honors ACE credits as appropriate for the program of study for students. Students should contact the Office of Admissions for information on documentation of ACE credits and verification of their application to programs of study.

PLA Portfolio: Ramapo students can document how they have met the outcomes of a specific Ramapo course through learning done outside of the classroom (often through a job or volunteer experience) by preparing a PLA portfolio which is evaluated for credit by a subject expert, generally a Ramapo faculty member. More information on PLA portfolios is outlined in subsequent sections of this handbook.

What are the national criteria for quality assurance in assessing learning for credit?

RCNJ follows the standards developed by The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) regarding assessment of prior learning:

I. Credit or its equivalent will be awarded only for *learning*, and not for *experience*.

II. Assessment should be based on standards and criteria for the level of acceptable learning that are both agreed upon and made public.

III. Assessment should be treated as an integral part of learning, not separate from it, and should be based on an understanding of learning processes.

IV. The determination of credit awards and competence levels must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic or credentialing experts.

V. Credit or other credentialing will be appropriate to the academic context in which it is awarded and accepted.

For more information, visit The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) at http://www.cael.org.

What are the advantages of PLA?

Earning credits through prior learning assessment allows a student to avoid duplication of learning while validating the learning that an individual has done outside of a classroom or university setting. PLA may reduce the costs associated with earning credits as well as potentially shorten a student's time to degree completion.

How should interested students determine if PLA is right for them?

Students who believe they might be eligible for PLA should schedule an appointment with the DCP Director, Patricia Laprey, who will work with students to determine if they have prior learning experiences for which they could possibly earn college credit.

Office: ASB-435
Phone: (201) 684-7388
Email: plaprey@ramapo.edu

What other resources are available?

Recommended resource: *Earn College Credit for What You Know*. Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. Publication date: Feb. 14, 2013.

THE PLA PORTFOLIO OPTION

How many credits may a student earn through a PLA portfolio?

Students may earn a maximum of 16 credits through PLA portfolios, assuming that they do not exceed the overall transfer credit limits outlined above.

Is there a time restriction on when student may earn credit through a PLA portfolio?

Students may not earn PLA credits as part of the final 32 credits of their degree. Students who wish or need to earn PLA credits as part of their final 32 credits must petition the Provost for a residency waiver. The DCP Office is responsible for forwarding those petitions to the Registrar, who forwards them to the Provost for review and decision.

What kinds of courses are available for credit through a PLA portfolio?

A PLA portfolio must address the outcomes of a specific course in current RCNJ catalog. Students may opt to develop a PLA portfolio for any allowed course from the RCNJ catalog which they feel best matches their prior learning. Students can browse the full catalog with course descriptions at: http://www.ramapo.edu/catalog.

Once there, click on the gray bar labeled "Majors/Concentrations Course Descriptions (Current)" and search by department.

Theoretically, any course in the catalog (with the exceptions noted below) is open for credit awarded through PLA portfolio. However, in practice, certain courses may lend themselves better to a PLA portfolio than others. Keep in mind that 100- and 200-level courses tend to be introductory, foundational or survey courses, while 300-level courses may require demonstration of an advanced level of learning.

What kinds of courses are NOT available for credit through PLA portfolio?

The learning demonstrated and verified through a PLA portfolio must have the academic equivalence of college-level learning. Developmental, remedial, or self-help courses are not comparable to college-level courses and thus are not appropriate for PLA portfolios.

Courses petitioned through PLA portfolio must not duplicate transfer credit or any other coursework used to fulfill degree requirements. Please note that students who enroll in an RCNJ course and do not earn a passing grade may not petition for credit through PLA portfolio for the same course.

PLA portfolios may not be used to earn credits for 400-level courses, including senior capstones in any major.

Some majors, such as Social Work, do not grant course credit through PLA portfolio. Please review the current RCNJ catalog on-line (http://www.ramapo.edu/catalog) for up-to-date information regarding a specific program's requirements or restrictions regarding PLA credits.

CONSTRUCTING THE PLA PORTFOLIO

What are the steps to get started with a PLA portfolio?

1. Students interested in submitting a PLA portfolio for credit should schedule an appointment with the DCP Director, Patricia Laprey: Phone: (201) 684-7388; Email: plaprey@ramapo.edu.

2. During this meeting, the DCP Director will review the student's record to make sure that s/he is eligible to earn credits through PLA, will outline the procedures for submitting a portfolio, and will provide the student with a copy of the PLA Student Handbook and the PLA Portfolio Contract.

3. The DCP Director and student will discuss possible course options for PLA portfolio as appropriate.

4. The DCP Director will direct the student to the appropriate dean to discuss course options. The student is strongly encouraged to complete the Proposal section of the PLA Portfolio Contract, including a one-page description of relevant activities, prior to meeting with the dean.

5. If the dean determines that a course is eligible for credit through PLA portfolio, s/he, in conjunction with the area convener, will identify a faculty member to act as the portfolio assessor.

6. The student then meets with the designated faculty member to discuss the PLA portfolio. Together, they should come to a clear understanding of: a) the portfolio requirements; b) the criteria that the assessor will use to determine if the student has met the learning outcomes of the course, and; c) a timeline to complete the process.

7. The student and faculty assessor complete and sign the PLA Portfolio Contract. The student is responsible for obtaining the dean's signature on the PLA Portfolio Contract.

8. The dean's office returns the completed Contract to the DCP Director.

9. The student submits completed PLA portfolio to the DCP Director by the agreed-on deadline. The DCP Director applies the assessment fee to the student account. Once the assessment fee is paid, the portfolio and the PLA Portfolio Review Rubric are sent to the faculty assessor.

10. The faculty assessor reviews the completed PLA portfolio and meets with student if a meeting is part of portfolio.

11. The assessor completes the PLA Portfolio Review Rubric and either approves/disapproves awarding credit for the PLA portfolio or recommends re-submission. The faculty assessor notifies student in writing of assessment result and submits portfolio and PLA Portfolio Review Rubric to DCP Office.

12. The DCP Office will process credit requests for all portfolios approved for credit.

What should a PLA portfolio include?

Specific portfolio requirements will be determined in consultation with the portfolio assessor. Generally speaking, a PLA portfolio should include a résumé, a narrative essay, and documentation to support the petition, along with a PLA Portfolio Review Sheet.

Examples of supporting documentation can include, but are not limited to: certificates of training or completion, workshop descriptions, manuals, minutes, performance appraisals or reviews, photos, proposals, webpages, audio/visual files, job descriptions, and public presentations.

How do I prove that my learning matches a course's outcomes?

There are four primary ways to demonstrate that your learning matches the outcomes of a particular course:

1. Product that shows your competency (ex: artwork, PowerPoint slides, websites, reports, etc.)

2. Portfolio narrative that connects detailed insights into your learning with specific course outcomes

3. Testimonials from others (ex: performance evaluation, certificate of training)

4. Direct demonstration of skills (ex: videotape of performance, in-person presentation).

What are some elements of a successful PLA portfolio?

1. Learning must be clearly differentiated from experience in the writing of the essay. Credit is not awarded for experience alone but for demonstrating knowledge and the application of that knowledge.

2. There must be adequate documentation to verify the authenticity and appropriateness of the learning being assessed.

3. The student must be able to demonstrate college-level writing skills throughout the PLA process. Correct use of standard English, including grammar, spelling, punctuation, and organization is essential.

What is the PLA Portfolio Contract?

The PLA Portfolio Contract is an agreement between a faculty assessor and a student that outlines what the student will produce in a portfolio and the due date for the portfolio.

EARNING CREDIT FOR A PLA PORTFOLIO

How are PLA portfolios evaluated for credit, and who does the assessment?

Portfolios are evaluated by RCNJ faculty with expertise in the content area. Assignment of faculty assessors to specific portfolios is at the discretion of the dean of the school in consultation with the convener. The assessor evaluates submitted portfolios using already determined content area standards, such as learning outcomes and objectives. Together, the student and assessor clarify the criteria the assessor will use to determine to determine if the student has met the learning outcomes of the course.

How is the amount of credit received for a portfolio determined?

Portfolios must be submitted for the standard amount of credit normally awarded for the particular course. If a course is normally offered for four credits, then the portfolio must be submitted for four credits. Successful portfolios may receive only the full amount of credit petitioned; partial credit is not awarded.

When will students learn if they have received credit through their PLA portfolio?

Students should allow at least four weeks from the date of portfolio submission for notification of credit awarded. Once a portfolio assessment is complete, the assessor notified the student whether or not credit has been awarded. The faculty assessor then returns the PLA Portfolio Review Rubric to the DCP Office with one of the following designations: approved for credit; not approved for credit; insufficient for review.

How do students resubmit portfolios?

Students may resubmit a portfolio only at the request of the assessor. Students who are asked by an assessor to revise a portfolio must do so within the timeframe designated by the assessor. The revision should address any

gaps indicated by the assessor on the PLA Portfolio Review Rubric. If the student fails to submit the revision by the deadline noted on the PLA Portfolio Review Rubric, credit for the portfolio will not be awarded.

May a student appeal a denial of credit?

Students who wish to appeal a denial of their portfolio credit assessment should follow the grade appeal process outlined in the current RCNJ catalog (http://www.ramapo.edu/catalog). A denied portfolio may not be resubmitted using a different course description.

How will credit earned through PLA portfolio be recorded on students' transcripts?

Credits awarded through PLA are noted on as "Ramapo PLA credit" and are treated as transfer credits. The student's transcript designates the course subject, course and title, number of credits awarded, and a grade of "TP" indicating transfer pass. Credits awarded through PLA portfolio are not computed in the grade-point average. Credits earned through PLA portfolio do not fulfill residency requirements, nor do they meet eligibility for financial aid or loan deferment.

Are credits earned through PLA portfolio transferable?

RCNJ does not guarantee that another university will accept PLA credit in transfer or as a prerequisite for graduate school. Students interested in transferring to another college or applying to graduate school should check with that school regarding its transfer policies.

Who has access to my portfolio?

During the PLA portfolio development and assessment process, a student's work may be viewed for academic purposes only. Those who may view portfolio work include portfolio assessors and other RCNJ staff and administrators as appropriate or necessary. If the student signs a release form, specified parts of his/her portfolio document may be used for educational purposes, such as viewing by other students and teaching by faculty. At that time, all personally identifiable and/or proprietary information is removed from the portfolio. Students must not include in any portfolio materials that violate the legal and moral right to privacy of any individual or organization.

What happens to my portfolio after it has been assessed?

After reviewing the PLA portfolio, the assessor submits it to the DCP Office along with the PLA Review Rubric. If credit is awarded, the DCP Office forwards the portfolio to the Registrar's Office for inclusion in the students' permanent file. If re-submission is recommended or if credit is not awarded, the DCP Office will return the portfolio to the student.

PLA PORTFOLIOASSESSMENT FEE

What is the PLA portfolio assessment fee, and when is it charged?

Assessors are compensated for the time spent meeting with students, reviewing the portfolio, and providing feedback when appropriate. Students are charged a PLA portfolio assessment fee once they submit a completed portfolio to the DCP Director. In 2022-2023, this assessment fee is $168.04 per credit sought through portfolio and is applied for each portfolio submitted by the student. This fee is non-refundable.

The PLA portfolio assessment fee is for the service provided through the assessment of the portfolio; therefore, the assessment fee is not refunded if the petition for credit is denied. Students who do not submit a PLA portfolio in the manner or timeframe outlined in the PLA Portfolio Contract are not eligible for a refund of the assessment fee.

There are no fees charged other than the assessment fee.