

Prior Learning
Assessment
Guide for Students

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	3
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT & PORTFOLIO REVIEW	3
PROCEDURES FOR CREDIT BY EXAM (CBE)	9
IS PLA VIA PORTFOLIO REVIEW FOR YOU?	9
THE PORTFOLIO CHECKLIST	9
QUALIFICATIONS FOR PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT VIA PORTFOLIO REVIEW	10
QUALIFICATIONS OF LEARNING	10
STEP-BY-STEP PROCEDURES FOR A PORTFOLIO REVIEW	11
DEVELOPING YOUR PORTFOLIO	11
PORTFOLIO REVIEW CONTENTS	11
ASSEMBLING THE PORTFOLIO	12
WRITE AN OUTLINE OF PORTFOLIO REVIEW CONTENTS	12
REFLECTIVE ESSAY(S)	12
DOCUMENTATION	14
EVALUATION PROCEDURE	15
PRESENTATION	16
NEXT STEPS	16
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	166
PORTFOLIO REVIEW PROCESS MILE MARKERS.....	177
PETITION FOR PORTFOLIO REVIEW OR CREDIT BY EXAM.....	188

INTRODUCTION

Marymount California University recognizes that college-level learning takes place both in and out of the classroom. Proving prior learning outside of the classroom is called Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) and students at MCU have many avenues available to demonstrate their learning.

This guide describes the various ways MCU accepts evidence of prior learning and then provides information on how to acquire credit hours and subject credit via Portfolio Review and credit-by-exam (CBE). The last page is an application to initiate a discussion regarding Portfolio Review or CBE.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT & PORTFOLIO REVIEW

What is Portfolio Review in terms of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)?

- A process that enables you to gain credit for what you have already learned through professional training, life experiences, job related activities, or volunteer work.
- Keep in mind: *credit is awarded for college-level prior learning, not experience.*
 - For example, a student may have spent 10 years mastering a topic and the student may be awarded 3 credit hours for the portfolio demonstrating the learning.
 - The same student may submit a portfolio for a different topic learned over a period of 4 years and may earn 6 credit hours for their efforts via portfolio review.

Are there methods of earning credit other than developing a portfolio?

- Yes, undergraduate students may earn credit through Advanced Placement (AP) exams, International Baccalaureate (IB) exams, College Level Examination Program (CLEP) exams, DSST exams, and MCU's Credit-by-Exam.
- Up to 30 units of credit from any combination of the following sources may be applied to a Marymount undergraduate degree:
 - CLEP exams
 - Credit-by-Exam
 - DSST exams
 - Military credit
 - Portfolio review
- There is no limit to the number of IB and AP credit accepted but there may be no duplication of credit.

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What are the benefits of Portfolio Review?

- Achieve your educational goals in less time and with less cost.
- Receive college credit for what you have learned.

When can I submit a portfolio for review?

- Students of Marymount California University may submit a portfolio for review within the first calendar year of their first day of matriculation.

How do I get credit for my prior learning via Portfolio Review?

- You will prepare a portfolio documenting your prior learning. It will include essays about the learning, how you acquired it, and documentation of that learning.
- Your portfolio may include evidence that you have the knowledge and skills which may match the stated Student Learning Outcomes for a particular course or courses. With this collected information, credit hours may be awarded as well as subject credit.
- In the case that your prior learning does not may match the stated Student Learning Outcomes for a particular course or courses, only elective credit may be awarded.
- Applying for prior learning assessment, submitting the fee, and preparing a portfolio does not guarantee that credit will be awarded.

What are credits vs. units vs. semester hours vs. subject credit?

- Most courses at MCU have units, credits or credit hours associated with them and may the terms may be used interchangeably. Students need at least 120 semester credit hours to graduate with a bachelor's degree at MCU.
 - If a student submits a portfolio review for a course such as ACCT 151 Financial Accounting, the student will receive 3 credits hours and subject credit for ACCT 151.
 - Conversely, if a student has demonstrated college-level learning in a topic not covered in one of our classes (for example, funeral services), a well-prepared portfolio may garner 3 credit hours, but not subject credit.

Do I need a separate portfolio for each course or topic?

- Disparate topics will require separate portfolios for review. Similar topics, like ACCT 353 Federal Income Taxation I and ACCT 354 Federal Income Taxation II, will likely only need one portfolio.
- You may be able to develop one portfolio for several courses, however, check with the Prior Learning Counselor (PLC) since some programs may require a separate portfolio for each course.

Who evaluates my portfolio?

- Depending on the subject matter, the Prior Learning Counselor will work with the program chair whose content is most relevant to the portfolio.
- The program chair may choose to do the evaluation or enlist the help of a faculty member.

How much credit can I earn using PLA Portfolio Review?

- Undergraduate students can earn up to 30 units through PLA Portfolio Review.
- The number of courses waived depends on the determination of the Department Chair and the Portfolio Evaluator.
- You and the Prior Learning Counselor will discuss the number of courses and credit hours that you can realistically apply for using prior learning.
- Graduate students should speak with their academic program chair to determine how much credit, if any, may be earned through PLA.

How do I start the Portfolio Review or Credit-By-Exam process?

- The process starts when you contact the Prior Learning Counselor (PLC) for a consultation.
- After meeting with the Prior Learning Counselor and you both agree on a portfolio topic, both will meet with a department chair relevant to the course in question. Then, after all the questions are answered and you, the PLC, and the department chair are confident in the portfolio's intended contents, you will need to submit a fee of \$400 which will cover the cost of one portfolio and the review process.
- With the guidance of the PLC, you create a portfolio and submit it to the portfolio evaluator.
- Based on the results of the Portfolio Review, the student may be awarded credit hours and/or subject credit.
- Similarly, if you are interested in proving your skills in a particular course via Credit-by-Exam, a fee of \$400 must be submitted. The Prior Learning Counselor will walk you through the process to initiate Credit-by-Exam for a particular course.

How much does Portfolio Review and Credit-by-Exam cost?

- After the contents of a portfolio are agreed up by the student, the Department Chair, and the PLC, the student must submit a \$400 fee to Business Services.
- The Credit-by-Exam fee is \$400 per exam.

How long will a Portfolio Review evaluation take?

- It is in the best interest of the student to submit the portfolio as soon as possible, since the Portfolio Evaluator may request more information from the student. However, submission of the portfolio, requests for more information from the Portfolio Evaluator, and resubmission by the student must be completed within the 16 weeks allotted.
- Putting together a portfolio which successfully earns credit may require a significant amount of time and organization. This will vary from student to student. However, the final product should be completed within one semester's time (16 weeks).

Will someone guide me in developing a portfolio?

- Yes, the Prior Learning Counselor will guide you through the process. See "Procedures of a Portfolio Review" on page 9 of this document to see what it will entail.

Will I receive a grade?

- If approved, portfolios are given a CR (Credit) grade and will be reflected on your MCU transcript. Portfolios not receiving credit will not be recorded on your transcript.
- Any units awarded will not affect your GPA.

Can I receive credit for prior learning and transfer the credits to another school?

- You'll need to ask your destination school if it will accept PLA credit already completed.

For which classes are students not allowed to provide prior learning portfolios?

- You may not use PLA credit for any courses you have failed at Marymount California University and courses which can be tested by CBE or CLEP, such as math or languages.
- Department chairs have identified specific courses that must be taken at MCU such as MCU 100/200. See the Prior Learning Counselor if you have questions.

The following chart details MCU's stated methods of earning credit other than developing a prior learning assessment portfolio:

Prior Learning Option	Description	Are units awarded?
Advanced Placement Exam(s)	Marymount recognizes the high level of achievement of those students who have successfully completed Advanced Placement Examinations (AP) with a score of 3, 4 or 5. Students must submit official AP scores from Educational Testing Service (ETS) to the Registrar's Office prior to registration to receive appropriate course credit.	Yes
CLEP exam(s)	Students who have taken a CLEP exam may earn course credit based on an acceptable score. Refer to chart on the website under Prior Learning.	Yes
Course Substitution	Students who believe that a course taken at a previous institution may be appropriate to their program and that this course could substitute for a specified course requirement may request consideration of substitution by petition. The student's transcript from the previous institution must be submitted to the Registrar prior to consideration.	Yes
Course Waiver	<p>Students who believe that previous training (i.e. previous course work, career or life experience) has sufficiently prepared them in a certain area may request a waiver by petition of a specific course requirement for subject credit only, not unit count. (Students wishing to receive subject credit <u>and</u> credit hours should consider completing a portfolio.)</p> <p>The student will be required to justify the request to the faculty member with final approval by the Program Chair. A waiver of a specific course requirement does not reduce the total number of units required for the major or the degree.</p>	No
Credit By Examination	Credit by exam is an opportunity for a student to take an MCU exam or exams to fulfill an academic requirement and provide credits toward a degree. A student wishing to receive credit by examination must complete an academic petition requesting the exam and explain a rationale for the request. There is a \$400 charge per exam regardless of course unit credit. These fees must be paid before the test is administered and they are non-refundable. See the catalog for a full description of the regulations of this option.	Yes

Prior Learning Option	Description	Are units awarded?
Credit for Military Service	Students who provide documentation of a DD214 with honorable discharge or documentation of current active military service will be awarded 3 units of elective credit per full year equivalent of active-duty military service for a maximum of 15 units. In addition, subject credit for American Council on Education (ACE) credit transcript recommendations may be considered by petition.	Yes
DSST	Students who have taken a DSST exam may earn course credit based on an acceptable score. Refer to chart on the website under Prior Learning.	Yes
International Baccalaureate (IB)	Students who complete an IB diploma with a score of 30 or higher will receive 30 semester units toward their Marymount degree. Academic credit is awarded for individual IB Higher Level exams with scores of 4 or higher. Credit is granted upon receipt of official documents from the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO). Refer to chart on the website under Prior Learning.	Yes
Portfolio Review	Students who believe that previous training (i.e. previous career or life experience) is equivalent to a course's student learning outcomes may request a portfolio review by petition of a specific course's credit.	Yes
Prerequisite Waiver	Students who believe that previous training (i.e. previous course work, career or life experience) has sufficiently prepared them in a certain area may request a prerequisite waiver by petition of a specific course requirement for subject credit only, not unit count.	No

PROCEDURES FOR CREDIT BY EXAM (CBE)

1. Complete the form at the end of this document and send it to the Prior Learning Counselor (PLC).
2. The PLC will schedule a meeting for you and the targeted course's related program chair. Together, you will complete and sign the front side of the PLA application and, together, schedule a date for you to take the test.
3. Then, you'll need to pay \$400 for the CBE process.
4. Take the test on your designated day. It will be submitted to the program chair or faculty for evaluation.
5. After the Prior Learning Counselor receives the results, they will contact you to review your submitted CBE results.
6. The results will be submitted to the Registrar and your passing results will be reflected in your transcript.

IS PLA VIA PORTFOLIO REVIEW FOR YOU?

THE PORTFOLIO CHECKLIST

The following checklist may assist you in determining if PLA via Portfolio Review is for you:

- I am still within my first year of full matriculation at Marymount California University.
- I have at least five years of post-high school life/work/military experience.
- I completed formal training (in-class or on-line) as part of my employment.
- I have attended professional seminars or conferences.
- I have earned certificates or licenses required for professionals in my field.
- I have participated extensively in community work or volunteer services.
- I have authored published work (letters to editor, training guides, articles, etc.).
- An AP, CLEP, or Credit-By-Exam is NOT available for the course I am seeking to receive credit for through PLA.
- I have comparable past experiences that are equivalent to the course descriptions and Student Learning Outcomes of courses in my program.

If you have checked off two or more of the above, PLA via Portfolio Review may be an

alternative for you to earn credit.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT VIA PORTFOLIO REVIEW

To be eligible for a PLA via Portfolio Review:

- you must be fully matriculated
- within your first year of matriculation
- the University must be in receipt of all official transcripts

QUALIFICATIONS OF LEARNING

1. **Learning must be verifiable.** Based on your submitted portfolio the Portfolio Evaluator should be able to measure the learning you have acquired from sources such as:
 - a. Formal, recognized, and well-documented training programs conducted by:
 - i. U.S. military
 - ii. business, industry and trade groups
 - iii. government organizations
 - iv. professional organizations
 - v. certificates
 - vi. employment records
2. **The learning must have a subject-matter knowledge-base.** Credit is awarded for skills that require theoretical knowledge. For example, if you have ten years of experience as a manager or supervisor and you are seeking credit for a management course, your reflective essay must indicate how your experience relates to the management theories taught in the course. It is a good idea to speak to the program chair, read the syllabus and refer to textbook(s) used in the course. The Prior Learning Counselor can help you acquire syllabi.
3. **The learning should have a general applicability outside of the specific situation in which it was acquired.** In each reflective essay for the course in which you are seeking subject credit and credit hours, you must explain how you gained the knowledge in your professional environment and also how you applied that knowledge to other situations. For example, the portfolio evaluator will not award credit for knowing the specific procedure for processing personnel applications which apply to only one firm/company, but for multiple companies.

STEP-BY-STEP PROCEDURES FOR A PORTFOLIO REVIEW

The following list details the process for a student to complete for portfolio review:

1. Contact the Prior Learning Counselor (PLC) or contact the Advising Office at 310-303-7273. Let the PLC know that you are interested in Prior Learning Assessment via Portfolio Review.
2. After speaking with the PLC, complete the form at the end of this document and return to the PLC.
3. The PLC will schedule a meeting with the program chair, the PLC, and student to meet. At the meeting, all parties will discuss the process and portfolio expectations, and sign the PLA application.
4. At this point, you'll need to pay \$400 for the PLA process
5. Maintain contact with the Program chair throughout the portfolio development process. Be sure that they know about your progress and about any delays that may occur.
6. You submit your completed portfolio to the Program Chair and Prior Learning Counselor with ample time for necessary revisions. If necessary, you may need to do revisions.
7. When the Program Chair determines whether or not it will receive subject credit or credit hours, the back of the application will be completed denoting the results. The PLC will submit the final determination to the Registrar's Office.
8. Your results will be documented on your transcript.

DEVELOPING YOUR PORTFOLIO

PORTFOLIO REVIEW CONTENTS

A Prior Learning Assessment Portfolio Review is a comprehensive document. It requires that you examine and list your previous experience to identify areas of college-level learning, to communicate in the reflective essay exactly what learning took place and where and how it was applied and to prove through documentation that learning occurred.

This section of this document is an overview of what is to be found in the Portfolio Review. For a comprehensive and detailed explanation of contents, see the document: [Developing a Portfolio for Review at Marymount California University](#).

Listed below is a checklist of the required sections of a portfolio and a brief description of each.

The contents of a portfolio required by Marymount California University, in the order in which they may appear in your folder, are as follows:

1. Cover/title sheet
2. Copy of your PLA application, signed by you, the relevant Program Chair, and the PLC.
3. Table of Contents with correct page numbers and titles of all documents
4. Current résumé including how you learned the relevant information
5. Reflective Essay
6. Documentation
7. Copy of your transcripts
8. Syllabus of related Marymount California University course obtained from PLC or relevant Program Chair
9. Annotated bibliography of books, journals, newspapers that you have read, etc. that relate to the course
10. A completed checklist itemizing the above materials

ASSEMBLING THE PORTFOLIO

WRITE AN OUTLINE OF PORTFOLIO REVIEW CONTENTS

An outline will help you stay organized, focused, and covers the content. The outline also assists the relevant program chair or faculty member who read the reflective essays to determine if the student's learning was appropriate to the course topics.

There are several methods for organizing the reflective essays. The narrative can be organized topically, chronologically, theoretically, or by using a step by step organizational pattern. Students should select the organizational pattern or combination of patterns that best matches the subject matter being discussed.

This outline must be presented to the Prior Learning Counselor at your first meeting and then precede the essay(s) and documentation of the portfolio.

REFLECTIVE ESSAY(S)

In this section, you will demonstrate that your prior learning experience is college-level knowledge. You will need to provide exact descriptions of your knowledge of both theory and application in a separate essay for each course for which you are requesting PLA credit. If applicable, the essay should include the targeted course's number, title, and goals and learning outcomes for that course.

While reading your essay(s), the Program Chair will look for several points of discussion which are not directly related to a given field of knowledge, but are an important part of conveying what you have learned.

- 1) Your experience
- 2) How knowledge was acquired from your experience

3) How knowledge was applied and used—the learning outcomes

You must demonstrate understanding of the basic theories, issues, topics, or principles of the course in order to receive credit. Students should cover the most critical components of the course in their essay. If a topic is listed in the course description or student learning outcomes, it should be covered in the essay. If there are too many topics to cover in one narrative, the student can combine the topics or describe several topics in one section.

You are also expected to know and appropriately use, the terminology pertinent to the course. A reference to the documentation which supports your knowledge is also required.

Once you complete the theoretical component, you should then explain how you gained the knowledge. Was it through workshops and training seminars? Perhaps it included discussions with experts in the field, on-the-job training from a supervisor, or reading textbooks on the subject. In this section, you should also discuss how you have applied your knowledge. If you have documentation of the above, it should be included in the portfolio.

If the course requires a component of theoretical understanding the student should include their knowledge and understanding of the theories, principles or major contributors to the field. The narrative is not a term paper but an explanation of how the principles provide a framework for understanding experiences. For instance, a supervisor may be dealing with a difficult employee. After a brief explanation of management or HR theory, the student can describe how the theory was applied to a specific incident he/she encountered when dealing with the subordinate employee.

Include a reference page on the last page of the narrative if a source is cited or discussed in the narrative. If you studied numerous sources of information, an annotated bibliography should be included in the documentation section.

DOCUMENTATION

The purpose of documentation is to prove that you have the knowledge that you say you have or that you have accomplished what you say you have accomplished. Documentation supports and strengthens your credit requests. Generally, the best documentation is something you have produced. Documentation should be tangible, and it must be submitted along with your portfolio.

The following recommendations regarding documentation may be helpful:

1. Be prepared to furnish proof that you did, in fact, produce the document/product which you are presenting.
2. A variety of products/documentation will support your claim for credit better than a single item.
3. The documentation should verify both the quantity and the quality of the experience.
4. Products should be clearly identified and logically connected to the credit requested.
5. When individual documentation is long or comprehensive, underline/highlight those parts of the document that are relevant to the credits requested.

As you collect your documentation you will find that some courses or experiences are easier to support than others. Often students identify documentation options for verifying their experiences while writing the narrative. The narrative explains the learning and the documents verify the experience. Documents such as human resources records, performance reviews, business receipts, screen shots of electronic documents, digital photos of collections of artwork, letters from colleagues or supervisors, or even tax records (for security, numbers can be blackened) can be used for verification. You should brainstorm documentation options with the Program Chair and Prior Learning Counselor. If no documentation is available to verify the learning, the student may consider using other methods of prior learning assessment such as testing.

Your documentation should be organized so evaluators can easily find it and identify its relationship to a specific credit request.

Digital Submission is preferred however, if some documents cannot be submitted digitally, hard copy will be accepted.

EVALUATION PROCEDURE

The relevant program chair or faculty expert evaluating your portfolio will look for:

- what was learned, and that the level of learning is reflected in the content of the essay, as well as the writing itself (e.g., a well-articulated college-level essay). A poorly written essay may jeopardize the granting of credit
- an appropriate title for the essay and for the portfolio
- the validity of the direct and indirect verification documents of the learning
- the content and level of learning to be consistent with the learning of other students engaged in the course for which you are seeking credit
- the learning to reflect the balance between theory and application appropriate to the course
- verification that 70% of the course learning outcomes, at minimum, are reflected in your portfolio.
- work that is cited properly
- how you applied what you learned, and
- evidence of analytical thinking and organizational skills

In addition, evaluators look for breadth and depth of experience, often measured by the variety of tasks in which you were engaged and the amount of involvement and exposure on the job. They also look for references within your essay to the documentation you include.

The portfolio is graded on a credit/no credit basis and does not affect the student's grade point average. The designated portfolio evaluator can make the following credit recommendations:

- Credit recommended. Student has demonstrated and documented college level learning for courses being petitioned (considered at a 70% (C) grade or higher level). If for elective credit hours, the portfolio evaluator will use a comparable course's student learning outcomes to determine if a 70% grade or higher has been demonstrated in the portfolio.
- No credit recommended. Student did not demonstrate and document sufficient learning to be awarded subject credit and/or credit hours.

Students are notified of credits awarded when the evaluation is complete. Any credit awarded will be reflected on the student's transcript. If credit is denied, it will not be reflected on the student's transcript.

PRESENTATION

The professional appearance of your portfolio will lend additional credibility to your college-level skills. If a portfolio is poorly organized or inadequately articulated and documented, the portfolio will be returned with suggestions for improvement or expansion.

The student will then be required to resubmit the portfolio for review and evaluation.

NEXT STEPS

If you believe that you are able to develop a portfolio or successfully demonstrate the courses' student learning outcomes using Credit by Examination complete the following pages' application and submit it to MCU's Prior Learning Counselor.

The Prior Learning Counselor will schedule a meeting with you and the relevant course's program chair to discuss your application. If we collectively decide to move forward, either a Portfolio Review deadline will be established or a day for CBE testing will be set.

The back side of the application will have the results of either the Portfolio Review or the CBE.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Prior Learning Assessment Guide for Students was adapted from Wilmington University's *The Prior Learning Assessment Guide for Students* and Southern New Hampshire University's *Developing a Portfolio at Southern New Hampshire University*. In turn, the guide was developed by information from The Student Handbook for *Competency-based Evaluation* by Wilmington University, *The Handbook for Preparing A Portfolio* by the East Central Colleges with offices at Bethany College in Bethany, West Virginia, and *Portfolio Development* from the University of Wisconsin, Superior. Marymount California University acknowledges their efforts and appreciates their permission to use these publications as a model

PORTFOLIO REVIEW PROCESS MILE MARKERS

Completed?	Date	Activity
		Student contacts PLC to discuss Portfolio Review topic
		Portfolio Review Application received
		Set meeting with Program Chair & Student Date:
		Meet with Program Chair & Student Received Outline of Portfolio Review Completion Date Set
		Student Pays \$400 for Portfolio Review
		PLC Checks in with Student – Wk 1
		If necessary, PLC Checks in with Student – Wk 2
		If necessary, PLC Checks in with Student – Wk 4
		If necessary, PLC Checks in with Student – Wk 6
		If necessary, PLC Checks in with Student – Wk 8
		First iteration submitted to Program Chair/Faculty Evaluator
		If necessary, PLC Checks in with Student – Wk 10
		If necessary, PLC Checks in with Student – Wk 12
		If necessary, PLC Checks in with Student – Wk 14
		If necessary, PLC Checks in with Student – Wk 16
		Completed Portfolio submitted to Program Chair/Faculty Evaluator
		PLC Receives results from Program Chair and submits to Student and the Registrar

MARYMOUNT CALIFORNIA UNIVERSITY

PETITION FOR PORTFOLIO REVIEW OR CREDIT BY EXAM

NAME _____ ID# _____ TERM _____ YEAR _____

LOCAL ADDRESS _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

TELEPHONE _____ MCU EMAIL _____@marymountcalifornia.edu

I WISH TO PROVE MY PRIOR LEARNING BY:

PORTFOLIO REVIEW (PR) Course(s) Targeted by PR (optional) or CBE (required)
for Credit Hours
for Subject Credit(s)

Course Code

Course Name

CREDIT BY EXAMINATION (CBE) _____

Course Code

Course Name

Proposed Portfolio Review or Credit-By-Exam Content:

STUDENT'S SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

Return this document to Prior Learning Counselor, priorlearning@marymountcalifornia.edu. The PLC will contact you to schedule a meeting with the related program chair, the PLC, and you to discuss this petition.

Meeting Results _____ Date: _____

Scheduled date for CBE: _____ Portfolio Review Due Date: _____

A copy of this document will be given to each party below. The student is aware of relevant deadlines and will accept the determination of the program chair and/or faculty.

Department Chair: _____ Date: _____

PLC Signature: _____ Date: _____

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

RESULTS OF PETITION FOR PORTFOLIO REVIEW OR CREDIT BY EXAM

CREDIT BY EXAMINATION RESULT:

Exam passed/Credit earned No Credit

COURSE CODE/NAME AWARDED: _____ UNITS: _____

EVALUATOR’S SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

PORTFOLIO REVIEW RESULT:

Approved – Credit Earned No Credit # or Units Awarded: _____

REVIEWED BY: _____ DATE: _____

COMMENTS: _____

COURSE CODE/NAME AWARDED: _____ UNITS: _____

COURSE CODE/NAME AWARDED: _____ UNITS: _____

Department Chair: _____ Date: _____

PLC Signature: _____ Date: _____

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

Business Services _____ Date: _____

(verifying \$400 charged to account)

FOR OFFICE USE:		
COPIES TO:	Student	Date Issued: _____
	Prior Learning Counselor	
	Department Chair	Date received by registrar: _____