

# **2010 – 2011 Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Student Manual**



A Regional University  
of the  
University System of Georgia

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The PLA Work Group  
Valdosta State University

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface .....	2
Prior Learning Assessment at VSU.....	4
Definition of Prior Learning.....	4
Prior Learning Assessment (PLA).....	4
Methods of Assessing Prior Learning for College Credit.....	4
Credit by Departmental Exam.....	4
National Standardized Examination.....	5
Portfolio Assessment.....	6
PLA Portfolio Assessment .....	7
Courses Available for PLA Credit.....	7
Courses Not Available for PLA Credit.....	8
PLA Portfolio Development.....	8
Registering for the PLA 2000 Documentation Course.....	8
Veterans and Current Military Service Members.....	9
PLA 2000 Prior Learning Documentation Course.....	10
Valdosta State University PLA Policies.....	11
Role Expectations for PLA Counselor, Faculty Assessors and Students ....	13
Fee Structure for Portfolio Assessment.....	13
PLA Credit Form.....	14

## ***Preface***

This handbook is designed to provide students with information needed when seeking credit for prior learning related to specific courses at Valdosta State University. The handbook, also available online via <http://www.valdosta.edu/pla/>, will be revised as new courses become available for PLA by portfolio credit.

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# PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT

## AT VSU

### Definition of Prior Learning

Prior learning is learning gained through life or work outside of structured higher educational courses. Many people learn through their experiences in life such as those in professional endeavors (through business, the military, or other work/training experiences) or through other educational experiences (through community work, family, travel, or personal study).

### 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 relative to specific course objectives at VSU.

### Earning College Credit for Prior Learning

Broadly speaking, one of the goals of college level education is to prepare responsible, reflective citizens who adapt constructively to change. College level education also helps students become critical thinkers and problem solvers in an ever-changing world.

Students can acquire learning from a variety of sources outside the traditional classroom, and they can earn appropriate credit in their work towards a degree for verifiable college level learning acquired through life or work experience, not for the experience itself. Students who acquire the level of knowledge that meets the expectations and the learning outcomes of a specific course may get credit for that course, provided the students can demonstrate proficiency in that specific course.

A total of thirty (30) semester hours may be earned through any combination of credit by departmental examination, national standardized examinations, correspondence courses, extension work, advanced placement and PLA by portfolio [[VSU 2010-2011 Undergraduate Bulletin](#), page 82].

### Methods of Assessing Prior Learning for College Credit

1. **Departmental Examination.** Students currently enrolled who present satisfactory evidence that they are qualified in a particular subject may receive credit by an examination developed and administered by the appropriate instructional department. Satisfactory evidence may be, but is not limited to, work experience, non-credit courses, course work taken at non-accredited institutions, or military courses. Permission must be obtained from the head of the instructional department offering the course; however, exams will not be permitted in courses for which a student has previously taken an exam for credit or was previously enrolled at VSU as a regular or audit student. (For more information consult the [VSU 2010-2011 Undergraduate Bulletin](#).)

Courses for which credit is available by departmental examination:

ACED 2400 Computer Technology for Workplace (For information go to <http://www.valdosta.edu/coe/aced/howto/exaced2400.shtml> )

2. **National Standardized Examination.** Credit for prior learning may be awarded through CLEP, Advanced Placement (AP) credit, DANTES, and ACE (further explanation is available in the [VSU 2010-2011 Undergraduate Bulletin](#)).

- **CLEP (College Level Examination Program) Credit**

VSU students may receive up to thirty (30) semester hours of college credit for certain courses based on CLEP scores. The Office of Testing coordinates the administration dates for the examinations.

Criteria for credit awarded for CLEP subject examinations, minimum scores, and credit given may be found at

<http://www.valdosta.edu/academic/CLEPTestMinimumScoreCourseandCreditGiven.shtml>

The only General Examination accepted is English Composition with Essay, requiring a minimum score of 500.

VSU will grant credit for DANTES/DSST exams determined to be equivalent to CLEP. The same score minimums will apply to these tests as the CLEP. CLEP credit will be indicated by a "K" on the student's transcript.

- **AP (Advanced Placement) Credit**

Valdosta State University provides the opportunity for qualified beginning students to obtain credit for certain basic courses. The granting of advanced placement is usually based on the College Entrance Examination Board Advanced Placement Test scores, as approved by departments of instruction. Students may contact the Admissions Office for more details and credit available. Scores of less than 3 will not be considered. The course and credit hours will be posted to the student's report card; however, the grade received will not calculate in the student's semester or cumulative grade point average. Advanced Placement credit will be indicated by a K on the student's transcript.

Information about VSU Advanced Placement Equivalencies is available at

<http://www.valdosta.edu/admissions/APIBCredits.shtml>.

- **DANTES (Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Educational Support) Credit**

VSU will grant credit for DANTES/DSST examinations determined to be equivalent to CLEP. The same score minimums will apply to these tests as the CLEP. CLEP credit will be indicated by a “K” on the student’s transcript. (See the web site for the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs at <http://www.valdosta.edu/academic/> for more information.)

Please refer to the DSST website at <http://www.getcollegetcredit.com> for more information.

- **ACE (American Council on Education) Credit**

The American Council on Education (ACE) is an organization that provides guidance to colleges and universities on the acceptance of credit. VSU is a member of ACE and honors ACE credits as appropriate for the program of study for students. Students must contact their advisor and the VSU Offices of Admissions (<http://www.valdosta.edu/admissions/>) for information on documentation of ACE credits and verification of their application to programs of study. ACE can be found online at <http://www.acenet.edu>.

### **Earning Credit for Work Taken or Exams Passed Prior to Attending VSU**

See (<http://www.valdosta.edu/academic/HowDoIGetCredit.shtml>) for further discussion of transfer credit and International Baccalaureate (IB) credit.

3. **Portfolio Assessment.** Students use the PLA portfolio development process to document their prior learning. This process requires students to prepare and submit a collection of documents that establish and support their claim that they have specific relevant skills, knowledge, values, attitudes, understandings, achievements, experiences, competencies, training, and certifications that align with specific course objectives. The portfolio developed in the documentation course should not only describe the relevant experience but should also identify the particular learning outcomes ([PLA Documentation Course](#)).

## PLA PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

If prospective students have other learning experiences that may fit courses not served by departmental examination or by national standardized examination, they may be advised to consider prior learning assessment by portfolio. Students will then be advised to sign up for the PLA Documentation course (PLA 2000). This course is the method by which students will develop documentation for the courses for which they hope to earn PLA credit. The PLA Documentation Course is a two credit hour course offered online and is taught by a PLA Counselor. In this course, students will learn how to develop the appropriate documentation sets for the classes for which they wish to seek credit. By the end of the semester, they should have materials ready to submit to faculty assessors from the program in which they are seeking credit.

### Courses available for PLA credit

In theory, any course in the Valdosta State University curriculum could be eligible for PLA credit. However, students should be aware that some courses are more or less relevant to their learning experiences and to their degree program. Individual departments determine which courses, if any, are available for PLA credit by portfolio. The following chart lists courses available for PLA credit by portfolio at time of publication. The most current list is available on the PLA website at <http://www.valdosta.edu/pla/handbook/description.shtml>.

### VSU COURSES AVAILABLE FOR PLA CREDIT

ACED 1100 Intro to Business	NURS 3150 Principles of Baccalaureate Nursing Ed
ACED 2050 Communication for the Workplace	NURS 3220 Community as Client
ACED 3100 Computer Systems	NURS 4060 Advanced Health Assessment
ACED 3400 Applied Computer Technology	NURS 4400 Nursing Informatics
CHEM 1211 Principles of Chemistry I	PERS 2160 Perspectives on Leadership
CHEM 1212 Principles of Chemistry II	PERS 2690 Multicultural America
CRJU 2100 Survey of Law Enforcement	PERS 2710 Exploring Success
CRJU 4910 Internship in Criminal Justice	PERS 2730 Internet Technology
CS 4121 Data Communications and Networks I	SCI 3103 Natural History for Middle School Teachers
CS 4122 Data Communications and Networks II	SOCI 3190 Clinical Sociology
CS 4345 Operating Systems	SOCI 4540 Internship in Sociology
Mathematics	SPEC 2110 / ASLS I American Sign Language I
MSED 7002 Content Methods	SPEC 2120 / ASLS II American Sign Language II
MSED 7005 Teaching Internship I	

### Courses NOT available for PLA credit

The courses covered by CLEP, departmental examination, DANTEs, and ACE methods of earning credit will not be eligible for credit through the portfolio process. In addition, courses for which the student has already registered are not eligible.

**PLA Portfolio Development**

Students use the PLA portfolio development process to document their prior learning. This process requires students to prepare and submit a collection of documents that establish and support their claim that they have specific relevant skills, knowledge, values, attitudes, understandings, achievements, experiences, competencies, training, and certifications that align with specific course objectives. The portfolio developed in the documentation course should not only describe the relevant experience but should also identify the particular learning outcomes.

Students must also offer a critical self-assessment of what college-level learning has been acquired through selected non-traditional experience. This experience might include a variety of work, training, reading and research, civil and military service, or life learning.

Once students complete and submit the PLA portfolio, assessors will evaluate it to determine if the portfolio provides evidence which ties those skills to a specific course objective. If the portfolio does so, credit can be awarded when assessors determine that the prior learning is acceptable for credit.

**Registering for the PLA Documentation Course**

Students register for the PLA Documentation Course in consultation with the PLA Counselor. For more information on PLA contact:

Dr. Gerald A. Merwin  
Office: 1060B Nevins Hall  
Phone: 229-253-2873  
Email: [gamerwin@valdosta.edu](mailto:gamerwin@valdosta.edu)

## VETERANS AND CURRENT MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS

Valdosta State University is committed to helping veterans and current military personnel take full advantage of their eligible benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (<http://www.va.gov/>). Students seeking VA educational benefits should contact the Veterans Affairs Office in the VSU Financial Aid Department (<http://www.valdosta.edu/financialaid/VeteransAffairs.shtml>).

In addition to VSU resources, veterans and military service members are encouraged to explore the educational opportunities available through the University System of Georgia ([http://www.usg.edu/student\\_affairs/veterans/](http://www.usg.edu/student_affairs/veterans/)).

Veterans and current military personnel can take advantage of the Military Evaluations Program conducted through the American Council on Education (ACE) for service school courses. For further information, see ACE Military Programs (<http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/MilitaryPrograms/index.htm>) and the Defense Activity for Nontraditional Educational Support or DANTES ([http://www.dantes.doded.mil/Dantes\\_web/DANTESHOME.asp](http://www.dantes.doded.mil/Dantes_web/DANTESHOME.asp)).

### **Additional Resources:**

- Veterans may be eligible for military-funded CLEP exams (<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/clep/military.html>)
- For a list of military benefits by state go to [http://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil/Home/Benefit\\_Library/State\\_Territory\\_Benefits.html](http://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil/Home/Benefit_Library/State_Territory_Benefits.html)
- VSU is a member of the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges Consortium. For information see the SOC website at <http://www.soc.aascu.org/>.

## PLA 2000 PRIOR LEARNING DOCUMENTATION COURSE

### Two (2) Semester Hours

This course provides an opportunity for guided practice in preparing portfolio-based documentation to support application for academic credit based on prior learning. Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is a process through which students **identify** areas of learning from their past experiences, **demonstrate** that learning through appropriate documentation, and **submit** their materials related to specific course objectives of a designated target course so that they can be assessed and possibly awarded academic credit. A target course is an existing course that has been designated by the institution as eligible for PLA Assessment by portfolio (see page 2 in this handbook).

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) defines PLA as:

*“The recognition of learning gained from experiences that may be granted credit or otherwise certified...the assessment of learning attained through experiences irrespective of the time and place in which they occurred.”*

Fiddler, M., Marienau, C., & Whitaker, U. 2006. *Assessing Learning*, p.12

PLA can reduce the repetition of relevant, course-related material for students with prior learning (or with prior degrees). This documentation course can also help prepare students who have not been in college before or who have not been in college recently to acquaint themselves with college learning and expectations. PLA can help reduce the time required to earn a degree.

Prior Learning Portfolio Development is a process used by students to document their prior learning. This process requires students to prepare and submit a collection of documents that establish and support a claim that applicants have the particular skills, knowledge, values, attitudes, understandings, achievements, experiences, competencies, training, and certifications that will align with specific course objectives of a target course. The portfolio developed in the documentation course should not only describe the relevant experience but should also link the documentation with particular learning outcomes designated for the target course. Students will also offer a critical self-assessment of what college-level learning has been acquired through selected non-traditional experience. This experience might include a variety of work, training, reading and research, civil and military service, or life learning.

Once the prior learning documentation is completed and submitted, the resulting portfolio must be evaluated by a qualified faculty assessor. Sufficient evidence linking knowledge and skills obtained through prior learning to objectives of the target course must be provided before credit can be granted. Faculty assessors will determine if the prior learning is acceptable for credit. PLA provides a method to help encourage non-traditional students to pursue a degree; it will help them make the transition to higher education and will shorten their time to graduation. This course has been designed in accordance with the principles established by CAEL (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning).

## VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY PLA POLICIES

1. Prospective students who fit the following criteria are eligible to participate in PLA:
  - i. They are adults.
  - ii. They are non-traditional students.
  - iii. They have other learning experiences outside a traditional college curriculum.
2. Course credit via PLA by portfolio may not replace existing credit assessments available through CLEP, departmental examination, DANTEs, or ACE.
3. Students are required to complete PLA 2000 Prior Learning Documentation in preparation for developing portfolio(s) for credit evaluation, preferably prior to their last semester.
4. Students may not conduct PLA by departmental examination, standardized test, or portfolio for any courses for which they have previously or currently registered at Valdosta State University as a regular or audit student.
5. The departments responsible for grading particular examinations determine the grading timeline for the examinations. Portfolios are due three weeks prior to the end of the semester for consideration of receipt of credit by PLA. Faculty assessors will assign grades by the final examination period.
6. Credit may be awarded after the first submission, in which case the student will be notified that credit has been granted. The assessors may specifically outline areas for improvement and encourage students to resubmit their documentation one time during the next semester. The assessors will provide a report giving specific feedback to students.
7. Students may resubmit the portfolio for re-assessment, with a revision of the documentation set and inclusion of any noted areas for improvement in the semester immediately after the PLA Documentation Course or the original assessment of that particular documentation set. Students may resubmit only one time for any given course.
8. If the assessors deem a portfolio "satisfactory," they will submit a PLA Credit Approval Form (available at <http://www.valdosta.edu/pla/resources/>). This form must be approved by the assessor, the assessor's department head and dean, and the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs before being sent to the Registrar's Office. Students will earn a grade of satisfactory (S) or unsatisfactory (U) for the PLA 2000 Prior Learning Documentation course and the course or courses for which students have successfully earned PLA credit will be noted on the transcript with a letter grade of "S" or "U." These "S" or "U" grades will not be part of the student's grade point average (GPA).
9. A maximum of 30 semester hours can be earned through any combination of CLEP, credit by departmental examination, correspondence courses, extension work, advanced placement (AP), or PLA by portfolio credit. Students should also work with the PLA Counselor and their academic advisor to determine any additional requirements they may need to consider.
10. Individual departments determine how many, if any, PLA credits may be awarded.
11. The PLA 2000 Prior Learning Documentation course will be recorded on the students' transcripts as "Satisfactory" or "Unsatisfactory." PLA credit for the courses for which the student seeks credit will be noted with a specific letter (S) designating that credit was given by PLA. (This is the current procedure for courses in which letters such as "K" are used.)

12. Appeal Process: "Students may appeal an unsatisfactory grade on a resubmitted portfolio through the normal course grade appeal process" (Refer to <http://www.valdosta.edu/academic/GradeAppeals.shtml>.)
13. Time Limit Policy: Students have up to two semesters to complete PLA by portfolio for a particular course. Students may have one additional semester if it becomes necessary to resubmit an unsatisfactory portfolio.
14. Students may resubmit the portfolio for re-assessment, with a revision of the documentation set and inclusion of any noted areas for improvement in the semester immediately after the PLA 2000 Prior Learning Documentation course or the original assessment of that particular documentation set. Students are allowed to resubmit only one time for any given course.

## **ROLE EXPECTATIONS: PLA COUNSELOR, FACULTY ASSESSOR AND STUDENT**

### **Role of the PLA Counselor**

Students who believe that they may have prior learning that can be used for academic credit should schedule an appointment with the PLA Counselor who will work with them to determine if the portfolio documentation process is appropriate. If a student decides to pursue this route, the PLA Counselor will enroll them in PLA 2000 Prior Learning Documentation.

### **Role of the Faculty Assessor**

Faculty assessors help determine appropriate courses based on backgrounds of students in concert with the PLA Counselor. Faculty develop assessment methods appropriate for the course, provide syllabus and assessment guidelines, and evaluate student portfolios.

Faculty assessors should develop course syllabi and course instructions that allow students to complete PLA by portfolio as a self-directed study. Faculty should be available to provide clarification of course expectations or instructions. However, faculty members are not expected to teach the course in the manner of an independent study.

### **Role of the Student in the PLA process**

Students must provide evidence to the Faculty Assessor and the PLA Counselor that they have relevant learning experiences that are aligned with learning outcomes for the target course. Obtaining course credit through the PLA process is not equivalent to a faculty directed independent study. Rather, PLA by portfolio is a process by which students evaluate prior learning experiences and demonstrate appropriate learning outcomes relevant to specific courses. Thus, students must meet the expectations of the course syllabus with a minimum of supervision by the faculty assessor.

## **FEEES FOR PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENTS**

PLA by portfolio fees are based on the number of credit hours assigned each course.

<b># Credit Hours</b>	<b>Fee</b>
4 - 6	\$300
3	\$250
2	\$200
1	\$150



## PLA Credit Form

NAME OF STUDENT \_\_\_\_\_ STUDENT ID \_\_\_\_\_

The above student has completed either a Departmental Exam or Prior Learning Assessment portfolio and documentation to receive credit for the following course(s).

Portfolio credit  Departmental Exam Credit

<u>Course Prefix and Number</u>	<u>Course Title</u>	<u>Credit Hours</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

### APPROVALS

Approved \_\_\_\_\_ Disapproved \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Assessor

Approved \_\_\_\_\_ Disapproved \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Department Head

Approved \_\_\_\_\_ Disapproved \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Dean

Approved \_\_\_\_\_ Disapproved \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Vice President of Academic Affairs

The PLA Counselor has reviewed all submitted materials to verify that the documentation to meet the requirements for credit is complete.

\_\_\_\_\_  
PLA Counselor Date

## NOTES