

PLA 2000 Prior Learning Documentation Course

Fall 2009 Online
Gerald A. "Jerry" Merwin Jr., Ph.D.

Office Location: 106 West Hall Web: <http://www.valdosta.edu/~gamerwin/>
Voice & Messaging: Office: 229.333.5776 gamerwin@valdosta.edu
Cellular: 229.221.2891 FAX: 229.333.5910
Office Schedule: Individual meetings can be scheduled either online or in West Hall at a time that is convenient for both the student and professor. Please contact me by email to set up a time.

Required Reading: PLA Handbook - <http://www.valdosta.edu/pla/>

Course Description: Prerequisite: Permission of instructor. Graded "Satisfactory" or "Unsatisfactory."

Techniques for the development of documentation for prior learning experiences based on standards and criteria established by academic and subject matter professionals. Students prepare and submit documentation which provides a clear description of competencies obtained.

Justification: 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 so that they can be assessed and possibly awarded academic credit.

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) defines PLA as follows: "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." (*Assessing Learning*, 2nd edition, By Morry Fiddler, Catherine Marienau, and Urban Whitaker, 2007, p.12)

PLA will reduce the repetition of relevant, course-related material for students with prior learning (or with prior degrees). The portfolio course will also help prepare students who have not been in college before or who have not been in college recently to reacquaint themselves with college learning and expectations. PLA should 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. The portfolio developed in the documentation course should not only describe the relevant experience but should also identify the particular learning outcomes. Students will also offer a critical self-assessment of what college-level learning has been acquired

PLA 2000 Prior Learning Documentation Course

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 portfolio is completed and submitted, it must be evaluated and evidence must be provided to tie those skills to objectives of a specific course 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).

Course Activities

The specific activities for each student will depend on the course for which the student is seeking PLA credit. All students are required to complete and submit the following:

1. Design or update a resume representing education, work, and training accomplishments.
2. Draft a portfolio for review. (The portfolio packet will include the resume and all documentation of learning activities, the knowledge, skills, and abilities gained from the experiences, with linkages to specific course objectives.)
3. Develop and submit a final portfolio containing documentation to meet the requirements of a course for which one is seeking credit.

The following tasks are considered appropriate for portfolio development and will help students complete their documentation of past work, training, and other life experiences:

- Develop chronological list of life experiences that represent learning opportunities.
- Write an autobiography.
- Develop or update an Educational Degree Plan (EDP).
- Request documentation from prior employers, training managers, volunteer coordinators, and others who might have observed learning activities
- Write essays about life activities and describe learning based on those events (drafts will be provided for peer and instructor review and critique)
- Assess personal needs for supplementary activities (in consultation with the professor) including:
 - seek assistance from the Student Success Center on development and revisions of the resume, essays and other submissions
 - attend workshops or other sessions for study skills, time management, etc.
 - take part in career counseling to refine or revise choices and plans

PLA 2000 Prior Learning Documentation Course

Course Objectives/Outcomes:

The student will demonstrate the following:

1. State career and educational goals and explain her or his progress toward meeting those goals.
2. Determine sources of prior learning (e.g., military, work and community involvement) and articulate the knowledge, skills, and abilities gained from those experiences.
3. Identify the courses from her or his major requirements that best fit the areas of learning previously gained.
4. Locate the course outcomes from the courses available for PLA and list those on the Application for PLA Credit.
5. Match the course outcomes for required courses and the knowledge, skills, and abilities from past learning to provide the best evidence for PLA review.
6. Determine the best forms of documentation for each course outcome and follow the established methods for developing the portfolio for PLA.
7. Package the documentation with the Application for PLA Credit and list each artifact or item that supports a course outcome along with a caption or brief explanation of the connection between the evidence and requirement.
8. Submit the portfolio on CD or DVD including the Application for PLA Credit and all artifacts linked from the application.

Assignments:

Point Values

The specific assignments for each student will depend on the course for which the student is seeking PLA credit. A possible list of tasks is provided below with sample values.

Essays on Life Experiences (All Essays Combined)	100
Resume	100
Autobiography	100
Chronology of Learning Activities	100
Educational Degree Plan	100
Portfolio Project Proposal	25
Outline of Documentation	25
Portfolio Draft	50
Final Portfolio	<u>100</u>
Total:	700

PLA 2000 Prior Learning Documentation Course

Course Policies

Attendance Policy: The University expects that all students shall attend all regularly scheduled class meetings held for instruction or examination. Although independent study is encouraged at Valdosta State University, regular attendance at class is expected. Instructors are required to maintain records of class attendance. The unexcused absence or “cut” is not regarded as a student privilege.

It is recognized that class attendance is essentially a matter between students and their instructors. Instructors must explain their absence policy in the course syllabus. All students are held responsible for knowing the specific attendance requirements as prescribed by their instructors When students are compelled for any reason to be absent from class, they should immediately contact the instructor. A student who misses more than 20% of the scheduled classes of a course will be subject to receiving a failing grade in the course. (*Undergraduate Catalog 2006-2007*, p. 79)

For this course, attendance is defined as participation in activities related to the online course schedule. This will include both discussions on PLA topics and submission of assignments. Students are expected to take part in all appropriate activities and maintain regular communication with the professor. The VSU Attendance Policy will be applied in relation to the online course process.

Accommodations Statement: “Valdosta State University complies fully with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If you believe that you are covered under this act, and if you have need for special arrangements to allow you to meet the requirements of this course, please contact the Access Office for Students with Disabilities, (229) 245-2498. Also, please discuss this need with the instructor at the time of the first class.”

Academic Student Conduct Code: Students should study and be sure that they thoroughly understand the concepts of plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. Useful information is located in Section I of the Student Code of Conduct, located in the VSU Student Handbook. If you have questions on these topics, please communicate with the professor.

Course Credit: This course carries "Institutional Credit" at the value of 2 credits, but the credits do not count toward a degree.

Course Evaluation: Students will be evaluated on projects that lead up to the final submission of a portfolio. Each submission will be graded on the following scale.

Grading Scale - This course is graded as either satisfactory (S) or unsatisfactory (U).

S = 71-100

U = 70 and below

PLA 2000 Prior Learning Documentation Course

Course Requirements & Schedule

Weeks 1 - 2: Introductions, Course overview, Overview of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Handbook <http://www.valdosta.edu/pla/>

During the first two weeks each student should communicate directly with the PLA 2000 Instructor to verify that the student understands the process for developing the portfolio. The remainder of the course will involve further communication as the student identifies, locates, and prepares the documentation for submission.

The primary purpose of the PLA 2000 course is to assist the student in preparing a portfolio that will be used to support the student's claim for credit. The PLA 2000 instructor, or PLA Counselor, will provide guidance and assistance along the way as needed. The introduction presented here in the syllabus is not meant to be an exhaustive list of all information necessary to seek credit for prior learning. It is intended to give each student an overview of the process.

The steps for creating the portfolio to submit for possible credit:

1. Select the course that best matches your knowledge, skills, and abilities.
2. Find out if the course is available for Prior Learning Assessment (PLA). Review the courses listed on the PLA Resources page on the PLA site. If you do not find the course, contact the PLA 2000 instructor or PLA Counselor.
3. Complete the Application for PLA Credit for the course that best matches your prior learning. If you are seeking credit for more than one course, you must complete one application for each course.
4. Work with the PLA 2000 Instructor and the specific faculty assessor (depending on subject area of course for which credit is being sought) to verify the requirements for PLA credit.
5. Develop the documentation to support your claim for the prior learning required to earn credit for the course.
6. Work with the PLA 2000 Instructor to be sure that your documentation is packaged appropriately for the portfolio.
7. Submit your documentation for review by the faculty assessor. In some cases the faculty assessor might request the student to provide further evidence of learning.
8. When the faculty assessor notifies the student that she or he is recommending that credit will be awarded, the student should submit the final portfolio including all work in electronic format (CD or DVD) to Dr. Jerry Merwin, PLA Counselor.

The final portfolio submission should be on CD-ROM or DVD and should include a copy of the Application for Credit Through Prior Learning Assessment and all documents, presentations, videos, or other files submitted to the faculty assessor.

PLA 2000 Prior Learning Documentation Course

There are two sample portfolios available for students to view as models:

- [NURS 4060 Sample Portfolio](#)
- [PERS 2730 Sample Portfolio](#)

These sample portfolios include examples of Applications for PLA Credit and demonstrate the methods for showing the links between the course objectives and supporting files. Remember that the final portfolio content will vary depending on the requirements of the course for which PLA credit is sought and the recommended methods of documentation.

Locate information about the courses available through PLA on the [PLA Resources](#) page. Depending on the course, you might find a syllabus, evaluation, guidelines, and/or other resources. Course outcomes or objectives will be available for each course. These materials should guide you in completing the Application for Credit.

If you do not find the course outcomes or objectives, please be sure to contact Dr. Jerry Merwin about that information. We will seek the needed information through faculty assessors who have developed the materials.

All portfolio submissions must be accompanied by the Application for Credit and provided in digital format. The specific files might be Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, or Access), Acrobat PDF, HTML, or other formats approved in advance by your PLA 2000 instructor.

Week 3 - 14: Develop and submit documentation to support your claims for credit for a specific course. Specific assignments will vary depending on the course for which you are seeking credit.

The assignments might include the following: Essays on Life Experiences, Resume, Educational Degree Plan, PowerPoint Presentations, and/or Videos that document knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Week 15: Portfolio Submission