

**PRIOR LEARNING PORTFOLIO HANDBOOK**

**Prior Learning Assessment Portfolio Development Course and Fees**

This course counts as 3 credits regardless of whether any prior learning credits are awarded. As required by CAEL standards, the payment is the same regardless of the number of credits awarded (if any).

**Introducing the Prior Learning Portfolio**

City Vision awards university credit for the learning gained in the unstructured arena of experience. Some of you with just a few years of formal work experience may have gained an introductory knowledge of a field; others will have rich veins of experiential learning from decades of holding increasingly complex positions. At City Vision we have developed a process to assess this learning and to assign credit awards based on the demonstration of learning gained through experience. The vehicle is the prior learning portfolio. This handbook is designed to help City Vision student understand the prior learning assessment process and prepare a prior learning portfolio.

**What is "experiential learning"?**

Experiential learning is learning gained by grappling with the day-to-day demands of living and working. All learning includes increased understanding and knowledge, but experiential learning and academic learning differ in the context in which one learns. Learning gained in college or through training programs is deliberate, structured, and intentional, whereas experiential learning usually happens as a result of activities directed toward other ends, such as meeting work requirements and family or community needs.

As we encounter typical situations again and again, we find ways of dealing with them more effectively. Over time we develop "best practices" for what we do. As new, less typical situations arise, we assess them and make adjustments to our standard responses, and with each adjustment we expand our repertoire of techniques and acquire more knowledge. A successful, experienced manager, for example, has learned a great deal about people—what motivates them, how they learn, how they react to change. He or she has also learned about how organizations work—how ideas are disseminated, how decisions are made, how organizational cultures affect the way work gets done. Though this knowledge is invaluable to the manager’s success, experiential learning is often a subconscious process. A manager may not have taken the time to think about where “good instincts” or “gut feelings” come from.

**Why award university credit for prior learning?**

At the heart of City Vision’s approach to prior learning assessment is the conviction that understanding one’s experiential learning and putting it in a larger context is a sophisticated intellectual process that expands a student’s knowledge and skill and is worthy of college credit. A manager who knows how she got from there to here and how her operating principles were developed has a deeper understanding than one who is just “going with the gut.” People who can demonstrate such knowledge are also demonstrating a level of thinking and understanding typical of college course requirements. In City Vision prior learning process, credit is not awarded for having had experiences, but rather for critically reflecting upon them, understanding them and demonstrating what they mean to you and to your field.

**What is a prior learning portfolio?**

City Vision’s prior learning process helps you think about your experience and identify the important themes, issues, and operating principles that have emerged from it. At City Vision, you seek credit for experiential learning by submitting a prior learning portfolio: a collection of analytical and reflective essays about your experience bound together with the degree plan, a resume, and documents that support your knowledge claims, such as clippings, writings, photographs, sample designs, and other appropriate materials supplementing the written narratives. This portfolio takes a good deal of work and time to develop, so we have designed this course to focus on it. You will submit the portfolio at the end of the term in which you complete the PLA course; you may add to the portfolio in later terms.

Once the portfolio is submitted, the level and scope of demonstrated learning is assessed by one or more City Vision advisors and, where appropriate, by one or more faculty members in the related field. This handbook will walk you through every step of the process, from the planning done when you design your degree to the final submission of the portfolio.

**City Vision Prior Learning Process: An Overview**

**The portfolio in the degree plan**

As you develop your degree plan in City Vision, you will need to think through several elements of the portfolio and its role in the overall degree. These first steps can be critical in guiding you later as you actually begin drafting the degree. They will define the scope, purpose and context of your later writing.

On the final page of the degree plan form, you are asked for the following information related to your prior learning portfolio:

*• General education credit or elective credit? Here you will decide whether your portfolio credits will be part of your general education requirements, elective credits, or some of both.*

*• The portfolio credits sought: In the degree plan you will determine how many portfolio credits you will seek to round out your degree.*

*Most students determine this number once they've calculated the number of credits remaining after listing courses, exams, and special transcript credits that will meet the City Vision requirements. Few students will seek more credits than will count toward graduation if doing so leads to a higher fee bracket for assessment. Your advisor will help you consider whether the number of credits you seek in prior learning seems reasonable, given your experience and the level of critical thinking and writing skills demonstrated in earlier courses. The typical range of credit awards is 15-24. Some students may earn as many as thirty credits for experiential learning, although awards at that level are relatively rare.*

*• Related experiences: On the portfolio page of the degree plan, you will also give a very brief list of the major experiences that you will be drawing on when writing the portfolio essays. This list usually consists of the years, organization, location, and job title for each experience. Include only the most important roles you have played that are directly related to the topics you have identified. Normally this list will include one to five experiences, sometimes combining similar ones.*

**What is college-level experiential learning?**

There is general agreement among higher education institutions assessing knowledge gained from experience that college-level experiential learning has the following attributes:

*• It is learning acquired through experience, not experience itself. A resume verified by documents is not sufficient to determine college-level learning, because it merely reports and documents experience. On the other hand, a creditable prior learning portfolio identifies key concepts, indicates problem-solving methods used, offers examples, and draws conclusions—it demonstrates that learning.*

*• It identifies personal frameworks or operating principles developed through experience. The more we experience the challenges within a given field, the more likely it is that we construct personal frameworks and develop operating principles to help us understand these various challenges and see the patterns within them. Developing a portfolio essay involves uncovering and articulating the frameworks and principles that govern our practice and testing them against published theories within the field.*

*• It represents broad, transferable skills and concepts applicable beyond a single context. Knowing how to process the hiring and performance evaluation forms within a paperwork-heavy human resources office does not constitute college-level learning. Most procedures are embedded within a specific context and rarely extend beyond that context. On the other hand, examining different approaches to hiring qualified staff, evaluating the effects of the Family and Medical Leave Act on the small business you work within, or comparing supervision styles among several managers demonstrates broad, transferable skills and the understanding of the larger context of the work.*

*• It is acknowledged as college level by appropriate experts. All prior learning portfolios are evaluated by highly qualified City Vision advisors experienced in the assessment process. Those involved in the assessment hold the final authority in determining if the subject and treatment in a portfolio represent college-level learning meriting college credit.*

One way to gauge whether your prior learning essay topic represents college-level learning is to see whether and how it is taught in a four-year college course. Here’s an example:

Example: Jerry wanted to write about his six-year experience counseling troubled youth who had come into contact with the legal system. To determine how to word his topic and what kinds of subtopics he should aim to include in his essay, he looked in the UMass Amherst catalog under the psychology and sociology departments. There he found an online course titled Delinquency and Juvenile Justice. To adapt it to his specific area, he decided on Counseling Youth in the Juvenile Justice System as one of his learning areas. Some of the topics listed in the course description were "theories of juvenile crime; influence of schools, peer groups, families, and drugs on juveniles; and the history of the juvenile justice system." Because he saw that his topic was well- represented in college catalogs, he knew that it could be college-level learning. He also gained some ideas of how to structure his essay dealing with that experience. By looking at his work with youth from the angles of influences on youth, counseling techniques, and the structure of the juvenile justice system and by reading and referring to published theories within the related fields, he knew that he would be sure to hit many key areas expected by the portfolio evaluators

**How will my learning be evaluated?**

City Vision has developed a rubric—an assessment tool—to guide the credit award process related to prior learning (listed at the end of this document). The rubric describes the criteria used in the assessment: knowledge demonstrated, critical thinking demonstrated, use of literature and theory, and supporting documentation. The rubric indicates degrees of achievement in each of the components, so you will have a good idea of the expectations of the evaluators when they read your portfolio. We use the following grading rubric for evaluating prior learning.

**Review Process and Appeal Policy**

1. Students must submit their portfolio’s for review at the end of the PLA 201 or PLA601 course. Students must submit a completed portfolio for at least one course at the end of the course.
2. After completing this PLA course, students have up to 6 months to submit the remaining portfolios for up to 30 credits included in the course fee.
3. If students do not submit their remaining portfolios within the 6 month period, they may pay an additional $200 to have them reviewed later. Students have until the time of their graduation to complete these portfolios for review.
4. A faculty member will review the portfolio using the portfolio review rubric and make recommendation for credit, denial or revision.
5. If you are not satisfied with your portfolio review, you may request an appeal to your PLA course instructor within 4 weeks of the ruling. Or you may choose to write additional PLA essays and provide additional documentation and submit them as supplements. After the second review of a portfolio, there is no additional appeal.

**Notes on Transferability of PLA Reviewed Credits**

While credits awarded by City Vision may be used to complete your degree with City Vision, most schools will not accept transfer credits of prior learning. Many schools to have prior learning assessment portfolio review process that should follow the same CAEL standards used by City Vision. This means that it is possible to revised and submit your portfolio to other schools for review. Once a degree is awarded by City Vision, the degree of students with Prior Learning credits is the same as all degrees by City Vision.

**Portfolio Process for Waiving Bachelor's Degree Admissions Requirement for Master's Degree**

If a student desires to be considered for an exception to City Vision’s Master’s admissions requirement that they must have a Bachelor’s degree, they may petition to take or Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) course as a mechanism to assess whether this waiver can be given. To be considered, a student has at least 5 years of experience in senior management or ministry positions that typically would require applicants to have a Bachelor’s degree; they may petition City Vision’s president to have their experience evaluated in this course make an exception to this requirement. **Before taking the PLA course**, the student should email andrew@cityvision.edu with the following:

1. Provide their current resume and job descriptions for the past 5 years.
2. Links to job postings of comparable positions in comparably-sized organizations that demonstrate that the position requires a Bachelor’s degree.

City Vision’s President will then assess whether you can be considered for an exception by taking the PLA course for equivalent standing of having a Bachelor’s degree. Being approved to take the PLA course for a Bachelor’s degree waiver does not mean that you will be approved to receive that waiver. The purpose of the course is to determine whether you have the evidence to justify that waiver, so the determination cannot be made until you complete the course.

City Vision will follow its standard PLA process as outlined in its PLA Handbook, PLA portfolio template and PLA course which follows the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning Process (CAEL). Students taking the PLA course for a Bachelor’s degree waiver should take it as other students do, except with the following changes:

1. Week 2 Assignment 1. When you submit your resume, you must also submit job descriptions for the past 5 years. Provide links to job postings of comparable positions in comparably-sized organizations that demonstrate that the position requires a Bachelor’s degree. Provide details of the size of your organization, and the number of reports you directly and indirectly supervise.
2. Week 2 Assignment 2. In your learning experience biography, be sure to emphasize how your experience is comparable to someone who would have a Bachelor’s degree.
3. Week 3. Instead of finding courses, you will need to identify a Bachelor's degree that you believe you have the equivalent experience in. It is preferred that you pick one of City Vision’s degrees, but you may also pick the degree of another school. Instead of mapping your learning to course level outcomes, you will need to map your learning to degree level outcomes.
4. Rubric. The faculty evaluating your prior learning will use the standard Portfolio Assessment rubric at the end of this handbook. In addition, you must meet the following criteria:

Criteria 1. Student provides evidence that the positions in which they have been operating in the past 5 years require the level of expertise and education of someone with a Bachelor’s degree.

* Potential Evidence: Job descriptions for past 5 years. Details of size of organization. Number of direct and indirect reports. Requirements of comparable job descriptions. Documentation that other accredited institutions have waived Bachelor’s admissions requirement in the past.

Criteria 2. Student’s portfolio narrative and supporting documentation demonstrate mastery of all degree outcomes for a Bachelor’s degree.

* Potential Evidence: Portfolio, portfolio supporting documentation, transcripts from accredited institutions
* Potential Evidence: Transcripts for students from unaccredited ministry training school. This will be considered using the Nontraditional Institutional Credit Evaluation Criteria and Evaluation Worksheet. Once an institution and its courses and programs have been evaluated through this process, future students do not need to develop full portfolios if they are requesting evaluation of the same programs and courses that have already been evaluated.

If the requirement for a Bachelor’s degree is waived through this process, and other admissions requirements are met, the student will be admitted into the Master’s program on a provisional basis. To be fully admitted, the student must complete their first three courses with at least a 3.0 GPA. If the student does not meet this requirement, they will no longer be able to continue in the Master’s program.

**Policies and Standards for Assessing Learning**

City Vision follows the standards of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning’s (CAEL). We have implemented all of the best practices listed in Chapter 5Assessing Learning: Standards, Principles, and Procedures. The following is a list of these standards and how our program has been designed to meet those standards.

1. Credit or its equivalent is be awarded only for learning, and not for experience.
2. This is met through the design of our portfolio template, requirements and rubric. These documents and our procedures ensure that credit will only be awarded for learning and not for experience.
3. Assessment is based on standards and criteria for the level of acceptable learning that are both agreed upon and made public.
4. City Vision will accept prior learning for General Education credits and electives. We will not accept prior learning for required courses in degree programs.
5. City Vision has developed the above rubric to ensure that any credit awarded is based on demonstrated learning on comparable accredited courses.
6. City Vision requires that students tie their request for prior learning assessment to their educational goals in the above template.
7. City Vision will accept credits for learning that occurred at any time as long as the student can demonstrate that their current level of learning meets the standards listed above.
8. Assessment is an integral part of learning, not separate from it, and is based on an understanding of learning processes.
9. This standard is met through the design of our portfolio process which ensures learning in the process
10. The types of evidence that is acceptable is listed in the portfolio instructions.
11. Evidence that demonstrates that a student took a course, completed training or had experience is not sufficient to document that sufficient learning was achieved.
12. The determination of credit awards and competence levels must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic or credentialing experts.
13. Letters should be on official letterhead and should reference that the student had knowledge or abilities listed in the learning objectives comparable to a student completing an accredited college course with those objectives.
14. The determination of credit awards and competence levels must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic or credentialing experts.
15. Faculty assessing learning must have a Master’s degree or above and have adequate subject matter expertise to assess the portfolio.
16. Credit or other credentialing should be appropriate to the context in which it is awarded and accepted.
17. While City Vision uses the standard process and rubric in this handbook to assess for credit, we will adapt what forms of evidence will be required based on the learning outcomes.
18. We may consider standardized tests for some forms of knowledge (such as Bible knowledge), but only if combined with other methods of assessment.
19. We award credits primarily based on demonstrated achievement of learning outcomes of accredited college courses. Students that achieve the full learning outcomes of those courses will receive the same number of credits corresponding to those courses. Time spent in an activity will not be the primary consideration in determining credit.
20. In this PLA course, students will be given formative evaluation of their portfolios in order to improve learning and their portfolios. After submitting the final portfolio, the student will be given a summative evaluation.
21. If awards are for credit, transcript entries should clearly describe what learning is being recognized and should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.
22. We ensure that all transcripts are coded to ensure avoid giving double credit.
23. Policies, procedures, and criteria applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available to all parties involved in the assessment process.
24. Our review and appeal policy is listed above in this handbook.
25. Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.
26. Our fee structure listed above meets this criteria.
27. All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions they perform.
28. All faculty conducting assessments will go through training by the PLA Director and must read *Assessing Learning: Standards, Principles, and Procedures* and this handbook.
29. Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served, the purposes being met, and the state of the assessment arts.
30. The first 2 reviews conducted by new faculty performing PLA reviews will also be reviewed by the PLA director.
31. The PLA director will conduct random sampling of reviews to ensure quality and consistency.
32. This PLA assessment process is integrated into our organizational assessment plan to be reviewed according to the policies and procedures outlined in that plan.

**Bibliography**

Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. (2006). *Assessing Learning: Standards, Principles, AND Procedures* (2 edition.). Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall Hunt Publishing.

Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. (2012). *Earn College Credit for What You Know* (5 edition.). Chicago; Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall Hunt Publishing.

*Note*: Parts of this portfolio handbook were adapted from:

<http://www.polk.edu/wp-content/uploads/PLA-Portfolio-Guidelines.pdf> and from

<http://www.umass.edu/uww/sites/default/files/images/HomePage_Slideshow/Prior%20Learning%20Handbook-Student%20Fall%202011.pdf>

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Portfolio Assessment Rubric |  |  |  |
| Category | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** | **Score** |
| Course Outcomes Identified and Addressed | Narrative and supporting documentation demonstrate mastery of all course outcomes. | Narrative and supporting documentation support the satisfactory mastery of at least 75% of the course outcomes. | Narrative and supporting documentation support the satisfactory mastery of at least 60% of the course outcomes. | Narrative and supporting documentation do not demonstrate a mastery of the course outcomes. Portfolio addresses fewer than 60% of the course outcomes. |  |
| Learning from Experience | Student is able to distinguish between their experiences and the learning that comes from these experiences. Examples of this distinction appear throughout the portfolio. | Student describes learning separately from experiences that led to the learning but gives limited concrete examples. | Student demonstrates understanding of how experience and learning are linked, but provides few, if any, concrete examples of where this happened in his or her experience. | Student conflates experience of technical practice with mastery. Student argues, for example, that length of time in a position is equivalent to college level learning. |  |
| Understanding of Theory and Practice | Student is able to cite broader theoretical or conceptual links that are related to the learning. | Student demonstrates a balance between application and theory as appropriate to the course, but provides limited concrete examples. | Student acknowledges a difference between theory and application, but provides few, if any, concrete examples. | Student relies on facts and experiences but does not relate learning to broader concepts or theories. |  |
| Reflection | Student demonstrates an ability to apply theory to his or her own experience, using concrete examples. | Student understands the potential for applying theory to his or her own experience, and provides limited concrete examples. | Student includes language appropriate to reflective thinking, but provides few, if any, examples. | Student has not demonstrated the ability to apply theory to his or her own experience. |  |
| Learning Application | Student demonstrates an ability to apply his or her learning to other contexts, as evidenced through specific examples. Student includes explicit references to how this knowledge has been transferred to other environments. | Student understands that the learning is transferable, but clearly states that they have not yet had an opportunity to do so, or, have not otherwise been able to apply the learning to other environments. | Student understands that the learning is transferable to other contexts, but makes no attempt to do so. | Student has not demonstrated that the learning is transferable to other contexts. Student has not conceptualized that the learning extends beyond the original experience. |  |
| Communication | Communication, either through the written word or orally, is at a high‐level, including strong thesis statements, arguments which follow a logical order, and minimal to no syntactical errors. Communication stays tightly focused on the topic being addressed. | Communication is focused and well organized. Communication is relatively free of grammatical or syntactical errors and is reflective of the commonly accepted rules for the English language. Communication is relevant to the learning outcomes being addressed. | Communication is satisfactory. Narrative flow may be unclear or may jump around. Communication features few or weak transitions. Communication contains grammatical or syntactical errors and sometimes goes off‐topic. | Communication is not at a college level. Narrative is unclear and contains numerous errors in grammar and syntax. |  |
| Supporting Documentation  *Source: LearningCounts.org* | Student has demonstrated an understanding of why individual pieces of documentation have been included in this portfolio submission and how each piece relates to the broader petition and narrative. Documentation is appropriate to supporting mastery of the outcomes of the course. | Evidence provided to support the credit request is relevant to the petition and appropriate for a credit recommendation of college‐level learning. Some superfluous documentation is included in the credit request. | Student has demonstrated an understanding of why individual pieces of documentation have been included in this portfolio submission and how each piece relates to the broader petition and narrative. Documentation is not always relevant to demonstrating the mastery of course outcomes | The student has demonstrated an understanding of the connection between the pieces of evidence submitted and the learning acquired. However, supporting documentation is inserted in portfolio without referencing it elsewhere and seem to be independent of other components of the complete portfolio |  |

**rning from**

**Experience**

**Understanding of**

**Theory and Practice**

**Reflection**

**Learning Application**

**Communication**

**Supporting**

**Documentation**