

UMS Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Standards
Approved by CAOC, December 2018
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This document outlines the policies and procedures for recognizing and awarding credit for college-level prior learning our students have acquired through various life, work, and educational experiences outside the college classroom. These standards should help ensure that our practices are consistent, have academic integrity, are responsive to learners, and reflect our commitment to the academic and administrative standards proposed by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL).

The University of Maine System recognizes that Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is important to the recruitment, retention, completion and cost-containment goals of our students. Our PLA program, including the standards, training, messaging, and procedures is designed to eliminate barriers for students and encourage their wide participation.

The term PLA refers to all the processes the University of Maine System uses to review and evaluate the student's evidence of prior learning and to award academic credit. In the evaluation process, the student's learning is assessed against the learning objectives of individual courses, discipline area electives, or general electives. Credits are awarded in line with those assessments and according to institutional policy.

The University of Maine System is committed to initial and ongoing professional development for faculty and staff who participate in PLA in some capacity. Faculty, professional advisors, admissions, and orientation staff need to communicate consistent messages to current and prospective students about PLA, encouraging them to initiate requests for PLA as soon as possible after matriculation. Information about PLA should be consistent in each of our catalogs, our websites, and in all public presentations.

These standards are also intended to support the transparent transfer of PLA credit between all the UMS institutions.

Student Eligibility

In most cases, students must be matriculated in a degree or certificate program in the UMS.

Award of Credit

- Credit for prior learning will be awarded based on assessment of documented college-level learning, which demonstrates achievement (at a grade level of C- or better) of learning outcomes for a specific requirement, discipline area elective, or general elective in accordance with institutional policy.
- Students may earn PLA credit for any requirement at any point in their program, unless there is a unique program requirement restricting this.
- The award of prior learning credit is subject to New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) standards. The revised standards (7/1/2016) cap PLA credits in certificate programs of 30 or fewer credits to 25 percent.
- Prior to a formal review, faculty and other academic advisors should provide guidance, but not assurances, of the number of credits that may be awarded.
- No student may receive credit twice for the same course.
- The UMS is committed to transparency in the award/denial of PLA credit. Each institution will address appeals in accordance with institutional academic policy.
- When credit has been awarded through the PLA process, the students will be notified by the office posting the credit, usually the Registrar's Office or PLA Office.

- Students and advisors should be aware of the rules related to Veterans benefits or other third party assistance as they apply to credits awarded through the PLA process. Note: Credit awarded through the PLA process is not generally considered part of a student's academic load for the term.

Transcription

- UMS institutions will record PLA credit using the appropriate labels and mechanisms in the database to differentiate test credit, military credit, portfolio, and credential credit.
- The credit will display as transfer credit on the transcript and clearly indicate the source of the credit (i.e. test, military, portfolio or credential).
- The subject and course number of the course for which credit is being given will be posted on the transcript. The course title will, except for test credit, reflect additional information about the student's prior experience and/or training.
- Credits awarded through the PLA process are considered to have been passed with a C- or better, like any other transfer course.
- Credits awarded through the PLA process do not carry quality points and are not calculated in the grade point average.

Fees

The following fees are applicable at all UMS institutions:

Assessment Type	Posting Fee	Test Administration Fee
Advanced Placement	None	
International Baccalaureate	None	
CLEP	None	\$30 for test admin**
DSST	None	\$30 for test admin**
FLATS exam	None	\$30 for test admin**
NYU Language exam	None	\$30 for test admin**
Military Training & Experience	None	
Credential Review	None	
Portfolio	None	\$50 per credit hour administration fee
Challenge Exam		\$100 flat fee

* Exams administered at selected institutions

**Does not include costs of exams students pay to testing companies

Fees are subject to review on a regular basis and may be adjusted to ensure they continue to serve the needs of the students and the institution.

Transferability

- UMS institutions recognize PLA credit awarded by any other UMS institution. Equivalent course credit to the credit awarded will be given by any subsequent UMS institution, unless a better equivalence can be given based on the receiving institution's equivalency rules.
- Credit will not be reevaluated by the second UMS institution unless such an evaluation stands to benefit the student by awarding a more precise and/or useful course equivalent.
- There is no guarantee that PLA credit awarded by one of the institutions in the University of Maine System will be accepted at colleges and institutions outside the UMS.

The following are methods of prior learning which the institutions in the UMS will assess for credit:

Standardized Exams

The institutions in the UMS will award credit for learning demonstrated by successfully passing exams from these testing agencies. Matrices that list these exams, the cutoff scores required and the course for which credit will be awarded are maintained on each institution's website.

CLEP (College Level Examination Program)

There are two scenarios for students using CLEP exams for PLA credit:

A student has already taken one/more CLEP exams at an earlier time and recognizes s/he may be eligible for prior learning credit in her/his program. The student should confirm having a CLEP score that meets the institutional requirement for credit, then request the College Board score(s) be sent directly to the designated staff for review and transcription. The designated staff will notify the student of credit awarded.

Or, a student learns through the advising process that s/he has some significant prior learning in a subject area which could be tested via a CLEP exam at a local testing center and earn the course equivalency credit. The student should register online at the CLEP exam website, choose a testing site, and specify the institution to receive the exam score(s). The designated staff will notify the student of credit awards. For more information, please visit: <https://clep.collegeboard.org/?navid=ap-clep>.

Note: At UMF, CLEP must be taken prior to matriculation i.e., the start of a student's first semester.

Credit for CLEP will also be granted in situations where students in good academic standing have had to interrupt their studies for more than two consecutive semesters and have taken one or more CLEP exams prior to re-matriculation. Students are limited to earning 16 credits via CLEP testing.

DSST (DANTES Subject Standardized Test)

DSSTs are tests originated by the United States Department of Defense, but open to all learners. There are two scenarios for students around DSST exams:

A student has already taken one/more DSST exams at an earlier time and recognizes s/he may be eligible for prior learning credit in her/his program. The student should confirm s/he has a DSST score that meets the requirement for credit, then request the score(s) be sent directly to the designated staff for review and transcription. The designated staff will notify the student of credit awarded.

Or, a student learns through the course of advising that s/he has some significant prior learning in a subject area that could be tested via a DSST exam in a local testing center and earn the student course equivalency credit. The student should register online at the DSST exam website, choose a testing site, and specify the institution to receive the exam score(s). The designated staff will notify the student of credit awards. For more information: www.getcollegecredit.com.

AP (Advanced Placement)

A student will have taken a recognized AP exam(s) during her/his high school career. See the institution's AP matrix for a list of the exams, acceptable scores and the institution's course equivalencies. The AP score(s) should be requested by the student and sent directly to the designated staff for review and transcription. The designated staff will notify the student of credit awarded. For more information, see: <https://apstudent.collegeboard.org/home?navid=gh-aps>.

International Baccalaureate (IB –Higher Level)

At high schools offering an International Baccalaureate program, IB courses culminate in a corresponding IB exam, much like an AP exam. The UMS recognizes IB achievement by awarding credit to students who score 5 or above on higher level IB exams. A matrix of IB exam course equivalencies is maintained

on each institution's website. Credit is applied to a student's record after official IB transcripts/score reports have been received by the designated staff. The designated staff will notify the student of credit awarded. For more information: www.ibo.org.

Foreign Language Achievement Testing

Foreign language achievement testing can assist students in receiving credit for a broad array of languages. CLEP, Brigham Young University (BYU) and New York University (NYU) offer testing options for this purpose. CLEP offers foreign language exams in three languages: French, German, and Spanish. Credit awards are based on minimum scores. Both BYU and NYU offer exams in over 60 languages. Credits for BYU language tests are awarded based on pass/fail scores for three levels of language learning. Credit for NYU language tests will be awarded as follows: 3 credits for the 12 point exam and 6 credits for a 14 point exam. The results of the language exams are valid for a period of five years from the date of the exam. The designated staff will notify the student of credit awarded. More information on registration for foreign language achievement tests can be found at the following links:

<https://clep.collegeboard.org/world-languages>

<https://flats.byu.edu/>

www.scps.nyu.edu/academics/departments/foreign-languages/testing/process.html

Credential and External Training Review

- Students may receive academic credit for some non-credit courses, certifications, licenses, examinations, registered apprenticeships, etc. gained outside of a higher education setting when there is an appropriate subject matter expert to review the learning and it is applicable in a student's degree.
- Many credit recommendations are listed in the American Council on Education (ACE) National Guide to College Credit for Workforce Training, and may be used by a subject area expert to produce equivalencies with College courses. See <http://www2.acenet.edu/credit/?fuseaction=browse.main>.
- A matrix for Credential and External Training Review recommendations, as they become approved, is available at each institution's PLA webpage and is updated regularly.
- Other trainings, not already reviewed, may be reviewed by a subject matter expert upon request.
- Any type of Credential and External Training Review assessment will require valid proof of learning such as the license, certification copy, course materials, certificates, or other information.
- The designated staff will notify the student of credit awarded.

Military Review

- Students may receive credit for formal training programs, military specialties and off-duty educational activities in the US Armed Forces, based on credit recommendations made by the American Council on Education (ACE) and by institutional faculty.
- Students should request military transcripts either through the [Joint Services Transcript](#) (JST).
- See also the institution's Veterans Services webpage.
- Students requesting Veteran's Educational Assistance are required to have all previous post-secondary educational experience evaluated for possible prior learning credit in order to be eligible for benefits.
- A designated staff member will notify the student of credit awarded.

Challenge Exam

- When a student has significant prior learning and none of the assessment methods listed above can demonstrate the learning for college credit, a student may access a campus-based Challenge Exam, if available. Exams do not exist for all institution courses.

- Some institutions give exams for competency or placement. These exams do not result in credit, but do allow for requirements to be satisfied.
- Exams are designed by subject matter experts, are based on the current set of course learning outcomes, are equivalent to comprehensive final examinations, and are unbiased toward students who have not directly participated in the course.
- For best results, Challenge Exams should be scheduled in time to impact a student's upcoming course schedule.
- Exams are limited to one attempt per course.
- Exams may not be attempted if the student has previously earned credit in the course at the institution.
- Exams are graded as is standard for the course. Where there is a result of C- or better, the student will be awarded the course credit and a grade of T will be transcribed.
- The designated staff will notify the student of credit awarded and request any necessary payment.

Portfolio Review

- A prior learning portfolio includes a written narrative presentation and supporting documentation, assembled and submitted for assessment of college-level learning equivalent to a specific course or content area elective learning outcomes. Credit will be awarded for learning that has a balance between theory and practical application.
- When the student has significant prior learning and none of the PLA methods listed above can help demonstrate the learning for college credit, a student will be encouraged to develop a PLA portfolio.
- The award of PLA portfolio credit is dependent on relevancy to courses in the degree program including general education, major and elective courses.
- The student will meet with the designated staff to determine if her/his knowledge and experience seem appropriate for consideration by PLA portfolio.
- The student may reference portfolio development materials available free, online, and self-paced at the institution's website in order to produce a complete and well-written PLA portfolio.¹
- Submitting a PLA portfolio does not guarantee credit award.
- A portfolio is reviewed by faculty subject matter expert(s) using a portfolio evaluation rubric. A recommendation for credit/no credit is based on the student demonstrating evidence of meeting learning outcomes at a level comparable to a grade level of C- or better for the course.
- The PLA portfolio(s) will ideally be submitted to the office that oversees PLA – and, for best results, in enough time for the review to impact the student's upcoming course schedule.
- Where applicable, a PLA application form and portfolio assessment fee should accompany this assessment. If no application form is required, the PLA fee will be assessed after the assessment.
- Once submitted, the portfolio will be forwarded to a subject matter expert.
- Once the evaluation is completed and credit is awarded or denied, feedback will be provided on the evaluation rubric and shared with the student when credit is denied.
- The designated staff will notify the student of credit awarded and request any necessary payment.

¹ USM requires an online, self-paced, module-based portfolio development workshop of all students creating a narrative portfolio.