

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)

Student Handbook

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Preface

This handbook is designed to provide students with information needed when seeking credit for prior learning related to specific courses at the University of West Georgia. For more information about PLA at UWG, contact the Center for Adult Learners and Veterans via email at cav@westga.edu or by phone at 678-839-5210.

Definition of Prior Learning

Prior learning is learning which is gained through life or work experiences outside of structured higher educational coursework. Many people acquire skills and knowledge through life experiences such as professional endeavors in business, the military, or other training as well as through involvement in community work, family management, travel opportunities, or personal study and development.

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 UWG.

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. Evaluation of demonstrated proficiency is determined by faculty members who are content experts in the field in which prior learning is believed to have occurred.

There are no limits on the amount of PLA credit that can be awarded to students, but students are required to complete a minimum of 33 academic credit hours at UWG to satisfy academic residence, depending upon degree requirements. In addition, UWG supports the transfer of PLA credit in its compliance with USG Policy 3.3.6, which can be reviewed on the website for the [Board of Regents Policy Manual](#).

Methods of Assessing Prior Learning for College Credit

1. Departmental Examination.

Several academic departments at the University of West Georgia offer the opportunity for credit by examination. The English Department, for example, allows students to write an essay evaluated by a departmental committee. Depending on the passing score, the student will be allowed to exempt English 1101 and/or 1102. The Department of International Languages and Cultures also allows students to exempt certain introductory foreign language courses. Please visit [Additional Information on Department Credit by Exam \(PDF 256K\)](#) to learn more on departmental exams, [Additional Information on Mathematics Credit-by-Exam, SAT Score \(PDF 58K\)](#) and [Additional Information on Mathematics Credit by ALEKS PPL](#) for additional information on credit options for math, and [Additional Information for English Credit-By-Exam \(PDF 57K\)](#) for additional information on credit options for English. The Criminology and Accounting departments offer challenge exams through UWG's Academic Testing Department. Passing grades are assessed \$6/credit hour charge for processing.

2. National Standardized Examination.

Credit for prior learning may be awarded through the College Level Examination

Program (CLEP), Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and DANTES. Students may visit the website for the [GAtracs Transfer Tool](#) to learn more about national standardized exams accepted by UWG and other University System of Georgia institutions.

a. College Level Examination Program (CLEP) Credit.

The College Level Examination Program or CLEP is a great way to earn college credit. Credit is granted upon the successful completion of a standardized test. Not only will a person save time by not having to take a course containing material he or she already knows, but the student will also save money by not having to pay for a college class. CLEP enables a student to move through his or her freshman and sophomore years at a faster pace. At West Georgia, a “K” grade is awarded after successful completion of a CLEP exam. The grade will appear on the student transcript and evaluation records. Visit the webpage showing UWG’s [CLEP Course Exam Equivalents \(PDF 85K\)](#) and veterans are encouraged to visit the CLEP website to learn about [military funded exams](#). Students interested in taking a CLEP test at UWG can visit [Academic Testing’s webpage](#) to register.

b. AP (Advanced Placement) Credit.

The Advanced Placement (AP) Program is available through many high schools and enables a high-school student to earn credit toward college in a variety of subjects. These courses are equivalent to college freshmen/sophomore level courses. High school students who earn AP exam scores of 3 or higher and who submit official score reports to West Georgia usually receive credit for coursework. Scores of 4 or higher are required to receive credit for history exams and may also count as

Honors College credit. Visit [UWG's website \(PDF 501K\)](#) to find additional information on AP course exam equivalents.

c. International Baccalaureate (IB) Credit.

International Baccalaureate (IB) scores are also reviewed for possible college credit. Students may receive academic credit for exams at each level depending on the score. Please review the current [IB Policy \(PDF 338K\)](#) to determine if you are eligible to receive credit.

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

To expand the prior learning options, UWG has begun a review of DSST exams and the UWG Academic Testing Services has applied to be an official DSST testing location.

3. *Military Training.*

Training and learning are a part of the military experience for active duty service members, reservists, and National Guardsmen. Military connected students are encouraged to provide UWG an official copy of their transcript from the [Community College of the Air Force \(CCAF\)](#) and their [Joint Services Transcript \(JST\)](#). Guidance to colleges and universities is provided by the American Council on Education (ACE) and veterans can learn more by viewing the [ACE website](#). UWG is a member of ACE and honors ACE credits approved by appropriate UWG instructional departments as appropriate for the program of study for students. In addition, UWG has an extensive number of military trainings for which credit has been reviewed and categorized. To ensure we continue providing credit when possible each military transcript is reviewed and compared to classes which are a part of the service members selected major. If training is found to be a possible match for credit, the

Center for Adult Learners and Veterans ask for a review of learning outcomes by the appropriate College.

4. Portfolio Assessment.

Students may be eligible to earn credit for learning experiences by completing a Portfolio. Visit [UWG Online's website](#) or the [College of Social Science's website](#) for more information on portfolios. 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 should not only describe the relevant experience but should also identify the particular learning outcomes.

Students who are interested in submitting a portfolio for review must enroll in a 2-credit hour class ([XIDS 2002](#)) that supports a successful portfolio submission. XIDS 2002 will review the learning objectives of the class for which the portfolio submission is desired and then seek documentation/concrete evidence each learning objective has been met. In addition to a one-time enrollment in XIDS 2002, a nonrefundable fee of \$250 is assessed on each portfolio submission to support the expert review and related documentation. The availability of a portfolio submission for prior learning credit lies within each department. Students who are interested in this option should inquire with the department chair or the program coordinator about the portfolio availability or other PLA options that may exist for the class(es) for which credit is desired.

a. University of West Georgia PLA Policies.

- 1) Prospective students who fit the following criteria are eligible to participate in CPL:
 - a) They are adults; typically, 25 years of age or older.
 - b) They are non-traditional students.
 - c) They have learning experiences that could be reflected in an academic program's curriculum.
- 2) Course credit via CPL by Portfolio may not replace existing credit assessments. Course credit acquired through these means cannot be used to satisfy the minimum number of hours that must be completed in residence at UWG, nor toward minimum hours in the major field (See SACS 3.5.2, and University catalog requirements for undergraduate degrees).
- 3) Students may not conduct PLA by departmental examination, standardized test, or portfolio for any courses for which they have previously completed at UWG as a regular or audit student.
- 4) Students are required to complete CPL Prior Learning Documentation in preparation for developing portfolio(s) for credit evaluation, preferably prior to their last semester. Students will earn two hours credit and a letter grade of A-F for this course.
- 5) Students must register for Portfolio Assessment in the appropriate department(s) in the term that they will submit a portfolio for evaluation.
- 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 allow students to resubmit their documentation one time during the next semester. The assessors will provide a report giving specific feedback to students. Students may resubmit a revised portfolio only once for re-assessment and must include the original portfolio submission and previous assessor's feedback.

- 7) Individual departments determine how many, if any, CPL credits may be awarded.
- 8) Students can pursue Credit for Prior Learning through a variety of pathways, to include CLEP exams, departmental exams, and portfolio assessment. Portfolio assessment is available for select courses and cannot be used for courses for which CLEP and/or departmental exams are available.