



# PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT

# PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT HANDBOOK

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## ► PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AT GRANTHAM UNIVERSITY

Grantham University recognizes that a great deal of learning occurs outside a university classroom. Often worthy of college credit, this “prior learning” (also called experiential learning) comes in various forms and is categorized as sponsored (e.g., corporate training, professional certifications, continuing education, etc.) or unsponsored (e.g., internships, volunteer work, etc.) learning.

Through Grantham’s Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) program, students can submit evidence of professional and experiential learning for evaluation for potential college credit.

**Prior Learning** is defined as the skills, knowledge, and competencies that people acquire from their work experience, volunteerism, community activities, travel, artistic endeavors and hobbies.

**Assessment** is defined as the process by which experiential learning is identified, evaluated, and equated with an amount of college credit.

The Prior Learning Assessment program is coordinated by the Registrar’s Office. Inquiries regarding the awarding of credit and the evaluation of experiential learning should be made to a student’s admissions representative or student advisor. In order to seek credit through PLA, the student must be enrolled at Grantham University and have successfully completed English Composition I with a grade of C or better with Grantham University or at another institution.

Students may earn credit through Prior Learning Assessment in two ways:

- **National Standardized Examination** (e.g., AP, CLEP, DSST, Excelsior, Straighterline, Sophia Learning) - Students should visit the respective websites of each for more information. If a standardized exam is available for a course, a petition for PLA credit will not be accepted. To earn credit, students must successfully complete the exam.
- **Faculty evaluation of Description of Experience essays**

Students may earn credit in either or both methods of Prior Learning Assessment. Students must have room in their degree program for PLA credits.

### PLA BENEFITS FOR ADULT LEARNERS

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- Enhances value of life-long learning
- Saves time and money
- Formalizes the learning process
- Decreases time to graduation

### TYPES OF PRIOR LEARNING

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**Sponsored Learning** is defined as some classroom learning, such as trade school, vocational school, continuing education units, professional development, etc. that took place outside of the traditional college setting. These classes are sponsored by an institution or an agency. Acceptable forms of sponsored learning include, but are not limited to:

- Training which has been evaluated and is listed in the ACE National Guide to College Credit for Workforce Training
- Training which has been evaluated and is listed in the National College Credit Recommendation Service (formerly PONSI)
- Government sponsored training and certifications, police and corrections academy trainings

- Professional licenses (e.g., real estate salesperson)
- Professional, occupational and vocational certifications (e.g., certified addictions counselor)
- Corporate training or professional development (e.g., managerial training)
- Continuing education (e.g., education required to maintain licensure or certification)
- Online courses (e.g., self-paced certification or license preparation classes)

**Un-sponsored Learning** (or experiential learning) is defined as formal, supervised learning experiences that rely substantially on students applying through direct experience the knowledge and information acquired through reading, simulations or electronic exercises, faculty instruction, or other modes of learning directly within the context and duration of the course. Consequently, experiential learning entails the integration of knowledge (the concepts, facts, and information acquired through formal learning and past experience), activity (the application of knowledge to a “real world” setting) and reflection (the analysis and synthesis of knowledge and activity to create new knowledge). Examples of un-sponsored learning may include, but are not limited to:

- Internships, externships, or on the job training experience in a given field of work
- Family, community, or volunteer experiences which resulted in college level learning

## PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT FEES

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Fees are based on the assessment services performed, not by the amount of credit awarded. All of the following fees are non-refundable:

- Sponsored prior learning (per submission): \$125.00
- Un-sponsored prior learning (per submission): \$250.00
- Combination of sponsored and un-sponsored prior learning (per submission): \$250.00

## ► DESCRIPTION OF EXPERIENCE ESSAY ASSESSMENT

A Description of Experience Essay is a reflective essay by the student on a topic that is based on post high school experiences in which the student acquired college level learning. The essay demonstrates understanding of the experiential learning process by aligning personal experience with the learning outcomes of a Grantham University course. Essays are evaluated by Faculty Subject Matter Experts to determine if the described learning outcomes along with the evidence submitted are sufficient to earn college credit.

## ► HOW TO ASSEMBLE YOUR PLA SUBMISSION

All PLA submissions must follow a specific format. All pieces of the submission outlined below should be combined into one document and include a title page and professional resume. Submissions that do not follow this format will not be accepted.

## PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT FORM

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This form can be found on the Grantham PLA landing page. The form will need to be filled out in its entirety.

[FILL OUT PLA FORM](#)

## COVER LETTER

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This is a short introduction, intended for the evaluator, outlining the area(s) covered in the essay.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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The table of contents should list all major sections, subtopics in each section, and all additional topics or items included in the essay. Each entry must have an accurate page number.

## DESCRIPTION OF EXPERIENCE ESSAY

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Each essay is unique, but each essay will contain the following elements:

### DETAILED AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION OF EXPERIENCE

In this section, the student provides a written self-portrait. The student will write something about themselves, highlighting experiences both personal and professional that exhibit growth, goals and the reasons for seeking credit for prior learning. This section should be a minimum of three pages. The following should be included:

- An introduction of the student, including educational and career goals
- Plans for further education after earning the degree
- A description of how educational goals relate to family, work and community life
- A description of the motivations for earning the degree
- A conclusion that sums up the student's intention for earning credit through the assessment of prior learning

### DISCUSSION OF PRIOR LEARNING AND HOW IT RELATES TO THE COURSE(S) BEING SOUGHT FOR CREDIT

In this section, the student must cover:

- The academic course for which credit is being sought
- The area of the degree program into which any prior learning credit will fit

The student should be as specific as possible about what part of the degree and/or the course requirement the prior learning credit will fulfill. It is rare that experiential learning will exactly parallel specific courses; however, the student must identify the Grantham course that is similar to the student's past experiences. Refer to Grantham University's catalog for specific course descriptions. This section should be a minimum of one page.

[VIEW UNIVERSITY CATALOG](#)

### Detailed Analysis of What I Learned from the Experience

This part of the essay is referred to as the "analysis of learning." It is the most important part, or heart, of the essay. In this section, the student will identify the theories, guidelines and principles learned from past experiences. The student will accomplish this by thoroughly answering each question below. Each answer should be a minimum of three paragraphs:

- What course objectives were achieved from the experience?
- How did the student apply what was learned to the job or personal life?
- How can this knowledge be applied to other areas of life or to other jobs?

- What difference does it make in the student's life to have this knowledge?
- Can the theories, rules, laws, guidelines or principles that have been learned from the experience be identified?

More than factual knowledge must be demonstrated. Evaluators will be looking for evidence that the student understands and has thought about what he or she knows.

**If more than one course is being sought there must be a separate discussion for each.**

## DOCUMENTATION

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Effective documentation is required and provides evidence and support of what the student knows. The documentation should be reflective of the learning experiences written about in the essay. Only include documentation that supports the essay. Suggested examples of documentation (this list is not exhaustive and certain courses may require additional documentation as determined by the Faculty Subject Matter Expert:

- Letter from employers
- Licenses
- Certificates and resumes
- Products of student's work (e.g., books, patents)
- Proposals
- Job descriptions/classifications

## ▶ PLA SUBMISSION PROCESS

### STEP 1: Ask about credit for prior learning

Current students should contact their student advisor to learn more about prior learning. Prospective students interested in learning more should contact Grantham at (800) 955-2527.

### STEP 2: Create your submission

- Gather documentation
- Develop the Description of Experience following the guidelines outlined above
- Complete PLA submission form
- Send completed submission to your Student Advisor or Admissions Representative

### STEP 3: Make Payment

Once a student receives notification via email that his or her submission has been accepted, he/she should submit the fee payment. He or she should not make payment until he/she has received confirmation the submission has been accepted. The acceptance notification will provide steps on how to make payment.

### STEP 4: Evaluation

Grantham's evaluation of potential credit begins after its determined all required information has been received and payment has been made.

### STEP 5: Credit determination

The student will be notified of the credit award decision following the four-week evaluation period.

## ► PLA CREDIT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The Grantham University PLA program complies fully with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) standards for excellence and the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC) credit for experiential learning policies.

### ASSESSMENT STANDARDS

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Grantham University adheres to CAEL academic standards by using the following assessment criteria:

- Credit will be awarded only for learning, not for experience
- College credit will be awarded only for college-level learning which meets the academic standards of Grantham University
- The process of applying for credit will be viewed as an integral part of the learning process
- The determination of credit awards and competence levels will be made by appropriate subject matter and academic experts
- Credit will be appropriate to the academic context in which it is accepted

### ADMINISTRATIVE STANDARDS

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Grantham University adheres to CAEL administrative standards by using the following assessment criteria:

- Transcript entries for PLA will clearly describe which learning is awarded credit. Students will not be awarded PLA credit that duplicates credit previously earned through transfer or other means. Credit will not be given twice for the same learning.
- Policies, procedures, and criteria applied to assessment will be fully disclosed to students in the Grantham University Catalog and the Grantham University website.
- Fees charged for the assessment of prior learning will be based on services performed, not by the amount of credit awarded. Fees are non-refundable.
- All personnel involved in the assessment process will receive initial and ongoing training and professional development.
- The Prior Learning Assessment Manager will be responsible for the planning, implementation, and monitoring of the PLA program. In conjunction with the Academics department, the Prior Learning Assessment Manager will develop and oversee the academic policies for prior learning assessment and will monitor, review, evaluate and revise the PLA policies and procedures as needed.

### PLA CREDIT PARAMETERS

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Grantham University has implemented the following credit parameters regarding the awarding of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) credits:

- It is the student's responsibility to provide evidence of learning.
- PLA credit will be awarded only in areas which fall within the regular curricular offerings of Grantham University.
- Students cannot submit remedial courses for PLA credit.
- PLA credit may not be counted toward the residency requirement in a degree program.



- PLA credit is posted to the transcript as credit earned (without a grade) and does not affect a student's grade point average
- Grantham University PLA credits may or may not be transferable. It is the student's responsibility to find out if credits will transfer to an institution that the student may plan to attend in the future.
- If documentation is not in English, a certified translation of all documents is required
- Appeals or exceptions to the stated policies and procedures will be handled by the University Registrar.

## PLA CREDIT LIMITS

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### Undergraduate Degrees

- Students may use PLA credits for up to 25% of their degree program. However, PLA and transfer credits combined cannot be more than 75% of the degree program.
- PLA credit may not be used to satisfy capstone courses.
- PLA credit may not be used to satisfy upper level courses from the College of Engineering & Computer Science.
- Additional courses may not be satisfied through PLA (For a complete list contact your Student Advisor or Admissions Representative.)

### Graduate Degrees

- Students may use PLA credits for up to 25% of their degree program – however, PLA and transfer credits combined cannot be more than 25% of the degree program
- PLA credit cannot be used to satisfy Capstone courses
- Credit requests for courses from the Mark Skousen School of Business require an oral exam in addition to the essay requirement.

## REQUESTING CREDIT FOR STUDENT SUCCESS COURSE

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Students who have significant experience learning in an online environment may request PLA credit for the Student Success course. They must submit an official transcript in order for their request to be considered.

### Undergraduate

- All Grantham undergraduate students who have earned less than 12 undergraduate level credit hours will be required to take GU100 in their first term.
- Students who have earned 12 or more credit hours through an online undergraduate program may request PLA credit for GU100.

### Graduate

- All Grantham graduate students who have earned less than 6 graduate level credit hours will be required to take GU500 in their first term.
- Students who have earned 6 or more credit hours through an online graduate program may request PLA credit for GU500.

## PLA CREDIT APPEALS POLICY

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Students who are dissatisfied with their PLA results have the right to appeal. Please note the guidelines below:

- Students must submit a request for an appeal to the PLA Committee at [pla@grantham.edu](mailto:pla@grantham.edu) in writing within four weeks of the date of the credit award letter or notification. Appeals received after this date will not be considered.
- Students will be required to describe the grounds for appeal, and must provide documentation to support the claims. If a student is denied credit due to insufficient documentation, this is not a valid reason to appeal. In this case, the student must obtain additional documentation and resubmit through the PLA process. Resubmitting following the loss of an appeal will not incur additional fees.
- There is a limit of one appeal per PLA submission. All credit decisions in an appeal are final. A credit appeal review may result in more, or the same, credits being awarded.