



# Handbook for Prior Learning Assessment



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## **INTRODUCTION**

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is a pathway for assessing learning gained outside a traditional academic environment. This could be learning acquired through prior employment, volunteer, military, corporate training, independent study, non-credit courses, or other relevant experience. PLA is a process of evaluating what a student knows at the college-level derived from these experiences to award college credit. PLA can save you time and money because you may not be required to take courses for material you have already mastered. Augusta Tech recognizes the importance of providing advanced placement opportunities to students who have shown and demonstrated course mastery through various methods. This manual provides an overview of the opportunities as well as the responsibilities of all parties.

## **TO RECEIVE COLLEGE CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING, YOU MUST MEET THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:**

- You must demonstrate to a faculty member in the program in which you are enrolled that you possess college-level learning in the courses requested. Various methods may be used including narrative descriptions, documentations, and verifications related to the subject matter of your accomplishments.
- You will need to show how you can apply theoretical concepts gained through your learning as they relate to the course objectives.
- Your prior learning portfolio credit cannot duplicate any other coursework completed or attempted in your program.
- Any credit earned through PLA is considered exemption/transfer credit. It does not fulfill any part of the residency credit requirements of Augusta Technical College. In order to graduate from a program, at least 25% of a student's program credit hours must be completed at Augusta Tech. In addition, it cannot be considered as current course work for your financial aid. Portfolios do not receive grades; they are awarded credit hours.

## **FIVE WAYS AUGUSTA TECH STUDENTS CAN EARN PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT CREDIT**

### **1. Military Training**

Augusta Technical College accepts coursework completed as part of training in the United States Armed Forces based on the recommendations of the American Council of Education. Students who wish to have military training reviewed for transfer credit must submit an official Joint Services Transcript to the Office of Student Records. Students may request Joint Services Transcripts by visiting <https://jst.doded.mil>.

All Joint Services Transcript credit recommendations will be reviewed by the appropriate college content area experts. In some cases, the content area expert may require the student to complete a skills assessment to verify the breadth and depth of the prior training. If a skills assessment is deemed necessary, this assessment will be provided to the student at no cost.

### **2. Standardized Examination Credit**

Credit will be awarded for successful completion of appropriate CLEP (College Level Examination Program) and DANTES core subject area examinations. Credit is awarded based

on score recommendations of the American Council on Education. The Office of Student Records maintains a list of CLEP and DANTES exams accepted for transfer credit.

Credit will be awarded to students for Advanced Placement courses, provided the student completed the official AP examination and the student provides an official score report from the College Board. Students must earn a score of “3” or higher on AP exams to receive transfer credit. The Office of Student Records maintains the list of acceptable AP courses for Augusta Technical College credit.

### 3. Industry Certifications

Students may earn exemption credit for coursework if they possess a current industry certification, enroll in a related program, and if the certification has been reviewed for learning outcome equivalency with Augusta Technical College courses. Official documentation of an active certification is required, and documentation requirements may vary by certification. The Office of Student Records maintains a current list of industry certifications that have been evaluated for course exemption purposes.

### 4. Non-Traditional Learning

Applicants with non-traditional instruction or job training may request to have their experiences reviewed for possible exemption credit. Any non-traditional learning experience must have previously been reviewed and recommended for college credit by the American Council on Education (ACE) or by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL). Students must provide their official ACE transcript or CAEL credit recommendations which will be reviewed by the appropriate faculty members for credit. ACE and CAEL recommendations are of an advisory nature and do not guarantee the issuance of exemption credit by Augusta Technical College.

### 5. Experiential Learning

Augusta Tech recognizes that many professionals have extensive experience in fields related to programs of study. In some cases, experiential learning is equitable to some college-level courses, especially introduction courses or certain areas of specialization. If a student has such experiential learning, he/she may apply for credit by completion a PLA portfolio.

Credit by portfolio will require the student to complete a portfolio. Upon submission of the portfolio to the PLA Coordinator will ensure all contents are official. The PLA Coordinator will send to the appropriate Dean who will assign a subject matter expert faculty member to evaluate the documents and make credit recommendations. This process normally takes several days. Evaluators may ask for additional information from students, request an interview, and/or require a demonstration of hands-on skills before making the final credit award.

After the faculty member determines the credit award, they will return a copy of your portfolio and the evaluation form to the Dean for approval of the recommendation. There will be a second copy made that will become part of the student’s academic records kept by the college and stored as all other student records. The credit recommendations will be forwarded to the PLA Coordinator to be communicated to the student and input into the BANNER, if necessary. The semester hours awarded will appear on your transcript and your

next grade report, carrying a EXP (credit) designation. Prior Learning Assessments do not receive letter grades.

Please note: When you submit a portfolio for evaluation, you are not guaranteed a credit award. If you are not satisfied with your portfolio's evaluation, you have the right to request a meeting with the Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs (SVPAA) to discuss the evaluation. However, the final decision in all matters relating to the granting of academic credit rests with the SVPAA.

### **STEPS TO HELP IDENTIFY COLLEGE-LEVEL LEARNING**

The first step in deciding if prior learning is an option is to determine if past experiences and training might qualify as college-level learning. You must identify the subject areas in which you believe you have gained significant learning. If you are in doubt concerning a subject area, consult the PLA Coordinator.

Refer to the Augusta Technical College catalog for a list of college departments and program areas.

The second step in identifying your learning is to determine if your knowledge is worthy of college-level credit. Not all experiences and learning will be at the college level and it is important to understand this when developing your request and portfolio.

Some helpful criteria for testing whether your prior learning is college level is as follows:

- Your learning should have a theoretical base, which means you understand and can apply the principles of what you are able to do. Your learning should not be merely the application of a narrow set of skills or procedure. It should be broad-based and applied to other relevant situations.
- The subject is taught on the college level. Reviewing Augusta Tech's catalog, syllabus received from PLA coordinator, and/or textbooks (reviewed in teacher classroom or library) may help you identify where your knowledge overlaps course material
- In some instances, a working or performance-based hands-on assessment may need to be documented to receive credit for lab-based courses.

The third step is critical in that you must be able to document and demonstrate to an expert (faculty) in the discipline that you do possess the knowledge you claim. A subject matter expert should be able to review and evaluate your experiential learning and assign college credit.

## **PUTTING THE PORTFOLIO TOGETHER**

The portfolio will be the final product of the request for credit. Keep in mind that the development of the portfolio will take considerable time and effort by the student and will be a critical component in identifying and justifying what credit is reasonable and deserved. Faculty will base their decisions on the content of your portfolio; therefore, it is important that your portfolio be organized, so anyone can follow it easily. A rubric used to score your PLA portfolio is located in the Appendix.

Your completed portfolio should contain at the minimum the following elements:

1. Request for Prior Learning Assessment Evaluation Form. You should fill out your name and your student ID number. Advisors/Faculty evaluators will complete the rest of this form.
2. Resume. A current resume gives the evaluators a sense of who you are and allows them to see where your experience and prior learning fit into the total picture. Your resume should include:
  - Your name, mailing address, e-mail address, fax and telephone numbers
  - Educational experience, with dates
  - Employment experience, with dates
  - Community activities
  - Other activities
3. Learning Outcomes/Course Syllabus. This will be provided by the PLA Coordinator.
4. Description and Documentation of Learning (Your Narrative). This component is your opportunity to present to the evaluators a brief description of your experience and explain how the documentation supports your requests. Keep in mind the evaluators may not be familiar with certain certifications and other documents, and it is in your best interest to explain their relevancy to the credit requested.
5. Evidence supporting prior learning. Make sure that any item listed as supporting evidence is reference in the narrative.
  - Work samples, letters of validation for work experience, job description
  - Performance appraisals, evidence of public presentation, etc.
  - Transcripts of formal academic courses (if applicable) or copies of non-credit certificates or industry certificates
  - Proof of membership in professional associations, community service organizations, proof of certification, licensing, etc.
6. Appendix. All documentation and supporting material not already included is placed in the appendix and referred to at the appropriate place in the body of the portfolio. Be sure to label your appendices (Appendix A, Appendix B, Appendix C, etc.) and to make all references to these appendices very clear.

## **PREPARING YOUR PORTFOLIO**

Once you have identified those areas where you have acquired college-level learning, you must select which of them you will use to prepare a request and portfolio. You might more easily get credit for some learning by taking an exemption exam, if available, for a fee. The exemption test fee is currently \$50. These decisions are best made after close consultation with the PLA Coordinator.

## **DESCRIBING YOUR LEARNING (Narrative)**

The first part of your portfolio will contain a description of your learning in the discipline, or subject area. Remember that a portfolio should focus on your knowledge and skills in one discipline (technology, business administration, computer information etc.) but may contain information about your knowledge of several sub-topics, or courses (management, finance, etc.), within that discipline.

For each specific subject you should make a brief statement on what you know. Then expand that statement by indicating how you acquired this knowledge, where, when, and in what context. You may wish to include the following information:

1. The various experiences that contributed to your learning: jobs, home activities, volunteer activities, non-credit courses and seminars.
2. An estimate for each experience of the amount of time you engaged in its activities.
3. A description of where the experience took place and, if appropriate, under whose supervision.
4. A brief description of exactly what you did in each experience.
5. An explanation of your position in relation to others involved in the learning experience.
6. The number of persons who were responsible to you in the course of the experience and their duties.
7. A description of how each experience contributed to your learning achievement.
8. A description of the context in which the experience took place. It may be helpful to the person reading your portfolio understand the circumstances in which you were operating at the time. Be certain that all significant facts and events are included.
9. Specific examples and illustrations of your work.

The most vital section to your receiving college credit from your portfolio's evaluators is the summary in which you bring together the components of your learning and relate how it corresponds to that discipline's theories and concepts. You would be wise to consult specific course syllabus for the learning in which you are requesting credit.

## **DOCUMENTING YOUR LEARNING**

When you seek credit for prior learning, the burden of proof rests with you. You must demonstrate to an evaluator's satisfaction that you have learned what is stated in the portfolio. In addition, the evaluator often does not know you personally and must rely entirely on your portfolio; therefore, proper documentation is an important and integral part of the entire package.

- If documents are irrelevant for the experiences and are not necessary they will only make the process more difficult for the evaluator(s). You would do better to provide adequate documentation and articulate clearly what you learned from the experience.
- It is a good practice to help evaluators by underlining, or highlighting those parts of the documents that are relevant to your learning.
- If you plan to submit products/work examples such as documentation, they should be photographed or reduced to slides because of the possibility of loss or damage to the originals. Also, photographs and slides are more easily circulated to faculty than the original works. Your photos and slides should be labeled, signed, and dated by you. Any valuable documents such as licenses, certificates, letters, or commendations should be photocopied for use in the portfolio.

## TYPES OF DOCUMENTATION

The type of documentation submitted can vary greatly based on experiences. The following tables are suggested forms of documentation. It is by no means exclusive or fully comprehensive.

### Work Experiences

Job Descriptions	Letters of commendation
Letters from supervisors, clients, peers	Performance Evaluations
Explanation of task performed	Licenses/Certifications
Performance standards for acquiring licenses	Scores on licensing exams
Membership and requirements in professional or trade organizations	Military records (DD214, CCAF, SMART, Transcripts)
Sample of work	Professional development plans

### Community Service Activities

Commendations and awards	Newspaper and magazine clippings
Letters of verification from co-volunteers, clients served, supervisors	

### Non-Collegiate Courses and Trainings

Transcripts or training records	Records of assignments
Number of hours spend on assignments, in class, or in clinical/practicum experiences	Letters verifying enrollment
Course descriptions, learning objectives, syllabi	Evidence of completion

### Special Accomplishments

Designs	Books published
Machines designed and developed (patents)	Speeches given
Samples of writings	Audio-visual presentations
Written proposals	Conversations with experts or Committee assignments

Other ways of assessing learning which could be used to demonstrate the mastery of the subject but which can be harder to verify and document may include oral interviews, oral examinations, simulations, situational observations, etc. When you submit your portfolio, the evaluator may also request additional materials to further document the experience.

## LETTERS OF VERIFICATION

The person preparing a written statement to verify and evaluate your experience should have direct observed knowledge of you during the experience you are claiming for credit. One person may verify and evaluate more than one of your experiences. However, the statement should comment directly and clearly on each experience.

In general, the statements should cover the points you have made in the narrative component in the portfolio and be relevant to the learning that has been achieved.



- Verify the writer is willing to write a letter before making a formal request.
- Those writing letters of verification for you should identify their relationship to you (supervisor, peer, subordinate) as well as their qualifications for commenting on your experience.
- The letter should be written on the official letterhead of the company or organization, in which the author is associated. Letters may be accepted in some instances if the author is no longer at the organization. The letter must be signed.
- It is important that the letter should document both the quality and quantity of the experience which you have had.
- Portfolio documentation may be considered public information. A number of people will be reviewing the documentation you furnish. Those who provide you with letters of verification should be informed of this possibility.]

### **IMPORTANT REMINDERS**

Keep in mind as you submit your portfolio, you are requesting credit for college-level courses. Your portfolio is expected to reflect college-level work. It should be thorough.

- It should be well organized.
- It should reflect clear thought and content relevant to your experiences.
- It should be grammatically accurate.
- It should be neatly typed.
- It should contain copies or examples of your work/documentation.
- It should include any proof of membership in professional associations, community service organizations, proof of certification, licensing, etc.
- All pages should be numbered and all references to the documentation in the appendices.

# APPENDIX

## TIPS AND TECHNIQUES TO IDENTIFY SPECIFIC LEARNING AREAS

There are various methods you can use to identify and analyze your learning.

### *Skills/Competencies/Knowledge*

Try to identify the major areas of your learning by making a list of your skills and your knowledge. Keep in mind this is more of a brainstorming process than an in-depth concise list of competencies, so write quickly without being too selective. Your lists might look like the following examples:

Electrical Ohms law, schematics, series and parallel circuits, frequency meters, wire AWG, Codes and Standards NEC codes, ANSI standards, safety practices, wire separations, conduit sizing, OSHA regulations, motors, Frequency drives

**Review your list.** Do any of the items represent college-level learning and are relevant to the field of study? If, for example, you gained experience as a plant manager, you may want to break this experience down into sub-categories such as technical abilities, management, human resources, and budgets and accounting principles.

### *Jobs and Experience*

You may find it easier to structure your thinking by reviewing each of your jobs or major experiences chronologically. The following headings may be useful to you in brainstorming:

<b>Job or Experience</b>	<b>What I Did</b>	<b>What I Learned</b>
Telecommunications Installation Tech	Installed Cabling System	AC/DC Circuits/Terminations/Testing/Fiber optic installations
	Installed Communication Systems	Installation best practices (standards) and system integration, Programming Concepts, System Design Concepts/Tool Use and Safety Concepts. Commissioning of a System, V-mail
	Installed Data Networks and Systems	TCP/IP, OSI model, Networking Concepts and Addressing , VOIP, Fiber Optics, Bandwidth Theories and Issues
Telecommunications Service Technician	Ran Service Calls	Troubleshooting Theories/Advanced Testing Procedures/Customer Service Skills

After you complete your lists for each job or important learning experience, you will begin categorizing what you have learned into credit-worthy learning components.

*Course Titles*

If you find yourself unable to get started using the first techniques, you might begin by making a random list of what you know. Using a college catalog, group together those skills or learning experiences that are related to specific college courses. Some examples might be personnel management, news writing, computer programming, accounting, etc. Whatever method you select to identify your learning, you should now be ready to list the college-level learning that has grown out of your life experiences.

*Example*

The following example may be helpful to you.

John was employed for five years as a supervisor at a telecommunications company. Prior to that, he was a telecom technician installing voice and data systems and running service calls. He also spent four years as an avionics technician in the Air Force. He made the following list:

***Experience and What I Learned***

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<p><b><u>TELECOM SUPERVISOR</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Leadership Skills</li> <li>▪ Management Skills</li> <li>▪ Budget Management Skills</li> <li>▪ Customer Service Skills</li> <li>▪ Documentation Skills</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>AVIONICS TECHNICIAN</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Antenna Theory</li> <li>▪ Safety Practices and Procedures</li> <li>▪ Troubleshooting and Repair</li> <li>▪ Test Equipment Utilization</li> <li>▪ Soldering Techniques</li> <li>▪ AC/DC Theory and Applications</li> <li>▪ Troubleshooting Skills</li> <li>▪ Teamwork Skills</li> <li>▪ Communication Skills</li> <li>▪ RF Theory and Application</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>TELECOMMUNICATIONS TECH</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Installation skills</li> <li>▪ Research and Design skills</li> <li>▪ Grounding and Bonding Skills</li> <li>▪ Safety Practices</li> </ul>	

Using the previous process, one can identify some general disciplines in which to place the skills and knowledge. After analyzing the list and consulting with a faculty advisor, applicable areas and departments and the possible courses the learning might fulfill within each discipline can be listed:

<p><b><i>Management</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Principles of Management</li> <li>• Managerial Account and Finance</li> <li>• Performance Management</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Telecommunications</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cable Installation</li> <li>• Fiber Optic Systems</li> <li>• Communication Platforms</li> <li>• Troubleshooting and Repair</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Electrical/Electronics</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AC/DC Circuits</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Test Equipment Fundamentals</li> </ul>	



## Prior Learning Assessment Application Form

### Application for Prior Learning Assessment

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Campus:     Augusta (Main)     Thomson     Waynesboro     Grovetown

(Please Print Clearly)

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student ID: \_\_\_\_\_ Application Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Program of Study: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip code: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Student Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

Prior Learning Assessment Credit Options: *(Choose all that are applicable)*

- Credit by Portfolio/Prior Knowledge Skills: Credit by developing a portfolio that will demonstrate prior knowledge and skills which equate to Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) for the course.
- Credit by Certification/Licensure: Credit by using the PLA Crosswalk
- American Council on Education (ACE)/Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL): Credit for workplace education or training programs through ACE or CAEL
- American Council on Education (ACE)/Joint Service Transcript (JST): Credit for military training/experience through ACE/JST.

Courses requested for review:

PLA Credit is recommended for the following course(s) with each course evaluation rubric attached:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## Prior Learning Assessment Tracking Form

**STUDENT ID:** \_\_\_\_\_ **PROGRAM:** \_\_\_\_\_

Action Item	Staff Member	Date Received	Date Complete	Comments	Initials
Application and portfolio submitted to Dean by PLA Coordinator					
Dean assigns portfolio to appropriate faculty					
Faculty completes assessment & returns to Dean <i>(within 3 business days)</i>					
Dean approves and submits portfolio & PLA credit recommendation to PLA Coordinator					
PLA Coordinator adds PLA credit <i>(if granted)</i>					
PLA Coordinator informs student of assessment decision					

PLA Credit is recommended for the following course(s) with each course evaluation rubric attached:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## Prior Learning Assessment Portfolio Evaluation Rubric

STUDENT ID: \_\_\_\_\_ STUDENT NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

COURSE REVIEWED: \_\_\_\_\_

FACULTY EVALUATOR: \_\_\_\_\_ PROGRAM: \_\_\_\_\_

ELEMENT	CRITERIA	SATISFACTORY	UNSATISFACTORY
<b>KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING DEMONSTRATED (EXPERIENCES)</b>			
Documentation and description of learning experiences	Sources adequately document life experience pertinent to course objectives; are effectively discussed in the narrative essay, and its significance and relevance to course learning outcomes is clear.		
<b>EVIDENCE OF LEARNING (COMPETENCIES)</b>			
Evidence (overall)	Student provides evidence of learning from experience.		
Evidence aligned with course competencies	Student provides adequate and appropriate evidence of each course competency listed in the course syllabus and course description.		
Evidence aligned with personal experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Student clearly demonstrates clear learning derived the student's experience.</li> <li>▪ Experience clearly represents the student's understanding of the topic.</li> </ul>		
Evidence aligned with academic theory	Appropriate amount and use of academic theory is integrated within the submission, so that the student's learning is grounded in the academic frameworks of the topic.		
<b>PORTFOLIO PRESENTATION (QUALITY)</b>			
College-level writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Uses appropriate depth and breadth to demonstrate learning related to experiences, skills, and competencies.</li> <li>▪ Narrative demonstrates college level writing including: organization, punctuation, effective word usage, in-text citations, and end-of-text references.</li> <li>▪ Correct and effective word usage and vocabulary.</li> </ul>		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Each sentence structured effectively; variety of sentence styles and length.</li> <li>▪ Correct use of punctuation, spelling, capitalization errors.</li> </ul>		
Documentation	Documentation is effective evidence of experience; documentation displays evident integration of key concepts outlined in syllabus.		
Overall Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ PLA portfolio is well-organized, uses adequate subheadings clearly aligned with competencies, and progresses in logical, convincing order.</li> <li>▪ Index of portfolio sections included</li> <li>▪ Appropriate format and presentation for assignment.</li> <li>▪ PLA submission is professionally presented, complete, and clear.</li> </ul>		
Components of Portfolios	Portfolio contains the following items as a minimum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Application and Approval Form</li> <li>▪ Resume</li> <li>▪ Description and Documentation of Learning</li> <li>▪ Course Syllabus</li> <li>▪ Evidence Supporting Prior Learning</li> <li>▪ Appendix (if necessary)</li> </ul>		

**Final Recommendation (to be completed by Faculty Evaluator)**

**Criteria for Credit Received:** Student must score at the minimum level of “satisfactory” in each element of the rubric.

Check one	Recommendation	Faculty	Dean	*VPAA
	<b>Credit Awarded:</b> all rubric elements are rated satisfactory			
	<b>Resubmission requested:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Hands-on Demonstration Requested: faculty to schedule with student</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Portfolio resubmission to further meet requirements</li> </ul>			
	<b>Credit Denied:</b> There is not enough evidence to meet all course requirements			

\*VPAA or designee – Will review ONLY if student appeals Faculty and Dean decision

**Comments (add sheet if needed)**

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## Prior Learning Assessment Crosswalk Rubric

STUDENT NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ STUDENT ID: \_\_\_\_\_

PROGRAM: \_\_\_\_\_

Requested Course	Documentation Included (must match PLA Crosswalk)	Credit Approved**	Credit Denied**
Course:			
Comments:			
Course:			
Comment:			
Course:			
Comment:			
Course:			
Comment:			

PLA Coordinator Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Dean Signature (if making exceptions): \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

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\*\*PLA Coordinator may be required to submit to Dean or VPAA for further evaluation of credit approval or denial.