

# Prior Learning Assessment Manual



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## **Introduction to PLA Manual**

This manual is designed to assist faculty, staff, and administrators in the important work of helping students gain credit for Prior Learning Assessment (PLA). It contains an overview of the process; definitions, roles and responsibilities; policies and procedures; questions and answers, and a history of PLA at Bristol Community College (BCC). There are also tables outlining the process, fees, and compensation for each option; a section for forms; and appendices with equivalencies and the resources.

Many people have worked hard to create a process that not only recognizes the fact that students bring to the campus a wealth of experiences but also maintains the academic integrity of the institution. This document will be reviewed annually and revised as needed. Comments and suggestions should be directed to the Office of the Vice President of Academic Affairs.

## **Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)**

Students may meet up to 30 credits of degree program requirements with credits earned through PLA and/or credits transferred from another accredited college or university. For more information on the PLA process, contact the PLA Coordinator.

There are three PLA options: Credit by Examination (CBX), Credit by Credential (CBC), and Credit by Portfolio (CBP).

### **Credit by Examination**

#### **College Level Examination Program**

The College Level Examination Program (CLEP) offers students an opportunity to receive college credit for subject matter learned through means other than formal college work. The CLEP Subject Matter and CLEP General Examinations are applicable for credit. Students may access information regarding CLEP examinations by visiting: [www.bbristolcc.edu/academics/creditprograms/priorlearningassessmentpla/](http://www.bbristolcc.edu/academics/creditprograms/priorlearningassessmentpla/) or contacting the PLA Coordinator at [PLA@bristolcc.edu](mailto:PLA@bristolcc.edu).

#### **Credit by Examination**

A student may receive credit for some BCC courses by passing a comprehensive examination prepared by the department or program in which the course is being offered. Any student who has been formally accepted into a degree program at BCC and has completed the course requisites and received permission from the program director/department chairperson may take the examinations. Students must request these exams if they want to take them. Credit granted for comprehensive examinations will not have a letter grade assigned. The credit earned cannot be used to raise grades or remove failures in courses already taken.

Arrangements and registration for credit by examination must be made through the PLA Coordinator. Additional information concerning the complete credit by examination policy can be obtained by visiting <http://bristolcc.edu/academics/credit/priorlearningassessmentpla/> or contacting the PLA Staff Associate in the Lash Center for Teaching and Learning.

### **Credit by Credential**

Students may earn equivalent course credit for prior learning, including instruction sponsored by the military, business and industry, public and private agencies, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), associations and educational institutions, and licensure preparation by regulatory agencies and associations.

### **National Guides**

Credit for non-collegiate courses and educational experiences in the armed services may be awarded according to the recommendations in the National Guide to Credit Recommendations for Non-Collegiate Courses, the Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services, the Directory of the National Program of Non-Collegiate Sponsored Instruction (PONSI), and the National Guide to Educational Credit for Training Programs of the American Council on Education (ACE). A student who submits official documentation attesting to the completion of a course(s) listed in one of these publications will be awarded appropriate elective credit by the Dean of Admissions or the Registrar. If the credit awarded involves course equivalent credit, approval of the appropriate divisional dean and department chairperson is required.

### **Credit by Credential Programs Approved by BCC**

Students may earn course credit for programs listed in the PLA Manual and on the website at: <http://www.bristolcc.edu/academics/creditprograms/priorlearningassessmentpla/> or contact the PLA Coordinator at [PLA@bristolcc.edu](mailto:PLA@bristolcc.edu) for information.

The Police Career Incentive Pay Program (PCIPP), and Amendment to section 108L of chapter 41 of the Massachusetts General Laws, delegated to the Board of Higher Education (BHE) the authority to establish guidelines for programs pursued for police career incentive pay increases.

The BHE has subsequently adopted new standards which DO NOT allow for:

- Academic credit to be granted for life experience or military, police academy, or other training;
- Academic credit for knowledge-based testing (CLEP, Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES), etc.) to exceed 6 credit hours or;
- Tech-prep

## **Credit by Portfolio**

In order to obtain an award of Credit by Portfolio, students present a written portfolio documenting college-level competencies acquired through educational, vocational, or personal experiences. The PLA Coordinator initially evaluates the portfolio to determine comparability to required or elective courses in the student's program of study. All credit is evaluated on a course-by-course basis and must be approved by the department chair/program director in consultation with the dean of the appropriate division and the Vice President of Academic Affairs. Contact the PLA Coordinator for more information.

## **Prior Learning Assessment Definitions, Guidelines, Roles & Responsibilities**

### **Definitions:**

*CBC: Credit by Credential (formerly Credit by Evaluation or CBV)* is the process that documents that certificates and other training are equivalent to a BCC course. A list of approved courses is available. (See Appendix A for the BCC Course Equivalency List).

*CBP: Credit by Portfolio* is the process that allows students to demonstrate that they have the mastery of course content by preparing a portfolio that documents their knowledge.

*CBX: Credit by Examination* is the process that allows students to test out of a course. Acceptable tests are the AP Exam, the CLEP Exam, or a departmental/program exam. (See Appendix A for the BCC Course Equivalency List).

*The PLA Coordinator* is appointed by the Vice President of Academic Affairs to oversee the college's PLA process, evaluate its operations, and report on its progress. The coordinator answers questions and assists students and staff in the process as needed.

### **PLA Roles and Responsibilities:**

*Academic Advisor:* An academic advisor may suggest that a student explore the possibility of earning PLA credit based on the student's experience prior to entering an academic program. The student will be referred to the Lash Center for Teaching and Learning for a short eligibility interview.

*Faculty:* A faculty member may also recommend that a student explore the possibility of PLA credit based on student's knowledge or prior experience. The student will be referred to the Lash Center for Teaching and Learning for a short intake interview. Faculty, along with department chairs, program coordinators and deans, determine eligibility, approve particular PLA methods, develop, assess and typically administer challenge exams. They assess portfolios and credentials, as needed. Faculty also formally proposes credit by credential opportunities that become college policy once they are approved through the college-wide curriculum process.

*Deans:* Deans will be notified by the PLA Coordinator when a PLA assessment of any kind is assigned or offered to a faculty member in their division. The dean's role is to work with program directors or department chairs when necessary to identify appropriate faculty evaluators. Deans sometimes work with faculty to approve student eligibility for PLA opportunities.

*Program Coordinators and/or Department Chairs:* Program Coordinators and/or department chairs are notified by the PLA Coordinator when a student requires eligibility approval and when an appropriate faculty member needs to be identified to create a challenge exam or evaluate a portfolio. They often work together with faculty and deans to approve student eligibility and assist with communication between the PLA Coordinator and that faculty member.

*Lash CTL Staff Associate:* A Lash CTL Staff Associate conducts a short interview (5-10 minutes) with the student and completes a Student Eligibility Form that is sent to the PLA Coordinator. He or she also informs the student about the PLA process. The staff associate also maintains, along with the PLA Coordinator, a database of all PLA inquiries.

*PLA Coordinator:* The PLA Coordinator works directly with students to help identify potential PLA opportunities, communicates with department chairs, deans and faculty as necessary to determine the student's eligibility, submits approvals to Enrollment Service and the Records Office for processing, and helps to maintain data-related PLA credit.

*Dean of Lash Division:* The Dean of the Lash Division for Teaching and Learning supervises the PLA Coordinator and supports the PLA process and related activities.

*Associate Registrar:* The Associate Registrar approves PLA applications and oversees the processing of them.

*Registrar:* The Registrar applies transfer credit to a student's transcript once PLA credit has been earned.

*PLA Advisory Team:* This team includes participants from across the college and meets once per semester to get updates on PLA-related issues, share concerns or comments from their respective areas of the college and make recommendations of PLA policy.

## **Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Process Overview**

1. Students interested in PLA credit should contact the Lash Center for Teaching and Learning in person (A-115, Fall River) or by phone (ext. 2511) to complete a Student Eligibility Interview. This involves a short conversation about the student's background, academic program, and courses for which the student is attempting to earn PLA credit.

2. In some cases, eligibility will be determined through this initial conversation. In other cases, the student will need to meet with the PLA Coordinator and/or department chair before eligibility is approved. The student may be asked to bring a resume or other relevant documentation to this meeting. While **only matriculated students are eligible to earn PLA credit**, the PLA Coordinator often provides general information about PLA to prospective or non-degree students as well.
3. The PLA Coordinator will discuss the type of PLA credit, if any, is available to the student. BCC offers three types of PLA credit: **Credit by Credential, Credit by (CLEP or Departmental) Exam, and Credit by Portfolio.**
  - An eligible student applying for **Credit by Credential** for a course that is listed in BCC's PLA Course Equivalency list will be asked to submit a Credit by Credential (CBC) application and a copy of the required credential(s) to Enrollment Services. Once these items are submitted, the student is registered, and the fee is paid, the Registrar will grant credit. The course and appropriate number of credits will appear on the student's transcript with a T for *transfer* credit and the notation, *Credit by Credential*.
  - A student interested in credit through **College Level Examination Program (CLEP) Exams** will be directed to the CLEP website (<https://clep.collegeboard.org/>) and BCC's Testing Center (<http://www.bristolcc.edu/students/testingcenter/clepcollegelevelexaminationprogram/>) to learn about, prepare, register, and pay for the exams they want to take. While CLEP testing is offered at BCC, students may take CLEP exams at any CLEP Testing Center and have those scores reported to BCC. (See BCC's CLEP Equivalencies (<http://www.bristolcc.edu/media/bcc-website/facultystaff/humanresources/forms/CLEP,Credit,Policy,Fall,2106.pdf>) for specific exams and scores). Once scores are received, the Registrar or Office of Admissions will grant credit where appropriate. The course and number of credits will appear on the student's transcript with a T for *transfer* credit and the notation, *Credit by Examination*.
  - An eligible student applying for **Credit by (Departmental) Examination** will work with the PLA Coordinator to secure the approvals, schedule, and get preparatory materials, if any. The student must submit a Credit by Examination (CBX) application to Enrollment Services. A course registration number (CRN) is generated and the student must register and pay before he or she can take an exam. A faculty member identified by the appropriate department chair or dean develops and assesses the exam and then sends an evaluation report to the

Registrar. If the student earns a *pass* on the exam, the Registrar will grant credit. The course and appropriate number of credits will appear on the student's transcript with a T for *transfer* credit and the notation, *Credit by Examination*.

4. An eligible student applying for **Credit by Portfolio** will work with the PLA Coordinator or a faculty member identified by the appropriate department chair to develop a portfolio that demonstrates how the student has met the course outcomes through his or her experience outside of the classroom. Typically, portfolios include, but are not limited to:
  - a. a title page,
  - b. table of contents,
  - c. course description and learning outcomes,
  - d. a prior learning assessment essay; and
  - e. supporting documentation

These contents vary based on the requirements of particular courses and departments. The student will work with the PLA Coordinator and/or faculty member to develop this portfolio before submitting it to the appropriate faculty for evaluation. The faculty member will submit a Portfolio Evaluation to the PLA Coordinator and Registrar. The PLA Coordinator will share the report with the student. If the portfolio is approved, the Registrar will grant credit. If the portfolio earns a conditional approval, the student has the opportunity to revise the portfolio based on suggestions made by the faculty evaluator. If the portfolio is resubmitted and approved, the course and appropriate number of credits will appear on the student's transcript with a T for *transfer* credit with the notation, *Credit by Portfolio*. If the portfolio is not submitted, or does not meet approval within a semester, an *F*, *W*, or *I* grade will be recorded.

## **Prior Learning Assessment Program Policies and Procedures**

1. PLA assessments should be completed with 60 days after a student completes an eligibility interview or by the end of the semester, whichever is longer. PLA assessments that are not completed within this duration must be reported to the Dean of the Lash Division.
3. PLA language developed by program coordinators and other faculty will be reviewed by PLA Coordinator and PLA Advisory Committee. Recommendations will be sent to the Dean of the Lash Division and the PLA Coordinator.
4. The PLA Coordinator will check in intermittently with both faculty and students to assess progress.
5. The PLA Coordinator will report to the Dean of the Lash Center the names of students with pending PLA registrations at the close of each semester.



6. PLA Student Grievance Process: Students who are dissatisfied with the PLA process should share concerns with the PLA Coordinator, then the Dean of the Lash Division. If still dissatisfied, the student should follow the standard grade appeal process.

### **Roles and Responsibilities for Credit by Credential (CBC) Option**

BCC currently participates in a number of programs that provide opportunities for students to receive college credit for learning experiences outside the normal academic framework. These programs recommend equivalencies for a variety of national training experiences, professional certification, and military schooling and experience.

Credit for non-collegiate courses and other educational experiences *may be* awarded according to the recommendations in the *National Guide to Credit Recommendations for Non-collegiate Courses*, the *Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services*, the *Directory of the National Program of Non-collegiate Sponsored Instruction (PONSI)*, and the *National Guide to Educational Credit for Training Programs of the American Council on Education*. The PLA Coordinator can access these lists.

A student seeking BCC credit for external programs submits official documentation attesting to the completion of a course(s) listed in one of these publications. If the course is on the BCC Course Equivalency List, the Associate Registrar will verify this and request that credit be awarded. The PLA Coordinator maintains this list and ensures that it is updated on a regular basis. The course equivalency list can be accessed online through the PLA website at <http://www.bristolcc.edu/media/bcc-website/academics/credit/PLA,Course,Equivalencies5417.pdf>.

Requests for credit based on experiences supported by military transcripts are reviewed by the Admissions office or the Registrar's office, depending on whether the request is made at the time of application or after the student has matriculated. If there is a need for additional evaluation, the Dean of Admissions or Registrar will contact the appropriate Program Coordinator, Department Chair, or Divisional Dean to review the documentation. Based on the recommendation from the content expert, the Vice President of Academic Affairs or designee approves or denies the request. An Admission Advisor may refer students to the PLA Coordinator if further assessment is necessary.

BCC offers an additional opportunity for students seeking credit for a learning experience that is not specifically listed in the national publications. Program Coordinators and Department Chairs determine BCC course equivalency; they make application to the College-Wide Curriculum Committee (CWCC) for approval of the BCC course equivalency. The PLA Coordinator assists the Program Directors and Department Chairs in the CWCC process and maintains a list of the BCC course equivalencies in a handbook and online that is available to the PLA Coordinator.

The Vice President of Academic Affairs may approve one-time requests for equivalency based on the recommendation of the Department Chair and Divisional Dean in whose area the course resides. The Vice President will present to the CWCC a list of one-time approvals for the academic year by the final meeting of the CWCC for its recommendations. The Vice President will make the final approval and the PLA Coordinator will ensure that the BCC Approved List is updated for the beginning of the following academic year.

The PLA Coordinator works with Program Coordinators and Department Chairs in maintaining the BCC Course Equivalency List (See Appendix A). Department Chairs and Program Coordinators should make themselves aware of programs, licenses, and certifications that may be equivalent to BCC courses offered in their disciplines and seek BCC equivalency approval from CWCC prior to a student seeking PLA-CBC credit.

The student will pay \$50 per course plus \$50 per lab if required for which PLA CBC is awarded. A student support fee of \$37 or amount consistent with current fee charged may apply.

### **Roles and Responsibilities for the Credit by Examination (CBX) Option**

The Credit by Examination (CBX) PLA option includes the following categories:

1. College Level Examination Program (CLEP) by the College Board
2. College Departmental and Program Challenge Examination

### **College Level Examination Program (CLEP)**

The College-Level Examination Program® or CLEP provides students of any age with the opportunity to demonstrate college-level achievement through a program of exams in undergraduate college courses. There are 2,900 colleges that grant credit and/or advanced standing for CLEP exams.

The BCC Prior Learning Assessment Program policy **requires** that, *if a CLEP examination is listed in BCC's CLEP Equivalency Policy in the subject for which the student desires PLA credit*, the student **MUST** take the examination in order to receive PLA Credit by Examination. For those courses for which a CLEP examination is accepted, there are no departmental or program challenge examination options. The PLA Coordinator must inform students seeking Credit by Examination that they must make application to take the CLEP subject examination for the course for which they wish credit.

It is the responsibility of the student to make application and to have the scores sent directly to BCC in an official transcript from the College Board. While students may take CLEP exams at any CLEP Testing Center, they may find it convenient to take their exams at BCC. In order to receive BCC credit for the course equivalency, a student must earn a score of 50 or better on the CLEP exam. Not all CLEP exams have direct equivalencies with BCC courses. Students should access the current BCC policy with an Advisor, Department Chair, Program Coordinator, or

Divisional Dean prior to taking any exam. The PLA Coordinator maintains oversight over this requirement. Information about the CLEP Equivalency Policy can be found at:

<http://www.bristolcc.edu/media/bcc-website/facultystaff/humanresources/forms/CLEP,Credit,Policy,Fall,2106.pdf>.

Eligible veterans and active military personnel may be able to take advantage of discounts or reimbursements. The College Board offers special waivers for fees associated with CLEP exams. Information about CLEP and the benefits available to veterans can be found at [www.collegeboard.org/clepveteterans](http://www.collegeboard.org/clepveteterans).

### **Departmental or Program Challenge Examination (CBX)**

Each department and/or program at BCC may develop challenge examinations in courses for which, in the opinion of the Department Chair or Program Coordinator, an examination is appropriate. BCC Departments and Programs should consider identification of courses for which challenge examinations are academically sound.

The Department Chair or Program Coordinator, in consultation with the Divisional Dean, recruits a faculty member in the appropriate department or program in which the course resides to create an examination. This examination should be designed to evaluate student course knowledge at a competency level of “C” or above. This examination shall be provided to the Department Chair or Program Director for the file.

The faculty member who develops the examination must be given first opportunity to proctor and grade the examination, though the PLA Coordinator may also administer the exam, if appropriate. This faculty member may meet with the interested student, and discusses the examination with that student; following this meeting, the faculty member schedules and administers the examination. The faculty member who administers and grades the examination *must* report the grade to the Registrar within two weeks of completion of the examination or 72 hours after the last scheduled final examination on the College-wide Final Examination Schedule, whichever is sooner.

The examination *may* be kept on file by the Department with the permission of the instructor who prepared the examination. If the examination is an objective examination, an answer key must accompany the examination. The faculty member who prepares the examination shall receive \$186/credit compensation for the process of examination preparation. Certain academic areas require substantially more time to prepare an examination. Faculty in such disciplines may make application for additional compensation at the current per hour rate to the Vice President of Academic Affairs.

The student will pay \$100 per course plus \$100 per lab practicum if required.  
The student will pay \$100 per course plus \$100 per lab practicum if no exam exists.  
A student support fee of \$37 may apply.

## **Roles and Responsibilities for the Credit by Portfolio (CBP) Option**

In order to obtain an award of Credit by Portfolio, students present a written portfolio documenting college-level competencies acquired through educational, vocational, or personal experiences.

Students must obtain permission from the appropriate Department Chair or Program Coordinator to seek Prior Learning Assessment Credit through the Credit by Portfolio option.

Responsibility for portfolio review occurs in a specific order:

1. A faculty member, recruited by the Department Chair or Program Coordinator, agrees to evaluate the student's portfolio with the student.
2. Faculty evaluator agrees to meet or communicate about portfolio request with student or PLA Coordinator, especially if there are no documented criteria for particular portfolio learning outcomes.
3. PLA Coordinator or designee works with student to develop portfolio.
4. Completed portfolio is submitted to faculty reviewer.
5. If the portfolio is approved with a C or better by the faculty reviewer, the Department Chair, or Program Coordinator reviews the portfolio.
6. If the portfolio is approved by the Department Chair or Program Coordinator, the Divisional Dean reviews the portfolio, and if the portfolio is approved at this level, the Vice President of Academic Affairs or his/her designee approves the credit for the course and the course is transcribed as Credit by Portfolio

## **Elements of a Portfolio**

The portfolio may include any of the following items, depending on departmental requirements:

- 1) Title Page
- 2) Table of Contents
- 3) A copy of the course description or outcomes will be provided to the student
- 4) Résumé
  - Complete work history in a résumé form
  - Form can be an acceptable format
    - Chronological Résumé
    - Functional Résumé
    - Combination (Chronological/Functional)
- 5) Prior Learning Assessment Essay
  - Statement should display college-level writing competencies.

- Statement should indicate a general awareness of how the student's life experience translates into his/her chosen academic field. This element of the essay displays college-level critical thinking and assessment competencies.
  - Statement should indicate how the experiences meets the course objectives
  - A copy of the course description or outcomes will be provided to the student
- 6) Appropriate documentation that demonstrates the student's learning. This may include:
- Supervisor's statement and/or recommendation/evaluation
  - Tangible products of the life experience
    - Writing samples
    - Formatted documents
    - Blueprints
    - Computer programs
    - Technical Reports
    - Artwork
    - Videotapes, CDs or DVDs
    - Publications
    - Web pages and/or sites
    - Links to online media as resources
    - Etc.
  - Copies of applicable transcripts
  - Certificates of professional training
  - Appropriate licenses and/or certifications
  - Some portfolios may also include an annotated bibliography as required by department
- 7) Annotated Bibliography/Resources
- The student should include a list of professional works (books, journals, etc.) and/or resources in his/he particular field that are directly applicable to the competencies of the course for which PLA credit is desired. These citations should include a short paragraph (the annotation) explaining why the source or resource is appropriate to the field and how the knowledge might assist the student.
  - This section allows the student to provide evidence of college-level awareness of the scholarly and/or practical material in his/her field.

## **A History of the Prior Learning Assessment Program at Bristol Community College**

On March 30, 1998, the Academic Standards Committee sent a memorandum to the Dean of Academic Affairs recommending that the College adopt a policy on granting credit for Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), formerly known as Prior Experiential Learning (PEL). Specifically, the Academic Standards Committee recommended the following:

- a) That Bristol Community College adopt in principle the concept of Credit for Prior Learning Assessment;

- b) That the Dean of Academic Affairs convene an ad-hoc Committee on Prior Learning Assessment to establish procedures and policy for the implementation of credit for Prior Learning Assessment;
- c) That Bristol Community College registers with the American Council on Education its recognition of the standards outlined by the American Council on Education in its publication National Guide to Educational Credit for Training Programs.

The Academic Standards Committee made its recommendations to the Dean of Academic Affairs after the Proposal was discussed and amended at the March 1998 professional staff meeting.

On July 15, 1998, David Feeney, Dean of Academic Affairs, sent a memorandum to President Farley accepting the Academic Standards Committee's recommendation on Prior Learning Assessment. The Dean of Academic Affairs subsequently appointed six people to the ad-hoc Committee on Prior Learning Assessment in October 1998. The ad-hoc Committee held its first meeting on November 5, 1998. At that meeting, the Dean of Academic Affairs gave the committee its charge.

The committee was charged with the responsibility of “developing guidelines for evaluating educational experiences not covered in the ACE guides currently used, recommending procedures for awarding (PLA) credit, and considering implementation issues such as fees, compensation for evaluators, posting of credit, etc.”

While some members of the ad-hoc Committee had previously served on the Academic Standards Committee, the amalgamation of the different levels of experience created a strong foundation for the issues to be reexamined. The Committee focused most of its efforts during the first few meetings in the fall on researching, acquiring, and assessing Prior Learning Assessments policies and procedures from other colleges and universities in the country. The Committee also reviewed historical documents showing previous attempts by the College to implement various forms of PLA policies, ranging from credit by exam to what we currently offer—College Level Examination Program (CLEP), Advanced Placement Program (AP), credit by department/program examination, and credit for non-traditional study.

After extensive research, the Committee selected North Shore Community College as a model because of its exemplary PLA programs. To learn first-hand from the professionals who run the program at North Shore, the Committee invited Jill Thornton, Instructional Specialist, to meet with the members on January 4, 1999. Ms. Thornton brought considerable material to the meeting and discussed in great detail the policies and procedures of the alternative studies program at North Shore. The Committee is very grateful to Jill Thornton for her assistance throughout the process.

At the beginning of the spring 1999 semester, the Committee discussed final recommendations for the PLA program at the College. After considerable discussions, the Committee chose to recommend a structure that situated the issue of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) within the broader context of the wide variety of learning experiences currently offered at the College. The

Committee decided to recommend that Bristol Community College grant PLA credit based on a three-pronged approach administered by a Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Coordinator:

(1) Credit by Examinations (CBX); (2) Credit by Evaluation (CBV); (3) Credit by Portfolio (CBP).

The Prior Learning Assessment Program began in the fall semester of 1999 with the appointment of a Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator, Maureen Melvin Sowa. The College administration made the determination that the PLA Coordinator should be a faculty member and that the position would carry an initial course reduction of three courses per academic year. Eventually the program grew sufficiently to warrant a faculty course reduction of four courses per academic year. The initial semester involved implementing the general policy outline into specific administrative activities; i.e., design of appropriate forms, faculty compensation procedures, student application procedures, credit transcription procedures.

In the first year of program operation, 167 students sought PLA information (122 matriculated students, 45 non-matriculated); 64 students completed the process and received PLA credit. The College divisions most immediately impacted by the program were Division IV (Health Science Technologies) and Division V (Mathematics and Sciences). Division V saw the most activity due to the interest in the Prior Learning Assessment Program by students enrolled in the Fire Science Technology Program. The Fire Science Technology Program had been recently reinvigorated through the efforts of the new program director, Chief Stephen Rivard; Fire Science Technology students were the majority of students completing the PLA credit options.

The program continued to grow through the academic years 2000-2003, finally stabilizing in AY 2002-2003 at approximately 250 inquiries per year. The PLA policy and procedures continued to develop during the period, but consistent issues and problems remained unresolved by practice. The PLA Coordinator recommended that the policy and procedures be reviewed by a committee comprised of BCC faculty and professional staff in areas most affected by the PLA program.

In the fall semester 2003, the Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator requested that the Dean of Academic Affairs authorize a program review to address some of the consistent issues that surfaced during the initial four-year period of implementation. A review was authorized for the spring semester 2004. The ad-hoc PLA Review Committee consisted of the following college personnel: Janelle Arruda, Assistant Professor of Computer Information Systems; Donna Davis, Director of Enrollment Services; Cynthia Hahn, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs; William Kelly, Professor of English; Doris Levasseur, Instructor in Early Childhood Education; Carol Martin, Professor of Office Administration; and Maureen Melvin Sowa, Professor of History and Coordinator of the Prior Learning Assessment Program.

The members did an extensive review of the program and recommended a number of changes in policy, including the development of a Prior Learning Assessment Manual to be distributed to all appropriate chairs and program coordinators. The Committee also recommended that for the first semester of implementation of the changes the current PLA Coordinator be granted one course release for the Spring 2005 semester to assist with the transition; such assistance should

include but would not be limited to training college personnel and assisting divisional assistant deans as required.

The Committee recommended that the PLA manual contain a detailed explanation of the PLA process roles and responsibilities, a detailed explanation of the various PLA options available to students, a list of all College courses with an indication of PLA options available, and an appendix of applicable PLA forms with a usage description and explanation of process.

During the summer of 2005, Michael Vieira, Divisional Assistant Dean and Karen Dixon, Assistant Academic Dean, edited and revised the manual. Pamela Chadwick, Administrative Assistant, created forms that may be filled out electronically and provided clerical and technical support. After a review by the Dean's Council, the Academic Dean, Steve Berrien, approved the changes to the PLA process in the fall of 2005 and appointed Mike Vieira PLA Coordinator and Susan Shannon as PLA administrative support staff. The changes to the process were distributed in November of 2005.

In 2011, the PLA Manual was revised, again.

In 2013, the name of the program was changed from Prior Experiential Learning to Prior Learning Assessment and was put under the change of the Dean of the Lash Center for Teaching and Learning, Suzanne Buglione. Jennifer Puniello served as PLA Coordinator during fall 2013. In January of 2014, a full-time faculty member, Debra Anderson, was hired. In 2014, a PLA Advisory Team was formed. The current membership includes representatives (faculty and administrators) from all academic divisions, Student Affairs, Workforce Development, and College Communications.

In 2014, a page of the BCC website was created for PLA:

<http://www.bristolcc.edu/academics/creditprograms/priorlearningassessmentpla/>. This PLA Manual was revised in 2015 by Debra Anderson and Bette Barbosa, who served as PLA Staff Assistant (fall 2014) and then Acting PLA Coordinator (spring 2015). It was distributed in November 2015. It was updated again in June of 2017. Jennifer Dekkers took over as PLA Coordinator on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017.



## **Easy Reference Guides**

## **Credit by Credentials – CBC**

### **Duties & Responsibilities**

#### **Advising (Faculty Compensation – no additional compensation)**

- Advising is part of the ordinary responsibilities of those faculty and professional staff who interact with students
- Initial intake advising may be done at various points of contact between the student and the College (i.e., Admissions, Enrollment Services, Advising)
- Advising assistance with regards to the PLA process will be the responsibility of the designated PLA Coordinator
- Every effort should be made to identify students with external learning experiences at the point of application for admission to the college.

#### **BCC Equivalency Application Process (Faculty Compensation – (\$186 per course or amount consistent with current tuition charged for one credit course)**

- Department Chair/Program Coordinator assesses the external learning experience presented by the student
  - 1) To be considered for Credit by Credential, a student's learning experiences *must* include state or national licenses, courses from professional associations, and other learning or training experiences *that provide transcripts or other documentary proof*
- Department Chair/Program Coordinator evaluates the documented learning experience for potential BCC equivalency
- Department Chair/Program Coordinator or designee prepares the appropriate CWCC form for a BCC Course Equivalency
- Department Chair/Program Coordinator presents the application to the CWCC
- The equivalency should be reviewed by the Department on a regular basis to evaluate continued academic credibility

#### **College Procedure after submission to CWCC (Faculty Compensation – no additional compensation)**

- CWCC makes recommendation based on the PLA-CBC application from the appropriate department or program and submits the application with recommendation to the Vice President of Academic Affairs
- PLA Coordinator forwards the application to the Vice President of Academic Affairs with either concurrence or additional recommendation
- Vice President of Academic Affairs accepts or rejects CWCC recommendation
- A copy of the CWCC recommendation is sent to the PLA Coordinator for inclusion into the PLA Manual

#### **Student Fees:**

The student will pay \$50 per course plus \$50 per lab if required for which PLA (CBC) is awarded.

A student support fee of \$37 or amount consistent with current fee charged may apply.

***No cost to student if the learning experience is listed in any national manual of course equivalency accepted by Bristol Community College.***

Credit by Examination – CBX

## **Duties & Responsibilities**

### **Advising (Faculty Compensation – no additional compensation)**

- Advising is part of the ordinary responsibilities of those faculty and professional staff who interact with students
- Initial intake Advising may be done at various points of contact between the student and the College (i.e., Admissions, Enrollment Services, Advising)
- Advising assistance with regards to the PLA process will be the responsibility of the designated PLA Coordinator
- Every effort should be made to identify students with external learning experiences at the point of application for admission to the college

### **Examination Development, Administration and Grading (\$186/credit or amount consistent with current tuition charged per credit)**

- Faculty member agrees to prepare the examination
- The examination may be kept on file by the Department Chair/Program Coordinator ***with permission of the instructor who developed the examination***
- Examination kept on file by the Department should be reviewed on a regular basis for academic credibility
- Faculty member who prepares the examination will be given the first opportunity to administer and grade the examination. Examination may be administered by PLA Coordinator, if appropriate.
- Certain academic areas require substantially more time to prepare challenge examinations; compensation may be adjusted with justification; adjustment is subject to the approval of the Vice President of Academic Affairs
  
- Students lose the PLA fee if the process is not completed within the semester in which it starts
- The examination may be administered or proctored by other than the faculty member who developed the examination or who has agreed to assess it, but the faculty preparer must be given first opportunity to administer and grade the examination
- Faculty member must submit a grade to PLA Coordinator and Enrollment Services within two weeks of the completion of the examination or 72 hours after the last scheduled college final examination, *whichever is sooner*
- Enrollment Services will forward a copy to Susan Shannon who will prepare faculty payment.
- Faculty are compensated once per semester for development, administration and assessment for a particular course, regardless of the number of students who take the exam within that semester.

### **Student Fees:**

The student will pay \$100 per course plus \$100 per lab practicum if required

A student support fee of \$37 or amount consistent with current fee charged may apply

Credit by Portfolio – CBP

## **Duties & Responsibilities**

### **Advising (Faculty Compensation – no additional compensation)**

- Advising is part of the ordinary responsibilities of those faculty and professional staff who interact with students
- Initial intake advising may be done at various points of contact between the student and the College (i.e., Admissions, Enrollment Services, Advising)
- Advising assistance with regards to the PLA process will be the responsibility of the designated PLA Coordinator
- Every effort should be made to identify students with external learning experiences at the point of application for admission to the college
- Department Chair/Program Coordinator assesses the external learning experience presented by the student and recommends that the student develop a portfolio to demonstrate competency in a particular course
- PLA Coordinator or Department Chair/Program Coordinator assists student in developing a portfolio based upon the PLA General Portfolio Elements (as modified by particular departments or programs)

### **Portfolio Assessment Process (\$186 per course or amount consistent with current tuition charged for one credit course)**

- Department Chair/Program Coordinator designates a faculty member to assess the elements of the portfolio for a demonstrated course competency of “C” or better
- Faculty member forwards a positive portfolio assessment to the Divisional Dean for concurrence
- Divisional Dean forwards assessment to PLA Coordinator who forwards assessment to the Academic Vice President and Associate Registrar for approval.
- Faculty member returns a negative portfolio assessment to the student with appropriate forms, outlining the deficiencies in the portfolio; faculty member submits a copy of the negative assessment to the PLA Coordinator for records.
- Student may resubmit the portfolio one time for a reassessment. (The initial faculty assessor must be given first opportunity at the reassessment.)

### **Student Fees:**

The student will pay \$50 for each portfolio assessment and \$50 for each reassessment

The student will pay \$50 per lab if required

A student support fee of \$37 or amount consistent with current fee charged may apply

## **PLA Forms**

Forms are available in Public Folders or by contacting the PLA Coordinator, Jennifer Dekkers at [Jennifer.Dekkers@bristolcc.edu](mailto:Jennifer.Dekkers@bristolcc.edu).

## **Appendix A:**

### **BCC Online Course Equivalency List**

<http://www.bristolcc.edu/media/bcc-website/academics/credit/PLA,Course,Equivalencies5417.pdf>

## **Appendix B:**

### **Enrollment Process for NUR 101 Challenge Exam**

Mid- December

- Associate Director of Admissions notifies Associate Registrar of need for Course Registration number (CRN) for NUR 101 departmental challenge exam
- Associate Registrar creates CRN.

End of Semester in December:

NUR 101 must be concluded to know how many openings there are for NUR 102 as there are also readmission students. The Department Chair would then notify the Associate Director of Admissions of the number of spots for LPN Challenge.

- Associate Director of Admissions works with Nursing Department Chair to identify students eligible for NUR 101 departmental challenge.

Late-December/Early January:

- Division IV Administrative Assistant contacts eligible students, letting them know that they need to go to the Enrollment Center to register and pay for the challenge exam before the first day of the two-day exam and other requirements to begin in the spring (e.g., CPR, CORI, immunizations, and physical).
- Division IV Administrative Assistant will send the list of students who intend to register to Associate Registrar and Coordinator of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA).
- PLA Coordinator adds student information to PLA Student Database.
- At the Enrollment Center, participating students will be asked to complete the Credit by Examination (CBX) Application (PLA Form 1-1) as well as to register and pay for exam. Approval signatures from Nursing Department Chair and PLA Coordinator are not needed if the student's name is on the list.

Mid-January

- Students take two-day NUR 101 challenge exam conducted by faculty of Division IV.
- Exams are assessed by Nursing Department Chair who also completes Credit by Examination (CBX) Grade Report (PLA Form 1-1.1) for each student and sends a list indicating which students passed and which did not to Registrar and PLA Coordinator.
- The Registrar applies credit to the appropriate students' transcripts.
- PLA Coordinator adds student results to PLA Student Database.
- Students are now eligible to register for NUR 102.