

MONROE COLLEGE

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT (PLA) GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

Academic Year 2021-2022



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Welcome to Monroe College's Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Program

Monroe College takes great pleasure in working with our adult learners to identify college-level learning that is both verifiable and applicable to their educational goals. We recognize that learning can take place through work or life outside of structured higher educational courses.

This guide describes the current opportunities for obtaining college credit for prior learning. Procedures are designed to uphold the academic standing of Monroe College while recognizing your previous learning experiences and applying them to your degree program. Developing a portfolio requires time and commitment to the process; therefore, we want to make sure students have all of the necessary information and support to successfully earn credit for prior learning.

The mission of the College speaks to access, attainability, and an innovative curriculum, all of which we offer you through this prior learning opportunity. I am so very pleased to welcome you to the Monroe College community and look forward to a successful and rewarding association.

Janice Girardi

Janice Girardi, EdD
Associate Vice President
Academic Records, Assessment, and Planning

MONROE COLLEGE

MISSION OF THE COLLEGE

Monroe College, founded in 1933, is a national leader in higher education access, affordability, and attainment. We believe in the power of education to facilitate social mobility and transform communities, and embrace our responsibility to advocate national policies that serve students' best interests. We are proud of our outcomes and unique caring environment, especially for first-generation college students, newly arriving immigrants, and international students. Our innovative curriculum, taught by experienced industry professionals, integrates local, national, and global perspectives. Our academic programs align with industries that drive the New York and international economies that we serve. Our graduates are prepared for continued scholarship, professional growth, and career advancement.

CORE VALUES

- ***Outcomes drive us.***
We are committed to remaining a national leader in delivering strong outcomes for students and always strive for continuous improvement.
- ***Integrity guides us.***
Honesty, transparency, accountability, and fairness are the bedrock of our work.
- ***Relationships define us.***
We build strong personal connections among students, faculty, and staff, as well as with external educational, corporate, and community partners.

SECTION ONE - OVERVIEW

DEFINITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

Prior learning is learning that has taken place before you enrolled at Monroe College. It is a process by which a student's knowledge and expertise acquired through life and professional experience is recognized and validated for academic credit. This learning may have occurred in a variety of settings outside of the traditional classroom.

The primary characteristic of prior learning credit is that it must be based on college-level learning, not simply on experience or length of time. All prior learning must be described, demonstrated, documented, and verified before credit can be awarded towards your degree program.

BENEFITS OF PRIOR LEARNING

The awarding of prior learning credit carries many benefits, among them:

- It accelerates degree completion. Prior learning credit fulfills your program requirements, reducing the amount of time spent completing your degree.
- It reduces duplication of learning. The identification of prior learning avoids repetition of learning that was acquired before entering the degree program.
- It may reduce student cost. Fewer courses means lower tuition costs which means smaller debt.
- It increases the likelihood of graduation. Studies show that students who earn prior learning credit have higher graduation rates than their peers without prior learning credit.¹

PRIOR LEARNING ELIGIBILITY

Fully matriculated and enrolled Monroe College undergraduate students maintaining at least a 2.0 GPA are eligible to apply for prior learning credit.² Only prior learning credit that is applicable to a student's degree program will be awarded. All course prerequisites must be fulfilled before prior learning credit is awarded.

¹ Underserved Students Who Earn Credit Through Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Have Higher Degree Completion Rates and Shorter Time-to-Degree. CAEL Research Brief, April 2011. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED524578.pdf>

² Some degree programs may be restricted from using prior learning credit toward major requirements. Speak with your mentor for details.

IDENTIFYING YOUR PRIOR LEARNING

There are several methods to show exactly how learning has taken place:

- ***Transfer credits.*** An official transcript from an accredited college or university may carry curriculum-based or general education credits that can be applied to your degree program and/or electives.
- ***Standardized or national exam.*** Students may fulfill credits by taking any number of standardized tests prepared by outside agencies. A good example is the CLEP exam for those of you who are fluent in a second language.³ Other national standardized exams include AP and Dantes/DSST.
- ***Military instruction.*** Some courses that are part of military training may be eligible for academic credit at Monroe.
- ***Certificates and licenses.*** Valid and current certificates and licenses earned through professional development may be applicable toward your degree program, such as those approved by the American Council on Education (ACE) or the National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS).
- ***Portfolio preparation.*** Students may describe, demonstrate, and document their learning by compiling materials in a professional work experience portfolio that shows mastery of a particular subject matter. Preparation of a portfolio is detailed in Section 2 of this Guide.

A maximum of 30 credits toward an associate's degree or 90 credits toward a bachelor's degree may be earned through a combination of transfer credits from another college, national standardized exams, challenge exams or projects, non-collegiate coursework, and/or prior learning portfolios. All Monroe College residency requirements apply.

STEPS TOWARD PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT

Prior learning assessment is the actual process of assessing how many credits you may earn through prior learning. Although guidelines and procedures are in effect to make this happen, students should first consult the course catalog to review their chosen program requirements and speak with an academic advisor to ascertain the best way to proceed. It is recommended that you do this early in your academic work at Monroe to fully benefit from the potential awarding of credit and, to avoid course repetition.

³ CLEP (College Level Examination Program) is a group of standardized tests created and administered by the College Board. These tests assess college-level knowledge in a variety of subject areas and provide a mechanism for earning college credits without taking college courses.

Following are the basic steps in the PLA process:

Apply

- Select the program you wish to enroll in and carefully review the required courses
- Submit application to the College
- Arrange for official transcripts from other colleges, if applicable
- Speak with an admissions advisor and a financial aid advisor

Upon Acceptance

- Register for classes
- Complete the CAEL Prior Learning Assessment Questionnaire (see link below)
- Speak with a Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) mentor to discuss potential prior learning credits
- Enroll in a Prior Learning Portfolio course, if needed (see Part 2 of this guide)

Academic Transcripts (if applicable)

Submit all of your official transcripts of post-secondary education to Admissions and/or the Registrar upon application to the college. There are several sources available to you for arranging for transcripts from other colleges, but check with your former college or university for specific instructions.

CAEL'S PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Monroe College instructs accepted students who are interested in prior learning credit to complete CAEL's Prior Learning Assessment Questionnaire at this link:

<https://earncollegecredit.org/monroecollege/pla#/home>

The Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) has been recognized for almost 40 years as the leader in setting industry-wide standards, and is referenced by all major accrediting associations.

The CAEL PLA questionnaire will ask you to supply basic contact information and to upload your resume. The program will then prompt you to answer specific questions about your chosen Monroe degree program, your education, and any other prior learning through non-credit-bearing courses, military training, or other work-related experiences. You may also upload certificates of completion or test results relating to your training.

WHAT IS COLLEGE-LEVEL LEARNING?

The task of identifying college-level learning takes some practice, but here's where your PLA mentor can help. College-level learning is the ability to examine your knowledge and skills and view it within a particular context (as well as other contexts) both inside and outside of your field of study.

The process for achieving college-level learning, therefore, requires that you have

1. acquired new information,
2. engaged in critical inquiry surrounding that new information,
3. analyzed, synthesized, and integrated the information as personal knowledge,
4. placed this newly learned knowledge into a broader framework, and then,
5. applied the knowledge.

Think back to all that you've done. Consider all of your experiences. There are any number of things you have learned in your life that could be classified as college-level learning. The following list is intended to assist you, but it is not complete. Use it as a starting point, and then write down an informal mini-autobiography to discuss with your mentor.

College-level learning could be derived from:

- Work or professional experience
- Military or police academy training
- Licenses, certifications, and other earned credentials
- Noncredit-bearing coursework
- Continuing professional education (or CEUs)
- Corporate and in-service training programs
- Learning through Open Educational Resources
- Volunteerism or recreational/sporting activities
- Publications (formal and informal)

A Prior Learning Assessment Worksheet appears in the appendix of this guide to help you identify the college-level learning you have acquired. Use it to think about and describe what you know.

YOUR PLA TEAM

Monroe's PLA mentors are available to help you from the first day of your interest in prior learning credit. You'll be assigned a personal mentor who will walk you through the process every step of the way.

Judi-Ann Beckford-Hue
Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator
jbeckford@monroecollege.edu
(646) 393-8640

Janice Franklin
Director, Academic Evaluation & Reporting
jfranklin@monroecollege.edu
(914) 740-6497

Sharon Gellman
Assistant Dean, Academic Assessment & Planning
sgellman@monroecollege.edu
(914) 740-6540

MONROE COLLEGE'S ADULT LEARNER PROGRAMS

Although the College offers dozens of programs to choose from, the following two bachelor's programs are specially designed for adult learners. Full descriptions with curricula may be found in the college catalog.

BS in Professional Studies

Are you an adult professional with work experience, some college credits, and a desire to earn a bachelor's degree? This program offers working adults flexibility while earning a credential that advances their career goals and professional marketability. The curriculum allows you a customizable college experience that focuses on skills employers require across a broad range of industries. Courses include those in your chosen specialization, augmented by courses in critical thinking, problem-solving, leadership, communication, and management.

- Transfer up to 90 credits
- Flexible schedules: on campus, online (asynchronous), virtual (synchronous), hybrid, 7-week modules, or a combination
- Career-focused skills
- Networking opportunities

The Bachelor of Science degree in Professional Studies is a 120-credit degree program that includes 10 courses in your chosen specialization and 10 open electives. Students choose to concentrate in one of the following disciplines:

- Accounting and Business Management
- Criminal Justice Administration
- Information Technology Management
- Health Services Administration
- Hospitality Management
- Human Services Administration
- Public Health Management

BBA in General Business

Broaden your understanding of the field of business within the context of your professional objectives. This flexible General Business program allows you to design a custom interdisciplinary curriculum to reach your career goals in business management along with a specialization in accounting, finance, health services, hospitality management, information technology, management, or marketing.

- ACBSP accredited
- Prepare for a variety of positions in the business world
- Gain valuable real-world experience by joining the award-winning Monroe College NABA and ALPFA teams
- Work at the Center for Entrepreneurial Excellence
- Take advantage of NYC internship opportunities

The 120-credit general business degree includes eleven elective courses, twelve business courses, plus six courses in your specialization – meaning you can tailor this degree to your own career path. Built-in General Education courses such as economics, math, psychology, and communication mean that you will be well-prepared to get your ideas across once you're working.

SECTION 2 – PLA PORTFOLIO

PLA PORTFOLIO DEFINED

One of the more popular methods of requesting an assessment of your knowledge for a specific course or courses is through written documentation, known as the PLA Portfolio. It consists of what you know, how you learned it, and how it relates to a particular course or courses. Students use specific learning objectives that appear on each course syllabus as a guide in the development of their portfolio for that respective course.

Students who are approved to pursue a portfolio for prior learning credit are enrolled in the PLA Portfolio course. The PLA Portfolio course content is delivered via the College's online learning management system, Blackboard. This non-credit-bearing course may extend past the one-semester rule.

Eligible students for the PLA Portfolio course must be registered and actively pursuing a degree at Monroe College. Your mentor will explain the components of the portfolio, identifying Deans and Program Directors as partners in the process.

Remember – if learning is to be recognized by the awarding of college credit, the learning must be stated, documented, measured, and evaluated. The portfolio, therefore, is a means to organizing prior learning experiences into a manageable form for assessment.⁴

PLA PORTFOLIO PROCESS

Students interested in submitting a PLA portfolio for credit should schedule an appointment with Judi-Ann Beckford-Hue at jbeckford@monroecollege.edu, telephone (646) 393-8640.

1. Your PLA mentor will work one-on-one with you to establish a plan using the PLA Portfolio Application. It will detail what you need to address in the portfolio, the criteria that will be used to determine if you've met the course learning outcomes, and your timeline for completion of the portfolio. This PLA Portfolio Application will be signed by you, and the Associate Vice President.
2. Your PLA mentor will assist you as you identify college-level learning and equivalent learning outcomes for the selected course. This is done by

⁴ Monroe College reserves the right to determine which courses can be assessed through the portfolio evaluation option.

documenting your knowledge, competencies, and skills acquired through prior learning.

3. You will meet with your PLA mentor to establish a clear understanding of the portfolio requirements as well as criteria that the evaluator will use to determine if you have met the course learning outcomes. A timeline for completion of the portfolio will also be discussed.
4. Your PLA mentor will schedule follow-up meetings with you to review your narrative for each learning outcome statement. If any questions arise concerning the learning outcomes and evidence you've provided, your PLA mentor will contact the School Dean to provide further advisement.
5. Once you have submitted the completed PLA portfolio by the agreed upon date, your PLA mentor will review it, and forward the portfolio to the Prior Learning Assessment Committee. After careful review, the committee will recommend whether or not you will be awarded the requested prior learning credit for the specific course(s).
6. The PLA Committee will assess your portfolio against your completed PLA Portfolio Checklist with a recommendation to (a) award credit for the portfolio, (b) deny credit for the portfolio, or (c) request a revision and re-submission of the portfolio by a specified date. Requests for resubmission are at the discretion of the committee reviewer(s), not the student. Failure to resubmit a revised portfolio by the specified date will result in a denial of credit for the portfolio.
7. The PLA Committee will notify your PLA mentor of the assessment result, who will then notify you, and will submit your portfolio with the committee's assessment to the Associate Vice President overseeing Prior Learning for approvals. If confirmed, your PLA mentor will request that the Office of the Registrar post the awarded credits to your official academic transcript. If your portfolio is not approved for credit, or if re-submission is recommended, the PLA mentor will return your portfolio to you.
 - Prior credits appear on the student's transcript with a "PL" prefix. They carry no academic grade nor will they affect the student's GPA.
 - If reasonable progress towards completion of the portfolio is not made by the agreed upon deadline, the College reserves the right to withdraw a student from the portfolio course.

PLA PORTFOLIO ELEMENTS

The following elements are required in the portfolio submission for the assessment of prior learning credit:

1. Resume
2. Letter of Intent
3. Education and Career Goals/Plan
4. Course Learning Outcomes Statement (per course)
5. Documentation (per course)
6. Title page
7. Sources (if applicable)

All written submissions should follow APA format, double-spaced with 1-inch margins, using Times New Roman font, size 12, and be submitted as Word documents in your Blackboard PLA course to the appropriate drop box. It is expected that all submissions will be proofread and written in a professional manner.

IMPORTANT: Make sure to include your name, date, and title of document at the top of each of submission.

1. Resume

The resume summarizes the major experiences and/or education you have acquired. Your resume should be formatted for professional use. Each position should include company, job title, years of employment, and detailed bullet points that clearly explain your major job responsibilities.

2. Letter of Intent

The Letter of Intent formally introduces you to the portfolio reviewer and summarizes why you are applying for PLA credit. This letter also serves as a link to your prior learning as well as to the learning outcomes of the course(s) that are the subject of the portfolio. The letter of intent will include the following:

- All courses included in the portfolio
- Learning outcomes you intend to prove
- Area(s) of expertise you intend to demonstrate
- Number of credits you are hoping to earn

The Letter of Intent provides insight into who you are professionally and the positions you have held that provided you with the experience to petition for prior learning credit. The letter should be a minimum of two paragraphs.

3. Education and Career Goals/Plan

The Education and Career Goals/Plan is a summary of your education, training, and career goals. This section also includes your plan for pursuing these goals, and should be a minimum of two paragraphs.

4. Course Learning Outcomes Statement (Describing your Learning)

The Course Learning Outcomes Statement is an essay that clearly and concisely describes your *learning* and demonstrates that you have met the learning outcomes of a specific course. There is no set length for the narrative, but generally it is three to five pages long, and should address each learning outcome with evidence and specific details. You should complete as many pages as necessary to describe your learning and analyze how the learning is connected with the course and degree requirements.

Step 1. Identify Learning Outcomes

Your first step in preparing the Course Learning Outcomes Statement is to identify the learning outcomes of the course for which you are requesting credit (they appear on the course syllabus), and then write a narrative of how you meet those learning outcomes. This is usually the hardest part of preparing your portfolio, but it can also be very satisfying when you finally identify all that you really know.

Step 2. Organize Your Thoughts

Before you start to write, it is a good idea to organize your thoughts and reflect on what you know. You must first identify the concepts you know – these are the subjects for which you have gained knowledge. Then, organize the various concepts in a way that makes sense to you. Finally, connect those concepts and discover how they are related to one another.

Step 3. Write a First Draft

Using the outline in the box below, write a rough draft of your Course Learning Outcomes Statement. It should provide a clear summary of each learning outcome of the course for which you're requesting credit, while also describing the source, nature, and extent of your learning. Important note: the focus of the statement is *not* autobiographical; rather, it should focus on analyzing your learning in the context of the experience. Use these steps as you do your first draft:

- a) Introduce how you acquired this learning, and then provide some context (why, where, when, and with whom the learning took place).
- b) Organize your knowledge in a logical way; elaborate on what you know as a result of your experiences.

- c) Start a list of examples and documentation that demonstrate your knowledge and related competencies and skills. You'll need these later in the Portfolio.
- d) Think about how this learning is related to the subject of your degree plan as well as to your professional goals, and write it down.

Step 4. Edit, Proofread, and Finalize

Now, take some time away from the draft to reflect on what you've written. When you return to it, do some editing and refining. Your Course Learning Outcomes Statement should be well written and supported by sufficient evidence of your learning. It should convey motivation, competence, and the ability to communicate. Your advisor will review it for clarity and context.

Course Learning Outcomes Statement Outline

1. A short introduction identifying the course you have selected for PLA and describing the learning that the narrative will substantiate.
2. Approximately 1-2 paragraphs for each course learning outcome. Include each learning outcome as a heading. Each paragraph should describe the following:
 - How you gained the knowledge, how you learned it, and how this learning/knowledge relates to the course's learning outcomes.
 - How this learning applies in other contexts (provide clear, specific examples).
 - How this learning relates to college-level learning.
3. A short conclusion summarizing your learning and relating it to the course learning outcomes.

5. Documentation

Documentation is the evidence that will support the prior learning described in your portfolio. The purpose of documentation is to prove the acquired learning has occurred and has been demonstrated. Traditional students prove their learning through assignments, research papers, projects, and tests. Therefore, students submitting a PLA portfolio must verify and confirm their learning and be able to demonstrate it. Documentation will be reviewed by the Prior Learning Assessment Committee to determine if the student has demonstrated learning in the area of the course learning outcomes.

There are two main categories of documentation that are submitted for evidence: direct and indirect.

- *Direct documentation* includes products, reports, plans, and performances that you have created. This is a very strong source of evidence because it was created by the student.
- *Indirect documentation* is a third-party validation/verification of learning. Indirect documentation refers to letters written by qualified individuals who can verify your learning. Good sources of indirect documentation include employers, co-workers, and business partners. This type of documentation is a verification that the learning occurred, and not just a recommendation or reference.

Documentation is required for each course in the portfolio. Students may need to redact any proprietary information contained within the documentation.

6. Title Page

The Title Page introduces the student to the Monroe College Prior Learning Assessment Committee. It is submitted upon completion of the all of the portfolio elements.

The following information should be included (title page is centered):

Monroe College
The name of the academic program student is pursuing
The course titles represented in the portfolio
The student's name
The student's contact information (address, phone number, and email address)
The name of the portfolio advisor and title
The date of the portfolio's submission

7. Sources

In order to fully demonstrate proficiency of the course learning outcomes, supporting research may be necessary. The portfolio should contain a formal list of sources and references if any were used in the creation of the portfolio. In-text citations should follow APA format. Students should review and become familiar with the College's Code of Academic and Scholarly Integrity regarding plagiarism and academic honesty.

PLA PORTFOLIO PREP CHECKLIST

- Your professional resume that clearly outlines and summarizes your experience in chronological order (most experience recent first)
- A letter of intent that formally introduces you to the PLA Committee and briefly links your prior learning to the course's learning outcomes
- A summary of your prior education, training, and career goals, with a plan for pursuing these goals
- The respective Monroe College course syllabus for which you are requesting credit, highlighting course learning outcomes
- Your course learning outcomes statement: a clear, concise, and descriptive narrative that provides evidence of how and why your experience meets the course's learning outcomes; includes specific examples from your work experience.
- A title page that includes the name of the college, the academic program of study, the course name and number, your name, your contact information, your PLA mentor's name and title, and the date of submission

Documentation:

- All post-secondary official academic transcripts
- Any certificates of completion of prior training, including military training and professional development that may be applicable to the course's learning outcomes
- Direct documentation, e.g., products, reports, plans, or performances that you have created or participated in that support the prior learning described in your portfolio
- Indirect documentation, e.g., letters in support written by qualified third-party individuals who can verify your learning (not a recommendation or reference)

Answer these questions:

- Have all of the major course learning outcomes been addressed?
- Does the narrative of your course learning outcomes statement describe the learning that was acquired and where the learning experience took place?
- Do you provide specific examples of your work experience that relate to the course learning outcomes?
- Have you followed APA formatting throughout your portfolio, including proper citations?
- Have you maintained professional writing throughout, and proofread the document?
- Have you made a complete copy of your portfolio for your own records?

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET

This worksheet is a tool to help you think about and describe what you have learned and how it will apply to your field or area of interest. Fill in the boxes on the right with topics and occasions where you have gained knowledge, and note how you've applied that knowledge.

The field or area of interest on which my learning is to be assessed: _____

What have I done that applies to this area of interest?	Give examples of your experience and/or work in this area.	
What do I really know about this field?	Create a list of different topics that you're familiar with. Consider what you'd focus on if you were teaching it to someone else.	
How have I applied my knowledge in this area?	Give examples of how you applied knowledge such as problem-solving, working on projects, etc. Include incidents where you might have applied this knowledge outside of your field.	
Exactly how did I initially gain this knowledge?	Provide examples such as workshops, on-the-job training, personal study, etc.	
Have I expanded on my knowledge in this area?	Discuss pertinent activities or research you've done to increase your knowledge.	
Have I shared what I've learned?	Give examples of how you've worked in teams, taught others, or shared your knowledge (in reports, online updates, or other publications).	
Have I continued to learn more about my area of interest?	Provide examples of your learning goals, how you have used feedback, and ways your learning has grown over time.	

SECTION 3 - APPENDIX

MONROE COLLEGE CONTACTS

Monroe College

Website: monroecollege.edu
Main Switchboard: (800) 556-6676
Bronx: (718) 933-6700
New Rochelle: (914) 632-5400
St. Lucia: (758) 456-3200

Prior Learning Assessment Judi-Ann Beckford, PLA Coordinator jbeckford@monroecollege.edu (646) 393-8640	Admissions Emerson Phillips, Dean of Adult Enrollment ephillips@monroecollege.edu (914) 740-6478
Financial Aid Dan Sharon, AVP Student Financial Services dsharon@monroecollege.edu (646) 393-8257	Registrar Abigail Thorpe, Senior Registrar athorpe@monroecollege.edu (646) 393-8569

PLA QUESTIONNAIRE

CAEL Prior Learning Assessment Questionnaire
earncollegecredit.org/monroecollege/pla#/home

TRANSCRIPT REQUESTS

Contact your prior college(s) for specific instructions

NATIONAL STANDARDIZED TESTING

CLEP College Board Standardized Exams for Prior Credit
<https://clep.collegeboard.org/college-credit-policy/monroe-college-bronx>

Get College Credit.com
DSST – DAN TES Subject Standardized Tests
<https://www.getcollegecredit.com/>

ONLINE COURSES

(flexible/affordable)

StraighterLine Online Courses

<https://www.straighterline.com/colleges/monroe-college/course-equivalency/>

Study.com Online Courses (ACE/NCCRS Certified)

[study.com](https://www.study.com)

Monroe College may accept up to 12 credits into a degree sequence from coursework completed at StraighterLine and/or Study.com. Review specific courses with your PLA mentor to ensure they are accepted by the College.

APA Style

APA Style & Formatting Guide

Purdue Online Writing Lab

owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_style_introduction.html