PLAR - Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition

Thank you for expressing an interest in Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition. At St. Lawrence College, we believe that significant learning can and does occur outside the classroom and that academic credits should be awarded for an individual's learning without regard to where and how it was attained. The college recognizes that adults may acquire college level learning through employment, volunteer activities, self-directed study, travel, or other life experiences.

The PLAR process at St. Lawrence is designed to assist adult learners in identifying, describing, and demonstrating past learning which may be eligible for advanced standing or course credits towards the certificate or diploma of their choice. It is the learning from the experience that is recognized and credited, not the experience itself. As well, in order to be eligible for credit, the learning achieved must be appropriate to the courses offered in the program of choice.

IMPORTANT: Each course you wish to receive a PLAR credit for requires a separate PLAR application. Payment for processing your application(s) must be received before processing of your application(s) will begin. Payment is is adjusted yearly and located on the PLAR webpage

Please contact the appropriate PLAR resource listed below for any questions on the process or when you are ready to begin filling out the application for the specific courses identified.

To prepare for PLAR, please work through the PLAR Process Student Checklist at the end of this package

PLAR CONTACT

Reinhard Celis
PLAR Advisor

St. Lawrence College

Brockville: 613-345-0660, ext. 1837

Cornwall: 613-933-6080, ext. 1837

Kingston: 613-544-5400, ext. 1837

Email: plar@sl.on.ca

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) General Policies

1. PLAR Eligibility

As a PLAR candidate, you must be at least 19 years of age or have a secondary school diploma or equivalent.

2. Fees

a) Payment for PLAR is required before the assessment portion of the PLAR process can begin.
b) The PLAR fee is established by the Ministry of Education and Training and is subject to change yearly. Please check with the registration office or with the PLAR contact listed for information on the current fee schedule.
c) PLAR fees are not reimbursed in the event of an unsuccessful challenge.

3. Residency Requirements.

Up to a maximum of 75% of the courses of many programs can be achieved through PLAR and/or direct credit transfer from another College or University. Therefore, a minimum of 25% of the total program courses must be achieved under the direct supervision of St. Lawrence College faculty. Please be aware that some programs have other residency restrictions related to licensing and credentials.

4. Appeals Processes

a. Candidates may appeal the assessment results.
b. Contact the PLAR contact within 10 working days of the notification of the results.
c. For specific information on the Appeals process, please consult with the PLAR contact.

5. PLAR Documents

All documents submitted by the PLAR Candidates are kept securely stored for 2 years following the conclusion of the PLAR process.

Guidelines for Prior Learning Assessment Challenge Activities

What is Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition?
Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is a process that involves the identification, documentation, assessment and recognition of learning acquired through a variety formal and informal ways such as: work, life experiences, training, independent study, volunteering, travel, and so on. The recognition of such prior learning, if equivalent to college-level learning, can be used towards the requirements of program at St. Lawrence College.

The following guidelines are provided to assist you in preparing for challenge activities for the assessment and recognition of your 'non-classroom' learning experiences.

What is a Challenge Activity?
The challenge process has been developed to measure an individual's prior learning achievements against specific learning outcomes of individual course(s). This process measures demonstrated learning through a variety of evaluation methods or challenge activities designed by faculty and include, for example:

- tests, both written and oral;
- performance activities observed and evaluated by the assessor, including, for example: presentations, demonstrations, on-site observations, and so on;
- product development specifically assigned by the assessor, including for example: case studies, reports, programs and so on.

When Would Challenge Activities Be Used Instead of Portfolio-based PLAR?
In most cases, challenge activities are used in situations where a portfolio would not be appropriate, or even possible. For example, challenge activities are commonly used for courses which are predominately theory-based, such as Nursing Theory, Introductory Sociology, and so on. Also, challenge activities may be the only method of assessment and evaluation in those situations where the client does not have the required supportive documentation for a complete learning portfolio.

What Assistance is Available to Me?
In preparing for your challenge activity/activities, consult the course outline which you can retrieve from the reception of the schools (a fee may apply) which specify the learning outcomes against which you will be assessed and evaluated. In addition, you will be assisted in obtaining access to texts and other learning resources in order to prepare for the challenge activity/activities. In most cases, you will also be able to consult with the assessor(s) prior to the scheduled challenge activity/activities. It is certainly recommended, where possible, that you contact the assessor directly to discuss the particulars of the challenge activity so that you can be adequately prepared.

What Is the Assessor Looking For?
Some of the general criteria against which the assessor will be evaluating your performance include, but are not restricted to, the following:

- **accuracy:** Is your performance in the challenge activity/activities accurate or correct? In other words, for example, is your performance correct / are your answers correct?
- **sufficiency:** Is your performance sufficient to serve as conclusive proof that you have acquired the necessary learning as specified in the learning out comes? I s your performance thorough and complete?
- **currency:** Is your performance in keeping with current knowledge, skills, and attitudes?
- **quality:** Is your performance of a high quality? Does it satisfy the learning outcomes for the course?
- **professionalism:** Is your performance in keeping with the standards of professionalism inherent in your occupation?

For further information, please contact the appropriate PLAR Contact listed on the first page of this guide.

How to Assemble a Learning Portfolio for Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition

What is Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition?
Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is a process that involves the identification, documentation, assessment and recognition of learning acquired through a variety formal and informal ways such as: work, life experiences, training, independent study, volunteering, travel, and so on. The recognition of such prior learning, if equivalent to college-level learning, can be used towards the requirements of program at St. Lawrence College.

The following guidelines are provided to assist you in the assembly of a learning portfolio, which is used as part of the assessment and recognition of your 'non-classroom' learning experiences.

For further information, please contact the appropriate PLAR Contact listed on page 1 of this guide.

What is a Learning Portfolio?
A learning portfolio is an organized collection of materials developed by the individual which records prior learning achievements and relates them to the learning outcomes of College courses. It describes relevant experience, identifies and analyzes learning achievements, and provides validation or proof through a collection of documents.

What does a Portfolio look like?
Most portfolios are submitted in a three-ring binder with material grouped into sections by dividers. Some portfolios include additional types of materials such as references, journals, videos, computer files (USB or DVD), and so on. Depending on the number of credits you are seeking, your portfolio may fit into one binder (for 1 course) or may require more than one binder (for those seeking credits for a number of courses). No matter what the format, it is essential that your portfolio be professionally presented and be clearly and correctly written.

What Assistance Is Available to Me as I Assemble my Portfolio?
If you would like some assistance in developing your portfolio, you may contact the faculty member assigned to be your assessor at each college campus. They would be pleased to assist you by answering questions and reviewing some of your ideas and materials.

How to Assemble Your Portfolio

What are the Essential Component Parts of a Portfolio of Prior Learning?
A portfolio of prior learning consists of **three** key sections each of which is outlined in greater detail below:

1. An introduction (See (1) below).
2. A detailed learning section outlining your prior learning as it relates to the learning outcomes of each course for which you are seeking prior learning assessment and recognition (See (2) below).
3. A comprehensive section of supportive documentation which proves your learning (See (3) below).

(1) Introduction must include:

1. A Table of Contents: A portfolio, no matter its final form, must be easy for the reader/assessor to review and to locate information. Therefore, a portfolio must begin with a table of contents indicating what items are included in the portfolio and where each item can be located. Generally people design the table of contents after the portfolio has been completed.
2. An Introductory Statement: An introductory statement includes 2 parts. *Personal information: name, address, phone number, St. Lawrence College student identification number, e-mail address- all the information which, at a glance, will allow the assessor to locate you if necessary.

   *A brief statement about what credits you are seeking via the PLAR process.
3. A Detailed Resume: You must include a detailed resume written to emphasize your strengths and abilities and to highlight your learnings, your skills and your accomplishments, as they relate to the specific courses for which you are seeking PLAR credit. As well, your resume should outline your education, employment, and any other relevant data related to the courses for which you are seeking credit. This kind of a resume is more detailed and, therefore, lengthier than those typically used for employment purposes. References for effective resume writing are available in the Library, in career centres, and on the Internet; in particular, you might explore references for **functional** resumes - which may not be the best choice for seeking employment, but is ideal for emphasizing your knowledge and skills.

(2) Learning Section for each course must include:

For each St. Lawrence College course for which you are seeking a PL AR credit create a separate section. For example, since John Smith is seeking PLAR credits for 3 Business courses, he has 3 learning sections as described below, one for each of the 3 courses.

The material in each of your learning sections demonstrates your prior learning based on your experiences. It is important to keep focused on the fact that credit is not awarded simply for your experiences alone such as your being an accountant, a teacher's aide, or attending a workshop. Credit is awarded for the *learning* from experience that you can both articulate and prove.

Within each of these learning sections (one for each course) include:

1. A Copy of the Most Recent Course Learning Outcomes: Learning outcomes are part of the course outline, which can be obtained from the department or through the PLAR staff.

2. A Summary of Your Learnings: This summary is a comprehensive statement, in your own words, of your learning accomplishments including the knowledge and skills that you have acquired through employment, volunteer activities, self-directed study, travel, or other life experiences *as they relate to the stated learning outcomes for the course(s) for which you are seeking credit*. For this section you will need to refer to the learning outcomes for the course(s), as well as to your resume, your job descriptions, and your documentation (See Documentation Section below).

For each learning outcome, clearly state your related experiences, learnings, knowledge, and skills. Present your case clearly so that it is easy for the assessor to extract information about what you have learned related to each learning outcome.

This summary of your learnings may be presented in a variety of ways, provided you clearly relate your learnings, knowledge, and skills to each specific learning outcome and clearly document that learning. For example, this summary might be presented in a number of formats (see examples to follow):

(a) in narrative form (written paragraphs)
(b) in table or chart form
(c) in a combination of narrative and table formats

a. **This summary might take a narrative or paragraph form.**
For each specific course learning outcome, in your learning statement you would:

- State the learning outcome
- Write a statement outlining, in detail how and where you acquired the knowledge/skill specified in the learning outcome.
- Reference the documents which verify your learning

For example: (this is a brief example.... you would expand more fully. Most PLAR candidates write 1+ page per learning outcome)

In course X, learning outcome #1 states that the learner, at the end of the course, must be able to manage an annual operating budget through the following phases:
needs assessment, budget proposal, and the monitoring of the budget. In my job as Controller of ABC Company in Brockville, I was required to prepare and manage an annual operating budget of $350,000 (in 1998-1999) based on the company's strategic plan. In order to prepare and manage an annual operating budget, I demonstrated both knowledge and skills in the areas of needs assessment, budget proposal, and monitoring of the budget. ... (*knowledge and skills in each of these areas are listed and discussed in some detail - using appropriate terminology*).... Please refer to the following documents in the Document section which demonstrate and verify my knowledge and skill with budgeting: Job Description (Document I); Strategic Plan (Document II); Budget Summary (Document III); Budget Review (Document IV); and a Letter of Verification from Jane Doe, my supervisor from 1994-1999 at ABC Company (Document V).

For example: (this is a brief example.... you would expand more fully)

In course Y, learning outcome #4 states that the learner, at the end of the course, must be able to prepare a program mission statement.
As the Director of Social Service Agency XYZ in Cornwall, the creation of a mission statement for our agency was one of the most important professional accomplishments of my career. In order to prepare and initiate a mission statement, I demonstrated the following knowledge and skills.... (knowledge and skills required in the preparation of a mission statement are listed and discussed in some detail - using appropriate terminology). ... Please refer to the following documents in the Documentation section which demonstrate and verify my knowledge and skill in the preparation of mission statements: Mission Statement for of Social Service Agency XYZ in Cornwall (Document I); Strategic Plan (Document II); and a Letter of Verification from John Smith, Chair of the Board of XYZ.

b. This summary of your learning's may also be presented in a table or chart format. This table or chart must still present the same information:

- the learning outcome
- how and where you acquired the knowledge/skill specified in the learning outcome
- documents that verify your learning

for example: (this is a brief example.... you would expand more fully)

Course X

Learning Outcomes	Learning Acquired	Documentation	Index
1. Manage an annual operating budget through the following phases:	As Controller of ABC Company, Brockville, Ontario, I prepared and managed an annual operating budget of $350,000	Job Description 1	I
- Needs assessment		Strategic Plan II	II
- Budget proposal	Knowledge required:	Budget Summary III	III
- Monotoring	Needs assessment (list) Budget proposal (list) Budget monitoring (List) Skills demonstrated: Needs assessment (list)	Verification letter from Jane Doe, supervisor, ABC Company	IV V

and so on …

c. You may also use a combination of both narrative and table formats.

Remember, the more clearly presented and the more directly related to the stated learning outcomes, the easier it is for the assessor to extract information about what you have already learned.

GOLDEN RULE OF PLAR:

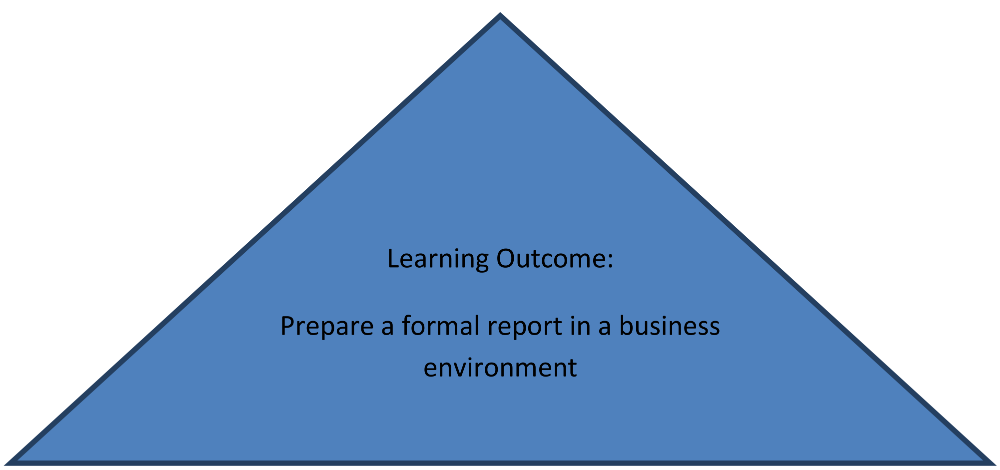
It is the <u>learning</u> from the experience that is recognized and credited, <u>not the experience itself</u>.

Evidence to demonstrate/prove your learning and, therefore, to support your request for prior learning credits must be gathered from a variety of different sources. In preparing your portfolio you should attempt to “triangulate” evidence or documentation for each learning outcome – that is, provide at least three sources of information.
Such evidence will be presented in the learning sections (see 2 above) and in the documentation section (see ˜ below). From the diagram below, we can see that for the learning outcome – prepare a formal report in a business environment – you have provided 3 sources of evidence:

1. Your resume and your learning statement 2
2. A copy of a report, which you actually prepared 3
3. A statement from your supervisor attesting to the fact that you are skilled in writing reports and that the appended report was, indeed, written by you.

The triangular that shows how you met the learning outcome:

Your resume and own learning statement which demonstrate your knowledge about the various factors/criteria involved in preparing a formal business report



A copy of a formal report which you actually prepared

A statement from your supervisor attesting to your skill in writing reports and verifying that you wrote the appended report.

(3) Documentation Section

The documentation section contains all the supporting evidence, which demonstrates or proves that the learning presented by you in the learning section (see above) has actually occurred. Just as students in a classroom must provide evidence of their learning in the form of tests, reports, proposals, and so on, so you will be expected to demonstrate that you really do possess the knowledge and skills which you claim to have.

The documents included in this section should be clearly labeled to allow easy referencing by the reader/assessor. The documentation section may be divided and inserted into each course section; or it may be appended, in its entirety, at the end of your portfolio. The first option is best suited if your documentation is distinct for e ach course; the second option is best suited if the same documents are used for different courses, which is very often the case. Most people use the second option and app end the documentation section, in its entirety, to the end of their portfolio.

1. <u>Document Index:</u> The Document Section, begins with an index (table of contents) which allows the reader/assessor to locate all documents easily. Each document can be identified by number or letter or a combination thereof; for example: document 1, IV, A, or A.1 and so on. It is up to you to design a consistent and effective identification system. As with the Table of Contents in the introductory section, the Index of Documents is not designed until the portfolio is complete and all the documents have been collected and put in some kind of order.

2. <u>Documentation:</u>

a. Effective documentation may take many forms and generally falls into two categories: **direct and indirect**.

i. Direct documentation refers to samples of work which has been written, designed, produced, manufactured, performed, etc. by the learner. Some examples of direct documentation/evidence include:

- reports, proposals, or articles written by the learner
- brochures, or posters created by the learner
- a presentation given by the learner - you could provide a videotape or a print copy of the presentation
- software programs, blueprints, electronic circuits you have designed
- any projects created by the learner which relate to the learning outcome.

All of these documents/objects must also be supported by some sort of third-party verification (i.e. letters from employers or clients confirming that the work is that of the learner, evaluations by participants in workshops facilitated by the learner, and so on.)

ii. Indirect documentation includes those materials that are about the learner, not created directly by the learner; again they must be clearly and specifically related to the learning outcomes. Some examples of effective indirect documentation include:

- job descriptions with competencies verified by employer/supervisor by means of a performance appraisal
- transcripts or certificates for training achieved (training that is not eligible for direct transfer of credit), supported by learning outcomes for such training
- professional licenses and/or memberships in professional or trade organizations, supported by performance standards

- awards, newspaper or magazine clippings about learner's activities

b. Ineffective or Weak documentation, which should be avoided, include, for example:

- references documenting personal attributes which are not reflective of the learning out comes - for example, "Jane Doe is friendly and well-mannered"... is not useful documentation for a course in word processing.
- job evaluations that are not specific about what you actually did or what skills you exhibited - even if they recount that you are a "superb employee"
- information about events in which you claim to have participated, but which do not mention you directly and/or do not specify learning outcomes
- any documentation which cannot be verified.

What is the Assessor Looking For in my Documentation?

Some of the criteria against which the assessor is evaluating the nature of your documentation include, but are not restricted to, the following:

- **relevance**: Is the documentation verifying learning which is both relevant and appropriate to the stated learning outcomes?
- **validity:** Does the documentation relate to the learning outcomes for the course(s) for which credit is being sought? Does it relate to all of the stated learning outcomes?
- **sufficiency:** Can the documentation, in total, serve as conclusive proof for the learning that has occurred? What else might be required?
- **currency:** Is the documentation recent and up-to-date in relation to the standards?
- **quality:** Is the documentation of good quality? Does it really verify the learning achieved and not just the experience? Remember that it is the quality, not the quantity of the documentation that is important.
- **authenticity:** Is the direct documentation really the work of the candidate? Can the learner provide proof that the work is re ally theirs? Does the indirect documentation give an accurate picture in support of the client's claims of competence?

GOLDEN RULE OF PLAR:

It is the <u>learning</u> from the experience that is recognized and credited, <u>not the experience itself</u>.

How Do I Put My Portfolio Together?

The basic principle that should guide you in putting together your portfolio is this:
Make it easy for the reader/assessor to understand.

- Be selective: Include only those facts, learnings, documents, and data which are directly related to your specific credit request.
- Be logical: Arrange your portfolio so enable your reader/assessor to follow your thinking as they go from section to section.
- Be consistent: Maintain consistency in terminology. Don't call something "business studies" in one section and "office procedures" in another. Follow a consistent pattern or order to each section.
- Be coherent: The reader/assessor should never have to stop to consider why you are bringing in an idea or information at a specific time. Everything that you write and include should be tied together.
- Be professional: Your portfolio should be professionally presented, grammatically correct and clearly written. It should look and read like a document worthy of a competent college student.

Ideally it should be done through word processing for appearance and ease of revision. Many portfolios are presented in some form of binder, with dividers separating the various sections.

How Do I Submit My Portfolio?

The completed portfolio should be submitted to the assigned/designated professor. The portfolio will be discussed with you to determine:

- if all the components outlined in this guide are in place
- if there is a clear link between the learnings you have articulated and the course learning outcomes
- if the documentation appears to be substantial and meets the above stated criteria

Please note: This review of your portfolio by the professor

- **gives you an opportunity to measure it against the standards outlined in this document**
- **is an advisement process NOT an assessment**
- **is in no way to be considered as an evaluation of your portfolio. The evaluation of your portfolio and its approval for formal credit or recognition is completed only by a knowledgeable faculty assessor.**

Is There a Fee for PLAR?

Yes, there is a fee for the assessment of all evidence submitted for PLAR. Fees cover the services of the College involved in the PLAR process, including the services of the PLAR contact, consultations with the Program Coordinator/faculty, as well as the actual assessment of your learning portfolio, and so on. Since the fee changes annually, please consult with PLAR contact or Student Services regarding the exact amount of the fee.

When Do I Register and Pay for PLAR?

Prior to any portfolio or other work on your part, you will be required to formally register for PLAR and to pay the fee. An application form will be completed by you and the PLAR Contact and fees will be paid at that time at Student Services. At this point, you begin preparing your portfolio etc, to be submitted to the assigned/designated professor.

For more information, please contact
the appropriate PLAR Contact listed on page 1 of this guide