**General Guide for PLA**

(use for your PLA request if there is no subject-specific guide)

**WHAT IS COLLEGE LEVEL LEARNING?**

Fran Smith worked for two years on an assembly line in a factory that produced baked goods. She was a quality control checker - one of the people who checked the packages for the quality of the product, the right amount of contents and proper sealing. She was active in her union and was a grievance officer and chair of the diversity efforts within the union. Her company promoted from within and she moved into a management trainee position in the nutritional development department. She completed company training in supervisory skills, personnel management and cultural diversity. In order to ensure her success, she also took adult education courses in typing, word processing and data management. As she learned more of her new department's business, she started to study nutritional guidelines, read newspaper articles on nutritional issues, and do additional research on human nutrition on her own.

What areas of prior learning should Fran pursue through evaluation? Although she learned a lot about assembly line work in her first job with the company, her learning from this situation probably is not college level as she learned only how to perform one specific task and not how to think about that task in broader terms. On the other hand, the different areas of learning related to her union work and management trainee job (supervision, grievance processing, cultural diversity, data management, nutrition) could be college level, as they involve broader-based learning that can be applied to many different situations. Her learning in typing/word processing may or may not be college level. If the course was strictly "how to" operate one word processing program, that learning may not be college level. However, if the course covered broader learning about computers (how the word processing program relates to the setting in which it is used, the overall systems and purpose of the program, etc.), then her learning may be college level.

**Students who successfully receive credit recommendations for their prior learning have learning that:**

* **Deals with General Concepts and Skills**As Mentor Duane Saari states, to understand "general concepts and skills," think of the difference between experience and learning. Experience is narrow - it helps you function effectively in one particular job. But learning is broader. It gives you general understanding that you can apply to new situations and different settings. It enables you to create new projects or solve new problems. As opposed to learning that is narrowly focused on doing one particular task, college level learning usually involves learning broader concepts and skills that you can apply to many different tasks and situations.

or

* **Considers a Subject in Some Depth**As Mentor John McCann states, most college courses require the commitment of 120-160 hours during a regular college term. Therefore, if you've attended a four-hour training session in a certain area, it's not likely that you'd have college level learning unless you had other substantial training or had done other substantial reading in the area.

or

* **Matches the Learning from a College Course**You can tell if you have what's traditionally considered college level learning if your learning matches most of a course description in a college catalog.

**Students who successfully receive credit recommendations for their prior learning at an advanced (junior-senior) level also have learning that:**

* **Shows Familiarity with the Methodology used in the Field**Different areas of learning involve different ways of thinking about and understanding information. You may have advanced-level college learning if you can apply a business, a scientific or a sociological method to make sense of new information.

or

* **Shows Familiarity with Professional Resources in the Field**Different areas of learning have their own professional publications and resources. You may have advanced-level college learning if you know of and use these specialized resources in a particular field.

or

* **Enables them to Explain Relationships within the Area**Students with advanced-level college learning can not only explain different concepts one by one, but also can explain different concepts in context to show connections and linkages and the impact of one idea on another.

**You do NOT need to know the specialized, "academic" language of a field in order to receive a credit recommendation. You DO need to be able to:**

1. explain how you gained your learning,
2. express your learning in your own words,
3. apply your learning to new situations, and
4. show some of the college level learning characteristics noted above.

An evaluator will help you draw out your knowledge, using your own language and based on your own experiences.

**HOW TO PREPARE FOR AN EVALUATIVE INTERVIEW**

1. If your topic is on the list of Guides to Credit for Prior Learning, request the appropriate guide and/or those that seem to relate to your topic area. If your title is not listed, request the Generic Summary of Prior Learning form.
2. Review the contents of the guide and fill out the attached Summary of Prior Learning form, or follow the directions on the Generic Summary of Prior Learning form. You may provide attachments to the form as appropriate (e.g., training certificates if your learning is based on training, a writing sample if you are requesting evaluation in business communication. etc.).
3. Keep a copy of the form and attachments for yourself so you can refer to it during the evaluative interview.
4. Submit two copies of the Summary of Prior Learning form and any attachments to the Assessment Center (see address on form).
5. Most importantly, reflect on the information that you have provided. Review it carefully and be prepared to discuss your topics of learning fully. Be prepared to give examples and, in general, to elaborate on what you have written on the form.

**WHAT OCCURS DURING AN EVALUATION?**

All evaluations involve two components: writing and discussion. You will have identified your learning in writing (on a Summary of Prior Learning form) and the evaluator will focus the evaluative discussion based on the learning experiences you outlined on that form.

During the discussion, the evaluator may ask you to start by explaining what you have done to gain your learning and then ask you to discuss the different things that you have learned. The evaluator may present you with a hypothetical situation and ask you to respond in order to see if you understand and can apply general concepts and skills in the area of learning. The evaluation interview usually proceeds as a conversation of approximately 45 minutes. Feel free to contribute to the conversation; you can mention additional learning or ask to re-direct the conversation in order to review all of the learning that you have gained in the area.

Sometimes an evaluator will ask for additional information in order to evaluate your learning. For example, if you are requesting credit for your learning in art, an evaluator will need to see a sample portfolio of your artworks in addition to the summary of prior learning and the conversation. If you’re requesting credit for public speaking, an evaluator may ask to see a videotape of your speeches in addition to the summary of prior learning and the conversation. An evaluator needs to have a good, accurate sense of your learning in order to recommend credit and, therefore, may ask for additional information (portfolios, videotapes, additional writing, etc.) as appropriate.

**DO NOT PURSUE CREDIT BY EVALUATION FOR PRIOR LEARNING IF:**

* you already have the same learning on a college transcript or credit pre-evaluated through National College Credit Recommendation Services (National CCRS), formerly known as the National Program on Noncollegiate Sponsored Instruction (National PONSI), or other agencies recognized by Empire State College. You may not receive credit twice for the same thing. If you are not sure if your learning is duplicated elsewhere, check with your advisor.
* you do not feel comfortable answering questions and having a discussion about the field of learning. Remember, credit is recommended for learning you have gained and can discuss, not for what you have done in the past and may have forgotten. For example, if you studied equal employment policy ten years ago when you worked as a personnel officer, but have not used that knowledge in the past ten years that you’ve been working as an accounts supervisor, it's not likely that you will be able to remember much of what you learned.
* your learning is not college level. (See above discussion of what constitutes college level learning; if in doubt, contact your mentor or the Assessment Office.)

**HOW MUCH CREDIT SHOULD I ASK FOR?**

Keep in mind that a typical college student earns 3-4 credits for at least passing (70 percent) familiarity with the material covered in a textbook plus ancillary readings. Review the books recommended by the evaluator or books of your own choosing. Do you have passing familiarity with 70 percent or more of the material in a typical textbook? If so, ask for at least 3-4 credits. If your learning involves such abilities as analysis, application, and evaluation, ask for credit at the advanced level. Note that most adults do not have a broad and thin knowledge base; they know fewer topics, but know them at greater depth. If your depth makes up for your lack of breadth, you may still be eligible for 3-4 credits.

As a rule of thumb, it takes a typical college student 40 hours (including class time devoted to discussion) to acquire one credit of learning. Once you have narrowed down the topics that you would be comfortable discussing with the evaluator, ask yourself if a typical college student could learn material of this depth and breadth in 40 hours? (Ask for one credit.) 80 hours? (Ask for two credits, etc.)

**General Guide Generic Summary of Prior Learning Form**

<http://www.esc.edu/degree-planning-academic-review/prior-learning-assessment/individualized-prior-learning-assessment/cdl-guides/generic-summary-prior-learning-form/>