Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)
Directions for Submitting PLA Materials

PLA Standards

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is an alternative path for earning college credit. The Saint Mary-of-the-Woods (SMWC) PLA process is based on Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) standards. Materials are evaluated by SMWC faculty who teach in the department for which the PLA materials are being reviewed. Fees are charged after the evaluation is completed and credit is awarded.

To be granted PLA, the learning must be <u>documented</u>, <u>verified</u> and be <u>equivalent</u> to college-level learning. (There are many learning experiences that are excellent and contribute to learning but are not college-level learning experiences.) PLA standards require:
1. College credit will be awarded only for college-level learning, not just experience.
2. Credit will be awarded only for learning that has a balance, appropriate to the subject, between theory and practical application.

Students may apply for PLA credit for up to 30 credit hours for a Bachelor's degree or 15 credit hours for an associate's degree, depending on relevancy to SMWC courses (including general studies, major and elective credit courses). PLA credit cannot duplicate credits previously applied to a transcript.

PLA Procedures

Consider the following resources as you decide whether to compile a PLA portfolio or materials:
- Your academic advisor or SMWC's PLA Coordinator (Associate Director of Woods Online) can help you determine if your knowledge and experience are appropriate to consider putting together a PLA portfolio/materials.
- Woods Online Director is also available for general consultation.
- Obtaining a copy of the syllabus and/or the textbook used for the course may be helpful as you plan and prepare your application materials.
- Supplemental guidelines for some specific course/areas are available on SMWC's website.
- Reference Book: <u>Earn College Credit for What you Know</u> by Janet Colvin, (Chicago, Kendall/ Hunt Publishing Company 2006). Available through the SMWC Library.

The PLA application portfolio/materials (hard copy or on a CD) should be submitted to Office of Woods Online, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, Saint Mary-of-the Woods, IN 47876.

The Portfolio—a separate application/portfolio is needed for each course and should include:
- Cover sheet for PLA
- Table of contents
- Introduction—self-introduction to your educational goal, how you plan to use the requested credit and a context for how you have learned about this subject
- Narrative—10-20 page typed, double-spaced description of your knowledge concerning the subject matter. (Size of narrative may depend on subject; consult supplemental guidelines from specific department if available.) Providing information on how you know something or your process in using a

learned skill may be appropriate. Incorporate terminology and concepts learned if enrolled in the course with references to supporting documentation. The narrative may be organized in several ways:
- ➢ course outcomes
- ➢ topics included in course description or
- ➢ general topics that make sense to the course

The purpose of the narrative is to:
- ➢ Describe your knowledge in context of course outcomes and course objective as found in course syllabus
- ➢ Describe how you learned the information and concepts
- ➢ Give detailed examples of what you know
- ➢ Describe incidents that demonstrate your learning and practical application of theory
- ➢ Reflect on how you use the knowledge

- Supporting documentation/verification of what you have indicated in your narrative to confirm learning, examples include:
  - ➢ Letters of recommendation &/or verification
  - ➢ Awards, certificates, commendations
  - ➢ Work samples, lesson plans
  - ➢ Writing samples
  - ➢ Programs, brochures, newspaper articles
  - ➢ Videotapes, slides, audiotapes
  - ➢ Evaluations
  - ➢ Job description, resume
  - ➢ Licenses
  - ➢ Photographs

The Process—Submit PLA portfolio/materials to the Office of Woods Online. Materials will then be forwarded to the appropriate evaluator. Materials are evaluated by faculty within the department in which the course is taught. Evaluation is usually completed and credit awarded or denied within 30 days. **All PLA applications must be submitted for evaluation before the student has 100 hours completed towards a bachelor's degree, 45 semester hours towards an associate's degree, or two semesters prior to non-degree program completion.** This allows time to enroll in courses prior to graduation or program completion.

Submitting the PLA application does not guarantee that the credit will be granted. The portfolio/materials will be reviewed carefully and the evaluator will determine if:
- ✓ PLA is awarded—student is notified of the decision and billed for appropriate amount. Credit is applied to transcript.
- ✓ More documentation is needed for evaluation—student is notified in writing. Upon receipt of necessary additional documentation, credit is granted or denied. Student is notified of decision. If additional documentation is not received within 30 days, the PLA award will be denied.
- ✓ PLA is denied—student is notified of decision and reason for denial. Appeals may be addressed to the Woods Online Director.

PLA portfolio/materials cannot always be returned to the student (those submitted to the Education Department, for example). It is the student's responsibility to copy any documents she/he wishes to maintain in their own files in case the materials need to be retained by the College.

KM 11/18/14 with assistance from materials created by education department and Earn College Credit for What you Know by Janet Colvin (2006)
Process and policy approved by Academic Council 2/11/10. Updated 11/2014