

**ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION OF
PRIOR LEARNING EXPERIENCE**

AAPLE

A HANDBOOK OF POLICIES
AND PROCEDURES

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I. Introduction to the AAPLE Program

The Assessment and Accreditation of Prior Learning Experience Program (AAPLE) is a credit for life experience program offered by the Levin College of Urban Affairs. The program recognizes that learning takes place in settings other than the classroom. It is designed to allow adults with significant prior work experience to apply their learning towards an undergraduate degree in urban affairs. Students enrolled in the program may submit portfolios which qualify for 3 to 24 hours of credit.

The AAPLE process begins with a student enrolling in UST 190 Analysis of Experiential Learning in Urban Affairs, a two-credit course. This class is offered in Fall and Spring semesters. The course provides the student with the understanding necessary to identify relevant prior learning and present evidence of competence in those areas. Portfolios developed in UST 190 are used as the basis for evaluation of credit. All portfolios must be submitted within one year of completion of UST 190. In rare cases extensions may be granted.

It is important that students be fully versed with the policies and procedures which underpin the program before they engage in any efforts in the direction of seeking credit through preparation of a portfolio. The steps outlined and the procedures indicated have been developed with the purpose of assuring that the Levin College's approach to granting credit (as an outcome of assessment of non-collegiate, but college-level experiential learning) embodies the highest level of academic standards. Though this approach may impose rigorous efforts on the part of students and faculty assessors alike, it is believed that adherence to high and generally accepted standards serves all involved parties well.

The faculty and staff of the Department of Urban Studies, the College unit which is administratively responsible for the AAPLE Program, are ready to answer questions about this program and are willing to render assistance to students who choose to participate. Persons who would like more information and/or who wish to schedule an interview to discuss this program in person should contact the following:

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Continuing education is a vital part of professional and personal growth. The need to update professionally, retrain for new skills, and solve complex domestic and social problems requires a commitment to life-long learning. For individuals who wish to maintain an active contributing role in contemporary society, life-long learning brings work and study together into a unified, continuing educational process directed toward individual growth.

For many people the life-long learning process functions best when they utilize the resources of a university. These resources have long been available through traditional classroom-oriented studies. Now universities can also assist learners by serving as a mechanism through which prior learning may be evaluated or assessed for the purpose of ascertaining the propriety of awarding academic credit for them. Two common methods are employed by colleges and universities to accomplish this service. First, college credit for non-collegiate learning can be obtained by taking College Level Examination Program (CLEP) examinations. Information about CLEP examinations is available from the CSU Testing Center (216/687-2272).

The second method by which credit can be earned for non-collegiate but college-level learning is a process known as prior learning assessment. At the Levin College this method is offered to students through the AAPLE program.

II. Philosophy of the AAPLE Program

The basic idea underlying the assessment of experiential learning—or learning stemming from prior experience—for the possible award of academic credit is that what a person knows is more important than how he or she learned it. The university is not interested in having students spend time in classrooms and laboratories re-learning knowledge and skills that they already possess as a result of “life” or “non-collegiate” learning experiences. The term “life experience” should not be interpreted in an all-inclusive sense, but rather as denoting college-level learning—learning comparable to college courses acquired outside a college or university program.

While this program is not restricted to certain age groups, it is designed primarily to meet the needs of experienced adults. Younger persons are not likely to have the extensive and in-depth experience which might qualify for academic credit.

III. What is a portfolio?

The formal written communication from students in which credit for prior life experiences is requested is known as a portfolio.

A. Portfolios are term-paper-like documents that also contain elements of a resume and detailed personal history.

B. Only well-organized portfolios that present substantial evidence of college-level learning related to Urban Affairs majors can be considered.

C. A portfolio is to be prepared in relation to a specific course or concentration area in the Urban Affairs curriculum for which the student requests credit for experiential learning.

IV. How much credit may be earned through the AAPLE Program?

At the Levin College, a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 24 credit hours may be earned through the AAPLE program, depending on the amount of experience and its relevance to a degree in Urban Affairs.

V. Who may participate in this program?

A. Undergraduate students who are officially admitted to Cleveland State University and pursuing one of the College of Urban Affairs majors are eligible to participate in the program.

B. Graduate credit may not be earned through the AAPLE Program.

VI. What are the advantages to students?

A. Advantages to students of an assessment of prior learning include the following:

1. The process can help to integrate life and work experience with other learning goals and educational programs.

2. The process of assessment can facilitate improved self-understanding of students' competencies and deficiencies.

3. The assessment process becomes a valuable aid to better planning of future learning experiences—both formal and informal.

4. Though preparation of a portfolio is an exacting and time consuming challenge, it should mean time saved in reaching educational goals. Credits earned through assessment can reduce the total amount of time spent in the classroom.

5. Cost savings should be realized. The required fees paid will be less than tuition paid to earn the same number of credits.

VII. What kinds of experiences are assessed?

A. The most prevalent kinds of experiences presented for assessment are:

1. Work experiences—in business, in education, in the military, nonprofit agencies or other organizational settings.

2. Experiences gained through participation in non-credit courses, workshops, or seminars.

3. Extensive and substantive experiences in community, volunteer, or service organizations.

B. Travel, hobbies, homemaking, and related experiences may be acceptable for evaluation only when clear and extensive evidence can be provided to indicate that the learning outcomes are equivalent to college-level learning.

C. The following are some general criteria that may be used in selecting experiences which could lend themselves to portfolio assessment:

1. The learning should be verifiable. Students should be able to demonstrate learning to an expert.

2. The learning should be equivalent to that usually acquired in college-level courses.
3. The learning should have a general applicability outside the specific situation in which it was acquired.
4. The learning should be related to a specific Urban Affairs course content. The college cannot award credit if it does not offer course work in the subject area requested.

NOTE: STUDENTS MAY NOT SEEK CREDIT FOR LIFE EXPERIENCE IN LIEU OF A CAPSTONE COURSE.

VIII. What are the assessment procedures?

The procedural steps to be followed by students in developing a portfolio are defined by the Department of Urban Studies as the following:

- A. Students meet with adviser to determine which classes/learning clusters are appropriate to pursue for credit for life experience.
- B. Students enroll in Analysis of Experiential Learning in Urban Affairs (UST 190); choice of acceptable learning clusters is finalized.
- C. Upon successful completion of the partial portfolio in the class, students are allowed one year to finish the document. The instructor will be available for assistance when needed during this period.
- D. Students submit hard copy of final portfolio to instructor.
- E. Instructor reviews portfolio and submits it to a faculty assessor for evaluation.
- F. If the portfolio is approved, the Office of Student Services' college admissions recruiter contacts students in order to finalize credit. Students then pay required fees at the Office of Treasury Services.
- G. If the faculty assessor does not approve the portfolio and modifications are necessary, the instructor notifies students.

NOTE: CREDITS WILL NOT POST TO STUDENTS' TRANSCRIPTS UNTIL FEES ARE PAID IN FULL. THE UNIVERSITY WILL NOT GRANT A DIPLOMA UNTIL ASSESSMENT FEES ARE PAID IN FULL.

IX. How does one actually prepare the Portfolio?

The following information should be submitted in a binder with appropriate headings, introductions, and explanations (See sub-paragraph G "Portfolio Format").

A. GENERAL FORMAT/TITLE PAGE

- 1. The concentration area and learning cluster areas for which credit is requested should be listed on the title page, along with the name and ID the student, day and evening phone numbers, email address, and the date on which the portfolio was submitted.**
- 2. A table of contents should indicate the nature and location of major sections in the portfolio.**

B. THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL RESUME

The autobiographical resume is to be prepared for inclusion in the portfolio. The autobiographical resume should take the form of an annotated resume, emphasizing those aspects in one's life experience that most closely relate to the concentration area and learning clusters for which the student seeks credit.

Autobiographical information should be presented in chronological format. Elements which should be included are the following:

- 1. Name and title (if applicable)**
- 2. Work experiences**
- 3. Formal education experiences**
 - a. elementary, high school, and college experiences**
 - b. all non-credit experiences that may have occurred in the context of a college or university**
 - c. other, non-collegiate, educational and training such as those acquired in military service, business settings, professional organizations, or similar organizations.**
- 4. Societal experiences**

Memberships and participation in community organizations, political activities, work in volunteer organizations, etc.

- 5. Special interests**

Hobbies and any vocational pursuits that might relate to the request for credit.

- 6. Publications, reports, and exhibitions**

C. COMPETENCY STATEMENT

In this section of the portfolio, students are expected to introduce those aspects of background and experience (listed in the autobiographical section) that most closely

relate to the concentration(major) for which credit is being sought. The objective of this section is to present knowledge, skills and values learned through life experiences. This section of the portfolio should be completed in the following format:

For an example of a competency statement refer to online syllabus. Begin each segment with the learning cluster in the heading, typically the title of the course for which you are seeking credit, and the number of credits sought.

Then describe your competencies using the following subheadings for each learning cluster:

- 1) Occupational/Vocational/Professional Competencies
- 2) Interpersonal Competencies
- 3) Problem Solving Competencies
- 4) Civic Competencies

Bullets may be used for this section.

D. NARRATIVE SECTION

In this section of the portfolio, students are expected to expand on competencies listed in the previous section. This is one of the most important sections, as students describe situations and circumstances in which knowledge was utilized, and skills were applied with some observable effects or impacts.

Students should write *three to four pages of narrative per credit hour sought* and include a reference page at the end of the narrative section listing the sources in the APA format.

Students should be sure to include for each learning cluster, as delineated in the competency statement, the following information:

1. Inclusion of activities in which students have participated and from which learning has resulted. (For example, the specific nature of the job experiences, training projects, and similar activities which contributed to their learning.)
 - A. An indication of the amount of time involved in each activity.
 - B. Information about where and under what circumstances these activities and experiences occurred.
 - C. A description of students' roles in these activities (as observers, participants, leaders, subjects, etc.)

D. A description of how activities, roles, or situations contributed to the competencies that have been acquired.

2. A description of what was learned, including connections between real life learning and what is actually taught in the classroom.

3. A demonstration of students' ability to use theories and concepts from academic sources and apply them in analyzing their experience. Current and archived syllabi from Urban Affairs courses will serve as a guide for this analysis.

NOTE: A MINIMUM OF FOUR AUTHORS ARE REQUIRED FOR EACH 4-CREDIT HOUR LEARNING CLUSTER.

E. DOCUMENTATION FOR LEARNING

Providing documentation is a very important aspect of portfolio development. Any number of items could be considered as evidence of experiential learning and could constitute documentation. Possibilities include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Letters of testimony from current or previous supervisors or persons who could attest to the quality of the student's work. Such letters should address the relationship between the experience and the credit requested.

2. Job descriptions for positions held by the student and which are germane to the credit request.

3. Copies of performance appraisals or evaluations that show examples of situations where non-college learning was achieved.

4. Copies of any certificates connoting honors, awards, and special commendations where these documents are germane to the request for credit.

5. Copies of articles, reports, papers, clippings, work samples, or similar items that might support the request for credit (See Table 1).

6. A Documentation List precedes the copies of the documentation in the portfolio.

TABLE 1

Type of Activity: Work Experience

Possible Documentation: job descriptions; awards; letters of commendation; letters of corroboration from superiors, peers, clients; congratulations on high performance; promotion evaluations; evidence of suggestions adopted; explanation of tasks performed; explanation of ranking, rating, or classification system in company or organization; licenses; performance standards for acquiring licenses, membership in professional or trade organizations; membership requirements for professional/trade organizations; scores on licensing exams; military separation papers; bills of sale; rating forms; military records; work samples.

Type of Activity: Community Service

Possible Documentation: commendations; awards; newspaper and magazine clippings; letters of corroboration from co-volunteers, clients served.

Type of Activity: Non-college Courses and Training

Possible Documentation: amount of assignments; amount of time spent on outside assignments; letter attesting to enrollment in course; learning outcomes or objectives of course; syllabi; evidence of completion; course description(s)/outline(s); number of course instruction hours; number of clinical or practicum hours; diplomas.

Type of Activity: Special Accomplishments

Possible Documentation: books published; list of books read; patents obtained; list of countries visited; mementos from countries lived in and traveled to; machines designed; photographs of famous landmarks visited; speeches given; programs from performances; writing samples; audiovisual presentations; proposals written; conversations with experts.

F. EDUCATION PLAN/GOALS STATEMENT

In two to three pages, students should write an essay which describes the courses taken or will be taken to supplement the knowledge gained through prior learning and the educational and career outcomes expected from continuation in the Urban Affairs academic program. This section should demonstrate that the accredited experiential learning is not random, but bears direct relevance to students' course work at the Levin College of Urban Affairs.

G. PORTFOLIO FORMAT

Students should endeavor to make the portfolio visually attractive and professionally presented. Principles of visual organization should be followed in order to enhance the professionalism of the submission.

1. Should it be desirable to include in the portfolio any documents which have personal or professional meaning for the applicant (and which are also germane to the request for credit), they should be photocopied and the photocopies, rather than the originals, should be enclosed.

2. Students should separate each section (autobiographical, competency statement, etc.) with labeled binder tabs.

NOTE: STUDENTS ARE PERMITTED ONE YEAR AFTER TAKING THE UST 190 CLASS TO SUBMIT A FINAL PORTFOLIO.

X . Assessment Fees

A. Once the completed portfolio is assessed, the student will be contacted by Student Services on how to proceed with paying the necessary fees.

B. As noted above, fees are paid by students in the Office of Treasury Services

XI. Standards

A. Despite the non-traditional nature of gaining credit for life experience via the assessment of a portfolio, traditionally high academic standards apply to this program. Earning credit through assessment of relevant life experiences should not be construed as being easier than traditional methods of earning college credit—it is simply an alternative method of earning college credit.

B. When credit is granted as a result of a favorable portfolio assessment by faculty members, no grade is given. The portfolio course credits will be entered on students' permanent record as hours earned under the related Urban Affairs practicum course. There is no effect upon students' cumulative grade point average.

C. Not all colleges and universities will accept transfer credit earned by students through the process of assessment of experiential learning. If students contemplate transfer from the Levin College to another college or university where they would like credit earned through the portfolio assessment process to be applied to a degree, it would be in students' best interest to inquire about the institution's policies on transfer of credit when the credits are awarded the portfolio assessment.