

## PRIOR LEARNING & MINISTRY ASSESSMENT

### Process Description

This process is a guided study in how to move life learning into an academic framework to obtain academic credit. Attention will be given to identifying personal strengths, weaknesses and life mission; to examining the formal learning experience and what is required in an academic program; and to integrating life learning into a chosen academic program. For those who are contemplating a return to formal education, this process is a beginning point to help clarify goals and expectations, as well as an outline of the process required in requesting academic credit for non-formal learning experience(s).

**Note:** Only post-High School learning experiences prior to becoming a student with Briercrest College and Seminary can be used in the portfolio.

### Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this process, the student will gain:

- An appreciation for and understanding of the relationship between experience and learning.
- An increased understanding of the scope and benefits of prior learning experiences.
- An ability to assess life experiences in terms of their contribution to learning.
- An appreciation for how a variety of life learning experiences contribute to one's future formal or informal educational needs.
- A new level of confidence regarding one's current level of learning.
- A sense of what types of learning opportunities or academic programs will be best to pursue in the future.
- The ability to develop a learning portfolio that clearly connects life learning experiences to equivalent academic credit.

### Suggested Reading:

Current Briercrest College or Briercrest Seminary Catalogues, depending on school one is hoping to enter (available online at [www.briercrest.ca/current](http://www.briercrest.ca/current))

Colvin, Janet. *Earn College Credit for What You Know*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Chicago, IL: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2006.

## **Outline**

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## Summary of Process by Unit

The processes are listed below in the order in which they should be completed. **Please use this guide in conjunction with the instructions in the rest of this description and your notes.** The primary purpose of this chart is to give you an overview of the processes and to help you understand what you need to work through first. You can also use this chart to track your own progress. Remember that further instructions will be given in each unit of the materials.

Unit	Process	Date Completed
2	Optional Reading: (Earn College Credit for What You Know)	
2	Initial program & course choice(s)	
3	Annotated Learning List	
3	Autobiographical narrative 4–6 pages	
4	Table: course, learning experience, documentation	
5	Descriptions of learning	
5	Self-evaluation using criteria	

<i>Earn College Credit for What You Know</i> (optional but highly recommended)	Date Completed
Chapter 1 - Going Back to School	
Chapter 2 - Profiles of Five Adult Learners	
Chapter 3 - Life and Career Planning	
Chapter 4 - Choosing the Right School	
Chapter 5 - Prior Learning Assessment	
Chapter 6 - Some Methods to Evaluate Prior Learning	
Chapter 7 – Portfolio: Assisted Assessment	
Chapter 8 - Surviving and Thriving in College	

<i>Catalogues</i>	Date Completed
Briercrest College catalogue (if seeking College credit)	
Briercrest Seminary catalogue (if seeking Seminary credit)	

## **Unit One**

### **Discovery Stage**

#### **An Introduction to Prior and Learning Ministry Assessment**

#### **Unit Objectives**

By the end of this unit, the student should have:

- Come to understand the basic concepts behind prior learning assessment.
- Grasped the assessment process.
- Gained an appreciation of the value of prior learning assessment as a planning tool.

#### **Unit One Learning Strategies**

It is very important that you examine the information in the unit carefully before proceeding with the balance of the program. It is a good general practice when beginning a new program to glance through all the materials in order to become familiar with its overall structure. Pay special attention to the nature and purpose of Prior Learning Assessment as you read this unit. It is recommended that you read over the entire process before deciding whether or not to enrol in the program. Once the decision to proceed has been made you should contact [Academic Services](#) and be enrolled in the program, you can request that an appointment with an advisor be booked at this time to introduce yourself and to get some initial advice on getting the most value from this learning experience.

#### **Introduction**

Prior Learning and Ministry Assessment (PLMA) is a process that uses a variety of tools to help learners reflect on, identify, articulate, and demonstrate past learning. This learning may have been acquired through study, work and other life experiences but is not recognized through mechanisms for the formal transfer of credit. The individual must demonstrate this learning through valid, rigorous assessment methods which follow Briercrest College & Seminary (BCS) policies and procedures and ensure that credible learning has taken place. PLMA makes it possible to evaluate past learning against established academic standards so that a credentialing body can award credit.

This program is designed to offer flexible tools that will help students have their life learning assessed to determine whether it will translate into academic credit. It will help the student develop a portfolio, outlining the learning gained through life experience. A portfolio can help the new or returning student to meet his/her need to:

- Know how much credit or recognition is to be awarded before deciding whether or not to proceed with additional learning at the college or seminary level.
- Refine educational/life/ministry goals.
- Assess educational goals and closely integrate prior learning with future learning.

## **An Overview of Prior Learning Assessment**

The end result of this program is the development of a learning portfolio based on one's life learning experiences. Developing a learning portfolio is not always easy, but it is an extremely valuable process. The first step in the process is to record your life experiences. Second is summarizing those into experiences which allowed for learning. Third is assessment—taking a good look at what you have learned from those experiences. Some people have twenty years' experience at a job; some have one year's experience, twenty times over. In this program, you will first identify your life-learning experiences and then show the learning you have gained from those experiences. In the end, it is your learning, not just your experience that will be the basis for assessment.

Prior Learning Assessment can be challenging, but you are not asked to work through this on your own. In fact, you will be encouraged throughout this process to seek the help and advice of an advisor. The development of a portfolio should have value to the student beyond being a basis for awarding credit or recognition of prior experiential learning. The process is costly in time and money for both the student and the college; to maximize the benefits to be derived from the process, there should be extensive student-advisor contact. Without such contact, many potential benefits will not be realized—benefits such as:

- a realistic understanding of present levels of competence;
- effective planning for future learning;
- student awareness of assessment procedures;
- creation of a valuable portfolio that can be added to and refined throughout the rest of the student's life;
- feedback to the institution as to student learning needs;

- adequate quality control over the portfolio process and the awarding of credit or recognition.<sup>1</sup>

You are encouraged to seek your advisor's advice and insights during this process. This will save you time and allow you to develop a learning portfolio that will best demonstrate your learning.

### **An Overview of the Assessment Process**

It is important for you to be certain that you understand the process as you begin. Secondary, but integral to the process is applying for prior learning credit, based on your learning portfolio. A brief overview of the process can be found on the following page.

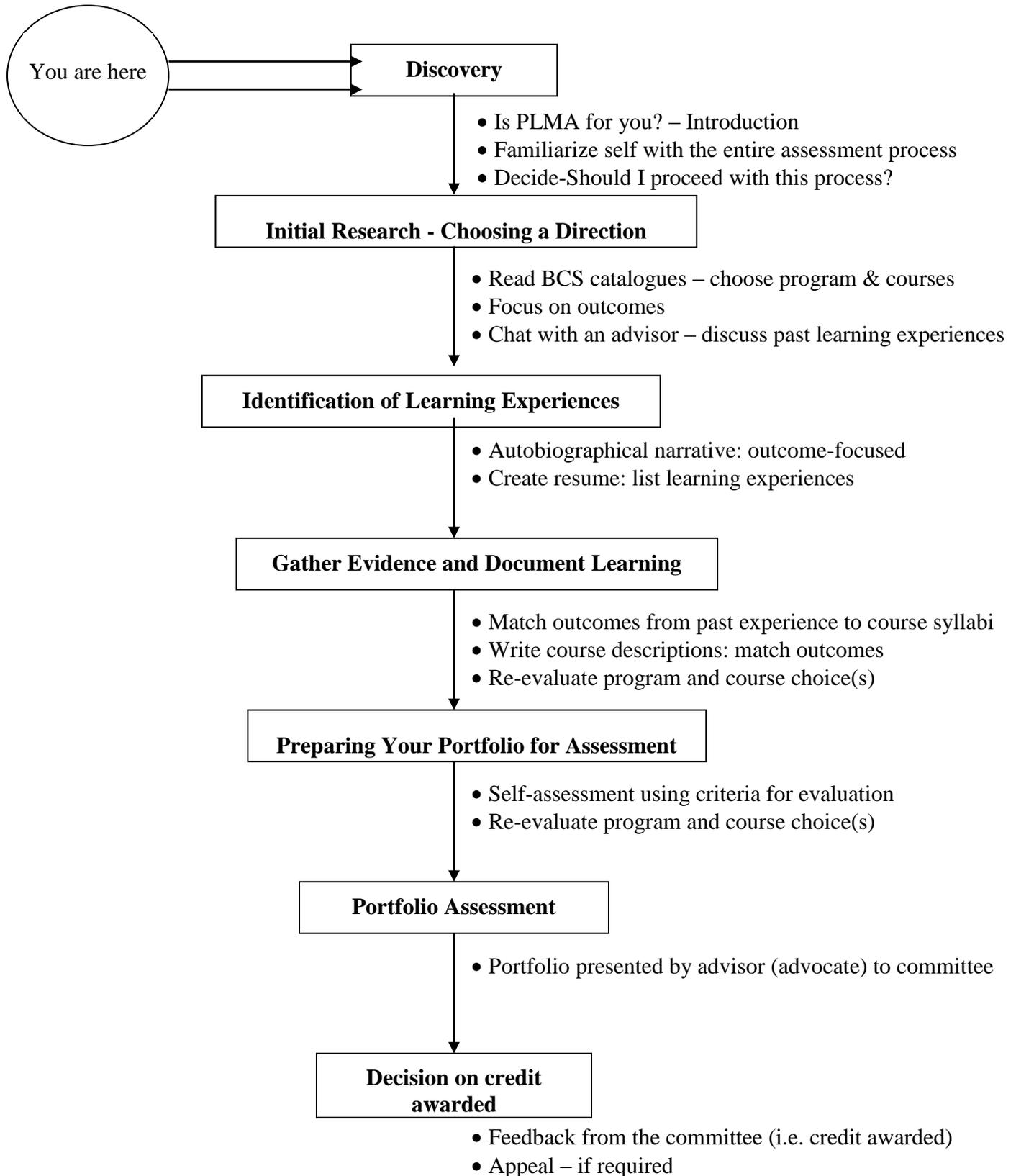
### **Summary**

At first glance, Prior and Learning and Ministry Assessment can feel a bit overwhelming to some students. The process materials are designed to help you each step of the way. Remember, your advisor is available to answer your questions or concerns. If you have determined that you would like to work through the PLMA process, you will need to register for the process with the [Academic Services](#) office (1-800-645-2275) before booking appointments with an advisor.

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<sup>1</sup> Keeton, Morris T. et al. *Experiential Learning: Rationale, Characteristics, and Assessment*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1976 (page 126)

## GEN297 PLMA – The Assessment Process



## Unit Two

### Researching Outcomes

#### Initial Research - Choosing a Direction

Prior Learning and Ministry Assessment is a process that helps you research and analyze your life learning experiences. As such, each of its units is meant to take you into a new area of exploration and research. You will be given exercises in each unit that should result in a well-presented and comprehensive learning portfolio. You will do some initial research and planning that will help you prepare for the balance of the process.

### Unit Two Objectives

By the end of this unit, the student should have:

- Gained a sound grasp of the relationship between experience and learning.
- Chosen or confirmed the choice of a program of study.
- Identified life learning that may be applicable for prior learning credit.

### Unit Two Learning Strategies

1. Read *Earn College Credit for What You Know*. As you read, summarize in a few sentences or a short paragraph what you consider to be the most important information for you to remember as you work through the process. Also, complete exercises as assigned in the reading chart. These chapter summaries will help to guide you in the process.
2. Examine the Briercrest College & Seminary online catalogues which are available at [www.briercrest.ca/current](http://www.briercrest.ca/current) under 'Academics'. As you look through the catalogues, you should pay special attention to the following:
  - a. If you have not already chosen a program of study, you should look carefully at the programs available both on campus and through Distance Education. It is very important that you set a direction for your program of study in terms of what might best suit your future goals. Students often change programs during their time of study, but it is still important that you become familiar with the current options that are best suited to your needs.

- b. Once you have formulated a sense of the type of program you might want to pursue, you should look at the course descriptions to begin to explore what types of courses would be good candidates for pursuing credit through PLMA.

As you read the course descriptions, ask yourself two questions: 1) Could this course fit within the program of study that I want to pursue? 2) Is there something in the course description that appears to connect with learning I have achieved through a previous experience?

- c. After reading through the catalogues as suggested above, write out a one-page report with the following information:
  - i. The program(s) that, at this point, you think would best suit your goals.
  - ii. A list of courses that you feel might be good potential candidates for Prior Learning and Ministry credit.

Discuss your initial research with your advisor and request the appropriate program sheet(s). (You can also request syllabi for some of the courses you have identified as potential candidates for PLMA credit by contacting [Academic Services](#).)

As you work through this unit, keep in mind that your work here is preliminary and intended to help you understand both the PLMA process and your own educational needs. The balance of the process will help you refine the initial choices you have made.

## **Unit Three**

### **Evaluating Past Evidence**

#### **Identification of Learning Experiences**

In the previous units, you should have become familiar with the overall assessment process and gained an initial sense of your educational needs and goals. In this unit, you will begin to build your learning portfolio by carefully examining and presenting the learning experiences that have shaped your life. This unit is the critical foundation upon which your portfolio will be developed, so it is vital that your research here be thorough and clearly presented.

### **Unit Three Objectives**

By the end of this unit, the student should:

- Have identified her/his significant life learning experiences.
- Demonstrate the ability to write at the college/graduate level.
- Be able to present the results of his/her research in a well-written autobiographical narrative format.
- Developed a resume that clearly presents both life experiences and learning.

### **Unit Three Learning Strategies**

1. Review the unit on “Portfolio-Assisted Assessment” in the “Earn College Credit for What You Know” textbook.
2. Create a rough draft of your personal chronological history, focusing on outcomes of significant life events and activities that have been influential in shaping the person you are today. These could include such diverse experiences as: work, personal experiences, community service, non-credit courses, training, ministry opportunities, special accomplishments, hobbies, and recreational activities. The goal of this exercise is that you begin to identify your previous learning and provide a personal history.
3. Develop a comprehensive annotated list of your learning experiences. This list is, in essence, your “learning resume” and should follow the format given below (also see textbook for more information). Make sure to attach a cover page when you submit the annotated list for evaluation.

**Example of Annotated Learning List**

<b>Source and Date</b>	<b>Nature of Experience</b>	<b>Description of Learning</b>
South Baptist Church 1996-1999	Music Director – Part Time Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Learned to recruit and assess volunteer musicians</li><li>• Know how to choose and arrange music</li></ul>
New Town Construction 2001-2003	Construction Foreman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Achieved journeyman status as carpenter</li><li>• Know worker safety standards</li></ul>
These should be in chronological order. Include all relevant learning experiences	Give a concise statement of nature of experience	Focus here on the learning that was gained through the experience. Try to be as concise and clear as possible

4. Summarize your learning experience and achievements in a written autobiographical narrative. The format of this paper should follow standard college/graduate paper submissions (see Format Guide for the College or Seminary, available at [www.briercrest.ca/current](http://www.briercrest.ca/current) under ‘Important Documents’). This assignment will be reviewed in detail for format, grammar usage and spelling by your advisor. You will be expected to make any corrections indicated, and then this assignment will become part of your final portfolio. Your advisor—and, in some cases, the assessment committee—will look at the autobiographical narrative to help assess your ability to study and write at the college/graduate level.

**In your narrative:**

- Begin by stating your educational goals and explain the reasons you have for seeking credit for your prior learning and ministry experiences.

- Give a brief personal overview of your personal and spiritual background. In this section you want to give your assessors a good “snapshot” of who you are as a person. Remember that this is an educational document that will be assessed for clarity and presentation. Include enough information to give your readers a good sense of who you are. It is best not to include material that is of an intensely personal nature. If you are unsure about what to include, please contact your advisor.
- Use your annotated learning list as the basis for your autobiographical narrative and explain 1) how significant experiences have contributed to your learning and 2) how you see past learning contributing to your future goals. This section should be the major focus of your paper.
- Write a clear conclusion to your paper that summarizes your future goals and the importance of Prior Learning credit in reaching those goals.
- Remember that in this autobiography you are trying to accomplish important goals. You want to show 1) that you are able to present yourself in a way that demonstrates your ability to write at a college/graduate level, 2) the importance of Prior Learning and Ministry Assessment to your future educational and ministry goals.

## **Unit Four**

### **Assessing Learning**

#### **Gathering of Evidence and Documentation of Learning**

The previous unit gave you the opportunity to identify the significant learning experiences that will form the basis of your request for prior learning credit. In this unit, you will move to the next step, which is to document the academic importance and relevance of these learning experiences. The result of this unit's work will be the primary basis for the assessment of your learning and the granting of credit for that learning. It is in this unit that you will be asked to make a specific connection between your prior learning experiences and courses in your chosen program of study.

#### **Unit Four Objectives**

By the end of this unit the student should:

- Have confirmed the choice of a program of study that best meets his/her future needs and goals.
- Have identified the courses for which she/he wants to receive credit through Prior Learning Assessment.
- Be able to document and verify prior learning and demonstrate how learning experiences meet the desired outcomes of the selected courses.

#### **Unit Four Learning Strategies**

1. Review the work you did in Unit Two, especially the program of study that you chose. It is imperative that your program of study match well with your future goals. If you now feel that another program of study is more suitable than the one you chose, request a new program sheet from your advisor.
2. Read the information presented in this unit before proceeding to the next step. It would also be helpful to review the related information in the textbook.
3. Review the list of courses that you identified in Unit Two as potential candidates for Prior Learning Assessment. Have another look at the relevant catalogue and check the course descriptions to clarify which courses fit your program of study and where you feel that prior learning experiences may have met the outcomes of the course. Once you have reviewed and modified your list as necessary, find

each syllabus online through [Briercrest Live](#), or if you don't have student access yet, request the syllabi from the [Academic Services office](#).

- Examine each syllabus you receive, paying special attention to the listed objectives or outcomes. Develop a list of learning experiences that have assisted you in achieving the objectives of each course. See sample below. Identify ways that you could demonstrate your achievement of those objectives. Prepare a table that shows the course being requested, related learning experience, and how learning (based on outcomes) will be documented. Before completing this unit, it is important that you discuss this information with your advisor if you are unsure of how you will support your learning with proper documentation.

<i>Course being Requested</i> <i>CM 101 Foundations of Church Ministry</i> (sample ideas)			
<i>Outcomes from the syllabus</i>	<i>Related learning experiences</i>	<i>Learning based on outcomes</i>	<i>Documentation</i>
Know and understand the nature and purposes of the Church.	Taught Sunday school for the past 5 years, assisted in multiple church ministry opportunities. Personal study.	Church is the gathering of believers, created to glorify God, edification, teaching, and ministry.	Letter of reference from the church that you taught Sunday school in, describing your involvement.
Know and understand the Biblical foundation and identity of the Church.	Attended a weekend conference with the MB church on who we are in Christ.	Church is the bride of Christ, built on the rock, Jesus Christ.	Notes on the seminar, or materials collected from the weekend.
Know and understand the Biblical characteristics & responsibilities of Church leadership.	Serving as Sunday School teacher, and belonging to the Missions committee.	I have read "The Purpose Driven Church" by Rick Warren.	A one paragraph outline of what I learned from the book in regards to my own responsibility to the church.
Value the necessity for your own spiritual health and growth as part of the body's health & growth.	Ladies prayer group, and I have a mentor	It is important that I stay connected with other Christians and spend time in reflection and in Bible reading to be a healthy contributing part of the church.	Letter from my mentor, describing our relationship.
Live and serve creatively as you translate the functions of the local Church into forms which meet needs.	I helped to spearhead a clothing exchange program for our community.	I learned that we need to reach out to people where they are in tangible ways, not to wait for them to come to me.	A note of appreciation from a young mother who benefitted from the exchange.

5. Create a description of learning for each course you wish to be considered for credit through Prior Learning Assessment. As you are developing your descriptions of learning, compile the related evidence and request documentation as necessary. These descriptions of learning will be the primary focus of the assessment. In your portfolio, each course should be clearly and separately identified for your assessors. Remember that these descriptions are your primary evidence and should be presented in factual, concise form, showing how you believe you have, through your life experiences, met the objectives and desired outcomes of the course.
  - a. When creating the course description, you are required to consult the syllabus for the course in question. Begin by completing a rough draft of the information that will be contained in your description of learning for each course. The following steps will assist you in preparation:
    - i. Write out the number and name of the course and the course description listed in the catalogue.
    - ii. Describe the experience(s) that you are using to apply for prior learning credit, as related to each course.
    - iii. For each objective of the course, list the related learning from your experience(s). Be sure to include books you have read as part of your descriptions of learning.
  - b. Quality is important, not just quantity; superfluous documentation, attractively presented, cannot compensate for poor performance in a learning experience or questionable relevance to the desired objectives.
  - c. Supporting documentation of learning should have an appropriate balance of theory and practical application. Re-read the course objectives and ensure that your documentation demonstrates theoretical learning and valuable practical application. Some types of helpful evidence are:
    - verification of accomplishment (prize or musical program)
    - testimony regarding competence (evaluative letters or job performance reports)
    - learning products (work samples, essays)

- certification (licence or rank attained)
- other direct evidence (publications or test scores)
- descriptions (syllabi, list of conference sessions, membership requirements, job descriptions)
- reading on the subject (in other contexts or for personal benefit)
- transcripts from other institutions

6. When you have completed your rough work, submit a description of learning for each course, following the guidelines included at the end of this unit.

Note: Documentation should be compiled and submitted along with your portfolio. Documentation may be sent directly to the advisor if the person providing the documentation would prefer that it remain confidential. If you have not recently spoken to your advisor, you should have questions at this point and must contact him/her before submitting any assignments from this unit.

### **Moving From Experience to Learning**

It is widely recognized that not all learning occurs in the formal classroom setting. Most programs integrate, as part of the curriculum, opportunities for practical experience such as field education, internships, practicum, or practice teaching.

Earlier in the process, you chose a program of study and requested a corresponding program sheet. You will notice that there are “required” courses and “elective” courses. All students must take the required courses; the list of elective courses allows for personal choices within the categories listed. Please note: you can request prior learning credit for both required and elective courses.

Study the program sheet again and try to identify with new eyes which courses you feel would be simply a review of things you have already learned. Study the actual syllabus for each course. A careful reading of the syllabus will clarify the objectives for that course as well as the assignments and an outline of the course content.

As you study the syllabus, you will quickly find some objectives that you may have already achieved through your life learning experiences. The following chart, adapted from Richard Peterson’s book, *Life Long Learning in America*,<sup>2</sup> shows the different sources of education and learning.

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<sup>2</sup> Peterson, Richard E. et al. *Lifelong Learning in America*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1979.

Deliberate Education and Learning			Unintentional Learning
<i>Schools</i>	<i>Non-schools</i>	<i>Sources</i>	
Pre-primary	Private industry	Personal—at hand	In the home
Elementary/secondary	Professional associations	Personal—at a distance	At work
Undergraduate	Trade unions	Travel	From friends
Graduate/Professional	Government service	Print media	Mass media
Public school adult	Federal job training programs	Electronic media	Travel
Proprietary schools	Military services		Community activities
Continuing	Agriculture extension		Recreation
Community	City recreation dept.		Entertainment

A quick examination of the above list should broaden your perspective of contexts where learning can take place. In examining the value of your learning experiences, you should keep several things in mind.

- You cannot equate years of experience with units of credit, nor can you “focus on the quality and quantity of experiences rather than on the learning outcomes of the experiences.”<sup>3</sup>
- Not all experiences educate and not all experiences educate in the same dimension.<sup>4</sup> Some experiences give us skills; others, new perspectives; some experiences have little educational value at all in academic terms.
- For the purposes of this process, of primary concern is learning that is clearly and demonstrably related to well-defined objectives or outcomes.
- Discernment is crucial in choosing those life experiences that are specifically applicable to the program of studies chosen. Remember that life learning that does not translate to academic credit is in no way less significant for you as a person.

<sup>3</sup> Keeton, page 165.

<sup>4</sup> Merriam, Sharan B. and M. Carolyn Clark. *Lifelines: Patterns of Work, Love, and Learning in Adulthood*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1991, (page 201).

Assessing your personal learning experiences can be a difficult task. The first challenge is to identify the broad range of learning experiences that have shaped one's life. The second challenge is to critically examine those experiences to determine the exact nature of the learning that was gained. There are very significant benefits to this exercise. First, you will come to appreciate the vast array of experiences that have contributed to who you are as a person. Second, you will understand more clearly the complex relationship between experience and learning.

## **HOW LEARNING EXPERIENCES ARE ASSESSED**

As you work through the process of carefully examining the learning value of your experiences, it is important to have some understanding of how your assessors will gauge the value of your learning when compared to the desired course outcomes. Your assessors bring a wide variety of educational experience to the assessment process, to give a full explanation of assessment criteria is beyond the scope of this course; however, when you prepare your descriptions of learning, keep in mind the following as the general basis for assessment:

### **Validity**

Does the evidence relate to the learning outcomes of the course for which you are requesting recognition? For example, being able to write a description of how a medical procedure is done does not equate to being physically able to do the procedure. Validity examines how the evidence connects to the credit being requested.

### **Sufficiency**

Is there enough evidence to provide conclusive proof? Both quality and quantity of evidence are of importance, and sufficient evidence must be made available to your assessors for them to be able to make a decision to grant credit as requested.

### **Authenticity**

Did the candidate produce this work? This is often where sound documentation is most important. Just as it is important to verify that a student is submitting his/her own work in any college course, it is important that the learning being described be verifiable.

### **Currency**

Are knowledge and skills up to date? The value of some types of learning is not affected by time, but in some areas of study, learning needs to be quite recent to be of current benefit.

## Quality

Is there clear evidence that the learning experience was characterized by quality in terms of both the potential for learning and the individual's participation?

## Reliability

How consistent is the assessment outcome? This principle of assessment applies not to the evidence but rather to the consistency of the process itself. Assessors will need to be sure that they are applying the same criteria to your assessment as they would to any other applicant. They will also ask the question, "If another group of assessors was examining this application, would they make the same decision?" This question should give you the assurance that your assessors will be working hard to make the assessment of your work as fair as possible.

## Summary

In this unit, you have been asked to take another look at your future goals and life experiences. This kind of self-examination is not easy, but it is of great value. One thing you should keep in mind is that both your advisor and your assessors want you to receive all the credit that you have earned through your prior learning experiences. The assessment process is one that seeks to give credit where credit is due, not to find ways to deny credit. One of the primary goals of this process is to give you a sense of confidence about what you have learned through your life experiences as well as to help you to identify where sufficient learning has not yet occurred so that further study is warranted. Most students find this unit to be the most challenging in the process, but be encouraged that your efforts will have significant benefit, regardless of the final outcome of the assessment.

## **Guidelines for Preparation: Course Description of Learning**

A separate description of learning is required for each course for which you are requesting credit for prior learning. The following guidelines are to be used in preparing this element of your portfolio:

**1. Course Name, Number and Description** - use information as provided in the appropriate catalogue

**2. Description of Experience**

In describing your experience, include the following, as you deem it appropriate:

- Where the learning took place
- When and for how long the learning took place
- Supervisor's name and title
- Job title and responsibilities
- A description of learning activities associated with the experience
- Any information that will guide your assessors to a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding the learning experience.

**3. Learning from Experience**

Your goal is to match the learning you have gained with each of the outcomes listed in the course syllabus. Include details of how the competencies, skills and knowledge acquired relate to the credit being requested. Show a balance of theory and practical experience appropriate to the subject matter, as much as possible. Emphasize learning gained from experience more than the experience itself.

**4. Documentation**

To verify the learning that you are claiming, list all relevant documentation from the sources that you are including in your portfolio. Be sure to label each document for easy reference by your assessors.

## **Unit Five**

### **Preparing and Submitting Your Learning Portfolio for Assessment**

The final step in developing a portfolio for the assessment of Prior Learning is compiling all the material you have prepared and performing a self-assessment to help you understand the results you should expect. At this point most of the work is done, and you have come to the part of your PLMA journey where you put your portfolio in the hands of your assessors to find out what credit you may have earned through your life learning experiences. For some students this step can be a bit intimidating, because it is here you reveal many of the significant learning experiences that have shaped your life and in a sense “ask for a second opinion” on their academic learning value. Just keep in mind, as you put the final touches on your portfolio, that your assessors are professionals who will treat your work with respect and honesty. They all believe that students should receive credit for prior learning when that learning can be granted according to the appropriate assessment criteria. You should try to view your assessors as important allies in helping you to understand the academic value of your learning experiences. It is always more pleasant to receive credit as requested but, whatever the outcome, this process is intended to be a significant tool in the process of preparing to move forward with confidence in the pursuit of your educational goals.

### **Unit Five Objectives**

By the end of this unit, the student should have:

- Prepared the documentation and evidence that will be included in her/his portfolio.
- Made a final decision on the courses he/she wants to include in the request for prior learning credit.
- Come to understand the potential outcomes of the assessment process.

### **Unit Five Learning Strategies**

1. Review the checklist included in this unit to make sure each piece of information is included as required.
2. Prepare a three-ring binder with separate sections (best to use labelled dividers) for each course presented. In the end, it is your evidence, not presentation that

will guide your assessors; however, presenting a professional-quality portfolio does allow you to present your learning in a way that will allow assessors to see that you are working hard to do your best. Good impressions do help!

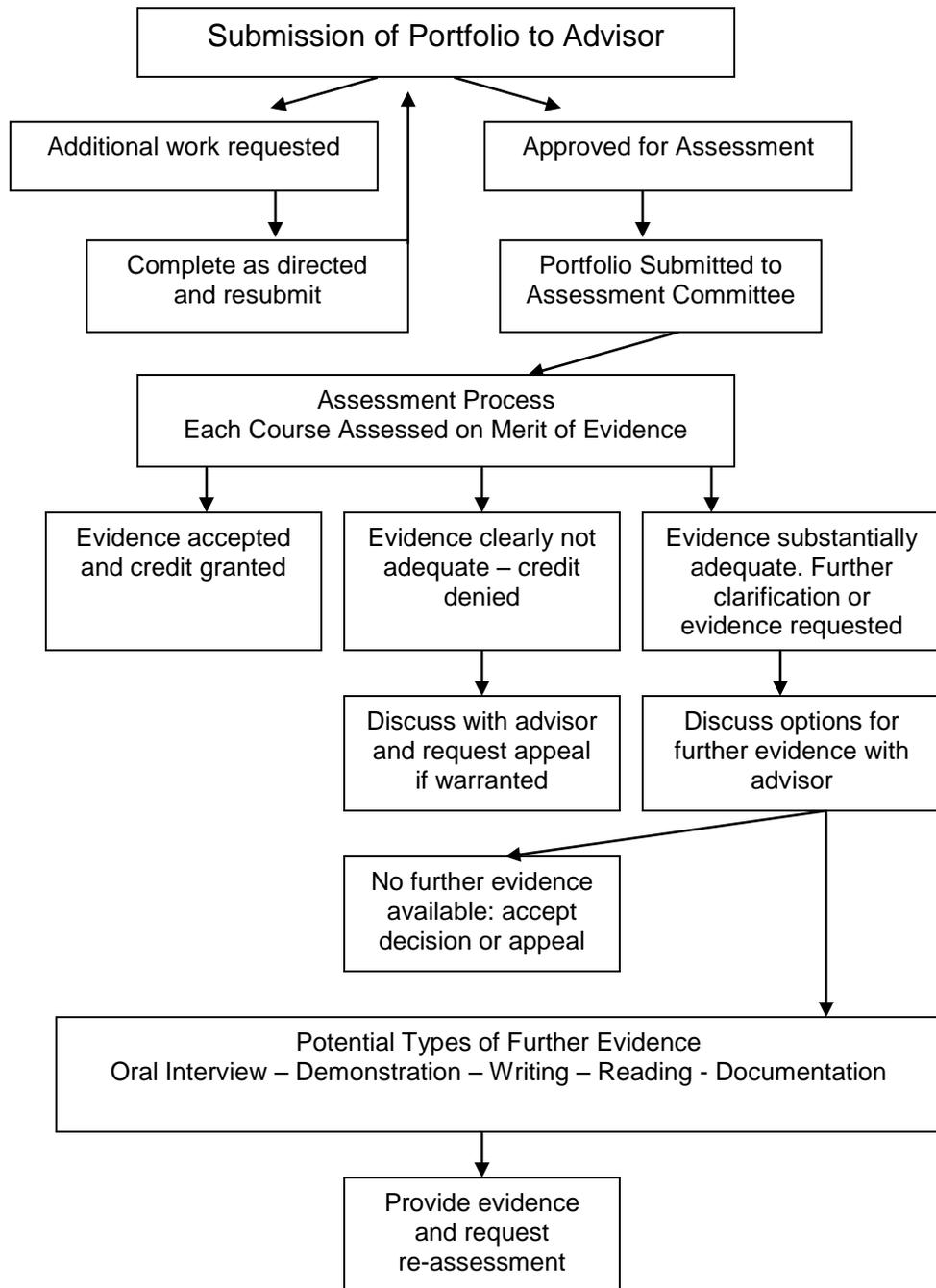
3. Review the assessment process flow chart included in this unit to become more familiar with the possible assessment outcomes.
4. Perform a self-assessment for each course that you have included in the portfolio, according to the standards given in Unit Four and the desired outcomes and objectives listed in the course syllabus. You should prepare one sheet for each course (sample included in this unit), being as honest with yourself as possible. You might want to ask yourself, “If I were assessing this, would I see enough evidence to grant the credit as requested?” This is a very important “quality control” step, because it allows you to identify any gaps that may exist in your documentation or evidence so that they can be corrected prior to submission. Your self-assessment will be seen by only your advisor, but is an important tool in the final preparation of your portfolio.
5. Once you have completed your portfolio, you should make a final decision regarding a request for assessment. In the vast majority of cases this decision is not difficult, because there is good potential for credit being gained through the process. However, in some cases, students come to the end of portfolio development and realize that they have not gained as much academically equivalent learning through their life experiences as they had originally considered. In these cases, it is very important to discuss your portfolio with your advisor. Remember that only one goal of this process is to determine how much academic credit you have gained through a variety of life experiences. Even if the credit earned is small, this process is one that will assist you in knowing what path you need to take to achieve your future goals.
6. Send your completed portfolio to your advisor for examination and to see if any changes need to be made prior to the assessment meeting.
7. Give yourself a big “pat on the back” for enduring a challenging process!

**Portfolio Check List**

Make sure you have completed these steps and included all the information listed below before submitting your Portfolio.

Item	Completed ✓	Comments if Needed
Program of Study clearly identified (include in portfolio)		
Annotated Learning List (include in portfolio)		
Autobiographical Narrative (include in portfolio)		
Table matching experiences with course syllabi		
Descriptions of Learning for each course (include in portfolio)		
Documentation of evidence included and labelled (include in portfolio)		
Self-Assessment Form for Each Course (include in portfolio)		
Each section clearly identified		
All material proofed and edited prior to presentation		
Advisor consulted during portfolio development process		
Copies of all important information made and/or stored electronically to prevent loss of material		

## Assessment Process and Potential Outcomes



## Prior Learning and Ministry Assessment Appeal Process

When a student's request for credit is denied, the Assessment Committee provides notification with rationale for the decision. The student has 30 days from the date of notification to appeal this decision.

An appeal should take the following steps:

1. The student must contact his/her advisor regarding the appeal process and advice on how to proceed.
2. A written appeal, with new evidence of learning and documentation, must be presented to the PLMA advisor for further discussion and advice.
3. Within seven working days from the initial appeal presentation, the student's advisor will bring the written appeal to the attention of the Assessment committee for consideration and re-assessment.
4. If, after further consideration, the assessment committee again denies the request for credit, the student may initiate further steps by presenting an appeal to the Academic Appeals Committee. This should be completed within seven working days.
5. The Appeals committee will document their decision in writing and deliver it to the student within seven days of meeting. Further steps to appeal are outlined in the College or Seminary Academic Handbook, which are available under 'Important Documents' on [www.briercrest.ca/current](http://www.briercrest.ca/current).

## **Appendix Self-Assessment**

Prior to submitting your portfolio for assessment, you are required to perform a self-assessment as a means of giving yourself a sense of the potential strength and/or weaknesses of your application for credit. You may find that you have provided all the evidence available in a clear and concise manner, or you may discover that a few changes could strengthen your application. In either case, self-assessment is a valuable learning experience and will help you to understand more fully the outcome of the assessment of your work. Please complete a self-assessment sheet (copy as many as you need) for each course for which you are requesting credit for prior learning.

### **Guidelines for self-assessment**

1. Review the section on “How Learning Experiences are Assessed” in Unit Four of the course notes. Not all of the criteria will be easy for you to assess; however, it is important to think through the issues that each assessment criterion addresses.
2. Review the objectives in the course syllabus to ensure that each objective has been addressed in the descriptions of learning.
3. Consider the balance in your evidence between theory and practice, and decide on what the strongest element in each description of learning is.
4. Review your documentation to see how clearly it supports the appropriate learning experience.
5. Complete the assessment sheet as directed, giving each section a value, as indicated.
6. Revise each description of learning as necessary, based on your self-assessment. If you have questions about this exercise, be sure to contact your advisor.

**Descriptions of Learning****Self-Assessment****Course Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate to what extent the statement describes your work (please note that your assessors will not have access to this document):

Excellent: Student feels expectations have been exceeded

Average: Student feels minimum standard has been met

Marginal: Student feels there is some weakness in this area

Statement	Marginal	Average	Excellent
1. All the objectives/outcomes provide evidence to show how the course expectations have been met.			
2. Documentation is sufficient to support learning as indicated.			
3. There is strong evidence of practical learning.			
4. There is strong evidence of theoretical learning.			
5. The learning described is based on a clear and distinct learning experience.			
6. The learning presented is of college/seminary level.			
7. The presentation shows evidence of quality in terms of organization and format.			

**Overall Assessment**

Based on the information above and potential assessment outcomes, I would expect the following: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is Prior Learning & Ministry Assessment?

Prior learning and ministry assessment (PLMA) is a process which uses a variety of tools to help learners reflect on, identify, articulate and demonstrate past learning which has been acquired through study, work and other life experiences and which is not recognized through formal transfer of credit mechanisms. PLMA allows the evaluation of past learning against established academic standards so that a credentialing body can award credit. (Definition from Mohawk College, Ontario: <http://www.mohawkc.on.ca>)

Prior Learning & Ministry Assessment (PLMA) is a process in which individuals have the opportunity to obtain credit for knowledge and skills gained outside the classroom and /or through other educational programs. It is a process which compares an individual's learning gained from prior education, work and life experiences and personal study to the learning outcomes in formal education courses. The individual must demonstrate this learning through valid, rigorous assessment methods, which follow Briercrest College & Seminary policies and procedures and ensure that credible learning has taken place. If the learning demonstrated is equivalent to what would normally be acquired through a formal course(s) in the chosen area of study, then credit is granted. Briercrest College & Seminary faculty and administrators are the experts who assess the learning and determine the credit awarded for prior learning (Definition from Red River Community College, Manitoba: <http://www.rccc.mb.ca>).

### 2. What is meant by "prior learning"?

Prior learning is any learning that an individual has acquired from formal education, work and /or volunteer experience, personal study and any other life activities (i.e. hobbies, travel, training programs, community life, etc.) that resulted in knowledge and skills. Learners may have acquired college or seminary level learning through these significant work and life experiences. They have learning which may be equivalent to the knowledge, skills and values expected from college or seminary courses (Red River Community College, Manitoba: <http://www.rccc.mb.ca>).

### 3. How can a student earn Prior Learning & Ministry Credit?

Prior Learning credit may be earned as a result of professional training (workshops, seminars, licenses, business and professional courses, and other institutionally-sponsored course work) or college/seminary-level learning gained through experience (University of Phoenix: <http://nca.uophx.edu>).

## 4. What are the benefits of Prior Learning & Ministry Assessment?

### Benefits to students:

- provides an opportunity to acquire college credits based on learning from work/life experience.
- reduces the amount of in-class time required to earn a credential.
- reduces the cost of education: tuition/books/parking.
- encourages placement in a Certificate or Diploma Program at a level the student can handle and deserves.

### Benefits to institutions:

- provides opportunities for faculty to maintain connections with business and industry.
- enhances the teaching/learning process.
- fosters appropriate student placement, maintaining retention.

### Benefits to community:

- partnerships between institutions and employers increases the efficiency of training.
- promotes a lifelong learning culture.
- Institution recognizes individualized learning from diverse backgrounds.

## 5. Who is eligible for Prior Learning & Ministry Assessment?

All students are welcome to explore the possibilities of PLMA. Credits earned through PLMA do not guarantee entry into a program, and candidates must follow normal program admission procedures.

## 6. What is a portfolio?

A portfolio is information and evidence that has been accumulated about a learner's past experiences and accomplishments. It is a useful tool for organizing life experiences into a manageable form for assessment. Normally, a portfolio contains descriptions of learning with supporting documentation to verify learning claimed. A portfolio is not only a product, it is a process by which prior learning experiences can be translated into educational outcomes, documented and assessed for academic credit.

## 7. What are the benefits of the Portfolio Development process?

- It provides assistance with navigating the assessment process for students.
- It provides an opportunity to explore life experiences and accomplishments in depth.
- It promotes development of academic skills and self-confidence, and enhances motivation to work toward career goals.

**8. What is a challenge process?**

A challenge process is a method of assessment other than portfolio, developed and evaluated by subject-expert faculty to measure an individual's learning achievements against course learning outcomes. It measures demonstrated learning through a variety of written and non-written evaluation methods for the purpose of awarding credit without requiring enrolment in a course. Challenge processes may include written examinations, simulations, and/or interviews. For more information on the Challenge process contact the [Academic Services](#) office.

**9. How is prior learning assessed?**

Prior Learning & Ministry Assessment credit is assessed on a course-match basis. A team of assessors, including faculty with expertise in both the subject matter and course content, are requested to review prior learning applications. It is up to the candidate to demonstrate that he/she has achieved the learning outcomes of the course. The assessor reviews documentation submitted and may arrange with the candidate for supplementary processes if required. The assessor may verify the documentation with the PLMA candidate or may contact employers/ references as submitted.

**10. What is the difference between Transfer Credit and Prior Learning & Ministry Assessment?**

Transfer of Academic Credit involves the examination of previous educational credentials from a recognized educational institution, presented by the student in the form of a transcript and course outlines. Prior Learning & Ministry Assessment is the assessment and evaluation of learning acquired through work/life experiences against course learning outcomes for which credit is being sought.

**11. Portfolio Development**

*Prior Learning & Ministry Assessment* is designed for learners who wish to clarify their personal, ministry and educational goals. One component of the process is the option to seek academic credit for learning acquired through life and work experience. This process will assist the learner to document her/his learning against course outcomes for the purpose of obtaining credit. The specific processes can be tailored to assist the learner who is preparing a portfolio for employment purposes or a resume for ministry opportunities.

**12. What courses are eligible for assessment?**

Students are invited to document learning in any course where they can provide documentation of learning outcomes. The internship component of any undergraduate program is not eligible.

**13. What are the Prior Learning & Ministry Assessment fees?**

The *Prior Learning & Ministry Assessment* process has a fee of \$200. Students are welcome and invited to review the information related to the process before submitting any fee, but are required to pay the fee prior to seeking the services of an academic advisor. Credits awarded are processed with a \$20 per credit-hour fee.

**14. What is the College's Prior Learning & Ministry Assessment appeals policy?**

Appeals with respect to Prior Learning & Ministry Assessment are part of the BCS general appeal policies and practices. Please check the applicable catalogue for the policy as stated.

**15. Why go through the Prior Learning & Ministry Assessment process?**

This process can be a useful tool for facilitating adult learners' access to academic programs. The purpose of the process is to help learners understand who they are and establish some ministry and educational goals. The process is also a tool that will help students document their learning from work and life experience and organize that learning into a meaningful format for prior learning & ministry assessment.

**16. Will the Prior Learning & Ministry Assessment process count toward my degree?**

No, the process is a tool for you to use, it is not designed to earn credit in and of itself.

**17. How does someone demonstrate equivalent learning?**

Learning which is equivalent to classroom learning is demonstrated by describing and producing evidence about the nature, scope and validity of the concrete experiences that contributed to a student's learning.

**18. Is it "better" to complete the process of submitting an experiential learning portfolio for academic credit or to take the comparable course in a classroom?**

There are several different opinions about this question. Because the process of developing and submitting an experiential learning portfolio is an extremely challenging and demanding one, some students feel working with an instructor in a classroom setting is more time- and cost-effective. The process of receiving academic credit in a traditional setting (i.e. a classroom) and receiving it in a non-traditional setting (i.e. via an experiential learning portfolio) are quite different. The process of applying for non-traditional academic credit presumes the learner can be self-directed in his/her academic planning and will assume the responsibility for assessing and resolving her/his learning needs. Because this can be an ambiguous process, some students feel a traditionally-structured classroom experience is preferable.

Learners who enjoy initiating projects and directing their own learning processes, who learn in an autonomous way, and who see a self-directed process as essential to their academic growth, enjoy the experience of completing an experiential learning portfolio. It is important to remember that, although the credit for experiential learning process may, in fact, save time and money, its original purpose is to provide learners who have significant personal and professional experiences a mechanism to use those experiences in an academic arena.

**19. Can a student receive academic credit based upon experience alone?**

Students receive equivalent academic credit for the learning they have acquired. Academic credit is not awarded on the basis of experience alone.

**20. How much academic credit do students receive for experiential learning?**

This, of course, depends upon the experience of the student and how well the prior learning is documented in the portfolio. A student who has completed the initial process will understand the structure of the program he/she is wishing to take. Not all experiential learning will apply to all programs. That is why students will select a program of studies early in the process and then focus the rest of their time on the experiences/learning that fit the chosen program of studies. In addition, experiential learning must be at college/seminary level to qualify for college or seminary credit.

**21. Do all programs allow credit for prior learning?**

All programs allow advanced standing for prior learning. Students must fulfill residency requirements (see the Academic Calendar for details) with Briercrest College & Seminary to earn a certificate or degree.

**22. What is the most difficult aspect of compiling an experiential learning portfolio?**

Feedback from previous students has indicated that completing an experiential learning portfolio is challenging because of the amount and variety of thinking and writing that is demanded by the task.

**23. Are writing skills important to completing the portfolio?**

Writing skills (that is, organization of thoughts, use of current and correct grammar and style, and accurate punctuation and spelling) are absolutely essential to completing and developing a quality portfolio. Writing is the mechanism by which students demonstrate to assessors that they have gained knowledge and skills comparable to what is taught in the classroom.

Although it is not necessary to consider yourself a professional writer to complete this process, it is critical that you are able to clearly describe your experiences to your assessor, using writing as your means of expression.

**24. What do you look for in an autobiographical essay?**

The essay should summarize the chronological history of the author. It should provide the reader with a clear, concise, chronologically-ordered listing of major life events and learning. Autobiographical essays should demonstrate the ways that a student has integrated personal and professional experiences into his/her life. Students should show that they have approached their life experiences as “lifelong learners;” that they have thought critically about life events and used and applied this meaning in patterns of living.

**25. Is it really necessary to look at the course syllabi before submitting the portfolio for assessment?**

It is very important to look at the objectives for the particular course for which one is interested in applying for credit. Reading the syllabus will enable the student to assess the scope of the course content and objectives/expectations and match outcomes of the course with outcomes from her/his experience.

**26. Can I apply for credit for a "required course"?**

All courses except internships are potential candidates for prior learning credit.

**27. Can I write the description of learning for several courses based on one experience?**

When you write your description of learning, you are presenting the learning outcomes that you acquired as a result of your experiences. If you can present your learning outcomes in such a way as to describe more than one major body of learning, then go ahead. However,

many learners find this difficult and feel it is better to identify separate experiences to detail distinct learning outcomes. If you are uncertain about how to proceed, speak to your advisor.

**28. What types of documentation are the most helpful to assessors?**

Documentation that clearly verifies experiences and concisely describes learning processes is the most valuable. This type of documentation addresses not only distinct experiences, but also specific learning that occurred.

**29. What kinds of mistakes, oversights, etc., cause portfolios to be sent back?**

Portfolios may be returned before they are forwarded to the assessors for some of the following reasons:

- failure to address learning and the theory upon which practice is built
- lack of focus and clarity
- lack of organization or poor presentation
- overlap between courses' descriptions of learning
- poor spelling or punctuation
- failure to specifically and explicitly relate learning experiences to the outcomes of the course.

**30. How will I know when the portfolio is ready to be submitted?**

You can feel confident in submitting your portfolio when you have checked every possible resource that might help you in developing your portfolio and have carefully proofread and edited your work. You should look for advice from your advisor about the readiness of your portfolio for assessment.

**31. What will the team of assessors look for when assessing prior learning?**

- Authenticity: the applicant has actually demonstrated the learning outcome that is being claimed.
- Currency: the learning outcome is still valid and performable.
- Quality: the learning has reached the acceptable level.
- Relevance: the learning is applicable to the area claimed.
- Transferability: the learning outcome can be applied outside the specific context in which it was learned.
- Comparability: the prior learning is comparable in content and standard with the subject(s) in which credit is sought.

Note: The standards applied in assessing prior learning are not greater than those required to pass the subject(s).

**32: What is the maximum credit that can be received through PLMA?**

The maximum amount of credit that will be granted for life learning is dependent on the program of studies the student is working in. No more than 1/6<sup>th</sup> of credit required for any program can be achieved in the form of PLMA.

**Note: Only post-High School learning experiences prior to becoming a student with Briercrest College and Seminary can be used in the portfolio.**