

**Western Michigan University
Faculty Senate
Memorandum of Action**

MOA – 20/02

**Revision to Create Faculty-driven Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)
Opportunities for Undergraduate Programs**

Name of Council(s)/Committee(s):

Undergraduate Studies Council

Approval Date:

March 10, 2020

Implementation Date:

Upon Administrative Approval

Responsible Office(s) and Responsible Enforcement Official(s):

The Office of Academic Affairs is in charge of monitoring, enforcing, and revising this policy/document

RECOMMENDATION:

Revise existing undergraduate catalog language to allow the creation of voluntary faculty-driven prior learning assessment (PLA) opportunities for undergraduate programs. This would involve a decentralized program-level process for PLA decision-making, with some centralized data reporting. The revised policy includes a process and specific requirements for proposing and approving such PLA procedures.



3/10/2020

Bruce Ferrin, Chair, Undergraduate Studies Council

Date

☐ Approve

☐ Disapprove

☐ Other Action

Comments:



3/13/2020

Richard A. Gershon, WMU Faculty Senate President

Date

☐ Approve

☐ Disapprove

☐ Other Action

Comments:

Jennifer Bott

4.10.2020

Jennifer P. Bott, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Date

☒ Approve

☐ Disapprove

☐ Other Action

Comments:

Edward B. Montgomery

4/12/2020

Edward B. Montgomery, WMU President

Date

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Faculty Senate
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**Revision to Create Faculty-driven Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)
Opportunities for Undergraduate Programs**

RECOMMENDATION

Revise existing undergraduate catalog language to allow the creation of voluntary faculty-driven prior learning assessment (PLA) opportunities for undergraduate programs, beyond the current forms of allowable PLAs (e.g., Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) credit; College Level Examination Program (CLEP); credit by examination). These revisions would involve a decentralized program-level process for PLA decision-making, with some centralized data reporting. The revised policy includes a process and specific requirements for proposing and approving such PLA procedures.

RATIONALE/PURPOSE

PLA is a process for evaluating prior learning, as acquired through previous work experience, training, course products or other learning experiences, and awarding college credit when those experiences align with specific requirements and learning outcomes in undergraduate programs (majors, minors, core curricula). The process of evaluating prior learning often involves development, by the applicant, of a comprehensive portfolio and a procedure for portfolio review.

Research indicates there are many benefits of PLA for students and universities. For example, a Council for Adult and Experiential Learning's (CAEL) survey of over 62,000 adult learners at 48 higher-education institutions revealed adult learners granted PLA credit take more college courses and graduate at higher rates than do traditional or adult students who don't receive PLA credits. The persistence and completion rate is also dramatically higher, compared to students who don't receive PLA credits, for students of color who are granted PLA credits.

PLA is not a new idea and WMU already has several types of PLA available to students, including awarding university credit for AP and IB courses taken while in high school. The World Languages and Literatures department awards, under an existing WMU policy, retroactive credits for students who test at certain proficiency levels in various languages. Credit for military service is also available.

While PLA is not new to WMU, there are several factors currently providing incentive for expansion of PLA options. These include the significant number of non-traditional students seeking degrees after time in the work force or military. Also, there are fewer traditionally-aged college students in the Midwest. While many WMU programs have successfully developed schedules that support working professionals, WMU's limited PLA options have prevented its programs from awarding significant academic credit for prior learning.

For some time, WMU faculty have worked diligently to establish measurable learning outcomes for courses and programs. This work makes it more feasible for faculty to evaluate prior learning through portfolios or other methods that document work, training, and learning experiences.

Many peer institutions are ahead of WMU in their use of PLA. A recent review of PLA policies found established procedures within such universities as Central Michigan University, Pennsylvania State

University, University of Alabama, University of Wisconsin and the University of Maryland. PLA procedures at these schools all involve an assessment fee and a significantly reduced tuition cost for credits awarded. Central Michigan claims that, to date, they have evaluated over 10,000 portfolios. It seems to be an appropriate time to allow interested WMU faculty to offer such opportunities for their programs and students.

It is important to acknowledge that the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) recognizes and supports the use of PLAs. Within its Assumed Practices regarding Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support (CRRT.B.10.020.B.g), HLC notes that an institution must have “a clear policy on the maximum allowable credits for prior learning as a reasonable proportion of the credits required to complete the student’s program. Credit awarded for prior learning is documented, evaluated, and appropriate for the level of degree awarded.” HLC does not require that accredited universities grant credit for prior learning, nor does HLC require its approval for programs that use PLA, as long as the PLA processes follow a clear university policy.

STAKEHOLDERS

For interested faculty who agree to create PLA opportunities for their undergraduate programs, this proposed revision could assist in recruiting more nontraditional students to their programs, as well as supporting such existing students. It can also positively impact the time to degree for current or potential undergraduate students engaged in such programs.

HISTORY:

- a) Effective date of current version: Unknown
- b) Date first adopted: Unknown
- c) Revision history:
- d) Proposed date of next review: None

CURRENT POLICY MODIFICATION (additions in bold and deletions with strikethrough)

From within the Undergraduate Catalog; Academic Policies; Registration, Records and Academic Regulations: Credit by Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) ~~by Examination~~

Each academic unit responsible for offering an undergraduate program may, with the approval of its dean, establish a procedure for granting credit via PLA, including the use of portfolios or any other methods noted within this policy, for any undergraduate course. All credit by PLA is subject to the following regulations:

- 1. The academic unit which offers an undergraduate degree program, major, minor or certificate program shall determine if a PLA process may be used to obtain credit for a particular undergraduate-level course required by a degree program, major or minor in that academic unit.**
- 2. All PLA applications will be administered, graded and/or reviewed, by no fewer than two faculty members. If the unit offering a given course for which PLA credit is sought is different than the unit offering the undergraduate major, minor, core curriculum course or certificate program, then faculty from the unit teaching the course should conduct the review of the request for granting prior learning credit for the course. The review of requests for prior learning credit must be completed within one calendar year after the receipt of the request.**

3. All PLAs shall be graded “Credit” or “No Credit”. “Credit” will be posted on the transcript as “Credit earned by PLA” without letter grade or honor points. Such credits will be listed as completed credits for one or more courses within a given program, but not counted in the grade point average. Students who do not achieve a sufficient score to receive “Credit” will have no entry made on their transcripts.
4. Any credit awarded via PLA can be used to meet any University graduation requirements.
5. Credit awarded via PLA will be placed on a student’s transcripts only after the student is admitted to a specific undergraduate degree program, major, minor or certificate program, although PLA request assessments may occur prior to such admission.
6. PLA credit earned at another university, whether awarded by examination or some other form of PLA, may transfer to WMU in accordance with the current policies governing transfer of credit.
7. The maximum number of total credits allowed to be granted via all forms of PLA must be a reasonable proportion of the credits or courses required to complete a student’s program. This amount may vary per program; however, the number of credits awarded via a WMU PLA assessment process may be no more than 45 undergraduate credits. For certificate programs, the maximum number of PLA credits awarded can be no more than one-half of the required credits (as rounded-up to include all credits for a given course).
8. The process to create a PLA opportunity, beyond that of solely examinations for a given undergraduate degree program, major, minor or certificate program must be initiated by faculty from that degree program, major, minor or certificate program. The written procedures for granting credit for prior learning must be approved by the chair, director and college dean of the department and college that offers the degree program, major, minor or certificate program for which prior learning credit is requested. These written procedures must specify:
 - a) the specific courses for which PLA credit can be granted for a given degree program, major, minor or certificate program;
 - b) detailed learning outcomes for each of these courses;
 - c) rubrics that show how prior learning from previous work experience, training, course products or other learning experiences, as evidenced by an applicant via a portfolio or other means, will be evaluated against the learning outcomes for each specific course;
 - d) the overall review process including the number of reviewers and review completion timelines;
 - e) the detailed application process
 1. including when a PLA application can be made (e.g., before or after admission to a given degree program, major, minor or certificate program or while already taking classes in a specific degree program, major, minor or certificate program);
 2. how such an application is to be submitted (e.g., portfolio, credentials, demonstrations).
 - f) the maximum number of credits, and justification for such number, that an applicant could apply for PLA credit, not to exceed the university maximum amount for undergraduate PLA.
9. Each department with program faculty engaged in reviewing and approving credits via any type of PLA process, shall provide uniform data on such activities to the appropriate WMU entity for reporting and Higher Learning Commission (HLC) accreditation purposes.

Advanced Placement Program (AP)

Western Michigan University participates in the Advanced Placement Program (AP) of the College Board. Students who earn the required score on an AP exam will receive college credit in the appropriate subject. For information about AP score requirements and equivalent credit awarded at Western, visit wmich.edu/registrar/students/advising/students-advising-ap. Students should have College Grade Reports of their test scores sent to the Office of Admissions at Western Michigan University (college code 1902).

After AP College Grade Reports of examination scores are received and evaluated, the Office of Admissions will notify students of the specific decisions regarding any credit award. After students' enrollment at Western, the Office of the Registrar will post course credit to students' transcripts.

College Level Examination Program (CLEP)

This program provides the opportunity to earn college credit by examination in a variety of areas of study. There are two types of tests offered—general examinations and subject examinations. Western Michigan University's credit award policies for each type are noted below. Interested students should check with their WMU academic advisors before making testing plans. Official score reports of CLEP testing should be sent to Western (college code 1902) by the College Board. In reference to CLEP credit granted by Western Michigan University and the University's graduation requirements, CLEP credit is not applicable to the required hours completed at an accredited four-year, degree-granting institution.

General Examinations

1. Students may take the general CLEP examinations only before completing 24 credit hours after entering or re-entering WMU.
2. The following eligibility rules apply to students who wish to take the general CLEP examinations:
 - Students who have already received credit for a college writing class cannot receive credit by passing the College Composition examination.
 - Students who have already received credit in a college mathematics course cannot receive credit by passing the College Mathematics examination.
 - Students who completed a WMU course or transfer equivalent that applies to the General Education Distribution Area of Fine Arts, Social and Behavioral Sciences, or Natural Sciences cannot receive credit for the corresponding CLEP examination.
3. The following guidelines shall apply in the earning of CLEP credit.
 - If a student passes the Humanities examination with a score of 50 or above, three hours of credit will be awarded in Area I (fine arts) of the General Education Program.
 - If a student passes the Social Sciences and History examination with a score of 50 or above, six hours of credit will be awarded to Area V (social and behavioral sciences) of the General Education Program.
 - If a student passes the College Composition examination with a score of 50 or above, three hours of credit for ENGL 1050 will be awarded in Proficiency 1 of the General Education Program.

- If a student passes the Natural Sciences examination with a score of 50 or above, three hours of elective credit will be awarded in Area VI (natural sciences) of the General Education Program, but will not satisfy the lab course requirement for Area VI.
- If a student passes the College Mathematics examination with a score of 50 or above, three hours of credit will be awarded in Proficiency 3 (mathematics) of the General Education Program.

Subject Examinations

CLEP subject examinations test specific knowledge areas and, unlike the general examinations, any Western student may take them and receive credit with appropriate scores. The University awards credit for only a limited number of the CLEP subject examinations. Students may not receive CLEP subject credit if they have already received college credit for an equivalent course. Visit the Office of Admissions website at wmich.edu/admissions/transfer-clep for detailed information about Western's score requirements and CLEP credit policy.

Comprehensive Examinations

Each department shall have the authority, with the approval of its dean, to establish a procedure for granting credit for any course in that department through comprehensive examinations. All comprehensive examinations should be administered by authorized personnel determined by the department. Each department should determine those courses for which the comprehensive examination procedure applies.

All credit by examination is subject to the following requirements:

1. All credit will be posted as credit only, without grade or honor points. Students who do not achieve a sufficient score for credit will have no entry made.
2. Credit by comprehensive examination in courses numbered 3000 or higher can be used to meet the requirement that one-half of all academic work must be completed at a four-year degree-granting institution.
3. Credit by comprehensive examination can be used to meet all other University graduation requirements, except the minimum residence requirements.
4. Credit by comprehensive examination can be posted only for admitted students who have either previous or current enrollment.
5. All credit by comprehensive examination is normally considered undergraduate credit.

~~Examination fees are assessed on a credit hour basis and are the same for all students. The current fee schedule: less than four credit hours, \$50.00 Four credit hours to eight credit hours, \$100.00. By special arrangement, some course examinations may require higher fees.~~