Students considering the academic portfolio process:
First, read through the following instructions.
Then, put together pertinent information.
Last, call 207-780-4867 for an appointment, or contact:

Joyce Lapping (207-780-4867), jlapping@usm.maine.edu
Kate Mitchell (207-780-4663), katem@usm.maine.edu

Two options for creating the GRADUATE portfolio:

1. Students may work independently, first meeting with Joyce Lapping, then with the appropriate professor who will mentor your portfolio process.

2. Using this guide, write the graduate portfolio and meet once more with your portfolio advisor before submitting it for final evaluation.
STUDENT GUIDELINES for the ACADEMIC PORTFOLIO
UNDERGRADUATE

An academic portfolio submitted to the Office for Prior Learning at the University of Southern Maine is a collection of evidence: "a formal communication presented by the student to the university as a part of a petition requesting credit or recognition for learning outside the college classroom. The [academic] portfolio makes its case by identifying [college-level] learning clearly and succinctly, so that faculty can use it, alone or in combination with other evidence, as the basis for their evaluation" allowing either course-equivalency or general university credits toward a degree.

Construction of an academic portfolio is not simply an account of your prior learning. It is in and of itself, a learning process. As John Dewey long argued, meaningful learning involves both active and reflective processes. The process of building an academic portfolio offers the student an opportunity to recapitulate key experiences, analyze and interpret them, and articulate and critique how these experiences contributed to what they have learned. The portfolio process has the potential to significantly deepen understanding of our experiences and how they have influenced who we are and how we live our lives.

The challenge of a graduate academic portfolio is to bring experiences together with applicable theories and concepts from the academic disciplines. In doing so, students can become ever keener observers of their own experiences while also growing in their capacity to understand conceptually abstract material. Well-written graduate-level academic portfolios provide ample evidence of the knowledge students have learned, for which they intend to receive graduate-level college credit. Students must document their specific graduate-level learning competencies which they have acquired through prior experience.

Learning competencies are: knowledge, abilities, and/or skills that students have acquired through their prior learning and that relate to graduate-level college content. In the portfolio process, students must provide convincing documentation, which is the evidence, written or performed, substantiating that knowledge, skills, and abilities have indeed been learned from their prior experience(s). Moreover, the written content of the portfolio must meet graduate-level standards, articulated on the following pages, including the following components, and addressing the following issues:

1) **Title Sheet.** Provide two copies of the title sheet, one for PLA and one for the evaluator(s), so that you may be contacted directly. Include your name, address, date of submission, phone number, and e-mail address.

2) **Table of Contents.** Include a one-page reference to all subsequent sections of your portfolio by page number.

3) **Letter of Intent.** Write a letter to the Office of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) which explicitly states the reasons for submitting your portfolio and the outcomes which you expect to emerge. The letter of intent will include the following:
   - Learning outcomes you intend to prove
   - Area(s) of expertise you intend to demonstrate
4) **Current résumé.** Update your résumé of one or two pages, to include a synopsis of your educational background and work history. Include relevant professional memberships, awards, commendations, publications, and supplemental experience or achievements (i.e. Speak fluent French; or Certificate in Court Mediation).

5) **Unofficial Transcript.** Submit an unofficial USM transcript along with transcripts from other institutions you have attended.

6) **Syllabus for Course(s).** Your graduate portfolio is course-specific and therefore must include a syllabus for each course pertaining to your portfolio content. A syllabus will serve as the basis for your graduate academic portfolio goals.

7) **Personal Statement.** Different from the Letter of Intent, the personal statement is autobiographical. It reveals your background relative to your graduate-level learning competencies. A personal statement is your opportunity to introduce yourself to the evaluator(s).

   **Graduate-level learning is described as:**
   - A synergistic interplay of the candidate’s experiences, with his/her narrative of the learning and problem-solving which has occurred. These act as springboards for...
   - …a conceptualization process to intuitively happen, which leads to …
   - …a reflection process, internalized and churned into …
   - …conscious graduate-level knowledge which, through analysis and critical thinking, can be …
   - …generalized to new learning situations … and
   - …the cycle starts again.

   Your task in the personal statement is to narrate the context in which you acquired the knowledge and relate it to the discipline in which you seek graduate-level credit. The personal statement is a personal reflection that mirrors your understanding of the discipline. It tells how you learned, rather than what; which skills, abilities, behaviors, values, and attitudes, intentional or not, you used to discover core graduate-level competencies embedded in your experiences which may give you credit in the targeted discipline.

   Here also, you may include your goals and ideals for this portfolio, as well as the organizational structure you intend to use to archive and display your learning competencies.

   **Please note that for certain portfolios the Personal Statement may be integrated into the next section. Check with your academic portfolio evaluator before writing the Personal Statement section.**

8) **Competencies and Learning Outcomes.** The learning outcomes and competencies are the heart of your presentation. Graduate academic portfolios will reflect the syllabus of the targeted graduate course. This section will most directly influence the credit your academic portfolio will earn. The competencies and learning outcomes also constitute the most challenging part of your academic portfolio to write. Your competencies will reflect the natural, logical, and expected outcomes of your experiences.

   In this section, you will give a description (with documentation) of the context in which your knowledge was gained. You will analyze, trace, and document your previous experiences, relating them to the knowledge and skills required by the target graduate discipline or course of your portfolio. This section will include specific details and insight from your past experiences and make systematic, logical connections to the theories and concepts of the graduate-level course in which you seek credit.

   To repeat in different words: this section of the portfolio requires critical reflection, an ability to synthesize meaning and impact of previous experience while at the same time connecting that meaning and impact to the requirements and criteria of the graduate course which credit you seek. You will need an awareness and understanding that it is you who is responsible for presenting your learning outcomes and competencies to the university in a narrative with documentation so strong and compelling that there is no doubt about the graduate credit you will earn in the academic portfolio.

   **Length**

   The length of this section may vary from five to fifteen pages, depending on the type and number of credits you are seeking. Factors which may affect length include: subject area, quantity and type of documentation, and the theoretical complexity of your knowledge on the subject. Specific detail and personal insight in this section is likely to develop a stronger case and earn you a maximum number of credits.
To Process Knowledge

You must know how to:

- Analyze the components,
- Distinguish crucial information from the trivial,
- Associate new information with stored facts,
- Integrate information from many sources to solve problems,
- Gain new awareness,
- Reflect on the applicability of your learned outcomes and competencies not only to self, but also to the world.

To Express Learning Competencies

Cognitive skills which will aid in expressing your learning competencies are:

- The ability to see patterns and connections in diverse information.
- The ability to organize and communicate these relationships.
- The ability to conceptualize many sides of a controversial issue, to understand the underlying issues and differing perspectives, and to effectively resolve informational conflict.
- The ability to learn from your experiences – you should be able to generate behavioral alternatives, to analyze a particular behavior in the context of another’s behavior; to determine the complexity and multi-dimensionality of intellect; to change or open your mind.

To Write a Successful Narrative

Your narrative, to be successful and to earn the maximum credit, may describe your learning competencies as those which:

- Describe your knowledge of the subject comparable to a graduate level;
- Specify when, where, and how you acquired the knowledge;
- Reflect your own strengths and weaknesses in context of these experiences;
- Relate your experiences to specific graduate-level course expectations and theories which have specific learning outcomes (which may offer equivalency credits);
- Have specific documentation;
- Elaborate upon the relationships between your documentation and the learning competencies you introduce and identify;
- Connect to present experience and future goals.

The Office for Prior Learning Assessment encourages students to submit a rough draft of Sections 7 & 8, Personal Statement and Competencies and Learning Outcomes, so that the academic portfolio evaluator can provide feedback and useful comments prior to the final portfolio submission.

9) Documentation. The material which you submit to prove your claims of graduate-level learning outcomes and competencies is called documentation. Documentation is the skeleton, the supporting foundation of your graduate academic portfolio and must specifically be identified with each learning outcome and competency.

Effective documentation:

- Provides direct evidence and coherent account of your competencies and graduate-level learning outcomes;
- Supports your narrative, specifically including graduate-level learning outcomes and their contexts;
- Accounts for the significance of your learning in terms of life goals and disciplinary knowledge.

Evidence may include audio or video cassettes, CD’s, DVD’s, candidate-created websites, photographs, and written evidence, such as licenses, certificates, and other examples (see below).
Your documentation for graduate-level learning should be specifically noted in your text as you discuss each learning competency and outcome. Organize and edit your documentation carefully to that request.

**Examples of documentation include, but are not limited to:**

- Job descriptions
- Awards, certificates, letters, references, or job verifications
- Diplomas for previous degrees
- Licenses granted by state or national agencies
- Scores on licensing exams
- Personnel evaluations
- Evidence of promotion
- Memberships in professional trade organizations (showing also their requirements for membership)
- Newspaper or magazine clippings demonstrating evidence of your experiences, or relating directly to you or your company
- Examples of written or artistic work
- Demonstration of dance, artistic or oral performance, or instruction on audio or video cassette, CD, DVD, candidate-created website, or photographs
- Evidence of adopted suggestions or outcomes
- Verification of completed course, workshops, seminars, and other educational events

10) **Annotated Bibliography.** At the conclusion of your graduate academic portfolio, include a list and brief description of all the books, articles, pamphlets, and other sources, electronic or in print, to which you referred. Use standard MLA, Chicago Style, or APA format and conventions. This list will strengthen the theoretical foundation of your learning and make your presentation more compelling.

*Please note: Course-specific academic portfolios will usually require this section. Check with your academic portfolio evaluator before writing this section to be sure it is needed.*

11) **Evaluation.**

**Criteria by Which You May be Evaluated**

Your academic portfolio evaluator may consider the following criteria:

- Your ability to state and explain learning competencies, as you also include specific details and insights;
- Your facility to trace and document meaning in performance and behavior;
- Your ability to describe and analyze the context in which your graduate-level learning competencies and outcomes were developed;
- Your ability to interpret, analyze, and transfer knowledge, learning competencies, outcomes, and personal attributes into leadership roles;
- Your ability to synthesize data and experiential situations for use in problem-solving and decision-making areas;
- Your ability to relate professional knowledge and/or core competencies embedded in your experiences to concepts, theories, and research pertaining to the relevant graduate-level discipline of your academic portfolio.
- Your ability to document each competency and learning outcome at the graduate level.
- Your ability to demonstrate graduate-level competency in writing.

**Personal Qualities Which May Indicate Measurable Abilities**

Several personal qualities, generally more subtly present among the competencies, may also indicate measurable abilities:

- Personal and professional maturity
- Interpersonal communication
- Problem-solving abilities
- Motivation
o Organizational skills
o Leadership abilities
o Role-modeling for new learning
o Teaching or facilitation skills
o Empathy
o Judgment about and/or discrimination of options


a) Discover.
   • Make an appointment with Joyce Lapping (207-780-4867) prior to starting any academic portfolio to sort the details and procedures for the process, and to establish an evaluator for your portfolio.
   • List the competencies and graduate-level outcomes you believe you can support with documentation.
   • List the graduate course(s) which may best match your graduate-level learning competencies and experience.
   • Gather supporting documentation which you will specifically key to each outcome.

b) Prewrite.
   • Write a narrative (unless directed not to do so) to remind you and explain to your evaluator the sources of your competencies and learning outcomes.
   • Gather supporting documentation which you will specifically key to each outcome.
   • Key each learning outcome and competency directly to the outcomes of the graduate syllabus (syllabi) you submit.

13) Academic Portfolio Timeline.

Below is a timeline for Academic Portfolio submission dates. Note that the timeline begins with a meeting with your evaluator, or the Director of PLA.

Week 1: First Meeting. Meet with either Joyce Lapping, Director of PLA, or your assigned portfolio evaluator.

Week 2: Title Page and Letter of Intent. Draft and submit a Title Page, and Letter of Intent, which is a letter to the evaluator telling him/her what you are trying to achieve.

Week 4: Resume, Transcript, and Syllabus. Submit a current Résumé. Also submit an unofficial Transcript and a Syllabus (course-specific if required) for each course covered in your portfolio.

Week 8: Personal Statement. Submit a Personal Statement, which is a narrative description of the learning you achieved on the graduate level. The statement should directly pertain to portions of the course objectives in the graduate syllabus submitted for your portfolio.

Week 12: Competencies and Outcomes. You will submit a course-specific portfolio and base your discussion of the Competencies and Outcomes of your graduate-level learning achievements, which occurred outside the traditional classroom, on the syllabus(i) you are submitting.
For your draft, this discussion can be completed in an outline format, especially if you are doing more than one course, and if you will want to integrate the personal statement with the *graduate-level* competencies in the final document.

Week 14: **Documentation.** Collect and label your Documentation for your *graduate* competencies and outcomes.

Week 15: **Annotated Bibliography.** Add an Annotated Bibliography to your draft. On the *graduate* level, it is required.

Once the draft has been submitted to your evaluator, and you have received comments, you have one semester to hand in a final copy for evaluation. If more time is needed, please put your intentions in writing.
COMPETENCE-BASED ACADEMIC PORTFOLIOS*

Evaluators use a competence-based method to determine academic portfolio credit awards. Competencies are personal characteristics or knowledge that an individual may develop through life experiences. Students are expected to demonstrate and verify these competencies and learning outcomes in academic disciplines in order to earn academic credit. It is the context in which the competency is used rather than the competency itself which creates graduate college credit. The following list may help you identify various competencies.

Communication

(Effectively listening, sending, and responding to messages from a variety of audiences.)

**SPEAK**  Effectively articulate your thoughts orally

**WRITE**  Form clear and concise written thoughts

**LISTEN**  Hear with thoughtful and objective attention, listen actively, and paraphrase

Flexibility and Creativity

(Effectively producing innovative ideas, design, and methods for new and/or existing situations, events, and procedures as well as artistic expression.)

**CREATE**  Be original and expressive

**INNOVATE**  Solve problems in unique ways

**ADAPT**  Accommodate multiple demands and see alternative courses of action

**CONCEPTUALIZE**  Derive ideas from inferences

Critical Thinking

(Effectively analyzing problems, ideas, and situations)

**MAKE DECISIONS**  Arrive at solutions that end uncertainty and dispute

**PROBLEM SOLVE**  Develop solutions

**THINK CRITICALLY**  Think outside the box, use your mind to theorize, analyze, intend, reflect, reconsider, and remember

**THINK FORWARD**  Anticipate, assess needs

**REASON**  Form conclusions, inferences, and judgments

**IDENTIFY ISSUES**  Apply criteria, analyze, and interpret

Planning and Organization

(Effectively managing time, energy, and resources)

**VISUALIZE**  Predict future trends and patterns

**INITIATE**  Implement projects and ideas

**SCHEDULE**  Set and reach goals

**PRIORITIZE**  Arrange according to importance

**ACCOUNT FOR/ASSESS**  Evaluate plans or decisions, and follow through

**DIMENSIONAL INSIGHT**  Illustrate, display, and create

Management and Administration

(Effectively managing, handling, and directing places, units, events, and/or situations)

**LEAD**  Effectively oversee and direct people

**MOTIVATE**  Inspire others

**DELEGATE**  Identify and select people for tasks

**BUDGET**  Allocate assets

**CONDUCT MEETINGS**  Lead, negotiate, and mediate

**PRESENT**  Consider learning styles; use various media

Interpersonal / Human Relations

(Effectively interacting with others)

**NETWORK**  Develop interactions with peers, supervisors, and subordinates

**BE A TEAM PLAYER**  Encourage and appreciate contributions of others

**USE DIPLOMACY**  Negotiate without arousing hostility as you deal with others
Research and Investigation

(Effectively seeking out and utilizing information)
IDENTIFY Pinpoint problems, needs, and solutions
DESIGN
EXPERIMENTS Test and validate data
USE TECHNOLOGY Know and use a variety of appropriate resources
EVALUATE Develop questionnaires and models

Personal Development

(Effectively inventing and maturing a self with the following characteristics)
MOTIVATED Go beyond the expected
COMMITTED Decide for the common good
INDEPENDENT Work without guidance
CONFIDENT Have a positive personal attitude
ENERGETIC Display enthusiasm
KNOWLEDGEABLE Proficient in a field of study

Information Management

(Effectively command the barrage of information and data that presents itself daily)
SYNTHESIZE Organize facts, concepts, and principles
CATALOG Compile, rank, and itemize information
MANIPULATE INFORMATION Evaluate against appropriate standards
E-KNOWLEDGE Understand and implement electronic and computer-related concepts
SORT Classify and categorize data and objectives
**APPROVAL**

Students must receive advanced written approval from the graduate academic department before pursuing course equivalency through the graduate academic portfolio process.

**EVALUATION**

Whereas a superficial, introductory-level of learning is not credit-worthy, and complex learning over a sustained and substantial period of time may be, it is essential that the portfolio candidate distinguishes between the two levels. The following phrase should be your mantra when writing the academic portfolio:

Remember, quantity does not equal quality.

Take for example a student who has worked for a company for ten years – does the student have one year of learning experience repeated ten times, or ten years of learning experience that demonstrate growth, advancement, and progress in expertise and level of difficulty? The graduate-level academic portfolio should be an illustration of vertical growth rather than horizontal development.

The question the student needs to ask: Is my learning truly graduate-level? Oftentimes a student may learn components which provide personal value and benefit, but is that learning sufficient in scope, range, detail, complexity, or general content to be valid for academic credit consideration at the graduate level?

Quality of learning can be exemplified in many ways. What evidence of graduate-level learning outcomes can be presented? What competencies and factual knowledge are necessary to process relevant information? How are these competencies and knowledge transferrable in order to deal with the practical problems in one’s job?

For course equivalency evaluations within a graduate department, the standard for quality is the same as that shown by a student passing the course with a B or better. Appropriate departmental faculty will evaluate the graduate academic portfolio and grant graduate credit as justified.

**PRESENTATION INFORMATION**

Major sections of the academic portfolio should be separated by tabbed inserts. In order to enable the evaluator to provide you with feedback, please do not put the résumé, personal statement, or learning competency sections in plastic. You may use plastic for the documentation section, especially if you are using original certificates, letters, or similar information which you want to protect.

**PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT FEES**

Graduate portfolio candidates must pay an assessment fee of $75 at the time of the graduate academic portfolio evaluation.

Once credits have been assessed, but before any graduate credits are posted to a USM transcript, the following credit fees must be paid:

$100 per credit hour

Graduate academic portfolio fees must be accompanied by the Graduate Portfolio Assessment Fee Posting form and may be mailed to: Portfolio Assessment, Office for Prior Learning Assessment, 85 Bedford Street, P. O. Box 9300, Portland, Maine 04104-9300.

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2 Wood, Diane R. Former Associate Professor of Leadership, Lewiston-Auburn College.
4 From page 9, based on "Career Services and Professional Life Development Transferrable Skills," USM and the work of Alverno College, Wisconsin.