PLA STUDENT GUIDELINES
UNDERGRADUATE
Resident Assistant or Tutor
ACADEMIC PORTFOLIO

The following pages describe the required content areas and process for the PLA academic portfolio for a resident assistant or certified tutor (including TESOL). These portfolios may be presented for general elective credits only.

First, read through the following instructions.
Then, put together pertinent information (but do not complete the portfolio).
Last, call 207-780-4663 for an appointment, or contact:

Ashley Collins, Ph.D. (207-780-5909), ashley.c.collins@maine.edu
Kate Mitchell (207-780-4663), katem@maine.edu

Two options for creating the academic portfolio:

1. Students may work independently, first meeting with Ashley Collins, then using this guide to write the portfolio, meeting with the portfolio evaluator before submitting it for final evaluation, or
2. Students may take the Portfolio Development Course, a three-credit course.

247 Luther Bonney Hall
85 Bedford Street
Portland, Maine 04104-9300
1-800-800-4876, x4663 or
207-780-4663
www.usm.maine.edu/pla
STUDENT GUIDELINES for the ACADEMIC PORTFOLIO  
RESIDENT ASSISTANT OR TUTOR

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. If you are considering the completion of a resident assistant or tutor portfolio, you must have been serving as an RA or a certified tutor for two years or more and may present your academic portfolio for general elective credits only.

Construction of an academic portfolio is not simply an account of your experiences or 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 an 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 academic portfolios provide ample evidence of the knowledge students have learned, for which they intend to receive college credit. Students must document their specific 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 college-level 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 high college-level standards, articulated on the following pages, including the following components, and addressing the following issues. Please also see the timeline for this portfolio on page 5, for more specific sequencing and processing details.

1) Title Page. Submit two copies of your title page which includes personal data (including your e-mail and telephone), subject area working title, area of degree plan for which this academic portfolio is being submitted, type of presentation (performance, art examples, document, etc.), date, and signature of the student.
2) **Table of Contents.** Include a one-page reference to all subsequent sections of your portfolio by page number.

3) **Letter of Intent.** Submit a letter to the evaluator telling him/her your intention to earn college credit through your academic portfolio and how you plan to demonstrate your prior knowledge.

4) **Current résumé.** Update your résumé of one or two pages, to include a synopsis of your educational background and work history. Be sure to include military background if applicable. 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) **Personal Statement.** Different from the Letter of Intent, the personal statement is autobiographical. It reveals your background relative to your college-level learning competencies. A personal statement is your opportunity to introduce yourself to the evaluator(s).

   **College-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 college-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 college-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 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.

7) **Competencies and Learning Outcomes.** The learning outcomes and competencies are the heart of your presentation. 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 discipline 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 discipline 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 subject area for 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 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 (See also page 9)

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;
- 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 subject area expectations and theories which have specific learning outcomes;
- 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 6 & 7, 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.

8) Documentation. The material which you submit to prove your claims of college-level learning outcomes and competencies is called documentation. Documentation is the skeleton, the supporting foundation of your 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 college-level learning outcomes;
- Supports your narrative, specifically including 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 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

9) Annotated Bibliography. At the conclusion of your 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.

10) 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 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 discipline of your academic portfolio.
- Your ability to document each competency and learning outcome.
- Your ability to demonstrate college-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
- Organizational skills
- Leadership abilities
- Role-modeling for new learning
- Teaching or facilitation skills
- Empathy
- Judgment about and/or discrimination of options

**11) Procedural Steps Which May Help in Your Academic Portfolio Preparation.**

a) Discover.
   - Make an appointment with Ashley Collins (207- 780- 4663) 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 college-level outcomes you believe you can support with documentation.
   - List the course(s) which may best match your college-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 learning outcomes and competencies.
   - Key each learning outcome and competency directly to the subject area of your portfolio.

c) Organize and Submit.
   - Organize the narrative and accompanying documentation.
   - Write and edit.
   - Complete and submit this preliminary draft to your portfolio evaluator for suggestions and edits.
   - Complete and submit a finalized portfolio (if necessary).

**12) Academic Portfolio Timeline: One semester**

Below is a one-semester timeline for Academic Portfolio submission dates. Note that the timeline begins with a meeting with your evaluator, or the Director of PLA, and your Letter of Permission.

The student will have one semester from the date of the Letter of Permission from your advisor or the Director of PLA in which to prepare and submit the academic portfolio. If the student fails to submit the portfolio within that one-semester period, the student will forfeit the evaluation fee and will have to resubmit a new Registration Form and Evaluation Fee, as well as seek a new Letter of Permission to begin the process again.

**DUE DATE MATERIALS DUE**

Week 1: First Meeting, Registration Form, and Letter of Permission. Meet either with Ashley Collins, Director of PLA, or your assigned portfolio evaluator. Discuss your plan for completing the Academic Portfolio process.
When you are granted permission to begin work on the portfolio, submit to PLA the official Registration Form, accompanied by the evaluation fee at this time, prior to the start of the portfolio process.

A Letter of Permission is issued to the student, with copies sent to his/her advisor, the Director of Prior Learning Assessment, and the chair of the department in which the academic portfolio credit is sought. (No action is required of the chair, though they must be informed.)

With this letter, the student is officially asked to begin the academic portfolio, and the one-semester timeline for submission starts with the date on this letter.

Week 2: Letter of Intent. Submit a letter to the evaluator telling him/her your intention to earn college credit through your academic portfolio and how you plan to demonstrate your prior knowledge.

Week 4: Résumé and Transcript. Submit your current résumé to your evaluator. Include your educational and military background along with the usual employment history. Also submit an unofficial transcript for each educational institution attended.

Week 5: Title Page. Submit a draft of your title page which includes personal data, subject area working title, area of degree plan for which this academic portfolio is being submitted, type of presentation (performance, art examples, document, etc.), date, and signature of the student.

Week 8: Personal Statement. Submit a personal statement, which is a narrative description of the learning you achieved at the college level.

For your general elective credits, include a general discussion of your college-level learning and from where it was acquired. In the personal statement, communicate information about who are, highlighting both personal and professional experiences that generated growth, and helped you move closer to your goals.

Week 12: Competencies and Outcomes. If you are completing a general elective portfolio, discuss your competencies and outcomes on which you are basing your request for earning the university credits.

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 competencies in the final document. The final copy, however, must be written in paragraph format. Remember that credit is given for the learning and not the experience.

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

Week 15: Annotated Bibliography. Add an annotated bibliography to your portfolio. Although it is not required, a bibliography is highly recommended. Please check with your evaluator if you are in doubt.

Week 16: Completed Copy. Submit your Completed Copy for evaluation. Please expect at least four weeks before the evaluation is complete. Your evaluator will complete evaluation and transcripting forms and submit them to PLA. Upon a successful evaluation, you will be assessed per credit hour for your credits to be posted to your USM transcript.
# LEARNING COMPETENCIES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT WORK SHEET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience (In what learning situations have I been involved?)</th>
<th>Tasks/Duties Involved in Each Experience (What responsibilities did I have in each of the experiences listed in Column 1?)</th>
<th>Learning Outcomes or Competencies (What knowledge was required to perform the experiences listed in Column 2?)</th>
<th>Documentation (What evidence do I provide to support knowledge shown in Column 3?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment 1.</td>
<td>1. a. b. 2. a. b. c. (continued on attached page)</td>
<td>Task 1a. 1b. 1c (continued on attached page)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-credit Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Licenses, Awards, Certifications</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Volunteer Experience</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Recreation &amp; Hobbies</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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 college credit. The following list may help you identify various competencies.

**Communication**

| 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**

| 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**

| MAKE DECISIONS | Arrive at solutions that end uncertainty and dispute |
| PROBLEM SOLVE | Think outside the box, use your mind to theorize, analyze, intend, reflect, reconsider, and remember |
| THINK CRITICALLY | Anticipate, assess needs |
| THINK FORWARD | Form conclusions, inferences, and judgments |
| REASON | Apply criteria, analyze, and interpret |
| IDENTIFY ISSUES | Effectively analyzing problems, ideas, and situations |

**Planning and Organization**

| 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**

| 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**

| 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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identify</th>
<th>Pinpoint problems, needs, and solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design Experiments</td>
<td>Test and validate data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use Technology</td>
<td>Know and use a variety of appropriate resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate</td>
<td>Develop questionnaires and models</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Personal Development

(Effectively inventing and maturing a self with the following characteristics)

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</table>

### Information Management

(Effectively command the barrage of information and data that presents itself daily)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synthesize</th>
<th>Organize facts, concepts, and principles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catalog</td>
<td>Compile, rank, and itemize information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulate Information</td>
<td>Evaluate against appropriate standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Knowledge</td>
<td>Understand and implement electronic and computer-related concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort</td>
<td>Classify and categorize data and objectives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 academic portfolio should be an illustration of vertical growth rather than horizontal development.

The question the student needs to ask: Is my learning truly college-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 college or university level?

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

For course equivalency evaluations and elective credit within a department, the standard for quality is the same as that shown by a student passing the course with a C or better. Appropriate departmental faculty will evaluate the academic portfolio and grant credit as justified. For general elective credit evaluations, the demonstration of college-level competency is equated with the same grading standard. See also #10, Evaluation.

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

Portfolio candidates pay an assessment fee of $75 at the time of the academic portfolio registration.

Once credits have been assessed, but before any credits are posted to a USM transcript, the student pays the following credit fees:

$50 per credit hour

Academic portfolio fees must be accompanied by the Portfolio Assessment Fee Posting form and may be mailed to: Portfolio Assessment, Office for Prior Learning Assessment, 85 Bedford Street, 247 Luther Bonney Hall, P. O. Box 9300, Portland, Maine 04104

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.