



RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING GUIDE

A GUIDE FOR CANDIDATES

2016

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SECTION 1 GENERAL INFORMATION

1.1 What is Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)?

The Columbia College recognizes prior learning as an important part of an individual's background, whether the prior learning occurred in Canada or internationally. There are procedures that allow Columbia College to give you credit for learning related to Columbia College certificates or diplomas. It is a combination of flexible ways of evaluating people's lifelong learning, both formal and informal against a set of established standards. RPL opens doors towards achieving your post-secondary education goals. It focuses on giving recognition for learning that individuals have acquired from life experience, job training, workshops, seminars, other institutions or other experience.

RPL is not an easy way to get your certificate or diploma, but it is a different way to do it.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) – a broad umbrella concept which includes 3 types of assessment processes that are used to evaluate the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that people have acquired in their lives. There are 3 types of learning:

- Formal learning – credit courses and programs offered at post-secondary institutions
- Non-formal learning – non-credit courses, on-the-job training, and professional workshops
- Informal learning – knowledge and skills acquired through life and work experiences

The 3 processes for assessing and recognizing these forms of learning are:

1. **Transfer credit** – awarding credit at one institution for courses completed at another institution (formal learning assessment).
2. **Credential recognition** – recognizing a completed in-province, out-of-province, or international certificate, diploma, or degree (formal learning assessment).
3. **Prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR)** – assessing and recognizing a person's knowledge and skills, acquired through non-formal and informal learning, in relation to a certain goal (for example, receiving credit in a post-secondary program, meeting professional licensure/certification requirements, or obtaining employment). This includes Challenge for Credit by Course.

Prior Learning Principles

Columbia College recognizes and supports the following academic principles developed and endorsed by the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer:

- Recognition of prior learning should be based on demonstrated learning.
- Recognition of prior learning should be appropriate to the course or program in which it is accepted.
- Recognition of prior learning should be consistent with the achievement levels required by post-secondary programs in which it is accepted.
- Recognition of prior learning should be for learning that has a balance, appropriate to the subject, between theory and practical application.
- Assessment of prior learning by post-secondary institutions should be made by content specialists, with external advice as necessary.

*In some cases where transfer of credit is not awarded for formal learning, students may choose to present that learning for assessment as part of a PLAR application, where applicable.

1.2 How can I use a Prior Learning to further my career?

- Improve employment fit, enhancing performance, job satisfaction and employee retention
- Provide opportunities for individuals without formal credentials to demonstrate required skills, competencies, and knowledge for advanced education entry
- Identify individual learning gaps and career development needs
- Identify skills, competencies, and knowledge for training and education received outside of Canada or identification of bridging programs that may be necessary to take to get recognition
- Build self-confidence in capacity to succeed in learning
- Eliminate duplication of learning, and enhance affordability by reducing the cost of education and training
- Have broader options within the career already chosen, and
- Have more choices in further education and training.

In addition, specific college credits and courses gained through PLAR may increase eligibility for other benefits, training, attendance at conferences and workshops. For instance, some college level credits may be a prerequisite to attend some conferences or training, or to be chosen for certain job assignments. .

1.3 How can Prior Learning help me reach my education goals sooner?

Managing time is a major factor when students decide whether to choose Prior Learning Recognition or take classes. If credits for prior learning are received, you may not have to take as many courses in order to graduate with a Columbia College certificate or diploma.

The Prior Learning process is not intended to be used to aid students in transferring to another institution. Students should be aware that credit granted through a Prior Learning is guaranteed only towards Columbia College's graduation requirements. Other institutions may not allow transfer credits towards their degrees, diploma or certificates for courses recognized or accredited through a Prior Learning Assessment.

1.4 How recent do my learning and experiences have to be?

Columbia College recognizes that skills and knowledge may be considered out-of-date. Columbia College reserves the right to determine the time limits on courses; these vary by program. Please note that Practical Nurse Diploma courses have a one year maximum time limitation on transferring permissible nursing courses. English, Psychology, Sociology and Communication courses are accepted up to 5 years.

1.5 What is the Impact of Prior Learning on Funding – Student Loans?

If you plan to be funded by student loans, please contact student services as this may have an impact on your full time status and funding.

1.6 How long does the Recognition of Prior Learning take?

Formal Learning Assessment	Informal Learning Assessment	
Transfer Credit	Challenge for Credit by Course	Portfolio Assessment
<p>The process of determining transfer credit from other institutions into Columbia College can take up to 1 month following the submission of the “Transfer Credit Approval” form and all required documentation to the Registrar’s Office.</p> <p>If previous post-secondary credit course work has not been accepted as credit, it may be possible to have it assessed under the prior learning assessment process.</p> <p>An original transcript verifying successful completion of the course is needed; a course outline is also required.</p>	<p>The Challenge exam must be written or completed within a 4 week time period from the date the College accepts your request.</p> <p>Timelines should be considered so that all challenges can be completed at least 6 weeks prior to the start of the program.</p>	<p>Student preparation - gathering of materials, getting references and putting the evidence of learning together - can involve as little as a week or as much as a few months of part-time effort.</p> <p>The amount of time you will require depends on access to your own records, how well they are organized and your skills at preparing for a challenge for credit or putting a portfolio together.</p> <p>We estimate about 4-6 weeks to complete the assessment.</p>

1.7 How much does the Recognition of Prior Learning cost?

* All fees are non-refundable.

Transfer Credit	Challenge for Credit by Course	Portfolio Assessment
<p>Students wishing to have transcripts from Alberta educational institutions evaluated for transfer – no cost. There is a fee of \$25 per course for other institutions.</p>	<p>The fee for a ‘Challenge for Credit’ course (non-refundable) is 100% of the fee for the course.</p>	<p>The PLAR fee is a flat fee of \$400 for all assessments and credits awarded.</p> <p>Course Fee \$50 per course</p> <p>Additional fees may be necessary dependent on the program selected and PLAR activities identified.</p>
<p><u>Advantage:</u> You will not have to take the course, do assignments, and pass exams in the course.</p>	<p><u>Advantage:</u> You will not have to take the course, do assignments, and pass exams in the course.</p>	<p><u>Advantage:</u> Work and life experience will be recognized through course credits. You will not have to take the course, do assignments, and pass exams in the course.</p>

1.8 What if I have a disability and need accommodations?

If you need accommodations due to a disability, please contact accessibilityservices@columbia.ab.ca or request an appointment with Accessibility Services by calling 403-235-9300 and ask to speak to an Accessibility Services Advisor. Please note that there is information on this area on Columbia College's website at www.columbia.ab.ca.

SECTION 2 - ASSESSING FORMAL LEARNING

2.1 Transfer Credit

This method would suit a student who had taken a similar or comparable post-secondary course at another institution and wanted to be granted credit for that course at Columbia College. Once course credit had been granted by Columbia College it would be used towards the appropriate certificate or diploma program that the student was pursuing.

If you are submitting foreign documentation for transfer credit evaluation, please provide transcripts and detailed course outlines translated to English by an official translator. A list of official translators can be found on the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Alberta website - ATIA's website www.atia.ab.ca.

Transfer Credit Steps

1. Request a Transfer of Credit form and fill it out.
2. Determine which courses you wish to transfer and list these on the form.
3. Pay the fee and submit to the Registrar's office as soon as possible. No Transfer of Credit will be considered after the program has started.

2.2 Credential Recognition

An individual who has an earned credential (certificate, diploma, degree etc.) may request that it be considered for recognition towards a program at Columbia College. Students with international credentials assessed by International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS). Having foreign credentials assessed is an important step in securing employment in Canada.

International Qualifications Assessment Service
9th floor, 9942-108 Street
Edmonton, AB T5K 2J5
Fax: 780-422-9734
Call: 780-427-2655
Toll Free – Alberta: 310-0000 (ask for 427-2655)
Eae.alberta.ca/labour-and-immigration/overview-of-immigration/

SECTION 3 ASSESSING NON-FORMAL LEARNING

3.1 Challenge for Credit by Course

This method would be preferable for a student who could demonstrate by a predetermined process that they are proficient in the subject matter of a specific Columbia College course without having to take the course. You identify the course you wish to challenge. The Challenge for Credit option is intended for students who are ready to challenge a course based on their previous work experience, life experience or community service. The challenge may consist of any number of activities such as an oral or written exam, assignments, reports, projects or any other means deemed appropriate.

3.2 Regulations Governing the Challenge for Credit Process

Knowledge and skills may be evaluated in a number of ways:

- a) completed assignments, reports, projects etc.; and/or
- b) an oral, written or practical challenge exam; and/or
- c) any other means considered appropriate by the Academic Department

All components of the challenge evaluation must be successfully completed in order to attain credit.

Cancellation or failure to complete all challenge requirements will result in a failing grade.

The Academic Department responsible for the Columbia College course being challenged determines the appropriate method of evaluation. You will be judged against the explicit subject matter, knowledge, and/or skills that have been established as course objectives. The maximum number of credits that can be challenged is equal to half the total number of credits required for the program. This information might be different for various programs.

The success or failure of the challenge for credit process is determined by a pass/fail grade as given by the course facilitator(s) and approved by the Department Chair/Director/designate. All challenges for credit will be recorded in your academic record and will appear on your official transcript. It will identify that the credit was awarded through a challenge for credit process.

Not all courses can be challenged for credit. Your PLAR Advisor will let you know which courses can be challenged for credit and methods of evaluation.

3.3 Columbia College Courses Which May Not Be Challenged

The following Columbia College courses may not be challenged:

- a. Courses for which you have received transfer credit.
- b. Courses for which you have received an exemption; that are unavailable at the time of registering; or courses in a category that is unavailable for challenge for credit.
- c. Practicum or Work Experience courses or courses that include a Practicum or Work Experience component as part of the final course grade.
- d. A prerequisite to a course that has already been successfully completed.
- e. Other courses identified by the Academic Department as non-challengeable

Should you fail the challenge for credit process you are not allowed to challenge the same material a second time or to write a supplemental exam for that course. In order to obtain credit for the course, you must register for the course and complete all course requirements.

3.4 Initiating the Challenge for Credit Procedure

To initiate a Challenge for Credit, you must

1. Determine if the course is available for Challenge for Credit by checking with the PLAR advisor.
2. Complete a Challenge for Credit by Course Letter of Request and submit it to the Office of the Registrar. Pay the fee.
3. Once you have started your program, you cannot apply for a Challenge for Credit.

3.5 Forms

Challenge for Credit by Course Letter of Request

3.6 Costs

The fee for a 'Challenge for Credit' course (non-refundable) is 100% of the course fee.

3.7 Invigilation of Challenge Exams

Regulations governing exam invigilators and locations also apply to challenge exams with two exceptions: people living outside of Canada must write their exam at an approved, accredited post-secondary institution; people living within Canada may write either at an invigilation centre or a post-secondary institution.

3.8 Appeals

1. Formal appeals follow Columbia College's official Appeal procedure as outlined in the Student Appeal Policy (ADM-P177).

SECTION 4 PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

4.1 What is a Portfolio Assessment?

This method would be preferable for a student who doesn't have "formal" education or training and would like the opportunity to have their "non-formal learning" be evaluated.

All applicants must have worked a full-time equivalent for a minimum of one year and have validation of competencies.

A PLAR assessment may include one or a combination of the following (other assessments may also be requested):

- Written challenge exam
- Oral exam or interview
- Performance assessment
- Product assessment
- Portfolio assessment

Portfolio: A collection of material to be organized to match the learning outcomes of the course being challenged. Learning outcomes are available on the syllabus for the course. Portfolios may be:

1. Paper portfolio (Binder)
2. Technology-enhanced portfolio – You can upload your documents onto a memory stick.

4.2 A Portfolio should contain the following:

1. A cover sheet that identifies the student, the course being challenged, and the date the portfolio is being submitted. See the format to be used in Appendix D.
2. Table of Contents
3. A current resume
4. An Autobiographical Essay/Personal Narrative – The goal of this essay is to provide the assessor with a context for the evaluation. You are basically explaining some things you want the assessor to know that are relevant to your prior learning assessment. You select what you want to say. Maximum length: 500 words.
5. Employment Validation Letter (Appendix B).
6. Description of past learning experiences – provide the information you feel the assessor would need to know about you, what your learning experiences were like, and what you specifically learned through the experience.
7. The portfolio assessment must have submissions for “each” course you have selected for PLAR. Do not submit one portfolio assessment for multiple courses. Dividers should be used to separate out each course.
8. If you require any assistance with going through this process, please contact the PLAR Advisor.

Assembling your Portfolio

- Use a binder with dividers
- Be word processed with double spacing for easy reading.
- Be written(typed) using complete sentences and correct grammar.
- Spell-checked
- Neat, clear and concise – approximately 15 pages or fewer. An assessor should be able to read it in about an hour or less. Assessors can’t spend large blocks of time on massive documentation.
- Have page numbers.
- Organization – logical, chronological way (earliest to latest material)
- Ensure any reference to third parties be deleted (references to clients, faculty, witnesses, etc.). Letters of reference are not included in this confidentiality requirement. Another solution is to get written permission from those persons who are identified. Permission letter(s) must be enclosed in the portfolio.

- Make 2 copies of the portfolio. Keep one for yourself and provide the other to the College. Portfolios are not returned.

4.3 How you can show evidence

1. **Evidence File:** You will provide evidence validating that you are able to perform each of the critical criteria for each outcome of a course. The documentation in the evidence file must be verified and validated by your employer or supervisor and assessed by the Columbia College assessor. Remember to consider both paid work (full or part-time) and unpaid work (volunteer etc.).
 - Samples – activity evidence, reports, pictures, videos etc.
 - Letters or memos that show your involvement in a learning experience
 - IQAS
 - Letter of Attestation - Statement/Testimonial by supervisor or other relevant individual certified by an authorizing body to be the individual providing the statement. These letters attest to/confirm your learning claims. The letter would refer to the learning claim and provide some specifics to that claim. For example, “I observed this person’s skills as an education assistant. She worked with specific students with behavioural challenges. She handled these challenges effectively, yet with compassion and care for the wellbeing of the student and others.”
 - Demonstration of skills on audio or videotape
 - Job descriptions, performance appraisals, letters of recommendation from supervisors or clients
 - Certificates of training with information as to number of hours, date completed, focus of training and how this training relates to the learning outcomes. It is not sufficient to provide only a certificate without any explanation or information.
 - When submitting foreign documents, please be sure the documents have been translated into English by an official translator. A list of official translators can be found on the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Alberta website.
 - Reference letters or documents from employers, trainers, or others you decide to include. Current mailing addresses and phone listings for those reference persons must be listed. Reference persons may be contacted as part of the assessment. You should inform these persons in advance and request permission to use references in this way.
2. **Interview:** You may be asked to attend an interview to review your evidence package and provide additional information and clarification.
3. **Demonstration:** As required, you will demonstrate each of or selected criteria on the validation checklist while being observed by a Columbia College assessor in a prescribed environment such as a lab or clinical setting.

Self-audit that will help you determine your level of competence: (SIAST Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology)

Consider the following levels of competence:

- Mastery: I am able to demonstrate the learning outcome well enough to teach it to someone else.
- Competent: I can work independently to apply the learning outcome.
- Functional: I need some assistance in using the outcome.
- Learning: I am developing skills and knowledge for this area.
- None: I have no experience with the outcome.

How is the portfolio assessment evaluated?

1. A copy of the assessment form is included in this package. (Appendix C)
2. Please note that if you are planning on transferring to a university in the future, be aware that some universities may not accept courses awarded by PLAR or may limit the number of courses completed by this process.

Responsibilities of Stakeholders

Each of the following stakeholders has an important role in the process of portfolio assessment and evaluation. These roles are clearly listed below:

Stakeholder	Role/s
Student	Determine if the portfolio assessment is the correct method of PLAR. Ensure that all the requirements for submitting a complete and thorough portfolio assessment have been met 'before' submitting the portfolio assessment.
PLAR Advisor	This individual provides information on the process and may provide guidance for questions regarding the assembling of the portfolio.
Assessor/s	The Assessor is responsible for evaluating how well the evidence of a prior learning supplied in the portfolio assessment for a particular Columbia College course satisfies the learning objectives/outcomes of that course. There may be a number of assessors involved in the evaluation process.
Registrar's Office	The role of the Registrar's office includes communicating with all stakeholders concerning submission, evaluation, receipt of credit, and appeal of the decision of a portfolio assessment. All portfolio assessments are submitted to the Registrar's office, and all correspondence to the student is made by the Registrar's office.
Department Chair/Director/designate	The Department Chair/Director/designate represents the academic program or department. This individual may provide advice and guidance for the assessor.

4.4 Process for PLAR

1. An applicant who is interested on one of Columbia's programs must have a student # prior to submitting for PLAR. Student #s are issued once a completed application to a particular program has been received. You must be provisionally admitted to a Columbia College academic program before any prior learning is assessed. An individual may request a PLAR as part of the application process.
2. Clients who are interested in submitting a request for PLAR, should meet with the PLAR advisor who will go over the process and answer any questions.
3. If the applicant wishes to proceed:
 - The applicant should determine from the course listing the courses they plan to apply for as PLAR. This information is available on Columbia College's website.
 - Copies of course outlines may be requested from the Registrar's office.
 - Compare the course outline of each course with your skills and knowledge and determine how you will provide evidence.
4. A *Letter of PLAR request* should be submitted to the Registrar's office, listing which courses you would like to have addressed through PLAR.
5. Upon receipt of this request, the Registrar's office will have 30 days to notify the individual. If the request of a PLAR has been accepted, the College will provide the candidate with details of the fees, and a timeline for payment and completion.
6. The applicant will pay the PLAR fee. PLAR fees are non-refundable. There is no guarantee that an applicant will have their request for a PLAR approved.
7. The applicant will assemble the Portfolio and submit it to:

Columbia College Registrar's Office
802 Manning Road N.E.
Calgary, Alberta T2E7N8
Ph: 1-888-235-9370; 403-235-9300
Fax: 403-272-3805
www.columbia.ab.ca
registrar@columbia.ab.ca

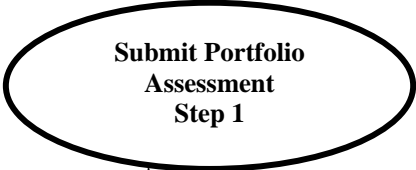
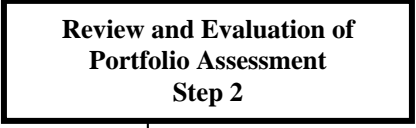
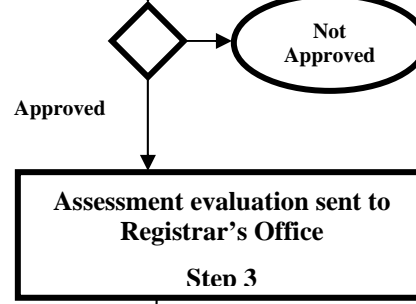
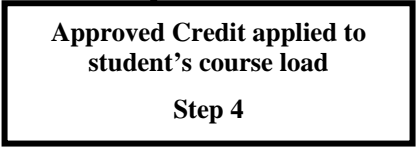
You can also electronically submit your portfolio to the Registrar's office at the above email.

8. The Registrar's office will forward the PLAR request to the appropriate departments for assessment.
9. Once the assessment has been completed, the documentation will be given to the Registrar's Office and the individual will be notified of the assessment outcome. This may take approximately four weeks.
10. The success or failure of the Portfolio Assessment process is determined by a pass/fail grade as given by the course facilitator(s).

11. Results will be recorded on the transcript as PL. No record will be made on transcript of unsuccessful Prior Learning Assessment attempts.
12. A successful challenge of a course with prerequisites does not mean that all prerequisites will be granted. The Academic Department may request further assessments for prerequisites. The applicant is responsible for the costs of these requests.
13. If you are dissatisfied with the portfolio assessment results, you may appeal the assessment through the Grade Appeal form. PLAR results may be reappraised. A reappraisal fee will be levied but is refundable should the reappraisal result in success. The reappraisal fee is \$150.
14. Columbia College will only keep your PLAR documentation for a 1 year period. If you are seeking credit after this time, you will have to re-submit your documentation and pay the PLAR fee.

APPENDIX A PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION PROCESS

The following flowchart outlines the process for Portfolio Submission:

Input	Process	Responsibility	Output
Completed Portfolio Assessment	 <p>Submit Portfolio Assessment Step 1</p>	Student	Letter of Submission is sent to Student
Portfolio Assessment Form	 <p>Review and Evaluation of Portfolio Assessment Step 2</p>	Assessor/s	Evaluation Need
Approved Need	 <p>Assessment evaluation sent to Registrar's Office Step 3</p>	<p>Assessors notify Registrar's Office of rejected evaluations</p> <p>Assessors notify Registrar's Office of approved course credit</p>	<p>Student Notified</p> <p>Student Notified</p>
	 <p>Approved Credit applied to student's course load Step 4</p>	Registrar's Office	

APPENDIX B: EMPLOYMENT VALIDATION LETTER

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition

Instructions: The employment validation letter provides a statement of verification of relevant industry employment. The employer must be asked to verify that the PLAR candidate is the writer of/has produced the workplace documents/samples in the PLAR evidence file. The employment validation letter must be printed on letterhead of your employer and signed by the appropriate signing authority. Your letter must also indicate the length of employment and working environment(s). If you have worked for a number of employers, each one must be approached to sign an employment validation letter. A letter template has been provided for your use. The completed letter should be included with your PLAR evidence and submitted to the PLAR advisor.

Letter Template (On employer's business letterhead)

Date

To Whom it May Concern:

I have reviewed the employment records of _____ and can verify that
Name of employee/candidate
the above candidate has been employed by _____ for
Name of Employer

Length of Employment

I verify that the candidate is the writer of or has produced the workplace documents/work samples, included in the PLAR evidence file. I further verify that the PLAR candidate has completed a successful employment interview with our organization.

Contact Information:

Name
Phone #
Email

Sincerely,

Name

Position Title

APPENDIX C: PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT PORTFOLIO EVALUATION

SAMPLE

Student Name: _____ Course: _____
 Assessor/s: _____ Credits: _____

Assessment Learning Outcomes						
Course Learning Outcomes	M	C	F	L	N	Comments
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						

*M-Mastery; C-Competent; F-Functional; L-Learning; N- None

PLAR credit awarded: Yes No
 Comments:

Signature of Assessor/s: _____
 Date: _____

APPENDIX D: PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT TITLE PAGE

Portfolio Assessment Title Page

Please use the following format for the cover page of your portfolio. You must also sign the cover page.

Portfolio for (your name)

Address:

Res. Phone:

Bus. Phone:

City/Town

Province Postal Code:

Columbia College Student #:

Email address:

I attest that the enclosed portfolio materials are correct and have been compiled by me. I attest that I am the person named in this application.

Name

Date

Non-refundable Assessment Process and Credits Fee Paid _____
Your assessment cannot proceed without this payment.

The personal information collected here will be used for the purposes of credit assessment and protected by the provisions of the Alberta Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, as well as, the Privacy of Information and Protection Act. If you have any questions about the collection of this information, contact: The Registrar's Office, Columbia College, 802 Manning Road, NE, Calgary, AB, T2E 3N8 (Tel: 888-235-9370).