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## The Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Guide For The BHS FLEX Program Students

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## Preface

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is an academic process that enables a student to gain credit for what he/she has already learned through professional training, life experiences, job-related activities, or volunteer work. PLA makes it possible for students to earn credit towards a degree for the skills and knowledge they already possess.

In addition to its support of specific goals (5 and 6) inherent in The Lincoln University's Strategic Plans (2009-2013 & 2013-2018), the PLA model is also aligned with the objectives of CAEL (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning) and ACE (American Council on Education)

The PLA credits described in this manual are only recognized in the Bachelor of Human Services *Furthering the Lincoln Experience* Program (BHS FLEX) at The Lincoln University. The procedures outlined in this guide are directed to BHS FLEX students. The material for this manual is derived from the FLEX program as developed by the Master of Human Services Program and approved by The Lincoln University full faculty and Board of Trustees in 2010.

# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

The FLEX program is a course of study for the non-traditional student that will culminate in the awarding of the Bachelor of Science Degree with a Major in Human Services. The FLEX Program is career-oriented and designed to accommodate adult students currently employed in the field of human services and interested in furthering their careers.

Students in the FLEX Program will generally be over twenty-five years of age, the usual starting age for non-traditional undergraduate students (Choy, 2002). They will also have had some college and/or work experience. Prospective students will be employed in the field of human services with at least one year of work experience in the field. Credits earned from previous academic studies, life learning, and professional experience will allow them to apply for advanced standing toward the undergraduate degree. Because of that opportunity, the FLEX Program will be an Accelerated Bachelor's degree program. The residency requirement will be at least 24 credits, with at least 15 credits in the major taken at The Lincoln University.

The proven and tested undergraduate major in Human Services will serve as the foundation for the FLEX Program. All required core courses and major requirements will be incorporated, with minor modifications, to accommodate the adult student with related work experience.

This Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Guide will describe how students can develop the materials needed to identify prior learning and the assessment process that the FLEX faculty and staff will use to evaluate student learning in relation to defined courses required for the undergraduate BHS degree.

Students working with FLEX faculty and staff are responsible for identifying PLA possibilities and developing the portfolio that includes documents that delineate experience(s) and specific knowledge and skills learned gained through prior work of life occurrences

Students can earn up to 45 undergraduate course credits based on the PLA process

The PLA approach that follows in this student guide is an alternative method for students to earn credits toward the BHS degree. In this regard students must understand that the PLA process will require a considerable amount of consideration and time. The pages that follow will assist students to raise questions that relate to whether PLA assessment has relevance to their progress in obtaining the BHS degree. The first step in the process will be to complete the prior learning portfolio while enrolled in the First Year Experience course (FYE 101). Once your portfolio is complete, your FYE 101 instructor will offer direction regarding the next step.

## **Frequently Asked Questions about Prior Learning Assessment**

### ***What is Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)?***

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is an academic process that enables a student to gain credit for what he/she has already learned through professional training, life experiences, job-related activities, or volunteer work. PLA makes it possible for students to earn credit towards a degree for the skills and knowledge they already possess.

### ***How do I get credit for my prior learning?***

After preparing your work portfolio in conjunction with the instructor of the First Year Experience class, you will meet with the prior learning coordinator to finalize the list of courses for which you want to petition for credit based on prior learning. This decision to petition is based on your having the knowledge and skills, which match the defined student learner outcomes for a particular course or courses identified. During this meeting with the prior learning coordinator, you will receive instruction about the process of petitioning for PLA for courses. You will then independently prepare a petition for each course that has been identified. If the petition is approved, you will be assigned to a lead panelist who, along with the prior learning coordinator, will guide you through the assessment phase. The approval of the petition and the documentation does not guarantee credit will be awarded. The final decision is based on your ability to demonstrate your learning during the assessment phase.

### ***What is a portfolio?***

A portfolio is a formally written document that the student develops and presents for recognition of prior learning. The portfolio must clearly and explicitly identify specific learning as well as provide sufficient supporting information and documentation to support that learning. The portfolio is used by the faculty in conjunction with other evidence and serves as the basis for their evaluation of the petition(s) for assessment.

### ***How much credit can I earn using PLA?***

As a BHS candidate you can earn up to 45 credits by Prior Learning Assessment. PLA credit may be applied to core courses, free electives, and general studies courses. Students discuss with the Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator, the number of courses in credit hours that can realistically be obtained through this process.

### ***How much does Prior Learning Assessment cost?***

Fees for PLA credit are significantly less than tuition fees for traditional courses. Students receive a fee schedule from the Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator. This provides the fees for the current academic semester. These fees change in conjunction with other tuition costs set by the University. PLA fees are paid by the student on an out-of-pocket basis. Federal financial aid does not cover PLA credits.

***Will someone assist me in developing a portfolio?***

The portfolio is prepared in the First Year Experience (FYE) course that is required for all students in the BHS FLEX Program. This portfolio is the final assignment for this course. You will receive instruction for its preparation throughout the semester in which you are enrolled in the FYE. The Prior Learning Assessment coordinator will review your portfolio with you and will help you determine your potential for PLA's and to understand the process. It is your responsibility to write and assemble the portfolio and to gather all the necessary documentation that supports the college level learning described in the portfolio.

***Who evaluates my portfolio?***

The FYE instructor will conduct the first evaluation of the portfolio. This evaluation will be a part of your final grade for the FYE course. The Prior Learning Assessment coordinator will conduct a second level evaluation of your finished portfolio and then forward the portfolio to the appropriate faculty advisors to evaluate the specific subject areas and the documentation of the learning.

***What type of grade will I receive for a successful PLA?***

Prior Learning Petitions and performance are evaluated using a satisfactory or unsatisfactory rating which is reflected as a P on the official transcript once the assessment is complete. A satisfactory rating means that credit will be awarded for the petitioned course. The results of your assessment of prior learning will not affect your grade point average (GPA).

***How long does a PLA typically take?***

The development of a portfolio and subsequent assessment, which is required to earn credit, requires a significant amount of time and organization. Documenting your prior learning and matching it to course outcomes can take days, weeks, or months. The length of time required for each portfolio and Prior Learning Assessment relates primarily to the students available time, organizational skills, critical thinking and writing skills.

Once the portfolio is prepared, the student meets with the Prior Learning Coordinator to finalize the list of courses for which he/she wants to petition for assessment. A separate petition is prepared for each course. All petitions must be submitted to the Prior Learning Coordinator by the Saturday of week five of each semester. Once the prior learning petition is approved, the student is expected to take the assessment by week 13 of the current semester.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Is The Prior Learning Assessment Process For You?**

Now that you are enrolled in the BHS FLEX Program, you are actively on your way toward meeting one of your educational goals, earning The Lincoln Bachelor of Science Degree in Human Services. You probably already know that the educational requirements for this degree, like those for most Bachelor's degree programs, are designed to cover work equivalent to what usually occurs over a four-year time period. To be eligible for a Prior Learning Assessment, you must be fully matriculated, and the college must have received all of your transcripts.

The incorporation of the Prior Learning Assessment Process in the FLEX Program confirms The Lincoln University's educational philosophy that recognizes the potential learning value of experience. The FLEX Program will recognize the value of your present professional work or volunteer experience as a practicum in the degree program, which can be credited toward the Bachelor of Science degree in Human Services (BHS). Such past experience might include, in addition to work experience, artistic achievement, independent reading, political or community organizing, cross-cultural and journalistic experiences. In all cases the experience must meet certain requirements to be eligible for academic recognition.

The most important requirement for earning degree credit through non-college experience is that the learning you have gained must be equivalent to college level learning. Also, the learning gained must be appropriate for meeting BHS requirements. It must be significant enough in quality as well as extensive enough in quantity to be equivalent to learning gained in a course of study as it would be taught and evaluated at The Lincoln University.

### **What is Advanced Standing**

When credit is awarded for learning gained before entering the program, you may have completed some of the degree requirements and advanced your progress toward the degree. Advanced standing is credits applied toward degree requirements for learning gained before admission. Prior Learning Assessment is one way to earn this credit. Other ways include:

1. Completed course work at other accredited colleges or universities
2. CLEP (College Level Equivalency Program) examinations

More information on these types of experiences is available from your First Year Experience at The Lincoln University course instructor.

### **The Prior Learning Assessment Process and What You Need To Do**

Prior Learning Assessment is the process used to identify and evaluate learning you have acquired through past experiences other than those listed above. The process can result in college credit awarded by The Lincoln University. The Prior Learning Assessment process does not include learning gained through experiences, which qualify for transfer credit evaluation.

## **PLA Needs Confirmation of Learning through a Portfolio**

As part of your learning requirements in the FLEX program you will prepare a Prior Learning Portfolio. In this portfolio you will state your educational and professional goals as a first step in explaining how your prior learning fits in with your total educational program to meet these goals.

## **PLA Credits Awarded Must be Equivalent to Specific College Level Course Requirements**

You will identify the learning you gained in the past and execute a Prior Learning Petition. You will write about your experiences, describe the setting and time frame where your learning was gained, and relate this learning to subject areas studied at a college level as identified in the BHS catalogue of courses.

## **PLA Must Focus on the Knowledge Base of Specific Course Requirements**

A single subject area of learning may be the result of many experiences – developing skills and gaining knowledge – in a number of settings as you experimented with ideas, planned and then evaluated your actions. For example, you may have learned about the subject of Human Growth and Development (Using an example that fits the university curriculum might serve the student better.), through working as a parent educator in a community based agency, you received multiple professional development classes on life span development. Additionally, you received supervision from a highly qualified professional in the field of psychology. Now, you are asked to link these experiences together and explain what you learned. This will probably be the most difficult as well as the most rewarding part of the assessment process. The best assistance you have may be your classroom experience in the FLEX program, working with others involved in the same process.

The final step in preparing the portfolio will be producing evidence that you have, in fact, acquired the learning you described and have had the experiences, which resulted in your present level of abilities and competence. In the portfolio this final step is known as documentation.

## **PLA Must Demonstrate Use of Knowledge Separate From Where Acquired**

Finally, you will meet with a committee of assessors to demonstrate in person that you have gained the learning presented in your portfolio. At the end of this meeting, known as the Assessment Interview, you will know whether the assessors recommend that you are awarded college credit for your prior learning. This step may also include completing an exam or project.

If the assessors agree that the learning you have gained is equivalent to a course (or courses) of college study, they will recommend to the Registrar that the course(s) be entered on your program of study by completing and submitting an evaluation form for each course. The Registrar receives this recommendation in the same way as a transcript from another institution. Courses accepted by the Registrar are added to your transcript of completed studies as Credit for Prior Learning, and you are advanced in the degree program accordingly. You then plan your remaining program to fully meet degree requirements.

## **Schedule for Applying for PLA's and Completing Requirements for Evaluation**

By the second week of each semester the Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator will publish a schedule in the Ledger, send a group email to current students, and post it on the bulletin board at the University City site. This schedule will outline timelines for submission of prior learning petitions. No petition will be accepted prior to the student completing the requirements of the FYE course. Beginning with the first semester after successfully completing the FYE course, a student may begin the PLA process by submitting one or more petitions. The deadline for petitions for each semester will be due the fifth week. Prior learning must be assessed by the student's panel by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> week of each semester. No petitions submitted after the deadline, which is published per semester will be accepted. For any assessments that run beyond the end of a semester, evaluation forms will be submitted to the registrar during the next semester.

### Schedule for PLA Process by Semester

Activity/event	Person Responsible	Due Saturday of specified week
Publishing of PLA Schedule for semester	Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator	Week two
Submit PLA petition form for each course to be considered	Student	Week five
Communication of decision on petition for each course	Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator	Week seven
Communication of assessment method to student	Lead Panelist	Week seven or earlier
Assessment Completed	Student	Week thirteen

## **PLA Check List – Is PLA Appropriate for You?**

- I have at least five years of post-high school work experience
- My work experience includes leadership or management responsibilities
- I completed formal training (in-class or on-line) as part of my employment
- I have attended professional seminars or conferences
- I have completed non-credit college courses
- I have earned certificates or licenses required for professionals in my field
- I am or was a member of the armed forces
- I have lived in a foreign country or traveled extensively since high school
- I have participated extensively in community work or volunteer services
- I have authored published work (letters to editor, training guides, articles, etc.)
- Is a CLEP available for the course I would like to receive credit for through PLA?

If you have checked off any of the above, PLA may be an alternative for you to earn credit. Contact your prior learning coordinator for more information.

The pages that follow in this handbook will give you general guidelines for preparing your Prior Learning Portfolio and explain the assessment process in detail. Thoroughly familiarize yourself with the contents and prepare to follow the instructions.

# **Chapter 3**

## **Portfolio Contents**

When you have completed the First Year Experience course at The Lincoln University, you are ready to begin to address your future learning plans. The First Year Experience course at The Lincoln University is designed to address the many challenges you may face including social and academic skill development. You will also learn about the Lincoln tradition, the meaning of liberal arts, library research/computer literacy, writing, speaking, and critical thinking.

As you continue learning about the Human Services degree, and discover your educational needs you should identify whether graduate school or professional certification in a field should be an aspect of your educational goals, and you should begin to think of the skills and knowledge that you have already acquired as your *prior learning*. This material is the basis for the development of the prior learning portfolio. The portfolio must address the following areas: your educational and professional goals; your updated professional resume; your identification of the specific subject areas related to the prior learning; and your analysis of the identified learning areas.

### **Educational and Professional Goals Essay**

The goals essay is a descriptive statement of your future plans. It places your prior learning within the context of your educational goals, explaining how this learning will help you meet these goals. Your past learning and future learning should fit together in a tentative plan to meet the requirements of the undergraduate Human Services degree program.

An effective essay clearly states your immediate and long range goals, and then builds a connection to your past in a general way. In other parts of the petition you will gradually become more and more specific about the past learning gained. Your tentative educational plan should consist of the skills and knowledge you still need to acquire. Your goals essay should answer these questions:

- What do you want to accomplish professionally and educationally in the next 10 years?
- What skills and knowledge will you need to be able to reach these goals?
- Have you acquired any of this learning as a result of your experiences before entering Lincoln?
- What learning will you need to gain while enrolled in the Human Services Program?
- How does your present practicum fit into your goals?

An example of an Educational and Professional Goals Essay is included to give you an idea as to how these questions might be answered. (See attachment A)

## **The Resume**

A resume should be included in the portfolio. It serves as a brief history of your previous work and educational experience. Your resume should contain the following information:

Personal Data: Name, home address and telephone number.

Formal Education: A chronological listing of post-high school education, identifying institutions, dates of matriculation, study concentrations, and degrees or certificates awarded.

Work/Volunteer Positions: Beginning with the current position, list past work experiences. Include the name of the agency or business, dates of employment, the position held, and a brief description of the duties and responsibilities of each position.

Informal Education Experiences: Projects, seminars, conferences, or training programs; including the dates you were involved.

Community Activities: Briefly list activities or offices held in voluntary associations, service clubs, community organizations, political parties, etc.

Materials and instructions on preparing a resume will be available from your First Year Experience Instructor.

## **Identifying Subject Areas of Learning**

This section of your portfolio, The Prior Learning Petition, concentrates specifically on the learning gained as a result of your past experiences. The experience itself is important only as the setting where learning was acquired. A number of experiences may now be linked together, having resulted in learning in a subject area. It may be helpful to think of a college classroom as one type of setting where learning is gained and your individual experience as another type of setting where learning took place.

Human Growth and Development was cited in chapter two as an example of learning gained as a result of past experiences. This knowledge was acquired in work settings: counseling in a half-way house and implementing a youth recreation program. One common factor in these experiences was that all clients were adolescents. The student working in these situations increased her understanding of adolescent psychology which helped her work more effectively with youth. This student might also have acquired skills in teaching and counseling techniques.

It is important to realize that only the individual student can identify what was learned. Many people can have similar experiences, but each person's learning is unique. Only you can convey what you have learned as a result of past experiences. You must identify the skills and knowledge you have gained, naming the subject areas of your learning. You are petitioning to have your learning in these areas evaluated (Fiddler, et al., 2006).

You can begin with broad academic or professional fields of study and practice. The Lincoln University will award credit for life experiences that have resulted in prior learning:

- a. in the core curriculum required by all Lincoln University undergraduate students, covering social sciences, health and wellness, humanities English composition, mathematics, language or computer science, and natural science and
- b. from specific human services work experience where learning was gained that is equivalent to major course requirements in the undergraduate human services curriculum, such as Sociology, Human Development, Social Policy, Sociological Theories, and Social Research. Portfolio materials, including official letters, follow-up calls to references, verified job descriptions, copies of performance evaluations, and training certificates will document these work experiences.

You must be very specific when identifying the subject areas within these fields in which you have developed skill or knowledge. For example, in group dynamics you may have the ability to understand how groups develop because of work you have done in community organizing and group counseling; you may have worked in a social welfare setting and have skills as a caseworker, and acquired the ability to interview clients and conduct counseling sessions.

Many subject areas of skill and knowledge are applicable to several fields. For example, knowledge of human behavior or group dynamics, and skills in leadership, problem solving or planning change can be considered basic and common to all human service professions. Such subjects are known as generic areas, and may be identified by students as subject areas when petitioning for credit for prior learning when identified as a part of a course listed in the University undergraduate course catalogue.

If you have had prior learning experiences in humanities subjects such as literature, languages, music, art, or theater; or in science subjects such as ecology, mathematics, biology or physiology, be sure to include these. Learning in these two subject areas is required for the bachelor's degree at The Lincoln University. (See Appendix B for a list of courses required by the BHS FLEX Program).

## **Analyzing Areas of Learning**

Once your list of subject areas is complete, you are ready to analyze the learning you have gained in those areas. Analysis is an in-depth description of what you have learned, presented in a systematic, organized way. When you analyze your learning, you want to communicate very clearly what you know and what you can do in a particular subject area.

The learning you have gained in each of your subject areas needs to be supported by analysis, explaining what you have learned in the subject as well as how and where you have used this learning. A single analysis may cover more than one subject. The analysis of your learning is the most important information in your portfolio. It is the learning you detail in your analysis that is considered when determining whether or not you will earn degree credit for your prior learning.

## **Writing an Analysis of Learning**

You can use this information as an outline or as general guidelines for developing your analysis. An example of analysis, excerpted from a Prior Learning Petition follows this information. (See Appendix C).

### **Step 1 – Defining the subject area(s)**

In your own words, define the subject you are analyzing. In the analysis of learning, definition means to describe the basic qualities of a subject, rather than develop a precise meaning for the words. In the petition excerpt, which follows, the student gives a general idea of the type of interview she has learned to conduct, one intended to gain information about a client's social interests and background. Definition is also necessary in analysis when using the technical terms of a profession. For example, the term helping is considered general, and you would need to be more specific, stating exactly what kind of help you mean. You may use abbreviations, such as IEP for an educational programming process, or FLEX, which is organizational language at Lincoln for Furthering the Lincoln Experience. Again, you want to be sure your meaning is very clear, so define your terms when using similar language.

### **Step 2 – Explaining Skills and Knowledge Gained**

Here you must be very specific in identifying specific skills and concrete knowledge you have gained as a result of past experiences. Skills are what you are able to do, services you are able to provide. Skills statements usually begin, "I learned to..." or "I am able to..." or "I can..." Knowledge is the theoretical, factual or practical understanding of a subject. Knowledge statements begin, "I learned that..." or "I discovered that..." or "I understand that..."

Knowledge of a subject is the explanation for applying specific skills or methods in a particular situation. An explanation of skills and knowledge might begin: "I am able to conduct a

staff training session (skill) that incorporates my knowledge of group dynamics (knowledge) and the needs of employees in an organization (knowledge).

After this opening statement, the writer of an analysis should explain how the workshops were designed and conducted, and why they were handled in this particular way. Extensive detail is not necessary; stating essential or central points is sufficient.

### **Step 3 – Illustration**

From your own experience, give examples showing how you have used the knowledge and skill you are analyzing. The example should be as brief as possible, emphasizing the most significant information and chosen to give the assessment team a general sense of how much and how well you have learned. Be sure your role in this experience is clear. For example, in the staff training program, the student should be clear as to whether he/she was the designer, instructor, a co-instructor or a member of the staff when illustrating his learning.

### **Step 4 – Describing the Learning Setting**

In this section, you should provide the following information:

- a. Where – Identify the particular place, (organization) the purpose and goals of this organization.
- b. When – Length of time (dates) you were involved in this setting.
- c. What you did – Your resume description may not give a full sense of your role, especially the activities most significant in acquiring your skills and knowledge.
- d. With whom you worked – Identify the important people involved in your learning situation, including their credentials, and describe their relationship to you. Include supervisors, co-workers, instructors, clients.

In the example contained in appendix C, the student describes what she did and with whom she did it. She described the organization in a previous analysis, explaining its purpose and the length of time she was involved in this particular position. If you have gained learning in more than one subject area in only one setting, you need describe the setting only once in your entire portfolio. Background information related to a particular area of learning, such as this student has provided, may be added when needed for the specific skills and knowledge gained.

You will notice that this student described the setting and circumstances of learning before explaining skills and knowledge gained. Prior Learning Assessment emphasizes the quality of learning rather than where it was gained, but a description of the setting is helpful to the assessment team in designing interview questions appropriate to your learning situation. You may present your analysis in any way you wish, as long as you provide the necessary information and follow the general guidelines for analysis.

## **Analysis of Learning from the Prior Learning Experience**

The excerpts from portfolios are meant to give you a sense of how the analysis of learning is developed. Completed portfolios will be unique to each individual's learning and writing style.

You will most likely need to get some practical experience with the process of written analysis. If you need to develop or refine certain skills in order to prepare an analysis that clearly communicates your learning, you should get assistance from your First Year Adult Learners Experience course instructor. The best way to get this assistance is to start writing and ask for comments and criticism so that you acquire an understanding of what to do and how to do it. If necessary, take advantage of Communication Skills faculty and increase your writing skills while preparing the Prior Learning Petition.

This may be repetitive, but it is very important. The analysis of learning is the most important part of your portfolio. It should provide an in-depth description of what you have learned. Your experiences are important only as the background or setting for learning. Analysis goes beyond reporting about an experience. You will need to step back from your experience and decide what the essential components of the learning are, that is, the ideas, theories, procedures, techniques and concepts you understand. You need to look beneath the surface of situations or events and examine the underlying themes of your experience.

When analyzing learning, the most important factor in successfully communicating your understanding of a subject is writing in a way that shows you have examined and reflected on the meaning of your experiences and the learning you gained.

## **Documentation**

The final step in preparing the portfolio is gathering and organizing documentation. Documentation is evidence that the prior learning experiences you have identified in your resume and in the analysis of learning (your illustrations and descriptions of settings) actually occurred. Documentation verifies:

- Employment
- Volunteer positions
- In-service training and non-credit courses
- Community services
- Accomplishments, especially products from your past learning experiences.

Letters of verification are the most common form of documentation. Several other types of documentation might be appropriate for your portfolio. The type used depends on the experience you had and your activities in the experience.

Letters of verification should follow these guidelines:

1. The person furnishing the letter should have directly observed you during the experience and be able to discuss your role or participation in that experience.
2. The person writing the letter of verification should identify his/her relationship to you in that experience (supervisor, peer, subordinate, etc.)
3. The letter should be one of verification, rather than recommendation.
4. The letter should be written on the official letterhead stationery of the company or organization with which you were associated, or the organization with which the person writing the letter is presently associated.

If the documentation is a product from your experience, such as a proposal or other work sample or piece of art, you may need proof that it is in fact your product. A letter of verification from a third party who observed you while you were involved in the making of the product can verify that it is your product. Organize your documentation. Documentation may either immediately follow an analysis or be contained in a separate section. If separate, it should appear in the same sequence as your analysis of related subject areas, or as experiences appear on your resume.

It is possible to provide too much documentation. You only need to supply enough documentation to verify your participation and accomplishment in the experiences you identify in the portfolio. If you are fortunate enough to have a number of choices, for example, if you have written numerous proposals or newspaper articles, choose no more than three, either written for different purposes, or highlighting your development over a period of time.

If you are unable to obtain documentation for an experience or accomplishment, and you have exhausted all the possibilities for obtaining it, include in your portfolio a statement explaining why documentation for a particular experience is not included.

In preparing this material for your portfolio, do not include originals you cannot replace; make copies. If materials such as case studies are included, delete any information, which might reveal a client's identity.

### **The Summary Statement of Learning for Each Course**

You will prepare a specific statement of learning for each course for which you plan to petition for Prior Learning Assessment. This will be a part of your assignment in the FYE course and will be included in your portfolio. This statement will describe the total of your prior experiences that suggest learning around the specific course student learner outcomes. Later when you interact with your panel, you will be asked to demonstrate what you know in relation to these learner outcomes through exam, project, presentation, or some other performance.

## **Types of Documentation**

Type of Activity	Types of Documentation
Work Experience	Letters of verification from Superiors, peers, clients Job descriptions Awards Letters of commendation Promotion evaluation Case studies Licenses Evidence of membership in professional organizations
Community Service Activities	Letters of corroboration from co-volunteers, clients served, supervisor Commendations Awards Newspaper and magazine clippings
Non College Courses and Training	Transcripts or letter attesting enrollment Other evidence of completion – certification, diploma
Specific accomplishments	Published writing Portfolio of art work Musical compositions Exhibits Speeches Programs and performances Writing samples Audiovisual presentations Proposals written Instructional materials designed or developed Bibliography of readings

## **Final Product Requirements**

Your Prior Learning Portfolio must be typed, the text double-spaced. Margins should be at least one inch on all four sides of the paper, and pages numbered. The portfolio must be securely bound, and copies should be the best quality obtainable. Citations and bibliography must use the most current APA format.

The Prior Learning Portfolio as a whole and in its parts should be coherent in the organization and expression of ideas. Spelling and grammatical usage are expected to be correct. The completed petition should not be more than seventy-five pages in length, and should be organized in the following way:

1. **Title Page** – The page tells who the author is, date the portfolio is completed and is signed by the writer.
2. **Table of Contents** – This is a chronological listing of the material in the portfolio and the location of the material by page number.
3. **Introduction** - this is a brief statement about yourself, your ideas or expectations related to the assessment interview, and/or any directions on how you want the assessment team to read the portfolio.
4. **The Educational and Professional Goals Essay** – This essay must clearly state the educational and professional goals of the writer. The essay is usually two to three pages long.
5. **Resume and Transfer Credit Summary** – Your resume should be brief, not more than two pages in length. You must include a Credit Summary even if you do not have any transfer credit.
6. **Identification and Analysis of Learning** – This section is the actual petition for credit. The first page of this section is your list of areas to be assessed. The analysis of each area follows the list. All learning you wish to have considered for prior learning credit must be included in this section. This information is the subject matter of your assessment. The analysis of each subject area should be kept between two and five pages.
7. **Documentation** – Learning experiences and achievements as described in the analysis of learning are verified through documentation. As a general rule related documentation follows each analysis of learning. Any presentation (i.e., video, sculpture, etc.) planned for the assessment interview should be identified and described. Exam results are also acceptable documentation if it is a challenge test administered by The Lincoln University or the CLEP test administered by the College Board. We believe that everything here is needed. However, if you want the sections that you suggested be deleted to come out, we will take them out. It is important to us to convey the spirit and philosophy of prior learning credits per CAEL so that students are clear that they have to document learning in order to receive credit.

## **Appendix A: SAMPLE EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL GOALS ESSAY**

In general my past experiences as a learner have been disorganized and not well planned, and so I have not always known what it is I wanted or where I wanted to go; therefore, it was impossible to determine how I was to get there. I want to change that now, and develop a systematic approach to learning so that I can increase my own rate of growth. I am pleased to be able to recognize my strengths, and I like the person I am today. I want to continue to grow to where I am more self-confident. Then I will be able to move into new ventures and not ask myself can I do it, but rather (based on what I know or what I have experienced), what is the best way to accomplish what must be done.

I want to earn a Bachelors degree, elementary teaching certification, and a Masters degree in Human Services. Although I am currently in the early childhood area, I want to one day move to where I can teach others how to grow young minds. I mean young in the sense that as long as a mind is in motion and is learning, it is young; constantly renewing itself. As long as the mind does not stop and stagnate, it can be young. This is the kind of mind I want to teach others how to work with. I am interested in how to bring about social change, and I believe education is the key.

My doctorate should follow, but I am not far enough in my planning and scope to be able to say definitely in what area. I only know that I am not sure in what area. I do feel that it might be in some area of human services besides education.

To reach my goals I know that I will need to meet educational requirements for teacher certification as well as the requirements for the Human Services degree. Right now I want to enroll in The Lincoln Masters Degree program and I know that I will be able to meet admissions requirements with a Lincoln Bachelor of Science Degree in Human Services.

I have already learned how to teach various subject areas in elementary and early childhood programs. In addition even though I have been successful in managing my classroom in a sensitive, humanistic way, I feel that I need more technical learning in classroom management. I have read extensively in the area of child development, and I feel that my classroom experience has added depth to my understanding. I can identify a child who is unable to do class work because of a learning disability. Parents and volunteers have assisted in my classroom, and I think this is an important element in home and school relationship. Also, I have worked closely and efficiently with school counselors, and I believe my ability to support a child's need for counseling services both in and out of the classroom is one of my strengths.

I want to make use of all the resources available here at The Lincoln University, particularly in media and reading skills. I want to be innovative in my particular classroom, and let my room serve to help the entire school, and I want to visit other schools in the area that are innovative, and talk to those parents involved in the schools and their activities.

My most immediate goal is to have a classroom where there is everything needed to maximize independent learning for my students. This would involve having learning centers, increasing my knowledge and understanding of record-keeping and evaluation, finding ways to inspire creative writing in students. I want to know more about how children behave, and I want to work more closely with them in arts and crafts.

On a more personal level I want to engage more in cultural activities, such as in music and art, not just in viewing but also in performing. I want to return to playing the piano, and I want to learn to play the guitar. It would really be an achievement if I were able to express myself on canvas.

Looking back, and in considering my present feelings, I think I learn better working with one other person, or in small groups, and with minimal supervision. In some religions a teacher is considered on a level second only to a great spiritual leader. That is a great responsibility to live up to. I believe the field of education would benefit greatly if teachers were more highly respected than they currently are. Through my studies and subsequent demonstration of learning I hope to participate in and help elevate the role of the educator in bringing about social change.

## **Appendix B: COURSE REQUIREMENTS - BHS FLEX PROGRAM**

The course of study is 120 credits. Students take the following courses (totaling 85-87 credits) and the remaining credits (35 credits) are made up from University electives.\*and the remaining credits are made up from University electives.\* BHS FLEX students bring transfer credits that are assessed by the University's Registrar. Once they are assessed and equated with the courses below and other University electives, the academic advisor determines with the student, what additional coursework will be required. The student and the Prior Learning Coordinator then work to determine which of the needed courses can possibly be satisfied through Prior Learning Assessment up to 45 credits

Number of Credits	Satisfied or to be satisfied	Subject
<b>Core Curriculum</b>		
3		First Year Experience
3		African American Experience
<b>Social Science</b>		
3		Economics 20,1 Economics 202, Education150, History 103, Political Science 101, Psychology 101, or Sociology 101
3		Economics 20,1 Economics 202, Education150, History 103, Political Science 101, Psychology 101, or Sociology 101
<b>Health &amp; Wellness</b>		
2		Dimensions of Wellness
<b>Humanities</b>		
3		Introduction to Music or Introduction to Art
3		Introduction to Philosophy or World Religions
3		World Literature I or II
<b>English Composition</b>		
3		English Composition I
3		English Composition II
<b>Mathematics</b>		
3		Math for Liberal Arts
<b>Language /Computer Science</b>		
3		Language or Computer Science course
3		Language or Computer Science course
<b>Natural Science</b>		
3		Natural Science Elective
4		Natural Science Elective
<b>Human Service Major</b>		
		Introduction to Sociology
3		Introduction to Human Services
4		Research Design and Analysis or Statistics II
3		Methods I: Individual and Family

3		Human Growth & Development
3		Sociology Theory
6		Field Placement w/ Lab
3		Cultural Anthropology or Institutional Racism
3		Methods II: Group Dynamics or Social Policy
<b>Department Electives</b>		
3		Human Services elective
3		Human Services elective
<b>Ethics</b>		
3		Every Day Ethics or Contemporary Moral Problems
<b>Psychology/HPR</b>		
3		Drugs and Society
		Introduction to Psychology,
<b>*University Electives:</b>		
3		University Electives
3		University Electives :
3		University Electives :
3		University Electives
3		University Electives :
3		University Electives
3		University Electives
3		University Electives
2		University Electives
<b>Writing Proficiency Requirement: Due 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester Junior Year</b>		
Document 1:		
Document 2:		
Document 3:		
Document 4:		

\*University elective courses can include any courses offered by the University. For a complete listing of courses, see the course catalog located on the Registrar's page of the University website (The courses are listed by Department, beginning on page 81)

## **Appendix C: EXCERPT FROM A PRIOR LEARNING PORTFOLIO**

### **Interviewing Techniques**

My development of skills as an interviewer began with my position as a group worker. I was supervised by the department head, who had a Masters in Social Work. My early lessons were through the apprentice method. After sitting with my supervisor while he conducted interviews, we would discuss the process and he would answer my questions. He also recommended some readings on the principles of interviewing. It was not long before I was conducting interviews alone.

The interview was intended to provide general information about the client's social and recreational interests and activities. The information was recorded on a form, which permitted our staff to help the client make meaningful choices for his or her socialization program.

I quickly learned that in order to accomplish the purpose of the interview without alienating the client to the program, I had to develop a sense of the client's needs at the time of contact and determine whether the client was ready for the interviewing procedure, which can appear long, cold and unfeeling.

The books and articles I read always seemed to stress an ideal physical setting for interviewing. I have never been so fortunate, so I had to learn to establish an atmosphere for an interview with my own manner. I learned that a comfortable, caring atmosphere does not come from the room the chairs or the desk.

I learned to be sensitive to the person's needs, level of understanding and feelings about his or her situation. I learned to be flexible, and I believe that adaptability is a crucial asset to setting the tone of the interview.

I learned the importance of recognizing the person as an individual and not as one of many. I learned that the most important requirement in an interview is an atmosphere of trust.

I also learned that knowledge of my own agency was essential, in order to be able to present the agency accurately and establish clear mutual expectations between the client and the agency. I learned to have information available to make appropriate referrals to other agencies when necessary.

I recall quite clearly the specific of interviewing one client, which I feel illustrates the learning and skills I have described. J., age 20, was referred following discharge from a psychiatric hospital after a 30-day treatment period for an acute episode. At our first meeting, she appeared frightened and reluctant to talk with me. Observing her high level of anxiety, hoping to make her more comfortable, I asked her an open ended question – "What was her understanding of why Mrs. V. had referred her to our organization?"

She began slowly explaining what she had been told about our program. As she talked she became more relaxed, and I learned about her desire to return to college, her concerns about her young daughter, and her wish to live independently of her mother.

Since she was feeling progressively more at ease with me, I began to discuss our program, look at her options and focus on some direction. I informed her how we would refer her

to the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation for educational evaluation and funding, and how we would secure day care for her daughter. I assured her that she would meet with a social worker at the conclusion of the interview to help her with planning.

I then concluded the interview and met its original purpose – to describe our group work program, assess her social interests, and determine her needs for that aspect of her total rehabilitation program.

I believe this client left me feeling good about the interview. I believe that had I been insensitive to her discomfort, simply explaining the social program and filling out forms, she might have left our program never to return.

As time went on, I began to participate in other interviews at this agency. I learned to apply my skills in interviews of prospective staff, taking social histories, eligibility determinations, information and referral and exit interviews for clients. Basic to all these types of interviews was the ability to be an active listener, some knowledge of human behavior, and observing and recording skills.

## **Appendix D: FORMAT FOR LETTER REQUESTING DOCUMENTATION**

Your Name

Current Address

Date

Employer's Name

Agency's Name

Current Address

Dear (Full Name): (avoid Sir or Madam)

Introduce yourself. Remind people of what you did (title) where (location with company) and when (dates).

Tell why you need documentation. Ask the person to submit the specific information needed, i.e., verification of employment or services, length of time, duties and responsibilities, title, special activities, projects, and accomplishments.

Provide the person with a copy of the analysis of learning section that describes your duties, responsibilities and accomplishments in the portfolio. Make some positive parting comments; thank them.

Request that your documentation be sent to you at your home address, even it is addressed to the Prior Learning Assessment Office as a formality. This enables you to make a copy of the documentation for your records, and the required copies for your portfolio.

Closing (Sincerely yours),

Sign your letter

## Appendix E: SAMPLE PRIOR LEARNING PETITION FORM

**Office of the Registrar**

PO Box 179, Lincoln University PA 19352  
(484) 365-8087 (484) 365-8116 fax  
Lincoln Hall, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

**BHS FLEX  
PRIOR LEARNING  
PETITION**

Last Name Doe First Name Jane Initial T. Student ID# 087651 Year entered LU _____ Credits Earned _____ Anticipated graduation date _____	
Course Title: PLA Course ID <u>SOC 310 (Human Growth and Development)</u> Term: <u>Fall, 2014</u> Credits <u>3</u>	
<p>Brief Description of Prior Learning Obtained (check the one(s) related to this PLA petition)</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I have at least five years of post-high school work experience related to this course</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> My work experience includes leadership or management responsibilities</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I completed formal training (in-class or on-line) as part of my employment</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I have attended professional seminars or conferences</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have completed non-credit college courses</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have earned certificates or licenses required for professionals in my field</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I am or was a member of the armed forces</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have lived in a foreign country or traveled extensively since high school</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I have participated extensively in community work or volunteer services</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have authored published work (letters to editor, training guides, articles, etc.)</p>	
<p><b>To be completed by Lead Panelist</b></p> <p>Description of Examples to be Provided and Tasks to be performed (<i>to be completed by Prior Learning Coordinator or Lead Panel Member</i>):</p> <p><u>Sample Description</u> Student will take the challenge exam for Human Growth and Development (SOC 310) Student will present a case to the panel featuring a child or adolescent and will discuss the stage of development using information from one of the theorists covered in the course</p>	
I am requesting an assessment of Prior Learning for academic credit. <b>Student:</b> _____	Date _____
I have discussed with the student how this proposed PLA affects his/her program at LU. <b>Academic Advisor:</b> _____	Date _____

The Prior Learning documents and/or Assessment s are appropriate and correspond to the Student learner Outcomes of the course. <b>Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator</b>	Date
I have discussed with the student the work needed to earn academic credit for the proposed Prior Learning Credit. <b>Lead Panel Member :</b>	Date
I approve this petition for Prior Learning Assessment <b>Department Chair:</b>	Date
I approve this petition for prior learning assessment <b>Dean:</b>	Date

Office of the Registrar	
Course entered on Student Schedule by _____	Date: _____

## **Appendix F: PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT EVALUATION RUBRIC**

**THE LINCOLN UNIVERSITY  
BHS FLEX Program  
Rubric for Assessing Prior Learning**

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Student ID# \_\_\_\_\_ Course ID \_\_\_\_\_

Method of Assessment:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

	Unsatisfactory (Fail)	Promising (Repeat Assessment)	Satisfactory (Pass)
	1	2	3
Performance in relation to course SLO's	Performance on challenge test, presentation, essay, or other assignment represents less than 50% mastery of the content for SLO's for course	Performance on challenge test, presentation, essay, or other assignment represents mastery of at least 50% of the content for SLO's for course	Performance on challenge test, presentation, essay, , or other assignment represents mastery of at least 70% of the content SLO's for course
Performance in relation to integration of theory and practice	Performance on challenge test, presentation, essay, presentation, or other assignment represents less than a 50% ability to apply theory to practice	Performance on challenge test, presentation, essay, presentation, or other assignment represents at least a 50% ability to apply theory to practice	Performance on challenge test, presentation, essay, presentation, or other assignment represents at least a 70% ability to apply theory to practice
Performance in relation to application	Performance on challenge test, presentation, essay, presentation, or other assignment suggests mastery of less than a 50% ability to transfer learning to broader situations	Performance on challenge test, presentation, essay, presentation, or other assignment suggests mastery of at least a 50% ability to transfer learning to broader situations	Performance on challenge test, presentation, essay, presentation, or other assignment suggests mastery of at least a 70% ability to transfer learning to broader situations

Decision (check one):  Pass  Repeat Assessment Process  Fail

Lead Panelist (Print name) \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Leas Panelist (Signature) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

1 in any of the three areas results in failure to award credits

2 in any of the three areas requires repeating the assessment

## Appendix G: GRADE REPORT TO REGISTRAR

**To: The Office of the Registrar**  
PO Box 179, Lincoln University PA 19352  
(484) 365-8087 (484) 365-8116 fax  
Lincoln Hall, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

Last Name Student ID#	First Name	Initial

Course Title: PLA	Course ID	Term: _____
Credits _____		

Panel Recommendation to earn academic credit:  The student has completed all of the requirements for earning the credits for this course and I am recommending that the petitioned credits be awarded. Or The student did not successfully complete all of the requirements for earning the credits for this course and I am <u>not</u> recommending that the petitioned credits be awarded.	
<b>Recommended Grade</b>	Pass/Fail
<b>Lead Panel Member :</b> _____	Date

Office of the Registrar Credits entered on Student Transcript by _____	Date: _____
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## **References**

- Choy, S. (2002). Nontraditional Undergraduates. Washington DC: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Fiddler, M., Marienau, C., & Whitaker, U. (2006). Assessing learning: Standards, principles, & procedures (2nd ed.). Chicago: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.
- Lincoln University: Strategic Plan. (2009). Lincoln University, PA:  
Goals are the same for both plans University Goal 5 and University Goal 6 specifically give rise to such an addition to the academic program ("Lincoln University: Strategic Plan," 2009). There is a new strategic plan—2013-2018.
- University Goal 5: The University will continue to serve its traditional base of students but will develop innovative educational programs and services in the Philadelphia area to meet the needs of non-traditional students.
  - University Goal 6: The University faculty will design and implement effective student assessment methodologies to document mastery of skills and competencies in the undergraduate and graduate programs.