



GEORGIA SOUTHWESTERN  
STATE UNIVERSITY

# **2022-23 Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Student Manual**

August 2022

Prior Learning Assessment Program

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## ***Preface***

This handbook is designed to provide students with information needed when seeking credit for prior learning related to specific courses at Georgia Southwestern State University.

For more information about PLA at GSW,  
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# PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT

## AT GSW

### Definition of Prior Learning

Prior learning is learning gained through life or work outside of structured higher educational courses. Many people learn through their experiences in life such as those in professional endeavors (through business, the military, or other work/training experiences) or through other educational experiences (through community work, family, travel, or personal study).

### Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)

PLA is a process through which students **identify** areas of relevant learning from their past experiences, **demonstrate** that learning through appropriate documentation, and **submit** their materials so that they can be assessed and possibly awarded academic credit relative to specific course objectives at GSW.

### Earning College Credit for Prior Learning

Broadly speaking, one of the goals of college level education is to prepare responsible, reflective citizens who adapt constructively to change. College level education also helps students become critical thinkers and problem solvers in an ever-changing world.

Students can acquire learning from a variety of sources outside the traditional classroom, and they can earn appropriate credit in their work towards a degree for verifiable college level learning acquired through life or work experience, not for the experience itself. Students who acquire the level of knowledge that meets the expectations and the learning outcomes of a specific course may get credit for that course, provided the students can demonstrate proficiency in that specific course.

A total of thirty (30) semester hours may be earned through any combination of credit by departmental examination, national standardized examinations, correspondence courses, extension work, advanced placement and PLA by portfolio.

### Methods of Assessing Prior Learning for College Credit

1. **Departmental Examination.** Students currently enrolled who present satisfactory evidence that they are qualified in a particular subject may receive credit by an examination developed and administered by the appropriate instructional department. Satisfactory evidence may be, but is not limited to, work experience, non-credit courses, course work taken at non-accredited institutions, or military courses. Permission must be obtained from the head of the instructional department offering the course; however, exams will not be permitted in courses for which a student has previously taken an exam for credit or was previously enrolled at GSW as a regular or audit student.

2. **National Standardized Examination.** Credit for prior learning may be awarded through CLEP, Advanced Placement (AP) credit, DANTES, and ACE.

### **CLEP (College Level Examination Program) Credit**

GSW students may receive up to thirty (30) semester hours of college credit for certain courses based on CLEP scores. The Registrar's Office coordinates the administration dates for the examinations.

Criteria for credit awarded for CLEP subject examinations, minimum scores, and credit given may be found at: <https://gsw.edu/academics/academic-resources/disability-services/testing-center/clep>

GSW will grant credit for DANTES/DSST exams determined to be equivalent to CLEP. The same score minimums will apply to these tests as the CLEP. CLEP credit will be indicated by a "K" on the student's transcript.

### **AP (Advanced Placement) Credit**

Georgia Southwestern State University provides the opportunity for qualified beginning students to obtain credit for certain basic courses. The granting of advanced placement is usually based on the College Entrance Examination Board Advanced Placement Test scores, as approved by departments of instruction. Students may contact the Admissions Office for more details and credit available. Scores of less than 3 will not be considered. The course and credit hours will be posted to the student's report card; however, the grade received will not calculate in the student's semester or cumulative grade point average. Advanced Placement credit will be indicated by a K on the student's transcript.

Information about GSW Advanced Placement Equivalencies is available at:  
<https://gsw.edu/Admissions/GeneralInfo/APandIB>

### **DANTES (Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Educational Support) Credit**

GSW will grant credit for DANTES/DSST examinations determined to be equivalent to CLEP. The same score minimums will apply to these tests as the CLEP. CLEP credit will be indicated by a "K" on the student's transcript.

Please refer to the DSST website at <http://www.getcollegetcredit.com> for more information.

### **ACE (American Council on Education) Credit**

The American Council on Education (ACE) is an organization that provides guidance to colleges and universities on the acceptance of credit. GSW is a member of ACE and honors ACE credits as appropriate for the program of study for students. Students must contact

their advisor and the GSW Office of Admissions for information on documentation of ACE credits and verification of their application to programs of study. ACE can be found online at <http://www.acenet.edu>.

3. **Portfolio Assessment.** Students use the PLA portfolio development process to document their prior learning. This process requires students to prepare and submit a collection of documents that establish and support their claim that they have specific relevant skills, knowledge, values, attitudes, understandings, achievements, experiences, competencies, training, and certifications that align with specific course objectives. The portfolio should not only describe the relevant experience but should also identify the particular learning outcomes.

## **PLA PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT**

If prospective students have other learning experiences that may fit courses not served by departmental examination or by national standardized examination, they may be advised to consider prior learning assessment by portfolio. Students will then be advised to complete a self-paced, online tutorial that will provide direction in the development of portfolio materials. After completion of the tutorial students should have materials ready to submit to faculty assessors from the program in which they are seeking credit.

### **Courses available for PLA credit**

In theory, any course in the Georgia Southwestern State University curriculum could be eligible for PLA credit. However, students should be aware that some courses are more or less relevant to their learning experiences and to their degree program. Individual departments determine which courses, if any, are available for PLA credit by portfolio.

### **Courses NOT available for PLA credit**

The courses covered by AP, IB, CLEP, departmental examination, DANTES, and ACE methods of earning credit will not be eligible for credit through the portfolio process. In addition, courses for which the student has already registered are not eligible.

### **PLA Portfolio Development**

Students use the PLA portfolio tutorial process to document their prior learning. This process requires students to prepare and submit a collection of documents that establish and support their claim that they have specific relevant skills, knowledge, values, attitudes, understandings, achievements, experiences, competencies, training, and certifications that align with specific course objectives. The portfolio developed should not only describe the relevant experience but should also identify the particular learning outcomes.

Students must also offer a critical self-assessment of what college-level learning has been acquired through selected non-traditional experience. This experience might include a variety of work, training, reading and research, civil and military service, or life learning.

Once students complete and submit the PLA portfolio, assessors will evaluate it to determine if the portfolio provides evidence which ties those skills to a specific course objective. If the portfolio does so, credit can be awarded when assessors determine that the prior learning is acceptable for credit.

## VETERANS AND CURRENT MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS

Georgia Southwestern State University is committed to helping veterans and current military personnel take full advantage of their eligible benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (<http://www.va.gov/>). Students seeking VA educational benefits should contact the GSW Office of Admissions <https://www.gsw.edu/Academics/Academic-Resources/Veterans/index>

In addition to GSW resources, veterans and military service members are encouraged to explore the educational opportunities available through the University System of Georgia ([http://www.usg.edu/student\\_affairs/veterans/](http://www.usg.edu/student_affairs/veterans/)).

Veterans and current military personnel can take advantage of the Military Evaluations Program conducted through the American Council on Education (ACE) for service school courses. For further information, see ACE Military Programs (<http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/MilitaryPrograms/index.htm>) and the Defense Activity for Nontraditional Educational Support or DANTES ([http://www.dantes.doded.mil/Dantes\\_web/DANTESHOME.asp](http://www.dantes.doded.mil/Dantes_web/DANTESHOME.asp)).

### **Additional Resources:**

Veterans may be eligible for military-funded CLEP exams (<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/clep/military.html>)

For a list of military benefits by state go to [http://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil/Home/Benefit\\_Library/State\\_Territory\\_Benefits.html](http://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil/Home/Benefit_Library/State_Territory_Benefits.html)

GSW is a member of the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges Consortium. For information see the SOC website at <http://www.soc.aascu.org/>.



## GEORGIA SOUTHWESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY PLA POLICIES

1. Prospective students who fit the following criteria are eligible to participate in PLA:
  - i. They are adult learners (usually defined as 25 years of age or older, contact the PLA Director if in doubt).
  - ii. They have other learning experiences outside a traditional college curriculum.
2. Course credit via PLA by portfolio may not replace existing credit assessments available through AP, IB, CLEP, departmental examination, DANTES, or ACE.
3. Students may not conduct PLA by departmental examination, standardized test, or portfolio for any courses for which they have previously or currently registered at Georgia Southwestern State University as a regular or audit student.
4. The departments responsible for grading particular examinations determine the grading timeline for the examinations. Portfolios are due six weeks prior to the end of the semester for consideration of receipt of credit by PLA during that semester. Faculty assessors will assign grades by the final examination period.
5. Credit may be awarded after the first submission, in which case the student will be notified that credit has been granted. The assessor may specifically outline areas for improvement and encourage students to resubmit their documentation one time during the next semester. The assessor will provide a report giving specific feedback to students.
6. Students may resubmit the portfolio for re-assessment, with a revision of the documentation set and inclusion of any noted areas for improvement. Students may resubmit only one time for any given course.
7. If the assessors deem a portfolio “satisfactory,” they will submit a PLA Credit Approval Form (found on page 12). This form must be approved by the assessor, the assessor’s department head and dean, and the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs before being sent to the Registrar’s Office. Courses for which students have successfully earned PLA credit will be noted on the transcript with a letter grade of “K”. PLA Portfolio grades will not be part of the student’s grade point average (GPA).
8. A maximum of 30 semester hours can be earned through any combination of CLEP, credit by departmental examination, correspondence courses, extension work, advanced placement (AP), or PLA by portfolio credit.

9. Appeal Process: "Students may appeal an unsatisfactory grade on a resubmitted portfolio through the normal course grade appeal process" <https://www.gsw.edu/campus-life/resourcesinformation/studentproblemresolution/forcurrentstudents>

## ROLE EXPECTATIONS: PLA DIRECTOR, FACULTY ASSESSOR AND STUDENT

### Role of the PLA Director

Students who believe that they may have prior learning that can be used for academic credit should schedule an appointment with the PLA Director who will work with them to determine if the portfolio documentation process is appropriate. If a student decides to pursue this route, the PLA Director will guide the student to the online PLA Tutorial.

### Role of the Faculty Assessor

Faculty assessors help determine appropriate courses based on backgrounds of students in concert with the PLA Director. Faculty develop assessment methods appropriate for the course, provide syllabus and assessment guidelines, and evaluate student portfolios.

Faculty assessors, in conjunction with the PLA Director, should help interpret requirements in the course syllabi and course instructions that allow students to complete PLA by portfolio as a self-directed study. However, faculty members are not expected to teach the course in the manner of an independent study.

### Role of the Student in the PLA process

Students must provide evidence to the Faculty Assessor and the PLA Director that they have relevant learning experiences that are aligned with learning outcomes for the target course. Obtaining course credit through the PLA process is not equivalent to a faculty directed independent study. Rather, PLA by portfolio is a process by which students evaluate prior learning experiences and demonstrate appropriate learning outcomes relevant to specific courses. Thus, students must meet the expectations of the course syllabus with a minimum of supervision by the faculty assessor.

## FEES FOR PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENTS

PLA by portfolio fees are based on the number of credit hours assigned each course.

# Credit Hours	Fee
4	\$275
3	\$250
2	\$200
1	\$150

**Note: PLA Portfolio Fees must be paid prior to the assessment, and are non-refundable.**



**Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Fee**

**Student Accounts**

Form to be completed by PLA Director. Student submits for to Student Accounts, alongwith payment.

Date\_\_\_\_\_

Student Name\_\_\_\_\_

Student

ID#\_\_\_\_\_

**The fee for PLA Portfolio reviews is \$250 for 3-credit hours.**

The fee distribution is as follows: \$200 to Faculty Assessor, \$25 to Faculty Counselor, \$25 to GSW.

Faculty Assessor:

Faculty Counselor: Charles M. Huffman, Ph.D.

Course(s) for which credit is being evaluated\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Approval of PLA Director\_\_\_\_\_

Charles M. Huffman, Ph.D. Director,

## Prior Learning Assessment

## PLA Credit Application Form

**This form is the cover page for your PLA Portfolio submission.**

Please complete all information below before submitting the application for credit.

Name:	Student ID:
(first)      (middle)      (last)	
Major:	Academic Advisor:
	(first)      (last)
GSW Email:	Date:
Address:	Telephone:
(street, apartment, box)	(home)      /      (cell)
	Best times to call:
(city, state, zip)	

Information about the course for which you are seeking credit:

Course prefix & number:	
Course Title:	
Is this course required for your major?	
Have you satisfied prerequisites (or equivalents) for this course?	
Is this course a prerequisite for other courses in your major?	
Will you need to transfer credit for this course to another university?	
GSW Core Curriculum Area for this course: A, B, C, D, E, or F?	