

**THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES (UWI)  
OPEN CAMPUS**

**PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT (PLA) POLICY**

**Purpose**

The University of the West Indies Open Campus recognises that learning takes place outside of the traditional setting and often through work and life experiences. It is mindful that there is on-going demand for university education by a very large and diverse group of potential students, many of whom have relevant experience and subsequent informal learning, but do not have the traditional, formal qualifications. Hence, it recognises the importance of interfacing the outcomes of relevant experiential learning with formal tertiary education and the need for Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is an integral element of this.

The need for PLA was established through a 2004 study<sup>1</sup> which included The UWI and other stakeholders. The proposal for its establishment was approved by the Board for Undergraduate Studies in 2006 and more recently in 2009, after the formation of the Open Campus.

**Definition**

**Prior Learning Assessment (PLA):** PLA is a mechanism for identifying and providing evidence of experiential knowledge and skills. The evidence may be through portfolios, challenge examinations or demonstration of skills. In the Open Campus, PLA will be based on portfolio preparation and assessment.

**Prior Learning Credits** are academic credits earned through the presentation and successful assessment of the outcomes of relevant experiential learning. Prior Learning Credits can be applied to a specified course within a programme.

**Policy**

- I. Conformance with Open Campus Values:** Prior Learning Assessment is reflective of the Open Campus Core Values: Student Centred, Agile, Enabling and Accessible.
- II. Eligibility:** PLA may be used for advanced placement and/or matriculation. In the former case, students wishing to earn PLA credits should be at least 21 years and have some relevant training and/or experience and satisfy the relevant University minimum entrance requirements for matriculation, either at Normal or Lower Level, before being considered for admission to degree or other programmes. In the latter case, students would not normally meet matriculation requirements.
- III. Integration of PLA Credits into Programmes of Study:** Prior Learning Assessment provides an avenue for comparing the evidence of acquired knowledge, skills and competencies with the expected outcomes from courses or other requirements in an institutional setting. Knowledge and skills can be assessed against the normal outcomes

of specific courses and credits awarded as a result of demonstrated knowledge and skills acquired from the outcomes of relevant learning. In this way, a student may be able to gain access to a programme of study or may complete a programme of study in a shorter time.

- IV. PLA for the Outcomes of relevant Experiential Learning:** PLA credit will be awarded for relevant experiential learning only; that is, it will be awarded only for the appropriate level of experiential learning.
- V. Quality Assurance:** For quality assurance purposes, PLA will fit within the mission of the institution and will include appropriate decision-making structures and processes; sound assessment and planning processes; personnel role clarity and training; research-based design and effective delivery of the portfolio preparation course; required IT support; approved review and evaluation mechanisms; revision and feedback processes; and accessible and appropriate fee structure.

PLA policies and procedures will be documented and available to all interested stakeholders; leaders and PLA practitioners must be appropriately trained and the PLA programme will be regularly monitored, reviewed and updated.

- VI. PLA Credit Limits:** A maximum of 30 credits or 10 courses can be earned through PLA. (The USA benchmark is 9 – 120 credits, normally regulated by Accreditation Boards). The credits need not be restricted to UWI Level I courses. Students must complete PLA credits before the start of the final year of study.
- VII. Management of the PLA Process:** A Steering Committee for Prior Learning Assessment comprising the Deputy Principal or nominee; Director, Academic, Programming and Delivery division; Campus Registrar or nominee; Director, Open Campus Country Sites or nominee; Quality Assurance representative; and PLA Programme Officer will have oversight of PLA at the Open Campus. The PLA Programme Officer will be responsible for the management of the PLA process with assistance from a Portfolio Course Coordinator and academic/faculty assessors. Mentorship will be provided by both the PLA Programme Officer and Portfolio Course Coordinator.

**VIII.** The University of the West Indies' procedures for Appeals will be followed.

## **Related Regulations**

The Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Regulations are related to this Policy.

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<sup>1</sup>Roberts, Vivienne (2004). *Tertiary Education in a Learning Society: A Case for Prior Learning Assessment*. (Unpublished study, Tertiary Level Institutions Unit, The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados).

## APPENDIX

The University of the West Indies Open Campus recognises the following Standards for Quality Assurance in Prior Learning Assessment accepted by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL).

### STANDARDS FOR ASSESSING LEARNING

To determine whether to award college credit to students for prior learning, follow these standards:

1. Credit or its equivalent should be awarded only for learning, and not for experience.
2. Assessment should be based on standards and criteria for the level of acceptable learning that are both agreed upon and made public.
3. Assessment should be treated as an integral part of learning, not separate from it, and should be based on an understanding of learning processes.
4. The determination of credit awards and competence levels must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic or credentialing experts.
5. Credit or other credentialing should be appropriate to the context in which it is awarded and accepted.
6. If awards are for credit, transcript entries should clearly describe what learning is being recognized and should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.
7. Policies, procedures, and criteria applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available to all parties involved in the assessment process.
8. Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.
9. All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions they perform.
10. Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served, the purposes being met, and the state of the assessment arts.

Taken from *Assessing Learning: Standards, Principles, and Procedures* (Second Edition) By Morry Fiddler, Catherine Marienau, and Urban Whitaker, 2006. Chicago, Kendall Hunt Publishing Company.

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