



BUCKS COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT HANDBOOK: A DETAILED GUIDE FOR STUDENTS, FACULTY AND STAFF

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I. OVERVIEW

a. BACKGROUND AND MISSION

Bucks County Community College (Bucks) recognizes that students enter the College from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, some of which may involve college-level learning. The College is committed to providing pathways for students to proceed along smooth transitions without delays, duplication of courses, or loss of credit. As such, the College maintains a Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Program in order that students will be afforded the assessment methods by which they can document their college-level learning and pursue equivalent credit toward courses in their programs of study. Bucks' support of PLA has been continuously affirmed through formalized mechanisms such as promotion of and adherence to the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) Standards for Assessing Learning; signing the Statewide Prior Learning Assessment Agreement and supporting the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Prior Learning Assessment Initiative; participating in the 48-institution CAEL study published in 2010; participating in the Perkins Local Plan for Statewide Articulation Agreements; and participating in the statewide community college work group for Prior Learning Assessment.

b. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of the Prior Learning Assessment Program is to provide the opportunity for students to document the college-level learning they have achieved outside the traditional college classroom and pursue equivalent credit. This benefits students by allowing them to save time and money by not having to take courses for material they have already learned. Student participation in Prior Learning Assessment can have a positive impact on retention and persistence towards graduation, as shown in numerous studies such as the 2010 Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) 48-institution study *Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success* in which the College participated. The Program's primary goal must always be moderated by the companion goal of maintaining the academic integrity of the institution. As such, the Office of Prior Learning Assessment strives to guard against the Program serving in any way to weaken the College, its programs and reputation. The Academic Departments are consulted regularly in regards to the parameters by which equivalent credit is granted.

The following goals and objectives are pursued in support of the mission of the Prior Learning Assessment Program:

- Provide support for students interested in pursuing PLA – provide advising, serve as student advocate, develop and submit proposals for students to receive equivalent credit.
- Develop and publish accurate and useful information about PLA at Bucks such as guidelines, policies and procedures.
- Create awareness of PLA and the opportunities it provides for students and enrollment efforts.
- Coordinate the evaluation of non-collegiate instruction and training programs for the possible recommendation of equivalent credit.
- Broker the internal and external articulation agreements to provide for a smooth transition for students without delays, duplication of courses or loss of credit.
- Liaise effectively with academic departments and student service areas.

c. STANDARDS

The Prior Learning Assessment Program upholds and abides by internal and external policies and standards developed by the College, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the federal government and professional associations.

i. CAEL TEN STANDARDS FOR ASSESSING LEARNING

The Program promotes and adheres to the *Ten Standards for Assessing Learning* developed by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL):

- 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.

ii. PENNSYLVANIA PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AGREEMENT, INITIATIVE, AND GUIDELINES

The College is a signed party to the *Prior Learning Assessment Agreement* and supports the *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Prior Learning Assessment Initiative*. The Pennsylvania PLA Consortium is a group of higher education institutions that have agreed to abide by, fully implement, and oversee the Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) General Guidelines developed by the Department of Education with cooperation from over 30 higher education institutions, non-profit groups, and the Department of Labor and Industry.

The *Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Labor & Industry Prior Learning Assessment General Guidelines* are as follows:

Based upon research, current Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) practices, and accrediting standards established by the Middle States Association Commission on Higher Education

(MSACHE), the "Joint Statement on the Transfer and Award of Credit" developed by the American Council on Education (ACE), the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), the Pennsylvania Statewide Task Force on Prior Learning Assessment and the Departments of Education and Labor & Industry have developed guidelines for PLA Programs. Pennsylvania postsecondary institutions are encouraged to develop, implement, and maintain PLA Programs with policies and procedures that are aligned with these recommended guiding principles:

Definition of Prior Learning Assessment

- Prior Learning Assessment is a validated process to evaluate the knowledge and skills students gain from life experiences.
- When prior learning experiences demonstrate college-level learning and align with college course competencies, postsecondary institutions should award college credit.

Characteristics of Prior Learning Assessment Programs

- PLA Programs are student-centered, learner-focused, and strive for appropriate balance of consistency, flexibility, educational rigor, and academic program integrity.
- Institutions' PLA Programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed.
- PLA should be conducted in a timely manner to inform academic advising and educational decision-making.

Benefits of Prior Learning Assessment

- PLA and transfer credit policies rank highly among adults as factors in college choice. (A sample of 1,500 adults in a College Board study rated 'credit for prior learning policy' as higher in importance than 'small class size' or 'availability of financial aid'.)
- PLA is a positive influence upon retention. (The University of Maryland found on average PLA students enroll in more courses than students not receiving credit for PLA.)
- PLA is a positive influence upon persistence. (A study by Simpson College showed a 75.3% persistence rate for PLA students, while only 38.8% of students who were eligible, but did not participate in PLA, persisted.)
- PLA students show somewhat higher levels of academic performance compared to other students. (The University of Maryland-University College cited that PLA students earn as high, if not higher, grade point averages than non-PLA students.)
- PLA is a positive influence upon developing meta-cognitive skills. (A study by the University of Connecticut found PLA students demonstrated higher levels of complex problem solving than students without PLA credit.)

Opportunities for Prior Learning Assessment

- Adult learners gain knowledge and skills from a variety of life experiences.
- Types of PLA opportunities include, but are not limited to:
 - Advanced Placement (AP) courses
 - Military training / experience
 - Apprenticeship
 - Employment / work experience

- Volunteer work / community service
- Informal self-study
- Formal Travel / Immersion in another culture or cross-cultural experience
- In-service programs
- Continuing education
- Local industry training programs (Non-college, industry training)
- Industry certifications
- Professional licenses and certifications

Assessment of Prior Learning

- Prior learning should be assessed on college course competencies.
- College credit should be awarded for demonstrated college-level learning.
- The assessment process for awarding credit should be conducted and monitored by institutional faculty and administrators.
- Assessments may include third-party review and/or consultation by industry representatives.
- Evaluation of prior learning completed ten years before the request date should be made at the discretion of the institution.
- Types of PLA assessment tools include, but are not limited to:
 - Advanced Placement (AP) Exams
 - College Level Examination Program (CLEP) Exams
 - Excelsior College Exams (Excelsior)

iii. PERKINS LOCAL PLAN FOR THE PERKINS IV STATEWIDE ARTICULATION AGREEMENTS

The College participates in and adheres to the guidelines for the *Perkins Local Plan for the Perkins IV Statewide Articulation Agreements*. The purpose of this Agreement is to ensure that students make the transition from a school entity to another school entity, college or university or a business/industry without experiencing delays in or duplication of learning. Under the Pennsylvania State Five-Year Plan and, in accordance with the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 (Act), all Postsecondary Institutions receiving funds under the Act are required to award college-level credit or equivalent clock hours to a matriculated student and apply that credit toward the completion of the approved Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) Program of Study, leading to an industry-recognized credential or certificate at the postsecondary level, or an associate or baccalaureate degree.

II. PARTICIPATION

The Prior Learning Assessment program at Bucks County Community College is designed to provide pathways for Bucks students to document their college-level learning and challenge courses in their degree or certificate programs of study.

a. ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible to participate in the Prior Learning Assessment Program at Bucks students must be

- currently enrolled and actively pursuing classes in a program of study that includes requirements for the course(s) they propose to challenge;
- in good academic standing with an acceptable cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 or better after completing at least one semester at Bucks; and
- in good financial standing with the College and not have any outstanding debts or obligations to the College.

Students who have not yet completed a full semester at Bucks may apply to begin the PLA process with any equivalent credit to be awarded after meeting these requirements for a minimum of one semester.

b. GRADUATION RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS

The College's graduation residency policy requires that students must complete no fewer than thirty semester credit hours in graded courses at Bucks County Community College to earn the associate degree and that no fewer than 50% of the credits required for a certificate be completed in graded courses at Bucks. The nontraditional ungraded credits that can be used toward a Bucks degree or certificate include all equivalent credit awarded through PLA (marked as CL, CX, and/or LE on the Bucks transcript) in addition to any Advanced Placement credit (marked as AP on the Bucks transcript), Military credit (marked as ME on the Bucks transcript) and Transfer credit (marked as TR on the Bucks transcript) brought into Bucks.

c. TRANSCRIPTION OF COURSES AND CREDITS

When equivalent credit is awarded through Prior Learning Assessment it is ungraded, i.e., no letter grade is awarded. Equivalent credit is transcribed on the Bucks transcript with a code of CL, CX or LE where the grade would be. The CL code indicates equivalent credit awarded via challenge by standardized exam (see section IV.a.), the CX code indicates equivalent credit awarded via departmental challenge exam (CREX), and the LE code indicates equivalent credit awarded via all other methods of PLA such as the evaluation of non-collegiate instruction by Bucks faculty leading to credit recommendations and/or articulation agreements and individualized assessment by portfolio. When equivalent credit is approved by the Assistant Academic Dean for the Department in which the course is taught, the specified code is entered onto the student's Bucks transcript where the grade would be, along with the course(s) and credit(s) granted. As of Fall 2011, if the code of LE is used, an additional code is entered into the student's Bucks database file to indicate the particular method by which the LE credit was awarded and granted.

d. FEES

In keeping with the *CAEL Ten Standards for Assessing Learning*, fees are charged for the assessment of prior learning, regardless of whether credit is awarded. Students are required to show proof of payment prior to any assessment of prior learning. The payment process varies depending upon the type of assessment administered. For CREX exams students will pay Student Accounts prior to taking the exam, for standardized exams students will arrange payment with

the Testing Center prior to taking the exam, for portfolios students will pay Student Accounts prior to submitting their portfolio for assessment.

The fees are as follows:

- i.** Departmental Challenge Exams (CREX) - \$100
- ii.** Standardized Exams - \$25 administration fee plus the fee charged by the test publisher (\$80 for CLEP, \$80 for DSST, and \$340 for NYU Foreign Language)
- iii.** Evaluation of Non-Collegiate Instruction – no fee
- iv.** Individual Assessment via Portfolio – \$60

e. TRANSFERABILITY

Equivalent credit awarded via Prior Learning Assessment may not be transferable to another institution. However, students should check directly with the intended transfer institution to determine transferability and/or the possibility of applying for a similar credit equivalency award process at the transfer school.

f. APPEAL PROCESS

The College provides an appeal procedure for students who believe that a recorded grade is not the one earned in a course. Students should follow this same appeal process for disputing the results of the assessment of their prior learning. The full procedure and associated form(s) are available on the College web site at <http://www.bucks.edu/catalog/policies/>, <http://www.bucks.edu/admissions/records/forms/>, and in College offices.

Students should first see the PLA faculty assessor to resolve the matter. If resolution is not achieved, then the Department Assistant Academic Dean should be consulted. The final step in the appeal process is the Committee on Academic Performance. It should be noted that only the faculty assessor makes an assessment change. Other steps in the appeal process are advisory. Students are urged to retain all work until the equivalent credit has been recorded on the student's transcript.

The Grade Appeal Process Form is obtained from the Office of Admissions, Records, and Registration; Academic Department Offices; the Student Services Center and online at <http://www.bucks.edu/admissions/records/forms/>.

III. APPLICATION

Students begin the PLA process by completing, signing and submitting an application. Prior Learning Assessment applications are available online at www.bucks.edu/pla and at the Student Services area of each campus location (Newtown, UBC, LBC). All students should feel free to contact the Office of Prior Learning Assessment directly for advice regarding their questions, concerns, and/or developing their individualized PLA plan. In order to complete the PLA Application the student should:

- 1) Carefully consider the course requirements for their Bucks program of study.

- 2) Review the course syllabus, available online at <http://www.bucks.edu/catalog/courses/>, to understand the course objectives of the course for which PLA is being sought.
- 3) Consider whether their prior learning has included achievement of the course objectives for any specific course(s) in their Bucks Program of Study.
- 4) Identify any course(s) to potentially challenge for equivalent credit.
- 5) Determine which course(s) they propose to challenge and indicate this on the PLA application.
- 6) Explore, with an advisor if desired, the pathways available to document their prior learning.
- 7) Select the most appropriate pathway(s) or assessment method(s) by which to document the prior learning and indicate this on the PLA application.

The completed PLA application should be submitted to the Office of Prior Learning Assessment in Student Services in the Rollins Center at 275 Swamp Road; Newtown, PA 18940. Original documentation will also need to be provided, with the type varying depending upon the pathway. For standardized exams, the official test transcripts will come directly to the PLA Office from the test publisher when the student selects Bucks as the receiving institution. For CREX exams, the Academic Department will provide the results directly to the PLA Office. For credit recommendations based upon credentials, such as the Childhood Development Certificate (CDA) or Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), the student will need to bring the original official credential to the Student Services area of the respective campus to be viewed and copied by a College official. For credit recommendations based upon non-collegiate training programs such as the Police Academy, the student will need to arrange to have official transcripts sent to the PLA Office. For articulation agreements, the student will need to provide the documentation stipulated in the agreement. For example, articulation agreements with local secondary technical programs require submission of the student's competency report and credentials, and those with Bucks noncredit programs require documentation of successful completion of the program. For portfolios, the student will submit the portfolio directly to the PLA Office.

The complexity of the actual PLA process for individual students can vary along a broad spectrum. For example, some PLA plans, such as those for challenge by exam, are straightforward. In those cases, the student should feel free to use the resources available through the PLA web pages and publications to create and pursue a plan to completion. On the other end of the spectrum, some situations may be complex and even involve multiple assessment processes and the student may benefit by consulting with the Office of Prior Learning Assessment to obtain advice for creating an individualized PLA plan.

All students should feel free to contact the Office of Prior Learning Assessment directly for advice regarding their questions, concerns, and/or developing their individualized PLA plans.

IV. PATHWAYS – ASSESSMENT METHODS

The College recognizes the three primary assessment methods by which students can document their college-level learning - examination, evaluation of non-collegiate instruction, and individual assessment.

a. CHALLENGE BY EXAM

Challenge by Examination (CBE), or testing, provides high-yield, low-risk opportunities to challenge courses for equivalent credit. Many Bucks courses are open for Bucks students to challenge by examination. The College recognizes and makes available departmental challenge exams (CREX) along with standardized exams given by the College Level Examination Program (CLEP), DSST (formerly known as DANTES), and the New York University School of Continuing and Professional Studies (NYUSCPS) Foreign Language Testing Service. The specific courses and corresponding exams are reviewed annually with updated lists made available on the College's Catalog, Testing Center, and PLA web pages at <http://www.bucks.edu/catalog/>, <http://www.bucks.edu/admissions/testing/>, and <http://www.bucks.edu/academics/pla/testing/>, respectively. Students should feel free to contact the Office of Prior Learning Assessment directly with any questions and/or concerns regarding challenging courses by examination.

i. STANDARDIZED EXAMS – CLEP, DSST, NYUSCPS LANGUAGE

The Bucks Testing Center administers CLEP, DSST, and NYUSCPS exams for Bucks students as well as for the general public. Students should note that a current government issued ID (e.g., a driver's license, non-driver's State ID card, or passport) is required for any test at the Bucks Testing Center.

Students will need to work with two areas of the College for the process of challenging a Bucks course(s) by standardized exam:

1) The Testing Center

Students should schedule, pay for and take their exam(s) with the Testing Center. The Testing Center's CLEP and DSST applications are available online at <http://www.bucks.edu/admissions/testing/> and contain scheduling and payment information.

2) The PLA Office

Students should complete and sign the PLA application, available online at www.bucks.edu/pla and at the Student Services area of each campus location (Newtown, UBC, LBC) and submit it to the PLA Office in Student Services in the Rollins Center at 275 Swamp Road; Newtown, PA 18940.

While the Testing Center at Bucks administers all CLEP and DSST exams, only the exams matched to specific Bucks courses as listed online on the College's Catalog, Testing Center, and PLA web pages at <http://www.bucks.edu/catalog/>, <http://www.bucks.edu/admissions/testing/>, and <http://www.bucks.edu/academics/pla/testing/> respectively may be taken to challenge the associated Bucks course. Scores at or above the minimum required score will lead to equivalent credit for the associated Bucks course, but no letter grade will be awarded. Students who do not achieve the minimum required score must wait at least six months to repeat a CLEP exam, 90 days for a DSST exam, and may repeat these exams as many times as desired.

CLEP exams are administered online and DSST exams are administered in “paper and pencil” format at the Bucks Testing Center. In both cases, students will be asked to indicate the code for the school they wish their scores to be sent to. When the Office of Prior Learning Assessment is in receipt of both the student’s PLA application and CLEP or DSST exam transcript showing a score at or above the required minimum score, a proposal is prepared for the student to receive equivalent credit for the Bucks course(s) he/she is challenging. When that Credit Award is fully signed and approved by the Assistant Academic Dean of the Academic Department from which the course is offered, the Award is sent to the Bucks Records Office for transcribing and a follow up email is sent to the student’s Bucks email account. There will be no grade(s) associated with the course(s) and the code “CL” will be indicated on the Bucks transcript where the grade would be.

Students are encouraged to prepare for the exam even when they feel confident of their knowledge of the material. The *CLEP Official Study Guide* and *Official DSST Test Preparation Guide* are available in the Libraries at all three campuses and the Bookstore. Detailed exam information, sample tests, and individual study guides are available on the test publishers’ web sites that can be accessed by links from the College’s PLA and Testing Center web pages at <http://www.bucks.edu/admissions/testing/> and <http://www.bucks.edu/academics/pla/testing/> respectively.

Credit based upon examination may not be transferable. However, many colleges and universities will have a similar process for awarding equivalent credit based upon CLEP and/or DSST results. Students should work directly with their transfer institutions to follow their process to request consideration of the test results for credit.

ii. DEPARTMENTAL CHALLENGE EXAMS – CREX

Departmental challenge exams, or CREX exams, are coordinated by the PLA Office in cooperation with the Academic Departments at Bucks and are often administered in the Testing Center. Students will need to work with up to four areas of the College for the process of challenging a Bucks course by CREX:

1) The Academic Department that offers the course

Students should contact the Academic Department(s) directly (contact information can be found online at <http://www.bucks.edu/academics/department/>) to obtain exam information. The Academic Department will provide information regarding test preparation and whether the exam is administered in the Testing Center or the Department. If the CREX exam is administered in the Department, students should bring their current government issued ID (e.g., a driver's license, non-driver's State ID card, or passport) with them.

2) The PLA Office

Students should complete and sign the PLA application, available online at www.bucks.edu/pla and at the Student Services area of each campus location (Newtown, UBC, LBC) and submit it to the PLA Office in Student Services in the Rollins Center at

275 Swamp Road; Newtown, PA 18940. The PLA Office will prepare and provide an invoice for the student.

3) Student Accounts

CREX exams cost \$100 each and the non-refundable fee must be paid to Student Accounts prior to taking the exam. Students will need to provide proof of payment to schedule their CREX exams with the Academic Department or the Testing Center, depending upon the location in which the exam is administered.

4) The Testing Center, when applicable

If the CREX exam is administered at the Testing Center, students should bring their current government issued ID (e.g., a driver's license, non-driver's State ID card, or passport) with them, as it is required for any test at the Bucks Testing Center.

When the Office of Prior Learning Assessment is in receipt of both the student's PLA application and CREX assessment results indicating that the student passed, a proposal is prepared for the student to receive equivalent credit for the Bucks course(s) he/she is challenging. When that Credit Award is fully signed and approved by the Assistant Academic Dean of the Academic Department from which the course is offered, the Award is sent to the Bucks Office of Admissions, Records, and Registration for transcribing and a follow up email is sent to the student's Bucks email account. There will be no grade(s) associated with the course(s) and the code "CX" will be indicated on the Bucks transcript where the grade would be.

Students are encouraged to prepare for the exam even when they feel confident of their knowledge of the material. The Academic Department will provide information specific to the exam, such as the type of test and names of text book(s) and/or resource materials to review. Passing the CREX exam will lead to equivalent credit for the associated Bucks course, but no letter grade will be awarded. Students who do not pass their CREX exams must wait six months to repeat the exam, with the exception of the CREX exams for NURS101 and NURS102 which may be repeated only once, either immediately or when they are offered again the following year.

Credit based upon examination may not be transferable. Students should work directly with the transfer institution to follow their process to request consideration of the exam results for credit.

b. EVALUATION OF NON-COLLEGIATE INSTRUCTION

The evaluation of non-collegiate instruction often results in credit recommendations and/or articulation agreements that provide students with specified opportunities to pursue equivalent credit. Students who have successfully completed instruction and training programs outside the traditional college classroom may be eligible to pursue equivalent credit via this PLA pathway, which evaluates these programs. Examples of programs that have qualified students for equivalent credit include tech-prep programs at secondary schools; noncredit programs at Bucks; and various training programs for professional credentials such as the Childhood Development Associate (CDA), Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), and Police Officer (ACT120 Police Academy). As with all PLA methods, the student must have achieved verifiable college-level

learning that matches a course in the Bucks program of study. Summary information about the many pathways and corresponding courses is maintained on the College's PLA web pages at www.bucks.edu/pla with the corresponding files and documents maintained in the PLA Office in Student Services in the Rollins Center at 275 Swamp Road; Newtown, PA 18940.

Students should feel free to contact the Office of Prior Learning Assessment directly with any questions and/or concerns regarding challenging courses by the evaluation of non-collegiate instruction.

i. CREDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

The College oversees the evaluation of non-collegiate instruction and training programs and maintains active credit recommendations for those deemed equivalent to Bucks courses. The number and type(s) of programs deemed equivalent to Bucks courses varies depending upon the instruction or training program that has been evaluated. Examples of active credit recommendations include some that graduates of some of Bucks noncredit programs may be eligible to pursue based upon the professional credentials they earn, such as the Childhood Development Associate (CDA), Fire Fighter 1 (FF1), and various certificates earned through the IT Academy. The complete list of active credit recommendations is maintained on the College's PLA web pages at www.bucks.edu/pla and in the PLA Office in Student Services in the Rollins Center at 275 Swamp Road; Newtown, PA 18940.

The College recognizes the American Council on Education (ACE) and the National College Credit Recommendation Service (National CCRS, formerly known as PONSI), two national bodies that evaluate non-collegiate instruction and training programs. If the program the student successfully completed has been evaluated by one of these two bodies, the student has the opportunity to challenge a Bucks course(s) based upon their credit recommendations. For example, military training is evaluated by ACE and the ACE credit recommendations are indicated on the student's military transcript. In addition, many professional instruction programs that a student may have completed as part of employment have been evaluated by ACE or National CCRS and the student's transcript from that program will indicate the equivalent credit recommendations. Any equivalent credit awarded based upon the credit recommendations from ACE or National CCRS will be transcribed as PLA credit and the code "LE" will be indicated on the Bucks transcript where the grade would be.

Students wishing to challenge Bucks courses for equivalent credit based upon credit recommendations should complete and sign the PLA application, available online at www.bucks.edu/pla and at the Student Services area of each campus location (Newtown, UBC, LBC) and submit it to the PLA Office in Student Services in the Rollins Center at 275 Swamp Road; Newtown, PA 18940. Documentation of successful completion of the training or instruction program, such as official military or trade school transcripts and/or original credentials, will also need to be submitted to the PLA Office. When the Office of Prior Learning Assessment is in receipt of both the student's PLA application and any required documentation, a proposal is prepared for the student to receive equivalent credit for the Bucks course(s) he/she is challenging. When that Credit Award is fully signed and approved by the Assistant Academic Dean of the Academic Department from which the course is offered, the Award is sent to the

Bucks Office of Admissions, Records, and Registration for transcribing and a follow up email is sent to the student's Bucks email account. There will be no grade(s) associated with the course(s) and the code "LE" will be indicated on the Bucks transcript where the grade would be.

Credit based upon the evaluation of non-collegiate instruction that has led to a credit recommendation may not be transferable. Students should work directly with the transfer institutions to follow their process to request consideration of their non-collegiate instruction for credit.

ii. ARTICULATION AGREEMENTS

The Office of Prior Learning Assessment works with Academic Affairs to collaborate with internal and external partners such as the Bucks Division of Continuing Education, Workforce Development and Public Safety; the Pennsylvania Department of Education; and local secondary technical programs to evaluate local non-collegiate instruction and training programs and enter into articulation agreements with those programs. These articulation agreements provide pathways for graduates of some of Bucks noncredit programs, local secondary technical programs, and Pennsylvania secondary technical programs to transition into Bucks degree programs without delays, duplication of courses, or loss of credit. The complete list of active Articulation Agreements is maintained on the College's PLA web pages at www.bucks.edu/pla with the corresponding files and records in the PLA Office in Student Services in the Rollins Center at 275 Swamp Road; Newtown, PA 18940.

Students wishing to challenge a Bucks course(s) for equivalent credit based upon an articulation agreement should complete and sign the PLA application, available online at www.bucks.edu/pla and at the Student Services area of each campus location (Newtown, UBC, LBC) and submit it to the PLA Office in Student Services in the Rollins Center at 275 Swamp Road; Newtown, PA 18940. Documentation of successful completion of the training or instruction program, such as official transcripts, original certificates, competency reports, and/or original credentials, will also need to be submitted to the PLA Office. The type of documentation required varies depending upon the program completed and is specified in the articulation agreement. When the Office of Prior Learning Assessment is in receipt of both the student's PLA application and any required documentation, a proposal is prepared for the student to receive equivalent credit for the Bucks course(s) he/she is challenging. When that Credit Award is fully signed and approved by the Assistant Academic Dean of the Academic Department from which the course is offered, the Award is sent to the Bucks Office of Admissions, Records, and Registration for transcribing and a follow up email is sent to the student's Bucks email account. There will be no grade(s) associated with the course(s) and the code "LE" will be indicated on the Bucks transcript where the grade would be.

Credit based upon the evaluation of non-collegiate instruction that has led to an articulation agreement may not be transferable. Students should work directly with the transfer institutions to follow their process to request consideration of their non-collegiate instruction for credit.

c. INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENT – PORTFOLIO

The opportunity for individual assessment is provided via the portfolio method at Bucks, by which students challenge a particular course in their program of study. Students should obtain authorization to pursue this method prior to beginning any portfolio preparation.

A portfolio is a written, visual, or performance presentation submitted on paper, online, or in person that demonstrates and verifies equivalent knowledge of the specified course material. Students must explain and document their achievement of each published course objective, equivalent to successful completion of the course at the “C” level or better. A major part of this process involves cross referencing the syllabus of the course being challenged with the student’s explanation of how he/she has learned the material. The contents and delivery method of each portfolio should be relevant to the course work that is being challenged and will include some narrative to explain and describe the student’s knowledge of the course material as well as demonstration and/or documentation of learning. Examples of the types of documentation that may be submitted include performance art demonstrations, art or work samples, and reference letters from those who have observed the student demonstrating the competencies. Students are provided with detailed instructions and feedback on the progress of their work before submitting the portfolio for assessment.

The work submitted must abide by the College rules concerning plagiarism and academic integrity. Any attempt to practice deception concerning information in a portfolio is grounds to eliminate the portfolio from consideration for an award of credit. Portfolios must reflect college-level ability; written portfolios must reflect college-level writing skills. It is strongly recommended that students successfully complete COMP111 or a similar course with a major research paper requirement before attempting to challenge a course with a written portfolio.

Students wishing to challenge a Bucks course(s) for equivalent credit based upon individual assessment via a portfolio should complete and sign the PLA application, available online at www.bucks.edu/pla and at the Student Services area of each campus location (Newtown, UBC, LBC) and submit it to the PLA Office in Student Services in the Rollins Center at 275 Swamp Road; Newtown, PA 18940. This will begin the process to obtain authorization to pursue this assessment method. Students will be contacted directly by the PLA Office to inform them whether their petition has been granted and they have been authorized by the Assistant Academic Dean of the Academic Department from which the course is offered to challenge the course(s) with a portfolio. Students should wait to receive this authorization before beginning any portfolio preparation.

A faculty assessor, as a subject matter expert, will assess the portfolio. The faculty assessor is designated by the Academic Dean of the Department in which the course is taught. Equivalent credit is awarded for a portfolio that attains the equivalent of at least “C” quality work; however, no letter grade is awarded.

When the Office of Prior Learning Assessment is in receipt of both the student’s PLA application and the assessment results from the faculty assessor indicating their recommendation to grant credit, a proposal is prepared for the student to receive equivalent credit for the Bucks course he/she is challenging. When that Credit Award is fully signed and approved by the

Assistant Academic Dean of the Academic Department from which the course is offered, the Award is sent to the Bucks Office of Admissions, Records, and Registration for transcribing and a follow up email is sent to the student's Bucks email account. There will be no grade(s) associated with the course and the code "LE" will be indicated on the Bucks transcript where the grade would be.

Credit based upon individual assessment via a portfolio may not be transferable. Students should work directly with the transfer institutions to follow their process to request consideration of their portfolios for credit.

V. CONCLUSION

The College is committed to providing pathways for students to proceed along smooth educational transitions without delays, duplication of courses, or loss of credit. The Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Program at Bucks provides students with the assessment methods by which they can document the college-level learning they have achieved outside the traditional college classroom and pursue equivalent credit toward courses in their program of study. This allows students to save time and money by not having to take courses for material they have already learned.

The complexity of the actual PLA process for individual students can vary along a broad spectrum. All students should feel free to contact the Office of Prior Learning Assessment directly for advice regarding their questions, concerns, and/or developing their individualized PLA plan.

The Office of Prior Learning Assessment is in Student Services in the Rollins Center
275 Swamp Road; Newtown, PA 18940
Student Services Reception Desk: 215-968-8081
PLA Coordinator: 215-968-8161; pla@bucks.edu
Appointments, PLA Administrative Assistant: 215-968-8195
www.bucks.edu/pla