

# Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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## What is a prior learning assessment (PLA)?

Prior learning assessment (PLA) is the process of determining if knowledge gained outside of the traditional academic environment is at the college level and worthy of college credit.

This knowledge may be acquired through:

- Work
- Military service
- Non-credit courses
- Employer training programs
- Volunteer or community service
- Independent study (i.e. open educational resources and massive open online courses, or MOOCs)

PLA methods include portfolio development and assessment, national exams (such as [CLEP](#), [DSST](#), [Excelsior College Exams](#) and [UExcel Exams](#)), and training (military and corporate) with [ACE CREDIT recommendations](#).

## What is a portfolio?

A portfolio is a set of documents that a student develops to demonstrate learning acquired outside the college classroom and that can be evaluated for college credit.

## What is LearningCounts.org?

LearningCounts is a comprehensive one stop prior learning assessment (PLA) resource for adult learners, offering PLA guidance, prior learning portfolio development courses, and portfolio assessment services.

## How is this service different from other PLA formats?

LearningCounts brings all forms of prior learning assessment (PLA) together and helps students determine the most efficient, affordable path to completing their undergraduate degree. If students decide to pursue assessments through LearningCounts, it is because their learning is suited to individualized portfolio assessment.

LearningCounts also differs from other services in that they're a service of the [Council for Adult and Experiential Learning \(CAEL\)](#), a nonprofit organization that is the national leader in PLA.

Their faculty assessors are CAEL-trained and work at colleges and universities all over the country.

Finally, as the leader in PLA for the past 39 years, their process and training procedures are recognized internationally as being rigorous and setting the standards for high quality.

## **What other special features does LearningCounts have?**

LearningCounts is the only online, nationwide PLA service available directly to students. Using the LearningCounts portal, students can learn more about the service, get advice from a College Credit Specialist, register for courses, build and submit their portfolio, and receive final credit recommendations on their work – all without leaving their living rooms. Finally, we think LearningCounts includes several high-touch features that make it special: an actual instructor providing personal feedback throughout the facilitated course; review of learning by a faculty member credentialed in the subject area of the portfolio; and a quick turn-around on portfolio assessments.

## **What's the return on investment (ROI) on prior learning assessment systems like LearningCounts?**

On average, students who earn prior learning assessments (PLA) are more than twice as likely to complete their undergraduate degrees as students who did not earn PLA credits. And, while completing their degrees, students with PLA credits save time — an average of 2-10 months — while earning these degrees.

This translates into not only saved time, but also saved money. Depending on the type of school in which the student is enrolled, as well as other factors, PLA users save anywhere between \$800 and \$12,000 per student. And for whoever is paying the bill for that tuition, the savings is \$800 to \$12,000 as well.

## **How long does this process take?**

CCS\*202: Prior Learning Assessment Theory and Practice is an 8-week course. Once a student's portfolio has been matched to a faculty assessor, the assessment itself will take about two weeks. Transcription of these credits will take just a few business days after that.

## **How much is a portfolio assessment?**

The cost is \$125 per portfolio assessment. Each portfolio holds the equivalent of one course.

## **Does a student have to enroll in a course to have a portfolio assessed?**

Yes. Students are required to complete – and pass – CCS\*202: Prior Learning Assessment Theory and Practice before submitting a portfolio. The portfolio software is included the course.

## **What are the outcomes of CCS\*202: Prior Learning Assessment Theory and Practice?**

Upon successful completion of this course, learners will be able to:

- Identify and reflect on areas of their own learning from both formal and informal settings
- Use critical reflection skills to rethink the nature and value of learning from experience
- Approach learning with an appropriate balance of practical and theoretical understanding
- Discuss and apply experiential learning theory, models, and concepts to case studies
- Generate college-level writing that demonstrates learning
- Identify, organize, and gather documentation in order to build portfolios of prior learning

## **How many hours a week should I expect to spend on CCS\*202: Prior Learning Assessment Theory and Practice?**

We advise students to plan on spending between 10-15 hours per week for the duration of this course, with the heaviest work load focused on the last few weeks of the course when students are generating narratives for their portfolios.

## **How do I know what courses to use to build my portfolio?**

[The LearningCounts courses](#) helps students select a college course (or courses) from a regionally accredited institution that best matches the college-level learning they obtained outside of the classroom. You can also use the free Credit Predictor provided by LearningCounts to help identify appropriate courses for your portfolio.

## **What is a syllabus?**

A detailed outline of a course written by a faculty member that may include course goals, textbooks, instructor contact information, learning outcomes, schedules, policies, course topics, evaluation, and grading criteria.

## **Is there a limit on the number of credits I can request via portfolio assessment?**

LearningCounts has no limits on the number of credits, but your degree program may have internal policies that limit the number of credits brought in through prior learning assessments (PLA) and/or through credit transfer. We advise you to check with your Excelsior College academic advisor to learn how many credits can be accepted through PLA and portfolio assessment.

## **How many portfolios can I submit?**

You can submit as many portfolios as you'd like. For example, if you'd like to earn college credit for your marketing experience, you could create one portfolio in that subject area. If you spent five years studying under a master plumber, you could opt to create a portfolio on plumbing, too. It is most important that you talk to your academic advisor to ensure that the portfolio credits you do will fit into your degree program plan.

[See how other students](#) have saved time and money through online portfolios.

## **Does LearningCounts accept financial aid?**

LearningCounts does not accept financial aid for courses or portfolio assessment. If you are an enrolled Excelsior College student, you may be able to use financial aid to cover the cost of CCS 202: Prior Learning Assessment Theory and Practice. Please ask your academic adviser for more information.

## **How can I get a transcript?**

To submit credits earned through the Learning Portfolio, you can order a National College Credit Recommendation Service/LearningCounts transcript. The transcript can be sent to the Excelsior College Office of Registration and Records or to you personally for your records.

Transcript ordering instructions will be provided at the end of CCS 202: Prior Learning Assessment Theory and Practice. There are no refunds for transcripts.

## **How do my portfolio credits appear on my transcript?**

Portfolio credit recommendations will include a lower or higher semester credit equivalencies, the name of the course for which the student received credit, and a brief description of the course. Degree applicable credits will be listed on an Excelsior College transcript as transfer credit from the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. Earned credits will carry Pass (P) grades.