

# **Sullivan University System Prior Learning Assessment**

## **Portfolio Evaluation and Policies Manual**



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With special thanks to  
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## IMPORTANT CONTACTS

### **PLA Coordinator**

Dr. Anthony Piña, Associate Provost

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(502) 413-8848

### **Bursar's Office**

Brenda Gargano, Bursar

bgargano@sullivan.edu

(502) 213-8311

## SELF ASSESSMENT

### Am I likely to be a successful portfolio candidate?

- I am over the age of 24.
- I have five or more years of experience in fields related to my desired degree and/or to specific courses needed to complete my degree.
- I am or have been involved in community, volunteer and/or career work where I can make use of my professional/vocational skills.
- In my work, I have been exposed to a broad range of experiences and I have knowledge and skills in different areas.
- I have received volunteer, work-related or military training or certifications.
- I feel in control of my own successes and failures (most of the time).
- I am motivated to continually expand my knowledge base.
- I keep informed of changes in my profession or vocation by reading recent publications, being a member of professional organizations, or by participating in credit or non-credit courses and training.
- I make a point of formally and informally networking with others in my field or profession.
- I would like to earn college-level credit by compiling the learning I have acquired through my experiences.
- I have documentation that can support my learning, such as letters, certificates, licenses, item that I have created
- I have good written communication skills.

Answering “yes” to most of these questions would indicate that you would be a successful candidate for portfolio evaluation at Sullivan University!

## HISTORY AND FOUNDATION

### Background

In 2008, the Academic Affairs Council at Sullivan University created the PLA Portfolio Task Force to study the feasibility of a portfolio evaluation program. In 2009, a 4 credit-hour online course, PLA 301 Prior Learning Assessment, was developed and offered. In 2015, a free, non-credit, self-paced portfolio development short course was developed as an alternative to PLA 301. Since then, many Sullivan University students have completed either PLA 301 or the non-credit course and have developed portfolios that have enabled them to receive credit towards their degrees.

### Prior Learning Assessment Defined

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is a process used at colleges and universities to assess college-level knowledge and skills for college credit. Sullivan University uses a variety of methods to award college credit including: 1) face-to-face and online courses; 2) courses

transferred from other accredited institutions; 3) credit by nationally recognized examinations, including CLEP and DSST and Sullivan University course-level bypass exams; 4) Military, corporate and professional training evaluated by the American Council on Education (ACE) and 5) prior learning portfolio. Recent research by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) has shown that students who take advantage of PLA tend to take more courses, have higher grade point averages and graduate sooner than those who do not.

### **CAEL Standards for the Assessment of Prior Learning**

Sullivan University has adopted the Standards for the Assessment of Prior Learning developed by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL). These standards can be found at <https://www.cael.org/ten-standards-for-assessing-learning>.

1. Credit or competencies are awarded only for evidence of learning, not for experience or time spent.
2. Assessment is integral to learning because it leads to and enables future learning.
3. Assessment is based on criteria for outcomes that are clearly articulated and shared among constituencies.
4. The determination of credit awards and competence levels are made by appropriate subject matter and credentialing experts.
5. Assessment advances the broader purpose of equity and access for diverse individuals and groups.
6. Institutions proactively provide guidance and support for learners' full engagement in the assessment process.
7. Assessment policies and procedures are the result of inclusive deliberation and are shared with all constituencies.
8. Fees charged for assessment are based on the services performed in the process rather than the credit awarded.
9. All practitioners involved in the assessment process pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions they perform.
10. Assessment programs are regularly monitored, evaluated and revised to respond to institutional and learner needs.

### **Prior Learning Portfolio**

A prior learning portfolio is a series of documents developed by a student who wishes to petition for credit in recognition of college-level learning gained outside the traditional classroom setting. The portfolio provides the student with the opportunity to demonstrate that he or she possesses the knowledge and competencies taught in a given college course. The portfolio provides sufficient supporting information and documentation so that a designated Faculty Portfolio Evaluator can assess the student's mastery of the knowledge and competencies required for a given Sullivan University course.

## **PLA 301: PRIOR LEARNING EVALUATION COURSE**

PLA 301, Prior Learning Assessment, is a for-credit elective course designed to allow students to engage in self-reflection and to learn techniques to identify and document college-level prior learning experiences. Students define learning and career goals and provide evidence of both applied and theoretical knowledge of college-level content, which can be assessed for possible award of credit. The non-credit, self-paced portfolio development course (PLA 001) is similar in scope and content to PLA 301, but it focuses exclusively on development of the prior learning portfolio.

### **STEPS IN THE PORTFOLIO EVALUATION PROCESS**

1. Student takes either PLA 301 – Prior Learning Assessment or PLA 001, the self-paced portfolio development course.
2. Prior to or concurrently with PLA 301/PLA 001, the student meets with an Academic Advisor to determine which courses to challenge by portfolio.
3. Student develops the portfolio(s) and compiles/scans documentation.
4. Student pays the portfolio evaluation fee to the Sullivan University Bursar's Office (*See Important Contacts on page 2*).
5. Student submits a digital copy of the portfolio(s) to the PLA Coordinator (*See Important Contacts on page 2*). Depending upon the nature of the portfolio and documentation, a USB flash drive with the materials may be required.
6. PLA Coordinator contacts the Discipline Dean to solicit a recommendation for an evaluator to assess the portfolio.
7. PLA Coordinator contacts the Portfolio Evaluator, arranges for training (if the Evaluator is new) and sends the portfolio, and PLA forms to the Evaluator.
8. Portfolio Evaluator assesses the portfolio according to the PLA evaluation rubric and CAEL guidelines to determine whether the student has demonstrated mastery of the course's learning outcomes. Portfolio evaluator completes forms, provides feedback, makes recommendations regarding the award of credit and returns the completed forms and the portfolio to the PLA Coordinator.
9. Academic leader accepts or rejects the credit recommendation made by the Portfolio Evaluator.
10. If credit is granted, PLA Coordinator notifies the Registrar, who adds the course credit to the student's transcript and notifies the student of the outcome of the portfolio evaluation.

## PORTFOLIO POLICIES

Sullivan University provides portfolio evaluation as an option for students who wish to receive credit for courses that teach what a student already knows and can do. **Students may petition for credit via portfolio but are not required to do so.**

### Eligibility

- Portfolio evaluation is offered to students enrolled at Sullivan University.
- Portfolio evaluation credits are restricted to undergraduate students.
- Guided internship/externship courses, courses numbered below 100, or courses designated as developmental are not eligible to be challenged via portfolio.
- Students must pass the PLA 301 Prior Learning Assessment course or PLA 001, the self-paced portfolio development course prior to submission of the initial portfolio.
- After completing PLA 301 or PLA 001, students may submit multiple portfolios but must pay the assessment fee for each portfolio. Up to 75% of a student's degree may be earned via prior learning assessment.
- Students may not submit a portfolio for a course that they have completed previously at a Sullivan University System institution (e.g., a course that they failed previously and must repeat).

### Academic Advising

Prior to working on a portfolio, students should meet with their academic advisors to determine:

- Which courses remain to complete the student's degree.
- Which of these courses may be completed through a prior learning portfolio or through other means, such as CLEP or DSST exams.
- Whether portfolio credits would not duplicate previously awarded credit.
- Whether credits are based only on college-level learning.

### Selecting Courses for Portfolio

In most cases, the student will select one or more Sullivan University course(s) to challenge via portfolio by referring to the course description in the latest University catalog and the most current syllabus for the course. The portfolio narrative will address each of the course objectives/student learning outcomes and major content areas. If a student wishes to develop a portfolio for a course not offered at Sullivan University, the course description must meet the following criteria:

- It must be able to satisfy a course requirement or elective in the student's degree program.

- The course description or syllabus must be published by a regionally accredited college or university and must provide clear and sufficient information regarding the course's student learning outcomes.
- The course must be for-credit.

### **Contents of the Portfolio**

A typical portfolio will contain the following items:

1. Cover Page
2. Table of Contents
3. Autobiography of Learning
4. Professional Resume
5. Narrative
6. Supporting Documentation (if applicable)

### **Deadlines**

After students have completed PLA 301 or PLA 001, they have until the beginning of the quarter prior to the last quarter before graduation to submit completed portfolios for evaluation. For example, if the student is set to graduate in December (after fall quarter), the completed portfolio should be submitted, and fees paid, by week 2 of summer quarter.

### **Fees**

- Fees for portfolio evaluations are charged for the number of credits petitioned, not the amount of credit awarded.
- Fees for evaluations must be paid to the Bursar's Office when applying for portfolio evaluation (*See Important Contacts on page 2*). Fees are not refunded if the credit is denied.
- Fees are subject to change. Students should consult the current Undergraduate Fee Schedule for the current fee structure.

### **Portfolio Credit Determination**

The portfolio is evaluated on a credit/no credit basis, with a P grade recorded in the student's transcript. The Faculty Portfolio Evaluator is responsible for assessing the portfolio and for making recommendations regarding credit. The four options for credit recommendations are:

1. **Credit recommended.** Student demonstrated and documented college level learning for courses being petitioned (considered at a C grade or higher level).

2. **Addendum Requested.** Evaluator needs additional explanation or documentation to make a credit recommendation (requirements listed in comment section below).
3. **No credit recommended.** Student did not demonstrate and document sufficient learning in the course being petitioned.

Sullivan University Academic Leadership will either approve or deny the Evaluator's credit. If the credit recommendation is denied, the student has thirty (30) days to submit an appeal in writing to the PLA Coordinator (See Important Contacts).

### **Student Transcripts**

Once credit has been recommended by the Faculty Portfolio Evaluator and approved by the designated academic administrator, the credit will be placed on the student's transcript by the Registrar's Office.

### **Credit Award Notification**

Students are notified regarding the credit decision via their Sullivan e-mail account.

### **Appeals Process**

If credit is denied, the student has thirty (30) days to submit a letter to the PLA Coordinator requesting a reevaluation and stating the basis for the appeal. The original submission of the portfolio with the contents of the portfolio unchanged or altered must accompany the request. Upon receipt of the request, the PLA Coordinator will consult with the appropriate discipline Dean, Director or Chair and decide if the appeal by the student is warranted and will either deny the appeal or schedule a second evaluation by a different Faculty Portfolio Evaluator.

### **Portfolio Authenticity**

Students who plagiarize or fabricate materials within a portfolio will receive no credit for the portfolio and will not have the evaluation fee refunded. The use of plagiarized or fabricated portfolio contents may result in suspension or expulsion from the University. Portfolios may be subject to originality checking via a service such as Turnitin or SafeAssign.

### **Portfolio Confidentiality**

PLA 301 Faculty, Faculty Portfolio Evaluators, and University Academic Leaderships may review the portfolio for the sole purpose of evaluation. If an exemplary portfolio is to be used for instructional purposes, the written permission of the portfolio's author will be obtained, and the author's name and other identifying information will be removed.



## **Transferability of Credits to Other Institutions**

Sullivan University does not guarantee the transferability to other educational institutions of credit achieved through prior learning assessment. Any student considering transferring to another institution should check the institution's transfer policies.

## Prior Learning Portfolio Evaluation Form

Sullivan University System  
Prior Learning Assessment

One form is completed for each course challenged via portfolio.

Student Name:	ID number:
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### **Grey section to be completed by Evaluator**

Course Number	Course Title (From Catalog)	Credits requested	Credit Recommendation (Filled out by Evaluator Only)	# of credits recommended

### **Explanation of credit recommendation**

1. **Credit recommended.** Student demonstrated and documented college level learning for courses being petitioned (considered at a C grade or higher level).
2. **Addendum Requested.** Evaluator needs additional explanation or documentation to make a credit recommendation (requirements listed in comment section below).
3. **No credit recommended.** Student did not demonstrate and document sufficient learning in the course being petitioned.

Evaluator's Name	Title and Department	Date
<b>Comments:</b>     		

### **Academic Approval**

Approve Recommendations <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	Name	Date
<b>Comments:</b>     		

**Sullivan University Prior Learning Portfolio Evaluation Rubric**

	<b>Excellent (3 points)</b>	<b>Adequate (2 points)</b>	<b>Incomplete (1 pt)</b>	<b>Points</b>
<b>Organization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Includes all required components (forms, autobiography, resume, narrative(s), documentation</li> <li>b. Items are well-organized, labeled and in a logical sequence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Includes all required components (forms, autobiography, resume, narrative(s), documentation</li> <li>b. Items are complete but may not all be labeled or in sequence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Missing one or more required components (forms, autobiography, resume, narrative(s), documentation)</li> <li>b. Items not well-organized and difficult to find</li> </ul>	
<b>Writing Skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Demonstrates above average writing skills</li> <li>b. Free of spelling, grammar and punctuation errors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Adequate/average writing skills</li> <li>b. Spelling, grammar and punctuation issues are at an acceptable level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Below average writing skills</li> <li>b. Has a great many spelling, grammar and punctuation errors</li> </ul>	
<b>Autobiography of Learning (AOL)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Items from the Autobiography of Learning are matched specifically to items in the narrative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Items from the Autobiography of Learning relate generally to the skills and knowledge demonstrated in the narrative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Autobiography of Learning does not demonstrate a clear relationship to the narrative</li> </ul>	
<b>Resume</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Items from the resume are matched specifically to items in the narrative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Items from the resume relate generally to the skills and knowledge demonstrated in the narrative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Resume does not demonstrate a clear relationship to the narrative</li> </ul>	
<b>Narrative: Learning Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Includes course description from catalog</li> <li>b. Specific learning objectives (skills and knowledge required for the course) listed explicitly and are easy to reference</li> <li>c. Narrative is organized by specific learning objective and how each objective was met</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Includes a description of the course</li> <li>b. Learning objectives for the course are included in the narrative</li> <li>c. Narrative addresses how the each of the learning objectives was met</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Does not include a course description</li> <li>b. Learning objectives are incomplete or missing</li> <li>c. Narrative does not address all learning objectives required for the course</li> </ul>	

<p><b>Narrative: Mastery of Objectives</b></p> <p><b>Note difference in points for this item</b></p>	<p><b>Excellent (6 Points)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Demonstrates mastery of all course's learning objectives (required skills and knowledge) at an above average ("A" or "B") level</li> <li>b. Demonstrates superior ability to reason logically</li> <li>c. Has shown clear ability to apply learning in real-world activities</li> </ul>	<p><b>Adequate (4 Points)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Demonstrates mastery of all course's learning objectives at an average ("C") level</li> <li>b. Demonstrates average ability to reason logically</li> <li>c. Has shown some ability to apply learning in real-world activities</li> </ul>	<p><b>Incomplete (1 pt)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Demonstrates below average mastery of learning objectives ("D" level or lower)</li> <li>b. Demonstrates only lower-level reasoning ability</li> <li>c. Does not show practical application of learning to real-world activities</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Supporting Documentation</b></p> <p><b>Not all portfolios require supporting documentation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Clearly labeled and organized</li> <li>b. Each item is referenced specifically in the narrative</li> <li>c. Each item is related directly to specific objectives of the course</li> <li>d. Letters from individuals include contact information</li> <li>e. All Letters are written on official letterhead</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Labeled and organized</li> <li>b. Not all items referenced specifically in the narrative</li> <li>c. Items are related generally to course objectives</li> <li>d. Letters from individuals, do not all contain contact information</li> <li>e. Not all letters are written on official letterhead</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Not clearly labeled and organized</li> <li>b. Items do not relate to narrative</li> <li>c. Item are not related to course objectives</li> <li>d. Letters not clear and do not contain contact information</li> <li>e. Letters do not appear to be official or legitimate</li> </ul>	
<p><b>TOTAL POINTS: Minimum 16 points (w/ supporting documentation) or 14 points (w/o supporting documentation) are required for a successful portfolio--indicative of a 70% ("C") or higher grade</b></p>				