

INDIVIDUALIZED PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT (IPLA)

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Empire State University is committed to the idea that students should be awarded credit for verifiable college-level learning regardless of where or how it was acquired. Many students have gained knowledge from sources that are not validated through traditional course work, standardized examinations or evaluated professional learning. This learning can be evaluated through the individualized Prior Learning Assessment process. Individualized Prior Learning Assessment (iPLA) is the process by which students explain and document their college-level learning, which is then assessed by an expert evaluator. Most students who go through the process find it satisfying, affirming and worth the time and effort. The iPLA Guide (<https://www.esc.edu/media/academic-affairs/ocar/2013-14/iPLA-2013-2014.pdf>) (PDF 1,246kB) found online at www.sunyempire.edu/iPLAGuide (<https://www.sunyempire.edu/degree-planning-academic-review/prior-learning-assessment/individualized-prior-learning-assessment/>), provides students with in-depth information on how to request credits through an assessment of prior learning. For current information on the fees associated with individualized Prior Learning Assessment, please visit Fees at Empire State University (<https://www.esc.edu/student-accounts/tuition-fees/esc-fees/>).

OVERALL PROCESS

Overall, the iPLA process includes the following steps:

- The student works with their mentor to develop their iPLA request. The request will identify, describe and document the student's knowledge.
- The student submit their request through PLA Planner.
- Staff in the Office of Prior Learning review the iPLA request for assignment to a qualified evaluator with expertise relevant to the subject.
- The evaluator evaluates the student's learning, which includes an interview.
- The evaluator writes and submits a credit recommendation report.
- The evaluator's credit recommendation report is reviewed and approved by a faculty committee.
- The student's evaluated credits are officially awarded and added to their record.

SOURCES OF PRIOR COLLEGE-LEVEL LEARNING

Empire State University recognizes that adults have many opportunities for valuable learning in their personal and professional lives. These include:

- Workplace training and experience
- Licenses, certifications and other credentials not evaluated by ACE, NCCRS or Empire State University
- Continuing professional education, including some training that yields continuing education units (CEUs)

- Learning acquired through open educational resources (e.g., MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses))
- Volunteer work in the community
- Hobbies and recreational activities that have resulted in considerable learning
- Independent reading and research
- Study at postsecondary/proprietary schools that may be licensed but not accredited

Students seeking assessment of their prior learning should consult the Office of Prior Learning website. This site includes links to other resources and information related to iPLA, including fees and PLA Planner. iPLA is a student's opportunity to:

- Earn credits for their college-level knowledge
- Save money and time by being assessed in areas in which they otherwise might have been required to take courses.

Credit may be granted for verifiable college-level learning acquired through life or work experiences, but not for just the experience itself. Credit is not awarded for what has been done, even if it has been done for a long time and done well. The experience may have provided an opportunity for learning, and the credits are awarded for student knowledge. A student's mentor or the Office of Prior Learning can help them determine whether their learning might be college level and whether it would contribute to their degree program goals.

WORKING WITH A MENTOR

A student's mentor is their resource as they review their learning and develop their request for credit. Their mentor will help guide them as to:

- The form, content and length of the student's learning description.
- The amount of credit the student should request.
- The determination of how it fits into the student's degree program.
- The supporting documentation and evidence the student should include in their request.

Students and their mentors will engage in early and ongoing conversations regarding their background, potential areas for prior learning assessment and potential areas for new learning – in other words, regarding the overall scope of their degree program and plans for their new learning through enrollment in Empire State University studies. Through the Office of Prior Learning, the university provides online, print and in-person resources that support students in this process. Students can contact the Office of Prior Learning through email at plaooffice@sunyempire.edu. (plaooffice@sunyempire.edu)

IDENTIFYING COLLEGE-LEVEL LEARNING

Defining college-level learning involves many factors, a student and their mentor will discuss these. College-level learning represents a student's ability to take their knowledge and relate it within a particular context and to other contexts within and outside their field. College-level learning involves:

- Acquiring new information.
- Engaging in critical inquiry.
- Analyzing, synthesizing and integrating the information.
- Situating the knowledge within a broader context.
- Demonstrating the ability to apply it.

This may sound complex, but there are different ways that college-level learning can be demonstrated. The guide, Individualized Prior Learning Assessment: A Guide for Students (<https://www.sunyempire.edu/media/academic-affairs/ocar/2013-14/iPLA-2013-2014.pdf>), provides details on identifying a student's college-level learning and how to describe and document their learning. Staff in the Office of Prior Learning also can provide guidance.

WORKING WITH AN EVALUATOR

The Office of Prior Learning will select a qualified evaluator with expertise in the subject area of the learning students have described in their iPLA request. The evaluator reviews:

- The student's learning description.
- Any supporting materials the student has submitted.
- The student's planned degree program plan to determine if there are any overlaps between the learning being evaluated and other knowledge identified on the degree program.

EVALUATOR INTERVIEW

The evaluator will interview students to gain a better understanding of their learning. The evaluator will ask different questions to understand the depth and breadth of their learning. The evaluator also may ask students to provide additional documentation. Once an evaluator is assigned, students will receive an automated email with their evaluator's contact information. Students are responsible for contacting the evaluator to set up a mutually convenient time to conduct the interview. The interview needs to be in real time (e.g., in-person, over the phone, or through video conferencing or other technology-enhanced methods). Face-to-face interviews will take place at the university or an agreed upon public environment. Email interviews are not in real time and should only be used to make initial contact and for follow-up questions.

EVALUATOR RECOMMENDATION REPORT

Once the evaluator has reviewed a student's request and has interviewed them regarding their learning, the evaluator will write and submit a written recommendation report. The evaluator is expected to make an academic credit recommendation that is in keeping with the standards of an accredited and respected collegiate institution. While students and their mentors have done their best to develop appropriate titles and credit amounts, the evaluator can adjust them to best reflect the learning they have demonstrated.

AWARD OF IPLA CREDIT

For all undergraduate students, the award of credit for their prior learning is the responsibility of the faculty committee of academic review. If students are in an individualized program, the Office of Academic Review will include evaluator recommendation reports as part of their degree program proposal. Once the evaluated iPLA credits are approved by the faculty academic review committee, and submitted to the Office of the Registrar, the student's prior learning assessment credits become official and are part of their student record.

PLA PLANNER

The iPLA request review and approval process is managed through the online tool PLA Planner. In PLA Planner:

- The student will create and submit their iPLA request, which includes their learning description and any other documents, to their mentor.
- The student's mentor will review their request and provide them with feedback. Students will work closely with their mentor to make

sure that the learning description clearly explains what they know, provides enough detail for Office of Prior Learning to locate an appropriate evaluator and for the evaluator to understand the nature of their learning and prepare for the interview.

- The student's mentor will submit the final draft of the request to the Office of Prior Learning, which will also review their request and may give them feedback.
- The iPLA fee will be posted to the student's account when the Office of Prior Learning accepts their request.
- The Office of Prior Learning will identify an evaluator and assign the student request.
- The student will be notified through email of the assignment. The email will include a link to the contact information for the evaluator. They are expected to contact the evaluator to set up a time for the interview.
- The student will submit any further supporting materials if the evaluator requests them.
- The evaluator will submit a recommendation report for review by the faculty committee of academic review that will review and approve the credit recommendation.
- The credits recommended by the evaluator and accepted by the faculty are sent to the Office of the Registrar.
- The Office of the Registrar adds the student's iPLA credits to their official record.

Throughout the process, a student can monitor the progress of their request through PLA Planner. The Individualized Prior Learning Assessment: A Guide for Students (<https://www.esc.edu/media/academic-affairs/ocar/2013-14/iPLA-2013-2014.pdf>) provides more information regarding how to use PLA Planner and an introductory quick guide that explains how to use the tool. Within PLA Planner, there is a full guide on how to use all the features in the program.