Prior Learning Assessment Policy
DRAFT January 11, 2016

1) Eligibility

Students must meet the following requirements to be eligible for all aspects of prior learning assessment (PLA):

☐ Currently admitted to Montana State University (MSU)
☐ Admitted to an undergraduate degree or certificate program
☐ In good academic standing
☐ Completed less than 75% of the credits required for the degree or certificate program

Students seeking PLA via national exams, challenge exams, or portfolio assessment:

☐ Currently enrolled at MSU

MSU does not allow prior learning assessment for prospective students.

PLA at MSU:
• Is appropriate only for college-level learning.
• Is available only for undergraduate courses.
• Is not available for courses for which the student has already enrolled (after the last drop date).

2) Number of Credits

A student may earn up to 25% of the credits required for their degree through PLA. For a typical 120-credit baccalaureate program, up to 30 credits may be earned by PLA.

Note: Students are cautioned that some PLA assessment methods result in Pass/Fail (P/F) grades. At MSU there are additional limits on the number of P/F-graded courses that can be applied to major requirements and degrees. See the MSU Bulletin for more information on P/F grading restrictions.

Credits earned via PLA are not considered part of the residency requirements. For baccalaureate programs the residency requirements are:

• At least 30 credits applied to the degree program must be earned at MSU.
• Twenty three of the last thirty credits must be earned at MSU.

3) Assessment Methods

Prior learning assessment is based upon demonstrated college-level learning applicable to existing MSU courses and stated course learning outcomes. The following methods of assessing prior knowledge are available at MSU:
a) **National Exams** – Credit may be earned through certain national examination programs such as:

- DSST – not accepted at MSU at this time
- UExcel – not accepted at MSU at this time
- CLEP
- AP
- IB

More information on these programs is available in the [MSU Bulletin](#), or through [MSU Testing Services](#).

b) **Credit recommendations** by the American Council on Education (ACE) and the National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS) for some military and corporate training:

- ACE Military Guide
- ACE National Guide to College Credit for Workforce Training

Note: ACE and NCCRS recommendations may include many credits which will not apply to a student’s degree program. Only recommendations directly applicable to the student’s degree will be accepted. If the student chooses a different degree, the assessment of the ACE and NCCRS recommendations will be updated. Once credits have been applied to a transcript they will not be removed. PLA credits in excess of degree requirements may limit the student’s eligibility for financial aid.

c) **Challenge Exams** – exams developed by faculty at MSU to allow students to demonstrate knowledge relevant to the stated learning outcomes of specific courses. Departments may not allow challenge exams for some courses. Challenge exams are not available for courses which can be tested via CLEP. Proficiency exams (e.g., music, language, welding) are considered a type of challenge exam. Additional information on challenge exams is available in the [MSU Bulletin](#) under Advanced Standing by Challenge.

d) **Portfolio Assessment** – students may submit a portfolio demonstrating achievement of a course’s learning outcomes. These portfolios are assessed by MSU faculty according to established guidelines and principles. Portfolio assessment is typically not available if CLEP or Challenge exams are available for the course.

Note: There are strict procedures for portfolio development and submission. Information on the process and requirements for PLA portfolio assessment are available at [new website](#).
4) **Credits Awarded**

Credits earned via PLA are posted on transcripts when the credit is awarded. PLA credits earned via national exams, challenge exams, or portfolio assessment will not be posted on the student’s transcript until the student has completed at least ten credits at MSU (on-site or online). Credits earned through PLA:

- Are applied to degree program requirements or certificate requirements in the same manner as all other credits earned at MSU.
- Will be designated on the student’s transcript by the appropriate course title, course number, and number of credits awarded as aligned with the course for which the credit was awarded.
- Will be identified as earned via PLA on transcripts in accordance with accreditation standards.

When a letter grade is associated with awarded PLA credits, the grade will be included in the calculation of the student’s GPA on the same basis as all other MSU credits.

5) **Transferability**

Credits earned at MSU via PLA may transfer to other institutions in the Montana University System (MUS) according to Board of Regents [Policy 301.19](#) and subject to limitations imposed by the receiving institution.

Credits earned at other MUS institutions via PLA are eligible for transfer to MSU subject to institutional policies and procedures for the evaluation of transfer credit.

6) **Fees**

Fees are based on the type of assessment method and may be set by an external agency (e.g., the cost of CLEP exams is not set by MSU.) MSU may add an administrative fee to the cost imposed by an external agency. All fees are published at [New website](#).

Fees are based on the type of assessment and the number of credits to be assessed, not the credits awarded. MSU makes no assurances to students regarding the number of credits to be awarded prior to the completion of the assessment process.

7) **Review and Grievance**

A student who disagrees with the result of a prior learning assessment performed at MSU may ask to have the assessment reviewed. A student who believes that an error has been made in the process of an assessment may file a grievance. Procedures for review and grievance are published at [New website](#).
8) Faculty Assessors Professional Development

The institution will provide training on PLA principles and best practices for faculty involved in assessment of prior learning via challenge exam or portfolio assessment.