

	<b>FGCU POLICY 2.021</b>	<b>Responsible Unit:</b> Academic Affairs
	<b>Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)</b>	

## A. POLICY STATEMENT

Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) offers opportunities for undergraduate Returning Students to earn credit following a formal review of their evidence of learning and the associated learning outcomes and competencies of a corresponding course(s) at FGCU.

FGCU program faculty develop methods for assessing student achievement of the expected core student learning outcomes, within the context of their academic programs, in alignment with Florida Board of Governors (BOG) Regulation 8.016, Student Learning Outcomes Assessment. Accelerated methods and assessment of prior and current learning are used to reduce degree completion time (FGCU Guiding Principles adopted June 18, 1996).

## B. REASON FOR POLICY

This Policy provides a framework for Faculty Assessors to evaluate student mastery of learning outcomes attained outside of a traditional college-level course. The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) identifies four (4) generally accepted approaches to PLA and, when properly conducted, all ensure academic quality:

1. National standardized exams in specified disciplines, e.g., Advanced Placement (AP) exams, College Level Examination Program (CLEP) tests, Excelsior College Exams (UExcel), Dantes Subject Standardized Tests (DSST);
2. Challenge exams for institutional courses;
3. Individualized assessments, particularly Portfolio-Based Assessments such as those conducted by colleges and CAEL's LearningCounts national on-line service; and
4. Evaluated Non-College Programs, e.g., the *National College Credit Recommendation Service* (NCCRS) or American Council on Education's *ACECREDIT* service and evaluations of corporate training and military training.

FGCU awards credit for national standardized exams described in section B.1. above as defined in FGCU Regulation 2.001, Undergraduate Admissions. This Policy operationalizes provision of credit for approaches in sections B.2., B.3., and B.4. above.

This Policy permits the award of credit to Returning Students who document Prior Learning achieved outside of a traditional academic environment, which align with learning outcomes in credit-bearing courses at FGCU. This Policy identifies assessment methods, Credit Hour limits, and PLA procedures for Returning Students, faculty, and staff.

The FGCU academic colleges and schools provide oversight of the identification of courses eligible for PLA and of Faculty Assessors in each of their respective disciplines.

### **C. APPLICABILITY AND/OR ACCOUNTABILITY**

This Policy is applicable to all units of the University that develop and offer credit-bearing courses and to all returning degree-seeking students enrolled in undergraduate programs.

### **D. DEFINITION OF TERMS**

1. *Challenge Exams for FGCU Courses*: Examinations created by FGCU departmental faculty to measure student learning outcomes achievement that, upon passing, Returning Students earn credit for the corresponding course.
2. *Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)*: CAEL pursues work at all levels within the public and private sectors to enhance learning opportunities for adults around the world. Since 1974, CAEL has provided guidance and recommendations concerning the award of credit for Prior Learning.
3. *Credit Hour*: A Credit Hour is an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes, and verified by evidence of student achievement, that is an institutionally established equivalency as outlined in FGCU Policy 2.013, Credit Hour.
4. *Credit Predictor Quiz*: Five-minute quiz developed by CAEL to assist Returning Students in determining the best fit for pursuing credit through PLA and to learn more about PLA.
5. *Faculty Assessor*: A faculty member selected in collaboration with the program administrator to assess student outcomes and Prior Learning experiences. Faculty Assessors are experts in their discipline.
6. *General Education Program*: Pursuant to BOG Regulation 6.017, Criteria for Awarding the Baccalaureate Degree, students must complete thirty-six (36) Credit Hours of designated General Education Program (GEP) coursework, including six (6) Credit Hours of English Composition coursework and six (6) Credit Hours of Mathematics coursework at the level of College Algebra or higher. Students must also complete nine (9) Credit Hours of Humanities coursework, six (6) to nine (9) Credit Hours of Social Sciences coursework, and six (6) to nine (9) Credit Hours of Natural Sciences coursework, including one Natural Sciences course with a lab experience. Courses evaluated for GEP

subject-area credit may be assigned course numbers of 1XXX or 2XXX.

7. *General Elective Credit*: Returning Students may request a review of content leading to the award of General Elective Credit. This will be noted on a Returning Student's transcript with the GEC prefix and appropriate course level as determined by the Faculty Assessor.
8. *Industry License*: Certification, license, or other formal designation awarded to a Returning Student after completion of a formal training program.
9. *Maximum Semester Hours*: Within an undergraduate degree program, a maximum of forty-five (45) semester hours earned through traditional Accelerated Mechanisms, as outlined in FGCU Regulation 2.001, Undergraduate Admissions, can be applied toward a degree. FGCU includes PLA in this maximum. Within the 45-Credit Hour limit, FGCU allows individual programs to determine how many Credit Hours may be earned toward the upper level requirements of the major.
10. *Non-College Programs*: Non-credit bearing programs whereby Returning Students master competencies that may align with credit-bearing courses and programs offered through a college or university.
11. *Portfolio-Based Assessment*: A commonly used assessment that often requires Returning Students to prepare a detailed written narrative, with supporting documentation, of their Prior Learning and the process of learning.
12. *Prior Learning*: Prior Learning is a term used by educators to describe learning that a person acquires outside of a traditional academic environment. The learning may have been acquired through work experience, employer training programs, independent study, non-credit courses, volunteer or community service, travel, or non-college courses or seminars.
13. *Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)*: Prior Learning Assessment is one way that colleges and universities can evaluate a person's college-level extra-institutional learning for the purposes of awarding college credit or advanced standing.
14. *Returning Students*: Students who did not traditionally matriculate directly into a university environment upon completion of high school. This also includes stop-out students who began college previously and, after a gap of time, return to complete a degree.

## **E. PROCEDURES**

1. Candidates for PLA should be able to demonstrate mastery of at least eighty percent (80%) of the course-level student learning outcomes documented on the course syllabi

that have been developed by teaching faculty. Individual programs or departments may require mastery at a higher percentage or through achievement of specific outcomes. A core group of FGCU faculty and administrators complete CAEL certification in Prior Learning Assessment to provide Faculty Assessors with guidance and to maintain consistent practices across the University.

2. FGCU subscribes to the ten standards for assessing Prior Learning consistent with the CAEL standards:
  - a. Credit or competencies are awarded only for evidence of learning, not for experience or time spent.
  - b. Assessment is integral to learning because it leads to and enables future learning.
  - c. Assessment is based on criteria for outcomes that are clearly articulated and shared among constituencies.
  - d. The determination of credit awards and competence levels are made by appropriate subject matter and credentialing experts (identified as FGCU Faculty Assessors).
  - e. Assessment advances the broader purpose of equity and access for diverse individuals and groups.
  - f. Institutions proactively provide guidance and support for learners' full engagement in the assessment process.
  - g. Assessment policies and procedures are the result of inclusive deliberation and are shared with all constituencies.
  - h. Fees charged for assessment are based on the services performed in the process rather than the credit awarded.
  - i. All practitioners involved in the assessment process pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions they perform.
  - j. Assessment programs are regularly monitored, evaluated, and revised to respond to institutional and learner needs.
3. Returning Students Procedures
  - a. To determine eligibility, Returning Students complete the CAEL Credit Predictor Quiz located on the FGCU Complete website.

- b. Designated FGCU staff work with Returning Students to interpret quiz results and determine eligibility in consultation with CAEL certified faculty.
  - c. Returning Students pursuing portfolio-based PLA enroll in a non-credit course and complete a learning contract. The learning contract outlines costs, expectations for Returning Students, and timeframe for completion of the tasks associated with the PLA process (16-week maximum timeframe to complete the process after enrollment).
  - d. Returning Students use the online learning management system to submit their documentation and assessments, and to access faculty evaluations of Prior Learning activities.
  - e. Returning Students seeking credit for courses offering test out exams, should contact the program department.
  - f. Upon completion of the assessment, Returning Students who successfully demonstrate achievement of program-determined student learning outcomes receive corresponding course credit. Returning Students receive a grade of “Pass” for courses where PLA credit is awarded. This does not factor into a Returning Student's cumulative grade point average.
4. Academic Programs and Faculty Assessors Procedures
- a. Credentialed FGCU faculty members in the discipline in which the courses were created, working with their program coordinator and/or department chair, will identify eligible courses appropriate for PLA credit.
  - b. FGCU faculty leaders, in the academic discipline in which a course was created, will identify Faculty Assessors to work with Returning Students determined as good candidates for PLA.
  - c. Faculty Assessors engage with Returning Students to determine Prior Learning activities, artifacts, test-out examinations, and/or information for submission. Faculty Assessors consult with department chairs to review assessment plans and student achievement.
  - d. Faculty Assessors use the online learning management system to maintain student artifacts, assessments, and evaluations of Prior Learning activities in Returning Students' portfolios. Faculty Assessors evaluate student achievements; Returning Students must meet at least eighty percent (80%) of course student learning outcomes. Individual colleges or programs may require a higher percentage of student learning outcomes, or specific outcomes, that must be met to award course credit.

5. Upon completion of the portfolio review process, Faculty Assessors will be compensated, not to exceed the amount paid by a Returning Student as outlined in their learning contract.

*Authority*

*BOG Regulation 1.001, University Board of Trustees Powers and Duties*

*History of Policy*

*New 12/09/20*

**APPROVED:**

\*s/Michael V. Martin  
Michael V. Martin, President

December 9, 2020  
Date