University of Niagara Falls Canada

Policy

Policy Title:	**Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) Policy**
Policy Number:	**4000**
Sponsor:	**Vice President - Academic**
Contact:	**Manager – Credit Transfer**
Approved by:	**Academic Council**
Date:	**April 11, 2024**
Next Review Date:	**April 11, 2027**

1. **Purpose**

   The Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) policy establishes principles, standards and criteria for the granting of academic credit for learning gained through non-formal or unrecognized education, training, or experience.

2. **Scope**

   This policy applies to the assessment and recognition of prior learning for students admitted or attending University of Niagara Falls Canada (UNF) an undergraduate or graduate program. It does not apply to transfer credit for courses taken at a recognized post-secondary institution (see the Transfer Credit policy).

3. **Policy**

   The University recognizes that students come to the University with a variety of backgrounds and learning experiences. Evaluation of prior learning can improve access to and accelerate a student's progress toward completion of a degree or program. The University will grant credit, where warranted, for a student's demonstrated knowledge and skill that is consistent with the learning outcomes and education standards of the University's courses and programs. The awarding of credit for prior learning must maintain the academic integrity of the University's courses and programs.

   The University adheres to the following principles in the recognition and evaluation of prior learning:

   - Recognition and credit will be given for demonstrated knowledge, skills and attributes and not for experience alone.

   - Learning assessed for post-secondary credit should be:
     - linked to established learning outcomes or other criteria consistent with institutional standards for a given course and program;
     - transferable to contexts other than the one in which it was learned;
     - current and relevant;
     - at a level of achievement equivalent to that of other learners engaged in studies at that
     - level in that program or subject area;
     - assessed using a range of strategies consistent with institutional standards for a given course.

- Some courses must be completed at the University as part of the degree pathway requirements and are not available for credit from prior learning assessment. A list of such courses will be maintained by the Registrar's Office.

- The amount of credit awarded for prior learning is granted under the following conditions:

- For undergraduate programs:
  - no more than 60 credits of a combination of transfer credit and PLAR will be granted toward undergraduate degree requirements with no more than 30 credits being awarded through PLAR.
  - prior learning credit used to meet the requirements of a previously earned undergraduate or graduate degree will not be eligible for prior learning credit toward a new degree at the University.

- For graduate programs:
  - students may receive up to 50% of a combination of transfer credit and PLAR toward degree requirements with no more than two courses granted through PLAR.
  - courses used to meet the requirements of a previously earned credential will not be eligible for credit toward the graduate degree.

- Assessment of the learning is the responsibility of faculty who are content specialists.

- Credit given as a result of a prior learning assessment will be identified as such on the student transcript and will not have an assigned grade. PLAR credits are not included in the University's cumulative grade point average calculation.

- Fees will be charged for the assessment of prior learning.

4. Appeals

The Admissions Appeal Committee reviews all appeals of PLAR. Their decision is final. All appeals must be submitted in writing to the Registrar's Office by the established deadline.

5. Definitions

These definitions apply to terms as they are used in this policy.

Word/Term	Definition
Assigned Credit	In the case of transfer or PLAR assessments, credit given in the form of a specific named UNF course.
Course Challenge	A method of PLAR in which a student's knowledge is determined through the writing of a comprehensive examination that is designed to determine a level of knowledge compared to the specific learning outcome of a designated course; similar to a comprehensive final exam.

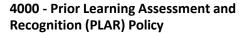|	
Credit	The value given to a course that indicates its relative weighting to other courses across a program or institution. Credits usually reflect the expected number of class/contact hours and/or workload of a course.
Portfolio	A collection of materials that demonstrates an individual's previous learning and connects it to the desired formal recognition. A portfolio will include a combination of components such as: a resume, projects, assessments, records, tests, or other assessable materials that are tangible evidence of the applicant's learning outcomes from prior experience.
Portfolio assessment	The process by which a student's portfolio is reviewed and evaluated by a faculty member with expertise in the academic area for which credit is sought.
Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition (PLAR)	Process of formal recognition of skills and knowledge gained through informal learning, unrecognized learning, work and/or life experiences, and is assessed through a rigorous examination of formal and information courses, professional development, work, interviews, tests or other means that allow learning to be clearly demonstrated and assessed for credit.
Recognized institution	A post-secondary institution that is approved, accredited, or otherwise deemed to be an institution officially authorized to grant academic credentials by the federal, provincial, or state authority of that jurisdiction.
Residency requirement	The minimum number of courses or credits that must be completed through UNF to meet graduation requirements.
Reviewer	A content or discipline expert who has specific academic knowledge and expertise to evaluate prior learning.
Transfer credit	Indicates the granting of credit toward a credential by one institution for programs or courses completed at another.
Unassigned credit	Credit granted for prior learning, whether transfer or PLAR, that does not equate to a specific UNF course but is considered eligible to be counted toward a UNF degree or program.

6. Related Policies

Admissions Policy. Transfer Credit Policy.

7. Responsibility

Students are responsible for:
- applying for a prior learning assessment;
- supplying all the necessary supporting documentation;
- building a prior learning portfolio (note: PLAR assessment is dependent on the portfolio completion and the time taken to complete the portfolio);
- paying the PLAR fee prior to the assessment commencing.

Registrar's Office is responsible for:
- initial processing of PLAR requests, ensuring PLAR fee is paid, and collecting supporting documentation to be forwarded to the appropriate Associate Dean;
- undertaking preliminary assessment of educational or training programs submitted for PLAR;
- maintaining records regarding PLAR assessments and outcomes;
- maintaining student records of credit earned through PLAR and updating degree pathways and transcripts accordingly;
- notifying students of the outcome of PLAR assessments including the right to appeal Financial Services is responsible for processing all PLAR payments.

Associate Deans are responsible for:
- determining whether a PLAR request shall proceed for analysis and assessment;
- appointing a Reviewer(s) with the appropriate discipline expertise to assess the applicant's portfolio of work;
- approving or rejecting the reviewer's PLAR assessment and recording their decision;
- providing the written decision and supporting documentation for a PLAR assessment to Registrar's Office for the official records and communicating with students;
- contacting the student, if applicable, to arrange for any additional elements for the review of their learning, including possible interviews, assignments, tests or other projects for assessment.

Reviewers are responsible for:
- assessing the portfolio and analyzing whether or not credit should be granted;
- providing a written report and recommendations to the Associate Dean.

Admissions Appeals Committee is responsible for reviewing and adjudicating appeals of prior learning assessments.