

## PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT (PLA) GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS

### INTRODUCTION TO PLA

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is a term used to describe learning gained outside a traditional academic environment.

#### Is PLA For You?

Review the checklist below. If any of these statements apply to you, you may be a strong candidate for PLA credit.

- I have at least 5 years of professional performance experience in dance, music, theater, or related performing arts disciplines.
- I have performed in recognized venues or with nationally/regionally known organizations, including tours, festivals, or union -affiliated productions.
- I have developed college-level knowledge, skills, and repertoire in my artistic work.
- I have created, composed, choreographed, or devised original works in a professional setting.
- I have experience teaching, coaching, or mentoring in the performing arts.
- I am or was a member of one or more performing arts unions.
- I have received awards, honors, or public recognition for my work.
- My work experience includes leadership, management, or supervisory responsibilities.

This guide provides information about the types of PLA credits available. Please read each section carefully and determine if PLA is something you wish to pursue.

#### What Is PLA

PLA is a process by which learning mastered outside of a formal classroom is reviewed for college-level equivalency. Thus, it is the evaluation and assessment of an individual's lived and real-world experience for college credit. Prior learning includes learning acquired from work and life experiences; individual study and reading; civic, community, and volunteer work; and participation in informal courses and in-service training sponsored by organizations and industry. PLA credit is not awarded for EXPERIENCE rather for college-level LEARNING that entails knowledge, skills, and competencies a student has obtained as a result of their prior learning, real-world experience. To receive credit, an applicant



must demonstrate college-level learning. Credit is evaluated based on the applicant's demonstrated knowledge and skills.

There are two broad categories of PLA:

Academic-based PLA includes learning that has taken place in an instructional setting that may or may not be an accredited institution. This could be credit earned through various types of examinations or transfer credit. Transfer credit is based on an applicant's submitted transcript from an accredited college and university. Applicants will typically submit their transcript and course descriptions during admission. Transfer of credits is possible if coursework was completed with a grade of C or better at an accredited institution.

Experiential-based PLA describes learning that has occurred outside of a traditional classroom setting. Credit for Prior Experiential Learning (CPEL) may be awarded for demonstration of knowledge acquired from work and life experiences, independent reading, and study, and/or approved military education or experience. This work is mostly evaluated through portfolio review; however, it might also be captured through challenge exams.

A combined total up to 75% of the credits required for the BFA in Performing Arts degree may be earned through these categories of PLA.

## CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING VIA PLA PORTFOLIO

### Definition

A PLA (Prior Learning Assessment) Portfolio is a structured, evidence-based collection of materials that demonstrates a learner's knowledge, skills, and competencies gained outside formal education—such as through work, military service, volunteerism, or artistic performance—for academic credit.

### Types of PLA Portfolios

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) portfolios There are two broad types of PLA Portfolios:

#### 1. Course-Specific Portfolio

A Course Specific Portfolio, is also known as a Single or Individual Portfolio, is designed to demonstrate prior learning that aligns with the learning outcomes of a specific course. This

type of portfolio is appropriate when a student is seeking credit for a particular course by providing mastery in that subject area. Evaluation of this portfolio results in credit being awarded for a specific course if the demonstrated learning meets the course's objectives and outcomes.

## 2. Broad-Based or Cluster Portfolio

A Broad-Based or Cluster Portfolio encompasses a wider range of learning experiences that may span multiple courses or subject areas. This type is often utilized in degree-completion programs or by students with extensive professional experience. The portfolio clusters related skills and knowledge into thematic areas, providing a comprehensive view of the learner's competencies. Evaluation of this portfolio may result in credit being awarded across several courses or areas reflecting the integrated nature of the learning demonstrated.

### Portfolio Components

A portfolio must contain each of the following items:

#### Learning Narrative

A reflective written summary explaining how prior experiences align with specific competencies or outcomes. For example, "10 years as a jazz pianist developed skills equivalent to music theory, including harmonic analysis and improvisation."

#### Documentation (Evidence)

Direct: Work samples, video or audio recordings, certification, licenses, performance programs, playbills as direct evidence.

Indirect: Letters from employers, artistic directors, awards, press reviews, or other types of indirect evidence.

#### Supporting Materials

commissions, website, wiki, YouTube links, or third-party validation (union memberships).

The BFA in Performing Arts requires eligible applicants to submit a Broad-Based or Cluster Portfolio that shows knowledge and skills across three areas:

- Technical Skills: mastery of technical skills related to your discipline
- Literature History & Repertoire: depth of knowledge in relevant literature, history, and repertoire within the context of your discipline
- Humanities and General Education: Breadth of competency in writing, critical thinking, arts appreciation, and other general and liberal arts education outcomes