

**AUSTIN PEAY STATE UNIVERSITY  
POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

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<b>Date:</b> May 11, 2004	<b>Dated:</b>
<b>Subject:</b> Experiential Learning Credit	
<b>Initiating Authority:</b> Vice President for Academic Affairs	<b>TBR Policy/Guideline Reference:</b>
President: Signature on File	

A Brief Overview

American institutions of higher learning have been assessing experiential college level learning for over 30 years. The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) was formed in 1974 and completed a study in 1976 which demonstrated the validity and academic reliability of evaluating learning gained from work and life experiences for academic credit. In 1972, approximately 40 institutions had comprehensive programs in place to assess prior learning. Today, over 1,000 participate in this connection between work (or other life learning) and education. The APSU Experiential Credit Committee consists of faculty members and administrators that determine the policy recommendations and develop guidelines for experiential learning assessment at the university. A focus group of experienced portfolio assessors provides a continuous feedback loop that offers improvement recommendations to the policy committee.

Credit for Experiential Learning

Credit for Experiential Learning may be requested for college level learning (not necessarily matched with specific courses) acquired through certain life/work experiences: however each department may determine whether it will participate in the experiential credit process or accept credits earned via the portfolio process. Credit will not be restricted to the area of concentration. All experiential learning must be validated through the portfolio preparation procedure and/or some other suitable evaluation process. Students will prepare a portfolio to be evaluated. Credit may be recommended by members of the faculty through the department head in the department(s) appropriate for the credit being requested. The amount of credit that can be earned through such prior learning will be restricted only by the appropriateness to the degree as determined by the advisor and/or the department chair.

By assessing experiential learning portfolios Austin Peay State University recognizes that learning takes place throughout life and that college level learning is not limited to the institutions of higher

education or to classroom settings. The rationale for portfolio assessment is that adult life and work can offer learning equivalent in substance and complexity to that offered in classrooms.

Individuals learn from experiences and the results of the learning experiences can be reliably assessed and certified for college credit. The significance of systematic recognition of prior learning is the linkage it provides between formal education and adult life. It is a mechanism for recognizing the validity of all learning that is relevant to a college degree and for actively fostering on-going education. Full and effective use of all educational resources is a worthy educational and social goal. APSU provides this opportunity for a population that historically has not had access to college. It is responsive to the economic and academic accountability to meet needs of the student. The assessment of prior learning acknowledges the changing concepts of what constitutes legitimate learning and the characteristics of an educated person. Through this assessment, the university considers education as a continuum and embraces the vast potentialities of human development.

### The Portfolio

A portfolio is an organized collection of essays and documentation demonstrating the student learning through life/work experiences. Through the portfolio, the student provides evidence that the knowledge gained through experience is equivalent to courses at Austin Peay State University. A portfolio may contain several subject areas, for example, Organizational Psychology, Public Speaking, and Information Systems Management. Each course equivalent is referred to as a section and is evaluated by a faculty expert in that field.

Students must choose CLEP, departmental challenge exams or other approved mechanisms to receive credit for prior knowledge when available in lieu of seeking credit via a portfolio.

### **Candidates for portfolio credit are:**

- Returning students with significant work experience
- Employed at least 5-7 years in a particular field, with increasing responsibilities
- Highly organized - effective speakers and writers
- Highly motivated – will work independently to complete a project
- Able to reflect on work and training experiences

With departmental approval, the student may choose to develop a portfolio for one or more courses. If significant work experience is related to the academic major without having completed a formal training program that can be evaluated, a portfolio might be a good option.

### **Preparation by Student**

The student that has a proposed program of study that includes portfolio credit is required to take a non-credit APSU course, Portfolio Development. This course is geared to the learning component model. Students who have become experts in a certain field may lose the ability to identify the knowledge and steps in the process necessary to accomplish the skill

level. Through this course students are guided in examining their experiential learning to extract specific learning components. Determining learning levels, learning components, theory and practice relationship, appropriate narration, documentation, and presentation are areas covered in this class. The student does not prepare the portfolio as part of this class, but must prepare one learning component for grading in order to insure that they grasp the concept. Later, the student independently prepares the portfolio. The student may consult with their academic advisor, subject area faculty, or the course instructor during the preparation. This is done in much the same way as faculty advising for other student projects.

Portfolio evaluation is the most comprehensive challenge examination that exists. In compiling the portfolio of experiential learning, the preparation itself involves new learning. The student identifies the learning possessed, expresses it in terms of college level curriculum or competencies. The student relates it to overall educational and career objectives. The student then compiles the evidence or demonstrating competence. In preparing the portfolio, a student must reflect on the learning and competencies possessed to transfer principles from one situation to another. The application of experiential learning to the curriculum of higher education avoids the duplication of learning and allows the student to build on the learning already acquired.

### **Assessment**

The faculty advisor or department chair reviews the completed portfolio for format, competencies, and documentation. The portfolio is submitted to the department head in the department relevant to the subject.

The department head directs the portfolio to the faculty member most qualified to evaluate the particular learning component contained in the portfolio. The department faculty member that has experience in the learning component is the most appropriate assessor.

The faculty member assesses the portfolio for appropriate documentation, credible learning, degree and level of competence, and credit equivalency. The determination of subject matter area, level of learning (upper or lower), and the amount of academic credit that – in line with what APSU expects of its traditional students – should be awarded.

Credit should be awarded for the existing courses that match the content or area of learning presented in the portfolio. The portfolio should demonstrate the student's learning in such a way that it can be related to learning outcomes that would be expected in a college level course in the related subject area. The portfolio is analogous to records that show classroom attendance, participation, reading assignments, and understanding gained from the course. Narration should give an overview of the learning outcomes gained from prior learning and relate the circumstances of the learning. The documentation included should provide evidence of the learning in the form of certificates, "reference" letters, actual documents or products that the student created, or perhaps a performance by the student. Amount of time spent in a job or with a volunteer organization is to be included in the narrative. Grading in traditional courses is not based on time spent in class or having opportunities to learn. It is learning that is being assessed, not experience, and it is the responsibility of the student to convey the learning or competency. The college level learning must be the basis for any award of credit. When the portfolio is presented for evaluation it becomes the responsibility of the faculty

assessor to determine the academic status of the learning, i.e., number of credits, level of credits, and specific course equivalencies, if applicable.

With departmental approval, the student may opt to develop a portfolio for one or more courses. If significant work experience is related to the academic major without having completed a formal training program that can be evaluated, a portfolio might be a good option.

### **Personal Interview**

Talking with the student to explore and clarify the contents of the portfolio provides a better understanding of the level and depth of student learning. The personal interview corresponds to the personal contact with regular students and reveals more evidence of learning. If the portfolio is incomplete, the student may be asked to rework it before the completion of the evaluation. The level of the learning presented in the portfolio should be compared with the achievement of traditional students. The amount of credit is determined by the amount of learning found in the portfolio. The minimum award is "no credit" and the maximum credit allowed is 15 credits and is within the parameters of the criteria determined by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The credit will be recorded as upgraded and is specified as experiential credit on the official transcript even if it is determined as credit for a specific course, such as BIOL 1010. Although portfolio evaluation is not quick and easy, APSU has determined this to be a valid and responsible response to the needs of the nontraditional student.

The process ideally includes a preliminary study of the portfolio, an interview with the student, and the determination of credit to be awarded by the faculty assessor.

**Life/Work Portfolio  
Experiential Learning Credit Options  
at the  
Undergraduate Level**

Austin Peay State University offers a program for assessing college-level knowledge gained through work and life experience. The Experiential Learning Program facilitates the assessment of such learning. Prior learning may be evaluated through a variety of assessment tools. The tools may include departmental examinations, portfolios, external examinations, performance assessment or documented training programs, as determined by academic departments. A student may earn a maximum of 15 semester hours at the undergraduate level through experiential learning credit. The APSU prescribed credit allocations for experiential credit fall within the established Southern Association of Colleges and Schools parameters for experiential credit.

1. Portfolio Development – Upon approval by the appropriate chair a student may develop a portfolio for a course or courses offered by Austin Peay State University to gain college-level credit. Portfolios are submitted to the faculty advisor and/or the department chair(s) of **the appropriate department(s)**.

**The following regulations for experiential learning credit will apply:**

1. Experiential learning credit will be granted upon the written recommendation of the chair of the department and/or designated faculty assessor having jurisdiction over the courses involved with department chair approval.
2. The applicability of experiential learning credit toward specific degree program requirements is subject to departmental approval.
3. A student may not fail a course at Austin Peay State University or any other institution and later receive credit for the same course through an experiential learning option.
4. Credit earned from non- accredited institutions may not be used as a basis for credit earned via a portfolio.
5. A student may not enroll in a course for credit or audit at Austin Peay State University and subsequently seek credit through an experiential learning option.
6. No letter grades will be entered on the transcript for experiential learning credit. The credit will be treated in the same way as transfer credit: a “P” (Pass) will be assigned and it will not count in the grade point average.
7. A student earning experiential credit must meet the minimum residency requirements of 25 percent of the total number of credits required for the degree at Austin Peay State University. This would include the specified residency hours of upper-level courses in the department of the declared major. The student should be aware that

some program residency requirements exceed the university minimum residency requirements.

The privilege of seeking experiential learning credit is available to both full-time and part-time degree status students. A student should meet with his or her program advisor at the beginning of the academic career at Austin Peay State University to determine how experiential learning may be applicable to the degree. For further information, contact the Dean of Extended and Distance Education.