
PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION

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AUTHORITY	SENATE
PRIMARY CONTACT	DIRECTOR, PLAR

POLICY

- I. Thompson Rivers University (TRU) recognizes that adult learners acquire knowledge and skills through life and work experience. Through prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR), TRU will assess this knowledge and skills and grant credit/recognition for the learning that has taken place.
- II. PLAR is the assessment by some valid and reliable means, of what has been learned through formal and non-formal education, training or experience that is worthy of credit in a course or program offered by TRU. PLAR is used to evaluate knowledge, skills and competencies which may have been acquired through, but not limited to, work experience, independent reading, hobbies, volunteer work, non-formal learning, travel and artistic pursuits.

The assessment and evaluation of prior learning and the determination of competency and credit awarded, will be done by instructional or faculty staff who have the appropriate subject matter expertise, but other staff in an institution may have a supporting role in the process.

The work required for PLAR includes, but is not limited to, classroom-based and individual advising; classroom-based and individual assessment, training and upgrading; development of assessment tools; and training in the use of flexible assessment.

- III. TRU accepts credit earned through PLAR (as transfer credit) from all Canadian accredited post-secondary institutions that have formally adopted quality assurance standards from a recognized organization such as the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, the European Union or UNESCO. Such transfer credit is applied in the context of TRU course and program requirements.

REGULATIONS

TRU offers candidates several methods of documenting and demonstrating that they have achieved an appropriate level of prior learning. No single PLAR method is best for all situations. With the help of a PLAR Facilitator, methods should be selected to suit the unique needs of the particular situation.

TRU will award credit or equivalent recognition only for prior learning which is appropriately documented or demonstrated and which is at an appropriate level. PLAR is a process which challenges learners to claim and articulate their knowledge, skills, abilities, and values based on documentation that describes learning or provides evidence of learning.

I. PLAR DIRECTOR

The Director, PLAR acts as the contact person for PLAR inquiries; offers orientation seminars, portfolio preparation courses and other PLAR related courses; and acts as liaison between the assessor(s) and the learner.

II. PLAR ASSESSOR

Prior learning will be assessed by qualified specialists, approved by the relevant department/program, who have expertise in the area to be assessed and training in assessment methods that meet quality assurance requirements for PLAR. Assessors will be responsible for ensuring that the documentation provided by the learner supports the claim for credit/recognition. If the assessor determines that the knowledge the learner has demonstrated is sufficient and appropriate, credit/ recognition will be granted.

The Director, PLAR will work with assessors with content expertise to develop appropriate assessment methods and/or provide training to content experts in how to conduct PLAR assessments.

III. DOCUMENTATION AND DEMONSTRATION OF ACHIEVEMENT

1. Evidence

All PLAR requires evidence. The learner has the primary responsibility for preparing the evidence that learning has taken place and that it contributes to an appropriate balance of theory and practical application. Tangible proof of competence can be provided through documentation of accomplishments or demonstration of skill and knowledge. Depending on the subject area, certain types of documentation or demonstration are more useful than others.

2. Examinations

The purpose of exams is to measure knowledge of the content of, or the achievement of, the learning outcomes that are equivalent to those of a specific course.

- a. Challenge exams are created for students who have not attended the course but who wish to demonstrate that they have achieved the course outcomes. Challenge exams are designed by a course instructor or Open Learning Faculty Member.
- b. Standardized exams are prepared by national organizations, such as the College Level Examination Program (CLEP); are applicable to a large population; and measure a specific level of achievement in a specific subject.

3. Equivalencies

Course equivalencies are awarded to learners who have completed and been evaluated in programs, professional licenses, or professional certificates outside of the college or university system. These non-formal programs and credentials are evaluated by TRU, and credit may be granted if the program or credential meets the TRU Credit Bank assessment criteria.

4. Portfolios

Portfolios summarize the learning gained from non-formal learning experiences. A portfolio is a collection of information that demonstrates the depth and breadth of what the learner knows and/or can do. A portfolio can be used alone or in combination with other methods of assessment. It provides evidence of learning.

IV. ELIGIBILITY

1. A learner requesting PLAR must normally be admitted to a TRU program before the PLAR process will be commenced.
2. PLAR can be used to accumulate credit in programs or to satisfy admission requirements to certain programs upon approval by the appropriate department chair or designate.
3. PLAR can be used to satisfy residency requirements for TRU—OL.

V. CONDITIONS

1. Credits granted for prior learning towards a specific program at TRU can be used in other programs at TRU where specific transfer credit exists.
2. Credits granted for prior learning at TRU may not always be transferable to other institutions. It is the responsibility of the learner to determine transferability.
3. For programs offered on TRU campus, a maximum of twenty-five percent (25%) of the credits required in a program will be awarded for prior learning. Exceptions to this would be subject to recommendation by the appropriate Faculty Council and approval of the Dean. For programs offered through TRU-OL, Planning Council for Open Learning will establish the proportion of each credential that can be gained through PLAR.

4. Not all courses are eligible for PLAR; non-eligibility will be determined by the appropriate department after consultation with the Director, PLAR.
5. Credit awarded through PLAR will be monitored to avoid awarding credit more than once for the same learning in a course/program.
6. A successful PLAR will apply only to the designated course and will not constitute a successful PLAR of any prerequisites to that course.
7. PLAR will not normally be granted for a course previously transcribed without the special permission of the department and without reasonable evidence of the acquisition of new knowledge.
8. Transcripts reflect the course being granted credit with a grade of S, which will count as credits attempted and taken, but not for GPA calculations.
9. If a request for PLAR is unsuccessful, there will be no listing on the transcript.
10. Learners who receive an unfavourable decision from the assessor will have access to TRU's appeal process.
11. Students are advised to consult with the Financial Aid office regarding any impacts enrollment in PLAR courses may have on eligibility for student aid.

VI. FEES

PLAR assessments are done on a cost-recovery basis. The cost of PLAR will be based on the services performed in the assessment process and the number of credits requested. For assessment of PLAR for an individual course, this cost will not be more than the course fee charged as defined by the tuition fee schedule. Students are responsible for all associated costs involved with PLAR which may include long-distance phone calls to an assessor, travel to an assessment site and/or mailing a portfolio to an assessor. All fees are non-refundable.