



# Prior Learning Assessment - First Steps

As you consider the relevance of prior learning assessment (PLA) to your situation, there is some important information that you should review. First, you should familiarize yourself with the current editions of the MSU Undergraduate Catalog and Learning Portfolio Development Guide. You can access and review copies of both of these resources by visiting the MSU website.

MSU's undergraduate catalog contains important information about the University's academic policies and procedures, and detailed descriptions of degree programs and courses. The catalog also contains detailed information about the University Prior Learning Assessment Program. The Learning Portfolio Development Guide provides a description of prior learning assessment and step-by-step instructions on how to develop a learning portfolio.

## REVIEW THE MSU CATALOG

**First**, review the section in the catalog entitled Prior Learning Assessment. Read this section to gain a general understanding of prior learning assessment and the current policies and procedures that govern MSU's PLA program

**Second**, review the sections entitled University Wide Academic Information, General Education Requirements, and Academic Organization. These three sections provide a general overview of academics at Mountain State University.

**Third**, review the information relating to the degree program that you want to earn at MSU. A listing of current degree programs is available on the MSU website under Academics. Once you identify a degree program, you should review the detailed programmatic / degree information about that degree program under the associated school. This programmatic information includes: a program description, a suggested progression of courses, and all other degree-related requirements. Once you decide on a specific degree program, be sure to discuss your interests with one of MSU's advisors to ensure that you learn about any program requirements that may have changed.

**Fourth**, review the entire section entitled Courses of Instruction in the catalog. This section contains a listing of all courses currently offered by the University. Each course listing contains a brief course description that provides specific information about the course and its associated learning goals. Begin by scanning through all the course descriptions. Focus on, and read in detail, those course descriptions that seem to reference familiar content—content for which you think you might have some level of comparable knowledge and competency. After this initial review, note only those courses for which you have a “been-there-done-that” feeling after reading the course description. If you read the course description and get a real sense that you may have already mastered the learning that course describes, then that course may be a good candidate for inclusion in your learning portfolio. After notating all such courses, go back through the entire section and make a list containing all of the courses you selected. Keep this list handy because you will discuss it during your initial PLA advising session.

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## REVIEW of MSU's Learning Portfolio Development Guide

The Learning Portfolio Development Guide (available online for download) provides important information about prior learning assessment, learning styles, and the development of a learning portfolio. Students who are interested in petitioning for equivalent academic credit through MSU's Prior Learning Assessment Program, must review the contents of this Guide before registering a beginning to work on the development of a learning portfolio. This Guide identifies the eleven essential elements that comprise a learning portfolio at MSU. The appendix to this Guide also contains several helpful worksheets and forms designed to aid the student as they work on developing a learning portfolio.

## PLA ADVISING AND REGISTRATION

Once you complete these initial steps, you will need to contact the School of Extended and Distance Education to schedule a PLA advising session. This initial session can be conducted by telephone and should only take a few minutes. Students interested in participating in Mountain State University's Prior Learning Assessment Program must review the University's Learning Portfolio Development Guide and complete the initial advising session before they can register. Students should contact Mr. Mark Miller at (304) 929-1392 to request a PLA Registration Form, or you can find one on page 26 in the appendix to the Portfolio Development Guide.

Additionally, you must pay a Prior Learning Assessment Fee of \$100.00 per credit hour evaluated. Please note that your PLA Assessment Fee is based upon the total number of courses (credit hours) contained within your learning portfolio. The assessment of your entire learning portfolio by a qualified faculty evaluator (reader) is a time consuming and exhaustive process. The student pays for the evaluation of their portfolio, not for the number of credit hours they receive. There is no guarantee that PLA credit will be granted upon the review of your learning portfolio.

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