Prior Learning
Student Guide

Compiled by Ana Self Schuber, April 2011
IDENTIFYING SIGNIFICANT LEARNING EXPERIENCES

One of the most important steps in degree planning and the preparation of a prior learning portfolio is to identify those life experiences which provided learning. LIFETRACK students are asked to prepare a Significant Learnings Outline (see pages 12-13 of this manual) even if they never intend to submit prior learning. This will be a part of the LIFETRACK Foundations of Adult Learning Seminar. Students should identify learning gained through personal experiences such as those listed in the following examples:

1. Experiences that were particularly significant and from which a great deal of knowledge was gained or important lessons were learned.
   ★For example: volunteering for a nonprofit organization, school or hospice; directing a fund raising event; taking over for a boss or co-worker who was ill; revamping a how-to manual at work; working for a women’s shelter on the hot-line; serving in the Peace Corps or military.

2. Experiences in which a great deal of time, money and/or effort was spent.
   ★For example: learning to fly, scuba dive; researching a family history, working with a handicapped child; traveling to Egypt; gaining Novell certification.

3. Experiences which offered pleasure because of efforts and accomplishments.
   ★For example: learning to play ragtime or classical music; learning to dance or speak French or German; learning the history of state or community; learning C++ programming.

4. Experiences which were not happy.
   ★For example: learning about serious illnesses; acting as executor for a will; experiencing a bankruptcy; working for a failed political campaign; experiencing domestic violence.

5. Experiences that gained recognition from others.
   ★For example: receiving awards from school, community, church or civic organizations; publishing a how-to manual.

6. Experiences during which there was special happiness or sadness.
   ★For example: working with AIDS victims; working on an abuse hot-line or in a hospice; helping prepare a family member for death; writing a children’s book or novel; learning computer skills; experiencing a transplant; adopting a child.

While preparing the Significant Learnings Outline students should ask themselves the following questions.

a. Is my experience college-level?

b. Did I experience growth?

c. Can I answer who, what, when, where and how questions?

d. What problems did I have to solve and how did I develop solutions?

e. What books or resources did I use?

f. What sort of documentation can I produce as evidence of the experience
   (letters from supervisors, brochures, advertising, contracts, etc.)?
COMPLETING THE SIGNIFICANT LEARNINGS OUTLINE

A sample of the Significant Learnings Outline follows these definitions and instructions. LifeTrack students are asked to prepare this form after their initial Foundations of Adult Learning Seminar as post-seminar homework; however, if a student is contemplating prior learning, it is a good idea to fill it out again or expand the original. It is important to allow enough time to think about past experiences. A resume will be helpful in preparing this outline.

Definitions of terms:

**Employment:** any paid activity.

**Education:** noncredit continuing education unit (CEU) courses and seminars including in-service training, workshops, clinics, conferences, discussion groups, evening courses, lecture series, television or radio courses, correspondence courses and newspaper courses. CEU’s are measures of quantity (how much time was spent) and not quality or evaluation (how well the student did in the course). CEU’s never transfer as automatic college credit. Do not list courses that already appear on an official college-level transcript acceptable for transfer. Remember: credit can only be received once.

**Volunteer Experience:** involvement with organizations such as community service projects of any type, church activities and political activities.

**Recreational Activities and Hobbies:** any leisure-time activities for the purpose of personal satisfaction and enjoyment; e.g., creative writing, theatre work, sports, gardening, camping, and concert or theatre-going. Be sure to note extensive readings or research in any particular area.

**Military Experience:** branch of service, rank, service schools attended, military occupational specialty (MOS) and principal duty assignments.

**Licenses, Awards and Publications:** titles, institutions, agencies or publishers, etc. (what, where, when). Some licenses and certificates, such as the Registered Professional Reporter (RPR), have already been evaluated for academic credit. Check with the institution where training was had before preparing a portfolio for such a license or certificate. The student may wish to review the National Guide to Educational Credit for Training Programs through the American Council on Education. This guide can usually be found in the reference sections of college or university libraries. It can also be accessed online at [www.acenet.edu](http://www.acenet.edu).

**Travel:** study tours, vacations, business trips, living for extended periods of time in various parts of the country or abroad, participation as a worker or volunteer in different cultural settings.

**Column 4. Description of Learning Outcomes and Competencies Reached with Examples of Application:** Description of learning outcomes, or what the student knows and can do, is critical in order for the student to receive credit for prior learning experiences. Identify those experiences in Column 1 from which the greatest knowledge has been gained.

Academic credit is based on knowledge of concepts, theories and facts learned from practical experience as well as the achievement of skills and competencies. Experts often evaluate knowledge, skills and competencies in terms of the content included in courses which are regularly taught at colleges and universities. Academic or college credit is not awarded for the experience, but rather for the learning gained during the experience.

**Column 5. Documentation:** Documentation is a form of evidence, of backing up or verifying statements made in this analysis of learning. In trying to obtain credit for learning form experience, the student bears the burden of proof that there is college-level learning in the experience. It must be demonstrated to the evaluator what was learned as well as how well it was learned. The type of documentation submitted will vary with the type of experience and from one student to the next. An effective analysis of the learning is more important than excessive documentation.
Build a Significant Learnings Outline of your life, starting with some point you would call “adult” and ending with the present. The point at which you begin is your first job, or when you were first “on your own”. Wherever you start, build an outline that lists, in order, the experiences you were involved in at certain time periods. Some may have been very brief; some probably occurred during the same time as others. FOR EXAMPLE: You may have completed a short-term course in grammar for adult learning while you worked on a five-year job experience. List as many examples as you wish. The idea is to get as many experiences as possible down on paper. Be generous with yourself. You may use additional paper if needed.

**Directions:** First complete only columns 1, 2 and 3. Now complete column 4. Finally complete column 5.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. EXPERIENCE</th>
<th>2. TIME SPENT IN ACTIVITY</th>
<th>3. DUTIES &amp; ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>4. ANALYSIS OF LEARNING</th>
<th>5. DOCUMENTS</th>
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