Prior Learning
Student Guide

Compiled by Ana Self Schuber, April 2011
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction/Overview</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Questions about Prior Learning</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Case Studies</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Learning Case Studies</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Studies of Bill &amp; June</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Studies of Sharon &amp; Ted</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advising Process for Bill, June, Sharon &amp; Ted</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Significant Learnings Outline</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying Significant Learning</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing the Significant Learnings Outline</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example of the Significant Learnings Outline</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Portfolio Submission</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio Submission Process</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing the Portfolio</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reminders and Examples of Forms</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important Prior Learning Reminders</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application to Submit Knowledge of Prior Learning (ASK)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified ASK (Instructions)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example of Modified ASK</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example of Evaluation Form</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foundations of Adult Learning Pre-Seminar Homework</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-seminar Homework</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Space for Questions</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appendix</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A—Pre-ASK Check-list</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B—Portfolio Check-list</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The University of Alabama New College LifeTrack Program offers adult students an opportunity to petition for an assessment of prior learning as one of several degree completion options available. In view of the New College LifeTrack Program’s mission of serving adult learners with significant professional experience, the academic recognition of prior learning is a fundamental component in the educational plan of many of its students. The concept is based on accepted principles of adult learning, which emphasize a participative, self-directed, problem-solving orientation to learning. It is designed to assist professional adult learners attain their academic and career goals by validating the professional competence they have acquired outside the classroom.

The integral place of prior learning assessment within the mission and purpose of the New College LifeTrack Program lies in its compatibility with the needs of the working adult student population served by the University. Based on the proven assumption that adults will bring a variety of diverse and often specialized skills to the classroom, experiential learning tends to emphasize the application of this knowledge; it challenges students to apply their theoretical and practical skills to the problems and needs of their community and workplace. By its very nature, experiential learning validates the richness and diversity of environments in which individuals can pursue meaningful learning.

The standards and criteria developed by the New College LifeTrack Program at The University of Alabama for assessing prior learning have remained virtually unchanged since the establishment of the New College LifeTrack Program in the early 1970s. Through the years, this program has achieved a position of distinction in its field and has served as a model for new and older universities that have chosen to add the assessment of prior learning to their programs. The New College LifeTrack Program has worked closely with the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL). CAEL is a nationally recognized organization whose mission is to foster academically sound and consistently administered assessment of adult experiential learning.

The New College LifeTrack Program is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and adheres to their prescribed guidelines.
Basic Questions about Prior learning

A student can gain college-level learning from life experiences. Academic credit may be awarded for that learning. However, credit is not awarded for the student’s merely having had the experiences; it is based on the ability to reflect on and articulate to faculty evaluators the college-level learnings from those experiences. Experiences that may be the source of college-level learning include employment, volunteer activities, hobbies, private study and in-service training. The New College LifeTrack Program awards credit for learning from prior experience toward the B.A. and the B.S. interdisciplinary degrees conferred by The University of Alabama.

1. How does learning from experience relate to traditional classroom learning?

Most classroom learning begins with theories or ideas, not applications; that is, it is deductive learning moving from the general to the particular. This approach to learning is generally formal. It involves set periods of time, various exercises (such as writing papers) and periodic examinations.

Learning from experience is generally informal. It occurs in the midst of work, family or recreational situations that rarely have set time periods, structured exercises or periodic exams. Learning from experience usually consist of hands-on activities. It tends to be inductive; that is, it begins with particulars from which general principles can be derived.

Distinctions between classroom learning and learning from experience are not always consistent. Classroom learning may involve laboratories or other forms of testing ideas in practice. Learning from experience may also be accompanied by reading or other forms of study, such as personal choice, hobby or employer direction. The chief difference is that classroom learning is structured so that credit hours can be awarded, usually with grades, based on known measures of content. Learning from experience is not organized in this fashion.

The student must extract from their experiences the guiding principles used in the academic fields that best relate to the experiences involved. These guiding principles must be illustrated and articulated to those who teach in the fields involved. This presentation or portfolio provides faculty with a basis for fairly assessing learning from experiences. That assessment can then be equated in credit units (semester hours) to what would have been earned in similar classroom courses.
2. What is a portfolio?

Educational inputs (seat time in a traditional class, hours on the job, life experiences, etc.) do not guarantee learning outcomes, and if credit for learning is to be granted it is essential that the evaluator have something upon which to base an evaluation. Classroom instructors use exams, papers, class participation, etc., as indicators that learning has taken place. The evaluator of experiential learning uses the portfolio, a formal written, oral or electronic communication, to assess learning.

A prior learning portfolio is a document in which learning from various life experiences is organized into a manageable form for academic assessment. It is a way to express what is known by the student in a clear and concise manner and permits accurate and efficient faculty assessment. In the portfolio the following questions should be answered:

✓ What are the life experiences and what is the learning?
✓ Is the learning equivalent to college-level learning?
✓ How can the college-level learning be documented?

3. What kind of life and work experiences would be worth college-level credit?

Many adults have had a variety of experiences from which they have acquired college-level knowledge and skills. Business people often know sales techniques, business law, human resource management, bookkeeping, supervision, inventory control and/or marketing. Secretaries often know keyboarding, computer skills, business English and office procedures. People who have written a great deal often know English composition and technical writing. A good many managers might know consumer economics. Many people have public speaking abilities. Work with volunteer and human service organizations could lead to credit for management and counseling. If the knowledge and skills are at a college level, it is possible that college credit could be awarded through portfolio evaluation.

4. What are the characteristics of learning that might receive prior learning credit?

It is learning that:
✓ was acquired after high school
✓ may have been required for professional competence
✓ is reasonably current (some learning is time sensitive)
✓ is comparable to courses offered in colleges or universities
✓ implies a conceptual (theoretical) and practical understanding
✓ shows a relationship to the student’s degree goals
✓ does not duplicate learning for which college credit has already been awarded.
5. How much time can be taken to prepare the portfolio?

Once an Application to Submit Knowledge of Prior Learning (hereafter called an ASK) (see page 18 of this manual) has been filed with the LifeTrack Prior Learning Coordinator and it has been approved, the student will have six months from the date of the letter of approval (Go Letter) in which to prepare and submit the portfolio. If the student fails to submit the portfolio in that six-month period, the student will forfeit the evaluation fee and will have to resubmit an ASK to begin the process again, should credit still be sought.

6. Is there help for students preparing a portfolio?

Students wishing to gain prior learning credit are advised to use this manual as a guide. A helpful text is Earn College Credit For What You Know by Janet Colvin (4th Edition, ISBN 0757527507 through Kendall Hunt Publishing). The Prior Learning Coordinator will provide guidance and bibliographic information on other texts about portfolio development. In addition, the student’s academic advisor or the Prior Learning Coordinator can provide critiques of the drafts of the various portfolio elements. However, neither the advisor nor the Prior Learning Coordinator will serve as the portfolio assessor.

7. How long does the portfolio assessment take?

The amount of time needed to complete the portfolio assessment varies, but it should be completed within six weeks after it has been submitted to the faculty assessor. The length of time may increase if the portfolio is submitted just prior to scheduled campus vacations such as Christmas or Spring Break. Every effort is made to get a timely evaluation.

8. How many semester hours will be awarded per portfolio submission?

If the student has invested time and care in the portfolio preparation, it should elicit credit. Because experience itself is not creditable, there is no way of knowing exactly how much credit a portfolio will render. The evaluator will recommend the number of credit hours to be awarded and that recommendation will be weighed against any credit duplication, professional hours earned and prior learning credit limits. Prior learning credit can be placed in any of the core requirement areas, in the Depth Study or as elective credit. Portfolio credit may not be applied to the Senior Project. There is a limit of thirty (30) hours (1/4 of degree) of prior learning portfolio credit that any one student can earn. There is also a forty-five (45) hour cumulative credit limit for all types of prior learning credit which includes ACE credit, PEP/CLEP, AP credit, Dantes credit and portfolio evaluation.
9. How do credits earned for prior learning appear on The University of Alabama transcript?

Prior learning credit is listed on The University of Alabama transcript using course equivalent titles where applicable. Portfolio credit is usually recorded on the official transcript with a grade of P (or “Pass”). In a classroom course a faculty member has established specific criteria for the awarding of grades A, B, C or D. Such criteria are not usually available for a portfolio and the learning rarely exactly duplicates a course.

10. Can credits earned for prior learning be transferred to other colleges or universities?

If an LifeTrack student wishes to use University of Alabama prior learning credit in other degree programs at other universities or colleges, there is no assurance or guarantee that these credits will be transferable. Students should ask this question of colleges or universities they wish to attend.

The University of Alabama New College LifeTrack Program will make transfer determinations on a case-by-case basis for acceptance of transcribed prior learning credit awarded by other regionally accredited colleges and universities.

11. Is there a charge for credit earned in prior learning assessment?

There is an evaluation fee of $500.00 that must be paid online after the ASK form has been approved. If the student is submitting a Modified ASK for standardized ACE (American Council on Education) credit, a fee of $150.00 will be charged. These fees are for the evaluation and are subject to change.

12. What if the portfolio does not earn the credit that the student expected?

A carefully prepared portfolio generally earns academic credit. However, sometimes students have unrealistic goals and are disappointed if they do not receive as much credit as they had hoped. The evaluation may show that the student needs to learn additional concepts or take additional courses in order to develop more fully the competencies in any field of study. If the student is unsatisfied with the evaluation, a request for another evaluation may be filed in the form of a letter requesting a second evaluation. If the request is granted an additional evaluation fee of $150.00 will be charged.

13. Is currency of knowledge important?

Currency is important in many academic areas. If experiences are old, it is unlikely that the student's knowledge of theories in that field is current. Campus courses are updated on a regular basis.
Prior Learning Case Studies

Adult students enter the New College LifeTrack Program with a vast array of knowledge gained through experiences in business, government, the community and social organizations. Because of the institutionalization of prior learning credit, these students are allowed to demonstrate the intersection of practical application and theory and receive college-level credit applicable to their degree. Prior learning credit is given for the “learning” and not the “experience”. This practice not only enhances the degree program of the LifeTrack student but also enriches the academic community by bringing an element of self-reflection to the typical course-based education. An additional effect is to bring together students and faculty of different “...social institutions, populations, life experiences, and fields of inquiry, all of which require new types of understandings and skills” (Mandell 6*).

The LifeTrack portfolio assessment program permits students to apply for assessment in any academic field for which a faculty evaluator can be found. The portfolio evaluators are University of Alabama faculty and staff whose academic training represents expertise in such areas as the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and business. In order for the prior learning credit to be considered UA auspices, the evaluator must be affiliated with The University of Alabama as a member of the faculty, staff or administration.

While each student brings to the degree plan an entirely different set of life experiences, there are some similarities in the way each student is advised about the preparation of a prior learning portfolio. The following four case studies offer examples of different areas of portfolio development. These examples demonstrate the questions asked and advice given in all initial discussions about prior learning. While all four of these students may attempt prior learning, past experience tells us that at least two of them will opt to choose new learning through contracts, Independent Study courses and on-campus experiences rather than submit prior learning. Whether students submit prior learning or not, it is vital to examine what has been gained from past experience so that there will be a better understanding of where to go with a degree.

Bill is 29. Immediately upon graduation from high school he joined the Air Force. While in the service, he assisted in running a post exchange, and feels he learned a considerable amount about bookkeeping and inventory control. He was stationed in Germany for two years.

Seven years ago, Bill opened a small gift shop that he still operates. He feels he has learned advertising and merchandising through his experience and through reading and taking noncredit seminars. He has traveled extensively in Europe in order to purchase merchandise for his store and knows French and German well enough to transact business in these languages.

He feels he has learned quite a bit about cultural differences and some of the history of Europe. He has also become an accomplished gourmet cook. Bill now wishes to pursue a Bachelor degree at a local state university. He feels that his experiences should be recognized in meeting the requirements for his degree.

JUNE is 32. She took a secretarial program in a business college immediately upon graduation from high school. She worked as a secretary for five years and then moved to office supervisor for three years. She had a drinking problem which began in high school and became increasingly severe during the time that she worked as a secretary.

The pressure of serving as an office supervisor greatly contributed to her drinking until the consumption of alcohol began to adversely affect her job performance. Finally, she took the advice of her doctor and was briefly hospitalized. She joined Alcoholics Anonymous and has not had an alcoholic drink since. She feels that she learned a considerable amount about herself and human behavior as a result of her bout with alcoholism. Following her hospitalization, June resumed working as a secretary and also has worked for the past five years as a volunteer aide in the psychiatric ward of a general hospital. She has taken in-service courses and has worked closely with a psychiatric social worker.

Over the last four years, June has served as a volunteer in the hospital’s annual fund drive, and rose from “worker” to “team captain” in the drive. She helped to write a procedural manual for conducting the fund drive and has read several standard textbooks and numerous articles and pamphlets on the general subject of abnormal psychology.

June now wants to go to graduate school in psychology. In order to be admitted to graduate school, she needs a baccalaureate degree. June feels that her experience should earn her credit to be applied toward a degree.
SHARON is 43. At the age of 18 she entered the local community college and pursued a general liberal arts program with no clear career objective. She received her AA degree at 20 and married. Since then, she has been a homemaker for herself, two children (now ages 17 and 15) and a husband. Throughout her child-rearing years, she read numerous books and articles and discussed them with her pediatrician. The pediatrician had recommended much of Sharon’s reading.

Sharon has also read extensively in the consumer economics field and applied much of her reading in decorating her home. She is a skilled, award-winning clothing designer. She enjoys gourmet cooking.

Sharon participates in a number of civic organizations. She was president of the PTA and vice-president of the local chapter of the League of Women Voters. She completed a Dale Carnegie course in Public Speaking. In her spare time, she enjoys playing tennis.

Sharon’s children are growing up and she finds herself less content with homemaking. She is not sure what career, if any, she would like to pursue. She feels enrolling in a B.A. degree program will help her find an area of interest. She hopes her years of experience will count toward the degree.

TED is 46. He has worked for seven years as an independent insurance agent. He also worked his way through a self-instructional textbook in salesmanship. He has participated in three on-the-job workshops totaling 60 contact hours.

Ted is a member of Toastmasters International and has given a number of speeches to service clubs. He is president of the local chapter of the Junior Chamber of Commerce and has served as president of the local chapter of the Lion’s Club. He also serves as an elected member of the City Council.

For nine years, Ted has read widely in photography during his leisure time. He presently owns $2,500 worth of basic equipment. He has won several awards at amateur photography showings and he has had two “one-man” shows in his community. Over the past six years, he has had considerable experience in backpacking and camping, and has read countless books and articles on the subjects. Two years ago he took a course in survival training. Once, he and two other men survived one week in a wooded, mountainous area living “off the land”.

Ted now wants to move up into a management position within his present insurance firm. Company policy requires that he have at least an Associate Degree in order to hold a management position. Ted wants to enter the local college to pursue a degree, and feels that his past experience should count toward his degree.
Advising Process for Bill, June, Sharon & Ted

QUESTIONS STUDENT AND ADVISOR WILL CONSIDER: How many hours of credit are listed on the LifeTrack in-house worksheet? What is student’s degree plan? Would a portfolio be appropriate in light of needed credit hours and time?

The Prior Learning Coordinator will:

a. Refer to the LifeTrack in-house worksheet will indicate what core requirements need to be filled. In addition, the Coordinator will check for student grade point average. Students must have a 2.0 overall GPA in order to apply for Prior Learning credit.

b. Talk to the student about life experience. If it appears that there is the possibility of credit the Prior Learning Coordinator will:

  ✓ Ask the student to re-examine the significant learnings outline that catalogs experiences and learning along with identifying documentation,

  ✓ Have the student look at college or university catalogs to determine what is currently being taught in the fields that the student is experientially familiar with, and

  ✓ Ask the student to look at textbooks and journal articles in areas of strength or greatest knowledge, and talk to professionals who teach or work in those same areas to establish the guiding principles and theories that are currently accepted in that field.

For example, referring to the previous four case studies, the Prior Learning Coordinator may suggest that:

c. Bill consider a Modified ASK in Military Experience; he should also consider portfolios in Small Business Management, Advertising, Marketing and Cross-Cultural Studies.

June consider portfolios in Substance Abuse, Psychology, Group Dynamics, Leadership and Publications.

Sharon consider portfolios in Consumer Economics, Marketing, Clothing Design, Political Science, Communication and Child Psychology. She should also consider a Modified ASK for the Dale Carnegie course.

Ted consider portfolios in Communication, Photography and Leadership.

All of these students should choose their strongest areas of competence and complete one portfolio at a time.

d. Once the student has established his/her strengths, an ASK should be submitted in the area or areas in which learning can be demonstrated. Once an ASK is approved and the evaluation fee paid, the student will have six months in which to prepare the portfolio. (The preparation of a Modified ASK for ACE or Military credit is somewhat different and directions are included on page 19 and 20 of this handbook.)
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.

**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.
SIGNIFICANT LEARNINGS OUTLINE

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.

<table>
<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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EMPLOYMENT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>EDUCATION (NON CREDIT)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE</td>
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<th>5. DOCUMENTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RECREATION &amp; HOBBIES</td>
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<td>MILITARY EXPERIENCES</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>LICENSES, AWARDS, PUBLICATIONS</td>
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<td>TRAVEL</td>
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PORTFOLIO SUBMISSION PROCESS

The New College LifeTrack Program has specific procedures for submitting evidence of Prior Learning. All portfolio submissions must be preceded by the submission of a Regular ASK (See page 18). The following is a step-by-step explanation of this process.

1. The student should:
   a. Discuss the submission of an ASK or Modified ASK with advisor (specific questions should be directed to the Prior Learning Coordinator).
   b. Fill out Pre-ASK check-list (Appendix A).
   c. Fill out the ASK and return it with all attachments to the LifeTrack offices. Once the ASK is processed the student will be notified to make the evaluation payment online at MyBama.UA.EDU. **DO NOT SEND THE PORTFOLIO WITH THE ASK.**

2. Once the ASK is received by LifeTrack offices the following procedure is followed:
   a. The student makes payment of the evaluation fee.
   b. The ASK and attachments are examined by the Prior Learning Coordinator. The ASK may be returned for clarification, corrections or additional information.
   c. If the ASK is in order, it is “Staffed” (taken to the weekly staff meeting where it is introduced and its viability is determined).
   d. If the ASK is viable, the student is sent a “GO” email stating that the student may begin the process of portfolio preparation. The student is given six months to prepare the portfolio.

3. The student will receive a 5th-month email as a reminder that there is one month left in which to prepare the portfolio.

4. If the student fails to submit the portfolio within the six-month period the evaluation fee is forfeited. If the student wishes to submit the portfolio after the six months another ASK and fee will have to be submitted first.

5. When the portfolio arrives in the LifeTrack office it is logged in by the Prior Learning Coordinator.
   a. A permission form is sent to the head of the evaluator’s department for approval of service.
   b. Once the permission form is approved and returned, the evaluator is contacted and the portfolio is delivered to the evaluator.
   c. The evaluator may take up to four weeks to evaluate and return the portfolio. During that time the evaluator may contact the Prior Learning Coordinator, the student’s advisor, colleagues or the student.

6. When the portfolio is returned with the evaluation, it is logged by the Registrar who will check for duplication, credit title and credit amounts. The evaluation form must then be signed by the student’s advisor and the LifeTrack Director. The Registrar will notify the University Records office of awarded credit.

7. The student will then be notified about the awarding of credit.

8. The portfolio will be retained in the LifeTrack offices as a record of the credit attempt until the student graduates.
ORGANIZING THE PORTFOLIO FOR A REGULAR ASK

Each portfolio is creatively different, but each portfolio will contain the following elements:

1. **Cover Letter or Transmittal Letter**: This letter is a short introduction to the evaluator outlining the area or areas that are covered in the portfolio. The student should list personal information, such as telephone numbers, e-mail address and regular mailing address in case the evaluator needs to make further contact to verify or clarify something with regard to the portfolio.

2. **Title Sheet (ASK)**: This is a copy of the submitted ASK which includes personal data, subject area title, area of degree plan, type of presentation, date and signature of student.

3. **Table of Contents**: The table of contents should show the headings of the various subdivisions of the portfolio in order to assist the evaluator in reading the portfolio. Each item listed must have an accurate page number. Be sure that the table of contents lists every item included in the portfolio. Save the pagination for the last step. Otherwise, if changes are made to even one item of the portfolio, each page may have to be renumbered.

4. **Resume**: This is a brief description of personal information, employment, military and educational background. The resume serves as an introduction to the assessor. The resume must be typed and the maximum length should be about two pages.

5. **Detailed Autobiographical Description of Experience**: In the narrative, the student communicates who he or she is. The student will tell something about themselves, highlighting experiences both personal and professional that exhibit growth, goals and the reasons for seeking credit for prior learning. The student should incorporate significant events from the Significant Learnings Outline. This statement should be a minimum of five typewritten double-spaced pages. The following should be included:
   a. An introduction of the student, including educational and career goals, and any plans for further education after earning the undergraduate degree.
   b. A description of how educational goals relate to family, work and community life.
   c. A description of the motivations for earning the undergraduate degree.
   d. A conclusion that sums up the student’s intention for earning credit through the assessment of prior learning.

6. **Discussion of How This Area of Prior Learning Relates to the Degree Plan**: The student will want the narrative in this area to include:
   a. The subject matter for which credit is being sought.
   b. The academic course, area and/or department that seems to correspond to the subject matter of the prior learning.
   c. Course titles (and descriptions, if necessary).
   d. The area of the curriculum into which any prior learning credit will fit.

   The student should be as specific as possible about that part of the degree and/or the course requirement the prior learning credit will fulfill. Experiential learning will rarely exactly parallel specific courses; however, the student should identify the types of on-campus courses that sound similar to the student’s past experiences. The following example from an adult student’s portfolio may be helpful.

   "My prior learning in management is directly related to my Human Services depth study or major. I chose Human Services because of its relevance to my career in government and my long-range educational goals of obtaining a master’s degree in Public Administration. The learning I acquired during my twenty years as a manager and in public service is directly related to the knowledge and skills required for a degree focused on Human Services. The courses listed below are both reflective of my prior learning and an appropriate curriculum for my depth study or major."
The degree plan I prepared when I entered this program listed my prior learning in the area of management. As a senior executive with the Internal Revenue Service, I have prior learning experience at several levels of management. Integrated into my practical application or hands-on learning has been an excellent formal training program. This formal classroom training has ranged from in-house courses on basic management to executive programs at Duke University, Dartmouth University and The University of Tennessee. The Internal Revenue Service has a strong commitment to management education and has provided me with over two-thousand hours of formal training, much of which has taken place in the past five years.

I certainly would not argue that my prior learning relates exactly to the courses listed below; however, from examining course descriptions and texts I believe my learnings fall in the general areas of these courses. On the other hand, this list may not be all-inclusive. The courses listed below are all relevant to my depth study/major and I believe the documentation provided in this portfolio supports that relevance."

MGT 302 Organizational Communications--Theory & Practice  
MGT 320 Leadership  
MGT 350 Performance Evaluation & Employee Development  
MGT 380 Management Presentations  
MGT 431 Public Sector Employee Relations

7. Detailed Analysis of What I Learned from the Experience: Some institutions and evaluators refer to this part of the portfolio as the “analysis of learning” or the “life-learning” essay. This part of the portfolio describes how, why and what difference it makes. In this essay, the student will identify the theories, guidelines or principles learned from past experiences. Answers to the questions for each part of the essay should be at least two to five paragraphs. This narrative is the most important part or heart of the portfolio. In the narrative the following questions should be answered:
   a. What was the subject matter or content learned from the experience?
   b. How did the student apply what was learned to the job or personal life?
   c. How can this knowledge be applied to other areas of life or to other jobs?
   d. What difference does it make in the student’s life to have this knowledge?
   e. Can the theories, rules, laws, guidelines or principles that have been learned from the experience be identified?

   More than factual knowledge must be demonstrated. The student must demonstrate an understanding of what difference it makes. Assessors will be looking for evidence that the student understands and has thought about what he or she knows. The credit received through the assessment of prior learning is directly related to the complexity of knowledge, regardless of how a particular subject was learned (adapted from Degree Planning and Prior Learning, Second Edition, by Robert H. McKenzie, Ph.D.).

8. Annotated Bibliography: An annotated bibliography is a list of resources used in the learning process along with the resources used while compiling the portfolio. Bibliographic information is followed by a minimum of ten lines of descriptive or evaluative comments on the sources.

9. Documentation: This part of the portfolio provides evidence of the items listed in column 5 of the Significant Learnings Outline. Effective documentation provides evidence and support of what the student knows. It is specifically geared to the area of knowledge in which credit is being sought. Suggested examples of documentation (this list is not exhaustive):
   a. Letter from employers  
   b. Licenses  
   c. Certificates  
   e. Newspaper clippings  
   f. Audiotapes and videotapes  
   g. Resumes  
   h. Photographs  
   i. Products of your work  
   j. Proposals  
   k. Job descriptions/classifications  
   l. Official forms or records/ performance evaluations
Important Prior Learning Reminders

(MAKE A COPY OF EVERYTHING BEFORE YOU MAIL YOUR PORTFOLIO.)

1. Discuss prior learning with your advisor first. This is to avoid credit duplication and deadline problems.

2. Students must have a 2.0 G.P.A. in order to begin the prior learning process. If a student does not have a 2.0 G. P. A., 12 hours of UA work graded at a C or better must be done.

3. Remember the 30-hour rule. This is for evaluated portfolios. The limit for all types of combined prior learning credit is 45 hours (PEP/CLEP, ACE, AP, DANTES).

4. All prior learning must be evaluated before beginning the Senior Project.

5. The evaluator will be looking for academic “value” in the portfolio.

6. When preparing the “Analysis of Learning” section, the student should begin with general overall theories in the area and then use personal experience as the example of those theories in practice. It is a good idea to investigate the filed of study by looking at textbooks and or syllabi from campus-based courses.

7. Not every experience will be worth “academic” credit (even if the ASK has been approved), but that does not devalue the experience. There is a difference in “skill- oriented” learning and “theoretical” learning.

8. Prior learning is graded on a “Pass” basis. The reason that most evaluators do not assign a grade is that they do not have ownership of the course material that is covered in a portfolio as they would if the student were taking a prepared on-campus course.

9. Remember neatness counts. For some of the people who read it, the portfolio will be all they will ever know of the student. If they must struggle with sloppy presentation, poor typing, misspellings and poor grammar they will associate their discomfort with the kind of person they suppose the student to be.

10. There are two types of prior learning. A portfolio is evaluated by UA faculty and requires a Regular ASK. Any prior learning that involves standardized credit (ACE corporate or military) requires a Modified ASK.

11. Remember that Prior Learning Portfolios take time. Time to think about, time to compile, time to write and time to evaluate.
NOTE: A student must submit this form for each subject area of prior learning he or she wishes to have evaluated. Submission of prior learning evidence does not guarantee credit. The fee paid for each submission of prior learning is an evaluation fee, not a tuition fee. Credit is earned on the basis of whether or not the evidence proves the learning is college-level, is current, does not duplicate credit already learned and makes a positive contribution to the student’s degree plan.

NAME: _____________________________ STUDENT CWID: _____________________________

ADDRESS: __________________________ DEPTH STUDY: _____________________________

EMAIL: _____________________________

TELEPHONE: (home) ___________________ (work) ________________________________

SUBJECT AREA TITLE (FIELD OF STUDY): ________________________________

(In general, subject area titles correspond to departmental headings in The University of Alabama catalog. Please discuss the appropriate title with your advisor before submitting this application.)

AREA OF DEGREE PLAN: I intend that any credit earned from this evaluation will be applied to the following area(s) of my curriculum worksheet:

___Humanities     ___Natural Sciences     ___Mathematics     ___Social Science
___Electives      ___Depth Study        ___Communication

If more than one of the above areas is checked, please explain:

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

TYPE OF PRESENTATION: (Specify portfolio, competency exam, oral/visual presentation, electronic, other.)

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

ATTACHED ARE:

___A. Brief Chronological Description of Experience (when)
___B. Brief Description of Learning Applications (how it relates to degree)
___C. Brief Analysis of Learning Outcomes (guiding principles)
___D. Tentative List of Possible Documentation
___E. Tentative List of Applicable U of A courses (UA or other institution)
___F. If approved, you will be notified to make your evaluation payment.

The actual presentation should be submitted within Six months of the approval of this application.

DATE: ___________________ STUDENT SIGNATURE: ________________________________
Modified Portfolios

Occasionally students pursue credit for learning experiences that have been evaluated and assigned credit recommendations by national groups such as the American Council on Education. Because preexisting (predetermined) credits are pursued in a slightly different manner, the process for compiling and submitting the portfolio is “modified”.

“Modified” portfolios are only used when students wish to claim credits that have predetermined recommendations; i.e. Military, “Dale Carnegie” or AT&T courses or for specific examinations such as Novell. Because credit awarded depends on the breadth and depth of the learning and the currency and applicability of the knowledge to the student’s degree plan, credit hours awarded for each certification, license or school may vary.

Because prior learning credits are viewed as more than just a way to accumulate credit, and to insure that students best demonstrate and maximize the learning for fullest possible credit recommendation, submissions for modified portfolio presentations should be handled in the following manner:

1. **MODIFIED ASK** (see page 20) The title page should indicate the subject matter and a brief statement of where any credit earned should be applied. Include a daytime phone number.

2. **Brief Chronological Description of Learning Experience.** This is important because ACE recommendations are dated and credit recommendations may depend on date of participation. It is also important when using licenses to check for currency.

3. **Description of the Learning Experience** (no more than two to three pages in length). This helps fill in gaps for needed information that may not always be apparent on certifications. It helps promote a quality presentation and eliminates “piecemealing” items for possible credits.

4. **Analysis of the Learning Experience** (no more than two to three pages in length). Be sure to include discussion on the currency of the knowledge and explain how the learning applies to your degree plan. Because mere exposure to the learning does not warrant college credit, include in your analysis what you learned and how it should fit into your degree plan.

5. **Documentation** (certificates, licenses, official school transcripts, DD214 or DD295, SMART or ARRTS transcripts etc).

*The student should always discuss the submission of the Modified Portfolio with their advisor and the Prior Learning Coordinator before actual submission to the New College LifeTrack Program.

The student will be notified to submit the evaluation fee online before finalization of the evaluation.
MODIFIED ASK APPLICATION TO SUBMIT KNOWLEDGE OF PRIOR LEARNING

NOTE: A student must submit this form for each subject area of prior learning he or she wishes to have evaluated. Submission of prior learning evidence does not guarantee credit. The fee paid for each submission of prior learning is an evaluation fee, not a tuition fee. Credit is earned on the basis of whether or not the evidence proves the learning is college-level, is current, does not duplicate credit already learned and makes a positive contribution to the student’s degree plan.

NAME: _____________________________ STUDENT CWID: ______________

ADDRESS: __________________________ DEPTH STUDY: ______________

EMAIL: _____________________________

TELEPHONE: (home) _______________ (work) _____________________________

SUBJECT AREA TITLE: ________________________________________________

(In general, subject area titles correspond to departmental headings in the University of Alabama catalog. Please discuss the appropriate title with your advisor before submitting this application.)

AREA OF DEGREE PLAN: I intend that any credit earned from this evaluation will be applied to the following area(s) of my curriculum worksheet:

___Humanities  ___Natural Sciences  ___Mathematics  ___Social Science

___Electives  ___Depth Study  ___Communication

If more than one of the above areas is checked, please explain:

_______________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________

TYPE OF PRESENTATION: (Specify ACE, Military, Examination, License, Other)

_______________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________

ATTACHED ARE:  

___A. Brief Chronological Description of Experience (when)

___B. Brief Description of Learning Applications (how does it relate to degree sought)

___C. Brief Analysis of Learning Outcomes (guiding principles)

___D. Documentation (photo-copied)

___E. Once approved you will be notified to submit the evaluation fee.

The actual presentation should be submitted with this application.

DATE: _______________ STUDENT SIGNATURE ______________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________
EVALUATION OF PRIOR LEARNING

In examining a portfolio for the purpose of recommending credit for what has been learned from experience, you may wish to consider the following criteria:

1. The learning gained from the experience must have been demonstrated by the student.
2. The learning should be at least on the undergraduate level.
3. The student should have demonstrated a conceptual as well as practical grasp of the subject matter.
4. The learning should be applicable outside of the specific job or setting in which it was gained.
5. The learning should be related to an academic field (although it need not be confined to an existing course content).

Your recommendation will be the basis for awarding credit by the Department of Arts and Sciences. Please forward your recommendation to the New College LifeTrack Program, P. O. Box 870388, Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0388.

PLEASE RATE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING AS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOOD</th>
<th>AVERAGE</th>
<th>NEEDS WORK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

GENERAL COMMENTS:

1. How the student addressed the area of requested credit. _____ _____ _____
2. Organization of portfolio. _____ _____ _____

NARRATIVE:

1. Explanation of how the learning was acquired. _____ _____ _____
2. The student’s general understanding of the field. _____ _____ _____
3. The mixture of theory and practice appropriate to the subject. _____ _____ _____
4. The student’s college-level writing skills. _____ _____ _____
5. Organization of narrative. _____ _____ _____

EVIDENCE:

1. The nature and quality of the evidence. _____ _____ _____
2. The authenticity of the evidence. _____ _____ _____

POSSIBILITY OF ADDITIONAL CREDIT:

(Please elaborate on conditions or requirements for possible additional credit.)

MESSAGE TO STUDENT:

________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
RECOMMENDATION: Upon examination of the material submitted by _________________CWID_______________ the following recommendation is made (check at least one of the three categories):

1. Semester hours to be awarded: _____________ (Pass/Fail) _________________
   Credit to be recorded as
   Equivalent UA courses, if applicable (please provide course number, titles and semester hours)
2. ______ The learning demonstrated duplicates that for which the student has already received credit.
3. ______ The learning demonstrated does not appear to be college-level and no credit can be awarded.

IF YOU ARE NOT RECOMMENDING A CREDIT AWARD, PLEASE CHECK ALL OF THE FOLLOWING THAT APPLY:

_____ evidence is inadequate
_____ narrative is too brief
_____ evidence does not support knowledge of topics in area of requested credit
_____ it is not clear how the knowledge was acquired
_____ knowledge demonstrated is not at the college level
_____ student’s knowledge lacks the breadth of the subject area
_____ other: ________________________________________________________________

If more work is required, what information should be provided?

_____ additional evidence; i.e.: ___________________________________________________________
_____ rewrite narrative: ______________________________________________________________
_____ a written exam is required: ______________________________________________________
_____ an oral interview is required (include topic) __________________________________________

****************************************************************

FACULTY MEMBER’S NAME (please type or print) ___________________________________________
FACULTY MEMBER’S SIGNATURE __________________________________ DEPT. ______________
CWID ________________________________ DATE ___________________

******************************************************************************************************************

LIFETRACK APPROVAL:

_________________________________________ ___________________________ ____________________________
Records Coordinator  Advisor     Program Manager

_________________________________________ ___________________________ ____________________________
Date     Date      Date
Pre-ASK Check-List

Nothing is more frustrating than to begin a project with high hopes and then hit a snag well into the project. This check-list is designed to assist you in discovering your readiness to begin a Prior Learning project.

☐ Do you have at least a 2.0 grade-point-average? If your answer is no, you will have to complete at least 12 semester hours of 2.0 or better before beginning prior learning.

☐ Have you reached the 30-hour prior learning portfolio limit? If so, you will not be allowed to accumulate more portfolio credit, but you may seek ACE credit (up to 45 hours cumulative).

☐ Have you reached the 30 professional hour limit in the field of study you intend to seek prior learning credit? If so, you should not seek additional prior learning credit in that area.

☐ Have you turned in your Senior Project packet? If you answer yes, you will not be allowed to submit prior learning. All prior learning should be completed prior to submitting the Senior Project packet.

☐ Have you discussed your intentions to seek prior learning credit with your advisor or the Prior Learning Coordinator?

☐ If you are seeking ACE credit for Military service, have you obtained a DD295 or DD214 or do you have a SMART or ARRTS transcript from ACE? If the answer is no, you should contact the Prior Learning Coordinator for appropriate forms.

☐ Have you examined college or university catalogs to determine whether your experiential learning would translate to college credit?

☐ Have you reviewed textbooks or syllabi from the fields of study from which you will seek credit? This will help you establish a list of guiding principles.

☐ Do you have the writing skills to articulate your learning without serious errors in grammar and spelling? You must be able to write sentences and paragraphs free of major errors and be able to correct your own errors with minimal help.

☐ Do you have the time to carefully compile a lengthy essay supported by documentation following a specific portfolio format?

☐ Do you have documentation that will support your experiential learning?

Completing this check-list should direct you to any major deficiencies in your quest for prior learning credit.
Pre-Portfolio Check-List

Before mailing your Prior Learning portfolio to the LIFETRACK offices at Box 870388, Tuscaloosa, Ala 35497-0388, you will want to check to see if you have included all pertinent information.

☐ Have you previously filed the formal ASK and paid the correct evaluation fee?
☐ Have you carefully researched the field of study for which you are seeking credit to establish guiding principles?
☐ Does the portfolio have a cover letter/transmittal letter as a short introduction?
☐ Does it include current telephone and email addresses?
☐ Do you have a Title Sheet (a copy of the formal ASK)?
☐ Is your Table of Contents clear and concise, and do the page numbers correctly correspond with the subject areas?
☐ Have you included an updated resume?
☐ Is your Detailed Autobiographical Description clear? Does it detail in chronological order your experience?
☐ Have you clearly divided the “analysis” portion of your portfolio either into areas of study or chapters that correspond to particular classes?
☐ Have you listed your guiding principles for each area or class that you are seeking credit?
☐ Have you then given examples of how those guiding principals were applied in your particular experience?
☐ Have you given examples of instances within the experience where the accepted theory did not apply to the experience and how you negotiated its outcome?
☐ Is your annotated bibliography in alphabetical order and does it include a summary paragraph and an analysis paragraph?
☐ Is your documentation reasonable? In other words, have you chosen wisely and not included repetitive documentation as filler?
☐ Have you made a copy of everything before you sent it in?
☐ Do you understand that it may take up to six weeks to receive word on your evaluation? You will be notified as soon as an evaluation is returned to the LIFETRACK offices.
☐ Do you understand that once your portfolio is evaluated, it remains in the LIFETRACK offices until your graduation as a record?
Pre-seminar homework
(To be handed in upon arrival at Foundations of Adult Learning Seminar)

1. What kinds of life and work experiences would be worth college-level credit?

2. Which type of prior learning requires an ASK (Application to Submit Knowledge of Prior Learning) and which requires the Modified ASK.

   Regular ASK:

   MODIFIED ASK:

3. Briefly explain the regular portfolio submission process.
Prior Learning Questions

Use this space to ask questions about prior learning. This will help us prepare seminar materials and lectures.
NOTES