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## Policy AC015: Earning Course Credit by Examination or Evaluation

Recommended for Approval by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel Engstrom".

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Daniel Engstrom, Ed.D.  
Interim Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs,  
Pennsylvania Western University

Approved by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Lorraine Bernotsky".

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R. Lorraine Bernotsky, D.Phil., Interim President,  
Pennsylvania Western University

Effective Date: 08/07/2023

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### A. Intent

To provide students with a means of validating prior learning equivalencies to college-level learning.

### B. Definition(s)

None.

### C. Policy

All policies of the University will be in conformity with all applicable Federal and Pennsylvania statutes and regulations. All policies need to be consistent with Board of Governors policies and Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education collective bargaining agreements.

#### Undergraduate Policy

Pennsylvania Western University offers specific programs to assess student requests for undergraduate credit to reflect learning acquired in a non-traditional manner. Specifically, the University offers the following options: College-Level Examination Program (CLEP), Credit by Exam, DSST/DANTES offered through the U.S. military, and Life Experience Credit – Prior Learning Assessment (PLA).

Only students who are pursuing a degree or certification at the University are eligible for credit by examination or evaluation as described in this policy. It is important that such credit awards be determined early in a student's career so that the subsequent course of instruction, planned with the academic advisor, can build around or upon them. Credits for PLA will not be posted until 12 credits have been earned at PennWest.

No more than 30 semester hours of credit may be earned under this policy, and individual programs may have specific limits on credit hours that can be applied toward major requirements. Military and veteran students should note that **Joint Services Transcript (JST) credits are not subject to this 30-credit limit**; information is provided in the PennWest Transfer Credit Policy (AC034).

Credits obtained through examination or evaluation, as defined in this policy, may be applied to the student's degree program, where they may meet major, general education, or elective requirements. However, these credits are not considered as earned from PennWest for purposes of meeting graduation residency requirements as defined in the Graduation Residency Requirements Policy (AC033). This means, for instance, that the student cannot complete all major or degree requirements through a combination of these credits and other transferred credits without taking a minimum number of courses directly from Penn West, as described in Policy AC033.

### **College-Level Examination Program (CLEP)**

Within certain limits, PennWest accepts credits toward graduation earned through CLEP. Subject examinations are offered through the CLEP program in a variety of subject areas, and the availability of subject-area exams may change over time. Each subject examination covers material usually taught in an undergraduate course with a similar title at most colleges and universities.

Students scoring at or above 50 on the exam will normally be granted the number of credits equivalent to those allowed for a comparable course taught at PennWest. For a list of course equivalencies for approved CLEP exams, the student should contact the campus Testing Center.

Duplicate credit will not be awarded for CLEP if the student has already taken a college course in that specific area of achievement. All students may take CLEP tests if eligibility requirements are met.

For successfully passed CLEP exams, credit will be coded on the student's transcript as a "CR" grade, which will not affect the student's GPA.

### **Credit by Exam**

Students may attempt to earn credit for courses within the PennWest catalog where they believe they have competency in the course content. Exams may not be available for all courses, and the student should verify with the chair of the department that houses the course to determine availability of a competency exam for that course. If the student earns a satisfactory score on the exam, they will be awarded credit for the course on their transcript. The academic department chair will determine whether a given exam score warrants credit for the course.

Students seeking to earn credit by exam for a course in which they are currently enrolled must complete the examination process prior to the end of the Add-Drop period. Students may not use the Credit by Exam method for courses where they had previously received a grade or had audited the course.

Credit will be coded on the student's transcript as a "CR" grade and count as credit earned at PennWest, but will not affect the student's GPA.

## **DSST/DANTES (Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support)**

PennWest will accept credit for DSST/DANTES exams where the student has earned at least minimum scores specified by the Pennsylvania Transfer and Articulation Center (<https://www.patrac.org/Student/Earn-Credit-by-Exam#3>).

Credit will be coded on the student's transcript as a "CR" grade, which will not affect the student's GPA.

## **Life Experience Credit – Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)**

Life experience is defined as learning experiences students have had as part of their employment or daily life, which equate with learning experiences otherwise achieved as part of coursework at PennWest. PennWest will award credit for life experience in those cases deemed appropriate through faculty evaluation and administrative review. Working with staff from the Office of Student Outreach and Success Coaching and relevant department chairs, the student should try to equate life experiences with specific courses at PennWest so that credit will be earned for those courses. Credit may also be awarded for general knowledge in a given subject area, which may not be equivalent to an existing course at the university.

Life experience credit may be used in lieu of internship credit pending academic department review and academic dean approval. Life experience credit procedures are administered by the Office of Student Outreach and Success Coaching. Final approval for the awarding of credit rests with the dean of the college in which the student has applied for credit.

Some PLA equivalencies are predetermined for earned certificates in certain disciplines, in which case the student will not be required to submit a portfolio in order to obtain credit. Students should contact the Office of Student Outreach and Success Coaching for information about these opportunities.

Credit will be coded on the student's transcript as a "CR" grade, which will not affect the student's GPA.

## **Graduate Policy**

Graduate students may be able to earn credits via prior learning assessment (PLA). Qualifying experience could be work, military training, personal educational growth, volunteer work, certificate training, specialized certifications, or independent study. Credit may be awarded when a student is able to demonstrate transferable learning; that is, knowledge that can be applied to a new or different situation. Prior learning assessment requires an understanding of theoretical concepts involved in the learning experience. Appropriate documentation must be provided. Graduate students may earn no more than thirty percent (30%) of the credits required for a PennWest graduate degree, certificate, or certification program.

## **D. Procedure(s)**

### **Undergraduate**

#### **College-Level Examination Program (CLEP)**

1. The student may schedule a CLEP exam through a PennWest Testing Center, paying the applicable fee through the Student Accounts Office.
2. Once the testing is complete, the student should submit the test scores to the university Transfer Office for posting of the credits to the student's transcript.

#### **Credit by Exam**

1. The student will contact the appropriate academic department chair to determine if an exam is available for the course in question. If so, the student will complete the Competency Exam Form.
2. The student will discuss the competency exam with their academic advisor and secure approval on the form from their advisor and from the department chair offering the course.
3. The student will take the form to the academic department housing the course to schedule the examination.
4. The department chair, or designee, will administer the examination and indicate whether the student has successfully passed the exam on the Competency Exam Form.
5. The form is routed to the academic dean for approval and then to the Office of the Registrar for posting to the student's academic record.

#### **DSST/DANTES (Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support)**

1. The student will complete DSST exams through the U.S. Military's DANTES program. Upon completion, the student should request that an official transcript from DANTES is submitted to the PennWest Transfer Office.
2. The Transfer Office will post credits to the student's transcript, as appropriate.

#### **Life Experience Credit – Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)**

1. The student will submit a Life Experience Credit Application Form to the Office of Student Outreach and Success Coaching.
2. The student will prepare a detailed portfolio describing the experience for which credit is being requested. The student may request a course outline or syllabus for the targeted course from the appropriate academic department chair for review in preparing the portfolio.
3. The student will be required to pay appropriate application and evaluation fees for this process.
4. The Office of Student Outreach and Success Coaching will review the completed portfolio and send it to the appropriate department chair(s) for evaluation.
5. The department chair will direct the portfolio to the appropriate faculty member(s) for evaluation. Following evaluation, the faculty member will recommend specific credit, if any, to the academic dean.

6. The academic dean will review the portfolio and the recommendation of the faculty, approving or adjusting the amount of credit, or identified course(s), for award. The academic dean will return the materials to the Office of Student Outreach and Success Coaching with the decision.
7. The Office of Student Outreach and Success Coaching will inform the student of the life experience credit decision and ensure administrative procedures for financial and credit award transactions. The student will only be charged the transcript fee (charge per credit earned) if credit has been recommended for award.
8. If the student wishes to appeal a negative evaluation decision, the Office of Student Outreach and Success Coaching will act as the mediator between the student and other university offices. If further evaluation is deemed advisable, there will be no further cost to the student, as long as the evaluation takes place in the same field as the original evaluation.
9. When the processes of evaluating and awarding of credit are complete, the Transfer Office will post any credits to the student's transcript and any fees associated with the credits to the student's account.

### **Graduate**

Current students may request a PLA review through the Office of Student Outreach and Success Coaching. Students need to be aware that some accredited programs may not accept PLAs, and therefore students should check with the program coordinator or academic dean prior to making a request.

PLA review does not guarantee that PennWest University credit will be awarded.

All PLA reviews are conducted by appropriate faculty in academic programs/departments with approval of the appropriate department chair and the dean.

A per credit fee is charged for all credits awarded to students via PLA.

If the PLA request is approved, credits, not grades, will be awarded, and transcribed through the Office of the Registrar.

NOTE: PLA may have financial aid and load repayment implications. PLA credit is not eligible for financial aid consideration. PLA credits are coded with the letter "P" and are not considered "registered credits". Loan repayment may be triggered if no "registered credits" are on the student's schedule. Before considering PLA, students should consult with the Office of Financial Aid.

### **E. Related policies**

Grading Policy (AC019)

Graduation Requirements Policy (AC028)

Graduation Residency Requirements Policy (AC033)

Transfer Credit Policy (AC034)

**F. Contact Information**

For additional information, please contact the Office of Student Outreach and Success Coaching.

**G. Policy Review Schedule**

All policies will be reviewed every two years or on an as needed basis if a change in BOG, PASSHE or Pennsylvania law would create the need for an immediate change.