



# Prior Learning Petition

## Academic Credit for Experiential Learning

(Revised May 2018)

### Introduction

As an adult, the chances that you have had “college-equivalent” learning experiences are great. These experiences may be related to your work, a vocation, military background, non-credit courses or training, community service, or other significant accomplishments. Siena Heights University can help you evaluate these experiences to determine whether they are in fact equivalent to college-level credit. This process begins at Siena Heights by meeting with an advisor, discussing the experiences which have resulted in learning, identifying all appropriate means for assessing your learning and determining appropriate credit awards. At this meeting you will bring a well-developed **learning resume** to guide your conversation (See outline for this attached at end of this document.)

At Siena Heights we use a variety of approaches for assessing the prior learning of our students. These include nationally and regionally recognized tests (CLEP, PEP, DANTES); nationally recognized assessment guides (ACE military and corporate program guides); national and state licenses, certificates and registry; and Siena Heights’ own prior learning assessment process (Prior Learning Petition – P.L.P.). Any or all of these approaches may be required to do an appropriate assessment of your prior experiential learning. This publication will focus on Siena’s prior learning petition process and what you will need to do to complete a successful petition (also called portfolio).

### Our Philosophy of Petition Development

If you and your advisor agree that a prior learning petition is appropriate in your case you will be guided by your advisor, appropriate faculty, and this publication. The process of translating your college-equivalent life experiences into an appropriate credit award is a challenging one. This is why Siena Heights first looks to nationally recognized tests, assessment guides, or national/state credentials. If a petition is to be successfully completed we must help you develop the case that your experiences are equivalent to experiences for which colleges give credit and determine an appropriate award. It is important to note that credit is awarded only for college-level learning not for experience itself.

At Siena Heights University we will assist you in equating your prior learning to what colleges ordinarily award credit for:

1. Courses (course equivalency)
2. Sponsored Experiential Learning related to one’s major area of study or career exploration (usually work experiences – volunteer or paid) variously called internships, cooperative education, fieldwork, practicum, etc.

Your advisor and appropriate faculty will work with you in identifying the specific academic awards to which your experience translates. By equating your learning to courses or sponsored experiential learning Siena Heights University believes it has appropriate parameters for developing reasonable and fair credit awards and guiding you in your petition development. Siena Heights has developed its over-all approach to assessing experiential learning as well as its institutional petition development process during over 25 years of experience in serving adult students. Our long history of association with CAEL (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning) and our involvement with other institutions serving adult learners (including our sister institution, Barry University in Miami, FL) have shaped our approach and commitment to serving adult learners.



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### Getting Started

Siena Heights University invites you to petition for credit for your experiential learning. Constructing a written petition is required for this credit award. In this petition you are expected to identify what you have learned, how you learned it, how you have used your learning and the documentation of that learning.

Since you are asking a university to grant credit for what you have learned, you are expected to demonstrate that what you know/have learned is comparable to what a college ordinarily gives credit for. You are expected to state: 1) your area of expertise; 2) how you learned it; 3) what you are able to do with this knowledge; and 4) how well you use this learning – which is an evaluation of your performance. You need to show relationships between what you know and the learning that would take place in college courses. You should show how your learning is relevant to your educational goals.

This process is not easily accomplished. Many steps are involved in producing the type of petition required. You may expect to do more than one draft, and your academic advisor will assist you along the way.

Be encouraged. You have learned much. Now all we need to do is figure out the best way to articulate it. How to do this is discussed below.

### Procedure

1. Meet with an advisor/faculty member to discuss your degree completion. Together you will develop a rough outline and structure. (Bring with you a well-developed learning resume complete with dates, and a detailed explanation or job description.) Before you meet with your advisor to discuss the potential for prior learning credits, all formal official transcripts must be in so we can guard against duplication of credit.
2. Develop a rough draft after agreeing on a proposed outline with your advisor/faculty member.
3. Submit a copy of your draft for initial feedback on tone, length, degree of details, presence of necessary evidence of learning, and to verify potential number of credits.
4. Rewrite.
5. Resubmit.
6. If necessary, repeat steps 4 and 5.
7. Submit final draft.
8. The final petition will be examined and approved by appropriate academic personnel (a committee of two-three professionals).
9. Petitions may be started at any time after enrollment. They must be completed at least three (3) months prior to an expected graduation date.
10. Upon payment, credit is posted on transcript as “credits” in the form of the equivalent college-level experience; that is, no letter grade is given.



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### How to Construct the Petition

The petition consists of six parts: 1) Table of Contents, 2) Cover Letter, 3) The Learning Resume, 4) Narrative, 5) Learning Summary and 6) Documentation.

- 1. Table of Contents:** A list of headings and sub-heading of the major topics discussed within your petition. The table of contents should include corresponding page numbers.
- 2. Cover Letter:** The Cover Letter should provide a brief overview of your academic and career/life goals and what your petition is about during the particular time frames(s) you are writing about. It should state when these experiences took place and include the number of credit hours for which you are petitioning. Include your email address and your day and evening phone numbers in the event that committee members need to contact you regarding your petition.
- 3. The Learning Resume:** The learning resume should outline all significant sources of learning following the format provided (attached). Include dates for all experiences ordered from present to past.
- 4. The Narrative:** First, you will develop a specific narrative section for each discernible area of credit sought (each course, sponsored experiential equivalency). Next, establish some facts. You may want to start with a summary or outline of your background in the area under discussion. From this point on you should proceed to do your best to clearly present an accurate summary of what you know/have learned or what you can do and your understanding of what it takes to do it. Be specific: What is your area of expertise? Go into as much detail as is necessary to make it obvious that you understand what this activity entails.

Next, identify how you learned what you know or what you do successfully. Were you formally trained? By whom? For how long? Where? How did you change what you first learned over time? Are you better, more competent, than you used to be? Why? Discuss how you keep current.

Give examples throughout that illustrate how you use the skills you possess. Whenever possible, discuss the decisions you make as you perform your function. Why do you now do things differently as a result of the learning that occurred? The What, How, Use, and How Well are critical components to a successfully written prior learning petition. **The length** of your prior learning petition narrative should be from **one to three, double-spaced typed pages per credit hour requested.**

- 5. Learning Summary:** End your P.L.P. with a summary of what it is you now have learned and include any accomplishments, promotions or special recognitions you may have received. Also, state why you believe this learning is worth the academic credit hours you are requesting.
- 6. Documentation:** The purpose of the documentation is to provide evidence that what you say is true. This objective can be accomplished in many ways. Typically, this includes letters (on letterhead) which verify dates of employment and competence; past and current performance reviews or evaluations where applicable; training material; certificates of training; examples of accomplishments; bibliographies; and more. These should be placed in the order in which they are discussed within you narrative, and labeled (Fig 1), (Fig 2) etc in the upper right hand corner of the particular piece of documentation. Reference each piece of documentation in the body of the narrative with a parenthetical note: ie—(see Fig 1)



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### Learning

Learning requires a certain degree of awareness, reflection, and analysis. One way for you to assess whether learning has taken place is to determine what **you could teach** another adult about what you now know—the problems you have solved, the necessary steps, the skills, and procedures. What principles must be considered to realize a successful outcome? What do you look for as an indication that you have been successful? What controls did you put in place so that tasks could be accomplished on time?

In some areas of our experiences we become experts as our knowledge deepens. Other skills and attitudes become obsolescent and atrophy as their usefulness diminishes. Mostly we readjust and recycle our points of view. We try to find some way to transfer what we relied on before so we don't have to start over. We salvage as we learn. It is a self-conscious process. We are forced by the present to think about what we have learned from past experience. The challenge of daily life requires that we adjust our set of skills and attitudes regularly.

### Criteria for College Level Learning

Adapted from material from Barry University and from Urban Whitaker's book, *Assessing Learning: Standards, Principles and Procedures* (1989)

- 1. Credit is awarded only for learning, not for experience.** It should be noted that not all experiences lead to learning. Learning is an "outcome" and experience is an "input." As you write the *Narrative* portion of the petition, you will answer these three questions:
  - **What did I learn?**
  - **How did I learn it?**
  - **What do I DO with what I learned?**
- 2. Learning must be above secondary school level.** Learning should relate in some way to the academic disciplines and corresponding areas traditionally taught by colleges. Experiential learning may be similar or very different from the specific areas within a discipline. Nevertheless, establishing a relationship between non-traditional learning and these disciplines is an important dimension in receiving credit.
- 3. Learning must have a theoretical as well as a practical application.** If learning is theoretical, students should be able to apply it in a practical context or situation. If learning is practical or applied, students should understand the why's and how's of what they do. In other words, students must be able to explain what they do. A good way to measure this is to determine if the learning is applicable outside of a specific context and serves as a basis for further learning.
- 4. Learning must be verifiable.** You must be able to verify your learning to receive credit for it. Verification is the process of assembling evidence (third party documentation) to support that you know what you claim to know.
- 5. Learning should show some relevance to a person's educational goals.** This criterion should have been described and met in the student's narrative.
- 6. Learning must be measurable, non-routine, more than what everyone gains from everyday experiences.** Not all skills represent college-level learning. For example, learning which results from marriage, parenting and family living, personal philosophy or religion may not be appropriate for the portfolio. In order for learning in these areas to qualify for credit in these areas, students would have to demonstrate the following:



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- a) **Reading and Training:** Augmenting learning gained from child rearing by reading and training in the area of child development and /or education and applying it by participating in a child care center.
- b) **Analytical Thinking:** The analysis of the principles involved in various religions and their comparison to students' personal beliefs including inferences on similarities and differences.
- c) **Communication:** Teaching parenting techniques or spiritual and civic values to troubled teenagers.

### Levels of Learning Objectives

1. **Knowledge.** This is the lowest level of learning and includes recall and memory. At this level, the learner is expected to recall specific facts such as dates, events, persons, places, and basic principles and generalizations. Example: Who wrote *Passages*?
2. **Comprehension.** This is the lowest level of understanding. The individual is expected to use facts or ideas without relating them to each other (for example, paraphrasing or even interpreting something gained from reading or listening). At the highest level of this category, the learner may be able to extend thinking beyond the data by making simple inferences. For example, in science class, the student may draw conclusions from a simple demonstration or experiment. The speech student may predict the consequences of action urged in a persuasive speech. Example: Define adult development in your own words.
3. **Application.** This intellectual skill entails the use of information in specific situations. The information may be in the form of general ideas, concepts, principles, or theories that must be remembered and applied. The science student for example, who draws conclusions from a particular experiment at the comprehension level is now able to apply the basic principle(s) to related experiments or scientific phenomena. The social studies student can relate concepts or principles concerning the separation of power to current problems. Example: Using Sheehy's stages of adult development, show how they apply to your own life.
4. **Analysis.** This skill involves taking apart information and making relationships in order to discover hidden meaning and the basic structure of an idea or fact. The student is able to read between the lines, to distinguish between fact and opinion, and to assess degree of consistency or inconsistency. Thus the science student is able to distinguish between relevant and extraneous materials or events. Similarly, the social science student is able to detect unstated assumptions that can be inferred only by analyzing statements within the document. Example: Examine various adult developmental theories for similarities and differences.
5. **Synthesis.** At this level, the learner is able to reassemble the component parts of an idea in order to develop new or creative ideas. While a certain amount of combining is involved at the lower levels, at this level, the process is more complete. The learner draws on elements from many sources in addition to those of the particular problem under consideration. The science student, for instance, may propose a unique plan for testing a hypothesis. The mathematics student may make a discovery or generalization not evident from the given communication. Example: Create your own adult developmental theory.
6. **Evaluation.** This highest level of cognition involves making the judgments on the materials, information, or method. It represents the end process of cognition, involving distinct criteria as a basis for such decisions. When conceived in relation to the problem-solving or cognitive process, it involves selecting one of the proposed alternatives over all the rest. Example: Based on discussions and reading, evaluate Sheehy's theory of adult development.

*From Taxonomy of Educational Objectives by Benjamin S. Bloom, Longman, Inc., New York, 1954.*



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### Alverno College's 7 Competencies

To assist you in thinking about what you've learned you might want to consider the competency-based curriculum of Alverno College in Wisconsin. Students can think of the learning they have acquired in terms of these general competencies.

#### The Seven Competencies (Alverno College)

1. **Administration** or effectively managing places, units, situations.
2. **Communication** or effectively listening, sending, and responding to messages in a variety of audiences.
3. **Critical Thinking** or effectively analyzing problems, ideas and situations.
4. **Creativity** or effectively producing innovative ideas, designs and methods for new and/or existing situations, events and procedures as well as artistic expression.
5. **Interpersonal Relations** or effectively interacting with others.
6. **Investigation and Research** or effectively seeking out and utilizing information.
7. **Supervision** or effectively overseeing people.

### Credits and Cost

1. A maximum of **eighteen (18)** prior learning credits can be petitioned for in a bachelor's program.
2. Prior learning credits cannot substitute for residency hours (classroom, blended or on-line courses taken with Siena Heights University)
3. Prior learning credits are elective credits only.
4. Prior learning credits can be awarded at the upper (300-400) and lower (100-200) levels.
5. **The cost** is \$179 per credit hour, plus a \$530 processing fee. This is payable upon approval. Approved prior learning credits will not be posted to your Siena Heights University transcript until the business office has received full payment.



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### Learning Resume

#### RESUME WITH DESIGNATED SOURCES

*(Those considered by you central to your request for college credit consideration)*

**NAME**

**YOUR EMAIL**

Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Area Code/Home Phone  
Area Code/Work Phone

#### PROFESSIONAL WORK EXPERIENCE

*(paid positions, indicate if full-time or part-time)*

Dates of Employment  
(indicate if part-time  
or full-time)

Current Position  
Team/Committee membership(s)  
Organization Name  
City, State

Dates of Employment

Previous Positions  
Team/Committee membership(s)  
Organization Name  
City, State

*(List all professional positions post high school where significant learning occurred.)*

#### FORMAL EDUCATION – Since High School

*(List all colleges, universities, technical schools, hospital training schools, and military schools)*

Dates attended

Name of School, Degree Awarded, Major

#### EDUCATION AND TRAINING

*(where credit was not received—usually, but not always, work related)*

Dates of Training

Organization Responsible for Training  
Most Recent Training Course Title (hours)

Dates of Conferences

Organization Giving Conference  
Most Recent Conference Title (hours)  
Conference Location



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Dates of Any Apprenticeship

Give Apprenticeship Details

Dates Books Read

Most Significant Books – Titles/Author

*(if relevant to petition)*

### PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS/ACTIVITIES

Dates of Membership

Organization Name  
City, State  
Position held (if applicable)

Dates of Membership

Organization Name  
City, State  
Position held (if applicable)

*(List most significant, up to five)*

### LICENSES, CERTIFICATIONS, REGISTRY HELD

Date of Credential

List Specific Name of Credential

### COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES AND OTHER SIGNIFICANT LIFE EXPERIENCES

Date of Activity

Most Recent Activity Position  
Organization Name  
City, State

*(List most significant up to five)*

### AWARDS/HONORS

Date of Award

Most Recent Award  
Source of Award

*(List most significant up to five)*