



## **LIFE EXPERIENCE ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (LEAP)** **Credit-by-Experience Process**

The term “life experience” is given only for those experiences that produce learning and skills comparable to the outcomes of courses or training at post-secondary levels. As a general principle, if colleges and universities award credits for the acquisition of certain kinds of knowledge and skills by standard course work, then comparable competence acquired in other ways will be credited through this experience assessment process. The basic intent of the program is to make college degree programs reasonably available to adults with work and family responsibilities.

The evaluation of student competence is made by teaching faculty. College faculty make judgments about the quality and value of the work their students regularly submit. These same faculty members are asked to review the statements and documentation of a student seeking credit equivalency, and also, where appropriate, to interview the student, and then to make a recommendation for an award of credit only in those areas in which the faculty member has been trained and regularly teaches.

The quality of evaluation of a student’s work should be quite comparable to that of traditional or standard programs, since the same academic personnel make the judgements in this program as in standard course and/or program offerings. The faculty making the evaluation may be as demanding or as lenient as they feel appropriate. The Division Chair responsible for the certificate or degree program, the faculty, and the Executive Vice President/Chief Academic Officer (EVP) share the general responsibility of seeing that academic standards are maintained and, at least as important, that the adult student receives a fair evaluation and an award of credit that does justice to the concept of college learning.

### **How the Life Experience Assessment is Conducted**

1. Assessment(s) of experience for credit is(are) conducted only for students who have been admitted to Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College. Advisory assessments are not made. There is no manual or guide that may be consulted to obtain probable estimates about awards of credit.
2. After admission to Southern, the student who wishes an assessment to be conducted completes an application for LEAP credit (Credit-by-experience) and prepares a detailed and documented portfolio of his or her adult learning experiences that are to be evaluated. Fees for evaluation of the portfolio must be paid prior to the assessment process.

3. The portfolio the student has prepared is submitted to the appropriate Division Chair, who then submits the document to the faculty of appropriate academic department or disciplines. The faculty member chosen to make a specific evaluation is instructed, where necessary, by the Division Chair about the procedures to be followed. Normally these evaluations will be made by the teaching faculty of Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College. If the student's experience being assessed lies outside the professional competence of Southern's faculty, a competent individual from another institution or another expert would be requested to make the evaluation.
4. The Division Chair's function is to provide general instructions to the student as a guide to preparing the portfolio and to assign appropriate department faculty members or recruit other experts to review the material submitted. It is also the Division Chair's role to advise faculty members of all previous and concurrent evaluation and recommendations of credit, so that faculty evaluators from similar or related areas do not recommend duplicate credit.
5. A faculty member, in each appropriate field in which the student is requesting credit, is assigned to evaluate the student's experience as documented through the portfolio.
6. The faculty member may request an interview with the student. The purpose of an interview is to allow the faculty member making the evaluation the opportunity to verify, in an appropriate manner, the information in the portfolio and to secure additional information from the student or other sources about the experiences described in the portfolio. Also, if there are original works of art, voluminous published materials or other bulky materials to be presented as supporting evidence, these would normally be brought to an interview rather than submitted with the portfolio. The purpose of the interview is not to dispense with a well-prepared written portfolio, since a written record of the evidence on which the award of credit is based is preserved in the student's permanent file in the Registrar's office.
7. The faculty member making the evaluation may seek additional information about the student's knowledge and abilities through the Division Chair, directly from the student, or from persons knowledgeable about the student's achievements. The faculty member is free to defer a credit recommendation until the student's written materials are completed to satisfaction.
8. Although comparable in some way to proficiency testing, the process of evaluation employed in the LEAP program is performed through a review of the portfolio, rather than by testing. However, if the student prefers, he or she is free to demonstrate knowledge of specific academic fields by taking various standardized tests, such as those offered through CLEP and similar programs, or challenge exams for specific courses.
9. After the faculty member has completed the evaluation, he or she makes a recommendation for an award of credit on the application form provided by the Division Chair. The preferred method of recommendation is to equate the student's competencies with actual courses listed in the institution's curriculum. However, since this is not always possible, the recommendation may be made in terms of credit hours for a special topics course.

10. After a faculty member's recommendation for credit is made, it is reviewed by the Division Chair who then makes a recommendation to the EVP for approval or denial of the credit recommended by the faculty member(s).
11. The actual awarding of academic credit for life experience is made by the EVP. After the EVP's approval has been given, the Office of the Registrar is officially notified of the award of credit, and this award is entered into the student's permanent record. The student will be notified in writing of the outcome of this evaluation by the Registrar's office. A grade of "CR" (credit) is provided for any LEAP credit granted.
12. The student has the right of appeal if the awarding of academic credit seems unreasonably low or is denied; however, the appeal must be made in writing to the Division Chair and contain substantive additional evidence to back the appeal. Upon receipt of an appeal, the Division Chair will review the matter with the original evaluator, and, if additional information or an interview might change the outcome of the evaluations, that avenue will be pursued. The final decision rests with the EVP.
13. For a variety of reasons, no timetable for completing student evaluations can be set in advance. In some cases, individual evaluations may require as much as a whole semester to complete because a student may be requesting credit under the auspices of several academic divisions, his/her experiences fall into several disciplines or because experts from outside the institution must be contacted to make the evaluations. Although every reasonable effort will be made to proceed expeditiously, new students should not assume that the evaluation can be completed in a few weeks or even a few months. Normally the final decision will be made in one semester, although in some complex cases, an evaluation may take more than one semester.

### **Instructions for Students**

1. Your application and portfolio will be submitted to the Division Chair of the academic division(s) responsible for the credit requested. The Division Chair will then submit it to qualified members of Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College for evaluation. The number of faculty members evaluating the portfolio will depend upon the number of fields of study in which you are seeking credit. The faculty from several areas would be needed for a candidate seeking credit in nursing, office administration, and computer information systems.
2. Divide your portfolio into three main parts: (a) narrative; (b) documentation; and (c) credit petitions.
3. The narrative section should include a short 2-3 page resume or overview of your educational and work experiences, awards, hobbies, and interests that would apply to the specific course(s) for which credit is sought. The narrative section should then contain a detailed narrative sufficient enough to spell out what learning has occurred in nontraditional educational settings by way of seminars, workshops, and continuing education units (CEU's) completed, and also by way of supervised and unsupervised

learning, which has occurred on the job and through hobbies, community service, self-study, etc.

In the narrative section, answer these questions:

- A. Who was your employer, firm, or company?
- B. How long were you employed in a particular position?
- C. What were your responsibilities and duties while employed? What projects did you undertake? What procedures did you learn? What awards and recognition did you receive?

4. In the documentation section, provide this information:

- A. Transcripts of all your college classroom work completed at the time.
- B. Examples of your work, when possible such as: sales brochures you used or developed, manuals you authored, reports you produced, syllabi for courses you have taught, recordings of musical or dramatic performances you have given, etc.
- C. Letters confirming your employment and statements concerning your responsibilities while employed: letters of commendation, diplomas, certificates, official programs or descriptions of nontraditional training (e.g., in banking, computer, communications).

5. The credit-petition section should list college courses from Southern which correspond to the candidate's work-and-life experiences as documented in the portfolio. Do not overlook the significance of hobbies and community service. For example, you might petition credit in some areas of Physical Education for experiences such as coaching Little League, or working as an Assistant Coach after school at some high school, or officiating at league or conference games in a given sport.

With each course or subject area that you petition credit for, also list the specific number of credit hours you are petitioning (e.g., Accounting 111 - 3 hours credit). Also include a brief rationale or justification with each petition, summarizing why you think you have nontraditional learning corresponding to a certain number of credit (classroom) hours, as well as referring to appropriate sections of the narrative material and the documentation section.

A non-refundable fee per credit hour petitioned is assessed for this service and must be remitted to the College prior to the assessment of your portfolio. Please refer to the current College catalog for the fee amount.

- 6. Include only relevant information. Information dealing with high school, home, family, and travel is frequently (but not always) not related to college-level learning.
- 7. Type and proofread the portfolio. Use double spacing in the narrative portion of the portfolio.

8. **A final note:** These directions probably appear complicated and even frightening. Each student normally would like to receive the maximum award of credit that his or her life experience can produce. In judging your learning experiences, the faculty will attempt to be reasonable and fair, and award roughly the same amount of credit for your learning experiences that you describe and document as they would for standard, on-campus courses. Credits awarded through life experiences assessment are on an equivalence with other credits applicable to the degree. There is no requirement that the norms for awarding them be more stringent than for standard course credit, nor is there any assumption that life experience credits are “easy credits”.

### **Student’s Right of Appeal**

At the completion of the evaluation process, which is concluded with the awarding of credit by the EVP, the student is informed in writing of the results. Among the student’s rights at this point is a right to appeal a credit award. However, certain conditions must be met before the appeals process will be set in motion.

1. The student must submit a request for a second review of credit awarded (or in some cases, credit denied) to the Division Chair, in writing, and within 30 days of written notice regarding the original credit decision.
2. A request for a second review of materials must contain significant and substantive reasons for objecting to the original award. The adequacy of the reasons for a second review will be determined by the EVP.
3. Only those portions of the portfolio will be re-evaluated for which sufficient justification has been provided.
4. Ordinarily, the original evaluator will be afforded the courtesy of being informed that his or her recommendation has been challenged. The original evaluator has the option of doing a second review or passing on the material to other qualified faculty evaluators.
5. The student candidate has the option of requesting that the second evaluation be done by a new evaluator; the EVP may, at his or her discretion, honor or reject that request.

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