



Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Policy

Policy No. 2.05

Purpose of Policy:

The purpose of this policy is to allow Tennessee State University to expand upon Tennessee Board of Regents policy and to develop procedures for the recognition of equivalent extra-institutional learning processes that include the awarding of credit or advanced placement.

Policy Overview:

Tennessee State University (TSU) values the diversity of its student body. This diversity includes the unique experiences, interests, and intellectual pursuits of students which may lead to the acquisition of knowledge at the college level. College level learning is the same, whether acquired in the traditional college classroom or through non-collegiate courses or activities. This equivalency is validated by academically sound and rigorous Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) methods. According to the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) publication, *Assessing Learning: Standards and Principles & Procedures*, PLA is defined as a process "by which an individual's learning from experience is assessed and evaluated for purposes of granting credit, certification, or advanced standing toward further education or training."

Since the initial publication of the Tennessee State University (TSU) Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Policy and Procedures for Implementation document, the University experienced a governance change in higher education (2016) and a revision of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) accreditation standards (2018). With the passage of the Focus Act in April 2016, Tennessee higher education was restructured to incorporate independent governing boards to oversee each of the state's six public institutions which had previously been governed by the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR). The governance change mandated that each independent governing board report to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC).

When the PLA Policy was initially drafted, the University was on the cusp of the change. The document reflected policy that had been developed by both TBR and THEC. After the governance change, the University devised and adopted its own PLA Policy which utilized THEC and TBR guidelines and policy as source documents. Furthermore, the original SACSCOC standards governing PLA policy were revised. The original documents from the three organizations have been included in the Appendix of this document for the historical record. The new referenced SACSCOC standard is 10.8.

In an effort to strengthen PLA standards at Tennessee higher education institutions and to augment completion strategies for Governor Haslam's "Drive to 55" initiative, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) appointed a Task Force on Prior Learning. In 2012, the group

released its policy recommendations governing awarding college credit earned through PLA methods. The work of the Task Force resulted in a document entitled, "*Recommended Standards in Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Policy and Practice for Tennessee Public Colleges and Universities.*"

The TSU PLA policy is aligned with the institutional mission, academic integrity standards, student educational attainment, and student success goals. Undergirding the TSU PLA Policy and Procedures are the following documents which are presented in the appendices of this document: (a) the THEC "*Recommended Standards in Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Policy and Practice for Tennessee Public Colleges and Universities* and (b) the SACSCOC position statement, "*Transfer of Academic Credit*". To provide University oversight of this policy, the Division of Academic Affairs has established the Prior Learning Assessment Council (PLAC) which is chaired by a University faculty member and the PLA Coordinator; the Council has a representative from each academic college and from each unit in the Division of Enrollment Management. Details outlining the practices and guidelines for PLA at the University will be published in printed materials and presented online in the University's undergraduate catalog, the PLA webpage, and in the PLA Student Handbook.

Policy:

- A. The process for awarding of credits through "Extra-Institutional or Life-long Learning" by Tennessee State University must be in compliance with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement (reference Standard 10.8), the Commission's Position Statement on the "Transfer of Academic Credit." (Appendix B).
- B. The institutional process for awarding credits through Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) by Tennessee State University must be in compliance with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission *Recommended Standards in Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Policy and Practice of Tennessee Public Colleges and Universities* (August 7, 2012), (Appendix A).
 1. These Standards ensure that Tennessee State University will utilize best practices as outlined by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and provide services to students that are consistent among institutions.
 2. The Standards ensure transferability of PLA credit, including identification of types of PLA credits available, instruct constituents on the transcription of PLA credit, and establish common standards for portfolio review.
- C. When awarding credit under this provision, Tennessee State University will use a recognized guide or procedure for awarding the credit for extra-institutional or life-long learning. The recognized guides or procedures include:
 1. American Council on Education (ACE) National Guide to Educational Credit for Training Programs.
 2. Guide to Credit by Examination.
 3. College Entrance Examination Board Advanced Placement Program (CEEB/AP).

4. Defense Subject Standardized Test (DSST) formerly DANTES.
 5. Credit by Departmental Examination.
 6. Subject matter experts who are not members of the institution's faculty but who evaluate extra-institutional learning at the institution's request.
 7. Individual portfolios using the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) or other standardized guidelines authorized, in advance, by permission of the institution.
- D. When awarding credit to students who are veterans or military service members, the Institution references the Joint Services Transcript (JST), DD-214 and/or transcripts from the Army/American Council on Education Registry Transcript System (AARTS), Community College of Air Force (CCAF), and Coast Guard Institute (CGI). The institution will use the American Council of Education (ACE) for awarding credit for military experience, education, and/or training obtained during military experience. The recognized procedures include:
- a. If military experience, education, and/or training are equivalent to a course that fulfills a general education or degree program requirement, the course credit will count towards graduation. Otherwise, appropriate course credit will be granted for elective credit.
 - b. Should credit not be captured through ACE recommendations, Tennessee State University will offer veterans and service members an opportunity for prior learning assessment via another recognized mechanism (refer to Section D, above).
 - c. Tennessee State University will provide veteran and military service members relevant information on awarding college credit for military education, experience, and/or training.
 - d. Tennessee State University will maintain a set of institutional policies on the awarding of academic credit for military experience within the undergraduate catalog. The policies will include a description of the procedure for removing excessive hours applied to transcripts, which may affect student eligibility for financial aid.
- E. When utilizing published guides for extra-institutional learning, the information provided should include:
- a. course title;
 - b. location of all sites where the course is offered;
 - c. length in hours, days, or weeks;
 - d. period during which the credit recommendation applies;
 - e. purpose for which the credit was designed;
 - f. learning outcomes;
 - g. teaching methods, materials, and major subject areas covered; and
 - h. college credit recommendations offered by categories (by level of degrees) and expressed in semester hours and subject area(s) in which credit is applicable.

Tennessee State University ensures that parameters for awarding extra-institutional credit are published in various University printed and online documents. Specific parameters guiding student eligibility and standards may be found in the *TSU Procedures for Implementation of the PLA Policy* document.

Exhibits: Prior Learning Assessment Procedures for Implementation at Tennessee State University (TSU)
Approved: Board of Trustees on October 2017