THOMPSON RIVERS UNIVERSITY

OPEN LEARNING DIVISION

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT & RECOGNITION

COURSE-BASED PORTFOLIO

PLAR General Information

Applicants to TRU-OL programs may be eligible for credit based on an assessment of non-formal education and/or experiential learning through prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) mechanisms. Prior learning includes the skills and knowledge gained through learning experiences such as industry-based training, professional development workshops and seminars, some non-credit courses, private study, and work experience. Such learning must be applicable to the student's remaining program requirements, over and above formal TRU and transfer credits.

TRU-OL assesses prior learning in one of two ways: challenge examinations or PLAR portfolio. Following an applicant's admission to a program, including an assessment of formal transfer credits (and, if applicable, TRU credits), the applicant submits a knowledge resume as the initial step for PLAR. The PLAR committee reviews the resume and advises an applicant whether potential exists for applicable PLAR credit and whether challenge examination and/or portfolio methods should be considered. Information on challenge examinations is provided on the TRU-OL website and in the print calendar. Note: *TRU-OL may determine that certain courses are not available for PLAR or are available only through the challenge examination method for PLAR.*

Eligible PLAR applicants will have the option to complete a portfolio to earn course credits towards their TRU credential.

Recommended Criteria for PLAR

- Several years of technical, supervisory, management or entrepreneurial experience

- Relevant industry training not otherwise recognized for credit

- Knowledge and skills acquired informally that are relevant to the program

- Post-secondary education not recognized as direct transfer credit

PLAR Portfolio Application Checklist and Sequence (Steps 1-6)

Step 1: Program Admission

Generally, applicants must have been accepted into a TRU-OL program, have any transfer credits for recognized post-secondary education assessed, and have received their program plan before starting the PLAR process.

Note: Applicants using PLAR to fulfill entry requirements into a program must state this on the Program Admission/Transfer Credit form at the time of applications to the program. As well, applicants should contact the PLAR Advisor at time of application to move forward with the process.

Step 2: Knowledge Resume Preparation

Applicants must complete and submit a knowledge resume according to the following guidelines. At this initial stage, applicants should submit only the knowledge resume; a covering letter may also be attached if desired.

The knowledge resume should include all information normally provided in a professional resume, specifically the following:

- **Formal Education**

    List all post-secondary credentials and/or courses, the institutions conferring the credentials, and the date the credentials were conferred. Provide a brief description (one to four lines in point form) outlining the skills or learning acquired while completing the credentials.

- **Employment History and Descriptions**

    List all employment that has resulted in potentially relevant learning. Provide a brief description (one to four lines) of all positions and list (point form) all learning.

- **Informal Education (Workshops, Training Sessions, etc.)**

  List the date attended and name of session and provide a brief description (point form) of all learning that took place at these events.

- **Hobbies**

  List all hobbies that have led to learning that may be relevant for PLAR. Provide a brief description (point form) of all learning.

- **Volunteer Work**

  List the date attended and type of all volunteer work that has led to learning that may be relevant for PLAR. Provide a brief description (point form) of all learning.

- **Summary of Competencies**

  This can be a series of brief paragraphs or a list in point form of information that highlights generic business management competencies. You may find that this section takes the longest to prepare, as you should relate your learning and experience to competencies that are germane to the program you are pursuing: communication (written and verbal), interpersonal skills, numeracy, organizational skills, problem solving and decision making (includes critical and creative thinking), and social understanding.

- **Other Skills and Learning**

  List any other skills and learning that you have acquired from sources not listed above. This may include applied knowledge and skills such as industry qualifications.

Note: A template is available to assist applicants with preparing their knowledge resume. To request a copy of the template, send an email to PLAR_OL@tru.ca

Step 3: Recommendations and Course Outlines (Learning Outcomes)

When the PLAR committee has reviewed the knowledge resume, the committee recommends whether course-specific credit should be pursued and recommends courses that appear to match the applicant's learning from experience. The PLAR Advisor emails relevant learning outcomes to assist applicants in preparing the final portfolio. Portfolio assisted PLAR applicants must use this information to show the correlation to their learning for specific course credit. Applicants may ask for permission to additional courses in their portfolio that are not suggested by the committee and may also request assessment of program - and/or course-level outcomes for other applicable offerings at other institutions. Applicants who wish such additional course learning outcomes should contact the PLAR Advisor.

Depending on the program, the applicant may also be eligible to submit evidence of broad, generic competencies that may yield additional unspecified credit. Please contact the PLAR Advisor for information on preparing a Competency-based portfolio.

Step 4: Application Form and Fee (Portfolio Submissions)

Complete the Application for Portfolio-Assisted PLAR available from the PLAR Advisor. Submit the application with payment to TRU-OL Student Services.

Step 5: Portfolio Preparation

On receipt of your **PLAR Application Fee**, your PLAR Advisor will arrange your admission to the **PLAR Course-based Portfolio website**, where you will find all of the resources and guidance you need to prepare your prior learning portfolio. Through the discussion board on the website, you will receive limited coaching on how to prepare a portfolio and/or examples of successful course-based portfolios.

Applicants are advised to use the provided learning outcomes as a checklist when compiling their portfolio. Applicants are encouraged to relate their evidence directly to the learning outcomes. Applicants should write about and provide specific examples of activities, reports, promotions, business plans, etc., that demonstrate they have met the learning outcomes of the course.

Applicants are reminded that since they are attempting to earn credit for university courses, portfolios should be checked for spelling and grammar before submission. Applicants are advised to edit their portfolio more than once. If it is evident that an applicant has failed to do these checks, the applicant's eligibility for PLAR credit will be impeded.

- Submit 20-30 pages per course for the full portfolio, typed, double-spaced, using a twelve-point font.

- Attach appendices of the most pertinent evidence that supports your learning claims. Where applicants are applying for assessment of non-formal studies, the following should be provided as appendices: course syllabus, learning outcomes, title of text used, method of assessment, hours in classroom, qualification of instructor.

- A letter of support from a current or previous employer (or both if necessary to support portfolio claims) is recommended. Ideally, this letter should be written after the employer has reviewed the full portfolio and should include verification of the content of the portfolio and confirmation of the contributions made by the applicant (and any others) to the materials submitted as appendices.

Application Letter

- An application cover letter is required, explaining why demonstrated skills warrant PLAR credit, why the applicant is pursuing a TRU -OL credential, and how she/he hopes to benefit from these studies

Submission Requirements

TRU – OL offers two options for portfolio submission:

Electronic portfolio

- o Submit via e-mail or on CD
- o No additional fee
- o Assessment completed within one month of receipt by PLAR Department

Hard copy portfolio:

- o Must submit **3 complete copies**
- o $**50** shipping and handling fee

- o Assessment completed within six weeks of receipt by PLAR Department

Please read the submission guidelines for each type of portfolio carefully.

A. Electronic portfolio

1. You can submit these types of files: Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Adobe, jpg. For supported formats for audio and video files, please contact the PLAR Department by e-mail (PLAR_OL@tru.ca).
2. Documentary evidence to support your portfolio will need to be scanned into an electronic format and saved.
3. Name each file using this format: YourNamePLARxxx. Save each part of your portfolio as a separate file and identify it by replacing "xxx" with the following names:
   - AL (Application Letter)
   - PL (Prior Learning in relation to Course Outcomes)
   - EV (Evidence supporting your learning)
4. You can submit your portfolio via e-mail if the files do not exceed 10 megabytes.
5. If your files are too large, you will need to copy them to a CD. Make 3 copies of the CD and label each clearly with your name. Mail the 3 CDs to:

>PLAR Department TRU - Open Learning
>
>BCCOL - 4th Floor
>
>Box 3010, 900 McGill Road
>
>Kamloops, BC V2C 5N3

B. Hard Copy Portfolio

1. **Do not send any original documents.** They will not be returned.
2. Make **three copies** of all parts of your portfolio, including any documentary evidence you are submitting to support your learning claim. If you want to use dividers and tabs to organize your portfolio, use them for all three copies.
3. Contact the PLAR Department by e-mail (PLAR_OL) to arrange for payment of the **$50 shipping and handling fee**.
4. Mail or courier the three copies of your portfolio to:
>PLAR Department TRU - Open Learning,
>
>BCCOL - 4th Floor
>
>Box 3010, 900 McGill Road
>
>Kamloops, BC V2C 5N3

Time Limit

You have a maximum of 12 weeks from the time you have paid the PLAR fee to submit your portfolio assessment for your first course.

For submission of your second and subsequent course portfolio(s), you have a maximum of 12 weeks from the time you were sent the PLAR assessment report on the preceding course.

Validation Interview

The PLAR assessor may contact you to clarify details of your portfolio.

Step 6: PLAR Credit Assessment and Award

Normally, within 3 to 4 weeks of receipt of all PLAR portfolio, the PLAR Department will send applicants the results of their PLAR assessment.. The PLAR Department places a copy of the PLAR report in the applicant's permanent student files, as well as informing the Student Record System and the Program Advisor of any PLAR credits awarded. **Note:** Please contact your Program Advisor is you would like an updated program plan.

PLAR Frequently Asked Questions

What are non-formal studies?

Non-formal studies may include courses, workshops, certificates, or training seminars that were completed outside a recognized post-secondary institution and/or did not receive post-secondary credit. Recognized post-secondary institutions are members of the Association of Community Colleges of Canada (ACCC) or the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC). Most private colleges are not recognized. Most studies completed through "continuing education" divisions of accredited colleges or universities do not receive transferable credit. Formal studies completed outside Canada and the United States must be reviewed by an accredited international credential evaluation service such as *www.bcit.ca/ices* and, normally, are not assessed through portfolio assessment.

What is meant by a PLAR portfolio?

For the purpose of assessment toward a Business and Management Studies credential, a PLAR portfolio consists of a document with selected appendices that outlines how an applicant has developed competency in the areas defined by the learning outcomes of a course or courses and in some cases a program. Often one of the competencies is effective communication, so you should endeavour to write your portfolio using clear, concise, and grammatically correct language. While it can be very useful to attach actual work-related documentation, you should obtain the permission of your employer and any other individuals mentioned or involved.

What is the result if I'm unable to demonstrate one of the competencies?

In you have minimal or no evidence of a particular learning outcome in a course, you may exclude that competency from your portfolio. However, lacking some knowledge of a subject will significantly reduce the likelihood of full credit being awarded.

How can I ensure I will be awarded PLAR credit?

Credit can only be determined and awarded upon assessment of a portfolio. Though some applicants may have unrealistic expectations of what their background may yield, TRU can make no assurances about PLAR credit that may be awarded. However, applicants who meet the following criteria are often awarded some credit through portfolio assessment:

- Have several years of relevant work experience but have little or no formal post-secondary credit

- Have demonstrated career advancement

- Actively pursue and participate in learning opportunities (workplace training, seminars, workshops, continuing education, etc.)

- On reading the PLAR committee's list of suggested courses and their learning outcomes, can immediately think of examples for and evidence of each competency

- Can write clearly and concisely and can organize thoughts into logical paragraphs that include references to suitable evidence of a competency

- Can demonstrate how experiences (both positive and negative) have created learning opportunities and helped in the development of different competencies

If I don't meet all the suggested criteria, should I submit a portfolio?

You should consider the credits that may be awarded in relation to the cost of assessment. As the PLAR fee is less than the cost of registering in two courses (6 credits), submitting portfolios for two or more courses may be worthwhile. Applicants should wait for the results of the committee's review of the knowledge resume before making this decision.

How much time is needed to assemble a portfolio?

This depends on the recommendations you receive after the preliminary assessment of your knowledge resume in relation to your program and how many courses/credits

you decide to seek recognition for. Remember that a typical 3-credit course requires a minimum of 120 hours of study and assignment work, so the suggested minimum amount of work for 3 credits of PLAR credit is 25-40 hours. You should plan to draft and revise your portfolio several times if you are expecting to be awarded significant credit. It is strongly recommended that before submission you have your portfolio proofread by a respected friend or colleague.

What is an "appropriate appendix"?

An example of an appropriate appendix could be a document you have written (e.g., financial statement, grant proposal, business plan) than demonstrates a specific competency or competencies. You may want to refer to the competencies developed through the process of creating the document. That information should be summarized in the portfolio, and a copy of the document could be included as an appendix so that the assessors may see the results of your work. Providing links to relevant websites may also help document your PLAR request. *You should include proof or acknowledgement from an outside source (e.g., in employer's reference letter) that you created the appendix.*

What is an "inappropriate appendix"?

An inappropriate appendix is a document that you do not refer to in your portfolio or a lengthy document with only small sections that you refer to in your portfolio. For example, if you are referring only to the marketing component of a business plan, include only that section with your portfolio. Do not include documents that you did not write or contributed to only minimally and do not attach more than one example of the same thing.

May I request credit for specific courses?

Yes. If you are seeking credit for a specific course, you may want to make this clear on your knowledge resume. The committee reviewing your knowledge resume may also provide recommendations about course-specific PLAR.

If I am not satisfied with the results of the assessment, what can I do?

You may be eligible for one supplemental submission to address specific shortcomings in the original portfolio. Beyond that, you may appeal your PLAR assessment results for a fee of $100. If your appeal is successful, the appeal fee is refunded. An appeal involves clarification of the original submission, not a new submission. For more information about academic appeals, refer to the TRU-OL website at *www.tru.ca/services/policies/appeals.html* or the print calendar.

Is PLAR credit accepted by other institutions?

PLAR applicants who may be applying to programs at other institutions are responsible for contacting the institution or ensure that such credits are acceptable. TRU anticipates that completion of a TRU diploma or degree program that includes PLAR credit will be recognized by most institutions where the credential and assessed learning are deemed applicable to their academic requirements, but transfer of PLAR course credit independently of a completed credential may be more limited.