A. BACKGROUND

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is a competency-based assessment process which seeks to recognize and give formal credit for college-level learning that is acquired informally, non-formally and formally. For example, the learning may have been acquired experientially through work and life experience, workplace training or unrecognized education attained abroad. Through the PLAR process, prospective students have their prior learning assessed according to course or program outcomes and formal credit awarded as appropriate.

B. POLICY

1.1   Prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) is available to persons interested in pursuing a College credential who, through work, life and educational experiences, have acquired learning that is equivalent to the course learning requirements of one or more College course(s).

1.2   To be eligible for PLAR, candidates must be 19 years of age or older, or have an Ontario Secondary School Diploma or equivalent.

1.3   The PLAR candidate's prior learning is assessed by Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), who are academic staff with subject matter expertise in the area. If the learning is deemed equivalent to College course learning requirements, credit(s) with grade values are awarded.

1.4   Part-time Continuing Education students may receive PLAR credits for up to 50% of their program courses. Full-time students may receive PLAR credits for up to 75% of their program courses.

1.5   Normally College courses are available for candidates to earn credit through PLAR. In some cases, programs may designate a course as one that is not eligible for PLAR. This will be indicated on the course syllabus. Program administration will have reason for course PLAR ineligibility.

1.6   PLAR procedures and processes will respect current, recognized national standards and best practices for PLAR.

1.7   Fees charged for the PLAR assessment will be based on Ministry guidelines. Fees are non-refundable and non-transferable.

1.8   PLAR applicants are not required to be registered College students.

1.9   PLAR Candidates must go through the regular admission process to gain entrance into the College program.

C. PROCEDURES

2. PLAR Orientation, Advising and Application

2.1.1   Students, or prospective students, interested in seeking credit for prior learning may access initial information about the process through *College Advising Service*, College print and online information, PLAR Program Contacts and the PLAR Office.

2.1.1   When candidates go to *Advising Service* to seek advice on attaining their academic and employment goals, if the advisor sees PLAR as potentially beneficial, he/she discusses this possibility with the student by outlining the PLAR process, showing the student course outlines, and encouraging the student to think about his/her prior learning.

2.2   To begin and discuss the official PLAR process, all candidates are referred to the PLAR Office.

2.3   Candidates will contact the PLAR Office. The PLAR Office will:
   • orient the candidate to College PLAR policy and procedures
   • pre-assess eligibility of candidate for PLAR
   This will entail the candidate and PLAR Facilitator reviewing course outlines and outcomes in detail together, as well as the candidate completing a Pre-Screen document. The Pre-Screen document will ask the candidate about his/her academic background, experience and learning, and other relevant information, such as specific activities and accomplishments, which outline what he/she did, knows and can demonstrate. Candidates will be asked to attach a resume to the Pre-Screen document.
   • assist with and collect application form from candidate
   • collect PLAR fee from candidate
   • contact the appropriate Program Contact to notify him/her that a PLAR candidate requires a SME to conduct an assessment
   • assist in setting up a meeting between the SME and PLAR candidate

2.3.1   Once notified by the PLAR Office that a PLAR candidate requires a PLAR assessment, the PLAR Program Contact will determine a SME to conduct the assessment within one (1) week.

2.5   The PLAR Office will forward a copy of the PLAR application and Pre-Screen document to the SME.

2.6   The SME will meet with the PLAR candidate at a mutually agreeable time and location.

2.7   Candidates must submit their PLAR application form to the PLAR Office on or before specified dates for each semester in order to begin this process.

3. Demonstration of Prior Learning

3.1   The general requirements for successfully challenging a course are determined by each program. SMEs determine individual assessment methods.

3.1.1   Challenge tests are one method of assessment. Challenge tests may require the candidate to participate in written, oral, or performance tests, to develop products or a combination of these assessments.

3.1.2   The type of challenge test is determined according to the nature of the learning being assessed. Challenges are prepared for candidates by SMEs consistent with course learning requirements.

3.1.3   Normally, challenge tests are made available within two (2) weeks after receipt of a PLAR application.

3.1.4   The Assessment Centre will invigilate tests as appropriate.

3.2   Development of a portfolio is a possible alternative to a challenge test. The portfolio is developed by the candidate and addresses the requirements identified in the Portfolio Guidelines, as determined by the PLAR Office. In general, a portfolio contains information which describes a candidate's relevant learning accomplishments (the knowledge, skills, competencies and abilities he/she has acquired), and provides validation that this learning took place. Validation may be in the form of a letter from a third party (such as an employer), for example. The portfolio must also clearly connect the candidate's learning accomplishments to the requirements of the course for which PLAR credit is being sought.

3.2.1   When required, candidates may be required to sign a wwaiver form giving permission to a SME to contact previous or current employer(s), co-workers, references, etc, to verify sources of documentation in their portfolio.

3.3   The PLAR Office offers a PLAR support workshop once per semester to provide information on portfolio development and challenge test preparation.

3.3.1   The PLAR Office provides on-going support to students by assisting with preparing for portfolio development and challenge tests. Students may make individual appointments with the PLAR Office to receive assistance, or contact the Office though phone or email.

3.3.2   Candidates with disabilities may use the additional supports available through *Disability Services* to assist with developing a portfolio, preparing for challenge tests, and completing challenge tests.

3.4   Students may apply for PLAR for failed courses only after one year has elapsed and they are able to demonstrate additional learning has taking place during that year.

4. Assessment and Evaluation of Prior Learning

4.1   PLAR candidates must fulfill assessment requirements within three (3) months of an application. Candidates with disabilities may be approved for an extended amount of time to fulfill assessment requirements, as mutually determined by the candidate, PLAR Office and SME.

4.2   The assessment is undertaken by SMEs who are approved by the Program Chair and supported by the PLAR Office.

4.3   The SME will complete his/her initial assessment within two (2) weeks of receiving the completed test or portfolio.

4.4   When a student is not successful, the SME may ask a candidate to complete additional assessment methods.

4.5   The PLAR Office notifies the candidate through email or telephone of the outcome of their assessment.

4.6   The Registrar's Office records the PLAR candidate's final grades. Successful PLAR credits are transcribed with a grade in the same way course grades are transcribed. Unsuccessful PLAR attempts are not recorded on the student's transcript.

4.7   When appropriate, all documentation will be returned to the PLAR applicant, by the SME, along with the final evaluation. In the case of a challenge exam, the exam itself will not be returned to the candidate, but the candidate will be provided with the final evaluation. If the candidate wishes, he/she may request to see the exam.

4.8   A formal record of the assessment process and results will be completed, available to the candidate and retained by the PLAR Office for five (5) years.

5. Appeals

5.1   Candidates may appeal the outcome of their assessment. To do so, the PLAR candidate must communicate a request, in writing to the PLAR Office within ten (10) working days of communication of his/her assessment results.

5.1.1   The candidate will outline the reasons why an appeal is warranted.

5.1.2   A fee will be charged, which will be refunded if the decision is changed in the applicant's favour.

5.2   Upon receiving a written request for appeal from the PLAR candidate, the PLAR Facilitator will organize an Appeal Committee

5.2.1   The Appeal Committee will consist of:
• the PLAR Program Contact
• a faculty member, who has not been the applicant's SME and who is knowledgeable of the relevant program/course
• a faculty member or staff person with knowledge of the PLAR process

5.3   The PLAR Office will call and convene the appeal meeting within ten (10) working days. The concerned parties (applicant and SMEs), will be asked to attend and present their views. The deliberations of the committee will take place in-camera.

5.3.1   The Appeal Committee will render its decisions in writing to the applicant within ten (10) working days of the review meeting.

5.3.2   The results of the Appeal are final and binding on all parties.

D. ROLES & RESPONSIBILITES

6. The PLAR Office

6.1   The PLAR Facilitator of the PLAR Office acts as the central PLAR coordinator for all PLAR-related College activities. This includes:
• supporting students and prospective students in matters related to PLAR
• supporting Subject Matter Expert and PLAR Program Contacts in matters related to PLAR
• promoting and monitoring PLAR procedures across the College
• managing PLAR data and reporting, including maintaining PLAR records
• coordinating communication between PLAR Office, staff, faculty and students regarding PLAR
• holding one PLAR support workshop for students once per semester

7. Academic Departments/Programs

7.1.1   Each program will have a PLAR Program Contact. For programs where PLAR requests are minimal, one PLAR Program Contact may share responsibility for multiple programs. The PLAR Program Contact will:
• locate faculty to act as SMEs to administer PLAR assessments for PLAR Candidates
• liaise between the PLAR Office and faculty as necessary

7.1.2   Subject Matter Experts are typically faculty members responsible for the course for which the PLAR credit is being sought. SMEs are responsible for:
• determining appropriate assessment methods for candidates. The assessment method must be communicated to the candidate within two (2) weeks after the PLAR application is received by the SME.
• assessing the PLAR challenge test or portfolio and submitting the results to the PLAR Office within two (2) weeks of submission by the PLAR candidate. In exceptional situations, the process may need to take longer. In these cases, the PLAR candidate will be advised by the PLAR Office of the new timeline.

8. Candidates (Students)

8.1   Receiving PLAR credit may affect a student's course load which in turn may impact fees and eligibility for OSAP, scholarships, bursaries and other sponsorships. It is the candidate's responsibility to check their status when applying for PLAR.

8.2   The PLAR Facilitator will orient candidates to College PLAR policy and procedures. However, candidates themselves are responsible for reviewing their own learning experiences, which may include experiences acquired through:
• Formal education for which credit is not recognized
• Paid employment
• Volunteer work
• Workplace training
• Self-directed study
• Non-credit courses
• Workshops or conferences
• Personal projects
• Travel

8.3   PLAR Candidates must adhere to PLAR deadlines, unless there is mutual agreement between the candidate, PLAR Office, and SME for a differing timeline.