

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT (PLA) STUDENT MANUAL

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I. INTRODUCTION

Community colleges offer quality-learning environments and a wide array of courses and services for diverse communities. This versatility and comprehensiveness attracts individuals who differ in life experiences, ages, formal and informal educational backgrounds, work experiences, and educational goals.

Students who have mastered academic or technical competencies in non-traditional educational environments, including training in a corporation, licensure/certification programs, career experience, self-directed learning environments, continuing education courses, and coursework and training through military experience can earn credit for prior learning experiences. In order to maximize the community college experience, it is important to use time efficiently through correct placement in a chosen degree program. Although the awarding of credit for competencies gained outside of the traditional classroom setting is an exception to North Harris Montgomery Community College District's (NHMCCD's) traditional assessment and placement of students, opportunities to earn credit for prior learning experience are available.

This manual describes eligibility requirements for different types of prior learning credit available at NHMCCD and describes the process to apply for credit or advanced standing. Prior learning assessment (PLA) options included in this manual are: challenge exams (both external and internal), portfolios, military transcripts, external licensure/certifications, advanced technical (high school coursework), advanced standing, and continuing education. Students must complete 50% of a certificate program and 18 hours of an associate's degree in residency at NHMCCD. Students can earn PLA credit to meet their remaining degree requirements.

For definitions of terms used in this manual see the glossary at the end of the manual.

II. PLA GUIDELINES AND CRITERIA:

1. To be eligible to earn PLA credit, the student must meet all admissions and TSI requirements at the colleges in the North Harris Montgomery Community College District and not have previously taken or attempted the course.
2. Check the online manual for the most current requirement and procedures.
3. Meet with a counselor or advisor for information and to complete the appropriate form(s) for advanced standing or credit by PLA.
4. Pay assessment fees as stated at the college business office.

5. PLA credit is only awarded when it applies to the NHMCCD program(s) of study. Students must still meet residency requirements of 50% for all certificates and 18 hours for all associate degrees.
6. Semester credit hours earned through PLA are designated as "CR" on the transcript; this credit is not computed for GPA purposes and no letter grade will be given on the student's transcript. Semester hours generated by PLA are counted towards fulfillment of graduation requirements.
7. Other academic institutions may not accept PLA credit awarded through NHMCCD, and it is the student's responsibility to check with the receiving institution before deciding to pursue PLA credit.
8. PLA through portfolio, military transcripts, and external licensure/certification is not awarded for core curriculum courses except for the KINE courses. Core credit may be earned through challenge examinations and articulated continuing education courses for only the core courses specified in the NHMCCD College Catalog or on the website.
9. Six hours of NHMCCD non-developmental credit must be completed prior to receiving PLA credit.
10. PLA credit may not be used if the course has previously been taken or if the course has been attempted. Student drops after official day result in a "W" posted on the transcript, making the course ineligible for PLA credit. Students dropping courses prior to official day can seek PLA credit.
11. If the student is a veteran applying for or receiving benefits, the student must comply with VA rules and regulations. To avoid overpayment, all transcripts must be evaluated and credit applied to the approved program prior to certification of courses for benefits. However, it is to the student's advantage to have his or her transcript evaluated prior to enrolling in classes.
12. Submit any required transcripts (i.e. high school or military) or other documentation as required.
13. PLA forms for completed challenge exams, high school and continuing education articulation are forwarded to the NHMCCD district student information services office by the advisor for posting of "CR" to the student's transcript.
14. Completed forms should be submitted to the NHMCCD advisor for approval and processing.
15. The district student information services will automatically inform students that PLA credit has been granted on the transcript by sending them an email notification.

This manual is evolving as new situations arise. Please check for updates and revisions at <http://wwwdstc.nhmccd.edu/templates/content.aspx?pid=5164> .

III. FEES:

Advanced Standing	No fee
Internal challenge exam	\$25 each
External challenge exam (CLEP, CAPE, etc.) processing (fees may be assessed for taking the exam)	No fee for
Portfolio credit	\$60 each
Military transcript evaluation	No fee
High school articulated (Advanced Technical) credit	No fee
Continuing education articulation	No fee

IV. PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT (PLA) OPTIONS

A. Advanced Standing

Advanced standing permits the student to move to more advanced work upon review of test results, previous grades and/or interviews by the appropriate department. Advanced standing is not placed on the student's official transcript. No credit is awarded. There is no fee for this evaluation. Contact the dean of the specific subject area for more information.

B. Challenge Examination

a. External Challenge Examinations:

NHMCCD has established equivalent course credit for minimum passing scores for several external challenge examination programs, including the ACT, CLEP, CAPE, AP, and IB. A listing of the external challenge examination and the corresponding course for which the student may earn college credit can be found in the NHMCCD catalog in the Policies and Procedures section. Students should make arrangements with testing sites to sit for the exams and should have their scores forwarded to one of the NHMCCD college advising offices prior to enrollment.

1. Achievement Test (ACT), <http://www.act.org>
2. College Level Examination Program (CLEP),
CLEP examinations may be taken at Tomball College or at area universities. Tomball College is an official CLEP testing center; please contact the center at 281-357-3698 at for more information. Scores earned on the CLEP should be submitted to the counseling office four weeks prior to enrollment. Go to <http://www.collegeboard.org/clep> for more information.

3. Foreign Language, Credit CAPE assessment and course completion
4. Advanced Placement (AP) by the College Board, Advanced Placement exams are offered at area high schools. For specific information on high schools offering this exam, call (888) 225-5427 or (609) 771-7300, or send an email to apexams@info.collegeboard.org. For more information go to <http://www.collegeboard.org/html/communications000.html>
5. International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma exams. International Baccalaureate exams are given at specific high schools. For more information on IB Diplomas go to www.ibo.org. For a list of courses that can be awarded by IB credit go to <http://www.nhmccd.edu/templates/content.aspx?pid=59057>

b. Internal Challenge Examinations:

NHMCCD departmental challenge exams are developed and approved by NHMCCD curriculum teams and administered by the colleges' assessment centers or by the department. The same challenge exam is used at all NHMCCD colleges. The curriculum team determines which courses can be challenged, the minimum passing score, and the exit competencies which are based on the learning outcomes for the course.

Credit awarded by NHMCCD through departmental challenge exams applies to its programs of study. The student should also consult with a faculty advisor or counselor to ensure that the course complements his/her degree plan. The website at <http://www.nhmccd.edu> or <http://wwwdstc.nhmccd.edu/templates/content.aspx?pid=5164> displays an updated listing of course challenge exams available.

Students should consult with a faculty advisor to discuss course content, outcomes and feasibility of taking a course challenge exam. After completing the form with an advisor and paying the challenge exam fee in the business office, the student takes the "PLA by Examination" form and paid receipt for the challenge exam to the division office or to the designated assessment center at the college offering the course to make an appointment to take the appropriate exam. A challenge exam may not be taken more than one time.

C. PROCEDURE FOR CREDIT BY HIGH SCHOOL ARTICULATION

It is the responsibility of the individual student to apply for his/her articulated credit at NHMCCD. Due to privacy laws, there is no follow-up process in place to allow NHMCCD to identify incoming students who have completed articulated high school courses. Students who have successfully completed a high school articulated course must petition for articulated credit within 15 months of high school graduation. An exception is made for students applying for admission to the Associate Degree Nursing Program to extend this time to 36 months. NHMCCD participates in the Advanced Technical Credit program (statewide articulation) developed by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Texas Education Agency. NHMCCD also has local articulation agreements for other courses. To the extent possible, student eligibility requirements for local and statewide articulations have been made similar. The most current information on student eligibility and links to other articulation and Tech Prep entities are at <http://www.nhmccd.edu/goto/collegetechprep>.

The most current crosswalk of NHMCCD courses involved in Advanced Technical Credit (statewide articulation is at <http://wwwdstc.nhmccd.edu/templates/content.aspx?pid=7391>). More information on ATC and other high school articulation issues can be found on the NHMCCD website at <http://wwwdstc.nhmccd.edu/templates/content.aspx?pid=3629>.

Complete the top portion of the “Application for Prior Learning Assessment by High School Articulation” form and the upper half of the box (down to “Year graduated”). A PEIMS # is a course identifier and should be on your transcript. Do not check any of the boxes; this will be done by the admissions or advising staff. An official copy of your high school transcript showing credit for the articulated course must be submitted with the application. Only courses that have articulation agreements on file with NHMCCD can be awarded credit.

D. ARTICULATED CREDIT FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION (CE) COURSES

Students have the opportunity to earn college semester-hour credits for certain courses in Continuing Education (CE) once the student meets all admissions requirements for credit enrollment. Students must be enrolled in or have completed six (6) credit hours in order to be eligible to apply for articulated credit through CE.

Students completing CE articulated courses are held to the same standards on projects, class activities, exams, and all other aspects of learning as credit students. If a CE to Credit articulation agreement is in effect for the semester in which the student is enrolled in the CE course to be articulated, students who have earned CEU's with a grade of "S" may apply for articulated credit. Verification of available articulated courses can be done with an advisor or by going to the PLA website at <http://www.nhmccd.edu/Templates/content.aspx?pid=6860>.

E. COLLEGE CREDIT FOR WORKPLACE EDUCATION OR TRAINING BY PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

The awarding of credit for non-collegiate learning experiences via a portfolio is restricted to verifiable learning. NHMCCD will award credit only for what a person can demonstrate as a result of experiences. For example, an individual may have six years of experience working as a secretary or administrative assistant. The college district will not award credit simply on the basis of the six years of experience.

The individual will be asked to document and/or demonstrate what has been learned about office administration, word processing, etc., as a result of the six years of experience. The learning experience for credit will be assessed based upon what the individual can demonstrate and not by how many years in the workforce the individual has worked. Learning experience must be documented to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes for the course credit being requested. A resume and a reflection piece that describes student learning may also be required. As part of the portfolio process, students may be asked to demonstrate specific skills and/or be interviewed to assess knowledge of the area. Credit is generally awarded only for introductory level courses.

Additional Procedures for Applying for Portfolio Credit

1. The student reviews courses available through portfolio on the NHMCCD PLA website at <http://wwwdstc.nhmccd.edu/Templates/content.aspx?pid=5171>. Students may review the NHMCCD catalog for credit course offerings that correspond to the knowledge and skills that he or she possesses and for which credit is desired. If the course is not listed on the website, the student must talk with the faculty member, department chair, or dean to determine if portfolio credit is available for the courses identified.
2. The student should apply for portfolio credit for courses in the degree or certificate in which the student is enrolled.
3. The student reviews the learning outcomes for the desired courses. These outcomes are identified by the curriculum teams for each program/discipline area and are available on the NHMCCD course listings website at <http://research.nhmccd.edu/cat/catsrch.asp>.
4. Once the student is satisfied that he or she can demonstrate proficiency for the learning outcomes for the course, the student develops a portfolio documenting achievement of the learning outcomes for the course and includes other documents and evidence as specified by the faculty member or department chair.

F. CREDIT FOR LICENSURE OR PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION

Professional certification or state licensure may be equated to college credit based upon competencies demonstrated by successfully completing the professional certification or licensure examination. In order to be eligible for this type of credit, the license or certification must be official and current. Only licensure and certification that has been approved through the curriculum process by the curriculum team will be articulated to credit. These can be found on the NHMCCD website at <http://wwwdstc.nhmccd.edu/Templates/content.aspx?pid=5170>. The student must provide evidence of successfully passing the professional certification exam and proof of **current or active licensure**.

G. COLLEGE CREDIT FOR MILITARY EXPERIENCE THROUGH ACE

NHMCCD is one of 1,800 members of the American Council on Education (ACE). The Center for Adult Learning and Educational Credentials (CALEC) at ACE helps adults earn college credit for learning they have acquired through workplace training, military service or other education acquired outside the formal classroom. There are three branches of the Adult Learning and Educational Credentials:

1. **The College Credit Recommendation Service** evaluates educational and training programs offered at the workplace and makes recommendations for college credit awards. Teams of subject matter experts from colleges and universities review the education and training courses and programs to determine whether they cover the subject in sufficient depth and whether appropriate emphasis is given to major topics.

Recommendations are published annually in the *National Guide to Educational Credit for Training Programs*. Students desiring credit for *workplace education or training programs* should go to ACE's website at <http://www.acenet.edu/cill/corporate/index.cfm> to determine whether the organization they trained with is an ACE participant. To determine if an *examination* carries ACE College Credit Recommendation, go to: <http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/CCRS/index.htm> If ACE does not recognize the workplace education or training, see other possible credit articulation options in this manual.

If the organization is a participant in the ACE College Credit Recommendation Service, students will be advised by ACE to join the Registry of Credit Recommendations for a one-time fee of \$40.00. They can then request that a transcript be sent to the college Admissions Office (\$15.00 per transcript). For transcripts, the student must contact the ACE College Credit Recommendation Service Office at (202) 939-9434 or at credit@ace.nche.edu For more information, see ACE's website at <http://www.acenet.edu//AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home>

2. **The College Credit by Examination Program** evaluates national examinations and examination programs to equate them to college credit. College credit is assigned to examinations on the basis of the examination results being comparable to traditional study.

Examinations evaluated by the Credit by Examination Program are published in the *Guide to Educational Credit by Examination*, which contains information on more than 350 exams. This publication includes information such as the content and technical review summaries, general subject area and/or course equivalents, evaluator's judgments about test quality, minimum scores suggested for credit, and recommendations for the type and amount of credit that is awarded. The Credit by Examination Program has evaluated many types of examinations and examination programs including the Professional Secretary International, the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES), and many others.

3. **Military Evaluation Program**

All of the branches of the armed forces have specialized training programs available to their recruits. There are several ways that a service member can receive college credit or programs and courses completed while in the military.

The *Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services* contains recommendations made by expert evaluators who review and recommend credit for formal service-school courses, demonstrated proficiency in military occupations, and college-level tests.

The *Guide* is now available online. We recommend that before searching the *Guide Online*, you fully read the instructions and the list of frequently asked questions: <http://militaryguides.acenet.edu/>

Please see the pages below for more information on eligibility of military personnel to obtain NHMCCD course credit.

Additional Procedures for Seeking Military Credit

1. Students seeking NHMCCD course credit for experiences in the Army, Army National Guard or Army Reserves only should obtain an AARTS transcript by completing a DA Form 5454-R, "Request for Army/American Council on Education Registry Transcript" available at <http://aarts.army.mil/>. For experience and training credit in the Navy, Naval Reserves, Marines or USMC Reserves, students must complete a request form available at <https://www.navycollege.navy.mil/>
2. Students seeking credit for Air Force experiences and training must contact the Community College of the Air Force or order an official transcript. This transcript does not have to undergo the ACE evaluation process. Refer to the section in the NHMCCD catalog entitled "Transfer of Credit from Other Institutions."

The AARTS transcript contains a complete record of a service member's educational experience. It helps colleges interpret military forms, certificates, and training course descriptions and recommendations to grant college credit to qualified service members. Recommendations made by ACE are included on the AARTS transcript. Regular Army enlisted soldiers and veterans entering active duty after October 1981 are eligible for this service, as are Army National Guard personnel entering active duty after October 1981 and on active rolls as of January 1993. Army Reservists entering active duty after October 1981 and on the active rolls as of April 1, 1997 are also eligible. Starting in Spring 2005, the DD214 can be accepted instead of a military transcript for KINE 1111 credit only.

The AARTS transcript recognizes completion of formal service-school courses, proficiency in military occupations, and passage of college-level exams, including CLEP, DANTES, or Regents College Examinations (formerly ACT-PEP).

PLA is also available for education gained through the following types of military experience:

Service-School Courses

ACE evaluates and makes recommendations for the following:

- ◆Courses offered by the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Army Reserve and National Guard.
- ◆Courses that are at least 45 contact hours in length since 1981; at least 60 contact hours from 1973 to 1980; and at least 90 contact hours prior to 1973.
- ◆Correspondence courses with proctored end-of-course examinations offered by the Coast Guard and Marine Corps.

Demonstrated Proficiency in Military Occupations

ACE evaluates and makes recommendations for the following occupations:

- ◆Army enlisted and warrant officer Military Occupation Specialties (MOS)
- ◆Navy rates, ratings, warrant officer, limited duty officer specialties and selected Navy Enlisted Classification (NEC)
- ◆Coast Guard enlisted ratings, warrant officer specialties and officer aviator designations
- ◆Selected Marine Corps MOSs

College-Level Tests

College-level testing programs that ACE recognizes are:

- ◆College-Level Examination Program (CLEP)
- ◆Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES) subject standardized tests (DSST)
- ◆Regents College Examinations (formerly ACT-PEP)

Service Members Opportunity Colleges (SOC)

Service Members Opportunity Colleges (SOC) was created in 1972 to provide educational opportunities to service members who often experienced trouble completing their college degrees because they frequently moved from place to place.

NHMCCD is a member of SOC, which coordinates associate degrees in a variety of curricular areas for the Army (SOCAD), Navy, (SOCNAV), and Marine Corps (SOCMAR). Regionally accredited colleges and universities accessible to Army, Navy, and Marine Corps installations worldwide offer these degree programs. Within each curriculum area or degree network, member colleges agree to accept each other's credits in transfer. In addition, in order to establish residency, students need only take 25% of the degree requirements at any single college.

Today SOC is a consortium of more than 1200 colleges and universities that provide educational opportunities for service members and their families. The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) co-sponsor Service members Opportunity Colleges, in cooperation with 13 other educational associations, the Military Services, the National Guard, and the Coast Guard. Service members desiring to participate in SOC should begin at their Military Education Center (Army, Navy, or Marine Corps, as appropriate). A counselor will help the service member select an appropriate course of study and refer him or her to the designated college office. The service member enrolls at a college near the military assignment. This college becomes their "home college."

Before the service member (student) earns six semester credit hours from the home college, he/she should request an official evaluation of prior learning experiences, including all possible credit sources. The college evaluates the prior learning and issues a Student Agreement degree plan. The student is advised to complete an academic residency of 25% of the degree at the home college. If the service member is reassigned to another installation, he or she may continue to take SOC courses that match the home college requirements as shown on the Student Agreement degree plan.

The student only has to meet the home college graduation requirements, and all courses taken at any SOC are guaranteed to transfer back to the home college. The student does not have to start over with a different college or set of degree requirements every time he or she relocates. After successful completion of all coursework, the home college awards the degree based on the completion of the original SOC Student Agreement degree plan. Contact <http://www.aasu.org> or 1- 800-368-5622 for more information.

In cooperation with the United States Army Recruiting Command, (USAREC), SOC operates the Concurrent Admissions Program (ConAP) to increase college enrollment of new Army recruits and reservists. Upon enlistment, eligible recruits can be admitted to college on full or provisional basis and take courses in their off-duty hours at or near military installations in the US, overseas and on Navy ships. Individuals interested in an application to the ConAP program should see their Army recruiter for an application and more information.

V. DEFINITION OF TERMS

Advanced Standing

Permits the student to move to more advanced work by the equating of test results, previous grades or interviews by the appropriate department. No credit is awarded and it is not reflected on the student's transcript.

AA

Associate of Arts Degree

AS

Associate of Science Degree

AAS DEGREE PROGRAM

Associate of Applied Science Degree

AAT DEGREE PROGRAM

Associate of Arts in Teaching Degree

ACE (American Council on Education)

ACE provides many services including opportunity for earning academic credit through military service, workplace training, and other education acquired outside the formal classroom.

ADVANCED TECHNICAL CREDIT (ATC, formerly Statewide Articulation)

A state-level process that identifies commonly articulated secondary career and technology courses, requires enhancement of their curriculum to align with postsecondary courses, and sets common standards for the award of college credit for these courses statewide. State-approved professional development provides information to teachers on articulated course methodology and expectations of college Workforce Education Course Manual (WECM) courses. The statewide articulation process allows students who successfully complete these career and technology courses, graduate from any secondary school in the state, and meet the requirements outlined for ATC, to receive articulated credit from any participating public postsecondary two-year degree granting institution in the state that offers the corresponding college course(s). Local articulation agreements for courses not listed in the ATC list can continue.

ALTERNATIVE TEACHER CERTIFICATE

A program in which individuals who hold a baccalaureate degree can obtain teacher certification.

ARTICULATION

Term for the process of linking educational institutions experiences, skills or prior knowledge to assist students in making a smooth transition from one level of education to another without experiencing delays or duplication in learning.

CE ARTICULATION

Articulation of a continuing education course into a credit certificate or associates degree. The course must be pre-approved for articulation prior to student participation and must meet all credit course competencies and evaluative measures.

CERTIFICATE

A formal award associated with the completion of a program of study of less than two years, indicating mastery of a prescribed series of academic and technical competencies with defined employment outcomes. This award is approved by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, appears on the Technical Program Clearinghouse Inventory, and is subject to the Coordinating Board program evaluation process.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Postsecondary institutions, which offer academic and workforce programs of study leading to awards at the associate's degree or certificate level.

CONCURRENT CREDIT

See Dual Credit.

CREDIT BY EXAM

A method to provide college credit for work experience, prior knowledge, skills, training or educational work without transcript credit. This allows a student to complete undergraduate requirements in less time (through advanced placement) and at lower cost and to enrich educational experience by taking courses other than those that merely repeat previously learned material. Examples include Achievement Test (ACT), College Level Examination Program (CLEP) in specific subject areas only. NHMCCD Departmental Examinations, and Advanced Placement Program by the College Board, and the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program. Contact the Counseling or Advising Office for more information.

DUAL CREDIT

Simultaneously completing a high school and college course for credit at both levels. The courses can be taught at the high school or the post-secondary location. Students receive both high school and post-secondary credit upon satisfactory completion of a dual credit course.

HIGH SCHOOL ARTICULATION AGREEMENT

The official document prepared by NHMCCD and each participating independent school district (ISD) specifying the competencies (courses) to be articulated so that students can have appropriate college credit.

INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE (IB) DIPLOMA PROGRAMME

The International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme is a challenging two-year high school program for students aged 16 to 19. It leads to a qualification that is widely recognized by the world's leading universities and colleges. Student may elect to take the whole Diploma (all six component areas) or may choose to aim for a certificate of Merit in a particular subject area.

NHMCCD

North Harris Montgomery Community College District that includes the following colleges: Cy-Fair, Kingwood, Montgomery, North Harris, and Tomball.

TECH PREP

A cooperatively developed, competency-based six-year program of study beginning in the ninth grade of high school and resulting in an Associate of Applied Science degree.

TECH PREP ARTICULATION

Competency-based course articulation included in Tech Prep educational plans.

TRANSFER

A student who subsequently enrolls in a different postsecondary institution, usually a university or four-year college.

UIL

University Interscholastic League