

<b>Title:</b>	<b>FLEXIBLE ASSESSMENT</b>
<b>Category:</b>	Education/Student Services: Admissions/Registrar
<b>Policy No.:</b>	<b>E2004</b>
<b>Replaces:</b>	
<b>Applicability:</b>	All Students
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<b>Source(s):</b>	Education Council
<b>Approval:</b>	<hr/> <b>President</b>

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## 1. PURPOSE

People learn through a variety of ways, as for example, formal and non-formal education, work experiences and training, self-study, travel, recreation, community involvement and other life experiences. The purpose of this policy is to ensure a systematic and consistent process for recognizing a person's knowledge, skills and abilities for academic credit.

## 2. DEFINITIONS

2.1 The basic concept of prior learning assessment, or flexible assessment, is that through a systematic and valid assessment process a person's knowledge, skills and abilities can be formally recognized and credited regardless of how, when, where or why they were obtained (Simosko and Cook, 1996).

Prior learning assessment (PLA) is assessment by some valid and reliable means, by a qualified specialist, of what has been learned through non-formal education/training or experience, that [may be] worthy of credit in a course or program offered by the institution providing the credit (B.C. Council of Admissions and Transfer, 1994).

2.2 Flexible assessment refers to the many ways that learning may be assessed for credit and recognition. Assessment tools and methodologies may include projects/assignments, portfolio reviews, program evaluations, challenge examinations, oral questioning, standardized tests, performance observations and skills demonstrations. The tools and methods are selected according to the nature of the learning (knowledge, skills, abilities) to be assessed, the learner's actual experiences and available evidence (Simosko, 1997) and the assessor's need to meet the academic standards for achievement.

- 2.3 Recognition is the awarding of formal credit for learning (knowledge, skills and abilities) that meets the program/departmental requirements for achievement of the courses/programs at Langara College, as well as those for occupational/professional certification or employment/labour market entry purposes.

### 3. AUTHORITY

The terms prior learning assessment, flexible assessment and recognition, along with terms such as flexible learning, learning outcomes, learner-centeredness, education technology and distributed learning environments are associated with current government policy initiatives related to educational reform.

In *Charting a New Course: a Strategic Plan for the Future of British Columbia's College, Institute and Agency System* (1996), flexible assessment is linked with the concept of flexible learning as a significant strategy for meeting the educational needs of a diversity of learners in a systematic, affordable and accountable manner. Flexible assessment of prior learning permits access to formal post-secondary learning for people who claim to have substantial knowledge, skills and abilities which have been learned through diverse experiences and in various settings but which are not recognized in the current system.

### 4. RELATIONSHIPS WITH COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS

Not applicable.

### 5. POLICY

Four basic principles underlie a successful Flexible Assessment service at Langara College:

- (i) Adequate funding and resources must be made available.
- (ii) Flexible Assessment offerings must be integrated instructional activities and, as such, must be accounted for as workload for faculty and staff.
- (iii) Students enrolled to receive Flexible Assessment services must be fully considered Langara College students.
- (iv) There must be a centralized policy with administrative support for decentralized implementation.

- 5.1 Langara College, through its participating programs/departments/services, will be responsive to the needs of the increasing number and diversity of adult learners who seek post-secondary education and training through a process that recognizes and values the knowledge, skills and abilities learned through non-formal education, work and life experiences.
- 5.2 By offering Flexible Assessment services, Langara College will increase access for adult learners to college courses and programs. The service will enable adult learners to earn credit towards a college course or program, to pursue advanced levels of learning at Langara College or to receive formal recognition in a discipline for knowledge and skills they already possess.
- 5.3 Learning obtained through non-formal study and life experiences may be evaluated to be equivalent with that obtained through formal study within the traditional, formal post-secondary educational system.
- 5.4 By using a variety of valid and reliable assessment tools and by ensuring that the highest standards of quality and rigour are maintained in the assessment process, learning may be assessed and formal credit awarded without the learner having undertaken a formal course or program of learning.

## 6. GUIDELINES/STANDARDS

Programs/departments that choose to offer Flexible Assessment services will be directed by the following guidelines.

- 6.1 The assessment of prior learning will be guided by the PLA principles as outlined in Appendix II and the Langara College standards for academic achievement.
- 6.2 Programs/departments are responsible for determining programs and courses that may be obtained through the Flexible Assessment process.
- 6.3 Applicants must first gain admission to Langara College and then to the specific course or program for which Flexible Assessment is being requested.
- 6.4 Learners will not be allowed to request Flexible Assessment for courses they have previously failed, either at Langara College or at other post-secondary institutions.
- 6.5 Learners undergoing assessment of prior learning through the Flexible Assessment process will be subjected to the same rigour of assessment as are students in the regular course offerings.

- 6.6 In making the assessment of prior learning, the Assessor will use the departmental/ program requirements for achievement that are applied to the regular students in the course or program for which Flexible Assessment has been requested.
- 6.7 Credit granted through the Flexible Assessment process will be considered resident credit since the credit is awarded by Langara College faculty based on a process that meets the evaluation and grading standards for Langara College. However, Flexible Assessment cannot be used to meet eligibility requirements for scholarship, bursaries, loans, Dean's List or any other academic award affected by the weighting of semester hours.
- 6.8 Fees charged for assessment will be based on the services performed in the Flexible Assessment process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.
- 6.9 Flexible Assessment processes will be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis and revised as needed.

## 7. EXCEPTIONS

Flexible Assessment is not:

- 7.1 Transfer credit - the awarding of comparable credit by a post-secondary institution for course or program credit gained at another post-secondary institution.\*
- 7.2 Advanced placement - direct entry into a higher level of a course or program, possibly because of recognition of a program or course of studies the student has successfully completed.
- 7.3 Block transfer - the process whereby a block of credits is granted to students who have successfully completed a cluster of courses, or certificate or diploma, which is recognized by the receiving institution as having an academic wholeness or integrity, and which can be related in a meaningful way to part of the degree program.\*

- 7.4 Exemption - A waiver of a requirement. A student may be excused from completing a course or program requirement if approval is granted by the appropriate institutional representative. Usually exemptions are granted to students who have proven that they have comparable learning. Although an exemption may be granted, the student may be required to replace the exempted course with an alternative.\*

\*These definitions were taken from: *Charting a New Course: A Strategic plan for the Future of British Columbia's College, Institute and Agency System* (1996); Continuing Education Credentials Articulation, 1996; and Prior Learning Assessment in BC: An Orientation for Post-Secondary Institutions.

## 8. PROCEDURES

- 8.1 Participating programs/departments at Langara College will, when requested by an applicant and in accordance with appropriate procedure, assess the learning that a person has gained through non-formal study, work and life experiences which is relevant to the person's educational goal and related to a course or program at Langara College.
- 8.2 Credit will be granted for demonstrated knowledge, skills and abilities that meet the program/departmental requirements for achievement and are:
- current;
  - at the post-secondary level;
  - consistent with the required objectives and learning outcomes of the course or program for which flexible assessment of prior learning has been requested.
- 8.3 Any credit granted via flexible assessment of prior learning will be in the form of a grade, the assignment of which will be based on the grading system in place at Langara College. Credit awarded as a result of Flexible Assessment will be designated as such on the transcript. The notation "NG" will be used for students who unsuccessfully pursue a Flexible Assessment.
- 8.4 Applicants eligible for Flexible Assessment services are:
- 8.4(a) adults who have acquired important knowledge, skills and abilities outside of the post-secondary system and through non-formal study or life and work experiences.
- 8.4(b) adults who have acquired knowledge, skills and abilities through formal study in jurisdictions where there is no articulation agreement or no formal recognition of post-secondary education established with Langara College.

- 8.5 Langara College will offer learners a choice of methods for demonstrating prior learning achievements. No single assessment tool or method is best for all situations. The faculty in the programs/departments that choose to provide Flexible Assessment will determine the assessment tools and methods most appropriate for their program and courses.
- 8.5(a) The faculty Advisor, who may be the Flexible Assessment Coordinator or a faculty member assigned by the program/department, will provide initial information about the assessment process and assessment methods, offer orientation seminars and Flexible Assessment-related courses (such as portfolio preparation or how to prepare for assessment), assist candidates in establishing educational goals, act as the liaison between Assessors and candidates and provide post-assessment guidance.
- 8.5(b) The faculty Assessor is a Langara College faculty member who is a content expert/specialist in the course or program for which prior learning is being assessed, who is assigned by the program/department and who has had training in the basic principles and processes of Flexible Assessment.
- 8.6 Learners who are not satisfied with the grade/credit awarded for prior learning, may use the appeal procedure available to all Langara learners.
- 8.7 In implementing the Flexible Assessment service, Langara College will adhere to the provincial Standards and Guidelines for Prior Learning Assessment (Appendix I) in so far as they are congruent with the mission and objectives of Langara College.

## 9. INQUIRIES

For further information regarding this policy, please contact the Flexible Assessment Coordinator.

## 10. APPENDICES

### Appendix I

PLA Implementation Guidelines for British Columbia (formerly referred to as Draft Standards and Guidelines for Prior Learning Assessment (PLA/Flexible Assessment))

### Appendix II

Prior Learning, Flexible Assessment and Recognition - An Overview of the Process

### Appendix III

References

**APPENDIX I**  
**PLA IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA**  
formerly referred to as: Draft Standards and Guidelines for  
Prior Learning Assessment (PLA/Flexible Assessment)

Most institutions in British Columbia are now implementing prior learning assessment services for learners. The experience of these institutions is reflected in the following guidelines.

Education and Administration

1. All institutions will identify any of their programs or courses which are listed in the BC Transfer Guide (or in other formal transfer arrangements) for which they will not accept credit awarded as a result of the assessment of prior learning.
2. Learners will receive recognition and credit for demonstrated knowledge, skills and attributes and not for experience alone.
3. Credit will be awarded for learning reflecting knowledge, skills, attributes and values which are appropriate to the subject, course or program.
4. In receiving institutions, credit will be awarded for learning which is consistent with the achievement levels required by the particular credential to be awarded.
5. The assessment and recognition of prior learning and the determination of credit awards will be made by content specialists, with external advice as necessary.
6. Learners will have access to prior learning assessment and learning opportunities appropriate to the content area.
7. Credit awarded as a result of the assessment of prior learning will be identified as such on the transcript issued by the institution and transfer credit will be granted on the same basis as is granted for equivalent courses as identified in the BC Transfer Guide or in other formal transfer arrangements.

NOTE: This guideline (#7) will be reviewed after a period of three years in the light of follow-up studies conducted by individual institutions and by the Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology to assess learner success and to monitor PLA policies and practices.

7. Policies and information about the prior learning assessment process, including provision for appeal, will be readily available.
9. The fees for assessment will be based on the services performed and/or the number of credits requested. The fees will not be determined by the amount of credit awarded.
10. Institutions will regularly monitor, review, evaluate and revise prior learning assessment policies and practices to maintain and improve institutional standards.

### Context

1. Assessment is integral to the learning process and is a vital component of fostering lifelong learning.
2. Prior learning assessment is a critical component of other educational and training reforms occurring in the province.
3. Prior learning assessment services involve a dynamic relationship among educators, business, industry, licensing and accrediting bodies, and professional associations.
4. Every effort will be made to meet the needs of all learners, including diverse and non-traditional learning backgrounds.
5. Learners need to be active participants in the assessment process.

### Access

1. Prior learning assessment will be considered as a vehicle for enhancing access to education and training or accelerating a learner's progress towards a desired credential or other goal.
2. Prior learning assessment should be developed first for those programs where the labour market demand or learner need has been identified, and institutional readiness and capacity are evident.

### Assessment

1. Learning assessed for post-secondary credit should be:
  - linked to established learning outcomes or other criteria consistent with institutional standards for a given course; it should not be linked to time spent;
  - transferable to contexts other than the one in which it was learned;
  - current and relevant;
  - at a level of achievement equivalent to that of other learners engaged in studies at that level in that program or subject area;
  - assessed using a range of strategies consistent with institutional standards for a given course.
2. The number of credits to be granted is determined by the institution, based on their published learning outcomes or other criteria.
3. Assessment of the learning should be the responsibility of faculty who are content specialists from the accrediting institutions; and the names and qualifications of those making an assessment should be recorded.



### Learner Orientation/Preparation

1. Learners should have access to adequate information about, and orientation to, the process.
2. Learners should be supported to make decisions throughout the learning process.
3. Institutions should offer a variety of opportunities to support learners to progress through the assessment process.

### Professional Development

1. All personnel involved in PLA (PLA assessors, learner advisors, instructors of portfolio development/career/educational planning courses) should have appropriate skills and knowledge relevant to their roles and responsibilities in the process.
2. All personnel should work systematically towards continuous improvement in their own practice.
3. Institutions should assume the responsibility for supporting staff to acquire and maintain expertise in prior learning assessment services and provide opportunities for sharing information and expertise with other institutions.

### Transcripts/Transfer

1. Grades or credits may be assigned to PLA awards and will be entered accordingly on the learner's transcript.
2. Institutions will document PLA credit awards internally.
3. The percentage of a program's credits which can be obtained through PLA is determined by the institution awarding the credential.

Note: See Education and Administration guideline #7 regarding identification of PLA on transcripts.

## APPENDIX II

### Prior Learning, Flexible Assessment and Recognition An Overview of the Process

#### PLA PRINCIPLES

The Learner is:

- an assessment partner
- actively involved in the decision-making process
- guided by information provided by the PLA facilitator and course assessor  
(Adapted from Module 4)

Assessment is:

- an assessment of current learning, resulting from prior learning
- attentive to the issues of credibility, validity, reliability and consistency
- learner-centred
- independent of location and method of learning
- credit granted for proven current learning  
(Adapted from Module 1)

Essential Ingredients are:

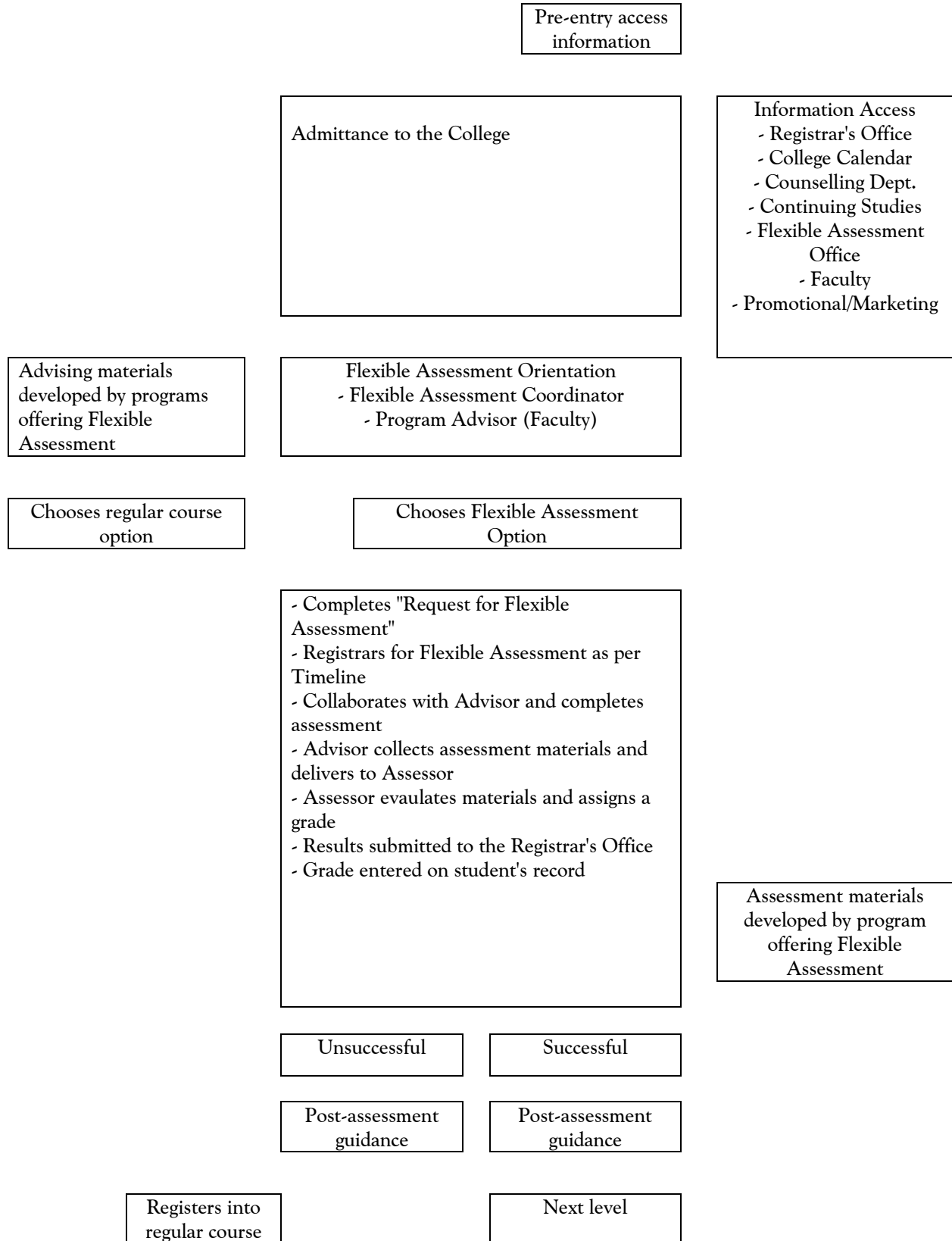
- Clear learning outcomes/expectations  
Must outline requirements, using verifiable and measurable criteria
- Technical requirements
  - Validity Does the evidence relate to the learning outcomes?
  - Sufficiency Is this enough evidence to provide conclusive proof?
  - Authenticity Did the candidate produce this work?
  - Currency Are knowledge and skills up to date?
  - Reliability How consistent is the assessment outcome?
- Systematic process  
Should include recording the results of evidence review, planning the assessment options to be used, and communicating effectively with the candidate regarding the process and the results  
(Adapted from Module 3)

Taken from *Prior Learning Assessment: PLA Training Modules*, (1997). Produced by the Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology. Victoria: B.C. Ministry of Education, Skills and Training.

## Appendix II The PLA Model

Stages	Activities
1. Pre-Entry	Candidates access publicity, promotional and other marketing literature and sometimes are provided with information or briefing sessions.
2. Candidate Profiling	Candidates establish aims, reflect on experiences, match learning to course or program expectations and establish clear educational or career targets with assistance from the institutional advisor.
3. Gathering & Generating Evidence	Candidates identify sources and types of evidence and prepare for assessment. The institution supports candidates through workshops, courses by one-to-one and/or group support. In person support and/or various forms of technology could be used.
4. Assessment	Candidates submit evidence, and Assessor reviews and assesses, provides feedback and makes decisions regarding candidates' requests for credit.
5. Credit	Registrar posts credit and/or candidates are supported to develop new learning plans.
6. Post-assessment Guidance	Candidates review accomplishments in light of initial goals and sets new targets, with assistance from institution.

## APPENDIX II Proposed Flexible Assessment Process for Langara College



## APPENDIX III References

- B.C. Council of Admissions and Transfer. (1994). *Prior Learning Assessment*, 3rd Update.
- B.C. Ministry of Education, Skills and Training. (1996). *Charting a New Course: A Strategic Plan for the Future of British Columbia's College, Institute and Agency System*, Victoria: Queens Printer.
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- Simosko, S. (1997). BC Trends in Prior Learning Assessment: Where are we going. *Learning Quarterly*, 1(3), 7-9.
- Simosko, S. & Cook, C. (1996). *Applying PLA Principles in Flexible Assessment: A Practical Guide*, London, Kogan Page.
- University College of the Cariboo. (1996). *Regulations R-ED-2.0: Prior Learning Assessment*, Kamloops: Author