

NATIONAL LABOR COLLEGE

Prior Learning Assessment Guidebook

EARN UP TO ONE YEAR OF COLLEGE CREDIT FOR COLLEGE-LEVEL LEARNING

July 2013 Edition



The National Labor College Mission Statement

By establishing the physical and intellectual space for the labor movement to imagine its future, the mission of the National Labor College (NLC) is to make higher education available to workers; to prepare union members, leaders, and staff for the challenges of a changing global environment; and to serve as a center for progressive thought and union learning.

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Appendices compiled from NLC core curriculum material

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Introduction to PLA

Considering your college-level learning and planning your portfolio

Welcome to the National Labor College's Prior Learning Assessment Program, a challenging and engaging process that will help you earn up to 30 college credits. In this section, you'll find an overview of the PLA program.

LEARNING & EXPERIENCE

- Jobs
- Union Positions
- Volunteer activities
- Hobbies

You have been learning your whole life, and some of your learning may parallel college courses. Have you ever looked through a college catalog and thought, "I know exactly what they're talking about. I learned how to do that when ..."? Capturing these experiences and the learning that they inspired is central to the portfolio development process. Your job is to reflect on what you've learned, how you've learned it, and how it connects to college-level learning requirements. While it may be challenging to document learning experiences by writing essays, hundreds of NLC students have found the experience worthwhile.

Before you begin to develop the materials that will document your learning experiences, you need to make sure that your NLC transcript reflects all of your potential transfer credits. You'll want to carefully review your transcript, so you have a clear idea about where you are in the degree and how the PLA process will work best for you. You should also be able to access your transcript through the NLC portal (<https://portal.nlc.edu/>).

Take some time now to visit the Online Orientation and Academic Advising site in Moodle, the NLC's online classroom (<http://learning.nlc.edu/>); it should be listed on under "My Courses" after you login. Here you'll find details about the degree programs, graduation requirements, student governance, and an orientation program. Additionally, your NLC advisor is a key resource for helping you understand the degree requirements, so reach out now to start a conversation about how PLA fits into your degree program.

The PLA Workshop

The PLA process includes the PLA Workshop on Moodle, the online classroom software that the NLC uses for most of its courses. You should have received a password and user name after you registered for the PLA Workshop, along with Moodle login information. Login and start exploring the links to get familiar with an important part of the NLC learning experience.

When you enter the online classroom, go to the Weekly Announcements section to find an announcement from your instructor that will go over the goals for the week (a copy will also arrive in your email). Additionally, you'll find a Workshop Overview, the PLA Guidebook, and discussion forums designed to help you achieve the weekly goals. Posting to the discussion forums connects you to other NLC students and has proven to be an outstanding motivator and a valued aspect of the workshop. Invest in connecting with your classmates and work on building your support network.

Click on the Faculty link for contact information about your instructors. As you write your resume and essays, you will be sharing them with NLC faculty who will review your work and give you feedback to help you develop solid essays for your portfolio.

Click on Assignments (you'll find links in the weekly topic boxes and at the top of the screen) to access the drop box. Upload your work in Microsoft Word, then check back for feedback from your instructor. Your instructor will make suggestions and help guide you towards creating an effective portfolio—take the time to review the comments and follow-up with your questions via email or post to the questions forum.

Following is an overview of each week; a detailed schedule is posted in the PLA Workshop in Moodle.

PLA Workshop Schedule

Week 1: Understanding PLA & Finding Documentation

Week 2: Compiling Your Educational Resume

Week 3: Telling Your Story with the Educational Narrative

Week 4: Connecting Your Learning to the Course Objectives

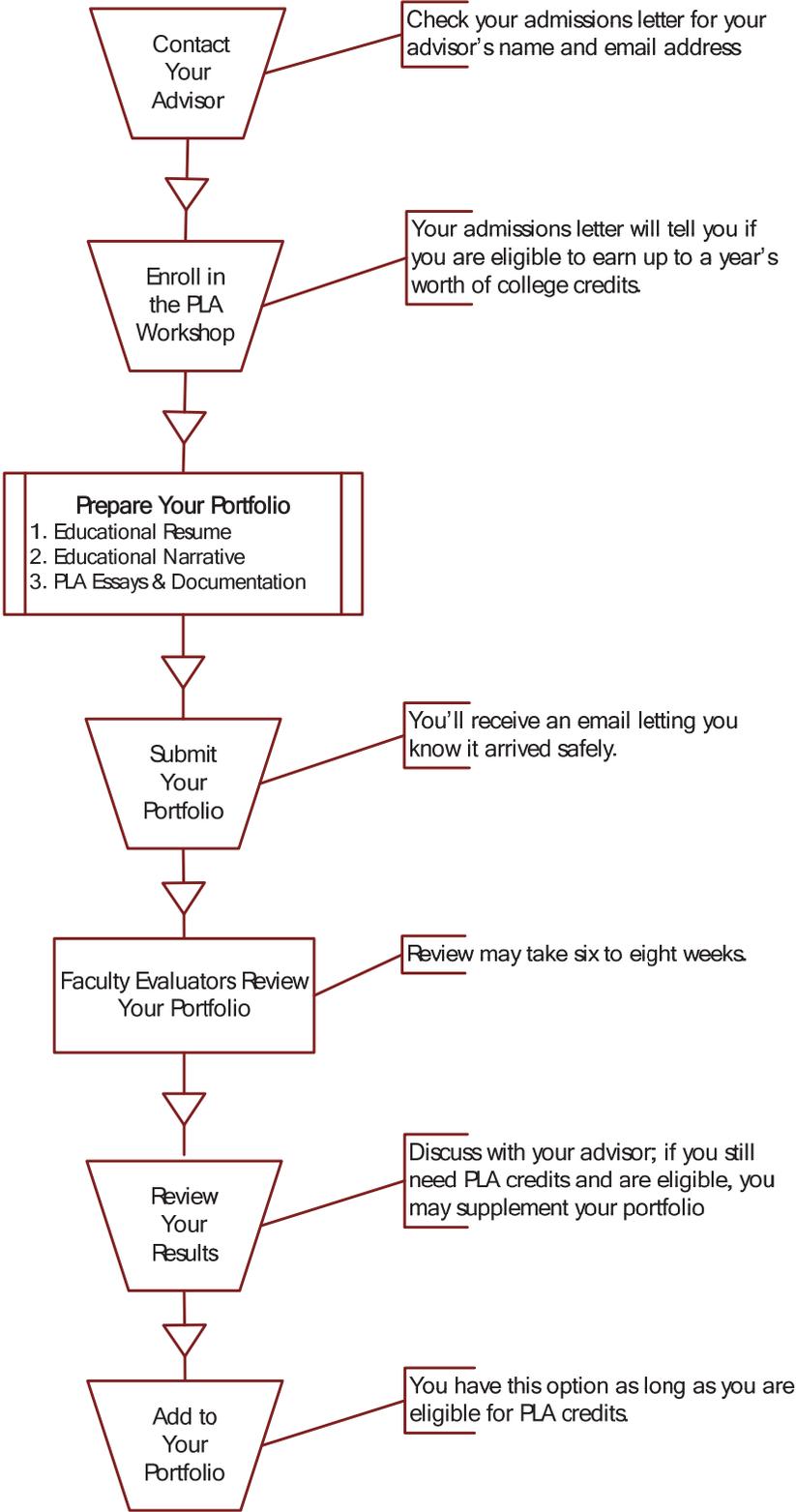
Week 5: Thinking about Experiences & Learning

Week 6: Reviewing Your Documentation

Week 7: Revising & Finalizing Your Portfolio

Post-Workshop: Submitting Your Portfolio

Steps in the PLA Process



Prior Learning Assessment Overview

The NLC's Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) program honors your lifelong learning experiences by offering you the opportunity to earn up to one year (30 credits) of college credits through a writing intensive portfolio development process. PLA helps you to compare your learning experiences to the learning objectives in accredited college courses and to build clear arguments that demonstrate your learning experiences outside the classroom.

PORTFOLIOS	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Resume
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Narrative
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	PLA Essays
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Documentation

This guidebook and the PLA Workshop will help you develop the three main components of the portfolio: an educational resume, narrative, and prior learning assessment essays with documentation. The resume comprehensively presents your work, union, and volunteer experiences, and the narrative adds details and reflective insights, including your learning goals. In the PLA essays (also known as experiential essays), you will analyze your experiences and the learning they inspired in comparison to an accredited college course, building a clear argument that you have already acquired the learning objectives presented by the course. Your essays will also offer clearly connected documentation that verifies your experiences. NLC faculty will review your portfolio and evaluate your college-level learning, as described and analyzed in your portfolio. Reviews generally take six to eight weeks, and all materials are retained by the NLC. Be sure to keep copies and do not submit original certificates, as they will not be returned.

If you are not satisfied with your portfolio review, you may appeal it through the Academic Review Committee. Or you may choose to write additional PLA essays and submit them as supplements. The NLC will accept your PLA essays until you reach the maximum 30 credits allowed or until February 1 for June graduation (October 1 for December graduation). If you need help at any time, reach out to your instructor or advisor, so you can be sure to achieve your PLA goals.

Costs for Prior Learning Assessment

PLA Workshop:	\$336
PLA Review:	\$336 for 1 to 15 credits \$336 for 16 to 30 credits

Fees cover a portion of administrative costs and are not related to the credit award.

For a 30-credit PLA portfolio submission and the workshop, the cost is \$1,008.

Please note that PLA costs cannot be covered by federal financial aid.

Prior Learning Assessment Policies

See the FAQs appendix for additional details.

Restrictions for Prior Learning Assessment

PLA essays are limited to subject matter represented by the NLC degree programs and faculty expertise, so you should begin your learning analysis with NLC courses or courses with similar content. Additional reviews may, on a case-by-case basis, be conducted in content areas that are represented by NLC faculty with expertise in specific areas. All other reviews are considered external reviews and are subject to the following conditions:

- The NLC will attempt to have subject matter experts available to review credit requests, but no guarantee can be made for any specific subject area.
- An additional fee will be required for each external subject area request.
- Timeliness cannot be guaranteed for external reviews.

You will be informed of the need for external review before the process is started to ensure that requirements for additional fees and timeliness issues are clear.

Additionally, although PLA essays addressing general education competencies may be submitted, no PLA essays may substitute for NLC's general education requirements, majors, or concentrations. Students may earn up to 30 credits, not to exceed the total 84 transfer credits allowed.

Submission of essays does not guarantee a credit award, and the NLC reserves the right to reject or limit the credit award of any essay that does not fulfill the requirements. PLA Workshop instructors' approval does not guarantee credit award. Although instructors will make every effort to help you fulfill the requirements, only faculty evaluators can make final credit determinations.

Academic Honesty

By submitting work to faculty for review during the course of the PLA Workshop and by submitting the final portfolio, students acknowledge that they have completed the work presented, that all learning assertions are true, and that all reference materials have been properly acknowledged.

Eligibility

The NLC offers students the opportunity to transfer up to 84 credits; of these up to 30 credits may be awarded through the prior learning assessment program. Students who already have 84 or more transfer credits are not eligible for PLA.

Faculty Evaluators & Credit Determinations

Topics suitable for PLA essays typically fall within the majors, specializations, or certificates programs offered by the NLC. Faculty do assess topics outside of those areas, but the decision to evaluate those subjects for credit will depend upon the

availability of NLC faculty with expertise in the given subject. PLA credit is issued at the discretion of the NLC under the guidance of CAEL Standards.

CAEL's Ten Standards for Prior Learning Assessment

The NLC follows the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) standards for prior learning assessment.

- 1.** Credit or its equivalent should be awarded only for learning, and not for experience.
- 2.** Assessment should be based on standards and criteria for the level of acceptable learning that are both agreed upon and made public.
- 3.** Assessment should be treated as an integral part of learning, not separate from it, and should be based on an understanding of learning processes.
- 4.** The determination of credit awards and competence levels must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic or credentialing experts.
- 5.** Credit or other credentialing should be appropriate to the context in which it is awarded and accepted.
- 6.** If awards are for credit, transcript entries should clearly describe what learning is being recognized and should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.
- 7.** Policies, procedures, and criteria applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available to all parties involved in the assessment process.
- 8.** Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.
- 9.** All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions they perform.
- 10.** Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served, the purposes being met, and the state of the assessment arts.

Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL). 2012. "Ten Standards for Assessing Learning." Retrieved June 29, 2012, from <http://www.cael.org/pla.htm>.

Getting Started

Assessing your transcript and planning for PLA credits

A successful portfolio takes planning, so before you get going on the first assignment, take some time to prepare. When you have a clear view of where you stand in terms of credits and degree requirements, it will be easier to ensure that your portfolio work is as effective and efficient as possible. So you'll need to start off with a clear view about the work you've already completed.

CHECK YOUR TRANSCRIPT

- College transcripts?
- Apprenticeship?
- Military Records?
- CLEP?

Start with your transcript. Check the NLC portal for instructions for linking to your transcript online. Not all of your learning experiences will be documented on your transcript—that's where the PLA program comes in. All other documentation may contribute to earning college credit through the portfolio development program. When you write your resume, you'll want to include all of this work. Review your transcript carefully and make sure every course you took and all other work eligible for college credit is on your record.

- Did you forget to include any coursework?
- Do you need to have partnership courses submitted?
- If your apprenticeship is eligible for college credit, is it included?
- Do you have any military training to add?

If a class is missing, for example, from the community college you went to 10 years ago, find out why. If your grade was lower than a C, then there's your explanation: the NLC will only accept courses with grades of a C or higher. If the class was developmental (often denoted by a course number that begins with a zero) or not offered for credit, then you have another explanation. But you want to be sure that all eligible classes are accounted for.

If you have questions about your transcript or the number of credits that were accepted, contact your NLC advisor. Your advisor can help you understand which requirements you have fulfilled and help you plan your degree.

The NLC Accepts up to 84 Transfer Credits

Partnership Credits: Partnership credits are based on individual articulation agreements between the National Labor College and specific unions, colleges, and universities. Like apprenticeships, partnership credits are awarded based on an individual review of each student's documentation. Partnership fees may apply.

Apprenticeship Credit (certified or ACE assessed): Apprenticeships that have been assessed for credit by the American Council on Education (ACE) or another college may be applied as transfer credit. The number of credits given for an apprenticeship may vary greatly depending upon the specific apprenticeship courses that were taken, the type of apprenticeship, and the years those courses were taken. The total number of credits is awarded based on an individual review of each student's apprenticeship certificate.

Military Training Records Request: College credit may be available for military services training that is evaluated by the American Council on Education. Each service has a method for obtaining a personal copy of your transcript and having an official copy sent to the registrar's office. The military often refers to official copies of transcripts that are sent to college registrars as institutional copies.

College Level Examination Program (CLEP): CLEP offers both General and Subject Exams; if you have passed any CLEP exams, then you should make sure these appear on your transcript. Also, consider if taking an exam might be right for you (credits can be applied to your general education requirements, unlike PLA credits). If you speak a second language, you may earn credits for your language learning through examination.

College Courses: You'll need official transcripts sent securely from your former registrar to the NLC registrar, but you should also request a copy for your records.

ACE accredited courses or ACE licenses: Some licenses are accredited, like the Airframe and Powerplant (A&P) license.

ACE Assessed Training: Some training has been assessed by ACE; in fact, the association works with employers to evaluate training through its College Credit Recommendation Services. See <http://www2.acenet.edu/credit> for details.

NLC Union Skills Courses: If you've been to the NLC, then you may have earned some college credits; check the *NLC Course Catalog* for course descriptions.

Learning Opportunities Not on Your Transcript

Apprenticeship Records: Unfortunately, if your union has not had its apprenticeship evaluated by the American Council on Education (ACE) or a college for credit, then it won't appear on your transcript. Yet this valuable learning experience can still help you earn college credit through the portfolio process. (Contact your union just to be sure that the review isn't in process.)

Continuing Education Credits (CEUs): CEUs are not the same as academic credit, so they do not appear on student transcripts; however, these noncredit CEU units work well to document your PLA essays. Pull out your records or certificates now, so your resume will be easier to compile.

Licenses: In most cases, having a license does not count for credit; however, a limited number of licenses (such as the A&P license) have been formally assessed for credit by ACE and can be accepted as transfer credits. Generally, all others must be documented through the portfolio process; licenses work well to document PLA essays. For example real estate licenses aren't generally accredited, but you can find plenty of college courses on this topic.

Training Classes: Throughout your career, you've probably attended training classes; while most are not assessed for credit, these sessions probably contributed to your learning in a particular subject area. Certificates from these sessions may contribute to your portfolio, so try to track those down.

The NLC & Degree Completion

Visit the NLC Website & Review the Catalog

As a degree completion institution, the NLC's goal is to help you earn a bachelor's degree by uniting all of your educational experiences, and the PLA program is an integral part of your degree. By analyzing what you've already learned, you'll be able to plan better for the rest of your degree. At www.nlc.edu, you'll find the *NLC Course Catalog*, which lays out the degrees available in the Schools of Labor Studies and Professional Studies. Spend some time reviewing your options, so you can plan to move towards graduation at a pace that seems right to you.

Choose Your Major

Which major works best for you? Read the descriptions carefully, so you have full understanding about which courses will fulfill the requirements. Talk this over with your advisor and ask plenty of questions. When you have decided, check with your advisor for the major declaration form and for help in choosing your courses. While you should rely on your advisor for help in fulfilling all of your requirements, ultimately the responsibility is yours, so make sure everything is clear.

Spend a little time with the course descriptions in the *NLC Course Catalog*, so you can see what courses you will need to take in the major or specialization you have chosen.

While you're there, you can see if any courses look familiar and think ahead to the college courses you will use to build your credit requests. Also, you'll want to think about which courses NOT to use for your PLA essays—some courses are key to certain majors, and you'll want to be sure to take those.

Build a Degree Plan

Consult with your enrollment coordinator or advisor to build the following components relevant to you into your degree plan. Link to the Online Orientation and Advising site in Moodle for a template.

Transfer Credits. Start with your transcript and the credits you earned in each area. Note the credits you have not yet submitted in parentheses, and remind yourself to follow up on that documentation.

Partnership Credits. If you have partnership credits, you will want to work with your advisor to determine if they qualify as part of the NLC 36 credits—some may even fulfill your major requirements.

NLC credits. As of fall 2012, all NLC students take at least 36 NLC credits: the core courses and the major courses. Core courses help students fulfill learning competencies in leadership, critical thinking, effective communication, global thinking, information literacy, and technological proficiency, which is the NLC's specialized general education program. Students must also fulfill 15 standard general education credits; these may be transferred, but cannot be fulfilled through the PLA portfolio process. If you have three transfer credits each in English, Math, Science, Social Science, and Humanities, then you may have fulfilled these requirements. If not, work out a plan with your advisor to effectively meet these requirements.

PLA Credits. If you have most of your details collected, you should be able to estimate how many PLA credits will be useful to you. Review your analysis with your advisor and then plan to get started. If you need to pursue the full 30 PLA credits, remember you don't have to write them all during this workshop. Aim for three or four solid essays, for now, then set yourself a schedule to write the rest.

The Educational Resume

Start with a review of your work history.

The educational resume captures a global view of your educational and professional life. If you have a professional resume or job application, that's a great place to start. Like a resume that you might use to apply for a job, the educational resume should help readers understand your skills, expertise, and experience. Like most resumes, this portfolio element calls for a chronological listing of your employment and other learning experiences with details about training, education, and your volunteer work and hobbies.

THE RESUME

- Educational Objective
 - Education
 - Employment
 - Labor Positions, etc
-

Make the resume work for you. The educational resume is a table of contents of your life's work, so it serves as a guide through your portfolio. While the evaluators will find it a useful introduction to your learning experiences, it will also serve you well. First, you can use it to develop your narrative—once you have a list of your experiences, you can add in the details to build your story. Even better, you can use it as a starting point for each of your PLA essays—a completed resume will be full of essay ideas and can remind you of areas not yet addressed.

Resume Format

Educational Objective

Use the educational objective to frame your educational experiences and goals. While this appears first on your resume, you may want to write it last. If you're not sure how to express your academic goals, try the freewriting exercise in the next section and see the example at the end of this section.

Work Experience

Include employment categories from the age of 18 on. Use your chronological listings and related learning to show growth and development. Offer details using parallel verbs that descriptively share your experiences; attention here will help you craft your essays. For a quick lesson on action verbs go to the Purdue Online Writing Lab site: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/543/01/>. To see helpful examples of parallel language, go to <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/644/01/>. Keep

this site as a favorite on your browser, since it can answer most of your writing questions.

Labor Movement Positions

If you have served the labor movement in a voluntary position, then list it in this section and offer details about your responsibilities and accomplishments. Describe your full-time paid labor movement positions in the employment section. Offer details, and later, when you are writing your PLA essays, you'll find it easier to compare your union service to NLC courses.

Academic Education

List your formal education beyond high school, including your enrollment in the National Labor College here. Include your estimated graduation date. (If you need help figuring this out, check in with your advisor or an enrollment coordinator.)

Other Training

List your training from apprenticeships, the military, training schools, civic organizations, labor and volunteer positions, and other formal training experience. (When you need to take a break from all of this listing, go look for the documents and begin to assemble them for your portfolio.)

Other Experience

Use this section to list experience not accompanied by formal training, including volunteer activities (for example, work done in your community or in religious organizations) and hobbies. (You probably have a file of certificates somewhere, for example, from PTA volunteering or, maybe, from coaching a youth team.)

Resume Format

Name

Address
Work Phone
Home Phone
Email

Educational Objective

Express your educational goals and objectives here.

Work Experience

JOB TITLE, DATES

Briefly describe your responsibilities and accomplishments working backwards from today. You may want to use bullets to list your experiences, for example:

- Trained apprentices
- Coordinated training schedules

JOB TITLE, DATES

Continue to list your positions in reverse chronological order.

- Offer details that reveal your learning experiences

Academic Education

- Name of Degree, Institution, Dates in attendance
- Bachelor of Arts or BTPS, National Labor College, Date begun and Estimated Graduation Date

Other Training / Education

- Offer details about type of training, training location, dates in attendance
- Include labor education, apprenticeship, military, vocational, business, or secretarial schools

Other Experience

- Civic activities
- Religious organization activities
- Hobbies

Sample Resume

LEONARD H. CAIN

Address
Work Phone
Home Phone
Email

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVE

To obtain additional knowledge and expertise in the occupational safety and health field by completing a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Labor Safety and Health.

EMPLOYMENT

ALLEGHENY ENERGY: 1994 - PRESENT

SAFETY AND HEALTH CONSULTANT: 2003-PRESENT

- Serve as an effective advocate of Allegheny's safety and health program.
- Develop employee safety training programs.
- Conduct and document incident investigations and reports.
- Counsel employees in regards to safety and health practices.
- Coordinate and lead internal safety and health assessment teams.
- Facilitate regional safety teams, such as, Incident Prevention Team, OSHA Voluntary Protection Program (VPP) Team, Wellness Team and Loss Control Team.
- Provide advice and recommendations to employees and management at all levels on matters relating to government regulatory safety and health requirements.
- Represent Allegheny in matters concerning government agencies such as OSHA and developing and maintaining positive relationships with government agencies such as OSHA.
- Provide guidance, direction and leadership needed to bring Allegheny sites into compliance with OSHA VPP mandates.
- Act as a liaison between employees and management in regards to safety related issues.
- Coordinate safety initiatives involving multiple locations.
- Plan and facilitate regional and corporate safety meetings.

SAFETY COORDINATOR; OSHA VPP: 2001-2003

- Provided leadership for the VPP Team.
- Audited company safety policies and procedures for compliance with OSHA rules and regulations.
- Drafted changes and recommendations for changes in documentation and accountability of the safety program.
- Designed and implemented programs and procedures.
- Dealt with OSHA representatives and interpreting government regulations.
- Planned and facilitated regional and corporate safety meetings.

SAFETY COORDINATOR; OSHA VPP: 2001-2003

- Provided leadership for the VPP Team.
- Audited company safety policies and procedures for compliance with OSHA rules and regulations.
- Drafted changes and recommendations for changes in documentation and accountability of the safety program.
- Designed and implemented programs and procedures.
- Dealt with OSHA representatives and interpreting government regulations.
- Planned and facilitated regional and corporate safety meetings.

ELECTRICAL MAINTENANCE; OP-TECH IV: 1994-2001

- Designed, troubleshoot and modified electrical and electronic circuits, devices, machines and systems without direct supervision.
- Tested and measured electrical characteristics of various electrical and electronic components using precise electrical testing equipment.
- Analyzed and interpreted blueprints and schematics.

PHILIPS LIGHTING CORPORATION: 1975 - 1993

ELECTRICIAN

- Identified and corrected electrical malfunctions, and performed preventive and corrective electrical maintenance without supervision.
- Repaired and maintained motors, controls, transformers, and solid-state circuitry.

MAINTENANCE MACHINIST/MECHANIC

- Repaired and maintained a variety of mechanical devices and equipment without supervision.
- Troubleshoot, fabricated, and reconditioned parts.
- Removed and installed parts and equipment.
- Tools used included hand tools, welders, and machinist tools and equipment.

MACHINE ATTENDANT/OPERATOR

- Maintained a variety of mechanical devices and equipment without supervision.
- Performed minor equipment repairs, equipment monitoring and machine adjustment while in operation.

ACADEMIC EDUCATION

- A.A.S. Degree: Business Administration, Fairmont State College
- Electronic Engineering Technology, Fairmont State College

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

- Computer Integrated Manufacturing, Marion Co. Technical Center
- Industrial Electronics, Monongalia Co. Technical Center
- Electrical Controls, Monongalia Co. Technical Center
- Industrial Electricity, Marion Co. Technical Center
- Machine Shop Technology, Monongalia Co. Technical Center

CERTIFICATIONS

- OSHA Special Government Employee (S.G.E.)
- Fundamental Skills of Managing Training
- Fundamental Skills of Communicating Training
- Supervisory Emergency Response Training
- Loss Control Team Leadership Training
- OSHA 510 Construction OSHA Standards.
- OSHA 500 Construction Industry OSHA Standards Trainer
- OSHA 511 General Industry OSHA Standards Trainer
- OSHA 501 General Industry OSHA Standards Trainer
- OSHA 521 Guide to Industrial Hygiene
- OSHA First Responder, Awareness: Hazardous Materials
- OSHA First Responder, Operations: Hazardous Spill Response
- FEMA IS-00700 National Incident Management System
- FEMA First Responder Technician: Emergency Response to Terrorism
- Hazwoper; First Responder, Operations Level
- Industrial Fire Brigade Training
- Fire Brigade Leadership Training
- Confined Space Rescue Team Training
- First Aid/CPR/AED Training
- Master Electrician, West Virginia State Certified
- Private Pilot Certification

COMMUNITY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- West Virginia Region VI Planning and Development Council
- Dept. of Labor; OSHA Special Government Employee (SGE)
- Allegheny Energy PowerPac Member
- VPPPA GoNet State Coordinator
- Leadership Marion Graduate
- Boy Scout Troop Committeeman
- Soup Opera volunteer
- Relay for Life Team
- Mountaineer Toastmasters

PERSONAL INTERESTS

- Hiking / Camping
- Scuba Diving
- Motorcycles
- Golf

The Educational Narrative

Write an autobiography that frames your educational experiences

Now that you've completed your educational resume, you've already laid out a chronological outline of some aspects of your life. Your next step is to build in details to create an essay that reflects who you are, where you've been, and how education will play a role in your future.

YOUR STORY

- Family life
- Work and unions
- School experiences
- The future

Look back at your admissions essay for another source. In fact, you can build from that essay to develop the longer autobiographical essay that the PLA portfolio requires. You want to create an essay that tells the evaluators about the experiences that have shaped your learning. It's up to you to determine which stories from your life are relevant here and how much you want to share.

Why Are You Writing This, Anyway?

The first step in any writing assignment is to understand your purpose. You've probably already thought a little bit about what you will include and why. You have plenty of stories you already tell when you meet new people, and you tell these stories for different purposes, all of which are related to this assignment. To be able to choose what you will include, you need to examine this assignment's purposes on two levels:

- Why did the college ask you to write this narrative for the PLA Portfolio?
- Why are *you* writing this?

While both purposes will be similar, yours will be the driving force behind your narrative, and it will shape your essay into a representation of you. So, what exactly are you supposed to do? By combining a discussion of your past experiences and what you hope to achieve in your future, this narrative will help to show your readers

- Who you are,
- What you've done,
- How your pursuit of higher education will help you become the individual and labor movement representative you want to be.

So, essentially, you want to write a memoir that captures your learning experiences and gives your readers an idea about who you are.

Writing Your Narrative

Write an autobiographical narrative that tells your story, describes your labor movement and work experiences, and lays out your educational experience and goals and how they will impact and enhance your labor movement activities and personal aspirations. Discuss what you have learned in life, what you want to learn, and how you hope to apply your learning. The detail and length of your narrative will vary, depending on the breadth of your experiences and your educational objectives, but aim for about five pages, double-spaced.

Your organization is up to you, and you should feel free to be creative and self-expressive. You should also include an explanation of the relationship between your educational goals and your current and desired labor movement positions and activities. Finally, reflect on how earning a bachelor's degree will impact your work within the labor movement and your life in general.

What Is a Memoir?

A memoir tells the story of your experiences. It's a form of narrative that captures part of your life on paper, and while it is nonfiction, it engages a creative process and reflection. Just as the reader learns more about you, you learn more about yourself. William Zinsser says,

A good memoir requires two elements—one of art, the other of craft. ... Memoir is how we try to make sense of who we are, who we once were, and what values and heritage shaped us. [...] Memoir writers must manufacture a text, imposing narrative order on a jumble of half-remembered events. With that feat of manipulation they arrive at a truth that is theirs alone, not quite like that of anybody else who was present at same events (6).

So, how do you get from the jumble of memories in your head to a memoir that is orderly and fulfills the purposes of the assignment? You might start off with by listing the information you want to include.

Brainstorming Exercise

Off the top of your head, what are some items *you* might cover in your narrative? For example,

- How did you first get involved in your union?
- What positions have you held?

- What activities have you participated in?
- What goals do you have for future contributions?
- What are your educational goals? How will they help you reach your career goals?
- How will your future degree impact your work? What about the rest of your life?

Take at least five minutes and brainstorm about each of these activities. Since human beings are built for stories, that's probably how you will remember your life's events. So you might be jotting down short titles to your stories, like, "the time I went to the jobsite with Dad," or "the first time I ran for president." These are short fragments that capture whole entire stories that you can write down later. How do they each fit into your purpose for the assignment? Reflect for a moment, and then get ready to start writing.

Getting Ready to Write

If all you have is your brainstorming list and an empty notebook, you may be feeling frustrated and afraid of getting started. Or, if you've already begun to write, and you're not sure what to do next, you might be wondering how to move forward. Either way, it's time to get your writing started. Is there anything you can do to make it easier?

How about freewriting?

Keep an open mind, and you may find that freewriting is just the answer you were looking for. Peter Elbow, well known for books like *Writing Without Teachers*, names freewriting as an effective way to improve writing. Here's how he describes it:

The idea is simply to write for ten minutes (later on, perhaps fifteen or twenty). Don't stop for anything. Go quickly without rushing. Never stop to look back, to cross something out, to wonder how to spell something, to wonder what word or thought to use, or to think about what you are doing. If you can't think of a word or a spelling, just use a squiggle or else write, "I can't think of it." Just put down something. ...The only requirement is that you never stop (3).

If you're wondering why you should try this, one simple answer is—it's a way to get started. But that's not all. It's a great way to capture ideas and allow ideas to develop without any background critical commentary. You might write something you can use in your essay. Or you might just release yourself from your worries and allow yourself to build confidence and ideas.

Freewriting Exercise

Write for 10 minutes without stopping. Do not stop to edit, change, admire, or revise. Just write.

Freewriting Review

Stretch your fingers and see if you have a new way of looking at this assignment. Take a look at what you've written. It's pretty amazing how much you can write in just 10 minutes, isn't it? Peter Elbow says, freewriting is "a way to produce bits of writing that are better than usual: less random, more coherent, more highly organized" (8). Not all of it will be good or useful, but the process of writing freely, without subjecting yourself to your internal editor will improve your writing generally and help you more easily access ideas that are important to you.

Lots of other writers support this idea. Consider what Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s advice: advises, "Don't sit around and wait until you have the story; just start telling the story" (in Zinsser 108). Frank McCourt says something similar: "Forget about writing. Just scribble, scribble, scribble, scribble. Put down anything. Write honestly. Write from your own point of view and your own voice, and it eventually takes form. There's no such thing as writer's block" (in Zinsser 77).

You may find that you will want to do the brainstorming exercise and the freewriting exercise a few more times on your own. You can use these to keep writing and focusing your ideas until you have plenty of raw material to work with. Later you can refine these materials into an organized and lucid whole.

Exercise: The River of Life and Work

On a large piece of paper trace your own working history, including your schooling and any job or work related experiences that influenced your union activism. Include also any persons or events or experiences that influenced the paths you have taken to get where you are today. Use whatever diagrams or images or colors you choose to convey this work life journey. As you work, think of the impact of your parents' jobs and educational backgrounds on your work-life decisions.

- Think of the obstacles, personal as well as societal, that you have experienced along the way (indecisions; fears, perceived failings, prohibitions, racial, ethnic, or gender discrimination; conflicting responsibilities, economic realities, etc.).
- Think of the privileges you have enjoyed along the way (money; connections; personal experiences; education opportunities; racial, ethnic, gender status, etc.)
- Consider how straight or circular your "career path" has been.

- Consider which of the twists and turns in your work life history were the result of a plan or choice or decision? On the other hand, which resulted from circumstance, chance, or luck? (How much choice, in fact, is involved in one's "career planning"?)
- Think about what you wanted to be when you set out, and where you are now. How would you describe your journey?

Source: Educational Planning curriculum.

Drafting Your Narrative

Introductions

Now that you've reviewed some of the logistics of narrative writing, you may be thinking, "Well that's all fine, but what I really want to know is how do I get started?" In other words, how do you open your essay? The introduction can be an intimidating task because it's the first part of the essay that the reader sees. You want it to set up the rest of the essay and make the readers appreciate your writing, your personality, and your experiences.

What are some ideas you have for beginning your essay? Try freewriting or brainstorming and see what you come up with. Here are some possibilities:

- Reflect on your parents' experiences and how you either wanted to imitate them or be completely different
- Begin with a poignant experience that taught you something, for example, getting fired or divorced or kicked out of school, having an accident, making a discovery, participating in a strike, being intimidated. This sets up the opportunity to reflect.
- Ask a question that piques your readers' interest—then answer it.
- Start off with an anecdote that grabs the readers' attention.

Body Paragraphs

As you draft your body paragraphs, keep details in mind. By giving your readers descriptions that resonate with sound, movement, and visualizations, you bring the readers into your story. Since part of your purpose is to reveal who you are, you'll need to move between detailed scenes that show who you are and summaries that bridge them.

Are you stuck here? Then go back to your brainstorming list and see what else you need to include. Try freewriting, then build the results into body paragraphs. Keep topic sentences in mind to help you control your paragraphs. And remember that transitional phrases help keep your readers focused.

Conclusions

The conclusion is particularly important in this essay, since you want to leave the readers with an understanding of why you want to earn your degree. Ask yourself, "What will

earning a degree mean to my future?” You want to show your genuine enthusiasm for the future you envision—a future that involves obtaining your degree and using it.

Some writers like to use a full-circle ending. To do this, go back to the introduction. Did you start with an anecdote or even a question? Try ending your essay with this same image; this technique can tie up an essay nicely.

Revising Your Narrative

Do you want your essay to read smoothly and make your message clear and beautiful? Well then, you'll need to reserve some of your time and energy for revision. When you draft, you want to keep your ideas moving. Don't stop to get the words just perfect, just grab the idea out of your head and get it down on your paper. Remind yourself that revision is a separate process; nothing is perfect when you begin, and it shouldn't be.

Toni Morrison explains, “When you first start writing—and I think it's true for a lot of beginning writers—you're scared to death that if you don't get that sentence right that minute it's never going to show up again. And it isn't. But it doesn't matter—another one will, and it'll probably be better. And I don't mind writing badly for a couple of days because I know I can fix it—and fix it again and again and again, and it will be better” (in Zinsser 200).

References

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Sample Narratives

Sample Narrative A

It all started for me on an early spring day in 1961. Unaware at the time, I was brought smack dab into middle class America, the first child of Ralph, and an assigned maintenance apprenticeship at Armco Steel. Mom, a year removed from high school, was the quintessential homemaker, washing clothes, preparing meals and dreaming of a beautiful home in the suburbs. Green grass, trees and breaths of fresh air will replace the constant soot spewed from the stacks of the local mill that cast shadows on her parent's row house in Western Pennsylvania. I spent many of my childhood days with my mom and grandmother in that small eastern European community, listening to the Pirates and Steelers on the radio, enjoying penny candy, waiting for Grandpa to come home and give me that treasured Kennedy half. Our days in the shadows were short-lived; the promise of a better living became a reality.

My youthful years were a tumultuous and bountiful time. Our brick ranch in the suburbs and two cars in the driveway indicated Dad's stability at the mill, yet visions of the war in a jungle half a world away dominated the newspaper and the evening news with Walter Cronkite. NASA's fulfillment of Kennedy's promise contrasted by the senseless killing of young protestors confirmed the ebb and flow of the tide. My friends and I enjoyed carefree days filled with baseball, basketball, football, and lounging poolside at the park. A bat, a ball, a couple of gloves, and any empty field satisfied our needs. From the Arab oil embargo, to the peanut farmer turned President, our mixed up world was struggling with its identity. On the other hand, my identity as an adult and fruitful contributor to society was starting to take shape.

The ripe old age of eighteen combined with wisdom beyond my years (so I thought) propelled me, like any self-respecting know-it-all, into the world of duty and responsibility. With the help of childhood friends, I landed in Phoenix, Arizona. I was in heaven, two thousand miles from home, no parents to answer to, no brother or sisters to deal with: paradise. Paradise however, had one glaring issue: how do I survive in this land of milk and honey? Off to work I went. Phoenix was just a watering hole in the middle of the desert at this time, the throngs of retirees and transplants from the northern climes had not started. Occupational opportunities for an eighteen year old, high school grad were limited. I began my life's resume mixing mortar in the 100 degree plus heat for hardly more than minimum wage. Between the heat and earnings that hardly kept my 1968 VW bug filled up, I needed a change. Night custodian at a large supermarket chain provided some hope of a decent living and the opportunity for advancement. The inability, or unwillingness, to assume the role of responsible adult role drove me back to the security of my youth.

A series of odd jobs here and there including short order cook, construction helper, convenience store clerk, finally culminated in securing a position as printing press operator for a local business forms shop. Although a few of my previous employers offered a decent wage and some form of health and retirement benefits, this job was what I considered my first "real" job offering all the amenities for myself and soon to be family. I worked hard at my new job, and tried my best to produce a quality product in an efficient manner. The shop had just relocated from a constricted space in town to a newly constructed wide open expanse. In addition to normal business forces, growth opportunities resulted from the firing of long term operators that attempted to form a union. This was my first introduction to the "union" and some of the activities surrounding it. Fear and trepidation were the order of the day and the unspoken warnings of "union affiliation" dominated the mindset and workplace environment. My naïve young mind and self preservation overcame any thoughts of stirring the pot.

Life was good and Karen and I were married in the late fall of 1981. She was the daughter of an immigrant card carrying Scottish Plumber, and I the son of a steelworker. We were living the

lives of any young couple our age, having fun, maintaining our home, and socializing with friends. Twenty months into our marriage we were blessed by the birth of our daughter Shauna. New car, new home, beautiful new baby, we were living the dream. Unfortunately, the road to the dream was marred with potholes. The biggest hole for me was the propensity to drink excessively. In the midst of paradise, from the depths of hell, alcohol dependency reared its ugly head. I tried to justify and rationalize but there was no escaping the fact that my drinking was beyond the social norm and I found myself committed to a drug and alcohol rehabilitation unit.

After the dust settled, I humbly accepted my new role as a recovering alcoholic and resumed my place as caring husband, loving father and hard working contributor. I viewed life differently these days, and a sense of confidence and maturity fell upon me. However, the repetitive mundane routine proved beyond what our young relationship could withstand and my significant other and I realized the error of our youth and went our separate ways. Embarrassed and demoralized, I returned to the soothing, mind numbing affect of my old standby; alcohol.

Gainful employment and alcoholism don't make good bed fellows. Needless to say my time at the print shop was limited and the gypsy life was soon to begin. Small time contractors, side jobs for cash and a stint with a hardware supply chain dotted my resume. The happy go lucky life was fast and carefree, but something was missing: my lovely Linda.

I met my wife one night at a local hot spot, ironically not far from that house where I spent time as a child with my grandparents. She was a polished, bright young woman with a refined sense of etiquette. We were in our mid-twenties and (unbeknown to me) looking for the promise of adulthood: a loving, passionate partner, good paying jobs, house of our own, and God willing, some happy, healthy children running around. Our relationship continued to blossom in spite of fact that I had not secured a steady, permanent job. My fortune would soon change.

I was enjoying some unassuming conversation one afternoon at my favorite watering hole with one of the other regulars and although we saw each other frequently, I considered him no more than an acquaintance. During the course of our chat, my friend was telling me about his time in the Army, then as a steelworker at the local rail car plant, (which was in the process of closing) and now as a general laborer in the Laborers union. He indicated that they were looking for men, particularly mason tenders. At that time, I didn't fully comprehend what it meant to be in the union, but I knew enough that the word "union" implied higher wages, health benefits and a pension. This was music to my ears.

At age twenty eight my road to prosperity started in earnest as a member of the Laborers International Union of North America. After going down to the local union hall, meeting the business agent, and paying my initiation fee, I was assigned with my friend to a small job close to home. This job was different, we worked at a normal steady pace, we were treated with respect and sense of equality by the other crafts and needless to say, the compensation was more than I had ever made. The union opened my eyes to the politics and bureaucracy that go on behind the scenes as well. For example, I was immediately approached to "volunteer" a percentage of my pay to the political action committee. There was no heavy handed, strong arming here, just the underlying suggestion that if I didn't contribute, it might be awhile before my next job came along. The organizational structure resembled the government: local unions, district councils, international union; all with their respective hierarchies and protocol. Through it all, the overwhelming message was clear, the union's top priority was to protect me, my family and a way of life for working men and women everywhere that demanded social and economic justice.

Laborers' and the work they do take a variety of forms. Some find their niche as carpenter helpers, asbestos workers, or cement specialists. My forte was mason tending. The work was mentally and physically demanding. The physical nature of the work demanded staying ahead of the game mentally to avoid doing things twice causing extra wear and tear on my body and inefficiency for the company. The combination of these demands kept willing participants to a minimum and need high for those of us who chose this field. The weather in western

Pennsylvania can be a blessing and a curse. The distinct four seasons provide us with some beautiful months in the spring and fall. Summers are typically hot and humid, while the winter months are equally cold and dry. For obvious reasons, work slowed during the cold, dark months and idle time spent at home collecting unemployment was the norm.

Positioning itself to take advantage of a movement that called for the remediation of dangerous materials used in industry from decades past, the Laborers district council of western Pennsylvania opened a new training center not far from home. The training center offered an opportunity to acquire the advance skill and knowledge required by law to work in these fields. These advanced certificates insured that the work we performed would continue to justify the social and economic standing we achieved through collective bargaining.

Certifications in Hazardous Waste Worker, a result of the Superfund cleanup project, Lead Abatement Worker, and Asbestos Abatement Worker all became part of my resume. The broad long term effects of the theoretical and practical knowledge gained from these courses in areas of chemistry, anatomy and physiology, physics and ergonomics manifest daily. For example, as a result of my hazardous waste worker training, I understand the detailed process of sending workers into a confined space. My training in lead and asbestos abatement gave me insight to the physiological dangers of lead ingestion and inhalation of asbestos fibers. Reduced cognitive function and asbestosis are just two of the many complications associated with the exposure to each. My down time provided me the ability to keep up with the new technologies in my own field as well. Training in scaffold usage, cutting and burning, and blueprint reading reinforced the practical knowledge I acquired in the field and kept me abreast of the ever changing Occupational Safety and Health Administration's requirements relating to the building trades and heavy construction industry. All of these advantages were carried out under the auspices of the Laborers International Union of North America.

The connotation of hard construction worker brought with it the implication of hard social player. I had no trouble fitting this bill and was proud to keep up the reputation. I worked hard during the day, and my wages as a union laborer provided me the means to play hard at night. On the brink of self-destruction and the loss of a second marriage and the unconditional love offered by my four beautiful daughters, I entered an outpatient recovery unit for round two of sobriety. But for the grace of God, and love of those around me, I humbly stand here today thankful for the sixteen years of freedom from the bonds of dependency.

A heightened sense of politics, years of attending regular monthly union meetings, and interaction with brothers and sisters from across the organized labor spectrum led me to become more of an activist. Created by the retirement of a long standing member, I was offered and graciously accepted an appointed to Recording Secretary of our local. The Recording Secretary at the local level is a member of the executive board, and is responsible for recording and reporting all minutes to the members and assisting the business manager on an as needed basis. The business manager asked me to become the Local's political action committee chairman (PAC) as well. Like any other volunteer based position, PAC chairman can be as large or small based on the time and effort one puts into it. Unfortunately, I had little time, and put forth minimal effort. Subsequently, the PAC reflected such.

Following an OSHA inspection and subsequent citation, I seized an opportunity to fill a void at my current employer, Etzel Masonry. Etzel was a small family owned business looking to move to the next level in masonry construction. Their increasing public presence (and the law) required them to institute a safety program. It was the perfect chance for me to convert the safety training I acquired into a practical field application. I spent many hours at Bailey library on the campus of Slippery Rock University designing and developing a comprehensive program suited to Etzel's safety needs. A HAZCOM (hazardous communication) program designed for safe container labeling and handling in conjunction with OSHA required record keeping, regular safety education and awareness training were all implemented. The impact of the education and training from the

western Pennsylvania Laborers training center was immeasurable. The leadership skills that I developed as Recording Secretary and the respect I garnered in the field factored in as well.

The prospect of working in a climate controlled environment utilizing my brain versus my back prompted me to set goals beyond the toil of manual labor. The Safety and Environmental program was my way out. That was my plan until the local mill that dumped its soot on my grandmother's porch and enabled my dad to retire comfortably at age 57 after 38 years of dedicated service, was hiring. I never desired to work at the mill, and my father discouraged it. After high school, I was to go to trade school and become a skilled craftsman. That was long ago, and now I was seeking to rest my weary back, and wind down my working career devoid of the physical demands of manual labor. In May of 1999 I hired on at Armco Steel and became a member of the Butler Armco Independent Union. The mill was a massive place constructed of steel beams, concrete and sided with corrugated tin. Overhead cranes, massive coil tractors and the constant drone of electric motors dominated the environment. I was new to the mill and listened to dad and others about what to expect.

I spent the first six months of my time at Armco in a department familiar and comfortable to me, general labor. Laborer in the mill had its similarities and differences to the general laborer on the outside. Similar duties included cement work, pneumatic tool use, pick and shovel work, and skilled craft helper to name a few. Major differences included mason tender and general clean-up (lots of oil and grease in the mill). I came to the mill for two reasons, first, to get away from manual labor and second, maximize my earning potential. Labor department offered neither, and at the earliest chance I needed a change.

In the fall of that year, apprenticeships in the Roll Grinding department came available. I was awarded one of the bids and started my apprenticeship in October of 1999 approximately the same time Armco merged with AK Steel and became AK Steel. This was the end of a long era of union/management cooperation. AK Steel had a reputation for creating a hostile workplace and my representative experience in the Laborers union prompted me to become involved with the independent union at the mill. The following year, elections for district representatives (similar to shop steward) were held and I was successful in my bid.

The district reps were the first line of defense in matters of contractual differences with local management. Safety, scheduling issues, overtime pay, rate and incentive pay and were all common issues. The company, in its infinite wisdom, was always stretching the envelope. We attended regular monthly meetings, and conducted a monthly department safety audit as well. Safety of the members being our top priority, we emphasized the importance and expedited any safety related issue. Our service to the members included involvement in the dispute resolution process also. If the initial meeting between the employee and management failed to be resolved, we entered the picture at the next step. Data collection and documentation was very important at this point. Depending on the issue and the global impact, these complaints might go all the way to arbitration, and the more evidence I gathered, the stronger (or weaker) our case. In addition to department representation, my service to the bargaining unit included; committee membership, community involvement and political activism.

Participation on the local union's committees was my first step toward becoming the full time officer that I am today. My first committee, grievance, was an appointed position by the bargaining unit chairman. This committee's primary function is to review all formal grievances for administrative errors, merit, and relative strength. The provisions of the contract said to be violated are scrutinized and a determination whether to send the grievance on to the next step or withdraw is made. I gained a lot of valuable insight into the negotiating process from this committee and achieved a greater understanding of the collective bargaining agreement.

Following our affiliation in 2003 with the United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America, UAW, our President invited me to chair the Community Action Program or CAP. The objective and purpose of CAP is to improve and enrich the quality of

American life. We do this by engaging in community services and other activities. In addition to those mentioned, I've worked on the Benefits committee, seventy-fifth anniversary committee and several other ad hoc committees.

The opportunity to take my participation in the union to the next level came to me by way of officer elections. In June of 2008, I had the great fortune of being nominated and successfully elected the Rate and Incentive Chairman of our local. My position exists primarily to assist members in matters of economics. I work closely with the industrial engineering department in order to examine, analyze and implement any new or improved procedures relating to production or workplace efficiency. As a standing member of the grievance committee, I am also involved in the broader issues that confront the membership as well. My participation in the political process expanded also. Newly elected Pennsylvania district three Congresswoman Kathy Dahlkemper extended me an invitation to join her Labor Advisory Board which I humbly and graciously accepted. The work that we do in conjunction with this body may quite possibly affect working Americans for decades. I am most excited and anxiously looking forward to exchanging ideas with the Congresswoman and the members of this group.

For the past twenty years, I've enjoyed the security blanket provided by membership in a labor organization. I have been through good times and bad, but the constant has been my reliance on the protection of a collective bargaining agreement. As I continue to grow and develop in my leadership position, I realize the need to communicate with other labor leaders to establish and convey a unified message. Our message goes beyond the bounds of our members, it is one that contains the promise of fairness and equality for all working Americans. My ability to effectively communicate our message necessitates continued education. I'm experiencing a paradigm shift in my life. The desire to provide for myself is being replaced with the desire to provide for future generations. The fact that we compete in the global environment requires a higher understanding than what sufficed previously. Higher understanding requires a higher level of knowledge. Completing my degree, combined with my leadership position, will help me to learn and therefore apply my learning. My ability to understand what I've learned will allow me to transfer it to those poised to pick up the torch. This is the essence of education. Preserving the past, protecting the present and providing for the future of working Americans has become my primary occupational goal, and gaining my degree will be the driving force to achieving it.

Many thanks to the anonymous student who agreed to share this narrative.

Sample Narrative B

by Patrick Stewart

It was another long day as we headed back to the office. We decided to take side streets since the freeway was packed from an earlier cig alert. As we made our way around the city a job site stood before us. Out in front two workers were sitting on a stack of drywall. It would have been real easy to keep driving, instead of stopping to talk to the workers. There were only a couple more miles to my car in the parking lot, which was waiting to take me home to my house in the suburbs. My wife and kids were probably in the living room watching Jeopardy, wondering when to start dinner.

This was an opportunity too good to pass up: two workers without any supervision around. We parked the car, walked up to the gate and squeezed between the chain-linked fences. The workers were talking, finishing up the last of what was left in their lunch boxes. One of them was wearing a Raiders hat so I let him know I was a Chiefs fan. We started joking and giving each other a hard time. It was the perfect ice breaker. They had just finished a ten hour day with no

overtime. I explained that we were union organizers but we once swung a hammer just like they did. We sat there on that stack of drywall telling our stories to one another. It's an amazing thing when you identify with people; it comes down to just one worker talking to another. They had the same dreams that we had, taking care of their families, sending their kids to school, and hoping their children would have a better life.

I told them, "See that building you're working on. It's going to create wealth for the developer long after you finish the project. Shouldn't you get your fair share of the pie?" Neither worker had any insurance. The company offered a 401K but they couldn't afford to pay into it. They just hoped and prayed that their wives and kids did not get sick or hurt. This was a story told over and over again for non-union workers.

We shared our experience and a hope for a better life, but more importantly we gave them a different kind of blueprint, one that showed what workers could do when they stood together. As the sun was sinking behind the skyline of Los Angeles, you could see by the looks on their faces that change seemed possible. After all, they were doing the same work, so why should they not get the same wages? We exchanged numbers and asked them to come up with the names of a couple other workers who felt the same way as they did. Then we would find a place to meet. That's when I realized what an incredible job I had. We get a chance to change lives. I know my own life has changed tremendously from where I came from.

I was born in Kansas City, Missouri, the youngest of a family of four. My sister Diane was eleven and a half years older, my brother Frank was ten years older and my sister Susan had three years ahead of me. Diane was mentally retarded and had the learning capability of a five year old. That made her the perfect playmate for me. My brother Frank was my idol. He carried me on his shoulders and took me for walks in the woods. In the trees behind our house we avoided "quick sand" (it was really just wet sand) and army ants. When I was five we moved to Manhattan, Kansas. Those early years were pretty dysfunctional. My dad was an alcoholic, and my mom was neurotic. She never forgave herself for bearing a mentally retarded daughter. Sadly, she mostly took it out on my sister Susan, because she was normal. My brother was more like a father to me and that's how it was.

I was really an adult by the time I was eight years old. Having had to put my dad to bed drunk, and watching my parents fight, always afraid to have any friends over to my house not knowing what might happen. However there were good times mixed in with the bad. Living in a small town I got to ride my bike everywhere. I stayed at the pool in the summer all day and played hide and seek in the neighborhood at night. As far as school went I excelled in what I liked and just scraped by in everything else. It was like that all the way through high school. I wish I had money for every report card that said "Patrick has a tremendous amount of potential, but he doesn't apply himself". It should come as no surprise that I was the class clown. I logged lots of hours in the principal's office as well as detention. I was also that kid that did whatever anyone dared him to do.

When I was fourteen my parents divorced and my dad moved out to California. My sister Diane had to be put into special care because she developed a rare syndrome called Kinetic Drops. She had no control over when she would black out. My brother Frank was the class valedictorian, and received a full scholarship to the University of Kansas. When my dad heard that he was skipping classes, he went for a visit to the campus. He found Frank in his dorm room with a fifth of Jack Daniels on the dresser and a bag of weed in the drawer. The next thing my brother knew he was in the Coast Guard. Like my dad, my sister also went to California. This left me alone with my mom and with no real direction.

Although after seeing what alcohol had done to my family I vowed that I would never drink. That lasted for the most part until I was about fourteen years old. All the confusion, fear, and stresses of life in general were a lot easier to deal with when I was partying. It also made me feel accepted. I was passing bad checks and had my car repossessed when I was sixteen. I learned early

on how to read people and how to tell them exactly what they wanted to hear. Everybody believed me because they had no reason not to. I was an extremely likeable kid that you wanted to help, but a great liar.

I too came out to California in my senior year of high school to live with my dad and stepmother. I found Pasadena High School to be overwhelming with a population of 3,000, a long way away from Jesup High School with a graduating class of 40. I wanted to leave Pasadena High School early, so they made me a deal: if I could pass all my finals in one day, they would let me graduate. Of course I did not study, but I did pass them all, barely. My dad felt it was in my best interest to leave the house. At that time, I dabbled at junior college taking mostly theater arts classes. I spent the next few years drinking and abusing drugs.

About four years later, my father retired from the Operating Engineers union. At the time of his retirement he was operating the freight elevators at Crocker Towers in down town Los Angeles. He had a good relationship with the foreman who was running the acoustical ceiling crew and was able to give me the opportunity to go to work for them. I showed up the next day on the job twenty two years old with shorts and a t shirt. I had no idea what I was getting myself into. In the early 80's there was not much talk of unionism even though I was working for a union contractor. I was told get your upgrades, do some side jobs, and work for cash on Saturdays. The union was strictly a vehicle to make money and that was the only exposure I had.

I continued to party in those days. I was single with no responsibilities, drugs and alcohol was very prevalent in my life. In 1991 the recession hit and work became very slow so I decided to go back to school. I took telecommunications at Pasadena City College. During this period I got sober and met my wife. When the talk of having a family and getting a house came up I knew the place to make that kind of money with health care was the union. I got myself reinstated with the Carpenters Union and my attitude completely changed as well as my exposure to unionism.

In early 1997 an application was sent out to all members looking for organizers. They had a new general president who was a visionary. He wanted to get back to grass roots organizing. When I saw the qualifications for the position I knew it was perfect for me. Out of over 400 applications they narrowed it down to 45. They held an extensive three day evaluation including roll playing, house calls, committee meetings and anti union meetings where you were part of a non-union company. Out of the final 45 applicants I was the first one hired in Southern California. Who knew that with all my life experiences and ability to motivate and communicate, I would get an opportunity to help workers?

The first two years I spent doing traditional bottom up organizing. This included hundreds of house calls and job site visits. I was also involved in setting up boycotts in San Francisco and Arizona. I was very fortunate to work with David Young, who is now Executive Director of the Writer's Guild of America. In 2000 the Carpenters Union changed direction in my department and switched to area standards campaigns employing the use of banners handbills and demonstrations. That first year I was in the field checking jobs and participating in all aspects of top down organizing.

The leadership noticed that I had strong communication and computer skills. Slowly I started to divide my time between the field and the office. I was trained on research, getting information on our targets, owner's developers, general contractors and tenants. I started sending out notice of labor dispute letters on our targets that did not meet area labor standards. In time I was making follow up phone calls and negotiating with all parties involved in projects using our targets. I was given the nick name the "funnel" because all information came through me. Within a few years this became my primary duty. I was also fortunate enough to work with the labor law attorneys and I got the opportunity to testify at the 9th and 10th circuit regarding our banners and handbills. At the time I left the Carpenters union I was working on campaigns in Southern California, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico. I was point person for communications on the Mid-West Drywall campaign for the Carpenter's International. I had an (800) number directly to my

office and fielded calls from across the country. I did all the radio and press interviews and took care of the banners and handbills. The result of an awesome team effort was signing Mid-West to a number one agreement bringing in 1500 workers. I was then asked by the general president to take the same roll with the nationwide and Canada Four Seasons campaign. The program that we established in Southern California was so successful that they sent executive secretary treasurers, representatives, and organizers from around the country to learn our system. Eventually, I reached a professional plateau at the Carpenter's Union and after eleven years I made the decision to take a position with the IBEW. Having been with the IBEW for over a year now, I am confident I made the right decision. I was able to use the relationships and skills I developed at the Carpenters Union to help make an immediate impact in the private sector. Additionally, working at the IBEW has opened new opportunities for me to grow as a labor professional.

At this point the door is wide open. I know that additional education can only help make me a better employee as well as a better person. One of the best things about being with the IBEW is the exposure to a whole new world in the labor movement. Anything that I can learn to improve my skills can only enhance this new exposure. My hope through obtaining my BA is to become a strong leader in the labor movement. I want to use this education as a means to elevate myself and the others around me. I feel earning a BA is something that will have a positive effect on my life personally and professionally. I look forward to the National Labor College giving me the opportunity to accomplish these goals.

Prior Learning Essays

Reflecting on your college-level learning experiences.

Simply put, prior learning assessment essays make an argument, just like most other forms of writing. You are already an expert at arguing, so you know that you will need to clearly state your argument and offer credible support.

PLA ESSAYS

- College Course
 - Experience
 - Learning Reflection
 - Documentation
-

PLA Essays start with your experiences. Your challenge is to reflect on what you learned from specific experiences and how that learning fulfills the requirements of a college-level course. By the time you've written your resume and your narrative, you've already invested in thinking carefully about what you've learned throughout your life. Next, you need consider how your learning relates to specific college courses.

Finding Appropriate Courses

You should plan to begin with the NLC College Catalog at www.nlc.edu. If you've been active in organizing or arbitration or apprentice training, for example, you'll find courses in these areas and many more. One obvious advantage to NLC courses is that you can be sure that there will be resident faculty expertise to evaluate your essay.

You can also seek alternative sources. If you coached sports teams, for example, you'll need to find a college that offers physical education courses. The Thomas Edison State College Prior Learning Database at <http://www2.tesc.edu/plasearch.php> is a useful resource. Visit and try searching for a course that will work for you.

Once you read the course description, reflect on how it compares to your experiences. Look back at your resume and narrative and pull from the reflective work you have already done. Invest a little time to interpret the course description—what learning objectives does the course fulfill? Your best bet is to try to find a syllabus for the course (many are posted on the web, or you can email the department or instructor and request a copy). Syllabi often lay out the student learning objectives in detail, and that will make your argument clearer and more powerful.

Go to the PLA Workshop virtual classroom and share your finds with the other students—and hope that others have shared the courses they’ve found. Post a question or a topic area you’re struggling with, and let your classmates share their expertise.

Prior Learning Assessment Essays

Write an essay connecting your learning to a specific college-level course. At the top of each essay, set off in italics, present a college catalog course description, including the college name, credits, and Internet address.

Begin your essay with an introduction that clearly states that you have fulfilled the learning requirements of the course and request the credits you believe you have earned.

Build your essay by describing how your learning relates to each element of the course description. Include detailed information about what you learned, how you applied it, and continue to apply it. As you develop the details of your experiences, clearly reflect on what you learned.

Connect documentation verifying your experiences to your essay, for example letters of recognition or appreciation, awards, certificates, photographs, materials you have produced (contracts, newsletters, organizing or political materials, etc.), or letters verifying or documenting experiences. (See *Earn College Credit for What You Know* for additional ideas.)

Conclude by summing up and restating your argument, including the credit request.

Upper-Level Courses and PLA

As you consider which courses work best for your PLA essays, keep in mind that you may need upper-level courses. If you have transferred 70 or more lower-level credits, the NLC requires all of your remaining courses to be upper level. Upper-level courses are generally numbered 300 or 400 and require students to demonstrate higher levels of competency. Check with your advisor to see if this applies to you.

Writing a PLA Essay

Learning Reflection Use freewriting to explore your experiences: build connections to what you learned and how you applied your learning to new situations.

Your PLA essay’s purpose is to demonstrate your learning compared to the requirements of a three-credit college course, though course credit hours may vary.

As you write and revise, remember learning reflection: your essay must clearly document that you have achieved college-level learning comparable to a specific college course.

A three-credit request typically ranges from three to five pages in length, single spaced. If you use the word count feature in Word, aim for a minimum of 1,500 words, not counting the course description, documents, extensive quotation, or embedded examples.

Once you've identified a course with learning objectives that you have already fulfilled experientially, it's time to move into argument mode. Your job is to convince (first your instructor and then) the PLA evaluation team that you have already achieved the learning objectives of the course.

Pull the learning objectives out of the course description and/or syllabus and build yourself a comparison/contrast chart to help frame your argument. In the following, take a look at how you might approach a course like Computer Skills for Trade Unionists. The first rows offer you some possible responses—you try filling in the rest.

Course Learning Objectives	What I Did	What I Learned
Ability to apply word processing tools to union work like contracts and proposals.	Used word processing programs for 20 years	Applied word processing technology to my work as a customer service representative, using the software to establish and maintain good relationships with customers.
Ability to use presentation software effectively to communicate with union members.	Developed PowerPoint presentations for customer service training seminars.	Learned to apply visual techniques to improve trainee understanding and to emphasize key policies and procedures.
Ability to apply spreadsheet software functions to present data.		
Ability to search the internet effectively.		
Ability to analyze effective uses of technology in labor unions.		

Remember this is just a start to help get you thinking about how to build your critical analysis of your prior learning experiences. College classes are complex—but so is your learning; plan to invest some time in building deep, thoughtful reflections on your learning achievements.

To help yourself with reflection, return to freewriting. Think about what you did and where it led. Explore tangents to see where they lead—learning word processing in the example above may have prompted the student to explore desktop publishing and move into newsletter writing. If you need help, go to the PLA Workshop online classroom and post your query to your classmates. Your instructor and advisor can also help you think through the learning gained through your experiences.

To write successful PLA essays, you need to ensure that critical reflection on your learning is the primary text in your essay—this is the main evidence for your argument.

PLA Essay Format

Title of Essay

NAME

EMAIL

Course Description, Credits, College Name, Internet address

Present the entire course description at the top of the essay, set it off from your text with italics. Include the college name, number of credits the course is worth, and the precise internet address where you found the description.

Text

INTRODUCTION

Begin with a clear introduction that states the purpose of your essay. Aim for at least two or three sentences, and include a thesis that makes your credit request and argument clear. For example, "Through my extensive experiences as an apprentice instructor, I have already fulfilled the learning requirements of the NLC course Teaching Techniques I, and I request three credits."

BODY

Build each paragraph with a clear topic sentence that connects your learning to the course learning requirements. Offer examples of your experiences and develop them with details, then reflect on what you learned from the experience. Make it clear to the evaluators what you have learned, not just what you have done. Add call outs in the text as needed to point to specific documentation, for example, "See Exhibit A for a copy of the syllabus I developed that shows my understanding of adult education techniques."

Although most essays you will write at the NLC will be double spaced, PLA essays are single spaced to help students and evaluators see when an essay meets the minimum length requirements. For each credit, present AT LEAST one solid single-space page (500 words). Essays that do not meet this requirement will not earn the credits requested. Use a 12-point font like Times or Garamond.

CONCLUSION

End by restating your thesis. Your conclusion should tie up the essay and emphasize that you have learned what the course required through your experiences.

References

Not all PLA essays will have references, but if yours does, follow American Psychological Association style, which is covered in the *Bedford Handbook* or the *Pocket Style Manual*, texts recommended for this workshop.

Documentation

Each essay should have at least one, preferably two, documents that verify your learning. Label these clearly for your final presentation, so evaluators can quickly and easily locate your document and immediately understand how it supports your essay. If you can't think of a good document, don't skip this step! Ask for help. Credits cannot be evaluated without appropriate documentation.

Documentation

Documentation

Each PLA essay needs documentation with callouts in the text to build clear connection to your learning.

Mining Your Records

You have many options available to document your learning experiences. Think about what materials you have kept over the years (you know, the ones in boxes and filing cabinets and basements). Do you have certificates for volunteer service or training? Examples of contracts, photos of community service activities? Thank you letters from those you have served? Take a look at these potential forms of verification:

1. Signed letters (from present or former employers, supervisors, associates or others) that explain and describe what was expected of you in your work: what you actually did, what skills and knowledge were required for you to perform satisfactorily, the period during which you engaged in the activities, what job titles you held. Letters of verification might also include a description of your college-level achievement or competence in particular areas, job descriptions, or appropriate performance records, or a variety of other pertinent information.
2. Official records of workshops and seminars attended; military accomplishments; courses taken (in-service, noncredit, adult education, correspondence, etc.) or other learning experiences.
3. Products that result from your learning: newsletters you edited, flyers or brochures you created, speeches you presented, photos of your work in the community, etc.
4. Certificates, licenses, awards, honors.

If you get stuck, ask for help. Your instructor has probably fielded your question before and can help you think up credible ways to document your learning.

Overdocumentation

After you have assembled all documentation, you should review it thoughtfully, eliminating duplication or items that do not contribute specifically and directly to supporting your application for credit. Once you have done your best to eliminate excess, you may find that some documents are quite long; please underline or highlight the most relevant parts of long documents and ensure they are referenced in your essay.

Organizing Documentation and Verifying Materials

Work on building clear connections between your documentation and your essays. Use callouts in the text to refer to numbered or lettered exhibits and explain how the document verifies your learning.

For example, if you are documenting your learning for the NLC course Computer Skills for Trade Unionists I, you will want to explain to the evaluators how you gained your

experience, what you learned from it, and how your document verifies your essay. In a paragraph analyzing your learning of the word processing skills course requirement, you would want to offer sentences like these in one of your support paragraphs:

Sample PLA Paragraph with Documentation Callout

I started using word processing software 20 years ago when I began my career as a customer service representative and have renewed and expanded my skills and ability to apply this software over the years. At that time, I was able to learn basic functions of word processing, and, as I have moved forward in my career, I have continued to develop these skills, applying them to new situations. As the letter from my former supervisor indicates (see document A), after learning word processing basics in a staff training session (see certificate, document B), I was able to analyze my work load and engage the program to automate mail merges, track customers' special needs and preferences, and create the layout for a training manual for new customer service staff. Through this work, I learned how to apply technology to solve everyday problems and how to communicate more clearly and effectively. Further, I was able to apply the basic wordprocessing concepts to other kinds of software, like spreadsheets, so I could further improve my productivity and skills.

With the callouts provided, the evaluator can then easily see the connection between the learning discussed in the essay and the documentation that helps to verify it.

Sample PLA Essays

Sample PLA Essay 1

Credit Request for Organizing and Representing the New Workforce by Joel Ochoa

LBOR 4181: Organizing and Representing the New Workforce, National Labor College Catalog, 2007-2008

As new immigrants and young people enter the workforce in ever larger numbers, there are many new challenges for unions to face in involving these workers in the union movement, especially in organizing and bargaining campaigns. This course will explore the challenges and opportunities this new workforce brings to the labor movement, and look for solutions in both historical and present day campaigns. Questions of race and gender and how the union movement deals with these issues will also be explored. 3 credits. www.nlc.edu/currentStudents/courseCatalogs.html

I am requesting credit for the course listed above because based on my activities as a community and labor organizer with several unions since the mid 1970s, I have achieved the learning expectations covered in this course. I have worked, primarily, in Southern California where the population is diverse and the labor force is very reflective of that reality. In the 1990s when the aerospace and other durable and non-durable sectors began their decline, some unions made significant gains organizing minority workers. Three cases that I considered benchmarks in Southern California are SEIU's Justice for Janitors Campaign in the service industry, IAM's

American Racing Equipment campaign in manufacturing (see Exhibit A for the contract I negotiated), and the Drywall movement in residential construction. I participated in two of those campaigns: American Racing Equipment and the Drywall Movement.

Immigrant Workers and Immigrant Communities

Based on my experience in organizing Latino immigrant workers, I will describe some lessons I have learned in organizing campaigns. There is a misconception that Latinos are unorganized and indifferent to join the institutions of society; particularly labor unions. Both assertions are incorrect and only reflect our ignorance about the fastest growing minority group in America. The truth is that Latinos are organized in many forms, and have historically been discriminated and rejected by labor.

There is a long history of labor and community participation in this country. Historians like Debra Weber and Juan Gomez-Quinonez have documented early participation in the trade union movement in the early 1900s when Mexicans formed their “own unions” for the purpose of collective bargaining because they were rejected by Gompers and the AFL. This experience of labor participation by Latinos was also expanded throughout the Southwest wherein Latinos participated in mining, cannery, steel, garment and other industries. The same can be said about organized community and civic participation when Mexicans founded their own “mutual aid” societies for the purpose of full engagement in society. Although this participation was not exclusive to Latinos (other immigrant groups had similar practices) it adopted its own cultural idiosyncrasies such as expression in the arts and letters.

In contemporary society, Latino immigrants have adopted new forms of self-organization such as the clubs based on shared origin, where people organize by hometown, state, and country of origin. These are powerful networks for organizing as the clubs have aligned themselves into trans-border federations with the capacity to mobilize by millions as was proven during the 2006 Mass Mobilizations for Immigrants’ Rights. These federations have served immigrants with legal orientations on housing, jobs, healthcare, etc., and also have become pipelines for the workforce into specific sectors.

The organizing campaigns of American Racing Equipment (Exhibit A) and the Drywallers in Southern California (Exhibit B) are precursors to the 2006 mobilizations. In each of these campaigns, the state of origin of the leadership played a key role: for American Racing the main leaders were from the state of Michoacan, Mexico, and for the Drywallers from Guanajuato, Mexico. Whether on a soccer field or in a plant, these networks exist as a “sub-culture” therefore, labor as an institution, does not see them.

What I have learned in working with these groups is that this community has to be approached in a holistic manner. Despite a larger hostile environment, these communities have survived and thrived because of their own internal solidarity. It is also my experience that with the exception of the Justice for Janitors campaign (a sector targeted by SEIU) the other examples are the result of self-organization, with the members of the “sub-culture” approaching unions for representation. In other words, organized labor has not tapped into this vast reservoir of unorganized workers. To the contrary they have sought us out.

UCLA Professor Goetz Wolfe estimates that there are more than 500,000 unorganized workers in light industry in Los Angeles County. Eight-five percent of these workers are immigrants. That is the future of the labor movement in Southern California.

American Racing Equipment Campaign

In August of 1990, more than 1,200 immigrant workers who produced aluminum wheel car rims went out on a wildcat strike. The labor movement found out about this uprising through the pages of the *Los Angeles Times*. The strike lasted for three days at which point the workers returned to work with the clear understanding that they needed to join a union. The union chosen was the

IAMAW. On December 20, 1990 these workers won their campaign for union representation and began the process of negotiating their own contract and forming their own Local under the IAM structure. Both were accomplished by September 30, 1991 when their first contract was ratified.

To organize this group the Machinists and the AFL-CIO had to bring Spanish-speaking organizers to the plant. This process coincided with the mass legalization of immigrants made possible through a government-sanctioned amnesty in 1987. As part of the legalization process, I served to put citizenship classes together for these workers. These workers brought into this country their own set of organizing skills. They only needed some orientation with respect to processes under the NLRA.

The IAM chartered Local Lodge 1910 for American Racing. All of the IAM materials needed to be translated, including the Constitution, which we accomplished. The workers elected their own President and Executive Board and conducted all of their business in Spanish.

Several important lessons were gained through this experience. One must be observant of what people bring to the table. In this case, the leaders and the workers only needed some orientation to the bureaucracy; they already possessed the “know how.” I participated in three negotiations, in two assisting, as lead in the third. (See Exhibit A for the contract.) I also negotiated a severance package when the plant decided to move some of its operation to Mexico, directly impacting several of the members. For me, globalization came full circle. I also learned how to identify and develop leaders, and bring them into positions of leadership within the labor movement.

Drywall Movement

This is another “in your face” example of the self-organization capacity of immigrant workers. During the 1970s, unions in the building trades lost their ability to retain their foothold in the residential construction industry in Southern California. To some degree it remains the same today. A notable exception was the Drywall sector which by the end of 1992, after six arduous months of strike, workers were able to force 70% of drywall companies to sign a master agreement containing wage increases based on square footage and medical benefits.

The strike spanned across six county lines, from the Mexican border up to Santa Barbara. The nature of the strike was very militant and consisted of pickets in hundreds of construction sites, many of them simultaneously, marches and demonstrations across Southern California and the closure of the Hollywood Freeway during rush hour traffic. These immigrant workers were fearless and committed to build their own union.

The leaders of this movement, as in the case of American Racing, were all from the same village in Mexico. In this instance, before they engaged in the organizing drive, they returned to Maguey, Guanajuato to seek the blessings of their elders.

I began meeting with this group of workers under the auspices of the California Immigrant Workers Association (AFL-CIO) in 1991. From the beginning, I observed workers bringing their wives and children to the meetings which, in many instances, lasted for hours. The Drywallers had their own networks of crews and most of them were related to one another. Approaching the crew leaders became a priority. Once a critical mass was established the talk of a strike emerged.

The traditional campaign planning took on a different perspective when spouses joined the picket lines and ensured the “basics” were provided for, including a demand for diapers and formula as part of the essentials families needed to support the strike.

Books have been written based on some of my experiences in this strike. Because of litigation and out-of-court settlements I am precluded from offering further comments in this context. (See Exhibit B.)

The lessons to me were clear, as they should be for the labor movement, that we have sectors of workers who are ready to join our movement; we just have to learn how to approach them. That means understanding how race, gender, and immigration status all factor in to the

development of new strategies for organizing. The role of community and political support were also pivotal lessons in winning the campaigns mentioned above and paving the way for later campaign strategies and tactics. Labor needs to be engaged at the community level, identifying and developing leaders regardless of their national origin and gender. Another important outcome of this experience was the recruitment of key leaders of the strike into full-time staff positions in the labor movement.

Based on my activities as a community and labor organizer for more than 30 years, I have achieved the learning expectations covered in this course and request three credits.

Documentation:

Exhibit A: American Racing Equipment Contract

Exhibit B: Drywall video (as shown on PBS in “We Do The Work”)

Note that documentation could not be shared in this format.

Sample PLA Essay 2

Credit Request for Union Administration – 3 credits by William A. Worsham

I found the following course description in the 2007-2008 NLC course catalog:

LBUA 4900: Union Administration

This course will provide a comprehensive understanding of virtually all aspects of the administration of unions. Students will be exposed to a wide variety of situations and problems encountered by union officials carrying out their duties.

I have already satisfied the course requirements for this class in as much I will demonstrate that I have developed a comprehensive understanding of all aspects of the administration and day-to-day operation of a local union. Therefore, I request three credits.

I was appointed in 1980 as the business manager of a local union affiliated with the Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA). Local union business managers are required to run for office every three years to keep their jobs. I was elected without opposition nine successive times over my career with the local union spanning twenty-five years (King letter, Exhibit A). In addition to serving as a local union business manager, I was elected as the Recording Secretary/Secretary-Treasurer of the North and Central Florida Laborers' District Council, a position that I held for fourteen years between 1991 and 2005. In 1997 I was appointed as a special international representative for LIUNA, an international staff position that I still serve in today. I served in all three of these positions until the Southeast Laborers' District Council (SELDC) offered me a job in 2005. I accepted the offer and moved to Nashville, Tennessee in October 2005. Currently, I am employed by the district council in the position of assistant business manager (Farner letter, Exhibit B).

As I reflect on the start of my career as a local union business manager after all of these years, it seems unbelievable to me that I entered a job with very little knowledge of what the job of a business manager entailed. I was virtually unprepared for the challenges which lay ahead of me. Fortunately, I was lucky enough to work in the same office with an older and wiser construction business manager who had experience representing public employees and managing the affairs of a local union. I honestly don't know how I would have managed without his mentoring and assistance. As time passed, I improved the skills I had learned while performing the duties of a

steward. At the same time, I learned new skills which I applied to the many problems I encountered on a daily basis managing a local union. I expanded what I had learned in the areas of grievance handling, collective bargaining and leadership, while I developed new skills training stewards and managing the day-to-day operation of a local union. Prior to my election as business manager, I served as chief steward and as a member of the union's negotiating team. It was not until I went to work for the union full time as business manager that I fully developed expertise in the field of union administration. I will discuss and explore the administrative skills I developed in the areas of grievance handling, collective bargaining, leadership and training, which I believe were critical to my development and success as a business manager of a local union.

Grievance Resolution

Grievance resolution and solving problems before they become grievances is a necessary part of representing workers, who more often than not, do not possess the requisite training and knowledge necessary to adequately prepare and reduce grievances to writing. Most workers are unaware that a grievance must be filed within a specific period of time, or that a written grievance must provide certain information, such as the date of the alleged violation, the article alleged to have been violated, an explanation of how the contract or policy was violated, and the remedy the employee is seeking.

I wrote my first grievance shortly after I was appointed as a union steward. In the beginning, grievances that I wrote often lacked clarity, and did not always convey the information necessary to make a compelling case. As I gained more experience investigating and filing grievances, I learned to gather the evidence and testimony I needed to construct my argument and reduce it to writing. I learned to write in clear and concise terms, organizing my thoughts into logical and compelling arguments, supported by written evidence and oral testimony. I improved my skill at oral argument, which when accompanied by a well written grievance, normally resulted in a favorable decision (Marshall Letter, Exhibit C). I learned early in my career, that not being thoroughly prepared prior to a grievance hearing was a sure way to lose a grievance. I did not keep track of the number of grievances I authored and filed during my career with the local union, but I imagine the number exceeded a thousand grievances over thirty years.

Collective Bargaining and Effective Communication

Negotiating collective bargaining agreements is another facet of union administration which demands a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the collective bargaining process. My first experience with contract negotiations took place early in my career, when I was appointed by the business manager as a member of the union's negotiating committee. My first impression of the process was that it was us against them, a style known as adversarial negotiations. I was unaware that there were different models of negotiations that I could employ to arrive at an amiable settlement. The other model which I learned later in my career is known as interest based or principled negotiations, a style where each party explores its own interests and the interests of the other party, in order to understand what each side needs to reach agreement. Essentially, each party must peel away the layers of the onion, in order to see what motivates and drives the proposals each party puts on the table.

My initial effort at assembling and writing contract proposals for negotiations was not particularly successful. With time and experience, I learned to write contract proposals in clear, concise language. I found that well written language conveyed a clear-cut and immediate understanding of the changes the union was seeking. I strengthened my organizational skills and learned that by going into negotiations fully prepared, I was able to gain a certain advantage resulting in a favorable outcome. This learning provided me with the tools I would need later in my career as assistant business manager of the SELDC in Nashville when I got the assignment to negotiate a new collective bargaining agreement with Vanderbilt University in June of 2006. These

negotiations were a test of my abilities and a confirmation of the learned skills I employed over the next eight months that ultimately resulted in the ratification of a great contract for the workers the Laborers' represented at Vanderbilt (Canak letter, Exhibit D).

Leadership

I believe leaders are born with a certain innate character, which if nurtured over time, will blossom and develop into a talent to lead others in this world. A critical area of my development as a successful business manager involved effectively demonstrating leadership. As a leader I felt it was important that I set an example for the other officers and stewards in my local. I developed the ability to motivate and inspire employees who I represented. Employees joined the union because they wanted to join. In a right-to-work state such as Florida, public employees do not have to join the union, but most of the employees I represented believed in me and supported me. Not all employees I represented joined the union, but a majority of employees did join the union, bolstering my efforts to negotiate better contracts and resolve grievances at the lowest possible level.

Managing the affairs of a local union is a complex undertaking, which requires union officials in smaller locals to spend an inordinate amount of time performing administrative functions for the local. Managing a public sector local union is particularly difficult because unlike business managers in the construction industry, income is limited to monthly dues. Construction locals charge working dues in addition to monthly dues, which generates a majority of the local's income. One secretary and I were the only full-time employees for the local. Our local had all of the tax reporting and payroll obligations of a larger construction local, and only two of us to prepare and file the reports. During this time I also served as the secretary-treasurer of the North and Central Florida Laborers' District Council, for which I received a small monthly salary. In addition to my other duties as a local union business manager, I was responsible to keeping minutes of council meetings, preparing and issuing monthly payroll, making timely deposits and completing and filing tax reports (minutes of council meeting, Exhibit E). I learned that people look to others for leadership and direction. Maybe it is that they are reluctant to make decisions that affect their lives and the lives of others, or perhaps people just want someone else to take responsibility. Whatever the reason, I found that leadership develops over time with experience. I learned that the workers trusted me to make the right decisions and to have the answers when they had questions.

The basic skills that I developed representing workers as a union steward, and later as business manager, established a solid foundation of learning that I was able to improve upon over time with experience. I reflect on the mistakes I made, and the lessons I learned from those mistakes, and I realize that this is how learning occurs. The important thing to remember is that it's okay to make mistakes, as long as one learns from those mistakes and moves forward to the next challenge, whatever it may be.

Supporting Documentation

Exhibit A, Charles L. King, letter of verification

Exhibit B, Glenn Farner, letter of verification

Exhibit C, Bill Marshall, letter of verification

Exhibit D, William Canak, Ph.D., letter of verification

Exhibit E, Recorded minutes from meeting of the North and Central Florida District Council and the North and Central Florida District Council PAC.

Note that documentation could not be shared in this format.

Finalizing Your Portfolio

After a few final steps, your portfolio will be ready for submission.

Now that you've crafted the main elements of your portfolio, it's time to put them together. Before you print out the final copy of your resume and your essays, spend some time reviewing, revising, and proofreading to make your essays as perfect as possible. Obviously, any written work is likely to have an error or two, but to present your work as credible and creditworthy, work hard to eliminate any errors that will prevent you from earning credits.

CHECKLIST

- Cover letter
- Resume & Essays
- Documentation

Prepare a brief cover letter that tells the reviewers what you have included in your portfolio: in addition to the resume and narrative, how many PLA essays did you include? This should appear at the front of your completed portfolio and should have all your relevant contact information, including a daytime phone number, your email address, and the dates you took the PLA Workshop. Should the evaluators need to contact you, they will rely on this. The cover letter is also useful because it ensures that the evaluators locate each PLA essay (the number of essays varies from portfolio to portfolio) and evaluate them properly.

Your cover letter will also make evaluation costs clear to you and the student finance department. Present a total number of credits requested and consult the evaluation fee structure for the amount due. Evaluations cannot be processed without the fees.

Costs for Prior Learning Assessment

PLA Workshop:	\$336
PLA Review:	\$336 for 1 to 15 credits \$336 for 16 to 30 credits

Fees cover a portion of administrative costs and are not related to the credit award.

For a 30-credit PLA portfolio submission and the workshop, the maximum cost is \$915.

Please note that PLA costs cannot be covered by federal financial aid.

Critical Review

Before you assemble your portfolio, take some time to review your work as if you were the evaluator. First check the elements:

- Is your resume complete? Did you make the corrections suggested by your instructor? Is it free of error and easy to read?
- Did you write a full narrative of at least five pages? Did you include a paragraph or two at the end that looks to the future and what you might do with your degree? Is it clearly written and free of errors?
- Do your PLA essays meet all of the requirements? Check the length (500 words or one single-spaced page per credit minimum) and the course description (did you include the college name and credits?). Review carefully for learning reflection and ensure that it matches the course description. Verify that your documentation is clearly connected with callouts.
- Did you include a cover letter that lists the courses and credits requested?

Revising

By now you should have gone through several drafts of your resume and essays, but every piece of writing is likely to need additional revision. You have to push yourself to revise one more time and critically examine your writing. Go to the Purdue Online Writing Lab for some suggestions to help you with your revising. Start here <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/561/05/> and then surf around for additional help.

Proofreading

Yes, it can be tedious, but failing to proofread tells your readers that you don't care about your work. Invest some time now in learning to proofread effectively, and you will benefit for the rest of your life. Take a look at the Purdue Online Writing Lab for some ideas to get started <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/561/01/>.

Printing, Copying, and Binding

As you print your final copies and prepare to submit them, please consider the environment. **DO NOT use sheet protectors** for your submissions, and, if possible, print on both sides of the paper (you'll save on shipping, too). Keep it simple, inexpensive, and environmentally friendly. If you are able to produce one electronic PDF file of your entire portfolio (including the cover letter and documentation), then you may email it to Jennifer Harrison at jharrison@nlc.edu.

Your goal is to present an organized and readable portfolio, so locate a suitable folder. If you have a lot of documentation, you may need a three-ring binder, but a paper folder with binding in the center will work, too. Neatly punch holes in your resume, essays, and documentation. Put your work in order (cover letter first) with the

documentation immediately after each PLA essay. If the documentation is not clearly connected, your essay may not be eligible for credit.

Saving the Original

Do not send any original documents with your portfolio, since the NLC will keep these materials permanently. Copy your entire portfolio for your files. If a PLA evaluator needs to contact you with questions, it will be especially handy for you to be able to look through a copy of your submission.

Shipping Your Portfolio

Mail your portfolio to Jennifer Harrison, PLA Portfolio Program, 10000 New Hampshire Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20903. You do not need to ship your portfolio overnight or via express delivery (save the costs and the environment). When your portfolio arrives, you will receive a receipt confirmation email.

Reviewing Your Results

Reviews may take up to eight weeks, and processing may take a little longer, so please be patient. You will receive a letter via email after your portfolio has been assessed and the account cleared by student finances. Review the results carefully against the portfolio copy you kept. Did the evaluators award all of the credits requested? Congratulations! If you're planning to write additional PLA essays, you can use your own essays as a model.

If you didn't receive all of the credits requested, examine your portfolio and figure out why. In most cases, essays fail to earn credit because they have not fulfilled one or more of the requirements. If you can't determine why your essay(s) did not earn the credits requested, consult with your advisor. If necessary, your advisor can contact the evaluators for further explanation. And, remember, you always have the option to write another essay to reach your PLA credit goal.

Take a look at your updated transcript—see the experiential learning section? If you have not earned the maximum 30 PLA credits (or the maximum 84 transfer credits), you can consider working on additional PLA essays in the future and submit them as a supplement.

PLA Supplements

If you decide to submit a supplement, you do not need to include your resume or narrative. Simply present a cover letter noting that you are supplementing your portfolio along with a list of essays and credits requested and contact information. Include a check for the additional fees as necessary.

Cover Letter Sample

Dear NLC Evaluators:

In addition to the enclosed resume and narrative, I have included the following PLA essays with clearly connected documentation:

- Computer Skills I 3 credits
- Teaching Techniques I 3 credits
- Organizing I 3 credits

I am requesting a total of 9 credits for now and plan to submit additional essays next month.

I assert that I have prepared all of the enclosed essays, and all information is true to the best of my knowledge.

Sincerely yours,

NLC PLA Participant

Appendix A: PLA FAQs

Is there a fee to review my PLA Portfolio? — Yes, the portfolio review fee is \$336 for the first 15 credits and \$336 for review of 16 to 30 credits. Please note that this fee helps to cover the processing costs involved in managing portfolios.

Do I have to pay any fee for each credit awarded for my experiential essays? No. While some schools charge by credit, and prior learning assessment can be quite costly, the NLC charges flat fees to make PLA as affordable as possible.

What is the maximum number of credits I can earn for PLA essays? Thirty; 15 in any single category such as welding, construction, leadership, organizing, etc. Consult with your advisor to ensure you understand your transcript, transfer credits, and degree requirements before you start writing.

Are there limitations on the content areas I can use as the basis of my PLA essays? Yes. Experiential essays will be accepted in the content areas that are covered within the majors, certificates, or areas of concentration for any of the NLC degree programs. At the discretion of the NLC, other content areas may be reviewed depending on NLC faculty subject-matter expertise. All other content areas may be reviewed, at the discretion of the NLC, but the student may be required to pay an additional fee (\$185) for an external review. A student will be notified if an essay does not fall within these guidelines. The student then has the option to substitute the essays with new essays that fall within these guidelines or agree to the additional fee. In almost all cases, external reviews will take a significantly longer time to complete. Don't worry, though, PLA faculty can usually help students work around this challenge.

Can I write experiential essays to meet any of the general education requirements for graduation? No. All general education requirements must be met by completing a minimum of three semester credits within the required general education disciplines. While these credits can be transferred from an accredited institution, they cannot be earned through the PLA process. You may, however, write essays for these courses to fulfill your credit requirements.

Can I get credit for CEUs (continuing education credits)? No. CEUs are not the same thing as academic credit, but these noncredit units can be used to document your PLA essays.

Can I receive transcript credits for any licenses I possess? In most cases, simply having a license (such as real estate, aviation, inspector, FCC, etc.) does not count for credit. The major exception is the A&P License (airframe and powerplant). Generally, all others must come in through the PLA portfolio.

What are the standards for prior learning assessment essays? All PLA essays must include a course name, description, college name and website, detailed analysis of your experiences and learning, and clearly referenced documentation.

Course Description: First, ensure that the course you have presented is from an accredited college or university (this should be prominent on the website, try the “About Us” section). Set off your course description from the text of your essay to ensure clarity and include the semester hours (s.h.) or credits available. Include the website, so the evaluators can seek additional information if needed.

Length: Essays must be a minimum of three pages at a maximum of 12-point text size, single spaced (approximately 1,500 to 2,000 words, or one single-spaced page per credit). If your topic takes longer to develop, then your essay will be longer; you should be sure to fully demonstrate your experiences AND reflect on your learning within the context of the course description you are using. This length requirement is exclusive of course descriptions and other auxiliary content. Students who do not meet this minimum will not be awarded the requested credits. However, meeting the length requirement does not guarantee the essay will earn credits.

Documentation: Build in references to your documents in your essay to ensure that reviewers understand how the documents serve as evidence of your learning. Present your documents and essays in a clear, professional manner, so evaluators can efficiently review your work. For example, when developing what you learned from a training experience, you might refer to the certificate you earned and included as documentation like this (See Exhibit A for a certificate that verifies this training). Then label your documents, so the evaluators can find them easily (right after the text of your essay). Documentation is vital to your evaluation—it triangulates the argument in your essay by verifying your learning—essays cannot be evaluated without documentation.

What types of documentation do I need for my experiential essays? All essays must have documentation: a certificate, picture, letter, CD with examples, etc., to confirm students’ learning experiences. Students who do not include documentation with each essay that is clearly connected and REFERENCED with a call out in the text (see example above) to the learning being discussed will not earn credit. Documents and other submissions become NLC property and will not be returned.

What about apprenticeship credits? ACE (American Council on Education) reviewed apprenticeships may potentially count as direct credit. Other ways that

apprenticeships come in are with community colleges that offer associate degrees for apprenticeship programs. Other apprenticeships must come in through the experiential credit essay and documentation route. Check the Online Orientation and Advising site in Moodle for any changes or updates and consult with your advisor.

Are all apprenticeships worth the same amount of credits? No, the maximum numbers offered in an ACE reviewed program may not necessarily be awarded to each apprentice. Variables such as year of graduation, specific courses taken within a program and apprenticeship concentration will impact the final total number of credits awarded. Each apprenticeship certificate is reviewed individually, and students should not assume they will be awarded the highest number mentioned for a particular apprenticeship.

What about union partnership credits? Everything mentioned concerning apprenticeship credits also applies to union partnership credits. Each student is different and should not make assumptions concerning totals of credits until they are reviewed and entered on a NLC transcript. Remember, like-named, same content, etc. courses are not union partnership courses unless they are offered and certified by the partnering union and approved by the NLC. As a regionally accredited institution, the NLC must follow strict regulatory requirements.

What about my military training? Visit these sites to find out:

- Army: To receive your Army, National Guard or Reserve transcript go to the Army/American Council on Education Registry Transcript Service (AARTS) web site, <http://aarts.army.mil/>.
- Navy/Marines: For Navy or Marine transcripts use the Sailor/Marine American Council on Education Registry Transcript (SMART) web site, <https://www.navycollege.navy.mil/>.
- Air Force: The Community College of the Air Force issues Air Force transcripts. Visit their transcript web site for directions on requesting your transcript, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/ccaf/transcripts.asp>.
- Coast Guard: To get the form to receive your Coast Guard transcript go to the U.S. Coast Guard Institute web site at http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg1/cgi/active_duty/go_to_college/official_transcript.asp.
- The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is the official repository for records of military personnel who have been discharged from the U.S. Air Force, Army, Marines, Navy and Coast Guard. You can request your DD21 via mail. To expedite this process use the online eVetRecs system web site. The address is <http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/>.
- If you have a transcript or DD214 that does not list the amount of credits awarded for training, research the credit awards online at www.militaryguides.acenet.edu.

I have taken a non-credit course with the same title and content as a course offered by the NLC or a partner, or a course that has been reviewed for credit by ACE but offered by another organization. Why can't I receive these credits on my transcript without writing an essay and providing documentation? The accreditation rules governing the awarding of credit either by transfer or ACE review are very clear in describing what can or cannot be accepted by the NLC. Only those courses offered by the NLC or a partnering organization can be potentially reviewed for direct transcript credit in these circumstances. This is the same for ACE reviewed courses. Only students taking the course from the specific sponsor and during the dates listed in the ACE materials can potentially be accepted. If in doubt, check with the NLC before assuming that courses are credit-worthy. In most cases, these courses can be considered for use in essays for your portfolio.

How do I enter college transcripts on my NLC transcript? Make sure that you have official copies of all transcripts sent to Office of the Registrar, NLC, 10000 New Hampshire Avenue, Silver Spring MD 20903. Unofficial or student copies of transcripts are not acceptable for transfer credit review; you must have an official copy sent from your previous accredited college or university directly to the NLC.

How long does it take to review my portfolio and hear back from the NLC? Generally, you should allow six to eight weeks for the process to be completed. Portfolios that need additional work will obviously take longer to complete. Holidays, degree weeks, etc. may also delay portfolio review. If you are on campus and are waiting for news about your portfolio, you should stop by Academic Services or the faculty building and inquire.

How should I forward my portfolio to the NLC? Send your portfolio by UPS or the USPS in a manner that allows you to track the package and guarantee that it arrives at the NLC; there is no need to pay for express rates or other charges. Simply ship the most cost effective way possible. You can also personally drop off your portfolio to the admissions office on campus. In all cases use the campus address (NLC PLA Program, Attention: Jennifer Harrison, 10000 New Hampshire Avenue, Silver Spring MD 20903).

Should I make a copy of my portfolio before I mail it? Yes, yes, and yes. Do not include original certificates; no materials will be returned to students.

Who should I contact if I have questions concerning the PLA process, writing my essays, or providing documentation? While you are enrolled in the PLA workshop, your instructors will be available to answer your questions. Your advisor is also a valuable resource and should be consulted as you develop your portfolio. Or you may contact Jennifer Harrison at jharrison@nlc.edu.

Appendix B: Liberal Arts Skills

Liberal arts skills are transferable, functional abilities that are required in many different problem-solving and task-oriented situations. This list of skills which are used in careers and in other life situations was developed by Paul Breen and Urban Whitaker in consultation with students, faculty members, and employers in the humanities and behavioral and social sciences.

Try using this list to decode course descriptions, then craft your own learning reflections from concrete examples of your experiences. For example, if you find a course description with a learning objective that uses critical thinking skills, like “defining and analyzing issues” (from Negotiating and Writing Contract Language, LBUS-3912, NLC), you can look below for ways to explain your learning. If you consider how you were able to “define the parameters of a problem” in contract negotiation, and tell a story about it, your learning reflection for this PLA essay will gain power.

If you have skills that don’t seem to match a particular course, try using this list to build connections to the learning objectives and competencies that the course requires. You’ll be using your critical thinking skills “define the parameters of a problem,” and building the evidence you need to convince evaluators that you have learned at the college level.

Information Skills reflect the ability to...

- sort data and objects
- compile and rank information
- apply information creatively to specific problems or tasks
- synthesize facts, concepts, and principles
- understand and use organizing principles
- evaluate information against appropriate standards

Communications Skills reflect the ability to...

- listen with objectivity and paraphrase the content of a message
- use various forms and styles of written communication

- use media formats to present ideas imaginatively
- identify and communicate value judgments effectively
- describe objects or events with a minimum of factual errors
- create innovative solutions to complex problems
- analyze the interrelationships of events and ideas from several perspectives

Critical Thinking Skills reflect the ability to...

- define the parameters of a problem
- adapt one’s concepts and behavior to changing conventions and norms
- apply appropriate criteria to strategies and action plans
- take given premises and reason to their conclusion

Research and Investigation Skills reflect the ability to...

- use a variety of sources of information
- apply a variety of methods to test the validity of data
- identify problems and needs
- design an experiment, plan or model that systematically defines a problem
- identify information sources appropriate to special needs or problems
- formulate questions relevant to clarifying a particular problem, topic or issue

Personal/Career Development Skills reflect the ability to...

- analyze and learn from life experiences—both one’s own and others
- develop personal growth goals that are motivating
- identify one’s own strengths and weaknesses
- accept and learn from negative criticism
- generate trust and confidence in others
- take risks
- accept the consequences of one’s actions
- “market” oneself to prospective employers

Design and Planning Skills reflect the ability to...

- identify alternative courses of action
- set realistic goals
- follow through with a plan or decision
- manage time effectively
- predict future trends and patterns
- accommodate multiple demands for commitment of time, energy and resources
- assess needs
- make and keep a schedule
- set priorities

Administration Skills reflect the ability to...

- analyze tasks
- identify people who can contribute to the solution of a problem or task
- identify resource materials useful in the solution of a problem
- delegate responsibility for completion of a task
- motivate and lead people
- organize people and tasks to achieve specific goals

Appendix C: PLA Approaches

Getting an Idea of What Credit Might be Appropriate

Your request for credit based on prior college-level learning should be made in consultation with your advisor. It is the responsibility of the expert evaluators to arrive at appropriate NLC credit amounts for the learning they identify. Of course, you will probably want to come up with a first approximation of at least a credit range to assist in your planning. Credit derived from transcript learning, examinations and, in many cases, from licenses or certificates is easily translatable into NLC credits. An estimate of credit for learning growing out of experience may be determined in several ways:

- Your advisor may be knowledgeable in the fields for which you are requesting credit. By reading your essay and examining the letters of verification he or she may be able to estimate how much credit is appropriate as a first approximation.
- There may be other advisors on the faculty who are experts in the area in question. Either you or your advisor might consult with them about an estimate.
- There may be no one at the NLC with appropriate expertise in the area for which you are requesting credit. In this case, it will be necessary for the NLC to consult an outside expert.

There are other ways to estimate how much credit your learning may be worth.

- Look at college catalog course descriptions to get an idea of how much credit is typically awarded to particular studies.
- Consult the descriptive booklets for the CLEP examinations to see the range of knowledge each examination tests and how much credit is assigned to it.
- If you have completed courses or independent studies at the NLC, you can ask yourself how much credit this learning would be worth if it were included in a course of independent study.

Identifying Creditable Learning

Creditable learning should be equivalent to college-level work in terms of quality. You may demonstrate this in one or more of the following ways.

1. Relating your learning to subject areas traditionally taught in colleges.
2. Indicating that what you have learned is at a level of achievement equal to what is normally taught in college.
3. Comparing your learning with groups who have completed college level work.
4. Relating your learning to a personal goal that might require college level learning.
5. Identifying your learning as that normally acquired reaching adulthood.
6. Identifying your learning as that normally acquired after high school and expected for professional acceptance.

The learning should have general applicability outside of the specific situation in which it was acquired. For example, you may have learned the specific procedures for processing personnel applications at one company. If you also learned principles and techniques that would apply at several other companies, then you might expect to receive college credit or recognition.

The learning should include both a theoretical and practical understanding of a subject area. Even though you may not have applied the knowledge you possess in a practical situation, you should be aware of how it might be applied. If you have learned how to do something, you should understand why you are able to do what you do. You should not expect to receive college credit or recognition for mere application of a skill or a narrowly prescribed routine or procedure.

An expert will evaluate your learning. You should be able to describe precisely what you know and can do and what appropriate attitudes you have developed as a result of your experiences and be able to demonstrate to an expert in the field that you possess the learning that you have claimed. Such an expert should be able to objectively measure and evaluate the learning that has occurred.

You may be required to demonstrate that there is some relationship between what you have learned and your proposed program of study at the National Labor College. You may be asked to demonstrate an ability to integrate “old” learning with proposed “new” learning.

Most people are learning constantly in life, but not all of this learning would be accepted for college credit. To assist you in understanding the types of prior learning

growing out of your life experience that may or may not receive credit, we have provided some examples and exercises.

You have probably had experiences in preparing a resume of your life experiences for job hunting purposes. A prospective employer is interested in what you did on your last job. The National Labor College (NLC), on the other hand, is interested in what you learned from these experiences. You might find it useful to think of your task of identifying your learning growing out of your experience as the preparation of an outline of your knowledge, skills or competencies (analogous to a resume of your job experiences).

In proceeding with your task, you will be developing what we call learning components and, eventually, learning descriptions of these components. A learning component gives structure to and provides a label for a series of interconnected learning activities, subject areas or skills. For example, in a job as a sales manager, you may develop skills in speaking to groups of salespersons for training purposes. You may also have experience in addressing groups through community volunteer activities. Perhaps, additionally, you might complete a noncredit course in public speaking at a local continuing education program and you may attend in-service workshops through your company to sharpen these skills. In developing a public speaking component, you would bring together the learning involved in each of these experiences under the learning component headed "Public Speaking."

Approaches to Identifying Learning Components

Here are several different approaches to identifying your learning components. Review them all quickly and select the one you find most appealing or logical.

Skills/Competency/Knowledge Approach

Some of you will be able to identify the major areas of your skills or knowledge immediately. If so, begin by making a list. Don't make it hard work but go quickly without being selective. Your lists might look something like this:

Photography

- camera technique
- light, lenses, filters
- darkroom technique

Aeronautics

- theory of flight
- navigation
- weather

Brokerage

- stock exchange operation
- corporate finance

- customer relations
- sales

Review your list

- Do all the items represent college level learning?
- Should some be eliminated?
- Are your categories too broad?

If you have experience with a large organization and list business administration, you should be more specific; for example, you might also break your learning down into such headings as corporate finance, marketing, sales management. On the other hand, you may have listed categories that are too narrow: typing, shorthand, filing might be combined as secretarial skills.

Job Experience Approach

Some students find it easier to structure their thinking by reviewing each of their jobs or major experiences chronologically. Make a list with three headings:

Where and When I Did It	What I Did	What I Learned
Hollyhock School, 1978-1980	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Taught 3rd Grade ▪ Developed Curriculum “Know Your Community” ▪ Chaired A/V Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teaching Strategies ▪ Curriculum Development ▪ Knowledge of A/V Aids

After completing your listing for each job or important learning experience, review your lists. Are there duplications? Credit can be claimed only once for any learning even though most individuals have repetitive experiences. For example, suppose you had experience interviewing prospective employees for the XYZ Company. Later you worked in the Department of Social Services, and one of your responsibilities was interviewing clients. To receive credit for both, you must be able to demonstrate that significant additional learning in interviewing techniques was acquired at the Department of Social Services.

Duplications may also occur between courses for which you expect transfer credit and skills used on your job(s). To receive additional credit, you will need to be careful to identify learning above and beyond or separate from the course content. For example, if you are a nurse who has been engaged in general patient care following graduation from nursing school, it may be difficult to prove new learning even though you may have refined or strengthened your nursing skills.

After you have eliminated duplications, you will need to bring together all of the knowledge, skills or competencies that are interrelated into learning components. The following example may be helpful:

Job Experience	What I Did
Hill Publishing Co., 1975-1977	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Book Production ▪ Library Science ▪ Cataloging Procedures ▪ Copy Editing ▪ Proofreading ▪ Manuscript Reading ▪ Copy Writing ▪ Catalog Production ▪ Manuscript Evaluation ▪ Research Methods ▪ Abstract Writing
Commercial Art Course, 1978	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Basic Drawing ▪ Color ▪ Type and Typography ▪ Advanced Typography ▪ Layout and Advertising

As you can see, this student needs to find some umbrella terms to describe his skills and knowledge. His layout and typography skills learned through the Commercial Art School have clearly been utilized in his job at the Hill Publishing Company; he also needs to find some way of combining his course and his work experience to avoid duplication. After analyzing this carefully and consulting with his advisor, the student's list looked like this:

Editorial Skills

- proofreading
- copy editing
- research
- manuscript evaluation
- abstract evaluation
- graphic skills
- typography
- catalog and book production
- layout

Through conversation with his advisor, the student realized he had not listed all of his library skills, so he developed a separate component. It looked like this:

Library Skills

- knowledge of reference materials
- cataloging forms and procedures
- copyright research methods

Autobiographical Approach

Some people don't realize how much they know until they hear themselves say it. You might try this approach with the assistance of a friend or member of your family who could record the important points; you might "say" it into a tape recorder; or you might write an account of your important experiences. As you begin, you need not be concerned about describing learning or skills; simply list those experiences in life that were important to you for any of the following reasons:

- you think you learned a lot,
- you are pleased with what you were able to achieve,
- you received appreciation/recognition from other people,
- you expended considerable time, energy or money,
- you found the experiences enjoyable,
- you found the experiences painful,
- any other reason that is important to you.

Significant life experiences often build on one another. Describe how one activity may have prepared you for a future activity. Be sure to include experiences you believe have been significant to your personal development and learning. What you are striving for is to identify themes: the significance of short-term and long-term experiences.

Once you have completed your autobiography, in which you have described your significant life experiences, you will be ready to proceed to the next. The process described under the job/experience approach will be useful. In helping you identify what you learned through prior experience. You now need to analyze what you learned.

Random Approach

If you are spinning your wheels and can't get started, you might begin by quickly making a random list of what you know. Then review it and bring together related skills or knowledge to develop learning components. If the term "component" is the stumbling block, just ask yourself what it is that you know after years of working and living that a traditional student has had to learn in the classroom. Some examples might be interviewing techniques, news writing or computer programming.

Preparing Learning Descriptions and Supporting Materials

As you reflect on the nature of your experiential learning and on ways to present a convincing claim that this knowledge is worthy of college credit, you may find it helpful to consider the questions below. Because the questions are intended to help define and describe many kinds of learning, not all will be relevant to your learning experience. However, answering carefully those which are relevant should lead you to a clearer definition of what you have learned and what proof you can offer of that learning.

- 1.** How did you acquire this learning (as a worker, volunteer, apprentice, student, hobbyist or other role)?
 - When did the learning take place? Over what period of time?
 - Where did the learning take place (in what company, institution, agency or other setting). Did it involve formal learning in courses, workshops or training sessions?
 - What documentation do you have to substantiate the above (certificates, manuals you wrote, newspaper clippings, engineering designs, etc.)? Can you obtain further documentation?
- 2.** If your learning involved substantial reading, can you provide a bibliography of that reading?
- 3.** Did you learn by performing tasks?
 - What were these tasks?
 - What changes in the tasks occurred during the time of the learning? What did you learn from these changes? Did different job assignments cause you to learn various aspects of a field?
 - Did the tasks involve learning complicated procedures? Trial and error? Finding ways to make improvements?
 - Did you learn more about your field by supervising or training others?
- 4.** What skills and knowledge did you learn that would be useful in any similar situation?
 - What makes you feel that these are college-level skills and knowledge?
 - What are some ways you could demonstrate these skills and knowledge to an evaluator? (Explain verbally? Actually demonstrate a procedure? Present documents or items that you have prepared during the course of your learning? Work problems on paper? Write a guide or manual that would explain your field, or part of it, to an outsider? Write a “term paper” on a specific aspect of the field?)
 - Can you distinguish your “how to” skills from your theoretical knowledge?
- 5.** What are the ideas, principles, or concepts that underlie the knowledge you have?
 - Have these concepts ever been brought out in readings or training sessions that were connected with your learning experiences?
 - Did these concepts enter into discussions you had with fellow workers or supervisors?
 - Did you need to formulate them for any specific task, problem solution or presentation?
 - Have you ever formulated broad concepts about the area in which you have knowledge simply as personal reflections? Can you do so now?

6. What insights have you had from this learning? How have your abilities to accomplish new activities or tasks grown from these insights? What are your judgments about appropriate applications of your practical knowledge?
7. What aspects of the field have you not explored in depth? What aspects would you like to pursue in future learning?

As you organize those reflections into a “learning description” for credit by evaluation, remember that the NLC will award you academic credit for your college-level learning, however that learning came about; but it will not award credit for what you have done, even if you have done it for a long time or have done it very well. In writing your “learning description,” therefore, it will be important for you to focus, not on your experiences or achievements, but rather on what you learned through these experiences and achievements.

The order of the questions above may help you to organize your “learning description.” For example, you might begin by explaining (in no more than one or two paragraphs) how you gained the learning, what documentation of this learning you can provide and what reading you have done in the field. Then you might explain the nature of your learning, including clarification of both the general scope and particular aspects of your knowledge (here it will be important for you to indicate levels of skill and more theoretical understanding by mentioning underlying principles of the field).

Try, if possible, to explain your original thoughts, judgments, and insights about the field and about possible practical applications of your knowledge. You need not go into great detail; but, because this part will be very helpful to evaluators in establishing the depth of your learning, it may be worth extra reflection. Finally, indicate what aspects of the field you do not understand and what plans for future learning you have.

It is not essential that you follow this exact order. Your “learning description” should provide, in whatever order seems most appropriate, a clear, readable abstract of your learning in each area you are presenting for credit by evaluation.



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