

# STUDENT GUIDELINES for the ACADEMIC PORTFOLIO

An academic portfolio submitted to the Office for Prior Learning at the University of Southern Maine is a collection of evidence: "a formal communication presented by the student to the university as a part of a petition requesting credit or recognition for learning outside the college classroom. The [academic] portfolio makes its case by identifying [college-level] learning clearly and succinctly, so that faculty can use it, alone or in combination with other evidence, as the basis for their evaluation"<sup>1</sup> allowing either course-equivalency or general university credits toward a degree.

Construction of an academic portfolio is not simply an account of your prior learning. It is in and of itself, a learning process. As John Dewey long argued, meaningful learning involves both active and reflective processes. The process of building an academic portfolio offers the student an opportunity to recapitulate key experiences, analyze and interpret them, and articulate and critique how these experiences contributed to what they have learned. The portfolio process has the potential to significantly deepen understanding of our experiences and how they have influenced who we are and how we live our lives.

The challenge of an academic portfolio is to bring experiences together with applicable theories and concepts from the academic disciplines. In doing so, students can become ever keener observers of their own experiences while also growing in their capacity to understand conceptually abstract material. Well-written academic portfolios provide ample evidence of the knowledge students have learned, for which they intend to receive college credit. Students must document their specific learning competencies which they have acquired through prior experience. Learning competencies are: knowledge, abilities, and/or skills that students have acquired through their prior learning and that relate to college-level content. In the portfolio process, students must provide convincing documentation, which is the evidence, written or performed, substantiating that knowledge, skills, and abilities have indeed been learned from their prior experience(s).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the written content of the portfolio must meet high college-level standards, articulated on the following pages, including the following components, and addressing the following issues:

- 1) **Title Sheet.** Provide two copies of the title sheet, one for PLA and one for the evaluator(s), so that you may be contacted directly. Include your name, address, date of submission, phone number, and e-mail address.
- 2) **Table of Contents.** Include a one-page reference to all subsequent sections of your portfolio by page number.
- 3) **Letter of Intent.** Write a letter to the Office of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) which explicitly states the reasons for submitting your portfolio and the outcomes which you expect to emerge. The letter of intent will include the following:
  - Learning outcomes you intend to prove
  - Area(s) of expertise you intend to demonstrate
- 4) **Current résumé.** Update your résumé of one or two pages, to include a synopsis of your educational background and work history. Include relevant professional memberships, awards, commendations, publications, and supplemental experience or achievements (i.e. Speak fluent French; or Certificate in Court Mediation).
- 5) **Unofficial Transcript.** Submit an unofficial USM transcript along with transcripts from other institutions you have attended.

- 6) Syllabus for Course(s).** If your portfolio is course-specific (as opposed to general elective), include a syllabus for each course pertaining to your portfolio content. A syllabus will serve as the basis for your academic portfolio goals.
- 7) Personal Statement.** Different from the Letter of Intent, the personal statement is autobiographical. It reveals your background relative to your college-level learning competencies. A personal statement is your opportunity to introduce yourself to the evaluator(s).

**College-level learning is described as:**

- o A synergistic interplay of the candidate's experiences, with his/her narrative of the learning and problem-solving which has occurred. These act as springboards for ...
- o ...a conceptualization process to intuitively happen, which leads to ...
- o ...a reflection process, internalized and churned into ...
- o ...conscious college-level knowledge which, through analysis and critical thinking, can be ...
- o ...generalized to new learning situations ... and
- o ...the cycle starts again.<sup>3</sup>

Your task in the personal statement is to narrate the context in which you acquired the knowledge and relate it to the discipline in which you seek college-level credit. The personal statement is a personal reflection that mirrors your understanding of the discipline. It tells how you learned, rather than what: which skills, abilities, behaviors, values, and attitudes, intentional or not, you used to discover core competencies embedded in your experiences which may give you credit in the targeted discipline.

Here also, you may include your goals and ideals for this portfolio, as well as the organizational structure you intend to use to archive and display your learning competencies.

**Please note that for certain portfolios the Personal Statement may be integrated into the next section. Check with your academic portfolio evaluator before writing the Personal Statement section.**

- 8) Competencies and Learning Outcomes.** The learning outcomes and competencies are the heart of your presentation. For course-specific portfolios, they will reflect the syllabus of the targeted course. This section will most directly influence the credit your academic portfolio will earn. The competencies and learning outcomes also constitute the most challenging part of your academic portfolio to write. Your competencies will reflect the natural, logical, and expected outcomes of your experiences.

In this section, you will give a description (with documentation) of the context in which your knowledge was gained. You will analyze, trace, and document your previous experiences, relating them to the knowledge and skills required by the target discipline or course of your portfolio. This section will include specific details and insight from your past experiences and make systematic, logical connections to the theories and concepts of the discipline/course in which you seek credit.

To repeat in different words: this section of the portfolio requires critical reflection, an ability to synthesize meaning and impact of previous experience while at the same time connecting that meaning and impact to the requirements and criteria of the college course which credit you seek. You will need an awareness and understanding that *it is you* who is responsible for presenting your learning outcomes and competencies to the university in a narrative with documentation so strong and compelling that there is no doubt about the credit you will earn in the academic portfolio.

**Length**

The length of this section may vary from five to fifteen pages, depending on the type and number of credits you are seeking. Factors which may affect length include: subject area, quantity and type of documentation, and the theoretical complexity of your knowledge on the subject. Specific detail and personal insight in this section is likely to develop a stronger case and earn you a maximum number of credits.

### **To Process Knowledge**

You must know how to:

- Analyze the components,
- Distinguish crucial information from the trivial,
- Associate new information with stored facts,
- Integrate information from many sources to solve problems,
- Gain new awareness,
- Reflect on the applicability of your learned outcomes and competencies not only to self, but also to the world.

### **To Express Learning Competencies** (See also page 9)

Cognitive skills which will aid in expressing your learning competencies are:

- The ability to see patterns and connections in diverse information.
- The ability to organize and communicate these relationships.
- The ability to conceptualize many sides of a controversial issue, to understand the underlying issues and differing perspectives, and to effectively resolve informational conflict.
- The ability to learn from your experiences – you should be able to generate behavioral alternatives, to analyze a particular behavior in the context of another's behavior; to determine the complexity and multi-dimensionality of intellect; to change or open your mind.

### **To Write a Successful Narrative**

Your narrative, to be successful and to earn the maximum credit, may describe your learning competencies as those which:

- Describe your knowledge of the subject;
- Specify when, where, and how you acquired the knowledge;
- Reflect your own strengths and weaknesses in context of these experiences;
- Relate your experiences to specific course expectations and theories which have specific learning outcomes (which may offer equivalency credits);
- Have specific documentation;
- Elaborate upon the relationships between your documentation and the learning competencies you introduce and identify;
- Connect to present experience and future goals.

**The Office for Prior Learning Assessment encourages students to submit a rough draft of Sections 7 & 8, Personal Statement and Competencies and Learning Outcomes, so that the academic portfolio evaluator can provide feedback and useful comments prior to the final portfolio submission.**

**9) Documentation.** The material which you submit to prove your claims of college-level learning outcomes and competencies is called documentation. Documentation is the skeleton, the supporting foundation of your academic portfolio and must specifically be identified with each learning outcome and competency.

#### **Effective documentation:**

- Provides direct evidence and coherent account of your competencies and college-level learning outcomes;
- Supports your narrative, specifically including learning outcomes and their contexts;
- Accounts for the significance of your learning in terms of life goals and disciplinary knowledge.

Evidence may include audio or video cassettes, CD's, DVD's, candidate-created websites, photographs, and written evidence, such as licenses, certificates, and other examples (see below).

Your documentation should be specifically noted in your text as you discuss each learning competency and outcome. Organize and edit your documentation carefully to that request.

**Examples of documentation include, but are not limited to:**

- o Job descriptions
- o Awards, certificates, letters, references, or job verifications
- o Diplomas for previous degrees
- o Licenses granted by state or national agencies
- o Scores on licensing exams
- o Personnel evaluations
- o Evidence of promotion
- o Memberships in professional trade organizations (showing also their requirements for membership)
- o Newspaper or magazine clippings demonstrating evidence of your experiences, or relating directly to you or your company
- o Examples of written or artistic work
- o Demonstration of dance, artistic or oral performance, or instruction on audio or video cassette, CD, DVD, candidate-created website, or photographs
- o Evidence of adopted suggestions or outcomes
- o Verification of completed course, workshops, seminars, and other educational events

**10) Annotated Bibliography.** At the conclusion of your academic portfolio, include a list and brief description of all the books, articles, pamphlets, and other sources, electronic or in print, to which you referred. Use standard MLA, Chicago Style, or APA format and conventions. This list will strengthen the theoretical foundation of your learning and make your presentation more compelling.

**Please note: Course-specific academic portfolios will usually require this section. Check with your academic portfolio evaluator before writing this section to be sure it is needed.**

**11) Evaluation.**

**Criteria by Which You May be Evaluated**

Your academic portfolio evaluator may consider the following criteria:

- o Your ability to state and explain learning competencies, as you also include specific details and insights;
- o Your facility to trace and document meaning in performance and behavior;
- o Your ability to describe and analyze the context in which your learning competencies and outcomes were developed;
- o Your ability to interpret, analyze, and transfer knowledge, learning competencies, outcomes, and personal attributes into leadership roles;
- o Your ability to synthesize data and experiential situations for use in problem-solving and decision-making areas;
- o Your ability to relate professional knowledge and/or core competencies embedded in your experiences to concepts, theories, and research pertaining to the relevant discipline of your academic portfolio.
- o Your ability to document each competency and learning outcome.
- o Your ability to demonstrate college-level competency in writing.

### **Personal Qualities Which May Indicate Measurable Abilities**

Several personal qualities, generally more subtly present among the competencies, may also indicate measurable abilities:

- o Personal and professional maturity
- o Interpersonal communication
- o Problem-solving abilities
- o Motivation
- o Organizational skills
- o Leadership abilities
- o Role-modeling for new learning
- o Teaching or facilitation skills
- o Empathy
- o Judgment about and/or discrimination of options

### **12) Procedural Steps Which May Help in Your Academic Portfolio Preparation.**

- a) Discover.
  - Make an appointment with Joyce Lapping (207- 780- 4663) prior to starting any academic portfolio to sort the details and procedures for the process, and to establish an evaluator for your portfolio.
  - List the competencies and college-level outcomes you believe you can support with documentation.
  - List the course(s) which may best match your college-level learning competencies and experience.
- b) Pre-write.
  - Write a narrative (unless directed not to do so) to remind you and explain to your evaluator the sources of your Competencies and Learning Outcomes.
  - Gather supporting documentation which you will specifically key to each outcome.
  - Key each learning outcome and competency directly to the outcomes of the syllabus (syllabi) you submit.
- c) Organize and Submit.
  - Organize the narrative and accompanying documentation.
  - Write and edit.
  - Complete and submit this preliminary draft to your portfolio evaluator for suggestions and edits.
  - Complete and submit a finalized portfolio (if necessary).

**The Office for Prior Learning Assessment encourages students to submit a rough draft of Sections 7 & 8, Personal Statement and Competencies and Learning Outcomes, so that the academic portfolio evaluator can provide feedback and useful comments prior to the final portfolio submission.**

# LEARNING ASSESSMENT WORK SHEET

## Competencies and Learning Outcomes

<b>Experience</b> (In what learning situations have I been involved?)	<b>Tasks/Duties Involved in Each Experience</b> (What <b>responsibilities</b> did I have in each of the experiences listed in Column 1?)	<b>Learning Outcomes or Competencies</b> (What <b>knowledge</b> was required to perform the experiences listed in Column 2?)	<b>Documentation</b> (What <b>evidence</b> do I provide to support knowledge shown in Column 3?)
<b>Employment</b> 1. 2.	1. a. b. 2. a. b. c.  (continued on attached page)	Task 1 a. 1 b. 1 c.  (continued on attached page)	
<b>Non-credit Education</b>			
<b>Licenses, Awards, Certifications</b>			
<b>Volunteer Experience</b>			
<b>Recreation &amp; Hobbies</b>			
<b>Other</b>			

# COMPETENCE-BASED ACADEMIC PORTFOLIOS\*

Evaluators use a competence-based method to determine academic portfolio credit awards. Competencies are personal characteristics or knowledge that an individual may develop through life experiences. Students are expected to demonstrate and verify these competencies and learning outcomes in academic disciplines in order to earn academic credit. It is the **context** in which the competency is used rather than the competency itself which creates college credit. The following list may help you identify various competencies.

## Communication

(effectively listening, sending, and responding to messages in a variety of audiences)

**Speak** - effectively articulate your thoughts orally

**Write** - form clear and concise written thoughts

**Listen** - hear with thoughtful and objective attention, listen actively, paraphrase

## Critical Thinking

(effectively analyzing problems, ideas, and situations)

**Make Decisions** - arrive at solutions that end uncertainty and dispute

**Problem Solve** - develop solutions

**Think Critically** - think outside the box, use your mind to theorize, analyze, intend, reflect, reconsider, and remember

**Thinking Forward** - anticipate, assess needs

**Reason** - form conclusions, inferences or judgments

**Identify Issues** - apply criteria, analyze and interpret

## Management and Administration

(effectively managing, handling, and directing places, units, events and/or situations)

**Lead** - effectively oversee and direct people

**Motivate** - inspire others

**Delegate** - identify and select people for tasks

**Budget** - allocate assets

**Conduct Meetings** - lead, negotiate and mediate

**Present** - consider learning styles; use various media

## Research and Investigation

(effectively seeking out and utilizing information)

**Identify** - problems, needs, and solutions

**Design Experiments** - test and validate data

**Use Technology** - know and use a variety of appropriate resources

**Evaluate** - develop questionnaires and models

## Information Management

**Synthesize** - organize facts, concepts, and principles

**Catalog** - compile, rank and itemize information

**Manipulate Information** - evaluate against appropriate standards

**E- Knowledge** - understand and implement electronic and computer-related ideas

**Sort** - data and objectives

## Flexibility and Creativity

(effectively producing innovative ideas, design, and methods for new and/or existing situations, events, and procedures as well as artistic expression)

**Create** - be original and expressive

**Innovate** - solve problems in unique ways

**Adapt** - accommodate multiple demands and see alternative courses of action

**Conceptualize** - derive ideas from inferences

## Planning and Organization

(effectively managing time, energy and resources)

**Visualize** - predict future trends and patterns

**Initiate** - implement projects and ideas

**Schedule** - set and reach goals

**Prioritize** - arrange according to importance

**Account for and Assess** - evaluate plans or decisions, and follow through

**Dimensional Insight** - illustrate, display, and create

## Interpersonal/Human Relations

(effectively interacting with others)

**Network** - develop interactions with peers, supervisors and subordinates

**Be a Team Player** - encourage and appreciate contributions of others

**Use Diplomacy** - negotiate without arousing hostility as you deal with others

## Personal Development

**Motivated** - go beyond the expected

**Committed** - decide for the common good

**Independent** - work without guidance

**Confident** - have a positive personal attitude

**Energetic** - display enthusiasm

**Knowledgeable** - proficient in a field of study

# ACTION VERBS TO USE IN YOUR PORTFOLIO

## MANAGEMENT & TECHNOLOGY

administered  
analyzed  
assigned  
attained  
chaired  
consolidated  
contracted  
coordinated  
delegated  
developed  
directed  
evaluated  
executed  
improved  
increased  
organized  
oversaw  
planned  
prioritized  
produced  
recommended  
reviewed  
scheduled  
strengthened  
supervised  
assembled  
built  
calculated  
computed  
designed  
devised  
engineered  
fabricated  
maintained  
operated  
overhauled  
programmed  
remodeled  
repaired  
solved  
upgraded

## COMMUNICATION

addressed  
arbitrated  
arranged  
authored  
collaborated  
convinced  
corresponded  
developed  
directed  
drafted  
edited  
enlisted  
formulated

influenced  
interpreted  
lectured  
mediated  
moderated  
negotiated  
persuaded  
promoted  
reconciled  
recruited  
spoke  
translated  
wrote

## RESEARCH

clarified  
collected  
critiqued  
diagnosed  
evaluated  
examined  
extracted  
identified  
inspected  
interpreted  
interviewed  
Investigated  
organized  
reviewed  
summarized  
surveyed  
systematized

## TEACHING

adapted  
advised  
clarified  
coached  
communicated  
coordinated  
demystified  
developed  
enabled  
encouraged  
evaluated  
explained  
facilitated  
guided  
informed  
instructed  
persuaded  
set goals  
stimulated  
trained

## FINANCE

administered  
allocated  
analyzed  
appraised  
audited  
balanced  
budgeted  
calculated  
computed  
developed  
forecasted  
managed  
marketed  
planned  
projected  
researched  
conceptualized  
created  
customized  
designed  
developed  
directed  
established  
fashioned  
founded  
illustrated  
initiated  
instituted  
integrated  
introduced  
invented  
originated  
performed  
planned  
revitalized  
shaped

## LEADERSHIP

assessed  
assisted  
clarified  
coached  
counseled  
demonstrated  
diagnosed  
educated  
expedited  
familiarized  
guided  
motivated  
referred  
rehabilitated  
represented

## CREATIVITY

created  
conceptualized  
customized  
designed  
developed  
directed  
established  
fashioned  
founded  
illustrated  
initiated  
instituted  
integrated  
introduced  
invented  
originated  
performed  
planned  
revitalized  
shaped

## DETAIL

approved  
arranged  
catalogued  
classified  
collected  
compiled  
dispatched  
executed  
generated  
implemented  
inspected  
monitored  
operated  
organized  
prepared  
processed  
purchased  
recorded  
retrieved  
screened  
specified  
systematized  
tabulated  
validated

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

achieved  
expanded  
Improved  
pioneered  
reduced (losses)  
resolved (problems)  
restored  
transformed

## APPROVAL

Students must receive advanced written approval from the academic department before pursuing course equivalency or elective credit within a department through the academic portfolio process. Students pursuing ITT 400 credit should receive approval from their departmental advisor.

## EVALUATION

Whereas a superficial, introductory-level of learning is not credit-worthy, and complex learning over a sustained and substantial period of time may be, it is essential that the portfolio candidate distinguishes between the two levels. The following phrase should be your mantra when writing the academic portfolio:

**Remember, quantity does not equal quality.**

Take for example a student who has worked for a company for ten years – does the student have one year of learning experience repeated ten times, or ten years of learning experience that demonstrate growth, advancement, and progress in expertise and level of difficulty? The academic portfolio should be an illustration of vertical growth rather than horizontal development.

The question the student needs to ask: Is my learning truly college-level? Oftentimes a student may learn components which provide personal value and benefit, but is that learning sufficient in scope, range, detail, complexity, or general content to be valid for academic credit consideration at the college or university level?

Quality of learning can be exemplified in many ways. What evidence of learning outcomes can be presented? What competencies and factual knowledge are necessary to process relevant information? How are these competencies and knowledge transferrable in order to deal with the practical problems in one's job?

For course equivalency evaluations and elective credit within a department, the standard for quality is the same as that shown by a student passing the course with a C or better. Appropriate departmental faculty will evaluate the academic portfolio and grant credit as justified. For general elective credit evaluations, the demonstration of college-level competency is equated with the same grading standard. See also #11 on page 4, Evaluation.

## PRESENTATION INFORMATION

Major sections of the academic portfolio should be separated by tabbed inserts. In order to enable the evaluator to provide you with feedback, please do not put the résumé, personal statement, or learning competency sections in plastic. You may use plastic for the documentation section, especially if you are using original certificates, letters, or similar information which you want to protect.

## PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT FEES

Portfolio candidates must pay an assessment fee of \$75 at the time of the academic portfolio evaluation. Once credits have been assessed, but before any credits are posted to a USM transcript, the following credit fees must be paid:

\$50 per credit hour

Academic portfolio fees **must be accompanied by the Portfolio Assessment Fee Posting form** and may be paid by cash, check or credit card at: Student Billing Office, 118 Payson Smith Hall, P. O. Box 9300, Portland, Maine 04104

<sup>1</sup> From page 4 Colvin, 2006, 191 and page 84, Lamdin, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Wood, Diane R. Associate Professor of Leadership, Lewiston-Auburn College.

<sup>3</sup> Hoffmann, Theresa. *Defining College-Level Learning*, 2006. 17.

<sup>4</sup> From page 9, based on "Career Services and Professional Life Development Transferrable Skills," USM and the work of Alverno College, Wisconsin.