

FACULTY UNDERGRADUATE PORTFOLIO GUIDELINES AND FAQ

INTRODUCTION

The construction of an academic portfolio is not simply an account of prior learning. Rather it is, in and of itself, a learning process. As John Dewey long argued, meaningful learning involves both active and reflective processes. Concurring, Donald Schon in his book *The Reflective Practitioner*, points out that unless we reflect back on our lived experiences, what we learn from them remains tacit and uncritical. The process of building a portfolio offers the opportunity to recapitulate key experiences, analyze and interpret them, and articulate and critique what has been learned from them. This 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. A good academic portfolio provides ample evidence of the knowledge a student has learned, for which s/he intends to receive college credit. The student must document these specific learning competencies which s/he has acquired through prior experience. *Learning competencies* are knowledge, abilities, and/or skills that a student has acquired through his or her prior learning and that relate to college-level content. In the portfolio process, the student must provide convincing documentation, which is the evidence, written or performed, substantiating that knowledge, skills, and abilities have been learned from prior experience(s). Moreover, the portfolio's written content must meet high standards.

Below are the standards of excellence expected of those submitting portfolios for academic credit.

Academic Portfolio Evaluation Standard I

Discipline or Content Knowledge

Students presenting an academic portfolio at USM:

- **Relate professional knowledge and/or core competencies embedded in their experiences to concepts, theories, and research pertaining to the relevant discipline of the portfolio.**
- **Analyze previous experience while demonstrating skills and knowledge of the discipline.**
- **Trace and document experiential learning in a developmental, logical, and orderly way while making systematic connections to disciplinary knowledge.**
- **Include specific details as to how theories and concepts relate to and provide insight into their experiences.**

Academic Portfolio Evaluation Standard 2

Learning Competencies and Documentation

To demonstrate and document the achieved learning competencies, a portfolio:

- **Contains a personal narrative that provides an in-depth look into the student's autobiographical experiences and reveals how they relate to the academic discipline in which the student wants credit.**
- **Provides a coherent and documented account of the acquired learning competencies (see introduction), and a description of the context in which they were developed.**
- **Accounts for the significance of the learning in terms of disciplinary knowledge and life goals.**

Academic Portfolio Evaluation Standard 3

Critical Reflection

- **Provides a synthesizing account of the meaning and impact of a previous learning experience.**
- **Articulates and critiques assumptions and/or theories of action.**
- **Considers alternative perspectives.**
- **Analyzes one's own strengths and weaknesses in context of experiences.**
- **Raises and explores continuing questions.**
- **Accounts for the ways learning has changed outlook and behavior.**
- **Connects learning to present experience and future goals.**

Academic Portfolio Evaluation Standard 4

Writing Competencies

A student who demonstrates competency in writing in his/her academic portfolio at USM would:

- **Address the portfolio topic and all aspects of its required content components fully, directly, and explicitly (as opposed to using inferences).**
- **Address the portfolio to a target audience of the faculty evaluator, using appropriate formal voice, varied sentence structure, appropriate syntax, and Standard English with careful attention to grammar and mechanics.**
- **Organize and develop the competencies and learning outcomes specific to the course content of the portfolio, connecting to theories and patterns where appropriate**
- **Provide appropriate warrant for claims and opinions by using explanations, logical argumentation, supporting details, facts, and examples.**
- **Ensure readability and access by coherently organizing complex content using thesis statements, headings, logical progression of ideas, logically-sequenced sections, clear references, and sufficient transitions between ideas and sections.**
- **Document each competency and learning outcome.**
- **Cite internal and end references, annotations, and claims by using correct MLA, Chicago Style, or APA format and conventions.**

Faculty Guidelines for the Academic Portfolio Questions for the Faculty

1. How do you determine which student can successfully complete the portfolio process?

The student who can successfully complete a portfolio can critically and reflectively evaluate his/her learning experience and connect it to theories and concepts of the academic discipline(s) in which the student seeks credit.

2. What characteristics of learning are needed to determine if the portfolio is the most appropriate method of assessment?

In order to use the offerings of PLA, the learning that is being assessed must involve significant and rich *prior* learning experiences. Learning that has been acquired in a previous or ongoing independent study do not count as prior learning in the sense used here and must not be included in the portfolio. In the portfolio construction process, however, limited additional research and/or readings may accompany the previously acquired knowledge presented in the academic portfolio.

3. Can an admitted or matriculated student create a portfolio to earn credit for work completed while enrolled in a USM degree program?

Yes. PLA/USM allows students in many special situations to complete portfolios.

4. Can a student not admitted to USM create a portfolio?

Yes. Examples are the Center for Furniture Craftsmanship in Rockport, Maine, educational technicians in public schools, and Portland city firefighters. Please contact the Office for Prior Learning Assistance for guidance.

5. Can a student transfer the credits earned through the academic portfolio process to another college?

It depends on the accepting institution. PLA/USM encourages faculty to promote excellence in every portfolio for prior learning credit in order to optimally position students for transfer credits should they apply for them.

6. What are the first steps a student must take in order to start the academic portfolio process?

- Ideally, the student starts the process by meeting with the director of the Office for Prior Learning Assessment (PLA).

- The student brings material supportive and relative to his credit request: résumé, statement of intention, syllabi or transcripts from other institutions attended, and other documentation of the prior learning experience.
- The student must complete a registration form, whether meeting with faculty or the director.
- The registration form is sent to and kept at PLA.
- The student meets with a member of the faculty in the portfolio discipline who is engaged in the creative process with the student from the start of the portfolio.
- If the portfolio candidate is seeking general elective credit, this step is unnecessary. The director will work with the student.

7. Who determines if a student can do a portfolio? Does the student need permission to create a portfolio? If so, from whom?

The Office for Prior Learning Assessment in conjunction with the USM faculty determine who creates academic portfolios.

8. Who establishes the expectations that the student needs to meet in order to have a successful portfolio (earn credit)?

The Office for Prior Learning and/or USM faculty determine the criteria and evaluate whether they are met in each portfolio.

9. May a student submit a portfolio for evaluation in a language other than English?

A student may need to submit a portfolio in a language other than English in order to meet a language course requirement for that portfolio. However, all students for all portfolios are required to demonstrate their proficiency in English. With this type of portfolio, proficiency is shown by submitting the Statement of Intent (at the beginning of the portfolio) and the summary of learning outcomes (at the conclusion) in English rather than in the target language.

10. Do students need to meet a certain standard of English language proficiency when submitting a portfolio in English?

Yes. Please read the PLA Evaluation Standards, Writing Competency, for further guidance.

11. Who do I, as a faculty member, have to notify of my involvement in the portfolio evaluation process?

You, as faculty, must receive acknowledgment from the chair of your department that you are working with a student to produce credit through

the portfolio process in conjunction with the Office for Prior Learning Assessment. The director of PLA will also contact the department chair in most instances.

12. Who has the final say in my participation in the portfolio process?

You, as faculty, decide.

13. Can adjunct faculty evaluate portfolios?

Although PLA accepts evaluations from adjunct faculty, your department makes the final decision.

14. Can I, as faculty, evaluate portfolios only in my discipline?

Yes.

15. Generally, how much time do I need to make available to assist the student in the portfolio process?

If you are familiar with the student, you may need only one or two meetings to help the student identify criteria for the portfolio. If you are meeting with the student for the first time, realize you may need additional time.

16. How much time does the student have to complete the portfolio process?

It varies with the content and extent of the portfolio. Most portfolios are completed within a semester, however there are more complex portfolios that may take significantly longer.

PLEASE SEE THE PROPOSED TIMELINE BELOW AS A GUIDELINE.

17. How long do I have to evaluate a submitted portfolio?

A portfolio evaluation should take no longer than three to four weeks.

18. What standards do the academic portfolios need to meet?

Each portfolio evolves, as it is being written and reviewed, to finally meet the faculty-developed Portfolio Evaluation Standards for Office for Prior Learning Assessment.

19. Are the portfolios graded?

PLA portfolios are not graded, though each must meet the Portfolio Evaluation Standards for Office for Prior Learning Assessment.

20. Generally, how many credits can a student earn through the PLA academic portfolio process?

- The portfolio content will determine the number of credits given. Typically, most students earn three to six credits through the academic portfolio, but in specific circumstances, significantly more credits can be earned.
- The Office for Prior Learning Assessment has no minimum or maximum number of credits that can be earned through the portfolio process, however each academic department may have its own limits.

21. Is there any compensation for my time?

USM faculty earns \$75 per portfolio evaluation.

22. Is there a cost to the student as s/he earns academic portfolio credit? If so, how much?

The student pays a registration fee of \$75 for each academic portfolio (which goes to the faculty who evaluates it), and \$50 per credit for the final portfolio.

23. Can the student use his/her student aid to pay for the portfolio?

Unfortunately, student aid cannot be made available for portfolio payments.

24. Who, on the faculty, can I contact who has been previously involved in the PLA portfolio process?

There are many faculty who have successfully mentored others through the PLA portfolio process and have volunteered to make themselves available. Please ask PLA for contacts.

25. How do I submit the evaluation and credit recommendation? To whom?

Forms needed by faculty portfolio evaluators are available through the Office for Prior Learning Assessment. Please ask for the Academic Portfolio Evaluation Form and the Transcribing for Credit Form. When you, as faculty, have completed and returned these forms to PLA, and the student has submitted payment for the portfolio credits you have recommended, these credits will be posted on the student's transcript, and you will be paid.

26. Can the academic portfolio credits count toward meeting the USM residency requirement?

Unfortunately portfolio credits cannot meet the USM residency requirement.

TIMELINE

Academic Portfolio

Below is a timeline for undergraduate Academic Portfolio submission dates. Note that the timeline begins with a meeting with your evaluator, or the Director of PLA.

- Week 1: **First Meeting.** Meet with either Joyce Lapping, Director of PLA, or your assigned portfolio evaluator.
- Week 2: **Title Page and Letter of Intent.** Draft and submit a Title Page, and Letter of Intent, which is a letter to the evaluator telling him/her what you are trying to achieve.
- Week 4: **Resume, Transcript, and Syllabus.** Submit a current Résumé. Also submit an unofficial Transcript and a Syllabus (course-specific if required) for each course covered in your portfolio.
- Week 8: **Personal Statement.** Submit a Personal Statement, which is a narrative description of the learning you achieved at the college level. If you are writing a *course-specific portfolio*, the statement should directly pertain to portions of the course objectives in the syllabi submitted for your portfolio. Otherwise, for *general elective credits*, include a general discussion of your college-level learning and from where it was acquired.
- Week 12: **Competencies and Outcomes.** If you are submitting a *course-specific portfolio*, base your discussion of the Competencies and Outcomes of your learning achievements, which occurred outside the traditional classroom, on the syllabus(i) you are submitting.
- If you are completing a *general elective portfolio*, discuss Competencies and Outcomes on which you are basing your request for earning the university credits.
- For your draft, this discussion can be completed in an outline format, especially if you are doing more than one course, and if you will want to integrate the personal statement with the competencies in the final document.
- Week 14: **Documentation.** Collect and label your Documentation for your competencies and outcomes.
- Week 15: **Annotated Bibliography.** Add an Annotated Bibliography to your draft. Although it is not required, a bibliography is highly recommended. Please check with your evaluator if you are in doubt.

Once the draft has been submitted to your evaluator, and you have received comments, you have one semester to hand in a final copy for evaluation. If more time is needed, please put your intentions in writing.