

6.10.1 Credit for Prior Learning

Last Revised: January 2024

Policy: Piedmont Community College (PCC) awards credit to students for prior learning through non-credit coursework and from previously completed instruction, training programs, and experiences.

Purpose/Definitions:

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the College follows consistent protocols to preserve the integrity of the Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) process.

Consistent with the provisions of this policy, PCC may award CPL using the following prior learning methods:

- Apprenticeship
- State or Industry Recognized Credentials/Continuing Education to Curriculum Credit
- Courses listed in high school to community college articulation agreements
- Military education and training
- Standardized examinations
- Challenge exams/Proficiency
- Portfolio assessment
- Public Safety Training (PST) prefix courses

Definitions

Advanced Placement (AP)—Advanced Placement is a program of college-preparatory courses for high school students administered by The College Board, an educational nonprofit organization.

Articulation Agreement—an agreement by which PCC will accept certain courses or experiences for academic credit. Terms for such agreements may be Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). Such agreements must be officially approved according to college policy or procedure.

Cambridge Assessment International Examinations—a series of internationally recognized college-level examinations administered by Cambridge Assessment International Education, a unit of the University of Cambridge.

Certification—an industry-recognized credential or designation that is obtained once the student has successfully passed a certification exam. Certification differs from licensure in that certification is a validation of specific industry-valued competencies and not a legal requirement for practicing a profession.

Challenge Exam/Proficiency—a departmental or institutional exam for a community college course used to determine if a student’s subject matter proficiency is equal to or greater than the corresponding proficiency the student would have achieved had they completed the actual course.

Clinical practice—credit of one semester hour is awarded for each 48 hours of clinical practice. Clinical practice provides an opportunity for health science students to apply knowledge and skill in their delivery of care in a health care setting. A qualified faculty member, clinical instructor, or preceptor, as defined by the program related approving or accrediting body, shall supervise clinical practice to provide the student with learning experiences related to the program and to monitor and assess the student’s application of skills (1D SBCCC 400.1(c)(2)).

College-Level Examination Program®—a credit-by-examination program offered by the College Board, an educational nonprofit organization. The program allows students from a wide range of ages and backgrounds to demonstrate their mastery of introductory college-level material.

College-level learning—knowledge, skills, and competencies equivalent to those expected of a student who successfully completes the corresponding curriculum course.

Continuing Education—consistent with 1D SBCCC 300.1(a), programs that provide education and training opportunities for targeted audiences. Courses are non-credit, short-term, and are offered in a variety of instructional delivery modes and locations.

Continuing Education Course—consistent with 1D SBCCC 300.1(b), a course included in the list of approved courses in the Combined Course Library (CCL) maintained by the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) Office.

Continuing Education Leadership Committee (CELC)—consistent with 1D SBCCC 300.5 (b)(2), a group comprised of a rotating slate of Continuing Education senior administrators from local colleges that reviews all requests for new courses or course modifications. The CELC recommends approval of new courses or approval of modifications if the new course or modification meets the definition of a continuing education course; demonstrates workforce need with local and state labor market data; and does not duplicate the scope of the description of existing CCL courses.

Credit—academic credit that appears on a student’s transcript. This credit may not necessarily be applied toward a credential.

Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)—curriculum credit awarded for college-level learning obtained through prior learning experiences other than curriculum coursework. This definition does not include curriculum credit transferred from another accredited U.S. institution of higher education.

Credit for Prior Learning standard—a designated amount of academic credit colleges shall award for college-level learning that fulfills established criteria.

Curriculum course—consistent with 1D SBCCC 400.8, any program credit course listed in the CCL approved for the NCCCS.

Curriculum Course Review Committee (CCRC)—consistent with 1D SBCCC 400.8(h), an NCCCS Office-appointed group of representatives from chief academic officers and community college presidents. The CCRC has the authority to approve and maintain courses in the CCL; to determine whether a curriculum course may meet a general education designation for certificates, diplomas, and associate in applied science programs; to archive curriculum courses that have not been offered by any community college for three consecutive years.

Curriculum program—consistent with 1D SBCCC 400.3(a), an organized sequence of courses leading to an associate degree, diploma, or certificate. All curriculum programs are designed to provide education, training, or retraining for the work force or to prepare students for transfer to institutions offering baccalaureate degrees.

DANTES Subject Standardized Tests—credit-by-examination tests developed by the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES), a United States Department of Defense program.

Developmental courses—courses and support services that include diagnostic assessment and placement, tutoring, advising, math and writing assistance. These programs are designed to address academic preparedness, development of general learning strategies, and barriers to learning. Developmental courses do not earn credit toward a degree, diploma, or certificate (1D SBCCC 400.3(b)).

International Baccalaureate® (IB) Diploma Programme—a college-preparatory program for students aged 16-19 administered by International Baccalaureate®, an international educational foundation. Standardized IB exams are used to assess student mastery of course content. Students receive scores on a “1” to “7” scale, with “7” being the highest.

Licensure—a legal status granted by a government entity that provides permission to practice a profession. Licensure restricts practice of the profession to individuals who have met specific qualifications in education, professional experience, and/or have successfully passed an examination.

Military Credit Advisory Council (MCAC)—a joint council of faculty and staff members from the NC Community College System and the University of North Carolina, MCAC oversees the process for establishing uniform standards for awarding Credit for Prior Learning for military training and experience. MCAC also ensures the transferability of these credits among institutions of both systems.

Military Education and Training—education and training that has been documented on a transcript issued by one or more branches of the Armed Forces.

Military Prior Learning Academic Panels—panels of academic faculty approved by MCAC are authorized to determine standards for awarding credit for identified subject areas.

Portfolio assessment—the evaluation of a Portfolio for Life and Work Experiences by subject matter experts designated by the local college in its local policy to determine whether a student is awarded Credit for Prior Learning.

Portfolio for Life and Work Experiences—a collection of artifacts documenting competencies gained through prior learning experiences that a student formally submits to the College.

Prior Learning Assessment—an evaluation of whether a student has obtained the requisite level of verifiable college-level learning outside of the traditional learning environment for curriculum credit.

Registered Apprenticeship—an industry-based (apprenticeship) program that is eligible for approval and registration by a Registration Agency and that conforms to the standards of apprenticeship given in the Code of Federal Regulations [29 C.F.R. § 29.5](#)

Standardized examination—any form of examination that requires all test takers to answer the same questions, or a selection of questions from a common bank of questions following established protocol and that is scored in a standard or consistent manner.

Supplemental Courses—assigned numbers 001-099, supplemental courses provide supplemental skills to a specific co-requisite course or customized developmental course delivery. Supplemental courses do not earn credit toward a certificate, diploma, or degree (1D SBCCC 400.8(b)(1)).

United States Armed Forces—consists of the Air Force, Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Space Force, and Coast Guard.

Approval Authority/Monitoring Authority: Piedmont Community College’s Board of Trustees has approval authority for this policy. The Vice President, Instruction and the Vice President, Student Development have monitoring authority over this policy.

Procedure:

Section 1: General Provisions

- 1.1. PCC may award curriculum CPL when the documentation of prior learning meets or exceeds a demonstration of learning outcomes at the College's standards for awarding credit for the corresponding curriculum course.
- 1.2. Only CPL that is directly applicable to a student's declared curriculum program of study may be awarded.
- 1.3. CPL for advanced courses does not negate the requirement to meet requisite learning outcomes.
- 1.4. CPL may be used to fulfill program requirements except for mandatory institutional requirements.
 - 1.4.1. Examples may include, but are not limited to, requirements of external agencies that specifically prohibited the use of CPL to fulfill the program requirements.
- 1.5. CPL cannot be used to satisfy the College's institutional credit requirements, which prescribe the minimum percentage of credit hours a student must earn through instruction offered by the institution awarding the credential.
 - 1.5.1. Twenty-five percent (25%) of the credit hours required for graduation from a curriculum program of study must be earned through curriculum courses completed at PCC.
 - 1.5.2. No greater than seventy-five percent (75%) of the credit hours required for graduation from a curriculum program of study may be earned through CPL.
- 1.6. Any CPL awarded by the College shall be reflected in the student's records by the College's Registrar without quality points assigned, except for allowances for graded military credit as described in 1D SBCCC 800.6.
- 1.7. Course Credit CPL standards approved by the CCRC shall be considered for transfer to any college in the NCCCS.

Section 2: Eligibility and Limitations

- 2.1. To be eligible to receive CPL, students must meet all the following criteria:
 - 2.1.1. Meet all admission requirements for their program of study.
 - 2.1.2. Be enrolled in a curriculum program to which the credit will directly apply; and

2.1.3. Request a prior learning assessment.

2.1.3.1. The College publishes an approved [Credit for Prior Learning Crosswalk](#) on its website.

2.1.3.1.1. For previous experience or non-credit courses completed at the College, or an institution or other accrediting body external to the College, the student should submit official documentation to the appropriate instructional dean for review.

2.1.3.1.2. Once a determination is made by the instructional dean, the request is forwarded to the Registrar.

2.1.3.1.3. The student must present any additional documentation requested by the Registrar no later than the graduation application deadline.

2.1.3.1.4. For previous experience or non-credit courses not included within the crosswalk, the instructional dean will review a request from a student to articulate a continuing education credit for a curriculum credit and determine if the Crosswalk should be updated.

2.1.3.2. Credit awarded for prior learning will be reflected in the student portal.

2.2. Nothing in this rule shall be construed to supersede limitations imposed by an accreditation, credentialing, licensure, or other external agency on the application of CPL towards credentials under their purview. In such instances, the College shall document the applicable limitations in the student's file.

2.3. It is possible that CPL from apprenticeship, certifications and licensures, courses listed in high school to community college articulation agreements, challenge exams/proficiency, portfolio assessment, and Public Safety Training (PST) prefix courses may not be transferable to UNC System constituent institutions or other four-year institutions.

2.3.1. The receiving institution may request documentation to determine potential course credit.

2.3.2. PCC encourages students to consult a transfer advisor at the receiving institution before using these CPL sources to attain credit at a community college institution.

Section 3: Apprenticeships

- 3.1. The NCCCS recognizes “Registered Apprenticeships” as defined by the U.S. Department of Labor.
- 3.2. At a minimum, the College shall award CPL based on statewide articulation as approved by the CCRC for related instruction provided by external entities for registered apprenticeship programs.
 - 3.2.1. The College may award CPL for related instruction provided by external entities for which statewide articulations have not been established by the CCRC consistent with this local CPL policy.
- 3.3. Work-based learning (WBL) course credit may be granted for the experiential portion of a Registered Apprenticeship.
 - 3.3.1. Documentation including completed time on task shall be provided through an Apprenticeship Agreement and shall constitute the documentational requirements of a WBL experience.

Section 4: State or Industry Recognized Credentials/Continuing Education to Curriculum Credit

- 4.1. The CCRC, based on recommendations from the CELC, shall have the authority to approve CPL standards for state or industry recognized credentials and continuing education courses, certifications, and licensures that document similar college-level learning as corresponding curriculum courses and, therefore, are eligible for articulated curriculum credit. Prior to approving CPL of industry recognized credentials or continuing education courses, the CCRC shall have written concurrence by two-thirds of colleges.
- 4.2. At a minimum, the College shall award CPL for successful completion of state or industry recognized credentials and continuing education courses, certifications, and licensures consistent with the CPL standards approved by the CCRC.
- 4.3. The College may award CPL for state or industry recognized credentials and continuing education courses, certifications, and licensures for which statewide articulations have not been established by CCRC consistent with this local CPL policy.
- 4.4. It is possible that CPL from these sources may not be transferable to UNC System constituent institutions. Furthermore, UNC System constituent institutions may request documentation to determine potential course credit. Therefore, students

should consult a UNC System transfer advisor before using this CPL source to attain credit at the NCCCS institution.

Section 5: Courses Listed in High School to Community College Articulation Agreements

- 5.1. The North Carolina High School to Community College Articulation Agreement is an agreement between the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the North Carolina Community College System. The articulation agreement ensures that when a student is proficient in a high school course included in the agreement, the student can receive college credit for that course at any North Carolina community college.
- 5.2. The College shall award credit to students who have completed a high school course and met the criteria as outlined in the High School to Community College Articulation Agreement.
- 5.3. The College may award credit for successful completion of other high school courses consistent with any local high school to community college articulation agreements entered into by the College and an education entity providing secondary education.

Section 6: Military Education and Training

- 6.1. At minimum, the College shall award CPL based on military education and training consistent with the standards adopted by the appropriate Military Prior Learning Academic Panel.
- 6.2. The College may award CPL for military training and education related to occupations and/or courses for which standards have not been established by an approved Military Prior Learning Academic Panel consistent with this local Credit for Prior Learning policy pursuant to the following:
 - 6.2.1. Air Force: Community College of the Air Force transcripts are evaluated by the College's Registrar or designated college official as a traditional college transcript.
 - 6.2.2. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard: Colleges should refer to recommendations from the American Council on Education for occupations and courses not currently evaluated by the Military Prior Learning Academic Panels or documented on the Community College of the Air Force transcript.

- 6.3. Once the Office of Admissions receives official transcripts, the Registrar will submit the information to the American Council of Education College Credit Recommendation Service for review and assessment.
 - 6.3.1. The Registrar will consult with the appropriate instructional dean that houses the courses for credit and subsequently issue credits based on the American Council of Education's Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services.
 - 6.3.2. Applicability of credits to degree programs is determined by the academic department requirements.

Section 7: Standardized Examinations

- 7.1. Colleges shall award CPL for the following standardized examinations consistent with the standards herein:
 - 7.1.1. Standardized AP exams are used to assess student mastery of course content. Students receive scores on a "1" to "5" scale, with "5" being the highest.
 - 7.1.1.1. An AP exam score determines how many credits are awarded towards specific coursework.
 - 7.1.1.2. The College shall award credit to a student who earns a score of "3" or higher on an AP exam as approved by the CCRC. Course credit is awarded based upon the academic program of study.
 - 7.1.1.3. The College may award credit for AP scores and courses beyond those approved by the CCRC as determined by local college policy.
 - 7.1.2. Cambridge Assessment International Education Examinations
 - 7.1.2.1. Upon review and evaluation of student submitted documentation by the college designee, students may earn credit based on the Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced (A) Level exam(s) taken and grades(s) earned.
 - 7.1.2.1.1. An official grade report from Cambridge International must be provided to the College.
 - 7.1.2.2. Students shall earn college credit if a grade of e/E or better (which is the equivalent to a grade of C in the United States) is earned on the Cambridge International AS and A Level Examination.

- 7.1.2.3. Using the current Cambridge translation table, course credit is awarded and listed on the student's academic record. Course credit is awarded based upon the academic program of study.
- 7.1.2.4. The course credit equivalency is documented on the student record.
- 7.1.3. College-Level Examination Program®(CLEP)
 - 7.1.3.1. If a CLEP exam in a subject is offered by the College Board, the College shall require a student to take the CLEP exam if they seek to demonstrate proficiency in the subject area by examination.
 - 7.1.3.2. The College shall award credit to a student who scores at or above the credit-granting score recommended by the American Council on Education (ACE) at the time the College evaluates the student's official score.
 - 7.1.3.2.1. The College shall award the same amount of credit to a student who scores satisfactorily on the relevant CLEP exam as a student who successfully completes the related course.
 - 7.1.3.3. Students who perform satisfactorily on College-Level Examination Program exams shall receive a standardized code in the College's Student Information System.
 - 7.1.3.4. Students who did not receive a satisfactory score on a CLEP exam may retake the exam after three (3) months.
- 7.1.4. DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSST)
 - 7.1.4.1. The College shall award credit to a student who scores at or above the credit-granting score recommended by the ACE at the time the College evaluates the student's official score report.
 - 7.1.4.1.1. The College shall award the same amount of credit to a student who scores satisfactorily on the relevant DSST as a student who successfully completes the related course.
 - 7.1.4.2. Students who did not receive a satisfactory score on a DSST may retake the exam after three (3) months.
- 7.1.5. International Baccalaureate®(IB) Diploma Programme

- 7.1.5.1. International credentials must be obtained from a recognized international institution that is validated by a U.S. credentialing agency.
- 7.1.5.2. A grade of (70) percent or higher must be earned for the courses being considered for credit.

Section 8: Challenge Exams/Proficiency

8.1. Challenge Exam/Proficiency Standards

- 8.1.1. Instructional deans request a subject matter expert(s) to develop challenge exams.
- 8.1.2. Challenge exams/proficiency may be handwritten, computer-based, oral, practical, or a combination of these administration methods.
- 8.1.3. Developmental courses, supplemental courses, and courses including clinical practice are not eligible for challenge exams/proficiency.
- 8.1.4. Challenge exams/Proficiency that are administered for courses contained in the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA) may be provided when the exam is vetted, administered, and graded by a qualified instructor in the discipline.

8.2. Limitations on Students Eligible to Take Challenge Exams/Proficiency

- 8.2.1. A student must meet all pre-requisite requirements before they are eligible to take the challenge examination/proficiency for a course.
- 8.2.2. A student may only attempt a challenge exam/proficiency once.
- 8.2.3. A student may not take a challenge exam/proficiency if they have already earned a grade for the course.
 - 8.2.3.1. A challenge exam/proficiency may not be used to supersede a grade a student already earned in the applicable course.
- 8.2.4. Career and College Promise (CCP) students, as defined in 1D SBCCC 400.11, may participate in challenge examinations/proficiency to earn college credit but may not earn dual high school credit.
 - 8.2.4.1. To earn dual credit, students must enroll and successfully complete the college course.

- 8.2.5. If a CLEP exam in a subject is offered by the College Board, the College may require a student to take the CLEP exam if they seek to demonstrate proficiency in the subject area by examination.
- 8.3. The College shall award credit for the applicable course to a student who successfully earns a grade of “C” or higher on a challenge exam/proficiency.
- 8.4. If the College’s challenge examination/proficiency occurs outside of regular course enrollment, then an optional assessment fee may be charged to cover administrative cost per 1E SBCCC 700.6.
 - 8.4.1. Federal Pell grant funds cannot be used to pay for challenge exams/proficiency.
- 8.5. Student hours shall not be reported for budget/FTE which result from challenge exams/proficiency except that the actual time required to take the exam may be counted in membership; students shall be registered in the class consistent with 1E SBCCC subchapter 300 or 1E SBCCC Subchapter 400 (1G SBCCC 200.95).
- 8.6. Challenge Exams/Proficiency are not calculated into a student’s cumulative grade point average.

Section 9: Portfolio Assessment

- 9.1. The College may award Credit for Prior Learning based on portfolio assessment as provided by their local policies.
- 9.2. If the portfolio assessment occurs outside of regular course enrollment, then an optional assessment fee may be charged to cover administrative cost per 1E SBCCC 700.6.

Section 10: Public Safety Training (PST) Prefix Courses 1D SBCCC 800.10

- 10.1. Courses in the Combined Course Library with a Public Safety Training (PST) prefix can be used for awarding prior-learning credit for industry-recognized public safety training and/or credentials.
- 10.2. Consistent with 1D SBCCC 400.8(c), credit shall be considered for public safety training that meets the criteria outlined in the Public Safety Training (PST) course descriptions as listed in the Combined Course Library.
- 10.3. Official documentation from the training provider or credentialing entity shall be provided to the college that validates, at a minimum, the description and length of training.

Legal Citation: [Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges \(SACSCOC\) Standard 10.7](#); Code of Federal Regulations: [29 C.F.R. § 29](#)—Labor Standards for the Registration of Apprenticeship Programs; [29 C.F.R. § 29.5](#)—Standards of apprenticeship; NC State Board of Community Colleges Code [1D SBCCC 300.1](#), [1D SBCCC 300.5](#), [1D SBCCC 400.1](#), [1D SBCCC 400.3](#), [1D SBCCC 400.8](#), [1D SBCCC 400.11](#), items 1D SBCCC 800.3, 1D SBCCC 800.4, 1D SBCCC 800.5, 1D SBCCC 800.6, 1D SBCCC 800.7, 1D SBCCC 800.8, 1D SBCCC 800.9, and 1D SBCCC 800.10 in [1D SBCCC Subchapter 800](#), [1E SBCCC Subchapter 300](#), [1E SBCCC Subchapter 400](#), [1E SBCCC 700.6](#), and [1G SBCCC 200.95](#); [North Carolina High School to Community College Articulation Agreement](#)

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