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ABSTRACT

This report contains suggestions on how adults can secure college credit for past education and life experience. According to the report, there are eight categories of life experience that can be worth credit: work; homemaking; volunteer work; noncredit learning; travel; recreational activities and hobbies; reading, viewing, and listening; and discussions with experts. These experiences can be validated in several ways: prior learning assessment, a prior learning portfolio, standardized tests, nonstandardized tests, and other options for obtaining college credit. Each of these types of validation is discussed and resources for more information are provided. (KC)

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College Credit for Past Education and Life Experience
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College Credit for past education and life experience

Standardized Tests

- Prior Learning Assessment
- Standardized Tests
- College Level Examination Program
- Proficiency Examination Program
- Graduate Record Exam
- Job Ready Assessments
- Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Educational Support
- New York University Proficiency in Foreign Languages
- Ohio University Course Credit by Examination Program
- Thomas A. Edison Examination Program

Non-Standardized Tests

- Challenge Examination
- Oral Exams

Other Options for Obtaining Credit

- Past College Credit
- Professional Certification
- Workplace Training
- College Bank

Additional Resources

- Indiana Colleges with Prior Learning Assessment
- Worksheet: Prior Learning Record

There are several ways adults can earn credit toward a college degree. College credits can often be earned through past life experiences and past formal education. According to Bear & Bear, in **College Degrees by Mail**, there are eight categories of life experience that can be worth credit:

1. **Work** - i.e., skills such as typing, filing, inventory control, accounting, computer programming & operating, welding, editing, sales.
2. **Homemaking** - i.e., home maintenance, household planning and budgeting, child raising, meal planning and nutrition, child psychology.
3. **Volunteer Work** - i.e., community services, political campaigns, church activities, service organizations.
4. **Non-Credit Learning** - i.e., company training courses, workshops, clinics, conferences and conventions, lectures.
5. **Travel** - i.e., study tours (formal or informal), living for periods of time in other countries or cultures, participating in activities related to subcultures or cultures.
6. **Recreational Activities and Hobbies** - i.e., musical skills, aviation training and skills, acting or work in community theater, sports, arts and crafts, fiction and nonfiction writing, public speaking, gardening, designing & making clothing.

7. **Reading, Viewing, Listening** - i.e., any subject area in which a person has done extensive reading or study for which college credit has not been earned.
8. **Discussions with Experts** - i.e., learning can come from talking, listening, and working with experts in significant, extensive, or intensive meetings.

Prior Learning Assessment

Prior learning assessment is a method that colleges and universities use to evaluate knowledge that a student has gained through life experience. Prior learning assessment enables college instructors to evaluate life experiences as potentially equivalent to courses taught at a college level. There are three common ways in which prior learning can be assessed: through standardized tests, non-standardized tests, and prior learning portfolios.

Before choosing any of the following options, students should check with their college or university to see which they will accept.

Prior Learning Portfolio

A prior learning portfolio is a written record presented by the student requesting college credit for learning outside the classroom. Credit is given only for college- level learning, and the portfolio must be well documented and organized. Portfolio requirements may vary from college to college, but most of them require the following elements:

1. Identification and definition of specific prior learning for which college credit is being requested;
2. An essay or narrative explaining how this prior learning related to the student's desired degree program, from what experiences it was gained, and how it fits into his/her overall education and career plans;
3. Documentation that the student has actually acquired the learning s/he is claiming; and
4. A credit request listing exactly how much credit the student is asking for and in each subject area.

Some colleges offer guidelines or courses to assist students with preparing a prior-learning portfolio. Some classes are required as part of preparing a prior-learning portfolio. For more information, talk to an admission officer at your college.

Standardized Tests

One way to earn credit is through standardized tests. Each college and university has its own standards for accepting tests, defining a passing grade, and awarding hours of credit. Some schools may have a limit on the number of credits that can be awarded through exams. Others will not grant credit but will allow the student to bypass an introductory class or classes and begin at a higher level.

College Level Examination Program

One type of exam offered by CLEP is the general exam that covers subjects usually taken in the first two years of college. The five general exams cover mathematics, English composition, humanities, natural science, and social science and history. You may be able to obtain 3-6 hours of credit per general exam for a passing score.

The second type of exam offered by CLEP is a subject exam. A subject exam covers specific subjects typically taught in undergraduate courses having similar names. Introductory Microeconomics is an example of one subject area exam. A passing exam usually results in an award of the same amount of credit that a student would receive by passing a similar college course. There are 30 subject exams available through CLEP. They are: The testing agencies issue a detailed summary describing each test and specific content area covered. Also, books on exam preparation with sample tests can be found in bookstores and libraries.
For more information on CLEP exams, contact:

CLEP
P.O. Box 661
Princeton, NJ 08541-6601
(609) 771-7865.

Proficiency Examinations Program (PEP)

PEP gives you the opportunity to obtain recognition for college level learning no matter how or where the learning took place. It covers 43 subject areas and contains multiple choice questions and some essay questions. Examples of areas tested include nursing, business, education, arts and sciences. Each exam is based on a course outline that is available in the PEP study guide for that subject. Colleges and universities may grant credit or waive a prerequisite course, allowing you to take a higher level course. The amount of credit that can be received ranges from 1 2/3 to 6 credits per exam.
For more information, contact:

American College Testing Program
P.O. Box 168
Iowa City, IA 52243
(319) 337-1000

Graduate Record Exam (GRE)

The GRE is normally required for students entering graduate school. However, it is sometimes used to assess prior learning at the undergraduate level. There are two types of tests available through the GRE. One is a general test that measures skills acquired over a long period of time that are not related to any specific field of study. The other type is a subject test that measures achievement in particular fields of study. The subject

test assumes either an undergraduate major or an extensive background in the area being tested. Subject tests cover 16 subject areas. The amount of credit awarded for a passing exam ranges from 0-30 credits. The general test is offered through computer-based or paper-based testing. The subject test is only offered through paper-based testing.
For a registration bulletin, call the ICPAC Hotline at 1-800-992-2076 or contact:

Educational Testing Service
P.O. Box 955
Princeton, NJ 08541
(609) 771-7671

Job Ready Assessments

Job Ready Assessments are often used to obtain credit or advanced standing in vocational and technical fields. They are used to measure knowledge and how that knowledge is applied. Job Ready Assessments are based on national standards and include a written and performance assessment. There are approximately 70 Job Ready Assessments available. Examples of assessments available include accounting, computer programming, construction, dental assisting, electrical occupations, general drafting and design, horticulture, motorcycle mechanics, plumbing, robotics technology, and welding.
For more information, contact:

National Occupational Competency
Testing Institute
500 North Bronsen Avenue
Big Rapids, MI 49307
(616) 796-4699

Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Educationa Support (DANTES)

DANTES is used by colleges and universities to award credit to students who can demonstrate knowledge of subjects commonly taught in introductory college courses. It provides 50 subject-standardized tests that are available to everyone, including civilians. DANTES is especially useful for active and reserve military personnel. It provides a testing program, an evaluation system for military technical training, and a system for documenting learning experiences gained through military services. DANTES also provides approximately 100 proficiency exams free of charge to military personnel and helps military personnel gain college credit through the use of a portfolio of their learning experiences.
For more information contact: DANTES Program Office
Educational Testing Service
Princeton, NJ 08541
(215) 750-8328

New York University Proficiency in Foreign Languages

New York University offers a proficiency testing program for approximately 41 foreign languages. The program is used to evaluate a student's knowledge of a language by testing three skills used in everyday communication - listening, reading, and writing. There are two types of tests offered: a 12-point exam and a 16-point exam. The 12-point exam involves answering questions about a listening comprehension; translating into English and into the test language; and writing short answers, paragraphs, and a longer essay in response to a selection of general topics. The 16-point exam is the same as the 12-point exam, but with the addition of a 350-word essay section on a more complex subject. These exams can be taken at New York University and other locations in the United States and overseas.
For more information, call ICPAC at 1-800-992-2076 or contact New York University at the following address:

New York University
Proficiency Testing in Foreign Languages
Foreign Language Program
NYU School of Continuing Education
2 University Place, Room 55
New York, NY 10003
(212) 998-7030

Ohio University Course Credit by Examination Program

The Ohio University Course Credit by Examination Program is another standardized examination program that covers over 100 subjects in Liberal Arts, Business, Professional, and **free-elective** areas. There are two options for taking this exam: Students can take and prepare for an exam on their own; or if they feel they need the assistance of a professor, they can take an independent study course by correspondence or do an independent study project. A brief syllabus containing a course description, a list of required textbooks, and information on the exam will be sent to students who register for the exam. Test results are received in the form of letter grades from A to F. A pass/fail option is also available.
For more information, contact:

Independent Study
Tupper Hall 302
Ohio University
Athens, OH 45701-2979

The Thomas A. Edison Examination Program

(TECEP) is a standardized testing program that was developed by Thomas A. Edison State College. It includes DANTES subject-standardized tests and covers over 100 subjects in Liberal Arts, Business, Professional and "free-elective" areas. A

study guide and a list of recommended readings are available for a small fee. TECEP may be used at other institutions and is administered nationally. Pass/fail grades are issued as test results, and only passing grades are on the student's record. For more information, contact:

Office of the Registrar
Thomas A. Edison State College
101 West State Street
CN 545
Trenton, NJ 08625

Non-Standardized Tests

Challenge Examinations

Challenge examinations are designed by the school, department, or the faculty member responsible for the course that corresponds to the area of learning for which the student is trying to obtain credit. They are not standardized and are based on lecture content and textbooks used for particular courses. For this reason, it is important to talk to the instructor before taking a challenge exam. Challenge exams are used to grant credit for the course being tested and to prove that the knowledge gained from a similar course elsewhere is transferable.

Oral Exams

Oral Exams are used to review students' understanding of a subject. Oral exams consist of an interview with a faculty member or members and may involve either a discussion of the topic or a list of previously prepared questions. Exam material tends to be based on the particular course the instructor is teaching and students should discuss this option with an advisor before choosing to take an oral exam. For more information on non-standardized tests like challenge and oral exams, talk to a college admissions officer or to the faculty member teaching the course for which credit is being obtained.

Other options for obtaining credit

Past College Credit

Past college credit may be accepted by students' present school. A copy of the transcripts may be obtained for a small fee from the college or university previously attended. Students can use these transcripts during the assessment process or they can ask the college or university to accept them as documentation for transfer credits. However, colleges and universities differ about the amount and type of credit they will accept; and they may not accept credits that they consider to be too old. Students shouldn't't be discouraged from trying to gain credit from previous course work. Most colleges will accept credit that is several years old. For more information, talk to an admissions officer or a transfer specialist at your new college.

You can also read Tips for Successful Transfer of College Credit.

Professional Certification

Another source of college credit is professional certification or licenses given in recognition of continued learning within an occupational field. Many of the professional certification programs have been evaluated by the Program On Non-Collegiate Sponsored Instruction, or PONSI. PONSI is a program conducted by the American Council on Education that evaluates courses sponsored by corporations, unions, and the armed forces. It issues guides that recommend credit for programs deemed equivalent to college courses.

For more information, talk to a college admissions officer or contact:

American Council on Education
1 Dupont Circle NW
Suite 800
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 939-9300

Workplace Training

Another way you may be able to obtain credit is through classes taken at the workplace, a community college, a proprietary school, or through courses taken as part of military training. Training programs by some corporations, unions, and professional associations may also be accepted. Colleges and universities may use the ACE National Guide to Educational Credit for Training Programs or the Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Forces to determine if a training program is worth college credit. Schools may also use it to assign credit directly or as guidelines for their own evaluations. For more information, including what documentation is required for a completed training program, talk to a college admissions officer.

College Bank

The Regents Credit Bank Services is an evaluation and transcript service for people who wish to consolidate their academic records. The Credit Bank issues one widely-accepted transcript on which all credit is listed in a comprehensible form. The Credit Bank will accept academic credits from local courses, correspon-dence courses, equivalency exams, or other methods. There are seven kinds of deposits that can be made into the Credit Bank:

1. College courses taken either in residence or by correspondence from regionally-accredited schools in the United States, or their equivalent in other countries.
2. Scores earned on a wide range of equivalency tests.
3. Military services schools and military occupational

specialties that have been evaluated for credit by the American Council on Education.

4. Non college learning experiences offered as company courses, seminars, or in-house training by many large and small corporations and evaluated by the American Council on Education or the New York National Program for Non-collegiate Sponsored Instruction.
5. Pilot training licenses and certificates issued by the Federal Aviation Administration.
6. Approved nursing performance examinations.
7. Special assessments of knowledge gained from experience or independent study.

The first six deposits have predetermined amounts of credit. The Credit Bank appoints a panel to assess how much credit will be given for the seventh category and, therefore, the amount of credit granted can vary greatly. There is a fee to set up a Credit Bank account that includes one year of update service. After the first year, a maintenance fee is charged each time a new "deposit" of credit is made. Some universities may do their own evaluation of previous credit, and will not accept credit bank transcripts. For more information, write or call:

Regents Credit Bank
Regents College
University of the State of New York
7 Columbia Circle
Albany, NY 12203
(518) 474-3703.

Additional Resources

- **Back To School: A College Guide For Adults.**
  (1996) Laverne L. Ludden, Ed.D. Park Avenue Productions, 720 North Park Avenue, Indianapolis, IN 46202-3431.
- **Earn College Credit For What You Know.**
  (1992) Lois Lamdin. Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 243 South Wabash Avenue, Suite 800, Chicago, IL 60604.
- **College Degrees By Mail.**
  (1995) John Bear, Ph.D. and Mariah Bear, M.A. Ten Speed Press, P.O. Box 7123, Berkeley, CA 94707.
- **Bears' Guide to Earning College Degrees Nontraditionally.**
  (1996) John Bear, Ph.D. and Mariah Bear, M.A. C & B Publishing, P.O. Box 826, Benicia, CA 94510.

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