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## Office of the Registrar Proposal to Create an Academic Policy (Action Item)

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**1. Identification of proposed policy:** Creation of a policy to allow granting undergraduate academic credit for prior learning as demonstrated in a student-developed portfolio.

### **2. Catalog statement of proposed policy:**

#### **Credit for Prior Learning by Portfolio Evaluation**

Students who have acquired extensive college-level knowledge and skills in academic areas including but not limited to employment, military experience, civic activities, volunteer service, organizational training or workshops, or other non-traditional means may be granted credit for the knowledge and skills they have gained through nationally standardized exams (AP, CLEP, IB, ACE, etc.), departmental exams, or portfolio development and evaluation. This policy focuses on portfolio development and evaluation, while referencing national and departmental exams when appropriate.

Prior learning by portfolio evaluation is considered an opportunity for students to demonstrate their knowledge and is not a guarantee of credit for experience. Students will complete a portfolio of their prior learning as a part of a portfolio development course, IDST 250, taught by an instructor who has undergone training by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL). The portfolio, with varying forms of documents, will tie content learning outcomes to the knowledge and skills students have acquired through experiential learning. Credit earned will depend upon the student's ability to produce a portfolio that communicates learning outcomes consistent with the WKU mission on the level expected for the credit sought. Before registering for this course, students will consult with the instructor to evaluate the feasibility of seeking credit in a particular area.

The student will identify a maximum of two content areas for which credit is being sought, and his or her portfolio will be submitted to two full-time WKU faculty members, at least one from each area for which the student is seeking credit, upon successful completion of the course. These faculty experts will review the portfolio and determine if and how much academic credit is to be granted, as well as whether the credit should be given for a specific course, or for non-course-specific credit (see below). The consensus recommendation of the reviewers must be approved by the department head(s) and dean(s) of the college(s) concerned, and then will be forwarded to the Office of the Registrar to transcript recommended credit.

#### **Policies**

1. Credit may be awarded for experiential learning and/or for non-collegiate sponsored instruction. In evaluating non-collegiate sponsored instruction, faculty may utilize American Council on Education (ACE) guidelines or other criteria meaningful to their discipline.
2. Credit may be awarded for a specific course. Each academic department will determine which of their courses, if any, are appropriate for credit by portfolio evaluation, and the department

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head will identify (an) assessor(s) for each subject field deemed appropriate. These assessors will receive portfolio assessment training, and receive a modest stipend for each portfolio they evaluate, regardless of outcome.

3. Credit by portfolio evaluation will not be awarded for courses in General Education or the Core Curriculum (Colonnade Program). Students may use departmental examinations, CLEP, AP, or IB for credit in General Education, ~~or in the Foundations and Explorations components of the Colonnade Program.~~

4. If WKU does not have a specific course equivalent to the student's prior learning, non-course specific credit may be awarded provided that WKU offers an academic program in a pertinent discipline. Non-course specific credit will be transcribed as XXX-PLA-EL-L (lower division elective credit) or XXX-PLA-EL-U (upper division elective credit), where XXX stands for the WKU disciplinary area awarding the credit (e.g. LEAD, HCA, etc.), and PLA stands for Prior Learning Assessment.

5. Non-course specific credit will only be granted if WKU offers a program in a discipline similar to the student's prior learning.

6. The total number of credit hours awarded for prior learning by portfolio evaluation shall not exceed one-fourth of the credit hours required for the major or minor, and shall not exceed one-fourth of the total credit hours required for the degree/ credential.

7. WKU does not accept non-discipline specific credit for prior learning based solely upon its appearance on other institutions' transcripts.

8. Prior learning credit will count toward the residency requirement for a degree/ credential.

9. If, on initial review of the portfolio, the assessors determine that evidence of learning is insufficient for credit, the assessors shall permit the student to provide one revision of the portfolio within six months of notification of insufficiency.

10. A student must have earned at least 12 hours of college credit, including credit for ENG 100 or its equivalent, prior to pursuing credit for prior learning.

11. A student may not request prior learning credit for a course that has been previously taken, ~~and failed.~~

12. A student may not request prior learning credit for a course in which he/she is currently enrolled.

13. Prior learning credit will appear in the same section of the transcript as does transfer credit. Only the portfolio course will be considered part of the term's course load.

14. Earned hours will be recorded for prior learning credit; neither letter grades nor quality points will be awarded for the credit.

15. WKU cannot guarantee that prior learning credit earned through portfolio evaluation will transfer to another college or university.

16. Students will pay tuition for the portfolio course, and a course fee will be charged for evaluation of the portfolio. The fee will be collected and administered by the Division of Extended Learning and Outreach (DELO). There will be no further charges for the credit that is awarded for prior learning.

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### 3. Rationale for proposed policy:

Credit for prior learning is defined by CPE as "college credit for the college-level knowledge and skills gained from non-college instructional programs or life experiences, including but not limited to employment, military experience, civic activities, and volunteer service. Credit is

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evaluated through nationally standardized exams in specific disciplines, challenge exams for specific courses at individual institutions, evaluations of non-college training programs, and individualized assessments.” Western Kentucky University currently awards credit for prior learning in a number of different ways. Students may receive credit on the basis of departmental examinations in any course listed as satisfying a general education requirement; individuals who qualify for credit based on Excelsior College Examinations, or Military Occupational Specialties as recommended by the ACE Guide may receive credit; students may receive credit as the result of their scores on CLEP, ACT and SAT, AP, and International Baccalaureate tests; and credit is granted for specific levels of certification of achievement in ROTC, nursing, foreign languages, medical technology, and vocational programs. In other words, non-classroom means for acquiring credit are already available to students: however, we have not previously had a way to award credit for non-sponsored experiential learning that does not lend itself to traditional examination.

One type of credit for prior learning available at many institutions but not currently at WKU is credit based upon a portfolio of prior learning. Because this type of credit is especially useful to adult learners, and because WKU has identified itself as an "adult learning focused institution," it is important that WKU adopt a policy that permits credit via the portfolio evaluation process.

This would also match the recommendations of the 2008 prior learning task force.

Another impetus for developing a method for evaluating adult students' prior learning comes from the proposed KAHEA alliance to deliver quality education to adult learners across the commonwealth. We expect this to impact our enrollment positively and contribute to our mission to prepare “students of all backgrounds to be productive, engaged, and socially responsible citizen-leaders of a global society,” and to enrich “the quality of life for those within its reach.” Participation in this alliance requires that we adopt a credit for prior learning policy.”

Finally, an important reason for this policy comes from the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education itself, which has adopted the following policy recommendation and rationale as part of its Kentucky Adult Learner Initiative:

**“Recommendation:** All public postsecondary institutions should reevaluate and expand policies regarding the opportunity to earn credit for college-level experiential learning in one or more of its forms.”

**“Rationale:** While many Kentucky institutions already have such policies, all should be evaluated in light of nationally recognized standards and procedures, such as the American Council on Education (ACE) National Guide to Educational Credit for Training Programs, the ACE Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Forces, the ACE Guide to Credit by Examination, and the CAEL standards for evaluating portfolios (2008).”

In part because of this CPE policy recommendation, a number of universities in Kentucky offer credit for prior learning portfolios, including the University of Louisville, which allows up to 48 hours of credit, Northern Kentucky University, which allows up to 32 hours, and Murray State University, which allows up to 30 hours.

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According to a 2006 study of 272 college and university administrators conducted by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), approximately 66 percent reported that their institutions grant credit for experiential learning, up from 50 percent in 1991 and 55 percent in 1996.

The portfolio course itself, approved in spring 2013, is designed to:

- Respect and value the college-level learning already in existence in order not to force the student into unnecessary and cost-prohibitive coursework.
- Give the student opportunity to develop or hone communication skills on a college level for intellectual advancement and efficacy.
- Allow the necessary time, reflection, and context for students to evaluate and communicate their own prior learning and its relationship to existing curricular outcomes.

**4. Impact of proposed policy on existing academic or non-academic policies:** None

**5. Proposed term for implementation:** Spring 2014. An implementation committee will be appointed by the Provost, consisting of a faculty member from each college, a representative from the Registrar's office, a representative from DELO, a WKU Regional Campus representative, and any other individuals the Provost deems appropriate. This implementation committee will also be responsible for on-going assessment.

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**6. Dates of prior committee approvals:**

UCC Academic Policy Subcommittee October 21, 2013

Undergraduate Curriculum Committee October 24, 2013

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University Senate \_\_\_\_\_