UBC Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition Framework

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Introduction

Prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) are learner-centred processes that allow individuals to identify, document, be assessed and gain recognition for their prior learning that is relevant and applicable to credit-based programming and courses at UBC. The learning may be formal, informal, non-formal or experiential. Across many BC post-secondary institutions, PLAR is applied in order to:

1. Grant a **pre-requisite exemption** for a formal credit/credential that is required for entry into a program or course
2. Grant a **course exemption** for a course required in a program, without granting credits for that course (i.e. the total number of credits to be taken remains the same)
3. Grant a **course registration in lieu**, usually as a replacement or extension of a practicum program, recognizing professional experience in the field
4. Grant **course credit** and completion status for a course in a program (i.e. the total number of credits to be taken is reduced)

Since the 1970's it has been widely acknowledged that academically significant and socially useful knowledge is acquired through multiple formal, informal and non-formal means. This includes knowledge gained through non-credit programs, paid and unpaid work, community and organizational involvement, and individual enquiry (International Labour Organization: Skills and Employability Branch, 2018). With increasing focus on lifelong learning, the growing demand for upskilling, and rising popularity of micro-credentials, PLAR is an important mechanism that has the potential to save students time and money, as well as promote inclusivity and access by validating diverse learning pathways.

UBC has not yet established guidelines to support units or programs interested in applying PLAR processes. While some programs and courses at UBC have implemented PLAR practices (see Appendix 1), the absence of shared principles has meant that approaches have evolved independently. Currently, the only campus-wide PLAR-related policy concerns incoming (transfer) credit. If another institution grants credit through PLAR, UBC will recognize it only if those credits are tied to a specific course that UBC already accepts for transfer credit (UBC Vancouver policy | UBC Okanagan policy). UBC Admissions also leverages a PLAR lens to students who submit an English Language Admission Standard waiver.

PLAR is not to be confused with transfer credit. Transfer credit has its basis in course-to-course articulation, a process formalized and managed through BC Council on Admissions & Transfer (BCCAT). These are two distinct processes for gaining academic credit at a post-secondary institution, both of which recognize prior learning. However, PLAR assesses learning gained from formal or informal sources, such as work experience, community involvement, non-credit programming, and self-directed study, whereas credit transfer recognizes formal education completed at another recognized institution. UBC has existing policies that guide the use of transfer credit (UBC Vancouver policy | UBC Okanagan policy).

For the purposes of this framework, PLAR refers to learner-centered processes for formally assessing demonstrated student competencies, skills, and knowledge that have been previously acquired, regardless of how or where the learning occurred. Such assessment may be used to grant course credits or course exemptions within a program of study, or—where permitted by Senate policy—as supplementary evidence for admission. PLAR is distinct from transfer credit, which is based on course-to-

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course equivalency, and does not assess how a student achieved their learning but only the competencies they can demonstrate.

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this document is to present a central framework to guide and support academic units who wish to use PLAR in their credit programs at UBC, on both the Okanagan and Vancouver campuses. The guidelines presented below acknowledge existing Senate policies. With appropriate consultation and as financially feasible, some administrative processes in association with PLAR may be implemented at a campus level. For clarity, PLAR may be applied either to grant credit toward specific courses or requirements, or as supplementary evidence in admission decisions, where permitted by policy.

This framework does not:

- Change or seek to supersede existing policy as defined in UBC's calendars.
- Automatically apply to all courses or programs. Applications to programs/courses is decided by the academic unit.
- Change the UBC general admission requirements for undergraduate programs, including broad-based admissions, master's programs, or doctoral programs.
- Change the entrance credits granted for IB, AP or British-patterned education students.
- Negate program-specific admission requirements, but rather supplements them with the option to accept alternate evidence of appropriate skills and knowledge.
- Apply to transfer credits from one institution to another.
- Directly grant credit for completion of non-credit programs, but does allow for a pathway from which learning achieved by any means can be assessed for credit or exemption at UBC.

Guiding Principles

The following principles were developed by the working group to guide the development of the framework.

Principles for Access

a. **A willingness to improve access and success for all, including historically, persistently, or systemically marginalized (HPSM) student populations**
   - Since PLAR can increase access for HPSM student populations, units should consider how to actively incorporate PLAR in their programs.
   - Eligibility, application processes and means of assessment should be transparent, clear, and publicly available.
   - Policy(ies) and practices should be fair and equitable.

b. **A recognition that many learners, particularly mature learners, come to UBC with skills and knowledge achieved elsewhere, including lived experience, which may fulfill a UBC program or course requirement**
   - Consider the diversity of the UBC applicant pool and assess how the framework aligns with the needs of those students. These groups might include:
        i. Working professionals
        ii. Those shifting careers
        iii. Indigenous learners in community
        iv. Military personnel
        v. Para-professionals

   - Units should be encouraged to use assessment strategies that are appropriate to their discipline and are simultaneously capable of identifying the previously achieved knowledge and skills of learners relevant to the course/program, regardless of how they were achieved.

Principles for Coherence and Quality

a. **A desire to establish foundational and coherent parameters across UBC**
   - Each program has its own specific needs which should be reflected in their PLAR practices, while aligning with the parameters of the UBC framework. There should be a level of coherence through foundational principles, and in some areas, it would be appropriate to have consistent institutional-wide messaging and practice (e.g., appeals, residency, maximum number of credits granted, fees etc.).

b. **The UBC Framework and practices should align with provincial and other relevant guidelines.**
   - The working group was guided by the BCCAT Guidelines for PLA, the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment Standards, and BC Prior Learning Action Network. These include guidelines for rigor, quality, fairness, transparency, and validity.

c. **Development of the UBC Framework may benefit from the experiences of other institutions**
   - The working group engaged with and learned from peer institutions' approaches and experiences with PLAR.

d. **Plans for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of PLAR practices and activities should be developed.**
   - The framework offers guidance on monitoring and evaluation.

e. **The UBC Framework commits to maintaining the quality and integrity of UBC academic offerings.**
   - All PLAR activities/assessments must be in alignment with UBC's academic standards and represent an alternate yet equally rigorous assessment of learning as found within the UBC curriculum.

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Principles for Process

a. Respect for diverse program contexts and needs.
- Processes and approaches for PLAR should be developed and administered by the academic programs. The UBC framework establishes guidelines and parameters related to overarching principles and considers the unique contexts and needs of the diversity of undergraduate and graduate programs.

b. A desire to promote the uptake of PLAR by academic units and to provide the support units need to conduct high quality PLAR.
- UBC should encourage academic units to consider PLAR as appropriate within their unit.
- UBC should prepare central supports for PLAR activity within academic units. This will include training for PLAR assessors in units to ensure that PLAR is done fairly and is of high quality.

c. Assessment of prior learning should involve a range of strategies consistent with institutional, program, course and discipline standards.
- Each program can establish the means most appropriate for its contexts.
- Assessments should be fair, and a valid measure of the skills and knowledge associated with the program/course in question.
- Assessment method(s) must be appropriate for the subject or skill area, targeted to the learning outcomes, competencies, skills, or outcomes of the course, and reflective of the level of achievement expected of any student
- UBC is responsible for developing the necessary skills and tools within the units to conduct fair and high-quality PLAR.

Guidelines

Section 1 – Admissions to UBC and Eligibility for PLAR

1. Admissions to UBC
a. Academic units may, at their sole discretion, use PLAR in order to satisfy admission requirements for their programs or faculty.
- Existing broad-based undergraduate and existing Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (Vancouver) and College of Graduate Studies (Okanagan) admissions practices are not impacted by the UBC PLAR Framework.
- Academic units may continue with their existing broad-based undergraduate applications, or they may amend them in light of any changes resulting from PLAR decisions in their unit.
- Academic units should consult with the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (Vancouver) or the College of Graduate Studies (Okanagan) if they wish to make amendments to current graduate program admission practices.
- The Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and College of Graduate Studies may, at their sole discretion, conduct a PLAR evaluation to evaluate eligibility of applicants who do not meet standard requirements for admission (e.g. GPA, or English language proficiency).

b. Existing practices of granting 1st year credit to incoming Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, or British-patterned education students will not be impacted by the introduction of a UBC PLAR Framework.

c. As per existing Senate policy J-51, grades based on prior learning assessment and/or challenge exams are to be excluded from admission averages.

2. Course Eligibility for PLAR

a. Academic units determine which, if any, courses in their program will be eligible for PLAR.

b. PLAR assessment can only be made for a required course or constrained elective within a program. It cannot be used to grant open elective credits.

a. Application of PLAR toward course-based practica should consider any contextual requirements of licensing bodies (e.g., a course may not be eligible if a practicum must be completed while enrolled in a program) and ensure that awards are based on evidence of learning (demonstrated knowledge, skills and/or competencies) and not experience alone.

3. PLAR Application Procedures

a. Academic units set their own processes and deadlines for PLAR assessment applications.

b. PLAR application processes and deadlines must be made clear on the program's student-facing website.

c. While processing times of PLAR applications will vary depending on the assessment method, it is recommended that assessments be completed a minimum of two weeks prior to the commencement of a term to be considered for credit during that term. Timely assessments and feedback are important as it may impact an individual's choice to matriculate.

4. Eligibility for PLAR

a. Academic units will confirm the eligibility of prospective and admitted students requesting PLAR, based on the institutional framework.

b. Where a prospective student/applicant is seeking a PLAR assessment as a basis of admission (see Section 1.1, Admissions to UBC), they do not have to be admitted to the program before the PLAR process can commence.

c. In contrast, where the purpose of the PLAR assessment is for course credit or course exemption, the individual must be admitted as a student to a program at UBC before requesting a PLAR assessment.

d. A student is ineligible for PLAR for a course if the student has any UBC grade for that course, including an 'F' or 'W.'

e. Students are normally allowed only one attempt at a PLAR assessment for a particular course.

f. Academic units will consult their PLAR records to ensure that an applicant has not previously attempted a PLAR assessment for a particular course.

5. Transferability of Course Credits and Exemptions

a. Credits granted via PLAR towards a specific program may be transferable to another program at UBC, as appropriate and at the discretion of the receiving academic unit.

6. Prerequisites for Course Credits and Exemptions

a. A successful PLAR applies only to the specified course. It will not constitute a successful PLAR of prerequisites to that course.

a. A student must take the prerequisites of a course for which they have received course credit or exemption if the prerequisite is a requirement of the program, unless the student is granted an exemption or credit for that prerequisite through an additional PLAR.

Section 2 – Use of PLAR and Assessment Practices

1. Determining Academic Unit PLAR Practice
a. Academic units will determine if and how PLAR will be enacted in their contexts and are responsible for creating their own policies, practice and/or guidelines, consistent with UBC PLAR Framework and existing UBC policies, that serve the contexts and students of their programs.
b. Not all programs, nor all courses in any program, need to be eligible for PLAR.

2. Types of PLAR Recognition
a. UBC recognizes and allows the following types of PLAR recognition:
   - Prerequisite exemption for admission to a program;
   - Prerequisite exemption for admission to a course;
   - Course credit (where full credit for the course is awarded);
   - Course exemption (student is not required to complete a course but credits are not granted. The number of credits required to graduate remains unchanged);
   - Course registration in lieu (allows a student to register in a different course), for example, replace a practicum course to recognized learning documented through professional practice.
b. PLAR cannot be applied towards the completion of non-course or zero-credit academic requirements (e.g., comprehensive exams, safety training, theses, or work experience hours).

3. Types of PLAR Assessment
a. Academic units will determine the assessment methods to be used, however, these methods should:
   - Use a range of strategies consistent with the discipline, course and institutional standards, selected to suit the specific needs of the course, the situation and the student;
   - Be an assessment of a student's competencies, skills and knowledge;
   - Require students to demonstrate the same level of competencies, skills and knowledge that reflect the learning outcomes/objectives of the course, and be consistent with achievement levels required for students enrolled in the course;
   - Be transparent and clearly articulated to the student;
   - Be consistently rigorous and fair to the student and their unique situation, particularly as it concerns different ways of learning and knowing.
b. A variety of assessment methods may be used, including, but not necessarily restricted to:

Method	Description
Examinations	A test prepared by the assessor, typically covering a wide body of accepted knowledge or concepts in the identified course, as detailed in the course learning outcomes.
Demonstrations	A student must demonstrate mastery of a skill in the presence of an assessor who measures their skill against a set of criteria.

Assignments	Assignments can take on a wide variety of forms as appropriate to the discipline. They may include essays, reports, case analyses, presentations, projects, problem solving, videos, etc.
Interviews	Interviews between the student and an assessor can target specific learning outcomes. However, alone they would likely not be sufficient to demonstrate achievement of the course learning outcomes. They may be used supplementally, either as a planned part of the assessment, or as a follow up to other assessments to ensure the assessor fully understands the student's level of knowledge, skill and attributes.
Portfolios	Portfolios are collections of artifacts that represent the student's accomplishments relevant to a particular course. This may include work achieved in non-credit programs, employment, volunteer work, etc.
Document Review	Letters of reference and other documents can be used to verify competency in some cases, and to supplement assessment by other means.

c. The academic unit should consider engaging with the student, where appropriate, in determining the type(s) of assessment methods.

4. Conducting Student Assessment
a. Heads of academic units will identify the appropriate faculty members to be responsible for conducting and overseeing PLAR assessments.
b. Assessments and the determination of competency and credit awarded will be done by faculty who have the appropriate subject matter and PLAR expertise.
c. All personnel involved in PLAR (including assessors and advisors) should work systematically towards continuous improvement in their PLAR practice.
d. The standards applied for a student assessed via PLAR toward credit or exemption in a course should be equivalent to those applied to students enrolled in that course.
e. Academic units are responsible for identifying the range of assessment methods appropriate to their program and course.
f. For a student to be granted credit or exemption for a course through PLAR, the student must successfully demonstrate that they have the equivalent knowledge, skills and attitudes as are required for a student to achieve credit for the course by traditional means. This means that the student must demonstrate the same competency with the course's Learning Outcomes as would be required by a student enrolled in the course.

5. Maximum PLAR Awards
Because PLAR credits are treated alongside transfer credits for the purpose of credit limits, these rules uphold UBC's residency requirement by ensuring that a significant portion of every program is completed at UBC.
a. **Graduate Degrees, Certificates and Diplomas:** Credits granted through PLAR count towards the allowable transfer credit maximum for graduate programs and may not exceed this maximum (UBCV and UBCO).
b. **Undergraduate Degrees:** Credits granted through PLAR in an undergraduate program reduce the maximum allowable number of transfer credits by the number of PLAR credits granted. The sum of the

number of transfer credits and PLAR credits may not exceed the lesser of 60 credits or 50% of the required number of credits for the program.

c. **Undergraduate and Post-baccalaureate Certificates and Diplomas**: The sum of the number of transfer credits and PLAR credits may not exceed 50% of the credits required for the program.

d. Academic units may set PLAR credit maxima for their programs that are less than the UBC maxima.

6. Developing Academic Unit Policy and Practice

a. Academic units will develop their own specific, clear and consistent PLAR policy and practice consistent with the UBC framework and appropriate for their program(s) and/or course(s). This will include, but is not limited to choosing:

- Which programs and courses may be eligible for PLAR
- The type(s) of PLAR recognition available
- The assessment methods appropriate for a given program or course
- Fees to be charged for PLAR assessment
- The maximum number of PLAR credits a student can be granted
- If a departmental appeal of unsuccessful PLAR attempts will be allowed, and if so, under what conditions and how appeal will be conducted
- Term deadlines for application for PLAR assessment and for submission of all documentation for PLAR review

b. Academic units will maintain written records of their policy and practices.

c. Academic units should ensure that students are aware of the policy and practices that affect them.

Section 3 – Administration

1. Supporting Academic units and programs

a. UBC will promote and support the use of PLAR by academic units and programs.

- Faculty involved in the design of PLAR assessment in programs and in the evaluation of student learning via PLAR should have professional development support from the institution to acquire and maintain expertise in PLAR.

2. Accepting credits earned via PLAR through transfer

a. As indicated in the UBC Calendars (Vancouver and Okanagan), UBC will continue to accept credits from incoming transfer students, where the credits were awarded for specific transferable course by another post-secondary institution through PLAR.

3. PLAR Records and Evaluation

a. Academic units are responsible for maintaining records related to PLAR uptake and success in order to assess the value of PLAR in their unit.

b. Academic units should maintain PLAR records, including the students who have attempted PLAR, the courses for which PLAR was attempted, the means by which the student was assessed, the name of the assessor(s), and the results of PLAR assessment and appeals. These records may be requested by the Vice President, Academic or designate.

c. With appropriate consultation and as financially feasible, some administrative processes in association with PLAR may be implemented at a campus level.

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4. Student Records

a. Credit received by PLAR will be documented on the student transcript as PLAR-achieved (PLA) but will not count towards a student's GPA.
b. If a PLAR attempt is unsuccessful, there will be no listing on the transcript.
c. The University will record successful PLAR in the student information system in the same way in which grades are normally transcribed.
d. Unsuccessful attempts will not be recorded in the student information system.
e. Academic units are to keep their own records of PLAR attempts and ensure that students only have one PLAR attempt for a given course.
f. Where a course is subject to the Credit/D/Fail policy, units may consider involving the student in the decision.
g. The name(s) and credentials of the faculty making the PLAR assessment of the student should be recorded in the records of the assessment and available to the student.

5. Ensuring PLAR Quality

a. Through conversations with units engaged in PLAR and/or review of PLAR records, UBC will monitor, review, evaluate and may revise prior learning assessment policies and practices to maintain and improve institutional standards.

6. Appeals

a. Academic units must determine for themselves if and under what conditions departmental appeals of unsuccessful PLAR attempts will be allowed and how the appeals will be conducted.
b. UBC provides no additional avenues for appeal beyond any departmental appeals that a unit may offer.

7. Non-credit to Credit Pathways

a. Credit is granted via PLAR for demonstration of learning, not for experience alone.
b. There is no automatic issue of credit for students with non-credit learning experience. This is not a 'transfer credit' situation. However, at the discretion of Faculties or programs, PLAR can facilitate non-credit to credit pathways, for instance:
    - Students may include in portfolio work, assignments, examinations, etc. completed in non-credit courses as evidence of prior learning; and
    - Programs may partner with non-credit providers in order to:
        o ensure that learning outcomes align in order to facilitate learner preparation for PLAR;
        o identify and promote specific courses at UBC for which student non-credit experience might prepare them well;
        o identify admission requirements that may be waived through PLAR;
        o provide students with information that will help them prepare for a future PLAR assessment;
        o recruit students from non-credit programs into UBC programs and courses, etc.

Section 4 – Student Support

1. **Institutional Support for PLAR Applicants**
a. Aspects of the PLAR Framework will be made public on UBC's student-facing institutional websites and may be published in the Academic Calendar as policies are developed. Student-facing considerations that will be prioritized for publication include how to access PLAR, FAQs and financial implications..
b. Students should be informed that receiving PLAR credits could change a student's status to less than full-time and therefore make them ineligible for financial aid and awards and/or could affect their tax status.

2. **Academic Unit Support for PLAR Applicants**
a. Academic units utilizing PLAR should support students throughout the entire PLAR process. This includes but is not limited to:
   - Publicizing on student-facing web pages where and how PLAR is applied in their program, including contact and other information to help PLAR applicants understand if they would benefit from PLAR, how it would apply to them, provisions for appeal (if any), how to receive support in preparation for their PLAR evaluation and fees etc.;
   - Providing academic advising support that will help prospective PLAR applicants understand the processes and implications of PLAR assessment;
   - Ensuring access to subject matter experts and/or assessors to help students understand and prepare for their PLAR assessments;
   - Providing access to the course syllabus and other relevant resources to help students self-assess their competencies and prepare for assessment; and
   - Providing detailed feedback and explanations related to the results of PLAR assessment.

Section 5 – Fees

1. **PLAR fees**
a. Academic units will set, publish and collect the fees charged to students for PLAR assessment.
b. Fees charged should be on a cost-recovery basis and never revenue generating.
c. Fees should be based on the services performed and/or the number of credits requested, but not ultimately by the number of credits awarded
d. The total fees charged to a student for PLAR assessment should never exceed the course fee as defined by the tuition fee schedule.
e. All fees are non-refundable.
f. Fees will require approval by UBC's Board of Governors.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Strategic Alignment

The implementation of PLAR processes is well aligned with UBC's refreshed strategic plan, *UBC's Strategic Directions 2025-2030*. The plan identifies seven new strategic direction to guide our work over the next five years. The strategic direction '**Create Flexibility for Learners**' seeks to increases program and pathway flexibility, as well as access and agency, for learners. As the educational landscape evolve, flexibility and accessibility are essential to meeting the diverse needs of learners and supporting their success—wherever they are and however they learn. PLAR is designed to improve access and success of previously excluded students by recognizing their relevant prior learning toward access, exemptions or credit.

In addition, the strategic direction '**Nurture a Strong and Vibrant UBC Community**' recognizes that our students, faculty, and staff are at the heart of everything we do. PLAR supports this strategic direction by ensuring we have a framework, principles and guidelines in place to help recruit (and retain) great students who otherwise may not pursue further education. PLAR is a mechanism that expands opportunities to access UBC programs for a broader range of potential students, by recognizing their relevant prior learning toward access, exemptions or credit.

The uptake and promotion of PLAR by Faculties and programs further advances key priorities in UBC's Indigenous Strategic Plan. UBC's Indigenous Strategic Plan provides thoughtful guidance for action and a framework for reconciliation in a post-secondary context and provides eight goals to guide and enable Faculties and others to follow through on the university's commitment to meaningful reconciliation. PLAR processes can be used to help UBC programs advance *Goal 6: Recruiting Indigenous people* by positioning UBC as an accessible large research university globally for Indigenous students, faculty and staff, and by providing a mechanism by which Indigenous students might attain course exemptions or credits based on their previous knowledge and skills, regardless of the source or context from which they achieved this learning.

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Appendix 2: PLAR at UBC

In February 2000, the UBC-Vancouver Senate Admissions Committee presented a report on Prior Learning Assessment that included four recommendations:

1. That UBC accept course credits earned through PLA from other recognized post-secondary institutions.
2. That PLA transfer credit be noted as such on the UBC student record.
3. That UBC create a part-time position for a PLA coordinator (using funding available from the province).
4. That the wording currently in the Calendar be changed… (to):
   - **Credit Earned via Prior Learning Assessment or Challenge**: *"Credits earned via prior learning assessment (PLA), challenge credit, or the equivalent, at another recognized post-secondary institution are accepted at UBC, so long as the course to which those credits apply is recognized by the University as suitable for transfer credit. The University only accepts PLA credits which are assigned to specific courses."*

The wording noted above appears in both the Vancouver and Okanagan Calendars.

PLAR is currently used by the following units and/or programs at the Vancouver campus:

- School of Nursing: As a pre-requisite for admission, applicants require 6 UG credits in Human Anatomy and Physiology from a recognized list of programs/courses. PLAR is available to assess if non-recognized courses/programs can be considered in lieu of those listed as recognized. Credit is not granted.
- Faculty of Pharmaceutical Science – Flex PharmD program: Awards up to 50% of program's credit for formal or informal learning toward didactic credit courses or Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experience courses. Not all courses are eligible and if an eligible course has pre-requisites, student must still complete the prerequisites for the course for which they seek PLAR credit. Challenge exams are used for granting credit for a didactic course and an abbreviated or a full portfolio is used for granting credit if the prior learning was achieved in formal or non-formal learning, respectively.
- Department of Computer Science – CPSC 110 (required course): Students may request to complete a challenge exam for credit or for exemption. Students are eligible to take the challenge exam once and only if they do not already have a grade from the course or a W standing. They must receive a 72% on the exam to successfully and the fee is equivalent to 1 credit of tuition.
- Department of Mathematics – Calculus Challenge Exam: Upon completion of the calculus challenge exam, students can potentially earn 3 credits with a grade. The fee is $100 per challenge exam.
- Faculty of Arts – Language Requirement: A challenge exam is available for students to demonstrate proficiency in French, Spanish, Italian or Portuguese in order exempt them from taking courses toward the language requirement. Credit is not awarded. *[no longer available]*

Appendix 3: Consultation Summary

Internal Consultations
Beginning in the summer and fall 2023, the following groups were engaged:

- Teaching and Learning Committee (UBC Okanagan)
- Associate Deans Academic and Students (UBC Vancouver)
- Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Executive Group (UBC Vancouver)
- The Office of Indigenous Strategic Initiatives
- The Senior Advisor on Indigenous Affairs (UBC Okanagan)
- Existing PLAR users, including colleagues in the School of Nursing, Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Faculty of Arts, Department of Mathematics, and the Department of Computer Science

In the Spring 2025, the following groups were engaged to refine and validate an updated framework:

- UBCV and UBCO's Associate Deans Academic and Students
- Indigenous Strategic Plan Executive Advisory Committee
- Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Executive Group (UBC Vancouver)
- Existing PLAR Users
- UBCV Senate Teaching and Learning Committee, joined by the Chair of the UBCV Senate Admissions Committee
- UBCO Senate Admissions and Awards Committee
- UBCO Senate Learning and Research Committee

External Consultations and Feedback

In 1999, BCCAT published PLAR guidelines for institutions. Most BC post-secondary institutions enact some form of PLAR, and many have published central institutional policy or guidelines, but the specifics concerning if and how PLAR is enacted for a program or course is determined by academic units.

UBC sought peer institutions for consultation through a search of websites of Canadian universities that publish anything online about their application of PLAR. Research intensive universities and BC universities were prioritized. The following institutions were identified and an email inviting consultation was sent:

- Royal Roads University
- Simon Fraser University
- Thompson Rivers University
- Université de Montréal
- Université Laval
- University of Calgary
- University of Ottawa
- University of the Fraser Valley
- University of Toronto
- University of Victoria
- University of Western Ontario
- Vancouver Island University
- Dalhousie University

In addition to email exchanges with all these peers, one-on-one consultations were conducted with Dalhousie, TRU, UVic, VIU, UFV and RRU.

Key Findings and Recommendations

1. Several institutions are building or updating their frameworks, addressing changing contexts and in order to align with CAPLA and Ministry statements concerning PLAR.
2. Fee structures and amounts charged to students for PLAR application and assessment vary widely and institutions report no understood justification for their fees and some are seeking to change them to make them fairer. The BCAAT Guidelines for PLAR indicate that fees should be based on service performed or the number of credits requested but not the number of credits issued. PLAR activities are seen as a service to the students and the university, and should not be revenue generating.
3. Institutions often set a maximum number of credits achieved via PLAR that can be attributed to an institutional credential. This often varies for credential type (i.e., certificate, diploma, under-graduate degree, graduate degree) and is less than or equal to the restrictions imposed by residency requirements.
4. Institutions vary widely in their promotion, engagement and uptake of PLAR and the centralized supports and oversight for PLAR vary accordingly. Peers with less oversight and support reported appreciating the need for support and oversight in order to align with the BCAAT Guidelines requirement to regularly evaluate PLAR activities.
5. Only some institutions (those with larger PLAR engagement) provide central support for the training of PLAR assessors. However, other institutions acknowledge the need for assessors to be both subject matter experts and trained specifically in best practices in PLAR assessment, as per the BCAAT Guidelines and CAPLA recommendations.
6. Academic units are primarily responsible for the administration, planning, execution and records of their PLAR activities. The Registrar's office enters credits into the records.
7. Institutions generally require that a student is enrolled in a program prior to requesting a PLAR evaluation for course credit or exemption in that program. This is not the case, however, for program application pre-requisites. Generally, students are not eligible for PLAR if they have any grade, including a failure, for the same course. Institutions vary in their rules for when students may apply for PLAR.
8. It is common for credits and exemptions granted via PLAR appear to on the student transcript, but that unsuccessful PLAR attempts are not so recorded. It is also common that students are ineligible for PLAR assessment after a previous PLAR failure for the same course.
9. There is great variability in if and when appeals to PLAR decisions are allowed.

Appendix 4: Framework Development

Development started in early 2022 with an environmental scan of PLAR activities at UBC, within BC and elsewhere. A working group, chaired by the Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President, Teaching and Learning (UBC Vancouver), formed in October 2022 to guide framework creation. The working group included 14 members representing units across the institution and across both campuses. To help socialize the work and inform the development of the framework, initial conversations were organized with the following groups during the summer and fall of 2023:

- UBCO Teaching and Learning Committee
- UBCV Associate Deans Academic and Students
- Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Executive Group (UBC Vancouver)
- The Office of Indigenous Strategic Initiatives
- The Senior Advisor on Indigenous Affairs (UBC Okanagan)
- Existing PLAR users

A member of the Working Group also conducted an extensive scan of peer institution policies and practices in BC, and existing policies across Canada, through the Fall 2023/Winter 2024. These activities included:

- Reviewing available literature on PLAR practices
- Reviewing the Canadian Association of Prior Learning Assessment Manual
- Reviewing the PLAR framework from Colleges and Institutes-Canada (CICan)
- Interview with the Executive Director of the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA)
- Reviewing peer institution policies
- Conducting 1-1 interviews with colleagues from peer research-intensive universities and BC institutions (see Appendix 3 for more information)

To refine and validate the updated framework, the following internal stakeholders were re-engaged during the Spring 2025:

- UBC Vancouver and UBC Okanagan Associate Deans Academic and Students
- Indigenous Strategic Plan Executive Advisory Committee
- Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Executive Group (UBC Vancouver)
- Existing PLAR Users
- UBC Vancouver Senate Teaching and Learning Committee, joined by the Chair of the UBC Vancouver Senate Admissions Committee
- UBC Okanagan Senate Admissions and Awards Committee
- UBC Okanagan Senate Learning and Research Committee

Appendix 5: Additional Resources

BCCAT Prior Learning and Assessment Implementation Guidelines

UNESCO Guidelines for the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of the Outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning

Beyond Academic Credentials: A 360 Degree Look at the Recognition of Prior Learning: Report of Outcomes

Buyer Beware: Report on PLAR Policies and Procedures of Post-Secondary Educational Institutions in Canada

RPL Standards and Guidelines for Canada: Mapping the Road Ahead

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