

Dear Ana writes on PLAR

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition

Many of you have worked or provided services for a long time in different occupational areas but do not have the academic credentials in your field to compete in the job market

What you have learned about your career or job, you learned on the job; or you have an uncompleted degree, diploma or certificate; or perhaps you simply taught yourself your trade or occupation.

In today's world of work, having academic credentials is important and in fact most employers are requesting that you have such documents.

What's ironic about this is that you may have worked for many years in your occupation where not having your certificate or diploma was never an issue. But now if you want to move on you need such credentials or you won't get that job. You may find yourself at a loss not knowing how to get your work experience recognized.

If you are in this situation, let me introduce to you PLAR – Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition.

What is PLAR? (Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition?) It is a formal process to evaluate learning that has taken place outside an educational institution; in other words, PLAR gives you credit for knowledge and skills you've gained through life experiences such as work and volunteer activities. This experience may have taken place in a specific industry or workplace, in independent study or non-college courses, travel and residency, teaching in foreign countries, volunteer and community activity, or military training and service.

To apply; you must be 19 years old or have an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) or equivalent. If English is your second language, you may need to complete a test to show that you meet college language requirements.

PLAR is the process of identifying a mature learner's previous life or work learning, comparing that learning to the learning requirements of a particular course or program, assessing and evaluating the

learner's knowledge and skills and, finally, recognizing the learning by granting academic credit in a course or program.

PLAR is evaluated by various methods that are used alone or in combination to assess learning including: structured interviews, a portfolio of evidence, a case study assignment, learning essays, challenge exams, performance observation, skill demonstration, product assessment, simulations, review of non-college transcripts, licenses, certification and program review.

It is possible to obtain a maximum of seventy-five percent of the college credits required for a certificate or diploma through PLAR. The remaining twenty-five percent must come from classes taken at the college granting the certificate. The actual number of credits granted depends on the degree of match between a candidate's prior learning and the college course requirements. But, if you can get credit for even one course, you will save time in earning your diploma.

PLAR assessors are college faculty who have expertise in both the subject discipline and the specific course content. The assessors compare your level of learning to the stated learning outcomes of the course. The assessor may verify the documentation with you or may contact employers or references. A team of assessors may review your portfolio, interview you and/or set up a challenge process.

You will be informed if you receive credits for the course or if a supplementary challenge process is required. Either a grade (when possible) or the designation "SAT" (satisfied) will be recorded on transcripts. If you have failed a course, you may apply for PLAR only after one year has passed and on demonstration of additional relevant learning.

A province-wide, non-refundable service fee (currently \$82.00 per course challenge) is charged for each course the applicant wants assessed for credit. This fee will vary depending on the total program hours involved. Additional materials charges may apply in some cases.

To start the process, obtain the course outline from the academic school responsible for delivering the course. Review the course outline to determine if your knowledge and skills match the course learning outcomes. Consult with the program coordinator or a

PLAR advisor, and collect documentation that supports the application for PLAR. This documentation might include: a resume, a description of experiences and learning that relate to the course being challenged, work samples, and letters of verification. Include a letter describing the experiences and the learning that relate to the course outline. Complete the PLAR application and submit the application with the supporting documentation and the fee.

Contact the Program Coordinator at your local community college. Apply for credits after being accepted in a college program, allowing at least six to eight weeks from the time you submit your application. Check whether the program of interest has established specific deadlines, and check the college calendar to find out when challenge tests and portfolio development courses are scheduled.

To receive credit for prior learning, you will need to analyze your prior learning, compare that learning to specific course requirements and provide evidence of your own learning.

If PLAR is an option for you, remember that it will require a lot of work, planning, determination, financial resources and personal commitment. Please note that there are many successful professionals out there who have gone through this process.

Again, contact your local community college, depending on the area where you live or the college you wish to attend. PLAR is available in Ontario community colleges and in some universities.

One last piece of information: Your transcripts indicate the credits obtained but do not indicate whether or not they were obtained through the PLAR process.

Good luck to all of you, and please forward your comments and questions.

Ana

Jan. 2005

(Source: Humber College)