

**Challenge for Credit Report
Presented to Academic Programs Committee
By Student Enrolment Services Division
January 25, 2008**

The current Challenge for Credit policy (PLAR)¹ was approved by Council in 2002, and at the present time this policy is under review by the Academic Programs Committee.

Who requests credit for prior learning?

Typically, PLAR candidates are mature, motivated individuals who have many years' experience in the workplace. They can be characterized as lifelong learners who want the learning they have done outside the classroom (in the workplace, in the community, through self-directed activities) recognized to give them a head start towards a university degree. The learning that students bring to the PLAR process can be viewed as experience-based learning or experiential learning. The PLAR option is available to students if sufficient evidence is provided that the learning was acquired outside a degree program at the U of S or from another institution for which transfer credit is not granted.

What kinds of methods are used to assess prior experiential learning?

PLAR provides a mechanism whereby credit is granted to those students who can demonstrate through direct and indirect documentary evidence that they have mastered the knowledge and skills associated with the satisfactory completion of specific university courses but have not taken formal courses in the subject area(s). This challenge for credit process could involve one or more assessment methods, including written and/or oral examinations, performance evaluations, research papers, interviews, and portfolios. In all cases, the assessment is conducted by a faculty member who is knowledgeable about the subject matter as well as the process of reviewing evidence of experience-based learning.

What is the extent of department participation in PLAR?

PLAR inquiries reflect an interest in a wide array of subject areas. Since 2002, SESD has communicated with the following colleges and departments regarding PLAR inquiries: Agriculture & Bioresources, Art & Art History, Edwards School of Business, Education, Engineering, English, Geography, Music, Native Studies, Nursing, Psychology, Sociology, Women & Gender Studies.

SESD sends information about PLAR to faculty members who review PLAR requests and meet with students. Faculty understanding, cooperation, and response has been good on the whole.

How many students have benefited from PLAR?

The following is a summary of student PLAR activity since the current policy was approved.

2003 1 student received challenge for credit for GE 300.3
1 inquiry for Art
1 inquiry for Agriculture
8 instances of successful challenge for credit for NURS 318.3

¹ PLAR stands for Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition

- 2004** 1 inquiry for Music
4 instances of successful challenge for credit for NURS 318.3
- 2005** 1 inquiry for Psychology
1 inquiry for Sociology
7 instances of successful challenge for credit for NURS 318.3 in addition to
9 inquiries for credit for NURS 318.3
- 2006** 1 student received 9 cu in Art
1 student received 3 cu in Continuing Education
12 instances of successful challenge for credit for NURS 318.3
2 inquiries for Education
1 inquiry for English
1 inquiry for Commerce
- 2007** 1 student received 9cu in English
9 instances of successful challenge for credit for NURS 318.3
1 student inquiry for Native Studies (advised she will probably be successful in receiving 12cu), Sociology (credit likely), Psychology, Women & Gender Studies
1 inquiry for Geography
1 inquiry regarding Communications

What are the current concerns about PLAR?

- From students:
 - Common misconceptions about PLAR are that students think they may be granted an undergraduate degree through the PLAR mechanism, or be able to do post-graduate studies without having completed an undergraduate degree
 - Waiting a long time for a faculty determination, i.e. several months for one case in 2007
 - Common reasons why inquiries are abandoned or not followed through:
 - too much work for the student to assemble materials/ portfolio
 - student does not want to apply to university and register for a class (which is necessary for PLAR assessment to occur)
 - student education/ experience not a match with PLAR (relating to subjects not offered at U of S, PLAR not consistent with future goals of the student, student experience not suitable for success at PLAR)
- From SESD:
 - Increase PLAR assessment fee from \$75 to \$90, consistent with application for admission fee and transcript evaluation for prospective students fee
 - Current policy is that one-half of the tuition for the course the student challenges is levied when the student commits to the challenge process, with this sum charged regardless of the outcome of the challenge. Change this policy to remove any tuition-related charge at any time in the PLAR process.
 - Remove stipulation that only U of S registered students can apply for PLAR
 - Can we be promoting PLAR more methodically or strategically?



TO: Academic Programs Committee

FROM: David Hannah
Associate Vice-President, Student & Enrolment Services Division

RE: PLAR recommendations

DATE: May 6, 2008

At a meeting of Associate and Assistant Deans on April 18, 2008 there was a discussion of Prior Learning Assessment Recognition (PLAR). Some of the key points that were agreed upon at this meeting were the following:

1. The current Challenge for Credit policy is for the most part satisfactory, and not in need of major revisions at this time.
2. There have been very few students taking advantage of the PLAR policy. This may be in part because of the nature of the PLAR process, which by its nature may be more relevant and applicable to non-university than university environments. Having said this, it is possible that students are not taking advantage of the process because they are not aware of it. Thus, the University should examine how it might better communicate and promote prior learning opportunities within the colleges.
3. There may be particular opportunities to promote PLAR for some of the University's more specialized Aboriginal programs, and thus special efforts should be made to communicate and promote PLAR within Aboriginal communities.
4. Special efforts should also be made to promote PLAR opportunities to adult learners.

Recommendations coming forward from this meeting include:

1. Because PLAR processes consume significant amounts of faculty time, the recommendation that tuition fees for PLAR assessments be removed should NOT be accepted. These fees do not begin to cover the actual costs of the assessments, and their removal could result in a huge increase in workloads for which no compensation would be provided.
2. SESD (in consultation with Associate and Assistant Deans) should be asked to review the current PLAR assessment fee (currently \$75) and bring forward for approval a revised fee that is more in line with our application and transcript evaluation fees.

David Hannah
/rt