See how your life experiences can help you earn a college degree.
MISSION OF THE COLLEGE

Bloomfield College, founded in 1868, is an independent college historically related to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and strategically located in the New Jersey-New York metropolitan region. The College offers academic programs leading to the Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees. The curriculum is designed to provide students with a sound liberal arts grounding as well as with the expertise they will need in their careers. The mission of Bloomfield College is to prepare students to attain academic, personal, and professional excellence in a multicultural and global society.

The College is committed to enabling students, particularly those who have traditionally been excluded from higher education, to realize their intellectual and personal goals. Programs of study are rooted in the liberal arts and assist students in obtaining the skills, knowledge, and values they need to become empowered, active individuals engaged in renewing themselves, their relationships, their workplaces, and their communities.

Programs are designed to help students think critically and quantitatively, speak effectively, write clearly, develop aesthetic appreciation, and integrate feelings and values. We believe students must gain a greater understanding of, and appreciation for, other cultures and for the unique racial and cultural diversity of the United States.

One of the strengths of the College is the rich diversity of its students. The College is committed to this richness because it provides an ideal context for personal growth and a basis for a better society. In joining Bloomfield College, each person assumes a personal responsibility to strive to achieve academic excellence, to take full advantage of the resources offered, and to contribute to the quality of the College community.

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INTRODUCTION

Not all college-level learning occurs in a classroom. Bloomfield College accepts credit through alternative means such as the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) and Portfolio Learning Assessment (PLA). PLA is the process by which an individual’s learning from experience is evaluated and weighed for purposes of granting college credit (Fiddler, Marifenau, & Whitaker, 2006). Credit is given for learning, not for the experience.

This Handbook is designed to help you navigate the process of applying for and receiving college credit for life experiences through portfolio learning assessment. In the Handbook you will find instructions to guide you through each step of the process and guidelines for creating the kind of portfolio that will be awarded college credit. Descriptions of the different forms a portfolio make take are included at the end of the Handbook.

Students may earn up to 16.0 course units through any combination of alternative learning assessments such as CLEP and PLA. Credit can be guaranteed for Bloomfield College only; PLA credit may not be transferable.

Assessment of life experience is often associated with adult learners, but all of us are lifelong learners and PLA can be appropriate for students of any age.
OVERVIEW OF PORTFOLIO LEARNING ASSESSMENT

Assessment of life learning experience is a flexible, efficient way of earning college credits for what you have learned outside the classroom. Awarding of credit for life experience operates on the belief that college-level learning, no matter how it is gained, deserves college credits. Therefore, nearly any type of experiential learning can gain college credit as long as (a) it is equivalent to a course or courses at Bloomfield College and (b) you can prove your expertise. A portfolio is a compilation of documentation assembled in an approved format to demonstrate college-level knowledge for an award of credit. The portfolio you submit will serve as proof of your expertise and the value it has in the academic world. It can include knowledge or skills gained from a wide variety of sources, including but not limited to:

- Full- or part-time jobs
- Independent reading and study
- Training programs or in-service courses
- Volunteer work
- Cultural and artistic pursuits
- Hobbies and recreational pastimes
- Community or religious activities
- Military service
- Travel
ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for portfolio learning assessment at Bloomfield College, you must

a. be currently enrolled full-time or part-time
b. have completed a \textit{minimum} of 6.0 course units at Bloomfield College (4.0 course units for transfer students with an AA or AS degree)*
c. have completed no more than 23.25 course units at the time of application for portfolio assessment (pre-senior class standing)
d. have approval of the appropriate division chairperson for freshmen-level courses
e. submit an application via email or interoffice mail to:
   Carolyn I. Spies, Ph.D.,
   Associate Dean for Faculty and Program Development
   73 Oakland Avenue, Room 8
   carolyn_spies@bloomfield.edu
   973.748.9000, x285

* You may apply for portfolio learning assessment prior to completing 6.0 course units, however, credit will be awarded and recorded on your transcript only after completion of the 6.0 cus.
PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT PROCESS

1. Submit a completed application to the Associate Dean for Faculty and Program Development, along with required supporting documents.

2. Applications are forwarded to the appropriate division chair for review. Based upon the application materials, the division chairperson will approve or deny an application or request additional information. The chairperson’s decision is based upon the potential for credit. It is the applicant’s responsibility to make a good case. The Associate Dean will notify an applicant of the application decision. Applicants should not contact a division chair directly about a PLA application.

3. Once an application has been approved, a faculty mentor and a faculty evaluator are assigned by the Division Chairperson.

4. Student creates her or his portfolio with guidance from the faculty mentor.* There is no deadline for submission of a portfolio, but it is strongly urged that students complete the portfolio within one semester.

5. A completed portfolio is submitted to the Associate Dean and forwarded to the faculty evaluator for assessment. The evaluator has one month to submit her or his assessment.

6. Upon submission of a portfolio, the Registrar is notified and a tuition bill is issued to the student. Current tuition is $275 per course.

7. Registrar records a grade of “satisfactory” on the student’s transcript. The grade of satisfactory is not used in calculating the grade point average.

*For assessment of ENG 106/107 credit, see p. 8.
ASSESSMENT OF ENG 106/ENG 107 CREDIT

A student who tests out of ENG 106 or ENG 107 through placement testing at Bloomfield College may apply for assessment of credit for these courses via portfolio learning assessment. To do so,

1. Submit PLA application along with several of your best writing samples to the Associate Dean for Faculty and Program Development.
2. The Associate Dean forwards the application packet to the Writing and Analysis Program coordinator.
3. If the application is approved, the student receives credit for ENG 106 and a grade of satisfactory.
4. If the student has not yet taken ENG 107, she or he will take the ENG 107 exit exam through arrangement with the Writing and Analysis Program coordinator.
5. The exit exam is evaluated by the Writing and Analysis Program coordinator or an appropriate designee.
6. If the student passes the exit exam, she or he receives credit for ENG 107 and a grade of satisfactory. If the student does not pass the exit exam, she or he must take the ENG 107 course.

To get started on the road to credit for life experience, follow the “Preparing the Application” instruction on page 9.
PREPARING THE APPLICATION

Before you submit an application, you should...

1. **Take written inventory of the knowledge you have gained through experience.**
   Review your job history, hobbies, areas of study or special training,* travel, hobbies, parenting, volunteer work, and other activities noted on p. 5. *Don’t go it alone!* Use the “Taking Inventory” worksheet. Speak with your advisor and Associate Dean Spies, who can help you.

2. **Choose the areas for which you want to seek college credit.**
   Evaluate the area you listed while taking inventory. Discuss with your advisor and Associate Dean Spies which subject areas to select for portfolio assessment and whether you need college credits in those subjects.

3. **Find course descriptions to match your learning.**
   Search the Bloomfield College catalog to identify courses that reflect the subjects you have chosen.

4. **Provide evidence of your knowledge.** Assemble preliminary evidence to document your learning. This material will be used by the Division Chairperson to evaluate your application.

5. **Describe what you know and how you learned it.**
   Write a one-page essay outlining *(describing in brief)* your knowledge of the course subject and how that learning was acquired to accompany your application.

6. **Fill out the application and submit!**

*Experiential learning can occur through sponsored and unsponsored activities. Sponsored activities are those study experiences that were preplanned such as a training program at work. Unsponsored, or non-formal, learning activities are unplanned; the learning occurs somewhat unintentionally.*
MEET WITH YOUR FACULTY MENTOR

Once your application has been approved, the next step is to **schedule a meeting with your faculty mentor**. You must take the initiative to call or email your mentor; do not expect your mentor to seek you out.

The role of the faculty mentor is to guide you in the preparation of the portfolio and to review the portfolio for readiness.

**The First Meeting with Your Faculty Mentor**

At the initial meeting with your mentor,

- review the course description
- review the course syllabus (and ask for a copy)
- discuss with her or him the subject areas and learning objectives for the course for which you will be building the portfolio.
- discuss the types of evidence you already possess and what additional documentation or evidence will be needed
- establish a timeline for the portfolio and deadlines
- establish meeting schedule and/or how you will maintain communication
PREPARING YOUR PORTFOLIO: INTRODUCTION

Experiential learning is constructive. This means that we create new knowledge from our experiences. Reflection is what we do to create that knowledge from an experience—we think about our experiences, make inferences about the experiences, and draw conclusions.

A Model of Experiential Learning

The portfolio assessment process is not a mechanism for getting credits “the easy way.” Developing a portfolio is a rigorous process that involves making an inventory of experiences, reflecting upon those experiences, and then documenting what has been learned in a way that is transparent to an evaluator.

ELEMENTS OF A COMPLETE PORTFOLIO

A complete portfolio includes (in this order)

1. **A portfolio cover sheet** with
   - Your name and ID number
   - Course name and number
   - Course description
   - Course learning objectives

2. **A table of contents** listing all items in the portfolio

3. **A justification** (see p. 17).

4. **Evidence** organized in the sequence in which it is mentioned in the table of contents and justification

Portfolios must be submitted in good form—typed double-spaced using page numbers. Once submitted the portfolio is considered an academic record and is the property of Bloomfield College. Therefore, you should keep a copy of all portfolio materials for your own records. Do not submit any original documents which you may need in the future.
GATHERING EVIDENCE

Evidence, the material you submit to document your claim of college-level learning, is the foundation of your portfolio.

Assemble a packet of material that expands on your application packet, which **thoroughly** and **transparently** documents your knowledge of the subject matter and learning objectives of the course. As you compile the documentation, it may be helpful to create a chart with a list of the topics and learning objectives, knowledge gained, sources of knowledge, and the documentation that you will provide for each topic and objective (see Portfolio Worksheet). **Remember that the learning must be college-level.**

Selecting Evidence
What constitutes effective evidence? Effective evidence does the following:

- Provides *direct* documentation of your knowledge and skills
- Pertains specifically to the topics and learning objectives in your course
- Supports the statements in your narrative about your learning experiences

Direct evidence is documentation of actual learning. Indirect evidence is documentation that is associated with learning but only implies that learning has occurred. Indirect evidence may be included but does not constitute documentation of learning. Indirect evidence can confirm
GATHERING EVIDENCE CONTINUED...

that work submitted is actually yours or verify details about your learning activities.

Examples of Direct Evidence
• Samples of work performed—a report, project, or case study you prepared;
• Programs from artistic performances or artistic products
• Tests or quizzes
• Graded class assignments
• Lab reports
• Official verification of proficiency—a professional license or transcript
• Affidavit from a work supervisor or clients served
• Notes you took during a training session or class
• Performance ratings
• Work or conference presentation or publication
• Commendations or awards
• Newspaper clippings
• A list of countries visited or books read
• Your written testimony describing what you learned

Examples of Indirect Evidence
• Number of years on the job
• Number of hours spent earning a certificate, involved in a cultural activity, etc.
• Photographs of you working, engaged in community service, etc.
• Registration or course enrollment information
Examples of Direct and Indirect Evidence

Direct:
You completed a company-sponsored course in business law and can provide both an official transcript and a graded research paper as evidence that you passed the course.

Indirect:
The syllabus for the business law course.

Direct:
Your evidence of college-level skill as a photographer includes four issues of your company newsletter which features photos you took. You received credit for the photos in the newsletter.

Indirect:
The editor of the company newsletter writes a letter stating that the photos are yours.

If evidence is unavailable, you and your mentor may determine that a test or other demonstration is needed.
GATHERING EVIDENCE CONTINUED...

Obtaining Affidavits
Letters from employers, work associates, or community leaders who have first-hand knowledge of your involvement and abilities may be needed to verify your learning. Because these letters can be critical to the success of your portfolio, request them early enough to allow time for the individual to prepare and deliver the affidavit. Your request should be specific about what information to include in the affidavit.

When you make your request do so in writing and be sure the letter writer:

- knows that the purpose of the letter is for verification of your knowledge/learning rather than for verification of employment or a recommendation;
- explains the nature of his or her working relationship with you and the length of time it continued;
- specifies what was expected of you and how well you accomplished those tasks or projects;
- states her or his qualifications for commenting on your activities and expertise
- relates this information to the course description and learning objectives;
- comments directly and separately on each learning experience she or he has been asked to verify;
- Knows when you will need the letter (but be prepared to follow up with a second request as a reminder).
WRITING YOUR JUSTIFICATION

The justification is your means of communicating to the assessor that you know the subject matter and can meet the learning objectives of the course. No matter how strong your evidence, you must put the evidence into context and show its full academic value.

An effective justification does the following:
- describes your knowledge of the subject
- specifies when, where, and how you acquired the knowledge
- relates your learning to the topics and learning objectives on the syllabus
- introduces the pieces of evidence in your portfolio
- clearly shows the relationship between your evidence and the course material

Length
The length of the justification will vary depending upon the type of course. Most justifications are between 3-10 pages, but a course that emphasizes theory may require a longer justification because you need to show your understanding of the subject by discussing the theory/theories taught. Write as much as you need to build a solid case. Your mentor will provide guidance on the justification.

...Continued on p. 18
WRITING THE JUSTIFICATION, CONTINUED

Organization
The justification should be well-organized so that the assessor has easy access to the information she or he needs to make a decision about your portfolio.

Organize your justification either chronologically or by topically and learning objectives. Whichever style you choose, be thorough.

Example of justification:

Course: CAT 223 Digital Photography
Topics: History of photography
       Single images
       Sequential images
       Digital editing
       Digital retouching
       Color management
       Lighting for studio shots
List of learning experiences: Took photographs of vacations and nature scenes, read several articles on digital photography, read book on history of photography

Justification: Describing these experiences in full sentences and linking them to the appropriate topic in the course.
SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

If you have followed the advice in this Handbook your portfolio should now be ready for submission. The decision of when to submit your portfolio to the College should be made by you and your mentor. Your mentor should advise you if the portfolio is incomplete or the evidence seems inappropriate and suggest changes or additions to improve it.

If you can answer “yes” to all of the following statements, then your portfolio should be ready for submission and evaluation by an assessor:

1. The cover sheet is typed and contains your name and ID number, the course name and number, course description, and learning objectives.
2. The table of contents is typed.
3. The justification has been typed.
4. The evidence is organized to parallel the justification and documents each claim you make about your learning.
5. All photocopied materials are clear and legible.
6. Documentation for each course is packaged as a separate portfolio.
7. You have carefully proofread and spellchecked your portfolio materials.
8. Your mentor has reviewed and proofread your portfolio.
APPENDIX A: TAKING INVENTORY

You have accumulated a tremendous amount of knowledge during your lifetime—from other people, work, books, hobbies, the media, travel, and many other sources. If you are like many people, you take much of your learning for granted. Therefore, taking stock of what you know is the best way to begin the portfolio process. Getting started may be the most difficult part. The following three-step inventory process may be helpful.

Step 1
Take a “mental walk” through your work history, starting with your very first job and including part-time, full-time, and volunteer positions. Make a list of all the jobs you have held and the responsibilities and any skills that came into play in performing those tasks. Also list individuals who might provide affidavits regarding your work experiences.

Step 2
List your experiences in the following areas:

- Community activities
- Religious activities
- Club or organization memberships
- Military service
- Non-credit training programs or courses
- Hobbies
- Recreational activities
- Travel destinations and activities
- Artistic or cultural pursuits
- Independent study or research
Step 3
List your skills and areas of knowledge that come to mind, including...

- Office skills: technology, telephone, accounting, office management
- Artistic talent: painting, music, dance, photography, crafts
- Foreign language abilities
- Communication skills: writing, public speaking
- Interpersonal skills: teaching, counseling, public relations, customer service
- Areas of study or reading (including travel)

Review your inventory to make sure you have captured everything. The inventory should give you a fairly accurate picture of what you have learned outside of the classroom.

Consider the following examples:

Jose is a musician whose band toured Italy for an entire summer. He stayed mostly in rural guest houses and became conversant in Italian and learned about Italian cooking. College-level learning occurred.

Ashley is employed by an international hotel chain. She worked in one of the chain’s hotels in Spain for six months but opted not to learn Spanish. No college-level learning occurred.
TAKING INVENTORY CONTINUED...

Using your inventory as a reference, determine the subject areas in which you have experience and knowledge. Examine the breadth and depth of your knowledge in each subject area.

For example, perhaps you have always been interested in African American history, have done some reading on the subject and listed it in your inventory of knowledge. Have you retained information about all periods of African American history or is your knowledge focused mainly on one event or period of time? Can you recall names, dates, and events or only the few pieces of information that interested you?

Then browse through the Bloomfield College Catalog to find courses that match up with your life experience. Keep in mind that it is what you learned, not your experiences per se, that will gain you college-level credit.

Remember that your goal is to earn useful credits—i.e., credits that will count towards General Education or major requirements (or elective credits if you need them). Earning credits that will not advance your progress toward graduation is only a waste of time. Evaluate how your knowledge from life experience fits with your priorities and will help you achieve your goal—to earn a bachelor’s degree.
**APPENDIX B: HOW DOES YOUR KNOWLEDGE MATCH-UP WORKSHEET**

**Course Name and Number:** ____________________________

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<th>Course Topics and Learning Objectives</th>
<th>Your Experiences</th>
<th>Knowledge Gained</th>
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