MAINE COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

SUBJECT: **PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT STANDARDS**
PURPOSE: **To provide uniform standards for the assessment and credit of college-level prior learning acquired by students from life, work and educational experiences.**

A.   Introduction

This policy establishes uniform standards for the recognition and award of academic credit for college-level prior learning acquired by students through life, work, and educational experiences outside of MCCS institutions.   These standards reflect the MCCS commitment to the academic and administrative standards proposed by the national Council for Adult and Experiential Learning and are designed to eliminate barriers for students and encourage their wide participation.   These standards are also intended to support the transparent transfer of prior learning credit between MCCS's seven colleges and with other institutions of higher education.

B.   Definitions

For purposes of this policy, "prior learning assessment" ("PLA") refers to all methods used by MCCS to review and evaluate students' evidence of prior learning and to award academic credit.

C.   Student Eligibility

To be eligible for PLA credit, a student must be matriculated in an MCCS degree program with one or more requirements to which prior learning credits could apply.

D.   Award of Credit

The following terms and conditions shall apply to the assessment and award of credit for prior learning.

1.   Credit for prior learning will be awarded based on assessment of documented learning that demonstrates achievement (at a grade level of C or better) of learning outcomes for a specific requirement/discipline area elective, i.e. credit by course equivalency.   Each college shall have written course description, objectives and learning outcomes for each catalog course, available for use by students seeking prior learning assessment.

2.   Students may earn prior learning credit for any graduation requirement, at any point in their program, for which they demonstrate equivalent learning, unless there is a unique program accreditation requirement that restricts or prohibits restricting the award of such credit.

3. The award of prior learning credit is subject to New Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) Standards for Accreditation. NECHE standards limit the number of PLA credits that may be used for certificate programs of 30 or fewer credits to 25 percent. PLA credits may not be used to meet the NECHE requirement that 25 percent of associate degree credits must be taken at the college from which the degree will be awarded.

4. Prior learning credits can be used to satisfy any degree/program requirements, provided that a student may receive credit one time only for a course that has been awarded through PLA.

5. Students are responsible for determining whether the prior learning credit will satisfy credit load requirements for purposes of Veteran benefits funding, or other similar third-party financial assistance programs.

E.   Decision and Appeal Process

1. A college president shall designate persons authorized to determine whether a student's prior learning shall be awarded academic credit.

2. A student may appeal a college's PLA decision through the college's academic appeal process.

3. Recommendations and scoring by nationally-standardized testing entities and credit recommendation services, such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and College Level Examination Program, must be appealed directly to the testing entity or credit recommendation service.

F.   Transcription

1. MCCS will use a standard coding system for each method of PLA, reflected clearly on Transcript Keys.

2. A college will award its own course title and number to the prior learning credit provided that credits transferred from another institution of higher education will retain the original course title and number.

3. Prior learning credits do not carry quality points and are not calculated in the grade point average.

G.   Fees

1. Students shall be assessed a reasonable fee for each Challenge Exam and Portfolio attempted. Additional lab fees and/or material costs for these assessments also may apply.

2.   Payment of a PLA fee does not guarantee the award of credit, and is non-refundable.

3.   PLA fees will be subject to periodic review and revised to reflect conformity with academic and administrative standards.

H.   Transferability of PLA Credits

1.   Between MCCS Colleges

MCCS colleges accept PLA credit awarded by other MCCS colleges, evidenced by an MCCS transcript, as transfer credit applicable to the relevant academic program at the receiving institution.

2.   From the University of Maine System (UMS)

The reciprocity described in Section I(1) extends to students and transcripts from the University of Maine System.

3.   To and From Non-MCCS or UMS Institutions

A college cannot guarantee the transfer of PLA credits to non-MCCS or UMS colleges or universities or the applicability of credits to a student's future degree requirements at such institutions.

I.   Methods of Prior Learning Subject to Assessment

The following are methods of prior learning that a college may assess for the award of academic credit:

1.   Transfer Credits

Academic credits obtained at another accredited higher education institution will be transferred with MCCS Policy 307.

2.   Examinations

Academic credit will be awarded for learning demonstrated by successfully passing examinations from the following national examination programs when there is a relevant course requirement in the student's program: College Level Examination Program (CLEP), DANTES Subject Standardized Test (DSST), Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB –Higher Level), and Foreign Language Achievement Testing. Matrices that list these exams, the score required for MCCS credit (reflecting the current American Council on Education (ACE) recommendations), and the corresponding college course equivalency will be maintained at each college's website.

3. Credential Review

Academic credit may be awarded for some non-credit courses, certifications, licenses, examinations other than those listed in Section K.2 herein, Registered Apprenticeships, and other similar educational experiences gained outside of a higher education setting when there is an appropriate subject matter expert to review the learning and the prior learning experience is applicable in a student's program. Credential review assessment requires valid proof of learning, e.g. the license, certification copy, course materials, certificates, or other reliable information confirming completion of the training for which academic credit is sought. A matrix for credential review recommendation will be maintained at each college's website.

4. Military Service Review

Academic credit may be awarded for formal military service school training programs and off-duty educational activities, including: basic training, military service schools recommended by the American Council on Education (ACE), and U.S. Armed Forces Institute correspondence courses.

5. Challenge Exam

A student with significant prior learning for whom none of the assessment methods listed above are available or adequate to demonstrate learning for academic credit may access a campus-based Challenge Exam if available. The following terms apply to Challenge Exams.

    a. Students seeking academic credit through a Challenge Exam must complete a college's PLA form and pay the Challenge Exam fee.

    b. Challenge Exams do not exist for all College courses.

    c. Exams are designed by faculty knowledgeable in the subject matter, based on the current set of course learning outcomes, equivalent to comprehensive final examinations, and unbiased toward students who have not directly participated in the course.

    d. All college add/drop policies and deadlines will apply to students attempting Challenge Exams.

    e. Challenge Exams are limited to one attempt per course.

    f. Challenge Exams may not be attempted if the student has previously earned credit in the course at the college.

    g. Standard course grading will be used for the Challenge Exam. A grade of C or better will result in the award of course credit and a grade of P will be transcripted.

6.   Portfolio Review

A student with significant prior learning for whom none of the prior learning assessment methods listed above are available or adequate to demonstrate learning for academic credit may assemble and submit a prior learning assessment Portfolio for review. A prior learning assessment Portfolio is a written presentation that includes tangible evidence of college-level learning equivalent to specific course/content area elective learning outcomes. Academic credit will be awarded for learning that demonstrates a balance between theory and practical application.

The following terms apply to Portfolio review:

   a. The student's knowledge and experiences will be evaluated to determine if they are appropriate for Portfolio review.

   b. The award of Portfolio credit is dependent on relevancy to courses in the student's degree program; including general education, major and elective courses.

   c. A student must present proof of college-level writing credit or be concurrently enrolled in college writing, prior to preparing any Portfolio for credit.

   d. A Portfolio will be reviewed by an appropriate subject matter expert, on a Pass/Fail basis, using an MCCS portfolio review rubric. A recommendation for credit/no credit will be based on the student demonstrating narrative and evidence of learning outcomes that would constitute a grade level of C or better in the course for which credit is sought.

   e. A Portfolio should be submitted to Academic Affairs and sufficiently in advance of the start of the semester to allow for timely review.

   f. Students seeking Portfolio credit must use the PLA application form and pay the Portfolio assessment fee.

   g. Upon submission, the Portfolio will be forwarded to the appropriate faculty evaluator within the department in which the course is taught.

   h. Students will be notified, within 30 days after submission, of an award or denial of credit or a request for minor revision to be completed within 15 days of notice.

   i. Submission of a Portfolio does not guarantee credit award.

REFERENCES: *MCCS Policy 307;* New England Commission of Higher Education Standards for Accreditation

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