



Regents Bachelor of Arts (RBA)  
Degree Program  
Portfolio Development  
Guidelines

2017-2018

## Standards for Assessing Learning

The Regents Bachelor of Arts (RBA) Degree Program College-Equivalent Credit/Prior Learning Assessment option is informed by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (HEPC) Series 59, *Awarding Undergraduate College Credit for Prior Learning*.

The RBA program also adheres to the 10 CAEL Standards for Assessing Learning:

**Standard I:** Credit or its equivalent should be awarded only for *learning*, and not for *experience*.

**Standard II:** Assessment should be based on standards and criteria for the level of acceptable learning that are both agreed upon and made public.

**Standard III:** Assessment should be treated as an integral part of learning, not separate from it, and should be based on an understanding of learning processes.

**Standard IV:** The determination of credit awards and competence levels must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic or credentialing experts.

**Standard V:** Credit or other credentialing should be appropriate to the context in which it is awarded and accepted.

**Standard VI:** If awards are for credit, transcript entries should clearly describe what learning is being recognized and should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.

**Standard VII:** Policies, procedures, and criteria applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available to all parties involved in the assessment process.

**Standard VIII:** Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.

**Standard IX:** All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions they perform.

**Standard X:** Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served, the purposes being met, and the state of the assessment arts.

[Fiddler, M., Marienau, C., & Whitaker, U. (2006). *Assessing learning: Standards, principles, & procedures* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Chicago: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company.]

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### AS AN RBA STUDENT, AM I REQUIRED TO SUBMIT A PORTFOLIO?

No. Developing a portfolio is an option, not a requirement, within the RBA program.

### WHAT IS PORTFOLIO DEVELOPMENT?

Portfolio development is the process by which a student documents and demonstrates college-level competencies (knowledge and skills) acquired in environments and agencies outside the traditional higher education classroom. In essence, it is evidence that the student has met learning outcomes or objectives equivalent to specific university courses.

Knowledge and skills gained through work, training, or life experiences may translate to college credit if students can document and demonstrate comprehension of learning outcomes and objectives equivalent to our courses.

Students must be able to demonstrate at least 70% knowledge of learning outcomes or objectives of a related college course, which most often includes theoretical or conceptual knowledge as well as application of subject-specific principles.

### FOR WHICH CLASSES CAN I OBTAIN CREDIT VIA PORTFOLIO REVIEW?

It varies. Portfolio work must be tied to specific courses currently taught at Fairmont State University or at another institution in the West Virginia State System of Higher Education.

However, not all existing courses are eligible for credit petition via portfolio development, since the ability to petition a course for credit is at the discretion of the faculty member teaching the course.

### HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?

Developing a portfolio is a research-intensive, writing-intensive process. Students should expect to spend 4-6 months to construct the portfolio.

An additional 2-4 months may be anticipated for the review and evaluation process. Subsequent revisions and resubmissions may be necessary if the faculty member evaluating the portfolio requests additional information or clarification.

## HOW ARE PORTFOLIOS EVALUATED?

Portfolios evaluations are completed by faculty members who teach the courses for which credit is sought.

## IS PORTFOLIO EVALUATION FREE?

No. The fee for portfolio evaluation is \$300 (per portfolio) regardless of whether or not credit is awarded.

If credit is awarded, then an additional \$10 per credit hour processing fee is required to transcript the credit.

## AM I ELIGIBLE TO SUBMIT A PORTFOLIO FOR REVIEW?

Academic credit will only be awarded to students who are admitted to and currently enrolled in the RBA Degree Program. Students, however, cannot be awarded college-equivalent credit during their first or final semesters in the RBA program.

Furthermore, all requests for credit based on learning other than college course work must be applicable to meeting RBA degree requirements.

Allowing students to apply prior knowledge toward their current curricular requirements will ensure that they are not retaking courses for which they already have competency. However, duplicate credit cannot be awarded.

## WHEN CAN I SUBMIT A PORTFOLIO?

Portfolios should be submitted prior to semester midterm to ensure that sufficient time is available for the evaluation.

## CAN I JUST SUBMIT A RÉSUMÉ FOR EVALUATION?

No. Because the university awards college-equivalent credit for prior *learning*, not prior experience, portfolios will differ from résumés, which describe what students have done rather than what they have learned.

However, a résumé is a valuable part of the necessary documentation presented within the portfolio.

## IS THERE ONE WAY TO DEVELOP A PORTFOLIO?

No. The portfolio development process will differ substantially among classes, course levels, schools, and colleges. The course syllabi and learning outcomes and objectives will provide a foundation from which to structure the portfolio.

Portfolios must be developed using the terminology and vocabulary of the course for which credit is sought. Classes offered at a lower-level may not expect the same level of analysis, evaluation, or creation expected by upper-division courses. Upper-division courses will also expect a higher level of conceptual and theoretical knowledge and understanding that may not be covered in lower-division and introductory courses.

Furthermore, portfolio development can vary considerably based upon the area of study. While some schools or colleges will require written verification only, some areas such as communications, fine arts, physical education, etc. may also require students to demonstrate specific skills such as painting, dance, oratory, acrobatics, and so forth.

Again, using the syllabi and learning outcomes and objectives to guide portfolio development is key given that credit will only be awarded to students who can document or demonstrate at least 70% of the stated learning outcomes or objectives of the college course.

The evidence provided in the portfolio or related demonstrations must be substantive and persuasive enough so that the evaluator is convinced of the student's mastery of a certain area of knowledge, learning, or skill development.

## SHOULD I DEVELOP A PORTFOLIO?

Portfolio development is a time-intensive and labor-intensive endeavor that requires the ability to document and demonstrate competencies learned outside of the higher education classroom environment. Deep reflection, critical thinking, superior organizational and communication skills, including persuasive writing, and the ability to integrate multiple sources of knowledge and evidence are required with no guarantee that credit will be awarded after the portfolio evaluation.

However, for students who are willing and able to demonstrate college-level course knowledge, earning credit for prior knowledge and skills can decrease time to degree and save on tuition and fees.

## Portfolio Development Process

*Please note:* The guidelines below are recommendations not rules. In reality, some phases overlap and, depending on the nature of the course, some necessary steps may not be listed. Once the course or courses for portfolio development have been selected, the best course of action is to utilize the course level, description, outcomes and objectives, and terminology and vocabulary to guide the portfolio preparation.

### Phase I: Pre-Planning Review

- Obtain an initial evaluation of your academic history to determine if there are any outstanding degree requirements for which you can document and demonstrate college-level knowledge.
- Identify the specific college course or courses that can be used to fulfill the RBA degree requirements. Do so by reading the course descriptions in the Fairmont State University catalog, as well as within the other institutions in the West Virginia State System of Higher Education, to discover potential courses for portfolio development.
- Contact the faculty members or the RBA Program Coordinator to verify that portfolio development is an option for the course or courses selected.
- Obtain the course syllabi and learning outcomes and objectives to help structure the portfolio development.

### Phase II: Match Knowledge and Skills to Course Outcomes and Objectives

- Develop an inventory of knowledge and skills that can be documented or demonstrated.
  - To help organize your thought process and match your learning experiences to the course outcomes and objectives, list each learning outcome or objective and then indicate where and when you learned that knowledge or skill and how you will be able to provide evidence proving so.
- Repeat the process above for each learning outcome or objective.
- Be sure to reflect upon all your learning experiences including those that have taken place at work (based on employment positions), in trainings (workshops, seminars, conferences, and classes to enhance professional development), as a volunteer, during self-study, while pursuing hobbies or

other interests, etc. and consider multiple ways to provide evidence of learning within those environments.

### **Phase III: Gather Supporting Documentation and Evidence**

- Brainstorm about and list what types of physical evidence exists to verify your competencies (knowledge and skills). Begin collecting copies.
- Some possible pieces of evidence include:
  - Job descriptions
  - Performance evaluations
  - Reports and presentations
  - Signed letters of verification
  - Licenses
  - Certificates
  - Videos

### **Phase IV: Assemble the Portfolio and Write the Narrative Summary**

- Determine the most appropriate way to structure your narrative summary. Ensure that the descriptions and discussions of competencies flow in a logical, sequenced order. Depending upon the discussion and evidence provided, you may want to organize the narrative by course learning outcomes and objectives, by key topic areas, or chronologically.
- Decide the most appropriate way to assemble and submit the portfolio. Portfolios can be submitted electronically as pdf versions, by using online portfolio development software, or printed and compiled within three-ring binders. (Material submitted within binders must remain in the RBA program office for a minimum of one year, so any documents and materials that you want to retain possession of should be copied or duplicated.)
- Provide concrete, specific examples that clearly demonstrate and describe how knowledge was acquired through experience or observations. Refer to evidence provided in the appendices when mentioned within the narrative.
- The narrative must also explain how you as a learner were able to translate your personal and professional experiences into college-level knowledge, skills, and understanding. The narrative provides the opportunity to indicate how personal and academic knowledge are integrated.
- Remember that the function of the portfolio presentation is to demonstrate that you have mastered the course outcomes and objectives to the same

extent as students who have completed the class. The main focus of the portfolio, therefore, is providing evidence that the course outcomes and objectives have been met through multiple sources and methods outside of the classroom environment.

### **Phase V: Submission and Evaluation of the Portfolio**

- Before final submission, review the Helpful Tips below.
- Once you are satisfied that the prepared portfolio persuasively and convincingly documents and demonstrates your knowledge and comprehension of the course outcomes and objectives, pay the \$300 submission fee at Enrollment Services, and submit the portfolio to the RBA Program Coordinator.
- Portfolio evaluation may take several months depending upon several factors including the level and amount of evidence provided and the faculty member's teaching, mentoring, service, and committee obligations.
- The faculty member may award full credit, partial credit, or no credit for the portfolio. Do not be discouraged if further evidence or documentation is requested.
- If full or partial credit is awarded, then you will need to pay \$10 per credit hour awarded to have the credit posted to your official academic history.

### **HELPFUL TIPS:**

- Ensure that the terminology, vocabulary, theories, and concepts of the course are utilized throughout the narrative.
- Provide specific, concrete examples of learning and clear explanation and discussion of experiences and resulting learning. Don't rely on the supporting documentation and evidence to tell the story. Tell the story yourself.
- Utilize the style manual required by the course, if identified. If a style manual is not specified, then choose the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, or *The Chicago Manual of Style*, and consistently follow the style and formatting rules throughout the portfolio.
- Go to the Fairmont State Writing Center for additional assistance.
- Google and review information about Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984), Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Domains (1956; revised 2001), and CAEL and other web sites about "prior learning assessment" to provide you with additional understanding of how individuals learn and structure knowledge.



## Structure of the Portfolio

**Cover Sheet**—Include title, your name, current degree program and institution, and date of submission

**Summary Page/Letter of Introduction**—A one-page overview summarizing your personal and professional background (autobiography) as it relates to the course descriptions and objectives, identify the course or courses for which credit is sought, and include your identification number and contact information

**Résumé**—The résumé should contain the typical identifying information on a standard résumé along with specific dates of educational, military, employment, and other experiences and detailed descriptions of your duties and responsibilities.

**Table of Contents**—List the contents of the portfolio in order including all sections headings, page numbers, and titled and numbered appendices.

**Narrative**—Organize the narrative clearly and coherently ensuring that this section includes an introduction, body, and conclusion. Reiterate the learning outcomes and objectives being addressed within the narrative. Within this section:

- Provide substantiated evidence documenting and demonstrating college-level knowledge and comprehension of the course outcomes and objectives,
- Specify when, where, and how knowledge was acquired,
- Introduce and explain each piece of evidence that is submitted and substantiate the relationship between each item of evidence and the course outcomes and objectives,
- Demonstrate college-level writing and critical reasoning skills,
- Describe in detail how personal and professional experiences resulted in competency development,
- Utilize theories, concepts, and principles that exhibit college-level comprehension and understanding consistent with the course outcomes and objectives.

**Appendices of Supporting Documentation**—Provide documentation that pertains specifically to the topics in the course descriptions, outcomes, and objectives and that verify claims of knowledge and skill acquisition obtained through prior learning experiences and presented in the body of the narrative.

*Please note:* The abovementioned structure constitutes a typical portfolio structure. However, as previously mentioned, the course for which credit is sought along with the learning outcomes and objectives will ultimately determine the most appropriate portfolio structure and elements.

## Additional Guidance:

### WHAT ARE THE QUALITIES OF AN OUTSTANDING PORTFOLIO?\*

***Course Outcomes Identified and Addressed***—Narrative and supporting documentation demonstrate mastery of all course outcomes.

***Learning from Experience***—Student is able to distinguish between his/her experiences and the learning that comes from these experiences. Examples of this distinction appear throughout the portfolio.

***Understanding of the Theory and Practice***—Student is able to cite broader and conceptual links that are related to the learning.

***Reflection***—Student demonstrates an ability to apply theory to his/her own experience, using concrete examples.

***Learning Application***—Student demonstrates an ability to apply his/her learning to other contexts, as evidenced through specific example. Student includes explicit references to how this knowledge has been transferred to other environments.

***Communication***—Communication, either through the written word or orally, is at a high level, including strong thesis statements, arguments that follow a logical order, and minimal to no syntactical errors. Communication stays tightly focused on the topic being addressed.

***Supporting Documentation***—Student has demonstrated an understanding of why individual pieces of documentation have been included in this portfolio submission and how each piece relates to the broader petition and narrative. Documentation is appropriate to supporting mastery of the outcomes of the course.

\* According to LearningCounts.org Portfolio Assessment Rubric