



Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)

Topic Guide

Faith, Self, and Community Experiential Learning



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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is meant to help you understand the knowledge and skills typically expected of someone who can demonstrate college-level learning for experiences of Faith, Self, and Community. This guide is also meant to help you go through the processes of thinking about your experience, refining your academic knowledge, and demonstrating a connection between your experience and knowledge. Answering the following questions and following the prompts will help you develop the essay, which will be your PLA Project.

GENERAL INFORMATION AND REQUIREMENTS

Number of Credits

The Faith, Self, and Community Experiential Learning project is the equivalent to a 2-credit course.

Level of Learning

The Faith, Self, and Community Experiential Learning project should be treated as a beginning/freshman college-level course.

Page Count and Sources Guidelines

- at least 6 pages (1200 words)
- at least 4 scholarly, professional or college-level secondary sources
- APA style

Additional Resources

- PLA Advisor (SCPSPLA@depaul.edu)
- University Writing Center (<https://condor.depaul.edu/writing/programs-writing-center-scheduling-appointments.html>)
- Purdue Online Writing Lab APA Style Guide (https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_style_introduction.htm)

LEARNING OUTCOMES

To demonstrate this Experiential Learning Opportunity, students must:

1. Offer a personal definition of spiritual or religious faith and compare that to other established definitions
2. Describe significant practices and beliefs of their faith community then compare/contrast these practices and beliefs with those from another religion, denomination or sect
3. Identify and explain how one of your religious/spiritual/faith-based values, convictions or beliefs has changed (strengthened, weakened, shifted, etc.) over time
4. Explain how this value, conviction or belief has contributed your identity and sense of self
5. Explain how this value, conviction, or belief affects your relationship to at least one community you belong to

COMPOSING YOUR PLA PROJECT

Follow the outline below by considering the questions and prompts to develop your PLA Project. Simply answering questions and prompts are not sufficient – you will need to expand your writing to demonstrate the depth and comprehensive of your understanding. As you respond and revise them into cohesive portfolio, remember that a content expert will assess your PLA project based on your 1) Experience, 2) Knowledge and/or Practice, and 3) Reflection & Self-Assessment.

Experience

This criterion requires you to communicate relevant descriptions and explanations of personal and/or professional experience related to learning outcome(s). Describe experience(s) and how you achieved college-level learning. Provide the context and background of your experience, and provide relevant details regarding what you did. For example, you might include a new skill you acquired, what you observed, how you approached the situation, how you solved a problem, and the outcome.

Knowledge and/or Practice

This criterion requires you to demonstrate understanding of relevant theories, models, or best practices related to learning outcome(s). You must demonstrate understanding of relationship among relevant theories, models, or best practices. Describe and cite the relevant theories, models, practices, and perspectives related to your experience.

Remember you will need to use at least 4 sources appropriate for scholarly or professional discourse and use APA style for citations.

Reflection and Self-Assessment

This criterion requires you to demonstrate reflect upon experience and critically assess your abilities and experiences in relationship to the sources you have included. You must provide self-assessment of your experience showing how it relates to the academic sources you are citing.

Writing Your PLA Project

Please answer the questions below to the best of your ability.

1. Faith Definition

- What is your faith community (religion, spiritual community, church, Sangha, fellowship group, etc)?
 - What is a faith community?
 - You may want to consider this source.
 - [Faith Community](https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412952583.n180)
 - Christensen, K., & Levinson, D. (2003). Faith communities. In *Encyclopedia of community: From the village to the virtual world* (Vol. 1, pp. 501-482). SAGE Publications, Inc., <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412952583.n180>
 - What is the specific history of your faith community?
 - How does it fit within larger faith communities (e.g. if your faith community is a church, how does it fit within its religious denomination and/or religion. Or if your faith community is a meditation center, how does it fit within larger groups of practitioners?)
- What is your personal definition of spiritual or religious faith?
 - Compare and contrast your definition to that from your own faith community
 - Compare and contrast your definition to that from a similar faith community
 - Compare and contrast your definition to that from a different faith community
 - What similarities do you see across all four definitions?
 - From a socio-cultural perspective, why might these similarities be important? (Do not reply a theological or religious perspective.)
 - Try to identify scholarly sources from the disciplines of Sociology, Psychology, Cultural Studies, and/or Critical Studies, that can help you discuss these similarities

2. Practices and Beliefs

- What are the regular practices and rituals of your faith community? Think of practices that occur on a regular schedule: Do you pray before every meal? Is there a day each week you typically spend in worship or devotion? Do you go on a yearly meditation retreat? etc.
 - Describe some of these practices and rituals as you practice them.
 - Research the history or geographical/ethnic development of these practices and rituals.
 - What is the personal significance of these practices and rituals?
 - What do you think about before/during/after you engage in them?
 - How do these practices and rituals make you feel?
 - What do secondary sources say about the origins of these rituals and practices? (Note: Since you are writing this for an academic audience, you are encouraged to find scholarly and objective sources.)
- Identify another faith community (another religion, denomination, sect, etc.) that has similar practices.
 - If you have personally observed or participated in these practices or rituals, describe your experience.

- Research the history or geographical/ethnic development of these practices and rituals.
 - What is the personal significance of these practices and rituals?
 - What do you think about before/during/after you engage in them?
 - How do these practices and rituals make you feel?
 - If you have not personally observed or participated in these practices or rituals, use secondary sources to describe the events. (Note: It is crucial you use objective and unbiased sources. The tone of this section of the project is to neutrally compare and contrast faith traditions – not to question the validity of another faith tradition or system of beliefs.)
 - Research the history or geographical/ethnic development of these practices and rituals.
 - What similarities do you notice between the practices of your faith community and the practices of the other community?
 - What do you think the significance of these similarities are? What do these similarities tell us about the human experience?
 - Do any secondary sources compare these practices or beliefs? If so, summarize the main points of these comparisons.
 - Explain how the comparisons you have made are similar to or different from the comparisons made in the secondary sources.
 - What differences do you notice between the practices of your faith community and the practices of the other community?
 - What do you think the significance of these differences are?
 - Do any secondary sources contrast these practices or beliefs? If so, summarize the main points of this contrast.
 - Include in your summaries any analysis about historical, social or cultural reasons for these differences provided in the secondary sources.
 - If you have participated in the practices of the other faith community, explain how the differences you have observe are similar to or different from the comparisons made in the secondary sources.
3. Changing Value, Conviction or Belief
- Identify and explain how one of your religious/spiritual/faith-based values, convictions or beliefs has changed (strengthened, weakened, shifted, etc.) over time.
 - If possible, try to link it to one of the practices or rituals described in section 2. However, linking is not required.
 - What do secondary sources say about this conviction or belief?
 - Are there any historical trends about this conviction or belief?
 - What do writers and thinkers in your faith community say about this conviction or belief?
 - What do academics or thinkers outside your faith community say about this conviction or belief?
 - Compare and contrast what those inside and outside your faith community say about this belief.
 - Explain how this value, conviction or belief has contributed your identity and sense of self

- If possible, identify secondary sources that address how this value, conviction or belief influences and affects individuals.
 - Compare and contrast these sources with your own experiences.
- Explain how this value, conviction, or belief affects your relationship to at least one community you belong to.
 - If possible, identify secondary sources that address how this value, conviction or belief influences and affects communities.
 - Compare and contrast these sources with your own experiences and observations.

PLA ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

The content expert who will assess your project will whether you have demonstrated mastery of the learning outcomes for the class with the following rubric.

Score	Result	Meaning
9-7 Points	Accept	Student is awarded credit for PLA project.
6-5 Points	Revise and Resubmit	Student has 2 weeks to revise PLA project based on content expert feedback.
4 – 0 Points	Not Accepted	Student is not awarded credit for PLA project.

	Accomplished College-Level Learning 3 points	Developing College-level Learning 2 points	Beginning College-level Learning 1 point	Not College-level Learning 0 points
EXPERIENCE: Effectively communicates relevant explanation of personal and/or professional experience(s) related to learning outcome(s).	Explanation of experience(s) is comprehensive and detailed. The context and background of experience(s) are described with specific details. There is a clear relationship between the description of the experience(s) and learning outcome(s). Provides specific evidence that learning occurred.	Explanation of experience(s) and the context and background of experience(s) are generally present though with some gaps. There is a general relationship between the description of experience(s) and the learning outcomes(s). Provides general evidence that learning occurred.	Explanation of experience is simplistic and/or incomplete. Minimal context or background of experience(s) was provided. Explanation of relationship between experience(s) and learning outcome(s) is linked but superficial, and is assumed but not explicit. Provides minimal evidence that learning occurred.	Explanation and description of the experience(s) is unclear and/or non-specific. No context or background of the experience was provided. The relationship between experience(s) and the learning outcome(s) is non-existent or scholarly investigation irrelevant. Provides no evidence that learning occurred. Experience is conflated with learning (i.e., length of time is equivalent to mastery).

<p>KNOWLEDGE AND/OR PRACTICE:</p> <p>Effectively communicates relevant theories and/or best practices related to learning outcome(s).</p>	<p>Explanation describes relevant concepts and/or practices and provides analysis (compares/contrasts) with other relevant ideas. Explanation demonstrates critique of strengths/weaknesses of ideas. Secondary sources are appropriate for scholarly or professional discourse.</p>	<p>Explanation generally describes relevant concepts and/or practice, and references other relevant ideas. Explanation may demonstrate adequate description of key idea(s) but there may be gaps in relating it to others. Secondary sources are generally appropriate for scholarly or professional discourse but may exclude key disciplinary concepts and/or be out-of-date.</p>	<p>Explanation superficially describes concepts and/or practice. Conceptual focus may be misdirected or ancillary. Explanation is mainly factual with limited analytical engagement. Secondary sources are included but markedly exclude key disciplinary concepts, are misused, and/or are inappropriate for scholarly or professional discourse.</p>	<p>Lack of evidence or understanding of relevant concepts and/or best practices. Lack of appropriate secondary sources and understanding of knowledge related to learning outcome(s).</p>
<p>REFLECTION AND SELF-ASSESSMENT</p> <p>Effectively reflects upon experience and critically self-assesses abilities in relationship to relevant body of knowledge.</p>	<p>Reflection on experience(s) specifically connects to broader body of knowledge. Recognizes relationship and provides clear critique and/or explanation of the significance of the connection. Provides critical self-assessment including descriptions of personal strengths and weaknesses as it relates to the experience(s).</p>	<p>Reflection on experience(s) generally connects to broader body of knowledge. Recognizes overall relationship and provides some critique and explanation of the significance of the connection. Provides some level of self-assessment including general descriptions of personal abilities as it relates to the experience(s).</p>	<p>Reflection on experiences(s) minimally connects to broader body of knowledge. Recognizes that there is a relationship but is unable to critique or adequately explain the significance of the connection. Provides superficial level of self-assessment that focuses on what one accomplished rather than how well they accomplished.</p>	<p>Lack of reflection on how experience connects to broader body of knowledge. Lack of evidence connecting experience within body of knowledge. Lack of self-assessment on one's abilities or performance.</p>

EXAMPLES OF GENERAL PLA TOPICS AND LEVELS OF LEARNING

	Building	Project Management	Spanish Culture	Professional Communication
NOT college-level	Know how to put up wallboard	Work to complete items on a checklist given to you	Traveled in Spain twice, for two weeks each time	Sends emails and text messages at work
Beginning college-level	Describe why walls are constructed a certain way	Create a timeline and supervise the completion of tasks	Describe trends and practices related to daily life, holidays, food, religion, etc.; familiar with some Spanish history related to contemporary attitudes and practices List trends and practices related to daily life, holidays, food, religion, etc. Describe some aspects of Spanish history	Communicates in the workplace by writing emails, instant messages and reports for a general audience
Developing college-level	Describe why walls are constructed a certain way Understand how to design a building so the walls stay up Explain why walls are constructed a certain way List the advantages and disadvantages of different methods for building a wall	Create a timeline and supervise the completion of tasks Work to create cooperation of all parties concerned with the project	Discuss trends and practices related to daily life, holidays, food, religion, etc. Identify sub-groups within the overall culture Describe some aspects of Spanish history related to contemporary attitudes and practices .	Communicates in the workplace by writing emails, instant messages and reports for a variety of stakeholders Identifies characteristics of different professional communication genres

Accomplished college-level	Make decisions to design a building so the walls stay up	Create a timeline and supervise the completion of tasks	Analyze nuances related to attitudes and practices	Analyzes professional communication genres to develop complex, diverse, and effective written and oral communication
	Explain why walls are constructed a certain way	Work to create cooperation of all parties concerned with the project	Identify sub-groups within the overall culture and analyze the sub-groups relationships with each other	Adjusts communications to mindfully consider audience, situation, context, and style
	Analyze the advantages and disadvantages of different methods for building a wall	analyze problems or issues and amend the plan; evaluate the outcome of the project	Compare Spanish history with contemporary attitudes and practices	

This chart was modified from [SUNY – Empire State College](#).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Office of Prior Learning Assessment (OPLA)

The Office of Prior Learning Assessment website provides guidance for students seeking to be awarded college credit for prior experience.

PLA Advisor (SCPSPLA@depaul.edu)

A Prior Learning Assessment advisor is available to help you throughout the process. They can help you understand the requirements of a PLA project and are happy to provide feedback on in-progress work.

Course Match PLA Examples

Scroll down to find a few examples of completed Course Match PLA projects.

5 Tips About PLA from a Student

Just what it sounds like—a student who has successfully completed PLA projects shares their tips for success.

The Writing Center

Peer writing tutors are available to help at all stages of the writing process. They can review completed work, in-progress drafts, and even assist with planning and outlining. You can meet with a tutor in-person or online!