

CHAPTER 7:
THE INDEPENDENT LEARNING PURSUIT
(ILP)
& Learning from Experience

- A. What Are Independent Learning Pursuits?**
- B. How To Create an ILP**

SECTION A: WHAT ARE INDEPENDENT LEARNING PURSUITS?

Learning activities come in many different forms that can happen inside or outside a classroom. You may have had job-related seminars, undergone training for acquiring specific skills, or learned important lessons through life experiences. You may also want to take a non-credit arts course or investigate an issue of particular interest to you at some point during your time at SNL. Independent Learning Pursuits (ILPs) can therefore document your *prior learning*, but they can also be pursuits of *new learning* you decide to undertake outside of a course. Regardless whether your ILP relates to prior or new learning, you need to follow certain rules about designing and documenting your learning. In this chapter we list requirements and criteria for assessment that should help you in planning or documenting your ILP, as well as guide you through the steps you need to take to submit your ILP successfully.

Some Sources of Independent Learning:

- ◆ **Community and Work Projects**

Involvement in community or work projects may be related to SNL competencies. In your written report on such a project, clearly outline your role, define the roles of others, state the scope of the project, and give your analysis of its progress, completion and implementation. The project need not have been a success; rather you should demonstrate how the project provided an opportunity for learning. You might also include newspaper accounts, letters of testimony, artifacts, and other evidence with your written work. You must make a direct connection between the experience and the competence you are addressing. It is likely that work projects will address competencies in the Focus Area.

- ◆ **Non-Credit Courses, Training, and Seminars**

Use non-accredited adult or professional education experiences as evidence if the content fits the competence, if the work was conducted at the college level, and if you can provide an evaluation of your work. Accompany certificates of attendance or completion with course descriptions and any evaluations of your work. In addition to your written description of the course or seminar, you might ask an instructor to furnish explanations of your performance. In the case of job training, supervisors may be in a position to evaluate your ability to implement seminar skills. You should also include your own assessment of the course, and of your performance there. Accompany this evaluation with a report on how you apply this learning elsewhere. Your explanation of the seminar content, its relation to the competence, and your application of the learning are the most important evidence of your competence.

- **Life Experience**

What does it mean to draw meaning from experience? In *Foundations* you have ample opportunity to explore this question. Adults come to college with accumulated experiences from which they can derive meaning. While their younger counterparts, who enter college soon after high school, may receive broad theoretical knowledge designed to help them interpret the world, as they will later experience it, adults have often lived the experience first. They have held positions in employment, have cared for family members who have had extended illness, have entered into and perhaps dissolved relationships, have raised a family of their own--sometimes, however, without the benefit of reflection on that experience as a source of learning. As you think about identifying competencies from prior or independent learning, it is also important that you be able to reflect on the learning

and the meaning you derived (or are continuing to derive) from your experiences. Your *Foundations* instructor will provide exercises and assignments as well as allow for in-class discussion on this topic, which will help you move forward in reflecting and drawing meaning from experience.

Exercises: Do “Prior Learning Exercise” and “Making Meaning from Experience Worksheet” in Chapter 9.

Reading: For more on experiential learning, read Chapter 9, “Experience, Learning and Knowledge.”

ILPs and the SNL Program

In addressing a particular competence, you should:

- ◆ Read the statement. Notice the *verbs* in the statement. Some verbs indicate knowledge, others indicate skill in action, and others indicate ability in judgment. Some competence statements combine these different kinds of ability;
- ◆ Consider the *category or area* in which a competence appears (A, H, S or F). These categories provide a context for the individual statement;
- ◆ Consider *educational goals* when reading a competence. You can interpret competence statements in relation to your own experiences as well as professional and educational needs;
- ◆ Be *creative* in your interpretation of the statements. Your *Foundations* teacher will inform you if your ideas are workable;
- ◆ Try to touch on all aspects of *your experience* as you review individual competencies. Relate them to your work, your family, and your leisure pursuits.
Since your ILPs are part of the learning activities within SNL’s competence-based college program it is important to keep in mind three issues when reviewing your life experiences and various kinds of prior learning:
 - ◆ You must clearly relate your learning to the SNL **competence framework**. This is of paramount importance. The statements are written broadly to encompass a variety of experiences. Your *Foundations* teacher will help you interpret them in class. As you discussed in the *Independent Learning Seminar*, not all learning is relevant to SNL’s educational framework. Many areas of your experience that are fruitful and personally valuable will not be of use of in your SNL program. Your task in *Foundations* is to look at your experience, starting with the framework provided by the SNL competencies, and make connections
 - ◆ You must concretely **document** the learning that led to your competence. In other words, you must show what you know. It is not sufficient to have had an experience, or report that you took a training seminar at your job. Nor is it sufficient to state that you are competent. You must go through the process of detailing the experience and the accompanying skill, knowledge or ability. You must state how your competence fits a specific statement in the competence framework, and you must prepare this information in documents that meet college-level work.

- ◆ Your projects must meet certain standards relevant to **college work**. Projects (papers, essays, letters, documents, etc.) must be written in formal written English, must show depth of knowledge, and must cover a variety of issues within your topic; work should demonstrate ability to analyze your topic, to engage with the ideas of others, to use theories and to solve problems in the area, and to use these abilities to address issues beyond the confines of your experience.

SNL Assessment Standards

In general, all submissions should demonstrate

- **Conceptual understanding:** An ability to explain particular events in relation to general concepts.
- **Reasoning skills:** The appropriate presentation and logical development of ideas and conclusions without unfounded assumptions, unsubstantiated claims, and logical inconsistencies or omissions.
- **College-level standards:** The use of formal written English, depth of analysis and breadth of research with appropriate documentation and use of source materials.
- **Relevance to the competence statement:** Each piece of evidence submitted for assessment should fit an individual competence statement.

In particular, use the following assessment areas to make sure your ILP reflects your best thinking and writing efforts.

Content

- Student connects his/her experience and knowledge and subject matter to the competence, addressing the criteria for assessment of the competence.
- Student describes and reflects on own experience and knowledge.
- Student relates others' view to his/her own learning experiences and/or demonstrates the ability to view experiences from multiple perspectives.

For the Focus Area:

- Student develops an ILP and competence statement consistent with the intent of the Focus Area as defined by the student, Faculty Mentor and Professional Advisor.

Analysis and Presentation

- Assertions are supported with evidence
- Focus and conclusion(s) are clear
- Presentation format is well organized, coherent, skillfully executed and appropriate to both the topic and the audience
- Grammar, syntax, spelling, and citation forms are appropriate (consistently cites author or title throughout the text)

Additional Criteria (optional) that can be used to address student learning

- Student makes connections between personal knowledge and experience and theories or concepts that contribute to making generalizations.

- Student relates prior experience to current issues, skills, or knowledge base needs.

For the Focus Area:

- Student demonstrates learning consistent with contemporary standards of the field
- Product describes a practice or idea that others in the field would find valuable
- The multi-faceted or multi-dimensional nature of subject, skill, and/or procedure is evident
- Student addresses Issues of context
- Student uses and documents multiple resources representing a range of viewpoints or perspectives

These standards are also stated in the submission form found at <http://snl.depaul.edu> under Student Resources

Forms of Evidence:

Learning in courses, whether at SNL or elsewhere, is assessed by a teacher who has carefully laid out a series of experiences that lead to a desired goal. Each student is measured in the same way, a paper, an oral presentation, participation in class discussions, tests, etc. Evaluation of learning from life experience is more complicated because you draw on unique experiences and unique reflections about those experiences to demonstrate a common ability. That common ability is what we call competence.

Evidence takes on a special significance because of SNL's concentration on concrete proof of the ability to apply learning. Remember that the competencies refer to common skills, abilities, and knowledge, not to specific *topics*. There is no competence that reads: "Knows the facts of the French Revolution," but we do have a competence stating that students should understand how and why we study history, H-1-F, "Can describe and explain the roles of individuals, groups, societies, or states in history." It would be relatively easy to document knowledge of the French Revolution. Understanding the historical process requires a different kind of evidence.

Your task, as you provide documentation to your Academic Committee and to SNL's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee (TLA), is to create a specific, direct link from your experience to a particular competence statement. Thus, rather than concentrating on your experience *per se*, you will want to focus on how your experience fits in with the requirements of any given competence.

As you review your life experiences, you will gain an extra measure of learning simply through the process of analyzing what you know, and trying to convince someone else that you know it. Furthermore, as we have stated above, the competencies are designed to help you review your experience in light of the liberal arts.

As you have discovered, developing evidence for life experience credit is not a simple process. Beyond the important issues of what you did and what you learned, you also must consider what learning skills you employed, what methods are relevant to the topic, what documentation you will provide, what others have to say about the issue, and how the experience connects with an SNL competence statement.

These are issues of great importance to SNL. Traditional educators have worked out methods for evaluating what they have taught. Non-traditional programs have to apply methods of equal rigor to

what you have learned through experience. SNL faculty must maintain the standards of quality appropriate to the BA degree. They draw on the SNL competencies to provide a broad context for learning, and they rely on you to demonstrate your competence.

▪ **Essay**

You will almost always be expected to submit an essay that discusses the relationship between your learning and the competence you will demonstrate. This essay often accompanies additional forms of evidence. In your written evidence, note the competence you are trying to demonstrate, describe the learning experience, your reflections, concepts gained from the experience, and applications of the learning to new experiences. Include prevalent theories, historical background, or scientific data as well as insights particular to the competence at hand. Acknowledge sources of information through citations and a works cited page. A well-constructed essay answers the following questions:

- What is the meaning of the competence statement?
- How does my experience relate?
- What do the others more experienced than I who are in the field have to say?
- What learning have I demonstrated?
- What insight can I contribute?
- How have my ideas been influenced by my research?

Remember: Any statements from a source must be cited using APA or MLA style.

As you prepare your ILP for submission, we recommend that you work with the Writing Center (<http://condor.depaul.edu/~writing/>).

♦ **Products/Artifacts**

If you have published articles, participated in theatrical presentations, painted, photographed, or designed something, the product of these interests may be presented as partial evidence of learning. Photograph large or valuable objects. Accompany your tangible evidence with a written explanation of the process and meaning of the objects presented and their appropriateness to the competence.

♦ **Letters of Testimony**

Letters of testimony by themselves are not considered sufficient evidence of competence. Often, however, students submit letters of testimony in conjunction with other evidence such as an essay or oral presentation. Letters of testimony should be written specifically for the purpose of demonstrating competence.

♦ **Other Supporting Material**

Depending on your ILP, you may also need to attach other forms of documentation such as the syllabus of a non-credit course, newspaper accounts, certificates of attendance or completion with descriptions and evaluations, or other kinds of material related to your ILP.

Please Note: **You should only complete ILPs for competencies you have not otherwise filled.**

SECTION B: HOW TO CREATE AN ILP

Creating An Independent Learning Pursuit: What to Do

Once you have reviewed the competencies individually during Foundations, have identified an experience that touches on issues raised in a particular competence statement, and have worked through the Kolb Cycle via the Learning Style Inventory, you are ready to begin the process of documenting your learning. Well-prepared written evidence explains to your reader what you know, how you came to know it, and what the consequences of that learning for you are. Your aim in writing Independent Learning Pursuits is to convince your readers that you have attained this competence, grasp the meaning of it, and that you can build an argument that demonstrates your knowledge and skill. Organization, clarity, and terseness are your greatest allies in this process.

Six Steps for Preparing Your ILP for Submission:

Here we briefly describe the steps, but the "Independent Learning Pursuit Worksheet" in Chapter 9: Workbook will give you detailed instructions about how to follow these steps.

STEP ONE: Preview SNL Assessment Standards

Two persons will review your ILP: your faculty mentor and a specialist in the competence area. If your ILP is in your focus area, your Professional Advisor will be the specialist reviewer. Their assessment will be guided by the SNL assessment standards. A non-refundable assessment fee is required for each ILP. ILPs do not carry credit hours and do not count for Financial Aid.

STEP TWO: Write your ILP Proposal

You are now ready to design a proposal. In your proposal you will address the following aspects of your ILP:

- In a **project overview**, you will briefly describe what the project will be.
- You will describe how and why the ILP relates to a **particular competence**.
- You will describe how you did or will **develop the competence**,
- You will describe how you will **document** the competence and what **evidence** and **supporting material** you will submit for demonstrating the competence.

Your proposal will also have a **cover page** where you state your name and address/phone number, what competence you want to demonstrate, the competence statement, and a date when you plan to complete the ILP. [The ILP Worksheet in Chapter 9 has all the details you need for constructing this proposal.](#)

STEP THREE: Submit your Proposal to your Faculty Mentor (and Professional Advisor if this is to demonstrate a Focus Area competence) for feedback.

Based upon this feedback, revise your proposal as necessary. Note that several iterations of getting feedback and revising may be necessary.

STEP FOUR: Prepare evidence and supporting materials you will utilize in demonstrating your development of this competence.

After you receive initial authorization for the ILP, you will need to prepare the evidence of your development of the competence. If it is a project you need to complete, do that work. If you have

completed the work, then collect the evidence.

STEP FIVE: Prepare your ILP Rationale Statement and complete the ILP Submission form

You will submit your ILP with all supporting material together with the ILP Submission form (which you can find at <http://snl.depaul.edu> under Student Resources.) This form includes a Rationale Statement where you are asked to describe how your ILP relates to the competence you are seeking by summarizing key aspects of your ILP.

STEP SIX: Submit your ILP electronically to your faculty mentor.

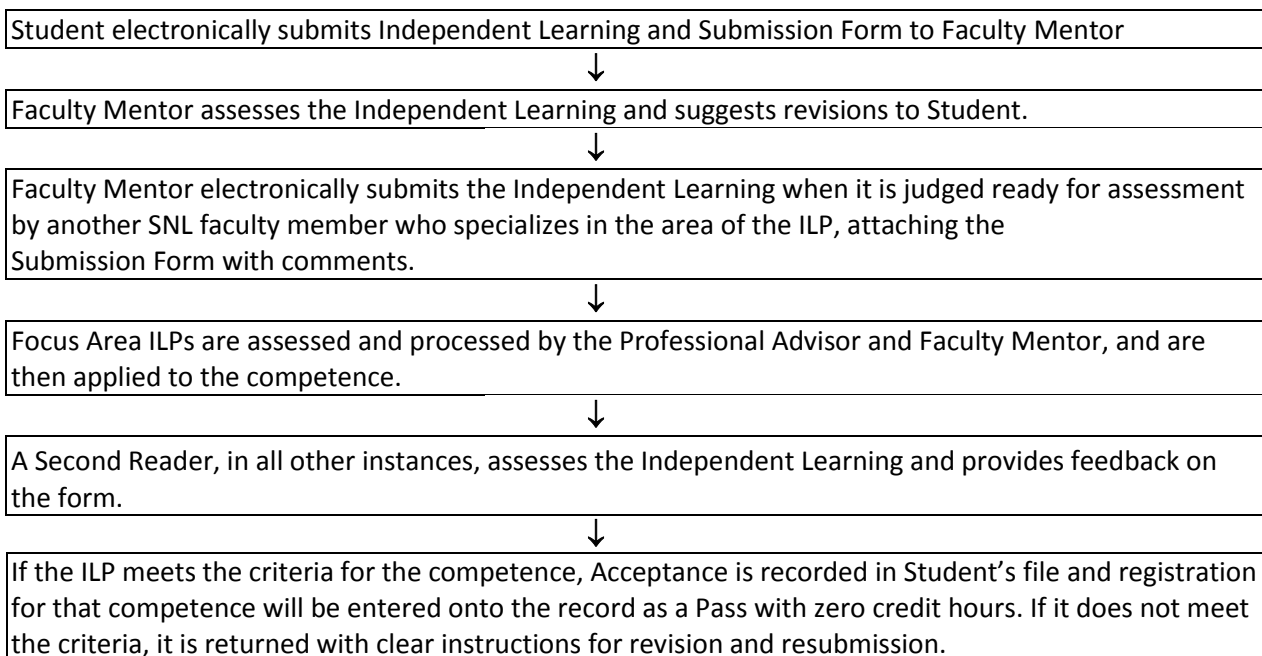
After having received feedback from your faculty mentor on your proposal, you can decide to submit the ILP for assessment and approval by SNL.-To do this, you should consult with your faculty mentor further to ensure that your Rationale Statement, Evidence, and any supporting materials are ready for submission. If they are, your faculty mentor will submit your work to SNL on your behalf.

The "[Independent Learning Pursuit Worksheet](#)" in Chapter 9 will give you detailed instructions.

Process for Submission

Your academic record will reflect the competence earned through assessment of an Independent Learning Pursuit after your submission has been approved for competence. These competencies also will be reflected on your quarterly grade report.

You can submit evidence of independent learning for assessment to SNL at any time after the beginning of *Foundations*. The form that will document feedback from the faculty mentor and the SNL assessor is the ILP Submission Form. This form is at <http://snl.depaul.edu> under Student Resources and must be attached to any Independent Learning Pursuits you submit. Specific steps in the process are as follows:



Please Note: For each submission, there is a fee to have your work assessed by SNL. If you wish to demonstrate E1 and E2 by ILP, they must be submitted separately. Current assessment fees apply. For information about ILP policies and fees, see <http://snl.depaul.edu> under Student Resources.