



University

UMassAmherst Outreach **Without**
Walls

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT HANDBOOK
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Introducing the UWW Prior Learning Portfolio

The University Without Walls, alone among University of Massachusetts Amherst degree programs, awards university credit for the learning gained in the unstructured arena of experience. Some of you with just a few years of formal work experience may have gained an introductory knowledge of a field; others will have rich veins of experiential learning from decades of holding increasingly complex positions. At UWW we have developed a process to assess this learning and to assign credit awards based on the demonstration of learning gained through experience. The vehicle is the prior learning portfolio. This handbook is designed to help the UWW student understand the prior learning assessment process and prepare a prior learning portfolio.

What is "experiential learning"?

Experiential learning is learning gained by grappling with the day-to-day demands of living and working. All learning includes increased understanding and knowledge, but experiential learning and academic learning differ in the context in which one learns. Learning gained in college or through training programs is deliberate, structured, and intentional, whereas experiential learning usually happens as a result of activities directed toward other ends, such as meeting work requirements and family or community needs.

As we encounter typical situations again and again, we find ways of dealing with them more effectively. Over time we develop "best practices" for what we do. As new, less typical situations arise, we assess them and make adjustments to our standard responses, and with each adjustment we expand our repertoire of techniques and acquire more knowledge. A successful, experienced manager, for example, has learned a great deal about people—what motivates them, how they learn, how they react to change. He or she has also learned about how organizations work—how ideas are disseminated, how decisions are made, how organizational cultures affect the way work gets done. Though this knowledge is invaluable to the manager's success, experiential learning is often a subconscious process. A manager may not have taken the time to think about where "good instincts" or "gut feelings" come from.

Why award university credit for prior learning?

At the heart of the UWW approach to prior learning assessment is the conviction that understanding one's experiential learning and putting it in a larger context is a sophisticated intellectual process that expands a student's knowledge and skill and is worthy of college credit. A manager who knows how she got from there to here and how her operating principles were developed has a deeper understanding than one who is just "going with the gut." People who can demonstrate such knowledge are also demonstrating a level of thinking and understanding typical of college course requirements. In the UWW prior learning process, credit is not awarded for having had experiences, but rather for understanding them and demonstrating what they mean to you and to your field.

What is a prior learning portfolio?

The UWW prior learning process helps you think about your experience and identify the important themes, issues, and operating principles that have emerged from it. At UWW, you seek credit for experiential learning by submitting a prior learning portfolio: a collection of analytical and reflective essays about your experience bound together with the degree plan, a resume, and documents such as clippings, writings, photographs, sample designs, and other appropriate materials supplementing the written narratives. This portfolio takes a good deal of work and time to develop, so we have designed our core curriculum to focus on it. Many of you will submit the portfolio after your second semester in the program, when you have finished UWW 370 Writing About Experience; others will take the writing course and submit the portfolio in later semesters.

Once the portfolio is submitted, the level and scope of demonstrated learning is assessed by one or more UWW advisors and, where appropriate, by one or more faculty members in the related field. This handbook will walk you through every step of the process, from the planning done when you design your degree to the final submission of the portfolio.

The UWW Prior Learning Process: An Overview

The portfolio in the degree plan

As you develop your degree plan in your first semester in the University Without Walls, you will need to think through several elements of the portfolio and its role in the overall degree. These first steps can be critical in guiding you later as you actually begin drafting the degree. They will define the scope, purpose and context of your later writing.

On the **final page** of the degree plan form, you are asked for the following information related to your prior learning portfolio:

- **Area of concentration credit or elective credit?** Here you will decide whether your portfolio credits will be part of your area of concentration, elective credits, or some of both. One UWW student, for instance, had designed an area of concentration entitled *Management Studies*. She intended to write about her experiences as the branch manager of a bank in her portfolio as part of her area of concentration, but she had also been a dance instructor for many years and wanted to include an essay about that experience in the portfolio as elective credit.
- **The portfolio credits sought:** In the degree plan you will determine how many portfolio credits you will seek to round out your degree. Most students determine this number once they've calculated the number of credits remaining after listing courses, exams, and special transcript credits that will meet the UMass Amherst and UWW requirements. Few students will seek more credits than will count toward graduation if doing so leads to a higher fee bracket for assessment. Your advisor will help you consider whether the number of credits you seek in prior learning seems reasonable, given your experience and the level of critical thinking and writing skills demonstrated in earlier courses. The typical range of credit awards is 15-24. Some students may earn as many as thirty credits for experiential learning, although awards at that level are relatively rare.
- **Related experiences:** On the portfolio page of the degree plan, you will also give a very brief list of the major experiences that you will be drawing on when writing the portfolio essays. This list usually consists of the years, organization, location, and job title for each experience. Include only the most important roles you have played that are directly related to the topics you have identified. Normally this list will include one to five experiences, sometimes combining similar ones. Keep these experience and learning area listings very short; the prior learning text on your transcript should stay in keeping with the brief course titles usually included on a transcript. For instance, you may identify the full period in which you were employed by Acme Company as 1995-2004, and include only your most recent position title:

1995-2004. Acme Company, Northampton, MA Senior bookkeeper (2002-2004).
- **Learning areas:** The list of 3-5 learning areas on the portfolio page of your degree plan gives you a road map for your portfolio writing. The learning area is a topic, not a job title. Learning areas for a freelance bookkeeper of many years may typically include *Small Business Finance* and *Tax Preparation Services*, with each being treated separately in depth

in a portfolio essay. Sometimes paging through course listings in the catalog or on university web sites will give you ideas for wording the learning area titles. (See *Planning the Portfolio*, p. 10, for more details.)

First-Stage Portfolio in UWW 370: Writing about Experience

During the second or later semester, you will draft, revise, and edit an introduction and two learning essays *to be presented for evaluation of up to fifteen credits*. In the course, you will also prepare the prior learning transcript statement form (which may be revised before actual submission) and compile the additional documentation that will accompany the portfolio. Writing About Experience also satisfies the UMass Amherst Junior Year Writing requirement.

Content of First-Stage Portfolio: The principal writing requirements for *UWW 370 Writing about Experience* are to draft, revise, and edit the following:

An introduction giving an overview of your experience in the areas under discussion in the portfolio and introducing the essays to follow (5-6 pages or 1500-1800 words).

Two analytical essays demonstrating learning in the learning areas identified in your degree plan (10-12 pages each or 3000-3600 words).

The minimum requirement to be submitted in the course is a total of 25 pages (7500 words) of revised and edited *new* writing. The total writing submitted for the course should not exceed 30 pages (9,000 words). The page totals are based on double-spaced type in 12-point Times New Roman.

A note about UWW 296Y. When you register for *UWW 370 Writing about Experience*, you will also register for *UWW 296Y Assessing Experiential Learning* at a reduced tuition rate. At that point you will also be charged the initial prior learning assessment fee of \$600 for a prior learning award of up to fifteen credits. *UWW 296Y* is a placeholder for your prior learning credits on the transcript. When the final portfolio award is made, the number of portfolio credits earned replaces the three credits of *UWW 296Y* credits you enrolled in. If your award is more than fifteen credits, you will also be billed for the appropriate balance of the assessment fee.

Example: Judy Y. has targeted 21 credits as a prior learning award. She is taking *UWW 370 Writing About Experience* in spring 2007, so she signs up for the three-credit writing course and signs up for *UWW 296Y* for three credits. If she successfully reaches her targeted award, the 21 credits will replace the 3 credits of *UWW 296Y* on her transcript. She will also be billed an another \$600 to cover the additional assessment fees associated with the award over 15 credits. (See **Prior Learning Fees**, p. 19.)

Second-Stage Portfolio: After the Writing about Experience

Students seeking more than fifteen credits for prior learning will have until the day grades are due for the semester following *Writing about Experience* to complete additional writing for the portfolio, either working independently or by signing up for *UWW 396E Portfolio Extension* for one credit to work with a course instructor. In this second phase of the portfolio process, the following guidelines apply:

- The student will write one additional essay plus an integrative conclusion.
- The additional essay may draw on writing done for one of the reflections courses (*UWW 310, 320, 330, or 340*) or other courses, but this work must be expanded significantly to meet the standards of a portfolio essay and should be placed solidly within the context of your experience.

- The integrative conclusion may take one or more of the following approaches:
 - trace your development through the UWW core courses and the portfolio process;
 - define a philosophy of your field of study;
 - develop a vision of the future of the field and of your role within it.
- The entire final portfolio (introduction, essays, and conclusion) to be submitted for over 15 credits should not exceed 50 pages (15,000 words). This limit applies to the written sections only, not including supplementary materials, such as the degree plan, resume, transcript statement, documentation, etc.

If you are electing to develop the second-stage sections of the portfolio independently, present the final version to your UWW advisor for submission to the UWW review team by the deadline (September 1 for those enrolled in UWW 370 during the fall; December 1 for those enrolled in writing during the spring.) At this stage, you will be depending on what you learned about portfolio writing in *Writing about Experience* and on the information contained in this handbook. Be aware that in choosing to write the second-stage portion independently instead of registering for UWW 396E, you are choosing to forgo having UWW faculty reviewing your work outside of the team evaluation.

The Assessment and Approval Process

First-stage portfolios: At the end of *Writing about Experience*, your advisor (and, for those with specialized degrees, your faculty sponsor) in consultation with the UWW 370 instructor will evaluate the portfolio and award it up to fifteen credits for experiential learning. Those seeking more than fifteen credits will wait until the additional material has been written before submitting the entire portfolio for evaluation.

Second-stage portfolio: By the end of the semester following *Writing about Experience*, when the entire portfolio is written, revised, and compiled, you will submit the appropriate number of copies to your advisor and evaluator—if required—for assessment. Your advisor will tell you how to submit your final portfolio for the assessment process, and he or she will distribute it to each of the UWW review team members. Once the evaluator and team arrive at agreement about a credit award, the evaluator signs the prior learning transcript statement (PLTS), indicating that he or she has approved the credit award. Either you or the evaluator returns the signed PLTS to the advisor for final submission.

Required Approval in the Prior Learning Assessment Process

	Advisor	Team	Non-UWW faculty in field
1-15 credits	X		
16-21 credits	X	X	(if outside standard concentration areas)
21-30 credits	X	X	X

Prior Learning Assessment Criteria

UWW grants academic credit for college-level learning, gained through experience, that is demonstrated in a prior learning portfolio. Let's look more closely at these three points.

What is college-level experiential learning?

There is general agreement among higher education institutions assessing knowledge gained from experience that college-level experiential learning has the following attributes:

- **It is learning acquired through experience, not experience itself.** A resume verified by documents is not sufficient to determine college-level learning, because it merely reports and documents experience. On the other hand, a creditable prior learning portfolio identifies key concepts, indicates problem-solving methods used, offers examples, and draws conclusions—it demonstrates that learning.
- **It identifies personal frameworks or operating principles developed through experience.** The more we experience the challenges within a given field, the more likely it is that we construct personal frameworks and develop operating principles to help us understand these various challenges and see the patterns within them. Developing a portfolio essay involves uncovering and articulating the frameworks and principles that govern our practice and testing them against published theories within the field.
- **It represents broad, transferable skills and concepts applicable beyond a single context.** Knowing how to process the hiring and performance evaluation forms within a paperwork-heavy human resources office does not constitute college-level learning. Most procedures are embedded within a specific context and rarely extend beyond that context. On the other hand, examining different approaches to hiring qualified staff, evaluating the effects of the Family and Medical Leave Act on the small business you work within, or comparing supervision styles among several managers demonstrates broad, transferable skills and the understanding of the larger context of the work.
- **It is acknowledged as college level by appropriate experts.** All prior learning portfolios are evaluated by highly qualified UWW advisors experienced in the assessment process, and those earning over 21 credits are also assessed by evaluators in the field of study. Those involved in the assessment hold the final authority in determining if the subject and treatment in a portfolio represent college-level learning meriting college credit.

One way to gauge whether your prior learning essay topic represents college-level learning is to see whether and how it is taught in a four-year college course. Here's an example:

Example: Jerry wanted to write about his six-year experience counseling troubled youth who had come into contact with the legal system. To determine how to word his topic and what kinds of subtopics he should aim to include in his essay, he looked in the UMass Amherst catalog under the psychology and sociology departments. There he found an online course titled Delinquency and Juvenile Justice. To adapt it to his specific area, he decided on Counseling Youth in the Juvenile Justice System as one of his learning areas. Some of the topics listed in the course description were "theories of juvenile crime; influence of schools, peer groups, families, and drugs on juveniles; and the history of the juvenile justice system." Because he saw that his topic was well-represented in college catalogs, he knew that it could be college-level learning. He also gained some ideas of how to structure his essay dealing with that experience. By looking at his work with youth from the angles of influences on youth, counseling techniques, and the structure of the juvenile justice system and by reading and referring to published theories within the related fields, he knew that he would be sure to hit many key areas expected by the portfolio evaluators.

How Will My Learning Be Evaluated?

UWW has developed a rubric—an assessment tool—to guide the credit award process related to prior learning. The rubric describes the criteria used in the assessment: *years of related experience; levels of responsibility; knowledge demonstrated; critical thinking demonstrated; use of literature and theory*. The rubric indicates degrees of achievement in each of the components, so you will have a good idea of the expectations of the evaluators when they read your portfolio.

Prior learning credit in UWW is awarded for learning, not for having had experiences.

Nevertheless, UWW has included years of experience as a criterion in the assessment process, because normally someone who has had many years of experience in a field has a deeper understanding than someone with only a few years of experience. This deeper understanding, however, must be demonstrated in the portfolio essays in ways that address the other assessment criteria.

Writing skill is not one of the components in the assessment rubric, but, make no mistake, clean and clear writing and clear demonstration of learning go hand in hand, so you should make every effort to submit a well-written portfolio with no grammar or spelling errors and with a well-structured presentation of your subject.

Outside references within the portfolio help put your experiential learning in a larger context. References to literature and theories in your field or citations of statistics from reputable studies help your readers understand how your experiences are connected with important issues within the field. Nevertheless, a prior learning portfolio is distinctly different from a research paper. Learning from experience, not from books or web sites, plays the dominant role in this kind of writing, so the references should enrich the essential material rather than overwhelm it. All portfolios benefit from references to outside reading or resources, but no portfolio will be able to reach the highest award levels without incorporating such literature.

Criteria for Prior Learning Awards—the “rubric” (rev 2/6/08)

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE RELEVANT TO PRIOR LEARNING AREAS	1	2	3
	1-5 yrs	>6	N/A
	1	2-3	4
LEVELS OF RESPONSIBILITY IN WORK	Exercises some independent judgment in narrowly defined situations, though most of work is governed by procedure.	<->	Challenging in complexity and level of responsibility; requires significant critical thinking, problem-solving; has significant decision-making authority; requires leadership or highly specialized knowledge.

	0-3	4-6	7	8-10	11
KNOWLEDGE DEMONSTRATED	Shows procedural knowledge specific to the work site; minimal depth or detail.	<->	Demonstrates knowledge required for position through detailed account of experience and some understanding of its relation to field beyond site; likely to demonstrate increasing responsibility and professional growth.	<->	Shows detailed depth of knowledge required for position and its integration into a broader knowledge of the field and theories that govern it.
CRITICAL THINKING DEMONSTRATED	Demonstrates ability to solve problems as presented. Expresses ideas and opinions on the knowledge demonstrated.	<->	Can identify key elements within experiences and analyze their effects on the outcome; uses some evidence to support positions; may identify some simple principles; may not take into account counter-arguments; may not be able to identify assumptions.	<->	Exercises mastery of critical thinking skills by clearly identifying problems and issues; establishes point of view; analyzes factors; consistently offers evidence; acknowledges counter-arguments, uncovers assumptions, and draws well-founded conclusions; identifies common themes among disparate experiences; describes process of own knowledge and skill development

	0-1	2-3	4
USE OF LITERATURE AND THEORY	Some references to outside work, but little attempt to engage directly with the ideas; references used mainly to reassert writer's point; appropriately credits external sources.	<->	Information and theory integrated throughout the paper but enriches rather than overshadows the writer's discussion of learning from experience; reflects principles of good citation practices.

NOTE: This rubric is designed for the assessment of the prior learning portfolio for credit—not for the *writing* of the portfolio in Perspectives and Writing about Experience. This rubric is offered as information within the courses to better guide the writing toward fulfilling its ultimate purpose: earning credits for experiential learning. Grades for the writing assignments, however, will take into account the depth of critical thinking, the use of supporting evidence, and the quality of the writing over the learning from experience reflected in it, since the latter will be assessed later in the formal review. The writing skills will not play a role in the assigning of credit, only in the development of the sections in the courses.

Planning Your Prior Learning Portfolio

What does a finished portfolio look like?

All reviewable portfolios contain the following:

- Preliminary materials
- A title page
- A table of contents
- The prior learning transcript statement (discussed later)
- The degree plan
- A short resume
- Portfolio narrative sections, including:
 - ♦ An introduction giving an overview of the student's relevant experience in the field
 - ♦ 2-3 analytical essays, with the number depending on the credits sought, discussing the learning areas in sufficient depth to demonstrate significant college-level learning
 - ♦ A conclusion integrating the various parts of the narrative sections (second-stage portfolio only)
- Documentation. You may want to make a list of documents included in the documentation section with a brief note describing the relevance of each document or group of documents that illustrate or verify the learning demonstrated in the narrative sections.

How can I be sure my portfolio will demonstrate my learning areas?

When thinking about the portfolio format in relation to your learning areas, keep in mind the following points:

- Demonstrating your targeted learning areas is the overriding purpose of your portfolio essays.
- Sometimes more than one learning area may be demonstrated in a single essay.
- Each of your learning areas must be discussed in sufficient depth somewhere in the narrative section to be credited and listed on your transcript.

Let's go back to Jerry, the youth counselor working with groups at the local YMCA, and consider how he might plan his portfolio. He had decided in his degree plan to seek fifteen credits for experiential learning. He has identified the following learning areas in his degree plan: Counseling Youth in the Juvenile Justice System; Adolescent Development Issues; and Youth and the Effects of Family Violence.

Because he will be writing two analytical essays for a first-stage portfolio, he must consider both what he wants to do in these essays and what he wants to say:

- **What he wants to do:** Show his knowledge of issues and skills related to counseling troubled youth in two detailed essays related to his work as a youth counselor. The first essay will compare how he worked with two different teens from two different socioeconomic classes to demonstrate counseling techniques and issues of adolescent development. The second essay will focus on one teen in the juvenile justice system who grew up in a family marked by family violence. Jerry will examine the effects of family violence by comparing his experience with this teen to studies done about juveniles in violent situations.
- **What he wants to say:** In the first essay, Jerry intends to show the way that he gains teens' trust so that he can learn more about the backgrounds and age-related concerns that have led them into trouble. He combines this personal knowledge with his knowledge of the

community and peer group norms to decide how best to work with each teen. In the second essay, he will show that the violent family situation of a young man on probation has made the teen unable to manage his anger and led to a number of arrests for assault. Jerry will also show that this youth's response to his family circumstances is typical of others in that situation and that the juvenile justice system does not serve these children well.

What is an effective approach for an analytical essay in the portfolio?

Choosing the right topic and focus for your analytical essays makes all the difference in how well they will serve to demonstrate your learning. Here are some thoughts to guide your selection:

- **Should I approach it top down or bottom up?**
 - ♦ A *top-down* essay examines a concept or topic as the organizing principle of the essay, with extended examples from experience brought in to illustrate particular points or subtopics. If Jerry begins his first essay with an overview of the themes of family violence that he has identified and then demonstrates how those themes are reflected in his experience, he will be writing a “top-down” essay.
 - ♦ A *bottom-up* essay focuses on a particular experience or set of experiences and draws out principles from them that apply beyond that particular situation. If Jerry's second essay begins with a case study of a violent teen, and Jerry then extracts principles from the case study, he is doing a “bottom-up” essay.

In both cases, the essay integrates concepts and principles with details of the experiences from which you came to understand them. The only difference is in the way you organize and focus the essay.

- **Does it offer sufficient complexity and coverage?** Choose the focus of your essay so that it is complex enough to spark a good discussion and not so narrowly focused that it won't show sufficient scope of knowledge. Keep in mind that your task is to demonstrate depth and breadth of learning in a particular topic. For instance, one manager may write a successful essay about a range of activities associated with human resources: interviewing, hiring, supervising, and disciplining a problem employee. Another may write a less successful essay by focusing too narrowly on a particularly irksome employee with whom she had serious personality differences. The second essay would not lead the manager to the broad principles of human resource management that he claims to understand.
- **Does it bear too great an emotional charge?** Whatever topic you choose, be sure that you can get some distance on it. Strong emotional responses may keep you from applying the critical thinking skills to the topic that are needed to demonstrate your understanding and range of knowledge. One student, for instance, was too close to the experience of being recently fired from a small company to examine his experience related to it with detachment. Another student tried to write about a recent painful divorce. She wanted to use her own experience to demonstrate her learning about the legal, financial, and gender issues associated with divorce, but she couldn't get far enough away from her hurt and anger to examine the issues critically.
- **Is it too inwardly focused?** Your own personal development, especially as it relates to your field of study, may be appropriate for an introduction, but is likely to be too self-focused for the topic of an analytical essay. Yes, this is your portfolio about your experience, but if it is to demonstrate college-level learning it must also be about the broader, transferable learning gained from that experience. No college course is titled "All about Me!", so trying to demonstrate learning with the sole topic of personal growth and development will strike the evaluators as self-absorbed. Putting your learning and experience in the context of the larger

world, however, is perfectly appropriate. "My Fear of Heights" is not an appropriate subject for a portfolio, but "The Source and Treatment of Acrophobia," can be an excellent topic, particularly if you have read about acrophobia or participated in support groups and can describe a wider range of problems than your own.

- **Am I writing about procedure or policy?** We've all had jobs that were routine and procedural, doing pretty much the same thing day after day according to a procedure set by management. Describing procedures does not demonstrate college-level learning, although analyzing the effectiveness of policies and examining the larger systems containing those procedures could serve you very well. For example, an employment counselor wrote ten pages describing the various forms required in her agency and recounting how she instructed a client to fill them out correctly. To be sure, much of her job consisted of working with unemployed clients filling out forms to help them negotiate the job market, but to earn college-level credit, she would need to demonstrate much more expansive knowledge. A student in a similar position might have looked at the system of incentives and obstacles that the agency presented the clients and evaluated the agency's effectiveness, based on what she had witnessed (anecdotal evidence) and what studies of employment practices had shown. So, essays based on the same job could lead to very different responses from portfolio evaluators.

How do I develop a plan for my portfolio?

Now that you have learned about the importance of learning areas and have some ideas about selecting topics, it's time to begin making a broad plan of your portfolio. Here is an approach used successfully by many UWW students:

- Write your learning areas on an index card and place it where it is always in sight near your computer. These learning areas are a reminder of what you are trying to do. Sometimes they will change because your writing takes you in a different direction, but be sure you think about how the newly defined areas fit into your degree as a whole. It's usually best to run any changes by your advisor before going too far with the writing.
- Think about what you want to do in each of the portfolio sections (introduction, analytical essays, conclusion). Identify the learning areas to be addressed and the subtopics you intend to examine as you do so. Think also about which experience or experiences you intend to draw on to illustrate these learning areas.
- Keep working with the portfolio sections, experiences, and learning areas until you have a general plan for the whole portfolio.
- Post the plan up next to your index card—and keep looking at it as you write.
- Once you have the plan worked out, you can begin developing a more detailed outline of the first section that you intend to draft. It will be much easier to decide what to say once you know how this section fits in with the whole.

Not everyone can begin their writing in the structured way suggested above. You may need to do some free writing, tell a story, or jump right into a case study in order to get started on the portfolio essays. Keep your learning areas in mind in all your writing so that you don't wander off track. If you find as you write that you're more interested in a different topic, follow it out, as long as it meets the criteria for college-level learning and your advisor has given the go-ahead. But be careful. Bouncing from one topic to another can take up a lot of time. Get focused on a topic as soon as you can. Then begin planning the structure of the essay and identifying examples and stories to illustrate the points you want to make, as well as resources that will give your essay context within the field.

Formatting the Portfolio

Having an understanding of the final portfolio format will help you at the beginning of the process by allowing you to:

- create styles and page setup in your Word documents to allow for uniform formatting throughout the whole portfolio;
- determine the length and scope of each section as you are drafting it and so minimize later cutting or expanding to size;
- gather correct APA citations as you research your topic(s).

What is the appropriate format for the final portfolio?

- **Font:** All text should be in Times New Roman 12-point font, double-spaced for easier reading. A typical narrative page in this font and spacing runs about 300-320 words per page.
- **Margins:** One-inch margins on both sides and top and bottom are appropriate.
- **Titles:** Each portfolio section should have a title or subtitle that clearly indicates the learning focus addressed in that section. For instance, in "Mom, Pop, the Fettuccini Alfredo, and Me: Managing a Family-Owned Restaurant," the subtitle explains the more frivolous and creative primary title. Sections don't need catchy titles, but if you can't resist using one, add a clarifying subtitle. "Titles" such as "Essay #2" are not acceptable because they don't tell the reader anything.
- **Portfolio learning areas:** Each section in the portfolio should include a heading that identifies the specific learning areas for which you are seeking credit to be addressed in that section. Normally you will demonstrate learning in depth only in the analytical essays, but occasionally an introduction or conclusion will also include sufficient discussion of the topic to merit including the learning area heading.
- **Section lengths:**
 - ♦ Introduction: 5-6 pages (1500-1800 words)
 - ♦ Each analytical essay: 10-12 pages (3000-3600 words)
 - ♦ Conclusion: 6-8 pages (1800-2400 words)

With these section lengths, a typical first-stage portfolio with two analytical essays would total approximately 30 pages of text, not counting supplementary materials and documentation. These ranges should allow enough space to develop a topic, but not enough to allow for long-windedness.

If, on the other hand, you have difficulty constraining your writing to the upper limits, then advance planning will save you from painful editing later. If you "let it all spill out" in free writing to get going, edit your work before handing it in. Don't assume that the instructor will edit it down for you. Becoming an effective writer means making choices, and selecting what matters and what doesn't is essential. Keeping within the ranges at the draft stage will save you work later.

- **Page numbering:** When compiling the separate sections into the final version of your portfolio, set page numbering so that the introduction begins on page 1 and the numbering continues throughout the whole portfolio. Assuming you have each section in a different file,

you should be able to set the beginning page numbers for a separate section, depending on the last number of the previous section.

TIP: In Microsoft Word, go to *Insert/Page Numbers* and click on the *Format* button. Then click on *Start as...* and enter the number after the last number of the previous section.

- **APA style for citations and references:** When referring to other publications, use the American Psychological Association (APA) style of documentation for both in-text citations and the reference list. See the resources section at the end of this handbook for publications or web sites that explain this style in detail.
- **Electronic or hard copy:** Your advisor will tell you whether your portfolio should be submitted as a hard copy or electronic copy. At this writing, all portfolios are submitted for review as printed copies, one for each reviewer, though this practice may change. UWW does not retain portfolio copies, so you will have them returned to you after the process is completed.

Drafting the Portfolio Sections

Before you begin to write, you need the right tools:

- a computer;
- an Internet connection;
- a good word-processing program, such as Microsoft Word, the program used by most students and teachers in UWW;
- a good writing handbook, such as Diana Hacker's *A Writer's Reference* or *A Pocket Style Manual*;
- a dictionary;
- a thesaurus;
- a quiet place where you can work without being disturbed.

How should I approach the introduction?

Keep in mind the dual purpose:

- **The introduction gives the reader an overview** of your experience and gives you a chance to tell your story, to start with the wide-screen perspective on your development within the field you're writing about. A major task of the introduction is to give the reader an understanding of the context of the experiential learning to be detailed in the analytical essays to follow.
- **The introduction prepares the reader for what is to follow.** Once you've given the reader an overview of the past—your experience—finish the introduction with several paragraphs offering an overview of the essays to come. When the reader has finished this section, she should have an image of you and your history in mind and an understanding of what you want to accomplish in the sections to follow. In particular, the reader will want to know how you intend to address the learning areas you've identified for each section.

Tips for writing an effective introduction:

- **Think and plan.** Before beginning the draft introduction, sketch out some thoughts about the course your life has taken, especially in relation to your field of study or the topics you will be writing about in the essays to follow. How did you become interested in the field? What path

have you taken from starting point to where you are now? Identify key turning points, connections between one position or role and the next, major influences along the way.

- **Shift the lens.** Imagine your life in different ways:
 - ♦ As a string of beads in a necklace. Each bead is a discrete experience, but all are connected by a thread--the dominant theme or themes.
 - ♦ As an obstacle course, full of advances and setbacks, a broken progress moving forward in the general direction of now.
 - ♦ As a tightrope walk. You don't just go straight along a tightrope; you must balance as you go—first shifting your weight to one side, then to the other—in order to go forward.

By reflecting on your past as involving continuities, obstacles, and balances (or imbalances) you will be gaining a more complex view of your experience. Does thinking about your experience in these ways allow you to see patterns you might not have noticed otherwise? Do you see any interplay between the continuities, obstacles, and balances?

- **Select and focus.** Your experience is too rich to capture it all in a limited number of pages, and if you race through to cover all the key points, it may leave the reader unsatisfied. You may end up being the tour guide who zips down the hallway of a historic mansion, opening doors, pointing quickly inside each, and then slamming them shut and rushing on to the next, leaving the poor tourist feeling that she hasn't had a chance to see anything. Instead, you'll want to select a few key rooms to linger in a while, rooms that suggest the treasures in the others not explored, where a glance inside would be enough.
- **Describe and narrate.** Because the introduction focuses more on what you've done than the why and how (which will come in later sections) you'll be using a combination of descriptive and narrative writing. To *describe* a thing is to use the language of the senses to render it in words. If you describe a pivotal moment in your life, you will help the reader construct a mental image with sensory words. To *narrate* is to place a sequence of events in time, to tell us what happened and when. Again, think of the movement down the mansion hall as a process of narration, putting the events in sequence. And then think of lingering inside the chosen rooms as a matter of description, when the guide stops, looks around, explains what he sees and how it fits into the whole.
- **Set up the signposts.** Let's continue with the tour metaphor. Perhaps the mansion is the first stop on a tour of a vast estate. When you emerge into the courtyard, the guide points toward the path ahead and tells you what to look for and how all the different venues—the stable, the walled garden, the pond—play a role in the whole estate and its history. So, as the portfolio tour guide, when you've finished telling the key points of your story, stand at the doorway and point ahead. Give the reader a preview of what's next.

How are the analytical essays different from the introduction?

The analytical essays are the workhorses of the portfolio. They have to do the job of demonstrating the learning and thereby earning your experiential credit by marshalling all the forces: descriptive, narrative, analytical, and reflective writing. The essays present your experience as examples of broader concepts, principles, and practice to show the transferable learning that you have gained from a particular experience. They also show how you think about that learning within the wider context of an industry, a political or social environment, or a national or international arena. The essays must prove to the reader that you know—in depth--what you claim to know and that your understanding extends beyond a single setting.

Tips for writing effective portfolio essays

- **Select the right topic.** Review the discussion earlier in the planning section about identifying effective essay topics. If your goal is to earn prior learning credits, then starting with the right topic will keep you from wandering away from that goal.
- **Remember the learning areas.** At any given moment in writing these sections, you should be able to answer "why am I writing this?" and explain to yourself how it relates to a particular learning area. Every element in a well-integrated and structured essay will reinforce the purpose at hand: to demonstrate your learning in a specific identified topic.
- **Balance the mix.** Every effective portfolio section depends on finding a good balance among:
 - ♦ A detailed rendering of experience (description and narration);
 - ♦ An examination of the events that led up to it, the effects that followed, and the influence at play (analysis);
 - ♦ A discussion of its meaning within the context of your life and learning (reflection).

An essay that is all analysis and reflection loses the connection with the experience that produced it; a prior learning portfolio essay should be differentiated from a research or term paper. On the other hand, a portfolio essay that is all description and narration won't successfully prove college-level learning.

- **Show, don't tell.** Students often make the mistake of thinking that telling about learning is demonstrating learning. It isn't. When Jason writes, "While working at ABC company, I gained skills in management, interpersonal communication, and project coordination," what have we learned about Jason's learning? Only that he thinks he has these skills. On the other hand, if Jason shows us—through concrete examples, stories, comparisons between experiences, or references to literature in his field—what he learned about management, we will know quite a bit about his learning.
- **Prove it.** Show the evidence, so the reader can see what you see and understand how you have reached your conclusions. Though Marianne has reached the conclusion that her former boss was a sneaky, interfering, micro-manager who represented all that she abhorred in her work life, the reader doesn't want to read that opinion in her portfolio. The reader is more interested in how Marianne gauges the effects of her supervisor's behavior on his subordinates' morale and productivity and how, by extension, Marianne can identify practices associated with poor management based on that experience. It is up to her to trace her judgment of her supervisor back to specific actions or incidents, analyze their effects, and offer her conclusions in light of that knowledge shared with the reader.
- **Go ahead, say "I."** Perhaps you have heard that the pronoun *I* and its siblings (*me*, *mine*, *myself*) have been banned from academic papers, and so you may find yourself avoiding it in writing these essays. This is a portfolio about *your* experience, *your* learning, *your* perspective, so go right ahead and say *I* as often as you like. Being as objective as possible, though, you will want to focus more on what you think than what you feel, because analysis involves first stepping back from your habitual perspective to examine the subject in a more detached way. If you have trouble writing about yourself, try writing about your observations and what they mean.
- **Use both microscope and telescope.** To examine an experience in sufficient depth, you must move in close to your subject, put it under the microscope. But narrowing your vision too much, so that all the reader sees is your particular small piece of the world, won't

necessarily demonstrate the transferable learning the reader will be looking for. At some points, you will want to pick up a telescope to see beyond the limited world of your experience. If you are writing about developing your family restaurant, for instance, then the microscope would show how you decided on theme, menu, staff, marketing, etc., for your restaurant. The telescope would show, perhaps, the failure rate of family restaurants and the reasons for their struggle to survive or the changing patterns of dining-out habits. A good writer will learn how to shift between the two smoothly. Your memory and intelligence will serve as the microscope; the library is a good telescope.

- **Compare and connect.** Rather than looking at specific incidents or challenges in isolation, draw out deeper meanings by comparing them. Adrienne, an emergency medical technician, described a typical emergency scene and analyzed her approach to managing it. She followed it with another more demanding and unusual scene that challenged her to adapt her standard procedures in the rush of the moment. In that way, she identified both best general practices and her problem-solving strategies when those practices did not fit well.
- **Check out other points of view.** You may want to propose a particular point of view on, say, housing regulations affecting your clients in a social service agency. Your position will be more compelling if you acknowledge the arguments against your idea and discuss whether they have any merit. In this way, you'll be showing the reader that you have a breadth of knowledge and can think critically about the issue.
- **Think about meaning.** Through critical thinking you may arrive at a more detached point of view on a subject, but at some point your conclusions may affect the way you live your life and see the world as an individual. Reflection involves uncovering the mental, emotional, and social implications underlying what you have done and seen and learned. What does the learning you have gained through experience mean to you? How does it affect you in your role as a working person, as a family, or community member? Has it made you think or act differently?

What should I discuss in the conclusion? (second-stage portfolios only)

The conclusion ties together the themes and experiences discussed earlier, by assuming a broader perspective. Ultimately, it asks and answers the final question, "SO WHAT?" What do we make of everything that has gone before in the portfolio?

Tips for approaching the conclusion

The follow-up question to "so what?" can be phrased in a number of ways, any one of which can lead to an effective closing:

- **What does it all mean to me?** You can use the conclusion to reflect on the meaning of your experience as a whole. Now that you have arrived at this point in your life, what is the way ahead? How do you move forward in the direction you want to go? How different are you now in your thinking than you were early in your experience?
- **How will my field develop in the future?** Given all that you have learned about your field, what lies ahead? Do you foresee major shifts or changes? How are those changes likely to affect your own role or ambitions? What have you learned that will prepare you for those changes?
- **How has writing the portfolio affected my perception of my experience and of my field?** You're likely to be somewhat different after writing the portfolio than you were before you started, and to some degree that difference rises from the process of thinking and writing

about experience. How did the portfolio process lead to that difference?

Getting Feedback and Revising

When you've drafted your sections, you've put them into writer-centered prose, a necessary first stage occurring when you've pulled out what is in your head and put it on the page (or screen). You know what it says and you know what it means. But will those words communicate the same thing to someone else less familiar with your thinking and your experience? Your next step is to shift from writer-centered to reader-centered prose, and you can't do that on your own. You need a reader...or two or three.

How should I get feedback on my writing?

Potential sources of feedback can include:

- **Yourself.** Read your work aloud, so that you actually hear it. You will be surprised how much you learn about your writing when you hear it as words outside your head.
- **Your writing instructor.** If you are working on your first-stage portfolio within *Writing about Experience* or second-stage portfolio within *Portfolio Completion*, your writing instructor will be a principal source of feedback. He or she understands the portfolio process and will have experience in helping students develop successful portfolios.
- **Classmates.** Your classmates are also a good source of feedback. Pay attention to their feedback. Even though they may be less experienced in working with the portfolio process than the instructor, they can be astute readers who can give you valuable information. People who don't know anything about your field can be particularly valuable in helping you clarify your writing and fill in the steps of your thought processes.
- **Friends and family members.** Call on those who know you to read through your work and tell you what impressed them, what confused them, what they would like to know more about. If they are particularly good writers, they can also work with you on cleaning up the mechanics, if needed.

Don't let anyone else edit your work without your direct involvement. For the portfolio to really be your own work, you must be involved in making changes, as well as understanding why they should be made. Others, though, can be helpful in showing you where revisions may be needed by asking questions or circling errors.

How should I handle revisions?

- **Start with the whole before the parts.** Once you have a full set of portfolio draft sections, read through all of them in sequence, making notes as you go. At this stage, you want to attune yourself to the whole portfolio, probably for the first time. Be sensitive to your experience as a reader as you move through the sections. Are you repeating yourself from one section to the next? Have you accurately represented the essays in the introduction? Do you find any bumps in the road for the reader? When you've laid out a plan for revising the whole, then you can work on the parts.
- **Start big and end small.** If you are revising an individual section, read it through and read through the comments you have received from others to identify the issues of focus, structure, and development first. You may be tempted to tinker with phrasing or correct the grammar because it's easier work than deciding on a new structure, but that could well prove a waste of time if you decide to slash a paragraph or refocus the page. Tinkering first may

also make it harder to radically change the writing that you've already reworked. At this initial stage you want to keep everything in play as you work first on the shape of the paper. Once it's shaped and structured to your satisfaction, then you can go line by line to improve the prose.

- **Apply these tests:**
 - ♦ Does this section focus sufficiently on the learning area(s) I want to demonstrate?
 - ♦ Have I included all four elements of writing: description, narration, analysis, and reflection?
 - ♦ Have I drawn out principles and concepts from my accounts of experience?
 - ♦ Have I included examples from experience in my discussions of principles and concepts?
 - ♦ Have I changed the names of real people, locations, or organizations with a parenthetical note or footnote to that effect?
 - ♦ Have I checked my writing over thoroughly for grammar and spelling mistakes, especially those not identified by a spell-check program?

Compiling the Portfolio for Review

Now that you have completed drafting and revising your portfolio, it's time to put all the pieces together and prepare it for review by your advisor, your faculty evaluator (if required), and, in the case of portfolios submitted for more than fifteen credits, a team of UWW advisors.

What should I include in the prior learning portfolio submitted for review?

- **A cover sheet.** The cover sheet should indicate that it is your prior learning portfolio submitted to the University Without Walls at the University of Massachusetts. It also should include your first and last name and the month and year of submission. You may also include a title, if you like.
- **A table of contents.** Prepare the table of contents after putting together all the other documents. List the initial documents (PLTS, degree plan, resume) without page numbers. Only the written sections or narrative should be numbered consecutively and the sections identified by page number in the table of contents.
- **A copy of the prior learning transcript statement.** The prior learning transcript statement (PLTS) is the form that must be signed by the faculty evaluator for the approval process to be complete. The PLTS outlines only those experiences discussed in depth in the portfolio and lists the learning areas for which you are seeking credit.
- **A copy of your degree plan.** Your degree plan should have been approved before beginning the writing course, but if yours has never received official approval, be sure to tell your advisor and sponsor it needs to be included in the review. It is normally included to allow the evaluators to see the educational context of the portfolio credits.
- **A resume of one or two pages.** The resume gives the evaluator a summary overview of your experience. It should not be too detailed or presented in a narrative format, or it may make the introduction seem repetitive.
- **The introduction.** The parts of the portfolio you've been working on begin here. This is also the point at which page numbering begins.

- **The analytical essays.**
- **The conclusion (Second-stage portfolio only).** Consecutive page numbering stops at the end of the conclusion.
- **Supporting documentation.** Supporting documentation may include a selection of newspaper clippings, photographs, letters from employers, sample written materials you've developed within your listed learning areas, marketing or business plans, and so on. When considering whether or not to include a document, keep these guidelines in mind:
 - ♦ The document should directly supplement or illustrate the learning areas you've identified for the portfolio.
 - ♦ The document should directly relate to your own efforts rather than merely provide background material. The human resources policy manual of your company would be appropriate to include only if you were directly involved in creating it. Otherwise it would provide heft without sufficient relevance. An exception would be materials discussed directly in the analytical essays that would need to be available in an appendix for the essay to be fully understood.
 - ♦ The document collection should be selective, not comprehensive. Choose documents that best represent the learning areas and supplement the discussion of your topic in the portfolio essays. Pure volume is less effective than an appropriate selection.
- **Documentation List.** You may want to include a page that identifies and introduces the supporting documents that follow, either individually (if there aren't more than 8-10 included) or in categories. Under each document title, offer a brief description and some indication of why you are including it in the portfolio.

Example: Review of Giuseppe's Restaurant, Dec. 1998. This article appeared in the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* shortly after our restaurant opening, as described in Section 3 of my portfolio.

Navigating the Review Process

How and to whom do I submit my finished portfolio for assessment?

- **UWW Advisor first.** The first step in the review process is to submit the final portfolio to your UWW advisor. Even before you've finished writing, you should discuss the process and clarify deadlines with the advisor. Early in the writing course, you should discuss with your advisor whether you wish to submit a portfolio for fifteen or fewer credits or target a portfolio of more than fifteen credits
- **UWW review team.** Those seeking more than fifteen credits for prior learning will submit the portfolio to the UWW review team through the advisor, who will give you directions about the number of copies needed. The advisor usually distributes the copies to the team for review. At the team meeting, several UWW advisors, including your own, will review the portfolio and recommend a credit award or range to the faculty evaluator, if required. Your advisor will give both you and the evaluator the results of the review.
- **The non-UWW faculty evaluator:** If you have been advised by your advisor or the review team that you will need to identify a faculty sponsor because of the specialized nature of your degree, then your first-stage portfolio (if your target is 15 credits or fewer) goes immediately to the faculty evaluator once the advisor has given approval to enter the review stage. After the UWW team review, second-stage portfolios are submitted to the evaluator with the team

recommendation. All portfolios seeking over 21 credits must have a non-UWW faculty evaluator review them after the team has determined a recommended award. Both the team and the faculty evaluator must come to agreement on a portfolio award. The advisor will manage the process of arriving at a credit award in the rare circumstance that the UWW team and faculty evaluator disagree.

When the PLTS has been signed by the appropriate person or persons, the advisor will turn over the signed paper to the administrative offices for entry on your transcript. The SPIRE transcript will show the credit award number as the credits associated with UWW 296Y Assessing Experiential Learning, *replacing* the three credits assigned when you registered. Shortly afterwards, the text entries from the prior learning transcript statement will also be entered on the transcript, so that the transcript will indicate the source of your learning and the areas for which you are receiving credit.

What are the prior learning fees?

When you enrolled in UWW 296Y Assessing Experiential Learning, the \$600 initial prior learning fee was included in your costs. If your final portfolio is awarded up to fifteen credits, you will owe no additional fees for the assessment process. If you have been awarded more than fifteen credits, you will receive a bill for the balance according to the following schedule of total portfolio fees:

Up to 15 credits:	\$ 600
16-20 credits:	\$ 900
21-24 credits:	\$1200
25-29 credits:	\$1500
30+ credits:	\$1800

Useful Resources

Resources for writing

- ***A Writer's Reference* by Diana Hacker (Bedford/St. Martin, 5th edition).** This handbook should be kept by your side as you write, along with a good dictionary. It offers excellent advice on composing, revising, grammar, research, etc.
- **Paradigm Online Writing Assistant (www.powa.org).** For those who prefer an online resource, this site offers comprehensive guidelines on all aspects of writing.
- **Purdue University Online Writing Laboratory or OWL (owl.english.purdue.edu).** Like Paradigm above, this online site should be bookmarked for readily accessible writing help, especially on the APA guidelines for documenting sources.
- **APA Style Guidelines on OWL (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>).** This is an excellent resource for detailed information on managing in-text citations and reference lists.
- **“APA Exposed” (http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=apa_exposed)** A PowerPoint presentation clarifying the purpose and conventions of the APA style.

Resources for research

- **UMass Amherst library (www.library.umass.edu).** This should be the beginning point of all your research activities, so remember to bookmark the site. Its amazing wealth of online resources may make it unnecessary to go physically to the library to find the information that you need. Within the library site, pay close attention to the following resources made available to you as a member of the UMass Amherst community. Your OIT NetID and password will give you access from home.
- **The Learning Commons (www.umass.edu/learningcommons/).** If you live close enough to visit the UMass Amherst W.E.B. DuBois library, then by all means begin with the Learning Commons on the lower floor in a space that "brings together library, technology, and other campus services in an environment that fosters informal, collaborative work, and social interaction."
- **Special library research page for UWW students (<http://guides.library.umass.edu/uww>).** The research librarians have prepared a page on the library web site designed to help UWW students in the research process. Click on the "Search Strategies" tab for brief videos guiding you through the process of finding online library materials.
- **RefWorks (<http://guides.library.umass.edu/uww> and click on the "RefWorks" tab).** RefWorks is citation management software that can be downloaded to your computer to manage all your references and to then create the appropriate citation format. RefWorks is free to all members of the UMass Amherst community. If you're baffled by the APA style, let RefWorks sort it out for you automatically.
- **Library subject guides (<http://guides.library.umass.edu/subjectguides>).** If you don't know where to begin with finding materials in your field in the library, start with a library subject guide. Reference librarians have created these pages to help students and faculty find the resources they need within the rich repository that is the library web site.
- **A reference librarian by phone, e-mail, chat, or IM (www.library.umass.edu/ask/).** If you're the type that would rather talk than click, you have several options for reaching a librarian directly through the telephone, as a live chat, by e-mail, or by instant message system. Look for the links to these options at the top right of the library home page.

UWW Prior Learning Policies

Deadlines and policies for first-stage and second-stage portfolio submission

- **First-stage portfolio completion within *Writing about Experience*.** All students enrolled in *Writing about Experience* (UWW 370) are required to complete a full *reviewable* first-stage prior learning portfolio for credit by the end of the writing course semester. This portfolio consists of an introduction and two analytical essays focused on learning areas, as described above in this handbook. *Those seeking up to fifteen credits must have completed the review process by the beginning of the semester following UWW 370.*
- **Incomplete grades for *Writing about Experience*.** Sometimes an instructor will agree to give a student a grade of *INC* if circumstances beyond the student's control interfere with progress during the last few weeks of the writing course, assuming the student has made continued progress through the earlier part of the semester. The student will have until the end of the following semester to complete the portfolio or the grade turns automatically to *IF* (

Incomplete Failure). At that point, the student may elect to turn in the portfolio as is without further development to have the grade changed from an *IF*.

- **Second-stage portfolio completion after *Writing about Experience*.** Those students seeking more than fifteen credits through prior learning assessment will submit a final portfolio consisting of the introduction and two essays written in *Writing about Experience* as well as the additional essay plus conclusion in the period indicated below following UWW 370. Portfolios are to be submitted for one review only, after the full portfolio has been completed. ***Second-stage portfolios must be submitted by the following September 1 for students taking UWW 370 in a fall semester and by the following Dec 1 for students taking UWW 370 in a spring semester.***
- **Revisions required by evaluators.** If additional work is required by the faculty evaluator as a result of the review process following the submission of the portfolio, the advisor will indicate the deadline for the completion of the revisions and final submission.

Students who completed UWW 370 Writing About Experience prior to fall 2006:

The following policy applies to those returning UWW students who were enrolled in UWW 370 Writing About Experience prior to September 2006, but who have not yet submitted a portfolio for review.

- **Students with fewer than 10 pages** of revised writing completed for the portfolio must re-enroll in UWW 370 Writing About Experience to begin the portfolio process again.
- **Students with at least 10 pages of writing completed** for the portfolio may either:
 - ♦ Complete the drafting and revision of the portfolio to a reviewable form while working alone, using this detailed prior learning handbook as a guide. When the portfolio is ready for review, the student will give the final copy to the advisor, who will decide if it merits being submitted as a fifteen-credit or higher portfolio.

OR

- ♦ Complete the drafting and revision of the portfolio to a reviewable form by enrolling in an UWW 396P Portfolio Completion with a designated writing instructor. The number of independent study credits to register for is indicated by the amount of work yet to be completed, as determined by the advisor. In general, the following guidelines will be used:
 - **1 credit:** one new section to be drafted and revised (or the equivalent) and the whole to be reviewed for final submission.
 - **2 credits:** two new sections to be drafted and revised (or the equivalent) and the whole to be reviewed for final submission.
 - **3 credits:** three new sections to be drafted and revised (or the equivalent) and the whole to be reviewed for submission.

Students taking either of these options would be limited to developing a portfolio of up to 24 credits.

A Glossary for the UWW Prior Learning Process

Analytical essay. One of the major essays of the prior learning portfolio in which students analyze a topic, theme, or issue they have learned about through experience.

College-level learning. Experiential learning that is demonstrably the equivalent of the level of understanding required in college courses.

Conclusion. A short essay at the end of the prior learning portfolio that ties the major themes of the portfolio together.

Critical thinking. A statement by Michael Scriven & Richard Paul for the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking Instruction captures much of way the term is used in UWW: *Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication...*

Documentation. Materials presented with the prior learning portfolio to document and supplement the portfolio essays (e.g. certificates, evaluations, newspaper clippings, photographs, etc.).

Faculty sponsor. A member of the UMass Amherst or Five College faculty who reviews UWW degree plans and usually evaluates the prior learning portfolio submitted as part of the Educator Licensure Program or for Individualized Degree students who have designated a specialized concentration requiring outside faculty review. (See *prior learning evaluator* below.)

Introduction. The introduction offers an overview of experiences that will be reflected in the analytical essays and introduces those essays.

Portfolio learning areas. The portfolio learning areas are those topics for which UWW seek credit through experiential learning demonstrated in the portfolio. These learning areas are first identified in the degree plan to show how the portfolio will fit in the overall degree. At the end of the portfolio process, the areas will be re-examined before entry on the prior learning transcript statement and ultimately on the transcript.

Prior learning evaluator. All portfolios with an award recommendation by the UWW review team of over 21 credits must also be evaluated by a prior learning evaluator, non-UWW faculty member at UMass or in the Five Colleges. Those students in Educator Licensure program or who have been required to have a faculty sponsor for the degree will usually use the same faculty member as a prior learning evaluator.

Prior learning rubric. An assessment tool to guide the credit award process related to prior learning. The rubric describes levels of achievement and understanding in five assessment criteria: *years of related experience; levels of responsibility; knowledge demonstrated; critical thinking demonstrated; use of literature and theory.*

UWW academic review team. A team of UWW faculty who review degree plans and prior learning portfolios of more than 15 credits.

UWW 191G Frameworks of Understanding. A required UWW first-semester course. Frameworks of Understanding focuses on the development of critical thinking and writing skills and, for Professional Studies students, the development of a degree plan.

UWW 196Y Degree Development. One of two UWW first semester courses required of students in the Educator Licensure program. Degree Development focuses on the design of the individualized degree, the requirements for licensure in Massachusetts, and the development of research skills.

UWW 296Y Assessment of Experiential Learning. A 3-credit "place-holder" course number under which prior learning credits are listed on the UMass Amherst transcript once awarded.

UWW 370 Writing About Experience: UWW's writing course that satisfies the UMass Amherst junior year writing requirement. It is also the course in which the first-stage prior learning portfolio is completed.

UWW 196E Portfolio Extension: The one-credit optional course available to students enrolled in UWW 370 in Spring 2008 or later who are seeking a prior learning award over fifteen credits. Depending on the amount of work to be written as part of the stage-two portfolio.