Synthesis, Application, and Integration of Learning (SAIL) Program

Prior Learning Assessment through Portfolio Development

2009-2010 Student Guide

The Prior Learning Assessment Program at Metropolitan School of Professional Studies:
Validating Lifelong Learning…

REASON, FAITH, SERVICE,
The Catholic University of America
Metropolitan School of Professional Studies
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The Metropolitan School of Professional Studies (MSPS) is dedicated to serving lifelong learners who bring a richness of experience to the classroom. As such, the MSPS Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) program is a natural extension of this school-wide commitment. The PLA program provides students with an opportunity to earn credit for learning obtained through work and other life experiences.

What are the options available for assessing prior learning?
The PLA program provides several avenues for evaluation of this learning:


2. **National Examinations**:
   - **CLEP** (The MSPS Level Examination Program): The CLEP consists of 32 content-based, standardized examinations, which may eligible for MSPS credit.
   - **DSST** (Dantes Subject Standardized Tests): The DSST program offers 37 content-based, standardized examinations, which may eligible for MSPS credit.

3. **American Council on Education (ACE)**
   - Educational Credit for Professional and Continuing Education Training Programs

4. **Advanced Placement (AP) Exam Credit** (as taken in high school)

Why is participating in the prior learning assessment program a good option?
The PLA program is appealing to students because it…

- **Acknowledges** the value of learning acquired from life and work experiences
- **Connects** academic theory and scholarship to students’ rich life experiences
- **Develops and enhances** the quality of students’ writing and research skills
- **Minimizes** the time needed for undergraduate degree completion
- **Reduces** the cost associated with an undergraduate degree

How do you know if prior learning assessment meets your needs?
Each student maintains a unique set of goals for his/her degree program and brings a variety of life experiences to the classroom. Accordingly, prior learning assessment may make more sense for some students than for others. At MSPS, we are dedicated to serving the whole student, and, in an effort to do so, strive to help you make the best decisions possible for your degree program. If you are wondering if the PLA program will meet your needs, we recommend you do the following:

- **Meet** with your academic advisor to determine which, if any, components of the PLA program will help you meet your degree completion goals.
- **Assess** the amount of time you can dedicate to pursuing a prior learning assessment.
   - Whether you choose to take a CLEP or DSST exam, or enroll in the MID50/350 SAIL course, the ability to work independently and manage deadlines will be important.
- **Evaluate** the costs associated with each PLA option.
- **Review transfer credit policy** as it relates to exams and the MID50/350 eligibility requirements.
What is the SAIL Program?
The SAIL (Synthesis, Application, and Integration of Learning) program is part of the larger Prior Learning Assessment offerings at MSPS. SAIL features a flexible, but intentionally designed and facilitated, course-based process that enables students to earn college credit for demonstrated evidence of college-level learning acquired from professional, volunteer, continuing education, military, and other training experiences.

The SAIL process begins with the identification of an appropriate course or courses for which the student believes he or she can provide “evidence” (i.e., portfolio) of equivalent learning as derived from life or work experience and which is aligned with the general course offerings available through MSPS. The student then works within the context of the portfolio-building course (i.e., MID50/350 Synthesis, Application, and Integration of Learning) to document this evidence through autobiographical and experiential learning essays – all supported by supplementary documents (e.g., résumé, work products, verification letters, etc.) – and synthesis with academic theory and scholarship.

In order to provide MID50/350 students with a rich, meaningful, and carefully crafted experience, MSPS faculty mentors work with students and the MID50/350 instructor to provide portfolio guidance, particularly in the realm of connecting experiential learning to academic scholarship. The faculty mentors also serve as the evaluators who assess the portfolio for the awarding of college credit.

Who is eligible for the SAIL Program?
In order to be eligible for enrollment in the MID50/350 SAIL course and embark on the portfolio development process, MSPS students must meet the following eligibility requirements:

- Students must be enrolled at least one (1) full term in the Metro School (carrying a minimum of six (6) credits) as degree-seeking, part-time or full-time undergraduates before applying to participate in the SAIL program.
- Students must have a minimum CUA cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of 2.75/4.0.
- Students must have successfully completed MHU151 Rhetoric and Composition and MHU152 Composition and Research with a grade of “C” or better (or transfer in the equivalencies). Strong writing and research skills are essential for success in MID50/350.

Once students determine that they have met the preliminary requirements above, they should meet with their academic advisors to discuss the role of SAIL in meeting degree objectives. Students are encouraged to complete the SAIL Self-Assessment (See Appendix) in preparation for this meeting. If the student and the academic advisor conclude that SAIL is helpful to the overall degree-completion strategy, the student must complete the SAIL Application (See Appendix) and schedule an appointment with the PLA Coordinator. Prior to embarking on the PLA journey, students should also familiarize themselves with SAIL program policies and guidelines (page 9 of this Guide).

What kind of learning is eligible for credit through the SAIL Program?
The SAIL program does not assess prior experiences; rather it assesses the learning obtained from those life experiences that is supported by a scholarly/theory-rich academic base and not duplicative of credit.
already earned. MSPS's SAIL program is guided by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning's (CAEL) Ten Standards for Assessment\(^1\). The Standards follow:

1. Credit should be awarded only for learning and not experience.
2. MSPS credit should be awarded only for college-level learning.
3. Credit should be awarded only for learning that has a balance, appropriate to the subject, between theory and practical application.
4. Competence levels and credit awards must be made by subject matter/academic experts.
5. Credit should be appropriate to the academic context in which it is accepted.
6. Credit awards and transcript entries should be monitored to avoid duplicating credit.
7. Policies and procedures (including appeals) should be fully disclosed and prominently available.
8. Fees charged for assessment should be based on services, not amount of credit.
9. Personnel involved in assessment should receive adequate training.
10. Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised.

What are the timelines associated with the SAIL Program?
Students who enroll in the MID50/350 SAIL course are expected to produce a well-organized, superbly written portfolio by the end of the course. Once the portfolio is submitted to the course instructor, it will be forwarded to faculty mentors for evaluation of credit earned. The PLA Coordinator will work with students, the instructor, and the faculty mentor to ensure that portfolios are submitted and evaluated in a timely fashion. Portfolio evaluation may take up to 6 weeks.

What is the cost for the SAIL Program?
Students wishing to enroll in MID50 SAIL course for 0 credits will be charged tuition at the standard rate for a non-credit course (please see [http://metro.cua.edu/admissions](http://metro.cua.edu/admissions)). Students wishing to enroll in MID350 SAIL course for 3 credits will be charged tuition at the standard rate for credit-bearing courses (please see [http://metro.cua.edu/admissions](http://metro.cua.edu/admissions)). For the 2009-2010 academic year, students enrolled in either MID50 or MID350 will also be assessed a $250 evaluation fee per portfolio submitted for assessment.

What is the difference between MID50 and MID350?
Students with elective room in their degree program should enroll in MID350 because it is a 3-credit elective course. These three (3) elective credits are gained independently from any potential portfolio credits and are charged at the regular tuition rate. Since MID350 is a credit-bearing course, it meets financial aid eligibility requirements.

Students with no room in their degree plan to fit a 3-credit elective course should enroll in MID50 because it is a 0-credit course charged at the non-credit tuition rate. While no credit is awarded for the course, award of portfolio credits is possible pending faculty review of the submitted portfolio(s).

Both courses include the same content and number of assignments, and both require the successful development of at least one portfolio as the outcome. Please note that students may request to take

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MID50/350 on the Pass/Fail basis; requests must be approved by the students’ academic advisor and Dean.

**How do I know if the SAIL Program is right for me?**
Academic advisors and/or the PLA Coordinator at MSPS play a significant role in helping students determine if portfolio development through the SAIL program is right for them. Additionally, students can determine whether or not SAIL is a viable option by doing the following:

- Reviewing the course descriptions available in the MSPS course catalog ([http://metro.cua.edu/courses/](http://metro.cua.edu/courses/)) in order to identify courses that might align themselves with prior MSPS-level learning obtained from *work*, *volunteer experiences*, *military*, or *other training*.
- Reviewing your degree planning form to determine how credits earned through SAIL might "fit" with the rest of your degree program requirements.

**How do I learn more about the SAIL Program?**
For more information about the SAIL program (and prior learning assessment in general), please contact: Melissa Stevenson, Manager, Student Programs and Development, MSPS
E-mail: [stevenson@cua.edu](mailto:stevenson@cua.edu); Tel: (202) 319-5256   Visit: [http://metro.cua.edu/degree/pla](http://metro.cua.edu/degree/pla)
Oftentimes the portfolio development process might seem complex and confusing, but, at MSPS, it is our goal to help students understand the process and to navigate it as successfully as possible. Below please find a visual layout of the portfolio development process.

**SAIL Program Portfolio Development Process**

Determine if portfolio development through the SAIL program helps you meet your degree objectives:
- Review the course descriptions available in the MSPS course catalog to determine what prior learning might “match” these courses.
- Meet with your academic advisor to review your degree planning form and determine how/if SAIL credits might “fit” into your degree plan.
- Assess the time you have to dedicate to the SAIL process.
- Complete the Self-Assessment.
- Meet with the PLA coordinator to discuss your self-assessment form and SAIL eligibility.

** Determination is that SAIL is not right for you at this time. Revisit the possibility of SAIL at a later date.**

** Determination is that SAIL may help you meet your degree program goals.**

Complete the Application and hand it in (along with the Self-Assessment) to the PLA Coordinator.

** SAIL Application is not accepted. Discuss options for improving application with PLA Coordinator.**

** The Application is approved and you are eligible to move forward in the portfolio development process.**

- Once the SAIL application is evaluated by the PLA Coordinator, students will be given permission to enroll in MID50/350: SAIL for the following semester. Students will enroll themselves for the course.
- Students will complete the course and, in the process, develop a portfolio for assessment with the assistance of the course instructor and faculty mentors.
- At the course’s conclusion, the portfolio will be submitted to the faculty evaluators for the assessment of credit earned. Students’ accounts will be charged $250/portfolio submitted. Assessment may take up to 6 weeks.
- Any portfolio credit awarded to the student by the evaluators will be posted to the students’ transcript. Please note that award of credit is not guaranteed. Students will receive a written evaluation of their portfolios.
- Students who do not receive credit for the portfolio may appeal the decision in writing within 30 days of receipt of the written evaluation.
What is a portfolio?
A portfolio is a collection of documents that evidence how you acquired MSPS-level learning through experience, where you acquired this college-level learning, and how you integrate/synthesize this learning with college-level theory and scholarship. This learning may come from experiences in professional settings, volunteer settings, continuing education coursework, etc. The MID50/350 Synthesis, Application, and Integration of Learning course will help you develop this portfolio of evidence.

What is included in the portfolio?
The portfolio includes the following components and each of these components will be thoroughly explored and discussed in the MID50/350 SAIL course:

- Portfolio Checklist
- SAIL self-assessment form and SAIL application
- Autobiography/Educational Goals Statement
- Experiential Résumé
- Experiential Learning Essay describing experience resulting in learning to include learning outcomes and application of appropriate theory
- Supporting Documentation (e.g., workshop and seminar certificates, diplomas, licenses, lists of trainings, letters of reference, and documents/records of military service, description of volunteer and community activities, records and outcomes from significant projects, etc.)

How do I prepare for the portfolio process?
Before you consider undertaking the portfolio development process, it is critical that you meet with your MSPS academic advisor to discuss prior learning assessment’s place in your degree plan. Specifically, you and your advisor will need to determine if you are eligible for the SAIL program given the requirements, and, if eligible, which courses you might want to “target” in the SAIL Program. By “target,” we mean that you will need to identify a course or courses in the MSPS course catalogue for which you think you can “prove” college-level learning via previous life and work experience. Before you meet with your advisor, we recommend that you prepare of a list of possible courses. You may reference the MSPS course listings (http://metro.cua.edu/courses).

What does the portfolio evaluation process look like?
Trained faculty mentors who are experts in the content area serve as the evaluators who assess the portfolio for the awarding of college credit. The evaluation will assess how you describe what you have learned, how you ground your learning in college-level theory, the learning outcomes you provide, the documentation accompanying your portfolio, etc.

What happens if I don't get credit for my portfolio?
Students who are not awarded credit for a submitted portfolio may appeal (in writing) the evaluation of that portfolio one time within 30 days of their receipt of the portfolio evaluation report. The PLA Coordinator will work on an individual basis with students requesting an appeal.
When should I enroll in MID50/350?
MID50/350 is typically offered every semester in an online format. You and your MSPS academic advisor should discuss when the best time to enroll is for you. Developing a portfolio is time-intensive and so will require you to organize your schedule and plan your other courses carefully.

What skills are important for success in MID50/350?
In order to be successful in MID50/350, strong research and writing skills are a must. Portfolio development is a writing and research intensive process and only superbly written, well-organized and planned portfolios will carry the possibility of earning credit. Additionally, time management and planning skills are very important for this course.

Can I take MID50/350 multiple times?
No, unless you withdraw or do not complete the course successfully, the course can be taken only once. Students do not need to take the course each time they wish to develop and submit a portfolio for evaluation, they must only take it the first time they develop a portfolio. However, students must consult with the PLA Coordinator if they wish to submit additional portfolios after having taken the course.

What is the grading structure for MID50/350?
MID50 is graded Pass/Fail. A grade of PASS will only be awarded to students who successfully complete all of the weekly assignments and submit them on-time, participate in the online course discussion, and produce a comprehensive, cohesive, academically-grounded, well-organized, and superbly written portfolio. As a PASS/FAIL course, the final grade will not be computed into the student’s overall grade point average. MID 350 is a letter-graded course and the final grade will be based upon timely completion of the weekly assignments, participation in online course discussions, and delivery of a comprehensive, cohesive, academically-grounded, well-organized, superbly written portfolio. The final grade for the course will be computed into the student’s overall grade point average.

To learn more about MID50/350, you are welcome to view the sample syllabus at http://metro.cua.edu/degree/Pla//MID50_SAIL_Syllabus.pdf. Please note that the syllabus is subject to change.
Students enrolled in the SAIL Program are subject to university academic policies as outlined on the CUA Policy website (http://policies.cua.edu) and in the Undergraduate Academic Announcements (http://announcements.cua.edu). In addition to these policies, SAIL students must also be aware of the following requirements/policies/guidelines specific to SAIL:

1. Students may earn up to 15 credits via the SAIL Program. However, the number of SAIL credits possible is determined by the student’s academic advisor given student’s progress with the degree plan.

2. Credit earned via the SAIL program is applicable to the major, core, and elective courses.

3. No partial SAIL credit will be awarded; each portfolio will be evaluated for 3 credits. However, there is no guarantee that students will receive credit from the evaluation of the portfolio.

4. Only students meeting the following criteria may apply to participate in the SAIL program:
   - Students must be enrolled at least one (1) full term in MSPS (carrying a minimum of six (6) credits) as degree-seeking undergraduates before applying to participate in the SAIL program.
   - Students must have a minimum CUA cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of 2.75/4.0.
   - Students must have successfully completed MHU151 Rhetoric and Composition and MHU152 Composition and Research with a grade of “C” or better (or transfer in the equivalencies). Strong writing and research skills are essential for success in MID50/350.

5. All students wishing to develop a portfolio for assessment MUST apply to the SAIL program for consideration. Students permitted to enroll in the MID50/350 SAIL course are subject to the academic standards of the course.
   - The course does not need to be repeated to submit additional portfolios.

6. Students who are not awarded credit for a submitted portfolio may appeal (in writing) the evaluation of that portfolio one time within 30 days of their receipt of the portfolio evaluation report. The PLA Coordinator will work on an individual basis with students requesting an appeal.
Appendix
Thank you for your interest in the SAIL program. Please complete this application, along with the SAIL Self-Assessment, and submit it to Metropolitan School of Professional Studies (Attention: PLA Coordinator), 334 Pangborn Hall. The PLA Coordinator will be in contact with you to schedule a meeting to discuss your SAIL Application, Self-Assessment, and overall eligibility for the SAIL program.

Name: ________________________________________________________________________

Last First Middle
Street Address:_____________________________ City:____________ State: _____ Zip:________

Home Phone: _(_____)_______________________ Work Phone: _(_____)___________________

Mobile Phone: _(_____)_________________ E-mail:________________________________

Program of Study at MSPS: ____________________________________________

Cumulative GPA: ________ Anticipated Graduation Date: ____________________________

Semester Admitted to MSPS: _______ Total CUA Credits Earned To Date: ____________

Have you completed MHU151 Rhetoric and Composition or transferred in the equivalent? ____________

Grade Earned: _______

Have you completed MHU152 Composition and Research or transferred in the equivalent? ____________

Grade Earned: _______

Based on your degree plan and the course descriptions found at http://metro.cua.edu/courses/ please indicate the courses you feel may be appropriate for portfolio development.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Number/Name</th>
<th>Course Number/Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ex: MBU205</td>
<td>Contemporary Marketing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*maximum of five courses

Along with this application, please submit the following:

- A 450-500 word type-written statement describing why you feel the portfolio development course is appropriate for the specific course(s) identified above and how they might relate to learning you’ve done through work, volunteerism and other experiences.
- An updated résumé.

By signing below you affirm that you have read and understand the policies and guidelines associated with the SAIL Program as described on page 9 of the PLA Student Guide and online at http://metro.cua.edu/degree/Pla//sailpolicies.cfm.

Applicant Signature: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

PLA Coordinator Approval: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

Departmental approval given for MID 50/350: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

For more information about the SAIL program, please contact:

Melissa Stevenson, Manager, Student Programs and Development, Metropolitan School of Professional Studies
E-mail: stevenson@cua.edu, Tel: (202) 319-5264
Thank you for your interest in the SAIL program. This Self-Assessment is a tool designed to help you determine whether or not portfolio development will help you meet your degree-completion objectives. After review of your résumé and program tracking sheet with your academic advisor, you are encouraged to bring this completed Self-Assessment to your initial meeting with the PLA coordinator. Once the PLA coordinator has determined your eligibility, please submit this Self-Assessment, along with the SAIL Application, to Metropolitan School of Professional Studies (Attention: PLA Coordinator), 334 Pangborn Hall. Enrollment in MID 50/350 is contingent upon submitting both the SAIL self-assessment and SAIL application.

Please respond to each of the following questions:

Section I: Prior Learning

1. Based upon your résumé and prior work/life experiences, please identify the MSPS course for which you believe portfolio development might be most appropriate (refer to the MSPS course catalog at [http://metro.cua.edu/courses/](http://metro.cua.edu/courses/)). Please fill out a separate self-assessment form for each portfolio area/subject you are interested in.

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<tr>
<th>Course Number</th>
<th>Course Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ex: MBU 205</td>
<td>Contemporary Marketing</td>
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2. Please list the five most important job functions you engaged in or skills you used during this particular work/life experience:

   1.
   2.
   3.
   4.
   5.

3. For each area/subject, please describe the a) experience(s), b) the learning you obtained from the experience(s), and c) how you would document it (e.g., certificate of completion, official letter, etc.):

   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
4. If you had to describe this particular experience to someone else unfamiliar with it, would you be able to do so? What knowledge would they have to have in order to do the same thing?

5. Did this experience include increasing responsibilities and accountability? Please describe the experience(s), the learning you obtained from the experience(s), and how you would document it (e.g., certificate of completion, official letter, etc.):

Section II: Academic Skills

1. Please describe your strengths and areas for improvement as a writer:

2. Please describe your strengths and areas for improvement as a researcher:

3. Please describe your strengths and areas for improvement with regard to time management:
4. Please describe your strengths and areas for improvement with regard to working independently:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

 Please feel free to include additional comments in the space provided: