

# Recognition of Prior Learning

## Background and Purpose

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is an assessment process which seeks to validate and award advanced standing for university-level learning that is acquired informally, non-formally and formally which is equivalent to the learning one would obtain from taking a university course. For example, the learning may have been acquired experientially through work and life experience, workplace training or unrecognized education attained abroad. Through the RPL process, prospective learners have their prior learning assessed according to course or program outcomes and advanced standing is awarded as appropriate. The aim of the RPL program is to increase access to post-secondary education for non-traditional learners and by lessening some of the barriers learners face when choosing to study at Dalhousie University. Awarding advanced standing when an individual's learning is equivalent to that of what they would learn in a university course, has the potential to significantly reduce the amount of time and money required to earn a university credential.

## Application of Policy

This policy defines conditions for, and governs the processes for, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) within the Faculty of Open Learning and Career Development

## Policy

### Eligibility

- The Faculty of Open Learning and Career Development permits a Recognition of Prior Learning process to be implemented in its program areas.
- RPL is available to persons interested in pursuing a university credential who, through work, life and/or educational experiences, have acquired learning that is equivalent to the course learning requirements of one or more of the Faculty of Open Learning and Career Development's course(s).
- There are two streams of RPL that a learner may pursue to have their prior learning assessed and recognized:
  - Recognition of Certified Learning: Assessment of prior formal coursework or training for the purpose of advanced standing. Examples of certified learning may include military courses, accredited certificates, workplace training programs, etc.
  - Recognition of Experiential Learning: Assessment of previous work and life learning that may be equivalent to learning outcomes of university courses / programs for the purpose of advanced standing. Relevant prior learning may come from work or volunteer experience, participation on committees or boards, independent study, etc.
- Each program area team decides which, if any, of its courses can be eligible for RPL by registered learners. Program accreditation requirements may constrain which courses may be eligible. RPL is also not eligible for programs where specific placement/diagnostic assessments already exists (i.e. English for Academic Purposes, UPrep, etc.)

## Process

- The RPL candidate's prior learning is assessed by Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), who are internal academic staff or external parties with subject matter expertise in the area. If the learning is deemed equivalent to the Faculty of Open Learning and Career Development's course learning requirements, advanced standing is awarded.
- Learners may receive advanced standing up to a maximum 50% of their certificate program's courses. The maximum award may differ among program areas.
- Learners may apply to have their prior certified learning assessed for exemption from a prerequisite certificate when wishing to join an advanced certificate. Learners are not given certificates for prerequisite certificates they are exempted from.
- For prior certified learning to be considered, the grade a learner has received from their prior learning must be equivalent with the university course's passing grade. In most cases, this is a grade of C (60% - 64%).
- Prior course work completed in the Faculty of Open Learning and Career Development can be assessed through RPL towards awarding advanced standing in future studies within the faculty.
- Prior learning must have occurred within an appropriate time frame. Typically, this is within 10 years, however, depending on the program area the learner wishes to study in, this period may be shorter based on the currency of the learning (i.e. technology skills / knowledge). Program teams and subject matter experts will determine if prior learning is still current/ relevant.
- The RPL process is only applicable for future studies in the Faculty of Open Learning and Career Development.
- Learners who receive an unfavourable decision from the RPL assessor have access to the Faculty of Open Learning and Career Development's appeal process (the appeal process is explained in greater detail later in this policy)
- The learner will be charged a non-refundable fee of \$175, payable in advance, to proceed with the RPL assessment. The \$175 fee must be paid for each additional RPL application.
- Learners can not earn micro-credentials for the courses they are awarded advanced standing for through the Recognition of Prior Learning program.

## Administrative Structure

- Authority: This policy falls under the authority of the Governance Council of the Faculty of Open Learning and Career Development. It is administered by Recognition of Prior Learning Manager in consultation with the Director, Enrollment, Student Services and Advising.
- Record-keeping: The record keeping pertaining to this policy will be the
  - responsibility of the Recognition of Prior Learning Manager.

## Areas of responsibility:

The RPL Manager, with support from the Faculty OLCD, is responsible for:

- Maintaining a list of all courses in the Faculty of Open Learning and Career Development that are eligible for RPL.

- Supporting learners and prospective learners in matters related to RPL.
- Supporting Subject Matter Experts and Program Teams in matters related to RPL.
- Promoting and monitoring RPL procedures across the Faculty of Open Learning and Career Development.
- Managing RPL data and reporting, including maintaining RPL records.
- Coordinating communication between the RPL Manager, staff, Faculty of Open Learning and Career Development and learners regarding RPL.
- Holding RPL support workshop for learners, staff, and external stakeholders as needed.
- The Faculty's program teams are responsible for:
- Determining a list of courses that the Faculty of Open Learning and Career Development deems eligible for RPL.
- Providing information to learners on the content of the course (outlines or syllabi) being challenged through RPL and on assessment procedures.
- Locating faculty/instructors to act as SMEs to administer RPL assessment.
- Liaising between the RPL Office and faculty/instructors as necessary.

Learners are responsible for:

- Requesting the RPL in a timely manner and adhering to deadlines set at the beginning of the process.
- Demonstrating how their prior learning is equivalent to the Faculty of Open Learning and Career Development's course learning outcomes / objectives.
- Making themselves available for interviews with SMEs if needed.
- Paying a non-refundable fee for the RPL process to begin.

## **Procedures**

### **Orientation, Advising and Application**

- Learners, or prospective learners, interested in seeking advanced standing for prior learning may access initial information about the process through the Faculty of Open Learning and Career Development print material, online channels, info-sessions, the RPL Manager, and/or most staff members in the Faculty of Open Learning and Career Development.
- To explore / initiate the official RPL process, all candidates are referred to the RPL manager who will:
  - Orient the candidate to the Faculty's RPL policy and procedures
  - Pre-assess eligibility of candidate for RPL
- This will entail the candidate and RPL Manager reviewing course outlines and outcomes in detail together as well as a discussion about the candidate's academic background, experience and learning, and other relevant information, such as specific activities and accomplishments, which outline what the learner did, knows and can demonstrate.
  - Assist the candidate with their RPL application in Destiny One
  - Collect RPL fee from candidate

- Contact the appropriate Program Director to notify the learner that a RPL candidate requires a SME to conduct an assessment
- Assist in setting up interviews (if necessary) between the SME and RPL candidate.

### Demonstration of Prior Learning

#### **Evidence**

All RPL requires evidence. The learner has the primary responsibility for preparing the evidence that learning has taken place and that it contributes to an appropriate balance of theory and practical application. Tangible proof of competence can be provided through documentation of accomplishments or demonstration of skill and knowledge. Depending on the subject area, certain types of documentation or demonstration are more useful than others.

#### **Recognition of certified learning**

Course equivalencies are awarded to learners who have completed and been evaluated in programs, professional licenses, or professional certificates outside of the college or university system. For these non-formal programs and credentials, the learner must provide accurate information about their training (including course outlines, grades, dates, etc.) before they can be evaluated by the Faculty of Open Learning and Career Development. Credit may be granted if the program or credential meets the Faculty of Open Learning and Career Development's assessment criteria.

#### **Learning portfolios**

Learners requesting to have their prior experiential learning assessed must complete a learning portfolio. Learning portfolios summarize the learning gained from non-formal learning experiences. A portfolio is a collection of information that demonstrates the depth and breadth of what the learner knows and/or can do. A portfolio can be used alone or in combination with other methods of assessment. It provides evidence of learning. Portfolios are electronic documents that will be submitted through Destiny One.

- The RPL manager provides on-going support to learners by assisting with preparing for portfolio development. Learners may make individual appointments with the RPL manager to receive assistance

### Assessment of Prior Learning

#### Recognition of certified learning

- The RPL Manager will first check if the learner's prior certified learning has already been included on Faculty of Open Learning and Career Development's recognized equivalency checklist.
- If the prior certified learning is not included, an assessment of prior certified learning must occur. To do this, the following steps may be required:
  - Program Directors may need to select an assessor or assessors to help evaluate the prior certified learning to determine if credits can be awarded for prior learning. Assessors should be experts in the subject matter of the course(s) involved in the request.

- An investigation into the prior certified learning that the learner has provided. This could include: 1) Reviewing the course content e.g. how rigorous the content was, the length of the course, and how closely it matches a course that Dalhousie University offers, 2) How long ago the learning took place and 3) The learner's performance (grade) in the certified learning.
- The Faculty of Open Learning and Career Development will endeavor to complete the assessment of prior learning, and communicate the results with learners, within 4 weeks of receiving an application.
- Learners who do not present enough strong evidence to award advanced standing based their prior certified learning may be asked to complete a learning portfolio.

#### Recognition of experiential learning

- Upon receiving a learning portfolio, the appropriate Program Directors will then select an assessor or assessors to evaluate the Learning Portfolio and determine if courses can be awarded for prior learning. Assessors must be experts in the subject matter of the course(s) involved in the RPL request. They must also have been trained on how to assess RPL learning portfolios.
- When possible, it is recommended that more than one assessor evaluate a learning portfolio. In many cases, a member of a program team may be the second assessor if they have a great understanding of the courses being 'challenged.'
- The Faculty will endeavor to complete learning portfolio assessment and recommendation of advanced standing within 4 weeks of receiving a portfolio.
- If assessors feel they do not have enough information to evaluate an individual, they may request additional documentation or an interview.

#### Appeals

If RPL has been unsuccessful, learners may appeal the results.

- An individual has the right to appeal any RPL result.
- An appeal must be submitted in writing to the RPL Manager within five (5) days of the RPL results notification.
- Individuals must provide sufficient proof why RPL should be reconsidered.
- Appeals will be performed by the Director or of the department that performed the original RPL evaluation in consultation with relevant Subject Matter Experts if required.
- Any decisions regarding the appeal are final. Individuals will be notified by the RPL Office of the results of their appeal.