

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition Policies and Procedures

Lutheran Theological Seminary
Saskatoon

Introduction

LTS recognizes that people learn in different ways. Some learning is gained through formal learning experiences, such as in post-secondary educational institutions (colleges, technical/trade schools, and universities). Other learning may take place in non-formal settings, such as on-the-job training, professional workshops, and other non-credit learning opportunities. Learning may also take place in informal settings, where a person learns through life and work experiences.

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is a systematic process used to evaluate and accredit learning gained in a variety of contexts by assessing relevant learning against the standards required by Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS) for admission to each of its degree programs. The PLAR process enables students over 31 years of age who do not have a completed a university degree to obtain recognition for learning (knowledge and skills) which they have achieved through both formal and non-formal learning experiences. As a part of the evaluation process, LTS will look at the formal learning experiences (university, college and technical/trade school courses) as well as non-formal and informal learning settings. Such learning experiences could be, but are not limited to, church involvement and leadership, independent study, community activities, social justice involvement, or cultural and artistic pursuits.

LTS also recognizes that prior learning in non-academic settings relating to the development of critical thinking and analysis and in understanding the church can be helpful in preparing a person for more formal educational experiences. PLAR is clear in emphasizing that it is what you have learned that counts, not the number of hours you have spent in a classroom or doing various tasks in previous work environments. However, you will have to assist in the process of assessing your prior learning by carefully outlining and documenting it.

“Learning, not just experience”

In any process of assessing learning in various contexts, recognition is given for learning that has occurred as the result of an experience. It is important to distinguish between the two terms "learning" and "experience." Here are two examples that may help:

A student who has served or chaired a local church board, a regional, synodical or national church committee, or has served as a delegate to Synodical and National Church Conventions over the past fifteen years may gain credit for the ability to demonstrate what he or she has learned about administration and polity in the church. However, merely having an experience of serving on these committees does not mean learnings have occurred from these experiences.

A student has been involved in management of a large firm for several years. The student has been involved in several professional development workshops related to interpersonal communication and team building in the work place, approaches to conflict management and program evaluation. The student may seek credit for the ability to demonstrate what she or he has learned about human relations, conflict resolution, and organizational behaviour.

Clearly, learning may occur as the result of an experience. However, it is quite possible to have experiences without learning anything from them. Credit will be given only for prior learning, not for prior experience. Therefore, to receive credit in the program, you must demonstrate not merely that you have relevant experience, but that you have learned from reflecting on that experience.

Application Process for PLAR

A student applying for PLAR will be required to prepare a portfolio outlining prior learning experiences. A portfolio is an organized collection of materials which records and verifies your learning achievements and relates them to the requirements of an education program.

In preparing the portfolio, it is helpful to reflect on learning experiences, which might include independent research, or reading in theological topics, seminars, retreats and workshops you have taken, in-service training or professional development, volunteer work in a community or church organization, or other work experience that has helped you to learn to think and analyze logically and rationally, or in which you have learned about faith, and your understanding of God and the church.

This portfolio shall include:

1. **Formal Application** (found on the LTS website), including the degree program to which you are applying.
2. **Application Fee.**
3. **Official, sealed transcripts** of all college, university and technical/trade school work attempted, to be sent directly to the Registrar at LTS via email, at registrar.lts@usask.ca or by mail to:

Registrar
Lutheran Theological Seminary
114 Seminary Crescent
Saskatoon, SK S7N 0X3

4. **A listing of successfully completed training or certification courses.** These would include short term (1 day to week-long learning workshops required at your place of work or in order to work as a volunteer, coach, etc. for a community organization. These workshops might include, but are not limited to, a safety training workshop, St. John's Ambulance certification, a skills upgrading workshop, etc.
5. **Four letters of reference.** These letters of reference, from a pastor, a friend or colleague, a member of your congregation, and a business person can be the same letters of reference as those required for application to these specific programs.
6. **Community and Church Service.** A list of the committees you have served on in the community and in the church, along with a short explanation of your role in those committees or organizations, and what you learned about yourself, the church, and the community through this service.
7. **Three essays:** In each essay, avoid simply stating facts (i.e. "I taught bible studies at church for four years." Rather, focus on what you learned about yourself, the bible, the church, and the ways in which others learn, as you were teaching these studies). Also, rather than simply stating skills that you have developed, focus on how you have learned to use these skills in your place of learning, work, and life. The topics of these three essays are:
 - a. A 1,000 word essay addressing the following question: "How has your professional life and experience prepared you for study at LTS?"
 - b. A 1,000 word essay answering the following question: "In your opinion, what are the two major challenges facing Christianity in the 21st century, and how do you think LTS will help equip you to face the challenges you have named?" Indicate your

research sources with footnotes and a short bibliography, to indicate your ability to do research and your ability to evaluate those sources.

- c. A 1,000 word case study detailing a critical learning incident in your life (where you learned something significant, for better or for worse), and how you might deal with it differently after further reflection. If you used sources providing examples or ideas of alternative ways of dealing with this critical learning incident, please indentify them in an appropriate manner.

When the student submits the completed portfolio to the LTS registrar, it must be accompanied by a non-refundable application fee of \$500, payable to LTS. The deadline to apply for PLAR assessment is May 1st in the year in which the student plans to begin study.

The Faculty will evaluate the completed portfolio in its annual May Faculty meetings and make a decision on the application. The Faculty will consider, in their evaluations, how the material presented in the Portfolio shows evidence of learning which would be judged to be at the same level or standard as someone who had completed equivalent course work, and how the learning described fits into the overall logic of the student's program of studies. After review of the materials, the Faculty may assign some additional learning experiences to supplement the prior learning experiences of the student that will need to be completed before beginning study at LTS.

Any appeals to the Faculty decision are to be directed to the President of LTS.