Work to Learn: Framework for Developing UNC Work-Based Learning (WBL) Portfolio-Processes

Purpose. Using the Counsel for Adult Experiential Learning (CAEL's) Assessing Learning Standards Toolkit and the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP), the Undergraduate Committee (UGC) at the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) has been charged with the development of a unified, evidence-based Work-Based Learning (WBL) Portfolio process. This document should align with the principle that credit for prior learning validates and empowers adult learners while supporting completion at UNC. These efforts seek to expand high-quality pathways for adult learners, support access, equity, and academic rigor, and should align with Colorado law HB20-1002, C.R.S. § 23-5-145.5 and HLC policy on Credit for Prior Learning (CPL).

Framework:

- Non-residency: Credit through portfolio counts as non-resident transfer work
- Prior Learning Experiences
- A maximum threshold of 30 credits
- Portfolio evaluation and credit assignment remains the purview of the faculty with relevant expertise within the individual units

Design of UNC's Work-Based Learning (WBL) Portfolio Process

Through collaborative consultation with UNC faculty, staff, and stakeholders, the UGC has designed UNC's WBL Portfolio. The WBL portfolio framework:

1. Centers on adult learners and expands pathways

Creates multiple, navigable pathways for adult learners to demonstrate college-level learning gained through work, military service, community leadership, professional training, and/or other experiential contexts.

Examples of prior learning that may qualify:

- **Workplace Leadership:** Managing teams/people, budgets, and projects.
- **Military Service:** Training in logistics, cybersecurity, leadership, or technical operations.
- **Community Engagement:** Leading or making significant contributions to civic initiatives, organizing civic or cultural events, or serving on boards.
- **Professional Certifications:** Industry-recognized credentials such as Project Management Professional (PMP), Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), or IT certifications.
- **Specialized Training:** Employer-sponsored programs in areas like data analytics, education, or healthcare.

2. Builds on evidentiary, transparent assessment practices

Support UNC programs in their development of assessment criteria and processes rooted in established quality standards, including:

- Awarding credit only for documented learning not just experience,
- Using assessment to support learning and reflection that aligns with UNC's institutional, disciplinary, and accreditor standards,
- Establishing clear, shared outcomes and transparent evaluation criteria using UNC subject matter experts, and
- Ensuring qualified assessors and equitable practices.

These principles reflect widely adopted CPL standards such as those articulated by CAEL. https://www.cael.org/our-work/cael-standards

3. Aligns portfolio evidence with degree-level course requirements

Portfolios demonstrate learning that maps to the student's degree expectations including for example:

- Specialized disciplinary knowledge;
- Broad and integrative knowledge;
- Intellectual skills;
- Applied and collaborative learning;
- Civic and global learning.
- This alignment ensures that credit awarded through WBL portfolios reflects meaningful, degree-applicable learning rather than isolated experiences.

4. Builds a supportive, inclusive process

Defines the advising, communication, and student support structures needed for learners to successfully engage in the process. This includes ensuring the process is navigable, welcoming, and grounded in proactive guidance while keeping in mind efficient and practical UNC workflows.

5. Ensures shared governance, collaboration, and sustainability

Engages UNC faculty, Student Academic Success, the Registrar, Financial Aid, and other partners to co-create a process that is consistent, academically sound, and feasible to sustain and scale across UNC.

Considerations (NY State Work-Based Learning Manual)

Provides detailed guidance on WBL programs, including:

- Registered vs. unregistered WBL experiences.
- Coordinator requirements and certifications.
- Benefits for students, employers, schools, and communities.
- Compliance with labor laws and safety standards

UNC WBL Portfolio Assessment Framework

A. Learning Outcomes (aligned to DQP categories)

- **Specialized Knowledge:** Demonstrate field-relevant concepts, methods, and applications at the bachelor's level.
- **Broad & Integrative Knowledge:** Integrate learning across disciplines to analyze complex problems or contexts.
- **Intellectual Skills:** Show proficiency in analytic inquiry, information literacy, engaging diverse perspectives, ethical reasoning, quantitative fluency, and communicative fluency.
- **Applied & Collaborative Learning:** Apply learning to real-world, unscripted problems through projects, teamwork, and reflective practice.
- **Civic & Global Learning:** Address civic, social, and global challenges; demonstrate intercultural competence and social responsibility.

B. Evidence Expectations

- **Artifacts:** Work samples, project deliverables, supervisor validations, training syllabi, certifications, military JST transcripts, and community leadership documentation.
- **Reflective Narratives:** Analytic reflections that articulate context, learning outcomes achieved, methods applied, and impact.

- **Mapping:** A crosswalk that explicitly maps each artifact and narrative to DQP outcomes and UNC program outcomes *(see UNC Business Program Crosswalk as example)*
- **Verification:** Third-party or employer attestations when appropriate; adherence to academic integrity standards.

C. Assessment Criteria & Rubrics (guided by CAEL standards)

- Evidence of learning (not time on task or experience alone).
- **Transparency:** Publicly available outcomes, criteria, and processes.
- **Subject-Matter Expert Judgment:** Faculty assessors determine credit recommendations.
- **Equity**: Procedures proactively support diverse learners and reduce bias.
- **Quality Assurance:** Regular monitoring, calibration, and review of assessment practices.

D. Assessor Roles

- **Faculty Assessors**: Evaluate evidence and determine level of mastery relative to course/program outcomes.
- **Portfolio Coaches/Academic Advisor:** Guide students to compile, reflect, and align evidence.
- **Registrar/Records:** Ensure accurate transcription and avoid duplication of credit.
- **Financial Aid:** Counsel students on fit, timing, costs, and impact on progression and aid.
- **Quality & Equity Leads**: Oversee training, calibration, and periodic audits.

Portfolio Components

Based on the above guidelines UNC's WBL portfolio may include:

1. **Reflective Essay** – Explains how prior experiences demonstrate college-level learning aligned with UNC degree outcomes.
2. **Documentation of Learning** – Certificates, transcripts, training records, or work samples.
3. **Organizational/Employment Verification** – Letters, documentation, or evaluations confirming roles and responsibilities.
4. **Learning Outcomes Mapping** – A table aligning experiences with UNC's degree-level expectations.
5. **Self-Assessment** – Reflection on growth and future learning goals.

UNC WBL Portfolio Process Flow

- **Step 1:** Student Inquiry → Advising
- **Step 2:** Portfolio Development → Support Resources
- **Step 3:** Submission → Faculty Assessment
- **Step 4:** Credit Award → Registrar Processing
- **Step 5:** Integration into Degree Plan

Potential recommendations for UNC Student Support Pathways, Advising, and Communication

- **Intake & Orientation:** Dedicated CPL/WBL orientation with examples and guidance.
- **Portfolio Course or Modular Workshops**: Scaffolded instruction in evidence-building and reflection.
- **Advising Workflow:** Decision-tree that helps students choose among exams, portfolio, challenge exams, and transfer options.
- **Equitable Fees**: Assessment fees tied to services provided; fee waivers/sliding scales for Pell-eligible students.
- **Turnaround Service Levels**: Clear timelines (e.g., 4–6 weeks per portfolio).

UNC Draft Policies for Credit Transcription & Integration

- **Transcript Notation**: Identify course equivalency or block credit with descriptors to avoid double counting.
- **Residency & Limits**: Define maximum portfolio-awarded credits applicable to degree and residency requirements.
- **Grading:** Ensure appropriate evaluative capabilities.
- **Duplication**, Transfer & Mobility: Ensure portability consistent with Colorado GT Pathways and statewide transfer agreements where applicable.
- **Data & Reporting (Documentation):** Track uptake, awards, demographics, and completion outcomes for continuous improvement.
- **Compliance**: Align with state statutes and CCHE/CDHE guidance on CPL and work-based experience credit.
- **Appeals & Feedback**: Documented processes for appeals; formative feedback when credit is not awarded.

UNC Fee Policy section:

- **Assessment Fee Structure** tied to services provided.
- **Sliding Scale for Pell-Eligible Students** and hardship criteria.
- **Waiver Options** for veterans, active-duty military, and equity programs.
- **Transparency** requirements for publishing fees and waiver criteria.
- **Non-Refundable Policy** with exceptions for administrative errors.
- **Annual Equity Review** to ensure alignment with UNC's access and equity commitments.

Implementation Roadmap (12–18 months)

1. **Phase 1 (0–3 months):** Convene cross-functional working group; adopt CAEL standards; define scope and target programs for pilot (e.g., Business, Psychology, etc.)
2. **Phase 2 (4–9 months):** Develop rubrics, crosswalks to DQP and program outcomes; build portfolio course/workshops; train assessors; publish policies and student guides.
3. **Phase 3 (10–15 months):** Pilot with adult learner cohorts; calibrate scoring; collect data; refine processes; secure technology (portfolio platform).
4. **Phase 4 (16–18 months):** Scale to additional programs; finalize governance; integrate with advising/registrar workflows.

Charge Outcomes

1. A recommended WBL Portfolio Assessment Framework, including outcomes, criteria, evidence expectations, and assessor roles.
2. Recommendations for student support pathways, advising, and communication.
3. Draft policies for credit transcription, documenting, and integrating portfolio-awarded credit into degree programs.
4. A potential implementation roadmap, including pilot recommendations if desired.

Credit Transcription and Integration of Work-Based Learning (WBL) Portfolio Credit

Purpose:
To ensure that credit awarded through UNC's Work-Based Learning (WBL) Portfolio process is accurately recorded, transparent, and consistent with institutional, state, and accreditor standards.

1. Transcript Notation

- Credit awarded through WBL Portfolio assessment will be recorded on the official transcript as **"Prior Learning Assessment – Portfolio"** with:
  - **Course Equivalency** (if mapped to an existing UNC course), or
  - **Block Credit** (if mapped to degree-level outcomes but not a specific course).
- Each entry will include:
  - Credit hours awarded,
  - A notation indicating **"Assessed Learning – Not Classroom Instruction"** to maintain transparency.

2. Residency and Credit Limits

- WBL Portfolio credit may **not exceed 25% of total degree requirements** (30 credits) and will **not count toward UNC's residency requirement** (minimum credits earned through UNC instruction).
- Portfolio credit is **not eligible for graduate-level transfer** and applies only to the undergraduate degree for which it was assessed.

3. Grading

- All WBL Portfolio credit will be recorded as **"CR" (Credit)** and will **not affect GPA**.
- No letter grades will be assigned for portfolio-assessed credit.

4. Duplication, Transfer, and Mobility

- Credit will **not duplicate** previously awarded transfer credit, standardized exams (CLEP, DSST), or challenge exams.
- Portfolio-awarded credit will be **transferable within Colorado public institutions** consistent with **CCHE/CDHE CPL policy** and **GT Pathways** where applicable.

5. Data and Reporting (Documentation)

The Registrar will maintain:
- Original portfolio assessment records,
- Faculty assessor recommendations,
- Mapping documents showing alignment to UNC learning outcomes and DQP categories.

- Records will be retained for **a minimum of five years** for audit and accreditation purposes.

6. Compliance

- All transcription practices will comply with:
  - **Colorado Revised Statutes §23-5-145.5** (**Credit for Prior Learning, CPL**),
  - **Higher Learning Commission (HLC)** standards,
  - **UNC academic policies on credit integrity and degree applicability**.

7. Appeals

- Students may appeal transcription decisions through UNC's **Academic Appeals Process**, which will include:
  - Written request within 30 days of notification
  - Review by faculty-led CPL Appeals Committee

References & Frameworks

- CAEL Assessing Learning Standards Toolkit (Ten Standards for Assessing Learning). https://www.cael.org/our-work/cael-standards
- Lumina Foundation Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP).
- Colorado Department of Higher Education CPL reports and statutes (e.g., HB 20-1002).
- New York State Work-Based Learning Manual (for structural considerations).
- https://www.unco.edu/policies-regulations/ for
  - UNC's Draft Policies for Credit Transcription & Integration
  - UNC's Academic Policies
  - UNC's Appeals Process