

DEPARTMENT OF EXPERIENTIAL STUDIES IN COMMUNITY AND SPORT

REQUEST FOR CREDIT - PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT

COMMUNITY STUDIES: COMS 1100 INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNITY STUDIES

INFORMATION:

Student Name: _____

Student ID: _____

Date Submitted: _____

REQUIREMENTS:

The following items *MUST* be included with this form and submitted to: **Transfer_Credits@cbu.ca**

1. A **portfolio** including the following:

- a) A complete list of all prior work/volunteer/life experiences relevant to the guidelines for this course, including for each item the length (dates), full-time/ part-time, supervisor's name and contact information;
- b) A complete list of duties and responsibilities for each item;
- c) A letter of verification from each employer listed;

2. An **essay** demonstrating how you have fulfilled the course objectives (see details attached).

Please keep a copy of the completed package for your records. You will receive notification when review of your application is complete. Successful applicants are required to pay one half the current course costs for which PLA is being granted. For more detail on completing this application, please contact the Department Chair (**CBU.ca**).

OFFICE USE ONLY:

Credit Granted: Yes No

Department Chair Signature: _____

Date: _____

Dean, School of Arts & Social Sciences Signature: _____

Date: _____

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT (PLA)

Experience - Reflection - Learning

COMS 1100: Introduction to Community Studies

Are you a candidate for a Community Studies (COMS) PLA?

Community Studies PLAs were developed for adult learners with extensive work/volunteer/life experiences acquired over an extended period of time prior to admission/re-admission to Cape Breton University. In the essay, applicants must demonstrate significant learning gained through these experiences.

What is Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)?

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is a process whereby academic credit is assigned to learning which has occurred in areas other than the traditional classroom setting. Experiences can be drawn from the workplace, volunteer activities, and/or family and community life. Students must critically reflect on and analyze their experiences in order to learn from them and then connect that learning to the course.

The purpose of this application is to provide you with a context in which to articulate, reflect upon and organize your prior learning as it relates to the COMS 1100 course. In addition to detailing what you have accomplished thus far, you will also be expected to identify the skills and knowledge you've gained and demonstrate how this fulfills the objectives of COMS 1100.

Read the Community Studies course information and the essay guidelines below.

ESSAY GUIDELINES

Step 1: Identification of university level skills

First, reflect on your life experiences, review your resume, and make a list of the following:

- All full or part-time jobs you have had
- All independent reading and study you have done
- All training programs or in-service courses you have completed
- All volunteer work you have done
- All community activities you are involved in
- All military service you have completed
- Your cultural, artistic, and religious pursuits
- Your hobbies and recreational pastimes
- Any significant travel or travel study you have completed
- Your organizational memberships
- Other relevant and meaningful areas of learning and experience You should now have a list of at least five areas to draw from. The next step is to determine if your experience is relevant to, and the equivalent of, this university level course.

Step 2: Review of the Community Studies 1100 course information provided

Carefully review the handbook and course objectives below and identify how your experience matches the stated course goals, at a university level.

Step 3: Write the Essay

Your final step is to write a narrative, similar to a research paper that is supported by theory or concepts, demonstrating that you understand and have integrated theory with your personal experiences. This narrative should clearly outline your learning and explain how your knowledge was acquired. You will also need to provide objective evidence and/or documentation to demonstrate support of the learning and knowledge you describe in your narrative. See requirements on "Request for Credit" form. Additional types of evidence may also be included. **Remember, you need to demonstrate that your learning is equivalent to that of a university level, 6 credit (year-long), course.**

Presentation

- Title page
- Table of Contents
- Introduction
- Body
- Conclusion
- References
- Appendices (if needed)

Format

- 12-point font - Times New Roman
- 1-inch margins all sides
- Typed and doubled spaced
- Quotes, citations, references in American Psychological Association (APA) style

Length

16 pages (excluding title page, table of contents, reference pages, and appendices)

COMMUNITY STUDIES HANDBOOK

PEDAGOGY AND RATIONALE FOR COMS COURSES

The aim of Community Studies (COMS) courses is to facilitate the development of skills valuable to you in your capacity as an engaged citizen, a worker in a rapidly changing economic environment, and as a creative individual.

To develop these attitudes and capabilities, Community Studies encourages cooperative, non-competitive pedagogies. Students work together in small groups of approximately eight students. A high degree of self-direction and independent organisation grow as students conduct research and write essays or plan presentations collaboratively on topics of mutual interest. Students will acquire problem solving, research, analysis, communication and group skills through experiential and discursive learning. Throughout this process, the faculty advisor adjusts their role depending on the learning needs of individuals and groups.

The organization of COMS courses constitute the core of the BACS degree over a three or four-year period. Development of the learning objectives listed below are incrementally across time. In each year, there is a growing interaction between group and community. Students are not only required to broaden their knowledge by taking discipline-based courses, but also are encouraged to establish learning relationships with other members of the community, at CBU and beyond. Tying this all together are the overarching learning objectives listed below. Learning objectives are infused throughout the programme, providing coherency of philosophy, pedagogy and evaluation.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR COMS COURSES

Collectively COMS courses offer students the opportunity to develop:

- the skills associated with self-directed learning;
- the confidence and understandings necessary for assuming an active role in community life;
- the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively engage in group work;
- broad and adaptable primary, secondary and applied research skills;
- the ability to effectively analyse a wide variety of issues from different perspectives;
- flexible, audience-sensitive, written and oral communication skills;
- the ability to respond creatively to problems and develop solutions; and
- on-the-job understanding of career options and an opportunity to reflect critically on work experiences.

FEATURES OF COMMUNITY STUDIES

1. Your Instructors

Your Community Studies course instructor acts as both a facilitator and catalyst for your learning, both inside the classroom and online. Each instructor has her or his field of expertise and becomes a co-learner with the students in other areas. You will find that your instructor spends most of the class time listening and posing questions, and little time lecturing. Therefore, we hear occasionally from students, that their instructor does not give them enough direction.

Indeed, this may be true, because we assume that reasonable amounts of floundering, making errors, and struggling are consistent with the educational philosophy of Community Studies. We also promote student ownership of the group process and project. Consequently, although each group within a COMS class has its designated instructor who is responsible ultimately for the submission of your grades, you are encouraged to view all faculty members in COMS as a resource pool.

2. Group Building and Group Cohesion

Most of your formal education prior to Community Studies courses may have taken place on an individual basis. You sat behind a school desk. You wrote exams. Your final grades represented what you accomplished as an individual student. In contrast, students in COMS courses work together in groups and the group's togetherness [unity or cohesion] and its effectiveness affect your grades. Working as a group may be a joyful and rewarding experience; it may also bring frustration and dissatisfaction. Therefore, in the first term of COMS 1100, considerable time is devoted to learning how groups work. Understanding group theory is essential for future COMS courses, as group cohesion is critical throughout the BACS degree.

3. Self-Directed Learning

As self-directed learners, you and your group members assume a major role in defining your learning needs and the methods of meeting these needs. You are largely responsible for making decisions about your learning. You take control of the goals and purposes of learning and assume ownership of how and what you learn. We hope this will allow you to: "enter into learning more purposefully and with greater motivation... [and thus] retain and make use of what [you] learn better and longer" (Knowles, 1975, p. 14). Self-directed learning can be difficult, but it is in line with where many of you are at this stage in your lives – taking responsibility for your own lives and defining your future path.

4. Reading, Writing and Critical Thinking

From COMS 1100 through COMS 4100, you will have many opportunities to develop skills in reading, writing and critical thinking through individual and group library research, group discussions, written papers and oral presentations. Once you have selected a topic and gathered sufficient information, you will be expected to critically analyse that information and articulate your findings orally and in written form.

5. Group Reports

One method of demonstrating the group's attainment of the course objectives is through the group papers submitted in a number of COMS courses at various times throughout the term. In these papers, groups demonstrate their ability to research, analyse and write, not only as individuals, but also as a cohesive unit.

6. Oral Presentations

Another way of demonstrating the group's experiences is through oral presentations held at various times throughout the term. Again, groups must present their research findings in a clear, concise fashion, with each person making an equal contribution.

7. Evaluating Your Program, Yourself and Your Peers

On-going peer and self-evaluation are an integral part of the COMS process. In addition, a formal written evaluation takes place at the end of each term and your instructor will use this information to determine your final grade.

PARTICIPATION MARKS

Student participation is particularly important in Community Studies courses as they employ a small group format and function as learning communities themselves. The contributions of every member matters to the learning experience of the group as a whole. The quantity and quality of your contribution to the group throughout the term is very important.

In Community Studies, an assigned percentage of each term's mark develops from class participation and group functioning. This grade will be determined by the instructor with input from the student themselves and their classmates.

Participation:

Regular attendance is expected. Engagement implies a level of interaction, commitment and membership in the group. For engagement, a student takes part in the discussions and contributes to group papers and projects. The final measure relates to the quality of the contribution. For example, a student may participate but their contribution may do little to facilitate the achievement of the course objectives. Such a student could receive good marks for attendance and engagement but score poorly for the quality of their contribution. On the other hand, some students may contribute infrequently but the quality of their contribution may be very valuable to the group experience.

Each student has a responsibility to encourage the participation of all group members and to ensure their equal contribution.

Group function:

Your group's ability to achieve an appropriate level of functioning in two areas will be evaluated:

1) Group Task function:

This relates to the running of the group and the task achievements. For example, is the group spending its time wisely, completing the tasks fully and in a timely manner, moving forward with a sense of shared goals and values, and executing the tasks in a thoughtful and reflective way.

2) Group Maintenance function:

This relates to the maintenance of working relationships within the group. For example, do the group members distribute the tasks equally; build on the strengths of each member; listen carefully to each other; deal effectively with conflicts, unequal participation and personal agendas; and finally debrief the group processes in order to improve and move ahead?

Groups are expected to resolve group difficulties through collective problem-solving.

COURSE OBJECTIVES FOR COMMUNITY STUDIES 1100

Group Work

- develop skills for analysing, participating and effectively engaging in group activities
- build theoretical understandings of group dynamics
- gain problem-solving skills

Community Studies Model/Problem-Based Learning Model

- understand the philosophy of the core courses in Community Studies
- understand the different ways of learning in COMS
- define the problem-centered studies model
- understand fundamental components of the problem-centered studies model as an educational model

Community

- define and understand community
- identify communities on a local, regional and global level
- analyze a specific community

Research:

- develop project research skills
- learn to access and select from a wide variety of secondary sources

Analytical /Critical Thinking Skills

Develop analytical skills with particular attention to:

- learning to approach issues from more than one perspective
- developing the ability to formulate exploratory questions
- recognizing the need to examine the basis of authority
- developing the ability to synthesize and integrate understandings gained from other courses

Writing Skills

Develop collaborative writing skills and build individual writing skills with a focus on:

- spelling and basic grammar
- effective paragraph construction
- coherent paper organization
- clear thesis statements
- correct use of citations
- proper format for bibliographies

Communication Skills

Develop oral communication skills, particularly those necessary for:

- sustained and productive communication with one another
- effective communication with resource people
- effective articulation of research findings