



Prior Learning Portfolio

A Guide to Developing Your Portfolio

Updated November 2021 (subject to revision)

| Intended Start Date for Studies | Deadline to submit PLP |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Summer Term – June 1 | February 1 st |
| Fall Term – Sept 1 | March 15 th |
| Winter Term – Jan 1 | October 15 th |

Introduction

Thank you for your interest in Atlantic School of Theology! We look forward to getting to know you.

Admission to the graduate level of study at AST is normally granted on the basis of a completed Bachelor's degree.

However, not all applicants have completed a Bachelor's degree. As a result, in some circumstances, AST will consider an application to a graduate program (the Master of Divinity program, the Graduate Certificate in Theological Studies, or as a Special Student) if you can demonstrate equivalence to a Bachelor's degree by means of a Prior Learning Portfolio (PLP). Please see below for more details.

Note #1: Admission to the Master of Arts (Theology and Religious Studies) program requires a completed Bachelor's degree. **Applicants may not use the Prior Learning Portfolio process to demonstrate Bachelor's equivalency for MA admission.**

Note #2: The Prior Learning Portfolio process is normally available to persons 30 years of age or older. **If you are under 30**, we recommend that you begin or continue undergraduate studies in the humanities (literature, history, languages, theology, philosophy, classics, or religious studies) and strive to complete a Bachelor's degree. This is the best way for you to prepare for graduate studies at AST.

Note #3 - Your Prior Learning Portfolio will be strengthened significantly by taking as many university courses as possible before you apply to AST, preferably within the humanities (literature, history, languages, theology, philosophy, classics, or religious studies). We prefer to see **a minimum of 5 year-long university courses** (or 10 one-semester courses) on your transcript, ideally at the A or B grade level.

Prior Learning Portfolio Preparation and Contents

It is the applicant's responsibility to prepare a portfolio and to learn about what is needed in the portfolio. To prepare a Prior Learning Portfolio, please take the following steps.

IMPORTANT: When your portfolio is ready, send all contents to the Academic Office in one package.

STEP 1

Contact the Academic Office Coordinator at AST, who will match you with a Prior Learning Advisor (academic@astheology.ns.ca).

STEP 2

If you and your Prior Learning Advisor agree that you will develop a Prior Learning Portfolio (PLP), please contact the Academic Office Coordinator to pay the non-refundable Prior Learning Assessment fee of \$788.00, payable by cheque or credit card to AST (academic@astheology.ns.ca).

STEP 3

Develop your Prior Learning Portfolio. Consult with your Prior Learning Advisor, who will coach you through the process. Your Advisor will not assign you homework, but will ask you to describe and assess your existing knowledge, learning, experience, skills, attributes, and attitudes in order to demonstrate your readiness for graduate theological studies. (**NOTE:** Now is the time to request transcripts from previous institutions – see Section J below.)

(If you decide not to develop a PLP at this point, please inform the Academic Office Coordinator, and if possible, let us know the reason for your decision: academic@astheology.ns.ca)

Things to consider while preparing your portfolio

The goal of the Prior Learning Portfolio is to identify, describe, and demonstrate your learning with a variety of forms of evidence.

Focus on what you learned (knowledge, skills, attitudes, abilities) not just on what you experienced. Thoughtful reflection and analysis should go into what you are preparing for inclusion in your portfolio. The question really is “what did I learn from the experience that helped to prepare me for graduate theological studies?”

Be sure your portfolio is complete, polished, proofread, and professional.

As we read your portfolio, we will ask, “Can this person be successful at AST?” Help us to see clearly why you believe the answer is “yes!”

*****The key criterion that AST will consider in assessing your portfolio is your readiness to begin graduate theological studies.***

This means that you have clearly shown the following competencies in your portfolio:

- research skills
- ability to understand and analyze written texts
- communication skills (oral and written)
- capacity for critical thinking
- time management skills
- organizational ability (of yourself and others)
- leadership ability, or good likelihood of developing it
- computer literacy, including word processing and email

Note #4: Any given element in your portfolio could be evidence for one or more of these things.

STEP 4

Contents of Your Portfolio (sections A-J)

Section A

A covering letter telling us

- which program you intend to apply for
- when you hope to start your studies
- if you have already applied to AST for a degree or certificate program
- a summary of the contents of your portfolio
- a statement that you are making a claim for Bachelor's equivalence.

Be sure to include your full contact information in this letter.

Section B

A chart (1-2 pages) that summarizes the evidence you are submitting, for example:

| <u>Area of competence</u> | <u>Document</u> | <u>Portfolio Page or Section</u> |
|---------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Research Skills | Historical Society Newsletter | page 12 |
| Organizational ability | Program from Community Fair that I organized | page 6 |
| Critical thinking skills | Academic writing Sample | page 14 |

Section C

Your resume (up to 4 pages)

Section D

Your autobiography as a learner (2-3 pages)

In this section, describe how your prior learning relates to your proposed studies at AST. Please be specific: **What have you learned? Where and how did you learn it?** How has your prior learning prepared you for graduate theological studies (e.g. research skills, writing skills, interpersonal relations, communication skills, leadership)?

Section E

A brief statement of your educational goals (1 page)

Section F

A list or description of formal learning, for example (1-2 pages)

University courses
Community/Technical College programs
Accredited professional programs (eg. RN, CGA, etc)
Training certificates

Section G

(up to 10 pages)

Descriptions and documents of significant learning experiences that were not or could not be formally transcribed, such as

- Continuing education courses and programs
- On-the-job training
- Participation in research and development
- Volunteer community work
- Artistic/cultural pursuits; hobbies
- Organizational membership/leadership

- Educational travel
- Informal self-directed learning
- Case studies
- Performance appraisals
- Test results
- Licenses
- Professional memberships

Section H

A sample of your best academic writing. Indicate carefully the assignment you were given when you wrote this essay. If you do not have an academic writing sample, please compose a short essay (3-4 pages) on the following subject: *"The Role of Spirituality in a Faith Community."* Remember to include research, quotations, footnotes, and a bibliography. You may take any approach you wish to this essay.

Section I

In this section, make a list (1 page) of **all post-secondary institutions** you have attended (not just those from which you graduated).

Section J

You will need to request an **official transcript** from each university and/or college you attended.

For paper portfolios: Your official transcript(s) must be **sent to you** in an envelope sealed and signed/stamped by the issuing education institution. **Do not open the envelope containing your official transcript.** Include all of your official transcript(s) in their original signed/stamped, sealed envelopes with your paper Portfolio.

For emailed portfolios: Order each official transcript and ask the issuing institution(s) to email or electronically transfer your transcript to the AST Academic Office: academic@astheology.ns.ca

STEP 5

Submit one copy of your complete portfolio, printed on paper (or by email as a single document) to

**Academic Office
Atlantic School of Theology
660 Francklyn Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3H 3B5**

IMPORTANT: Send all contents to the Academic Office in **one** package.

Do not bind your Portfolio with a report cover, coil binding, dividers, or three ring binder.

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STEP 6

The Academic Office Coordinator will send you an email to let you know when your Portfolio and official transcripts are received and provide you with an estimated timeline for completion of the assessment.

Please wait for AST to contact you about the results of the assessment of your Portfolio. After you hear back from AST about the result, you may proceed to apply to the M.Div., GCTS, or as a Special Student. (If you wish, you may apply to a program at AST before you hear back about the results of the assessment of your PLP, but please note that admission will be dependent on a positive assessment of your PLP.)

What happens after I submit my portfolio?

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition

After you submit your portfolio, your advisor will confirm that it is complete. If it is complete, your portfolio will be forwarded to a Prior Learning Reviewer at AST for review. The Reviewer may request an interview with you if clarification is needed. The Reviewer will carefully evaluate all the components of your portfolio, then provide recommendations to the Academic Dean.

After the Academic Dean has reviewed the Reviewer's recommendations and your portfolio, you will be notified if you have been deemed to have a Bachelor's equivalency for the purposes of AST's graduate studies admission process.

If you are deemed to have a Bachelor's equivalency for the purpose of AST's graduate studies admission process, you will be eligible to apply for the M.Div., GCTS, or as a Special Student anytime within the following 24 months. After 24 months have passed, you will need to complete a new PLP process.

If you are not granted Bachelor's equivalency, AST will recommend steps you could take to further develop your readiness for graduate theological studies.

Note #5: *If you choose to submit evidence of supplementary learning, it must be submitted within 24 months of filing your portfolio. When you are ready to submit evidence of supplementary learning, contact the Academic Office Coordinator to advise and to submit your material.*

After 24 months, you will need to submit a new and complete portfolio. The second PLP fee will need to be paid.

Document destruction policy

Please keep a personal copy of your Prior Learning Portfolio.

The copy of the PLP you send to AST, including all its contents, will not be returned to you. It will be destroyed securely (with the exception of transcripts that you include) after one of the following occurs, whichever occurs last:

- you graduate from AST
- you withdraw from studies at AST
- you are not deemed to have a Bachelor's equivalency for the purpose of AST's graduate studies admission process
- you are not granted admission to graduate studies at AST

Conclusion

Best wishes in the completion of your portfolio. Please feel free to contact your advisor if you need assistance.

Contacts

Academic Office Coordinator
AST Website

academic@astheology.ns.ca
www.astheology.ns.ca