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# Prior Learning Assessment Portfolio

## Master of Arts in Theological Studies (MATS) Program

### Introduction to the Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)

#### **Purpose of the PLA**

The Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is a formal process used by academic institutions to evaluate and recognize learning acquired outside of traditional classroom settings. This includes knowledge and skills gained through professional experience, ministry, independent study, military service, and other non-academic avenues.

For applicants to the Master of Arts in Theological Studies program at The University of Saint Mary of the Lake, the PLA provides an opportunity to demonstrate how the applicant's prior learning aligns with graduate-level academic outcomes. The PLA seeks confirmation that the applicant's experience demonstrates their ability to engage in critical reflection, theological engagement, and practical application at a graduate level.

#### **Why the PLA is Needed**

Many individuals entering graduate theological programs bring with them a wealth of experience in ministry, theological reflection, and spiritual formation. The PLA ensures that this experience is formally acknowledged and may be credited toward academic requirements. This process not only honors the applicant's background but also allows for a more efficient and personalized academic journey.

#### **Requirements to Complete the PLA**

To complete the PLA, applicants must submit a comprehensive portfolio that includes the following components:

- a) Cover Letter or Statement of Intent



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- b) Reflective Essay detailing prior learning and its relevance to theological studies
- c) Learning Outcomes Alignment Document
  - 1) Supporting Documentation (e.g., transcripts, ministry records, certifications)
  - 2) Evidence of Competency (e.g., homilies, liturgical plans, teaching materials)
  - 3) Third-Party Evaluations or Letters of Recommendation

**Cover Letter or Statement of Intent**

The cover letter should clearly state your intention to seek academic credit through the Prior Learning Assessment process. It should briefly outline your background in theological ministry or formation and express your commitment to the academic and spiritual goals of the program.

**Reflective Essay**

The reflective essay (approximately 1,000–1,500 words) should demonstrate how your prior learning and experience align with the academic and ministerial outcomes of a graduate-level program in Theological Studies. Use the following bullet points to guide your reflection:

- **Scripture Interpretation**
  - Describe your experience reading and interpreting sacred scripture in its historical and cultural context.
  - Reflect on how Catholic teaching has informed your understanding of scripture.
  - Share how contemporary challenges and questions have shaped your engagement with biblical texts.
- **Theological Analysis**
  - Discuss your exposure to and analysis of contemporary embedded theologies.
  - Describe how you have engaged these theologies in conversation with Catholic tradition.



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- Share examples of theological reflection or dialogue in ministerial or academic settings.
- **Spiritual Reframing**
  - Reflect on your human and spiritual formation prior to graduate study.
  - Describe how academic theological study has reframed or deepened your spiritual journey.
  - Share experiences of transformation or new insight gained through theological engagement.
- **Teaching and Formation of Others**
  - Describe any experience teaching or mentoring others in theological topics.
  - Share materials or approaches you've used to help others understand theological concepts.
- **Research and Writing**
  - Reflect on any theological writing, research, or presentations you've done.
  - Describe your ability to analyze theological texts and communicate insights.
- **Integration and Readiness**
  - Summarize how your experiences have prepared you for graduate-level studies.
  - Reflect on your readiness to contribute to academic and ministerial conversations in theological studies.



**Learning Outcomes Alignment Document**

<b>Master of Arts in Theological Studies Learning Outcomes</b>	<b>Description of Your Experience</b>	<b>Examples of Supporting Documentation or Evidence</b>
Capacity to interpret sacred scripture in historical, cultural, and theological contexts	Describe your scriptural studies, ministry roles, or personal reflection that involved deep engagement with scripture.	Certificates, transcripts, theological essays, Bible study outlines
Ability to analyze contemporary embedded theologies in conversation with Catholic teaching	Mention any theological discussions, writings, or ministry experiences engaging contemporary theologies.	Copies of papers, theological reflections, annotated bibliographies
Ability to reframe personal formation through academic theological study	Share how your academic study has transformed your spiritual and human formation.	Personal statement, spiritual direction notes, formation program records

Please compile the above documentation and submit to Linda Couri at [lcouri@usml.edu](mailto:lcouri@usml.edu) or:

Linda Couri  
University of St. Mary of the Lake  
1000 E. Maple Ave.  
Mundelein, IL 60060

After the application deadline, the admissions committee will review all completed applications and notify applicants of the admission decision.