

## Theme 4 – Personal Understanding (GED0014) PLAR

### General Education

The purpose of General Education (Gen Ed) courses in the Ontario college system is to develop educated citizens who are aware of the diversity, complexity and richness of human life and are able to contribute thoughtfully, creatively and positively to the society in which they live and work.

Gen Ed courses provide opportunities for learners to explore questions related to the issues and values raised by the subject matter, along with their application to contemporary life, covering at least two of the following:

- ethics and values
- historical context
- theoretical origins

### General Education Themes

Depending on their length, Algonquin College programs typically include one or two general education online electives. [General Education courses](#) cover areas of general interest and are divided into five themes:

- 1 – Arts in Society
- 2 – Personal Understanding
- 3 – Social and Cultural Understanding
- 4 – Science and Technology
- 5 – Science and Technology

Check your program of study to determine which of the above themes are available to you within your program. This will help you decide which Student Resource Guide to use as you apply for credit through the PLAR process.

### Theme 4: Personal Understanding (GED0014)

#### **Rationale**

Becoming fully functional, integrated persons able to achieve vocational and financial success requires due attention to our physical, mental, emotional, social, sexual and spiritual health. The long road to personhood can be a bumpy one without roadmaps through the various social systems and institutions that take us safely from early adulthood to retirement.

#### **Content**

Courses in this area focus on understanding one's personal development, economic function, social life, place in the environment and universe, challenges and opportunities, setbacks and success, and meaning and purpose. Courses facilitating the study of human social behaviour systematically allow students to understand how individuals can function and succeed in a variety of contexts.

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### Objectives

Here are the learning outcomes associated with courses within the Personal Understanding Gen Ed theme.

#### Placing Ourselves

1. Explore individual development, economic function, social life, place in the environment and universe, challenges and opportunities, setbacks and success, and meaning and purpose.
2. Consider human social behaviour systematically.
3. Explain how individuals may navigate various social systems and institutions to become integrated physiological and psychological entities.

#### Finding Our Potential Selves

4. Compare individual functioning and success in a variety of institutional contexts (e.g., educational, vocational, commercial, recreational, nuptial, familial, etc.).
5. Analyze the ideal of being fully functioning persons vocationally, physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, sexually and spiritually.

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### Are You Eligible for PLAR Credit under Theme 4? Self-Assessment

Complete the following self-evaluation to determine which past experiences you have that might qualify you for a Personal Understanding Theme (GED0014) PLAR credit.

Before you devote your time and financial resources to this PLAR application, please answer **Yes** or **No** to the following four questions to determine if your application in Gen Ed Theme 4 is likely to succeed.

Have you ever...

1. assessed your own learning style?
2. followed a self-improvement regimen?
3. taken an ethical stand in the face of adversity?
4. involved yourself in areas related to human development?

If you answered **No** to all of the above, please visit the [PLAR website](#) to choose a more appropriate General Education Theme to PLAR.

If you answered **Yes** to any of the above, ask yourself if your experience and prior learning is of suitable depth for a successful PLAR application. Your application will have a good chance of succeeding if your personal understanding experience:

1. lasted for months or years rather than a few days or weeks (**Duration**)
2. helped you reflect on new ideas about yourself, your community and the world (**Impact**)
3. exposed you to new concepts, especially related to theory, history and ethics (**Learning**)
4. provided you with a depth of life experience beyond mere facts and skills (**Experience**)

Here are some life experience examples that would NOT result in a successful Gen Ed Theme 4 PLAR:

- ✗ *“I read a book by Dr. Phil.”*
- ✗ *“I should probably do something about my gambling problem. Because the house always wins.”*
- ✗ *“I got in a car accident a few years back and my shoulder hasn’t been quite the same since.”*

On the other hand, the following experiences MAY result in a successful Gen Ed Theme 4 PLAR:

- ✓ *“Recognizing that I spend way too long in front a computer for work and my smart-phone ensures that I’m never really alone, I’ve set aside 2 hours a day free of all electronics. I tend to just spend it going for walks and thinking about my relationship with technology, or just spending time with the real people in my life.”*
- ✓ *“I’m a nature nut. Always have been—from collecting ants for my ant farm when I was a kid to joining the science club in high school. Now I’m especially into ornithology as an avid birdwatcher, but I’ll watch a good doc on nearly anything in the animal kingdom.”*

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If you believe your experiences are of a suitable depth, please answer the four self-assessment questions again, this time using the [online self-assessment form](#). If you are able to provide evidence of learning for all four questions in any one section, you may be a good candidate to proceed with the PLAR process.

The next step is to [apply online for a PLAR](#), and attach your completed [self-assessment form](#).



The academic area will confirm whether you are a good candidate for this PLAR. It is recommended that you do not begin working on your Portfolio until your candidacy has been approved.

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### Portfolio Submission Guidelines

Once your candidacy for PLAR has been confirmed, you can begin working on your Portfolio.

There are three essential components of the Portfolio:

#### **1. Cover Letter**

Your one-page cover letter must:

- a) begin with a paragraph that states the purpose of the application (i.e., to obtain credit in GED0014: General Education Theme 4 – Personal Understanding) and introduces you by explaining what you are doing now and which goal a successful PLAR will help you achieve.
- b) in your main body paragraph, explain why you feel you qualify for this PLAR theme by summarizing how you have the related learning and prior experience to meet the Personal Understanding Theme Objectives on page 2 above. You may also want to provide more detailed answers to the four questions above (in the “Have You Ever?” section).
- c) conclude with a statement verifying that you own all the evidence included in the enclosed Portfolio.
- d) follow the detailed instructions in the “PLAR Portfolio Instructions and Rubric” section starting on the next page.
- e) be written in a narrative form (without bullet points) and proofread for spelling and grammar.
- f) not exceed one 8.5 by 11” page in length.

#### **2. Personal Understanding Experience or Accomplishments Summary Report**

This key Portfolio component showcases your personal understanding experience and shows your ability to distinguish between workplace/life experience (the act of doing something) and the significant learning that results from it. To address Theme 4 Objectives (page 2 above), this section must include a title, introduction, and either:

- a) a photo essay with at least five items showcasing your personal understanding experience (e.g., self-assessment, self-improvement, or ethical commitment), each featuring you and accompanied by a written summary of learning derived from it;

OR

- b) evidence of a strong interest in or study of human development in the form of five past or present written commentaries (e.g., on case studies), blogs, analytical essays, critical reviews, correspondence (e.g., your part of an email exchange), or links to other media that you have produced, along with a written summary of learning derived from each.

#### **3. Personal Reflection Essays**

- a) Write a two-page essay explaining the role and impact that the type of experience you showcase in your Personal Understanding Experience or Accomplishments Summary Report generally plays in culture and society; focus on addressing Theme 4 Objectives 1-4 (see page 2 above).

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- b) Write a one-page reflection on how your personal understanding has affected you over time. To focus on addressing Theme 4 Objectives 1 and 5, summarize how your:
1. personal understanding has influenced your general outlook on life
  2. efforts towards personal understanding have made you more self-aware
  3. self-awareness has affected your social and professional development
  4. self-awareness has made you a more physiologically and psychologically integrated person

The **PLAR Portfolio – Instructions and Rubric** on the following pages provide more detailed instructions.

*Note on your submission:* once you have completed your Portfolio, submit an electronic copy to the PLAR Office while keeping original documents for possible future use.

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### PLAR Portfolio – Instructions and Rubric

#### Assessment of Your Portfolio

The instructions and rubrics below explain the assessment for each of the three parts of your Portfolio:

- Cover Letter
- Arts Experience or Accomplishments Summary Report Cover Letter
- Personal Reflection Essay

To ensure a successful PLAR Portfolio, please follow the description given under the “Excellent” heading for each of the three portfolio components of the rubric. Avoid the mistakes listed under the “Unsatisfactory” level of achievement.

The success of your Portfolio depends on achieving a minimum score as noted at the bottom of each of the three individual component rubrics. By doing so, you will meet or exceed the required **minimum total of 65 out of 130 possible points** for all three parts combined.

## 1. Cover Letter

#### Format

Please use the following formatting guidelines for your cover letter.

1. Your street address
2. Date line
3. Recipient address
4. Subject line
5. Recipient salutation
6. Body consisting of three blocked paragraphs
7. Closing goodwill statement
8. Your signature and full printed name
9. All on one 8.5” by 11” page with single-spaced lines, double between items 1-8, and a consistent font.

<b>Excellent</b>	All 9 format components are included in the required order.	5 points
<b>Satisfactory</b>	Some of the 9 format components are absent, presented in the wrong order or incomplete.	3-4 points
<b>Improvable</b>	Many of the 9 format components are absent, presented in the wrong order or incomplete.	1-2 points
<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	No cover letter provided, or none of the 9 format components followed.	0 points

#### Opening Paragraph

State:

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1. the purpose of the application (to obtain credit in GED0014: General Education Theme 4 – Personal Understanding);
2. introduce yourself by explaining what you are doing now; and
3. describe what ultimate goal this application will help you achieve.

<b>Excellent</b>	All three of the required points are stated clearly in the given order.	5 points
<b>Satisfactory</b>	Two or three of the three required points are stated clearly, but one or two are unclear, in the wrong order and/or mixed with some irrelevant, redundant or repeated detail.	3-4 points
<b>Improvable</b>	One or two of the three required points are stated clearly, but the others are absent, unclear, in the wrong order and/or mixed with some irrelevant, redundant or repeated detail.	1-2 points
<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	Cover letter omits an opening paragraph, or it covers none of the three required points.	0 points

### Main Body Paragraph

Summarize how you have the applicable learning and prior experience to meet most of the five Personal Understanding Theme Objectives (see page 2 above).

<b>Excellent</b>	Paragraph convincingly, clearly, concisely, and coherently summarizes how your prior learning and experience meet most (4-5) of the Personal Understanding Theme Objectives.	9-10 points
<b>Satisfactory</b>	Paragraph summarizes how your prior learning and experience meet some (3-4) of the eight Theme Objectives.  There may also be minor problems with the clarity, coherence and concision.	6-8 points
<b>Improvable</b>	Paragraph summarizes how your prior learning and experience meet 1-2 of the Theme Objectives.  The paragraph may also be incoherent (e.g., sentences jump around and run off-topic), too short, or too long with off-topic details and a general lack of clarity.	3-5 points
<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	There is no discernable main body paragraph or it barely summarizes how your prior learning and experience meet any of the Theme Objectives.  Most of the sentences lack clarity and coherence, and/or are riddled with off-topic details.	0-2 points

### Closing Sentences

Clear statement verifying that you are the rightful owner of all materials included in the enclosed portfolio, as well as a goodwill expression of thanks to the assessor for considering your application.



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<b>Excellent</b>	Closing sentences clearly and concisely state that you are the rightful owner of all materials included in the enclosed portfolio, as well as thank the assessor for considering your application.	5 points
<b>Satisfactory</b>	Closing sentences state that you are the rightful owner of all materials included in the portfolio and thank the assessor, but there are minor problems with the clarity and conciseness of expression.	3-4 points
<b>Improvable</b>	Closing sentences state that you are the rightful owner of all materials included but don't thank the assessor or vice versa. There may also be problems with the clarity and conciseness of expression.	1-2 points
<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	Closing is either absent, or doesn't clearly and concisely state that you are the rightful owner of all materials included in the enclosed portfolio, nor does it express thanks to the assessor for considering the application.	0 points

### Quality of Writing

Letter content is correct in terms of spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax and mechanics, and is generally professional in style throughout.

<b>Excellent</b>	Well-written, with few or no spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanical or stylistic errors.	5 points
<b>Satisfactory</b>	Generally well-written but with some spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanical and/or stylistic errors.	3-4 points
<b>Improvable</b>	Several spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanical and/or stylistic errors.	1-2 points
<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	Too many errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanics (e.g., capitalization) and/or stylistic errors.	0 points

To gain a PLAR credit, the Cover Letter must score a **minimum of 15** out of 30 points.

<b>Points Total</b>	/ 30
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### 2. Personal Understanding Experience or Accomplishments Summary Report

#### Format

All work is contained in a single document with a descriptive title, introduction, and pages that combine learning summary statements, along with photos or writing samples on each page, with a professional overall appearance, a document title and a consistent use of font type/size and headings throughout.

<b>Excellent</b>	The report is titled descriptively, has an introduction page, followed by pages that combine titled learning summary statements and photos or writing samples. The report appears professional, with a consistently-applied font type and size, heading styles and spacing throughout.	5 points
<b>Satisfactory</b>	The report has a title that is not descriptive, the introduction is not on a page of its own, and/or the report has some minor inconsistencies in the font type and size, heading styles, spacing, and/or organization of learning summary statements and photos or writing samples.	3-4 points
<b>Improvable</b>	The report's title is misleading or absent, the introduction is not on a page of its own, the report has many inconsistencies in the font type and size, heading styles and spacing, and lacks organization in its presentation of learning summary statements combined with photos or writing samples.	1-2 points
<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	The report lacks a title, has many inconsistencies in the font type and size, heading styles and spacing, and lacks organization in its learning summary statements combination with photos or writing samples.	0 points

#### Introduction

A brief (at least a paragraph but no more than one page) introduction that explains the purpose of the Personal Understanding Experience or Accomplishments Summary Report and the occasion for its being written, and gives a brief overview of its contents.

<b>Excellent</b>	The report has an introductory page with a clear title ("Introduction") and at least one paragraph that clearly and concisely explains the purpose of the Report and the occasion for its being written, and gives a brief overview of its contents.	5 points
<b>Satisfactory</b>	The report's Introduction is not appropriately titled and does not clearly and concisely explain either the purpose of the Report, the occasion for its being written, or its contents.	3-4 points
<b>Improvable</b>	The report's Introduction is not titled, is not on a page of its own, and/or does not clearly and concisely explain the purpose of the Report, the occasion for its being written and its contents.	1-2 points

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<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	The report omits an Introduction, or includes one that meets none of the requirements.	0 points
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### Learning Summary

A title and introductory paragraph summary above each photo or writing sample explains the context and learning that resulted from personal understanding experiences or accomplishments, with learning that relates to most of the Theme Objectives stated on page 2 above.

<b>Excellent</b>	Above each of the 5 photos or writing samples is a title and 1-2 paragraph summary explaining the context (time, place, people involved, occasion, importance, etc.) and learning that resulted from the personal understanding experiences or accomplishments, and the learning described relates to at least 4-5 of the Theme Objectives.	16-20 points
<b>Satisfactory</b>	The summary paragraphs introducing each photo or writing sample are titled and good but there are only 3-4 of them, or there are 5 of them but they lack clarity and focus when describing the context and learning that resulted, and they relate to only 1-2 of the Theme Objectives.	11-15 points
<b>Improvable</b>	The summary paragraphs introducing each photo or writing sample are good but are untitled, there are only 1-2 of them, or there are more but they don't clearly describe the context and learning that resulted, they do only one of these, and/or they relate to only one or so of the Theme Objectives.	6-10 points
<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	There are no summary paragraphs introducing each photo or writing sample, or they are untitled and so thin that they describe neither the context nor the learning that resulted, nor do they relate in any way to the Theme Objectives.	0-5 points

### Photo Essay or Writing Samples

A photo essay chronicling your personal understanding experience (e.g., self-assessment, self-improvement, or ethical commitment), each featuring you (one photo per page),

OR

Writing samples showcasing your strong interest in or study of human development (e.g., past or present analytical essays, critical reviews, commentaries, blog postings, or links to other media).

<b>Excellent</b>	A photo essay with at least 5 photos chronicling your personal understanding experience (e.g., self-assessment, self-improvement or ethical commitment), each featuring you (one photo per page); OR  At least 5 writing samples showcasing your strong interest in or study of human development (e.g., past or present	20-25 points
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	analytical essays, critical reviews, commentaries, blog postings or links to other media).	
<b>Satisfactory</b>	You may only have 3-4 photo essay photos chronicling your personal understanding experience (e.g., self-assessment, self-improvement or ethical commitment), or you have 4-5 but they don't all feature you (perhaps you were behind the camera).  You may only have 3-4 writing samples or you have five but they don't all convincingly demonstrate a strong interest in the study of human development.	13-19 points
<b>Improvable</b>	You may only have 1-2 photo essay photos chronicling your personal understanding experience, or you have 3-4 but they don't all feature you or clearly illustrate what you describe in your accompanying Learning Summary Statements.  You may only have 1-2 writing samples or you have 3-4 but they don't all convincingly demonstrate a strong interest in the study human development.	6-12 points
<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	There is no representative selection of evidence of personal understanding experience, accomplishment, or interest; or evidence is minimal and presented in a manner that defies evaluation and thus the Theme Objectives.	0-5 points

### Quality of Writing

The Summary Report is correct in terms of spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax and mechanics, and is generally professional in style throughout.

<b>Excellent</b>	Well-written, with few or no spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanical or stylistic errors.	5 points
<b>Satisfactory</b>	Generally well-written but with some spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanical and/or stylistic errors.	3-4 points
<b>Improvable</b>	Several spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanical and/or stylistic errors.	1-2 points
<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	Too many errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanics (e.g., capitalization) and/or stylistic errors.	0 points

To gain a PLAR credit, the Summary Report must score a **minimum of 30** out of 60 points.

<b>Points Total</b>	/ 60
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### 3. Personal Reflection Essays

#### Format

The essays fill three single-spaced pages, have a descriptive title and a subheading for each of the two sections named below.

<b>Excellent</b>	The essays fill three single-spaced pages with the title given above and a subheading for each of the two sections named below; the font type and size, heading styles and spacing are consistent throughout.	5 points
<b>Satisfactory</b>	The essays deviate slightly from the format requirement (for example, the title is not the same as that given above), or has minor inconsistencies in the font type and size, heading styles or spacing.	3-4 points
<b>Improvable</b>	The essays are not single-spaced and are inconsistent in font type and size, heading styles and spacing.	1-2 points
<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	One or more of the essays is absent or disorganized, with too many format errors, such as no title or section headings, multiple line spacing or inconsistencies in font type or size, heading styles or character spacing.	0 points

#### Section A: Cultural Role and Impact

A two-page original essay on (1) the role that the type of personal experience you showcase in your Personal Understanding Experience or Accomplishments Summary Report generally plays in culture at large, and (2) its impact on society historically and today, addressing Theme 4 Objectives 1-4.

<b>Excellent</b>	The Personal Reflection Essays document begins with a full, two-page original essay with the subheading “The Role and Impact of [Your Chosen Type of Personal Experience— e.g., fitness training] in Culture” and explanation of (1) the role that the type of personal experience you showcase plays in culture at large and (2) its impact on culture historically and today; the essay addresses Theme 4 Objectives 1-4 (see page 2 above).	16-20 points
<b>Satisfactory</b>	The Cultural Role and Impact essay is closer to 1.5 pages in length, may not identify your chosen type of personal experience in the subheading, covers topic (1) in more depth than (2) or vice versa, covers contemporary but not historical aspects for topics (1) or (2) or vice versa, runs slightly off-topic, and/or addresses only 2-3 of Theme 4 Objectives 1-4 given on page 2 above.	11-15 points
<b>Improvable</b>	The Cultural Role and Impact essay is slightly more or less than a page in length, discusses culture in general rather than the specific type of experience you focus on in your Personal Understanding Summary Report, fails to follow the required subheading name, covers topic (1) but not (or	6-10 points

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	barely) topic (2) or vice versa, fails to clearly address historical or contemporary aspects for either topic, runs off-topic, and/or addresses only 1-2 of Theme 4 Objectives 1-4 given on page 2 above.	
<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	The Personal Reflection Essays document omits the Cultural Role and Impact essay or it is less than a page in length, vaguely discusses experience in general rather than the type you focus on in your Personal Understanding Summary Report, omits a subheading, vaguely addresses only topic (1) or (2), fails to discuss the historical and contemporary aspects of either, largely ignores Theme 4 Objectives, runs off topic, and/or is plagiarized in whole or in part.	0-5 points

### Section B: Personal Meaning

A one-page personal reflection on how your personal understanding has affected you over time, addressing Theme 4 Objectives 1 and 5 by summarizing how your personal understanding has (1) influenced your general outlook on life, (2) made you more self-aware, (3) affected your social and professional development, and (4) made you a more physiologically and psychologically integrated person.

<b>Excellent</b>	The Personal Meaning essay fills one full page with a reflection on how your personal understanding has affected you over time, addressing Theme 4 Objectives 1 and 5 by summarizing how your personal understanding has (1) influenced your general outlook on life, (2) made you more self-aware, (3) affected your social and professional development, and (4) made you a more physiologically and psychologically integrated person.	9-10 points
<b>Satisfactory</b>	The Personal Meaning essay fills less than a page with a reflection on how your personal understanding has impacted your life and addresses Theme 4 Objectives 1 and 5 by clearly and coherently summarizing three of the four topics suggested in the guidelines on pages 4-5 above, though the fourth topic and Theme Objective 1 or 5 may be unclear or crowded by off-topic digressions.	6-8 points
<b>Improvable</b>	The Personal Meaning essay fills around half a page with a reflection on how your personal understanding has impacted your life and addresses only Theme 4 Objective 1 or 5 by clearly and coherently summarizing at least half of the four topics suggested in the guidelines on pages 4-5 above, though some of the topics and the Theme Objective may be unclear or crowded out by off-topic digressions.	3-5 points
<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	The Personal Reflection Essays document omits the Personal Meaning reflection on how your personal understanding has impacted your life or it falls short of half a page in length, barely addresses Theme Objective 1, 5, or the four topics suggested in the guidelines on pages 4-5	0-2 points

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	above, adds off-topic digressions that may even bring the essay to the required length or more, and/or is plagiarized in whole or in part.	
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### Quality of Writing

The Personal Reflection Essays are correct in terms of spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax and mechanics, and are generally professional in style throughout.

<b>Excellent</b>	Well-written, with few or no spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanical or stylistic errors.	5 points
<b>Satisfactory</b>	Generally well-written but with some spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanical and/or stylistic errors.	3-4 points
<b>Improvable</b>	Several spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanical and/or stylistic errors.	1-2 points
<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	Too many errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, mechanics (e.g., capitalization) and/or stylistic errors.	0 points

To gain a PLAR credit, the Personal Reflection Essays must score a **minimum of 20** out of 40 points.

<b>Points Total</b>		/ 40
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To gain a PLAR credit, your complete PLAR Portfolio must score a **minimum of 65** out of 130 points.

<b>Portfolio Points Total</b>		/ 130
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