



Betty Bishop earned enough college credit from life experience that she was able to complete her associate degree at Southern State Community College.

Life experience could lead to college credit at SSCC

Do you have life experience that might be eligible for college credit? There's one way to find out. Attend a free Prior Learning Assessment Workshop from 1-5 p.m. Friday, April 4, on Southern State Community College's Central Campus, 100 Hobart Drive, Hillsboro.

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is a term used to describe learning gained outside a traditional academic environment. Put another way, it is learning and knowledge you have acquired while living your life: working; participating in employer training programs; serving in the military; studying independently; volunteering or doing community service; or studying open source courseware.

In short, PLA is the evaluation and assessment of an individual's life learning for college credit, certification, or advanced standing toward further education or training.

When Betty Bishop retired in 2013, she had an impressive roster of accomplishments. But one was missing – her college degree.

“The day I retired I was in a meeting with Dr. Boys (SSCC President),” said Bishop. “I told him I'd like the opportunity to finish my degree. Can I use my life experience?”

In fact, she could. And Bishop had plenty of experience from which to draw. Among other roles, she has served as mayor, community development director, and city manager, in addition to volunteer work with Grow Highland County, Highland County Chamber of Commerce, and the Scioto Paint Valley Mental Health board.

“I needed to set an example for my family and my community,” said Bishop. “I needed them to know that education is the most precious thing one can acquire.”

Bishop had always dreamed of going to college, but her father had a heart attack while she was in high school and she entered the workforce instead to help her family financially.

In 1980, Bishop was elected mayor of Hillsboro and was instrumental in orchestrating the site choice for Southern State.

“The Southern State project was important to me,” she said. “I wanted people to have an opportunity to get a college degree. I was told other communities were going to work hard to bring Southern State to their city, but I said they’re not going to work at it like I’m going to work at it.”

When the campus opened, she immediately enrolled in classes and earned 34 hours of credit, but, again, life happened and she stepped out to take care of her aging parents. She said she just had to forget about her degree for the time being.

But time passed, and she retired, and she asked an offhand question of Dr. Boys, and she got her answer. Indeed she could tap her life experience for college credit. Bishop worked with Associate Professor Julia Basham in documenting her myriad roles, skills and training, and ultimately chalked up 30 more credit hours – enough to earn her an associate degree.

“At my age, I might never use it again in my life,” she said. “But I have always celebrated education and it was important for me to wrap this up. Even though it took me almost an entire lifetime, it was worth pursuing.”

To learn more about the April 4 workshop on Prior Learning Assessment, please contact Amy McClellan at amcclellan@sscc.edu or 800-628-7722, ext. 2785. Those interested should bring documentation of eligible experience. Documents could include verification of employment and positions held, job description, letter of recommendation from a supervisor (on company letterhead), and certificates of completion for non-credit courses or workshops.