Challenge Exam: Definition and Purpose

A *challenge exam* is a specially designed assessment that allows students to demonstrate their knowledge and mastery of the course learning outcomes without having to complete the entire course. These exams are typically offered to students who have prior knowledge or experience in the subject, which they can substantiate through real-world experience, previous coursework, or independent study.

The key purpose of a challenge exam is to give students an opportunity to earn credit for a course they believe they have already mastered. If they perform well on the exam, they can bypass the course requirements and move forward in their academic program without repeating content they already know.

Differences Between Challenge Exam and Final Exam

1. **Purpose:**
   - *Challenge Exam:* Designed to assess whether a student has the prior knowledge or experience necessary to skip taking a course. It is used for earning course credit without attending the course.
   - *Final Exam:* A summative assessment intended to evaluate a student's understanding and mastery of all course material covered throughout the semester.
2. **Content Focus:**
   - *Challenge Exam:* Generally focuses on testing the essential learning outcomes and core concepts of the course in a comprehensive manner. It covers the material that would typically be taught in the course but does not necessarily follow the course structure or the pace of the class.
   - *Final Exam:* Covers all the material that has been taught during the course, including lectures, readings, assignments, and activities. It reflects the instructional approach and content sequence used throughout the course.
3. **Eligibility:**
   - *Challenge Exam:* Only available to students who can demonstrate prior knowledge or experience. Students may need to provide documentation of relevant work, prior coursework, or expertise. Students who have previously or are currently enrolled in a course are not eligible for challenge exams (per CPL policy).
   - *Final Exam:* Open to all students who have completed the course requirements, regardless of their background or prior knowledge.
4. **Preparation:**
   - *Challenge Exam:* Students typically prepare on their own, as they are expected to already possess a level of proficiency in the subject matter.
   - *Final Exam:* Students prepare based on the content covered during the course, including lectures, discussions, and assignments.
5. **Outcomes:**

- *Challenge Exam:* If a student passes the challenge exam, they earn credit for the course without having to take it. The credit earned does not equate to a course grade on the student transcript.
- *Final Exam:* The result of the final exam contributes to the student's grade in the course, which then impacts their final course grade.

The recommended passing score for a challenge exam is department specific, with the following considerations:

1. **Standard Passing Score:**
   - A common passing score for a challenge exam is around **70% or C grade equivalent**. This is based on the idea that the student should demonstrate sufficient knowledge to prove they have mastered the essential content of the course, without necessarily mastering every single detail.
2. **Consistency with Course Expectations:**
   - The passing score should align with the expectations of the course itself. For instance, if a course typically requires a minimum of 70% to pass, then the challenge exam score should also be set at this threshold. Some departments may set a higher passing score (e.g., 80%) for more advanced or specialized courses.
3. **Departmental/Faculty Discretion:**
   - In some cases, the faculty or department may have discretion in determining the passing score. They may choose a higher threshold for certain courses based on their content complexity, or they may adjust the passing score to align with industry standards, especially in professional or technical fields.
4. **Consideration of Exam Format:**
   - The format and difficulty of the challenge exam should also be considered. For example, if the challenge exam is more comprehensive or includes application-based questions (e.g., case studies or practical exercises), a higher passing score may be deemed appropriate to reflect the higher level of mastery required.

Key Takeaways:

- **70%** is a common threshold for passing, though this can vary.
- The passing score should be **aligned with the course's expected outcomes** and level of difficulty.
- Academic programs may adjust the passing score based on **specific course content**, **discipline**, and **academic standards**.

Challenge Exam Process

1. Administration Process:

- **Application/Eligibility:**
  - For courses that have a challenge exam option, students can apply via the Prior Learning Portal www.uvu.edu/priorlearningportal
  - Some programs may also require students to meet certain prerequisites before being eligible for a challenge exam.
- **Scheduling/Administration:**
  - Challenge exams can be scheduled directly with the academic department, or through the UVU Testing Center. It is highly recommended that these "high stakes" exams are given in person or with an authorized bricks and mortar testing partner, as there are so many ways online exams can be compromised.
  - Students need to register or sign up for a challenge exam in advance, and you may limit the number of times a student can take a challenge exam.
- **Exam Format:**
  - The format of the challenge exam often mirrors that of a traditional exam, though it can also include other types of assessments such as essays, practical assessments, or projects. Some programs may offer multiple-choice, essay-based, or oral exams/interview, depending on the course content.
  - The exam may be comprehensive or focus on specific skills or concepts that align with the learning outcomes of the course.
- **Assessment and Grading:**
  - Challenge exams are typically graded by faculty members or department staff who are familiar with the course content. We have created a provisional partnership with OTL to utilize Canvas for this purpose. Contact the CPL director for more information on this process.
  - We recommend using a standardized rubric to assess the student's performance, ensuring that grading is consistent and fair. This rubric needs to be documented and ready to provide during internal audits and accreditation reviews.

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2. Costs:

- **Fees for Challenge Exams:**
  - Once a student is approved for a challenge exam through the CPL portal, the student is charged an application fee. This application fee stays with the CPL office. An additional assessment fee can be charged to the student for each assessment used, regardless of whether the student passes or fails the assessment. All assessment fees will go to the department, minus a proctoring fee given to the Testing Center if utilized.

- o Fees may cover administrative costs, exam preparation, and faculty time to create and grade the exam. In some cases, the fee may also cover the issuance of credit if the student passes the exam.
- **Potential Additional Costs:**
  - o In cases where the challenge exam includes a practical component (such as a lab or performance-based test), there could be additional costs related to equipment or facilities usage. In such cases, contact the director of CPL for further discussion.

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3. Resources:

- **Study Materials:**
  - o Many programs provide study guides or suggested reading lists to help students prepare for challenge exams. These resources are designed to give students an understanding of the core content and key concepts they need to master.
  - o In some cases, students may also have access to previous exams or practice tests to better prepare.
- **Faculty Support:**
  - o While faculty are generally not expected to provide direct tutoring for challenge exam preparation, some programs might offer workshops or review sessions prior to the exam to help students understand what to expect and how to study effectively.
  - o Faculty members may also be available to answer questions or provide clarification on course content as it relates to the challenge exam.
- **Testing Center:**
  - o UVU's Testing Center is available to administer challenge exams. The center is equipped to handle the logistical aspects of exam scheduling, administration, exam security, live in-person proctoring, and video recording of exam is retained for 6 months.
- **Recognition of the Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) Office:**
  - o UVU has a dedicated CPL office that assists students in navigating the challenge exam process, including the application, eligibility determination, and scheduling.

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4. Additional Considerations:

- **Limitations on Challenge Exam Use:**
  - o Some programs may have limitations on how many challenge exams a student can take. For example, they may only allow challenge exams for introductory-level courses and not for advanced courses within a program.
- **Impact on Academic Record:**
  - o If a student passes a challenge exam, the credit earned may be listed on their academic record without a grade. The credit may appear as "credit by

examination" or as CR. This means the exam result does not affect the student's GPA.

Summary:

Challenge Exam Administration:

- Application-based, requiring prior experience or coursework.
- May involve multiple exam formats, including written, oral, or practical assessments.

Costs:

- Fees include an application fee to the CPL office, and as assessment fee to the academic department.
- Additional costs may apply for equipment, or special resources (with approval from the AVP over CPL).

Resources:

- Study materials (guides, practice exams) may be available.
- Faculty, CPL Office and the Testing Center can provide administrative support.
- Some programs provide additional faculty assistance.

In general, challenge exams provide students with an efficient way to gain credit for prior learning, but they are managed with the same level of rigor as traditional course assessments to ensure academic integrity and fairness.