

90 Credit Task Force Report
February 13, 2026

Introduction:

The 90-credit degree task force, a volunteer initiative, was formed in April 2025 to explore the possibility of offering 90-credit degree options at William Paterson. After evaluating current research and thinking about 90-credit degree options, the Task Force finds a dearth of relevant background information and 90-credit institutional models whose experience is **directly applicable** to regional publics, like William Paterson University. Of course, this brings into sharp relief obvious and inherent risks to our institution and the quality of the education provided in a 90-credit degree context.

As a result, decision-making, resource allocation, campus community and local community impact and efficacy of a 90-credit program at William Paterson University will more likely be successful based on the following: faculty support, university marketing and publicity of the particular 90-credit program, and how robust and reliable institutional research of current and potential students for that program will be.

As an institution, and according to NECHE Standards for Accreditation, “the institution must clearly distinguish the degree with a prefix that it requires fewer than 120 credit hours, include language prominently displayed in marketing materials, including on websites, that graduate, professional schools, and employers may not accept baccalaureate degrees with fewer than 120 credits, specify the program creates a pathway to a four-year degree, ensure institutions develop an assessment plan that measures student outcomes, including post-graduation outcomes, define curricular requirements, and, critically, meet NECHE’s Standards for Accreditation.”

The Value of Being First

As an institution, being first in the 90-credit space requires that we can confidently decide on the clear risks and possible rewards in such a venture; right now, it’s very difficult to do that based on current information. The research isn’t very applicable to WP, so any results would be suspect, and many of the few institutions who are implementing 90-credit are doing so as niche, *pilot* or online programs. While an unfortunate moniker, a *pilot* program often recognizes inherent challenges and problems with the initiative and also communicates to the community that the initiative lacks the requisite depth and breadth in order for the institution to fully commit but is still, at some level, “worth trying.”

This last point is worth expanding. The task force concluded that there may be value in a 90-credit program to the institution, for specific applied programs in which faculty and students are identified as being highly interested, but this isn't the same as believing that students will find *educational value*. Educational value is a moving target for students and "why are we creating a 90-credit program in the first place" will lead us to more relevant student perspectives.

Therefore, the task force isn't **recommending** whether WP should pursue 90-credit degrees. We can only present current thinking, questions to consider and links to institutions that, as noted, are not like WP in many ways.

Additional Institutions that are in progress on a 90-credit degree or have programs:

Johnson and Wales University

Northwood University

BYU-Pathway Worldwide /BYU Idaho/Ensign College

University of Maine Systems

Utah System of Higher Education

College-in-3 Exchange – www.college-in-3.org Approximately 52 member institutions. It's unclear how the *College-in-3 Exchange* functions, that is, whether it's an advisory group, "think tank," information sharing group, etc.

As is clear from the above list, it's essential to note that there are limited real-world examples and best practices associated with 90-credit degrees in traditional academic institutions. First, there is a lack of comprehensive information on the career and market value of 90-credit degrees **compared** to the research and career data related to traditional liberal arts degrees. Second, several institutions have created 90-credit online programs, which no one can argue attracts a different demographic than brick-and-mortar programs.

Third, at William Paterson, for library faculty, introductory library classes occur in foundational courses when librarians are invited. If those introductory courses are exempted, as part of a 90-credit degree, a learning and knowledge vacuum will result.

Fourth, students often transfer into the University with over 65 credits, sometimes over 90 when they come to WPU. What will happen if they are seeking to earn a 90-credit degree with our university when they need to have 50% of their major course minimally completed at WP to be able to earn the diploma from us. What criteria will there be if any for students interested in a 90-credit degree program?

Last, whatever the “mix” of credits that is used to create a 90-credit program, there will be shifts in expectations along the lines of major requirements, necessity of minors, credit for prior learning, and other considerations. This is a significant institutional challenge, particularly since the recent UCC 2.0 implementation.

Essential SWOT Analysis for WP

**This SWOT was developed, in part, utilizing Senate Exec feedback

Some Potential Strengths

A 90-credit degree could be beneficial to some specific WP programs. Faculty can be involved and develop a degree tailored to their students. A 90-credit degree could be a very student-centered strategy, maintaining academic quality and simultaneously engaging students in interesting ways.

A potentially faster and cheaper path to a degree, with earlier potential wage gains and lower debt. [NWCCU+1](#). Federal aid eligibility is preserved for approved 90-credit programs. [NWCCU](#) Programs often accept prior learning/experience to speed completion. [University of Maine System](#)

Could be a tool to re-engage the ~40 million+ adults with some college education but no credential; a good strategy to address enrollment cliffs and workforce gaps. [nscresearchcenter.org+2Lumina Foundation+2](#)

Chance to design competency-based, stackable curricula focused on outcomes; accreditors are explicitly evaluating learning and employment outcomes. [NWCCU](#)

A 90-credit degree could address significant NJ workforce needs, which would be valuable if those needs could be linked to the current WP curriculum and a 90-credit degree could be marketed and publicized effectively.

Potential Weaknesses:

A 90-credit degree could signal uncertainty in some sectors until market familiarity grows. [Inside Higher Ed](#)

Generally, this is not a good fit for disciplines with mandated clinical/contact hours (e.g., engineering, many health professions, some agriculture)—programmatic accreditors typically drive the length. [NWCCU](#)

Requires careful curation of gen-ed/upper-division credits (≥ 30 at the home institution) and robust assessment plans. [New England Commission on Higher Education](#) Must guard against cannibalizing 120-credit programs; pilots typically limit eligibility and require clear internal transfer paths back to 120. [University of Maine System](#)

UCC 2.0 requires time to be fully implemented and to determine how and whether those credits will be part of a 90-credit degree program. Robust 90-credit degree programs might involve removing electives. It's unclear how certificates would work with a 90-credit degree program.

Thinking about time on task, 90-credit program implementation appears to be another faculty and staff "ask." For instance, managing transfer students and their credits would seem to be complicated by 90-credit degrees and would likely require more time from staff and faculty.

Potential Opportunities

It's appropriate to initially locate any 90-credit degree within WP Online and the College of Adult and Professional Studies. Credit for prior learning would likely be an essential element, and this College has extensive experience with CPL evaluation.

Limit 90 credits to adult degree completers (e.g., ≥ 2 years out, prior credits, working learners), with CPL (credit for prior learning) and competency-based or flexible delivery.

If developed and marketed correctly, 90-credit degree programs could positively differentiate William Paterson, possibly increase enrollment, and improve reputational status with State legislature stakeholders.

Potential Threats

Faculty are resistant to large-scale initiatives that don't immediately demonstrate a clear throughline to student success — beyond expediting degree completion and saving money — and this type of initiative will likely increase faculty work *time* beyond classroom and curriculum development.

Clear institutional purpose and outcomes are paramount, as purpose drives decision-making, resource allocation, and impacts the work-life balance for staff and faculty. Institutional clarity empowers faculty to develop the most effective and targeted programs for their students. Currently, the institutional purpose and desired outcomes are unclear.

Thorough, evidence-based research is required on 90-credit degree value in the NJ marketplace and its correlation to job and career success. This is an unknown, therefore, it poses an inherent risk.

Important questions and other concerns

retrieved on 2/5/26 from <https://nwccu.org/news/v6i4-letter-from-the-president/>

- How do 90-credit, three-year baccalaureate programs ensure the same level of educational quality as 120 semester/180 quarter credit, four-year programs?
- What is the specific structure of the 90-credit, three-year baccalaureate degree programs, and how do they differ from four-year degrees? Are there provisions for stackable programs, and how do they enhance the educational experience?
- Will the 90-credit, three-year baccalaureate program allow for and include experiential education and capstone courses and experiences?
- How have students, faculty, and other relevant stakeholders been involved in the development and evaluation of these proposals?
- How might the combination of concurrent/dual enrollment credits received at high schools be incorporated into a 90-credit, three-year baccalaureate degree program?
- What will be the impact of 90-credit, three-year degree programs on community colleges? Is there a risk that these factors could temporarily diminish community colleges' ability to attract students?
- Will students with a three-year baccalaureate degree meet various post-graduation requirements, including for professional licensure, employment, graduate education?
- What will be the overall impact on institutional finances and reputation?
- How might this influence grant funding, graduate school placement, faculty recruitment, and other institutional aspects?
- Will student learning outcomes of students in 90-credit, three-year degree programs be comparable to those of four-year degree programs? How will success of these programs be measured and what benchmarks will be used?

- Will graduate and professional degree programs consider applicants who have completed three-year baccalaureate degrees?
- What implications will the introduction of three-year baccalaureate programs have on the transferability of college credits earned in high school or at two-year institutions? Specifically, how will this affect the seamless transfer of credits into receiving institutions that have condensed learning outcomes and subject matter mastery into 90 semester credits?

Conclusion

The 90-credit Task Force appreciates the opportunity to present this information and hopes it will serve as a guide for the WP Administration to make thoughtful and carefully considered choices that, no doubt, will impact the daily lives of students, staff and faculty on the WP campus.

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