

FAQs - 90-Credit Bachelor's Degrees (90CB)

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1. What is a 90-Credit Bachelor's Degree?

A 90-Credit Bachelor's degree is a bachelor's degree that requires less than 120 credits to attain. A 90-Credit Bachelor's degree is not an associate's degree, a technical degree, or an undergraduate certificate program. Therefore, any 90-Credit Bachelor's Degree will have the same reporting requirements, the same financial aid rules, and the same internal approval process (Provost, Faculty Senate, Board of Regents) and accreditation review as any other bachelor's degree offered at WSU.

To help faculty, staff, and students understand the similarities and differences between a 90-Credit Bachelor's degree and 120-Credit Bachelor's of Science and 120-Credit Bachelor's of Arts degrees, a new section of the WSU Catalog has been proposed by the Academic Affairs Committee. If 90-Credit Bachelor's degrees were approved, this information would be placed on page 36 of the current WSU Catalog (available here: <https://registrar.wsu.edu/media/j11p1nao/current-wsu-catalog.pdf>), just before the College-level inventory of available undergraduate degree programs.

2. Understanding the 90-Credit Bachelor's Degree?

Overview

A 90CB degree is a reduced credit bachelor's degree that is completed in as little as three years. For comparison, the BA and BS degrees are 120-Credit (minimum), four-year undergraduate degrees. Like BA and BS degrees, 90CR degrees may be offered across a wide range of disciplines. The three degree types share foundational academic structures but differ in curricular focus, flexibility, and career preparation.

Similarities

- **General Education Requirements:** All three degrees require completion of the UCORE General education requirements.
- **Major Declaration:** Students in all three degrees must declare a major and fulfill its specific requirements.
- **Career and Graduate School Access:** All three degrees can lead to professional careers and/or graduate study, depending on the major and a student's future goals.

Defining Features

Feature	90-Credit Bachelor (90CB)	Bachelor of Arts (BA)	Bachelor of Science (BS)
Semester Credit Hours for Graduation	Require between 90-119 semester credit hours	Require 120 or more semester credit hours	Require 120 or more semester credit hours
Curricular Focus	Narrowly specialized training and education	Broad liberal arts training and education	Specialized, technical, and scientific training and education
Elective Flexibility	Minimal or no electives, mostly UCORE and major-specific courses	More electives and interdisciplinary options	Fewer electives, more major-specific courses
Math & Science Emphasis	Depends on the major field of study	Usually less intensive	More intensive, often includes lab work
Common Fields	Potentially any area	Humanities, social sciences, arts, languages, education	STEM fields, business, health sciences

3. Under what authority can WSU offer 90-Credit Bachelor's degrees?

In July 2025, NWCCU, WSU's regional accreditor, approved institutions to begin to offer three-year bachelor's degrees, i.e., programs with 90-119 semester credits (6-8 semesters) instead of the traditional 120 credit minimum. According to NWCCU (<https://nwccu.org/news/v7i4-bachelors-degrees/>) they will require the names of degree programs of less than 120 credit hours to be distinguished from degrees of at least 120 credit hours through a different naming schema. WSU has decided to call these 90-Credit Bachelor's to distinguish them from other bachelor's degrees (e.g., Science, Arts, Music, Fine Arts).

WSU is allowed to offer 90-Credit Bachelor's degrees under Washington State code. RCW 28B.10.118 (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=28B.10.118>) defines an "Accelerated Bachelor's degree" as a baccalaureate degree that students can earn in three years without attending summer classes or enrolling in more than a full-time class load during the regular academic year. This RCW section states that WSU is able to offer Accelerated Bachelor's degrees (i.e. 90-Credit Bachelor's degrees) after approval.

4. Why should WSU offer 90-Credit Bachelor's degrees?

From conversations involving university leadership, Faculty Senate leadership, and other institutions, a non-exclusive list of rationales for WSU to offer 90-Credit Bachelor's degrees include the following considerations.

- a. Offering 90-Credit Bachelor's degrees is aligned with WSU's Land Grant mission to provide a high-quality education to the people of Washington State. There are degree programs and careers that may be better served by a shorter duration bachelor's degree, and these credentials will help us meet that demand. For example, other

institutions are offering 90-Credit Bachelor's degrees in areas such as Computer Science, Cybersecurity, Communication, Global Health, and Hospitality Management.

- b. Educational quality will be ensured through the established formal Provost Office/Faculty Senate/Board of Regents/NWCCU review process. In addition, NWCCU will ensure that these degrees meet similar thresholds of student learning outcomes assessment as traditional 120-Credit Bachelors' degrees.
- c. These degrees will allow WSU to graduate some students in a shorter time with lower student debt. That is expected to make WSU more competitive in the higher education marketplace and will hopefully allow us to attract more students as we enter a time of declining high school graduation rates in Washington State. Other institutions across NWCCU are exploring these degree options and in Idaho and Utah institutions are already offering them indicating that WSU will be a competitive disadvantage in the near future as they have wider availability.
- d. Nationally, other R1 institutions are exploring or planning to offer 90-Credit Bachelor's degrees. Examples include the University of Maine, Kansas State University, the University of Miami, and the University of Central Florida. Other institutions that are competitors to WSU who are looking at 90-Credit bachelor's degrees include Central Washington University and Portland State University.
- e. 90-Credit Bachelor's degrees will allow departments, programs, and campuses to be creative in their curriculum development. For instance, some existing degrees may benefit from converting to an 90-Credit Bachelor's and reducing their total credits below 120 by eliminating non-major elective credits. Other areas may find that a 90-Credit Accelerated Bachelor's allows them to construct a high-quality degree that is simply not feasible now due to the 120-credit threshold.
- f. 90-Credit Bachelor's degrees may provide WSU new avenues to attract previously enrolled students with some credit, no degree, an important student demographic group for our institution.
- g. Instead of 4+1 bachelor's to master's programs, some areas may be able to create 3+1 programs instead. In areas where the Master's degree is the credential required for licensing or has better career outcomes, these programs may be attractive, especially if they don't require summer courses like current 120-Credit accelerated degrees.

5. How will WSU ensure that a 90CB is useful for students and not harmful for future employment or graduate school?

These degrees will be required to be developed in partnership with graduate and professional programs and corporate and non-corporate employers to ensure that they will be recognized credentials for graduates. Also, this is mandated by NWCCU – See FAQ #5.

6. How will WSU ensure the quality of 90CBs?

According to our accreditor, NWCCU, they will allow two types of substantive change proposals related to 90-Credit Bachelor's degrees:

1. A 90-Credit Bachelor's degree that is unique and has between 90-119 credits
2. A 90-Credit Bachelor's degree that is created by dropping the credit hours of an existing degree.

Any 90-Credit Bachelor's degree proposal to NWCCU will be required to address:

- a. How the student learning experience with general education/free electives at the lower division (200-level or below) and upper division (300-level or above) will be ensured. (In other words, WSU must have the same General Education requirements for Bachelor's and 90-Credit Bachelor's degrees)
- b. How the disciplinary depth and breadth will be ensured.
- c. What is the expected graduation pathway for this type of degree (i.e., workforce, graduate school, etc.).
- d. What type of review and assessment the institution has done to ensure that the proposed program will not hinder or limit a student's ability to obtain employment, industry certification, and/or apply to graduate school.
- e. What type of review and assessment the institution has done to ensure that there are no programmatic or specialized accreditation requirements limiting or impacting the ability to make this change.
- f. A robust curriculum map, program learning outcomes, and assessment plan are essential elements for any successful degree proposal.

Therefore, even though NWCCU will entertain proposals to create 90-Credit Bachelor's degrees from member institutions, the standards that must be inherent in planning and execution of one of these degrees is substantially higher than what is required for a traditional 120-Credit Bachelor's degree.

In addition, participants in WSU's internal review process (Provost's Office, Faculty Senate, and Board of Regents) will also be considering proposals in light of these heightened standards.

7. Are all existing and future degree programs at WSU expected to be 90-Credit Bachelor's degrees?

The unequivocal answer to this question is NO. There is no expectation by anyone in leadership, state leadership, or our accreditor that all programs become 90-Credit Bachelor's degrees. Many, if not most, of the degree programs that currently exist at WSU will likely never be candidates for the 90-Credit Bachelor's format due to external accreditation and/or the education needed for students to meet the learning outcomes for the major/degree. However, there may be existing degrees and, more likely, new degrees that would be suited for the 90-Credit Bachelor's degree requirements. The decision to move or create any program in either

the 90-Credit or 120-Credit Bachelor's format is at the discretion of the faculty in the department/program/college offering the degree.

8. How would a 90CB affect enrollment (and therefore, WSU's budget)?

Any program seeking to create a new 90CB or to transition an existing 120 credit degree into a 90CB will be expected to explain how the 90CB will bring new enrollment into WSU (not simply shift enrollment from other existing programs at WSU). In addition, any program proposing a 90CB will need to consult with any potentially affected programs; applications will need to include letters regarding potential impacts from those programs to help assess the likelihood that enrollment will simply be shifting from other existing 120-Credit degrees to a new 90-Credit bachelor's degree.