

WSCJTC Equivalency Academy FAQs

Why did the Equivalency Academy program change?

Over the last several years, the WSCJTC has reorganized and re-evaluated many of our core programs. Major upgrades were made in the Basic Law Enforcement Academy, Corrections Officer Academy, Instructor Development courses, and Leadership courses, just to name just a few. We focused on adult learning principles, student-centered facilitation, distance learning, problem-based learning, and established educational standards. The Equivalency Academy program directly benefited from all the lessons we've learned working with all the other programs.

The structure of the Equivalency Academy is very similar to online college courses. Anyone with experience in higher education programs online will immediately recognize many of the program tools and features. We use the Desire-to-Learn system through the University of Wisconsin-Platteville servers to host the online classroom environment.

At the same time this program raises academic levels, it also represents cost savings for the WSCJTC and our client agencies. Offering this course online helps us continue to deliver quality training to our clients, while reducing many of the overhead costs associated with an on-site course. For agencies hiring laterals, this course provides a way to keep employees working throughout the course – they will no longer need to be gone for two weeks.

Another important benefit is the 9-week program fosters much more absorption of the material, and supports application of learning to the on-the-job training occurring simultaneously. The former course structure simply did not challenge students up to the level we now expect from our academic programs.

What's the length and time commitment of the course?

The program is 80 hours total, completed over 9 weeks, with about 12 to 18 hours per week of expected participation and homework. The time commitment varies depending on the student and the agency's ability to schedule uninterrupted time to complete the necessary course work. The first day is on-site at the Burien campus of the WSCJTC. The final week includes a second 1 day on-site at the WSCJTC campus. (See the syllabus and schedule for details on exactly what is expected from week to week.)

Can students work ahead of the schedule (and finish the course faster than 9 weeks)?

No. Like most online college courses, the class will work through the assignments and discussions in sync with each other. Discussions about the material is where much of the learning will take place, so the class will need to stay together to provide that opportunity. While students are encouraged to check the syllabus, look ahead at all the course materials, and study on their own pace, the assignments and weekly discussions must be completed during their proper windows, and by their listed due dates.

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What will the work be like?

The course centers on 4 Write-up papers. Every 2 weeks a problem-based learning exercise (PBLE) will be presented, and students will use a defined problem solving process to work through their research. These PBLE Write-up papers detail what is learned and how the student would handle the problem on patrol. The PBLE Write-ups are individual projects, not group work.

In addition to the PBLE Write-ups, there are small weekly assignments and online discussions that occur, as well as self-paced eLearning study sessions which relate to the PBLEs and help students prepare for the final written exam. (See the syllabus and schedule for details on exactly what is expected from week to week.)

Papers... Study... Exam... that sounds like work!

Yes, it is. It's about the same amount of work as a typical online college course. This course will require actual knowledge and proper application of Washington State law and criminal procedure. Furthermore, since a large part of patrol work revolves around writing skills and articulation of information, it's reasonable to require a modest amount of writing to pass this course.

What are the participation expectations?

Students are expected to complete all assignments and participate in the online discussions throughout the course. It will not be necessary to log-in to the online classroom every single day; however, it will be necessary to log-in several times a week. Some of the weekly discussion assignments will ask students to evaluate and respond to other student's posts. This will require critical thinking, honest and constructive feedback, and references to sources to support conclusions. Replying, "*Nice post. I agree,*" will not be sufficient. (See the syllabus and schedule for details on exactly what is expected from week to week.)

What if a student does not participate or fails to complete assignments?

The instructor's job is to support the students and assist them toward success. The first time an assignment is not up to par, the instructor will provide coaching feedback and offer an opportunity to correct the work. We want students to understand the material and pass the course with flying colors, so they can take that knowledge into the field!

If there is indication that a student is falling behind in the course, the instructor will contact the student, either by email or phone, to determine how to get the student back on track. We will also notify the student's sponsor agency to keep them in the loop.

What if a student drops out of the course or fails the course?

The student will not be certified as a Washington peace officer. Students only have one opportunity to enroll in and complete the course.

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What is the grading and testing like?

The course has four “areas” which will be graded. Each of the four areas must be passed at 70% average or higher to complete the course.

- **4 Papers** – [25pts each / 100pts total] – graded using an evaluation rubric (rubric included in the pre-course materials).
- **8 Weekly eLearning Assignments** – [5pts each / 40pts total] – graded based on correct application of law and procedure.
- **8 Weekly Discussions/Participation** – [10pts each / 80pts total] – graded based on active participation and thoughtful content.
- **1 Final Written Exam** – [87pts total] – around 70 multiple-choice questions, with 1 essay question requiring application of the problem solving process used throughout the course.

How will you know if the right person is doing the online work?

We’re confident this won’t really be an issue, since our client agencies are doing background investigations, interviews, and testing to hire employees with integrity. In addition, when students arrive on campus for the 2 on-site days, we’ll be checking department IDs and taking attendance. The final written exam will be conducted on site, and will require that the material of the course was learned and can be applied.

Students asking fellow officers for help →good!

Students having someone else do their work →bad!

Also, as most colleges do, we will be using a service that checks papers for plagiarism. We expect that each student does their own work – that’s when the learning occurs.

What kind of computer equipment and connection will students need?

Any decent Internet connection and regular browser (such as Microsoft Internet Explorer) will work. Dial-up will work, but may be a bit slow for downloading and uploading documents. Students will be able to log-in from any Internet-connected computer.

Students will need to provide an email for communication with the instructor. This can be a personal or work email, as long as students check it regularly.

Who developed this course?

This online Equivalency Academy course was developed by members of the WSCJTC Development, Training, & Standards division and staff of the Basic Law Enforcement Academy.

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Who's teaching the course?

The course will be instructed by current or former Basic Law Enforcement Academy TAC Officers who have several years teaching experience in the areas of criminal law and/or criminal procedures. There will also be support from the WSCJTC Development, Training, & Standards staff as needed.

Will an on-site equivalency course still be offered as well?

No. This online program replaces the 2-week on-site course, and is the only method for lateral peace officer certification.

How many times per year will this course be offered?

We are currently running 4 courses per year.

What should agencies do with lateral employees while they're enrolled in the course?

This decision is entirely up to the hiring agency. Every agency's hiring process and field training program is structured differently. One huge benefit of this course is that it allows agencies to get their lateral hires out working sooner. We recommend that students are given time during the work week to conduct research, complete assignments, and participate in the online discussions. Many agencies give their student(s) at least one shift per week to work on course assignments. We also recommend that the students' supervisors are coordinating their agency's FTO/PTO process to compliment the online course.

What's the application and registration process like?

Registration will still be handled through the BLEA registrar.