

by northwest7  
on December 4, 2016  
under Opinion  
∞ Permalink

## COMMENTARY: CHAPEL CREDIT FOR CHURCH ATTENDANCE

Posted: Wednesday, November 30, 2016 6:00 pm

By Catherine Brakke

Photo credit Zac Price



Year after year, students have asked questions about the spiritual life credit requirements. Some think 35 credits are unrealistic and hard to achieve while trying to fulfill other commitments. The Northwest University faculty are well aware of this concern and have done their best to help accommodate those who struggle to meet the expectation by adding additional opportunities. Students can now receive credit for attending one of the many life groups, Pursuits, regularly-scheduled chapels, Monday morning devotionals, and a variety of other dispersed opportunities around campus.

Despite the extra options, many students still feel restless about chapel requirements and are asking the question: should outside church attendance be one of the various options for receiving chapel credit?

"I think if we attend outside church we should most definitely get chapel credit. I shouldn't have to sacrifice time with my church family who have invested so much time into helping me grow in order to meet a requirement. It seems a bit counterproductive," said Kat Falvey, a commuter student

Many local churches are the ones encouraging students to attend NU. Once attending, some students feel it's almost impossible to stay connected to the church that has invested so much time into their lives because they are trying to reach a certain amount of spiritual life credits. In addition, by having more current NU students attend local churches, there could be an influx of potential students in their youth groups and Sunday schools, who are hearing about NU via current students. The more students attending churches outside the NU bubble, the more people will hear about the school.

Other students feel that while adding church as a possible chapel credit would be convenient for some students, it would be too much work to track and is not, technically, NU's responsibility.

"It would require a whole restructuring of chapel [and] the chapel system. It might or might not 'work', but I think the real question is whether or not it's beneficial. The intention for encouraging church attendance is because the school/chapel is not church. We ought to go to church because there's something the local church offers that the university never could," said Tessa Curl, an NU student.

Several local churches provide the benefits of multigenerational community, spiritual growth, and a variety of cultures and worship styles. Part of Christianity is being in community and fellowshiping with other Christians. Outside church attendance is certainly beneficial for those reasons. Allowing credit for attendance would encourage this healthy spiritual discipline when so many people use the excuse, "I already go to church."

There is still the matter of where to draw the line. Though the school has a gathering of Christians, which is part of the definition of a church, NU is a university and they cannot monitor everything outside of campus. That is why they encourage outside church attendance, but offer as many tools as they can to help students manage their chapel credits and schedules.

"It's not just about spiritual formation, it's about spiritual formation within our community," said Assistant Pastor Christian Dawson

It's not just about spiritual formation, it's about spiritual formation within our community," said Assistant Pastor Christian Dawson.

Allowing outside attendance to count as chapel credit could help bridge the gap between school and "the real world." Students could easily be involved with local churches, therefore, less likely to disconnect after graduation and encourage healthy long-term church commitment.

"As an NU student, I struggle on Sundays getting to church because I feel disconnected from my home church. I do all of my church activities at NU so I can get chapel credit and pass. It's hard," said senior, Trinity Harris.

Another major concern with allowing church attendance to count towards chapel credit is how administration would track attendance. It would be difficult, but not impossible. Similar to outside internships, students could fill out a release form with pastors' signatures. Perhaps the amount of credit a student could receive could be limited in order to encourage community on campus. It would be similar to the personal devotions that students can do for five credits. Students could journal about their experiences and turn that in or a similar rule could be in place that's used with life groups where a student can only get one credit per week from that avenue.

The goal wouldn't be to make participation at NU unnecessary; it would be to give students an opportunity to contribute to their local church, those who legitimately struggle to find that time within their schedules.

"It would be cool, but there is no real way to track that," said sophomore, Joe Stack.

"From an administration stand point, it would be so hard to manage. It would be nearly impossible to monitor. It doesn't go against, but it doesn't help the idea of how all of us work together to make each other more like Jesus in this community for this short period of time," said Dawson.

Ultimately, NU is a school and though it is also a gathering of Christians, they cannot provide all that a local church has to offer, just as the local church cannot offer everything NU can. Certainly, there is value in both, and NU acknowledges that. At the same time, they want to see their students connected with the community on campus and will do their very best to see that it is done well. At this time, outside church attendance doesn't further the goals for this particular community, though personally valuable.

"My philosophy here is that I want to see every student in a local church. I want to push them and pastor them into a local church. And then, I want to take the mindset that none of them are going to a local church and I want to give them everything I can while they're here," said Dawson.

Chapel requirements have changed over the years as the faculty see fit. Though there is no system in place to count church attendance right now, that does not mean they won't consider it in the future if they see it as beneficial for this community. There is value in sharing spiritual growth with fellow students on this campus, as well as getting out of the NU bubble and being a part of a local church.

If students are looking to find a church home, NU can connect them with several local churches and resources.

Contact staff reporter, Catherine Brakke, at [catherine.brakke15@northwestu.edu](mailto:catherine.brakke15@northwestu.edu).