Guideline: Asking for the Social Security Number

Northwood Tech does not require the student to submit their SSN, except for the Federal requirement you must provide the SSN when applying for Financial Aid. However, by not providing the SSN, processing student records, self-service and password reset may be delayed until the College can securely confirm your identity.

Can we legally require the SSN from students?

Financial Aid: When applying for Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to determine if a student is eligible to receive federal student financial aid and the amount that they are eligible to receive, we are legally required to ask and receive the SSN on the FAFSA Form.

Supporting Documentation: FAFSA: https://fafsa.ed.gov/help/ffpriv01.htm

Scholarships: Some scholarships may ask for the student SSN. However, it is not required in many situations. If the scholarship is for low-income student families, they may ask for it; however, make sure you confirm the legitimacy of the scholarship before submitting.

Financial Payment: If the student is employed by the college (Work-Study), they are required to submit their SSN for tax reporting purposes.

1098T - Northwood Tech is required to issue 1098T's. This IRS form is required by eligible educational institutions to be filed for every student that enrolls and for whom a reportable transaction of qualified tuition and related expenses is made. A reportable transaction is the collection of tuition, fees and course materials required for a student to be enrolled at or attend an eligible educational institution. This requires Northwood Tech to collect SSN on every student that enrolls in a course for which academic credit is offered with very few exceptions.

Why does Northwood Tech ask for the SSN?

Federal Law allows the WTCS Colleges to request and use the Student SSN. While the student is not legally required to provide SSN on the Application for Enrollment Form, the student is encouraged to do so. The College will ONLY use your SSN to confirm your identity. By not providing or delaying the submission may result in further delays in processing the student records.

- The SSN is not used as a login account or any type of identifier; it is strictly used to confirm identity.
- The storage of the SSN is protected within all systems by masking and encrypting the number. Only staff with required access can view.
- From the standpoint of identification/verification, the student SSN verifies who the student is avoiding duplicate student records.
- When the student creates their account, the SSN is used to check for duplicates and ensures the account creation process occurs in real-time. If the SSN is not provided, the student is required to show proof-of-identification before the account can be created, or password reset, and this may cause some delays in processing the account.

- The SSN safeguards the security of the student's data. Without the student's SSN, the student must provide clear documentation confirming who they are. Failure to confirm identity delays the student account creation and access to the necessary systems (College Network, self-service tasks and password reset).
- The SSN confirms who the student is when they forgot their account or password and need to be reminded or reset. The College Help Desk has a self-service reset/forgot password process or users may call into the Help Desk and we will ask for the last 4 of the SSN to confirm who the student is. The birthdate is also asked for, but because that can be found anywhere on Social Media, the integrity of the SSN enhances the College's efforts to confirm the student's identity.
- For classes that produce a licensed certificate of completion, the SSN is required to confirm who the student is.

A FAQ to be posted on our Website and linked anywhere we ask for the SSN.

Frequently Asked Questions

General

Why do we need a policy on Social Security numbers?

The Social Security Administration issues Social Security numbers as a means of identifying individuals. The value of being able to uniquely associate an individual with a short number resulted in the wide use of the Social Security number among government agencies and businesses. With this widespread use of the SSN, it became increasingly clear that it was possible to use the Social Security number to obtain a great deal of information about an individual without their permission. Consequently, in 1974 the Federal Government passed legislation that explicitly addresses an individual's Social Security number. This law, The Privacy Act of 1974, expressly states the conditions under which one can solicit an SSN, what obligations the solicitor must meet, and protects the individual's right to services even when withholding their SSN.

Does this mean that I don't have to give the College my Social Security number?

That depends. All employees must provide a valid SSN, your employment paperwork won't even begin being processed until you supply your SSN. Students, generally speaking, must also provide a SSN in order to receive a loan or some scholarships. If you or your parents plan to take a tax credit for tuition paid you must provide your SSN. Naturally, any student applying for any form of employment must provide their SSN. If a student chooses to withhold their SSN at enrollment, but at some later time provides it, for example, to obtain a loan or employment, then they increase the risk that a clerical error could 'disconnect' their earlier records with their newer records. The student, more than the College, benefits from the submission of his or her Social Security number at the earliest possible time.

Students
So if I don't need a job, or a loan, or a tax credit, or a scholarship, should I withhold my SSN?

It is your decision. Presently all of the College's student record systems rely on the Social Security number to confirm any duplicate student records. Providing the College with a valid Social Security number is the best way to ensure that your student records are properly maintained. Hence, when a student enrolls, transfers credits, requests transcripts, or has any information sent from other institutions to the College, the primary means for connecting these pieces of information with the correct student is the Social Security number. If an incoming student does not supply his or her SSN, it may take longer to verify that college entrance tests have been submitted or that transcripts sent from other schools have arrived. This could delay enrollment.

Just what will you do with my Social Security number if I give it to you?

Answering this question was one of the main reasons the College created a policy on Social Security numbers. Your SSN will be treated as a confidential piece of information, similar to student or employee records.

Employees
I need Social Security numbers to do my job! Why are you taking these away from me?!

The College will continue to collect and store Social Security numbers. Indeed, we are obligated to do this for the vast majority of the College community. The policy statement expressly acknowledges our right to do so. Furthermore, College employees who in the course of performing their jobs need access to student or employee SSNs will continue to have access to them.