

Freshmen Enrollment Focus Groups

Summary of Group 1

Conducted January 16, 2008

Group 1. Eleven students participated. All eleven students in this group took 14 or fewer state support credits in fall quarter, and all scored lower than one standard deviation below the mean verbal SAT score for the freshmen class. Two of the students took 12 credits in the fall, four took 13 credits, and five took 14 credits. Their interests were distributed among the colleges, as represented by Summerstart advising group assignments—environmental studies, health, or math and science, four in humanities or Fairhaven, two in music or fine and performing arts, or admitted to Fairhaven college, one undecided, and none in education. Seven are female and four male. Six are students of color, three transferred credits, three participated in an FIG and two in an FYE, none are honors students, ten attended Summerstart, and none are athletes.

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Introductions

First, let's go around the room and say a little about yourself—Why you chose Western, what major you were interested in when you first started at Western and whether that's different now, and your educational plans for the future (do you plan to stay at Western, and how many years until you graduate?)

The majority in this group chose Western for the following reasons:

- A certain program
- The location (close to home)
- The size (not so big)
- The environment (bay view, trees, close to mountain)
- Friends or family attend (or have attended) Western)

The majority were interested in a particular major when they first started at Western. However as of Winter Quarter, the majority are uncertain. Six of eleven in this group plan to graduate in four years (for two students it's because parents will only pay for four years). Three students believe it will be four to five years to graduation. One believes it will be three years, and one is not sure how long it will take.

I chose Western because it was close to home and I didn't want to go to UW because it was too big. At first I wanted to major in art's studio, but right now I am not quite sure. Is that it? Hopefully I will graduate in time, no more than five years, cause that is my scholarship, is five years.

I chose Western because I didn't want to go anywhere east, so I only applied to UW and Western. I didn't get into UW, which is okay, so I came here, not knowing much about it. But I really liked it when I came to visit, and, I was really interested in the music program and I hope to be a music major. It is just a long process that I have to work on, so, depending on how that goes I plan to graduate on time and finish all of my GURs and see if I can get into the music program. On time would be Four years. My dad will only pay for four years.

Well, I am kind of similar to both of the previous. When I came here to visit, first I thought that the Western campus was so big, but I kind of found out that it wasn't as big as UW or Wazzu, not nearly. And I fell in love with the bay view, the location and the weather is better than at UW or Wazzu.. And I applied first to UW, Gonzaga, Wazzu, and Western. When I applied to the first three it took a bit of time, so I applied to Western later, like a bit late. I came back for a second visit and fell in love with the place. So, I waited for my acceptance and for the other schools. I really thought that I wanted to be a political science major, but first quarter political science 101 wasn't that great, so I am rethinking it. I am planning on finishing on four years, hopefully on time.

I came to Western because my friends came here and really liked it. And it's not close to home and not far away from home, so it was right where I wanted it to be. And I really like it here. And when I started I wanted to major in education and become an elementary school teacher. But now I am thinking of either nursing or being a psychologist. And, I am not sure how long it will take, but I am planning on staying here to finish it.

I really wanted to go to Colorado for school. My dad and I went to visit it and I loved where, like at Boulder, it was right next to the mountains, at the foot of the Rockies. But then I really love working with kids and my job this summer was working at summer camp, and so I really want to go into special Ed, early childhood education. And so this was basically the place for that. I am planning on being here four or five years, hopefully four, but five would be fine, because that is just how long the stuff I want to do will take.

I came to Western because I needed to get out of Seattle, and it was close, but still kind of far away. And I wanted to be out somewhere where there are trees, not like Wazzu and Eastern—

Central is out in the boonies. And I am undecided now what my major is, but I plan to stay four to five years. That is how long my scholarship is, five years.

I came to Western first of all for the communications sciences and disorders major. Now I am not sure, somewhere in the health field for my major. And, I just love the campus here, and I hope to finish in four years. That is about the time my parents will pay for it.

When I came in, I didn't know what I wanted to major in. And I still don't know what I want to major in. I have been just taking classes, solely based on if I think that I will like them. So there is a really wide range on the types of classes I'm taking. I chose Western because, I really like Seattle, but I felt like I needed to get out of it, so I wanted to pick a school that was close, but not too close. So that is why I chose Western. And, I'm hoping I will finish off in four years.

I chose Western because it's a good size for me. Um, I went to a really small high school, and I didn't want to jump to a school like UW or Wazzu. And I didn't want to go to eastern, because it is just way too far away. I live on the west side of Washington. And I heard that Bellingham is a lot like my hometown. But a little bit bigger, and I love my hometown. I like the trees and the mountains and the water. So that is why I chose Western. Originally I wanted to become a teacher, and maybe a basketball or volleyball coach, but I changed my mind after I took my first intro class for teaching. And I still might become a coach or something like that, because I am into sports and I like working with kids. Being able to teach and mentor, and all of that good stuff. I plan on graduating in four years, but I am not sure if it is going to work out because of the credit load I have been taking so far. I need to make up the credits if I am going to graduate in four years.

I came to Western cause it was either here or Montana. My twin brother came here and a bunch of friends from high school. So I figured I might as well be here. And it is far enough away from home and not too big. I lived in Ocean Shores in high school. It's like a graduating class of thirty kids. So I didn't want to go super big. I plan to be here four years. I don't really want to be in school much longer than that. I plan on majoring in engineering. My dad owns a plastic engineering or a, he makes plastic parts for different things, and so, I come here for the plastic engineering.

I chose Western because I wanted to come here for the environmental program at Huxley and I had a bunch of family that up came here and recommended it. And I like Bellingham too. So my major is going to be environmental science, at Huxley. And I still want to do that. It should take me three years, I believe, because I have all of my GURs done because I did Running Start.

Registration Experience

Please talk about your registration experience and the reasons why you chose to take the types of classes and the number of credits that you chose when you initially registered.

Students in this group took less than 15 credits Fall Quarter. They took GUR's and courses in an area they might pursue for their major or minor. Some students say they were unsure or "clueless" about how credit loads work at the university, and they didn't know how many classes to take. In some cases, students had 4-5 classes, yet these added up to less than 15 credits. The majority were advised to take 12-15 credits.

Three students selected their own classes then checked in with advisors about their schedules. They were told to "stick with 13, you don't need anymore; "14 is a good load"; or "good enough".

I registered in the fall only because I wasn't able to make it to Summer Start. I registered for Math 112, Education 109, and Communication 101. I wasn't sure how much work 13 credits were going to be, and I didn't want to be too overwhelmed by it, being a freshmen in my first quarter. And my advisor told me to stick with 13, that I don't need anymore, its good enough. I stuck with all three of those classes throughout the quarter and I finished them.

I applied at Summer Start for my classes. I took Spanish 104, Psychology 101, and Geology 101. And I took Psychology and Spanish because I might want to minor or major in them. Geology was random. I just took it to finish my science credits. I knew about the credit load, but I was unsure how it worked also at the university. So I asked my advisor, and my advisor said that 14 credits was a good load, so I took those credits and those classes and I was happy with them.

I registered at Summer Start also. I registered for English 101, Psychology 117, and Math 112. And the Psychology 117 was one of those freshmen interest groups. But I kind of regret taking that because after it was too late to drop the class, my teacher told me it didn't cover any GURs and I was kind of irritated by that because, well, I wanted to take Psychology 101, but it was full. I took 14 credits. And, because my advisor said 14 were enough, but I wish that I would have taken another class, because more credits would have been good. Like taking a history or something along with that.

Two students started with 16 credits but the advisors said "that is a little too much", so they took less.

I signed up in Summer Start also. I registered for Anthro 201, Liberal Studies 122, for our achiever's class, Education 108, and then I wanted to take Spanish 301, cause I took Running Start with Spanish already. But because I was a freshman, and it was my first quarter, I only had some credits so I wasn't able to register for the Spanish. And also my advisor was like, that's 16 credits, that is a little too much. So then, I didn't get into Spanish, so that left me with 12 credits. It was the minimum, so I just stayed with that.

I registered at Summer Start. I registered for Spanish 104, Environmental Studies 202, English 101, and Philosophy of Logic and Reasoning. When I registered, my advisor said that 16 credits might be a little much, but I could think about it over the next couple weeks and then drop the

class when I got here, if I wanted to. So I chose to do that (dropped Philosophy of Logic.) I didn't think that it was going to be too much work, I just came in thinking, I might as well have it be a little easier than too hard. I didn't know if I really wanted to take that class. It sounded interesting, but it was one of those classes that could have gone either way, it could have either been fun or insanely boring.

Two students originally started with 15-16 credits, but dropped below 15. For one it was due to a time conflict, and for the other it was because a class got cancelled.

I registered at Summer Start, and I had 16 credits, I think at the beginning, which was English 101, Sociology 260, Theater 101, and Psychology 119. The first day of class, I skipped my Sociology class because I really wanted to go to University Choir. And so, right after I went to choir class, I dropped the sociology because it was the same time as the choir class. So that put me at 13, I think, I am not really sure of the numbers. That is why I did start off with 16 credits because they said the average freshmen load should be about 15 credits, so I was like, oh 16 was close. I did that, but I definitely ended the quarter with different classes than I took originally.

I registered at Summer Start. I signed up for Racquetball, Volleyball, just to have the extra credits, but my racquetball class got cancelled. Then I also took a Psychology 101, Theater 101, and seminar, and that was a FIG. And Communication, Science, and Disorders 251, which is my major. That was 15 credits, but then racquetball got cancelled, so then I was just left with 14.

One student heard that the minimum is 12 credits; and another was told she should be over 12 credits because that is the minimum. Neither student knew about taking 15 credits "in order to graduate on time."

I registered during Summerstart. I had my achievers advisor with me, and I wasn't still quite sure how the credit load worked at a university. And so when they said that the minimum was 12 credits, I thought, okay, if it was 12 credits, then it was really good enough. But, the information that I know now, I kind of regret, cause, in order to graduate on time, I will have to take summer courses, which I am fine with, but I kind of regret it because the FIG class. I don't really like it. I mean, I enjoyed it because I met some of the students, and was able to network. And so the big class didn't seem so big because I knew the basis, because of the seminar class. But it felt like a waste of time, just because of the credit load. I had five, five classes, and it was only 13 credits.

I registered at Summer Start. At first, I really didn't know how many classes I should take, and, what I should do. But my advisor recommended that I should be over 12 credits because that is the minimum. And I didn't know about the 15 credits if you want to graduate on time until afterwards. I was clueless as to how it works. So I didn't know how to drop, or add any classes. So the deadline for adding or dropping passed me by and I kind of got stuck with them. And, I didn't change any of them. The reason I picked them was because I wanted to test myself in political science. I wanted to major in it. I wanted to try out the entry class, which was a bit hard (so I am rethinking the major).

This student didn't know how the credits work, and he signed up for 13 credits with help from an advisor.

I took Anthropology 101, Math 106, Martial Arts, and Etech 110. I signed up during Summer Start. When I signed up, I really had no idea what a normal, or really how the credits work. I just winged it with my advisor, and I was like, I want to be an engineer, so picked me a bunch of classes, and then, they were telling me that your freshmen year you get first pick, so sign up something fun. So I picked Martial Arts. And then I didn't have enough credits, so she signed me up for an anthropology class, so I just took that. I took 13 credits. It seemed alright. It was a pretty easy schedule but it was spread throughout the day.

Academic advising

How did the academic advising you received at Summer Start or from the advising center affect the number of credits you registered for? Were you encouraged to enroll in 15 or more credits? What were you told about this? What was your reaction to the advice?

One student understood from the advisor that 15 is the ideal.

I was told that 15 is the ideal, and so I made sure that I had 16, just in case. But then as soon as I dropped my class, I was like, oh my gosh, 12 is so little, but I think I have 13. But I really thought that 13 was a good number.

Ten of the eleven students in this group said they were *not* encouraged to register for 15 or more credits. They heard that 12 credits is the minimum. When students selected their course schedules, advisors said their schedules were fine at less than 15 credits (Registration Experience section, above).

Nobody tried to help us by saying anything. They told us, we don't want to influence your decision, so we are not going to tell you anything. The minimum is 12 credits, that's it. We are not picking any of your classes. Whichever way you want.

Ten of eleven students in this group heard from Summerstart advisors that it is "normal" to graduate in four to 5 years.

The advisor was really like, it's normal to graduate in five years, so if you don't make it in four years it's perfectly normal. But then I was like, I want to graduate in four though.

Four to five, is common, that's what I heard.

I heard it was becoming more common to graduate in five years, over four.

The majority of this group has heard from other students that four to five years is common for graduation.

You have a quarter to screw up, then you can do it in the fifth year. You have a quarter to fix it. So if you messed up some quarter, like your fall quarter, you just have another quarter to do it, like next year.

A lot of people say that most of the majors, like the teaching major or the music major, it takes five years. They will say just plan on finishing in five years. I know that my RA, I talk to her a lot, and she's in the teaching program and she said that she is definitely going to be here five, maybe six years. She said that it is because of the major she is taking and she has to take certain classes, so she won't be able to finish it all in four years.

For people that don't do Running Start, like me...they tell you four to five years. My roommate did Running Start and he basically has half his GURs done. He says he'll be done with his major in four years. But, it takes us like five years because we didn't do Running Start.

Did other students or family members influence your decision about how many credits to enroll in? Who? How? Why?

Four students were influenced by friends and family to “take an easier class load” in order to transition into college and to not get overwhelmed.

My friend's mom told me to take fewer credits. Just because you are transitioning to something new and different and if you take an easier class load, it will be easier for you to, kind of get into everything. So I kind of wanted to take fewer.

My sister's husband, he went through college and he's been there and done that, so he said don't overwhelm yourself. You need to get used to being away from home and being in a new environment, and school, and type of work, and all of the homework that comes with it.

Yeah, that what's my older brother said to me.

My parents said probably taking English because I am not very strong in English and they said that and Math, since I haven't taken that since Junior year in high school, might be a little overwhelming, but I did fine and didn't care. I was like, well I am signed up for them and I don't really want to drop them.

Two students were advised by parents to take more than 15 credits, but they both ended up with 14.

My dad actually told me to take more credits than 14. So, if he wanted me to take like either another class or, I don't know something else. But yeah, he wanted me to take around 16 or 17 credits. And I am really glad that I didn't. Cause I thought that 14 was the right way to go.

Both of my parents are like you are graduating on time, no matter what. You have to take between 15 and 17 credits and that's it. Like that basically how they put it. I signed up for 15, but then I ended up with 14. But I have 5 extra credits to back me up too from taking a course, my American Sign Language course, I got credit for it.

Logistics of Registering

Since Western has courses with different numbers of credits attached to them, did this affect your ability to register for 15 or more credits?

According to this student, the different numbers of credits threw him off track.

I think that the different numbers kind of threw me off track because there were some classes that I wanted to take but they didn't add up to the number of credits that I wanted to take. So, it all depended on what it was, or how many credits they were. And I didn't want to go where it was too many credits, so that's the way I thought. There were some classes I took that were four credits and in order to keep my 14 credits and they weren't classes that I really wanted to take, but I took them so they matched the credit load.

As many of you will remember, the Summerstart registration process can be fast and furious and many times students can't get the classes that they really wanted to take. Did this affect you in terms of how many credits you ended up registering for?

One student said that the registration experience is overwhelming because of the all the information received in one day.

Maybe if we didn't register on the same day that we had all of this information, we would have kind of enough time to you know, put it in and okay, well, think about the classes instead of here is a piece of paper, this is what the FIG classes are, these are what classes I would recommend. So it's like, I mean, like registering right there on the dot, you are overwhelmed. So you don't know what to do.

Seven students did not get their first choice courses because classes were filled, and this affected the schedules they ended up with.

The first class I went to sign up for was Spanish. I just wanted to take Spanish classes, but it filled up so quickly. So I spent like thirty minutes looking through the course book, trying to find GURs to take. So just finding classes that were GURs that worked with certain times and filled certain credits was very time consuming.

I had the same trouble when I tried to find a Spanish class. And English 101 was also gone like the second, all of them were filled. All of the math classes were filled. It overwhelmed me trying to find any classes open.

I really wanted to take psychology 101, but that filled up. So my advisor, was like, why don't you do a FIG? It sounded cool and I read the little piece of paper, but, I would have sworn it said it had a GUR on it, but it didn't. So, that's that.

Because I couldn't get into Spanish 301 in Summer Start, I am a quarter behind because I could have gotten my Spanish minor by this spring. And, so now I am just a quarter behind. I have to wait until the next one.

My only first choice was English 101, just because you are suppose to get it done within the first four to five credits or so. And, it was in my degree planning guide thing for education, but I substituted English 101 with Math 112.

The advisors actually told me not to sign up for either English 101 or Math 112 for the first quarter. I have Anthropology 101 and, well I wanted to do math so I just started with an easier math course to just kind of be refreshed.

Academic Interest Area

Do you think that the academic area you were interested in pursuing affected your decision to take fewer than 15 credits? How? In what ways?

Prerequisites were a concern for a variety of reasons. In some cases, prerequisites are only 2-3 credits.

Yeah. It definitely did because you have to declare your major ASAP because you can't take any music classes without being in the major. So the only music classes you can take is choir or listening to music. So I took choir (3 credits). And that is the only way that you can even get close to your major. It's just being around music. It's not a prereq for the major. I just wanted to be around the music building just to know what it's like if I did get into the program.

The classes I wanted to take towards my major, like the credit loads weren't that big. I wanted to take some type of math course 'cause I was getting into engineering and that was, I can't remember if that was 2 or 3 credits. And then my engineering class was only 3 credits, so the classes I took, I had four classes, but the classes weren't that very many credits.

For the Special Ed department, I went to talk to the head of it, and he just told me to take the basic English 101 and Math 112. Just try to get those basic GURS done. And by spring I could apply for the program and see what happens.

For my major, I have to go up to calculus in math. So, I only got into math 112, so that's kind of why I chose Math 112. Just to start out on math.

Difficulty of courses needed for the major

While considering your credit load for Fall quarter, did you think about the difficulty of courses you need to take for your major?

I'd say so. Because your major, when you hear the word major, it sounds like you need to really step up and take a hard class to get to your major. So, I was kind of scared to take any class that has the word major for me in it, like education 109 was the one I was taking to go towards my major, and I was kind of scared for that class. But it turned to be the best grade I got.

I kind of came in with kind of an idea what I wanted to do. But I kind of wanted to keep an open mind of, cause everyone always told me most people will change their major once or at least twice or something, before they figure out what they are doing. So I was keeping a mind open and just taking classes to figure out what I wanted to do.

I did when the midterms came around for communication sciences and disorders. It was later, not at registration.

Undecided About Major

For those students in this group who were undecided or unsure about your major, do you think that this uncertainty affected the number of credits you enrolled in?

No.

Not at all.

Co-Curricular and Extra-Curricular Activities

When you were registering for classes, how many of you were interested in participating in extracurricular activities your first quarter? (Show of hands)

Clubs — 8

Recreational activities outside of school — 7

Student Government — 1

Did these types of interests affect your decision about how many credits to take your first quarter?

These types of interests did not affect students' decision about how many credits to take.

I didn't really think about it, I am not going to lie.

Not at all.

I was just like, here are all of the papers that they handed us at Summer Start, I've got to register because when I am done registering, I get to go home.

I thought about high school. Do your classes and go to school, and then you have your after school activities. So I was like, I will register for my classes and do the other clubs and whatever else. So, I didn't think about it.

Financial Concerns and Work Schedules

Did financial concerns enter into your thinking in any way when you were thinking about how many credits were enough or best for you your first quarter? In what ways?

Financial concerns and work schedules were not an issue for this group while registering.

Academic and Social Confidence Levels

To what extent would you say that you took fewer than fifteen credits because you weren't extremely confident about your ability to do well in your first quarter of college course work?

About half of the students in this group say they took fewer credits because they did not feel confident ("to a large extent") about their ability to do well their first quarter.

I figured that I didn't know what I was doing coming from a small high school to a big college. It was a big change so it was kind of scary. I have always had my teachers say college is hard. We used to hear our teacher's old college stories back in our high school. Like how he worked at night and full time to provide for his college education. How hard classes were. So that kind of built a huge image in my head.

I didn't really know what I was doing, so that is why I just trusted what other people said.

We don't know any better.

Because I am the first one to go to college in my family, I didn't have anybody else telling me it's going to be hard. All I really had was teachers saying, yeah, it's going to be way harder. And then, advisors and other friends that are already here, they are like, oh 15 credits is going to be a lot. It's going to be kind of hard. So it gets you scared in a way, so you are like, okay I am going to go 14 or under than that.

The other half of this group felt confident about their ability to do well in college because they believed they had the necessary study skills. However they found that it's a big change coming to Western. There is a lot more homework, and they have to "study harder."

My teacher was pretty much one that just joked all of the time. So it was kind of like, well we don't really have to study. We can cram the weekend before the test and we will get a decent grade. And I did. High school was just a breeze for me. It wasn't, like I graduated top ten in my class and I studied hardly at all. And then, I was like, I will just have to study a little bit harder when I get to college, but that wasn't the case. I had to study a lot harder.

That was kind of how it was. I barely ever had homework in high school, and if I did, I would do it ten minutes before class. So, coming here I was like, it can't really be that much worse. Because high school was so easy, I really didn't think it was going to be that hard. Compared to how much homework we have to do now.

There was a lot of homework senior year for me, but I was on top of it. It wasn't really hard. I think that here, during the fall quarter, it kind of tricked us. I don't know about you guys but, the deadlines, having a paper due a month away, it kind of encouraged us, well me and my roommates to be lazy. And procrastinate and do it like the day before. That's what we are used to in high school, we are used to doing the paper by next Monday, over the weekend. We don't do it until Sunday night. That's how we are used to it. It's a big change.

AP classes prepared some students for college, but not others.

When I was in high school I paid attention to all of my friends in their classes and it didn't seem like it prepared them for college at all. Even the AP classes.

I agree.

I went to a small high school in Marysville, the Marysville's arts and technology high school. The idea was like a small school atmosphere that would like prepare you for college. This one was all AP classes. You are going focus I guess. And so, my junior year was definitely my hardest year, and they taught us how to study. But my friends that went to the other high school, which, their graduating class was 600 kids. We took the same exact AP test history class, except they had absolutely no homework. And I had three page essays due every other week. It just depends I guess.

Some students were warned by AP teachers or by Western advisors that their GPA will probably go down their first quarter in college. However this did not influence their decision about the number of credits they would take Fall Quarter. Instead they thought about the *number of classes* they were going to take, compared to high school.

I really wasn't sure what to expect from the classes. So I was kind of just like, four classes. Four classes just seems small compared to high school. I really didn't know what to expect. (several students agree)

Yeah. I compared a lot of like my classes to like high school. I used to have six classes, so I thought like three would be, you know, a lot easier. Well, it wasn't.

I kind of didn't really even think about it at all. I was kind of like these are the classes I am taking and that's what's going to happen.

Students were not concerned about their GPAs until *after* they received Fall grades. Ten of eleven in this group admitted that they are not happy with their Fall GPAs.

It was after fall quarter, when I got my GPA. I didn't know how it worked just because in high school it was a lot different. So when I found out my GPA, I got really scared, and so now, for winter quarter, I really have to work so that I can get my GPA up again.

Well, they warned us though. They at least warned me.

Academic warned me.

Yeah they warned us that your GPA will probably go down, by like an average of 1 point when you first start, they said. That's what they told me.

Mine tripled down. Cause in high school I got like a 3.5 and for fall quarter I got into academic warning.

In high school I had like a 3.9 every year. And when I got here, it just dropped down like to a 1.8.

It's like you have never seen those numbers before.

I was shocked.

What my AP teachers told me, cause I took a lot of AP classes in high school, is that the average, like, let's say that you get all B's like in your classes, then you are going to drop like 2 letter grades once you get to college. So, I mean, I was thinking in my head, okay I got to like work to actually get a good grade. That didn't exactly happen. They said just expect next year that you are not going to get like B's in this class, you are going to get like C minus or lower. That didn't make me too happy.

Ten of eleven in this group say that Western's grading practices are very different compared to high school, and this shift is a major reason for their lower GPAs.

What I thought was so different is that they just grade different. 'Cause in high school, if I did bad on a test, I would just be like, oh, I am just going to do really good on a bunch of my assignments and bring my grade up. And now, now here, it's just strict tests, and so when you are basing it off that. It's just that this is totally different. I mean, because if I just did bad on a test, I could just make it up. But now you rely on your tests. You have nothing to bring your grade up if you do bad on a test.

Ten of eleven students agreed with this statement above. On the other hand, one student expected tougher grading because he took Running Start classes for two years. His GPA did not go down.

I was expecting it because I did the community college for two years (running start). So I knew that Western would be tougher grading than the community college, so I was expecting tougher grading and my GPA to go down a little bit. But it didn't.

The majority of this group did not fully realize until late in Fall Quarter that grading would be so different at Western compared to high school.

When I registered, I didn't even know anything about that.

Yeah, me neither.

It wasn't until after I got into fall quarter and understanding it. So, during Summer Start, I was really clueless. I was just, doing, ya know, doing my classes and that's it. And then, after, that is when I started understanding how it worked.

Yeah. That's how it was. When I went in to sign up for classes, I really had no idea about anything. I just knew, like, here is a million classes I've got to look at and figure out which ones I had to take. It was pretty much my perspective on it. So it was kind of hard to say what influenced, what kind of credits, or how many credits I took, I just, I was just like oh, 13. It's the number.

Right before finals I kind of started clueing in on my grades and studying. I really never studied that much in fall quarter, I am not going to lie. I mean, I did all my homework and I thought that I understood it. But then once it came to like the final and I looked at the questions, I was like this is not what I studied.

Second quarter, when I signed up for classes, that's when I figured out what I needed to do. That's when I kind of started figuring everything out.

I think that fall quarter was basically, like, a lesson learned. So you know what to not do. A lot of bad stuff. And definitely, from like high school, and living away from your parents. It's just all a big change. So, I think that will have an effect.

It was a dramatic change.

Transfer Credits

Some of you brought in credits from either AP courses or community college coursework. Did having these credits affect your decision to take fewer than 15 credits? How?

Four students in this group had "College in the Classroom." Having these credits did not affect their decision to take fewer than 15 credits their first quarter at Western. One student came to Western with 63 credits from Running Start, however this did not affect his decision to take the credit load he chose.

I came into college with 63 credits already through Running Start, and that didn't affect anything, any of my credit loads that I chose. I only needed three more classes to finish GURs because it was all completed through community college already. So I just picked the three classes that fill those. And I didn't look at credit load at all. Just what classes would finish them.

Academic and Social Adjustment

Now we would like to find out how you think your credit load affected the experience you had at Western during your first quarter. Do you think that taking fewer than 15 credits affected your ability to do well in your classes this past quarter? Explain.

Students say that it wasn't the credit load that affected their ability to do well in classes. Instead, it was the issue of adjusting to college life, meeting new people, and taking part in all the activities.

It was adjusting.

Adjusting going to school and a new environment mostly.

I know I was focusing more on meeting new people. So the school work was like whatever, I will do that later. Yeah it's procrastination, but I just figured making friends sounded a lot more fun than sitting in my room reading a book.

And the first quarter, our dorms had a lot of activities going on. And there were a lot of things where they wanted people, like us, to participate in. So most of my time went to that, I guess.

I ran for hall council and I am the president of hall council. And so I had to commit a lot of time to that, but also, seeing that I didn't have that many credits, I could be able to catch my time with both of them. But at the beginning I was more interested in that than actually doing school.

It appears that time management and study habits were the main issues, not credit load, and this affected the ability to do well in classes. Students say they not do well with early morning classes, or with breaks too long between classes. During long breaks students tend to take naps or socialize, and they forget about assignments.

For me, I think that it was kind of the breaks between classes. Since in high school I was so used to six hours straight and then go home. So what happened was that after my class ended I would go to my dorm and take a nap. Then sometimes I would forget, like of shoot, I forgot to turn in that assignment.

It was just my schedule, not the number of credits. My first class was at 8:30, and you go to sleep at like two. So you go to class, and you are falling asleep in class. You have an hour and a half break until 12 to my next class, so I would just sleep. And my education class I didn't take it seriously. It was just there. We had to because of our scholarship. So then, like we had assignments for that class, and then I would forget about it, so when I would take naps, I would be like oh crap by the time it was three o'clock, the time to go to class. I tried to do it quick or I wouldn't do, and then turn it in late.

My first class was at 8, and my next one wasn't until 12. So I would just sleep. It was crazy. My schedule was just all spread out, so my whole day was, I had an hour between each class, just enough time to like walk to my dorm room, and I don't know, do something, and come back to class.

I think scheduling your classes like that, it doesn't motivate you to study. And so, to have a kind of a consistent study period, you need, okay, from this time to this time you are done with your classes, you eat lunch and then do your study. And then you go back to your dorm, and do all that. So having it, like you know, breaks, it's really tough. Cause then you will just socialize and you don't have that consistency.

It didn't matter how many credits I was taking, I just had no study skills at all. And, I live in Fairhaven and can't study in my dorm. Like I have ADD, so I get distracted extremely easily. And since I have a TV in my room, it makes it extra hard. And I didn't want to lug all of my books to the library or something to do that there. If I wasn't in the Fairhaven commons, I would just socialize with someone I knew or something like that.

I have ADD also and I can't study in a library. I can't sit there and be quiet. It works a lot better for me if I do two other things while I am reading something. Or else I get really fidgety and bored, and I just stop. I am not learning anything, so I might as well stop.

My roommate and I are funny with that. We can't study when we are hungry or when we are too full (laughter). Or when the other one is watching TV.

One student found that the breaks between classes were beneficial for her, because she was able to use the time to study in the library.

I really liked the breaks. That's why I would leave my dorm room in the morning and I wouldn't come back until all my classes were done, even though I had hours in between them. Cause that's when I would do my homework, is in the breaks, in the library. I wouldn't take any homework back to my room. So I really thought that was beneficial.

These students decided to schedule classes closer together Winter quarter, since long breaks between classes did not work well for them Fall quarter.

You definitely go into the second quarter with such a big change. I mean, I completely changed my first quarter from my second quarter. I learned so much and I totally changed my schedule. It definitely benefits me a lot better. I have it set up where, first of all I am not waking up at 8 anymore cause I just couldn't handle that. Because I can't go to bed early, I have to stay up to at least 12 or 1, minimum...

Definitely an extra hour or two of sleep changed my whole schedule, my whole day. And then I don't have an hour between each class, I have them more like right after another. I like it better because I just get it all done and I have a certain block of time to study before I go to dinner. That is how I have it set up now with my classes all together. I am taking 15 now. So I am going to try to take 17 next quarter to try and make up for the two I missed this quarter, I mean last quarter.

Students also signed up for fewer classes Winter quarter—but these add up to more credits, which some say is better.

I took 14 credits, that was 5 classes last quarter. This quarter I have 16 credits, 4 classes, which makes it a lot easier for me, 'cause I only have to study for four courses.

I started fall quarter 14 credits, 5 classes. This quarter I took 4 classes and I have 16 credits. It's a bit more work.

For fall quarter I took 4 classes and it was 13 credits. And this quarter I have 3, five credit classes, and none on Tuesday or Thursday. So I really like that. It's really easy, even though they are five credit classes. The nature of it isn't that bad to have 5 credit classes, so 15 credits in 3 classes is a really good deal.

It seems like it is better to have less classes and just more credits.

Yeah (several in agreement)

Seven students in this group are thinking about taking classes at community colleges over the summer. They want to catch up on credits and get further ahead with GUR's, and it's cheaper. None plan to attend Western summer quarter.

I took 5 classes fall quarter, 13 credits. And 3 classes, 14 credits this quarter. But I plan on taking some classes at a community college during the summer. I got only 8 credits from 13. So I really have to catch up.

I wanted to take classes over the summer, just because I could get a head start in my credits and so I can register for classes before everyone else. Well, not before, but like ahead. Cause I didn't come in with any credits to start out with. So I was the last day to register for winter classes and they were all full.

I want to catch up on credits and finish up the GURs. And also, I heard that some of the classes at Western aren't very good. So, for example, I heard that math wasn't good here. And now I know why. But I like it, so I am going to stick with it, but for example, maybe like science, lab science, the GUR courses, I think might be more valuable at a community college than a bigger class room. Because of the smaller atmosphere, I think that it will be more valuable.

I think that that is a good idea because I don't mind math. But it is taught by a grad student, and yeah, they know math, but my grad student didn't know how to teach math. It was a nightmare.

I think its more like a high school environment, like at the community college. And I think it is easier to understand your teacher and be able to ask questions to your teacher without being such a big classroom. I just think that it is going to be easier.

Community college is also cheaper. (several agree).

Yeah, I kind of feel guilty somehow because I took last quarter 14 credits, so I am paying \$13,000 a year. I should take all total credits to get my moneys worth.

Advice for Incoming Freshmen

What advice would you give to new students coming in next fall with respect to how many credits they should try to register for? Why? What would you tell them about strategies they should use to make sure that they have a good course schedule?

In sum, students in this group would advise incoming freshmen as follows:

- Shoot for 14-16 credits so that it won't overwhelm you. Around 15 is the main goal, because it will keep you on track— but take whatever credit load you feel will be comfortable

- Take classes you will enjoy and that fit for you
- Take classes that will count toward GUR's or your major
- Do not leave big gaps between classes and plan your day time-wise
- Find a good place to study and work hard
- Listen to what people say; the information may be helpful
- Try taking a FIG for the resources and to meet people

I would say, like a lot of people told me to pick classes that sound fun. But I was just thinking that's a bunch of crap. Because if you take classes that just seem fun, they might not count as GURs and it could just be a waste of time and money. So I would say to take classes that you are going to need and don't pay attention to the amount of credits of the classes, I just pay attention to what it is going to be worth to my major or GURs.

I would make sure that they know to take at least 15 credits. At least have them know that. Basically what messed me up was just how my classes were set up time-wise. And so, that was a big part of how I changed my schedule. Just make sure you look at your time-wise and just know how you can plan your day so you are not so stressed out.

I would tell them to shoot for 15 credits because it's not really going to overwhelm you. If it's like 4 classes, then that isn't going to be too bad, from my perspective. Maybe 14 credits. 14 or 15 credits. It's really nice to have classes that you enjoy, but you also do well in and are going to help you get to where you are going. What I really like this quarter that is different from last quarter is that my classes are at 10 and 11 and then 12, instead of 9, and then 11, and 2. It really helps.

I don't know an actual number of credits. I would say take whatever you think will be comfortable. For some people that is going to be 17. For some people that is going to be 15, 12. Shoot 15, but if that seems like a lot, go a little bit lower. And you can make it up later. Study. And don't have huge gaps between classes. That change between fall and winter is really helpful.

I would just say take anywhere between like 14 and 16 credits and you should be okay. It wouldn't be too overwhelming or anything and you would still be on-time to graduate. Try to get rid of your GURs as soon as you can. And try to sign up for English 101, especially, just because you never know when you will be able to get into that class within the following quarters.

I think they could shoot for up for 15 credits, and then they are ahead. But depending on the person, how they feel with the credits. And if you are a big procrastinator, do not leave gaps, because 8:30 to 12 and then 3 does not work.

I say probably around 15, like they all said. But then figure out where you study best. I figured out that when I went to the library and it was super quiet, it was really intimidating. My mind just like wanders. But then I figured out that I would just like go to the VU and sit by those

windows. And yeah, there's like people coming and going, but, it was just steady noise. I just have to focus on what I am doing.

I would say take it easy the first quarter. Not necessarily 12 credits, but not 17 either. I would say around 14-16 also. I just tell them to work hard and yeah, find a place where you can study. And it amazes you how much your GPA can drop the first quarter.

I would tell them the same thing. Just, 15 credits is your main goal. And pick a class that will fit you best. Based on your high school experience, if you are good at math, start with math. And try finding classes that you are interested in or if you want to test yourself. Your fall quarter is your experiment quarter for college. And you want to listen carefully to what other people say. Most of the information they tell you will be helpful.

I would say that even though everyone says that you don't need to declare your major when you first enter, you still need to be conscious of what you want to do, because of the classes you are going to take. You could turn into panic mode at the end of your first quarter, so think of all of the things you need to do for your major. So just be conscious of that at the very beginning. And even if you do change it, at least you will know what classes you did well in or what you need to take. And the credit load, I think that 15 is good. Having a little less isn't going to hurt you as long as you know. It's a good thing to talk to people to find out what to do.

I think that finding the perfect study spot is definitely one of the main things. Where you are comfortable at. Always bring your Ipad with you, wherever you go. Read the syllabus that the professors give you. Go to rateyourprofessors.com, that's very helpful.

I would also say to them don't sign up of the FIGs. I am glad I didn't do it. It had more reading than any of my other classes. And it was more papers than any of my other classes. And it doesn't count for some of your GURs.

It counts for QSR. I think it depends on which FIG you take. The FIG last quarter was really fine. We had people come and be quest speakers—people from different resources on campus. I would say it's helpful. You might want to take it for your first quarter.

I think it was a great way to meet people, 'cause you are like, okay, I see familiar faces. And I think that is one of the really big things. Especially going to a big school where I didn't know anymore. (Three in agreement)