

## Freshmen Enrollment Focus Groups

### Summary of Group 3

Conducted January 30, 2008

Group 3. Twelve students participated. All twelve took 15 or more state support credits in the fall, and all scored below 1 standard deviation below the mean verbal SAT score. Half of the students took 15 credits in the fall, two took 16 credits, and the remaining four took 17 credits. Their interests were distributed among the colleges, as represented by Summerstart advising group assignment; with four assigned the environmental studies, CST scholars, health or math/science groups, two assigned to the undecided group, two to the Fairhaven College, music or fine & performing arts groups, one to the humanities or Fairhaven interest group, and three to the education group. Seven of the participants are female and five male. Seven are students of color, four transferred credits from high school, three participated in an FIG and two in an FYE, none are in the honors program, eleven attended Summerstart, and none participated in fall athletics.

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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 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)
- Nice campus; great town

- A variety of things to do here
- Friends or family attend (or have attended) Western

Six students in this group have a certain major in mind—Pre-Pharmacy, Elementary Education, Financial Economics, Music Education and Performance, Special Education, Technical Theatre. Six students are exploring majors—possibly Political Science or English, Biology or Business, Elementary Education or Communication Sciences and Disorders, music education, and physical education.

One student plans to leave Western in three years for pharmaceutical school. Another plans to graduate in two years as he came into western with an AA degree (two years of Running Start). Five students plan to graduate “hopefully in 4 years”; two students say it will probably take 5 years (both majoring in music education); and three don’t know how long it will take.

*The reason why I chose Western is ‘cause it is instate, it is not too far to home, which is only a hour away. My major is going to be pharmacy. I plan to go to Western for three years and then transfer to pharmaceutical school.*

*I chose Western kind of for the same reasons as her. Close to home. Not too big, not too small. Perfect size. And I want to major in elementary education, and Western has a really good education program. I don’t know how long it will take me to graduate, but I plan to stay here until I do.*

*I chose Western because it is instate as well. Also my dad and brother went here and I felt it was a strong academic college. I prefer the size of it to UW and some other instate colleges. I am not quite sure what I want my major to be, but I am leaning towards Polisci, and possibly English. Hopefully 4 years, I am not sure though.*

*I chose Western, I really like Bellingham. It’s kind of an outdoorsy town. I am a snowboarder, so Mount Baker close and I wanted to be near a mountain, so it works out good. Also instate. I plan on majoring in financial economics and that’s what I came into Western planning on majoring in. I did two years of running start, so I transferred with an Associates in Arts, and plan on graduating next spring.*

*I chose Western because it is also instate. And pretty close to home, only an hour away. Also, I don’t know exactly what I want to major in yet. I am just doing my GURs, just to do it. I don’t know how long I will stay here, or if I plan to graduate from Western.*

*I chose Western because I fell in love with the college, when I came up when I was a sophomore. Like everyone's been saying, it's close to home and it's instate, so it's good. I plan to major in probably biology. But now I am having second thoughts and leaning towards business now. So I don't know. I plan on staying here for four years and then maybe go to the UW for further education.*

*I came here for the music program and it's pretty good. Music education and pretty good with performance. I plan on double majoring in those two. And it will probably take 5 years, is what I am guessing. That's what most people say it takes. And its instate.*

*I chose Western for kind of the same reasons everyone else said. It's far away, kind of far away, but close enough. It's a good size. I think that I want to major in elementary education or maybe communication sciences and disorders. Graduate, it depends. Probably 4 years.*

*I am hoping to major in Special Ed endorsement. I came to Western because, like everybody else, it's really close to home and if I need to, I can go home. I am not sure how long it is going to take me.*

*I came to Western because it was kind of like home. It's by the water. It's a nice, somewhat small size. I actually came to Western because it was out of state for me. I kind of wanted to get out of the state for a little bit. I am kind of undecided right now, but kind of leaning towards music education. And I have a hunch I am probably going to be here for 5 years. I don't mind being that long at Western.*

*I chose Western mostly from word of mouth. I don't know what I am going to major in yet, but maybe physical education. I plan on staying here for 4 years. I like Western because it is a pretty good size school and it's by the coast. I like how there is woods and trails and right in my area.*

*I like Western and I kind of chose to come here cause I like the atmosphere of the whole campus and the interaction of the people and how diverse it is. I have a few friends up here and I visited them, they gave me a tour, and I just loved it. Love Bellingham. I plan on major in technical theater. Hopefully I will be here for 4 years, that's what we are shooting for.*

## Registration Experience

**Think back to last summer and early fall when you were registering for Fall classes. Tell us about your registration experience and the reason why you chose to take the types of classes and number of credits that you did.**

Students in this group took 15 or more credits Fall Quarter. Advisors helped the majority in selecting classes—classes that would fulfill GURs, classes that could be applied toward their major, and classes that looked fun or interesting. One student was advised to try the FIG program.

*My process started out with Summer Start. They went over how to register as a freshmen on the website and stuff. I was talking to the advisor of the pharmacy, actually the chemistry department. And I talked to him for awhile, and I decided to take classes with GURs. I took 15 credits. I took Anthropology 201, Psych 101, and Math 99. The advisor helped me choose the classes.*

*My Summer Start advisor also worked in Woodring education. So he was able to help me find classes that would not only help me fulfill GURs, but would actually work with my major, which is elementary education. So he gave me lots of help with tips about getting GURs done first and doing electives later. So, that was the main advice I got. I took Comm. 101, English 101, Theater 201, and Education 109.*

*I was also at Summer Start and I took Psychology 101, Beginning group Fitness, Math 106, and another Psychology class that was like an intro class. I think that it was a seminar. My advisor helped me and I also had the same problem. I didn't really know what I wanted to do and classes started filling up. But I liked my schedule and kept it. (15 credits)*

*I registered during Summer Start and I was advised to try the FIG program. Just simply because it's a good transition for freshmen. My first attempt at getting a class was English 101, but because it was full, I started to kind of lean towards the idea of getting a FIG. And so, I took one that included History 104. I ended up really enjoying cultural anthropology. And it gave me the 15 credits, which I wasn't able to get this time around. So I guess the FIG was a nice idea.*

*I also signed up for a FIG before I went to Summer Start. I don't remember the name of it, but it had Psychology 101, theater 101 and a seminar class. The other class was Math*

*112. I got help from my advisor. She told me that it was one of the classes required to get into Woodring. (15 credits)*

This student started with a FIG but wanted more than 12 credits, so added classes to bring her credit load to 16.

*I registered for a FIG during the summer. And then I came to Summer Start. I had to take an education class for the scholarship I have. So that brought me up to like 12 credits. And then I wanted more credits so I took a history class. And a PE, so that brought me to 16 credits. So I ended up taking the Daily Planet FIG, which is journalism 190, environmental studies 203, and I had a seminar, my history class, and then my education one.*

This student registered for six or seven classes because these are required for music majors.

*I missed Summer Start. I was kind of worried about registering because I didn't know what I was doing, but I scheduled a meeting with the music advisor. And basically, I didn't sign up for any of my classes, just because when you are a music major, you have a bunch of classes which you have to take. I signed up for Violin performance, oral skills, keyboarding skills, music 105 which is a music history class, and then orchestra, and a music theory class. And then I took 1 GUR, which was Math 112. That was 15 credits total, 6 or 7 classes, but they were all like 1 or 2 credits each.*

This student was advised to take Chemistry 121 but the course was too difficult. He was too late to drop the class, and ended up with 10 credits at the end of the quarter.

*I also went to Summer Start. The advisor was advising everyone in the room to take Chem. 121 because it is like, a hard class to get into unless you are in Summer Start. So I took that, Psych 101, and English 101. And I found out taking Chem. 121 right off the bat was a bad idea. And I also found that out by a lot of other friends that took the same time. They all dropped it, because none of us were ready for that. It was a lot of hard work and went really fast. I actually didn't get to drop it. I missed it. So, I ended up with 10 credits, but I took 15.*

Three students selected their own classes during Summerstart and ended up taking 16-17 credits—classes they needed and that also looked interesting.

*I also attended Summer Start, but my advisor, she was actually not at Summer Start. So I kind of went off of, well my friend and I decided we should take at least a couple of fun classes that are interesting and something that actually works. So I ended up doing actually 3 GUR classes. Theater 201, Psych 101, and I don't remember the thing, but intro to British Literature. English 2-something. I ended up taking a total of 17 credits. And intro to Lighting Design 215.*

*I attended Summer Start and for the most part, at the community college I attended, I fulfilled most of my GUR requirements. So I was more looking into classes that were counting towards my major. One of the tools I used was the schematic for majors that kind of showed the rundown and what order you have to take classes in, based on prereqs and things of that sort. And so, after filling in the classes that I had already taken at my community college, I kind of decided on what I wanted to take. I actually wasn't able to register at Summer Start because my transcript hadn't gotten filed yet, and so all the classes I needed to register for had prereqs that the computer thought I hadn't took, but really I had at my community college. And so, I ended up making just a schedule that, you know, didn't involve prerequisites and then I ended up later changing it to the classes I needed. I ended up taking Accounting 245 and 3 Econ classes: 303, 306, and 311, for 16 credits.*

*Well, I also registered at Summer Start. And when you are kind of undecided, it's kind of hard to figure out what kind of classes you want to take. So I was there for a really long time and the classes just started filling up. So I ended up just kind of taking whatever was left. But I was kind of happy with my schedule, in the end. I ended up taking East Asian studies, Math 112, Symphonic band, and Japanese 101 (17 credits). Most of them were GURs.*

## **Academic Advising**

**How did the academic advising you received at Summerstart 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?**

Only one student in this group was advised to take 15 or more credits. He was advised that 15 to 16 credits is a good amount for music majors.

*I heard that 15 or 16 was just the good amount to take (from the music advisor). Basically music majors take a certain requirements per quarter. They have classes that you have to take and then you try to jam in as many GURs as you can that fill it up to 15*

*or 16. First quarter I just took the one math class. And then the music requirements were one less class this quarter, so I took 2 GURs to get up to that 15 or 16 area.*

The majority were advised to take 12-15 credits. Some were told that 12 is the minimum, and they should take no more than 15 credits—a lighter load so they could adjust to college life.

*My advisor at Summer Start said to take between 12 and 15 credits. And I took AP classes my senior year in high school and worked really hard, so wanted to take 15. It wasn't very hard. I took AP English in high school and I took English 101 last quarter. I also had 3 years of Spanish and didn't know whether to take Spanish 201 or Spanish 104. I ended up taking 104, so I knew mostly what was taught in that class. I probably should have taken 201. Then my Psychology class was just lecture and some tests, so it was pretty easy..*

*I have this scholarship that is called Achievers, and you are assigned to talk to your advisor two times a quarter. And I had contacted her before registering and she was like, do not take more than 15. Take a light quarter. She did not encourage that at all. So, that was what she was saying. Compared to high school, college is a really different type of thing. So I really did appreciate her telling me to take a light course. 'Cause at the end, it's really different.*

*I was advised to not take more than 15 credits by my advisor at Summer Start. It was just mostly so that we would adjust to college life and the courses, cause they said that they were a lot harder than they seemed. My credit load was pretty good. There was only one class that really was hard to study for, but I ended up passing.*

Four students heard from advisors that 15 credits is a good load for freshmen—the preferred goal to stay on track for graduation. (Two also heard that 12 is the minimum.) These students aimed for 15 credits.

*My advisor told me that 15 was a good starting point. And if I can take 15 credits each quarter, I would be a sophomore by the next fall. So he just kind of helped me work out 15 credits. He said 12 is the minimum, but 15 would be better if I wanted to stay on track. It was really good load for me. Since the PE class wasn't any real learning, I got to take a break every once in a while. So it wasn't every day I had work to do*

*I was under the impression that 15 is the preferred goal, from the Summerstart advisors. They said, as a freshmen, definitely don't go too far over that and you also want to try to get 15 and not any less. Just simply because it will put you on pace to graduate as early as possible. I just enrolled in a FIG and then took at Comm. 235 class to get the 15. It was definitely manageable.*

*My advisor at Summerstart did the whole 12 credits is the minimum, 15 is a good load for a freshmen. Since I didn't know what I wanted to do, he just said take some GURs and maybe some electives. I ended up just trying to get as many GURs as I could and add in an elective. I got the 15 with the 3 classes and then I really wanted band, so that was only 2 credits. The TA who was going around the classroom said that my schedule looked okay. You don't really, you know, study for band so I could probably get by with two extra credits*

*When I went to Summer Start, they never really advised how many credits you should take or like a light load. They just gave you the general, most kids take 15 to stay on pace, 45 to become a sophomore next year. So he just more advised on what classes we should take as a freshmen. Chem. 121 is obviously the big one because you have to take that for the major. It was obviously a bad idea on my part. That and he also advised what not to take with that class, which was another math class because it is already enough math on its own. I found I did more of the social part 1<sup>st</sup> quarter than actually studying for classes. Chemistry wasn't a good idea. Just coming into college, not knowing what to expect, I don't think that it was a great idea on my part. Cause I wasn't ready, obviously, for the studying since I really didn't do as much as I should have.*

Five students did not follow the advice given by their advisors. Two students were advised to "take only 13 credits" (a lighter load so they would not be overwhelmed), but they chose to take 15-16 credits.

*My advisor actually advised me to take only 13 credits. He said for your freshmen year, first quarter, I would advice you to take fewer credits to not overwhelm yourself. I actually ended up with 15 and I guess I didn't really follow his advice. But I did at the same time because I took the GUR classes like he advised. Get those over with first. My advisor is actually the teacher of one of the classes I chose. And he saw my schedule and told me that it would be difficult, but if I was up for the challenge then it would be okay. I thought that I was fine. The work load, I think, was challenging, but I liked the challenge. English 101 was papers every other day, it seemed like. But I think this quarter is harder than last quarter.*



*I have the achievers scholarship. So when I came to Summer Start, I was able to meet with my advisor and she pulled away from me taking more than 13 credits. She was like, just take a light load. It's a good transition if you have a FIG, and maybe have a PE class or something, then you will be at 13 and you will be fine. But I felt like I wasn't doing enough. Senior year I was working my butt off. I was taking AP classes, so I was just like I might as well continue it now. So that is why I decided to shoot for more credits and I had 16. Taking a history class got me to 16 credits. My advisor said, how did you end up with 16 credits? And I was like, I am doing fine. She was like, well, if you are doing okay with it, fine, but it would have been better if you had taken fewer. She just wanted me to do well in the classes I was taking.*

Three students were advised that "15 credits is the average load", but they chose to take more. One felt comfortable doing more because he had experience through Running Start; and the others wanted "to do better than that", or to "stretch the box". One student discovered however, that the load was too heavy.

*The advisor that was in the room while we were registering, she did mention once or twice that the average load was 15 credits. And I kind of thought that I could do better than that, so I chose to do 17 credits. I don't really know why, but it just kind of ended up happening. But then I did meet with my major advisor and she said that was probably a good thing that I ended up taking a little bit more just because the theater class, that she was actually the instructor for, was pretty much a review for me and helped me get into the department. She said that was really easy, so it was pretty much like I was only taking, I think like 14 credits because the class was 3 credits. But the work load, other than that, for the British literature class was really heavy. I haven't had an English class that was college level and so we were doing all of this reading. It was really intense. Kind of all of the homework was a lot for me, but I somehow managed to pass it. Other than that, it was just a lot of reading.*

*For the past two years I have been taking 15 credits or more a quarter (Running Start), so I had already been introduced into college life for the most part. For the most part, they recommended to all of the other students to take a light load first quarter just to see how they do in the college atmosphere. With my previous experience I was comfortable taking at least 15 credits.*

*I knew that 15 was good, but I also knew that 18 was the maximum credits you could take. So I was like, oh, I can stretch the box. And I think that I am pretty smart, so I wanted to go for as many credits as possible. I kind of set my schedule up so that it was*

*like a high school schedule. I had those classes everyday for 5 days. Not a good idea, because there was homework in all of those classes and them being GUR classes. I kind of set myself up for failure there. It was too heavy a load. I should have taken 2 GURs and not 3, and spent more time studying.*

**Did other students or family members influence your decision about how many credits to enroll in or what classes you would take? Who? How? Why?**

Three students say their parents influenced them because of finances.

*I took a lot of advice from my dad. Definitely my dad was pressuring me to take at least 15 credits. He is always on my back about everything.*

*They are paying for the majority of our education, so I would imagine there has to be a certain amount of pressure.*

*I know that my family is poor and stuff and I am the first in my family to go to college, so I kind of have to step it up.*

## **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? How did this work for you?**

One student says it is difficult having a major where the majority of classes are 4 credits, not five. He has to take either 12 credits or 16.

*Unlike BCC it's definitely a little more difficult to make a 15 credit schedule up here. Just because most of the main classes are 4 credits rather than 5. At BCC you could pretty much count on taking 3 main classes and having a full schedule. I knew I wouldn't be working at all my fall quarter and so I set myself up for 4 classes. To one, keep it above 15, and also just kind of get going on things because I knew I would be working so I would have the extra time to study. My major is Financial Econ in the business school. The business classes are all 4 credits so I have to take 12 credits or 16. I haven't seen a class in the college yet that has been 5 credits.*

**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. Did this affect you in terms of how many credits you ended up registering for?**

The majority were pretty much able to get the classes they wanted during Summerstart, as discussed previously in the Registration Experience section. However eight students could not get their first choice courses for Winter quarter, and this affected their credit loads. Their loads are either lower than they wanted (13 credits) or higher than they wanted (17-18 credits).

*My goal was to get 15 just like the previous quarter, but it was literally impossible because everything was taken. I had a FIG and 15 fall, but winter I was only able to get 13. English 101 was the only one that I definitely wanted this quarter. The other two were just filler. It was just frustrating because it filled so fast.*

*I couldn't register until the last 2 days. I had to keep changing what classes I wanted to take because every time I would look, the classes would be filled up. But I ended up taking 17 credits now. It's a little tougher than last quarter. If I had gotten the classes I wanted, I would not have taken 17. One of the classes I signed up for was demography, but then the teacher said that it was like a sophomore level class, so it would be a little tougher for me. He recommended that I dropped it, and that would have put me down to 12 and I didn't want to do that, so instead I just substituted for psychology 210. So it put me above the 15. I just didn't want to drop to 12.*

*I was in the same situation too. It was just frustrating because if you didn't take this class, then you are up to only 14 or 13, and so to make it the number that you want, the number of credits, you have to add classes. I ended up taking 18. All I do is literally stay in the library all day and study.*

*It was the same for me as her. I was the second to last day and it was really frustrating because I had different schedules I was planning on taking if they filled up. I ended up with a completely different schedule. I actually lucked out because I contacted a couple of the teachers and they gave me override codes for two of the courses. They were kind of lenient on it because one of the classes had a prerequisite and I was not able to get into that prerequisite class, but he let me get into it anyway. If it wasn't for them, I probably would have ended up with a really bad schedule. (Ended up with 16 credits)*

Some students believe it may take longer than 4 years to graduate if they can't get the classes they need—particularly prerequisites. Students also say it may take longer if they double-major, or because certain programs take longer (teaching); or because they are undecided as to major.

*I was on a waitlist for an econ class and one of the major things that ends up being a factor is once you get into your major, a lot of things go in order. For Economics you need to take this class and then the next one. The first one was a prereq for the next one. So if you don't make it into those primary, lower level you can't get into the higher level classes. It's really important to get into those and it can be stressful when you are on a waitlist or the class is entirely full and there are already students in front of you with overrides.*

*If you don't get into the classes you need, you are not going to graduate. That's pretty black and white.*

*I almost got actually all of the classes I wanted, except for one class, and it filled up right before I could sign up. That was a science class. It was kind of frustrating because it was going to knock me back from what I wanted to do. I am planning on applying for Woodring for next fall, and if I get in, it will bump my schedule around all over the place.*

*I'm doing a double major. Just too many classes to take and GURs. It kind of slices your time.*

*It will take me probably 5 years to graduate because I am trying to do the teaching program and you usually do 4 years schooling plus your student teaching and trying to get your certificate.*

*Being undecided, you are just taking random classes until you do figure out what you want to do. It could take longer, meaning that you will have to take more classes when you do decide what you want to do.*

## **Academic Interest Area**

**Do you think that the academic area that you're interested in pursuing affected your decision to take 15 or more credits? How? In what way?**

One student thought about his major because he's a junior and wants to take an average of 15 credits a quarter to graduate in time. Another student thought about prerequisites he needs for the major.

*I was definitely thinking about the major. One cause I am a junior and I need the classes for it. But also graduating on time. That probably made me take more than 15 credits. You have to keep an average of 15 a quarter. Like you were saying earlier, its either 12 or*

16. *I went ahead and took a heavy load, especially knowing that I would want to snowboard and things this upcoming quarter. And so I wanted to take a lighter load then. That made my decision for me, kind of.*

*I was thinking of my major because I wanted to get my foot into the door because it's kind of hard to get into the theater department. It's like a big competition between talent and stuff. If I can get to know a lot of the theater people and maybe some of the teachers, I can get into there a little faster. So I was thinking about it.*

Most students did not think about credit load or the major. Instead they were focused on registering for classes for the first time, particularly GUR's.

*I don't really think that that was something that I thought about. For me coming to Summer Start, I had no idea what classes to register for. So you sit in there for an hour and they give you so much information during that hour that it is just overwhelming. My head was just kind of like, oh! So I don't really think that I thought about my major at all or how it would be an effect. I was just kind of like, okay, this class is open. I can get into it. That's all that was on my mind at the time.*

*I viewed it as a really simple process. Really just because you have got to take these GURs and it's your first quarter. So why don't you just take a few that look interesting to you and take 15. Unfortunately I didn't get English 101. That was really the only setback.*

*I don't think that I thought about my major at all when I registered for fall classes. I was just like, I just want classes. I just want to get started. For winter quarter, I definitely looked at the major guides, where they tell you to take these prereqs and this other classes. I saw that there was this chain I had to follow. So I looked at that and that's when I was like, I need to take GURs next quarter. That's basically what I am doing this quarter, all GURs. They are my classes, GURs. That was afterwards though.*

## **Co-Curricular and Extracurricular 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 — 7 people*

*Recreational activities outside of school — 2*

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

Students say that interests in clubs and recreational activities did not influence their decision about how many credits to take their first quarter.

*Not really. It didn't come up until after you started classes and you realized..(several agree)*

**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?**

Because of the financial aspect, one student intends to take a full load each quarter to graduate on time.

*I would say that it's definitely a concern. Not just in how much this year is going to cost and getting the most out of it, but graduating on time. A lot of people don't graduate on time. They take 5 years or just 4 years and a quarter, but having to do an entire extra year, that's a big chunk of your time. That's money. You know how they say, time is money. So I want to take a full load to ensure to graduate on time. I guess that just naturally comes with the financial aspect of tuition costs.*

**Did work levels or scheduling affect your first quarter credit load? How?**

Two students worked Fall Quarter. One student said that scheduling her time for work and studying was an issue, but it really didn't have to do with credit load or registration for classes.

*I had class every day until 11 and not again until 2. I didn't work the first part of the quarter and I would try to go to the library. So I ended up working between there. So when I was done with my 2 o'clock class, I would work on my homework. It was kind of good for me to do that so I didn't sit on the internet and do mindless stuff. Cause I couldn't get myself to actually study between classes, so it was good for me to have that.*

**Academic and Social Confidence Levels****To what extent would you say that you took the credit load that you did because you were extremely confident about your ability to do well your first quarter?**

Eleven of the twelve students in this group say they felt “extremely confident” about their ability to do well their first quarter at Western. The students in this group all say they did well in high school. Five took AP or advanced classes which helped to prepare them for college and for the workload.

*I just did really well in high school.*

*My teacher told me how hard college would be because I took AP classes. They explained how much more of a workload in college than in high school. I think that the teachers really helped.*

*At my school we didn't have AP classes, we had advanced classes. So I took advanced classes my junior year and senior year I didn't take English. I took electives and I took more science classes. So I didn't do as well as the years before, just because I was taking a lot of science classes. Coming here, I was like, I think I am smart. I think I can handle it. It was hard. English now is so much different than what it was like when I took it in high school. I don't feel like my teachers prepared me that well, but I still love them anyways. I turned out fine.*

*I took AP English in high school and AP Calc and molecular genetics. Especially my first semester of high school was really hard, and I spent a lot of time working. Just talking to my friends who were in college and who would have the same teachers as I had. Like my English teacher was really really hard. It was really hard in high school. They were like, college English would be fine. I mean, we read a lot and wrote every day. So I just felt like I was well prepared for the workload.*

*Being able to get used to the quarter schedule and the college atmosphere at community college was nice. I don't think that it was necessarily more work than high school, just a different way of going about it. The choice is yours in college, where in high school you have to do a lot of things because it is required. In college, you read a lot more and learn a lot more on your own, rather than being in classes. I am sure all of you noticed that you are probably in class about half the time compared to high school. Still, you do the same type of work. I think that it is just different. Being at a community college and getting used to that before having to take classes at a university level helped a lot.*

*AP courses taught me how to study. What exactly you need to do. That's why I felt confident. Even if it's a completely different course than what I am taking up here, I knew what went into studying. Just because the setting being so similar.*

Two students didn't feel as prepared as they would have liked, because they didn't have the necessary study skills.

*I don't have them. I don't even think I have them now. I don't think I study the way I should. I went to the tutoring center and asked how do I study? You should help me. It's different. I still haven't found the right way for me. Its hard because I tried doing it with my roommate or people that I had the same class with. They had a way and were getting it, and I am just like, I don't like your way. It's not sticking in there. So I just kind of have to do a lot of finding my own way to study. I am still trying to become good at it. But I still haven't found it. I do okay on the classes and the tests, but I don't do as well as I want to do.*

*I don't think I was as prepared as I wanted to be. I mean, I did fine in high school. I got good grades and everything. But I didn't take any AP or honors classes. And I just kind of got psyched out for the workload to come. I think that I kind of psyched myself out a little too much because I did fine last quarter. I got good GPA. I think I was a little more worried than I should have been*

## **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 15 or more credits? How?**

Students in this group say that a person coming in with college credits is in a position to stay ahead (and will most likely choose to stay ahead) as long as they register for 15 each quarter. Yet the extra credits also allows for flexibility if you can't get a class, or if you choose to take less.

*Well you are still in the position to stay ahead as long as you can get that 15. But when the registration process lets you down or in your mind you feel like you have to have something else. You can stay ahead if you register and get 15.*

*As long as you are persistent, I don't think a typical person who is taking AP classes or coming in with college credits, isn't going to slack off. They are not going to say, oh I am a head, so I can just chill and not work hard as I have been for the past few years. I am pretty sure everybody is going to think the same thing. If you are ahead, you are going to stay ahead and continue to build off of what you have already worked on in high school. I don't think anybody would really see AP classes or college credits as an excuse to take light loads. But more as insurance and motivation to continue your education.*



*I agree with him. It did kind of allow me to be picky though and stay with 13 because I came in with a few. I chose not to take classes that I really did want. And I wouldn't have done that if I wasn't up at all.*

## **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 15 or more credits affected your ability to do well in your classes this past quarter? Explain.**

The majority said their credit loads were manageable. However, some students experienced difficulty adjusting to the workload, and some had difficulty with time management at first—balancing the social aspect of college with academics. These students were able to do well once they adjusted to college life and built in enough study time.

*I thought 15 credits was pretty good. It seems like classes are done a lot earlier than high school, so you had a lot of time to do your homework. You had a good solid 12 hours to do whatever you needed to do.*

*I think that the social aspect of college and that adjustment was harder for me than focusing on my classes, than the actual workload that I had. I would say that 15 credits is pretty good and didn't really have an effect on how much work I was able to put into my classes.*

*I think my credit load was fine, especially with the experience I had. I didn't feel like it was too much... Maybe except to study harder in one of my classes that I didn't perform as well as I would have liked to... It was challenging. I had never taken classes at a junior level before, 300 level classes. They are difficult. They aren't 200 and 100 level classes, that's for sure. But I think that I was able to balance a new social atmosphere, being new to Western and Bellingham, with the classes I had. I feel like I was able to do well with my schedule.*

*It was really hard to adjust to the workload at first because it was a lot different from high school. I kind of lucked out because I had a roommate who had really good study habits. As soon as she got home, she would do her homework. And since she needed it to be quite in the room, I got in the habit of doing homework with her. And since we had the same kind of friends, we would go out the same time. I kind of got on track because of her. I*

*learned from her. 15 credits was manageable, but you really have to balance social and study time.*

*I would say that taking 16 credits was definitely harder than the typical 15 I had been taking at BCC. Just because 4 classes instead of three, even though credit wise, there was only one more, that is another set of midterms, finals and homework assignments to deal with. It adds to the stress of managing all of your classes. So I would definitely say that taking 16 credits was more difficult than what I had done before. But it's not impossible. As long as you manage your time well and have decent study habits, you can succeed pretty easily.*

*I didn't know how to manage my time, at all. I am very social and I am involved in a lot of clubs here on campus. And I took them very seriously. I was at every meeting and I was doing this event, and was at that event, fundraising. In terms of doing my assignments, I was always a procrastinator. So I was always pulling all-nighters to get an assignment done and studying for tests last minute. I think it affected me to manage my time. And then I ended up passing my classes and I did well, its just that it was hard the last two weeks of finals. I had no life. I wasn't able to go to clubs. Do this and do that and I have a presentation tomorrow and an essay due the following day. It was just basically trying to manage my time. That was the only thing I found hard.*

*It was a bit hard. Just because there was also the whole time management thing. Well I was also under work study, and so that kind of added more hours into my schedule. It was kind of like another class in a way. Just having 2 hours a day built in. I guess I didn't realize how hard the workload was going to be. Finding time at all was really hard. And the whole adjusting thing.*

*I would have to agree with the social thing too, and the time management. I came in here and it was social for like the first month. I would do my homework at the last minute, staying up till like 1 o'clock in the morning. But half way through the quarter I realized I needed to work a little bit harder, study more. I spent more time studying. I tried to do the 2 hours for every credit that they would always say to do for studying. And that actually ended up being a lot of studying for me, but in the end it actually helped.*

*I just don't think I really paid much attention to my workload at all. I mean, did all the homework when it was due, but I really didn't study when I should have been. I did the work to get it done, instead of actually trying to learn. Which is wrong in Chem. But all of the other classes I did well, so I don't know.*

*I think it really just depends on the person. If you are ready to take on more classes, and have a good mindset, then I think that you can do it. But as a freshmen, I would take a second to think about that. Really consider before doing it because it's your first time stepping in and you want to have a good start. So I would really think about whether you can handle it.*

Three students admitted they did not do as well as they would have liked Fall quarter. They lacked the necessary study skills and had difficulty with time management.

*I think that part of me was disappointed in myself because when I didn't do well, it was probably because I didn't study as well as I should have. If I had a test, I would be like, I think I know everything so I don't need to study. You think that you know the material and then you take the test. You obviously didn't know the material as well. I think it was just learning how to study. I have never really had a class where you sit and get lectured at all the time, and then you just take tests. So I think that was hard because usually in high school you do a lot of on-hands learning. Or discussing with other people on what you are doing. I have never really had a class where I have just been lectured at and taken tests. Just learning how to study for that and for the tests was different. I don't think that I did bad, but I just feel better equipped now. A second quarter to do better.*

*I just didn't spend my time wisely and I just bombed everything. What else is there to say? I feel like I am doing much better now this quarter. Just the whole rebound. I have lost kind of everything. I have to build myself up now. Where else are you going to go when you have hit bottom?*

*Basically it just comes down to studying. When you are assigned reading, you are like, okay, I can do it later. I will do all of the readings together versus if you were to follow the syllabus and do what is scheduled. It would make it easier when the test came down. Versus high school, you could study for an hour and I would be fine and do great. In AP or anything. Versus here, you have to spend more time. I have to get used to that.*

Some students talked about what they would do differently if they could do Fall quarter over again. They would do a better job balancing social time with homework; and they would change their study habits or "learn to study."

*For me, just on the social side of things. I got involved with a lot of stuff and was doing stuff every night. It was just really overwhelming. I think that just coming in, you have to find a balance to make sure that you have time to just kind of chill and not going to this, going to that. And doing homework. It's just kind of overwhelming because you want to do stuff, but you just have to be careful and make sure that you don't do too much.*

*I think that I would have changed my study habits. At least find a study buddy in one or two of my classes. My psychology class, everyone says it's supposed to be easy. I found it kind of difficult because I didn't know anything about psychology. I figure if I would have studied more and had some one who could have helped me through it, it might have been a little bit easier. But I don't think that I would have changed any of the classes because I did get a lot out of them. I actually had fun and I have carried some of the stuff into this quarter. For my British Literature class, I carried into English 101 and wrote one of my essays on it.*

*Obviously I would learn how to study. I probably came in with more confidence than I should have since senior year I basically got to slack off and do nothing because I finished everything I needed to. Other than chemistry, the workload was fine. I just didn't keep up with Chemistry and I didn't really care that much to actually do the work. I probably should have and I probably should have just done it.*

*I am with him. Just the whole studying thing. I really like my classes. It was just a matter of doing the work for them.*

Two students say their FIG groups really helped, because they were able to make connections with the teachers and students.

*I would think that FIG groups really help. Really, it did help because we have that seminar class where there were 25 people that were both in your two main classes. Mine was once a week when we met together. It also had the opportunity to go and hang out with my teachers. We went to coffee and we talked about doing a review. My journalism class I loved. It was hard but the fact that I had that support from the professor because I met him through the FIG seminar. He seemed to kind of take care of us and help us more than the other students. Just because we were in that program. That was really helpful for me because I was afraid to approach professors. I thought they were mean and I am just probably a number to them because they are big lecture classes. It made them seem*

*more, I guess human. And approachable. And they won't bite you or be mean. So that was good and helped me.*

*I took a FIG. I liked the fact that we did get to meet with the teachers and that we had a group of students who were in the same classes as us. So we got to connect more and form a study group. I thought that it was helpful because it tied in the concepts of both subjects that you had. For example, whenever you had to write an essay, it was applying how those two courses relate. That just kind of helped. And also if there any clarifications that you needed in any particular class, you could ask the professor or students in it.*

### **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 15 credits to stay on track. 15 credits is manageable. However, it's also a personal decision and you have to decide where you will fit in. So take a lighter load if you're social and you want to take time to adjust to Western
- Find the balance between social life and studying; manage your time wisely
- Take it seriously; have a plan; be prepared; stay on top of things
- Work hard; do your homework; find people to study with
- Take a FIG class to connect with professors and students; and because it helps you adjust to college
- Take GUR's to get them done
- Take courses to explore possible majors
- Take courses that will be interesting and fun
- Talk to advisors and friends who have experience; ask questions
- Have fun! It's college!

*Since I think that we pretty much all agree that 15 credits wasn't that difficult and we were all able to manage it, I would say go for the 15. Unless you really think that you want to take it light and adjust. I would also recommend taking GURs. Get them done and over with. I would also recommend really finding that balance between social life and doing school work.*

*I would just say to a new freshmen to take it seriously. It's your first quarter and you want to get off to a good start. So understand what you want to take so you can prepare yourself. Don't let the social life get to you—just the whole friends thing. Try to get to know people, but don't let it get to you. Don't be going out every night versus studying. And if you think that it will get to you, then I would suggest taking a light load. It's not that big of a deal to take 12 credits. You are only three credits off.*

*I would say that overall make sure you are prepared and on top of things. There are a lot of deadlines and random things. Whether it is for housing or advising or Summer Start or registration. Just make sure you have all of your ducks in a row. It pays off to just spend the time while you are at home to make sure you have everything in line. Also, I think as far as credit load goes, it's on a personal basis. If you think that you are going to be really social and just kind of get used to Western, go ahead and take that light load. You need to also emphasize that if you do take a light load, you are going to have to take a heavy load eventually to make up for that light load. If you are studious, and think that you can handle it, I would say try to keep an average of 15. I would rather stay at a steady, medium load than have to take a light load and then get slammed later on with hard quarters. As far as credits go, just on a personal basis. I recommend just 15 or more just because if you do the math, most majors are around 180 credits. If you divide that up for the quarters, you want to stay at 15 or higher to graduate on time. And have fun! Its college.*

*I would go with what he was saying about its all personal preference. Most of the kids I know, if they were coming into college, I would suggest taking a light load just because I know that they would want to be more social. Especially in a place where you know a bunch of people, like I do up here. I have a bunch of people that went here from high school plus I live with my best friend. 15 credits, it wasn't that much. I just didn't do the work. So as long as you can keep on task, it's not hard.*

*I would consider a FIG if it fits you. If you can find a FIG that consists of courses that really fit your interests, I would go for that. Shoot for 15 and don't procrastinate. It really does depend on if you think that you can succeed in those classes.*

*Kind of going off what everybody is saying, it's your own personal thing. If you think you can handle 17 credits, go for it. It's just your choice. I would recommend to take a FIG. That was really helpful. I liked my science class FIG. I did get to know the professor and he knew my name, which was nice. The class was like 180, so for him to know my name, I was like whoo, I must be something special. Work hard, do your*

*homework. Try to find that balance between hanging out with friends and doing homework. Manage your time wisely.*

*Yeah, I agree. Just managing your time wisely and doing both school work and social stuff. 15 credits is reasonable. Talking to advisors seems to help a lot if you ever run into any problems. It seems like they want to help. Something that helped was talking to a friend that was already at this school. I just kind of asked them what to expect. Someone that had experience.*

*I do think that 15 credits is manageable. It's also a personal decision and you kind of have to decide where you will fit in. Another helpful thing that my advisors told me was, they talked about that you probably shouldn't take for example English and Math at the same time. Because they are both kind of hard and you will have homework every day in them. I think to ask questions like that. Are there two classes that I shouldn't take at the same time? And also just find a balance between classes you feel like you are going to have to take because you just have to. Like math, English, you don't like those. Find a balance between the ones you feel like you have to take and the ones that you think will be interesting and fun. Especially your first quarter, as you adjust. Make sure you don't wake up every morning dreading going to class.*

*I would also say 15 credits is a good range to be in. Definitely try one of the FIG classes because it helps you adjust to college. And plus you have that seminar class that will help you in the two main classes.*

*I would say really take to heart the whole 12 to 15 credits is a good amount. But not necessarily over. Just to keep up with studying. Pick up good study habits at the start. Ask questions. Get help. Use the resources around campus.*

*I would tell freshmen to know what classes you are interested in before hand. Maybe write down two lists, one that you really want and maybe one with some alternative classes that you would not mind getting into. I would tell them not to stress about finding the time to study right away. You kind of have to work into it. Kind of have a feel for your classes and then kind of set up a schedule where you have enough time to study and socialize, but not be too overwhelmed with one or the other.*

*I would have to say to take at least 1, maybe 2 GUR classes to kind of get a feel for the different departments, or something like that. Probably take a fun class or a class that you are possibly wanting to major in to kind of get a feel for if that is what you really*

*want to do. And definitely try to take one class that will be probably challenging. I did feel that helped with my study habits because it showed me this is what a more challenging class is going to be like, so I should work up there and study. Also to find someone in the class that you can study with. Get to know them because then you can also socialize with them outside of that class and know more people.*

*I too would encourage freshmen to find people within their classes to study with. I go to class and sit by myself. I don't really know anyone. It would be nice to be able to study with someone else and be able to feed off each other a little bit.*

*Have a plan. Don't let the GURs bite you on the butt because you don't have them done. Make sure to stay on top of things. Be prepared in the beginning but also make sure you kind of have a plan of where you would like to go. Just again, to be able to graduate on time and be able to major in what you want to major in. It all factors into planning ahead and taking classes that will be worth your while and doing something for you rather than keeping you from graduating or keeping you from being able to apply for a major because you don't have certain classes. Try and plan if you can. I know a lot of people come in not knowing exactly what they want to major in, but that doesn't mean you cannot take meaningful classes that will benefit you.*