

Freshmen Enrollment Focus Groups

Executive Summary for Group 4

Conducted January 31, 2008

Group 4. Thirteen students participated. All twelve took 15 or more state support credits in the fall, and all scored higher than one standard deviation above the mean verbal SAT score, except the student interested in Education, who scored higher than 600 but lower than the one standard deviation cutoff. Four of the students took 15 credits in the fall, four took 16, three took 17, and one each took 18 and 19 credits. Their interests were distributed among the colleges, as represented by Summerstart advising group assignment; with one assigned the environmental studies, CST scholars, health or math/science groups, three assigned to the undecided group, three to the Fairhaven College, music or fine & performing arts groups, five to the humanities or Fairhaven interest group, and one to the education group. Eight of the participants are female, three are students of color, all transferred credits from high school, two participated in an FIG and one in an FYE, five are in the honors program, all thirteen attended Summerstart, and two participated in fall athletics.

Introductions (p1-4)

The majority chose Western for the following reasons:

- The location (close to home)
- The size (not so big)
- The atmosphere here; friendly
- Beautiful town
- Financial reasons
- Friends or family attend (or attended) Western

Students in this group have a wide variety of major interests. Several are still exploring possibilities. Interests include Music, Journalism, Creative Writing, Political Science or Economics or Philosophy, , English, Psychology or Canadian studies, possibly Art, English with a minor in Music, Fairhaven (not sure of focus), Environmental Studies, Philosophy (possibly a double-major with Environmental Science), Political Science or Economics; and one undecided. Plans for graduation vary: 2-3 years (2); 3-4 years (1); 4 years (but that could change) (5); More than 4 years (3, double-majors); don't know (2) (p1-4).

Registration Experience (p4-5)

All students in this group took 15 or more credits. They chose classes because they would apply toward their major, or because they looked like interesting classes that would fulfill GURs. For this general overview about registration, only three students talked about credit load. One student was told she should take more than 15 because she was used to doing it in high school. Another was told to not take more than 16, in order to not be too overwhelmed. And another decided to conduct

an experiment by taking as many credits as he could (17) to see how it would affect his social life, academic life, and extra-curricular life (p4-5).

Academic Advising (p 5-10)

The majority of students in this group were advised to take 15 *or fewer* credits. Two students were advised to “take about 15 credits” — 15 credits was “the magic number” in order to graduate in about 4 years (p5). One student was told to take 15 credits, and “you can’t take 17-18 because this is your first year” (p6). Another student was advised to take between 13 and 15 credits. The student believes advisors should consider personal circumstances (p6). Five students are in the Honors program. The Honors advisor said it’s okay to take only 14 credits, or “don’t worry about the maximum.” The main emphasis is on quality not quantity—to take classes in your interest area, and to not be overwhelmed in the first quarter (p6). Rather than *number of credits* as a concern, students believe that the *types* of courses and *course load* should be considered. For example, “some music courses that are 1 and 2 credits are probably as much work as a 4 credit class” (p7). One student says he could have taken 16 credits, but he chose to take 22 because it worked for him (p7). Three students did not receive advising about credit load specifically (p7-8). Students say it would be helpful if they could attend more than one advising group session during Summerstart, because students are typically interested in more than one area (p8-9). Students also say that peer advisors are really helpful because “they have already been through it.” Peer advisors suggest 15 credits (p9). Two students were advised by family and friends to take a moderate credit load so they could have a social life (p9). Two other students were advised by parents to take as many classes as they can “to get your money’s worth” and to not spend extra time (p10).

Logistics of Registering (p10-13)

Two students took PE classes in order to bring their credit loads up to 15 (p10). Another student was used to taking 5 credit classes through Running Start and found it strange to have 3 or 4 credit classes at Western—which made him feel obligated to take a fourth class in order to have more than 12 credits (p10). Nine students believe that the *number of classes* or the *type of course* is more important than the number of credits, because of the work load associated with each course—for example, lab work and time-consuming assignments (p10-11). For each particular person it is also a matter of time management skills and level of interest in certain areas (p11-12). Students suggest that balance is very important when considering credit load—social life balanced with academics, and variation in classes (p12). Only three students did not get their first choice classes Fall quarter, and this did not affect how many credits they ended up registering for. However 9 students did not get their first choices for Winter classes (p12-13).

Academic Interest Area (p13-14)

Rather than thinking about credit load while registering for Fall classes, students were more concerned about taking GUR's and exploring areas of major interest (p13). Some students couldn't get the prerequisites they needed, which delays access to sequenced courses and access to the major (p13-14). We asked students in this group who were undecided about their major whether this uncertainty affected the number of credits they enrolled in. One student's uncertainty leaves him feeling unmotivated; whereas two students enjoy exploring a variety of classes to find what they really want to do. It's more about the decision-making than it is about affecting credit load (p14).

Co-curricular and Extra-curricular Activities (p15)

Eight students participated in clubs, four in sports, and nine in recreational activities outside of school. However, students say they didn't think about credit load and extra-curricular activities while registering for Fall classes (p15).

Financial Concerns and Work Schedules (p15-17)

Two students must take a minimum of 15 credits for financial aid. One student isn't concerned because he has a scholarship. Two others thought about making the most out of their money (p16). Four students worked Fall quarter, however this did not affect their credit loads or scheduling. The job is flexible, or the job started after registration (p16-17).

Academic and Social Confidence Levels (p17-19)

Nine of the thirteen students in this group say they felt "extremely confident" about their ability to do well their first quarter at Western. All took IB or AP or Running Start classes which fostered their confidence and motivation to continue achieving at higher levels (p17-18). Students agree that AP classes were challenging and introduced them to a structured workload, which helped to prepare them for higher standards in college (p18). In high school there was a lot of competition and pressure from friends and family "to measure up", and this carries over into college (p18-19).

Transfer Credits (p19)

Ten students brought in AP credits, and three brought in community college coursework. One student points out that because he is the kind of person who took AP courses in high school, his mindset is to take more than 15 credits-- he is the kind of person who will continue taking greater credit loads. Seven students agreed (p19-20). Because of the extra credits, students feel free to get started in their areas of interest since many of their GUR's are taken care of (p20). It's also possible for students to graduate earlier than 4 years. On the other hand, some say that because

they came in with extra credits, the pressure is off—they can take the time to get courses they need, and they have extra time to explore majors (p20).

Academic and Social Adjustment (p21-22)

Students in this group believe that time management is more crucial than how many credits you have. They say it's important to schedule in social time even though it might be difficult (you have to “give and take a little”); and sometimes lack of sleep is a factor (p21-22).

Advice for Incoming Freshmen (p22-25)

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

- Don't overload yourself in the first quarter —maybe not even taking 15 credits; Fall quarter is a big adjustment; allow for social time; you know what you can do; don't overestimate yourself
- Don't take math and science at the same time
- Take a variety of classes; besides required courses. Take 1-2 classes you really want to take—fun classes or classes you're “passionate” about
- Learn time management and apply it
- Schedule classes later in the day if you're a night owl
- Have fun; do new and exciting things; do something socially you've never done before; find your passion in life
- Look into all the resources we have: math centers, writing centers, clubs
- Ask people for suggestions about classes (p22-25)