

Freshmen Enrollment Focus Groups

Summary of 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.

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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:

- 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).

I'm majoring in music. And I chose Western through a long and arduous process, but I won't go into it. Stay here for 4 years, go to grad school.

I was deciding between Wazzu and Western, and I picked Western because it's a smaller school and because there's an actual town and people and not just wheat. And I plan on majoring in journalism. And I don't really know about my plans for graduation, I'm kind of just going one quarter at a time.

I chose Western just because I liked the smaller college town a little bit more than UW and I thought I was going to be a teacher going into college, now I'm looking more at majoring in the combined politics, economics, philosophy major and going into law after that. So, I'll probably keep taking quite a few credits and then maybe do a summer or two here so I can try to get through in three years, because I don't want to be in college my whole life. Just law school, and take a while after that.

I chose Western because it's in a beautiful town and a bunch of my friends are already going here, so it seemed logical. And I'm majoring in creative writing. I transferred in with a lot of credits. Looks like 4 years to graduation but that could change.

I chose Western because some of my friends are going here already and the price was good, and I got a scholarship a little bit, and I don't know what I'm planning on majoring in right now, so I think I'll just take a few random classes and see if I like anything. I'll get the undergrad here for sure. At least two years. And I hope to go to grad school sometime.

I went to Western mainly because my parents told me to go to college...so I went to Western because I'm a third generation here, my grandpa, my mom, and me. I don't really know what I want to do. Basically I'm just looking at an English degree, or maybe

just my AA. That's about it.

I chose Western because I really like the campus and the atmosphere, and it was not as overcrowded as UW is, so it just seemed better with smaller class sizes and everything, that I would do better at this type of environment. I haven't decided my major. I'm thinking of double majoring in psychology and possibly Canadian Studies, I think that's really interesting. I think it's gonna take me around 4 and a half years, but that may change because I'm planning on taking summer quarters.

I chose Western because it was smaller than UW and I liked the campus. I am an art major currently, that might change later, but if not then I'll just go 4 years here. I don't know after that what I'll do.

I chose Western because I thought it'd be a better fit for me than UW and both my parents went here. I think they're more proud of me going here than if I'd gone to an Ivy League school or something like that, so. I'm planning on probably majoring in English, but I'm still not decided yet. I'm minoring in music. I'm hoping probably like maybe a little less than 4 years, because I had transfer credits from high school, but it'll probably be around 4 years.

I'm from out of state, so I get asked that "why did I come here" question all the time. I like the size and I like the campus, it's pretty. I like the education school. I'm in Fairhaven, but that wasn't one of the reasons originally. I'm interested in special ed and sociology and gender studies, and I'm in Fairhaven, so I'm not really sure how I'm juggling all of that yet. I came in with some credits, but I think it'll probably take more than 4 years.

I came here because I just liked the friendly atmosphere at Western and I also came for the environmental science program. It also helped that I wasn't accepted to some other schools across the country, but I just decided that I could go here and be close to home, and I would get basically everything I could at another college, and I'm really happy with it. I'm planning to be an environmental science major, and go on to get my masters in that, but I'd also like to major in art. I can't minor in it, but I still like art, so that'd make my credit load really pretty heavy. I'm hoping I can finish the undergraduate stuff in 4 years. But that's hoping.

I plan on getting my major in philosophy. But I'm also doing a double major. I haven't really decided yet, maybe environmental studies or something. I chose Western because it was actually the only public school I applied to, so I mean, by default kind of. It was like 6000 dollars in loans or no loans? But anyway, I also really liked the atmosphere, and

just the size because I went to a small high school. And I plan on taking, because I took Running Start, like 3 to 4 years depending on if I double or triple major.

I'm interested in political science and economics. The reason I came here was it was a good range size college, smaller than UW. And for financial reasons. And I wouldn't mind being here around ideas for the rest of my life, but I think it'll take me about 4 and a half years.

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.

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.

I went to Summerstart, and I was in the Fairhaven advising group, and I had to take Fairhaven 101 and 201 because that's the core program. I took Sociology 268 because of the topic, society and gender, sounded interesting, and because I didn't know a lot about sociology, and I took Intro to Communication Disorders because it sounded interesting, and Mod Hop dance, because I've been taking a lot of dance classes. It was kind of hectic process, because I hadn't figured that out ahead of time... they said that 15 was average, but I should probably take more than 15, because I always do it. I was like an overachiever in high school, so I thought that more than 15 was probably good.

I went to Summerstart and I had really awesome advisors. There were actually two people in my group. They were really, really helpful and interested in helping me see what classes matched my interests, but coming in I knew I wanted take a biology class, and they said there was a FIG available because it also covers GURs, and they said FIG students tend to do better, a little bit. So I did a FIG, and I ended up taking Biology 101, Art 109, Psychology 119, because I really like psychology, beginning martial arts, and education 108, and then the FIG class, and that was 17 credits. And the reason why... they didn't really suggest for me to take more than like 16 credits. They were like 12 to 15 is a good number for credits, but since two of my classes were PE classes, they were

like “Yeah that’ll be fine” and I shouldn’t be too overwhelmed.

I came in with a couple extra credits, so I figured I would conduct an experiment, so the first quarter I took as many credits as I could, which turned out to be 17, and I just wanted to see how that would feel, with the maximum credit load, just how it would effect my social life, my academic life, my extra-curricular life. And that goes for this quarter, too, because now I’m taking the very least I can possibly take, and seeing how that effects my life, social and extra-curricular life. So the first quarter, I took two courses that I wanted to, and two courses that were just GURs that I needed to get rid of. So the first one was Honors 103, which is kind of a history, sociology, literature class which I’m interested in. I’m interested in humanities. And Intro to Political Science. So those are the two I liked. The two I didn’t like but I needed to get rid of was Geology 101 and Math 112, which I’m both terrible at. But I figured if I was going to get a low grade, I should probably get it in the first quarter of college

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?

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.

I really liked my advising session. I found that they were very helpful. They were really encouraging us to take about 15 credits, like 15 credits was the magic number that was on the board, because we did the math, and in order to graduate in about 4 years, you had to take 15 credits a quarter. So that was on the board, but I was a little wary because I didn’t know about the transition between high school and college, so I decided to take 15 credits, but have like core credits, like GURs and stuff, but then to have two PE classes, so it would just be easier, and I wouldn’t die of reading. So I just thought my advising session was fantastic. I really liked it. They were really nice, and even encouraged me to come back if I had any questions during the year. They were really helpful, and helped me find stuff I wanted to take that I wouldn’t have found if I was just on my own.

They were really nice and trying to be helpful, but they didn’t know a lot besides Fairhaven. I took three non-Fairhaven classes, and they didn’t know much about that, and I think they kind of looked through the book with me, but I don’t think it was very helpful. I remember that 15 was the average number.

This student was told to take 15 credits, and “you can’t take 17-18 because this is your first year.”

Well I was in the Running Start advising group, and as far as advisors, they didn’t help with anything about what classes we should take, and actually discouraged me from taking as many classes as I wanted. They told me “No, you can’t take 17, this is your first year” and I’m like, well I have 40 credits, so I ended up taking 18 even though they told me I’d probably fail all of my classes. They said it would be really hard because Running Start, they were easy classes. And I was like “Well, no. I know what I’m doing, I’ve already done this for a year” and they were like “Okay whatever.” They told me I should take only 3 classes, and 15 credits, because I wouldn’t be able to adjust.

This student was advised to take between 13 and 15 credits. The student believes advisors should consider personal circumstances.

The only problem, like I knew what I wanted to take going in, but I think they make really broad statements— like my advisor suggested taking between 13 and 15 credits, for everyone, and whereas I think that would be a good idea for most people, I think they should take into account personal circumstance, like some people are really bright and should take 22 credits, and some people aren’t as bright and should take like 10. Well it’s not just brightness, but I think like work ethic and stuff, so I think they should take that into consideration when they’re talking about it. Other than that I think they were helpful.

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.

I remember the Honors advisor just said that it’s okay if you only take 14 credits, or just don’t worry about taking the maximum you can take, because you don’t want to be overwhelmed your first quarter. And I think that’s all he really said.

I don’t know specifically about the number of credits that they specified, but I know the honors department emphasis was no matter what you take, just be sure to take honors classes in your interest.

The emphasis was definitely on the quality of the classes, not the quantity.

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.”

I really think it would be helpful if advisors would talk about taking more classes if you're taking easier classes. I know it's a really subjective term, but this quarter I'm taking 4 classes, but it's a breeze compared to last quarter, because they're different classes that I don't find, it's in my humanities, lots of reading, writing kind of stuff, which is more my thing, versus like French I had never taken before, and chemistry was like whoa. So I think that it's definitely important for advisors to talk about “Okay are you going to be really challenged by this course load” not just how many credits it is—because I don't think credits have much to do with anything. What it has to do with is, forget the number, look at what the classes are going to be assigning you. Like tons of reading, or tons of homework problems, whatever.

I really agree with all of that. I agree with what you were saying, especially with the music program. Because the music program is really different. We have 1 and 2 credit classes that are probably as much work as like a 4 credit class, so I ended up taking 16 credits. I shouldn't have taken the extra class that I did. I'm not so sure about the honors advising session. I found it to be really general. I think it would have been more helpful for me to be in the more specific advising group that's geared toward one department where they have a lot more knowledge than that, because I found it a million times more helpful to just go into the music advisor to talk about what I wanted to take.

One student says he could have taken 16 credits, but he chose to take 22 because it worked for him.

I ended up taking 22 credits. It really wasn't that big of a deal. I was talking with my music advisor and he said you have to take your music classes but it's a good idea to get rid of your GURs before you move to upper division where you're going to be spending more of your life devoted to what you're going to be doing... so I had to get more out of the way now... It was a choice, I could have taken 16.

Three students did not receive advising about credit load specifically.

I am a first generation college student, so I came to Summerstart having absolutely no idea what I was doing at all. I kind of had my classes picked out when I came, but I feel like my registration session with my advisor was focused more on what we were doing on Web4U or whatever program we used, instead of what we should do with our classes. So I didn't know what I was doing at all. I didn't know what the credits meant really, like if

I was supposed to base how much work I was getting based on the credits I was taking. And I feel like it would have been more helpful if my advisor had gone over something like that. I ended up taking 16, and then when I withdrew from yoga, it was 15, and I need 15 for the financial aid that I get, so it worked out.

To go off that, my advisors didn't really say much either about what kind of classes we should take. I went into Summerstart kind of knowing, like I knew I had to take the art classes, I know that much, but after that, both my friend and I, we kind of just looked through the catalog and we were trying to figure out which ones sounded interesting and which ones fit with our schedule, so it was just kind of like an individual thing after that.

As much as my thing was focused on the way to register for classes, I do remember them mentioning that if you were undecided about your major, taking different classes from different departments to kind of get a sense of what the departments were, and trying to find something you like that way, by like taking samples.

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.

Definitely there needs to be more connection between the different departments and colleges, because people aren't going to be taking all of their classes in one area necessarily, and often the requirements cross those boundaries, so it would be helpful if there was an easier way to communicate, because I know when I was registering, I wouldn't have been able to talk to people in those departments, because they didn't have office hours at the time, and so it made things very complicated.

I agree with that, actually. What I was just thinking about, what might be helpful, and I don't know how this would be possible, but maybe like, just changing it so that you're not bound to one advising group, because for me, I had a couple different interests, and I think it would have been really helpful to be able to talk to just different departments, as opposed to being stuck in one advising group. So maybe having like a general advising session, where they did talk about how to register, but then maybe having freedom to talk to different advisors, because I also agree with what was being said earlier about how it was more being shown how to use Web4U as opposed to being shown what classes to take, because I felt fairly in the dark about it as well.

Yeah, and in terms of getting advice on multiple majors and areas of interest, I think they had a majors fair today, but if they had something like that incorporated into Summerstart, I think it would be really helpful. So that people could go, and talk to

people from different departments, and then go register, with those ideas in mind, like "Okay I want to do this, and this requires this."

Students say that peer advisors are really helpful because "they have already been through it." Peer advisors suggest 15 credits.

I had students in my advising session, like Western students, like they came in and talked to us about classes, and that was really helpful because they've already been through it and they know what's going on, and I just really liked that, because they were like "Oh, don't take this one you're freshman year, it's a little hard to adjust, so take this easier class, it's still a larger credit thing, but it's easier and that way you don't get swamped your first quarter." Because, even when other colleges, like when you go to grad school, even if they see that there's still a positive trend line from like a low score when you're a freshman, and then higher, that's positive still, they stay it's better to do well in the beginning, and just not get bad grades, so.

I think they're just like "15's..." They just kind of said what the advisor said. They were just really helpful, like saying if you already know what you want to do, some credits can count towards your major, and as a GUR... It was just really helpful talking to them because they've already been through it.

Yeah, the students made it a lot more informal, and that was very helpful.

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

Two students were advised by family and friends to take a moderate credit load so they could have a social life.

Yeah. They said don't take so many that you don't have a social life, but don't take so little that you can party all the time.

My mom definitely encouraged me not to be a, because she was more of an overachiever when she did college, but, like because she went to UW and everything, and she was taking like 20 credits or something all the time because she was originally doing pre-med and she just encouraged me not to be like, just really into academics my first quarter, and just, it's okay to take the minimum requirement, and drop a class if you need to.

Two 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.

My parents actually encouraged me to take as many as I could without driving myself totally insane, just to get my money's worth out of college, and get a good start on requirements, but that was also probably my own fault too, just because I was a bit of an overachiever in high school, and didn't know any different, so I guess I wasn't going to change in college.

I was always told that you better take as many classes as you can because you have only so much time and you're paying a lot for it, so you gotta get your money's worth, and you don't want to spend an extra year, or an extra 2 years, because you didn't fulfill the graduation requirements. I had a cousin who spent 7 years, and it cost his family a lot. He changed his major 3 times, and he finally stuck with something.

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?

These students took PE classes in order to bring their credit loads up to 15.

I was at 14 before I took the dance class, so I thought that 14 wasn't enough and I was looking at 2, 3 credit classes, and I took the dance class so I could get up to 15.

Yeah I just took a PE class for the sake of having 15, because I just like rounded it off.

This 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.

I found it kind of odd, because I went to the community college before this, to Running Start, and that was all 5 credit classes. So it was so strange to have 4 credit classes. It made me feel obligated to take a 4th class just so that I wouldn't be taking 12 credits with 3 classes. So, and especially the honors department, it's only 4 credits for most of the courses, and the philosophy when I get around to taking more of those classes, it's only 3 credits per class.

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.

One thing I would say is the advisors focused a little bit too much on the number of credits rather than the number of classes. So, I think I've kind of figured out over the quarter that the number of classes, and just like, you can look up the course work that you're gonna have to do before. I've just realized that's more important than the actual number of credits.

Music 212 was just piano, it's a 1 credit class, but it's a lesson, two studio classes, outside requirements, and practicing multiple hours a day, so it's not necessarily really hard, but it's really really time consuming, but I think that our credit hours kind of... I just kind of thought like less credits, less work type thing.

I think 3 classes is enough if you're doing math and science that requires lab work and intensive studying, versus just kind of reading for a broad concept, and writing and stuff like that. Because especially I know if you have a lab on top of 5 hours a week of class, it is time consuming, and same with music. It's not just the class itself. You have all this other stuff, but I think 4 is a good number if it's just like regular classes.

4 classes is a good number. That's what I took last quarter, and I'm taking 5 this quarter, and it's a little bit more than what I would want.

I think it completely depends on what department and like what type of classes you're taking. I don't think it really should depend on number of classes and number of credits. I think it should be like, you shouldn't take like 4 science classes, you're gonna die. I think just the type of class should be taken into consideration.

And that distinction should definitely be made at Summerstart because I had no idea, and we had no idea until we actually experienced those classes, the science and music classes, about how hard they would be. With labs and outside work. That should definitely be made clear early on.

For each particular person it is also a matter of time management skills and level of interest in certain areas.

I agree with what's been said, but I also think that a lot of it has to do with how much a person wants to pursue certain classes, how much of time management skills and drive they have, because if someone's really into science, and science is their life, they live and breath science, then they can probably take, like, I don't know, 4, 5 classes. Because if they woke up, and started doing science, and they took science classes, they took a 15 minute lunch, went back to science, they took maybe a 30 minute dinner, did science till bed time... I mean, the social life wouldn't necessarily be there, but if they did it, they

would excel and be really enjoying it. So I mean, I think it also all depends on the person and their attitudes toward the classes.

I think nonetheless, I always considered myself pretty good at chemistry. I got an A last time I took it as a college class. But at the same time, you just don't realize how time consuming something can be, and even if you are really good at it and really dedicated to it, I mean, I honestly don't think anyone, aside from that example exactly, if you really did devote your entire life to studying science or studying any sort of time consuming subject, I don't think it's really a good idea for anyone to take like 3 lab classes in a quarter.

Students suggest that balance is very important when considering credit load—social life balanced with academics, and variation in classes.

College should definitely encourage a social life. They should at least inform the students on this decision, even if they like science that much.

I think variation in your classes is important, too, just so that you get other things in your schedule. I mean, you could really do science all day if you wanted to, but I'm sure at some point during the quarter, you'd get really bored. I mean, I would, definitely.

Yeah, like pretty much, yeah anything that requires... I just personally think that it would be a bad idea to take too many classes from one department. I think it's a good idea to mix them up.

When you have GURs that you need to take classes from different departments anyway, they should encourage you to do that first quarter.

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?

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.

I just filled up the gap with more credits.

It really, it mostly effected whether I took stuff that was applicable to my major or not, because like, I've already taken lower division philosophy classes, and by the time that I

got around to registering, even with all my credits that I brought in, all of the upper division classes were full. So, I guess it can be tough in that situation.

Yeah, it's tough. Hoping spring quarter will be better, but we'll see.

Academic Interest Area

Do you think that the academic area you were interested in pursuing affected your decision to take the credit load that you took Fall quarter? How? In what ways?

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.

Being in Fairhaven, I don't have to do those GURs, I have a lot less credits that are GURs, so I was advised to take stuff that I was interested in, to help me figure out what I wanted to do.

I almost wish they would have told me to take GURs more because in the end, I didn't necessarily get any GURs done my first quarter. So I really wish that they would have been like "Hey, take at least one or two."

Well, I felt like I wasn't even focusing on my major, because I just was taking stuff to try it out. I think it's good to just get some GURs done and explore areas, because you can explore areas of major interest through GURs. And that way, if you do really decide you want to do something, at least you have taken all your GURS already, so then you don't have to worry about those when you're trying to get your major requirements done.

Some students couldn't get the prerequisites they needed, which delays access to sequenced courses and access to the major.

I took Journalism 190, Intro to Mass Media fall quarter, and the next journalism class that I need to take is newswriting, I can't remember what number it is, but they only offer 2 classes, and each of them have 18 spots, so I did not get into that class, but I need that one to take any other journalism class.

The same exact thing happened to me this quarter, because I was interested in journalism, just not quite sure, but I'm taking mass media now because the newswriting filled up way too fast, even with my credits I couldn't get it. It must be all like seniors and some juniors in there.

Which doesn't make sense if you need to take that to move on to other classes. So, I guess it's kind of off the subject, but I think the administration needs to think about making the classes that are prereqs for a lot of other classes, either making those open to more people, or just offering more classes, because I've listened to a lot of people very frustrated about that.

I ultimately want to major in English, but I haven't been able to even take an English class yet because, well last quarter I was going to, but I had to change my schedule due to scheduling conflicts. And I think to declare my major, I have to take like English 203 or something like that, but it's gonna be really hard to get into that, so, you know.

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?

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.

I feel kind of unmotivated because of that. Since I don't know what major I want to do, I see that I have all this time, it's kind of made me decide that I should spread out the GURs more, because if I finish them in a short amount of time, I don't have anything else that I know I want to take, so, and plus it's just unmotivated to not have a goal to work towards or anything. Like, I feel like if I was decided on what major I wanted to do, and I knew exactly how much time it was gonna take, all the classes, I needed to take, I would probably work harder.

I wasn't sure, and I'm still not quite sure, but in fall quarter, I think it encourages you, gives you an incentive to take a lot more classes, with a lot more variety, so that right off the bat you can start delving into a couple different branches of what you think you might be interested in. So there's definitely incentive there to take more branches.

I'm kind of the opposite of that. I feel like having no major makes it, I can take any class I want to, and in the end I'll have a major that I actually really, really want to do, instead of just picking like, accounting because I'll get rich or something like that. Having no major, I've been able to take some classes I'd never even think of taking before, more of them. I really wish the art department would open up more of its classes.

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?

Clubs — 8

Recreational activities outside of school — 9

Sports — 4

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

Students didn't think about credit load and extra-curricular activities while registering for Fall classes.

It should have but it didn't.

I didn't know when the clubs were meeting during registration, so it didn't interfere at all.

Not really, actually now that I think of it. Which is surprising, because I also do crew, and I didn't even think about that, because I didn't even decide until I started school, but...I think it's hard to really tell what you're going to be involved in.

I had a naive notion that if I had 4 classes, I could make anything else work, because I had 6 classes in high school.

I knew coming in fall quarter that I was gonna be on the crew team, but I still chose an 8:00 class, because somehow I thought that would work. But then when I registered this quarter, I knew that early morning classes don't work well with an early morning practice schedule. So that kind of, it was kind of like a trial and error kind of thing. I knew that I need to have kind of a, either take my classes more clumped together in the morning, or clumped together in the afternoon so that I had time to sleep during the day at some point, and so that kind of, it was like a trial and error kind of thing, definitely.

I didn't want anything too late, because that would interfere with clubs. But there wasn't that much classes that were that late, so it didn't do a lot.

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?

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.

I have to do a minimum of 15 for financial aid.

The only reason is the same thing as her. The 15 credit thing for the financial aid. That was it. But I was going to take it anyway, so it didn't really matter.

I think I wasn't necessarily that concerned, but I think I would have been much more so if I hadn't had my tuition paid for by scholarship. Because I'm like, well it's not my money, so I think, I'm not just going to waste the opportunity to go to college and everything.

I thought about it a lot. How I should make the most out of the money I'm spending, and try to get the GURs done, and try to explore a major.

I just figured if I can get through it all, because I already had some transfer credits, then if I could get through it all in 3 years, then I could save like \$14,000 or whatever. So that would be nice. But I'm not too concerned about it anymore.

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

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.

It didn't affect my scheduling at all. I actually, I work in the recording studio at the Performing Arts Center, and we record everything, bands, concerts, solo musicians, whatever. So, you get paid a certain amount, and you work your own times. It's a good way to make money, a great way to have fun. I also taught migrant workers' children how to play guitar in a bilingual guitar class. And I'm still doing that, it's quite a lot of fun. But it didn't affect anything. I can always schedule that somewhere.

I was also really lucky with my job. It didn't interfere at all. I registered first. I had the job the entire time, but I didn't do my job until after classes. I'm just a promoter, so they just pay me. I just promote whenever I have time.

I got my job after I already signed up for classes. It's kind of fluid. I work in a program

for an autistic kid, and he has people come in 2 hours a day on week days and 4 hours a day on weekends, and there was a whole bunch of people to do it. So I just kind of got to do whatever hours worked for me, and then this quarter when I have a different schedule, they kind of reshuffled a couple of days, which ones each of us would work.

I'm doing work study. It's like the easiest thing ever. I work in the lost and found, and work study is extremely lenient with the hours that you work, and I chose my schedule, and there's 3 of us that work, and then we kind of like, send the one girl who's kind of in charge of scheduling what are schedules are and she'll be like "Okay, do these hours work for you?" and if I can't work a certain day, or just a certain part of a shift, then I just stick a note on the door that says I'm not there. It's really easy, it's just two hours every day, and I do my homework during that time.

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?

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.

Definitely IB.

Both AP and IB does a really good job of fostering enormous egos.

And Running Start. I was familiar with the structure, and I think though like, I remember being told in honors information session "Oh when you go to Western your GPA usually goes from 4.0 to 3.0" and I'm like "Oh no way, I wouldn't get a 3.0 GPA."

I think people that take AP classes are the ones that are like the overachievers and the ones that are really focused and driven, and that's why it just kind of goes on that when they're in college, it's like "keep on truckin'."

People that take AP classes are generally smarter than people that take normal classes, and that's part of the reason that they develop those huge egos.

I think it has nothing to do with smartness. One of the things that always came up was that all people would procrastinate, but people who were in the AP classes, the IB classes

just knew how to procrastinate and get stuff done well. So it was not necessarily about that-- it was about a certain mindset that people have. Not necessarily brightness because I know a lot of bright kids who are in those classes, but they just weren't motivated to take those classes.

I think it's just being confident in general.

My AP classes I can honestly say really helped me get into the whole college thing, because I slipped one day into one of the regular high school classes for English, because my friend was in there, and I was just stopping by, and their level of work, not to be judgmental, but it was significantly lower than what we were doing. We were held standard to in my AP English class. Like something that they wrote and they got an A on, it would not even C me, I wouldn't even get a C. It's the development of quality of work, I think is what really AP has.

I think it prepares you for the commitment that you'll need, but it's also true that in high school, the schedules are more strict. Like what you have to turn in is much more defined, and so what doesn't carry over is like, the sense that in college, you really have to get things done yourself, and nobody's gonna tell you when you need them done.

Students agree that AP classes were challenging and introduced them to a structured workload, which helped to prepare them for higher standards in college.

I knew going in that the AP's were harder, because my parents kept saying that they never had that much work even in college, and definitely I haven't worked as hard in college as I did in my AP classes.

I think part of the whole AP thing is that it's really structured. I can't imagine not having done running start, and going in without having any AP classes or any college classes. I would have just been completely overwhelmed by how structured everything was. So I think AP definitely fosters this like "Okay, I'm obligated to do this by a certain time," and so that's part of the reason why people succeed after doing AP courses.

I think AP starts to kind of give you a sense of "this is what you need to get done; now you can do it." AP tries to harbor the feeling that "Look, you are held to a higher standard," and it does to some degree.

In high school there was a lot of competition and pressure from friends and family "to measure up", and this carries over into college.

For me it's a lot about competition. At my high school, it was really competitive, and all of my friends were smart, so I had to measure up to them, and we were all measuring up to each other. Then also kind of peer pressure, too, because like, everyone else is doing it, so you should take these AP classes, too. And then getting your homework done and that sort of thing. And my high school was smaller, so the teachers knew who we were.

It was kind of expected of me from my family, and from my peer group. There was a whole lot of different people in my high school, but my specific peer group, we were expected to take APs and the same thing with my family. I never had a hard time in school, and so I was expected to take the harder, challenging classes and get A's.

I felt in high school, the competition motivated me to take AP classes, and the whole, you need them to get into a good school thing, but I think in college it kind of changed in that I'm more motivated in that I get to take what I want to take, and I get to take what I'm interested in as opposed to really strict high school requirements, and so I think that helps a lot with motivation, just being able to take something you want to take.

For me it's like, just because I don't know any different. Like about 6th grade, they start some students on one track, in like, math or whatever, and so we just like kept going, and also probably a lack of ability to focus on any one area, so I might be doing environmental science as a major, but I like, still want to do music and art and theater, I don't know how that would fit in but like, I can't eliminate anything, and so that's probably why I have so many credits.

For me it was competition, too. And I think clubs I did in high school that only developed that competitive spirit that I have. I did sports and then I did debate, I competed on the debate team, so that definitely made me competitive, and that carried over into my classes.

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?

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.

I think the same mindset that is the reason that I have credits coming in also pushes me to

take more than 15, so I could take less if I wanted to, but because I'm the kind of person that took a lot of APs in high school, I'm also the kind of person that would keep taking a lot of credit.

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.

It freed me up a lot, just was a big monkey off my back so I could pick classes I actually wanted to take instead of all GURs. If I wouldn't have come in with these credits, I probably would have gone all 4 classes GURs just to start out, and make each of my quarters economic, but I took 2 I wanted to take and 2 GURs and I figured out nicely what I wanted.

Yeah my AP credits, some of them counted for GUR credits, so I didn't have to take certain classes, which was really nice. Both this quarter and last quarter, finding out what GURs I had to take, because I didn't have to take ones my friends did. It just opened up more room for me to take other things I'm interested in.

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.

I figured out before school started that I could probably do a program that usually took more than 4 years, in 4 years. And I'm not following that path now, but it was cool to have that option.

I was really determined to graduate early initially, and so at first it was like "Okay, I have to take upper division classes this year." But after I kind of let go of that and it was okay to take 3 or 4 years if I need to, then it really took the pressure off. Like I don't ever have to worry about having enough elective credit. I mean, I just have to take what I need.

I don't think it's necessarily taking a certain number of credits. I just don't feel pressured to always take the right course. I'm not, I'm still kind of undecided, and I don't feel really pressured to take, like if I took this class, oh that's a waste of time because I ended up choosing a different major. Then, it's more that feeling like, I feel like I can still explore majors without feeling guilty that I'm wasting money.

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.

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.

I think time management is so much more crucial than how many credits you have. I mean if you have 20, it's hard to have a social life. But, time management made it easier if you're really good at it, no matter how many credits you have. So I think that's more of an influencing factor than credit load.

I agree with that statement, and I mean, I was taking a lot credits, I was working, I was doing a lot of stuff, so it ended up that I was spending, during the week day, like 18 hours out of my room, just out working, doing stuff, and then come back, work for 3 hours on homework, and sleep for 3 hours. But I'd always schedule in that Friday, when I got off work at 6:00, that was my evening. So, it's important to have a social life, it's important to do those things, but if you want it, you have to make sacrifices.

Yeah, so with crew, we have practice every morning, plus Saturdays, so the only night that I really could do anything was Saturday night. But this quarter, I had a really hard time readjusting, and I called my mom and she gave me advice, and we had afternoon workouts, and I was trying to go to work, go to workout, do my homework, and go to bed at a somewhat decent time. But I think I'm really good at time management because of that. I had to try and fit working out earlier in my schedule instead of earlier in the day, or just not work out at all that day just so that I could relax. So it's kind of like a give and take a little bit.

I learned time management. Fall quarter was a bit more of an adjustment than it should have been if I had known time management, but I feel now more like now that it's winter quarter now, like I know how to schedule my time so I don't get overwhelmed with homework and stuff like that. However, sleep schedule is bad.

Assuming you're taking decently hard classes, it's a matter of just kind of getting used to this constant studying or reading kind of thing, and then letting yourself have breaks. But it's very different from high school where you can put things off until the last minute

really easy versus now it's reading a book at least a week, and on top of all this other stuff, it's not like you can put it off until the very last minute. We think we can.

I also make sure that I schedule in relaxation time. I have a boyfriend who doesn't go here, and so every night I make sure I get my homework done by a certain time, then I talk to him online for like, an hour or so. So I think just doing stuff like that, where you make sure that you have time to do something you want to do. It's just really important for sanity, and then also trying to find ways to sleep. Because social life can often lead to little to no sleep. Of course, sleep can impede on social life as well.

I don't think it affected my social life, it just affected my sleep life, because again, I can't eliminate anything from my schedule, and also, probably having a roommate who was not taking honors classes, it was actually a good thing because as opposed to being shut up in my room all the time, I would just get pulled off to Fairhaven or where ever, so I actually ended up having a social life, but yeah, not a whole lot of sleep.

Social life was kind of scheduled in, because I did dance clubs pretty much every night, and other scheduled social things, so that was like part of like, I had to do my homework at this time, because I was going to go be social at swing kids at that time. I didn't have any like, not as much relaxed social time as I should have had, but it was okay because I was still doing something.

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:

- 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

I would say not to try to overload yourself at all, like, maybe not even taking 15 credits, because I think it's just like, fall quarter is a big adjustment, and you just need to kind of, yeah people just always talk about how college is such an adjustment, and it really is, and I think especially fall quarter, you need to have time to meet people and have a social life, and not being isolated in your room doing work all the time. You know, I think there's time later on to take harder schedules.

Yeah, because, I definitely feel like social life during fall quarter takes a bigger chunk of your time because you know all these new people and it's like, you don't really learn, you haven't learned to necessarily discipline yourself to be like "Okay, I'm staying in tonight, I'm doing homework." I mean, it's tough. I would encourage students to really take classes they can see themselves getting passionate about and not just worrying about "Okay, I have to do all this for my major and GURs and all that. Just take classes, because that goes a long with finding a major, take classes that you really want to go to, it's not like you're required to.

I would advise people to ignore the credits, and just think about it more in terms of what they've done in the past. How many classes, they've taken, and try to imagine that fitting in to what they're gonna take in college. Because, I mean, a 4 credit class, you're in class for 4 hours, but that doesn't tell you anything about how much time you're going to have to spend outside of class doing work.

If you know yourself well enough, like you know what you can do, trust it. People were talking about counselors that said "you should do this and you should do that," but like, they don't know you and maybe you've never done college before, but you've done high school, and you know how much you can do.

At the same time, don't let your ego take over. There's a difference between knowing yourself and overestimating yourself.

I would say to have a really big variety of classes you take, even if you know what you want to major in, just, you know, in case something else comes up that kind of catches your eye, or sparks your interest.

I would recommend that people have fun with what they're doing, because I mean, if you're going into your major, which is what you're intending to do with the rest of your life, you shouldn't be hating it already. So have fun with it, and if you're not having fun,

find something else.

I would say 3 really important things. 1: Learn time management and apply it. 2: Take two classes that you want to take. 3: Do one thing socially that you've never done before in your fall quarter. I feel like in high school, you're there usually for 4 years, with the same group of people, with the same teachers. Here, you are at college, you have the opportunity to take like a self defense class, or some other random class, and I think it's important that you not think of that as waste of money or a waste of time at college, but more of an opportunity to get to do something that you might not have time for later. The reason I said do 1 thing socially you've never done before is just because in high school you have a safety net, because you're living with your parents usually, and you have a nice community that you know, and part of going to college is having all that kind of wiped away on the surface. You still have a support of some kind, but you're out on your own, you're doing your own thing, and if you screw up, well then good, you're gonna learn a lesson. If you don't, if you do it right, that new social thing, whatever you do, it's your first lesson in life, about how you can do something yourself.

Also, this is like the first time in our lives when school equals our life because we live here, and so if you don't do new or exciting things while you're here, it's basically, you aren't going to do them while you're here, for how many years you're here, so you better do them.

Yeah, I'm just like overwhelmed with all the resources that we have here. It's amazing. Like, my high school, it was like 150 students, you don't have anything besides like the 6 teachers there, and it's cool and all because it's really tiny, but at the same time it's like "Oh my gosh, we have math centers, writing centers" and then we have all these clubs, and it's like anything you want is out there. And I think people should really look into that. Use the resources, because you're paying for them.

Don't take math and science at the same time. Yeah, because that was passed on to me, and I just took science, and that was hard enough, and I would have died if I took math at the same time, I know for sure, so it's good advice.

Something else just kind of, if you're a night owl, try to take classes later in the day, if you're a morning person, try to take classes that are in the morning, because like, I'm definitely a night owl, and sleeping in until noon everyday was nice.

I would say take, along with taking 2 classes that you actually want to take, if you do end up taking just GURs, at least take 1 class that's, even if it's just 1 credit, something that's different, that you never thought you could take, or like a fun class.

If you ask around, too, then people always are willing to give you suggestions for what classes are good or bad, I think.

Just have fun, and if you're interested in something, find out where it's happening in town before you get here, that way you're not out of the loop.

Find a passion in life. Find what really makes you get up in the morning, what excites you. And do that, and if that means taking a lot of classes and finding stuff and struggling, it's okay. But, if it means knowing what you want to do already, then that's okay, too. But be flexible with what you want.