

Freshmen Enrollment Focus Groups

Executive Summary for Group 5

Conducted February 6, 2008

Group 5. Eleven students participated. All eleven were assigned to the “undecided” Summerstart advising group, and all took fewer than 15 credits in the fall with three taking 13 and eight taking 14. Seven participants are female, three are students of color, and six transferred credits from high school. One participated in an FIG and one in an FYE. None are honors students, all eleven attended Summerstart, and one participated in fall athletics (football).

Introductions (p1-3)

The majority chose Western for the following reasons:

- The location (close to home)
- The size (compared to other colleges)
- Really like Western (pretty; and the way its set up)
- The people and atmosphere
- Got a scholarship
- Friends or family attend (or attended) Western
- Certain sports
- Certain programs (debate; science)

The majority in this group are undecided as to major. Students are tentatively interested in the following areas: medicine (possibly dermatology), business marketing, engineering (2), environmental science, pre-law, physics, communication sciences and disorders, biology. Most are hoping to graduate in four years, however two students are athletes so they estimate they will be here four and half to five years. One student may take longer than four years because he doesn't want to “cram”, and another plans to transfer to the U.W. for law school (p1-3).

Registration Experience (p3-5)

In this general overview, students listed various reasons why they took the number of credits that they chose. For the most part, students chose courses to fulfill GUR's or because they wanted to explore potential majors (p3-5). One student was advised to take 14-15 credits (p3). Two students chose to take fewer than 15 credits because they didn't know what college was going to be like, and they wanted to be able to adjust (p3). One student took fewer than 15 credits because he needed time for football practice (p4). One student was signed up for 17 credits originally, but decided this would be too much (p4). This student took a FIG as well as English 101, yet the credits added up to fewer than 15 (p4). Three students registered for three classes each, to explore certain majors and to fulfill GUR's. Clearly these students were thinking about the *types of courses* they were taking and whether they made sense. They were not thinking about credit loads (p4-5).

Academic Advising (p 5-8)

Four students were advised to take 15 credits (or around 15 credits) as it is the average load, or the number of credits needed to graduate in four years. However they took 13-14 credits and figured that was okay (p5). Four students were advised to take 14 or 15 credits as this is a “normal load” or a “reasonable load.” Their schedules worked out to be less than 15 credits (p5-6). One student didn’t know what was considered a normal load. The advisor questioned why she was signing up for 17 credits and asked for her high school GPA (p6). Another student was advised to take 14-18 credits. She ended up dropping from 18 down to 14 because of the amount of homework (p6). We asked the group to tell us the reasons *why* they were advised to take 14-15 credits, or 14-18. Six students believe the concern was about adjusting to the workload in college and learning how to study (p7). One student understood that in order to graduate in four years, it should average out to 15 credits a quarter (p8). One student was pressured by her dad to take 15 or more credits in order to graduate in four years because of the money, and he was upset when she dropped below 15. (p8). Parents told another student about the study load she might expect, and friends had taken 17-18 credits their first quarter; so she chose to take fewer than 15 credits in order to not be overwhelmed (p8). Teammates told the cross country student that the first quarter is the hardest, so he chose to take fewer than 15 credits (p8).

Logistics of Registering (p9)

One student didn’t pay attention to the number of credits attached to courses. Several others say they would rather take 14 credits than add another class that would put them at 17 or 18 credits, because that would be too overwhelming (p9). The registration process during Summerstart did not affect students in terms of how many credits they ended up taking Fall quarter; however for winter quarter “everything was gone” (p9).

Academic Interest Area (p9-10)

One student mentioned that he couldn’t get into any of the prerequisites for engineering (p9). The majority in this group is undecided as to major, and they were more concerned about selecting a wide variety of GUR’s than they were about credit load (p10). About half of this group was advised to not take English and Math at the same time (p10).

Co-curricular and Extra-curricular Activities (p10-11)

Two students chose to take lighter loads so they would have time for practice (one was playing football and the other was on the cross country team) (p10). One student was in Lacrosse and another was in the Viking band, but this did not affect their decision-making about how many credits to take Fall Quarter (p11).

Financial Concerns and Work Schedules (p11-12)

Two students were thinking in terms of being a full time student (minimum 12 credits) in order to keep their scholarship (p11). Parents are paying for one student’s tuition; and another student is paying for college on his own. This did not affect their decision-making

about how many credits to take (p11). Three students worked Fall quarter, however this did not affect registration for Fall classes (p12).

Academic and Social Confidence Levels (p12-13)

Four of the eleven students in this group said they felt confident coming into Western, and they even had more time here than during high school (p12). Seven students admitted they did not do well with time management in their first quarter (p13). We asked students to tell us the extent to which they took fewer credits because they wanted to get comfortable with the social climate here at Western. Three students answered this question, saying this was not a factor. They did not consider social time while registering (p13).

Transfer Credits (p14)

Six people brought in AP coursework and one brought in community college coursework. The majority felt they could take less than 15 credits fall quarter since they had extra credits coming in. One student felt pushed to do more so he could move ahead to sophomore status. Another came in with 5 transfer credits and plans to schedule classes so he can move to sophomore status next fall. Another points out that you can stay on track if you take 16-17 one quarter then 14 another (p14).

Academic and Social Adjustment (p15-16)

This group agrees that they were able to do well and to transition into college because they took fewer than 15 credits Fall Quarter. It reduced stress a lot. They were able to handle their homework, and to learn the necessary study skills. They also learned how to set up their schedules for better time management (p15-16).

Advice for Incoming Freshmen (p16-19)

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

- Take 14-15 credits so you can adjust to college, learn good study habits, and keep up with the work load. (Stay close to 15 to stay on track.)
- Consider your ability levels and set up your schedule so you are comfortable with your work load
- Sign up for 18 credits during Summerstart then drop the extra class once you've had a chance to "read the teacher" and determine how much homework there will be.
- Sign up for popular classes during Summerstart because you may not get them later
- Take a variety of courses

Eight of eleven in this group advises freshmen to take 14-15 credits-- (Six say 14-15 credits; and two more recommend staying close to 15 in order to stay on track.) They recommend 14-15 credits because it is "a reasonable amount" or a "good introductory weight"-- so freshmen can adjust to college, learn good study habits, and keep up with their work load (p16). This group emphasizes the importance of considering students' ability levels, and setting up a schedule so they will feel comfortable with their workload (p17). Another

suggestion is to sign up for 18 credits during Summerstart then drop the extra class once you've had a chance to "read the teacher" and determine how much homework there will be (p18). One student recommends getting involved in clubs or activities in order to have more fun in the first quarter (p18). Three students suggest signing up for popular classes during summerstart because you may not get them later (p18-19). Finally, one student suggests taking a variety of classes, not just classes toward a major (p19).