

Freshmen Enrollment Focus Groups

Executive Summary for Group 7

Conducted February 27, 2008

Group 7. Thirteen students participated in the seventh focus group, which was defined by low fall state support credits and assignment to the math/science or health Summerstart advising groups. Seven participants are female and six male, four are students of color, and seven transferred credit from high school. One student participated in an FYE, but none participated in FIGs, and none are in the honors program or fall athletics. All took fewer than 15 credits in the fall: two took 12 credits, five took 13, and six took 14. Eleven participants attended Summerstart.

Introductions (p1-3)

The majority chose Western for the following reasons:

- The location (close to home)
- A certain program (Industrial Design, Marine Biology. Chemistry, Japanese)
- The atmosphere
- The size

Students in this group attended math/science or health Summerstart sessions.

Major areas of interest include: Industrial Design, Marine Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Molecular Biology or Physical Anthropology, pre-dentistry (but now undecided), Geography, pre-med and Psychology, Japanese. Two students plan to complete math and sciences course here (pre-x-ray tech and pre-pharmacy), then transfer. Plans for graduation vary: 2 years (had two years of Running Start), four years (four students), a little over four years, four or five years (2 students), and five years (two students) (p1-3).

Registration Experience (p3-5)

All students in this group took less than 15 credits. Students took a smaller course load for essentially two reasons: 1) to adjust to their first quarter in college (six students); and 2) the credit loads worked out that way because of the classes selected (all thirteen students).

Advisors and students considered the types of courses and the workload involved—particularly since students were taking courses in math and the sciences, as well as certain GUR's and prerequisites for the major. Many of these courses are 3-4 credits each; so a course load may add up to less than 15 when three classes are combined—For example, Biol 101 (4), Etec 110 (3), Math 106/107,/ 240 (4), Eng 101 (4), Hist 103/104/112 (4), Phys 101 (4), CSCI 101/102/103/140 (4) (p3-5).

Academic Advising (p5-8)

Six of thirteen students were advised to take no more than 15 credits their first quarter, considering the workload that would be involved—particularly in math/science courses; and also considering the workload students believe they can handle (p5-6). One advisor told the health group to take no more than 15 credits in order to keep up their GPAs for graduate school (p6). Five students were told that 15 credits is about average, however

students took less than 15 (one had a science and math; another took 3 classes to ease into it) (p6-7). One student was told that freshmen typically take fewer than 15 credits their first quarter, then compensate later (p7). One student was advised to take three or four classes (p7). Only one student tried to register for more than 15 credits and was advised against it (p7). Students in this group are generally not concerned about taking 15 credits a quarter in order to graduate in four years (p7-8). Friends and family advised four students to take it easy their first quarter in order to adjust (p8).

Logistics of Registering (p9-11)

Four of the 13 students in this group had 3-4 credit classes that involved the same amount of time and effort required for a 5 credit class (p9). Three students agree that English 101 should be worth 5 credits, not 4 credits (p9-10). Eleven of thirteen students in this group attended Summerstart. One student felt rushed and left her schedule at 14 credits because she couldn't fit in another class (p10). Another student was able to schedule classes during a later Summerstart session, while students in the earlier sessions had trouble getting into the same classes (which were reserved for the later sessions) (p10). We asked students whether they considered taking 1 to 2 credit courses in order to reach 15 credits. Three students say that it was hard to fit 1-2 credit classes into their schedules because classes conflicted or the times were awkward (p10-11). Two students were able to take 1-credit classes to bump up their credit loads (p11).

Academic Interest Area (p11-12)

For two students, registration was oriented around getting into graduate school. They had certain courses to take, and they were concerned about GPA (p11). One student was blocked from Art classes because she is not a declared major (p11-12). Another student was advised to keep the credit load low because of the workload involved He was taking Math and Chemistry (p12).

Co-Curricular and Extra-Curricular Activities (p12)

One student was involved in clubs, and five were involved in sports. However, these interests did not affect their decision about how many credits to take their first quarter (p12).

Financial Concerns and Work Schedules (p12-13)

Work schedules were not an issue for this group. Four students are receiving financial aid and must take a minimum of 12 credits in order to continue receiving it (p12-13).

Academic and Social Confidence Levels (p13-15)

Four students did not feel extremely confident with their ability to do well their first quarter; and they chose to take fewer credits because they did not want to become overwhelmed with the workload (p13). One student felt extremely confident about her ability to do well in classes she wanted and would enjoy; however she wasn't so sure that she could do well in classes that were required and she would not enjoy (p13). Three people

felt “indifferent” about how well they would do with studying and handling their workload (p14). Three students took fewer credits because they wanted to make sure that they got comfortable with the social climate at Western (p14). Nine of the thirteen students in this group admit they are not happy with their Fall quarter grades. For one thing, teaching styles are different and students were unsure about expectations (p14-15). Nine students also agree that they didn’t really know how to study and they didn’t have good study habits (p 15).

Transfer Credits (p15-17)

Nine students brought in AP or running start credits. Three students say that having the extra credits gives them a cushion, so they don’t feel pressured to take 15 or more credits (p15-16). Having extra credits did not affect credit load for three students. Instead they thought about the prerequisites they brought in so they could take certain courses at Western (p16). Two students are thinking about how they can graduate earlier because they took AP or Running Start courses (p16). For another student, it’s about having certain classes taken care of rather than graduating early (p16-17).

Academic and Social Adjustment (p17)

We asked students whether they think that taking 15 or fewer credits affected their ability to do well in their classes this past quarter. Four students say the ability to do well is more about the types of classes and the workload involved, not credit load (p17). One student is happy with her decision to take fewer than 15 credits (she is happy with what she received for grades) (p17).

Advice for Incoming Freshmen (p18-20).

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

- Take 12-15 credits; paying particular attention to the type of class (course content) and the workload involved (balance essay writing vs. math/science with lab time).
- Take it slow the first quarter in order to adjust to the new environment
- Balance out required classes with classes that look fun and interesting.

Students say to take 12-15 credits in general. However, rather than looking at the number of credits for each class, it is more important to look at course content and the workload involved. The balance of classes should also be considered (required classes vs. classes for enjoyment; and math/science with labs vs. History and English which require a lot of reading and essay writing). (p18-19). Students also say it’s important to take it slow the first quarter in order to adjust to the new environment (p19-20). Finally, make sure to research the classes, and balance out required classes with classes that look fun and interesting, so you will enjoy going to class (p20).