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Freshmen Enrollment Focus Groups – Selection Methodology and Participant Descriptions

Background

Freshmen are taking fewer credits than they have in the past, and this is potentially delaying their expected graduation. Lower credit loads also mean fewer FTE students and the possibility of falling short of state budgeted FTE. If the perceived problem is confirmed, WWU administrators would like to know why freshmen are taking fewer credits, and whether interventions are appropriate to encourage higher credit loads, or if more applicants should be admitted to fill the gap. To help answer these questions, the Office of Survey Research (OSR) conducted eight focus groups of freshmen during their second quarter at Western (Winter08). This report gives a brief narrative description of focus group participant attributes.

Selection Methodology

Each of the eight focus group targets a specific set of students. Recognizing that students likely have different reasons for their credit-load decisions that are related to attributes such as college of interest, academic confidence, sex, participation in Summerstart, participation in an FYE or FIG, honors status, participation in athletics, number of hours transferred in, etc. The composition of each group was designed to facilitate in-depth discussion of credit-load decision reasons that are unique to each group. Focus groups are numbered in the order of occurrence chronologically, with the groups of most interest to researchers at the beginning of the schedule. Groups 1 – 4 are mutually exclusive. It was not possible for a student to be eligible for more than one. Groups 5, 7 and 8 are also mutually exclusive, and were selected prior to selecting group 6, which overlays on all the groups. Students selected for a group were excluded from participation in other groups. Students were assigned a unique random number, and were sorted based on the random number when selections were made for the groups. Students at the top of the list were selected first, and substitutions were made working down the list to attain the desired mix of attributes. With a goal of 10 participants, OSR initially selected 30 students for each group, with the assumption that 15 would commit to participating, and 10 would actually participate. After having difficulty getting students to commit, OSR added 10 – 20 additional names to each list.

Selection Criteria

Criteria and prioritization used to select students for each group are listed below

Group 1. Low credit and low score

- Criteria: fall state support credits < 15 AND SAT Verbal score < 1 standard deviation below the mean
- Priority: attempted to get representation of scarce attributes, and balance of other attributes. Considered participation in varsity athletics, college of interest, sex,

student of color status, transfer hours indicator, FIG or FYE participation, honors, number of fall state support credits, and Summerstart participation.

Group 2. Low credit and high score

- Criteria: fall state support credits < 15 AND SAT Verbal score > 1 standard deviation above the mean, or > 600 for students with an interest in education. The score standard was changed because not enough education students qualified for this group.
- Priority: attempted to get representation of scarce attributes, and balance of other attributes. Considered participation in varsity athletics, college of interest, sex, student of color status, transfer hours indicator, FIG or FYE participation, honors, number of fall state support credits, and Summerstart participation.

Group 3. High credit and low score

- Criteria: fall state support credits > 15 AND SAT Verbal score < 1 standard deviation below the mean
- Priority: attempted to get representation of scarce attributes, and balance of other attributes. Considered participation in varsity athletics, college of interest, sex, student of color status, transfer hours indicator, FIG or FYE participation, honors, number of fall state support credits, and Summerstart participation.

Group 4. High credit and high score

- Criteria: fall state support credits < 15 AND SAT Verbal score > 1 standard deviation above the mean.
- Priority: attempted to get representation of scarce attributes, and balance of other attributes. Considered participation in varsity athletics, college of interest, sex, student of color status, transfer hours indicator, FIG or FYE participation, honors, number of fall state support credits, and Summerstart participation.

Group 5. Low credit and undecided Summerstart advising group

- Criteria: fall state support credits < 15 AND undecided Summerstart advising group.
- Balanced attributes: sex and number of credits.

Group 6. Low credit and transferred credits from high school

- Criteria: fall state support credits < 15 AND transfer hours > 0.
- Balanced attributes: sex and number of credits.

Group 7. Low credit and math/science or health Summerstart advising group

- Criteria: fall state support credits < 15 AND math/science or health Summerstart advising group.
- Balanced attributes: sex and number of credits.

Group 8. Low credit and business/economics Summerstart advising group

- Criteria: fall state support credits < 15 AND business/economics Summerstart advising group.
- Balanced attributes: sex and number of credits.

Participant Descriptions

A total of 92 freshmen participated in the eight focus groups. The following are descriptions of the students who participated in each group.

Group 1. Eleven students participated. All eleven students in this group took 14 or fewer state support credits in fall quarter, and all scored lower than one standard deviation below the mean verbal SAT score for the freshmen class. Two of the students took 12 credits in the fall, four took 13 credits, and five took 14 credits. Four are interested in environmental studies, health, or math and science, four are interested in humanities or Fairhaven, two are interested in music or fine and performing arts, or are admitted to Fairhaven college, one is undecided, and none are education students. Seven are female and four male. Six are students of color, three transferred credits, three participated in an FIG and two in an FYE, none are honors students, ten attended Summerstart, and none are athletes.

Group 2. Ten students participated. All ten students in this group took 14 or fewer state support credits in fall quarter, and all scored higher than one standard deviation above the mean verbal SAT score for the freshmen class. One student took 12 credits in the fall, three took 13 credits, and six took 14 credits. Three are interested in environmental studies, health, or math and science, three are interested in humanities or Fairhaven, two are interested in education, one is interested in music or fine and performing arts, or is admitted to Fairhaven college, and one is undecided. Five are female and five male. Four are students of color, seven transferred credits, one participated in an FIG and one in an FYE, three are honors students, eight attended Summerstart, and none are athletes.

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.

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.

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.

Group 6. Eleven students participated. All transferred credit from high school. All eleven students attended Summerstart. Three were assigned to the environmental studies, CST scholars, health or math & science Summerstart advising groups, two to the undecided group, two to the Fairhaven College, music or fine & performing arts groups, three to humanities or Fairhaven interest, and one to the education group. All took fewer than 15 credits in the fall: four took 12 credits, four took 13, and three took 14. Six participants are female and one is a student of color. None participated in either an FIG or FYE, one is an honors student, and none participated in fall athletics.

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.

Group 8. Ten students participated in the eighth focus group, which was defined by low fall state support credits and assignment to the business and economics advising group. Six participants are female and four male, three are students of color, and five transferred credit from high school. None of the students participated in an FYE or FIG, and none are in the honors program. Nine students attended Summerstart, and one participated in fall athletics. All took fewer than 15 credits in the fall: five took 12 credits, three took 13, and two took 14.