



1-1-2008

Group 1 Freshman Enrollment Focus Groups

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Recommended Citation

Office of Survey Research, "Group 1 Freshman Enrollment Focus Groups" (2008). *Office of Survey Research*. 558.
http://cedar.wvu.edu/surveyresearch_docs/558

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Freshmen Enrollment Focus Groups

Executive Summary for Group 1

Conducted January 16, 2008

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. Their interests were distributed among the colleges, as represented by Summerstart advising group assignments—environmental studies, health, or math and science, four in humanities or Fairhaven, two in music or fine and performing arts, or admitted to Fairhaven college, one undecided, and none in education. 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.

Introductions (p1-3)

The majority in this group chose Western for the following reasons:

- A certain program
- The location (close to home)
- The size (not so big)
- The environment (bay view, trees, close to mountain)
- Friends or family attend (or have attended) Western)

The majority were interested in a particular major when they first started at Western. However as of Winter Quarter, the majority are uncertain. Six of eleven in this group plan to graduate in four years (for two students it's because parents will only pay for four years). Three students believe it will be four to five years to graduation (for two students it's because they have five-year scholarships; and for one it's because that is how long it will take to do the Special Ed program). One believes it will be three years (because he did Running Start); and one is not sure how long it will take. (p1-3)

Registration Experience (p3-6)

Students in this group took less than 15 credits Fall Quarter. They took GUR's and courses in an area they might pursue for their major or minor. Some students say they were unsure or "clueless" about how credit loads work at the university, and they didn't know how many classes to take. In some cases, students had 4-5 classes, yet these added up to less than 15 credits. The majority say they were advised to take 12-15 credits (p3-6). Three students selected their own classes then checked in with advisors about their schedules. They were told to "stick with 13, you don't need anymore; "14 is a good load"; or "good enough"(p4). Two students started with 16 credits but the advisors said "that is a little too much", so they took less (p4). Two students originally started with 15-16 credits, but dropped below 15. For one it was due to a time conflict, and for the other it was because a class got cancelled (p5). One student heard that the minimum is 12 credits; and another was told she should be over 12 credits because that is the minimum. Neither student knew about taking 15 credits "in order to graduate on time" (p5). One student didn't know how the credits work, and he signed up for 13 credits with help from an advisor (p6).

Academic Advising (p 6-8)

One student understood from the advisor that 15 is the ideal. Ten of the eleven students in this group said they were *not* encouraged to register for 15 or more credits. They heard that 12 credits is the minimum (p6). When students selected their course schedules, advisors said their schedules were fine at less than 15 credits (p6). Ten of eleven students in this group heard from Summerstart advisors that it is “normal” to graduate in four to 5 years (p6). Also, the majority of this group has heard from other students that four to five years is common for graduation (p7). Four students were influenced by friends and family to “take an easier class load” in order to transition into college and to not get overwhelmed (p7). Two students were advised by parents to take more than 15 credits, but they both ended up with 14 (p8).

Logistics of Registering (p8-9)

According to one student, the different numbers of credits threw him off track. Some classes were four credits and didn’t add up to the total number of credits he wanted to take (p8). One student said that the registration experience is overwhelming because of the all the information received in one day (p8). Seven students did not get their first choice courses because classes were filled, and this affected the schedules they ended up with (p8-9).

Academic Interest Area (p9-10)

We asked students whether the academic area they were interested in pursuing affected their decision to take fewer than 15 credits. Prerequisites were a concern for a variety of reasons. In some cases, prerequisites are only 2-3 credits so a student might have 4 classes but the credits add up to less than 15 (p9). One student thought about the difficulty of courses needed for the major when he registered for Fall classes, and another thought about it when midterms came around (p10). For those students in this group who were undecided or unsure about their major, this uncertainty did not affect the number of credits they enrolled in for Fall Quarter (p10).

Co-curricular and Extra-curricular Activities (p10)

These types of interests did not affect students’ decisions about how many credits to take.

Financial Concerns and Work Schedules (p11)

Financial concerns and work schedules were not an issue for this group while registering for Fall classes.

Academic and Social Confidence Levels (p11-15)

About half of the students in this group say they took fewer credits because they did not feel confident (“to a large extent”) about their ability to do well their first quarter (p11). The other half of this group felt confident about their ability to do well in college because they believed they had the necessary study skills. However they found that it’s a big change coming to Western. There is a lot more homework, and they have to “study harder” (p12).

AP classes prepared some students for college, but not others (p12). Some students were warned by AP teachers or by Western advisors that their GPA will probably go down their first quarter in college. However this did not influence their decision about the number of credits they would take Fall Quarter. Instead they thought about the *number of classes* they were going to take, compared to high school (p12-13). Students were not concerned about their GPAs until *after* they received Fall grades. Ten of eleven in this group admitted that they are not happy with their Fall GPAs (p13). Ten of eleven in this group say that Western's grading practices are very different compared to high school, and this shift is a major reason for their lower GPAs. On the other hand, one student expected tougher grading because he took Running Start classes for two years. His GPA did not go down (p13-14). The majority of this group did not fully realize until late in Fall Quarter that grading would be so different at Western compared to high school (p14-15).

Transfer Credits (p15)

Four students in this group had "College in the Classroom." Having these credits did not affect their decision to take fewer than 15 credits their first quarter at Western. One student came to Western with 63 credits from Running Start, however this did not affect his decision to take the credit load he chose (p15).

Academic and Social Adjustment (p15-18)

Students say that it wasn't the credit load that affected their ability to do well in classes Fall Quarter. Instead, it was the issue of adjusting to college life, meeting new people, and taking part in all the activities (p15-16). It appears that time management and study habits were the main issues, not credit load, and this affected the ability to do well in classes. Students say they not do well with early morning classes, or with breaks too long between classes. During long breaks students tend to take naps or socialize, and they forget about assignments (p16-17). One student found that the breaks between classes were beneficial for her, because she was able to use the time to study in the library (p17). Two students decided to schedule classes closer together Winter quarter, since long breaks between classes did not work well for them Fall quarter (p17). Students also signed up for fewer classes Winter quarter—but these add up to more credits, which some say is better (p17). Seven students in this group are thinking about taking classes at community colleges over the summer. They want to catch up on credits and get further ahead with GUR's, and it's cheaper. None plan to attend Western summer quarter (p18).

Advice for Incoming Freshmen (p18-20)

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

- Shoot for 14-16 credits so that it won't overwhelm you. Around 15 is the main goal, because it will keep you on track— but take whatever credit load you feel will be comfortable
- Take classes you will enjoy and that fit for you
- Take classes that will count toward GUR's or your major
- Do not leave big gaps between classes and plan your day time-wise

- Find a good place to study and work hard
- Listen to what people say; the information may be helpful
- Try taking a FIG for the resources and to meet people (p18-20)