



2-20-2008

Group 6 Summary of Transcripts

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Recommended Citation

Western Washington University. Office of Survey Research, "Group 6 Summary of Transcripts" (2008). *Office of Survey Research*. 529.
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Freshmen Enrollment Focus Groups

Summary of Group 6

Conducted February 20, 2008

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.

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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
- The area; Beautiful town; Mt. Baker
- Financial reasons
- Friends or family attend (or attended) Western
- A certain program (Fairhaven)

Students in this group have a wide variety of major interests: Fairhaven Interdisciplinary Studies, Computer Science or accounting, Industrial Design, Journalism, History and

Spanish double-major, Political Science/Philosophy/Economics, Environmental Science and Philosophy. Two students are undecided. Plans for graduation vary: Four years (6), 3-4 years (2), 4-6 years (1, Industrial Design major), and 5 years (1, double-major and working part-time).

I chose Western because of its proximity to Mount Baker, one big reason. I also really like Bellingham area. It's really nice – music and parks. Western also appealed to me, especially the Fairhaven school of interdisciplinary studies. I really wanted to make my own major and chose that. Four years to graduation.

I chose Western probably primarily for financial reasons, but I love it here now. I really like Bellingham and it is close enough to home that I can go home on the weekends when I want to, but far enough so that I don't have to live in my own city. I have no thoughts on my major. And I believe that it will take me 4 years to graduate.

I chose Western because it was a lot smaller school than UW and it was on the west coast. I like it around here. I am planning on majoring in computer science so far. But it might switch to something more like accounting. And I plan on being here four years until I graduate.

Whatcom County is my home town. I have lived here all of my life, so that is probably why I chose Western. And I got into Central, but I don't like Central. I like Western better. I am going to do the Industrial Design major. I think they told me it is going take 4 to 6 years--The advising I had this whole quarter. The student advisors. But I don't know exactly. I haven't looked too much into it.

I chose Western because of it's proximity to Seattle. It was kind of close, but not too close. The size was pretty nice. And also financial reasons as well. Currently I am undecided about my major, but I hope to graduate in 4 years.

I chose Western because it was cheapest, prettiest, and had the best sweatshirts (laughter). I plan on majoring in Journalism and hopefully I will graduate in 4 years or less.

I chose Western because of financial reasons as well. When I first came up here about a year ago, it had a really nice vibe about it. Not quite as big as UW and Wazzu. I am double majoring in History and Spanish and I will hopefully be done in 3 or 4 years.

I actually was going to go to Central because I didn't think that I was going to get into Western, but my advisor in high school made me apply. I made the waitlist and fought really hard to get in because I always wanted to go here 'cause my siblings did and I like being close to home. It's beautiful up here. I hope to graduate in 4 years, but if I do beauty school as well, it might take an extra year.

I went to Western because of the financial aid. I could have gone instate for cheaper, but all of the schools in Idaho are crap. It was mostly financial aid. I am majoring in History and Political science. And it should take around 3 ½ years from the present.

I came to Western because, like a lot of people here, its' close proximity from Seattle. I am from Seattle. I like being away from home, but being able to go home if I feel the need to. Plus I love the Pacific Northwest. Love the atmosphere around here, love the feeling. But wanted to go to a smaller school than UW. I came in here hoping to do Political science, Philosophy, and Economics, the combined major, but discovering that Political Science wasn't exactly what I expected, I don't really know now. How long? 3 to 4 years. I came in with a little extra credits so, I will try to cut it off.

I originally wanted to go to Seattle University but I just didn't even apply because there is no way that we could have even afforded it. I like Western because of its small size and the people I have met here. For my major I want to double major in Environmental Studies and Philosophy. It would probably take me at least 5 years. Probably upwards of that because I am working part time.

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? What advice did your SummerStart advisor give you about the number of credits to register for? Were you told to register for at least 15 credits?

Eight of eleven of students "got the impression" from advisors, friends or family that they should balance their credits quarter by quarter, so that the average will come out to 15 credits a quarter.

I think the impression that I got was not 15 or more but was just think about it so that it will average out to 15ish. My advisor, remembering back to it, said something like, your first quarter you can take like 13 or 14 credits, you just have to think down the round about maybe taking more at a later date.

Yeah. I got the same vibe. Just balance your credits.

I heard it from my RA.

I think that my advisor said that you want to average 15 a quarter. So you can take 14 one quarter and 16 another quarter. Just have it all even out.

I don't know if she actually said it, but that was the impression I got.

I actually got the impression from the other kids in my group.

I didn't hear anything about it from my person. But the other kids were like, I heard you are supposed to take 15 or something.

My main advisor in the group said something along those lines. I also heard from my family.

Three students were advised to take between 12 and 15 credits their first quarter, in order to adjust.

My advisor said to take between 12 and 15 first quarter. More so on the lower side actually. She really didn't give any reason behind that...she just didn't want us to take a big load, I guess.

They told me to take 12 to 15 credits, which is a pretty good thing to say... They said something about adjusting. Like the same things that pretty much everyone told me. Don't take too many credits your first quarter because you don't know what it is going to be like yet. I thought that it was good advice.

I did get the 12 to 15 credits spiel and adjusting. And not take English.

One student was told that you can't take more than 17 or under 12; and you should consider what you are interested in for your first quarter rather than what you are obligated to take.

I don't remember being told anything about specific credit numbers you needed to take except for that you can't take more than 17 and under 12. She advised don't necessarily go by GURs. Go by what is interesting to you for your first quarter. Don't feel obligated to take an English class or math class your first quarter. Take something that is going to be fun for you instead of cramming all of this stuff you are going to hate into your first quarter. Which was really useful for me.

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

Three students were influenced by parents to take 15 or fewer credits. For one, her parents wanted her to be comfortable in the first quarter and have a social life. For another it was because she was also taking a class at Whatcom. For the third student it was to balance Math with other coursework.

Parents. Definitely recommended I take less. It runs in my family that we take a long time to finish college. They were like, you don't want to take more than 15, especially your first quarter. My parents didn't want me to get discouraged from the beginning. They wanted me to have a social life and make friends and feel comfortable more than be like I just want to drop out first quarter. I think that it was friends too because I am a social person and it's more important for me to be happy than just studying my whole life.

My mom was an influence. Just because I knew I was going to take another class at Whatcom, so when I first registered here, I had 17 credits here and another 3 credit class at Whatcom. And two days before the quarter started, she was like you should drop one of these. So I ended up with 14 plus the other class at Whatcom. To think about it, I don't think that I would have been able to take all 17 credits here.

I think that my parents had something to do with it. More saying what I already knew. I wound up taking 14 credits. I considered taking 17. Since I was in the focus group I was in, I was in an accelerated math class, I knew it was going to be a pain in the ass. So I showed my parents the schedule and said that I was thinking of taking another one and they were like, but you are in a math class and hate math. So take it easy.

One student was influenced by friends to try to take 15 credits, but it didn't work out that way.

I knew I was in over my head. I guess I was influenced by my friends. I saw all of my friends taking 15 credits and I was like, I should try to take 15 credits and try to do everything I could do get them. It didn't end up working out that way.

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?

One student points out that the number of credits assigned to a class does not necessarily indicate how much homework will be involved; so it's more about the workload rather than the number of credits you are scheduling.

I think the number of credits that they assign to the classes are completely arbitrary. What might take one person hours and hours to study for and might be considered a four credit class. Like I rarely ever studied for my political science class and I got over one hundred percent in it and I really enjoyed it. Whereas some people might have had to really study for that and it was hard. When I was looking at how many credits I was taking, it really had nothing to do with it being 15 credits. It had to do with how much homework I would have to do. Like a math class for me, would be like 5 or 6 credits for some other people. So I don't really think that it matters how much you schedule.

Another student says she took 14 credits because if she had taken an additional 4 credit class it would have been 18, which would be too much.

I think for me, one of the reasons why I had 14 because if I had another one, then it would be too much. Because it probably would have been a 4 credit class and that would be 18. So I felt like I was kind of maxed out even though I wasn't really maxed out. Just the way the classes I was taking ended up. I would rather take easier than way too hard.

Another says it also has to do with class frequency and having to be in classes all day or every day.

Yeah. It also had to do with class frequency. Language classes tend to be every day. The past two semesters I have had two classes per semester that were every day. I didn't really want to take a lot of classes. This semester, on Tuesdays, I am in class from 8 in the morning until 4 in the afternoon, which blows. It's fine because the one in the afternoon is only once a week. The act of getting up in the morning and getting to class had something to do with it.

Three others say that it isn't necessarily the credit load or the number of credits attached to classes. Instead it is a scheduling issue, and certain classes interfere with others that they wanted to take.

This quarter, I had a lot of difficulty trying to get the credits I needed and the times that I had available, which has to work with Whatcom, where scheduling is different. Even now I have two classes that overlap, but my instructor at Whatcom is okay with it. That's just unusual for other people, especially for those who don't go to Whatcom.

I had this one class, a two credit class that I had to take because of this program that I was in. It was on Friday, in the middle of the day and by the time I was actually signing up for classes, a lot of classes were full and closed. It was really hard for me to find another class that would fit into my schedule with that one Friday class in the middle of the day. There wasn't really anything open that would not be on Friday or at a different time. I had 13 credits fall quarter.

I had the same problem. They didn't match up with my Fairhaven classes. I took two Fairhaven classes and was going to take two Western classes, but the Western classes didn't match up. They interfered with the time and day. I went through 3 or 4 Western classes before I finally found one that worked. It was kind of a bummer because the class I took, I didn't enjoy. It wasn't necessarily the credit load, but the classes I wanted to take.

Did the level of difficulty involved in certain courses affect your decision to take fewer than 15 credits fall quarter?

One student took into account the workload that would be involved in math and science courses.

Yeah. I think so. I know that math classes have daily homework so I took it into account. I thought, okay, I am going to have to do an assignment every night for this. I took an English class and a Political science class. I thought that those would just be reading mostly. I wasn't going to take a math, physics and chemistry all in one quarter. That would have been ridiculous.

Academic and Social Confidence Levels

Because you had taken AP, IB, or running start during high school, did taking these credits affect your confidence coming into Western and your feelings about how much academic work you could handle? How?

Eight of eleven students in this group felt confident about their ability to do well Fall quarter because they had taken AP, IB, or Running Start coursework during high school. For the most part, students felt better prepared for the workload, for studying, and for test taking.

I felt very confident coming into here, particularly after doing IB testing, which is a lot of in class essays. Huge in class essays. But coming here, I realized that I was ready for the homework load a lot more than I thought I would be. I was a lot more ready for the homework here, easily I just increased my grades on homework drastically. But I wasn't used to spending half of the quarter studying just for one test. I was used to once every two weeks having a little test. Where this is you have to make sure that you keep your notes from the very beginning of the quarter and you make sure you study from the very beginning of the quarter. You can't miss anything. I was confident for the homework, but not the testing. Maybe not extremely confident, maybe somewhat instead. I want to change my answer.

I did become a lot more confident doing Running Start at Whatcom for two years because Ferndale high school, I don't want to diss on them, but they don't prepare their students for college that well. Going to Whatcom, there are some classes that are easier than high school, which I did not appreciate, but I had a couple of instructors that had become my favorite instructors because they just really teach how they teach here. And a lot of them don't give homework but you just have to read, go to lecture classes, and take the test. And that is how all of my classes have been like here so far. So that prepared me a lot. And the English classes were a lot better at Whatcom than at high school. I feel like literally, going to Whatcom and doing running start, I felt like I relearned everything and totally know it now.

I guess I kind of felt confident coming in with my credits just because after taking AP US history junior year, I knew there was nothing more rigorous ever, in the world. So I wasn't really scared. I don't think that my study habits have changed much though. I still put things off until the last minute, but I found that I tend to do my best work when I am scared.

I felt pretty confident so far, in two quarters of Western. I have never been as stressed here as I was in high school, taking 7 classes and putting as much effort as I put into 3 here. Or 4, which ever number I take. AP history took most of my life my junior year. That really taught me how to study and how to sit still and do it. I would say that it really helped because my GPA coming in here was 3.83, which was better than I ever got in high school.

I didn't go into the college courses trying to gain confidence from it, but just to see where I wanted to go. But after I came out of those courses and got the whole college vibe of school work, it made me more confident. The way that it works in college is so different, but I liked it so much more because it is more individual basis with less busy work. More interesting things. So I knew I would be down for doing the actual work because it was complete B's. So in that sense it made me feel like I could do college at western.

I suppose they made me feel more confident. Well they weren't that hard. I really didn't put a ton of effort into high school, so it's not like I worked so hard in high school that I knew I could handle it. It was more like, well I will tackle it as it comes. I will do my work. I guess I really didn't think about it.

Before I took AP classes, I would not even put forth any effort and I would still get A's and B's in the classes. You quickly learn in AP that you have to do work in advance and have to study to get A's before the exam. That's really helped me so far learn how to study early and retain what I am learning.

Doing Running Start two years, I was able to finish my English and my Math completely. Now I am not as afraid to take other classes because those are my hardest subjects. Now just every class that I take is more and more interesting to me because I have learned the topics.

I felt somewhat confident coming into Western. Some of my AP classes prepared me for doing well and for the workload here. But others were complete jokes. Some of them were really easy. Public school, AP classes aren't always the best, especially at some of the schools I went to. They weren't much harder than any of the regular classes. Some of them were hard, but not all of them. On the other hand, I am a really big procrastinator, which isn't good. I always have been, but coming into Western, that kind of affected my confidence. I was like, oh no, what am I going to do if I procrastinate? I will be screwed for the tests or whatever. That kind of affected that. But it is working out okay. I have changed my ways.

Two students didn't have much confidence coming to Western, partly because they didn't have good study habits.

I wasn't terribly confident, but I still think that they inflated my confidence a bit. The AP classes, some of them were quite hard, but you could still study the night before and do really well in the class. And so I kind of came here with that mentality. Like, oh, it's going to be really hard, but I will just crack down and study. And then I would study one night and it didn't work. I think that's how it affected me. I could have done better fall quarter in my opinion. I was still in that mentality that if I studied one night, I would do fine on the test. And there was no homework or whatever, so if you got a C on the test, you got a C in class. I wasn't studying enough and it took me a while to realize that I needed to commit more time. I kind of got into the hang of it in sort of the later edge of fall quarter.

In high school, I was ASB Vice President and I was leadership, and that probably took way more time than my studies. Just because leadership was a full time commitment and I was at school until 9 every night doing whatever. So studies were almost second. Not as important to me because I had so many other responsibilities. Coming to Western I was really scared. I had no confidence because academics has never been my very strong point. More like social stuff. Taking those classes really didn't do anything for me. Cause it was just another class that I had to pass and that was my goal, to pass it. Coming here, without parents around and having the whole new social life in the dorms, it's hard to crackdown and study when you have to. I definitely learned that the hard way – that I need to go somewhere where it is quiet instead of having friends come in all of the time. It's been an eye-opening experience.

One student felt confident coming to Western not because of the AP coursework, but because his brothers have been successful in college; however his study habits “were not too good.”

I don't think that my AP credits affected my confidence at all. I didn't have very many, I just had calculus and biology. More what affected my confidence is my brothers, having them be so successful at college. And I was like, oh, they did really well, I can probably do pretty well. Then I got here and took 3 extremely hard courses and didn't enjoy that too much. I would say that my study habits in high school were not too good. I had decent grades in high school, but that didn't work out too well when I came here. I have gotten a lot better. I had to do a lot of learning about how to study when I got here.

Considering the level of confidence you felt about your ability to do well your first quarter, did this affect your decision to take fewer than 15 credits?

Overall was not confidence level that affected students' decisions to take fewer than 15 credits. As discussed above, reasons include workload, scheduling issues, and parental influence. Also, three students wanted to ease into their first quarter and not be overwhelmed; two students took fewer than 15 credits because their schedules were full (one was also taking a class at Whatcom); and one dropped a class because it was too difficult.

I think that the reason that I took fewer than 15 credits was because I felt like, it is my first quarter, I might as well ease into it.

I took I think 14 last quarter. I just really didn't want to jump in head first my first quarter. I wanted to ease into it. But now I am at 17. Just that first quarter I wanted to take it slowly and not become overwhelmed right at first.

I took as few credits as I did because I heard that your first year can be really difficult. You are not used to living away from home and there is more partying going on. There are just so many things that you just didn't have to deal with when you were living in your own town and

everything. I've never worked on weekdays and had school on weekdays, so I wasn't sure how that would affect my studying. I just thought that I would try it with as many credits as I did, and I don't think that I could take much more than what I am taking and still get A's in those classes.

It wasn't necessarily my confidence that stopped me there, it was just my schedule got really full, really fast. The three classes I took, I knew they were pretty hard, so I just kind of stopped it at three classes. That gave me under 15 credits, but two of them were almost every day, so it really filled up my schedule and kind of blocked out taking any other classes really.

It wasn't really my confidence either why I chose 3 classes. I originally came here because I wanted to go into the art department, but I learned that I really didn't like that department here. Plus I can't take art classes until I get into the art department, and I know that isn't going to happen, so I am actually taking art classes at Whatcom still. This quarter I am taking two classes there and three classes here. Last quarter I just took one class there and two classes here. So I was taking a full load. That is why I am choosing industrial design because they have their own department and I don't have to go through the art department. I wanted to graphic design, but they don't have graphic design here. I am just doing industrial design.

I honestly I started out fall quarter with 16 or 17 credits, but I ended up in a journalism class that scared the bejesus out of me and I dropped it after like two weeks.

How did taking these college credit courses in high school affect the way you thought college would be like academically and socially?

The majority did not equate AP classes with college courses. They treated AP classes as any other classes, and it didn't affect the way they thought college would be like. However they thought college would be harder, and they found that it really isn't.

I just treated my AP classes like regular classes and I did fine in them. So it didn't really change what I thought of college at all. I just always thought college was way higher education since my two brothers went to college. It was mostly my brothers that affected my opinion of college. They both went to UW together and so I heard about it a lot from them.

I agree, I never really equated the AP classes with a college course. I never thought about them that way. I just thought about them as another class. It's just how it was. I agree that I expected that courses at college would be more difficult and require much more time outside the classroom, but I did not find it that way.

I too agree. I think that she pretty much hit the nail on the head. I thought that it was going to be a lot harder. Maybe that is just the classes I am taking. But they say that for every hour you spend in class there will be three hours outside of class (laughter and talking all at once)

studying. I did not find that. I believe that it will get harder, but fall quarter freshmen year has been simplistic.

I thought that it would be a lot harder than it was. Based on the AP classes I took, in order to get a 5, you really had to be really serious about it. I wouldn't say that college classes are easy, but you definitely can get by doing less work than you should.

I always heard that AP courses are equivalent and are as hard as or easy as college classes. Some of my AP were really tough, but I thought that college really isn't that hard if you stay ahead of the game.

One thing that I wasn't prepared for was the large lecture classes. I thought that it would be pretty similar to Whatcom but double as hard. Community college there isn't that difficult. But there is a lot more support here academically, like tutors and study groups and stuff.

Did you receive advice from instructors in your AP, running start or IB classes about first year expectations, course load, work expectations? What was it?

One student was told that grading would be based on exams, not homework; and another was told to expect longer papers and more essays.

I remember my AP English teacher in my fourth year said that there would be really long papers and a lot more of them. For my Fairhaven classes it is true because you don't take exams, you write essays. So the reading and writing intensive was good advice.

My teachers always warned me about how most of your grade will be based on your exams instead of on all of this little cool work that will add up to an exam score. So if you don't do so well on the test, you will be okay in high school. Like with all of the classes I have taken here, it's been three exams. You have to do pretty well on all of them or you will not pass the class. I had to prepare myself because I am not a good test taker. And that's been a challenge for me.

Two students were told that there would be less tolerance for excuses (instructors will not be as lenient or understanding); however one student discovered just the opposite.

I heard advice that it wasn't going to be as lenient...In high school I would slack off and turn in a paper a week late. But that isn't really even an option here. You can't retake tests; it's all set. Which I think is good.

You can't make excuses here. I had the flu for like a week and my guy wouldn't understand. It's a whole different story here. I was deathly sick and it didn't pass for my guy. So it's different.

I had a very different experience. Throughout my entire career of school it seemed to be a common teaching tool to threaten that the next step up is going to be a lot harder, and that the teachers

will be less understanding. But today, where my demography teacher, I said that I didn't have a chance to get this in. He was like, do it tonight. I haven't taken it off yet. Just get it in whenever you have the chance.

Two students were advised to work on creating relationships with professors. Another was told that none of the instructors would care, but he discovered this is not true.

Teachers have told me to create relationships with your professors. Go talk to them in their office. Just in case something does come up or if you do bad on an exam, you feel comfortable going in there and talk about what you have problems with and they would help you through the next test or something like that.

I got two different things of advice. One told me that your professor won't care about you and the other said get to know them, they won't fail someone they know. Luckily it's been the latter of the two I think.

I remember one of my teachers told me that once I got to college, I would be just a number and none of my instructors would care. I was pretty shocked though. I was in like classes with 100 to 200 people and I think all 3 of my instructors knew my name and they knew me. So I guess that was kind of untrue. I don't know if it's just Western instructors. Like it is something about our school that they try and care. Maybe at UW that wouldn't happen.

Transfer credits

All of you brought in credits from either AP courses or community college coursework. How did these credits transfer over to Western? Do you think they will help you graduate sooner?

Five of eleven students took AP, IB or Running Start coursework in part because they wanted to get ahead in college, or they are hoping to get through college faster; and two students think they might graduate a quarter earlier—(although the main reason they took AP/IB was “because they were there” or because their friends did).

I did two full years of Running Start, so I think that it was 50 to 65 credits. So I did all of my GURs like English, math, social sciences and sociology, and Spanish, ceramics, painting. I just did them because I always knew that I would do Running Start. My mom is involved with Running Start at Whatcom Community College and she is the financial aid advisor there. I just always had this knowledge of Running Start, so that is why I did it. To get me ahead in college too.

I transferred in with 25 credits from college in high school, that's what my school called it. It goes through a community college. It was a lot cheaper when I did the credits there, so my parents were like, you should do it. It was not as challenging as it would be here. I transferred and found out that I had all of my math GURS and my humanities GURS done, so I am really ahead, which

is really nice. And I didn't want to go into college having to take a huge course load just because I wanted to adapt easier and have more time for social life.

I transferred in about 30 credits from IB, which I took simply because the regular classes weren't nearly as interesting. They seemed on the surface. My friend started out taking IB classes, I didn't start taking them until my sophomore or junior year. I eased into. My friends were telling me that it was so much more interesting, so much more in depth. I started taking IB. And I am hoping to graduate earlier. I am hoping to graduate with the 30 credits if I push, in a year or two. At least 2 quarters earlier.

I took a bout 22 credits of AP classes because they were a little bit challenging and I wanted to challenge myself in high school. I believe that all of them transfer. I have about 22 from them all. I hope that they are going to help me graduate earlier so I can take the next step to grad school. But I may not.

I came in with about 32 AP credits from physics, biology, the Econs and American politics and a comparative politics or government, whatever they call it. The sciences transferred in at about 100 level, but everything else was upper 200 level, which I was kind of surprised by. I did take them in part because I thought that I could get through college faster and wouldn't have to do as many GURs.

I came in with 13 transfer credits from AP classes. I took AP English, history and US government and stuff. A lot of those transferred into my humanities GUR, and I ended up taking a lot of humanities classes my first quarter, which was a bad choice because I already had a whole bunch of credits in there. And some went into an elective category as well. I took those in high school just cause they were there. I just wanted to be challenged a little bit. Take some interesting classes. I don't think it will help me to graduate earlier because it was only 13 and that's a low quarter low here. Maybe a quarter early, but I don't know, we will see.

I came in with about 21 credits from AP and UW in the classroom and some summer classes at community college. I took those courses in high school just because all of my friends did. Most of them transferred except for a couple business ones. And for graduation, maybe like a quarter earlier. Hopefully I will get done with all of my GURs by next quarter.

Four students took AP or Running Start coursework not because they wanted to get ahead in college--It was because the courses were interesting, or because they wanted to prepare for college (e.g., explore areas, or take prerequisites for honors courses).

I have approximately 30 AP credits I think. From Spanish, English, Calculus, US history. I took them in high school because they were there. Not because I wanted to graduate early from college. They were the best classes at my high school. I don't know how they fit into GURs or any of that, but when I registered for my classes winter quarter, it already said that I had this many.

I had either 12 or 15 credits from AP. They transferred over in the same subjects and everything. AP US history and AP stats. I took those classes because they were interesting and there were pretty much two groups of kids in my school, the ones who were going to go to college and the ones who were going to stay in Sequim. So I wanted to go to college.

Most of my transfer credits came from Running Start. It wasn't to get ahead in college or anything of the sort like that. It was just to kind of feel out what area I wanted to go into. I took Psych 101, Environmental Science, and Photography. Those were the only classes I took. They were mainly to figure out where I wanted to go in college. And they did transfer over, which was great and I am happy about that. It made me really want to go into photography.

I got a couple AP credits from Calculus and Biology. I know calculus transferred over. I have no idea if Biology did or not. Calculus helped me get into an honors program here for math. I am not sure they will help me graduate sooner. They just got me into better courses.

To what extent did you see these credits as a “cushion” allowing for you to take fewer than 15 credits?

Four students see their transfer credits as a “cushion” allowing them to take fewer than 15 credits—in part because they wanted to ease into their first quarter.

I have like 30 other credits, so technically I could take like 12 credits a quarter until I graduate and be fine. I don't think that I will do that. I thought might as well take it easy my first quarter. Ease myself in. So I took 14 credits and one of them was racquetball.

I was able to have some cushion room and I was somewhat late in signing up for classes and most of the classes I was interested in weren't available at that point. So I was like, alright, I will go with 13 credits and leave it at that for now. Because I am not going to push myself into a class that I don't have any interest in. It allowed me to have some slack.

For me it was also probably the cushion effect and also the fact that it is a big change coming into college. I didn't want to be overloaded too badly, so that's why I only took 13 first quarter. I was also somewhat confident as I mentioned earlier.

Coming with transfer credits, it makes me feel better about taking as few classes as I did because it's like I have an extra quarter. I am like, I am doing okay. I also plan on doing summer quarter. It made sense to me.

One student says that it wasn't the “cushion effect.” It was the way classes worked out. He chose to take 14 credits instead of 17.

I took 14 and it wasn't the cushion the effect. It was just the way that my classes panned out. I just chose to take 14 instead of 17. And now I am keeping on track with just 15. If I can get 15, if its 14, I don't care. If it's maybe 16, I don't mind either.

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:

- Take around 15 credits or less, because you don't want to overwhelm yourself in the first quarter. And if you take less than 15 credits, know that you will have to take more later in order to balance it out.
- Diversify. Take requirements as well as fun or interesting classes; and try something different—Experiment. And don't take Math and science together
- Balance credit load with social life
- Sign up for as many credits as possible because you can always drop a class later

The majority (seven of eleven students) say to take around 15 credits if it works out, or less, because you don't want to overwhelm yourself in the first quarter. And if you take less than 15 credits, just know that you will have to take more later in order to balance it out.

I would tell them sign up for 15 if they could. And if they couldn't, I would tell them just like they told me that if you are taking 14, down the road you will have to take more to balance it out. You aren't going to be able to get exactly 15 every quarter, so you just have to work it out that way. In Fairhaven, I would just tell them to take the two basic courses that you normally take.

I would suggest also taking 15 credits if it works out. But if not, I would say don't take more than 15, but take less. You don't want to take over 15 because you don't want to burn yourself out the first quarter. I would say diversify your classes, take a lot of different things so you can see what you like. If you already know what you like, then cool, but I didn't and it's okay. So I took a lot of different things and that worked out well. And now I have a better idea. So I would say diversify, take 15 credits, and take things that are interesting. I was also suggest taking a PE, take advantage of your PE because it is really fun. So far I have taken 3 and they are awesome.

I would say take 15 or around there because it is a pretty big change coming from high school to college. I don't think it is good to overwhelm yourself.

I took 13 and everyone was like that is really low and you should take more, but I didn't feel like it was too low for my first quarter. It's just how my scheduling worked out. So I would say 13 to 15 is just fine. Whatever works out, just because I think that social life is really important in college, especially if you are far away from home. It's always important to have friends and stuff. For me, I kind of wanted to get my GURs out of the way, so I took two GURs classes and then one class that I just randomly wanted to take. I am the type to get requirements out of the way so I can explore my major.

I would say that if you are not working and not really involved in extracurricular or sports, that 15 would probably be a good number. Maybe just because it is your first quarter you might want to take more like 13 or 14. But if you are doing anything like that, I would not take more than 12 or 13.

My situation because I take classes at Whatcom, I don't really know exactly what to suggest. I am only taking 11 or 13 credits and then my classes at Whatcom. So maybe just stay under 15. But I would suggest prepare and look at the classes before you go to summer start. I didn't at all, so that is probably why it took me so long to register. They just don't tell you to do that. They say that they are going to educate you about everything when you get there, but you only get about half an hour to do it.

I would say shoot for 15. If you can't make it to the 15, do under but not over 15. I would say just take anything that sounds remotely interesting to you and explore what is out there, especially if you are undecided. Take interesting classes.

Five students say that you should diversify. Take requirements as well as fun or interesting classes; and try something different—Experiment. And don't take Math and science together because they tend to require a lot of homework.

Also, out of personal experience, don't take a math and a science together. Cause they generally tend to be a lot of homework and a lot of studying constantly. They really overwhelm your schedule. If you have a major already, like I did, or you know what you are really interested in, taking a requirement and then taking something that is not a requirement where you are doing it simply for fun. It was a change that I made this quarter. I am taking stuff that is a requirement, but I have something like game design, which I am really interested in and it is a lot of fun, but not required. So it keeps me interested and still working, instead of getting bored and burnout.

I would say definitely diversify. Don't necessarily assume what interests you. I ended up being forced into communications 235, argumentation and expositions, but it is the most enjoyable class that I have taken so far. I just had a blast.

I agree with him, it's your time to experiment. As long as you have GURs to burn, you might as well try things that are totally different and different ends of the spectrum. Don't write yourself off as you already know what you are going to do and already have it all planned out.

As for what kinds of classes, I would say it is important to diversify. A random class was also my favorite class. But also take something that you want to get out of the way because I am sure that later on in your time as a college student you are not going to be taking like math 101 or something.

Don't just take classes that you know you will like. Don't just take all English one quarter. Really diversify it because you never know what you might like. I took an art history class thinking oh boy art, and then I loved it. So you never know.

One student recommends balancing credit load with social life.

I would say take enough credits where you have to do a lot studying but yet you can have a social life at the same time. So you are not stuck at the library or the dorms the whole time.

Another suggests signing up for as many credits as possible (take advantage of the opportunity to register during Summerstart) because you can always drop a class later.

Take as many or sign up for as many credits as possible. You can always drop classes. Particularly when you are an incoming freshmen and it is your first quarter and you get to sign up before everyone else, you have the opportunity to take a lot of classes that you are not going to be able to take until your junior or senior year. Try to get Fridays off. That's what I had first quarter and it was really fun.