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Group 6 Freshmen Enrollment Focus Groups

Western Washington University. Office of Survey Research

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Freshmen Enrollment Focus Groups

Executive Summary for 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.

Introductions (p1-3)

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) (p1-3)

Academic Advising (p 3-5)

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 (p3-4). Three students were advised to take between 12 and 15 credits their first quarter, in order to adjust (p4). 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 (p4). 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 (p4-5). One student was influenced by friends to try to take 15 credits, but it didn’t work out that way (p5).

Logistics of Registering (p5-6)

Since Western has courses with different numbers of credits attached to them, we asked students whether this affected their 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 (p5). 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 (p5). Another says it also has to do with class frequency and having to be in classes all day or every day (p6). 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 that certain classes interfere with others that they wanted to take (p6). One student took less than 15 credits because of the workload that would be involved in math and science courses (p6).

Academic and Social Confidence Levels (p7-12)

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 (p7-8). Two students didn't have much confidence coming to Western, partly because they didn't have good study habits (p8-9). 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" (p9). Overall it was not confidence level that affected students' decisions to take fewer than 15 credits. 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 (p9-10). We asked students to tell us whether taking college credit courses in high school affected the way they 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 (p10-11). We also asked whether students received advice from instructors in their AP, running start or IB classes about first year expectations, course load, and work expectations. One student was told that grading would be based on exams, not homework; and another was told to expect longer papers and more essays (p11). 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 (p 11-12). 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 (p12).

Transfer Credits (p12-13)

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) (p12-13). 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) (p13-14). 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 (p14). 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 (p13).

Advice for Incoming Freshmen (p16-17)

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 (p16-17).