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# Student Demand for an Expanded Summer Session

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## Student Demand for an Expanded Summer Session

Prepared by Carl Simpson, Linda Clark, Gary McKinney, and Joseph E. Trimble

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During Winter quarter, 1996, students responded to a questionnaire concerning the expansion of Western's Summer Session to "year-round operation." They were asked how likely they were to attend Summer Session in 1996, and then how likely they would have been to attend if Western had an expanded Summer Session in place for 1996.

Survey findings indicated that expanding to year-round operation would significantly increase the size of enrollments during the Summer, though Summer would remain substantially smaller than during the academic year. The increase in student demand was estimated at 1315 students, a 51% increase in Summer Session attendance. This comes on top of the estimated 5% increase without any policy change. About 15% of these students indicated they would attend Summer by take another quarter off--usually Winter.

Multiplying estimated enrollments by the number of credits students would take if enrolled in an expanded Summer Session, we estimate that 41,362 Summer student credit hours would be generated under an expanded year-round program. Because some students would begin their education during Summer Session, Summer enrollments would increase further under year-round operation. We estimate that upwards of 50% of graduate students, about 30% of transfers, and about 14% of native freshmen would begin during Summer quarter if Western were to offer a full year-round program. These estimates translate into about 800 students.

Students indicated how much each of a set of policies would influence whether or not they decided to attend an expanded Summer Session. At least two-thirds of students reported that they would be "some" or "a lot" more likely to attend Summers in the presence of the following policies: full curriculum available in major field; tuition same as academic-year quarters; financial aid/work study available; and Summer courses listed in annual timetable of classes.

## INTRODUCTION

At the request of the Provost and the director of Western's Summer Session, The Office of Survey Research conducted two surveys during Winter quarter concerning the advisability of enlarging Western's Summer Session to constitute "year-round operation." This report presents the findings from one of those surveys: the survey of Western students. The companion survey is of Western faculty.

Our brief questionnaire was sent to a sample of 1759 students selected randomly from all students enrolled in the first week of Winter quarter, 1996; 1078, or 61.3%, responded. In addition, 163 people were included in the sample who registered two weeks before the beginning of Winter quarter but did not attend Western during Winter quarter. While these people did not fit into the sample from which we wanted to estimate demand, they exhibited a pattern of off-and-on attendance which might make them particularly interested in Summer Session. Only 44 (27.0%) responded, and their responses were essentially identical to those for the original sample, so were not reported separately.

Given the number of students responding, the standard error term associated with any percentage reported here is approximately two-and-one-half to three percent for questions asked of the full sample. An additional caveat to the findings is that despite pleas to the contrary, a disproportion of the students least interested in attending Summer Session may have decided against completing our survey. Research on surveys suggests that such biased non-response is likely, but with a 60% response rate, the resulting distortion of findings is likely to be small. The survey included questions that allowed for correction, as described below, making the results reported here unlikely to suffer serious bias.

The survey's particular definition of "year-round operation" is critical to an accurate understanding of findings and is therefore presented *verbatim* here:

It has been proposed that Western expand Summer Session significantly, to operate "year-round" (i.e., to make all four quarters more similar). Year-round operation would mean:

- Western would offer enough courses to allow students in all majors to "make progress" toward their degrees during Summer Session.
- Summer courses would be included in the annual Timetable of Classes, so that students could plan in advance to attend four quarters per year or to attend Summers instead of another quarter
- Summer courses would meet the same total number of hours as in other quarters.

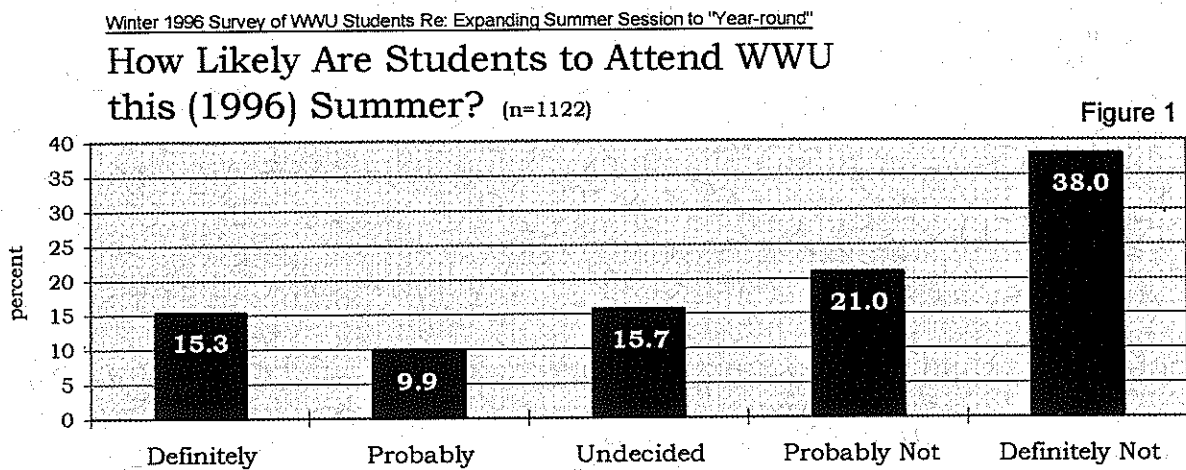
## FINDINGS

Students were asked first whether they planned to attend Western's Summer Session in 1996. Responses to this question provided a basis for comparison with students' estimates of whether or not they would attend if Western's Summer Session were expanded as defined above. Furthermore, it allowed comparisons to Summer attendance patterns over the recent years. The distribution of respondents also was compared by class with the known distribution of all students. Our analysis of the sample concluded that: 1) slightly fewer sophomores than other classes responded; 2) many more graduates than others responded; and 3) controlling for year in school, the Summer Session

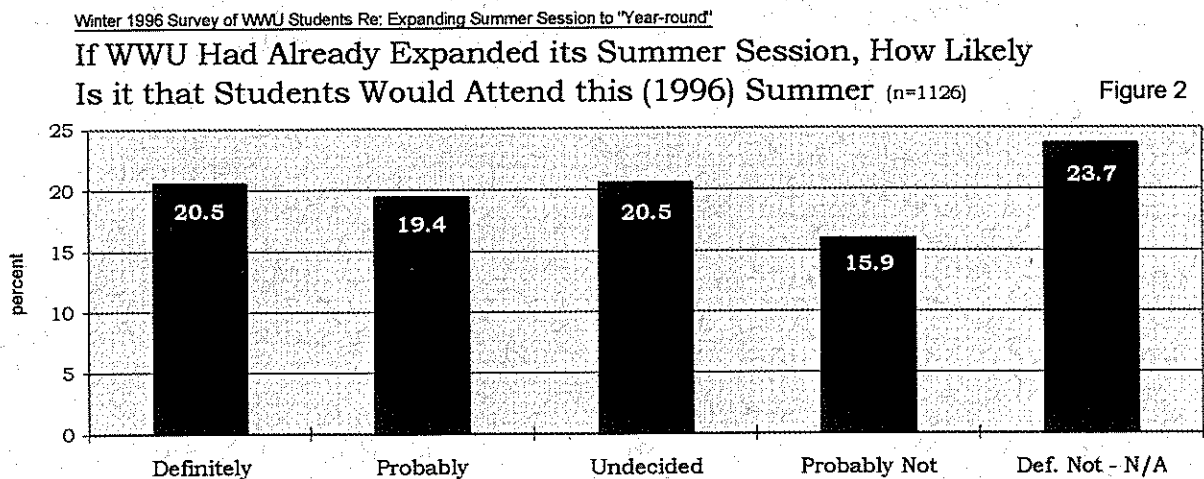
attendance estimated from students' reports closely matches that expected on the basis of projections from past Summer enrollments. To correct the sample, making it more fully representative of the student population, responses were weighted to slightly expand the proportion of sophomores and to significantly reduce the proportion of graduate respondents. After weighting, the distribution across classes matched the population fully and the projected Summer attendance appears realistic.

### ESTIMATED DEMAND FOR AN EXPANDED SUMMER SESSION.

Figures 1 and 2 present students' estimated likelihood of attending school Summer, 1996, and of attending "if Western had already expanded its Summer Session to allow year-round operation (as described above)..." Figure 1 shows 15.3% planning "definitely" to attend and 9.9% "probably" attending. Nearly three-fifths (59.0%) plan not to attend. These include graduating seniors and others who prefer not to attend.



By comparison, Figure 2--demand for an expanded Summer Session--shows an increase in those "definitely" planning to attend from 15.3% to 20.5%. The "probably" category also increases from 9.9% to 19.4%. While 39.6% still would plan not to attend, that represents 19% fewer than under the current Summer Session.



These findings make clear that expanding to year-round operation would significantly increase the size of enrollments during Summer yet that Summer would nonetheless remain substantially smaller

than during the academic year--aside from non-matriculated students and early starts that would become possible under year-round operation. These figures do not, however, estimate exact enrollment. That requires some assumptions. We measured degree of certainty as to intentions ("definitely" to "definitely not") because a simple "yes/no" question is misleading. Counting a "probably" as a "yes," which would happen with the simpler measurement, would considerably overestimate the likely actual enrollment.

Generating specific estimates of increased student demand for Summer Session involved testing several assumptions concerning the rate of actual attendance among those whose answers were "probably" and "undecided." Several logical proportions were tested for each group to estimate Summer Session attendance in 1996 for each class. The best model adds 100% of those who say they "definitely" will attend Summer plus 70% of those who responded that they "probably" would attend, plus 20% of those who were undecided. (See Table 1.) The result almost perfectly matches the projection based on Summer 1995 attendance by matriculated Western students plus 5%, the most recent approximate annual growth rate.

To add precision, Table 1 breaks down and then combines projections by class. It shows somewhat higher estimates for attendance by freshmen through juniors and somewhat lower attendance by seniors than in fact observed during Summer Sessions. This difference is very likely accounted for by the survey being administered in Winter, two quarters before Summer. After two additional quarters, the year in school would look much more like previous Summer attendance patterns. In short, we are satisfied that this approach to calculating estimated student demand works quite well and is significantly better than estimates generated from a simple "yes/no" question would have been.

Table 1: Estimated Change in Demand for Summer School Enlarged vs. at Present

	Enrolled Winter 1996	Estimate Summer 1996 <sup>1</sup>	Estimate from survey, regular Summer <sup>2</sup>		Estimate, Expanded Summer <sup>2</sup>		Change w/expanded Summer
			%	#	%	#	
Freshman	1773	55	7.7	136	19.1	339	203
Sophomores	1592	154	18.3	291	34.3	546	255
Juniors	2855	711	33.0	942	48.0	1370	428
Seniors	3371	1233	29.0	978	39.9	1345	367
Graduates	601	400	40.0	240	49.6	298	48
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10,192</b>	<b>2553<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>2578</b>	<b>38.2</b>	<b>3893</b>	<b>1315</b>

1. Based on Summer 1995 (1995 + 5%)
2. Based on 100% of "definite" + 70% of "probably" + 20% of "undecided" responses. Percentages are generated from our sample. Numbers are those percentages x the number of students in each category enrolled in Winter, 1996.
3. Was 2450 in Summer, 1995.

The one exception is estimates for graduate student attendance, which appeared quite low. It is likely that the difference is accounted for by differential definitions of graduates as on- or off-campus, but we have no way of being sure. Ironically, our estimated graduate demand was very accurate before adjusting the sample to match the proportion of graduates as reported by the Registrar's records--a fact that reinforces the likelihood that the underestimates of graduate demand was accounted for by a confusion in the definition of graduate status. We recommend that conclusions from this analysis take seriously the *rate of increased* demand among graduate students, but use graduate enrollments in Summer, 1995 as a base, rather than the figures reported here.

The next step was to apply the same 100%-70%-20% model to estimating demand for Summer Session under an expanded year-round program. Table 1 uses the percentage estimates generated by applying the 100%-70%-20% model to students' responses and then multiplying the estimated percentages times the known number of students in each class during Winter, 1996. The increase in student demand is estimated in Table 1 as 1315, or a 51% increase from 2578 to 3893. Given the error margin for this survey's estimates, we can be 95% confident that the true increase, given our method of calculating demand, is between 48% and 54%.

To estimate income from tuition, one must also consider the number of credits each Summer Session student would complete. Counting only those who "definitely" or "probably" would attend an expanded Summer Session, 28.5% say they would enroll for 1-8 credits, 41.5% for 9-12 credits, 28.2% for 13-16 credits, and 1.8% for 17 or more credits.

Table 2 estimates the Summer Session student credit hours (SCH) that would be generated under an expanded year-round program, by combining findings shown in Table 1 with figures on number of credits students plan to take. Table 2 uses the 100%-70%-20% model to estimate the number of students who would plan to enroll for each level of credits during an expanded Summer Session. Multiplying through by the number of credits produces a total number of credit hours among each group and the total, 41,362.

Table 2: Estimated Student Credit Hours (SCH) Generated Under an Expanded Summer Session

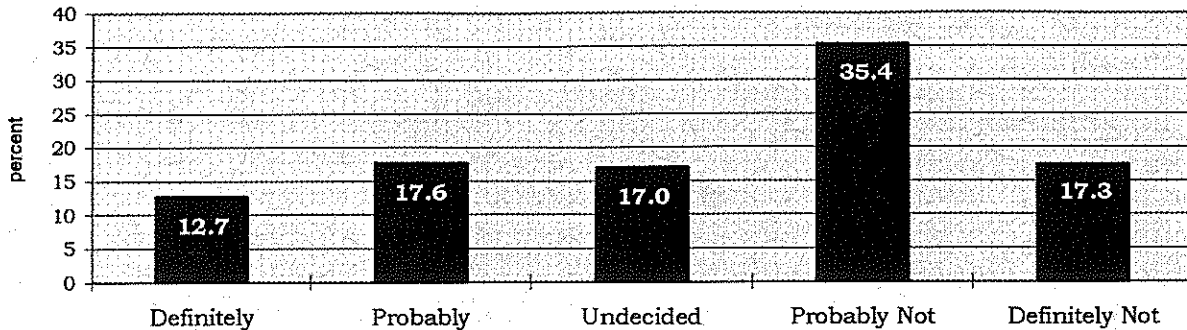
Number of Credits				
Range	Estimated Average	% of Sample	Estimated # of Students	Estimated SCH <sup>1</sup>
1-8	6	27.2	1059	6,354
9-12	11	42.0	1635	17,985
13-14	14	29.4	1145	16,030
17+	18	1.4	55	990
		<b>100%</b>	<b>3893</b>	<b>41,362</b>

<sup>1</sup>Number of students at average credits

The final aspect of demand for an expanded Summer Session was whether or not students would have begun their Western education during Summer had the opportunity been available. Figure 3 displays findings showing 12.7% "definitely" and 17.6% "probably" would have begun early. Using the 100%-70%-20% formula, we estimate that 28.4% of the current student body believe they would have entered Western during Summer, had the opportunity existed.

### If Students Had the Opportunity to Begin Education at WWU During Summer, Would They Have Done So? (n=1118)

Figure 3



Further analysis finds students responses to this question highly dependent on their year in school, with an estimated 48.6% of graduates saying they would have begun in Summer, 36.1% of seniors, 26.9% of juniors, 22.1% of sophomores, and 13.8% of freshmen. In part, the linkage with class presumably means that transfers would more often begin in Summer. In addition, it may be that students closer to the degree not only attend Summer school more often, but also reconstruct their likely decisions some years earlier.

While these estimates involve some assumptions concerning the accuracy of students' estimates of their own behavior and are subject to error, we suggest the following as "educated guesses" about likely proportions of students who would begin their studies early, during Summer.

- Graduate students: 45% of each entering class, or about 150.
- Native freshmen: 14% of each entering class, or 225 students for an entering class of 1600.
- Transfers: 30% of each entering class, or 420 students for an entering class of 1400.

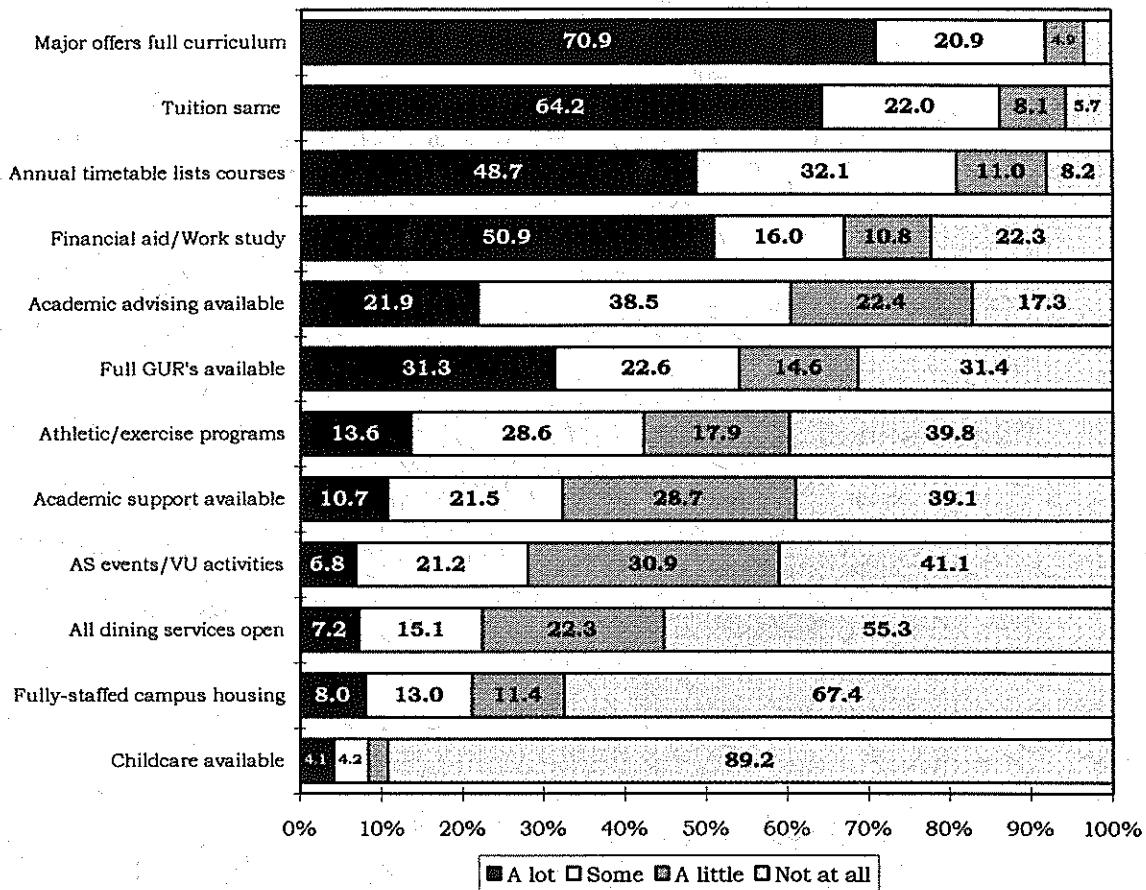
One final question concerning student demand is whether students who attend an expanded Summer Session would plan to attend Western all four quarters per year, graduating earlier, or would take off a different quarter, thus creating sporadic openings for other students during the academic year. Students who would at least consider attending an expanded Summer were asked whether they would attend four quarters per year or Summer plus two others. The great majority (85.9%) would attend all four quarters. Eleven percent would take off Winter, with the others split evenly between Fall and Spring. Thus, the greatest impact of expanding Summer on the regular program would be to graduate some students faster, allowing the admission of more students upon their exit.

## THE INFLUENCE OF SUMMER SESSION POLICIES ON STUDENT DEMAND

In the event that Western decides to enlarge Summer Session significantly, it may prove useful to be aware of the policies most likely to influence levels of student enrollment. Therefore, students were asked: "How much, if at all, would each of the following increase your likelihood of attending Summer Session at Western?" Figures should not be taken as indicating how many would, in fact, attend, since both those who would attend Summers and those who would not responded. Even so, the relative strength of support for each policy can be relied on as an indicator of how much it would affect student attendance levels. Figure 4 displays the findings.

How Much Would Each of the Following Increase Your Likelihood of Attending Summer Session? (n=1109)

Figure 4



The most powerful policy incentives revolve around available curriculum, financial issues, and ability to plan ahead. Four of the policies listed in figure 4 produce at least two-thirds of students reporting that they would be "a lot" or "some" more likely to attend Summers in presence of that policy: "Full curriculum available in your major field" (91.8%); "Tuition the same as Fall, Winter, Spring" (86.2%); "Summer courses listed in annual timetable of classes" (80.7%); and "Financial aid/work study available, as Fall, Winter, Spring" (66.9%). The availability of advising, GURs, and athletic programs also appear influential for about half of students. Associated Students and VU activities are important for a minority of the sample. Interestingly, "fully staffed campus housing available" and "all dining services open" are irrelevant to more than half of respondents. As expected, child care is important to only a few students, although it may be very important to those few.

OTHER FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS' DECISIONS TO ATTEND SUMMERS

To assist Western's planning, we asked about a set of motivations that might lead students toward or away from attending Summer school. This question was asked concerning Summer Session in general, not specifically relating to an expanded version. Findings are displayed in Figure 5.



How Much Would These Reasons Influence Decision Whether or not to Attend Summer? (n=1108)

Figure 5

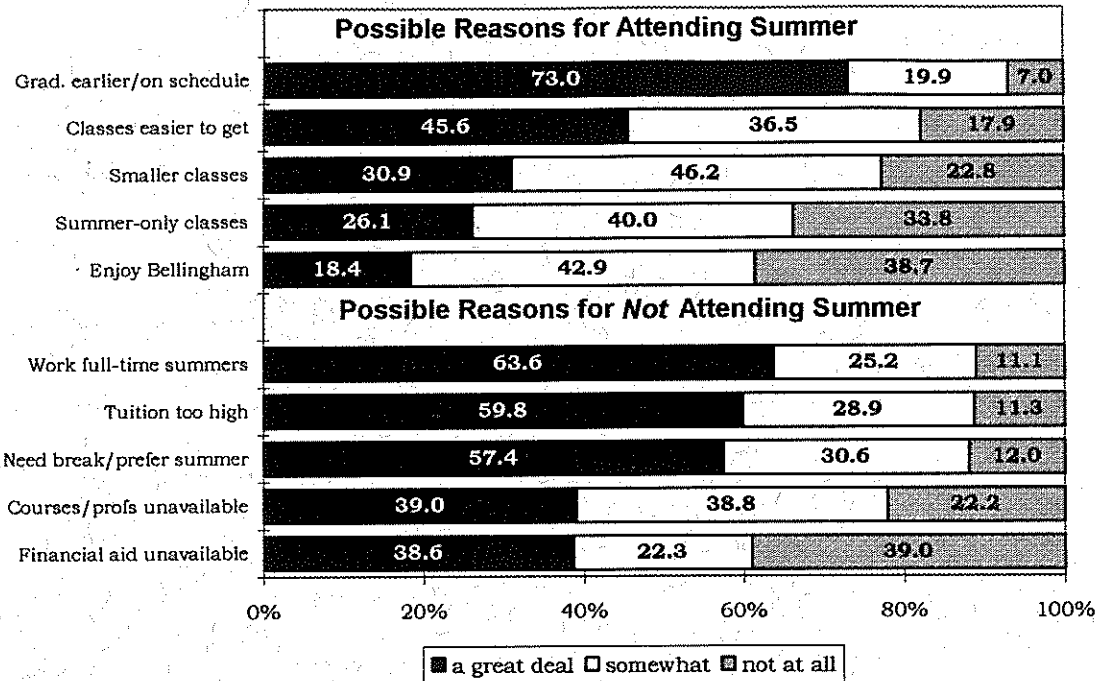


Figure 5 shows a rather clear motivational set regarding reasons for attending Summer Session. Graduating more closely on time is the overwhelming push, with a closely-related issue, course access, coming in second. A substantial minority also look for particular courses or for smaller, less formal courses—two features that might be undermined if Western mounts a year-round operation.

Certain reasons for *not attending* Summer Session showed considerable influence, though three of these might be less problematic under an expanded Summer Session: the higher full-time Summer tuition; the limited availability of courses or instructors; and the inability to get Summer financial aid.

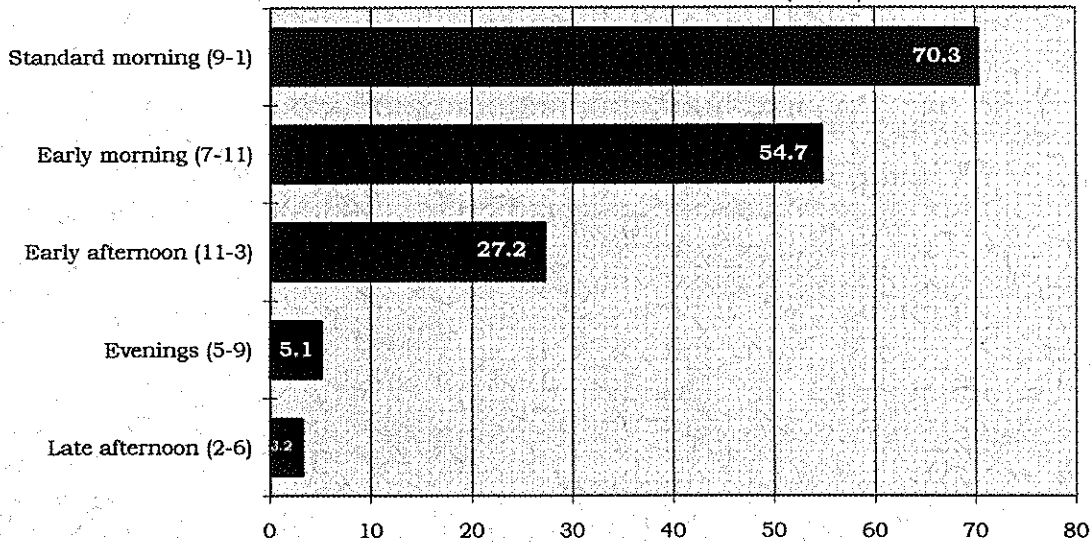
### SCHEDULE & COURSES STUDENTS PREFER IN AN EXPANDED SUMMER SESSION

To assist Western's planning regarding Summer Session, students were asked what type of weekly calendar they would prefer, what hours they would prefer, and what types of courses they would plan to take if they were attending an expanded Summer Session this coming Summer. Findings are displayed in Figures 6 through 8.

Findings concerning preferred daily schedules, displayed in figure 6, offer few surprises. Students overwhelmingly prefer the standard morning schedule or, to nearly as great an extent, the early morning schedule, with a substantial group also listing early afternoon as one of the two most desirable schedules. Despite the fact that students were asked to list *two* schedules they found the most desirable, only a handful listed either late afternoons or evenings.

### What Times of Day Do Students Prefer to Have Classes in Summer\* (n=603)

Figure 6

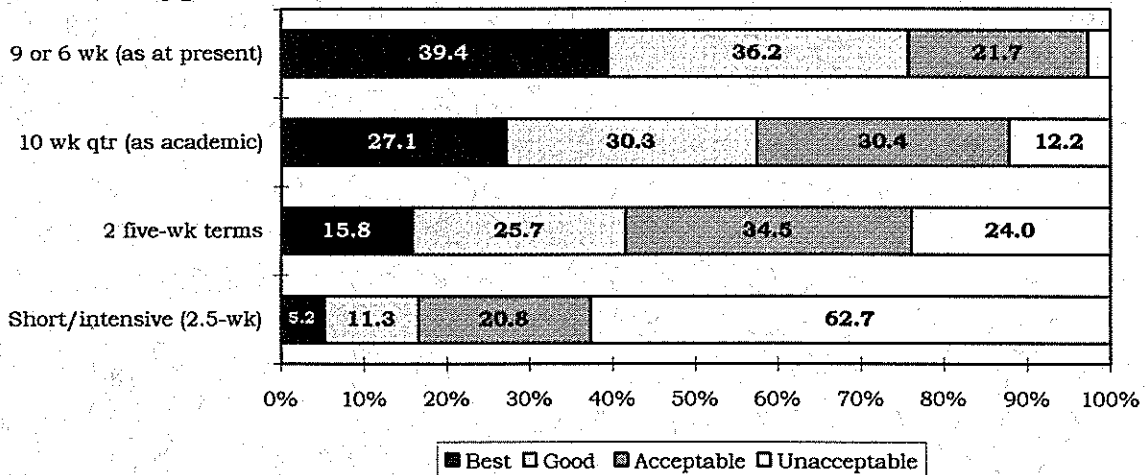


\*Percentages more than 100% because students were invited to mark two preferences.

Students also were asked to evaluate several types of schedules, including the present 9- and 6-week terms, one ten-week term, two five-week terms, and short, intensive terms. Findings are shown in Figure 7. The nine-week schedule is the most preferred, presumably because it is shorter than the ten week alternative and perhaps because it is the present system. Assuming that as a part of expanding Summer Western moved to a full ten-week schedule, this fact could present a marketing issue.

### What Type of Schedule Would Students Prefer? (n=642)

Figure 7



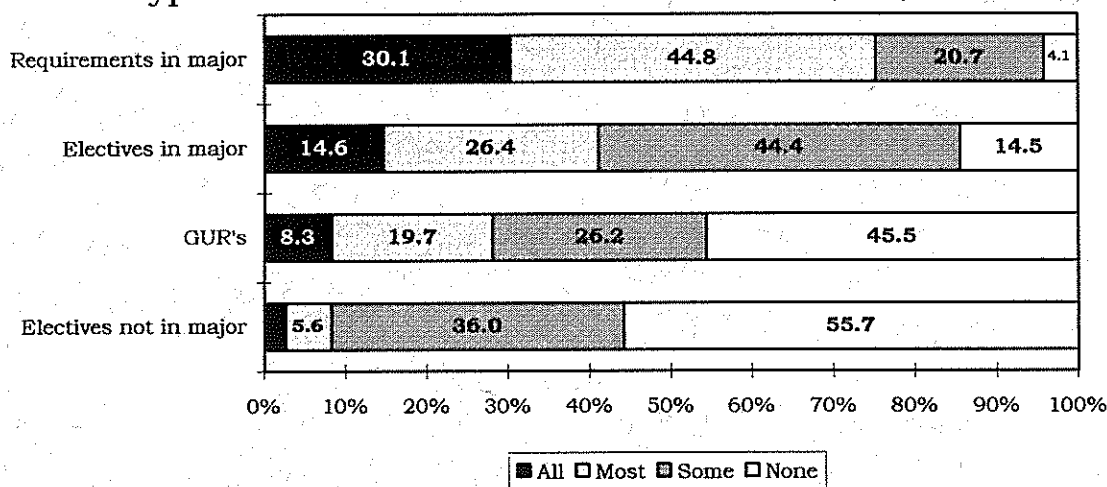
One ten-week quarter is seen as "best" or "good" by 57.4% of those who would plan to attend an expanded Summer Session and as at least "acceptable" by 87.8%. Whether the 12.4% who rate this option as "unacceptable" would therefore not attend a ten-week Summer Session is unknown, but it appears that at least some decrease in demand for Summers will occur if the schedule is made equivalent

to that for the current academic year. The most favored schedule of the faculty, two sequential five-week terms, is acceptable to only 76.0% of students and is "best" or "good" for only 41.5%. Students find short intensive classes essentially unacceptable.

The final analysis included in this report shows the types of courses planned by students who "definitely" or "probably" would enroll in an expanded Summer Session. Students were asked whether they would take "all," "most," "some," or "none" of their courses from each of four types of courses, "requirements in major," "electives in major," "GURs," or "electives not in major." Findings are shown in Figure 8. The majority of students would take all or mostly requirements in the major, with electives in the major a distant second. These two findings re-emphasize the importance of the policy that "year-round operation" would need to offer core programs in most, if not all, majors. On the other hand, these findings also indicate that many majors might get by with modest offerings--required courses only.

Winter 1996 Survey of WWU Students Re: Enlarging Summer Session to "Year-round"

What Types of Courses Would Students Take? (n=681) Figure 8



GURs and university electives are possibilities for about half of those who would attend an expanded Summer Session, but few students would plan to take primarily GURs or university electives. On the other hand, the demand for GURs is sufficient (28.0%) that a year-round program would be well-advised to offer at least the most popular or least accessible GUR courses. In addition, GURs might be an important element of drawing students to begin their education during Summer, if that were to become one goal of an expanded Summer Session.

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