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# Group 8 Freshmen Enrollment Focus Groups

Western Washington University. Office of Survey Research

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# Freshmen Enrollment Focus Groups

## Summary of Group 8

Conducted February 28, 2008

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.

### **Introductions (p1-3)**

Students selected for this focus group were assigned to a business and economics Summerstart advising group. However, only three of the ten students are certain that they want to major in business (or marketing). Three students are undecided as to major, although one is leaning toward business and another is leaning towards international business. Four students have different majors in mind: English-Creative Writing, Communications and Philosophy, Human Services, Communications or Sociology (p1-3). Plans for graduation vary: one and a half years (two students who came in with 80 and 95 running start credits); four years (two students); four to eight years (one student planning to attend law school); and four to five years (five students). Four of the latter five students are business majors; one is undecided as to major so it may take longer depending on the major; and one student says “something could happen, or maybe I’ll take quarter off, or I’ll study abroad” (p1-3)

### **Registration Experience (p3-4)**

Four students signed up for fewer credits so they would not be overloaded their first quarter. One of the four students also wanted to meet people and be more social; and another says that classes were full by the time s/he registered during Summerstart so it took a long time to put together a schedule (p3). Two students registered for classes at home. One originally had 16 credits but dropped to 12; and the other signed up for 12 credits needed for the major (p3-4). One student signed up for 12 credits because s/he heard from students as well advisors that s/he should sign up for this amount, or “not too much” (p4). One student was advised during Summerstart to not take too many credits (p4). One student selected GUR’s and the credit load came out to 13, which s/he thought was perfect (p4). Another student chose classes based on interests s/he had in high school, and the schedule turned out to be 14 credits (p4).

### **Academic Advising (p5-7)**

Nine of the ten students in this group say they were advised during Summerstart to take *15 or fewer credits* (the 10<sup>th</sup> student did not attend Summerstart). Advisors said to take fewer credits so that students would not be too overwhelmed during the first quarter (p5). We

asked students whether they thought advisors said to take less than 15 credits because of the types of courses they were going to take (business, econ, and math). Students say no, it was more about the concern that first-quarter students need time to transition into college, which they acknowledge is indeed true (p5-6). On the other hand, one student felt insulted about the advice to take fewer than 15 credits because of the assumption that it would be too much for him (p6). Five students are taking 16-18 credits Winter Quarter in order to make up for the credits they didn't take Fall Quarter. They feel that they need to "catch up" (p6). Three students got bored Fall Quarter so they are taking more than 15 credits Winter Quarter (p7). Two students were advised by peers (and student advisors) to stay low on the credits Fall quarter so they can meet people and transition into college (p7). One student received advice from her mom about which classes to take, but not about credit load (p7).

### **Logistics of Registering (p8-9)**

For three students, having courses with 3 or 4 credits affected their ability to register for 15 or more credits (p8). Six students wish that classes were 5 credits each so they could easily register for 15 credits. Also 4 credit classes (and sometimes 3-credit classes) are about the same workload as 5-credit classes (p8-9).

### **Academic Interest Area (p9-10)**

Four students could not get into classes they wanted for their major because they were filled, or because they didn't have the prerequisites (p9). One student had a scheduling issue, with classes for the major being offered on just Tuesdays and Thursdays (p10).

### **Co-Curricular and Extra-Curricular Activities (p10-11)**

Six students participated in clubs Fall Quarter, and four participated in sports. These types of interests affected credit loads for two students. One took 13 credits Fall quarter in order to be involved in a number of social activities (clubs) (p10). The other student was on the golf team and could only find 12 credits that worked for a morning class schedule (p10-11).

### **Financial Concerns and Work Schedules (p11)**

Four students are concerned about taking a minimum of 12 credits each quarter in order to receive their scholarships (p11). One student knew she would have a work study position and didn't want to get stressed out with this new job as well as school, so she registered for fewer credits Fall Quarter (p11).

### **Academic and Social Confidence Levels (p11-14)**

The majority felt confident about their ability to do well in their first quarter; however four students were nervous about how well they would do. One of the four did not feel competent academically; another gets distracted easily; and two students knew they might have difficulty balancing academics and socializing (p12). For another student it wasn't about confidence level. She took fewer credits because she was advised to take a smaller credit load (p12). Community college or AP coursework helped three students feel better prepared for college (p12-13). Two other students took AP coursework during high school,

which didn't necessarily help them to feel better prepared for college. For them, college is harder than high school (p13). Four students discussed issues with time management and study habits (p13). Five students took fewer credits Fall Quarter because they wanted to get comfortable with the social climate at Western first (p13-14). Three students signed up for more credits then dropped to less than 15. For one student it was because the class was too hard. Another didn't want morning classes but couldn't find classes to fit her schedule. Another started with 16 credits but one of the classes conflicted with snowboarding (p14).

### **Transfer credits (p15)**

Two students thought of themselves as being ahead because they brought in AP credits or community college coursework (p15). Two others brought in a lot of transfer credits, so they thought they didn't have to rush or take a lot of credits (p15). Others didn't think about their extra credits while registering for classes (p15).

### **Academic and Social Adjustment (p15-17)**

Having fewer credits Fall Quarter, students had a lot of free time on their hands. One joined clubs, another golfed or had free time, and others spent the time socializing (p15-16). Eight students wish they had taken 15 or 16 credits Fall Quarter (but no more). They felt they could have handled it, and some were bored (p16). Eight students are taking 15 or more credits Winter Quarter. Although the workload is more than students expected, they say it is manageable and keeping busy helps to motivate them (p17). One student is taking 17 credits Winter quarter because he hates winter quarter and would rather be studying. However he plans to take around 15 credits in Spring and Fall because he prefers to do things outside (p17). One student is taking 14 credits, and another is taking 11 (it was 16 originally). They would rather stick with these lighter loads because they would rather have time to do other things (p17).

### **Advice for Incoming Freshmen (p18-21)**

- Take 15 credits because it is the average, and it will keep you on track for graduation in four years.; but take less if you're concerned about the workload
- Manage your time wisely!
- Do your homework!
- Get involved in various activities, but not too many
- Use the resources at the Advising Center
- Know the rules and requirements yourself so you won't be misled
- Meet people, socialize
- Know how Summerstart and registration works in advance, so you won't be overwhelmed while you're there

Eight of ten students say to take 15 credits because it is the average, and it will keep you on track for graduation in four years (p18-19). Two students say to take as many credits as you think you can handle personally (p19-20). Other advice includes getting involved in various activities, but not too many (p20); Use the resources at the Advising Center (p20); Know the rules and requirements yourself to avoid being misled (p20); Meet people, socialize (p20-21);

Know how Summerstart and registration works in advance, so you won't be overwhelmed while you're there (p21).