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# Group 3 Freshmen Enrollment Focus Groups

Western Washington University. Office of Survey Research

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## Freshmen Enrollment Focus Groups

### Executive Summary for Group 3

Conducted January 30, 2008

Group 3. Twelve students participated. All twelve took 15 or more state support credits in the fall, and all scored below 1 standard deviation below the mean verbal SAT score. Half of the students took 15 credits in the fall, two took 16 credits, and the remaining four took 17 credits. Their interests were distributed among the colleges, as represented by Summerstart advising group assignment; with four assigned the environmental studies, CST scholars, health or math/science groups, two assigned to the undecided group, two to the Fairhaven College, music or fine & performing arts groups, one to the humanities or Fairhaven interest group, and three to the education group. Seven of the participants are female and five male. Seven are students of color, four transferred credits from high school, three participated in an FIG and two in an FYE, none are in the honors program, eleven attended Summerstart, and none participated in fall athletics.

#### Introductions (p1-3)

The majority 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)
- Nice campus; great town
- A variety of things to do here
- Friends or family attend (or have attended) Western

Six students in this group have a certain major in mind— Pre-Pharmacy, Elementary Education, Financial Economics, Music Education, Special Education, Technical Theatre. Six students are exploring majors—possibly Political Science or English, Biology or Business, Elementary Education or Communication Sciences and Disorders, music education, and physical education. One student plans to leave Western in three years for pharmaceutical school. Another plans to graduate in two years as he came into western with an AA degree (two years of Running Start). Five students plan to graduate “hopefully in 4 years”; two students say it will probably take 5 years (both are majoring in music education); and three don’t know how long it will take (p1-3).

#### Registration Experience (p4-6)

Students in this group took 15 or more credits Fall Quarter. Advisors helped the majority in selecting classes—classes that would fulfill GURs, classes that could be applied toward their major, and classes that looked fun or interesting (p4-5). This student started with a FIG but wanted more than 12 credits, so added classes to bring her credit load to 16 (p5). One student registered for six or seven classes because these are required for music majors (p5). One student was advised to take Chemistry 121 but the course

was too difficult. He was too late to drop the class, and ended up with 10 credits at the end of the quarter (p5). Three students selected their own classes during Summerstart and ended up taking 16-17 credits—classes they needed and that also looked interesting (p5-6).

#### **Academic Advising (p 6-10)**

Only one student in this group was advised to take 15 *or more* credits. He was advised that 15 to 16 credits is a good amount for music majors (p6-7). The majority were advised to take 12-15 credits. Some were told that 12 is the minimum, and they should take no more than 15 credits—a lighter load so they could adjust to college life (p7). Four students heard from advisors that 15 credits is a good load for freshmen—the preferred goal to stay on track for graduation. These students aimed for 15 credits (p7-8). Five students did not follow the advice given by their advisors. Two students were advised to “take only 13 credits” (a lighter load so they would not be overwhelmed), but they chose to take 15-16 credits. Three students were advised that “15 credits is the average load”, but they chose to take more. One felt comfortable doing more because he had experience through Running Start; and the others wanted “to do better than that”, or to “stretch the box”. One student discovered however, that the load was too heavy (p9-10). Three students say their parents influenced how many credits they should enroll in because of finances (p10).

#### **Logistics of Registering (p10-12)**

One student says it is difficult having a major where the majority of classes are 4 credits, not five (business). He has to take either 12 credits or 16 (p10). The majority were pretty much able to get the classes they wanted during Summerstart, as discussed previously in the Registration Experience section. However eight students could not get their first choice courses for Winter quarter, and this affected their credit loads. Their loads are either lower than they wanted (13 credits) or higher than they wanted (17-18 credits) (p11). Some students believe it may take longer than 4 years to graduate if they can't get the classes they need—particularly prerequisites. Students also say it may take longer if they double-major, or because certain programs take longer (teaching); or because they are undecided as to major (p11-12).

#### **Academic Interest Area (p12-13)**

While registering for Fall classes, one student thought about his major because he's a junior and wants to take an average of 15 credits a quarter to graduate in time. Another student thought about prerequisites he needs for the major (p12). However, most students did not think about credit load or the major while registering. Instead

they were focused on registering for classes for the first time, particularly GUR's (p13).

**Co-curricular and Extra-curricular Activities (p13-14)**

Seven students participated in clubs, and two participated in recreational activities outside of school. Students say these interests did not influence their decision about how many credits to take their first quarter (p13-14).

**Financial Concerns and Work Schedules (p14)**

Because of the financial aspect, one student intends to take a full load each quarter to graduate on time (p14). Two students worked Fall Quarter. One student said that scheduling her time for work and studying was an issue, but it really didn't have to do with credit load or registration for classes (p14).

**Academic and Social Confidence Levels (p14-16)**

Eleven of the twelve students in this group say they felt "extremely confident" about their ability to do well their first quarter at Western. The students in this group all say they did well in high school. Five took AP or advanced classes which helped to prepare them for college and for the workload (p14-15). Two students didn't feel as prepared as they would have liked, because they didn't have the necessary study skills (p16).

**Transfer Credits (p16-17)**

Students in this group say that a person coming in with college credits is in a position to stay ahead (and will most likely choose to stay ahead) as long as they register for 15 each quarter. Yet the extra credits also allows for flexibility if you can't get a class, or if you choose to take less (p16-17).

**Academic and Social Adjustment (p17-21)**

The majority said their credit loads were manageable. However, some students experienced difficulty adjusting to the workload, and some had difficulty with time management at first—balancing the social aspect of college with academics. These students were able to do well once they adjusted to college life and built in enough study time (p17-18). Three students admitted they did not do as well as they would have liked Fall quarter. They lacked the necessary study skills and had difficulty with time management (p19). Some students talked about what they would do differently if they could do Fall quarter over again. They would do a better job balancing social time with homework; and they would change their study habits or "learn to study" (p19-20). Two students say their FIG groups really helped, because they were able to make connections with the teachers and students (p20-21).

**Advice for Incoming Freshmen (p21-14)**

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

- Shoot for 15 credits to stay on track. 15 credits is manageable. However, it's also a personal decision and you have to decide where you will fit in. So take a lighter load if you're social and you want to take time to adjust to Western
- Find the balance between social life and studying; manage your time wisely
- Take it seriously; have a plan; be prepared; stay on top of things
- Work hard; do your homework; find people to study with
- Take a FIG class to connect with professors and students; and because it helps you adjust to college
- Take GUR's to get them done
- Take courses to explore possible majors
- Take courses that will be interesting and fun
- Talk to advisors and friends who have experience; ask questions
- Have fun! It's college!