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Western Educational Longitudinal Study: Baseline of Freshmen entering Fall, 2003

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WESTERN EDUCATIONAL LONGITUDINAL STUDY:
BASELINE OF FRESHMEN ENTERING FALL, 2003

(REPORT 2003-02)

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October, 2003

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
WELS SURVEY FINDINGS:	3
Frequencies	3
Figures	15
APPENDIX A: WELS GOALS AND OBJECTIVES	23
APPENDIX B: SURVEY ADMINISTRATION PROCEDURES	26
APPENDIX C: DATA QUALITY	29
APPENDIX D: ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE FINDINGS FROM WELS FRESHMEN FOCUS GROUP	32

Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS)

INTRODUCTION

In Summer 2003 Western Washington University's entire entering Freshman Class had the opportunity to complete a highly-customized survey designed during a year-long effort to bring in and coordinate the information needs of a variety of units that engage students early in their college careers. The survey covered their high school experiences and activities (both academic and personal), their expectations for college, and their family and personal background. The survey is intended for use by program administrators and faculty inasmuch as their programs have the potential to influence or be influenced by new students at Western.

Seventy-one percent of incoming freshmen responded to the survey forming the baseline for six-year study of their cohort. Additional surveys on student transitions, course registration and first-year experiences are planned for the 2003-2004 academic year.

This report provides background on the Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS), as well as the content and results of that baseline survey. Readers are encouraged to examine the findings carefully and consider the implications of the findings for their respective units.

BACKGROUND

The Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS) was conceived as a process to obtain data more relevant to Western and its mission than survey data had been able to obtain previously. Rather than continuing to rely on outside survey forms, many of which were pricey and often only partially useful, researchers developed a Western-specific survey form. This development process began about two years ago with researchers sitting down with dozens of individuals, departments and offices and asking them what their survey data needs were. From these conversations general areas of interest (expectations, pre-college experiences, college preparedness, etc.) were outlined and specific questions logged. Along the way, WELS researchers also noted where data was already being collected so that doubling up on survey questions was minimized.

The survey form began taking shape in January of 2003. Its development was a process of drafting, sharing the draft with all the interested parties, and revising. There were numerous iterations. Yet the work was well worth it, as the final survey form was considered by all participants to be as thorough and Western-specific as everyone thought it could be. This does not mean that the form has been written in stone. One of the benefits of developing a Western-specific survey is that it can, and should, be a flexible document, with questions and/or sections being as easily deleted as added.

Researchers concluded that in the WELS approach yearly survey administrations would be replaced by a six-year survey cycle, *with a new cycle beginning every three years*. The initial survey of in-coming freshmen was administered in the summer, 2003; the next survey of in-coming freshmen would take place in the summer, 2006.

WELS researchers also determined that a truly effective survey process should be designed to respond relatively quickly to administrative concerns. To accomplish this goal, the initial pool of survey participants (the baseline) needed to be as large as possible. This concern was not only about having robust initial findings, but also about flexibility. With a large baseline, representative random samples of students (as few as 200) could be contacted for future surveys, thus a wide variety of brief, detailed and issue-specific surveys could be included in each six-year cycle.

RESEARCH METHODS

Students completed pen and paper surveys as part of their Summerstart orientation, as well as being contacted by telephone if they were unable to attend or did not turn in a survey after attending Summerstart. (For more details on the administration of the WELS see Appendix B of this report.) Where students provided their Western ID, their responses were merged with Student Information System data to provide additional variables including high school GPA, SAT scores, sex, age, etc. Analysis shows that there are some small differences between the 1580 responding students and the 690 who did not respond. Those differences are described in detail in Appendix C of this report.

FINDINGS

In all, the WELS 2003 Baseline survey data provide the most comprehensive, appropriate and complete information WWU has ever gathered on its incoming students. The following pages provide the exact wording of each question the students responded to, with the distribution of responses for each item. To aid in interpreting the findings, additional graphics are provided at the end of the survey for questions with a large number of related items. Future analysis of these data will follow upon the requests of those who participated in the construction of the items, as well as units that see value in exploring the findings in greater detail. For more information please contact the Office of Institutional Assessment, Research and Testing (OIART).

Also included in this report is a summary and analysis of findings from The Office of Survey Research's (OSR) academic-year long focus group of freshmen entering Western in Fall of 2002. The research project was designed to find out about high school experiences and activities, expectations for college, and what it's like for freshmen as they transition into college life, academically and socially. (See Appendix D of this report.)

WELS SURVEY FINDINGS: FREQUENCIES

Western’s Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS):
Freshmen Entering Fall 2003

(Survey results: N =1580. All rows sum to 100% unless otherwise noted.)

These first items ask about your lifestyle when you were in high school.

1.1 When you were in high school, about how much time did you spend engaged in each of the following activities?

	Great deal	Quite a bit	Some	A little	None	Missing
a. Student government	7.5	6.5	13.4	24.4	48.2	-
b. Socializing with friends	40.1	43.9	13.1	2.2	-	0.6
c. Sports, exercise or other recreational activities	31.9	31.3	21.5	11.9	3.2	0.3
d. Spending time with your family	14.2	35.6	35.9	12.3	1.0	0.9
e. Performing or fine arts activities	16.8	15.9	18.3	26.8	21.8	0.4
f. Working for pay	13.6	27.0	24.2	21.4	13.2	0.6
g. Academic, political, ethnic, religious or social clubs	10.3	16.3	22.7	26.1	24.3	0.3
h. Community service, volunteer work or service learning projects	11.1	23.5	33.5	25.4	6.2	0.2
i. Studying/homework outside of school	14.7	38.2	33.0	13.2	0.9	0.1
j. Watching TV by yourself	2.7	10.8	30.8	41.8	13.7	0.1
k. Watching TV with others	2.2	12.3	38.8	39.7	7.0	0.1
l. Playing video/computer games.	4.0	8.5	17.3	32.2	37.8	0.2
m. Looking for news and information on the Internet	7.9	26.2	34.7	26.8	4.4	-
n. Using materials and resources at a local or school library	3.0	15.8	34.1	37.7	8.8	0.6
o. Using computers for email, chat rooms, or instant messaging	19.2	28.2	25.5	21.1	6.0	-

1.2 How often did you take courses ...¹

	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Rarely	Never	NA or not offered	Missing
a. That were less difficult in order to keep up your GPA?	0.5	2.3	18.7	41.7	35.9	0.9	0.1
b. Explicitly to fulfill college entrance requirements	9.9	28.2	34.9	16.3	8.6	1.0	1.1
c. Because they were especially difficult and challenged you	8.1	30.4	44.8	13.8	2.3	0.3	0.3
d. To make your transcript look good to colleges you applied to	9.1	30.3	36.5	15.5	7.6	0.5	0.6
e. Just for enjoyment, because you wanted to learn something new	9.1	35.4	43.6	10.1	1.5	0.4	0.1
f. That required you to do library research on topics you chose?	3.1	14.6	42.1	25.9	9.2	4.9	0.3

¹ Please see Page 17 for a graphic representation of these items

	Yes	No	Don't know	Missing				
1.3. During high school, did you develop any close relationships with your teachers? (i.e. a teacher/mentor?)	84.2	11.7	3.9	0.2				
1.4 Did you participate in a Teaching Academy or Careers in Education course?	7.0	85.1	7.6	0.3				
1.5 Have you ever taken a college course on a college campus?	19.5	79.6	0.8	0.2				
		Extremely well	Very well	Somewhat well	A little well	Not at all well	Don't know	Missing
1.6 Please rate how well you think your high school prepared you for college coursework.	6.6	31.8	41.8	10.6	3.2	6.0		
1.7 How much experience do you have using computers for...								
	Great deal	Quite a bit	Some	A little	None	Don't know	Missing	
a. Email	60.4	26.6	9.7	2.8	0.5	-	0.1	
b. Finding information on the internet	52.2	35.1	11.0	1.5	0.1	-	0.2	
c. Finding information using library databases (i.e. Proquest, Ebsco)	14.0	18.4	33.9	24.1	9.4	-	0.3	
d. Creating documents.	41.8	30.4	16.5	8.7	2.0	-	0.5	
1.8. How comfortable are you with your ability in each of the following areas? ²								
	Extremely comfortable	Very comfortable	Somewhat comfortable	A little comfortable	Not at all comfortable	Missing		
a. Writing effectively	17.1	43.9	32.9	5.3	0.9	-		
b. Speaking effectively	13.4	30.4	39.1	13.4	3.7	0.1		
c. Critically analyzing written information	9.7	31.5	44.4	12.8	1.6	-		
d. Defining and solving problems	10.5	41.6	40.3	6.4	0.7	0.5		
e. Working and/or learning independently	27.2	49.4	19.9	3.0	0.4	0.1		
f. Working cooperatively in a group	26.1	50.7	19.9	3.1	-	0.2		
g. Understanding and applying scientific principles and methods	8.7	28.0	43.9	16.1	3.3	-		
h. Understanding and applying quantitative principles /methods	6.5	23.5	41.8	21.9	5.8	0.4		
i. Understanding and appreciating differing philosophies/cultures	22.1	42.3	25.8	8.8	0.8	0.2		
j. Understanding the interaction of society and the environment	14.7	40.8	34.7	8.3	1.0	0.4		
k. Working effectively with technology, especially computers	21.2	33.2	31.7	12.3	1.5	0.1		
l. Using management/leadership capabilities	19.9	39.4	29.4	9.6	1.3	0.5		
m. Understanding organizations and how people behave in them	11.5	40.8	36.6	10.1	0.8	0.3		

² Please see Page 18 for a graphic representation of these items

1.9. Which of the categories in the previous question would you say are your three greatest strengths? (Please note the letter of the category; rank in order where 1=strongest)

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____	Strengths	N	% in top 3
f.	Working cooperatively in a group	644	41%
e.	Working and/or learning independently	587	37%
a.	Writing effectively	563	36%
i.	Understanding and appreciating differing philosophies/cultures	477	30%
l.	Using management/leadership capabilities	475	30%
k.	Working effectively with technology, especially computers	415	26%
b.	Speaking effectively	347	22%
d.	Defining and solving problems	306	19%
g.	Understanding and applying scientific principles and methods	210	13%
j.	Understanding the interaction of society and the environment	200	13%
c.	Critically analyzing written information	195	12%
m.	Understanding organizations and how people behave in them	162	10%
h.	Understanding and applying quantitative principles /methods	128	8%

1.10. Which are your three greatest weaknesses? (Please note the letter of the category; rank in order where 1=weakest)

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____	Weaknesses	N	% in top 3
h.	Understanding/applying quantitative principles/methods	812	52%
g.	Understanding/applying scientific principles/methods	727	46%
b.	Speaking effectively	552	35%
c.	Critically analyzing written information	450	29%
k.	Working effectively with technology, especially computers	389	25%
a.	Writing effectively	326	21%
m.	Understanding organizations and how people behave in them	280	18%
l.	Using management/leadership capabilities	255	16%
i.	Understanding/appreciating differing philosophies/cultures	244	16%
j.	Understanding the interaction of society & environment	222	14%
d.	Defining and solving problems	183	12%
f.	Working cooperatively in a group	137	9%
e.	Working and/or learning independently	95	6%

1.11. How comfortable are you with your ability in each of the following areas?

	Extremely comfortable	Very comfortable	Somewhat comfortable	A little comfortable	Not at all comfortable	Missing
a. Using computers	32.2	37.9	24.6	4.7	0.6	0.1
b. Planning, implementing and organizing research	12.5	42.0	38.0	6.7	0.4	0.4
c. Using library resources for research	12.8	42.9	36.9	6.8	0.5	0.1
d. Citing references for research papers (creating a bibliography)	12.7	35.1	38.5	11.6	1.9	0.1
e. Understanding how to avoid plagiarism in your writing	25.0	45.5	23.6	5.3	0.4	0.2

This next section asks about your college application process and your decision to attend WWU.

2.1. How much of a factor were each of the following as reasons you decided to attend college this fall?³

	Major reason	Minor reason	Not a reason	Missing
a. My parents wanted me to go	15.3	38.0	46.6	0.2
b. I wanted to get away from home	29.6	44.6	25.5	0.3
c. To be able to get a better job after graduation	72.8	18.9	7.9	0.4
d. To gain a general education and appreciation of ideas	70.9	25.8	3.2	0.2
e. To improve my reading and study skills	36.0	49.4	14.5	0.1
f. To make me a more cultured person	55.9	33.1	10.8	0.3
g. To make more money after graduation	58.2	28.8	12.8	0.2
h. To live somewhere new	49.0	36.1	14.7	0.1
i. To learn more about things that interest me	83.2	14.7	2.0	0.1
j. To prepare myself for graduate/professional school	49.6	32.9	17.0	0.5
k. To get training for a specific career	62.0	26.9	10.9	0.2
l. A mentor/role model encouraged me to go	7.9	31.3	60.4	0.3

³Please see page 19 for a graphic representation of these items

2.2. Of the items listed above, which reasons were the most important to you personally? (Please write the corresponding letter in the blank; rank in order of importance.)

1. _____	2. _____	3. _____	Most Important	N	% in top 3
	i.	To learn more about things that interest me		847	54%
	c.	To be able to get a better job after graduation		683	43%
	d.	To gain a general education and appreciation of ideas		579	37%
	f.	To make me a more cultured person		515	33%
	k.	A mentor/role model encouraged me to go		478	30%
	g.	To make more money after graduation		417	27%
	j.	To prepare myself for graduate/professional school		373	24%
	h.	To live somewhere new		308	20%
	b.	I wanted to get away from home		245	16%
	a.	My parents wanted me to go		93	6%
	l.	To get training for a specific career		88	6%
	e.	To improve my reading and study skills		85	5%

2.3. Compared to attending college this fall, how much would you have preferred to be...

	A great deal	Quite a bit	Some	A little	Not at all	Missing
a. Taking time off from school	5.4	10.7	25.5	28.1	29.7	0.6
b. Working at a job	2.3	8.2	24	23.7	41.3	0.5
c. Going to school at a community college	1.3	2.6	11.9	18.8	64.8	0.6

2.4. How many colleges did you apply to for admission this year? (If "1" please skip to question 2.5)

N=1469 Mean=2.8 Median=2 Std Deviation=1.58 Minimum=0 Maximum=10 Missing=111

2.4.a. Was WWU your first choice among those you applied to?	Yes = 44.2	No = 21.4	Don't know = 8.5	Missing = 25.9
2.4.b. Were you accepted into more than one college or university?	Yes = 66.5	No = 7.0	if No, skip to question 2.5	Missing = 26.5
2.4.c. Was WWU your first choice among those you were accepted to?	Yes = 51.5	No = 9.9	Don't know = 5.4	Missing = 33.2

	Extremely	Very	Somewhat	A little	Not at all	Don't know	Missing
2.5. How important is it to you to do your <i>best</i> academic work this year?	51.0	41.5	6.8	0.3	-	0.1	0.3
2.6 How important is it that you attend college this year to you <i>personally</i> ?	56.3	35.4	6.9	0.8	-	0.1	0.5
2.7 How important is it that you attend college this year to <i>your family</i> ?	37.8	39.6	15.4	3.4	1.1	2.2	0.4

2.8. Have you ever had a course that required you to refer to a course syllabus (a document that tells you what to read and when, when tests are scheduled or what the course would be like)?

No = 14.7 Yes, once = 18.5 Yes, more than once = 60.9 Don't know = 5.6 Missing = 0.3

2.9. How well, if at all, do you understand the meaning behind the course numbers? (For example, courses numbered in the 100-level versus 200, 300 or higher?)

Very well = 14.7 Somewhat well = 58.7 Not at all well = 24.9 Missing = 1.7

This next section asks about your expectations for the coming college year.

3.1. How difficult will each of the following be for you personally this Fall?⁴

	Extremely difficult	Very difficult	Somewhat difficult	A little difficult	Easy	Don't know	Missing
a. Managing your finances	3.7	11.6	39.7	28.4	14.2	1.4	1.1
b. Managing your physical and emotional health	1.1	6.3	22.5	30.5	36.5	1.9	1.3
c. Getting the emotional support you need to do well in school	0.9	3.2	15.1	24.6	51.6	3.4	1.1
d. Dealing with homesickness	1.5	6.0	14.5	28.0	45.4	3.3	1.3
e. Managing stress	3.2	11.3	33.5	32.7	15.9	2.2	1.1
f. Getting enough sleep	5.4	20.4	32.8	25.8	12.0	2.2	1.4
g. Handling the use of alcohol and drugs	0.8	1.7	8.8	15.7	69.1	2.7	1.3
h. Fitting in with others at WWU	1.3	2.9	15.5	31.2	43.4	4.4	1.3
i. Meeting your family's expectations	2.7	6.8	14.9	24.4	45.1	5.0	1.2
j. Getting the financial support you need	5.1	10.4	22.2	25.6	31.3	3.9	1.5
k. Finding people you get along with, making friends	1.2	2.5	15.3	28.7	47.9	3.1	1.3
l. Being able to maintain your spiritual or religious values	0.7	2.7	7.0	14.2	62.5	11.4	1.6

⁴Please see page 20 for a graphic representation of these items

3.2 Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements⁵

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Missing
a. I expect to be a very successful student at Western	59.8	34.7	3.9	0.2	0.1	1.3
b. I will feel comfortable talking to professors after class and during office	42.2	41.2	9.3	5.4	0.4	1.5
c. My long-term education plans are very clear to me	22.2	31.5	18.4	17.5	8.9	1.5
d. I have the study skills I need to be a successful student	26.9	46.8	15.3	8.5	0.8	1.7
e. I feel I will be a part of the university community	31.3	47.0	17.7	2.2	0.3	1.5
f. I am very certain of my major field of interest	22.8	24.3	16.9	18.9	15.4	1.6
g. I have no idea what college is going to be like	6.6	30.9	25.3	28.0	7.7	1.5
h. I expect to have important, new friendships with other Western students	49.9	39.8	7.5	0.9	0.3	1.6
i. Concern for my family will interfere with my academic work	0.9	6.4	23.0	34.1	33.9	1.8
j. I feel Western's campus will be a safe place to live	50.8	37.0	9.7	0.6	0.3	1.6

⁵Please see page 21 for a graphic representation of these items

3.3. How much influence will your family have over...

	A great deal of influence	Quite a bit of influence	Some influence	A little influence	No influence	Don't know	Missing
a. The courses you will take	1.3	5.5	25.4	27.8	37.9	0.8	1.4
b. How much money you'll spend	13.2	28.3	26.3	19.9	9.5	1.1	1.7
c. The major you'll choose	0.9	2.9	14.2	24.1	55.9	0.5	1.5
d. Your living arrangements	6.4	11.8	22.3	26.5	29.9	1.7	1.4

3.4. Would you say your family is financially...

Above average=34.6 Average=46.3 Below average=9.7 Well below average=1.6 Missing=1.6

3.5. How many students do you think will be in the *largest* course you take over the coming year?

N=890 Mean=190 Median=150 Std Deviation=133 Minimum=20 Maximum=1,000 Missing=690

3.6. What would you expect to be a *typical* class size for your first year at WWU?

N=982 Mean=57 Median=45 Std Deviation=45 Minimum=11 Maximum=500 Missing=598

3.7. How easy do you think it will be to get the classes you want this year?

	Extremely easy	Very easy	Somewhat easy	A little easy	Not at all easy	Don't know	Missing
	1.4	6.7	38.7	27.3	10.9	13.4	1.5

3.8. How likely are you to do each of the following this year?⁶

	Definitely will	Probably will	Probably won't	Definitely won't	Don't know	Missing
a. Talk to a professor outside of class	39.4	49.9	5.9	0.1	3.3	1.4
b. Personally contribute to a classroom discussion	40.1	45.4	9.7	0.4	3.0	1.5
c. Volunteer on or off campus	16.6	43.0	23.4	1.3	14.1	1.5
d. Talk to an advisor about your courses	48.3	44.1	3.5	-	2.6	1.5
e. Change your plans for your major field	10.0	30.9	29.2	9.1	19.4	1.5
f. Seek out a job for credit (internship) rather than pay	5.1	23.2	39.0	5.6	25.5	1.6
g. Do community service work as part of a course	6.2	37.1	22.3	2.3	30.2	1.9
h. Write a substantial paper (5 pages or more)	47.8	45.3	1.4	0.1	3.7	1.6
i. Use tutoring services for help	15.7	36.5	28.0	2.7	15.3	1.9
j. Seek help from a disability resources service	1.6	3.7	37.0	39.7	15.9	2.1
k. Skip a class	6.5	36.1	33.9	10.1	11.6	1.8
l. Seek help from a counselor for something personal	3.9	18.8	47.0	8.4	20.3	1.6

⁶Please see page 22 for a graphic representation of these items

3.9. How difficult do you think each of the following will be for you this Fall?⁷

	Extremely difficult	Very difficult	Somewhat difficult	A little difficult	Easy	Don't know	Missing
a. Managing your time effectively	4.1	13.7	59.1	16.3	4.4	0.9	1.6
b. Managing your coursework	1.9	13.7	62.3	15.5	3.9	0.9	1.8
c. Paying attention in large lecture classes	3.7	13.8	44.9	27.3	7.0	1.6	1.7
d. Preparing for and presenting your work in front of a class	8.9	19.7	43.4	19.4	6.0	0.9	1.8
e. Sharing with other students in a discussion group	0.8	6.6	27.6	42.5	20.2	0.4	1.9
f. Getting to class consistently	0.4	1.0	14.4	51.3	30.4	0.8	1.6
g. Completing reading and coursework on time	1.1	4.1	35.9	39.3	16.7	0.9	1.9
h. Doing well on multiple choice tests	1.6	6.4	34.6	35.7	17.5	2.5	1.6
i. Writing papers as part of your coursework	1.8	8.4	40.9	32.7	13.4	0.9	1.8
j. Balancing your coursework with personal activities	2.8	10.4	50.7	24.7	7.9	1.7	1.7
k. Balancing your coursework with social life	3.0	11.3	49.9	23.9	8.2	1.9	1.8
l. Balancing your coursework with family or community obligations	1.1	3.4	27.9	42.8	20.3	2.7	1.8

⁷Please see page 23 for a graphic representation of these items

3.10. Over the next few years, how likely are you to...

	Definitely will	Probably will	Probably won't	Definitely won't	Don't know	Missing
a. Transfer to another university	3.0	10.3	48.6	19.5	17.7	1.0
b. Transfer to a two-year college	0.2	0.4	27.8	61.9	7.8	1.9

c. If you *Probably* or *Definitely will* transfer to another university or a two-year college, please let us know why:

Reasons why students probably or definitely will transfer to another university or college (N=233)

Academics

- Western doesn't offer intended program/major
- Academic prestige elsewhere
- Graduate school elsewhere

149

Personal

- Family/significant others
- Not sure whether I'll fit in
- New experiences/changes/keeping options open
- Travel; Finances

64

Location:

- Live closer to home/go out of state
- Warmer climate/larger city

42

3.11. How likely are you to...

	Definitely will	Probably will	Probably won't	Definitely won't	Don't know	Missing
a. Take a quarter or more other than summer off from college over the next four years?	1.1	5.6	49.1	32.7	9.8	1.7
b. Graduate from WWU	44.1	40.0	4.2	0.7	8.1	2.9

3.12. How long do you think it will take for you to finish your bachelor's degree?

Less than 4 yrs=7.3 4 yrs=46.1 4-5 yrs=38.4 More than 5 yrs=0.2 Don't know=6.5 Missing=1.5

If you are enrolling in Fairhaven College, you are finished with the survey. All other students please continue. Thank you!

Western students are expected to take courses in a wide range of areas as a part of their educational experience. These General University Requirements, or GURs are distributed over six different areas including communication, humanities, mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences and comparative, gender and multicultural studies.

4.1. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:

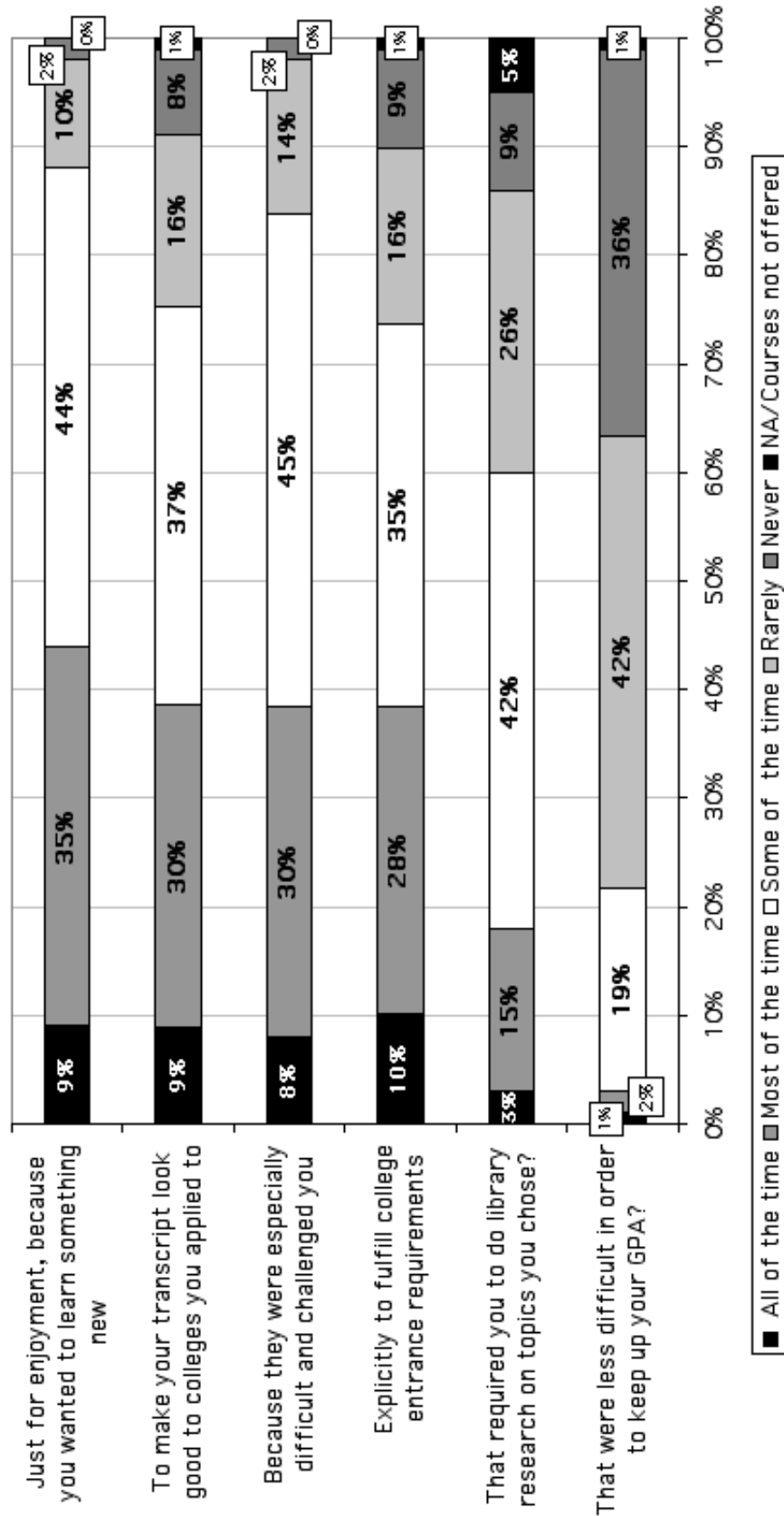
	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Missing
a. Taking GUR courses will give me useful skills and ideas	33.8	44.0	10.9	3.1	0.6	7.7
b. GUR course requirements will interfere with my taking courses that really interest me	6.3	30.8	31.4	18.9	4.7	7.9
c. I plan to use GURs as a key source for exploring potential majors	21.8	35.3	21.6	8.3	5.2	7.9
d. Completing courses in a broad range of disciplines is something I would choose to do myself even if it were not required	21.4	37.2	20.9	9.7	2.6	8.1

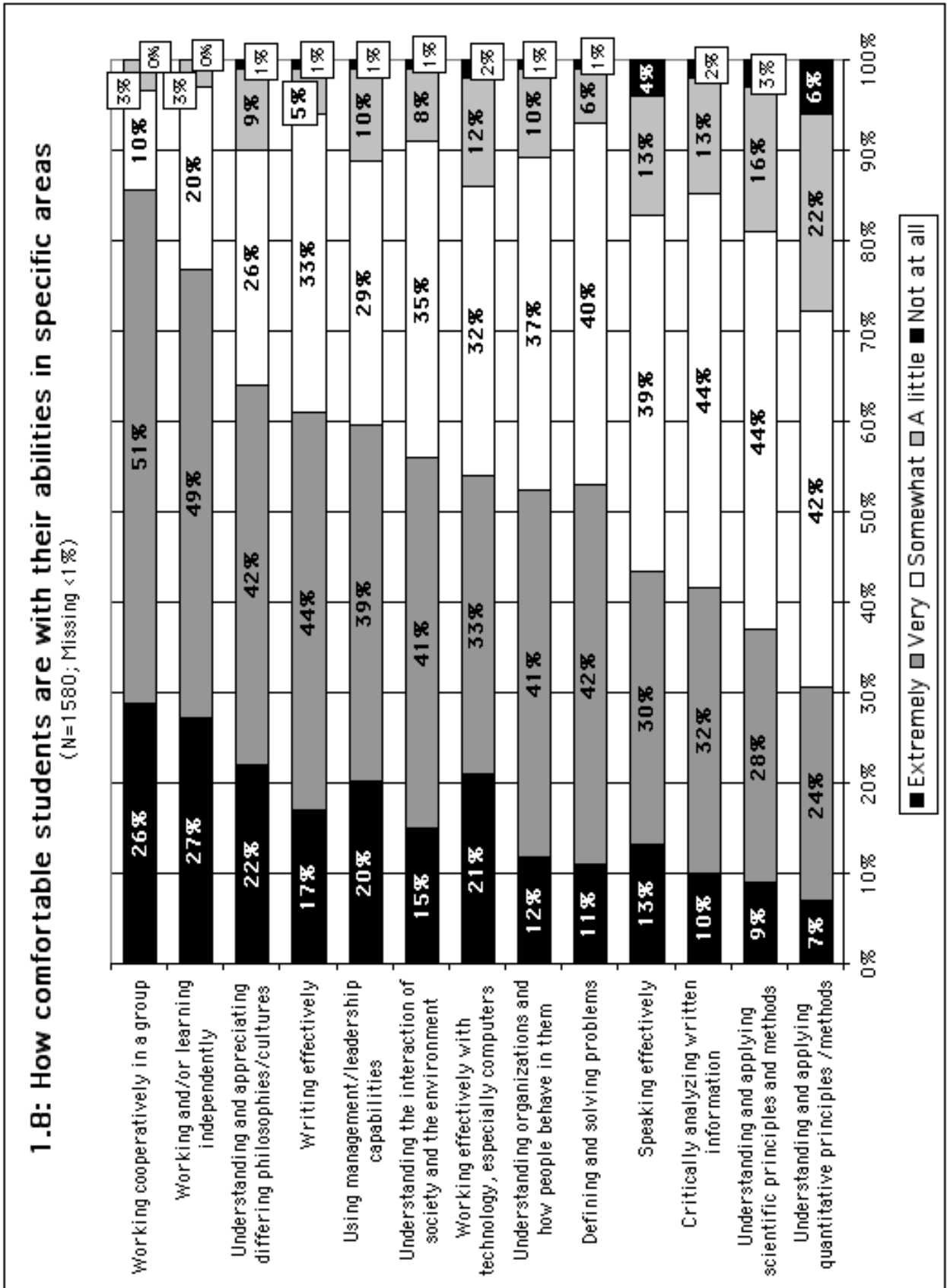
Thank you for your time and assistance with this important project.

WELS SURVEY FINDINGS: FIGURES

1.2: How often students took courses for specific reasons

(N=1580, Missing < 1%)





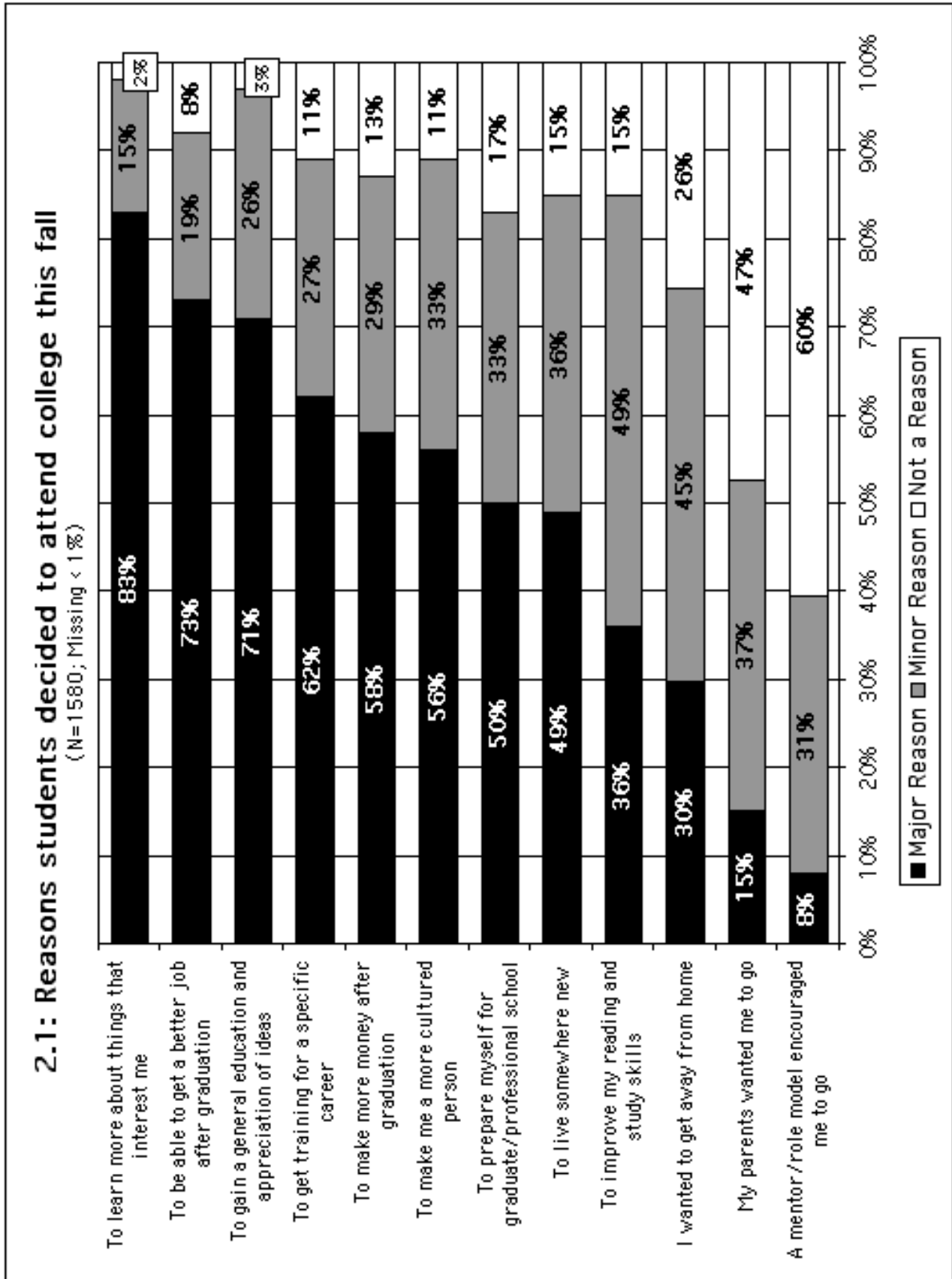
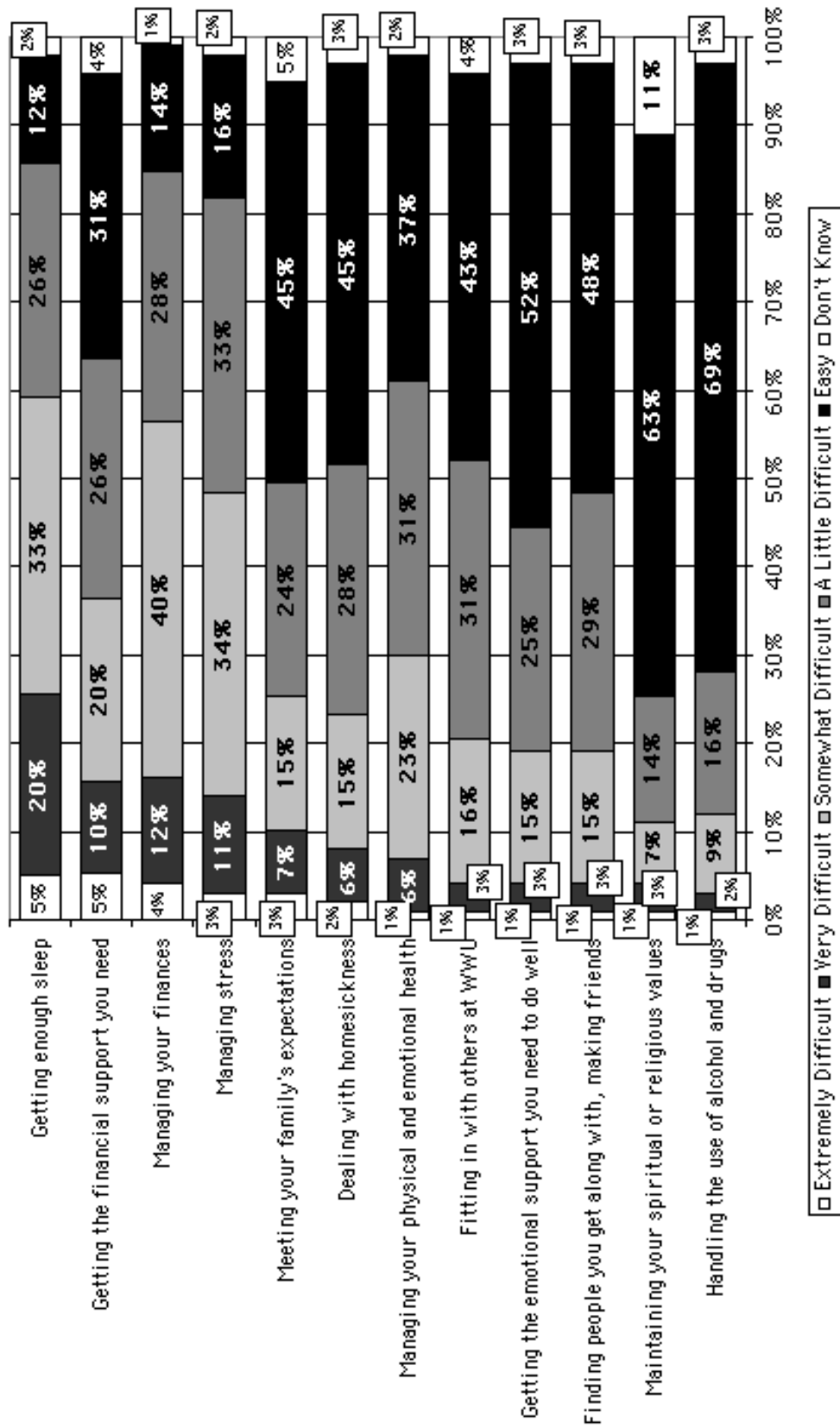


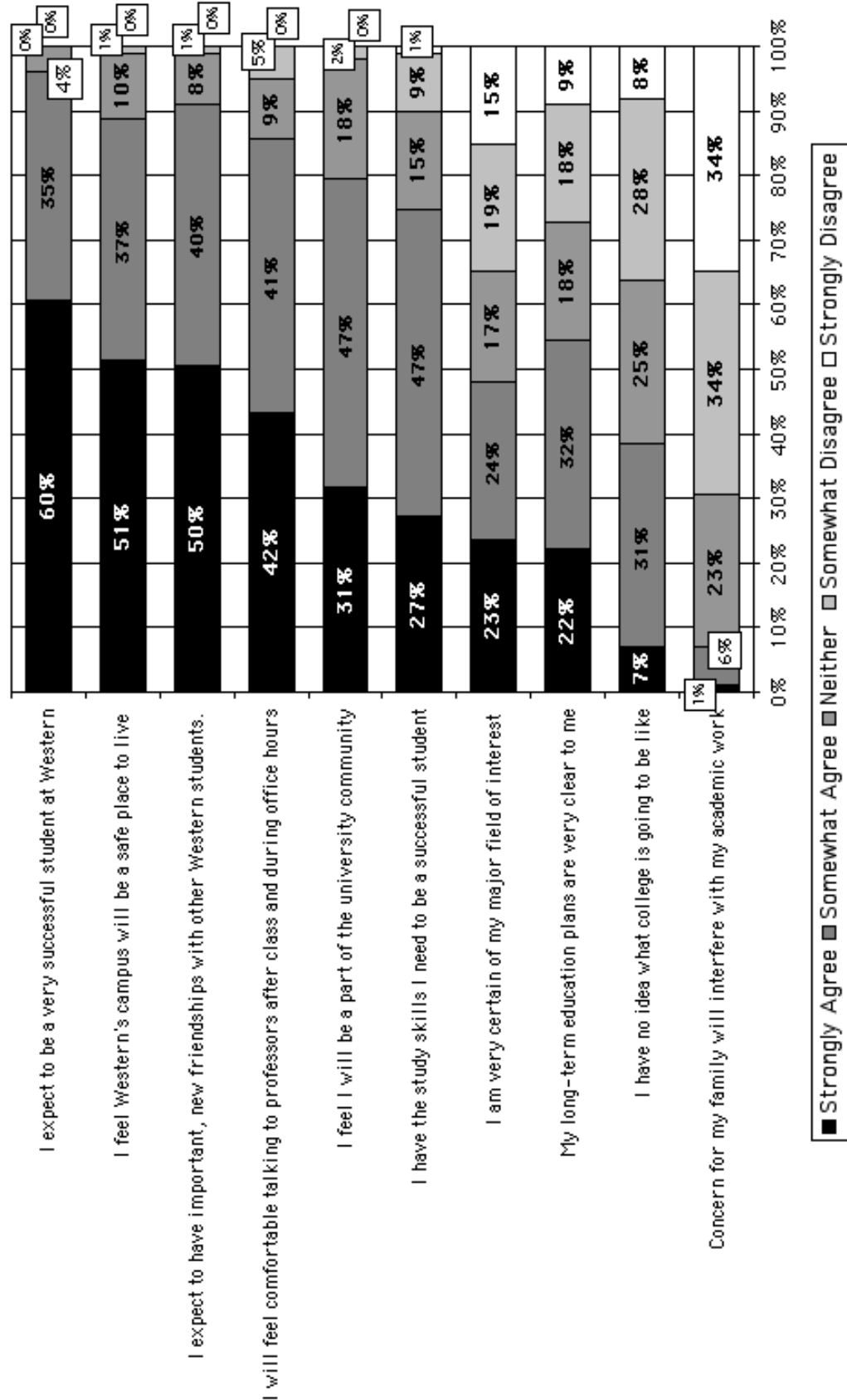
Figure 3.1: How difficult will each of the following be for you this fall?

(N=1580 ; Missing <1%)



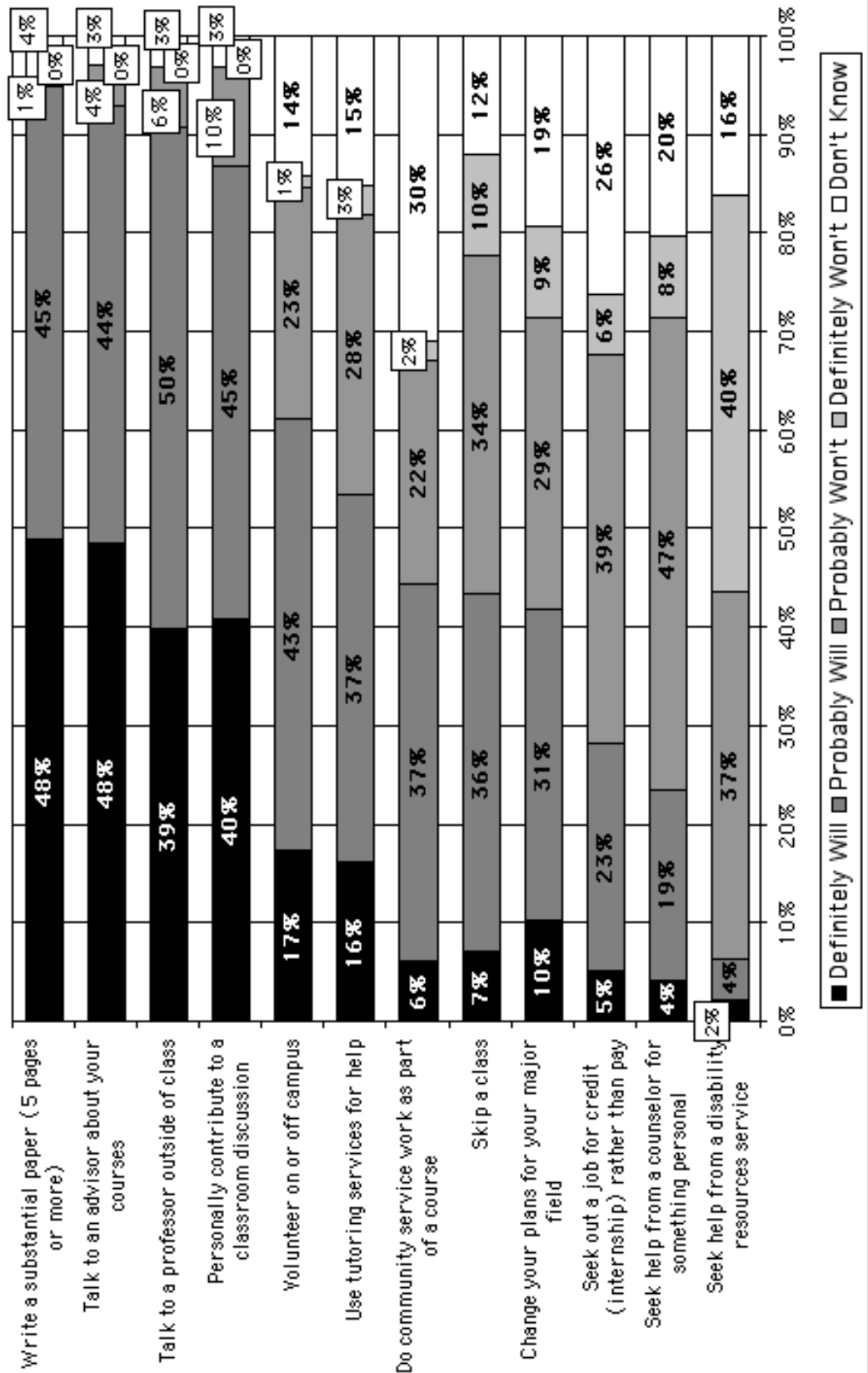
3.2: Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements

(N=1580; Missing, 2%)



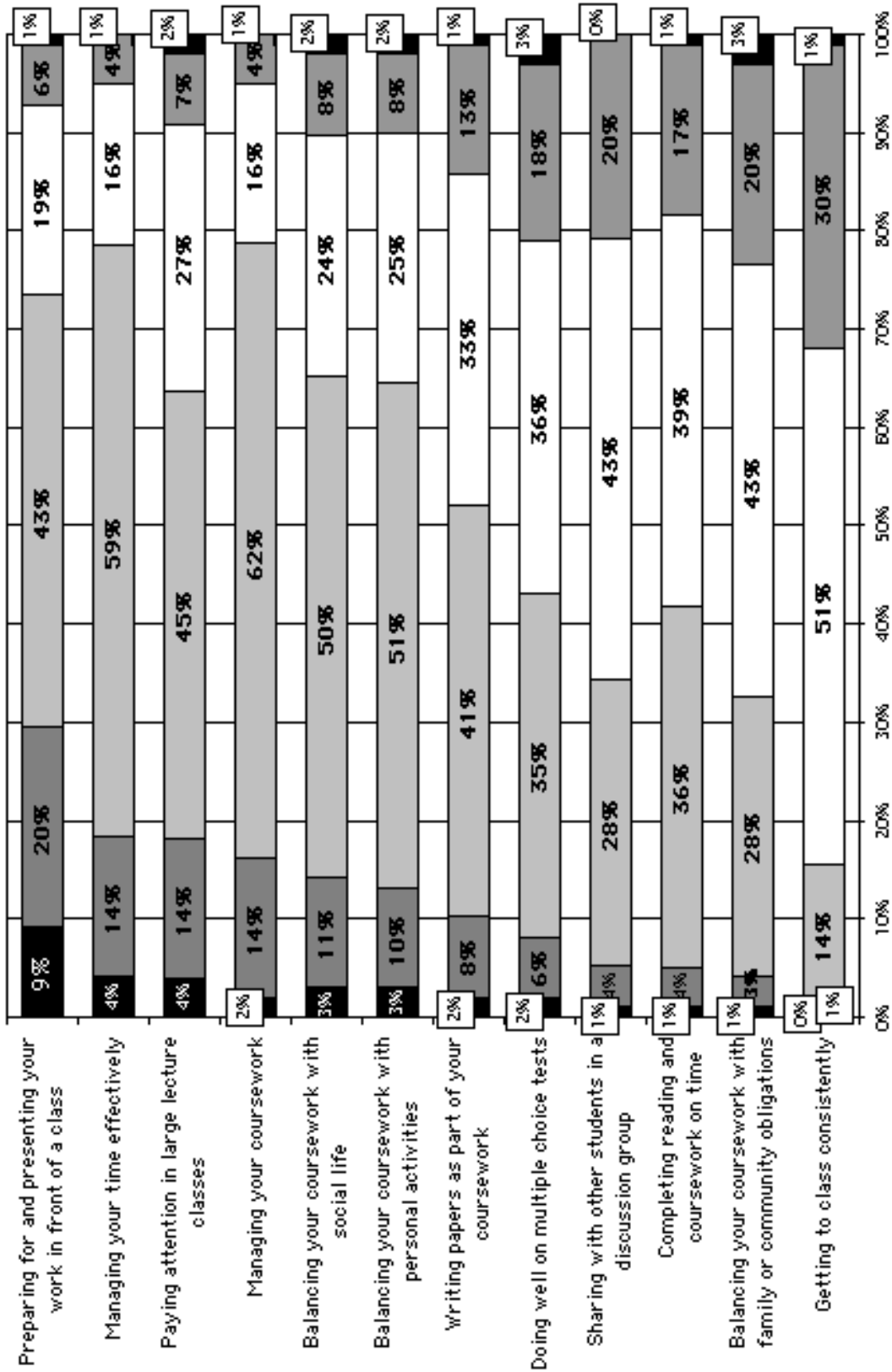
3.B: How likely are you to do each of the following this year?

(N=1580; Missing <1%)



3.9: How difficult do you think each of the following will be for you this fall?

(N=1580; Missing <1%)



■ Extremely Difficult ■ Very Difficult ■ Somewhat Difficult □ Not Difficult □ Don't Know

APPENDIX A:
WELS GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

WELS: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Currently the Office of Institutional Assessment and Testing administers three major surveys whose instruments are generated by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI). These include the CIRP (Freshmen), YFCY (Freshmen Follow-up), and CSS (Senior) surveys, which offer valuable overall data tied into national norms. The CSS is administered every quarter, the CIRP every summer, and the YRCY each fall. Additionally, the Office of Survey Research administers an Alumni survey every even-numbered year, and the Close-in survey of first-time freshmen and transfers is administered every odd-numbered year. Moreover, both offices respond to additional survey research projects fielded from colleges, departments, and offices on an ad-hoc basis.

The strength of the current method is that HERI surveys link Western findings to national norms, and the data is robust enough to fulfill the needs of many departments and to inform administrative offices and outside agencies. The weakness of the current method is that only cross-sections of data are generated, so student progress can't be carefully tracked and evaluated for predictive markers of trouble and success; additionally, current survey data has limited coverage, with some colleges, departments, and offices feeling unserved.

WELS is a longitudinal survey program that would take a step in the direction of more fully responding to Western's data needs. Without overburdening respondents with repeated surveys from a variety of sources, WELS would provide an annual vehicle that would aid departments, offices, colleges and organizations in exploring issues that are particularly timely and relevant. WELS would enable issues of retention and graduation efficiency to be more carefully explored; WELS would also provide data that could be more directly used for program evaluation and improvement. Moreover, WELS would introduce a flexibility that would allow unserved parties more readily into the data loop. We believe that WELS would not only be a more efficient use of staff time and financial resources, but would also provide more useful, higher quality data than in the past.

WELS: PURPOSE AND METHOD

THE PURPOSE OF THE WELS SURVEY PROGRAM is to more efficiently serve the Western community and the organizations it supplies with information (the Washington State Legislature, the Higher Education Coordinating Board, the Office of Presidents, etc.).

THE METHOD FOR ACCOMPLISHING THIS GOAL is to stream-line current survey methodology, and at the same time expand the kinds of surveys being administered, thus increasing the variety and usefulness of data that are being collected.

NOTE: THIS DOCUMENT WAS LAST UPDATED IN JANUARY, 2002.
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WELS: HOW IT WOULD WORK

The accompanying chart delineates how that stream-lining and expanding would be accomplished. To start with, certain surveys that have heretofore been administered yearly, would be administered in a survey cycle that would commence *once every three years*. The CIRP, or freshmen survey, for example, would be administered beginning in the fall of 2003 and then again in the fall of 2006. Each survey cycle would run for six years, thus an overlapping of cycles would begin at the half-way point of the initial survey cycle.

The strength of this design is that a wider variety of surveys would be included in each cycle. To illustrate, let's consider only the first survey cycle, which would begin in the fall of 2003. The CIRP (Freshmen Survey) would be administered in the late summer/early fall, depending on the Summerstart schedule. In the spring quarter of that academic year (spring, 2004), the YFCY (Freshmen Follow-up) would be administered to the same freshmen who entered in the fall. In the fall of 2004, a survey of Non-returning students (NRS) would be administered to those students who, at the end of their first academic year, did not return to Western. In the spring of 2005, the SSE (Survey of Student Engagement), or some other appropriate survey, would be administered to those students who had begun the first survey cycle in the fall of 2003. As the chart illustrates, subsequent surveys would be conducted at the end of the junior and senior year, and would be supplemented past graduation by alumni surveys.

In the WELS concept, the surveys that already prove useful would be retained, while new surveys would add invaluable longitudinal depth to Western's survey data bank. Importantly, proven surveys new to Western could inquire into issues either overlooked or simply not studied in enough depth in the current system. They could address data issues concerning particular divisions or offices that could use better tailored and/or more specific survey coverage. Moreover, the combined survey findings could create a synergy of information that would greatly increase Western's efficiency and effectiveness.

NOTE: THIS DOCUMENT WAS LAST UPDATED IN JANUARY, 2002.
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APPENDIX B:
SURVEY ADMINISTRATION PROCEDURES

SURVEY ADMINISTRATION PROCEDURES

Key to the issue of a large baseline of survey respondents was administrative logistics. Pursuit of this goal would have been nearly impossible without the eager and professional help of the offices of New Student Programs and Advising Services. Both offices worked closely with WELS researchers to design an administrative process that would obtain a high response rate. After analyzing various options, it was evident that budget restraints required administration to occur during Summerstart. Ultimately, however, unforeseen problems arose that dampened the response rate. The following were some of the problems that occurred during the administration of the WELS survey:

1. Lack of uniformity in administration.
2. Incomplete Paper Surveys due to time and respondent error.
3. Inaccurate or missing student identification numbers (NOTE: identification is voluntary, but necessary to the value of the WELS).
4. Inaccurate data entry of student identification numbers.
5. Need for and cost of mail and telephone follow up.

Although there were a number of pilot administrations of the survey, factors impossible to create in a test setting and difficult to anticipate in the planning stages, resulted in the administration of the survey running upwards of 30 minutes—about 10 minutes longer than tested. In hindsight, it was clear that Summerstart students were predictably too anxious (about getting the classes they wanted, for example), and probably too distracted generally in their first formal interaction with the University to concentrate as well as the students who participated in the pilot survey administrations. As a result, it took students too much time to complete the survey form. Many of the professors serving as advisors got frustrated with the time they were giving up; at least one stopped the survey process altogether, resulting in maybe 40-50 surveys getting only partially filled out.

Summerstart directors were wonderful in working with WELS administrators to essentially create new administrative logistics on the fly. Yet, of course, these logistics were compromises on the original intent, and affected the eventual lower-than-expected survey participation. Rather than the hoped-for 90% participation, the Summerstart administration achieved a completion rate of about 56% (1251 out of 2218)—which, while not bad all things considered, was still well below the anticipated rate.

In order to make up for the unforeseen problems with at Summerstart, WELS researchers used two additional survey administration techniques: land mail and telephone. The land mail administration gathered another 125 survey forms, but had a dismal participation rate of about 20%. The telephone interviews with non-responding Summerstart students and students not attending Summerstart went much better, and boosted the final overall participation rate to 71% (1580 out of 2218).

Yet some other administrative concerns should be mentioned. For one, pen and paper self-administration of the survey left open many opportunities for error to creep into the project—error that compromises the reliability of the project by limiting the number of usable

responses. For example, the WELS baseline paper administration resulted in 31 cases with substantially incomplete responses from students skipping large portions of the survey, requiring interviewers to contact the respondents by phone to complete the survey items that were skipped. Errors also resulted from students not providing their Western ID number or providing one that was incomplete. Indeed, 161 students did not provide ID numbers and another 24 provided numbers that were erroneous. Substantial staff resources went into investigating problematic ID numbers further delaying the reporting of results. Had those surveys provided accurate student ID numbers, 80% of the entering freshman class would have been represented in the WELS Baseline of 2003.

The analysis and long-run value of the data was compromised also by the informal logistics of the survey administration. For those students without accurate student ID numbers, no longitudinal tracking can be done. We cannot match the survey responses to student information system data, and there is no way to be certain they didn't submit duplicate surveys—one by mail with no ID and one at Summerstart.

The additional step of hand-entering the student ID number also lent itself to error—error which could have been avoided by loading the student ID number directly from the student information system and administering the survey by telephone. It should also be noted that telephone surveys rarely result in incomplete data. Because of the rules of social interaction, people who are interviewed on the phone rarely refuse to answer questions and can ask for clarification before giving responses, thus leaving fewer items blank. Additionally, when telephoned, respondents fatigue less quickly and can experience a stronger sense of reward by responding to a person rather than reporting on a piece of paper.

For the next WELS baseline cycle, switching to a telephone-only survey administration might be worth considering. A telephone survey administration will not cut into important time students need with advisors at Summerstart, costs are negligible compared to the staff time and data quality compromises of the pen-and-paper survey administration, data collection can be completed by the end of July rather than mid-September, and data turnaround will be one week (as far as providing a frequency report like this one).

APPENDIX C: DATA QUALITY

DATA QUALITY

As noted above, 71% of entering freshmen responded to the WELS baseline survey. Respondents matched the population in terms of Total SAT scores (1122), percent of first generation students (35%), and age (18.7 years). They differed from the overall population of entering freshmen in slight but significant ways. Respondents were:

- Better high school students (average GPA of 3.54 compared to 3.52 in the population).
- More likely to be female (59.6% compared to 56.7% in the population).
- More likely to be from out of state (8.4% compared to 7.8% of the population).
- More likely to be enrolled in a Freshman Interest Group (3.1% compared to 2.6% of the population).
- More likely to have enrolled in an honors class (4.6% compared to 3.9% of the population).
- Less likely to have been a Running Start students (13.1% compared to 14.2% of the population).
- Less likely to be from a minority ethnic group (14.9% compared to 15.7% of the population).

Although some of these differences are so small that they may not seem meaningful, the uniformity of characteristics of the entering freshman class is such that they are statistically significant. Of particular note was the lower response rate of African-American and Hispanic respondents, and of respondents with a high school gpa of less than 3.6. (See the tables on the next page.) These groups, although small, are now indeed under-represented for the duration of this WELS cycle, a happenstance researchers were hoping to avoid. Indeed, the goal of the WELS was to reach enough of the student population that previously under-represented groups would be fully represented. Attaining this goal was vitally important: the more representative the cohort, the more accurate decisions based on data can be. Thus there is even more impetus to make sure in the next WELS cycle that the administration logistics can attain that difficult but important response rate or 90% or better.

WELS RESPONDERS VS. NON-RESPONDERS: ETHNICITY

	COMPLETE		Total
	No	Yes	
White	545 79.0%	1265 82.8%	1810 81.6%
African-American	20 2.9%	24 1.6%	44 2.0%
Hispanic	33 4.8%	39 2.6%	72 3.2%
Asian	55 8.0%	127 8.3%	182 8.2%
Native-American	9 1.3%	31 2.0%	40 1.8%
Unknown/other	28 4.1%	42 2.7%	70 3.2%
Total	690 100.0%	1528 100.0%	2218 100.0%

WELS RESPONDERS VS. NON-RESPONDERS:
HSGPA DISTRIBUTION

	COMPLETE		Total
	No	Yes	
Less than 3.2	114 16.70%	206 13.60%	320 14.60%
3.2 to < 3.4	131 19.20%	258 17.10%	389 17.70%
3.4 to <3.6	170 24.90%	339 22.50%	509 23.20%
3.6 to <3.8	153 22.40%	343 22.70%	496 22.60%
3.8+	114 16.70%	364 24.10%	478 21.80%
Total	682 100.00%	1510 100.00%	2192 100.00%

APPENDIX D:
ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE FINDINGS FROM WELS
FRESHMEN FOCUS GROUP

INTRODUCTION

The Office of Survey Research (OSR) selected a small group of freshmen entering Western in Fall of 2002 to participate in a special research project. The research was designed to find out about high school experiences and activities, expectations for college, and what it's like for freshmen as they transition into college life, academically and socially.

The group met off and on throughout the school year to discuss their experiences, and they helped OSR with our planning for Western's Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS), a large-scale study of freshmen launched in Summer of 2003. This is a summary of our discussions.

METHOD

Twelve freshmen were randomly selected to participate in our WELS freshmen focus group for the 2002-2003 academic year. The average AI for our group was 72. The average AI of all students who were new freshmen in Fall 2002 was 66. Six of the focus group were males; six were females. Three individuals were of Japanese ethnicity (one is from Hawaii). The others were Caucasian (two were first generation students). Eleven lived on campus; one commuted from Stanwood and stopped participating after the first meeting.

We divided the students into two groups and met three times in Fall Quarter, twice in Winter Quarter, and once in Spring Quarter.

During Fall we developed a draft of the WELS Freshmen Survey, inspired by our discussions with the group. The group provided feedback regarding the WELS draft and helped with revisions and a pretest.

All meetings were about two hours long. Discussions were informal and refreshments were always available. Students said they enjoyed being a part of the group (some really liked to talk), and some felt honored to be involved in the study. We awarded each student a gift at the end of each quarter to thank them for their participation and as an incentive to stay with the group —\$100 gift certificates to the Bookstore.

ONE WEEK BEFORE FALL CLASSES STARTED

One week before classes started, we talked with students on the phone. All twelve were "totally excited" about coming to Western, ready to move away from home and do something new, ready to meet new people, excited about starting classes and learning new things. They could hardly wait. Yet some were also nervous about how difficult the work would be, how much studying there would be, and whether they'd be able to find their way around. Also, one student was still waiting for his room assignment.

Overall the group felt they were pretty well prepared in terms of time management, study skills, reading and writing skills, although they said they might be rusty for lack of use over the summer. One student honestly admitted he slacked off quite a bit during high school so college might prove to be more difficult.

The majority of this group was familiar with Western's GUR system (one student was not at all). Their overall opinion was that GURs were good because there are many options to choose from. "That's really neat, to be able to choose from a whole list. It gives some direction," said one. Also, GURs will help to keep people "rounded." "I think it would be cool to take courses you wouldn't normally take. It opens up interest in other areas. I'm curious," said another.

EXPLORING EXPERIENCES AND EXPECTATIONS: TWO DAYS BEFORE CLASSES STARTED (SEPTEMBER 23, 24)

Our first meeting was just two days before classes started in the Fall. We asked, why college, and why Western? Typical comments from students included:

- "I've grown up with the expectation that everyone is going to college, right?"
- "I just have the understanding that to get a job you have to get a good education"
- "To be any kind of professional you have to have a college education"

Students also said they were ready to get away from home, and if you didn't have something waiting for you after high school you'd end up staying there. Two students discussed this effect saying, "In my town, you can really tell the people that just didn't really do anything after high school and are working as farm hands." "Ours is the shipyard," another said.

REASONS FOR COMING TO WWU

The students applied to other universities besides Western but chose W.W.U. for several reasons:

- smaller size compared to other universities
- location (beautiful; outdoorsy / access to recreation; close to family or far enough away)
- finances (its cheaper; could get financial aid)
- good liberal arts education
- overall friendliness of this campus compared to other campuses
- family or friends have attended Western

Also, many students visited the campus (campus tour, or visited friends/family) and this confirmed their decision to come to Western. One student said, "Coming up here gave me a much better feeling for the kind of school it is."

DORM AND SOCIAL LIFE

Eleven of the 12 students were living on campus. Dorm rooms were smaller than they thought they would be, and this was a popular topic of conversation. "My room is tiny. Two people can't walk in the middle at the same time. It's got to be like squishing past." Students

have to get used to sharing a bedroom as well as a bathroom, which is especially hard. One student wasn't happy with her dorm assignment, and another said one of his roommate's friends wanted to switch with him. Noise was already a problem, they said, with people squealing and neighbors blaring music at all hours.

However, the students said overall there's a friendly atmosphere in the dorms, and they were most excited about living with other people and making new friendships. One student was afraid she wasn't going to meet people because she already had such a strong network here. "It's just so easy to just hang out with people I know," she said. Another felt somewhat alienated because her roommate knew 30+ people from high school. "She came with a clique. They have all these inside jokes and they're really tight. I know nobody in comparison," she said. Another said the entire floor above her was "filled with a team of snobby girls and they only hang out with each other." The one student who commuted from Stanwood had some concern about meeting people because he didn't live on campus.

RECREATION AND ACTIVITIES

Everyone in this group planned to participate in some sort of club or activity: council, flag football, spirit club, intramural basketball, soccer, baseball, Christian groups, Anthropology club, fencing club, music activities, slaps, yoga, hiking, rock climbing, sailing, guitar lessons—all these were mentioned. Several said they will eventually get a job, but for the first quarter they wanted to get situated.

CHOOSING A MAJOR

When we asked, "how many times have you been asked what you want to major in?" they all moaned and laughed, "Too many times!" "I get asked all the time and I'm starting to get irritated with the question. I don't know because it always changes." The majority said they didn't know what they wanted to major in. "It changes all the time. I've bounced around so much." One student said he had often been asked, "'Why don't you know yet?' And I'm like, I don't *know* why. Honestly it gets very annoying." Another said she gets the opposite. "Every time I say I'm undecided, they say it's great if you haven't decided, because you are going to change your mind." One student wanted to major in Business, and another knew he wanted to major in Theatre, but his Dad says he needs to get a second major in order to get a good job that pays well. "And for my second major, I don't really know." Another wanted to major in Engineering, but wasn't sure which area. Another has known since she was 5 years old that she wants to be a teacher, but she was also thinking about broadcasting, communications.

REGISTRATION

Registration was pretty easy for students who were in the earlier Summerstart sessions. "I signed up for a FIG a long time ago, so that made registration super easy." For those who registered later, many classes were full so they had to find alternates. For some, registration was very stressful. "Everything was just so fast. Everyone was so stressed out about registering it was frightening."

Everyone at Summerstart, they were just there to register and it was like competition.” Some students helped each other figure things out, and others got help from advisors. They searched for courses they would like and that would also fulfill GUR’s. In some cases, there were “huge gaps” in their schedules—four or five hours between classes. But for the most part, they were happy with their classes and looked forward to starting the quarter.

MAKING THE TRANSITION

What will be easy for students in their overall transition to college? Students said the transition from home to school wouldn’t be difficult at all. Students said they will definitely enjoy living on their own, having their freedom and managing their own time. “It’s the tiniest things, like even just going and doing anything whenever you want and not having to tell your parents where you are going and when you’ll be back. That will be nice.” One student said “I’ve been waiting for this for years. I wanted to move out in high school even.” Some students also said the social scene will be easy, getting to know people and just having fun.

What kinds of things will be most challenging? One of the biggest challenges will be having to try harder in college compared to high school. “I know that college is more studying and more reading. I’m just not looking forward to having to put forth more effort now.” Another issue is “just being able to manage the social and the school—the balance—and making sure I can do it.” Other concerns included size of classes (not knowing what to expect); getting used to the dorm food (they want to eat “healthy food”); finding their way around; finding a group of friends that will be as “comfy as the one back home”; getting used to “the little small town of Bellingham” (“I am definitely a city girl”); and getting used to all the people (one student came from a small town in Eastern Washington).

THE MIDST OF CHANGE: SECOND WEEK OF FALL CLASSES (OCTOBER 7, 8)

RECAP

What’s been going on for students, academically and socially? According to one, “It’s been draining. I think I’m tired from the change, and from moving, starting school again and all that. I find I have a lot of time to check email, watch TV...like a surprising amount. It’s easier than high school because I have more time—time between classes and after.”

Several students talked with their parents frequently, almost every day, so they really didn’t feel homesick. However, two students missed their pets. One felt closer to her parents now that she’s gone, whereas two of her friends came back in tears from their weekend at home. “It was nothing but fighting. They’re trying to make me do *this*, and they’re accusing me of *this*.” Two of the male students said “My parents are going like Yeah, he’s gone!” One talked with his girlfriend two-three times a week. “We’re not pining away in our rooms...like the guy across from me who’s always on the phone.”

One student wasn’t getting along with her roommate, now that they were getting to know each other. But another was getting along with her roommate pretty well. “I mentioned

before her whole high school was here. She still hangs out with everyone from high school but I've adjusted to them and they've warmed up to me. So we hang out."

Every member of this group (except one) joined a sport or activity, which they said is not only fun, but another way to meet people: rugby team, flag football, baseball, basketball, STEP class, hip-hop class, volleyball, yoga, and aerobics. One student also played lots of pool, another used the weight rooms regularly, and another planned to go swimming. A couple of students are going to check out the recreation program in the VU for outings and trips like mountain biking and winter sports. Several go to parties on the weekend (both on and off campus) or they watch movies or go dancing; and one attended a concert on campus. The one student who hadn't joined an activity spent a lot of her time with friends or watching TV.

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT IS PERIPHERAL

Students have mixed feelings about their courses. They are enjoying their classes for the most part, finding them to be fun, interesting, and "pretty easy." But certain classes are too boring (too much review; not challenging enough; the professor isn't interesting). Class sizes are generally larger than expected. "A major difference is that you can't just raise your hand and ask questions for clarification like you could in high school. People don't want to look stupid in front of a lot of people." All say there is a lot of homework—assignments, papers, reading—yet they are managing to keep up with the reading.

Several have been skipping classes due to lack of interest, or to write a paper, or because "I don't like the professor," or it's hard to get to a morning class, or "I've learned this stuff before, in high school," or "Because I wanted to! Because I can get away with it!"

Students have been using computers every day (they brought their own or use their roommate's or go to a lab)—to write papers, get assignments from Blackboard, check email. "In our dorm there's the little instant message thing. Everyone's talking on their computers." Several students are not using their Western email account. They're having trouble accessing their accounts, or "it's much easier to stick with the old Hotmail."

THE CENTRALITY OF DAILY LIVING

What kinds of frustrations did students experience in the first couple of weeks? For one, the most frustrating thing was not having her close friends anymore. "I thought when I moved here, people just made good friends really fast, but it's not true. So it's hard." Others said it was frustrating trying to figure out how to get around (can't find the Health Center, the Library is too big); the computers in the dorm lab are really slow; and the "the dorm food is horrible" ("too much carbs"). One student was annoyed with the girls in her dorm because "their behavior is a lot like high school. There's a lot of squealing and screaming." Another said, "there's *always* people" and she can never have time by herself.

Students say their doors were always open and people were always walking in and out. "There's always stuff going on." Several stayed up late socializing. "Social is really kind of hard to get away from. Even during the week I'm up until 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning." But if

you get real loud, you'll get "written up" by the R.A.'s. "Yeah, a lot of people I know have gotten MIP'S."

Besides the noise and socializing, there were several other distractions which made it difficult to find the time and place to study—distractions like video games, T.V., computers (email; instant messaging; making CD's). Sundays were generally quiet in many of the dorms, because everyone was studying. It's laundry day too. Yet one student said his dorm was never quiet. Some students studied with their music on or even the T.V. One went to the VU to study in order to get away from all the distractions. Another went to the lounge, and others went to the Library.

How about finances? "It just goes so fast. I don't know where it went." One student said, "I'm running out of money. I need a job fast. Like just free spending money." One spent money on shirts and shoes and had no more money for the rest of the month. Another had money for the rest of the month, but "can't really do anything fun."

TURNING THE CORNER: MID-TERMS (NOVEMBER 7-15)

In November we checked with the group about how they were doing by using Blackboard discussion. By now their adjustment here felt natural and easy. They'd gotten into the flow of classes and established a regular daily routine. Students felt more comfortable and knew how to make their way around. They said this is their "home" now, having met more people and developed deeper friendships. In fact, going back "home" to visit felt odd.

Social life continued to play a central role in their daily routines. Students said they were having a hard time focusing on schoolwork because there was always something else going on ("the fun part takes over")—distractions with roommates, parties, various activities. One student said she was having a hard time finding down time—just having time out from school and social life. Another said there was so much going on, it sometimes cut deep into sleep time. "The absolute hardest thing though is Monday mornings, when the social weekend collides with the academic morning. Argh!"

Academic realities were starting to set in. Some said "the grading is tougher here" than in high school. They were doing a lot more reading and studying a lot harder. "It's definitely not the same as high school." Others admitted they were relying on the "procrastinate and cram" technique, which consists of "blowing off your work and reading until the day before an exam, when you lock yourself in your room for the day with your books."

SETTLING IN/BECOMING COLLEGE STUDENTS/ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT SETS IN: FINAL MEETING FALL QUARTER (DECEMBER 3, 4)

Students realized that at the beginning of the quarter everything was new and exciting. They had just moved here so there was a lot going on, and they didn't want to miss out on things. Classes were more of an interruption in their social life and activities. Classes were still an interruption at this time, but some students said they were working harder than they did before. At first classes were easy and things were going really slow—but things accelerated

by about the middle of the quarter—suddenly just took off. For some, it was when they had their first test when they realized how much work they needed to put in to do well (some classes only have 2 tests.)

Classes are harder than what they're used to. The material is a lot more in depth. "One thing college has taught me so far is how to study. In high school I never had to study the way I do now. This quarter has been all about learning how to learn—how to study and finding your way through college. "Everyone now is worried about that grade. School has become more of a priority." Students say that in high school they got good grades yet didn't really learn anything, whereas here they have to work really hard to get a B, yet they are learning so much more. "I feel like I'm learning a lot but my grades don't necessarily reflect that."

Two students say college is actually easier for them because they are so much more independent. "High school was hard because you had to be in class for so long every day, but here it's all up to me, so it's easier because I make it easier."

Some students admitted they were studying *less* than they should be—not studying enough, procrastinating and cramming, doing poorly in certain classes. Several said they do better when they're really busy and have more scheduled in their day. They say they're not good with their open time—they need structure. Two students planned to take a heavier credit load Winter Quarter, rationalizing that "more credits will force me to study more, because I'll have more to do."

COURSE REGISTRATION AND GURS

When students registered for Winter classes they found that many of the classes they wanted were already closed. "It's the curse for being freshmen. You get crappy classes. It's frustrating." The majority of students had gone to a group advising session prior to registration, but they say it was "lame"; "pointless"; "just a pep talk". They were told "it's going to be hard—classes are going to be full. It sucks to be in your position." And indeed classes were closed when students tried to sign up, or they couldn't gain access because they had to be a declared major to take the course.

Students said that every class they're taking counts as a GUR. Several used the GUR catalogs and degree planning guides and felt they were very helpful as "everything is spelled out." However, some students said GUR's are really a "burden." "I don't like GUR's. I mean, they kind of give you a path but it's more of a block, a barrier. And for some classes you're just fulfilling your credits." During Summerstart, students were encouraged to pick courses they'd be interested in, so they enjoyed their Fall classes for the most part. But for Winter, some students will be taking requirements they don't like (Math, Science, English), but they have to do it, and they're not looking forward to it. "So probably I won't have as good of a quarter."

REVISITING THE TRANSITION/IMPROVING ON WHAT THEY LEARNED: WINTER QUARTER, FIRST MEETING (JANUARY 28)

We asked the group how things have been going this quarter, and they talked about how their study habits have changed. One student said his classes weren't any harder but he had

more work, “Plus I’m more on top of it this quarter.” He was studying a lot longer and doing his work earlier so he could go back and fix what’s wrong, as opposed to having to cram at the last second. Some students were taking heavier workloads Winter Quarter (18 credits rather than 15), and their classes required that they study more. They felt motivated to do the work because it kept piling up. One student said he really didn’t find himself partying as much on the weekdays as he did last quarter. “This quarter I’m taking more credits so it’s kind of keeping me on track, which is a good thing.” He studied and wrote papers during the week, and went skiing on the weekends. Another said he had more homework Winter quarter so he’d become more studious, yet he wasn’t pull all-nighters like he did last quarter. Instead he went to bed earlier (1:00 in the morning rather than 3:00 or so).

On the other hand one student said she wasn’t as motivated to do her reading Winter Quarter, because was taking classes she didn’t like as much. Another was trying out a new method: “I’m not studying as much but going to class, which is opposite of what I did last quarter. Older graduated friends said you don’t have to read every night as long as you go to class.” Yet another said she skipped classes much more, because she didn’t like her classes. She felt overwhelmed with Philosophy 102 and Math 102, so she thought she’d end up dropping the Philosophy class.

DEVELOPING PRECURSORS TO STUDENT ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Discussion turned to the first half of the WELS survey draft. The group gave us feedback as to which items needed clarification or revisions. They were very helpful in this process, and we learned more about what is important to them. For example, we asked the group to tell us what connected them to their high school outside of their high school classes—what activities or clubs. For the WELS survey, we are interested in knowing *how engaged* students were in high school, and whether these types of connections help them to transition more easily to college.

Students pointed out that if you’re an outgoing person, or you care about something in particular like student government or sports, you will be involved in those activities. However, students say that for them, connection to school or “engagement” has more to do with *social life* than with formally structured activities. “I did a lot of extracurricular activities like sports, but I went to school to socialize. Socializing overlaps into a lot of things.” In fact, “every activity you are in, you are in with tons of your friends.” One student says she wasn’t involved in school activities, but she was involved socially—she spent time doing activities with friends outside of school. Another says he was often with friends who happened to be doing volunteer work so he helped them out, but he wouldn’t necessarily say he was volunteering.

Some students say that the group of friends they have at Western are very different compared to the friends they had in high school. “When I came to college I did know some people who were from my high school, but the majority of the people I have met up here, I had no idea who they were. *It is all just about making new friends.*” According to one student, he was an athlete in high school and hung out with the kids he played football with, or ran track with. But here he “hangs out with people who are more into theater, really musically talented. Our paths wouldn’t have crossed in high school. Up here it is just a different mix.”

During their senior year in high school students began to look at college entrance requirements. Some students took classes that were less difficult in order to raise their GPA, while others took harder classes because they were trying to make their transcripts look better. “I never took classes to challenge myself intentionally. The main thing for me was to get into college.”

LOCUS OF CONTROL

Some students say their parents were highly involved in the process of applying for college, financial aid, housing, etc. Their parents filled out the paperwork for them, even going as far as to write the admissions essay. Other parents expected the students to do all the paperwork on their own but they were very involved because they wanted to know everything that was going on. “I can’t imagine them having to do any of it because starting college is the first part of my life where I am in control of it and I am independent, so that is where I have to start taking responsibility and having to do it. I keep them informed of what is going on and they are helping me financially, so that’s the main reason they have concern about my grades—because it is their investment.”

COMMITMENT TO WWU

It is likely that some students will transfer to another college or university. Two students said they still don’t know what they want to do, but if Western doesn’t have a program they want, or they don’t like it at Western, they will go somewhere else. Another student said he might transfer, “not because I don’t like it here, but because other schools have more prestigious standards and more prestigious reputations as far as getting your degree in a certain area.” Other students said they might transfer because Western doesn’t offer certain courses they’d like to take, or their program lacks some of the certification they need.

REVIEW OF SKILL-BASED MEASURES: WINTER QUARTER, SECOND MEETING (FEBRUARY 25)

This session focused on the second half of the WELS survey draft. We asked students to rate their level of mastery regarding a set of 14 skills and abilities, comparing themselves to other students their age and experience starting college this year. The scale was 0 to 10, with 10 being the highest level of mastery. We wanted to get a sense of how students rate themselves coming into college, then throughout their four years and after graduation. The fourteen items are skills and abilities that all universities would expect students to improve upon and have good grounding in by the time they graduate from college—including writing effectively, speaking effectively, defining and solving problems, and so on.

Students said this question was difficult to answer for a number of reasons:

- they don’t really think about comparing themselves to other people (“you might not have an accurate gauge of where you really do rank among your peers”);
- they don’t want to feel like they’re better or worse;
- full mastery really isn’t possible because you can always learn something more;
- self-assessment is difficult (“it’s hard to grade yourself”);
- “You might be an 8 compared to everyone else but you might consider yourself a 5 compared to where you’ll be when you graduate.”

One student also said, “The more I write in this English class I realize that yes my writing has improved, but it’s not good. Its better than I wrote in high school but, when I start reading some of these other papers and seeing where my writing really should be going, I realize there is so much more out there that I’m not even touching compared to other people in the university.” Another said, “I felt I had pretty good writing skills, and I’m in English right now. But it’s stressful. It’s a totally a different style of writing then I was doing senior year in my English class. So I don’t know if that’s an improvement or it’s just learning a different style.”

We revised this question entirely because of the feedback we received. We eliminated the reference group (comparison to other students) and changed the scale. The question now asks, “How comfortable are you with your ability in each of the following areas,” with a five-point scale—“extremely comfortable” to “not at all comfortable.”

As an interesting aside, we asked which one of these skills or abilities students *would like to be* completely comfortable with. Priorities are: writing and speaking effectively, critically analyzing written information, working cooperatively in a group, understanding philosophies and cultures, problem solving.

PEDAGOGICAL EXPERIENCES – GROUP WORK

Five people had group projects in their classes so far. For the most part, these weren’t positive experiences. Students say that people don’t carry their load; they socialize and don’t do the work, or they do just C work; and group projects are always a headache because it’s hard to get together. If students could choose their group it would be okay, “because you can choose people who you know will pull their load.” On the other hand, “When I’ve had to get into groups it’s like, oh god not him.” Students also say they learn less when they work in a group because the work is divided up. “You only learn that one little portion that you’re in charge of.”

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT AND COURSE SATISFACTION

While students were optimistic about GUR requirements in the Fall, their attitudes had shifted somewhat by the close of Winter quarter. Some students said they don’t like the GUR’s, while others said they like the idea but “the requirements are way too much”. Some say their strategy is to take the hard ones now—the ones they don’t like—to get them over with. “Why wait for something you don’t want to do?” One student says she “likes the idea of taking classes all around because I still don’t really know what I want to do and so I thought that would help me.”

Most agreed that if they are interested in a class, they really want to learn material. So they would rather take essay tests or be graded on papers, as opposed to multiple choice tests. Students say they learn more when required to put in more effort, whereas with multiple choice tests they learn superficially and retention is low. On the other hand, they say it’s an

easy way to get through a course you don't like, if you're good at taking multiple choice tests, because you can learn just enough to pass the test. But the bottom line for most is grades. According to one student, "I enjoyed two out of the three classes my first quarter but I still considered it successful because I got a good GPA". Another said, "I think a lot of times if there's a lack of interest there's going to be a lack of effort. No matter what the grading format is, I still want to meet my personal standard—I'm still going to put in enough effort to satisfy myself."

PRE-TESTING THE SURVEY AND WRAPPING UP: SPRING QUARTER (MAY 19)

In early May, the group conducted a pre-test of the WELS survey. They brought the completed questionnaires to our Spring focus group session. Each member had five freshmen friends complete the questionnaires as if they were just entering Western in the Fall (the survey was designed to be implemented during Summerstart). This gave us 55 completed questionnaires and lots of feedback. Several of the friends were shocked while doing this survey to see how much their answers had changed throughout the year. They said their mindset is different in Spring, and "it was so hard to put myself back into that place because I have changed so much."

The majority of this session was spent fine-tuning the questions and answer scales for the WELS survey. We then asked the group to recap some of the major themes that came up this year. How have students changed over the year, and what are their challenges now?

REFLECTING ON KEY FIRST QUARTER HURDLES

When students first came to Western, they weren't prepared for how to navigate their way through college, even if they had taken community college or high school AP classes. This includes knowing how to choose classes and get through the registration process; knowing what the different levels of courses mean; knowing what academics would be like; knowing what it would be like to live at college. The first major hurdle was registration, which was their main focus during Summerstart. Several students weren't familiar with campus until they were here for at least a full quarter, then they started paying attention and realizing where things were. Some students still don't know how to find their way around the library, which is "just overwhelming because it's so big".

GURs

At the start of the year several students thought "GURs can be a good idea", but Spring Quarter they said its one of the worst ideas. They say the requirements should be about a quarter of what they are—"it's too much." One student asked, "how am I gonna make it out of here in four years?" Another said, "I know we are a liberal school and we have to have a well rounded education but it feels almost like we are being forced to take classes that we have no interest in." This discourages students about their school work overall. "It's me and probably a lot of other people too. If I'm in a class for a GUR that I don't like, I'm not going to do nearly as well in it. So it brings our GPAs down." One student "hates science" and "it's just

too much for me having to take four science classes.” Another says “that’s a lot of money to take classes that you hate.”

On the other hand, two students said they like the GUR system because it does make them take classes that they wouldn’t have otherwise taken. “I’m a fan of GURs ‘cause that’s how I found my major. Maybe it’s because we had so few classes in my high school that I’m really glad to take a lot of different classes here. Or maybe it’s just because I’ve had really good luck with my classes.”

ACCESS TO CLASSES/DECLARING A MAJOR

One student was very discouraged because she can’t take certain classes unless she’s a declared major in that department. Yet to declare the major it’s a lengthy process. “I wasn’t really aware of that at all when I came here, and it would have changed my mind maybe.”

SKIPPING CLASSES

A major challenge for eight of 11 students is getting to class, especially during Spring. They’re not really interested in certain classes and “it’s too nice out! There are other things to do.” They say “I don’t think the teachers want to be there any more than we do.” One student didn’t go to class for a whole week, another skipped three out of four classes one day because she had a test, and others tended to skip on Mondays. One student said “I took a test this quarter without having been to the class more than twice and having not bought the book.”

ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENTS

Yet students believed they will still do well academically—about the same as last quarter. They’re keeping up with homework, although the majority admitted they’re procrastinators (one student was not. She was planning ahead). They had received some feedback from instructors by now, so they knew where they stood in their classes, and they knew exactly what to do to get the grades they wanted. Students said, “I know the system and know which classes you need to read the book for and that’s why it’s easier to skip and do better than I would have done first quarter”; and “I think my study skills definitely got better since high school. I finally figured out how.”

ACADEMIC ADVISING

Most students haven’t talked with an advisor since Summerstart, although two talked with advisors about whether to drop a class or not (one did, one didn’t). Students say they haven’t really needed advising because “if you understand the GUR’s, you just read over what you have to do and it’s pretty self explanatory. It’s mapped out for you.” Students think that the end of *next* year will be different, because by then they are supposed to declare a major.

SOCIAL AND DORM LIFE

The majority of students said they wanted to get out of the dorms. Only one planned to live on campus in Fall 2003, but she planned to move to Buchanan Towers. People complained about the dorm food, which was “worse by the end of the year, and they said “it’s hard to live, eat, sleep, do homework, hang out, everything in one little box.” Students say that after a few months, you never imagined it would be that hard. Also, social tensions were rising by Spring Quarter. “True colors” were coming out, and “everybody knows who they don’t like.” Several say it also has to do with the R.A.’s.—too nosey, too many rules, too much policing of the building. “I thought you were coming to school to live on your own, but it’s worse than at home.” (One student said her R.A. is awesome.)

COMMITMENT TO WESTERN

By this time, students were thinking about whether they’ll be staying at Western after a year, or leaving. Friends are a big factor, and another is how students feel about Bellingham. Students say Bellingham is a really cool town—even those coming from bigger cities who originally thought Bellingham might be too small. One student has decided to transfer to Eastern, because she’s from Spokane. She has family and friends there, and they have a good Spanish program.

FINANCES

The majority were planning to find summer work to save up. Ten students planned to live at home during summer, and one planned to be out of town fishing. Also most said they wanted to find a job for next year so they’ll have spending money. Most discovered they didn’t have enough this year, even after the first quarter. “You learn what you need and what you want. You learn you don’t really need a whole lot!”

THEIR ADVICE FOR INCOMING FRESHMEN

What advice would these students give to incoming freshmen? About academics, they say:

- Just carefully read over the GUR system;
- Don’t take lecture/101 classes if you can do the early sign up (they’re so big and you lose interest)—take smaller classes (50-30 people);
- Find out which teachers to take and which not to take, because some are ten times harder for the same credits;
- Find the course syllabus on the webpage so you can see what’s going to be covered before you choose;
- Take classes you *want* to take.

About the social aspect of college, they say:

- It's important to get involved with things you might be interested in—sports, clubs or activities—because “that’s a good way to get plugged in and meet people, and you start to like it here.”
- “Don’t be afraid to try new things or ask questions, branch out and explore, meet people. Some people are leaving next year because they just didn’t find their social.”

Students say this is such an important thing, it really makes a difference. “Two people in my dorm ended up moving back home after the first quarter. They didn’t try to get plugged in. They weren’t proactive about it at all. They didn’t try to get involved in things. I think they were kind of waiting for friends to come to them, and it didn’t work.”

AFTERWARD

Ten of the original 12 students in this group returned Fall 2003—including the student from Stanwood, the three Japanese students and the two who are first generation students. One student declared her major in English, and nine are undecided. The two students who didn’t return in Fall 2003 left Western in good academic standing.