Thinking About Your Spring 2014 Course Schedule

It is now November and you will soon be able to register for Spring 2014 courses. As you do so, think carefully about how much you can manage comfortably along with your various extracurricular and other commitments. **In particular, I suggest that you consider a course load that falls in the range of 14 to 17 credit-hours.**

*How did you come up with this range?* Well, our various degree programs range in requirements from 120 to a bit over 130 credit-hours. If we think about a student who enters Case Western Reserve with no previously-earned college credit and who does not plan to take classes over the summer (in order to use that time to support his or her education or to take part in a research experience, a co-op, or an internship), then the arithmetic leads us to 15-17. The range of 14-17 recognizes that there will be a bit of adjustment around that from semester to semester. This range usually translates to about 4 or 5 courses, which would be considered a full load.

We have some preliminary evidence that course loads in this range promote academic success. We looked at the records of first-year students since we began suggesting that they limit their enrollments during the first semester to the range of 14-17 credit-hours and found that this reduced the number of students who withdrew from or failed courses. Remember that no one starts the semester expecting to withdraw from a course or fail a course. What those data don’t take into account is the time students spent early in the semester trying to juggle a larger course load, which likely interfered a bit with performance in the courses in which students remained enrolled.

*But I think I can manage more. What will I do with my time if I don’t enroll in additional credit-hours?* Case Western Reserve provides a wide range of opportunities outside of your courses that will prepare you well for later life, both in terms of career and in terms of community engagement. Now, you don’t expect the Dean of Undergraduate Studies to be arguing against the centrality of your courses, and I’m not. Rather, I want to make the case that involvement in other activities also provides experiences that contribute to your CWRU education and may even complement your coursework, be it leadership skills, community service, research, or work experience. In many cases, these activities will help you become a more unique and attractive applicant for employment, professional study, or competitive scholarships and fellowships. The staff in the Career Center and the deans in Undergraduate Studies can help you think about how best to present yourself in these applications. There are also personal benefits that accrue from collaborating with others on a common endeavor.

Also, remember that you can always pursue topics in your courses more deeply as time allows. It is usually better to explore a limited set of topics in greater depth than to get only a cursory introduction to many as you spend time shifting between work in a large number of courses.

Of course, what you need to do and what you are able to manage depends a lot on your major and what you seek to get out of your overall college experience. I encourage you to discuss your plans with your academic advisor. Certainly do what you need to do to make progress toward completing your degree in a timely fashion.

*Let me know what you think. You can write to me at jeffrey.wolcowitz@case.edu.*