

SOME THOUGHTS ON EVERGREEN'S LIBRARY

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In discussions to date, the primary goal that has been formulated for the Library at The Evergreen State College is that of supporting the instructional program. Is it not also quite necessary for the Library, given Evergreen's stance toward undergraduate education, to supplement, to expand, and invigorate that enterprise? After all, the instructional program of a good college is probably less a function of its formal curriculum, fundamental as curricular concepts are, than of its total climate. To the extent that that proposition seems accurate, there is every reason to press for the Library's acting as a major determiner of the positive qualities in Evergreen's educational, intellectual, and humanistic atmosphere.

One implication here is that the important contributions of the Library must include substance as well as service, leadership as well as support, and acted-upon convictions as well as valuable consulting resources. One can only be impressed by the reading in Library Position Paper No. 1 of the huge and root-deep problems that beset contemporary culture: ecological suicide, racial bitterness, grinding and almost inexplicable poverty, unreasonable and unpopular wars and the threat of nuclear extermination, dislocations resulting from altered and altering sex mores. The list clearly suggests population growth as one of the sources of the modern malaise; less clearly, it still raises the question of whether research and scholarship ought not to be controlled in some fashion. Far from flowering into humane and gently civilizing influences

when left uncabined, the enterprises of creating, discovering, or resynthesizing knowledge have, the critics would say, produced atomic weaponry, nerve gas, pesticides that upset the balance of nature, ruinous increases in population, the techniques of manipulating human behavior that are associated with Madison Avenue and the role of calculated PR in the 1968 presidential campaign, and still other items on a roster of horrors.

Because these issues are of great concern to young people (and to some who are not so young who still could find TESC an important and useful place), and because they are unlikely to be resolved very soon, they properly command a focal place in the College's environment. The best and potentially most productive focal place for them, it can be persuasively argued, is the Library. We have hardly a better symbol of the application of intellect to issues of boundless human significance; the Library, especially in the light of its Dean's own generalist leanings, probably defines the best point at Evergreen where information and ideas from manifold sources can flow together at topically important junctures, and the centrality of the Library can serve to underscore the values placed by the College on self-determined learning, on the development of skills in exploiting resources for learning, and on the personal development of students toward functioning as confident but undoctrinaire citizens of a harrowed as well as a changing society.

In this conception, there are considerable advantages for the Library, for its Dean, and for the kind of staff contemplated for recruitment. Although these benefits are certainly up for discussion in any way that would be helpful, the more important proposition here is that the Library could be a great and unconventional boon to the entire College if it chooses to interact in *influential and vigorous* ways with other components of TESC's culture and if

it can identify and act upon those substantive issues that it regards as of basic significance to the educational process in these last three decades of a century that is either in serious trouble or that is undergoing a more wrenching experience of cultural transition than history has previously recorded.

In view of these observations, all growing out of previous Library Position Papers and in-house conversations, several strong recommendations can be urged.

First, in addition to serving the expected and appropriate needs of the College community, Evergreen's Library should build up collections in selected areas that are first-rate in their comprehensiveness, depth, and regard for interdisciplinary contributions. Each of these special collections should include generic items rather than only printed materials, and each should be developed with a deliberate eye on the contributions from science, from ethics and the other disciplines of man (psychology, economics, history, etc.), and from such arts as literature, music, and film. The topical areas of choice seem to be the following:

1. Population growth and public policy
 2. The imperiled American environment
 3. American foreign policy and world peace (with special initial concentration on the War in Vietnam)
 4. Poverty and its elimination
 5. Racism and racial conflict: Worldwide phenomena
 6. The dynamics of moral values (with special reference to changing norms)
 7. Intellectual and academic freedom: Fulfillments and possible dangers
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At least two or three of these special collections can be made the best, if not the very best, in the country. It is highly probable that the interaction of the topical significance of these selected issues with our distinctive educational thrust would be attractive to outside support, and there is no reason for us not to go aggressively after this kind of money if we have the will to develop this opportunity in imaginative ways.

Second, the special collections should be the basis for a vigorous systematic series of exhibits, displays, lectures, symposia and debates, and student-organized discussions. A sustained thematic emphasis, with variation introduced by virtue of the several issues involved, could provide a highly educative experience over time. With a basic program defined in this fashion, the pitfalls of a service station or of a smorgasbord could be avoided while ample room is retained for other, more ad hoc, events to be scheduled as taste or need may require.

Third, the collections and the programs based on them should furnish faculty members with very special resources to incorporate into their own instructional activities and would afford students enlarged opportunities to prepare learning contracts and to identify special realms of independent study. Here again the Library has a chance not only to support the processes of learning and teaching, but to participate in them in a distinctively contributory manner.

Fourth, in cooperation with other interested components of the College, the Library should share sizeably in setting the æsthetic tone of the institution and in establishing the arts as a primary determiner of the Evergreen atmosphere. Two suggestions are offered as illustrations rather than limits: At regular and relatively frequent intervals -- for instance,

for a ten-day period each month -- an exhibit of prints should be arranged. Coverage could vary over such possibilities as the works of a single painter or of a school, the commonalities and differences in the arts of two or more primitive peoples, the historical development of a style, a thematic topic like ghetto art or the depiction of the Negro in American painting, etc. In conjunction with the exhibit, a brief catalogue should be prepared, providing essential information about each work shown, the artist or artists involved, and the themes or generalizations central to the showing, and giving a short bibliography to encourage a student's finding other pictures germane to the presentation and to identify sources by which he can extend his familiarity and understanding of the issues and concerns which the exhibit underlines. In a similar fashion, the Library could show films almost daily -- classical movies, those made for straightforward entertainment but noteworthy for some special feature of camera work or acting, documentaries, and home-made films -- making available lists of references on the movie as an art form and as a communications media. Exhibits of books could be paired with the showings. Relatively short discussion groups could be held before and after each film; student attitudes and preferences could be systematically sampled to determine what should be included in subsequent film presentations, and the new style of viewer could be provided so that people can go over cinematic scenes with the same care and flexible repetition with which they go over a passage in a novel or in a printed work of nonfiction. Again, if our program is ingeniously and soundly conceived, we should be able both to secure outside funding for such a venture and to combine resources profitably with other academic and cultural institutions. With both paintings and movies, although there would be ample opportunity

to create credit-generating projects for students, the central objective is that of helping to form and to direct the Evergreen climate along educationally, intellectually, and humanly constructive lines.

Fifth, the Library could combine forces with the counseling staff in providing two rather different but related programs based on special but rather small collections. One of these efforts would be concerned with bibliotherapy, the intellectual sources of enlarged self-understanding, and materials (books, tapes, films, etc.) on the processes of personal growth. The other would be focused on occupational information and career choice. Even more than is true of the other programmatic enterprises explored here, these two could be largely run by student-counselor boards under the leadership, supervision, and stimulation of the library staff. In conjunction with these units in the Library, lectures, discussion groups, and panels could usefully be planned, often involving such people as a psychiatrist from the College health service, the graduate dean or the head of a graduate department from a major university, representatives from business and professional groups that are relevant to expressed career interests among Evergreen's students, labor leaders, or members of the mental health professions who have had special experience with minority cultures. On the one hand, the venture emphasizing vocational developments could usefully dovetail with TESC's work-study plans; on the other, the program concentrating on personal development could helpfully generate a greater understanding of how to use counseling and psychiatric resources, the utility of such devices as encounter groups and the very stringent limits on them, the ways in which one can come to more effective grips with one's developmental problems through the arts, and so on.

There are obviously other possibilities. These suggestions, however, should concretize the notion of substantive goals for the Library. If such objectives

are pursued, then the special staffing patterns that have been recommended become easier both to justify and to comprehend. Both organization and recruitment become instruments by which to achieve broadly outlined ends, and the specification of those aims sheds light simultaneously on the kinds of people to be sought and the ways in which they can be put together once they have joined the staff. When these kinds of substantive goals, energetically striven for, are combined with rich consultative services in media development, immediate available instruction for students (and others) in how to use library resources efficiently and effectively, facilities for rapidly acquiring by purchase or on loan those items that are needed by members of the College community, and the thousand thoughtful tricks (like the installation of a message board to permit students and others to get easily in touch with each other) that make a library humanly habitable, then the probability becomes excitingly high that TESC will enjoy an unusual, lively, and climate-determining library. Support of instruction is basic, essential, and properly to be expected by a good faculty. Whatever their expectancies, students -- in either the sense of undergraduates or in the sense of people who take seriously the processes of studies -- are entitled, by Evergreen's working philosophy to a large addition that, happily, the College is perfectly capable of supplying. That addition is a library that, beyond meeting its basic obligations, gives a special and constructively provocative color to the institutional environment, that enlarges the options for learning on campus, and that both clarifies and meets the needs of undergraduates as useful citizens in a threatened world.

-- Edward Joseph Shoben, Jr.