

THE EVERGREEN STATE COLLEGE

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M E M O R A N D U M

To: President Charles McCann and Vice Presidents David Barry and Dean Clabaugh

From: Joseph Shoben

Subject: Another pass at academic organization and the curriculum at TESC

Much of Evergreen's enormous attractiveness and excitement lies primarily, it seems to me, in three notions, all of which have been expressed in either the Arrowhead speech on institutional climate or the minutes of the meetings of the Advisory Committee as well as in conversations that have appeared to be far from casual. All of these ideas recognize squarely the urgent need for new points of departure in American higher education and for more effective forms of intellectual service to American young people. Perhaps the most fundamental of these perceptions is that we cannot successfully change parts of the current "system," expecting to alter the whole at a later date; Evergreen's implied commitment is to a basically different conception of undergraduate education, not simply to a repackaging of the last half century's patterns and contents. Second, TESC seems corporately aware of contemporary society's demands for liberated generalists, for sensitized citizens who have learned how to learn and who understand that man's most distinctive trait is not an ability to solve problems but a capacity to formulate them. It is largely for this reason that the College has been wary of domination by graduate-school interests and of vocationalism (which are, in some essential ways, very much the same thing). And finally, there is the view that Evergreen is not for everybody--that, although it is far from elitist in temper and although it deliberately rejects the belief in the sanctity of SAT scores or QPA's, it understands the failure of service-station approaches to higher education, the perils of the multiversity model, and the efforts by a variety of institutions to be all things to all people with baccalaureate aspirations. The intent of the place, as I've understood it, has been to determine what it can do in a distinctively contributory way, to do it well (which includes recruiting the students and the faculty for whom this mission is likely to be a generally congenial one), and to keep alive the question of how exportable both the goals and the methods may prove to be. Uniqueness is not an institutional aim, and our articulate hope is to have some meaningful and positive impact on educational thought and practice in the United States.

As our too brief lead time shortens, all of us, of course, are pressed by a sense of desperation, and the temptation to do what we know best how to do becomes a powerful one. Because all of us are inescapably the heirs of the very traditions of which we are critical, we risk, despite the best collective will in the world, succumbing to these pressures; and if we do, we could readily wash all our dreams of realizing these humanely exciting ideas down the academic drain. If we organize ourselves according to conventional disciplinary concepts, even though that organization is patched by substituting divisions for departments and loosened by emphasizing independent study over standard "courses," then we at the very least make room for invasion by the values of the graduate school--specialization, professionalism, and technical expertise rather than personal development, undogmatic citizenship, and in informed respect for the intellect in coping humanely with the contemporary

world's grinding problems. If we seek as faculty members, especially at critical levels of academic leadership, only those men and women with the usual professorial bona fides, then it seems highly probable that they will, sooner or later (and probably sooner), put that kind of background to work along quite predictable lines. Moreover, our salary schedule implies that our power of attraction is likely to be low in relation to a Yale or a Minnesota, a Kenyon or a Kansas State; therefore, our efforts to play a conventional game are likely to lead us into playing it in a rather undistinguished manner. And if we rely on the presence of Mt. Rainier and Puget Sound to make up salary differentials, then we are liable to get people who are a bit more committed to mountains and sea water than to making a new educational conception come constructively alive. Finally, if our curriculum takes the form of work, regardless of how it may be advertised and wrapped, in the disciplines of natural science, social science, and the humanities, then, once we have a discipline-oriented faculty aboard, the potency of professional socialization and the weight of academic convention provide ample ground for betting that we will move rapidly toward departmentalization and the values of departmentalism. The only probable forces acting against such a trend will be the disruptive ones of radical militance and the Dionysian rejection of the intellect that currently attract large numbers of students and a small proportion of professors.

What is offered here is one possible alternative to a disciplinary basis for our academic organization. It rests on several postulates, all of which are open to criticism and which may or may not be closely geared to the invigorating ideas that lie close to the heart of Evergreen's emerging self-concept as I understand it. The aim here is simply that of attempting to make clearer and more articulate what we are and are not willing to attempt, to widen in some degree our range of perceived alternatives for defining the framework into which we want to invite similarly committed men to help in our further planning, and to throw a set of recommendations into our hopper for whatever consideration they may merit.

The first postulate on which the present proposal rests is not likely to evoke much argument: Evergreen's academic organization should, flexibly but definitely, reflect its conceptions of genuinely educative experience for undergraduates and its curricular commitments. If we believe that the liberated generalist emerges from a study of the disciplines and that the disciplinary divisions of knowledge are therefore the proper curricular units of learning, then a departmental organizational structure is obviously sensible. In our discussions so far, we have steered clear of this kind of traditionalism; and one idea that we have examined relatively positively is that undergraduate education is in trouble in large part because it has confused the strategies of formal and technical scholarship, which are preeminently disciplinary in their character, with the strategies of education, which must be much more closely attuned to the processes of human development, to students' learning styles, and to the backgrounds and the motivational structures that students bring with them to the educational experience. From this first postulate, an important problem emerges: What are our conceptions of productive undergraduate education and of the curricular opportunities appropriate to it?

The second postulate represents one response to that question. The curriculum at Evergreen should be marked by relevance. In this context, "curriculum" refers to the content of what is to be learned, and "relevance" has four basic dimensions. First is the dimension of meaning in relation to the major social issues that the modern world and its inhabitants face. Second is the dimension of personhood--the problems of a developing self in a highly unstable society and the difficulties of finding and creating a core of secure individuality in a community that is increasingly crowded and that is marked by more and more intrusions of noise, of

information, and other people. Third, there is the dimension of man-nature relationships, having to do with the changing concepts of the natural environment and of man in interaction with it, the ways in which that environment has been altered with human consequences of considerable moment, and the implications for man of the strategies by which he copes with the natural world. Finally, there is the dimension of expression--the effectiveness with which a person can articulate his own experience, understand others, and enter into communicative interchanges.

The third postulate is that Evergreen's predominant (but not sole) educational emphasis is on the intellectual development of students. That is, the commitment to relevance is disciplined by a commitment to the life of the mind. Educationally, ethically, and even politically, this statement means that, whenever choices must be made, the College will be guided by Apollo rather than by Dionysius, that although it recognizes and honors the noncognitive components of personal development and respects men's passions, its primary business is with the roles played by knowledge, reason, and taste in both individual growth and the endless search for more humane forms of civilized corporate life. From the standpoint of its curriculum and its educational responsibilities then, the College is neither family, commune, mental hospital, nor revolutionary fortress. Although it will make every effort to serve human needs, to provide the widest possible latitude for personal growth including the opportunity for failures upon which growth sometimes depends, and to create and maintain an environment in which a great diversity of life-styles can flourish, its attempts in these directions are clearly and deliberately subordinate and instrumental to the furthering of intellectual goals. In so stressing the intellect, TESC intends nothing pretentious and, a priori, nothing narrowly exclusive; all that is meant is a fundamental stress on the cultivation of thought and informed rationality as distinctive and useful human characteristics.

Fourth, to be educative, the curriculum should involve little content that can be taught but a great deal that affords opportunities for learning. Outside the special domains of technical and professional training, there is ample room to doubt both the meaning and the effectiveness of what is called teaching, and there is already some disposition here at the College to break down, in the interest of education, the traditional model of masters and apprentices. More positively, Evergreen seems to put a premium on the idea of a community of learners, of people working together on problems and issues of common significance in which some individuals are more widely experienced, better informed, and more constructively provocative but in which all are concerned with a quest for new ways of formulating problems and for new answers. This image contrasts sharply with the model of journeymen and apprentices with the former initiating the latter into the special mysteries of their academic guilds. Teachers, like books, films, and recordings, become resources for learning; and the job of teachers becomes that of managing the conditions of learning--their own as well as their students'.

Fifth, each unit of learning at Evergreen should expose a student in a substantively integrated fashion to materials and processes that engage and challenge his aesthetic response, his logical and information-processing capacities, his normative judgments, and his sense of himself as a member of the only species that binds time, that is both determined by and acquires flexibility from the past and that has expectancies of the future. There is a rough equivalency here (although only a rough one) in the proposition that all units of learning should include, unified by the substantive problem on which the student is working, materials that are artistic, scientific, moral and valuational, and historical, but this translation

can be at least as misleading as it may be clarifying. The aim is to help the student (of whatever age or nominal status) develop as a whole learner concerned with a complex of issues that to him are puzzling and important. It is not, except in the most incidental of ways, to facilitate his discrimination of art, science, philosophy, and history as ways to knowing or as specialized approaches to knowledge. Honoring that kind of discrimination and that form of specialization, we can appropriately leave these enterprises to graduate schools and the apparatus of the academic professions--which are quite strong enough at the moment without Evergreen.

Sixth, to insure the meaningfulness of learning units for individual students, they should be embodied in learning contracts between the student and suitable faculty members, constrained by the available goodness of fit between the terms of the contract and the resources of TESC for their fulfillment. The acceptability of a contract--an indication of what the student wants to study and an agreement with respect to how that study is to be executed--is in large part a function of whether the College can provide the books, the other documents (whether printed or otherwise), the access to relevant people and sources of experience, and the availability of faculty members organized in a manner cogent to the enterprise that are all essential to its productivity. In creating the broadest possible bounds within which students can exercise individual initiative and personal responsibility in defining the parameters of their education, Evergreen's professors and administrative officers must simultaneously structure themselves in the light of that student-oriented objective and in a way that reflects their own intellectual concerns and values. If there is too much conflict between these two requirements, or if the organization of the academic venture is at variance with them, then the notion of highly individualized learning contracts within programmatic limits set by faculty interests is likely to come a cropper, and the rhetoric of individualization is liable to prove frustratingly empty.

Seventh, the level of study represented by any particular learning contract should be estimated on the basis of a student's previous background, his relevant abilities, and his aspirations. Deliberately excluded is the question of whether the student is freshman or senior, lower division or upper division, undergraduate or graduate. The issue is one of whether he is tackling an intellectual problem that is of human significance in a way that for him is likely to facilitate his development as a learner. By the same token, the student has the privilege of staying within the same domain (called below--only for want of more imagination--a "program") of contracts throughout his tenure at the College or of moving over a wide range of substantive interests. In any case, proper accord (Could that term be Evergreen's equivalent for "credit"?) should always be given to what a student has previously learned, whether through formal channels or informal, whether in school or out; and the basic standard of evaluation should be growth from an individual baseline rather than an approximation to some external norm the objectivity of which is very much in doubt and the applicability of which is, given the diversity of student bodies, even less supportable. As a consequence of such arrangements, Evergreen graduates will not have achieved a common level of intellectual performance, just as they will not, except incidentally, have acquired a common set of learnings. The point, of course, is that the same can be said factually about the graduates of more traditional institutions, and the advantage is that each student at the College will have demonstrated some growth in his own functional capacity to define and to cope with intellectual problems that he looks upon as important.

These seven postulates are not necessarily exhaustive, and there is no pretense here of their being fully developed. They seem sufficient, however, to suggest (a) some of the content of the learning experiences that Evergreen must provide to fulfill its potentialities and (b) at least one of the forms of academic organization that would be appropriate to its aspirations. What follows is a proposed skeleton of an organizational arrangement that embodies these educational ideas with some illustrative "programs"--substantive areas of inquiry--that could profitably and excitingly be associated with it. The focus of the argument is on the structure. If we commit ourselves to this kind of conception of our academic effort and find the proper leadership for the "Divisions" that are offered for consideration here, then we are likely to recruit a faculty that will implement the principles implied by the postulates and that will work out its own congenial and effective modes of address to the specific programs that will define TESC's curriculum. In turn, that curriculum, it will be recalled, simply marks the boundaries within which learning contracts can be written; it does not imply courses, sequences, or levels.

The essential core of this proposal is four Divisions, each headed by a dean or a director. Each Division would generate programs, probably with each program led by a chairman, to which several faculty members would contribute. Professors, whose appointments would be divisional, could and probably should be involved in more than one program. Programs would be conceived as thematic fields of study within which learning contracts could be written. The specific terms of each contract would be worked out between each student and one or more faculty members in the program relevant to his interests. Three of the four Divisions are conceptually parallel to each other: One is concerned with programs in the realm of man's relationship to his natural environment; the second focuses on man's relationship to his societies, and the third is concerned with the relationship of man, the reflexive and reflective animal, to himself. The fourth Division is quite different; its function is to provide programs that facilitate a student's growth in expression and communication. It should operate both in a clinical fashion, helping students to overcome what they regard as deficiencies in their expressive and communicative abilities, and developmentally, helping students to achieve some facility in new modes of expression.

The four Divisions are listed below with a set of purely illustrative programs assigned to each:

Division of Expressive and Communicative Studies

Writing, speech, and reading
Foreign languages
Mathematics
Studio arts

Division of Programs in Man-Environment Relationships

Man in balance of nature
Technology and environmental transformation
Natural resources and public policy
The technology and politics of space exploration
Human strategies for coping with the environment
Community health: External and internal environments

Division of Man-Society Relationships

Population growth and its consequences
Peace and war
Poverty and affluence
The governing of men
Race relations and racial conflict
Social planning and personal freedom
The dynamics of urban cultures

Division of Programs in Man-Self Relationships

Conceptions of human nature
Identity and alienation
Moral choice and moral dilemmas
Self-realization and self-deception
Imagination and extralogical experience
The creative process
Aesthetic experience

Because this proposal is presented for discussion and critical evaluation, there is no point in trying here to explain its ramifications at any length. A very few reminders and examples will suffice. A crucial point, of course, is the one made in the fifth postulate: Each learning contract within a program in the three conceptually parallel Divisions should engage a student's aesthetic response, his logical and information-processing capacities, his normative judgments, and his time perspectives. To form an illustrative contract out of thin air, one can think of a student, working in the program on strategies for coping with the environment, exposing himself to these obligations: (1) he reads a novel like C. P. Snow's The Search, a work like Reinchenbach's Experience and Prediction a criticism of science like Barzun's Science: The Glorious Entertainment, and a history like Singer's From Magic to Science or Mason's Main Currents in Scientific Thought; (2) he visits a museum of natural history or of science and industry, evaluates the exhibits on the basis of what he learns from them about the natural environment in which he lives, interviews the curator with respect to what the institution's purposes are and what problems are encountered in trying to fulfill those purposes, and perhaps prepares a design for a museum that will better enlarge its visitors' understanding of the natural world; (3) he spends a brief period--a day to a working week--with a natural scientist, watching him practice his profession and asking how his activities are likely to shed more light on the character of the natural environment, about the human benefits that result from such work, and about the satisfactions that the scientist himself derives from his day-to-day involvements; (4) having discussed his readings and his experience with the faculty member with whom he is working and with other students who may have similar interests, he prepares a paper, using such other materials as may prove necessary, on the way that science shapes men's concepts of their environment and raises such questions as he is able to generate about the aesthetic, moral, and political significance of that process. In the criticism of his paper, his faculty associate pays particular attention to the accuracy of his understanding of scientific ideas and information and, where appropriate, sets him the task of correcting any misconceptions he may have. If the student wants to pursue this line of inquiry, he can easily move up to more sophisticated materials and to more complex kinds of questions that demand, among other things, a more technical and precise comprehension of, say, chemical or geological concepts. In contracts that relate to programs in race relations and racial conflict or in imagination and extralogical experience, it is even easier to construct off-the-cuff learning

units that, assuming initial interest on the part of the student, engage him as a whole learner.

In the Division of Expressive and Communicative Studies, the programs are a bit different. On the one hand, if diagnostic tests suggest that a student is reading slowly and if he wants to improve himself on this score, he can devote one (or more) of his "learning units" (in Evergreen phraseology) to clinical work in the upgrading of reading skills. On the other hand, if he chooses to acquire facility in a foreign language, he can find in the Division the resources by which he can totally immerse himself (the terms are now Berlitz's) in the linguistic community of his election, work with a tutor on developing only a reading comprehension of the selected language, or join a small group, led by a native speaker, in the development of this new proficiency. The rate of learning and the level of accomplishment to be attained are up to the student; the College simply makes the required resources available, grants him credit, and evaluates him on the basis of his growth to the point of his discontinuing language study. In both mathematics and such studio arts as ceramics or oil painting, similar principles apply: The emphasis is nonprofessional, and the rate of learning and level of achievement are left up to the student; the goal sought is that of helping him either to say something or to understand something of importance to him in a more sophisticated way.

Although it would not be difficult to illustrate in considerable detail some of the hypothetical programs listed here, my primary purpose is simply that of indicating one form of organization that would permit a closer realization at TESC of the educational dreams that grow out of our shared criticisms of conventional undergraduate curricula. It is only to concretize and to stimulate further our consideration of alternatives to traditional patterns of academic organization that this plan is submitted. I hope we can soon continue our hunt for a pattern that will give Evergreen a vigorous and fruitful start in all probability, there is none within the reach of either discovery or creation that will do more than that.

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