

A PUGET SOUNDING: EARLY HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS

WRITTEN OUT IN 1971

While I was thinking about what recollections could be useful to a future historian of Evergreen, it struck me that there might be some interest in the kind of public-relations stump-speech which I was giving in the year before the college opened to students. Because we had just taken root, perhaps the term "sapling speech" for our hopes and aspirations might be more suitable. There were over twenty occasions, from September 1970 through September 1971, when I addressed audiences concerned with what would be going on at their new institution. About half of these events were held on campus in the prefab building housing the Library staff, which contained the largest room available at the time. The rest occurred at evening meetings of fraternal, sororal, political, social, and religious groups in the Greater Olympia area whose members were curious about our principles and plans.

As the year went on and I could anticipate the questions and reactions which audience-members would be likely to have, the speech became more polished. It also conveyed more detailed information, especially after I had edited the academic material of our first catalog and written, incorporating contributions by Merv Cadwallader and Don Humphrey, the introductory sections on our goals and methods. But familiar as the salient points remain some forty-six years later, I found it difficult to recapture the spirit of the time and to deal with those plans which did not work out. Then I remembered a published version of the speech which I had written for a regional magazine, a copy of which I had contributed to the archives upon my retirement. Randy Stilson, Archivist, has retrieved it; and we offer it to you now.

Background: In early January of 1971, on the day before the legislative session would begin, the newly elected legislators gathered at the Capitol for a late-morning ceremony of swearing into office. They were accompanied by their spouses, who thereafter joined those involved in the ceremony at a formal luncheon. The newly sworn-in legislators would spend the afternoon in meetings where they would be instructed about official procedures of the House and Senate, as well as matters of housekeeping in their new offices. But what was to be done with the spouses? Someone had the bright idea of sending those who were interested out to the Evergreen campus, and so several of us waited for the visitors' van to arrive so that we could hold an information session.

Only the contractor's people in their hardhats were allowed near the site where the Library and Lecture Hall buildings were under construction. So Jerry Schillinger, our Facilities Planner, walked our guests up through the woods where the ComLab now stands so that they could have a glimpse of the construction work from a distance. We then went to the meeting room of the Library prefab building where Jerry had placed the three-dimensional model of how the campus core and the buildings -- under construction and envisioned -- might look. President McCann came over to say hello to our politically important guests, and I gave my current version of the public-relations speech. Our visitors were alert and engaged, and we then had an active question-and-answer session before they returned to the Capitol Campus and their spouses.

It turned out that one of the legislative wives was an officer of the Seattle Junior League. She had been much impressed by her visit to our campus, to the extent that she suggested to the editor of the elegant Junior League monthly magazine *Puget Soundings* that an article about Evergreen might be in order. With board approval, the editor got in touch with me in the spring. I wrote and submitted the article in the summer, and just as we were opening, the article appeared in the October 1971 issue.

[Puget Soundings

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Today's Alternative: Tomorrow's Prototype

by Charles B. Teske

Down outside Olympia, its thousand-acre campus set on Cooper Point along Eld Inlet, The Evergreen State College grows ready for its first academic year. More than eleven hundred students have been admitted and tentatively registered in their initial programs. Thirty-seven new faculty members have been recruited to join the eighteen members of the 1970-71 planning faculty. Other members of the administrative staff -- some of whom have been working on the plans for Evergreen since its creation by the Legislature in 1967 -- continue to organize resources to get this complex, innovative enterprise under way.

Within a few weeks, the doors of the first buildings will open to receive the first students. A new college will come to life.

The phrase "a new college," though it carries overtones of adventure and opportunity,

may also unsettle those who hear it. As advertising copywriters well know, people can get positively excited about new products and machines, new processes and techniques and ingredients. But the benefits of novelty are not self-evident when one thinks about brandy and whiskey and religious doctrines, jewelry firms and the workshops of hand-craftsmen, investment houses and institutions of higher education.

For colleges have been intimately concerned with tradition – the giving across or handing down of articulated problems, solutions, lore, hypotheses, theories, disciplined techniques, and the detailed substance of cultures. But abiding strategic principles have often become confused with tactics meant to be temporary, which then also, by inertia, become "time honored." A concern for preserving traditional values can become confused with an unquestioning devotion to methods and even habits formed by accident. Yet when the old, established systems have obviously gained so much for us, it is a bit hard to cut their losses, a bit hard not to be suspicious of colleges-come-lately. Most of us would be happier if the walls of new colleges could somehow be covered with ivy from the start.

When planners declare that a college will not merely be "new" but also strikingly "different," even a hardy devotee of higher education may begin to squirm in his seat. He will have misgivings about those who would tamper with the methods by which he received his formal training. "I learned the traditional way, and I turned out all right."

Add to such threats against security a fascinated uneasiness about the confusing and confused behavior of younger people, by turns actively involved and aloof, gentle and hostile, menacing in their rejection of all sorts of traditions. The opening of the college both new and different becomes an occasion for ambiguous feelings – a combination of hope and fear, encouragement and admonition, held for the moment in equilibrium by a strong dose of curiosity.

The Legislature has charged us with providing a genuine alternative for undergraduate education in the State of Washington. The planners of Evergreen could have interpreted this mandate in a safe and narrow manner, searched the catalogs of existing colleges and universities throughout the state for the courses and departments which these institutions do not have, and offered an array of "alternative" subject-matters – somewhat exotic but not especially enlightening. Instead, we have interpreted the mandate as an opportunity to work out alternative methods, especially methods which can accommodate a good many interests, old and new, while allowing for rapid response to the changing needs of our students and of our other constituencies.

What will Evergreen be doing down there?

One coherent program of study at the time. Students at most colleges enroll in from

three to six courses during a given period of time. These are usually unrelated and, in effect, compete for the student's energies. A student in such arrangements serves many masters simultaneously and receives little help in making sense of what he is learning. An Evergreen student, however, will have clear and unified responsibility to one Coordinated Studies program or one learning contract at a time.

His task may be singly focused or complex. It may keep him in continual contact with faculty members and other students, or it may take him off campus for months. He may work with books and paper, computer techniques, laboratory equipment, film, audio tape, video tape, or the special tools and materials of artistic creation. But he will be responsible to one faculty seminar leader (Coordinated Studies) or one contract sponsor (Contracted Studies) during the period. And this teacher-advisor will be responsible for his total academic progress

Coordinated Studies programs will typically contain from three to six faculty members and from sixty to one hundred twenty students. They will emphasize interdisciplinary teamwork on large problems, topics, or themes over set periods of time (from one quarter to as many as six quarters in such a program). Some of the 1971-72 titles are: "Causality, Freedom, and Chance"; "Contemporary American Minorities"; "Human Development"; "The Individual, the Citizen, and the State"; "Political Ecology"; "Southeast Asia: Transition and Conflict"; "Communications and Intelligence"; and "Environmental Design."

For both students and faculty, membership in such a program will be the full academic assignment. Part-time students may join such a team to do part of the total assignment, but no one will be a member of more than one program group at a time. A Coordinated Studies group will then be subdivided into seminars led by faculty members. Each leader will combine the roles of advisor and main teacher to the students in the seminar while serving as a resourceful person to the program-group as a whole.

Each student in the program will have access through assemblies, lectures, panel-discussions, film showings with discussion, other presentations, field-trips, and workshops to all the other students and faculty members in the program, plus whatever other consultants may be brought in or visited off-campus. But he will have particular access and accountability to the other students in his seminar and to the faculty seminar leader – who will be working on the basic assignments of the program right along with him – in several seminar meetings each week and frequent tutorial or critical conferences. He will have a variety of intensive and extensive experiences in an atmosphere of teamwork.

In *Contracted Studies*, the alternative and complement to the Coordinated Studies programs, a small group of students or an individual student works with an individual faculty member on a well-defined project. An average of fifteen students will be working with the

faculty member at a given time. In some cases, the faculty member may take the lead by announcing his interests and then negotiating projects with students who wish to develop such interests. In other cases, a student or group of students may have a project in mind and may then apply to a faculty member for guidance.

Some arrangements will involve sponsorship by Evergreen staff members beyond the faculty and may also use the talents of other skilled persons on or off campus as "subcontractors." Part-time students may arrange for such projects by spreading their work for appropriate credit over a longer time. In all cases, students and faculty members will define the tasks which they wish to do together and file these definitions as contracts.

Whether it involves a sequence of readings, field research, laboratory work, artistic or technical craftsmanship, or on-the-job experience; whether it assumes much small-group and tutorial contact or much independent study; whether the faculty member brings specialized knowledge to bear or works along with the student on a topic new to both of them – they will hold each other responsible for getting the job done.

Time and space in the service of learning. On most college campuses, students are engaged in "schedules" of courses rather than in coherent programs or projects. Teachers offer several courses to different groups of students. Clock-and-bell time systems measure formal student-faculty contact. Classrooms, continually vacated and filled by different groups, are the allocated spaces which house undergraduate work. The classrooms are neutral ground. A faculty member is at home, not where he teaches, but in his small departmental office. The student, unless he is very advanced and has earned the right to a bit of departmental work-space, has no academic "turf" to call his own.

At Evergreen, the shift to unified academic responsibilities will enable Coordinated Studies groups and Contracted Studies sponsors to have charge over their own spaces. The unit will be the "office-seminar" room. It will serve as the meeting place for the members of his seminar or his contract students, as his own work-space, and as a study area for both him and his students, according to their habits of working.

A Coordinated Studies group of five faculty members and one hundred students will be housed in a suite of five such office-seminar rooms, with an additional combined workshop or study room, a student lounge area, and a one-third or one-fourth share in an assembly room capable of holding the entire program-group (to be scheduled not by a remote registrar but by agreement with adjoining Coordinated Studies groups). A faculty member involved in Contracted Studies will be housed either in an office-seminar room or else in a laboratory area or studio next to the equipment which he and his students are using.

Pursuing full-time assignments and controlling their own spaces, faculty-student teams

at Evergreen will be able to devise their own schedules week by week. No bell system will interrupt. They can meet as often as their problem requires for as long as it takes. They can leave basic equipment set up, papers spread out, and chalkboards full of diagrams, or follow their problem off-campus. In short, the patterns for using space and time at Evergreen should foster rather than fragment and thus inhibit learning. The opportunities for developing momentum, concentration, and thoroughness would seem to be good.

Matching interests. Evergreen does not tell students what to take. It indicates what its teachers are prepared to offer – experience and interests brought from the natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, arts, and a good many other areas into our new environment. The "requirements" that concern us are the students' needs to know, the teachers' understandings of these needs and of what is worth doing, and the internal necessities of the problems which the students and teachers join to work upon.

Teachers in the service of learning. At most colleges faculty members are grouped because they share the same professional degrees. At Evergreen, faculty members will be grouped in temporary alliances because they are leading a Coordinated Studies program or because they are sponsoring contracts and need weekly interdisciplinary discussions. These groupings will change at need as one program or set of contracts is completed and new arrangements require new circles of collaboration. Both Coordinated Studies programs and contracts are self-terminating, to be replaced by new matchings of interest in response to the needs actually perceived by those who wish to learn together.

Getting into it. By unifying academic responsibilities and attempting to foster coherent programs of study we have chosen penetration and thoroughness over the kinds of "coverage" usually promised in course syllabuses. Granted, the interdisciplinary teamwork in basic Coordinated Studies programs should lead to valuable breadth of awareness. Yet we wish to allow for depth of concerns and do not limit this penetration to "majoring" in subject-matters as normally set forth by academic departments.

Through such advanced programs as "Communications and Intelligence" (photography, video techniques, audio techniques, film, and communication theory) or through long-term contracts in his later years, a student will be encouraged to match specialized interests with faculty members, other staff members, and outside subcontractors in businesses, agencies, workshops, and community organizations. So long as a student demonstrates the need to know and the likelihood of profiting by the experience, he can go just as far as we are honestly able to guide him.

He may spend as much as a full academic year in our library or laboratories on one complex project or on an extended internship off-campus. It will be up to his judgment and the

judgment of his faculty sponsor. But any prospective sponsors will know quite a bit about his capacities by that time. He should know quite a bit about himself. And he will know that the award of Evergreen credit comes not for "taking a course" but only for demonstrated achievements in learning.

Credit when credit is due. Rather than the usual system of ambiguous letter-grades compounded into a Grade Point Average (which may look precise but is no less ambiguous than the letters from which it is derived), Evergreen will try out a pattern which may be a bit simpler and certainly more informative. For graduation a student must have earned thirty-six units of credit, each roughly equivalent to a month of full-time productive effort (4 years X about 9 months in an academic year = 36 months). A student participating successfully in the activities of a nine-month-long Coordinated Studies program will receive nine units of credit, and so forth. However, when a student negotiates an individual learning contract with the sponsor, the units of credit appropriate will be decided at the start. Then, as if for piece-work, the student receives his credit only when the contract is fulfilled and as soon as it is fulfilled. He can accelerate his pace as much as possible, or take longer to finish the job without "failing" and having to start over. Both unusually energetic students and those with deficient backgrounds who must go slower should find such flexibility encouraging.

A student's career at Evergreen will thus be summarized in units and multiple units earned for his participation in various programs and contracts. When he does not fulfill his obligations to one of these, no credit is entered for it. Because of the unified responsibility and close full-time guidance assumed in programs and contracts, it will be possible, however, to document each award of credit with more than usual precision.

Each award of credit will be represented in the student's cumulative "portfolio" by a description of the study he has undertaken, a letter of evaluation written by his seminar leader or contract sponsor, and a student's own evaluation of what he has learned and how well his efforts have been supported by the teacher or teachers working with him. Such documents will provide for efficient evaluation of people and programs within Evergreen and should allow prospective employers to form a more accurate than usual impression about who the graduate is and what he accomplished at Evergreen.

Cooperative Education. Our arrangements will allow students not only to follow their problems into field research at need, but also to prepare for careers by negotiating long-term contracts for combinations of work and study in firms and agencies off-campus. "Cooperative education," the term most often applied to such on-the-job learning, provides excellent opportunities for gaining practical experience while reflecting upon the meaning of that experience. It should enable students to make much better-informed choices of careers and to make better use of further studies on campus toward goals which have now become clearer.

What is more, it saves duplicating on campus the equipment and staff for specifically vocational training, which can take place more effectively in the firm or agency itself. As the college and the enterprises off-campus cooperate, the student engaged in such programs becomes an effective link between academic life and the larger community.

Responsiveness and responsibility. We wish to remain flexible in the kinds of learning we promote while insisting that all persons – students, faculty, and administrators alike – give their best efforts to the assignments which they themselves have helped to formulate. We shall make it much easier than usual for students and teachers to develop a wide range of concerns and then work on them. But once people have designed a program and registered for it, they must carry it out.

We also wish to remain responsive and responsible to public needs and expectations beyond the College. Therefore we have emphasized the grouping of people into self-terminating task forces to examine large problems from many sides, and the negotiating of contracts to fill the needs-to-know of students preparing for careers as productive and contributing members of society, as citizens, and as human beings. We are attempting to do this by arrangements which will cost the public no more than does traditional undergraduate education and may yet, perhaps, lead to greater opportunities for each student to learn.

Will Evergreen really be all that new and different? Many of our main ideas have been tried before. But not all together, and usually in somewhat tangential, even parasitic options attached to undergraduate programs dominated by traditional courses, departments, and the rest. We have instead tried to develop an efficient academic organization which will be rooted firmly in the soil of Western Washington but which can stand by its own inner logic.

Commentary: The title "Today's Alternative: Tomorrow's Prototype" was supplied by the editor. I had suggested the more modest "A New College for Washington State" by way of leading into my points about the problems of innovation in the academic world. Her title is more ambitious and only partly accurate. Evergreen has not provided an institutional prototype. Only a commitment from the ground up to devote the majority of resources and faculty effort to full-time, interdisciplinary, team-taught programs rather than multiple courses under the control of departments would allow a whole college to follow our principles. But our emphasis from the beginning on coordinated studies has influenced the development of "learning communities" as curricular alternatives within otherwise conventional institutions around the country. Surveys such as those in *U.S. News and World Report* have recognized somewhat similar programs as a separate category of offerings, and Evergreen continues to rank high on

the list.

"... Interdisciplinary teamwork on large problems, topics, or themes over set periods of time (from one quarter to as many as six quarters)" -- When Mervyn Cadwallader, at the Planning Conference of February 8, 1970, introduced to the rest of us his idea of offering one or two "theme teams," he was thinking about full-time programs involving five faculty members and 100 students for two academic years. As the planning administrators adopted and adapted this idea, and as the members of the planning faculty of 1970-71 designed the offerings for our opening to students in the fall, the two years had shrunk to a maximum of three quarters. There have been many instances of carrying on the concerns of programs into further quarters through having some students and faculty members engage in group or individual learning contracts. But there have been no two-year, six-quarter programs.

"An average of fifteen students will be working with a faculty member at a given time." -- As State funding of higher education has been cut back over the decades since the founding of Evergreen, faculty members engaged in both contracted studies and programs have had to assume loads averaging over twenty full-time students for each full-time teacher. Because our arrangements allow for whole persons to work with whole persons rather than having an "instructional unit" in which one-fifth of a student meets one-third of a teacher in the "class hour" of one of their uncoordinated multiple assignments, we still can provide the kind of contact and personal responsibility usually found only in private undergraduate colleges with richer faculty: student ratios.

"Time and space in the service of learning." -- These were lofty aspirations that we could not put into effect. Office-seminar rooms might be desirable, but they would tie up too much unused space when the faculty members would be working by themselves or holding individual conferences. The Library Building could provide a few such rooms early on. But as the spaces could be reconfigured and as new buildings were planned, efficiency required the provision of twenty-plus-seating seminar rooms which could be scheduled to serve several programs, and of small faculty offices. Through the 1970's, however, there was enough space available that the larger programs could each have the control of one secure seminar "home room," overseen by the program aide and housing a small reserve library, a program mailbox, an audio-components cart for listening sessions, and a typewriter.

As we opened we were required to adjust to state-wide procedures for reporting on the registration of students, which generated the academic operating budgets and assumed the awarding of credit by quarters or semesters. We could not regard individual contracts as "piece work," for which the student would receive the credit "only when the contract is fulfilled and as soon as it is fulfilled." Contracts would be written quarter by quarter and would represent work on artistic or research projects rather than requiring the completion of the projects. We also moved by 1973-74 away from the "Evergreen unit," each of which would equal five quarter-credit hours at other State institutions. With three such units originally counted as full-time study for a total of 15 quarter-credit hours (whereas undergraduate students at the other institutions were registering for an average of 16 quarter-credit hours) we had been short-changing our students and our academic operating budget. We moved to a more compatible and more equitable system of defining full-time work as resulting in the award of sixteen credit-hours per quarter. And we moved from single narratives by students about what they had learned and how well their efforts had been supported by their teachers to separate self-evaluations (for their transcripts) and faculty-evaluations (for their faculty members' portfolios).

Beside the schemes that did not work out and the adjustments necessary for us to fit into the financial and credit-generating procedures of State higher education, there was one dream which was simply too ambitious to realize. A number of us planning administrators hoped that the new college could move rapidly to full operation through four equal quarters. It seemed to be the right time to divorce the institutional calendar from the medieval system of faculty-student vacations developed to allow the young gentlemen to return to their families' estates to help oversee the planting and harvesting. The taxpayers were already providing the means to keep the campus open and air-conditioned through the summer. By adopting a calendar which would allow full student enrollments through the year, we could make full use of the facilities. If faculty members were on three-quarter contracts and could take their open quarters at different times of the year(e.g. so that they could pursue individual research projects when the opportunities for such research were most available) we could increase our total faculty by 25% without constructing new spaces. Those students who wished to accelerate their undergraduate careers would be able to take advantage of a full range of offerings year-'round.

We waited for several years to propose to the legislators this calendar reform, which would require them to increase our academic operating budget, though not the Facilities', Library's, and other services' budgets. When we did so, we received pats on the shoulders for our desire

to run the college more efficiently, and the response, "Nice try – no money." And so our relatively few summer programs had to be offered on a cash-and-carry basis with the faculty members who wished to offer programs being compensated according to the number of students who signed up.

This failed attempt at academic-calendar reform amounted to the one instance when we-the-planners employed a strategy of proposing innovation incrementally. Otherwise, we took advantage of the opportunity to recruit from the very beginning a faculty who would be committed to realizing our boldest intentions. And when I consider how many of these innovations did take root and how many crises we had to survive, it is amazing and gratifying to find that the College is still here, doing much of what its founders hoped to accomplish.