

LITTLE BITS OF CREDIT, LITTLE BITS OF CASH

or, How We Stopped Short-Changing Ourselves

Perrin Smith, Registrar, joined me to walk to the parking lot of the Golden Carriage Restaurant. Our weekly meeting of the Deans' and Directors' Breakfast had just ended. It was the middle of the Fall Quarter of 1971-72 – our first term with students. Along with the other registrars of Washington State colleges and universities, Perrin had received a copy of the report on 10th-day "head-counts," listing for each institution the Full-Time-Equivalent (FTE) students registered (full-time students plus the sum of the fractions of part-time students) and the totals of Quarter Credit-Hours (QCH) for which they had enrolled. As he read it he realized that we would be short-changing our students in the academic credit which we would be awarding for their work.

Before Perrin and we three founding deans had come on board, the President and his three Vice-Presidents had decreed (1) that the College would have only one requirement for the B. A. degree and (2) how it would be earned. Evergreen would follow the practice of the other three colleges and the two universities in requiring a minimum of 180 QCH for graduation. Our College would, however, award credit toward that total in a quite different fashion. The members of the President's Council had wished to avoid wherever possible fragmentation and the diffusion of energy – in President McCann's phrase, "nickeling and diming" the students. So instead of thinking in terms of quarter credit-hours, we would use Evergreen Units, each of which would be translated into five QCH in the common currency for graduation or transfer to another institution

Our system, as described in our first catalog, seemed quite rational and arithmetically elegant. Full-time work for a quarter would generate three Evergreen Units, or the equivalent of 15 QCH elsewhere. Successful work in a fall-winter-spring academic year would generate nine Evergreen Units (45 QCH). Four such academic years would generate thirty-six Evergreen Units (180 QCH) and satisfy the graduation requirement which we shared with the other three State senior colleges and two universities. Part-time students could enroll for one or two Units. Students enrolled for full-time study who could not complete the work specified by their programs or in their contracts could still receive partial credit for what they had accomplished.

Perrin had discovered, however, that our students would be at a disadvantage in comparison to their undergraduate counterparts in the other State colleges and universities. As he scanned the 10th-day-of-quarter headcounts he saw that their FTE students were enrolled for 15.9-to-16.1 QCH. They would be earning on average one QCH more for full-time work than a

Greener. As Evergreen developed, as students from other institutions would transfer to us, and as some of our students would wish to transfer to other institutions, the disparity would become significant. For example, a student transferring from another Washington State institution after two years of earning full-time credit would be starting at Evergreen with 96 QCH. A Greener transferring after two years of full-time study would start at the other institution with 90 QCH. If a student spent four full academic years at Evergreen, she would have to earn full credit for each quarter to graduate. There would be no leeway for illness or any other occasion for receiving reduced credit.

Perrin had raised the problem with his superior, Executive Vice President Joseph Shoben. Shoben had displayed no interest in doing anything about the situation. Perrin felt strongly enough that he was now appealing to me, as the academic dean who had "Liaison with the Registrar and the Registrar's Office" among his Deans' Desks assignments. Perhaps I could persuade my superior, Provost and Academic Vice President David Barry, to put the matter on the agenda of the President's Council.

[Where did the concept and term "Deans' Desks" come from? During the Planning Year, the three of us academic deans made a number of recruiting trips to interview potential first-year faculty members. With only one exception, we went individually. Merv Cadwallader and Don Humphrey made that exceptional trip together, and they came back with a proposal to arrange for an orderly transition of the founding deans into the teaching faculty. They had gotten into a conversation about being teachers rather than career administrators and about their eagerness to teach in the curriculum which the three of us were helping to design. They asked me to join them in an initiative by which we would make the transition in consecutive years, the order to be based on the lengths of our administrative servitude thus far. Don would go first, at the end of 1972-73. Merv would follow at the end of 1973-74, and I in June of 1975. Our faculty colleagues applauded the initiative.

At the time, the watch-words for administrative service at Evergreen were "accountability" and "locatability." For difficult and perhaps unpopular decisions, there would be no hiding behind committees ("Don't look at me; they decided it") or the temptation to dilute or to evade responsibility by employing the bureaucratically vague and impersonal passive voice ("This job will be done by ... the end of next month"). In addition to these ideals, we now had to think about "continuity." In the rotation of deans into (and then from) the teaching faculty, how would information, procedures, and responsibilities be maintained?

I suggested that we employ the nomenclature and practices of the Department of State and the Institute of International Education, which maintained "Desks" for dealings with all major foreign countries and regional groupings of the others. Administrators would come and go, but a Desk would remain the dedicated locus of files, policies, and responsibility. I joined in Merv's

and Don's proposal, and they accepted my suggestion. And so, within the current organization, including a troika of Vice Presidents, we-the-deans devised the Desks to identify our several assignments within the Deans' Office and by which we could collaborate with directors reporting to the other higher-level administrators.]

After some further discussion of the problem with Perrin, I wrote a memorandum to David Barry, dated Nov. 17, 1971, with copies to President McCann, VP Shoben, VP Clabaugh, Dean Cadwallader, Dean Humphrey, Director of Admissions David Brown, and Registrar Perrin Smith. Because I would be harping about the matter for the next year-and-a-half in pretty much the same language, I quote the reasoning used in this first written statement:

"The Evergreen Unit = ?

"From the point where concerns about student evaluation, catalog statements, and faculty activity analysis [three of my current Desk assignments] all meet, I should like to make an observation and start you worrying about the consequences of our present policy of equating one Evergreen unit with five quarter credits earned elsewhere. I believe that this equivalence may be a bit low and that our students, as well as the whole College, may start to feel undesirable effects from this equation very soon.

" '36 units for graduation' remains a simple and elegant policy. The number is divisible by four years and three quarters in each year; the rough approximation of the one unit to one month of full-time effort also provides a convenient reference for drawing up contracts. No problem here yet.

"But the equation 'one unit = five quarter credits' has the major disadvantage of comparing 'normal progress' at Evergreen with 'minimum requirements for graduation' at other four-year colleges. Several results would seem to follow:

" (1) Students transferring quarter-credit hours into Evergreen are favored; a minimal full-time load in their previous institutions becomes an average or normal rate of earning credit as soon as we translate their hours into our units.

" (2) Students transferring Evergreen units into other undergraduate programs are placed at a disadvantage; their average or normal progress at Evergreen becomes minimal full-time progress as soon as their units are translated into quarter credits.

"(3) Our currency is thus 'hard' -- undervalued; and this may speak well for our modesty and unpretentiousness in the early years; better to raise the value

of our currency later than be forced to deflate it by lack of acceptance elsewhere.

"(4) But we are likely to run into serious trouble when we report our institutional output in total units of credit awarded; for as soon as these units are translated into the quarter credits reported from other undergraduate programs, the average full-time effort of our faculty and use of our facilities will seem to compare with lower levels of operation at other colleges.

. . . [statistical queries; calculations]

"Perhaps all this can wait. The latest CHE [Council on Higher Education] draft on 'Faculty Assignment Analysis Criteria,' however, suggests that student credit hours will be important in output analysis. If so, and if data gathered from other institutions warrant it, we should consider a revaluation of our currency at once."

On November 22, 1971 Barry, Cadwallader, Humphrey, and Teske took up the issue:

"SUMMARY: PROVOST'S COUNCIL MEETING

. . . .

" 2. General discussion held on the evaluation of the Evergreen Unit of credit. Values must be set to not penalize outgoing students and which must also relate appropriately to budgetary formulae. Dean Teske will follow through with discussions with Perrin Smith, Registrar to explore compatibility and parity of the Evergreen Credit Pattern. . . ."

The next document relating to the issue, the President's Council Meeting Minutes of December 17, 1971, has as Item 5. "Evergreen unit (Teske's 11-17 memo). Agreed: take no action at this time. Take off agenda."

Because I had just finished the draft of the academic-policy section of the 1972/73 College catalog and was thinking ahead, I responded swiftly with a memo of December 20, 1971 to the President's Council, copied to the academic deans, to David Brown, and to Perrin Smith:

"The Evergreen Unit Again.

"Let me plead once more for action to translate the Evergreen unit as the equivalent of 5 1/3 quarter credits or 3 1/3 semester credits at other institutions. There are three reasons for urgency:

" (1) Although we may not wish to put such a higher translation value on our credit for the rest of the current academic year, we may wish to do so for

1972-73. The new catalog will serve 1972-73 and should express our intentions clearly. Granted, it will not be impossible to report the new values to CHE and to admissions officers of other institutions even though the older values are represented in our catalog. But it may be awkward.

" (2) The anomaly persists that we seem to be equating 'normal progress toward graduation' at other colleges, to the obvious disadvantage of any Evergreen students who might wish to transfer their Evergreen credit to these colleges.

"(3) It now appears that CHE will indeed use quarter credits as the main index of output by the colleges of the State of Washington. If we translate 'normal progress' at Evergreen according to 'minimal progress' elsewhere, we simply shall not be reporting what we are doing. At the risk of tiring you, let me run through the calculations again

. . . .

" Two related objections have been raised: (1) that once we move into the realm of fractions or decimal points we shall both clutter up our own administrative systems and place ourselves at the mercy of fluctuating averages elsewhere and (2) that a change in our translation values to suit the guidelines of CHE and WICHE [Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education] will amount to a surrender of our leadership in the educational community.

"Answers: (1) We are already in the realm of fractions or decimal points in treating translations into and out of semester credits. A movement to 5-1/3 quarter credits will not clutter up our internal system for students and faculty but will simply necessitate translational work by administrators at widely spaced intervals. And the essence of translation would seem to be the putting of one's discourse into the standard active vocabularies used by those to whom one is speaking. (2) By providing CHE and WICHE with expressions of output in quarter credits, we might be giving up a kind of leadership – the determination to go it alone. I perceive that we cannot go it alone and that if we are going to report to them, we had better do so in a manner which is at once accurate and favorable to our purposes."

Our paper trail does not show any official reaction to this memo by the President's Council, and the catalog draft which I submitted to VP's Barry and Shoben came back in January with no alterations suggested for the section dealing with Evergreen Units.

In 1972 two sequences of events made the issue of academic credit and its relationship to formula funding all the more significant.

(1) Just after the Memorial Day weekend, my colleague Don Humphrey suffered a heart attack. He had been working on the academic operating budget request for the next biennium and had left a stack of calculations dealing with three different future enrollments. David Barry assigned

me to take over the task of coming up with the official figures for our request and the text justifying them, which had to be completed by early July so that the draft could go to the President's Council, then to the Trustees, and then to the Governor's staff for inclusion in the budget which he would submit to the Legislature in January, 1973. As project director for a number of grants, I had some experience with budgetary proposals and reports, but nothing so complicated or massive or crucial as the funding of faculty and support-staff positions, benefits, and the supplies and services which would be needed to run our future programs.

Fortunately, Ken Winkley, our Evergreen Controller, was an excellent teacher for a crash course in Washington State formula funding. I learned that our calculations for the academic operating budget request would be driven by the QCH we were now projecting and that the funds we would receive in the fall of 1973 would depend upon the QCH we would be reporting after the 10th-day headcount. Because we did not have graduate programs yet, the quarter credit hours would fall into two categories: Lower Division (the equivalent of 100- and 200-level courses elsewhere) and Upper Division (the equivalent of 300- and 400-level courses elsewhere). Ken and I had to predict how much credit at each level would be offered in our future academic programs.

It was not too surprising to find that the total dollar-figures we could request would depend upon the total QCH which we projected for our offerings in the next biennium. But I was surprised to learn that the number of full-time faculty equivalent (FTEF) positions we could staff would also depend upon the quarter credit hours we would be offering for Lower Division and for Upper Division work. Our adherence to the equivalent of 15 credit hours per quarter as full-time study would be costing us 1/15 of the academic funds and FTEF positions to which we were entitled. I spread the word to my fellow deans and directors – Edward Kormondy having replaced Don Humphrey – and to other faculty colleagues who were concerned about the funding of the College.

(2) In the fall Perrin's and my initiative received strong support. Some faculty members were concerned about making adjustments to our curricular procedures after the experience of a full year of operation. With administrative approval but not oversight, they organized themselves as the Monarch/Lake Quinault Task Force (named for the locations where they held their meetings). Deans, directors, the President, and the Vice Presidents could attend these retreats; but it was the faculty and staff members directly responsible for running and supporting the curriculum who developed the recommendations. I was asked to testify about my concerns with the amounts of academic credit we were offering and the manner in which the credit was awarded.

In Its Final Draft of November, 1972, under the heading THE EVERGREEN CREDIT UNIT, "The joint committee recommends: 1. The basic unit of credit is to be calculated on the basis of 4

(four) units per quarter, that is --

a year-long coordinated study = 12 units

a quarter-long coordinated study = 4 units

a module (half-quarter Type A group contract) = 2 units

a 1-quarter Type B group contract = 1 unit

2. Part-time students be allowed to take 1 or 2 units of credit per quarter.
3. Translation into quarter hours to be achieved by multiplying our basic unit by 4. That is, one quarter's work (4 units) x 4 = 16 quarter hours.
4. The graduation requirement by 48 units.
5. Previous work at Evergreen be retroactively translated into the new units."

On the strength of this report, I requested that I be allowed to attend a meeting of the President's Council to argue for a revaluation of the Evergreen Unit. After summarizing my earlier reasoning, I presented what I had learned in working on our academic operating budget request and spoke in favor of implementing the recommendations of the Task Force. Joseph Shoben spoke against such action, briefly but cogently:

Yes, we were keeping our currency hard. But in the present political climate and considering a certain amount of public dissatisfaction with Evergreen, it was prudent to do so. Opposition in the Legislature ranged from reasonable doubt to outright hostility. By our curricular innovations and the ethos of social criticism and radical lifestyles, which we were perceived to be encouraging, Evergreen had been pushing the envelope. By seeming to fight for the last possible bits of credit and money, we would be giving ammunition for those who wanted to turn us into a conventional college or even close us down. The small amounts of credit and money which our students and the College might gain would not be worth the considerable risk to our whole enterprise.

Shoben's reasoning prevailed. After a year of trying, I let the matter rest.

The near-disaster and consequent reorganization which I have described in "March Mayhem, 1973" brought on many changes, including the termination of Joe Shoben's appointment, the shift in the assignment of David Barry to become our legislative liaison, and the appointment of Ed Kormondy as Academic Vice President and Provost. When the dust had cleared, Ed asked me to pursue Perrin's and my and the Task Force's initiative once again. He promised to back us

fully, and he was as good as his word.

On May 29, 1973 I sent him a 4 1/2-page memo:

"The Evergreen Unit

. . . .

[After repeating the reasoning of my November 17, 1971 memo to David Barry, I added:]

"Since that time my work with the faculty staffing and support formula has intensified my conviction that we claim too few 'student credit hours' in our budgetary requests and that our formula funding suffers as a result – whether we project FTE students at 15 quarter credit hours each or use our 'historical' number of 14.57 credit hours per 'headcount student,' again based on 15 CH as full-time norm. If the large majority of 'full-time' students at our sister institutions did indeed register for 15 credit hours per quarter, then we should be wrong to increase the translational value of our credit. But if the average of credit hours per quarter for which a full-time student registers elsewhere is close to 16, then we should think seriously about adjusting our 'normal full-time progress toward graduation' to theirs. . . .

"Whether we like it or not, our currency does not depend upon an absolute standard. Whenever we translate our units into other people's credit hours, we must carefully examine the going rate. Otherwise, we may be giving away one-sixteenth [should be 'one-fifteenth'] of our formula funding at the outset, undervaluing our productivity, and working to the disadvantage of Evergreen students who wish to transfer to other undergraduate colleges.

"Several new considerations have entered all of our thoughts in recent months:

- (1) the statewide plans to move to a charge-per-credit-hour;
- (2) the Lake Quinault group's recommendation that we move to a system of four units per quarter (each unit to be the equivalent of four quarter-credit-hours); and
- (3) the desirability of breaking our credit into smaller pieces to serve the needs and financial capabilities of the part-time students not seeking degrees.

" All of these considerations favor the adoption of the system by which normal full-time progress at Evergreen would be defined as four units per quarter; the minimum for a B.A. would be 48 units; and each unit would be translated as four quarter credit hours. . . .
[After several pages of calculations and discussion of alternatives, I concluded:]

". . . all of us [should be] prepared to argue for the extent and depth of the academic work performed by the average Evergreen FTE student – for there will be

questions when we claim that the worth of our currency has increased."

On June 13, Ed Kormondy sent a memo to Administrative Vice President (new title) Clabaugh, the academic deans, Perrin Smith, Ken Winkley, and the members of the Task Force who had written the recommendations about the Evergreen Unit – with a copy to President McCann.

"The Evergreen Unit

"I am attaching a lengthy statement [my May 29 memo] concerning the much discussed change of the Evergreen unit from the equivalent of five quarter credit hours to four quarter credit hours. You recall that this item was specifically recommended by the Quinault Task Force and has long been a position championed by Charles Teske.

"We hope to come to conclusion on this matter in time to affect the fall quarter's program. I will appreciate your reviewing the document with particular regard to your particular concern. I would also appreciate meeting with you"

On June 15, Dean Clabaugh [his name, not title] responded and formally joined the discussion of the issue for the first time:

"I will attend the June 26 meeting.

Advance comments on Teske's memo:

(1) I agree with virtually all of Teske's rationales.

(2) I concern myself about 48 units as a requirement for the Evergreen B.A.; that's 192 credit hours, higher than at other State institutions. Can we accept the 4 credit hour unit while simultaneously reducing the total number of units for the baccalaureate, thus accelerating college study time? [We did.]

(3) The formula divisors ... result from inter-institutional agreement, not from OPP&FM dictate.

(4) The average full-time undergraduate load at other four-year state institutions, at the last CHE report, was 15.9 credit hours; close enough, in my opinion.

(5) Getting OPP&FM and CHE to accept the shift should entail no great difficulties if we lay the proper groundwork; more important is the assuring of endorsement inter-institutionally (I've already broached the subject to staff members of LBC [Legislative Budget Committee], OPP&FM, and CHE, and to ICBO [Inter-Institutional Committee of Budget Officers])."

On July 2, Kormondy sent a memo to President McCann on the "Re-evaluation of the Evergreen Unit": "I respectfully request your approval and subsequent recommendation to the Board of Trustees at its July meeting for re-evaluation of the Evergreen unit from the equivalence of 5 quarter credit hours to 4 quarter credit hours effective with the Fall Quarter, 1973-74." As the "substantive arguments for this change," he summarized the reasoning previously presented. He concluded by saying that he was deferring any recommendation about the number of quarter credit hours to be required for graduation until there could be discussion with the faculty during the fall orientation. In the penultimate paragraph, he added a perceptive observation: "Although there will be some logistical problems in effecting this conversion in the Offices of Admissions and Records and Financial Aid, none of the problems are insurmountable nor as difficult as such a change would be at a subsequent time."

All went smoothly, if slowly, in the next few weeks. Charles McCann was highly regarded for persistence in his visionary idealism – his intellectual and ethical stamina. He was not easy to persuade. But once he could envision that a recommended course of action was the right thing to do, he would press you to the wall to gather the information and reasoning he needed to present the case forcibly and eloquently, whether in correspondence or in testimony before the Governor's staff and the committees of the State Senate and House of Representatives. The Evergreen Board of Trustees accepted McCann's recommendation of the action proposed by Ed Kormondy. Through correspondence, CHE approved the revaluation of credit and spread the word to academic registrars throughout the State. There remained to be sought only the approval of OPP&FM of the financial changes connected with the revaluation.

Late in the summer, McCann, Kormondy, Clabaugh, and I had an appointment with Wally Miller, Director of OPP&FM and his deputy in charge of the funding of higher education. Aside from making a show of solidarity, the rest of us Greeners were not needed. McCann did the talking, and did it well. When he came to the crucial issue of the disparity between our policy of counting 15 QCH as full-time study and the other institutions' reporting of at least 15.9 QCH by FTE student enrollment, Director Miller asked his deputy if the figures were accurate. The deputy assured him that they were.

Miller quizzed McCann about why, when we would have known about this situation for almost two years, we had not come to his agency earlier to correct the disparity. "What were you people thinking?" McCann responded with the arguments for inaction made by Joe Shoben for keeping our currency "hard," and not forcing issues in a climate of legislative doubts about us and public disfavor. We thought it prudent not to presume too much and, having been so bold in other ways, to be comparatively modest where credit and finances were concerned. Miller said, "That's all very noble, but it's not the way we think here. If you are providing the services, then you deserve the support."

As we were taking our leave, after a round of ritual handshakes, Director Miller remarked that it was a good thing we had come in when we did. He could not change our allocation for the current academic year but could do so for the next. If Evergreen had gone through another biennium using the older calculations, his agency would have depended upon them as furnishing an historical pattern and would have employed them in its long-range plans for funding higher education. It would then have been difficult indeed to make the necessary adjustments.

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One-fifteenth of anything doesn't seem like very much. It may appear that some of us made a lot of fuss about rectifying a slight disadvantage. But when one considers the fractional improvement, over the years, in the context of at least two million credit hours awarded and many more millions of dollars contributed to the academic operating budget by the State, the effort to make the correction seems to have been warranted.