

THE M 'n M MANIFESTO
MY SNOWMAN'S BURNING DOWN

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I. The "Problem"

It's impossible to spend much time on The Evergreen Campus without coming with or hearing about "the problem." Administrators, faculty and staff walk around up-tight, students wander around spaced-out, and there seems to be a general sense of uneasiness all over the place. Some programs, some students and faculty, some projects and internships are going along splendidly. Some people here seem to have a firm sense of who and what they are, and they are forging ahead. But there seems to be a pervasive malaise, a funk, or a depression, hanging in the very air we breathe instead of the excitement and vitality a lot of us are looking for. Some of our Coordinated Studies Programs are hardly "coordinated," (others are "studies" by only the greatest stretch of the imagination), seminars are pointless if they aren't dissolved (and some of those that still meet are in effect "dissolved"), students complain that they aren't learning anything, long-faced faculty members trudge on grimly, fearing the next frustrating encounter with Woodstock Nation anti-intellectualism, meetings bog down in meaningless excess verbiage, everyone is buried in tons of paper--today's unread memos piled on top of last week's, communication is so bad that important things end up getting done late, if at all, and the time just keeps on going by with people running around wanting "somebody to do something." This is only a partial listing of the ills that Evergreeners agonize over and spend hours rapping about, but it gets at what seems to be "the problem."

This "problem" has a whole series of implications, many of which keep this whole venture perilously close to collapsing around our ears. First, our desire for community ends up as a phantasm or a bugaboo. What many people seem to be looking for is mobbism, not community, which is a group of unique individuals with shared goals and interests. We get all wrapped up in Huxley's touchie, soundie, tastie, feelie, Orwell's group think or some other distorted sense of unity rather than real community. The proper concept of our community is a willing (in the sense of consciously chosen) bonding of separate individuals, not a glob of mindlessly identical ciphers. We should choose to unite rather than be forced to it. (Ever wonder why "straights" and non-whites feel so uncomfortable in this "community"?). So what happens is that scores of people gather together and bitch about the lack of "community." We needn't rehearse all those old cliches about "standing in one's own light" and "the forest and the trees," but ironically, they seem to apply. We've got so much "community" that we're about to bust, but so far it's a community of misery and frustration. Rather than building community, we need to take advantage of the community we have and direct it in more creative ways, i.e. toward learning.

A second implication of the "problem" is that the rampant insecurity about the identity of this institution keeps everyone perpetually on edge. Administrators are afraid to make decisions, faculty are afraid to teach, students are afraid to study. Everyone seems so afraid of doing something that Evergreen is not, that they don't do some of the things that Evergreen thinks (or says it thinks) it is.

A third tendency implied in the "problem" is the tendency toward dissolution, the most pernicious and dangerous of the three mentioned here. This one leads subtly, but nonetheless directly, to extreme do-your-own thingism (witness the pressure towards a curriculum based mainly on individual and/or group contracts). It leads away from interdisciplinary, coordinated study and ever more toward courses in this and departments of that. The point here is not that everyone should be for everyone or any other such perversion of coordination or togetherness, nor is it that coordinated studies should be the only acceptable learning mode here, but rather -that we should avoid the precesses of fragmentation and factionalization that this culture has built into us all. This is the only way we can make the most of coordinated study, the only aspect of our whole approach that is new or innovative. While no other college has as much contract study as we expect to, the mode is not new. The "problem" and its implications are with us; maybe by dealing with some of the possible causes we can better understand how to get at some of the solutions also available to us.

II. Possible Causes

These seem to be some of the things at the root of our troubles:

- 1) The obscure nature of the institution and its Goals. Until folks both on and off campus know just what this college is in clear, concrete terms, none of us will be able to do his job or to tell when someone else, regardless of his title, is doing his.
- 2) Ambiguous and unclear catalogue and campus rhetoric. The vagueness of our language in crucial places, which makes it possible, indeed common, for folks to understand what they choose rather than what we mean about the curriculum, the educational process, the college administration, and other campus matters, seems to be a direct contributor to the confusion and lack of morale all over the campus. Further, the broad generalities about what ought to be happening do not accurately describe what is going on around here.
- 3) The failure of academic leadership by the people responsible for it. There has been too little effort expended by faculty and administrators in trying to define, clarify and perform the functions for which we were hired. Too many people have been too afraid of charges of "authoritarianism."
- 4) The misleading implications of the COG Report. The suggestion that "community" means representative or participatory democracy in guiding college affairs has led people to believe that the real decision-making power around here is vested somewhere other than where it is, i.e. in the hands of those appointed by the legislature, the board of trustees, and the college's administrative staff.
- 5) The most crippling aspect of the "Woodstock" culture: the superficial, paranoid, anti—intellectualism of students and faculty. There is a strong tendency in a significant and influential minority toward a kind of cultism that asserts things like "whatever happens happens, and it is all good," "you can't learn anything worth knowing from books, and besides, people are more important," "honest and open communication is the whole trip," and so on ad nauseum.

Implied in all five of the points above is the recognition of a connection between language and thought. Evergreen's language, both on campus and in crucial public documents about itself in one way reflects its confusion and shortage of balls, but in another way it does not adequately describe the realities of the Evergreen experience.

Evergreen's language is treacherous. The catalog, the COG Report, the Social Contract and the President's letter on gun policy lend themselves, because of their often vague and slippery language, to widespread misinterpretation. It is a commonplace to observe that each member of the Evergreen community has a private vision of what the place is all about, yet this healthy diversity does not go hand in hand with some widely understood and accepted assumptions. The commonplace is accurate and should come as no surprise, given the absence of clearly articulated goals that the members of the community understand and accept, and of a sustained dialogue intended to guide the development of all areas of the college. The language of our most important documents can easily be construed as a set of promises which, if the experience of the past six months is any indication, can never be kept. Probably the most widely held misconception is that Evergreen is a participatory democracy. The experience of the first year of operation directly contradicts this ideal. The truth is that Evergreen is not a participatory democracy, and we ought not to flinch from saying so. The college deserves whatever troubles come its way if

its public proclamations are consistently proved false by its real organizational structure and daily practice. The structure of power in Evergreen ought to be evident to everyone: Power comes from the state government to the Board of Trustees and thence to the President and the Administration and Faculty and Staff. Yet the ideals of democratic community lingers, raising false hopes.

The consequences of our misleading rhetoric have been severe. We are not talking here about a problem of "student power" or the prospect of "strikes." No amount of idealistic rhetoric can be expected to ward off such complex social upheavals anyway. Rather, we are talking about a far more subtle problem resulting from the vague language of the institution: the lack of clarity concerning the role of the faculty. Are faculty to be regarded as "co-learners" and "facilitators"? That seems to be the official rhetoric. Again, however, experience subverts ideals, for increasing numbers of faculty and students have seen through these euphemisms and are determined to carve out a more serious role for the faculty than the official rhetoric suggests. The time has come to give up the silly defensive posture implied in such terms as "co-learner." Surely neither the Trustees, nor the Administration, nor the Faculty harbors such self-contempt as to imagine that the faculty's training and experience and talents count for so little as this language suggests. The popular revulsion at the "authoritarian" teacher and classroom need not be made into an article of faith. In any case, such an article of faith is largely meaningless when embodied in catchphrases like "co-learner."

At most, "co-learner" means that the faculty at TESC continue to learn while in the service of the institution. That, after all, is one of the most attractive features of life in the academy. Why give it a new name? As hinted above, there may be two attitudes that lie behind the new language. The first is a fear that the faculty will earn a reputation for being tyrannical. We should recognize, however, that mere words can never protect against professorial tyranny; only sound hiring and rigorous evaluation procedures can provide such insurance. And only serious discussion and review of these procedures--of which there has been virtually none involving faculty themselves this year-- can guarantee that these policies are meeting the needs of the institution. The second attitude underlying such curious usage as "co-learner" and "facilitator" amounts to a contempt for the intellectual-academic-artistic life. The contempt lies deep, residing probably in the minds of all of us, and springs forth in deceptive language. Such contempt in students is probably to be expected, especially today. The academy, however, instead of legitimizing these tendencies should expect students to question them. It should, in other words, be unequivocally committed to education. Evergreen is not meeting students' needs when it hedges so conspicuously on the definition of the role of its faculty.

But getting rid of the language of "co-learner" is not enough. A new definition must be devised, but until it is forthcoming we can only rely on the traditional one: that the faculty are to be considered teachers or instructors or professors, qualified by virtue of their education, talents, and experience to teach students. Faculty and students are decidedly not equal, in this respect, despite the easily misunderstood official rhetoric.

Only the most fearful and insecure will see faculty leadership and faculty authoritarianism as being identical.

III. The Way It 'Spozed To Be

Given all this talk about "the problem," its possible causes and our murky language, it should now be easier for us to focus attention on the real expectations that we should have of ourselves and each other as members of this educational community. This essay doesn't speak to the student living situation, or problems with facilities and "support services." Neither do we discuss structural or personnel changes that need to be made. These are important things, but our concern is with simply trying to make what we have in the academic area work better. Our commitment to innovation and experimentation notwithstanding, we are a state institution legitimately charged with the responsibility of educating students and awarding baccalaureate degrees. And as such we do have means by which we invite students and faculty to join us and, if necessary, to leave us. Therefore,

we are morally bound to state clearly what we expect of those people who are here now and of those to come. However misleading and obscure the language of our official publications and our campus life, the following are the things, with only an occasional modification, that the members of our community are supposed to be doing. By listing these activities we do not mean to suggest that none of them are going on now, nor do we believe that they comprise a rigid structure. We only mean to reaffirm them as the core of Evergreen's educational process.

- 1) Covenants--Reciprocal agreements between faculty, students and the college. These binding agreements should clearly specify the individual and mutual activities and responsibilities of the people involved in either coordinated, contract study, or internships.
- 2) Evaluations--To receive credit, students are expected to write critical and constructive evaluations of themselves, their faculty, and programs or contracts. Faculty in turn are expected to critically and constructively evaluate student work, to award or deny credit on the basis of work accomplished as specified in covenant agreements, and to indicate to students at the earliest possible moment what their prospects in their current courses of study appear to be. Faculty are also expected to write evaluations of themselves, their most immediate colleagues, and their particular curricular activity.
- 3) Subject-matter oriented seminars--Students are expected to do substantial reading of materials negotiated over but finally determined by their faculty. In addition to reading, certain seminars will stress the development of artistic or technical skills.
- 4) Lectures--Since the lecture is still a valid form of teaching and learning, despite faddish arguments to the contrary, members of this community are expected to give and listen to formal lectures by faculty, students and invited guests on a regular basis. These lectures are an integral part of the learning experience at Evergreen. (It seems to us that lectures--debates, too, for that matter--might help increase the exchange of ideas and information among persons or groups with similar interests).
- 5) Writing--Language is one foundation of culture. Moreover, writing is as valuable a mode of learning as are reading and speaking. Therefore, students at Evergreen are expected to write regularly as part of their education.
- 6) Skill Development--This college is expected to provide opportunities for students to develop the skills necessary to the completion of their courses of study; students in turn are expected to avail themselves of those opportunities.
- 7) Faculty Group Seminars--The faculty should meet regularly in their Alpha, Beta, Gamma groups for the purpose of improving their teaching. Such meetings are consistent with Evergreen's dedication to developing an alternative style of education.
- 8) Individual Motivation and Group Dynamics--Students are expected to develop both independent initiative and the ability to work in groups as complimentary modes for pursuing their academic work. Faculty and staff are expected to use their Alpha, Beta, Gamma groups as models to develop their ability to work in groups. (Meetings for this purpose might help to overcome the isolation that individuals and teaching teams too often feel).
- 9) Curricular Design and Schedule--Faculty are expected to inform the

community, especially their students, of the over--all design of their programs or contracts as much in advance of specific activities as possible. They are also expected to publish a weekly schedule of program or contract activities.

IV. Creating Evergreen

If this description of the Evergreen "problem" is accurate, and if the analysis of the possible causes offered here is valid, then to live up to the expectations stated here will help to create an exciting and valuable alternative style of education. We will create Evergreen. It will be a liberal arts college in which students can acquire knowledge across the traditional disciplines of the Humanities, Natural Sciences and the Social Sciences and develop mastery in some of them. It will be a college in which students can gain broad general knowledge as well as such specialized knowledge as we can provide. This much is possible today, and has been possible all year long. To the objection that this kind of college will produce graduates with only a vague, superficial knowledge of a variety of subject matters, we say that if Evergreen lives up to these expectations for a sufficient number of years, it will be possible for future Evergreen students to forge their generalized and (their specialized knowledge into a coherent whole.

NOTE: Please join us in a discussion of this statement and possible courses of action in Lect. Hall #1, on Wednesday, March 15th at 7:30 p.m.