



T E S C
OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT & PROVOST
July 19, 1999
Memorandum

TO: General Education/Evergreen Learning Outcomes DTF
Brian Price (Chair), Sharon Anthony, Olivia Archibald, Arun Chandra, Jin Darney, Emily Decker, Anne Fischel, George Freeman, Jr., Patrick Hill, Steve Hunter, Cynthia Kennedy, Ernestine Kimbro, Phyllis Lane, Lee Lyttle, Jim Neitzel, Toska Olson, Kitty Parker, Yvonne Peterson, Gilda Sheppard, Matt Smith, Ann Storey, Gail Tremblay, Sherry Walton, and E.J. Zita
Students: Anatra Brewer, Debbie Dietz, Steve Dublin, Jesse Fries-Kraemer, Molly Jarchow, Jon Prudhomme, Kelli Sanger, Sasha Schworm, and Hilary Tombaugh

FROM: Barbara Leigh Smith

SUBJECT: General Education and Evergreen Learning Outcomes DTF Charge

I am writing to ask you to serve on the General Education and Evergreen Learning Outcomes DTF. The DTF's first meeting will be on September 14, from 9:00 a.m. to Noon, in CAB 108. Since this is a pre-contract day, faculty will receive extra compensation. I expect this DTF will meet weekly during governance time for several quarters of the 1999-2000 academic year with a final report to me no later than May, 2000. Brian Price has agreed to chair this committee.

As its overall charge, this DTF has to respond to the Northwest Commission on College's recommendation "... that The Evergreen State College make sure that all of its students acquire the competencies appropriate to general education, especially but not exclusively in the area of mathematics. This is called for by the college's own goals as well as Standard 2.C Whatever the means taken, given a situation in which there are no required courses/programs, and in which student choices are largely unconstrained, there is nonetheless an institutional responsibility to achieve its stated liberal and general education goals and the requirements for general education and related instruction set forth in Standard Two. The Commission will schedule a 'focused visit' to Evergreen in Fall 2000 to follow-up on this recommendation specifically."

This recommendation dovetails other information we are receiving from the Governor's office and the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) which are setting firm expectations about student learning outcomes. In December 1998, HECB passed a policy stating that institutions must have student learning outcomes for students in all academic programs by the year 2003. More specifically, colleges must develop learning outcomes in the areas of quantitative skills and technological literacy (defined as familiarity with applications typically

used in the workplace). By 2000, we must report on progress in putting such outcome measures in place. There is also discussion about statewide learning outcomes in writing, and we are already part of a pilot program to assess senior-level writing.

I see the learning outcome discussion as integrally related to the general education issues raised by the Commission on Colleges. It seems to me that the best way to discuss general education is in terms of the learning outcomes we expect our graduates to achieve. I hope that Evergreen can produce an innovative and thoughtful approach to this challenge. It seems to me that this college, more than most others, tries to educate its graduates with skills, values, and competencies that far surpass traditional distribution requirements.

What does all of this mean? First, the college will, of course, have to comply with the Commission's recommendation, but we will have some latitude in terms of how we do so. Perhaps more importantly, however, the Commission's recommendation raises legitimate questions we should be asking about ourselves as an interdisciplinary liberal arts college.

What do we already know about the gaps in general education program? We have good information about both the credit students take at Evergreen as well as what they have before coming here. A large (344) random sample of 1996 graduates demonstrates that large numbers of our students are well below commonly accepted general education standards in exposure to the arts, the sciences, and quantitative reasoning. For several areas, significant numbers of our graduates report no credits in areas important to a liberal arts education.

<u>Area</u>	<u>Per cent of graduates with no credit at all in the areas below</u>
Art	39%
Science	33%
Math	30%
Social Science	8%
Humanities	7%

The common expectation for general education is a minimum of 10 credits in the broad divisional areas (though usually art and humanities are combined), and a modest four credits in math. The proportion of Evergreen graduates in the sample who did *not* reach this standard is as follows:

Art	67%
Science	52%
Math	36%
Social Science	21%
Humanities	22%

I hope this will provide a good opportunity to raise questions among ourselves about what an Evergreen graduate should look like. This cannot be thought of solely as additional requirements to place upon core programs. We should instead think about our graduation expectations for all our students, including the 80% of our graduates who are transfer students. Therefore, the purview of this DTF is all four years of the curriculum as a whole.

The Northwest Commission on College's recommendation thus offers this DTF the challenge

and opportunity of considering the meaning to TESC of general education and of Liberal Arts education for the twenty-first century, and of considering how both can be meaningfully addressed through interdisciplinary, collaborative pedagogy. Though committed to achieving workable, broadly acceptable outcomes, the DTF's approach should embrace philosophical discussion and reflection, with the aim of creating imaginative, experimental, and stimulating practical proposals for curricular and other changes to meet the Commission's recommendations for student outcomes.

How might we respond? This is for you to recommend but it seems to me that one approach would be to approach the issues through multiple avenues for students to fulfill distribution expectations by:

- * Doing a better job of infusing these throughout the curriculum
- * Building modules as avenues to satisfy distribution expectations
- * Testing out through competency-based assessments
- * Developing stated expectations which guide advising
- * Clarifying current credit equivalencies on transcripts
- * Making better use of summer school

As you approach this important task, I ask you to consult broadly with students, faculty and staff. Please also look carefully at the literature on this subject and at good models at other institutions. I will gladly provide you with support materials.

In addition to responding to the learning outcomes issue and the general education issue, I am asking this DTF to re-examine the role of the Learning Resource/Writing Center. This year Olivia Archibald will be leading the Writing Center as Interim Director. We want to re-examine the role of the director, the job description, and the way the Center functions. I also want you to appoint a sub-committee to deal with this beginning in January after some of the general directions about general education are set. I suggest that you have Lee Lyttle chair that sub-committee since the LRC reports to him, and he will be in charge of the reorganization.

In summary, your task is the following:

1. Develop a clear policy statement about general education at Evergreen, recognizing that general education is an issue for the whole curriculum, not just core, and that it must include the large number of transfer students as well as native four-year Evergreen students. I am hopeful that we can gain a leadership position in thinking about general education in a way that is distinctive and provocative for higher education.
2. Consider how the achievement of general education will be measured. While this may practically involve the metrics of counting credit hours, I encourage you to be more conceptual, creative and imaginative about this. Perhaps the metrics themselves have the potential to be highly innovative.
3. Consider how academic advising needs to be organized to support the new approaches to general education.
4. Revisit the role of the Learning Resource Center and the job description of the Writing Center Coordinator.