

A MODEL FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY:  
THE EVERGREEN STATE COLLEGE (TESC)

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The cry "More interdisciplinarity!" applies not only to research but also to education. The opportunity to experience and to practice interdisciplinary thinking and working must be made available in formal education, not only as a means to solving more effectively the problems of society, but also for the sake of personal development -- so say the recommendations of the Arbeitskreis [Task Force on] Faecheruebergreifendes Lehren und Lernen [Inter- or Supra-Disciplinary Teaching and Learning -- see the "Translator's Note" at the conclusion of the article] (FueLL; see Huber, et al., 1994). In colleges and universities of the U.S.A., one can learn how interdisciplinary studies may look, as I have already attempted to show in a summary (see Huber, 1994). In order to illustrate this general report with an example, the following account will describe and evaluate in detail one American college which has distinguished itself insofar as its curriculum is designed throughout for interdisciplinary study: The Evergreen State College (TESC) in Olympia, WA.

But at the outset two objections should be raised: Will this effort be at all useful for German readers? Are we concerning ourselves, in the first place, "only" with a college which is neither directly nor inferentially comparable to a German university? And then, in the second place, aren't all the forces at work among us, both principles and practices, opposed a priori to the realization or even the desirability of a purely interdisciplinary curriculum?

Against such doubts, with which I also approached my investigation of this college, some hopes may be expressed. First: An American liberal arts college may function in a different organizational pattern and have the mandate to provide general education -- which in the German educational system is the province of the higher levels of the Gymnasium. But it also has a function which in Germany is provided -- or ought to be provided -- in the first years at the university: the introduction to advanced academic studies. Perhaps we might be able to learn something by examining the Evergreen model. Second: Even if one can't imagine, or doesn't want to imagine that such a model as a whole could be instituted here, the thoroughgoing interdisciplinary conception of the Evergreen curriculum fosters a large variety of substantive and organizational elements for teaching and learning across disciplinary boundaries. These elements can be considered individually, each deserving to be examined carefully with a view toward possible adoption.

## 1. APPROACH

### 1.2. Several Data.(1)

[(1)These and all the following remarks are based, unless otherwise noted, either on my own inquiries and observations on the site, or on the catalogues of The Evergreen State College, especially that of 1993/94; further, on Youtz 1984; TESC 1989; Teske (undated) 1989; Mott/Hunter 1991; Thompson 1991, 1992; Tommerup 1993.]

The Evergreen State College -- named for the trees which characterize the State of Washington -- was founded, by contrast to the large majority of other institutions, as one of the few state-supported liberal arts colleges independent of connections with a university. It is the only one of its kind in the State of Washington (and that is why it always uses the article "The" in its official designation). It numbers, in total, about 3400 students, of whom about 5% are enrolled in the inner-city branch in Tacoma, 12% have part-time status, and over 8% are enrolled in the three small graduate programs (Environmental Studies, Public Administration, Teaching). Ethnic minorities are comparatively weakly represented (a condition which, at least for black people, holds true for the whole state). The faculty consists of about 180 people and conforms in the percentage of Ph.D.'s (75%) and recruitment (from all parts of the U.S.) to the standard of good liberal arts colleges.

### 1.2. The Campus:

Because one has become accustomed to such "build-them-and-use-them" structures ["Aufbau- und Veruegungszentren"] as the single-purpose or multi-purpose "functional" buildings at our newer German universities, similar to the earlier high-rise office-buildings, one has also become used to considering the question of spatial accommodations for academic teaching and learning as a secondary issue. Things work otherwise in American colleges, especially the "pure" colleges which exist outside university complexes. In such an American institution, the campus testifies to the spirit and the status of the college; to its interest in promoting academic study or its consideration for its students; to its history (if it is an older institution), which can be read in its buildings just as one would interpret the growth-rings of a tree; or to its guiding concepts (if it is a newer institution). TESC belongs to the latter category, and its campus belongs among those conceived as architectural wholes.

The campus lies in the middle of woods, in parts still old-growth forest (the college possesses about 1000 acres and a stretch of seashore or, better, fjord-shore), near the city limits of Olympia, which is only a small city in appearance but

is the capital of the state and possesses an impressive capitol structure. The college buildings, situated as if in the middle of a natural landscape, are arranged in a kind of semi-circle about a large plaza ("Red Square") which opens itself to the visitor. They present slight gradations of height, following the lightly rolling terrain, and using the slopes below them for daylight-basements, an amphitheater, and access-roads. Above, the buildings, with their average of four stories, stand lower than or even with the tall trees -- as is the case with the landscape of this region, tall trees indeed. (The highest building is not, as one would expect, the clock-tower, but a student dormitory constructed in the woods beyond the half-circle of academic buildings.) The facades, though of uniformly fair-faced concrete, are artistically arranged without being any the less functional. Inside, although the overflowing bulletin boards bear witness to many facets of student life, the buildings are rather comfortable. There are carpeted corridors; amazingly well-laid-out sitting-areas in all possible corners and niches, as well as in the library (which is open from morning to midnight); tables and chairs which can be easily arranged in new circles; large lounges, which can be used for a variety of academic presentations, in the Library Building; and a great hall, in the Campus Activities Building, in which all kinds of people can congregate and around which the numerous student organizations have their offices. Concerning academic activities, one is especially struck by the seminar-rooms and the well-equipped laboratories. There are only five lecture-halls, arranged cleverly in a round building. "Peace with Nature; Communication among Human Beings!" -- so one could interpret the message of this campus-configuration.

The students add considerable color to this picture. Not only is the age-range wide -- from the typical college-age, 18-24 (2/3) to over 40 (1/10) -- but also the social backgrounds of the students are evidently quite various; the styles of dress are adventurously pieced together; the hairstyles are bold (insofar as they are not hidden by the wool caps and baseball caps worn even in seminars) and shimmer in all the colors of the rainbow. The placards and notice-boards indicate interests in Native American poetry and Hispanic music, aerobics and meditation, holistic nutrition, and organic farms (there is one located on the college grounds), as well as concern for the rain forests, the homeless of the region, the victims of famine in Mexico, and the tutoring of street-children in Zimbabwe. One term can stand for all: "alternative."

### 1.3. An Offshoot of the Era of Educational Innovation

"Alternative" characterizes the image of TESC both in its neighborhood and in national higher educational circles. But it isn't only in the campus atmosphere and the ecological undercurrent that the college shows itself to be a response to

the educational-reform era of the 60's. One must also consider, besides the interdisciplinary studies which will interest us here: the renunciation of departments, the emphasis upon teaching, the superseding of lectures by seminars, the replacement of grades by narrative evaluations, the emphasis upon cooperative learning, the cultivation of opportunities for intensive practical application (see TESC 1989, especially pp. 13ff.), the high valuation of democracy and low valuation of hierarchy by the faculty members, the lack of interest in fraternities and sororities, and the fact that (up to the present) no formal student government has been found to be necessary. The college shared many of these elements with other institutions founded at that time, but most of these either do not exist any longer or have changed back to conventional practices. One of the sources of the vitality and viability of Evergreen may lie in the strength and flexibility of its interdisciplinary design.

## 2. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM

### 2.1. The Basic Design of Interdisciplinary Study at TESC

The basic design is called a Coordinated Study Program and is, first of all, to be described in its social and organizational aspects. Under a theme which subsumes various disciplines (see below), such a program will be organized, initiated, developed and supported by a team of two-to-five faculty members (see Teske), and carried through with a corresponding number of students, according to the standard relationship at TESC of 1:22, therefore with 44-to-110 students. The program, offering 12-16 credits (usually 1 credit assumes one academic contact-hour of 60 minutes per week), engages the complete effort or the largest part of the "credit-bearing" weekly assignment of the normal full-time students. It does so for at least one term, but more often for two or all three terms (Trimesters) of the academic year. Within this framework the students and faculty members participate in plenary sessions (lectures by individual faculty members, symposia led by all faculty-team members, presentations of films and research, workshops, and field trips), component seminars (group-sessions each supervised by one member of the faculty team), and other activities (such as laboratory periods, language workshops, tutorials, or periods of work on individual projects).

This arrangement requires a major commitment on the part of the students. Whereas in other places in the U.S.A. and also in German universities -- indeed, even in the course-system of the upper division of the Gymnasium -- they will seek out individual courses from a whole array and "mix" them for themselves, here they must buy one of the (less numerous) "packages." They choose not membership in a small class but in a single group, albeit a large one. They choose their teachers not one by one but as a

faculty team. They choose not the offerings of departments but a single -- if comprehensive -- theme. (2)

[(2) Concerning the upper-division offerings of the German Gymnasium, an analogy may be found in the "concentration-profile," combinations of basic-courses and achievement-courses, with which several schools are experimenting, for example, the Max-Brauer-School in Hamburg.]

On the other hand, they stand to gain much by this organization. Instead of the usual frittering away of energy, they can concentrate upon this one theme. They can come to know this theme not through the perspective of a single conventional department but in various substantive facets and through various disciplinary perspectives, they can work on it through various media and formats, and they can do so with much room for the development of their own questions and positions. Finally, instead of the prevailing anonymity, they find themselves for many hours of the week -- now in smaller groupings, now in larger -- in the same team of fellow-students, all working together in the same term on the same theme and the same texts, assignments, or problems.

## 2.2. Placing the Program in Context

In the context of the academic system and the discussions of curricular reforms in American colleges, the following characteristics of this model stand out:

-- As a curricular design, which for however long or short a period of time brings together the arrangements for learning, both substantively and socially, into a distinctive unity, the [Evergreen] program poses a radical alternative to the "modular system," which, still -- i.e. after the withering of the post-60's experiments in reform -- characterizes American colleges. (For a description and a critique, see Rothblatt 1989). This modular system presents arrays of separate courses: offered by departments according to the academic levels of the students; completed and weighted according to applicable credit-hours through the passing of examinations set by individual instructors; and selected by the students, who put together their individual programs from these offerings (therefore also known as the "cafeteria system"). The curricula for the majoring students prescribe only how many courses at which levels and in which areas -- including the major discipline, any minor disciplines, and any related disciplines -- must be passed in order to earn the Baccalaureate degree. For undergraduates the colleges define (as a rule, above the level of the departments) general education requirements for the first two years. At the least, these requirements force the students, regardless of their intentions or the specialities they may already have chosen, to take courses in each of the three large divisions (Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences).

The organizational advantages of this system are large: it can be planned, it is flexible, it offers many options, and it is therefore adaptable to individual wishes. The drawbacks, however, involve the fragmentation of the content of the studies and, especially in larger institutions, the complete dissolving of social relationships. Numerous attempts have been made in various places, and in various forms, to remedy the situation through "integrated learning," at least for the area of general education and the lower division of the college (see AAA 1990-92).

-- In contrast, the coordinated study programs of TESC posit not only the concentration upon and study-in-depth of the subject matter, beyond the boundaries of disciplinary areas, but also collaborative learning. They represent a strong emphasis on the form of organization known as "Learning Communities," which in recent years has been introduced in an increasing number of community colleges and liberal arts colleges (see Gabelnick, et al. 1990; Smith 1991). It is the central principle and also the defining characteristic of these programs that one and the same group of students, even if it is only a part of their academic load, attend several courses together. Thus they can share, discuss, and enhance their experiences as learners, forming a learning community (improvement of the interaction among students). Perhaps they will even form a community of interests which can influence the inner workings of a course (intensification of the interaction among students). More extensive arrangements can take many shapes and sizes. A course can be devised specifically for such a group of students (now expanded). The contents of the course can be coordinated across disciplinary boundaries, with the consent or the shared planning of the faculty, extending even to team teaching (improvement of the interaction among teachers). Finally, the faculty members themselves can also become part of the learning community, in their own meetings (e.g., in a faculty seminar), or in meetings with the students (e.g., in a fishbowl arrangement).

Both forms of faculty interaction can be found at Evergreen. That teachers themselves should learn in areas new to them is essential to the construction of interdisciplinary programs. It is also, however, a highly attractive idea within a thoroughly classical conception of the university and belongs among the most important elements in the tradition of Meiklejohn 1920 and Tussman 1969, to which Evergreen also belongs. I was welcomed into an Evergreen faculty seminar in which four teachers, academic professionals in their disciplines (psychology, literary study, physics, and mathematics), but none of them a professional classical philologist, worked on Plato's dialogue "Ion," from a basic understanding of the text upwards to controversial interpretations -- which they treated a few days later in the student-seminars of their program. Teaching is rarely so "fresh"!

-- Concerning the content of the program: The approach to interdisciplinary integration at Evergreen parallels the main thrust of similar attempts at other colleges to deal with basic studies, and especially "general education." In this sense, it therefore includes such typical programs as "Great Books" or "Classical and Modern: Construction of Human Experience." Beyond these, however, it extends much further, into the full-time curricula of even the more advanced students, which conventionally would be organized in sequences of courses determined by specialization into "major" academic disciplines. The following sections will describe this practice more exactly.

### 2.3. Other Relationships, Other Articulations

As I have already noted, TESC contains no departments. Instead, "Specialty Areas" appear. To be sure, these introduce specialization; but they deal with themes which cut across the boundaries of conventional disciplines. These too are groupings of teachers, still in part representing different disciplines, but only in the sense of contributing to the area's curriculum from their respective fields. In principle, they exist only for the time being and are, at any rate, not institutes with their own facilities and their own rights in the recruiting of faculty personnel. (Thoroughly interdisciplinary committees are formed by the college for the task of faculty recruitment.)

In the academic year 1993/94 the Specialty Areas are titled: Knowledge and the Human Condition; Language and Culture; Native American Studies; Expressive Arts; Political Economy and Social Change; Management in the Public Interest; Science, Technology and Health; Environmental Studies; Science and Human Values.

They vary widely in the ways in which they are composed -- a heterogeneity which demonstrates equal amounts of common interest and of tolerance. "Knowledge and the Human Condition," obviously an "umbrella" theme, numbers 34 members -- a cross-section of all the disciplines of which the most strongly represented, as might have been expected, are those which fall within the humanities (18, including fine art); through the social sciences (12, including history); to the natural sciences (4 members). Almost as large (31) is "Science, Technology and Health," two-thirds of which is composed of natural-scientists of all disciplines, but "broken" through the collaboration of psychologists, sociologists, philosophy teachers and teachers of literature. "Environmental Studies" numbers 21 members, among them 13 natural scientists (8 of whom are biologists); but another 8 are social scientists (from sociology, political science, and economics, through urban planning and agriculture, to ecology). In "Expressive Arts" are 19 practicing artists, representing all fields from dance to photography. In contrast, the remaining groups are markedly smaller, numbering 7-to-10 members, but little less variegated in composition. It is also

possible for a faculty member to be affiliated with two "specialty areas," and the teams actually running the programs can include members of other specialty areas, who collaborate on an ad hoc basis.

According to their titles, the specialty areas can be roughly classified under the divisional headings of humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. But the programs they offer, at least in part, still cut across such divisional boundaries. Several examples: Within the offerings of "Expressive Arts," along with the "creative" programs one can also find programs in cultural anthropology or the sociology of the media, taught by interdisciplinary teams. "Knowledge and the Human Condition" includes programs in ethnography. In "Native American Studies" there will be studies of juvenile delinquency. "Political Economy and Social 'Change" includes a program on "American Identity in Transition." And "Science, Technology and Health" includes not only health-science, as the title suggests, but also such programs as "Science of the Mind" (one of the new "hybrid-disciplines" dealing with cognition) and "Post-Modern Bodies," which relates natural-scientific observations to cultural issues. It should also be noted that every program-description presented in the catalogue contains the course-equivalencies, listed by conventional disciplinary headings, which the participants can earn (in case such descriptions of the credit earned should ever be needed). Both through these equivalencies and the composition of the faculty team, the program-description announces the disciplinary concerns which are to be brought together in the program.

The actual working-out of the program cannot consistently fit the rhetoric of the program-description, which, after all, appeared much earlier as an announcement of good intentions.(3) [(3) Indeed, during the time of my visit discussions were taking place which suggested that this discrepancy is one of the causes for too high a drop-out rate.] Naturally there are instances even at Evergreen of boring people, clumsy performances, uninterested students, unsuccessful class-periods and conceptions, and the kinds of side-tracking of discussions into pet topics which German observers have felt to be "American" instances of superficiality or cultural narrow-mindedness. (See Frank 1993, but also Thompson 1991, p.81.) But this study deals with the potential which the constellation of learning-situations I have described may have for the science of education and the development of the intellect. I therefore present two examples from my own observations:

#### 2.4. The Intermediate Phase of Studies: Two Examples of Interdisciplinary Programs

I made a point of visiting the program "Post-Modern Bodies," offered under the specialty area "Study of Science and Human

Values," but cross-listed in the catalogue as a "related offering" by several other specialty areas. I did so because, according to the description, it seemed to be especially audacious. Issues of health and literary theory, visual analysis and scientific theory, rhetoric and photography -- how should all of these concerns go together? At the time of my visit, the group had already been through the reading and discussion of books by Foucault (Discipline and Punish) and Arney (Power and the Profession of Obstetrics). In the working seminars (two sessions of two hours each per week), the program was dealing with a book by Bourdieu (Unbearable Weight), which treats the experience of women with their own and others' perceptions of their bodies. In one of the sessions, in which I participated, the discussion focussed upon the experiences of alienation which pregnant women and women giving birth felt in a modern gynecological clinic. (By the way, the discussion, almost without intervention from the faculty member, was carried on completely by the students with contributions based upon the text. It was substantially strengthened by the presence of an older participant who, as a mother and former nurse, introduced two additional perspectives.) Of the four weekly meetings of the whole program-group (each lasting one-and-a-half hours), one, called "Oratorical Space," was devoted to the presentation of student projects (writings, speeches, and the like), and another to "Visual Analysis." In the session of the latter which I attended, a film was shown about a macho male just released from psychiatric treatment, who seduced a starlet. It was not a good film, but it provided all sorts of material for a discussion -- which took place immediately afterward -- about body-language, expressions of power, conceptions of illness, and symbolism.

Of the two lectures in the week when my observations took place, one had to be improvised because the designated lecturer was ill ("suffering from a social construct"). It presented the reflections of the sociologist on the faculty team about the cultural production of "the body" (or the body as a social construct, related closely to the work of Bourdieu), the contemporary uneasiness with the "animality" of the body, and the tendencies of modern science to do away with it or make it "virtual." Several students contributed comments from their readings in genetics, information theory and cognitive science (virtual reality). In the other lecture of the week, the philosopher of the faculty team explored the theme of relativism or constructivism implicit in the "cultural explanation" with a rigorous theoretical explication and contrasting of the social-scientific and natural-scientific modes of explanation.

The program also called for students to do their own creative work on the visualization of the theme: powerful photographs, but also collages and even "environments," which were to be presented at the end of the quarter in an exhibition. These projects were developed in extended workshop sessions with

the literary theorist of the team and an instructor of photography. The projects had a double function. Through the relationship with this program, the development of practical artistic skill and aesthetic expression (in the sense of "general education") was given a theme, a focus: the clinical, or medical-technological production or "instrumentalization" of the body. Conversely, the theoretical (and certainly not easy) substance of the seminars and lectures was quite differently treated through such activity and transformations into other media -- literally "taken to heart." The artistic expressiveness which some of the students worked out here in photographs of their own bodies was, to my mind, remarkable. (4) [(4) It is worthy of notice that, at least in part, other students came to the fore here than those who had been leaders in the seminar discussions.] On the other hand, they themselves explained to me in conversations how important such fulfilment was -- not only because they were achieving new technical competence (making, developing, enlarging photographs, etc.); not only because the different medium, material, and mode of working brought the program-theme home to them (Foucault's influence was to be felt everywhere in the pictures and, in part, in the captions applied to them); but also because they had learned for themselves the experience that pictures will always be manipulated (necessarily so), which fitted exactly the guiding concept of the program. Completely on their own initiative they cited interdisciplinary study as one of the large attractions of Evergreen and the advantage provided by this particular program that they could, to a certain extent, witness such collaboration among the members of the faculty team -- not only in the plenary sessions but also in the opportunity for them to be present (voluntarily) for the faculty "fishbowl" seminars, in which the team itself worked over the texts.

Another example: In contrast to the preceding program, which was designed for students in their second year of studies, "Science of Mind," in the specialty area "Science, Technology and Health," was offered to juniors and seniors (third- and fourth-year students) by three faculty members, representing philosophy (and computer science), neurobiology, and (cognitive) psychology (specializing in metacognition). The coordinating theme was: "What is the human mind? What is its structure?" The basic pattern here as well included: plenary sessions for lectures and films (four periods of two hours each per week) and parallel seminars for the discussion of the very comprehensive and demanding selection of theoretical literature (two hours per week, on the most important sources in the history of psychology and hypotheses for the contemporary discussion of cognitive structure, artificial intelligence, neural networks, and computer models of brain functions). In addition, this decidedly empirically-oriented program required two sessions of three hours each per week in the laboratory (either the Computer Center or Neurobiology) and a statistics workshop, as well as tutorial sessions ("Help" sessions) supporting both kinds of laboratory

assignments (for both of them, another 6 hours per week). During my visit, one of the seminar sessions was devoted to the discussion of philosophical questions which the students raised about the readings (on neuron-networks, among others): What is the meaning of "Representation"? What is the difference between learning and being programmed? What are the implications of "connectionism" for the question of free will vs. responsibility? -- and so on. A lecture surveyed and described the positions of the protagonists of "artificial intelligence" and the critics of these positions. A related presentation dealt with the latter (Searle) in an excellent documentary video-film (from the BBC), upon which the faculty members commented (about the possible future dissolving of the distinction between mind and matter, and of the boundaries between philosophy and natural science). The two further lectures treated (neurobiologically) the development of the brain and (psychologically) decision-making and heuristic processes. In the same time-span, and almost congruent, so far as the assignments were concerned, the activities in workshops and labs progressed, organized as mini-projects for individual research by the students. In these they pursued the program-theme of problem-solving by replicating classical psychological experiments geared to their own immediate environment, testing them, and simultaneously learning and using statistics -- all of this done by the continual use of computers.

By these methods the program simultaneously develops technological/methodological competence and fosters the practical application of theoretical principles in another context and medium -- the counterpart of the photographic work in the program previously described. But in its scientific demands, "Science of Mind" goes further: in the individual research projects (similar to German Facharbeiten [disciplinary research]) planned for the next quarter, which each student will design and carry out; and insofar as the integration developed by the program seems to me more intensively focussed (on the psychological components). But this focus seems to me to hold true for the program as a whole: it shows more of the structure of a new, developing subject matter -- a hybrid- or super-discipline (the Cognitive Sciences) -- rather than reflecting interdisciplinary concerns. Yet this new hybrid reveals itself as a combination of clearly recognizable, highly developed disciplines (in this case, biology, psychology, and computer science, each of which claims a sequence of lectures for itself). To be sure, the seminars allow space for the discussion of the emergent philosophical questions.

In similar fashion one can imagine the workings of other programs organized by other specialty areas for students mainly in the middle of their undergraduate careers. For example, in one area we shall find "Ecological Agriculture" or "Geography and Environment: (human and natural) Systems in Conflict"; in another, "Seeing the Light" or "The 'Artist' in Technoculture"; in a third, "Ethnography and Culture: Practicing the Craft" or

"Celtic and Slavic Folk Traditions." Next to such programs stand, as well, "group contracts" and "individual contracts" -- manifold forms of more concentrated and, in part, more disciplinarily oriented specialization. These are available mainly for the students' last undergraduate years. I shall treat them later. For now, I shall consider the beginning of their undergraduate careers.

### 2.5. The Beginning of Studies: Core Programs

Registration in core programs is required of all first-year students and recommended for those transferring from other undergraduate institutions. The core programs follow strictly the basic patterns prescribed for coordinated studies, both for the sake of orienting new students to the college and to present a breadth of subject-matter to them. In the academic year 1993-94, the following programs were offered:

- "The Context of Discovery" -- Along with an historical review of great contributors to various fields of knowledge and the arts (which seemed to the German observer perhaps too venturesome), the program pursued the questions of why and how discovery and creation happen: the conditions, the processes, the contexts.
- "Mirrors of Language" -- The intentions, forms and impacts of communications in the various media were to be studied, along with theories of language and the development of language.
- "Environment, Land and People" -- This program offered readings in the interactions between land and people, climate and ecology, as well as field-trips in the region.
- "The American West as Image and Reality" -- This program offered multiple perspectives on the American West: its nature and history; its use as a subject for literature and art.
- "Conquest and Revolution" -- This program offered a comparative study of the history, geography, anthropology, and political economy of Ireland, Mexico, and Peru.
- "Classical and Modern" -- This program offered a wide-ranging excursion through world literature (not only European!) from antiquity to the modern period (including films), similar to the extent of the program to be described next. This program, however, was organized in a theoretical perspective on "Constructions of Human Experience" and included contrasts between others' constructions and the students' own.
- "Great Stories" -- This was the Evergreen equivalent of the "great books" courses to be found at other institutions in the tradition of Meiklejohn and the University of Chicago (e.g., St. John's College, Annapolis, MD). During the academic year the program was to move from Gilgamesh and Homer; through Greek classical poetry, philosophy, and science; through the Bible; through Leonardo, Shakespeare and Newton; to Marx, Darwin, Freud, and contemporary literature. Here the pervading questions dealt with the impacts of the transformations from oral tradition to the embodiment of words in writing, from one literary form to

others, and from one medium of communications to another. At the time of my visit, Plato's dialogues were under discussion, and I could witness in one of the seminars how these questions were implicitly treated in the analysis of "incompleteness" [aporia] as a feature of the Socratic method which does not seem to accord with the written doctrines of Plato. I could not help noticing how vigorously the students debated with Socrates as if he were a contemporary figure, whom they were meeting in the primary sources; in what detail they worked out his arguments, which they were allowed to read in translation, quite differently from the procedures followed by students of a German Gymnasium; and how they brought techniques of interpretation to bear on the subject. (With all my uneasiness about the rapidity of the forays made in such a program, this experience fascinated me.)

No matter what theme may be, all the Core Programs present themselves as allgemeine Wissenschaftspropaedeutik (without knowing this term). [Tr. note: The term means something like "the development of general academic skills -- an introduction to reflective or consciously scientific thinking"]. Textual interpretation, logic, techniques of experimentation and evaluation of evidence, "qualitative and quantitative reasoning" -- all of these are commonly mentioned as basic methods. All such programs emphasize the improvement of expository writing (integrated into the program-work or treated in writing workshops). Some of them emphasize, as well, audiovisual representations or creative projects among the practical activities of the students. All media will be employed. It is also expected that all core programs will prepare students for work in all specialty areas (which, reciprocally, list participation in "any core program" as a prerequisite for their offerings).

It is doubtful whether this expectation is met -- or whether it can be met. Such a program as "Great Stories," for example, deals with Pythagoras or Euclid, Newton, Darwin or Freud; but it is questionable whether the basic understandings of the disciplines involved, brought (or not) from high school, will be sufficiently developed. One indication of shortcomings appears when the specialty areas emphasizing the natural sciences will strongly recommend, within their own offerings of coordinated study programs, introductory or foundational work to be done in the second year. Another indication appears when, in a mild heresy against the philosophy of the institution, the students of their own accord, or on the advice of their teachers, elect to take beyond their core programs, or at in latest in their second year, individual courses (modules) in the disciplinary areas in which they are deficient -- modules which are otherwise offered to part-time students. So far as work in foreign languages is needed, the procedure will be the same.

## 2.6. Toward Graduation: Disciplinary or Individual Specialization

The coordinated study programs described in 2.4 may involve students for all four years and allow them opportunities for senior projects or honors theses. Yet for the most advanced students, two further modes of study are available:

-- Group Contracts operate similarly to coordinated studies, but they have a narrower focus, are not so comprehensive, and will be led by one or two faculty members. They constitute a large part of the offerings for advanced students -- according to the 1993-94 catalogue. As the name indicates, they can also come into being when a group of students is able to enlist a teacher to work with it on a subject of common interest. More usually, however, one or two faculty members devise an offering, to which they attract the students. Group contracts also involve about sixteen academic hours per week; and they combine, for the same group of participants, lectures, seminars (in which an increasing number of student essays are presented), and -- when appropriate -- laboratory sessions, and also internships or field-work. But they are more definitely oriented toward particular disciplines and future studies or career-paths. The interdisciplinarity, usually suggested in the title, depends on the width of the horizon and breadth of the competence possessed by the individual teachers. I spent a long morning in one such group, "Landscape Processes." I saw just how much of computer-mapping, biology, meteorology, environmental issues, research methodology, and disciplinary analysis a competent geologist could master and present when he is stimulated in such a context.

-- Individual Learning Contracts allow advanced students to study independently according to the interests and competences which they have previously developed. They are, as the name says: contracts, for each of which a form is to be filled out jointly by a student and a faculty member. The students obligate themselves to carry out a particular program of learning and working -- readings, research, field-observations, evaluations of practical experience, laboratory experiments, and so on. The teachers obligate themselves to support and to evaluate the work -- giving advice, offering regular supervision, and so on (rather like the effective supporting of a diploma-thesis or a doctoral dissertation). It is a wonderfully flexible instrument. It is flexible in allowing for the kinds of unconventional questions which can be formulated when the teachers are willing, to a certain extent, to learn along with the students. It is flexible in respect to the forms and fields in which the work can take place, which may reach out far beyond the walls of the college -- from modest experiments in the field to sea voyages, work in the Peace Corps, or study abroad, so long as the experiences are systematically planned, sufficiently documented, and carefully studied. It is altogether flexible in providing a bridge between an ever more clearly defined project and the developing individual interest (whether it concerns a problem or the

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achieving of a particular sort of competence). (5) [(5) Naturally, something so flexible is also open to misuse. My informants frequently lamented the weakness of some contracts and the inflation of the credit awarded for them, the instances of deficient documentation, and the instances of a lack of supervision.]

### 3. DISCUSSION

TESC has many facets which call for discussion, and the college itself is involved in a continuing and intensive self-critical discussion (reflected in Academic ... Subcommittee, 1994). But I cannot go into much detail here and therefore shall not discuss student life, narrative evaluations of performance, students' criticism of the instruction, decision-making structures, and so forth. Rather I shall restrict myself to those questions which relate to the theme of interdisciplinarity.

#### 3.1. Varieties of Interdisciplinarity

At Evergreen this term is used generously, applied to all the phases and forms of the curriculum described above. A closer examination, however, discovers significant differences.

Core programs are "broadly interdisciplinary" in their themes and in the sense that they are presented "by a faculty team whose expertise spans several academic fields" (Catalogue 1993-94, p.9). The disciplinary backgrounds of the teachers bear upon their teaching through the questions, interests, and interpretations which they contribute to the subject at hand. But this pressure occurs implicitly, at least in "Great Stories" (see above), and most probably in the other core programs, without overt references to the disciplinary backgrounds, perspectives, and differences. Thus far one might consider the "text" which constitutes such a program as being rather "pre-disciplinary" than "interdisciplinary (and in saying this, I do not mean to say anything against the educational value of this practice!).

By contrast, an advanced program in the area of the sciences, such as the "Science of Mind" already described, exemplifies markedly how the disciplines represented can combine into a field. Here the disciplines converge upon a new problem, previously defined as beyond any single discipline, and serve as instruments to shed light upon particular aspects of the problem. The instruments themselves, the disciplines, are not under discussion, at least not as constructions -- of if so, mainly because of their limitations. Thus far such a procedure seems more to focus upon the different aspects a problem offers to different disciplines than to reflect upon the perspectives which disciplines use to observe, or rather to construct, reality (see the distinction "aspektivisch/perspektivisch" drawn by Frank/Schuelert 1992) -- rather "multidisciplinary" than

"interdisciplinary" in the strict sense of the terms (and yet, again ... see above!).

"Post-Modern Bodies," on the other hand, thoroughly exemplified the theory of the social construction of reality, with which both cultural and disciplinary constructions are concerned. Here the program's perspective explicitly encourages relationships to and reflection about the disciplines involved, especially in a sequence of constructions specific to the media and to everyday life. Thus far the program can be called perspektivisch and "interdisciplinary," even in the strict sense. To be sure, the program relates the students to some entities which (inevitably) they previously could have understood only as phantoms -- namely, the disciplinary constructions.

To my way of thinking, it is useful to distinguish among these varieties of interdisciplinarity, in order to clarify the aims and concepts of such a program and thereby to pursue and to work out the actual intention more consistently. It is not, however, a matter of consequence to decide for one mode and against the other. In the whole curriculum, each mode can take an important place.

### 3.2. Renunciation of Disciplines?

No matter what varieties of interdisciplinarity may be represented, they will be introduced at Evergreen through the faculty members, according to their disciplinary backgrounds, and will arise only through the contributions they make or from the texts and assignments which they choose. On the other hand, the students have no disciplines (even though, from their readings and other activities, they have some understanding of disciplines). To this extent the students work in interdisciplinary relationships without knowing or having experienced disciplines as such.

They can neither estimate nor learn the challenge which interdisciplinary thinking poses for "disciplinary" people. But the complete renunciation of disciplines at Evergreen causes other sorts of problems. One piece of evidence comes from the rate of students dropping out after the first year (which had, at the time of my visit, increased to at least 1/3) -- after, therefore, their first confrontation with the Evergreen concept. No concept can be the right one for all kinds of learners. But possibly in this first year of transition and entry, despite all the fascination of the interdisciplinary themes and heterogeneous groupings, there is a serious need for some kind of territory which, although -- or because -- it may be narrower, would allow one to learn more systematically, to acquire firm ground under one's feet, to experience a sense of progress and growth in competence. Another indicator is the undermining of the interdisciplinary emphasis by the offering of and demand for

modules in some kinds of necessary disciplinary expertise, presented either as options within programs or as separate courses. Yet another indicator comes with the "academic pathways" (individual curricula) suggested in orientation and advising as possible routes through the programs -- ways of getting in control of specialties, but fraught with the dangers of narrow-gauge thinking (see Academic ... Subcommittee, p.7). Fourthly, there is the evidence that the offerings meant for the last phase of studies bear a much stronger disciplinary emphasis as preparation for specific kinds of employment or professional study, for joining the world of work and of specialized competence beyond Evergreen.

One might also ask if the development of both basic study-skills and organized academic knowledge might not be better served if interdisciplinary and disciplinary learning, from the beginning onward, could be combined -- either in parallel, or in alternation (for example, semester by semester). In my opinion, Evergreen would still provide a model of how the interdisciplinary half of the curriculum could be configured as an academic entity strong and complex, substantively and socially coherent -- rather than letting interdisciplinary studies shrink into becoming only popular extra-added-attractions for audiences from all departments, presented at the outermost fringe of departmentalized study, as they mostly are in German universities. But it must be said that a number of my Evergreen informants feared that exactly such a situation would come into being on their campus once disciplines and even departments would be introduced. They adduced plausible reasons and examples of how other, earlier attempts at academic reform had withered away.

### 3.3. Interdisciplinarity in the Curriculum

With such a combination the college would avoid the danger that interdisciplinary teaching and learning would be a matter only of the lower-division concern with basic academic skills, as the Evergreen curriculum indicates (see above) (6) -- with the possible result that the interdisciplinary emphasis would be "forgotten" as a serious concern when the students and teachers turned to disciplinary work. [(6) "You will gradually progress from a multi-disciplinary perspective to a specialized focus," according to the 1993-94 catalogue, p.9.] The follow-up studies of Evergreen, to be sure, do not indicate such forgetting; rather, they indicate the success and acceptance of its graduates -- above all because of their well-developed general capabilities (skills in communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, tolerance, ability to learn; see Mott/Hunter, especially p.16ff., 26f.). This evidence, however, does not negate the possible validity of these recommendations. If they were to be followed, the interdisciplinary emphasis still would not be introduced only at highly advanced levels, such as graduate study (as one fears it will be in Germany, according to

the moves being made toward curricular reform), when probably the socialization in a discipline will have become deeply rooted.

In Evergreen programs one observes how important and useful an opportunity for learning can be when it has not already been measured out and divided up by departmental practices but rather allows for questions and discussions, studies and projects which cut across the conventional boundaries. Even when methodological reservations are present, the investigation by Thompson (1991) still demonstrates that the Evergreen students, according to the scale of Perry (1981), are far advanced in their cognitive development -- farther than the average at other colleges. At least such a method of learning carries the possibility that the hard problems which span many disciplines -- and the thinking they require, philosophical and technological, political and social -- will not (necessarily) be forgotten when the student turns to disciplinary learning. The Evergreen system also allows the possibility that (with luck) students who have developed a strong interest in a problem which does not fit within a conventional discipline will be able to pursue it with others or individually (through a group contract or individual contracts). The important point here is that the students have a social place, in which exchanges with others about their work will be both fostered and demanded. For the study of such a problem, Evergreen offers to some students the framework of a comprehensive coordinated study program. For others it has developed, beyond individual learning contracts, the option of "cluster contracts" for "Student-Originated Studies" -- ways of constituting and supporting small groups of students rather than working just by individual consultation.(7) [(7) I am grateful to Charles Teske for this information; during my short stay I was not able to observe "cluster contracts" for myself.]

#### 3.4. Qualifications of the Faculty Members

The very thought that teachers frequently offer instruction in disciplines for which they have not been trained and examined -- yes, even that they are expressly encouraged in many of the core programs to begin as learners themselves -- might arouse suspicion among us. Certainly one can't rule out the possibility that superficiality or unsureness will follow. But perhaps these are no worse than the narrow-mindedness and unwarranted certainty which can occur among the professors of academic disciplines. The process is not basically different from that by which, about 25 years ago, countless philologists worked their way into linguistics or, in the last few years, members of various disciplines have worked their way into computer science. At Evergreen, at any rate, the administration and the deans, as well as the faculty members themselves, describe the common task of organizing and operating the programs (team planning and team teaching) as the most effective, consistent, and challenging method of faculty development for the further qualifying of the

teachers in both subject matters and pedagogy (see Smith, 1991). So that this stimulation will remain strong and not be blunted by the formation of cliques, on the occasion of the evaluative review every eight years, which determines whether the faculty members' contracts will be renewed, the faculty members must demonstrate not only that they have taught in teams but also that during the period under review they have each worked with at least 8 different faculty colleagues. The medium in which this interdisciplinary qualifying takes place is, at Evergreen, a product of the basic organizational principles of the college and is held as an explicit and unequivocal priority for teaching. At the same time, it is difficult for the faculty members to keep up with the research in their original disciplines -- insofar as they still consider it worth the effort to do so. Some members achieve quite admirable results; others have consciously abandoned the practice. At the time of my visit, in my conversations with faculty members, the need was repeatedly expressed that after ten or twenty years of interdisciplinary teaching one should again have the opportunity to publish. And the faculty members were searching for forums and formats in which they could communicate their scholarly ideas and experiences.

One can only wish that they succeed. For on the positive side of this diminution of disciplinary research, there exists at Evergreen, quite evident even from a brief visit, an intellectual climate, in the best sense of the term -- an atmosphere charged with the steady exchange of differing points of view, fresh questioning, relativistic awareness of one's own position, and a drive for understanding. It must be owing to the basic interdisciplinary principles of the college that here the theoretical stimuli of the newest books and the most contemporary and pressing political and practical problems can immediately become the subject of discussion among teachers and students and among faculty members above and beyond academic disciplines -- as one could wish to find at a university.(7)

[(7) I should like to express my hearty thanks for their accessibility and frankness: to the faculty teams and students of the programs named above, the academic deans, and the Academic ... Subcommittee; for extensive and productive conversations -- to President Jane Jervis and Vice President Russell Lidman, as well as Bill Arney, Marianne Bailey, Steve Hunter, Charles Pailthorp, David Paulsen, Barbara Smith, Charles Teske; to Jose Gomez most of all for the organization and support of my visit; and again to Charles Teske for his translation of this article.]

[Translator's note: Faecheruebergreifend is the German equivalent of "interdisciplinary." Prof. Dr. Huber uses both the Germanic term and the Latinate interdisziplinaeres at various points in his monograph. He also varies his usage between Disziplin and Fach. The last term carries such importance in

German higher education that a note on it may be useful.

According to the Langenscheidt Standard German Dictionary: German-English/English-German, the simplest concrete definition of Fach is "compartment." In a cabinet, it will be a "partition." In a desk, it will be a "pigeon-hole." In a bookcase, it will be a "shelf." In a chest of drawers, it will be a "drawer." In architecture, it is a "panel." Our "post-office box" in German will be a Postfach. The term thus carries a much stronger -- and perhaps more secure -- sense of walled-in separation than does our word "department." By figurative extension, it becomes the main German word for one's professional discipline. Rendered most simply into English, Facheruebergreifend becomes "compartments-over-gripping," or, to use the equivalent Latinism in place of "gripping," "compartments-comprehending."

A Fachmann is an "expert" or "specialist." Because of the connotations of narrowness, a person who knows a lot about a narrow specialty but little beyond it will be called a Fachidiot. William Winden has informed me that the term connotes extreme specialization among German-speaking opera singers: one's Fach may encompass in the whole repertory of opera only four or five major roles to which the singer's voice is particularly suited. Changing one's Fach amounts to a major turning-point.

When the term is used in German university circles, it carries even more identifying force and pride than an American professor will imply in talking about her "field." But as academic metaphors we live by, Fach="compartment" and "field" carry different connotations. As you might expect, when I have tried to describe Evergreen programs to some German professorial acquaintances, they have begun to show symptoms of agoraphobia. Conversely, much as I admire the German practice of going down to basic principles and then building methodically upon them, I have often felt symptoms of claustrophobia during the times I have spent at German universities. Perhaps an awareness of such contextual differences will help Evergreen readers of Prof. Dr. Huber's monograph to understand the "suspicion" (Argwohn) he writes about in 3.4 -- "Qualifications of the Faculty Members."

In his remarks on an earlier draft of the translation, Prof. Dr. Huber has commented on this matter: "Your note on Fach is quite accurate. One might discuss the issue at considerably greater length, but that might only complicate for an American reader a problem which we can hardly deal with in our own language." -- C.B.T.; 1995.]

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