A STATEMENT FOR THE LONG-RANGE CURRICULUM DTF

This is a revised version of a statement prepared in November, 1993, in reply to Pris Bowerman's call for visions for the Evergreen curriculum. We ask you to recognize that we are addressing a complex of the most serious issues facing the world today and about a truly significant role that Evergreen could play in addressing those issues.

The basic issues.- Evergreen, like many other colleges, says that we are trying to prepare students to live in the 21st century. It is time for us to realize what that commitment implies for our teaching and how much of the curriculum should be oriented.

It should be clear that if there are going to be any people at all living by the end of the 21st century, in anything resembling civilized and humane conditions, one enormous problem must be solved: averting the ultimate ecological disaster. The forces of overpopulation, pollution, and ecosystem destruction are so great, so pervasive, so apparently unstoppable, that they constitute a threat to the continuing existence of life on Earth. Viewed realistically, the future for our students and their immediate descendants looks bleak indeed.

This is the problem that humanity--and, by extension, educational institutions--must address. At first glance, it would seem to imply that Evergreen should simply develop our environmental studies program and hire more environmental scientists. We believe this is partially true. In other memos, both Michael Beug and Fred Tabbutt have shown that the hiring of scientists has lagged way behind hiring in other fields and that there is a desperate need for more scientists of all kinds in the faculty, especially environmental scientists. However, the solution to our ecological problems is not primarily scientific. It is, rather, economic and social. This, in fact, is one of the major reasons that the problem should be of interest to a major part of the Evergreen faculty.

We put it to you that the changes humanity must make to avert the ecological disaster are identical with those changes that must be made to solve our pervasive economic, social, and health problems. Lester R. Brown, of the Worldwatch Institute, has said that a real environmentalist these days must be considered someone who is working for fundamental changes in our economic system, and this observation goes to the heart of the problem(s). The dominant world economic system encourages population growth, to create more workers and consumers; it is this system that demands that everyone in this overcrowded world must have a job to survive, no matter how unnecessary or destructive that job might be; and it is the insane drive for profit that underlies pollution and the devastation of ecosystems. Furthermore, it is easy to see how closely these factors are tied to other world and national problems: among others, depletion of energy resources, deteriorating health, the widening gap between rich and poor, the need to empower women with control over their lives, increasing poverty and social deterioration, wars arising from competition for diminishing resources, increasing violence, crime, and interclass and interethnic strife, and the need for land reform and empowerment of native peoples. Faculty members with different expertise could undoubtedly list other related issues and problems; and there is probably something in this list to interest everyone in our current faculty and everyone we would want to hire.

A hope for the Evergreen curriculum.- Many Evergreen students, like others of their generation, are aware of these matters, and we should like to emphasize the large numbers of

prospective students who express a primary interest in environmental studies. Most students, however, like most of the population as a whole, are not aware, and it is critical for them to address the issues. These issues are so serious, so complex, so intimately tied together, and of such concern to a large share of the Evergreen faculty that they constitute a proper orientation for much of our curriculum. It is appropriate for Evergreen, which has been a leading innovator in education, to now lead in directing education to the solution of these universal problems. Someone must do it. Somehow, the problems must be solved, or humanity (and the bulk of the living things we share this planet with) simply winds up in the cosmic trash bin.

Anyone who becomes interested in these issues will see numerous opportunities for designing exciting programs, at all levels. These are the epitome of interdisciplinary matters, and the arts, humanities, natural and social sciences can all make major contributions to their study. Although it is easy to be pessimistic in the face of apparently overpowering forces, as our colleague Pete Taylor has written, "it is important to balance the negative, dark aspects of concerns about environmental problems with the positive sides of celebrating natural 'biodiversity' and human cultural diversity. . . . It is important to retain and promote hope to empower ourselves and students to be able to work toward whatever possibilities there are for resolving problems." We hope our students will become citizens who are not only well-educated about environmental problems but are also determined to work for their solution.

We are *not* simply calling for "Environment Across the Curriculum," as another little burden (writing, math, multiculturalism, you name it) to be imposed on every program. It would be ridiculous to try to somehow orient every program a little toward this problem; most programs would wind up resentfully paying lip-service to the issue. Rather, we are suggesting that the curricular structure should encourage people to devise programs that address whatever aspects of these complex problems they may be interested in, and, particularly, that we factor this orientation into future faculty hiring. There is a broad perception that we are trying to have a little bit of everything in the curriculum--in spite of our continually resolving not to do so. It is clear from student interest that we need a lot more faculty members with expertise in environmental and population matters, and the broad view of these issues that we propose would require improving faculty numbers in quite a broad range of disciplines.

Parenthetically, we note that Jane Jervis has some related concerns about the Evergreen environment; she foresees pressures from the outside to take over and use our land in some way, or pressure to justify our own use of it. The emphasis on environmental matters that we propose would contribute enormously to preservation of our local environment.

No one should have any illusions about the seriousness of the problems and the ability of a small college to have much impact on them. But we do have an enormous opportunity to show the way, to show how seriously we take these problems, and what higher education can contribute to their solution. Even if our students stand witness to the cutting of the last fir and the death of the last sparrow, they will be able to say that we did our best.

Competing proposals.- All kinds of other proposals for structuring the curriculum will undoubtedly emerge. That's fine--the College must serve a number of needs, and its curriculum cannot be driven by a single interest. What we must avoid, however, is a lack of firm plans and an attempt to incorporate a little bit of everything. That would allow our curriculum and hiring

policies to be driven by default by a directionless organic growth in which people develop trendy programs on the basis of short-term interests and propose to hire new faculty members with little plan, except that "it would be nice to have a . . . ." The result Evergreen would continue to do what we keep telling ourselves we cannot do: "Be all things to all people." The College cannot continue to give in to vocal student groups and to short-term faculty interests without broader perspective, while ignoring the large number of prospective students who are concerned about the problems outlined here and are looking for places to study them. Evergreen ought to be such a place.

The Evergreen faculty currently shows strong interests in many cultural issues, and especially in multiculturalism. If, however, humanity does not solve the problems of population growth and ecological disaster, there simply isn't going to be anything resembling civilization, with all its varied cultures. Humanity will be plunged into a dark hell so terrible that our descendants will look upon our current problems with envy. Furthermore, it should be clear that solutions to the all-pervasive population-ecological problem underlie solutions to the problems of different peoples living together in harmony and mutual understanding. Studying the one set of issues contributes to solutions for the other set of issues.

Some implications for the curriculum.-

1. Expansion of the Environmental Studies area and opening it to encourage broader study of the social, political, and economic ramifications of environmental and population problems.

2. A general statement, in the policy developed by the Curriculum DTF, that the College considers environmental and population issues to be of prime importance and that all faculty members ought to be encouraged to develop programs that address them. (This might appear to be an ineffective action, but it is highly significant if the College simply acknowledges a policy of encouraging the study of these issues, as a guideline to faculty and deans about the kinds of programs they ought to think about.)

3. Long-range hiring implications: As faculty members are hired in the next few years (many replacements of retirees expected), we look for people who not only have the particular specialty expertise we want but are also interested in teaching programs that examine various aspects of the issues discussed here.

4. Support for faculty development, to encourage all faculty members with interest in these issues to increase their knowledge and to develop programs that address the issues.

a. Summer programs taught by Evergreen faculty members and visitors, for other faculty members.

b. On-going symposia during the school year, to increase faculty awareness. These should include invited speakers and some field trips.

5. Implications for the MIT program: Incorporation of more emphasis on environmental

and population matters in teacher training; emphasis on these issues in K-12 initiatives by the College.

6. Implications for the College campus: Setting aside areas for long-range study, design of repeating programs to take advantage of them. Setting aside areas for nature trails and building connections with the public schools for using them (further implications for MIT program and for K-12 initiatives).

15 November 1994

TO: Jeanne Hahn, for the Long-range Curriculum DTF

FROM: Burt Guttman

SUBJECT: Attached statement

Please accept the attached statement and distribute copies to members of the DTF. This is a revision of a statement I originally wrote about a year ago. Since then, I have received favorable comments and suggested revisions from a number of faculty members; and when the Long-range Curriculum DTF was formed, I asked several of them if they would support this as a statement to the DTF. Although people are naturally busy and many haven't had a chance to consider the paper, the following have asked to have their names added as supporters:

Michael Beug, Paul Butler, Rob Cole, Jeff Kelly, Pat Labine, Mark Levensky, Jack Longino, Don Middendorf, Dave Milne, Nalini Nadkarni, Jim Neitzel, John Perkins, Brian Price, Tom Rainey, Pete Sinclair, Fred Tabbutt, Pete Taylor, Jude van Buren, Al Wiedemann.

I must emphasize that some of the co-signers have expressed reservations about the precise wording of this statement (which is exactly right, of course, the whole purpose is to encourage discussion of the issues), but all agree to its general sentiment.

I will continue to seek other supporters for this statement, but on behalf of myself and the co-signers, I ask you to seriously consider this matter in your deliberations.