17 November 1993

President Jane Jervis
Campus

Dear Jane,

In your remarks at the first faculty convocation (I think), you referred to your self-evaluation and commented that this is a strange art-form (or words to that effect--I forget the adjective you used). It is, indeed, an art-form. Many of us have indulged our literary-creation writing muscles in self-evaluations and colleague evaluations over the years, and we tend to do so still, essentially ignoring the stultifying format that was prescribed for us a few years ago. In that light, let me send you a few comments stimulated by your self-evaluation. I recognize that this is very late, but I'm not writing it for the benefit of the Board and a formal process--merely for whatever good these thoughts may do you.

You commented, in your second paragraph, about the quality of mind that is attracted, developed, and nurtured here. That's what we're all most proud of, I think, and with good reason. Still, it could be better. Naturally, we are all trying to improve our ways of developing and nurturing, but the *attraction* could also be better. From the beginning of the College, I think we've perceived a strongly bimodal distribution among the students; Gonzalo Munevar, who has been here relatively few years, recognized it when he said that about 20 percent of his students are terrific and are thriving in our environment, while another 20 percent have heads full of mush, have all kinds of strange beliefs, and can't possibly be developed into significant intellects (again, words to that effect; I've forgotten his exact words). So here is one axis on which students can be assessed and described that could be improved, though I don't know how to label the axis; it's not something that could be measured by an IQ test and it probably has something to do with a whole intellectual history. (By the way, even as I bemoan the fact that we have so many students on the wrong end of this axis, I do rather like a certain degree of weirdness and nuttiness among our students. That's always been a characteristic of Evergreen, and I don't want it to disappear. It just mustn't be a dominant characteristic.)

Orthogonal to this axis is another one that is easy to describe: readiness to do college work. This came up the other day in our Dean's Group meeting, where Meg Hunt made the same observation I've made: that the students who are really impossible to work with are those who simply are not ready, at this time in their lives, to be in college--any college--doing serious work. This problem has become much more significant in the last few years, as we attract many students directly out of high school. One of the delights of Evergreen, especially in the past, has been that it has attracted so many mature students, those who typically tried to go to college for a while, dropped out, worked, travelled, and eventually found something they really, truly wanted to do with all their hearts, and are now back here learning to do it. They're the ones who really make teaching here worthwhile. But the poor 17-year-old kid who has come out of high school, who has only some vague thoughts about a possible future, who is probably most interested in the brand new worlds of Sex, Drinking, and Living Away from Home--that kid is wasting everyone's time. Unfortunately, a lot of them are able to slip through the system and acquire quite a bit of credit--maybe even graduate; but that's another problem. What I'm addressing here

is the matter of attracting such students.

Here is where I think you, as President, may be able to have some good effects. Much of your work is being an ambassador for the College. ("Ambassadress" is probably one of those outmoded words, like "aviatrix," isn't it?) This is probably the kind of thing you'd want to discuss with folks like Arnaldo Rodriguez and Shannon Ellis, but I'll bet that as you go around the state talking about Evergreen there are ways that you can help to create an image of the kind of student that we really want, who will thrive here, and the kind who should avoid Evergreen. (Here you have to tell a kind of lie by omission, because a lot of the students who are on the wrong end of the axes I've described do seem to continue here with some success, on some level; but we don't want to talk about *them*, do we?) Part of this effort, which obviously goes way beyond your office, is simply making it clear that people can do wonderful things here. My colleagues in the basement, Clyde and Jeff, said that shortly after you arrived they went over to talk to you, and you said that you had heard two things about science at Evergreen: that there is none and that it's terrific! I think that's accurate. Just to take science as one area where we do well, I think there is a general perception among excellent students in Washington that you just can't do it at Evergreen. But those who come here and do it generally find that it *is* terrific. So we have to keep working to change the perception, and my suggestion is that that's an important thing you can be involved in doing.

Item the second: I'm sorry, but I was too busy to get to the convocation at which you were formally installed. However, I was told that you made an interesting speech, and that you referred, among other things, to nurturing language instruction here. Please talk to Clyde Barlow sometime and ask him about his idea for everyone at Evergreen learning a language. Clyde thinks in novel, creative ways, and this was one of his most interesting thoughts.

Item the third, regarding your comments about the high distrust of structure and our being ungovernable: You probably understand the roots of this phenomenon. Evergreen was started by people who were largely rebelling against all the evils they found in the traditional academic structure, and those of us who joined them during the first year or two were of much the same mind. So the tradition of mistrust is old, and runs deep; we have probably, also, tended to hire people with similar views. However, after 20 years this mistrust of structure starts to feel old and unnecessary, and as the old-timers retire and die I imagine you will see it gradually disappear. New, younger folks, I think, perceive the campus as unnecessarily political, and as they take their places in campus affairs I suspect they will tend to develop needed structures and eliminate the constant renegotiation of everything. Nevertheless, I hope this feature of the College will always be preserved to a degree--"eternal vigilance" and all that.

Best wishes,

Burt Guttman