INVITATION TO JOIN AN OPEN CONSPIRACY

Evergreen, like many other colleges, says that we are trying to prepare students to live in the 21st century. I think it's time for us to realize what that must really mean and to orient much of the curriculum to that end.

I put it to you that if anyone is going to live in the 21st century, there is one enormous problem that 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.

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. I put it to you further 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 I think this observation goes to the heart of the problem(s). The dominant world economic system encourages population growth, in the belief that more workers and consumers are needed; it is this system that demands that everyone in this overcrowded world must have a job in order 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, 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.

Many Evergreen students, like others of their generation, are aware of these matters, but most are not. In any case, the 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 the bulk 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.

You may think that I'm calling for "Environment Across the Curriculum," as another little burden (writing, math, multiculturalism, you name it) to be imposed on every program. I'm not. 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, I'm suggesting that we encourage people to devise programs that address whatever aspects of these complex problems they may be interested it, and I'm suggesting that we factor this orientation into future faculty hiring. I think there's a broad perception that we are trying to have a little bit of everything in the curriculum--in spite of our continually resolving that we won't do so. It is clear from student interest that we need a lot more faculty members with expertise in environmental matters, and the broad view of these

issues that I'm proposing would require improving faculty numbers in quite a broad range of disciplines. I would not expect changes to happen quickly, but if we could get the faculty to agree on the importance of this emphasis in the curriculum, we could gradually make this a consideration in future hires.

I ran a version of this letter past Jane Jervis, for her reaction, and then we talked a little. She gave me permission to send her reply along with this note. She, incidentally, doesn't have any specific plans to go with her concerns, but I think the two kinds of concerns mesh very well.

If this view of a future for Evergreen interests you, I'd like to hear from you--just a brief note of interest at the bottom of this page. If there appears to be a core of us with similar ideas, we can then get together and start making some plans.

Burt Guttman

_____ Yes, I'm interested. Name: _____ Comments: