

Dear friends,

I would like to continue the conversation we have from time to time about the quality of our students and the need for recruiting. Yes, I know there are a zillion issues on the table for discussion, but I think you'd have to agree that this is important. I want to suggest that spring would be a good time for us to get out into the high schools and start to make some friends and some points for the College.

My own perception is that the average quality of science students has been going down alarmingly in the last few years, and I think many other folks share that perception. The best are as good as they ever were, but their numbers are diminishing and the peak of the curve is sliding away from the C-B level toward the D-C level, if you'll pardon my non- Evergreenish terms. Part of the answer to this problem lies in recruiting the best and the brightest, showing them that they can get a better general education and science education here than at the UW or WSU. (And of course we have to make that true, but that's another issue.) Conversations with some of our current students tell me that Evergreen is still being perceived as a crazy hippy college, even by scientific colleagues who ought to know better, so the best students don't even consider coming here. I think we need a concerted program of making contacts with high school teachers, especially science teachers, and showing them our strengths, so they start to send us their best students. I'd like to begin a serious conversation among us to develop a plan and start to take action. The questions that immediately come to mind include:

Just what should we try to do? Guest lectures and demonstrations?

Getting to know high school faculty members personally? Some kind of direct work with good students?

How should we be working with Admissions on such a project?

What contacts do we already have with high school faculty, and can we build on those contacts?

Who among us are willing to do this work? Should we expect everyone to participate?

Are we most likely to be successful through a variety of individual contacts or through some unified program that has official College blessing and support?

If we can really start to attract some of the best students, we will have to seriously evaluate the quality of some of our programs. I have in mind particularly programs such as INS, which feed both of our planning units. Bright, well-prepared students are not going to be happy sitting through programs that are geared to the low level of some of our current students, particularly in math. Last year's INS program was the worst I've been through, compared to five previous versions of that program and several other more interdisciplinary programs at about the same level. All year we were fighting with junior-high-school math abilities, and I see essentially the same level of competence in too many students in this year's S&F program. We must have higher expectations and enforce strong prerequisites, or we're going to be baby-sitting and turning out graduates who can barely meet the mathematics expectations of the outside world.

Anyway, I would like to hear from other folks about this issue, and maybe we can have a meeting soon to make some plans.