

## CAREER COUNSELING AT EVERGREEN

### The Needs and the Resources at this moment.

There are various aspects of life in the United States in the 1970's, and of education at Evergreen that make career counseling an essential service. Career options and life style alternatives in the United States at the moment present a confusing picture to many undergraduates. Vast numbers of options, large social problems, adults whose life styles have been rejected, geographical rootlessness, and relatively few personal commitments except government loans. All these are commonplace in an undergraduate's life and few have the resources, either emotional or informational, to get themselves out of this maze. There are few pointers that help them answer the questions, "Who am I?" "What do I want to do with my life?" "How do I go about achieving whatever I finally decide to do?"

These questions and the obstacles to answering them confront all undergraduates in this country, and all undergraduates are at the age where they will be making their earliest major life-planning decisions. Therefore, many stand in need of career counseling. But students at Evergreen have an even greater need for this than students at most colleges. Our entire educational philosophy rests on students taking the responsibility for choosing what they want to do. There is no time when we say, "all right, you've chosen a career, this is what you need to do." Each year, in some cases each quarter, students here are confronted with questions about their goals and they have to find the answers. In addition to this constant questioning, Evergreen does little to hide the ambiguity of the answers, and students here have no security blankets in the form of majors or other college devices which clarify choices.

The combination of the state of this country and the education at Evergreen make it essential that we offer both preventative career counseling, and relief from problems that students confront. There is a need for counseling in its traditional form: assistance in clarifying goals, values, commitments. There is also a need for up-to-date, constantly renewed information; life changes so fast, energy crisis come and go and students need to understand what's happening in the society around them. Finally, there is a need for advice: very few of the traditional models remain which are used to guide a young person's choice, at the same time students are very aware of their own lack of experience and skills in evaluating options. There has to be someone, somewhere who can empathise with their goals and give them advice on the best means of achieving them.

So much for the general needs at Evergreen. How far have we gone towards meeting them? I take as a given that faculty do some work in this area, but there is plenty of evidence that they can't keep up with the options inside Evergreen, let alone all the ones outside the college. Also, many of them do not at the moment have the counseling skills or the time to do effective work in this area. We need to ensure that they are always sensitive to the career/life planning concerns of their students but we cannot give them full responsibility for helping students in this area. Much of the responsibility has to be with someone or some people for whom this is the primary goal.

At the moment the college finances the work of one third-time career counselor, and one 15 hour-per-week paraprofessional counselor. The career counselor actually works full time except in summers. The student probably works 25-30 hours per week. The former saw 43 per cent of the total counseling caseload in Fall 1973, and the latter 25 per cent. That adds up to 220 individuals for one or more scheduled appointments. In addition, the

career counselor sees one to three drop-ins most days, two to twelve people each week in a graduate school workshop, and turns away up to 20 people per week to ensure that the schedule does not become clogged up so far in advance that emergencies, etc., can't be dealt with. In strictly numerical terms, the service we can offer is still limited, the college is getting twice the work it pays for. Only about 10-15 per cent of the students on campus are receiving help with their academic and career concerns. Yet the problems outlined at the beginning probably confront all students at one time or another.

What does all this mean in terms of tasks performed and kinds of students seen? In the area of tasks performed these things are being done effectively:

Graduate school counseling for juniors and seniors, academic advising for those unable to continue in their present programs, career counseling for approximately half the senior population. Basically, all those questions where students cannot avoid acknowledging that they are in difficulties and can't help themselves out. So they ask for help and though it isn't usually too late, it is certainly too late to avoid some difficulties and a fair amount of unhappiness. Our school's philosophy is developmental and preventative, but in career and academic counseling the majority of our work is solving problems once they have already arisen.

There are a number of other areas where we are doing a partly effective job. We have the beginnings of a resource library of information and some planning has been done for some "self counseling" tools that students can use to help themselves understand their goals. We have done some work in ensuring that there is information available on current and future academic options. We have worked off and on with the faculty to ensure that they have the information and skills to do some counseling, and we have also done partial training of some of the other counseling paraprofessionals. We have begun close work with the Placement Office on campus, but both our areas are so swamped with work, as are the faculty, that none of us really has the time to share our skills and ideas enough to provide a broad preventative service. We have also begun to establish contacts with graduate schools through visits to them and conferences here, but considering how much weight graduate admissions committees put on the prestige of undergraduate schools, our efforts have only scratched the surface of the problem.

There are some further aspects of career counseling that we are doing virtually nothing about right now. We are doing almost no preventative and developmental work with 1-3 year students. We have also been very poor at developing counseling techniques, written resources and personal contacts for those who are interested in non-traditional schools and careers. This is sad, though the resources are more difficult to obtain in this area.

What does this mean in terms of people served? Basically, we help the more desperate and aggressive whites of both sexes, particularly juniors and seniors. We don't do enough outreach and developmental work either to prevent these students getting desperate or to reach the less aggressive ones. We also have not succeeded in reaching non-whites in any significant numbers. They are some of the most career oriented students on campus and are getting the least help. We just don't have time.

"We just don't have time." We have to say that repeatedly at the moment, to individual students, to groups with good and exciting projects, to people who are not in crisis but have realised the need to do a little preventative work on their own. If the student counselor and the career counselor really worked only the hours they were paid for, they would become so inaccessible that students would rapidly become disillusioned and many would leave Evergreen because they would find themselves unable to work through the ambiguities of our structure and the world outside.

Our efforts are limited by comparison with what needs to be done. But it is time for Evergreen to make a decision whether or not it is prepared to make a commitment to fund them adequately, and realise that that commitment involves not only funding the present positions fully, but also funding another one in the near future to deal with unfinished business.