



Social Class at Evergreen: Behind the Myth

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Abstract

The Evergreen State College, in Olympia, Washington, is often misunderstood as having a highly privileged student population. Using data from a survey of 531 of the approximately 4900 students, conducted in January, 2010, the authors find that working-class majorities exist at the college's Tacoma campus, in the Evening and Weekend and Grays Harbor programs, and among students of color, veterans, working students, and students who are parents. The survey addressed a wide variety of variables, including class self-identification, family education levels, employment, educational financing, and inheritance. We concluded that Evergreen's practices and policies encourage equity, and we hope to stimulate discussion about why and how class matters at the school.

Introduction

For a small liberal arts college that has not yet reached the age of forty, The Evergreen State College has collected more than its share of kudos and awards. Evergreen delivers "prestige without the price," according to one college rating guide. Since its doors opened in 1971, it has gained a national reputation for academic rigor, pedagogical innovation, and financial accessibility by everyone from *Colleges That Change Lives* to *The Hipster Handbook*. The school is one of the most academically challenging colleges in the nation, judging by its scores on the Pew Trust's National Survey of Student Engagement.

Evergreen has always attracted a large cohort of students from outside of Washington state due to this reputation. A quarter of its undergraduates pay more than three times the state resident tuition rates. Many of these have the resources to attend private liberal arts colleges.

Over the years, Evergreen has collected more than its fair share of stereotypes, centering around its image as "that hippie college in the woods." The imaginary "Greener," as students and grads are referred to, is on the extreme political and environmental left, lives in the woods and smokes marijuana.

In addition, there are class stereotypes based on a false notion that Evergreen students are privileged "East Coast brats" or "trustafarians." *The Olympian* newspaper drew on this popular caricature in its coverage of a recent protest demonstration involving a number of students. In describing a scene involving a former student, the reporter wrote,

"A woman arrested on suspicion of kicking a police officer in the groin during Thursday night's anti-police rally downtown told an officer, "The last time an

officer said I assaulted him the charge got dismissed, no contest. My mom 4 has a lot of money, my friend," court papers state.

And, as is more typical at regional public colleges, low income students are a big portion of Evergreen's student body at more than 36%, and 27% are "first-generation" – with neither parent college-educated. Many are working adults who live within a commuting distance and attend Evergreen at night or on weekends. It turns out that Evergreen has a large working class population, though those words are seldom used within or outside the institution.

Only in recent years has the literature of higher education begun to address the issue of social class and how it matters. This may be partly because class is not discussed often in the U.S., for many reasons. Liberal arts colleges and universities are seen, or may prefer to be seen, as elite environments. Increasingly, though, the public regional colleges and universities are serving working class students. As higher education has expanded over the last fifty years, it has become more stratified, and many public institutions can be defined as "working class institutions."

Where does Evergreen fit in a stratified system of learning institutions? How real is the stereotype of Evergreen students as a privileged group? What does social class look like, and does it matter at the school?

A group of students sought answers for these questions during the 2009-10 school year, studying sociology and statistics in an interdisciplinary class, called, "Class in the United States." The students designed and administered a survey about social class to 531 students – over ten percent of the total. They then analyzed the results by working in teams, each of which chose a particular theme or focus. Seven of the fifty or so students enrolled in the class pursued a "group learning contract" to edit their colleagues' work, perform more data analysis, and write this document.

The student authors of this report are more typical of another side of Evergreen – one that doesn't often make the newspaper. Lisa, 27, is the daughter of a machinist. She has dropped out of school a few times as she unsuccessfully tried to balance work and college. Robert, Joan, and Zoanne are all in their 50s. Robert started college at Evergreen in the early 1970s, dropped out, and returned after military service and a long blue-collar career. Joan works for the state department of labor and graduated from the local community college. She came to Evergreen encouraged by "my brother, the PhD." Zoanne works in a public school office. Until recently, she hadn't contemplated returning to school, but a divorce forced her to reconsider her career. Cindy, 40, is the president of her union of educational assistants, has two almost-grown kids, and works in a school that serves mainly poor and working class youth. Monica, 29, is a pharmacy tech who works a swing shift, but still makes it to early Saturday morning classes. She was a military kid and is married to a sol-

dier. Will, 30, is a former Marine, who is proud of the radical labor past of his grandfather and aims to go into social work. The faculty member who sponsored the class and project, Sarah, finished her BA and started graduate studies in her late 30s, after working in the printing industry and postal service and being active in the labor movement.

None of the students fits either the “trustafarian” stereotype or that of the “traditional” college student who comes straight from high school, has parental support, lives in the dorms, eats pizza and goes to parties.

Defining our terms

In designing our survey, we considered several definitions of “middle class.” We grew to understand the middle class as not simply an income category, but as a group that has a different relationship to power at work and social capital in society. We were most influenced by Barbara Ehrenreich’s work, *Fear of Falling*, in which she explains the ways that the professional middle class uses and guards higher education in order to preserve status across generations. Economist Michael Zweig, in his book, *The Working Class Majority: America’s Best Kept Secret*, distinguishes the middle class from the working class by the amount of authority they have in their occupations. In addition to self-identification, we examined families’ education levels, ability to support students in school, and likelihood of passing on inheritance.

For the purposes of this project, we have chosen the definition of “working class” offered by Zweig, who defines working class people not simply by their income (though it is a major factor) but by their relationship to work. They labor for wages and salaries and have relatively little autonomy or control over what they do, unlike middle class professionals. Zweig establishes, through an analysis of occupational data, that working class people are a majority in the U.S., comprising 62 percent of the population.

In our report, “working class” students are those who identified themselves as poor, low income, or working class on our survey. We agree with Zweig, who argues, “The poor are not some persistent lump at the bottom of society; they are working people who have hit hard times.” “Poverty, he explains, “happens to the working class because unemployment and low-wage jobs happen to the working class.”

In trying to measure class at our school, we agreed with Zweig that occupation is important, but understand that social capital matters, too. It *does* make a difference if one has college-educated parents and friends to help navigate how school “works.” It *does* make a difference to have even some limited financial inheritance. Status differences follow us to school, and lack of status can undermine students as they pursue an education.

So, while the working class may be a majority of the public, public colleges and universities are still considered middle-class or even elite environments. Certainly, liberal arts colleges are considered elite. Could a college like Evergreen have a working class majority? Or are there working class majorities in some corners of the school? Is privilege generalized over the student population, or is it distinct to some groups?

Class Self-Identification

In our survey, we asked a variety of questions about age, work, debt, race or ethnicity, residence, families, military service, and culture. We also asked our student respondents to self-identify their social class by commonly-used terms. We offered the following choices: Poor, Low Income, Working Class, Middle Class, Upper Middle Class, and Upper Class. We chose these labels with the goal of making the often-automatic choice of Middle Class more complicated. The terms, Working Class, Middle Class, and Upper Class are used on the General Social Survey, so some direct comparison of our data to a larger set is possible. But we felt that offering Upper Middle as a choice was important, which the General Social Survey does not. We hoped that this category would identify a group with relatively more privilege – enough privilege to make a difference in a student’s college experience. We decided not to use the General Social Survey term, Lower Class, as it is often used as an insult rather than a demographic category, choosing instead to offer the categories of Poor and Low Income. The chart below shows how all of our survey respondents identified their class status.



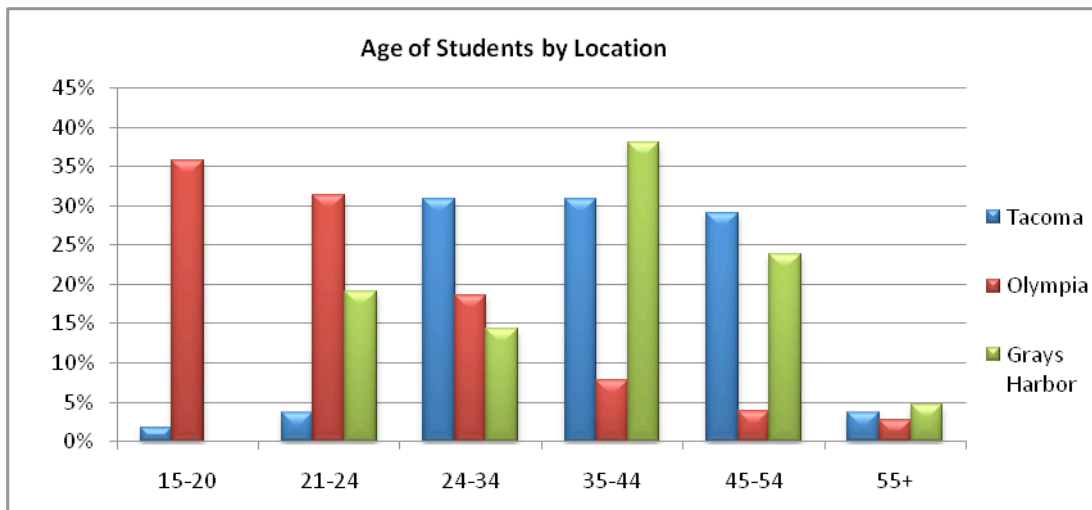
As we have studied social class and the increasing stratification of higher education, we have become stronger in our belief that Evergreen does an exceptional job of providing a high quality education for students across the economic spectrum. The collaborative, interdisciplinary educational methods go far in reducing the effects of social inequality. Yet, we

hope that our report helps us understand our community better and accommodate working class students more thoughtfully.

Class, Campus, and Location

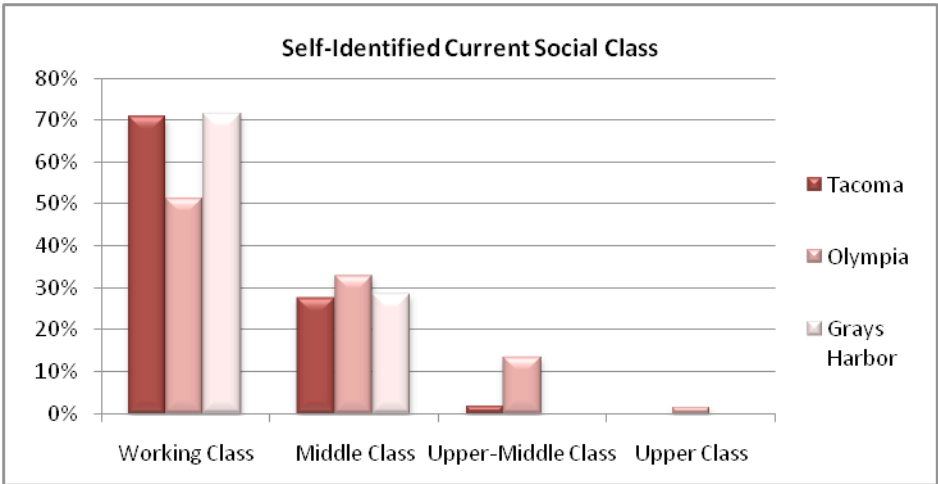
Evergreen conducts classes not only on its main campus, on a forested thousand acres outside Olympia, Washington, but also in an urban setting in Tacoma, in the mid-sized and depressed industrial town of Aberdeen, and around the Olympia Peninsula in tribal communities. We were able to survey students in Olympia, Tacoma, and Aberdeen (the Grays Harbor program) and found the social class composition of these three student locations significantly different.

One fact that we noticed early on was that Tacoma and Grays Harbor had a higher proportion of older students. The majority of students in Olympia are younger than 24; most students in Tacoma are relatively evenly distributed between ages 24 and 54; and at Grays Harbor, the student age demographic peaks between 35 and 44. Are these age differences related to class? Upper middle-class students are more likely to attend a four-year school directly after high school graduation than are students from poorer or working class backgrounds. These will probably be more likely to be among those pursuing a bachelor's degree later in life.

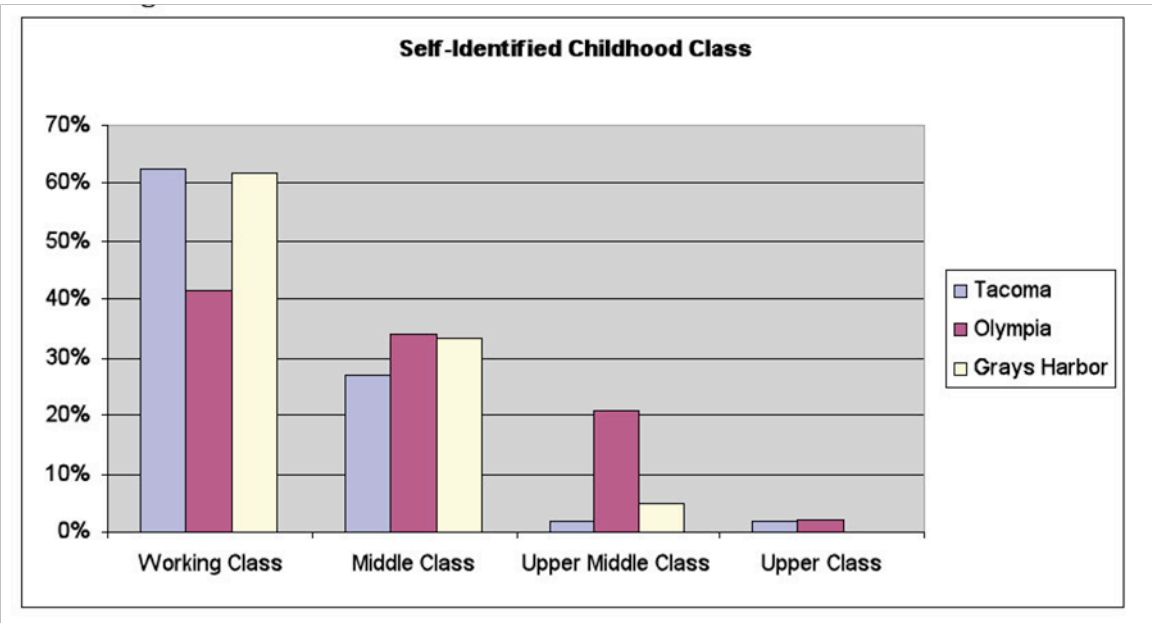


In fact, we found many proportional differences between locations, all indicating that Tacoma and Grays Harbor each has a working class majority, while Olympia *may* not. One of the most straightforward indications of the differences between these communities is students' response to the survey question asking them to identify their current social class:

This table shows that Grays Harbor and Tacoma both had significantly higher percentages of working class students.



Class status today mirrored that of their family of origin, below.

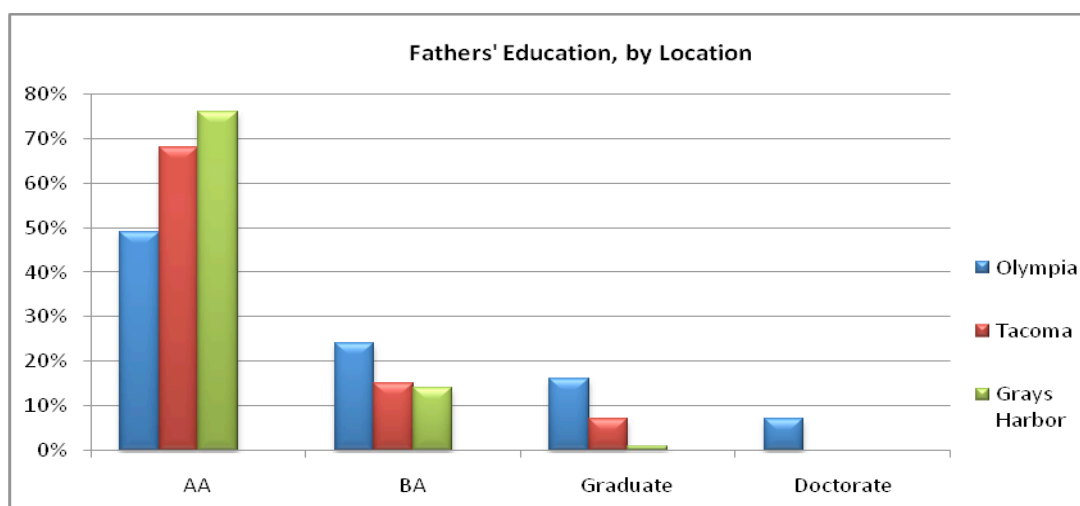


Notably, the Olympia students were the only group reporting upper middle class status in

significant numbers.

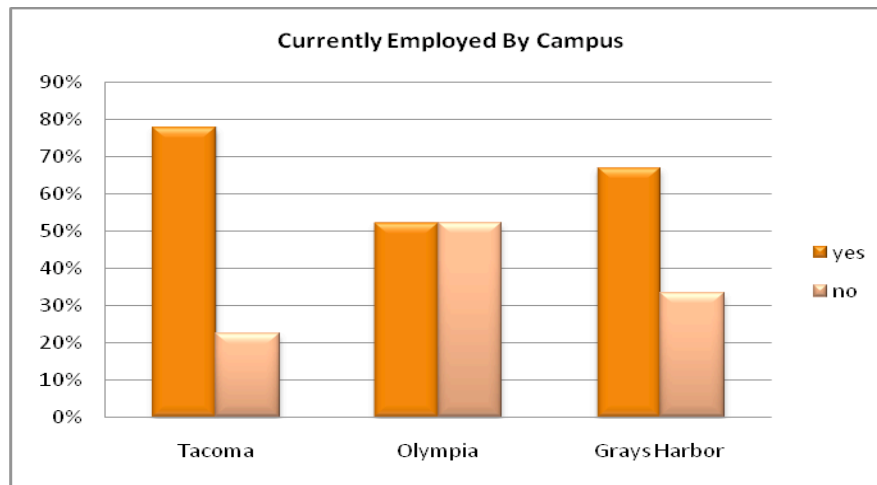
Not surprisingly, the graphs of childhood and present class were strikingly similar. Class seemed to be passed on from parents to students.

Typically, people in the working class have spent fewer years in school. This affects the kind of “cultural capital” that they can pass on to their children. If a child’s father is a doctor, he knows how to prepare a child for academic rigor, and can help his child with biology homework, or can choose to hire a tutor. If a child’s father is a factory worker, with a high school diploma, he may not be able to help his child with pre-calculus, and has little funds to hire a tutor. Hence, we decided to look at respondents’ fathers’ highest level of education to see if they echoed the same distinctions between locations:



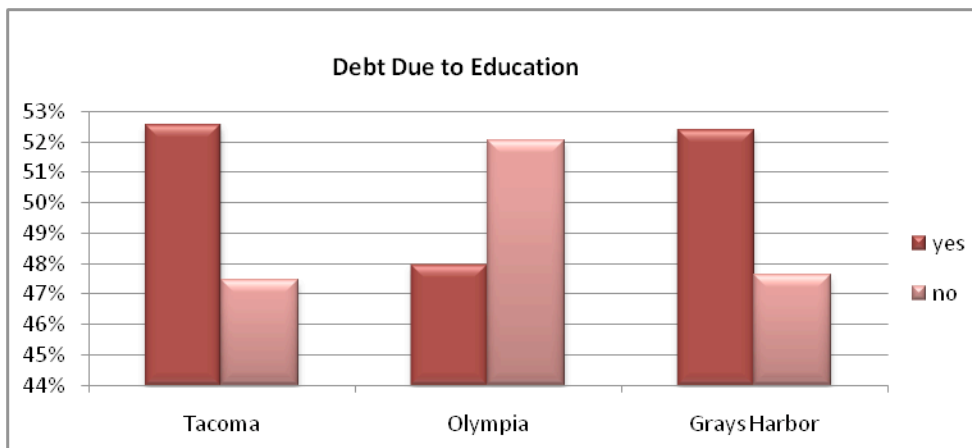
Again, Tacoma and Grays Harbor had substantially higher proportions of fathers with an AA or below, indicating they are likely working class. Just about 50% of fathers of Olympia campus students had an AA or below; the other half were college graduates, including quite a few fathers with doctorate and professional degrees.

We began thinking more about what it means to work *and* go to school. Does it signify an economic instability or vulnerability? One might assume that working class students would have less financial help from parents or family, and therefore, must work to avoid large debt and keep paying rent and tuition. We found that a much higher percentage of students at Tacoma and Grays Harbor worked than Olympia students.



Olympia campus students were visibly less likely to have a job. This could be for numerous reasons other than class. For instance, the older students at the other two campuses might have more financial responsibilities, like a family or a mortgage, or a career that discourages them from getting off track. But it could be related to class, because the younger, middle and upper-middle class students at the Olympia campus have more financial support from their families.

To further understand how students at each campus are paying for college we then looked at whether or not the student or family went into debt to finance the respondent's education. Again we see the same pattern arising. Tacoma and Grays Harbor students had to go into debt, while Olympia students were more likely to respond that they hadn't incurred debt.

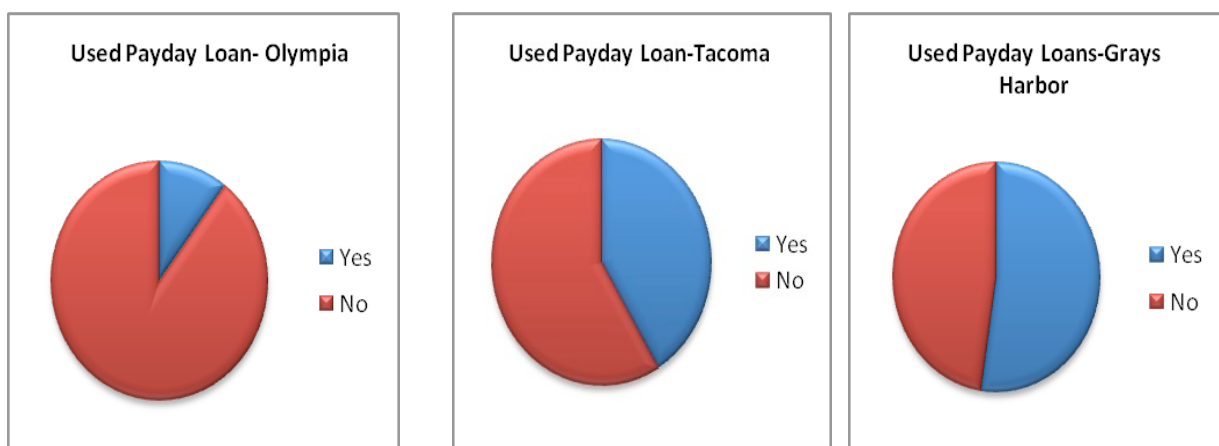


We also looked for questions that we felt would be obvious class indicators. Use of food stamps and of payday loans indicate an unstable and underprivileged economic position. We hypothesized that since Tacoma and Grays Harbor each had higher proportions

of self-identified working class students, there would be more students depending on these financial supports.

We found that food stamp usage did *not* prove to be significantly different between Tacoma and Olympia, or Grays Harbor and Olympia. This may indicate that a large proportion of Olympia’s students are working class, and full time students employed for 19 hours or more with low household incomes can qualify for food stamps.

However, we found that Grays Harbor and Tacoma each have significantly more respondents who have used payday loans than Olympia. We deduced that use of payday loans is a strong indicator of class, since if people are in a position to have to use these high-interest loans, it means that they have no wealth assets to draw on and are financially unstable.



In conclusion, we believe that Tacoma and Grays Harbor have larger portions of working class students, are less economically stable, and would be most vulnerable to cuts in financial aid or raises in tuition.

Evergreen’s educational practices and schedules at these two campuses acknowledge the working-class majority in important ways. The Tacoma campus gives students the choice of attending classes during the day or night, recognizing that working-class people often have rotating shifts or are vulnerable to sudden, unilateral changes in their schedules. The small Evergreen Grays Harbor program conducts its classes on weekends. At the Olympia campus, the majority of students attend full-time, during the day, while about 15% attend evening and weekend classes geared to working adults.

Night and Day

For its first two decades, The Evergreen State College conducted its interdisciplinary classes for full time day students during the weekdays, with only marginal and episodic part time, evening and weekend offerings. The original design of the college centered all the teaching and learning in full time programs, and the imagined student had no other major demands on her or his time, neither jobs nor children. However, since the mid 1990's, the college has offered interdisciplinary, liberal arts education for nontraditional as well as traditional students. Its Evening and Weekend Studies program (EWS) makes it possible for adults to return to school while they continue with their daily obligations, which may include work, raising a family, taking care of elderly parents or a combination of those. Classes are offered in Olympia, Aberdeen, Tacoma and at tribal communities in Western Washington.

While the college serves working adults through EWS, Abby Kelso, the program's Outreach Coordinator, explained that the college may have had other motivations. "It was my understanding that expanding Evening and Weekend Studies was a way to meet the enrollment targets set by the legislature," she said. But she also explained that the evening programs helped fulfill the original legislative mandate to serve the educational needs of the people of Southwest Washington.

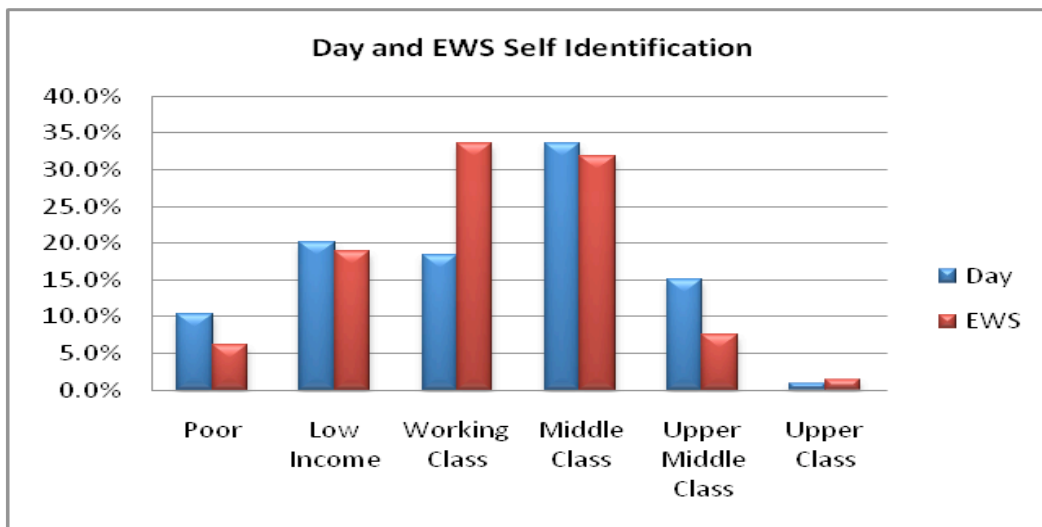
But how different are the students who attend in the evening from those in the full time, day programs in Olympia? Are there differences that are significant, and are they differences of class? Our survey data helped us understand some of these.

Day verses Evening/Weekend Students.

Of the students surveyed, 527 indicated which program they attended. Of those, 240 were enrolled in day programs and 287 in evening and weekend classes in Olympia, Aberdeen and Tacoma. Full time day students also often take evening or weekend classes as a supplement to their day programs, but for the purpose of this analysis, we distinguished the two populations by considering anyone who took day at all to be a "day" student.

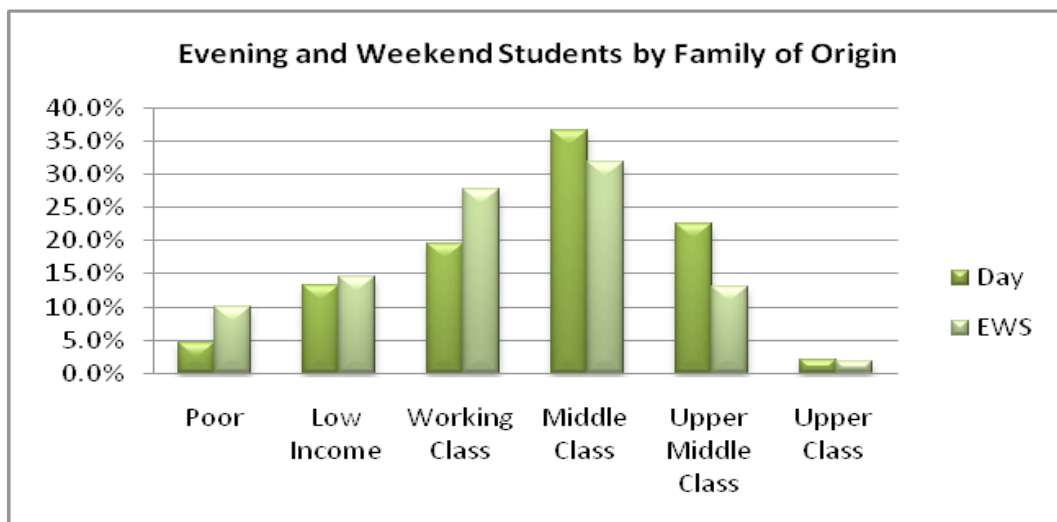
Evergreen's Class Self Identity

There are some significant differences in class self-identity when we compare day students to EWS. A large number of EWS students identified themselves as "working class," 34%, compared to Olympia day students at 18%. In fact "working class" was the biggest identify category for EWS students, whereas Olympia day students chose "middle class" most often at 33%. When we combine the categories of poor, low income, and working class to get a total "working class" figure, we find that EWS students are 58.6% working class as opposed to 49% in the day program.



Family of Origin

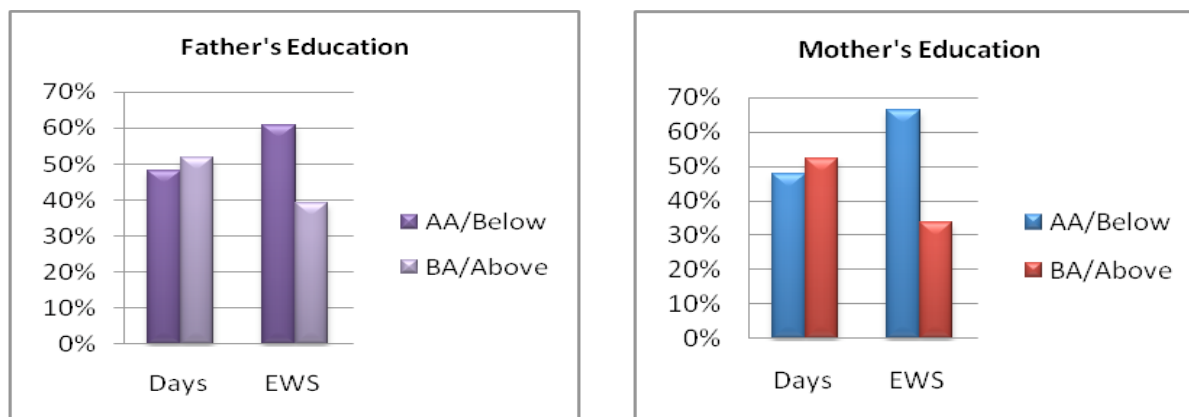
A striking difference between day and evening students is evident in the percentage who grew up in upper middle class households. Almost 23% of day students come from upper middle class backgrounds, versus only 13% of evening students. “Night school” students are more likely to be entering or finishing college later in life due to a relative lack of privilege in their high school years.



Fathers’ and Mothers’ Education

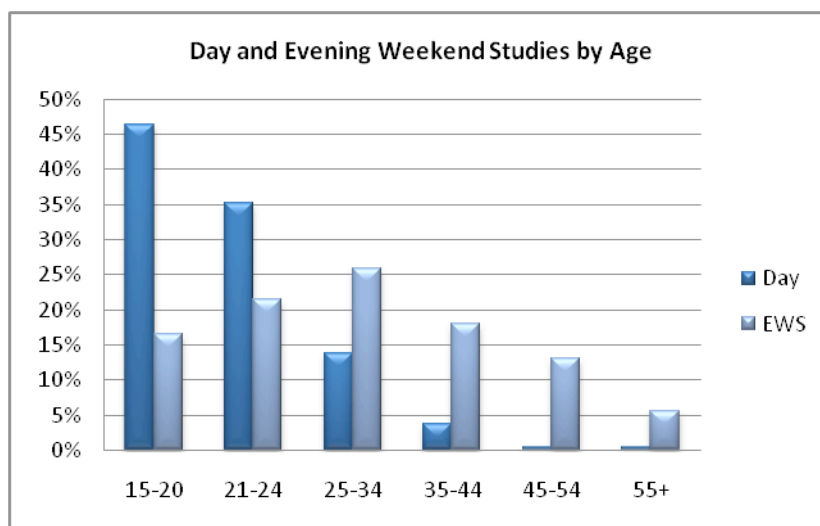
Parents’ education levels can be an important indicator of social class. Day students were

evenly divided between those whose fathers attained a BA or above and those who had an AA or below. It is more likely that the fathers of EWS have an AA or below (61%) than a BA or higher (39%). The same can be said for EWS students' mothers' education as well. The large percentage of EWS students whose parents do not have BA degrees confirms that this is a working class community of students.



Day Verses Evening/Weekend by Age

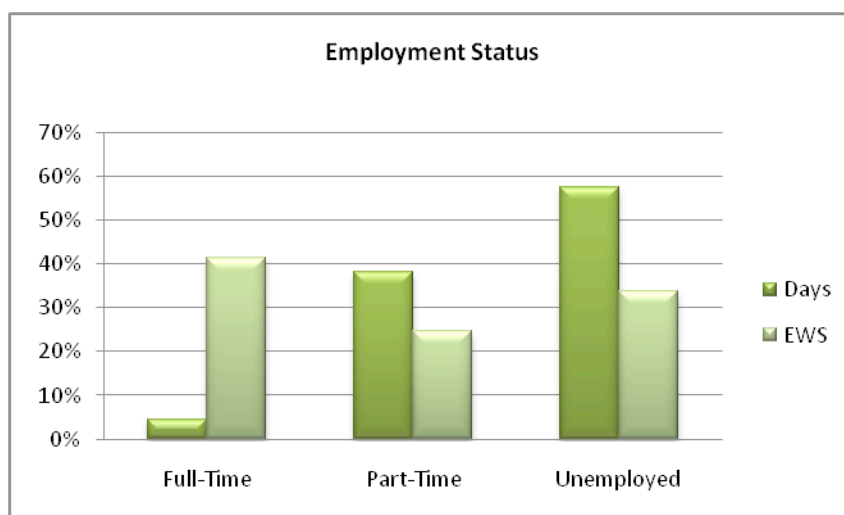
It is not surprising that the evening weekend population leans more towards what educational literature considers the "nontraditional." The largest age demographic for day students is 15-20, while EWS students are more likely to be 25-34.



Employment Status for Day and Evening/Weekend Students

When it comes to who works while going to school, and for how many hours, there is a clear difference between evening and weekend and day students. The majority of EWS students work full-time or have a part-time jobs, but that is not the case for day students. This finding is not surprising, considering Evening and Weekend Studies was designed for the work-

ing student. Of EWS students surveyed, 38% worked full-time and 23% worked part-time, compared with Olympia day at 4% full-time and 36% part-time employment.

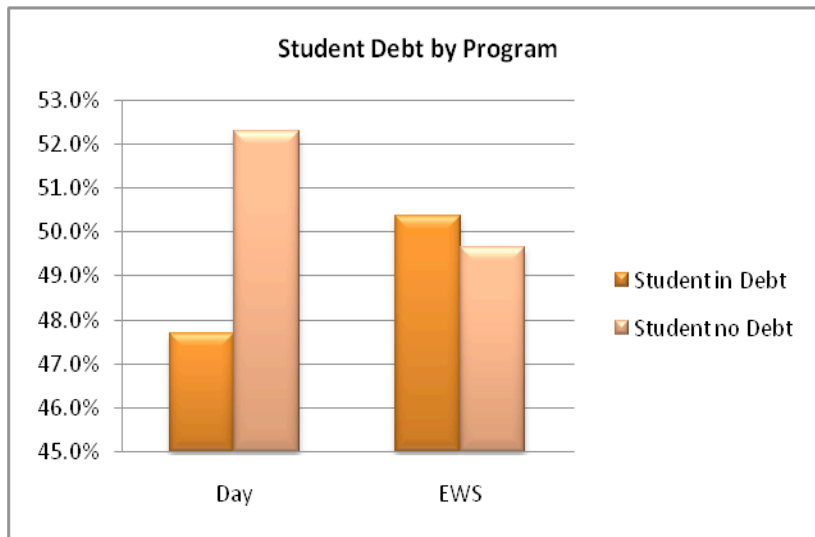


The wages from their work makes college attendance possible for most working class students, yet it is often very hard for them to balance working and going to school. Sherry Lee Linkon explains, in an article on the stratification of higher education, that, *"students at working-class institutions often work thirty-five or more hours a week, commute long distances between home and campus and have family responsibilities that make completing assignments difficult."*

In fact, the major reason that students drop out of college is the tension between work and school and the "need to work and make money", according to a recent study by Public Agenda, *With Their Whole Lives Ahead of Them: Myths and Realities About Why So Many Students Fail to Finish College*. According to the report, students who had dropped out said that balancing work and school was a bigger problem than the cost of tuition. When asked what would have helped them stay in school, the survey respondents' two top answers were financial aid for part time study and more class offerings in the evening and on weekends.

Student Debt by Day and Evening Weekend Programs

Earlier, we pointed out that more students were in debt for their education in Tacoma and Grays Harbor than Olympia. Tacoma and Grays Harbor showed a larger percentage of working class students, who may lack family financial resources and be more likely to have to borrow for college. Evening and Weekend students, too, are more likely to be in debt for their educations than are day students, but the differences are not dramatic. Of the 239 day students, 48% were in debt due to school as compared to 50% of the 286 evening weekend students surveyed.



Payday Loans for Day and Evening Weekend Students

Use of non-standard (or predatory) lending is much higher among low-income working class people. It is little known in the upper middle class. Here, we see substantial differences between the day and evening populations. Only 8% of the day students have ever used payday loans as compared to 23% of the evening weekend students. Though the older age demographic may have had more time to incur bad luck, the more likely explanation is a class difference in the populations.

Residency Status of Day and Evening Weekend Students

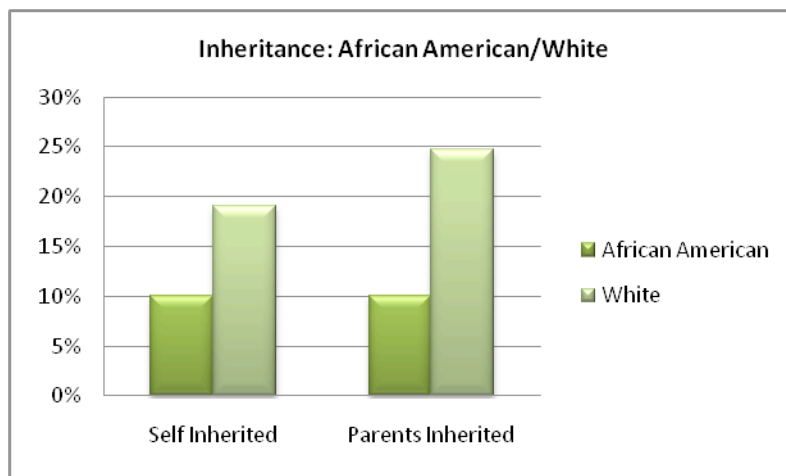
The college draws a large cohort of out-of-state students who pay substantially higher tuition and are often choosing Evergreen from a wide variety of options, including private colleges. These students are more likely to be relatively privileged. Non-residents made up 30% of the day population as compared to only 13% of evening and weekend students. We can conclude that Evening and Weekend students are, in their majority, working class, while the day students are more likely to be privileged, though there are many of them from working class backgrounds as well.

Race and Class

Does being white imply an economic advantage, or are there alignments between race and class status among students at Evergreen? Our survey data tell us that African Americans and other people of color are yet another working class majority at Evergreen.

In *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality*, Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro looked at black/white differences in wealth and the intergenerational transfer wealth. “Inherited wealth,” they explain, “is a very special kind of money imbued with the shadows of race.” They explained the importance of even small wealth transfers to children at critical periods in their life, particularly entering college and buying a first home. Since African Americans and other people of color have faced discrimination throughout history, that has made it harder for them to accrue wealth. Oliver and Shapiro explored the ways that African Americans have been prevented from acquiring middle class status in the same proportion as whites.

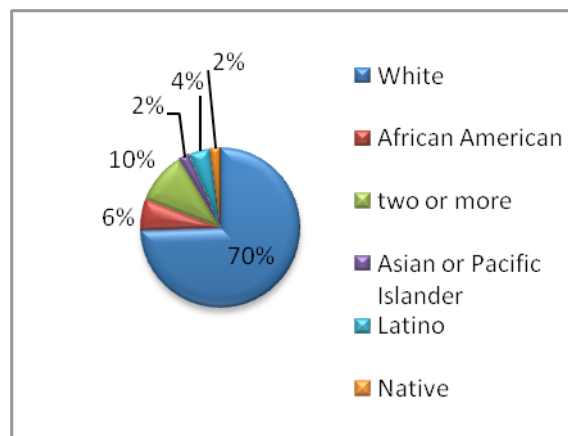
Certainly, we can confirm that African American students are less likely than their white counterparts to have inherited real estate or financial resources from parents or other family members, as were their own parents.



Class self-identification, as well, is different when students who identified as white are distinguished from those who identified as African American, Asian, Latino, Native American, or two or more categories. Students of color were much more likely to identify as working class, whether asked about their current status or their family of origin.



Our total sample characteristics are shown in the chart below.



While students of color attend classes in all of Evergreen's location, we best see the connections between social class and race when we contrasted the Tacoma program with Olympia's campus in the previous section. In our survey, 60% of Tacoma respondents were people of color; in Olympia, 30% were. The differences in social class are related to the racial inequalities in our society.

Working/Nonworking Students

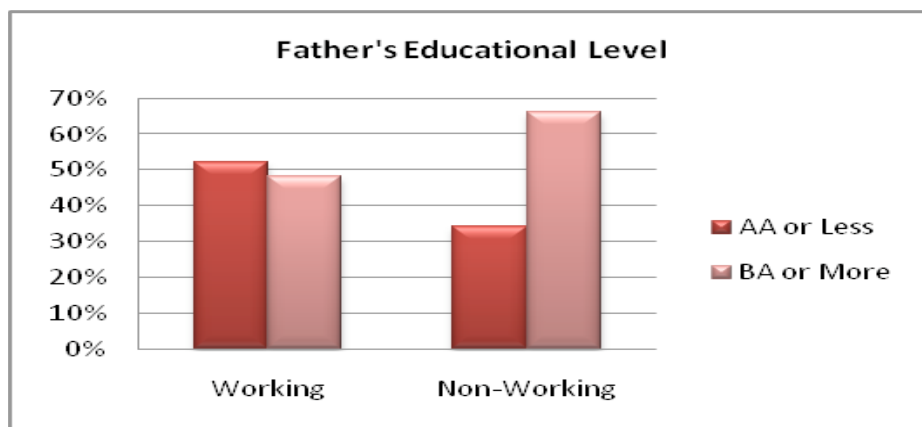
Assessing the class status of students is different from looking at the population at-large. For instance, income is a very faulty measure. It may not correspond to status very well at all, since students who can afford to go to school without working will report very little "income." Older students may not prefer to work and go to school but must maintain house-

holds and can't afford to stop working. Some might not be able to drop out of their career path in order to study full time.

In the younger age demographic, we expected to find that students aged 15-24 would be more likely to not be employed if they come from a middle, upper middle or upper class background, as opposed to students from working class backgrounds. Starting with the survey question: *Are you currently employed?* we cross-referenced several other survey questions about parents' education, inheritance, class self-identification, and fathers' occupation.

Evergreen draws students, resident and non-resident, from upper middle and upper class homes for a liberal arts education. We would expect to see fewer such students who need to work to support themselves in our younger student body. Our survey found that 56% of the students aged 15-24 at Evergreen are not working.

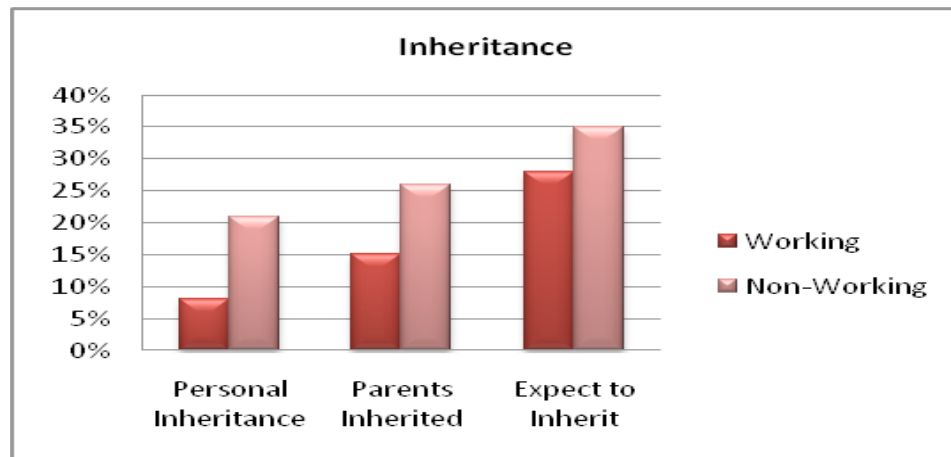
We also looked at fathers' education levels in assessing the class status of younger students. Barbara Ehrenreich explained that colleges and universities were essential to the reproduction of class status for middle class professionals in her book, *Fear of Falling*. Attending community college is a working class marker, and associate degree or technical college graduates are likely to be in working class occupations. Our hypothesis about the relationship between working and class status was confirmed; we found that 66% of *non*-working students aged 15-24 at Evergreen have a father holding a BA or a graduate degree. The chart below shows that those whose fathers had an AA or less were more likely to work; those whose fathers had a BA or more were likely to not work.



Inheritance

As Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro pointed out in their pathbreaking book, *Black Wealth/White Wealth*, even a small inheritance can make a major difference in the ability of young people to attend. As expected, we found that non-working students were more likely than

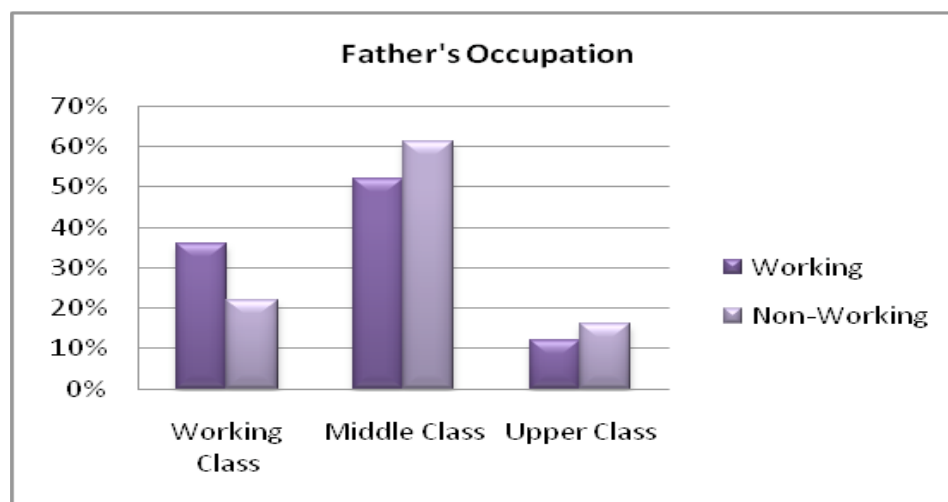
working students to have received an inheritance, have parents who had inherited, or have a greater expectation to receive inheritance in the future.



Parent's Occupation

The survey asked for parents' occupations, and we coded them for status using a method similar to Zweig's in *The Working Class Majority*. We separated them into low status, middle status, and high status groups. While we found that the children of middle and high status-occupation fathers often worked, those whose fathers had working class occupations were quite likely to work while going to school.

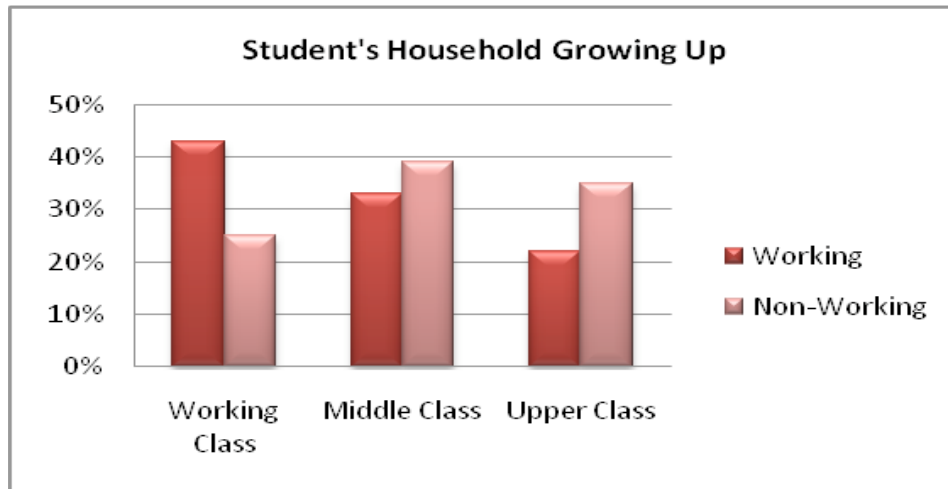
So we can say with confidence that if you are from working class stock, you are more likely to have to work.



We found that 74% of working students had fathers with working class occupations, compared to 63% for non-working students. Of non-working students, 37% had higher status fathers, compared with 26% of the working student population.

Students who identified themselves as coming from working class families were much more likely to work than others. Of working students, 43% identified the household they grew up in as working class or lower, compared with only 25% from the non-working group.

With this variety of tests, we can conclude that Evergreen students aged 15 – 24 are more likely to *not* be working if they come from families with middle, upper middle, or upper class backgrounds. Students who are working are much more likely to come from families with a working class background.



Veterans

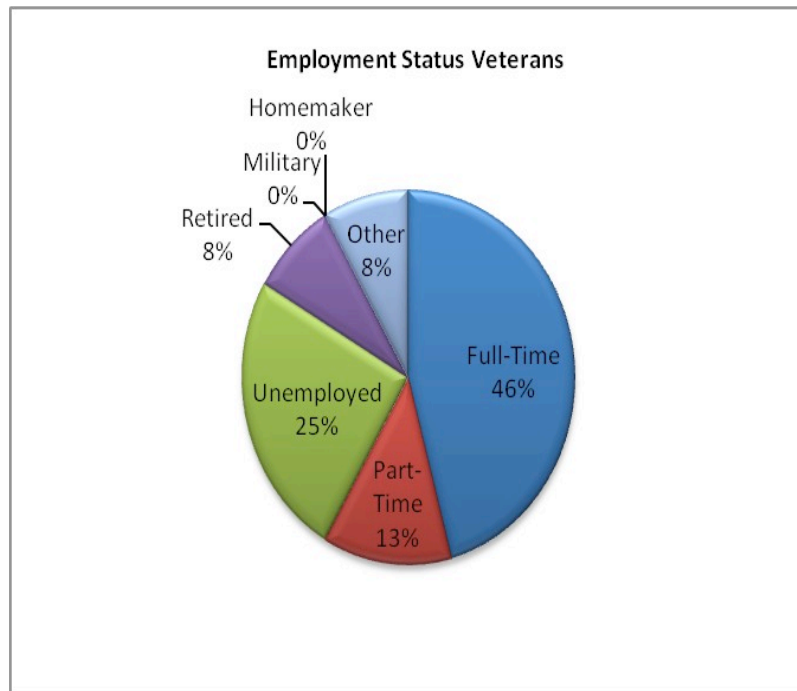
Three military bases are close to Evergreen's campus – a National Guard base, an Army base, and an Air Force base. They are all just north of Olympia and provide the college with its current small contingent of active service military students and veterans. We found that Evergreen veterans are a very diverse, and very working class, group.

Like students in the Tacoma, Grays Harbor, and Evening programs, the veterans are older than the average student -- 42% of veterans are between the ages of 25 to 34.

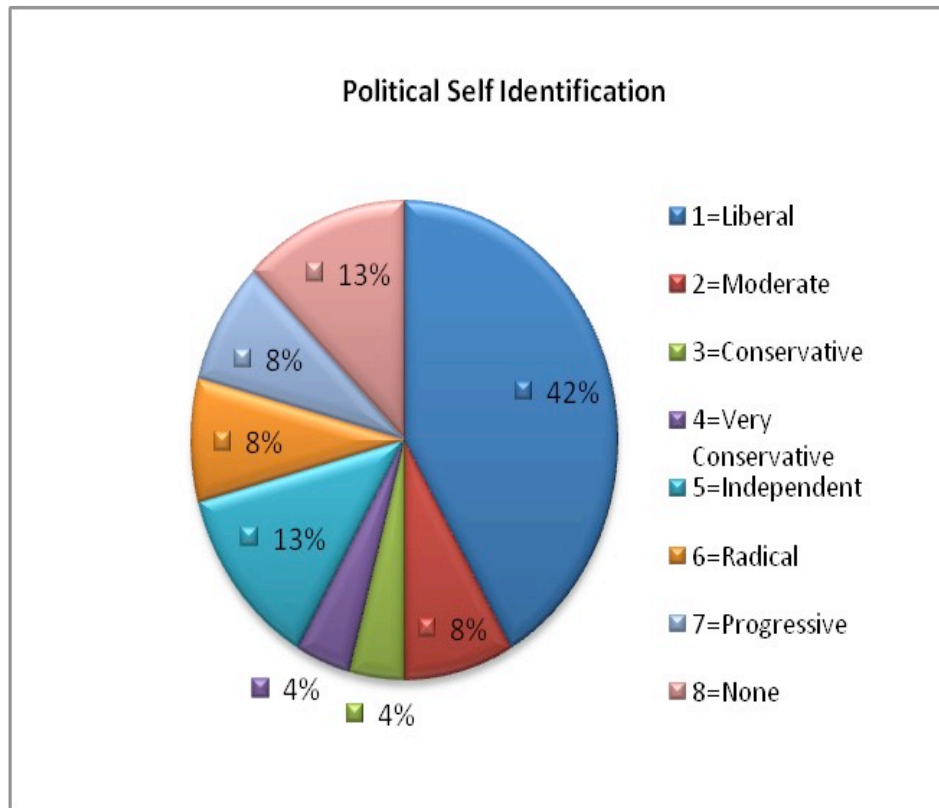
Veterans are 70% are male, and, surprisingly to some, 30% female. Of respondents, 58% identified as white, 25% African-American, 4% Native American, 13% two or more races.

Rafael Lozano, Veterans Liaison at the college, says that his work to recruit veterans to Evergreen has increased the racial diversity of the whole college, and he hopes that will continue and expand.

Veterans are more likely to consider themselves working class than any other group of students. In our survey, 43% identified this way. When the 24% low income and 5% poor are added to the working class category, veterans come out to be 72% working class. A majority of them are employed, and the largest segment works full time in addition to going to school.



The Evergreen State College has always been a sort of laboratory for change, and the political opinions of students and faculty lean strongly progressive, liberal or left. Some veterans may not want to identify publicly as former or active military. But veterans can be victims of an unfair political stereotype as well. Others may be surprised to learn that only 8% of veterans said they were politically conservative, with 8% moderate. The majority identified as liberal, progressive, or radical.



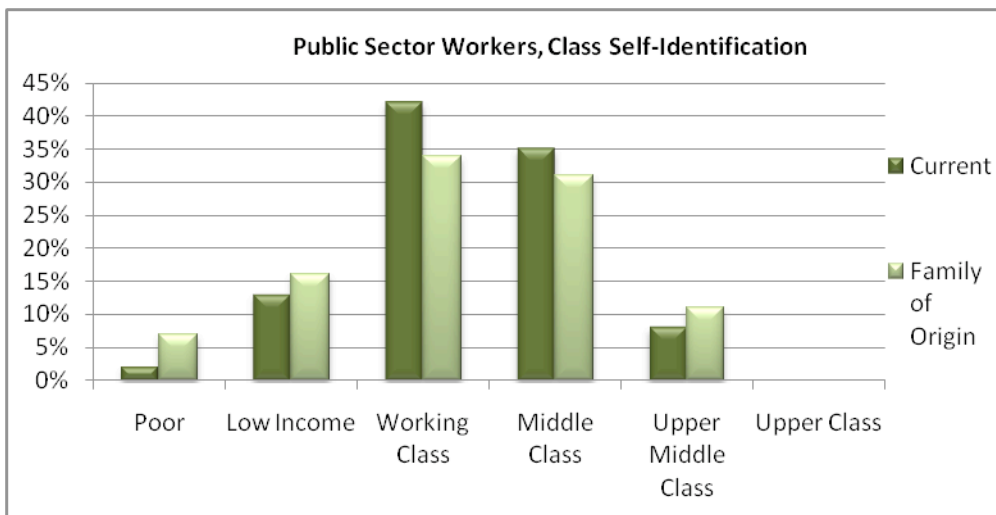
Public Sector Workers at Evergreen

Evergreen is located in Olympia, the state capitol of Washington. In the local area, tens of thousands work for state government and also for city and federal jurisdictions. Of survey respondents, 88, or 16% of our sample, were public sector workers.

Some state agencies reimburse tuition, and tuition waivers are also available for some state employees, but only 14% of our sample reported using these benefits. For the most part, public sector workers are using their own wages, or those of their spouse or partner, to pay for school. Only 10% are getting any parental help, and few qualify for financial aid. When asked if they could stay in school if they lost their jobs, 40% reported that they could not.

Of public sector workers, 82% attend evening and weekend classes, rather than full time day programs. 57% plan to attend graduate school in the future. Many of them will likely attend one of Evergreen's graduate programs, which are all oriented to public sector employment.

Public sector workers identify as working class most often, and the largest portion come from working class backgrounds. When the categories of poor, low income, and working class are added, 57% currently identify that way, and the same proportion report their families of origin within those categories.



State workers are yet another “working class majority.”

Students Who Are Parents

When working class students face the problem of funding their education, tuition and school expenses must compete with car insurance, health insurance, rent, groceries, childcare and car payments. Still, college promises the possibility of a more rewarding work life, both in the financial and personal sense.

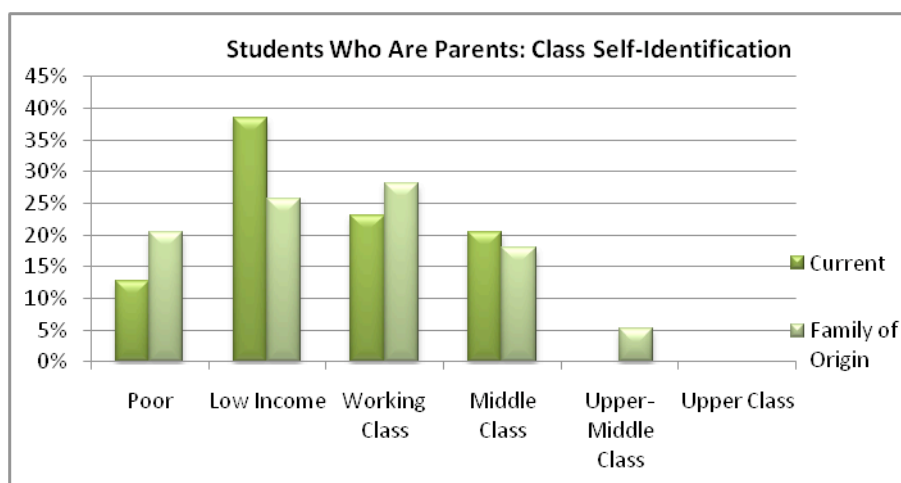
Going to school and making ends meet may occupy all the time of a single person, but students who are raising families have to balance time and resources between their studies and household, and often their jobs, too. Of our respondents, 7% were parents raising children under the age of 18. Female students raising children outnumbered their male counterparts 3 to 1.

Both Grays Harbor and Tacoma serve large working class populations comprised of non-traditional students, while the demographics of Olympia's are more traditional. When we look at locations, we found that 5% of the Olympia students, 19% of the Tacoma students and 38% of the Grays Harbor students are raising families while pursuing their degrees. A quarter received Pell grants, while 69% had subsidized loans and 67% unsubsidized loans.

The difficulty of attending school while raising a family may explain why 62% of these students have had to quit school previously and 24% anticipate having to take a break for financial reasons.

We found that 12% of the Tacoma students and 19% of Grays Harbor are *single* parents, while the Olympia campus is comprised of 3% single parents. Of single parents, 82% rely on Pell grants and 68% receive state need grants, subsidized and unsubsidized loans. This compares with all students, who receive 45% subsidized loans, 38% receive unsubsidized loans and 37% Pell grants and state need grants. Of students who do not have children, 46% receive assistance from their parents, while we didn't locate a single student parenting children who received support from their own parents.

When we look at the class self-identification of students who are parents, the picture is not surprising. A stunning 74% considered themselves to be poor, low income, or working class, and 75% grew up in similar households.



Conclusions

We felt, but didn't know, that class differences exist at Evergreen when we started this project. Though it is difficult to measure class, particularly among students, we were able to design questions that gave us a way to quantify class differences. Learning to look at our world through the lens of social class helps us understand ourselves better.

We have discovered that beneath the stereotype, there are working class majorities at our school, particularly at our locations in Tacoma and Grays Harbor, in the Evening and Week-end program, and among veterans, single parents, and students of color.

In preparing our report, we had conversations with academic staff members and students, including ourselves, about how class *works* here. The answer was not what one might expect, but it was heartening. Most of our community felt that Evergreen does a very good job for its working class students in providing educational equity and a welcoming atmosphere. Though it may be harder for working class students to pursue and complete their education, with jobs placing more demands on their time, fewer resources, and, sometimes, families to raise, they persist and thrive here. The collaborative learning style puts working class students at less of a disadvantage than competitive, traditional learning methods. The small classes and low student/faculty ratio helps all students get their share of attention. The practical, applied projects in most classes make use of a wide variety of student skills and abilities. It's much easier for students to get their hands on media and scientific equipment, even first year students. Undergraduate students are encouraged to do research, and the college sometimes funds students to travel to conferences. Two of the student authors were thus able to travel to a conference called *How Class Works* to present this research.

"Learning across significant differences" is one of the five "foci," or principles, guiding Evergreen's pedagogy. Class differences can contribute to a richer experience when we use them to understand experiences and knowledge different than our own.

Still, we have some recommendations. First, for working class students, it's particularly important to have good academic advising services. They are unlikely to have families or peers who can advise them about graduate school and career directions with their liberal arts degree. More academic advising time should be devoted to the evening and weekend students in all our locations.

Financial aid is crucial for working students who attend part time and should be available for those who register for less than the current required 12 quarter hours. If federal policies are a barrier, then the college should use its influence to promote a change. We encourage the college to maintain, and possibly expand, the number of programs offered in the evenings, on weekends, or with flexible schedules. These two recommendations – financial aid for part time enrollment and enhanced evening and weekend offerings – topped the list when students who had dropped out of college were asked, "what would help?" in a recent study.

Finally, we hope that the Evergreen that we have portrayed here helps students, faculty, and staff understand our community. We also hope to open a broad conversation about social class. Faculty should know how many of their students are working, have children, or come from backgrounds that make college more challenging, and possibly more rewarding. Getting beneath the stereotypes, and learning how class works, will hopefully help us understand how to build a more equal and just future.

Our thanks to:

Allen Mauney, member of the faculty in Mathematics, co-teacher of *Class in the U.S.*, Fall-Winter, 2009/10 and our statistics mentor.

Laura Coghlan, Evergreen's Director of Institutional Research, Vauhn Foster-Grahler, Director of the Quantitative and Symbolic Reasoning Center, Abby Kelso, Evening and Weekend Studies Outreach Coordinator, Rafael Lozano, Veterans Coordinator, and Gilda Sheppard, member of the faculty for the Tacoma program for their thoughtful conversation, advice, and insight.

Sarah Pederson, Academic Budget Dean, who helped student authors find funding to travel to the conference, *How Class Works*.

Stephanie Madison, who put so much extra effort into developing, formatting, and analyzing the survey, and Jean Squires for her huge contribution to the writing of the report.

And to all of our student colleagues who wrote the survey, administered it, and entered and analyzed the data: Michael Albert, Christian Andersen, Travis Bacon, John Bolinger, Megan Brownlee, Cassie Burke, Zoe Carpenter, Butch Chapin, Kendra Coburn, Madeline Corrado-Din, Candice Cullitan, Carl Davis, Luis Dayton-Ricks, Neil Donovan, Shon Eck, Mahon Gandy, Matt Garl, Devin Good, Damon Gossett, David Grover, Ian Hastings, Leslie Holmes, Song Israel, Andrew Jones, Xander Knight, Jason Lake, Oliver Lee, Evan Lytle, Ruth Magana Moreno, Shonda Okonda, Barbara Pacifico, Sarah Person, Angela Poiré, Zz Quinn, Peter Ramey, Kathe Rumsey, Liz Sauer, Kelly Shaffstall, Justin Slaby, Annie Slee, Cooper Sloan, Cameron Smith, Brenda Stauffer, David Stevenson, Alicia Tarin, Christian Truscinski, David Wulf, K Yacks, and Michael Yegge.

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Page 19, working students: (Students 15-24, Non-Working > Students 15-24, Working) Z test = 2.93-- This meets the test for 5% significance level. We can say with 95% confidence: 56% (+ or - 8%) of the student body age 15-24 at Evergreen are Non-Working students. This was hypothesis tested to a 5% significance level.

Page 20, working/nonworking: Z test for Non-Working + BA or more > Working + BA or More = 3.1 (greater than 1.645) We can say with 95% confidence that 66% (+ or - 9%) of Non-Working students age 15-24 at Evergreen have a father holding a BA or a graduate degree. This is at a 5% significance level.

There are significantly more Working students with fathers in working class occupations than Non-Working students with father's in Working class occupations. (Z test = 2.41) At the 95% confidence level more student's with Working class fathers work 36% (+ or - 15%) compared to 22% (+ or - 14%) for Non-Working students with working class fathers. This is at a significance level of 5%.

Page 21, working/nonworking: This also passed the hypothesis test at a 5% significance level. (Z test score of 3.21) We can say with 95% confidence that 43% of Working students (= or - 13%) identified the household they grew up in as working class or lower, compared with only 25% (+ or - 13%) from the Non-Working group.