

Concluding Analysis and Future Issues

All institutions are characterized by certain critical tensions as a result of their history, structures, and practices. As we engage in serious self-analysis, it is important to distinguish productive and non-productive tensions. Some of Evergreen's tensions are the inevitable result of the particular innovations and structures we have chosen to embrace. Some of these tensions have been present since the inception of the college, and we have come to see these not as "problems to be fixed" or disasters to be feared. They are, quite simply, continuing concerns that reside alongside principles we value, but concerns which need to be revisited every five years or so to be sure we can *still* live with them. They are the contradictions of our lives that we acknowledge and continue to hold. They often provide a useful way to talk about our work and the directions in which we would like to proceed.

On the other hand, all institutions also experience some gaps between their aspirations and their behaviors. Self-studies can help to identify issues that do indeed need addressing. Our challenge is to distinguish issues that might undermine the college's mission from needed changes which might further support Evergreen principles. We've chosen to describe these as tensions because these are issues and values which have at least two opposing sides, each embodying principles which we hold dear and which are, nonetheless, in inevitable conflict with each other. The strengths of the principles are often also the weaknesses—when they conflict with equally important principles. The tensions connect directly to the college mission and to our expectations of faculty and students. They also result from our effort to dismantle the traditional power structure of a college, and to engage the campus community in discussions about our future—more people involved in the discussion often leads to more disagreement.

Critical Tensions

Collegiate and Managerial Culture. Some of the continuing concerns of faculty, administrators, staff, and students are inevitable results of the organization and structure of any college. Throughout the United States, for example, there has been a steady increase in bureaucracy and regulation. For many early faculty, this is experienced as an increasing incursion of the "managerial culture" into what used to be an intimate community and a "collegiate culture." The increasing scale of the institution has created stress and a sense of loss as Evergreen tries to remain a small scale and personal institution in the face of a real need for professionalization and more regularized policies and procedures. The influence of the different cultures of the academy extends further within the institution to the functions performed by the various units, and the real need to understand and respect our various roles. The managerial, developmental, collegial, and negotiating cultures have been identified by William Berquist as prototypes for the different parts of the institution. All contribute to the institution's well-being, but they sometimes fail to appreciate each others contributions.

Rhetoric and Action. Evergreen has clearly stated objectives both for learning and for working together. Because these objectives cannot always be realized, members of the community experience frustration at the lack of coherence between the rhetoric and the actual behaviors. Many new faculty express relief at being at a college where these thorny issues are openly and continuously discussed, at least, but they are also quick to point out seeming hypocrisies. Faculty, students, and staff come to Evergreen with high expectations based on the language of our aspirations; they also bring to the college expectations of an educational utopia, which no single institution can meet (Exhibit Room, Exhibit 2-2-133, *Teaching and Learning at Evergreen: an ethnographic study*, 6). They also bring expectations that, *here*, if nowhere else, rhetoric and practice will mesh perfectly.

Egalitarianism and recognition. Evergreen is deeply committed to egalitarianism as one of its fundamental values. It is one of the reasons why many at the college support a largely non-selective admissions policy. Within the faculty various structures and practices support egalitarianism including team teaching, no faculty rank, equal teaching loads and class size, the use of first names rather than titles, and an experience-based faculty salary scale. For all members of the community, this leads to equal treatment of students, staff, and faculty in accessing basic services (no special parking, no privileged checking out of books or media equipment, etc.). For students this value is put into practice by stressing collaboration through narrative evaluations rather than grades, and pervasive expectations of working in groups and in seminars. The flip side of this stress on equality is what may feel like nonrecognition of those who truly excel, those who go the extra mile. For faculty, there is an absence of structures to mark their career—whether it's tenure, promotion, or an award for teaching excellence—and gain public recognition from their colleagues. For students raised in the competitive atmosphere of other schools, narrative evaluations can feel unclear as benchmarks of their performance and potential. Competition is deeply embedded in American culture, and it remains a contested terrain even in an institution devoted to collaboration.

Community and Autonomy. Founded as a community of learners, with an emphasis on collaborative teaching and learning, Evergreen is not a perfect community in itself. We use the language of community to describe a process of teaching and learning that is sometimes quite isolated and lonely. We envision community as a process in itself, rather than something one joins. The nature of community at Evergreen is that it focuses on the academic program level—the coordinated studies mode of teaching and learning, primarily. Not all faculty or students are engaged in a coordinated studies program and thus are excluded from the most successful forms of community-building. Campus-wide community efforts are considerably less successful. Our increasing size, changing interests of faculty and students, and changing times make Evergreen a lonely place for some.

Evergreen's pedagogy places a premium on public and engaged teaching and learning. Some faculty and students fear public exposure: of their failure to embody the college's rhetoric, of their failure to be stunning at every lecture, of their inability to make themselves understood (Exhibit Room, Exhibit 2-2-133, *Teaching and Learning at Evergreen: an ethnographic study*). Because of the public nature of teaching and learning, and the expectation that students will assume responsibility for their own learning, students often fear the responsibility for their failures, as well. Faculty, with active participation for most aspects of college decision-making, are equally fearful of wrong decisions.

Evergreen's faculty treasure both community and autonomy. Sometimes this leads to overlooking responsibilities to students, to one's colleagues, and to the college. The autonomy so prized by Evergreen faculty can also make us less respectful of our colleagues and their work.

Curricular Continuity and Change. Throughout its history, Evergreen has experienced an ongoing tension around curriculum continuity and change. Some areas of the curriculum are more sequenced and pre-figured while others have a strong preference for a curriculum that changes each year. Some conceive this as a genuine value conflict around the purpose and principles of the institution. The 1989 reaccreditation visitor's report offered good counsel when it said that the dual demand for flexibility and predictability were important tensions to live with. They also noted that Evergreen needed to live with the trade-off between full-time coordinated studies programs and the rigidities this curriculum structure imposes.

Curricular Depth and Breadth. Evergreen expects that students will engage in a wide diversity of disciplinary work in their time here, but the preponderance of transfer students makes a requirement for breadth only at the freshman (or Core) level impractical. Thus, our

concern for disciplinary breadth (humanities, social sciences, natural and physical sciences, mathematics) considers both lower- and upper-division offerings. The lack of academic majors also means that students may elect to do all of their work in a single field—the “super major” phenomenon. Faculty have grappled with this issue in several versions of curriculum review, and continue to believe that the flexibility enjoyed by all students is worth the occasional super major.

The Five Foci and Questions of Scale. The commitment to the principles embodied in the five foci is college-wide, but faculty experience tensions as they attempt to put the foci into action in programs with growing enrollments and shrinking resources for staff support, facilities, and equipment. “Putting Theory into Practice,” for example, requires close student-faculty interaction, and adequate time for project development and assessment. Evergreen’s emphasis on interdisciplinary teaching and learning, together with the commitment to equality of class size, makes it difficult to offer advanced work for a necessarily limited number of students.

Teaching and Scholarly and Creative Work. This tension, present in all academic institutions across the country, takes on a particular shape at Evergreen. Faculty commit to the primacy of teaching at Evergreen, but wish to maintain their research interests. As we hire more faculty directly from graduate school, the tension changes somewhat, and becomes a question of how to bring recent graduates into an institution with teaching as its primary focus. Recreating the curriculum each year also has a price since it requires faculty to continuously learn new subject matter with little support in terms of release time to do so.

Self-Governance in a Growing Institution. Both faculty and students experience frustrations with regard to governance. Committed from the planning days to a committee of the whole for decision-making, faculty and students now find that process frustrating and ineffectual. The college is now more than three times the size of the founding days, the academic climate has changed, and the nature of teaching and learning has changed. While the value of self-governance is still strongly held, community participation and shared responsibility and authority are increasingly difficult to accomplish as the institution grows.

High Expectations of Students/Range of Students’ Abilities and Effort. Evergreen made an early commitment to admitting a diverse range of students, and the diversity of the student body has increased substantially over time. Large numbers of transfer students are just one dimension of this diversity. We have never found traditional selection criteria useful in predicting success at Evergreen. Students enter Evergreen programs with diverse backgrounds and preparation, and the range of abilities in most coordinated studies programs is very large. Faculty have high expectations of all students, but often find the active nature of the learning makes those differences immediately apparent, and makes teaching to some mythical “average student” impossible.

Blurred Boundaries and Roles. Evergreen has tried to be a community that recognizes everyone’s role in the educational process, be they staff or faculty. This has led to the blurring of traditional boundaries and roles, to a strong ethos of equality, and to a preference for informal ways of getting things done. The necessary and desirable blurring of institutional boundaries raises expectations for respect and for even more interaction and consultation. Members of the Academic Advising staff, for example, are important participants in the discussions of the curriculum, and faculty are increasingly engaged in both formal and informal advising. This, in turn, leads to the expectation that all faculty will be thoroughly informed about the curriculum, and that all staff members in APEL have a good working relationship with each faculty member. As the scale of the institution increases and relationships are recast as original members of the community depart, founding values can erode.

The blurring of organizational boundaries also leads to an increased reliance on face-to-face interaction, and members of the Evergreen community come to rely on personal relationships as a good way to get things done. We value this intimacy over the concomitant inefficiency. As the college grows, face-to-face interaction is increasingly difficult, and as we add faculty and staff, new members of the community experience frustration in trying to find the right person to ask.

Limited Resources/High Expectations. Evergreen has always struggled with limited resources, but has, at the same time, attempted to do much. Expanding needs for equipment, technology, and staff support have created a tension with the equally important needs for increased faculty and staff salaries and a reduced faculty/student ratio.