

# Where is the student in the Evergreen transcript?

## A preliminary report from the participants in the August 2005 Transcript Review Assessment Workshop

### Introduction

In Spring 2001, the Evergreen faculty adopted the six Expectations of an Evergreen Graduate as a key part of Evergreen's new general education initiatives in response to concerns raised during the 1998 accreditation review. The Assessment Study Group (charged by the Provost in January 2002) developed a multi-faceted approach to assessing the implementation of the general education initiatives. This group believed strongly that the student transcript should be the primary source for assessing student learning at Evergreen. In August 2002, a group of faculty (who represented nearly all of the undergraduate planning units), several staff members, and a student developed a rubric based on the six Expectations of an Evergreen Graduate. They used the rubric to assess evidence of learning in a random sample of 152 transcripts from the graduates of 2000-01 in terms of the Expectations. That process was considered a baseline measurement, since those students completed their studies in the year that the Expectations were adopted by the faculty.

This August 2005, a group comprising faculty (representing nearly all planning units), two staff members, and a student convened for the second assessment of student learning based on transcripts. We met for eight days to read and assess a second random sample of 158 Evergreen transcripts from the class of 2003-04. We used the rubric developed by the first faculty assessment team to assess the transcripts for evidence of student learning in terms of the Expectations of an Evergreen Graduate. The assessment scores that resulted from this work will be presented in a subsequent report. In this preliminary report we present some recommendations and observations based on our assessment work.

Why are we making recommendations regarding evaluation practices? In the process of reading and assessing evidence of student learning in the transcript, participants began to recognize some characteristics of transcripts and evaluations that effectively communicate student learning as well as some that do not. An important, secondary purpose of the assessment workshop was for the participants to discuss both student learning and evaluation practices with colleagues across planning units and to reflect on one's own practice. One participant described this assessment as "a humbling process to some degree." Another faculty participant stated, "I now see the value of the transcript and learned how to read and write evaluations and encourage students to write better evaluations." Another faculty participant observed, "If we can't see the learning, we need to do a better job of bringing it out."

Our work led us to affirm that student voice and faculty voice have different, complementary roles in the transcript as a whole. We were disappointed by how many transcripts had no student voice at all. Our primary recommendation is to ask faculty to require students not only to write self-evaluations but to include them in their transcripts. We further encourage faculty to include evaluation support in their programs. The transcript evidence shows that **all** student self-evaluations — not just those written by the strongest writers — are of significant help in

assessing student learning. **The best transcripts had clear, distinct, and consistent presence of both student and faculty voices.** Having both voices helps students develop their own ability to reflect on the significance of their learning (itself a large part of the sixth Expectation). Moreover, it allows the transcript reviewer to understand the relationship between the faculty's and student's assessment of the work.

### **“Where's the student's voice?": A Polemic on Co-Authored Evaluations**

We have reached strong consensus concerning **co-authored faculty evaluations**. This is a particular style of faculty evaluation developed in response to the 1997 Narrative Evaluation DTF. Co-authored evaluations begin with a paragraph of this form:

*This is a co-authored evaluation. The student, \_\_\_\_\_, contributed most of the information in this evaluation. It reflects the student's style and, to some degree, emphasizes the topics that the student found most significant. Each evaluation went through a peer review process. In addition, the faculty read, edited, verified, and added information as necessary. Faculty assumes responsibility for the veracity of the document based on evaluation criteria in the covenant and weekly class meetings with the student.*

The evaluation then proceeds to discuss the student in the third person.

Our understanding is that in preparation for the evaluation conference, students draft the “co-authored evaluation” in the third person, and this draft is used as the basis for the transcript document. Perhaps if done skillfully, this process can be a powerful learning *experience* for the student. But our reading of a number of these evaluations leads us to conclude that the process results in a poor *product*. Our reasons are as follows:

#### 1. Co-authored evaluations obliterate the student voice.

Please read the attached documents. The first is a faculty evaluation (not co-authored); the second, a student's self-evaluation; the third, a co-authored evaluation from the same student's next program. The co-authored evaluation is excellent in most respects: it is clear and specific on the student's accomplishments, it is judicious in selection of details, and it is informative about what the student is ready to do next.

The only problem with the co-authored evaluation, in fact, is that the student's voice is absent. You can see this for yourself by reading it in juxtaposition with the student's previous self-evaluation — that is, *as an outside reader would read it*. A reader of the complete transcript can easily see that the co-authored evaluation does *not* reflect the student's style. It reflects the style of the faculty member — in organization, in selection of topics, and in expression.

Further, co-authored evaluations lack the student's attempt to integrate the work of the program and to articulate its significance, something which shines forth in the student voice of self-evaluations, as is demonstrated in the attached form.

Third, since the evaluation is on the faculty evaluation form, it carries the authority and power of the faculty not the student. The very possibility of independent student authority is thus undermined.

### 2. Co-authored evaluations undermine the authority of the faculty voice.

When the co-authored evaluation says, “Aaron contributed most of the information...,” the reader has no way of knowing what particular information or how much. The faculty thus appears to be merely a “pass-through” for much of the evaluation. This makes it hard to credit the faculty’s assumption of “responsibility for the veracity of the document” as stated in the paragraph above. The reader may suspect that the faculty has abandoned the work of *evaluating* the student. This undermines faculty authority.

Co-authored evaluations typically include claims that make sense as first-person reports but are highly problematic if not patently absurd in the third-person faculty voice. For instance, “Aaron felt that he understood...,” “Aaron believed that...,” “Aaron does not feel confident in ...,” “Aaron wants to...” All are statements of the contents of the student’s consciousness and as such are not observable by the faculty. They are not they *evaluative* statements of the student’s work or academic growth over the course of the program either. These statements overreach, and they confuse the purpose of the faculty evaluation. They have a place in the transcript, but that place is in the student’s self-evaluation, for there, stated in the first person, they make sense as reports that convey the nature and significance of student learning.

### 3. Coauthored evaluations undermine opportunities for reflection and learning.

The co-authored evaluation denies the student the opportunities of reflecting on their own work and understanding how their faculty member views their work. It denies the faculty member the opportunity to hear how the student would have articulated their work had the student been writing a self-evaluation, as opposed to hearing how the student would want their work framed in a faculty evaluation. It denies the transcript audience the opportunity to understand the student’s learning and work from two different perspectives and to consider the relationship between what the faculty notes about the student’s work and what the student notes about their own work. If these Expectations of Evergreen Graduates are important, then we should avoid evaluation practices that mask the evidence of student learning and student abilities.

We think the above reasons present a convincing case to abandon co-authored evaluations. Below we discuss some reasons that could be offered in favor of them.

*“It is worthwhile to have students draft a co-authored evaluation.”*

Some faculty members hold that students learn a lot from writing of their work in the third person: Students must attempt to see themselves as others see them. Also, some find it helpful to have students’ reports on their own learning as an aid to writing faculty evaluations. Both of these are reasons for having students do some sort of *preparatory* writing. They are not reasons to include the document, however revised, in the transcript.

*“Putting the student’s words on the faculty evaluation form lends them weight.”*

This is not true when faculty and student voices are not distinguished. It is not the *evaluation form* but the *authoritative faculty voice* that can lend weight to the student voice. The

authoritative faculty voice is compromised in co-authored evaluations. Faculty members can lend weight to the student's words in other ways. Some quote the student's work explicitly in the faculty evaluation. Some, in fact, quote directly from the student's self-evaluation, refer to it in detail, or endorse it as accurate and helpful.

The co-authored style was a worthwhile and bold experiment, and some elements — such as the preparatory writing that students do — are valuable consequences of it and worth continuing.

But overall, co-authored transcript evaluations blur the voices and the respective authorities of faculty and student, leaving both severely damaged. We urge faculty to abandon this practice.

### **Summative Student Self Evaluation**

When present, summative evaluations add valuable evidence about how the student made sense of their undergraduate experience. Evidence of student integration, synthesis, and ability to reflect on the personal and social significance of their work was more readily available when a summative evaluation was present. The summative evaluation provided the transcript reader with an overall sense of the student's learning, whether they were written as separate documents on the summative evaluation form or written within a final program. The summative evaluations written in final programs or at the end of a final culminating project or internship referred to the prior learning that had brought the student to this deliberate conclusion of their undergraduate work. Effective summative evaluations were not comprehensive lists of everything the student had done, but rather those in which the student identified significant learning and how that learning came together into a whole undergraduate education. The summative evaluation, whether it was completed as a separate document or at the conclusion of the final program, provided the reader with an expression of the student's authority over their whole education.

Here are three examples of senior culminating experiences as defined by students in their final evaluation: 1) One senior noted in her final evaluation why she chose her final year-long program as a logical conclusion based on her prior studies. 2) Another senior articulated why his final 8-credit program during spring quarter of his senior year provided him the opportunity to bring together his previous studies and learn to apply them to his future goals. 3) Another senior did an internship during the senior year and identified it as a way to synthesize previous intellectual pursuits and apply skills in a work environment.

Many transcripts had evidence of what could have been a culminating or summative experience, but the student didn't take advantage of the opportunity to reflect publicly on that experience by including a self-evaluation in their transcript.

### **Faculty support for student self-evaluations in programs**

Students need direction in writing good self-evaluations. Students' reflective work needs to be taken seriously and supported by faculty. This work includes not only reflecting on the nature and significance of the activities and themes of individual programs, but also synthesizing their

learning across the boundaries of individual programs, taking responsibility for their work and academic pathways, evaluating their own efforts, and articulating their work. Ongoing reflection about the student's work by the faculty can ease the evaluation writing process at the end of the quarter. Ongoing reflection by the student or through portfolio development or synthetic/integrative activities along the way may help the student develop a better evaluation of their work at the close of the program.

The Evergreen transcript offers students the unique opportunity to have their own voice present in their transcripts. Students don't always recognize the value and opportunity of having their voices in their transcripts. How can faculty encourage students to value and utilize this opportunity? What are the factors that prohibit students from submitting self-evaluations? Are there circumstances in which students are being discouraged from submitting self-evaluations?

There are many transfer students entering various parts of Evergreen's curriculum at various points in their undergraduate pathways. Faculty should not assume that all students in their program have experience evaluating and articulating their own work, even if it is an upper division program. Support for student self-evaluation should be present across the curriculum, not just in entry-level programs.

Given the decision to exclude individual learning contract and internship forms from the transcript, encouraging students to submit self-evaluations for contract work becomes even more important. The learning objectives and related academic preparation and work experience sections of the contract form often provided the only evidence of what the student set out to learn and how their independent work connected to prior work and future goals. In other words, evidence for student synthesis of learning and ability to articulate and assume responsibility for her/his own work often appeared in the contract document itself. Very often students did not submit self-evaluations for contracts and internships, thus the contract document was the only evidence available for assessing those areas.

## **Faculty Development**

How can faculty learn to write narrative evaluations and support student evaluations? The best way is to involve more faculty in the process of reading and assessing a transcript, so that they can make their own meaning from the experience. One relatively new faculty member mentioned that the transcript assessment activity would have helped her immensely as a new faculty. She said that the new faculty group did read transcripts, but not in terms of looking for anything in particular, such as evidence of the Expectations. We promote environments that allow our students to discover their own knowledge and to learn in context, why shouldn't we provide those same learning opportunities for our faculty? When faculty participate directly in this collegial assessment, they are more likely to have meaningful realizations and learning than if they are asked to accept recommendations based on someone else's experience.

Faculty could share strategies with one another about how they support student self-evaluation. Some workshop participants shared their own strategies during the assessment workshop. Stephen Beck distributed copies from the self-evaluation workshops and self-evaluation

guidelines which he implemented in his 2004-05 program. In her programs, Jeanne Hahn asks her students to select one or two concepts, a specific text, or an experience from the program and expand on that in the self-evaluation to give the reader a sense of the student's thinking and what matters to them. One faculty member shared that the Writing Center provides self-evaluation workshops that are decent for general advice, but the tutors cannot give the detailed feedback on the content of the program that the current faculty member can provide.

The faculty members of the assessment workshop participants suggested that they could share this document and facilitate deeper discussion at their own planning unit meetings in the coming year. In addition, they noted the benefit of this time to come together with their faculty colleagues to discuss teaching and learning across planning units. They encourage more faculty institutes and opportunities that bring folks together to talk across boundaries about how we teach and why we teach this way.

### A Concluding Note

There is an old adage that says: "it is easier to imagine hell than heaven." For some reason people tend to focus on what doesn't work instead of on what does. This preliminary report, for better or worse, fits into this pattern. We have called attention to a number of features in our sample of Evergreen transcripts that we found to be deeply problematic and we have only alluded to the strengths of the transcripts. Please don't read too much into this. We don't want in any way to convey the impression that "Evergreen is broken." In fact, during our review we were regularly overjoyed to read about what some of our students had done during their time here. During lunches and breaks we regularly "bragged" about the great student whose transcript we had just read. Of course, the readers had no more right to "brag" than anyone else, for those students had worked with faculty, staff, and fellow students throughout the college. It was simply that we were proud to be associated with the institution where such bright and energetic people had been given the opportunity to flourish in their education.

So, please take our comments in this spirit. We believe that there is much for us to be proud of in our work with our students. Our suggestions are intended to help faculty to collectively build transcripts that *reveal* to the greatest extent possible all of the great work that we *know* our students are *already* doing.



The Evergreen State College - Olympia, Washington 98505  
**FACULTY EVALUATION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

Student's Last Name	First	Middle	ID Number
	Insects and Plants of Washington		
Program or Contract No.	Title		16
		Date began	Date ended
			Qtr. Credit Hrs.

was a focused, personable, hard-working student. She attended most of the program meetings, participated enthusiastically on the field trips, and completed all of the assignments. She got along well with the other students and by the end of the quarter, she learned the names of almost all the other students in the program (42/46).

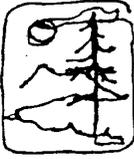
answers on the weekly study questions were complete and detailed—evidence of the strong effort she invested. They demonstrated an excellent understanding of the concepts covered. She effectively used details to support her answers. This level of understanding was not directly reflected in performance on the exams. Her final botany and entomology exams showed improvement over her midterms and indicated a good understanding of the material covered.

completed the twenty-five required plant drawings (plus three more) and the quality of her drawings was good. They captured the general appearance and stature of the plants. However, the addition of labeled details of key plant features would improve her drawings. Additional natural history/ecological observations for each site visited and plants observed are suggested for future field work. plant identification skills were fair, as she demonstrated on the botany portion of the lab practical.

submitted a fair insect collection. She showed good attention to specimen preparation, labeling, and arrangement. However, her collection suffered from not being as complete as it could have been, with some of the major insect groups missing, and her identifications of the submitted specimens had a relatively high error rate. performance on the entomology lab practical demonstrated a fair ability to identify insects on sight.

Suggested Course Equivalencies (in quarter hours): Total - 16

- 8 - General Botany with Lab
- 8 - General Entomology with Lab



The Evergreen State College - Olympia, Washington 98505  
**THE STUDENT'S OWN EVALUATION OF PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT**

Student's Last Name	First	Middle	ID Number
Insects and Plants of Washington			
Title		Date Began	Date ended

I spent the spring semester of 2003 in a class called Insects and Plants of Washington. During the three field trips we went on I got the best field experience of my college career so far. We waded through knee-deep water for three hours identifying plants on the Pacific Coast, conducted plant surveys in the shrub steppe of Eastern Washington and attempted ant baiting on the slopes of Mt. Adams.

This class changed the way I look at my immediate environment. I learned the major families, genera, and species of the plants and insects within not only the state of Washington, but within the entire Pacific Northwest. This is the area of the country I plan on living in for at least the next ten years of my life. When I get a job, hopefully using my science degree, I plan to be working with some of the species I became familiar with in this class. Everywhere I go in the area I can identify some flora and fauna around me and assess what kind of environment I'm in and how healthy it is.

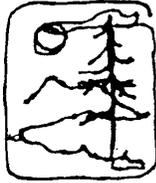
I am doing an internship this summer through the National Resource Conservation Service in Tulelake, California. There I've already begun picking up samples of unfamiliar trees and flowers to take home and identify. I got very comfortable using my plant and insect identification books and dichotomous keys this semester so I feel confident when I "key out" new specimens. I can now recognize tree species through a moving car when I'm driving. It makes me feel more connected to my environment. The forests are not just a green carpet anymore, but each stem holds an individual flower. I think humans have a tendency to forget they are a part of nature and her cycles. What I want to do on this planet is remind them. I believe science is an ideal way to do that. Most of the time we're not even aware of the life teaming underneath our feet in the soil.

If I can understand and identify with the environment around me then I care about it more. Instead of instinctively smashing the insect I see landing on my arm, I hold it up and examine it. Insects have ceased to be pests and are now marvels. Plants are not just pretty, but amazing works of art that took centuries to genetically create.

In this class I began to better understand the connections between all the species in an immediate area. Plant and insects' features have evolved based on their relationships together. Whether it be a bee foraging for nectar and pollinating orchid flowers, or flowers providing nutritious seeds to tempt a passing ant to collect and germinate in its colonies "midden;" we are all working together on this planet and affect each other in our daily lives.

I spent a lot of lab time working with the dissecting and compound microscopes this semester. While drawing the main identifying insect and plant features, I learned more about the complexity of our world. Bug and plant features are so tiny most people wouldn't even know they were there. I felt privy to nature's secrets every time I would look at a specimen under a scope.

Science is the subject I feel most passionate about; it is the medium I express myself through. I will continue on with my scientific research in The Fungal Kingdom this fall.



The Evergreen State College - Olympia, Washington 98505  
**FACULTY EVALUATION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

Student's Last Name	First	Middle	ID Number
	Fungal Kingdom: Lichens and Mushrooms, Nature's Recyclers		
Program or Contract No.	Title		16
	Date began	Date ended	Qtr. Credit Hrs.

This is a coauthored evaluation. The student, \_\_\_\_\_, contributed most of the information in this evaluation. It reflects the student's style and, to some degree, emphasizes the topics that the student found most significant. Each evaluation went through a peer review process. In addition, the faculty read, edited, verified, and added information as necessary. Faculty assumes responsibility for the veracity of the document based on evaluation criteria in the covenant and weekly class meetings with the student.

\_\_\_\_\_ entered this quarter with a strong background in biology and ecology and her goals were to develop her understanding of mushroom and lichen taxonomy and the roles each play in the forest ecosystem. She is a hardworking and diligent student who attended nearly all class meetings, completed all assigned work on time and participated fully in all aspects of the program. \_\_\_\_\_ worked hard to prove she could perform upper-division work.

\_\_\_\_\_ had no previous mycology experience, but nevertheless became very absorbed in the collecting, studying and identifying of the various fungal species. \_\_\_\_\_ was comfortable in the field, and her field notes on the location and habitat of her collections were good and improved over the quarter. \_\_\_\_\_ prepared a mushroom collection of twenty species. Her drawings of the mushrooms in her lab notebook were great. The macroscopic descriptions could have used more detail, but the microscopic details included were thorough and well done. Her identification of the various species was impressive.

Her performance on the mushroom portion of the final exam demonstrated a fair understanding of the basic concepts of fungal biology and ecology. Her grasp of the subject matter improved over the quarter. \_\_\_\_\_ gave a presentation on a scientific paper that dealt with mercury and its bioconcentration factors in wild mushrooms. She could have analyzed the paper's details more closely and drawn more conclusions to include in her summary paper. Her presentation on the subject was very good.

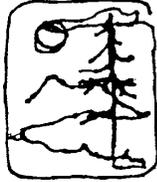
\_\_\_\_\_ had previous experience using taxonomic keys and field guides to identify organisms to species level, which was very useful this quarter. She collected and correctly identified 23 out of the 24 lichen species she turned in. Her drawings were excellent and showed good detailed work. Her descriptions were excellent and improved over the quarter. She is now competent using macroscopic features and technical keys to identify lichens.

Her answers on the lichen portion of the final exam indicated a very good grasp of the main topics covered. \_\_\_\_\_ showed improvement of her understanding over the course of the quarter. \_\_\_\_\_ gave a presentation on the recent discovery of a new species of fungal pathogen that

Faculty Signature(s)

Faculty Name

Date



The Evergreen State College - Olympia, Washington 98505  
**FACULTY EVALUATION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

---

---

Student's Last Name	First	Middle	ID Number
	Fungal Kingdom: Lichens and Mushrooms, Nature's Recyclers		
Program or Contract No.	Title		
	Date began	Date ended	Qtr. Credit Hrs.

degrades secondary metabolites (defense mechanisms) of lichens. Her presentation was excellent. She is a comfortable speaker who spoke clearly and was easy to follow.

Overall, she was highly organized and made good use of her time this semester. She has a good grasp of theory but really excels with the hands-on work. She is looking forward to applying her undergraduate degree in science to a job upon graduation. She thinks that being a good steward of the land means to understand the connections, limits and flexibility of the organisms living on the land. She wants to do work that brings awareness of the connection of human beings to the land and all the life forms it contains.

Suggested Course Equivalencies (in quarter hours): Total - 16  
(\* - indicates upper division science credits)

- \*8 - Mushroom Biology and Taxonomy
- \*8 - Lichen Biology and Taxonomy