



Final Report

The Evergreen State College

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Documenting Effective Educational Practice (Project DEEP)

The Evergreen State College

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Overview

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) are working together on an initiative to identify and describe the policies, practices, and cultures of colleges and universities that are unusually effective in promoting student success. With support from Lumina Foundation for Education and the Wabash College Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts, the Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP) project features case studies of about twenty colleges and universities that have higher-than-predicted scores on five clusters or “benchmarks” of effective educational practice and also higher-than-expected graduation rates. The benchmarks are based on how students respond to the questions on the National Survey of Student Engagement. The benchmarks are academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment. Appendix A contains additional information about the benchmarks and the NSSE project.

The institutions selected for the DEEP project reflect the diversity of four-year institutions, including large universities, small colleges, urban universities, and special mission institutions. Our aim is to discover and document what these institutions do, and to the extent feasible, how they have achieved this measure of effectiveness. Then, we intend to share with other colleges and universities the educational practices that seem to work in a variety of different settings with different groups of learners and to further our understanding of how institutions of higher education can modify their policies and practices to promote student success. The major findings from the project will be reported in a monograph and other vehicles by NSSE and AAHE. Additional information is available on the web: <http://www.iub.edu/~nsse>

Methods

The conceptual framework guiding our work is anchored by a concept called “student engagement.” Although the importance of student engagement has been known for years, many colleges and universities have not had good information about the student experience to know where to best direct their resources and energy to improve undergraduate education. Since 2000, more than 730 different institutions of higher education have turned to the NSSE to learn more about this important dimension of the undergraduate experience.

Student engagement represents two critical features. The first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities. The second is how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum, other learning opportunities, and support services to induce students to participate in activities that lead to the experiences and outcomes that constitute student success (persistence, satisfaction, learning and graduation). The latter feature is of particular interest, as it represents the margin of educational quality that institutions contribute – a measure of value added – and something that a college or university can influence to some degree. NSSE benchmark results were used to help us identify Project DEEP schools. While the NSSE data provide a useful structure for our work, they are not the only topics of interest in this study.

A time-honored approach to improving productivity is the identification and adaptation of qualities that characterize high-performing organizations. In a similar way, virtually all institutions of higher education can learn valuable lessons from educationally effective colleges. Toward this end, we used a case study approach to learn as much as possible about your school and the other DEEP colleges and universities. We visited Evergreen twice. The first was January 21-23, 2003. The second visit was May 28-29, 2003. Prior to and during the site visits, team members reviewed many pertinent print and web documents about Evergreen. Jeannie Chandler coordinated our visit schedules and campus tours and arranged meetings with a diverse group of faculty, students, and administrators. In all, we met individually or in focus groups with more than 100 students, faculty, administrators, and others (some of them on more than one occasion). Following the first visit, the team prepared an Interim Report. The report was distributed widely prior to our second visit to the campus. Our primary goal for the second visit was to further our understanding of Evergreen and to correct factual errors and questionable interpretations in the Interim Report. To do this, we met with small groups to discuss the report with an eye toward better understanding aspects of undergraduates' experiences at Evergreen that were not adequately depicted in the Interim Report. We also met with some additional people who helped clarify particular elements of institutional policies and practices. We then revised the Evergreen Report to incorporate these additional insights and findings. Information about the DEEP researchers who participated in the visits is provided in Appendix B.

We are grateful for the cooperation of the Evergreen students, faculty, staff and others who shared their time and insights during our first visit. We are especially indebted to Jeannie Chandler who arranged our interview schedule and attended to many other details to make our visit productive and enjoyable.

Guiding Principles

Three principles guided our work and the preparation of this Report.

First, the goal of Project DEEP is to document and describe effective educational practice. We are interested in understanding what works well in engaging different types of students at high levels and how the institution achieved their success. We are less interested in identifying institutional weaknesses, though we realize that even high performing schools can improve in certain areas. As a result, we attempted to emphasize descriptive statements about Evergreen.

Second, we attempted to be inclusive and to learn the views of as many different groups as time would allow. Whenever possible we sought out people who we were told might have different or divergent perspectives on the student experience.

Third, our goal was to understand Evergreen as students, faculty, staff and other "insiders" experience university life.

We submit this report with two caveats. The first is that we are certain to have not fully captured everything worth knowing about the College. We are mindful that at best this report provides only a snapshot of a moving target; that is, some of what may have been issues at one point in time may now be settled, and new issues may have emerged. Second, in instances where we have misinterpreted factual matters we want to be notified so that we may correct these errors.

Overview of the Report

This Report is organized into four sections. First, relevant aspects of Evergreen's history and institutional context are introduced, followed by a discussion of general themes related to effective educational practices. Then, information illuminating and supporting the benchmarks is discussed. The report concludes with a section with some thoughts about the quality of the undergraduate experience at the College.

OVERVIEW OF THE EVERGREEN STATE COLLEGE

Context

The Evergreen State College (TESC) is a four-year, state-supported, liberal arts college. The campus occupies 1000 thickly forested acres, and has a remote, rural feel, yet it is only about 20 minutes from downtown Olympia, the capital of Washington State. The main entrance road, Evergreen Drive, winds through densely wooded areas and connects with a busy freeway, Highway 101. In the early years, the “shaggy baggy, unkempt, 60s” appearance of “Greeners” prompted more than a little criticism of the College from the more socially conservative residents of Washington state – comments that frequently spilled into the caustic and, on some occasions, even angry derision. These perceptions have changed somewhat during the last dozen years or so as Evergreen began to receive positive media attention after being ranked high in the *U.S. News & World Report* college ranking publication. The performance of TESC graduates also is credited by some for the changing perceptions of the institution in the state. Even so, one senior administrator told us that “the reputation of Evergreen is better the farther you get away.”

The local image of the College today is not all that different than it was 20 years ago. Indeed, there are still people in nearby counties who take opportunities to ridicule Evergreen’s ethos and core values. But the positive media attention has helped quell worries that Evergreen is not worthy of state support. And Evergreen itself seems to be shifting somewhat in terms of the amount of attention it gives to indicators of quality that resonate with external audiences, such as the SAT scores of first-year students and other more conventional measures of quality.

The Olympia campus enrolls about 4,000 students, far short of the estimated 40,000 students for which the campus and facilities such as the Library building originally were designed. About one quarter of the undergraduates live on campus in 21 buildings with more traditional residence hall living (Building A) as well as apartment-style housing and 19 modular duplexes. The rest live nearby in rural houses, or in the nearby communities of Olympia, Lacey, or Tumwater. There is regular bus service between the campus and Olympia.

Fall 2002 enrollment data indicate that about 87% of the undergraduate students at Evergreen are full-time and 78% are residents of Washington. The student body is ethnically diverse and reflects a broad range of ages, learning skills, and educational backgrounds. About 18% are students of color – 5% African American, 5% Native American, 4% Asian Americans, and 4% Latinos. Nearly all at the College are aware that the relatively low minority population in Washington makes Evergreen's efforts to recruit more minority students a special challenge. Students are also diverse by age: 63% are between 18-24 years of age; 22% are 30 or older. The median age is 25.

Evergreen is a transfer-friendly institution, as evidenced by the composition of the incoming class. Of the 1,328 new students in the Fall of 2002, 836 (63 %) transferred from another institution. A priority admission policy facilitates transfer of credits for students who have completed associates degrees at Washington community colleges. Moreover, Evergreen’s Upside Down Degree program enables students with certain technical degrees to complete a bachelor’s degree, inverting the traditional model of general coursework followed by specialized training.

Evergreen’s student population represents two poles of academic ability – those who could have gone anywhere and those who would have had a hard time going anywhere else. For

both groups, there is an uncommonly high level of self-selection involved in the application process, one reason many aspects of student performance tend to be strong. Sixty-three percent of enrolled first-year students who enrolled for Fall 2000 had a high school grade point average of 3.00 or higher, and 20% of those reporting SAT scores had a verbal score of 650 or greater (2002-2003 Catalog, p. 132). Prospective students recognize Evergreen's distinctive curricular qualities; thus, a good deal of match-making occurs even before application to the college. We will provide details about the distinctive elements of Evergreen later.

As with other schools, Evergreen students have changed in some ways over the years. Though White students compose more than 70 % of the student body on the Olympia campus, Native Americans and Blacks make up 3 % each and Hispanics and Asian/Pacific Islanders 4 %; 13 % responded "other" or gave no response. According to the campus profile published in the 2002-2003 Catalog, total TESC enrollment was 4,125, including 3,901 at the Olympia campus, 153 at the Tacoma campus, and 43 in the Tribal program. Women constitute 57% of the student body, and students aged 17-24 are 62% of the total enrollment. Graduate enrollment is just 5% of the student body, and 2,940 student received financial aid, with the average award totaling \$9,300.

Consistent with students at other types of institutions, many "Greeners" (a term we heard used to refer to Evergreen students) work off campus, a non-trivial number in full-time jobs. Yet despite programs tailored toward non-traditional students, one of the deans told us that the median age actually is dropping as more students come to Evergreen directly from high school.

Evergreen also offers an academic program in Tacoma. As with the Olympia campus, interdisciplinary approaches and team teaching are used, although they are tailored for an older and predominantly evening student body. Other off campus offerings are at Grays Harbor College, a community college about an hour west of Olympia and at reservations serving the Quinault, Skokomish, Muckleshoot, Port Gamble S'Klallam, and Makah tribes. Through the Reservation-Based, Community-Determined Program, tribal leaders and students help shape the content and learning objectives of the programs, which are targeted toward furthering the education of adults employed by the tribes.

We did not visit any of the other sites, though students from these locations are represented in the NSSE data. Therefore, this report focuses exclusively on the Olympia campus.

The Physical Plant

College lands extend to Puget Sound where there is a shoreline and beach of more than 3,000 feet. Consistent with the College's egalitarian values and intentional absence of status distinctions, the buildings do not carry the names of people, such as key figures in Evergreen's history or major donors. There is one exception – the library. This building was actually named after the second president and former governor of the State of Washington, Dan Evans, who later went on to become Senator Evans. However, no one calls the library by that name and the signage marking the building simply says, "Library." Similarly, the residence halls are labeled A, B, C, and so forth. The newest building – still under construction – is Seminar II, a classroom building similar in purpose to Seminar I.

The Red Square is a red brick plaza that is the campus crossroads, a place that everyone passes when going from residences to most classroom buildings, from the parking lots (screened by woods) to the CAB (College Activities Building) or to the Library, or for that matter, going just about anywhere. It is the place for announcements, to meet friends, and hang out. Red Square is surrounded by green grass and trees, with benches and other sitting places. In front of Red Square is the bus stop - where buses to and from Olympia and environs stop regularly.

The College Activities Building (which borders Red Square on one side, houses the bookstore, food services, and the Student Activities Administration offices. The weekly newspaper *The Cooper Point Journal* (CPJ), the college radio station (KAOS), Services and Activities Fee Allocation Board (S&A), and a variety of other clubs and organizations that fall under Student Activities have offices located in the CAB. The Greenery cafeteria, which features a terrific salad bar plus several cafeteria and sandwich counters, and the separate Deli – a quick alternative for those on the run – are the main dining options for students, staff, and faculty. The food service provider, Bon Appétit, emphasizes local produce through a partnership with the TESC Organic Farm that is located on the edge of campus and offers a regular program in small-scale organic agriculture. They also take pride in supplying a "made with organic" menu and – in keeping with Evergreen's values – partner with vendors who value fair trade, sustainable food production, recycling and conservation. Students, faculty, and staff were complimentary of the food service. The entry from Red Square is host to several "tables," spaces that can be reserved for selling hand-made jewelry, promoting upcoming events, recruiting members for organizations, and the like.

Also off the Red Square is the Library, a building with many purposes. Like the CAB, it also serves as a kind of community center. The central stairway and surrounding balconies host dozens of colorful, handcrafted posters announcing upcoming activities or promoting campus organizations such as environmental or human rights groups. In addition to the actual library, the building houses many student services (e.g., admissions, financial aids), some student organizational offices including First People's Advising, and the Vice President for Student Affairs, the Provost and Academic Dean's offices. The Writing Center, Quantitative Reasoning Skills Center, and Computer Center are all located in the Library.

The Longhouse Education and Cultural Center is emblematic of Evergreen's commitment to multicultural education. The structure, which incorporates Northwest Indigenous Nations' architectural concepts and design, symbolically communicates Native American traditions of hospitality. The Longhouse is both an educational and cultural center that promotes multicultural study and understanding. Native American performances, ceremonies, and artists hosted at the Longhouse bring members of the Evergreen and Olympia communities together with local and regional Native American communities. The facility is sometimes used for Evergreen events sponsored by other groups and programs covering various topics meet in the classrooms. The flexible design includes moveable walls that, when configured for the purpose, make the Longhouse the largest gathering space on campus.

The residence halls, down a path off behind the CAB, are surrounded by trees. There are murals painted inside buildings; community meeting rooms are available for student programming, and some have apartment style rooms. They are – in an Evergreen sort of way – sturdy and functional.

A Short But Distinctive History

Though Evergreen is young compared with most four-year colleges in the U.S., it has a distinctive character, cluttered with cultural properties that are rooted in its founding mission and values. The College is an instructive model of an institution that was shaped to a considerable degree by the educational philosophy prominent at the time it was created. Founded in 1967 by the Washington State Legislature, Evergreen opened in 1971 as a regional institution. Its mission was officially changed in the 1980s to recognize and sharpen the institution's focus on the liberal arts. But the College has essentially remained true to its founding academic purposes and values.

The first president, Dr. Charles J. McCann, continues to serve on the faculty. McCann came to Evergreen after the institutional philosophy had been established through dialogue between a key consultant, Joseph Tussman, and many prominent figures writing about higher education during the 1960s, a very frisky time in American higher education. McCann was a powerful advocate of individualized education and shaped many of the College's qualities and structures that continue intact. McCann wrote in 1977 while reflecting on his presidency that:

My ideas for Evergreen were composed of a list of negatives (no departments, no ranks, no requirements, no grades) accompanied by vaguer list of positives: we should have cooperative education (internship) options for students, we should be interdisciplinary there should be as little red tape as possible among the faculty members and students and what's there to be learned, freshmen – everyone – should have the opportunities and obligations presented by seminars, evaluation should be in narrative form, library and computing services should have disproportionately large shares of the budget, students should be able to study on their own when they're capable of it.

The College was founded as an alternative school with few rules and regulations. In fact, McCann told us that requirements are anathema to what Evergreen stands for. One historical document characterized this as “The Four No’s: No Departments, No Ranks, No Requirements, No Grades (McCann, J. (2002). General Education at Evergreen). Even today, people avoid using words such as “mandatory” or “required.” Talking about “policies” – though they are often ignored – is more palatable. One example is using the term “pathways” – a descriptive term for a way to think about a student planning his or her curriculum (i.e., following a set of Programs¹, independent contracts, internships, and courses that add up to some coherent whole). Academic advisors work with the faculty and others to help students determine “pathways” through the undergraduate experience that taken together provide this sense of coherence. Although advising cannot be “required,” about 60% of the students we’re told have some sort of formal contact with the advising office.

Another of the founding values was innovation and the rejection of its opposite – “standardization.” This way the College could stay free of the usual (and too often ineffective) academic routines in favor of working collegially, of helping students take responsibility for their own education, and of affording students the freedom to grow with the minimum of intellectual prescription or restraint. Instead they have developed an effective pedagogy marked by individual responsibility for learning coupled with attention and nurturance by the faculty. While high quality academic performance and hard work are valued, there is a sense of whimsy in the air. It’s a place

¹ We’ve capitalized Program throughout this document when referring to the curricular arrangement; when not capitalized, the term is used in the standard manner.

that doesn't take itself too seriously, which can be seen in some of the staff photos in the handbook.

Students and faculty members alike are infectiously enthusiastic about their academic and intellectual pursuits. They practice an approach to learning that is so old that it is seen and regarded as experimental, even radical. It is that students should receive as much individual attention as possible, and further that they should assume responsibility for their own education. No wonder faculty members and students are excited about what they do!

Mission and Philosophy

The Evergreen 2002-2003 Catalog begins with a bold statement about Evergreen's mission and principles that guide the College's educational programs. The Five Foci of Teaching and Learning, based upon these principles and developed in 1989 as part of a reaccreditation report, state that the main purpose of the College is to promote student learning through: (1) Interdisciplinary learning; (2) Learning across significant differences; (3) Personal engagement with learning; (4) Linking theory to practice; and (5) Collaborative learning. They direct how the curriculum is structured and guide policy and practice. Although an administrator thought that all students would know the Five Foci, several first-year students, when asked about the Five Foci, were not familiar with them.

In May 2001, Evergreen adopted a set of expectations – “Expectations of an Evergreen Graduate” – for all students. Building on the Five Foci, the Expectations elaborate the goals that all students should consider as they formulate their academic plan. They include the following:

1. Articulate and assume responsibility for your own work
2. Participate collaboratively and responsibly in our diverse society
3. Communicate creatively and effectively
4. Demonstrate integrative, independent and critical thinking
5. Apply qualitative, quantitative, and creative modes of inquiry appropriately to practical and theoretical problems across disciplines
6. As a culmination of your education, demonstrate depth, breadth, and synthesis of learning and the ability to reflect on the personal and social significance of that learning (Advising Handbook, 2001-2202, p. 10).

These expectations were posted and highly visible in numerous locations on campus; we saw them in several places in the Library, for example. The institution is committed to making these a salient part of the institution's culture. Using the word “expectations” instead of outcomes is a symbolic statement about the way the College works and consistent with its anathema to mandate or requirements (“you should develop this way...”). Also noteworthy is that student support services are featured early in the catalog, perhaps in effort to make it plain that such important services are available and that Evergreen is student centered.

Evergreen's social contract between students and the institution is also prominent early in the catalog. The social contract, which is part of the Washington Administrative Code, includes the following elements

- Freedom and civility
- Individual and institutional rights
- Society and the college
- Prohibition against discrimination

- Right to privacy
- Intellectual freedom and honesty
- Open forum and access to information
- Political activities

The social contract provides guidance for students in terms of how to be members of the community (2001-2002 Advising Handbook, pp. 16-17).

Innovation Leavened with Autonomy, Personal Responsibility, and Egalitarianism

Owing to its founding ideals and values, the College's academic and management structures and operating philosophy are unusual compared with most state-supported colleges and universities. There is an absence of competition, status, cliques, and overall imperiousness that too often characterizes an institution of higher education. Evergreen is also marked by collaboration, an unusual and functional kind of egalitarianism, and a special level of caring and community. As one person put it, "there is a conviction that we are providing a powerful learning environment," which is manifested as a love for academic work that pervades the place. All of this doesn't just happen. There are some carefully thought through conventions, such as the rotating, and sought after, faculty librarian position (6-8 applications a year). The faculty member who rotates into the library performs many regular librarian tasks, such as working the reference desk, helping build the library collection in their areas as well as other areas, and conducting workshops for programs and others around the campus. Whereas some faculty rotate into the library, some members of the library staff rotate into the classroom, to understand more fully the challenges and responsibilities of their teaching colleagues. This person also helps instruct students in how to access information and other information literacy skills. Thus, in Evergreen-speak, the faculty members who rotate into the library "liaise" between their discipline and intellectual interests, those of other faculty, and the services and work of the library.

The Faculty

In the Fall of 2002 Evergreen reported 161 full-time and 55 part-time instructional faculty members. The funded student/faculty ratio is 20:1. Women account for just about 50 % of the faculty and 25 % are people of color, and each of the major ethnic groups are represented at or above their representation in the labor market (10 % Asian/Pacific Islander, 6 % Black, 5 % Native American, and 4 % Hispanic). A Native American faculty member commented that a critical mass of Native American faculty and students has now been achieved at Evergreen.

The faculty is deeply committed to the liberal arts, to teaching, to working collegially in an interdisciplinary mode, and to the academic values and processes that are distinctive and central to Evergreen. They are also intellectually alive, vital, and have a visible dedication to learning - something that, once again, is fueled by the form and substance of Evergreen's special curricular approach. The College is not organized into traditional academic departments. Faculty members believe strongly that the traditional departmental organization inevitably results in narrowness of intellectual view, and departmental politics, and promotional and appointment rituals that consume time and energy that could be better spent with educational matters. Rather, Planning Units made up of faculty members who have common interests do this work. Some things that are commonly centralized and coordinated at most institutions, (such as standard class hours) are not at Evergreen. Instead, the faculty who band together to teach a Program (the basic vehicle by which the curriculum is delivered) set the class times and lengths for that Program.

Evergreen eschews other traditional characteristics of academic life: (a) tenure, (faculty convert from to successive three-year term appointments to a continuous appointment upon completing a successful review after the fifth year on staff), (b) status differences in the form of designated academic ranks (no assistant, associate, or full professors; all are “members of the faculty”, and (c) primary allegiance only to one’s academic discipline. To the contrary, faculty are encouraged in the interdisciplinary mode learn to conceptualize broadly, contextually, and in relation to current issues. It is important to note that the process that leads to a continuing faculty appointment at TESC focuses on the candidate’s contributions to TESC. One administrator put it this way: “Reappointment is not external—forget about journal articles and activities in professional organizations.”

Also there is no merit pay, but rather a salary structure that recognizes loyalty and longevity. As one long-time faculty member put it: “No one is here for the money. You feed your curiosity here; that is what matters.” Another told us: “We are just all members of the faculty, as a title from the day we come to the day we leave or retire...We are all on the same schedule. So you are taking out some of the elements which would get in the way of faculty coming together as equals and forming a team as equals.”

In the present era of a narrow, often suffocating focus on prestige and research epitomized by the research universities, one might think it would be difficult to recruit faculty who are committed to investing themselves fully in careers of teaching. This is an especially important question as the last of the founding faculty near retirement. Can equally dedicated and effective replacements be found? Evergreen’s recent searches have resoundingly answered that question in the affirmative. There are ample numbers of scholars who seek situations like those offered by Evergreen where one can be invested fully in interdisciplinary teaching, unencumbered by the politics and narrowness of departments.

Administration and Governance

Minimizing administration is one of the founding ideals that has survived the first 30 years. The Academic Vice President and the academic deans do not view administration as a career move. Rather, they are “taking time away from their faculty duties” to more or less take their turn and do their share to organize and keep the complex academic systems running. Many will rotate back to the faculty after a three-eight year stint.

Five academic deans comprise the operational infrastructure of the College. The Dean for Faculty Hiring is responsible for faculty development, especially for new faculty and the “nearly news” (faculty members hired in the past few years) with the goal of finding innovative and energizing ways to encourage and sustain faculty growth and development, both in their respective fields as well as teachers and members of the Evergreen community. Our sense was that deans discussed and even negotiated some of their specific administrative responsibilities. The deans with whom we met referred to their administrative responsibilities as “desk assignments.”

Administrators are more the keepers of the Evergreen vision than leaders of the academic community. The community, (or better said, the communities) more or less lead themselves. There is strong community membership and a deep commitment to tending of the commons. Entitlement has no place here. As a result, community governance is very important at Evergreen, though many

of typical trappings are not to be found. Indeed, from the beginning the College wanted to avoid creating permanent committees that might get in the way of and, to some extent, become more important than the academic activities in which all participate. To obviate this likelihood, but yet make certain that all members of the Evergreen community could participate in the governance of their college, Disappearing Task Forces (DTF) are used – committees established to deal with issues that operate in an open and participatory way. A part of each week (Monday and Wednesday afternoons) is set aside to do “College Work.” No classes are scheduled during this time so that projects and Disappearing Task Forces can do their business.

There is no form of “community-wide” governance for students, though at times they wish there was. In part this is because there seems to be less of a need for such vehicles. As one faculty member pointed out students at Evergreen are less alienated from the learning process and the institution compared with their counterparts elsewhere. Therefore, the need for a formal mechanism to represent student interest and needs simply is less keenly felt. The Program and the nature of contacts and ongoing communication between student and faculty, seems to serve that purpose. So it is organic structures and curricular arrangements that serve as mechanisms to ensure that student voices are heard and the institution is responsive. For example, students sit on almost all DTFs, including some of the more cantankerous efforts such as the general education DTF. They also serve on hiring DTF and on budget and steering. The only committee they do not serve on is the personnel review committee.

The Curriculum: Evergreen’s Double-Helix

One of Evergreen’s more distinctive characteristics is how the academic experience is organized and delivered. The basic building blocks are the Coordinated Study Program, Group Contracts, Individual Learning Contracts, Internships, and Courses. The Coordinated Study Program is defined as “Academic programs with a team of two to five faculty and 40 to 100 students. Primarily full time and one or more quarters in length, they focus on interdisciplinary study and research on a particular theme or topic” (2002-2003 Catalog, p. 125). “The work typically includes a common reading list, seminar discussions, labs, lectures, workshops, individual projects and sometimes internships. The students and the faculty devote all their time and attention at school to this shared work, which is usually organized around a theme or problem that needs examination from a variety of academic disciplines” (Advising Handbook 2001-2002, p. 3).

The Coordinated Study Program is the dominant pedagogical vehicle and the context for much that is special about Evergreen. It is the locus for a wide swath of effective educational practices. Instead of a 16-credit course load composed of four or five different courses, students can enroll in one Program for the full 16 credits of a quarter. The Program, which is really akin to a small college, is the building block of community for students, substituting for the primary affinity group at most other institutions. Many are offered for a full year, some are offered for only one or two quarters. Because the Program usually requires the full-time participation of the student, often lasts for the entire academic year, and is made up of a team of faculty numbering from two to five, virtually every student at Evergreen is known, and know well, by one or more faculty members. As one faculty member told us, “You really end up knowing more than you want to. After all, we are with them, and only them, for at least 18 hours a week!”

The students, for their part, talk frequently about the significant bonding that takes place within the Program. These are the peers they know best, interact with, often live with, and develop significant relationships with. At the beginning of a Program time is set aside to allow students to

get to know one another and the faculty. Some Programs began with a retreat or potluck dinners held in faculty homes. Thus, the Program is the locus for the Evergreen experience – friends, structure, and intellectual challenge.

All this makes Evergreen more of the authentic, total learning community it aspires to be, contrasted with the well-intended efforts by other institutions to create certain characteristics of learning communities within traditional curricular structures, such as by co-enrolling students in common linked courses. One faculty member described this difference:

Being anchored by full-time Programs...the learning community here is complete. I mean it is not like taking three linked courses and living in the same dorm. It is that you are all doing the same thing together and that allows faculty as much or as little as they want to allow students to shape that learning environment. Now, some faculty will allow more shaping than others. But they never have to worry about, “Hey, we are going on a retreat next week. Who can’t go because they have other classes that conflict with it?” It just provides a much richer array of learning opportunities. You can stop the program for a day or two because you have an issue that has come up in the learning community.

For faculty, the main structural features of coordinated study include the Program theme or problem and the Faculty Seminar. The Program theme refers to the central matter, questions, or problem to which the year's reading, lecturing, seminar (a verb with special meaning at Evergreen), creative projects, group projects, laboratories and writing will address itself.

A second faculty-centered aspect of the coordinated study is the Faculty Seminar. This arrangement is designed to make it possible for faculty members to teach with each other across their disciplinary specialties by providing them with a time each week for their discussion of the material as it bears on the Program theme for that week. This Seminar occurs prior to their meeting with students on the same material and is the glue for collaboration. Because Programs are interdisciplinary, they bring faculty together in ways that make things exciting for both students and faculty. As several put it, “At Evergreen many of the things that separate students and faculty just don't exist. Here there are only younger learners and older learners.”

Here is how one faculty member described the development of a Program:

The faculty comes together, they form teams, and they are generally matching up according to something that they are excited about. They are creating a thematic based program. I draw the analogy to an artist. The individual artist may be working in oils but figures out am I going to do a landscape, am I going to do a portrait, am I going to do something more abstract? So there is that creative element from the very, very beginning that is at the very foundation of what makes everybody work. We minimize the degree to which someone says you must do X, Y or Z. You are a junior faculty member; you need to teach Chemistry 101, five years running. You are a junior faculty member; you are the one that is going to be teaching Spanish 101. Once you become a senior faculty member then you will get to teach the more interesting stuff. So one element of reducing alienation and maintaining vibrancy is by allowing the faculty to have a lot of power over their product...And you see some pretty amazing matchmaking going on.

I was just talking to a student about one, which is a second year faculty member who is a visitor, who in that sense is even more of an outsider. Match them with the faculty member who has been here for 25 years and they are functioning well as a team and the effort is made to make it as even of a team as possible. So that is the first step in terms of lack of alienation for the faculty. It is to reduce the degree which faculty is alienated from their product. That maximizes the chance that the faculty members are excited about what they are doing and that shows in their teaching and the students pick up on that.

The other thing is that students pick up on the engagement faculty have with each other, in the classroom. Not all team teaching situations work out well, it is just like marriage. There is a failure rate and in spite of good intentions going in, sometimes, things fall apart. And students can pick up on that too.

Another faculty member did his best to help us understand some of nuances of how and why Evergreen's curricular design works:

There is a lot of concerted effort on teams to try to build learning communities and what is really hard in an interview like this or for you to come in from the outside, is it is hard to capture how pluralistic Evergreen is. So how it's done in science may be centered around three textbooks — calculus, organic chemistry and some sort of molecular biology, all grouped together, where they know they have to get through a certain amount of material because it lays the foundation for the future work versus a humanities program, or a Great Books Program where the choosing the Great Books — the Canon — is subject to debate. So how different teams and different parts of the college approach the devolvement of a learning community is different. Also how much teams are conscious of trying to form a learning community differs. I find that working with the scientist, that the learning community is formed in field studies and in the lab. In humanities programs it is formed more in the seminar. But you will see teams that week one, week two, fall quarter, they are off on a retreat for four or five days.

We all have humorous stories about just putting the students in charge of food and how that builds learning community....Three years ago...we were going to stay in a church and they had a big kitchen and half of the class took care of half of the meals and half of the class took care of the other meals and they started off saying, “we need to feed 45 people, so we need a cup of rice and twenty pounds of cheese.” They evolved toward a fairly OK menu, but the point is, is that there are lots of different ways to build learning communities. It is not necessarily around a text. Others build ropes courses and others it is the group projects, it is the take home exams. There are just lots of ways to foster collaborative work. Whether it be between two people, twenty people or an entire group of 40 to 50 or 100 students. So I think there is a lot of consciousness on faculty members' part to do that.

Other Curricular Elements

Core Programs are Coordinated Study Programs especially planned for first-year students where the emphasis is teaching students how to learn on their own or learning to learn. They “are designed to give you a solid foundation of knowledge and skills to prepare you for advanced studies: to learn to write effectively, read carefully, analyze arguments, reason quantitatively or mathematically, work cooperatively in small groups and use campus resources such as the library” (2002-2003 Catalog, p. 40). Illustrative titles of the 2003 Core Programs include: *Imaging the Body; Life on Earth: Postcards from the Edge; Patterns across Space and Time; So You Want to Be a Teacher? Exploring Issues of Development, Learning and Schooling; and What’s Love Got to Do with It? Men, Women, Marriage and Families.*

While each Core Program has a theme, all expose students to interdisciplinary learning, to certain learning skills, and to the Evergreen approach, which places so much responsibility on the individual student to both learn and teach, to work collaboratively, and to shed any need for competitiveness when it comes to scholarship. Because students have differing abilities, some faculty members create heterogeneous groups of high, middle, and low ability within the program. Formative assessment is emphasized to help students identify where improvement is needed in their writing, for example. All programs are encouraged to include a strong writing component and faculty members are strongly urged (but never required!) to encourage their students to use the Writing Center. Student affairs staff frequently work with faculty members who teach in the Core (or Coordinated Studies Programs intended for first-year students) in a process observer role, helping teach students how to monitor their own behavior and that of other students in order to make good use of seminar opportunities and also assist with academic advising.

Most students start with Coordinated Study Programs then move toward individual contracts, the latter of which are not well represented by the questions on the NSSE survey. Individual Learning Contracts are defined this way: “An individual study program agreed to by a student and a faculty sponsor, and include readings, writing, photography, painting, field studies or research. It requires well define goals, self-discipline, lots of motivation and the ability to work with minimal supervision” (2002-2003 Catalog, p. 125). “The faculty provides guidance and feedback, but the design and structure of the course of study and the learning goals all originate from the student” (2002-2003 Academic Catalog, p. 31). Individual Learning Contracts provide students with an opportunity to plan an academic project and work on a one-to-one basis with a faculty member, usually meeting for a weekly conference. Some contracts might involve several students working together and with the faculty member. These are more common for more advanced students with well-defined goals.

Internships are similar to Individual Learning Contracts. They are defined as “Supervised experience in a work situation for which a student receives academic credit” (2002-2003 Catalog, p. 125). There is a one-to-one relationship with a faculty member, but also with a field supervisor, usually the student's sponsor on the work site. A group contract is taught by one or two faculty, with 25-50 students. They are designed for more advanced students who desire a more specialized or deeper study or a problem or theme. Evergreen also gives academic credit for prior learning experience (PLE) that is defined as “a program that recognizes that learning from life experience, not from academic studies. At Evergreen, students have the option of applying to receive academic credit for knowledge gained form such experience” (<http://www.evergreen.edu/priorlearning/PLE%20Information.htm>)

None of these learning experiences are graded, per se, but they are rigorously evaluated through individual meetings where the teacher and student share and discuss a written evaluation of the student's activity in the course. Faculty complete a narrative evaluation that details the student's accomplishments, describes the subject areas studied, and assigns the number of credits earned. Among the elements of the faculty evaluation are the following:

- An assessment of how well you achieved the program's goals
 - A summary of your academic attributes and performance
 - Judgments, criticism, a rave review or general remarks, all backed by examples
 - A clear description of any change in your performance over the course of the period described
 - A discussion of the skills you displayed or acquired over the life of the program...
- (Advising Handbook 2001-2002, p. 12).

At the conclusion of a Program, students submit a self-evaluation in which they are encouraged to reflect on their work and describe significant learning experiences. The student also prepares a written evaluation of the faculty member. Typically, students and faculty exchange and discuss these evaluations along with faculty members' evaluation of the student at the end of Program evaluation conference. The student's evaluation of the faculty member then goes to the Dean after the student and instructor have discussed it.

Making the Evergreen Curricular Structure More Student-Friendly

While 20 years ago the vast majority of students were enrolled in year-long Coordinated Studies Programs, today far fewer Programs are of this length. In fact, the number of Coordinated Studies Programs that are two quarters long also is declining. To respond to changes in student preferences and demographic characteristics, the College has created more options, including single course offerings that allow a student to pursue a specific area of study that will ensure breadth in areas related to general education (e.g., foreign language, fine arts). To make this possible, the College instituted a policy in 2001 that allows students to take as many as 20 credits per quarter. One year later about 13% of all undergraduates were doing so and this fraction is expected to increase. Also, many more students today move from Coordinated Studies Programs in the first two years to doing more contract studies and internships in the third and fourth years. In fact, according to the institutional research office, more than 13 % of all FTE students at Evergreen are involved in contract learning or internships.

Along with other colleges and universities Evergreen is feeling the press to make more efficient use of its physical plant. Thus, there is pressure from the State to expand evening and weekend offerings, given the increasing demand for higher education. About 700 students are exclusively in the evening and weekend curriculum. But about 1,300 of Evergreen students spread their studies across both the regular program and the evening and weekend curriculum. Thus, about 16 % of the total undergraduate FTE is registered through the evening and weekend curriculum. The single course courses are sometimes referred to as an "out of Program" course. A Half-time Program is an eight credit evening and weekend program, some of which are a year long. Thus, weekend and evening students (many of whom might otherwise be labeled as part time students in other institutions) can, in fact, receive the same amount of exposure that some students have in a two quarter 16 credit coordinated program (that is eight credits per quarter for an entire year as contrasted with 16 credits per quarter for a two quarter full time program). Still,

the guiding philosophy and approach to learning is the same we were told as the full 16 credit Coordinated Studies Program.

A Self-Correcting, Innovating Institution

An emerging quality of the schools selected for study in the DEEP project is that they seem to never be quite satisfied with their level of performance; that is, they continually revisit and rework and reinvent what seems to be effective educational practice in their setting. One leader at TESC described the situation this way, “We talk about what needs to be fixed all the time. This is very much a part of our culture.” In this person’s view, this approach was a consequence of strong ideals that the College will not give in to mainstream ideas and that TESC is committed to providing an excellent education.”

This self-regarding, self-correcting ethos is leavened with a commitment to tending the commons, which is a powerful cohering value. At Evergreen, the most obvious example is that the curriculum is always changing. As a team finds and readies itself to teach a Core or Coordinated Program – even if it is for a second time – the content and often the basic approach invariably changes. Much of the academic program remains organic, that is reinvented on an annual basis. The way the curriculum is created at Evergreen is something a kin to an artist who creates something out of whole cloth. It is estimated that about 70-80% of the programs are reconstituted annually. Some Programs are offered on an annual basis while others are offered less frequently.

One example is the process used to change the name of the Expressive Arts planning unit to the Expressive and Environmental Arts, an outgrowth of the response of trying to include more science in the curriculum and the productive work done by pairing scientists and artists who teach in the program. Another example is the process the institution followed to change the general education program. After considered considerable debate and discussion, the disappearing task force (DTF) on general education recommended that the College should strengthen and broaden its general education offerings. The DTF used the annual Association of American Colleges and Universities summer workshop to plan for this effort using three principles: (1) The general education enrichment needed to use the existing curricular structure; (2) Two learning resource centers were needed, one to focus on writing and the second on quantitative reasoning skills; (3) Advising needed to be strengthened which required an infusion of funds to student affairs which would help appoint students to general education opportunities that were available via the curriculum. Small grants were then awarded to faculty to find ways to incorporate general education skills and competencies in their programs. Because there are no majors per se, students must bring meaning and coherence to their collection of coordinated studies. This puts a special strain on advising. The academic advising office is making a special effort to bring more faculty back into the student advising loop and to design ways to get students to begin taking a longer range view of how to put together a set of programs and individual courses that add up to at least the sum of, if not more than, their parts.

An assessment study group monitors the implementation of the general education curriculum and faculty development grants also were made available (\$130,000-140,000) to support this effort. In addition, summer institutes and seminars focus on the inclusion of general education in the Evergreen offerings. Also, important to the general education expansion is additional focus on art, math, and science, which needed more emphasis (or were not being emphasized as much in the Coordinated Studies Programs).

Students Take Charge of Their Own Learning

One of the distinctive qualities of Evergreen is a carefully orchestrated “seamlessness” between in-class and out-of-class life. The College viewbook declares: “Social life at Evergreen begins in the academic community.” They mean it! It challenges the usual rhetoric, and provides an evocative example of how an academic community can be a balanced, interconnected experience. For example, students regularly organize and conduct Book Seminars where they will read and discuss a book related to their Program. The purpose is to examine a reading assignment in relation to the Program theme. But there are other purposes: they help students learn how to work together as a group by paying attention to issues of equivalent participation and relating to implied faculty authority. The Seminars are small, and students customarily take responsibility for certain parts of the reading and discussion. They are designed to be truly interactive and give students practice in articulating ideas with increasing precision, to be responsible for coming to the seminar prepared, and to become both independent and inter-dependent with the group. A transfer student observed that TESC is a closely-knit community. This person explained that “The atmosphere is built on helping each other. The place is very friendly.”

One of the factors contributing to high levels of student engagement is – to a very real degree – their ownership of the educational program through their contribution to curriculum development. There are specified bulletin boards in the Library building where curricular ideas are constantly submitted for public view. Students participate by putting ideas on the boards, and reacting to ideas placed there by faculty. Students also give counsel to the deans and faculty about the overall shape, scope, and content of the curriculum. In addition, students work directly through specialty areas or individual faculty members to develop Program proposals.

The Academic Fair is the time during the Spring term when students sign up for their program of study and where faculty members are present to discuss their Programs. It has been described as a sea of card tables where students pore over projected coordinated studies and other offerings for the coming year. This fair has been relatively unchanged over the years, though catalogs now give more structure to the programs. Despite increasing routinization, one student said of Academic Fair, “It’s a zoo – like a battle to get to the professor!” A “Last Ditch Contract Fair” is held at the beginning of each quarter before registration so that new students or those who wish to change contracts can do so. This latter event was described to us as a “sea of card tables” on all three levels of the Library gallery.

While there is much to be said for having the freedom and responsibility for one’s own learning, this autonomy and independence can be disorienting and intimidating, especially for someone straight out of high school who has a particular conception of what college is about. For this reason, one student suggested that “Evergreen works better as a transfer – you have a sense of who you are, what you want.” Another put it this way: “If you know what you want and know where you’re headed, Evergreen is a very good place for you.” But Evergreen is not for everyone. A group of students pointed out that students leave because the environment requires students to be self-motivated learners, that some students need more structure than Evergreen provides, and because nobody is forced to do anything, some students simply do not earn credit.

NSSE BENCHMARKS OF EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

We now turn to the NSSE Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice as a framework within which to examine, better understand, and summarize what Evergreen does to engage students at high levels in educationally purposeful activities. Our visit confirms in many respects why the school performs so well on the NSSE benchmarks. Evergreen is, indeed, a distinctive institution with an unusually high commitment to teaching and learning and a vibrant intellectual spirit. It works well because the College is a community of learners, one not artificially created out of separate parts sewn together to mimic certain elements, but a place that set out to be one and succeeded, despite the odds. As much as any school – and more than most – the student experience at Evergreen is seamless in a way that makes it somewhat artificial to allocate student and institutional behaviors and activities to specific categories of effective practice. In fact, most of the powerful qualities and dynamics of the Evergreen experience spill over into two or more of the five NSSE benchmarks. Nonetheless, we attempt to do so for the purposes of understanding and communicating to others how Evergreen works.

Academic Challenge

Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and collegiate quality. Colleges and universities promote high levels of student achievement by emphasizing high expectations for student performance, and emphasizing them early in the student's contact with the institution.

Evergreen students arrive expecting something different than they experienced in other educational settings. Most students with whom we spoke told us they were attracted to the College because of how learning is organized, referring specifically to interdisciplinary learning communities, seminars, and opportunities for individual learning contracts. One first-year student put it simply, “I came here because I like bringing lots of different topics together and talking about them in seminar.” A junior transfer student indicated that it was the institution’s “courses that force you to integrate different perspectives” that triggered her transfer to Evergreen. A senior student added that Programs always have a minimum amount of work that students need to complete, “but there are always extra things to be done. Students are self motivated.” Most students commented on the benefits of interdisciplinary learning and how their programs required them to analyze and integrate ideas, experience, and theory. In fact, NSSE 2002 data show that Evergreen students report that their coursework places a significant emphasis on analyzing, synthesizing, and making judgments in comparison to comparable institutions. For example, more than 90% of the seniors reported that their coursework emphasized analysis of the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory “quite a bit” or “very much.”

Faculty and students alike characterized Evergreen students as intellectually motivated, creative, collaborative, and interested in directing their own education. Students with whom we met demonstrated a strong commitment to their educational pursuits. For example, five “Greeners” told us during an impromptu meeting about their wide ranging educational interests, yet they all articulated clear, well-reasoned explanations for choosing their course of study. Another measure of students’ commitment to academics is the time they spend preparing for class. Evergreen’s NSSE data indicate that 63% of seniors report spending more than 16 hours a week preparing for class, while less than 50% of the seniors at peer COPLAC and baccalaureate liberal arts colleges report this level of preparation. Most of the student with whom we spoke essentially corroborated these

data in their accounts, and added that the amount of assigned reading and writing in each program and the level of work required to complete individualized learning contracts, required more time than students were sometimes able to devote.

In the opinion of one faculty member, “Most faculty pitch their teaching at the graduate level.” Another faculty member pointed out that there are students who are engaged at a level that is rigorous for them, but still may fall behind the group. But, in the end the structure of Programs allows faculty to get to know such students, and work individually with them.

Intellectual Challenge and Rigor

Evergreen’s distinct curricular structure provides students and faculty complex and intense opportunities to engage in academic inquiry through interdisciplinary Coordinated Studies Programs. An administrator explained that Programs enable deep learning and an ability to develop momentum and internal motivation to learn. Programs are centered on questions and issues studied from multiple perspectives, incorporate extensive reading lists and small group seminars. As discussed earlier, the design of these Programs creates a powerful learning community. Taken together, the features of the Evergreen curriculum emphasize elements associated with high levels of academic challenge.

Coordinated Studies Programs provide a structure for incorporating the best features of high academic challenge. As described in the opening section of this Interim Report, each quarter 50 to 100 students enroll in one full-time, interdisciplinary Coordinated Studies Program, taught by two to five faculty members. A variety of different instructional modes are employed in programs, but most involve a common reading list, seminar discussions, labs, lectures, workshops and projects. Programs are offered at three levels of achievement, beginning, entry-level, and advanced. Core programs require no prior college-level work, entry-level programs build on basic skills developed in previous work in the planning unit, and advanced programs are designed to help students synthesize ideas and prepare for future education or employment. All-level programs are designed to accommodate first-year students through seniors; however, Core programs, are specifically designed to introduce interdisciplinary study to first-year students. According to students and faculty, all-level programs provide support to new students as well as considerable challenge in the form of more independent work and higher expectations for more advanced students. Because Evergreen programs are open to students at all levels, it is common to have first-year students in class with seniors. A faculty member observed that there is a challenge to offering Programs with a mix of students, from first-year through senior students, since there are times when first-year students struggle. The faculty member added that faculty must pay attention to the students who struggle and provide extra support for them. A number of students reported that they appreciated having mixed year classes. A junior transfer student in an environmental science seminar commented on the benefits of all-level programs. “I’ve learned a lot from the more experienced students in class... sometimes it is the older students but I also learn from the first-years.” For example, she explained that she learned a lot from the sophomore who lived for a summer in Yellowstone. A junior added that because students choose their programs, there is a “common interest that binds us”; this common interest facilitates a strong learning environment where “students learn from each other, not just the teacher and the articles.” As another student put it, “you get to experience your own learning **and** each others’ learning.” Finally, another junior explained that “the best thing about Evergreen is that they try to create a learning environment that makes you want to learn – that captures you.”

An institutional leader pointed out that students hold each other responsible for their learning. This person explained, “Those (students) who don’t work hard affect the group. Our students who skate by are visible. In a book seminar, for example, you are exposed.”

Although students come to Evergreen with some feel for the academic program, new students get better acquainted with the curriculum during New Student Orientation. This nine-day orientation program, which occurs before classes begin, assists first-year and transfer students in understanding Evergreen’s unique approaches to learning and teaching, through new student advising workshops, and sessions on getting the most out of the seminar experience and “how to read 400 pages in a week.” In addition, in Fall 2002 the College launched a pilot program, “Beginning the Journey,” the First-Year Student Readiness Seminar, a two-credit hour course for new students that met daily during Orientation and then for two hours of discussion per week for four weeks during the Fall quarter. This pilot program is designed to further introduce students to expectations for college-level work.

Interdisciplinary Study

Evergreen’s explicit emphasis on interdisciplinary teaching and learning is another factor that contributes to high academic challenge. NSSE results show that first-year students and seniors at Evergreen exercise higher ordered mental activities – analysis, synthesis, and integration of ideas, experience, or theory – at significantly higher levels than their peer institutions. According to Evergreen students, faculty and administrators, to examine questions and problems from multiple disciplinary perspectives requires practice in the integration, analysis and synthesis of ideas, experiences and theory. By centering the curriculum on interdisciplinary study, Evergreen has created a structure for putting higher order mental skills into practice.

Evergreen students explained that interdisciplinary study forced them to understand the complexities of ideas rather than trying to keep ideas fragmented and separate. Most students we spoke with described the interdisciplinary work as a highlight of the program. “Thinking about problems from many points of view is what I came here for,” exclaimed a junior. “I am forced to think versus to regurgitate,” said a first-year student. Another student described various approaches to studying anatomy and physiology from various perspectives, including traditional approaches one might expect in studying science to the use of the visual arts. This student was very enthusiastic about what had been learned from this interdisciplinary approach. A senior enthusiastically described the practical value of interdisciplinary work, “as someone who hopes to do environmental protection, I have to understand anthropology, history, and science.”

A faculty member observed that most Evergreen students quickly develop fairly sophisticated analytic capacities. “Students make interesting connections between what we’re discussing in class and their experiences and are skilled at taking on many points of view.” Another faculty member added that expectations for high levels of participation in seminar fostered the development of higher-ordered thinking skills. However, interdisciplinary thinking has not come easily for everyone. A student explained: “Here you have to make links. No one is doing it for you. Last quarter in this program there was a heavy workload. Some people broke. They [faculty members] have lightened things up a bit because we just couldn’t do it.”

Reading Intensive

An Evergreen senior studying environmental science explained that Evergreen's reading demands were necessary for students to develop an interdisciplinary understanding of their area of study. "I have to read a broad range of books in addition to the traditional science texts...in subjects like art, political science and economics." She described the reading lists for most Evergreen programs as "extensive;" another student added, "eclectic." A junior mentioned that one of the most difficult, though enjoyable, adjustments she had to make when she transferred to Evergreen was keeping up with the reading. She explained, "Doing the readings is vital to having a good seminar experience." Most students emphasized the importance of completing the readings so that one could participate in seminar. A faculty member commented that most Evergreen students understood the link between readings and seminar. "Being a good participant in seminar demands that students do the readings." She added that students took their reading seriously so they could engage with their classmates at high levels of thinking.

A few students described the reading list in a Core program as "overwhelming." A first-year elaborated, "We had to read a book or two a week, plus a bunch of articles...and we were in class almost all day for four days a week." He clarified that he was not complaining about the amount of reading, just that it was difficult to get used to. The level and complexity of reading that Evergreen students do is also impressive. For example, first-year students in the "So You Want to Be a Teacher?" seminar had read primary sources, including Plato and Dewey. A classroom observation of this seminar demonstrated that students had a command of the reading and were quite skilled at making connections to these readings during the seminar. Furthermore, the structure of enrolling in only one integrated program each quarter makes it possible for faculty members to thoughtfully incorporate breadth and depth in terms of readings.

"Seminar"

"Seminars are central to most academic programs at Evergreen. They are the forums in which program issues and themes are raised and explored—though not necessarily resolved. They require you to think carefully and to think on your feet; to practice the skills of analysis and synthesis and by doing so, to improve and expand on your initial ideas" (Advising Handbook 2001-2002, p. 4). Programs may vary in their emphasis on labs, lectures and workshops, but most feature an opportunity for discussion of program issues and themes. Students identified the seminar experience as a site of high academic challenge. Seminars are where students demonstrate their capacity to bring multiple points of view to bear on the problem, discuss the readings, and engage with their peers in academic dialogue. A new student declared that "seminaring" (Evergreen lingo for the active mode of seminar) is his favorite aspect of the program. "I learn the most in seminar. When I've done all my readings and have thought about my questions and views on the topic I get a lot out of it." A first-year student commented that seminars are central to learning at Evergreen and that it is important to learn how to do it well. "Seminar is a science here," he asserted.

Observations of both Core and all-level programs demonstrated that Evergreen students and faculty were fairly skilled in the practice of "seminaring." Seminar refers to the negotiation of meaning among students and instructors; it is a process of discovery for students. Students at all levels of experience were thoughtfully engaged in seminar discussions. A junior explained that the faculty members team teaching her program talked about group process and "how to seminar" on the first day of the course. "The instructor asks us to talk about the quality of the seminar throughout the course," she added. "They [faculty members] stressed that it is important for us to

feel comfortable talking and how we can help people feel comfortable talking in seminar.” A first-year student mentioned that in one of his programs, “We did retreats, community building...we broke barriers in the beginning of the quarter so we would feel more comfortable in seminar.” Students felt that since they were expected to be equal participants in the classroom dialogue, they must be prepared, have completed the readings, and have formulated questions and thoughts on the topic.

In one of the seminars we observed, students continued the discussion beyond the stated end time of the class. Students told us they did not want to cut short the conversation because some of the most interesting comments are made at the end of class. We’ll say more about the role of the seminar at Evergreen in the section on active and collaborative learning.

Writing Across the Curriculum

Writing at Evergreen is distributed across the programs. According to “Teaching and Learning at the Evergreen State College 2001/2002” (Report of the Assessment Study Group, December 17, 2002), the majority of Evergreen programs during the 2001-02 academic year reported a major or minor emphasis on writing. Students described writing as a major requirement in all courses. One student admitted, “It is easy to get behind here. It is all about writing....It is easy to get overwhelmed. If you don’t keep up you’re gone.” Evergreen students explained that a variety of forms of writing are a standard feature of an Evergreen education. For example, students described the following types of writing assignments: journals, and reflective writing, research reports, short in-class writings about a reading, creative science writing, technical lab reports, and collaborative research papers. Two faculty members teaching a Core program pointed out that Core programs are expected to include a strong writing component. A first-year student explained that while there are probably more papers required in the Core programs, and in Culture, Text and Language, the science programs also required students to do a lot of writing. NSSE data indicate that Evergreen students write a variety of short and long papers fairly regularly. First-year students and seniors write significantly more short papers (fewer than five pages) than students at comparable institutions.

In addition to writing instruction being distributed across the curriculum at Evergreen, the Writing Center provides vital support programs to enhance students’ writing. The Writing Center provides day and evening tutors. A first-year student told us that he works with a science tutor and takes advantage of the writing center. He explained that a faculty member persuaded him to work with a writing tutor. “[Faculty member] challenges me to do my best work....She gives me lots of feedback on my writing and won’t let me turn in something that I have not worked on with the writing center tutors.” According to our student tour guide, Core programs are assigned Writing Center peer tutors who read the texts, get input from faculty, and help students as needed. He explained that he took advantage of tutoring by scheduling time every week to work with the Writing Center. A faculty member noted that some Evergreen students need remedial writing help. She relied on the Writing Center tutors to help with this remediation but expressed concern that some students were not getting the assistance they required. “These students might benefit from a more traditional English Composition course,” she added. A tutor in the Writing Center was pleased with her experience in the Center and felt that students found the service valuable. “Students see the Writing Center as a useful, helpful resource.” She added, while sometimes students “just want their papers edited” the tutors aim to help students become better writers. Tutors also help students write their narrative evaluations and guide students in peer review processes.

Personalizing Education

A hallmark of the academic program at Evergreen is that students shape their course of study to explore specific areas of interest. Evergreen students do not have the option to simply follow the curricular requirements outlined in a traditional major. Instead, they are the architects of their academic programs. Students are required to make their own choices about their educational goals and academic plan. Being independent and having well-articulated ideas are highly prized at Evergreen. An administrator emphasized, “Evergreen students have the privilege and responsibility to design their education....The curriculum is not prescribed, we do not have predefined majors....students have to assume responsibility for their learning.” Another administrator commented, “Each student is expected to be a full participant in their education, to take responsibility for their own education.” Students shape their individual sequence of study based on their academic goals and interests. They select programs and courses that best satisfy the plan they’ve outlined. As students progress in their education, they can arrange Independent Learning Contracts and Internships. These contracts allow students to work with a faculty sponsor to complete advanced academic work and gain practical experience.

While students are encouraged to “broaden” their academic experiences by their advisors, there are no academic requirements along the lines of traditional approaches to “general education.” Faculty quickly pointed out that since interdisciplinary teams of faculty lead Programs, students as a consequence benefit from liberal approaches to learning.

According to most students, the opportunity to design their own academic program is one of the many benefits at Evergreen. “The interdisciplinary and independent learning was appealing to me....It changed my life when I came here,” said a senior enthusiastically. By creating a unique program of study, and arranging Independent Learning Contracts and Internships, students felt they were “personalizing” their education. In addition, students mentioned that the freedom they felt to contribute their ideas and experiences in seminar, and the use of self-evaluations in the assessment of their learning, created a setting that fostered student responsibility. A junior described Evergreen as a “self motivated kind of place. Students have to take charge of their education.” A sophomore attributed his academic success to having “control of my education.” A sophomore transfer student reported that the opportunity for self-direction attracted her to Evergreen, “You have to take responsibility hereI hated high school because my teachers gave me no respect. They did not allow me to control my education or be a part of it. Here, I am respected because I am taking charge of my education.” A first-year student explained how the reality of taking one full-time program for three quarters made him realize that he had to stay on top of his work and perform to the his best ability. “I thought, 'I am going to have two profs for the whole year! Oh my gosh! I can’t slack.’ It forces you to take responsibility for your own education.” Another student’s statement seemed to summarize the comments of her peers: “We are given the freedom and choice to let it be our education.” Evergreen’s personalized approach to education compels students, particularly the well-motivated student, to take responsibility for their learning.

Narrative Evaluations

Students do not receive letter grades as is the case at most other undergraduate institutions. Rather, Evergreen students receive written narratives from faculty about the quality of their work. When asked about the accuracy of their narrative evaluations from the first quarter, one first-year student said they were “were dead-on.” We did not hear any student express concern that the narrative evaluation poorly represented their capacities. An administrator joked about

the investment made by faculty to produce these evaluations: It is the “only college in the country where instead of students sitting for blue book exams, the faculty do.” He went on to say, “A narrative evaluation, done well, is a remarkable document of learning.” And in the process, students have to grapple with assessing the quality of their own work. Graduating students are encouraged to prepare summative a summative self-evaluation that will “provide an opportunity to identify the breadth and depth of the work you have done here and at other schools” (Advising Handbook 2001-2002, p. 13). These self-evaluations are not mandatory. They can be done for credit, under a contractual arrangement with a faculty member, or simply as an exercise to be included as a guide to their transcript. The self-evaluation is to be no longer than two pages. We attended a workshop for students who were interested in preparing a summative self-evaluation during our second visit and noted that students were provided substantial personalized assistance in framing their thinking about preparing this document.

Active and Collaborative Learning

*Students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and are asked to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings.
Collaborating with others prepares students to deal with the messy, unscripted problems they will encounter daily during and after college.*

Evergreen’s first-year and senior student results are higher than both the liberal arts and national averages on the active and collaborative learning benchmark, placing it above the 80th percentile for both groups. After controlling for student and institutional differences, Evergreen’s first-year students are at the 98th percentile and seniors are between the 93rd and 98th percentiles. The very strong performance on this benchmark corresponds with what we observed and heard about during our visit.

Student-student, student-faculty, and faculty-faculty collaboration are apparent throughout the Evergreen curriculum. From the beginning of an individual’s contact with the College, one is introduced to a cooperative environment that actively engages students in learning. Themes that emerged from our visit include student’s responsibility for their education, learning from students, and peer advising and tutoring.

Taking Responsibility for One’s Own Learning

During one of our first conversations at Evergreen an administrator identified student responsibility as a grounding principle that underlies much of what happens at the College. A peer advisor explained why this is such a powerful catalyst for learning: “People seem to do better when they realize they are responsible for their own stuff.” Students, faculty, and administrators consistently echoed these sentiments, providing multiple and varied examples of how responsibility is inculcated and how it shapes the learning environment.

From the moment they start exploring Evergreen, students are told that they are expected to be full participants in their education and that the onus for learning lies with them. First-year students participate in a “mandatory” (sic) two-and-a-half hour New Student Advising Workshop that introduces them to the curriculum and the means to navigate its unique structure. This workshop is but one way that first-year students learn that, unlike most of their high school experiences, attending Evergreen will require them to assume a high level of responsibility for

what they gain from their education. Indeed, the curriculum itself is structured in such a way that it fosters increasing levels of self-direction as one progresses through it.

A prominent function of the first-year curriculum – the Core Program – is to educate students about the role they play in developing and following through on their interests. Several students and faculty commented that the framework of the curriculum provides sufficient structure without being overly constraining, thus benefiting those who are transitioning from the highly regimented educational experience typical of high school without stifling those who are more independent in their educational approach. Bringing first-year students along in this process of taking ownership can require a special effort on the part of faculty, but it is an investment that pays off as students assume a high level of ownership and become actively involved in shaping their own education. A long-time staff member commented on the rewarding nature of “watching [students] turn the corner” as they recognize the opportunities and responsibilities of the Evergreen education.

Associated with responsibility is a freedom to tailor academics to suit one’s personal objectives. Whether within the structure of a coordinated program, via a group contract, or as the result of an independent contract, there is significant latitude for students to pursue topics of individual interest. As one junior told us, the nature of Evergreen is such that you “take charge of your education.” Another student, a senior tutor, said that one of the best things about Evergreen was “being able to figure out you’re own learning – especially if you’re a motivated person.”

Students Learning from Students

Evergreen students are educational agents in the classroom, as tutors or mentors, and in informal settings. According to an administrator – an Evergreen alum – many students are attracted to the College because of this cooperative learning environment.

In virtually every facility, and especially the Library building, students were seen working intently in small groups on curricular-related tasks. Students met in classrooms, huddled in circles in hallways, or congregated in a lobby during breakout sessions of their seminars. Discussions were animated and participants appeared to be highly focused on the conversations at hand despite the periodic distraction of someone walking past – or through – their group.

Consistent with the NSSE results, we observed students asking questions of each other in the classroom as they worked toward mutual understanding or challenged a hypothesis. One student spoke of frequent conversations with roommates about her academic experiences: “I want to run home and tell people – we talked about this today.”

One administrator noted that internal motivation for collaborative learning is fostered as students observe faculty teams work together within a program. Beyond what is “caught,” faculty are intentional about what is “taught,” not only in the material but in the process used to connect students to that material. There is a high consciousness on the part of faculty of the importance of forming authentic learning communities – groups of students and faculty sharing a curiosity about a topic and working together to expand their understanding of the subject. A faculty member (another alum) highlighted the importance of faculty “de-centering” themselves

– removing themselves as the focal point of the seminar, thus inviting students to engage more dynamically with their peers and with the material.

Students and faculty members expect one another to contribute to or otherwise actively participate in discussions. According to one administrator, it is not uncommon for students to prod their peers if they aren't contributing their share in seminar discussions.

At the end of one seminar that we observed, the professor seemed chagrined that there had not been as much discussion as he had hoped. He commented on needing to find a better way to draw students into conversation. A student responded immediately, downplaying the need for greater effort on the professor's part and indicating that the students needed to shoulder responsibility for the level of dialogue in the seminar.

In another class, the students had agreed that they need to do a better job at monitoring the relative levels of every member's participation in class, and not let just a few dominate. Some people talked too much, some too little. One member of the faculty team had previously volunteered to bring beans to the seminar; the plan was for each student to surrender one of his or her 10 beans for each contribution made to the discussion. "I forgot the 10 beans," said the instructor apologetically soon after arriving. The students forgave her: "That's okay, we'll pretend we have the beans," said one. The following is from one of the seminars we observed, which illustrates the faculty guidance, feedback, and support that facilitates student collaboration.

The class is discussing three scientific articles as examples of different types of science writing. The instructor asks them to divide into pairs to develop questions for discussion. One pair being observed launches right into the articles, discussing what they liked about the three papers and how they differed. The female student (a junior) has experience as a naturalist and demonstrates a real command of the material. In fact, she has talked about one of the articles (an anthropological piece about how native peoples relate to plants) with a friend who knows a good deal about Native American traditions. The students integrate the various perspectives presented in the articles by posing questions from one article to the other – "What does the Saguaro article [an article about disease in Saguaro cacti] tell us about our culture [cultural perspective from the anthropological piece on huckleberries]?" All the small groups are talking about the articles, the room is abuzz with conversation, but the professor brings the group back together.

The faculty member asks a pair to offer up questions. A student raises one question, others jump in to respond. Some talk straight from the article, other incorporate their experiences from other classes.

The instructor pulls some ideas together. She points out aspects of science writing, such as which articles include methodology and asks students to elaborate the water conservation difference between hardwoods and conifers (recall the professor is an artist; she is actually asking them because she is not entirely sure of the difference). A couple of students collaborate on developing a complete answer. The faculty member prods them for greater understanding and then asks a student to summarize the class consensus. Students continue to facilitate one another's understandings; they volunteer their knowledge from other classes, and summer field experiences,

their current job etc. “What was the name of that book we read last quarter?” Another student responds: “Wisdom Sits in Places.” A few nod and take note of this connection. “I worked in the Yellowstone ecosystem and...” all the discussion seems relevant. Students reference the readings, “On page 104, there is another myth about plant disease.” And they challenge one another when statements are unsupported by facts. “Back that up by facts,” says female student to a male who made a statement about Native women’s workload.

A few more talkative students self-monitor their class contributions. A woman who has offered a number of valuable science contributions begins a comment with “My beans are almost up now.” A student, who contributed less, offers up her beans. Another quieter student opens with, “I had better use up some of my beans...”

This level of discussion goes on for more than 90 minutes. About 15 minutes before the scheduled class end, students are restless, packing their backpacks, shifting in their seats (there has been no break, although a few students get up to probably go to the restroom). The faculty member says, “I see people packing up, my sense is that we’re done.” Two students voice their objection, “No let’s hear from the last group.” The last group makes a few comments about the articles and their discussion. The comments seem abbreviated. The faculty member then asks, “How did we do on our process?” One student makes an observation about another student’s participation. “[student], you seemed quiet today.” She explains that she felt that she talked too much last week and was trying to let others respond today. Another student comments that he “liked the challenge of today’s discussion...I don’t think we needed the beans today.” At the end of the class it is clear that almost everyone has participated. The paired portion of the beginning of the class got everyone involved from the start.

The level of student participation in seminars such as the one described above does not go unnoticed by students. It is like a “light coming on for students” when they understand what they contribute, that “they bring something important to seminar,” said an administrator. A faculty member highlighted the importance of the student voice: “The learning of the group depends on the whole. Each individual depends on these elements that don’t come from the faculty” but from other students. One student told us, “You realize that you’re as much the teacher as anyone else in the room.” A senior concluded that “You have to know what you’re talking about if you want to teach someone.” Another student, a junior, elaborated:

Yeah, everybody has lots of experience...there’s a lot of knowledge to share. I bring anthropology to the conversation. [A science instructor who was not present] makes us use the language. I really like having older people in the class. They are almost like teachers too. I talk a lot with them outside of class, and I learn from them too.

Faculty members use a variety of mechanisms to foster the norm of students working together including field trips, ropes courses, and so forth. An administrator suggested that another benefit of group work is that it helps students learn how to check their own behavior – to elevate their awareness of interpersonal dynamics and what is, or is not, appropriate or expected within a given context.

Peer Advising and Tutoring

The Peer Advisor team in the Academic Advising office is a group of students that is involved in educating other students at Evergreen. Although Peer Advisors are typically the first person that a student will encounter in the Academic Advising office, they do much more than simply staff the front desk. As a first point of contact for many visitors to Academic Advising, the Peer Advisors are trained to diagnose students' needs and refer them to the appropriate person or office. They also meet individually with students to help them navigate the unique curricular structure of Evergreen, serving as a sounding board as students dream about opportunities or wrestle with confusion over their options. As part of an effort to reduce attrition, Peer Advisors staff what amounts to an Academic Advising extension office in a residence building. Among their other responsibilities, Peer Advisors assist with a mandatory two-and-a-half hour New Student Advising Workshop that introduces new students to the curriculum and campus resources.

Writing Center tutors work with other students who initiate contact of their own accord or who are part of a program that is intentionally linked with a tutor. Tutors offer two writing workshops a week that target different elements of the writing process (e.g., outlines and organization, thesis statements, avoiding plagiarism, etc.). In addition to the standard topics, specially tailored workshops can be presented to a program at the request of the program faculty. The Writing Center invites faculty to enlist tutors for two other approaches. The first mode, which is most commonly used by Core programs, connects students with a tutor in regular weekly or biweekly tutoring sessions. Tutors read the same texts that are assigned to students in the program and get input from the program faculty about ways to best meet the needs of students. A second method is for a tutor to liaise between a program and the Writing Center, announcing upcoming writing workshops and filing writing assignments at the center for future reference by students or other tutors. Another venue in which students give and receive feedback on each other's work is through weekly peer review sessions held at the Writing Center. Tutors, who are required to complete a two-credit preparatory class prior to working for the Writing Center, are truly peer educators, not just spell- and grammar-checkers. Students sometimes come to the Center just wanting to have a paper edited, but according to a veteran tutor the goal of the Writing Center is to help them become better writers.

Students consistently reported high usage and positive regard for the Writing Center. A senior who was doing an individual contract said that he has scheduled time every week to work with a tutor at the center. Another student confirmed that the Writing Center and the new Quantitative Skills Center are heavily used, in part, he commented, because "I actually feel helped!"

Student-Faculty Interaction

Students see firsthand how experts think about and solve practical problems by interacting with faculty members inside and outside the classroom. As a result, their teachers become role models, mentors, and guides for continuous, lifelong learning.

Evergreen's first-year and senior results on this benchmark are higher than predicted, after taking into account student and institutional characteristics. For example, compared with COPLAC and the national results, Evergreen first-year and senior students scored significantly

higher on NSSE items about discussing ideas from readings or classes with faculty members outside of the classroom and receiving prompt feedback from faculty on academic performance. Sixty-one percent of Evergreen's first-year respondents indicated that they had often or very often discussed grades or assignments with an instructor; 71 % of seniors said the same.

Yet the scores on these and other items within the benchmark are not as high as one might expect given the way the curriculum is arranged and the fact that students and faculty are in almost constant contact through a large fraction of the week – 12 to 18 or more hours. In addition, many of the Coordinated Study Programs incorporate additional activities, such as retreats and field trips, which increased the amount of contact students have with their teachers. One plausible explanation is that the nature of the questions on the NSSE survey do not conjure up in students' minds the nature and range of contacts they have with their faculty. That is, so much of what occurs at Evergreen is seamless, with the lines between "classroom" and out-of-class activity being so blurred so as to make it difficult for students to distinguish where they have interacted with faculty, individual students, or the larger group.

Several features of Evergreen contribute significantly to students' ability to develop relationships with faculty members. Two elements of the curriculum – Coordinated Study Programs and individualized learning opportunities – combined with frequent informal contact outside of the classroom, create an environment in which students know, and are known by, members of the faculty. What are the consequences of such interaction? An example was provided by a faculty member who indicated that if students are absent for two or three days, they are called by a faculty member just to make sure they are okay. Another example is the five-week warning process. Students are given warnings five weeks into the term if their work is deficient. Students characterized the warning as a letter that says "you are in danger of losing credit." This stimulates a meeting with a faculty member that focuses how students can the quality of their work improve. One faculty member pointed out that "lots" of faculty members meet with students during the fifth week. The conference helps students stay on track in terms of being responsible for their learning.

Coordinated Studies

Students interact with faculty members at high levels simply as a result of spending from 12-18 hours a week together in programs. Most of the students we met with reported significant contact with the faculty members teaching their program. They had close interactions in seminars, talked frequently before and after class, discussed projects and assignments during office hours, or via e-mail, and frequently ran into each other on campus. A student in a Core program explained her relationship with the faculty member leading her seminar, "I like the professor. She knows me, I feel I know her. I can e-mail, call and visit her." Another student added, "Everyone goes by their first name." Some students developed close relationships with these faculty members. A senior described, "I interact with my profs on a social level [they go to movies, community events, dinner]. Another student commented, "Faculty notice when students aren't in class. My prof called me when I wasn't in class. I had been in a car accident. She was concerned about me because she knew I never missed." Another student stressed the care and concern he felt from faculty, "Faculty are really devoted to students. I think everyone here was willing to take a chance with me." Many students reported that they visited faculty in their offices, sometimes during office hours, sometimes they just dropped by.

Two first-year students talked with us about the ease with which they can talk with their faculty instructors about personal problems. The students described a sense of being known as individuals: “Everyone [students and faculty] gets to know each other on a personal level.” A few students told stories about working with faculty to arrange alternative deadlines and to get supplemental assistance in a course. “I talk with my faculty personally when I am struggling,” said one student. “Faculty are really devoted to students,” commented another student.

Another benefit of this close interaction is that faculty members get to know a student’s academic strengths and weaknesses. A junior put it nicely, “I may not get as much attention as I would at a small liberal arts college where everyone lives on campus and classes are all really small, but they [faculty] get to see my whole journey.” She mentioned another personal benefit. “Since I only have one coordinated studies course, I don’t have to explain to five different teachers that I have a learning disability, just two, and it is for the same class.” A few students mentioned that faculty were willing to work with them when they were struggling academically. For example, faculty members worked with students to arrange alternative deadlines and to coordinate supplemental assistance when necessary. Students also indicated that faculty were willing to talk with them about their performance. Another student mentioned that the trust established in the seminar made it possible for students and faculty to offer constructive feedback to class members during seminar.

Seminaring also provides an opportunity for students to see faculty model good thinking. This is especially apparent when a member of the team is teaching “outside of her/his field.” A couple of faculty members recounted stories of having to learn the language of another discipline in order to effectively contribute to their program. This is not easy, but some students recognize the benefit. A junior in the “Picturing Plants” program mentioned that she liked having an artist team teaching the course. “We get to see how she makes sense of the science material.” Students also recognized the role their faculty played in facilitating the seminar. “[Our professors] remind us to listen to one another.” For example, “Someone will have a view that is kind of out there, or ill-formed and [our professor] will say to us, ‘You should really listen to what so-and-so said, he has a really different idea than what we’ve been talking about.’” As a result, students see good thinking modeled.

Pursuing One’s Bliss (If I Can Find a Sponsor!)

Coordinated studies programs provide students a model environment for learning and close student-faculty interaction. However, Independent Learning Contracts and Internships are also popular curricular options and afford numerous opportunities to interact with faculty members who sponsor the contracts and internships. One student told us that her strongest relationships with Evergreen faculty members were developed through her work with the school newspaper and through individual contracts. She had developed a variety of individual contracts, on campus and abroad. More will be said about the substance of independent learning contracts and internships in the next section.

It is important to note here is that students’ taking responsibility for their learning mediates all aspects of this curricular option, as students have to do the legwork to craft a proposal and find the appropriate sponsor. According to a senior, this might mean that newer students have to talk with a couple of faculty members before finding the right sponsor. Juniors and seniors indicated that they usually worked with a faculty member they had previous contact with when creating a contract. Evergreen provides students some assistance in finding the

appropriate faculty sponsor. For example, a web-based index lists faculty by subject areas in which they have indicated interest and expertise. Students mentioned that this was a useful tool for identifying faculty for advising or to work with on an Individual or Internship Learning Contracts. Evergreen students seemed to thrive on the opportunity to pursue their passions in independent contracts, and many developed close relationships with faculty who shared their interest.

Casual Contact Beyond the Classroom

Some students mentioned having a good deal of informal contact with Evergreen faculty through campus and community events. A lot of this interaction occurs because campus programs and events tend to appeal to both faculty and students. Additionally, a number of events that traditionally might be considered as part of the co-curriculum really are part of Programs, such as attending lectures and plays, which students frequently do with members of the faculty. For example, students and faculty attended one-act plays and music events sponsored by Evergreen's Performing and Media Arts unit, events presented in the Longhouse, and speakers brought in by student organizations. According to students, it is not uncommon to see faculty and community members participating in campus events. In addition, Resident Assistants (RAs) reported that they make concerted efforts to increase programming with faculty. One example is the "Friday Night with Faculty" where faculty members presented on a variety of topics such as the Rainforest and Environmentalism, while others taught origami and bridge.

Enriching Educational Experiences

Educationally effective colleges and universities offer many different opportunities inside and outside the classroom that complement the goals of the academic program. One of the most important is exposure to diversity, from which students learn valuable things about themselves and gain an appreciation for other cultures. Technology is used increasingly to facilitate the learning process and – when done appropriately – can increase collaboration between peers and instructors, which actively engages students in their learning. Other valuable educational experiences include internships, community service, and senior capstone courses that provide students with opportunities to synthesize, integrate, and apply their knowledge. As a result, learning is deeper, more meaningful, and ultimately more useful because what students know becomes a part of who they are.

Evergreen's first-year and senior results on NSSE's enriching educational experiences benchmark are higher than predicted after controlling for student and institutional characteristics. According to NSSE results, 54 % of first-year students at Evergreen say they often or very often had conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than their own; 61 % of seniors reported the same. Seventy-seven percent of first-year students and 63 % of seniors indicated that they often or very often had serious conversations with students who were very different from them in terms of religious beliefs, political opinions, or values. Asked whether the institutional environment encouraged contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds, first-year and senior responses were significantly higher than their peers in the COPLAC, liberal arts, or national comparison groups.

About 300 hundred students study abroad on an annual basis for at least one quarter. Yet, the percentage of seniors who report having had a foreign language is less than half that of students at other COPLAC institutions (23% compared to 50%). Two-thirds of the students say they do not participate at all in co-curricular activities, again about twice as many as students at COPLAC institutions and well above the national average. However, this does not mean that Evergreen students idle away the hours, relaxing and socializing. In fact, larger proportions of students spend more time studying and they also spend more time working off campus and caring for dependents compared with their counterparts at COPLAC and other comparable size and admission institutions.

In our discussions with students, staff, and faculty, it was evident that Evergreen places a strong emphasis on real-world application of classroom content, individualized educational experiences, and communication across differences.

Real-world Applications

Evergreen believes that the best way to thoroughly understand academic theories is to apply them in real-world situations. Here, you'll do more than sit in a classroom and absorb knowledge. You will also learn how to apply information and skills and to test the relevance of your learning. (Admissions brochure)

Evergreen enacts the oxymoron that there is nothing more practical than a liberal arts education by emphasizing the connection of classroom content to practical, hands-on situations. As a plain-speaking dean put it: “students take stuff out of the class to the real world and apply it.” Programs often provide connections to real-world settings, whether through lab sessions, field trips, or other integrative modes. NSSE data corroborate this orientation, as with the survey question, “Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course.” Evergreen’s senior response average was significantly higher than the national and liberal arts comparison group means. In addition to the Program structure, many students who are involved in individual contracts and internships engage in this theory-to-practice process of learning.

In fact, according to information from the institutional research office, individual contracts compose almost 13% of all student FTE (full-time equivalent). The heavy participation in faculty-supervised individualized work enables students to pursue unique, personally relevant learning experiences in ways that would not be possible in a classroom setting. Individual contracts can involve on-campus, local, regional, or overseas experiences. Students may design an Independent Learning Contract as a full-time credit-bearing experience, or for a fewer number of credit hours, during a quarter. In 2001-02, more than 1,900 Independent Learning and Internship contracts were sponsored. In fact, about 25% of all seniors’ credits were earned in contracts and internships. Here are a few examples of the variety of educational experiences that students are pursuing through individual contracts.

- To pursue an interest in making instruments, a student developed an independent contract that involved learning to use the woodshop so he could build didgeridoos (an Australian aboriginal woodwind instrument) and drums. He also did a contract in small business management, which eventually led to a position as co-manager of the campus restaurant.
- A senior with an interest in journalism spent four months with a magazine publishing company in India as part of an individual contract. In so doing, she was able to

intertwine international affairs interests with an intensive journalism experience. The position in India was not part of an Evergreen sponsored study abroad program; the student identified the opportunity in India, made necessary contacts, and solicited the necessary support from a faculty advisor.

- Another student also interested in journalism arranged an independent contract to serve as Editor of the CPJ (the Evergreen newspaper). His contract specified that, in addition to his editing duties, he had to write an article a day and meet with his faculty sponsor two hours a week. At the time of our visit, he was trying to get a friend who is also interested in writing to sign on so they can collaborate on and discuss stories.
- Another student did an ecological study of water quality as part of an individual contract. “I had to read 50 pages a night to keep up!” she exclaimed, evidence that her out-of-class experience contributed to a rigorous intellectual environment.

Internships must be reviewed and approved by an advisor. Including in-Program internships, there are typically about 100 students interning in the fall, 150 in winter, 300 in spring, and 200 in summer. One student – a junior with an emphasis in philosophy – is doing an internship in Evergreen’s Office of Admissions where he presents information to prospective students and their families, assists professional staff, and learns the details of the admissions process. In addition to the 14 credits he is receiving for his 40 hours of work, he is taking a four credit philosophy course that meets in the evening.

Students interested in studying abroad can do so through an individual contract, internship, academic program with a study abroad component, or one of Evergreen’s consortium programs. One student recounted his quarter in Europe as part of an individual contract where read 20 history texts and wrote 50-60 pages of material as he traveled across the continent. At first he was worried about his ability to produce academic work without having the structure of deadlines, but he found that he thrived in the independent learning environment.

The opportunity to shape one’s own learning through the unique experiences afforded by individual contracts can be a powerful educational experience. As mentioned earlier, an additional benefit of these individualized modes of study is the ability to develop connections with the faculty members who serve as advisors. On the other hand, the range of possibilities opens the system to question, if not outright abuse. A student related what she identified as a running joke: “Why did the Evergreener cross the road? Because they’ll get credit for it.” At first blush, this perspective minimizes the academic rigor one would expect from credit-bearing activities. Some students, it would seem, think that credit is awarded for activities that do not merit academic credit. Another message of the joke, however, is that Evergreen is flexible and supportive of experiences students identify as educationally meaningful. Credit might not be given for crossing the road alone, but if the student contracted to study the physics of propulsion, the political process that led to construction of the road, and environmental impacts of the construction and traffic, perhaps the critical edge of the joke would be supplanted by an appreciation for the structure that enables self-directed educational experiences.

Experiences with Diversity

Based on our conversations and the NSSE results, it appears that Evergreen is doing many things that encourage communication about differences – racial, political, gender, and

other. Yet, as with many realms, the more aware students become of the issues the less satisfied they may be with the status quo. Two African American students commented about their concerns about the racial composition and conversations about diversity at the College. One woman said, “Often, I’m the token Black chick in my class.” The other student concurred, adding that discussions of prejudice tended to focus only on Black-White issues.

Some students with whom we spoke observed that while Evergreen is becoming more diverse, the focus seems to be on certain types of diversity. This perception of a “certain type” of diversity is supported by responses to a 2001 CIRP Freshman Survey. According to the Freshman Survey, nearly 76 % of the students considered themselves to hold liberal or far left political views (<http://www.evergreen.edu/institutionalresearch/cirp.htm>). Several students noted that perspectives of certain groups seem to be less welcomed at Evergreen – conservatives, Republicans, Christians, those with military backgrounds and those interested in business. A student who was studying business said, “‘Business’ is a taboo word on this campus.” There is little question that student self-selection plays a substantial role in shaping the political and social leanings of the student body.

None of the students with whom we spoke referred to the Longhouse Education and Cultural Center or of the links to Native American communities. We can only speculate whether this was because they did not perceive them as having much influence on their education or if it was because these components are so much a part of Evergreen that their influence is not identifiable apart from the institution.

On the other hand, an administrator stated that “the College is particularly successful at empowering the female student.” This in turn affects male students, in that the men are exposed to different viewpoints than they might have previously heard. An example that illustrates this point came from a vocal, self-described activist White male student, who commented that as one who overshadows others’ voices, he has learned a lot about privilege of race and sex while at Evergreen.

Other Enriching Experiences

Portfolios are used in some Programs but they are “not alive as a general practice” according to one institutional leader. “Some programs are sold on them as a practice but others are not,” according to this person. Portfolios are tools students can use to demonstrate the learning that has occurred over the course of the Program experience. The Advising Handbook 2001-2002 recommends that “At a minimum, your portfolio should include faculty evaluations of your work, your self-evaluations and some samples of writing or studio work” (p. 14). Developmental portfolios are also prepared by students. These include work over the course of a student’s entire academic experience. Faculty members as well as the Career Development and Academic Advising office provide support for students who prepare a developmental portfolio (Advising Handbook 2001-2002).

There are other forms of enriching educational experiences at Evergreen, such as students serving as undergraduate research assistants. We had a chance to meet with several undergraduate student research assistants who worked with faculty in various labs on campus. The students are recruited directly by the faculty who supervise the labs or are referred by other faculty. In some cases the students are paid for their work while in others they receive credit. In all cases the students we interviewed were very enthusiastic about the value of their experiences and several

asserted that they could not have received this kind of experience any where else. As a consequence of their research experience they are able to have a hands-on experience in a lab as well as present their research at professional conferences.

Supportive Campus Environment

Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relations among different groups on campus.

Although Evergreen communicates and holds student to high expectations for individual achievement and self-directed learning, students also view it as a supportive, encouraging environment. NSSE results show that 85 % of first-year students and 80 % of seniors perceive that the institution places “quite a bit” or “very much” emphasis on providing the support needed to succeed academically. Compared with COPLAC and national groups, Evergreen seniors gave higher responses when asked whether the institution emphasizes helping them cope with non-academic responsibilities such as work and family. And Greeners have a more positive view of their relationships with faculty and administrators than peers in COPLAC and national comparison groups. As a whole, Evergreen’s supportive campus environment benchmark score was higher than predicted after statistically controlling for the types of students at the College and other institutional characteristics.

We have already alluded to some examples of how Evergreen supports students academically and socially. The additional elements discussed here are not exhaustive, but highlight prominent support structures for Evergreen students, including the collaboration between faculty and student affairs, the power of personal relationships, services for a diverse study body, and other notable support features evident on the campus.

Bridging the Faculty–Student Affairs Divide

The student affairs staff administers the usual variety of services (admissions, counseling, medical, organizational advising, orientation, and so forth), functions that are necessary for a college to work. At the same time, there is – unlike some other institutions – widespread faculty and administrative acceptance and appreciation of their work. This may in part be because of the pervasive philosophy that the College focuses on the whole student. That is, personal issues that may get in the way of learning are not ignored by faculty members and left for student affairs to deal with exclusively. Rather, student affairs staff provide faculty with some back-up experience, advice, and support.

One of the key roles of student affairs staff at Evergreen is to assist the institution in staying focused on teaching across significant differences, which is one of the Five Foci emphasized in the College’s mission. The institution has had a strong social justice orientation from the beginning which continues today. Also, it is important to note the Evergreen faculty play certain roles (support, etc) typically expected of student affairs staff at other institutions. This blurring of roles and functions between academic and student life is functional, noteworthy, and quite rare in higher education in general.

Relationships Abound

Students with whom we spoke were effusive in their description of relationships with peers, faculty, and staff. A general claim stated by several students was that “everyone is really friendly.” Again, the character and structure of Programs are key factors. Students also discussed an environment of peer networks and student-to-student support. One student described the atmosphere as one of “reverse snobbery,” suggesting that Greener intentionally disregard social structures that in other settings might separate groups of people. She used an oxymoron to describe the atmosphere, saying that “cliques are pretty open,” allowing people to enter established groups easily.

The Program structure also contributes to the support students feel. Participating for an extended period of time in one Program unified around a central theme, with the same group of students and two or three faculty from different academic disciplines, fosters a sense of community among students and faculty. A transfer student described this structure as a “real community builder,” citing the “positive learning community” that formed in her environmental studies program and the support she received from her peers.

Diverse Needs, Diverse Services

Evergreen has institutionalized its commitment to diversity with regular activities, events, and organizations that help minority students, adult students, and those with special needs help each other, discover and celebrate their unique histories, and offer them a sense of space and full membership in the school. There is a strong sense of administrative support on issues of diversity and on related programming, and an informal but pervasive role of faculty in creating a supportive environment.

First Peoples’ Advising provides services and programs specifically focused for “minorities” or “people of color.” The term First Peoples was selected in the mid-1980s in recognition of the unique indigenous heritages of students from varied racial and ethnic backgrounds. The First Peoples’ Scholars Program, a fall pre-orientation activity, was developed to help new students transition into the Evergreen community. Other formal programs and informal contacts serve to create a network of resources for First Peoples students. A student related a story of getting help from the First Peoples’ Advisor: “Holly helped me restructure my daily schedule so I would get work done.” Another student added, “Holly helped me when I was struggling.”

The KEY Student Support Services Program provides services for first generation, low income, and disabled students. KEY, which stands for Keep Enhancing Yourself, offers academic support, career planning, and social events among its array of services. Whether through structured programs or individual interactions, KEY helps students progress toward their educational goals. One student commented, “KEY Services really helps, too. I borrowed a laptop so I could get some work done.” According to the College’s website, “Each year, almost 200 Evergreen students use – and benefit from – KEY’s comprehensive support services...KEY students persist and graduate at a higher rate than other Evergreen students.”

Some students identified Access Services as an excellent resource for students with disabilities. The mission of this office is to “ensure that student with disabilities have equal

access to all of Evergreen's programs, activities and facilities" (Advising Handbook 2001-2002, p. 19). The students thought this office provided excellent assistance for students with disabilities in reducing barriers on campus.

Although a good number of non-traditional age students participate in the full-time Programs, Evergreen's Evening and Weekend Studies offerings provide working students with alternatives to the regular weekday Programs. Another resource for non-traditional students is the Campus Children's Center, which provides affordable childcare for students with young children. In addition to regular daytime hours throughout the week, the Children's Center runs late into the night and operates on Saturdays to correspond with the Evening and Weekend Studies courses.

Other Support Structures

Services of the Writing Center, discussed previously, were identified as vital to student success. Of the five students who stayed after class to speak with us, three talked about their reliance on writing tutors for help with their papers. Students within the program also read classmates' papers on a regular basis, in and out of class, and provide critiques to their peers. The structured interdependence fostered by many faculty through peer evaluation could easily go unnoticed, but it seems to have a powerful influence on students' sense of connectedness with each other and with the institution.

The majority of Evergreen's self-directed students are less likely to depend on institutional services, though they, too, occasionally still make use of them. But for students who are less prepared, Evergreen's supportive ethos has a notable impact. A student commented, "I think everyone here was willing to take a chance with me." According to an administrator, "Evergreen has a tradition as a second chance institution." As a place that offers second chances – or first chances for those who might be considered at-risk students – Evergreen has demonstrated astonishing proficiency at contributing to students' success. Support services and programs, combined with the genuine interest and helpfulness of faculty, staff, and students, play an immeasurable role in helping students progress in their educational endeavors.

LAST THOUGHTS

The Evergreen State College originally was designed to be a highly engaging institution focused on undergraduate education. It was and to its credit remains so today. Its mission is clear and forceful, and its operating philosophy mirrors what are thought to be theoretically sound effective educational practices. The faculty celebrate their teaching and their learning, are intellectually alive, and wish to share their enthusiasm for discovery and learning with their students. It is a college that puts first things first - and in its case those things are learning in an interdisciplinary mode. It provides an integrated experience. It deliberately avoids the usual institutional tendency to carve students into intellectual (or cognitive) beings on one part, and feeling (affective) human beings on the other - and then dividing their labors along those lines. To the contrary, Evergreen is a model for enacting the idea that students are whole thinking and feeling persons who learn best when all dimensions of their lives are acknowledged and valued.

Evergreen works so well, according to one faculty member, "because neither faculty members nor students are alienated from their work or one another." This is due, he went on, in

no small part to “faculty members having considerable autonomy in planning and implementing their teaching and students being able to shape the curriculum and what they are learning.”

The more entrepreneurial an institution is forced to become to respond to changing external environmental pressures, the more its basic purpose and culture are threatened. How Evergreen responds to the issues it is facing will determine whether it morphs from its current organic, self correcting character to some other organizational form.

Valid concerns bubble at the surface about how much of what makes Evergreen “special” will survive as the founding faculty retire. The increasing numbers of students and the strained student faculty ratio is beginning to take a toll and making it more difficult to work as deeply with students as in the past. The student-faculty ratio has increased to 23:1 in Core and 25:1 in upper programs. Some faculty leaders and administrators are wondering aloud if the infrastructure is fraying. As Willi Unsoeld (mountain climber) said back in the mid 1970s, “this college won’t last five years because this faculty works too hard.” People are worried that Evergreen has passed the tipping point in this regard. As one person told us, “We are saturating the faculty’s ability to take on contracts and internships.” Another faculty member said, sooner or later “experimental colleges often don’t survive the passing of the mantel.” Others worry that maintaining the status quo could lead to “calcification.” At the same time, a cautious optimism persists, largely because of the quality of the people the College has been able to recruit.

People expressed hope and optimism that Evergreen can minimize costs (both in terms of morale as well as well as financial), and yet maximize opportunities that keep the institution true to its mission and values by finding new configurations. For example, the College is trying to strike a balance whereby full-time Coordinated Studies Programs can continue along side or even integrated with evening and weekend programs. It is no secret that some faculty members are concerned about the appropriate role and function of the part time and evening and weekend studies programs. Some expected the promised “firewall” between the regular and evening weekend programs to remain intact so that they would in fact be parallel colleges. This does not seem to be the case as indicated earlier by the increasing fraction of students who participate in both.

We sensed another tension line between faculty’s being free to design Programs and courses that are consistent with TESC’s traditionally rigorous academic expectations and the needs of students to develop basic skills. The continuing challenge – now as in the past – is to shake students into taking responsibility for their own learning. One of the distinctive characteristics of Evergreen is that it has been able to accommodate students of varying academic abilities through the Coordinated Studies Program. Thus, it is becoming increasingly important to find ways to teach students how to be successful at Evergreen.

Another of the challenges in Coordinated Studies Programs is the number of students who drop out and then are replaced at the beginning of a new quarter by students joining the program. This is tricky stuff as one of the reasons multiple-quarter Coordinated Studies Programs have such a powerful effect is the group cohesion, trust, and bonding that occurs as students learn to work together. One faculty member described the situation this way:

There are just a lot fewer students who are willing to stick around through multiple of quarter in a full time program. So it becomes problematic if you try to build into your structure full year learning communities...And enrollment pressures are such

that we can't afford to allow faculty to be in year long programs where they do not accept new students at the beginning of the winter or the beginning of spring...So, several years ago when we examined the curriculum, we decided that we wanted to go increasingly to a model of two quarters and then new programs in the spring, in partly response to that. Faculty have to adjust their teaching a bit. Some have and some haven't. Some start rethinking what learning community is and ask, "Can we accept new members into our learning community or is this the sort of thing that we can't?" You can't do that in organic chemistry over two quarters. But you can in a lot of other areas. But there is a frustration about a loss of a common foundation through fall or winter quarter and the big pay off in those yearlong programs was spring quarter, after having two quarters of common work together. But there are other people that have found that introducing those new students in winter quarter provides a spark and gets students out of some of the ruts that are going to happen when you are together so long.

This phenomenon may have implications for student persistence. More than a few people indicated that the first-year experience could benefit from more structure and attention. And students would benefit from more out of class connections to the institutions. Peer Advisors studied reasons that students leave Evergreen and discovered that first-year students who switch programs mid-year or who have individual contracts are less likely to return the following year. The College is correctly focused trying to improve its first-to-second year persistence rate, initiating such events and programs as Friday Night Fun with Faculty, creation of a first-year fund, the Beginning the Journey orientation course, and focused attention of RAs and student councils to the social component in first-year student housing.

A priority for student services is to make advising more intrusive and helpful. Because Evergreen does not have a codified list of requirements for graduation other than accumulating 180-quarter credit hours, it is critical that students can bring coherence and meaning to the collection of coordinated studies and their other learning experiences.

Another priority is to determine how to make better use of the residential living experience to promote student learning and student involvement in campus life. This is a somewhat ironic challenge, for Evergreen to intentionally manage the environment so that faculty and staff can get to know students better beyond their Program. In contrast, most institutions would be satisfied to simply have each student at least know one faculty member well enough to be able to get a letter of reference! By incorporating tutoring and other academic support services in the halls, and increasing hall programming, residence life staff members are working to enrich the living learning environment.

Our time on campus confirmed that we made a good choice by including Evergreen in the DEEP project. Many other colleges and universities will benefit from learning about Evergreen's policies and practices along with those at other schools in the DEEP project. At the same time, even educationally effective institutions such as Evergreen have areas in which they can improve, and some of the schools in the DEEP project are using their Reports toward this end. Here are some examples:

- One institution included its DEEP Report as a part of their campus accreditation process.
- Faculty members at another DEEP school used the report to spark dialogue at a faculty retreat and generated recommendations for curriculum improvement and development.

- Governing board members and senior administrators at a third institution intend to combine the DEEP findings with NSSE and other institutional quantitative data to ignite discussion at their annual retreat. They believe this will give them a greater understanding of their students and how to best meet their needs.
- Another school plans to use the DEEP report to focus on inclusion strategies that will assist the institution in becoming a more diverse campus community and help it explore whether or not its institutional mission is clear and explicit in its diversity emphasis, and whether or not the campus enacts a commitment to inclusion

Perhaps Evergreen can productively adapt one or more of these applications to further enhance the quality of undergraduate education. We would be grateful if you would pass along to us the ways the institution uses this Report or its NSSE data, now and in the future.

The data collection portion of Project DEEP has concluded. We intend to share what we have learned from Evergreen and the other 19 colleges and universities in national presentations and publications over the coming months. Again, we deeply appreciate the opportunity to visit and learn about effective educational practice at the Evergreen and trust you will be pleased with the way in which we portray your fine institution.

Appendix A: NSSE Information

The National Survey of Student Engagement

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is supported by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts and is cosponsored by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and The Pew Forum on Undergraduate Learning. The NSSE project provides colleges and universities with valuable information about students' views of collegiate quality by annually administering a specially designed survey, *The College Student Report*.

The Report is a versatile, research-based tool for gathering information that will focus local and national conversations on learning-centered indicators of quality in undergraduate education.

The Report is useful in several ways:

- institutional improvement – as a diagnostic tool to identify areas in which a school can enhance students' educational experiences and student learning.
- benchmarking instrument – establishing regional and national norms of educational practices and performance by sector.
- public accountability – documenting and improving institutional effectiveness over time.

Designed by national experts, *The College Student Report* asks undergraduate students about their college experiences – how they spend their time, what they feel they've gained from their classes, their assessment of the quality of their interactions with faculty and friends, and other important indicators. Extensive research indicates that good educational practices in the classroom and interactions with others, such as faculty and peers, are directly related to high-quality student outcomes. *The Report* focuses on these practices.

The Report is administered each spring to random samples of first-year students and seniors at public and private four-year colleges and universities. It can be completed either via a traditional paper questionnaire or on the World Wide Web. A demonstration of the Web version and a copy of the paper version of *The Report* are available at **www.iub.edu/~nsse**.

The random sampling method ensures that the results are comparable, meaningful, credible, and usable for institutional self-study and improvement efforts as well as consortium comparisons and national benchmarking. After your institution provides a student data file and customized invitation letters, NSSE handles the sampling and all aspects of the data collection including mailing surveys directly to students, collecting, checking and scoring completed surveys, and conducting follow-ups with non-respondents. Guidance for the NSSE project is provided by a national advisory board comprised of distinguished educators and a technical advisory panel made up of experts in institutional research and assessment.

Summary of the NSSE Benchmarks of Effective Education Practice

Level of Academic Challenge

Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and collegiate quality. A number of questions from NSSE's instrument, *The College Student Report*, correspond to three integral components of academic challenge. Several questions represent the nature and amount of assigned academic work, some reflect the complexity of cognitive tasks presented to students, and several others ask about the standards faculty members use to evaluate student performance. Specifically these questions are related to:

- Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing)
- Reading and writing
- Using higher-order thinking skills
- Working harder than students thought they could to meet an instructor's standards
- An institutional environment that emphasizes studying and academic work

Active and Collaborative Learning

Students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and have opportunities to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings. And when students collaborate with others in solving problems or mastering difficult material they acquire valuable skills that prepare them to deal with the messy, unscripted problems they will encounter daily during and after college. Survey questions that contribute to this benchmark include:

- Asking questions in class or contributing to class discussions
- Making class presentations
- Working with other students on projects during class
- Working with classmates outside-of-class to prepare class assignments
- Tutoring or teaching other students
- Participating in community-based projects as part of a regular courses
- Discussing ideas from readings or classes with others

Student Interactions with Faculty Members

In general, the more contact students have with their teachers the better. Working with a professor on a research project or serving with faculty members on a college committee or community organization lets students see first-hand how experts identify and solve practical problems. Through such interactions teachers become role models, mentors, and guides for continuous, life-long learning. Questions used in this benchmark include:

- Discussing grades or assignments with an instructor
- Talking about career plans with a faculty member or advisor
- Discussing ideas from readings or classes with faculty members outside-of-class
- Working with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student-life activities, etc.
- Getting prompt feedback on academic performance
- Working with a faculty member on a research project

Enriching Educational Experiences

Educationally effective colleges and universities offer many different opportunities inside and outside the classroom that complement the goals of the academic program. One of the most important is exposure to diversity, from which students learn valuable things about themselves and gain an appreciation for other cultures. Technology is increasingly being used to facilitate the learning process and – when done appropriately – can increase collaboration between peers and instructors, which actively engages students in their learning. Other valuable educational experiences include internships, community service, and senior capstone courses that provide students with opportunities to synthesize, integrate, and apply their knowledge. As a result, learning is deeper, more meaningful, and ultimately more useful because what students know becomes a part of who they are. Questions from the survey representing these kinds of experiences include:

- Talking with students with different religious beliefs, political opinions, or values
- Talking with students of a different race or ethnicity
- An institutional climate that encourages contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds
- Using electronic technology to discuss or complete assignments
- Participating in:
 - internships or field experiences
 - community service or volunteer work
 - foreign language coursework
 - study abroad
 - independent study or self-designed major
 - co-curricular activities
 - a culminating senior experience

Supportive Campus Environment

Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relations among different groups on campus. Survey questions contributing to this benchmark describe a campus environment that:

- Helps students succeed academically
- Helps students cope with non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)
- Helps students thrive socially
- Promotes supportive relations between students and their peers, faculty members, and administrative staff

Appendix B: DEEP Research Team Member Biographies

Jillian Kinzie

Jillian Kinzie is Assistant Director of the NSSE Institute for Effective Educational Practice and Project Manager of the Documenting Effective Educational Practices (DEEP) initiative. She earned her Ph.D. in Higher Education with a minor in Women's Studies at Indiana University Bloomington. Prior to this, she held a visiting faculty appointment in the Higher Education and Student Affairs department at Indiana University, and worked as assistant dean in an interdisciplinary residential college and as an administrator in student affairs. In 2001, she was awarded a *Student Choice Award for Outstanding Faculty* at Indiana University. Kinzie has co-authored a monograph on theories of teaching and learning, and has conducted research on women in undergraduate science, retention of underrepresented students, and college choice.

George D. Kuh

George Kuh is Chancellor's Professor of Higher Education at Indiana University Bloomington. He directs the National Survey of Student Engagement and the College Student Experiences Questionnaire Research Program. George received the B.A. from Luther College (1968), the M.S. from the St. Cloud State University (1971), and the Ph.D. from the University of Iowa (1975). He's taught at Kirkwood Community College and the University of Iowa Colleges of Education and Dentistry. At Indiana University, he served as chairperson of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (1982-84), Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the School of Education (1985-88), and Associate Dean of the Faculties for the Bloomington campus (1997-2000). Widely published, George's interests include assessment, institutional improvement, and campus cultures. He has consulted with more than 140 institutions of higher education and educational agencies in the United States and abroad. George has received awards for his research contributions from the American College Personnel Association, Association for Institutional Research, Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), the Council of Independent Colleges, and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. Past-president of ASHE, he serves on several editorial boards including About Campus, Change, and Liberal Education. In addition, he received the Educational Leadership Award for Teaching from St. Cloud State University, several Teaching Excellence Recognition Awards from Indiana University, the Dean's Award for outstanding contributions by a faculty member to the quality of undergraduate life at IUB, and the prestigious Tracy Sonneborn Award from Indiana University for a distinguished record of scholarship and teaching.

Richard Muthiah

Richard Muthiah is Director of the Academic Learning Center at George Fox College. Previously he worked as a Project Associate for the NSSE Institute and the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ). Prior to joining the NSSE Institute and CSEQ staff, Richard worked at the Center for Service and Learning at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), and in several student affairs roles at Taylor University. He completed a B.S. in psychology/systems analysis at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana, an M.A. in counseling at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, and a Ph.D. in higher education at Indiana University Bloomington. His dissertation focused on course-based community service, also known as service learning. Other areas of interest include out-of-class contributions to

student learning, program assessment, study of campus cultures, and Christ-centered thought and practice in higher education.

John H. Schuh

John H. Schuh is Distinguished Professor of Educational Leadership at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa where he is also department chair. Previously he has held administrative and faculty assignments at Wichita State University, Indiana University (Bloomington), and Arizona State University. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in history from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, and his Master of Counseling and Ph.D. degrees from Arizona State. He is the author, co-author or editor of over 180 publications, including 17 books and monographs, 45 book chapters, and 90 articles. Among these are his most recent monograph, *Using Benchmarking to Inform Practice in Higher Education* (co-edited with Barbara Bender), and *Involving Colleges* (with George Kuh, Elizabeth Whitt and Associates). Currently he is editor-in-chief of the New Directions for Student Services Sourcebook Series and is associate editor of the *Journal of College Student Development*. Schuh has made over 180 presentations and speeches to campus-based, regional and national meetings, and has served as a consultant to 40 colleges, universities, and other organizations. Among his many honors, Schuh has received the Contribution to Knowledge Award and the Presidential Service Award from the American College Personnel Association, and was selected as a Pillar of the Profession by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators in 2001.