

2/7/08 Student Focus Group on Student Services

Student Services

As for getting paperwork, I came here and I was e-mailing Academic [Advising] and that was very helpful. I couldn't make it for the fair because that was too far ahead, and I just couldn't afford to fly back and forth. So I did that, and I forget who I was talking to at the moment, but they were so helpful and got everything, my classes worked out. So that was great, that stuff was awesome, but then it felt like right when I got here ... I went around to a few different places saying, "You know, I'm new, what do I need done?" [I was] looking for almost a checklist, or something to work towards that. And it never happened and people just gave me little snippets, like "Well, you can do this, but I don't know how you do the rest." ... It was just little things like how do I get my ID. ... And little information like that. I felt like I had to really really dig into and research and ask around to actually find out, which, with my experience at my other college, was really not the case. ... I don't say, "Spoon-feed me. What do I have to do?" I don't expect that, but also I felt it did lack a little support of the little detail logistics of literally finding your way into the system of Evergreen. So that was really frustrating for a little while for me. I think I got so much support from the students, like my roommates and my classmates that that helps. So that's another aspect that was interesting too. I think that speaks to a bigger Evergreen kind of statement. We're not gonna jam this down your throat and tell you what to do. They kinda looked out for me, which was nice. So it was a frustrating and difficult time, but it was also a really great and welcoming and exciting time, for the experiences.

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Student 1: [Financial aid] was a really big hurdle. I was really trying to work and figure that out. ... And working with financial aid it kept [being] like, "Well, you didn't fill out this" or "you didn't fill out this." And it was never explained to me that needed to be filled out, and so I filled it out. And I literally for the first week or two that I was here I went into financial aid office almost every day just to check off on what was the next step and was everything taken care of, are you sure everything's taken care of? It took so long for [my] Americorps award, for that to be processed. No one knew why, so I had to pay out of pocket and be reimbursed, which worked out okay, but I had come to school and it had gone through but it hadn't got transferred. Then they're like, "Well, it's Americorps, they haven't given out the funds," but I didn't find out that information until after the ... financial due date. That's the biggest stress, too, how can I pay, and how can I pay on time so I can go to school, and that's where I felt the least support.

Student 2: I heard a lot of people got their financial aid late. ... Some of them couldn't buy the books, [they didn't] have the money yet.

Advising

My experience [with Academic Advising] has been kind of hit and miss. I was friends with the Primetime academic advisor down in housing for awhile, and she was really really awesome and I really had a good time talking with her and felt really confident about my ability to communicate my needs and get good advice from her. But ... it was

more like how to get into a program or how to get a particular internship or independent learning contract that I was already interested in. And when I started talking about my career plans and working with the Career Development Center I had some pretty solid good experiences. ... But I think some of the advisors, just my chemistry with them doesn't work all that well, so sometimes you find a good one and sometimes you don't find a good one and sometimes you wait 50,000 hours before you can go see one, depending on if it's drop-in hours or what. So, definitely when I'm in a calm state and I'm kinda leisurely, "Oh, I wonder what I should do with my life?" Then, it's no problem, because I can schedule an appointment with someone I know I get along with and it works out, but if it's like, "I need to figure out what to do tomorrow!" Then, if you have to go in for drop-in hours, basically if you're not really prepared and you actually really really need the help ... I feel like that's when I don't get it. The people, they're tired and you have to wait in line and the advice is not, you know, maybe not what you're looking for, but there's nothing you can do about it at that point. ... There's not a lot of triage, they don't do triage very well, they do good conversations. So, as far as my long-term goals, it depends on the situation.

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Facilitator: How did you pick your first program?

Student 1: I was e-mailing and calling [Academic Advising] and connected with one [advisor] in particular and I just kept contacting her and so she helped me through [picking my first program]. ... So that was great for that short-term goal and then as for long-term ... I think in my head I've started to make lists of people I might want to talk to about that. So I haven't even really experienced that so I can't really say too much about it. But as for short term goals especially, though, I would like to say again that the students that I'm with, ... they've been extremely helpful in explaining and helping me plan [that] out. 'Cause I know what I want to do while I'm here. I came back to school because I now knew what I wanted to do, so I'm past the kind of searching for myself and figuring out what I'm happy doing, and now it's just like, okay, what will get me to that point now. People have been, other students have been helpful in helping me track that down.

Student 2: For the most part I did some e-mailing to the Academic Advisors. I didn't get a whole lot helpful stuff back. They're like, "Oh yeah, do this." And I was like, "I don't know how to do that." ... So eventually I just dug through the catalog and I looked up everything under anthropology and ecology because I'm kind of doing a cultural ecology study and I found the class that went between the two. ... So then I just went ahead and e-mailed all three teachers on that and I got a response that was like, "Sure, just come in, we'll be here today." ... And it worked out ... but Academic Advising didn't help me. I think it was mostly because I didn't know a particular person to go to. ... So I'm gonna go try to find a good advisor that really works with me, really take my time to find one and schedule an appointment and then go in.

Social Life and Activities

Student 1: How do you guys feel about both being new to the Olympia area? Where do you go to meet people? Do you feel like there are places that are available for you to make connections and start building your own personal community?

Student 2: I was really lucky because my roommates just have been really great. And actually one of my roommates is in the same program as me, so that made the transition even easier. I was just really lucky that I'm in the program that I am. ... [The program is about community] so everyone's very community-oriented. So that part of it was just like boom, easy access to different groups and things going on, because everyone wanted you to be involved and be part of it. It was great. That part of it was just a breeze to get into. Which was very refreshing.

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Student 1: I'm kind of weary of the Geoduck Union in general. ... It seems like whenever I'm in a meeting with staff members, everyone is all about the Geoduck Union. They're like, "Oh my god, we have to get Geoduck Union support and we have to get them to sign off on this, blah blah blah." Then I talk to students, and students are like, "I don't even know who the heck is on it or what they're doing or when they meet or anything, I don't care." So it's this really weird dichotomy of this Geoduck Union that the staff is putting so much stock in, and I don't feel like the students are really feeling is meeting their needs. So my big concern with that is that the Geoduck Union isn't going to be around for all that long, and ... it sounds like a lot of staff is putting a lot of responsibility on the Geoduck Union and they're saying that a lot of the ways for students to get involved is going to be through the Geoduck Union. ... And so if the Geoduck Union suddenly disappears, I'm concerned about where student involvement is going to come from.

Student 2: To be really honest, there's a lot of opportunities here and I'm overwhelmed with trying to figure out what to join and what to get involved with. I hadn't really heard much about the Union at all. ... If it is the case of it being such an important role, I think that that's really really great, but maybe there needs to be a shift of something, or a need to get more people involved in it for it to stand for what it really is supposed to stand for.

Student 1: There's still some positive aspects to it. I think it's really great that the administration is able to support the interests of students. So there's this core group of students who's really motivated to having their voices heard within this governmental structure, and the administration just really helps support them in making that a reality. I think that speaks a lot for what kind of college Evergreen is.

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Facilitator: Should we move on to things that have helped you engage socially at Evergreen?

Student 1: In my program I'm in, they split us up into research groups, and that really has grown into not just a research group but we're friends, it's more than just researching. We like to hang out and complain to each other about random stuff and have potlucks, eat together. We went on a field trip, which was in some senses bad. But in another sense I really felt like having that ability to go on a field trip like that overnight and all and be able to spend time with people in other groups that I don't often see really helped too. I really feel more connected to them and I'm able to actually call out their name now without sounding weird or concerned or anything. So I think that helps a lot.

Student 2: I got a job the summer after my freshman year on campus and a lot of my friends are from that job, it was a really great way to meet people. I think something that I experienced as a freshman living in the resident halls was this kind of a feeling of isolation. ... I've talked to other folks that have kind of had similar experiences where

you have orientation week and week one of classes to get your social group and then after that people just kind of close off. ... It was hard for me to find venues where I would feel confident that there were people there who would share some of my same interests. After being here for longer I've definitely found venues and I've found student activities and stuff that are really exciting and I'm involved with a lot of things now, but as a freshman I definitely felt overwhelmed and not really sure how to proceed in how to make those connections. So I think there's some good and some bad there.

Student 1: I go to big fairs where all the student groups get together and try to promote themselves. That's where I find groups that I'm like, "I like what you're doing, I'm gonna join up and probably make some friends out of this deal." That's usually how I do it.

Student 3: I guess what helped me personally was again being in such a great class I was in, very open. ... One of the good and bad things is there's so many options I've seen, so many groups I really want to get into and get involved, and [that] I was really excited about, and they were having some open houses and stuff like that going on. I was really disappointed because I went to two or three meetings or open houses with these groups and it was really weird, because it was like, "Hey, come be in our group," and stuff, and when it really came down to it, it felt like they just needed my signature for something. ... I [would] hang out and come and they're really cool, and then after I'm there for a little bit, literally just after an hour or less or something, I was very closed off, like, "You're not with us." And obviously that comes from being in a new group, and just being kind of outside. I guess what was so weird was they were being so open ... right at the beginning, but once I did join them they were like, "Who are you? What are you doing here? This is our group." It just really deterred me a lot. I don't know, that was just a weird phenomenon I encountered here. But more than once.

Student 4: I made a list of things I think really influence the social [life] I found at Evergreen. I think one is the small size. I grew up in Minneapolis, Minnesota. So being around the U of M campus where it's very urban, you rarely cross paths with someone, so I think the small size creates this cauldron of interaction. The intentional learning communities and field trips in class. ... I bonded with people in my resident dorm freshman year, it was fun, but where I've found the friends that have lasted primarily came out of people that I had in class. ... I'm not so much a student group joiner, but I was in the Vagina Monologues and I was also in a luau my freshman year, so I was in dance workshops, acting workshops, meeting people, and you become friends but also 2 years later I'm re-circling around the same people in a new way, so the small size is beneficial to those repeated pollinations that create friends. And I know my roommate really loves the First Peoples organization, a lot of support for people of color I think is really good, because I think on a campus that's primarily white that can be an issue and can be alienated from people of color. So I can't say from personal experience but it seems like they do a really good job of creating that sense of community and I felt really warmly welcomed when it's welcoming to the whole community, so I think that's really a powerhouse of intentional community at Evergreen as well. And student activities, sometimes when I go up there it makes me want to be a group joiner, because I do love the offices upstairs and I'm always like, "You guys are so unified!" And so I like the spirit up there, it's hard for me to balance school and a full time commitment to a group, but they seem awesome.

Meeting Academic Goals

Facilitator: So what's helping you meet your academic goals?

Student 1: My instructors are very helpful. They're a really diverse group of people who ... I can talk to one-on-one and they can be like, "You know, you are perfect for this kind of stuff." ... And [I can] get introduced to something and really dig into it and it really helps.

Student 2: I would say the willingness of faculty to meet you on an interdisciplinary level. ... I had one teacher, [faculty name], who's wonderful and he would have a meeting, you'd have three meetings, not just an eval, and you'd go over, you know, your writing skills, so these very basic academic skills. He would also go over the broader material, you know, connections that you're drawing, but also talk with you about your history, work outside of school, what you're interested in. ... Just really that investment, I think we do have a faculty that's excited they get that connection and get to see kind of the manifestation of their work, their teaching in the world, so that has really helped me. And so far every faculty, pretty much every faculty that I've encountered is interested in your story as a student and their role in that.

Student 3: Yeah, I've definitely had kind of a similar experience. When I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my life and started talking with the staff members that I really respected on campus about what their jobs were, and everyone I talked to was really excited that I was asking them and was interested in what they were doing and gave me a huge list of other people I should talk to and things I should get involved in. So the more that I became involved and the more people that I talked to the more I learned and the more I got excited, and most of the people that I talked to were staff members, but the faculty too were just really responsive and really excited to see me kind of taking control of my educational future and figuring out where I wanted to go. And I think that if it wouldn't have been for the welcoming enthusiasm that I got from faculty or staff that I wouldn't be quite as far along.

Student 2: I think our support staff is amazing. One of my best friends did a designer major at a huge public institution, you know, 35,000 students, and she was always so frustrated with her academic advisors. I've had great luck with my academic advisors. ... So I just think that we have such great support staff. I struggle a lot with procrastination and freaking out with anxiety, and so I went to the counseling center, [and] I felt like it was to help me academically and [the counselor] was so great, just kind of synthesizing like, "Calm down, here's how you can..." But she totally loves the school and is on board and it just seems like a really cohesive unit. It is a bureaucracy, but there seems a pervading sense of mission that I'm pretty grateful for.

Employment

Student 1: I think faculty's always been really understanding [about students having jobs]. I think that because you can demonstrate so much who you are a student there's a trust that's built, so I think with the rigor of a work schedule and a class schedule you can kind of find ways. If you're like, "This paper's coming up and I have to cover somebody's shift," I've found faculty to be really helpful to me. For me, again, it's kind

of an accessory of not being a face in the crown that makes it helpful. Still hard, but I think it might be easier here than other places.

Student 2: All of my jobs have been on campus so I feel very supported both from my class but then also from my job, to be like, "You're a student first." And that whole thing is really nice. And then I think that the computer center has been my saving grace. With an on-campus job I'm able to plan my schedule so that I have work and then time in between to go to the computer center and do class work and then go to class. ... I really am glad that the computer center is open for as long as it is, as often as it is.

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I work off campus and I like that world outside of school. But one of my roommates has a job doing social work that she got through Student Employment, she got hooked up with them and she's employed by work study. One of my roommates worked in the maps department, and she loved the on-campus work study, it was so convenient, works so well, and now she works for S&A productions. So those fit their schedule perfectly, and they're both really happy with that. Also one of them got hooked up with a Saturday job helping this woman clean her house. ... She found that through the online database for campus work. But then I have a fourth roommate who is broke but doesn't fit completely into the financial profile so has never been able to get work study. That's been really frustrating for her. ... Because she doesn't have a car, that's really what would work for her, but she's never able to do it. ... So I've had good experiences and bad experiences.