

2/5/08 Student Focus Group on Student Services

Choosing and Transitioning to Evergreen

Student 1: I'm a transfer, just took 45 credits community college, and came right over, and that showed a lot of benefits for me. But I totally skipped past all that extra stuff that freshmen are usually given. ... My orientation was really simple, and it wasn't very all-encompassing, and I wouldn't say it was really that helpful at all. I basically had to give myself a tour of the college and learn it that way.

Student 2: Yeah, I feel like I kind of got left out, being a transfer student, from some of the services that could have been provided. ... Maybe they should send out this information even if you've already attended a year of community college. The new students period whether you're a transfer or a freshman.

Student 3: I did go to a mandatory seminar or lecture on, basically it was the Evergreen basics. [I had been here for a month already and] everything they covered in that ... I'd already figured out or been told at some point in time.

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Student 1: I think that I could have taken advantage of a lot more things when I first got here.

Facilitator: Yeah, talk a little bit about your experience getting here and how you did find, how did you get to understand about the college. What was the process you used to figure out how this college works to the extent that you have figured that out?

Student 2: This summer I came and scoped it out at the same time I was looking at other colleges, and I got a pretty good feel for what the campus looked like, and my old boss had attended Evergreen, graduated Evergreen decades ago, so I got filled in there. From there, I came through the process, paid my fifty dollars to take my same walking tour that I gave myself, but learned a little bit more about it. I still wasn't clear what seminar on Wednesdays was for everybody, and when you get here you don't really know. And by the time I had gone to the sit-down portion of [the tour], I already knew that I wanted to attend here. I was 90% sure.

Student 3: I wasn't really very thorough when I decided to come to Olympia and go to Evergreen, it was mainly that I wanted to attend a school that had a good program in ecological agriculture, and still have my head above water as far as student loans goes. And that's Evergreen. I mean, really, there's a lot of other much more academic-based programs at other schools, and there's some potentially better or more thorough programs at other schools, but they're private schools. So I had a very incomplete sense of how Evergreen really works.

Student 1: Then how'd you learn?

Student 3: I just kind of threw myself into it.

Facilitator: Did being in the program help? Once you were in a program, did that help you in any kind of way in terms of orientation to the place, to what you were doing or what your expectations were?

Student 3: Well, yeah, I mean inevitably, but it was more like by the end it kind of dawned on me, like, oh, that's how it functions, and it's just [a] very dynamic learning in the moment kind of a situation. I went to a counseling session with one academic advisor

potentially before my first quarter started I think, but I didn't know to ask what seminar meant or any of those things.

Student 1: And see, that's a workshop that they provide freshmen, but we don't get or know about that.

Student 2: I just heard about that. Seminar Savvy?

Student 1: Yeah, and it would be helpful for transfer students, especially coming from community colleges who don't usually [have seminars]. I had seminars in mine, but some of them you don't have that type of structure at all. I knew I wanted to come to Evergreen from tenth grade on. I was really interested in mycology, and I was like, yeah, Evergreen, what a great place to come for that. I got here and I had to wait around and take Fungal Kingdom, but the first class I took that really got me to know the college was In Search of Sustainability, and I had a project where I had to go through and do all the history and background behind all the student groups and the farm and I wrote a lot about all these different pieces, and that's how I really got involved on campus and got into clubs and things like that, the ERC. So that really taught me a lot about the school, but now the only mycology professor is [a dean], so I'm not getting offered exactly what I came here for, but I've definitely found different faucets to go into.

Student Services and Support

Student 1: One thing that would have been extremely helpful for me was if there had been some sort of support on registering for classes. ... Something that's totally common is that your class is totally full two minutes after your time slot opens up, and you have a nervous breakdown because you really wanted to be in that class.

Student 2: And it's the busiest time, nobody's there to help you, and you don't know to just show up. ... It probably discourages first year students that don't get the classes that they're looking for, even if day number one 45 people are registered and 42 show up, there's three empty seats there.

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Student 1: I'd say the library and CAL being open late has gotten me more work done.

Facilitator: So, the availability of computing and libraries has been a big plus.

Student 1: This is my sole source of internet, is coming to school.

Student 2: That's a big help.

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The teaching gardens for me were really helpful, and just having the woods nearby. And the beautiful trails that we have. Definitely a place to go when you're stressed out. It's really nice. And to learn new plants. Field trips are always great. Getting integration, social integration. And internship fairs are really helpful in getting to know what available things are out there. I know upper-division science programs and courses are pretty hard to come by sometimes here, and internships offer the upper-division credit you can get in order to get your Bachelor's in Science or Bachelor's in Arts and Science.

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The Community Opportunities Database. That's been really helpful. I've had, I've gotten jobs through there. I don't have workstudy, I don't have any financial aid, but I still can get student employment. CODA's been helpful.

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Student 1: With eco-ag, we were all supposed to have a quarter of biology and chemistry, and I'd say half or two-thirds of us don't. But yet we still have access to the lab. There's a lab dude, I don't know what his official title is, but he comes in to monitor us and remind us on rules and stuff like that, but it enables us to do labs on soil and things like that, which is really helpful, to not have a chemistry background or really any formal experience in labs at the college level, but yet be able to perform these labs that I understand and that assist me in understanding soil sciences. ... And I think that is something that must stand out just a little bit at Evergreen. It seems like at other colleges it would just be like, "You don't have the prereqs, no, you can't be in the lab." So, it's nice that that just works out.

Student 2: Yeah, I would agree, I think the labs are a huge help, and even if you're doing things outside of class, you can go to lab stores and get just about anything you need for home cultivation of mushrooms, for instance.

Student 3: I picked up a YSI and a PH meter today and no questions ask, here's my ID, go.

Student 2: It's wonderful, it's a great resource. And then you also can get trained in any equipment that you need, you can get certified, and I've gotten certified in the flow hood and the autoclave recently, and it was relatively easy and everybody's really friendly and helpful.

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I used the QUASAR once. And I haven't gone back, for a reason. But I think that it could be a really helpful place. ... I almost, I wish that I could have a conversation with the person who organizes the QUASAR and tell her ... what my issues are and then be met with a tutor instead of just going in and being like, "Um, I don't know how to do this, this is math but it's also a biology diversity indice. Do you know how to deal with that?"

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Anti-oppression training is something I might want to access some day, but I don't have any sense of how Evergreen offers that or how this organization on campus offers it, and to whom and how. ... So I guess, maybe that answers a little bit of ... what has helped [me] or stood in the way of engaging socially in the Evergreen community, that kind of thing, the fact that it's not just announced broadly across campus or something like that. Because the more things that come to wandering into the right office some day and asking the right person some day, I'm going to lose steam for those kinds of things because I'm busy trying to get into the class I want and thinking about what I'm taking next quarter and everything else that I'm doing.

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Student 1: I've talked to a lot of freshmen and they have a real big problem with the block meals thing that they're forced into when they come here. I had never had to deal with that, thank goodness, because I would hate to have to eat on campus.

Student 2: I've eaten there one time, and I couldn't believe that they pay 5.50 or something like that, and then its like 7 or 8 bucks for the public to go in there. I was shocked.

Student 1: It's so much! And then when the campus is closed, what are they expected to do for food? That's another big thing.

Advising

I think for a while I would go into academic advising sessions and I always knew more about the programs being offered than my advisor, so it was like every time they would suggest something to me, and I would be like, “Yeah, I don’t want to do that, I already read all those books” or something like that. And so I felt like I had a limited number of options of classes I really wanted to take. And so I was kind of a singular mind, because I didn’t have an advisor who would challenge me on that and who could open me up to possibilities that I wouldn’t even think about, because I just would look at the titles and think I wasn’t interested. But since then I’ve found an advisor who is extremely helpful, and really does know everything more than I do about the programs being offered.

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Student 1: I’m relying on my professors for further information for next year.

Student 2: So you feel like you have the rapport with your professors that they will advise you?

Student 1: Well, yeah. I talked to one who’s a biology professor about more biology classes and she says, “Yeah, definitely take that, if that’s the direction you’re going ... and you want to do this for a living, definitely.” That might be a little easier given that that [is the] kind of program that I’m in right now and that’s what I’m interested in taking later on down the road. I don’t want something well-rounded.

Student 3: I’ve never used academic advising other than getting my internship signed recently. I’ve heard bad things about academic advising more so than good things. I don’t think the majority of students go to academic advising for advice on what to take. I think they maybe go more towards the catalog and just pick for themselves that way. At least that’s how all my friends do it.

Facilitator: Do they talk to the faculty?

Student 3: Oh yeah, I know that I talk to my faculty at the evaluation, but usually by that time I’m already pretty much knowing what I want to take.

Facilitator: So you come in to a faculty, say your evaluation conference, with a single choice or a couple of choices?

Student 3: For me, I’ve usually known exactly what I’m going to take every time and I’ve been able to get into it. Except usually winter quarters, there’s usually not that great of offerings. ... Sometimes I’ve settled for things like sign language and ceramics and taken smaller little piece classes.

Social Life and Activities

Student 1: I don’t belong to any of the clubs or anything, but recently a group of us started going out and supplementing some other schools’ monitoring of freshwater sites on streams, mostly in Thurston County. ... And there’s so many opportunities to meet people here socially that it seems like a pretty friendly school all things considered. I’ve been to a few and ... I don’t see [Evergreen] as being socially challenging. I see hardly anybody who gets stuck in the corner by themselves. Most people seem to include everybody.

Student 2: That’s one thing I like about Olympia. There is a lot of culture here, a lot of art, a lot of music going on. I live off-campus so I don’t usually come to campus for

concerts. I've come to speeches and bigger events. I haven't done any concerts or anything that's at the housing area, I know that they have a lot of stuff going on there. I have been in the ERC, briefly, that's a club, and I still get their e-mails, and that's pretty neat, getting to know what political-type things are going on that I could be a part in. Knowing what protests are happening, and how you could be a part of that, that's handy.

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Student 1: I think being on the Evergreen e-mail is a big help. And if you find the certain clubs or certain listserves that you can get attached to, you'll be getting all this and more, constantly via your e-mail, a bunch of information on workshops, on everything that's going on on campus. It's just getting hooked up to the right e-mail list. And there is, on the Evergreen website, there is whole lists of different kinds of listserves you can get on, just sign up for it. And those I'd say have been really helpful to me.

Student 2: I tried them for a while but my inbox was getting so plagued.

Student 1: Yeah, that's usually what happens, you get too much.

Sustainability

Student 1: I'd have some kind of incentive for people who are two people and carpooling. Me and my girlfriend come to school three or four days a week together and we don't get a carpool spot and yet both of us had to buy forty dollar passes. ... There should be some kind of reward for reducing some of the cars in the parking lots and the carbon emissions in the atmosphere.

Student 2: I couldn't agree more. Like that first week they had the carpooling incentive where you didn't have to pay for parking if you had three people in your car or something like that.

Student 1: Three people, that's tough to do with the diversity of where people live in this general area. If you live off campus, chances are you don't have neighbors who go to school here.

Student 2: I think it [would be] an overall good message, though, like it says something good about the school that they're willing to basically cover the expenses of your carpool and saving that much more.

Student 1: If it comes down to it, dollars for being green, we're already buying green energy, we're already putting all this money into other forms of reducing carbon emissions, its just one more thing that we could do with money.

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Student 1: Overall sustainability, anything that would make us more sustainable would be better. ... It would teach everybody, beyond just academic students and faculty. It could be a greater lesson to the world.

Student 2: Yeah, I mean, we talk about sustainability so much at Evergreen, and we've got this great little college in the woods, but our food still comes from California, etcetera etcetera.

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Student 1: It seems like there should be more forest management type in the classes. We have the eon plots, which is a good start, but I think we actually should have more forest management teaching techniques and use our own forest and manage our forest, because we're just letting it go. Look at all the noxious weeds that are taking it over. It's not as

healthy of a forest as it could be. And using the trees wisely for certain things isn't a bad thing, you can cut down some trees.

Student 2: That'd be great. You'd dispel so many people's myths about how managed forests equals logging. It would be very helpful for a lot of people.