

Core Values Group Report to the Management Group

December 18, 2002

“I believe most strongly, however, that we should and must retain the core of Evergreen’s unique education. Comprehensive and interdisciplinary coordinated studies, a collaborative rather than competitive education...”¹
(President Dan Evans – 1980)

I. Introduction

In October, 2002 at the management retreat, the group engaged in a conversation about Evergreen’s core values. The group determined that 1) clarification of Evergreen’s core values would be helpful in guiding budget discussions this year, and 2) we are not providing adequate orientation to new staff and faculty about the college’s core values. As a result, as more new staff and faculty come on board, we become more disjointed as a community.

After the management retreat, Les Purce asked Steve Hunter, Phyllis Lane and Tom Womeldorff to organize a Core Values Group (CVG). In an *ad hoc* fashion, additional members of the management group joined the CVG. Contributors to the group and to this report include: Tom Womeldorff, Steve Hunter, Phyllis Lane, Walter Niemiec, Doug Scrima, Stacey Davis, Tina Kuckkahn, Paul Gallegos, Scott Coleman, Peter Kardas and Carolyn Dobbs.

The Core Values Group (CVG) has two objectives.

First, to provide recommendations for the budget process for 2002-2003 to ensure we stay cognizant of Evergreen’s core values and, specifically, of the impact of any proposed budgetary cut on practices associated with core values.

Second, to provide recommendations on how to improve the orientation received by new staff/faculty about the uniqueness of both Evergreen’s core values and the practices associated with those values.

Up until this point, the CVG has focused only on the first objective. The purpose of this document is to outline our thinking about how the budget process should be structured to keep core values “on the table.”

We acknowledge that the CVG is an *ad hoc* group. This report does not pretend to provide a definitive list of core values. Further, because of the *ad hoc* nature of the group, this is not the group to generate a definitive document outlining Evergreen’s Core Values. If such a document is desired, we recommend that it be generated by a group including representatives from all segments of the Evergreen community, including students.

II. Difficulties in determining Core Values and connecting them to the budget process

We began discussing core values at the Management Retreat in October. The difficulties of distilling our core values into a discreet useful list were immediately apparent. These difficulties did not go away, and they seem to be unavoidable. We conclude:

¹ Richard M. Jones, *Experiment at Evergreen* (1981), p. 30.

- We could spend the entire Academic Year refining our core values.
- Any listing of core values will necessarily be somewhat tentative.
- The value of a listing of core values—in and of itself—is limited.
- Naming core values does not eliminate the reality that core values will come into conflict.
- The uniqueness of Evergreen is not only expressed by core values. The uniqueness is in our *practices*—how we choose to express those core values.
- It is essential to connect core values to associated practices.
- In a budget-cutting situation, it will be impossible to make cuts without adversely affecting practices viewed as intimately linked to our core values.
- We will be more effective in our budget discussions if we discuss concretely how practices and structures associated with core values are affected as opposed to engaging in abstract discussions of values.
- Nevertheless, explicit references to core values should not be eliminated.

III. Core Values:

We (the CVG) have struggled over the past few weeks to distill all that is unique and wonderful about this institution down to a handful of essential phrases. In drafting this list, we have considered the following questions:

- What distinguishes Evergreen from other schools?
- What is our unique niche in higher education, both in Washington state and nationwide?
- What are the promises we have made to our students, our fellow faculty and staff members, and to the community at large?
- What values make Evergreen a vibrant, healthful and diverse place to learn and work?
- What elements of Evergreen are so crucial to the college's identity, that the school would be fundamentally changed if those elements were altered?

First of all, we believe the Five Foci (interdisciplinary study; learning across significant differences; collaborative learning; theory to practice and personal engagement) are embedded in all of the work done at the college, and should be at the forefront of any list of core values. In addition, we have identified a further set of key values and practices, which we have grouped into three broad categories in order to help clarify the college's triple commitments to the campus community, student education, and the larger populations of Washington.

Two crucial notes:

1) In creating this list, the Core Values Group has resisted the temptation to prioritize these values and practices in any way. As we compiled this list, the members of the Core Values Group remained aware that we continued to have unanswered questions about the exact educational mission of the college. Specifically, we wondered whether there is a key (stated or unstated) assumption by some members of Evergreen that undergraduate credit-bearing education should be the primary goal of this institution. Were such an assumption embraced by the CBC, it might have a drastic impact on the continued viability of some of the core values listed below, especially those linked to Evergreen's interaction with the wider local community. To avoid making such an assumption, or any similar assumption about the relative worth of the various structural aspects of the college, the Core Values Group decided to leave the list unprioritized.

2) Many of these values, and perhaps even the list as a whole, could describe a variety of alternative educational institutions. We urge the CBC to reflect on the specific ways these values are manifested at Evergreen, and on the impact budget cuts could have to those specific practices. For example, many institutions have a commitment to diversity, but Evergreen's commitment is manifested in (among other ways) the Reservation Based Programs. Many

colleges profess to care about student-faculty interaction, but Evergreen's focus on the powerful combination of small seminars, full and part-time programs, and original student research is unique.

Core Values:

1. Commitments to the campus community:

- a) Commitment to maintaining a community of students, staff and faculty who are diverse in ethnicity, race, culture, class, gender, sexual orientation and thought.
- b) Collaborative governance
- c) Innovation
- d) Face-to-face communication
- e) Equality in access
- f) Decision makers are locatable and accountable
- g) Commitment to the well-being of all members of the community
- h) Fostering of life-long learning opportunities for students, faculty and staff
- i) Commitment to serving students and members of the community who have historically been underrepresented or not well-served by traditional education.
- j) Commitment to fostering and sustaining a thriving, safe and healthy campus life for students both in academic and social arenas.

2. Educational philosophy and practices:

- a) Student-centered learning
- b) Small-group interaction
- c) Intimate and deep relationships between students and their faculty, staff and each other
- d) Writing and reading across the curriculum
- e) Thematic structure of the curriculum
- f) Narrative assessment
- g) Fostering of critical and analytic thinking
- h) Fostering active citizenry
- i) Emphasis on original student research, and on providing ways for students to gain research skills, and access to research materials
- j) Connected thinking
- k) Emphasis on quantitative and qualitative reasoning, and on creative thinking
- l) Fostering depth and breadth of learning

3. Engagements to the broader community beyond the college:

- a) Commitment to social justice
- b) Commitment to moral and civic engagement
- c) Public service
- d) Commitment to innovative, participatory education both on campus and in the community
- e) Creative engagement of students, faculty and staff with the community beyond the college
- f) Recognizing and valuing community knowledge
- g) Commitment to provide a diverse range of educational opportunities for Southwest Washington residents

IV. Questions for the CBC

The Core Values Group believes that the CBC should carefully consider the manner in which any proposed budget cuts or reallocation of funds would affect each of the core values listed above. To help the CBC in this task, the Core Values Group proposes the CBC ask the following questions as it ponders cuts/reallocations:

1. How do we express our core values in our practices?

For example, we value an intimate and deep relationship between students and their faculty. This value is expressed through many practices including a relatively low student/faculty ratio and allowing for individual contracts.

2. What is the tipping point? With every practice, if it changes at the margins, at what point does our practice cease to be consistent with our core values?

Using the same example, if we contemplate a possible change in the student/faculty ratio, at what point will the student load be so great such that we can no longer ensure an intimate and deep relationship between students and their faculty?

3. When proposed cut(s) and reallocation(s) are considered individually or in combination, what domino effects or impacts will they have beyond the directly affected program(s) or unit(s)?

For example, in addition to endangering the close student/faculty relationship, at some point a higher student/faculty ratio might also affect the faculty's ability to write narrative evaluations of students.

Because thorough consideration of the impact of budget cuts/reallocations on core values is such a crucial part of this year's budget process, the Core Values Group recommends that over the course of the year the CBC publicly communicates its considerations of the core values and practices, and especially its rationale for choosing one budget scenario over another in light of the core values.

V. Need for further training in decision-making processes/methodologies

In light of examining Evergreens' core values, it is essential to ensure that members of the community have access and exposure to methodologies regarding good decision making. Such methodologies can support an individual, divisions and groups in their budget deliberations regarding:

- Information needed to make the decision
- Clarification regarding who is making the decisions vs. requests for input vs. consensus
- Understanding group dynamics and organizational structure associated with decision making.

Our recommendation is that members of the community involved in decision making receive training regarding good decision-making.

At a minimum, the CBC must communicate to the entire Evergreen community the process to be used in making budgetary decisions. Further, the CBC should regularly report on how it is adhering to the decision making process.

VI. Nominees for the CBC

We discussed the importance of having someone on the CBC whose primary role is to ensure that discussions and decisions include consideration of our core values and associated practices. We also discussed how additions to the CBC would increase the credibility of the budget process, particularly given the environment of mistrust that was created by last year's process. Given this, all members of the CBC should own the need to consider core values. This role should not be delegated to one member.