

I. WHY THIS GUIDE?

Narrative evaluations are both a glory and a vexation for Evergreen. A glory, because of the commitment they embody. Evergreen is a place where faculty take responsibility for assessing in writing what students accomplish in their studies, and where students are expected to do the same. These narratives shape the faculty-student conference held at the end of every quarter, with final statements becoming part of the official transcript when the class is completed. Evaluations are at the heart of our distinctive academic culture, which prizes ongoing reflection on learning rather than measurement by grades.

Still, despite the great investment the College has made in them since its founding, narrative evaluations remain fraught with difficulties. For one thing, preparing them puts a chronic strain on faculty, given the number of students they teach. For another, official transcripts, pieced together as the series of final evaluations, tend to be ungainly documents: hard to follow as a sequence, and often bewildering, even maddening, to read. What may work well in as a record from a single program frequently loses impact in a compiled transcript. The sum proves less than its parts. Some students applying for graduate school and employment are ill served.

Concerns about evaluations and transcripts led provost Barbara Smith to charge a Narrative Evaluation DTF in 1996. This committee, chaired by Matt Smith and composed of seasoned and newer faculty and staff, came to a consensus that reaffirmed the value of evaluations while calling for far greater concision in writing. The group concluded that brevity would improve the readability of transcripts, lighten the effort required of faculty, and free up end-of-quarter conferences to focus more substantively on students' actual learning.

The DTF's findings inspired a number of faculty, both individually and as teams, to change how they write evaluations. But its effects at the institutional level were muted. Some faculty objected to certain recommendations, and before final revisions reached a vote, the faculty's attention turned to a prolonged consideration of general education. Since that time, in the wake of decisions regarding Gen Ed, new pressures have arisen. For example, many more two and four credit courses offered through Evening and Weekend Studies now need to be incorporated into transcripts. Some have suggested that evaluations should show how students meet the Expectations of an Evergreen Graduate that the faculty has adopted. Meanwhile, participants in subsequent DTFs and summer institutes who have examined randomly selected transcripts have confirmed the Narrative Evaluation DTF's earlier critiques.

It is in this context that provost Don Bantz charged the Narrative Evaluation Study Group in September 2003. He told us to take a close look at approaches to evaluations. He asked us to make a taxonomy of types of narratives, to identify better and worse practices, to suggest parameters for length and proportions among parts, and to produce a guide to evaluation writing for faculty, keeping newer faculty especially in mind. He called on us

to “focus in your report on how to make narrative evaluations most useful to students, both as an integral part of their learning and as a transcript for external readers.” Don, who served on the earlier Narrative Evaluation DTF, gave his own testimonial of how that experience taught him “how to prepare more concise, learning-outcome-focused evaluations while, at the same time, significantly reducing the time and energy spent in doing so.”

Our Study Group, like the previous DTF, consisted of a mix of faculty at different stages in their careers and staff who work with transcripts. We were all interested in getting a better grip on the nature of narrative evaluations and passing along sound advice to the faculty. We enjoyed advantages compared to the 1996 DTF—namely, we had their analysis to build on, and a climate at the College more conducive to thoughtful reassessment. We also benefited from the concurrent efforts of the Evaluation Process Review Committee to make the mechanics of processing evaluations more efficient.

This guide, the result of our study, seeks to answer the question: What makes good narrative evaluations? Our set of answers affirms faculty members' authority to make their own judgments about student achievement in their own ways. At the same time, it anchors the act of evaluation writing in techniques that support the integrity of the transcript as a whole document. The guide offers an array of practical approaches to composing evaluations with clarity of purpose and conciseness of expression. It identifies practices that can serve students while easing life for faculty, too.

In the next section we review considerations that shape evaluation writing. Later sections take up the parts of evaluations, offering guidelines and the reasoning behind them. At the end is an appendix with examples of evaluation types. To simplify the presentation we write primarily about "programs" and "teams," but, for the most part, the points apply to all of the credit-bearing modes of teaching and learning at Evergreen. (We do not address faculty self- and collegial evaluations, or student evaluations of faculty.) While we note two matters that we think call for formal faculty decisions—handling of upper-division credit and removal of contract cover sheets from official transcripts—the report eschews making a set of proposals that need to be debated and voted on. Our intention is to spur thinking that leads to economy of effort and the creation of better transcripts.

II. CLEARING THE GROUND

Prior to the 1996 DTF, few faculty had perused complete Evergreen transcripts. Since then, word has circulated about the shock of discovering what the College has wrought. Reading transcripts is mind-altering, faculty say. It makes them question their own practices. They recommend it to colleagues as a wake-up call.

What disturbs gimlet-eyed readers? The document's sheer bulk is daunting. The overall shape of the student's educational experience is often hard to discern. The level of detail frequently seems excessive, repetitive, or obscure. Sometimes it's interminable.

Description too often overwhelms judgment, making a student's accomplishments unclear. Browsing, one finds nuggets, of course, and one may be able to form a good impression of the student as learner. But deciphering transcripts tends to be a dispiriting exercise, with similar problems cropping up again and again.

The large gap between the herculean effort that most faculty put into evals and the cumulative resulting transcripts arises from knotty issues in Evergreen's culture of evaluation. These include tensions between writing for the student and for external readers; the felt need to translate, justify or elaborate for those unfamiliar with Evergreen; the fuzzy overlaps among faculty evaluations, student self-evaluations, and program descriptions; and the force of habitual techniques of evaluating developed over decades. The 1996 DTF concluded that underlying this jumble of considerations are key issues of audience and authority. We build on their insights below.

Reaching the Audience

Do faculty write primarily for the student or for potential admissions committees and employers? Faculty member Pete Sinclair shed light on this question for the first DTF when he pointed out an incompatibility in the interests of the two audiences. Faculty know the student's work intimately. The student benefits best when faculty assess it frankly and in depth. External readers, knowing neither the student nor the work, need a more basic picture of both. Not the gritty details, but a sense of what the student has accomplished; not the detailed process, but a summary, a result.

Many faculty, once attuned to this opposition, feel that they've tried to have it both ways. They write for a composite audience consisting of the student and imagined outsiders. The mixture can easily muddle the transcript evaluation and make it drag on. Far better, our Study Group thinks, to address the evaluation to a primary audience. To choose one audience, of course, is not to exclude others. When you direct your words externally, your student has the useful experience of reading over your shoulder, as it were, hearing how her or his performance sounds when explained to the world. The solution for most faculty has been to pitch their official evals directly to outsiders. Others, who regard the student as their true audience, put things in language that outsiders can easily understand.

The distinction between the two audiences has long been embodied in the custom of preparing interim evaluations at the end of each quarter prior to the last in multi-quarter programs. These "in-house" documents, often cast as notes or as a letter to the student, assess the study-in-progress. The student, in turn, writes an informal self-evaluation. These statements set the stage for the conference to be an honest dialogue about the student's learning. At the program's conclusion, faculty and student each write formal transcript evaluations, drawing in part on the previous writing. This sequential practice has the virtue of serving both audiences, meeting the student's need for meaty feedback and the external reader's need for succinct overview.

A common alternative practice, stringing together quarter-by-quarter evaluations to make the formal evaluation, falls short of serving either audience, our Study Group thought. It tends to be repetitive and diffuse, while lacking the candor of interim evaluations. According to David Marshall, director of Institutional Research, more than 1/3 of TESC's multi-quarter, multi-faculty programs produce transcript evaluations of this stitched-together kind.

There's always been speculation within the College about whether our transcripts help or hurt graduates. It's tempting to throw brickbats at readers who won't take the effort to give the document fair consideration. No doubt some incorrigibles will be hostile to a non-graded system. Nevertheless, we are sympathetic to reports of confusion, frustration, and skepticism, given the state of transcripts that we have encountered and the numbers of candidates for admission or employment that committees must review. Faculty member José Gómez, for instance, relayed to us the dismay expressed to him by a professor at the University of Washington Law School who is a reviewer: "She said that they find [our] evaluations so repetitive that it is difficult to make much evaluative sense out of them. She wondered if we were aware of this." While the College has not conducted research on the reception of transcripts in different contexts, the registrar, the director of the Career Development Center, and deans all regularly deal with queries and puzzlements from graduate admissions committees.

A snapshot of the external audience for transcripts: Among graduating seniors from '02-'03 and '03-'04, 40% had requested transcripts by winter quarter 2004. (The percentage will increase with time.) Half the requests were sent to graduate and professional schools, a third to the student making the request, and about a tenth to employers. Most of these employers were school districts. Few other employers require transcripts at the B.A. level, although many students who ask for their transcripts may excerpt them as part of the application process.

We are convinced that the most crucial step faculty can take to make transcripts reader-friendly is concision. Keeping evaluations modest in length respects busy readers. It creates a sense of proportionality among all evaluations in the transcript, and thus among all phases of the student's education. It distinguishes between what's worth making official and what isn't. Moreover, it requires considerably less effort than preparing long evaluations. Many faculty members find themselves trapped by conscience, habits, and college expectations into offering exhaustive accounts. Succinctness can liberate them from this self-imposed burden.

Faculty and Student Authority

Students at Evergreen are expected to actively reflect on their studies in order to clarify, for themselves, what they have learned. Self-evaluation is the embodiment, in writing, of that act. It is rooted, as is well known, in the College's founding pedagogic philosophy, which rejected grades and elevated a sharing of authority between teacher and student for

assessing the student's work. (See Appendix I for a discussion of premises underlying evaluation at Evergreen.)

In the early years, the faculty focused their responsibility for evaluation internally, not externally—that is, the emphasis was squarely on helping students gain a clearer sense of their learning and growth. Indeed, the first Faculty Handbook, in 1970, envisioned written faculty evaluations as *optional* parts of transcripts. The parts to be required were student self-evaluations, program descriptions, and credit reports. By the mid-1970s the main current components of the transcript had been codified. Over time since then, faculty have assumed increasingly more authority for evaluations, students increasingly less.

The 1996 DTF attributed this shift, in large part, to faculty's responding "with good intentions to the rational, defensible demands for accountability and legitimation." Credit equivalencies, for example, were appended to evaluations in order to translate what the program covered into more-or-less conventional course titles. There ensued pressure to make evaluations justify the specific equivalencies that were being awarded. Another practice developed whereby the members of a team wrote separate statements evaluating the student in the segment of the program that they taught. The result of such tendencies has been that many evaluations have come to function as certifications of credit for external audiences. But at a cost: they tend to be lengthy compilations, not succinct, integrated accounts of students' accomplishments. And too often they lack substance. On this score, David Marshall's findings are sobering: 38% of the evals that he reviewed in a recent study "were little more than a repetition of elements that are ordinarily part of a program's description. The narrative describing strengths of the student was typically limited to statements of the 'Johnny did a good job at experience X' variety."

There is a double loss here. As the faculty role in evaluation has expanded, it has tended to grow more bureaucratic and formulaic. At the same time, the student role has shrunk. In the Office of Institutional Research's sample of 61 transcripts of 2000-1 graduates, 42% of all programs, courses, contracts and internships lacked self-evaluations. The breakdown by planning unit of the proportion of evaluations that included self-evaluations was: Culture, Text and Language, 82%; Environmental Studies, 53%; Expressive Arts, 48%; Scientific Inquiry, 45% Society, Politics, Behavior and Change, 54%; Tacoma, 42%.

Most students still write a self-evaluation for their conference, but for a surprisingly large number the threshold of inclusion in the transcript is not being crossed. We heard two related kinds of explanations from faculty about this falling-off of student voice: one, that many students can't write good self-evaluations, so it's a disservice to put them in the transcript; the other, that there isn't enough time, given everything the class is doing, to help students create good ones. In practice, a substantial number of faculty leave it to students to decide whether or not to submit self-evals to the registrar. Absent an emphasis on self-evaluation, the end-of-quarter conference is more likely to revolve around the faculty's assessment, not the student's reflection.

The health of evaluation as part of Evergreen education depends, the Study Group concluded, on regular exercise of both faculty and student authority. For faculty, this means commitment to making judgments about student work. For students, it means writing well-considered self-evaluations. Again, David Marshall, a relative newcomer who has waded through tons of transcripts, offers useful perspective. He thinks that self-evals, done well, are more persuasive than faculty evals at demonstrating student accomplishment to external readers. “While the outside world relies on the authority of the faculty to evaluate abilities,” he argues, “it should be up to the students to demonstrate synthesis of learning, and the ability to reflect on the personal and social significance of that learning.” He invokes here the language of the Expectations, to which can be added the Expectation that students will “articulate and assume responsibility for their own work.” Clearly, the crafting of good transcript self-evaluations requires effort by students—but their commitment to it is determined largely by the instruction and encouragement that faculty provide.

Faculty traditions and ongoing experiments with evaluation provide many productive ways to exercise authority, and this guide will describe a number of them. It's important to note that the mutual taking of responsibility for evaluation has an effect that goes far beyond the preparation of an official transcript. It also sets up the end-of-quarter conference to be an occasion for grounded, frank discussion about what the student has learned and where he or she is heading. That kind of dialogue is, after all, the *sine qua non* of student-teacher relationships at Evergreen.

III. EVALUATIONS OF STUDENTS

The transcript evaluation should be a succinct statement that makes judgments about what the student has accomplished. It should give a picture of the student and his or her work from a specific narrative angle. Suggested limits are a page for full year programs and 1/2-1 page for quarter-long ones. The evaluation should have a single author, who integrates contributions from others. Multi-quarter programs should avoid stringing together quarter-by-quarter evaluations.

Narrative Strategies

There are myriad ways for faculty to offer judgments about student learning. Each faculty member already has, or can develop or refine, his or her own reliable style and techniques for doing so. Views of what judgment consists of, and what kinds of judgment belong in official evaluations, vary a great deal. This is as it should be.

At a more general level, there appear to be a small number of *types* of narratives. Reading transcripts inductively, the Study Group found three common frameworks. One focuses on the skills the student has demonstrated across the range of content and activities in the

program. The second focuses on the character of the student and how he or she develops in the course of the program. The third focuses on major projects the student undertakes in the program. Boiling these differences down, the choice is to evaluate the student primarily in terms of (1) skills, (2) development, or (3) most important work.

You may object, "But my evaluations cover all these bases!" We don't disagree. An evaluation of one kind typically incorporates aspects of others. Still, one angle predominates. The choice of angle is a narrative strategy. Having a strategy for selection, we realized, is the very thing that makes an evaluation a narrative instead of a collection of information. To give a persuasive account of student learning, faculty need to depict it from a specific point of view. The strategy they follow depends on the nature of the program and on their predilections both as individuals and teams. Below are some considerations of purpose and method for each of the three types.

Skills narrative. This, the commonest kind of evaluation, addresses most or all of the main activities of the program, noting the skills demonstrated in each venue or subject. The emphasis is on judgment about what the student can now do, based on what he or she did in each area. Since programs cover a lot of ground, it's awfully easy for this kind of narrative to balloon unless what is to go in it is planned prior to the writing.

Skills-based evaluations tend to succeed best when clearly connected with the program description. If the description states what the program has done, including issues the inquiry dealt with, the evaluation can assess actual achievement in relation to the program's substance and goals. The program description might say, for example: "In winter quarter students wrote a major (15-25 page) research paper in order to deepen their understanding of a particular aspect of the French Revolution, to gain research skills, and to develop capacities to organize a complex argument." The evaluation would then briefly note the student's accomplishment with respect to those goals. Alternatively, the program description might simply say that a major paper was required, and the evaluation would enumerate the goals as aspects of the student's accomplishment. Deciding in advance how to divide what belongs in the program description and in the evaluation eliminates redundancy and simplifies the writing. Note that some student capabilities may not be predictable at the beginning of the class: they may well be emergent results of the work of the program or the particular student. (Turn to Appendix A for examples of skills evals paired with student self-evals and program descriptions.)

Developmental narrative. This kind of account centers on the student as a person learning; it's oriented to the student's character and the process of development she or he goes through in response to challenges posed by the program. Faculty member Chuck Pailthorp thinks of the approach as "a reflection, from a seasoned professional's point of view, of what the student has been up to. Hopefully, what I write helps them see what they have done in ways that help them find coherence in their lives as students." The method, as he practices it, "is to show students features of their work that they will recognize as their own: some I judge to be strengths, others weaknesses, and other simply to be characteristics." There is no obligation to cover the full range of program activities; rather, examples are chosen for the light they shed on the student.

Assessing development, one often considers whether and how the student's work met one's standards for whatever it is that one is teaching or the student is trying to learn. A crucial purpose for this kind of evaluation is to help the student make choices about what he or she will do next in either improving a skill or mastering a subject. In some cases, criticisms imply that the student should do something else entirely. Whether the primary intended audience is the student or others, these evals are concerned about the student's own growth. (See Appendix B.)

Project narrative. This approach focuses on one or more major projects to show how the student develops his or her own work in the course of the program. It recognizes that students discover their work gradually, in large part by undertaking significant projects on subjects of their own choosing—projects that call for independent initiative and that involve issues and topics germane to the inquiry. Thus, it assesses learning by documenting what students accomplish in these efforts of research, writing, performance, service, and so forth. In this sort of narrative, part stands for whole: depth gets priority over breadth of activities.

The nature of major project work in programs (and in independent contracts) is, of course, extremely varied. The evaluation can stress the culminating project in a program, or else two, even three projects. The method lends itself well to inclusion of a quotation from the best project, which the teacher glosses to exemplify the student's strengths. It also lends itself well to incorporating other faculties' assessments of projects that they supervised. The project(s) provide evidence on which faculty can characterize the student more broadly as a learner. Other program arenas (e.g., seminar, papers, labs, tests) are often briefly noted in such evaluations. Discussion of these activities can be expanded if they, rather than the major project, constitute the student's best work. (See Appendix C.)

Each of the strategies can be critiqued for what it leaves out. Bear in mind, however, that they are not pure types: project narratives usually deal selectively with development, developmental narratives with skills, and so on. Furthermore, given the great desirability of brevity and economy of effort, such tradeoffs are inevitable. Indeed, a variety of approaches enliven a transcript by portraying the student's undergraduate learning from multiple points of view.

Whatever the strategy, comprehensibility is crucial. The fact that readers of the transcript will likely be graduate school admissions committees may tempt you to write for peers in your field. Remember, though, how diverse and unpredictable students' postgraduate paths turn out to be. The challenge is to describe their learning in language that draws on specialized fields of knowledge in ways broad enough for a wide range of readers to grasp. Disciplinary dimensions of the work can be further adumbrated in program descriptions.

Length

The 1996 DTF recommended a one page limit for evaluations in full-time year-long programs, and half a page to a page for one quarter programs. Since that time, a number of faculty have adopted and thrived within these limits. Our Study Group agrees that for most faculty these lengths are adequate and highly desirable.

Why *most*, not *all*? An early member of the faculty who is a fine writer said: "It'd be a lot harder for me to write it in one page than in two." Another used to say to younger colleagues that if they couldn't tell the truth about a student in one paragraph, they couldn't do it at all. We think it would be wrong to propose a mandatory rule. The point is to make evaluation writing easier. We recognize that for some faculty accustomed to greater length, brevity could have the opposite effect. Somewhat longer evaluations can surely be effective—if they are skillfully written.

Still, we caution that what can seem to make perfect sense within a program can be numbing to outside readers, especially in the context of a whole transcript. Problems include internal program rhetoric, recondite disciplinary jargon, repetition of information, and minutiae of student work. Like the 1996 DTF, the Assessment Study Group and the Rubric Writing Institute before us, we found it agonizing to wade through evaluations and program descriptions that each ran three to six or more pages. As an exercise, one of us took a six page description and evaluation for a two-quarter program and boiled it down to two pages. We all found the redaction to be much more readable and informative than the original. We know that faculty who write in encyclopedic detail or string together each quarter in multi-quarter programs are diligent teachers with refined techniques for assembling evaluations. Our hope is that they will try suggestions in this guide and will support their more recently hired teaching partners to approach evaluation writing in less time-consuming ways.

Consider the value of proportionality in transcripts. This principle encourages faculty to see their particular program not in isolation, but as part of a collective enterprise manifested in each student's education *through* his or her transcript. Every program's contribution is noteworthy. None should claim priority by taking, relative to others, an inordinate amount of space.

Some Tips on Preparing

What appears in a transcript evaluation is only part (usually a small part) of what the writer actually knows about a student's learning. The final eval can be seen as a proxy for this more complex understanding. Below are various tried-and-true methods for assembling evaluations.

* Teams should develop a plan for evaluation congenial to all as part of program planning. New and newer members of the faculty must be equal partners in this discussion. The plan might cover what elements of student work will be evaluated, how

information will be exchanged, which narrative strategies teammates will use (they don't all need to use the same one), how student self-evaluation will be woven into the process.

- * A single faculty member should take authority for authoring the final evaluation. Without a unifying voice, the eval tends to fracture into a series of disparate statements that make it harder to follow, repetitive and excessively long.
- * Give the gist of the final eval in the opening paragraph. Readers typically start from the top and form a quick impression. They may go no further than those first lines.
- * Don't recoil from offering criticism when justified. Including it is essential if students are to learn and transcripts are to be taken seriously. Faculty arrive at their own characteristic ways to note shortcomings and areas for improvement without inviting misinterpretation by external readers. Newer faculty, especially, should freely consult colleagues for examples and feedback. (Some of the evals in the appendix exhibit strategies for writing about students' academic difficulties.)
- * Simplify your work by incorporating language and sentiments from other team members into the final eval. In multi-quarter programs, interim evals can be invaluable. If your teaching partner has aptly characterized the student's seminar participation, for example, you can use those words instead of, or combined with, your own. Teammates can agree in advance to formally describe certain parts of the program (e.g., a project, a series of labs) in interim evals, enabling the author to paste, quote, or paraphrase those pieces in the final eval. Citing colleagues by name, you introduce their voices. Or you can put some of their words into your own voice. It depends on what works best for your narrative.
- * A similar strategy should simplify matters when one team member is responsible for all students' work in a particular workshop or module. It often takes inordinate labor and space to write a formal paragraph for each student's final eval; instead, a sentence or phrase passed on to the author is often quite sufficient. In programs composed essentially of modules, it makes the eval more readable by limiting the length of each faculty's contribution and combining accounts of sequential learning.
- * Meet as a team at the end of the program (or quarter) to reflect on each student's work. As faculty member Matt Smith explains: "This takes a few minutes for each student, but usually we can quickly identify a central tendency in our mutual observations and share any exceptional circumstances, achievements, or concerns we have. We also clarify awards of credit and make sure everyone has copies of all the evals."
- * If feasible, structure the program so that the faculty who authors the final eval is the one responsible for most of the student's final quarter's work. If you are both the student's research advisor and seminar leader, for instance, you are in a strong position to assess overall accomplishment.

* Take advantage of the flexibility you have in preparing "in-house" evaluations to make them less time consuming to write. While you might agonize over how to couch criticisms in the transcript, you're free to be quite candid describing strengths and weaknesses when you address the student. Whether they take the form of a letter, notes, or a statement, interim evals treat student work in detail and depth that support the dialogue you wish to have in the conference.

* When a major project is due at the end of the quarter, write about it only once, in your evaluation, rather than in an additional response to the student.

* Have the student's draft self-evaluation in hand when preparing the final eval. Many faculty find they can affirm and connect to the student's view of his or her own work as they write their evaluation.

* Use both interim and final evaluation conferences as occasions for advising. They are a most propitious time to discuss near and long-term plans and sense of direction.

Experiments

Experiment is crucial to the vitality of the evaluation process. Some faculty are driven to innovate by discontent with dysfunctional tendencies in the system—problems of student and faculty authority, transcript readability, and faculty workload that this guide has noted. Below we discuss two such efforts that have been put into practice. We then consider the need to encourage ongoing exploration of new methods and new wrinkles.

Blended narrative. This strategy combines the student's and faculty's evaluations into a single document prepared by the student and then edited by and with the faculty. Jim Stroh introduced this procedure in some of his programs starting in the early '90s. He begins by holding a planning session to explain the method. He provides a detailed program description and model examples of evaluations. Students also receive faculty comments on their final work of the quarter in time to take them into account. Each student then writes about him- or herself in the third person and vets the draft with a small group of peers to improve its quality. Then, as Jim described it to the 1996 DTF, "During evaluation week I have an appointment with each student (about 30 to 40 minutes) during which I bring their evaluation up on screen, add the necessary boiler plate, and go over it line by line making additions, corrections and such as necessary. If I have a strong disagreement with their version and it can't be resolved or corrected I tell them I will do the re-write...In almost all cases by the time the student leaves we both agree on what their evaluation will be, right down to equivalencies. The student gets a copy on the spot and we discuss advising issues or do a little small talk as there usually is time."

Jim's rationales for taking this approach were that "students should have as thin a transcript as possible so the 'real world' will more likely read it," and that "students know their own work better than faculty." He discovered that students gain perspective on their

achievement as they take on the faculty role. The Study Group agreed about the good quality of students' contributions in Jim's co-authored evals. (See Appendix D.)

As the use of blended evaluations has spread across the College in recent years, concerns have been raised in the deanery and elsewhere. The most serious is that, in some cases, students appear to be writing the evaluation *for* the faculty. Some students have protested that they don't want (or are uncomfortable taking) that responsibility, that they're doing the faculty's job for them, that faculty are not really assessing their learning. This flies in the face of Jim Stroh's practice. In his experience, creating blended evals takes at least as much effort by faculty as writing them from scratch, since one must become thoroughly familiar with the student's work in order to co-author the document. Jim only employs the method if teammates are committed to the labor required. It's inappropriate for faculty to make students prepare a self-evaluation masquerading as a co-evaluation.

A second concern comes from the registrar, Andrea Coker-Anderson, who has been quizzed by graduate admissions committees: Is the student awarding credit to him- or herself? Our group felt that the heading "Faculty Evaluation Of Student Achievement" looks confusing when the evaluation is co-authored by the student. A new title seems needed. "Faculty and Student Co-Evaluation of Student Achievement"? We also toyed with a possible variation on the blended model: a document in which the faculty eval appears as interlinear commentary alongside the self-eval, in a separate typeface. In the end, after weighing the loss of distinct student and faculty voices in blended evaluations, we agreed that the combining of student-faculty authority offsets the loss—so long as faculty do their part.

In sum: **STRENGTHS:** The blended narrative is more concise than the paired faculty evaluation and student self-evaluation. Students' authority over their own learning is given significant weight. Students learn to reflect well on their work. **CONCERNS:** Students should not be placed in the position of writing the evaluation for the faculty. Outside readers have been confused by authorship of blended evaluations.

Response narrative. This strategy shifts the focus squarely onto the student's self-evaluation, making the faculty evaluation a response, a gloss on what the student has written. The method was common in the early years. In the way that Sarah Williams has practiced it with teammates, self-evaluation becomes an ongoing, highly structured activity within the program, so that by the end students create detailed, accurate accounts of their own learning. Sarah explains: "Because this process makes the faculty evaluation a response to the student self-evaluation rather than the primary evaluative document, the faculty evaluation can be short and focus on just the unique or distinctive qualities of the learning the faculty experienced in relationship with the student. For me, this has reduced my stress when the four foot high stack of portfolios appears outside my door at the end of week ten. In this system, faculty are not responsible for creating a comprehensive evaluation of students' work at the end of the quarter. Rather, through self-assessment documents and collaborative workshops, students articulate and assume responsibility for

their own work. Then, through workshops during each quarter students receive peer response and faculty feedback regarding their reflective and evaluative work."

Students become quite invested in this sort of evaluation process since their role is clearly consequential. Indeed, Sarah's teams award credit for the activity. Redundancy between student and faculty voices is reduced, since faculty respond very selectively to the student's narrative. And, Sarah testifies, evaluation week becomes pleasurable. Her teams meet "for several hours with good food and drink—laughter and tears—to review each student together. It is fun and instructive to share multiple perspectives on student work, especially in programs involving alternating modules, workshops, seminars, and studio components. Then, in writing the faculty evaluation for your seminar group of 25 students, individual faculty can focus on what was truly engaging about her/his experience of a student's work as well as offer an assessment for the faculty as a whole."

The Study Group offers two cautions about this approach. First, just as with blended evals, response evals require strong faculty engagement. The challenge is to design the program so that student self-evaluation is knit prominently into it. Second, the sheer amount of evaluating generated by this method can lead to overly long transcript documents. Proportionality should be kept in mind. Further details on Sarah's structured technique for self-evaluation are given in the next section of the guide. (For an example of a response eval and an end-of-quarter worksheet, see Appendix E.)

In sum: **STRENGTHS:** Authority for students' achievements is shifted decidedly to the students. Faculty workload in reviewing student work is considerably reduced. **CONCERNS:** Significant program time needs to be dedicated to the students' work of reflection. The pair of faculty evaluation and student self-evaluation tend to be lengthy.

Support for experiment. A significant number of faculty, now and in the past, have felt stymied and frustrated by constraints of the evaluation system. Yet little in the way of alternative modes of writing has emerged. We think it's important to nurture a climate at the College in which fundamental questions about the nature of evaluation are asked and faculty who want to try out new ideas get support to do so.

Consider, for example, some faculty's interest in possibilities of a grid method of evaluation. Such an approach would list, in boilerplate, the set of abilities and kinds of knowledge and skills that faculty wanted students to gain, and describe how the student fared with regard to each. It could include a paragraph summarizing the student's work overall. (Appendix F shows what a grid might cover in a specific program.) A good case can be made that grid-based evaluations would serve students well by clearly laying out their accomplishments for graduate schools in ways that might be quicker and easier to grasp than typical narrative evaluations, while requiring much less effort to write.

Grid strategies have been proposed occasionally over the years, but their use has not approved by the deans because grids have not been deemed to be narratives. Are they? And if they aren't narratives, does it matter? In our group's discussion, several concerns were raised: that grids *assert* faculty authority rather than *earn* it, as narratives

do; that the limited number of categories chosen in a grid format will capture some students' learning but overlook others; that brief comments would tend to be converted by readers into grades rather than taken as substantive judgments. These objections don't invalidate the potential of grid-based evaluations; rather, they point to the need for faculty to have an institutionalized means to air issues and explore innovative strategies regarding evaluation.

It would be inappropriate to begin including grid-style evaluations in students' transcripts without further consideration within the faculty. To support that discussion, we concluded that what is called for is a commitment at the College to controlled experimentation. Teams who want to try something new should have a group of faculty and staff to turn to for guidance and feedback. If their experiment pans out, it can develop into another tool for evaluation that becomes available to faculty at large.

IV. STUDENT SELF-EVALUATIONS

All students should write a self-evaluation at the end of each quarter. At the end of the program they should write a self-evaluation for their transcript—1/3 to 1/2 page if the program lasts a quarter, no more than a page if it's yearlong. By giving students guidance and time to compose good self-evaluations, faculty help make reflection central to their education. Seniors should write about the culmination of their undergraduate education in their self-evaluations.

Creating Space for Reflection

Students' attitudes towards self-evaluation depend on their faculty. When faculty stress its importance and make it an integral part of the program's design, most students take it seriously, too. When faculty expect them to write self-evals that are worthy of inclusion in the transcript and support them to do so, most students come through.

This determinative role of faculty is our key conclusion about self-evaluations. It is at odds with the view among a number of faculty that many students can't write good self-evals and so are better off omitting them from transcripts. That belief appears to us to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. We've seen ample evidence that in programs where emphasis is put on self-evaluation, the great majority of students prove able to write quite creditable accounts of their learning. Faculty, not students, set the terms of engagement.

But why emphasize the writing of self-evals *for the transcript*? Why not require students to submit a self-eval for the conference, but leave it up to them to decide whether to put one in the transcript at the end of the program? (The *Faculty Handbook* states: "In 1987 the faculty voted to require that all students go through a written self-evaluation process in their academic programs." It leaves it up to program faculty "to determine explicitly and notify students at the beginning of the program, regarding whether or not student

self-evaluations will be a part of the permanent student transcript.") It's a matter, we think, of the threshold of expectation about students' exercise of authority for their learning. If the stakes are real, the students' act of writing the self-evaluation becomes a more critical moment to reflect upon and integrate the work they've done. Without such stakes, the weight of authority swings more heavily to faculty, dimming prospects for reflection.

In practice, the College's policy is this: If you refer directly to the student's self-evaluation in your transcript evaluation, she or he is *required* to submit it to complete the transcript. Until that happens, the transcript won't be sent outside TESC, although the credit earned for the class will be posted. Many students don't know this policy, so if the team decides to require transcript self-evaluations you should explain it to them. (Conversely, if you *don't* refer to the self-evaluation in your evaluation, the registrar *won't* require it, regardless of what you tell students or put in your covenant.) We discovered that many students who write a draft self-evaluation for the conference do not submit a final version for inclusion in their transcript. The pattern seems caused partly by mixed messages in student culture about evaluation, and partly by the fact that when the class is over faculty don't track whether this last step is taken.

Embrace of self-evaluation shifts authority not just to the student as an individual, but also to the class as a whole. As faculty member Rita Pougales views the connection: "As students develop the skills of reflection and a more personal and powerful relationship to their work, a different role for the learning community begins to evolve. Often peers become as important as audience and critics as the teacher is. Students look toward one another, as well as toward the faculty, for feedback and development of key concepts and support for their intellectual risk taking."¹

Here are some suggestions for how faculty can strengthen the climate for self-evaluation:

- * State in the syllabus or covenant that in-house self-evals will be required at the end of each quarter and a transcript self-eval at the end of the program. As part of the opening activities of the program discuss why self-evaluation is important for learning and how it will be approached. (It can be revealing for students to hear, for example, that as part of TESC's emphasis on reflection team members evaluate themselves and each other.)
- * During the first week of the quarter, set aside class time for students to create a baseline from which to assess their learning in the program. One approach is to have them do some reflective writing about their current understanding of the program content. Another is to have them respond to a form that lists the program's goals, evaluating their current standing with respect to each. (See the last part of Appendix F.) These exercises give students a solid point of reference for comparison at the end of the quarter or program, and can be updated partway through.

¹ Marie Eaton and Rita Pougales, "Work, Reflection, and Community: Conditions that Support Writing Self-Evaluations," in Jean MacGregor, ed., *Student Self-Evaluation*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993, p.62.

- * If you have a get-to-know-you meeting with each student close to the start of the quarter, ask for previous self- and faculty evals to read in advance. This underscores the significance of self-evaluation in TESC education.
- * Check in with each student at mid-quarter about his or her learning so far. This can be done through a brief oral conference or a short written paragraph. (The contact can be especially important for students who may lose credit: it goes beyond a formal 5th week warning to a closer look at problems and circumstances.)
- * Near the end of the quarter, take a class session to prepare students to compose their self-evals. This meeting can preview how to approach the writing and review program content for the quarter. It helps students to hear good potential ways to frame their narrative. You can propose such questions as the following: "Describe the challenges the program posed for you and how you met them." "Why were you drawn to the program, what did you think you might learn, and what *did* you learn?" "Assess your most significant work." "How do you see your learning in relation to the goals/issues of the inquiry?" "...in relation to the foci/Expectations emphasized in the program?"
- * Encourage those who need additional guidance (typically, new students) to attend an Academic Advising workshop or to review their draft with a tutor at the Writing Center. Both places offer solid support. Academic Advising hands out a smart statement by emeritus faculty member Richard Alexander arguing that self-evaluation is the most important part of the transcript. Many Greeners take advice in this essay to heart. "The self-evaluations taken as a whole should provide a running record of your ACADEMIC PROGRESS through Evergreen," Alexander writes. "Readers who start with the first evaluation and read through to the final one, should be given the autobiographical story of your work here. Why did you choose to come to Evergreen? What were you prepared to do? What did you want to do? Why did you want to do it? Why did you choose this program at this time? What did you learn? How have you changed? grown? developed? Are your goals still the same? What do you plan to do next? and why?"
- * Explain to students how you want them to approach their "in-house" self-evaluation in comparison to their final one. You might stress, for example, increased detail, freewheeling form, the difference in audience, the value of frankness.
- * Give students a draft copy of the program description for end-of-program preparation. If you can't, tell them what it will cover. That helps them avoid repetition and decide what to address in their self-evaluation.
- * Consider in what way and what context to review program content. Here, for instance, is a method of Matt Smith's: "I take one full morning or afternoon for students to make a map of the year-to-date program. The map is made by small groups. (Students need to bring their books, notes, papers, syllabi, journals, projects, group work, lab notes, etc. to this exercise.) The map should include all the activities of the program. It should have images/arrows that connect these activities conceptually, and explicit statements of what they see as connections. These maps are shared and explained by each group to the

program as a whole at the end of the session." This exercise not only prepares students for evaluation, it also clarifies for faculty how the class sees the learning that's occurred.

* After students undertake the review Matt describes above, they write a two to three page essay on their critical learning. "I ask them to identify three documents (academic journal entries, papers, presentations, etc.) where this learning took place and to write about it and its importance. For students remaining in the program, this is their self-evaluation. Those who are not rewrite the essay as a self-evaluation for the transcript." Students submit portfolios, with the essay and the three documents as the key pieces of evidence about their learning, and all their other writing as supplementary.

* A still more structured approach is used by Sarah Williams. "Students were provided handouts at mid-quarter and quarter's end during fall, winter, and spring quarters that required a written reflection regarding all aspects of program work. Embedded in these worksheet exercises was ongoing assessment work done in critique sessions with regard to studio work. Also, portfolios were required and assessed during workshops through written evaluation forms including peer review of both the content and form. We met in the computer lab at mid-quarter and quarter's end to read and review a narrative compilation of each student's evaluative work. The goal was to have this narrative become the most polished and accomplished piece of writing each student produced during each quarter." As part of this process, students decide how to distribute their own program credits, based on categories and criteria provided by faculty. Their final narrative becomes the primary document in the transcript evaluation. (Appendix E)

* Hold a session during the tenth week for peer review of self-evaluations. In small groups, students take turns reading their drafts and receiving feedback. You should offer guidance at the beginning on how they might best help one another. Fellow students are a fine audience for the drafts. They smell bull, spot omissions, and suggest clarifications. Hearing each other leads to new recognitions about personal and shared learning. After the session, students redraft their self-eval. (This was a favorite device of Richard Jones in the early years.)

* Consider the potential for student peer evaluation in your program. Faculty member Sarah Ryan has found it valuable both for increasing faculty knowledge of students' work and for engaging students in reflection as a communal responsibility. Sarah's colleague Nancy Parkes introduced her to it as tool in assessing group projects. Sarah writes: "The covenant says that 'students will evaluate one another's work in project groups in writing at the end of the quarter.' Then, when it actually comes time to write these, we suggest that they write a short paragraph or a couple of sentences about each project group member's contribution. In addition to letting faculty know who contributed what to the final project, we also got some good language for evaluation and the students felt it added to the accountability of the group. It took away some of the anxiety for those who fear they end up doing more work than others for the same credit." Similarly, peer evaluations can play a significant part in cluster contracts, where a faculty member sponsors a group of students to pursue independent study, at least in part, together.

* You can also make broader use of peer evaluation, as Sarah Ryan did in the evaluation workshop at the end of a multi-quarter program. The team gave the following instructions: "If there were other students who contributed something important to your education, write a sentence or two about each person and what her or his contribution was. You're welcome to comment on their seminar or small group contributions, their personal and intellectual friendship, their written or performed work, or anything else." Sarah notes, "We got some results we expected, but also got some surprising consensus on people who may not have spoken up much but were really teachers in the class in their interaction with peers."

* Get the transcript self-evaluation, in best-draft form, before the conference. This enables you to (1) draw on it in thinking about your evaluation, and (2) prepare editorial suggestions for the student. The latter is critical. While a portion of the self-evals that reach your desk are ready, as is, for the transcript, most need varying degrees of tweaking. There may be mistakes in mechanics (punctuation, spelling, grammar). There may be problems of structure or content (e.g., repetition, unfinished points). There may be redundancy with the program description. There may be overblown claims about accomplishment, or too much self-deprecation. With a short investment of time you can assess what's needed. During the conference, go over corrections and advice. Your interest in the self-eval at this stage may well determine whether the student finishes it for the transcript.

* If you think a self-eval *shouldn't* go in the transcript, level with the student. He or she probably needs help in the future from Academic Advising and the Writing Center. (If you've made inclusion a class requirement, simply remove your reference to the self-eval in your eval of the student.)

* While some faculty prefer to get the interim self-eval prior to the conference, others wait until the meeting. An advantage of that approach is that you learn face-to-face how the student thinks about her or his work. The conference can begin with the student reading and commenting on the self-eval. You respond. Then you read your eval to the student. The dovetailing (or not) of the two documents makes for rewarding conversation.

Senior Self-Evaluations

With the absence of departmental major requirements, Evergreen seniors face the challenge of defining for themselves how to complete college. The Expectations of an Evergreen Graduate speak to the faculty's hopes about this: "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." Seniors document this experience through their transcript self-evaluations.

Summative self-evaluation. The idea that graduating seniors should reflect on their entire college career in a final statement placed at the top of the transcript was endorsed by a faculty vote in the 2001 Gen Ed deliberations. The Study Group found, however, that

while many seniors have heard about the desirability of such a statement, extremely few write one. We learned about a recent experiment, a part-time studies class for summative self-evaluation writing in which students produced many drafts with intensive guidance from faculty. The students, we heard, learned a lot from the experience. We applauded the effort but were dismayed by the implication. Stretched as faculty already are, who has time for multiple meetings of this kind? Some of us were also ambivalent about the results. One member of the group complained that from the distance of hindsight, this set of students tended to "write about themselves as though they were someone else, as though they were case studies." He found much of their language "bureaucratic, dispassionate, at times almost clinical."

We think that a summative statement is no substitute for ongoing self-evaluation that shows what the student did and learned in the immediacy of specific studies. Its presence could even be counterproductive, detracting attention from the student's voice elsewhere in the transcript. At the same time, we recognize that some students file few if any self-evaluations. Some don't do senior projects. Some long for a sense of perspective on their education. For students such as these, a summative self-evaluation might be the ticket to tie things together. Having the chance to reflect on their undergraduate learning in a structured setting could be a valuable capstone for them. It seems likely that few seniors will write summative self-evals without ongoing guidance, but a limited number will choose to if 2-credit classes and individual contracts are offered for that purpose.

Senior project. Students undertake major projects of many kinds: laboratory, field, and library-based research; internships, community service, and social action; artistic creation and performance; study abroad. Many of these activities are pursued in programs, many in independent contracts. For seniors, such projects often become culminating experiences in the development of their own work: their most advanced undergraduate studies. We agreed that senior self-evaluations of this learning, when well fashioned, constitute an exceptionally valuable part of the transcript. Appearing at or near the top of that document, they can persuasively show achievement of depth, breadth, and synthesis by discussing what the student actually did. (For an example, look at the self-evaluation in Appendix C.)

The more students are able and encouraged to pursue senior projects (or theses), the better! While some faculty and planning units explicitly offer these opportunities, we think that many students who would benefit by carrying out part of their senior year's studies in this way are not sufficiently aware of the potential for doing so. Advising by faculty, starting in junior year, can help orient students to consider these projects and to find promising contexts in which to pursue them.

Integrative paragraph. When seniors compose their self-evaluation for their final quarter, faculty can advise them to include a paragraph or two of reflection on their studies as a whole. Many students, at this moment before graduating, are mulling over their education. It's a natural topic to discuss in the last conference. Writing about it briefly is a modest, realistic task—one that many graduating students welcome.

V. PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

The program description should succinctly describe the nature and content of the inquiry, the activities involved, and the texts and other materials studied. It should avoid redundancy with other parts of the evaluation. Suggested limits are the same as for evaluations of students: 1/2-1 page for a one-quarter program, a page for a yearlong one.

For most external readers, who think of undergraduate education in terms of courses and majors, program descriptions offer an important sense of how study is organized at Evergreen. The need for clarity and compactness applies at least as much to these documents as to the other parts of the evaluation. Readers, after all, will be more interested in the student's achievement than in the program *per se*. We were struck by tendencies to repeat information in description and evaluation and by the substantial number of descriptions longer than a page in length (40% in a sample of 2000-1 graduates). After reviewing examples of well-honed descriptions, a number of us found it easy to improve our own. Here are suggestions for writing them based on patterns we observed:

- * Draft the description before writing the final evaluations, so the two documents are complementary, not overlapping and redundant.
- * Include all team members' names and fields of study. (They're absent surprisingly often.)
- * Begin the description with an overview of the program. (Some may read no further than the first lines of the first paragraph.)
- * Put essential details about program activities into the description, reducing boilerplate in the evaluation.
- * Integrate learning objectives—the purposes of program activities—into the description. For example, instead of saying "students wrote a research paper," say they wrote it "to develop ability to organize, synthesize, and assess the reliability of a range of sources."
- * Instead of listing books, films, speakers, etc., as blocks of text, present them in the context of program themes. There's no need to list them all!
- * Consider the value of noting how subjects referred to in the equivalencies figured in the content of the program.

- * Make the description intelligible to readers unfamiliar with the fields, and avoid jargon internal to the program.
- * Check the catalogue copy or syllabus for already existing language about the nature and content of the inquiry that can be adapted to the description.
- * In multi-quarter programs, develop the description quarter by quarter, synthesizing new material as the program proceeds. This usually makes for the most economical effort, since different versions are needed to cover students who weren't enrolled from beginning to end. (The registrar's office reports that sometimes this isn't done, leading to confusion about what these students actually studied.)

VI. CREDIT EQUIVALENCIES

Credit equivalencies should use disciplinary, sub-field, or interdisciplinary terminology that will be clear to graduate schools. When feasible, the number of credits assigned should be comparable to college courses.

Clarifying Equivalencies

The original motivation for credit equivalencies was to provide a translation of programs into the language of disciplinary content for graduate schools and employers. The need for such redaction—inadequate as it often is in characterizing the actual substance of programs—remains as real as ever, even in this increasingly postdisciplinary age. The Study Group found that nearly all the terms that faculty use for equivalencies make sense when taken in the context of their program description and narrative evaluations. The trouble is that few readers have time to study the transcript in this way. Most encounter the equivalencies in the form of a summary list in the "Record of Academic Achievement" that is attached at the front of the transcript. So equivalencies need to be self-explanatory. Often they're not. In a sampling of credit equivalencies in 100 program descriptions across all planning units, the Office of Institutional Research estimated that 43% were not stated as easily-discerned subjects, even when using interpretive criteria a good deal more flexible than standard terms for disciplinary content of undergraduate courses.

We suggest several kinds of labels that can help make equivalencies easy to grasp:

By discipline and topic. Example: "History: Agrarian Reform Movements." Simply listing the discipline (History) is insufficient, when one thinks of departmental courses. So is simply listing the topic (Agrarian Reform Movements), which by itself offers no indication of the scholarly approach. Was it historical, political, or sociological? While all three may have been involved, often one encompasses the others.

By sub-field of knowledge. This is an area that is smaller or more focused than the standard disciplines, and seems best described in its own terms. Often it bridges disciplines. Examples: "Oral History," "Filmmaking," "Spectroscopy."

By interdisciplinary designation. When the parsing of content in either of the above ways seems inapt, a broader label can be perfectly acceptable. Examples: "Cultural Studies," "Quantitative Reasoning," "General Science." Terms such as these have become common in many institutions. They are preferable to condensed or rephrased program titles that may seem cryptic to outsiders. They can be further defined by topic ("Cultural Studies: American Identities").

The term "Research" often appears in credit equivalencies without further explanation. What about the field and the skill required? Was it a self-directed exploration or a programmed set of lab or workshop exercises? (These questions may not be clarified by the evaluation, either.) By clearly naming what the subject and nature of the research were, the credit equivalency fulfills its purpose as translation.

We advise that, when feasible, credit equivalencies be defined broadly enough that the number of credits is roughly comparable to a typical college course: at least three, often four, sometimes five credits. Divisions of two credits—the equivalent of a "mini-course" at other institutions—should be done sparingly. A single credit equivalency should be avoided if at all possible.

When it comes time to craft credit equivalencies, it can be very useful to return to the catalogue copy. Following the categories for credit proposed there usually serves students well because the subjects are easily comprehensible.

Designating Upper-Division Credit

On this matter, we think the faculty needs to decide on a consistent policy.

As things stand, there is no faculty-wide agreement about how or when to denote upper-division credit. Some indicate it by placing an asterisk (*) after units of credit in the equivalencies. Others do not. This lack of consistency can be quite misleading. Outside readers who see asterisks by some credits but not others can logically conclude that un-starred credits represent lower-division study. Even if the program description states that the work was upper-division, those credits will *look like* they're lower-division if they appear, un-starred, alongside starred credits in the full list of equivalencies at the top of the transcript. Students, for example, may receive asterisked credits in sophomore but not senior year, even though their senior studies were much more advanced. The list of equivalencies looks, mistakenly, like a hodgepodge of lower- and upper-division work.

Some background on how this came to pass: Asterisking began with the introduction of the Bachelor of Science degree, which is awarded only to students who have obtained 48 upper-division science/math credits. At first, only science faculty adopted the practice.

Later, when state regulations for admission into Masters in Teaching (MIT) programs required certain courses in the student's major area to be certified as upper-division, other faculty were asked by Evergreen's MIT program to attach asterisks to those credits at students' request. Although state policy no longer demands this certification, the use of starring has continued to spread among some humanities, arts, and social science faculty.

Our Study Group took no position on what the policy should be. We want here to note some dimensions of the issue and to suggest alternative solutions.

At the root of the issue, unsurprisingly, is the fluidity of Evergreen's curricular structure compared to that of other colleges, which designate courses at "100" to "400" levels. True, we call some programs "upper division." But we call others "all-level." And while some parts of the curriculum are clearly sequential, others clearly do not require previous preparation of a specific kind. A hallmark of multi-quarter programs is that students progress to increasingly advanced work—with different students moving more quickly and further than others along different continua of the inquiry. These considerations don't rule out the use of asterisks. But they suggest some of the complexities involved in codifying the distinction between upper- and lower-division credit for a college that puts such a premium on students' individual learning.

Let's say that the faculty was to adopt the policy that faculty members will asterisk all credits that they deem to be upper-division. Each faculty member would remain free to determine how, when and why she or he designates this credit. Some may decide at a program's outset that it will be taught at an upper-division level and designate all credits awarded as upper-division. Others might wish to determine whether a particular student completed work at an upper-division level. In that case different students in the same program might receive different amounts of starred credit. Or a team might designate some, but not all, of the credit awarded within the program as upper-division.

Note the likely divergence, in an asterisked system, in the basis on which faculty would award upper-division credit. For some, starring would indicate only that the subject was *taught* at a junior/senior level. So long as a student earned credit it would automatically be starred—just as, at another college, one could get a "D" in a senior level class. Other faculty would reserve award of upper-division credit to those who achieve a level of quality that constitutes upper-division *learning*. Starring, for example, might be the equivalent of superior work for freshmen and sophomores in certain contexts.

What about eliminating asterisks? Faculty have always had other means to signify that studies are upper-division. They identify upper-division programs as such in program descriptions. In evaluations, they often make judgments about student learning that explicitly or implicitly characterize its "level" with respect to specific subjects. There are some faculty who prefer to avoid the upper/lower distinction altogether when they can, because they find it problematic: much undergraduate education, after all, falls into an intermediate zone, a mixture of "sophomore" and "junior" levels that's neither "beginning" nor "advanced." But other faculty find the distinction essential in presenting students for admission to graduate school. Wendy Freeman, director of Career

Development, shares this view. She believes that sometimes admission depends on whether students' upper-division work is clearly visible in their equivalencies—not necessarily through asterisks, but somehow.

Here, then, are four choices for the faculty to consider:

1. Adopt asterisks as a college-wide practice, giving faculty autonomy about how and when to use them. (If the College goes this route, it will be important not to *overuse* them.)

2. Identify all classes in the transcript "Record of Academic Achievement" by level: "first year," "all-level," "intermediate," "upper-division." Credit equivalencies will not be individually starred. Readers will rightly assume that upper-division programs award upper-division credit. For other kinds of programs, they will need to consult the evaluation to learn about the level of student work. Faculty will be encouraged to specify the level(s) at the beginning or end of the narrative.

3. This approach resembles (2) in that classes are identified by level, but with the difference that asterisks are used, and faculty specify which part of the credit equivalencies in all-level and intermediate programs are upper- and lower-division. Each team will be free to decide whether to award upper-division credit on a student-by-student basis or to make the apportionment the same for all students.

4. Science and math faculty, only, use asterisks. An explanation appended to the transcript Record of Achievement will state that these are credits towards the B.S. degree.

VII. INTERNSHIP AND INDEPENDENT STUDY CONTRACTS

Student and faculty evaluations, taken together, should give an accurate, descriptive, and non-redundant account of the work accomplished. For a 16-credit contract, these evaluations should be at most a page long—and proportionately shorter when for less credit.

Since Evergreen opened its doors, self-directed learning has been a central aim of the College's pedagogy. It is knit into programs, fostered by the faculty, and pursued energetically by students through internship and independent study contracts. These contracts occur plentifully in all planning units.

Care needs to be taken in crafting evaluations for and by students who contract for independent study and internships so that there exists a readable, useful report of activities undertaken, as well as what learning ensued from it. In this regard, the "project" and "developmental" narrative strategies often seem especially apt, as do the "blended" and "response" experiments described earlier in the guide. Whatever strategy

is employed, faculty, students, and (where appropriate) field supervisors should cooperate to assure that there is an accurate and minimally redundant description in the evaluations of the work undertaken. (See Appendix G for examples of internship evals.)

Our Study Group recommends that the "Internship Learning Contract" and "Individual Learning Contract" forms—the ones that students fill out and that sponsors, supervisors and deans approve before the work commences—be dropped from the transcript. To do so will require a faculty vote. Removing the form would eliminate misapprehensions caused for readers when specific elements of a plan shift in the course of the quarter. It would also eliminate repetition of what appears in faculty and self-evaluations. Completion of the form would still be required for registration: it remains the agreed-upon contract, essential for student preparation. In lieu of having the form in the transcript, student and faculty should make sure to include relevant information from it (such as name and location of organization, name and position of supervisor, nature of duties, learning objectives, books read) in their evaluations.

To support proportionality within the transcript, student and faculty evals should each be a maximum of one page for a 16-credit contract. If the student describes the work well, the faculty sponsor can often write a succinct commentary. With internships, faculty should use their judgment to decide whether to excerpt the field supervisor's letter in their evaluation or to include the entire letter. If the letter is long, diffuse, overly critical, or repeats what's covered in the other evals, excerpting it makes great sense.

We were surprised to hear from David Marshall that student evaluations for internships and independent study were missing nearly as often as not in transcripts, since the work is so obviously devised, observed and conducted by students themselves. For both internships and individual learning contracts, the point made earlier in the guide needs emphasizing, namely that the act of writing self-evaluations offers a critical moment for student reflection upon and integration of their experiences. Student and faculty may very well find intensified moments for collaboration and complementarity in meetings and discussions during the period of contracted study, but *especially* during the evaluation conference. The presence of student voice as an official part of the transcript goes a long way toward conveying what happened.

Here are some commonsense practices that prepare the ground for good evaluations:

- * Be persuaded that the student is prepared to undertake the proposed work. Don't hesitate to ask for an example of previous work or evaluations.
- * Get the student to be realistic about the number of credits. The standard formula is 2 1/2 hours of work per credit. Ask the student to log hours, to monitor him- or herself.
- * Help the student develop an academic component as part of an internship. This often becomes the basis of your ongoing connection, and later of your evaluation.

* Keep to the meeting or contact schedule that you agree to at the outset. Problems tend to occur when student and sponsor fall out of touch, against expectations they'd had.

* Make a site visit or speak by phone to the internship supervisor if appropriate, at a point that's good to check on how the student is doing.

VIII. EVENING AND WEEKEND STUDIES EVALUATIONS

Evaluations for Evening and Weekend Studies offerings should follow the same guidelines as those for full-time offerings. They should be proportionately shorter in length: 1/2 page at most for an 8-credit description/evaluation, and 1-3 sentences for a 2-credit one. Students should write a single unified self-evaluation that covers all their study in a quarter, or in several quarters if they are continuing in a multi-quarter program.

The guidelines in this report are for the most part fully applicable to writing evaluations for offerings in Evening and Weekend Studies. (See Appendix H.) But there are particular features of EWS offerings that call for special comment.

As noted in the introduction, the growth of the EWS planning unit (prior to spring 2002, called Part Time Studies) has been one of several changes that have placed a strain on transcripts. EWS comprises offerings that vary from yearlong, half-time programs to 2-credit courses, with a great many one quarter, 8-credit programs and 4-credit courses. While many students enroll in a full-time program and augment it with a 2- or 4-credit course, others only take offerings from EWS: for instance, an 8-credit program together with one or two courses, or sometimes, three or four 4-credit courses in a quarter. These modes of study constitute a significant change from the college's original ideal—and normal—mode of study: study within a single, multi-quarter, full-time coordinated studies program.

The growth of new modes of study at Evergreen within EWS raises some challenges to narrative evaluations. First, there is the matter of length of student transcript. The proliferation of offerings that a student takes in a given quarter leads to a proliferation of pages within the transcript. EWS has already addressed this matter with some success, in the following ways. While full-time programs normally place the program description as a separate document from the faculty evaluation within the student transcript, the norm within EWS is to combine these within a single document. This commonly keeps the description/evaluation sets of 2- and 4-credit courses as well as some 8-credit programs to a single page. Further, the EWS Faculty Handbook gives specific advice to faculty on how to write a concise narrative evaluation:

Faculty Evaluation of Student Achievement

There are three types of information about the student's work included on this form:

Course/Program Description:
Evaluation of Student Work
Suggested Course Equivalencies:

Description: Write a short (usually one or two paragraphs) description mentioning primary learning objectives (concepts, principles, skills, etc.)

Evaluation: As briefly as possible, describe the student's progress in meeting the learning objectives you mentioned above. You will not have space to address all of the work the student accomplished. Consider referring to some of the work as exemplifying the student's learning. When you write student evaluations, a good rule of thumb is to begin with a general descriptive statement of the student. For example, *Gail exceeded all requirements of this course and showed particular strength in facilitating collaborative working groups.* Or, *Holly met sufficient requirements for credit in this course, and showed, by her seminar participation and writing, that she is grappling with fundamentals of critical thinking.* Next, address the learning objectives in your course or program, using seminar, or project work, or an essay only as an example. *Ivan demonstrated a very solid understanding of the ways in which historians approach their work in his well developed oral history project.* Finally, consider indicating where you would place the student in terms of academic levels: *Jerry is well prepared for advanced work in linguistics.* Or, *Kerry needs more work in fundamental cellular principles before doing intermediate work in biology.*

Suggested Course Equivalencies: List equivalencies normally used in traditional colleges and universities. College catalogues can be found in the reference section of the library if you need inspiration. Please do not use general categories such as Social Science or Psychology. Instead, try to be specific, and break the credit down if necessary.

Second, faculty teaching in EWS do not have the opportunity to come to know their students as well as faculty teaching in full-time programs, simply due to contact time. This fact limits what EWS faculty can reasonably say about the student. Faculty teaching in 2- or 4-credit courses are unlikely to be able to speak meaningfully to a student's character development, for instance, so a "developmental narrative" will simply not be appropriate. Similarly, major project work is understandably less frequent in EWS offerings—though it can and does have a place in some half-time programs, particularly multi-quarter ones. Thus, EWS evaluations most commonly do and should fit within the "skills narrative" type.

A third issue is that for those students who enroll only in two, three or four 4-credit courses in a quarter, there is no single faculty member who is recognizably the student's primary faculty. For these students, no faculty can address whether and to what extent the student has integrated his or her studies. The only person who can speak to this is the student, in the self-evaluation.

But this leads to a fourth issue, that of student self-evaluations within EWS. Presently, student self-evals within EWS are handled formally just as they are for full-time programs: The standard is, "one offering, one self-evaluation." Thus, a student who takes four 4-credit courses could conceivably be expected to submit four transcript self-evaluations for the quarter. This would fragment the student's own voice and remove the opportunity to do the integrative work mentioned above.

It would be a reasonable and slight modification of the current standard to expect students to write *at most* one transcript evaluation per quarter—the guideline would be that when the "longest running" offering that a student is taking ends, the student submits a transcript evaluation. Faculty teaching in 4-credit courses may still require a student to write a transcript evaluation, but only if the student isn't, say, continuing in a multi-quarter full- or half-time program. In such cases, the faculty may require the student to draft a self-evaluation which the student intends to incorporate later into a transcript evaluation. In any case, it is to be understood that even when a student is required to write a transcript self-evaluation, that document will likely range beyond the student's work in a single EWS offering.

Recall the importance of proportionality among the parts of the transcript. The integrity of the document as a whole—the sense that readers can make of it—depends on keeping the length of evaluations in line with the number of credits earned. We suggest a 1/2 page limit for an 8-credit description/evaluation of a program that lasts one quarter, and one page if it's yearlong; 1/4 page for a 4-credit class description/evaluation; 1-3 sentences for a 2-credit description/evaluation. We also think it's worth considering whether transcripts ought to be reformatted so that all 2- and 4-credit description/evaluations appear in a series, perhaps at the end, in the interest of saving space and making a clear demarcation for readers between large and small units of study.

IX. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

There were times in our Study Group's discussions when we contemplated junking transcript evaluations altogether. So few ever read them! The sweat that goes into them! The worst part of the job! Whatever you write feels concocted! It's the conference that matters! We all came back to that: to the conference as the beating heart of student-faculty interchange. And we asked ourselves whether there might not be some better way to create an official record: a way that let faculty conserve energy and sanity while supporting the vital work of reflection with students. Could there be a third choice that steered between the muteness of a grade and the thorniness of a narrative? Could we imagine a decoupling whereby faculty put grades (or mini-comments that served a similar purpose) in the transcript while writing evaluations for students' eyes only?

We could imagine it, but the prospect gave us no joy. There is a powerful bond, we agreed, between the conferences and the transcript evaluation. As teacher and learner take responsibility to make a public accounting, attention shifts from college towards the larger society. If that bond were broken—if narrative evaluation somehow became only an internal process—what would happen to the conference? We suspect it would tend to become more subjective, even solipsistic, and less essential to both students and faculty. The felt need to make sense of the learning to a world beyond Evergreen heightens the evaluation's meaningfulness. (See Appendix I for further discussion of why Evergreen has narrative evaluations.)

A drumbeat of concern about transcripts and support for the evaluation process sounds across the College's history. It was present in the 1981 Evaluation and Transcript Review DTF. Based on data from recent alumni and still-enrolled advanced students, that DTF found: "In spite of the inherent difficulties in convincing graduate schools of the validity of a voluminous TESC transcript, there were very few respondents who favored letter grades as a replacement for written evaluations...Former students did say that evaluations ought to be written so graduate admissions committees could readily ascertain an applicant's skills and abilities." The DTF called on the faculty to show "precisely what this student did and how well he/she did it."

If this guide marks a new phase in collective thinking about evaluations, then we hope a forum will be created to further the conversation. Faculty with questions or issues to raise, practices or examples to share, objections or rejoinders to make, or experiments or ideas to propose, ought to be able to engage with others so that experience can be pooled and horizons expanded. If interest warrants it, an ongoing group should be set up, perhaps with a website and e-bulletin board. One potential next step: the materials in the appendix to this report could be augmented by more examples from faculty across the curriculum. Especially valuable, we think, would be examples of succinct evaluations and descriptions, and of techniques for writing critically about students' academic difficulties. Another, not-so-distant topic for discussion: as the evaluation system moves online, there will be opportunities and issues regarding the linking of transcripts to the development of e-portfolios.

Confident though we are that guidelines offered in this report will make evaluations easier to read and to write, we remain acutely aware of the effort they will continue to require. Given external economic pressures currently faced by public colleges and universities, we think it important to point out that the very feasibility of the existing system—and the prospects of strengthening it—probably hinges on maintaining current class sizes.

We know that in the future, the faculty as a body may decide to consider larger structural changes in the evaluation process. Two such ideas emerged in our discussions. One is old, and was exhaustively debated in the past: the semester system. An obvious advantage of it is that evaluation would happen twice instead of thrice a year, reducing strain on faculty. A point most of us hadn't considered is that the growing number of one-quarter programs may be less conducive to self-evaluation than semester-length programs would be. Students may find it harder to reflect on their learning (they've got less to reflect *on*), and some faculty may find it harder to devote precious class time to self-eval preparation.

The second idea is new: for Evergreen to set aside the final week each spring as a time for year-end reflection. Students would write a single transcript self-evaluation covering their entire year's work, based on informal statements they'd composed each quarter, and meet with faculty in conference. The reasoning behind this idea is that, with the increasing fragmentation of the curriculum into one-quarter and part-time pieces, students have greater need than they once did for integration. The student's voice in the transcript

might be stronger if it were represented by a small number of inclusive, refined self-evaluations. Students could be expected to use this week as well to put finishing touches on their best work of the year and, if they chose, to build an e-portfolio.

Our experience as a group sharpened our respect for the founding faculty's decision to replace grades with narratives that reflect upon learning. There is nothing coercive about their insight. It contains no hidden agenda about what is or is not worthy of attention. Rather, it's a gust of fresh air for undergraduate education. It returns to the simple challenge of interpretation that animates the liberal arts tradition: the question of saying something about something. What can you say that's truthful and interesting about what has been done? What you can say is open. It's a playful invitation.