

Annual Report of the President
The Evergreen State College

President George S. Bridges
June 2021

Introduction

In the receding shadow of the global pandemic, our work in the 2020-2021 academic year focused on Evergreen's future while doing our best to serve Evergreen's current students.

We created a powerful new strategic plan to recruit and enroll new students, landed generous support from the Legislature, advanced initiatives on equity and student success, firmed up Paths to help students see where their education can take them, and sought new leadership for the college. With compassion and creativity and within fiscal constraints, we set the stage for a new era of post-pandemic teaching and learning at Evergreen.

This report summarizes the year's challenges and accomplishments in five sections. The first section describes the college's current finances along with important projects completed in our facilities and operations. The second outlines Evergreen's new strategic plan and initiatives to increase enrollment. Section three reviews how we increased support for current and future students, particularly those from underserved backgrounds. The fourth reviews the college's response to the pandemic and plans for a return to in-person instruction in fall term 2021. The fifth and final section covers the new direction in leadership for the college.

Finances, Facilities, and Operations

Finance

At the end of the 2019-2020 academic year, Washington projected a dire \$9 billion budget shortfall from the COVID-19 shutdown of the state's economy. As noted in Jeremy Mohn's [annual legislative report](#), however, the state budget improved significantly over the year and substantial federal relief support followed. Thanks to the work of many, Evergreen received sturdy operational funding and additional resources for new faculty and staff, along with significant support for capital projects to renovate campus facilities.

Evergreen's budget has benefitted from significant energy savings and reduction in travel expenses. By the end of this fiscal year we expect to have a modest surplus. However, staffing levels are misaligned with enrollment, especially with faculty, we planned reductions in next year's spending of approximately 8 percent. This reduction will be achieved through cost savings at every level of the college, eliminating vacant positions, and some layoffs. Federal COVID relief funds will be used to temporarily

defer some of the cuts, giving time to consider re-organization of some of the college's units and divisions.

Evergreen's comprehensive campaign and annual fund-raising events, including [*The Art of Giving*](#), have resulted in significant support for the college and our students. In the past two years, the initial phase of the campaign has raised nearly \$25 million in support of many current and new programs, which far exceeded our aspirations. In this fiscal year, the college has raised over \$11 million, more than any amount raised in a single year.

Generous campaign gifts from alumni have advanced key Evergreen initiatives. A major gift from an alumni couple is supporting Evergreen's Center for Climate Action and Sustainability, which will offer the knowledge and hands-on learning opportunities students need to be future climate leaders. Another major gift from an alumnus is helping the college reach out to other friends and graduates who wish to leave legacies to support scholarships and other college programs. Finally, grants from the U.S. Department of Education and the Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies added significantly to our support for students from underserved populations and initiatives to advance indigenous art and culture respectively.

Facilities and Operations

Despite the adverse impact of COVID on the college's operations, staff made significant progress in improving facilities, achieving energy and utilities savings, and upgrading Evergreen's computing and communications technology. A few of the improvements in the college's facilities over this past year include:

- Completing a new campus health and wellness center for serving the physical and mental health needs of our students;
- Repairing the Longhouse's electrical and heating systems along with complete restoration of the beautiful Longhouse Thunderbird;
- Upgrading the Central Utility Plant cooling towers, providing reliable campus cooling in an energy-efficient manner;
- Upgrading HVAC systems in campus buildings to support COVID indoor air-quality safety;
- Installing new energy-efficient boiler and sewer lines at the Lord Mansion.

The college's team in Computing and Communications made extraordinary achievements in areas related to online instruction, particularly in response to the COVID pandemic emergency. Among these were the following initiatives:

- Transitioning all staff, faculty, and students to a remote environment using Zoom, Microsoft, Canvas, Remote workstation and other remote systems, while maintaining and supporting these systems through the entire academic year;

- Successfully migrating all staff, faculty and student email to our Microsoft 365 platform and creating MS Teams for all work units and cross-divisional task forces and projects;
- Replacing network switches and cabling throughout campus, upgrading power, air conditioning and access control in all data closets and the data center;
- Protecting the college's systems against many significant incidents that threatened to impact the college's ability to teach and conduct business.

Strategic Plan and Enrollment

Completing a new strategic plan for Evergreen was a priority for the year. Building upon the extensive Blue Sky and Big Bets discussions with staff, faculty and students, we completed a new strategic plan aimed at Evergreen's future and approved by the Board of Trustees. [*The Evergreen State College Strategic Plan 2020-2023*](#) was submitted to the Office of the Governor and OFM in the early fall along with Evergreen's biennial budget request.

The plan focuses our work for the next few years on three primary goals:

- Achieving unprecedented levels of student academic success and personal development;
- Significantly expanding support for our local community, region, state, and nation; and
- Becoming a much stronger, more resilient, and adaptive college.

The plan includes specific objectives and tactics tied these goals, focusing primarily on actions that increase the college's enrollment and improves the experience of every student. The plan's goals, objectives and tactics guide development of new academic directions, including those that enroll new types of students with academic offerings of certificates, professional credentials, and online courses and programs.

Strengthening Enrollment

Outreach initiatives to prospective students relied heavily on strong Evergreen stories and content generated by our communications team for targeted social media, direct email marketing and engagement and printed materials. In terms of volume of quality content about the college, it was a record year on our digital platforms and in media outreach.

We connected with individual students via virtual information sessions through Zoom, email, phone calls and letters. We continued many types of virtual events (developed last year), helping students select their academic programs of study and building a foundation of knowledge about the college and academic success.

Enrollment of new students in Fall '20 was lower than projected and retention of current students had declined over the previous year. Anecdotal evidence and the experiences of the other public four-year schools in the state suggest that many students, especially those with low income, deferred attending college this pandemic year. The COVID environment made recruiting prospective students difficult for every college, particularly given the importance of in-person, on-campus visits to new student recruitment.

We've worked heavily on retention of current students with Paths, marketing them to our current students, encouraging them to affiliate with a Path, and collecting aggregate level data on students' Path affiliations. Early data on student affiliations indicate that approximately one-half of our students have chosen to affiliate with a Path. Affiliating with a Path is not required.

In February, each of the public four-year colleges in the state saw a significant drop in applications for Fall '21 from high school seniors, particularly those living in Washington and those from low-income and underserved backgrounds. In response, our Office of Admissions launched a pilot [Direct Admissions Initiative](#) in a sample of school districts in the region. Working closely with high school counselors in each district, we developed a process for directly contacting and recruiting their graduating seniors.

In late May, we delivered letters of admission to every high school senior in three neighboring school districts who met our admission qualifications but who had not already applied. We expect to have a complete set of students' responses by the end of June. For the '22-'23 academic year, in Fall '21 we plan to expand the initiative to a broader set of schools in the region, connecting with counselors and students early in the new academic year.

Advancing Equity and Student Success

Of the many positive results of this year's legislative session, new investments and regulatory support helped advance our work on equity. These include:

- Support for a tribal liaison position to extend our outreach to tribes across Washington and the Northwest
- Permanent funding for the Assistant Director of our Native Pathways Program,
- Two new faculty lines to serve Native students
- Permanent funding for staff in First Peoples Multicultural, Trans and Queer Services to continue and expand their equity work, and
- Passage of SB 5227 mandated student, staff, and faculty trainings on anti-racism and diversity, equity and inclusion across higher education.

As part of our commitment to equity and student success, staff across multiple divisions are working to advise and support the *whole* student, including their basic needs,

resilience and academic-success strategies. The primary goal of this *holistic* approach is to ensure every student has access to the support they need. We want to help students feel a sense of value, competence, and empowerment such that achievement gaps are reduced and their commitment to Evergreen is sustained during their studies, and long after they graduate.

This work combined with important ideas outlined in a recent report, *Re-Imagining Student Affairs*, is the basis of a Title III grant application to the U.S. Department of Education. Currently being developed, the grant will seek funding to create a new organizational structure for student advising that weaves students, faculty and staff together via improved coordinated technologies and services.

Finally, our longstanding work in indigenous art and culture based in the programs of Evergreen's Longhouse, Fiber Arts and Carving Studios, just recently received \$2.25 million from the Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies (MACP). This grant enables Evergreen to pollinate and replicate the Longhouse's widely recognized approaches to supporting Native arts, artists and cultures in higher education institutions in the Midwest, the Southwest, and the Pacific Northwest, including British Columbia.

With the departure of Tina Kuckkahn-Miller, our internationally recognized vice president of Indigenous Arts, Education and Tribal Relations and former director of the Longhouse, we have launched a search to fill that position. We expect to appoint a leader of this important work over the summer.

Adapting to COVID-19

Over the past year, Evergreen faculty and staff have adapted impressively to the impact of the pandemic on the college's operations, including the instruction of our students. Last spring, the college successfully pivoted to remote operations. Faculty taught their programs and classes remotely, primarily through Zoom platform and Canvas, our course management system that supports online learning and teaching.

As vaccines became available earlier this calendar year, we announced our intent to return to more in-person instruction in Fall '21. Building upon the work of our COVID-19 response teams to date, Vice President for College Relations Sandra Kaiser assumed leadership of COVID planning in February. Wading through constantly changing conditions and guidance from federal, state and county authorities and liaising with other colleges, our COVID teams have helped us maintain a very low rate of transmission while updating our operations to keep pace.

We have kept students, staff, faculty and external audiences informed through a steady stream of video town halls, front-channel messages, special web pages and media releases. A project position to focus on internal communication has been essential to keeping everyone up to date, and that position will continue through the next fiscal year.

Preparation for Fall '21 has focused on moving safely from totally remote to in-person and hybrid formats. Widespread access to COVID-19 vaccinations has made the pivot possible. We received a generous gift of vaccine from the **Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation** and administered vaccinations to students, faculty and staff on our Olympia campus in April. In May, we announced that students, staff, and faculty will be required to show proof of vaccination prior to the beginning of the fall quarter for 2021.

Evergreen is currently operating under [Evergreen Back to Campus Guidance](#), outlining the protocols and steps we are following through August 30, when most employees will physically return to campus. We will be issuing instructions on how to get vaccinated and updating our telework policies this summer. It's clear that while the majority of students are hoping to experience their Evergreen education in person on our beautiful campuses, some will prefer remote options. We are planning to maintain some remote offerings, applying some of the lessons we learned during the pandemic about this alternative mode of teaching and learning.

Presidential Search

With my decision to return to teaching, the trustees launched the search for the next president last summer, consulting Evergreen constituencies about the college's future leadership needs. The constituent groups included an Advisory Committee representing the larger community; staff, faculty and students on campus; and our alumni and other friends. Feedback from these consultations formed the basis of the [presidential search prospectus](#).

With the assistance of Karras Consulting and the college's Search Committee, and a very large advisory committee, and extensive outreach to prospective candidates yielded a diverse pool of over 60 applicants. From this pool, the Search Committee identified a group of five semi-finalists, to which the Trustees added two from the applicant pool. Having reviewed and interviewed these, the trustees identified three distinguished finalists to be interviewed by the Evergreen community and Advisory Committee.

Following decisions by each finalist to withdraw from the search, the trustees postponed continuation of the search and appointed Dr. John Carmichael, Vice President for Finance and Operations, as Interim President and Dr. Dexter Gordon, professor and director of African American Studies at the University of Puget Sound, as Executive Vice President.

Final Thoughts

The pace of societal change is rapidly reshaping our college and the way we work. This change has revealed new ways of teaching and learning, new populations of students we can serve, and new strategies for helping students succeed. It's pointed the way to new opportunities for Evergreen.

Evergreen was designed to change and to adapt often. And in the last few years, we've been transforming the college. We've created new structures that promise greater first-year retention, increased transparency and predictability in the curriculum, and new academic directions for students seeking more education but no degree.

We've also developed substantial capacity for remote instruction, refocused the mission of our Washington Center to better support our learning and teaching, and created new centers integrating transformational leadership and climate action into students learning experiences. Finally, we've advanced our commitment to equity by completing our first campus climate survey, strengthened resources supporting Inclusive Excellence and Student Success, established an annual equity symposium, and sponsored a steady stream of equity institutes for faculty and staff.

Three important principles informed the changes we've made:

- Ensuring that every student, now and in the future, has a successful experience at Evergreen;
- Adapting effectively to the changing makeup and interests of our students and those we're recruiting; and
- Retaining the distinctive virtues of an Evergreen education as we transform how we teach and support the students of the future.

As a result, the college is more student centered, more equity focused, and more responsive to the educational needs of the region. Evergreen is now telling its unique stories in a firm and clear voice that is being heard by the Legislature, donors and prospective students. At a moment of new leadership and commitment to sustaining these changes and advancing new initiatives, Evergreen's next 50 years promise to be bright.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Bridges", written in a cursive style.

George Bridges