

## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

### **I. Year One: Academic Year 1999-00**

#### **A. Sample**

In late summer 1999, a random sample of 150 incoming first-year students was selected from the administrative database. Half of the students were assigned to the control group and the other 75 were assigned to the participant group. Mail and telephone methods were used to recruit participants. Substantive recruitment efforts yielded 43 students who agreed to participate in the first year of the T2S project.

#### **B. Project Methodology**

Activities for the Year One T2S Project participants were designed in four areas: connection to an individual at the college, academic skills support, thorough and individualized advising, and social engagement with other students.

Academic Advisors interviewed individual T2S participants at the beginning and end of fall quarter, near the end of winter quarter, and at the end of spring quarter. The interviews were loosely structured conversations that to varying degrees followed a list of suggested topics and questions. Advisors conducted additional follow-up and/or referrals to resources as needed based on the issues raised in the interviews. The interviews were tape-recorded with student consent and later transcribed into paper format. A data coding sheet was developed by the Office of Institutional Research based on the suggested questions that the advisors used during the interviews and common themes in student comments. The coding sheets were applied to the transcribed interviews and information was extracted from the student “case-studies” to facilitate summarization and comparison to the Year Two participants.

The fall intake interview topics included student experiences, support needs, expectations of Evergreen, employment, Orientation Week activities, and academic workload. At the end of fall quarter, students were asked about time management, workload, Thanksgiving break stressors, academic plans for winter, and feedback for the T2S project. Mid-winter quarter, advisors checked in with the participants via a telephone contact to remind them of upcoming workshops and to discuss how things were going, academic challenges, and plans for spring. Near the end of winter quarter, advisors and T2S participants discussed academic progress and goals, satisfaction with social opportunities, faculty accessibility, use of student support services, and plans for spring and summer. Spring quarter concluded with a brief one-on-one conversation between the T2S students and their advisors, and the students also completed an evaluation of the T2S program, an Evergreen-specific survey, and the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ).

Initial writing assessments were conducted during fall and early winter quarters in one-on-one writing consultations at the Writing Center. Advisors and Writing Center staff wanted to ensure that students had the academic skills to succeed in their academic work at Evergreen. Some students chose to participate in a follow-up writing consultation during spring quarter to discuss writing progress they had made during their first year.

A series of ten workshops were offered to the T2S group for academic support and skill-building as well as an opportunity for socialization with other members of the group. To increase personal engagement in the project, the participants were asked to suggest ideas for workshops that they would like to see offered through the program. Advisors scheduled more than one session of most workshops at varying times of day to facilitate student participation, and they reminded students by phone of upcoming events. Despite advisors' efforts, participation in the workshops was lower than hoped and dropped off considerably over the course of the year.

Fall quarter:

- Learning Styles Inventory / Introduction to College Writing
- Writing with Authority / Self-Evaluations

Winter quarter:

- Career and Lifework Planning
- Introduction to Keep Enhancing Yourself (K.E.Y.)
- Individual Contracts / Study Abroad / Internships
- Myers-Briggs Type Indicator
- Creative Fiction Writing

Spring quarter:

- Portfolio Development (Part 1)
- Charisma Theory
- Portfolio Development (Part 2)

Evergreen Bookstore gift certificates were offered per quarter of participation as an incentive to attend workshops and interviews.

Control group members were first contacted in spring quarter, when they were asked to complete two surveys about their experiences as first-year students at Evergreen. The Evergreen-specific survey and the CSEQ were administered to the control group. It took six different sessions to gain the participation of 43 of the 56 members of the control group who were still enrolled at Evergreen. They received a gift certificate for completing the surveys. Results of the surveys and retention rates were compared for the T2S participants versus the control group.

## **II. Year Two: Academic Year Two 2000-01**

### **A. Sample**

At the beginning of fall quarter 2000, a random sample of 150 students was selected from all first-year students. 75 of the first-year students were assigned to the T2S participant sample; 75 of the students were assigned to the control group sample.

The 75 potential participants for the second year of the project were sent letters of invitation, which explained that T2S was a pilot project designed to learn about how Academic Advising can better support new first-year students. The letter also described that throughout the quarter, advisors would like to talk with each student one-on-one and/or in a group with other first-year students. The discussion would include activities that could help the students' first year in college go smoothly, and they would be given an opportunity to work on their academic plans and learn about some of the rich resources at the college through unique workshops. Students were asked to return commitment cards if they were willing to participate. Final sample size depended on postcard response rate, follow-up telephone recruitment, and actual student participation. The participant sample size goal was 50 students.

The return of commitment cards did not yield enough participants, and other methods of follow-up recruitment were employed. Follow-up e-mail and telephone contacts yielded a few more successful contacts, but these methods were problematic because 75% of the students did not have current telephone numbers registered with the college and most students were not using their Evergreen e-mail accounts. Core Connectors, faculty, and the Prime Time advisor connected with a few more students, and finally several trips to Housing to knock on the doors of potential sample participants brought the total participant group up to 42 students for the second year of the project. At the time of the follow-up contact with members of the participant sample, a gift certificate to the Evergreen Bookstore was offered as an incentive to participate in the fall quarter interview.

### **B. Project Methodology**

T2S program methodology was refined in the second year based on experience gained from the first year pilot with the 99-00 student participants. Students reported that the one-on-one advisor interviews were the most successful part of the first year pilot, and this aspect of the model was the focus of T2S activities for this second year of the program. New interview instruments were designed to collect more consistent information from participants that could be more readily analyzed. Project redesign ideas also focused on building a more sustainable model of first-year student intervention, so that if elements yielded promising results, they might be incorporated into future practice.

The new interview methodology contained categorical questions, rating scales, and open-ended narrative response questions. The standard interview questions and response categories were developed using a review of the transcribed interviews from T2S Year One. While the standard interview questions were asked of all participants, there was also time for students to talk beyond

the script of the questionnaire. Advisor interventions and referrals to appropriate resources were tailored to the issues and questions identified by the student during the course of the interview. In an attempt to increase the sense of connection between T2S advisor and student, advisors began subsequent interviews by following up on issues identified by students in prior interviews. This process was more than a gathering of information; it also provided opportunities to identify and intervene with concerns and questions that were unique to each student. Advisors completed a checklist of the kinds of support provided, types of referrals given, and topics of discussion during the interview and interaction that followed. The checklists provided a method of assessing the variety of interventions and referrals that advisors were providing to the T2S participants during their contacts.

In Year Two, one-on-one in-person interviews were conducted with each participant during fall and spring quarters. During winter quarter, a shorter telephone check-in survey was completed. The final activity of the academic year was to complete a written evaluation of the Year Two T2S Project. The Office of Institutional Research distributed the T2S evaluations via e-mail and mail. In order to promote honest responses and protect confidentiality, students were asked to return their evaluations directly to the research office and were notified that the results would not be associated with their other T2S interviews.

In addition to the interviews, an academic planning workshop, Mapping Your Education II, was designed and offered to the participants during spring quarter. This was the only workshop offered specifically to T2S participants this year, as opposed to the series that was offered the first year with limited positive feedback and participation. The Mapping Your Education II workshop included a panel of Evergreen seniors who shared their academic pathways with the first-year students. The panelists were also filmed in one-on-one interviews, which were edited into a video that can be used in future Mapping Your Education II workshops. At the end of the workshop, student participants completed an evaluation of their experience.

Evergreen Bookstore gift certificates were offered as incentives to students for their participation in each T2S Year Two activity.

Again, control group members were first contacted in spring quarter, when they were asked to participate in a short survey about their experiences as first-year students at Evergreen. The questions on the control group survey were also administered to the T2S participants as part of their spring quarter interview, to allow comparison between control group and participant responses. Retention rates were also compared between the sample and control groups.

Year One of T2S showed some evidence that students were better retained through the academic year (fall-to-spring), but that they were not better retained than other students to the next fall. Based on the idea that critical decision-making about persistence was occurring over the summer, a mid-summer check-in contact was attempted with the Year Two T2S participants. The contacts were sent to individual participants via e-mail. The check-in consisted of a note regarding registration status for Fall 2001 (whether student was registered or not), dates for Academic Fair and tuition deadlines, an offer of support with any concerns, and an invitation to visit Academic Advising in the future.

### C. Participant Interview Domains

The domains addressed by each interview are presented in the following table. Note that some questions and scales were repeated at each interview in order to watch for trends in student experiences. Other survey items were determined to be time-specific or not sufficiently useful to be asked quarterly. The final column in the table identifies the questions asked in the spring survey of the control group that allow comparison to the sample participants.

<b>Interview Domain</b>	<b>Fall quarter one-on-one interview</b>	<b>Winter quarter telephone check-in survey</b>	<b>Spring quarter one-on-one interview</b>	<b>Control group survey spring quarter</b>
Employment status	X	X	X	X
Living situation	X	X	X	X
Financial support	X			X
Academic program	X	X	X	X
Is program first choice?	X	X	X	X
Like best about program	X			
Like least about program	X			
Program workload	X	X		X
Stay in same program?	X	X		X
Stress inventory	X	X	X	X
What's going well at TESC?	X		X	X
What's been difficult at TESC?	X	X	X	X
Particularly challenging time	X			
Sources of academic support	X			
Emotional support at TESC	X			
Academic skills inventory	X	X	X	X
Institutional confidence	X	X	X	X
Confidence in own ability to succeed	X	X	X	X
Intent to stay at TESC to degree	X	X	X	X
Sense of connectedness	X	X	X	X
Extracurricular involvement	X			
New friends	X			
Met students outside program	X			
Expectations of TESC			X	X
*CSEQ Life-long Learning Index			X	X
Student Services Inventory			X	X
Evergreen Satisfaction Inventory			X	X
Long-term academic plans	X		X	X
Follow-up on previous issues		X	X	
Advisor interventions and referral checklist	X	X	X	
Check-in with unregistered students to see why and if plan to return		X	X	X

*\* This survey was also administered to a large sample of undergraduates at Evergreen spring quarter, which allowed comparison of the T2S participants and control group to a larger student population.*

#### **D. Other First-year Student Activities**

In addition to the research activities conducted with the T2S sample participants, other activities took place with three targeted Core programs. Four focus groups were conducted in weeks seven and eight of fall quarter with students from three first-year Core programs: *Olympic Peninsula*, *Performing Arts in a Cultural Context*, and *Reinhabitation*. Focus group participants were provided with food and a gift certificate to the Evergreen Bookstore for their participation. Students discussed their transition to Evergreen, developing a support system, and how to better serve first-year students.

The focus groups were recorded on cassette and transcribed. The transcripts have been reviewed and the results are summarized later in this report.

Two additional presentations were offered to the same three Core programs for winter quarter. The primary offering was a Talking Catalog, specifically designed with the interests of each program in mind. The Talking Catalog is a panel of Evergreen faculty, alumni, and other professionals that are working in a field related to students' academic and vocational interests. Talking Catalogs have been sponsored throughout the years by Academic Advising and aimed at the general student community. From past experience, we know that Talking Catalogs have been well received by students who appreciated the real-world demonstration of how academic planning and learning connect to career applications. Although one of the Core programs expressed interest in having a Talking Catalog presentation, scheduling did not work out.

The second optional presentation offered to the three Core programs was a co-curricular involvement panel made up of Evergreen community members discussing ways that students can get connected with resources on and off campus that encourage their avocational interests. None of the Core programs were willing to have a panel presentation in their programs.

### **III. Administrative Data**

Retention rates were calculated from the College's administrative data tracking system. Supplemental demographic data – ethnicity, gender, residency status, entrance SAT scores, high school grade-point average, application type, and completion of New Student Advising Session – were also collected from the data system. Student records were reviewed to determine how many credits they earned of those attempted; this information was interpreted as a measure of academic success.