

From: "VerMeulen, Laura" <VerMeulL@evergreen.edu>
Subject: Composition of schools for Evergreen University
Date: May 29, 2020 at 11:17:37 AM PDT
To: Big Bets <bigbets@evergreen.edu>

I don't have a specific amendment but rather some thoughts to share as a long term Evergreen staff member (25 years) someone who has worked in higher education at several institutions who has worked with students of color both formally and informally. I've taught as an adjunct here and served as a faculty sponsor for independent study.

A few weeks ago, Therese Saliba facilitated a conversation with her division as well as Tina Kuckkahn-Miller's division and members of the Big Bets team. The very clear message from staff who serve students of color, Native students and students who are 1st generation is that Evergreen must simply avoid the habit of crafting long, opaque names for schools, functions and processes at Evergreen. They do not resonate, they obscure and they discourage students looking for a way toward a Bachelor's degree that will serve them well after they graduate (a good financial investment). People trying to recruit students to Evergreen have to constantly explain what terms mean. Having to do so does not make Evergreen "innovative" or "cutting edge." Descriptors of academic programs are confusing and traditional-aged students and adult students may not have the patience for it any longer. It feels important to mention that following this pattern with the names and functions of our "schools" may continue to stifle our capacity to truly describe what Evergreen has to offer and why any prospective student should choose to enroll and pursue a degree here. Clearly our enrollment struggles demonstrate at some level that we aren't very clear about what the student academic experience will be in our marketing and that our "product" is not something students are willing to purchase any longer. Of course, a college degree is much more than any of that, but it is vitally important to adeptly convey our good work.

Given that the big bets presented to the faculty is entirely different than the big bets structure presented to staff I am personally discouraged to see that the schools to comprise the university also do not follow recognized schools in higher education across the country. The primary reason Evergreen is a college is because virtually all of the undergraduate curriculum falls within a college of arts and sciences. Separating out areas of study that continue to be under the umbrella of

arts and sciences into "schools" may invite external criticism that Evergreen is being amateurish and unreasonably reaching to re-brand itself as a university. Obviously having a school of graduate studies would make enormous sense since we have three graduate programs and we are proposing a fourth (MFA). Can we not be a university with two schools? Arts and Science and Graduate Studies? And then under Arts and Sciences, offer the tracks of thought faculty are currently considering?

Public perception between terms like "college" and "university" show that citizens as a rule do not understand what makes one institution a college and what makes another a university. However the term "university" is associated with a step up in seriousness and quality. People generally have no idea that a university is simply a collection of schools under one institution. The big bets team touches on this somewhat by drawing distinctions between community colleges and the 4 year plus curriculum offered at Evergreen. While Evergreen can never hope to control the external narrative about Evergreen, the mere change in name is going to invite criticism. As a citizen of the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska I know that it is critical to play the game and do it better in order to be taken half as seriously as a Native person. Like it or not, Evergreen is in a similar boat with public perception. There was a time when Native faculty and staff would wryly joke about this being the reason Native students were so at home at Evergreen.

I know that the team is also trying to keep relevant the obscurely named Paths and CATs, as a great deal of time and Mellon funds went into that work. However paths and CATS are also meaningless to students regardless of economic or demographic group they may represent. It may feel natural to make these loosely related strands into interdisciplinary schools. I fear this will not make sense to students, their families or the public but I can appreciate this is a work in progress.

I would also advise that if Evergreen as a faculty-centered institution decides this is the way to go, we refrain from putting "interdisciplinary" in each school title but in a subheading that assures "all schools will reflect Evergreen's commitment to interdisciplinary study in recognition of the fact that real-world problems are not solved within any one academic field or discipline." Or find another way to actually define what Evergreen means by "interdisciplinary."

Thanks!

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