

Duke Kuehn
Interviewed by Anthony Zaragoza
The Evergreen State College oral history project
July 12, 2021
FINAL

Zaragoza: Good morning once again, Duke. We're back here with you for the second part of your interview. It's July 12, 2021. When we left off, we were talking about the Management in the Public Interest program that you had worked with, and then you started to get into Evergreen's enrollment crisis and some of that. Maybe you could give us some context for your work in that and your winding path at Evergreen. Like many of us, once you get into the Evergreen machine, or lack of a machine, you can go in so many different directions and get spun around.

Kuehn: That's for sure. A little bit of background. I had come to Evergreen partly because it was located in the state capital. Not that I was interested in politics, but I was interested in public policy research. I'd done a little bit of that stuff at Riverside, and I knew I wanted to do more of it.

In my first week of orientation at Evergreen, they introduced to everybody, all the administrative offices and everything. I made that first day a lifelong friendship, and a life-altering friendship, with a fellow named Les Eldridge. Les was the Assistant to the President and the head of Legislative Affairs. He was Evergreen's lobbyist downtown.

He was in a meeting, and after the meeting, I walked up to him and I introduced myself, and I told him that I wanted to get involved with the Legislature. He was excited to have a faculty member who was interested in that kind of stuff, and so he taught me everything from the ground up. We became fast friends. He died last year.

Zaragoza: Sorry.

Kuehn: I was honored to speak at his memorial service. Les went on to become a Thurston County Commissioner, which he served for many years, and was very active in Democratic politics in the state.

From the very first day of Evergreen, I got on a track that I had intended, and it was a track that, quite frankly, wasn't particularly interesting to most of my colleagues, or if it was, more in a political sense.

As I indicated, two significant things happened within my first three or four years at Evergreen. The first thing, as I told you, was that at the faculty welcome the first day of 1975, the Provost, Ed

Kormondy, stood up and told us that there were serious enrollment problems, and they might have to reduce faculty. Since I was new and had no tenure and no seniority, that wasn't particularly good news.

After my first year at Evergreen and my two years at Vancouver, and in my growing friendship with Eldridge, Dan Evans became President. A lot of what happened thereafter in some ways was Eldridge's doing. He had his own agenda legislatively to advance. He had my support and my friendship, and he also, as he got to know me better, realized that I had some resources that were particularly useful to the college, most notably, my ability to analyze data.

I forget what I taught when I first came back. I think I might have taught that course with Ginny Ingersoll on decision-making. At the end of that, Eldridge convinced me and Evans that I should be appointed the college's first Director of what's called Institutional Research. That's kind of a technical term that's unique to colleges and universities. What it really means is there's somebody who collects data internally and does internal research that's pertinent to the college's operations. Could be budgetary stuff. In my case, it turned out to be major stuff about enrollment.

Zaragoza: Duke, you were the founder of Evergreen's Institutional Research department/project, however we might call it?

Kuehn: I was the first one.

Zaragoza: Fantastic. Such an important part of Evergreen still to this day.

Kuehn: Tony, I didn't even know such a position existed. I didn't even know there were such things. But Eldridge did. Eldridge saw this. Eldridge also saw this as an effective way of communicating with Evans. Evans was an engineer. Evans was a data guy. He already liked me. As I told you, he understood the Evergreen program [in Vancouver at Clark College] and he liked the way I approached things.

As I told you, I was never one to give him advice. He was getting advice from all sorts of faculty about all sorts of stuff, and I didn't give advice. Never have. You ask me a question, I'll give you an answer, but I'm not likely to seek you out and tell you what you've got to know.

So, I open this Institutional Research office. I'm not teaching at all. The enrollment problems were prominent. Nobody understood why we had an enrollment problem. That was the amazing thing. The college was in operation now six or seven or eight years, and everybody knew we had a problem, and nobody seemed to understand what the nature of the problem was.

To tell you the truth, it didn't take all that much statistical acumen to figure out what was going on. At the same time, or close to the same time, the college appointed a DTF to look at the college's enrollment problems. I was appointed to that. I don't know if I was appointed because of my Institutional Research position. Whatever. I ended up on this DTF, and I start analyzing data.

I go back and look at admissions data. I go back and look at applications. I go back and look at people who left the college, people who stayed in college. I conducted what I ended up calling a program called Super Sort. Over the Thanksgiving weekend of whatever year that was—'78, '79—I went through all this enrollment data. The statistical analysis was pretty simple. I simply looked year after year after year to see what, if any, percentage changes there were.

The thing I did, however, is that I looked at seven or eight or nine demographic characteristics. Age, gender, transfer from a community college or four-year school, stuff like that. I drew trend lines. I could go from 1971 all the way out to 1979. Downstairs, I still have a poster-board that I made of the overall trend line. The overall trend line of the college looked like this. It went up steeply, stabilized, and then held pretty stable. It didn't go up anymore.

That was deceptive because the second thing I looked at was new admissions each year. That went up steeply two years, and then went into a nosedive. Without getting too technical about all of this, fundamentally what was happening was the college was very popular in its first two years of operation. Tons of students came, and tons of students left. Didn't like it.

Moreover, the college gained no traction or popularity with two major populations: high school counselors and high school students. The number of high school directs from the State of Washington literally fell to single digits. I think it was seven or eight or nine one year. Unbelievable. It was unbelievable that a four-year institution in a state could attract each year less than 10 new students. Not transfers, new students. Freshmen. The freshman class was just disappearing.

The overall trend line looked like it was stable, but the fact of the matter, it was just crashing through the ground. When you looked at new enrollments, it was clear that within a couple of years, after you've finally moved out those people who'd come in in the first few years and they graduated, there was nothing to replace them. The college was headed straight down the toilet.

I was stunned. Then I went through and I looked at every conceivable demographic combination. I had a good sense about this. I was assuming—that's the thing about any overall trend line. What you learn as a statistician is that an overall trend line is made up of hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of smaller trends, and they all add up and accumulate. I figured there were lots that were going down, but there had to be some going up.

At the end of that Thanksgiving weekend, out of hundreds of trend lines that I looked at, I think there were six that went up. Of any piece of research I've ever done in my life, it was as stunning and shocking as it could have been. The few trend lines that went up were community college transfers, some local evening students, stuff like that. Not enough. Nothing.

I reported this back to Evans and to Eldridge, and I guess to the DTF. It looked hopeless. Nearly hopeless. Somehow in all of that, I think again, partly at Eldridge's instigation, Evans decided that the college needed to undertake a major initiative to turn the enrollment around by the next fall. I can't remember. I've got to go back and look, but I'm guessing this was in the winter of '78 or '79. The goal was to turn the admissions trend line back up within nine months, let's say.

I was 30 years old, and I was appointed Special Assistant to the President—as I told you before, appropriately named SAP—and I was given the job of turning the enrollment around. I don't know anything about this stuff, Tony. I'm 30 years old. I've been teaching for six years. I know nothing about marketing, certainly nothing about marketing in admissions to colleges. Nothing about mobilizing a thing like this. But Eldridge thought I could do it, Evans thought I could do it. I thought I could do it. I figured I could try.

The Director of Admissions, Larry Stenberg, and the Registrar—the guy's name, I've since forgotten—were cooperative and helpful, but they were all kind of confused. So, it started out in an office downstairs in the Library Building. Got a secretary out of it.

They sent me to a couple of workshops. [laughing] I got sent to a workshop on direct mail advertising. That was pretty weird, but I learned Marketing 101. I remember I went one weekend—this must have been in early spring, late winter—I'd had these experiences because of the Vancouver Program, having driven back and forth between Olympia and Vancouver and I knew all sorts of places in between. Down just north of Kelso/Longview, in those days there was a little old motel alongside a river. Probably been there since the '30s. No longer there.

I went in and I checked into that motel. It must have had one of the first laptops ever. No, it was an IBM Selectric I hauled down there. I spent the weekend all by myself eating burgers from a local stand, still there, and I wrote Evergreen's first marketing plan ever.

Zaragoza: Wow.

Kuehn: I didn't know anything about this, but I guess I had a kind of intuition about it. A lot of the stuff that I've done in my life is quite honestly common sense. But common sense is often at a premium in organizations that have problems.

I wrote a marketing plan, and a thrust of it was to go after community college transfers. Another thrust of it was to reposition ourselves with high schools. As part of my background in research with this, I went out with admissions counselors to high school visits. It was stunning. The admissions officers sold Evergreen's bullshit all the way. No majors. No grades. Blah blah blah blah blah. We're not really even a college in some ways.

That's not how to market a college. We had all sorts of wonderful alternatives, but I'd be sitting at the table with an admissions counselor and a kid would walk up and say, "Can I major in marine biology at Evergreen?" The first thing the admissions counselor would say was, "No."

One of the things that you learn in Marketing 101 is you never say no to a prospect. Right? "No." The kid would immediately turn off, even though the Evergreen counselor might go on to stress all of Evergreen's positives. "We don't have majors, but we have concentrations." Blah blah blah blah. The kid was gone by then. "No major. I can't study marine studies at Evergreen. Fuck it. I'm outta here." That's how you end up with eight or nine high school freshmen.

So, I mounted a major initiative to make sure that the high schools understood what Evergreen was all about. I also did a bunch of research, and the most interesting finding was that a lot of people didn't like Evergreen, and even more people didn't know anything at all about it. They bought the college's pitch. "We're not a college." "Well, I want to go to college. I don't want to go to a not a college," at least all but seven or eight high school students. [laughing]

We worked our asses off. I think I told you, in a moment that I still find phenomenal, there was a faculty meeting, and I was asked by Evans to present to the faculty the result of the Super Sort study. There was no arguing the data. The college was in deep trouble. It was kind of like looking at your tires and realizing all four of them are going flat at the same time.

I got very few questions. You've got to remember, most of those faculty were not at all statistically oriented or empirically oriented, so they were a bit suspicious of all of that. They were very suspicious of me. As I told you before, I'd been hired in the fifth year of the college's operation, and I was kind of a deviant case to begin with.

We're standing in the meeting room downstairs in the Student Union Building and I'm standing in front of the whole faculty and Evans was standing next to me. Evans puts his arm around me on my shoulder. He had a powerful speaking voice. He was an exceptional speaker. He looked at the faculty and the gathered staff and said, "Duke Kuehn speaks with my voice until I tell him to shut up." [laughing]

Zaragoza: Clear.

Kuehn: Never before or never since have I been given such a blank check. It was partly because Evans had a lot of confidence in me. He didn't have any answers either, so I guess I was also a bit of a sacrificial sheep there. But I walked out, and I met with every single person I could meet with. I was never mean, never threatening, and never abused my authority, but I made it very clear. I'd be talking

to somebody in the administration, and I'd say, "This has got to get done. If you don't do it, I'll find somebody who will do it."

I met with faculty, and I certainly knew some faculty were more community-oriented than others. I said for years—I had no proof of this but I've always felt this even before I got to Evergreen—"If you went to any college or university campus in the world, at least in the US, they all have some sort of Red Square. And I gathered all the faculty in that Red Square, here's what would happen. Ninety percent of the faculty would turn inward and talk with each other. Out on the edge were these little, goofy people like me who didn't want to talk to the faculty. I wanted to talk to the people in the community. I had some people who were wired like that, but I also had to deal with a lot of Evergreen's traditional leadership, traditional faculty, guys like Charlie Teske and those guys. I had to kind of reeducate them. I had a faculty meeting with all of your Tacoma colleagues the other day, so I don't know if I told you this. When I came to Evergreen, it was very clear amongst the founding faculty and the people they hired that their image of the ideal student was at Reed.

Zaragoza: Right.

Kuehn: Young, white liberal. Liberal arts. Or Oberlin or a whole variety of other institutions like that. They were having to swallow a very, very bitter pill because I was saying, "That might be your ideal, but those kids aren't coming here. They're going to Reed or Oberlin. The profile of the students who are coming here are in their thirties, finishing their college education, employed by the State of Washington or Thurston County."

They didn't like hearing that. They didn't want to teach those people. They didn't want to teach these adults. It sounded like a fucking community college. Right? Well, that's where we're getting our students. Most of those students didn't come to Evergreen because they wanted to. It was because they had to. They were place bound.

I talked to a lot of faculty. I encouraged a lot of faculty to start doing more in the way of community outreach. I put it squarely on the hands of the faculty. It was their job to get students and to keep students.

This went on for months and months and months and months. Crazy, crazy time. I don't know. Do they still have Super Saturday?

Zaragoza: No, it was shut down around budget cut issues about five, 10 years ago, Duke. It's been a while. It's time to revive some similar thing with less liability, but it's no longer—

Kuehn: There are disputed claims about this, but I know the truth on this. Larry Stenberg, who was at that time the Director of Admissions, claimed that he started Super Saturday. He didn't. I did. He came

along. He was a major supporter and leader of it. I said to Evans and Eldridge, "We need to get the community on this campus. They need to see what we have here." People would drive by, and they wouldn't even drive in.

When I first came to Evergreen, I'd never get my haircut by somebody who knocks where I work. Just won't do it. I bet I went through nine barbers and hairdressers before I found somebody who didn't say anything negative about Evergreen. I don't think they knew enough about it.

People believed it was full of hippies. They knew it was full of gays and lesbians. They knew it was full of radicals and all sorts of stuff. I said, "You've got to get people out here to see it. They've got to see what's here." So, we had Super Saturday in June, just before graduation. It was phenomenal. I just followed people around all day long and I'd listen. "Gawd, they've got electron microscopes? They've got this studio? They've got all this stuff?"

The only other thing people liked who knew about the college was the swimming pool, the athletic facilities. I figured, if they liked that, they might like the rest of it. And it worked. It really fucking worked! People's eyes were opened. They saw that there was a resource here. A lot of them left with the same misconceptions, but some didn't.

I worked my ass off, and a lot of other people. I got a couple of great staff people to work with me. I had a great secretary. The big day comes, the first day of registration, sometime in September. I remember leaving my office, which was down in the lower corner of the Library Building and walking through the downstairs part of the Library Building where it's all tile. There were all these tables and things set up for registration.

I went out that door and then I went up the stairs. It was about an hour before registration. I came up the stairs that are part of the clock tower onto the main campus and I turned around, headed towards that round lecture hall. There were 500 fucking students lined up to register.

Zaragoza: There you go.

Kuehn: I couldn't believe it. Just couldn't believe it. I almost broke into tears. It was the most tangible outcome we ever could have imagined. I give people lots and lots of credit and people earned lots and lots of credit. But on this one, I take a lot of credit for myself. Because Evans stood there and said, "Hey, buddy, it's on your shoulders." I not only didn't back down, I gave 110 percent to that.

Next fall, record enrollment. Turned the corner. Went up and up and up and up for years after that, and then it topped out and started to drop a little bit again. It was an incredible experience in a whole variety of ways. I had never been given a responsibility like that. I had never been forced to use

my statistical knowledge in that practical of a manner. I had never worked with a leader as powerful and directive as Evans. It was literally a life-changing moment.

I had no desire to leave teaching. I did for a while, but I had no idea of my own efficacy. I know I couldn't publish much sociological stuff in journals. Bob Mitchell told me years earlier that I wasn't as good a sportswriter as I thought I was, but all of a sudden, I am a marketing guru.

In the midst of all of this, Evans had—because of his political background—relations with a number of public relations firms. He knew a national public relations firm that had an office in Seattle, a firm called Hill & Knowlton.

Zaragoza: [Laughing]

Kuehn: Do you know of Hill & Knowlton?

Zaragoza: Yeah, absolutely. They're the firm that worked for Dick Cheney to sell the United States the Iraq War.

Kuehn: Is that right? [laughing]

Zaragoza: Yes. They went on. I don't know how they were then, Duke, but they went on to do some really nasty, devious propaganda work for US militarism, empire, and some of the worst capitalists that this country has ever seen. No, it's really bad what Hill & Knowlton went on to do.

Kuehn: Are they still around?

Zaragoza: My assumption is, so I heard about them doing something recently also, but my most knowledge comes from then. Maybe you remember the babies? The Iraqis were taking babies out of incubators in Kuwait and throwing them on the floor. It was Hill & Knowlton that made up that lie.

Kuehn: Is that right? That's very interesting. The guys I knew in Seattle, I certainly never understood their politics, but they really, really liked me. They saw in me a talent and a skill that I certainly didn't even know or recognize, and they encouraged me. In fact, got me one of my first big consulting contracts.

Charles Wright Academy up here just a few miles from where I live was going through serious enrollment problems. They referred Charles Wright to me, and Charles Wright hired me, and I worked with Charles Wright for probably three or four years. Turned their enrollment around there. Very similar stuff. That's why I live here, because I was canvassing the neighborhood to find out what people knew about Charles Wright and found the neighborhood where we live, and we ended up buying a house here.

The end part of the story is OFM or someone required that the position that I was in, which was a temporary position, become a permanent position. To do that, it had to be opened and advertised, so if I were going to continue in that position, I was going to have to apply for it.

I went to Evans, and I said, "I don't want to apply for it. I've made a lot of enemies in the process of this. I think I've done a good job, but there are some people who don't like me, and I think might be out to get me. I don't think I can open myself up to that. I don't want to open myself up to that. If you'll appoint me, I'll take it, but I'm not going to apply for it." He said, "Duke, I can't do that. I don't have that power." I said, "Okay, no hard feelings."

I went back to teaching. Didn't miss what I had done at all. Loved teaching. I got assigned to a great program, Political Ecology. Taught in that for a whole year. But I had tasted something, and it had changed me in many fundamental ways. As much as I loved teaching, I also loved the stuff that I had done.

Get me clear here, buddy, I had no desire to become a dean, no desire to become an administrator. I liked the kind of stuff that I was doing. I liked working and solving problems, stuff like that. In a great moment, I'm downtown with Eldridge, and we're meeting at OFM and we're talking to a guy who has been there for decades. He knows everything about college enrollments and all that stuff. This guy takes zero bullshit.

Eldridge and I are meeting with him and we're talking about what the college is doing. Blah blah blah blah blah. This is probably a year or so after I had done the Super Sort stuff. This old guy, probably younger than I am right now, looks at Eldridge and he points at me. "What's the wizard think?" [laughing] I have never had a higher compliment in my life. "The wizard."

So, I got a taste of it, and that's how I started a consulting business. I enjoyed working with real problems in which there was a lot at stake. The college's future, people's jobs were at stake. That's what motivated me to do that job. That's what I continued to do in one form or another. We can talk about all that later on, but that's how I started to consult. I think I made an interesting hybrid merge in that even as a consultant, I never stopped being a teacher.

Zaragoza: That's right.

Kuehn: I'd be talking to a CEO, and I'd still be teaching.

Zaragoza: That's right.

Kuehn: It was just a big internship. That's what I did for the next few years. I taught, started a consulting business, little job here, little job there. Began to gain a reputation for being good at that.

Then they started an MPA program, and I was not part of the planning faculty. I don't know why. I never considered myself a particular expert in public administration. They started a program and I taught in the first year. In fact, I just ran into one of my students the other day from that class.

I don't know. Anyhow, Russ Lidman had started that program. It was his program. It was very much designed along his lines. Lidman and I had kind of parallel careers if you want to think about it in some ways. Russ decided to leave the directorship and take a sabbatical to Columbia or Peru, somewhere in South America. I guess I was the most likely person to take over the directorship of the program, which I did, and it was just as awful as I thought it would be. It was a deanship. It wasn't called a deanship, but it was the Dean of the Public Administration program. I carried with it all the horror that I thought it would carry. I'm not a good dean. I'm not a bad administrator, a pretty good manager, but not a good dean. I'm not good in that whole political environment.

Before Lidman had left—and Lidman did this really as a bridge to his next life at Evergreen—he got the Legislature to fund a Public Policy Institute at Evergreen. Should I shut up?

Zaragoza: No. This is important and excellent stuff, Duke. I'm following along with the story the entire way, and I think this is a good direction. Thank you for taking us there.

Kuehn: They started this Public Policy Institute, and the idea was that the Legislature would be able to access academic research through this Public Policy Institute. Not just go to the U, as they always did, but come to us, and then we would broker out around the state. It was a very ambitious, very clever idea on Lidman's part. Lidman, of course, envisioned that he would be the Director.

There was a big difference between Russ and I, though. Russ was interested in public policy as I was, but Russ was also interested in politics. He was very active in the state Democratic Party's activities. The Legislature gave the college money to start this Public Policy Institute, but they didn't hire Lidman as the Director. He had disqualified himself politically.

I had done lots of stuff, but I had no political affiliation whatsoever. Most people were correct in assuming I was a fairly liberal Democratic, and certainly, my association with Eldridge would suggest that, but my association with Evans suggested maybe I had a leaning towards Republicans. I don't know. Nobody was ever able to label me, and I didn't do anything to label myself. Again, that also made me a little less popular amongst my Evergreen faculty, because Evergreen faculty were very politically active and very politically vocal. That just wasn't me. Never has been.

Lidman goes off to Peru and they hire a director, a guy—Len Mandelbaum, I think—who was the former Director of the ACLU office in Seattle. Totally the wrong guy to hire. Didn't know Olympia, didn't know Evergreen, commuted from Seattle, didn't understand academia particularly. Probably good at

ACLU stuff. Just a catastrophe. Because I'm the MPA Director, I'm on the Board of Directors of the Institute, and Len is in trouble within a few weeks. Within a few months, it's clear the Institute is not getting anything done, and Len's not making any progress to do that.

Evans had left because he took over whoever retired as senator and the collegd appointed, I don't know, somebody, Olander maybe, as President—I forget who it was—in the interim. The Provost, Patrick Hill, and a couple of other people suggested I should take over the Institute as an acting director, which I gladly took because it meant I could get out of being the MPA Director.

So, I became the acting director of the Public Policy Institute, which was located up on the third floor of the Seminar Building. Small staff. Small budget. I made a couple of decisions that cost me in the long run. I would never, ever again take an acting position. That's crazy.

Two, I'm a pretty practical guy. I was going to save the Institute like I saved the college. The only way I was going to save the Institute is if we started getting stuff out that people could see and read and look at. I commissioned a whole bunch of studies and got a whole bunch of things going. They were pretty superficial studies. They had to be done quickly and they had to be done dramatically. I did something on sex offenders, sexy kind of stuff. Made enough of a splash to get the Legislature to say we were productive, at least.

Lidman is sitting down in Peru, and he is pissed. He feels I've stolen his job, so he starts lobbying for from afar to get his job back. I'm in just an acting position. When Lidman returned, I should have said, "Russ, I'm going to step aside." But you know me. I don't quit. They ended up opening a search for a regular, non-acting position. I applied. Lidman applied. A couple of other people applied. It was a fait accompli. Lidman was going to get it this time. My track record at the Institute, while it was productive, wasn't impressive. In the meantime, while I'd been at the Institute—this is probably about after 18 months—I had not changed my political activity. I didn't kiss up to legislators. I didn't do that stuff.

So, Lidman got the position. The Provost pissed me off and I never hardly spoke to him again the rest of the time he was there.

Zaragoza: Which Provost was this?

Kuehn: Patrick Hill. Hill had been my supporter, but he refused to be my supporter in this search. He said he couldn't support one Evergreen faculty member over another. That's crazy.

In June of whatever year that was, I found out that I was going back to teaching in the fall. This time I'm not excited about the prospect of it at all, and I am pissed off at Evergreen. I remember

standing in the kitchen and saying to Kathleen, “I’m going to see how many consulting contracts I can get between now and September. If I can get enough, I’m outta here.”

My wife is a banker. Has been all her life. Very, very sensibly minded. She supported me, but I can remember going to her and saying, “Honey, I’ve got to do this. I’ve got to get a personal computer.” I laid out what it cost to get one. The banker in her looked at me and she said, “Is that going to be like all that other shit you’ve got in the garage you never use?” [laughter] She gave me a budget, and I went to—I forget what the place is called, it’s like Costco—and bought a Commodore 64 computer.

Zaragoza: Oh, you went to RadioShack then.

Kuehn: Something like that, yeah.

Zaragoza: I had one of those, too, by the way.

Kuehn: I beat that machine to death. I took the bulk of my budget and bought a good printer, because people couldn’t tell what wrote it, but they could see what printed it. And I started working. I did a huge study—that Charles Wright study—huge survey of the community. Did it on, I don’t know, 12 different floppy disks. I’m flipping them in and out. It was fun. It was resourceful.

I had three clients, and I went to each of them, and I said, “I’m not asking you for business. I would never do that to you. I am asking for your help. If you see anybody you think could use my assistance, just send them my way, please.”

I used to have a big chart. I ended up with hundreds of clients at the end of all of this. I could take almost any one of those clients, Tony, and track to back, client to client to client, and 90 percent went back to those three people, indirectly. They had no idea it was going to have this impact 20 years later, but it did.

I started the consulting business. Thank gawd, I didn’t have enough business to quit teaching, so I went back and taught, and taught in a magnificent program with Judy Bayard, called The Business of Computers. She invented this program, taught it one year, and then brought me in. We had a group of upper-division students. She did all the computing stuff. I did all the marketing stuff. They worked in teams, and their job over the year was to create and market a piece of software. And they did, quite successfully.

Zaragoza: Is this late ‘80s, Duke?

Kuehn: Yeah. I’d just gotten married to Kathleen in ‘84, so this would have been about ‘86-‘87. That program changed my life in a lot of ways, too, because it really got me into computing. I ended up writing a big database program for Charles Wright Academy.

But what really happened was that learning with Judy—learning about systems analysis, learning about data flow diagrams, learning all that stuff about organizations from a computer scientist’s perspective—just absolutely supplemented, augmented, everything I knew as a social scientist. Really, really, really changed my understanding and perspective on things, and made me more effective as a teacher, more effective as a consultant.

I rode that train for a long time. Then I don’t know exactly how or why, I knew about the Tacoma Program. The only person I really knew up there was Joye [Hardiman]. I knew Maxine [Mimms], but not well. I don’t know this, but I’ve always felt there was a certain degree of rivalry, because at the same time she started that Tacoma Program, that’s when I was starting the program in Vancouver. The college was sending lots and lots of resources to Vancouver and very little resources to Tacoma, so I have a hunch . . . I don’t know, I think she always had a sort of funny feeling about me. We overcame that over time.

Somebody—it must have been Joye—invited me to come up and do a guest lecture in Tacoma. I was sold. Those were the students I wanted to teach and the faculty I wanted to teach with. I did a couple more guest lectures over a year or so, and then finally, I guess, I went and talked to some of the faculty. Willie Parson was there in those days. Artee Young. Barbara Laners. I asked if they would be willing to accept me as a colleague. Much to my delight, they said “yes.” Golden.

I transferred to Tacoma. My reasons for doing so were not altogether pedagogic. All our kids had just graduated from high school and were off to college. Neither Kathleen nor I were that enamored of Olympia. We wanted to move closer to Seattle. I was now, as a consultant, flying 100,000 miles a year. Up until five years ago, when I retired, for 20 years in a row, I flew 100,000 miles a year or more.

Zaragoza: Wow.

Kuehn: With United. I had high standing with United. Kathleen had to drive all the way up from Tumwater to the airport and bring me all the way back. That was an hour and a half sometimes, so we started looking for someplace in between. We liked this neighborhood—which I had found when I was working for Charles Wright—and bought a house here. Half the distance to the airport. Also, a long drive to Olympia, so teaching in Tacoma had a number of other advantages, too. But primarily, I really felt at home there.

Zaragoza: When did you start teaching at Tacoma, Duke?

Kuehn: I want to say . . . 2000. 1999-2000-2001. I came when it was still in the old building, so right at that time. I think I was there for about 10 years.

Zaragoza: Our stories are very parallel.

Kuehn: Are they?

Zaragoza: Yeah. I was invited up by Gilda to do some guest lectures. I rotated up a year. I went back to Olympia, and then there was an opening. I think Dr. Young was transferring to the Olympia Campus, and Gilda contacted me and said, “Hey, we’d like you to teach up at Tacoma permanently.” I did nearly 10 years at the Tacoma Campus.

Kuehn: I think you were in my office.

Zaragoza: Yeah, yeah.

Kuehn: That’s a great office. Should have two plaques on it. Gilda Sheppard is without a doubt the most exceptional person I’ve ever taught with.

Zaragoza: That’s incredible.

Kuehn: I’m so excited with her current filmmaking success.

Zaragoza: Yes, and I can’t wait to see what she does next.

Kuehn: Yeah, nobody deserves it more. I think I told them this story, not you. When I got to Tacoma, many students of color were suspicious of me. Who’s this white guy? What’s he doing here? What’s his game all about? I really had to work hard to gain their trust and credibility, and I think I did. Some of the white students thought, oh, here’s somebody who’s a secret supporter of ours. Well, they learned that wasn’t the case.

I was talking to the Tacoma faculty about this the other day. In preparation for this planning retreat we did, I asked them serious questions. One of the questions was, “Assume you came back 100 years from now, and you walked into the building, and saw that plaque that says, ‘Enter to learn, depart to serve.’ There’s a plaque underneath, and there are the names of every faculty member who ever taught here. After each name, there’s a little epigram that describes, summarizes, their life as a Tacoma faculty member.”

When I said this, I didn’t realize that a lot of people didn’t understand it or didn’t see the joke. I said, “After me, it’ll say ‘Take your head out of your ass.’” Do you know this story?

Zaragoza: Please tell it.

Kuehn: One student, a white kid, early twenties—bright kid, nice kid, community college transfer. How the hell he ever ended up at Evergreen, I’m not sure. He comes into my office one day, and I think he thought he had a sympathetic ear. He said, “Dr. Duke, I just don’t get it. All this stuff about race all the time. All this stuff about blacks, black history. Geez. It’s on and on and on.”

I forget what his name was. I looked at him and I said, “Mike, you’ve got to take your head out of your ass.” [laughing] In all my years of teaching, I had never, ever, ever said anything like that to a

student, but I guess I had reached my point of impatience about that. He went and complained to Joye. I think, in all the years I taught, that's the only time I ever had a complaint lodged against me.

Zaragoza: That was a worthwhile complaint to have lodged.

Kuehn: I felt so. I felt it was a moment for me. Which reminds me, I've got to tell you this story before we go any further. I got thinking about this after we hung up the other day. My very worst ever faculty evaluation.

Somewhere in the middle of all of this, I'm teaching a group contract on public policy. It's a good course. The more I did that kind of stuff, the more I integrated it into my teaching. It was absolutely true. The best part of my life in some ways professionally, there was no barrier between my teaching and my consulting. I'd teach a class on Tuesday. I go work for the client on Wednesday. I come back and teach in a class on Thursday. What I talked about in class on Tuesday, I did on Wednesday. What I talked about in class on Thursday was what I'd done on Wednesday. I ended up creating a series of courses all on my own.

I'm teaching this public policy class. It's one quarter, and it was really good. They did some good stuff. A lot of legislative simulation stuff, which I tried several times. It's faculty evaluation week, and they're coming in. I always followed the protocol. I would listen to your self-evaluation. I would provide you my evaluation of you. We'd negotiate and talk about it. Then when that was done and signed off, I would ask you to read your evaluation of me. I'd always ask students to read it out loud. I think I wanted them to carry the weight of it. I still have this somewhere.

It was an older woman, a mature woman, in her thirties or forties. She was Canadian, we've had a number of arguments in class about Canadian versus American politics. My evaluation began like this. I'm sitting at my desk and she's sitting in the chair next to my desk reading my evaluation. "I cannot comprehend why The Evergreen State College continues to employ Dr. Kuehn." And then it got worse. [laughing]

I mean, she just ripped me right, left, up, down, in and out. Like every student evaluation, I sat there and listened to it and nodded. She finished, and I looked at her and I said, "Well, it sounds as though you weren't too pleased with me this quarter." She looked at me and she said, "You're exactly like my ex-husband." [laughing] For years, that was the first evaluation in my portfolio.

Zaragoza: Over the years, I had students project all kinds of relationships on me, sometimes their parents, I was like their parents. Sometimes like an ex-partner. One time I had a Tacoma student who said, "You're just like my son."

Kuehn: Oh, my gawd!

Zaragoza: I had all three generations I inhabited for people. [laughing] Which is a testament to the many generations that we get at Evergreen, Olympia and Tacoma both.

Kuehn: Sure. And a testament to the degree in which—although I didn't agree with her, there was always a level of intimacy in the teaching in which it would be possible for a student to conclude there is some relationship, for better or worse, between this person and someone else close in my life. But she nailed me.

I came to Tacoma, and I did that, and I began to realize that consulting began to get so large because it was the case that I was finishing class at Tuesday night, driving to the airport, flying all night, working in Chicago the next day for two days, and then coming back. It got just overwhelming. And economically, I couldn't support it. I could make as much in one day of consulting as I could in a month of teaching.

Finally, like you, I was always one of those faculty who was always available in my office for anything. You want to come in and talk about the boyfriend you're breaking up with, or your dog you lost, or whatever. I realized that I didn't have time to do that anymore, and I wasn't doing that anymore.

One day, I was coming back—I always taught in that room upstairs that was kind of my room, my public policy room—and a student came to me after class and said, "Dr. Duke, could you do me a favor? I need your signature on this form so I can get a reduction on my auto insurance." I said, "Sure, come on downstairs." We walked downstairs into my office, and I signed it.

We were just chatting about what she was doing, where she was going. She looked at me and she said, "You know, this is the most you and I have ever talked." I felt that big. Because that had been my life. My life had been sitting there listening to you tell me about your auto insurance.

I came home and I told Kathleen, "I think I have to leave Evergreen." I could have done it for a few more years, and I don't think anybody would have complained because I did a hell of a good job as a teacher, I think, and as a colleague, but I was shorting the students in some ways, at least shorting them in terms of what I'd done in the past.

And I was so tired of reading papers. I told my students, "I have sleep apnea. If you turn in a paper and get it back, and you find, on one of the pages, a red line that goes all the way from the top to the bottom, that tells you I fell asleep." Not a good sign. [laughter]

Zaragoza: Before we move on to the fulltime consulting work—because I really want to hear the work you did post-Evergreen—can you tell us any other stories or moments or programs or activities that you

did while you were at Evergreen Tacoma? I really want to capture your life at Evergreen Tacoma before we move on to post-Evergreen.

Kuehn: Interesting question. I'm glad that I'd had 20 or so years teaching in Olympia before I was there, because as I understand the concept, the Tacoma Program is a true coordinated studies program as any I ever taught in.

I have to tell you one more thing back in Olympia. I was very fortunate to be invited by Chuck Nisbet, who had been part of the original faculty—he was an economist, and somebody—Ginny Ingersoll—recruited him right away for the management program. Very, very straightforward, hard, good critical thinker. Chuck came up with a program that he titled Problems Without Solutions? It was a program for—I forget what they called first-year programs—but a first-year program for students new to Evergreen. We taught it twice. The second time we taught it—and it was Problems Without Solutions?

The first time we taught it, each quarter we focused on one geopolitical region. The first year we taught it, it started with South Africa, went to Palestine-Israel, and on to Northern Ireland. We were fortunate [to have] a psychologist with us, and we had a rotating faculty member who came from that region. It was an incredible program and provided for me perhaps the most extraordinary moment of teaching in my life.

We would look at these geopolitical regions. We'd look at the history, we'd look at the economics, the politics, the culture, the literature, the arts. It was a powerful program. In the quarter that we did Israel-Palestine, I was tasked to do some of the literature for Israel. I studied around, talked to some librarians, stuff like that, and came up with the name of a poet whose name I since forget, but it was a very, very prominent poet, at least in relatively recent Israeli history.

His poetry is very good and very evocative of what it meant to be a Jew, what it meant to be a Jew in Israel. I wanted to have the students hear the poetry, and much of it was written in—I'm not Jewish and I don't know Hebrew or Yiddish, whatever that language is, so I called the local synagogue and talked to the rabbi and got the rabbi to agree to come out and read some of this poetry. I was kind of excited about all of this. The day of this lecture, at the last minute, I got a call from the rabbi who had fallen sick or something and he couldn't come—she couldn't come.

It was left to this Irish Catholic kid here to read that poetry. I think I completed my bar mitzvah. There I am, standing in the lecture hall in Olympia, reading Hebrew poetry to 100 undergraduates. Never missed a beat. Had no one to question whether or not it was right or wrong, but I did it.
[laughing]

Zaragoza: I just wanted to comment, Duke. In some ways, that's a testament to what's possible at Evergreen, I think.

Kuehn: Yeah, I guess. I don't know the degree to which I destroyed any of the beauty of the poetry, but I tried. I was thinking about that while I was thinking about our last conversation the other day, and it came up in the discussion I had with the Tacoma faculty the other day. As part of my professional work, I'd get organizations to write and commit to mission statements. But the mission statements are the least glamorous, exciting mission statements you've ever read in your life, because I learned early on, mission statements are what you do and what you get. Quite frankly, the mission statement for one college or university is the same as another one. It should be. Just as the mission statement for one brake shop is pretty much like the mission statement of another brake shop.

Everything else, in terms of planning—the vision, the values—all of that defines what makes you distinct. But the mission better be, as Tom Peters used to call it, sticking to the knitting. This is what we do, how we invest our resources, and this is what we expect to happen.

I was sharing that with the Tacoma faculty and then I said, "The mission of the Tacoma faculty is the mission for any educational institution. We teach. They learn." You can modify that however you want to, but the basic foundation of any—whether it's the UW or Harvard or Pierce County Community College.

Somebody added "We all learn." Not just the students. I thought about that, and I thought about the enormous amounts of things that I learned at Evergreen—not just academic stuff, which I did, but all the different things that [were] exposed to me to [in order] to learn all the things that I came to. I think I shared this with you the other day. I advised my granddaughter, as she goes through college, if you've got a choice, and you're lucky enough to have a choice, take the choice that opens more doors.

That's precisely what happened in my life. If I had followed the safe path, "Nah, I don't want to do that institutional research stuff," if I said to Dan Evans, "I don't want to take care of that enrollment stuff," if I had said to Judy, "I don't want to learn how to do systems analysis," my life would have been just fine. It would have just tracked right on down. I would have been the perfect faculty member to teach sociology at Cal State Long Beach.

I turned out something quite different. I'm not sure better, but I certainly turned out something much different than I would have ever imagined or intended that I thought I could be. I guess to have the literal chutzpah [laughing] to read that poetry says something about what it means to be an Evergreen faculty member.

That now does connect back to the question you asked me about Tacoma's students, students of various sexual orientations—what I thought their goals were, I'm not sure were correct. They were my goals. I know what my ambitions have been in life, but I don't know what ambitions necessarily a gay, black musician has. I can relate at one level, but on other levels, I can't.

The longer I taught in Tacoma, the less I became directive. Here's stuff. You can use it. I don't know how you're going to use it. I know you can use it if you want to use it. It's there for you to use. I think I saw myself as a purveyor of opportunity, but I'm not sure what those opportunities were, how they were perceived, or whether they're even the right ones.

I do know that I had the satisfaction while I taught it in Tacoma, I'd teach something in a class, and a week later, a student would come back and say, "Dr. Duke, I work for the Postal Service. We had a meeting the other day and they were talking about something, and I raised my hand. I mentioned something we'd talked about in class. Afterwards, my boss came up to me and he said, "Bob, you're pretty sharp. I've got my eye on you." [laughing]

So, I had that feeling of satisfaction, a feeling that I helped. I did help people follow their dreams or ambitions or opportunities. That's what Tacoma was mostly like for me. It really forced me to question my own assumptions about students sometimes—what they were doing, or what they weren't doing, or why they were doing it. It forced me to acknowledge, without guilt, that I was born into a society of white privilege, and I took advantage of that privilege.

But it had a profound impact, driven home by the fact that my one of my daughters a few years ago had a child that is of mixed race. When I look at that kid, I don't see a black kid, or a mixed-race kid, I see one of my grandchildren. But I am sensitive to the fact that the term Black Lives Matter has a certain different implication to me than it did before. A lot of things that could happen to her that wouldn't happen to my other granddaughters or her sister.

I guess—and I certainly didn't think so at the time—the 10 years in Tacoma represented for me a point of arrival. I was now in my fifties, early sixties. It was arrival in terms of my teaching, which I had begun with a single desire to help students succeed in whatever their ambitions were. That certainly came to full fruition there.

It's also when my consulting came to full fruition. I can remember sitting in an airplane once and was flying somewhere over west Texas, and I looked down 35,000 feet and I thought, I did what I set out to do. I wanted to become a nationally known, successful consultant, and I've done it.

Tacoma represents for me personally and professionally—I don't want to say a point of arrival, but certain things started to become complete. Does that answer the question?

Zaragoza: Yes, sir. For sure. Now I want to go deeper into that work, Duke. Do you want to tell us a little bit about your consulting work, what you do, and the kinds of impact you have in your role as a nationally known consultant?

Kuehn: In a very narrow realm. How many of these do we do?

Zaragoza: Today will be it.

Kuehn: Oh, no-o-o-o.

Zaragoza: Unless you really want to come back for another one for sure.

Kuehn: Yeah, I've got one more. I've got more stories than just the stories today. We're not going to make it today. Okay?

Zaragoza: Okay.

Kuehn: You're nurturing my ego. When I was in graduate school, consultants were looked down on by my faculty. They were looked down on in the same way that liberal arts teachers were looked down on. You went to research four-year institutions and did the stuff there, so I never even thought about it, really. I always thought about the practicalities when I taught, even at Riverside, and I'd done a little bit of public policy work, and so I saw myself initially as a source of knowledge in public policy research. That's what academics do, right? Legislators call up and they want to know, what are the possibilities in terms of dealing with this or dealing with that, as we've seen so abundantly through the whole Covid crisis.

That's how I started out. Here's where Evergreen fits into the picture and maybe put a twist on it. To teach at Evergreen, to survive at Evergreen, I had to learn how to work very effectively with groups—seminars, or teaching teams, or whatever—and I knew some of that stuff theoretically, but I was very challenged. I was proud of the fact that I think I always had pretty good seminars.

The concept of group dynamics became very real and significant to me. I got known by the secretaries. This happens all the time. People will call the college and say, "Do you have anybody there that could help me? I'm getting bees and I need help with my bees." Or people would call up and say, "I've got this organizational problem. Could I get some help?"

A lot of the calls that came in initially for me were public policy calls. One expertise that I gained in graduate school was in an area called evaluation research, which was very nicely timed at the same time that Lyndon Johnson was doing the War on Poverty, so a number of sociologists focused on developing and designing research programs that could look at a large social action program and determine whether or not it had any impact over time. Teenaged pregnancies, or quitting smoking, or whatever.

I became an expert, and that's a lot of the original consulting I'd do. I'd get a call from somebody downtown and they'd say, "The Feds are requiring us to put together a bit of an evaluation. Can you help us with that?" I said, "Sure."

I'd go down and I'd sit in somebody's office, the director of some sort of program, and my first question was, "What is your program? What are your goals and objectives?" They'd stare back at me, and they'd go, "Well, that's why we called you. We need some help in determining that." I said, "You're getting millions and millions of dollars, and you don't have any goals or objectives?" "Well, not really."

I realized that there were billions and billions of dollars being spent at every governmental level for programs that were fundamentally nothing but doing things, not necessarily achieving anything except just doing stuff. And they did lots of stuff. They spent lots of money, but they never took the time to figure out whether they had any results or not. That astounded me. That's how I started doing strategic planning. I developed a technique and got very expert at it. got bigger and bigger organizations to set goals.

But there was another element to this. I met a guy, may he rest in peace, whose name was Jack Morris, ended up a very good friend of mine. Jack was the head of Information Services at the Department of Social and Health Services. Big, big data processing office in a big data world. Right?

I started saying that secretaries knew that I would take these calls. I'd get them. "Hi, I'm Jack Morris of the Information Services division of DSHS. Do you work with groups?" I said, "Yes." "I need some help."

Jack had this really dysfunctional, crazy management team. He was a good manager, but they were just nuts. I'd sit in on their meetings, and there were nine or 10 of them. They'd start off cordial enough, and then literally, within 45 minutes of every meeting, they'd be arguing with each other, threatening each other. It was horrible.

I figured out how to do that, figured out how to help them. So, I learned a lot of these group dynamics at Evergreen, and some other stuff about organizational settings, about how to deal with that stuff. I worked a lot with groups that had conflict or groups that were struggling or groups that were all sorts of stuff. I had a community college one time that had major gossip problems. Faculty and staff were all gossiping so much it undercut their ability to do teamwork altogether. I went through and I fixed all that up.

If somebody called me up and said, "Could you help me with this?" I'd always say, "Yes." Unless it involved nuclear physics or dentistry, I could figure it out. And I did, I think largely because I'm a good analytic, but I'm also a good listener. Right from the very beginning, I assumed there is no reality. There

are many realities, and what I could do is maybe bring all those realities together into some sort of coherent whole.

I discovered the value of diversity. If I walked into a room and the management team was all white males, easy job. Lots of agreement. Lots of consensus. If I walked in and there were people of all sorts of different types, lots of creativity, lots of differences potential conflict, but boy, it got to be so that if I walked into a room and I didn't see some diversity, I knew we were in trouble.

Oh! I've got to tell you that story, too. It gets back to Tacoma. I might have told you the first part of this. I was invited to speak to the managers of, I think, the Department of Licensing. Big meeting room, lecture hall in downtown Olympia on the campus. Most of the time when I speak and lecture, I don't have any notes. I just do it off the cuff, I have good enough memory and good enough cognitive organization to be able to do that.

I don't know what made me say this. I looked at this group and I said, "I'm a racist." [laughing] Then I went on to explain, how could I not be a racist? I grew up in America in 20th Century California. I thought all those Mexicans lived in Fullerton instead of Anaheim because they wanted to. I told them, "I don't want to be a racist, and I certainly don't want my kids to be racists. We've got to talk about confronting that."

I don't think I told them this story, but it's a story that Gilda knows well. I had grown up in a totally white environment most of my life. Quite frankly, I was afraid of black people. Walking down the sidewalk and see a black guy coming towards me I'd get uneasy.

I knew I had to stop that, so if I'm walking down the street in Olympia and I see a strange black person approaching me, you know what I'd do? I'd smile. I'd say, "Hey, how are you doing?" You know what happens when you smile at people? Ninety-five percent of the time they smile back. Self-reinforcing. Right? Walking through an airport, sit on an airplane, sit next to a black person. "Hey, how are you doing? Good to see you." "Good to see you, too." I got so I'd look forward to running into the black people. [laughing] It was self-reinforcing. It was pleasant. It was good.

I still—and I'm sure some people think I'm nuts—when I'm standing in the grocery line—I did this. I went through a Starbucks the other day and the barista who served me in the drive-through was black. I said, "Come here. I want to whisper something to you." She leaned out the window. I said, "I'm really happy to see a person of color working here at Starbucks." She said, "Oh." That's what people always do. "Oh, really?" "Yeah, I like living in a diverse society."

The pharmacist, who was a Muslim, I guess—she wore a hijab—she was filling my prescription one day and I leaned towards her, and I said, "Despite what you hear, I'm really glad you're here in

America.” People must think I’m nuts, but I feel really good letting people know, hey, we’re all part of the same place here. This is my society. I like it like this.

In dealing with groups now, that’s the approach I took. There were no right or wrong or good or bad or whatever. There could be, and certainly there were perceptions of that. My job was to build a coherent whole. A community. I discovered that the trick to that had to do with values. As I told you before, every organization has fundamentally the same mission. Do this, get that. It’s the values that make a difference.

I used to do an exercise with students. I’d say, “Go into two different brake shops and come back and tell me what you could learn about those two different brake shops just by the stories they told you, just by the values that you saw, just by the literature that was laid out or the parking or whatever.

I learned that values are what make a difference in any organization, be it a family or a nation state. You either have them or you don’t. You either have consensus or agreement around what you think is important, so I spent a lot of time working with finding, developing, building agreement around values, building a priority around values. What’s the most important thing here? Profit? Clearly, in a lot of places.

I went into this store to get some printer ink. I don’t know why I went to this store, an independent kind of place. Turns out it was run by a husband and wife who had immigrated from England and had started this store. The husband was serving me, and he was kind of a surly guy. You could see the wife in the back. And I could see across the counter through a door a piece of poster paper, and on it, it said “Mission Statement.” [laughing] This is what it’s like to work with someone like me.

I said to the husband, “Is that your mission statement?” He said, “Yes.” “It’s got a problem.” “What’s that?” His wife hears this, and she appears from the back and is listening to me. “I saw your mission statement goes on and on and on and talks about what you do. That part’s good, but you’re missing something.” “What’s that?” “Are you going to give me these ink capsules free?” “No, of course not.” “You should add you do this for a profit.” “Well, I don’t know about that.” “If you don’t put it on for profit, I guarantee you’re not going to be back here next when I come.”

His wife comes around and she says, “What do you mean?” “There’s nothing wrong with making a profit. It’s a fair outcome. If you said you’re going to cheat me for profit, that’s another question. But if you’re going to provide me a service, and you do it so that you can be profitable, then I

can come back and you can support yourself and build a business, that's fine by me. She went and got a marker pen, and at the bottom wrote "For profit."

You've got to clear about values. You've got to be clear about what's important. Evergreen Tacoma is going to go through a really, really tough conversion trying to bring in first- and second-year students. The only way they can navigate that is if they have a very clear sense of what their values are, and what the priorities of those values are, and what can be compromised and what can't be compromised.

That's what I ended up doing. I ended up working a lot with closely held or family-owned businesses, commercial real estate offices in particular because they'd often get all confused and couldn't find their way. I'd try to get them back on track, try to get them to move forward. I didn't always succeed.

I worked with some large organizations, too. I worked with some corporations. The biggest client I had towards the end was Golden Corral, the buffet restaurant company, which turned out to be a great company, really great people. It was a perfect fit between me and them. They're in a lot of trouble now, financially.

As I told you before, I followed the same logic that I had with students. I became friends with my clients. I became friends with my students. I recognize that that sometimes compromised my objectivity, but not much. I felt as a teacher or as a consultant, it was my responsibility to tell the truth, as I saw it. Sometimes that wasn't popular, but I never saw that as a threat to a friendship. In fact, I saw it in some ways as an element of friendship.

A lot of people didn't hire me, and they didn't hire me, and they didn't hire me for a good reason, because I'd come in and tell them what I saw. I didn't expect them to necessarily agree, but that's what I thought I was hired for. I thought I was hired to come in and "Here's what I see. You can disagree. We can argue about it. In fact, you may be right and I may be wrong, but the fact of the matter is in that dialogue between what I saw and what you think it is, there's a reality somewhere."

I got to be known as a trusted advisor. It was not uncommon for me to be brought in to deal with a very discrete problem within an organization and be invited back, often for many years, to deal with other issues as they arose.

I used to tell people I'd often be sitting in a restaurant at lunch with a client, and sometimes somebody would come up to the table to see their friend, and the client would say, "Let me introduce you to Duke Kuehn, who is working with us right now." They would struggle for trying to encapsulate

what I did or who I was. More than once, I was pleased that people would say, “He’s a friend of the organization.” That really pretty much summarized what I was trying to do.

I had some great experiences. I got to travel literally all over the world. Met some terrific people. Had some wonderful experiences. Made a number of friends, who I still have today. I still get to see them, although electronically, we’re still connected. It was the culmination of my teaching and continued to be a source of my learning.

That’s what I did.

Zaragoza: Thank you for going into that, Duke. I have one final related question for today, and then we can figure out when to come back for you to get into some new aspects. The question I have leads right from what you were talking about. You talked about your consulting work as the culmination of your teaching career. You talked about parallels between the way that you worked with students and the way you work with clients. I’m curious if you could talk to us specifically about how your experiences—teaching and administering and organizing and marketing at Evergreen—how that work at Evergreen, how Evergreen influenced your work as a consultant. How do you see Evergreen reflected in your work?

Kuehn: Totally. Absolutely. Again, if I think about my life, I can’t imagine what would have happened if I hadn’t gone to Evergreen. Would I have done some of these things? Maybe. Would I have done them in the way that I do them? Certainly not. Evergreen was such a proving ground, testing ground, learning environment for me to develop techniques and skills and perspectives that I can’t imagine I would have derived any other place.

When I first started to consult, a very popular fad was teamwork. I made quite a dent in my market by taking what I’d learned at Evergreen about teamwork and telling clients, “It’s a lot harder than you think. It’s just not something you make a commitment to. It’s something you have to work at constantly. In early stages, it’s harder to do things in teams than it is to do them as individuals.”

I only saw that—I came to learn the difficulties teaching in faculty teams. By the time I finished at Evergreen, I think I taught with 75 different faculty members. I was forced to develop a sensitivity to what it meant to work with somebody whose values were often very different. And I never, ever quit a faculty team or quit on a faculty. Some, I didn’t like. Some, I wouldn’t teach with again. But I felt a commitment to see that all the way through.

Tell you a story, not exactly pertinent. It goes back to something earlier. I had this concept of teamwork and collaboration that had been a curiosity and a problematic one for me for a long time, particularly the issue of leadership, so I really went and did a heavy library research on leadership.

Leadership became a major topic in American social sciences, right about the time, after World War I, during World War II.

I read all the literature and I was not satisfied with it at all, because the major finding was there is no consistent style of leadership. Leadership is decided by the needs of a group, and that good leaders adapt, like they would to an audience. That didn't seem right to me. Having worked with somebody like Dan Evans or other people like that, who had some very clear traits and skills that I would have associated with leadership, bothered me.

I did training on leadership. I did all sorts of stuff on leadership. When working with it—and there's a chapter I forgot I've got to tell you about. It was a training that Evergreen did for the State that I was involved with.

Anyhow, I'm frustrated with this leadership literature. I think I was teaching in Management in the Public Interest one year. We were teaching downstairs in the Library Building, one of those rooms that held 40, 50 students. I'll never forget this moment, standing in front of the class—there was a little podium there—teaching students. There's a student back in right center field. His name was Patrick. I wish I could remember his last name because I owe him.

I was talking about leadership and I'm confessing to the students, "I can't come up with right understanding of this." Patrick raises his hand. "Dr. Duke, I recently had an experience. Do you think this qualifies as leadership?" I said, "What's that?"

He says, "A bunch of buddies and I were up skiing, and it was right at the end of the day. We were all on our last run, coming down the hill, and one of my friends falls and breaks his leg. Sun's going down. We all ski over to him. Everybody's standing around looking at him. He's in pain. We know we've got to get him off the mountain. Something's got to get done. I'm standing there and waiting for somebody to step forward, take over, and nobody does, so I realized, I guess I've got to do it."

"Bingo! That's what leadership is. It's a recognition of the need to step forward even though you don't necessarily want to do it. That's the call." It changed my whole thinking from that point on. I've written tons about it since then. Owe that kid a ton.

The thing I left out, teaching in the MPA program, Lidman calls me and says, "The Department of Personnel has called. They want us to put together a training program for career executives, sort of mid-level executives moving up into leadership roles. Can we do that?" "Sure."

I put together and design this thing, got the faculty involved and for two years, we offered this career executive program. Must have easily trained 30 a month, so I guess we did 400 or 500 mid-level

managers in the State of Washington, teaching about leadership and policy analysis. Just a kind of condensed version of the MPA program. Great experience.

In fact, I've got to tell you this story. I know this is a public record, but I didn't do anything bad here. You know how it is when a teacher gives a really good lecture, a really good program. Afterwards, people come up and they want to talk to you.

Zaragoza: Yep.

Kuehn: Ask you questions and congratulate you. We had just finished. This program was three or four days long. All day. I'm standing up in front with a couple of Evergreen faculty. Some people come up to me at the end of the program, and there's a very attractive woman executive. She says, "I need to talk to you." She gestures me to step aside. I walk over there, and she said, "I need to tell you what an exceptional teacher you are." I smiled. She said, "When you lecture, I become sexually aroused." [laughter] I didn't know what to say. I just said, "That's a hell of a compliment. Thank you." [laughing] Wisely walked away from the situation. I'm not sure how that fits into the Me Too Movement, but I didn't do anything except give a lecture.

Zaragoza: I hear you, Duke. My guess is that wasn't the only time that happened.

Kuehn: It was the only time anybody ever expressed it to me, believe me.

Zaragoza: I think we've got to stop for today. I'm glad to come back another day, if that would work for you, and if you've got more things to tell.

Kuehn: Yes.

Zaragoza: I'm going to stop recording now.