

Thad Curtz
Interviewed by Stephen Buxbaum
The Evergreen State College oral history project
July 3, 2018

Begin Part 1 of 3 of Thad Curtz on July 3, 2018

Buxbaum: This is Stephen Buxbaum with Thad Curtz. Thad and I are convening our third segment of the oral history project on July 3, 2018. Good morning, Thad.

Curtz: Good morning.

Buxbaum: I'm just going to launch in here a little bit of organizing first. I was able to listen back to two of the segments, at least to some sections. In part, I want to do a little bit of follow-up on just that early period, pertaining to what some have called the mythography of the first early years, the planning years, of Evergreen. Then I want to move off that.

Curtz: Okay.

Buxbaum: I have a laundry list of things that you kindly provided that I just want to work down.

Curtz: Sure.

Buxbaum: So, for segment three, maybe we can start off a little bit with that initial period again, of the planning years in the early '70s. Anything more that you might remember from that, and how you would characterize it. I'm going to prompt you by one thing that may or may not be useful. There is some sense that this was a turbulent period, a period of trying to figure out how to make things work, between faculty and students, and implement a curriculum. I don't know if you recall it, there was the Marr and Martin Manifesto.

Curtz: Yeah, I remember that there was one. I don't remember what Rudy and Dave maintained in that manifesto though. [laughter]

Buxbaum: What are your recollections, if you have anything notable that you want to share from this period?

Curtz: I think all through my experience at Evergreen, I've only had a peripheral relationship with the administrative life of the college. I never became a dean, mostly because I have a very low tolerance for having people being mad at me, and I thought I couldn't be dean without that.

So, there were other people who were involved in administrative struggles of one kind or another that I was unaware, I think, a lot of the time. I have written a bunch of little manifestos of my own of one kind or another, but I've never been chair of the faculty. I didn't remember the fact that I'd

been the convener of Culture, Text and Language, at least once, until I looked back at some of the stuff that I was sending to you.

Anyway, I think there was a lot going on in the administrative part of the college in those first years. Certainly, people thought when they staffed up the administration that the college was going to grow much faster than it turned out it was going to grow. So there were a bunch of people who arrived and were here for two years and then left again—[Joe] Shoben and I don't know who else. But my life at the college was pretty much consumed by figuring out what to do about the program I was teaching. Like, I guess, most Evergreen faculty most of the time, I was working pretty hard. I didn't have a lot of time and energy left over for sitting around the faculty senate and politicking about one thing or another. [chuckles]

There was significantly more money in the opening years of the college. We had all this brand-new equipment that we'd had the money to buy because we were starting out from scratch, so there weren't worries about money. We had a much more generous program budget in those first years than we did later on. There was money to do things, like the poster project in that first year that I talked about. We had 600 or 800 bucks that we could afford to spend doing something that we seemed like it would be fun and interesting, and contribute to the life of the college as a whole.

We wanted to do that partly—one of the ideas we had about it was that all these programs were going to be very intensely inwardly oriented, and that the college didn't have much of anything in the way of structures for programs to have some sense about what was going on anywhere else; and that putting these posters around would at least give people some ongoing sense that we existed, and what we were thinking about.

Evergreen structures, at least for a long time, did provide an awful lot more opportunity for faculty to learn from each other than most colleges do. In most places, you start teaching and that's it as far as your education as a teacher goes. Teaching at Evergreen, by virtue of the programs that are team-taught anyway, every once in a while—fairly often—you see somebody else get up and do something that you never would have thought of doing. And you think, oh, gosh, that's pretty interesting, and I could probably do that. Then you try it out, and lo and behold, you can. Or, you are going to teach some program with somebody and the structure of the program—the things they're interested in—mean that you end up reading various stuff that you probably would never have read if you were teaching Chaucer and advanced Chaucer. You can turn out to use that some other way, a few years later.

In the early years of the college, there as this, I don't know, rule certainly that you were supposed to observe the teaching of the other people in your team as part of the ongoing evaluation process. I think that has faded away gradually, almost throughout the college. But it was very useful in the sense that it was really easy to imagine—I think for everybody, but certainly for me as a beginning teacher—that the seminar down the hall was going infinitely better than your seminar was. Sooner or later, you get down to actually making the time to go sit it on that seminar down the hall, and generally, it turned out that things weren't any better or any worse there than they were in your room. [chuckles]

But because of the way Evergreen runs—ran— I think runs, and because of the fact that people's programs basically consumed all the time and energy they had available, I don't think there was a lot left over for worrying about—and also because of the fact that the college had been formed by these cohorts of people who knew each other and were committed to the same notion about what needed to happen in American education. It was like there were four or five parallel colleges going on, I think, with some ongoing interbreeding or mutual education occurring between them. But it wasn't like there was one college that policy needed to be worked out for and settled for. It was like there were half a dozen colleges that were working out their own ideas about what needed to be improved and what needed to happen.

Buxbaum: Can you characterize a few of those cohorts?

Curtz: Yeah. Self-paced learning. The people who came from Reed with some kind of set of ideas about integrated, hands-on science teaching, engaging students in faculty research, sort of access to sophisticated lab equipment for undergraduates. And programs like Matter in Motion and INS and so on. The field biology people who came out of the Grinnell Natural Journal movement of natural history writing, and some notion about field biology and the capacity to do extended fieldwork with students as a pretty crucial piece of education in environmental studies. People like me, who came out of an integrated humanities. Basically, I think we were attracted by the idea that you could provide the equivalent of really good private education with small classes and a lot of contact with faculty, in a public college setting. People who were involved in the '70s ethnic studies curriculum movement. So that's five maybe.

Buxbaum: Yeah.

Curtz: On the social science, I guess I don't know how I'd characterize the social scientists who came at the beginning. There was already some set of social scientists that are not covered by my list.

Buxbaum: Can you mention a name?

Curtz: Jeanne Hahn. Various psychologists. Ron Woodbury. I think, roughly speaking, they were progressive left-wing social scientists; people who were interested, at least, in Marxist theory and not just in contemporary sociology, sort of positivist, [Auguste Comte] sociology, and sort of contemporary mainstream American economic theory as the be all and end all. So, I guess people who were interested in teaching political economy instead of straight economics out of [Paul] Samuelson or somebody like that, is probably a reasonable way to characterize who those people were.

Buxbaum: Some of what you're mentioning here makes me think of perhaps some of the challenges with folks that were working in pure science, for example, and how that fit into coordinated studies model, or even seminar for that matter. Was there a conscious effort to mix between what might be an integrated science—well, integrated science, I guess Matter and Motion, maybe that was conceived in some ways to bridge between scientific inquiry—just lab work—and broader fields of humanities.

Curtz: I think there's been an enormous range in how people put programs together, and kind of what they thought counted as a satisfactorily integrated program—everything from programs that were the rough equivalent of the directed studies program I did at Yale, where there were basically three or four separate classes going on, each one taught by one of the faculty—they had some kind of relation to each other, but they weren't all doing the same thing—all the way to programs where all the faculty did everything together. That depends partly on the disciplines and the demands of the disciplines—I think it's much easier to do that with some combinations of things than with others—and how advanced the program is, and also just the temperament and interests of the faculty.

But some time fairly late in my career of teaching—oh, I don't know, Technology, Cognition and Education—[June Pomerand? 00:15:37], who was a kind of media faculty member taught in that program, at some point—maybe when we were talking about my evaluation or something—she said that she'd learned an enormous amount from me, from this program about how you might fit a program to make the different parts of a program fit together.

It's a little vain, but I do think that's something that I've always been particularly good at compared to most people, partly because I have a pretty wide range of competencies and interests, and I also have a rather unusual, I think, powerful synthetic capacity for figuring out ways of making things connect to each other. And I've always been willing to work really hard at doing that. In program planning, it's saying, "Okay, you want to this and you want to do that. I'll figure out how to find other stuff that I can teach that I think will go with what you're talking about."

Buxbaum: What are the components of a well-structured program, like what you're speaking about? How might a person approach that successfully?

Buxbaum: It all depends [chuckles] on the person, I think, and the program. I think having a program theme. There's a bunch of stuff in the archives, or at least with people's accumulated manifestos about this anyway. I think having a program theme is really useful and interesting; helpful to the students, if you can manage to keep reminding them what the program theme is [a buy is? 00:17:33]. And it's nice to have a program theme which is a little mysterious, and which will become progressively more complicated and interesting as the program goes along.

I taught this program with Don Finkel once called Development: The Aim of Education, which was basically Don's program. I think he'd taught it once before, and he'd certainly had the fundamental ideas for it. It was about [Jean] Piaget and [Erik] Erikson and moral development theory. I remember him saying once that the title of the program came from the title of a very famous article, which was kind of about [John] Dewey and Piaget and progressive education and moral development theory, and how they all fit together with each other. I said at some point, "The good thing about this is that we'll read that article at the end and they'll finally be able to understand it as a result of the work we've done in this program."

So, something like that, where the theme progressively deepens, and as you go along, the work that you're doing in the program contributes progressively to your understanding of the theme. That's pretty good, I think. I taught a program called Perception, and the theme was perception, but we did a lot of interesting work about perception in various ways. But I don't think that theme gets deeper in that kind of way.

What else? Well, it's good to have the faculty get along with each other. Very useful. I personally have done my best to avoid having the program be separate courses. It seems to me that that gives you none of the potential benefits of coordinated studies and all of the costs. You're tied to a particular set of faculty. You have to take the same combination of courses. You can't pick one of the ones in your program and two of the ones in some other program that you'd rather be studying. And you get a very minimal benefit from the fact that there's some kind of relationship between the work that's being done and the separate courses.

At least from the point of view of the faculty, having everybody do everything is wonderful for somebody like me, who became a college teacher because I liked being a student. And I think it's very good for faculty development in the long run. You get to see all these other people teaching, and think about what they're doing and get advice from them. In a program that's going well anyway, you get advice from them.

Buxbaum: How can you tell if a program is going well?

Curtz: “All happy families are happy in the same way. Every unhappy family is unhappy in its own unique way,” as Tolstoy says at the front of *War and Peace*. [laughing] I actually think the interesting thing is the opposite; that it’s very easy to have some students come to you and complain and to imagine that all the students are complaining. It’s very helpful to survey the students every month or every five weeks, especially if some little group of students comes and tells you that things are going terribly, or that the workload is impossible or whatever. It’s very helpful to actually see what the whole program and all the students say before you panic, because in my experience anyway, it generally turns out that things are not near as bad as you tend to imagine when this little delegation first arrives on your doorstep.

And if you have a regular process in the program, then it’s easy and unpainful for you to be able to say, “Okay, we surveyed. Here’s what everybody says about the workload. Twelve percent say it’s too much for them, 50 percent of the people say it’s about right.” It’s like this social science research about how all the kids in high school think all the other kids are having sex a lot more than they are, and smoking more dope than they are. I think it’s helpful for the students who are feeling like they’ve got way too much to do, or the students who are thinking, there’s not near enough work to have some sense about, yeah, I do feel that way, but it’s partly me, it’s not just reality.

Generally speaking, I have just taught as hard as I could whatever I was teaching. I have not kind of . . . well, I don’t know, that’s not absolutely accurate, but I have not shrunk from doing demanding stuff. In first-year programs, I’ve tried to provide a lot of help for students. And sometimes I’ve just said, “Yeah, that would be great to do but we can’t do it. It’s just too hard.” But mostly, I’ve tried to do interesting, demanding work—reading difficult, important books, whatever I was teaching.

Buxbaum: Is there an example of something that you characterize as demanding?

Curtz: Practically any program I’ve taught. Instead of reading some book about Marx, we’ve had students read [*Das Kapital*]. Instead of having them read some textbook about developmental psychology, we’ve had them actually read Piaget. And just down the line. Partly that’s because I’ve taught in a lot of programs where the point was reading great books, and the students had signed up because they wanted to have that be part of their education. But it’s also true about what I’ve done in programs like Perception or Weird and Wondrous, or whatever.

Buxbaum: In some ways, demanding is going directly to the source, and letting students struggle with it and making that part of the educational experience.

Curtz: Yeah. I try to provide them with as much help as I can, but not feeling as if they need to just read a textbook about it, read what somebody else says about it.

Buxbaum: Thinking about *Kapital*, where students plunge in the middle of that and they're spinning their wheels? Is that ever the case? What's the best method of managing [that]?

Curtz: I don't remember what the particular occasions were, but there have certainly been occasions where I started out—we, some team—thinking that we could manage do to X, and ended up saying, “No, instead of the assignment for week three about this, just read these six passages, these six sections. Skip section so-and-so and skip section so-and-so. We've got to do less, and those are the ones we think are really important, or the ones we think are most manageable, given what we've done so far and what people seem to be able to handle.”

I also think, certainly for me but I think probably for the faculty in general, it's easy to think that everybody is getting along all right, when in fact some people have just kind of checked out about this, that or the other thing.

I've always been interested in this issue, about faculty workload and ways to mitigate it. One of the things I started doing—over the last 10 years I was teaching maybe, or maybe a little less than that—was having students mark up the reading, do marginal notations, and just collecting all of their books at the beginning of every seminar, giving them something to do and spending 10, 15 minutes just looking through the marginalia and making little notes. I think you can get a pretty accurate sense of about how engaged with the reading students are. I think that probably also provides a fairly substantial amount of incentive or leverage—pressure—for students to actually do all of the reading. Because it's certainly not as easy for students to just float along at Evergreen as it is at most colleges. But it's certainly possible to just kind of get by.

Buxbaum: After looking at marked-up texts or articles, what's the next step, one that's passed back? Is there more to a method of helping students figure out how to mark up and read?

Curtz: I guess I've always handed out some samples of what I've done, reading the books myself, except I'm being paid to do this. [laughing] I have to worry about running out of things to say in seminar, or things to ask in seminar, so you're not expected to mark your books up as intensively as this. But you can see the kind of things I do, and generally, I give a little talk. I say, “Okay, here's this kind of mark I made here, and here's why I made it.” “Here's what this little thing here is. You can see how here, I said, page 22, because back there on page 22, there was an image that was like the one here. You can see here, I started writing blue in the margins. Every time the color blue, or something else about blue, came up because it looked like that was going to be an ongoing, returning thing in the book and I wanted to keep track of it. And this is handy, because if you decide you want to write your seminar paper about blue, it's really easy for you to go back and locate all of those places, if you marked them up

in the course of doing this. And it helps you stay awake when you're reading the book to be marking it up like that."

Sometimes, either I sat some student down or wrote a little note that said, "You know, looking at the things you underlined, it looks to me like you're just making this up. [laughing] You just seem to be drawing some lines in the book." Once in a while, I gave people suggestions, but mostly the point of it was just for me to be able to have some way of checking in efficiently, and doing something that would take less of my time, and having them write a little seminar paper every time, and having the feeling that I needed to sit down and mark those papers up, and give people advice about them.

Buxbaum: Do you have a sense, during your time at Evergreen, were those methods widely employed? Is there a basic foundational set of skills that are provided to students, or were provided to students?

Curtz: I don't have any real idea. Some, I think, pretty much all the time, and some over stretches of time have had foundation programs. If you took Introduction to Natural Science, or Political Economy, and I don't know, I think Introduction to Natural Science was pretty much a requirement. But certainly, you were strongly encouraged to do one of those if you were thinking that you wanted to go on to do advanced work in some area.

The humanities has never had a program like that. I tried to persuade the humanities faculty that we ought to have one. I thought our not having one was a significant issue. It meant you were starting from scratch. Every program, you had new students who didn't know about Freudian theory, they didn't know about close reading, they didn't know about this, that or the other thing that it seemed like you probably were going to need about them and to do advanced work in the humanities and the interpretive social sciences.

I thought we ought to have a program that basically taught everybody some set of things. The faculty—my colleagues—never wanted to do that, mostly, I think, because a lot of them did not want to be in the position of having to teach that program every so often, and some of them for pedagogic, principled reasons.

That was one idea about how students ought to get introductory skills, if you like. There was a lot of ongoing work about core programs of one kind or another, about what ought to be taught in core. And a certain amount of faculty development work dedicated to trying to make sure that core programs actually did cover that stuff and teach those skills, but I think [they were] spotty and sporadic at best. Every core program kind of worked that out in their own terms, I think, whatever ideas they had about what ought to be done.

There were a certain number of things that spread through the college, and then, I think, tended to fade away again. Peter Elbow did a bunch of stuff about free writing and writing without teachers, and student-centered writing groups that was attractive to lots of faculty, and a lot of faculty adopted in one way or another for a while. Some people did intensive journal workshops based on Marilyn Frasca's work. There was a whole stretch of a lot of popularity for the kind of structured workshops that Don Finkel invented. I think probably Grinnell Nature History journal writing, a lot of people did that for in various programs for quite a while. There was a Writing Across the Curriculum movement, and a bunch of administrative work dedicated to trying to improve the teaching of writing in every program in the college, since we didn't have any freshman composition. But I think most of those things were movements. They appeared, they gained a fair amount of momentum and popularity, and they tended to fade away again eventually.

Buxbaum: Were they driven by individuals?

Curtz: I think most of those things in my last list were the inventions of individual people, and they spread mostly by having people in teams that they had worked with think that they were great, and carried them forward—sometimes by a little proselytizing. And sometimes people—like the Grinnell Natural History people—they, I think, all arrived interested in that particular way of working with students, and knowing about it already.

Buxbaum: Can you share some names?

Curtz: Steve Herman was probably, I think, the central advocate in the faculty for the Grinnell Field Journal. I think most of those things anyway were written up by the faculty. There was a book about how to do it already, like the *Progoff Intensive Journal* book that Marilyn learned how to do that from. She didn't learn it from the book, she learned it from Progoff, but there was a book about how to do it.

Buxbaum: *Progoff Journal Workshop*.

Curtz: Yeah. But I think Bob Sluss and [Larry] Eickstaedt certainly, and Al Wiedemann. I think those people were, I think, either became committed to natural history field writing, or were already more or less on their arrival at the college, or were already interested in it as a way of working with students.

Buxbaum: Clarifying question about the labels that we use these days. You mentioned core programs. At some point, inserted in the Evergreen structure, there's a reference to basic programs.

Curtz: It's the same thing. For a long time, the college required entering students to do a first-year program. You didn't have any choice about it, you just had eight options or whatever, six options.

Buxbaum: Again, the "first-year" programs, that's that same thing of a basic or a core program. Barbara Smith appeared on the scene at some point—1978—so there were specialty areas that were

inserted into the mix, and then there was this concept of the basic program. Was that a dean-delivered structure?

Curtz: No, I don't think so. There's probably a DTF or something to try to work out what ought to be done about the—the whole life of the college, there's been this ongoing tension between “every program ought to be its own autonomous world”—certainly I and I think lots of the faculty arrived at Evergreen thinking, well, I have given up a promising academic career in the regular academic world to come to this new somewhat risky college. And one of the things that I ought to get, as a result of coming here, is autonomy.

And that, together with a deep commitment—certainly on my part, and I think on the part of most faculty—to the idea that at a good college, the faculty runs the curriculum. The administration does not run the curriculum at a decent college.

Those two things together have contributed. And I think also maybe the temperament of people who decided they wanted to come teach at Evergreen—at a college that didn't have requirements, that didn't have majors, that didn't have departments—all of those were connected by a kind of taste for individual liberty and autonomy probably.

Anyway, at one end there's been the idea every program is its own universe, and that's fine. It doesn't matter whether students—you could put first-year students in—the whole notion of advanced programs and beginning programs and this structured, progressive hierarchy in the curriculum didn't matter or make sense to a fair number of the faculty, certainly depending a lot on the disciplines that they were in. The science faculty tended to—I think quite rightly, especially in the hard sciences—to think that some kind of progressive structure was essential. Faculty in the humanities tended to think that it didn't matter at all, at least lots of them tended to think that it didn't matter at all. And everybody else [was] kind of in between, I think.

At the one end of the spectrum, we've got this idea that every program is its own community, its own culture, its own little world, and that's great. And on the other hand, we have this idea about there ought to be paths of study; there ought to be clear repeatable programs; there ought to be career paths laid out for students who come thinking that they want to be journalists or veterinarians or whatever, and they ought to be able to see in the curriculum what they're going to be able to do for the next four years, which will lead to their coming out prepared for that career. Those are two visions about how the college ought to be structured that are in pretty deep tension with each other, and we've continually tried to work out a suitable combination/synthesis/compromise between those two tensions.

Buxbaum: Characterize again for me, if you would, the two tensions. Are paths of study and career paths on different sides?

Curtz: No, I don't think so, except that there are some paths of study that are not really directed toward careers at all. The teacher ed mostly is a function of the State's ever-increasing list of requirements; is probably about as close as you can get to something where the path of study really is a career path. You are doing this in order to come out and be able to be certified according to the State's requirements for a particular job and union card.

Majoring in philosophy or humanities, even at a traditional college, is sort of a path of study. It says, okay, and every year for the next four years, there are going to be programs that you can take which will make sense if you're interested in, say, English and American literature. But most of the people who are interested in English and American literature, and want to learn about it in college, are not going to end up becoming English teachers, not even high school English teachers. So, that's a path of study, but it's not exactly a career path.

Buxbaum: Characterize again for me the two tensions.

Curtz: Just that on the one side, you have the idea that every program is an autonomous and coherent whole, and it doesn't have to be related to anything else in the curriculum. On the other hand, you have the idea that there ought to be four-year integrated structures in the curriculum that link the programs that are going to be offered for the next four years into comprehensible patterns, and useful patterns.

Buxbaum: I'm just thinking again about sciences. Ed Kormondy, one of the first scientists that was dean.

Curtz: He was an administrator for a long time.

Buxbaum: Can you think of some examples where there was an active effort to really bring together integrated structures between humanities and science?

Curtz: I think only in particular programs. I taught a couple programs where I thought that was done probably more than in most programs. The Reflections [of] Nature program that I taught with Rob Knapp and Hiro Kawasaki and Larry Eickstaedt did informal outdoor physics, [with] a section about clouds, a section about flow in water, and natural structures and various other topics like that. Hiro Kawasaki did art about nature, like Hudson River Valley painting, and I did natural history writing, and Eickstaedt did field biology.

The Perception program that Nancy Murray and [Chuck] Pailthorp and I did that did smell for six weeks and vision for six weeks and sound for six weeks. We did lab biology stuff about the neurobiology of perception, and philosophical stuff about the philosophy of perception, and literature about smelling,

and anthropological stuff about [Kalui? 00:49:02] sound worlds, and musician stuff about soundscape composition, humanities stuff of various kinds. It was about those modes of perception.

I think there have been a fair number of programs like those that integrated work for science students and for humanities students, but I don't think that the administration, as far as I know, has ever done anything about saying, "Every year, there has to be a core program which will combine work for humanities and work for science students," though there's been a lot of faculty interest of one kind or another in creating programs like that, not just the two that I was in.

Buxbaum: From your list of programs of Reflections of Nature onward, those are all solid examples of integrated structures.

Curtz: Mm-hm.

Buxbaum: On the other side of the equation, can you recall and speak to anything about the more autonomous structures at the college, and examples of that?

Curtz: More programs were all autonomous structures in the way I was talking about them a minute ago. Weird and Wondrous, say, didn't fit into any path of study exactly, except that Jean Mandeberg thought that there needed to be a program that would have space in it for beginning metalwork students, and that program would do. It fit into the structure in the sense that Jean was committed to being able to offer a certain kind of work with her to students at a certain stage in their college careers as potential art students. But it wasn't part of some path of study. It wasn't like "Well, we have to offer Introduction to Natural Science again this year. Who's going to teach it?" Which was what the other kind of path of study or career path involved—a commitment to say to students, "Yes, here's what you're going to be able to do over the next four years. We will offer X every year, we will offer Y every two years, we will offer some version of C every year." That's the other pole, I suppose.

But especially toward the end of my career, where basically there wasn't an English department except for me and one and a half other people, I taught some various group contracts—in The Novel, or Renaissance Studies. They weren't quite English department courses, but they were pretty much certainly literature department courses put together in certain kinds of ways.

Just one other thing. There's a kind of administrative reflection of this, I guess, which is in the college's hiring procedures, the question "Who are we going to hire next?" If your specialty area, or your piece of the territory, has a path of study, then you're in a much better position to advocate for a certain set of faculty needs. You could say, "We have to have another chemist, because we are committed to teaching X every two years, and we don't have the faculty we need to teach X."

One of the reasons we ended up without an English department, we started out with four Chaucerians on the faculty—me, [Pete] Sinclair, Peter Elbow and Charlie Teske. Charlie didn't quite do a dissertation about Chaucer, but we had three Chaucerians, which was more probably than any other English department in the country had. And we had a lot of English teachers in the very first years of the college—a lot of people who had been trained in literature—partly because it's relatively easy to integrate literature as a discipline into all sorts of interdisciplinary programs. It's much easier than to integrate chemistry, say, or biology, or lots of other things. So I think that was one reason we ended up [without an English department] because we started out with a lot of English teachers [who] looked like they would be useful in various ways.

But one of the problems for the humanities about not having a path of study in any discernable way was that it made it harder to argue for the area's hiring needs compared to [specialty areas]. So one of the consequences of that was that we ended up with fewer and fewer English teachers, fewer faculty in the humanities. You can look at the statistics about . . .

Buxbaum: What would a good, solid foundation in the humanities look like?

Curtz: Well, I wrote a whole position paper about this once. [chuckles]

Buxbaum: I guess I'm interested, in part, you were working on selling something.

Curtz: Yeah, I have a particular notion about what integrates the humanities and the qualitative social sciences, and it's the act of interpretation. An interpreter originally was a price fixed etymologically; somebody who stands between the buyer and the seller and adjusts values. The fundamental methodological issue that all of those share is what philosophers call your hermeneutic questions. You have one set of meanings out there that's the meanings of the agents and one set of meanings that's the meanings of the reader, and the interpreter is standing in there between, trying to figure out how the process of converting the meanings that are embedded in the actions that some anthropologist is studying, or the dreams that some psychoanalyst is looking at, or the literary text that some critic is reading. You're dealing with the author's intentions, or the dreamer's intentions, or the poet's intentions and the actual text itself, the actual actions, the actual dream record, the actual poem on the page, and whatever set of meanings you're bringing to it. And the meanings of the symbol for the dreamer are not the same necessarily as the meanings of the symbol for the author. The meanings of the words in the poem are not the same as the meanings of the words in the language, you know, the historical moment that the critic stands in.

There's this famous story about Dr. [Samuel] Johnson walking into St. Paul's with [James] Boswell and he says, "It's an awful heap, Boswell," which meant it was an awesome edifice in 1842, or

whenever they had this conversation. That's a pretty vivid sample, but that's almost true. So, I think about interpretation as the central thing that characterizes work in the humanities and work in the qualitative social sciences, and in humanistic psychology. So, that's what I thought the center of an introductory program to the area ought to be.

And then there were a lot of particular skills and a body of theoretical stuff that I thought students probably needed to know to go on effectively. I just thought it would be a lot easier if you didn't have to start over again from scratch with people having some idea about what Freudian theory was, and what Marxist interpretive theory was, and what new criticism was, and how to do a close reading of a text. A bunch of things like that. I had quite a list about what I thought this thing ought to cover.

I couldn't persuade the area to do this, but Betty Estes and I—now I think maybe I tried to do a program like this. [Transcriber could not tell whether he changed from Betty Estes and I to only I in this sentence 00:59:50] I think students actually got credit in one of the early years of the college. The third year or something, I organized an evening, for-credit thing—I think you could get credit for it—called On Interpretation, where I got one person from the faculty to come every week and do a talk. They brought in a particular text from their discipline and they gave a talk about interpreting it. It happened in Lecture Hall 1 and there were kind of 50 or 60 or 100 students who came and listened to those, and then there was some work I think people did on the side if they wanted to get credit for it, as opposed to just coming to the lectures. It was a set of ideas I'd had around for a long time. There were posters for it, too, I think that I did put up around campus.

I did this program as a set of three one-quarter programs, where you could take the whole sequence, and they kind of built on each other. There was one called Poetry and Painting, there was one called . . . I don't remember what the title was. The first one did art history and painting, and then the second one was called On Narrative, and it did storytelling and novels and historical texts, and various other things that are about creating a story. The third one was about interpreting action of one kind of another.

Partly it was a time in the college's history where we had a lot of transfer students, and there were not many things for transfer students to do, so I had a bunch of students were arriving and couldn't find anything else to do and took this. It definitely was not the required introduction to the specialty area. And it wasn't taught by anybody else, it was just taught by me.

One of my pitches to my colleagues was that by sharing the work for an introductory program like this, we could reduce our workloads. People could come and teach a little section about what they

could teach kind of off the top of their heads, and contribute to this thing that would make everybody's workload simpler. They didn't want to have to teach it every two years.

Buxbaum: I'm going to quickly break here.

Curtz: And I think, just before you turn it off, some of them were opposed to this for reasons of pedagogical principal of one kind or another. They didn't believe that there was such a thing as introductory skills, really. They thought that there was so much that was individual about doing the humanities that they really didn't think you could put together a list of what students ought to know in order to do advanced work. They didn't think that work in the humanities built on previous work in the humanities in that kind of way at all. So it wasn't just that they wanted to be able to do whatever they felt like whenever they felt like it, but it was some combination of those two things, I think.

Buxbaum: Good. I think I might end up coming back to this a little bit.

Curtz: Sure.

Buxbaum: But a quick break here.

End Part 1 of 3 of Thad Curtz on July 3, 2018

Begin Part 2 of 3 of Thad Curtz on July 3, 2018

Buxbaum: This is Buxbaum and Curtz again for segment number four on July 3. I'm just going to start out with Thad. Any recollections to plunge in on?

Curtz: I actually thought of a couple of other things about programs, about programs' social life. I think it's perfectly possible to have a program that's going well in which students are learning a lot, and in which they're not having a particularly good time. I think that whether they have a good time or not is a function of what the social psychologists call group formation. It's got to do with some set of things, like student participation in the planning of the program, and their sense of having some kind of ownership about what happens and what's going to happen.

Doing student projects is one piece of that, and student presentations at the end of the program, where you give students some assignment. In *Weird and Wondrous*, we told students that they were supposed to study something that was an experience of wonder for them over the course of the quarter, and that was a piece of their work for the program. They were going to have to do a presentation about it at the end. The presentation was not supposed to be a regular talk, but a presentation that tried to give the rest of us some glimpse of what was wondrous of the actual wonder in this experience.

This is also one of the few things in which you can give the students some work which does not multiply your own work by a factor of 20, which is another desirable thing about it. You assign some paper, you get 20 papers to read, you do lab reports, you have 20 lab reports to read, the student only has one paper to write or one—so, you're continually behind the eight ball more and more. But having students do a research project and then a presentation at the end is not like that.

Having students help plan the second quarter of the program or the third quarter of the program is another. Student retreats, I think, are very useful, and I think one of the things that the college—everybody did—religiously when the college was starting, and I think has become something that some people still do and other people don't. Program potlucks on some kind of regular basis, another thing that involves shifting the personal relationships between the students and the faculty a little bit, and giving the students some chance to build some community that doesn't just involve coming together for classes and going away again. That was what I wanted to add to that.

Buxbaum: Yeah, that's helpful, in terms of design. Was that something that was regularly built into programs in your experience?

Curtz: Those things were certainly something that I always did. I think, in the first years of the college, everybody had program potlucks, and everybody went on retreat. Partly, the faculty got older, at least a lot of the faculty did, and there got to be less energy for going off and staying at someplace with hard beds on cots or bunks or something for three days.

Another thing about the demographic shift at the college is that, as you get older, I think the emotional basis of your relationship to students changes. When I started teaching at Evergreen, I was 29, and my teaching emotionally, I think, was fundamentally funded by my identification with what it had been like for me to be a student. And also, I wasn't that different from the students in lots of ways. When I got to be 45 or 50, that wasn't functional for me. I don't think I had that emotional relationship to the students anymore, and so I had to shift to some kind of emotional basis for my teaching that was more like parenting, I think, and less like being another student and remembering what it was like to be a student.

Buxbaum: I want to go back to paths of study just briefly. I think this may be sorting out some of my own confusion around paths of study more than anything else, so this might not be useful at all to anybody. [chuckles] But the interviewer's prerogative, I guess.

Curtz: I'll be amazed if anybody ever listens to this, so . . . [chuckles]

Buxbaum: Yeah, that's right. It's the old placing the dollar bill in the thesis routine. [laughter] Maybe we should give somebody something redeemable here.

Part of my questioning comes from the college is currently going through this paths of study effort, and it seems to be an investment. There's some money behind it from a Mellon grant, and we're looking at year two in some certainty, in terms of implementation. Was there a point where paths of study was something that was invented at the college? And do you recall when that was interjected into the college vocabulary?

Curtz: I don't know when historically, no. There certainly was a point at which the college—if I had to guess, I'd guess at the time of our first enrollment crisis probably. But also, I think, you look at the first-year catalog, they only had to deal with upper-division students who had already done introduction to the major works someplace else. And there were just 10 programs or something. [chuckles] So I think probably just the result of progressive experience, it became clear to people that this was an issue for students. It certainly was an issue for Admissions. Admissions was dealing with students all the time who said, "How can I study X at Evergreen?" And Academic Advising was dealing with students all the time who said, "I want to do X, and there's no way for me to do it next year."

Buxbaum: Is this just a continuing dialog about paths of study?

Curtz: I think so. I think it's a structural tension in the college between departmental majors and interdisciplinary programs. The more I'm teaching in Reflections of Nature, and running off and picking out a bunch of books that will fit nicely with studying clouds and studying Hudson River Valley painting, the less I'm doing in the curriculum about teaching Chaucer, or Shakespeare, or the British novel or whatever.

Buxbaum: I wish I had more and better questions about this, because in part, I don't know what to do with this current discussion about paths of study, particularly in the context of Evening and Weekend Studies program, which is challenging.

From our discussion, and maybe some of my own perceptions just coming into this whole project, it sounds like some of the most wonderful programs, and very successful programs, came out of the inspirational process that was driven by a faculty, and was supported and promoted by good relations with other faculty.

Curtz: I think that's true. The most memorable programs, I don't know that students learned more in those programs than they did in the Introduction to Natural Science when it was well taught, but they're more fun to hear about. [laughter] They were more exciting to read about in the catalog probably, but I

don't know that they were more educational. Just different. They were something that you couldn't do at some other college. You probably could do the work that Introduction to Natural Science did anywhere, though maybe not as well.

Buxbaum: There's another side to this coin. I look forward to promoting some discussions with alumni, and getting perceptions of students in terms of what was special about their experience.

I want to switch gears a little bit and start working down a list of your experiences at the college. I wanted to start with writing, in part because we were talking about foundational programs. Writing is something that we've got to work with in every aspect of the curriculum, from my perspective. I could have probably pulled out a dozen different things about writing, but I selected one that came from . . .

Curtz: . . . Pacific Northwest Writing Consortium. The National Endowment for the Humanities funded this thing.

Buxbaum: It was 1982 and it looks like a project that you were directly involved in. Can you shed a little light on what that was about?

Curtz: I don't remember where the money came from. I suspect that Peter Elbow wrote this grant, and then he left the college and I ended up inheriting [the responsibility] for it. There was a stretch when I did a bunch of things about Writing Across the Curriculum, and wrote a few articles for the *Washington State English Teachers Journal*, and did some high school in-service work, and went off, maybe on this grant, and did something in Atlanta at Emory.

But this particular piece of it was modeled on this each one teach one grant that we had, and on the Finkel workshop stuff that I had been working with. It's about using these structured workshops for groups of students to teach concepts in writing, like supporting a thesis and so on. I did a writing project just kind of for fun, maybe when I was working in core—I spent this quarter studying core programs, interviewing students, writing workshops for a couple of core programs about the novels that they were going to do to try to help reduce the faculty's workload, I think maybe, as part of that.

Anyway, I sat a bunch of students down and interviewed them about papers that the faculty had written comments on. I just started at the top and I pointed at every mark on the page and said, "Can you explain to me what that means, and what you're supposed to do, what the teacher wants you to do?" The best students could explain maybe a third of the marks, I think, which seemed important. That's connected to this issue about, what concepts do they have? When the teacher says, "You need to support the thesis more," or, "You need a transition here," those are concepts about something

that's supposed to happen. If they have an idea about what a transition is at all, it is not necessarily the same idea that the teacher assumes that they've got.

This piece of the grant paired up high school English teachers and college teachers. I think we visited each other's classrooms, and talked about teaching issues with each other and wrote these workshops about concepts. We had a summer institute thing where I kind of talked about this set of ideas, and we looked at some sample workshops and then we worked together on trying to do these workshops about using workshops like this to teach writing concepts. I don't know that anybody ever used any of these. [chuckles] But that was the idea.

Buxbaum: Any advice about how writing should be integrated into the curriculum at the college?

Curtz: I never had a freshman composition class. At Yale, you just arrived; they assumed you knew how to write a paper; they assigned you a paper; and then they gave you advice about the paper. I learned how to write that way, basically, and that's fundamentally how I've always taught writing, too.

At the other end of the spectrum, Sara Huntington—she changed her name, I don't know whether that was her name, but when I arrived at the college, that was her name after, I guess, she got divorced. Anyway, the other Sara in the Library the year that I was doing all this work with core students, she was teaching in a core program. She had put together this very elegant, very tightly structured writing curriculum for the program. It had a little, bitty, very focused assignment—a couple a week—that built progressively on one another. The students in that program thought that the writing was wonderful. They thought they were learning a ton about writing, and lots of the students in the other programs I interviewed thought they weren't learning much of anything about writing, I think.

I worked hard trying to get Sara to give me all of this stuff and distribute it around the college, and she was pretty reluctant to actually do that. She gave a weekly composition lecture, and the workshops that she did, the exercises she did, were roughly, I think, based on or inspired by a book called *Ten Lessons in Clarity and Elegance*. Something like that. A good book about writing.

There's a lot of research about college writing which shows pretty definitively, I think, that students' writing goes progressively downhill over the course of their college careers; that they have formal writing instruction in the freshman year, and after that they don't do very much writing, and what writing they do does not get any sophisticated feedback or attention by people who care about it as writing; and that they get worse. And they're worse by the time they graduate as writers than they were at the end of their freshman year. So clearly, the standard model is not very satisfactory. You do need to have writing be a part of the student's education every year, in an ongoing, sustained way.

[Knocking heard at the door]

End Part 2 of 3 of Thad Curtz on July 3, 2018

Begin Part 3 of 3 of Thad Curtz on July 3, 2018

Buxbaum: We're just picking up here.

Curtz: I was just saying you need ongoing, sustained attention to writing. Actually getting that to happen is extremely difficult. It's like what [unintelligible 00:00:25] says. Well, no, it isn't even like that. The main being that teaching writing is very labor-intensive. You assign a paper, you get 20 papers back. It takes a lot of time to read them. It's the least pleasant part of the job for most English teachers, so getting faculty who are teaching something else to do it is really difficult.

One solution to this is to have somebody who teaches writing in every program, and they lean on their fellow faculty to do this work. Maybe that makes it likelier to happen. But faculty have all sorts of other things that they think it's important to teach that they're trying hard to teach students. I think the college has been very uneven about its capacity to keep doing this.

There are a bunch of things that English teachers have figured out about reducing the time load of this. The most important one for me, I think, based on this story I told you about interviewing the people about the marks on their paper is that most teachers make far too many marks on their students' papers. I think you would be much better off telling the students, "I'm going to mark up the first page of your paper, about copyediting issues and stylistic issues. After that, I'm just going to talk about what you've got to say, and my questions about it, and things I thought were really effective and that kind of stuff. But after the first page, that's it. But I want you to look at every one of those marks, just that first page, and if there are any of them that you don't understand, I want you to ask me about them."

Hardly anybody ever asks you. If they don't understand it, they don't [ask], so you've got to pitch that to them as persuasively as you can. Then you have to try to make yourself stop at the end of the first page. Most people who are writing teachers, or who are interested actually even in this part of teaching writing, spent a great deal of their student life worrying about the marks on their pages and what they meant, and trying to make them better, so they're deeply invested in that process. Just psychologically, it's awfully difficult for lots of people to stop making marks on the page.

There are a bunch of other things you can do. Professional writing teachers have figured out rubrics and having students read each other's papers with a guided correction templates and other

things that can significantly reduce the amount of work that it takes. A good Writing Across the Curriculum program ought partly be devoted, I think, to trying to persuade the rest of the faculty how important it is that students actually learn this stuff, because it will affect their careers for the rest of their lives, and partly try to help them learn how to do it as relatively easily and effectively as you could figure out.

That's all the thoughts I have about it, really. It takes a sustained, ongoing commitment by the faculty, and whatever the faculty leadership can do to support that. It's probably particularly important at Evergreen because we have this student writing in people's transcripts.

I suppose one thing that I did in the teaching of writing is that I did a conference with every student every year about their self-evaluation. And I marked their self-evaluations up, just like I marked their papers up, and said, "You ought to take this away, and here's my suggestions about how to fix and improve it."

Buxbaum: Do you remember when the Writing Center was first created?

Curtz: No. Not very long after the start of the college, I think. Six or eight years would be my guess, but I don't really remember.

Buxbaum: I wondered, in part, how much of the writing aspect in some camps was just delegated to the Writing Center; that that was the place where students were referred to?

Curtz: I certainly think some faculty tell students, "You really ought to go to the Writing Center because you need more work with your writing than I can provide."

The other thing I'd say about the teaching of writing is that certainly creative writing, and I think maybe writing in general, teaching it is partly a matter of teeny little skills of one kind and another, teachable skills, and part of it is a matter of psychological counseling. People's work as writers is as much a function of their character structures as it is a function of their grammar. It's about their willingness to take risks, and their capacity to inhabit other people's points of view and see what objections some reader might make to something they take for granted—a whole set of things like that, which these days, most English teachers care less about grammar and style than anybody else does. They've got very sophisticated linguistic notions about the relativity of grammatical norms to different cultures, and they don't believe that those things—they do spend a lot of time trying to teach people those things because they happen to be very socially important in the culture that we live in, but they have almost nothing to do with being a good writer in the sense of being able to move an audience, or explain what really matters to you in a way that will help other people see the point. Those things are a

function of your relationship to the material, how brave you are, what kind of risks you're willing to take, and a bunch of other psychological things like some of the ones that I just mentioned. That's a completely different side of this process, but also really important.

There was some autobiographical exercise—a faculty workshop at some retreat or something—that I took part in once about making a poster about yourself as a teacher. My poster was this hand raised in the air like this, along with this quote from Potemkin who says, “What kind of a world do you want to live and work in? Ask yourself what you need to know to build that world [and] demand that your teachers teach you that.” [laughter] And the two sides of that are kind of like myself as a teacher, and my aspirations as a teacher. I was a very good student of the sort where that means I always had my hand in the air because I thought I had the right answer, and I was hoping the teacher would call on me.

One of these things that sticks in your memory about your education, my first year in college, or maybe my second year, I was in this seminar about philosophy in this directed studies program taught by a guy named Richard Bernstein. Bernstein asked some question about the text we were reading, and I told him what I'd figured out about what the argument was. He asked, “Well, what's the argument here?” And I trotted out the argument and Bernstein said, “Well, yeah. Do you think it's true or not?” And I don't think that anybody had ever asked me that, but it certainly was like the moment in some Zen session, where the Zen master comes around and whops you with the bamboo. [laughing] It made me sit up and realize that I hadn't really been thinking about that much.

Buxbaum: Learning how to think. You did a lot of observation of colleagues, I believe, at the college.

Curtz: Yeah, a fair amount.

Buxbaum: That was a Danforth grant?

Curtz: Yeah, I got paid to do it for a quarter, I think. People volunteered. They said, “I'd like to have a Danforth visitor.” I wasn't the only person who did this. I think we had money maybe for doing this over three years, and somebody different did it each year. Anyway, I did it for, I think, a quarter.

Ten people volunteered. I went and interviewed them about what kind of issues in their teaching they were interested in thinking about, and then I did observational work. I went and sat in their classes, looked at the papers they were handing back to students, and did stuff like that depending on what they wanted to talk about, and offered advice. I had conversations about teaching with them. It was fun to do.

Buxbaum: Yeah, it sounds fun, and it sounds valuable. Did anything emerge out of that that was more broadly shared in the college, or things that led to institutionalizing?

Curtz: I don't think so. Part of the deal was that it was supposed to be a private conversation. But also, if I came away with any general conclusions, I don't think I remember what they were.

Buxbaum: Very individualized?

Curtz: Yeah, people wanted to work on very particular things.

Buxbaum: I think at one point maybe there was a presumption that faculty would do this for each other in their programs.

Curtz: Oh, yeah. It was supposed to be part of the faculty evaluation process and programs.

Buxbaum: I assume that that occurred, and then did it change over time?

Curtz: I certainly think visiting each other's classes changed over time. I think the smaller the programs got, the more difficult it was to have an interesting faculty seminar. If you have two people having a conversation is really different than if you have five people. I guess I would hazard—sociologically or statistically—that the percentage of programs that had serious faculty seminars, discussing the content of the material that they were going to be teaching, as opposed to business that had to get done about “When are we going to do what? Who's going to do X?”—the percentage of programs that had functioning faculty seminars in that first sense has gradually decreased over the life of the college. But I don't have any empirical basis for that really.

Buxbaum: Is it correct that something that has changed in terms of program structures is just simply the number of faculty that are assigned to a program?

Curtz: Oh, absolutely. I think that's unquestionably true that there are fewer and fewer big programs, have been fewer and fewer big programs and fewer and fewer long programs. The first-year catalog, there was nothing except programs with six faculty and 120 students and year-long.

Buxbaum: Is that how we would appropriately characterize those early years of Evergreen versus what Evergreen is now? Is that the singular difference?

Curtz: Oh, no. I think there are lots of differences, but that's certainly one, and I think it's probably quite important pedagogically in all sorts of ways. In the program structure like that, it was very easy to take students off to the Grand Canyon for six weeks as part of the program because they weren't signed up to do anything else. If students are taking some Evening and Weekend Studies program, they can't do that anymore.

But 20 other things have changed, too. Students are working. College is a lot more expensive than it was. You look at the tuition in the first-year catalog. I was looking for something so I looked at it between our last conversation and this one. I think tuition for out-of-state students was \$400, something like that. Tuition for in-state students was \$163, if I remember correctly. So a lot more students are working now than they were then. The student body has changed in all sorts of ways. The number of black students that I had in the course of my Evergreen teaching, ending in 19-whatever-it-was—2005—you probably could count them on the fingers of one hand. That was partly a function of the sorts of things I was teaching, but it was partly a function of the composition of the college. You look at the statistics now, we have a third Latino students or something, and 12 or 15 percent black students, so the students are really different people than they were. There are a lot of other things that have changed, too, I think.

Buxbaum: I have my own curiosity. Do you remember the origin of DTF, Disappearing Task Force?

Curtz: I think it was already there when I came. It was one of the things the founding faculty had agreed on, that standing committees were a blight and a waste of time, and produced entrenched bureaucratic positions and ought to be done away with.

Buxbaum: You were on a number of DTFs, of course. One of the ones I wanted to touch on was Native American Studies program. We can find this out, but can you place it in time just off the top of your head?

Curtz: If I had to guess, it was sometime around 1982-85, something like that. The Native American Studies program was under a fair amount of pressure. There were a lot of questions about whether it ought to be continued or not, about whether it was doing a satisfactory job. I don't know exactly how this happened, but my memory is that Russ Fox asked me to write the report for this DTF, or asked me to be on the DTF and asked me to write the report, I think because he thought what I said about the program would lend a certain . . . what? . . . how is it that I want to put this . . . that if I said the program was okay, it would carry a certain amount of weight; people would feel somewhat confident in my having done a respectable job and in my judgment.

But the basic question, I think, was, how much autonomy should the Native American faculty have about running the program the way they wanted to? It was a sort of complicated political or moral process for me. I went off and interviewed a bunch of people. The report I wrote was mostly an attempt to explain and provide reasonable justifications for what they were doing and why they wanted

to do it. I don't know whether it had any political effect in supporting the program or not, but that was what the process was like for me.

I don't remember anything else about the DTF other than that I ended up writing the report. I think I've ended up writing the reports for most of the DTFs that I've been on [laughter] because I've been willing to do it, and people thought I'd probably do a good job. But mostly because I was willing to do it, and I thought I'd do a good job. [laughing]

Buxbaum: In this particular case, and DTFs, I guess generally, they emerged because of some . . .

Curtz: . . . problem that people think needs to be addressed.

Buxbaum: Do you have any recollection of what precipitated that particular DTF?

Curtz: No.

Buxbaum: So it was really just that you were imposed upon to—

Curtz: I got recruited by Russ [laughter] because he thought I was at least one of the people who could do what he thought ought to be done.

Buxbaum: Anything changed as a result?

Curtz: Not that I remember. They didn't close the Native American Studies program, but I have no idea what part the DTF or the report played in that politically. Russ probably knows, but I certainly don't.

Buxbaum: Technology was another thing on my laundry list, and the evolution of technology at the college. A lot has changed. As a matter of fact, monumental changes, from almost a paper world to a digital world over the years spread of your career.

Curtz: Pretty much.

Buxbaum: Can you say something about that in terms of evolution at the college? You came in, and in some ways, you were a bit of a troubleshooter for faculty.

Curtz: Yeah, there was a stretch where when the Internet started to be important and usable, and wasn't easy to use, when you had to understand how to subscribe to a UNIX listserv, and there was this, that and the other thing before the Web came in, really. And then even after the Web came in, there were all sorts of things about—I guess I said [earlier], I thought the college's technical support for faculty was really poor, and I set up and wrote how-to things that I sent out to the faculty about doing this, that or the other thing, and told people, "If there's something else you'd like to know how to do, send me a message and I'll try to help you do it."

I said before there was a stretch when I thought when the college was having admissions problems, one of the things that I did was look at everything on the Admissions Web site, and there were all sorts of things I thought could be improved about that. I did a bunch of work trying to harass people [and] offer people suggestions about those things.

I did this work I told you about, producing some of the stuff that I thought ought to be on the Web site for Admissions, both the Alumni Writers Project that I started, and this thing with Fred Tabbutt about studying science at Evergreen that I sent you. I guess I didn't. That does still exist. If you're interested, I'm getting Amy Greene to bundle it up for me and send it to me, so if you're interested, I can send that to you and you can see what it's like.

Buxbaum: Wonderful.

Curtz: One thing led to another in this process. [chuckles] I looked at the current page on Evergreen's Web site about studying writing as part of—there's no link to this thing, the long set of Web pages, where there's testimonials by students who studied writing at Evergreen and have published about their studies at Evergreen. So, if you're a student cruising the Web and interested in studying writing at Evergreen, there's no way that the page about writing sends you to that. It has a picture on it. The one picture on the page is, I think, Jane Jervis. She looks like a high school teacher in front of the class chewing out some student who's been called up to the front of the room. She's not teaching writing particularly. She's about as far as you could get from the image that you'd like to have students have about working with faculty at Evergreen is like.

It has a list of the writing faculty that's on the side, which looks like the curriculum vitae in tiny print at the back of other catalogs. Their names are not linked to the stuff about those people as persons that's on the Web site, so if you want to look them up, you have to go to find the faculty directory somewhere. Then you go to the faculty directory, and half the people in the faculty directory don't have any photographs in the faculty directory.

There are a gazillion things like that that are, in my view, bad, that ought to be fixed. It does not look as if somebody like me goes over these things for each specialty area and provides feedback to the Admissions people and the Web people about the fundamental tool that the college currently has for attracting students, and when the college was in this admissions crisis before and I did this work about studying—I was working with Irwin Zuckerman then. Zuckerman, I think, actually read the 40 pages I wrote and he said, "Well, you know, this is what a really good organizational consultant would have done for the college for half a million dollars."

There were a gazillion things like that—little, tiny, to me obvious things that could be improved about how they were running the Admissions office. The Admissions people did not like having me produce this report, even though I'd tried to be as polite as I could about things I thought they could do. They were not happy. They were doing the best they could was their view, and people ought to appreciate that and leave them alone. So, it's not easy for the faculty to offer advice to the staff in general.

Buxbaum: Now, very challenging in terms of the institution.

Curtz: And lots of the staff are not interested in having feedback and advice.

Buxbaum: Has it always been like that for this institution?

Curtz: It's always varied depending on who the faculty were and who the staff were, and what area you were talking about, I think. My impression is that the media faculty and the media staff have always worked together pretty compatibly, because they're involved in teaching the same students, I think. The media staff have basically been teaching members of the college because the faculty hadn't wanted to do all the technical stuff about teaching people how to use media. So, I think they've always built having the media staff do a lot of that teaching into the structure of their work.

But it's different when somebody from the English department offers advice to the Web people. I think it's not the same relationship at all.

Buxbaum: Yeah, a critically important interface with the public connection with future students.

Curtz: I think obviously. I think it's the way in which students look at a college these days.

Buxbaum: Right. Over the years, what kind of connections have there been between Admissions and faculty?

Curtz: Very . . . well, minimal, I think. Except that during one of these enrollment crises, the Admissions office recruited faculty to go around to do high school visits around the state. There were two or three years where a bunch of people rode off in vans with the Admissions staff when they were going to some—when parents came, I gave a little talk about teaching and learning at Evergreen to the assembled parents at a couple of those visitors' weeks. I don't whether they do a special thing where they invite everybody who's interested in the college these days or not. But mostly, my sense is the Admissions office is kind of run as its own world.

Buxbaum: At one point, you spent a quarter reviewing the Admissions' recruitment efforts. Was that that same time?

Curtz: Yeah, that was the thing I was talking about where I wrote the 40-page report with all the particular pieces of advice in it.

Buxbaum: Do you happen to remember a date on that?

Curtz: I don't know what year that was, no.

Buxbaum: I think some of us will be interested in looking at the report if it exists. Maybe that's [in the archives]?

Curtz: I suppose it is in the archives somewhere. An awful lot of it was about very particular teeny things. Like I walked around the hallways and at this school we were visiting, and the only indication that Evergreen was going to come and be available for students to talk to us was this one dingy little piece of paper on some bulletin board in the back room. [laughing] We should be doing better about trying to give students advance warning that there's a possibility to talk to us. A gazillion things like that. I don't remember that there was much in the way of generalizable advice in it.

Buxbaum: Should Evergreen be looking for a particular kind of student?

Curtz: I'm interested in the question of why the minority composition of the campus has changed so much, and whether that's a function of a decision about admissions and recruiting, to put a lot more energy into trying to attract those students to the campus. For an awful lot of the life of the college, Admissions has been taking whoever they could get to come. [long pause] I've had a few students that Evergreen didn't work for because it turned out that they really needed grades. They really to have some sense about exactly how well they were doing compared to everybody else—mostly about how they were doing better than everybody else.

I don't think the college works very well for people who have—outside the sciences—a really clear sense about what you want to do. If you want to become, say, a mechanical engineer, like [Molly? 00:34:41], Evergreen isn't a good place to do that. She eventually went back to the U[W] and did a second major in energy stuff; redid a bunch of stuff that she'd done. She graduated from Energy Systems. She got a job doing energy modeling, but then she wanted to become a respectable professional engineer, so she went back to the UW and did a year and a half or two years at the U in order to graduate with an actual engineering degree and take the exam and so on. So, if you knew that you wanted to do that before you started, Evergreen probably isn't a good place for you to do that.

The general things that people say about the college, about how it's good for self-motivated students and it's good for students who have a lot of self-discipline and so on, I take with a grain of salt

myself. I guess it goes back to what I said a while ago about having so much more sense about this particular student and this particular situation and this particular program that I don't have much sense about sociological generalizations about the student body. I just don't think about them that way.

You know, the deans read your portfolio every five years, and Barbara Smith once said—when I'm writing student evaluations, I try to have a first sentence that's a summary of the whole thing, just in case that's all people want to read. Barbara Smith said, "I notice that you say students are smart very frequently in those first sentences."

Certainly, being the sort of student I am, that's one of the things I value, and I think in every college, the smarter the students are, the better, from my point of view. I suppose that depends partly on your political and cultural and moral commitments. There may be other people on the faculty who think, I don't care how smart they are at all. I just want to help get them from where they are to being better educated whoever they are. I don't think that I've tended to play favorites particularly, but smart students are more interesting to work with than students who aren't too smart. Students who are engaged and are taking their education seriously and working hard are better than students who aren't doing those things. So the college should try to find and admit them; try to find people like that and persuade them to come.

I said a while ago that I thought that the students who had done something else for a few years in the first years of the college and then come back to school were often particularly interesting and competent students who got a lot out of their educations here, who were better able to take advantage of the opportunities that Evergreen offered.

Somebody like [Charlie Gustafson? 00:38:23], who arrived knowing that he wanted to make movies and came to Evergreen basically because Evergreen had fabulous media equipment that he would be able to use, and he wouldn't be able to get his hands on anywhere else—wouldn't be able to afford—but he could use Evergreen's 16mm camera and stuff if he could get enough people to sponsor him in individual contracts to make a whole movie. He had a really clear sense of what he wanted to do. He was a really smart and interesting and talented person, and very persuasive, and he managed to—after his first year, I think he just did individual contracts at the college and made that movie. That was his education.

Buxbaum: Is that something that the college should sell, if you will? Is that a pathway?

Curtz: Yeah, I think it's fine for—I don't know that there are very many students who are capable of doing a huge project like that in an ongoing way, but I certainly think that the opportunity to do

advanced individual work of your own is an important thing that the college offers. It's one of the many things that few places offered when the college started, and that almost everybody offers now.

Buxbaum: Individualized study?

Curtz: Yeah, individual contracts. I said in one of our previous sections that one of Evergreen's structural issues, I suppose, is that there are a bunch of things that Evergreen has always done that nobody else was doing when we started out, and now everybody does them—internships, interdisciplinary programs, individual contracts—so that means there are a lot of other places you can go that are advertising basically the same opportunities.

Buxbaum: Do you think now that there are some specific, unique things that Evergreen is that other colleges are not?

Curtz: I think that Evergreen still offers a fair number of team-taught, full-time, interdisciplinary experiences, and I don't think there are many places that do that. There's hardly anybody that does narrative evaluations anymore. Those programs offer opportunities to take the whole program off somewhere for three weeks together that you can't do at a regular college at all because everybody has three other classes they have to be there for.

For the right students, Evergreen offers a possibility for a really intense, sustained study of one particular subject, like the year-long France program in French. It does Haiti and France and French history and culture and literature and French language, and then you can go to France. You can't do that in most places. You can take one or two French classes a year.

You can do wacky, interesting and hopefully good programs at Evergreen—like Weird and Wondrous—that you can't do anywhere else. You can do a lot more interdisciplinary work of more adventurous and interesting kinds at Evergreen than you can at most of the places that advertise interdisciplinary studies. We have much more accumulative experience about how to do it, and we do it a lot more seriously. I guess there are places that have little, bitty learning community experiments, where you can do something in a learning community, but there isn't any place where you can do a lot in a learning community, as far as I know.

Buxbaum: Looking retrospectively at your time at Evergreen and where you're sitting now, do you have recommendations on what the college should invest in and do more of?

Curtz: Well, I don't think the college should invest in distance learning. I do not think that's a wave of the future that is a desirable one. Massive online learning groups, Moogs or whatever they're called

[does he mean MOOCs, massive online open courses? 00:44:06], I don't have . . . well, I think the college should have a Chinese studies program. So much of this depends on the faculty you have and what they're interested in doing. I suppose if the college suddenly had a burst of resources, it could hire three or four people in different disciplines who wanted to teach a Chinese studies specialty area together, but it doesn't have those resources at the moment.

But I'm not like one of the people in 1972 who said, "Self-paced learning is the wave of the future." Or, "Nobody in America does internships. This is an integrated piece of undergraduate education, and that's really a great idea. We're going to do that at this college." Or, "Coordinated studies is what American education needs to reinvigorate and transform itself and become politically relevant." I don't have a great idea like that to offer.

The college ought to try to keep doing better at what it does. It's kind of like doing the dishes. It's not like you can do something and fix it permanently. It's a matter of continual, ongoing repair with the tools falling apart. [laughing] [T. S.?] Eliot says someplace that he spent years trying to figure out the right way to say something—how to make it possible to say something—only to discover that when you get to that, it turns out there's something new that you want to say. It's some process like that. It's not like some [unintelligible 00:46:48] college is going to arrive at some perfect state. And faculty keep retiring, new faculty keep arriving.

This is not a new idea, but I didn't know anything about what was going on at the college the last two years, except what appeared in the faculty e-mail list and what was in the newspapers. There isn't anybody who's currently teaching at the college that I talk to much at all. I talk to [Lester last name and spelling? 00:47:51], but he's not really centrally involved in the college. I thought the way that faculty talked to each other in the course of that was really disheartening. So, whatever the college can do about supporting and building civic, collegial, engaged, significant, sustained working relationships among its members would be good. Everybody, I think, would agree to that. It's doing it that's the hard part.

Just to go back to something I said at the very beginning, my notion about what being an experimental college or an innovative college or a progressive college is, is basically Dewey-ite. The central thing absolutely is this thing, which is kind of modeled on the scientific process. It's a matter of doing things, acting and then playing reflective attention to what you've done, and assessing it and modifying your action going forward on the basis of that. But that's what "experiment" means. The more the college could keep that in mind, and improve its capacities for reflective feedback, the better

off it would be. I think that's also very hard to do, but I think that ought to be the center of what faculty leadership and administration are trying to figure out.

I guess I said at the very beginning that one of the things I thought the college had never done well was learning from its history; that all these program histories and these oral interviews and these DTF reports basically go into the dark, as far as I can see. They're never consulted again. There's no ongoing, progressive, accumulative process that says, "You know, we talked about this five years ago and 10 years ago, and here's the various conclusions that people came to about it, and here's what we've tried since then, and here is where we could begin if we want to try to move forward on the basis of that, instead of starting from scratch, just trying to solve our problems."

Buxbaum: Yeah. I want to try to shift meaningfully from what you're talking about now to the MIT [Masters in Teaching] program. You played a role in starting the MIT program. Can you describe that a little bit?

Curtz: I taught with Don Finkel in this program, Development: The Aim of Education, and before that in this—oh, there's one other interesting things about programs that I'll just stick in here.

Buxbaum: Yes, please.

Curtz: Betty Estes and Don and I and maybe Irwin were scheduled to teach this program called Darwin, Marx and Freud. At that point, the college had what I think was a very useful process called the "trial balloon," where every year they put up all the ideas the faculty had about what they might teach the next year, and collected feedback from students. It covered the walls in the Library lobby, and there was a week or something when students could go look at stuff and make suggestions and ask questions. Hardly anybody said they wanted to take Darwin, Marx and Freud, which was a problem for us. [chuckles]

So we scratched our heads. We looked at the feedback. There were all sorts of people who said, "There's nothing in the curriculum about education." So we scratched our heads and we renamed this program. We called it Teaching in the 20th Century instead—how you would teach if you believed Darwin, how you would teach if you believed Marx, how you'd teach if you believed Freud, how you'd teach if you did Piaget if you believed Piaget.

We taught basically the same texts that we would have taught in Darwin, Marx and Freud, but there was a huge waiting list to get into this program. It was sort of welding this stuff to something that students were personally interested in as a career, and that gave us opportunities. There were a lot of teaching exercises, people designing curriculum. A third of the program did Finkel workshops based on

our reading in Marx, and had the rest of the program take those workshops, and then we did internships. It was a dramatic improvement, I think, in the quality of the program in general.

But the most interesting thing was just that you could reframe the same texts pretty much exactly, in terms of some different idea that was better connected to students' perceived interests, students' actual interests. It surprised us a lot that it made such a huge difference, and I thought it was a very interesting, provocative lesson for thinking about program planning.

To go back to where we were, the MIT program. Don and I had taught these two programs. Don and I had done this summer each one teach one thing where I'd studied Piaget with him. This was different from the Danforth visiting thing. You could pair up with some other faculty member and they'd teach you about some subject that they were interested in—that they knew about and you were interested in—and you'd teach them about something from your disciplinary background.

Buxbaum: Just to clarify that. That exchange—the each one teach one—what happened during the program?

Curtz: No, in the summertime.

Buxbaum: Oh, I see.

Curtz: We got a summer grant funding to do this.

Buxbaum: Okay, I'm glad I clarified that. I think other people understand that.

Curtz: It wasn't about teaching at all, as opposed to the Danforth thing. It was about I wanted to learn more about Piaget, and developmental psychology. Don wanted to learn more about something I knew about, modern poetry or British novels or something, I don't remember what it was.

Buxbaum: And the intended outcome was to further coordinated studies.

Curtz: Yeah, broaden your disciplinary, expand your capacity to teach something else that you were interested in knowing more about.

Buxbaum: Yeah, and perhaps relationship building, too, amongst the faculty.

Curtz: Certainly. Anyway, I'd done a bunch of work with Don. There was this teacher education program on campus, where we had some arrangement with WSU or Western or something, where they taught their teacher education program on campus for a few years.

Then Evergreen started its own program. Don and a couple of visiting faculty from wherever it was that had been doing this teacher education stuff were the faculty for that first two-year cohort.

And then I inherited this program. It was part of what was going on in this applied social theory area that Don and I and a few other people had set up. The MIT program was originally going to be part of that. But then, it was a graduate program.

So I and . . . I guess it must have been Sherry Walton and Yvonne Peterson, I guess it was the next year. So we were the faculty, I'm pretty sure, for the second cohort of that thing. We tried to redo—they were both brand new, and so I kind of . . . I thought the structure of the MIT program was going to be what Don and Helen [last name?] and [Sy? Last name and spelling 00:57:23] had worked out. Obviously, they had other ideas and interests and thoughts about what students needed to learn to be teachers, and how they ought to learn it. So, we did some kind of combination of the things that they brought, and this set of ideas and structures that Don and Sy and Helen had worked out. Then the second-year students did student teaching and some classwork—two student teaching experiences and an academic quarter in the middle. The MIT program, I don't think, has much of any relationship to Don's originally notions about what made sense as an education for people who wanted to be teachers.

Buxbaum: Can you share a little bit about what that was, and what was different about what you, Don and Helen were bringing to the table?

Curtz: Basically it was *Development: The Aim of Education*. It was an integrated view based in developmental psychology that integrated Dewey-ite ideas about progressive education, moral development theory of Piaget, Erikson, [Lawrence] Kohlberg and those people, with a political understanding about American democracy, and what functions progressive politics—progressive social work of all kinds, including education—ought to provide in a functioning democracy. If you've never read this article, this is really great article, the *Development: The Aim of Education* article. It's probably on the Web now, Kohlberg and [Rochelle] Mayer. I'll try to send you a link to it.

Buxbaum: Good. Just in summary, what was the counterpoint? What was really being proposed that was different?

Curtz: There was a lot of stuff that Sherry was interested in that fit perfectly well with this. Basically, she was committed to this kind of framework. Do you know her? I guess she's retired now. She's interested in the cycle linguistics of reading, and there's this whole body of research called cycle linguistic reading theory, which is basically Piagetian. It's founded on what's called "errors analysis." You ask kids to read you a text, and then you look at all of the discrepancies, what are called "miscues." They aren't errors exactly, they are places where the students reads something other than what's on the page. And by studying those, you can get a clear sense of the cognitive frameworks that they're

applying to the task of making sense out of text. There are three ways that human beings do that—phonetics, meaning and syntax. So you can see, by the ways in which they misread the text, you can what cognitive structures they're employing.

This fits with a lot of Piagetian stuff about how learning takes place. And Sherry had a huge amount of experience actually teaching people in classrooms how to teach, and I had not, except a lot of experience teaching college students. So, it was partly a matter of integrating that stuff; it was partly a matter of integrating various things about the stuff that the program was supposed to cover for the state certification requirements—you have to have all sorts of stuff about this, that and the other thing as part of the program—so that all had to be faded in, too. But the basic intellectual—and Yvonne basically had a lot of experience working with Native American students, so she had a different set of ideas about what we needed to do and what we needed to cover, and what white students who were going to teach Native American, or students from other cultures in general, needed to know about.

So I did a lot of work going off and trying to find things that I thought would fit with the set of ideas that were going to be central to the program, and also fit with the things that Yvonne and Sherry wanted to have students working on.

Then, different faculty kept getting hired and they all had their own notions about what ought to happen. There was a long stretch where I thought the program was significantly different in every cohort, and significantly better or worse taught depending on which three faculty ended up getting together and deciding they were going to teach it. I don't know what it's like now at all. I'm pretty sure that there's very little of Don's vision of what it ought to be and what it would make sense to do.

Buxbaum: Yeah. Backtracking a little bit, but I'm interested in the connection between your work on applied social theory and the MIT program. Maybe simply, can you share a little bit about what that was about in terms of [unintelligible 01:03:56]?

Curtz: There was some stretch in which the college had this rethinking of the specialty areas. I suppose we were in an enrollment crisis of some kind or other, one of the many. There were these various things that seemed like ought to be taught, so Don and I and some other people proposed—basically Don and I proposed—this idea about a new specialty areas that might bring a bunch of this together—education programs, mass communications programs, counseling programs of a certain kind.

We advertised it and got enough response for enough faculty to put together this little specialty area. But it only lasted for three or four years, I think. The various people who had said they were

interested in it—Susie Strasser left, I think, to teach somewhere else, and one thing and another happened.

I taught Mass Communications and Social Reality for several years as a result of signing on to help do this stuff. I learned a bunch of stuff about journalism and video production and stuff; ran around and educated myself enough to be a mass communications professor, respectively. [chuckles]

Buxbaum: For me, it sounds like that's one of the great opportunities at Evergreen. If you are a continuing faculty, you're in a good position to be, I don't know if entrepreneurial is the right word, but you can build things, a path of study, and recruit others, and run with stuff for a while, see how it works. And if you're really good, you can improve, reflect and fine-tune and try again.

Curtz: Try again. One of the other things about learning from experience is I proposed—especially when faculty were complaining bitterly about the workload one way and another—I proposed a number of times that the college ought to re-offer programs that have been enormously popular and really well done in the past; that that would be an easy way to improve student retention, reduce faculty workload. But most of the faculty have shown very little interest in doing that.

Buxbaum: I have a couple of transcripts that are coming back to us to read, and I'm imaging, after we've had a chance to review that, if we both think it's a good idea, to reconvene and do another session, and maybe fill in some of the gaps, or maybe there will be other things that will emerge. But at this stage, is there anything else you want to mention or talk about—even if it's a laundry list of things?

Curtz: Not that occurs to me. It was a wonderful place for me to teach, I suppose I said at some point, compared to teaching freshman composition and introduction to Chaucer and advanced Chaucer.

Buxbaum: I think actually if I recall, that reflection, I think you said that if the college had closed, you might not have continued teaching.

Curtz: I'm not sure if I could have got a job if the college closed, but I don't at all know that I would have wanted to go off somewhere. If I could have found another college that was sort of like Evergreen, where I could do this sort of thing, yeah. But I wasn't really prepared. After 15 years at Evergreen, I wasn't prepared to be a professional Chaucerian in and English department anymore.

Buxbaum: I took it in part—and maybe I'm not correct in this—that there were conditions that you found agreeable about teaching, specific conditions. And if you couldn't get those conditions met, it was sort of “Why do it?”

Curtz: I think that's right.

Buxbaum: Is it worth saying something about summarizing what those conditions are that might characterize your particular satisfaction in being at Evergreen?

Curtz: One of the reasons I didn't become a lawyer was that after six months in law school, I thought that I pretty much learned all the ideas that there were to learn in the law, and that being a lawyer was going to consist of looking up references and applying them to the same ideas over and over again, and that seemed pretty dull to me. Whereas I thought if I went off and studied English literature, there would always be new books for me to read. So, Evergreen was nice because there were always interesting new books to hunt down and read, and talk with people about.

I really liked the opportunity to work with particular students for a long time and get to know them, and offer them advice and see what happened to them. I liked team teaching, and I liked seeing other people teach, and working as part of a collaborative group to try to figure out what to do next, and what to do about Jane, and all that kind of stuff. I liked being in the Pacific Northwest. [chuckles] But that wasn't terribly important. I think those are the big three things.

I liked being able to be entrepreneurial, to teach what I thought would be interesting to teach with who I thought it would be interesting to teach with the next time around, and not being inside some structure where people said, "Well, you're the Chaucerian. You can't really teach Dickens, because that's the Victorian literature guy's territory."

Buxbaum: Good.

Curtz: Just to go back to one of the things I said about the two very different sides of teaching reading, about grammar at one end and being able to say something that matters on the other end. This is true about reading, too, I think, and about people's college educations in general. Most people are never going to—after 10 years, eight years—remember any of the things that they read and talked about in college, except in the most general way. They're going to remember something about *The Odyssey*, and have some images from that that they carry with them forever, and some little bits of poems maybe. But the particular content is a means to something else, which is you want people to emerge from a college experience caring about reading, and liking to do it, and having some capacity to think about what they read in certain kinds of ways, and have interesting conversations with other people about it.

So, the measure of a good college is how much it helps people learn how to do that, and I think Evergreen is better than a lot of colleges about helping students learn that kind of thing. Now, I'm sounding like my colleagues in the humanities who say, "The sequencing of things doesn't really matter that much." There's some truth to that, too. Certainly, from one point of view, the only thing that

matters in your education is your relations with a few teachers. That was certainly true about my education. I did a lot of work about Plato, as well as some work about Freud, and I certainly believe that education us an erotic process, in the sense that it's about falling in love with your teachers.

Socrates says someplace that it's not exactly about falling in love with your teachers. That's this thing that's called *Himeros* in Greek, where you're sort of stuck on the teacher, so there's these students of Socrates who, in the dialogues, were kind of walking around wearing sandals like Socrates [laughing] and talking like Socrates. That's not so good. You're supposed to fall in love with the true and the beautiful as it manifests itself through the teacher. That's a good place to stop.

Buxbaum: Good place. We'll let things percolate. Thank you.

End Part 3 of 3 of Thad Curtz on July 3, 2018