Steve Hunter

Interviewed by Barbara Smith

The Evergreen State College oral history project

February 13, 2018

FINAL

Begin Part 1 of 2 of Steven Hunter on February 13, 2018

Smith: This is an interview by Barbara Smith of Steve Hunter. It's February 13, 2018. So, Steve, why don't you start with your beginning? Your childhood, growing up, how you went to college. I think you're one of the few people we're interviewing who was actually a student here as well as . . .

Hunter: Yeah, so I'll just jump to that point, if that's all right.

Smith: That's fine.

Hunter: Unless you want to hear—or someone wants to hear—

Smith: I think we want to hear how you came to Evergreen.

Hunter: Sure. I did not come to Evergreen straight out of high school. I went straight out of high school to Western Washington, and actually ended up at Fairhaven.

Smith: Oh-h-h!

Hunter: And so I did a brief stint—two quarters—up in Bellingham.

Smith: What year was this?

Hunter: That would have been '71, '70 maybe.

Smith: Oh, way back. That was Fairhaven just starting.

Hunter: In fact, bursting at the seams. Their dorms were full of 18-year-old kids, like me, and had 600—that was its . . .

Smith: . . . heyday.

Hunter: Yeah, zenith, I think, or close to it anyway. But it was a going concern. I happened into that inadvertently. It was overflow housing for Western, and then I ended up going to Fairhaven, so I started off in an alternative college, and then left. That was the time that I was relating, before we started this interview, my introduction to the Greek classics, by virtue of a particular faculty member, Henry Miller, whose father was Henry Miller's doctor when he was in the Big Sur area. For some reason, he took me under his wing. He would actually invite me to other lectures he was giving when he was pulling some kind of shenanigan, but he thought I would appreciate.

Anyway, at that time—and one of the motivations for many of the young males to go to college—was that the college deferment was still in place.

Smith: Ah, yes. Vietnam.

Hunter: Yes. I had friends who were a couple of years older who did not go to college and who ended up in Vietnam, and reading some of their letters was enough to convince me this was a must. [laughter]

Smith: A better alternative! Yes!

Hunter: But by the end of my first year, which I did not complete—I went fall and winter quarters and dropped out by spring—that was before the lottery decisions—I was then beginning to think about, so, what are my options?

I ended up getting a high enough draft number that I wasn't in danger of being drafted. So then, there was a little hiatus in higher education for me, until '76. I moved around the country actually, but had come back to Olympia and had decided, well, I've give this Evergreen place a shot. So I enrolled in fall of '76 at Evergreen.

Prior to that, I'd done a variety of things—construction; I worked in the woods for several years; I was a skidder driver around, so worked in Arlington and Whidbey Island and different places in the Northwest, and enjoyed that. But I realized I really ought to start thinking more seriously about not looking back at 50 and trying to make a living in the woods anymore. [laughter] And the timber industry was falling apart at that time, too.

Anyway, I came to Evergreen. I enrolled in the first year of the MPI program, so met Duke Kuehn, Ginny Hill—then Ingersoll—and Chuck Nisbet, and they had a cluster of adjuncts that would come in. But that was Evergreen's first business curriculum. I ended up making a strong connection with both Ginny and Duke. But by '78, the college was having a serious enrollment downturn, as it is facing now again, I'm loath to remember. And Duke got tagged by the then-new President Dan Evans to become his first—well, first, Les Eldridge—I think his title was Director of Community Relations at that time. He was the Legislative Liaison guy. He was, in the best sense of the word, an empire builder. He had the first Director of Development, the first Director of Alumni and the first Director of Institutional Research—that was brand new—and Duke was in that position a quarter time, still teaching.

Smith: I'd forgotten all of this.

Hunter: And then got pulled up further to be Evans' Special Assistant for Enrollment Recovery or something like that. That's significant for me in that because I had developed a relationship with Duke, I got involved in student recruitment then as a student. My senior year, I got a work-study job working with Duke. So, in some ways, I feel like I have been working on enrollment at Evergreen . . .

Smith: . . . your whole career. [laughing]

Hunter: Yes, the whole time. At that time, one of the things we did to try and increase awareness of Evergreen was—do you remember Dave Carnahan, who worked in the Library?

Smith: Yep.

Hunter: He got commissioned to take a troupe of Evergreeners—students and a few faculty—and do a circuit at community colleges during a show. And I remember Tom Foote was coming playing with his band Western music, and we had our students, of course, looking like no other community college students, jumping and dancing all over the place. I can remember thinking, I don't know that this is really the strategy that's going to work for us. So, I was part of that. [laughter]

I graduated in the summer of '79 and actually went off, took the GMATS, and was thinking, well, I guess, what do you do? You go to graduate school. The college had just permanently funded the first full-time Director of Institutional Research position, but was going through budget cuts due to the enrollment decline. And I got a call just a week or two after I had graduated. They said, "Hey, would you come back and be temporary as the Director of Institutional Research?" It was on, of course, Duke's recommendation as well. "I know this student. He'll come back"—and work for less, of course [laughter]—"and we can keep doing the work." That was my first start, so I did a year on 30-day emergency extension hires as the Director of Institutional Research.

Looking back on it now, I realize that one of the things that was great about that work—which I did until 2001, I think, so I did quite a long stint—was nobody here really knew what the Director of Institutional Research should be doing. And since enrollment was the current crisis that was what Institutional Research did. But I kind of got to make up the job, or at least what the duties were, along the way. People just assumed, well, Institutional Research is whatever Hunter's doing, I guess. So it was really a nice way to grow into the job. Of course, it expanded over time to other things, but that's how I got my start.

After that first year, they did conduct a search, and I competed. And because I was a known quantity by then and people had gotten to see me and see the work, I got the job. That lasted for a long while. And gave me lots of different kinds of experiences, because as the Director of Institutional Research—and Barbara, you'll remember this because I worked with you a lot, I worked with all kinds of committees—every DTF that got charged thought they needed the Institutional Research person there.

Smith: They did! [laughter]

Hunter: So, I got lots of exposure around campus, got to know faculty. I know one of your questions was, what was it like to work here at the beginning? One of the things that I remember really fondly

about those early years is that we knew our backs were up against the wall, and everybody was in. It's not to say that there wasn't kvetching going on, or there wasn't a contingent, I think, particularly among the faculty, who said, "Better to go down with the ship than to compromise values." But most everybody—especially everybody that I was associated with—faculty, staff, students—had their shoulder to the wheel, and everybody was helping out. And we continued that work in that spirit for a long time.

That's when I met you, and as you moved up in the organization and then I worked for you, that's another interesting, I suppose—minor detail, really—but I've reported all over the place. I started off reporting to Les Eldridge as he was building the empire that actually grew great roots.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: Okay, if you could help me out with the sequence here. So, Evans leaves. Dick Schwartz was an interim President for a little while, but was that when we bagged Olander?

Smith: Yes.

Hunter: And so Olander elevated me to his staff, so then I reported to the President for a while with that gang.

Smith: Wow. Okay. You were always up on the third floor, though, at that point.

Hunter: Yes, that area was where Les was located, next to the President's office. So, that space stayed the same, but then I was moved as part of the President's staff. So, it had the Legislative Liaison budget, and I think by then, Advancement was growing and split off.

Smith: Yes, and College Relations had been established by then, too.

Hunter: Yes. Cut me off if you want me to stop on this history, but then there was the battle between the President Olander and the Provost at that time, Patrick Hill. Another one of the smartest things I think I did was I saw that storm brewing and I negotiated—by virtue of, I think, the first—maybe it was the first—strategic planning process that, of course, as Director of Institutional Research, I was in. I now look back on those experiences as largely forgettable. [laughter] Nevertheless, they were—

Smith: At the time they were important.

Hunter: Yes. And typically the Provost led that charge.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: So, I thought, this is my chance. If there's going to be a fight—which there was—I don't want to be on this side of it, I want to be on the academic side of the house. So, I met with Patrick and said, "Okay, look. Can you cut me this deal?"

Smith: Ah-h-h.

Hunter: "Take me in. We'll use as the excuse for the reason for that is because I'm going to be an important adjunct to your work leading the strategic planning that it makes sense for me to roll over." So, that's how I got into the academic administration side of things, in which you were already located as a Curriculum Dean . . .

Smith: Right.

Hunter: . . . and then was moved on up to Provost, and so I reported to you as Provost for a while.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: Then, after however long that was, close to whatever—1980 to 2000—well, for 20 years, I guess. Then, as, I think, you moved on, then I had begun—because I'd always worked with admissions, always worked on student recruitment, I was in there doing the enrollment forecasting from the first day I came in. And so I had a hand in that work, and did a lot of work trying to figure out why weren't more students coming? Why weren't they coming? Why weren't they staying? So I did lots of work on retention, which got me, again, acquainted with lots of different folks on campus.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: Then there was an opening for, I guess it was, the Dean of Enrollment Services is the position what it used to be titled. And then VP for Student Affairs, Art Costantino, there was a changeover there in that position and so I got asked to do this, again, on an interim basis.

Smith: They liked to try you out.

Hunter: Yeah! [laughter] And part of it was I was a known quantity and had been mixing it up with folks in that area a lot, so that was not a big deal. They had gone through some rocky times with the person and people in that position prior to that, and had fumbled around a little bit trying to find somebody who would fit in.

I did that for, I think, another year. I never had to compete. I've only had one job interview here, which was for my original permanent appointment as the Director of Institutional Research. They did conduct another search in which I didn't apply, failed it and offered me the job.

Smith: Oh, gee.

Hunter: And so I took it on those conditions. I said, "Well, why not?" [laughter] So that's where I was until August 2017, when I retired.

Smith: Wow.

Hunter: So that's how I got here.

Smith: Right. Couple questions, one about the progression. You seemed to have unique skills that actually fit in many different places in the college, and that was part of the propeller, I guess, that pushed you.

Hunter: Yeah.

Smith: I remember thinking, as the Dean and the Provost, that your amazing institutional research background was the proof of the pudding. What did you see as the overlaps and helpful insights of the way this all played out?

Hunter: For me?

Smith: Yeah, for you and how you worked these different jobs, building on what you'd done before.

Hunter: It sounds like I'm touting myself a little bit, but it is a rare combination of skills, I think, to find in a person who can do the quantitative side of things . . .

Smith: Yes.

Hunter: . . . and then the analytics associated with that, and be able to write a little bit, to converse a little bit, and get along with people. You don't see it very often.

Smith: Usually it's parceled out to specialists, not in one person.

Hunter: Right. And so I think that's one thing that made . . .

Smith: . . . a difference.

Hunter: Yeah, and it was helpful for me because I could, on one hand, I could talk to the numbers side, and did a lot of that. But I could also—as you could attest to, Barbara—I also didn't mind having a good time along the way. [laughter] And so I think that helps. Eventually, I was the Associate VP for Enrollment Management. But I went from 20 years as the Director of Institutional Research with the beginning part of that, the most people I ever supervised was two, and I went into an operation that had 45 employees. Obviously, there were directors in there who were closer to the action that I was, but that was a huge adjustment for me, and the whole personnel side of things I had not been amounted to much for me prior.

Smith: Well, you left a good successor in the Institutional Research Office.

Hunter: Yes, and I hired Laura Coghlan and she continues to do extremely well. That was a good hire, and she is one of those people who can both do the analytical side and also has some social skills. [laughing]

I hired a guy who has just left the college shortly after I did, but for five years, that's the only other time I've run across somebody who I really felt like, in an interview situation, that this guy could do it. He grew up in Olympia, but he applied from Scotland. He was working for a finance outfit in

Scotland. Actually, Laura had tagged him in the applicant pool and said, "Hey, you ought to give this guy some consideration." Anyway, all of that to say that I think the combination of those skills is not common, and I think that's what helped.

And I had great mentors along the way. I had Doug, Duke, and working with you, both as a Curriculum Dean, and I think feeling like the way people worked together at Evergreen. Having not worked in another educational institution, I'm out on a limb making this comparison, but I think we felt like—I felt like we were on fairly equal ground.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: It was clear who had more responsibility and authority and decision-making, but we treated each other as equals. It felt like that.

Smith: Yeah, and a real team.

Hunter: Yeah.

Smith: And it was fun!

Hunter: Yeah, and we did have fun. Of all sorts, which I will not go into great deal on. [laughter] No, it was. It was a good time, and I think we all knew everybody was pushing as hard as they could push to keep the college afloat and move forward. And then we began to see some success, which I think always helps bond you in that effort.

But it was a hell of a ride, and it really was for most of the time. Obviously, there's always ups and downs when things seem tough for one reason or another, but it was a hell of a ride. It was a good time.

Smith: Okay, I'm going to stop a minute.

End Part 1 of 2 of Steven Hunter on February 13, 2018

Begin Part 2 of 2 of Steven Hunter on February 13, 2018

Smith: My history of looking at this, which I recently recorded for a history of faculty development, shows over our joint careers this up-down-up-down-up-down in enrollment. Do you have any lessons or observations as an insider on all that over how the current approaches should be structured, how this should be thought of?

Hunter: So, given where the college is now, which is once again in a very serious enrollment decline. In fact, I'm hearing it will be perilously close to where we were in 1978 . . .

Smith: When I came!

Hunter: . . . when the wheels came off.

Smith: Six hundred under-enrolled.

Hunter: Yeah, and they're all of that now. I think I heard the forecast for next year would be 3,100, which a thousand and some . . .

Smith: A disaster.

Hunter: Yes, it is. That was one of the very difficult things for me, and I knew that I was approaching my time to be put out to pasture. But it certainly eliminated some second thoughts I might have had about it. To see it again, and in some ways, I thought to myself, coming out of a hole like this is a young man's game. You've got to be willing to eat, sleep and pray for this place. I told Wendy at one point, "I don't think I've got it anymore for the kind of effort it's going to take." Which was hard to say, I felt bad, and the allegiance for the place over this many years is obviously substantial. Yeah, easy for me to give advice now, not being here.

But, one, I have never seen the kind of widely shared commitment to doing whatever it takes to pull the college out that I saw when I first started working here. And continued for years, in some ways, because that team that you've talked about that you were very much a big part of stayed together—we worked together for years—and you had that to rely on. You knew that there were people you could count on that when we hit a crunch or a rough spot, you knew who to go to and you knew who the people were that would go the extra mile.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: And how to get a response out of the faculty. I think that that was critical. In fact, the management program that I came to as a student in its first year was an example of full-time faculty rising to the occasion to try and offer something that students were interested in, and that we did not have in the curriculum.

My sense of things is now that that response has to come from the faculty again. It is not removed from the curriculum, and in fact, the curriculum is a very big piece of it. And I do not sense that the willingness is there to commit to do some things for the college that you would otherwise not choose to do as a faculty member. And frankly, I think the place is sunk until those kinds of changes can be made. There have been attempts to build this, to expand the curriculum, through the part-time studies program, which has grown substantially from those early years. I have always felt that the true sign of an institutional commitment is when you see these things being offered by the regular faculty, the faculty who are hired here full time. And I've not seen that.

I have seen Curriculum Deans since you've left. A number of them wrestled with that to no avail, and so I think there needs to be an awakening, and I don't know how this enrollment decline is being played now; whether people have been as candid to say, "This is it, friends. If this doesn't turn

around, we are not too precious to fail. It can happen." Which is a thing that was different, I think, when I look back in history; that because Evergreen drew faculty who had been in experimental colleges and alternatives colleges that had failed, that threat was very real to them. They had seen this before, and seen a college flop, or a special program set within a larger university flop. And so it was real to people that when this happens, you've got to put your shoulder to the wheel, you have to work together, and there have to be changes.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: I don't feel like commitment, that realization, dawns on people. Of course, it hasn't been that long ago that I was here in the trenches, and still hearing from faculty—either frustration by those in administrative positions about what could they do to get people to pull behind this in ways that might make a difference, and from others, a feeling really that we are too big already. That was our mistake. I got quizzed several times "Well, who made this 5,000-student target anyway?" And I say, "Well, you know, it goes back to the deal we cut to get SEM II built."

Smith: It was 10,000 at first. [laughter] That's what Dan told me.

Hunter: And we made that argument back then that was the whole economy of scale. "Just give us a chance to grow and these high-unit costs are going to fall into line with everybody else."

Smith: Right.

Hunter: But now, that's viewed by some as a mistake. So how do you turn that around, where people—I fear for the place right now. And until there's that sense of, really, our backs are up against the wall, friends, and it's time now to make some sacrifices.

Smith: It's hard, too, when your infrastructure is for a much bigger institution.

Hunter: Yes.

Smith: Because it's inevitably cutting situations.

Hunter: Right. This is not going to be for the interviews that you've already done, I'm sure, but, yeah, the college has taken some pretty serious budget cuts just recently, and are about to take some more. That's the way I started out, too. We were cutting budgets every year until things started to turn around. But I've often said that's the first thing I learned as a young administrator was how to cut your budget. [laughter]

Smith: Yeah. It's different, though, in some ways, because the whole state was under water back then.

Hunter: Yes.

Smith: So the bigger picture isn't really completely comparable.

Hunter: Yep. And the successful period of time we had, which lasted for quite a while, was not the case that we were alone in that. The whole system was bloated with students, and we benefited from that. And perhaps got a little fat and sassy about how appealing we were. And I think that that's been lost.

One of the most frustrating things I would hear is that there's thousands of students out there. In fact, if you look nationally, there's hundreds of thousands of students. Surely, you can find enough to fill the seats. What's the problem? I think it will be a bitter pill for the institution to swallow, but it needs to be, I think, understood that some changes are in order. We were hatched out of the notion of the late '60s, and what would a college look like that was really relevant to students of the late '60s and early '70s? What could we do? As Charlie McCann said, "What can we do to make to remove as many of the obstacles to teaching and learning as we can?" It's a different world. It's a different place—different concerns, different expectations that students have. Do we have the courage to reconsider ourselves in that light?

Smith: What are some of the differences that stand out for you?

Hunter: For me, the confidence in economic improvement that higher education now costs.

Smith: A lot.

Hunter: And people—students, too, and families—rightfully ask, "What's going to be the return on my investment? What am I going to get?" And it's not just parents, it's students that get that, too. This is time and money I'm investing. And what are we going to point to?

And I think the college—it sounds disparaging, and I don't mean it that way, because I've busted my tail for this place and I believe in it, and it worked for me as a student, but times have changed. Can we bold enough to acknowledge that, and to think again about, what if we invented—perhaps not in whole cloth again—but what if we actually took that hard look at ourselves? Where could we go with that? Ultimately, maybe the best solution is to get told—and I know you've done some work here where you've uncovered the Council on Postsecondary Education study of us, and I have thought, maybe that's the best thing is some new version of that, which takes the load off of institutional leadership in demanding this change, and instead can take the role of arbiters of change that are recommended and necessary by a sympathetic group of reviewers. But I think that's a more workable solution than finding the gumption. And when you have a relatively new Provost right now, a new President, I think you just don't have the trust that's necessary.

Smith: Or the capital.

Hunter: Yes, exactly. The new Provost has barely had time to build capital, much less begin to spend it.

Smith: That was one of the questions I asked Dan Evans about, the Council on Postsecondary Education study, and whether he'd make that happen, and he said no. He said that there were two camps that wanted to study, and they had completely opposite goals. The critics thought it would give them ammunition to shut the college down, and the supporters thought it would help it improve. So, that's an interesting way to think about it.

Hunter: Yeah.

Smith: But you've got to have the right committee. [laughing]

Hunter: That's right. And it felt to me like that. I remember the study. In fact, I surfaced it for the Board, because so much of what was observed in that 1979 CPE study could read just like the news today about the college.

Smith: Yeah.

Hunter: And it was about relevance, and the ability to tell the story. It's more than tell the story in a compelling way, it's actually to be compelling in terms of what results you can point to. I think that's the other thing that has changed. It isn't enough to say, "Look, we've now knocked ourselves out to create a college that's going to do the right things, it's going to promote teaching and learning like you've never seen before." It sounds like a Trump speech. "It's going to be fantastic!"

Smith: Without the adjectives. [laughing]

Hunter: Yeah. You know, what's the evidence? That's never been a long suit for us. We can marshal up the anecdotes.

Smith: Isn't that the institutional research job?

Hunter: Yes. And one of the problems that we have had, especially when you get large databases that allow you to make comparisons about, so, how are our graduates fairing out there in the world? It's not very impressive.

Smith: Huh.

Hunter: To continue in my line of heresy, one of the questions I frequently would get from whether it would be prospective students or parents or other educators from outside was "Is everything I hear about Evergreen true?" And my answer is, "Probably." [laughter]

Smith: "What do you hear?" is another way to answer that.

Hunter: But it is the good and the bad. And for every stellar example—of which there are many and we have cited over and over again—there's a competing example that is not, and so there is an unevenness. The argument can be made "Well, hell, there's D students everywhere, so we've got some here."

Smith: I think that's true, there are everywhere.

Hunter: I think that that's true, too. But if you're in the struggle to prove yourself even yet, after 50 years, there's a message in that for us.

Smith: And the other places aren't being asked to produce that either.

Hunter: No, and it's the cost of being different.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: And bringing different students as well.

Smith: And the metrics are often very conventional.

Hunter: Yes.

Smith: And there aren't better ones out there that we've invented yet.

Hunter: No—and this should probably be struck from the record—but I think the other thing we have never faced up to is the narrative evaluation is the pound of flesh we have offered up in the place of giving letter grades, and I believe that eliminating letter grades from the system transforms the teaching and learning experience. I believe that is true. I also believe that if you read, in any large number, the narrative evaluation has a face that only a mother could love. It is not deathless prose, it is mind-numbingly boring, by and large.

Smith: And long.

Hunter: Yes.

Smith: We've worked on that a lot.

Hunter: We have worked.

Smith: It's better but it's still long.

Hunter: Yes, but when something that I think both contributes to in a very powerful way to teaching and learning, and yet the artifact does not do it justice. And I don't know what the solution is.

Smith: It's sort of about the process is what's valuable.

Hunter: Yes. And I do believe that that does help a student—or as, I think, Beryl Crowe, who I attribute this to, one of our founding faculty members, and a rascal—was that students made the conversion from being a registrant to being a student; that it was about them; they weren't just taking up a seat in the classroom and putting in the time.

Smith: Yeah.

Hunter: All of a sudden, it mattered to them. And when that happens, that is a transformative experience that happens at the college, and we should be—I am—extraordinarily proud of. And I believe that's what faculty are proud of, too, is that they see that happening.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: How do you make that case in an effective way? And when there are some serious doubts about that? I believe it is true, but I believe that the evidence is not in, the artifact, the remains.

Smith: Yeah. I don't know if you'll ever actually, or if it's even possible, to give evidence to the doubters. One of the ways that it would change, I think, would be if we became selective.

Hunter: Yes.

Smith: Because selectivity leads to higher retention, makes you more famous, makes you look more classy, all of that.

Hunter: Yeah, it helps the reputation when there are students out there who are saying, "I got denied by Evergreen." Who'd a thunk it? We went through a period like that in the late '80s and early '90s.

Smith: We had high retention then, too.

Hunter: We did the traditional solution, we just moved the GPA threshold up.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: And you're right, it made a difference. That plays into another image that people hold of who we are and who we are serving.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: Again, that will be another hurdle, should the college ever find itself in a position to make those kinds of decisions. Again, I'm not sure this belongs in the interview text, but the little bit I've heard—and it's been about six months now that I've been away, and I've made a conscious effort not to be seen, one, just because I've been here for a long time so I don't want to be haunting my successor, but I nevertheless do get some reports coming back. We've dropped our application fee. There's no application fee.

Smith: I hadn't heard that.

Hunter: We've doubled the size of the tuition waiver for non-residents students, which I'm sure will help attract more.

Smith: Yeah.

Hunter: But I was always leery of that because of the financial implications. If 25 percent of our enrollment produces 50 percent of the tuition revenue, you cannot keep bleeding that horse or the budget won't pencil.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: But all of those things are signs of desperation, in my mind.

Smith: They're signs of buying students, too. I worked in the newly-named Reservation-Based Program on enrollment for six months, and tracked everything from the time of a first letter. It was amazing to

me how much work it is to get a student actually to the registered status. There's all these places they disappear, and the $50 fee is one of them. [laughing] Yeah, it's difficult.

Hunter: So, there are paradoxes about the place that are true, that exist.

Smith: Yes. You talked a little bit about paradoxes and disappointments—and successes.

Hunter: Yes.

Smith: How has your educational philosophy changed? What are you proud of about what the college does?

Hunter: I am proud of the fact that I think is successful in engaging students with their education, and in developing a sense of ownership in it that isn't found many other places.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: And they are proud of the work that they have done, and own it. I think that's an incredible transition at the undergraduate level for students actually to have decided that they now have a passion in education.

Smith: Yeah.

Hunter: So when it works—and it works for a lot of students—I think that's incredible. And that's what was intended at the beginning was "This should be your education and it should be meaningful to you. That means you will have a bigger in deciding what it is, and means that bad choices will be made on occasion. That's all you learn from, those mistakes, too."

I've personally felt, both as a student and in the time that I have been here, that this is a culture that allows outliers. It doesn't require that everyone be an outlier, but it will tolerate it. We tolerate that among faculty, staff and students. And to roll that up into that same ball in which the objective is for those students to become passionate about if they discover something here that they are passionate about and will continue to study. And we have a big tent. It's okay. That's extraordinary, I believe.

Smith: Yeah. I know a few of the outliers from the first class because I lived on Port Townsend. [laughter] They're amazing people, and I think they wouldn't seem successful by a traditional job or dollars earned, but they're incredibly creative, happy, productive. That's got to count, too, I think. I don't know how you count that.

Hunter: I don't either. I value it myself, and I value it when I see it in others, but making a compelling case for spending $100,000 on yourself or your kid I think is an issue. As a student here, I was independent, but I graduated from college and I owed $3,000. It was a joke.

Smith: I owed nothing. The price issues, cost issues, are huge now.

Hunter: Yeah, it is huge. And I think that's why I can't find any fault in people's concerns about that, from students to parents.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: Now it's a big chunk of change. What are we going to get out of this? So I think we have to learn how to talk about that more clearly with folks.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: And we do have successes.

Smith: The community college system was partly set up to provide an answer to that cost issue. And then there's a very, very few schools that have bit the bullet and done that—like Heritage University—to stay affordable, given their audience. But it's hard, I think.

Hunter: Yes. So, what's the college facing? I think it's facing a need to tell a clearer story about what it is doing for students, and in a way that is compelling.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: And that the documentation for it is credible. You just can't do it nearly as much with nearly as many students by just saying, "Trust us, it will happen."

Smith: No. [laughing] The society isn't into trust a lot right now as a whole. [laughter] Do you want to talk a little bit about memorable people or experiences that stand out?

Hunter: Oh, well, from the . . .

Smith: . . . the rascals and all of them?

Hunter: . . . sublime to the ridiculous? [laughter]

Smith: Are you at the dinosaur table often?

Hunter: Yeah, enough that I got counted in as a dinosaur.

Smith: You look a little more like one now than you did when you first came.

Hunter: Yes. That was part of what was great being here as a recent—a little bit older, but a recent graduate of the college, and then being accepted by faculty. And because in those days I liked to hunt and fish, then I got to know them in different arenas. Rudy Martin and I became good friends in large part because we'd sneak off to go duck hunting quite a bit and fish.

Smith: That was me and Pete Sinclair, the same way. He could be really a rascal here, but we went skiing together, so that worked out okay. [laughing]

Hunter: I think that mixing it up between faculty and staff, I'm sure that's still going on, but it's not . . .

Smith: I don't think it is as much. We've paid the price for scale partly.

Hunter: Yes.

Smith: And massive turnover in faculty and staff, so the longevity thing isn't there either.

Hunter: Yeah, I think that that's true, and I think that it may be impossible for those who didn't feel like they had at least a toe in the water at the beginning of the college and that history. It's not the same experience, and it's not a place then that you would—I mean, what I think about dedication, I don't recommend this and it did not happen to me yet—but I've seen it ruin marriages. Commitment to the college ruined marriages, ruined people's health, ruined their psyches.

Smith: Yes.

Hunter: It has driven people crazy or mad. And at the same time, there's something about that level of dedication that I felt here, and saw in others, that bonded you together. But it comes at a cost. And I don't know how it can be recreated, except through an extraordinary crisis perhaps.

Smith: I think the founding experience is once in a lifetime, and those early years—probably really up until almost 1990—they had it. I didn't have it because I came in '78, but I got it. [laughing]

Hunter: Right, as did I. It was palpable.

Smith: It was.

Hunter: And you could join.

Smith: Yes.

Hunter: That was, I guess, the other piece about it. I think I have heard you say this, and I have heard others say it, that for many newly-founded colleges, they do not survive—or do not survive well—that passage of the founding faculty core. And we're clearly in that phase now, and so what carries it on?

Smith: Yes. There's a difference between inventing something and owning it, and having it handed to you.

Hunter: Yes.

Smith: So the practices become more . . . I don't know what the right word is, but they're not owned, and visceral in the same way.

Hunter: Yeah. And I think then there's this notion that you can't commit heresy around some of those things; that these are sacred. And yet, there was heresy regularly committed. That college was hatched out of heresy—right?—for traditional higher education, and then it continued within. Maybe that's another part of being able to accommodate outliers.

Smith: I thought the founding faculty were very genuinely respectful of difference.

Hunter: Yes, and could tolerate the disagreements between themselves.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: So how do you keep an organization that is that accommodating to differences—strong differences—of opinion about what's the right move to make?

Smith: And where's the boundaries?

Hunter: And then how do you move ahead?

Smith: Yeah.

Hunter: I don't know. I think, again, the CPE study is an example of how some external intervention can help push some change that would have otherwise taken a lot longer, if we had the time.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: Maybe that's the thing to be hopeful about. I can't imagine that the Legislature isn't going to take a look at this eventually. They're still funding as if we had 4,200 students there. That can't go on. Somebody's going to take a look at it and say, "Friends, you owe us some money."

Smith: So they don't make people pay back anymore?

Hunter: They haven't. That's another thing that shouldn't go public, whoever is recording this.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: But I wonder, how long can that go on? And especially as enrollment continues to slide, how can lawmakers—representatives for the public—make that kind of financial commitment to the place?

Smith: Right.

Hunter: We are not that precious. [laughing]

Smith: No. That's one way the State stays ostensibly neutral, but deals with ups and downs in the economy and all of those things.

Hunter: And the other challenge the college is facing, you mentioned the community colleges, the proliferation of bachelor's degrees opportunities. For years I had lobbied "Would you just get me a management program that we can point to? People will come that are not coming now. I know it will fill." It was good for 250 FTE for about 20 years.

Smith: So was Health and Human Behavior.

Hunter: Yes.

Smith: Those were the two most popular programs.

Hunter: But now I think the community colleges have acted. They've stolen our thunder on that, and I don't know that if we started up a management program—why would they come here and pay more money in tuition when they can get it at the community colleges?

Smith: Right.

Hunter: And we're not standing up against the competition in the UW in Tacoma. They are eating our lunch, along with the CCs.

Smith: Yeah. That was another thing Dan said. He thought it was a big mistake to have community colleges doing four-year degrees, and it was based on an argument of you should do what you're really good at and built for. That came out of learning about Louisiana doing the same thing, and they ended up having dozens and dozens of colleges, more than they needed. [laughing]

Hunter: I guess I have not thought that shrinking considerably is a possible future, unless we became a branch campus of the UW. I think that that could happen. But I've drawn a line. I would not tolerate just for sake of my own history at the place becoming a branch campus of the Tacoma branch campus. That would be . . . [laughter] . . . don't do that to us.

Smith: You've seen a huge trajectory of change, up and down and lots of strengths and lots of challenges at the same time.

Hunter: Yeah, and some great time along the way, but . . .

Smith: How about some ending statement about your Evergreen career in retrospect?

Hunter: I think I've said, "It was a hell of a ride" several times now. In retrospect, I think how fortunate I have been. Towards the end of my working career here, I would get both staff and sometimes students who somebody would say, "Well, you need to go talk to Hunter. How did he get that" . . . [whatever the hell it is? 00:36:50]. And I would just confess freely, immediately. "I'm happy to talk to you about how I got here [unintelligible 00:37:02], but I will have to tell you upfront, I had no plan. Ever. I came here out of a last gasp, thinking I do not want to turn 50 driving skidder in the woods."

And I hit it off with the place. I was actually seduced by the place. I didn't come here really with a strong feeling about this becoming a transformative educational experience. I figured, I've got to get with the program here in terms of getting a bachelor's degree and probably going to graduate school. I've got to do this. And I fell in love with the place.

Smith: And you had some amazing mentors.

Hunter: I did.

Smith: I think you're beginning story is amazing about the influence of that program and Duke and Ginny.

Hunter: Yeah, and I actually worked with them a second year, too. The final year I was here, they were in another program called Big Decisions. We did a study for Boeing on hiring. They wanted to know why they weren't bagging as many engineers as they thought they should be.

And it was with them that I discovered—and I don't know why—I understood statistics. And that's just a gift. Often, looking back, well, at that age, that was like a physical skill or something I had. It was just a gift. I don't know why. And I had never really thought of myself as a big math person. I was okay.

Smith: Did you learn that all here?

Hunter: Yeah.

Smith: In that program?

Hunter: Well, I read the manuals. And I can remember sitting down—it was for this Boeing project, so I was doing the number crunching, using the SPSS program back when it was run out of the mainframe and you had to punch cards. I actually learned those statistical procedures by reading the SPSS manual. It was a great manual. I actually went through the stats.

Smith: I read it, too, but I didn't get it as well as you did. [laughing]

Hunter: I can remember sitting down with Ginny because I was asking questions, trying to get this program. It was a discriminant function program analysis, quantitative. I couldn't get it to run right. We had the manual and she said, "Look, you can read this stuff. Just take it home and read it and you'll get it." That's after having ping-ponged around. I got to Matt Smith once to say, "Hey, somebody told me you're an SPSS dude here. What the hell am I doing wrong here?" He couldn't help. But I finally just took her at her word and said, "All right, that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to read this thing." And I would have occasional conversations, some of which with David Paulsen, because David could—

Smith: David was good at reading it. [laughing]

Hunter: Yeah. I certainly appreciated him for that. He may have appreciated me, too, for it. Yeah, there was something about it. Now, the joke I tell about this particular piece is the gift I got was I can read statistics texts. At the time, I would have traded that gift for being about three inches taller and running a little faster. I would have played football. [laughter] This is the gift I got? [laughing]

Smith: Well, you had more than that. You could explain the statistical stuff in plain English that really helped readers that weren't well versed in numbers.

Hunter: Yeah, and I taught a little bit of stats, and I enjoyed taking that challenge on in terms of helping the poor souls who quaking over having to take a stats class and how terrifying [it was]. And it is uniformly terrifying, I think, except for the occasional geek that gets it and thinks, yeah, that's pretty cool stuff. [laughter]

Smith: A lot of those geeks can't talk to other people though.

Hunter: I know, I know, I know.

Smith: That's what my son is like. He's like you in that respect. He's got these other skills, but he's also a computer scientist.

Hunter: I think that is a great combination because you don't get the two of them together that often. And that's just luck. [laughing] Perhaps it's because of the time I spent with *The Odyssey*, and Henry Miller.

Smith: Or your parents. [laughter]

Hunter: Yes! Yes, being born while they were in seminary school. Maybe that had something to do with it.

Smith: I don't think *The Odyssey* had anything to do with this. [laughter]

Hunter: Okay. What else?

Smith: It's been a great ride, and I sure have appreciated your work here. You've been a very important person in my life here.

Hunter: Like I said, it worked out really well. That's right, that's how I got started on this is, how do I counsel people on their career paths? Well, personally, I just jumped in the river and sort of got washed up here. [laughter] And stayed.

Smith: And you probably ran into a salmon, and that's how you became a fisherman, too. [laughter]

Hunter: But, yeah, I count myself very lucky to have known you and all the many others.

Smith: Lots of wonderful people here.

Hunter: We were talking about this as we walked up here to the room. For me especially, Marilyn Frasca. To think of yourself as a numbers guy, and then Marilyn, who's an artist, and far away from the numbers stuff, I really hit it off with her, and I appreciated what she could teach me.

Smith: Yeah, that was a privilege as a dean to get to know this unbelievable array of creative people.

Hunter: Speaking of Marilyn, do you remember there was a period where the State lavished a potful of money on the assessment work? There was a big deal around assessment. There was an inter-institutional committee.

Smith: Yeah, in the beginning.

Hunter: And they did this crazy thing. They had a lump sum and they just divided it by six. So the University of Washington got 400,000 bucks a year and Evergreen got 400,000.

Smith: Yes. [laughing]

Hunter: I can remember going to Patrick and saying, "Well, yeah, give it to me. Let me administer it. I'll administer it." [laughing]

Smith: And he said yes?

Hunter: He said yes in part because I can remember John Aiken, who was in the deanery at that time, saying he wouldn't touch it with a 10-foot pole. There's going to be some kind of accountability we'll have to justify. I, unknowing, innocently enough, figured, what the hell? We'll do it.

And the stuff that we commissioned, in part as a result of influences like Marilyn, I was taking videos of people talking about teaching to show what Evergreen's assessment work was about. Which, in some ways, was perfect because I thought our role was to stake out a position here that's in pretty deep left field, but is arguing that it's not all about strictly quantitative stuff.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: And we were doing some of that. Kirk Thompson became a convert to—what was Bill Moore's rating scale thing that he did when he came here?

Smith: Oh, the Perry scheme.

Hunter: It's not Perry, it comes out of that, but Kirk latched onto that, so he became—

Smith: That's real numbers. [laughing]

Hunter: Yeah, and it's another one of Kirk's reincarnations.

Smith: Yeah, this guy kept reinventing himself.

Hunter: Yeah, right. I think, as a psychology person, wasn't he, when he came?

Smith: Yes.

Hunter: And then became a photographer.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: And then—and then—in this brief stint, he became a research analyst.

Smith: Wonder what he is now down at Berkeley?

Hunter: I have no idea, but that's the last that I heard.

Smith: Did all those assessments studies go into the archives? I hope they did.

Hunter: I hope they did, too. I'm not certain of that.

Smith: I'll have to ask. I can find out. I can look at the accession list, too.

Hunter: Yeah, because there's a video that has both Marilyn and Rudy on it talking about teaching.

Smith: But another opportunity. Right? And who else, what other institution could have done that? But before Legislative committees and sometimes big rooms full of people. The UW would be doing its quantitative analysis, and then Evergreen would get up and I'd show them a video. "And here's what we're doing to think about teaching and learning. We're going to have people talk about it."

Smith: Yeah, sounds good to me.

Hunter: Yeah. That was another fun period. And plus, I could provide quite a fantabulous treats at the meeting of the assessment study group with 400K. I mean, we were having some nice food.

Smith: Yeah, they didn't have like federal limits at NSF on fine food. [laughing]

Hunter: Probably I'm incriminating myself now. Somebody will ask me how we spent that money.

Smith: It's a little late.

Hunter: Yeah! [laughter] Anyway, those things were fun. I remember trips we would take with you, with the Dean's and the Provost's staff down to the ocean.

Smith: Paddleboats.

Hunter: Yeah, bumper boats or whatever the heck they were. But it was a good team.

Smith: Yeah, it was.

Hunter: And that's what made it fun. It was hard work, and people were dedicated, and it was a hell of a good time.

Smith: Yeah. That's what I missed when I retired was the people. The work's stimulating, too, but the people, you really miss.

Hunter: Yeah. And I think there was a special camaraderie for that bunch of us.

Smith: Right.

Hunter: So, it was a privilege. It really was.

Smith: It was a privilege, and we were lucky to have you.

Hunter: Well, I was lucky to have all of you. I was lucky to find a place to . . .

Smith: . . . spend your life.

Hunter: Yeah. And to have just kind of waltzed into it.

Smith: Yeah. Well, you made the most of it, too. It wasn't like it was all an accident. [laughter]

Hunter: I enjoyed doing the work, that's true. I enjoyed that. But in terms of planning, I'm not the right guy. To think that at one point I was Institutional Research and Planning. They finally took the planning out. I think it was a good move. [laughing]

Smith: Okay, end of interview. Thank you, Steve.

End Part 2 of 2 of Steven Hunter on February 13, 2018