

**Oscar Soule**  
**Interviewed by Shangrila Joshi**  
**The Evergreen State College oral history project**  
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**Final**

**Joshi:** Thank you for agreeing to do this, meeting me to tell your story about how you came to Evergreen, what all you did while you were here, and anything you might have to impart for people who might be reading about your story. First of all, what brought you to Evergreen?

**Soule:** That's a very good question. What brought me to Evergreen was a chance meeting with Don Humphrey, who was one of the three original academic deans of the college. The chance meeting took place in November 1970 in the thorn scrub forest of the Mexican state of Durango in the valley of the Rio Mezquital.

This was on an expedition that was going to walk 500 miles, from the town of Mezquital to the Pacific Ocean. It was a collection of men, mostly a group of friends from Corvallis and Eugene, who took regular trips to the Mexican state of Quintana Roo to look at or look for Mayan unexplored ruins. They had a history of doing this. One of these men, the vice president of Georgia-Pacific in Portland named Bob Lee, came up with an idea—I believe it was his idea—to go to the valley of the Rio Mezquital to determine if it was a barrier to plants and animals moving north and south on the west-facing slope of the Sierra Madres. Parts of the Barranca del Rio Mezquital are larger than portions of the Grand Canyon in Arizona.

This was a major physical barrier, so that was the question. And to make this more like a *National Geographic*-type trip, they decided for the first time to invite some scientists along—an ornithologist, a herpetologist, a mammologist, and I was invited as the botanist. On this trip, we would be sitting around the campfire at night, and the scientists would be preparing their fieldnotes, pressing their plants, or stuffing, whether mammals or birds, while the inner circle around the fire were these men who were just talking, because sometimes they hadn't seen each other for a while.

One of the people was Don Humphrey. Don had left this group in Oregon and had come up to Evergreen, or to Olympia, to help design the college. He would sit there at night talking to them about this new school, and they were very interested because their friend had left to do this kind of crazy thing, in *their* minds. They would say, "How are you going to grade people there?" and Don would say, "Non-traditionally. There won't be letter or numeric grades. There will be written evaluations." They

would say, "That will never work. That's nuts." He said, "No, we think this will work." They would say, "Well, you are a professor. What's the faculty rank situation? How will you determine that?" Don would say, "There isn't going to be any faculty rank. Everybody will have the same rank." They said, "That will destroy any incentive for advancement on the part of the faculty." He said, "No," and he'd explain the philosophy of the college as it stood at that time.

Then they would say things like, "How many classes will people take? What would the classes look like?" He'd say, "Well, they will be different. The students will only take one class for the whole year." They'd say, "That's insane! Nobody will want to do that. There isn't enough information in a discipline to just take one class for the whole year. That's absolutely foolish. This place will never work." Then he would explain what they meant by coordinated studies.

I had one ear open to this while I'm doing my work. At that point in time, I had a post-doctoral fellowship at the Missouri Botanical Garden, and it was about over, and I was looking for a job. What I had been trained to do was go to work at an academic research institution—a university—where I would do research and be dependent on grants, and have to create publications to keep my job or improve my job status. That didn't play to my strength. I had been a poor undergraduate student and found myself in graduate school, and realized that, one, I love to teach. I hadn't taught very much before, but I thought I would love to teach, and I wanted to work with students who had underachieved, as I had underachieved in high school and college.

I remember one of the points that Don made was that it would be an expectation that the faculty would work with their students closely because they would know them so well, since they were only taking one class at a time, and at that time, for a year. You had the expectation of advising your students on what to do next. What should they take next year, and maybe what would their curriculum look like for the rest of the time they had at Evergreen? This seemed like a dream situation for me.

There was a chance situation that occurred a few days into the trip. We were walking down the canyon. It was thorn scrub, so there were lots of small trees and shrubs. The trees were maybe 15 feet high, 20 feet at the most. Lots of shrubs three, four feet high. Lots of thorns on them. We all had machetes and we were just hacking our way through this stuff, and at night, the horses and burros that were carrying our sleeping gear and our food—we had essentially just a backpack with water and whatever items we needed during the day—would come down from the edge of the rim of the canyon to where we were camping. We were in walkie-talkie radio contact with the vaqueros, who had the animals and our supplies, so they would meet us on the bottom of the canyon. We would camp and

have a campfire, where I was hearing about Evergreen. Next day we would start walking further, and the animals would go up the side of the canyon along the rim.

We were estimating that it would take about five or six weeks to cover the 500 miles. This was in early November 1970. Within about five days, we were three weeks behind where we were supposed to be. It became clear that we would never make our goal. The leader of the group decided that we needed to turn back. The way it was structured, it was almost like a paramilitary organization. There was somebody with a radio at the front, somebody with a radio at the back of our group in the canyon. We would stay in touch with each other, and that way, nobody would get lost, or we'd know if somebody wandered off. There was a point and a sweep and all that kind of stuff.

We met one night and the leader said, "We're going back," because he was in charge. As I say, it was this quasi-military structure, so he was the boss. Most of us didn't want to go back, and he said that didn't matter. But I, for instance, and some of the other scientists had gotten grants to pay for our travel there. In theory, I would have to give the money back if I didn't do what I said I was going to do. Others had similar reasons for staying, and some just wanted the adventure of doing it.

We had this discussion and some people said they were going to go back, as the leader said, and others said they wanted to go on. This area was very much unexplored. We had a map, but the map didn't show anything in the area where we were. It was just blank, because no non-Native people had been through there to map it. There were Native Mexicans and Native Indians living there, and there were some small ranches, but they were parts that were completely Indigenous with little tie to the outside world.

Some of us said we were going to go on, but we didn't know how we were going to do that. Bob Lee—he must not have been the actual person organizing this, because he led; we called it a mutiny—led the mutineers. The discussion was "The only way we could continue would be by horseback." We did have access to some horses because we had been using the pack animals to bring our gear down each night. The vaqueros went around to some ranches and borrowed, or rented, animals for us to ride. I ended up riding a burro, named Loco. Others had horses, some had burros. We didn't all have saddles. We hadn't brought with us the things you normally would use, so I ended up riding on a wooden pack saddle with blankets. I still have the saddle in the other room.

There was another problem. I, for example, had never really ridden a horse in my life, let alone a burro, so what were we going to do? Bob Lee was an expert horseman, so he came up with the following plan. We would ride for five minutes, 10 at the most, and then we would walk for an hour,

leading our animals. We decided no longer to go through the canyon itself, but go along the edge, or cut across—more or less make a straight line—and intersect the canyon periodically. We gave up on the original plan of this very detailed census of what we were going to find, but instead we were just going to make the trip and that would be it.

We would ride for five or 10 minutes, walk for an hour, ride five or 10 minutes, all day long. Then slowly, we would ride for longer, 10 to 15 minutes. Eventually we got to the point where we were in the saddle all day long. We were just riding our burro or our horse. We slowly made it across this area, and finally we got about two-thirds of the way through when the most exciting part occurred. We were camped on the banks of the Rio Mezquital and the vaqueros told us that they wanted more money.

Now several of us were armed. I always carried a gun because I was shooting lizards and things like that for the collection of animals that we saw, and we had somebody collecting birds who had a shotgun. All of the vaqueros were armed because they were just always armed. We were camped on the Rio Mezquital. They were on one side, we were on the other. The river was maybe 100 feet wide. It was substantial, but not huge. We were at this stalemate. What should we do? Should we give them what they demanded? We had an agreement. Some wanted to, some didn't, some didn't want to pay on principle, some didn't want to because we were afraid then they'd want more and more money. Some were worried because we were in the middle of nowhere. Nobody knew where we were exactly. They could have just killed us all and taken our money and gone home, and nobody would have ever known anything about it.

Don Humphrey played an important role in that negotiation, but it eventually took two or three days. The part that sticks in my mind is one of the vaqueros—and I had only seen this in cowboy movies—threw a tin can up in the air and shot it with his handgun, and kept the can in the air by shooting it. The bullets kept it popping. They did that to intimidate us, and it was very effective, I can tell you.

Eventually we ended up paying them a little more and they lead us out. The part that I remember being meaningful was we ended up close to the coast, not right at the coast. There was this little town—a village at most—and we walked into the bar, and the man behind the counter said, "From where do you come?" We said, "Mezquital." He said, "Impossible." That made us feel pretty darn good.

That was essentially the end of the trip, so I said to Don Humphrey, “Don, I’ve been listening to you talk about this Evergreen place. I would really like to apply to teach there because it seems to match all my dreams of what a school would be.” He was very nice, somewhat non-committal. He said something to the effect, “Well it’s a free world, so if you want to apply, you can.”

The trip was over. I came home. It was now December. I applied to Evergreen immediately. I got married in January, I got invited out for an interview in February, I got hired in March. We came out here in June to look for a place to live, and we drove out here in early September to start teaching. That chance meeting was critical.

Another part that’s important in terms of my personal engagement with the college is that, A, I had never taught before other than teaching a class as a graduate student and one as a post-doc, but just filling in. I had never had a teaching appointment. And B, I was a newlywed, so I was adjusting to a new way of life.

The reason I say these are important is the new people who came to Evergreen, in most cases, were leaving or fleeing an academic situation that they felt was broken, was ineffective, wasn’t doing what it should do, and Evergreen was a hope for them of a better way of life in terms of teaching. I, on the other hand, had no experience, so whatever happened I thought was the way it happens, so my adjustment was much simpler, in a way much more easy, because it was just a job. Not “just” a job, it was a dream job, but I didn’t have anything against which I could compare it, so I just did it.

And we [Barbara Soule and I] were newlyweds, so we were adjusting to that as well, and a significant part of that adjustment was the fact that we were working very long hours. I know today our faculty complain about how much work they do. But I remember the early time studies. There were people working 90-hour weeks. They were somewhat nuts, but you easily worked a 60-to 70-hour week without even thinking about it. People were loving it.

One of the things that happened was several marriages collapsed in the early years. My wife and I talked about that because we were newlyweds and we were seeing people who we liked getting separated or divorced. We were trying to figure out why that was. My assessment was there were couples at other schools who were not happy with their teaching and their family life is what held them together. Then when they came to Evergreen and their teaching became their dream—they got to teach the way they wanted to—then their family life became less important to them, and because of the very long weeks, they took it out on their family life, and that created untenable situations. For me, we just got used to it, and that’s how it was.

I mentioned chance, and chance played key roles for me in terms of where I went to college, how I got into graduate school, how I did in graduate school. I can leave those out because they're somewhat secondary. The last piece was my meeting Don Humphrey in the middle of the thorn scrub of the Rio Mezquital. I can say that my first publication at Evergreen was we wrote up the biology of that trip, or the ecology of that trip. That did get published.

**Joshi:** Was it a collaborative piece?

**Soule:** Right. The mammologist and the herpetologist and I wrote up our results.

**Joshi:** This was in 1970, your time together with Humphrey?

**Soule:** Yes, that was in November 1970.

**Joshi:** Then you were one of the first hires at Evergreen.

**Soule:** In that group, yes. There were about a dozen what I call "founding faculty"—Bob Sluss, Al Wiedemann, Fred Tabbutt. I can probably name most of them. Those 12 hired another 35 people. Larry Eickstaedt was in the original group, and I was in that group that helped open the college. I think the faculty number the first year was 55.

**Joshi:** It is an interesting geography of how you came to be at Evergreen—a chance meeting in Durango, Mexico, with some of the initial founding faculty based in Oregon, and then Evergreen ends up being created in Washington.

**Soule:** Absolutely. I can't think of how many times I've marveled over the fact of how lucky I was, because I had been trained to do something in my heart of hearts I didn't want to do. By mere chance, I got exposed to one of the few jobs—I like to think the only job—that really met all my needs—not my needs, my desires.

**Joshi:** You said your bachelor's degree was from Colorado College?

**Soule:** Yes.

**Joshi:** I have a sense that their curricular structure is also not a standard sort of curriculum?

**Soule:** Correct.

**Joshi:** Did you have some familiarity with a different kind of pedagogical structure while an undergrad?

**Soule:** Yes. [laughing] I went to Colorado College from 1958 to 1962. At that time, in 1958, Colorado College did not have a good reputation as an academic institution. They had hired a new president

named Louis Benezet, who I believe subsequently went to one of the small liberal arts colleges in California. He had been brought to Colorado College to make it into a good school.

My 1958 class was the last class admitted of poor students. Now it's not that everybody was poor. There were some pretty bright students in our class, but there are pretty bright students almost everywhere. The fact that they admitted me was a clear indication that their admission standards were quite low, which is a very roundabout way of saying they didn't have the Block Plan when I went there.

By the time I left Colorado College, it had become a good school. By my sophomore year, if I had applied my sophomore year, I wouldn't have been able to get in. By the time I was a senior, I had trouble communicating with some of the freshmen because they were so well-trained, so bright, so motivated. I will not, for the sake of propriety, go into what I did well in college, but I *can* say that it was critical to my activities at Evergreen, and maybe even what I felt was my success at Evergreen.

When I was a senior, I was a pre-med student. My GPA my freshman year was a D, my sophomore year was a C, my junior year it was a B, and there was every thought that I was on my med-school track. All I needed to do was get an A average my senior year, and I looked pretty good. My average for my senior year dropped back down to D. One of the reasons was my major professor, who will remain nameless. I took a five-unit special credit course from him—we were on the semester system—as a way to beef up the GPA. You get five units of A for that.

They posted the grades for the first semester, and I got five units of F from my major professor. So I went to see him and I said, "Dr. Blank, why did you give me five units of F?" And he said, "You didn't do anything." I said, "I know that, but Rosenfeld didn't do anything, Osborne didn't do anything, and Rivers didn't do anything, and they got As." He looked at me and he said, "Soule, I haven't liked you since you were a freshman." And I thought, WOW!

So, two things are important in that. One, he had been my advisor, at that time, for three and a half years. In that period, I had gotten one A in a real class, and that was in Trans-Mississippi West History. Through my whole life, I had loved history. It's the only subject that made sense to me in high school or college. The fact that he was my advisor and never noticed that in my major, I never got higher than a C, except for one class—ecology—where I got a B. The fact that he never recognized that I shouldn't be a pre-med student. What in the hell should he do? "There was this one A in a tough class. Maybe you should look into that – that is what he should have done."

That was the moment when I realized that academic advising was very important, especially with students who maybe were pretty smart, but they weren't motivated. They weren't studying what

was of interest to them. That was the first thing that I got out of that meeting, and that drew me to Evergreen. I mentioned before how when Don said Evergreen faculty would have an obligation to know their students, and learn what they want to do, and what they can do, at least based on their understanding of the students when they have them. That spoke very, very clearly to me.

The other thing that I needed to do—which is kind of neither here nor there—between semesters, there was a Biology Department field trip that lasted about a month, a road trip from Colorado Springs to Rocky Point [Puerto Peñasco] at the head of the Gulf of California, led by the guy who just told me he'd never liked me. I thought, what in the world should I do?

I have a line that “There’s no problem too big that it can’t be run away from.” What I wanted to do then was just run away from the problem. But instead, I went to see my ecology teacher, the only one who had given me a B in my major, and I wished he had been my advisor all along. I went to see him and asked him what I should do. And he said, “Go on the trip, because you need to show Dr. So-and-So that you’re not afraid of him.” So, I did. I went on the trip. It was a fascinating trip, and some really crazy stuff involving deaths and things like that. It was very surreal.

The reason I bring this up is that when I graduated from Colorado College—and you’re the one who brought up Colorado College—I applied to many graduate schools and graduate schools in zoology. That man, the Colorado College ecologist, wrote a letter for me to the University of Arizona. He sent it to a man with whom *he* had collaborated.

The man had done a somewhat underhanded thing to the Colorado College professor. The University of Arizona professor had received a manuscript from the Colorado College ecologist asking what he thought of it. He made some changes, and then put his name as the senior author and sent it back, which is pretty cheap. I think he felt bad about that, so when he got this letter from Colorado College—and I subsequently got into Arizona, which is another chance situation—he took me on as a graduate student. That changed my life.

This man, Charles Lowe, was a mad genius. We had a lab of mammologists, botanists, ornithologists, herpetologists, physiologists, geneticists, ecologists—a complete mix—and we all worked together, collaboratively. I was there for seven years. And that adapted me for collaborative teaching and coordinated studies. What I did at Arizona, and maybe even how I did what I did at Arizona, then paid off in my being most comfortable teaching in teams, as compared to teaching on my own.

And the last piece -- since you brought up Colorado College -- there are two last pieces. One is not self-serving. I don’t know how interesting this will be to future readers, but I ended up being the



senior class president, even though I didn't make my grades. I led the academic procession at graduation. We were sitting in the bleachers, I was the first one, and next to me were all the recipients of fellowships and graduate study awards and honors. The first diplomas were handed out to them. Then they got to students alphabetically. So, I'm sitting next to the smart people. They get called up and get their diploma and joined their families. When they get to the S's, they're in the second half of the bleachers and I'm sitting on the other side by myself.

Afterwards, we're all standing around, and the parents of the smart kids come up to me because they noticed I came in before their child. They don't know that I was there because I was the president of the class and could drink more beer than anybody else, so I had become president of the class. They would say, "Our son is going to Oxford next year on a Rhodes Scholarship. What are you going to do?" I had applied to 17 medical schools and had been turned down by all of them, and 19 graduate schools in zoology, and I had heard no from most of them, so I didn't know what I was going to do.

But for one of the few times in my life, I thought of the perfect thing to say. When the next one came up and said, "Our daughter's going to Harvard to study nuclear medicine, and she has an internship this summer developing and heart and lung machine. What are you going to do?" I said, "I haven't decided yet." They left because they really didn't care, they just cared about their child, thinking, oh, he must have some wonderful choices. That's the first thing.

When I was a graduate student at the University of Arizona, I was invited by the Colorado College ecologist to come up to Colorado College to present a faculty seminar. It was his way of bringing me back. I think he was kind of proud that I had a very high GPA in graduate school and I had gotten my master's. I got in on probation to Arizona, but I got a master's degree and I was working on a doctorate, so he invited me up to speak.

Here I am, I'm in my coat and tie. They still weren't on the Block Plan yet. I couldn't be more proud, honestly. Dr. Richard Beidleman—great man, one of the heroes of my life—stands up and he said, "Today we are going to be addressed by Oscar Soule. Oscar represents the dark ages of education at Colorado College," and sat down. And I thought, most people would have been offended by that, but I understood what he was saying, and I took it as a compliment; that I represented that transition. Most of the faculty in that room hadn't been there when I came to Colorado College. I represented the dregs of a long-gone student body, and I had made something of myself, at least a little bit, at that point. I think maybe he was saying to them, "Don't forget about these people. Don't get caught up in the fact

that you're teaching the elite, and you're pretty hot stuff to be hired at a fine school like this." I took that very kindly.

Last Colorado College story. About 1977—the exact year could actually be found out—while I was there, Willi Unsoeld passed away on the slopes of Mount Rainier. Colorado College was on the Block Plan at that time, but all the blocks were one faculty member and one subject for three and a half weeks, and that was the Block Plan. They had never tried an interdisciplinary block. Dr. Beidleman was going on sabbatical, so I got invited to teach at Colorado College for a quarter. They gave me his office. I don't know how to describe it other than that was one of the most joyful periods of my life because every day, I got to sit in his chair, and I considered him a god. I got to sit in his chair and look up at the books over his desk. These were the tablets. It was just wonderful.

I taught with a physicist and a geologist the first interdisciplinary block at Colorado College. That kind of put closure to that. They may have a few interdisciplinary blocks. It lasted two blocks. That made a little sense. I hope that answers that question.

**Joshi:** Sure. Thank you. These are great stories. When you visited Colorado College around 1977, was that after you had been hired at Evergreen?

**Soule:** Yeah, I was hired at Evergreen in '71. So, I had already taught here for six years.

**Joshi:** Did you take a sabbatical or something?

**Soule:** It wasn't even so much a sabbatical as the school is always looking for faculty to go somewhere else and get paid by the other schools.

**Joshi:** I see.

**Soule:** It saves Evergreen my salary for a quarter.

**Joshi:** Is that how it worked? You could just have that kind of flexibility and move in and out of Evergreen?

**Soule:** In essence, yes. Not too many people did that. Answering it the way I just did might be misleading because it might seem that somebody could just teach for a quarter and do private work or consulting or something like that. You had a regular contract, but if, for instance, you wanted to go away for a year and teach somewhere else as a visiting scholar, in some cases there were exchanges between schools.

What I found—this is a bit of an aside but I think it's an important thing—was that any time a faculty member had an idea for a project, and they presented it in a logical way to the academic deans,

and subsequently to the Provost, and possibly the President—that more often than not, you could do that. For instance, I had an arrangement where I ran the Colorado River as the naturalist for a company that was owned by a former student of Evergreen. It required me being gone for a week during the month of May, so when I was asked to do this, I went to the academic deans and said, “I would like to be gone a week in the month of May. I’ve talked to my faculty team and they said it’s fine with them. It isn’t going to disrupt the students,” and the deans said, “Fine.” So, if you had an idea, you could more often than not do it.

**Joshi:** Along these lines, you talked about a summer program you taught in 1972 or ’73 with Mark Papworth.

**Soule:** Yes. [chuckles]

**Joshi:** Was that one of those programs you came up with?

**Soule:** No, that was just a standard program. But it was what I call “classic Evergreen,” because Mark was a great character. He was an archeologist. I don’t know much about the anthropology, but archeology, especially in Egypt and the like, but very interesting guy, always taking on different things.

They asked us to do a summer program, and I thought, what can we do that would essentially attract students and—don’t take this the wrong way—would be a fun, be an enjoyable activity? Because I felt that if you’re going to get a student to work hard, it helped if they really enjoyed what they were doing, and then it didn’t seem to be quite as much drudgery and work.

We came up with a plan essentially to create a giant road trip. If I remember correctly, we traveled down to the John Day Fossil Beds in Oregon, and Mark talked about the work involved with dealing with fossils.

Another activity was we decided we’d go deep-sea fishing. We made arrangements. We had a budget, which clearly wouldn’t involve chartering a tuna boat, but we got a tuna boat for a day, and then we charged the students what the budget wouldn’t cover. I remember the deans thought this was a real boondoggle. We thought, how in the world can we make this into a truly academic situation? I believe we got Larry Eickstaedt or Pete Taylor, who were marine biologists—I know it wasn’t Dave Milne—and we brought them along to analyze the stomach contents of the fish we caught, so then we had our fishing derby that became a scientific activity. We went all over the state and the students had a fabulous time, learned a great deal, and we had a full program.

**Joshi:** What else did you enjoy teaching at Evergreen? What were some of the programs – you mentioned that Political Ecology was one of your favorite programs, and you also mentioned a program where you took students to the Volga Basin and Lake Baikal?

**Soule:** Yes.

**Joshi:** They all sound quite fascinating.

**Soule:** Favorite programs. There are several, for different reasons, but there is one commonality. The common factor was the role of project work in the program. I felt that if the students could get involved with a tangible project—by tangible I mean one that has an outcome that is substantial—a report of some nature, a map, a plan for some activity, like a plan for a city park, or a report that deals with the real question. For instance, there was a concern over the amount of forestland in Thurston County, including the cities, and the students did a report on that.

But having something tangible did a great deal for helping the students feel that their work was important, because if there was a report, that meant there was somebody, or some group, receiving the report was waiting for that information, and was going to apply that information.

Secondly, if the student had that, they could use it when they applied either to graduate school or for a job. When they went in and the person asked what they could do, they could show them. Then that body, be it a graduate school committee or an HR person—whoever was interviewing them—would say, “Oh, this is just what we want.”

Most of my programs that lasted more than a quarter had that component. They ranged from first-year programs, or core programs, on up to senior-level programs. I should add, to make this real, I liked to get the recipient of the information to be committed to the project, so as often as I could, I would work a budget into the negotiation so that the recipient was paying for the information. Because as soon as they’re paying for it, they care about it. By paying for it, maybe I’d include the cost of printing it, or maybe I’d include money for film and developing it. Maybe I would include mileage if we were going to be using State cars. We would always have a budget for the program, but the budget would never really cover those things, or if they did, something else would have to be reduced. If the students knew that the people getting the report were paying for it, that made the report real. Not diminishing it, but like parents who give their kids an allowance if they have chores to do, then it has an impact.

Back to examples. The first year the college was open, I taught Political Ecology with Ed Kormondy and Fred Tabbutt and Dave Milne and Richard Anderson. Ed had arranged for a grant from the US Fish & Wildlife Service to do a biological inventory of Hood Canal. We had five faculty and 100

students working on that for three or four months. We ended up publishing a report that was more than a half-inch thick, which the government used in decision-making. It had a real impact.

One year, in the program called Health: Individual and Community—again, a core program, as Political Ecology was—I had seen that medical waste at that time—this was in the '70s—was being treated as hazardous waste. This didn't have to do with the health dangers, it had to do with the Mafia controlling the solid waste industry. By getting hospital waste declared a hazardous waste, they could charge more for handling it, whether it was really dangerous or not. So I thought it would be interesting to see how much hospital waste is really hazardous. And when I looked into it, there wasn't any data. It was just kind of that they used common sense, which actually was wrong.

With my wife, who worked at the hospital, we did a solid waste audit for a 24-hour period. First-year students. We developed our own protocol for how to determine how much was paper, plastic, metal, biological waste and wrote a report. We also included the national accepted standard of hazardous waste. The hospital was thrilled to get the report. The City of Olympia was anxious to get the report because they were having problems at the landfill because they had to treat all the waste from the hospital as hazardous waste. So, if they could get information to the contrary, that would save them money.

And so, it was very well received, and because of Barbara's [my wife] contacts, our data and reference to our study was published in a national study out of University of North Carolina, and we were told our report was the first quantitative measurement of hospital waste done in the US. It was really important.

And that is an example of the kind of project work you could do with students. I could go on. The most extreme was the *Defending Wild Washington*, which was a Ted Whitesell project. Ted had seen a book done in Utah by students and felt that we could do something like that. I was more or less at the very end of my time at Evergreen, so I worked with Ted and we got a year-long group contract, which was pretty unusual at that time.

I used my experience to get dedicated space. This is maybe the role of oral history. One of the things that made teaching much more effective in the early days was that the school was under-enrolled relative to the size of the school. We had enough students for the number of faculty we had, and we had more space than we had faculty. Therefore, if you were teaching a lab program, it was your lab. You could have it all year long. Maybe that's overstating it, but you had much more access to space. You didn't have another program coming in right on your heels, and that made things a lot easier.

With Ted and Ben Shane, who was a visiting faculty member for the book project, I found space that we could have for the whole year, which meant that the students could work 24 hours a day. We got them keys to the building, so if they wanted to come in at midnight and work on something, or if they wanted to do one thing or another, they could. It was their space, and it was very important. The project never would have been successful if we just met on a regular schedule. Do you want more?

**Joshi:** I think that's good. I heard a little bit about *Defending Wild Washington* book program from Ted Whitesell when I interviewed him. It was also helpful to get some additional details from your perspective.

**Soule:** I hope what I said didn't disagree with him, because he was the one who did it.

**Joshi:** Wonderful. Would you like to speak a little about your teaching in MES? Because MES, in my understanding, has been like a different world within Evergreen, even if it's Evergreen...

**Soule:** Yes and no. [sighs]

**Joshi:** Also, you were the first director and you're welcome to speak about that, too.

**Soule:** Right. So, why did we even have an MES program? The program is now close to 30 years old. The Master's in Public Administration was the first graduate program. There was a great concern over the addition of graduate programs to the college offering by many faculty. That goes back to what I said at the very beginning about faculty fleeing what they felt were poorly run and poorly conceived programs. One of the areas where many faculty felt education had failed was in graduate training. Many of our faculty felt that graduate school really was kind of ripping off the graduate students. You paid them a pittance to teach, so that the graduate faculty could have lots of time for writing and travel, and that kind of thing -- dalliances of one kind or another. So, there wasn't an overwhelming desire to see graduate education.

But we got the MPA program, and then there was thought that maybe there could be another program, because those programs tend to make money for the college. It would enhance the image of the College, and better serve our region. They put together a committee to consider whether we should have a graduate program in environmental studies, and I was chairman of that committee. We met, and I'd love to see those reports, but I think I mentioned to you in an earlier conversation, they have been lost somewhere in Lab I. The committee agreed that there should be a graduate program in environmental studies, or in ecology, that kind of thing. This was accepted by the administration and faculty.

Then there needed to be a DTF or a committee to design it, and I was the chairman of that. It was an interesting process because we wanted to decide how the balance should be between what we did well at that time in environmental studies – community studies with Carolyn Dobbs and Russ Fox – and natural history and field studies. This was Steve Herman and Al Wiedemann doing terrestrial, and Gerardo [Chin-Leo] and others—Dave Milne—doing marine biology. There was a concern that we wanted it to be interdisciplinary. However, we didn't want it just to be kind of a focus on the ecology and natural history of Southwestern Washington, or the temperate rainforest, something like that. Instead, it needed to focus on our type of environmental studies, which included community studies, history, political science, economics, and some philosophy, as well as the biology of the area.

We came up with a plan. It's roughly 30 years ago—a little more than that— so what I remember most distinctly is I, as the chairman of the committee and then subsequently the first director of the program, needed to work with the faculty as a whole to essentially not end up getting stabbed in the back by pushing this thing that some faculty didn't want. I spent a lot of time doing that and making sure that people in political science and the like saw that we were dealing with policy as well as science and the like. Bottom line, we got things squared away. As an aside—I hope this is of interest—we were dealing with the HECC [Higher Education Coordinating Commission] Board. The HECC Board had to okay it, and for the HECC Board to okay it, it had to be endorsed by all the other State universities.

Once we had the plan that had to pass muster with the whole faculty at the college, we had a report. We sent it to all the State schools. It was fascinating. We sent one copy. I guess we probably sent it to the Provost or a Dean at the school, and that person needed to send it to somebody. But it was interdisciplinary; so do they send it to the natural sciences or do they send it to the social sciences? It varied from school to school, but the response was the same in the five cases—Western, Eastern, Central, UW and WSU.

If it went to the social sciences, the letter came back: “We find this interesting. We feel your assessment of the natural sciences is fantastic. We wish we could do something like this, but the social science is a little weak. You need more coursework.” If it went to the natural sciences, we got a letter: “Very interesting program. We're thinking about it. However, the natural science is too weak. You need more coursework, but the social science is fantastic. We wish we could do that.” We took it upon ourselves that we were right on. They were just covering their behinds. I think we ended up adding a little more coursework, maybe six hours or something.

Now we had the okay to do it, which gets back to your original question. I remember – and I wish I could give you the exact date, but – it was during a budget exigency and we were afraid we were going to have to cut faculty. We weren't hiring new faculty and the like, but I was getting about three lines for MES. I walked into a faculty meeting a few minutes late and Byron Youtz was the Provost. We had already sent out letters welcoming students into the first class, and Byron said, "Oh, Oscar's here. Let's give him a round of applause." I'm thinking, wow. [laughing] I don't get this very often. "Oscar's agreed to delay the opening of the MES program for a year, which allows us to not cut 4.5 faculty lines." Everybody clapped, and I go, I've just been stabbed in the back. That's the way things work. We had to send letters out saying that due to problems, we're not going to open this year. You're in for next year if you want to come. I can't remember how many we lost. But that was our aborted first opening.

Then the next year we opened, and my goal— and this, I think, is actually important—was to have the MES program being nested in the Environmental Studies Specialty Area. When we agreed on faculty teaching assignments—and in those days you did it a year in advance—I would go to the Environmental Studies Specialty Area meeting—just like people interested in marine biology, or people who want to make sure that there was going to be one or two people in the Habitats program, whatever—and I had to find people who would teach in the program. This is in contrast to the MPA program, which pretty much was a stand-alone program. The new faculty generated by the MES program were expected to go into the undergraduate curriculum.

The reason for that—and I hope people listening to this tape or reading the transcript won't take it the wrong way—from the very beginning, the MPA program had faculty lines associated with it and hired people. They'd hire them, and they'd get in the program for a year, maybe two, and then they'd say, "I don't like teaching in this. I don't get along with this person," or, "I don't want to do it." They'd leave the MPA program and they'd go into the undergraduate teaching.

Then it would come time for hiring and they'd say, "We've got to hire one or two people for the MPA program. We're down." I'd say, "Wait. Get somebody from"—"No, nobody wants to do it." So it was just a backdoor to get in, and that always bothered me because, as I told people who would listen to me, "These people are being hired to teach management. They're being hired to teach how to get along with people. They're being hired to teach how you make a team work, yet none of them can do that. We, on the other hand, are kind of nerdy scientists, and we get along, and we try and figure out how to make things work. We did initially get some lines to fill start the program, but we don't keep



getting new positions all the time.” Our MES faculty came from the Environmental Studies Specialty Area faculty and other areas while most of our new hires taught undergraduates.

I don’t know, it might be very different now, but in those days—in the early days of the MES program—I always felt that we were at one level at a disadvantage because we weren’t getting more and more people. At another level, I was always proud of the fact that the people we had were more effective in teamwork than the other graduate programs. That doesn’t necessarily apply to the MIT program, which I did do some help with them, but they more or less stood alone.

**Joshi:** MES, I think, has some dedicated lines hired to the MES program. But in my understanding even the dedicated hires do rotate into the undergraduate college once in a while.

**Soule:** Right, exactly, and what I’m saying is that in the old days, the MPA had those dedicated hires, but they couldn’t find anybody to fill them in-house, so they had to get new people. That always annoyed me.

**Joshi:** You were part of the DTF that was charged to design the MES program. Do you recall any discussion or debate as to whether to call it environmental studies versus environmental sciences? You yourself are a scientist, but you have taught Political Ecology.

**Soule:** Exactly.

**Joshi:** What kind of discussion was there?

**Soule:** I had a problem with that from day one because I felt it wasn’t science. It was environmental studies. We had some science in the program, but it wasn’t really heavy-duty scientific work. I don’t remember if we ever had a required lab-based “science” component in the program. It was optional.

The college in its publications used to put in that it was an MES, Master of Environmental Science program. I don’t know if they ever did it on the diplomas. They may have one year actually had the diploma wrong. If they didn’t, they did so many other things wrong that they might as well have done that.

To answer your question directly, yes, that was a question from day one. Most people when I was at the college called it by whatever they thought was the name. They never bothered to look it up. I would send letters to the President, to the Provost, to the deans saying, “I was at a meeting the other day and the President was laudatory in terms of talking about the program, but he doesn’t know the name of the program.”

The reason I felt it should be called environmental studies is the fact that the science wasn't lab-based. It was appropriate for what the person was doing. If it was expected that our graduates were going to be in charge of water labs and things like that, and they needed science-based studies, then we would teach different things in the program. As it was, if somebody needed something like that, there were also courses they could take, or even a program that they might take all or part of to get that science. And I was all for that. I certainly would never be opposed to that.

We had so many people coming from State government who were already employed as managers, they didn't want, nor did they need—in terms of their current jobs, or even the jobs to which they might advance—that hard-core, lab-based, lab-coat science. Maybe you asked a non-provocative question, but to me it wasn't so much provocative as it had real meaning to me, and from the very beginning. So, yes, there was lots of discussion: should we call it science or studies? And there wasn't unanimity at all. There were people who felt that if it was called science, it would be perceived as being more rigorous. If it was called science, it would be perceived as being more prestigious, and we were doing ourselves a disservice by calling it environmental studies. But we called it environmental studies at the undergraduate level.

**Joshi:** Is that so?

**Soule:** It used to be.

**Joshi:** You mentioned the specialty group in environmental studies as well, and you wanted the environmental studies faculty to be part of the MES program. It is still environmental studies today as well, but the question of what would be an appropriate label for what is being taught is still relevant, I think.

**Soule:** Yeah.

**Joshi:** Because now we have the curricular area teams under which different paths of study are included, and environmental studies is a path of study within the science curricular area team, so there is a little bit of a structural impediment to—

**Soule:** It doesn't bother me. Assuming that the student is going to get an exposure to a broad set of ideas, calling it environmental studies and having science classes in it is not inconsistent at all. The idea of changing the name to environmental science, I mean, at one time I probably would have gotten really pretty agitated, but now, not so much. I think of it still as environmental studies.

**Joshi:** That's great. I was quite interested in how it originated, and what had been the original motivations and logic for how it was created.

I think that maybe we could talk a little bit more about teaching, and maybe we talk about governance another time. It's 10 till 12.

**Soule:** Okay, because we just have a few minutes.

**Joshi:** I'm curious about your pedagogical style and strategies. You did talk about the project work being very integral to your programs.

**Soule:** That's very interesting. With me, there's always a long answer and a short answer. The short answer in terms of a pedagogical style is I don't have one. I remember coming to Evergreen, I told you, I was a terrible high school student and a terrible college student—really awful—so I never learned much about learning. When I finally started paying attention, I just did my work, so I came to Evergreen, and I kind of had no background at all! I just had my personality and an interest in helping people learn.

It tended to shift with whom I was teaching. We would have an early planning meeting for the faculty in the teaching team, and so I would not stand up and say, "Well, I think we should use a Tussman model seminar style, and I think we have to have a minimum of so many hours of... the ratio of lecture to lab based on various teaching, Socratic phenomena... yada yada?" There was none of that. I just did what I did. I was not, I guess, vulnerable, but I was kind of agreeable to work with other people, and I was always very careful with whom I taught. Incredibly careful. This does speak to your question because I picked people that I liked and people I respected, and so I trusted them. Sometimes we had more lectures and fewer labs, and sometimes we did this, and we didn't do that. But it wasn't because I felt that was the only way.

I remember I worked very frequently with Ralph Murphy. You know Ralph. I love Ralph. Ralph never met a lecture he didn't like. Ralph could lecture 12 hours a day. I know sometimes with Ralph, I would say to Ralph—say we were in a longer program—"I think we should take the fifth week off." He'd say, "What?" I'd say, "I think we should have student conferences. We'll find something for the students to do. You know, maybe they all have a research project, and on Friday they'll all present the results of their research project. But during the week we'll have an hour conference with each student to see how they're doing."

**Joshi:** An hour long? Wow.

**Soule:** And he'd say, "You're nuts! I won't be able to cover the economic impact of the French Revolution! We can't do that!" I would have done that in every program. I think it would have cut down on student dissatisfaction, would have helped with student retention and all that kind of thing. So some of the things I liked to do, I didn't get to do very often.

But in terms of my pedagogical style, I loved to give lectures, but I didn't like the traditional lecture, I liked to tell stories. I wanted there to be a conclusion at the end of the lecture about this is why it's important. Or, this is how it impacted things. I wanted to create an environment that was comfortable for students. I learned a trick from Dave Milne, who is a wonderful guy. He had something called *Chase's Book of Dates*. It's a big, thick book, and it has every day and everything that happened on that day—whose birthday it was, the first gold nugget was found at Sutter's Mill, the yoyo was patented on that day. All kinds of stuff. And Dave would -- say class was supposed to start at 9:00. You know people are always wandering in, so exactly at 9:00, Dave would -- go to the front of the lecture hall, open Chase's book, and start reading what happened on that day. It is stunning.

He'd say, "This is James Buchanan's birthday. Who here knows who James Buchanan is?" People would say, "The NBA," and he'd say, "No, he was President of the United States. Who knows what President he was?" "Fifth," and they'd say whatever it was. It was remarkable. "World War II ended on this date. What year was that?" "1970." He did a ton of teaching, but he got people engaged. He'd do this for two or three minutes. It wasn't like for a half an hour, but till people, you know —and then he'd move into what he was teaching that day.

I loved that, and I used to do that. Some faculty, I'd do that and they'd get so annoyed. "If you start lecturing at 9:00, and they miss some important stuff, they're going to be there at 9:00 next time. Our job isn't to entertain them." And that kind of thing.

I like project work, as I told you. That was part of the pedagogy. I enjoyed fieldtrips, lectures, but tried to make things as interesting as possible because I remember I was bored silly in physiology lectures and the like because I hadn't done my homework. I hadn't read the material before class, or after class, for that matter.

So I wanted to, I remember teaching in a program where somebody else was lecturing and a student was sound asleep in the back, so I went over to him and I tapped him on the shoulder. I said, "Wake up." He said, "I wasn't asleep." I said, "I think you were." He says, "No, that's how I do my best learning." I said, "Let's go out in the hall. Look, we work hard. It really is disrespectful for you to sleep in class. On the other hand, the fact that you're asleep means that you're tired. Now that means either

you were up all night studying, or you were up all night partying, whatever, so I would just as soon you not be here if you're going to sleep. Now, if you're up all night studying because you don't understand the material, then come in and let's talk about it, you know, but you can't just do this." That's part of the pedagogy.

**Joshi:** Your teaching partner probably appreciated that.

**Soule:** I hope so. [laughter] But really, I taught with so many people. I had so much respect for people who had come to Evergreen because it fit a pedagogical model that they had dreamt would exist, or they were testing their own pedagogical model and the like, but I never had enough training in that to do it other than just do what comes naturally.

**Joshi:** More intuitively.

**Soule:** Yes.