

NEWS

The Evergreen State College
Olympia, Washington 98505

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It is probably difficult enough to be the only female development officer in a state college or university on the west coast --- possibly in the nation.

But add the facts that Marianne Nelson, newly appointed to that position at The Evergreen State College is working for one of the newest institutions in America, one which is not readily understood by persons accustomed to more traditional educational formats and one with less than 300 alumni, and one begins to understand the task she faces.

The slim and pretty Ms. Nelson, who has spent more than 13 years working with higher education development programs, views her job as a chance "to create a whole new system and to try entirely different techniques."

The task essentially, she says, is to solicit funds from the private sector which will "give it the margin of excellence to rise above other similarly funded colleges and universities."

"The monies we raise can mean the difference between an ordinary college and an excellent one," she believes. "They can enable us to provide ever-needed scholarships and loan funds, to allocate more resources to the library, to sponsor educational public events (like lectures, symposia, exhibits and workshops), to encourage professional development of our staff and faculty, and to expand such co-curricular activities as the Evergreen Day Care Center, campus radio KAOS, and shoreline development for marine recreation and marine academic programs."

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Dick Nichols, Director
Information Services

How to raise the money is part of the problem. Helping persons understand the proper role of her office is the other part.

"We first have to make persons understand that our office receives money," she laughs. "We don't give it away." She says many people have called to request financial support from her four-month-old office "when we're just beginning to raise some."

"Besides," she adds, "when we do succeed in developing what we call the Greater Evergreen College Fund and other developmental funds, my office won't decide who spends it. The administration as a whole has already determined the priorities for its use."

And, Ms. Nelson feels, there are just about as many ways to raise the money as there are to spend it.

"The first task, as she sees it, is to develop a core of volunteers. "The myth that Development Officers run around knocking on doors to raise money is simply not true," she says. "We've found that the most effective way to earn financial support from others is through volunteers who are personally convinced that the college is a source worthy of their contributions and who can convince others of its value."

Ms. Nelson, who first got involved in raising money for higher education in 1961 while working for the Stanford University multi-million dollar P.A.C.E. program, says the secret to encouraging donations to an institution is "to get the right persons to ask at the right time for the right thing."

"But first you have to find volunteers --- and the usual source of such volunteers is the alumni." But Evergreen, which opened in 1971, has less than 300 graduates. "This requires some innovative thinking by the development staff," she says.

"We obviously have to go somewhere else for our volunteers --- like to friends of the college, to parents of current students, and to persons interested in innovative education."

"The cultivation process is a long one and it can take as long as five years to secure financial support from a donor," she continues. "If I'm really effective as a development officer, I won't be around to see the real results of my efforts --- they'll come years from now. But," she smiles, "it's a rewarding challenge."

"I grew up with a concern for education. By accident, I landed in a relatively new field of work and have been lucky enough to work for only those kinds of institutions which I really believe in.

"I can't do this kind of job if I don't believe in the institution," she declares. "I've kept an eye on Evergreen since 1968 and I wanted to be here."

One of 250 applicants for the position, Ms. Nelson came to Evergreen from Menlo Park, California, where she served as associate director of development for Menlo Park School and College. Prior to that, the Oregon-born and reared Ms. Nelson spent a year working for a Los Angeles consulting firm, a year as director of development for Sarah Lawrence College, a year at Vassar College, and four years with the University of Michigan --- two as Western Field Director for Michigan's 55 million dollar campaign with responsibility for 12 western states and two with the development staff in Ann Arbor.

Her work took her across the United States several times and to Seattle for two years while she served as assistant field director for the 75 million dollar Stanford fund raising program.

At times, the traveling caused problems for the single Ms. Nelson. "I didn't feel free to roam around the cities I was visiting like a man would," she says. "But, male curiosity often got me in to see potential donors or volunteers other (male) development officers couldn't get near. They weren't accustomed to women working in this field.

That field is changing rapidly, she says. "At one time, capitol campaigns --- ones which had a specific, sometimes multi-million dollar goal set over a long period of time --- were the sure-fire answer to funding problems.

"That's no longer feasible," she adds. "Now you can't assure your alumni and friends that 'we'll ask for one large gift now and won't be back to ask for any more.' Instead, you have to establish long-range development programs which don't require constant solicitation of your entire constituency, but permit you to work with different groups of supporters at different levels over long periods of time."

So far, the Evergreen office is working with a newly established Corporations Committee composed of Olympia-area business persons who are enthusiastic about the college.

An alumni association is being formed, plans are being made to establish a parents' group, and Ms. Nelson hopes to begin working more with foundations which support education.

In the meantime, she's doing her homework --- researching both the college and its supporters thoroughly --- and she's buying her first home after more than a decade of apartment living.

"I plan to stay at Evergreen," she says. And no one doubts that her stay will be productive.