

**Ed Kormondy**  
**Interviewed by Oscar Soule**  
**The Evergreen State College oral history project**  
**October 6, 2017**  
**FINAL**

**Soule:** I should say that for recording purposes, it's Friday, October 6, 2017 at 10:15, and we're picking up into the second of our two sessions. But that's fine. We can go back to the acupuncture. This just lets the typist know where to begin.

**Soule:** Did you look through—

**Kormondy:** Yes, I did.

**Soule:** Did it trigger anything?

**Kormondy:** It was fascinating. I didn't remember a hell of a lot of that. [laughter] No, seriously, I did not.

**Soule:** Well, to tell you the truth, when I read it, I was at the college when those things happened, and many of the things that you described either I didn't remember, or I didn't even know happened because they were happening in the office of the Provost and the deans and the like. But was there anything in there, like your point about being more rigorous in either moving out faculty who were not doing a good job—not the people necessarily, but just that the process of trying to upgrade the faculty, and upgrade the quality of instruction—that's always been an important thing to you?

**Kormondy:** Yes, always, from way back. The most important thing that a college does is to provide opportunities for students to become better individuals, as well as being better student scholars; learning more about their subject matter; becoming a perfectionist, to some degree, without becoming a prude. I think one of the roles of a faculty member is to encourage students to always do better, to strive to do better. I think that's one of the functions of a good faculty member is to not just accept the status quo, and mediocrity, and getting by, but encouraging them to go beyond the bare passing to higher levels of achievement as a student.

I think that gives a reward to the faculty member, too, that he or she then sees that their efforts in teaching are being rewarded by those students going on and doing better. Of course, one of the real joys of a faculty member is seeing that student go on in graduate work. That's sort of pumps, pumps hearts. "So-and-So is going on to the University of Michigan for graduate work, or whatever. And he's my student," or, "She's my student. And she's going to really do very well at Ann Arbor."

And then, when she does, or he does, you can't help [but] feel that you've had a little part of that, preparing them to not be satisfied with the status quo in their lives, but to always aim a little bit higher. Always aim a little bit higher.

**Soule:** I've been encouraged not to ask questions that are leading, where I'm giving you the answer, but to your point, I think Evergreen has always done a good job in encouraging students to do the best they can. There was one feature of the system, where essentially, the student was graded against himself or herself. We never graded on the curve.

**Kormondy:** Yeah.

**Soule:** So, it was possible for an average student, if they did as well as they could, or even better than we thought they could, it still might have been a C somewhere else, you could give them the equivalent of an A by saying that they had pretty much done as well, if not better, than they could. Even though they had a basic understanding, you could put it in the context that they didn't get an A from Harvard, but they got an A for being Anne Jones or John Jones and the like. Did you think that was a strength of the college?

**Kormondy:** Yeah, I think that's putting it quite well. I think that's putting it quite well. It seems to me that we attempted to have students measure themselves against themselves, not against some arbitrary standard out here, you know, this is whatever it is. But are you maximizing your potential? Are you using all your talents to the maximum? And if not, how can we help you to go beyond the ordinary to more than you expected you could do? One of the things that we tried to do at Evergreen was just that, to get students to realize their potential was greater than they had thought it to be. Even though it may not have been whatever—mind-blowing—at least, in probably almost every case, the potential was greater than they had realized they could expect to achieve. And when they did achieve something a little beyond whatever, they said, "Ooh, wow! I did that?"

**Soule:** That often, as you said led to them seeking maybe graduate work or professional work that they couldn't imagine they would have done when they entered the system.

**Kormondy:** Exactly. It's hard to generalize, but, as I reflect back on those many, many years ago, I think most Evergreeners came without great personal expectations. Expectations, yes, but not great expectations. When they were able to achieve something above and beyond this sort of plateau. "Wow! I did that?"

**Soule:** I think you're making a very important point, because at the beginning, we had not only no reputation, we had no track record. Eventually, we became good at getting students into medical

school, and into other professional schools, but at the beginning, nobody came to Evergreen because they wanted to become an architect or an artist or something.

**Kormondy:** That's right.

**Soule:** They just came because they wanted an education, and, as such, following your words, we became adept of helping them move on to whatever they might do professionally.

**Kormondy:** Or, Evergreen was the convenient place to go, it was right next door, or easy to get into, or whatever. Then, only later, did students begin to realize that they were being challenged, and given opportunities, of which they had no idea when they came in as a freshman. They had no idea when they were at the level of a sophomore that they'd be able to "Wow! I can do one of these internships?" Just eye-opening and mindboggling.

I'm generalizing, but I think the faculty at Evergreen really were interested in their students. The students were not just chattel, they were not just a means of earning an income. They were meaningful human beings. My recollection is that the ties between a number of faculty and a number of students became very strong over the years.

**Soule:** That's true.

**Kormondy:** And it lasted for the full four years of the student's existence. Even though the student may be taking courses from somebody else, there was always that tie back with **Dave Milne**, or **Fred Tabbutt**, or **Oscar Soule**, or whoever, as if you were guardian angels. [chuckles]

**Soule:** That's true.

**Kormondy:** Or devils, as the case might be. [laughing]

**Soule:** Well, occasionally. [chuckles] Again, speaking to that point about engagement with the students, and preparing them for better work and life's work that they thought they might achieve, another aspect of that education was, to me, the emphasis on project work; work that took place in the real world, not just in the weekly ecology lab, where we'd just go out and get stream water from campus, and look for hellgrammites or whatever; that we would take those kinds of exercises and put them in the context of doing a report for somebody. Specifically, I'm thinking of a project that you got funded and oversaw in Political Ecology, which was the Hood Canal bio-inventory that we did for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

**Kormondy:** Oh, gosh, I'd forgotten that, Oscar.

**Soule:** I think that was one of the most important projects ever done at the college, because it was done in the first year, so there was no history on which you could draw to put it together. It was the first year, and it was in a freshman or first-year program. So, we didn't have third-year biology students,

or third-year saltwater ecology students. Instead, we had to teach the students on the fly, and have them do work that would be acceptable for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. And, at the end, when we published that report, which was used by the Fish and Wildlife Services, those students had a document. Should they choose to go to graduate school, they would be able to show them effectively a piece of peer-reviewed work—maybe it wasn't peer-reviewed, but it was accepted by the U.S. government as a valid piece of work—which had their names on the chapter where they had done the work.

So, how did you think about the use of applied work put in a real-time context for students there, in terms of it raising their self-esteem and their skill levels?

**Kormondy:** I guess it was the notion that what you're about to experience is a real-life experience. It's not something we made up. It's not something artificial, not something that doesn't have value, function. But, as a result of your work, there may be a change in policy, change in procedure, and you could see your name on there, saying, this was part of the study we did that showed that we had to do X, Y, Z.

And, I think, realizing that collecting data was not the easiest thing in the world. It's hard work—really hard work—whether you were measuring oxygen levels, or carbon dioxide levels, or whatever. It was not excruciatingly demanding, in that sense, but demanding of the best that you could bring to the table. It required consistency, persistency, cooperation with your fellow students, who were working on another aspect of the problem. I think we were lucky that year that the Hood Canal study opened up as a possibility. We were really lucky.

**Soule:** Again, the record should show that if it wasn't for you, it wouldn't have happened. You had the contacts and the background on how to follow up on those contacts, that resulted in it happening, and then providing some training for us. As you said, it's one thing to go to lab on Wednesday afternoon from 1:00 to 4:00 and count something. It's another to get in the van at, say, 11:30 at night, and drive for an hour out to Hood Canal, and then start sampling at low tide at midnight or 12:30, [laughter] using flashlights, and knowing that you're not just doing this for yourself; that this is going to be used to make public policy. So, even the most casual student somehow gets caught up in their work. They quit thinking about themselves, and have a little bigger perspective on the activity.

**Kormondy:** I think you're getting at a crucial point in Evergreen's philosophy, at least in the sciences. I can't speak for all the other areas, but at least in the sciences, it was that we tried to make sure that what the students were engaged in were meaningful, were professional, and were contributing to the improvement of whatever it was that we were working on at the time. I can't give any specific examples, but I think that, over that year of working on Hood Canal, we improved some sampling

techniques. That's not quite the right word. The rationale, we came to understand better how certain things fitted together. This piece, and this piece, seemingly initially were like this, but after a period of time, you realize that they reinforced each other, and produced something stronger than either study alone. Which is part of the joy, and frustration, of research; that you finally realize that what you're doing can be—it doesn't mean it always is—but can be part of a larger picture, not necessarily a significant part, but not an insignificant part of that larger picture. But, another little piece in the puzzle. So, here's another drop in the bucket, when you do those samples at midnight, or 6:00 in the morning, or whenever convenient during the day. [laughing]

**Soule:** It's true, because even, like you were saying, sometimes it has a meaningful outcome and actually changes public policy, and sometimes it doesn't. But it becomes that added report, that added piece of information that might be used sometime later. Because I remember, in the spring of that year, we did more project work. I worked with a small team that was designing a park in Tumwater, down near the golf course. We actually laid out cedar plank trails, and the city appreciated it very much, but then abandoned it, and it grew over again and the like. But the students got the experience of designing a park, and collecting material and the like. So, they got something out of it, but it didn't have the long-term impact that something like the Hood Canal study did.

And this is just a moment to thank you personally. Because of you and that Hood Canal project, in every program in which I taught, there was an applied component of the program. That was my first year of teaching, so I was learning how to be a teacher from you, because I'm an ecologist—or was, I guess we always are—and you were a role model in that sense. And that project left that impact on me of, if you can combine social science and natural science, or ecology and policy, you end up with something much, much stronger than the individual parts. So, thank you, and the college thanks you.

**Kormondy:** You're welcome. I didn't realize I had that impact. [laughing]

**Soule:** Well, you did. You did, there's no question about that. I was just looking over some names here of people from the old days. Do you think that might pique any—or, you read your evaluation? Is there anything in there that brought back any good or bad memories?

**Kormondy:** Nothing specific, I'll put it that way.

**Soule:** Generalities are important.

**Kormondy:** I think what it reminded me is the commitment that all of us had in that first year to making sure it was a success, for the college, for us as faculty, for the students. And that, given the timeframe, was not easy to define, because Evergreen was cutting a different slice out of higher education. It intended to be different, but at the same time, to assure that its students, after graduation, were

equipped to do whatever, either further graduate work, or into one of the agencies. My recollection is that we were successful in having students proceed on to graduate work, and also, for some students, to go on and work for the Department of Wildlife or whatever.

**Soule:** Ecology?

**Kormondy:** I don't remember specifically. I really can't speak for the rest of the academic units at the college, but I think we in the life sciences really worked hard at giving our students a tough, but meaningfully tough, experience, with some very specific—at the time—anticipations as outcomes. And yet, allowing leeway for those students who couldn't quite measure up. We nursed those students along, as I recall.

**Soule:** True.

**Kormondy:** If you think of that in a usual classroom, or class—freshman class, let's say—there is a range of abilities, a range of enthusiasms, a range of dedication. But I think whether it was the luck of the draw or not, I think we ended up with a very devoted—is that too strong a word?

**Soule:** No.

**Kormondy:** Devoted, committed, and able students in that first year.

**Soule:** To bring you up to date, I mentioned **Bob Butts** as a name. **Denny Heck**, one of our students, is now a U.S. Representative from our area, and doing a fabulous job.

**Kormondy:** Oh, really?

**Soule:** Yes, I'll go on record as saying a fabulous job representing our District.

**Kormondy:** Wow.

**Soule:** **Dee Frankforth** went on to do work. **John McCombs** and **Eugene Maltzeff** went on to be commercial fishermen in Alaska, and John is still fishing today, 40-some years later. Other people have become involved with the environment and the like. **George Barner** even was a County Commissioner in Thurston County for years and a public servant.

So, I look back on that first year, and agree with you that we were quite fortunate in having people—one student contacted me years later, a student named **Paul Page**, who was one of the larger developers of low-income housing for migrant people on both the east and west sides of the state. Some people went into the environmental area directly. Some people went into the business side of life, but with a social consciousness. I think you can feel assured that your comments are quite correct that that was a special group of students.

**Kormondy:** I think you and I can both say it was a challenging experience.

**Soule:** Yes.

**Kormondy:** Not the routine college teaching experience, namely, that you went in and taught your class, and then you went over somewhere else and did your thing in your lab, or in the field, or whatever.

**Soule:** Yes. That raises a point I wanted to bring up, in terms of you being both a teacher at Evergreen and administrator, because when they would do those time analyses of how much time we were teaching. But to us, teaching also meant advising students, and meeting with students after class informally, because that was, in our view, like you said, that was all a part of the learning package. It wasn't just the 45 minutes we were in lecture, or the hour or whatever.

**Kormondy:** Exactly.

**Soule:** And the numbers came back to high, that if you took in all of the time—because you had to read the seminar books on your own time, you couldn't just refer back to books from years past—people could be working 60, 70, 80, sometimes 90 hours a week. We had to kind of explain that to the outside world that our faculty were really working hard and, as you say, it took kind of special people who would be willing to commit that much of their lives. Did you ever have to explain that to somebody and have them kind of go “No, people don't do that”?

**Kormondy:** I probably did, but I don't remember. [chuckles] I probably did.

**Soule:** You mentioned the other day how much time it took to teach. It didn't affect me very much, because I had never taught before and so I just thought if I had been at the University of Michigan, I would have worked 90 hours a week. [laughter] Everybody does that. But how did you adjust to that?

**Kormondy:** I didn't really think of it as an adjustment. This is what it took to do the job. I honestly—now, looking back—I don't think I checked the clock, so to speak. I just realized this needed to be done, and this needed to be done, and this needed to be done, and this needed to be done. It ended up being X number of hours a week, or day, or half a week or whatever. It just became part of the Evergreen way of accomplishing our mission—making yourself available to students, literally, almost any time, especially those students who were working on the Hood Canal project, because they were doing their sampling at various crazy times. [chuckles] And they'd come back with certain results, and then ask, “What do you think this means?” And whatever, whatever, whatever. Those were pretty exciting times. Pretty demanding times.

**Soule:** I remember, because you had a family, and your children were maybe 10 years older than ours because we were[just] newlyweds. I remember you and Peggy gave us a party—which I always thought was very kind—in anticipation of Sarah's birth. But we had little kids and that was just part of it. You'd put them to bed, read from 9:00 to 1:00 in the morning, and that was just part of the job. And then, get

up at 7:00, and do whatever you had to do with little kids because we were both working. And Sarah, when I mentioned that I was going to see you, said, “Oh, Mrs. Kormondy’s husband.” [laughter] Not “Ed Kormondy.” As you say, it was just part of the job. I don’t remember people feeling sorry for themselves, or saying they wished they hadn’t come here, they didn’t know they were going to have to work this hard.

**Kormondy:** It was the ethos of the institution. I can’t say that everybody bought into that, but those that didn’t, I think, left after a year or so. But we were very fortunate in the life sciences. I think we had a very committed group of faculty, who were very devoted, very capable, very stimulating, very creative. It was an interesting period of my life.

**Soule:** I guess we owe a debt of thanks to **Don Humphrey, Bob Sluss, Larry Eickstaedt, Al Wiedemann,** who would have been the people that interviewed us to become the scientific part. I guess **Fred Tabbutt** was in that group, too, who picked that first group of scientists, who were natural physical scientists, who came in. I think, looking back, and then having both been an administrator as a dean and then Director of the MES program, I agree that the physical and natural science faculty seemed to be more cohesive and more in sync with the part of the college we’ve been describing than some of the others. And then, they ended up picking like Byron Youtz to be the Provost and others from the physical and natural sciences to be administrators. I think it speaks to your point of our being fortunate.

**Kormondy:** Yeah. Byron was a good choice.

**Soule:** Mm-mm.

**Kormondy:** He was a very good choice. I still keep in contact with Bernice [Youtz]. Birthday cards and like that.

**Soule:** She was interviewed for this project.

**Kormondy:** Oh, good.

**Soule:** I haven’t seen her comments yet.

**Kormondy:** She was a very strong supporter of the college.

**Soule:** Yes. Do you remember any ways? Was it like through the community groups, like ECHO and some of those other . . .?

**Kormondy:** No, I don’t.

**Soule:** I mentioned that I found this list of names from the early days. **Bill Aldridge, Mike Beug.**

**Kormondy:** Oh, my gosh.

**Soule:** Ring a bell?

**Kormondy:** Yeah, the name is there, but I can’t put . . .



**Soule:** Mushrooms. Chemistry. He now makes wine in the Columbia Gorge. **Richard Brian**, mathematician. **Don Chan**, music. **Thad Curtz**. **Dave Marr**. **Dave Milne**, certainly. **Chuck Nisbet**.

**Kormondy:** As you read them, the name is there, but I can't bring up a . . .

**Soule:** . . . a story?

**Kormondy:** Yeah.

**Soule:** How about **Tom Rainey**? Tom Rainey?

**Kormondy:** Oh, yeah.

**Soule:** Historian.

**Kormondy:** Yeah.

**Soule:** Tom is still teaching occasional classes at Evergreen.

**Kormondy:** Really? Oh, my gosh.

**Soule:** And as vital as ever. **Charlie Teske**.

**Kormondy:** Oh, yeah. Charlie and I—oh, gosh, what was that relationship?

**Soule:** Oberlin.

**Kormondy:** Oberlin, yeah. We were colleagues at Oberlin. Oh, my gosh. [laughing]

**Soule:** Was Charlie part of recruiting you to come to Evergreen, as you remember? Or, was it just a fortunate happenstance that you found out about the school, and ran into him out here?

**Kormondy:** I honestly don't remember.

**Soule:** Any memories of that original dean group—**Merv Cadwallader**, **Don Humphrey** and **Charlie Teske**?

**Soule:** They couldn't be more different as individuals in so many ways. They all made significant contributions to the college, in their way. I don't have anything specific. Nothing comes up.

**Soule:** But in terms of just general style, or as you remember their personalities? Because I agree with you that they were cut out of different molds.

**Kormondy:** Oh, yes.

**Soule:** Any just generalities about those kinds of differences? I assume I'm going to get interviewed one of these times, and they're going to ask me to talk about them, and I will. So, I don't want to put any words in your mouth.

**Kormondy:** No, as I think about those three individuals, very different. Very different. All three were very committed. I don't come up with anything specific on any of the three.

**Soule:** I think of Merv maybe being the intellectual compass of the school, with his [Alexander] Meiklejohn, and all those innovative educational philosophies that were bubbling up in the mid-'60s,

late '60s. Don is kind of the pragmatic scientist, who had the budget and was kind of building on that. Charlie, from more of the arts perspective, and holistic and communicative side of him.

**Kormondy:** Those are good.

**Soule:** But then, I'm putting words in your mouth. You can say yes.

**Kormondy:** The more I think about it, those are quite apt descriptions.

**Soule:** When you became Provost, did you ever have to effectively spank any of them for not playing well with each other?

**Kormondy:** Not that I recall. Maybe I did, but I don't recall. [laughter]

**Soule:** Very well put.

**Kormondy:** I don't remember much about my time as Provost, really. Well, it's like a lot of my experience in life, it's just gone.

**Soule:** Yeah. Again, I got thrown into administration, and in your self-evaluation, you point out that the idea of using the deanship as a place to train people to be deans wasn't a great idea. I was the first person to be tried out in that way, so I took that as both a direct reflection on me, which I could be annoyed at you saying that. But I couldn't become annoyed because you were absolutely correct. So, after one year of being dean, I found I didn't like it, and I went back to teaching, which I did for another 30-some years.

I guess, like you, I'm forgetting where I was going with that. Oh, I know. You didn't remember pretty much the day-to-day or the specifics. What I learned out of my year is that, considering the Provost and the President, there was a Mr. Inside and a Mr. Outside. That goes back to—you know me and sports analogies—Doc Blanchard and [Glenn] Davis, I think, for Army were Mr. Inside, Mr. Outside football players.

It was true that, over the years, our Provost and our President, one has been kind of the outside spokesperson of the college, and the other dealt with the inside stuff. It's my perspective that when you were the Provost, you were the outside person, and Charlie was more the inside person. You had to deal with legislative, committees, and maybe going up to Seattle to do things and the like. In other times—Dan Evans—it was different. Evans was the outside person, and Byron [Youtz] was the inside person, so it varied from President to President.

**Kormondy:** I think that's right.

**Soule:** Does that kind of fit what you remember?

**Kormondy:** That sounds about right. This is not meant as a negative, but Dan Evans was the politician. That's how he'd spent most of his career, and he knew how to work the Legislature and legislators,

where Byron was an educator. His focus was internal. Dan's focus was external. I think we were fortunate that we had those two people in those key roles at that time. Even though, as you know from history, many of us were upset the way Dan was chosen to become our President.

**Soule:** Certainly.

**Kormondy:** He was . . . that would be putting it too strongly . . . I was going to say, Evans never became an Evergreener, but that's putting it too strongly. I think, as a politician, he absorbed what he needed to absorb, so that when he went to his former colleagues up on the Hill—so-called on the Hill—he could speak their language, and at the same time, convey our language, with was pretty difficult, but easy for a politician. I don't mean that in a negative sense at all. I think Dan did a good deal of good work for the college in getting funding, which was important for the institution at that time.

**Soule:** Did you feel, when you were the Provost, that you handled a fair amount of the, say, political side of presenting the college to various governmental agencies and other groups, or did Charlie actually do most of that? I saw it being more you doing it, because Charlie wasn't as comfortable in that role.

**Kormondy:** I guess I did it because it had to be done, and he wasn't interested in, or willing to, or whatever, and it sort of fell upon me to do it. So, I did it.

**Soule:** Any other things that come to mind?

**Kormondy:** No, but this has been an interesting couple of hours, Wednesday and then today, stirring up some memories that have been long since idle. It's been good. I appreciate it.

**Soule:** I don't leave till tomorrow evening. Is it worth coming back tomorrow again for more?

**Kormondy:** I don't think so. I think we've pretty well milked the cow. [laughter]

**Soule:** Well, I can tell you that what you've said has been very important, and we'll never know how useful it will be as an oral history. It's like any piece of scientific work. Mendel's work sat on the shelf for quite a while [laughter] before it got picked up and used. So, we'll see what happens with our conversation.

**Kormondy:** That's quite a comparison. [laughing]

**Soule:** It might be a little too over-flattering to the two of us, but let's hope that it is.

**Kormondy:** Yeah.

**Soule:** Terrific, Ed. I can't thank you enough.

**Kormondy:** It's been fun just visiting with you again. Long-time colleague.

**Soule:** Absolutely.

**Kormondy:** Many, many years in between the time period we've been talking about, which was the early '60s?

**Soule:** No, early '70s.

**Kormondy:** Yeah, so that's 40 . . .

**Soule:** Forty-six, forty-seven years ago.

**Kormondy:** Yeah, almost 50 years ago. Oh!

**Soule:** A long friggin' time.

**Kormondy:** That's a long time, buddy. [laughter]

**Soule:** I think we've held up pretty well. Cheated a little bit to get through, but what the heck. Terrific. So, with that, I'm going to turn off the machine, and the transcriber will never hear what we say next.