

Peter Dorman
Interviewed by Anothony Zaragoza
The Evergreen State College oral history project
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FINAL

Zaragoza: Good afternoon. I'm here with Peter Dorman, former faculty member of The Evergreen State College on the Olympia campus. Peter, welcome.

Dorman: Thank you, thank you, Anthony.

Zaragoza: Maybe you can start by telling us about your early life, your upbringing and some of your early intellectual pursuits up through high school and college.

Dorman: I had a weird life growing up, sort of. I was kind of an afterthought child, so there was a gap of six years between me and my older brothers. I grew up in Racine, Wisconsin, which at the time was an industrial town—strictly industrial—just south of Milwaukee.

My parents were an unusual Jewish-mixed marriage, where my father came from an impoverished background—Eastern Europe—really, really hardscrabble. He spent some time on the rails during the Great Depression. It was really tough for him. My mother came from an upper-class Viennese-Austrian family, one of the great Jewish families of Vienna, the Goldwassers. I was distantly related to Barry Goldwater on my mother's side.

My grandfather—her father—was one of the most unpleasant people I've ever known. He became rich as a foreclosure lawyer during the Depression. The man was absolutely heartless. He was tough.

Zaragoza: Yeah, you'd have to be to be that kind of vulture.

Dorman: Oh, yeah, yeah. He just preyed on people. He didn't care. But he got rich that way. So, that was an unusual marriage, I think. They were very devoted to each other. They got along well. They were both to the left. I have a suspicion, though they never confirmed it to me, that they were at the least in pop-front-type politics in the '30s, if not Communist Party.

But I think after World War II, that wasn't the case anymore. They were Hubert Humphrey Democrats. My mother was a member of United World Federalists, "World Peace Through World Law"—that kind of stuff. I would go to their meetings as a little kid and watch the police take down the license plate numbers. My father was on the board of the Urban League and was vehemently antiracist, which I think served me pretty well. I'm really grateful for that.

I'm not going to say they were the all-time greatest parents, but who is? I grew up in that context, but it was kind of tough for me because I had a serious illness as a little kid, and I had a kind of weird psychological reaction to that. I was kind of out of it for about half a year. I almost died as a little kid.

On top of that, I later found out that I'm on the autism spectrum. Of course, back then nobody knew about that stuff. I thought it was a mystery why I had no friends and everybody else had friends. Eventually, I learned about that.

I was a very precocious student. Nothing seemed to work for me quite right. I was happiest when I was studying by myself, reading on my own and learning. I didn't do that great in school. I blew off a lot of classes. I think I ended up with about a 3.0 grade average, but that's figuring in some flunked classes and stuff—because I was just alienated from school completely. But I'd gotten the idea that I should self-educate because I thought school was nowhere, so I had a reading list of great books and plowed through them. I did that in high school.

I had difficulty getting into college. All the colleges I applied to rejected me. I eventually got into a college—Beloit College—and they kicked me out [laughing] after about a year in a weird case. It's probably not worth going into here. It was ultimately a case of mistaken identity. They were having demonstrations and they thought I was the organizer, and I was just a foot soldier, but they took it out on me. That was okay because I wasn't getting much out of school. At that point, I was pretty much ready for hippiedom.

The one thing I maybe should throw in here is that Beloit College at the time had a system of mandatory internships. After three quarters on campus, you had to go off and do an internship. My internship was at the *New York Times*. I'd always wanted to be a journalist, so I started out as a copyboy. That was the official job, but for whatever reason, they figured out that I could write. I'd always been a writer. I'd started writing as a little kid and wrote a lot. They put me on as a city desk clerk. My job was to rewrite the stories that the city and state reporters were sending in, because often their stories were not that well-written.

Before my internship was up, they called me in and asked if I wanted to be a reporter. They offered me a job to put me on a reporter track. I said no because I couldn't stand living in New York. I'd always lived in a small town. New York was driving me crazy at that time, and I couldn't wait to get out. I guess I wasn't also mentally flexible enough to accept the idea of just changing life track and moving to the big city and working with the *Times*. But that was a kind of interesting experience.

I went back after that and in the next quarter, they kicked me out. [laughing] Then I spent many years being a hippie, doing a lot of drugs. I helped start a food co-op and I helped start a radio station, so I was active in things. I worked for the Post Office for a while and they kicked me out—they fired me—and I got a lawyer to find out why they had falsified and back-dated evaluations. It turned out I was on Nixon's enemies list. We uncovered a message from the White House to the Postal Service saying that I was on a list of names deemed unsuitable for federal service. Immediately after that, I was bounced from the Post Office.

Zaragoza: Peter, do you have any sense of how extensive that list was? Are we talking thousands, tens of thousands?

Dorman: Yes. It's said there were something like 70,000 on that list.

Zaragoza: Is there any sense of the mechanism that went into compiling it?

Dorman: You know, that's an interesting question how they came up with those names. My suspicion is that it was kind of catch as catch can. I don't think they were that well organized back then. For instance, when I saw my FBI file, there were obviously big mistakes in the file. They must have had me confused with other people. They thought I was harboring Weather Underground fugitives and stuff. I would have nothing to do with anything like that. I think it was kind of random. But I was in the underground press, and I was organizing demonstrations and things like that, so it's not irrational that I would be on a list.

Zaragoza: Is there any chance that Beloit had anything to do with that?

Dorman: Absolutely, because the reason Beloit thought I was organizing the demonstrations is that a piece that I wrote was published in *New Left Notes*, which was a national SDS publication, and I didn't even know that they had taken it, that they were using it. It was only years later that I found out that this had happened. And they changed it. They actually made my writing sound more militant, and they put some slogans in it and stuff.

Zaragoza: Okay, I didn't want to distract from that. You were telling us about your court case against the Postal Service.

Dorman: I'm just trying to say all of this is prior to going back to school. The reason I'm telling you this is not just because I like to talk about myself, but to make it clear that a lot of the things that are really important to me are things that I have established before I was a student, really, before I went back to school and went the academic route.

I think for a lot of people, they go straight through school and then they discover stuff. Maybe they take a class and that changes their mind or something like that. It wasn't like that for me. My life

path was more or less set during a period of about eight years when I just held odd jobs—Postal Service and whatever I could get, temp work and stuff—and was involved in the left and alternative culture in Madison, Wisconsin. It was out of that that I eventually decided to go back to school.

After I got this settlement from the Post Office, I got money, so I didn't have to work for about a year. [chuckles] When the money started running out, I thought, oh, no, I don't want to go back to work. That's when I thought, maybe I should go back to school. The idea came to me that maybe somebody like me should learn economics, because in some of the local organizing I'd been doing, economics came up in different ways, especially in environmental stuff. I was active in urban environmental struggles, and we would confront cost/benefit analyses and things like that, and it was all mysterious to me. I thought, okay, maybe people like me need to learn some of this.

The other part of that was I had been very anarchist-influenced and I noticed that the only lefties who seem to study economics were pretty hard-core Marxists, so I thought, okay, maybe somebody from this alternative radical viewpoint, it would be good to have some economic expertise to provide more points of view.

I had one more thing because it's very important for my Evergreen career. This is going to sound very strange, but it's how things work in a person's life. I was somewhat invested in the Portuguese revolution. In 1974, there was a revolution in Portugal—they'd had a dictatorship—and some of the mid-level officers who were fighting in Africa in colonial wars started to come to the conclusion they had more in common with the African guerrillas they were fighting against than their own government.

What eventually happened is that the colonial wars in Angola and Mozambique trained a whole generation of officers to be enemies of their own government. They went back and they overthrew their government. This is in the 1970s. The people who were the most active among these ex-colonial officers were very New Left-influenced and their political outlook was pretty similar to mine. It was a big event when this revolution happened in Portugal among people I knew. I didn't go to Portugal but some of my friends did.

Zaragoza: Would you give us 30 seconds on what you mean by New Left-influenced?

Dorman: In academic terms or leftist official terminology, "council communists" sort of captures it. It's the idea of a socialist society governed bottom-up through councils and federative types of organization. It's not hard-core anarchism, but it's kind of halfway between anarchism and a kind of radical socialism. Does that help?

Zaragoza: Yes, thank you.

Dorman: That was a perspective that was definitely out there at that time, and I was kind of influenced by that and so were these officers. I had two friends who actually went to Portugal to visit the revolution firsthand. I followed it as closely as I could. I was very optimistic, but that part of the revolution simply collapsed. It was embarrassing. It wasn't like they were defeated by their enemies. They tried to implement some of these ideas in parts of Portugal over which they had influence and it didn't work. It became clear that it was a bumper sticker and not a plan. You talk about workers' control and workers' power. It's a very nice idea but that's not a plan. That's just a mood or something.

The collapse of the Portuguese revolution had a big effect on me, and I thought, okay, people like me need to study economics so the next time this happens, we won't just stumble into it and not know what to do. We'll understand in advance what some of the practical issues are, we'll have ideas about how to surmount these problems, and maybe we can create something with legs.

That was a big motivation for going back to school, and it's remained a motivation to this very day, so looking forward, alternatives to capitalism has always been a central part of my search and my self-definition as an economist and it started then. It was the original impetus for going back to school.

First, I had to go back and get a B.A. because I dropped out of school years before. [laughing] I went to the University of Wisconsin in Madison because I was living in Madison. I talked the undergraduate director into exempting me from all the required first-year stuff so I could graduate as quickly as possible, and I took those undergraduate courses.

Then I had to figure out where I was going to go to grad school. Everybody said, "You're weird. You should go to U Mass. That's where all the weird people go." I looked on the map and I saw, well, they have mountains out there. It isn't flat. I was really into hiking, so I thought, that's a plus. That, plus weird people, that's probably where I should go.

So, I went to U Mass, and that was in '77. It was difficult for a while because it was mostly a Marxist program, I would say, or more Marxist than not. I appreciate certain aspects of Marxism. I'm not an anti-Marxist in the sense of thinking there's nothing there, but that was never my worldview, and for a lot of people, that was their world and that was all that mattered to them. So, that was a little bit of a disjuncture for me. I didn't entirely fit in. There was nobody else there who was sort of libertarian left like I was. That was non-existent, so I was kind of on my own with that perspective.

I had some ups and downs there that I won't get into, but the main point here is that it took me 10 years to graduate. The reason is I had a PhD project I pursued that didn't pan out and I lost a lot of time with that. And I had a kid, and I couldn't just live on a graduate student's salary, so I had to work. Everything just took longer, and it was 10 years between when I started and when I finally had a PhD.

In that time, I got into this pattern of getting one-year temp jobs around the country. I spent, I think, a dozen years just going from one temp job to another. It was utterly brutal, and it definitely changed me in certain ways. I've never recovered my ability to work in a community. It's already a little bit of a struggle for me to work in the community because of autism stuff. I can do it, except getting uprooted year after year, eventually you just lose whatever it is that gets you involved with other people. It's like, why bother?

I went through years of just being an outsider everywhere I lived, and I never got past that. I think that, too, influenced how it was for me at Evergreen. A lot of people were able to combine community work at Evergreen with academic stuff. Evergreen is built for that because it is a community and it's got all these tentacles that spread outward into the communities around it. I think a lot of people really took advantage of it in a way that I didn't. On the other hand, as I'll explain later, I got connected to international networks that, to some extent, substituted for that. But I never took full advantage of Evergreen's community connections.

Zaragoza: What year did you arrive at Evergreen?

Dorman: Let's get to the Evergreen part of the story. Let me just say, the last job I had before I went to Evergreen should be mentioned. That was at Michigan State. It was not in an economics department. I actually was never able to get a job in an economics department. There was always some economist there who would look at me and go "Jesus, we don't want one of those." [laughter]

So, at Michigan State, I was in this sort of weird political economy sub-unit of an honors college. I was there for five years, and I probably would have gotten tenure there, but I just couldn't stand it. I didn't like my colleagues, who I thought had no respect for their students. The university itself seemed mismanaged to me. Subsequently we found out that the university was horribly managed to the extent that top administrators got indicted and that sort of thing. The Larry Nassar thing was Michigan State.

I was really eager to leave, and I hated being in Michigan. Flat, humid in the summer and cold in the winter, really unpleasant. Evergreen had been on my radar for a number of years. I thought maybe I would like to do it, but I knew that Evergreen was demanding and that I didn't want to make the shift until I thought I was well enough established in my research life that I would be able to continue it at a place like Evergreen, if that makes sense.

Zaragoza: Yeah.

Dorman: So, that happened. During my time at Michigan State, I got a book out, I started working with the UN. Stuff was happening. I was doing a lot of health and safety work with unions. I'd been working

still on trade stuff, again, mostly with unions. I felt, okay, now I've got a lot of these things going, I can go to Evergreen and not be totally isolated. I'm prepared for that.

I didn't tell anybody at Michigan State that I had applied to Evergreen. I did it secretly. Of course, when you have a job, you don't advertise that you're looking for another one. When Evergreen accepted me and I told my colleagues, they said, "That's great. You can use that to negotiate for a higher salary." [laughter] It was really funny because Evergreen had offered me 20 percent less than what I was making at MSU, so I said, "Well, I could ask the people at MSU if they're willing to cut my salary even more. Maybe that would convince me to stay."

I took the pay cut and the workload increase and I left Michigan State and I came to Evergreen. Ironically, a guy that I knew fairly well at MSU was doing the same thing at the same time, and that was Ted Whitesell. I saw Ted in Michigan at one point and I said, "Ted, I've got something to tell you. You're not going to believe this." He says, "I have something to tell you." And it was the same thing. We both had agreed to jump ship and go to Evergreen.

Zaragoza: A quick question, Peter. Thinking about your reasons for getting into economics and thinking about the work you were doing with unions and internationally at MSU, do you feel like you were doing the things you were getting into economics to do? Were you satisfied with the direction your academic career had taken up to that point based upon where you originated?

Dorman: Sort of. It's complicated. I can't give you a yes or no answer to that. In some ways, yes. Certainly, the international stuff, yes. But for a lot of the work I wanted to do in rethinking economics, critiquing it and reconstructing some of it to make it more useful, and the alternatives to capitalism stuff—which were very closely related, those were always two aspects of the same thing to me—I knew this was too big for any one person.

I would want to be part of a team. But there was no team. I didn't know anybody anywhere who had the same interests or desires I had. I wasn't able to train graduate students because I was only working at an undergrad level at Michigan State. Of course, Evergreen, there's no opportunity for that, so I couldn't even train people to be part of my team, which I would have loved to have been able to do. I also wasn't in proximity to people who might have gravitated into this type of work. I would say in looking back on it—this covers the whole period before and including Evergreen—I accomplished a whole lot less than what I wanted because I was always just working on my own.

But the things that were important to me—the union stuff—yes, that eventually petered out because of the kinds of stuff I was working on—well, unions started petering out. Then the issues that I was involved in became less salient for the labor movement. That's not totally true because I was

working on international trade. I'm not quite sure why the international trade thing . . . I'll have to think about that. But somehow, I found myself irrelevant to what people were doing, even though I'd been working for years on it—trade and labor standards.

Zaragoza: Thank you. I just wanted to check in in terms of your career path. Then you're on your way to Evergreen and you arrive in Olympia. What are some of your first impressions about the place?

Dorman: The very first impression, of course, was the late summer faculty retreat, which happened before the school year started. Man, that was great for an incoming faculty member because we were out in the woods doing a real retreat.

We did skits. It was the responsibility of the incoming faculty to do a skit for everybody else. That was cool for me because I'd been writing plays since I was seven or eight years old. Every year in grade school and middle school, I wrote the class play. I started writing real plays when I was a teenager, so I was always into writing plays and skits and stuff and I was able to apply those skills. The basic skit was a bunch of people wandering through the woods lost.

Zaragoza: What year was this, Peter?

Dorman: '98. So, a bunch of people are wandering through the woods and they come across a campfire, and it's Evergreen. They're trying to find out, what are these people around the campfire doing? There were songs in it. "We All Live in Mellow Evergreen," things like that. It was a lot of fun, but that's not terribly significant, I suppose.

The physical campus really struck me, the combination of the brutalist architecture and then all these amazing trees and forest. Though already, by the late '90s, it was obvious that the environmental vision of the people who started Evergreen was skewed. They thought to be environmental meant you went out into the woods, like far from town. [laughter] Now we know it's exactly the opposite; that the people who go out to the woods are the ones who are responsible for all the destruction, and it's the cool people who stay in the cities who will save the world, but back then, there was this other view.

Pretty quickly, before I had researched the history of the school, it became obvious to me that there were two Evergreens, or at least two Evergreens. One was academically serious, innovative, and politically motivated. The other was—how do you want to say it?—spiritual, holistic, and about redeeming lost souls. Every year, all these people would gravitate to Evergreen as students who were just lost, or who just needed direction in their lives, or some kind of foundation, and they'd come to Evergreen and they would take these programs about finding yourself, and they would find themselves. It was quite powerful for them. I admired that.

I had known over the years, prior to coming to Evergreen, people who went to Evergreen specifically for that purpose. It's like "I don't know what I'm doing. Maybe I should go to Evergreen and find myself." That has always been a big part of Evergreen.

I noticed the campus was almost split in that sense. You'd meet a faculty member and it was clear which side they were on. They were doing primarily one thing or primarily the other. There wasn't a whole lot of cross connection between the two. A little bit, but not much. I think it remains the same. Maybe later, when we talk about the financial problems of Evergreen, I think we can get back into that because I think it's an important part of it. That was obvious to me right from the get-go.

The other thing that was obvious—and it also has developed over time as part of my awareness of the school—is that Evergreen is a teacher's paradise in certain ways. I can't imagine a school that gives teachers more freedom to define what they're doing, set the boundaries for it, the criteria, the methodologies—everything. It's like a candy shop for teachers. It's incredible.

That can only work if people have the right motivation. If you are truly student-oriented, if you truly want to take that freedom and use it to improve education, improve the world, it's incredible. It's incredibly powerful. But for some people, of course, they will use the freedom in order to just have a good time, not have to work very hard, and cut corners.

Right in my first program, I encountered a faculty member who was like that, who tried to cut every corner he could. I'm not going to name names here. There's no point to it. But it was obvious to me that this regime of freedom at Evergreen depended a lot on internal regulation. When I think back on the faculty, it's incredible. I would say the vast majority of them were unbelievably dedicated, self-motivated, self-regulating people who used their freedom constructively. And then there were a few others. That's always been an issue at Evergreen, how do you manage that freedom? How do you keep the people using the freedom in an effective way?

Part of that, it's not just a question of the motivation of the faculty, it's also whether the faculty are connecting to the students. Is the freedom of the faculty always in the interest of the students? The ideology at Evergreen was yes, if you're doing what inspires you, turns you on, then it will turn on the students and they'll be inspired. That happens a lot, but I don't think it always happens.

I could see right from the beginning that there was a little bit of a gap between what the faculty thought they were doing and what students experienced, and students would tell me about that. They perceived me as being open to listening to some of their concerns, and I would regularly hear from students, "This faculty member, they're just going off on their own thing and they're not listening to

what I need.” That was a seed that was planted. So, it was complex. I learned that Evergreen was a complex place.

Zaragoza: What were some of the educational influences that you saw in operation, or that you deployed?

Dorman: That I deployed myself?

Zaragoza: Or that you saw others using, discussing, sharing with each other. What were the pedagogical methodologies that you thought really had something important in them that others were doing, that you were doing?

Dorman: Good question. Long before coming to Evergreen, I had discovered John Dewey in just generally reading around, and I realized I had a lot in common with Dewey. I have a few issues with him and I think he’s not perfection, but I really, really admired a lot of Dewey’s work and the way he tried to rethink education to make it appropriate for a vision of society, of the self-governing society where everybody’s a subject, everybody plays an active role.

When I got to Evergreen, I could immediately see the Dewey part of it, and I probably was blinded a little bit at first by seeing only that. I thought, man, this is it. We’re going to put in practice—we are putting in practice—this idea of education for a democratic community, where everybody has a voice, and a practical education where people are doing hands-on work and getting the kinds of skills to build a new world, and education that breaks down the wall between the school and the outside world so that it’s organic in its connections with the concerns of the people and all that stuff. So, I thought, yeah, this is it. It took me a few years—and to answer your question in the most direct way, I saw a lot of pedagogical stuff that reflected that, and that led me to think that it is really Dewey all the way down or something like that.

It was clearly, for instance, active learning. I saw active learning immediately everywhere. Instead of people standing up and lecturing, there was very little lecturing. Students had to beg me to lecture. I didn’t want to give any lectures at all when I got there. But clearly, lecturing was an activity of last resort. [laughing] When nothing else worked, you would lecture, but you would try everything else first.

We always had projects going, students working on projects. The projects were connecting to the world. They were related to real things. They weren’t just fictional or mythological projects, they were actual real-world projects. In Political Economy, that’s pretty straightforward to do. You have students working on problems that people are struggling with, either locally or internationally, and

researching them, and giving reports, trying to do problem-solving and strategizing around those issues. That was just tremendously powerful for me.

Zaragoza: It's interesting, Peter, because I've found much of Political Economy at Evergreen to be very traditional in its approach to teaching.

Dorman: Yes, some of the people—again, I don't want to get into names. One Political Economy person we're both thinking of whose approach is very traditional. I taught with this person and, yes, I would agree with that. But if you have a three-person team, you have one person who's super-traditional and then you have two people who are hands-on. That's a good balance.

Zaragoza: Yeah. I appreciate that. I was surprised to see how traditional some of the instruction was at Evergreen when I came in, so I was curious if that was your experience also. But, yeah, I think mixed teams is another strength of teaching in teams. Anyway, I didn't want to derail your train of thought. I just wanted to bring that up.

Dorman: I think it was the third year that I was at Evergreen, I taught in a program I never would have expected to teach in, Eco Design. I taught with Rob Knapp and an adjunct faculty, Gretchen Van Dusen. I was completely blown away. I was simply blown away. I was brought into this because I had some background in urban planning, and the idea was to combine building-scale design with neighborhood-scale design to put the buildings in a context, and to do some basic urban planning; sit down there with some of the city maps and go through them to figure out how things could be reconstructed to make it a better urban environment, so I was brought in for that.

This program went further than I've ever seen any other program go in terms of hands-on learning. Everything was project-based learning. Students were given tasks. The very first day the task was to set up your workstation. We had a room 24/7. It was our room—nobody else was using it—for the entire year, so students could set up semi-permanent structures. They set up light-tables and stuff. So, at the very beginning, you had to design your own workstation and then build you workstation. This is already, right from the beginning, hands-on.

Then we're actually doing projects for people. They weren't necessarily projects that people would use, but they were for their actual problems. Designing homeless shelters. Designing intersections that were horrible, terrible urban intersections. Dealing with fractured neighborhoods. Improving buildings on campus. It was all real-world problems that needed to be addressed and we were working on it. All the instruction was through the projects. Everything we taught was to aid the projects.

Since we had the room 24/7, the students would be working on their projects at any time. There was no concept anymore of a daily schedule. We would schedule certain things, but people would come in when they came in. I might wake up at 3:00 in the morning and ask, "Hm. I wonder what's happening at the lab?" I'd go down to campus and to our room and check in on the students in the middle of the night, who were working on their projects or listening to music and just hanging out. I could chat with them for half an hour and head back home. It was unbelievable. Talk about a learning community. I could not have imagined anything so complete and enveloping, such a complete implementation of this Dewey concept of a learning community working on real-world problems as a democratic community and encountering academic material in that context.

Zaragoza: Understood. Do you want to talk more about the team-teaching aspect of Evergreen? We've kind of opened that up. It would be important, I think, to hear about your experiences with team teaching.

Dorman: That was always a big draw for me for Evergreen. If I think about the reasons I wanted to come to Evergreen, team teaching would be near the top of the list. I really liked being one of several faculty in the room and not the only one. I think that breaks down some of the hierarchy because if you just have one faculty member in the room, it's really hard to be egalitarian. But if you've got an egalitarian relationship between the faculty, then you've got something to work off of in terms of the students. You can begin to develop a broader community in the classroom that's largely egalitarian. I just thought the social dynamics were better in team teaching.

Of course, learning from one another is huge. There were huge gaps in my knowledge when I came to Evergreen and I thought, this is great, I'm going to get continuing education. I'm going to fill in some of these gaps by teaching with people who know stuff that I don't know anything about and can begin to learn, so I went out of my way to teach with people whose expertise was just light years away from mine. I could just sit there and absorb as much of it as possible, especially natural scientists. That was just great for me. I learned so much science during my years at Evergreen, but not only science—history and many other things.

In terms of pedagogy, team teaching is very powerful because if you're teaching with other people who love and care about teaching as you do, then they have all these great ideas and you're going to learn from them. You'll pick up stuff. My list of what I picked up from other faculty would be very long. It would probably be 90 percent of what I left with.

Zaragoza: Were there some memorable programs that you want to speak to, some years that stood out for you at Evergreen?

Dorman: Sure. In terms of team teaching, I mentioned already the Eco Design. I'll add one more thing there, which is as an experiment that year, we decided to join Eco Design and Eco Ag kind of at the hip. We had joint class meetings—not all of them, but every week would be one meeting where we would bring the two programs together for a common activity. We had a fieldtrip together. There was a lot of utopian speculation about how far you could go bringing in building and materials-type design with ag-type design, and maybe you could bring in other aspects of what communities need. Before long, you could have a total educational engagement with the outside world, where you were involved in all aspects of this stuff. It didn't go anywhere, but it was one of those things that takes the roof of your mind off when you imagine the possibilities. That one really stood out.

A lot of the fieldtrips were really memorable. For various reasons, it didn't always go well when I was teaching with Paul Przybylowicz in a program called Trees, Timber and Trade, but the fieldtrip at the beginning of the year to the Olympics was just incredible. It was an incredible fieldtrip. I'll never forget it. Just beautiful.

Zaragoza: In that program, were there pedagogical differences, political differences? What were the tensions that I hear you alluding to there?

Dorman: I'm not sure it was pedagogical. In some ways, it worked really well. I think at times it really fit together well, especially when we were doing project-based stuff. For instance, we did a thing on, what are the ecological services of the Evergreen campus forest? We had students going out and examining ecologically what the forest does, not just looking at individual trees. Then looking at the literature on how those things are valued, what they accomplish for the environment and for people. That worked really, really well. That was kind of a high point.

To some extent, I think our internal clocks were a bit different or something like that. We just sometimes didn't operate on the same track. I got really sick in the second quarter of that program, and that was difficult for both of us. I got pneumonia.

Zaragoza: I'm sorry to hear that. What year is that, Peter?

Dorman: That was 1999, I think, so that was a little bit less. Working on something like Global Meltdowns or something like that, we were looking at climate and energy and the economy. We organized a survey—a research project—in Thurston County on the attitudes toward climate change. That was really interesting, getting the students out on the street and surveying their fellow citizens. That was really powerful to me to see how that worked.

This gets away from team teaching a little bit but in Alternatives to Capitalism, which I taught a whole bunch of times, I always wanted students to see an intentional community that was economically

self-sufficient. There's a lot of those in other parts of the country, but for some reason, the Pacific Northwest has almost nothing like that. It's not like I think the future of the world is in these communities, but I think there's something to be said even for small-scale holistic communities, which try to address all aspects of people's life, including economics.

To give you an idea at least at a small scale what that looks like—and the only one I found in the Pacific Northwest is Breitenbush. Breitenbush Hot Springs is a worker co-op. It's collectively owned by its workforce. On top of that, it's a residential community with a fair amount of shared ideology. People go there as sort of a spiritual thing, I guess you might say. There are different interpretations of that, but they live out there in the woods with each other. Communally, they handle a lot of their needs, so it's pretty close to being an intentional community. It's economically self-sufficient due to the Hot Springs. It's actually a thriving business.

By the way, Breitenbush looks like it survived the fires virtually by a miracle. A fire hit Breitenbush, burned down half of it, and left the other half standing, including the most important stuff like the lodge and the infrastructure. By some just crazy quirk of fate, it looks like they'll come back.

But going to Breitenbush was extraordinary, partly because of Breitenbush itself but then the students. In a way that students might have trouble understanding other types of intentional communities, they really could understand Breitenbush. You could just see that within a day or two of this intensive experience, their view of what was possible in the world had just expanded. It happened before your eyes. It was like time-lapse photography of flowers opening up.

Zaragoza: Talk a little bit more about student experiences over your career—struggles, challenges, learning, things that you saw grow, those kinds of things that you witnessed from your perspective happen among and within students.

Dorman: There's a lot of different stories that one could tell here. I think that to some extent—Anthony, you've been replaced by a poster. I think to some extent, Evergreen for many students was a second-chance school. We had a lot of older students who were returning and many of them, for different reasons, it just never worked out that well the first time. Some of my most positive experiences, I think, were with students who came back later when they were really ready for it and took advantage of the opportunities of Evergreen and blossomed. I saw a number of students who did that.

I had one student who came in who had such a negative self-image. I guess she had really been mistreated by a number of men and she had internalized a lot of that. She needed people who believed in her, basically, and by feeding self-confidence and by pointing out the skills that people had that they

don't always recognize, you can really have an impact on a person's life. As I think back on it, I can think of half a dozen or a dozen students who were really transformed in front of my eyes. I don't claim any particular expertise or skill. It's just a matter of believing in somebody and believing in them enough that they can absorb it from you, get some of that faith themselves.

Again, the diversity of the work that you're doing is a part of that, too, especially the project-based work. A lot of the students who had negative experiences in more traditional schools—because they weren't good at memorizing, or they didn't have this or that particular academic piece of it—in a real-world situation often you can bring things to that which are non-traditional, and you can discover that you're a powerful person, you can get things done and figure things out, even though in traditional classrooms, you always seemed to be the last one to pick up on it.

Zaragoza: What about the governance at Evergreen? Are there things that you want to speak to there around governance?

Dorman: Oh, yeah. [chuckles] I think Evergreen was pretty well governed when I got there. I'm like one of these kneejerk administration skeptics. I question why anybody would ever want to be an administrator. I think if you're a good human being, you should not want power.

But I know that people go into administration for different reasons, and we had some people who were pretty good, I think, when I got there. I think the administration of the college gradually deteriorated over time for a number of different reasons. I don't want to lay it on the individuals. I think the problems developed and the administration didn't keep up.

One thing I absolutely want to put on the table—we can get to it now or later—is that my experience with FAC was extremely disillusioning in terms of the administration.

Zaragoza: You've got to tell us what FAC is.

Dorman: FAC is the Faculty Advisory Committee on the Budget. Evergreen periodically has budget crises and had had them before I got there. One of the legacies is that a permanent group was created of rotating faculty members whose job is to monitor the budget and to be go-betweens between the faculty and the administration when there are budget issues to be addressed.

I joined this group, I think, around 2013-2014, something like that. Evergreen was starting to have budget problems. Even before I joined it, there were already budget cuts. The first thing I discovered is that Evergreen didn't have a unified budget. It was incredible. This is a college with millions of dollars in its budget and revenues and expenditures, and it's a big operation—a big entity—and we'd never hired anybody apparently with the skills to put together a unified budget. Different parts of the college had different budgets, literally different spreadsheets, with different terminology

and different structures for their revenues and expenses, that didn't communicate with each other. In fact, there was no way that you could determine what the impact of one person's budget, or one unit's budget, on another unit was directly. You had to get the two people in the room sitting down with their spreadsheets and saying, "If I do this, how is that going to affect you?" After about two or three hours of discussion, they might be able to figure it out.

Of course, what you need, or what you should have, in an organization like this is one single budget for the whole organization with different people who have different parts of that budget. Now, electronically, it should be integrated so that you could just press a button on one spreadsheet and it would show what's going to happen everywhere else. We were facing budget crises with the absence of just such an information system to tell us what the consequences were going to be, what the causes were, how it could be handled.

Zaragoza: What year is this crisis that you're referring to?

Dorman: I didn't look up the exact year. I think we're talking about something like . . . we had a bulge after the financial crisis, where we had an influx of students, and then that influx of students went out, so this is a few years later. I'm just going to say 2013—I can look it up—but it begins about 2013. I'm on this committee for four years.

What we had to do as a faculty committee, we had some financial expertise here. I'm not a finance person, I'm an economist, but I've worked with budgets and I've managed budgets in the past on research projects and things like that. I know my way around a budget, and we had a couple of other people who had these skills. What we spent most of our time doing was just figuring out what the budgetary situation of Evergreen was. We were doing their work for them. They were getting unpaid faculty support to figure out how to have the different parts of the budget communicate with each other from this faculty committee.

That's incredible to me. I hate to say it, it's rinky-dink. It's just rinky-dink. You've got a lot of people who depend on you. This is a big organization, and there's so much at stake, and not to have the basics organized, it seems to me, is unforgivable.

I'm not a historian. I can't give you a definitive statement as to why that came about, but I strongly suspect it's because at Evergreen—for very understandable reasons—there was little interest in expertise when people were hired to administrative positions. People were admired for their personal skills, for their quality as human beings, for the social relationships they had developed, and they moved up the ladder on the basis of that, but they didn't have the training. [laughing] We didn't have people who knew how to handle this stuff, so it was just Scotch tape and chewing gum. That's how it was. It

was a big, amateur college, and when we got into real financial problems that were difficult—intractable even—we were just unprepared for it. That's the first thing is the competence factor, the expertise factor.

The second thing was a stunning lack of leadership. Just stunning. What are administrators for in the end? You have a school like Evergreen where academically, it's incredibly decentralized. You're just like a clearinghouse for faculty to pursue their dreams and their visions, and create cool stuff, and for students to find cool stuff, and all that matchmaking and invention is taking place at a very decentralized level. We don't have departments like traditional universities have, so the job of the administrator is not to say, "You've got to switch to this textbook," or, "You've got to add a course for this," like they did at Michigan State. The job for the administrators is to keep the machine running so that individual freedom and collective freedom can continue to be the organizing principle down the line.

They didn't keep the machine running. They just were asleep at the wheel. We tried for years to get administrators to step up and say, "Here's the problem. These are some of the things we have to fix." We tried to enlist the faculty on that and say, "You've got to own this problem. If you don't own this problem, somebody else is going to ultimately own it and they're going to tell you what to do. So, if you want to put faculty in charge of dealing with it, you've got to take some initiative here."

We tried to communicate that message, and nobody wanted to hear it. I think with faculty, I'm willing to give them some slack because faculty are mostly in the programs. That's mostly what they care about. I wish they weren't quite so insular, but that's how it's always been at Evergreen. But there's no excuse for administrators. They should have been on this from day one. By the time there started to be some action—which was after George Bridges came—already the problem was out of control. It was really out of control. Maybe there was no solution at that point.

Zaragoza: We're kind of getting into a really important topic here, Peter, and looking at it from one angle. You're starting to think through the evolution of Evergreen. I'd like to hear your thoughts, especially about how Evergreen has evolved from your perspective.

Dorman: I hope I can remember everything I want to say about this. I have a number of different thoughts. Here are two thoughts that are interconnected. On the one hand, I mentioned the two Evergreens at the beginning. You had the Evergreen that's more traditionally academic and innovative, and then you have this other Evergreen, which is more spiritual, and finding yourself, it's the journey, and that sort of thing.

I think part of what happened to Evergreen that made the Evergreen model problematic is that two things happened simultaneously. On the one hand, there was a certain pool of people that we drew on for that second Evergreen, the find-yourself Evergreen, returning students who have a lot of promise, who got off on the wrong track somehow, and needed an environment in which to get back on track. Evergreen has processed—that's not a nice word—it's been the venue for thousands of those people over the years to find themselves. It's a huge function of the college. The world is a better place because of this. But that pool has gradually dried up. This is my belief. Fewer and fewer students every year come to Evergreen to find themselves, older students with that particular need. Just, who am I? What's my place here? What am I going to do with my life? Fewer and fewer students. They still exist—I'm not saying they don't—but I think it becomes less of a source of demand for the college.

At the same time, you've got more and more students for whom Evergreen is the affordable State university in their neighborhood. From their point of view, those programs, they don't even see the point. Those programs just seem to be hippie-dippy, not serious, low-standard kind of programs, and it's really unfortunate.

Part of what happened is that Evergreen developed a reputation for not being a serious school, not academically rigorous, etc. All the data gathering that we paid these various consultants to do supports that, but that perception of Evergreen was growing and growing and growing, even as we were attracting fewer students for whom the non-academic Evergreen was exactly what they needed.

I think that's a structural problem, and it would have taken a lot of creativity and goodwill to make that adjustment. Shift some resources out of that Evergreen but to do it respectfully, knowing how valuable Evergreen is. Using advising so that there were fewer students in those programs who were looking for academic work. That's really important so they weren't disappointed and running around talking about how rinky-dink Evergreen is. I think there are ways we could have managed that, but we had to identify that problem and deal with that.

A second thing that happened—and I don't know how connected this is—had to do with the balance of the college. I mentioned the two Evergreens. I'm going to speak to a different dichotomy here, and it doesn't line up one to one—I don't want to give that impression—but it's another dichotomy that kind of crosscuts the first one, and that's ideological or the fundamental idea behind the college.

Later, after I'd been at Evergreen for a few years, I found out, no, it's not all Dewey. It was Dewey and Alexander Micklejohn. When the founders came to Evergreen at the end of the '60s to

create this college, some of them were Dewey people and some of them were Micklejohn people. Then they compromised and they created structures that had a little bit of each.

Zaragoza: Give us a quick sentence about Micklejohn.

Dorman: Dewey is the hands-on thing, and it's also more political. It's about changing the world, democracy, equality, that kind of stuff. Micklejohn is self-discovery. Education basically is about tapping into the eternal quest, and the eternal quest has not changed over the centuries, or even the millennia. It's ultimately the same. It's about finding the inner truth, and the path to the inner truth would be through the great thinkers who have approached these fundamental questions in profound ways. So, the Great Books approach to education, for instance, is Micklejohn.

The other aspect of that is the idea that the ideal environment for education is as isolated as possible. You want to remove yourself from the corruptions of the world to move into an environment that is only—it's like a retreat. Education should be like a retreat. You contemplate these eternal questions with as little interruption or distortion from the rest of the world as possible. In that sense, it's the opposite of Dewey. Dewey wants to throw you into the world and Micklejohn wants to take you away from it and put you in the woods with a few Great Books, sitting around talking about them, and discovering who you are.

Evergreen was a dance between those two, kind of a balance. My perception—and I'm not going to say that I'm necessarily right about this, it could just be how it looked to me or where I was at in the institution—was that over my years at Evergreen, the balance shifted away from the Dewey people and toward the Micklejohn people.

I feel like a decisive moment there was the academic statement. The academic statement was entirely framed in Micklejohn terms. It was very politically contentious. It eventually had to be rammed through. You can maybe get other people to talk who were closer to the politics of it to talk about that.

My particular experience of it was I've always talked a lot with students about what they're getting out of Evergreen, just to listen, just to try to get a sense of how it's going. I'm not a natural teacher. Some people are born teachers. I have had to work at it pretty hard, and I have to check in with students constantly to find out how effective I am, and to take guidance from them. I just can't sense it intuitively like a lot of people can. So, I do end up doing a lot of talking to students about what they're getting out of Evergreen. I was hearing from a lot of students, "You know, it just doesn't add up. I take this, and I take that, and I take something else, and it's all very interesting, but I don't see how it comes together."

That type of thing that I was hearing a lot of other people were hearing at the same time—talking with other faculty, I definitely got the sense this was an issue for Evergreen. Maybe our image out there in the world is declining because students think it doesn't add up. They're not getting a coherent education from it.

My concern about the academic statement—which, from the beginning, I knew would be good for a lot of students; it wasn't that I thought no students should ever write this—was that it might be an attempt to slough it all off on the students, to say, "Oh, so you don't think it adds up? Well, that's your problem. You have to figure out how it adds up." To me, that was an abdication of responsibility. If the students are complaining about it, we need to huddle with ourselves and say, "Wow! Are there ways that we could help it add up better?" Take that responsibility for ourselves, and I felt this was a refusal to take responsibility for it and to put it on the shoulders of the students.

I got somewhat embroiled in those politics, but at the same time, I wasn't an activist on either side. I wasn't counting the votes or anything like that. There are other people you can talk to who would get down and dirty with how that got through. But I do think that was a decisive moment when the Micklejohn view that Evergreen is about self-discovery and traditional academic criteria is not the point, it's about how it comes together in the individual student, and as a human being, and how they revise their view of themselves through the experience they've had. That view of what Evergreen was kind of took control.

Zaragoza: In those terms, it feels like a very neoliberal move, both in the sense that it puts it on the students to find the meaning in their education and it emphasizes the individual self-discovery as opposed to the social relationships which were embedded in the more Dewey-influenced pedagogy.

Dorman: I half agree and half disagree. The part I agree with is it's certainly more individualistic. I'm not sure it's neoliberal. I think actually what's happened in the last two or three years is really the big neoliberal turn, which is seeing the student as a customer. For better or worse, in the Micklejohn view, the student is not a customer. The student is somebody who has come on a quest to undergo a transformation.

I agree with you that that's a very one-sided view of what needs to be fixed in this world. [chuckles] It doesn't mean it's not true. It doesn't mean it's false in any fundamental way. There are a lot of people who will benefit from transformation in that form. I think even in the most political economy-inspired view, there's still space for personal transformation—a necessary space. We're not trying to preclude that entirely.

I think in the last couple of years, and with the current redesign of the college, it's entirely about marketing. It's entirely about giving people a product that we hope they'll buy, whereas Evergreen was really a do-it-yourself once upon a time. You made your own product. There was a different ethos. It was a big workshop. You came to the workshop and all the tools were there, and you'd come out with what you built. Now the idea is you go there and there's a bunch of shelves and you point to what you want, and you pay for it. That, to me, is the neoliberal turn.

Zaragoza: How else has Evergreen evolved over the time that you've been connected?

Dorman: Let me mention a couple of experiences. I'm not sure this will fully answer your question, but it's different windows that I've had on Evergreen.

Really right around the time I came to Evergreen, and ever since, there's been concern about business and management and how to handle that. It's always been a crisis at Evergreen. Students have wanted business programs, but how business would fit into the Evergreen structure and ethos is very problematic, obviously.

When I was researching this interview, I was going back over some of the old documents, and already, by the year 2000—which is just two years after I came to Evergreen—I'd already submitted a proposal.

I should back up here and say while I was never that much of a hands-on activist at Evergreen, like trying to mobilize people, I was constantly coming up with proposals. Every year or two, I had a proposal, and I would write it up and I'd try to spread it around to people.

I think my first proposal that I wrote in the year 2000 was for democratic management and how that would look. I pointed out that there's this whole field out there called critical management studies, people who approach accounting and finance and organization from a critical and often directly anti-capitalist perspective, and they struggle to get jobs in business schools, but they have a community out there. Why shouldn't Evergreen go after those people and have a kind of business and management program which imparts these critical skills but does it in the context that fits a larger, insurgent self-identity that the college could have? It would be deliberately training people who are going to go out and transform America and make it a more egalitarian, sustainable place.

That was the first thing I wrote up and boy, do I remember the reaction. It was "No, we can't go there." Every time I re-made that proposal—I've made it in various forms—I just hit a wall. Initially, the wall was just negative toward me, but then it became clear that Evergreen had decided—and I don't know how it was decided—that business was going to be an extension of that second Evergreen.

Business was going to be about finding yourself. The connection between business and Evergreen was your inner entrepreneur.

That happened maybe about 10 years ago or so that that coalesced as the idea, so then, every time I presented my effort to kind of get a critical management thing at Evergreen, instead of just hearing “Well, we don’t like what you’re proposing,” it was like “Well, you’re too late because now we have this other approach, and this is the approach we’re using.” It’s about spirit and psychology and that sort of thing. They’re still trying to do it and it’s still not working, by the way. They still can’t get business faculty to stay at Evergreen. It’s a shotgun marriage between business and spirituality, in my view. So, that’s one window.

The second thing is another story, and I’m not quite sure how to interpret the story but I’ll just tell it. One of the things that had really bothered me—and, I think, every other kind of socially conscious faculty member at Evergreen was bothered by exactly the same thing—is that because Evergreen is essentially an open-access institution, we get a large number of students whose academic background is insufficient for college-level work. They have difficulty reading, they have difficulty writing, they have rudimentary math skills. I get students who don’t know how to do fractions. How am I supposed to teach statistics to a student who can’t do a fraction? It’s beyond me.

That puts faculty in this horrible situation. You really have one of two choices. Either you take it on yourself to try to backfill all this stuff, knock yourself out to try to do it—which shortchanges the other students for whom that’s not relevant—I suppose you could deny credit to students or you can socially promote them. You can just say, “Okay, it’s not your fault. You come from an America that shortchanges a high percentage of its population—screws them over, gives them screwed-up education—so I’m not going to hold you responsible for it and here are your credits.” But that doesn’t solve the problem either, right? In the long run, that’s not such a gift.

It seems to me that if you’re going to be open access like Evergreen, you have to have programs that are targeted to students who have deficient academic backgrounds. “Target” is the key word here. You’ve got to take resources away from the rest of the college. Much as you might not want to, you’ve got to take some of those resources and directly provide them to the students who are most vulnerable, most at need, most screwed over by America. That, to me, is a social justice issue, and it also can help bring sanity back to the classroom. It can avoid a lot of the problems that arise when you put these students all together and you don’t have the resources to deal with it.

In 2014, I think it was, I came up with a proposal for that, how that could be structured. I shopped it around to a few people—some of my friends from Political Economy and other people—and

the reaction was positive. I presented it to the Provost at the time and he said, “Yes, this is what we need. I’ll set up a DTF. Would you be willing to be on the DTF?” I said, “No,” because I was already on FAC and there was no way I was going to do anything else. It was already a wipeout assignment and, I thought, a very important one.

So, I didn’t, so this Provost proceeded to water down the charge and just said, “Well, we have to think about developmental education in some general way.” Then it went to the faculty and it got divided into two groups. One was reading and writing—language stuff—and the other was quantitative. Both of them, in different ways, got screwed up.

The quantitative one got handed off to the sciences. It was like, well, the only students who really need quantitative stuff at Evergreen are the science students, so we’ll just give it to the sciences. The sciences—bless them—within that narrow world developed a program to do it. It needed some external funding, and they took it to the Legislature and the Legislature turned them down, so the proposal still sits on the shelf. It’s out there to be funded but has never been funded.

The language part of it went to some faculty who thought about it and came back and said, “All students have language deficiencies at Evergreen. We shouldn’t think that this is special. We are all struggling to be better learners, blah blah blah, so let’s set up something for everybody, for all of Evergreen.” In other words, they basically just blew it off. They threw out the entire social justice agenda. Just chucked it.

I think there is no moment in my experience at Evergreen when I was more infuriated than when I was sitting in that faculty meeting and listening to these faculty using all this flowery language to explain to us why social justice is not an issue at Evergreen. Every part of my skin was burning. I felt like I was going to explode.

I don’t know fully even yet how to interpret that. You would have to talk to the people who were on the other side of that and get their story. I’m probably missing part of what happened. But to me, that was emblematic of the failure of Evergreen to confront the fact that it’s an open-access institution, it has a diverse student body, with diverse needs, and that the priority has to go to the people who’ve been the most messed over by American society. I just feel like Evergreen has never accepted that.

A little bit. That’s an extreme statement. The existence of the Tacoma Campus is a nod in that direction, so maybe I’m overstating it. But at least on the Olympia Campus, that’s how I feel.

Zaragoza: Peter, in terms of the evolution of Evergreen, I’m also curious to hear what you think about this. Evergreen has often been thought of as a radical hotbed or a place where radicalization happens.

We could debate the extent to which that's true or not, but it's certainly changed over time-- that, I think, is undebatable—and the institutions' relationship with that element and that reputation. Can you speak to that evolution a little bit?

Dorman: Yeah, I think that's true. To some extent—and you're probably getting this from other people, too—the evolution of political economy itself speaks to that. The gradual attrition of what you might call the broader political economy. There's a narrow political economy of people who identify primarily with that part of the college, but then there's the outer ring, if you will, of political economy, people who occasionally teach in a political economy program, but their primary commitment might be somewhere else.

I don't know. I've never sat down and done the numbers. I know in terms of the hardcore political economy, there's been attrition. My feeling is that there's also been attrition in that outer ring as well. That attrition is, of course, a function of decisions that people make. It doesn't just happen. It's about how new openings are defined, and who's on those hiring committees, and what they're looking for. That, I think, is a marker to some extent of part of the drift of Evergreen.

I think as the student body has changed Evergreen has struggled to relate a radical view of its mission to students who don't come to be radicalized. They didn't come to Evergreen because it's weird or different, they came to Evergreen because it's the State college in Southwestern Washington and it's the one that they could afford. Evergreen has now become the value leader of higher education in Washington, and it's been that way for a while, so part of the problem has been, how do you promote a kind of radical pedagogy and intention with those students? I have a feeling it hasn't really been given as much thought.

Let me back up and say that things happen not just because people want them to happen, but things sometimes happen because the world is changing and they're not keeping up, and they're not figuring out how to renew what they're doing in a different environment. I think part of what's happened is that the environment for Evergreen has really changed over the last couple decades or so, but people are on auto pilot. A lot of people are on auto pilot and trying to do next year what they did last year without thinking about how it might need to be changed.

I'll put some of the burden on us that we haven't figured out as well as we might have how to structure what we're doing and how to present ourselves in a way that meets this new student body, and inspires them, and fulfills them.

Zaragoza: Are there other examples that you could point to that indicate this evolution, this change, at the college, this push against the left for a lack of a better term?

Dorman: Of course, the biggest single story—and I’ve mentioned this to you before—is the expulsion of the Labor Center. The Labor Center was a tremendously valuable resource. I used the Labor Center every year in my teaching in one way or another, whether it was people coming in and talking, whether it was sending students there for research, or internships or whatever, the Labor Center was absolutely integral to the kind of work I do. I’m a labor-oriented person and it’s important. When the Labor Center was driven away, that was a huge loss for the college.

You might say in some ways we got CCBLA as kind of a compensation for the loss of the Labor Center, but it’s not the same. I’m not saying this to downgrade it in any way. The CCBLA is the Center for Community-Based Learning and Action. I’m not saying this to downgrade them in any way, but in the larger scheme of things, it represented a movement away from the kind of commitment that the Labor Center represented. That was very important, the loss of the Labor Center. I guess that one would be front and center.

There’s another aspect of this, which is very dicey. I hesitate to bring it up. Here we’re talking not just about Evergreen but the whole country. That is that what it meant to be on the left changed over the 20 years that I was at Evergreen. To be a radical social change person 20 years ago meant you were still thinking in terms of issues like imperialism, capitalism, who controls which resources and how those resources are used. You’re talking about empowerment and changing institutions so that people who have lacked power will now have more power over those institutions. It was fairly concrete. Our conception of power and inequality was, you might say, material and concrete.

What happened meanwhile nationwide—not just at Evergreen—was the replacement to a large extent—not completely but a substantial replacement—of that perspective by another one, which says that oppression comes mainly from the culture; that we live in an oppressive culture and therefore, liberation takes the form of cultural change. It means one mind at a time, basically. We’re going to liberate ourselves mentally from the cultural straitjacket that we’ve inherited. When enough of us have become enlightened, we’ll form a new culture, and that new culture will be our freedom.

Again, it’s always a question of balance. I don’t want to argue that culture is irrelevant. Culture is a huge part of the story. I’ve never been persuaded that you could just ignore the culture in some sense, that that wasn’t an important front in the struggle. But I think what happened was that it became the whole thing for some people. Evergreen is just a part of that. I don’t think Evergreen is more like that than other places. If you went to any other college in the country, you’d see pretty much the same thing, that the kind of radicalization that you and I identify with is on the retreat, and there’s a

different kind of radicalism that defines itself, psychologically and culturally, almost entirely, which is predominant.

Zaragoza: Tell us a little bit about your research, Peter. What kind of work did you work on while teaching at Evergreen?

Dorman: Before I came to Evergreen—and it's one of the reasons I was willing to come to Evergreen—I published my first book called *Markets and Mortality*. It's about occupational health and safety. The book was despised by economists, but it got a very warm reception from the public health community and that opened a lot of doors in public health. In particular, I found myself, within about a year after starting at Evergreen, working on child labor issues. Actually, before I even came to Evergreen, I was working on child labor in the U.S. Then from the UN, I got interest in working on child labor internationally.

What “working on” here means doing research into the nature of the problem, the causes of the problem, and what kinds of interventions helped children—are really effective, and also helped their parents and helped their communities. I spent years and years working a lot on that. One year in particular, I took a whole year off from the college and spent that in Geneva, Switzerland working with the ILO [International Labor Organization] on child labor-related stuff. I produced a global what you might call cost/benefit analysis of the elimination of child labor, which was a tool that was used by the UN. It was quite an effective document.

I did some travel in connection with the research I was doing, observing children working in different countries and trying to understand the nature of their work. In particular, I was very interested—I wrote a long report, like a short book—on the question of, are children exploited economically? It's an interesting question. People who don't know much about child labor assume the answer is yes, children are hired because they're cheap or something like that.

There're two problems with that. One is, first of all, most children don't work for an outside employer, they work with their parents. Even the ones who work for an outside employer, yeah, you don't pay them as much, but also, they're kids. They don't produce as much, so how could you try to bring the production side together with how much they're paid to get a sense of whether they were being exploited in a way that crowds out adults from working, which is the big fear, they'll hire a kid and not an adult. I did a lot of research on that and I eventually wrote up a long report that analyzed that issue. That was one area of my research.

At the same time, I was very interested in rethinking economics. I continued to work on that, as I do now, and every now and then I'd write a paper about it, but I didn't have that much time to do it. A

couple of economic textbooks came out of that, though they only just touched lightly on the work I'd been doing. I hope, looking ahead, I'll be able to write more on that stuff.

Especially working with environmental programs at Evergreen, I got more involved in environmental issues. In particular, that led to a lot of work on climate change. I've written a book on climate change. I actually wrote it several years ago, and I have had great difficulty in getting it published. Every time it goes up for review, there's always one reviewer who says, "This book shall not be published. I will do everything in my power to prevent this book from being published." [chuckles] I hope that if you were to talk to me a week from now, I'd say I have a contract. It looks like I will finally have a contract.

Zaragoza: Any sense of why there are some who don't want it published?

Dorman: Yeah. At the present, nobody has ever written a political economy book on climate change, a real political economy book on climate change. By that I mean there's a lot of stuff that is cultural stuff about climate change. It's like bad thinking has given us climate change.

An example of that would be "Oh, the people who run the world are in love with economic growth. Because they are in love with economic growth, that's why we have climate change. The problem is their minds. They have bad thoughts, they have bad values, or ideologies or stuff."

But nobody has ever written a political economy thing, which is, "So, if you look at the actual structures of wealth and power in the world, who is going to benefit and who is going to be harmed by particular actions? And to what extent? Can we put dollar values on it? What is actually the cost? If you're a capitalist in America with a diversified portfolio, what will strong measures against climate change mean for you and your portfolio? Nobody has ever looked at that, and then nobody has ever looked at the politics of what that means.

What the book basically says is there's no overlap between the program of what we need to do and the program of what business is willing to accept. That's harsh. I could be wrong on that, but I make the case for that. That's harsh because that means they have to be defeated. To save the planet, they need to be defeated. There's no compromise.

Zaragoza: Not just changing people's minds.

Dorman: Yeah, not just changing people's minds. You actually have to defeat them politically.

Zaragoza: Let me ask you one other question, Peter, and then I'll give you a chance to talk about anything you haven't. That is about the work-life balance at Evergreen. Would you speak to that a little bit?

Dorman: It's like what Gandhi said about Western civilization. Remember? It would be a good idea, work-life balance. It would be a really good idea. I'm in favor of that.

The saying that I heard—and I heard this, I think, right around the time I first came to Evergreen—is that between teaching at Evergreen, doing research, and having a life, you can do maybe two of them. I found that basically to be true. You can be a conscientious teacher at Evergreen and you can have a fulfilling personal life—do the stuff you enjoy doing, have a relationship with family—but you're not going to do any research. There would be no time. Or, you can be a conscientious teacher at Evergreen and you can do research—you can do publications and be known nationally—but good luck having a family, or having any kind of life but that.

Now, I think, we have people—an increasing number at Evergreen—who are numbers two and three people, that is, they have fulfilling personal lives, they get some research done, and they're not conscientious teachers, unfortunately. I don't think there are that many of them, but maybe more than there used to be. I think that's a sustainability issue, and I think Evergreen is suffering from that. That is actually one of the structural problems.

Here's a hypothesis—again, I'm not working off of real numbers, I'm giving a lot of hypotheses where if people wanted to, they could follow up and do more detailed research and see if it's true or not. But this is my perception, that as the academic job market deteriorated over the last generation or so, and it got harder and harder in more and more fields for people to get tenure-track jobs—all there was was adjunct crap—so, it got harder to get jobs. On the hiring committees at Evergreen, you started to see more and more people who were applying to Evergreen basically because they wanted a job, and Evergreen was just a job. It was a job that maybe they could get.

I'm sympathetic to that. I'm not trying to come down on people like that. If you've gone through graduate school and given your life to wanting to be an academic, why shouldn't you apply for the jobs that you might be able to get?

We had applicant pools that were more and more tilted away from hardcore fanatic [laughing] Evergreen people who believed in the model and wanted to come here and embrace the model, and more and more people who were applying here because it was what there was. Of course, many of these people are attractive. They're doing interesting research, they're interesting people, they have a lot to offer, but they're not really here for the model. They have other priorities in their life.

Over time, I think, the percentage of faculty who are deeply self-motivated in teaching 50 to 60 hours a week and defining the success of their academic career in terms of the succession of programs that they teach at Evergreen and what they gained from them, that percentage is going down. It had to

go down. I don't think there's any way you could prevent that. It seems to me that to have a sustainable model in the long run, it has to be sustainable in view of your applicant pool, and I don't think the work-life balance at Evergreen was sustainable that way.

I don't think we've ever really had a conversation about it. There were endless conversations in the hallways about how out of whack it is, but we never really sat down and said, "What can we do to reformulate this model in a way where we don't have to work for 50, 60 hours a week?"

Zaragoza: We've got just a minute left. Any final words, any other things you want to be sure you get in your narrative before we go?

Dorman: Yeah. I want to put in my two cents about the blowup in 2017. Do you have time for that?

Zaragoza: Yeah, let's do it.

Dorman: Two things I want to say about it. One is very personal, which is that I was teaching Political Economy that year in fall and winter with Lori Blewett, and as we were planning the program, we realized that things were coming to a head at Evergreen, and there was a lot of campus-based activism that was going to be intense.

What we decided we needed to do was to focus on teaching students skills about effective activism, teaching students to think strategically about how to do actions and formulate demands and that sort of thing. We would roleplay. We would put students into historic struggles, and what would be the strategic ramifications of doing it this way or that way, and how did they eventually do it, and did it work? Getting students to be political strategists, and also pushing very strongly the importance of organization. You don't want to just blow it all in a big thing and then have nothing that remains. You want to build because real social change is a long-term struggle.

We had this whole curriculum that we developed around this, and we had a bunch of our students who were activists at Evergreen. We were complete failures at it, so I just wanted to say as a post-mortem to that, our failure was that we didn't take into account what students already had when they came into the room. We treated them as if they were blank slates and we could do this educational thing. But they're not blank slates. They have certain assumptions and expectations that are part of their culture and come out of their own experiences, and we never engaged them on their own terms.

If I had it to do all over again—because I really feel I could have impacted how things turned out in 2017 if I had done this better; as a teacher, my role is to help students be effective and not to just go off half-cocked—I could have done better. Undoubtedly in the future, faculty will be in this situation, and I hope they learn from my shortcomings and do a better job, and especially begin by listening,

getting students to talk about what they think politics means, what they think social change means, and how it happens, and engage them on that, and don't just lecture at them or begin with the assumption that they're going to be immediately receptive to whatever it is you're putting forward. That's a personal thing I just want to get out there.

The second thing is I think, in terms of the public story of what happened at Evergreen, I don't want to deal with most of that. But the one piece that I think has been insufficiently considered is that my interpretation of the way that thing blew up is that it started with the proposal for mandatory diversity training for faculty.

I totally understand where that demand came from because I'd been hearing from students for years about mistreatment by faculty. Faculty were engaging—often unconsciously but sometimes even consciously—faculty were discriminating, were being oblivious, and creating bad environments in the classroom, and students were frustrated.

Out of that came this demand for diversity training. It came up to the faculty meeting and unfortunately, the effort was made to write it in a way that was ambiguous. It was like, well, it's not mandatory, but it is mandatory, blah blah blah. They tried to straddle the fence and that made a lot of faculty really distrustful, and it was eventually voted down and defeated.

The response on the part of the people who promoted—both students and faculty—said, "The faculty is irredeemable. They're just a bunch of racist shitheads. We're never going to make progress with that." They said, "Okay, we're going to have to go through the administration and just force them, just force them to do it." Then things came out of that, and that's another story.

The irony in that to me is that cultural turn again, as if the solution to real issues that we were seeing in the classroom was somehow changing people's hearts and minds through training. Hell, Derek Chauvin, who killed George Floyd, went through diversity trainings. It didn't help his heart or mind very much. We've had decades of research and experience with corporate diversity training. There's a whole literature out there about what they do and what they don't do, mostly on what they don't do.

What frustrates me in the end was that we had this giant blowup over an issue that was kind of a displacement. We should have gone directly to the source. We should have put language in the collective bargaining agreement, holding faculty accountable for equitable treatment of students. We still don't have that language. To me, that's a crime not to have that language. There needs to be a clear accountability toward those criteria, and then mechanisms in place so that students can anonymously go, if they feel that there's inequitable treatment that there's a procedure they can go through—they don't have to go through the social contract rigamarole, which in the end is just about

burying issues rather than dealing with them and hearing them out—and really making faculty accountable for the behavior in a material way would be the way to do it. Instead, we have this craziness that in the end was all about how we're going to reprogram our minds. It's so frustrating, and I think back on it and how unnecessary it was.

Zaragoza: Well, Peter, thank you for being with us. I appreciate the many stories that you shared, your insights, your analysis, and your perspective. Thank you again.

Dorman: Okay.

Zaragoza: Let's talk again sometime. It's been a real pleasure.

Dorman: Yeah.

Zaragoza: I don't know if you saw, but Ruth Bader Ginsburg died while we were on the call.

Dorman: Oh, man, that is such bad news.

Zaragoza: Yes.

Dorman: Oh, we are so screwed. Oh, jeez. Everything that's come down this year has been bad, bad, bad.

Zaragoza: It fits right in.

Dorman: This is like a shithole of a year.

Zaragoza: Yeah.

Dorman: Oh, man.

Zaragoza: I'm sorry to be leaving you with that.