

NEWS

The Evergreen State College
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for further information
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Bart (Lee) Vandegrift of Mercer Island was sold on The Evergreen State College before it ever opened. That's why he became Evergreen's first officially admitted student back in 1971.

A nearly straight-A student, he spent his senior year at Mercer Island High School in an interdisciplinary honors humanities program which emphasized the quality of the student's work rather than a grade. He found that he thrived on the intense learning atmosphere of the program and could succeed very well on his own without what he calls "the false rewards of grades."

"We worked around the clock, studying seven days a week, because we wanted to," he says. "It was a turning point in my life --- a time when I discovered that learning has its own reward."

Vandegrift said he heard about Evergreen and thought it resembled the humanities program.

"Evergreen seemed to me to offer an interdisciplinary approach directed toward current, relevant issues," he says. "It seemed, too, to have an intense learning atmosphere unhindered by administrative structure and traditional emphases on majors and minors."

Vandegrift says he wanted to go to the new college so badly that he waited for materials from Olympia every day "and as soon as they came I filled them out and returned them to the Post Office within ten minutes."

Haste was not waste for the now 21-year-old Mercer Islander. In 1971, he became the first student officially admitted to Evergreen and, three years later, he is among the first four Evergreen pioneers --- those students who've completed their college degrees solely at Evergreen.

In those three years Vandegrift's enthusiasm for the college has not diminished. "In fact," he grins, "it's increased every quarter."

The son of Mr. and Mrs. Peter Vandegrift of 7201 SE 29th, says he "just can't imagine having any better program" than he's had the past three years. As a freshman in the first year of Evergreen's operation, he enrolled in a Coordinated Studies Program along with 160 other students and seven faculty members to study the "Individual in America." There, he says, "I got to explore so many different subject materials and different modes of relating to other people. It was very intense, but I learned a lot about myself and how I relate to others."

The program, he says, also helped him decide which subjects he really wanted to pursue. He got involved in politics that spring and served as a delegate to the county and state Democratic conventions. During summer, 1972, he worked in U.S. Senator Warren Magnuson's office as an intern and he returned in the fall to give more academic attention to "Politics, Values and Social Change," another Coordinated Studies program.

"The program was a second turning point for me," he comments. "It made sense out of the history of the Western world. It taught me where our culture originated, why it's the way it is, and helped us all understand better what things can or can't be changed within our society and why."

The program, he adds, "left me gasping for an additional understanding of economics." So, he and a group of students organized a group study contract and spent two quarters engrossed in all aspects of economics.

"By the time I'd finished that program, I felt I had gotten what I wanted out of college," he recalls. "I felt I then deserved a chance to just study what I wanted." So, Vandegrift spent Spring and Summer quarters, 1974, studying ancient and modern European history on an individual basis with two faculty historians.

Finally, his last quarter, the Mercer Islander decided he wanted to take a closer look at teaching at the high school level.

"I'd been thinking about teaching," he says, "but I wanted to get an inside view." So, despite the fact he had only three months of college work to go, Vandegrift agreed to a nine-month internship with the Lincoln Evening School and Community School,

both headquartered at Lincoln High and sponsored by Seattle School District No. 1.

He says working as an administrative assistant in the two programs provided the opportunity he sought to see what schools are like and weigh his future involvement in teaching. And, he grins, "I've applied for law school."

Vandegrift enjoys the school experience, he's quick to add, and will continue working at Lincoln until his internship is over, even though he's already completed degree requirements at Evergreen.

Looking ahead, he's anxious for law school next fall.

"My theory is that Evergreen has prepared me tremendously well for law school," he says. "Now I want to put that theory to the test."