

**Charlie Teske**  
**Interviewed by Susan Fiksdal**  
**The Evergreen State College oral history project**  
**Interview 6, Part 2 of 2, November 22, 2016**

**Begin part 2 of 2 of Charlie Teske on November 22, 2016**

**Fiksdal:** Okay. Do you remember where you were? I think the separation of ethics and . . . ?

**Teske:** There are all kinds of fragmentation going on, Susan. Again, if you think about the regular system, as I believe we said before, you're supposed to think like a little historian between 9:00 and 9:50, and then you go and you're supposed to think like a little biologist from 10:00 to 10:50 and so forth. And the issues of, what does this all mean? How does it all fit together? They will never be addressed.

Then also, I don't know what you felt about this, but, oh, my, did I ever hear complaints from my Oberlin students about that, because they tended to be very serious. Oberlin was very much like a graduate prep school. At the time I was there, within a year after graduation, 70 percent of the men would be in either graduate school or law school or med school, and 50 to 55 percent of the women would be like that. Oberlin had about 2,000 students. One-sixth of the professors in the U.S. with Ph.Ds had done their undergraduate training at Oberlin. It was a graduate prep school, which meant very little excitement because it was just another four years on the way.

But what the students said one of the most difficult times was when you sat down after supper to decide what to study for first when you had competing claims of these five different courses upon you. One of my students, who had a background mainly in science, got so fascinated with mythology, I recommended Edith Hamilton's book to him. He got it and he got so fascinated, he sat down and he read the whole thing. He fell so far behind in physics that several weeks later, he had to ask me to give him an extension on a paper, because getting fascinated and into this book had really messed up his schedule. That's not a good thing to have happen. That is not something good for learning.

At any rate, Don and I, we didn't try to choose up sides—all scientists over here to Don; all artists and literary types over here to Charlie; you concerned social scientists and historians and philosophers, you go to Merv—we did not do that. As I say, Merv did not really believe in individual contracts. But he compromised and so we went ahead.

Same thing when we started approving programs. I never heard Merv—directed to Don and me, or the people who were signing up with us—say anything against. We were all looking for the strengths of the programs. We not trying to undermine each other. We were working for things, and trying to

choose which programs would work, which faculty members. For a time there, Susan, we had one of the strongest deans' offices in the country because it would be as if the faculty—we had the money from the state that was given to us as a block grant. Then the faculty members approached us with proposals about how to get paid for teaching the next year. And we were able to say “yes,” “no,” “yes,” “no” and so forth.

Once we said that, we became one of the weakest deans' offices in the country because people did their own budgets, their own schedules, and we just watched and hoped that everything would work out okay.

So, that's the way that went along in the deans' office. And at one point, when Merv was being interviewed by Stevens, he briefly touched upon this problem of the vice presidents, and he said, “It's too bad they could not have worked the way that the three of us deans worked together.”

Really, it was exciting. And not just the planning year, but also the first year. The Planning Faculty could help us from mid-winter through the spring in recruiting the 30 new people that we needed for our first-year faculty. But then, the second-year faculty, our faculty members were so busy teaching their first years' programs that you asked how often the deans met, when we would meet with [Dave] Barry, that would be about once a week. But then, as we started having these needs to go around the country recruiting, and Don and I trying to raise money in D.C. and New York and so forth, the first teaching year, I think we realized when we had some sherry together right before Thanksgiving that we hadn't seen each other for about three weeks, because we had been off on the road and so forth. But the main thing is, Susan, we trusted each other.

So, things went along like that. In 1973, Don left. After his heart attack, he had been replaced by Ed Kormondy. But then, in '73, Ed became Provost and Byron Youtz then replaced Don when Don went back on the faculty. Then, in '74, Merv left and was replaced by Rudy Martin, and she was then Llyn Patterson—later, Llyn De Danaan—with Byron still in there. Then, in the June '75, I left. I did go back in for a term and a half on an emergency, but I left the deans' office.

It would have been around October 1975, Merv called me up and said, “I'm coming over, and it's going to be a sort of serious talk.” Merv announced to me—and he said he'd already talked to a bunch of faculty members in clusters, but he wanted to talk to me individually, and he'd already talked to McCann—he was going to propose a reorganization in which Evergreen would be divided into two. One of them would be teaching his version of coordinated studies, the San Jose—what some of the planning faculty members had started referring to as “Merv's little red schoolhouse,” his pure version of that. Then, there would be three academic deans; not necessarily departments, but divisions that would be

using regular classes and so forth.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, that would go back to using courses?

**Teske:** Yeah.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, I see. Huh.

**Teske:** Not necessarily departmental organization, but still, courses within those areas. And Merv said to me, “Face it. Sciences and the arts have never really worked out under this system.”

Well, as I was thinking about this, Susan, just recently, I thought, wait a minute. The way that the deans organized their dean groups, Don was pretty much in charge, and then after him, Ed and then after him, Byron, of the programs that had a strong science component.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, so he hadn’t really seen them.

**Teske:** And I was in charge of the programs that had a strong arts component. So Merv had never really, at dean-group level, witnessed, evaluated, talked all that much with people who were doing hands-in programs in the sciences and the arts.

I should add here—lest it get completely forgotten—all of the first-year programs save one were planned and in the first catalog. The one that came later—remember, this was 1971—Man and Art—sorry, Person and Art—anyway, Man and Art. There I recruited all three of the faculty members for that. Jose Arguelles was a very interesting, enigmatic person. But still, he and his wife, Miriam, right as they arrived at Evergreen, they had done a book on mandala, with her help on the drawings and his text. Printing ran to 70,000, translated into four languages at least.

**Fiksdal:** Amazing.

**Teske:** And he was our coordinator. And then Don Chan, who was a separate great story—did so much for the school—and then Cruz Esquivel, the other faculty member. They were so important to the artistic life of the school and its reputation in those first couple years.

But still, Merv had really nothing to do with Man and Art, so he didn’t know about that. But when Merv said, “It hasn’t worked,” I said, “Merv, what about”—and I think this was the second or third year—“Forms A and B, Peggy Dickinson and Linda Kahan?” Peggy brought 20 students from the arts; Linda brought 20 students from biology. The biologists learned to draw; the artists learned about biology. I don’t know if you’ve ever seen them, but they turned out a suite of drawings that almost rivaled Audubon in their interest of birds, plants and so forth. Every once in a while, they will be shown in the Lab Building.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, I think I went and saw them. I remember.

**Teske:** But to my mind, that was really great, and, of course, in the first year. But again, these people

reported to me. Space, Time and Form with Byron Youtz, physicist; Sid White, artist; Beryl Crowe, Lee Anderson, and Don Heard, who got killed. Very successful program that really did not have much of the humanities or the social sciences at all, but instead of, as I said, aligning with sciences at one extreme and arts at the other, it was more like a circle, with the arts and the sciences meeting at the top of the circle.

**Fiksdal:** Another great one—I don't know if you were aware of this working—Jake Romero, who was a physicist, a power systems person, and Bob Gottlieb, who was music—20 physicists meet 20 musicians. The program was called Harmony of the Universe. Their concert was amazing. They had developed new instruments, new scales, all kinds of things going on. And I said, "Merv, you can't say that there haven't been real successes, successes that other schools cannot duplicate because they do not have the program.

At any rate, Merv was circulating this plan among the faculty. He talked to Charlie McCann and he said, "McCann agrees." At that time, we were in session for the Monday and Tuesday of Thanksgiving week, and the students left campus on Tuesday evening. The idea was we would hold a special faculty meeting on Wednesday, when the students were not around. McCann had agreed—and I never talked to him about this; I still have my doubts about whether he's being quoted directly—that if the faculty enthusiastically wanted to change, he would go along with it. I said, "Well, if you're going to hold that meeting, I'm going to have to speak very much against it."

Somehow, the word got out to the students, and apparently even what Merv had on paper got out to the students, and at the beginning of November, there was a huge uproar. Several mass meetings about this. It was not just that the students felt they had come to Evergreen for coordinated studies and contracts and so forth, but that they were being bypassed, and a whole new thing was going to be put in that they would have no say in.

Boy, I did not envy Ed Kormondy as Provost and the other new deans' lot. They didn't have anything to do with it, but they were like the U.S. Embassy. You've got to have something to throw your rotten eggs at, right? They were the ones that were in view, so they had to declare no classes. "On Monday and Tuesday, we will have institution-wide meetings."

**Fiksdal:** What year did this occur in?

**Teske:** 1975, after I had left the Dean's office. The very first day I sat in on most of the thing, and I still recall the head of the deans being seated at the table in front, and the bright lights because the video cameras were working. They were being attacked for the students for this change, which they had nothing to do with. I do not recall if Mervin even was there to be asked questions.

I just now dug up again, and I will read from this. This is a letter to the editor. It would be the *Cooper Point Journal*. I unfortunately don't have the date right here, but it's the first issue that came out after Thanksgiving. The letter is by a man named George S. Wood, who obviously is a very serious, very committed student. The title of the letter is "Return to What?"

Evergreen, from the beginning, has been an institution of crises. The events of the past three weeks merely seem more intense, due perhaps to a lack of historical perspective in the few years of the college's existence. The tremendous concern that I see pressing Evergreen is not the call for student power. That, I can handle. But what I fear is the call for student power without an underlying educational philosophy. All too often during debate for power and its location, concern with what that power is for was lost, and thus, a real opportunity to reaffirm the college's mission was ignored. If much can be seen from the effects of the teach-in and its related activities, it would be a call for power for the sake of power. No one questioned the validity of some student desires in light of what I saw the school attempting to do. By not questioning these motives, I feel a shaky step has been taken to separate the college into diverse sections, and may split the very thing that makes Evergreen a powerful institution.

The proposals put forth by Merv Cadwallader are in sharp conflict with the kind of educational philosophy on which Evergreen is founded. His proposals, point by point, are a return to traditional college education built on the model of the high school experience we all wanted to leave behind, and agitating for power for the sake of power will only lend itself to that kind of experience. A four-college system, with its own deans and its own budgets, will point the institution to the type of departmental backbiting that plagues most, if not all, colleges in the country. Evergreen's insistence on interdisciplinary study attempts to get past the idiocy, and instead recognizes the need to teach composite education, with heavy emphasis on reading, writing and thinking. If you can agree that high schools and traditional colleges are models of fragmented supermarket educations, then formulate a student power group on refining and maintaining Evergreen's mode of innovative studies. After all, it is clear to see what is wrong with education without substance. Do you wish to return to that which you disliked so much?

Well, he continues in this vein. It is one of the most emphatic statements in favor of interdisciplinary, team-taught, full-time programs that you can imagine. It did happen, according to him, that in the second day of the discussion, it left entirely what would be taught, and it was on the issue of how students would get the initiative.

There were two things that the students did not like. Number one was what he's getting at, a return to what they perceived as what's wrong with the regular system. Number two, the fact that they felt that they were being sandbagged, when an individual faculty member, who isn't even any longer a dean, could come in with something like this that would be taken seriously.

I guess the reason I read that to you, Susan, is for maintaining some sort of objectivity. This isn't just me, this is a bright student seeing this. Now, what really hurts is this person doesn't realize that the coordinated studies come out of Merv.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah.

**Teske:** But to me, it was very sad to see this. And, of course, I think there is a corollary: if Merv's attempt at changing things—which some people called a palace revolution—if that had failed, but the students had not heard of it, Merv could have stayed. But when you have this kind of thing going on, very, very difficult to remain. Because not only did he not get his way so that he could—you know, the main reason he wanted the separate interdisciplinary college was what he said at the outset when Larry Eickstaedt was taking him to the airport for the February conference that he was hoping to sell us at least one theme team, and then he would be quite willing to have a conventional school for the rest of it. So this was his attempt to get back his vision at Evergreen.

**Fiksdal:** Original vision, yeah.

**Teske:** And it didn't work. And there are two ironies, and then finally we can wrap this up. It's really sad that if I'd known this student, I would have tried to get hold of him and said, "Look, don't you realize how important he was to this? It's just that we took his vision and went somewhere else with it, and now it looks as if he has to pay for your disgruntlement about this." But I must say, one of the big things that came out of this was a reaffirming by the students of what they were coming to us for.

Okay, two ironies. One of them, if anything, Merv and I became closer, really heartfelt talks. As he started looking for work, he was sort of using me as a sounding board. I recall he was looking at two different places, a vice chancellorship of the Platteville campus of the University of Wisconsin, and the Chicago Art Institute, being head of the academic enterprise connected with the art institute.

He said, "You know, Charlie, I'm very much attracted to the art institute, and there's a very strong, charismatic leader. But I have to watch it, because when I went to Old Westbury, I was drawn by Harris Wofford—a strong, charismatic leader—and it didn't work. And, of course, at Evergreen, McCann was not the kind of strong, charismatic leader that I wanted. I guess I have to stop doing that. What do you think?"

We talked about that, and he eventually took the Platteville job. But he said to me—and this is, I think, really sad—"Well, I hope you won't think that I'm deserting a sinking ship." I said, "Merv, the ship is not sinking, and some of us are going to be just doing our level best to keep it from sinking."

**Fiksdal:** Why did he think that it was a sinking ship? And I still don't quite understand why he left. Maybe we can talk about it a little more next time.

But it's interesting how the story reminds me of how you talked about Dave Barry and Joe Shoben; that you do have your own perspective, and maybe that becomes so all-encompassing when you're already so busy and doing so much that you can't move out of that perspective to make things better for yourself.

**Teske:** There was one thing, as I look back on myself, where I would refuse to budge. If we were going to have interdisciplinary programs, I wanted to stop any departmentalism from creeping in. Because the dean and I at Oberlin had tried hard to get some interdepartmental programs going, and the inertial momentum of the department is so strong that it ripped it apart.

And again, I go back to the experience of Fairhaven at Western, of starting as if it were to be a healthy, vibrant alternative campus within the college. And then I—what do you call it?—degenerating or whatever into a sort of office for special types of programming, and I did not want that to happen.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah.

**Teske:** Now, I mentioned one irony, and that irony was that Merv and I began even more heartfelt talk. The other irony is [chuckles] that Merv was so much against the division into individual learning, of individual contracts, and where did he wind up as an administrator? At the Union of Experimenting Colleges and Universities where, in effect, they were giving Ph.Ds as individual contracts.

**Fiksdal:** Oh, my goodness?

**Teske:** Maxine Mimms has one, Llyn De Danaan has one, Joye Hardiman has one. I think Betsy Diffendal is also from there.

**Fiksdal:** I think Helena Knapp, too.

**Teske:** But that's where Mervyn—but that wasn't his last stop. His last stop was University of Phoenix. And whether he was engaged in the distance-learning there, I don't know. But isn't that amazing . . .

**Fiksdal:** Yes, it is.

**Teske:** . . . that he should end up in—

**Fiksdal:** Well, he ended up knowing a lot about it, and maybe that's what they wanted at the time.

**Teske:** I guess. So.

**Fiksdal:** It's so interesting.

**Teske:** Well, Susan, listen. Thank you for letting me get that off my chest. I'm sorry, but it is part of our history.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah, it's a sad part.

**Teske:** And you can't really understand the background of the place if you don't understand this.

**Fiksdal:** Yeah.

**End part 2 of 2 of Charlie Teske on November 22, 2016**