

Evergreen a 'breath of fresh air' from high school education



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In a bubble of ignorance, believing that school was supposed to be about competing for grades, doing meaningless homework and taking even more pointless tests, I was frustrated until I visited Evergreen College.

Why couldn't I have been left alone, left to choose a "traditional" college and complete my education in a more "normal" way? I could have persisted with learning little, retaining little and being unenthusiastic about the whole process.

Luckily, there was another alternative. After two weeks of debating with myself and discussing with my dad, I jumped. It was a leap of faith - faith in myself, and faith in Evergreen's spectacular system (or refreshing lack thereof).

But Evergreen has the genuine raw appeal of a completely non-traditional atmosphere, though it's definitely not for everyone. It is intriguing to students who have never questioned their school's method of awarding grades or percentages.

Through high school, we're trained to "strive" for the A, or maybe to accomplish "just" the B. But as anyone who has taken at least a semester of high school knows, the definition of a letter

grade changes in every class. Do you really have to reach for that A in choir, like you do the one in math? Maybe you're psyched for a C in history, but disappointed by a C in chemistry. With all the ambiguity and shape shifting of grades, it's a wonder that we still put meaning in them. Then again, it's so ingrained in all students that we just accept it.

Not so at the Evergreen State College. No letter grades are assigned, no numbers. Nothing that could be misunderstood or misinterpreted. Teachers instead write complete, comprehensive evaluations of students and their work throughout a quarter. They can choose to give full, partial or no credit for a program.

Evergreen doesn't require as much academic prowess and scholarly willpower as it does creativity. I have an unlimited imagination, but never has it been applied to designing a college education. In an institution which allows this and encourages it, the mind is freed of meaningless worries such as credits, grades and mere memorization. Instead, a swiftly growing and maturing brain will engage in more important processes, like internal discussion, developing ideas and opinions, self-analysis, and self-discovery (partly through self-doubt).

Evergreen's program system clears things up for those of us who were frustrated by having to jump from learning about DNA to reading Moby Dick in two hours. What if we could connect the two based on something they may have in com-

mon?

In a program, all types of classes - arts, sciences, social studies - are tied together around a central theme. Usually, there are two to five professors who each specialize in an area within the program. They all collaborate and share their expertise.

The students' environment is collaborative as well. When they don't have to compete for a grade or "setting the curve," there's much more energy for sharing opinions, knowledge and backgrounds.

Authors of what we call the "Great Books" believed that this was always what learning was supposed to be about. Why, then, didn't education remain such a quenching and enlightening process? Obviously, most people are not meant to write books, which, thousands of years later are still memorable enough to be in the canon. But how and when did education become so untrustworthy that tests of knowledge were developed? When did it become so discrete that we could measure the amount of it in a letter grade? When, in fact, did education become a measurable quantity at all?

College should be a place where one's own schools of thought matter most. Personal concepts can be applied to a learning environment where there can only be endless rewards - the introduction of new thoughts, which develop and are reapplied. This means a cycle of win-win collaborative learning situations

in discussions, ideas and personal growth. I feel I now have so much to look forward to. Aside from Evergreen's unique perspective on studies, it doesn't lose any exciting opportunities available at other colleges. There's so much to get involved in and so many choices to take advantage of in clubs, sports and the arts. Many activities were not options for me in high school.

I have attended a college prep school for the past six years. Needless to say, it wasn't prepping me for the type of learning I will embrace at Evergreen. I have been trained in the ways of the traditional college, where I would spend even more tedious hours fighting for that weird letter A that really represented nothing.

Then again, it's not like there's an Evergreen Prep School. And because of the whole diploma thing, high schools need a way to quantify how much a student has supposedly learned.

I'm confused by the awarding of letter grades for tedious memorization and regurgitation of textbook knowledge, and by what, if any, relation these grades have to learning in the first place. Evergreen opened my eyes to this disconnection. In attending Evergreen, I'm especially anticipating seeing the world unrestricted by the blindness caused when education is made into a monotonous, unimaginative chore. Evergreen is a breath of fresh air after struggling to find inspiration in a traditional school system.

Religion should be utilized in the classroom



RACHEL MILHEM
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"Separation of church and state" is a phrase often used in the world today, especially in Supreme Court cases and other controversies within the government.

The first amendment clearly states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise of..."

As a country born on the basis of freedom of religion, and other freedoms from the oppression of a monarchy, the first amendment seems appropriate.

The amendment, at the time of its ratification, ensured that United States government was providing the freedoms that England did not. Now, however, it serves more as a guideline to ensure that no one is offended.

To avoid threatening the integrity of the Constitution, the U.S. instituted the separation of church and state ideal and extended it through all government institutions, right down to public schools.

Most Spokane schools do not offer courses directly focused on world religions. This may be a good decision because it avoids offending anyone and avoids the corresponding

lawsuits that may occur with someone being offended.

In some cases - such as the current controversy at East Valley High School - student religious groups have even been disbanded.

Unfortunately, the public school students of America are missing out on a prime aspect of education.

Religion may incite disputes, but it is essential to education and to understanding the world. Many of the important events of history and the current world issues are based off religious conflicts.

The Protestant Reformation and England's break from the Catholic Church are key concepts to European and United States history. Understanding the doctrine and basic concepts of Protestantism and Anglicanism is the only way to understand the resulting political conflicts. The colonization of the United States was in part a consequence of the religious turmoil in England.

With the passing of Israel's 60th birthday this month, religion again becomes the core of the situation. About 60 years ago, the Jews took back the land that they claimed was theirs by a covenant with God. Muslims, however, cite a right to the land. Not only did this enrage the Arabs who had previously controlled the land, but fundamentalist Jews were also offended because they believed

that the only way to take back the "Promise Land" is through the arrival of the Messiah.

These are just a few examples of the importance of religion in every day life. A student must be informed on religious matters to be able to carry on conversations about these problems with others.

In certain classes, students are provided with religious education because it is essential to the subject they are learning, but no class is designated specifically for religious education.

All students should be required to take a class about world religions. Of course, teaching every aspect of every religion would be impossible, but learning the general history and main doctrines of prevalent religions would give students an education that would help them in future endeavors.

A piece of clarification: I am not only talking about Christianity and Judaism. Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and other beliefs should also be studied, which would expand education and ensure that no one of a certain belief would be excluded.

Teaching religion in an objective, non-persuasive way is completely possible. This would not break any rules or constitutional amendments and would not offend anyone. It is education, not conversion.

College expenses strain American families



CHRISTOPHER GARLOCK
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In America, we like to talk of this nifty thing called the American Dream: no matter how poor you are at the beginning of your life, you can advance through hard work. You can do whatever you desire - you can even be president, if you are into that sort of thing.

Our country is by no measure perfect, but we have a relatively good environment for social mobility.

For now, I say that because I and probably most of you reading this are on the leading edge of a very unfortunate trend. A good college education is fast becoming a luxury for the rich.

Now 40 or 50 years ago, this would not have been a big deal. College was somewhere you went if you had a little extra money to invest in yourself so you could make more money later. It was nice to have a degree, but not incredibly necessary to get a good job.

I am sorry to say that, discounting a few notable exceptions, this is no longer the case. Getting a job you can comfortably support a family with all but requires a college education. And that requires money - lots of it.

The College Board says that in 2005, the average yearly tuition was \$12,000 for a public school and \$29,000 for a private school. This is perfectly fine for the rich - to them, this just means cutting back the expensive seafood dinners to three per week instead of four. However, those at the poverty line must be in a real bind.

Well... yes and no. You see, the government

gives away loads of money and low interest loans to poor people. There are also more need-based scholarships than stars in the night sky.

The new victim here is the middle class working family: the bread and butter of the US economy. These people cannot qualify for all the fun free money from Uncle Sam, but do not have near enough to pay for school either.

And I am not talking about Jerry down the street with a 1.5 GPA - even honor roll students are struggling, despite their hard work in school.

The part I cannot figure out is that no one seems to care.

Of course, our government does not have a strict obligation to put students through school - that would be a bit socialistic. However, everyone on Capitol Hill seems to be concerned about how much dumber we are than India, but has so far failed to solve the middle class college problem.

Under the circumstances, Congress should be scrambling to these students faster than it declared war on Japan. It seems in the best interest

of keeping the country competitive internationally.

Seriously, a crystal ball should not be required to imagine what will happen if the middle class cannot afford good education. The economy will be in real trouble for one, because people will not be able to get decent jobs and afford goods other than the bare essentials. If this sounds a little exaggerated, it is - at this point.

But if no one acts to make college more affordable, the American Dream will be much more difficult to attain. I very sincerely hope that someone will take heed of the message and act, because I will be heading off very soon to spend loads of cash on college myself.

Summer provides boundless opportunities



SAMANTHA ULIANO
Gonzaga Prep

Well, did you have a good year?

See, I told you it would be awesome way back in September. With luck, you have kept your mind and your heart open this year and, no doubt, you are doing much better for it.

Way to be. Optimism thanks you for giving it a chance this year and understands that you have a lot of choices in philosophy, so it hopes you will continue flying it to your next destination in life.

Of course, working at being optimistic for an entire nine months is hard. So now, take a break and relax because it is summer vacation!

Or almost. Relaxation. That is really the key to summer break, isn't it? Sleeping in, sleeping long, lazing about. It is all good. Extra sleep makes you healthy, makes hair shinier, and, probably most importantly, lowers your stress levels.

Now, what's more optimistic than health, shiny hair and not being stressed?

Money, of course! Summer break, for most teenagers, means the addition of a job, which means another source of income, which means an even closer step to independence from your parents! Or just lots of extra cash for video games. Whatever suits you.

But let it be known - summer break is the time to be out there and earning money. Shops all around Spokane are looking for you bright-eyed teenagers to do their dirty work - so get out there early and make some cash.

Perhaps the best thing about being away from school is the obvious lack of school work.

Now you can stay up all night, not to read Dickens or memorize the quadratic formula, but to watch stupid videos of skateboarders falling down and a capella groups singing Mario, which in today's world, might actually take you

farther in the real world than either Dickens or math.

Or, at least, you will remember these videos long after Pip, Magwitch and X and Y have long left your brain.

Now that it is summer, we have a healthy new addition to the weather forecast: the sun! Get out there and enjoy the sun this summer.

The sun's helpful rays help your skin produce vitamin D which helps prevent cancer by preventing the overproduction of cells. Just remember the sunscreen - it blocks out the bad rays, which cause cancer.

It has been a great year. I will not be around next school year to remind you to keep thinking sunny, so please remember that positive thoughts equal positive outcomes.

Remember the mantra of the optimist: the glass may be half-empty, but I'm not always thirsty.

Summer brings only heat and boredom



JENNA CUMMINGS
Gonzaga Prep

I'm writing this in my basement, far, far away from the horrible weather outside.

I can't stand summer. I really can't.

The heat is what gets me. It does not seem right to me that you can do nothing and still sweat. It seems like cheating, like Mother Nature is trying to punish you for something you did not even do.

Air conditioning doesn't cut it. AC can only cool the air twenty degrees below what it is outside, and if it is one of those days in August where we hit 100°, 80° inside may seem nice at first but it is not going to last.

In response to the heat people try short-sleeved shirts and shorts, and the only thing that happens then is a nasty sunburn. Summer is the sun's vengeance time - the moon will not give you moonburn or skin cancer.

Every time

you go outside you come back in looking like a stewed tomato, and heaven help you if you live anywhere near any body of water; the mosquitoes will literally eat you alive. And you can't even drive to the store to get sunscreen or aloe vera!

If you live in here in the Inland Northwest you've heard the joke about the seasons, I'm sure. Our seasons are almost winter, winter, still winter, and construction.

Welcome to construction. If a street isn't under construction these days then it's either got so many potholes it looks like there has been an air raid or there is so much traffic it would've been faster to walk. Try going down Monroe one of these days, and you might be back home in a few weeks.

At least sitting in traffic is something to do. I think everyone has experienced that sad day when they would almost rather go back to school than spend one more day watching television (even though there is nothing good on) or any one of many various outdoor activities which leaves you sweaty, sunburned, and itchy.

For seniors who have just graduated it's even worse. They're all looking forward to college (or are terrified of it) and have a long, hot wait.

I could tolerate the three-digit heat, the bugs, the bad roads, the boredom and the sunburns except for one thing: flip flops. That little noise they make drives me nuts.

There is nothing worse than walking through the grocery store trying to get some cold lemonade when someone walks up behind you sounding like they're clapping two pieces of wood together with every step.

Are you really so important you must announce your presence to everyone around you? And how do you drive in those? That must be why some workplaces and schools have banned them; not because they are informal, but because they are annoying and downright dangerous.

Have a fun summer, and try to maintain the element of surprise at all times.

