

May 27, 2017

Hi all,

Frankie and I talked for a while tonight, and it seems like a good idea to reach out and share some (but far from all) of what I know about what has happened at Evergreen this past year. I imagine that you all have a sense of the larger picture, the larger landscape in which this is happening, nationwide. Our little Evergreen is just that—little—but it does have the potential to be the example that breaks some of what has been stifling and, frankly, killing, higher education for many years now.

This document got so long that I'm sending it as a pdf as well as in the body of the email. You may share it, if you like, among friends, and Bret's current students whom I don't know. It's long, and if anything is unclear, it's probably easiest for us to meet in person to get clarity.



Before I walk through the history of the last year, I'm going to pull just a couple of points from the "Strategic Equity Plan" that you've heard mentioned a lot. I'm also attaching it here. It's dense and long—I would argue, intentionally and unnecessarily so. But a few things are clear:

P10: "Have an equity justification/explanation for each potential hire/position that is submitted to the Hiring Priorities DTF." (The same idea is repeated in the appendix on page 32, step1, point2—again, kind of encoded, but looks like the same thing.) This is in code, but the most parsimonious (yes) explanation of what this means, especially given the context around it in the document, is that no position may be advertised or recruited for unless that *position* has an equity justification or explanation. We're not talking affirmative action. We're talking no more artists, or chemists, or writing faculty, or any faculty, really, unless their research/training is explicitly about equity. That would be the end of the liberal arts college. Full stop.

P3: "In order to close these gaps, the Council suggests, that the College move from a diversity agenda focused on intercultural understanding to an equity agenda, an agenda that recognizes the existence of equity gaps and strives to close them." Again, encoded, but they are disappearing the concept of diversity from their own charge (that is, the instructions given them by the president), because it does not suit their goals. Diversity is no longer to be an "agenda" of Evergreen. (If it is racist to object to the abandoning of diversity as a laudable goal, then go for it, call me racist.)

Things that are harder to know from just looking at the document include, most importantly, that the statistical analyses that are the basis for the claims that there are in fact equity gaps at Evergreen (pp 4-5), are fraudulent. We have been told this by people who know the data, and the analysis. The conclusions here are simply not true. (Important aside: Even if the analyses *were* true, the way that the analysis is done makes it impossible to know if the equity gaps were created at Evergreen. *Equality of*

*opportunity* is a clearly laudable goal, and is possible regardless of where equity gaps emerge; *equality of result*—in which everyone ends up at the same “level,” however that’s measured—is essentially impossible if the equity gaps are pre-existing.)

Furthermore, it is totally invisible in this document that there were faculty of color on the Council that created this, who were so upset by the process, and its goals, that they stepped down. Again, this is hearsay, but it is hearsay that we have heard often.



Essentially nobody has read this document. The vast majority of faculty did not, I am pretty sure. Nobody that I asked had. I did, and Bret did, and a few others did, and all of us that I talked to had the same reaction: WTF. This isn’t right. Only Bret—and a very few others—made noise about it. The noise that they made, and then that only Bret was making, was this: We need to talk about this.

Seriously, that was his request. A request for dialogue. Over and over and over and over again. It never happened. He went to every single faculty meeting this last year, beginning last May when some of the proposals started emerging, every single one (I believe—he may have been on a field trip for one of them), and at them and before them and after he requested dialogue—that’s part of why there’s a long email trail, because at the meetings there was “no time” for discussion. Just more and more new policy changes adding up, some of which were about equity (e.g. DoA/DoP), some of which weren’t (e.g. demoting full-time programs to a small part of the curriculum), none of which we, the faculty, were ever allowed to discuss. They were just announced, and done. This has never been how change has been implemented at Evergreen before, and now, not only is there is no discussion, there shall be none. Ever.

The Strategic Equity Plan was revealed in November of last year, and again, no discussion. So some of us who read it and thought—oh, this looks ill considered—tried to point out the problems with the document. But no: no time for discussion. Sorry folks. We can’t talk about that.

With every faculty meeting that he went to (I went to none of them—excuses, excuses, but: recovering from boat accident, sabbatical, etc), Bret saw the college being further sunk into authoritarianism. Most of the policy changes were not equity or race-based in any way. The one that he and I were most opposed to was the idea that full-time programs are disappearing, in fact. Well, we’ve been told, privately, that that is a done deal. It’s happening. Full-time programs will be no more at Evergreen, at some point in the nearish future. Full-time programs, which, apparently >80% of students think is the ideal curricular structure (as, of course, do Bret and I), are going to disappear. Now, you can’t even find that in a document anywhere, but without full-time programs, what exactly makes Evergreen different?

I digress. All of that is to point out that the entire year, since last May, has been one of aggressive policy change with no opportunity for discussion, and Bret has been front and center throughout, asking for dialogue. Two other faculty, both scientists as well,

also demanded dialogue publicly, particularly on the issue of the new VP for Equity which was pushed through with no agreement or acceptance on the part of the faculty. Does that mean that they or any of us are opposed to the idea of (real, actual) equity? No it does not. It means that another VP fundamentally weakens the other VPs—it spreads the power across more groups—and this particular one will also, in a totally unprecedented move, be vice-provost. Here we get into the arcane stuff of academia, and Evergreen in particular. I won't drag you too deep, but if you want details, I can provide them. And I'm attaching two "org charts" of the college—one from 2012, one from 2016—so that you can see how much fatter admin has become at this college recently—at the expense of, well, let's guess: students and academics.

Super short version: Evergreen prides itself on its flat hierarchy. Just a few years ago, we had one president, four Vice Presidents (VPs), and everyone but the president's staff who was employed by the college was in one of those four divisions. Academics was one, and the head of academics was both the VP of Academics and the Provost (two titles, one position, historically). Academics includes faculty, and everyone related to curriculum, such as academic staff—like the SITs and the people who work the Writing Center and QuaSR. The other divisions were Student Affairs (RAD, sports, the CAB, KAOS, Health Center, on and on and on...), Finance and Administration (infrastructure, facilities, HR, etc), and Advancement (getting money for the college). If you create a new VP, *and* make that new VP vice-provost, you have just hamstrung academics.

Add to this that one of the first moves of our new president was to fire the previous provost, meaning that we already have a weak academic division because our provost, while well-intentioned, is temporary—turning our "flat hierarchy" into a bloated administrative mess with Academics under the thumb of a newly created division—well, I'm sorry, it's not racist to object to that. (Indeed, the other two faculty who I alluded to earlier did most of the heavy lifting objecting to that particular part of the document, rather than Bret.) We were promised answers to why this was being pushed through, but they never came. We were never offered dialogue. It just happened to us.

Meanwhile, since November in particular, but really beginning last May, Bret has been calling for conversation. After the "Strategic Equity Plan" was released to us in November, his calls for conversation have been increasingly met with hostility from a small, vocal minority of faculty who say that any call for discussion is inherently racist. Asking for discourse is racist. Now if that isn't batshit crazy I don't know what is.

And yet somehow it worked on enough people—or rather, most people were scared into not speaking up, or just not paying attention, because remember, the Strategic Equity Plan was read by almost nobody—that it became a trope. Bret is asking for conversation because he's a racist. Umm...no?

Which—with many twists and turns left out, believe it or not—arrives us at last week, more or less. I'm not going to write into this document some of the background narrative on personalities that I am confident explain how this was able to happen here at Evergreen, although I would talk to people in person about it if they wanted. We have what looks like a strategic protest, last Tuesday, that the faculty behind the

student protestors thought would be a slamdunk. Find the witch, cry witch, watch the witch burn. Trouble is, they didn't know Bret. Call him a witch, and he says, "would you like to talk about that?" That wasn't in their script. You know what happened then, some of you much better than I do, because you lived it.

What do you do, if you are the strategic presence behind a protest, and that protest goes awry? You pretend that this is what you had intended all along.

So quickly, midday Tuesday, we begin to see a shift. Instead of "hey ho hey ho Bret Weinstein has got to go," we begin to hear "hey ho hey ho racist faculty have got to go." And they are? Well, they haven't been named, but dollars-to-donuts (no, I don't know what that means, but it sounds good), they are the other faculty (alluded to earlier) who spoke up about policy changes this year, specifically around the creation of a new VP position. Oh, and at this point, probably me too, because I've now been called a racist as well. (I won't go into the semantic change that has been argued for by the social justice people, over the word "racist," but note here that if we were to agree with a new definition, that purports that people of color cannot be racist, and that all white people are inherently racist, then chanting that "racist faculty" have got to go is equivalent to arguing that all white faculty have got to go. You can see how this usage of the term "racist" is damaging to clarity, at best.)

So, the protestors pivot away from him—Bret must be in the clear, right? He should pick up his marbles and go home, pleased to be out of the spotlight. Well, no. That would be betraying everything that he has been fighting for, by demanding dialogue, this entire year.

It is also, as those who know Bret, constitutionally not in his nature to hide from conflict. It is part of what makes him so effective, that he can look people in the eye, even when they're hot-blooded and furious with him, and continue to be himself.

More to the point, Bret is fundamentally interested in truth, and justice, and equity. He's not *not* stepping away because of his personality. He's not stepping away because if he was the type of person who desperately needed not to be in the hot seat, he never would have objected to the policy changes in the first place. He's not stepping away because to do so would be to let the false narrative of the protestors—and more importantly, the strategic presence behind them—win the day, and false narratives are never a good thing. We know this. And: This is the moment when, for the first time in a year, attention is on Evergreen, and Bret's repeated, insistent requests for dialogue, which were ignored or mocked or just plain shut down by administration and faculty leadership, can perhaps be heard by those outside of the institution.

So letting the protestors disrupt, bully, aggress against, hunt—all of these things and more—you and him, and then threaten to do so to me, and by extension our children (that was the concern of the police, which is why we ran away to another house for a while, and took our animals, and are keeping everything well locked, and put up a game camera on the driveway...)...to let that to have happened, as a response to Bret carefully and calmly asking for dialogue all year, and to have the protestors realize that

his supposedly racist email actually isn't, and that the wider world reads it and says—uh, wait, that's not racist, sorry—it's obviously not their call that he (and we) are now supposed to be grateful that they're claiming this isn't about him. Because it was. They thought they had a witch they could burn. He wouldn't burn. That is a relevant story.

It shows how authoritarian and anarchic movements succeed, and fail to succeed. And higher education in this country is going to fail—seriously, the whole system of higher ed in the U.S. feels on a precipice—because of the shutting down of dialogue. It's beyond ironic: at a place of higher learning, where critical thinking is supposed to be valued and learned and taught, and post-Enlightenment values of reason and logic ought to be relied on when they can be, it is exactly at these places in the U.S. where speech and dissent are the most constrained now. Constrain speech and dissent in college, and where will our leaders come from next?

We know that lower ed has already mostly failed in the U.S. Public K-12 education is more about indoctrination and learning to be cogs than about becoming careful, critical, creative thinkers. And now higher ed, too? It comes in a very different package, to be sure. And the forces that worked to destroy K-12 education are easier to pin on the right wing. But this regressive left, where dissent is disallowed, and speech is monitored—it's just as reminiscent of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* as a lot of the garbage going on on the right. It comes in a package we like better, because we think of ourselves as progressives. And it sounds like it's about the "right" issues.

But at the end of the day, if you are told that you have no choice about what to believe, and that you must adopt, 100%, the position, or be a racist (or whatever the epithet of the moment is): that is not liberal. It is not progressive. It does not promote equity or justice or democratic ideals. It is autocratic, authoritarian, and will result in anarchy. Which some people want. It isn't the stated claim of the protestors, but the Strategic Equity Plan, and the tactics used by these protestors—they will result in communities continuing to fall apart, and result in less equity, rather than more. I have another argument here, which I shared with Frankie, about why the tactics are what they are—I believe them to be intentionally flawed—but again, I'll save that for a real time discussion, if you like.