

# Evergreen Entrance Essay

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In my first year at Evergreen, I am beginning many new projects. One project is personal: to help me adjust to a new role, a new city, and a new way of thinking about myself. This project is the transition to being a teacher, and presenting myself as a teacher to the outside world. Another project is to explore a new way of teaching, a hybrid model that is halfway between a school and a startup. It feels good to have a goal, even if you change your mind in mid-stream. These two projects will feed one another as I continue to realize my place as a citizen in a larger community.

**Project Number One: So you want to be a teacher.** I became a graduate student, or as my friend Ken Brown calls it, the 17th grade, without a lot of thought. This lasted for a a long three year break in the middle and lots of wandering sidequests to Europe, being unemployed, employing myself off Craigslist, and trying to find myself at Burning Man. I realized I didn't really like research culture, which ironically is the main point of grad school, to be a *professional student*. In my last year of grad school, I had a chance to design my own class from scratch. It was a mix of graphic novel, quantum physics, computer science, and historical fan fiction. This happened at the same time that I was applying for academic jobs, and I remember that Evergreen was the only school where I was not afraid to reveal all of my interdisciplinary ideas. By

that time, I was really tired of pretending to be someone that I was not. I want to be an *amateur student*, one who loves learning, and I thought that being a *professional teacher* was the way to do it. But what was I going to do with my newfound freedom that I couldn't do as a professional student?

**Project Number Two: Only personal experience teaches.** One thing that frustrated me about grad school was the lack of feedback. At first I thought it was a character flaw, that I needed positive reinforcement and a connection between effort and reward. Research was very uncertain and self-guided, and the reward of getting a paper published was too rare and fleeting to feel compelling to me. When I was unemployed, I made websites for people on Craigslist, which is the default programmer job. It is the fast food of software, and it is as unprestigious as you can get among programmers. But I interacted with clients on a face-to-face basis, and every day was like a new adventure: what job was I going to accept, where would it take me, who would I meet? What would I get to learn, could I even do it? Was there a way to capture this empowering feeling of being financially sustainable without the emotional downside, and to share it with students? I envisioned a class where I taught students to develop software for paying clients, where they would experience both the theoretical pleasure of thinking great thoughts but also get a concrete thrill from applying their skills to a real-world problem.

Both of these projects are long-term visions. It's not clear how much progress I will make during the busy first year of my new job. However, in this new chapter of my life, I want to choose my actions deliberately to express my values, and not blindly work out of inertia or to meet others' expectations. I think an experiential, education-based startup captures my values right now, and I think it will fit in well with the values and interests of my colleagues and students at Evergreen.