

Highlights from Evergreen Workshop on Teaching Strategic Advocacy

Prepared by Roger Conner, June 16, 2016

Over a two-day period, Evergreen faculty and Roger Conner from Vanderbilt Law School exchanged ideas on strategic advocacy – specifically, how to teach relevant skills to graduate and undergraduate students. The purpose of this document is to provide a reminder to those who attended and information for those who could not.

Why teach strategic advocacy skills?

Everyone agreed that we want more of our graduates to become change agents on campus and after graduation, and that part of our job is to arm them with knowledge, insights and skills to be *effective* advocates. Evergreen participants offered several reasons for explicitly teaching about effective advocacy campaigns and skills; among them were:

- 1) Evergreen’s existing courses sometimes give students such a truthful and brutal description of injustice and dangerous trends that students can leave with a sense that nothing can be done;
- 2) Where advocacy campaigns are discussed in existing programs it tends to be descriptive; students may learn about what has happened in the past but not how that history might apply to them;
- 3) Where advocacy skills are featured in programs and course materials, students often fail to “get it” because they do not have a framework to organize and make sense of the information being offered.

For these and other reasons, a consensus emerged that colleges in general and Evergreen in particular should do a better job teaching students that they can affect the world through advocacy, and also teaching them about how to be strategic and effective advocates. Several participants noted that they have tried to help students see how advocates can successfully change policies and outcomes; based on the final papers, however, the ideas on how to succeed are not getting through.

The Conner-Shaine Framework

The three workshop facilitators presented the current iteration of a framework under development for years by Roger Conner and Ben Shaine, which is based on their experience as well as academic research. Participants explored the Framework, did a role playing exercise and offered suggestions for improvement.

Participants agreed that the Framework as presented was a good starting point, but a number of changes and clarifications were suggested. For example:

- 1) As constructed, the Framework seemed to assume that all policy related debates are about “us vs. them” conflicts, which is not always the case;
- 2) It did not have an obvious place for advocacy tactics that are not intended to influence a particular policy outcome, but instead represent a demand to be heard, a demand that those who countenance and defend the *status quo* sit up and take notice;
- 3) It did not distinguish among advocacy strategies developed at different levels or scales. Participants noted there is a fundamental difference, on the one hand, between challenging basic attitudes like racism or institutional structures like patriarchy and, on the other hand, trying to change a specific policy, practice, rule or law.

The group worked through these and other flaws, and by the end of the Workshop a revised and improved outline of the Framework more attuned to the needs of programs like the ones at Evergreen had emerged (being distributed with this document).

Evaluation:

Participants suggested that Roger Conner and Ben Shaine come up with an instrument to measure whether Vanderbilt Students can recall lessons learned from the class.

Developing and refining cases:

Participants felt that the Strategic Advocacy Framework could be used in at least two ways at Evergreen: First, where the program addresses a single subject such as Title IX or preservation of wilderness areas, to discuss how strategic advocacy influenced the course of events at critical moments. Second, in programs that address multiple, related issues, such as Introduction to Environmental Studies, to introduce Strategic Advocacy as a necessary skill alongside research methods or statistical analysis.

In both instances, participants agreed that good case studies are essential to help students learn the principles of strategic advocacy. Several points were emphasized

- 1) Teachers need an accessible, indexed compilation of case studies with teaching notes on how they illustrate or relate to the Framework;
- 2) To the extent that Evergreen faculty or students are involved, cases should be developed to meet the needs of specific programs and courses.

Next Steps:

For Conner-Shaine-Whitesell:

- 1) Revise the Strategic Advocacy Framework Outline;

- 2) Revise the Introductory Essay (“How to be a Strategic Advocate”) so that it can be used as a reading in Evergreen as well as Vanderbilt;
- 3) Write a short paper for faculty on teaching Strategic Advocacy
- 4) Post all existing case studies from the Vanderbilt course with short summaries, teaching notes and links to resource materials;
- 5) Create a new case study on an issues that Evergreen students already care about, such as racism, homophobia and inequality (Black Lives Matter campaign was mentioned as an example);
- 6) Assist Evergreen faculty who want to revise their existing or planned teaching materials for this next academic year;
- 7) Develop a survey and conduct it with Vanderbilt Law Students to determine whether the Framework ideas “stuck”.

For Evergreen Participants

- 1) Look for opportunities in upcoming programs where the Framework could be introduced, and try to work it in;
- 2) Look for opportunities to “tweak” case studies already in use or develop a new one so that it explicitly connects to the Framework;
- 3) Identify existing topics for case studies that they would definitely use in the next academic year if they were to be developed;
- 4) Share this report and the revised Strategic Advocacy Framework with other interested colleagues

For all Participants

- 1) Review the new versions of the Outline and introductory essay and use the Wordpress web site to make suggestions;
- 2) Case studies: review the list of case studies posted by Whitesell-Conner-Shaine to see if one or more could be used in an upcoming program; make suggestions if a case would become usable with in your classroom with limited modifications; try to develop new cases on the Occupy Movement, Black Lives Matter, HIV activism; Title IX, ADA, Social Security, or military bases in Okinawa
- 3) Identify one or more publications where Shaine-Conner-Whitesell could publish an article on teaching Strategic Advocacy
- 4) Share “go-to” readings/resources on web site