Student Recruitment and Retention (written by Gail Wootan, Assistant Director)

For 2014-2015, our recruitment dollars were spent on a combination of various events and web marketing. We continued to pay for a profile on gradschools.com, which is one of our primary feeders for inquiries. In conjunction with the other graduate programs, we also advertised with AmeriCorps Alums through one of their monthly newsletters (in Fall 2014, 14% of our total student body were AmeriCorps alumni, 16% of the Fall 14 cohort were AmeriCorps alumni, and so far 22% of the Fall 2015 cohort are AmeriCorps alumni). In addition to monthly info sessions (including one in Tacoma), which have been very successful in recruiting students, we also attended the following events:

* National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR)
* Northern and Southern California Diversity Forums (including visit to San Diego State University, San Diego University, and Soka University)
* Tacoma Sustainability Summit
* University of Santa Cruz grad fair (including visit to Santa Clara University)
* South Sound Science Symposium
* AASHE (Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education)
* St. Martin’s/Evergreen Career and Grad Fairs
* Storming the Sound

Most of these events yield a large number of inquiries, but so far we have not seen many applicants from these fairs. As such, our focus for 15-16 will be on more local recruitment, but we will continue to attend AASHE, NCUR, and local fairs because we also get a large number of applicants through word of mouth.

In addition to recruitment events, the program continued to hire 3 ambassadors. These students helped plan our third annual admitted student day (28 attendees), which this year was planned in conjunction with the MES 30th Anniversary. Ambassadors also meet in person and over the phone with prospective and admitted students. The MES Ambassador program is a key component to our recruitment and yield strategy, and also gives paid leadership position to current MES students.

Due to all of these recruitment efforts, MES received around 700 inquiries for Fall 2015, and currently have 95 applicants, 10 more than Fall 2014. We also had the largest number of nonresidents (41). Despite the larger number of applicants, we expect to see about 45-47 students start in the Fall 2015 cohort. It is evident that a larger percentage of nonresidents in our applicant/admit pool means that our total yield will go down, since the 5-year average yield for nonresidents is 44.2% (vs. 68.7 for residents). In addition, surveys of admits who decide not to come to Evergreen indicate that Evergreen was not their first choice and that other institutions offered more financial aid.

As for financial aid, Fall 2014 nonresidents who applied for aid received $5,800 and residents received an average of $3,180. For Fall 2015, these numbers went down to $4,759 and $2,232, respectively. The average resident award went down primarily because the Evergreen Need Grant was reduced to $2,100 instead of the usual $2,700. The eligibility criteria also became stricter, thus reducing the number of students who received it. Because Fall 2015 saw such a large number of nonresident applicants (and because of the reduced Evergreen Need Grant), we successfully lobbied for $29,500 more in tuition waivers (over our usually $75,000). However, by the time the waivers had been approved, the students we had hoped to convince to come had already made a decision not to attend. Some of the waiver funds were approved to use for second year students. It remains to be seen if they will all be used for 15/16. At this time, about $8,000 of the $29,500 has been awarded.

In the 2013-14 report, I had indicated that MES would implement a new customer relationship management system called Salesforce. This ended up not happening with the primary reason being that Evergreen decided to purchase CRM software through Hobson’s (called Radius) that will be implemented for 15-16.

As for retention, in Fall 2014, a total of 46 new students enrolled and 41 enrolled for Spring 2015. Out of the 40 students who started in Fall 2013, 34 returned for Fall 2014 (not counting students on leave of absence). In addition, the total headcount of MES students in Fall 2014 was 101 (11 more than Fall 14). The average FTE for 2014-15 (Fall, Winter, Spring) was 91.2 (target was 60 FTE). Of the 34 students who started their thesis in Fall 2014, Spring 2015 saw 27 students give their thesis presentations, and almost all officially graduated in Spring quarter. Those that did not present or finish in the Spring are expected to finish in Summer or Fall 2015.

