Biography of President Thomas L. Purce

Dr. Thomas L. (Les) Purce has served as president of The Evergreen State College, a nationally recognized, public liberal arts college, since July 1, 2000. Prior to that, he served as Vice President of Extended University Affairs and Dean of Extended Academic Programs at Washington State University in Pullman, Washington. He had been with WSU since 1995.

Accepting the Evergreen appointment was something of a homecoming for Dr. Purce. He was Executive Vice President at the college from 1992 to 1995. He also served as Interim President of Evergreen for two years before that. He came to Evergreen in 1989 as Vice President for College Advancement.

Before coming to Evergreen, Dr. Purce was at Idaho State University as Special Assistant to the President and Director of the Research Park and Economic Development. Dr. Purce's career in the state of Idaho spanned 15 years in both the public and private sectors. He was the first black elected official in the state, serving as city councilman and then mayor of Pocatello. He later served as Director of Idaho's departments of Administration and Health and Welfare under Governor John Evans.

In the private sector, he served as partner and chief operating officer of Power Engineering Inc., one of the fastest growing electrical engineering firms in the Northwest.

Dr. Purce holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology, a Master of Arts degree in Education, and a Doctor of Counselor Education from Idaho State University. He also attended Harvard University's Institute for Educational Management. President Purce has also received two honorary degrees. In May of 2009, he received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from the University of North Carolina, Asheville and in May of 2014, he received an honorary degree of Doctor of Laws from SUNY Geneseo, NY.

Dr. Purce serves as a board member for the Community Foundation of South Puget Sound, the Northwest African American Museum, and Washington Campus Compact. In addition, he is Chair for the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) Council of Presidents.

At Evergreen, Dr. Purce oversees a $158 million biennial operating budget, a $30 million biennial capital budget, approximately 230 full- and part-time faculty and more than 500 staff.
Evergreen serves more than 4300 students from its main campus in Olympia, at a satellite site in Tacoma, and through a unique reservation-based program for Native American students at six locations around the Puget Sound.

Since opening its doors in 1971, the college has become a national leader in the development of interdisciplinary learning communities that combine and coordinate several academic subjects that are traditionally taught separately. Students at Evergreen report higher than average engagement on many benchmark measures of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), including level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment. Many colleges and universities across the country now model parts of their curricula on Evergreen’s innovative approach to interdisciplinary study in the arts and sciences.

In 2007, Dr. Purce joined 250 other college and university presidents in making the American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment and formally committing to the pursuit of campus carbon neutrality. Evergreen also received the Governor’s Award for Pollution Prevention and Sustainable Practices, the state’s top environmental honor. The award highlighted Evergreen’s Seminar II building, Washington’s first publicly funded education facility certified Gold by Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED). The conceptual design for the building was developed through an academic program and makes use of natural ventilation, recycled and sustainable materials, and green roofs. Since that award, the college has also earned LEED Silver certification for a remodel of its Laboratory II building and LEED Gold certification for the College Activities Building (CAB). Evergreen has also received national recognition from the Princeton Review and Sierra magazine for its commitments to sustainability in operations, academics and quality of life.

As part of Evergreen’s broad liberal arts education mission, Dr. Purce encourages community engagement, curricular innovations and academic programs that educate about social justice issues through the liberal arts and sciences. With Dr. Purce’s support, The Evergreen State College vigorously promotes and pursues the values of diversity and equity. The college sponsors an annual Diversity Series, a college-wide educational forum that examines issues of diversity, social justice and equity through the lenses of the arts, sciences and the humanities; Day of Absence/Day of Presence events to promote learning across ethnic, cultural and social differences; and other events and activities each year.