

Curriculum calls for intervention

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ALEXANDRIA

While Kate Conley, dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at William and Mary, is patting herself and the faculty on the back for voting in a weaker general education curriculum in their insular world, allow me to show you an aerial view of the process and its catastrophic results.

ESSAY

First and most alarming, the college, a self-described liberal arts institution, will be churning out graduates who, because there are no requirements in place, may avoid taking a W&M course in literature, history, natural science and social science.

No literature or history of any kind, from any era, from any country. No natural science, no social science.

This isn't a liberal arts education. It's a travesty.

Where were the professors of these departments, protesting this absurdity?

Perhaps they felt, like some W&M math and economics professors I know, that the joy of not having to teach students who don't want to be in their classes was reason enough to vote yes for this insipid model.

Or perhaps they were too terribly, terribly busy living in their own little bubbles to care about the plan itself. After all, as long as their lives remain the same or better, what difference does it make to professors what the college does or does not require of students?

Secondly, Conley is lying when she claims in her essay (*Gazette*, Dec. 25) that the administration timed all votes on the curriculum for "broad participation." Let's take a look at just how obvious a lie that is.

For convenience and to improve participation, other

important faculty votes are taken via the Internet, but not curriculum votes.

Faculty had to be present in person to vote. And to maximize the inconvenience to the faculty, faculty members had to vote in person during exams when faculty are busiest tying the records of the whole semester's work together for their students prior to final grades.

Faculty had to be motivated enough either for or against the curriculum to show up at the most stressful, work-laden time of the semester.

The process ensured the least number of faculty would participate in the vote.

No wonder the turnout was small and the margin of victory exceedingly narrow. It was rigged that way by the administration to force through the absurd, watered-down curriculum.

There is no way a responsible Board of Visitors should reward such an obvious misuse of administrative power and departure from long-established procedure. Let a proper vote be held, and if that votes the new curriculum through, so be it. At least it will represent a wider consensus of the faculty.

Some faculty may still complain about the changes, but at least they can't claim the procedure was poisoned by design by Conley and Provost Michael Halleran.

Thirdly, nowhere did anyone in power in this process answer the question, "What will employers get when they hire a W&M graduate?"

Someone trained to think about thinking won't cut it in the business world, the legal profession, the medical realm, or the teaching classroom.

For want of a meaningful curriculum, for want of a

faculty motivated by students' needs and not selfish wishes, for want of a provost who leads with decent ethics, William and Mary will sink into mediocrity.

A liberal arts degree from the college will be meaningless.

William and Mary's reputation is at stake, and the only way to save it is for the Board of Visitors to refuse to fund the new curriculum, to insist on a liberal arts education that includes literature and history requirements.

The board will have to be strong and not yield. The Visitors will have to rise above their natural tendencies to be figureheads who do no more than meet four times a year, share a glass or two, and laugh about their now-remote college days.

Being on the board is a privilege, often tied to political connections, but a Visitor also has a duty to steward the college's resources well and to lead when the administration and faculty have gone astray.

Such is the case today.

When it meets in February, the board will need to be resolute and united.

Does it have the authority to refuse funding and point out errors? Yes.

It will need to be prepared for a fight both internally and in the media. It will not be pretty, but it will be right.

Fighting for what is right is never easy.

I urge the board to do what's right for the good of the college's reputation, for the good of the students themselves. And damn the professors and administrators who cannot see past their own noses.

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