

W&M's quest for lower standards

New requirements are not a done deal. The Board of Visitors will get the final say, and they should say no.



KARLA BRUNO

FOLLOWING MONTHS of intense inquiry amongst themselves, the faculty at the College of William and Mary is set to vote this fall on substantive changes that lower standards at W&M. The curriculum will then be put before the Board of Visitors for what would normally be a rubber stamp.

The proposed curriculum requires five actual courses (at four credits each), plus a 2-credit colloquium on something international, and a 2-credit "experience" preparing a portfolio, for a total of 24 required credit hours. In contrast, the current system requires that students earn a total of 36 credit hours in core courses.

Currently students are required to take one math course and two natural sciences courses. These three classes will be reduced into one class requirement for math and science.

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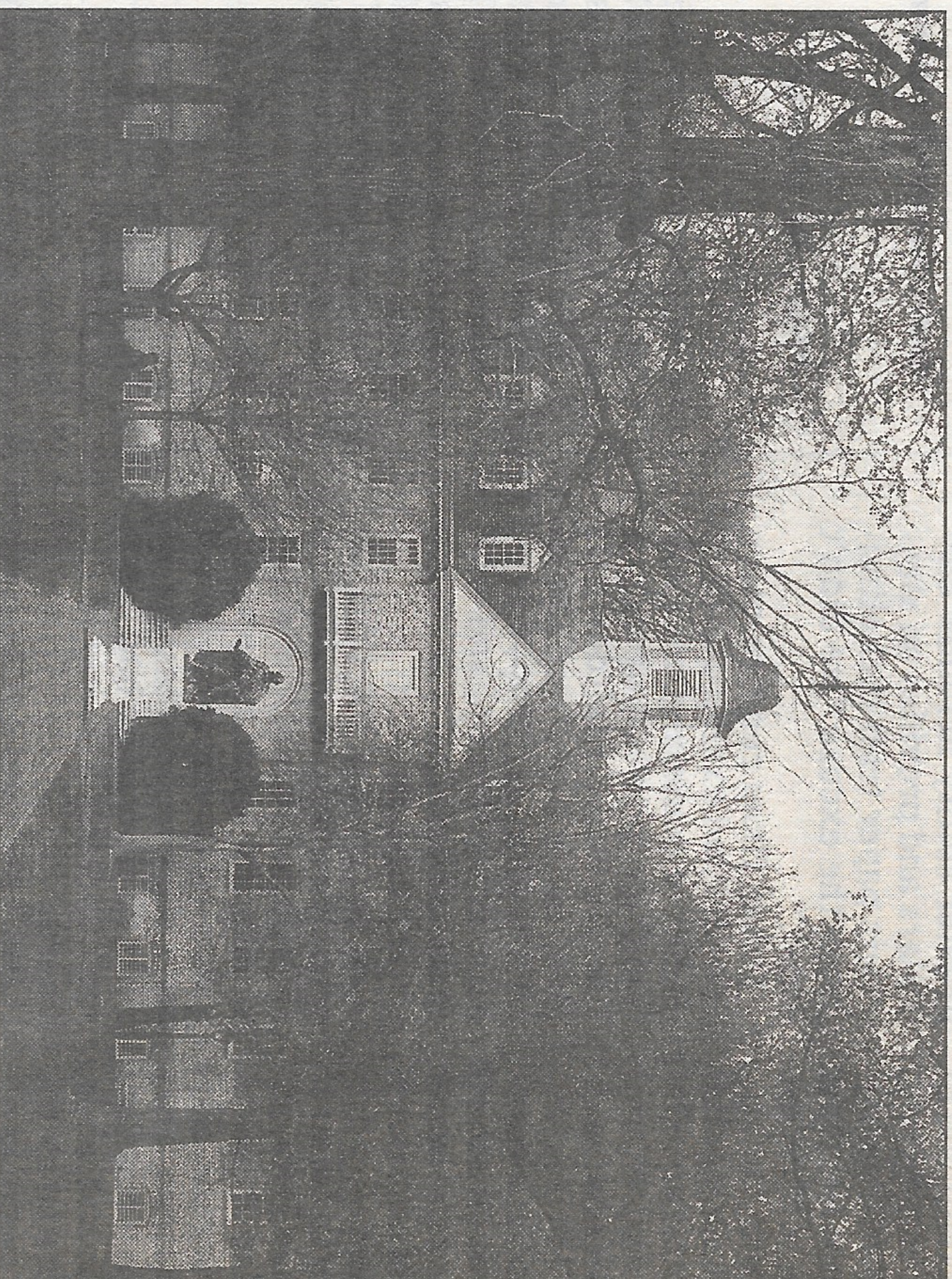
Colonial Williamsburg, Jamestown and four presidents, does not require its undergraduates to take at least one class in history.

What rationale does the faculty offer in support of the changes? How will lowering graduation requirements improve education at W&M? How does having a "Senior Experience" — wherein students collate and assess their own work instead of defending a thesis — make for a stronger curriculum?

The W&M website doesn't have much to say about this topic. It has been an insular process, without much input from alumni, the president, or the Board of Visitors.

Indeed, it is unclear to faculty members if any of their suggestions to the 10-person Curriculum Review Committee have been incorporated into the proposal.

In an era of steep competition for the best and brightest students, W&M cannot afford to be seen as weakening the



Something is dreadfully amiss when the College of William and Mary, with its iconic Wren Building, left, and with strong ties to Colonial Williamsburg, does not require its undergraduates to take at least one class in history.

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value of its degree. In the past twenty years — notably the last time the curriculum was reviewed and changed — W&M has dropped from 22nd to 33rd in the U.S. News and World Report rankings.

In short, the core curriculum at W&M needs strengthening, not reducing.

This new curriculum is not

a done deal. The Board of Visitors, seventeen intelligent people charged with governing the college, have the power — the obligation — to push back and require the faculty to justify its choices.

The college, like much of the nation, is at a critical juncture. What the board decides to do this fall about the proposed

changes will be definitive for the college's future. Minimally, the board should require the faculty to explain in cogent, clear terms the rationale behind the changes.

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