

# Justify curriculum choices

By Karla Kraynak Bruno

ARLINGTON  
Held Monday at the Sandler Center, the fourth curriculum panel discussion hosted by The Society for the College was a roaring success and proved that one big question looms over all:

## ESSAY

Why?  
Guest professorial panelist Mark Bauerlein of Emory University observed that none of the changes made by the committee is based in any scientific research on effective higher education.

Why?  
Presumably, changes in curriculum are made to improve undergraduate education, yet William and Mary has offered no rationale to support its changes.

What is offered is a "thinking about thinking" theme, which has nothing to do with actual learning.

Why did Provost Michael Halleran, the guiding hand in all things curricular, not insist that standard academic inquiry and research be the baseline for the entire proc-

ess?

Why did the provost not require the use of a set of standards by which to measure effectiveness?

Why are the provost and Curriculum Review Committee content to have a curriculum that is content-free?

William and Mary's School of Education has numerous experts on learning theory, and the scholarly work of cognitive specialist Daniel Willingham of the University of Virginia is particularly useful.

Resources for academic standards and achievement are widely available, yet the committee did not avail themselves.

Why not?  
Facts, as John Adams once noted, are stubborn things.

Fact: The provost and the Curriculum Review Committee are not employing academic rigor to the process of reviewing the curriculum, assessing the need (or lack of need) for change, and delivering a result that is rooted in the very academic quality they profess to seek in their students.

Why?

Fact: A tiny percentage (about 15 percent) of the faculty is involved in the process.

Why?

Fact: Knowledge is power, and the new curriculum opts out of empowering students.

Why?

With an estimated start date of Fall 2014 for any new curriculum, the college has roughly one year to ensure that the undergraduate program gives all students an education worthy of the college's history.

The duty of the administration is to ensure that a degree from William and Mary carries its weight with dignity in the world, that a degree has meaning, clout, and academic integrity.

The duty of the faculty is to teach.

The duty of the students is to learn.

It is a simple dynamic.

Why is William and Mary making it all harder than it needs to be?

Karla Kraynak Bruno is a 1981 graduate of William and Mary.

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