

No history equals no liberal arts

BY KARLA BRUNO

With regard to the new curriculum at the Gazette William and Mary, The Virginia Gazette recently mused: "Perhaps the history can be more relevant to the course of study. Which should a science major know more about: Lincoln's Gettysburg Address or the experiments of 19th-century physicist Albert Abraham Michelson?"

ESSAY "More" assumes there is at least some knowledge of Lincoln's address on the part of a physics major. Which assumes that the physics major has taken at least one class in American history at college.

But, as professor Paul Davies rightly noted, with the new curriculum it is possible for a W&M student to graduate without ever having taken a course in history of any kind. That is a travesty for an institution claiming to produce liberal arts graduates. Editor Rusty Carter pointed out that the most useful college class he ever took for the real world was a class in historic research.

The question then becomes how does the college amend that error in design for the new curriculum? What is stopping the administration from insisting on a history requirement?

If no amendment is urged, or worse, none desired, what does that say about the quality of education of a W&M graduate starting in 2019? Amend the new curriculum to include a history requirement and "liberal arts graduate" becomes proper nomenclature.

I would urge a class in American political economy to be mandatory as it was for so many years past at the college, perhaps with a required viewing of the first edition of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in Swem Special Collections.

The college has the distinction of being the first university in America to teach *Wealth of Nations*. Restoring it to a place of honor and requirement would be at once an homage to the great teaching of the college's glory days in 1780, and a useful class for all students who are presumably, voters.

Every scientist should understand the nature of free markets and their effect on every aspect of society because, ultimately, it will affect their livelihood and their standard of living. Every leader in every field should understand the "invisible hand" that brings prosperity to any nation and how such a system may be flawed, but it's the best system available for raising the standard of living for every citizen.

But I would applaud any history course to be required for graduation, a course where primary sources are the only resources and written critical assessment the only product.

One way to calm new curriculum nay-sayers would be to assess each student as he enters and then again as he departs. An exit exam with published results would prove that graduates had the knowledge and skills needed to enter the workforce. An exit exam would be proof that the new curriculum was living up to the promises made.

Another useful tool would be to track graduates for the first 10 years post-graduation. What jobs did they land? What salaries did they make? What is their potential for leadership in their chosen field? Are they leaders at the 10-year mark?

And publish those results. Because it would be helpful, useful and transparent — because facts, as John Adams once noted, are stubborn things.

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