

Three additional thoughts on the idea of student course load reduction at William & Mary.

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1) Many of us are troubled because we feel we must teach less material than we would like to, because students cannot take it all in, given their course loads. I agree. I can't teach all I'd like to. But I think this is an acceptable and desirable sacrifice if it allows students to take more classes, and therefore obtain a broader liberal arts education. I want our students to learn Art History, Philosophy, Economics, etc. This is the mission of William & Mary.

2) It's been expressed that reducing student course loads will be a way to give students more time "to think" about their courses. I have a lot of respect and affection for our students. But, I find that students consistently give about 80% effort to each of their classes. The rest is reserved for social activities, TV, the internet, sports, etc. I suspect that if we reduce their course loads, they will still give roughly the same effort to each course. I doubt that the vast majority will use the extra time to sit and ponder our disciplines. I think that the 80% effort mark is fairly fixed. If we require more, they'll do more; if we require less, they'll do less.

3) The argument that Princeton does or does not engage in a particular academic practice is not sufficient evidence in itself that that practice is necessarily good. We should judge the idea of student course load reduction on its own merits and for our own students. Let us be very careful as we judge what is best for our students. Cutting the student course load is like cutting taxes. It sounds good to lighten the load. But if we do so, and then find that we've gone too far, it will be very difficult to reverse direction and restore what we've taken from our students' education.