

WILLIAM AND MARY SILENCING STATEMENT

William & Mary has a powerful commitment to the free play of ideas. We have a campus where respectful dialogue, especially in disagreement, is encouraged so that we can listen and learn from views that differ from our own, so that we can freely express our own views, and so that debate can occur. Unfortunately, that type of exchange was unable to take place Wednesday night when an event to discuss a very important matter -- the meaning of the First Amendment -- could not be held as planned.

The event, co-sponsored by William & Mary's student-run programming organization Alma Mater Productions (AMP) and the ACLU, was entitled "Students and the First Amendment." The anticipated conversation never occurred when protesters refused to allow Claire Guthrie Gastañaga, executive director of the ACLU of Virginia, to be heard. The protesters then drowned out students who gathered around Ms. Gastañaga, seeking to ask her questions, hear her responses and voice their own concerns.

Silencing certain voices in order to advance the cause of others is not acceptable in our community. This stifles debate and prevents those who've come to hear a speaker, our students in particular, from asking questions, often hard questions, and from engaging in debate where the strength of ideas, not the power of shouting, is the currency. William & Mary must be a campus that welcomes difficult conversations, honest debate and civil dialogue.

