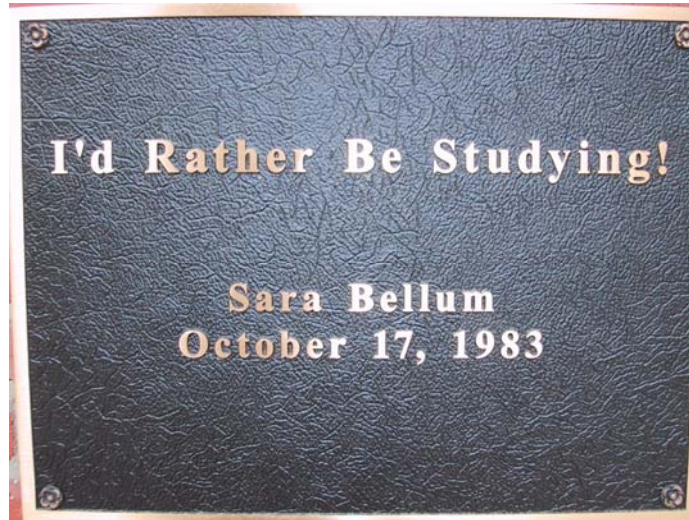


EDUCATION IS A NOBLE AND RISKY AMBITION



The Sara Bellum "I'd Rather Be Studying" memorial plaque on the front of Taliaferro Hall is dedicated to the legendary Sara Bellum and to all the students who died on this campus from lack of study.

I realize that some students aren't deserving of great honor, but this is also true of some warriors and it's not the point. Scholarship is a noble ambition, a risky adventure, and critically important to society.

Memorials honor the intention, the willingness to try, to go into battle not knowing if one will survive. Yet we know that the number who fall in the halls of academe is much higher than the number who fall in the theaters of war.

Most military people never see combat, but when we honor those willing to defend our country we don't focus upon the ones who spent the war bookkeeping in a cozy office in Washington, we honor the ones who fell on the front lines.

This memorial plaque doesn't focus upon students who survived the Battle of the Brains by coasting through the University on extraordinary talent, diligence, and luck. It honors the students who faced the greatest dangers, the students who cracked under the strain of oral reports, term papers, and final exams while battling the great General Education in large classes.

The first students failed miserably when they ate from the tree of knowledge and students have been falling like cut timber ever since. When they tried to speak clearly, they were crushed under the Tower of Babel.

The life of the student is head-to-head combat where one goes alone fearful of knowing we are all only one question away from disaster, especially if the question asks us to explain asses bridge or the iron law of oligarchy.

We must remember the fallen dead of academe. We must consider the truth that all who set out upon the intellectual journey to liberation soon discover the limits of knowledge—the Faustian impasse described so well by Goethe: an insatiable striving for knowledge and mastery results in despair.

Perhaps the students who failed simply arrived at this truth earlier than the rest of us and, like Faust, sold their souls to the devil in exchange for worldly pleasure and the chance to escape normal human limits.

This essay was written by John Pease and published in [The Diamondback](#) (October 17, 2000).