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ACTA Celebrates 20 Years of Promoting Academic Freedom and Excellence

Twenty years ago, on March 17, 1995, ACTA's founding president, Jerry Martin, and ACTA's current president, Anne Neal, developed a vision and a strategy to restore academic freedom and academic excellence to American higher education. While too many education leaders were resting on reputation and runaway funding, the new organization, born in a small student tavern in Georgetown, recognized the challenges and set about to overcome them. There is so much to celebrate and we have an entire year's worth of events planned, culminating in a **20th Anniversary Gala on October 16** at the National Geographic Society in Washington, DC. Before that, we're hosting a **20th Birthday Party on March 17**, the day of ACTA's founding.

And what a history it has been! The small fledgling organization, not yet named ACTA, was then known as NAF, the National Alumni Forum, and it scored some major victories in its early years. In 1996, a year after its launch, NAF rattled the nation with *The Shakespeare File*, decrying the disappearance of crucial course requirements from our colleges. Newspapers from the *New York Times* to the *LA Times* picked up the story. NAF's bold intervention the following year helped Brooklyn College preserve its storied core curriculum. And we gained friends and distinguished supporters, as Saul Bellow, Hank Brown, Irving Kristol, Jacques Barzun, Marty Peretz, and other leaders and policymakers joined NAF's National Council.

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Join us for ACTA's 20th Birthday Party!



Join us for a festive evening celebrating ACTA's official 20th birthday on March 17 from 6-8pm at F. Scott's in Georgetown! The event will include cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, and surprise guests just a few steps from ACTA's birthplace. Registration is complimentary at www.goacta.org/anniversary/events. All registered guests will receive two drink tickets upon arrival. We do hope you'll join us in toasting 20 years of raising the bar of higher ed!

www.goacta.org

info@goacta.org

1-888-ALUMNI-8

**Heather Noyes, Director of Operations
Maine Heritage Policy Center
Portland, ME**

“Your conference definitely provided a new viewpoint on ways in which [the Maine Heritage Policy Center] can work with trustees in Maine. As always, it was terrific to see you and many thanks for your hospitality and a great conference.”

Editor’s Note: Ms. Noyes attended ACTA’s trustee seminar in Cambridge, MA.

**The Honorable Harold Daub, Trustee
University of Nebraska
Lincoln, NE**

“Thank you for your...letter and the new report *Governance for a New Era*. I have enjoyed reading it and found it most impactful. Keep up the good work!”

**Louise Mirrer, President and CEO
The New-York Historical Society
New York, NY**

“What a splendid evening you organized and how honored I feel to have been the beneficiary of the Merrill award.”

Editor’s Note: Dr. Mirrer was awarded the 10th annual Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education at a gala event in November, 2014.

**The Honorable Richard S. Bray, President
Beazley Foundation
Portsmouth, VA**

“As always, the ACTA ATHENA Roundtable is a special event in content and attendance. The presentations offer much substance and the opportunity to meet and greet new and old friends is added pleasure. To participate in the program was a unique privilege for me....”

Editor’s Note: In November, ACTA held its ATHENA Roundtable—an annual meeting of influential college and university trustees, educators, state policymakers, and alumni leaders from around the country—at Columbia University. This year’s is scheduled for October 16 at the National Geographic Society in Washington, DC.

**Elise Scanlon, Co-Host
Radio Higher Ed**

“... I would like to thank you being a contributor on Radio Higher Ed in our third season of production. We were thrilled to be able to share your perspective and insight with our audience of listeners. Your podcast was very well received and we are grateful that you were willing to be part of such an important conversation.”

Editor’s Note: ACTA president Anne Neal was featured in the June 13 Radio Higher Ed podcast: “Reflections on Purpose: the Need for Change in Core Curriculum and Accreditation.” You can hear the podcast at radiohighered.com.

ACTA’s 20th Anniversary, continued from 1

In 1998, we became ACTA, and our campaign to ensure that American higher education remains the finest in the world only intensified. In the summer of 2000, ACTA issued *Losing America’s Memory: Historical Illiteracy in the 21st Century*, with the chilling results of a survey that revealed the historical illiteracy of seniors from America’s most prestigious colleges and universities. The project was endorsed by Pulitzer Prize-winning historian David McCullough. The nation took note: Congress passed a unanimous concurrent resolution calling on boards of trustees to strengthen U.S. history requirements. And we remain on the front line of this campaign, with further surveys on the state of historical and civic knowledge in 2012, 2013, and 2014. ACTA’s work on historical literacy was featured in over 500 publications—including *TIME* magazine, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Washington Post*—with a total nationwide circulation that put the story before 34 million Americans.

By 2004, ACTA began a national campaign to rescue general education. That year, ACTA published *The Hollow Core: Failure of the General Education Curriculum*. By 2009, that project blossomed as our signature What Will They Learn?™ online college guide, which now encompasses over 1,100 colleges and universities in its annual reviews, and which has earned the praise of columnists in the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times* and many other newspapers.

In recent years, ACTA has published three major studies of intellectual diversity and academic freedom, culminating in *Free to Teach, Free to Learn*, an anthology of contributions by leading First Amendment scholars. And in the lead-up to our anniversary year, 21 of the nation’s college presidents, policymakers, and political leaders joined former Yale president and CUNY board chair

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breaking
news

**ACTA Calls for Due Process:
Learning from the UVA Scandal**

ACTA has consistently warned that when a college must deal with grave and emotionally charged issues—and surely sexual assault is such an issue—it is due process and the principle of innocence until guilt is established that alone can ensure justice. Many on campus and in political leadership feel better by crying for swift, stern punishments, but rapid, bungled investigations often mean that the guilty walk free and the innocent are punished. Unless we want to see vigilante-style justice, we need to rely on the legal system to deal with crime. The recent events at University of Virginia offer a case in point.

Shortly after *Rolling Stone* magazine published “**A Rape on Campus: A Brutal Assault and Struggle for Justice at UVA,**” ACTA issued the statement, “Colleges have the responsibility of providing a safe atmosphere, but the investigation

and prosecution of grave criminal activity can only be done effectively by the police and the courts.” UVA’s ill-considered response, however, stands as an example of what happens when a university chooses a different path.

As is now notorious, the story told in *Rolling Stone* quickly came apart and the article became emblematic of something else: the incontrovertible reality of false accusations, the intellectual and moral bankruptcy of trial by the media, and the failure of college leadership.

KC Johnson, a longtime ACTA friend and professor of American history at Brooklyn College, was one of the first to point out discrepancies. It was Professor Johnson who chronicled how several members of the Duke lacrosse team were held by their own university to be guilty of a rape they did not commit. His astute analysis of the UVA situation called for



Student protester at UVA’s Phi Kappa Psi house.

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ACTA’s 20th Anniversary, continued from 2

Benno Schmidt in signing a bold commitment to improving college governance and advancing the goals that ACTA set forth 20 years ago: academic excellence, academic freedom, and accountability.

You can find more information about the upcoming birthday event on the cover of this issue, and on our new 20th anniversary website, www.goacta.org/anniversary. This website will be the online home for our anniversary celebration, including registration information



Flanked by a bipartisan group of lawmakers, then-president Jerry Martin and Anne Neal publicized *Losing America’s Memory’s* disturbing findings at a press conference on Capitol Hill. Soon after, Congress passed unanimous resolutions calling upon boards of trustees to add requirements in U.S. history.

for the various events. Be sure to check back frequently as we’ll be updating the site with important information regularly. There will also be a set of historical highlights featured each month, speaking to how much we’ve grown throughout the years.

Our rich and energetic history of the past two decades is ACTA’s inspiration. Much remains to be done. Join us in celebrating the past 20 years and looking forward to the challenges ahead. ●

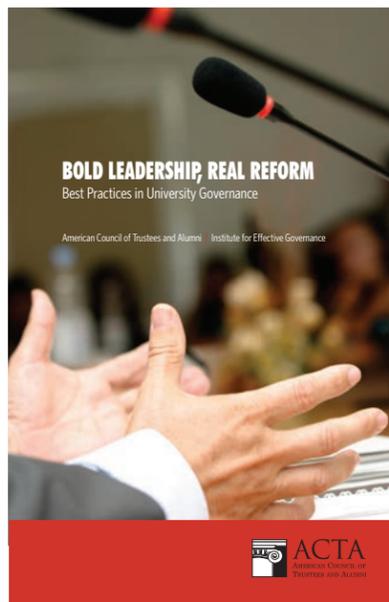


New Guide Outlines Best Practices for Bold Leadership

Trustees across America know that it's time for higher education to enter the 21st century. They know they can do better by students, and that the stagnation which has become the norm in academe can and must be overcome. What they often don't know, however, is how to take these crucial goals from idea to implementation. Where does one start when there's so much to fix?

ACTA's new trustee guide, which we sent to over 17,000 trustees at 1,100 institutions this month, has the answer. Drawing on the experiences of universities across the country, ***Bold Leadership, Real Reform: Best Practices in University Governance*** details what works in higher education. The guide presents 12 best practices aimed at reducing the cost of a degree while increasing the quality of student learning. It provides trustees with the knowledge and tools to make their school a stronger institution. With suggestions for everything from optimizing classroom use to measuring student learning, ***Bold Leadership, Real Reform*** offers solutions for the most pressing problems universities face today and outlines examples of institutions where these strategies are working.

At many institutions of higher education, attempts at reform run into strong opposition. New initiatives can creep forward at a snail's pace, and it can be hard to remain committed to reform when the road is long and the voices of naysayers are strong. But, as ACTA's new guide observes: **"large-scale change in higher education is not only possible, it has happened."** The universities and systems profiled in this guide show that efforts towards reform can and will pay off—all that it takes is a strategic and informed approach, and the courage to advocate for change. ●



NACIQI Backs Down on Recusal

ACTA president Anne Neal successfully fought off a decision by the U.S. Department of Education that would have banned her from the review and discussion of a major regional accreditor—part of her role as a member of the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI).

In 2012, Neal wrote a letter to the Department of Education in her capacity as ACTA president to question the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges' (SACS) decision to place the University of Virginia "on warning." The letter pointed to the problem of federal overreach into an institution's autonomy—an issue that had been raised by

others years before. ACTA made the critique openly, and it was published on our website and in an article by the Associated Press. The letter opened a dialogue about the proper role of accrediting bodies: "If federal accreditors are allowed to substitute their judgment in matters of state law and governance whenever internal constituencies feel aggrieved, they will bring about the sure erosion of institutional autonomy and undermine the ability of governing bodies everywhere to provide needed oversight."

Neal serves on NACIQI, which advises the Secretary of Education on matters related to accreditation. Last summer, shortly before SACS was up for renewal, Neal's critique of SACS curiously re-

surfaced. SACS requested Ms. Neal be recused from NACIQI deliberations concerning SACS, and the Department of Education—without any input from Neal—granted SACS' request.

"This situation was a perfect example of the bullying behavior that accreditors too often display toward colleges and universities," said Neal. "Without any notice to me, SACS used the recusal process to eliminate a critical perspective on the committee. It took six months to have the decision reversed. Isn't it time to admit that accreditors are more like guilds, focusing on their own interests, rather than acting in the public interest?" ●

"SPEAKING UP"

A Victory for Donor Intent

When it came to light in 2008 that Trinity College was violating the stipulations of its benefactor, the late Shelby Cullom Davis, ACTA joined the fight to preserve donor intent. The struggle has been long and hard, but finally, in late 2014, Trinity agreed in writing to comply with the terms of the bequest.

Shelby Cullom Davis, investment visionary and father of ACTA friend Diana Davis Spencer, had established a fund in 1976 at Trinity College in Connecticut with explicit directions that included hiring a chair who would teach students about private enterprise and entrepreneurship, the practice of which made Mr. Davis so very successful as a businessman and investor. But Trinity quietly began diverting the funds to other projects that were not congruent with the donor's wishes. The chair, Gerald Gunderson, alerted the Connecticut attorney general's office. The *Wall Street Journal* reported in 2009: "Trinity's president summoned him to the school's cavernous Gothic conference room, where he called the professor a 'scoundrel' and threatened not to reappoint him."

For years Gunderson and Mr. Davis' family were engaged in efforts to ensure the gift was used in ways that complied with donor intent, a donor who made sure to write "no exceptions whatsoever" across his final agreement letter with the college. ACTA wrote to trustees, underscoring the important role generous donors play in supporting higher ed, and demanding adherence to donor intent as "critical to maintaining the trust of current and future Trinity College donors."

The story ends well. This fall, the Shelby Cullom Davis Endowment Fund, which has grown over the years, will support two additional tenure-track faculty positions to further the passion that Shelby Cullom Davis had for promoting entrepreneurship and the understanding of free market economics. This is a tremendous victory for donor intent as well as academic excellence and intellectual diversity. ACTA will, of course, continue to advise donors on their gifts and promote our *Intelligent Donor's Guide to College Giving*, now in its second edition. ●

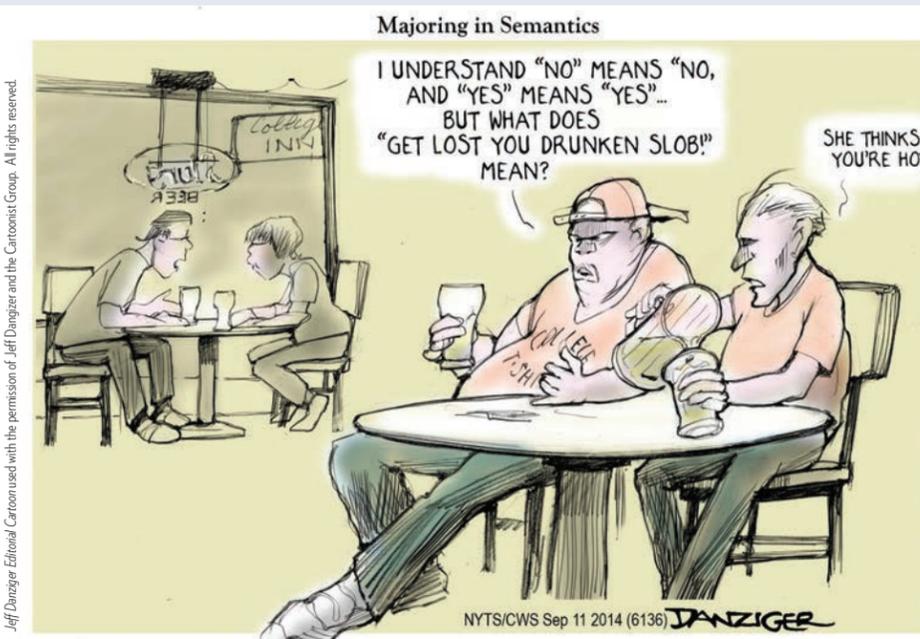
Featured Donor: Eugene Grant



President of Eugene M. Grant & Company, a real estate investment firm, Eugene Grant is a successful businessman, noted philanthropist, and longtime friend of ACTA. He's a member of ACTA's Chairman's Society and has been a dedicated supporter for 15 years.

Born and raised in New York City, Mr. Grant earned a bachelor's degree at the University of Michigan, and then a J.D. at Columbia Law School. He also served our country as an Air Force pilot during World War II. Shaped by his own military service, he has been outspoken about the benefits of a service year for young people, and he encouraged ACTA when we stood up for ROTC programs, which were under fire at our elite colleges and universities. ACTA won many successes on that front, bolstered by Mr. Grant's support. Harvard, Brown, Stanford, Yale, and Columbia have now reinstated ROTC on campus.

Mr. Grant and his wife Emily are supporters of many laudable organizations, and Mr. Grant serves on the boards of several. He has been a stalwart ally of ACTA's, and we thank him for doing so much to help us lead the way in higher education reform. ●



ACTA's Legacy Society

As we mark 20 years, there is much to be thankful for—including the members of ACTA's Legacy Society, those special donors who have remembered ACTA in their estate planning. Whether it's through endowing fellowships for ACTA interns, sponsoring long-term projects, or funding ACTA's rainy-day fund, Legacy Society members have made a commitment to sustain ACTA's work into the future.

Roger and Edna Haskell, members of the Legacy Society, had this to say about why they decided to make such a gift:

When it became apparent to us that there were very serious problems in the provision of essential and basic instruction at the university level in our beloved nation, we were immensely pleased to discover the perfect answer to this distressing situation in the American Council of Trustees and Alumni. ...

We felt our long-standing concern could be best satisfied by setting aside a legacy which would further the momentous advances being pursued by ACTA. Judging from the great success being achieved, there is no question that we have done the right thing.

We are truly honored by the commitment made by the Haskells and all of our Legacy Society members. We hope you too will consider joining ACTA's Legacy Society; your gift will



safeguard a rich liberal arts education for future generations. For information about ACTA's Legacy Society, please contact Jacquie Merrill at jmerrill@goacta.org or (202) 401-6787. ●

Featured Trustee: Harold "Hal" Daub

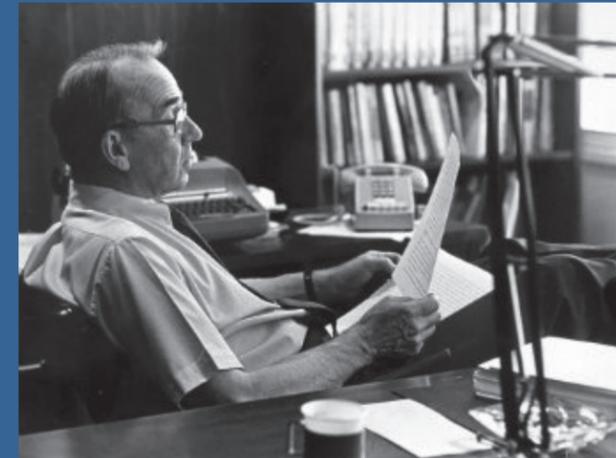


The University of Nebraska is lucky to count Harold "Hal" Daub among its regents. A former congressman and once-mayor of Omaha, Daub is a good friend of ACTA. He recently reached out to us as the University of Nebraska Board of Regents was in the midst of a presidential search process. ACTA has worked with him to ensure that the regents remain actively engaged throughout the search and maintain the level of transparency necessary to assure stakeholders in the campus community that the Board has their interests in mind.

The Board, like many faced with the complicated task of finding a dynamic and capable president, brought on a

presidential search firm to help with the process. This is a topic of long-standing interest to ACTA. One of our earliest guides on the subject is *Selecting a New President: What to Do Before You Hire a Search Firm*, which outlines the board planning process and emphasizes the urgent need for boards to create search committees solely or primarily of trustees and chaired by a trustee. Most recently, 22 higher leaders in *Governance for a New Era* called on boards everywhere "to consider carefully whether search firms really add value" to the search process given the growing case that they give "rise to a conflicted, expensive and inefficient process." ●

In Memoriam: Walter Berns



It is with much sadness that we mourn the loss of Walter Berns, the great political theorist, constitutional scholar, and professor. He passed away this January at the age of 95.

A student of Leo Strauss, Berns spent his career exploring what the greatest thinkers of the past—from Aristotle and Plato to Hobbes and Locke—had to say to our modern republic. He believed firmly that democracy's success was dependent on the maintenance of an educated and virtuous citizenry.

Perhaps that is why he was always such a dedicated friend and supporter of ACTA. He was with us in the trenches from ACTA's earliest days, participating in our Shakespeare teach-in at Georgetown to defend the place of the Bard in university curricula. And when ACTA led the charge to preserve the University of Chicago's legendary core curriculum, Walter Berns was by our side demanding that the university

not drop its Western Civilization requirement. The nation will remember him as a defender of Western civilization, the American Republic, and the notion that true education is about studying the best that has been thought and said. Here at ACTA, we will surely remember him as all that. But we will also remember him as a dear friend and fellow reformer. May he rest in peace. ●

ACTA Calls for Due Process, continued from 3

the proper procedures and inquiries UVA's leadership should have undertaken.

But UVA's leadership failed to control the emotional climate on campus. Mobs of student "activists" responded to the overheated atmosphere, vandalizing the house of the fraternity named in the article, and calling for harsher punishments of those they already deemed guilty. The crowds were so aggressive that the Phi Kappa Psi brothers had to be temporarily housed in a hotel off campus for their own safety. At the height of the frenzy, President Sullivan failed to offer the presence on campus that such a crisis requires.

ACTA president Anne Neal's statement on the incident noted that "Charlottesville Chief of Police Timothy Longo said he hadn't previously spoken in front of the Board of Visitors. ... If UVA is to move forward, it has to remedy the communications breakdown among students, administrators, and law enforcement."

Some good has come after all the scaremongering. Many came to realize, as this all unfolded, that universities are atrociously ill-equipped to handle cases of sexual assault. ACTA has repeatedly advised that the alcohol-fueled party culture prevalent in



On the PBS NewsHour, ACTA president Anne Neal argued that sexual assault is a sensitive crime that demands the training and evidentiary standards of the criminal justice system.

Charlottesville and on college campuses around the country provides a matrix for sexual assault and has to end. As we note in our trustee guide, *Substance Abuse on Campus: What Trustees Should Know*, trustees' most important obligation is to ensure that the "university is and should be primarily a place of learning and intellectual discovery. ... Self-destructive substance abuse fills the void created by the lack of meaningful course requirements

and minimal effort needed to earn passing grades."

ACTA will continue to work with trustees in the exercise of their fiduciary duty to maintain the safe, academically-focused environment that students and taxpayers deserve. ●

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ACTA **20th** ANNIVERSARY

Gala

OCTOBER 16, 2015

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

WASHINGTON, DC

Join the American Council of Trustees and Alumni for a memorable afternoon discussion with Mitch Daniels, David McCullough, Larry Summers, Richard Arum and more, followed by a cocktail reception and gala dinner. Visit the anniversary page for further details. Feel free to Register Now!

goACTA.org/anniversary