



ACTA
AMERICAN COUNCIL OF
TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI

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BACKGROUNDER

Founding and History

In 1995, Jerry Martin and Anne Neal founded the National Alumni Forum (NAF). The mission of NAF was to give a voice to concerned alumni across the country. NAF became the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) in 1997 to emphasize better its work with university trustees. Since then, ACTA has expanded its programs and initiatives, growing to a full-time staff of 19, dedicated to ensuring that American higher education remains the envy of the world.

Mission

ACTA is the only organization that works directly with alumni, donors, and trustees to improve American higher education. It focuses on the “Three A’s”: academic excellence, academic freedom, and accountability. Accordingly, ACTA advocates for rigorous liberal arts education, the free exchange of ideas, and a high-quality college education at an affordable price.

Academic Excellence

America’s democratic republic is premised on the need for an educated citizenry. Our Founders deemed public education to be essential for sustaining a free society. That education must have at its core a sound foundation in the liberal arts, which uniquely prepare students for career, community, and citizenship. By requiring students to gain a broad base of core subjects, colleges prepare them to engage new and challenging ideas and viewpoints. A strong core curriculum creates a common conversation for students and builds a vibrant academic community. ACTA opposes practices that threaten or undermine academic standards and believes that the mission of higher education is teaching, learning, and the rigorous pursuit of truth.

What Will They Learn?[™]

What Will They Learn?[™] is ACTA’s award-winning project that rates the core curriculum at over 1,100 colleges and universities. It encompasses every four-year public university with a stated liberal arts mission as well as hundreds of private colleges and universities, selected on the base of size, mission, and regional representation. What Will They Learn?[™] assigns grades of “A”–“F” to institutions based on how many of the seven core subjects essential to a liberal education they require: Composition, Literature, (intermediate-level) Foreign Language, U.S. Government or History, Economics, Mathematics, and Natural Science. Through this project and through technical support, ACTA encourages schools to improve their curricula. The project has also served to increase awareness of curricular standards throughout higher education. See how your alma mater stacks up at www.WhatWillTheyLearn.com.

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Academic Freedom

The lifeblood of academic excellence is academic freedom and free expression. Universities represent a special community that must protect and foster spirited inquiry and debate, for they are the engines of intellectual progress. ACTA directs attention to free speech issues on campus and writes to boards and institutions to defend free speech and academic freedom.

Accountability

Taxpayers subsidize higher education through state investment, student aid, and federally backed loans. Students and their families also pay large sums for a college education. ACTA believes that colleges in return are obligated to deliver a high-quality education at an affordable cost to students and parents. America spends more money per student than any other industrialized nation in the world, but overall receives lackluster results for its large investment. Colleges must be accountable for burgeoning administrative costs and wasteful management of resources. ACTA advises policymakers on strategies to control costs and monitor outcomes through its many white papers and guides and through its presentations to boards and to federal and state governments.

Accreditation Reform

ACTA has long been on the frontier of higher education accreditation reform. The current system of higher education quality assurance is broken and in need of a thorough overhaul. Under the current system, regional accreditors do not hold colleges accountable for learning gains or student success. Yet these organizations hold vast gatekeeping power over access to the federal financial aid crucial to individuals and institutions. Colleges with poor retention and graduation rates continue to be accredited—and continue to receive federal funds even as national student debt climbs. ACTA has proposed an alternative streamlined system based on audited certification of student outcomes and fiscal stability. ACTA's proposals have steadily gained bipartisan support, and ACTA will continue to work to ensure that higher education is efficient and that students receive a quality education.

Governance for a New Era

ACTA works with trustees through its Governance for a New Era project and the Institute for Effective Governance (IEG). Trustees are the fiduciaries of their institutions, and effective university governance requires trustees to be well informed of university business and actively engaged in policymaking. IEG provides printed trustee guides, board retreats, consultation services, and continuing education to college and university trustees to support them in their fiduciary responsibilities.

Fund for Academic Renewal

The Fund for Academic Renewal (FAR) is a program of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni which provides free programmatic and legal advisory services to donors to American higher education. Led by Executive Director Dr. Jacqueline Pfeffer Merrill, FAR collaborates with donors, family offices, and advisors to articulate their philanthropic goals, shape and protect donor intent, and structure gifts to colleges and universities that foster academic excellence and

intellectual diversity. FAR can also pool gifts of donors with similar interests and goals to achieve greater impact through its own Special Purpose Funds. Through its unique set of consulting services, FAR has helped donors navigate the giving process and influenced millions of dollars in gifts to make an enduring impact in colleges and universities. To learn more about FAR, please visit www.AcademicRenewal.org.

Oases of Excellence

ACTA assists philanthropists in making the most of their giving dollars. Targeted giving by donors and alumni have created the Oases of Excellence. The Oases are academic programs that increase intellectual diversity on their home campuses. There are over 65 such programs across the country that serve as havens for rigorous intellectual discourse *and* honor donor intent. They create lasting value on campuses and mentor dedicated students who benefit from their rich courses and programming.

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ACTA is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to academic freedom, academic excellence, and accountability in higher education. We receive no government funding and are supported through the generosity of individuals and foundations. For more information, visit GoACTA.org, follow us on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#), and subscribe to our [newsletter](#).