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An Agenda for Trustees in 2017

For more than two decades, ACTA has been the go-to resource for college and university trustees, as they work to address issues of cost, quality, and oversight. ACTA has identified five important ways proactive trustees can have a positive impact on higher education in 2017. Trustees should:

Establish a dashboard of key metrics. Effective board oversight requires that trustees regularly account for how their institution stewards its resources. They must insist on clear, objective measures that provide evidence that their institution is meeting its educational mission. ACTA's *Getting the Data: 10 Questions Trustees Should Ask* wallet card identifies specific data points—such as building utilization rates, student engagement measures, and administrative spending growth levels—that trustees should

take into account when establishing board priorities.

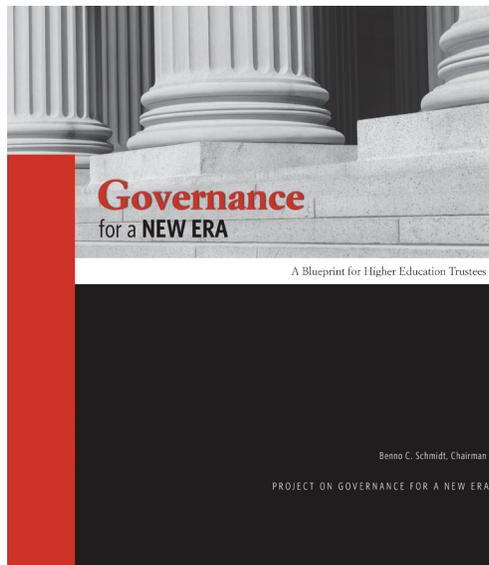
Ask the provost for a report on the number of courses that fulfill the institution's general education requirements. Too

often, course catalogs contain hundreds, sometimes thousands, of choices instead of a well-designed core curriculum. Beyond the detrimental academic effects of curriculum dilution, the administrative burden of maintaining such a system can be unsustainably costly. ACTA's trustee guide *The Cost of Chaos in the Curriculum* describes how an institution can save nearly 10% of instructional costs per semester by

reducing the number of courses that satisfy distributional requirements.

Establish formal procedures for athletic oversight. It is problematic that only a handful of Division I universities have

(continued on 3)



ACTA offers an array of publications and guides to help college and university trustees address issues of cost, quality, and oversight.

Save the date for ATHENA 2017

Join ACTA on **October 20, 2017** to celebrate ACTA's 13th annual ATHENA Roundtable Conference. The event will feature morning discussions by prominent scholars of higher education and will culminate in an evening gala presentation of the Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education. More information to follow.

www.GoACTA.org

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1-888-ALUMNI-8

**Mike DeWine, Ohio Attorney General
Trustee, Spring Hill College
Columbus, OH**

“Thank you very much . . . for your attention to issues of real educational significance . . . I well understand and appreciate ACTA’s point that academic freedom and the free exchange of ideas are tremendously important on campus and to our society more broadly. I will be interested in following the results of your efforts, just as I am attentive to the broader concerns that you raise.”

**Thomas O’Laughlin
Urbana–Champaign, IL**

“I’ve been an ACTA fan for more than 20 years and still am. It was early visits with [ACTA Senior Fellow] Anne Neal and others that inspired me to write and talk to friends on this campus over a decade ago about the need for even a shred of political balance on this priceless campus.”

**Albert Oettinger, Jr.
Winston-Salem, NC**

“Many thanks for the copy of [Philip Merrill Award recipient Niall Ferguson’s book] *Civilization* . . . which I look forward to reading. It continues to be a pleasure to support the work

that ACTA does, and to read and hear about the results of your efforts. Keep up the good work!”

**George Lucas, Stockdale Chair in Ethics
U.S. Naval War College
Newport, RI**

“When I eagerly poured through the latest addition of the ACTA newsletter, I was overjoyed to see that you have brought . . . Ken Kolson on board to help with new policy initiatives! . . . I was so impressed with all the reports on the ATHENA Roundtable, the award ceremony with Niall Ferguson, the reports on college excellence, and on the growth of administrative expenditures.”

**Mike Scutari
Los Angeles, CA**

“I’ve repeatedly wondered why alumni donors aren’t more vocal in demanding accountability from their alma maters. The tide, however, seems to be turning. . . . The expansion of FAR represents a new tool that donors now have at their disposal.”

Editor’s Note: The above appeared in an article in Inside Philanthropy on December 16. Read more about ACTA’s Fund for Academic Renewal at AcademicRenewal.org.

ACTA Updates

ACTA welcomes our new director of development, **Sherrill Berk**, who now leads ACTA’s development team and oversees our fundraising strategy. She has over 20 years of experience in business and nonprofit fund development, including positions with the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank and the University of Virginia Health Foundation. She serves on the Board of Directors of the Brody Jewish Center, Hillel at the University of Virginia (president emeritus). She succeeds Jacqueline Pfeffer Merrill, now the executive director of ACTA’s expanded Fund for Academic Renewal.

And we commend our former staff members, who are continuing to make important contributions in public policy and higher education.

Daniel Burnett, ACTA’s former

director of communications, is now a communications manager at the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education. And **Rachel Wagley**, a former Robert Lewit Fellow in Education Policy at ACTA, is a foreign policy advisor in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Meanwhile, **Evan Burt**, who previously directed the What Will They Learn?™ project, is earning master’s degrees in global policy studies and Middle Eastern studies from the University of Texas–Austin. **Rich Lizardo**, formerly ACTA’s research associate and editor, is now a Ph.D. student in history at the University of Pennsylvania.

Thomas Sanford, formerly program officer for trustee affairs, is completing his final year at the University of Virginia



Sherrill Berk, Director of Development

School of Law. And **Drew Lakin**, ACTA’s former administrative director, has just finished a stint at the U.S. Department of Education and is heading to law school at the University of Iowa in the fall.

ACTA congratulates these and other alumni, who have done so much to advance our mission. ●

ACTA Names Leading Law Firm as FAR Legal Advisor

On the heels of our December 2016 launch of the expanded Fund for Academic Renewal, which helps conscientious college donors craft gifts that have an enduring impact on higher education, ACTA has named Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer LLP as the Fund for Academic Renewal's legal advisor.

FAR helps higher education donors translate their philanthropic aspirations into gifts that enhance the offerings of the colleges they support. The Fund's innovative approach is to work with donors to create well-crafted gift agreements that ensure that major donors can give confidently—knowing that their donor intent will be honored—and offer them creative mechanisms to maximize their impact. FAR also offers accounts so that donors can direct or pool gifts to various schools, programs, and initiatives in vital liberal arts subjects such as science and mathematics, the Western tradition, and American history.

"The deep experience of the Tax-Exempt Organizations practice group at Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer LLP in guiding philanthropists is essential to the important work of the Fund for Academic Renewal at every step of the gift-making process," said FAR Executive Director Jacqueline Pfeffer Merrill. "Working with the firm, FAR will be well-equipped to help donors reinvigorate the liberal arts and high academic standards on campus."

Andras Kosaras, counsel, Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer LLP, will be the lead attorney representing FAR. The firm has a long tradition of providing a full range of legal services to all types of nonprofit organizations on a broad range of regulatory, transactional, and operational matters. The firm also advises individual and corporate clients on charitable giving matters.

To learn more about FAR's services, which are offered to donors and their advisors at no cost, thanks to a generous grant from the Diana Davis Spencer Foundation, visit AcademicRenewal.org. ●



Andras Kosaras, Esq.

Agenda for Trustees, *continued from 1*

athletic programs that bring in more money than they spend. College athletics is a multibillion dollar enterprise—one that merits special attention to ensure that it does not compromise institutions' educational missions. As an institution's "front porch" to the public, the failure of leadership to oversee a school's athletic program can lead to disastrous results for its reputation. The University System of Maryland Board of Regents, guided at the time by board member and former U.S. congressman Tom McMillen, created a robust and effective board review that others should emulate; it is featured in ACTA's web video *Best Practices in Athletic Oversight*.

It is problematic that only a handful of Division I universities have athletic programs that bring in more money than they spend. College athletics is a multibillion dollar enterprise—one that merits special attention to ensure that it does not compromise institutions' educational missions. As an institution's "front porch" to the public, the failure of leadership to oversee a school's athletic program can lead to disastrous results for its reputation.

Join the growing number of institutions that have adopted the Chicago Principles on free expression.

Colleges and universities are supposed to be places where students seek truth and learn to encounter a diversity of viewpoints, but the growing number of speaker disinvitations and intensity of campus disruptions in recent years makes it imperative that boards be proactive in establishing policy that ensures the free exchange of ideas on campus. Trustees should consider adopting the principles of the University of Chicago Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression, as schools including Princeton, Purdue, the University of Wisconsin, the University of Southern Indiana, and Chapman University have done. *(continued on 5)*

ACTA Fights Against Cafeteria-Style Curriculum

Writing in the *Baltimore Sun* in December, ACTA spoke out against Goucher College’s adoption of a “You-Focused Curriculum.” In overhauling its curriculum, Goucher discarded a general education program that had clear requirements in Composition, Intermediate-level Foreign Language, Mathematics, and Natural Science—essential elements of any core curriculum. The new plan seeks to make the student an “academic entrepreneur” and suggests to the student: “Customize your college experience.”

Although cafeteria-style curricula may be in vogue, they fail to ensure that students receive the cohesive, rigorous education they need in order to be prepared for career, citizenship, and lifelong learning. Skills like written communication, analytical reasoning, and cultural awareness, which are key for postgraduate success, come from studying subjects like expository composition, mathematics, and intermediate-level foreign language—precisely the courses schools increasingly fail to require.

Goucher and other colleges would do well to reconsider. Choosing the trendy over the substantive when designing the curriculum risks the integrity of academic standards and is likely to do college students, and the nation, an intellectual disservice.

ACTA Takes on Overspending in College Athletics

ACTA has long called attention to the dangers of overspending in college sports, and this football season, we again sounded the alarm.

ACTA’s president, Michael Poliakoff, and vice president of trustee and legislative affairs, Armand Alacbay, were quoted in an October 2016 *USA Today* article on expensive buyout clauses in college coaching contracts: Here, they emphasized the importance of boards’ oversight responsibilities.

In December, ACTA published an op-ed in *U.S. News & World Report* titled “The Cost of Gridiron Glory.” In all, only 12 universities operate athletics programs without the subsidies of student fees and other school operating funds—subsidies that cost students and taxpayers a stunning \$10.3 billion between 2010 and 2015.

And in January, on the eve of the national championship game, we released a statement urging increased oversight of athletic spending. As Dr. Poliakoff explained, although college sports have many benefits, “Higher education leaders need to rethink their priorities and exercise better discretion when it comes to managing college sports. . . . Teaching and learning must always be a school’s spending priority.” ●

Stephen Trachtenberg Speaks at ACTA



In January, one of the most distinguished leaders of higher education visited ACTA to share insights gained from a half-century in the field and to discuss the outlook for 2017 and beyond. Stephen Joel Trachtenberg led The George Washington University as its president from 1988 to 2007, and the University’s Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration is named in his honor. He previously served as president of the University of Hartford and vice president of Boston University.

Drawing from his experience, Mr. Trachtenberg gave his assessment of the challenges facing colleges and universities. Too often, the guardians of the status quo have responded to calls for much-needed reform with recalcitrance. But he also recalled examples of vision and insight from his own experiences as well as those of emerging new leaders.

ACTA has championed several of Mr. Trachtenberg’s ideas in our own initiatives, echoing his support for a renewed focus on the liberal arts, increased facility utilization, and greater support for innovation.

We were honored to have Mr. Trachtenberg with us at ACTA, and we will be sure to learn from his guidance as we continue to promote academic freedom, academic excellence, and accountability in American higher education. To hear President Trachtenberg’s thoughts, download ACTA’s Higher Ed Now podcast at GoACTA.org. ●

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H E A R D C A M P U S O N

George Washington Gives U.S. History the Hatchet

History majors at The George Washington University (GW) are no longer required to take a survey course in American history, due to a late 2016 decision by Colonial faculty. In doing so, GW joins the ranks of over two-thirds of *U.S. News & World Report's* “top” colleges that fail to require their history majors to complete even a single course in U.S. history. As ACTA explained in our *No U.S. History?* report, “requirements within a major showcase what knowledge a school deems vital to the comprehensive understanding of a particular field of study.”

And ACTA’s surveys have shown the consequences of colleges’ abandonment of the U.S. history requirement, finding troublingly low levels of civic literacy. In a country where fewer than half of college graduates know that George Washington was the general at Yorktown, his namesake institution would do well to reconsider its decision.

Penn Shelves the Bard

In *The Unkindest Cut: Shakespeare in Exile 2015*, ACTA found that exceedingly few top colleges require English majors to take a course focused on Shakespeare. In December 2016, one school went a step further, exiling Shakespeare—literally! Students at the University of Pennsylvania removed a portrait of William Shakespeare from its prominent placement in Fisher-Bennett Hall, demanding that the school incorporate a more diverse range of authors. And Penn’s English faculty reacted supportively.

ACTA President Michael Poliakoff called attention to the deeper issue: “[N]eglecting the most consequential writer in the English language will erode confidence in the humanities,” he said. “Regardless of the portrait’s fate, Penn faculty would serve their students better by restoring Shakespeare and other core texts to their proper place as requirements.”

UC Chancellors Defend Free Speech

As provocateur Milo Yiannopolous’s unfolding campus tour sparks endless controversy, two University of California leaders have reaffirmed their commitment to free expression. After a Yiannopolous event at UC–Davis was abruptly cancelled, Interim Chancellor Ralph Hexter emphasized, “Our community is founded on principles of respect for all views, even those that we personally find repellent. . . . A university is at its best when it listens to and critically engages opposing views.”

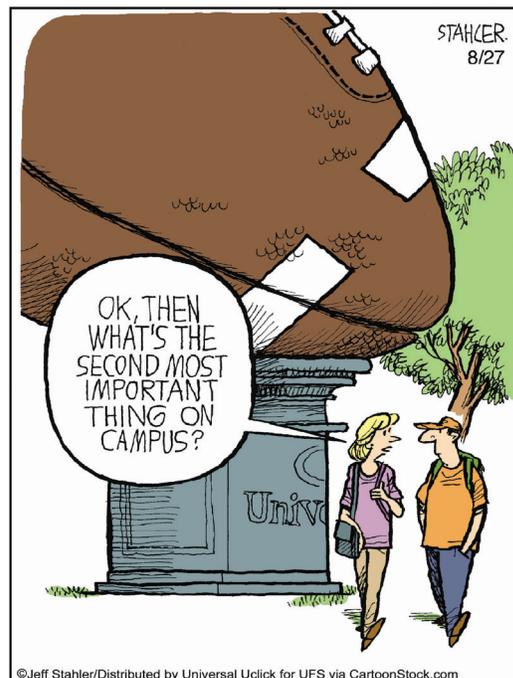
And Chancellor Nicholas Dirks of UC–Berkeley reacted unequivocally when violent protests forced police to evacuate Mr. Yiannopolous before his event could take place, “condemn[ing] in the strongest possible terms” the disruption and “deeply regret[ting] that [it] undermined the First Amendment rights of the speaker as well as those who came to lawfully assemble and protest his presence.”

Their statements are commendable, and ACTA urges UC–Davis, UC–Berkeley, and other institutions to codify these sentiments into policy by adopting the Chicago Principles of Free Expression and by applying firm sanctions against disrupters. ●

Agenda for Trustees, *continued from 3*

Support ACTA’s accreditation reform efforts. Accreditation is a costly, highly intrusive process for colleges and universities, and one that no longer serves its statutory purpose as a guarantor of educational quality for the disbursement of federal financial aid. By giving limitless authority to accreditors, the federal government has empowered them with the ability to threaten the shutdown of any institution that relies on Title IV funds—a power accreditors have used to interfere with institutional governance and to stifle attempts at cost-saving innovation. As Congress considers reauthorization of the Higher Education Act this year, ACTA is gathering a coalition of reform-minded organizations, trustees, and other members of the higher education community to support a proposal to decouple accreditation from Title IV eligibility, replace it with audited, transparency-based quality control, and return institutional autonomy to boards of trustees.

For trustees interested in implementing reforms at their institutions, ACTA is here to help. We offer an array of publication guides and consultation services free of charge. To learn more, visit GoACTA.org or call 202/467-6787. ●



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Effective TRUSTEESHIP



Alan Novak, who served almost two decades as a trustee, recently took time to reflect upon his experiences and to share takeaway lessons. He was a board member first at West Chester University and then at Ursinus College, where he served as board chair until 2016. Here are edited excerpts of his interview:

On joining a board: When I first became a trustee, the orientation was very top-down; there was less emphasis on a board setting out its own priorities and agenda. It took me time to grow into the position. What I learned was that new trustees need to do a lot of reading on higher education issues, beyond what their college gives them. They should talk to trustees on other university boards, and they should start asking questions from Day One.

On chairing a board: Boards should be engaged in shared governance, not just writing checks. At Ursinus, [then-President] Bobby Fong and I worked to grow our board from a purely fiduciary role to a strategic one, where the board was active in strategic planning. Our goal was to eventually have a generative board, which would pay attention to long-term issues.

Q&A with Alan Novak Advice for College Trustees

On board turnover and transitions: Boards must have trustees with a diverse range of perspectives and experiences. Our board worked to expand the pipeline of prospective trustees. Personality matters here: Trustees need to work well with others in the boardroom, while still asking the tough questions.

On working with administration and alumni: As a board chair, I talked regularly with our president. It's important to increase the level of transparency and openness. Trustees should examine what works and what doesn't, and identify potential improvements. Look carefully to see where and how you can make a difference. I also interacted with alumni more than I ever thought possible. They would have three types of questions, asking about the president's performance, the school's financial health, and any cases of campus craziness. Freedom of speech has been a particularly important issue in recent years, and it is one that should be addressed at the board level.

On presidential searches: I participated in two searches. It's important for presidential search committees to know what they are looking for—they should fully understand the school and what it needs. A skilled search chair will keep the committee focused on this, even when different constituencies make it difficult. And it's important to choose a consultant carefully; presidential searches are joint efforts between committees and their consultant, but the committee's vision should prevail. ●

To learn more about ACTA's resources and services for trustees, visit www.GoACTA.org/audience/for_trustees or email Armand Alacbay at aalacbay@GoACTA.org.

Oasis of Excellence: McConnell Center, University of Louisville

In January, the *Louisville Courier-Journal* highlighted the programming of the University of Louisville's McConnell Center and the Center's status as one of ACTA's 59 Oases of Excellence. Our Oases of Excellence initiative recognizes individual centers and programs at colleges and universities that promote the study of such vital subjects as American history, Western Civilization, political theory, economics, capitalism, leadership, and the Great Books. The McConnell Center, which identifies and trains Kentucky's next generation of leaders, is an exemplary Oasis. Now celebrating its 25th anniversary, it is home to the McConnell Scholars Program, a full tuition scholarship opportunity and immersive learning experience for 40 exceptional undergraduates. The Center also features the U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell and Secretary Elaine L. Chao Archives; the Civic Education Program, to improve historical and constitutional literacy among Kentucky teachers, students, and the general public; and the Public Lecture Series, featuring seminars, panel discussions, and other events led by prominent political, business, and academic leaders.

This spring, the lecture series, which is free to the public, examines "Promises and Perils of the American Presidency." ●

Featured Donor: Thomas M. Rollins

ACTA is honored to announce that Thomas M. Rollins—a 2012 recipient of the Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education, member of the Merrill Award Selection Committee, and longtime supporter of ACTA—will be joining our Board of Directors in April.

He was the founder of The Teaching Company, which has created audio and video lectures that bring the full range of the liberal arts and sciences to a worldwide public. The Teaching Company ignited passion for lifelong learning by harnessing an insight Mr. Rollins discovered as a law student studying for an exam: Recorded lectures by the most dynamic college and university professors are a uniquely powerful way to learn. Twenty-five years on, Teaching Company courses have been taken more than 19 million times, and The Teaching Company has been described by the *New York Times* as “a force in continuing education” and by the *Wall Street Journal* as “the colossus of its field.”

Prior to founding The Teaching Company, Mr. Rollins served as chief of staff and chief counsel for the U.S. Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources. He is a graduate of Georgetown University and Harvard Law School, where he was an editor of the *Harvard Law Review*.

“In expanding the accessibility of higher learning for millions, Tom Rollins has made remarkable contributions to the liberal arts,” said ACTA President Michael Poliakoff. “I am delighted that he will be joining our Board of Directors, and his experience will be invaluable as we continue working to build academic excellence and sound governance at America’s colleges and universities.” ●



What Will They Learn?™ Makes Its Mark

With our flagship project, What Will They Learn?™ (WWTL), ACTA is leading the charge to revitalize core curricula. And higher education leaders are taking notice. In 2016, dozens of university administrators from across the country contacted ACTA, asking how they can do better. Several institutions have already taken our advice, placing academic excellence at the forefront of their missions.

One private college in the Southeast created an endowed chair of U.S. history, and the new senior professor will design a course on the American founding that will be required of all freshmen. Another private college in the region recently added a literature requirement, ensuring for every student the instruction in critical thinking that comes from the attentive reading of literary texts that delve into the diversity of human thought and experience.

And, in the Midwest, a private college asked for ACTA’s advice to make its mathematics requirement more rigorous and in alignment with WWTL’s criteria. After several months of consultation, the college decided to implement a robust mathematics requirement, so that every student will receive college-level instruction in complex, analytical thinking and reasoning.

And we are expanding WWTL’s reach. ACTA’s policy team is working to bring WWTL, at its heart a college guide, to those who would benefit from it most: prospective college students and their parents. After a successful pilot test in August 2016, ACTA is now preparing to connect all high school guidance counselors in the country and in turn, the parents and students they advise, with our academic excellence initiatives, especially WWTL. By informing



63% of employers say too many recent college graduates are not prepared to participate successfully in today’s economy.

—USA Today

what will they learn.com

Find out what the college rankings *don't* tell you.

Visit this free college-guide website to find out which universities make sure their students learn what they need to know.

Prospective college students and their parents are increasingly looking for institutions that provide real academic value in return for the dollars received. Since WhatWillTheyLearn.com was launched, students and parents—more than 400,000 of them—have thronged to our website to see for themselves what different institutions require.

In “What Will They Learn?” our premise is simple: The core purpose of attending college is learning, and we examine what institutions actually require students to study.

What have we found? That hundreds of colleges and universities, public and private, famous and not-so-famous, require very little of their students.

In this age of globalization, a staggering 87.3% do not require intermediate-level foreign language of their students. A full 81.9% do not require a basic course

in American history or government. At 40.6% of the institutions we examined, students can graduate without taking a college-level mathematics course, and at 18.3%, students can leave without that most essential career preparation—a basic course in English composition.

Students pay a price when their institutions fail to set meaningful academic standards. Recently, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) surveyed its member nations to determine the levels of quantitative and verbal literacy that adults demonstrate. While America spends substantially more per student on higher education than any other OECD nation, we are far from the top when it comes to performance. The literacy level of recent four-year college graduates is below the average of our international peers.

The original idea of a liberal arts education was one that would equip students with the knowledge needed by a free citizen. Centuries later, the importance of a broad-based general education has never been greater.

See what people are saying about whatwilltheylearn.com >

ACTA
ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES
TRUSTEES AND SCHOOLS

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prospective parents and students about the cost and quality of American higher education today, ACTA hopes they will vote with their wallets to signal to trustees and administrators the urgency of widespread reform in colleges and universities. ●



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Innovation on the Air

ACTA's podcast continues to bring the cutting edge of higher education policy and governance best practices directly to your smartphone.

Our first episode of 2017 brings to life the importance of innovation in higher education, as **Daniel Pianko, co-founder of University Ventures, discusses how private companies can work with colleges and universities across the country.** He highlights the opportunities in developing income share agreements, such as Purdue University's Back a Boiler™ Program; improvements to career services; and business-university partnerships to streamline the path from graduation to employment. His unique perspective will inspire any trustee to embrace new and creative ideas to improve their schools.

Higher Ed Now is available for FREE on iTunes, Google Play Music, and Stitcher. Subscribe now and never miss a new episode or simply visit: GoACTA.org/higher_ed_now/podcasts.

