

In This Issue...

- 2 In Box
- 3 A Battle Won in Virginia
- 4 Economic Literacy Campaign Hits Home
- What's New with ROTC?
- 5 Speaking Up
- ACTA in the News
- 6 Effective Trusteeship
- Barnstorming the Sunshine State
- 7 Heard on Campus
- 8 "Founding Father" Martin Retires
- A Donation, Not a Bailout
- 9 New Oasis of Excellence Launched
- Managing to be Different
- 10 Best of the Blog
- 11 In Memoriam
- Exporting *EûPluribus Unum*

Wall Street Journal Spotlights Donor Intent

By David Azerrad, ACTA Program Officer

On April 23rd, the *Wall Street Journal* ran an in-depth, front-page story on donor intent that featured ACTA president Anne D. Neal and ACTA Leadership Society member Diana Davis Spencer. The article describes how financially strapped colleges are scrambling for assets and subverting donor intent by diverting funds from endowments reserved for specific purposes.

Working with Mrs. Spencer, ACTA pointed *Wall Street Journal* reporter John Hechinger toward a previously unreported dispute at

Trinity College in Connecticut. There, administrators are facing scrutiny from the state attorney general for their plan to spend part of a \$9 million endowment from Mrs. Spencer's late father, Shelby Cullom Davis.

Hechinger made Trinity the primary focus of his article.

In 1975, Mr. Davis gave Trinity \$750,000 to create a professorship of

American Business and Economic Enterprise and to fund several related activities. In a letter to the president, Mr. Davis explicitly specified that the funds should be used "for no other purposes." The Davis professorship was created and though the fund is now worth \$9 million, the university has blocked attempts to create another one.

Meanwhile, Trinity has in recent years

tapped into the endowment for projects that depart from its mission. The college spent nearly \$200,000 for an internship program and tried to fund scholarships for foreign students. Trinity has since reimbursed



Diana Davis Spencer, president of the Kathryn W. Davis Foundation

(continued on 3)

Save the Date for 2009 ATHENA Roundtable

ACTA's 2009 **ATHENA Roundtable**, *Getting Back to First Principles: Reclaiming Higher Education*, will be held on **November 5-6** at George Washington's Mount Vernon. The event will culminate with a gala dinner and presentation of the 2009 **Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education** at the historic Cosmos Club in Washington, DC. Keep an eye out for your invitation. See www.goacta.org or call us at 202-467-6787 for further details.

www.goacta.org

info@goacta.org

1-888-ALUMNI-8



William H. Gates, Sr., Trustee
University of Washington
Seattle, WA

“Thank you for your letter and the enclosed *Washington Post* editorial. I agree that the policies at CUNY and now at UDC are needed in higher education.”

John Silber, President Emeritus
Boston University
Boston, MA

“Thanks for the articles from the *Washington Post* and *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. It is splendid that ACTA has played a useful role in these reforms. I hope UDC continues the reforms introduced by President Sessoms. And let us hope that Virginia Tech does not try again to impose their ridiculous straitjacket on academic freedom.”

Thomas B. Hall, III
Shawnee Mission, KS

“ACTA is doing critically important work. I hope you will keep producing reports on public higher education, especially state by state.”

Robert Gerst, Chair of Liberal Arts
Massachusetts College of Art
Boston, MA

“Thanks very much [for the copies of ACTA’s study *The Hollow Core*]. I’m going to distribute this report to members of my general education faculty. We take these issues very seriously, and we’re working hard to restore general education to what it ought to be: an educational environment that inspires students to think autonomously and creatively, informed by the rich tradition which makes autonomy and creativity possible.”

Robert L. DuPont, President
Institute for Behavior and Health
Rockville, MD

“I agree with you that the dumbing down of college life is part of the same malign culture that turns a blind eye to the devastating epidemic of drinking and drug use that is having such a negative impact on a large minority of college students. The key ideas behind this new, neglectful college culture start with the new, PC relativism that sees almost everything anyone does as morally equivalent. Excessive and destructive drug and alcohol use is to be seen as ‘an alternative lifestyle choice’ to be treated

with tolerance for diversity. But it is not just that. This initial cultural abdication is compounded by the shift to thinking about colleges as selling their services to students in a competitive market where victory goes to the colleges which are as attractive to students as possible. Since a lot of students like the party scene—which has become synonymous with the college years—the race is on to provide the ‘party’ lifestyle to attract more students. Grades, course selection and hard work are all sacrificed in this new college culture. What is missing from this dismal scene is the adults acting as adults. That means adults exercising one of the most important roles of adults: active stewardship for the lives of the nation’s youth, especially the best and brightest who are in our colleges and universities. Sure, plenty of college students complete college and thrive despite this abdication of adult stewardship. What is missing in this view is the heavy toll taken on that large minority of students whose hopes and promise are swallowed by substance abuse.”

J. William Reed, Director
Education Task Force
American Legislative Exchange Council
Washington, DC

“Thank you for your contributions to this year’s Spring Task Force Summit—specifically, your informative presentation on grade inflation and your screening of the documentary on intellectual diversity. I’m glad we’ll be able to keep these issues at the forefront of ALEC’s higher-education initiative.”

Cynthia L. Hale, Trustee
Hollins University
Decatur, GA

“I recently read three of the ACTA trustee guides: *Measuring Up*, *The Basics of Responsible Trusteeship* and *Strategic Planning and Trustee Responsibility*. Thank you so much for making them available to me. As one of the brochures asserted, new trustees are rarely given the training we need to fulfill our responsibilities fully. Having read and studied the brochures, I now feel like I understand my role. I am also happy to say that Hollins University’s Board of Trustees is one that operates in excellence. One of the best things we have done is to select a strong, courageous and visionary president who has indeed made some difficult decisions that have helped the institution to survive these tough economic times. I will be discussing your materials and counsel with our Board.”

A Battle Won in Virginia

Virginia Tech announced in April that it would abandon a controversial set of proposed tenure and promotion guidelines after ACTA wrote to the Board of Visitors and the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* criticized the policies in an editorial. The guidelines would have mandated that professors eligible for tenure report “diversity” activities in violation of academic freedom and their own freedom of conscience. The seemingly innocuous commitment to diversity in effect amounted to an ideological litmus test.

In March, following a faculty vote on the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences (CLAHS) policies, ACTA sent a letter to the board calling on it to undertake a comprehensive review of all Virginia Tech promotion and tenure policies. The policies of the CLAHS, as well as those already on the books, raise “serious questions about the university’s adherence to the First Amendment and accepted principles of academic freedom,” we wrote. In raising these concerns, ACTA joined with the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, the National Association of Scholars, and the Virginia Tech student newspaper.

Echoing ACTA and others’ criticism of the policies, the editorial board of the *Times-Dispatch* denounced the university’s politicized diversity initiatives and called on “wiser heads at Tech to make necessary changes.” The wiser heads must have listened, because the university announced the following day that it would abandon the CLAHS policies. The CLAHS is, however, only one of Virginia Tech’s nine colleges. Other problematic policies remain on the books. Let us hope Virginia Tech leaders will not stop there and will look at *all* policies that raise serious First Amendment and academic freedom issues. ●

Donor Intent, continued from 1

the endowment for the internship and nixed plans for the scholarships.

“If colleges like Trinity undermine donors’ confidence that they will respect our wishes,” Mrs. Spencer told the *Journal*, “they place at risk the generous support they receive from our foundation and so many others—and the benefits that inure to millions of students from this largesse.”

In the article, ACTA noted that the recent settlement of the Robertson family’s donor-intent lawsuit against Princeton University—a case covered previously in *Inside Academe*—has proven a wake-up call to many college and university donors. In a

paper published in February by the Hudson Institute’s Bradley Center for Philanthropy and Civic Renewal, ACTA examined the implications of the settlement, under which Princeton agreed to pay \$100 million to the Robertsons.

“Universities have broken the compact of trust,” ACTA wrote. “When giving to a university, donors must apply the

same kind of diligence and vigilance they would when making any other comparable investment. Donors have a responsibility to make sure that they give wisely.”

To help them do so, ACTA is currently updating *The Intelligent Donor’s Guide to College Giving*. This publication, first released in 1998, remains quite popular with donors who want to make sure their gifts are used according to their wishes.

But donor vigilance in no way detracts from the university’s responsibility to carry out the donor’s intent. Especially in these challenging times, alumni support, which totals more than \$8 billion a year, can be the lifeblood of

higher education. That’s why ACTA firmly believes that our colleges and universities—starting with those in charge, the trustees—must make sure they are living up to their obligations to donors. The tale related by Diana Davis Spencer and others in the *Journal* is just one more reason why boards must step up to the plate. ●

“If colleges like Trinity undermine donor s’ confidence that they will respect our wishes, they place at risk the generous support they receive from our f oundation and so man y others—and the benefits that inure to mil- lions of students from this largesse.”

– Diana Davis Spencer

Economic Literacy Campaign Hits Home

Late last year, ACTA conducted a survey of 100 leading universities across the country to determine how many had an economics requirement. With the nation's attention squarely focused on the financial crisis, we wanted to know whether our colleges and universities were preparing leaders and citizens who could understand and think critically about the economy. Not surprisingly, our discovery that only one of those surveyed—the University of Alaska—requires economics caught the attention of the media. On January 27th, we hit pay dirt: *MindingTheCampus.com* ran an op-ed on the topic by ACTA research fellows Erin O'Connor and Maurice Black. A version of the piece also ran in *Newsday* on March 8th.

The very next day, ACTA president Anne D. Neal was interviewed on Fox Business Network to discuss the results of

our survey and the need for our universities to pay attention to this critical subject—a need made even more pressing by the widespread economic illiteracy among young Americans.

The following day, ACTA published an opinion piece in the *DC Examiner* on the subject that called on trustees to take action to ensure that their graduates are economically literate. And a day later, the CBS affiliate in Fairbanks, Alaska mentioned the results of our survey during a news segment on the University of Alaska's efforts to engage students on economic issues—in and out of the classroom.



We will soon be returning to the topic of economic literacy—and our colleges and universities' role in teaching this important and central topic—when we publish a new national survey of core curricula in the fall. ●

What's New with ROTC?

By Noah Mamis, ACTA Program Officer

In our last issue of *Inside Academe*, we wrote about ACTA's letters to the boards of seven universities that do not allow ROTC on campus. Since then, there have been several encouraging developments.

First, Indiana University has seen its ROTC program enrollment increase by 50 percent since 2005, giving the lie to claims by those who still exclude ROTC that students are not interested in serving our country. Meanwhile, Colgate University has reinstated its program—which had been disbanded during the Vietnam War. Though the program is still small, student interest appears to be growing, and the program's prognosis is strong. Although schools have argued that enrollment in ROTC would be too low to justify the cost, these cases illustrate the adage of "if you build it, they will come." Low enrollments are not the result of low interest but rather low information and administrative roadblocks.

And there is more good news: At Harvard, one of the seven with which ACTA corresponded, a recent survey of undergraduates showed that a solid majority of undergraduates—over 60 percent!—would support official recognition of ROTC. This follows a vote last fall of the Yale Political Union in favor of the return of ROTC to New Haven. It is clear that students are ready to see the program made easily available to them. Hopefully student interest and demand will help Harvard (and the other six) make the right decision. ●

ACTA Visits L.A. and Two Staunch Defenders of Academic Excellence

By Michael Schilling, ACTA Office Manager

Oscar Award winner David L. Wolper is well known for producing the TV series *Roots* (1977) and the hit films *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* (1971) and *L.A. Confidential* (1997). Less well known is his passion for the teaching of American history. In a recent essay about George Washington that he shared with ACTA, Wolper writes:

Unfortunately, most students in this country don't know anything about the founding of America and the importance of George Washington. Ask them about Washington and they'll answer: He had wooden teeth and he cut down the cherry tree. Neither is true. His false teeth were made of hippopotamus ivory and the cherry tree story was a fictional piece written in a book in the early 1800s to demonstrate Washington's character. American history is shamelessly neglected in grade schools, high schools, and universities.

That's why Mr. Wolper is a member of ACTA's Society of Fellows—and why we

visited him recently at his home in Beverly Hills. There, we discussed the many recent studies by ACTA and others that show today's high school and college graduates have a poor understanding of the American story—particularly the founding period, and the significant achievements of our greatest figures.

While in Los Angeles, ACTA president Anne Neal also met with Sherry Lansing, former chairman and CEO of Paramount Pictures and a devotee of educational excellence. Ms. Lansing is on the Board of Directors of Teach for America and has served as a trustee of Scripps College and the board of Independent Colleges of Southern California. She is currently vice chairman of the Board of Regents of the University of California.

ACTA appreciates the support of our friends on the West Coast and with their help will continue the fight for academic excellence in higher education. ●

Kathleen M. Pesile, chairman of ACTA's Institute for Effective Governance and a trustee of the City University of New York, weighs in on recent actions at the University of the District of Columbia.

Why UDC Is on the Right Path

The Washington Post
March 22, 2009

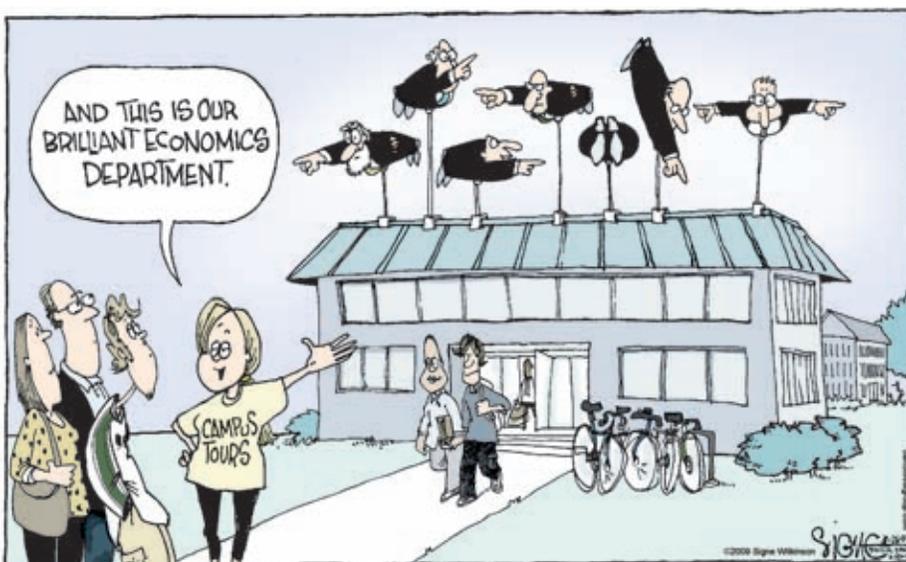
“Ten years ago, I joined the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York—or, as the newspapers at the time called it, Remediation U. Seventy percent of incoming freshmen failed at least one remedial test in the three R's. Enrollment had been steadily declining for years, and graduation rates were woefully low.

Fast-forward to today. Enrollment has reached the highest point since we began charging tuition in the 1970s. The average SAT scores of our freshmen are almost in the top third nationwide, and we have twice as many incoming students who graduated from high school with an 85 or better average as we did 10 years ago.

If the CUNY I joined resembled in many ways countless other failing urban public universities across the country—including the University of the District of Columbia—the questions are: How did we turn our school around, and can our approaches be applied at other schools?

We first had to have a bold and dynamic leader who shared the board's commitment to CUNY's mission: offering an accessible,

(continued on 7)





Warm Winds of Change in Connecticut

“Students who enter college are unprepared to do college-level work. Forty percent of freshmen at Southern, Central, Western and Eastern Connecticut state universities must take remedial math courses, 25 percent must take remedial English. In other words, after 12 years of schooling, these college freshmen don’t have the basic skills required to read, write or do arithmetic.” So said a recent editorial from the Litchfield County, Connecticut *Register Citizen*, focusing on the Connecticut State University System.

Given these numbers, it’s no surprise that less than half of the CSU system’s entering freshmen complete a four-year degree within six years. While this is consistent with national trends, the CSU Board of Trustees is trying to break this pattern—and it voted in March to raise admissions standards.

In the future, applicants will have to have high school coursework for four years in math (instead of three), three years of science with two laboratory courses (instead of two years of science with one year of laboratory), three years (instead of two or three) of Social Studies plus U.S. History, and second-year competency in a world language. These changes, which are slated to go into effect as early as 2015, are designed to produce a better-prepared student body less likely to need remediation or take more than four years to complete a bachelor’s degree. They also send the message to elementary and secondary schools that academic laxity is not an option at a time when an educated workforce has become more important than ever.

Kudos to the CSU Board. May other boards follow this example! ●

Barnstorming the Sunshine State

You don’t have to ask most people twice to go to South Florida in the frosty months—and this past winter, two ACTA supporters had an understandably easy time rounding up friends who wanted to hear about what’s happening on America’s college campuses.

In February, ACTA Decade Society member Jody Wolfe and Society of Fellows members Carrie and Bill Philipbar hosted dinners in ACTA’s honor at their homes in Miami and Palm City, respectively. We owe Jody, Carrie, and Bill a debt of thanks not just for their stalwart support of ACTA, but also their willingness to introduce their friends to our message of higher education reform. And we make trips around the country to advance our goals and engage the support of more trustees, alumni, and concerned citizens. If you would like to host a similar event in your area, please contact ACTA program director Charles Mitchell at 202-467-6779 or cmitchell@goacta.org. ●



Anne Neal with ACTA Society of Fellows members Bill and Carrie Philipbar.



H E A R D C A M P U S ON

Ward Churchill: The Saga Continues

Ward Churchill, the former University of Colorado ethnic-studies professor whose infamous “Little Eichmanns” essay sparked a national controversy and a heated debate about the limits of academic freedom, is in the news again. After having been found guilty of multiple counts of plagiarism and falsification of research, Churchill was fired from his post at CU, but subsequently sued—claiming the investigation and firing were triggered by his political views. A Denver jury ruled in his favor, awarding him a \$1 settlement.

ACTA believes that faculty members’ academic freedom must be protected—but also deplores academic dishonesty and unethical behavior, which Churchill has clearly committed. This episode underscores the need for colleges and universities to ensure accountability for faculty, through a formal system such as post-tenure review that rewards high performance

and sanctions poor performance. That way, institutions can maintain academic standards.

ACTA Report Card Featured at Missouri Board of Curators Meeting

ACTA’s report on public higher education in Missouri, *Show Me*, has received real attention. Last December, it got a close reading in a place where its insights particularly matter—the meeting of the University of Missouri Board of Curators. These trustees discussed various rankings and evaluations from outside groups, featuring ACTA’s *Show Me* alongside *Forbes* and *US News & World Report*. They duly noted the report’s praise as well as the areas in which the university system could use some improvement. Trustee David Wasinger expressed hope that *Show Me* “serves as a catalyst to improve higher education in Missouri—and across our country.” We agree. ●

UDC, continued from 5

high-quality education. This was our chancellor, Matthew Goldstein. We then had to stand by him as the much-needed reforms he implemented—introducing admissions standards and overhauling remedial education—gave rise to an onslaught of criticism.

In this regard, the University of the District of Columbia is moving in the right direction. President Allen L. Sessoms, with the backing of the board, has set out to fulfill the university’s promise to offer “broad opportunities for a diverse student population” by preparing them to become “productive citizens with marketable skills.” He aims to do so by splitting UDC into a four-year university with admission standards and a community college that would remain open to all.

His plan would allow the university to carry out both aspects of its mandate: The community college’s open-enrollment

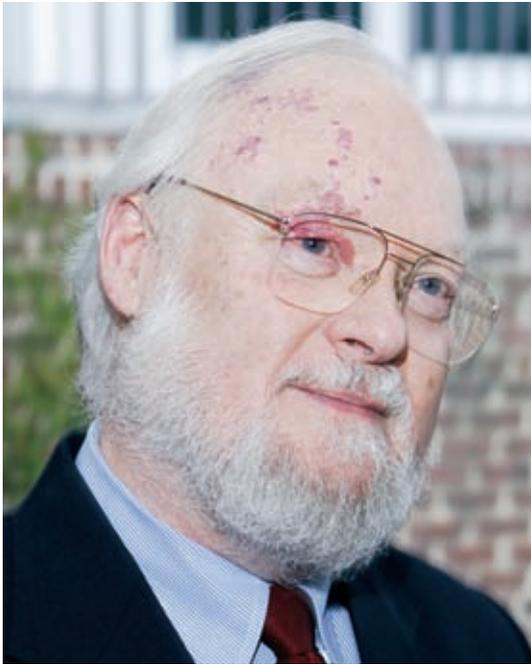
policy will ensure accessibility, and the four-year university, relieved from the burden of remediation, can focus on a proper undergraduate curriculum.

As things stand, UDC attempts to combine both mandates and succeeds at neither. As a recent Brookings Institution report said, UDC “struggles with the dual missions of a community college and a state university, straining its resources and hampering effectiveness.” The report also notes that Washington is the only major American city without a full-fledged community college and calls for the creation of one.

Now, Sessoms and the UDC board of trustees are trying to do just that. Their efforts have already drawn the ire of critics who believe admissions standards will lead to a precipitous drop in enrollment. In reality, the contrary is true. Under the current open-admission policy, enroll-

ment has plummeted from a high of 15,000 in the 1970s to about 5,700 this past fall. Meanwhile at CUNY, enrollment has soared across the board since we reintroduced admissions standards in 1999. When endowments are tumbling and families face acute financial pressures, more of the “same old, same old” simply doesn’t cut it: It doesn’t inspire confidence in our universities and it doesn’t attract those increasingly rare philanthropic dollars. Bold, well-informed leadership—in the form of presidents who will challenge the status quo where needed, and boards who will stick with them—does. That’s the lesson of CUNY’s renaissance—and UDC seems to have learned it. In these challenging times for higher education, I hope that Allen Sessoms and the trustees will hold fast—and that students and parents will support them.” ●

“Founding Father” Martin Retires; Lewit Assumes Chairmanship



Jerry L. Martin

is ACTA's Founding Father: Our unique “inside-outside” approach to higher education reform (alumni push from the outside, trustees pull from the inside) was his brainchild, and during his time as our leader we made huge progress implementing it. As a former tenured professor and former chairman of the philosophy department at the University of Colorado at Boulder, Jerry has a deep understanding of academe. But in a way unmatched by most any other “absentminded professor” (as he likes to call himself), he has also manifested a knack for speaking to other constituencies, such as trustees, and turning his excellent ideas into concrete action.

And lest we forget, it's fair to say Jerry's relationship with ACTA was a win-win. While the organization—including all of us here today—benefited richly from his ideas and his energy, Jerry's personal engagement in ACTA's efforts at the

City University of New York in the 1990s introduced him to a wonderful professor named Abigail Rosenthal. Or, as we call her today, Abigail Martin. Yes, that's right: Higher education reform is not only needed, it's romantic!

Jerry's successor as chairman is another name familiar to *Inside Academe* readers: Dr. Robert T. Lewit, member of our Board of Directors and Decade Society, namesake of ACTA's Robert Lewit Fellowship in Education Policy, and active alumnus of Harvard University. This doctor is a retired psychiatrist, not ex-professor. And ACTA has already benefited richly from Bob's active engagement in our work. Bob and his wife, Jane, divide their time between the Washington area and the Adirondacks and are a steady presence at ACTA's events, particularly our annual ATHENA Roundtable.

Please look for them, and join us in welcoming Bob Lewit as ACTA's chairman. ●

When ACTA's Board of Directors met in March, it was the end of an era—and the beginning of another.

At the meeting, Dr. Jerry L. Martin—ACTA's founding president in 1995, and the chairman of our board since 2003—announced his intent to retire in order to concentrate on his scholarly activities. It is no exaggeration to say Jerry

A Donation, Not a Bailout: Using Your IRA

We've read much about “bailout,” stimulus, and other bills that have passed in recent months. As it turns out, one of the bills has some bearing on ACTA.

The Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 reauthorized a provision in prior law that had lapsed, enabling individuals over the age of 70½ to make up to \$100,000 in tax-deductible gifts from their IRAs. Such gifts count toward your

required annual withdrawals as long as they are made to a public charity—of which ACTA is one. The provision will expire again at the end of 2009, unless Congress once again renews it.

Several ACTA donors have utilized this provision to support our work. If you would like to join them, consult your accountant or ACTA program director Charles Mitchell at 202-467-6779 or cmitchell@goacta.org. ●



New Oasis of Excellence Is Launched!

By Sandra Czelusniak, ACTA Program Officer

For those interested in scholarly excellence and integrity, American higher education can often seem like a barren landscape. But this landscape now has one more oasis of excellence. In April, UCLA approved the creation of the Center for the Liberal Arts and Free Institutions, which will use both curricular and extracurricular avenues to advance scholarship in European and American political thought. UCLA law professor Daniel Lowenstein, a featured speaker at ACTA's 2008 ATHENA Roundtable, will direct the center and lead a seminar for students. Its goal is to give a measure of coherence to participating students' studies and to expose students to an important aspect of the intellectual heritage of the United States.

Lowenstein's new center is part of a growing trend in

American higher education of on-campus institutions that bring together scholars and students in a common theme—whether it be the American founding, the origins of Western thought, or the study of political and economic liberty. These institutions add considerable intellectual diversity to universities, and benefit students by promoting their intellectual engagement with some of the best thinkers and teachers in the academy today. Starting with the James Madison Center at Princeton University, the idea has spread like wildfire, with centers cropping up at places including the University of Wisconsin, Georgetown University, and the University of Virginia. We wish the Center for the Liberal Arts and Free institutions at UCLA the best of luck as it joins this impressive group. ●

Managing to Be Different: From Imitation to Imagination

By Gary Rhoades, General Secretary, American Association of University Professors

Editor's Note: Late last year, the AAUP's magazine featured an article by ACTA on post-tenure review. Now, we are pleased to have a guest column here by the AAUP's new leader, Gary Rhoades

Part of American higher education's genius is its extraordinary diversity. ACTA is particularly focused on one dimension of that diversity—intellectual diversity in the range and openness of political positions on campus. I speak to another dimension—organizational diversity in the goals that drive campuses. My thesis is that the status aspirations of colleges and universities are driving them to seek increasingly similar students (i.e., wealthier and higher scoring) and to become increasingly alike in structure. Some of these behaviors stem from rankings races (e.g., to move up in *US News & World Report* rankings). Some stem from institutions seeking to generate new revenues, and prioritizing that over their historical missions. The problem is aspirational homogeneity, institutions trying to imitate higher ranked places and generally becoming, at best, poor, indistinct copies of them. Lost in the process is opportunity, variety, and choice for students and faculty to pursue their ideas. Herein lies a key threat to academic freedom—institutional homogenization. The many small institutions of higher learning cannot fully represent the variety of academic knowledge and political perspective in any one department or college. Intellectual diversity in the U.S. has been connected to organizational diversity from its beginnings, from Cotton Mather's role in building Yale, to embed in its early years a distinct brand of Christianity to that of liberal Harvard, with the former noted for its puritanical intolerance, and neither known well into the 20th century for openness to students other than White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant males. Academic freedom should exist in all institutions, but the intellectual diversity we also all value is partly contingent on the organizational variety in higher education. Part of unleashing our intellectual imagination is for trustees, alumni, administrators, faculty, and students to encourage and support strategic organizational imagination in defining distinct organizational aspirations and programs. ●

What the AAC&U survey really says

Posted by Anne D. Neal on May 18, 2009

On Friday, the Association of American Colleges and Universities issued a survey conducted in late 2008 and early 2009 of chief academic officers at AAC&U member institutions. *Inside Higher Ed* described the survey as showing only a “distinct minority” of colleges clinging to the distribution-requirement model, while *The Chronicle of Higher Education’s* headline proclaimed, “Colleges Seek New Ways to Give Students a General Education.” In its own press release, AAC&U offered more spin, claiming that colleges and universities have now moved beyond “cafeteria-style” requirements to “a model that combines course choice with other integrative features.”

These claims sound quite good—until one takes a closer look. For starters, the AAC&U survey doesn't actually collect or analyze different requirements in place at each college or university. Instead, it simply asks college administrators to assess their own institutions.

Second, far from showing the demise of distribution requirements—a goal on

which both ACTA and AAC&U can agree—the survey shows quite the contrary. The report says bluntly that “four in five institutions include a distribution model as part of their general education program.” No doubt in an effort to find some “news,” the survey writers elaborate that “administrators indicate that many of their institutions also incorporate common intellectual experiences (41%), thematic required courses (36%), upper-level requirements (33%), core curricula (30%), and/or learning communities (24%).” Yet these features aren't defined in any informative detail, and are coupled with such depressing additional information that one is left totally unpersuaded that cafeteria style curricula are actually on the decline.

Indeed, the survey appears to show only that institutions have exchanged one diffuse list of specialized courses for another, or simply grafted on a few of the “integrative” features cited in the report. Less than half of those surveyed believe that students in general education pro-

grams actually understand learning outcomes set out for them and—the most damning statistic—65 percent of administrators describe their gen ed programs as lacking a coherent sequence of courses. Notably, institutions using a core curriculum rank themselves higher in coherence than any other subgroup.

Apparently, AAC&U would like us to believe that if you don't like the cafeteria, all you need to do is add more food. But a more expansive menu doesn't make a fine restaurant. By performing a close review of the course catalogs and actual general education requirements at schools across the country, ACTA found in 2004 that when it came to the key subjects that prepare students to become productive workers, informed citizens, and lifelong learners, most of the country's leading universities were not doing their jobs.

We will soon release a new and expanded assessment of curricula asking the question: What are students learning for the big bucks they pay? Stay tuned. ●

Get up-to-the minute info and analysis on
America's colleges and universities at our blog

ACTA's Must-Reads
www.goactablog.org

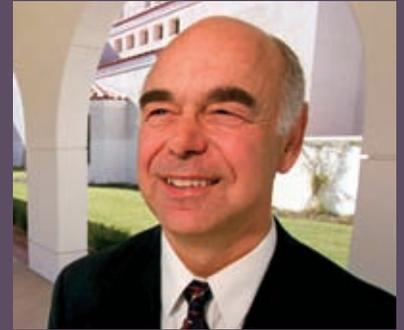
In Memoriam



Ruth and Lovett C. "Pete" Peters

ACTA notes with sadness the passing of Ruth Peters, one of our great friends and supporters. Ruth was an alumna of Smith College, Class of 1938, in whose community of alumnae she remained active. She and her husband, Lovett C. "Pete" Peters, founded the Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, a think tank in Boston, following his retirement. Her life was dedicated to civic engagement and strengthening American education. ACTA is indebted to Ruth for her enthusiasm and her wisdom, and we extend our condolences to Pete, their son Dan, and the rest of the Peters family.

ACTA was deeply moved by the news of Dr. Thomas Dillon's untimely death in a car accident in Ireland this April. A long-time friend and supporter of ACTA, Dr. Dillon was the president of Thomas Aquinas College in California, an institution that offers a comprehensive liberal arts curriculum centered on the Great Books and a unique voice of clarity in a higher education landscape often characterized by muddle and confusion. Dillon's leadership and conviction will be greatly missed. ●



Thomas Dillon

Exporting *E Pluribus Unum*

By Noah Mamis, ACTA Program Officer

In April, ACTA was pleased to host two visitors from Indonesia to discuss American higher education and America's national identity. Sponsored by the U.S. State Department, two leaders in interfaith relations—Brother Budi Hernawan, a researcher with the Franciscans of West Papua, and Khamid Anick Khamim Tohari, the executive director of the Liberal Islam Network—talked with ACTA president Anne D. Neal in our offices about the recent report of the Bradley Project on America's National Identity, *E Pluribus Unum*.

This was a great teaching opportunity for everyone: ACTA learned much about international methods of education and the difficulties of forging a coherent identity in a multiethnic country composed of thousands of islands. Our Indonesian guests learned about the challenges we Americans face in preserving the American experiment, as well as the way higher education works in this country. We also discussed America's traditions of religious tolerance and how Americans can retain their own cultural traditions while forming part of national polity. Finally, we talked about the crucial role of the educational system in instilling civic values—a task at which our colleges are failing.

ACTA wishes both Brother Hernawan and Mr. Tohari well in their studies, and success in their endeavors in Indonesia. We also thank the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and the Mississippi Consortium for International Development for making this informative visit possible. We hope to have more of these opportunities in the future, and are glad for the chance to share *E Pluribus Unum* with an international audience! ●



Anne Neal with Khamid Anick Khamim Thari and Brother Budi Hernawan.



ACTA

AMERICAN COUNCIL OF
TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI

INSIDE ACADEME

1726 M Street, NW, Suite 802
Washington, DC 20036

NONPROFIT ORG.
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT #1112
MERRIFIELD, VA

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

ACTA on the Road

January 9-11, 2009 - ACTA chaired panel at National Association of Scholars conference in Washington, DC.

January 15-17, 2009 - ACTA participated in colloquium on the university's place in a free society, hosted by the Liberty Fund, in Indianapolis.

February 17, 2009 - ACTA spoke before the Yale Political Union on the topic "Resolved: The Academy Should Be Politically Balanced."

February 27, 2009 - ACTA Decade Society member Jody Wolfe hosted regional meeting in Miami.

February 28, 2009 - ACTA Society of Fellows members Carrie and Bill Philipbar hosted regional meeting in Palm City, FL.

April 4, 2009 - ACTA participated in a conference in Albany celebrating the 60th anniversary of the founding of the State University of New York.

May 1-2, 2009 - ACTA presented on grade inflation and intellectual diversity at American Legislative Exchange Council conference in Memphis.

June 13, 2009 - ACTA participated in American Association of University Professors annual meeting in Washington, DC.

June 25, 2009 - ACTA to participate in forum co-sponsored by the Cato Institute and The John William Pope Center for Higher Education Policy discussing factors driving up costs in higher education.

July 15-18, 2009 - ACTA to present at American Legislative Exchange Council annual meeting in Atlanta.

November 5-6, 2009 - ACTA's 2009 ATHENA Roundtable conference at George Washington's Mount Vernon and presentation of annual Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education.

INSIDE ACADEME • published quarterly by ACTA, Washington, DC

Publisher: Anne D. Neal Editor: Charles Mitchell Production & Design: Lauri Kempson

Telephone: 1-888-ALUMNI-8 • Email: info@goacta.org • Website: www.goacta.org • Blog: www.goactablog.org