

## In This Issue...

2 Keeping the Publics Public

Pennsylvania Legislator Introduces ACTA's Reforms

3 Press Puts Spotlight on ACTA as Penn State Names New President

4 Effective Trusteeship

College Completion in Indiana

5 Speaking Up: ACTA Stands Up for Academic Freedom and Condemns ASA's Boycott of Israel

On the Road for Accreditation Reform

6 Heard on Campus: Talking Academic Freedom at Columbia

7 From the Bookshelf

## Top Liberal Arts Colleges Offer Empty Promises

Tucked amidst picturesque scenery in small towns across the country, America's top liberal arts colleges promise talented students a well-rounded education, professors dedicated to teaching, and an environment conducive to free and vigorous inquiry.

But do these institutions actually deliver on what they promise? That's the question ACTA's new report, *Education or Reputation? A Look at America's Top-Ranked Liberal Arts Colleges*, sets out to answer. We took a look at *U.S. News & World Report's* top 25 liberal arts colleges (29 colleges were evaluated due to ties in the rankings), peeling back the veneer of prestige to reveal where their priorities really lie.

*Education or Reputation?* covers a wide range of issues, from core curricula and spending priorities to student debt and free

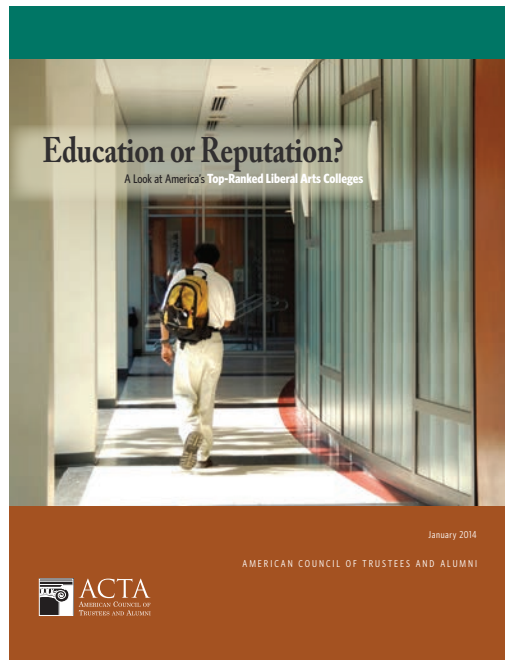
speech on campus. In far too many of these areas, our elite colleges are falling short. Here is just a glimpse of what our report found:

- **Most schools fail to provide a well-rounded education.** All the institutions

ACTA evaluated claim to provide their students with a broad-based liberal arts education. Yet, many of these so-called liberal arts schools have weak general education requirements—if they have such requirements at all. We asked whether each college requires seven basic core subjects: Composition, Literature, Math, Science, U.S. History or Government, Economics,

and intermediate-level Foreign Language. Twenty schools required three or fewer of these subjects. Five required none at all.

- **Not one college adequately protects freedom of speech and expression.** Of the 25 top liberal arts colleges evaluated by the



(continued on 3)

## ACTA Trustee Seminar—Coming up March 14<sup>th</sup>

Are you a college or university trustee? Join us at ACTA's next trustee seminar, "How to Ensure Cost-Effectiveness and Academic Quality," on **March 14** at the **Stetson University Law School** in Gulfport, FL. Partnering with The Aspen Institute, we will provide strategies trustees can use to evaluate their institutions' academic quality, be on the winning side of disruptive innovation, and cut costs. For more information or to register, contact us at (202) 467-6787 or [info@goacta.org](mailto:info@goacta.org).

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## Keeping the Publics Public

These are challenging times for public higher education: declining state appropriations and growing public scrutiny of the use of taxpayer dollars.

In this era of tight budgets, it's no surprise that public universities are trying a range of plans to make ends meet. Some of these strategies are thoughtful; others, not so much.

In the latter category are recent distressing actions at UVA. UVA president Teresa Sullivan recently basked in the spotlight of a White House meeting focused on helping underprivileged students. But what she didn't acknowledge—and Virginia students know only too well—is the board's recent decision to cut Access UVA, a once generous financial aid package designed to provide poor and middle-income students access to a public education.

At UVA, undergraduate tuitions have risen 27% in the last five years. Now families who once looked to affordable higher education as a ticket to a better life find themselves faced with crushing debt. The president, whose own salary approaches half a million, is now pushing to increase faculty salaries so that UVA will have one of the best-paid faculty in the country.

Presidents of public universities once proudly defended the institutions' role of providing their states with an educated citizenry and a skilled workforce and providing young people with an affordable chance to move up. Alas, many public university presidents appear to have abandoned this special



"The institution of my native State . . . will be based on the illimitable freedom of the human mind, to explore and to expose every subject susceptible of its contemplation."  
— Thomas Jefferson, 1820

mission, to advocate instead for what amounts to privatization of public universities. Last year President Sullivan appointed a Public University Working Group, which called for a "new contract between the University and the Commonwealth of Virginia"—essentially a call for privatization. The group proposed raising tuition to private-university levels on the

promise that in-state students would have access to increased financial aid. Proposals introduced in the legislature would, in the meantime, reduce the governor's authority to appoint trustees to the Board of Visitors and, instead, give alumni the power to assign trustee seats to alumni, students, and faculty groups.

Trustees should be working hard to "keep public institutions public"—to defend public institutions' unique mission of readying a state's young people for a lifetime of learning, work,

and active citizenship.

And there are boards making this happen. In 2011, when ACTA released our report *Made in Maine*, we found that Maine's public universities had raised tuition every year for 25 years, and that tuition was taking an increasingly large bite out of the average family's budget. We recommended an end to ever-spiraling increases and the University of Maine's Board of Trustees voted to freeze tuition, despite cuts to state funding. To make it work, the system cut costs and improved efficiency.

The next year, they approached the state with a deal: the

(continued on 7)

## Pennsylvania Legislator Introduces ACTA's Reforms

For evidence of ACTA's impact, look no further than the Pennsylvania state legislature. There, state senator John Yudichak (D-Luzerne/Carbon/Monroe) has proposed legislation that adopts ACTA's recommendation to reduce the size of the Penn State board of trustees.

We know ACTA inspired Senator Yudichak because he cited our work when announcing the legislation. The senator remarked that "exceedingly large boards like Penn State, in the words of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, tend to be less effective[.]"

We are pleased to see policymakers taking steps to improve governance at Penn State. While more reforms are needed to ensure that the board can effectively govern the university, Senator Yudichak's legislation is an excellent first step. ●



## Press Puts Spotlight on ACTA as Penn State Names New President

Since the Jerry Sandusky scandal broke in December 2011, ACTA has been a leading voice for responsible governance at Penn State and the need for reform-minded leadership. That's why ACTA has been featured front and center in the media following the recent announcement that Eric Barron will become the new president of Penn State University.

ACTA's vice president of policy, Michael Poliakoff, was quoted in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, and *Associated Press* on Barron's merits and salary. Dr. Poliakoff praised Barron's innovative spirit, but lamented the \$800,000 starting salary on top of a \$200,000 "transitional payment."

In a statement posted to ACTA's website and distributed to reporters around the country, ACTA said: "Though the search process was at times clumsy, and the president's salary unconscionably high at a time of rising tuition prices, Penn State has chosen a leader with a proven commitment to cost-effectiveness and high academic standards."

The Associated Press story was picked up by dozens of media outlets including ABC News, *Newsday*, the *Washington Post*, Yahoo, and the United Kingdom's *Daily Mail*.

### Excerpts from recent press quoting ACTA vice president of policy, Dr. Michael Poliakoff:

#### Wall Street Journal

"This is an outstanding pick for Penn State. He was well regarded at Florida State and is known as a bold innovator."

#### Associated Press

"The last thing that a university like Penn State, which has had some very significant issues, the last thing it needs is a guardian of the status quo," Poliakoff said. "I'm not suggesting that he start a rumble, but it's really important for the president to be a leader of the faculty—not just a fundraiser."

#### Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

"Leadership in higher education at this moment really demands a level of modesty and forgoing high levels of compensation. This is a time when students and their families are making enormous sacrifices to meet ever-rising tuition."

### Empty Promises, *continued from 1*

Foundation for Individual Rights in Education's "Spotlight" speech code study, *every single one* maintains at least one policy that threatens free speech and expression on campus.

- **Costs are out of control.** Despite having an average endowment size of nearly \$1 billion, these institutions—except for the service academies—raised tuition and fees anywhere from 6.2% to 17.1% above inflation between 2008 and 2013. At every college excluding the military academies, the total cost of attendance for one year exceeds the national median household income of \$52,762. It's no surprise students graduate from most of these institutions with an average debt approaching \$20,000.

- **Executive pay is through the roof.** While families are struggling in a weak economy to pay for a supposedly "elite" education, the presidents of these institutions are raking in

the cash. Eleven of these institutions paid their presidents base salaries of \$400,000 or more to run colleges that typically have fewer than 2,000 students. To put that in perspective, these presidents are paid as well as—or better than—the President of the United States.

- **Teaching is not these colleges' priority.** If we can discern an institution's priorities by looking at its budget, then it is clear that educating students is of increasingly less import at too many top colleges. At over half of the schools studied, administrative spending is growing faster

than instructional spending. And faculty teaching loads at many schools are surprisingly low.

*Education or Reputation?* has received a tidal wave of media coverage, reaching more than eight million readers. The *Washington Post's* Kathleen Parker dedicated an entire syndicated

"While these recent findings are not so surprising to those who follow such studies, one can still be stunned by what can only be described as a breach of trust between colleges and the students they attract with diversions and amenities that have little bearing on education and that will be of little use in the job market." — Kathleen Parker, *Washington Post*

(continued on 6)





## Purdue University: President and Board Working Together

In our age of chronic higher ed mismanagement, it is always a pleasure to point to university leaders who model responsible, engaged university governance.

Purdue University's board of trustees and president are doing just that. The university recently announced a 2.5% reduction in room and board rates, and the board of trustees has approved room and board discounts of \$150 for 12-month contracts, encouraging students to take summer courses. Furthermore, tuition will not increase at Purdue, as the school continues its two-year tuition freeze. The board has also approved a compensation plan for its president, Mitch Daniels, which is both substantially lower than other university presidents' base salaries and ties his compensation to performance benchmarks.

In an open letter, President Daniels announced several more initiatives he will be pursuing. He will be seeking an extension of the tuition freeze for a third year, pushing for a 5% cut in meal plan costs, and offering a \$500,000 award to the first university department to fashion a three-year degree and the first to create a competency-based program.

In the words of ACTA president Anne Neal, "[T]rustees everywhere should take a look at the Purdue playbook." Purdue's board and president have shown what engaged university governance can accomplish, and we hope they will continue pointing the way toward true higher ed reform.

## University of Colorado: Jim Geddes and Sue Sharkey Model Engaged Stewardship

Effective trustees are deeply engaged at their institutions, identifying problems and creating solutions. Two such leaders are University of Colorado regents Jim Geddes and Sue Sharkey.

Together, Geddes and Sharkey recognized the limitations of the University of Colorado's anti-discrimination policy, which did not cover "political affiliation or political philosophy." They brought the issue to their colleagues on the board. While they met some opposition from members of the faculty and administration who wanted to avoid a sensitive topic, in the end the board unanimously agreed to expand the policy.

Encouragingly, the board was not content simply to mandate academic freedom in writing. In addition, they commissioned a campus climate survey to gather hard data on how well the university was living up to its principles. Regent Sharkey explained that without the survey the board "cannot gauge how well it is meeting this goal" and that "consistent with principles of academic research, rather than relying upon anecdotal evidence or urban legend, this climate survey will tell us where we have succeeded and where we have opportunities to make the University of Colorado stronger."

America needs more trustees who will not only take the lead in implementing changes but also follow through and monitor their decisions with objective research. ACTA salutes the efforts of regents Jim Geddes and Sue Sharkey. ●

## College Completion in Indiana

Indiana Higher Education Commissioner Teresa Lubbers, a longtime friend of ACTA, issued a clarion call to increase Indiana's college completion rates at the state's second annual State of Higher Education address. Pointing out that Indiana is 40<sup>th</sup> out of the 50 states in educational attainment and 39<sup>th</sup> in personal per capita income, Commissioner Lubbers outlined a plan that looks at college completion in just the right way. Rather than throwing money at the problem, as policymakers are often tempted to do, the Indiana plan focuses on policies that will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of Indiana's public universities. Among them:

- Simplifying degree requirements so that most degrees can be satisfied with the standard 120 credits—allowing students to graduate more quickly and with less debt.
- Holding down tuition so that Indiana families can afford the state's universities.
- Streamlining transfer pathways for the one-third of Indiana students who transfer between institutions of higher education.

Commissioner Lubbers's plan marks a strong step in the direction of efficiency and affordability. Hats off! ●

## ACTA Stands Up for Academic Freedom and Condemns ASA’s Boycott of Israel

Academic freedom took a serious blow at the end of 2013, when the American Studies Association (ASA) voted to endorse an academic boycott of Israeli academic institutions. The boycott was endorsed by both the ASA’s National Council and a majority of its membership.

ACTA joins the American Association of University Professors, seven past presidents of the ASA, and nearly 100 college and university presidents in condemning the ASA’s endorsement of an academic boycott. Academic boycotts serve to dismantle academic freedom in favor of political posturing. As ACTA noted in a press release soon after the vote to endorse a boycott of Israeli universities in protest of the state’s foreign policy, it is “at best ludicrous, and grotesquely discriminatory.” ACTA vice president, Michael Poliakoff, and ACTA friend and former National Endowment for the Humanities chairman, Bruce Cole, co-authored a column in *The Daily Caller* which exposed both the moral and intellectual bankruptcy of the anti-Israel activities of the ASA and the Modern Language Association (which recently voted to condemn Israel).

In its seminal “Report on the University’s Role in Political and Social Action,” (featured in ACTA’s *Free to Teach, Free to Learn* trustee guide) the Kalven Committee at the University of Chicago stated that “To perform its mission in the society, a university must ... maintain an independence from political fashions, passions, and pressures.” This maxim is just as true today as it was four decades ago. And it is just as true of an academic organization like the ASA as it is of a university.

These events remind us that the threat to academic freedom from within the ivory tower is real and present. That is why ACTA remains vigilant in ensuring that the academy remains a place where unfettered discussion and debate thrive. ●

In our unflagging campaign for accreditation reform, we take our message to every audience we can reach, from testifying in Congress to spreading the word through social media. In January, ACTA president Anne Neal addressed an audience of 200 at the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), calling for delinking federal funding from accreditation. While she spoke favorably of “the system of peer review [and] voluntary self-improvement” created by accreditors, Neal argued that “[s]elf-improvement and federal enforcement do not a good marriage make,” noting that accreditors’ increasing encroachment into institutional affairs usurped rights properly granted to public trustees.

ACTA allies Senator Hank Brown and former Lafayette University president Arthur Rothkopf were on the road as well, addressing reform opportunities with Congressional staff convened by the New America Foundation. ACTA VP of policy Michael Poliakoff also offered reform ideas to staff members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, urging better quality assurance and greater transparency.

ACTA also regularly tweets on accreditation reform, and we’re pleased to note that our commentary has attracted a new follower—Senator Mike Lee of Utah—who has recently introduced a bill adopting ACTA’s call for delinking and permitting states to accredit new programs. It’s a thrill to see our reform message gaining such traction! ●



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## Talking Academic Freedom at Columbia

ACTA is taking our message of academic freedom on the road! In February, we co-sponsored a seminar at Columbia University Law School on “Academic Freedom and the Global University.” A crowd of approximately 80 was treated to an important introduction by Columbia Law School dean, David M. Schizer, and a presentation by Philip Hamburger, a professor at the law school and contributor to ACTA’s groundbreaking *Free to Teach, Free Learn* trustee guide.

Professor Hamburger posed questions about the ethical dilemmas raised when overseas campuses of American universities are required to conform to local laws that violate deeply-held American beliefs in academic freedom. He asked his audience to examine and

respond to the explanations that several university presidents have offered for their willingness to compromise standards of academic freedom at their overseas satellites.

The question and answer session that followed was certainly lively. Students asked how universities could preserve academic freedom while establishing campuses abroad, partnering with overseas universities, and sending students and faculty on exchanges.

There was a great ACTA contingent in attendance, with president Anne Neal, vice presidents Michael Poliakoff and Lauri Kempson, director of development Jacqueline Merrill, and ACTA friend and supporter Stanley Stillman making the



trek up to New York. There was also strong representation from Columbia Law’s chapter of the Federalist Society.

ACTA has reached out to many of *Free to Teach, Free to Learn*’s contributors and offered our assistance in co-sponsoring similar events on the issues of academic freedom and free speech on campus. We hope that the discussion begun last month at Columbia will continue on many other campuses throughout the nation. ●

### Empty Promises, *continued from 3*

column to the report’s findings, lamenting the “breach of trust between colleges and the students they attract with diversions and amenities that have little bearing on education and that will be of little use in the job market.” Numerous news outlets and blogs from *USA Today*, the *Huffington Post*, and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* to *Minding the Campus* and *Wall Street Journal Online*, covered the report’s release. And Fox News highlighted ACTA’s shocking discovery that none of the schools ACTA looked at, save the service academies, requires a foundational survey course in American history or government.

*Education or Reputation?* makes clear that there is much more to a college’s quality than its ranking in *U.S. News*. Many of the institutions we studied have storied histories and once offered the rigorous, broad-based education their students deserve. But the chase for prestige and a misguided educational philosophy have led them astray.

If these elite institutions want more than a good reputation—if they want to back up their promises with substance—they must take measures to restore academic standards and rigor, protect free speech on campus, and prioritize student learning. We hope our report motivates students, parents, trustees, educators, and everyone else with a stake in the future of higher ed to demand more from the country’s top liberal arts colleges. ●

ACTA’s new report, *Education or Reputation?*, received extensive press coverage, reaching over 8 million readers.

Read articles from the *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the *Huffington Post*, *Fox News*, and more at [GoACTA.org](http://GoACTA.org).

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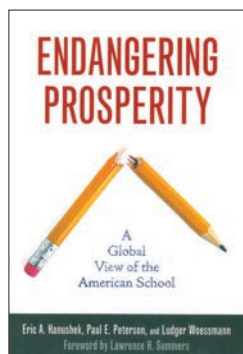




**The American Founders**

by Lewis E. Lehrman

Mr. Lehrman, author of two books on Abraham Lincoln, as well as other publications on American history, turns his attention to the Founders in this delightful overview. Written in short chapters, the book offers characteristic anecdotes about the major founders—such as Washington’s quieting a potential mutiny through sheer force of character—with thumbnail sketches of lesser-known but important figures, including Roger Sherman, John Witherspoon, and Nathanael Greene. Through Lehrman’s fresh and conversational prose, the reader becomes familiar with the Founders, not just as statesmen, but as men, as though we had been with them all in Philadelphia. Highly recommended.

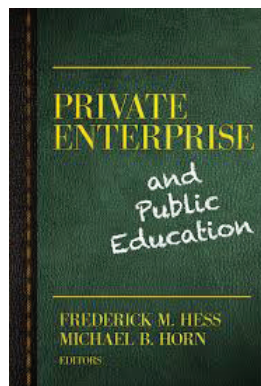


**Endangering Prosperity: A Global View of the American School**

by Eric A. Hanushek, Paul E. Peterson, and Ludger Woessman

Underperformance at American schools is endangering our ability to compete, our economic future, and even our na-

tional security. That is the thesis of the authors of *Endangering Prosperity*, a new book that assesses the educational landscape and what it means for America’s future. In just over 100 pages, the authors place American (under-)achievement in a global context and argue for overcoming the vested interests of the teaching profession in order to ensure academic excellence.



**Private Enterprise and Public Education**

by Frederick M. Hess and Michael B. Horn

*Private Enterprise and Public Education*, edited by the American Enterprise Institute’s Frederick Hess and Michael Horn, presents essays by some of today’s leading experts in education policy. In the face of a public education system that often fails its students, this book examines the role for-profit educators can play in reforming both K-12 and higher education in America. The book offers neither a full-throated endorsement nor a blanket dismissal of for-profit education. Instead, it presents a nuanced approach that is aware of the potential downsides of for-profit education but open to the innovation and opportunity that such institutions offer. It is a must-read for anyone concerned about the future American education. ●

**Keeping the Publics Public, continued from 2**

board would freeze tuition for two more years if the state would agree to maintain its current level of funding. It wasn’t easy for the legislature to agree: most states were cutting higher education funding as a result of budget challenges. But the Maine trustees were wise. Instead of treating state appropriations as an entitlement, they proved that they were serious about holding down costs and using the taxpayers’ money judiciously. This made them a credible partner for the

state, and the governor (a Republican) and legislature (controlled by Democrats) signed onto the plan.

Rather than embracing privatization and reducing student access, schools in Florida are undertaking administrative streamlining, academic prioritization, increased building utilization, year-round enrollment, and creative use of innovative technology. Purdue University, a prominent public university in Indiana, just announced

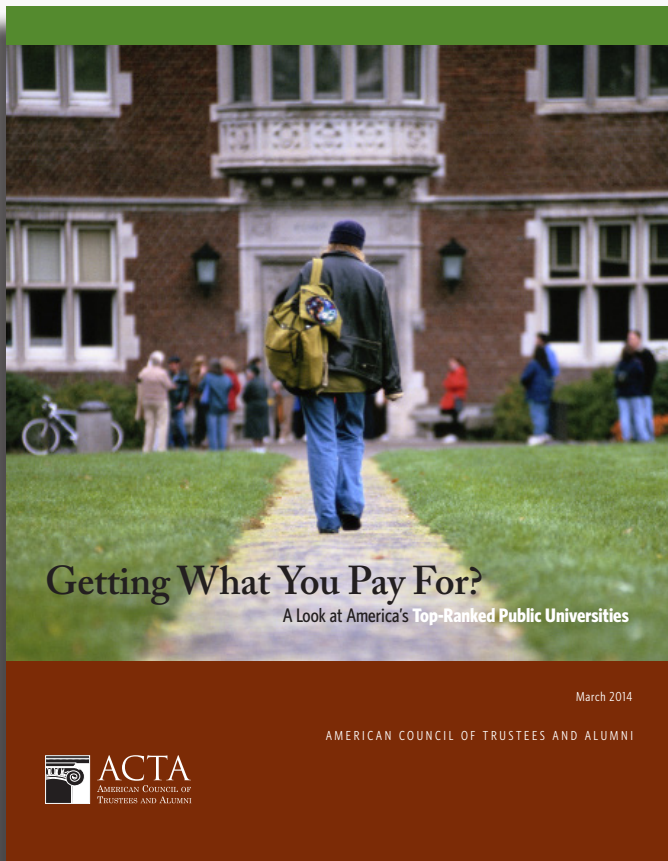
that it would freeze tuition for a third straight year. And trustees at the University of Missouri and in the Minnesota state system have embraced the necessity for academic program prioritization.

Some public institutions are working hard to be more successful with what they have; others are loosening ties with the public that build it. It’s time trustees remember their primary constituency: the students in their state. ●



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**Of the top-ranked public universities evaluated:**

- **Not one** requires an economics course.
- **Only five** require a survey course in U.S. history.
- **Only nine** require a survey course in literature.

From ACTA's report: *Getting What You Pay For?*

ACTA's upcoming report, ***Getting What You Pay For? A Look at America's Top-Ranked Public Universities***, evaluates our country's state flagships to determine if they are living up to their mission to educate the public.

Do they provide a well-rounded education that will prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workforce? Are students graduating and doing so on time? Are academics the top priority of these universities?

**Find out all this and more, next month—only from ACTA!**