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ACTA's Next President

Niall Ferguson & Ayaan Hirsi Ali Win Merrill Award

As ACTA enters into its third decade of higher education reform, historian **Niall Ferguson** and human-rights advocate **Ayaan Hirsi Ali** will be the 2016 recipients of the Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education. At a

Center for European Studies. In 2011, he published *Civilization: The West and the Rest*, which describes in the light of meticulously detailed world history how and why Western Civilization has increased life expectancy, health, and prosperity throughout not only



time when Western principles of open inquiry and free speech face serious challenges, both Dr. Ferguson and Ms. Hirsi Ali stand out as fearless defenders of the ideals of Western Civilization. Dr. Ferguson currently serves in his 12th year at Harvard as the Laurence A. Tisch Professor of History and as a resident faculty member of the Minda de Gunzburg

the West but also the many regions with which it has interacted. He has also taught history at Oxford (2000–02) and at New York University (2002–04); recently, he joined Stanford's Hoover Institution as a senior fellow. In addition to *Civilization*, Dr. Ferguson is the author of more than a dozen works; his most recent is the first volume of

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ACTA Announces Dr. Poliakoff to Be Next President

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni Board of Directors has chosen Dr. Michael Poliakoff to serve as ACTA's next president, effective July 1. Dr. Poliakoff is currently ACTA's vice president of policy, a position he has held since March 2010. Please see the full article on the back of this issue.



www.GoACTA.org

info@GoACTA.org

1-888-ALUMNI-8

John Garvey, President
The Catholic University of America
Washington, DC

“I have taken the liberty of forwarding your letter to the Provost. You might not know that we are at this moment engaged in a reexamination of our curriculum, and advice like yours may prove very helpful to that effort.”

Patrick Judd Murray, Law Enforcement Official
Amherst College '65, Washington, DC

“Groundhog Day again! Last week the trustees ran according to form and unhorsed Lord Jeff as the unofficial mascot of Amherst. In a statement issued by their chairman, Cullen Murphy '74 [26 Jan. 2016], they insisted that at Amherst the first and third words in the term ‘diverse intellectual community’ must occupy as high a place as the second. Pity they disregarded the Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression at Yale, led by Professor Vann Woodward [23 Dec. 1974]; they might have acquired wisdom.”

Betsy Nottingham
Washington, DC

“My grandson is applying for [college] next year, but I have already given him the *What Will They Learn?* booklet. I personally was horrified at how little he might learn, and we have discussed this a lot. He’s diligent and will take—mostly, I guess—meaty courses in economics, political science, etc. with an eye to graduate school. But you all have done a great service with this publication. Many thanks.”

Michael Crow, President
Arizona State University

“Thank you for sending me the copy of your paper, *The Cost of Chaos in the Curriculum*. Your work at ACTA is a great asset to higher education, and I am glad to see that our goals here at ASU align with your findings on this important issue.”

Adrian Smith, U.S. Representative—NE

“There is no doubt the cost of college is impacting families across the country. Eric Bledsoe, program officer for curricular reform at the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, stated in a December column for the *Daily Signal*, ‘the cost of public higher education rose an astounding 538% between 1985 and 2013.’ Inflation across the U.S. economy over the same time period was 116%.”

Editor’s Note: The above appeared in an op-ed written by the Congressman in the Beatrice Daily Sun on March 8, 2016.

Catharine Trauernicht
McLean, VA

“Thank you for taking time to send me the superb article written by Eric Bledsoe about the fight to restore Western Civilization to the Stanford curriculum. We know that this continues to be an arduous fight, and we need a mighty force of articulate, impassioned, and educated Patriots on the battlefield, like all of you at ACTA.”

Newest “A” in WWTL: St. Katherine College

ACTA is delighted to announce that St. Katherine College in San Marcos, California, will be the 25th “A” in its *What Will They Learn?* report. Of the over 1,100 institutions the report examines, only 2% can claim to have the honor of an ACTA “A.” Dr. Michael Poliakoff, ACTA’s vice president of policy, said, “It is clear that the faculty and leadership of St. Katherine College came together and determined the skills and knowledge that all its graduates must have in common, whatever their majors might be.” This is a sign of true academic excellence and commitment to student success.

St. Katherine, which opened its doors in 2011, turned to ACTA for guidance in designing a curriculum that would ensure a robust liberal arts education for all students. In order to earn an “A,” a university’s general education program must require at least six of seven courses ACTA outlines as necessary for a foundational undergraduate education. They are composition, literature, intermediate-level foreign language, U.S. history or government, economics, mathematics, and natural science. In describing his university’s program, Dr. Frank Papatheofanis, president of St. Katherine College, said, “Every student completes a four-year integrated, interdisciplinary sequence in core subjects as well as studies in their degree-specific discipline, as well as a senior thesis. All of this is done in the tradition of the liberal arts and sciences.”

The college is setting an example for California institutions and the nation of the crucial role a rigorous liberal arts education has in preparing students for the challenges ahead. ●



ACTA Featured on Cover of the *Chronicle*

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION
LEADERSHIP & GOVERNANCE

A Higher-Ed Needler Finds Its Moment

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni, still a polarizing force, has achieved growing relevance in core debates

By Jack Strippling

APRIL 10, 2016



"Shared governance is not an excuse for inaction," argues Anne Neal, who for two decades at the American Council of Trustees and Alumni has insisted that deep-pocketed trustees are not just "ATM machines" and must take a far greater role in setting policy for their colleges. She is about to step down as the group's president.

On April 11, ACTA captured the front-page headline of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. The article, titled, "A Higher-Ed Needler Finds Its Moment," profiled ACTA President Anne Neal and discussed some of the organization's successes in "moving the needle" in higher education's core debates. As the story acknowledges, ACTA is a critical player in the high-stakes of higher education reform: "There is a growing strain of college trusteeship in this country that looks a lot like what the American Council of Trustees and Alumni prescribes."

The front-page exposure brought encouragement from both longtime friends and new followers. *Forbes* offered a "hearty congratulations" to ACTA for the prominent article, and the *College Fix* wrote, "ACTA's influence on higher education has risen so much that its critics accuse it of promoting—gasp—'adversarial' relationships between trustees and presidents, whose main concerns seem to be fundraising and rankings—not whether students emerge intellectually enriched."

The article highlights one of ACTA's core missions: to encourage trustees to take a more active engagement in the academic, financial, and overall health of their educational institutions. Richard Arum, author of *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*, was quoted in the article, saying, "If the trustees ask nothing of

their administrators other than about finance and reputational rankings, then administrators will focus solely on that. So in order to get universities to focus on academic quality and academic rigor, we need trustees to be asking questions about academic quality."

(continued on 4)

Merrill Award, continued from 1

a biography of Henry Kissinger, with a second volume soon to appear. Movingly, Dr. Ferguson dedicates *Civilization* to his wife Ayaan Hirsi Ali: "It is dedicated to someone who understands far better than anyone I know what Western Civilization really means—and what it still has to offer the world."

Indeed, Hirsi Ali's articulate commitment to Western Civilization is matched by her personal courage. In the spring of 2014, she made headlines when Brandeis University not only disinvited her from its commencement but also revoked the honorary degree it had planned to confer upon her; these decisions resulted from campus objections to her strong criticisms of Islam—criticisms shaped by her personal experiences with female genital mutilation, an attempted arranged marriage, and, since leaving the faith, numerous fatwas. Ms.

Hirsi Ali moved to the Netherlands, where she earned a master's in political science and eventually served as a member of the Dutch parliament (2003–06), focusing on empowering and helping integrate Muslim refugee women. She is a fellow with the

detailing her experiences, including, most recently, *Heretic* (2015). She is now working on *Short-cut to Enlightenment*, a dialogue between the prophet Mohammed and three of her favorite Western thinkers: John Stuart Mill, Karl Popper, and F. A. Hayek.

The award selection was advised by a distinguished committee of scholars from around the country. Past Merrill Award recipients have included constitutional scholar Robert George, former U.S. Senator and University of Colorado

President Hank Brown, and historian David McCullough. For the first time, ACTA is presenting the Merrill Award to a husband and wife together, for it would be very difficult to find a team that has advanced the liberal arts as effectively as Niall Ferguson and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. ●

Registration for ACTA's 12th annual ATHENA Roundtable conference and Merrill Award gala dinner is now open.

To register for the event or find out more information, please visit www.GoACTA.org/events/ATHENA.

Future of Diplomacy Project at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at the Harvard Kennedy School and is also a visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. In 2005, Ms. Hirsi Ali was named one of *TIME Magazine's* "100 Most Influential People." She has published a number of works

Uncomfortable Learning at Williams

Last fall, Williams College saw the disinvitation of author and cultural critic Suzanne Venker, who was slated to speak as part of the college’s “Uncomfortable Learning” series. Of course, the incident raised serious concerns regarding the state of academic freedom and the free exchange of ideas, and Williams’s president duly acknowledged that this disinvitation by students undermined such principles, properly held dear at Williams College.

Unfortunately, however, this spring, the same president violated these principles when he chose to disinvite another speaker in the “Uncomfortable Learning” series, John Derbyshire, claiming that disinvitation was “in the best interest of students and our community.” Ironically, “Uncomfortable Learning” is a student-run, alumni-funded organization that aims to engage students with often provocative and uncomfortable viewpoints such as Derbyshire’s.

This decision to shield students from such ideas—however uncomfortable, shocking, and offensive—signaled an urgent need for the board to reinvigorate the principles of free inquiry and vigorous debate. ACTA reached out to the board and urged the trustees to adopt the Chicago Principles of Free Expression.

Strengthening ROTC at Harvard

With ACTA pushing every step of the way, over the last few years, Harvard has restored to campus Navy ROTC, Army ROTC, and just this spring Air Force ROTC.

But Harvard still has work to do to make these programs a success. The university has not yet created a policy governing course credit for required ROTC courses that meet, upon objective review, academic standards of credit-bearing courses at Harvard. This policy means cadets may have to take six to nine additional courses for their degrees.

As a result, this spring, ACTA wrote to the Harvard Corporation, urging the university to join other ROTC programs that grant credit to cadets for ROTC classes: Yale, Berkeley, and Penn, for example, have policies in place that allow students to receive credit for ROTC courses, provided that the courses meet the academic criteria set by the university.

As ACTA wrote in one letter: “When ROTC was reinstated, Harvard surely let the public, families, and alumni believe that it once again recognized the mutual benefit to be gained from working with the military services. Allowing appropriate course credit for ROTC students would exhibit the university’s dedication.” ●

ACTA Testifies before Alaska Legislature

In April, Alaska’s House Education Committee asked ACTA Vice President of Policy Michael Poliakoff to provide written testimony on the importance of civic education in K–12 and higher education to supplement the two addresses he gave by telephone to the committee in the previous year. Dr. Poliakoff stressed the importance of understanding our process of government and the need for requiring that each student graduating from high school and college have a strong foundational knowledge of U.S. history and government.

Dr. Poliakoff also cited ACTA’s 2015 Constitution Day survey to showcase the troubling civic illiteracy facing future generations. According to the study, nearly 10% of college graduates thought Judith Sheindlin—commonly known as Judge Judy—is on the Supreme Court; one-third of college graduates couldn’t identify the Bill of Rights as a name given to a group of constitutional amendments; and 46% of college grads didn’t know the election cycle—six years for senators, two years for representatives.

Some states have taken action to address this troubling trend. In the world of K–12, Arizona, Idaho, Louisiana, North Dakota, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, and Wisconsin have all passed laws mandating that students pass examinations showing civic literacy. Dr. Poliakoff urged Alaska to take similar steps to ensure future generations have the knowledge and understanding of our system of government. ●

ACTA on Cover of *Chronicle*, continued from 3

Anne Neal also discussed the important role trustees play in ensuring campuses remain intellectually diverse. As she noted, trustees should protect the free expression of all views, even those that may make some uncomfortable: “If there is any place that should not be safe, it should be the college and university campus, where students get to engage in ideas and hear multiple perspectives and understand that there may be different views so that they are then able to make up their own minds.”

The article finds that “this moment [in higher education] is made for disrupters and watchdogs, who want big changes in the way colleges do business. A number of such advocates have been brought under the banner of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni.” “ACTA is a singular oddity in the world of higher ed,” Wallace Hall, a Texas regent and longtime ACTA friend, was quoted as saying. “They focus on the issues that matter.” ●



Two Different Views on the Importance of Western Civilization

Stanford's Attempted Western Civilization Requirement

In April, Stanford University's student body voted down a proposition to restore the Western Civilization requirement to the university's curriculum. The call for such a requirement came from the *Stanford Review*, an independent student newspaper. ACTA took to the *National Review* to rally support for the movement. After much heated debate—including charges that the supporters of the initiative were “racists,” “bigots,” and “classists”—and attempts to disqualify the proposition, it made it onto the ballot with more than 370 signatures. Several weeks later, however, 1,992 students voted against the proposition while only 342 voted in favor of it.

The episode reflects the ongoing struggles within higher education to reassert the importance of the study of the historical and cultural influences that undergird American civilization. At a time when so many curricula can only emphasize diversity and difference, students are left without an understanding of the triumphs and tragedies of Western culture. In challenging those who argue against the importance of studying Western Civilization, Allan Bloom said it best: “There is no conspiracy; only the desire to know. If we . . . turn our backs on the great dialogue, our loss will be irreparable.”

The events at Stanford remind us that there is still a hunger among students to explore who we are as a nation and the forces that have shaped the history of Europe and America. There is a renaissance waiting to happen when

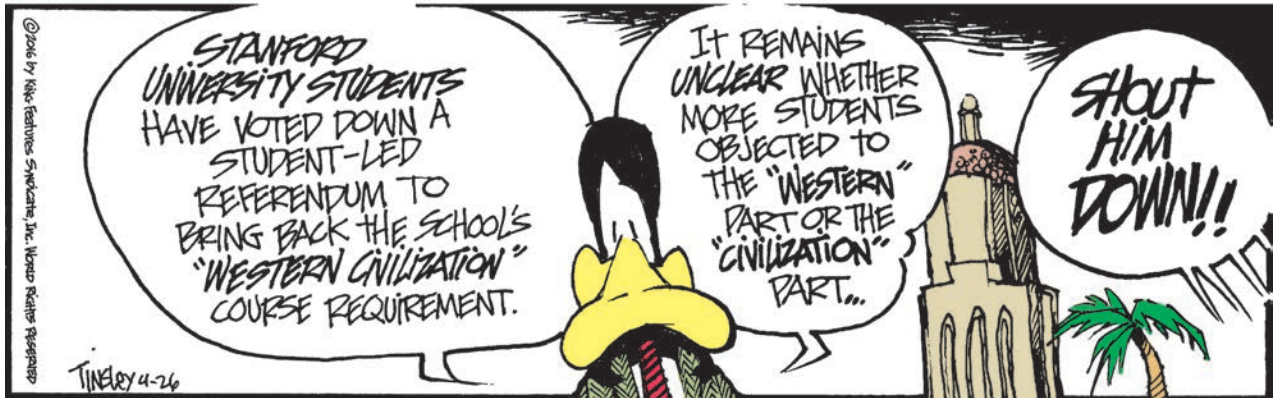
higher education leadership regains its intellectual integrity. ACTA will continue to work to bring that renaissance to be.

Featured Oasis: Texas Tech's Institute for Western Civilization

As part of ACTA's Oases of Excellence, the Institute for the Study of Western Civilization at Texas Tech University is a model for colleges and universities that wish to reinvigorate the study and understanding of Western Civilization. Affiliated with the school's honors college, it helped develop a concentration in Western Civilization within the Honors Arts and Letters degree program in which students study U.S. and Western history, fine arts, philosophy, logic, science, and the Great Books of the Western world.

Professor Steve Balch, a founding member of ACTA's board and founding president of the National Association of Scholars, leads the institute. Its mission is to “foster research and discussion about the nature, origins, and future of the West; encourage the development of courses and programs on Western Civilization and its classic texts; and bring to Texas Tech scholars for whom the study of Western Civilization as a distinct phenomenon is a major concern.” The institute does great work in hosting lectures, providing curricular support, and even engaging in a dialogue with K–12 educators. At a time when too many academics ignore the contributions and significance of Western Civilization, Texas Tech's institute stands as a beacon in American higher education. ●

Mallard Fillmore



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

Harvard Waffles

Beginning last fall, Harvard Law School (HLS) weighed whether or not to eliminate the school seal, which was modeled after the family crest of an eighteenth-century benefactor who was also a notorious slaveholder. In March of this year, the Harvard Corporation approved the HLS committee's recommendation to remove the seal from use. Not long after that, Harvard's president announced that the college will bar members of single-sex clubs, including final clubs, sororities, and fraternities, from leadership roles in campus organizations and even on sports teams. ACTA forcefully called on Harvard to cease its violation of students' right to maintain their own private associations.

Defenestrating Harvard's benefactor won't illuminate the complexities of good and evil. Breaking down voluntary associations won't reduce sexual violence. Both actions, however, have high potential to diminish Harvard.

Yale Decision Falls Short

For months, student activists loudly objected to keeping Calhoun as the name of a residential college and also sought to eliminate the title of college master, calling both examples of racial injustice. ACTA, however, has frequently reminded all schools to think carefully before expunging controversial historical figures and pointedly advised Yale not to lose the time-honored title of college master, whose origin is respect for the life of the mind, not the domination of others.

In late April came the Yale Corporation decision. Yale will keep the name of Calhoun College. As Yale's president stated, removing John C. Calhoun's name would "risk masking the past" and would "obscure the legacy of slavery rather than addressing it." Unfortunately, however, the corporation decided to eliminate the title of college master, replacing it with the bland "head of college."

Yale's Calhoun, like Princeton's Woodrow Wilson (see below), will remain as a reminder of the good and evil in our history. It is a wise decision. It is sad, however, that Yale will lose the ancient Oxbridge tradition that the title of college master represented.

Princeton Stands Up to Protestors

Meanwhile, Princeton has faced a controversy over the monuments of Woodrow Wilson on campus—a man who served as president of both the university and the United States yet was tainted with racism. But in April, the board of trustees rightly decided to maintain the name of Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs as well as the residential college named after him.

The board argued that the university must recognize "Wilson's failings and shortcomings as well as the visions and achievements that led to the naming of the school and the college." The decisions reached allow that without sacrificing the identity of Princeton, an identity of which Wilson is so undeniably a part. ●

Pulitzer Prize–Winning Journalist Speaks to ACTA Supporters

In April, two dozen enthusiastic ACTA friends gathered at the Metropolitan Club in Washington, DC, for a special dinner salon with Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist Daniel de Visé. As a top reporter for the *Washington Post*, Daniel tirelessly covered the failure of colleges to uphold high standards. He featured ACTA and its efforts in his cover article for the *Washington Post Magazine* in February 2011: "8 Big Ideas for Improving Higher Ed."

At the salon, Daniel's discussion of higher education's value proposition underscored ACTA's emphasis on issues of quality and cost. Indeed, ACTA has been working hard to help college leaders improve that value proposition: In our recent report *The Cost of Chaos in the Curriculum*, we outline strategies for college leaders to cut costs while making curricula more rigorous. We sent it to our network of over 21,000 trustees and are pleased that several boards have asked for additional copies.

Daniel also spoke about his exciting new book, *Andy & Don: The Making of a Friendship and a Classic American TV Show*, his penetrating biography on the legacy of *The Andy Griffith Show*. Daniel's account of Andy Griffith and Don Knotts's collaboration offered wonderful insights into this American classic. ACTA is grateful to all our supporters who spent the evening with us and, of course, to Daniel de Visé himself. ●



In Memoriam: Edith Kurzweil



We mourn the loss of longtime ACTA friend and supporter, Edith Kurzweil. Dr. Kurzweil was the editor of *Partisan Review* and recipient of the NEH National Humanities Medal, awarded in a White House ceremony by the President of the United States. Throughout her life, she was dedicated to the humanities and to educational excellence.

Born in Vienna in 1924, Kurzweil fled Europe after witnessing the Anschluss and subsequent Kristallnacht, arriving in America in 1940. She earned her Ph.D. in sociology from the New School for Social Research and later served on the school's board of governors. Always the defender of intellectual rigor and a return to high culture, Dr. Kurzweil once said, "What students don't know about history is appalling. You really have to spark people, and it's very hard. Consumer culture is overwhelming them. However, I do see pockets that are different. And the humanities aren't something we can give up on."

Indeed, Dr. Kurzweil never gave up on the humanities or on sparking others out of apathy through groups like ACTA. We are immensely grateful to have known her and strived with her to restore higher education to its place of intellectual and civic prominence. In addition to three children, two stepsons, her brother, and her grandson, she leaves behind anthologies from the *Partisan Review*, her memoirs, a body of critical works, and what is certain to be a

lasting legacy of intellectual and academic excellence. ●

Shakespeare's 400th Anniversary

2016 marks the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare's death. While countless events will honor the Bard this year, it is important to note that colleges across the country do not acknowledge his significance in their English-major requirements. As ACTA's report, *The Unkindest Cut: Shakespeare in Exile 2015*, revealed, only four schools of the top 25 national universities and top 25 liberal arts colleges as identified by *U.S. News & World Report* require English majors to study Shakespeare. Rather than mandate a course in Shakespeare, these programs have broad requirements that majors can satisfy with courses like "Digital Game Studies" (Dartmouth College), "Queer Identity" (Johns Hopkins University), and "Literature, Food, and the American Racial Diet" (Princeton University). Also alarming is the fact that these programs are training the next generation of high-

school English teachers who will one day teach Shakespeare. It is doubtful they will be prepared to teach when their knowledge of Shakespeare's works goes no further than their own high-school-level proficiency.

Courses like those listed above may be engaging for English majors, but when they are taken at the sacrifice of foundational instruction needed in Shakespeare, the public must call for a return to academic excellence and responsibility. We must go "once more unto the breach" and call for a return to rigorous and responsible standards in higher education curricula. Schools have a responsibility to uphold the public trust of educating students to be ready for meaningful and thoughtful lives. No author calls on us to consider more keenly what that means today than Shakespeare. On the 400th anniversary of his death, we should not



have to mourn the loss of his works in the academy but celebrate his eternal value to civilization. ●

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



ACTA

AMERICAN COUNCIL OF
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INSIDE ACADEME

1730 M Street NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20036

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Dr. Michael Poliakoff to be ACTA's Next President

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni Board of Directors has chosen Dr. Michael Poliakoff to serve as ACTA's next president, effective July 1. Dr. Poliakoff is currently ACTA's vice president of policy, a position he has held since March 2010. "We are utterly delighted that Michael has agreed to serve as ACTA's next president," said board chairman, Dr. Robert Lewit. "ACTA's focus on academic freedom, excellence, and accountability is more important than ever before. We conducted a national search, and it was clear that Michael offers an unmatched record of hard-charging reform."

Since joining ACTA, Dr. Poliakoff has overseen ACTA's programming and publications, including its signature What Will They Learn?™ project, which grades more than 1,100 institutions around the country on general education. He has also authored or coauthored numerous reports, including *The Cost of Chaos in the Curriculum* (with former Arizona State Provost Betty Capaldi Phillips) in 2016 and *The Unkindest Cut: Shakespeare in Exile 2015*. He has also provided regular consultation to boards of trustees on issues ranging from presidential evaluation and compensation to intellectual diversity.

Dr. Poliakoff previously served as vice president for academic affairs and research at the University of Colorado and in senior roles at the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Council on Teacher Quality, the American Academy for Liberal Education, and the Pennsylvania Department of Education. He has taught at Georgetown University, George Washington University, Hillsdale College, the University of Illinois–Chicago, and Wellesley College. He received his B.A. magna cum laude from Yale University and went on to study at Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar, earning a Class I degree in *Literae Humaniores*. Thereafter, he earned his Ph.D. in classical studies at the University of Michigan.

Dr. Lewit remarked, "ACTA enters its third decade at a time when the failings of higher education are in the national spotlight. Michael brings clear vision and a steady hand that will enable ACTA to move to ever-higher levels of impact, outreach, and success." ●

