



Leading the Charge

Governors, Higher Education, and Accountability



ACTA
AMERICAN COUNCIL OF
TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI



"The challenges besetting higher education are considerable: costs, quality, and accountability. Governors are the key to change."

American Council of Trustees and Alumni

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The Accountability Revolution

There is an accountability revolution going on in higher education. Parents and taxpayers are asking hard questions about quality and costs. The public and their elected officials are looking for better information about educational results. They want to ensure that public higher education is getting the “biggest bang for the buck” in meeting their state’s needs. Trustees increasingly understand that it is their job to represent students, parents, and taxpayers. Across the board, citizens are looking for greater accountability.

Governors Provide Leadership

Governors provide the key ingredient: leadership. In most states, they appoint trustees and state education officials. They can set an agenda for change. They shape priorities for funding. And they have the “bully pulpit” to put issues of quality, cost, and accountability at the top of the public agenda.

Experience shows that there are a number of actions that innovative governors can take to improve the accountability and performance of state institutions. Concretely, governors can start with the following steps:

Appoint thoughtful, active trustees. It is not enough to appoint “good people” to university boards. To be effective, governors must appoint individuals who can be board leaders. These are individuals willing to invest the time, understand the issues, and raise the tough questions. Trustees are the key to changing public higher education.

Give trustees a clear sense of their responsibilities to the public. Trustees of public colleges and universities may think that their main job is to advocate for their institutions. In fact, they are public officials with a fiduciary obligation to represent the taxpayers.

Set an agenda of questions to ask and issues to address. Trustees must focus on those issues of greatest importance to the state. No one is in a better position than the governor, who is the highest elected official in the state, to advise them on priorities.

American Council of Trustees and Alumni Provides Assistance

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) is an independent, national nonprofit organization that works with trustees, state officials, and citizens to improve accountability. For 20 years, ACTA has customized support services to institutions of higher education, governing boards, and state governments. ACTA has been instrumental in helping governors address the all-important issues of cost, quality, and accountability in higher education.

◀..... ▶.....▶ ***ACTA can help identify or review trustee candidates.*** ACTA has members in all 50 states who are highly informed and committed to higher education improvement. Many would make excellent college or university trustees.

◀..... ▶.....▶ ***ACTA encourages trustees to view themselves as public servants.*** Through publications, orientations, training seminars, and conferences, ACTA stresses the fiduciary obligations of trustees as representatives of the public interest.

◀..... ▶.....▶ ***ACTA supports governors who provide leadership on higher education.*** ACTA believes that the way to achieve results in a democracy is for elected officials to advocate changes based on concerns for the public.

Governors Provide Leadership

Provide trustees with training on how to set policy without micromanaging. Colleges and universities are complex and unique institutions. Trustees need training on how to conduct their responsibilities effectively and appropriately. Governors can take a vital first step to reform by convening a higher education conference.

Governors can facilitate or even host the kind of trustee training that ensures appointees are informed public servants.

“For a strategic plan to work, the stars must be aligned. For a public university, this means not only alignment of the trustees and the chancellor, but the alignment of the governor as well. No plan for serious change in any public university will work unless the governor endorses it in concrete detail. That happened at the City University of New York, and it is why changes were able to happen.”

— Benno C. Schmidt, former chairman,
City University of New York Board of Trustees
and former president, Yale University

Encourage trustees to hire presidents who are agents of change.

An era of accountability needs a new style of presidential leadership. Boards should be encouraged to cast a wide net and find innovative leaders who are not afraid to question the status quo.

American Council of Trustees and Alumni Provides Assistance

◀..... ▶.....▶ *ACTA organizes statewide “governor’s conferences” for trustees.*

These conferences stress trustee responsibilities and inform trustees about the challenges facing higher education. They provide guidance on how boards can function as effective policymaking bodies and help trustees understand how to work with campus constituencies to achieve change.

ACTA has presented at governors’ conferences in a number of states, including South Carolina, Florida, Colorado, Missouri, and Massachusetts. Conference sessions have ranged from “What Will Students Learn? The Challenge of Academic Standards” and “Getting the Biggest Bang for the Buck: Managing Resources Effectively” to “What To Do Now: Setting Goals and Following Through.”

“I certainly want to thank the American Council of Trustees and Alumni for the support they gave to this project, **Governance for a New Era**. There’s no question it’s a new era today. . . . There’s no question that informed and well-prepared higher education trustees need to be more active in setting directions for their institutions and more attentive to oversight, and I think more willing to embrace accountability.

— John Engler, former governor of Michigan
and former president, Business Roundtable
Governance for a New Era launch, National Press Club, 2015

◀..... ▶.....▶ *ACTA helps governing boards identify candidates for presidencies capable of providing innovative leadership.*

We help boards cast a wide net and locate leaders willing to explore new and better ways of doing things.

Governors Provide Leadership

Authorize studies that will document issues important to the state. Information precedes action. Whether the issue is grade inflation, time to graduation, capital expenditures, program duplication, or educational performance, a well-publicized study can focus attention on needed improvements.

“Today, higher education is at a crossroads—not just in Missouri—but across America. To survive and thrive, higher education must make fundamental changes in its business model, including how instruction is delivered, how degree programs are organized, and how remedial education is achieved. . . . Higher education will be strengthened by supporting institutions that deliver improved performance on clear, distinct missions.”

— Jay Nixon, former governor of Missouri

Bring in experts who can talk about innovation and “best practices” in other states. Trustees, state commissions, legislative committees, and other public bodies can benefit from learning about the most successful efforts in other states.

Reorganize higher education into a coherent, statewide system. In many states, higher education is a random patchwork of different institutions and governing boards. They may need to be organized into a system that makes sense for the overall needs of the state.

American Council of Trustees and Alumni Provides Assistance

ACTA produces analytical studies that provide the informational basis for needed changes. ACTA draws on a national network of well-respected experts to study governance structures, assess educational quality, evaluate programs and services, assist in strategic planning, and recommend improvements in the structure, content, and delivery of educational services. Some of ACTA’s important reports include: *Governance for a New Era* (a blueprint for higher education trustees); *What Will They Learn?* (an analysis of course requirements at over 1,100 colleges and universities); and *Getting What You Pay For?* (a report on America’s top-ranked public universities), as well as state report cards on public higher education in California (*Best Laid Plans*); Florida (*Florida Rising*); Georgia (*Shining the Light*); Idaho (*Here We Have Idaho*); Illinois (*For the People*); Maine (*Made in Maine*); Minnesota (*At a Crossroads*); Missouri (*Show Me*); North Carolina (*Governance in the Public Interest*); South Carolina (*Prepared in Mind and Resources?*); and Virginia (*The Diffusion of Light and Education*).

ACTA provides experts for briefings and testimony about successful efforts around the country. Some states have made great strides in improving accountability, devising performance measures, streamlining programs, raising academic standards, and making other needed changes. Experts are available to share this information.

ACTA can make concrete recommendations for improving governance and reorganizing higher education. A state is not well served if each institution is guided only by its own self-interest. Changes may be needed to ensure that the higher education system meets the needs of the whole state.

Governors Provide Leadership

Appoint a blue-ribbon commission to recommend changes.

Concrete recommendations from a widely-respected group of business, government, and education leaders can generate powerful momentum for needed changes.

“Higher education has never been so important to the health and well-being and the future of our state as it is right now. . . . If we are going to make the kind of improvement we need . . . [trustees] are going to have to press for it, and measure it, and demand results. . . . [Colleges and universities have] already got a booster club. A good one, they don’t need a second. . . . Please stay back there at the school and work on how to use that money to the maximum educational success of every conceivable student; that’s what we’re asking you to do.”

— Mitch Daniels, former governor of Indiana and president, Purdue University
Remarks as governor at Trustees Academy, 2010

Ensure that trustees remain informed and engaged during their appointments.

Continuing education is certainly not a new concept, and it applies as much to appointed trustees as it does to lawyers, doctors, and other professionals. It is imperative that education leaders receive expert advice through ongoing information and training. Some states in fact mandate continuing education.

Beware of challenges to gubernatorial authority. In recent years, regional accreditors have sought to diminish the impact that governors can have on their states’ public higher education systems by asserting direct influence over matters properly left to state governance.

American Council of Trustees and Alumni Provides Assistance

ACTA helps organize and advise governors and blue-ribbon commissions. ACTA can provide a model charter for a blue-ribbon commission, advise on optimal organization, and suggest what kind of report will best promote needed changes. Ideally, commissions can focus on raising the quality of academic and research programs in the state’s public colleges and universities; keeping a college education affordable for students and their families; and ensuring accountability for the care and use of public resources. They can address savings available through the expanded use of online delivery, full-year academic schedules, academic consortia and partnerships, and more efficient use of existing classrooms and infrastructure.

ACTA’s Institute for Effective Governance is devoted to enhancing boards’ effectiveness and helping trustees fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities. ACTA offers services tailored to the specific needs of individual boards—individual information, individual consultations, meetings, and web conferences.

ACTA supports governors in their reform efforts. ACTA has been on the forefront of accreditation reform for over a decade and advises governors’ associations on external threats to gubernatorial authority in higher education. ACTA effectively generates public support for governors and other leaders working for needed improvements.

About ACTA

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) is an independent, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization committed to academic freedom, excellence, and accountability at America's colleges and universities.

Launched in 1995, we are the only organization that works with alumni, donors, trustees, and education leaders across the United States to support liberal arts education, uphold high academic standards, safeguard the free exchange of ideas on campus, and ensure that the next generation receives an intellectually rich, high-quality college education at an affordable price.

ACTA reaches thousands of alumni on both a national level and a college-by-college basis and has a network of more than 22,000 trustees spanning over 1,200 colleges and universities. Its quarterly publication, *Inside Academe*, goes to over 13,000 readers.

Please visit our website: www.GoACTA.org

How to contact us:

American Council of Trustees and Alumni
1730 M Street NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202-467-6787 | Fax: 202-467-6784
Email: info@GoACTA.org

Michael B. Poliakoff, President

Michael B. Poliakoff became part of the ACTA team in 2010. He oversees ACTA's programming and publications and works directly with ACTA's constituents on behalf of higher education reform. He 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, and at the University of Michigan, where he earned a Ph.D. in classical studies. He has been a junior fellow at the Center for Hellenic Studies, and his research has been supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst, and the Alexander Von Humboldt Stiftung. He is the author of numerous books and journal articles in classical studies and education policy and has received the American Philological Association's Excellence in Teaching Award and the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Distinguished Service to Education Award.

Armand B. Alacbay, Vice President of Trustee & Legislative Affairs

Armand Alacbay joined ACTA in 2011 and currently manages ACTA's trustee outreach and government relations initiatives. Prior

About ACTA *(continued)*

to joining ACTA, he worked in private practice as a trial attorney in the Commonwealth of Virginia and later launched an educational services startup company providing guidance to students and families on college admissions. His areas of expertise include institutional governance, higher education data collection, and federal accreditation law. He received a B.A. in economics and English from the University of Virginia and his J.D. from George Mason University School of Law, where he served on the school's Moot Court Board and as editor-in-chief of the George Mason University Civil Rights Law Journal. He is a past president of the alumni association for the Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology.



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