



Professor John McWhorter with President Michael Poliakoff
2022 Merrill Award Gala



ACTA
AMERICAN COUNCIL OF
TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI

2022
ANNUAL REPORT



Promoting **ACADEMIC FREEDOM**,
ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE, and **ACCOUNTABILITY**
at America's colleges and universities.

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) is an independent, nonprofit organization committed to academic freedom, academic excellence, and accountability at America's colleges and universities. Founded in 1995, ACTA works with alumni, donors, trustees, and education leaders across the country to support the study of the liberal arts, uphold high academic standards, safeguard the free exchange of ideas on campus, and ensure that the next generation receives an intellectually rich, high-quality education at an affordable price.

Our network consists of alumni and trustees from over **1,300** colleges and universities, including over **23,000** current board members. Our quarterly newsletter, *Inside Academe*, reaches over **14,000** readers.

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ACTA's Three A's

Academic Freedom

Help institutions preserve and foster a campus culture that champions intellectual diversity, open inquiry, and the free expression of ideas.

Academic Excellence

Work with colleges and universities to promote high academic standards and rigorous liberal arts curricula that prepare students for the challenges of career and informed citizenship.

Accountability

Empower trustees and higher education leaders to advance accountability at colleges and universities through increased engagement on issues of quality and cost



FROM THE PRESIDENT

As much as we might shake our heads and wonder in despair at the intellectual weakening and structural problems that are now far too common at American colleges and universities, we can never, ever give up the battle to set them right. Our task is to make these storied institutions once again the indisputable envy of the world for their academic rigor and unfettered freedom of inquiry and expression. It hurts to read week after week in our own media and the international press about the work of bureaucrats forcing their diversity statements and training on every aspect of the campus. Common as they are, every cancel mob and shout-down is a mark of shame. We must work urgently for a dramatic and lasting course correction.

Anger is helpful only to raise the alarm. What makes me so proud to lead ACTA is that we channel our anger into solutions. For me, a lifelong professor of classical languages, our very name, ACTA, rings true: It is not only our initials, but also a Latin word for things accomplished.

Here are just a few breakthroughs of the past year:

ACTA Chief of Staff Armand Alacbay and I led a day-and-a-half retreat for the trustees of the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill. This dynamic board soon thereafter voted unanimously to accelerate development of the new, independent School of Civic Life and Leadership. It is designed to strengthen teaching and research of core American values. Our work with the North Carolina General Assembly helped move forward the REACH Act: This bill will require all students in public universities to complete a much-needed course in American history. Our Campus Freedom Initiative™ gained a major victory in Texas. The administration of the flagship campus at Austin had ignored for years its students' demand to adopt the Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression. Several weeks after our Campus Freedom launch, the University of Texas System Board of Regents voted unanimously to adopt a similar statement for all of its campuses.



President Michael Poliakoff with Nadine Strossen and ACTA Board Director Paul Levy at the Levy Forum for Open Discourse, a new ACTA initiative launched in 2023.

Ideologues may shout all they want that some issues in American society are beyond discussion, but our Campus Debates and Discourse Program has involved over 6,000 students in over 120 debates on topics like funding the police, transgender athletes in college sports, and Confederate monuments. Never have we witnessed an incident of incivility.

We are changing campus culture from the bottom up and from the top down. And we will not rest until we have changed the norms and expectations.

I thank our supporters whose generosity makes it possible for us to extend our reach and accomplish more and more. I am proud to present to all of you this report of our work in 2022.

Michael B. Poliakoff
President



The American Council of Trustees and Alumni... is not a lightweight, papier-mâché organization... They're about the fight for the integrity of the higher educational institutions and about empowering alumni and trustees to be able to effectively advocate for open discourse... Don't cancel speakers, and don't let the inmates run the asylum... That's real, solid on-the-ground pushback.

—Glenn Loury, The Glenn Show, October 29, 2022



“Laws alone cannot secure freedom of expression; in order that every man may present his views without penalty, there must be a spirit of tolerance in the entire population.” —Albert Einstein

For the past two decades, ACTA has shone a light on the dire threats to free expression plaguing college campuses, including disinvitations, the proliferation of bias response teams, alarming levels of self-censorship, and intense pressure to conform to certain political orthodoxies. We have established our reputation as a leading organization fighting to protect free thought on campus, and we have built relationships and allies within the walls of colleges and universities. Now, ACTA is contributing to transformative reforms that have the power to reach beyond the campus community, building what Albert Einstein called a “spirit of tolerance in the entire population.” Through the support of the Diana Davis Spencer Foundation, ACTA launched the Campus Freedom Initiative™ in 2022. We also incorporated our college debate program into freshman orientations for the very first time. And we amplified the voices of some of the nation’s most thoughtful academics to spark unifying and open conversations about diversity on campus.

Free Your Campus, Free Your Mind

The **Campus Freedom Initiative™** (CFI) is a groundbreaking national campaign to restore campus freedom. The project provides effective steps to solve the free speech crisis that ACTA has so long fought to expose and remedy. CFI identifies institutions that face serious challenges related to free expression and have strong potential for a course correction. In the pilot stages, we launched campaigns at three institutions in 2022 to help their leaders make improvements, and we are shining the light on many more schools in 2023. This new project includes conducting student survey research on

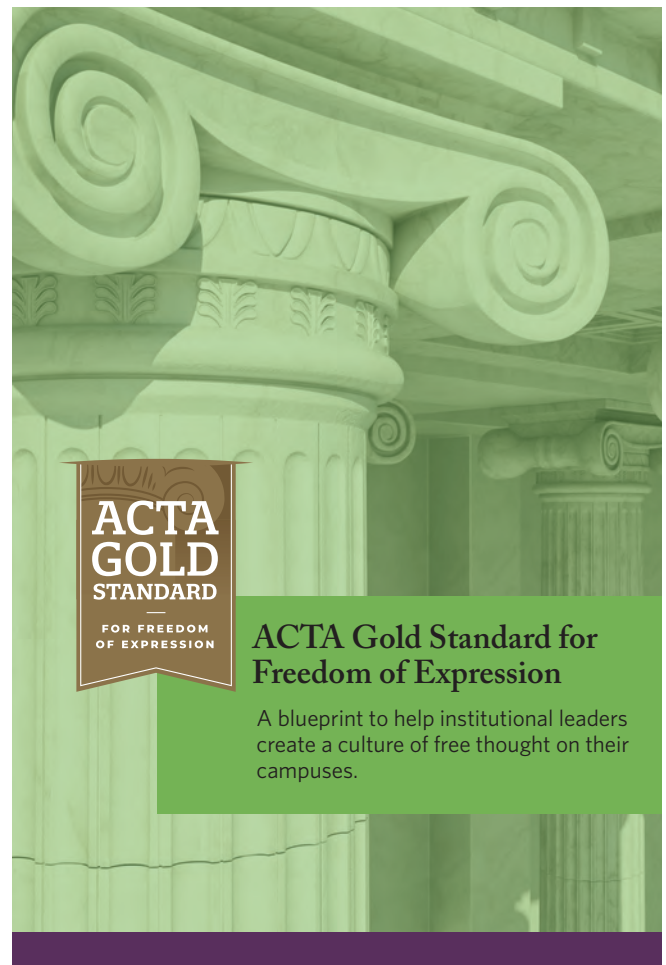
each campus to determine specific factors that contribute to an ideological monoculture and self-censorship; introducing these institutions to our **Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression™**; generating alumni, student, and faculty pressure for change through direct outreach and multimedia; and providing university administrators and boards with recommendations and best practices to turn their schools into bastions of free thought. Since our launch in 2022, the CFI website has had **239,493** unique visitors.

The Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression™

The heart of our Campus Freedom Initiative™ is the Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression™, a set of 20 concrete actions that college and university administrations can take to defend and promote free expression and intellectual diversity. The Gold Standard is designed to bring about change at multiple levels. First, it provides a model for students, faculty, alumni, and the public of the policies and practices that an American institution of higher learning should have in place to provide a truly high-quality education and a forum for the free exchange of ideas. Next, the Gold Standard tells university administrators and trustee boards the precise steps they must take to create a campus culture that celebrates free inquiry, from adopting the Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression and establishing consequences that deter the disruption of sponsored speakers to making intellectual diversity a stated goal in faculty hiring. Finally, ACTA offers resources and expert consultation to help institutions make these changes. We have had encouraging breakthroughs, even within the few short months since we launched our first three CFI campaigns at the **University of Texas–Austin**, the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology** (MIT), and **Cornell University**.

University of Texas–Austin

We began our first CFI campaign at the University of Texas (UT)–Austin in September. We published a school-specific website for UT–Austin and released a video to draw attention to free expression deficits at the institution. Our video quickly received over **37,000** views on YouTube. In an op-ed published in the **Dallas Morning News** on October 8, ACTA President Michael Poliakoff and Steven McGuire, the Paul & Karen Levy Fellow in Campus Freedom, urged President Jay Hartzell to take four Gold Standard actions, including the adoption of the Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression. Our message reached the University of Texas System Board of Regents, which met in November to



The Gold Standard outlines **20 concrete actions** that college and university administrations can take to defend and promote free expression and intellectual diversity on campus. ACTA offers resources and expert consultation to help institutions make these changes.

Download a copy on GoACTA.org.

IMPACT

Campus Freedom Initiative™

In 2022, ACTA's groundbreaking campaign focused its efforts on UT–Austin, MIT, and Cornell.

- The University of Texas System Board of Regents voted unanimously to adopt the Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression.
- THE MIT Faculty Senate adopted a Statement on Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom.

College Debates and Discourse Program

To date:

120+
debates with

6,000+
student participants from

50+
institutions nationwide.

consider, among other matters, the adoption of the Chicago Principles. The board then voted unanimously to become the 92nd college to do so.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

We initiated our second CFI campaign at MIT. Our strongest impetus was the institute's shameful disinvitation of University of Chicago geophysicist **Dorian Abbot**, who had agreed to deliver its prestigious John Carlson lecture in 2021. We released a video and an advertising campaign that urged MIT to follow our proposals for reform and to avoid backsliding from its perch as the premier American STEM university. In coordination with our allies at the MIT Free Speech Alliance, we put pressure on members of the Ad Hoc Faculty Free Expression Working Group to study the university's free expression policies and issue findings that lead to tangible change. We supported the working group's Statement on Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom, which the Faculty Senate passed in December 2022. We were among the first organizations to co-sponsor the 2023 **Great Debate** at MIT on April 4, where former ACLU president **Nadine Strossen** moderated an Oxford Union-style debate on whether "Academic DEI programs should be abolished."

Cornell University

Our third CFI campaign took off at Cornell University in November, focusing on the alarming requirement that new faculty hires undergo mandatory diversity, equity, and inclusion training in their first semester of service. Only a few days after our launch, political commentator Ann Coulter was scheduled to speak on campus, but student protesters aggressively disrupted her remarks. In response to a question about how to prevent such disruptions, Cornell President Martha Pollack said, "I don't have a good answer to the question of what will deter this in the future." ACTA immediately sent her a letter emphasizing that our Campus Freedom Initiative™ tells her exactly what she and other Cornell leaders should do: adopt the Chicago Principles and implement the rest of our Gold Standard solutions.

The College Debates and Discourse Program

As ACTA works with college administrators and governing boards through the Campus Freedom Initiative™ to end the official and unofficial restraints on free expression, we are also partnering with faculty to empower students to engage in the pursuit of truth with both passion and civility. Our highly popular College Debates and Discourse Program, in partnership with **Braver Angels** and **BridgeUSA**, is breaking



In 2022, ACTA integrated our debate program into freshman orientation sessions. We held an immersive workshop on political polarization for 140 incoming freshmen at Duke, and we introduced all 680 incoming freshmen at Denison University to the principles of respectful discourse.

the chains of censorship, cancel culture, and polarization by giving students the opportunity to channel their zeal for social reform into constructive, civil discourse built on a foundation of intellectual humility and cooperative problem-solving. In 2022, we held parliamentary-style debates on a range of student-chosen topics, many of which are considered untouchable in today's fractured public discourse. Since the program's inception, we have organized over **120** campus debates involving over **6,000** students.

This year, we accomplished a long-held goal to integrate our debate program into freshman orientation sessions. With Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy, we held an immersive workshop on political polarization for 140 incoming freshmen. At Denison University, we introduced the entire incoming freshman class to the principles of respectful discourse through three simultaneous debates as part of the school's "Minds Wide Open" orientation program. Colleges across the nation have been inspired by these programs and have reached out to ACTA and Braver Angels to incorporate our model into their own freshman orientations.

We are delighted to report that ACTA and Braver Angels recently secured a \$1.26 million grant from the John Templeton Foundation to fund a two-year research project. In partnership with expert research faculty, we are examining the effects of our debates on students at 10 institutions and will identify campuses where we can establish "Communities of Practice," groups of students and faculty who will spread habits of civil discourse, intellectual humility, and spirited debate across campus, introduce incoming students to these core principles, and establish models for other campuses to follow.



Denison University recently included the ACTA program as part of its mandatory first-year orientation program to show incoming freshman [sic] how mature college students engage in the debate of ideas. . . . Young college graduates hold disproportionate power in our system because they staff campaigns and offices, flock to the media and publishing houses, and dominate social media. If they want to debate rather than dominate, that impulse will quickly spread throughout the body politic.

—Henry Olsen, *Washington Post*, March 1, 2023

Diversity Done Right

One of the most significant threats to academic freedom and free expression on campus is the meteoric rise of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) bureaucracies. These administrative apparatuses have an outsized influence on the courses universities teach, the professors they hire, and how they enforce campus policies. Too often, these bureaucracies seek to enforce a political or ideological agenda through administrative fiat. However, we believe a hallmark of liberal education is the knowledge that there are never only two sides to any discussion, let alone one, and that the best discussions are those that capture the true diversity of opinions. This is why ACTA encourages universities to be places where diversity of all sorts is respected and encouraged, and to include other dimensions of diversity, including socioeconomic background, politics, religious affiliation—and more—among their concerns. Above all, ACTA encourages institutions of higher education to provide forums for the free discussion of important issues like the income gap, inequality, and discrimination in a spirit that welcomes disagreement, instead of enforcing particular political ideologies and silencing those who offer different perspectives.

Providing Alternatives to DEI

On October 21, we invited Brookings Institution Senior Fellow **Jonathan Rauch**, University of Chicago Professor **Dorian Abbot**, former MIT Corporation member **John Chisholm**, Carleton College Professor **Amna Khalid**, and Brown University Professor **Glenn Loury** to participate in “Diversity Done Right,” the featured panel at our ATHENA Roundtable. With an intellectual openness and daring we see too little of today,

the panelists spoke frankly about how DEI initiatives threaten academic freedom and stifle the free exchange of ideas. They exposed the increased use of diversity statements as political litmus tests; emphasized the importance of focusing on academic ability when hiring faculty and admitting students; and encouraged trustees and alumni to investigate DEI programs and advocate for protections for free speech on campus.

Also at our ATHENA Roundtable, we recognized **Erec Smith**, associate professor of rhetoric and composition at York College of Pennsylvania, as our **2022 Hero of Intellectual Freedom**. In a keynote address, he discussed his alternative to the current DEI framework that trades blame and victimhood for liberal values, self-awareness, and empowerment. Through two organizations, Free Black Thought and EmpowerED Pathways, he showcases viewpoint diversity among black intellectuals and teaches students not to be afraid when they are challenged, but to use moments of disagreement as opportunities to make their own ideas better.

Earlier in the year, at the Cosmos Club, we formally recognized University of Chicago geophysicist **Dorian Abbot** as a **Hero of Intellectual Freedom**. He, too, has taken on the DEI behemoth and was attacked by a social media mob and disinvited from delivering MIT’s John Carlson Lecture. In 2021, he co-authored a widely read article in *Newsweek*, criticizing DEI policies that discriminate against prospective students and faculty hires based on physical characteristics and ideological viewpoint. He proposed an alternative called “Merit, Fairness, and Equality” policies, whereby “university applicants are treated as individuals and evaluated through a rigorous and unbiased process based on their merit and qualifications alone.” Dr.



Jonathan Rauch, Dorian Abbot, John Chisholm, Amna Khalid, and Glenn Loury participate in a rigorous discussion on diversity, equity, and inclusion at America’s colleges and universities.



Professor John McWhorter, ACTA's **2022 Merrill Award** recipient, described the often condescending assumptions undergirding contemporary conversations about race and called for a new way of thinking based on the principles of the Enlightenment. Download his speech on **GoACTA.org**.

ACTA named **Professor Erec Smith** as our **2022 Hero of Intellectual Freedom**. His keynote address discussed his alternative to the current DEI framework that replaces blame and victimhood with liberal values, self-awareness, and empowerment. View on **youtube.com/GoACTA**.



Abbot argues against treating people as members of favored or disfavored groups. Instead, he boldly advocates that we treat others as individuals who are worthy of respect and allow everyone to discuss values and ideas freely.

Honoring a Champion of Free Thought

We presented our **2022 Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education** to Columbia University **Professor John H. McWhorter**. There is arguably no individual who has more fearlessly and effectively explored the thorny issues of race, education, and free expression than Dr. McWhorter, through his social commentary, editorials, teaching, and scholarship. In his recent, bestselling book *Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America*, he argues that today's ideology of anti-racism—which is widely promoted on college campuses—amounts to a new, and perverse, religion. In this religion, “white privilege” serves as original sin, and cancel culture and social media mobs are the weapons of choice to silence heretics.

In December, we published the remarks Dr. McWhorter delivered as he accepted the award, entitled “**Is the Problem Free Speech or Modernity? The Principles We Must Regain.**” In this incisive speech, he describes the anti-modern and often condescending assumptions undergirding contemporary conversations about race, and he calls for a new way of thinking based on the principles of the Enlightenment. He remarks, “Our problem is that there’s a certain contingent wielding disproportionate influence in not only universities, but thinking culture today, who believe that we must focus on something very specific: battling differentials in power, especially ones that involve white people in power, and that if you are not battling these differentials in power, then you should not be allowed to speak.” He continued, “I’m sure that all of us here are ready to march on and fight this slow but necessary fight against something perfectly understandable, yet absolutely poisonous to an American thinking culture that deserves the name.”

Together with academics and leaders who are taking a stand against oppressive DEI bureaucracies, we are working to make college campuses places where people from all walks of life and all points of view are welcome to share their opinions and study new ideas, free from censorship or coercion. ●



ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

“The well educating of their children is so much the duty and concern of parents, and the welfare and prosperity of the nation so much depends on it, that I would have everyone lay it seriously to heart.” —John Locke

While censorship and cancel culture have drawn national attention to the troublesome state of our colleges and universities, and rightly so, there is another fundamental challenge facing higher education today: the poor academic return students receive on the large investment they make in a college degree. These students often arrive on campus unprepared by their secondary education for serious study, and they are graduating from college still unprepared for professional life. What is more, amidst continued social and political division, colleges and universities are failing to equip students with a strong foundation for reasoned discussion and deliberation, rooted in a deep knowledge of our country’s history and governing institutions. ACTA is empowering students, families, and K-12 educators to use their market power to demand higher standards from colleges and universities, and we are supporting campus programs that are committed to the study of the liberal arts.

Promoting Serious Study of Our History

The epidemic of ignorance about America’s Founding and history starts in primary school and extends beyond high school into college classrooms. ACTA is working to reverse the civic education crisis by providing college faculty and high school educators with high-quality resources that give the full picture of our nation’s history. We will soon release an edited volume,

entitled *1776 or 1619? The Challenge of the American Founding*. This series of highly readable academic essays critically engages with the *New York Times'* 1619 Project, which puts slavery and racism at the center of the American story. *1776 or 1619?* does not whitewash America's failures, but it does not disregard and diminish our achievements. Instead, our distinguished authors—including **Diana Schaub, Bret Stephens, Lucas Morel, Gordon Wood, Colleen Sheehan, Robert Paquette, Peter Coclanis, Jane Calvert, Wilfred McClay, William Allen**, and others—infuse both scholarly and public discourse with a factual examination of America's past.

We are in the process of gathering data for the next iteration of our **No U.S. History?** report. Previous editions have focused on the course offerings of top history departments in the country at traditional four-year colleges. The new edition of *No U.S. History?* will zero in on U.S. history course requirements in teacher education programs. Preliminary research shows that too few education programs require U.S. history courses, even for students who wish to become high school history teachers. Those who enter the challenging field of K-12 education deserve better and students deserve better. By exposing the academic shortcomings of teacher education programs, we plan to rally educators, policymakers, and students and families to advocate for a dramatic course correction. Only with first-rate teacher training programs can we develop competent citizens who understand our history and system of government.

Helping Students and Families Make Informed Choices

With more and more students and parents questioning the value of a college education, ACTA's **What Will They Learn?**® (WWTL) project continues to be the only rating system that focuses on general education requirements instead of prestige, amenities, or the size of university endowments. Out of the 1,135 schools we surveyed in the 2022–2023 report, only 22 earn an "A" grade for requiring students to take a course in six to seven of the following essential subject areas: **Composition, Literature**, (intermediate-level) **Foreign Language, U.S. Government or History, Economics, Mathematics**, and **Natural Science**. The shares of "A" and "B" grades have decreased to 1.9% and 29.6% respectively, while "Fs" have increased to 13.4% of all grades, a 10% growth from last year's proportion. Foreign Language and Composition requirements have increasingly been eliminated and watered down, and Literature requirements are disappearing faster than any other subject area. A bright spot is U.S. Government or History, which shows the effectiveness of our

IMPACT



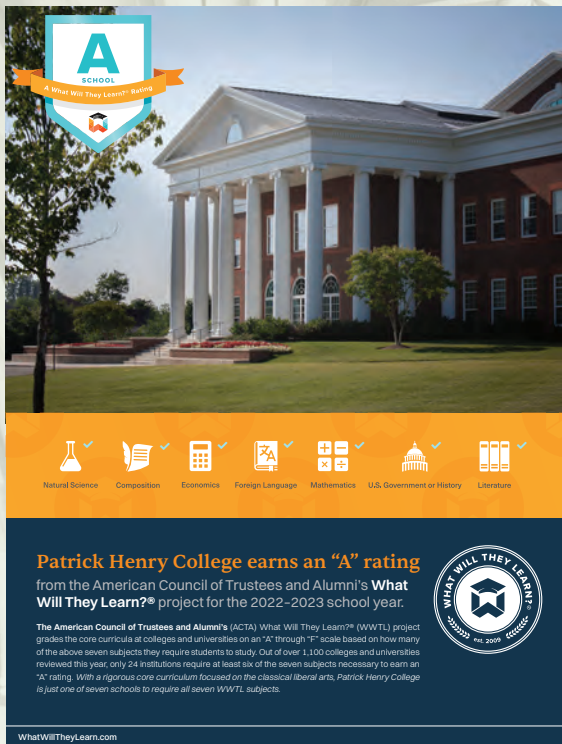
24,409,352
people read or watched news stories about What Will They Learn?®'s 2022 web launch.

175,737
visitors used WhatWillTheyLearn.com, a **71.25%** increase from 2021 driven by **1.2 million** user views on Instagram.

382,500
high school families and counselors learned about What Will They Learn?® through mail outreach.

12,500
attendees at conferences for K-12 educators learned about our college search resources.

23,000+
trustees received customized charts comparing their institution's core requirements with those of peer institutions.



This past summer, **Patrick Henry College** (PHC), with a top-tier core curriculum, obtained regional accreditation and was added as WWTL’s 22nd “A” school. PHC celebrated its new “A” status: A full-page ad was placed in *National Review* magazine, and ACTA and PHC recorded a series of faculty and student interviews promoting the liberal arts and the core curriculum. ACTA will release a video featuring these interviews in Spring 2023.

persistent efforts advocating for civic education. All South Carolina public colleges and universities must require a course in America’s constitutional heritage since the passing of the REACH Act in 2021; and Purdue University’s civics literacy requirement took effect on all campuses in 2022.

Through rigorous outreach, we have made thousands of students, parents, counselors, and high school educators aware of this essential college selection tool that can help them separate the academic wheat from the chaff. We also reached **over 100,000** parents, students, and counselors through direct emails, and we attended **12** conferences for K-12 educators, distributing our college search resources to **12,000+** attendees.

In 2022, we partnered with the **Classic Learning Test**—a rigorous college entrance exam that provides an alternative to the SAT and ACT—to support students and families who select institutions that offer a strong foundation in the liberal arts and sciences. ACTA and the Classic Learning Test have entered into a four-year partnership to award scholarships to the top 1% of Classic Learning Test takers who choose to attend a school that has earned an “A” or “B” rating in ACTA’s *What Will They Learn?* report. This new initiative will expose even more prospective students and families to ACTA’s college search tools and will serve as an additional point of leverage to convince “C” schools to improve their curricular standards to become eligible for these funds.

Renewing the Study of the Liberal Arts

ACTA is continuing to expand our **Oases of Excellence** network, which has grown to **82** programs, with 10 new Oases inducted at the beginning of 2023. An “Oasis” is a faculty-led, donor-supported campus program that provides students with opportunities to study topics typically underrepresented in the curriculum, but which constitute the foundations of liberal democratic society, from Great Books to market economics, in an atmosphere of intellectual openness, debate, and dialogue.

On September 23, ACTA and the Fund for Academic Renewal hosted our annual **Oases of Excellence Faculty Conference** in partnership with the **Pepperdine School of Public Policy**. At the conference, faculty leaders discussed how to enhance intellectual diversity and enable deep learning on their campuses. The leaders of our Oases programs are doing amazing work. **Douglas Henry**, dean of Baylor University’s Honors College, an Oasis of Excellence, served as our keynote speaker. The Baylor Honors College offers students an interdisciplinary curriculum that emphasizes the foundational



Shilo Brooks, assistant director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions and lecturer in the Department of Politics at Princeton University, speaks during a panel entitled, “Making the Liberal Arts Indispensable” at the Oases of Excellence Faculty Conference at the Pepperdine School of Public Policy. Photo by Ron Hall

works of literature, theology, and philosophy in small seminars. At the conference, **Paul Carrese**, founding director of Arizona State University’s School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership (SCETL), spoke about SCETL’s innovative curriculum that combines study of classic works and contemporary issues of politics, economics, and statesmanship to develop effective leaders well-versed in the principles of liberal democracy and the meaning of political liberty and economic well-being.

These programs are excellent investments for higher education donors. Oases of Excellence change the culture of the academy from the inside by maintaining high academic standards; training students in essential values like intellectual humility, integrity, and leadership; and providing speakers series, lectures, and debate programs that expose the entire campus community to the principles of free expression and civil discourse. 📍



Colleges and universities have an obligation to help ensure that students are encountering a rigorous curriculum and engaging in a robust academic program. Too often, these institutions have been coming up short, making that kind of education an option rather than an expectation. ACTA has provided an eye-opening look at one facet of the challenge and a useful tool for students and families seeking institutions committed to a classically broad education.

—**Frederick M. Hess**, *Forbes*, October 7, 2022



ACCOUNTABILITY

“It is not only what we do, but also what we do not do, for which we are accountable.” —Molière

In 2022, ACTA continued to work with college governing boards to help institutions reform themselves from within, while also assisting policymakers to bring outside pressure on universities to rein in runaway spending and improve student outcomes. We ramped up our board services program to provide retreats and consultations for trustees at major universities across the country. We provided testimony before Congress and met with individual lawmakers to expose the problems of censorship on campus and craft legislation to protect intellectual freedom. And we distributed high-quality resources to help trustees and lawmakers navigate complex issues of cost, quality, and campus freedom.

Shaping Legislative Solutions to the Campus Free Speech Crisis

In April, ACTA’s **Jonathan Pidluzny** was invited to address the **House Committee on Oversight and Reform’s Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties**. In his testimony at the hearing, entitled “Free Speech Under Attack: Book Bans and Academic Censorship,” Dr. Pidluzny discussed the ongoing censorship crisis in higher education. In response to questions from the assembled members of Congress, including the current chairman of the House Judiciary Committee Jim Jordan, Dr. Pidluzny explained how universities create bias response teams to enforce unconstitutional campus policies that forbid “offensive” speech and recommended that lawmakers and college administrators work together to abolish bias response teams and overbroad speech restrictions.

In December, **Bradley Jackson**, ACTA’s vice president of policy, was invited to participate in the second annual **Congressional Campus Free Speech Roundtable**, held by **Representatives Greg Murphy, Virginia Foxx, Kat**

Cammack, Burgess Owens, and Mariannette Miller-Meeks. In his testimony, Dr. Jackson offered several avenues for protecting free speech on campus, including making it harder for administrators who violate students' First Amendment rights to hide under the shield of qualified immunity. He also recommended adding a new criterion to the federal accreditation standards that would require schools to show they have an appropriate free expression environment in order to receive accreditation.

Empowering Trustees to Take Charge

At many institutions, trustees are asleep at the wheel, allowing destructive trends to usurp their school's mission to provide a high-quality education. Trustees need specialized knowledge and training to understand their role and steward their institutions wisely. In 2022, we reinvigorated our board services program, which offers consultations, retreats, and resources to help college governing boards fulfill their responsibilities.

In October, **Michael Poliakoff** and **Armand Alacbay** were invited by Virginia Governor **Glenn Youngkin** to give presentations at the orientation of new appointees to the **Virginia Board of Visitors**, which oversees all of the state's public institutions. We led training sessions focused on the nature of shared governance; best practices for directing funds to support the instructional mission instead of administrative bloat; how to foster intellectual diversity and free expression on campus; and the board's role in overseeing a robust core curriculum for all students.

In November, we hosted a retreat for the **University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill's Board of Trustees and the university chancellor**. At the retreat, ACTA noted that the university has no requirement for the study of American history and government and that greater intellectual diversity is needed on campus. We are pleased to share that in January 2023, the board of trustees voted unanimously to establish the **School of Civic Life and Leadership**. This new school, a stand-alone academic unit with its own dean and faculty, will be devoted to exploring American civic values with the full freedom of expression, intellectual diversity, and open inquiry that such studies require.

Also in November, President Poliakoff addressed the Academic Affairs Committee of **Ohio State University's Board of Trustees**, introducing board members to ACTA resources and again stressing the importance of prioritizing spending on instruction rather than administration, requiring the study of American history, and protecting free expression.



In November, ACTA conducted a retreat for the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill's Board of Trustees and the university chancellor.

Board Chair David Boliek later remarked:

“The board retreat led by ACTA in November was one of the sparks that got the board thinking about the need for UNC–Chapel Hill to have a strong, independent center to promote intellectual diversity and deep engagement with American civic thought and values.”

IMPACT

HOW COLLEGES SPEND MONEY

440+

colleges and universities have sought ACTA's counsel on matters of cost-effectiveness, financial governance, and institutional spending.

HowCollegesSpendMoney.com

1,200

state lawmakers and **50** governors received ACTA's annual state rankings that provide higher education performance metrics in all **50** states.

GoACTA.org/policymakers



\$188 million

in gifts to higher education donated to date by alumni who sought advice from ACTA's Fund for Academic Renewal.

AcademicRenewal.com

ACTA's efforts to promote a model policy called the **Informed Trustee Act**—based on Virginia House Bill 2620—have continued to bear fruit. In April, Connecticut signed into law a new bill that calls upon the Connecticut Board of Regents and the University of Connecticut Board of Trustees to adopt a policy requiring any newly appointed member of the state or university board to undergo training in 15 categories, including such vital areas as a board member's ethical responsibilities; professional accounting and reporting standards; budgeting and financial reporting; and student debt trends.

To ensure that trustees have the resources they need to do their jobs well, ACTA sent a series of mailings to our extensive network of over 20,000 college trustees featuring our 2021 report, ***The Cost of Excess: Why Colleges and Universities Must Control Runaway Spending***, and our companion web tool **HowCollegesSpendMoney.com**. Over **300** trustees requested a full copy of the report, and **80** individuals requested specific information on their institution's spending trends. In addition, we sent our 2022 annual state rankings to **50** governors and **1,200** state lawmakers. These rankings provide key data on higher education performance metrics in all 50 states so that lawmakers can see where improvements need to be made. Our rankings measure administrative spending per student, student-to-administrator ratio, tuition as a percentage of median household income, and four-year graduation rates.

Helping Alumni and Donors Make a Difference

Colleges and universities are supported by the taxpayer dollars, donations, and tuition payments of Americans, and we all have a stake in how these funds are directed. Institutions are to use this generous support to prepare graduates for career and citizenship; to provide a free marketplace of ideas; and to develop new technologies for our world. Instead, we often see that many institutions hike tuition prices while building multi-million-dollar sports facilities; water down general education requirements; and encourage the cancel culture and censorship that choke public discourse and drive distrust. Alumni and donors can call colleges to account by keeping a close grip on their checkbooks when institutions fail to protect their values and by advocating that their schools implement real protections for free expression, academic freedom, and viewpoint diversity.

Alumni

With generous funding from the Diana Davis Spencer Foundation, ACTA is helping alumni form advocacy groups to pressure their alma



Bryan Paul, Chuck Davis, John Craig, Tom Neale



Stuart Taylor, Sec. Aimee Rogstad Guidera, Michael Poliakoff



Rep. Gregory Murphy



Joe Cohn, Cherise Trump, Ilya Shapiro, Samantha Harris



Libby Klinger, J.R. Scott, Isabella Carrega, Lauren Noble



Audience member Victoria Guroian Sanders



Dawn Toguchi, Steven McGuire, John Tomasi, Lindsey Burke, Jenna Robinson



Jered Cooper

maters to protect free speech. We are working closely with the **Alumni Free Speech Alliance (AFSA)**, which first formed in 2021. What started as a small association of five alumni groups has since grown into a formidable alliance of **16 member groups** that continues to swell its ranks and stand as a bulwark against the illiberalism afflicting our institutions of higher learning. The movement has gained national attention, including a full-length feature published in the **Washington Post** on July 24, 2022, entitled “College alumni groups spread nationally to counter ‘cancel culture.’”

In February 2022, in collaboration with AFSA, we held the first Alumni Summit on Free Expression in order to motivate alumni and equip them with the best strategies to get their alma maters’ attention. With funding from the Stanton Foundation, we organized a much larger summit in 2023 and produced a promotional video, **Alumni Rising**, that invites concerned citizens across the country to join the alumni free speech movement.

The 2023 summit took place on March 30 and 31 at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, DC, and drew 119 enthusiastic alumni from the AFSA network as well as alumni seeking to form new groups at their own alma maters. At a reception and dinner on March 30, the **Honorable Janice Rogers Brown**, retired judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, delivered an address entitled, “The Wisdom of *Sesame Street* or the Madness of Mao?” She examined the ideas corrupting colleges and

ALUMNI RISING



At our Alumni Summit on Free Expression, ACTA premiered **Alumni Rising**, a short video highlighting the Alumni Free Speech Alliance (AFSA) and the national alumni movement. Inviting others to join, this inspirational video features testimonials from key AFSA leaders, including AFSA cofounder Stuart Taylor, Jr., and ACTA President Michael Poliakoff.

View on [youtube.com/GoACTA](https://www.youtube.com/GoACTA).



universities and emphasized the urgency of taking action to restore truth-seeking and open inquiry on campus.

The following day, alumni attended a series of panels that included discussions of how to use the legal system to combat restrictions on free speech and compel administrators to enforce their free speech policies, as well as how to advocate for new policies on campus, like implementing ACTA's Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression™. The sessions also tackled the nuts and bolts of starting a new alumni free speech group and building relationships with campus stakeholders. Leaders of existing AFSA groups, including AFSA President **Chuck Davis**, shared practical advice and answered specific questions from the audience.

A luncheon keynote was delivered by **Virginia Secretary of Education Aimee Rogstad Guidera**. In her speech, entitled "Defending Virginia's Hallmark: Free Speech and Inquiry in Education," Secretary Guidera shared how Governor Youngkin's administration is taking proactive steps to safeguard free expression and intellectual diversity on campus, from trustee appointments to nonprofit partnerships. Secretary Guidera was introduced by University of Virginia (UVA) student **Jered Cooper**, who won UVA's second annual Oratory Competition with an outstanding speech in defense of free expression, entitled "A Remedy to Save America." Lastly, a panel of students shared their personal experiences with censorship and viewpoint discrimination on campus. Several brought up the need to improve freshman orientation programs, a problem that ACTA is working to solve by helping administrators and faculty add units on civil discourse and free expression to new-student orientations through our College Debates and Discourse Program.

Donors

ACTA is also assisting donors who want to make transformative gifts to higher education. Through our **Fund for Academic Renewal (FAR)**, we help donors recognize that they do not have to write a blank check to the general fund. Rather, they can target their gifts to institutions that align with their values and thus use their donations to make a real difference on campus. Since 2016, FAR has advised donors on **\$188 million** in gifts to higher education. This year, we assisted a donor in endowing a named program in constitutional law at Duke University; advised a donor on a gift to establish a new course and student programming with the Center for the Study of Free Enterprise at Western Carolina University; and helped a family foundation endow a named chair of internal medicine at the University of Illinois College of Medicine–Peoria. 📍



NATIONAL REACH

ACTA's message of reform was featured in hundreds of media outlets across the nation in 2022. The launch of our Campus Freedom Initiative™ and the acceleration of the alumni free speech movement have brought enormous attention to our work. From media interviews and high-profile op-eds to Twitter posts and Instagram stories, ACTA's experts gave the public a vivid look at the problems on campus, while simultaneously providing commonsense strategies for change.

In the Headlines

In 2022, ACTA made **452** appearances in nearly **300** online, print, and broadcast outlets, reaching over **430 million** people in **39** states. Our voice was heard in the **New York Times**, **Inside Higher Ed**, the **Chronicle of Higher Education**, **C-SPAN**, the **Washington Examiner**, **The Federalist**, the **Associated Press**, **RealClearPolitics**, **RealClearEducation**, **RealClearPolicy**, the **Boston Herald**, and **FOX-TV Online**.

ACTA President Michael Poliakoff's commentary on colleges' covert pursuit of revenue from sports gambling companies appeared in the **New York Times** in December. President Poliakoff and Steven McGuire weighed in on the Supreme Court's reconsideration of racial preferences with "Stop using race to rig college admissions" in the **Washington Examiner** on September 29. In his **Forbes** column, Dr. Poliakoff drew attention to cases of ideological coercion and irresponsible tuition increases in hard-hitting essays, including "Controversy Over Israel Studies At University of Washington Did Not Have to Happen" and "Is It True That Tuition Increases Are Robin Hood For Economically Disadvantaged Students?". To date, the **Forbes** column has collected nearly **226,000** reader views.

GETTING THE WORD OUT

322,298

Number of new users on ACTA's website, **GoACTA.org**.

4.1 million

Reach of ACTA's Twitter and Facebook platforms.

225,970

Combined readership to date for ACTA President Michael Poliakoff's **34** hard-hitting articles in *Forbes*.

452

Number of times ACTA appeared in nearly **300** print, broadcast, and online media outlets in **39** states, reaching over **430 million** people.

40%

increase in unique downloads of ACTA's **Higher Ed Now** podcast, surpassing **60,000**.

3,570+

Number of ACTA resources requested or downloaded in 2022.

Online

ACTA significantly increased its reach on Twitter and Facebook this year. On Twitter, we garnered nearly **three million impressions**, a **995%** increase from the previous year. With hundreds of new followers, more and more users are retweeting ACTA's posts, disseminating our message to a wider audience. Our page reach on Facebook hit **1,163,349**, a **162%** increase from last year, with over **9,000** page visits.

Overall traffic to GoACTA.org increased **184%** in 2022, and we received **322,298** new users. Our Campus Freedom Initiative™ has driven new engagement. The landing pages for our three target schools, the University of Texas–Austin, Cornell University, and MIT, were our top three most-visited pages this year.

Higher Ed Now Podcast

Throughout 2022, ACTA produced **20** new episodes on our Higher Ed Now podcast, and our roster of guests included some of the most important names in higher education leadership and reform. We interviewed **Nadine Strossen**, former president of the American Civil Liberties Union and a longtime ACTA friend, about her pioneering work to champion free expression. We gave a voice to targets of unjust social media mobs: **Ilya Shapiro**, who this year was hired, suspended, and reinstated as a senior lecturer and executive director of Georgetown University's Center for the Constitution; **Erec Smith**, brave defender of ideological diversity at York College of Pennsylvania; and recent University of Virginia graduate **Emma Camp**, who spoke out against groupthink in the *New York Times*.

We also featured college leaders and faculty who are committed to renewing higher education, including **Pano Kanelos**, president of the University of Austin, a new institution focused on free thought and viewpoint diversity; **Roosevelt Montás** of Columbia University, an indefatigable proponent of the transformative power of the liberal arts; and Denison University **President Adam Weinberg** and Denison **Professor of History Adam Davis**, who partnered with us to incorporate our debate program into the school's 2022 freshman orientation program.

Reaching the Higher Education Community

Trustees. Our growing network includes trustees from nearly every four-year institution across the country that offers a liberal arts degree. We continue to provide guidance and support, and we reach over **23,000** trustees at nearly **1,300** institutions.



Doug Sprei, April Lawson Kornfield of Braver Angels, Manu Meel of BridgeUSA, Karrin Taylor Robson, founder of the Regents’ Cup, and Professor Deondra Rose of Duke University discuss how civil discourse can change the culture on campus.

Alumni. Our quarterly newsletter *Inside Academe* reaches more than **14,000** alumni from a wide range of colleges and universities. And over **3,000** alumni receive our monthly eNewsletters as well as email updates about our latest initiatives, events, and achievements.

Governors and Policymakers. ACTA reaches out to governors and their education policy staffs, in addition to state policymakers and legislators. ACTA regularly testifies before state legislatures across the country on bills of interest, and our *Higher Ed at a Glance* quarterly eNewsletter reaches over **1,100** lawmakers nationwide.

2022 ATHENA Roundtable and Gala

ACTA’s 2022 ATHENA Roundtable and Gala was an extraordinary success, thanks to our distinguished presenters, the dedicated work of our staff, and the enthusiasm and generosity of our friends and supporters. On October 21, hundreds of trustees, students, education leaders, and ACTA friends gathered at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center to hear two interactive panel discussions: “**Diversity Done Right**” and “**How Civil Discourse Can Change Campus Culture.**” The first panel, featured in the Academic Freedom section of this report, included **Jonathan Rauch**, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution; **Glenn Loury**, Merton P. Stoltz Professor of the Social Sciences at Brown University; **Dorian Abbot**, associate professor of geophysical sciences at the University of Chicago; **Amna Khalid**, professor of history at Carleton College; and **John Chisholm**, former member of the MIT Corporation.

Our second panel explored how ACTA’s **College Debates and Discourse Program** in partnership with **Braver Angels** and **BridgeUSA** is helping to rebuild civil society. **Doug Sprei**, ACTA’s vice president of multimedia & campus partnerships, moderated a fascinating exchange between **Deondra Rose**, Kevin D. Gorter Associate Professor of Public Policy at Duke University and host of a recent ACTA/Braver Angels debate; **Karrin Taylor Robson**, former member of the Arizona Board of Regents and architect of the Regents’ Cup, a debate competition between Arizona’s three public universities that trains students to engage in the free exchange of ideas; **Manu Meel**, CEO of BridgeUSA, which is helping ACTA and Braver Angels tailor our message of civil discourse to current and incoming students; and **April Lawson Kornfield**, managing director of debates and public discourse at Braver Angels.

After the panels, ACTA presented our 2022 Hero of Intellectual Freedom award to **Erec Smith**, associate professor at York College of Pennsylvania and creator of Free Black Thought. This award honors members of the academy who protect and foster the diversity of viewpoints that is the lifeblood of liberal education.

Following the ATHENA Roundtable, nearly 200 guests came together to honor Columbia University **Professor John McWhorter** with the 17th annual Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education. The Merrill Award, named in honor of Philip Merrill, an acclaimed public servant, businessman, philanthropist, and trustee, is a unique tribute to those dedicated to the transmission of the great ideas and central values of our civilization.

Janice Rogers Brown, ACTA board member and retired United States circuit judge for the District of Columbia Circuit, opened the ceremony, saying, “John McWhorter is a distinguished scholar and teacher who does not hesitate to follow wherever the data or the unvarnished facts may lead. At a time when this nation is roiled with self-destructive division, his call to reason, truth, logic, and individual excellence leads us forward.”

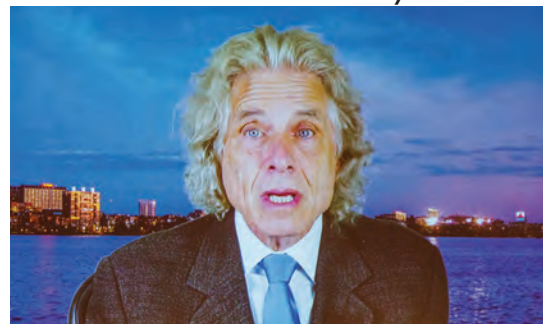
Tributes to Dr. McWhorter were given by Brown University **Professor Glenn Loury**, Columbia University **Professor Roosevelt Montás**; and Harvard University **Professor Steven Pinker**. Professor McWhorter was presented with a custom-made, colonial era fire bucket, inscribed with the Rosetta Stone in celebration of his distinguished work in linguistics. 🟢



The Honorable Janice Rogers Brown



Professor Glenn Loury



Professor Steven Pinker



The ACTA annual conference in DC... was very well done and well worth attending. The panelists were superb—some of the best thinkers and doers in the free expression field.

—**John E. Craig, Jr.**, Chairman, Davidsonians for Freedom of Thought and Discourse

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Senior Fellow and Scholar-in-Residence

ACTA continues to benefit from the expertise of our senior fellow, **Anne D. Neal**. Ms. Neal is a cofounder of ACTA and served as our president from 2003 to 2016. She is currently president and CEO of the National Association for Olmsted Parks. This year, we welcomed **Joshua Katz** as our scholar-in-residence. He also serves as senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

Interns

ACTA's internship program offers a unique educational experience to talented college students and recent graduates. Our spring and summer interns perform critical work on research and writing assignments, including the What Will They Learn?[®] project and ACTA's high school counselor database. The Robert Lewit Fellowship in Education Policy offers select students the opportunity to engage in special assignments. Interns and fellows benefit from a summer speaker series, in which eminent scholars discuss important topics in higher education. Eleven interns joined the ACTA team this summer.



Interns met with ACTA staff for a weekly reading group. Each reading came from one of the seven What Will They Learn?[®] subject areas, such as Composition (George Orwell) and Mathematics (Euclid).



I have loved working at ACTA and appreciate the fact that the interns are doing important work on the WWTL project. I have also really enjoyed working with the other interns and taking part in all of the excursions and speakers that they have planned for us. I couldn't have asked for a better first internship!"

—**Hattie Murray**, 2022 ACTA Intern

2022 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

as of December 31, 2022

Assets

Cash/Cash Equivalents (unrestricted)	\$ 893,251
Cash/Cash Equivalents (restricted)	1,172,082
Marketable Securities	3,564,441
Property/Equipment (Net)	430,247
Prepayments & Other Assets	<u>2,595,178</u>
Total Assets	<u>8,655,199</u>

Liabilities & Net Assets

Accounts Payable	209,802
Deferred Compensation	20,500
Lease Liabilities	<u>3,397,582</u>
Total Liabilities	<u>3,627,884</u>
Unrestricted Net Assets	3,855,233
Temporarily Restricted Net Assets	<u>1,172,082</u>
Total Net Assets	<u>5,027,315</u>
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	<u>\$8,655,199</u>

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

as of December 31, 2022

Revenue & Support

Contributions/Grants (unrestricted)	\$2,548,129
Contributions/Grants (restricted)	1,726,600
Interest/Dividends	11,276
Miscellaneous Income	16,731
Unrealized Loss	<u>(211,696)</u>
Total Revenue & Support	<u>4,091,040</u>

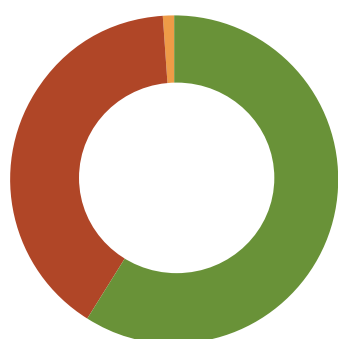
Expenses

Programs	4,781,707
Fundraising	27,342
Management/General	<u>362,053</u>
Total Expenses	<u>5,171,102</u>

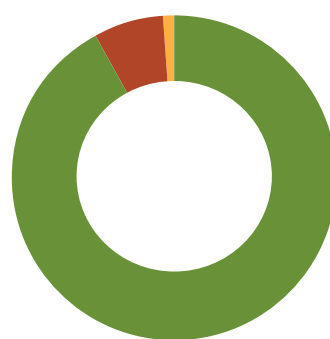
Change in Net Assets	<u>(1,080,062)*</u>
Net Assets, beginning of year	<u>6,107,377</u>
Net Assets, end of year	<u>\$5,027,315</u>

*The Change in Net Assets figure includes expenses of \$611,282 incurred in 2022, which are covered by dedicated funding from a multi-year grant received in previous years. The figure also includes \$211,696 of unrealized loss in 2022.

2022 OPERATING REVENUES



2022 OPERATING EXPENSES



Our Partners

ACTA is grateful to our supporters, whose loyalty and dedication make our important work possible. We rely upon them not just for funding, but for inspiration, collaboration, and assistance in our common goal to ensure that all college students receive an intellectually rich liberal arts education at an affordable price. And because we do not receive government funding, our donors enable us to maintain our independence in forming policies and taking action.

Members of ACTA's Donor Societies are invited to exclusive events throughout the year, where they meet important and influential scholars and leaders of higher education reform. We appreciate these opportunities to engage with our Donor Society members and hear their ideas about the future of higher education.

2022 ATHENA Roundtable Sponsors

Socrates Society (\$25,000)

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John Stuart Mill Society (\$15,000)

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The Thomas Jefferson Legacy Society honors donors who make planned gifts to ACTA. Their generosity drives ACTA's work, creating a real legacy by protecting rich liberal arts education for future generations.

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The Leadership Society consists of grant-making foundations whose generous gifts make ACTA's endeavors possible.

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Founder's Society

Established in 2015, the Founder's Society is ACTA's highest level of individual donors who support ACTA with gifts of **\$50,000 or more.**

Alumni Free Speech Alliance, South Carolina
Anonymous
Karen & Paul S. Levy, New York

Chairman's Society

Established in 2011, the Chairman's Society consists of individuals who support ACTA with gifts of **\$25,000–\$49,999.**

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Kathe & Edwin Williamson, District of Columbia

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Established in 2016, the Trustee's Society consists of individuals who support ACTA with gifts of **\$15,000–\$24,999.**

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Barbara & John Bruning, New York
Mack Lindsey, Texas
Alice & Bruce Whelihan, District of Columbia
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Decade Society

Established in 2005 to commemorate ACTA's 10th anniversary, the Decade Society consists of individuals who donate **\$10,000–\$14,999.**

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Established in 2011, the Society of Fellows consists of individuals who contribute at least **\$5,000–\$9,999** in support of ACTA's work.

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President's Society

Established in 2007, the President's Society consists of individuals who contribute between **\$1,000–\$4,999** in support of ACTA's work.

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In 2022, additional donations came nationwide from hundreds of supports to whom we are truly grateful.

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