



President Michael Poliakoff and Professor Nadine Strossen
2024 Merrill Award Gala



ACTA
AMERICAN COUNCIL OF
TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI

2024
ANNUAL REPORT



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

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) is an independent, nonprofit organization committed to academic excellence, academic freedom, 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 **15,000** readers.



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ACTA's Three A's

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.

Academic Freedom

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

Accountability

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



*Knowledge is in every
country the surest basis
of public happiness.*

—GEORGE WASHINGTON
FIRST ANNUAL ADDRESS | JANUARY 8, 1790

From the President

About two millennia ago, Rabbi Tarfon, one of the major figures in the making of the Talmud, admonished, “The time is short and the task is great; the workers are lazy, though the reward is great, and the Master of all is impatient.” No one, of course, ever stays with ACTA being lazy: An awesome work ethic is simply part of our DNA. But we take Rabbi Tarfon’s words to heart, and a sense of urgency and duty relentlessly drives us forward. At stake are not only our colleges and universities, but also America’s values and national character. The peril to our nation is dire if we fail. In these challenging times, ACTA breathes a sense of mission.

We bring facts, data, and truth to replace the clichés that protect a broken status quo. When we hear “diversity,” we ask if it has anything to do with the campus vibrancy that comes from different opinions and perspectives in dialogue, or if it is a cynical cover for the power dynamics of race and gender. We investigate whether “distribution requirements” are anything other than a vast flea market of course options substituting for a thoughtful and reasoned core curriculum. We expose how “holistic admissions” serve as a cover up for unethical and now illegal discrimination. And we unpack how “shared governance” can serve as a disingenuous maneuver to disempower trustees and place all academic decisions into the hands of an increasingly politicized faculty.

The task has indeed been great, but our reach has grown, and we have so very many victories and breakthroughs to celebrate as we come to our 30th birthday.

We have helped in three states to shape legislation that will vastly expand the teaching of American history and government at public universities, and we have advised on the establishment of new institutes—seven in 2024—for in-depth study of the American story and the responsibilities of civic life.

Our reputation for sound guidance has grown, and in 2024, we conducted more board retreats and trainings than in any prior year. It was a crucial year for ACTA’s call to restore the values without which higher education will replace meritocracy with mediocracy and campus order with anomie.



Bernard-Henri Lévy, Michael Poliakoff, and Natan Sharansky discuss “The Battle for Civilization: Israel and Ukraine” at ACTA’s Levy Forum for Open Discourse.

The murderous terrorism of Hamas that the world witnessed on October 7, 2023, will forever live in infamy. What also shocked our nation was the shameful campus behavior, redolent of antisemitism and hatred for America, that followed. Too often, we witnessed the perverse spectacle of students and faculty celebrating what any civilized person would mourn and outrageously obstructing the educational opportunities of others with their encampments and disruptions.

ACTA used its resources to bring what we hope will be lasting remedies to campus. Before the new academic year began, we equipped the 23,000 trustees in our network with a guide to preventing encampments and restoring order and the rule of law on campus. We accompanied that guide with another on the dangers to institutions when trustees entertain discussion of divestment. We hosted a well-attended webinar for trustees to help them fight antisemitism effectively while respecting the First Amendment.

Through the generous support of Paul Levy, a member of our Board of Directors, along with his fellow philanthropists, we helped to design a lecture tour for humanitarian Bernard-Henri Lévy of 14 campuses in America and Canada. Monsieur Lévy brought powerful encouragement and guidance for resisting anti-Israel and anti-Jewish forces in higher education. His work marked the beginning of ACTA’s Campus Religious Freedom Initiative.

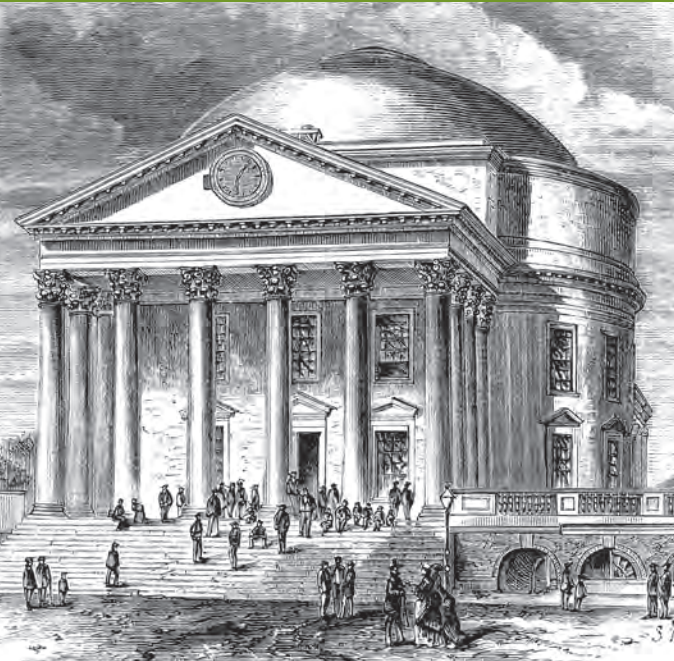
Beyond the urgency of responding to the crisis of campus antisemitism, we have worked on a broad range of legislative initiatives to bring better curriculum and better campus policies to states across the nation.

ACTA will not rest from its mission to ensure that higher education fulfills its promise for our nation. Thank you to all of ACTA’s friends for your financial generosity, your ideas, and your inspiration. Please read on to learn more about what your support has helped us achieve.

Michael B. Poliakoff
President & CEO

“You have no idea how wonderful it is for me, as founder, to see the great heights to which you have carried ACTA—and doing such important work in these profoundly troubled times!”

—**Jerry L. Martin**, Founding President of ACTA



*Educate and inform
the whole mass of the
people . . . They are the
only sure reliance for
the preservation of our
liberty.*

—THOMAS JEFFERSON

Academic Excellence

In 2024, ACTA launched a major initiative to reverse the civic literacy crisis plaguing our nation and ensure that our colleges and universities are shaping liberally educated students who can carry on America's tradition of self-governance.

We are advocating for a substantive, required course in U.S. history and government while also generating support for new, independent centers dedicated to the study of American history at universities across the country. ACTA has also launched a national commission of 23 distinguished historians and education leaders who will advise the nation on the key historical moments and foundational texts that every college student should know.

◆ **NATIONAL COMMISSION ON AMERICAN HISTORY AND CIVIC EDUCATION**

In July, ACTA released the results of a national survey we conducted of 3,000 undergraduate students that measured their knowledge of America's history and system of government. The results were an embarrassment for our nation and for our institutions of higher education. ***Losing America's Memory 2.0*** revealed that a majority of college students cannot identify congressional term lengths, when the U.S. Constitution was written, or the chief justice of the Supreme Court. These findings are not surprising, given the fact that **What Will They Learn?**[®], ACTA's study of the core curricula at over 1,100 universities, found that only 18%—less than one in five—require a foundational course in American history or government.

As the nation's 250th anniversary approaches in 2026, ACTA has launched the **National Commission on American History and Civic Education** to remedy this dire problem. Our commission, composed of 23 distinguished historians, political scientists, and education leaders, will alert the American public

to the urgency of restoring the undergraduate requirement in U.S. history and government at every university in the nation. We will publish the recommendations of this nonpartisan, intellectually diverse group of experts in a white paper entitled, ***A Broadside to the Nation***. The white paper will provide guidance on what should be covered in this foundational required course and how trustees and legislators can implement it.

Complementing this work, commission members will also produce an anthology titled, ***American History and Government: What Every College Student Should Know***. To be released in 2026, this book will provide the public with a clear picture of what it means to be a well-educated citizen in a free society. We will also record podcast episodes with our 23 National Commission members, broadcasting to the nation their plan for the renewal of civic education. And we will continue to conduct national undergraduate surveys each year to chart the effectiveness of civic education on college campuses.

ACTA's National Commission on American History and Civic Education

ACTA's National Commission on American History and Civic Education includes 23 of the most distinguished and respected historians, political scientists, and education leaders in the country.

Dr. Michael B. Poliakoff, *President and CEO, ACTA, ex-officio*

The Honorable Hank Brown, *former U.S. senator*

The Honorable Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr., *former governor of Indiana*

The Honorable John Hillen, *James C. Wheat Jr. Professor in Leadership, Hampden-Sydney College*

Dr. Allen Guelzo, *Thomas W. Smith Distinguished Research Scholar, Princeton University*

Dr. Wilfred McClay, *Victor Davis Hanson Chair in Classical History and Western Civilization, Hillsdale College*

Dr. Roosevelt Montás, *Senior Lecturer in American Studies and English, Columbia University*

Dr. Vincent Phillip Muñoz, *Tocqueville Professor of Political Science, University of Notre Dame*

Dr. Colleen Sheehan, *Professor of Politics, School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership, Arizona State University*

Dr. Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, *President Emeritus, George Washington University*

Dr. Gordon S. Wood, *Alva O. Way University Professor of History Emeritus, Brown University*

Dr. Jed Atkins, *Director of the School of Civic Life and Leadership, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill*

Dr. Jane E. Calvert, *Founding Director, The John Dickinson Writings Project*

Dr. Joshua Dunn, *Executive Director of the Institute of American Civics, University of Tennessee-Knoxville*

Dr. Richard Haass, *President Emeritus, Council on Foreign Relations*

Dr. Robert "KC" Johnson, *Professor of History, City University of New York-Brooklyn College*

Dr. Louise Mirrer, *President and CEO, New York Historical*

Dr. Lucas Morel, *John K. Boardman, Jr., Professor of Politics, Washington and Lee University*

Anne D. Neal, *Regent, Mount Vernon Ladies' Association*

Dr. Lawrence H. Summers, *President Emeritus, Harvard University*

Dr. Jean Yarbrough, *Gary M. Pendy Sr. Professor of Social Sciences, Bowdoin College*

Dr. Jonathan Zimmerman, *Judy and Howard Berkowitz Professor in Education, University of Pennsylvania*

Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster, *Fouad and Michelle Ajami Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, and former U.S. national security advisor*



2024 RESULTS

LEGISLATION requiring civic education at public universities passed in Ohio and is pending in North Carolina and Tennessee.

ACTA advised on the following CIVIC EDUCATION INSTITUTES:

**Institute of American Civics,
University of Tennessee–
Knoxville**

**School of Civic Life and
Leadership, University of North
Carolina–Chapel Hill**

**Five college institutes devoted
to American constitutional
order in Ohio.**

- The Ohio State University
- Miami University
- Cleveland State University
- Wright State University
- University of Toledo

◆ STATEHOUSE PROJECT

ACTA's **Statehouse Project** is spearheading a movement of lawmakers, university leaders, and philanthropists to improve civic education requirements and establish independently funded institutes dedicated to the study of American history and government. In 2024, we were heavily engaged in **Ohio, North Carolina, and Tennessee**, helping to shape legislation that would vastly strengthen civic education at public universities. Legislation requiring a civics course passed in Ohio in March of 2025.

Since the beginning of the Statehouse Project, ACTA has helped establish the Institute of American Civics at the **University of Tennessee–Knoxville**, the School of Civic Life and Leadership at the **University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill**, and five college institutes devoted to American constitutional order, intellectual diversity, and free inquiry in Ohio. In July 2024, Lee Strang was appointed as the founding director of the Salmon P. Chase Institute for Civics, Culture, and Society at **Ohio State University**. And ACTA is working with policymakers, trustees, and education leaders in other states to shape legislation to create such civic institutes.

These institutes, designed with independent hiring authority, are essential to restoring the teaching of U.S. history and renewing faith in the value of higher education. At too many institutions today, American history and Western Civilization are taught with a highly negative bias, and students are left feeling ashamed of their country. The new institutes will tell the complete American story, without omissions or distortions.

◆ SUPPORTING THE BEST OF THE BEST IN THE LIBERAL ARTS

A rich liberal arts education is the key to raising graduation rates, opening career doors, and preparing students for informed citizenship. ACTA's Academic Affairs Department works around the clock to incentivize institutions to raise their standards and connect students with worthy academic programs.

Our **What Will They Learn?**[®] (WWTL) project grades 1,100 institutions across the country on an "A"–"F" scale based on how many of seven liberal arts subjects they require in their

“The American Council of Trustees and Alumni . . . has been a national leader in documenting the state of civic illiteracy in higher education. ACTA unwaveringly focuses on the basic educational and civic duty that academia mostly has neglected over the past half-century.”

—**Professor Paul Carrese**, School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership, Arizona State University

core curricula. WWTL also provides data on graduation rates, tuition costs, free speech policies, and more. Students and families use this resource to identify institutions that offer a high-quality core curriculum at an affordable price.

In 2024, we have expanded our grading scale to include an “A+” and “B+,” which denote schools that require seven or five of our WWTL subject areas, respectively. We accompanied the rollout of the new grades with a targeted outreach campaign to the presidents, academic officers, and trustees at “A” and “B” institutions to encourage them to raise their grades by adding new requirements. We are currently discussing core curriculum improvements with leaders at **Baylor University**, **Auburn University**, and **Purdue University**, and last fall, **Arizona State University** implemented new general education programming to raise its WWTL rating.

We also added new features to **WhatWillTheyLearn.com**, allowing users to compare schools directly

against each other and share links to specific search results. We launched a free membership option that allows members to search for institutions by religious affiliation, sports conference, and more, as well as view information about schools’ requirements in additional subjects, including philosophy, religion, world history, Western Civilization, and fine arts.

◆ HIDDEN GEMS AND OASES OF EXCELLENCE

ACTA connects students and families to meritorious academic programs at universities nationwide through our Hidden Gems and Oases of Excellence networks. Academic programs throughout the country are now reaching out to ACTA to request consideration as a Hidden Gem or Oasis of Excellence. In 2024, we designated six new programs as Hidden Gems. We also provide support and networking opportunities to the tireless faculty who lead these programs.

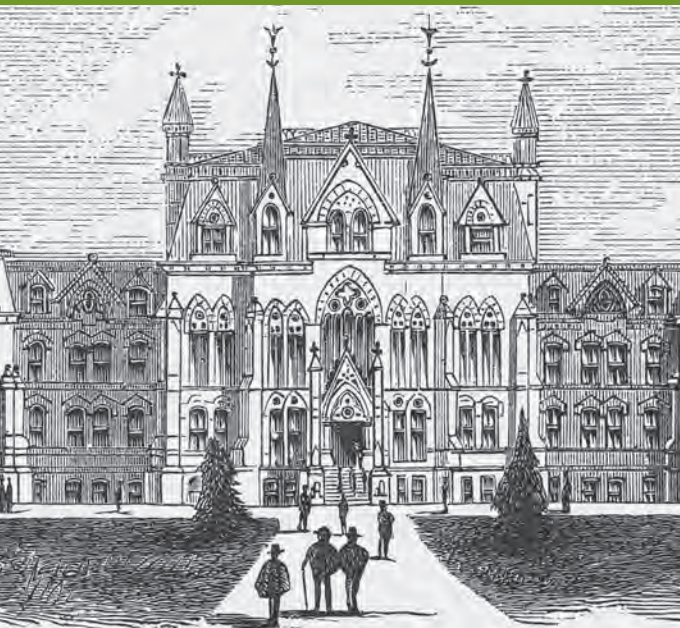
**MEET THE NEW
WHAT WILL THEY LEARN?®
GRADES:
A+ & B+**

BRINGING BACK HIGHER STANDARDS TO HIGHER ED

We are discussing core curriculum improvements with leaders at Baylor University, Auburn University, and Purdue University. Arizona State University implemented new general education programming to raise its WWTL rating.



whatwilltheylearn.com



*Without freedom of
thought, there can be no
such thing as wisdom;
and no such thing as
public liberty, without
freedom of speech.*

—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Academic Freedom

ACTA's relentless work to defend free expression and intellectual diversity on campus is sparking dramatic cultural change. In response to our national campaign initiated in February, over 40 universities have adopted a policy of institutional neutrality, providing freer campus cultures for thousands of students. Thanks to the work of our partnership with Braver Angels and BridgeUSA, called the College Debates and Discourse Alliance, students and faculty at institutions large and small are exchanging ideas instead of insults as we teach them how to debate controversial topics with open minds.

◆ EXPANDING FREEDOM ON CAMPUS

On too many college campuses today, students are taught what they can and cannot say. Faculty and speakers who depart from campus orthodoxies are shouted down, and administrators punish those who stray from the party line. This cannot go on. ACTA is committed to restoring academic freedom, freedom of expression, and intellectual diversity in higher education. Our **Campus Freedom Initiative™** (CFI) achieved remarkable breakthroughs this year as we work to encourage every university to implement the **ACTA Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression™**, 20 commonsense policies and practices for promoting free expression and viewpoint diversity on campus.

In February, CFI launched a national campaign to urge colleges and universities to adopt a policy of **institutional neutrality**, one of our 20 Gold Standard actions. We sent a copy of the University of Chicago's 1967 **Kalven Report**, which ACTA republished this year, to 23,000 trustees. We also contacted presidents, provosts, and other administrators at universities nationwide to offer our assistance.

To date, **over 40 colleges and universities** have adopted a policy of institutional neutrality, many directly guided by ACTA's influence. Steven McGuire, ACTA's Paul & Karen Levy Fellow in Campus Freedom, appeared before the **University of Alabama System Board of Trustees**, encouraging the board to adopt neutrality. It soon thereafter did so, providing a freer campus culture for 70,000 students. The **University of Michigan Board of Regents** adopted a new statement on free expression in January 2024 and adopted a policy of institutional neutrality in the fall. ACTA provided counsel and suggestions on both these actions. A faculty member at **Emerson College** reported to ACTA that she shared our materials with the president of the college and asked him to adopt institutional neutrality, which he did shortly thereafter.

CFI also continued its vital work to provide data on student attitudes toward free expression on campus. Our surveys allow us to pinpoint the specific challenges facing each university and provide concrete recommendations for reform. In October, CFI issued the results of two massive surveys we conducted with College Pulse, one at **Pennsylvania State University** and one at the **University of Pittsburgh**, uncovering high levels of censorship and viewpoint intolerance. In January 2025, we also released our first-ever **Gold Standard report card**, an evaluation of the state of free expression at **Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University, and the University of Arizona**. We are currently working with all five institutions to generate policy changes that align with the Gold Standard, including adopting institutional neutrality; making intellectual diversity a priority in faculty hiring, evaluation, and promotion; and training faculty, administrators, and students in free expression policies. Other institutions are taking note: George Mason University's Board of Visitors included ACTA's Gold Standard in its annual goals for the 2024–2025 academic year in an effort to become the first Gold Standard institution in the country.

Highlighting Successes

ACTA's Institutional Neutrality Campaign



Institutional neutrality protects the vibrant exchange of ideas that is the lifeblood of our colleges and universities.

Scan the QR code to find out more and download a copy of the Kalven Report.

TO DATE . . .

40+

colleges and universities have adopted a policy of institutional neutrality, many directly guided by ACTA's influence.

5

Number of institutions ACTA is currently working with to implement our Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression™.

George Washington University's Board of Visitors set a goal to become the first Gold Standard institution in the country.



2024 RESULTS

College Debates and Discourse Alliance

To date:

400
campus and classroom
debates with

16,500
students, faculty, and
participants from

105
colleges and universities
nationwide.

Scan the QR code to
see what the buzz
is all about!



We hope to drive every college and university to adopt the ACTA Gold Standard by launching more CFI campaigns and issuing report cards on several more universities. At the end of 2024, we received the funding to make this work possible. The Diana Davis Spencer Foundation generously extended a \$1 million matching challenge, which ACTA successfully met with the help of individual supporters and foundations across the country. We will use this new funding—a total of \$2 million—to urge every university to become a sanctuary of freedom.

◆ CHAMPIONING CIVIL DISCOURSE

As CFI works with college presidents and governing boards to generate top-down change, the **College Debates and Discourse (CD&D) Alliance, a program of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, Braver Angels, and BridgeUSA**, is on the ground training students and faculty in the habits of civil discourse. The project was conceived in ACTA's conference room in 2018 from a conversation with ACTA staff, Jonathan Rauch of the Brookings Institution, and David Blankenhorn of what was then called "Better Angels" and is now known as Braver Angels. ACTA brings its unique organizational reach with college leadership and the higher education community. Braver Angels provides a proven parliamentary style debate methodology that has engaged thousands of students, faculty, and citizens across the country in lively exchange. BridgeUSA, a student group with chapters at campuses nationwide, allows our program to connect directly with students at diverse institutions. To date, we have held almost **400** campus and classroom debates, engaging **16,500** students at **105** colleges and universities. Students have engaged in civil debate and deep critical thinking on the most polarizing topics of our times, including abortion, immigration, DEI, and the Middle East conflict.

Demand for our programming is growing rapidly. For the third consecutive year, the CD&D Alliance was invited to incorporate its debates into the freshman orientation program at **Denison University**, and for the first time, we were invited to do the same at **Hamilton College**, the **University of South Dakota School of Law**, and **Juniata College**. We also brought debates to several new campuses this year, including the **University of Houston**, the **University of Virginia**, **Elizabethtown College**, **Johnson**

“One of [the National Governors Association’s] favorite projects is the College Debates and Discourse Alliance, a coalition of Braver Angels, ACTA, and BridgeUSA, to sponsor ‘debates’ that help students discuss contentious topics in the right way.”

—**Spencer J. Cox**, Governor of Utah

& Wales University, and **Union University**. A generous gift from the John Templeton Foundation has allowed us to develop our “community of practice” model that supports campuses in fostering sustainable cultures of civil discourse. We are scaling this model in North Carolina with the support of the Barnes Family Foundation, aiming to establish CD&D programming throughout the entire **University of North Carolina System**.

The CD&D Alliance has begun teaching students and faculty to chair their own debates, with **40** new chairs trained so far. At the 2024 CD&D Summer Symposium held in June, we launched a new workshop that ACTA developed called **A Braver Campus Dialogue (ABCD)**. Designed to facilitate more open-ended conversation than a typical parliamentary-style debate, the workshop invites students to discuss and weigh out possible solutions to social and political problems. ABCD has received enthusiastic feedback, and we have already piloted it at George Mason University, Calvin University, Beloit University, and Columbia University.

College Debates and Discourse Alliance Introduces New Workshop



A Braver Campus Dialogue (ABCD) is designed to facilitate more open-ended conversations than our parliamentary-style debates and invites students to discuss possible solutions to social and political problems. It has received enthusiastic feedback. Above, Sadie Webb from ACTA, with Manu Meel and Ross Irwin from BridgeUSA, piloted the workshop at an intercollegiate debate at George Washington University.



3rd Annual Alumni Summit on Free Expression



Keynote speakers Professor Emeritus William B. Allen (pictured), Utah Governor Spencer Cox, and former Wisconsin governor Scott Walker delivered remarks to 100+ alumni from across the country on how to protect and foster free expression on campus.

◆ ALUMNI AND DONORS DEMAND FREE SPEECH

Alumni Advocacy

Alumni and college donors are an essential part of ACTA's work to ensure that every campus is a sanctuary of freedom. In May, ACTA and the Alumni Free Speech Alliance hosted our third **Alumni Summit on Free Expression** in Washington, DC. Over **100 alumni** gathered for two days to discuss what they can do to protect and foster free expression on campus. Our distinguished keynote speakers included **former Wisconsin governor Scott Walker, Michigan State University Professor Emeritus William B. Allen, and Utah Governor Spencer Cox.**

We also provided support to alumni as they seek to generate grassroots change at their alma maters. Through the generosity of the Stanton Foundation, ACTA helped emerging alumni free speech groups at Arizona State University and the University of Texas–Austin to organize campus events on their own that promote free expression and civil discourse. ACTA also partnered with the **Furman Free Speech Alliance** to release a student survey showing significant levels of self-censorship and intolerance among Furman students. Following publication of the survey, the university adopted a new statement on free expression.

Fund for Academic Renewal

Thanks to the support of the Diana Davis Spencer Foundation, ACTA helps donors make transformative gifts to higher education through our Fund for Academic Renewal (FAR). FAR was established to assist philanthropists in crafting effective gifts to preserve academic freedom and advance academic excellence in higher education. It also helps donors seek recourse when they fear their gifts have been misused by the recipient institution. In 2024, FAR actively advised on **\$100,000,000** in gifts to colleges and universities, for a total of just under **\$275,000,000** in gifts advised since the program's inception.

This year, we advised donors on a legacy gift in New Mexico, an art installation at the University of Texas–Austin, a scholarship and research grant in California, and a potential major gift in Vermont. We were also called upon to help ensure that two institutions are properly stewarding endowment gifts.

“This was the first ACTA/AFSA Summit that I have attended. It was inspiring to meet alumni from other universities that are dealing with the same free speech issues but with lots of variations. Connections made at this meeting will provide many opportunities for problem solving.”

—**Alan Crowther**, Board Member, Huskies for Common Sense,
Michigan Technological University

In recognition of the growing number of donors concerned about censorship and viewpoint intolerance on campus, FAR published ***Free Speech on Campus: A Guide for Givers***. The guide provides donors with creative ways to direct their philanthropy to ensure that universities are providing a forum for the free exchange of ideas.

Levy Forum

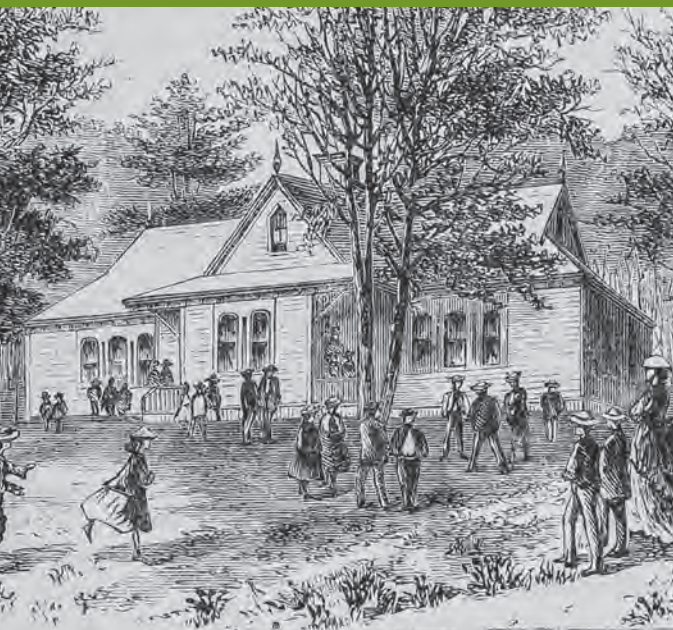
ACTA hosted the second season of the **Levy Forum for Open Discourse** at the Palm Beach Synagogue in Florida. Made possible by ACTA board member Paul Levy and his wife Karen, the forum features lectures by the world’s most distinguished scholars and public intellectuals. Forum speakers explore the foundations of the freedoms we enjoy today and the challenges that lie ahead both for higher education and the nation. Speakers in 2024 included human rights activist **Ayaan Hirsi Ali**, historian **Niall Ferguson**, *Washington Post* columnist **George Will**, Brown University Professor **Glenn Loury**, U.S. Ambassador **John Bolton**, and humanitarian **Bernard-Henri Lévy**.

Through the generosity of the Levys, ACTA brought Bernard-Henri Lévy to Temple Emanu-El in New York City after the publication of his profound book, *Israel Alone*. **On September 11, 2024, Monsieur Lévy addressed a crowd of over 1,000 at Temple Emanu-El, with an equal number viewing the event online.** His address was a call to support Israel in its struggles after the Hamas massacre and to resist the rising tide of antisemitism. A group of Jewish college students joined him in conversation, sharing their harrowing experiences with antisemitism on campus since October 7, 2023. Their stories illustrated the real and dangerous consequences of college leaders’ failure to prevent disorderly and, in many cases, illegal campus demonstrations.



Campus Religious Freedom

To ensure campus cultures of tolerance and open discourse and to root out antisemitism, ACTA board member Paul Levy and a dedicated group of philanthropists supported a tour backed by ACTA that brought Bernard-Henri Lévy to 14 colleges across the country and Canada. Monsieur Lévy spread his message of religious freedom to thousands of students in California, Michigan, New York, Ohio, New Jersey, Washington, DC, Vancouver, and Toronto.



*You cannot escape
the responsibility of
tomorrow by evading
it today.*

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

A ccountability

As fiduciaries of their institutions, university trustees are the key to restoring trust in American higher education by raising standards and lowering costs. Through our trainings, counsel, and cutting-edge publications, ACTA provides college trustees with the tools they need to balance the budget, reinstate strong academic requirements, and protect free expression. At the same time, ACTA advances commonsense legislation at the state and federal levels to ensure that our public universities provide a high-quality education at an affordable price.

◆ PROVIDING SOLUTIONS TO CAMPUS UNREST

Since October 7, 2023, Americans watched in dismay as campus protests, encampments, and occupations were met with indifference by many university leaders who were unwilling to enforce the rules that should govern campus life. ACTA took immediate action, calling on university presidents and trustees to take back the reins and providing them with the resources to do so. In August, we released two guides addressing campus unrest, ***An Equal Space for All*** and ***Danger in Divestment***. These two guides empower trustees to understand the tactics of the antisemitic protests on campus and properly respond by strictly enforcing university rules and adopting a position of institutional neutrality, as well as ending the politicized agitation for divestment and academic boycotts.

After we sent these guides to all **23,000** trustees in our network, we were contacted by university leadership seeking to implement our recommendations at the **University of Memphis, Purdue University–Fort Wayne, the University of Florida, MIT, and the University of Mary Washinton**. We were also invited by the chair of the **University of South Carolina Board of Trustees** to discuss our findings at an event hosted by the Combat

Engaged Alumni & Donors

Active Trustees

Informed Policymakers

Antisemitism Movement. We presented to over **70** higher education leaders, as well as **South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster** and **Attorney General Alan Wilson**.

We hosted two very well-attended events publicizing ACTA's roadmap to restoring campus order. The first, a webinar on "**Antisemitism, Academic Freedom, and Board Leadership**," was held in April and drew over 100 trustees and education leaders. Participants heard from distinguished panelists **Lawrence Summers**, president emeritus of Harvard University; **Nadine Strossen**, John Marshall Harlan II Professor of Law Emerita at New York Law School; **Eli Noam**, director of the Columbia Institute for Tele-Information; and **Pamela Paresky**, senior fellow at the Network Contagion Research Institute.

On October 22, higher education leaders, alumni, and journalists joined ACTA at the **National Press Club** in Washington, DC, for a special program on leading a university in a time of turmoil. The event featured an address

Trustee Resources

ACTA took swift action as campuses erupted with protests, encampments, and occupations after the October 7, 2023, attack on Israel. We provided trustees with resources on how to restore order on campus and adopt a position of institutional neutrality.

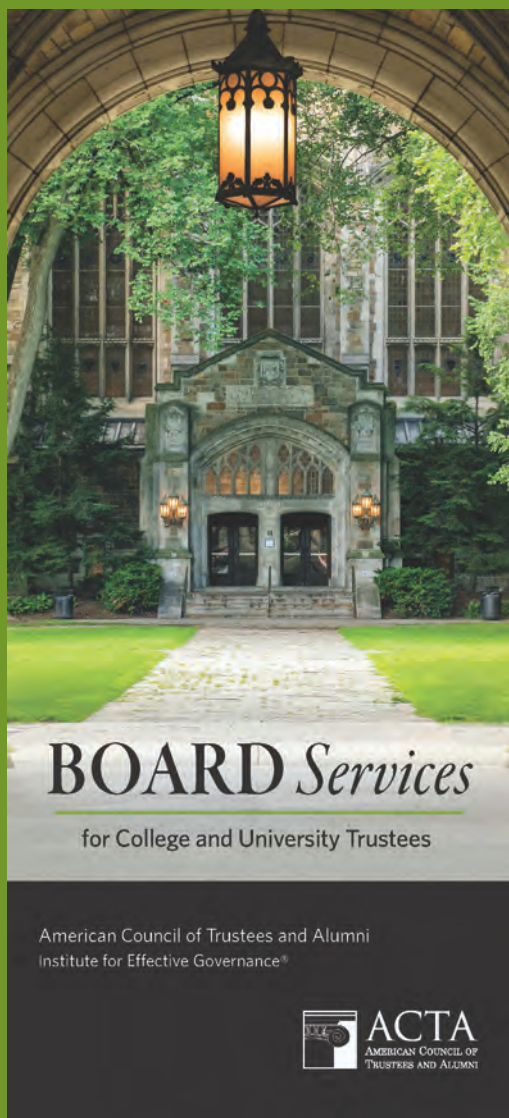


An Equal Space for All



Danger in Divestment





In 2024, ACTA conducted trustee trainings and consultations for institutions in 14 states, helping college and university trustees address fundamental issues on campus.

Scan the QR code for more information.



by **Vanderbilt University Chancellor Daniel Diermeier** and a conversation between Chancellor Diermeier and **Stephen Joel Trachtenberg**, president emeritus of George Washington University and a member of ACTA's Board of Directors. Chancellor Diermeier has provided a model for the nation on how to respond firmly and prudently to campus protests. In his remarks, he identified institutional neutrality as the answer to pressure from activist groups and exhorted trustees to ensure that neutrality applies not only to speech, but also to how the endowment is managed.

◆ TRAINING TRUSTEES NATIONWIDE

Through our **Institute for Effective Governance® (IEG)**, ACTA led retreats, trainings, and workshops for governing board members at a record number of institutions this year, including the **University of Alabama**, the **University of North Carolina–Charlotte**, and **Coastal Carolina University**. ACTA was also invited by policymakers to lead statewide trustee trainings with the **Pennsylvania Association of Councils of Trustees**, the **State Council of Higher Education for Virginia**, and the **Ohio Public University Trustee Governance Symposium**.

Individual trustees representing governing boards in Colorado, South Dakota, New York, Minnesota, Massachusetts, Maryland, Florida, and North Dakota requested our consultation. We provided guidance on presidential selection, free speech policies, and challenging diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.

IEG crafts its trainings to address the unique, complex challenges facing each trustee board, from ensuring that faculty hiring practices comply with federal and state law, to reevaluating academic program offerings, to reducing tuition costs.

◆ SCORING LEGISLATIVE WINS

ACTA seeks to encourage broad, bipartisan momentum for reforming higher education. Working together, ACTA is hopeful that we can raise curricular standards, restore merit-based hiring and admissions policies, and safeguard the rights of students and faculty.

In April 2024, **Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin** vetoed Senate Bill 506, which would have allowed public universities

“When considering trustee orientation and education options, we wanted our trustees to engage with deeply substantive content relative not only to the general higher education landscape, but more specifically relative to our institution. That’s when we discovered the board workshops that the American Council of Trustees and Alumni offers. Their work in assisting governing boards with advancing their university’s mission is unparalleled. Their attention to crafting a board workshop based on our needs is exactly what my board needed.”

—**Dennis Bunker**, Chair, University of North Carolina–Charlotte Board of Trustees

to make decisions without prioritizing the interests of Virginia taxpayers. ACTA played a key role in this action, issuing several op-eds that warned the public of the bill’s consequences. ACTA’s Nick Down also spoke against the bill before the **Virginia House of Delegates’ Subcommittee on Higher Education**.

On November 11, Mr. Down testified before **Texas’s Senate Subcommittee on Higher Education**. He exhorted college governing boards to identify diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives whose funding should be reappropriated and to adopt policies of institutional neutrality. These reforms, Mr. Down explained, “would add tremendous value to higher education in Texas and, ultimately, strengthen the Texas workforce.” In a major win for

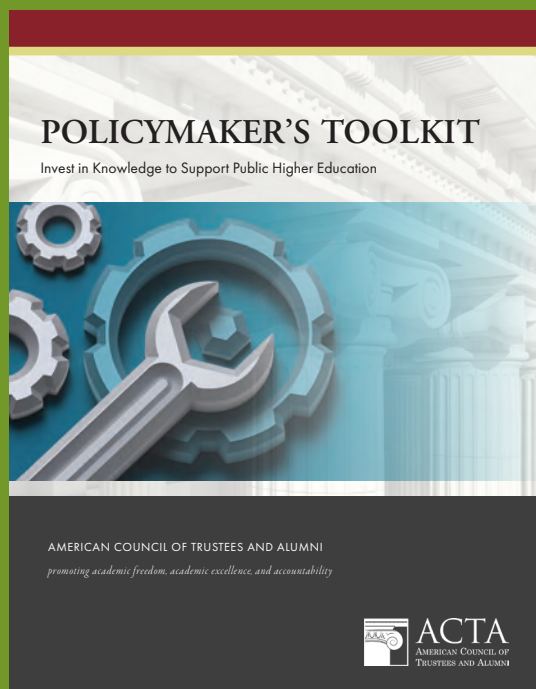
Leading a University in Times of Turmoil

Higher education leaders, alumni, and journalists joined ACTA at the National Press Club for a special program on leading a university during times of turmoil.

Vanderbilt University Chancellor Daniel Diermeier identified institutional neutrality, as outlined in the University of Chicago’s 1967 Kalven Report, as the key solution to pressure from activist groups and calls for divestment.

Scan the QR code to download Chancellor Diermeier’s remarks.





With public confidence in higher education falling, this comprehensive guide outlines steps that policymakers can take to strengthen the institutions in their states.

Scan the QR code below for a copy.



free expression, the subcommittee subsequently recommended that all Texas higher education institutions adopt a policy of institutional neutrality.

ACTA's voice for commonsense reform reverberated all the way to **Capitol Hill**. On September 19, our statement of support on H.R. 3724 was read on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives by Congresswoman Virginia Foxx. The bill, which has passed in the House, would ensure accreditors cannot require institutions to express political beliefs specified by the accreditor in order to receive federal financial aid funding and would require all schools to disclose their First Amendment policies to students. ACTA stated, "The bill's introduction is a positive sign that Congress is listening to major public concerns as the battle for the soul of American higher education continues to play out in countering hegemonic diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, the heckler's veto, and deplatforming."

◆ DRIVING INFORMED DECISION-MAKING

Over the last three decades, ACTA has built a vast library of guides and reports for college governing board members and policymakers, describing data-driven best practices on every aspect of university leadership, including cutting administrative bloat, choosing the right accreditor, addressing college drinking and drug use, and much more.

In time for the next legislative session, ACTA released our first ***Policymaker's Toolkit***, a comprehensive guide that shows lawmakers what they can do to improve higher education in their states. The toolkit provides nonpartisan research, model policies, and best practices on the most pressing challenges facing higher education today, including controlling runaway spending, restoring First Amendment protections on campus, and fixing the broken accreditation system.

ACTA also released an updated edition of our trustee guide, ***Restoring a Core: How Trustees Can Ensure Meaningful General Education Requirements***. This guide offers trustees a step-by-step plan for creating coherent core requirements, from forming a faculty working group to overseeing implementation.

We also sent our **2024 annual state rankings** of higher education performance to 1,200 state lawmakers and 50

At a congressional hearing on the Respecting the First Amendment on Campus Act, Representative Virginia Foxx quoted ACTA's support of the bill.

“Mr. Chair, we have groups that are supporting this bill, strong support. The American Council of Trustees and Alumni stated: ‘[T]he First Amendment on Campus Act is a step in the right direction toward protecting freedom of speech, association, and religion on college and university campuses across the country.’”

—Congressional Record, September 19, 2024

governors. The rankings, available on GoACTA.org, show policymakers and trustees how universities in their state stack up on administrative spending, graduation rates, speech code policies, and other key performance metrics.

In addition, our accountability tool, **HowCollegesSpendMoney.com**, allows higher education leaders to evaluate spending data and trends in comparison to peer institutions. ACTA provides this cutting-edge tool free of charge and regularly updates our data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System so that trustees and policymakers can make informed decisions in real time.

State Ranking Surveys

The screenshot shows the ACTA Florida State Ranking Survey report. The header includes the ACTA logo and the title "Your Impact On Higher Education Can Be Measured". The main content area is titled "Does your state provide an intellectually rich, high-quality college education at an affordable price?" and "See how your state is doing compared to others." It lists five metrics with their values and state ranks:

Metric	Value	State Rank
Tuition as a % of Median Household Income	9.61%	3 rd
Administrative Spending Per Student	\$2,933	13 th
Core Curriculum	2.99	4 th
Speech Code Policies	2.28	8 th
4-Year Graduation Rate	55.02%	5 th

The footer includes the slogan "Make quality education a reality" and the website "GoACTA.org/Policymakers".

Each year, ACTA surveys every four-year college and university in the country on 10 measures of academic quality and cost-effectiveness.

See how your state ranks by scanning the QR code below.





*Liberty cannot be
preserved without a
general knowledge among
the people, who have
a right . . . and a
desire to know.*

—JOHN ADAMS

National Reach

ACTA's media profile as one of the most respected and influential leaders in higher education reform grew significantly in 2024. The phones ring all day long in the ACTA offices, as reporters seek our commentary on breaking news and our advice for the future of America's colleges and universities.

◆ GETTING THE WORD OUT

In the Headlines

In 2024, ACTA made **1,627** appearances in over **1,400** online, print, and broadcast outlets, reaching billions of readers across **47** states. We published op-eds, gave interviews, and contributed commentary in national, regional, and local media outlets across the country, including the ***New York Times***, ***FOX News***, ***The Economist***, **C-SPAN**, **NPR**, the ***New York Post***, ***USA Today***, the ***Chronicle of Higher Education***, and ***Inside Higher Ed***.

ACTA President Michael Poliakoff and Levy Fellow Steven McGuire gained national attention with their August 25, 2024, opinion editorial in the ***Wall Street Journal***, entitled “**AAUP Throws In With Campus Antisemites**.” In the influential article, they lambasted the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) for its shameful reversal of its 2006 position against academic boycotts. Drs. Poliakoff and McGuire wrote, “The [AAUP’s 2024] statement omits any mention of Israel, but what other nation is boycotted today? Academic boycotts of Israel are a pillar of the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement. They’re also what motivated the AAUP’s 2006 statement. . . . The AAUP has now betrayed its own noble legacy.”

Online

We reached **1,717,396** users on **X** (formerly Twitter) and gained **677** new followers. On **YouTube**, ACTA gained **546** new subscribers, and our videos received **126,084** views. On **Facebook**, we reached over **200,000** users.

GoACTA.org received **282,979** page views in 2024, with brand-new users comprising over half of these views. The online results of our national civics survey, ***Losing America's Memory 2.0***, garnered nationwide attention, along with our webpage tracking schools that have adopted institutional neutrality.

Higher Ed Now Podcast

ACTA released **19** new podcast episodes in 2024. Unique downloads of Higher Ed Now increased by **13%**, surpassing **85,000** since the series began. Some of our most popular episodes featured **John Bolton**, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations; **Jeffrey Rosen**, president of the National Constitution Center; and **Nadine Strossen**, past president of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). We also produced our first-ever podcast in a foreign language, a special episode in Spanish featuring **Clemente Cox**, academic director of the Center of General Studies at the Universidad de los Andes.

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.

Alumni. Our quarterly newsletter ***Inside Academe*** reaches more than **15,000** alumni from a wide range of colleges and universities. 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.

Inside Academe is going digital!



ACTA's quarterly newsletter, ***Inside Academe***, is going digital as of **JANUARY 1, 2025**.

It provides in-depth coverage of our work to reform higher education, our resources for college leaders, and our commentary on breaking news.

We do not want to lose any of our faithful readers! Please submit your email address to info@GoACTA.org to receive ***Inside Academe*** online.



Harvard economics professor Roland G. Fryer, Jr., ACTA's 2024 Hero of Intellectual Freedom, delivered a powerful acceptance speech at the ATHENA Roundtable.

Scan the QR code to view Professor Fryer's remarks.



◆ 2024 ATHENA ROUNDTABLE AND GALA

On October 18, over 130 college leaders, trustees, alumni, and ACTA supporters gathered at the Ronald Reagan Building in Washington, DC, for our annual ATHENA Roundtable, **The Challenge of a Free Society**. Our first panel, **Educating for Freedom**, was moderated by **Joshua Dunn**, executive director of the Institute of American Civics at the University of Tennessee–Knoxville. Our panelists included Harvard University Professor **Jeffrey Flier**, Loyola University Maryland Professor **Diana Schaub**, and University of Austin President **Pano Kanelos**. Our second panel, **Civil Liberty On Campus**, was moderated by Carleton College Professor **Amna Khalid** and featured Yale Law School Professor **Keith Whittington**, past ACLU president **Nadine Strossen**, and **JoAnn Koob**, director of the Liberty and Law Center at George Mason University.

Following the panels, we recognized **Roland G. Fryer, Jr.**, professor of economics at Harvard University, with our 2024 Hero of Intellectual Freedom award. A tribute to Dr. Fryer was delivered by **Ian Rowe**, senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. When warned by his colleagues not to publish his study on police brutality, for fear that its findings would crumble the dominant racial narrative, Professor Fryer's reaction was, "Now I'm definitely going to publish it." In his moving acceptance speech, he spoke of the legacy left by his grandmother, who taught him how to "disagree with affection" instead of with resentment, prejudice, or anger.

In the evening, we were delighted to present **Nadine Strossen**, John Marshall Harlan II Professor of Law Emerita at New York Law School and past president of the ACLU, with our 19th annual Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education. Through her activism, public commentary, and scholarship, she has worked tirelessly to ensure that all Americans understand, appreciate, and exercise their fundamental right to free expression, which is the very lifeblood of liberal education.

Tributes to Professor Strossen were delivered by **Randall Kennedy**, Michael R. Klein Professor of Law at Harvard Law School; **Monica Harris**, executive director of the Foundation

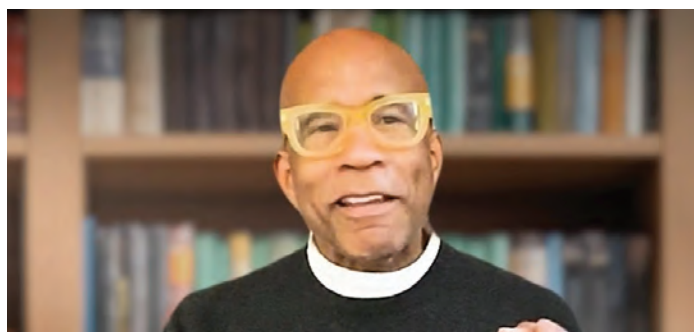
Against Intolerance & Racism; **Amna Khalid**, associate professor of history at Carleton College; and **Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr.**, past president of Purdue University and former governor of Indiana.



Joshua Dunn, Pano Kanelos, Jeffrey Flier, and Diana Schaub discuss educating for freedom.



Professors Amna Khalid, Nadine Strossen, Keith Whittington, and JoAnn Koob examine how to balance free speech and civility on campus.



Professor Randall Kennedy



Professor Amna Khalid



Monica Harris

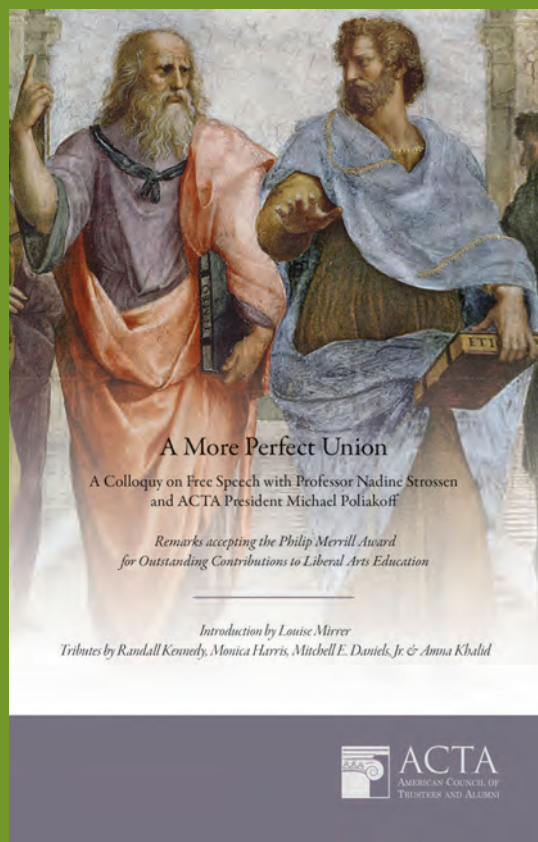


The Honorable Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr.

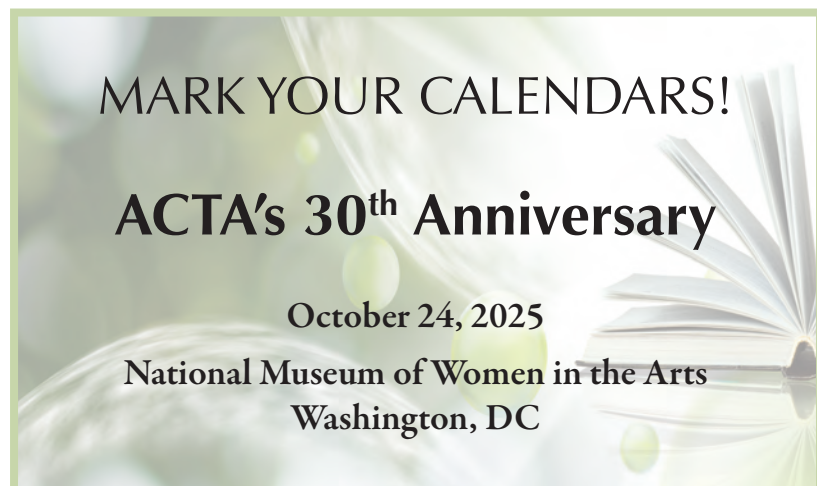
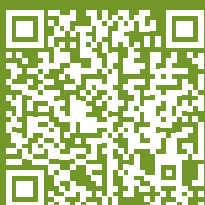


President Michael Poliakoff and Professor Nadine Strossen engage in a colloquy on free speech.

Professor Strossen elected to engage in a colloquy with President Poliakoff in lieu of a traditional acceptance speech, making this year's gala a unique and memorable occasion. They discussed why civil disagreement is so essential for both liberal education and our democratic republic. Professor Strossen remarked, "In my many, many, many debates against people with whom I strongly disagreed on particular civil liberties issues, I really can't think of an exception to what I'm going to say now, which is if you dig deep enough, you share something profoundly in common." We are indebted to Professor Strossen for demonstrating how to disagree with humility and good faith and for dedicating her career to defending the right of all people to express their ideas freely.



Scan the QR code for a copy of ***A More Perfect Union: A Colloquy on Free Speech with Professor Nadine Strossen and ACTA President Michael Poliakoff.***



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CEO/President



Lauri Kempson
COO/Sr. VP of Finance



Armand Alacbay
Chief of Staff/Sr. VP of Strategy



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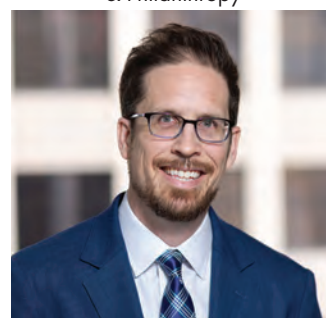
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Kayla Johnston
Program Coordinator, College
Debates & Discourse Alliance



Alexander Blinkoff
Digital Strategy & Social Media
Associate, Communications



Veronica Mayer Bryant
Curricular Improvement Fellow

◆ SENIOR FELLOWS & SCHOLAR-IN-RESIDENCE

ACTA continues to benefit from the expertise of our senior fellow, **Anne D. Neal**. Ms. Neal is a co-founder of ACTA and served as our president from 2003 to 2016. She is currently the 24th regent of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association. **Joshua Katz** serves as our scholar-in-residence, and **Solveig Gold** serves as our senior fellow in education & society.

◆ INTERNS

ACTA's internship program offers a unique educational experience to talented college students and recent graduates. The Robert Lewit Fellowship in Education Policy, sponsored by a former chairman of ACTA's board, offers select students the opportunity to engage in special assignments in higher education policy research.

2024 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

as of December 31, 2024

Assets

Cash/Cash Equivalents (unrestricted)	\$2,839,559
Cash/Cash Equivalents (restricted)	1,564,696
Marketable Securities	594,898
Receivables	202,500
Property/Equipment (net)	541,101
Prepayments & Other Assets	<u>1,972,010</u>

Total Assets **7,714,764**

Liabilities & Net Assets

Accounts Payable	246,867
Deferred Compensation	69,205
Lease Liabilities	<u>3,183,463</u>

Total Liabilities **3,499,535**

Unrestricted Net Assets	2,719,738
Temporarily Restricted Net Assets	<u>1,495,491</u>

Total Net Assets **4,215,229**

Total Liabilities & Net Assets **\$7,714,764**

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

as of December 31, 2024

Revenue & Support

Contributions/Grants (unrestricted)	\$2,848,752
Contributions/Grants (unrestricted)	2,935,676
Interest/Dividends	107,468
Miscellaneous Income	21,257
Realized/Unrealized Gain	<u>256,311</u>

Total Revenue & Support **6,169,464**

Expenses

Programs	5,653,614
Fundraising	53,970
Management/General	<u>443,326</u>

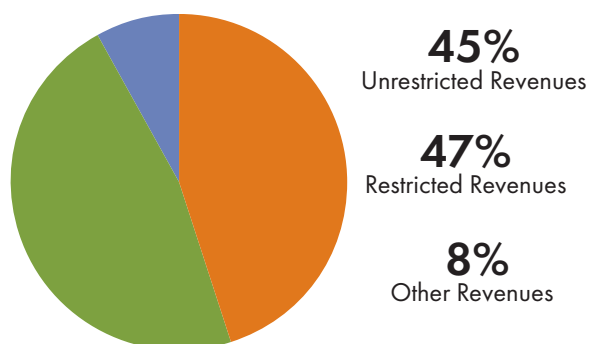
Total Expenses **6,150,910**

Change in Net Assets **18,554**

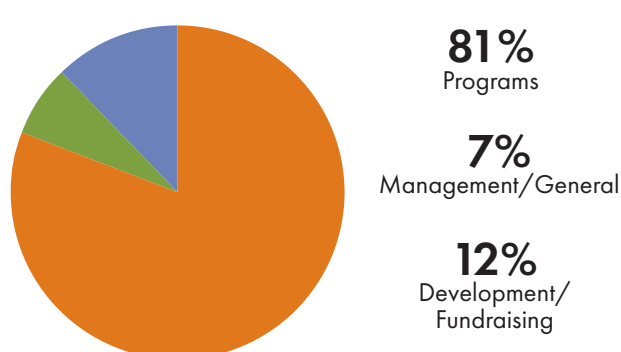
Net Assets, beginning of year **4,196,675**

Net Assets, end of year **\$4,215,224**

2024 OPERATING REVENUES



2024 OPERATING EXPENSES



Unaudited – For Management Purposes Only.



◆ 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.

2024 ATHENA Roundtable Sponsors

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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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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.**

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Karen & Paul Levy

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

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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 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 2024, we bid farewell to our very
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