



*Promoting
Academic
Freedom and
Excellence*

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Higher Education Leader Larry Summers Accepts 2025 Merrill Award

Lawrence H. Summers, the Charles W. Eliot University Professor and president emeritus at Harvard University, is the winner of ACTA's 20th annual Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education. ACTA greatly admires this visionary leader, who has made an extraordinary impact on higher education and, indeed, our nation.

Dr. Summers's leadership of Harvard from 2001 to 2006 was defined by a commitment to removing inequalities of opportunity in education. His administration eliminated all financial obligations from students with family incomes below \$60,000 a year, allowing deserving students from all backgrounds to receive a Harvard education. A passionate advocate of the sciences and a graduate of MIT, Dr. Summers launched an extensive project to make Boston, and Cambridge in

particular, the global leader in life sciences research, forming major programs for stem cell research and genomics. He also led efforts to renew Harvard College, with dramatic increases in study abroad programs, faculty-student contact, and collaboration across the university during his tenure.

He became a full professor at Harvard at the age of 28, one of the youngest in the university's recent history. In addition to his professorship, he directs the University's Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government. Dr. Summers was the first social scientist to receive the National Science Foundation's Alan Waterman Award for scientific achievement, and, in 1993, he was awarded

the John Bates Clark Medal, given to the most outstanding economist under 40 in the United States.

Professor Summers is one of our nation's most dedicated defenders of the core

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Save the Date for ACTA's 30th Anniversary Gala

ACTA's 30th anniversary celebration will take place on **October 23-24, 2025**. On October 23, we will present the **Jerry Martin Prize** to the University of Michigan Board of Regents at the Cosmos Club in Washington, DC. On October 24, a distinguished panel of historians will discuss the state of civic education at historic Mount Vernon, and ACTA will present the **Hero of Intellectual Freedom** award to University of Austin Chancellor **Panayiotis Kanelos**. In the evening, we will honor Harvard University President Emeritus **Lawrence H. Summers** with the **Philip Merrill Award** at the National Museum of Women in the Arts. Please join us! Registration information to follow soon.

Senator Jerry C. Cirino
Ohio, District 18

“Thank you for your invaluable testimony in support of Senate Bill 1. Your extensive experience and commitment to ensuring quality education is both inspiring and crucial. The points you raised about civic knowledge provide significant insight into the challenges higher education faces today. I deeply appreciate your dedication to this important issue.”

Samuel J. Abrams
Professor of Politics, Sarah Lawrence College

“The good news is that the ideological activist madness that had overtaken so much of the higher education space is no longer a little-known problem, but is prominent in the press and social media. Today, the federal government and the American polity

recognize this problem and they are, along with groups like the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, working to save academia from itself.”

Note: This quote is an excerpt from an article written by Professor Abrams in AEIdeas entitled, “A Moment of Enlightened Discourse.”

Bill Hewitt
Alumnus, Princeton University

“Deep thanks for ACTA’s vital work on Princeton’s wrongs to Joshua Katz. I hope the issues raised by my NR piece get widespread and probing attention.”

Note: On March 29, Bill Hewitt published “The Disqualifying Hypocrisy of Princeton’s President” in the National Review. The article can be found at <https://archive.is/5U9i4>.

Larry Summers, continued from 1

curriculum. As many universities abandoned general education requirements in favor of niche courses and cloistered majors, he argued that higher education has an inviolable obligation to broaden students’ perspectives and prepare them for “enlightened participation in society,” as he emphasized in a 2011 *Washington Post* interview. He has advocated that no student should graduate from college without a foundational knowledge of the discoveries, moments, and achievements that have shaped our culture and civilization, from biology to mathematics to literature. A liberal arts education, taught by deeply knowledgeable faculty who are passionate about their area of expertise, equips students not only with a common body of knowledge, but also with the ability to discern truth. “The idea that we should be open to all ideas,” he has said, “is very different from the supposition that all ideas are equally valid.” Investing personally in that truth, Professor Summers currently teaches a general education course at Harvard, “The Political Economy of Globalization.”

Dr. Summers is an articulate and passionate defender of academic freedom and freedom of expression. At a time when too many decisions are made on grounds of practicality and image, he has admonished those in positions of power in higher education to exercise moral leadership. His reasoned and fair-minded opposition to discriminatory practices like the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement are crucial for restoring sound policies on campus. As he observed in his address to the Columbia Center for Law and Liberty, “The right to say, advocate, or propose anything must always be protected. But it must come with others’ right or even obligation to call out words and deeds that threaten the community and the values of moral concern and rational inquiry for which it stands.”

A distinguished public servant with a rare ability to relate to people from all sides of the political continuum, he served as the 71st U.S. secretary of the treasury during the Clinton administration. He was also the director of the White House National Economic Council and chief economist of the World Bank under the Obama administration. His tenure at the U.S. Treasury coincided with the longest period of sustained economic growth in U.S. history.

A champion of academic excellence, academic freedom, and fiscal accountability, Dr. Summers has set the gold standard for principled university leadership. As ACTA celebrates 30 years of higher education reform, we are honored, and privileged, to bestow on him the 2025 Philip Merrill Award. ●

INSIDE ACADEME IS GOING DIGITAL!

Over the next year, ACTA will begin transitioning *Inside Academe* from a hard-copy newsletter to an eNewsletter. We do not want to lose any of our faithful readers! Please submit your email address to ACTA at info@GoACTA.org so that you can continue receiving *Inside Academe* online.

ACTA Applauds Ohio Senate Bill 1

On March 28, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine signed into law Senate Bill 1, the “Advance Ohio Higher Education Act.” ACTA provided guidance to Senator Jerry Cirino as he drafted the bill, which will make Ohio a leader in promoting free expression, academic excellence, and fiscal accountability on campus.

Senate Bill 1 requires that all Ohio institutions of higher education adopt a policy of institutional neutrality and that the presidents and governing boards of all of Ohio’s public institutions issue strong statements committing their universities to the principles of free inquiry, civil discourse, and intellectual diversity. The bill mandates periodic faculty performance evaluations and

post-tenure reviews. It also rolls back DEI departments, expenditures, and consultants while eliminating mandatory DEI statements from the faculty hiring and promotions process.

All students at public universities will now be required to pass a course on United States history and government that includes the study of the foundational texts that have shaped our nation, including the Constitution, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Federalist Papers, among other texts. The bill also mandates high-quality trustee training, which is the key to ensuring that these new reforms are implemented and stewarded properly.

Describing the bill’s goal to expand free and open inquiry on campus, Senator

Cirino said, “It is essential for students to learn how to think rather than what to think, and how to listen to opposing views with a respectful but critical ear.”

ACTA President Michael Poliakoff, who testified in support of the bill, stated, “Senate Bill 1 provides a model for other states to follow in their efforts to embrace excellence and accountability. For American higher education to remain indisputably the envy of the world, it will take state-level leadership, like that of bill sponsor and champion Senator Jerry Cirino. ACTA is proud to have testified in favor of the bill and looks forward to watching the benefits it will bring to Ohio’s universities and the students they serve.” ●

ACTA President Interviews Senator Jerry Cirino

In January, President Poliakoff interviewed Ohio Senator Jerry Cirino on Higher Ed Now about the state’s landmark higher education reform legislation, Senate Bill 1, which was signed into law in March.

Michael Poliakoff (MP): You’ve specified within the bill that every student will need to read and understand the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, some of the Federalist Papers, the Emancipation Proclamation, the “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” And that is in and of itself, I’m sorry to say, revolutionary in this country. ACTA has tracked core curriculum requirements for some years, and only 19% of the 1,100 colleges and universities that we track have a single requirement for American history and government.

Jerry Cirino (JC): I just found it quite amazing how very little exposure young people have had to the . . . basics of our country’s history, our Founding, the documents you mentioned. . . . If you are in a university or college today, unless you’re majoring in history or political science (and even then it’s not even guaranteed), the chances of you ever being exposed to any of the concepts you described and what we have described in the bill would be extremely, extremely low. . . .

But the irony of this is that . . . on the one hand, we have our students who might be majoring in architecture or



medicine, a non-social study type of major, being politicized because their faculty members have seen fit to do that. And at the same time, they are not being exposed to what we might consider the counterarguments of American history and civics. And I’m talking about knowledge about our country, the good, the bad, and the ugly. This is not a sterilized version of American history that we’re talking about propagating. We’re talking about everything that we’ve done right, everything we’ve

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Effective TRUSTEESHIP

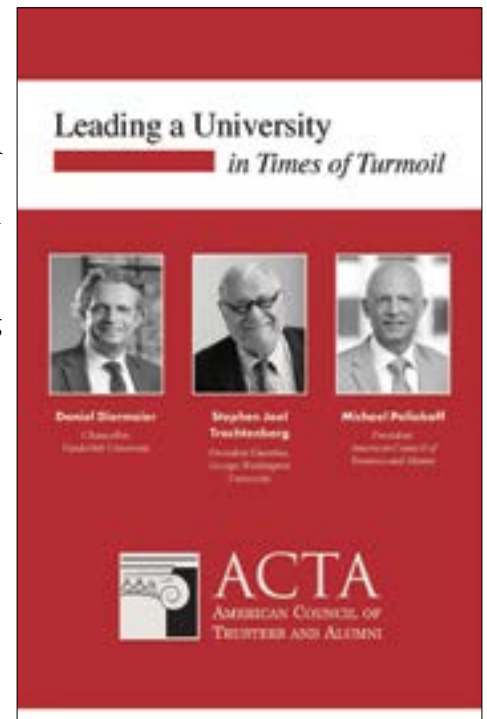
Leading a University in Times of Turmoil

In May, ACTA published *Leading a University in Times of Turmoil: Campus Leadership for Intellectual Freedom and Open Dialogue*. This publication is the product of an ACTA event last October at the National Press Club, which featured an address by Vanderbilt University Chancellor Daniel Diermeier on the importance of institutional neutrality and a conversation with the distinguished higher education leader Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, president emeritus of George Washington University. Below are excerpts from Chancellor Diermeier's remarks. Download *Leading a University in Times of Turmoil* on GoACTA.org to read his full address as well as the fascinating discussion that followed.

What is institutional neutrality? "The purpose of a university is to encourage debate, not to settle it. That's the institutional neutrality postulate. . . . The reason it is so critical for universities to resist these pressures is because when you are taking a position on an issue such as divestment, you are signaling to your community that this is the right answer. The Kalven Report has argued that if you do that, you are undermining an environment where free expression of ideas can flourish because people are now concerned that they're violating the party line. And that creates a chilling effect undermining the free flow of ideas and debate that is fundamental to education and research, to a university's purpose."

On institutional neutrality and the endowment: "Some universities have said institutional neutrality applies only to speech by the president—to official statements, if you will. That's great. But it's very important to understand that institutional neutrality . . . doesn't just apply to speech. It applies to actions. It prohibits position-taking, in both words and deeds, on political and social issues unrelated to the university's core purpose."

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Senator Cirino Interview, *continued from 3*

done wrong, policies that worked, policies that didn't work, et cetera. And if we can't figure out how to require a three-hour course in civics engagement, then our educational system is truly failing.

MP: We have universities that have asked for essentially loyalty oaths, using DEI screenings for faculty hires even now after the Supreme Court has ruled that kind of thing illegal. I'd love to get your further thoughts about the fire in your belly that has created within the bill some very, very firm provisions to make sure that we move back to merit, fairness, and equality.

JC: The kind of education that we should be giving to [Ohio's students] is not indoctrination, but teaching them the skills of analysis, of how to do research, how to look at different sides of issues so that they can make up their own minds. And they need a faculty that's cooperating with that. And when you have a faculty that sees life through a specific prism, generally that is what they're going to convey to students, and they're selling the students far short of what they should be getting for the amount of time and money that they're putting into their education. . . .

I've talked with lots of faculty and students who were afraid to come in and testify at my various committee hearings . . . and they say, "Look, here's what's going on. I have to self-censor all the time. If I'm a faculty member, I'm afraid I'll be ostracized. I won't get invited to the cocktail parties, I won't get promoted, I'm not going to get tenure." . . . I never, Michael, press them hard to come in and testify because I would not want to jeopardize somebody's job . . . or a student getting a failing grade. But what they do is they simply self-censor and let the other side get away with what they're doing. And that has got to stop. We have got to get true intellectual diversity in our universities, and that means that the boards of trustees, who are the governing bodies of our institutions, have to in my bill make a firm public commitment to intellectual diversity in their institutions in all the policies and decisions that fall within that. ●

Listen to the full interview on Higher Ed Now.

States Spearhead Higher Education Reforms

In the first four months of the new year, states across the country have introduced legislation to reform higher education. ACTA has provided testimony in support of several of these bills.

In February, the **Minnesota** Senate introduced Senate File 377, which would ban legacy admissions at public and private institutions in the state. In his testimony on the bill, ACTA Policy Research Fellow Kyle Beltramini stated, “Legacy preferences have no place in this industry, as they are clearly antithetical to the principles of academic excellence and equal opportunity which form the bedrock of liberal education.”

In **Maryland**, Senator Benjamin Brooks introduced Senate Bill 713, which would require universities to display prominently on their websites the institution’s graduation rate, salary outcomes, debt outcomes, and other key data. In her testimony to the Maryland Committee on Education, Energy and the Environment, ACTA Data Analyst Fellow Anna Sillers said, “One way to both bring down the debt level and improve graduation rates is to ensure students and their families have accessible and up-to-date information when choosing to attend college. . . . I urge the committee to vote for S.B. 713.”

North Carolina and **Tennessee** introduced legislation to require all undergraduate students at public universities to take a minimum of three credit hours in American history or civics prior to graduation. At a hearing in April, ACTA Associate Director of External Affairs Nick Down provided testimony on North Carolina’s REACH Act: “Students should not be allowed to leave an American public university ignorant of crucial concepts like representative democracy, bicameralism, separation of powers, federalism, and constitutionalism.”

Also in April, **Montana** Governor Greg Gianforte signed into law Senate Bill 134, the “Safeguarding Endowment Gifts Act,” which will give donors recourse if a university does not adhere to a gift agreement. In a letter supporting the bill, Rebecca Richards, director of ACTA’s Fund for Academic Renewal, said, “This bill is essential for protecting both donor intent and ensuring trust between the donor and the recipient institution.”

ACTA applauds the legislators who have led these efforts to restore rigor, freedom, and transparency on American campuses. ●

ACTA’s Nick Down Appointed to Virginia Advisory Committee



ACTA is pleased to announce that Nick Down, our associate director of external affairs, was appointed on April 11, 2025, to serve on Virginia’s Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights maintains advisory committees in all 50 states composed of citizen volunteers who are familiar with local and state civil rights matters. The committees release reports on a range of topics, including issues of accessibility and discrimination in higher education. Along with fellow members of the Virginia Advisory Committee, Mr. Down will hold briefings and produce reports to inform the president, Congress, and the public on civil rights issues. ●



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H E A R D

C A M P U S

Merit First at University of Austin

The University of Austin (UATX) has announced a “Merit-First” admissions policy. Under the policy, students who score a 1460 or above on the SAT, a 33 or above on the ACT, or a 105 or above on the Classic Learning Test will be automatically admitted to the university, “pending basic eligibility and an integrity check.” Applicants who meet this threshold will receive a full-tuition scholarship. Students who do not meet the standard will be evaluated based on “test scores, AP/IB results, and three verifiable achievements, each described in a single sentence.”

In its statement announcing the policy, UATX took aim at the current system, saying, “College admissions are unjust. Not just biased. Not just broken. Unjust. . . . Admissions at elite colleges now come down to who you know, your identity, group, or how well you play the game.” The statement continued, “We care about two things: intelligence and courage. . . . At UATX, your merit earns you a place.”

UATX is led by its chancellor, Panayiotis (Pano) Kanelos, an ACTA friend who shares our vision that all students should receive a high-quality, affordable college education on campuses devoted to fairness and freedom.

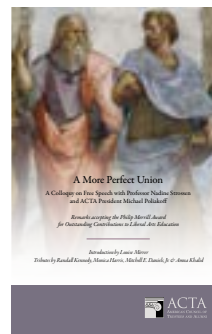
Universities Dismantle DEI

Major universities are dismantling DEI bureaucracies in response to President Donald Trump’s January executive order titled, “Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity.” On February 14, the Trump administration also issued a Dear Colleague Letter that threatens to withhold federal funds from institutions that discriminate on the basis of race.

On March 25, the governing board of Virginia Polytechnic Institute voted to dissolve its DEI office, joining the University of Virginia and Virginia Commonwealth University. Three days later, the University of Michigan announced that it will shutter both its Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion and its Office for Health Equity and Inclusion. It also announced that it will no longer solicit DEI statements in admissions, hiring, or promotion decisions.

ACTA Fellow Steven McGuire commented, “The University of Michigan’s decision to roll back its diversity bureaucracy is a momentous one that will have a profound and positive impact not only in Michigan but across American higher education.” ●

A More Perfect Union: A Colloquy on Free Speech



ACTA has released the remarks given by our 19th annual Philip Merrill Award winner, **Nadine Strossen**, past president of the American Civil Liberties Union

and John Marshall Harlan II Professor of Law Emerita at New York Law School. Her remarks take the form of a colloquy with ACTA President Michael Poliakov. Their compelling discussion, entitled *A More Perfect Union: A Colloquy on Free Speech*, illuminates and models the principles of free speech and open dialogue and why they are so essential for both liberal education and our democratic republic.

Professor Strossen stressed the benefits of engaging with our ideological opponents earnestly, instead of superficially. She said, “It’s really important to emphasize what we have in common and to have the humility that you might learn something that will help you to have a . . . more profound understanding of those concepts and also of strategies for advancing those concepts.”

Read the full transcript of the colloquy, as well as the tributes delivered to Professor Strossen, on GoACTA.org. ●

Leave a Legacy

What does it mean to leave a legacy? It is to plant trees under whose shade we may never sit. The Thomas Jefferson Society honors donors who have included ACTA in their legacy plans by making a gift through their estate. For 30 years, ACTA has worked tirelessly to ensure that the next generation receives an intellectually rich education at an affordable price. With your support, we can renew the promise of higher education and sustain the blessings of liberty for generations to come.

Gifts through your estate plan are a simple yet profound way to preserve your legacy by ensuring the future of ACTA’s work through the vehicle that best fits your plans.

Options include: **naming ACTA as a beneficiary of a bequest or living trust; life insurance designations; and a retirement plan that designates ACTA as a primary or contingent beneficiary.**

We honor the members of our Thomas Jefferson Society by displaying their names on a plaque in the ACTA office. Legacy gifts to ACTA offer different tax advantages, so please consult with your financial advisor or estate planning professional. To discuss your legacy with ACTA, please contact Nancy Phillips at nphillips@GoACTA.org or (804) 519-8537. ●

As the federal government launches investigations of over 50 universities to address the use of illegal racial preferences, antisemitic harassment, and other worrying trends, ACTA President Michael Poliakkoff issued the following statement to college trustees.

The Time for Trustee Leadership Is Now

Your institution—and the nation—needs your leadership as never before. Shared governance means SHARED. Institutions properly should challenge government when it exceeds its statutory authority. Institutions properly should remind the public of their contributions to medicine, science, industry, and defense that have made this nation strong and prosperous. HOWEVER, higher education has many self-inflicted wounds, and the

federal government has demanded proper corrective action. There were far too many instances of discriminatory practices that have corrupted admissions and faculty hiring in the name of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The year 2024 was witness to too many instances of hapless administrators unable to enforce time, manner, and place restrictions for demonstrations and protests. Less than one in five colleges and universities requires a foundational course on American history and the principles of our government. Higher education will be in a much better place, ethically, reputationally, and financially, when trustees direct policy and work with strong administrative teams to refine and implement it. Trustees themselves must engage in revisions of the student code of conduct to ensure that the campus can never again

turn into a place rife with antisemitic harassment or any other violation of the civil rights of students and faculty. Trustees must take a leading role in ensuring that universities maintain the institutional neutrality and commitment to the free exchange of ideas that make the campus a place where individual expression replaces groupthink. Trustees must review hiring, tenure, and promotion procedures to ensure that they are not discriminatory and that the intellectual diversity that energizes academic discourse can find a home.

This work of reform is, for reasons painfully apparent, not a job Leviathan ought to be doing, but rather the engaged, informed fiduciaries on whom responsibility for everything that happens on campus ultimately rests. This is the time. ●

Leading a University, *continued from 4*

“Crucially, it applies to how you deal with the endowment. At the University of Chicago and Vanderbilt, institutional neutrality has meant that the endowment will not be used for political purposes. Therefore, calls for divestment are inconsistent with the principles of institutional neutrality, no matter what the cause is. . . . I think it is logically inconsistent to say, ‘I refrain from condemning Israel, and then I’m going to divest from Israeli companies,’ because if you’re divesting, you’re making a statement. You’re saying it is contrary to university values to invest in fossil fuel companies, private prisons, or whatever the issue is.”

On institutional neutrality in academic departments: “Institutional neutrality needs to extend beyond the president and provost’s offices to a university’s academic units. Indeed, position-taking is arguably more of a problem at the level of schools, colleges, and departments. It is very difficult for faculty, especially for junior faculty, to object or dissent when everybody pressures them to sign or to be in line with a statement by the department. So it’s very important to have an environment that encourages the free expression of ideas and debate not only at the university level, but also at the level of the law school, or the school of social work, or whatever academic unit we’re talking about.”

On the politicization of universities: “If a university leader is taking positions on controversial issues—on foreign policy, or climate policy, or some other divisive matter—they are encouraging an environment in which competing interest groups push and pressure the university in one direction or another . . . [pulling] the fabric of the university community apart. And the last thing you want is to create an environment that further encourages polarization on campus.”

“All these lingering problems are manifestations of the same fundamental questions: What is the purpose of universities? What are the values that guide and undergird that purpose? And are most universities acting according to these values, or are we seeing them drift toward becoming political actors, taking actions that are inconsistent or even undermine the very purpose that they stand for? This move from purpose to politics is fundamentally a question about the politicization of our universities. It is vital that we stay sharp and vigilant about this temptation, that we remain clear about what the purpose of a university is. . . . In so doing, we can preserve these remarkable institutions that have been a source of American competitiveness and prosperity for so many years.” ●



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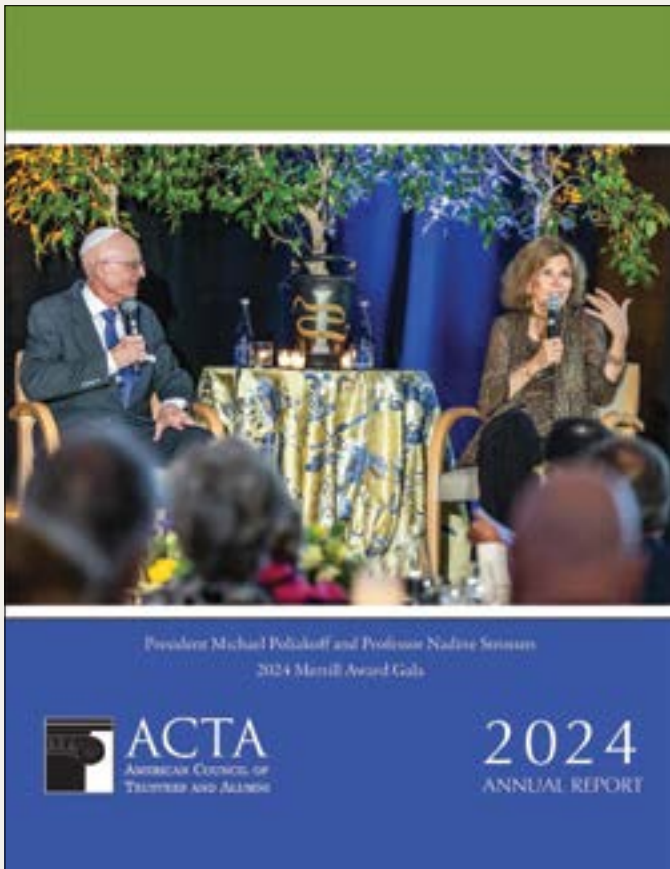
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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



2024 Annual Report

We are proud to share with you ACTA's 2024 Annual Report. Thanks to the individuals and foundations who have faithfully supported our mission, we achieved many victories in the past year. We launched a national campaign that resulted in over 40 universities adopting a policy of institutional neutrality; we helped in three states to shape legislation that will vastly expand the teaching of American history and government at public universities; and, with ACTA Board Member Paul Levy, we sponsored a lecture tour for humanitarian Bernard-Henri Lévy of 14 campuses to share his guidance for resisting anti-Israel and antisemitic forces in higher education.

Read about these accomplishments, and more, in our 2024 Annual Report! Thank you for your financial generosity, your ideas, and your inspiration as we fulfill our mission to renew American higher education.

Scan the QR code for a copy.

