

Speaker 1 ([00:00:02](#)):

Radio Free Campus, brought to you by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni.

Steve McGuire ([00:00:09](#)):

Hi, everyone. Welcome to Radio Free Campus. I'm Steve McGuire.

Justin Garrison ([00:00:13](#)):

And I'm Justin Garrison, and in this episode we've got a number of important and interesting topics to cover. We're going to interview the president and CEO of our illustrious organization, Michael Poliakoff, to discuss a number of important issues about ACTA's past, present, and future. We are also going to talk about a global news story that is especially important for American higher education, that is the assassination of Charlie Kirk and what that portends for civil discourse and the broader environment of higher ed going forward.

([00:00:41](#)):

We teased this in the last episode, we always deliver the goods on RFC. So we're going to talk about some of our most important and interesting findings from our Virginia Report Card project. And of course we will do the segment that everybody loves, the Apparatchik of the Month and the Hero of the People Awards. So let's get to it.

([00:01:00](#)):

Now, Steve, next month in October, we're having an annual celebration of ACTA's amazing work, the Athena Gala. But this year's a little bit different, because it's ACTA's 30th anniversary. And I was just wondering if you wanted to tell our audience who might not know, why do we do this? What's it like and thoughts on it?

Steve McGuire ([00:01:22](#)):

Yeah, it's going to be a big celebration this year. We do it every year and like you said, we're going to be celebrating ACTA's 30th anniversary this year. During the day we hold a roundtable conference with panels, bring in guest speakers to talk about higher ed. I believe this year we're going to be focusing in particular on civics or civic education, which is one of the things that ACTA really cares about. And then we give out a few awards as well. So we have our Merrill Award winner this year is going to be Larry Summers, former president of Harvard University. And then we also give out a Hero of Intellectual Freedom Award, and this year it's going to be Pano Kanelos who's now chancellor and was founding president of the University of Austin. And then like I said, we bring in a bunch of other great guest speakers.

([00:02:10](#)):

A lot of people come out, it's a great intellectual discussion during the course of the day. And then we have this great gala at the end with food and drink and it's a great time. So certainly encourage people to go to our website and check that out and hopefully some people can join us.

Justin Garrison ([00:02:28](#)):

Yeah, so we're going to put a link to the relevant information in our show notes. Steve, you did forget to mention something quite important about Athena, you and I will be there.

Steve McGuire ([00:02:37](#)):

Oh yes, of course.

Justin Garrison ([00:02:38](#)):

Our devoted subscribers can meet us in the flesh. I only charge \$25 for photos and I will sign them, but I don't do personalizations. I'm too busy.

Steve McGuire ([00:02:48](#)):

Oh, I can do better-

Justin Garrison ([00:02:50](#)):

This is a wonderful event.

Steve McGuire ([00:02:51](#)):

I can do better than that. Anyone who comes and tells me they're there because of Radio Free Campus, I'll give them a signed copy of the Act of Gold Standard for freedom of expression.

Justin Garrison ([00:02:58](#)):

We'll have them on the next episode in November. So if you're interested in this event, it's absolutely wonderful. I would encourage you to attend. There'll be a link that you can follow. As I said in our show notes, it's black tie optional, just like life.

([00:03:12](#)):

Now, one of the other important guests that we're going to have at Athena is the person we're going to actually interview today. So Steve, why don't you tell us a little bit about the person we're going to talk to in just a moment?

Steve McGuire ([00:03:23](#)):

Yeah, not really a guest, more like a master of ceremonies, I guess. Michael Poliakoff, our president at the American Council of Trustees and Alumni is our guest on the podcast today. We wanted to talk to him about the 30th anniversary and what ACTA has accomplished over the last 30 years, where he sees ACTA going into the future. And we'll also discuss with him a couple of other things, get his thoughts on the assassination of Charlie Kirk, and we'll also talk to him about our new report card and survey results for Virginia. So with that, let's get to Michael.

([00:04:10](#)):

Michael, welcome to Radio Free Campus.

Michael Poliakoff ([00:04:14](#)):

Hi Steve, real pleasure to be with you and be with Justin.

Steve McGuire ([00:04:18](#)):

Yeah, we wanted to get you on the podcast and we're really glad that you could be with us here for this episode. We invited you on because we wanted to talk about ACTA's 30th anniversary and we will get to that. But first, just a few weeks ago, Charlie Kirk was tragically assassinated on a university campus in Utah. And so I wanted to take a moment first to ask you about your thoughts about Charlie Kirk's murder and what lessons you hope colleges and universities might take from this tragic event or how they might respond to it.

Michael Poliakoff ([00:04:57](#)):

Tragic is exactly the right word for this awful murder. In fact, all murders are awful, but this is a particularly obscene one on a college campus that should be the sanctuary for freedom of speech. A man who said, "Prove me wrong," who was committed to dialogue however vigorous it might be, but that's the nature of American society. This is a good thing. A man committed to this free and vigorous exchange of ideas would be cut down. The dimensions of this are overwhelming and we need to hold at the same time our grief for his loss, our grief for his family, and our sense of what we have to do to repair a very, very broken culture.

(00:06:07):

My thoughts turn back to some of the classic statements that Kirk was really rather committed to, even if he didn't explicitly quote them. I am thinking of the C. Vann Woodward committee report after a shout down at Yale, not a murder. Lord knows the trajectory has been absolutely horrific. But it was C. Vann Woodward who said, I'm reading now from the report, "The history of intellectual growth and discovery clearly demonstrates the need for unfettered freedom, the right to think the unthinkable, discuss the unmentionable and challenge the unchallengeable." And when we stray from that, we are losing the very DNA of a great and free society and the kinds of universities that we need.

(00:07:07):

And I think too of the great dissent that Oliver Wendell Holmes gave in *Abrams V. The United States* in 1919, "When men have realized that time has upset many fighting faiths, they may come to believe even more than they believe the very foundations of their own conduct, that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade and ideas. That is the best test of truth, the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market. And that truth is the only ground upon which their wishes safely can be carried out. We should be eternally vigilant against attempts to check the expression of opinions that we loathe and believe to be fraught with death unless they so imminently threaten immediate interference with law."

(00:08:04):

Can we get back to that as we mourn for Charlie Kirk? Prove me wrong, is the legacy that I hope will always be kept in our memories of him. We can do better. I am glad for what Governor Cox has been sharing, that we have allowed a real corruption to creep into our lives. The daily me, so many people only look at the news that they want to see and the algorithm will help them to get into their bubble and to stay there, we have to break out of that bubble. We have to consciously work for heterodoxy for embracing the people that may actually be gadflies, to use that image of Socrates and to cherish them, not to do what the Athenians did to Socrates and not to do what this terrible deranged individual did to Charlie Kirk.

Steve McGuire (00:09:13):

Yeah, thanks Michael. That's great. And those are a great couple of readings that you quoted for us. And I think that's exactly right. There's been some people, obviously there's been horrific responses to what happened to Charlie that we've seen across society, including in some cases in higher ed. And there's been a lot of people who have said that they won't mourn for him, and that sort of thing. But the fact is that this was a man who was on a college campus there to debate people and he was murdered in the course of doing that, and it's just absolutely horrific

Michael Poliakoff (00:09:49):

And we have to stop that trajectory. I just happened to see the Harvard 1636 post last night about the staggering number of Harvard students who say that it's okay to use violence to shut down a speaker they don't like. Well, sooner or later deranged people connect those dots and this is where we really need to have that great cultural repentance, taking stock of ourselves, what we're doing to ourselves, what we're doing to our children, and turn this around. It's a time when we need real leadership to pull us back onto that course where we exchange ideas, where we depend on persuasion, not force, not violence.

Steve McGuire ([00:10:48](#)):

Right. Yeah. Thanks, Michael. Well, let me turn it over to Justin and we can talk about something a little bit happier, the 30th anniversary of ACTA.

Michael Poliakoff ([00:11:00](#)):

Yes.

Justin Garrison ([00:11:00](#)):

No, I'm going to stay in the doldrums for just a moment. Michael, what you just said reminded me of one of those wonderful essays from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn about the importance of national repentance. And he has that line early on in it about, "The dividing line is in between left and right, between the laboring classes and the elites, the line of good and evil runs through every person's heart." And that's why we have to repent individually and nationally because there can't be that dichotomizing of we are good, they are evil because it leads to just the kinds of events that we were discussing.

([00:11:43](#)):

So Michael, in your response you were talking about, you quoted some really powerful passages that not only seem to embody so much of what Charlie Kirk stood for in his mission on campuses, but also a lot of what ACTA stands for in terms of its own efforts to reform higher ed. And so with that in mind, could you tell our audience a little bit about how you got involved in ACTA and how you've seen it change and develop over the time that you've been associated with it?

Michael Poliakoff ([00:12:13](#)):

It's a wonderful story, Justin. Two highly placed people at the National Endowment for the Humanities, Anne Neal was the general counsel and Jerry Martin, who was the assistant Chairman, co-founded ACTA in 1995, recognizing based on their experience at the NEH, that there was some serious problems lurking within higher education. And they founded what was then called the National Alumni Forum, which very quickly they refounded as the American Council of Trustees and Alumni recognizing the two important power centers.

([00:12:56](#)):

And back then ACTA was a voice crying in the wilderness. Higher education was very smug. We are the envy of the world. We have the best colleges and universities and anybody who doesn't recognize that is just being sour. Well, ACTA begged to differ and we promoted the idea of three A's that every university and college needed to look at academic freedom, academic standards and accountability. And our colleague Lauri Kempson, who I think joined ACTA within a couple of years of its founding, she has the longest institutional memory, often says that we should hang a great banner out on M Street in Washington saying, "We told you so." But we don't want to be thermometers just telling the nation how bad the temperature has gotten, we want to be the thermostats that offers solutions and correction.

([00:14:05](#)):

And over the years I've seen us issue extraordinary reports. One in the year 2000 based on a survey we did of students at the "top 50 colleges and universities" that we renamed, Losing America's Memory in which we showed that they all knew who Beavis and Butt-Head were, but only about a quarter of them could identify quotes from the Gettysburg Address or knew that James Madison was the father of the Constitution and these were the American elite, and yet we found such appalling ignorance.

([00:14:47](#)):

Over the years we have continued to put out very important reports, sometimes really quite hard-hitting, always very factually based, carefully footnoted. We are just releasing one now called Achieving

Common Dignity: How Trustees Can Have a Discrimination-Free Campus. We talk about DEI of course, as one of the obstacles to a discrimination-free campus. But more than anything else, active reports quickly shift to what you can and should do, whether you're a lawmaker or a trustee or a parent or a student, what you should do to make our universities and colleges what they should be.

(00:15:38):

I'm very proud of the fact that we do so much that's really direct action. We address legislatures and we've helped them frame really important legislation that rebuilds core requirements, particularly in American history and government that protects intellectual diversity and freedom of speech. And we more and more have been addressing individual boards of trustees and their retreats. And this gives us an opportunity to make sure that they're not just reading what we have to say, but that we're engaged in a vigorous dialogue with them about how to implement those things.

(00:16:19):

I'm particularly proud, for example, that after we did a board retreat at University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, a storied and wonderful university, and really emphasized their need for an independent school for American history and government with its own hiring authority committed to intellectual diversity, that within a few weeks they passed a unanimous resolution to accelerate the formation of what's now the School of Civic Life and Leadership with terrific funding bringing in brilliant scholars. This is what gives ACTA that adrenaline rush every day when we come into the office.

(00:17:05):

So that combination of real scholarship in the reports that we do and direct action. And of course what you all are doing, reaching out to the public with more and more of a reach in social media on the web, in podcasts. ACTA's moment is here, boards must be in leadership positions or somebody else is going to do it for them.

Steve McGuire (00:17:35):

Michael, if you don't mind, could you remind me how long you've been with ACTA yourself?

Michael Poliakoff (00:17:40):

In some ways from its very beginning because I was a program officer at NEH and I revered Jerry Martin and Anne Neal. These were mentors and friends that I looked up to. And as ACTA or National Alumni Forum was being formed, I was in touch with them. And after I left the endowment, I moved into academic administration and ACTA was my lifeline. And every once in a while when they didn't have anybody to send off on a mission, because it was very small and this funding was very limited, they'd send me out as a kind of an agent extraordinaire and I helped them write a guide to teacher education. So we were always very close friends.

(00:18:34):

And then in 2010, Anne Neal called me up and said, "Isn't it time you just came to ACTA?" And I said, "You know, you're right." So I came in as the director of policy and in 2016 when Anne left, I became its third president. I just confessed to her that it took me a week to move into her office. I felt that this was kind of sacred ground and that I shouldn't tread upon it. And then finally the line from Pirates of the Caribbean came to me, "The Dutchman needs a captain," so I moved into her chair, which is where I sit now and I continue to revere my longtime friend and mentor.

Steve McGuire (00:19:22):

That's great. So you were mentioning a little bit a moment ago, ACTA's direct action that we don't just want to be a thermometer. And you mentioned a couple of things that ACTA has done. Are there any

other stories from your long time working for ACTA about successes that ACTA has had that you're particularly proud of?

Michael Poliakoff ([00:19:43](#)):

Well, I'm going to start with you guys. But I venture to say that I'm going to have to keep this fairly compact, we've only got maybe another 10, 15 minutes and your question is like asking me, which of my five children do I love the most? I love them all, and I wouldn't have answered that question anyway.

([00:20:11](#)):

But the Campus Freedom Initiative is brilliant. When I look at the tally of schools that have embraced intellectual freedom neutrality, this is something that would never have happened without you. You all really promoted this so brilliantly. And the number of schools that have now taken up the Chicago Principles of Freedom of Expression, you and I, Steve put an article in the Dallas Morning News about why University of Texas needed to embrace the Chicago Principles of Freedom of Expression and lo and behold, a few weeks later, the Board of Regents passed a unanimous resolution that was binding on all their campuses. I got some grumbling actually from the Chancellor, "I was just about to do that when you guys published that article." Well, I believe him, but we'd been waiting a few years prodding them to do it, so it was time.

([00:21:16](#)):

And now the Arizona Report Card has prompted very, very good discussion about how they can embrace more of the ACTA Gold Standards, the 20 criteria for a campus truly devoted to the freedom of expression. You're doing that imminently in Virginia. These are great victories. And we're also grateful to the Diana Davis Spencer Foundation for funding it at a level that allowed us to do that. Wonderful surveys that put in front of a board of trustees, don't tell us that that's somebody else's problem, this is what your students are saying about self-censorship, about their really great uncertainty about whether they can challenge a professor on an issue of public policy. All of these signs of the same thing that we began with an echo chamber that's growing up and now instead we're seeing schools with institutional neutrality where the leadership recognizes that it's not right to inflict an opinion on the campus even if you believe it with all your heart, that's not your role. So that's great.

([00:22:35](#)):

And it's slightly older sibling, the College Debate and Discourse program that's brought civil parliamentary style debate to some 500 campuses around the country serving over 20,000 students. And never in all of that history has there been an instance of incivility. This is really quite amazing that they can take up the war in Gaza or LGBTQ athletes in college sport or abortion or Confederate monuments or funding of the police, and they're not even hurling insults at each other, much less stooping to violence and silencing one another. This is the way we change the culture.

([00:23:27](#)):

CFI with more of a chop down approach and college debate and discourse changing it from the bottom up. We want campuses where students wouldn't think of canceling a speaker, where they would actively say, "Bring it on. I want to hear you. And even though I disagree with you, and I find, as Oliver Wendell Holmes said, 'Your idea is fraught with death,' I want to hear what you have to say." That's the way we grow.

([00:24:00](#)):

And then our new National Commission on American History and Government, which is also related to that because we're getting back to the core principles, the DNA of America, we're going to be meeting next month, October 3rd, a wonderful, wonderful group of America's greatest historians and university leaders, Mitch Daniels and Larry Summers and Hank Brown and Steve Trachtenberg and Gordon Wood and Allen Guelzo and Louise Mirrer from New-York Historical and Bill Maclay and H.R. McMaster on a

very simple but absolutely crucial task to ensure that hundreds of schools by the time we're done with this white paper and publication will restore the disciplined study of the American story.

(00:24:55):

Yevtushenko wrote, "Who never knew the price of happiness will not be happy." And those college students who do not know the story of America will be willing to walk away from it, as we found in our survey Losing America's Memory 2.0, that the majority of American college students answered that if Russia invaded this country, they would flee rather than fight for it. What have we done to ourselves? And indeed even where we started when they don't understand how important the First Amendment has been since our founding, indeed with a Zenger case even before our founding, they're willing to give it up. We've got to turn that around.

(00:25:49):

And then I could natter on actually all day talking about the things that ACTA has done, just as if you asked me about what my children have achieved. Ohio, five new independent institutes for the study of the American story with their own hiring authority like the UNC Chapel Hill School of Civic Life and Leadership, this brilliant new institute, the Salmon P. Chase Institute at Ohio State University, really digging in an informed and nuanced way to the great story of Western civilization and the American achievement. And along with that Senate Bill 1, the brainchild and the creation of Senator Cirino, requiring every student in Ohio public universities to take a foundational course in American history and government. This is really the novus ordo seclorum. This is a reordering of the ages in America. So that, again, even at my advanced age of 72, wakes me up in the morning with an adrenaline rush.

Steve McGuire (00:27:07):

That's great, Michael. And yes, those are all such excellent projects that ACTA is engaged in. And I know for Justin and I, we're so happy to be part of ACTA and to be working on these projects with you and all of our other colleagues.

(00:27:23):

One thing I want to ask you about is the role of trustees specifically, because that is so central to what ACTA does and why we were set up. And I think a lot of people don't know about that. They don't know exactly who are the trustees, what are their responsibilities, and I think also what do we think trustees can and should do to make higher ed better and how do they go about doing that?

Michael Poliakoff (00:27:55):

I'll start with the last part of your question. The trustees have to take charge in a way that they haven't done before. It's not about wearing fancy robes at convocation, it's not about a seat in the president's box at the football game. I liked what Anne Neal used to say, "You're not a potted plant, you're not a decoration, you're a fiduciary." In fact, everything that happens on campus is your responsibility. You need to delegate, you shouldn't micromanage, but never should you lose your oversight. Never should you allow yourself to be uninformed. If you don't have the data on how your school is spending money... By the way, I should have mentioned our project on how colleges spend money, our colleague, Armand Alacbay's, great creation, get on the website, howcollegesspendmoney.com, and you can see how your school is using money on administrative expenditure, on or on instruction.

(00:29:09):

When we first announced this tool, I'm getting off in a digression, I know, the rector of one great university came barreling up to me and said, "This is a great project, but why did you allow the public to have it?" I said, "Exactly. I'm glad you realize what we're up to here."

(00:29:28):

So we want to see them take the reins, not wait for a crisis, not wait until they've read it in the student newspaper that something awful has happened or that somebody has discovered, maybe ACTA, that their core curriculum is a hollow curriculum and that they're not preparing students for good citizenship and for career or that they're spending money like drunken sailors on things that are superfluous. Trustees ought to be on top of that and they need to be fearless, absolutely ready at any moment to say to the administrative leadership, "We've got to do things differently."

(00:30:16):

And why? Well, "Virtue has been thrust upon us by our impudent crimes," ought to be the motto of many colleges and universities, a nod towards T.S. Eliot, that now they're under the lens properly of the federal government. And I am myself a person who believes that these are things that should have been done by the institutions, but if the institutions can't do them, somebody else has got to do it for them. I want to see institutions reinstate their core curriculum, particularly as it pertains to the study of American history and government. If they can't do it, ACTA has helped state legislatures craft the legislation they need to make it a requirement for public university students. And we hope that sooner or later, more private colleges and universities will be sufficiently ashamed of themselves that they will follow suit.

(00:31:25):

I think it's a very bad thing when we have to depend on external authorities to do the things that colleges and universities should be doing. So trustees, this is your moment to review what needs to be done and to do it. To do it in a way that is as inclusive and as collegial as possible, recognizing the absolutely unique skills and authority that faculty have in their subject areas. But remembering that, and I speak here as a faculty member, a faculty member's loyalty is divided, sometimes largely leaning towards the discipline itself, looking out from the institution. Who serves the whole of the institution, all of its needs? It's the board. And beyond that, who serves the public that funds our universities?

(00:32:31):

And of course getting back to dollars and cents, I get a little impatient when I hear the charge, "We're under funded." Well, if you look at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development charts, we're just about the very top, Luxembourg edges is out for expenditure per student in higher education. So like the kids in the football game, "We're number one." We're number one in spending money. But you look at things like the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, whose messenger was shot by the way in 2003. Nobody could really bear to see that the average college graduate, four-year college graduate can't reliably compare viewpoints in two different newspaper editorials or compute a grocery bill if the cost was given per ounce. What have we done to ourselves for all of that money? So trustees, now take the reins, do it. We're depending on you.

Justin Garrison (00:33:38):

Well, hear, hear. And if you didn't catch that, we're coming for you. Luxembourg.

Steve McGuire (00:33:45):

No wait, I think that's a list we want to move down on. That's the one list we want to move down on.

Justin Garrison (00:33:52):

Oh my goodness. We've been on with Michael Poliakoff of ACTA, our president and our CEO. Michael, thank you so much for your time this morning. Before we let you go, I wanted to ask you a very brief question, in our show introduction before we got on to our conversation with you, Steve and I talked for a few minutes about ACTA's 30th anniversary celebration. We want people to get tickets and join us in our efforts to reform higher ed. We're going to put a link for that in the show description. If you're on the

fence about coming to our celebration, you could meet Michael, you could meet Steve, you could meet me, fabulous people doing wonderful things.

(00:34:30):

But Michael, what I wanted to ask you about is every year at this time, ACTA gives awards to people who have done incredible work, advancing campus freedom and advancing the kind of trustee work that you've suggested that trustees need to just be doing as a matter of their daily job. Can you tell us a little bit about the awards and the recipients that we're going to be distributing when we get together in October?

Michael Poliakoff (00:34:55):

Oh, absolutely. With great joy. Steve will introduce our hero of intellectual freedom, and this year it will be Chancellor Pano Kanelos from the University of Austin who was at the absolute center of creating a university that is totally committed to the limitless freedom of the human mind of freedom of expression and continues to energize the nation about the University of Austin's commitment to developing students' minds in that way, and so properly a hero of intellectual freedom.

(00:35:41):

In the past, Steve's had the honor of introducing Carole Hooven, who argued as an evolutionary biologist that there really are these two different sexes, one is male and one is female and that being sensitive to gender decisions, of course, that you cannot change the biological fact for which she was persecuted at Harvard, indeed under the regime of Claudine Gay, and stuck to her principles. And Roland Fryer, also a person who stood up for the data that he had found and was indeed persecuted for it. And Abby Thompson, the mathematician who argued against the Loyalty Oath of the California Diversity Rubrics, and Sam Abrams and Joshua Katz and Jodi Shaw at Smith.

(00:36:49):

These have all been wonderful friends, friends not just of ACTA, but of the nation and it's our privilege to present them with an award and more than anything else, to let them know that they're not alone. And I keep forgetting somebody when I give lists off the top of my head, Erec Smith, the co-founder of Free Black Thought, these are truly heroes who are willing to stand up to popular sentiments and say, "No, come prove me wrong. Here are the facts."

(00:37:21):

And then in the evening we give our Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education, to none other than Dr. Lawrence Summers the past president of Harvard now emeritus president and the former Secretary of the Treasury who was a fierce advocate for core curriculum, for higher academic standards at Harvard, for freedom of speech, back then it was called political correctness that was challenging so much of freedom of expression. It seems like a different halcyon era compared to what's happened now.

(00:38:05):

And just as Larry had warned in 2002 in the famous speech at the Harvard Chapel that there was a growing problem of anti-Semitism and people didn't listen. And now we see what happened on campus after October 7. So Larry has been one of the great citizens of the university, freedom of discourse, high academic standards, a great citizen of higher education, and it's our privilege to honor him on October 24th.

(00:38:42):

And two of the tribute speeches will also be directed to the importance of the freedom of expression, one will be coming from Steve Pinker who will be with us, and the other from Nadine Strossen, both of them very close friends of Larry Summers, along with Tom Rollins, the founder of The Teaching Company. So

it will be a very lively evening. Please do join us. It's a time to celebrate ACTA's work and more than anything else, to reconnect us with the principles that have made higher education in America the great institution that it is, that we need to protect. It needs a little maintenance, it needs a little course correction, and that's what we're about.

Steve McGuire ([00:39:33](#)):

That's great. And sometimes we come together for drinks and fine food as well to talk about those things. So I think we're all looking forward, we look forward to Athena every year and I think we're especially looking forward to it this year. Well, Michael, we're so glad we could have you on the podcast. I'm sure we'll have you on again in the future. Thanks for your time and your insights and your wisdom, and we'll look forward to talking to you again.

Michael Poliakoff ([00:40:00](#)):

Well, thank you for the privilege of being with you, and thank you for being such wonderful colleagues. I can't say that I love you more than my other colleagues, but I do want to tell you how much I love you and how much I admire you.

Steve McGuire ([00:40:15](#)):

We are recording right now. All right, thanks Michael.

Justin Garrison ([00:40:21](#)):

Thank you, Michael.

Michael Poliakoff ([00:40:22](#)):

Thank you. Okay, bye.

Justin Garrison ([00:40:29](#)):

We've just been talking with Michael Poliakoff of ACTA, our President and our CEO. And one of the topics we of course discussed with him was the tragic assassination of Charlie Kirk at Utah Valley University on September 10th. Now like millions of other people, of course I've seen Kirk on YouTube, I've watched his engagement with different students on different kinds of issues. I think he did a really wonderful job of not wilting under pressure, but treating people with respect and demanding that people in engaged in civil discourse even when they disagreed with him. But that was kind of a pretty common experience of Charlie. I'm wondering, what was your experience? Did you know him? Did you guys ever interact? What are your thoughts on this whole tragic event?

Steve McGuire ([00:41:16](#)):

Yeah, thanks. I got to say I'm still kind of stunned to be honest that this happened. I'm angry, I'm upset. It's kind of remarkable to see the responses. I've had a lot of people who I know personally say things like, they're almost surprised by how impacted they are by this. I've seen a lot of people write similar things as well. Even someone like Ezra Klein at the New York Times, he's now written two things about Charlie Kirk. One where he said he thought Charlie was practicing politics in just the right way or exactly the right way and he got a bunch of polarized responses to that and he kind of doubled down on that in response and talked about how impacted he is by it, so that's interesting to see.

([00:42:14](#)):

So I didn't know, I wasn't close to Charlie in any way. I didn't run in his circles or anything like that, but back in 2021, Charlie and I were Lincoln Fellows at the Claremont Institute together. So I did spend two

weeks in that group with Charlie and got to know him a little bit and got to see him in action. And I remember actually being quite impressed by Charlie. He was still, we were supposed to be totally committed to doing this program every day, all day for two weeks and he was already a pretty big name by then and so he made a few arrangements so he could continue to do his daily podcast a few times while he was there, but he was a full participant in almost all of the programming.

(00:43:00):

And I was a professor at the time, and I just remember thinking to myself in so many of these sessions that, "Wow, he's done the reading, he's thought about it. He's come with really interesting questions." And one of the things I noticed was how he was collecting ideas in his mind. I felt like I could actually see it happening during the course of these discussions where clearly he was thinking about something or had a question about the reading and really wanted to figure something out so that he could store that away and use it either during his debates or on his show. I think a couple of times during that week he maybe even used things that he was learning in the seminar while he was appearing on his show.

(00:43:42):

But it's been heartening to see the outpouring of support for Charlie. On the other hand, it's been just disgusting to see some of the other reactions, people celebrating his murder and that sort of thing. And of course some of it coming from academia, we'll talk about that a little bit more in a few minutes.

(00:44:04):

But what I'm thinking about now too, obviously it's a personal tragedy, first and foremost for Charlie, for his wife, his children, his parents, his friends, his colleagues at TPUSA. And then I think about what impact is this going to have on our country? What impact is this going to have on higher ed? And I think in particular about conservative students on college and university campuses, and we've seen a number speaking out, the College of Republicans at Boston University published a letter almost immediately calling on their administration to offer them more support. And we know that conservatives are in the minority on almost all of America's campuses. They're often treated with great intolerance both socially and intellectually by their peers and in some cases also by faculty members and administrators who don't want to give them the same support or the same opportunities to air their views that other students receive.

(00:45:11):

And I think we need to support those students more than ever right now, a lot of them say that they're going to be speaking up more going forward inspired by Charlie, and I hope that's the case and I hope people will support them in doing that and their administrations will come out and support them as well. Like I said, these are students who are used to being treated with intolerance, facing bias on campus. And then you see statistics like 34% of students, college students are unwilling to rule out violence as an appropriate means to stop somebody from speaking. And I don't necessarily think this is the trajectory to look at in terms of what happened to Charlie, but if you go back to Milo and Ben Shapiro at Berkeley in 2017, Charles Murray, his interlocutor at Middlebury was actually injured just two years ago. Michael Knowles and Brad Polumbo were at the University of Pittsburgh, and I believe Knowles was burned in effigy and somebody set off an incendiary device like a smoke bomb or a firecracker or something like that. I mean, this is scary stuff.

(00:46:21):

When these events happen they already need extra security. That's another thing I think about too is that this has happened in the past where universities have used security fees as a reason to shut down speech on campus to stop people from speaking on campus. And I'm definitely worried that now in the wake of this, more colleges and universities are going to want to say that they just don't want to host events or allow people to speak. And obviously there are real concerns there, but we need to find a way to protect speech and allow people to express themselves. Utah Valley University, there was a petition circulating,

people didn't want them to allow Charlie Kirk to speak, and they did, and the outcome now is horrific and tragic, but the university was right to allow him to come onto campus to speak, and there were thousands of people there. That's something Michael and I addressed again in the statement that we put out last week.

(00:47:23):

So I think going forward, we've been saying this for years at ACTA and others have as well that we need to look at these problems in terms of free expression, bias on campus and hopefully now people who haven't really listened, people who haven't done anything about it will be motivated to change course because I think we need to do something.

(00:47:48):

And just one last thing, in terms of the willingness to endorse violence, I've seen some other stats, there was an editorial in the Wall Street Journal that had some original survey results reported in it and this is something that we see among younger people that they're more willing to do this. And the Wall Street Journal article suggested that it didn't matter whether these people had gone to college or not, that this was something that you're seeing in the young regardless. And of course, we're still waiting to find out more about the killer. We know a decent amount already. It seems to me that he's most likely radicalized online. He only did one semester at a university and then was enrolled in a technical college or technical university. But nevertheless, universities have a critical role to play in our intellectual culture and in setting the tone for debate and discourse in this country. And in a lot of ways, they have not been doing a great job for years now and it's time to fix it.

(00:48:55):

How about you, Justin? What are your thoughts?

Justin Garrison (00:49:02):

Yeah, I think what you've said is really important and it's powerful and it makes me concerned. I mean, I don't think it'll surprise you to know that I'm more of a glass is half empty, or sometimes it's completely empty and has been smashed on the floor kind of person. I'm very concerned.

(00:49:25):

If you put this in the context of just the last few months with the murder of children at mass in Minneapolis, you look at the state legislators who were shot, some of whom were killed in Minnesota setting Josh Shapiro's house on fire last year, two assassination attempts for Donald Trump. If we don't make more of an effort in higher ed and in business and in politics and in all walks of life to appeal to the better angels of our nature, that inaction has consequences and the consequences look to me like the kinds of things that are unfolding in real time. And I just don't understand the kind of lurid enthusiasm for violence. It's a manifestation, I don't know of some kind of Kierkegaardian boredom or something. I mean, it's so appalling.

(00:50:31):

For whatever it's worth, I've found myself thinking more and more about maybe the right frame of mind to have in the present is to start reading Edmund Burke and really think philosophically and with charity about how to confront such an ugly time with grace, without compromising principles, without pretending like nothing's happening. But yeah, it's stunning.

(00:51:01):

And I think we'll get into this probably a little bit more in the apparatchik section, I have almost no interest in whataboutism and yeah, I've just heard so many arguments about, "Well, why aren't you upset about XY, and Z?" It's not a contest. There's not a supply of empathy, and human beings aren't called to love humanity in the abstract. That's a modern form of escapism. If I'm a friend of everyone, I'm actually

a friend of no particular person. So being jarred, shocked, saddened by Charlie Kirk's death doesn't somehow mean you don't care about other people. It's a stupid argument to make that somehow saying, "This bothers me," means other things are irrelevant, or something like that.

Steve McGuire ([00:51:55](#)):

Right.

Justin Garrison ([00:51:56](#)):

Yeah.

Steve McGuire ([00:51:57](#)):

Yeah, well, when you were talking about Kierkegaard or Burke, I think that points to something too, which at least in terms of what colleges and universities do, I think there's... Most of what you and I work on has to do with things like policies concerning academic freedom, freedom of speech on campus, as well as practices, things that campuses can be doing. And if there are people listening who are wondering, what can I do on my campus maybe to respond to this or to try and start improving things, they can contact us, they can contact ACTA. We have ideas. There are others out there as well. But there's also a pedagogical issue here I think as well that in terms of, how are we teaching students, what are we teaching students, that needs to be addressed?

Justin Garrison ([00:52:50](#)):

Yeah, you can't make a lot of progress in viewpoint diversity if Burke is a fascist, right? I mean, it's so difficult to get anything remotely resembling, immersion in the broad and conflicting experiences of human beings. And if you come out of these things with only one mindset, it's not unreasonable to see that people react... It's not surprising to see that people react violently when they have no other tools available to them to deal with difference and disagreement. We have to do better than that.

Steve McGuire ([00:53:25](#)):

Yeah. Yeah.

([00:53:31](#)):

So Justin, as part of our Campus Freedom Initiative, we're launching our latest report card, the Virginia Report Card. We've launched one in Arizona previously, which Michael mentioned when we were talking to him. And in the past we've launched campaigns at individual schools, but now we've done what is our biggest report card project to date, looking at six schools in Virginia. Why don't you tell us about what we found?

Justin Garrison ([00:53:57](#)):

Yeah, thanks Steve. So this is twice the size of the Arizona report card. They have three public universities in Arizona, Virginia has many more than the six that we picked, but we picked the six most prestigious public institutions of higher education, and we spent months analyzing them. The links to our report card and to the survey are going to be in the show notes if anyone wants to, and they definitely should want to check these things out.

([00:54:23](#)):

So we picked the top six schools as we set up the criteria for it, and so that was William & Mary, George Mason University, the University of Virginia, Virginia Tech, James Madison University and Virginia

Commonwealth University. So not only are they the most prestigious public schools, but they're also really well spread out to cover different parts of the state and to get different demographics in that way.

(00:54:47):

So as people know, we've talked about this before, we have a 20 point checklist called the Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression, and this analyzes a variety of policies and practices at universities, measuring protections for free speech, promoting diversity of thought, training staff and administration, making sure that the people who aren't in the classroom are also on board with free expression perspectives. And so we put these six schools through a rigorous months long process, which was not easy because so much got upended in January with a variety of federal executive orders. UVA and GMU, as we mentioned in our last episode, they're under federal investigation for a lot of things. So policies were just changing all the time. I kept track of this. We have a new team member who came on recently named Emma, who's done phenomenal work getting us up to date on the latest policy environment for these schools.

(00:55:43):

So out of 20 points, the top school in this report card was William & Mary with 13, George Mason and UVA, both tied with 12 points, Virginia Tech and James Madison University both got nine points, and last, and by quite some margin, unfortunately for them, is Virginia Commonwealth, they pulled out six points from our gold standard.

(00:56:08):

So in terms of the report card, some of these schools, but not all of them have adopted things like institutional neutrality policies. They've adopted versions of the Chicago principles for freedom of expression. William & Mary was the leader, and they've done some things that we don't typically see on the gold standard that we nevertheless encourage. They've done training for administrative staff when it comes to free expression and viewpoint diversity. And they've also done their own internal research. They did a survey in 2021 that tracks with some of the survey findings that we've now discovered four years later.

(00:56:44):

Areas where all of these schools struggled is in having active policies and plans to promote intellectual diversity and diversity of thought on campus, but especially as it relates to things like faculty hiring, tenure and promotion. Everyone frankly needs to do better with that and by quite a big margin.

(00:57:06):

And then some of the schools, we talked to students from these different institutions, some of them are very academically engaged, others very politically engaged and others disengaged. And I think in some sense, that tracks with the level of interest and commitment that these universities have to promoting the policies and implementing the policies that we think they need to bolster campus freedom. You've seen the research, I've seen the research, what are your thoughts on this?

Steve McGuire (00:57:36):

Yeah, well, thanks to you and Emma for all the work that you've put into this, that's one of my first thoughts. And the schools that are the highest on this report card in that 13 range, relative to other schools that we have analyzed is not too bad, but obviously shows a lot of room for improvement. I believe when we did the Arizona report card, ASU was the top ranking school there and scored a few points higher. So they're doing fairly well by that metric, but still have room to improve. And as Michael mentioned, we've talked to them about this and are trying to get them to adopt a few more measures on the gold standard and hope that they will.

(00:58:17):

But when you're analyzing these schools and you get a 13 and you're thinking, "Wow, that's one of the better ranking ones that we've seen," that's still a pretty sad story because the points on the gold standard, all 20 of them, are things that colleges universities should be doing.

(00:58:32):

And one of the things that just obviously doesn't surprise me in any way, but still amazes me when I think about it, is how reticent colleges and universities are to truly embrace freedom. Only after prolonged pressure from the outside, only after some kind of big scandal or crisis takes place will they take some minor steps to try and improve the situation on their campus, but they never really take the bull by the horns, recognize that freedom of expression should be one of the paramount values on their campus and really embrace that and work to make their campuses a place that has policies that support a culture of freedom of expression and diversity of thought and then to really focus on building that culture up.

(00:59:22):

And so the other thing I would say, quickly, is of course, like you said, there's been a lot going on in Virginia lately, and I think we could acknowledge that the Youngkin administration has done some positive work to bring about some change in Virginia. It's obviously been a rocky time there, but some of these schools are doing a little bit better in our gold standard analysis because they've been pushed to adopt certain policies that we advocate for by either the state or in some cases the federal government. And like Michael was saying in his interview, of course, we always prefer for the institutions to do it themselves. The trustees should take the reins. But I think this report card would look even worse for these universities if it weren't for Governor Youngkin and the work that his team has done. Am I wrong?

Justin Garrison (01:00:13):

No, I think you're right. A lot of the things that are positive have come about over the last couple of years, whether it's adopting Chicago or adopting institutional neutrality. The schools that have done those things in Virginia didn't do them decades ago when those reports initially came out, they've done them fairly recently. And I do think it's some kind of response, from my perspective, it might be a grudging response to a real problem here. And if anyone who works at any of these schools is listening to this and is upset, you should be, you should do better than this. And I know it's frustrating when someone comes in and makes you do things you don't want to do. I have this conversation with my children, you have an opportunity to do the right thing, but if you don't, I'm going to make you, because this is how responsible people do business.

(01:01:09):

And if you don't like the state government or the federal government getting all up in your business... Yeah, that's annoying. And I'm not even weighing in on whether all of these things are overreach or whatever, I'm just saying, make the changes yourself. If you look at the gold standard, this is not like some kind of reverse ideological intolerant culture we're trying to promote, instead of radical left, we want extreme right. That's not what we're doing at all. If you can't get behind stuff like that, it's going to be imposed from outside. So take the opportunity and make prudent changes that will make the school a better place for your students, a better place for faculty, and a better place for the people who make laws and pay taxes to support these public institutions. So that's my take on it.

Steve McGuire (01:02:01):

Yeah, no, that's right. And in a lot of cases, these things that we advocate for on the Gold Standard, ACTA is not the only organization that's advocating for these things, and we've been advocating for them for years, as have others. And as far as the, do they need to do better? I mean, the other evidence of course, that there's room for improvement is our survey. And do you want to tell us a little bit about some of the things that we saw in our survey of Virginia college students and alumni?

Justin Garrison ([01:02:29](#)):

Yeah, we've got a live interactive survey where you can look at the results for all of the students aggregated just as Virginia students and alumni. We've broken things down in tabs by institution. So where I live, it's a real big deal if you're a UVA or a Virginia Tech kind of person. So the football rivalry can live on well into the wee hours of the morning if you want to check those bars with those schools. We did an ideology breakdown as well, as well as a gender breakdown. And there are any number of examples where things don't look good, so it can't be waved off as, "Well, national trends have nothing to do with my backyard."

([01:03:09](#)):

I'll give you an example of this. In the state of Virginia, these public universities are legally required to engage in free speech education as part of new student orientations, and these schools do that, at least we were able to find evidence of compliance from most schools, if you check out a report card, the evidence still seems to be outstanding for a couple of them, and that's why they didn't get the mark. But they're supposed to do that.

([01:03:34](#)):

When we found evidence, it was pretty thin, almost like an after thought, a foot note, "Here's all of the stuff we really care about and by the way, free speech is important." And it's not surprising then when such little time is invested that you see only about 25, 20% of students responding, "Yes, I receive training like this." If you're going to do it, you got to do it throughout the curriculum, not just a one and done for five minutes when you meet your residence assistant for the first time, it's got to be integrated in different ways, and it's got to be integrated into the entire DNA of the institution. That's how it sinks in.

([01:04:16](#)):

We also, of course, found some very sad data. We've been talking in different ways about the Charlie Kirk event, and one of the things that we've noticed in national polling, and it's reflected in our survey as well, is the political extremes are kind of catching up to and largely mirroring each other right now. So you'll see just about as many people on the far right as the far left, willing to do things like shout downs or even use physical violence. On that violence measure itself, only 2/3 of very liberal and very conservative students said, "Never under any circumstances should you use violence." 2/3 is a great fraction if you're trying to get control of the United States Senate, but when you essentially have 33% of people who say, "Well, at least sometimes I guess violence would be a good idea," that's wrong. That is not a culture that's consistent with free speech, that's a culture that's consistent with the opposite of the kinds of things that we promote. So I found that to be pretty shocking.

([01:05:20](#)):

And then the last, I guess part of this that I would talk about is when looking at these schools, students clearly feel uncomfortable trying to express themselves in class, because they're afraid that their professor might take it out on them, they're really afraid that their friends are going to drop them, that they're going to get ostracized or deleted from social life. But they're also really interested in reporting professors who try to engage them and say things they might find controversial. At Virginia Commonwealth, 83% of the students who responded to our survey said, "Yes, report professors who say things that I might find offensive," that's not good either. So it's students experiencing a toxic culture, but they're participating in it as well. They need to take ownership for that, just like faculty, just like administrators do.

Steve McGuire ([01:06:13](#)):

Yeah, that's right. And I think these problems in some cases at least, seem to be getting worse, not better over time. And you're right, a lot of the results for our survey in Virginia reflect things that we see in other national surveys as well. And you make a good point about the violence and the willingness to shut down these measures of intolerance, of the views of others. Over the last several years in the data, various

polls and surveys, we tend to see that it's more students on the far left or the very progressive, different surveys use different words, who say that they're willing to shout down a speaker or think that would be appropriate, or that they think that violence might, in some cases be an appropriate response. But like you said, we're now seeing on the far right, people are starting to catch up, or our very conservative category, and so that's definitely concerning to see.

(01:07:07):

Also, like you said, the students, they're concerned about what happens in class, they're concerned about their professors, but like you said, they seem to be most concerned about the reaction of their peers. I think that makes sense. These are young people. Their social lives are very important to them. In a lot of cases, they're living in dorms with their peers, so this is basically their home situation on a day-to-day basis and so of course, they're concerned about these things. But these data show that there's a real need to work with students to understand the important of free expression, the important of civil discourse, accepting diversity of thought, being able to separate somebody's political views from how you sort of respect them as a person, or treat them as somebody with dignity, someone you could have a meal with, or whatever, play a game with or something like that and they might have different political views than you, and you could talk about that and debate it in a respectful way. Maybe sometimes it gets heated, but that doesn't mean you can't friends or acquaintances and find ways to get along with one another.

(01:08:16):

And so again, you highlighted too, there's a pedagogical function to this, as I mentioned earlier, that students, in a lot of cases, they're probably just reacting to what they've been taught and whether that's from their K to 12 experiences, their college experience, if they've been there for a few years, maybe it's online, maybe it's elsewhere, colleges and universities have a responsibility to try and impart certain values to students and teach them how to disagree in more productive ways. And as Michael mentioned, that's what our colleagues on the campus debates and discourse team are trying to do. And of course, that's one thing that colleges universities can do is they can bring these kinds of debates to their campuses that model how people can engage in constructive dialogue and debate with one another.

Justin Garrison (01:09:07):

Yeah, no, I think that is sage advice. And we could talk about the report card and the survey all day. It took us months to put it together, we could dissect it for months. If you are a trustee, a college or university president, you're a student, you're an alum, we surveyed alums as well, recent alums, as well as students that are currently at these schools, please do check out the full details of the research that you can get to in the below.

(01:09:36):

But now we should move into the home stretch, and this month I'm going to be doing our Hero of the People award.

(01:09:49):

Okay. So Steve, this month for the Hero of the People I selected the University of Kentucky, and I did this because, to my knowledge, this is the longest institutional neutrality policy statement I've ever seen. It is six single-spaced pages. I mean, they could have made it longer by, I guess enumerating all of the actual names of the people who could possibly be implicated in this policy. But it's from, I think, an active perspective, it's a pretty solid document. It has a very clear definition of what institutional neutrality means and why it's important. It identifies very clearly, not just in general terms, but with specific examples of what acceptable and unacceptable formats of institutional speech would be. It provides a clear outline for procedures for engaging in institutional speech if you're permitted to do so. It does all of those things while providing, I think a substantive statement about how this doesn't undermine

or interfere with anyone's first amendment rights to free speech or with anyone's rights to academic freedom.

(01:10:56):

It does so many, I think, really wonderful things. If you're listening to this and you're at a university that has not adopted a policy of institutional neutrality, you've never heard of institutional neutrality before, this is certainly one of those policy documents that I think is really well-thought-out. There are, of course others, but this one's really, really good. It's up on our website where you can see all the adoptions of institutional neutrality from any school in the United States, but I picked that one. It was approved by the trustees in compliance with Kentucky's House Bill 4, which is an anti-discrimination law that applies to all of Kentucky's public institutions of higher education. So as we were talking about a moment ago, it would've been an even better accomplishment, a duper hero of the people, maybe if UK had done this just totally on their own, but they're in compliance with state law as far as I understand it. So well done, Wildcats.

Steve McGuire (01:11:51):

Great. Well, we'll have to give lawmakers some credit there too. And I know sometimes people, they question institutional neutrality, or maybe it's not the sexiest higher ed reform that you've ever heard of in your life, but I think it's just such an important principle for colleges and universities, the idea that the institution itself is not going to take positions on matters of social and political controversy whenever it can avoid it and it's going to allow people within the institution to do that for themselves and to debate it amongst themselves and to ask questions and to conduct research and to teach. And I think it's just critical for the nature of what a university is as an institution. And also, quite frankly, from sort of keeping these institutions out of the political fray as much as possible so that they can contribute to our political society in the way that they're meant to, rather than the way that they have historically been trying to do it over recent years by weighing in as political partisans.

Justin Garrison (01:12:51):

Yeah, you said it, it's not sexy, but it is so important. With all due respect, if you are college president and you have a PhD in engineering or economics, that's great, but that doesn't mean that you are the all-knowing everlasting know-it-all when it comes to everything else. Sometimes silence really is the best policy, not because you can't take positions, but because it's not your job to share your private opinions with people and then pretend it's what the institution itself thinks. It's just too toxic to do that in any other way than the ways that something like the Kalven Report clearly articulates.

Steve McGuire (01:13:34):

Yeah. Well, speaking of toxic, let's get to the apparatchik of the month.

(01:13:43):

All right. Well, this time around, we've actually got a whole series of apparatchiks. And what I've selected is some of the responses to the assassination of Charlie Kirk on America's colleges and universities. And I'm not going to single out any one particular instance, but anybody who's been reading the news or following along on social media has seen some of these, at least. We have administrators, faculty members who are publishing reactions where they're celebrating the fact that he was killed or saying terrible things about him as a person, maligning his character. And another thing I saw a lot of, it seems to have happened on just about every campus, at least several of them, this has been reported on, they have these anonymous social media platforms like Yik Yak or Fizz, where students or others on campus can post anonymously, and I've seen a number of just terrible, in some cases, outright disgusting posts about Charlie Kirk at campuses around the country. And we've seen, in some cases, if we haven't seen the posts, students or student newspapers have mentioned them.

(01:15:01):

And beyond that, we've also seen things happen at vigils that were taking place for Charlie. So I know at the Claremont Colleges, there was a series of arguments, I think in the middle of the vigil. The students were heckled from above by another group of students, and then they were followed off campus by individuals wearing masks. And this was a vigil days after Charlie Kirk had been assassinated. I mean, just totally disgusting, totally unacceptable. There are other incidents as well, NYU, which of course is right in the middle of New York, there were some pretty foul responses while the students were holding a memorial. And so I just think there should really be no place for this kind of reaction. Somebody has died. It's a personal tragedy, it's a political tragedy, what it's going to mean for our country and for the future of higher ed. Everybody's worried about it.

(01:16:06):

It's one thing if you have some disagreements with Charlie Kirk, or if you weren't a follower of his, or you didn't like some of the statements that he made, although I will say a lot of people now are going and watching more and longer clips of Charlie Kirk than they had ever seen before, and are finding that they had misjudged him. So anyone who's seen a random quote pulled out of context and thinks that that encapsulates everything that Charlie Kirk thought said and did, maybe dig in a little deeper and go look. And I'll add too, that at least one of these so-called quotes isn't even in fact a direct quote, and he's being misrepresented and maligned.

(01:16:49):

But the rock bottom here is that he was on a college or university campus to engage in debate, which as Michael has said, as we've said, this is exactly the kind of thing that we want people doing on college campuses. As he was shot, he had given somebody else who disagreed with him an opportunity to speak. He was in the process of that kind of debate. And so, okay, maybe you don't like something Charlie said a couple of times, maybe you didn't follow him, like I said, but at the end of the day, this guy is a martyr for freedom of expression and specifically for freedom of expression on our campuses, because he spent a good chunk of his life going around to colleges and universities debating people and that's exactly what he was doing the moment that he was killed. And so even people who don't like it, don't like him, they're going to have to accept that that's what this is.

Justin Garrison (01:17:53):

Yeah, it seems like there are too many people summoning up demons that they don't understand and can't possibly control. It's very, very disheartening and it's terrifying because if you know anything about human history or human nature, these are moments that can lead to a national healing and a reset, but it can also be the moment where things really just go downhill and in an irrevocably terrible way. I hope people try to remember that we're all human beings and we all deserve dignity, especially when it's someone that you might not agree with or even like.

Steve McGuire (01:18:42):

Yep. Yeah, and there'll be time going forward, of course, as always, to debate these issues and argue about them, but I think right now what we have to recognize is that what happened to Charlie is just completely unacceptable and we need to make that clear, and we need to do what we can to make sure something like this doesn't happen again.

(01:19:11):

All right, well, that's our episode for this month. And thanks to all of you for joining us here on Radio Free Campus. Certainly some heavier subject matter than we've had to discuss on previous episodes, and hopefully we won't have to discuss something like this happening again in the future.

Justin Garrison ([01:19:36](#)):

So if you can do like, subscribe and hit that bell, download our podcast on any platform. If you're looking for audio only that you have access to, we're there. So we will see you next month, and until then, KBO.

Speaker 1 ([01:19:54](#)):

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Speaker 5 ([01:20:31](#)):

57% of Arizona State University students believe that offensive professors should be reported. Discover how ACTA's Gold Standard can help ASU foster a more free and open campus experience.