

Free Your Campus, Free Your Mind

Learn more about ACTA's Campus Freedom Initiative.

GoACTA.org/campus-freedom-initiative/



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**ACTA
GOLD
STANDARD**

—
FOR FREEDOM
OF EXPRESSION

ACTA Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression

A blueprint to help institutional leaders
create a culture of free thought on their
campuses.

Free Expression and the Task of American Colleges and Universities

There are certain truths of American political life that antedate even the Founding and are as important for our age as they were for ages past. Among these are that demagogues hold most sway over the ignorant, that a free people must be an informed people, and that representative democracy requires widespread education to flourish. A self-governing people cannot be a foolish, deluded, or benighted people, else it will soon lose its liberty. For these reasons, Americans must become passionate learners, fearless truth-seekers, and searching critics in order to take up the responsibilities of citizenship.

Universities are indispensable for a free and prosperous society. They are the engine that drives both scientific and social progress. They educate students for career and responsible citizenship and habituate them to self-discovery and the pursuit of truth. Their mission depends on a campus culture of free expression and intellectual diversity. Unless teachers, students, and researchers can inquire and speak freely and fearlessly, innovation will stall, questions will be left unasked and unanswered, and students will be ill-prepared for life, career, community, and citizenship.

But we learn in story after story, year upon year, that colleges and universities have lost their way. Instead of encouraging students to explore different lines of intellectual inquiry and equipping them for the rough-and-tumble of a vibrant democracy, too many institutions seem to be training them for lives as informers, inquisitors, and isolated, distrustful individuals. Rather than teaching students how to engage productively with challenging new ideas, far too many colleges and universities build cozy bubbles in which only comfortable orthodoxies are permitted. They foster large, expensive bureaucracies to police infractions of vague (and often extralegal, if not outright illegal) rules against expressing ideas that someone might find offensive.

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) seeks to hold American colleges and universities accountable to their missions. Progress depends on the freedom to pursue new ideas. Self-discovery requires uninhibited exploration of life's timeless questions. Education for citizenship in a liberal democratic republic necessarily involves opening ourselves to all the perspectives we might encounter in the community at large, even silly and dangerous ones, so that we are prepared to live and negotiate with all our fellow citizens. In short, an excellent education depends on free expression and intellectual diversity.

ACTA now provides a blueprint to help higher education regain and live by this core principle. The **ACTA Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression** provides clear guidance for institutions to create a culture of free thought on their campuses. Following these best practices will help colleges and universities reclaim their place as leaders within our liberal democracy.

The Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression is part of ACTA's **Campus Freedom Initiative**: GoACTA.org/campus-freedom-initiative/.

ACTA Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression



1. Commit to a Culture of Freedom of Expression

- Adopt the Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression or a similarly strong statement.
- Establish clear expectations regarding free expression in student and faculty handbooks and codes of conduct.
- Include a free expression unit in new-student orientations.
- Protect the diversity of political viewpoints by adopting an institutional neutrality policy such as the Kalven Report.

2. Foster Civil Discourse

- Sponsor campus debates that model civil discourse.
- Promote free expression by encouraging the establishment of student groups devoted to free expression, civil discourse, or representing a plurality of perspectives.
- Establish policies that protect free expression rights on campus and set clear consequences for disruption of sponsored speakers, events, and classes.
- Enforce policies that protect free expression rights on campus and apply clear consequences for disruption of sponsored speakers, events, and classes.

3. Cultivate Intellectual Diversity

- Encourage presidents, provosts, and deans to model respect for a broad range of viewpoints.
- Guarantee that viewpoint diversity is reflected in student life policies and practices.
- Support academic centers dedicated to free inquiry and intellectual diversity.
- Ensure faculty hiring, evaluation, and promotion processes are based on merit and make clear that the institution is open to intellectual diversity.

4. Break Down Barriers to Freedom of Expression

- Eliminate speech and IT policies that have a chilling effect on free expression.
- Ensure that enforcement of Title VI, Title VII, and Title IX does not infringe on free expression.
- Disband bias response teams.
- Review student government policies to ensure viewpoint neutrality in student group recognition and funding.

5. Advance Leadership Accountability

- Include commitments to free expression in mission statements, values statements, strategic plans, or other key institutional documents.
- Include a commitment to free expression as a criterion in searches and evaluations for presidents, provosts, and deans.
- Require free expression and viewpoint diversity training for administrative staff.
- Conduct regular evaluations of the state of free expression and intellectual diversity on campus.