



Promoting
Academic
Freedom and
Excellence

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ACTA Celebrates 30th Anniversary: We Hold These Truths... America at 250



Anne D. Neal, regent of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, kicks off ACTA's colloquy at the George Washington Presidential Library, entitled "Educating for a More Perfect Union."

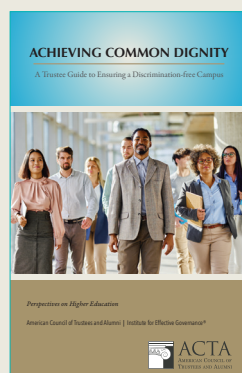
At ACTA's 30th Anniversary Celebration on October 24, 2025, our many friends and supporters gathered at the Presidential Library at Mount Vernon to reflect on all we have accomplished together and exciting plans for the future. We began the day with "Educating for a More Perfect Union," a colloquy moderated by **Anne D. Neal**, co-founder and past president of ACTA and regent of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association. Our distinguished panelists included **Richard Brookhiser**, senior

editor of the *National Review*; **Douglas Bradburn**, president and CEO of George Washington's Mount Vernon; **Louise Mirrer**, president and CEO of the New York Historical; and **Wilfred M. McClay**, Victor Davis Hanson Chair in Classical History and Western Civilization at Hillsdale College.

In answer to Ms. Neal's question about why we should care about connecting with our past, Dr. Bradburn said there are fundamental events and figures that students must

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ACTA Publishes Guide on Disbanding Discriminatory DEI Programs



Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs on college campuses have contributed to the very discrimination they profess to combat, censoring diverse viewpoints and policing free speech. How can college leaders ensure that all campus members are treated with equal dignity, while also eliminating unconstitutional race-based preferences and promoting merit, individual liberty, and academic freedom? ACTA's new report, **Achieving Common Dignity: A Trustee Guide to Ensuring a Discrimination-free Campus**, helps university leaders answer this complex question.

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**Carlos Rodriguez, Former Member
National University Board of Trustees**

“Your newest guide for trustees addresses a subject that has always been dear to me and which drove me to accept the invitation to serve on the board at National University.”

**Suzanne Reynolds, Regent
University of Science & Arts of Oklahoma Board of Regents**

“The ACTA guide provides a robust, principled roadmap for restoring merit, free speech, and equal treatment in higher education, countering what many see as divisive, ideologically driven DEI initiatives that prioritize group identity over individual achievement. It aligns with core American values like personal responsibility, limited government intervention, and adherence to constitutional principles.”

Editor’s Note: ACTA’s newest publication, Achieving Common Dignity, provides guidance for trustees on building a discrimination-free campus.

**Alan Charles Kors, Henry Charles Lea Professor Emeritus
of History, University of Pennsylvania**

“I’m not able to accept your kind invitation to share in such a wonderful event. Your organization has a birthday in a world still trying to respond rationally to the issues you’ve raised all these decades; I wish that I could be there. You are honoring superb individuals for all the right reasons.”

**J. Walter Sterling, President
St. John’s College—Santa Fe**

“What a great day! From the Pledge of Allegiance to the closing remarks at the gala, I took great inspiration from the day. It was especially meaningful for me to be present to honor and visit with Pano—and to hear from and spend a little time with Bill McClay. But I had many good conversations with other folks and learned much across the whole day. Larry Summers’s talk was riveting and inspiring (and uncompromising). Thanks to you and the whole team there for including me.”

Editor’s Note: ACTA celebrated its 30th anniversary on October 24. Read about the events in this issue.

**Phoebe Sengers, Professor of Information Science
Cornell University**

“I have gotten a lot of positive feedback about the debate, and I enjoyed it immensely myself. The FAU committee is determined to have more events like this, now that we’ve seen for ourselves how it can go. Your support all along the way is what made this possible—we really appreciate it.”

Editor’s Note: ACTA’s College Debates and Discourse team, in partnership with BridgeUSA, held a debate on November 4 at Cornell University entitled, “Does Artificial Intelligence Do More Harm than Good in Education?” The event was sponsored by Cornell’s Committee on the Future of the American University.

Virginia Universities Can Restore Free Speech

In September, ACTA’s Campus Freedom Initiative™ (CFI) released its second state report card, which assesses policies and practices related to free expression at six universities in Virginia—the University of Virginia (UVA), William & Mary (W&M), Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia Tech, James Madison University, and George Mason University. The report card evaluates each school against the Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression™, ACTA’s 20-point action plan for restoring free speech and open inquiry on campus.

To inform our assessment of Virginia’s universities, ACTA partnered with College Pulse to survey over 2,300 students and recent alumni from the six schools. Our survey uncovered pervasive self-censorship, extensive intellectual intolerance, and a lack of diversity of thought at each institution. Nearly 40% of all Virginia students surveyed believe it is always or sometimes acceptable to shout down a campus speaker, and only 19% say their campus is very welcoming of people with unpopular political opinions. A shocking 67% of UVA students believe professors should be reported to the administration for making comments students find offensive, with similar percentages believing the same at the other five schools. At all six schools, a significantly higher percentage of students say they are often exposed to liberal or progressive



(continued on 3)

ACTA's National Commission Meets at George Washington's Mount Vernon

On October 3, ACTA's National Commission on American History and Civic Education convened for a summit at Mount Vernon. ACTA assembled the 24-member commission to form solutions to the civic literacy crisis plaguing America's college campuses. Our commissioners include professors of history and politics, former university presidents, and distinguished civic leaders.

The National Commission has a simple yet ambitious goal—for all colleges and universities to require their students to take a comprehensive,

rigorous course in American history and government. This signature course will guide students through our nation's great documents, works, moments, and themes, incorporating best practices in capturing student attention and interest.

The need for such an effort is clear. ACTA's recent survey, *Forgotten Fundamentals*, found that 52% of undergraduates cannot identify Mount Vernon as George Washington's home. Other ACTA surveys have found that only 37% can name the current chief justice of the Supreme Court, and a majority of students are unable, on

a multiple-choice survey, to identify the term lengths of U.S. senators and representatives. These knowledge gaps are no surprise, given that only 19% of colleges and universities require students to study American history or government.

The Founders understood that the experiment in self-governance requires an informed and engaged citizenry. If today's college students—our future leaders in business, education, and politics—are not educated in America's story, our nation's future is in grave jeopardy.

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Virginia Universities, continued from 2

views in course discussions and assignments, as compared to conservative views.

Our Virginia Report Card provides recommendations for restoring the free exchange of ideas tailored to each school. For example, ACTA recommends that William & Mary—which ranks first in our evaluation and receives credit for 13 Gold Standard measures—adopt the Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression and an official policy on institutional neutrality, while also making intellectual diversity a stated goal in faculty hiring, evaluation, and promotion. These actions would help create a freer campus climate for W&M students, 44% of whom believe their campus is unwelcoming to those who hold heterodox, unpopular opinions.

“Virginia’s universities have begun to improve their policies related to free expression in recent years,” said Steven McGuire, ACTA’s Paul & Karen Levy Fellow in Campus Freedom. “But our survey shows that far too many students self-censor, and too many are willing to stop others from sharing their views. Leaders at these universities must embrace free speech and intellectual diversity. They can begin by looking at where they fail to meet ACTA’s Gold Standard.”

Stay tuned as ACTA releases report cards on additional states in the coming year. These assessments are a key part of our mission to ensure that every institution in the country meets the Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression™. ●

Effective TRUSTEESHIP

University of Michigan Board Wins Martin Prize

As part of our 30th Anniversary Celebration, ACTA honored Sarah Hubbard and her seven colleagues on the University of Michigan (U-M) Board of Regents with the Jerry L. Martin Prize for Excellence in College Trusteeship. Regent Hubbard, who served as chair of the board from July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024, accepted the prize on behalf of the entire board at a ceremony on October 23, 2025, in Washington, DC.

In October 2023, the beginning of the war in Israel set off major protests at U-M, including a tent encampment, demands for divestment, and vandalism. In response, the U-M Board of Regents championed policy changes and approaches to restore order on campus while upholding free speech for all. The board updated its policies affecting student rights to ensure those who engage in problematic conduct on campus are held accountable in a timely manner.

Campus activists targeted Regent Hubbard and several of her colleagues, protesting in front of their homes and offices. In May 2024, activists placed body bags smeared with fake blood on Regent Hubbard's lawn, drumming and chanting over a bull horn in the early morning hours. Rather than decry the protesters' vandalism and trespassing, the U-M Faculty Senate sided with them, voting to censure the board.

Despite this intimidation, the board has stood firm and continues to implement reforms. The university directed faculty to discontinue the use of diversity statements in hiring and



University of Michigan Regent Sarah Hubbard accepts the Jerry L. Martin Prize.

promotion, ended its DEI programs, and significantly increased scholarships and aid for students with financial need. It has also committed \$50 million to launch an independent center dedicated to diversity of thought and civil discourse.

ACTA President Michael Poliakoff stated, "Trustees have not only the power but the responsibility to protect and restore order, reason, and the free exchange of ideas without intimidation at their institutions. Regent Hubbard and the U-M board serve as a model for how capable governing boards can lead universities to a better place." ●

ACTA Publishes Guide on Disbanding DEI Programs, *continued from 1*

The guide explains the requirements of new laws regulating DEI programs and pinpoints the ways existing programs have threatened institutional missions. DEI, the guide explains, "when it acts as an apparatus to silence and censure faculty or students selectively based on viewpoint," threatens the foundational principle of free expression, and it is the duty of trustees to intervene. ACTA recommends that governing boards adopt the Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression and the Kalven Report on institutional neutrality. These two policies safeguard the institution's educational mission by enabling the unfettered exchange of ideas.

Trustees must also conduct a thorough inventory of diversity programs to ensure they do not undermine the core values of the institution. Close review is critical, as many DEI initiatives have creatively rebranded in response to recent government directives. If the university currently operates a bias response team, it should be immediately disbanded. Governing boards should also prohibit the use of diversity statements as a condition of employment or promotion and consider re-envisioning diversity and inclusion goals within a framework of merit, fairness, and equality.

Trustees will face pushback as they evaluate DEI programs, and the guide offers advice for navigating this challenge. But it is essential that they remain vigilant to ensure their institution can continue to pursue truth, foster knowledge, and prepare students for positive participation in our pluralistic democracy. ●

Contact ACTA for a copy of the guide today or scan the QR code for a digital copy:





Salmon P. Chase Center Leads Civic Education Revival

As America's 250th birthday approaches, ACTA has launched several initiatives to counter our nation's civic literacy crisis. Working with lawmakers and education leaders, we advocate for the establishment of academic institutes that are dedicated to the study of civic education. One of these institutes, the Salmon P. Chase Center for Civics, Culture, and Society, was established in 2023 by the Ohio legislature at The Ohio State University (OSU), along with centers at four other public universities in the state. ACTA praises Ohio Senators Jerry Cirino and Rob McColley for bringing the enabling legislation to fruition.

In a conversation with President Poliakoff, **Distinguished Professor of Law Lee Strang**, the inaugural director of the Chase Center, discussed its mission to expose students to a wide range of viewpoints, while building a shared understanding of America's history, ideals, and significance. The center, which has independent hiring authority, has brought in faculty from multiple disciplines, including law, history, and sociology, in order to represent "all the bodies of knowledge that [are] . . . relevant to young people becoming great Buckeyes and great American citizens." Almost 100 students

have signed up to become members of the Chase Society Scholars program, which offers lectures by outside speakers and small reading groups led by Chase Center faculty. The center's introductory course, "American Civic Tradition: Creeds, Conflict, and Cooperation," evaluates the origins of the claims made in the Declaration of Independence and how those claims have been received or rejected at different points in American history.

The Chase Center and Ohio's four other civic institutes are collaborating to educate not only undergraduates for informed participation in our democracy, but also graduate students and all Ohioans. Like the civic institute at the University of Toledo, the Chase Center will soon begin a program for K–12 instructors, focused on effective teaching of the American story. The center will provide model curricula, texts, and video presentations that teachers can use in their classrooms. The center will also conduct some of the first empirical research on the efficacy of different models of K–12 education.

It is disturbing that in today's higher education culture, any program dedicated to studying America's Founding principles faces automatic scrutiny. Professor Strang remarked that while there will be a

portion of the OSU community that may never be won over, "by and large, when I share the mission of citizenship education . . . people say, yes, that's a great mission. They see a need for it, too. They see that we have young people who have never read the Constitution . . . and they have a hard time talking to each other." He continued, "Americans are siloed in so many ways. We silo where we live, who our friends are, whom we marry, and so I think people of all different backgrounds see that there are real challenges facing the United States, especially in the formation of young people."

Salmon P. Chase, the namesake of the center, lived "American civic life to the fullest" as a U.S. senator, chief justice of the Supreme Court, opponent of slavery, and founder of the Republican Party. Without a strong understanding and appreciation of America's Founding ideals as defined in the Declaration of Independence and Constitution, Senator Chase would certainly not have accomplished nearly as much. ACTA's initiatives focus on equipping every college student with the same understanding, so they can lead meaningful lives and contribute to the American tradition of liberty, equality, and justice for all. ●

National Commission, *continued from 3*

A major solution to this crisis is for colleges and universities to require all students to take a foundational course on American history and government.

In a series of confidential sessions at the October 3 summit, our commissioners discussed the essential texts, events, and ideas that such a course should cover. They also discussed strategies for influencing college leaders and policymakers to implement a new American history requirement at the country's colleges and universities.

ACTA will share the commission's work with the public in 2026, before the country's 250th anniversary on July 4. This will include a blueprint for reform detailing the commission's solutions as well as an anthology titled, *What Every Student Should Know about American History and Government*, to be published by the University of Tennessee Press.

Together, these initiatives will be ACTA's birthday gift to the nation, preparing university trustees and lawmakers to fulfill their responsibility to educate the rising generation for informed and engaged citizenship. ●

We Hold These Truths... America at 250 (cont'd)



Anne D. Neal, Richard Brookhiser, Douglas Bradburn, Louise Mirrer, and Wilfred McClay discuss the importance of the study of American history and civic education at colleges and universities.

be familiar with, lest they lose their ability to be virtuous citizens. Mr. Brookhiser reminded us that many Americans, both famous and simple farmers, slaves and immigrants, died to give us our blueprint for freedom.

Should we judge those who came before us by the standards of our own time? We must recognize, Professor McClay remarked, that there is a process of moral development throughout history. In the eighteenth century, the idea of slavery as an evil institution was just starting to take root, but it is humbling to realize that an estimated 50 million people are still enslaved. Historians should act as “recording angels” instead of “hanging judges,” giving

students a window into human variety, the beautiful and the ugly. Dr. Bradburn added that when he asks students who visit Mount Vernon what they believe, they often list ideals that came out of the Founding itself, like representation and justice for all.

Effective collegiate history courses should paint a picture of the American story. Dr. Mirrer shared that for much of our past, college curricula focused on antiquity and the classics. When we came to recognize that our own history is worth preserving, the discipline quickly became saturated with a sense that all history is equal, giving rise to a focus on facts and events instead of historical evolution.

Universities can teach the type of history that “leaves an indelible imprint” by partnering with institutions like New York Historical and Mount Vernon that make history come alive through the study of primary texts and connect us as people to our past in its complexity.

Professor McClay agreed, saying that restoring civic literacy is all about restoring a sense of the American story. Many of the greatest Americans, like Abraham Lincoln, had little formal education and came from disadvantaged backgrounds, yet became powerful leaders because of their deep sense of American history. “When you know the story,” Professor McClay said, “the facts find a place.” ●

Pano Kanelos Honored as Hero of Intellectual Freedom



Dr. Kanelos delivers remarks accepting the Hero of Intellectual Freedom award.

Jacob Howland, past provost of UATX, shared that Dr. Kanelos’s commitment to free inquiry is a means to restore the study of eternal questions in higher education. The rich liberal arts education that Dr. Kanelos promotes gives students the philosophical foundations to register what is eternal, develop “ultimate measures of truth,” and form communities united by the love of things held in common.

ACTA’s 30th Anniversary Celebration continued at Mount Vernon with the presentation of the Hero of Intellectual Freedom award to **Pano Kanelos**, co-founder and inaugural president of the University of Austin (UATX). Dr. Kanelos’s devotion to free expression has influenced many, most recently through his leadership of UATX, a new university committed to the free exchange of ideas and the fearless pursuit of truth.

Opening the ceremony, **Steven McGuire**, ACTA’s Paul & Karen Levy Fellow in Campus Freedom, quoted Dr. Kanelos’s vision to “move us back towards a center in higher education where we recommit to principles of freedom of inquiry, freedom of expression, and freedom of conscience.” In his tribute to our award winner,

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ACTA Statement on the Assassination of Charlie Kirk

Published on September 11, 2025, by ACTA President **Michael Poliakoff** and Paul & Karen Levy Fellow in Campus Freedom **Steven McGuire**

Charlie Kirk was at Utah Valley University yesterday to engage in political debate with students as he so often did. It was the beginning of what was supposed to be a 15-stop campus tour. Thousands of attendees, mostly young people, were there to see him. Though a petition had been circulating to prevent his talk, the university rightly stood by the event, citing its commitments to free expression and institutional neutrality. Security and police were present because Charlie's events often attracted protests and threatening behavior, but then something categorically different happened: Just as the event was beginning, Charlie was murdered.

We send our prayers and condolences to Charlie's wife, his young son and daughter, his friends, and his colleagues. This is a horrific tragedy that has left us all stunned.

Everyone should be able to express his or her views and engage in debate with others on a college campus without fear for personal safety. For years, we have heard people say that words are violence and that speech causes harm. The percentage of students who say it is acceptable to shout down a speaker or even use violence to stop someone from speaking is rising, not declining. People are demonized and excluded and silenced because of their social and political views. We have seen protests tip into vandalism and violence before. Now a man who was visiting a campus to participate in the free exchange of ideas has been assassinated.

What happened to Charlie is part of a rise in political violence in our country that transcends higher education. But we must recognize that rising intolerance and willingness to endorse violence as a response to speech on our campuses is part of the alarming trend. America's institutions of higher education must be part of the solution, not part of the problem. They can help by truly embracing free expression, openness to diversity of thought, and educating their students to engage in civil debate with one another—especially when they profoundly disagree. As Charlie once said, “when people stop talking, that's when violence happens.”

Discussion, dialogue, debate, and persuasion are the tools of civilization and human flourishing. The appalling crime and the tragic loss of Charlie present a dire warning that we must do better. Unless we do, our nation, our values, civilization itself will fail us. ●

Pano Kanelos, *continued from 6*

In his acceptance speech, Dr. Kanelos thanked ACTA for emboldening professors to defend free expression. Just as our legacy of democratic government is compromised if we forget history, Dr. Kanelos remarked, so is forgetfulness the enemy of intellectual freedom. He learned the great cost of telling the truth when getting to know those who fought against communism during the Cold War, including Czech student dissidents and scholar Roger Scruton, who aided underground universities in Central Europe by smuggling in banned books and teaching secret seminars. The totalitarian ideas that forced ordinary people to live dual lives and purged professors and priests from society

have infected American universities today. Rather than gulags and state censors, university censorship relies on bureaucrats and psychological suppression. This erosion of freedom comes not from the state, but from moral lassitude within the academy, from failing to remember the sacrifices of those who paid a price for defending truth.

UATX was established not in defiance, but with hope that professors and students can once again speak and think freely. “True education,” Dr. Kanelos commented, “is an act of remembrance.” In accepting the award, he commemorated those students and scholars who fought against totalitarianism and past ACTA Heroes who took risks to defy censorship. He remarked, “They remembered . . . that to compromise their own intellectual integrity was to compromise their very humanity.”

ACTA presented Dr. Kanelos with an 1873 portrait of John Stuart Mill from the *Illustrated London News* to honor his work to preserve intellectual freedom on behalf of students, professors, and the public. ●



Pano Kanelos, ACTA Board Chair Mark Ridenour, Michael Poliakoff, and Jacob Howland with an 1873 portrait of John Stuart Mill.

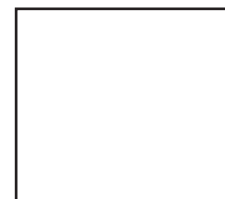
Contact ACTA for a copy of Dr. Kanelos's speech or scan the QR code for a digital version.





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INSIDE ACADEME

published by ACTA, Washington, DC

Publisher: Michael B. Poliakoff

Editor: Greta Wagley

Production & Design: Lauri Kempson

For the great religions of the West, this is the season of miracles. We draw inspiration from the miracles and heroic deeds of our past.

And as we acknowledge with gratitude the blessings we share in our great country, we also take up the task each day of building upon the miracles and heroism of the past in our own acts, great and small.

Michael Poliakoff, President & CEO

As the holidays approach, ACTA is grateful for the generosity of our donors that has fueled our work for 30 years. Together with courageous trustees, academic leaders, policymakers, and alumni who share our vision, we are ensuring that more students receive an intellectually rich, high-quality college education at an affordable price.

As you make your end-of-year giving plans, we hope that you will consider a gift of enduring importance to ACTA. With the stock market at record levels, it is an opportune time to gift appreciated stock and avoid capital gains tax before the year ends. **Transferring stock to ACTA is simple with instructions available on our website: GoACTA.org/support-acta/.**

Please accept ACTA's heartfelt gratitude and wishes for a joyful holiday season and prosperous new year. ❶



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