



*Promoting
Academic
Freedom and
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ACTA Publishes New Report on Foreign Language Requirements

In February, ACTA released *Ivory Tower of Babel: Rebuilding Language Learning in Higher Education for a More Secure and Competitive America*. The report features

meticulous research performed primarily by ACTA Academic Affairs Fellow Veronica Bryant, who earned her Ph.D. in Spanish Literature from Yale University, served as a Fulbright Fellow, and is a professional translator of Spanish, French, and Latin.

Ivory Tower of Babel makes the case for why colleges and universities must restore robust foreign language programs that have historically been a central part of a liberal arts core curriculum. Harvard University's earliest program of study from the seventeenth century required students to study Hebrew, Syriac, Aramaic, and ancient Greek, and all nine colonial

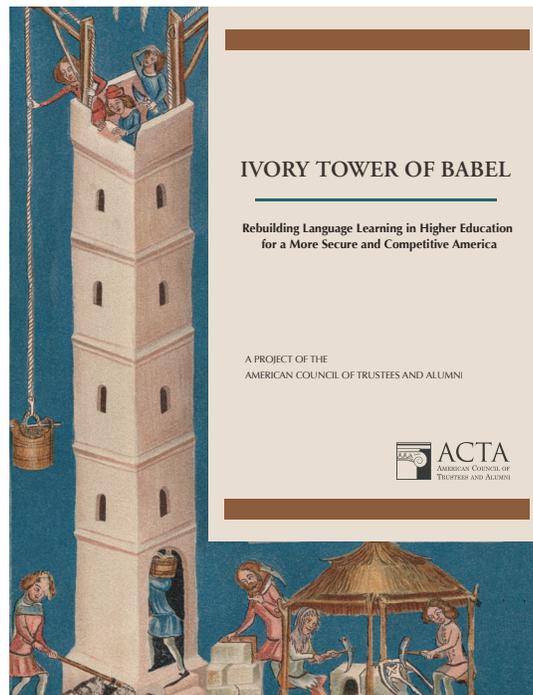
colleges had similar curricula. Founders including Benjamin Franklin and Benjamin Rush emphasized the importance of studying modern languages, such as French and

German.

Today, collegiate language programs are in jeopardy. As colleges prioritize broader course options and specialization in STEM fields, language enrollments have declined 59% over 51 years and dropped 17% from 2016 to 2021 alone. When colleges face financial trouble, language departments are among the first to be cut. For example, six out of seven universities in Ohio

that made academic cuts in 2024 downsized or eliminated their language programs. Only 11% of colleges and universities require foreign language study at the intermediate or higher level.

(continued on 2)



ACTA Publishes Hero of Intellectual Freedom Speech



ACTA has published the brilliant remarks given by our newest Hero of Intellectual Freedom, University of Austin founding president Dr. Pano Kanelos, at our 30th Anniversary Celebration in October 2025. His address, entitled "Memory, Forgetting, and the Freedom of the Intellect," discusses the indispensable values of courage, freedom, and remembrance in liberal arts education. 🗣️

Read or download a copy of the speech on GoACTA.org or scan the QR code for a digital copy:



Lauren Jones Kenny
Director, Orr Group
Washington, DC

“The forum was a delight and so full of meaningful moments . . . I truly look forward to the opportunity for more colleagues from Vanderbilt to bear witness to the great conversations you are facilitating through the Levy Forum.”

Jonathan J. Sanford
President and Professor of Philosophy
University of Dallas

“Each year since 2009, the University of Dallas (UD) has received an A, and since they have introduced it, an A+ ranking in the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) What Will They Learn?—the gold standard for evaluating general education curricula across U.S. higher ed. . . . this distinction reaffirms our mission: to educate the whole person in the Western intellectual tradition, equipping graduates not just for success, but for wisdom and virtue in service to the common good.”

Note: This quote was taken from a public post made by President Sanford on his LinkedIn account in December 2025.

Phillip J. Ardoin
Professor of Political Science
Appalachian State University, North Carolina

“CD&D has genuinely made a difference at AppState, demonstrating to our students that respectful dialogue is not

only possible but essential in navigating the divisiveness facing our nation today.”

Brian MacHarg
Director of Academic Civic Engagement
Appalachian State University

“Initially, I was inclined to talk about the spirited debates that CD&D has facilitated in my classroom, the kind that help normally quiet students to find their voice. I thought also about mentioning the campus wide debates and conversations and how they have helped disparate groups such as student government and student leaders to cooperate together and for students from a wide variety of backgrounds to hammer out their ideas. I could mention how I’ve watched students process ideas and, even as they are in the act of speaking, change their minds and wrestle with important ideas out loud. . . . Instead, though, I really would prefer to offer gratitude for how you and Braver Angels [CD&D] have mentored the designated student leaders with gentle direction.”

Note: Professors Ardoin and MacHarg serve as faculty fellows in the Barnes Family Foundation Campus Debates and Discourse Program for North Carolina. With the generous support of the Barnes Family Foundation, ACTA and Braver Angels, together with 42 student and faculty fellows, have facilitated 130 debates and workshops at 11 institutions throughout North Carolina as part of our College Debates & Discourse Alliance.

ACTA Publishes New Report on Foreign Language Requirements, *continued from 1*

No online platform or translating service can provide the proficiency, cultural knowledge, or resulting professional and cognitive benefits developed by studying foreign language at the college level. Multilingual employees are offered 19% more compensation than monolinguals, and foreign language acquisition contributes to a wide range of skills, including multi-tasking, logical decision-making, test performance, and creative thinking. Learning another language gives students deeper understanding of other peoples and cultures and better ability to communicate with them, an essential skill in our multicultural society.

ACTA’s report shows how college and university trustees can offer high-quality language programs while staying within budget. We recommend that institutions require at least intermediate-level language instruction in general education programs; narrow the number of course options in general education curricula rather than eliminate core foreign language programs; and explore opportunities to form consortia and share courses with nearby institutions using ACTA’s Map of Foreign Language Program Graduates, available online. ●



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College Leaders Must Act to End Antisemitism on Campus

Colleges and universities overall have shown little progress in addressing the dangerous and unacceptable increase in antisemitic harassment on campus. A study by Hillel International reported 2,334 antisemitic incidents at universities during the 2024–2025 academic year, the highest number recorded since the organization began tracking incidents in 2019. In 2023–2024, there were 1,853 incidents, up from just 289 in 2022–2023. The sharp jump coincides with the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023. Sixteen commencement ceremonies were also disrupted by pro-Palestine demonstrators in 2024–2025.

The Department of Justice has opened civil rights investigations into several universities to determine whether these schools violated federal law by failing to protect Jewish students from discrimination. One such investigation targets the University of Nevada–Las Vegas. In 2024, an astronomy lecture

by an Israeli professor was disrupted by pro-Palestine students, who forced the event to end after just 15 minutes. The protesters were not removed by campus police, nor did they face discipline.

Addressing antisemitism should not be left to the federal government. College and university leaders must take drastic action to protect students from harassment and prevent protests that disrupt academic programming and violate the free speech rights of invited speakers. This is a foundational responsibility of college governing boards. It is intolerable that students fear for their safety walking across campus, nor should protesters be allowed to silence campus discourse or obstruct opportunities to learn.

Demonstrators are likely to keep returning to campus, louder and more determined than ever, as long as the crisis in the Middle East continues. ACTA calls on trustees to respond firmly to protests and occupations while

safeguarding free expression. In 2024, we issued two guides for trustees, entitled *An Equal Space for All: A Trustee Guide to Preventing Encampments and Occupations on Campus* and *Danger in Divestment: The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions Movement. What College Trustees Need to Know*.

ACTA writes in *An Equal Space for All*, “Peaceable assembly and freedom of speech are core values of our nation, and they are absolutely essential in higher education. Time, manner, and place restrictions to ensure campus order are also equally important, and they are protected by precedents in case law. Implementing such restrictions serves free inquiry, civil discourse, and academic excellence by ensuring that everyone has a right to learn, participate in campus activities, and use campus spaces.”

Download both guides on GoACTA.org. ●

ACTA’s “Informed Trustee Act” Introduced in South Carolina Legislature

In January, South Carolina Representative Timothy A. “Tim” McGinnis introduced House Bill 4737. If signed into law, the bill would require new trustees at public institutions to undergo comprehensive orientation and training programs, ensuring that they are prepared to serve as informed, engaged fiduciaries. Most new board members have limited experience with the unique requirements of academic institutions and shared governance. It is all too easy to find themselves adrift in a sea of slide decks, industry jargon, and rushed presentations seeking a rubber stamp of approval instead of board input and oversight. The new bill provides the support needed to ensure that board members have the skills to engage meaningfully with faculty and administrative leadership and serve as effective stewards of their institutions’ mission.

House Bill 4737 is based on ACTA’s “Informed Trustee Act” model policy, which we encourage state legislatures to adopt. Since 2019, similar legislation has passed in Virginia, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Ohio. In December 2023, a member of the Coastal Carolina University (CCU) Board of Trustees reached out to ACTA to request information on training for new board members. In response, ACTA provided a copy of the Informed Trustee Act, and CCU’s board officially adopted the measure in February 2024.

ACTA recently learned that it was because of CCU’s adoption of this policy that Representative McGinnis became interested in a legislative mandate to support board training. We were honored to provide testimony in support of House Bill 4737 when it passed unanimously out of the Higher Education Subcommittee of the House Education and Public Works Committee on January 29, and we look forward to its continued progress. ●



ACTA Defends Trustees' Rights in National Private Equity Deal



On November 14, ACTA hosted a webinar exclusively for trustees of the 18 universities in the **Big Ten Conference** to examine a proposed \$2.4 billion-dollar private equity deal between the Conference and UC Investments. Our webinar panelists included five governing board members from Big Ten schools: **Charles T. (Tom) McMillen**, member of the University System of Maryland Board of Regents; **Sarah Hubbard**, member of the University of Michigan Board of Regents; **Jay Paterno**, member of the Pennsylvania State University Board of Trustees; **Jeffrey Smulyan**, member of the University of Southern California Board of Trustees; and **James Farnsworth**, member of the University of Minnesota Board of Regents.

Speaking as individuals, not as representatives of their respective boards, our panelists expressed serious concerns about lack of transparency in the process. They explained that trustees did not receive sufficient information about the finances and governance structure of the proposed deal, compromising their ability to exercise proper stewardship.

In an open letter to the governing board members of Big 10 institutions, ACTA President Michael Poliakoff

wrote, “A university’s board exists to serve as the ultimate guardian of its mission, integrity, and assets. That stewardship includes oversight and final authority over all material university decisions and resources, including those related to intercollegiate athletics. Effectively selling or transferring an athletic department’s most valuable rights—its media, branding, or commercial assets—is unquestionably a material institutional decision requiring board oversight.”

ACTA urged each Big 10 governing board to adopt a clear resolution requiring the board to be fully briefed on the proposed transaction—and future transactions—with all relevant documents, analyses, and legal opinions. The resolution should also ensure that the board has formally authorized the president or chancellor to vote on the proposed transaction on behalf of the institution.

We are pleased to report that, following these efforts, UC Investments issued a statement committing to address the concerns expressed by our webinar panelists and others. The private equity firm also announced it would extend the deal’s timeline, allowing boards to exercise their due diligence. ●

“ SPEAKING UP ”

ACTA Expert Speaks at Congressional Roundtable

On December 12, Steven McGuire, ACTA's Paul & Karen Levy Fellow in Campus Freedom, participated in the annual **Campus Free Speech Roundtable**. ACTA has now been invited to offer our counsel to lawmakers at this event for five years running. The roundtable was hosted by **Congressman Greg Murphy** and included **Congressman Burgess Owens**, **Congressman Bob Onder**, and **Congressman Randy Fine**.

This year's roundtable focused on how lawmakers can hold institutions accountable for failing to safeguard First Amendment rights. Dr. McGuire discussed ACTA's Campus Freedom Initiative™, which assesses the state of

free expression at universities nationwide and urges leaders to implement policy changes to reverse campus censorship, intellectual intolerance, and biased hiring practices.

The congressmen also queried roundtable participants about university DEI initiatives and counter-initiatives. In ACTA's recently published trustee guide, entitled *Achieving Common Dignity*, we call on college governing boards to prohibit the use of diversity statements as a condition of employment or promotion and re-envision DEI goals within a framework of merit, fairness, and equality.

Congressman Murphy stated, "Universities must be held accountable

for . . . endorsing egregious DEI programs that elevate individuals based on immutable characteristics over merit. Congress has an important oversight role in protecting the First Amendment rights of students at public institutions. I am encouraged by the progress we have made in bringing free speech protections on college campuses back towards equilibrium and the diverse coalition that is committed to supporting these efforts."

ACTA is grateful to receive recognition for our work to promote free expression on campus. We will continue to provide policymakers with best practices as they seek to restore the free, fearless pursuit of truth in higher education. ●

Distinguished Education Leaders Deliver Lectures at Levy Forum



Jason Riley and Roland Fryer engage in a discussion with President Michael Poliakoff on race in America.

On December 4, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni celebrated the start of the 2025–2026 season of the Levy Forum for Open Discourse, hosted in partnership with Paul and Karen Levy and the Palm Beach Synagogue. Now in its fourth year, the Levy Forum features distinguished scholars and public intellectuals whose insightful lectures explore the foundations of the freedoms we enjoy today and the challenges that lie ahead both for higher education and the nation.

Jason Riley, senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute and columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*, and **Roland Fryer**, economist and Harvard University professor, kicked off the series with a lecture titled, "America, Race, and Building a More Perfect Union." Discussing the

difference between affirmative action and policies that promote meritocracy, Professor Fryer shared, "What I thought affirmative action could be was actually true meritocracy. And meritocracy doesn't mean my four-year-old is smarter than your four-year-old, and I'm rich and you're poor. Meritocracy is something like: What is the true latent ability in this person? If I give them an opportunity, what's the derivative look like? Are they going to have a sixth or seventh gear if I give them a chance?"

On January 7, the Levy Forum welcomed Hillsdale College President **Larry Arnn** and *Wall Street Journal* columnist **Walter Russell Mead** for a fascinating discussion on education and politics. And on January 27, we hosted Jewish scholar and leader **Rabbi Meir Soloveichik** and Museum of the Bible President and CEO **Carlos Campo** for a conversation entitled, "Cherishing and Strengthening America's Heritage of Religious Freedom," moderated by Tikvah Fund Executive Director Eric Cohen.

If you will be in the Palm Beach area this spring, please register on GoACTA.org to attend our next events. We will enjoy lectures by civil rights leader Robert Woodson on February 24 and historian Allen Guelzo on March 19. ●



New College Rankings System Brings Much-needed Attention to Academic Quality

The Manhattan Institute recently released a new college rankings system that marks a fresh approach to evaluating higher education in the United States. The rankings assess 100 top colleges and universities on 68 factors, combining statistics from government sources with metrics from other ranking systems, including ACTA's **What Will They Learn?**® (WWTL) initiative. Rather than rewarding schools based on reputation or endowment size, the Manhattan Institute assesses whether they encourage free inquiry and viewpoint diversity, offer a rigorous curriculum, prioritize academic excellence over political activism, and give graduates a good return on their investment.

ACTA is pleased that the Manhattan Institute's system incorporates our WWTL ratings, which evaluate colleges on the strength of their core curricula, shining a light on institutions that are committed to the rigorous requirements that cultivate a broad range of knowledge and practical skills. The rankings also indicate which institutions house an **ACTA Oasis of Excellence** or **Hidden Gem**, academic centers and programs that foster free inquiry, promote civic literacy, and expose students to a diverse array of disciplines and perspectives.

The Manhattan Institute scores institutions on whether they require students to study U.S. history or government. ACTA's **What Will They Learn?**® reveals that fewer than one in five four-year institutions require students to take such a course. By including this metric, the Manhattan Institute's new rankings bring much-needed attention to the civic knowledge crisis in our country and a key solution for fixing it.

ACTA encourages trustees and alumni who care deeply about their alma maters to view the rankings with the utmost seriousness. We also hope that state legislators will consider the information the Manhattan Institute provides in their decisions about investments of public money in state institutions.

Lastly, we urge students and families seeking a rigorous education worth their hard-earned tuition dollars to examine the new rankings system and visit WhatWillTheyLearn.com. As Manhattan Institute Senior Fellow John Sailer and Professor Kevin Wallsten write, "Meaningful change in higher education will happen only when prospective students begin holding colleges and universities accountable through informed decision-making and 'voting with their feet.'" ●

ACTA's Hidden Gems Help Students Thrive

Students who attend institutions that do not offer a robust core curriculum can receive a high-quality liberal arts education by participating in one of ACTA's Hidden Gems: academic programs, majors, and minors that foster free inquiry, promote civic literacy, and expose students to a diverse array of disciplines.

We recently recognized six new programs as Hidden Gems, bringing the total to 26 programs across the nation. These include the Philosophy, Politics, and Economics program at Duke University; the Honors College at Regent University; the Philosophy, Politics, and Economics program at Rhodes College; the Honors College at Baylor University; the Liberal Arts major at Concordia University–Irvine; and the Core Texts and Enduring Questions minor at Assumption University.

Each program prioritizes deep learning in close-knit communities, exposing students to timeless authors and ideas while also preparing them for successful careers. Douglas Henry, dean of Baylor's Honors College, commented, "At the heart of [the college] is our spirited commitment to liberal arts education that integrates scholarship and teaching, faith and learning, and academic and student life. This commitment itself flows out of a capacious vision of loving truth, kindling faith, and cultivating virtue in friendship, study, and service to Christ and neighbor."

ACTA Academic Affairs Fellow Veronica Bryant stated, "So many colleges claim to offer an interdisciplinary education, but it is rare to find an academic program that truly provides students with a deep, cohesive formation across the liberal arts. ACTA's Hidden Gems initiative profiles outstanding liberal arts programs that help students thrive." ●

Scan the QR codes below to learn more about ACTA's programs promoting the liberal arts.



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H E A R D C A M P U S O N

Harvard President Acknowledges Faculty Bias

In a recent appearance on the Identity/Crisis Podcast produced by the Shalom Hartman Institute, Harvard University President Alan Garber spoke candidly about the role of faculty activism in the campus free speech crisis. He commented, “If a professor in a classroom says, this is what I believe about this issue, how many students . . . would actually be willing to go toe-to-toe against a professor who’s expressed a firm view about a controversial issue?”

Many students have experienced repercussions for expressing opinions that deviate from campus orthodoxies, from lower grades to social ostracism to administrative discipline. Harvard and other Ivy Leagues are particularly notorious offenders. The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression’s 2026 Free Speech Rankings place Harvard at 245 out of 257 schools when it comes to protecting free speech.

As President Garber shared, faculty play no small role in this state of affairs. For every professor silenced or fired for

expressing controversial views, and there have been several at Harvard, there are many who openly push their personal opinions in the classroom, leading students to fall in line or self-censor. It is encouraging to see the president of a prestigious institution recognize that faculty activism has chilled open inquiry. ACTA hopes Harvard’s leaders will take action by training professors and administrators on the importance of safeguarding and fostering free expression and intellectual diversity on campus.

DEA Educates College Students in Ohio and Michigan

Last fall, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) initiated a campaign to prevent substance abuse at colleges and universities across Michigan and Ohio. There has been a recent drop in drug overdose deaths nationwide, but illegal drug use remains highest among young adults. A 2023 report by the Substance Abuse Mental Health and Services Administration found that 39% of Americans ages 18 to 25 have used illegal drugs over the past year.

The DEA is traveling to universities in both states to educate students and administrators about how easy it is to procure dangerous drugs on college campuses. DEA Assistant Special Agent Derek Ross warned, “All [students] need is a smartphone to get on and find a drug network that mass produces counterfeit pills that are disguised to look like . . . Adderall, Ritalin, or even Percocet or Vicodin, and it’s really either a fentanyl pill or a methamphetamine pill.”

The government’s education efforts are one part of the battle to combat college student substance use. Collaboration between administrators, coaches, residence life advisers, health professionals, parents, local bar owners, and others is essential in the effort to improve campus safety and ensure students take full advantage of their education. ●

Scan the QR code to read ACTA’s guide on campus substance use prevention, *Addressing College Drinking and Drug Use*.



Restore Higher Education and Lower Your Taxes

For generations, American higher education was the envy of the world. The last several decades, however, have seen erosion of academic standards, soaring tuition, and political intolerance. It is no wonder that many Americans no longer trust that universities serve the public good.

Now in its 31st year, ACTA continues its work to combat these damaging trends and advance academic excellence, academic freedom, and accountability at our colleges and universities. A strong higher education system is key to ensuring a free and prosperous future for America’s next 250 years.

ACTA receives no government funding and depends on the generosity of people like you who are dedicated to the promise of higher education. If you are considering giving to ACTA, one tax-advantaged option is designating ACTA as the beneficiary of your IRA assets. Public charities like ACTA do not pay income tax on IRA income, which means every penny of the donation supports your charitable goals. In 2026, an individual over age 70½ is permitted to make a direct transfer of up to \$111,000 from his or her IRA custodian to a qualified charity. The transfer is not included in taxable income. If the IRA owner is over age 73, the distribution may fulfill part or all of the required minimum distribution (RMD).

Together, we can restore a high-quality, affordable higher education system, for the sake of our children and grandchildren. We are most grateful for your partnership. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact Nancy Phillips at nphillips@GoACTA.org or (804) 519-8537. ●



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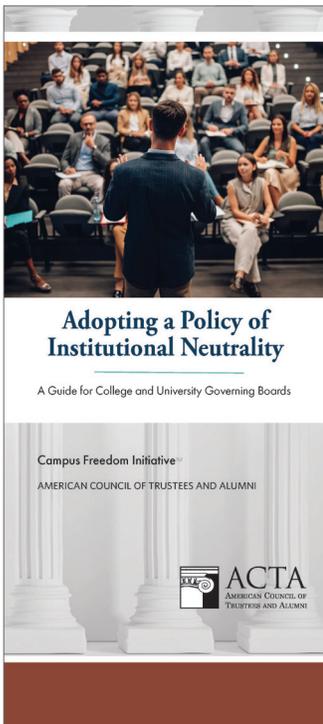
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Adopting Institutional Neutrality: A How-to Guide for Trustees



ACTA has released a new brochure for college and university governing boards on the basics of adopting a policy of institutional neutrality, available for download on GoACTA.org.

Such a policy should:

- State that institutional leaders . . . will not take official positions on behalf of the institution or their units within it.
- Make clear that the policy also protects university investments from politicization.
- Allow exceptions for matters that directly and significantly impact or threaten the mission or operations of the institution.
- Accommodate leadership's duty to express empathy and consolation when tragedy occurs.
- Explain how and why it supports academic freedom and the mission of the institution.
- Outline a process for determining when an institution will or will not make a statement.

Trustees can visit GoACTA.org/institutional-neutrality for additional information, including a list of schools that have adopted the policy, sample resolutions, and key arguments for institutional neutrality as well as responses to common misconceptions. ●