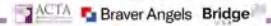


ELEVATING THE DIALOGUE
ACTA in the News 2025

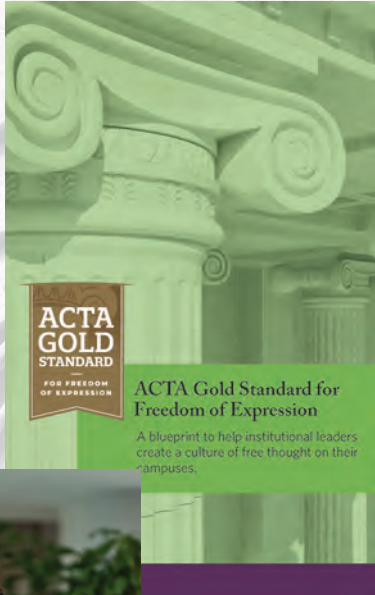


COLLEGE DEBATES AND DISCOURSE ALLIANCE



No U.S. History?

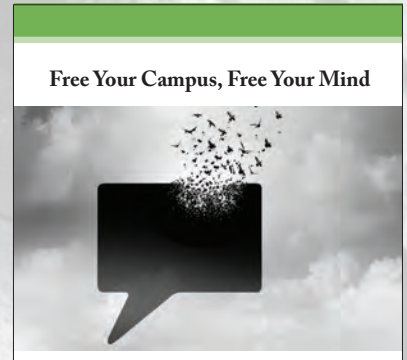
How College History Departments Leave the United States out of the Map



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 Your Campus, Free Your Mind

CAMPUS FREEDOM TOOLKIT

AMERICAN COUNCIL OF TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI
 Campus Freedom Initiative



Defending FREE EXPRESSION and INTELLECTUAL DIVERSITY

What Trustees Need to Know

a webinar from the American Council of Trustees and Alumni
 August 9, 2023 2:00 p.m. EDT



BOARD Services

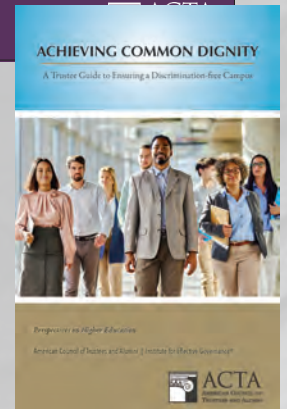
for College and University Trustees



An EQUAL SPACE for ALL

A Trustee Guide to Preventing Encampments and Occupations on Campus

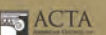
AMERICAN COUNCIL OF TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI
 Institute for Educative Governance



ACHIEVING COMMON DIGNITY

A Trustee Guide to Ensuring a Discrimination-free Campus

Progressives in Higher Education
 American Council of Trustees and Alumni | Institute for the Study of the University



EDUCATING FOR A MORE PERFECT UNION

Fighting to Fulfill the Promise of Higher Education

2025



ACTA
 AMERICAN COUNCIL OF TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI

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ACTA
AMERICAN COUNCIL OF
TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI

EDUCATING FOR A MORE PERFECT UNION

Fighting to Fulfill the Promise of Higher Education

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

“ I think back 30 years when we started, when everyone thought everything was fine. That atmosphere has changed. People are now in ACTA’s camp. There are issues and challenges in higher education, and there is one incredible organization out there that is working on them, really, almost by itself, to deal with these issues of academic freedom, academic excellence, and accountability, and it’s the American Council of Trustees and Alumni. So happy birthday ACTA.

—Anne D. Neal, Regent, Former President, ACTA



Promoting **ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE**,
ACADEMIC FREEDOM, and **ACCOUNTABILITY**
at America's colleges and universities.

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) is an independent, nonprofit organization committed to academic excellence, academic freedom, and accountability at America's colleges and universities. Founded in 1995, ACTA works with alumni, donors, trustees, and education leaders across the country to support the study of the liberal arts, uphold high academic standards, safeguard the free exchange of ideas on campus, and ensure that the next generation receives an intellectually rich, high-quality education at an affordable price.

Our network consists of alumni and trustees from over **1,300** colleges and universities, including over **23,000** current board members. Our quarterly newsletter, *Inside Academe*, reaches over **15,000** readers.

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ACTA's Three A's

Academic Freedom

Help institutions preserve and foster a campus culture that champions intellectual diversity, open inquiry, and the free expression of ideas.

Academic Excellence

Work with colleges and universities to promote high academic standards and rigorous liberal arts curricula that prepare students for the challenges of career and informed citizenship.

Accountability

Empower trustees and higher education leaders to advance accountability at colleges and universities through increased engagement on issues of quality and cost.



FROM THE PRESIDENT

My association with ACTA began at its birth in 1995. Anne Neal and Jerry Martin, the mentors I had so admired during our time together at the National Endowment for the Humanities, kept me apprised of their bold plans. As I started my new career track in academic administration, they were my go-to for yet deeper guidance and insight. Like so many others in the early years of this century, I learned from ACTA what no other higher education agency could tell me.

When Anne Neal called me in 2010 and asked, “Isn’t it time you just come and work at ACTA?”, I knew she was, as always, entirely right.

I have watched with excitement and joy as hard work and unwillingness ever, ever to give up led the ACTA team from one victory to another.

ACTA has labored to ensure that a solid, foundational course in American history and government is required of all undergraduates at every college and university in the nation. The miracle is coming true. As of this year, 51,000 freshmen in the Ohio public university system will have this crucial preparation for citizenship; they join 88,000 freshmen in South Carolina. More such breakthroughs are on the way. ACTA’s work to establish independent institutes, with their own hiring authority, for the study of the American story and the advancement of intellectual diversity was not easy. But the University of North Carolina (UNC)–Chapel Hill, the University of Tennessee, Ohio State University, the University of Iowa, and others bear witness to the success of ACTA’s efforts. This is our gift to the nation in its 250th year.

When ACTA warned about the intrusiveness of the flawed and broken system of accreditation, many ignored this seemingly technical detail. That does not happen anymore. After we protected religious freedom from the largest accrediting agency and later stood up to another accreditor’s attempts to stop the creation of UNC–Chapel Hill’s School of Civic Life and Leadership, we gained the attention of the nation and remain the go-to for strategies to overhaul the system of quality control.

Our Campus Freedom Initiative™ has won victory after victory in grading schools on their demonstrated commitment to freedom of expression. There is now a “race to the top” as institutions work to achieve a better rating.

Eight years ago, at a meeting in ACTA’s conference room, the College Debates and Discourse Alliance was born. At this moment, we have engaged more than 25,000 students in over 600 parliamentary style debates and dialogues on the most controversial topics of our times. Our skilled, carefully trained moderators have yet to see a single incident of incivility.



Rabbi Moshe Scheiner, Roland Fyer, Jason Riley, Michael Poliakoff, and Paul Levy at a 2025 Levy Forum for Open Discourse event on “America, Race, and Building a More Perfect Union.”

When I arrived at ACTA in 2010, our What Will They Learn?[®] project evaluated 55 schools. Today, it evaluates over 1,100. Schools celebrate gaining a coveted “A” rating from ACTA. It is another “race to the top.”

Last year, our Trustee & Government Affairs team received so many requests to give legislative testimony or lead board retreats and trainings that we could barely meet the demand. And that demand continues. The ACTA message of engaged, highly informed trustees and focused legislators continues to resonate.

Since our beginning in 1995, ACTA has helped donors make targeted, meaningful gifts to higher education. We have led them away from “blank checks” and toward philanthropy that contributes to positive, enduring change. Today, we have advised on over \$275 million in meaningful higher education philanthropy.


ACTA’s success is based on its love for higher education. Our extraordinary colleges and universities have often been less than they should be; their reputation has been tarnished too often. But we will never view this crown jewel of our nation as its enemy; we will not join in meaningless anger and mockery. Our guiding light is a classic of Western Civilization, I Corinthians 13:13: faith, hope, and love are what abides.

There is much more within this report, as we celebrate our 30th year. Please read on and know our gratitude to all of you who have sustained us with your generosity and your encouragement.

Michael B. Poliakoff
President & CEO

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Preparing Students for Success and Citizenship



In 2025, ACTA launched its Civic Education Initiative with the ambitious goal of ensuring that every college student graduates with comprehensive knowledge of the American story. We made remarkable progress, convening our **National Commission on American History and Civic Education** at George Washington's historic home; issuing a new survey assessing college students' knowledge of American literature, culture, and scientific achievements; and supporting policymakers across the country to pass legislation promoting civic education.

ACTA's Surveys Expose Civic Literacy Crisis

In Summer 2025, ACTA conducted a national survey assessing college students' knowledge of American literature, culture, and scientific achievements. Entitled **The Forgotten Fundamentals**, this survey builds on another published last year, **Losing America's Memory 2.0**. We will be releasing yet another national assessment before America's 250th birthday on July 4.

These surveys allow educators, university trustees, lawmakers, and the public to see that most college students know little about the history and accomplishments of their own country. In *The Forgotten Fundamentals*, we surveyed **3,215** undergraduates and found that a majority cannot correctly identify books written by literary greats such as Ernest Hemingway and Herman Melville. Sadly, **one in five students** have not read a book outside of one that was required in a college class in the last year.

We also found that only **28%** of students know that Jonas Salk developed the first polio vaccine, and only **37%** correctly identify Thomas Edison as the inventor of the phonograph. Less than half (**48%**) know that George Washington lived at Mount Vernon, and just **36%** know that Thomas Jefferson designed Monticello.

ACTA President Michael Poliakoff stated, "The failure to teach American history at institutions of higher education has decimated not only civic knowledge, but also appreciation of America's cultural heritage. . . . What we are all witnessing is nothing less than the dumbing down of a whole generation, at the very moment when we need our future voters and citizens to be conversant in politics, government, and the wider elements of American civilization."

Our Solution: A Required Course in U.S. History and Government

If America is to sustain its experiment in self-government, future generations must understand the ideals upon which our country was built. ACTA launched its Civic Education Initiative to urge every college and university in the nation to establish a rigorous, required course in American history and government for all undergraduates.

National Commission on American History and Civic Education

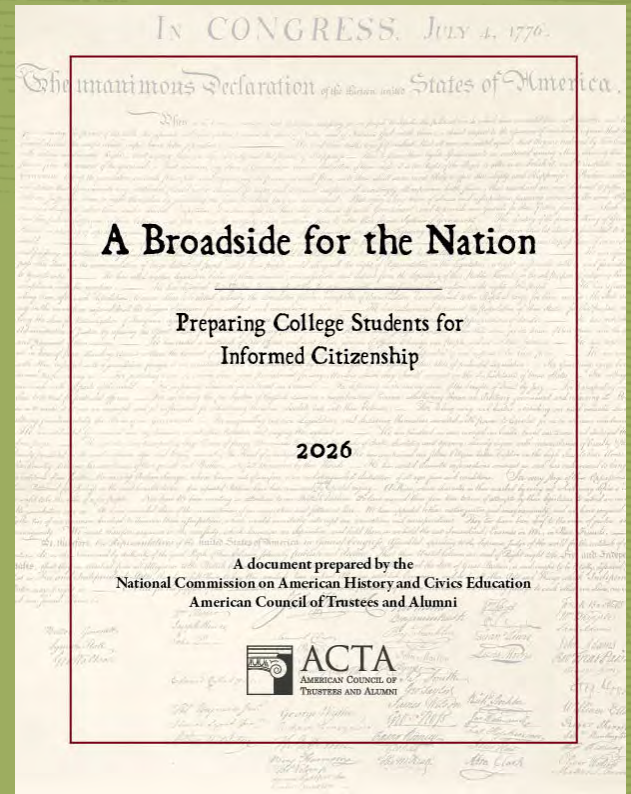
On October 3, 2025, ACTA's **National Commission on American History and Civic Education** convened for a summit at Mount Vernon. Our 23 commissioners—history professors, former university presidents, and distinguished public leaders—were tasked with developing a signature course to guide students through our nation's great documents, works, moments, and themes, incorporating best practices in capturing student attention and interest, such as giving students access to real historical artifacts. In a series of confidential sessions, the commissioners discussed the essential elements that such a course should cover and strategies for influencing college leaders and policymakers to implement the new requirement.

ACTA will soon release a blueprint detailing the commission's findings entitled, **A Broadside to the Nation: Preparing College Students for Informed Citizenship**. We will also release a companion anthology of essays titled, **What Every College Student Should Know about American History and Government**. It will feature essays from 12 members of the commission and will be published by the University of Tennessee Press.

American Lyceum Initiative

There is a growing bipartisan consensus that young Americans' ignorance of history and civics threatens the country's constitutional order. ACTA's American Lyceum Initiative is leveraging this concern to build, train, and support coalitions of lawmakers, university leaders, faculty, and philanthropists to improve U.S. history requirements and establish independently funded campus institutes dedicated to civic education.

In March, **Ohio** passed **Senate Bill 1**, an omnibus higher education bill. ACTA provided guidance to Senator Jerry Cirino as he drafted the bill's provision to require all Ohio public university



In 2025, ACTA's **National Commission on American History and Civic Education** convened for a summit at Mount Vernon. Our 23 commissioners were tasked with developing a signature course to guide college students through our nation's great documents, works, moments, and themes.

We will release our findings in celebration of America's 250th birthday.

“*Your extensive experience and commitment to ensuring quality education is both inspiring and crucial. The points you raised about civic knowledge provide significant insight into the challenges higher education faces today. I deeply appreciate your dedication to this important issue.*”

—Senator Jerry C. Cirino, Ohio, District 18



IMPACT



ACADEMIC OUTREACH

WhatWillTheyLearn.com

57%

increase in unique users since 2024

20%

increase in page views since 2024

College and university faculty and administrators, including from Auburn University and the University of Chicago, contacted ACTA for help with academic reform.

CIVIC EDUCATION

ACTA testified in Ohio, North Carolina, and Tennessee on legislation to strengthen civic education. Ohio passed Senate Bill 1, which includes our recommendations and will affect 339,000+ college students.

In 2025, ACTA advised on the establishment of the Center for Intellectual Freedom (IA) and the Center for American Civic Leadership and Public Discourse (SC).

students to pass a course in U.S. history and government that includes study of the foundational texts that have shaped our nation, such as the Constitution, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Federalist Papers. Similar legislation, recommended by ACTA, is under consideration in **North Carolina** and **Tennessee**, and we are in talks with leaders in **three additional states** as they explore implementing state-level civic education requirements.

ACTA also advised education leaders on the establishment of the **Center for Intellectual Freedom** at the **University of Iowa** and the **Center for American Civic Leadership and Public Discourse** at the **University of South Carolina**. Both centers were created to teach students about the traditions and texts that shaped America’s Founding and constitutional order. ACTA advocates that these centers be designed with independent hiring authority and bring in scholars from a range of intellectual perspectives.

Supporting the Liberal Arts

What Will They Learn?®

Grade inflation and long lists of distribution requirements exacerbate the civic literacy crisis and leave students without foundational skills they need to succeed in career and community. ACTA’s signature What Will They Learn?® (WWTL) project shows students and families which schools offer a high-quality core curriculum. We grade over **1,100** institutions on an “A+” – “F” scale based on if they require all undergraduates to take a course in Composition, Literature, (intermediate-level) Foreign Language, U.S. Government or History, Economics, Mathematics, and Natural Science. Beginning in 2024, we added evaluations of five new subject areas to WWTL.com: Fine Arts, Philosophy, Religion, Western Civilization, and World History.

In 2025, ACTA staff counseled faculty and administrators at **Auburn University**, **Grove City College**, the **University of Chicago**, and **John Adams College** on improving their academic offerings. The president of the **University of Dallas** personally celebrated the university’s superb “A+” WWTL rating. The **Manhattan Institute incorporated ACTA’s WWTL ratings into its new college rankings system**, shining a light on institutions that are committed to the rigorous requirements that cultivate a broad range of knowledge and practical skills. The rankings system also indicates which institutions house an ACTA Oasis of Excellence or Hidden Gem.


Oases of Excellence and Hidden Gems

Students on campuses that do not earn an ACTA “A” can receive a high-quality liberal arts education by participating in an Oasis of Excellence or Hidden Gem. These ACTA-designated academic centers and programs foster deep study of the great texts and ideas that have shaped Western Civilization while promoting free inquiry and exposing students to diverse intellectual perspectives.

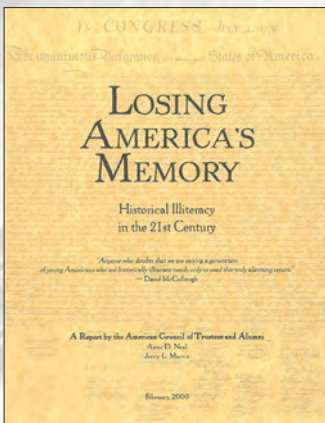
This year, ACTA recognized six new Oases of Excellence, bringing the total to **97** centers across the nation. These include the Institute of World Politics, the School of Civic Leadership at the University of Texas–Austin, and the Stanford Civics Initiative. We also inducted six new programs into our Hidden Gems network, bringing the total to **26** programs: 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 & Enduring Questions minor at Assumption University.

Restoring Collegiate Foreign Language Requirements

In February 2026, ACTA released a new report entitled, ***Ivory Tower of Babel: Rebuilding Language Learning in Higher Education for a More Secure and Competitive America***. The report makes the case for why colleges and universities must restore the robust foreign language programs that have historically been a central part of the core curriculum. We show that foreign language education increases compensation, contributes to a wide range of cognitive skills, and strengthens the fabric of our society.

The report provides university leaders with innovative strategies for preserving 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 eliminating 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. 

THEN & NOW...



2000

ACTA’s ***Losing America’s Memory*** report revealed that 81% of seniors at the top 55 U.S. colleges and universities failed a high school-level history exam; even worse, none of the institutions surveyed required an American history course. The report inspired Congress to pass a joint resolution calling for a national response.

Over 800 news stories featured the study.

2025

ACTA convened **The National Commission on American History and Civic Education** consisting of 24 history professors, former university presidents, and distinguished public leaders. We will soon release its blueprint for a foundational college course in U.S. history and government:

A Broadside to the Nation: Preparing College Students for Informed Citizenship.



ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Transforming Campus Culture

As our nation confronts an alarming rise in political polarization and violence, we desperately need college campuses that boldly defend fundamental American values of free expression, civil discourse, and intellectual pluralism. ACTA is working to restore these precious freedoms by teaching college students the skills of discourse and engagement. Through our **College Debates and Discourse Alliance**, **Campus Freedom Initiative™**, and **Levy Forum for Open Discourse**, ACTA is inspiring college presidents, trustees, faculty, students, and community members to resist campus censors and revive civil debate.

The College Debates and Discourse (CD&D) Alliance

Too many campuses are characterized by intellectual intolerance and coercion. Students and faculty are afraid to speak their minds and all too willing to disparage those with opposing views. ACTA is changing this. In 2025, our College Debates and Discourse (CD&D) Alliance, a partnership between ACTA, Braver Angels, and BridgeUSA, engaged over **7,000 students on 93 campuses in 187 debates and workshops on the most controversial topics of our day**. Our debates are conducted in a light-parliamentary style, giving students an opportunity to share their views, ask questions, and listen to those with whom they disagree. Not once have we witnessed an instance of incivility.

For example, just days after Charlie Kirk was assassinated at Utah Valley University, ACTA held a debate at neighboring Utah State University. The question that students chose to discuss, “How should our campus community respond to controversial speakers?”, took on new urgency after the tragedy. Despite tensions, participants modeled the art of civil disagreement under the guidance of the CD&D team, showing that respectful discourse is still possible on college campuses, if only students are given the tools and opportunity to practice it.

New CD&D Workshops

To engage even more students in our mission to cultivate campus cultures of civil discourse, the CD&D Alliance rolled out a new workshop called **A Braver Campus Dialogue (ABCD)**. In these collaborative dialogues, students brainstorm solutions to complex social and political problems, uncovering the reasoning behind opposing views and finding areas for compromise. Following beta testing, we facilitated **45 ABCD workshops** nationwide in 2025.

One workshop, held at the Virginia Military Institute, gathered over 100 students and faculty from four local institutions to discuss the question, “How can we improve the local economy?” More than a dozen public officials and business leaders engaged in the workshop, including the mayor of Buena Vista, members of the economic development council, and local business owners in Lexington.



We also expanded our workshops for faculty. During these workshops, professors learn how to hold debates in their own classrooms by choosing a topic and conducting a debate themselves. For example, in a workshop at the University of North Carolina–Pembroke, faculty debated, “Should professors publicize their political views?”, and at Germanna Community College, faculty discussed, “Should colleges maintain institutional neutrality on social and political issues?” We also rolled out the third edition of our Curricular Toolkit, which gives faculty step-by-step instructions on incorporating civil discourse programming in their courses.

The Campus Freedom Initiative™

ACTA’s **Campus Freedom Initiative™** (CFI), made possible by the generosity of the Diana Davis Spencer Foundation, continues to drive institutional reforms across the country. This year, we launched our first-ever free expression report cards. These report cards assess the policies and practices of individual universities against the **Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression™**, ACTA’s 20-point action plan for restoring free speech and open inquiry on campus.

Gold Standard Report Cards

In January, we published our **Arizona Report Card** and Arizona Campus Experience Survey, evaluating the culture of free expression at the state’s three public universities: Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University, and the University of Arizona. Our survey of over **3,000 students** revealed high rates of self-censorship and viewpoint intolerance on each campus. We called on all three universities to address these problems by implementing key Gold Standard measures, including adopting an official policy of institutional neutrality and committing to merit-based faculty hiring. In April, staff from the Arizona Board



628

events held by the College Debates and Discourse Alliance since its inception.

25,500+

students and faculty from 132 different institutions participated.

79%

of student participants would recommend the experience to someone they know.

(Based on a survey conducted by the Democratic Erosion Consortium, a nonpartisan research firm, of 924 student participants across 39 unique institutions.)

“*Having a neutral third party from the College Debates & Discourse Alliance was incredibly helpful as we navigated difficult conversations with students. . . . The CD&D dialogue framework slowed the conversation down, reduced tension, and helped students engage across differences without feeling like they had to defend themselves or ‘win’ an argument. For me, the greatest value was knowing that these conversations were being guided by an expert Sadie’s presence allowed us to breathe and support students in a meaningful way while modeling the kind of respectful, human-centered dialogue we want to see on our campus.*

—Alexis Palmer, Ed.D., Associate Vice President of Student Life, Utah Valley University



Adopting a Policy of Institutional Neutrality

A Guide for College and University Governing Boards

Campus Freedom Initiative™

AMERICAN COUNCIL OF TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI



Over 40 universities have adopted a policy of institutional neutrality since ACTA launched its national campaign.

Scan the QR code for a copy of the trustee guide.



of Regents met with us to discuss our report card, and an official from the office of Arizona State University (ASU) President Michael Crow wrote a detailed letter to us about our ratings. We are currently corresponding with ASU leadership about implementing mandatory free expression training for administrative staff, another Gold Standard action.

In September, CFI surveyed over **2,300 Virginia students** and published another set of Gold Standard report cards on the top six universities in the state. We are in communications with the president of William & Mary and the assistant vice president of the University of Virginia (UVA) and have since traveled to UVA to observe the university's free speech and civil dialogue programming in action.

Following these successes, we have launched a campaign to publish two report cards every two weeks, and universities across the nation are already rising to meet our standard. More than **35%** of the schools evaluated so far have responded to our report cards, and we have met with leaders from more than a quarter of them to discuss their results. The **University of Wyoming** (UW) recently publicized its exemplary Gold Standard report card rating. UW President Ed Seidel wrote, "We don't promote agendas and have been known for neutrality, strongly supporting the First Amendment via our freedom of expression efforts." In addition, the chair of the **Coastal Carolina University Board of Trustees** contacted ACTA to discuss strategies it can pursue to meet all 20 Gold Standard measures. Our work has already led to important policy changes at several institutions, and more are in the works as schools respond to our encouragement to become leaders in freedom of expression.

Institutional Neutrality Campaign


In 2024, CFI launched a national campaign to urge universities to recommit to their intellectual and nonpartisan mission by adopting policies of institutional neutrality modeled on the University of Chicago's 1967 Kalven Report. Since then, **47 universities and university systems** have adopted such a policy, and interest continues to rise as universities grapple with ongoing campus unrest related to the war in Gaza and other political flashpoints.

In April 2025, **Cornell University** requested CFI to provide commentary on its task force's draft report on institutional neutrality, and we expect to play a continued role as the process unfolds. We are also providing advice to the provost and faculty committee at

George Washington University as they consider adopting a neutrality policy. And in September 2025, the **University of Kentucky** adopted a policy of institutional neutrality, following encouragement from CFI.

The Levy Forum for Open Discourse

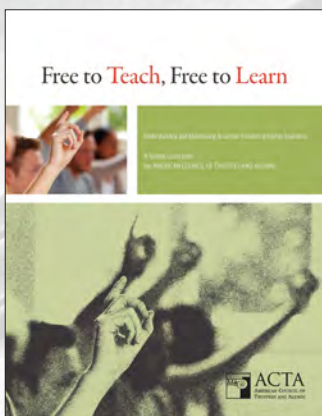
Through the Levy Forum for Open Discourse, a project conceived of and supported by ACTA board member Paul Levy and his wife Karen, ACTA is engaging alumni and concerned citizens in conversations about the integrity of our democratic republic. Our forum speakers explore the foundations of fundamental American values and the role of higher education in cultivating freedom-minded citizens and strong leaders.

The 2024–2025 season of the Levy Forum featured **Sir Niall Ferguson**, scholar **Ruth Wisse**, activist and filmmaker **Bernard-Henri Lévy**, human rights activist **Natan Sharansky**, historian **Victor Davis Hanson**, diplomat **John Bolton**, and *Wall Street Journal* columnist **Walter Russell Mead**. The forum’s fourth season focuses on the theme, “America at 250: Toward a More Perfect Union.” Running through April 2026, this series features distinguished thought leaders on matters relating to our nation’s heritage and history. Speakers include author **Jason Riley**, Harvard University Professor **Roland Fryer**, Hillsdale College President **Larry Arnn**, Jewish scholar and leader **Rabbi Meir Soloveichik**, Museum of the Bible President **Carlos Campo**, civil rights leader **Robert Woodson**, former senator **Ben Sasse**, and historian **Allen Guelzo**. 

“*The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) has given the University of Wyoming a higher rating for free expression than all universities the organization has evaluated to date. . . . “I couldn’t be prouder of our students, staff and faculty for leading the way in creating a campus climate in which free and open inquiry prevails over ideological conformity—and dialogue is valued over diatribe,” says UW President Ed Seidel.*

—Excerpts from University of Wyoming Press Release

THEN & NOW. . .



2013

ACTA released **Free to Teach, Free to Learn**, our seminal guide for trustees on the dangerous decline of academic freedom and intellectual diversity on college campuses. The report was sent to **14,000+ trustees** across the country, and ACTA hosted a conference in New York City on the academic freedom crises. The event featured experts in the field and was covered on **WSJLive**.

2025

ACTA launched a campaign to release two report cards every two weeks evaluating colleges and universities across the country on 20 criteria outlined in our **Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression™**. Institutions are now reaching out for guidance on how they can improve. **Three institutions are striving to be the first to meet all 20 Gold Standard measures.**



ACCOUNTABILITY

Fortifying Institutional Governance

Bold, engaged leadership by university trustees, combined with principled oversight from state legislators, can return excellence to higher education and restore public confidence in our institutions. ACTA equips trustees and policymakers with resources, tools, and guidance to enact essential reforms. This year, we led trustee trainings across the country, successfully helped postpone a rushed private equity deal that attempted to bypass the authority of trustees of the 18 universities in the Big Ten Conference, and released a widely praised guide on dismantling discriminatory DEI programs.

ACTA Provides Legislative Testimony

In 2025, ACTA was called on to give legislative testimony in **Minnesota, Maryland, North Carolina,** and **Ohio** on matters of fiscal transparency and fairness in admissions. Policymakers in **Texas, Tennessee, Kansas, Connecticut,** and **Oklahoma** contacted us for guidance on legislation related to institutional governance and student support.

Our advocacy made a difference. In January, the **Texas Senate Higher Education Subcommittee** released an interim report that included ACTA's recommendations for Texas governing boards to adopt the Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression and the Kalven Report on institutional neutrality. ACTA's guidance also led to the development and passage of legislation in Iowa and West Virginia to establish new centers for civic education.

Since 2020, ACTA's experts have been invited by **Congressman Greg Murphy** to participate in the annual **Campus Free Speech Roundtable on Capitol Hill**. At the December 2025 roundtable, Dr. Steven McGuire, ACTA's Paul & Karen Levy Fellow in Campus Freedom, shared with Congressmen Murphy, Burgess Owens, Bob Onder, and Randy Fine about how ACTA's Campus Freedom Initiative™ is holding institutions accountable for failing to safeguard First Amendment rights. He also discussed ACTA's work to combat discriminatory DEI initiatives and replace them with campus policies that promote merit fairness, and equality, a subject that has received close attention under the new presidential administration.

ACTA Promotes Bold, Engaged Leadership

Defending Trustees' Rights

In November, ACTA hosted a webinar exclusively for the governing boards of the 18 universities in the **Big Ten Conference** after trustees in our network expressed concerns about a proposed \$2.4 billion private equity deal between the conference and University of California (UC) Investments. Our webinar panelists—including trustees from the University System of



Maryland, the University of Michigan, Pennsylvania State University, the University of Southern California, and the University of Minnesota—explained that trustees did not receive sufficient information about the finances and structure of the proposed deal, compromising their ability to exercise proper stewardship.

ACTA promptly sent an open letter to the Big Ten schools, urging each governing board to adopt a clear resolution requiring the board to be fully briefed on the proposed transaction with all relevant documents, analyses, and legal opinions. Major national news outlets covered our work and amplified our call for transparency. 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 firm also announced it would extend the timeline, allowing boards to exercise their due diligence.

Board Services

More and more trustees are turning to ACTA for assistance as they learn how to oversee complex enterprises that deliver a high-quality education at an affordable price. In 2025, we moved rapidly to expand our Board Services program, working with individual trustees in **15 states** to address fundamental issues of cost, quality, and transparency. ACTA led retreats and workshops for education leaders at the **2025 Ohio Trustees Conference**, the **Utah System of Higher Education**, the **State Council of Higher Education for Virginia**, and **Christopher Newport University**. And as the new presidential administration got underway, we hosted a discussion group of trustees to learn more about their institutions’ reactions to recent changes in federal higher education policy. We are now issuing a new circular, “ACTA Publica,” which provides clear explanations of the latest federal higher education policies.

Our efforts have generated encouraging reforms. For example, two years ago, a trustee at **Coastal Carolina University (CCU)** reached out to ACTA to request information on board training for new members. In response, we provided our model policy requiring trustee training, called the **Informed Trustee Act**. The CCU Board subsequently adopted the measure in February 2024.



ACTA’s webinar for Big Ten Conference university trustees to discuss a pending \$2.4 billion private equity deal between the conference and UC Investments garnered national attention.

ACTA urged each Big Ten governing board to adopt a clear resolution requiring the board to be fully briefed on the proposed transaction.

As a result, UC Investments issued a statement committing to address the concerns expressed by our panelists and many others.

ACTA’s role was covered by *USA Today*, the *Associated Press*, and *Inside Higher Ed*.

“*Thanks for the note and for your work here in Utah and across the nation. We really enjoyed having Armand from your team out at our trustee training conference last fall.*”

—Jon Cox, Vice Chair, Utah Board of Higher Education

ACHIEVING COMMON DIGNITY

A Trustee Guide to Ensuring a Discrimination-free Campus



Perspectives on Higher Education

American Council of Trustees and Alumni | Institute for Effective Governance®



ACTA
AMERICAN COUNCIL OF
TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI

“The ACTA guide provides a robust, principled roadmap for restoring merit, free speech, and equal treatment in higher education. . . . It aligns with core American values like personal responsibility, limited government intervention, and adherence to constitutional principles.”

—Suzanne Reynolds, Regent, University of Science & Arts of Oklahoma

Scan the QR code for a copy of the trustee guide.



Fast forward to 2026, when ACTA’s model policy was introduced in the **South Carolina Legislature as House Bill 4737** and is now under consideration. We recently learned that it was because of CCU’s adoption of our model policy that South Carolina Representative Timothy A. McGinnis, who introduced the new bill, became interested in a legislative mandate to support board training.

ACTA Develops High-Quality Resources

ACTA gets to the heart of the controversies confronting higher education leaders with our printed guides and resources. In September, thanks to support from the Kovner Foundation, we published a new guide for college trustees entitled, **Achieving Common Dignity: A Trustee Guide to Ensuring a Discrimination-free Campus**. With meticulous scholarship, ACTA’s report documents how campus DEI programs have contributed to the very discrimination they profess to combat, censoring diverse viewpoints and policing free speech. We provide college leaders with a set of clear recommendations for replacing harmful DEI policies with policies that promote merit, individual liberty, and academic freedom.

In July, ACTA released **From Major to Market: How Virginia Colleges Can Drive Workforce Growth and Regional Prosperity**. This report gives Virginia’s leaders the tools to navigate the coming enrollment cliff, a challenge that all universities will face. Using the latest data from the U.S. Department of Education, the report identifies the fastest-growing careers in four regions across Virginia. It is accompanied by ACTA’s virtual program map that allows education leaders to identify which majors have the fewest graduates and find schools nearby with which to merge programs.

ACTA also develops resources for policymakers to promote common-sense reforms. In June, we partnered with **Third Way** to release “**Five Bipartisan Principles for Accreditation Reform**,” which calls for congressional action to create an accreditation system that provides reliable quality assurance focused on objective standards. In October, we released our **2025 State Rankings**. Performed annually, ACTA’s rankings assess public, four-year colleges nationwide on 10 measures of academic quality and cost-effectiveness. We shared our findings with the higher education committees in every state and updated the Policymakers webpage on GoACTA.org to allow users to view their rankings and explore ACTA’s work in their states.

ACTA Empowers Alumni to Drive Reform

Alumni and college donors are a key part of ACTA's mission to renew higher education. For far too long, donors have given colleges and universities unrestricted gifts to fund projects and programs that do little to enhance students' education. ACTA's **Fund for Academic Renewal (FAR)** is turning this tide by helping donors craft strategic, purpose-driven gifts that advance academic excellence, academic freedom, and accountability.

To date, FAR has advised on almost **\$275 million** in higher education giving. We are currently advising on **\$70 million** in gifts, including a major scholarship and lecture series, as well as donor intent cases at Trinity College and Concordia University–Ann Arbor. We also redesigned the FAR website in November 2025 to educate wealth advisers and university trustees about wise college giving. And we hired a new program associate in philanthropy, allowing us to offer our free advising services to more concerned alumni. ●

“*I'd like you to know that my wife and I relied on ACTA's The Intelligent Donor's Guide to College Giving as the “bible” when we structured our philanthropy plan for the University of Colorado This 40-page pamphlet (small but mighty) provided the blueprint for devising and implementing our giving strategy. We now feel confident that the money we are donating will be expended in areas and programs that align with our values.*

—Jon Medved, Former President and CEO, Current Inc.

THEN & NOW . . .



2014

ACTA convened 22 national higher education leaders to draft **Governance for a New Era**, a blueprint for board governance in the 21st century. The report focused on innovative solutions to the many issues confronting American colleges and universities. It was covered widely in the press and still resonates today, serving as the primary guidance for our work with boards of trustees.

2025

ACTA provided guidance on issues of cost, quality, and transparency to individual trustees across the country in **15** states, and we led board retreats and workshops for large state systems in **Ohio, Utah, and Virginia**—in total affecting **1.1 million+** students. We also launched a circular entitled **ACTA Publica** to help trustees understand federal policy under a new administration.



NATIONAL REACH

Informing the Public Conversation

Reporters sought out ACTA's comments on issues ranging from new changes in federal education policies to campus antisemitism to the integrity of college sports. Reporting for the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* on President Donald Trump's scrutiny of Harvard University, columnist Debra Saunders wrote in May 2025, "Michael Poliakoff, president of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, is a man in the middle. ACTA has been working to deliver true ideological diversity—not the false diversity that rewards like-minded liberals—by exposing students to the rough-and-tumble of spirited debate."

Getting the Word Out

In 2025, ACTA made **1,434** appearances in nearly **800** online, print, and broadcast outlets, reaching **billions** of readers in **46** states. ACTA's op-eds, statements, and letters were published in national, regional, and trade publications, including *Inside Higher Ed*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Bloomberg*, *NBC News*, *Yahoo! Sports*, and *USA Today*, among many others. Major media hits throughout the year include "Why Didn't More College Leaders Condemn Charlie Kirk's Murder?", published in *City Journal* by ACTA's Steven McGuire and Justin Garrison; "America Needs Tough Grading: Undeserved As mean bad education and deprive the world of students' potential," published in the *Wall Street Journal* by ACTA fellows Joshua Katz and Solveig Gold; and "Moral Failure and Government Intrusion at Harvard," published in *Law & Liberty* by President Poliakoff. The latter essay put pressure on both Harvard and the federal administration to address antisemitism.

Online

ACTA reached over **411,608** users on Facebook in 2025, double the number from last year. On X.com, ACTA received **2,929,588** impressions and gained an impressive **615** new followers. And on YouTube, our videos received over **1,002,251** views, and our channel gained **543** new subscribers. Our website **GoACTA.org** received **279,164** page views, with **169,814** new users. Top-visited pages included our Gold Standard report cards on universities in Arizona and Virginia.

Podcasts

In 2025, ACTA released **17** episodes on our **Higher Ed Now** podcast. Our audience on Spotify grew by **830%**, with our fans listening to us for longer than **78%** of other podcasts on the platform. Across all platforms, Higher Ed Now has listeners in **37** countries. Our guests included Ohio Senator **Jerry Cirino**; **The Honorable John Hillen**, distinguished resident fellow at the Center for Politics in Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy; **Jane Calvert**, director of the John Dickinson Writings Project; **Richard Haass**, president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations; and so many other leaders and students who seek to renew the promise of American higher education.

In May, we launched **Radio Free Campus**, a new video podcast hosted by Dr. Steven McGuire and Dr. Justin Garrison, leaders of our Campus Freedom Initiative™. In each episode, they take listeners behind the front lines in the battle to expand free expression, viewpoint diversity, and civil discourse on campus. In 2025, we released eight episodes on YouTube and other streaming platforms. Downloads and subscribers are growing rapidly.

Reaching the Higher Education Community

Trustees. Our growing network includes trustees from nearly every four-year institution across the country that offers a liberal arts degree. We continue to provide guidance and support, and we reach over **23,000** trustees at nearly **1,300** institutions.

Alumni. Our quarterly newsletter **Inside Academe** reaches more than **15,000** alumni from a wide range of colleges and universities. Over **3,000** alumni receive our monthly eNewsletters as well as email updates about our latest initiatives, events, and achievements.

Governors and Policymakers. ACTA reaches out to governors and their education policy staffs, in addition to state policymakers and legislators. ACTA regularly testifies before state legislatures across the country on bills of interest, and our **Higher Ed at a Glance** quarterly eNewsletter reaches over **1,100** lawmakers nationwide.

Celebrating Our 30th Anniversary

On October 24, 2025, ACTA hosted our 30th Anniversary Celebration, entitled "**We Hold These Truths . . . America at 250**," at the Presidential Library at Mount Vernon and the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, DC. This was truly a momentous occasion as we gathered with the many friends who have supported us throughout the decades to bring lasting reform to higher education.

The day started with "**Educating for a More Perfect Union**," a colloquy on reinvigorating collegiate civic education by engaging students in dynamic study of the fundamental figures and events

“*The gala was a wonderful opportunity to connect with leaders and friends who support strengthening higher education by promoting academic excellence. It’s encouraging to see how much is being meaningful achieved to advance academic freedom and ensuring the highest quality education for this and future generations of students.*

—Ellen Carmichael, Founder & President, The Lafayette Company



We Hold These Truths . . .



At ACTA’s anniversary gala dinner, we premiered “**We Hold These Truths**,” an inspiring short film documenting the steady rise of the organization and commemorating 30 years of determined work to restore the principles of **academic excellence, academic freedom, and accountability** in America’s higher education system.

Scan the QR code to view the film.





As part of our 30th Anniversary Celebration, ACTA honored **Sarah Hubbard** and her colleagues on the University of Michigan (U-M) Board of Regents with the **Jerry L. Martin Prize for Excellence in College Trusteeship**.

In October 2023, the war in Gaza set off protests at U-M, including a tent encampment, vandalism, and demands for divestment. In response, the U-M Board of Regents championed policy changes to uphold free speech for all while ensuring students who engage in disruptive conduct are held accountable.

Campus activists then 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.

The U-M Faculty Senate sided with the students. **The board, however, remained firm and implemented major reforms.**

“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.”

—President Michael Poliakoff

that shaped America's Founding and progress. The colloquy was 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.

Later that day, we presented the **2025 Hero of Intellectual Freedom** award to **Pano Kanelos**, co-founder and inaugural president of the University of Austin (UATX). Dr. Kanelos's devotion to preserving free expression and intellectual diversity in liberal arts education has influenced many, most recently through his leadership of UATX, a new university committed to the free exchange of ideas.

In his tribute to our award winner, **Jacob Howland**, past provost of UATX, praised Dr. Kanelos for promoting a rich liberal arts education that gives students the philosophical foundations to develop “ultimate measures of truth.” Dr. Kanelos's acceptance speech, entitled **“Memory, Forgetting, and the Freedom of the Intellect,”** deeply affected all in attendance. He explained that we must fight the totalitarian ideology that has infected American universities by teaching students to remember the sacrifices of those who have paid a price for defending truth throughout history.

In the evening, we gathered to honor **Lawrence H. Summers**, president emeritus and Charles W. Eliot University Professor at Harvard University, with the **2025 Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education**. Tribute speeches to Dr. Summers were delivered by **Thomas M. Rollins**, founder of The Teaching Company; **Nadine Strossen**, John Marshall Harlan II Professor of Law Emerita at New York Law School; and **Steven Pinker**, Johnstone Family Professor of Psychology at Harvard. In his remarks accepting the award, Dr. Summers stressed that our great universities are vital to the success of the American project. He called on trustees to resist pressure from the federal government to change their policies in order to remain eligible for federal funding.

As we look ahead to another 30 years of advancing academic excellence, academic freedom, and accountability at our colleges and universities, we thank all our donors, supporters, and friends for their encouragement and steadfast commitment to our mission. ACTA will not rest until American higher education is once again the envy of the world. ●



Anne D. Neal, regent of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, kicks off ACTA's colloquy at the George Washington Presidential Library.



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



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.



President Michael Poliakoff welcomes ACTA's 200+ guests to the National Museum of Women in the Arts to celebrate ACTA's 30th anniversary.



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

Scan the QR code to download a copy of the speech on GoACTA.org.



ABOUT Us

Our Staff



Michael Poliakoff
CEO/President



Lauri Kempson
COO/Sr. VP of Finance



Armand Alacbay
Chief of Staff/Sr. VP of Strategy



Emily Koons Jae, Vice
President, Development &
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Debates & Discourse Alliance



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Paul & Karen Levy Fellow in
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Veronica Bryant
Academic Affairs Fellow



Kyle Beltramini
Policy Research Fellow, Trustee
& Government Affairs



Greta Anderson
Senior Researcher/Editor



Anna Sillers
Data Analyst Fellow, Trustee &
Government Affairs



Justin Garrison
Research Fellow, Campus Freedom
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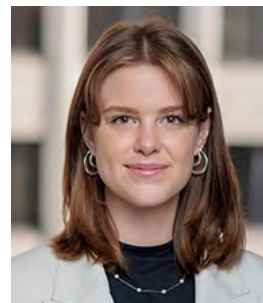
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Sadie Webb
Associate Director, College
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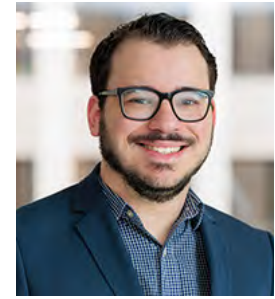
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Academic Affairs



Emma Horn
Program Associate,
Campus Freedom Initiative™



Bradley Gerber
Program Associate, Academic
Affairs



Jane Mangelli
Program Associate,
Communications



Victoria Kiper
Program Associate,
Development

Senior Fellows and Scholars-in-Residence

ACTA continues to benefit from the expertise of our senior fellow, **Anne D. Neal**. Ms. Neal is a founder of ACTA and served as our president from 2003 to 2016. She is currently regent of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association. **Joshua Katz** is our scholar-in-residence. He also serves as senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. This year, we welcomed **Solveig Gold** as our senior fellow in Education & Society.

Interns

ACTA's internship program offers a unique educational experience to talented college students and recent graduates. In Summer 2025, ACTA welcomed three interns, **Joseph Kavetsky**, **Kaleb Dueberry**, and **Peter Scott**. The interns provided valuable assistance to many of ACTA's departments by reviewing bills, researching accreditation issues, and maintaining our databases. They enjoyed workshops by ACTA staff, lunches with higher education leaders, and a guided tour of the Capitol.

2025 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

as of December 31, 2025

Assets

Cash/Cash Equivalents (unrestricted)	\$1,383,162
Cash/Cash Equivalents (restricted)	1,360,831
Marketable Securities	1,710,023
Receivables	5,000
Property/Equipment (net)	455,880
Prepayments & Other Assets	<u>1,600,323</u>

Total Assets **6,515,219**

Liabilities & Net Assets

Accounts Payable	205,613
Deferred Compensation	111,390
Lease Liabilities	<u>2,874,961</u>

Total Liabilities **3,191,964**

Unrestricted Net Assets	2,073,814
Temporarily Restricted Net Assets	<u>1,249,441</u>

Total Net Assets **3,323,255**

Total Liabilities & Net Assets **\$6,515,219**

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

as of December 31, 2025

Revenue & Support

Contributions/Grants (unrestricted)	\$3,516,791
Contributions/Grants (restricted)	1,490,090
Interest/Dividends	231,394
Miscellaneous Income	52,125
Realized/Unrealized Gain	<u>59,181</u>

Total Revenue & Support **5,349,581**

Expenses

Programs	5,726,418
Fundraising	65,361
Management/General	<u>449,776</u>

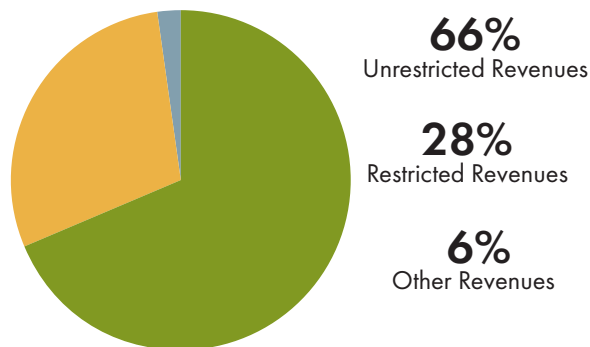
Total Expenses **6,241,555**

Change in Net Assets **(891,974)**

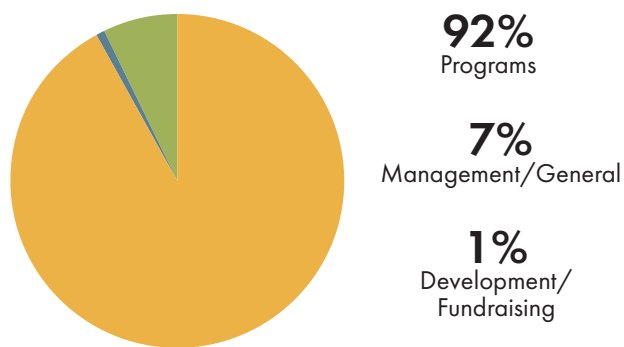
Net Assets, beginning of year **4,215,229**

Net Assets, end of year **\$3,323,255**

2025 OPERATING REVENUES



2025 OPERATING EXPENSES



Unaudited – For Management Purposes Only.

Our Partners

ACTA is grateful to our supporters, whose loyalty and dedication make our important work possible. We rely upon them not just for funding, but for inspiration, collaboration, and assistance in our common goal to ensure that all college students receive an intellectually rich liberal arts education at an affordable price. And because we do not receive government funding, our donors enable us to maintain our independence in forming policies and taking action.

Members of ACTA's Donor Societies are invited to exclusive events throughout the year, where they meet important and influential scholars and leaders of higher education reform. We appreciate these opportunities to engage with our Donor Society members and hear their ideas about the future of higher education.

2025 ATHENA Roundtable Sponsors

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The Thomas Jefferson Legacy Society honors donors who make planned gifts to ACTA. Their generosity drives ACTA's work, creating a real legacy by protecting rich liberal arts education for future generations.

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The Leadership Society consists of grant-making foundations whose generous gifts make ACTA's endeavors possible.

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The Chairman's Society consists of individuals who support ACTA with gifts of **\$25,000+**.

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The President's Society consists of individuals who support ACTA with gifts of **\$10,000–\$24,999**.

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