



Promoting
Academic
Freedom and
Excellence

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ACTA's National Commission Charts Course for Requiring U.S. History & Government at Colleges

On April 21, ACTA celebrated the release of *A Broadside for the Nation: Preparing College Students for Informed Citizenship*, the culmination and centerpiece of months of work by ACTA's National Commission for American History and Civic Education. Galvanized by the crisis in civics knowledge among college graduates, the Commission's 24 historians, political scientists, and education leaders met at Mount Vernon in early October to devise remedies. They call for a classic ACTA solution: that all colleges and universities require a comprehensive, rigorous course in American history and government.

The report lays out the problem and how institutions can best achieve the solution.

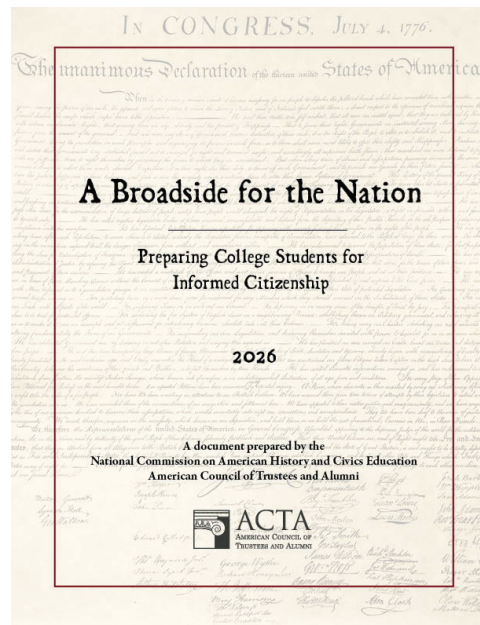
ACTA's recent surveys, *Forgotten Fundamentals* (2025) and *Losing America's Memory 2.0* (2024), document how American college students are alarmingly uninformed about their nation's institutions and history: 48% of students believe that the president, not Congress, can declare war, and a majority

believe that 1776 was the year in which the Constitution was written. The stakes are high: Civic illiteracy among voters could lead the American republic, which relies on an enlightened public, to "die by suicide," in Lincoln's words. America needs, as Reagan termed it, "informed patriotism."

At present, according to ACTA's What Will They Learn?[®] project, only 19% of colleges or universities require a course in American history or government, a major deficit when 43% of the U.S. population aged 25 to 39 holds a bachelor's degree. The course that the *Broadside* recommends would convey the American story to college students, by starting with a

broad survey of major moments and themes in American history, and an examination of essential primary texts in American history and government: at minimum, the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, the Federalist and Anti-Federalist Papers, the Emancipation Proclamation and the Gettysburg Address, and documents of the civil rights era. Building on this foundation, institutions and faculty could

(continued on 2)



ACTA Offers a Range of Seminars for Boards of Trustees



ACTA's **Institute for Effective Governance**[®] is releasing an updated brochure that describes its Board Seminars for college and university trustees. Seminar topics range from improving civic education and core curriculum to the essentials of governance and board procedure. IEG's tailored programs equip trustees to fulfill their fiduciary duties with confidence.

To request a copy or learn more, contact BoardServices@GoACTA.org.

John Danielson, Advisory Board

USC Schwarzenegger Institute for State and Global Policy

“Having long admired and respected the thoughtful leadership of Michael B. Poliakoff and Anne Neal Petri through the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, I did not hesitate to fervently add my endorsement upon the release of their commendable *A Broadside for the Nation*. At this critical time in the country’s history and particularly as we celebrate the 250th of our founding, I commend this report as essential reading. ACTA has nailed it once again.”

Captain Jamison Broggi, United States Marine Corps

“Your team did an excellent job displaying both the good and bad of where NC [North Carolina] is on this issue. I enjoyed the whole publication and I will send around.”

Dr. Clifford Humphrey, Vice President of Strategic Initiatives University of West Florida

“We are glad to know ACTA is highlighting this problem of civic illiteracy as an opportunity to do better as a nation. We at UWF are certainly doing what we can, and we hope and expect to expand our programming and reach in the near future.”

Note: ACTA Released A Broadside for the Nation: Preparing College Students for Informed Citizenship in April 2026.

Roosevelt Montás, Laura Y. Chang and Arnold Chavkin Professor in Liberal Education and Civic Life Bard College

“Have been meaning to email you with a heartfelt thanks for joining the gen ed panel at ACTC on short notice and doing such a great job of compressing the Redbook into five minutes!”

Note: ACTA presented at the Association for Core Texts and Courses annual conference in March 2026, “We Hold These Truths: Liberty, Equality, and Core Texts.”

Zayd Hamid, Graduate Professional Assistant for Student Civic Engagement, Research, and Programs George Mason University

“I read through the foreign language study report and found it very insightful, particularly its appendix covering the history of foreign language instruction. Great work from your team!”

Note: ACTA Released Ivory Tower of Babel: Rebuilding Language Learning in Higher Education for a More Secure and Competitive America in March 2026, documenting the freefall in the study of foreign language at America’s colleges and universities.

College History Requirement, continued from 1

make the course their own. Instructors can incorporate visits to museums, historical sites, and online archives to make history immediate. They can hold classroom debates to help students internalize both sides of key disputes in history.

The *Broadside* also suggests how universities can institute this requirement. At both private and public institutions, trustees and donors can advocate for robust civic education: Governing boards can work with faculty and administrators to enhance the requirement according to institutional priorities, and donors can provide grants and gifts targeting the creation and maintenance of a required course and civics center.

Donor and trustee advocacy is important at all colleges and universities, and essential at private ones. Yet, at public institutions, state laws also govern. Currently, 14 out of 50 states have mandated American history or government courses, with South Carolina’s REACH Act, which focuses on primary texts, serving as a model for other states since 2021. Centers of civic thought, sometimes established by state legislatures, are well-equipped to develop and teach foundational American history and government courses.

On America’s 250th anniversary, through *A Broadside for the Nation*, ACTA and the National Commission aim to endow America with a more thoughtful and knowledgeable college-educated electorate. Dozens of nationally renowned education leaders have already endorsed the effort. ACTA expects many more will join that number. ●

Scan the QR code to view the report.



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ACTA's Steven McGuire Testifies before Congress



Paul & Karen Levy Fellow **Steven McGuire** represented ACTA before the House Committee on Education and the Workforce's Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development during an April 29 hearing on "Speech or Silence? The Future of the First Amendment in Higher Education." Dr. McGuire recounted the ongoing

concerns regarding both self-censorship and intolerance toward heterodox views in American higher education. Sharing with the committee some of the results of ACTA's survey research, he pointed out that 63% of respondents to a survey of students at five Ohio public universities said they had not spoken up on campus because they thought their opinion would be unwelcome, while only 22% said it is never okay to shout down a guest speaker, and 65% said a professor should be reported for saying something students find offensive. Faculty are also afraid to teach and pursue their research. A Harvard survey revealed that 51% of its instructors were reluctant to lead a classroom discussion on a controversial topic, and 41% said they would be reluctant to conduct research on a controversial subject.

Asked by the committee to suggest what could be done to improve the conditions for free expression and diversity of thought, Dr. McGuire discussed ACTA's Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression™, stressing the need for institutional neutrality, viewpoint neutral policies governing student activities, free expression education for students and staff, and hiring practices free of discrimination.

While many institutions have significant room for improvement, some institutions, including the University of Wyoming and the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, have scored well on the Gold Standard, and as Dr. McGuire told the subcommittee, other schools "are trying to improve their scores. Our initiative, still in its early stages, is creating a race to the top." ●

Rekindling the Revolutionary Spirit: ACTA at the Museum of the American Revolution

On April 30, 2026, ACTA and the Museum of the American Revolution (MoAR) in Philadelphia collaborated to present **Educating for a More Perfect Union: The Indispensable Role of Civic Education for Informed Citizenry**. The event, the first of several live events planned across the country in 2026, was tied to ACTA's National Commission on American History and Civic Education and the launch of its inaugural publication, *A Broadside for the Nation: Preparing College Students for Informed Citizenship*. The publication and the event with MoAR are part of a broader mission, coinciding with the American semiquincentennial, to highlight the national crisis in civic education and persuade institutions of higher education to establish a requirement that every college student complete a rigorous course on U.S. history and civics to graduate.



Richard Haass, Anne Neal, Michael Poliakoff, Jonathan Zimmerman, and Scott Stephenson discuss the need for civic education in college.

(continued on 6)

Department of Education Demands Transparency on Foreign Funding

After years of “pervasive noncompliance” by colleges and universities, the Department of Education has launched a sophisticated transparency dashboard for reporting and analyzing foreign funding in higher education. This shift in posture began during the first Trump administration and continued in an April 2025 executive order directing Secretary of Education Linda McMahon to take “all appropriate actions” to enforce Section 117 of the Higher Education Act. That statute requires the disclosure of any foreign funding exceeding \$250,000.

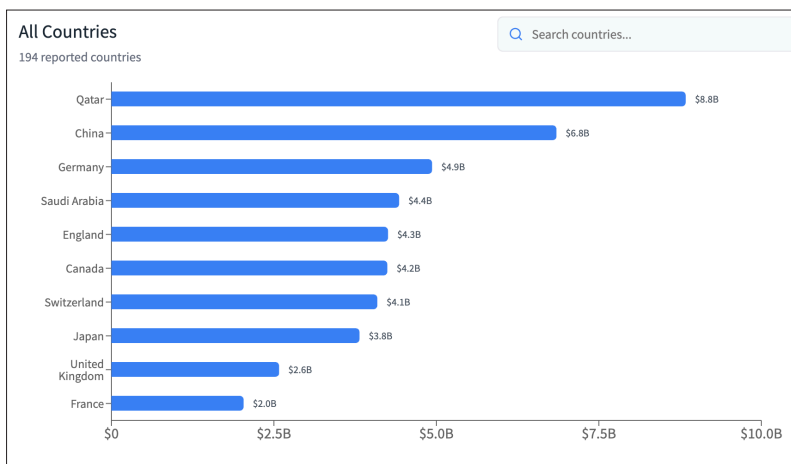
The new dashboard allows the public to review more than \$72 billion in gifts and contracts, while registered users at institutions can log disclosures in bulk, decreasing the regulatory burden of this process. The legal stakes of noncompliance have never been higher, as Secretary McMahon has declared that taxpayer-funded universities have a “moral and legal obligation” to be fully transparent with the American public, and the administration has asserted that

knowingly incomplete or inaccurate disclosures could trigger litigation and severe statutory penalties. This aggressive oversight has already resulted in the freezing of billions of dollars in federal grant funding at elite institutions, pending full disclosure of foreign financial sources.

ACTA maintains that while international partnerships are

not inherently negative, the current landscape of board passivity on this issue represents a significant fiduciary failure that trustees must address vigorously. In a February public policy bulletin, ACTA’s senior research fellow reviewed the statutory and regulatory guidelines trustees must be aware of and recommended that

trustees “ensure that robust internal reporting standards are in place and that the staff members responsible for tracking foreign investments are trained to steward these funds appropriately.” ●



ACTA in the States

Across the country, state lawmakers are zeroing in on higher education, raising fresh questions about whether colleges are meeting their obligations to students. Mounting concerns over gaps in civic knowledge, constraints on viewpoint diversity, and inconsistent oversight have fueled a new wave of reform efforts. ACTA has engaged directly at the state level, backing policies aimed at restoring academic rigor, strengthening accountability, and protecting intellectual freedom.

In **Maryland**, that push surfaced in late March with testimony supporting **House Bill 1322**. The measure targets

restrictive “free speech zones” and calls for clear, viewpoint-neutral rules governing campus events, including permits and security fees.

Oklahoma lawmakers are taking a similar approach. **Senate Bill 1725** and **House Bill 3129** seek to ensure that security fees cannot be used to privilege or penalize particular viewpoints, requiring consistent, content-neutral application.

In **South Carolina**, attention has turned to oversight. **House Bills 4736** and **4737** would require formal training for members of the Commission on Higher Education and university trustees,

aiming to better prepare them for institutional governance.

Tennessee is focusing on the classroom. **House Bill 291**, introduced by Representative Ron Gant, would require all undergraduates at public institutions to complete a three-credit course in American history.

Taken together, these developments signal a coordinated shift. Policymakers are pressing for a higher education system that prioritizes open discourse, civic understanding, and effective governance, and are moving legislation to make it happen. ●

“ SPEAKING UP ”

ACTA Hosts Webinar on Intellectual Diversity

On May 6th, ACTA hosted a webinar on how trustees can promote intellectual diversity at their institutions. Moderated by Paul & Karen Levy Fellow in Campus Freedom **Steve McGuire**, the event featured **Dr. William Inboden**, executive vice president and provost at the University of Texas–Austin; **Ramsey White**, trustee at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill; and **Dr. John Tomasi**, president of Heterodox Academy.

Discussing the lack of intellectual diversity on many campuses, the panelists explained that increasing the range of views and intellectual interests among faculty is critical to improving the education offered by colleges and universities. Otherwise, students would have little opportunity to explore the broad range of perspectives within American society, a key element of effective citizenship. Academic excellence, moreover, requires a curriculum that includes a true heterodoxy of scholarly perspectives.

The webinar outlined concrete steps trustees, administrators, and faculty can take to improve intellectual diversity ranging from reforming existing programs and curricula to creating new academic units that can bring diversity of thought and even a healthy dose of intellectual competition to campus. ACTA will soon be publishing a trustee guide on improving intellectual diversity. In the meantime, do not miss the opportunity to hear from these insightful panelists! ●



Scan the QR code to view.



ACTA Partners with the Council on Foreign Relations in Indiana and Oklahoma

The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and ACTA’s College Debates and Discourse (CD&D) Alliance have launched a dynamic partnership centered on strengthening civil discourse and global affairs engagement on college campuses.

Sharing a common mission to prepare students to become informed, engaged citizens, the initiative combines CFR Education’s extensive resources and simulations with CD&D’s immersive programming to foster respectful, productive dialogue across differences.

Pilot efforts kicked off in April with A Braver Campus Dialogue (ABCD) at Indiana University Southeast. Led by CD&D associate director Sadie Webb, the event drew 55 students, faculty, staff, and community members from Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio. That same week, classroom dialogue events were facilitated by CD&D curricular fellow Bryan Paul at Rose State College and Oklahoma State University.



CD&D’s associate director Sadie Webb moderates a dialogue at Indiana University Southeast.

International topics for these dialogues ranged from AI regulation to U.S. engagement in the Iran war. Participants entered the room informed and prepared to engage in high-level and nuanced conversations in which they could challenge each other’s ideas and explore potential solutions together. Post-event surveys showed an 18%-point increase in participants’ confidence in sharing ideas, a 16%-point increase in viewing political conversations as engaging, and a remarkable 27%-point increase in empathy and understanding of differing viewpoints.

Following the dialogue at Indiana University Southeast, Chancellor Deborah Lynne Ford remarked, “Tonight was an amazing event! To see our students learn the skills of public speaking, discourse, and active listening was so fulfilling and meaningful.” The success of these dialogues provides a model for future CFR–CD&D programming nationwide. ●



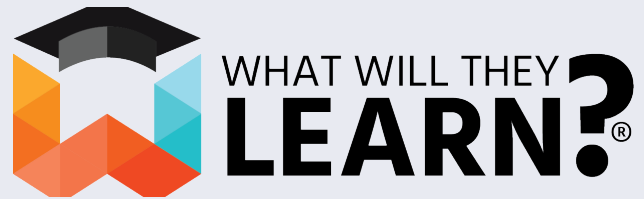
New What Will They Learn?® Results Show Worrying Trend, but Also Signs of Improvement

Since 2009, ACTA has rigorously evaluated the core curriculum of hundreds of colleges and universities that claim a liberal arts mission. It is gratifying to see how many of these institutions consult with our Academic Affairs team to gain insight into strengthening their core requirements.

This May marked the release of the What Will They Learn?® (WWTL) initiative's latest results. ACTA's Academic Affairs team has assigned more than 1,100 colleges and universities a grade of "A+" to "F" based on the strength of their general education programs. ACTA, unlike far too many institutions, does not suffer from grade inflation. We hold institutions accountable not for their promises but for the standards they set and maintain.

The rise that New College of Florida achieved, for example, moving from an "F" rating to a "B+," is precisely the kind of success that ACTA endeavors to help all schools achieve. Replacing a chaotic and fragmented academic structure with a coherent core organized, in the words of Richard Corcoran, president of New College, "around discipline, reason, and the ability to wrestle honestly with complex ideas" is a service to students and to taxpayers. This is why ACTA works, year after year, on its WWTL initiative.

WWTL grades colleges and universities based on whether they require seven subjects that form the minimum of a



foundational education in the arts and sciences: Composition, Literature, (intermediate-level) Foreign Language, U.S. Government or History, Economics, Mathematics, and Natural Science. Fulfilling these requirements ensures students receive essential knowledge and skills: college is often students' only chance to learn from experts in these different fields.

In this most recent cycle, we see evidence that ACTA's work has begun to raise standards in an area of crucial importance: U.S. Government or History. The proportion of colleges and universities requiring this subject rose from 18.9% to 19.4%. That is not nearly good enough, but this change reflects ACTA's ongoing efforts to promote that core requirement. Most recently we convened our National Commission on American History and Civic Education and issued *A Broadside for the Nation: Preparing College Students for Informed Citizenship* (see article on page 1). We won't rest until we succeed.

What Will They Learn?® shows ACTA can reverse declining standards. It is a gift we want to give to higher education and to our nation. ●

ACTA at the Museum of the American Revolution, *continued from 3*

After opening remarks by ACTA board chairman **Mark Ridenour**, ACTA president **Dr. Michael Poliakoff**, and MoAR president **Dr. R. Scott Stephenson**, President Emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations and author of *The Bill of Obligations: The Ten Habits of Good Citizens*, **Dr. Richard Haass**, delivered the evening's keynote, discussing the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence as a unique opportunity to rebuild informed patriotism.

Dr. Haass then joined Dr. Poliakoff, along with **Anne D. Neal**, Regent of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, and **Dr. Jonathan Zimmerman**, professor at the University of Pennsylvania, for a panel discussion moderated by Dr. Stephenson.

Dr. Poliakoff began with a stark warning that declining civic knowledge among young Americans is already having dire consequences for civil discourse on campuses across the nation. Drs. Zimmerman and Haass urged the reintroduction of foundational principles such as information literacy, respectful disagreement, openness to compromise, and the rejection of political violence. Anne Neal spoke eloquently about how deeper study of founder George Washington could expand a young person's critical thinking about their nation. The discussion was followed by lively Q & A.

MoAR then invited guests to attend a special after-hours screening of the film *Washington's War Tent*. The tent served as George Washington's home away from Mount Vernon during the grueling Revolutionary War years between 1775 and 1783. Dr. Stephenson delivered a poignant and impromptu presentation about the tent, and audience members were able to view the actual war relic itself, the crown jewel of the museum. ●



H E A R D C A M P U S ON

UC Davis Suspends Law Students Association for BDS Resolution

Even when universities have the right policies in place, they often fail to enforce them. But the University of California—Davis took appropriate action when it suspended its Law Students Association (LSA) for passing Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) resolution, which would have prohibited the spending of student government funds on individuals and organizations connected to Israel. As university administrators told *The Davis Enterprise*, they intervened because the “discriminatory resolution” violated a UC systemwide policy that “requires student government organizations to support activities on a viewpoint-neutral basis.”

It is all too common for student groups to face discrimination based on ideology, religion, or other factors, which is why ACTA’s Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression calls on universities to ensure “viewpoint neutrality in student group

recognition and funding.” A free and open campus must allow students to organize and pursue their interests together so long as they follow reasonable rules that apply to all students and student organizations equally. When student governments fail to abide by university policies, university leaders should act as UC Davis did, ensuring rules are followed and that there will be consequences when they are not.

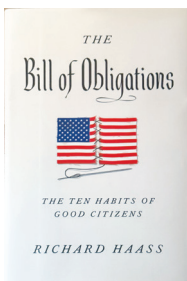
Yale Issues Report on Public Trust in Higher Education

In the face of widespread public dissatisfaction with higher education, Yale University President Maurie McInnis announced last year the formation of a Committee on Trust in Higher Education. The 10-member faculty committee released its Report on April 15, and, as President McInnis observed, it “calls on Yale to reflect on and take responsibility for our role in the erosion of public trust.” She went on to say, “This decline

did not come out of nowhere, nor did it happen overnight. And we were certainly more than mere bystanders. We must acknowledge how we have fallen short.” This is a critical first step toward reform that too many others in higher education remain unwilling to take.

In a statement, ACTA commended Yale for this Report, which makes over 20 recommendations, but noted that more substantial reforms, including, for example, requiring a course in American history or government, would be needed. We added that the true test will be whether Yale acts on the recommendations made by the Committee. We were delighted to see that the university has already adopted one of them, refocusing its mission statement on the pursuit of knowledge and removing language about other social goals that might be “worthy” but “not what makes a university a university.” ●

FROM the BOOKSHELF



The Bill of Obligations: The Ten Habits of Good Citizens

By: Dr. Richard Haass

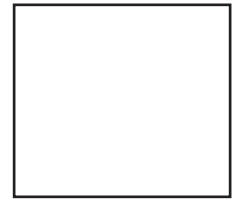
Reviewed by: Alina Amin and Bradley Gerber

At a time when many lament the state of American politics and democracy but few offer solutions, Richard Haass’s *The Bill of Obligations* supplies much-needed proposals. Haass, president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations and former special envoy to Northern Ireland, argues that society should re-emphasize citizens’ obligations to democracy and not simply the freedoms it allows. He lays out a ten-chapter “Bill of Obligations” as a counterpart to the Constitution’s Bill of Rights that includes nonviolence, political awareness, and national service. Refreshingly, his writing not only admonishes but also provides clear recommendations for making these obligations part of our lives.

Aligned with Haass’s role as a member of ACTA’s National Commission on American History and Civic Education is “Obligation IX: Support the Teaching of Civics.” He writes that “no people should assume their history, their heritage, and what is central to it, is widely known among them, much less automatically handed down.” Rather, educational institutions must teach each subsequent generation of Americans to understand and find themselves in the American story. Haass’s proposed curriculum would expose students to the fundamental primary sources without settling debates or preaching policy, thereby giving students the knowledge necessary to draw their own conclusions. His call should rouse all Americans to adopt these obligations for the betterment of our constitutional democracy. ●



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A CONVERSATION WITH THE FUTURE

As America prepares to celebrate its 250th birthday, it is right to remember the devotion and sacrifices of all those who have dedicated themselves to our nation's success. It is also right for us to embolden younger generations to safeguard our freedoms and ideals for the next 250 years.

Historian David McCullough wrote, "**ACTA, like no other organization, is reaching out to trustees and alumni to insist on a quality liberal arts education that is fundamental to an educated citizenry.**" Education is the key to self-government and liberty. For 31 years, ACTA has worked with trustees, faculty, administrators, and alumni to strengthen higher education and secure that promise.

ACTA receives no government funding. We are supported through the generosity of individuals and foundations who believe in America's past and future. As you consider your legacy, we invite you to partner with ACTA. Options include:

- Naming ACTA as a beneficiary in your will or living trust.
- Designating ACTA as a life insurance beneficiary.
- Naming ACTA as a primary or contingent beneficiary of your IRA (transfers are generally tax-free; inherited retirement accounts can carry significant tax burdens).

What sort of legacy will you leave? To discuss your legacy with ACTA, please contact **Nancy Phillips** at nphillips@goacta.org. Together we can partner to ensure the future of higher education and that the rising generation possesses the informed patriotism to keep our Republic free. ●