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ACTA Testifies on Accreditation in the Senate

In June, ACTA was again invited to provide expert testimony on the controversy surrounding college accreditation. Appearing before the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, ACTA President Anne Neal spoke about accreditation's failure to ensure academic quality. She cited evidence that regional accreditors do not provide any real protection of taxpayer dollars or educational quality. The role of accreditors has expanded from voluntary peer review to gatekeeping for the

billions of dollars spent each year on Title IV student assistance. The accreditation process, however, has done little to protect the nation from poor quality colleges and universities. Senators at the hearing focused on Corinthian College as one such example, but Neal reminded them: "While Corinthian can be accused of not doing a good job, there are many institutions that are accredited, non-

profit and otherwise, that are not doing a good job either."

Neal noted that the accreditors' failure to ensure quality is only one problem. She cited instances of accreditors second-guessing schools that offered innovative delivery of courses, or pushing back against



Anne Neal testifies before the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee at its June 17 hearing, "Reauthorizing the Higher Education Act: Evaluating Accreditation's Role in Ensuring Quality."

trustees who were trying to improve financial accountability or eliminate administrative inefficiency. Suggesting a solution, Neal urged lawmakers to consider removing

accreditors as the gatekeepers of Title IV funds and instituting a more efficient and less intrusive quality control system based on clear metrics and consumer information.

She noted that now it is not unusual for a school to spend over a million dollars to pay for the federally mandated accreditation process, and the system of regional accrediting monopolies does not give schools

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Register Now for ACTA's 20th Anniversary Gala!

Join us on October 16 to celebrate two decades of hard-charging higher education reform! A dynamic afternoon discussion with distinguished civic and education leaders will kick off the event and will be followed by a gala dinner culminating in the presentation of the 2015 Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education. **Register now at GoACTA.org/anniversary or call 202.467.6787.**

www.GoACTA.org

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**Senators Lamar Alexander (TN) and Patty Murray (WA)
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions**

“We would like for you to provide your perspective as a higher education expert on the current status of accreditation including a discussion of how well it assures quality for students, the public and policymakers. It also will be helpful to hear specific suggestions for policymakers to consider that would improve accreditation and the quality of American higher education.”

**Senator Patty Murray, Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions**

“Our committee members benefitted greatly from your clear recommendations to improve the accreditation process and place a greater focus on educational quality and accountability. We look forward to continuing discussions about the best ways to ensure quality in higher education. Thank you again for your dedication to these issues.”

**Velma Montoya, Regent Emerita
University of California, Los Angeles, CA**

“[C]ongratulations, for ACTA’s recognition with Heritage’s Salvatori Prize for American Citizenship. More and more, parents are asking, ‘What will my child learn in college in exchange for my hard-earned money?’ ACTA is providing the answer.”

**Harold Cannon, former Division Director, National
Endowment for the Humanities; former Dean and Professor
of Classics, Manhattanville College
Southwick, MA**

“Thanks very much for sending me your leaflet on the status of Shakespeare in the academy. I knew things were bad, but I had no idea they were that bad!”

Editor’s Note: In April ACTA released The Unkindest Cut: Shakespeare in Exile in 2015. View the full report at www.GoACTA.org.

**Harold J. Daub, former U.S. Representative; Trustee
University of Nebraska, Omaha, NE**

“We, of course, are so proud of Senator Hank Brown, my classmate from the entering class of freshman Republican Members of Congress in 1980 and want you to pass on to him our best wishes and congratulations on this acknowledgement of his accomplishments.”

Editor’s Note: Senator Hank Brown will receive the Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education at ACTA’s 20th Anniversary Gala on October 16. Register for the festivities at GoACTA.org/anniversary.

ACTA Accreditation Testimony, continued from 1

the opportunity to choose a more suitable accreditor. “Regional accreditors are nothing more than cartels,” explained Neal. Accrediting schools by region means institutions are given a one-size-fits-all approval, which doesn’t take into account the defining characteristics of each unique institution. Neal noted that a new system of specialized accrediting bodies could focus on specific education areas such as STEM, research universities, or liberal arts colleges.

The current system of accreditation also has no requirement to measure learning gains. Neal argued that awarding Title IV funding based on clear and

audited performance metrics, including measurements of learning gains, would be a far better system of quality assurance.

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ACTA made the case for a complete overhaul even stronger when Anne Neal testified before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Her May 29 testimony demonstrated that accreditation does

nothing to ensure that at-risk students get the education they need. Lack of transparency in the accreditation process hurts students and their parents.

It provides little information on academic outcomes of the schools, and accreditation often creates a false assurance of quality and educational effectiveness. Accreditors fail to highlight good schools that make sure minority students get the attention they need to finish their degree on time.

Neal’s testimony will be crucially important as lawmakers reevaluate education policy this fall and deliberate the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. ●

Academic Misconduct at UT–Austin and UNC–Chapel Hill

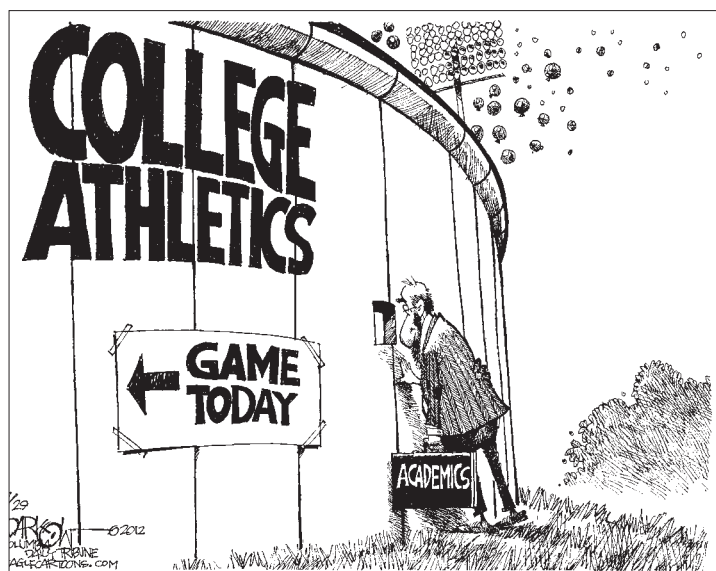
The University of Texas–Austin (UT) is home to the latest controversy in college athletics. Just this past June, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported allegations of the academic misconduct of three former members of the men’s basketball team. In 2013, former guard Martez Walker allegedly cheated on a math test; in 2009, former guard J’Covan Brown allegedly had a substitute complete his assignments in several classes; and in 2006, former forward P. J. Tucker allegedly turned in an essay in his name that he did not write himself.

UT swiftly responded that it would launch an investigation into the allegations. The university hired independent investigator and attorney Gene Marsh, formerly of the NCAA, not only to review the allegations themselves but also to assess comprehensively the academic support and resources provided by the athletic department for the admissions, tutoring, and course selection of its players.

This controversy follows on the heels of another at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill (UNC). Earlier in June, the NCAA charged the university with five academic violations, including lack of institutional control over its academic program. Additionally, the university’s accrediting agency placed UNC on a year-long probation, with three months to respond formally to the charges. It is noteworthy that these violations extended over a 19-year period, calling into serious question the effectiveness of both the NCAA and the accreditors in upholding academic standards.

Both instances show the clear need for

trustees to insist upon stronger academic standards and more effective mechanisms to uphold them. ACTA’s new web video, available on our website and featuring University of Maryland regent Tom McMillen and former chancellor Brit Kirwan, will guide boards on their responsibility for athletic oversight. ●



Published with permission of caglecartoons.com.

Sweet Briar Trustee Warns of Problems

It is hard to be a prophet in one’s own land. Just ask former Sweet Briar trustee Richard Leslie. Mr. Leslie served on Sweet Briar College’s Board of Directors from 2007 until 2014, when he was asked to resign. When the news broke in the spring that the 114-year-old women’s liberal arts college would close, Mr. Leslie was one of the few not surprised by the sad announcement. During the last two years of his tenure on the Board of Directors, the board was made subordinate to an “Executive Committee” made up of the college president’s supporters. Ignoring the warning signs, the school lost much of its senior staff, withdrew increasingly large amounts from the school’s endowment, and saw a decline in admissions and retention. Sweet Briar soon had what the board termed “insurmountable financial challenges.”

Mr. Leslie had identified these problems and voiced his concerns a year before Sweet Briar’s leadership admitted defeat. Instead of listening to concerned board members, according to Leslie, the president “brought in a coach from the Association of Governing Boards,” who effectively stifled vigorous board involvement precisely when Sweet Briar needed it most. Trustees who raised objections were systematically purged by the Executive Committee. Mr. Leslie correctly believed that Sweet Briar could be saved. After the school announced its impending closure, alumnae stepped in and sued to keep their school open. In June, the Virginia Supreme Court issued a stay. Sweet Briar will have a new president, a new Board of Directors, and a chance to succeed. If Sweet Briar is lucky, the new board will be as principled as Mr. Leslie. Sweet Briar serves as a warning, especially for small liberal arts colleges, that poor governance can destroy an institution. A school’s salvation rests in having engaged and proactive trustees. ●



ACTA's Support for Trustee Training Gains Traction

ACTA has long advocated for professional development for trustees, and its Institute for Effective Governance (IEG) has provided such services since its inception in 2003. The message is gaining traction across the country. Three states are considering or have recently passed legislation requiring trustees to participate in training as a condition of their service on a college governing board. Commenting on the new legislation, ACTA Vice President of Policy Michael Poliakoff told *Inside Higher Ed* that although “It’s not unreasonable for the state to give that legislative guidance.... it’s preferable when institutions themselves create and enforce conflict-of-interest policies and board training.”

Texas Senator Judith Zaffirini sponsored a bill because, she said, “newly appointed regents didn’t understand their roles.... They have a limited role.” ACTA agrees that trustee training is crucial, however, it has advocated for a broader understanding of trusteeship. Board members need to understand and take responsibility for the operations for their own schools. As stated in the report ACTA sponsored, *Governance for a New Era*, “Trustees should take a more active role in reviewing and benchmarking the work of faculty and administrators and monitoring outcomes. Too many have seen their role narrowly defined as boosters, cheerleaders, and donors.”

Former Westfield State University President Evan Dobbelle reportedly rang up more than \$450,000 on five school-related credit cards, and Massachusetts Inspector General Glenn A. Cunha launched an investigation. The audit discovered that Westfield trustees “were unaware that they had both the right and the responsibility to question Dobbelle’s expenditures and conduct.... Dobbelle’s blatant use of University funds for personal purposes over several years highlights the need for every state college and university to have a strong and informed board of trustees.” ACTA has consistently counseled boards to require the metrics they need to be effective fiduciaries. As Dr. Poliakoff stated in an interview with *MassLive*: “We’ve always felt the best possible thing is for each board to make [training] a part of its culture.”

Alabama’s state legislature wants more transparency in governance of the state’s public universities. State Representative Jack D. Williams authored his state’s bill in response to questions about governance practices at the University of Alabama–Birmingham. The message is clear: The state legislature is closely watching university boards.

ACTA’s IEG continues to make its printed guides and its seminars available as it works to make good governance the norm at America’s colleges and universities. ●

ACTA on the Road in Pennsylvania

On April 17, ACTA Vice President of Policy Michael Poliakoff participated in the spring conference of the Pennsylvania Association of Council of Trustees, “Focus for the Future,” in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Trustees from the 14 institutions of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) attended. Dr. Poliakoff and Pennsylvania’s State System Chancellor Frank T. Brogan gave a keynote address concerning the responsibilities of the CEO and the trustees. The presentation covered crucial areas of college leadership: academic freedom, shared governance, presidential selection, and the data and metrics trustees should have in order to make effective decisions on behalf of students, their families, and the public.

Chancellor Brogan is one of the signatories of the *Governance for a New Era* project that ACTA sponsored. He has been a dynamic leader of the PASSHE and before that, the State University System of Florida. ACTA’s work with Chancellor Brogan began when ACTA studied the remarkable commitment to transparency and growth that his office made to Florida’s public universities. ACTA is proud to partner with college leaders and boards that honor their mission and fiduciary responsibilities with such devotion. ●



PA State System of Higher Education chancellor Frank Brogan



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

An Oasis at Harvard

Harvard's Program on Constitutional Government, directed by Professor Harvey Mansfield, is one of ACTA's "Oases of Excellence." It is distinguished by its rigorous focus on key aspects of American history, Western civilization, and the political theory that undergirds them. In an exciting development, it has just made its seminars of the 2015 spring semester available online. These seminars include "Liberal Education and Plato's Laws" by Robert Goldberg, tutor at St. John's College; "The Consistency of Edmund Burke" by David Bromwich, professor at Yale University; "Thomas Hobbes: At the Edge of Promises and Prophecies" by Alison McQueen, professor at Stanford University; and "The Supreme Court in American Law" by Adam J. White, a lawyer and writer based in Washington, DC.

This program is truly an oasis of excellence and intellectual diversity at Harvard, and by posting these seminars on YouTube, the program enriches the intellectual life of the nation as well.

Purdue's Reforms

These past few months have been quite busy for Purdue University. Earlier in May, its Board of Trustees passed an important resolution that articulates Purdue's commitment to academic freedom. The resolution endorsed the principles put forth

in the University of Chicago's 2014 Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression—principles that affirm the priority that the free exchange of ideas must hold. Purdue, adopting the Chicago resolution, "greatly values civility" and holds that all members of the community "share in the responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect"; however, the role of the university is not "to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive."

A month later, the university announced that Purdue Polytechnic Indianapolis High School will open in August 2017. This charter school is the product of a partnership between Purdue and several private organizations, and now the charter school will serve students interested in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—with particular support for those who are low-income, first-generation, and/or minority students. Students who successfully graduate from the program would go on to receive either automatic enrollment in Purdue University or official certification for the industrial workforce.

ACTA commends Purdue University for its pledge to uphold intellectual diversity and academic freedom and for its commitment to the highest standards of academic excellence and service. ●

Featured Donor: William Armstrong



As a dynamic Colorado businessman, state legislator, and member of the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate, the Honorable William Armstrong has been a guiding hand for his community and the nation for over 40 years. His presidency of Colorado Christian University (CCU) shows how much energetic, mission-driven leadership can achieve.

Bill served in the Army National Guard from 1957 to 1963 after attending both Tulane University and the University of Minnesota. Moving from military to political service, he held elected office from 1963 to 1991. Upon retiring from public office, he returned to Colorado and in 2006 took up the leadership of Colorado Christian University.

CCU has flourished under his guidance: The campus and the student body have grown, and the university has developed an innovative and effective career apprenticeship program. In 2012, CCU enhanced its general education requirements and became one of only 22 institutions in the nation to earn an "A" rating in ACTA's *What Will They Learn?* survey.

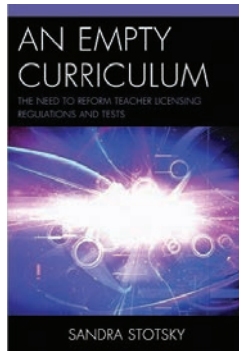
ACTA has benefited from President Armstrong's wise advice on policy issues, particularly in our efforts to reform the college accreditation system. We are honored by his continuing friendship and support for our efforts to strengthen higher education in America, including his gracious participation and membership in ACTA's 20th Anniversary Gala Host Committee. ●

With our old building scheduled for demolition, ACTA has relocated! Please make note of our new address:

1730 M Street NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20036

An Empty Curriculum

by Dr. Sandra Stotsky

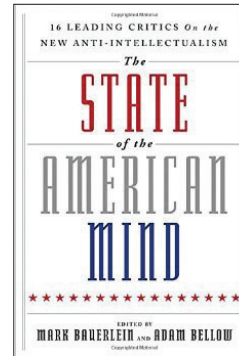


ACTA board member Sandra Stotsky has devoted her entire career to maintaining high standards in American education, particularly the training of teachers. As Senior Associate Commissioner in the Massachusetts Department of Education,

she directed the revision of Massachusetts K–12 curriculum standards as well as the regulations for teacher licensure and licensure testing, which together formed the essential elements of the “Massachusetts education miracle.” This year, she published *An Empty Curriculum: The Need to Reform Teacher Licensing Regulations and Tests*. It is a relatively short book, as welcoming to the non-expert as it is replete with insights for the veteran. It is also an uncompromising book that leaves the apologists for poorly trained teachers no room to hide. It is a must-read for those who seek to remedy the declining standards of our nation’s public school system. ACTA Vice President of Policy Michael Poliakoff has published a full review of the book at www.GoACTA.org/the_forum/overview.

The State of the American Mind

by Mark Bauerlein and Adam Bellow



Mark Bauerlein and Adam Bellow’s *The State of the American Mind: 16 Leading Critics on the New Anti-Intellectualism* diagnoses the grave condition of the present American populace and its institutions. Bauerlein, professor of English

at Emory University and member of ACTA’s Council of Scholars, and Bellow, Vice President/ Executive Editor at HarperCollins, bring together an interdisciplinary group of critics who contend that the American citizenry is in a state of intellectual and cultural malaise. The eclectic group consists of such thinkers as E.D. Hirsch, Jr., Jean Twenge, Greg Lukianoff, and Richard Arum, to name a few. In the spirit of Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), Bauerlein and Bellow’s book empirically analyzes the educational dilution, cultural illiteracy, and civic apathy that have contributed to the nation’s cultural degeneration and intellectual decay. ACTA Program Officer for Curricular Reform Eric Bledsoe has published a full book review online at the Conservative Book Club. ●

An Evening with Robert Zoellick



In June, an enthusiastic group of ACTA friends gathered at the home of President Anne Neal for dinner and an engaging address by Robert Zoellick, past president of the World Bank and former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State. Mr. Zoellick spoke on the “Globalization of Higher Education,” focusing on issues of academic quality and taking up many of ACTA’s concerns regarding collegiate standards and effectiveness. He argued that the United States cannot afford to compromise on academic standards if it intends to remain competitive in the global market and retain the distinction of having the world’s preeminent system of higher education.

Mr. Zoellick also shared the personal experience he had with the narrow-mindedness of today’s college campuses. His alma mater, Swarthmore College, had repeatedly urged him to speak at commencement and to accept an honorary degree, yet students protested so vigorously against Zoellick’s invitation in 2014 that he felt it necessary ultimately to decline.

ACTA is very grateful both to Mr. Zoellick and to our supporters who attended, including long-time friend John Wilson, who came all the way from Georgia! ●

In Memoriam: Dr. Jack Templeton



It is with sadness that we note the passing of Dr. Jack Templeton, a generous, longtime ACTA friend and a ceaseless source of inspiration to make both our nation and our world more thoughtful and more compassionate. He was a physician, with a specialty in pediatric surgery, and he brought to his career the gentleness of spirit that has been the hallmark of his profession, along with the intellectual rigor that has informed its progress. As the Templeton Foundation that was begun by his father, the legendary Sir John Templeton, grew in size and complexity, Jack brought his kind heart and rigorous mind to the work of the Foundation. Dr. Templeton, like his father, sought answers to what they called the “Big Questions,” particularly those regarding the interrelationship of science and religion. Many of the world’s most eminent scientists, philosophers, educators, and theologians found support at the Foundation, as they advanced understanding of natural science, religion, and human spirituality. We mourn his death but celebrate his life so well lived. We are thankful for the many ways in which he left the world a kinder and better place. ●

Meet ACTA’s Summer Interns

No summer in DC would be complete without a new cohort of interns who provide valuable research for our What Will They Learn?™ project. **Emily Linz** graduated from the University of Dallas with a B.A. in English and a concentration in Latin. She recently completed her M.A. in English at the Catholic University of America. Originally from Temple, Texas, Emily has worked as a writing center instructor at CUA and Temple College and has served as a liaison for freshmen composition classes.

A rising senior at Ashland University, **Ivan Larsson** is majoring in political science and history with minors in mathematics and economics. Originally from Sweden, he now hails from Cheyenne, Wyoming. Ivan plans to attend law school after graduation.

From Richmond, Virginia, **Skip Estes** is a rising junior at the College of William and Mary. As a public policy major and business analytics minor, Skip enjoys analyzing fiscal, economic, and regulatory policy. While at William and Mary, Skip became a brother of the Alpha Zeta chapter of the Kappa Alpha Order. He is a founding member of Young Americans for Liberty, a student group that advocates for a free society.

This summer, ACTA awarded two Robert Lewit Fellowships in Education Policy: one to **Andrew Guernsey** and the other to **Shahrukh Kahn**. Andrew grew up in Ave Maria, Florida, and is a rising senior at Johns Hopkins University, double majoring in political science and classics. He has participated in fellowships at the Hertog Political Studies Program, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, and the Charles Koch Institute. Andrew is writing his senior thesis on threats to academic freedom. Shahrukh Kahn is a rising junior at Harvard University, majoring in social studies. Originally from Elmont, New York, his academic interests include education, law, social theory, and linguistics. ●



ACTA interns Emily Linz, Ivan Larsson, Andrew Guernsey, Shahrukh Kahn, and Skip Estes.

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



David McCullough



Mitch Daniels



Richard Arum



Tom McMillen

Join us for a dynamic discussion

featuring Pulitzer-Prize winning historian **David McCullough**, Purdue President **Mitch Daniels**, education expert and author of *Academically Adrift*, **Richard Arum**, and former University System of Maryland regent **Tom McMillen**.

These prominent leaders will examine the future of higher education on ACTA's panel, *CLASS OF 2040: What Will They Learn and At What Cost?*, as part of **ACTA's 20th Anniversary event on October 16** at the National Geographic Society.

Make plans to join us after the discussion for cocktails and our gala celebration! If you haven't reserved your tickets, there is still time!

This is an event you won't want to miss!
Register at GoACTA.org/anniversary.