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## Prominent Colleges Take Steps on Intellectual Diversity

What do the University System of Georgia, the University of Missouri System, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Old Dominion University, the University of Pennsylvania, the City University of New York, Amherst College, and Dartmouth College all have in common? They are just a few of the well-known colleges and universities that have taken concrete action—in line with ACTA's recommendations—to protect intellectual diversity on campus.

That's what our newest trustee guide, *Protecting the Free Exchange of Ideas*, shows. There, we detail ten best practices for promoting intellectual diversity—such as the elimination of oppressive speech codes, the promotion of visiting scholar programs, and the incorporation of intellectual diversity into a school's strategic planning—and commend institutions that have taken these steps.

To pick just a few examples: In Georgia and Missouri, ACTA's State Higher Education Report Cards helped produce reforms. Steps forward at Old Dominion and the

South Dakota system came in response to the introduction of sunlight legislation based on our previous report, *Intellectual Diversity: Time for Action*. A unique lecture series at Harvard Law came at the behest of a member of ACTA's Donors Working Group. And as readers of *Inside Academe* know, reform-minded trustees and alumni at CUNY and Dartmouth have worked with ACTA for years.

The institutions we praise in *Protecting the Free Exchange of Ideas* are responsible for educating 700,000 students each year.

Since a lack of intellectual diversity is one of the most pressing issues facing our colleges and universities, ACTA has dedicated considerable energy to working with trustees

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## Register Now for 2009 ATHENA Roundtable

Register now for ACTA's 2009 ATHENA Roundtable, "Getting Back to First Principles," to be held on November 5-6, 2009 at George Washington's Mount Vernon. See [www.goacta.org](http://www.goacta.org) or call us at 202-467-6787 for further details.

[www.goacta.org](http://www.goacta.org)

[info@goacta.org](mailto:info@goacta.org)

1-888-ALUMNI-8



**Laurie Morrow, President  
Morrow Public Relations  
Montpelier, VT**

“In this booklet, there was so much clear progress described on other campuses around the country that it was a great pleasure to read. The University Center approach has been and will be transformative. I appreciate more than I can say the extraordinary amount and superb quality of the work you put into growing these Centers—and into all you do for higher education.”

*Editor’s Note: In June, ACTA published a report called Protecting the Free Exchange of Ideas in which the University of Vermont and several other schools were profiled for their actions to protect intellectual diversity on campus.*

**Robert A. Brown, President  
Boston College  
Boston, MA**

“Thank you for your letter of June 18 and the enclosed report, *Protecting the Free Exchange of Ideas*. It is a timely and pithy summary of the steps educational institutions should take to create an environment for unfettered intellectual diversity. I was pleased that you noted Boston University’s strong support of academic freedom and intellectual diversity in its official policy statements. I shall share the report with appropriate administrators.”

**James E. Lyons, Sr.  
Secretary of Higher Education  
Maryland Higher Education Commission  
Annapolis, MD**

“Thank you for sharing ACTA’s ideas with the Governor. ... We, and our colleagues at the individual institutions we represent are always on the lookout for new, innovative, and cost-effective ways of providing students with a high-quality education that prepares them to meet the workforce needs of the State. ... Thank you again for your correspondence and for your fine work on behalf of college and university trustees and alumni.”

**Yvonne K. Seon, Trustee  
Allegheny College  
Meadville, PA**

“Thank you so much for sending the handy brochure *Asking Questions, Getting Answers*. I have served on the Board of Directors of a Private Voluntary Organization for 32 of the last 36 years, and I have learned the importance of asking the right questions. This experience in higher education is different, however, and I am still learning how to balance responsibility as a trustee with ‘trust’ for the officers of the college. Again, thanks for the help.”

## You’re Invited to ATHENA

On November 5-6, ACTA will convene its annual ATHENA Roundtable conference at George Washington’s Mount Vernon. This year’s topic is “Getting Back to First Principles,” and we will be doing just that by addressing the challenges before us and focusing on what leaders across the country are doing to reinvigorate higher education. We’ll hear from panels of engaged trustees, alumni, and others on key topics ranging from “Strong Presidents and Strong Boards” to “Checks and Balances.” There will be a colloquy featuring *New York Times* columnist Stanley Fish and Princeton University professor Robert P. George, and our keynote address will be delivered by noted historian Richard Norton Smith.

We’re also excited to have several important reformers joining us as speakers and moderators. Andrew McRoberts, who heads a successful group of concerned alumni of the College of William & Mary; Tom Rice, a member of the Georgia House of Representatives who has used ACTA’s report on the University System of Georgia to bring about significant change; and Allen Sessoms and James Dyke, president and board chairman of the University of the District of Columbia, which is currently enacting structural reforms ACTA has praised in the *Washington Post*, will all be joining us.

Please join us as we gather a remarkable community of leaders. ●

Register online at  
[www.goacta.org/events](http://www.goacta.org/events)  
or call 202-467-6787.

## KC Johnson to Receive 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Philip Merrill Award



Robert "KC" Johnson

This year's ATHENA Roundtable will culminate on November 6 with a gala dinner at the Cosmos Club in Washington, where we will be presenting the fifth annual Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education. This unique award honors individuals who have made extraordinary contributions to the advancement of liberal arts education, core curricula, and the teaching of Western civilization and American history.

The 2009 Merrill Award will be presented to Robert David "KC" Johnson, professor of history at Brooklyn College and The Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Professor Johnson is a recognized teacher and scholar whose specialty is American political and diplomatic history. He has written several books on the subject, including his most recent, *All the Way with LBJ: The 1964 Presidential Election*, and is also co-author of *Until Proven Innocent*, the definitive history of the Duke lacrosse case.

Professor Johnson is a standard bearer for intellectual diversity and excellence in the academy.

Despite remarkable credentials, his career nearly came to a grinding halt over his criticisms of the politically-correct university. Professor Johnson's defense of traditional scholarship, his critique that a college-sponsored teach-in shortly after 9/11 was one-sided, and his opposition to hiring a candidate he considered unqualified, prompted his colleagues to deny him tenure. ACTA, students from Brooklyn College, and a group of eminent historians from other colleges protested the decision, and eventually the chancellor reversed it with trustee support. These efforts have been richly repaid as Professor Johnson continues to inspire students at Brooklyn about topics that are ignored on many campuses. Don't miss this chance to honor a true champion of academic freedom and excellence. ●

### Prominent Colleges Take Steps, *continued from 1*

and others to address this problem. Of course, many deny there is a problem at all. That is why numerous ACTA publications have asked those who know—namely the students—what is actually going on in the classroom.

For example, in 2005 when we published our previous report, ACTA was unable to find a single major institution that had taken concrete steps to protect intellectual pluralism and academic freedom on its campus. Not only that, when we asked the students themselves what was going on—via a scientific survey—they reported campus panels on current events that were one-sided, politics frequently being brought into the classroom, and pressure to agree with their professors' political views in order to get a good grade.

While these problems certainly still exist, the findings of *Protecting the Free Exchange of Ideas* are a sea change from four years ago. Thanks to intense public advocacy by ACTA and others, many institutions vigorously sought to be recognized for protecting intellectual diversity. For instance, Amherst's

president sent us a lengthy letter elaborating on numerous initiatives he has personally undertaken. This simply did not happen four years ago.

Additionally, our findings are getting attention. The day our report was released, it was featured in *USA Today*, which reaches more daily readers than any other newspaper. Moving forward, we are leveraging this good news to encourage other institutions to follow in the footsteps of those profiled. ACTA has worked with reporters across the country to get good press for the universities taking action—a strategy designed to keep them moving forward—and we have sent our findings to thousands of trustees, every governor in the country, and members of the education committees in Congress.

While there is certainly much more to do, ACTA's approach is paying dividends: We are changing the culture on this important issue and promoting institutional reform—which benefits every single student on campus—at influential colleges and universities. ●

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## New College Guide Asks: What Will They Learn?



Mel Elfin, founding editor of *U.S. News*' rankings, endorses ACTA's new college-guide website at the National Press Club.

“**W**hatWillTheyLearn.com is an invaluable and unique additional resource for parents.” Such is the praise that ACTA’s new college-guide website—which rates colleges based on the question of what students are expected to learn prior to graduation—has received from Mel Elfin, the founding editor of the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. And Mr. Elfin isn’t the only one. Our website and accompanying report have been making headlines across the country, and it is clear from the responses that our focus on education is striking a chord.

ACTA announced the launch of WhatWillTheyLearn.com at a well-attended press conference at the National Press Club on August 19, just before *U.S. News & World Report* issued its annual college rankings. The media response

has been fantastic. Staff members have had the opportunity to do several radio interviews about the website. Our ratings have been discussed side-by-side with the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings in major newspapers such as *USA Today*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Daily News*, and the *Houston Chronicle*. The Associated Press included our website in an article picked up by dozens of local newspapers—which has brought the readership of all of the newspapers in which we have been featured to over 12 million. Several student newspapers—including the *Cornell Daily Sun*, the *Kentucky Kernel*, and the University of Houston *Daily Cougar*—have written complimentary articles about the project, and some did so even when their own schools did not receive superior grades.

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## Donors Establish New Fellowships

By Charles Mitchell, ACTA Program Director

**T**his year, ACTA’s work is benefiting richly from two brand-new fellowships established by our supporters. The first is the Friess Family Fellowship, a two-month position for a graduate student made possible by Foster, Lynn, Steve, and Polly Friess, members of ACTA’s Society of Fellows. The inaugural fellow was **Shant Boyajian**, a third-year law student at the Catholic University of America, who helped revise our *Intelligent Donor’s Guide to College Giving* over the summer. He is a member of the Federalist Society and an executive editor on the *Journal of Contemporary Health Law and Policy*. Following his fellowship at ACTA, he secured a position at the Department of Energy. After graduation, he plans to work as a public policy lawyer in Washington. Watch for a new edition of the *Intelligent Donor’s Guide* later this year thanks to the Friess family and Shant.

The second is the Jerry L. Martin Fellowship in Higher Education Reform, a one-year position honoring ACTA’s founding president. As *Inside Academe* readers will recall, Jerry Martin recently retired as ACTA’s board chairman. His fellow board members established this fellowship to honor his enormous contributions to higher education reform. The inaugural fellow is **Heather Lakemacher**, a recent graduate of Shimer College, a Great Books college in Chicago with which ACTA has worked for years—where she also served as a trustee. Previously, she was the customer service manager for Cedar Roofing Company in Lake Forest, Illinois. Concurrent with her fellowship, Heather participates in the Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation’s Associate Program, an intensive and selective program that cultivates future leaders in the nonprofit sector. Her work, consistent with Jerry’s fabled command of the written word and passion for engaged trusteeship, focuses on writing, editing, and trustee relations. ●



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

## Course Syllabi Are Coming to a Computer Screen Near You

By Heather Lakemacher, ACTA Jerry L. Martin Fellow

Registering for classes is often a confusing and time-consuming task for students. Not only do they have a lot to consider—which classes will meet graduation requirements, how class schedules will affect their part-time employment opportunities, whether or not the classes they need are already full—but they also frequently have very little information about the most important aspect: what will actually be taught in the course.

Although some schools have a robust “grapevine,” the official information available to students about the courses they are considering often consists of no more than a short paragraph in the course catalog. This can prove wholly insufficient in the case of courses such as “American Writers” where authors and works are chosen by the professor teaching the class.

However, there are promising indications that this may be starting to change. In May, the Texas legislature passed a bill requiring all public colleges and universities in the state to post their undergraduate syllabi online within the first two weeks of the semester. The bill (now a law, thanks to Gov. Rick Perry’s signature) also specifies that a syllabus must list “a brief description of each major course requirement, including each major assignment and examination,” “any required or recommended reading,” and “a general description of the subject matter of each lecture or discussion.”

Although this doesn’t directly help students with registration, the fact that the colleges are also required to keep

the syllabi posted online for at least two years does. Going forward, students will be able to review syllabi from previous semesters before making a decision about which professor or section of a course to take. Additionally, the Texas legislature now requires that schools post information on their websites about departmental budgets and the educational and teaching history of their professors, both of which can be helpful not only to students but also to parents, alumni, trustees, and policymakers.

Texas isn’t the only place where colleges and universities are under pressure to be more transparent. A 2008 report by the Pope Center—a North Carolina nonprofit dedicated to improving higher education—called for similar reforms in the Tarheel State’s colleges. In *Opening Up the Classroom: Greater Transparency through Better, More Accessible Course Information*, the Pope Center examined several institutions that have already started posting syllabi online. They found that students at institutions where syllabi were available during registration were more satisfied with their registration process and spent less time adding and dropping courses after the start of the semester. The Pope Center has recommended that North Carolina’s legislature follow the lead of Texas but take it a step further and require their colleges to post preliminary syllabi for all up-coming classes prior to the start of registration.

Clearly, ACTA is not alone in placing a growing emphasis on transparency and providing students and the public with more information about what is actually being taught in the classroom—and the states are responding. ●

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## Bridging the Gap

Posted by Anne D. Neal on July 19, 2009

“Reaching Across the Aisle: Bridging the Gap Between Governing Boards and Academics.” That was the name of ACTA’s panel discussion at the recent American Association of University Professors annual meeting. Dedicated to fostering a greater exchange between faculty and trustees, this panel was part of ACTA’s larger, long-term effort to educate trustees about what constitutes appropriate governance, to educate faculty about the same thing, to spark productive discussions between these two groups, and to enlist the AAUP as a partner in those efforts.

In recent months, ACTA has been pleased to reach out to faculty and the AAUP in a number of ways. In December, we participated in a colloquy with AAUP board member and Penn State English professor Michael Berube at the National Communication Association’s annual convention. In January, at the annual meeting of the National Association of Scholars, we asked AAUP president and University of Illinois English professor Cary Nelson to

join us in stomping out speech codes (he accepted our invitation). Most recently, we included an article by AAUP general secretary Gary Rhoades about intellectual diversity in our newsletter. These events are complemented by our participation in academic conferences hosted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, the State University of New York, and others. At every point, we seek to build an ongoing, positive engagement with the higher ed community—to discuss issues, to hear differing perspectives, to brainstorm solutions, and to build the kinds of dialogues and relationships that can facilitate beneficial reform for everyone in higher ed, from the faculty to the students.

We may not have completely “bridged the gap” just yet, but we have only just begun. And I do believe we have laid a strong foundation. As I noted during the AAUP session, ACTA shares faculty members’ interest in demanding excellent governance—including resisting rogue administrators and trustees who micromanage. That

is one of the goals of our state report cards, which grade boards on numerous fronts: presidential selection and review, committee structures, transparency and accessibility, as well as substantive actions. ACTA also shares many faculty members’ legitimate concern about administrative bloat and about trustees who lack a sensitive understanding of the special protocols and values that underwrite the unique enterprise of higher education.

That said, we also believe that it is the professoriate’s job to reach out to trustees. Faculty should understand that presidents and trustees are engaged in enormously complex, vital, and often urgent fiduciary endeavors. They should also understand that, going forward, trustees must be included among academia’s primary stakeholders, alongside faculty and administrators. The bottom line: Shared governance should indeed be “shared.” ACTA has made a start towards a broader dialogue and we look forward to continuing on this path. ●

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# Meet ACTA's Interns

By Noah Mamis, ACTA Program Officer

The generous donations of ACTA's supporters once again made it possible for us to hire a strong corps of interns for the summer of 2009. The interns contributed key writing and research and were instrumental in the continuing expansion of our unique Trustee Database. They were also treated to a series of seminars with notable education experts, as well as tours of the White House and the dome of the U.S. Capitol.

**Jeremy E. Schiffres** is a junior at Yale University, studying political science. He is the Chairman of the Conservative Party and a member of the Yale Political Union. He also plays trumpet in a pops orchestra.

**Carrie Brochu** is a graduate of the University of Connecticut, where she earned a B.A. in anthropology. She has just completed her M.A. in International Peace and Conflict Resolution at American University.

**Nicoletta Dimova** is a recent graduate of American University, where she received her degree in international relations with a specialization in Middle East studies and foreign policy. This fall, she will be attending the London School of Economics and Political Science, where she will be pursuing her master's degree.

**Evan J. O'Brien** was ACTA's Robert Lewit Fellow in Education Policy, a special position established by the generosity of



Lewit Fellow Evan O'Brien, interns Jeremy Schiffres and Nicoletta Dimova, and Friess Fellow Shant Boyajian.

ACTA board chairman Robert T. Lewit, M.D., and his wife, Jane. Evan is a recent graduate of Harvard College, where he studied history and helped run Harvard Model Congress tournaments in Boston, San Francisco, and Belgium. This fall, he will be teaching at Regis High School in New York. ●

## What Will They Learn, *continued from 4*

Most importantly, the website itself has attracted more than 30,000 visitors, who are viewing an average of 13 different pages each! This indicates that people are actually using the website as intended: to explore how the curricula at different schools compare to one another.

WhatWillTheyLearn.com examines the general education curricula at more than 125 leading colleges and universities to see if they require students to take math, composition, literature, science, foreign language, U.S. government or history, and economics. ACTA then assigns a letter grade to each school based on the number of subjects required. No school that we graded requires all seven subjects, but seven schools—Baylor University, Brooklyn College, Hunter College, Texas A&M University, the United States Military Academy, the University of Arkansas, and the University of Texas at Austin—receive an A for requiring six of the seven subjects. In contrast, the 27 schools that receive an F for requiring either one subject or none include such notable schools as Amherst College, Cornell University, Johns Hopkins University, Northwestern University, Vanderbilt University, and Yale University.

We are pleased that so many people are now focusing on the simple but central question, “What are students expected to learn while they are in college?” Stay tuned for updates as we continue to expand this project—and the public's awareness of the gaps in many students' educations. ●



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

An advertisement for the website 'what will they learn.com'. The background is a light beige color. At the top, the text reads 'FIND OUT WHAT THE COLLEGE RANKINGS DON'T TELL YOU.' in a serif font, with 'DON'T' in red. Below this is a dark blue horizontal bar with the website name 'what will they learn.com' in white. At the bottom, there is a photograph of a rolled-up white diploma with a blue ribbon, a blue graduation cap with a gold tassel, and a blue graduation stole. The diploma has the word 'DIPLOMA' written on it in colorful, block letters. To the right of the diploma, there is a quote: '63% of employers say too many recent college graduates are not prepared to participate successfully in today's economy.' followed by '- USA Today'.

This full-page ad for ACTA's **What Will They Learn?** project appears in the 2010 *U.S. News & World Report* college guide. See page 4 of this issue for details.