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## Trustee Benno Schmidt Wins Merrill Award

Trustees are key to academic excellence and accountability. That was the message on November 5, when ACTA presented the sixth annual Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education to Benno Schmidt, chairman of the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York (CUNY). The prize was presented at a gala dinner before a crowd of over 100 at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

The award, sponsored by ACTA, is the only one in the nation to honor those who have made an extraordinary contribution to the advancement of liberal arts education, core curricula, and the teach-

ing of Western civilization and American history.

Under Dr. Schmidt's leadership, CUNY has undergone an academic renaissance. Before joining the CUNY board, he led Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's task force on

revitalizing the CUNY system. The task force's recommendations to end open enrollment and raise academic standards have helped the board and the chancellor make the CUNY system more competitive on a national level. In the last decade,

CUNY, the largest urban public university in the world, has drastically upgraded its academic standards—while simultaneously offering more remedial classes and dramatically increasing minority enrollment and graduation rates.

*(continued on 3)*



## Attention Trustees...

We are interested in what interests you. Please fill out the enclosed reply envelope and let us know what issues concern you in the coming year.

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

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

1-888-ALUMNI-8

**William Kirwan**

**Chancellor, University of Maryland System**

"The Merrill Award is such an impressive and appropriate recognition of Benno. Please give him my heartfelt congratulations and my sincere regrets that I cannot join in applauding his impressive leadership in liberal education."

**The Honorable José Cabranes**

**United States Circuit Judge for the Second Circuit, NY**

"It was my privilege to serve as a Yale trustee (Fellow of the Yale Corporation) during all but the first of the years in which Benno served as President. He was a superb academic leader—a thoughtful and courageous proponent of liberal arts education grounded in the study of the Western tradition. ... I can think of no University leader whose service to higher education, at Yale and beyond, is more deserving of ACTA's recognition."

**Catherine E. Wilson, Assistant Professor of Political Science  
Villanova University, PA**

"Thanks again for inviting me to the ACTA [ATHENA] conference—what a wonderful event. I was able to meet some great people there and the topics discussed are of central importance to the university."

**The Honorable Richard S. Bray  
President, Beazley Foundation Inc.  
Portsmouth, VA**

"As always, I was impressed with the most recent ACTA conference. The program, participants, ACTA staff and overall administration of the event were all outstanding and the quality of ACTA was evident throughout. The Union League ... provided a perfect venue for attendees to converse, meet and greet one another to exchange thoughts."

**Garrison Walters, Executive Director**

**South Carolina Council on Higher Education**

"I enjoyed meeting you and also appreciated ... your presentation. As I mentioned, I did look at ACTA's web site a bit as well and found many valuable papers. I strongly agree with your stand on curriculum and think it might be beneficial for you to present and make that case at our next Trustee's Conference."

*Editor's Note: In September ACTA policy director Michael Poliakoff addressed almost 500 administrators, professors, politicians, trustees and concerned citizens of South Carolina at a Higher Education Summit hosted by Governor Mark Sanford and focused on rising costs at the state's public universities. (see page 6)*

**Diane Reese, Director of Guidance  
Osborn High School  
Manassas, VA**

"It has been quite a ride since College Night! I want to thank you for participating in our College Night event. ... You will be pleased to know that we are using the information from the website [WhatWillTheyLearn.com] with our students and parents. It is proving to be very valuable information."

*Editor's Note: In October Michael Poliakoff addressed an audience of students, parents, and guidance counselors from several Manassas, VA high schools. (see page 7)*

**Diane A. Straley, Guidance Counselor  
Mount View High School  
Welch, WV**

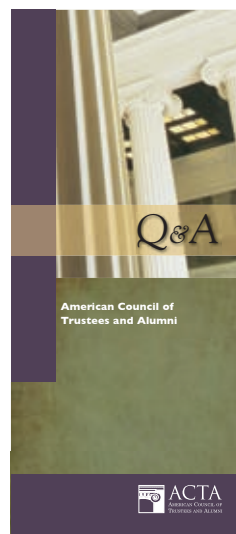
"I just received two of your excellent [WhatWillTheyLearn.com] fliers. I am writing to request more to give to parents and students. Thank you very much for your excellent site and for the good information."

## What's ACTA All About?

If you have questions, we've got answers in our new brochure, *Q&A*. The booklet tells who we are and what we stand for, the key challenges facing higher education, and how you can become involved.

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) is an independent, nonprofit organization committed to academic freedom, academic excellence, and accountability in America's colleges and universities. Launched in 1995, we work with trustees, alumni, donors, and education leaders across the country to uphold high academic standards, safeguard the free exchange of ideas on campus, and ensure that the next generation receives a philosophically rich, high-quality college education at an affordable price. ACTA's national network includes alumni and trustees from more than 700 colleges and universities, including nearly 10,000 current board members.

For a copy of *Q&A*, please call 888-ALUMNI-8 or visit [www.goacta.org](http://www.goacta.org). •



*"ACTA has achieved amazing victories ... and is continuing its vital program of educating alumni, trustees and the rest of us interested in the health of our educational institutions and the country they serve."*

— Professor Donald Kagan  
Yale University; National  
Endowment for the  
Humanities Jefferson  
Lecturer

## Helping Trustees in Indiana

It was called the Trustees' Academy. And in late August, Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels, the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education, and the Lumina Foundation brought together nearly 100 trustees from Indiana's public universities to address the fiscal responsibilities of trustees.

Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels kicked off the day by reminding trustees that they must play a key role in higher education reform, saying "you're not there to be a mindless cheerleader." Daniels added, "The role of trustee has never been so critical as it is today. But I don't want to see you at the Statehouse asking for more money. Please stay back at the school and find ways to be more efficient with those dollars."

ACTA president Anne Neal followed, pointing out that "the gravy years are over" and that trustees had no choice but to find ways to use the resources they have more effectively. Drawing heavily from ACTA's new guide for trustees, *Cutting Costs*, she outlined ways to do more and better with less: expanding use of distance education; creating more partnerships between institutions; reviewing tenure and teaching-load policies; and renewing an emphasis on a common core curriculum.

Taking up Governor Daniels' theme, Neal reminded trustees that they were not appointed merely to be boosters or proud alumni, but as guardians of a public trust who need to ask tough questions and demand answers in order to fulfill their role in helping more students graduate and succeed. ●

### Benno Schmidt, *continued from 1*

"For over 30 years, Benno Schmidt has been at the forefront of higher education reform and the advancement of a strong liberal arts education as a scholar, an administrator and now a trustee," said ACTA president Anne D. Neal. "At CUNY, the efforts he has spearheaded and continues to spearhead have been nothing short of spectacular."

Prior to joining CUNY, Dr. Schmidt was president of Yale University from 1986 to 1992, where he was known for his outspoken defense of freedom of expression and liberal education. Before heading Yale, he was the dean of Columbia University Law School where, in 1973, he became, at age 29, one of the youngest tenured pro-

fessors in Columbia's history.

CUNY alumnus Gen. Colin Powell praised the selection: "Benno has been



Carl Schramm, Janice Kreamer, and Benno Schmidt

in the forefront of the campaign for American educational excellence for decades as an administrator, university president, chairman and believer in the

simple proposition that the first priority of every generation is to prepare the next generation to lead us. I congratulate

ACTA on all it is doing to support a liberal education and to reform our educational system. In selecting Benno Schmidt for the Merrill Award, you have chosen well and wisely."

The award is named in honor of the late Philip Merrill, a publisher, entrepreneur, philanthropist, and member of several university boards who served six presidential administrations as a

dedicated public servant. Merrill was also a member of ACTA's founding National Council. ●



# 2010 ATHENA Roundtable: The Purposeful University

Every year, ACTA is privileged to convene professors, administrators, trustees, and friends of higher education for the most democratic of events: a conversation. Thus, it was fitting that this year's ATHENA Roundtable convened in the birthplace of the American republic, Philadelphia. The conference was held in The Union League, a few short blocks from the Liberty Bell and Philadelphia's historic district. The theme was drawn from Benjamin Franklin: "The secret of success is constancy of purpose."

To start it all off, ACTA friends and speakers visited Franklin's old haunt: Independence Hall. Thanks to the generosity of former National Endowment for the Humanities chairman **Bruce Cole**, attendees were treated to a tour of the rooms where Franklin, Washington, and Jefferson shaped the nation and our founding documents were signed. That evening, speakers and members of ACTA's donor societies enjoyed an exclusive dinner and wine tasting with wine expert **Ron Brooks** (husband of ACTA vice president Lauri Kempson).

Then it was on to a second day of inspiring panel discussions kicked off by ACTA president Anne Neal. **Wilfred McClay**, professor of history at the University of Tennessee, delivered the keynote, explaining he had good news and bad. The bad news, he said, is a "higher education bubble," much like the recently-burst housing bubble, where unwary buyers—students and their families—assume improperly that the underlying good investment is sure to keep rising in value. The good news, he continued, is that the upheaval resulting from a burst bubble creates a moment of reassessment and a chance to return to first principles—principles which the Founders clearly articulated. The Founders, he said, had "a consuming interest in learning" and saw education as preparation for citizenship.

The first panel followed, dedicated to examining pathways to student success. Ohio State University president **Gordon Gee** spoke with characteristic energy and wit, noting the immense size of state schools. "I have a Department of English bigger than Swarthmore," Gee noted, arguing that

large public universities are more able to change and adapt than elite private schools. To advance reform, Gee called on administrators to reconsider faculty incentives and rewards. "The secret to changing the curricular structure is changing the



Gordon Gee



Elizabeth Capaldi



Peter Berkowitz and James Kurth



Floyd Abrams



Daniel Perron and ACTA board member

recognition structure. Provide the opportunity for people to re-think and they will."

**Jackson Toby**, professor emeritus at Rutgers, suggested that the key to student preparedness is providing them with the



incentives to want to learn. **Donald Drakeman**, a trustee at Drew University, advised that a college's most important task is to teach students how to tell good information from bad. What is needed, he said, is a "high-tech humanities" where the

Institution senior fellow **Peter Berkowitz** and his former professor, Swarthmore emeritus professor and political scientist **James Kurth**, tackled the purpose of the university. As Berkowitz saw it, the goal of a liberal education is to free minds, but students must not be abandoned to a "compassless curriculum" but pointed to a coherent core. He noted the connection between liberal arts and a free society, saying that "liberal education presupposes that it's good to have citizens whose minds have been furnished and who have the ability to think for themselves."

Kurth conceptualized the university as three "estates": the faculty, who oppose any change because their influence comes from their position as specialists; the students, who are unable to effect change because they lack the experience and knowledge; and the administration, which is unwilling to change because it is by and large responsible to the first two. That leaves two estates, he concluded, who are the only hope for change: trustees and alumni.

The day's final panel discussed issues of affordability. "You want to know your provost ... Provosts control the money," remarked first panelist **Elizabeth Capaldi**, who also happens to be provost of Arizona State University. She then outlined the reorganization of Arizona State's academic programs, which resulted in annual savings of \$13 million. **Roger Benjamin**, president of the Council for Aid to Education, home of the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), stressed the need for a national debate on educational policy focusing on how we assess learning. Finally, **Robert Dickeson**, former president of Northern Colorado University, cautioned trustees to be on their guard for the ways costs rise: redundancies, "program creep," and the myth that all academic programs are equal. Schools must set their priorities, and then act accordingly, he said.

The events culminated at Penn

Museum's Egyptian Gallery with the presentation of the Merrill Award to Benno Schmidt. Tributes to Benno were given by CUNY chancellor **Matthew Goldstein** and First Amendment attorney **Floyd Abrams**. **●**



**Roger Benjamin and Robert Dickeson**



**Wilfred McClay**



**Matthew Goldstein**



**Member Jody Wolfe**



**Jackson Toby and Donald Drakeman**

timeless search for truth is aided, not undermined, by science and technology.

After lunch, teacher and student literally returned to the classroom—this time to teach ATHENA's attendees. Hoover

# Effective TRUSTEESHIP



“It doesn’t take courage to pass the buck and raise tuition,” said ACTA policy director Dr. Michael Poliakoff. His words were addressed to almost 500 administrators, professors, politicians, trustees and concerned citizens of **South Carolina** recently gathered at a Higher Education Summit hosted by Governor Mark Sanford. The reason for the summit?—the governor’s concern about rapidly spiraling costs at the state’s public universities.

Poliakoff reviewed rising tuitions at the state’s universities, and then revealed one troubling “secret”: recent growth in spending has come largely from administrative bloat, rather than increased spending on instruction. Meanwhile, students are taking more than six years to graduate—meaning they are paying more for a longer period.

In difficult economic times, Poliakoff called on colleges and universities to hold off on expensive new building programs and to find ways to use existing buildings more efficiently. Finally, he reminded attendees that a coherent core curriculum offers not only more quality—but more affordable delivery—than specialized and costly niche classes.

Media coverage of the summit was extensive, and it is clear that policymakers were listening. The day after the summit, the state’s Budget and Control Board placed a hold on most new campus construction for schools raising tuition above 7 percent; and over the next few weeks trustees at four state-supported schools announced reductions in planned tuition hikes.

In the aftermath, numerous attendees have expressed thanks to ACTA for speaking the blunt truth about the unsustainable growth in college spending. ●

## Highlights from Speakers at ATHENA Roundtable

### Gordon Gee

“This sea change that began with an economic tidal wave can enable us to accomplish even more on behalf of our students and our communities; it can do so by giving us the courage to break through old habits of mind and hardened bureaucracies.

To make the most of this moment, we must return to first principles and re-evaluate our programs with those ideals in mind—cultivating innovation and creativity, generating opportunity for others, and educating young people capable of leading in a thoroughly global environment. To thrive in the 21st century, universities must cast off Jurassic thinking, seek calculated risks, and reach out aggressively in partnership.

In this accelerated era, conventional approaches will doom us to extinction.”

### James Kurth

“When you have a decadent nobility with offices beyond their capabilities, desperado politics, indeed, may follow. In the French Revolution, there was the feckless monarch—and we recognize that parallel in academics—and the *sans coulottes*, that may be the students. There was one group in France that represented the France of the future, not the France of the Revolution, and that was the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie. That, I believe, are the college trustees.”

### Peter Berkowitz

“The purpose of a liberal education is fairly easy to state. One element of that is transmitting and imparting information about what’s been thought and said. And not only the best that’s been thought and said but also the worst. ... We want to furnish the mind. And, we want to cultivate students’ capacity to think for themselves. ... [L]iberal arts are connected to freedom and free society. Liberal education presupposes that it’s good to have citizens whose minds have been furnished and who have the ability to think for themselves.”

### Donald Drakeman

“The Greeks gave us the concept of ‘paideia’ to describe the well-rounded education that would lead students to become good citizens. This is where we get the word ‘encyclopedia.’ In Greece, paideia covered natural history, philosophy, mathematics, rhetoric and a number of other subjects designed to prepare young Athenians for success.

What kind of paideia do we need in this era that has both a business character and an increasingly high tech orientation? ... We must teach students how to tell good information from bad—to perennially ask themselves: *How do we know what we think we know*—whether we read it in a book, a scientific paper, or, especially, on the internet.

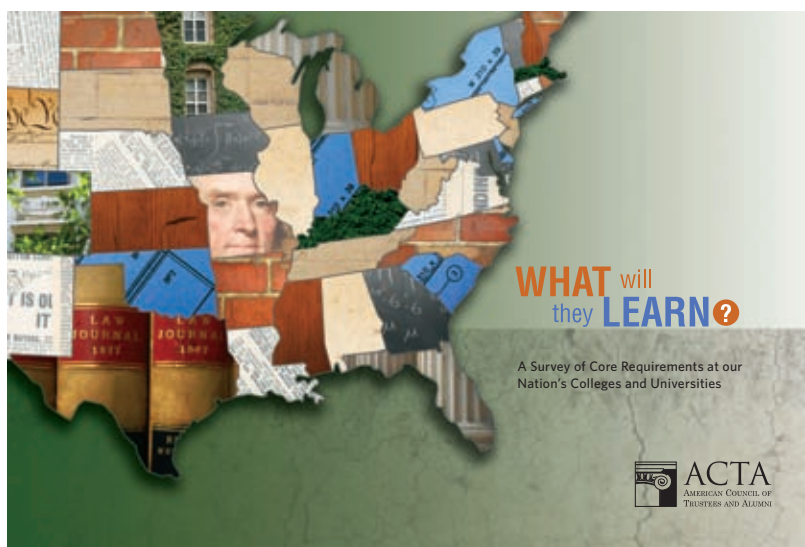
In short, what we need is a wiki-paideia.” ●



Following the release of our expanded WhatWillTheyLearn.com website in August, ACTA's unique on-line college guide continues to be a smash hit.

- The national media attention has translated into public attention, and in October the website recorded its 100,000<sup>th</sup> hit. And it's not the same people coming back again and again: 80% of those visitors are new and unique, meaning that thousands of parents, students, alumni and donors across the country are logging on to see if the schools they care about are covering the fundamentals.
- A letter was recently sent to 60,000 high school guidance counselors across the nation, informing them of the unique resource rating 718 different schools around the country. Dozens have written back, thanking us for the resource, seeking more information, and asking for new colleges to be included. Guidance counselors play a key role in helping students make decisions about college, and adding WhatWillTheyLearn.com to their toolkit ensures that they will be thinking about academic quality in a new way.
- While ACTA's online college guide

was created to assess the curricula of existing institutions, in fact, it is having a far greater impact. One school, St. Katherine College, in San Diego, California is using ACTA's criteria to develop a general education program—from scratch! St. Katherine is a small liberal arts and sciences college which will commence classes in Fall



2011. St. Katherine has announced that its curriculum will include a two-year long integrative core specifically designed to incorporate the seven core subjects WhatWillTheyLearn.com recommends.

- The printed version of ACTA's findings is on its way to **over 10,000** college and university trustees nationwide. We have continued to hear from trustees, administrators, and faculty who are concerned about what their grade re-

veals about their college's curriculum and who seek to improve their rating.

- And then there's College Night. Yes, WhatWillTheyLearn.com was a featured element of a recent College Night for several high schools in Manassas, VA. ACTA policy director Michael Poliakoff addressed an audience of students, parents, and guidance counselors, demonstrating the website and answering questions about what to look for in a college education.

WhatWillTheyLearn.com examines the core curricula of colleges and universities to see if they require coursework in seven foundational subjects: English composition, literature, foreign language, U.S. government or history, mathematics, and science. It has

drawn praise in the media from Kathleen Parker, Michael Barone and numerous others for its objective focus on college curricula. Ms. Parker wrote in the *Washington Post*, "the [ACTA] study and Web site do fill a gap so that parents and students can make better choices. As a consequence, colleges and universities may be forced to examine their own responsibility in molding an educated, well-informed citizenry."

We agree! ●

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**From all of us at ACTA, we thank you for your support  
and wish you the joys of the season.**