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## New Report Shines Light on Virginia Higher Ed

ACTA's new state report card is making waves across Virginia. *The Diffusion of Light and Education: Meeting the Challenges of Higher Education in Virginia*, ACTA's most extensive state report to date, evaluates 39 colleges and universities in the Commonwealth: 15 public institutions and 24 private. It measures four key areas: what students learn (the core curriculum), retention and graduation rates, the cost of college, and how universities are run (institutional governance).

The report highlights crucial areas for improvement.

- **Tuition must be held in check.** In the last six years tuition has grown rapidly at nearly every institution: at some schools it has risen more than 50%. What's more, tuition at every public four-year institution in Virginia demands a greater share of the median household income than six years ago.

- **Schools must graduate more students.** Only six out of 15 public four-year schools in Virginia graduate a majority of students within four years.

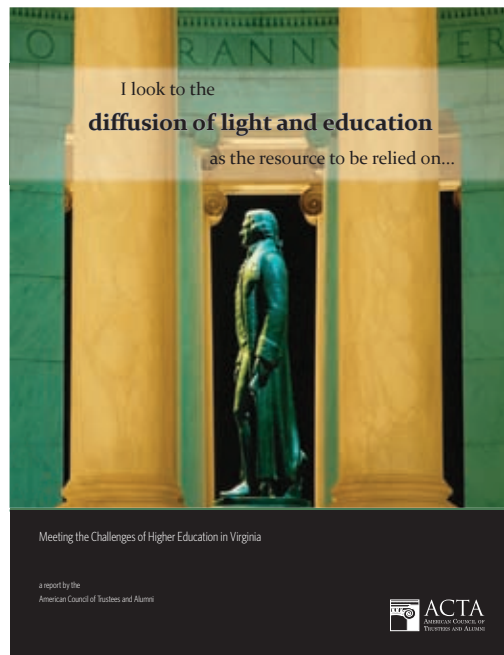
- **Schools must become more cost-effective.** At many schools administrative costs take an increasing share of the budget, crowding out instruction and threatening the school's core educational mission.

- **Schools must re-focus on the core curriculum.** Only two of the 39 institutions in our study—one public, one private—require a foundational course in American history

or government. Not a single one requires a basic course in economics.

*The Diffusion of Light and Education* has attracted truly remarkable attention. It has been noted in *The Washington Post*, *The Virginian-Pilot* (the largest paper in Virginia),

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## Save the Date for ATHENA 2012

ACTA's 2012 ATHENA Roundtable will be held on **November 9** at the Fairfax Hotel on Embassy Row in Washington, DC. The event will culminate with a gala dinner and presentation of the 2012 Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education at Anderson House, headquarters of The Society of the Cincinnati—the nation's oldest patriotic organization founded in 1783 to preserve the memory of the American Revolution. Keep an eye out for further details on [www.goacta.org](http://www.goacta.org) or call us at 202-467-6787.

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**Brent D. Glass, Director Emeritus  
National Museum of American History  
Smithsonian Institute**

“Congratulations on an excellent article in today’s *Wall Street Journal*. As a trustee of Lafayette College and as a former long-time resident of Pennsylvania, your comments struck a chord on several levels. I am afraid the tendency to turn away from bad news is not restricted to higher education, but I agree with you completely that colleges and universities should be taking the lead in setting standards of accountability. Even though I am a dedicated sports fan, I am at a loss when I hear alumni and some students take vehemently strong positions in favor of athletics and social clubs without considering the impact on the educational mission of the institution. We can do a lot better and I appreciate your articulate leadership. Well done!”

**Jim Hill  
Louisville, KY**

“Great article in the WSJ this morning! Many congrats on your quite cogent observations and recommendations. Unfortunately, it sometimes takes several subs launching torpedoes to get an aircraft carrier to start its turn. I’m afraid the Penn State imbroglio is one of those torpedoes. But I’m confident your article and ACTA’s continued good work serve as another such ‘urge to turn’. . . so keep up the good work!”

*Editor’s Note: The letters above respond to an op-ed written by ACTA president Anne D. Neal entitled Where were Penn State’s Trustees? published in the Wall Street Journal on November 30, 2011.*

**Jonathan West, Director  
College Funding Group  
Richmond, VA**

“Thank you so much for the work you and others did on ‘the diffusion of light and education.’ It is an excellent work and I am hopeful that the light you have shed on the problems in college today will help us point to solutions.”

**Thomas Rucker  
Virginia Beach, VA**

*To Judge Richard Bray, president of the Beazley Foundation: “I just finished reading the ACTA report and was dismayed that it confirmed to a large extent my anecdotal thinking about college education in general and college education in Virginia in particular. If anything, I was surprised by how bad it has become. I cannot commend you and the Beazley Foundation enough for funding this study. I can only hope that it will open many eyes and energize the right people.”*

*Editor’s Note: The above refer to ACTA’s newly released report on higher education in Virginia. See [www.goacta.org](http://www.goacta.org) for a copy.*

**Peter Alcock, former Vice Chair  
Massachusetts Board of Higher Education**

“College costs, student funding and for-profit competition may give us an opening to gather interest in quality. Academia has to wake up to the fact that a four-year maturation-only process is not adequate.”

## Churchill Library Comes to GW and DC

The nation’s capital will soon have a library devoted to that great friend of America, Winston Churchill. The George Washington University has partnered with the Chicago-based Churchill Centre to open a Churchill library and center on GW’s campus.

The \$8 million facility will bring a collection of materials by and about Churchill to the heart of DC. It will endow a professorship in Churchill studies and a directorship for the center, as well as offer displays and exhibits about Churchill and his times.

Laurence Gellar, chairman of the Churchill Centre’s board, called the new library “A Churchillian’s dream come true.” He spoke of the many lessons that can be learned from Churchill’s career and the importance of “making those lessons learned relevant today . . . translating those historical events so that people can use them.”

ACTA friend and supporter Larry Berlin, who also supports the Churchill Centre, said that the new library’s mission is closely akin to that of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni. “ACTA is trying to expand the knowledge of history . . . to the young generation so they can learn from it and use it to better make decisions. That’s what the Churchill Centre does.” ●

## University of Maine Heeds ACTA, Freezes Tuition

On January 23, 2012, the board of trustees of the University of Maine System made history when it froze tuition for in-state students. For the first time in 25 years, Maine residents will not see a tuition hike.

This decision comes in the wake of ACTA's study *Made in Maine: A State Report Card on Public Higher Education*, published last year with the Maine Heritage Policy Center.

*Made in Maine* warned about the University of Maine System's rapidly-increasing tuition and fees. Tuition at Maine public universities had increased an average of 35% in just five years.

Where did the money go? In 2010-11, the Maine System had 233 degree programs that graduated five or fewer

students, including 84 programs that produced no graduates at all. Those under-enrolled degree programs are expensive. So is approving \$50 million in new capital expenditures, as the University of Maine did in a period of just 27 months.

Fortunately, trustees have the power to control costs—and in Maine, they used it. Trustee Karl Turner proposed the motion to freeze tuition, which the University of Maine board passed unanimously. Turner said, "I think one of the very important things we can do is tightly control tuition and fees as much as possible."

Other stakeholders in the system support the board's decision. Bob Caswell, Director of Public Affairs

at the University of Southern Maine, called the freeze a "critically important step."

Governor Paul LePage said, "Making education more affordable for students must be a priority and I applaud the forward thinking of the Board of Trustees on their decision." The student body president also welcomed the news.

ACTA has long objected to excessive tuition hikes that take an increasingly large bite out of families' budgets. Our advocacy in Maine and other states is clearly having an effect. As Heather Noyes of the Maine Heritage Policy Center said, "No doubt, ACTA had a hand in this great outcome!" ●

### Virginia Report, *continued from 1*

*The Washington Examiner*, and other papers with a combined circulation of more than 1.5 million. It has been covered on websites and college papers as well, and the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* printed an op-ed, based on the report, advocating major reforms in Virginia higher education.

What's more, the report has generated a striking response from the Beazley Foundation, one of the report's funders and a nonprofit organization that funds numerous educational projects across Virginia. The Foundation's trustees—deeply concerned about Virginia colleges and universities—fired what ACTA vice president of policy Michael Poliakoff called "the shot heard 'round the world of higher education philanthropy." They voted to suspend all grants to higher education until the institutions demonstrate that their

programs provide real educational benefits to students.

Virginia offers serious challenges but also great opportunities, and everyone concerned with higher education can contribute. All Virginia trustees have received copies of the report with a call to ensure quality education at an affordable price. Alumni can create accountability groups like the *Society for the College* at William & Mary to ensure that curricular standards remain high. And more donors can join the Beazley Foundation in insisting that schools prove their commitment to liberal arts education

with requirements, not rhetoric, before and after they receive money.

ACTA advocates all of these reforms, and we're here to help every step of the way. ●

"I look to the diffusion of light and education as the resource to be relied on for ameliorating the condition, promoting the virtue, and advancing the happiness of man."

– Thomas Jefferson  
October 1822



## ACTA Informs Trustees of Failing Curricula

What will students learn? On many campuses, not much. What can trustees do about it? A lot more than you might think.

That was ACTA's message in our most recent letter to college and university trustees. In a mailing to more than 12,000 trustees, ACTA introduced our most recent edition of *What Will They Learn?*, a report that evaluated the general education requirements at over 1,000 colleges and universities across the country and revealed dangerous gaps in students' education.

Eighty percent of the schools evaluated allow students to graduate without studying American history or government; 85% of schools lack a foreign language requirement; 95% of schools do not require economics. Indeed, more than 60% of schools receive a C or below

for requiring fewer than half of ACTA's seven core subjects.

ACTA's mailing included What Will They Learn?<sup>TM</sup> data for every school in a trustee's state, so each trustee can compare his or her school's results with those of local institutions.

ACTA also sent an action plan: seven steps trustees can take to rebuild higher education. We encouraged trustees to inform themselves about their institutions' curricula by studying catalogs and convening special board sessions on general-education programs. We offered ways to "dig into the details" of a curriculum, to see past its rhetoric and examine what, if anything, students learn.

We suggested that trustees use their business and accounting skills in examining the cost-effectiveness of various curricula. We called on trustees to im-

prove students' employment prospects by seeking advice from leaders of business and industry.

And we encouraged trustees to take action on their curricula—and to set benchmarks and monitor progress so that they can clearly identify whether their schools' curricula are improving.

ACTA offered trustees a free copy of the complete report, *What Will They Learn?: A Survey of Core Requirements at Our Nation's Colleges and Universities*. ACTA also offers consulting, retreats, management seminars, and other support to boards at little or no cost.

Trustees have a unique power and duty to ensure the educational quality of their institutions. ACTA is ready to work with trustees and their boards to meet that challenge. ●

## ACTA Warns of Rising Costs, Poor Graduation in Palmetto State



Since ACTA released the eighth in its series of state report cards, *Prepared in Mind and Resources?: A Report on Public Higher Education in South Carolina*, media outlets statewide have taken notice of the report's sobering findings about public higher education in the Palmetto State.

"Many S.C. public colleges and universities are excessively expensive and have strayed too far from their core mission: educating students, according to a recent study," reported *The State*, South Carolina's largest newspaper. The article quotes ACTA's president, Anne Neal: "We asked how much families are paying to attend schools, how the schools are spending that money and what students are getting in return. And we found that paying a lot of money did not necessarily buy a high quality education."

The study, prepared in conjunction with the South Carolina Policy Council, highlights disturbing trends in college affordability, such as tuition rising by as much as 36% over a five-year period. At the majority of institutions surveyed, tuition now costs almost one-quarter of the median household income in South Carolina. Meanwhile, the increases over a five-year period in administrative spending outpaced those of instructional spending by a margin of 61% to 44.3%.

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## ACTA Calls for Accreditation Reform

When President Obama told the nation that college costs are too high, ACTA agreed. For years, ACTA has warned of expense and waste in higher education: tuition rising four times the rate of inflation, schools squandering money on bloated administrative budgets, and hundreds of billions of dollars in taxpayer aid flowing to universities without a discernible improvement in educational quality. Several ACTA publications, like *Cutting Costs: A Trustee's Guide to Tough Economic Times*, offer smart tactics to hold down the cost of college.

But ACTA has long been a lonely voice criticizing a key driver of rising costs and slack quality standards: accreditation. The accreditation system was created to ensure that colleges and universities receiving taxpayer dollars offer high-quality education. Today, however, the process wastes taxpayer money without ensuring even modest quality standards. Many schools completing the accreditation process pay upwards of \$1 million and devote hundreds of hours of staff time.

What is it all for? Few know—the process is opaque and parents, students, and policymakers rarely are privy to the findings. Meanwhile, hardly any school ever loses accreditation, even those that graduate less than one out of three of their students.

The National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI), on which ACTA's president sits, is proposing reforms—but they are far too mild to address the problem. That's why ACTA has proposed an alternative. Instead of costly and prescriptive intrusion by accreditation bureaucrats, ACTA's alternative requires proof of financial solvency and key institutional audited data on student performance and cost. The power is placed where it belongs—in the hands of students and parents who will have data they need on the financial and academic health of institutions they care about. And accreditors return to their voluntary role in self-improvement rather than as gatekeepers of federal funds.

Prominent university officials are agreeing with many of ACTA's concerns. Princeton president Shirley Tilghman endorsed severing the link between accreditation and eligibility for Title IV funding “[i]f the current system cannot carry out its responsibilities without risking damage to institutional quality and autonomy.” Government eligibility standards, she added, would need to be focused on such outcomes as completion/graduation, licensure, job placement and other indices of career progress. The president of Dartmouth, Jim Yong Kim, criticized the geographic structure of accreditation as “unsuited to American higher education,” noting concern that accreditor staff often substitute their own judgment for that of an institution's trustees and administrators. Stanford provost John Etchemendy argued that “accreditation is no substitute for public opinion and market forces as a guide to the value of the education we offer.”

It's time for taxpayers, trustees, and parents to stand up and demand a system that really works for students. ACTA has led the way on this, and we hope others will join us. ●

## In Memoriam:

### Two Champions of Higher Education Reform

ACTA mourns the passing of two dear friends who were stalwart defenders of academic freedom, academic excellence, and donors' rights.

**Herbert Wiley Vaughan**, “Wiley” to his friends, was a charter member of ACTA back in 1995, and he joined each of our donor societies. Wiley's support and inspiration led ACTA to publish its original *Intelligent Donor's Guide to College Giving*. And he was featured in our second edition of the guide for his inspired project, the biennial Herbert W. Vaughan Lecture at Harvard Law School, which invites outstanding scholars and jurists to campus every other year to discuss the U.S. Constitution and its doctrines. We are indebted to Wiley for his creativity, enthusiasm, and support.

**Rynn Berry** was also among our earliest supporters. A graduate of Yale College and Yale Law School, he served for three decades as secretary of the Class of 1937. His affection for his alma mater was great—but it was never unquestioning. He worked to expand and strengthen Yale's exemplary Directed Studies program and also spent many years working to end Yale's long-standing ban on ROTC. After so much struggle, it is a great comfort to know that he finally saw ROTC return to his alma mater.

Higher education has lost stalwart champions, and we have lost close friends. ●

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## UCLA Center Brings Western Civ to Campus

Should college students understand the principles of free institutions? Should they study the great works of Western civilization? Some colleges might not think so—but ACTA does, and so does the *Center for Liberal Arts and Free Institutions* (CLAFI) at UCLA.

Founded in 2009 and directed by ACTA friend and supporter Daniel Lowenstein, CLAFI grows out of a years-long effort by UCLA faculty to resist the centrifugal pull of research specialization. It brings together students—primarily undergraduates—and faculty in many disciplines to discuss the great texts of the west and to confront the central questions of human existence.

The events the Center sponsors are truly interdisciplinary: a recent conference on Mark Twain hosted a political theorist and an actor alongside literary scholars and concluded with a dramatic adaptation of Twain's work. Other events have addressed subjects as diverse as Tolstoy, the Civil War,

and the influence of Jewish thought on the Enlightenment.

CLAFI's most ambitious project is its curriculum: it offers full-length seminars studying great works of Western thought. The current course offerings treat topics in literature and philosophy from the ancient Greeks to the American Revolution. Ultimately, the Center's leaders hope to offer a thorough set of general courses that will introduce students to "the history and achievements of Western civilization."

CLAFI was profiled in ACTA's *Intelligent Donors' Guide to College Giving* and remains a stellar example of the "Centers of Excellence" that ACTA advocates and promotes on campus. We wish them continued success as they grow into a truly comprehensive center for the traditional liberal arts, and we hope that, inspired by their example, faculty and philanthropists will build similar centers at many other institutions. ●



### South Carolina Report, *continued from 4*

The report also raises concerns about graduation rates. Four-year graduation rates were no higher than 54% at any of the South Carolina schools studied, and they were below 25% at the majority of schools.

In light of these challenges, opportunities lie ahead for higher education reform in South Carolina. Governor Nikki Haley recently unveiled a proposed model for Accountability-Based Funding for Higher Education, which would base appropriations on meeting institutional benchmarks including college completion, affordability and access, and educational quality. A recent editorial in *The Post and Courier* of Charleston expressly drew on ACTA's findings to recommend consolidating governance into a central board of trustees.

ACTA continues to work with trustees and legislators in South Carolina to capitalize on progress already beginning in the state. ●

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# ALEC Approves ACTA's Model Legislation

ACTA has contributed a number of important model bills and resolutions that have become part of the American Legislative Exchange Council's repertory of ready-to-go state legislation to strengthen higher education. These include the Higher Education Transparency Act, the Resolution Supporting United States History Education, and the Higher Education Accountability Act.

In December, vice president of policy Michael Poliakoff presented two new bills, which have now been approved by ALEC's board of directors. The Higher Education Capital Projects Transparency Act addresses the chronic problem ACTA discovered of under-utilization of classroom facilities. The new legislation would require a public institution of higher education to develop procedures for maximum utilization of existing facilities, to make data on the average weekly usage of classrooms and laboratories available on its website in a format clearly comprehensible to the public, and to hold public discussion of each proposed capital construction project. The second bill is the Academic Assessment and Accountability in Higher Education Act. ACTA took to heart the shocking findings of *Academically Adrift*, which showed that 36% of the college students studied realized little or no cognitive gains in core academic skills. Thus, the new model bill provides for clear data on student learning gains so that the public can identify institutions that are successful at helping students gain core collegiate skills, and institutions themselves can pinpoint areas of teaching and learning that need improvement.

The two new bills were discussed by ALEC's Education Committee and enthusiastically recommended to ALEC's board of directors. ACTA will continue to work with policymakers and state legislators to bring these reforms to bear on higher education throughout the nation. ●

## Campus Update: Next Steps for ROTC

In 2011 several elite universities—Yale, Harvard, Columbia, and Stanford—lifted policies that excluded ROTC from their campuses that had been in place for an entire generation. Their decisions came after more than a decade of activism by ACTA, student groups, trustees, and alumni, including many soldiers and veterans. Brown University, though it did not go as far as the others, also established closer ties to ROTC.

These schools deserve our thanks and praise, but they need to take further action to support scholar-warriors fully. In recent letters to the boards of trustees at Harvard and Brown, ACTA commended the trustees for the progress they have made but held them to account for fulfilling their promises. We outlined several steps that should be taken, which include:

- **Recognize all branches of ROTC.**

Many campuses recognize only one branch, acknowledging the service of students in the Navy, for example, while denying recognition to students in the Army or Air Force.

- **Settle the question of course credit.**

Not all schools need award credit for every ROTC course, but schools should look for ways to count appropriate ROTC courses toward graduation. Several schools, including Cornell and Penn,



already offer credit for intellectually-demanding ROTC courses in subjects like Naval engineering. Yale's newly-established ROTC program will award credit for certain courses, and other universities should do the same.

- **Provide accessible transportation.**

Some schools cannot offer every branch

of the service on campus, but they can ensure that students have access to programs at nearby schools. A dedicated shuttle service can make the difference between a thriving program and one that is impracticable for most students.

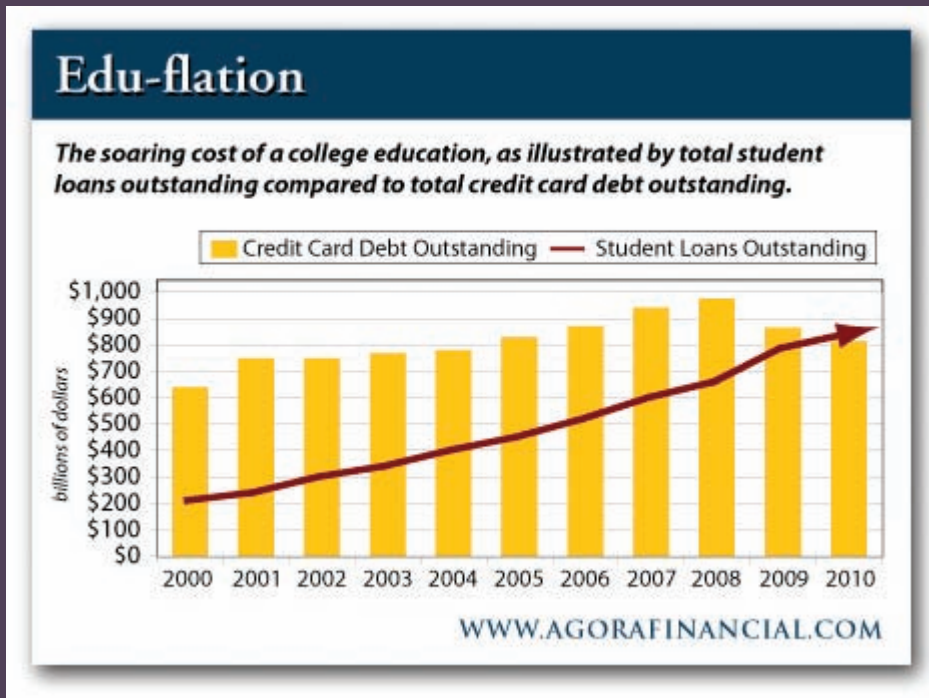
- **Offer courses in military history.**

In the 2011-2012 school year, Harvard University's history department—which includes 47 faculty members—did not offer a single course in military history.

ACTA friends Cheryl Miller of the American Enterprise Institute and Jon Hillman of the Council on Foreign Relations also took up this cause. In an op-ed published in the *Wall Street Journal* they argue that more elite schools should follow Yale's lead by establishing a unit on campus and that all schools should actively recruit students interested in the military. They also explain how important it is to heal the cultural rift between the academic elite and the military.

Elite universities have made strides in the last year, and ACTA hopes they will continue to expand opportunities for students who choose to serve their country. ●

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



Between 2000 and 2011 credit-card debt increased 30% while student-loan debt increased 300%.

ACTA's reports identify ways to improve efficiency, reduce tuition, and save students money while still providing a top-notch education.

Schools like the University of Maine and Coastal Carolina University are heeding the call.

See articles inside on the University of Maine System's decision to freeze tuition and reforms being proposed in South Carolina.