

OCTOBER 23, 2013

WHAT will they LEARN?

- American colleges and universities earn a disappointing “C” for core curriculum
- National four-year graduation rate is just 40% among 1,091 institutions studied
- Many institutions seem to be “tuition traps” for their high cost, low grad rates, weak core curriculum

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The American Council of Trustees and Alumni today released the 2013-2014 edition of *What Will They Learn?*, which highlights the tremendous disconnect between perception and reality in higher education. Though Americans expect colleges to deliver a quality four-year liberal arts education in an environment that does not stifle students’ freedom of speech, *What Will They Learn?* shows that too many institutions are letting students down.

The study examines four crucial components of higher education excellence and value: the curriculum (rated “A” through “F”), the four-year graduation rate, freedom of speech on campus, and college cost.

CURRICULUM: Only 22 institutions (2 percent) receive an “A” grade for requiring at least six of seven subjects that are essential to a liberal arts education: literature, composition, economics, math, intermediate level foreign language, science, and American government/history. The average institution requires about three courses—meaning most students are graduating from college without exposure to such fundamental courses as American history, basic economics or literature. In too many places, graduates aren’t expected to have any more knowledge of these pivotal courses than a twelfth grader.

ACTA “A” Institutions

- Baylor University
- Bluefield College
- Clark Atlanta University
- Colorado Christian University
- Gardner-Webb University
- Kennesaw State University
- Morehouse College
- Pepperdine University
- Regent University
- St. John's College (MD)
- St. John's College (NM)
- Southwest Baptist University
- Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi
- Thomas Aquinas College
- Thomas More College of Liberal Arts
- United States Air Force Academy
- United States Military Academy
- United States Coast Guard Academy
- University of Dallas
- University of Georgia
- University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma
- University of Texas - San Antonio

What Will They Learn? By The Numbers

By Grade

A:	22 schools	2.0%
B:	387 schools	35.5%
C:	335 schools	30.7%
D:	256 schools	23.5%
F:	91 schools	8.3%

By Subject Required

Economics:	34 schools	3.1%
Foreign Language:	147 schools	13.5%
U.S. History/Government:	197 schools	18.1%
Literature:	414 schools	37.9%
Math:	654 schools	59.9%
Composition:	903 schools	82.8%
Science:	962 schools	88.1%

GRADUATION RATES: Not only are students graduating with major gaps in their skills and knowledge, but they're doing so with record debt. Part of the reason is that only two in five first-time, full-time students complete a four-year degree program in four years. Families and students shouldn't expect a four-year college degree to take five, six or more years to complete.

SPEECH CODES: Many schools stifle free speech on campus. ACTA partnered with the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education to assess the state of free speech on campus. Of the institutions that have ratings from FIRE, less than 4 percent receive a "green light" rating for not threatening free speech. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) garner a "red light" rating, meaning the institution has at least one policy that "clearly and substantially" restricts freedom of speech.

- 706 institutions (65%) graduate fewer than half of their students in four years.
- Nearly two-thirds of the schools have at least one speech code that "clearly and substantially" restricts freedom of speech.
- **Average number of subjects required:** 3.085 out of 7. Higher Education in the U.S. gets a "C" grade.
- **Paying more doesn't get you more.** The average tuition of the "A" schools that charge tuition is \$24,930 vs. \$32,455 among the "F" schools.

COST: Is that famous school in fact worth its enormous and ever-rising sticker price? President Barack Obama has called for a federal ranking to show how colleges and universities perform. [What Will They Learn?](#) provides a reliable set of data, without federal intervention, which can show which colleges provide a strong liberal arts education, respect freedom of speech, and, as the president said, which colleges offer "the most bang for your educational buck."

"Sadly, the picture that most Americans have of higher education—four-year degrees, unfettered debate and discussion, and a strong curriculum—simply isn't accurate at too many of our colleges and universities," said Anne D. Neal, president of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni. "Our nation's institutions of higher education are limiting access and failing to prepare the next generation."

There were 32 private institutions with tuition over \$25,000, first-time, full-time graduation rates at or below 50 percent and a curriculum that earns a "D" or "F" in *What Will They Learn?* They are joined by seven public institutions with similarly low graduation rates, weak core curricula, and an out-of-state tuition above \$25,000. In ACTA's opinion, these schools could well be called tuition traps. More detailed data for the 1,091 colleges and universities is available at the [WhatWillTheyLearn?](#) website.

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