



ACTA on Academic Freedom

ACTA believes that freedom of expression is the lifeblood of teaching, learning, and the pursuit of truth.

For more than two decades, academic freedom has been a core mission of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni. ACTA strives to ensure that college students gain exposure to a wide range of viewpoints in the classroom, feel free to express their own views, have the opportunity to study traditional but now severely underrepresented subjects like diplomatic and military history, and learn to think for themselves. ACTA is on the front lines in the fight to protect the free expression of ideas. As college campuses are roiled by students demanding mandatory diversity training, “safe spaces,” and speech codes, ACTA provides college and university trustees with solutions to protect academic freedom.

Advancing the Chicago Principles

The University of Chicago’s 2015 “Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression” puts the free exchange of ideas at the heart of the educational mission. ACTA has called on our network of more than 21,000 trustees at more than 1,250 schools to stand up for intellectual diversity and academic freedom by adopting the Chicago Principles at their own institutions. Purdue, Princeton, Chapman, the University of Wisconsin System, and other schools have already affirmed these principles, and we are urging more schools to do the same.

Promoting Intellectual Diversity

A 2015 survey revealed that seven in ten college students believe their college or university should do more to promote diversity of opinion. But at too many schools we have seen intellectual diversity decline and courses on traditional subjects like diplomatic and military history disappear from course catalogues. ACTA now leads the way in promoting policies that increase intellectual diversity on campus.

Educating Trustees, Policymakers, and the Public

ACTA provides trustees with the resources and policy guidance they need to be agents of reform. We equip them with reports and trustee guides, including our seminal guide to academic freedom, *Free to Teach, Free to Learn: Understanding and Maintaining Academic Freedom in Higher Education*. ACTA regularly takes to the media to defend academic freedom, appearing in such leading outlets as the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal’s Opinion Journal*.

Advising Trustees and College Leaders

Trustees have the ultimate fiduciary responsibility for their institutions and can insist upon reforms to protect the free expression of ideas. That is why ACTA addresses trustees and other college leaders at schools where academic freedom is under threat, advising them about policies and procedures to protect academic freedom. Trustees at schools across the country have implemented our recommendations.

ACTA SPEAKS UP . . .

Freedom of Expression

“The primary purpose of higher education is to follow truth wherever it may lead and to create an environment where faculty and students may challenge the prevailing orthodoxies, without fear or intimidation.”

“The University of Chicago has served as a model for academic integrity by adopting a Statement on Principles of Free Expression. . . . Voluntary adoption of the Chicago Principles can help revitalize universities as places of vigorous intellectual exchange necessary to social change.”

“An American Council of Trustees and Alumni survey . . . of 50 selective colleges found that 49 percent of students complained of professors frequently injecting political comments into their courses even if they had nothing to do with the subject, while 46 percent reported that professors used their classrooms to promote their own political views.”

— Walter E. Williams, *Orange County Register*

Safe Spaces, Trigger Warnings, Disinvitations

“Rather than indulging students with a safe space, colleges should encourage students who may disagree with a speaker to attend an ‘uncomfortable’ event. Students will be shocked to find that there are areas of convergence that could be the start of meaningful cooperation and change.”

“The popularity of trigger warnings and proliferation of perceived affronts—microaggressions—are symptoms of a dangerous misunderstanding that college should offer therapy rather than education.”

“The American college campus has become a place where too many students, faculty, and administrators want freedom from speech, not freedom of speech; where people with controversial views are disinvited or shouted down; and where force—not reason—is viewed as the avenue to change.”

“With this return to first principles, ACTA aims to set matters on a more hopeful course, that promises academic freedom, academic responsibility, and high academic achievement.”

— Benno Schmidt, past president, Yale University, and former chairman, CUNY Board of Trustees, in ACTA’s seminal report *Free to Teach, Free to Learn*

Intellectual Diversity

“Intellectual diversity is not just a nice idea or a catchy phrase. It lies at the very heart of what a quality education is all about. Exposure to a wide range of subject areas and viewpoints gives students a solid foundation of knowledge and creates lifelong learners and critical thinkers.”

“ACTA’s *Free to Teach, Free to Learn* report called on trustees everywhere to ensure intellectual diversity and to take steps to obtain baseline information through campus climate surveys and other measures.”

“ACTA encourages providing targeted support to ‘Oases of Excellence’—specific programs set up at institutions across the country that promote the study of American history, Western Civilization, political theory, economics, capitalism, leadership, and the Great Books. . . . All share a commitment to educating students for informed citizenship in a free society. These programs are an effective way to change the culture of the academy from the inside.”

“ACTA’s consistent call for the restoration of ROTC at elite college campuses led to success at Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Stanford, and Brown.”

“The survey, by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni [*What Will They Learn?*] . . . of 1,100 colleges and universities found that only 18 percent require American history or government, where such foundational premises as the First Amendment might be explained and understood.”

— Kathleen Parker, *Washington Post*