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## Top “Flagship” Universities Failing Students

If the price of milk rose as sharply as public college tuition, it would cost \$17.48 a gallon. With costs growing so rapidly, it’s vital to ask if students and taxpayers are getting their money’s worth.

ACTA’s newest report, *Getting What You Pay For?: A Look at America’s Top-Ranked Public Universities*

asks precisely this question about America’s “flagship” universities. The companion report to *Education or Reputation?*, ACTA’s investigation of top liberal arts colleges, *Getting What you Pay For?* evaluates 52 of the nation’s great public universities. We look at curricula, speech codes, tuition, graduation rates, athletic spending, and more to find out if student, parent, and taxpayer dollars are being well-spent.

Though they were founded with the highest expectations of academic excellence

and service to their states, too many flagships are failing in their missions. Once we strip away the schools’ lofty rhetoric, the data is profoundly troubling.

• **Not one of the 52 institutions we investigated requires a course in basic**

**economics, and less than 10% require a course in U.S. history or government.**

This is simply jaw-dropping. America’s great public universities were founded with an eye toward creating an informed citizenry, but it is clear that most are doing no such thing. Many

schools also fail to provide students with key skills they will need in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century economy, such as competence in a foreign language.

• **Student debt is out of control.**

One of the core purposes of public universities is to provide broad access to

(continued on 2)

### Getting What You Pay For?

A Look at America’s Top-Ranked Public Universities

- Of the top-ranked public universities reviewed, **not one** requires an economics course. Only **five** require a survey course in U.S. history.
- 30 out of 52 schools graduated **more than half** of the Class of 2012 with some level of debt.
- 32 of the institutions pay their president or chancellor a salary that **equals or exceeds that of the President of the United States.**

## Save the Date—ATHENA Roundtable 2014

ACTA’s **2014 ATHENA Roundtable** will be held on November 7 in New York City at Columbia University’s spectacular Italian Academy theatre. The conference will culminate in a gala dinner for the presentation of the 10<sup>th</sup> annual **Philip Merrill Award**. Look for your invitation and registration details in the next issue of *Inside Academe* or visit [GoACTA.org](http://GoACTA.org) and register today.

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**The Honorable Chris Christie  
Chairman, Republican Governors Association**

“Thank you for joining us at the Republican Governors Association’s Executive Roundtable Quarterly Meeting in Washington, DC .... It is great to know that we have a strong education leader like you who not only joins the discussion but also works toward finding solutions. We are fortunate to work with you to create a stronger country for future generations.”

*Editor’s Note: In February, ACTA president Anne Neal spoke before the Republican Governors Association’s Executive Roundtable Meeting as part of a panel on higher education.*

**The Honorable Sandra Day O’Connor  
Former Associate Justice, United States Supreme Court**

“I am appreciative of your efforts to promote civic literacy and reinforce the importance of this educational foundation at the college level.”

**Mel and Laura Bernstein  
Lincoln, MA**

“Congratulations on your timely and concrete actions to hold higher education’s feet to the fire. There’s really nobody quite like ACTA in the field.”

**Louis Chandler, Associate Professor Emeritus  
University of Pittsburgh**

“Just wanted to say how impressive the chronicle of ACTA’s achievements are when put together, as in the Annual Report. I thought the two examples of ‘overreach’—by the government and by accrediting agencies—are exactly the sort of things where ACTA could be involved ... and you were ... effectively! Good job!”

*Editor’s Note: In March, ACTA released Higher, our 2013 Annual Report. If you would like to receive a copy, please note your request on the enclosed envelope.*

**Roger Benjamin, President and CEO  
Council for Aid to Education**

“You are doing very important work. The stakeholders in the higher education sector will not change their minds easily.”

**Michael F. Adams, President Emeritus  
University of Georgia**

“I am glad that ACTA is out there. It is important for the future of higher education and will help the pendulum swing toward excellence in undergraduate education.”

**Flagships Failing Students, *continued from 1***

higher education at an affordable price. But 30 out of 52 schools graduated more than half of the class of 2012 with some level of debt, and the average debt load ranged from nearly \$17,000 to over \$35,000. This is even more unconscionable when one considers that just over half of students graduate on time.

• **Many institutions spend more on athletics per athlete than on academics per student.** At

many flagships, it seems that the business of college athletics is more important than the mission of educating students. Public universities in Division I of the NCAA spend three to six times as much on athletics per athlete than academics per

student. This level of athletic funding crowds out important investments in facilities and faculty that are vital to student instruction.

• **Taxpayer money is subsidizing administrative bloat and outsized executive compensation.**

31 of these institutions pay their presidents a base salary equal to or higher than that of President Obama. At half of the schools evaluated, growth in administrative spending outpaced growth in

instructional spending.

• **All but four schools seriously imperil free speech and expression on campus.** Though they are public institutions, most of these top schools show little concern for the First Amendment.

*(continued on 6)*

“Too many of America’s great public universities are trapped in an old mindset that prioritizes inputs over outcomes and prestige over fulfilling their missions to taxpayers. It’s time they committed to providing a sterling education for America’s young people at an affordable cost. It is time that students, parents, and taxpayers get what they are paying for.”

## ACTA Speaks Up for Condoleezza Rice, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, and Intellectual Diversity

As college students around the country prepare for graduation, we at ACTA have been monitoring the spectacle of “disinvitation season”—that annual ritual in which misguided students and professors protest commencement speakers with whom they disagree causing cowardly administrators to rescind their invitations.

February saw faculty and students at Rutgers University protest the selection of former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as 2014’s commencement speaker. Arguing that, despite her accomplishments as an academic and a public servant, her role in the Bush administration rendered her unfit for the honor, these students called for Rice to be disinvented. ACTA was quick to speak up against such an illiberal effort, condemning this call as “rank political discrimination” and praising the Rutgers administration for standing firm in face of the crowd. Sadly, the hecklers scored a victory in the end, when Rice, “unwilling to detract from [commencement] in any way” declined

her invitation. Responding to this news, ACTA noted the stark contrast between Rice’s “magnanimous desire to prioritize the needs of the students who insulted her” and the “obnoxious and unreflective behavior” of the forces who protested her selection as commencement speaker.

At Brandeis University, it was the university administration that pulled the plug on a controversial honoree. Brandeis promptly rescinded its offer of an honorary degree to women’s rights activist and critic of Islam Ayaan Hirsi Ali in the face of faculty and student protest. ACTA president Anne Neal blasted the university’s decision in a letter to the *New York Times*, noting that “Justice Louis D. Brandeis would be turning over in his grave” at the news that the university “has illustrated the depths of small-minded bigotry and intolerance that now represent the culture on many campuses.” Neal called on trustees at Brandeis and across the country to “stand firm in defense of the free exchange of ideas” that is at the heart of liberal



education. ACTA has also spoken out against the efforts to disinvite former Mayor Michael Bloomberg as Harvard’s commencement speaker and the recent disinvitation of sociologist Charles Murray from Azusa Pacific University.

As always, ACTA stands at the ready to assist trustees and alumni in defending academic freedom from those in the academy who would make it subservient to political correctness and the desire never to offend. ●

### University of Hawaii: Regents Right the Ship

Not long ago, the University of Hawaii Board of Regents drew ACTA’s attention for all the wrong reasons: in a planning fiasco, highly-paid administrators allowed the school to lose \$200,000 to scammers pretending to arrange a Stevie Wonder concert. The resulting state senate investigation laid much of the blame at the feet of the board, faulting them for failing to provide proper oversight, lacking transparency, making uninformed decisions, and being overly dependent on the president.

Since then, however, the board has faced the problem squarely and taken steps to bolster its oversight role.

New policies passed by the regents’ personnel affairs committee require the school to obtain the regents’ approval before recruiting or hiring for positions paying over \$150,000. The board has also implemented a requirement that it be notified of the specific terms (including tenure status and faculty fallback salary) of any administrative appointment. Furthermore, it has commissioned a full review of its executive and managerial compensation policies and practices. These common sense measures will help keep the board informed and administrative costs down while protecting the university from future embarrassments.

Many boards waffle and make excuses after a mistake; Hawaii’s took responsibility and made much-needed changes. ACTA commends them for it, and hopes that more boards will follow their lead. ●



# Dear Future College Students: A Letter to the Class of 2018



*Greg Lewin, a recent college graduate and director of ACTA's What Will They Learn?™ project, wrote a letter to a student choosing colleges. It offered such important advice, it's been adapted for all soon-to-be college students and can be found at [WhatWillTheyLearn.com](http://WhatWillTheyLearn.com). We urge our readers to share this with family members and friends.*

Congratulations! You've been accepted into college! If I may, I'd like to share some of my ideas on what it means to go to college, and how to select a college and college program that will prepare you for all of the important things you want to accomplish.

Looking back, it's amazing to examine how much changes between the ages of 18 and 22. According to law, when

we turn 18 a switch is flipped, and we become adults. Suddenly we can vote, we can choose where we live, we can decide what classes we take in college.

Choosing your courses may not seem like a huge decision. But in essence, you are asking yourself, "What knowledge will equip me with the wisdom required to make life's big decisions?"

At 18, I did not identify the gaps in my fundamental knowledge. I did not choose classes that would help fill these gaps and prepare me for the real world. Though legally I was an adult, I was actually just a college kid who didn't know any better. And no one told me otherwise.

Colleges across the country have loosened curricular requirements. Today, according to ACTA's What Will They Learn?™ study, less than 40% of colleges require a college-level literature course. Just 18% require an American history or government course, and a paltry 3% require economics.

It worries me that in times like these, so many students are graduating without fundamental courses that I—and quite a number of employers—

believe are important for life beyond college. Of the nearly 1,100 schools What Will They Learn?™ evaluated last year, only 22 earned an "A" rating for the strength of their curricula. Some are small private schools enrolling a few hundred kids, but a school need not be tiny to be selective about its academic program. The president of the University of Georgia, an "A" school which boasts an undergraduate population of over 26,000 students, recently made a statement about our evaluation. His words perfectly sum up the vision that informs a well-designed academic program: "In an era of cafeteria course loads at many places, where students are free to choose from an array of courses, this place has remained steadfast in the belief that in the first two years, all students should have a similar liberal arts foundation laid in preparation for the specialization to come."

It is true that students can get a great education from almost any school in the country. The bad news is that the quality of their education is, in many cases, up to them, and many schools will provide little guidance. Students who want a solid foundational education don't have to go to one of the 22 colleges that earn an "A" rating. They can build their own education. But at many colleges and universities, the burden will be on them to make these informed choices.

The fact is, even if some students are well-prepared for college, many will not have studied literature, science, math, economics, and the other fields of knowledge essential for success at a truly collegiate level.

Knowing what I now know, I wonder why the adults often "dumb down" existing requirements and ignore the gaps that allow students to graduate without the skills and knowledge that will help them succeed after graduation.

If I could go back and give some advice to Freshman Greg, it would be to not only take courses that pique my interest or fit conveniently into my schedule, but also to take a wide array of foundational courses that would help me in the future. ●

## Featured Donor: Diana Davis Spencer

**D**iana Davis Spencer is a longtime friend and supporter of ACTA. She has especially championed ACTA's efforts to strengthen U.S. history requirements at America's colleges and to ensure that higher education fosters the intellectual freedom on which academic excellence depends.

Under her leadership as chairman and president of the Diana Davis Spencer Foundation, the Foundation has funded a number of educational organizations, with particular emphasis on those that promote self-reliance and America's founding values. And she has been in the forefront of the fight to ensure that universities respect the intentions of donors. Since 2009, ACTA has joined with Diana Davis Spencer to challenge Trinity College for misusing a gift made by her father, legendary Wall Street investor Shelby Collum Davis.

ACTA was delighted to see her leadership recognized this spring by the Washington, DC chapter of NFTE, the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship, an organization that supports entrepreneurship education for low-income students. At the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary gala, NFTE honored Diana Davis Spencer for her contributions in this vital initiative. ●



## “Unconscionably High”: ACTA Fights Sky-High Executive Compensation

Why does President Obama pull a base salary of \$400,000 a year, while Swarthmore College president Rebecca Chopp earns \$530,000 in base pay to administer a college of 1,550 students? It’s a good question: as colleges charge ever-more-unaffordable tuition, they pay their presidents ever-higher salaries.

ACTA has fought this trend, even when it meant speaking out against our friends. When Eric Barron was selected as the new president of Penn State, ACTA applauded his selection due to his commitment to cost-effectiveness and high academic standards. But we called out his exorbitant compensation package, saying, “Leadership in higher education at this moment really demands a level of modesty and forgoing high levels of compensation.”

By contrast, we praised Mitch Daniels, who has shown admirable restraint and leadership. When he took the helm at Purdue, he asked the board to lower his salary and tie a third of his compensation to a set of performance measures. He will

receive—or not receive—that portion on the basis of his performance in five areas of measurement, such as graduation rates, student debt, and academic excellence. Performance measures have also been applied to the salaries of other top administrators.

We also praised St. Mary’s College of Maryland, where concerned members of the community began pushing for a plan to link presidential pay to the salary of the lowest paid employees at the school. ACTA came out wholeheartedly in favor of the initiative, noting the importance of “squarely confront[ing] ... the enormous and growing gap between top executive compensation and that of faculty and staff.” Regrettably, the plan was defeated by a razor-thin margin in the faculty senate.

But faculty shouldn’t have the last word. Boards of trustees can make it a priority to stop the seemingly endless rise in presidential compensation by hiring responsible leaders who will put the needs of students and parents ahead of the desire for a private-sector salary. ●

## Reasons to Worry About Upcoming SAT Changes

The higher ed world is abuzz with talk about the College Board’s most recent overhaul of the SAT. The changes that have been announced contain some good news. For example, every exam will now include a reading passage from one of the nation’s founding documents or from important discussions of such texts. Given the historical illiteracy of our generation, this is certainly reason to celebrate. But many of the other changes coming to the SAT are cause for concern. As ACTA noted in our statement on the matter:

An announcement by the College Board that it will end the SAT’s longstanding focus on challenging vocabulary, eliminate the required writing test and water down the math standard suggests that the changes are designed to make students look prepared, when they aren’t.

Sadly, the College Board has a history of lowering standards in order to make students look more prepared than they really are. And we ought not to underestimate the harm this can cause. Harry Stille has documented the billions of dollars spent on under-prepared students who end up dropping out. This doesn’t just hurt the finances of institutions and taxpayers, it hurts the students who end up taking on massive debt but leave school without a degree.

Standardized tests are hardly perfect tools. But they are important ones. Ultimately, if we want to make sure every student gets the high quality education he or she deserves, then we need to stop lowering standards and start raising them. ●

*A version of this piece, by ACTA’s program officer Avi Snyder, first appeared on National Review Online’s blog, Phi Beta Cons, on March 11, 2014.*

Mallard Fillmore



Mallard Fillmore used with the permission of King Features and the Cartoonist Group. All rights reserved.





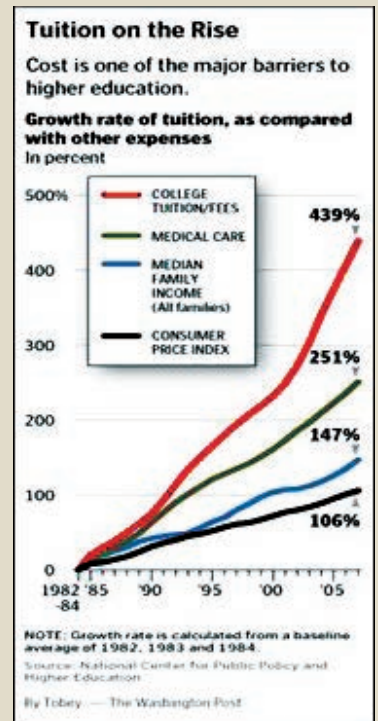
# H E A R D C A M P U S

## 50 Schools Freeze Tuition: ACTA Influences Trend

For years, ACTA has said that college costs are rising too fast and schools need to reform in order to save students money. Now, there's finally some good news on that front: in the 2013-14 academic year, over 50 institutions froze or reduced tuition. Among the institutions that have taken this great step are Ohio State and the University of Maine system, where ACTA's *Made in Maine* report called the system out for tuition increases.

The public believes higher ed must do more and better with what it has. And this is a move in the right direction. The current model of constantly raising tuition to cover unnecessary capital projects, bloated administrative staffs, and costly athletic programs must come to an end. Instead of passing the buck to students, more universities need to examine closely their spending priorities and make tough, but necessary, choices to control costs. After all, the higher ed bubble is beginning to pop—if small schools don't want to go out of business, they will have to follow the lead of the schools that have adopted tuition freezes in order to attract and retain students.

ACTA commends the colleges and universities that have wisely instituted tuition freezes, and we very much hope to see many more schools following their lead! ●



### Flagships Failing Students, *continued from 2*

Just four of them received a “Green Light” rating from the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education indicating that they do not have policies that restrict free speech.

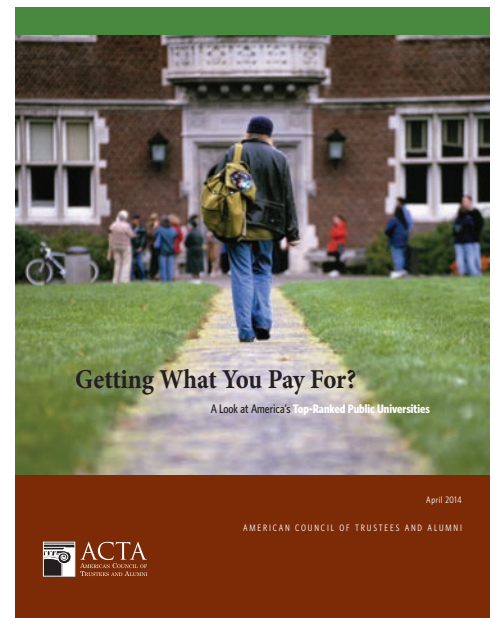
• **There are still some bright spots.** Despite all of this bad news, all is not lost. The University of Georgia has a magnificent core curriculum that earns an ACTA “A” from our What Will They Learn?™ project. The University System of Maryland has pursued aggressive cost-cutting measures and held the line on tuition. Despite large cuts to state funding, the University of Florida and Florida State University have increased efficiency and quality.

Overall, this report must serve as a wake-up call. In the words of ACTA president Anne Neal, “It’s time for our colleges and universities to uphold their commitment to the people who finance them.”

Dr. James Geddes, a regent at the University of Colorado, did just that. His guest editorial urging fellow board members to address the university’s problems of exploding tuition, party culture, and declining standards appeared in the weekend section

of the *Denver Post* (read the full article on GoACTA.org).

Too many of America’s great public universities are trapped in an old mindset that prioritizes inputs over outcomes and prestige over fulfilling their missions to taxpayers. It’s time they committed to providing a sterling education for America’s young people at an affordable cost. It is time that students, parents, and taxpayers get what they are paying for. ●



Download a complete copy of the report at [GoACTA.org](http://GoACTA.org). It is time that students, parents, and taxpayers get what they are paying for. ●

**INSIDE ACADEME** published by ACTA, Washington, DC

Publisher: Anne D. Neal • Editor: William Gonch • Production & Design: Lauri Kempson

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## New Faces at ACTA



ACTA is delighted to welcome **Terence P. Ross, Esq.** to our board of directors. Mr. Ross, a partner at Crowell & Moring in Washington, DC, concentrates on civil lawsuits relating to intellectual property, media, and technology. He has received extensive recognition for his highly successful legal practice, including acclaim from the Washington Legal

Foundation and the National Institute of Trial Advocacy. He has twice been named a “best lawyer” by *Washington Magazine*, and he is a member of the bar of several courts, including the Supreme Court of the United States.

Mr. Ross graduated from Stanford University with honors in 1980, and from the University of Virginia School of Law in 1983, where he was a research editor and on the Managing Board of the *Virginia Law Review*. He is an adjunct professor at George Mason University Law School and formerly served as a member of the Board of Visitors for the University of Virginia.



We are also pleased to welcome **Dr. Clara Lovett** as our first Scholar in Residence. Dr. Lovett is president emerita of the University of Northern Arizona and former president of the American Association for Higher Education. Before that, she served in a variety of teaching and administrative roles. Trained as a scholar of Modern European history, Dr. Lovett served

on the faculty of Baruch College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She has received scholarly awards from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and several other institutions. She has also served as dean for the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences at The George Washington University and as provost at George Mason University. Dr. Lovett will bring her extensive scholarly and administrative experience to advance ACTA’s accreditation reform project. ●



Jerry L. Martin

## ACTA Outside of ACTA

We are devoted to the founding fathers and were delighted when ACTA’s own founder and erstwhile

senior professor of philosophy, **Jerry L. Martin**, came to ATHENA this past November. Jerry stepped down from ACTA some years ago to follow a calling to another project, for which the word “major” would be an understatement. That project has now culminated in a remarkable book, *God: An Autobiography, as Told to a Philosopher*, which his agent is showing to publishers. Excerpts are available at [www.godanautobiography.com](http://www.godanautobiography.com), and Jerry is currently contributing a column for the “Good for the Soul” section of the online magazine, *The Good*

*Men Project*. BBC Radio’s “Something Understood” program featured Jerry’s paper, “The Scandal of Divine Presence,” which he presented at the Eric Voegelin Society in the fall. Jerry invites his friends, old and new, to keep in touch at Jerry.Martin@verizon.net.

Jerry isn’t the only “ACTAivist” who is working hard on independent projects. Many members of our team are deeply involved in intellectual work and service projects outside of the office.

Director of development **Jacqueline Merrill** contributes a weekly column to *Philanthropy Daily*, the online news website published by *American Philanthropic*. She also serves on the board of a non-profit organization that works with Goucher College to offer full-fledged college classes to inmates at Maryland’s only prison for women.

Press secretary **Daniel Burnett** volunteers at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, greeting guests and of-

fering information. And development associate **Jordan Pic** serves as vice president of the DC Alumni chapter for her alma mater, the University of North Florida—despite being only a year out of college!

ACTA vice president of policy **Michael Poliakoff**, a former professor of Classics, maintains an active publication presence in his field. A specialist in ancient sport, he recently contributed four articles to *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History* and an article on “Athletics” to *The Virgil Encyclopedia*. Earlier this year he gave a lecture entitled “Games, Contests, Violence and Culture: Sport and Competition in the Ancient World” to the fellows of Saybrook College at Yale.

**Bill Gonch**, senior program officer for communications, recently published a case study on civic education for the American Enterprise Institute’s Program on American Citizenship; he is currently editing a website devoted to the work of the literary critic Lionel Trilling. ●



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### **The *Washington Post*'s Kathleen Parker Highlights Findings of ACTA Report**

ACTA's report on the state of America's elite liberal arts colleges, ***Education or Reputation?***, received extensive coverage in the media. Among those to report on our findings was Pulitzer Prize winning *Washington Post* columnist Kathleen Parker.

"ACTA proposes that many schools, rather than offering the educational quality that earned them a golden reputation in the first place, often depend on public reverence for the past rather than present performance.

Of great concern is the diminishing focus on core curricula—the traditional arts and science coursework essential to developing the critical thinking necessary for civic participation. Among the 29 schools surveyed by the ACTA, only three require U.S. government or history, just two require economics and five colleges have no requirements at all.

Other findings of the 46-page report are equally compelling .... Summed up: American students are paying too much for too little .... Getting people into college is only half the battle. Getting them out with a useful education seems an equal challenge."

—Kathleen Parker, *Washington Post*