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Report Card Opens Doors in Minnesota

By Heather Lakemacher, Jerry L. Martin Fellow

“The governor is ready for you.” Those were the words we had been anxiously waiting to hear for the last 20 minutes. We quickly followed the young woman down the hallway, not to Governor Tim Pawlenty’s office but to the radio studio where

of report cards that have analyzed public higher education in states across the country. *At a Crossroads* examines ten campuses from the University of Minnesota (U of M) and the Minnesota State Colleges & Universities (MnSCU) systems. Both U of M and MnS-



ACTA staff members on air with Governor Pawlenty.

he was broadcasting “Good Morning, Minnesota”—his weekly program—live.

Governor Pawlenty had invited us onto “Good Morning, Minnesota” to discuss the findings of ACTA’s state report card, *At a Crossroads*. The report is the latest in a series

CU are given Pass or Fail grades in four categories: what students are learning, whether the marketplace of ideas is vibrant, how the universities are governed, and what a college education costs.

(continued on 2)

Save the Date for 2010 ATHENA Roundtable

ACTA’s 2010 ATHENA Roundtable, *The Purposeful University*, will be held on **November 4-5** at The Union League in Philadelphia. The event will culminate with a gala dinner and presentation of the 2010 Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archeology and Anthropology. Keep an eye out for further details on www.goacta.org or call us at 202-467-6787.

www.goacta.org

info@goacta.org

1-888-ALUMNI-8

Guidance Counselors Respond to WhatWillTheyLearn.com

Editor's Note: At the end of January, ACTA mailed flyers about our college-guide website, WhatWillTheyLearn.com, to 60,000 high school guidance counselors throughout the country. In the days that followed, the number of visitors to the website more than tripled, and we received dozens of emails from counselors saying that they would be pointing students to our site. Here are a few of them.

**Daniel Townsley, Director of College Advising
Legacy Christian Academy
Frisco, TX**

"Thank you for the email and for developing the site. This is a terrific and much needed resource to help me in guiding students and parents to the best place for each of them. Without resources like this, the decision comes down to sports teams and ranking schemes that mostly do not match the experiences of freshmen. Thank you for your work, and I encourage you to expand this research when possible."

**Donna Hunter, Assistant Principal
Suzanne Middle School
Walnut, CA**

"Thank you for the information regarding the website. This is excellent information for parents and students. I have forwarded the link to my colleague at Walnut High School and believe they will appreciate the resource Thanks for including me in the distribution of this timely and excellent resource."

**Jo Ann Barnard, School Counselor
Mahwah High School
Mahwah, NJ**

"I took some time yesterday to open and explore the website. I think that it is an excellent resource, another pool of information for students and parents, to analyze colleges according to their educational goals and financial situations. I have made photocopies of your flier, to distribute to parents during our Junior College Conferences in the spring."

**Mark Stodgell, Jr. High School Counselor
West Lafayette Junior/Senior High School
West Lafayette, IN**

"I got your literature and went to the site it is a very good source of information and I appreciate knowing where to find such quick and basic answers I look forward to your growth and development."

**Christine B. Desmond, Director of College Counseling
Ursuline Academy
Saint Louis, MO**

"Fascinating! I only wish there were more schools on it from our area ... but I will keep watching your website for more updates. I have deplored the weakening of core curricula and the 'study what you like' philosophy for years. Your site is a valuable one."

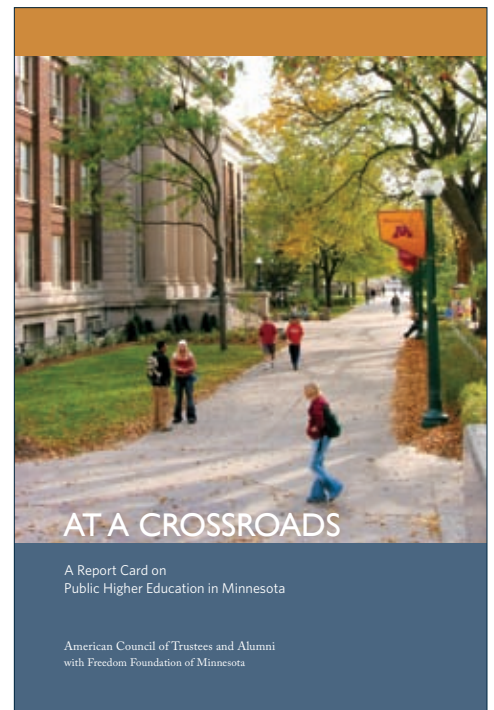
Minnesota Report Card, *continued from 1*

ACTA decided to issue a report card on Minnesota in partnership with the Freedom Foundation of Minnesota, an independent, non-profit educational and research organization that focuses on public policy within the state. They were eager to work with us because of our knowledge of national best practices, and we were eager for them to introduce us to the key players on the ground and to provide local follow-up. And boy, did they deliver!

For two whirlwind days, the FFM staff joined us at meeting after meeting in which we discussed our findings. An op-ed co-authored by ACTA president Anne D. Neal and FFM CEO Annette Meeks was featured in *The Star Tribune*—Minnesota's largest newspaper—on the morning of our press conference at the State Capitol. Footage from that press conference was later incorporated into the public affairs program "At Issue," which is broadcast around the state. We also met with numerous policymakers, reporters, and the editorial boards of *The Star Tribune* and *The St. Paul Pioneer Press*. Being invited onto Governor Pawlenty's radio program was simply the culmination of FFM's well-planned, local media outreach.

The findings of *At a Crossroads* are not so uniformly positive as our meetings.

(continued on 3)



Time to Tackle Transfer Policies

By David Azerrad, Program Officer

In March, ACTA president Anne D. Neal and four other higher education experts wrote a letter to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, urging him to address the problem of restrictive transfer policies between different colleges and universities with a view to increasing graduation rates.

The letter builds on President Obama's goal of increasing the number of students with postsecondary degrees and calls for a "high-priority and thorough study documenting the extent of the problem [of transfer credits] and identifying conditions and interventions that advance student success."

One of the dirty little secrets of American higher education is that restrictive credit transfer policies between institutions significantly contribute to low graduation rates. But there is a lack of information on the subject, making it impossible to assess the actual costs associated with nontransferable credits—to the students or the federal government. As the letter explains:

A credible study of the costs of restrictive transfer policies remains badly needed. With multiple providers and multiple modes of delivering higher education, it is essential that policies be in place that ensure students do not waste time—or taxpayer dollars—in obtaining postsecondary education. . . In a world in which nearly 60 percent of college students can be expected to earn credits from more than one institution of higher learning, the institutional practice of privileging certain kinds of federally-recognized accreditors over others cannot continue.

The other signatories of the letter are Kevin Carey, policy director at Education Sector; Frederick M. Hess, director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute; Mark Schneider, a vice president at the American Institutes for Research; and Richard Vedder, director of the Center for College Affordability and Productivity. ●

Minnesota Report Card, continued from 2

Minnesota's public universities exhibit many of the problems that are currently plaguing higher education throughout the country. Graduation rates are low; none of the institutions that we surveyed has a four-year graduation rate above 50 percent. Tuition increases are outpacing inflation—by almost 30 percent at the state's flagship campus in the Twin Cities. Students report feeling pressure to agree with their professors' political or social views in order to get a good grade. And although almost all of the institutions surveyed require composition, science, and math, none require a broad course in U.S. history or economics.

Despite this, we were pleased to find that the boards of both U of M and MnSCU operate in a remarkably transparent manner, making them well-positioned to address issues of quality and cost. The board websites list the home or work addresses of all of the board mem-

bers. Meeting documents dating back to the founding of the systems are available online. And board meetings are streamed live over the internet so that the public can see what's going on.

including whether students are passing licensure exams. And to cope with hard economic times, the board closed 345 academic programs in recent years while only opening 191, indicating a critical level of attention to efficiency and cost. In all of the other states we have researched, the board has opened more programs than it has closed—sometimes by ratios as high as 15 to 1—and in Illinois, the boards didn't even have a reliable record of the programs they had opened and closed!

With the publication of our report and the meetings we had in Minnesota, there are promising signs that Minnesota is intent on improving

higher education. In the coming weeks and months, we look forward to building on our successful trip by working with interested trustees and policymakers to take further action on the report's findings. ●

PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION IN MINNESOTA	
General Education	F
Intellectual Diversity	F
Governance	
University of Minnesota System	
Board Structure and Transparency of Operations	P
Board Accomplishments	F
Minnesota State Colleges & Universities System	
Board Structure and Transparency of Operations	P
Board Accomplishments	P
Cost and Effectiveness	F

We were also pleased to find the MnSCU board actively engaging many of the challenges facing the system. The trustees recently started an online Accountability Dashboard, which publicly reports on key performance measures

Stevens Institute of Technology Provides a Cautionary Tale

By Noah Mamis, Program Officer

When Donald N. Merino called ACTA in 2005, nobody knew the firestorm that would come of it. Merino is a tenured professor and alumnus of the Stevens Institute of Technology, a private institution in Hoboken, New Jersey. As chair of a faculty committee, he was responsible for analyzing Stevens' financial state. Although the administration told him that Stevens had a balanced budget, the reality was very different; Stevens had been using dedicated endowed funds to plug the budgetary holes.

After several years of back and forth, New Jersey attorney general Anne Milgram filed suit against the university in 2009. Drawing on a two-year investiga-

tion, the lawsuit alleged that Stevens' president—along with the chair and two vice-chairs of its board—spent the university's endowment contrary to donor intent and board guidelines and improperly compensated the president, all the while concealing Stevens' financial position from the other trustees. As part of a settlement, the university had to agree to replace the president, hire an outside consultant to advise the board, dilute the power of the Executive Committee, adopt a Donors' Bill of Rights and Gift Acceptance Policy, and improve board transparency, among other things.

Alumni involvement in the lawsuit was critical. After all, it was their dona-

tions that were being mismanaged, and it was their activism and pressure that forced the investigation to be undertaken in the first place. They brought public attention to this matter and kept it in the limelight.

ACTA recently mailed a memorandum to over 10,000 trustees from across the country, outlining the Stevens' lawsuit as a cautionary tale and explaining ways that they can prevent such abuses from happening at their institutions.

But most importantly, we offer some well-deserved kudos to Don Merino and his merry band for fighting the good fight. ●

Poliakoff to Spearhead Expansion of WhatWillTheyLearn.com



Michael Poliakoff

We are delighted to announce that Dr. Michael B. Poliakoff, a longtime veteran of higher education reform with a keen understanding of the inner workings of the academy, has joined ACTA as our new policy director. Michael has spent more than thirty years working in the academy and on higher education policy at the state and federal level, including a stint at the Pennsylvania Department of Education, where he served as deputy secretary of postsecondary and higher education. He previously served as vice president for academic affairs and research at the University of Colorado and in senior roles at the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Council on Teacher Quality, and the American Academy for Liberal Education. He has taught at Georgetown University, George Washington University, Hillsdale College, the University of Illinois at Chicago, and Wellesley College. He has studied at Yale, Oxford, and Michigan as well as being a Rhodes Scholar.

Michael's first project is to oversee huge growth in ACTA's college-guide website, WhatWillTheyLearn.com. This website is the only place parents and students can go to find out whether a given college or university will actually make sure they take solid coursework in key areas like American history, math, science, and writing. And it has attracted a huge following—over 50,000 visitors as well as appearances on major television programs, in newspapers reaching over 20 million people, and on some of the biggest sites on the Internet. Under Michael's direction, WhatWillTheyLearn.com—

(continued on 5)



Academic Centers Enhance Intellectual Diversity

Although recent ACTA studies have found that general education requirements are sorely lacking at many colleges and universities, an increasing number of people are taking matters into their own hands. Professors and donors—often concerned alumni—are working to create academic centers devoted to the balanced discussion of neglected or controversial subjects. Below are profiles of several recent initiatives.

At the **University of Vermont**, James F. Gatti—an associate professor in the School of Business Administration—and several colleagues started The Center for Liberal Inquiry. The Center aims to advance research and discussion about the merits of top-down government solutions versus bottom-up market solutions for public policy issues. The Center's signature program is the Janus Forum, a series of expert debates on topics such as, "Buy Local or Buy Global," "Single-Payer vs. Consumer Driven Health Care," and "Nuclear Power: Promise or Peril." The Janus Forum has attracted audiences of up to 800, and guest speakers have had numerous opportunities for follow-up interviews with the local media.

In New York, an initiative started by several **Hamilton College** professors—the Alexander Hamilton Institute for the Study of Western Civilization (AHI)—moved off campus in 2007 and has been attracting the attention of college students throughout upstate New York. In the fall of 2009, AHI introduced its Undergraduate Fellows Program. More than 30 undergraduate students, who were selected through a formal application process, have been engaging in research, leading Publius Society discussions, and participating in

monthly Leadership Luncheons. The Leadership Luncheons provide a forum in which students can interact with leading scholars and other distinguished guests about topics as wide-ranging as the meaning of federalism and the future of liberal arts education.

At **Ohio University**, Robert G. Ingram—an associate professor of history—recently started the George Washington Forum on American Ideas, Politics & Institutions. The George Washington Forum "aims to bolster the teaching of America's foundational principles in their Western intellectual, political, and institutional contexts." During this academic year, the George Washington Forum has hosted several guest lectures on topics such as "Liberating the Liberal Arts: On Re-learning the Art of Being Free" and "Habeas Corpus: London, Calcutta, Guantanamo Bay," and later this year it will host a three-day conference on "Making Democracy: Violence, Politics and the American Founding."

UCLA recently issued a formal charter to the Center for the Liberal Arts and Free Institutions (CLAFI). CLAFI was started by UCLA law professor Daniel Lowenstein as an interdisciplinary center devoted to the idea that "an educated citizen in a democracy should have a sound understanding of the history of free institutions and their underlying principles." CLAFI held its inaugural event—a four-day Lincoln Celebration—in November. The well-attended event included a theatrical reading of the Lincoln-Douglas debates and eight presentations by scholars. CLAFI is also offering two courses this academic term and intends to offer additional courses in the future. ●

Poliakoff, *continued from 4*

which has been growing since the day we launched it—will encompass over 600 schools, five times its size just last August. This will be a crucial advance for perhaps our most exciting program, and a direct response to the number-one request we receive from the public: Add more schools!

"When it comes to higher ed, Michael Poliakoff gets it," said ACTA president Anne D. Neal. "Michael's thorough grasp of the academy will be a boon to our efforts to ensure that America's colleges and universities deliver on their promises." We are delighted Michael has come on board—and we thank our generous supporters for enabling us to reel him in! ●

Outside Speakers and Intellectual Diversity

Posted by Michael Poliakoff on March 17, 2010

A recent story in the *Indianapolis Star* details the Butler University faculty senate's quick dismissal of a student proposal to invite John Roberts, Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, to be this year's commencement speaker. The story indicates a range of possible rationales for the decision. Some, including the president of the senior class, believe faculty members objected to Chief Justice Roberts' ideology. Others, including the president of the Faculty Senate, point to a putative "no politicians" policy at commencement. And at least one faculty member has claimed that it takes several years to award an honorary degree, which would have ostensibly gone hand-in-hand with an invitation to speak at commencement.

Sadly, it is too late for Butler's Class of 2010 to have the opportunity to hear the Chief Justice. But Butler's trustees can make this sad affair into a teachable moment by reviewing the procedures for inviting outside speakers and awarding honorary degrees and reinvigorating the institution's commitment to intellectual diversity, as we suggest in a letter we sent to the board today.

There are few campus issues more urgent than protecting the free exchange of ideas. All institutions would do well to review the admonition of the faculty committee chaired by the distinguished historian C. Vann Woodward: "Above all, every member of the university has a special obligation to permit free expression in the university. No member has a right to prevent such expression. Every official of the university, moreover, has a special obligation to foster free expression and to ensure that it is not obstructed."

The Butler Board of Trustees should ensure that—whatever happened here—Butler has a comprehensive speaker policy that protects academic freedom as well as ensuring that students have access to a wide variety of views, so they can make up their own minds. If it does not, the board should work with the administration and faculty to craft one. We suggest that the board also consider other steps enumerated in our 2009 report, *Protecting the Free Exchange of Ideas*.

ACTA Convenes Conference on Giving for Lawyers

ACTA—in conjunction with the Federalist Society and the Philanthropy Roundtable—hosted a conference on protecting donor intent in college giving on February 3 in Washington, DC. The conference was targeted at trusts-and-estates lawyers, who write most grant agreements between donors and universities. ACTA president Anne D. Neal moderated a panel featuring representatives from three academic programs across the country: the Tocqueville Forum at Georgetown, the James Madison Program at Princeton, and the Academy on Capitalism and Limited Government at the University of Illinois. The panelists discussed how their programs successfully went about fundraising, as well as how these sorts of programs can serve as outlets for donors seeking to improve their alma maters.

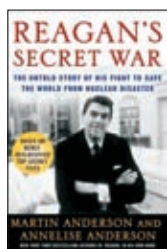
A quartet of lawyers from across the country—all of whom have unique expertise in advising clients on how to ensure that the intent of their gifts is respected—comprised a second panel. Some of their suggestions included avoiding making gifts in perpetuity, considering donating to a legally distinct supporting



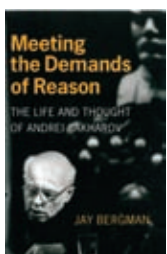
Richard Gallagher, John Horak, and Seth Lapidow participate in conference on college giving.

organization and appointing a neutral ombudsman from outside the university, such as ACTA, to ensure that donors' wishes are respected.

For donors who were unable to attend the event, other suggestions can be found in ACTA's *The Intelligent Donor's Guide to College Giving*. Additionally, some of the materials that were distributed at the conference are available upon request from ACTA. ●



Hoover Institution fellow **Martin Anderson** is the author of what you might call ACTA's Bible—his book *Impostors in the Temple*, which fingers trustees as “the only people with both the responsibility and the authority to take decisive, effective action” and has informed our work from the very beginning. With his wife, Hoover fellow **Annelise Anderson**, he recently authored *Reagan's Secret War: The Untold Story of His Fight to Save the World from Nuclear Disaster*.



In addition to being one of ACTA's best and most faithful friends and a fixture at our ATHENA Roundtable, Central Connecticut State University history professor **Jay Bergman** is also the author of the new book *Meeting the Demands of Reason: The Life and Thought of Andrei Sakharov*. We recommend it!

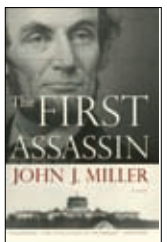


Hudson Institute president **Herbert London**—a longtime ACTA supporter last seen memorably holding forth on academic freedom as part of a colloquy at our ATHENA Roundtable—has released

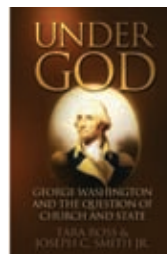
his latest book, *America's Secular Challenge: The Rise of a New National Religion*.



You've heard ACTA sounding the alarm that Americans have forgotten our own nation's history. Our friend **Theodore Roosevelt Malloch**—one of whose many hats is being a research professor at Yale—is concerned about another case of amnesia in his book *Thrift: Rebirth of a Forgotten Virtue*, which comes with a foreword by the late Sir John Templeton. Malloch is also author of *Spiritual Enterprise: Doing Virtuous Business*.

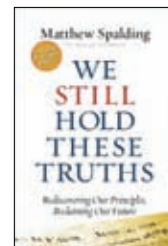


Love history? Seen his frequent columns in *The Wall Street Journal* and other publications? Then don't miss *The First Assassin*, a new historical novel on the Civil War era by our longtime friend **John J. Miller**, a dynamite writer and a consultant to a number of grantmaking foundations.



You've read before in this space about *Under God: George Washington and the Question of Church and State*, ACTA

friend **Joseph C. Smith Jr.** and **Tara Ross's** book on ACTA president Anne D. Neal's most favorite president. We have good news: It's in its second printing! If you couldn't make our regional meeting in Denver featuring Joe, now's your chance to get a copy.



Are you detecting a theme? Yes, ACTA loves history! And so does our friend **Matthew Spalding**, director of the B. Kenneth Simon Center for American Studies at the Heritage Foundation. His latest is *We Still Hold These Truths: Rediscovering Our Principles, Reclaiming Our Future*.



Jackson Toby, professor of sociology emeritus at Rutgers, has just published an excellent book entitled *The Lowering of Higher Education in America: Why Financial Aid Should Be Based on Student Performance*. It comes with the endorsement of fellow ACTA friends **Stephan Thernstrom** and **Richard Vedder**, and it quotes from our 2007 study *The Vanishing Shakespeare*. This one is on numerous ACTA staff members' personal reading lists, and we recommend it most highly! ●

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“Wow.” That was the reaction of Gov. Tim Pawlenty to ACTA’s new report card on higher education in Minnesota. ACTA appeared March 19th on his radio show, “Good Morning, Minnesota.” Learn more in our cover story.