



Promoting  
Academic  
Freedom and  
Excellence

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## ACTA Receives a Major Gift from the Diana Davis Spencer Foundation



DIANA DAVIS SPENCER  
FOUNDATION

A generous gift from the Diana Davis Spencer Foundation will vastly increase the American Council of Trustees and Alumni's ability to identify and bring remediation to institutions where the campus climate stifles free speech and inquiry.

The foundation has awarded \$3 million to ACTA, plus a \$1 million challenge grant, to address the free speech crisis afflicting our nation's colleges and universities. ACTA will intervene when schools restrict free speech and disseminate best practice models that provide faculty, higher education leaders, and students with strategies and solutions to ensure intellectual diversity. We will also use this funding to leverage key stakeholders to drive positive change through our Donor Revolution initiative.

The assault on reasoned debate and the pursuit of truth at America's colleges and universities has grown in intensity and, all too often, outright viciousness. We are seeing the erosion of intellectual diversity in the classroom and on campus, accompanied by severe limitations on student and faculty expression. The norms of academic freedom that protect the unfettered pursuit of truth

in research and teaching are deteriorating at an alarming rate. We are also witnessing the development of diversity initiatives that have the practical effect of defining favored viewpoints and severely punishing those who dissent. The fate of the academy as we know it is at stake.

"We are profoundly grateful to the Diana Davis Spencer Foundation for its generosity and vision," said ACTA President Michael Poliakoff. "Since 1999, the foundation has been a key supporter of ACTA's work, including a five-year \$5 million grant in 2015 to reinvigorate our Fund for Academic Renewal and help donors make discerning gifts to higher education in keeping with their values.

"This transformative gift is a huge momentum builder for 2022. It will allow us to expand our staff and add several essential initiatives to our growing portfolio of programs focused on campus free speech, curricular reform, and reining in the cost of a college education. These are the initiatives through which ACTA works to bring a desperately needed course correction to higher education." ●

## ACTA Co-Hosts Alumni Summit on Free Expression

On February 24 and 25, alumni group leaders advocating for free thought and open inquiry at their alma maters convened in Washington, DC, for the first annual Alumni Summit on Free Expression. The newly formed **Alumni Free Speech Alliance**, an organization co-founded by **Edward Yingling** and ACTA Board Member **Stuart Taylor, Jr.**, co-hosted the event. **Nadine Strossen**, former president of the American Civil Liberties Union, delivered the opening keynote address. Presentations by attorney **Samantha Harris** and Brookings scholar **Jonathan Rauch** followed the next day. Alumni participated in a series of panel discussions on the role that alumni play in advocating for free speech and securing a better future for higher education.

**Karrin Taylor Robson**  
**Arizona gubernatorial candidate**  
**Former regent, Arizona Board of Regents**

“I am not sure that I can ever thank you enough for the tremendous honor you and ACTA bestowed on me with the Jerry Martin Prize. Together we have a lot of work ahead that we need to accomplish for the next generation—a task made easier because of organizations like ACTA.”

*Editor’s Note: On November 11, ACTA honored Ms. Taylor Robson as the recipient of our Jerry L. Martin Prize for Excellence in College Trusteeship as part of our 25<sup>th</sup> Plus One Anniversary Celebration.*

**Jeremy Tate, CEO**  
**Classic Learning Test**

“It was an amazing ACTA event a few weeks ago. I believe ACTA is doing some of the most important work in higher ed, and I am extremely impressed with your leadership.”

**James Agras**  
**Pittsburgh, PA**

“The vitally important mission of ACTA [is so] apparent especially in our school system from elementary to graduate, and beyond. You and your ACTA colleagues, and others, MUST during the coming years continue to demonstrate enduring strength as you espouse your important mission throughout.”

## ACTA Continues to Fight Bias Response Teams

By Jonathan Pidluzny

Those who have not recently set foot on American college campuses would hardly recognize them as academic institutions. Cafeterias have been replaced with sushi bars, dorms with luxury apartment complexes, and Spartan weight rooms with multimillion-dollar recreation centers. Unfortunately, the glitzy new infrastructure and carefully manicured grounds adorn a crumbling intellectual foundation. Critical inquiry and wide-ranging debate are endangered species on campus today for many reasons. But one of the most surprising is that colleges and universities have erected new administrative apparatuses designed to investigate their own students for voicing disfavored opinions.

“Bias response teams” operate on hundreds of campuses today, including many public universities. Their purpose, as the Orwellian name suggests, is to swoop in where feelings are hurt: to comfort the aggrieved and

punish offending speakers. The exact composition of bias squads varies from campus to campus, but they often task police officers and senior student life administrators with investigating offensive speech in the name of building a more inclusive community. The point:

“When universities encourage students to inform on their peers and professors, they create a dynamic reminiscent of an East European Soviet police state. It hardly matters whether speech is protected—by academic freedom policies at private institutions and the First Amendment at publics—when students fear the wrong word could set off a process that is punitive and reputation-damaging irrespective of the finding.

bias teams adopt a punitive framework; they even borrow processes from the criminal justice system and appropriate the language of the courtroom (“victim,” “offender,” “investigation”).

So it is no surprise that students are using them to target viewpoints they

dislike. At Colby College, a student reported a peer for using the phrase “on the other hand” (ableism!); at Michigan State University, a student informed on his roommate for watching Ben Shapiro on YouTube; and at the University of Oregon, a professor was turned in for an oblique comment skeptical of Christine Blasey Ford’s sexual assault accusations during Brett Kavanaugh’s confirmation hearing.

When universities encourage students to inform on their peers and professors, they create a dynamic reminiscent of an East European Soviet police state. It hardly matters whether speech is protected—by academic freedom policies at private institutions and the First

Amendment at publics—when students fear the wrong word could set off a process that is punitive and reputation-damaging irrespective of the finding.

The good news is that federal appeals courts have noticed. When the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals agreed that

(continued on 3)

## ACTA Releases New State Rankings

ACTA recently released our updated State Rankings Project, which evaluates colleges and universities in all 50 states on a series of key performance indicators. Drawing on data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), we surveyed all regionally accredited, public four-year institutions with a stated liberal arts mission, amounting to a total of 500 schools.

On GoACTA.org, users can navigate an interactive map to see how each state ranks for the performance of its public institutions on five measures of cost-effectiveness—Tuition as a Percentage of Median Household Income, Administrator-to-Professor Ratio, Student-to-Administrator Ratio, Administrative Spending Per Student, and Student Services Spending Per Student. We also evaluate schools on five measures of academic quality—Core Curriculum, Speech Code Policies, Four-Year Graduation Rate, Student-to-Faculty Ratio, and Pell Student Graduation Gap.

Oklahoma ranks best of all 50 states on the measure of Administrative Spending Per Student, a data point that ACTA calculated using what institutions report to NCES’ Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System as “institutional support,” which commonly includes costs for executive management, legal departments, and fiscal operations. Institutions in Oklahoma commit an average of \$1,445 per student on administrative expenditures for every dollar spent

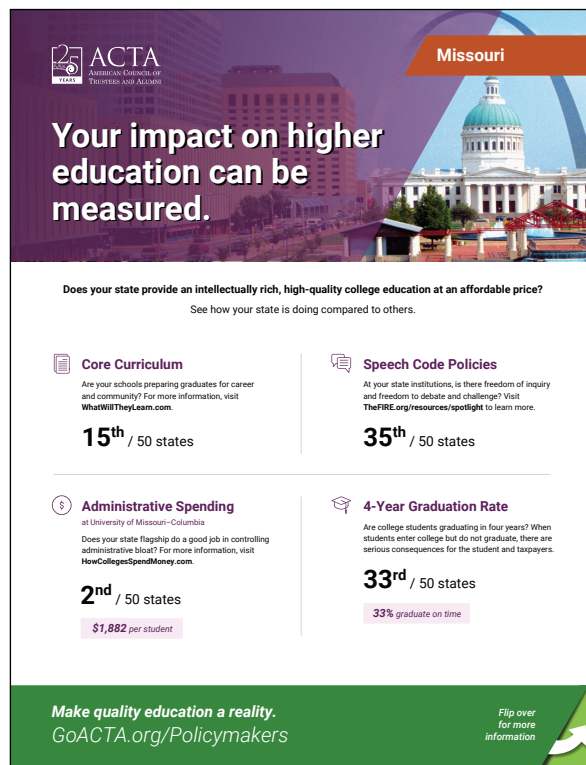
on instruction. On the other side of the chart, Wyoming, which ranks 50<sup>th</sup>, spends an average of \$7,389 per student on administration for every dollar spent on instruction. Rhode Island ranks first in the nation for its Student-to-Administrator Ratio, employing one administrator for every 27 students. In contrast,

institutions in Mississippi, which ranks 50<sup>th</sup>, employ the highest ratio of administrators, with one administrator for every 10 students.

Looking at measures of academic quality, Arizona, Mississippi, and New Hampshire tie for first place for having colleges and universities with the least restrictive speech code policies on a state-by-state basis, while Wyoming takes last place for having the most restrictive speech codes. Delaware ranks first in the nation for its Four-Year Graduation Rate, graduating 66% of its first-time, full-time freshmen seeking bachelor’s degrees. Alaska comes in at 50<sup>th</sup> place, graduating just 15% of its first-time, full-time students in four years.

By providing these independent, objective metrics, ACTA hopes to

help lawmakers ensure that taxpayer dollars support students, not administrative bloat, and to encourage university leaders to commit to responsible financial stewardship. Using ACTA’s state rankings, students and families can also evaluate if the schools in their state provide an intellectually rich, high-quality education at an affordable price. ●



### Bias Response Teams, *continued from 2*

the University of Texas–Austin’s (UT) policies had a chilling effect on student speech, the university settled with Speech First, the student group that sued. UT agreed to shutter its bias response team, delete its policy on “Hate and Bias Incidents,” and make changes to how it defines verbal harassment. A 2021 Speech First appeal to the Seventh Circuit had a similar outcome when the University of Illinois–Urbana-Champaign agreed to settle by defanging its bias team. Working with partners at the Independent Women’s Law Center, ACTA submitted amicus briefs in both cases. Now, the University of Central Florida (UCF) and Virginia Tech are under the microscope for similar, speech-chilling practices. In the amicus brief we submitted to the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals last fall, we explained that UCF’s policies put “the very mission of the American university—learning through the free exchange of ideas . . . at risk.”

Rebuilding norms of free expression in the American academy begins with dismantling the administrative-diversity complex. Unprincipled campus leaders who have allowed it to metastasize may finally be forced to act by judges who *are* committed to the First Amendment. ●

In recent months, ACTA has helped fuel the uniting of alumni across the nation who are concerned about threats to free expression, academic freedom, and viewpoint diversity on campus. In these difficult times, colleges and universities are relying upon the philanthropy of dedicated alumni to keep their institutions afloat. With this increased dependence on donors, we believe alumni can combine their voices to push for powerful, overdue reforms at their alma maters.

Recently, ACTA Board Member Stuart Taylor, Jr., and Edward Yingling, former president of the American Bankers Association, formed the Alumni Free Speech Alliance (AFSA), which seeks to unite alumni from colleges around the country. ACTA has been working closely with AFSA to provide our resources to alumni who want to form advocacy groups to support free speech on campus.

In October and November, we developed two surveys in partnership with Davidsonians for Freedom of Thought and Discourse (DFTD), one of the five founding members of AFSA. DFTD seeks to make alumni concerns with the state of free expression on campus known to the Davidson College administration, especially as the school begins its search for a new president.

In partnership with Braun Research, Inc., we surveyed 1,114 major donors to Davidson College, most of whom are also alumni. A majority of the 300 donors who responded indicated they are “somewhat” or “very” dissatisfied with the direction that Davidson College has taken over the last decade, with more than one-third of respondents saying that their level of giving has declined or ceased in recent years. The survey revealed a widespread perception that the campus is ideologically biased, with 81% of donors describing the campus culture as “liberal” or “left of center,” compared to 2% who described it as “conservative” or “right of center.” Only 20% of

respondents said it is “extremely” or “very” clear that Davidson’s administration “protects free speech on campus,” and 94% said that Davidson’s next president should make freedom of speech and civil discourse a priority.

Our survey of current Davidson students echoed alumni concerns about free speech on campus, revealing troubling levels of self-censorship. More than seven out of 10 students reported feeling like they could not express their opinion on a subject because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond. Nearly 40% of students said that, should a controversy over offensive speech occur, it is “not very likely” or “not at all likely” that the administration would defend the speaker’s right to express his or her views.

Both alumni and students strongly support the proposal that Davidson adopt the Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression. Eighty percent of the alumni donors we surveyed favored the adoption of the Chicago Principles, and 79% of students said that Davidson’s next president should make the adoption and implementation of the Chicago Principles a high priority. In the fall, Davidson President Carol Quillen commissioned a working group of alumni, faculty, and students to draft a statement affirming Davidson’s commitment to free speech and open inquiry. This is an important first step toward renewing alumni confidence and dismantling the ideological monoculture that has dominated the campus in recent years.

On February 24 and 25, in partnership with AFSA, ACTA held the 2022 Alumni Summit on Free Expression at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, DC. This first-ever summit taught alumni how to organize their own advocacy groups at their alma maters and equipped them with the knowledge and resources they need to be dynamic agents of change in higher education. ●

## ACTA Issues Statements on SCOTUS Consideration of Race-Based Admissions

On January 24, the U.S. Supreme Court announced that it will hear two cases during its next term that challenge race-based admissions policies at Harvard University and the University of North Carolina. *Students for Fair Admissions v. President & Fellows of Harvard* and *Students for Fair Admissions v. University of North Carolina* ask the court to reverse previous rulings that allowed colleges and universities to consider the race of applicants in the admissions process.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, “The lawsuit against Harvard alleged the school used quota-like racial balancing tactics that artificially raised the standards of admission for Asian-American applicants, in violation of federal civil-rights law. The challenges alleged Asians were admitted at a lower rate than whites, even though their overall academic scores were better.” The lawsuit against the University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill alleges that the school “unlawfully factored students’ race into the admissions process, favoring Black, Hispanic and Native American applicants and even caused them harm by inviting them into classrooms for which they weren’t prepared.”

ACTA President Michael Poliakoff stated, “As a citizen of this nation, an educator, and the father of two adopted Asian daughters, I am outraged by the evidence of Harvard’s discrimination against meritorious Asian American applicants in its

(continued on 7)



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

## New Institute of American Civics to be Established at University of Tennessee

ACTA applauds Tennessee Governor Bill Lee for his action to create an Institute of American Civics at the University of Tennessee. In January, Governor Lee announced that the state budget for fiscal year 2022–2023 will include an initial appropriation of \$6 million to establish the new institute, with \$4 million appointed annually thereafter.

In his State of the State Address on January 31, Governor Lee said that he hopes the Institute of American Civics “will be a flagship for the nation—a beacon celebrating intellectual diversity at our universities and teaching how a responsible, civic-minded people strengthens our country and our communities.”

At a time when many colleges and universities fail to require a course on American government or history in their core curricula and even in their history majors, Governor Lee’s action to promote civic education is urgently needed. ACTA President Michael Poliakoff commented, “Governor Lee’s proposal to establish a new institute for civic education at the University of Tennessee will do what Thomas Jefferson envisioned for his own university, ‘to instruct the mass of our citizens in these, their rights, interests and duties’ and ‘to form the statesmen, legislators and judges, on whom public prosperity and individual happiness are so much to depend.’ It is the kind of bold, new initiative that will make Tennessee a leader in the long road ahead to restoring thoughtful discussion to our public dialogue and an understanding of our civic institutions.” ●

## ACTA Interviews AFSA Co-Founder Edward Yingling

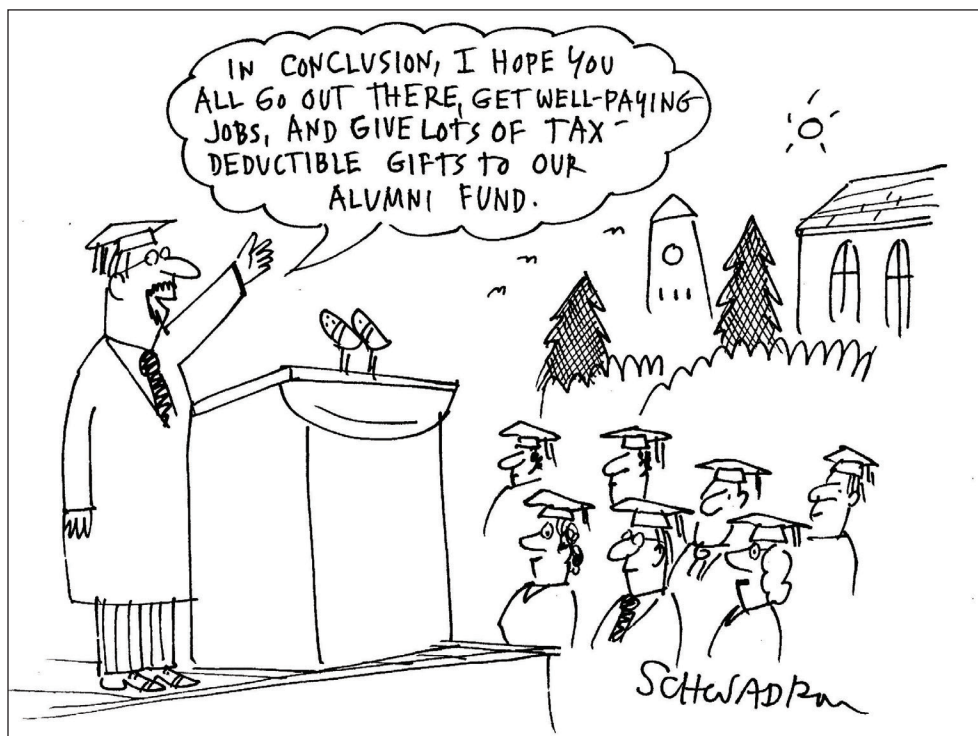


In December, ACTA President Michael Poliakoff interviewed Edward Yingling, who co-founded the Alumni Free Speech Alliance (AFSA) along with Stuart Taylor, Jr., a member of ACTA’s Board of Directors. AFSA brings together alumni groups that have a shared conviction to support free speech, academic freedom, and viewpoint diversity at their colleges and universities. Mr. Yingling was president and CEO of the American Bankers Association, and together with Mr. Taylor, he also co-founded Princetonians for Free Speech at Princeton University, his alma mater.

**Michael Poliakoff (MP):** Please tell us how you first, along with Stuart, formed Princetonians for Free Speech and then quickly expanded to the nation.

**Edward Yingling (EY):** Well, first let me thank you and all the team at ACTA because you have already helped us so much, but we have many exciting things we’re going to do together to help alumni free speech groups across the country. We have really exciting tools we’re going to develop with you, and you’re going to be a great partner for us, and you already are. So thank you so much. . . . We all started with a very small group. Princetonians actually started with three, others had bigger lists, but you had a dedicated core

*(continued on 6)*



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## ACTA Cited in the *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal*

On December 17, 2021, *Washington Post* columnist George Will published a column in the *Post* about historian Gordon Wood, the recipient of our 2021 Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education. Mr. Will gave a tribute to Professor Wood at our 25<sup>th</sup> Plus One Anniversary Celebration held at the Library of Congress on November 12.

In his article, entitled “The malicious, historically illiterate 1619 Project keeps rolling on,” Mr. Will shared excerpts of the speech that Professor Wood delivered after receiving ACTA’s award: “Addressing the American Council of Trustees and Alumni last month, Gordon S. Wood, today’s foremost scholar of America’s Founding, dissected the 1619 Project’s contentions. When the Revolution erupted, Britain ‘was not threatening to abolish slavery in its empire’ . . . The 1619 Project aims to erase (in Wood’s words) ‘the Revolution and the principles that it articulated—liberty, equality and the well-being of ordinary people.’ These ideas are, as Wood says, the adhesives that bind our exceptional nation whose people have shared principles, not

a shared ancestry.” Please contact ACTA to receive a copy of Dr. Wood’s extraordinary speech.

On November 30, 2021, ACTA’s work was showcased in the *Wall Street Journal* in an article by education reporter Douglas Belkin entitled, “Alumni Withhold Donations, Demand Colleges Enforce Free Speech.” Discussing the effort by alumni at Davidson College to voice their concerns about the administration’s failure to protect free expression, Mr. Belkin wrote, “To measure the breadth of concern among Davidson donors, [Davidsonians for Freedom of Thought and Discourse] this summer commissioned the American Council of Trustees and Alumni to conduct a survey of 1,114 donors. Among the 314 who responded, just 20% said it is very or extremely clear the school administration protects free speech, and 94% said the next president should make protecting free speech and civil discourse a priority.”

Please see a full discussion of ACTA’s survey of Davidson donors on page four of this issue. ●

### Edward Yingling Interview, *continued from 5*

group, then you reached out and found others who were interested in it, and then you just grew from there. This is truly one of those issues where a few individuals from any school can start and make a huge difference.

**MP:** It seems like the giant is awakening. Alumni gives over \$11 billion each year to higher education. They are a very, very powerful and important body for the future of American colleges and universities. You got quite an extraordinary response to your op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* that ran in October.

**EY:** First let me say that we have four great partners in the Alliance, alumni groups from Cornell, Davidson, University of Virginia, and Washington and Lee. . . . We started very small. . . . We had this idea, this dream, that we would have eventually a national network, an alliance of groups all over the country. And when we decided to go public, Stuart and I wrote this op-ed, and we were amazed and shocked at the

response. What it shows is alumni all across this country are so disturbed about what’s going on at their schools that they’re ready for something like this, but they didn’t know how to organize. And so, in retrospect, what happened when we wrote that op-ed is we said, “Here’s how you organize.” And to give you a feel for it, in two weeks after that, alumni from over 60 colleges and universities contacted us about setting these groups up. Some of these contacts were from individuals, and we’re linking them with other individuals.

**MP:** Alumni are not walking checkbooks that are supposed to be patronized, taken off to the football game, otherwise ignored except by the development office when it comes time for fundraising. You’ve restored the idea of the alum as a son or a daughter of their schools, who are the guardians of the values that shape their minds and characters. And they are an integral part of the academic community, part of that crucial dialoguing, since they’ve been out

in the workplace, they’ve seen the damage that the erosion of free speech has done. It’s just self-defeating and insulting not to take their voices seriously.

**EY:** At many schools, students, faculty, and administrators are being overwhelmed by an organized group that’s trying to shut down free speech. And the polls have all shown that students don’t understand free speech, and, in fact, many of them oppose it. The administrators are often really a problem, and the president may or may not be a problem but has got all these people on campus that are a problem. So who’s left? Alumni. That’s why we believe that it may be up to the alumni to save the day . . . All we are saying is, what is a university about? All universities were based on, at their core, people getting together, exchanging ideas, learning, criticizing each other, free speech, academic freedom, viewpoint diversity. This is the core of any university. We’re not asking people to change things. We’re saying if you’re going to be a university, these are

*(continued on 7)*

# College Debates Program Engages Hundreds of Students

ACTA's College Debates and Discourse program with Braver Angels and the student group BridgeUSA is rapidly expanding across the nation. Last year, the program engaged 1,500 students at 25 institutions in campus debates, classroom debates, and workshops. In 2021, the program received more than \$470,000 in funding from several foundations, including the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations and the Sarah Scaife Foundation.

Debates in 2021 included “Controlling content on social media platforms” at Arizona State University; “Mandate the COVID-19 vaccine?” at George Washington University; “Deplatforming controversial speakers” at the University of Connecticut; “Defund the Waco police department?” at Baylor University; “Abortion and equal rights for women” at Sul Ross State University; and many more.

As a result of our campus debates, many faculty members have asked us for help to implement Braver Angels debates in the classroom. With support from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, we developed a Curricular Toolkit, easily downloadable from our College Debates and Discourse website, that enables faculty to build enriching, civil debates into their lesson plans. Approval from teachers has been strong; as of this writing, the toolkit is already in use at the University of Alabama—Huntsville, the University of Missouri, the University of Baltimore, and Lynn University.

Looking toward the year ahead, our spring semester calendar is filling up with debates at institutions including Xavier University, Duke University, Denison University, Miami University, the Virginia Military Institute, the University of Delaware, and many others. ●



The Fund for American Studies hosted six live debates on campus and two on Zoom in 2021.

## Supreme Court, *continued from 4*

admissions process. Should such odious admissions processes be allowed to stand, these young men and women and millions of others after them could face even higher barriers of entry to America's most storied institution of higher learning simply because of the hue of their skin or their ethnic heritage. So would many white students, poor and rich alike. . . . Allowing Harvard, or any other institution of higher learning, or any American institution at all to codify such an approach would be to shred the U.S. Constitution. Bigoted admissions processes merit a final, strong, crystal-clear rebuke from the highest court in the land.”

Jonathan Pidluzny, ACTA's vice president of academic affairs, commented, “It is undoubtedly true that campuses are enriched immeasurably by a diversity of perspectives in the student body . . . Now, over 40 years later, however, we know that an obsessive focus on diversifying the campus, where administrators focus almost exclusively on students' demographic characteristics, has seriously damaged the academic environment. . . . Far from breaking down stereotypes, the academy's obsession with diversity teaches college graduates that it is appropriate—even an imperative—to judge others on the basis of group identity.”

The court is expected to hear the case in October 2022. ACTA hopes that its decision helps to restore justice and fairness to the college admissions process. ●

## Edward Yingling Interview, *continued from 6*

your core values. You have to have them, and you cannot let some people come in and destroy them. And we alumni are going to be organized and make sure you do it.

**MP:** What are the particular criteria that you have established for joining the Alliance?

**EY:** There's no one size fits all. Every alumni group for free speech is going to be different. They have to be different because they have to have a close relationship with the alumni . . . we want to make sure you have the critical mass of people and enough money to get going. We have said beyond that, that first you must be alumni focused . . . that doesn't mean it's all alumni. Every one of our five groups has relationships . . . with faculty and students . . . but it has to be primarily alumni focused. Then you must have as a primary focus issues of free speech, academic freedom, viewpoint diversity. . . . We also say that you have to be nonpartisan. All of us believe that if you believe in free speech, it has to be free speech for everybody. . . . And the final one is . . . you have to be separate from the university. You can have a great relationship with them, but you have to be legally separate. And then, if you want to join the Alliance, we welcome you.

Please visit ACTA's Higher Ed Now podcast to listen to the full interview. ●



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AMERICAN COUNCIL OF  
TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI



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### INSIDE ACADEME

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## A Request from ACTA Chairman John W. Altman

ACTA's core mission of promoting academic freedom, academic excellence, and accountability is now crucial to the survival and rebirth of colleges and universities. The crisis facing higher education did not happen overnight, and repairing the broken system will be a herculean task. The powerful winds of political correctness are stronger than ever. We must be steadfast in our efforts to effect a course correction in higher education and steel ourselves for the long battle ahead.

Our Thomas Jefferson Legacy Society is an opportunity for ACTA supporters to bequest or provide donations to ACTA through their estates, and there are multiple ways to participate. I hope you will be inspired, as I was, to become a member of this special society. As a fellow member, your name will be inscribed—if you choose—on a plaque in ACTA's office in Washington, DC. This will be a powerful testament to visitors and staff, now and in the future, of your commitment.

Please contact Mike Deshaies, vice president of development, at (202) 467-6787 or [mdeshaies@GoACTA.org](mailto:mdeshaies@GoACTA.org) if you have any questions.

By making a legacy gift, you will help carry the torch for academic freedom, academic excellence, and accountability at America's colleges and universities. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John W. Altman  
Chairman