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A Penny for Your Thoughts?

What Will They Learn? Report Tells Students What College Rankings Won't

When they graduate, some college students have a fine liberal arts education. Others have, in the words of former Michigan governor John Engler, "Debt, anger, and a couch at mom and dad's." Until recently there was no way to tell which schools offered which—but ACTA is changing that with our most recent *What Will They Learn?* report.

Evaluating over 1,000 institutions, *What Will They Learn? 2011-12* grades every major non-technical, four-year college or university in the United States. Each school receives a grade from "A" to "F" based on how many of the following seven core subjects it requires: Composition, Mathematics, Literature, Foreign Language, Natural or Physical Science, U.S. Government or History, and Economics.

The recent launch of the expanded website, whatwilltheylearn.com, has attracted more than 44,000 views as well as national media attention, with coverage by William McGurn in the *Wall Street Journal* and Kathleen Parker in her nationally syndicated column. Articles have appeared

in papers across the country so that as we go to press, news of this year's report has reached more than 17 million readers.

And what do those readers find? Many schools have abandoned their obligation

to require a broad liberal arts education, and even those that haven't, all too often, offer a smorgasbord of courses from which students can choose the easiest and most entertaining. The University of Wisconsin-Madison, for instance, allows students to fulfill their "Humanities, Literature and the Arts" requirement with "Introduction to Television," while

(continued on 4)



2012 Philip Merrill Award

We are now accepting nominations for the 2012 Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education. Please find a nomination form inside this issue and give us your thoughts!

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Forrest Latta, Trustee

Troy University

“I appreciate the excellent work of ACTA through its various publications, which our trustees receive and frequently comment upon.”

John Doyle, former Trustee

Connecticut State University System

“I also want to thank you, your staff, Board, and supporters for making ACTA a reality and growing it in service to America’s college and university trustees. That you have attracted men of the caliber of Jay Bergman here in Connecticut speaks volumes on the quality and integrity of your work. That you have stimulated volunteers to think beyond the boundaries set for them by those they are supposed to be leading is a gift for which all of us volunteers should shout our appreciation.”

Catherine Merrill Williams, President and Publisher

Washingtonian Magazine

“Great choice [for the Philip Merrill Award]. I had David McCullough as a visiting professor at Cornell back in 1990. Single best class I ever took and one that changed my life. The ability to see history through different points of view and bring it to life is a genius he shares with few others.”

Responses to ACTA’s new *What Will They Learn?* 2011-12 study and website college guide whatwilltheylearn.com.

Phyllis Hudecki, Secretary of Education

State of Oklahoma

“If the U.S. wants to be competitive, our colleges and universities must ensure students learn about math, science, literature, history and other core academic subjects. And too many are simply failing to do so. We strive for excellence in our higher education system, and I am pleased that our colleges and universities fared particularly well in ACTA’s *What Will They Learn?* college guide. The University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma, one of only 19 institutions to receive an A, is a fine example of that effort.”

John Engler, President, Business Roundtable

Former Governor of Michigan

“The *What Will They Learn?* study points to shortcomings in higher education that have a real impact on U.S. competitiveness. Too few schools require their students to

develop a firm grounding in core subject areas, the foundation upon which later expertise can be built. This does a disservice not only to the students but also to employers seeking the capable, well-rounded employees they need to compete in the global economy.”

Michael L. Lomax, President and CEO

United Negro College Fund

“The ACTA review’s finding that historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) ‘demonstrate overall stronger general education requirements than other public and private institutions’ confirms the important role these universities continue to play in American higher education. We are also gratified by the overwhelming public support reported by the Roper survey for giving all students the rigorous education they need and that the nation needs them to have. The challenge now is for our colleges to set their sights higher: to give their students not just a good education, but a great education.”

Charles Kolb, President

Committee for Economic Development

“ACTA’s *What Will They Learn?* project calls attention to the urgent need for academic standards in postsecondary education. Students who graduate without a broad education in basic subjects such as math and science, American history and composition are unlikely to remain competitive in today’s competitive, rapidly changing global environment. Hopefully, this will spark a renewed commitment by institutions to high standards and quality education for all students.”

Thomas Stanley, author of *The Millionaire Next Door*

University of Georgia alum

“As an author and researcher of the habits of America’s wealthiest people, I have learned what constitutes a good investment. One of the best investments you can make is in that of your child’s education. I am proud of my alma mater, the University of Georgia, for garnering an ‘A’ rating in ACTA’s study this year. It shows UGA’s commitment to a broad-based education. Additionally, it serves as an example to other schools that investing in students by providing an in-depth core curriculum will always pay off. The success of *The Millionaire Next Door* can be directly traced back to the extraordinary training I received from the eminent scholars at UGA. I am also delighted that my children are UGA alumni.”

Penn State's Board of Troubles

Is Penn State the Enron of higher education? ACTA thinks so, and hopes that from the current tragedy a new sense of responsibility will emerge.

The unfolding scandal has revealed a culture of complacency, a lack of transparency, and an obsession with reputation that regrettably characterizes many institutions across the country.

The institutional reckoning lies squarely with the governing board, which is ultimately responsible for the actions of the leadership. While the board's first priority is to address the devastating allegations of sexual abuse, it must also examine itself and ask in a broader sense whether it is fulfilling its inherent obligations to students, families, and taxpayers.

ACTA has called on trustees to return higher education to its primary purpose: education. Not winning football games or erecting sparkly buildings, but educating

students. This call for accountability recently appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, where ACTA's Anne Neal wrote, "Every generation or so, a scandal emerges that not only exposes the flaws of an institution but shakes entire industries to their foundations. For higher education, that scandal should be Penn State."

As the readers of *Inside Academe* know, ACTA has long urged trustees to be active leaders and guardians of their institutions. What the unwelcome spotlight on Penn State has revealed is that too many trustees are uninformed.

The *Patriot-News*, the major paper in the region that includes Penn State, carried an ACTA op-ed in which we pointed out that Penn State's board structure is a relic of the 19th Century—"an unwieldy collection of 32 people, coming from a range of constituencies." A large and unwieldy

board often "goes along to get along" and neglects to ask tough questions, leaving itself uninformed about major issues. Penn State's trustees exemplified this problem: many reported never hearing of the scandal until they read about it in the papers, and some even complained that the details of the indictment were withheld from them.

The problems of Penn State's board are by no means unique, and ACTA calls on all trustees to learn from its mistakes. As Anne Neal put it in the *Journal*, "Every college governing board should interpret Penn State's troubles as a clear warning of what happens when institutions lose sight of their educational mission."

Engaged trustees who are committed to educational excellence can refocus universities on their missions, hold administrators accountable, and protect their students. ●

Survey Shows Widespread Dissatisfaction with Higher Education

ACTA has long argued that colleges and universities should require basic classes in core subjects like writing, mathematics, U.S. history, and science. We commissioned the respected public polling firm of Roper to find out what Americans think. The survey showed 70% of Americans agree with us! More than half are surprised to learn that many prominent colleges and universities do *not* require these subjects. What's more, nearly half of Americans say that students do not get their money's worth from colleges and universities. These and other responses can be found in full on our website whatwilltheylearn.com. ACTA's What Will They Learn?™ project highlights the cost of college and points out that schools with strong core curricula are often more cost-effective than their counterparts. Colleges and universities should hear this wake-up call and get serious about cost-effectiveness, a core curriculum, and accountability.

WHAT DO AMERICANS THINK ABOUT A CORE?

Results from August 2011 Roper Survey

Most Americans agree colleges and universities should require classes in core subjects. **70%**

Americans just out of college, ages 25 to 34, support a core in even greater numbers. **80%**

Over half of Americans say America's institutions of higher learning are doing only a fair or poor job of preparing students for the job market. **57%**

WhatWillTheyLearn.com

ACTA Proposes Model Legislation to Improve Transparency

ACTA vice president for policy Michael Poliakoff addressed more than 50 state legislators this fall at the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC)'s Academy on Higher Education in Denver, identifying the challenges that face public systems of higher education. America's higher education spending per student is more than twice the average of countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), but the U.S. demonstrates below-average results. Nearly every developed country graduates a greater proportion of undergraduates than does the United States, and even among those who graduate, many lack skills in math, writing, and other core competencies.

To meet these challenges, Dr. Poliakoff developed model legislation in partnership with ALEC. And this month, at ALEC's States and Nation Policy Summit in Phoenix, Poliakoff presented the model bills which improve accountability at public institutions by requiring colleges and universities to assess student learning and make the results available to the public, and to disclose building utilization data and hold public hearings on proposed capital projects. In essence, public universities would have to demonstrate that their students are learning and that they are good stewards of the resources entrusted to them—or explain to the public why they have failed.

Dr. Poliakoff has recently been appointed co-chair of ALEC's Higher Education Subcommittee, a committee that ACTA president Anne D. Neal helped to found. We look forward to continuing our long-standing collaboration with ALEC working for meaningful higher education reform. ●

What Will They Learn?, *continued from 1*

at Vassar the freshman seminar—what passes for a composition course—may be fulfilled by courses in Hip Hop or Chick Lit.

Fewer than 20 schools out of 1,007 receive “A” ratings, while almost 90 receive an “F.” Less than 20% of schools require students to study American government or history—even though the U.S. Department of Education recently found that 55% of graduating high school seniors lack even basic knowledge of the subject. Less than 40% require a literature survey; only 16% require foreign language; only 5% require economics. Despite the universally-acknowledged importance of science and mathematics, more than a third fail to require even a single course in college-level mathematics.

Fortunately, *What Will They Learn?* demonstrates that any school *can* offer a rigorous general-education program. Doing so requires only that trustees and administrators take seriously their duties to students. The “A” list includes many different kinds of institutions—public and private, large and small—such as a state flagship (the University of Georgia), selective public schools like CUNY-Brooklyn College, regional schools with nearly open enrollment like Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, religiously-

affiliated schools like Baylor and Thomas Aquinas College, and independent private schools like St. John's College. The list also includes three of the four military service academies and, in Morehouse College, one of the nation's premier historically black colleges. Indeed, HBCUs deserve commendation for

their commitment to general education, performing considerably above the national average in *What Will They Learn?*

In this era of tight budgets, it is significant to note that implementing a core curriculum may help to control costs. Certainly, paying a lot of money does not necessarily get you a lot. The average tuition and fees at “A” schools totals \$16,223 per year; at “F” schools it is \$27,529.

Every school *can* provide a rigorous general education program and reduce costs while doing so. ACTA offers advice and consulting to universities at little or no cost: we are happy to help trustees, administrators, students, parents, and alumni improve the core curriculum at their universities.

Look up your school at whatwilltheylearn.com—and if it is not an “A” school and you'd like to do something about it, give us a call! ●

“Still, when it comes to what our colleges and universities are charging for their degrees, [students] have a point. Too many have paid much and been taught little. They've been ripped off—but not by the banks or the fat cats or any of the other stock villains so unwelcome these days in Zuccotti Park. 'If these students and grads understood the real issues with their college debt,' says Ms. Neal, 'they would change their focus from Occupy Wall Street to Occupy the Ivory Tower.'”

— William McGurn

Wall Street Journal, November 1, 2011

“SPEAKING UP”

We Need a Core Curriculum by Greg Lewin



Student Greg Lewin at ATHENA

I am currently enrolled as a senior at the Elliott School of International Affairs at The George Washington University. The Elliott School’s description of its curriculum informs the reader that the courses required by GW “provide a general education in the classic tradition and enhance intellectual capacity and critical thinking skills.”

Reflecting on this description, I was struck by the realization that I never would have known about GW’s pledge had I not been conducting research for ACTA’s What Will They Learn?[™] project to assess the core curricula of the nation’s colleges and universities; a quick survey of my classmates

revealed that I was not alone in my ignorance. The words on GW’s website apparently provide the rationale behind a large part of our undergraduate education, but they were unfamiliar to us as fourth-year students. The reason for this disparity is simple: students are not concerned with the mission statements of course catalogs. The rhetoric and promises presented are not what we rely on to ascertain the fields of knowledge that our school deems to be fundamental to our education. We rely instead on the requirements of the curriculum itself.

GW receives a “C” grade in What Will They Learn?[™], earning credit in three of the seven areas which ACTA deems essential to an undergraduate core curriculum. As an incoming freshman, I certainly would have accused ACTA of being arbitrary in its selection of these areas of evaluation. What use was a math course to me, when all I thought I wanted to do was join the Foreign Service?

My ambitions now are not the same as when I was a freshman. I want to be a professor, or to continue working in the non-profit sector. In either case, advancement will require more than a bachelor’s degree. When I took my first practice test for the GREs for graduate school applications this summer, I will never forget the wave of panic that hit when I realized that this was the first time in four years I had done math more advanced than giving change at the diner where I worked. And it was more than standardized testing that was at stake here. A part of my brain had been left to atrophy. I felt the same frustration then that I do now when I attempt to play a piece on the piano, having neglected practicing during college. It is the frustration of one who understands the value of a discipline even as he finds that his relevant abilities are wanting.

Freshmen are not in a position to be thinking in the long term when selecting their courses. They are presented with requirements, so they take courses to fulfill these requirements that will fit in their schedule and maybe look interesting or fun. It is only with hindsight that I am able to reflect on how the requirements shaped the courses

(continued on 11)

The Case for Civic Education



Education is not just a stepping-stone to a career: it should prepare students for engaged, informed citizenship. ACTA studies show that many schools fail in this mission, graduating students with mediocre knowledge of U.S. history, government, and civics.

A new anthology addresses the problem. In *Teaching America: The Case for Civic Education*, editor David Feith has assembled almost two dozen distinguished contributors to address America’s declining civic education and to chart a way forward. **Justice Sandra Day O’Connor** contributes a history of American education’s role in preparing students for democratic government. Emory professor **Mark Bauerlein** warns of young Americans’ declining levels of civic participation and subterranean levels of civic knowledge, citing ACTA’s research on U.S. history requirements on campus. **Andrew Rotherham**, co-founder of Bellwether Education, writes of a subject close to ACTA’s heart: core curricula and their importance for an educated citizenry. And 19 other contributors weigh in on matters from naturalization and becoming American to rights in a digital age.

ACTA has long warned that colleges and universities are neglecting their role in civic education. We’re delighted to see such celebrated figures joining us to make the case. ●

2011 ATHENA Roundtable: Setting Priorities in Higher Education

ACTA stands for high educational standards and a rich intellectual life—goals which come to life at our annual ATHENA Roundtable. At this year’s conference, some of the nation’s most prominent scholars and higher education leaders came together in conversation on the topic of the day: Setting Priorities.

Robert Lewit, ACTA’s board chairman, kicked off the conference by introducing the keynote speaker, Brown University’s great historian, **Dr. Gordon Wood**. Speaking on “The Revolutionary Origins of the Civil War,” Wood addressed slavery as the indirect but fundamental cause of the war. He provided a gripping history of how slavery caused the North and South to develop very different cultures and economies and how those differences frustrated the founders’ hope that slavery would die out peacefully.

ACTA’s **Michael Poliakoff** moderated a panel on “Promoting Educational Excellence and the Core Curriculum.” Citing studies recording the decline of learning in higher education, he called on every faculty member and administrator to demonstrate the value of his or her work. Former Michigan governor **John Engler** expanded the discussion to the international competition that America faces and the disturbingly poor skills shown by many college graduates. He stressed the need for educational quality and core curricula to help American businesses compete. Finally, **Judge Richard Bray**, president and CEO of the Beazley Foundation, explained the vital role that donors play in ensuring educational excellence. He paid tribute to ACTA’s What Will They Learn?™ project and described a Beazley Foundation initiative to fund schools and provide support to help them reach “A” status.

James Van Houten, a trustee of the Minnesota State Colleges and University System, a system featured in ACTA’s Minnesota state report card, moderated the next panel on “Demanding Accountability and Innovation.” He detailed MNSCU’s 10-year program to streamline academic services and develop programs for non-traditional students. **Peter McPherson**, president of the Association of Public and Land-grant Uni-

versities, outlined his work on the Voluntary System of Accountability, an initiative that makes important data on student learning available to the public through the College Portrait website, showcased on our whatwilltheylearn.com. The data helps



James Van Houten



Gordon Wood



Peter McPherson and Michael Crow



Diana Davis Spencer and Seymour Herman

students make informed choices about which school to attend; it also helps colleges and universities improve their performance. Finally, **Michael Crow**, president of Arizona State University, described ASU’s model of innovation, the New American Uni-

versity, which requires ASU to find new ways to measure learning outcomes and contribute to student learning. Two examples he outlined are teaching math and science in original ways and incorporating entrepreneurship across the curriculum.

perspective to issues that matter to ACTA, Summers compared universities to industrial enterprises under communism, noting that in both cases the enterprise is run, not for the benefit of the consumer, but for the benefit of the producer—in this

case the faculty and administrators. He advocated exposing more students to a liberal arts education through broad-based survey courses across the disciplines, and he treated grade inflation as a moral issue: “A society that tolerates the grade inflation of its students should not be surprised when it finds the inflation of corporate earnings of those students 20 years later.”

ACTA’s **Anne Neal** kicked off the final panel: “Rethinking Old Models.” She shared the podium with two accomplished higher education policy leaders from states where ACTA has been active: **Michael Nietzel**, senior advisor to Governor Jay Nixon of Missouri, and **Teresa Lubbers**, Indiana Commissioner of Higher Education. Dr. Nietzel spoke about implementing Governor Nixon’s innovative cost-effectiveness reforms, most notably performance funding. Ms. Lubbers addressed performance funding as well, which Indiana has used since 2003. She described several new directives in Indiana’s public higher education system, which include restricting the growth of new majors and programs and instituting a common general education program that unites community colleges and four-year institutions.

And last but not least, a speaker who reminded us all of first principles—**Greg Lewin**, an ACTA intern and senior at The George Washington University, spoke on the importance of higher education, the core curriculum, and ACTA’s research and advocacy for students. He described the university’s important obligation to oversee the education of students and direct the content of their learning. “It might not seem

this way to freshmen, but a university that meets its duty by setting forth a coherent body of general knowledge has their best interests in mind and, in the end, earns their respect.” ●



Michael Nietzel and Teresa Lubbers



Larry Summers



Daniel DeVise



John Engler



Trustee Janice Brown and Judge Richard Bray

At some conferences you might nod off after lunch—but not here! Former Harvard president **Larry Summers** kept everyone awake by giving a public interview with *Washington Post* higher education reporter **Daniel DeVise**. Bringing his unique

David McCullough Receives 2011 Philip Merrill Award

This year's ATHENA concluded in Washington's magnificent House of Sweden with a gala dinner and the presentation of the seventh annual Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education to historian **David McCullough**.

Catherine Merrill Williams of the Merrill Family Foundation led off a series of moving tributes by McCullough's friends and associates, recounting her days as his student. Inventor and entrepreneur **Jay Walker** spoke of McCullough's storytelling genius and tireless work promoting historical education. Former head of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation **Daniel Jordan** spoke on the energetic trusteeship that McCullough exhibited on the board at Monticello. **Brent Glass**, director emeritus of the National Museum of American History, paid tribute to McCullough's wide interests and encyclopedic knowledge—another way of saying his truly liberal education. And presidential historian **Richard Norton Smith** gave participants a peek at his personal character by his choice of heroes: those ordinary men and women who get up every morning and go to jobs that they may well dislike in order to provide for their families.

Then McCullough spoke and everyone remembered the first thing readers say about his writing: he is among our greatest

storytellers. He began with the names of ordinary, unknown people like William Small, Nathaniel Southgate Shaler, and



Anne Neal, David and Rosalee McCullough, and Catherine Merrill Williams

Gladys Watson. Each person he mentioned had been a teacher, and each had an enormous but invisible influence on the world.

When Thomas Jefferson was at William & Mary, he adored William Small. Nathaniel Southgate Shaler inspired the young Teddy Roosevelt to such enthusiasm that Southgate often reminded the future president that he, not Teddy, was teaching the class. And when Harper Lee finished the manuscript of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, she showed it to her beloved English teacher, Gladys Watson.

ACTA works for rich and rigorous education, and great education is impossible without the devoted, often heroic labor of teachers and professors. At a dinner honoring a great writer who is also one of America's great teachers of history, it was good to be reminded of how important and enduring the work of a teacher can be. ●



Following the ATHENA Roundtable conference, ACTA was privileged to host a special dinner for conference speakers and members of our most generous donor societies.

Attendees gathered at Georgetown University's stunning **Riggs Library**, in a chamber usually reserved for the University president's special events. The meal was accompanied by a presentation by Georgetown professor Patrick Deneen, founder of the Tocqueville Forum on the Roots of American Democracy—a program advancing the study of America's founding principles and their roots in Western philosophical and religious traditions.

Effective TRUSTEESHIP



Reform in Virginia

Virginia has given the nation eight presidents, including Washington, Jefferson, and Madison. But in this state, nicknamed the “Mother of Presidents,” only one public university requires its students to study American history.

Thankfully, Virginia trustees want to change that sorry state. ACTA president Anne D. Neal addressed almost 90 recently-appointed trustees at Virginia’s Meeting for New Members of Boards of Visitors in October. She warned trustees about the challenges that higher education faces today: rising tuition, weak curricula, and employers who find that students graduate deficient in core skills and knowledge. She also provided clear ways forward through learning assessments, a rigorous core curriculum, and engaged boards of visitors. New visitors—the Virginia name for trustees—were invigorated by the challenges: the visitors from James Madison University

took pride that JMU *does* require U.S. History. Governor McDonnell, who attended, supported these efforts, urging trustees to be “bolder and innovative.”

A week later, Michael Poliakoff and ACTA intern Greg Lewin—a senior at The George Washington University and a researcher on *What Will They Learn?*—appeared, along with faculty member Paul Davies, on a curriculum panel hosted by the Society for the College at the College of William & Mary. The panel addressed an ongoing curriculum review at the College. The Society is concerned about William & Mary’s weak core curriculum: it receives a “C” in *What Will They Learn?*, and despite counting Thomas Jefferson among its alumni it does not require its students to study American history. Or literature, economics, or composition. William & Mary is a fine institution with an exceptional tradition of learning, but

when trendy courses like “It’s Cool: The Rhetoric of Climate Change” fulfills what passes for the writing requirement, and when another writing course contains several grammatical errors in its course description, something has gone seriously awry.

Fortunately, the Society and other attendees received ACTA’s message with interest, sympathy, and concern. The William & Mary community includes many individuals concerned about the future of their school and committed to strengthening its general education program. That our message has resonated so well in Virginia, as well as in Texas, Indiana, and other states, demonstrates the growing consensus in higher education that ACTA’s call for high standards, strong core curricula, and cost-effectiveness are crucial to the future of higher education. ●

Texas Legislative Panel Addresses Trustees’ Fiduciary Duties

“Informed, active boards are essential for effective higher education governance.” That was the message that ACTA’s Michael Poliakoff brought to the Texas state legislature’s Joint Oversight Committee on Higher Education Governance, Excellence, and Transparency. He spoke as part of a panel convened to identify best practices relating to excellence, transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the governance of public universities. He addressed boards of trustees’ most important duties and offered examples of boards that achieved excellence in each area he noted: Minnesota trustees who made hard decisions to shut down low-enrollment and under-performing majors and programs; South Carolina trustees who focused on reducing unnecessary capital projects, especially in an era when budgets are tight and many academic buildings are wastefully underused; and trustees who insist on a rigorous core curriculum with objective and transparent learning measures—an area in which Texas already leads the way.

Dr. Poliakoff closed his remarks with the story of the CUNY board of trustees’ successful attempt to raise academic standards, strengthen the core curriculum, and improve academic outcomes. Benno Schmidt, ACTA friend and chairman of the CUNY board, led that endeavor, and ACTA has supported similar initiatives by boards across the country. That Texas’s legislature called upon our expertise indicates that many schools are taking notice. ●

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In Praise of Intelligent Donors: Jack Miller

Intelligent giving is fundamental to ensuring that universities and colleges uphold academic rigor, preserve the free exchange of ideas on campus, and hold administrators accountable. Intelligent donors set goals, develop faculty friends in university departments and programs, and establish mechanisms that allow them to ensure that their money is used wisely and that they get the quality outcome they expect. ACTA commends intelligent donors whose wise gifts steer university decision-making in a positive direction, and we showcase them in our 2011 edition of *The Intelligent Donors Guide to College Giving*.

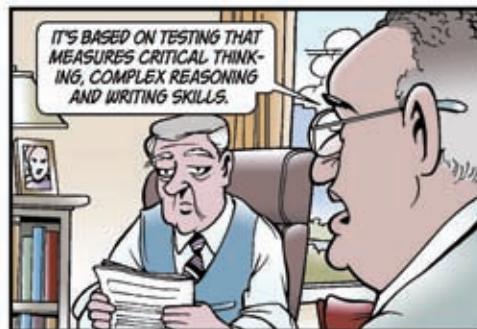
Prominent among these intelligent donors is ACTA supporter and friend Jack Miller. Jack began working with scholars and non-profit organizations in response to mounting evidence that the next generation was ill-prepared to lead our nation. Graduates lacked the knowledge of America's founding principles and the understanding of U.S. history and government necessary to be informed and engaged citizens. Mr. Miller's dedication and passion for reform in this area lead to

the formation of the **Jack Miller Center for Teaching America's Founding Principles and History**.

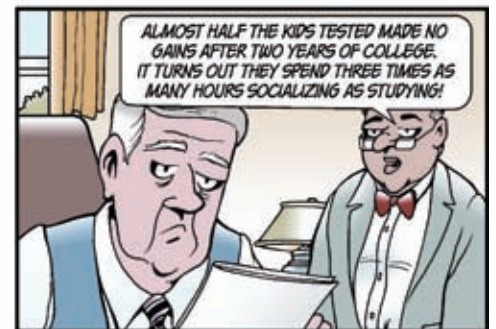
The Jack Miller Center works to increase the quality of U.S. history education. It holds Summer Institutes for young university faculty, enabling them to attend seminars with leading scholars and collaborate on best teaching practices. The Center provides funding to a variety of university teaching fellowships and hosts numerous on-campus seminars through a wide network of regional affiliates.

Intelligent donors like Jack Miller serve as a model for philanthropists who care about higher education reform and want to ensure that their money is being spent as wisely and as effectively as possible. Whether it's supporting programs *inside* the university like the Jack Miller Center or supporting programs *outside* like ACTA which promotes university accountability, intelligent donors are key to higher ed reform. Both are needed to return our educational system to first principles: academic freedom, academic excellence, and accountability. ❶

DOONESBURY



BY GARRY TRUDEAU



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ACTA Addresses Indiana Trustees Academy

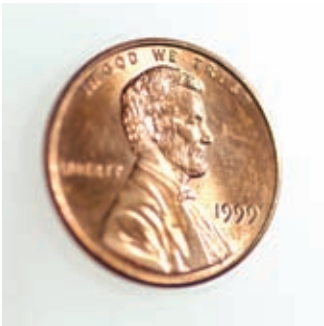
This September, at the Indiana Trustees Academy, ACTA's Michael Poliakoff facilitated a panel on "The Role of the Trustee in Ensuring Student Success." Advocating trustees as agents of change in a school's institutional strategy and structure, Dr. Poliakoff gave a talk on the current state of American higher education that highlighted the role of the trustee in elevating national academic standards. He presented recent findings that indict the higher education establishment: universities have neglected core curricula, too many businesses find recent graduates unprepared, and more than a third of students show negligible learning gains after four years of college.

Dr. Poliakoff encouraged trustees to insist that their institutions assess students' learning and measure their own teaching effectiveness. The Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP), the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) provide school administrations with accurate tools to evaluate curriculum strength, proficiency levels, and the amount of work students put into preparing for class. The National Assessment of Adult Literacy and ACTA's What Will They Learn?™ help trustees determine whether their schools' curricula are rigorous or ineffective.

Quoting Benno C. Schmidt, chair of the CUNY board of trustees, Poliakoff concluded his presentation with a call to action: "change in institutional strategy can only come from trustees ... reviewing an institution's academic strategy and deciding whether change is called for is a trustee's most important responsibility." ●

A Penny for Your Thoughts?

ACTA spotlight on Jeff Gore's "Retire the Penny"



Jeff Gore, associate professor of physics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is an ACTA friend and supporter who is working to promote high standards and excellence in higher education both on and off the campus. Alumnus of MIT (1999) and University of California-Berkeley (2005), Dr. Gore is involved in a number of reform movements regarding education, commerce, economics, and science. And a particularly notable initiative

is his Citizens for Retiring the Penny (CRP)—a project dedicated to educating the public on the advantages of retiring the penny from general circulation. (CRP's website can be viewed at www.retirethepenny.org.)

Gore observes that, today, it costs more than a penny to make a penny, and that the time spent handling pennies at cash registers adds yet more expense in the form of transaction costs. He proposes to discontinue the penny and round transactions to the nearest nickel.

And his appeal has attracted real attention. He has appeared on 60 Minutes, The Colbert Report, NPR, ABC World News Tonight with Peter Jennings, and a host of other news sources as he seeks to garner support for the reform movement. As he writes on his website, he owes his inspiration to Benjamin Franklin, "a man who always sought to improve the world around him." ●

We Need a Core, *continued from 5*

that I took, and how each educational gap in these requirements is a piano that I now lack the dexterity to play. As I researched other schools for What Will They Learn?™, I saw the comprehensive education of which I have been deprived being promoted in the coursework of those schools earning an "A" grade. It is for this reason that I consider a What Will They Learn?™ evaluation to be a real indicator of the breadth of education a school's students are receiving.

College is supposed to give us the tools for life-long learning, but most students are groping at the toolbox blindly. Great care must be given when deciding the nature of the requirements which constitute a core curriculum. Too many schools fail to exercise that care. ●


A version of this article was presented to the Society for the College at the College of William & Mary. Greg Lewin is an intern at ACTA and a senior at The George Washington University.



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From all of us at ACTA,
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THE PHILIP MERRILL AWARD

FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS TO LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION

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If you have any questions, kindly contact ACTA president Anne D. Neal at 202-467-6787. Please return the completed form on or before February 15, 2012 to Anne D. Neal, President, ACTA, 1726 M Street, NW, Suite 802, Washington DC 20036. Thank you.



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THE PHILIP MERRILL AWARD

FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS TO LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION

AWARD

The Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education honors individuals that advance liberal arts education, core curricula, and the teaching of Western civilization and American history.

The award is named in honor of Philip Merrill, a distinguished public servant, publisher, businessman, and philanthropist who served as a trustee of Cornell University, the University of Maryland College Park Foundation, the Aspen Institute, the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, and the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. Throughout his career, Mr. Merrill was an outspoken proponent of academic excellence and an articulate spokesman for the importance of historical literacy in a free society. Mr. Merrill was also a charter member of ACTA's national council. The award is intended to recognize outstanding individuals for extraordinary achievement in promoting liberal arts education.

SELECTION

Selection is made by an Award Selection Committee composed of distinguished educational and civic leaders. Those eligible for the award include distinguished writers and scholars, college and university professors and administrators, government officials, and public-spirited citizens, who have demonstrated a significant dedication to the advancement of liberal arts education.

OCCASION

The award is bestowed at an annual dinner held in conjunction with ACTA's ATHENA Roundtable. ATHENA is an important and influential forum for issues on higher education and draws a national audience of prominent citizens, college and university trustees, alumni, and education leaders from around the country.



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