

College Donor

QUARTERLY

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2022 Oases of Excellence Faculty Conference

by Emily Rees



Shilo Brooks speaks during a panel entitled, "Making the Liberal Arts Indispensable." Photo by Ron Hall

On September 23, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) hosted its annual Oases of Excellence Faculty Conference in partnership with Pepperdine University's School of Public Policy (SPP) in Malibu, California. The conference brought together 26 faculty members who lead outstanding campus programs for conversations about the opportunities and challenges facing higher education.

Campus centers earn designation as an "Oasis of Excellence" by promoting rigorous academic study, a strong liberal arts curriculum, and broad viewpoint diversity at colleges and universities. These faculty-led, donor-supported programs play a vital role in

restoring the promise of higher education. The growing Oases of Excellence network currently includes 80 campus programs (see the full list at www.goacta.org/initiatives/oases-of-excellence).

At the conference, faculty leaders participated in panel discussions on several key topics, including engaging students in civil discourse, opportunities for specialized graduate programs, ways to cultivate connections with alumni, and ensuring that students from a range of disciplines have access to a vibrant liberal arts education. This year's conference gathered both seasoned and newcoming ACTA faculty friends. Paul Carrese, founding director of Arizona State University's School of

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INTELLIGENT COLLEGE GIVING. The Fund for Academic Renewal serves alumni and college donors who aim to support a renewal of the highest standards on college campuses through targeted philanthropy.

OASIS PROFILE:

The Civil Discourse Program at Duke University

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni's Oases of Excellence initiative recognizes innovative and academically rigorous liberal arts programs on campuses across the United States. Last year, ACTA named the Civil Discourse Project, housed at the Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University, as its first Oasis of Excellence in North Carolina.

The Civil Discourse Project sponsors courses, lectures, conferences, and research on pressing questions pertaining to virtue and citizenship. The program aims to cultivate intellectual and civic values and foster community across ideological divides. It also prioritizes truth-seeking and civil disagreement.

Jed Atkins, E. Blake Byrne Associate Professor of Classical Studies, is the director of the Civil Discourse Project, and John Rose (Princeton Theological Seminary, Ph.D.) serves as associate director. Lectures and courses are the program's main components. Dr. Atkins teaches comparative interpretations of democracy, liberty, and equality. Dr. Rose teaches four of nine sponsored courses, including "How to Think in an Age of Political Polarization" (the first Kenan Institute course to need a waiting list) and "Happiness and the Virtuous Life."

At our 2022 Oases of Excellence Faculty Conference, Dr.

Rose shared his pedagogical approach. Each session in his "How to Think in an Age of Political Polarization" course uses a different debate topic (e.g., Israel/Palestine, abortion, gun control) to teach students habits of open discourse and civil disagreement. In this way, the classroom becomes a lab of experiential learning.

Though focused on undergraduate students, the Civil Discourse Project has expanded its reach to include faculty and high school students. Dr. Rose co-leads a summertime faculty seminar with Oxford University professor Teresa Bejan to train early-career professors to teach a class on civil discourse at their own institutions, modeled after Duke's initiative. The seminar is made possible by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations. The Civil Discourse Project's high school student seminar includes readings on ethics, philosophy, and religion and discussions about morality and the relationship between science and religion.

Through courses like these, and through extracurricular programming, the Civil Discourse Project provides important opportunities for Duke students to engage in robust intellectual exchange. Educating student by student, small programs can inspire other departments and the wider campus to advance principles of free speech and open inquiry. 🌿

Oases of Excellence Conference, *from page 1*

Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership (SCETL), returned as a panelist to discuss SCETL's vision and success. Faculty from institutions across California—including Thomas Aquinas College, Biola University, and Stanford University—joined us for the first time. Attendants represented diverse fields of studies, including philosophy, politics, economics, and music composition.

ACTA named the Pepperdine School of Public Policy as an Oasis of Excellence in 2019. SPP offers a master's degree that combines coursework in the humanities, like philosophy and history, with quantitative courses like economics and policy analysis. Pepperdine University is also one of only four schools in California to earn an "A" grade from ACTA's WhatWillTheyLearn?® project by requiring students to study six or more core liberal arts subjects in their general education programs.

In a closing address, ACTA President Michael Poliakoff summarized key points made throughout the day by speakers and attendants. He remarked that the telos of colleges and universities must be educating students in the rigorous pursuit of truth. Higher education has its "base cut out from under it" when it fails to provide a solid

“Higher education has its ‘base cut out from under it’ when it fails to provide a solid liberal arts foundation upon which to build more specialized programs.”

— Michael Poliakoff, ACTA President & CEO

liberal arts foundation upon which to build more specialized programs.

Dr. Douglas Henry, dean of Baylor University's Honors College, delivered a keynote speech at the dinner following the panels. Dr. Henry began by describing the state of higher education with a tongue-in-cheek set of ABCs: "A is for abyss. B is for

brink or broken. C is for collapse and crisis." But he also offered hope that the study of the liberal arts can renew our colleges and universities. Against the backdrop of a Pacific Ocean sunset, he remarked, "Liberal education always and ever addresses itself to the human person, whose intellectual and spiritual liberation is at stake."

After the conference, Shilo Brooks, assistant director of the James Madison Program at Princeton University, commented, "I am a big ACTA fan, and this conference only reaffirmed my affection." When asked about the most valuable takeaway from the event, Siri Terjesen, associate dean for research and external relations at Florida Atlantic University's College of Business, said, "There are others in academia who are defending the liberal arts, all in different ways. We can learn from and with one another and we are not attempting our work alone." 🌿

Gearing Up for Year-End Giving

According to Nonprofits Source, “30% of all annual giving occurs in December, and 10% of that happens within the last three days of the year.” Knowing that the holiday season (and tax deductions) inspires donors’ charitable spirits, nonprofits issue a rush of solicitations and calls to action.

In fiscal year 2020–2021, giving to colleges and universities reached \$53 billion, according to an annual survey by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education. However, due to lower enrollments and high inflation, institutions are leading aggressive development campaigns to raise funds. Faced with a flood of charitable solicitations, donors can feel overwhelmed, but there are several resources they can use to determine which schools could most benefit from their support.

First, know how much you want to give. Look at your financial portfolio, consult your financial advisor, and assess your financial and charitable goals. Treasure is a tool for great change when used well.

Second, explore the data regarding the college or university’s financial health and academic performance. HowCollegesSpend-Money.com is an ACTA initiative that presents spending data from the U.S. Department of Education’s Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System through easily accessible charts. Donors can find the rate of spending per student on administrative expenses, instructional expenses, and student services expenses, as well as inflation-adjusted tuition and graduation rates.

Donors who are concerned about academic quality can visit WhatWillTheyLearn.com. ACTA’s website assesses the core curricular requirements of more than 1,100 liberal arts institutions. Users can create customized comparisons based on curriculum, region, four-year graduation rate, price, and institutional type.

Third, learn more about an institution’s mission and programming by getting in touch with a development officer. Rather than relying on emails or letters from a college, establish a connection within the development office or the program that you are interested in supporting. It is often possible to earmark funds for a specific program, such as an honors college.

Wise giving has the power to renew American higher education. When sifting through year-end solicitations, look for the data points that are important to you to ensure that your gift can have a meaningful impact. 🌱

Fund for Academic Renewal Director Emily Koons Jae recently appeared on the DonorsTrust podcast, **Giving Ventures**, with DonorsTrust Vice President Peter Lipsett. DonorsTrust is a donor-advised fund provider with a mission to protect constitutional liberties and strengthen civil society. It has granted over \$1.1 billion to more than 1,900 charities.

Scan the QR code to listen to her 30-minute interview on how higher education donors can give well.



Gag by Phil Menges

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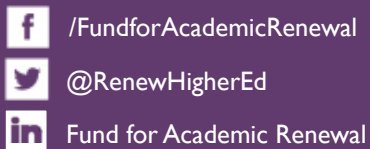


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About FAR

A program of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, the **Fund for Academic Renewal** (FAR) serves alumni and college donors who aim to support a renewal of the highest standards on college campuses through targeted philanthropy.

With access to a network of on-campus contacts, FAR assists donors in maximizing the impact of their investment by helping them craft gift agreements that are carefully tailored to achieve their goals. FAR has guided over \$188 million in gifts since 2016. Because every gift is different, FAR offers personalized guidance for individuals at every giving level.

Thanks to a generous grant from the Diana Davis Spencer Foundation, FAR provides these services, including legal consultation from Arnold & Porter LLP, at no cost to donors.



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