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The American Council of Trustees and Alumni Releases Annual Ratings – *What Will They Learn?*<sup>TM</sup> 2011-2012 – of Colleges and Universities.

Over 1,000 Institutions Rated on the Basis of Their Required General Education Curriculum.

Clear Majority of Schools Allow Students to Graduate With Major Gaps in Their Academic Skills and Knowledge.

Nation-wide Poll Shows Americans Strongly Support a Required Broad Core Curriculum.

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – The American Council of Trustees and Alumni is releasing today its latest edition of *What Will They Learn?* – a sobering report on the state of general education at the nation’s colleges and universities. The study, whose results can be found online at [WhatWillTheyLearn.com](http://WhatWillTheyLearn.com), covers all the major public and private colleges and universities in all 50 states – a total of 1,007 four-year institutions that together enroll more than seven million undergraduate students.

Institutions are assigned a letter grade ranging from “A” to “F” based on how many of seven core subjects they require. Those subjects are: composition, U.S. government or history, economics, literature, math, science and foreign language at an intermediate level.

Most of the findings are deeply troubling:

- **More than 60% of all institutions receive a “C” or worse for requiring 3 or fewer subjects, allowing students to graduate with major gaps in their academic skills and knowledge.**
- **29% of the institutions (294 schools) receive a “D” or “F” for requiring two or fewer subjects.**
- ***What Will They Learn?* doesn’t inflate grades or lower standards – less than 2% of all institutions receive an “A.”**

**Several crucial subjects are required at only a small fraction of American colleges and universities.**

- Only 5% require economics.
- Slightly less than 20% require U.S. government or history.
- Barely 15% require intermediate-level foreign language.

**Paying a lot doesn't get you a lot. The higher the tuition, the more likely it is that students are left to devise their own general education.**

- The average tuition & fees at the "A" schools is \$16,223. At the "F" schools, it is \$27,529.
- The average number of subjects required by the Ivy League schools is only 2.88.

**This year's ratings did identify a number of schools that achieved outstanding evaluations. Nineteen colleges and universities were rated "A" by the ACTA study, with 371 rated a "B." "A" schools were those that required six out of the seven core courses. "B" schools required 4-5 core courses.**

**Two categories of schools stood apart positively from others in the ACTA ratings.**

**America's military academies were leaders among the 1,007 institutions evaluated.**

- Three military academies (Air Force, Coast Guard, and Army) received "A" ratings for meeting six requirements.
- The Naval Academy received a high "B" for requiring five subjects.
- In addition to rigorous requirements in mathematics and science, all of the academies require English composition and a survey course in literature.

**The nation's historically black colleges and universities were also impressive, particularly when compared to other public and private institutions.**

- The average grade for an HBCU is a "B," while the average grade for all other institutions in the *What Will They Learn?* study is a "C."
- No single HBCU received an "F," compared to the 87 "F's" among the other schools in the study.
- Every HBCU in the study received credit for an English composition requirement.

A recent nationwide survey conducted for ACTA by the highly respected firm, Roper Public Affairs and Media, found that 70% of Americans believe colleges and universities should require that all students take basic classes in core subjects. That number jumps to 80% in the 25 to 34 year old age group, the segment that includes recent college graduates looking for employment and often finding that prospective employers judge their skills to be deficient. Clearly, the American people understand that the state of affairs in higher education is unacceptable.

Other significant findings in the Roper survey include:

- More than half of respondents (54%) were surprised to learn that some American colleges and universities – including some very prominent ones – do not require students to take any classes in basic economics, math, science, writing and U.S. history before they graduate. That number rose to 61% for 18-24 year olds, the demographic being asked to make choices about entry-level college courses.
- Less than half believe students are getting their money's worth from public or private institutions of higher learning.

- Nearly six in ten Americans believe colleges and universities are doing only a fair or poor job of preparing graduates for future careers. That number increases nine percentage points among the age group that includes recent graduates.

“The *What Will They Learn?* study shows that many colleges are letting students and taxpayers down,” said Anne D. Neal, president of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni. “Tuition is at an all-time high, yet colleges and universities aren’t ensuring students have the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in careers and life. It seems most Americans get it when it comes to the need for reform, as opposed to many of those who run our colleges and universities.”

**BREAKDOWN BY GRADE, SUBJECT, AND TUITION & FEES:**

Grade	All Institutions	Percent of Total	Public Institutions	Percentage of Publics	Private Institutions	Percentage of Privates
A	19	1.9%	10	2.0%	9	1.8%
B	371	36.8%	196	39.5%	175	34.2%
C	323	32.1%	166	33.5%	157	30.7%
D	207	20.6%	99	20.0%	108	21.1%
F	87	8.6%	25	5.0%	62	12.1%

Subject	All Institutions	Percent of Total	Public Institutions	Percentage of Publics	Private Institutions	Percentage of Privates
Composition	839	83.3%	447	90.1%	392	76.7%
Literature	377	37.4%	149	30.0%	228	44.6%
Foreign Language	154	15.3%	45	9.1%	109	21.3%
US Gov/Hist.	200	19.9%	145	29.2%	55	10.8%
Economics	50	5.0%	22	4.4%	28	5.5%
Mathematics	661	65.6%	350	70.6%	311	60.9%
Natural Sci.	916	91.0%	469	94.6%	447	87.5%

	All Institutions	Public Institutions	Private Institutions
Avg. Tuition & Fees (2010)	\$17,927	\$6,969	\$28,374
Avg. Number of Reqs.	3.12	3.25	2.99
Avg. Grade	C	C	C

In order to get an A, schools must require a course in at least six of the seven academic subjects. a “B” grade signifies a school requires 4-5 of the core subjects; a “C,” 3 required subjects; a “D,” 2 required subjects; and an “F” one or no required courses.

The following 19 schools of the 1,007 surveyed had the high-quality core curriculum that made them “A” schools:

1. Thomas Aquinas College
2. Thomas More College of Liberal Arts
3. University of Dallas
4. California Polytechnic State University - San Luis Obispo
5. Pepperdine University
6. United States Air Force Academy
7. United States Coast Guard Academy
8. Kennesaw State University
9. Morehouse College
10. University of Georgia
11. St. John's College (MD)
12. Gardner-Webb University
13. St. John's College (NM)
14. City University of New York - Brooklyn College
15. United States Military Academy
16. University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma
17. Baylor University
18. Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi
19. University of Texas - San Antonio

When advised that the school had received an “A” rating, Pepperdine University’s Vice Chancellor Michael Warder said, “Pepperdine is pleased indeed to be given the highest rating by ACTA. In making general education requirements here for our undergraduate students, we intend for them to graduate, no matter what their major, as good decision makers. They need to have a broad exposure to moral underpinnings of our civilization, an ability to apply rigorous analytical skills, and a general breadth of knowledge as a foundation for whatever major they may complete. A free society requires these foundational courses of study.”

The findings are being sent to more than 10,000 trustees, representing every institution covered in the study. Governors, state legislators, and other policymakers will also receive copies to draw their attention to the importance of a robust core curriculum at state colleges and universities and the failure of colleges and universities to ensure exposure to key areas of knowledge.

ACTA will also reach out to guidance counselors and others in the high school community to help them inform students as they make decisions about their college studies.

This project was directed by Michael Poliakoff, ACTA’s Vice President of Policy. Among the many academic positions he has held, Dr. Poliakoff is a former professor of classical studies at Wellesley College and a former Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research at the University of Colorado. The criteria and model used by ACTA were reviewed by two panels of noted independent academics, including George E. Andrews, former President of the American Mathematical Society and Evan Pugh Professor of Mathematics at Penn State; Mark Bauerlein, Professor of English at Emory University; Jonathan Rose, William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of History

at Drew University; Sidney Gulick, Professor of Mathematics at the University of Maryland; and James A. Sellers, Professor and Director of Undergraduate Mathematics at Penn State.

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni is an independent, non-profit organization committed to academic freedom, excellence, and accountability at America's colleges and universities. Since its founding in 1995, ACTA has counseled boards, educated the public and published reports about such issues as good governance, historical literacy, core curricula, the free exchange of ideas, and accreditation in higher education. For further information, visit [www.goacta.org](http://www.goacta.org) or [www.WhatWillTheyLearn.com](http://www.WhatWillTheyLearn.com).

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