ACTA
American Council of Trustees and Alumni

"Promoting the Liberal Arts and Sciences"

By Thomas M. Rollins

Remarks accepting

The Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education

with

Tributes from
William Cook
Daniel Robinson
Alan Charles Kors
Bob Shrum

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The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) is an independent non-profit educational organization committed to academic freedom, excellence, and accountability. Launched in 1995, ACTA has a network of alumni and trustees from over 1,100 colleges and universities, including over 14,000 current board members. The quarterly newsletter, *Inside Academe,* reaches over 12,000 readers. ACTA receives no government or university funding and is supported through the generosity of individuals and foundations.

"Promoting the Liberal Arts and Sciences"

by Thomas M. Rollins

Life, I suspect, does not get much better than this; certainly not while wearing a tie.

I want to thank ACTA and Anne Neal for this honor, but also for ACTA's forceful, steadfast, and ingenious work on behalf of excellence and accountability in higher education.

I thank all of you for attending this evening, especially the many of you who came to town to join us tonight.

I especially thank Bill, Alan, Dan, who flew in from Oxford, and Bob, who postponed a trip to Italy, for their extravagantly kind words. These men are among my heroes. My children, Tom and Kay, are my witnesses: I tell them stories about the virtues of these friends.

It is very strange to be honored by those whom I regard as the most excellent of human beings, and I have great hope that they will be forgiven for any hyperbole as it concerns me, because I am not actually the worthy recipient of Mr. Merrill's award. My achievement, such as I've had one, was to find a wider audience for the most precious resource a nation holds—its great teachers. I recall David McCullough's beautiful address on this same occasion last year when he identified—*by name*—the teachers who fixed the destinies of Thomas Jefferson, Harry Truman, Theodore Roosevelt, Harper Lee, and others.

* * *

I certainly didn't do this by myself. Millions of people have experienced America's finest teachers because those teachers joined with me and my colleagues at The Teaching Company….my colleagues who joined with me to build an enterprise that made it possible for anyone who wants to learn from the best to do so. And we did it because of our loyal customers who love what we do and who paid for everything.

On behalf of us all, but especially on behalf of three people who are no longer with us—my brother, Ted, who worked for eight years at The Teaching Company, Professor Rufus Fears, who recorded so many beautiful lectures for the Company, and Ken Bagwell, who served on our Board of Directors for 15 years—I'd like to ask that anyone in this room tonight who has ever worked at The Teaching Company, taught for The Teaching Company, served on its Board of Directors, or been a customer of The Teaching Company, to please stand for a moment of recognition—this is our night.

Finally, I want to salute, across space and time, Philip Merrill. Our biographies are not dissimilar: he was an entrepreneur, a publisher, a fierce advocate of excellence in education, and a public servant. I wish I had known him—I suspect he and I could have talked for days.

The Philip Merrill Award is for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education. I would like to address my remarks to the value of the liberal arts—as I found them in a somewhat circuitous way—and how better to promote them.

I want to confess now—now that I have the Merrill Award in hand—that I became a liberal arts and sciences impresario by accident.

I came to business from government and politics, and it seemed obvious to me that we should ask our customers—as soon as we had some—what else they wanted us to make. For 20 years, we polled tens of thousands of customers so we could make courses in response to what our customers wanted.

And what did they want? History of almost all periods and areas, intellectual history, fine arts, literature, rhetoric, composition, science, mathematics. In short, the liberal arts and sciences. Since our first poll in 1992, until I sold the company in late 2006, the company doubled its sales roughly every two and a half years. And the company has roughly doubled in size since.

I didn't produce these courses because I was on a mission to promote the liberal arts—I did it because I was drawn by the invisible hand of our customers' demands.

Who are these people who consume these courses almost like they were eating popcorn?

One is a dropout who caught up on college with Teaching Company courses on economics, history, comparative religion, linguistics and mathematics. And he says that Rich Wolfson's course, "Physics in Your Life," includes the best description he's ever seen on how a semiconductor works. That dropout is Bill Gates.

The courses are a salvation for commuters. One wrote that she won't move closer to work because that would cut back on the time she's able to spend listening to the courses.

Others have time to kill for other reasons: One writes, "Listening to your lectures while being incarcerated in a maximum security prison has been one of the greatest intellectual prospects one can have without being able to go to college…." For whatever reason.

For the customers of The Teaching Company, the lectures by great professors contradict the great Harvard professor William James' claim more than a century ago that "Outside of their own business, the ideas gained by men before they are twenty five are practically the only ideas they have in their lives." Professor James was ahead of his time in excluding women from this insult.

So what is it that draws people—commuters, prisoners, and billionaires—to these courses? Two things. One is great teaching,

which I'll discuss in a moment. The other is the liberal arts and sciences curriculum demanded by its customers and offered by the company.

Why do they want liberal arts and sciences? It isn't because it fulfills the medieval and Renaissance liberal arts trivium and quadrivium, the categories that included language arts, mathematics, music and astronomy.

Could it be that they are drawn to Harvard's more modern description? I will start with Dave Barry's standard warning when he reports something like this: "I am not making this up!"

Harvard's Office of Admissions website, insisting that it offers a liberal education, names *not one* subject that is included in such an education, only that it is, quote: "an education conducted in a spirit of free inquiry undertaken without concern for topical relevance or vocational utility." Close quote. End of story!

"And that'll be two hundred grand, thank you very much."

The description never says what *does* concern a liberal education.

I'm trying to channel Jon Stewart here:

The Harvard page translates as free inquiry into nothing in particular but what is just as likely as not the irrelevant and useless—a kind of intellectual loitering and vagrancy—and, according to the website, is QUOTE "one of the achievements of civilization."

Surely we could ask more of civilization.

I have spent countless days researching why customers take our courses, and I've spent hundreds of hours taking the courses myself. So I'd like to say a bit about why our customers want the liberal arts and sciences.

The reasons are not, I think, obscure or small. They don't crave these courses to become better citizens—though many folks would like other people to take them so others can become better citizens. They don't do it to improve their tolerance for ambiguity or to become critical thinkers. They certainly don't do it to avoid soiling their hands with anything Harvard's site disdains as "topically relevant."

They want the liberal arts and sciences because—this is a big claim—they want to understand *everything*, and the liberal arts and sciences are where that happens. Quick data point: if a customer orders a course in science, what is the next most likely topic in which she will take a course? Answer: religion and theology. These are embracing minds at work.

This desire for understanding is sublime. To comprehend—from the Latin, literally to grasp with the hand—is a species of power. To comprehend the world is not to shape it, but when we can hold it in the mind, it is as though we possess it. Perhaps this animated Aristotle's startling claim that the difference between the educated and the uneducated is the difference between the living and the dead.

Maybe the claim isn't so startling. Here we are, privileged among the trillions of molecules in the cosmos with the incredibly rare awareness of our awareness of being. And, before we start making and doing things for money, the liberal arts and sciences ask of us these few fundamental questions:

What is this place and how does it work?

Who am I; who are these other people, and how ought we deal with each other?

How can I know if I have a good answer to these questions?

And how can I express my understanding of these things to others?

Every course in the liberal arts and sciences, whether it knows it or not, is asking these questions. A liberal education cannot be defended as Harvard's website tries to do because it isn't about anything—it is defensible because it is about everything.

Too often, the arts and sciences seem like a grab-bag of courses, an island of lost toys, but only because we have allowed their specialization to obscure their fundamental connection. What joins Einstein's physics, the New Testament, Greek philosophy, French poetry, and American history?

Allow me to invoke the old adage that an ounce of inaccuracy saves a pound of explanation and suggest that the liberal arts and sciences cover two things: Understanding and Expression.

Understanding includes all of the disciplines that seek to explain our world and our place in it—as it *is* and as it *ought to be*: the natural and social sciences, history, philosophy, theology, mathematics, and also literature and the arts when they expand our understanding of our experience and others'. And, yes, the sciences and mathematics are right there with the others because they share the same mission of understanding, just as they did in the trivium and quadrivium.

Expression of our understanding is learned in composition, in foreign languages, in rhetoric (or its modern simile, communications), in literature and the arts, and in mathematics—all of the disciplines in which we use symbols and action to express what we understand to others.

There is a deep unity and embracing universality to the liberal arts and sciences, and to lose track of the profound purpose of such broad understanding because we burrow into ever narrower fields of research is a crime against our humanity.

Let me be explicit. Colleges and universities have two purposes: to impart existing knowledge to the next generation and to discover new knowledge. But the obligation to teach what we know is primary in no small part because new knowledge will vanish in silence without it—and the task of undergraduate education is to ensure that its graduates understand what we have, at great pain, figured out in the past 3,000 years about the world and the human condition so they can carry the cause forward with their lives enriched. That is the mission of the liberal arts and sciences.

No other field of study begins to approach this global ambition to imbue each generation with the wisdom of the species.

Does anyone even dare to measure courses in real estate finance or website design against the liberal arts? Those would be unfair comparisons between apples and orchards.

Now, I want to concede one argument about an undergraduate liberal arts degree, though it is a bit of a caricature—that such students often aren't prepared to do anything but study—and see if it can't be solved. As I have suggested, the liberal arts teach two broad categories of things: Understanding and Expression. I suspect that all of us revere both.

But this focus does not address our desire, and sometimes our moral obligation, to preserve or change the world based on what we understand and express. I worry—as much as I honor them—that the ideal human we imagine as the product of the liberal arts is the college professor, and, implicitly, that other callings are a debasement or compromise of that ideal.

I disagree with that imagining, and I suggest that, in addition to Understanding and Expression, a full education should include the study of Action: how to make things happen in the world. Students would learn how goals are best set and reached, how leadership and cooperation are best undertaken in their pursuit, how time and resources should be allocated to produce a result, and, heaven forbid, how wealth is created by making something more valuable to other people than it was.

And in each case, students should learn by studying the best examples that history affords and drawing lessons from them—from Alexander of Macedonia, to Gandhi of India, to Steve of Apple.

A person equipped to understand, express, *and* to act would be much more a Renaissance man than a medieval monk or a harmless drudge.

I agree wholly with the intellectual's maxim that the unexamined life is not worth living, but it is also true that the unlived life often is not worth examining.

Please set aside my rant for now—it will never get past a curriculum committee—in part because it would require action to do so. Let's return to the liberal arts as Understanding and Expression.

Is there a final concession to be made about the liberal arts? What can we say to prospective freshmen who demand: "Show us the money! We want to hit the ground running and be welcomed by the machine on Day One!"

We might sigh and think "Maybe college *and* youth are wasted on the young…."

We should begin our advice to these freshmen by acknowledging that those with full degrees in the liberal arts tend, in general, to make less than those with, say, degrees in computer science or petroleum engineering. But, we should remind our avaricious young friends, a very large portion of those with liberal arts degrees go to graduate school, which produces a fat double-digit increase in lifetime earnings.

Moreover, sons and daughters, we have not, with considerable searching, found one shred of evidence that a year or two in the liberal arts before devoting oneself to a more marketable major will have any effect at all on your lifetime earnings.

And that time just might help you answer these questions: Why do I want the money? What should I do with my life? What should my country do? These are worthy objects of reflection before you find yourself in a career that pays well, crushes life, and leaves you a dimly informed spectator to history.

We should caution our freshmen to consider ACTA's belief that the liberal arts can be more valuable than narrow career training because people now change jobs and careers so often. Acquiring mere technical expertise is a strategy for the dinosaur; as a friend once counseled me: "Never try to get really, really good at anything where you could be replaced by a button."

A clue that you may be ready for extinction is this: Can you take all the courses you need as Massive Open Online Courses—M.O.O.C.s

or "mooks"—where all of the evaluation is graded by a computer? If a computer can decide whether you can do the work, there's a very good chance that a computer can eventually do the job.

What can you do that a machine cannot? The liberal arts and sciences are inherently open-ended in great part because these disciplines uniquely and deeply ask "why?" rather than "how to?" There are no certain answers, only better cases to be made.

Our freshmen live in a dawning, golden age of communications and scientific discovery. The argument against specialization for the present will get better all the time because the future is changing at an accelerating rate.

The wise reason in a changing world to choose a particular course of study is to learn how to learn, and the wise choice on what to learn is in the liberal arts and sciences where we also learn how to live without the false comfort of precise answers.

If we think the liberal arts should be promoted, how can we do it within undergraduate education?

There are two ways. One is to require it, as ACTA has urged. I know some brilliant and very accomplished people who went to Berkeley—at least one is in the audience tonight—but today UC Berkeley does not require its students to take any coursework in literature, US history or government, mathematics, or college-level science. But they do require a course in composition—perhaps on the theory that their graduates may not have anything to say, but at least they'll say it well.

And if we do require something, we should require that it be meaningful, as ACTA has also urged. ACTA's research on what counts as a liberal arts requirement is, simply, astonishing. Again: "I'm not making this up!" At UC-Davis, the "Quantitative Literacy" requirement (which you could be forgiven for assuming that it would require college mathematics) can be fulfilled by a course in "Landscape Meaning." You get the sense that the doctors aren't running the asylum anymore.

I will add that even with the right subjects in the course catalog, no one will learn much if courses don't require it. The study *Academically Adrift*, by Professors Arum and Roksa, after measuring the critical thinking and problem-solving skills of 2,300 college freshmen at their entry into college and then again two years later, reports the truly remarkable result that nearly half of all college students do not improve their skills in critical thinking, analytical reasoning, writing or problem-solving in the first two years of college *at all*. Their research has been supported by a comparable and large data set in the Wabash National Study.

Those who do improve these skills, after controlling for other variables, are in classes where professors set high expectations, require at least 40 pages of reading per week and at least 20 pages of writing per semester, and in which students are likely to engage in study by themselves, rather than in groups. Shocking! Shocking!...that this is what it takes.

My children hate stories about how hard school was for me and for Vicki—how we learned to write with coal on the backs of shovels, how we had to walk ten miles each way while it rained sharp sticks, and so forth. But I'll wager that most of us in this room would have regarded just 40 pages of reading a week and a 20-page paper as a walk in the park, while today it distinguishes a course as hard work.

In addition to requirements, the second strategy I'd like to suggest is that you draw people into the liberal arts by having great teachers teach the introductory and important classes.

I never needed to do any polling on whether great teachers matter—I knew that in my bones…because I had neglected to attend Evidence class in law school, and I had three days in which to master, among other things, the Federal Rules of Evidence. There are other attorneys in the audience tonight who will vouch for me when I claim that scarcely in human history has a more boring subject been fashioned by the mind of man than the Federal Rules of Evidence. But

the Harvard Law School library had, on reserve, ten hours of lectures on the Federal Rules of Evidence that we could watch over the course of the weekend in advance of the exam.

About five of us gathered there to watch the lectures. I was prepared for one of the worst weekends of my life; I brought two sharp pencils, one for each eardrum, so as I dozed off I could jolt myself back to waking. And then they turned on the videos—and magic happened.

They were taught by Irving Younger, an evidence professor and a seasoned trial lawyer—who later became a partner at Williams & Connolly, as my wife has been and where many in the audience tonight are also partners. He would do anything to explain to us and make sure we cared about the Federal Rules of Evidence. He taught us what dying men say to their wives, how Britain won World War II with radar. At one point he looked into the camera and said: "I can make you laugh or cry! At will!" And then he did it. And we all agreed tearfully that we should turn up the volume. It was a marvelous experience.

And I got an "A" on my Evidence final.

I also had the fabulous experience as an undergraduate to have Dan Robinson as one of my professors. I still remember the roughly five-minute answer he gave to a literally sophomoric question I had asked about the effects of statistical noise in a system on our ability to make strong and rule-based judgments about the subject matter of the class, which was "Death and Dying." Some day later I will decide why it was that at 19 I thought that was a great course to take, but of course, I took it in part because of Dan Robinson's reputation as a great teacher.

After I had started my company in an attic off of 49th Street Northwest in D.C., mountains of evidence confirmed my intuitions about great teachers. The *New York Times* reported a couple of years ago that "A new generation of economists [has] devised statistical methods to measure the 'value added' to an elementary or secondary student's performance by almost every factor imaginable: class size

versus per-pupil funding versus curriculum. When researchers ran the numbers in dozens of different studies, every factor under a school's control produced just a tiny impact, except for one: [to] which teacher the student had been assigned…."

Do great college professors matter? They certainly determine what you will study. Adam Smith observed almost 250 years ago: "No discipline is ever required to force attendance upon lectures which are really worth attending."

At The Teaching Company, our data have shown for decades that someone who rates a course a nine or a ten on a ten-point scale is two and a half times more likely to take another course as someone who rates a course a five or six on the same scale. The difference between great and mediocre is enormous.

I promise you this: If you build a classroom and populate the podium with great teachers, they will come.

MIT's Department of Materials Sciences and Engineering will only allow professors highly rated by students to teach introductory courses, because their experience is that strong teachers draw students to the subject…and that weak teaching can kill it.

Consider Classics at the University of Pennsylvania and listen to Jeremy McInerny, whom we recruited from Penn's Classics Department many years ago to teach about Ancient Greek Civilization. He now chairs the department.

> When I started at Penn in 1992 [a group of faculty reformers in Classics] targeted the intro classes and put dynamic teachers into those courses. The result? Intro classes on Greek and Roman history went [from about 35 regularly enrolled] to between 180 and 200 students, occasionally pushing up to 300….[M]ythology is taught by my charismatic colleague, Peter Struck, who gets 200 kids in the classroom (as well as 35,000 students online through Coursera). The moral of the story? Intelligent planning, respect for the kids, a belief that what we

do really matters and a willingness to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset—these are all ingredients for growing the Liberal Arts and reaching even career oriented, bottom-line oriented students. It isn't a zero sum game where if business schools win, we lose.

So who are these Great Professors? I've studied this for a long time. Allow me to describe their work.

- One, great professors share no uniform stylistic traits.
  - Some are slow and almost poetic in their deliveries; they cannot be hurried from one point to the next.
  - Some make learning like drinking from a firehose. Remember the ad for Maxell tapes with the guy in a big chair listening to music and his tie and hair are blown backwards by the sound? That can be a powerful style.
- Two, while they have no uniform style, the best are uniformly very articulate; we expect that of great speakers.
- Three, they are also immersively learned in the subjects on which they teach. Customers and students can spot a dilettante a mile away.
- Four, great teachers are extravagantly well-prepared.
  - Lectures are not created equal, my friends. The lecture done well is a ton of work. The company has studied how best to create lectures for over two decades, and professors who make them for us often agree that creating a series of lectures for us is the equivalent of writing an academic book.
  - Much of the *disdain* for lectures is that they are often *not* well prepared, and much of the preference for "discussion" style classes is that it takes very little preparation to conduct one.

- I will add my strong but merely anecdotal belief that professors who work hard on their classes will have students who work hard too. There is a reciprocal bond—unspoken and obvious—that students take seriously professors who take them seriously.

- Finally, and most distinctly, great teachers seem to be driven by a nearly messianic zeal to explain to the rest of the world what their discipline has discovered. Whether it is what the universe will do in the next 14 billion years, or what Shakespeare can tell us about marriage gone bad, these teachers have a need to tell the story of their fields. Customers will call this "enthusiasm," and it is palpable when it is present.

I'm sometimes asked, "Why not just read a book rather than hear the words delivered—recorded or live—by a speaker, however gifted?" Aside from the obvious advantages in hearing tone and emphasis, in seeing how a speaker physically reacts to an observation or argument, I think that there is another reason we are drawn to great professors.

We want, knowingly or unknowingly, to be able to do what they do. The "sage on the stage" is still a sage. An articulate and learned person who can speak fluently on a complex matter of concern is something to which we all aspire—and by seeing it done, we are able to do it better.

Add this: these speakers are powerfully expressing a love for a body of knowledge. At the end of the day, their zeal is the most precious gift an education can endow. Once we can ignite that spark—the passion for knowledge—it never goes out, no matter where it was first found.

Aristotle taught Alexander the Great. Plutarch wrote that Alexander's "violent thirst after and passion for learning, which were once implanted, still grew up with him, and never decayed."

If we want the liberal arts and sciences to succeed, then studying them must become an end in itself, not only for other ends that may be decades away. In the hands of a great teacher—as millions of our customers are happy to report—the reason to study the liberal arts is to study the liberal arts. Let a great teacher light the fire of learning and most of what we hope for from the liberal arts and sciences will take care of itself.

The symbol of The Teaching Company is the torch of learning held high, and it is the visual expression of the ancient command that if you have the light of learning, you should light the lamp of another; it increases the light of the world and does not diminish your own.

I thank you for your kind attention, and I hope that you will, in the many ways you can, join in that quest to brighten this world.

The following are tributes given in honor of Thomas Rollins at the presentation of the Philip Merrill Award on November 9, 2012.

William Cook
Distinguished Teaching Professor of History, State University of New York at Geneseo

When you tape for the The Teaching Company, there's about a ten-foot high numerical clock that ticks down exactly how many seconds you have, and if you go more than 30 seconds over, they just simply stop the tapes. Anne told me I had five minutes. I never did less than 50 minutes until I ran into Tom Rollins. And I can't believe now he's going to get me from 30 to five. You deserve an award for that—many of my students would honor you for that.

I've known Tom a long time. Let me tell you how long ago it was when I first heard about The Teaching Company and Tom Rollins—there was no Google to find out who he really was. And when I got to the studio the first time, there was a podium, a drape and a camera. It's grown from there. Let me tell you why it's grown, I think. I've done a lot of courses for The Teaching Company, and there's one hard and fast rule: You never dumb things down. The people who buy these courses want university lectures. They don't want to be pampered; they want to be challenged. And Tom knew that. By the way, that's a pretty good model for schools in general, don't you think? And I remember not too many years ago, a rival sprang up to The Teaching Company, and I happened to be at The Teaching Company taping the day the first courses were released. People were nervous because this was done by Barnes & Noble, and they had a distribution network. So some of the staff went out and bought them in the morning and very nervously

listened to them while they were having a bagged lunch. By the end of lunch, they were laughing because these were not university lectures. They were done by university professors, but clearly ones who had been coached to do something very different than they normally did.

And that's the reason that I'm not only a Teaching Company guy in terms of making courses, I'm a Teaching Company customer. Just like you. I remember, I was going to Japan to give a lecture. I thought: I'm going to a Buddhist country, don't know anything about Buddhism. Is there a course? Turns out, there's a pretty good one.

I think we all have had the pleasure of The Teaching Company, but let me just tell you a couple of stories, because now with email, probably every other day I get an email from somebody. Some of them are cranky—not very many. A few of them are critics of my ties, although God knows why. But generally speaking, they are enormously grateful for what The Teaching Company does for their lives. I got one from a 20-year-old who had dropped out of school, was traveling across the country, and had downloaded courses into his iPod. He decided to go to college because of those courses. He said, "I didn't know from my high school experience teaching could so excite me. But the fact that it does, I want to go experience that."

I got a letter from a retired professor at Georgetown, a Jesuit priest with macular degeneration. He said, "The Teaching Company is the only place I can go that keeps me alive and excited and up on current scholarship. This is not 25-year-old stuff, this is not boilerplate stuff, this is the newest stuff by the professors who are doing the research and are out there in the field. And I stay connected to the world and to the academic community because of The Teaching Company."

Tom once told me he had the greatest faculty in the world; I'm proud to be part of that faculty. And I have to confess that Tom Rollins has made some of his professors and me—in the eyes of my children anyway—international stars. Last summer, I was in Nairobi walking

through the airport with a group of students, and someone comes up behind me and says, "Aren't you Professor Cook?" He'd never seen the videos, but he heard my voice and recognized it. That has happened to me in Kenya. It has happened to me in Italy. It happened to me in Cambodia recently. I've got to tell you about the one in Italy because this tells you something about The Teaching Company and the many facets of it. It's a hundred degrees, I'm in the Roman Forum with students, and students are not interested in the Roman Forum when it's a hundred degrees. So I'm standing up, sort of—you know—articulating to almost no one about the wonders of the Roman Forum, and this guy comes up with a British accent and says, "You're Professor Cook, I have your videos." Instant respect. Or as one woman told me at a talk I gave in Philadelphia—this was an invitation based on Teaching Company courses—"When I meet you, it's almost like meeting a rock star."

That's what Tom Rollins has done for me. But you know what Tom Rollins has done for education. You know what he's done for tens of thousands of people. I had one email that said, "Thanks to Tom Rollins and you, I'm 50 pounds lighter." Because he gets on his exercise machine and gets so carried away by the courses, he does 30 minutes. So, in many ways in terms of the intellectual health of Americans and many beyond our shores, even in terms of the physical health, I want to tell you that Tom Rollins is the real star. It was his idea, and it was he who had the business acumen as well as the idea to make it a success. And he has a legacy far beyond anything he knows. I just wish—maybe I should forward him all my emails—that he would know, as has been written, what a force in American education Tom Rollins and The Teaching Company are. So I say for all of you, because many of you are Teaching Company fans: Thank you, Tom.

Daniel Robinson
Professor of Philosophy, Oxford University; Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Georgetown University

There is always pleasure when the truly deserving have their merits publicly acknowledged, and the pleasure is greatly enhanced when the praise is showered on a friend. Tom Rollins is my friend, and I am delighted to be able to add my own few words to our celebration of his extraordinary achievement.

How apt that we meet here in Anderson House. The Society of the Cincinnati was founded in 1783 for the express purpose of preserving and promulgating the principles of our American Revolution. How apt that tonight's honored guest should reach the active and civic world by way of Law, for it was our Revolution that advanced and defended that sacred precept according to which sovereignty is the sovereignty of law.

My thoughts tonight are moved by these associations and moved back to the time of the first of our citizens to bear the title, Professor of Law. I refer to George Wythe, Thomas Jefferson's teacher and friend. An outspoken opponent of slavery—indeed, a Virginian who freed his own slaves—Wythe possessed a mind grounded in classical scholarship and directed by a clear sense of purpose and of principle.

Jefferson corresponded with Wythe on various matters but, for tonight's occasion, I offer you a letter he addressed to Wythe on August 13, 1786. Many of you will recognize this summoning passage:

> *I think by far the most important bill in our whole code is that for the diffusion of knowledge among the people. No other sure foundation can be devised, for the preservation of freedom and happiness....Preach, my dear Sir, a crusade against ignorance; establish & improve the law for educating the common people.... The tax which will be paid for this purpose is not more than the thousandth part of what will be paid to kings, priests and nobles who will rise up among us if we leave the people in ignorance."*

Tom Rollins has been truer to this spirit than is today's college or university. His has been a crusade against ignorance, but an American crusade, stripped of artificial rank and unearned privilege. Where knowledge itself has not been "democratized," the political form of democracy can be little more than ritual.

Those of us who have offered courses under the gentle guidance of my friend have received deeply gratifying words of praise from customers. My own collection includes thoughtful letters from university professors, one convicted felon, and more than one teenager who had no idea that philosophy was actually interesting! I never read these without thinking of Tom; thinking of a great idea made into a reality by a man who abandoned a profession for that special state of being—a VOCATION.

We are all your beneficiaries, Tom. The world is better for your labor of love. Well done!

Alan Charles Kors
Henry Charles Lea Professor of History, University of Pennsylvania

It is my great privilege to participate in the tribute to Tom Rollins this evening. Tom Rollins had a vision that there was a hunger out there—what today would be termed a niche market, but he understood that what underlay it was a hunger—for deep knowledge of the richest, most intellectually stimulating, and, indeed, most challenging kind. He risked so much on that vision, and it is only in retrospect, of course, that we know that he was entirely right. He wanted to offer to the public courses by professors who cared about their subjects, and who cared about the kind of teaching that mattered most: informed; rigorous; untendentious; and respecting the longstanding values of higher education at its best. The public responded with rightful enthusiasm.

I got to know Tom Rollins during the early years of the great venture that became his Teaching Company. Unlike our current universities, he never once asked, of anyone, What are your politics? He never once asked, What are you ideological commitments? He asked of us only, in effect, What have you mastered and how do you propose to communicate it? Again, unlike our current universities, he asked that we refrain from expressing those of our concerns that were irrelevant to our subjects and that we take the opportunity given to us in a way that accepted with absolute seriousness the right of our students to an honest presentation of acquired knowledge. I know that he was often shocked by those things against which ACTA also has fought with valor: the laziness, self-indulgence, and inappropriate politicization—from any direction—of professors who made students the involuntary audience of a professor's whims, omissions, and propaganda. I know how much he cared that his students received honest value—in all meanings of value—for their hard-earned monies. I know how

consciously and conscientiously he strove for authentic intellectual pluralism and integrity. Many people who fooled many a major university could not fool Tom Rollins. Unlike those universities, he saw through the charlatans. Unlike them, he saw through those just going through the motions. Unlike them, he saw through professors who preferred disciples to students with independent and open minds. Tom Rollins cared too much about honor, veracity, and quality to repeat the errors of the worst sides of our campuses. He wasn't dispensing credentials that students needed for the credentials themselves; he was dispensing courses that meant something of significance to those who took them.

When individuals whom I never have met before say to me, "I know you," it is not for anything political or academic-political that I have done. It is because of my courses for Tom Rollins' Teaching Company. He showed civil society that higher education could be demanding, rich, and rewarding, in ways that too many campuses no longer seek or encourage.

Let me end on a personal note. When I was nominated to serve on the National Council for the Humanities, decades ago, politicized academic foes of that appointment began a campaign of deceit against me and many others. Tom Rollins sought information and facts; he brought them to the attention of his own friends in DC; and all of us were approved unanimously, at a highly partisan time, by the appropriate Senate Committee and then by the full U.S. Senate. Tom Rollins, in addition to his commitment to education, had an abiding commitment to truth. He is a hero of mine. It does deserved honor to him and it does honor to ACTA that he is the recipient of its prestigious award.

Bob Shrum
Political Consultant and Journalist

Listening to those who spoke before me, I thought this is like a great course from The Teaching Company—and they show why the Company worked.

I'm honored to be here, not only because of the person whom you honor, but because of the work ACTA does. Anne, I agree with 99% of your speech. And I'm proud to be here for Tom who earned this award over a long, hard, vision-driven 17 years.

For me, there is a web of connections across this room that reaches across decades. I think of Tom's friends and mine from debate. And I want to acknowledge Tim Petri, Congressman and Anne's lucky spouse; I shared an apartment with him and our mutual friend Lee Huebner after I graduated from law school.

I have five minutes—and how in that time do I sum up my best friend of 40 years?

I first met Tom when I judged him in a high school debate. He was the best debater I ever encountered—then and in his remarkable years at Georgetown.

He had, and has, a passion for argument and ideas rooted not just in competitive ambition, but in a ceaseless love for knowledge. He took an entire year between college and law school to read his way through the great books and far beyond.

After Harvard Law School, his clerkship, and a brief two years practicing in Houston, he became the Staff Director of the Senate Labor and Education Committee. A colleague who had worked with me for Senator Ted Kennedy recommended Tom. When Teddy asked me about Tom, I said he was no expert on these issues, but he was astonishingly smart—both deep and quick. Teddy said that was fine—someone like that can learn the issues, but you can't teach someone else who only knows issues how to be smart. On that Senate committee,

Tom thought originally, maneuvered masterfully, and crafted legislation that broke the mold and broke through partisan barriers.

After four years, Tom left to pursue another idea that broke the mold—to harness technology to bring the finest of teaching in the liberal arts not to a select few on elite campuses but to millions everywhere in America—and at every stage of life. He lived in a small, downscale apartment and invested everything he had—mind, heart, and every dime he made—in the company. At one point, those of us on the board, including his Dad, had to force him to accept a raise from $25,000 to $40,000—not the usual salary range for someone from the Harvard Law Review.

He invented a new way to convey the liberal arts—and reached more people than most universities could in a generation. And now The Teaching Company has inspired universities, from MIT to Georgetown and Berkeley, to take this path.

So Tom became a pioneer, a great educator and a great entrepreneur.

All this time, I was a political consultant—and he was there to cheer me in victory and sustain me in defeat.

Oatsie, my wife and the love of my life, invested in real estate—and did well. But the most fortunate investment she made, at the very start, was in The Teaching Company.

She also thought Tom and Vicki were ideal for each other—even before they did.

Today we are privileged to be godparents to Tommy and Kay and we are as happy tonight as Tom's parents, whom you also met earlier. We have shared with them many a wonderful dinner and vacation over the years.

ACTA's mission was Tom Rollins' cause before either of you ever knew about each other—to advocate and elevate the liberal arts and sciences.

The light of such learning can be found in books, as Tom did when he was young.

It can be found in classrooms—if not all the time.

But as Tom's Teaching Company taught us, the light can also shine in a powerful and different way—on many who instinctively comprehend that the irreplaceable gift of the liberal arts is at the heart of living up to our own best possibilities as individuals and as a community.

People yearn for that—and Tom answered that yearning for those who otherwise might never have seen it happen.

As a Democrat in an audience where all may not share my views or my joy last Tuesday night, let me also add that Tom is a job creator who made a profit and built a brilliant business.

And to return to the ground of my political being, let me finish by saying that Tom has proved the truth of John F. Kennedy's words:

"Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream, which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and strength for the nation."

Tom pursued his dream—and because of that, for so many, their dreams and their hopes live on.

You chose well to present your Philip Merrill Award to my friend, Tom Rollins.

Thomas M. Rollins

From ancient literature to quantum mechanics, from enlightenment philosophy to modern corporate and economic theory, The Teaching Company has for over 20 years been in the business of offering video and audio lectures on the foundational disciplines that have shaped civilization. The Company's founder, **Thomas M. Rollins**, ignited the public's passion for lifelong learning by recruiting the most dynamic professors from colleges and universities across the country and making their lectures available to anyone interested in continuing their education.

As a Harvard Law School student, Rollins was facing an important exam in the Federal Rules of Evidence. He managed to obtain videotapes of ten one-hour lectures by a noted authority on the subject, Professor Irving Younger. "I thought that few subjects could be as dull as the Federal Rules of Evidence. But I had no other way out." Rollins planted himself in front of the TV and played all ten hours nearly nonstop. The lectures, he says, "were outrageously insightful, funny, and thorough." Watching the lectures was one of Rollins' best experiences as a student, and he never forgot the unique power of recorded lectures by a great teacher.

Mr. Rollins is a graduate of Georgetown University and Harvard Law School, where he was an editor of the *Harvard Law Review*. In 1989, after practicing law for several years and serving as Chief of Staff and Chief Counsel for the U.S. Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, Mr. Rollins went in a new direction and founded The Teaching Company. With over 10 million courses sold, the Company has been described by the *New York Times* as "a force in continuing education" and by the *Wall Street Journal* as "the colossus of its field." Tom Rollins' success in bringing the finest instruction to so many thousands of learners throughout the world is one of the most significant contributions to the liberal arts in our time.

The Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education

ACTA is most pleased to be presenting the eighth annual Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education. The awarding of this prize, made on the advice of a distinguished selection committee, advances ACTA's long-term goal to promote and encourage a strong liberal arts education.

The Merrill Award offers a unique tribute to those dedicated to the transmission of the great ideas and central values of our civilization and is presented to inspire others and provide public acknowledgment of the value of their endeavors. Past recipients of the award are Robert P. George, the McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence and founder and director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University (2005); Harvey C. Mansfield, William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Government at Harvard University (2006); Gertrude Himmelfarb, Professor Emeritus of History at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York (2007); Donald Kagan, Sterling Professor of Classics and History at Yale University (2008); Robert "KC" Johnson, Professor of History at Brooklyn College and The Graduate Center of the City University of New York; Benno C. Schmidt, Jr., Chairman, Board of Trustees of the City University of New York; and historian David McCullough.

The prize is named in honor of Philip Merrill, who served as a trustee of Cornell University, the University of Maryland Foundation, the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, the Aspen Institute, and the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. Mr. Merrill was also a founding member of ACTA's National Council.

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