



10 September 2016

Dear Colleague,

I would like to invite you to become a member of the National Association of Scholars—the NAS.

Why should you join NAS? Essentially to become part of a broader community of scholars who share your interests. NAS can connect you to people, inside and outside your particular discipline, who can read and discuss your work and introduce you to still other scholars. Our quarterly journal, *Academic Questions*, delves into issues that at most get glancing attention elsewhere. We are one of the nation's leading sources for original research on what might be called macro-issues in higher education. Getting involved in NAS gives you the opportunity to engage knowledgeably and with authority on matters ranging from Western civilization requirements to fossil fuel divestments.

If there is a subject you know well and would like to bring to an audience beyond your discipline, NAS can provide the platform. If there is a national controversy in higher education that you would like to understand better or in which you like to be heard, NAS is the place you can do that without fear of running afoul of campus censors or speech codes.

### **Who We Are**

Let me describe NAS in a little more detail and then anticipate some questions you may have.

We have about 2,500 members. More than 90 percent are academics, whose fields range across the disciplines. The other ten percent consists mostly of people in the learned professions, such as law and medicine, who take an active interest in the academy. Membership requires annual dues (\$75 for full-time academics; \$35 for students) and comes with a subscription to *Academic Questions*, which is sent in hard-copy, along with digital access to the whole 29-year run.

NAS was founded in 1987 by academics who were concerned about the rising politicization of higher education and its ideological narrowing. We scored some early and important victories. Early benchmarks included persuading a major accrediting body in 1991 to drop its “diversity” standard; the first important critique (1993) of the sexual harassment industry; and the passage in California of Proposition 209, the ballot measure drawn up by NAS members that outlawed racial preferences in college admissions. By 2005, we had founded over thirty campus centers,

and helped to set up an alternative liberal arts accrediting body and several parallel organizations, including the Historical Society, the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics, and the American Council of Trustees and Alumni.

It would be nice if I could say that NAS has marched from triumph to triumph. But that has not been the course of American higher education for the last thirty years. Instead of seeing a rollback of the politicization of the curriculum, the classroom, and academic appointments, we have seen the deeper entrenchment of that politicization.

In that light, NAS has gradually redefined itself from an organization that fought to maintain traditional academic standards of intellectual openness, fidelity to the evidence, pursuit of truth, and liberal education to an organization that seeks *to rekindle these ideals*. That means we spend a lot of effort critiquing the status quo in higher education and reintroducing core concepts.

### **What We Do**

In January 2016 we issued an 11,000-word statement, *The Architecture of Intellectual Freedom*, which we have been sending to college trustees and presidents. It is a reminder of some basics: The First Amendment and academic freedom are not interchangeable. Both differ from the ideal of intellectual freedom. Freedom of expression doesn't exist as a stand-alone ideal, but as part of the larger design of an institution that is dedicated to the discovery and teaching of knowledge. We published *The Architecture of Intellectual Freedom* as our response to the current "cry-bully" demands for "safe spaces," and the feckless response to those demands from so many college presidents.

The work that *you* do depends on the willingness and the ability of colleges and universities to maintain your freedom of intellectual inquiry and expression. Those are at risk from a generation of students, abetted by illiberal faculty members, who have dim regard for such freedoms. NAS is among your most important allies in the fight to keep higher education open to your ideas.

We have been publishing important research reports on academic matters since 1996, beginning with *The Dissolution of General Education*, which traced in detail the 80-year history of how general education requires had been dismantled, watered-down, and all but eliminated at many American colleges and universities. *Dissolution* has played a key role in discussions at many institutions grappling with the intellectual entropy of their students.

Some of our recent studies include:

*The Vanishing West, 1964-2010: The Disappearance of Western Civilization from the American Undergraduate Curriculum.* (2011)

*Recasting History: Are Race, Class, and Gender Dominating American History?* (2013)

*What Does Bowdoin Teach? How a Contemporary Liberal Arts College Shapes Students.* (2013)

*Beach Books: What Do Colleges and Universities Want Students to Read Outside Class?* (annual from 2010 through 2016)

*The Disappearing Continent: A Critique of the College Board's Revised AP European History Examination (2016)*

All of these are available in digital form on the NAS website, if you care to take a look. Most of them are also available in print form too, and we provide them on request.

When we publish a new report, we hold a launch event and do our best to attract the press as well as NAS members. The launch event for the 2016 edition of *Beach Books* was held at the office of *First Things*, keynoted by Mark Bauerlein, and covered by C-SPAN. You can find the video by searching “college freshmen” at [www.c-span.org](http://www.c-span.org). We hold national and regional conferences too, though not on a regular schedule.

Our journal, *Academic Questions*, covers a lot of ground. While we definitely have an editorial point-of-view, we work hard to keep the journal open to many perspectives. Each issue has at least one theme on which we assemble several articles. Some recent issues dealt with “Common Readings, Uncommon Conversations,” “Rape Culture on Campus?” “Massive Possibilities: A Forum on MOOCS,” “Inequalities,” “Campus Progressivism: Top-Down and Bottom-Up,” and “Peer Review in the Politicized Academy.” Another feature of the journal is our ongoing series, “Verdicts,” where we invite a scholar to assess the career of an individual who has had an outsized influence on the academy. We have published “verdicts” on Edward Said, Reinhold Niebuhr, Eugene Genovese, Martin Heidegger, Camille Paglia, Martha Nussbaum, Thomas Sowell, and Frances Fox Piven, among others.

Lastly, NAS has played a significant role in recent years as a contrarian voice on various educational reforms. We challenged parts of the Common Core, on the grounds that its standards don't really make students “college ready.” And we initiated the controversy over the College Board's revised Advanced Placement U.S. History Standards. Our published critiques led to an open letter to the College Board from 125 prominent historians, after which the College Board revised its revisions to meet our objections.

### **Questions You May Have**

That's the National Association of Scholars. As I said, I anticipate that if you have read this far, you may have some questions.

***Is it dangerous to join NAS?*** I get this a lot. There has never been an instance as far as I know of a faculty member suffering professional setbacks because of NAS membership. But we don't run the risk. We keep the names and identities of our members private. If we see an opportunity for a member, such as the chance to speak publicly on an issue, we let the member know privately.

***What about attacks on NAS's reputation?*** Some of the online search results for “National Association of Scholars” are smear sites such as SourceWatch and Right Wing Watch, which recycle one another's accusations against NAS.

Many of the points are long out of date (e.g. The NAS did receive grants from the Olin Foundation, but that foundation closed in 2005). Some of the content is spurious (e.g. “The Association doesn't have members”). And much of it simply attempts to put our real positions in

a negative light. These include the statement that NAS “opposes multiculturalism and affirmative action” (we do oppose racial preferences in admissions and hiring because they harm the quality of education for everyone, increase racial tension, and institutionalize racial discrimination), and that we espouse “climate contrarianism” (We don’t take a position on the science of global warming; we welcome debate. But it seems allowing debate is itself “contrarian”).

In any case, vituperative attacks have unfortunately become part of the cultural environment that critics of the academic status quo must deal with. Our reputation among people of intellectual integrity has withstood these tests. But anyone who considers joining NAS needs to know how our detractors operate.

***Will I be associated with NAS positions I disagree with?*** No. For one thing, no one need know you are a member (see above) but if you are open about being a member and disagree with some position we have taken, we will gladly publish your dissent. We are eager to model to the academic world a healthy openness to disagreement and debate.

***Can I influence the direction of NAS and the issues it takes up?*** Every issue NAS takes up started as a concern expressed by an NAS member. We are not big enough or wealthy enough to turn every concern into a major research project, but we try to find ways to turn every concern into at least an article or two. Last year we were approached by a member who was concerned about Chinese government-sponsored Confucius Institutes at American colleges and universities. We secured a grant to study the problem and will shortly publish a report. A few months ago another member complained to us about the weaponizing of Freedom of Information requests to attack scholars. We turned that into a symposium on the good and bad sides of FOIA requests that was published in the Spring 2016 issue of *Academic Questions*.

Other questions? Just ask me, at [pwood@nas.org](mailto:pwood@nas.org) or (917) 551-6770.

Please do consider joining the National Association of Scholars. We are more than an organization. We are a movement of scholars and intellectuals who are fighting to preserve a key part of the legacy of Western civilization. You can help.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Wood", written in a cursive style.

Peter Wood  
President