

# Information

## NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF THEATRE

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### Introduction

The major activities of the National Association of Schools of Theatre are the accreditation of educational programs in theatre and the establishment of curricular standards and guidelines. NAST is recognized by the United States Department of Education as the accrediting agency for the field of theatre. The Association has approximately 187 member institutions, including public and private colleges and universities, as well as independent professional training institutions. All NAST member institutions meet accreditation standards and uphold the Code of Ethics of the Association as stated in the *NAST Handbook*.

In addition to the accreditation function of the Association, NAST publishes books and newsletters, holds an annual meeting, and provides information to the general public about educational programs in theatre.

### A Brief History of the Association

The National Association of Schools of Theatre was established in 1965 to improve educational practices and to maintain high professional standards in theatre education. During its early years, NAST was an affiliate organization of the American Theatre Association. In 1980, a national office was established and NAST became an autonomous accrediting organization and part of the National Office for Arts Accreditation. In 1982, NAST was recognized by the United States Department of Education. NAST initiated its Annual Meeting and Retreat for Administrators of Theatre Programs in Higher Education in 1986.

### The Objectives of the Association

The Association is established to develop a closer relationship among schools and programs of theatre for the purpose of examining and improving practices and professional standards in theatre education and training. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To establish a national forum to stimulate the understanding and acceptance of the educational disciplines inherent in the creative arts in higher education in the United States.
2. To establish threshold standards centered on the knowledge and skills necessary to develop academic and professional competence at various program levels.
3. To foster the development of instruction of the highest quality while simultaneously encouraging varied and experimental approaches to the teaching of theatre.
4. To evaluate, through the process of voluntary accreditation, schools of theatre and programs of theatre instruction in terms of their quality and the results they achieve, as judged by experienced examiners.
5. To assure students and parents that accredited institutions offering theatre programs provide competent teachers, adequate physical plant and equipment, and sound curricula, and are capable of attaining their stated objectives.
6. To counsel and assist institutions in developing their programs and to encourage self-evaluation and continuing studies toward improvement.
7. To invite and encourage the cooperation of professional theatre groups and individuals of reputation in the field of theatre in the formulation of appropriate curricula and standards.

8. To maintain a national voice to be heard in matters pertaining to theatre, particularly as they would affect member institutions and their stated objectives.

### **The Association's Role as a Specialized, Professional Accrediting Agency**

NAST recognizes the need to find ways of clarifying and maintaining standards in theatre through responsible education in theatre. By means of accreditation, it can encourage those institutions that consistently give students a sound basis for significant future accomplishments in the theatre. Accreditation also imposes on those institutions the responsibility for continual effort to strengthen theatre education in general—in both accredited and not-yet-accredited schools. In addition, it provides a basis for public recognition of an institution's quality.

The development of NAST as the accrediting agency for theatre education has placed upon the Association the following responsibilities: to maintain high educational standards; to safeguard the profession against inadequately prepared educators and practitioners; to disseminate information on accreditation to institutions, counselors, teachers, parents, and students; to guard against improper non-educational pressures on individuals and institutions; and to consider other important educational problems and issues. The Association recognizes and accepts these responsibilities.

### **Procedures for NAST Membership**

The two basic procedures for Membership in NAST are institutional self-study and peer evaluation. The self-study is designed to produce a comprehensive effort on the part of the institution to evaluate its own programs while considering its objectives.

Peer evaluation provides professional, objective judgment from outside the institution, and is accomplished through an on-site visitation, a formal Visitors' Report, and Commission review.

NAST publishes procedural documents. Institutions seeking Membership should visit the NAST [website](#), or [contact the National Office](#) for appropriate materials.

### **Consultative Visits**

During preparation for application for Membership, an institution may wish to request a [consultative visit](#). From a slate provided by NAST, the institution may select a consultant experienced in the accreditation process in theatre to visit the campus for one or more days to assist in developing or revising degree programs, to determine the readiness of the institution to apply for Membership in NAST, or to provide other appropriate services. The consultant is hired by and works for the institution. Since the consultant may not act as an NAST evaluator for the institution when application for Membership is made, his or her recommendations are purely advisory in nature, and do not affect later accreditation decisions.

### **Individual Membership**

NAST maintains an [individual membership](#) category open to interested individuals. It is a useful, optional service provided by NAST. Individual members are informed about, but have no vote in, the activities of the Association.

Individual Membership is designed especially for theatre executives and faculty members of institutions preparing for NAST accredited institutional Membership. The theatre executive is encouraged to become an individual member during the application phase of the process.

### **Accredited Institutional Membership**

Institutions meeting Association standards for accreditation shall be accorded Membership following review under applicable NAST procedures.

It is the policy of the Association to reexamine accredited institutional members on a regular cycle, the period of which shall not exceed ten years. However, the Commission on Accreditation has the authority to require reexamination at any time upon prior notification to the institution.

Institutions eligible to apply for Membership include independent theatre schools, colleges, universities, two-year institutions and institutions offering graduate work only. Institutions may be degree- and/or non-degree-granting.

- A. Associate Membership** may be granted to baccalaureate and/or graduate degree-granting institutions, community/junior colleges, and non-degree-granting institutions applying for the first time that meet all curricular standards and all other applicable standards of the Association, and which are developing in areas related to purposes or operations. Accreditation with Associate Membership is valid for up to five years. At the end of this period, such institutions will be required to demonstrate substantial progress in areas under development and to satisfy all criteria for Membership in the Association.
- B. Membership** is granted to institutions meeting all of the standards of the Association. Institutions approved for Membership are granted five-year periods of accreditation. At the end of five years, such institutions are expected to apply for renewal of Membership. Institutions approved for renewal of Membership are granted ten-year periods of accreditation.

The standards for institutional Membership are published annually in the NAST [Handbook](#). When applicable, new or amended standards that have been ratified by the NAST Membership and/or the Board of Directors are available as addenda to the *Handbook*.

### **The Development of Standards and Guidelines for Accreditation**

In presenting its standards and guidelines for member institutions, NAST reaffirms its special commitment to those principles of voluntary accreditation that encourage differences among institutions and respect for operational integrity within institutions.

The standards and guidelines are presented, not as a set of rules and regulations to be enforced through rigid procedures, but as a synthesis of current thought about professional training in the theatre to be used as part of the peer review process of accreditation.

In this process, standards and guidelines provide a point of departure for (a) the dialogue occurring within the institution as part of the self-study process, (b) the institution's discussions with the visiting team, and (c) the exchange of views between the institution and the Commission on Accreditation.

Therefore, the standards and guidelines are also intended to provide the public at large with a comprehensive document outlining the attributes of professional training programs in theatre. These attributes are presented as the parts of a framework within which each institution develops the specifics of its unique program. *In no case should "standards and guidelines" imply standardization.*

### **Basic Criteria for Membership for Non-Degree-Granting Institutions**

The National Association of Schools of Theatre accredits non-degree-granting institutions. Programs in these institutions may or may not lead to a professional diploma or certificate. The primary purpose of all such schools should be to provide the best possible environment for the artistic growth of their students. Such an environment should foster an understanding of the arts and their contribution to society.

Unless specified otherwise below, regardless of institutional type, the composite institution offering non-degree-granting programs must meet the following Basic Criteria for Membership:

1. The institution shall maintain a curricular program in theatre at various levels according to the needs of its students.

2. The institution shall offer, as part of its regular program, studies reflecting attention to such areas as theatre history and criticism. Such studies may be in addition to, or in conjunction with, production studies.
3. The institution offering postsecondary professional education and training programs must offer at least one non-degree curricular program at the undergraduate level requiring at least 30 semester hours or the equivalent, or one non-degree curricular program at the graduate level requiring at least 15 semester hours or the equivalent. Such institutions shall offer at least one curricular program that meets all appropriate standards that (a) has been completed by students, (b) has an enrollment of at least three students, and (c) is progressing students toward completion.
4. The institution shall have been in operation for at least three consecutive years and shall maintain its programs on a regular academic-year or year-round basis.
5. The institution's legal authority shall be clearly stated in its published materials as identified by its charter, structure of control, profit or non-profit status, and any affiliation with a parent institution.
6. All policies regarding the admission and retention of students, those pertaining to the school's evaluation of progress through its educational program, as well as those concerning the operation of certificate or diploma programs, shall be clearly defined in literature published by the institution.
7. All tuition, fees, and other charges, as well as all policies pertaining thereto, shall be clearly described in the institution's published literature.
8. Faculty members shall be qualified by educational background and/or professional experience for their specific teaching assignments. The institution shall list its faculty in its published literature.
9. The institution shall provide in its institutional catalog a complete description of each course or program offered.
10. Although only federal and state governments shall have legal jurisdictional powers and responsibilities in matters of public law, the institution should develop an appropriate code of ethical standards governing institutional and programmatic practices that recognizes social concerns relevant to quality education.
11. The institution shall have facilities and equipment adequate to the needs of its educational program.
12. The institution shall have either library space or holdings adequate for its educational programs, or shall have made arrangements for its students and faculty to have access to appropriate library facilities in the immediate area.
13. The institution shall demonstrate a commitment to a program of continuous self-evaluation.
14. The institution shall be licensed or chartered to operate as required by local and state legal codes. The institution shall meet all legal requirements to operate wherever it conducts its activities. Multipurpose institutions offering programs in theatre and in other disciplines shall be accredited by the appropriate regional or institutional accrediting agency, unless such accreditation is not available.
15. The institution shall provide (or, in the case of foreign studies programs, be responsible for) all coursework or educational services to support its educational programs, or demonstrate that any cooperative or contracted coursework or educational services are provided by an outside institution or organization having accreditation as an entity by a nationally recognized accrediting agency.

NAST recognizes that the terms *diploma* and *certificate* are used for the recognition of collegiate level work.

### **Basic Criteria for Membership for Degree-Granting Institutions**

The National Association of Schools of Theatre recognizes many types of programs in degree-granting institutions. The primary purpose for all institutions, whatever types of programs they offer, should be to provide the best

possible environment for education and training in theatre. Such an environment should foster an understanding of the arts and an attitude of respect for their potential contribution to society.

Applicants for accreditation as degree-granting members are two-year, four-year, or five-year undergraduate or graduate level institutions. Accredited institutions shall meet the following Basic Criteria for Membership:

1. The institution shall maintain a curricular program of education and training in theatre.
2. The institution shall offer at least one complete degree program, e.g., Bachelor of Fine Arts, Bachelor of Arts with a major in Theatre, et al., or shall provide the theatre component of a degree program offered in conjunction with an accredited degree-granting institution.
3. The institution shall have graduated at least one class of students who have been through the institution's own program from beginning to final year, and another class shall be in readiness subject to examination.
4. Institutions offering one or more graduate programs as their only degree programs shall have graduated at least two students from at least one graduate program that meets all applicable standards, and shows evidence of continuing enrollment. If institutions offer undergraduate and graduate programs, graduate programs must have graduate students matriculated or in residence, or have received Plan Approval from the Commission on Accreditation.
5. The institution's legal authority shall be clearly stated in its published materials as identified by its charter, authority to grant degrees, structure of control, profit or non-profit status, and any affiliation with a parent institution.
6. All policies regarding admission and retention of students, as well as those pertaining to the school's evaluation of progress, shall be clearly defined in literature published by the institution.
7. All tuition, fees, and other charges, as well as all policies pertaining thereto, shall be clearly described in the institution's published literature.
8. Faculty members shall be qualified by educational background and/or professional experience for their specific teaching assignments. The institution shall list its faculty in its published literature.
9. The institution shall have facilities and equipment commensurate with the needs of its educational program.
10. The institution shall have library space and resources commensurate with the needs of its educational program.
11. The institution shall demonstrate a commitment to a program of continuous self-evaluation.
12. The institution shall be licensed or chartered to operate as required by local and state legal codes. The institution shall meet all legal requirements to operate wherever it conducts its activities. Multipurpose institutions offering degrees in theatre and in other disciplines shall be accredited by the appropriate regional or institutional accrediting agency.
13. The institution shall provide (or, in the case of foreign studies programs, be responsible for) all coursework or educational services to support its educational programs, or demonstrate that any cooperative or contracted coursework or educational services are provided by an outside institution or organization having accreditation as an entity by a nationally recognized accrediting agency.

### **Standards and Guidelines of the Association**

The complete standards and guidelines for NAST, published in the *Handbook* of the Association, provide a basic framework for the accreditation process, thus allowing objective analysis of curricula. They are meant to be the basis for dialogue (a) within an institution as the self-study is being developed, (b) between an institution and the Association (the visiting evaluators and the Commission), and (c) between the Association and the public as a whole.

The Association does not attempt to develop detailed formulas, plans of course work, or other inflexible specifications that might impinge on the freedom of institutions to develop individual programs. Instead, NAST has developed standards and guidelines that are specific enough to ensure a certain level of educational quality, but are not so restrictive as to stifle experimentation, innovation, and individuality of program content.

In addition to the Basic Criteria for Membership noted above, the *Handbook* contains standards and guidelines for programs in theatre in the following areas:

- *Standards for Purposes and Operations.* Purposes of the Institution and Theatre Unit; Size and Scope; Finances; Governance and Administration; Faculty and Staff; Facilities, Equipment, Health, and Safety; Library and Learning Resources; Recruitment, Admission-Retention, Record Keeping, and Advisement; Published Materials and websites; Community Involvement; Articulation with Other Schools; Evaluation, Planning, and Projections; and so forth.
- *Theatre Program Components.* Credit and Time Requirements; Time on Task, Curricular Proportions, and Competencies; Forms of Instruction, Requirements, and Electives; Independent Study; Distance Learning; and so forth.
- *Undergraduate Program in Theatre*
- *Admission to Undergraduate Study*
- *Two-Year Degree-Granting Programs*
- *Liberal Arts Degree with a Major in Theatre*
- *All Professional Baccalaureate Degrees in Theatre*
- *Specific Professional Baccalaureate Degrees in Theatre*
- *Baccalaureate Degrees in Theatre Education*
- *Baccalaureate Degrees in Preparation for Advanced Professional Study*
- *Graduate Programs in Theatre*
- *Admission to Graduate Study*
- *Specific Initial Graduate Degree Programs*
- *Specific Terminal Degrees*
- *Non-Degree-Granting Programs in Theatre*
- *Admission to Non-Degree-Granting Programs in Theatre*
- *Specific Professional Non-Degree-Granting Programs*
- *Specific Operational Standards for Free-Standing Theatre Institutions of Higher Education*
- *Specific Operational Standards for Proprietary Schools*

## **Code of Ethics**

NAST member institutions have agreed to abide by the Code of Ethics of the Association. It contains statements on ethical concerns in areas such as faculty appointments, financial aid, advertising, and the school's responsibility to the student. The Association has formal procedures for reviewing complaints directed against member institutions. All formal complaints are reviewed by the Commission on Accreditation or the Committee on Ethics, composed of representatives elected by the membership.

## The Governance of the Association

The officers of the Association are the President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer, all of whom are elected by the membership; and the Executive Director, who is appointed by the Board. The officers, four directors elected by the membership, two representatives of the general public, the Chair of the Commission on Accreditation, and the Immediate Past President constitute the Board of Directors of NAST.

NAST maintains a Commission on Accreditation to review membership applications. The Commission consists of a Chair, two public members, and seven representatives elected by the membership.

The Association also maintains a Committee on Ethics and a Committee on Nominations.

## Other Services of the Association

**Website.** NAST maintains extensive information and current materials on its website.

**National Office.** NAST maintains a professional staff of 15 (14 full- and two part-time) at its National Office in Reston, Virginia. The staff provides technical services, information, and assistance to members of the Association and interested individuals in areas related to theatre training, education, and the arts. Staff members also carry out the administrative functions of the Association, including accreditation coordination, accounting, correspondence, and policy analysis. The Association offers a comprehensive list of publications on its website. It also collects and makes available comprehensive data regarding theatre programs and institutions.

**Directory.** The Association publishes a searchable, online Directory list that provides the names of all member institutions, their addresses, telephone numbers, theatre executives, and degree programs. The *Directory* is the official accreditation listing for NAST member institutions. The Association also makes [mailing labels](#) available for purchase through its website.

**Handbook.** The *Handbook*, published annually in electronic form, includes NAST Standards for educational programs in theatre as well as the Association's Constitution, Bylaws, Code of Ethics, and Rules of Practice and Procedure. When applicable, new or amended standards that have been ratified by the NAST Membership and/or the Board of Directors are available as addenda to the *Handbook*.

**Statistical Services.** NAST participates annually in the Higher Education Arts Data Services (HEADS) project, an ad hoc coalition designed to gather statistics on the arts in higher education. HEADS provides yearly statistical compilations about enrollment, degrees awarded, admission, graduation, faculty, administration, operational expenditures, credit hour production, fees, and student demographics, organized by size and type of institution. Statistics are stored on computer for use in "Special Reports," a service that allows schools to compare themselves to a selected group of other institutions. "Special Reports" provide comparative statistics for samplings as small as ten institutions in most categories of HEADS data.

**Notices.** During the academic year, NAST publishes various items of information, annual meeting content and registration, reports of Commission actions, drafts of proposed changes to the *Handbook*, descriptions of activities of interest to theatre executives, discussions of national arts policy issues, and so forth. Such notices can be found under [About NASD](#) on the NAST website.

**Annual Meeting.** NAST holds an annual meeting in March. Sessions at the annual meeting are designed to include topics of interest to individuals involved in theatre training. Included are meetings by type of institution, interest group sessions, and workshops. Papers presented at the meeting, when available, are published in the [Past Annual Meetings](#) section of the NAST website.

### **A Summary of Benefits of Institutional Membership**

NAST offers many services to member institutions:

- Constructive evaluation of programs through the accreditation process.
- Advice and counsel concerning new curricula.
- Periodic research studies of topics pertinent to education in theatre.
- Information concerning developments in theatre, the arts, education, and related matters.
- Data compiled from the annual reports of member institutions filing a comprehensive picture of theatre in higher education.
- Publications containing information and basic standards for the education of theatre professionals.
- National forums for discussion of issues, concerns, and opportunities.

*For further information, please contact:*

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