

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF THEATRE**

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Dear Colleagues:

It is increasingly clear that our higher education system is under severe pressure on several fronts. At the federal level alone, the Higher Education Act is yet to be reauthorized after four years of effort; the Commission on the Future of Higher Education empanelled by Secretary Spellings has presented analyses and made recommendations that some applaud but many find deeply troubling, and the Secretary has started a process for changing regulations about the federal connection with accreditation without having new legislation for guidance, this after a bi-partisan cautionary letter from a number of U.S. Senators and strong objections from the higher education and accrediting communities.

Under such conditions, it is critical to understand what is at stake, keep calm, think deeply, and act responsibly. One function of NAST is to provide information and analysis that supports individual considerations and decision making. Given the present and developing situation, I hope that you will read further and consider your own situation and position carefully. The future freedom and independence of American higher education are at stake.

To help fulfill NAST's responsibilities, over the next few months, I will be sending a series of e-mail briefing letters addressing various issues associated with the nature, purpose, and structure of the accreditation and other evaluation systems or concepts and their relationships to institutions, programs, the professions, and the federal government.

The officers and the staff of NAST need your understanding of this information if they are to serve you in an optimum way in the times ahead.

Given recent generic attacks on the accreditation system, and potential political developments in this arena, it is important for all of us to be conversant with first principles and basic operational structures. Individuals in accredited institutions need to have a clear understanding of facts, issues, and options so that they are able to reflect and respond in thoughtful and sophisticated ways.

The second letter will follow in a few days and will deal with the most strategic issue of all: the freedom and independence of institutions of higher education depends on the freedom and independence of accrediting agencies and the entire accreditation system.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Best wishes.

Samuel Hope  
NAST Executive Director