

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF THEATRE
ANNUAL MEETING 2018**

NAST President's Report

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Good afternoon and welcome to the 53rd Annual Meeting of the National Association of Schools of Theatre, held in this beautiful city of Portland, Oregon, a city rich with diversity in theatre. We offer appreciation to the Hilton for the service provided to attendees, and as well to the Portland Center Stage and the Artist's Repertory Theatre for extending a reduction in ticket prices to individuals attending this Annual Meeting. NAST has worked throughout the year to prepare this year's program - one that incorporates suggestions from the membership and constituencies, and important current issues that relate directly to our roles and purposes as institutional representatives responsible for leading higher education programs in theatre. We appreciate the feedback provided that assisted NAST to finalize the program.

Beyond the issues we will discuss here in Portland, the world in which we live today presents us with no shortage of topics related to training in theatre that we may wish to discuss during our lunch and dinner conversations, for those discussions, too, help us to build and strengthen our bonds as a community of artists.

My address today will focus on two important topics: leadership and legacy; topics which align with this year's themes of advocacy, leadership, and engagement.

As we know, NAST is an organization of leaders, individuals responsible for administering theatre programs in institutions of higher education, individuals who have accepted a daunting responsibility - to ensure that our students are educated and trained at the highest level. It might be safe to say that none of us went to graduate school expecting or planning to become department chairs, deans, provosts, or the like. Instead, these positions of leadership happened upon us, found us - probably because we have exhibited skills, hold values, acquired qualities necessary to manage in the academy in the most vital ways. In my own life, I am fortunate to have been offered opportunities when I was not seeking them. I describe it as someone putting a stepping-stone in front of me. My decision to step forward has meant that I said "yes" (or perhaps "yes, and"). The stones have been of different shapes, sizes, and colors, but they've created a gloriously beautiful path of challenge and opportunity that has allowed me to make a difference. One of the stones in the path led me to this position. I took great care in considering my decision, as the shoes of those who had served the organization before me were large and, in my opinion, difficult to fill. However, what has always intrigued me about NAST is the opportunity to be able to contribute to the national conversation that is focused on the training of theatre artists, and encourage others to do the same. For the conversation to be meaningful, we need multiple perspectives. I also

value getting to know the institutions and members of this organization, a condition which offers the opportunity to broaden collaborations, deepen understandings of curricula that will serve our 21st century students, and hone our ability to assess our own efforts in this regard.

So here we are, leaders we. Why have we accepted the mantle? The role of administrator seems to fall somewhere between the patron and protector, and the enforcer and entrepreneur. Perhaps we agreed to serve because in our former lives as faculty we experienced the work of an effective administrator. We saw how significantly an individual was able to improve the productivity of the team, succeed under pressure, expand emotional intelligence, use developed charisma, improve listening and communication skills, and affect creativity and innovation. More directly, as administrators, we can create a course and production schedule that effectively accommodates faculty and students, manage a budget that will support a defined effort, represent or be the face of the unit at institution-wide meetings and events, and hold pride and feel the exhilaration that results when resources we fought for were obtained to support a faculty initiative or a student scholarship. Having served as both a chair and a dean, I can say without hesitation that my ability to sleep well at night was directly related to my ability to solve the sort of problems that we face. The work of the theatre administrator is student-centered; it is student-driven to a great extent. We are steeped in assisting students to resolve conflict, graduate on time, to understand fact and nuance and tell the difference between them. We are advocates for increased budgets, sponsorships of our production series, improved facilities, and faculty and staff positions. And, like all theatre faculty, our reward often comes in witnessing the empowering transformations that occur within our theatres.

The 21st century theatre administrator is the lynchpin of the academic organization. Is this reason enough for us to have accepted the challenge? Is it reason enough for others to consider serving in such roles? If so, several questions arise. How do we cultivate the body of scholars, intellects, and achievers who will follow us and be the caretakers of the garden we've collectively landscaped? What must we acknowledge about the realities of leading an academic program, about the realities those who succeed us will see? Certainly, higher education looks different today than it did twenty years ago. It looks different today than it did yesterday. As an example, today's students are concerned about the cost of higher education, about access and availability, about the value they will reap from their higher education experience. We see first-hand the effects brought about by the decline in state and private support, campus tensions, and attacks on academic freedom. Families focus on whether curricular programs will ensure that their children are career-ready; they focus on issues of job placement and time to completion. We are further challenged by demographic shifts that offer us enrollees who are neither 18 years of age nor fresh out of high school. As well, 73 percent of higher educational students are considered non-traditional, meaning they may be working while attending school, studying part-time or through alternative delivery systems, or supporting a family. Also, students learn in different ways, which suggests the need for consideration of pedagogical reforms that will enable the incorporation of the newest technology and media into existing modes of delivery. Nevertheless, the university maintains a stronghold in its place in the global higher education system, which is

increasingly driven by knowledge, information, and ideas. So, considering these changes, the changes we've witnessed with regard to the 21st century student, and the legislative implications such as those of the Higher Education Act, our programs not only rely on strong leadership, they thirst for it. We need leaders who will stand up; speak the truth; plan, defend, and protect our curricular programs; and attend to the future of our graduates.

At any given time, several if not many institutions are in the process of succession planning - sitting administrators move on, prepare to retire, and the like. These departures create vacuums, which we must fill, and fill with those who are charged to nurture our legacy. What are the pathways we can provide to those whose skills appear to include leadership? How do we identify those who, though perhaps not seeking the position, would serve the academy well? Elizabeth Lehfeldt, in an article published in the Chronicle of Higher Education in 2015 posits, "Too often, I think, the chair's position rotates through a department according to some unspoken matrix of seniority, martyrdom, and desire to keep it from falling into the wrong hands." She further suggests that some may choose to serve for release time or a bump in salary, noting that while true, these are not the best reasons to serve.

This is one way to look at the task. I suggest there is another. Let's celebrate the effect we can have, the change we can facilitate - change that benefits our students, our faculty, and our profession. But to do so, we must be or become expert in our administrative prowess. But how?

It is good to note that, in the absence of training provided by our own institutions, there exist abundant external possibilities. Of particular note and value are those that focus explicitly on leading a theatre program. NAST is one such organization that provides a wealth of experiences for the theatre executive, whether these be pre-meeting workshops for new and seasoned theatre administrators, or sessions that offer relevant content and necessary opportunities for dialogue. Over the course of any Annual Meeting, participants hear from presenters and participate in discussions focused on a plethora of topics important to the field, as this year's Annual Meeting program will reflect.

If you have attended a previous Annual Meeting, you know how valuable these sessions can be, and on some level, I suspect that developing your own leadership skills has proven immeasurably useful. Perhaps, in addition, we should be cultivating leaders regardless of their administrative aspiration. Through leadership training and service, we are afforded the opportunity to lengthen our perspective, to move from the front row to the balcony. NBC-Universal led a public service initiative using "The More You Know" as its slogan. It would seem that the "more we know," the better we can evaluate situations, the better we can understand, and the better we can appreciate the complexity of the whole, rather than just the single pieces.

Truly, our involvement with our national accrediting organization provides us with the opportunity to engage with one another, share our stories of success and failure, create leadership teams who mentor and exchange resources, and deepen our understanding of and commitment to the standards of NAST, which, after all, are the pillars on which we as theatre administrators stand. It is important to remember that we develop these national

standards, and therefore we not only strive to uphold them, we value what they stand for and what they say about our work and its rigor. They guide us as we develop our programs, and encourage us to aim high, to create, to innovate. They assist us to advocate for our students and our work. For accreditation, with all its trimming, is advocacy, pure and simple.

I remember, all too well, attending an annual NAST meeting, when, heading to the elevator after a day of meetings, a member of the Board extended an invitation to join other registrants for dinner. Rather than head to my room for the evening, I joined a group of then strangers, who would soon be strangers no more. As a result of that single event, a stone was placed in my pathway. Surely each of you has a similar story to tell. It's up to us, all of us, to think about how we will provide stones, stones that will encourage others to become the leaders of tomorrow. It is up to us to decide what legacy we will leave to them. Lin-Manuel Miranda offers of poignant statement in Hamilton, in this verse from his song, "The World Was Wide Enough."

"What is a legacy? It's planting seeds in a garden you never get to see."

May you begin your planting, sow your seeds, and see the benefits of your tender care of the shoots.

I hope you take advantage of all aspects of this Annual Meeting. If we may at any time provide assistance, I hope you will not hesitate to ask. Thank you.