

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF THEATRE
51st Annual Meeting
and
Retreat for Administrators of Theatre Programs in Higher Education

March 16 – 19, 2016

Report of the Executive Director

The 2015-2016 academic year marks NAST's 51st season of service to its members and to the field. Efforts to support and advance the theatre profession in the United States remain at the core of the Association's projects. Its work in various areas, including accreditation, professional development, research, and monitoring and analyzing policy surrounding higher education and the arts, is continually being reviewed, discussed, improved, and enhanced. As NAST serves an ever-growing and diverse membership, its projects in accreditation and beyond continue to broaden and evolve. The Association's principal activities during the past year are presented below.

Accreditation Standards and Procedures

Much of the yearly work of NAST involves accreditation. This includes preparation for meetings of the Commission on Accreditation; scheduling accreditation visits; arranging consultations for member and potential member institutions; communicating with institutions preparing accreditation materials; receiving and reviewing accreditation materials; and developing standards, guidelines, resources, and educational programs in support of the accreditation review process. All individuals involved in these activities—including institutional representatives, faculty and staff members, NAST Commissioners, visiting evaluators, consultants, presenters, and staff members—work to make this service a valuable component in the advancement of theatre programs for institutions in higher education.

In August of 2015, NAST announced its intention to begin a multi-year comprehensive review of its standards. This process, now underway, is intended to focus on the following groups of standards currently found in the NAST *Handbook*: Graduate Programs, Undergraduate Programs, Non-Degree-Granting Programs, applicable Appendices, and Purposes and Operations. NAST began in the fall of 2015 by opening a review of its graduate standards. Mailings, which included materials under review and instructions regarding the submission of comments, were distributed to accredited institutional members including administrators, faculty, staff and students; non- and potential member institutions; the higher education community including regional, specialized, and national accreditors; related organizations and associations; and the general public. Although particular focus is devoted to the graduate standards, the standards as a whole will remain open for comment during this time of review. This is particularly important, as there are relationships between and among standards. Consideration of these relationships will be included in review conversations, and used to inform ongoing and later phases of the comprehensive review process.

Subsequent to the comment period, NAST will hold an Open Hearing during its 51st Annual Meeting in Louisville. Feedback collected during the fall comment period and that collected during the Open Hearing will be reviewed by the National Office staff, and considered by the appropriate bodies within NAST. Individuals should feel free to contact the office of the Executive Director at any time if views are held that would assist the Association in this review process and its ongoing work.

Concurrent with the comprehensive review of the standards, NAST is currently reviewing its *Procedures* documents. The new editions of the *Procedures* documents are intended to be released in time for the 2016-2017 academic year. NAST requests your participation in this process and looks forward to your thoughtful contributions.

Institutions undergoing accreditation reviews are reminded to use the versions of the *Handbook* and *Procedures* that are current at the time of the review. Brief additions or amendments are added from time to time. Therefore, individuals are asked to review the most recent revision dates located on the inside cover of each document. Improvements made to these documents throughout the revision process are intended to help make the accreditation review process more clear and efficient.

An amended *Handbook* typically is released annually just after each Annual Meeting. The 2016-2017 *Handbook* is expected later this spring. *Handbooks* released just after Annual Meetings include any standards changes approved by the membership during the most recent meeting, as well as any amendments approved between Annual Meetings. The membership reviewed and approved standards changes in May 2015 and January 2016. These changes have been included in Addenda to the *Handbook*, and the NAST *Handbook 2015-2016*, both of which are available online. There are no proposed revisions to come before the membership for a vote during this Annual Meeting.

All current accreditation-related documents, templates, standards, and procedures are available for download from the Association's website at nast.arts-accredit.org. Institutions are reminded that the NAST framework does allow for flexibility in approach. To discuss available flexibilities that can assist to address local conditions and realities, and for assistance in using the *Procedures* and *Handbook*, please contact the NAST National Office staff.

The Association continues to encourage consideration of the use of the NAST review process or materials in other review contexts. Consolidating reviews may assist institutions to conserve resources and realize economies of scale. Many institutions are finding efficiencies by combining the NAST review with internal and/or other external reviews. The Association is willing to work with institutions and programs to consider options and to craft NAST reviews that are thorough, efficient, and suitably dovetailed with other internal and external efforts.

The Association is cognizant of the many hours devoted by member and applicant institutions to research, study, consider, prepare, and present accreditation materials for review by the Commission on Accreditation. NAST is deeply grateful for these efforts and congratulates the institutions for the many accomplishments and successes resulting from their work.

Projects

NAST participates in the Council of Arts Accrediting Associations (CAAA) with the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), National Association of Schools of Dance (NASD), and National Association of Schools of Music (NASM). The Council is tasked with reviewing issues that affect all four disciplines and their accreditation efforts. NAST President R. Terrell Finney, Jr. and Vice President Holly Logue are the theatre Trustees of the Council, and represented NAST during CAAA meetings held in January 2016. CAAA sponsors the Accrediting Commission for Community and Precollegiate Arts Schools (ACCPAS), which reviews arts-focused schools at the K-12 level. Currently, there are 16 institutions accredited by ACCPAS. This undertaking is valuable in that it assists to connect K-12 and higher education efforts. Bruce R. Halverson is the theatre appointee to ACCPAS.

The Higher Education Arts Data Services (HEADS) project continues to be refined and improved. Participation by member and non-member institutions remains strong. Following the close of the 2014-2015 HEADS Survey, the resultant Data Summaries were published in March 2015. Additional capabilities and services are added as time and financial resources permit. Periodically, minor adjustments to the Data Survey are made that are intended to clarify the submission process ensuring the collection of accurate and helpful data. Data Survey changes are followed by associated changes to the Data Summaries. Comparative data in the form of Special Reports are a feature of the HEADS system and can be valuable resources for administrators. These Special Reports and their possible uses will be discussed during the Annual Meeting at a session on Saturday morning and can be discussed at any time with staff in the National Office. The 2015-2016 data submission process closed on January 31, 2016. The current year's Data Summaries and access to Special Reports will be available later this spring. NAST welcomes thoughts and feedback regarding the HEADS project.

The Annual Meeting of NAST provides various opportunities for the discussion and dissemination of current information surrounding theatre study, higher education, administration, and related areas. A large number of individuals participate in the Annual Meeting program each year, producing sessions that provide helpful and thought-provoking ideas. The 2016 Annual Meeting will address issues such as the undergraduate curriculum; recruitment practices in small schools; student and faculty health and wellness; legal issues; assessment; and enhancing communication and collaboration between professional studio schools and colleges and universities. The meeting will also provide opportunities for discussion of the topics on the program, and those of interest to attendees. Member roundtables will be held, as will several informational sessions for individuals shepherding their institutions through the accreditation/reaccreditation process. Training opportunities will be offered for potential and experienced visiting evaluators. Informative sessions addressing the Higher Education Arts Data Services (HEADS) project, NAST resources and support services, and federal issues will also be offered.

Concurrent with the Annual Meeting, NAST is offering once again a Retreat for Administrators of Theatre Programs in Higher Education. The retreat is designed to address issues that directly affect theatre administrators such as working with faculty and administration, financial and time management, and leadership issues. There will be ample opportunity to discuss these topics and interact freely with other retreat attendees.

The Association is grateful to all those who developed specific agenda material for the Annual Meeting and Retreat for Administrators, as well as those who have agreed to serve as moderators and recorders.

Policy

The Association continues to follow and monitor carefully various federal and state initiatives and issues.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act first was authorized in 1965 as part of the "War on Poverty" legislation introduced by Lyndon Johnson in 1964. On December 10, 2015, following a showing of congressional bipartisan support, a bill entitled *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) was signed into law, which reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This new law, which takes effect on October 1, 2016, will replace the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) that expired in 2007 but had remained in force largely through a system of contingency-based waivers granted to states by the Department of Education. Within the ESSA, the arts are presented as one of many examples of subject matter that could potentially satisfy requirements for programs and activities that support access to a well-rounded education. Presently, the Department of Education has announced

its intention to enter into the negotiated rulemaking process in order to regulate portions of the law that are open for interpretation, including control and implementation.

Capitalizing on ESSA momentum, there is a strong desire to recraft the Higher Education Act (HEA) this year, which was last reauthorized in August 2008 and expired on December 31, 2013. However, election year events may slow progress in this regard. Issues of concern that continue and remain part of the ongoing conversation include gainful employment, state authorization, and teacher preparation. Joining this list are issues such as access, cost and completion; new pathways for collegiate study; student achievement; institutional responsibility; and excessive federal overreach. Two examples of this overreach include the Department of Education's recently announced initiative on transparency, and recent activities of the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau to review postsecondary institutions. The transparency initiative is of particular concern in that it includes executive actions and suggested legislative reform proposals (such as repealing the statutory prohibition on the Department's ability to set and enforce expectations regarding student achievement standards), which further encroach upon the autonomy and freedoms of institutions. Protecting and maintaining institutional autonomy and freedoms vital to the success of our educational system, and our pursuits of creative and innovative undertakings, remains paramount. Concerted effort will be needed to ensure that neither law nor the regulation that follows enable or allow federal reach beyond established and necessary boundaries.

NAST currently publishes advisories, which describe regulations associated with the 2008 law. These may be found within the publications section of the website and are titled *NAST Advisories on Federal Issues*.

Many policy challenges exist on local, national, and international levels; many exist beyond the horizon but, in time, will come into plain view. Unceasing efforts seem to exist that work to replace current systems, which are based on trust of expert knowledge and experience, and independence of institutions regarding academic matters, with centralized systems focused predominantly on methodologies, techniques, collection of copious amounts of information, and counting. NAST will continue to monitor ongoing events, actively participate in the conversations that address such issues, assist to provide detailed and thorough information, and keep the membership informed as issues and projects progress.

In addition to accreditation policy mentioned above, the Association remains concerned about tax policy, intellectual property, the preponderance of data collection and associated issues of privacy and confidentiality, a growing disparity in educational opportunity at the K–12 level, and the pace of cultural climate changes enabled by technological advances and their impact. Many contextual issues that affect NAST schools grow out of large social forces that can be understood but not influenced significantly. Economic cycles and downturns have a profound effect, but no single person or entity controls them. NAST continues to join with others in addressing policy approaches regarding deductions for charitable contributions on federal income tax returns. Increasing personal philanthropy is a critically important element in future support for education and the arts, particularly in these fluctuating economic times. NAST continues to monitor with concern proposals that would bring increased federal involvement in the activities of and control over nonprofit organizations and philanthropies.

National Office

The NAST National Office is located in Reston, one of the Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C., and the current terminus of Metro's Silver Line. The office is about eight miles east of Dulles International Airport, and approximately 20 miles from downtown Washington. We are delighted to welcome visitors to the National Office. Should your travels bring you to the area, please feel free to schedule an appointment with a staff member, or merely stop by for a visit.

The primary purpose of the National Office is to operate the Association under rules and policies established by the membership, the Board of Directors, and the Commission on Accreditation. Its strength rests in its peer governance operations and its peer review efforts. The work of the Association is carried out by many volunteers—elected officials, evaluators, meeting participants—all willing to donate their valuable time and expertise; all holding and exhibiting unwavering commitment to the field. Although the availability of time for each member has become ever more precious, the volunteerism in NAST continues to grow—a testament to the extraordinary spirit and dedication of its members. The work of our visiting evaluators and Commissioners is an exemplary expression of commitment to the field and of faith in the future.

This outstanding corps of volunteers is joined by a dedicated and capable National Office staff—Tracy L. Maraney, Anne Curley, Kyle Dobbeck, Paul Florek, Nora Hamme, Julia Harbo, Jenny R. Kuhlmann, Stacy A. McMahon, Erin Moscony, Lisa A. Ostrich, Ben Thompson, and Sarah Yount. At the current time, one position is vacant due to a recent retirement. As the number of accredited institutional members has grown, so has the work of the staff and the services to NAST over the years. Staff is focused on carrying out the daily work of the Association, developing new and refining old systems, assisting the burgeoning number of institutions seeking accreditation for the first time, and consulting with those seeking renewal of Membership. The staff is diligent in its efforts to assist and serve the institutions, and to carry out the responsibilities of NAST effectively.

As a staff, we are able to see on a daily basis the great foundational strength of NAST. Fundamental to this foundation is wisdom about the need to remain informed, communicate, and work together to build theatre in higher education as a whole, as well as in each member and applicant institution. NAST has realized great success in maintaining its focus on issues of importance to institutions and the field, and in working to address these issues. It promotes collegial connections and centers its work on concepts, conditions, and resources necessary for competence, creativity, and innovation. This foundation now strongly in place will serve NAST well as it faces changing and challenging times ahead.

The staff joins me in expressing appreciation for the support, cooperation, assistance, and kindness extended by the NAST membership. It is an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to serve NAST, its member institutions, and constituencies. We hope you will always feel free to contact the staff whenever you think we may provide assistance. We look forward to continuing our efforts together.

Please accept our heartfelt appreciation and best wishes as you continue your work throughout the year.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen P. Moynahan
Executive Director