

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF THEATRE
52nd Annual Meeting
and
Retreat for Administrators of Theatre Programs in Higher Education

March 15 – 18, 2017

Report of the Executive Director

The 2016-2017 academic year marks NAST's 52nd 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 reviewing 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 National Office staff members—work to make this service a valuable component in the advancement of theatre programs in institutions of 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 this review in the fall of 2015 by opening consideration of its graduate standards; the review of undergraduate standards began in the fall of 2016. Mailings, which included the text 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 undergraduate standards at this time, the standards as a whole remain open for comment. This is particularly important, as there are relationships between and among standards. Consideration of these relationships will be included in conversations pertaining to standards review, and used to inform ongoing and later phases of the comprehensive review process.

Subsequent to the comment period pertaining to the undergraduate standards, NAST will hold an Open Hearing during its 52nd Annual Meeting in Henderson, Nevada. Feedback collected during the open comment period, as well as 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 concluded a yearlong review of its *Procedures* documents in the summer of 2016. The new editions of the *Procedures* documents were released on September 1, in time for the 2016-2017 academic year. The September 2016 Edition of the *Procedures* documents will be in effect through 2024. Institutions undergoing accreditation reviews are reminded to use the versions of the *Handbook* and *Procedures* that are current at the time of the review.

An amended *Handbook* typically is released annually just after each Annual Meeting. The 2017-2018 NAST *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. There are no proposed revisions to come before the membership for a vote during this Annual Meeting.

All current accreditation-related documents, 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 various *Procedures* documents 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 on behalf of the field of theatre and congratulates the institutions and their representatives for the many accomplishments and successes resulting from their work.

Projects

NAST participates in the Council of Arts Accrediting Associations (CAAA) with NASAD (art and design), NASD (dance), and NASM (music). The Council is concerned with 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 2017. 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 pre-collegiate and higher education efforts. Marc Powers 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 information gathering process facilitated by the 2015-2016 HEADS Data Survey on January 31, 2016, the resultant Data Summaries were published in April 2016. 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 typically 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 an Annual Meeting session and can be discussed at any time with staff in the National Office. The 2016-2017 data submission

process closed on January 31, 2017. 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.

NAST concluded its year and a half long review and redesign of its website. The amended site was launched in late June of 2016. Users will notice not only a refreshed look, but also enhanced navigation, which facilitates access to NAST's comprehensive library of materials. The Association hopes users will visit the site often and become aware of the many resources available.

The NAST Annual Meeting provides various opportunities for the discussion and dissemination of current information surrounding theatre study, higher education, administration, and other related fields. A large number of individuals participate in the Annual Meeting program each year, producing sessions that provide helpful and thought-provoking ideas. The 2017 Annual Meeting will address culture-building in the theatre unit/institution as well as the impact culture has on curriculum design and curricular offerings; campus safety plans, FERPA, and Title IX; and how theatre units and institutions can anticipate, prepare for, and address the needs of incoming students. The meeting will also provide opportunities for discussion of the topics on the NAST program, and those of interest to attendees. Roundtables and forums will be held, as will several informational sessions for individuals guiding their institutions through the accreditation/reaccreditation process. Training opportunities will be offered for potential and experienced visiting evaluators. Informative sessions addressing NAST annual reporting requirements, administrative resources, and federal issues for theatre administrators 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 volunteered 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 (ESEA), first authorized in 1965 as part of the "War on Poverty" legislation introduced by Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964, was reauthorized and signed into law on December 10, 2015 through the passing of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA). This new law, which took effect on October 1, 2016, rewrites ESEA and replaces the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) that expired in 2007. The law is intended to return decision-making authority and control to states and school districts. Of particular note is the inclusion of the arts in the definition of a "well-rounded education." Such a statement is intended to ensure that arts education programs and teachers are eligible to receive federal funds. As is typically the case after the passing of new legislation, the Department of Education held negotiated rulemaking sessions in March and April of 2016 for the purpose of writing regulation intended to clarify several provisions of the law. Following these sessions, draft regulations were released for comment regarding a variety of topics including accountability and data reporting, assessment, and the classification of funds to "supplement" or "supplant" existing monies. Final regulations published by the Department of Education regarding accountability and data reporting (November of 2016) and assessment (December of 2016) are currently on hold due to federal action. Proposed regulations regarding the issue of "supplement" versus "supplant" were withdrawn by the Department of Education in early January of 2017.

Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) in 2017 is anticipated. This Act was last reauthorized in August of 2008 and expired on December 31, 2013. Issues of concern that continue and remain part of the ongoing conversation include gainful employment, state authorization, teacher preparation, and misrepresentation. Joining this list are issues such as access, cost and completion, new pathways for collegiate study, student achievement, institutional responsibility, borrower defense to repayment, and institutional obligations under Title IX. Excessive federal overreach remains a concern and is exemplified by the Department of Education's Transparency Initiative released on November 5, 2015. This initiative is problematic 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. Other concerns on the federal level include the recent desire and push from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to review postsecondary institutions, the Department of Labor's published overtime rule, blocked in November of 2016 by a preliminary injunction, and the National Labor Relations Board's recent ruling allowing for unionization of graduate students providing services at private institutions. As the previous administrative term drew to a close, higher education witnessed an unprecedented increase in regulatory activity. In November and December of 2016, the Department of Education released final regulations as part of the Higher Education Act of 2008 regarding state authorization, teacher preparation, and borrower defense to repayment that were subsequently placed on hold in 2017 by federal action. On February 7, 2017 the House of Representatives voted to overturn regulations regarding teacher preparation and accountability through action under the *Congressional Review Act*. To complete the nullification of the rules, the Senate must also vote to overturn these regulations and the president must sign the resolutions into law. Members and colleagues should continue to remain abreast of unfolding activities, study federal writings, and consider carefully the potential effects of proposed regulation. Concerted effort is needed to ensure that neither law nor the regulation that follows restricts the academy from designing and implementing effective programs of study. Protecting and maintaining institutional autonomy and freedoms vital to the success of our educational system, as well as our pursuits of creative and innovative undertakings, remains paramount.

NAST currently publishes advisories, which describe regulations associated with the 2008 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. These may be found within the Publications section of the website, are titled *NAST Advisories on Federal Issues*, and may be found to provide helpful summary information.

In addition to accreditation policy mentioned above, the Association remains concerned about implications of tax policy, intellectual property rights, 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 institutions 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 follow policy discussions 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 non-profit organizations and philanthropies.

NAST will continue to monitor ongoing events, actively participate in the conversations that pertain to such issues, assist to provide detailed and thorough information, and keep the membership informed as issues and initiatives progress.

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 each member's time becomes ever more precious, NAST continues to seek volunteers and enlist their assistance in the work of the Association. Such acts of support and volunteerism in NAST are 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 faith in the future.

This outstanding corps of volunteers is joined by a dedicated and capable National Office staff—Kyle Dobbeck, Erin Fiorelli, Paul J. Florek, Nora Hamme, Julia Harbo, Linda Kiemel, Jenny R. Kuhlmann, Tracy L. Maraney, Stacy A. McMahon, Lindsey N. Nikithser, Lisa A. Ostrich, Ben Thompson, and Sarah Yount. As the number of accredited institutional members has grown, so has the work of the staff and the services provided 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 and creativity. 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