

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF THEATRE**  
**53rd Annual Meeting**  
and  
**Retreat for Administrators of Theatre Programs in Higher Education**  
March 28–31, 2018  
**Report of the Executive Director**

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The 2017–2018 academic year marks NAST’s 53rd 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 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, Two-Year Programs, applicable Appendices, and Purposes and Operations. NAST began this review in fall 2015 by opening consideration of its graduate standards; the review of undergraduate standards began in fall 2016. In September 2017, NAST began a review of standards for non-degree-granting programs. 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 non-degree-granting 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 review conversations, and used to inform ongoing and later phases of the comprehensive review process.

Subsequent to the comment period pertaining to the standards for non-degree-granting programs, NAST will hold an Open Hearing during its 53rd Annual Meeting in Portland, Oregon. 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 as appropriate by the applicable 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.

An amended *Handbook* typically is released annually just after each Annual Meeting. The NAST *Handbook 2018-19* is expected later this spring. *Handbooks* released just after Annual Meetings include any standards changes approved by the membership, Board of Directors, and/or Commission as appropriate during the most recent meeting, as well as any amendments approved between Annual Meetings. Official notices regarding the proposed revision to the *Handbook* were disseminated January 26, 2018 and February 28, 2018. Following these two open and public official comment periods, the proposed revisions are slated for votes by the appropriate bodies during this Annual Meeting.

All current accreditation-related documents, standards, and procedures are available for download from the Association's website at <https://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 Holly Logue and Vice President Jim Hunter are the theatre Trustees of the Council, and represented NAST during CAAA meetings held in January 2018. 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 2016–2017 HEADS Data Survey on January 31, 2017, the resultant Data Summaries were published in April 2017. 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, thus ensuring the collection of accurate and helpful data. Data Survey changes typically are followed by associated changes to the Data Summaries. Enhancements to the 2017–2018 Data Survey include clarification of existing language and additional features that automatically check entered date. 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. NAST welcomes thoughts and feedback regarding the HEADS Project.

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 2018 Annual Meeting will address advocacy; the art of leadership; the importance of community engagement in the life of the theatre unit; curriculum design; and understanding copyright law in the classroom and theatre. The meeting will also provide opportunities for discussion of the topics on the NAST program, and those of interest to attendees. Roundtables and discussion groups 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.

NAST continues in 2018 its long-standing tradition of offering 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. Introduced in 2018 is a Pre-Meeting Workshop for Seasoned Theatre Administrators.

The Association is pleased to welcome each registrant and 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.

As a reminder, the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), first authorized in 1965 as part of the “War on Poverty” legislation introduced by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964, was reauthorized and signed into law on December 10, 2015 through passage of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA). This new law, which took effect October 1, 2016, rewrites ESEA and replaces the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), which expired in 2007. The law is intended to return decision-making authority and control to states and school districts. The federal government is currently implementing this Act through the application of law and regulation.

Activity regarding reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act* (HEA) began in earnest in late 2017. This Act was last reauthorized in August 2008 and expired December 31, 2013. Issues of concern include initiatives pertaining to 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. On December 12, 2017, the House Committee on Education and the Workforce voted along party lines (23-17) to advance a comprehensive bill to reauthorize the HEA. The bill, entitled the *Promoting Real Opportunity, Success, and Prosperity through Education Reform Act*, or the “PROSPER Act” (H.R. 4508), was introduced by Committee Chair Virginia Foxx (R-NC), and is expected to be taken up by the entire House for debate and a possible vote in 2018.

Key provisions of the bill include: the repeal of regulations regarding the definition of the credit hour, gainful employment, borrower defense to repayment; and the October 29, 2010 and December 19, 2017 state authorization regulations; changes to procedures and rules regarding borrower defense to repayment processes; language disallowing the Secretary from creating or enforcing rules related to gainful employment and the credit hour; the prevention of the creation or administration of a postsecondary institution rating system; language banning public colleges from restricting speech through speech zones or speech codes; the creation of new due process requirements regarding investigations and disciplinary hearings related to sexual assault allegations; the reauthorization of Pell Grants through FY 2024; the repeal of Academic Competitiveness Grants, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG), the Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (LEAP) Program, and the Robert C. Byrd Honors Scholarship; the elimination of cohort default rate calculations and implications thereof for federal student aid programs; and sunsets the Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grant program on June 30, 2018.

While the House has made rapid progress to advance its latest reauthorization bill, no such companion bill has yet been introduced in the Senate. The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP), chaired by Lamar Alexander (R-TN), has been attempting to reach bipartisan agreement on many of the issues during the bill writing process and has held a variety of hearings in early 2018 regarding reauthorization.

It is important to recall that these Acts govern the flow of federal monies earmarked for elementary, secondary, and higher education.

In November and December of 2016, the Department of Education released final regulations pertaining to state authorization, teacher preparation, and borrower defense to repayment. However, early in 2017 these regulations were subsequently placed on hold by federal action. On February 24, 2017, the current administration released an Executive Order titled, “Enforcing the Regulatory Reform Agenda.” This order required the Department of Education to convene a task force charged with the responsibility of identifying burdensome Department regulation and guidance, and suggesting action as appropriate. In May 2017, the Regulatory Reform Task Force published a progress report that identified at least 150 rules slated for additional consideration and action. The Task Force specifically identified borrower defense to repayment and gainful employment as regulations that required immediate attention. On June 16, 2017, the Department of Education published a final rule implementing an indefinite delay of the effective date of the borrower defense to repayment regulations, and noted its intent to establish a negotiated rulemaking committee to review and revise these regulations. In June and July of 2017, the Department of Education took a variety of actions pertaining to gainful employment regulations currently in force, including the establishment of a negotiated rulemaking committee to review and revise the regulations; the extension of the deadline from July 1, 2017 to July 1, 2018 for institutions needing to comply with aspects of the regulation; and the announcement of a new comment period and plan to rewrite the regulations. Negotiated rulemaking sessions for both sets of regulation will conclude in March 2018.

In September 2017, the Department of Education 1) rolled back Title IX guidance, specifically previous guidance offered in the 2011 “Dear Colleague” letter and the 2014 Question/Answer set; 2) issued interim guidance pertaining to Title IX; and 3) published notice of its intent to negotiate regulations pertaining to Title IX.

There is no doubt that the federal landscape associated with higher education has changed dramatically during the past year. Members and colleagues should continue to remain abreast of unfolding activities, study federal writings, and offer feedback pertaining to federal requests and 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 pursuit of creative and innovative undertakings, remains paramount.

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

On December 22, 2017, the *Tax Cuts and Jobs Act*—a comprehensive tax bill—became public law. Key changes affecting higher education include: a 1.4% “endowment tax” applicable to institutions with enrollments of at least 500 students, assets of \$500,000 or more per full-time student, and more than 50% of students located in the United States; the expiration of the “above the line” tuition and fees deduction, while maintaining the American Opportunity Tax Credit (AOTC) and the Lifetime Learning Tax Credit; an expansion to the deduction for charitable contributions so that taxpayers may contribute up to 60% of adjusted gross income rather than the previous contribution limit of 50%; an increase to the standard deduction (\$24,000 for joint filers, \$12,000 for individuals), which may translate into more filers claiming the standard deduction and fewer people choosing to itemize their tax returns and deduct their charitable giving; a \$10,000 deduction cap for state and local taxes; the ability for individuals enrolled in 529 plans (or, “qualified tuition plans”) to use funds for tuition at elementary and secondary schools; and the cessation of treatment of forgiven loans due to death or permanent disability as income.

On December 14, 2017, the commissioners of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) voted to repeal the “net neutrality” regulations that required Internet service providers (ISPs) to treat all online traffic equally. The move gives ISPs free rein both to speed up service for websites that they favor and those that pay a premium for “fast lane” service and, conversely, to slow down or simply block other sites. Many in higher education worry that this change could negatively impact both research and instruction, and result in higher broadband costs for institutions. Other critics of the repeal decry the implications for free speech and innovation. A number of state attorneys general have filed lawsuits that challenge the FCC’s decision.

NAST continues to monitor the recent change in leadership at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), noting that this change in direction appears to include a narrowing of purview in a variety of areas, such as higher education and accreditation.

On September 5, 2017, the current administration formally announced its plans to rescind the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, effective March 5, 2018. The policy allowed individuals who entered the United States as minors without legal status to apply for a renewable, two-year deferral from deportation and to be eligible for a work permit. At this time, there are approximately 790,000 individuals enrolled in the program, 350,000 of whom are enrolled in secondary or higher education. In January and February of 2018, federal judges in California and New York issued injunctions barring the end of DACA while various lawsuits move through the court system. In March 2018, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the administration's appeal of the January injunction, noting that the legal actions are expected to "proceed expeditiously" through the lower courts.

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, the 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 monitor 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. As well, NAST keeps a watchful eye on 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 address such issues, assist to provide detailed and thorough information, and keep the membership informed as issues and projects progress.

### **National Office**

The NAST National Office is located in Reston, a Virginia suburb of Washington, DC, 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, and 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 Commission members is an exemplary expression of our collective commitment to our field and faith in its 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, Linda Kiemel, Jenny R. Kuhlmann, Tracy L. Maraney, Stacy A. McMahon, Lisa A. Ostrich, and Sarah Yount. To support the work of accredited institutional members, the work of the staff and the services to NAST over the years have grown. Staff is focused on carrying out the daily work of the Association, developing new and refining old systems, assisting 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