

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF THEATRE
54th Annual Meeting
and
Retreat for Administrators of Theatre Programs in Higher Education

March 27–30, 2019

Report of the Executive Director

The 2018–2019 academic year marks NAST’s 54th 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; the review of non-degree-granting standards began in Fall 2017. Continuing its multiyear review of accreditation standards, in February of 2019 NAST began a review of standards pertaining to purposes and operations, two-year degree-granting programs, and applicable appendices. 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 at this time to standards pertaining to purposes and operations, two-year degree-granting programs, and applicable appendices, 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, NAST will hold an Open Hearing during its 54th Annual Meeting in Minneapolis, Minnesota. 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 2019–20* 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 revisions to the *Handbook* were disseminated January 21, 2019 and February 26, 2019. 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 2019. 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 precollegiate 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 2017–2018 HEADS Data Survey on January 31, 2018, the resultant Data Summaries were published in April 2018. 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. 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 2019 Annual Meeting will address student achievement, designing curricular programs, season selection in support of curricular goals and aspirations, establishing industry connections which align with curricular mission, artful leadership, legacy planning, intimacy training for faculty and students, and deepening awareness regarding student mental health issues. 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 2019 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.

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 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 Virginia Foxx (R-NC). In July 2018, House Democrats introduced a separate version of the Higher Education Act entitled *A bill to amend and strengthen the Higher Education Act of 1965 so that every student has a path to a quality, debt-free degree or credential that leads to a rewarding career*, or the “Aim Higher Act” (H.R. 6543). With the arrival of the 116th Congress, current and new House Committee Chair Bobby Scott (D-VA) and Ranking Member Virginia Foxx have announced a series of hearings as part of a formal effort to reauthorize the Higher Education Act during the 116th Congress.

While the House has made progress toward a 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 throughout 2018 regarding reauthorization. Chair Alexander has announced his upcoming retirement and desire to reauthorize the Higher Education Act before he departs from Congress.

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

As a reminder of past activities and events, following the release of final regulations in 2016 pertaining to state authorization, teacher preparation, and borrower defense to repayment, in 2017 these regulations were subsequently placed on hold by federal action. In July and August 2018, following delays of the implementation of recently approved rules related to borrower defense to repayment and gainful employment, the Department of Education announced a variety of new comment periods and plans to rewrite or rescind various regulations. In July 2018, the Department of Education announced the intention to form a negotiated rulemaking committee and requested comment regarding regulations related to the Secretary’s recognition of accrediting agencies. The Department included in the notice information of significance indicating that in addition, the committee would be tasked with reviewing federal definitions and requirements related to state authorization, the definition of “regular and substantive interaction” as it relates to correspondence and distance education, the definition of the credit hour, and direct assessment programs and competency-based education. Also in July 2018, the Department of Education issued a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) requesting comment related to federal standards concerning the evaluation of applications related to borrower defense to repayment. In August 2018, the Department of Education issued a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) requesting comment concerning the Department’s proposal to rescind regulations related to gainful employment. In

October 2018, the Department of Education issued its intention to establish a negotiated rulemaking committee on varied issues such as accreditation, distance learning, TEACH grants, and faith-based educational entities. Relatedly, in December 2018, the Department of Education released two documents with an intention to guide future policy proposals entitled, “Rethinking Higher Education” and “Rethinking Higher Education: Accreditation Reform.” Negotiated Rulemaking sessions on policy proposals noted in both documents began in January and are expected to continue through the end of March 2019. NAST will closely and carefully monitor the outcomes of these sessions.

In July 2018, the Justice Department and Department of Education through the publication of a “Dear Colleague” letter formally rescinded seven documents issued by the agencies between 2011 and 2016 which offered guidance related to Affirmative Action and the use of race by schools and colleges in decision-making processes.

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. An NAST Federal Advisory was sent regarding the November 2018 Department of Education release of a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking. This Notice requested comment regarding proposed regulations related to Title IX. It remains to be seen what changes will result from these actions.

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 provide helpful summary information. Review is highly recommended.

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, copyright and public domain, 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—Stephanie Blakely, Adèle-Marie Buis, Kyle Dobbeck, Paul J. Florek, Tiffany Govender, Nora Hamme, Linda Kiemel, Jenny R. Kuhlmann, Tracy L. Maraney, Stacy A. McMahon, and Lisa A. Ostrich. 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