

# **NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF THEATRE**

## **57<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting**

and

### **Retreat for Administrators of Theatre Programs in Higher Education**

March 23 – 26, 2022

## **Report of the Executive Director**

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Events occurring during the 2021–2022 academic year and their effects, much like the preceding year, continue to place before institutions offering education and training in theatre an array of challenges, unprecedented in nature and proportion. In addition to the attention that must continue to be devoted to our daily work, our time and energy have been captured by and diverted to consideration of a plethora of new realities—all of which can easily test our resolve. Throughout these many months, the members of NAST have remained true to their missions, unwavering in their commitment to educate to the highest-level students enrolled in theatre study. NAST applauds the unfailing and enduring efforts of its members and those involved in this noble pursuit. As we approach the 2022–2023 academic year, one marking NAST’s 57<sup>th</sup> season of service and support to its members and to the field, efforts to support and advance the theatre profession in the United States continue, as they remain at the core of the Association’s initiatives. The effectiveness of 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 and issues of note are presented below.

### **SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic**

In March of 2020, the higher education community and the country at large became aware of the onset of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic—powerful in its effect, swift in its ability to spread. The impact that the virus and its associated illness, COVID-19, have had on the work of the academy in these ensuing months has been substantial, disruptive, and in many cases, devastating. Operating in a time during which the provision of information is insufficient in breadth, depth, and consistency, institutions and their administrators, faculties, and staff members have worked tirelessly to reimagine how educational content is delivered, to reconfigure physical spaces, to redesign curricular programs, and to relearn how to communicate effectively. The creative capacity, will, and spirit of these individuals is evidenced in their efforts, monumental in nature, to continue to educate and train students enrolled in theatre study and to advance the artform of theatre, undertakings which at this time have never been more important given the role they play to coalesce, engage, encourage, and heal a nation of people thirsty for connection.

Informed by the understanding that the health and well-being of the individuals involved in the activities of NAST holds a predominant role in considerations, NAST’s work to support its accredited institutional members and constituencies through its accreditation, professional development, policy analysis, and research initiatives continues. Many initiatives remain unchanged in approach and execution; some have been modified; some altered to address current challenges faced.

### **Accreditation Standards and Procedures**

Much of the yearly work of NAST involves accreditation. This includes preparation for the 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 Commission on Accreditation members, 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, and theatre as a specific disciplinary field of study.

Maintaining its responsibility to review accreditation applications, the work of the Commission has continued without pause during these last two years, aided in large part by its ability to connect and conduct its business through virtual means. Although the number of comprehensive review considerations has decreased as several institutions have sought and received postponements of on-site comprehensive reviews, the agendas of the Commission have remained robust as the Commission has continued to review Responses, Progress Reports, Plan Approval and Final Approval for Listing applications, and requests for Substantive Change.

Throughout the last two years, NAST has taken steps to expand the breadth and depth of its pool of visiting evaluators. This has been accomplished through the provision of virtual training sessions for new evaluators. Noting the number of institutions scheduled for comprehensive reviews during the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 academic years that have postponed their visits, the need for evaluator participation will be acute, particularly during the next several years. NAST deeply appreciates the service of those assuming this important role, and the assistance evaluative teams and consultants provide to applicant institutions. It is highly recommended that representatives from accredited institutional members consider participating in evaluator training. In addition to the assistance provided by evaluators to institutions and NAST, this service can be invaluable in the opportunities it presents to broaden the perspectives of the theatre administrators.

The NAST *Handbook* includes current national standards and guidelines for degree- and non-degree-granting institutions offering programs of study in theatre, as well as the Association's Constitution, Bylaws, Code of Ethics, and Rules of Practice and Procedure. NAST continually reviews the information in the *Handbook* and conducts annual as well as multi-year comprehensive reviews of the entire *Handbook*. Such reviews provide to NAST an opportunity to focus on all standards currently found in the NAST *Handbook*. Though the comprehensive review process which began in 2015 has come to final conclusion, the standards as a whole remain open for comment. NAST welcomes feedback at any time. Following its commitment to proactively review in detail all standards in the *Handbook* on a scheduled basis, the next comprehensive review process is slated to begin in 2025.

An amended *Handbook* typically is released following the Annual Meeting. The NAST *Handbook* 2022–23 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 on Accreditation as appropriate during their respective and most recent meetings, as well as any amendments approved between Annual Meetings. The text of these changes may be found in the *Official Notice: Proposed Revisions*, which has been circulated to the membership and constituencies in the field in two successive 30-day open and public comment periods and are slated for a vote at this time.

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 standards are set in a framework which allows for flexibility in approach. Should representatives wish to explore the depth, breadth, and latitude inherent in the standards, which can be invaluable when addressing local conditions and realities, contact with the NAST National Office staff is recommended.

The Association continues to encourage consideration of the use of the NAST review process and/or materials, particularly the national standards, in other review contexts. Consolidating reviews may assist institutions to

conserve resources and realize economies of scale. Many institutions are finding efficiencies by combining required NAST comprehensive reviews with internal and/or other external reviews. The Association is willing to work with institutions and programs interested in exploring options in this regard 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. 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.

### **Annual Meeting**

Due to the effects of the national pandemic and NAST's intentional focus on the health, safety, and well-being of all individuals involved in its work, after careful and thorough consideration of and attention to issues before the Association and by subsequent action by the Board of Directors, NAST canceled all on-site aspects of its 2020 and 2021 Annual Meetings, including the meetings of the Commission on Accreditation and Board of Directors, all pre-meeting workshops, and all professional development sessions.

The NAST Annual Meeting is an integral opportunity for individuals to connect, communicate, and come together in community. It offers the opportunity for theatre administrators to share and receive information which can broaden and hone understandings, particularly with regard to current and salient issues, and assist administrators to address local and national realities. As well, the Annual Meeting serves as a venue which enables the Association to conduct its required business. NAST is pleased to return to its tradition of in-person assembly in 2022, and to reconnecting with past attendees and welcoming new registrants. Feedback regarding Annual Meeting activities and ideas for future meeting programming and presenters is welcomed.

### **Availability of Informative Materials**

NAST maintains a robust library of material focused on topics such as accreditation, professional development, policy analysis, and research. These materials are intended to assist accredited institutional members to navigate the constantly changing landscape. A recent addition to the NAST library includes an extensive web-based resource entitled, *Leadership: Navigating Difficult Situations and Conditions* (<https://nast.arts-accredit.org/leadership/>). Offering a wealth of information, this site is divided among six sections: *Facts, Principles, Considerations: Important Reminders; Strategic Thinking—An Intellectual Endeavor: Developing an Abiding Approach; Informed Decision-Making: The Importance of Distillation and Synthesis; Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs); The Long View: The Place of Reasonableness; and Concluding Thoughts: Support and Appreciation*. It is recommended that representatives of member institutions visit and review the site's content often and as needed, as well as the extensive list of publications available within the Association's publications section of its website (<https://nast.arts-accredit.org/publications/>).

### **Financial Planning**

As a result of action by the Board of Directors in 2020, the Association created a Managed Assets account and implemented an Investment Policy which governs the disposition of these assets. The balance of funds in this account and the growth anticipated will assist NAST to continue to build its solid financial base, support its work to advance its objectives, and ensure its future and therefore its ongoing contributions to its members and the field.

## 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 Jim Hunter and Vice President DeAnna Toten Beard are the theatre Trustees of the Council and represented NAST during CAAA meetings held virtually in January 2022. 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 18 institutions accredited by ACCPAS. This undertaking is valuable in that it assists to connect precollegiate and higher education efforts. Holly Logue of Kean University is the theatre appointee to the Commission.

Just prior to the onset of the pandemic, NAST finalized, and anticipated launching in March of 2020, its new Annual Meeting app. This app is intended to provide to Annual Meeting attendees streamlined access to Annual Meeting, hotel, and venue information. NAST looks forward to releasing this app for use during the 2022 Annual Meeting.

During the 2021–2022 academic year, the National Office staff, in partnership with an external third-party vendor, began work to design and implement an accreditation data management system that will enable institutions to submit accreditation materials electronically. Among other attributes, this new tool will enable NAST to sunset the requirement for hard-copy accreditation submissions. Work to complete this project is expected to continue at least through 2022.

Participation by member and non-member institutions in the Higher Education Arts Data Services (HEADS) Project remains strong. The information gathering process facilitated by the 2021–2022 HEADS Data Survey, although scheduled for closure January 31, 2022, was extended to March 1, 2022 to provide additional time to users during the inaugural year of the new platform. Access to the navigational dashboards is expected later this spring. The redesign of the Higher Education Arts Data Services (HEADS) platform remains in progress. The new platform is intended to feature modern aesthetics and is designed to be user-friendly and intuitive in approach. Users will find the data entry process similar in form and function to that previously in place (the Data Survey). However, the traditional Data Summaries and Special Reports features will be replaced as the predominant source of data presentation by a user-driven ability to compare data points; customize reporting options; and create, view, and save visual presentations of data and data comparisons—features provided through the use of interactive dashboards. The new platform has been populated with five years of historical data, enabling users in the first year to review six-year trends. This perspective will increase each year as new data is added to the system. It is hoped that this tool will provide invaluable information and will serve to inform institutional decision-making considerations. Should questions arise, please contact Nora R. Hamme in the National Office (nhamme@arts-accredit.org).

## Policy

Department of Education: Higher Education

The Association continues to follow and monitor carefully various federal and state initiatives and issues—one of particular import is the Higher Education Act (HEA). This Act was last reauthorized in August 2008 and expired December 31, 2013. Although in recent years there have been attempts to re-energize the reauthorization process, to date, reauthorization has yet to begin in earnest. Perennial issues of concern include initiatives pertaining to gainful employment, state authorization and distance learning, teacher preparation, and misrepresentation, access, cost and completion, new pathways for collegiate study, student achievement, institutional responsibility, borrower defense to repayment, institutional obligations under Title IX, student loan repayment and forgiveness, and Pell Grant expansion. It is important to recall

that the HEA does not govern institutions directly, rather, the flow of federal monies earmarked for higher education.

Within the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress, Chair Bobby Scott (D-VA) and Ranking Member Virginia Foxx (R-NC) continue to hold their respective positions on the House Committee on Education and Labor. With the change in party majority in January 2021, the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP), is now chaired by Patty Murray (D-WA) with Richard Burr (R-NC) serving as the Ranking Member. Given other pressing initiatives before the U.S. House and Senate, action regarding reauthorization is not anticipated in the near term.

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, these regulations were subsequently placed on hold by federal action in 2017. 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 2019, the Department of Education announced new gainful employment regulations, thus rescinding prior gainful employment regulations entirely. In August 2019, the Department of Education announced final regulations regarding borrower defense to repayment applicable to all federal student loans made on or after July 1, 2020, replacing the 2016 borrower defense to repayment rules. The new rule contains, but is not limited to, a federal standard for facilitating the collection and review of evidence, new evidence standards, a new limitations period of three years, and a definition of “misrepresentation.” On November 1, 2019, the Department of Education released final regulations, applicable to institutions that participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs, governing the recognition of accrediting agencies, certain student assistance general provisions, and institutional eligibility as they pertain to the HEA. These new regulations are far-reaching and include the modification of requirements regarding accreditor-established timelines for institutions and programs to come into compliance with accreditor standards; removal of the geographic area of accrediting activities from the definition of scope of Secretary recognition for regional accrediting bodies; and changes to the term “substantive change” and resultant submission requirements for accreditor review. The final regulations went into effect July 1, 2020. On September 1, 2020, the Office of Postsecondary Education of the Department of Education published final regulations entitled “Distance Education and Innovation.” These regulations offer further permissions and definitions regarding “regular and substantive interaction” in distance education, include asynchronous interactions when using “clock hour” definitions, and provide additional rules and flexibilities regarding competency-based education. On August 10, 2021 the Department announced its intention to establish the Affordability and Student Loans Committee for the purpose of preparing proposed regulations for Federal Student Aid programs authorized under Title IV of the HEA. On December 8, 2021 the Federal Register confirmed the Department’s intent to establish the Institutional and Programmatic Eligibility Committee. This Committee will review, with an intent to rewrite, regulations related to Ability to Benefit, Standards of Administrative Capacity, Gainful Employment, Financial Responsibility, Changes of Ownership and Change in Control, Certification Procedures, and Title IV Revenue and Non-Federal Education Assistance Funds (90/10). NAST provided detailed information regarding this initiative in an announcement released to the membership on February 8, 2022.

In addition to activities related to the HEA, heightened activity affecting institutions of higher education appears to be widespread in various federal agencies, departments, and other entities.

#### Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights: Title IX

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. A notice was sent to the membership regarding the November 2018 Department of Education release of a notice of proposed rulemaking. Over 124,000 comments were received in response to the proposed changes. On May 19, 2020, the Department of Education published in the Federal Register the Final Rule entitled, “Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex in Education Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Financial Assistance.” As the regulations span over 2,000 pages, the Department of Education simultaneously published a summary of major provisions of the Final Rule. The Final Rule, effective August 14, 2020, includes significant provisions such as: an amendment of the definition of sexual harassment for Title IX purposes; the role of the Title IX coordinator; mandatory response and reporting obligations; grievance processes and procedures, including processes and requirements related to investigations and hearings; and each institution’s confirmation of the standard of evidence now in place as it relates to Title IX investigations. It is anticipated that the implementation of the rule will affect various daily practices at institutions of higher education. However, on March 8, 2021, the Executive Office of the President issued an executive order initiating a one-hundred-day review period of all previously published guidance and regulations regarding Title IX with an intention to consider suspending, revising, or rescinding any aspect that would not align with the current administration’s initiatives, as well as publishing for notice and comment newly proposed rules. It would appear that the Department anticipates issuing a notice of proposed rulemaking related to Title IX by April of 2022.

#### Department of the Treasury: Tax Policy

On October 15, 2020, the Department of the Treasury published final regulations intended to clarify statutes in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act regarding the excise tax applicable to the net investment income of private colleges and universities meeting certain thresholds. These regulations further define “applicable education institution,” applicable students, applicability of the tax based on institutional location, and assets used directly in carrying out an institution’s exempt purpose. Although previous interpretations of the law specify a 1.4% excise tax on investment income, the final regulation specifically defines “qualified tuition and related expenses” and its exemption from the tax in order to require that the tax apply to gross amounts of income from interest, dividends, rents, royalties, and capital gains income from all sources other than those directly used by the institution in carrying out its exempt purpose.

#### Department of Justice: Antitrust

In 2017, the Department of Justice (DOJ) began to pursue a possible restraint of trade concern as it pertained to the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), specifically with regard to changes made by NACAC to its *Code of Ethics and Professional Practices* in 2017. Although NACAC amended its *Code* provisions in September of 2019, the concern resulted in a complaint filed by DOJ against NACAC in December of 2019. The removed provisions addressed exclusive incentives for early decision, recruitment of undergraduate students who have already committed elsewhere, and recruitment of transfer students. Following an open comment period, on April 17, 2020, a final judgment was pronounced in *United States of America v. National Association for College Admission Counseling*, imposing a number of requirements on NACAC and prohibiting the removed *Code* provisions from being reinstated. In light of the final judgment and in order to preserve NAST’s independence, autonomy, and ability to maintain the spirit of the NAST Code of Ethics, NAST conducted a careful review of the provisions of its Code, which resulted in proposed changes which were approved by the membership in March of 2021.

There is no doubt that the federal landscape associated with higher education has changed dramatically during the past year and will continue to change. Members and colleagues should remain abreast of unfolding activities, study federal writings, and offer feedback as deemed appropriate by the institution pertaining to federal requests and proposed regulation applicable to issues which may affect collegiate study and the

education and training of students enrolled in theatre programs. Concerted effort is needed to ensure that neither law nor the regulation that follows restricts post-secondary institutions 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, remain paramount.

It is of note that, in addition to regular mailings, NAST currently publishes advisories that describe regulations associated with the current 2008 reauthorization of the HEA. These *Advisories on Federal Issues* may be found within the “Publications” section of the website and are intended to provide helpful summary information. Review is highly recommended.

In addition to policy areas 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 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 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, 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. Due to the effects of the pandemic, the NAST National Office staff has been working from both the National Office in shifts and remotely since March 17, 2020. Upon our return to the National Office full-time, we would be pleased to welcome visitors once again. 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, Stephen Cannistraci, Stacy R. Fletcher, Nora R. Hamme, Jenny Rebecca G. Kuhlmann, Tracy L. Maraney, Stacy A. McMahon, Kathryn Omune, Lisa A. Ostrich, Joanna Pepple, and Kristin Stowell. 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 practices and refining established 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 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 continue 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 its 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 during these unprecedented and challenging times.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen P. Moynahan  
Executive Director