

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF THEATRE

58th Annual Meeting

and

Retreat for Administrators of Theatre Programs in Higher Education

March 15 – 18, 2023

Report of the Executive Director

Events occurring during the 2022–2023 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 appreciates and applauds the unfailing and enduring efforts of its members and those involved in this noble pursuit. As we settle into the 2022–2023 academic year, one marking NAST’s 58th 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 pertaining to 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 the ensuing months has been substantial, disruptive, and in many cases, devastating. During this time, institutions and their administrators, faculties, and staff members worked tirelessly to reimagine how educational content could be delivered, to reconfigure physical spaces, to redesign curricular programs, and to relearn how to communicate effectively. The creative capacity, will, and spirit of all individuals involved in this endeavor are evidenced by 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 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 three years, aided in large part by the Commission’s ability to connect and conduct its business through virtual means in 2020 and 2021. Although the number of comprehensive review considerations decreased for a period as several institutions 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 three 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 two virtual training sessions for new evaluators. Noting the number of institutions scheduled for comprehensive reviews during the 2021–2022 and 2022–2023 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. A Workshop for Visiting Evaluators is offered each year during the Association’s Annual Meeting. 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 theatre administrators.

The NAST *Handbook* includes all 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 current standards. Though the most recent comprehensive review process, which began in 2015, was concluded in 2020, 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 2026. An amended *Handbook* is typically released following the Annual Meeting. The NAST *Handbook 2023–24* is expected later this spring. It will include current standards and guidelines as approved by the membership and required of institutions mounting accreditation reviews.

A comprehensive review of the Association’s *Procedures* documents is being conducted during the 2022–2023 academic year. The new editions of these documents will be released just before the beginning of the 2023–2024 academic year. NAST welcomes comment and feedback.

All current accreditation-related documents, standards, and procedures are available for download from the Association’s website located at <https://nast.arts-accredit.org>. Institutions are reminded that the standards are set in a framework which allows for flexibility and creativity 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 assemble NAST reviews that are thorough, rigorous, 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 extended on behalf of the field of theatre and congratulates the institutions and their representatives for their 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. The Annual Meeting 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 can 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 was pleased to return to its tradition of in-person assembly in 2022 and is equally delighted to gather in community on-site in 2023. NAST looks forward to connecting with past attendees and welcoming new registrants.

Annual Meeting content is driven largely by the feedback offered by member institutions and Annual Meeting attendees, and as informed by current issues faced by theatre administrators responsible for guiding and leading collegiate programs in theatre. NAST welcomes your thoughts, ideas, and suggestions, and stresses the important need for your feedback. NAST offers to all registrants an opportunity to provide comment through the use of the Annual Meeting app. Subsequent to the Annual Meeting, NAST circulates a questionnaire to all members and Annual Meeting attendees. Please consider taking a moment to participate in these initiatives, and/or to merely communicate directly with the NAST staff.

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 navigate the constantly changing higher education landscape. A recent addition to the NAST library includes an extensive web-based resource entitled, *Leadership: Navigating Difficult Situations and Conditions* (see <https://nast.arts-accredit.org/leadership/>). Offering a wealth of information, this site is divided into 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 (see <https://nast.arts-accredit.org/publications/>).

Financial Planning

Although the Association's Managed Assets account has not escaped the recent tumultuous movements of the market, the balance of funds in the account is anticipated to grow over the long-term at a slow and steady pace. The solid base this will create is intended to support NAST's work to advance its objective 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 therefore represent NAST during CAAA meetings, which in January 2023 were held in person in Arlington, VA. 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 ACCPAS Commission.

Just prior to the onset of the pandemic, NAST finalized, and anticipated launching in 2020, its new Annual Meeting app. This app was designed to provide to Annual Meeting attendees streamlined access to Annual Meeting, hotel, and venue information. NAST released this app for use during the 2022 Annual Meeting. The app is offered again to attendees in 2023. Noting the functionality of the app to present Annual Meeting logistics and information, subsequent to the 2023 meeting, NASM will sunset the provision of hard-copy Annual Meeting packets. For those who have chosen to use the app to navigate the 2023 Annual Meeting, NAST welcomes your feedback.

During the 2021–2022 academic year, the National Office staff, in partnership with an external third-party vendor (Salesforce), 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 its requirement for hard-copy accreditation submissions. Work to complete this project is expected to continue in 2023. Launch and use of the new platform is anticipated in 2023, in particular for institutions slated to submit new applications for Commission review in 2024 and beyond. Further information outlining use of the system will be provided by the NAST staff once the new system is operational. Helpful and informative sessions regarding the operation of the system will be offered during future NAST Annual Meetings.

In addition to the advancements outlined above regarding the Annual Meeting app and the electronic collection of accreditation information, NAST, in conjunction with its sister organizations, has been working diligently for the past several years to upgrade the HEADS Data Services Project, moving it to a new platform. This upgrade entails refreshing the HEADS Data Survey instrument, sunsetting the well-known HEADS Data Summaries, and introducing navigable dashboards. 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 primary 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 will be 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. The new HEADS Data Survey tool was launched in its second year on November 1, 2022. Completed Surveys were due January 31, 2023. Participation by member and non-member institutions in the Higher Education Arts Data Services (HEADS) Project during the 2022–2023 Survey period remained strong. At this time, the HEADS staff is reviewing final

iterations of the navigable dashboards. Facing inordinate delays in their completion, NAST hopes to make these dashboards available at the earliest possible time. With regard to the past degree-granting HEADS Data Summaries, NAST has made available at no charge all of the HEADS Data Summaries compiled during the last several decades. This information may be found on the Association's website at the following address: <https://nast.arts-accredit.org/services/heads/heads-data-summaries/>. For administrators interested in historical data as it relates to the disciplines of art/design, dance, and music, NASAD, NASD, and NASM offer, on their respective websites, copies of discipline-specific historical HEADS Data Summaries at no charge. NAST extends deepest appreciation to its members for the patience each has offered as NAST works to finalize and launch successfully all aspects of the new platform. Should questions arise regarding the HEADS Data Survey, please feel free to contact Nora R. Hamme in the National Office (nhamme@arts-accredit.org); with regard to the HEADS Navigable Dashboards, please contact Angie Elkins (aelkins@arts-accredit.org).

Policy

Leadership of Congressional Education Committees

The 118th Congress sees a return of Virginia Foxx (R-NC) to the position of Chair of the House Committee on Education and Workforce; Ranking Member is Bobby Scott (D-VA). The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) is chaired at this time by Bernie Sanders (I-VT); Bill Cassidy (R-LA) serves as the Ranking Member.

Higher Education Act of 1965

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. Given other pressing initiatives before the U.S. House and Senate, action regarding reauthorization is not anticipated in the near term.

Lack of timely reauthorization (expected every fifth year) has resulted in substantial efforts to regulate and re-regulate the existing law (HEA). Although regulations are intended to clarify existing law, the re-regulation of various aspects of the law can and often do lead to re-interpretations of original and/or various rewritten regulations, the result of which requires institutions of higher education participating in Federal financial aid programs to remain abreast of and pay careful attention to federal activities in this regard. Information provided below outlines initiatives pertinent to higher education which have either been completed, are ongoing at this time, or are anticipated.

Department of Education

Final Regulations Released:

Borrower Defense (November 1, 2022)—Determines the acts or omissions of an institution of higher education a borrower may assert as a defense to repayment of a loan made under the FDL and FFEL Programs.

Determining the Amount of Federal Education Assistance Funds Received by Institutions of Higher Education (90/10) (October 28, 2022)—Governs whether proprietary institutions meet federal regulation that requires institutions to receive at least 10 percent of their revenue from sources other than federal education assistance funds.

Change in Ownership and Change in Control (October 28, 2022)—Amends existing regulations pertaining to institution and program eligibility associated with changes in institutional ownership which result in a change in control.

Public Service Loan Forgiveness (November 1, 2022)—Enables borrowers to receive loan forgiveness after ten years of qualifying payments on qualifying loans while engaging in public service.

Final Regulations Anticipated:

Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex in Education Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Financial Assistance (anticipated May 2023)—Will address issues pertaining to the prevention of discrimination on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation and establishment of educational environments free from discrimination on the basis of sex, including sexual orientation and gender identity.

NPRM (Notice of Proposed Rulemaking) Anticipated:

Ability to Benefit (April 2023)—With regard to students who do not have a high school diploma or its equivalent, an intention to amend regulations which are meant to articulate State-defined processes which address a student’s “ability to benefit” from an educational program, including how to document and verify whether an institution offers an eligible career pathway program.

Gainful Employment (April 2023)—An intention to amend regulations which are meant to ascertain whether post-secondary educational programs prepare students for gainful employment in recognized occupations, and the conditions under which institutions and programs remain eligible for student financial assistance programs under Title IV of the Higher Education Act.

Factors of Financial Responsibility (April 2023)—An intention to amend regulations which are meant to define the level of financial responsibility an institution must maintain in order to be eligible to participate in programs under Title IV of the Higher Education Act.

Standards of Administrative Capacity (April 2023)—An intention to amend regulations that are associated with the administrative capability that must be achieved by institutions participating in programs under Title IV of the Higher Education Act.

Notice of Intent to Commence Negotiated Rulemaking:

Accreditation and Related Issues (April 2023)—Amend existing regulations associated with the Secretary’s recognition of accrediting agencies and accreditation procedures as a component of institutional eligibility for participation in federal student financial aid programs.

State Authorization (April 2023)—Amend existing regulations associated with State Authorization as a component of institutional eligibility for participation in federal student financial aid programs.

Title IV (April 2023)—Amend existing regulations associated with: the return of unearned Title IV Higher Education Act program funds, opportunities to protect students and taxpayers, and the easing of administrative burdens placed on institutions of higher education.

Cash Management (April 2023)—Amend existing regulations associated with cash management to ensure that students have and maintain timely access to student aid disbursed by their institutions.

Third-Party Services and Related Issues (April 2023)—Amend existing regulations related to existing guidance for third-party services, reporting requirements, financial or other compliance requirements, and past performance requirements as a component of ongoing institutional eligibility for participation in federal student aid programs.

Improving Use of Deferments and Forbearances (April 2023)—Amend existing regulations associated with requirements which address the issuance of forbearances and deferments, particularly in relation to income-driven repayment.

Distance Education (April 2023)—Amend the definition of “distance education”.

Guidance from the Department of Education Issued in the Form of “Dear Colleague” Letters. Of Note: “Dear Colleague” letters offer guidance provided by the staff of the United States Department of Education (USDE)

regarding both current Higher Education law and regulation.

(GEN-23-03) **Requirements and Responsibilities for Third-Party Servicers and Institutions** (February 15, 2023; Updated February 16, 2023)

(GEN-22-13) **Federal Student Aid Eligibility for Borrowers with Defaulted Loans** (August 17, 2022)

(GEN-22-11) **Procedures for Institutions Seeking approval of a Request to Change or Add Accrediting Agencies** (July 19, 2022; Updated September 26, 2022)

(GEN-22-10) **Guidance for Institutions Seeking to Change or Add Accrediting Agencies** (July 19, 2022)

Other Initiatives:

Supreme Court

Debt Relief Plan—On August 24, 2022, the White House announced its Debt Relief Plan. Subsequently, on November 10, 2022, a federal district court judge in the state of Texas ruled the Debt Relief Plan unlawful. At this time, the aspects of the Plan are before the Supreme Court. Oral arguments as they pertain to two lawsuits will be heard beginning February 28, 2023. A decision is expected to be made and a ruling announced in June of 2023.

Race in Admissions—With regard to its consideration of two cases pertaining to race in admissions in October of 2022, decisions are expected to be made and rulings announced in May/June 2023.

Department of Homeland Security

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)—On August 24, 2022, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced the availability of the final rule pertaining to DACA. In general, the final rule codifies existing policies and includes limited amendments intended to preserve and fortify DACA. The final rule was to be effective October 31, 2022. However, on October 5, 2022, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit issued a decision on the DACA policy, partially affirming the District Court's July 2021 decision declaring the 2012 DACA policy unlawful. The Court of Appeals preserved the partial stay issued by the District Court in July 2021 and remanded the case back to the District Court for further consideration of the new DHS DACA regulation published on August 30, 2022.

NAST will continue to monitor these conversations, providing salient information to its members as it may become available.

There is no doubt that the federal landscape associated with higher education has changed dramatically during these last years and will continue to change. Members and colleagues should remain abreast of unfolding activities, study federal writings, and offer feedback 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 as deemed appropriate by the institution. Concerted effort is needed to ensure that neither law nor the regulation that follows restrict postsecondary 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, remains paramount.

It is of note that, in addition to regular mailings, NAST publishes advisories that describe regulations associated with the 2008 reauthorization of the HEA. These *Advisories on Federal Issues* may be found within the "Publications" section of the NAST website and are intended to provide helpful summary information. Review is 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 absent useful purpose 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 engage in the conversations that address 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, a Virginia suburb of Washington, D.C. The office is about eight miles east of Dulles International Airport, and approximately 20 miles from downtown Washington, accessible via the Metro's Silver Line. Due to the effects of the pandemic, the NAST National Office staff has been working from the National Office in shifts and remotely since March 17, 2020. We are pleased to welcome visitors. Should your travels bring you to the area, please feel free to schedule an appointment with a staff member.

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: Stephen Cannistraci, Jane Creagan, Angie K Elkins, Stacy R. Fletcher, Nora R. Hamme, Jenny Rebecca G. Kuhlmann, Tracy L. Maraney, Stacy A. McMahon, Justin Medlen, Lisa A. Ostrich, Joanna Pepple, and Kristin Stowell. To support the work of accredited institutional members, the work of the staff and the services provided to accredited institutional members have grown over the years. Staff is focused on carrying out the daily work of the Association, developing new practices, creating new and refining established systems, assisting institutions seeking accreditation for the first time, and consulting with institutions seeking renewal of accreditation. 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 assistance may be needed. We look forward to continuing our efforts together.

Please accept our heartfelt appreciation and best wishes as you continue your work to advance the cause of theatre.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen P. Moynahan
Executive Director