

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF ART AND DESIGN
2010 ANNUAL MEETING — CINCINNATI, OHIO

Report of the President

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Welcome to the 66th Annual Meeting of the National Association of Schools of Art and Design. First, I would like to thank everyone who has come to the conference this year. You are each the reason the rest of us are here. We have over 300 people in attendance — a record.

I would like to add my thanks to Chira Kirkland, Teresa Ricciardi, Mark Marion, Tracy Maraney, and Lisa Ostrich, and of course to Karen Moynahan and Sam Hope for the extraordinary work they have done in preparing the conference and especially to Sam and Karen for so carefully watching over our well-being in Washington DC. It's amazing to think there are only twelve people in the National Office and to realize what they accomplish on our behalf and, really, on behalf of the national and international education community.

And of course my heartfelt thanks and admiration to Johanna Branson and the institutional representatives and senior members who are challenged each fall and spring and have taken on the truly monumental and critical task of reviewing all of the complicated cases on the Commission on Accreditation. They are the heart of our operations.

A special thanks to our Vice President, Kristi Nelson, for her work with the workshop for new and aspiring administrators; veteran leaders Beverly Seley and Susan Russo for their efforts in training new evaluators; and Sister Cor Immaculatum Heffernan and Melody Weiler for their work with the experienced evaluators. And thanks to the members who have volunteered their services as presenters and panelists at the conference. I look forward to the rest of the sessions today and tomorrow.

Preparing for the conference takes all year, and in your packets you will find results of the ongoing work of the Design Futures Working Group and the CAAA Commission on Multidisciplinary/Multimedia, as well as the Nominations Committee and the hopefully not overtaxed Ethics Committee. Thanks to my colleagues on the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors for their insights and work all year on the conference content.

Finally, thanks to our hosts at the Westin and in Cincinnati for the opportunity to share in the cultural life of this community.

NASAD is a service-oriented organization. It exists to help member institutions and individuals do their best work and, when called upon, to provide clear and appropriate counsel to others as well. I hope the conference will provide you with the opportunity for reflection about your own institution, the role we all play in larger arenas, and that something you learn or someone you meet might help when you return.

This year, I have had the opportunity to watch the leadership of our National Office join with others in a truly significant national effort aimed at preserving pathways to institutional and

organizational autonomy and efficiency in the face of extraordinary efforts to the contrary. Serving behind the scenes as “servant leaders” they have undertaken a truly far-reaching, principle-centered task.

And this fall, in a welcome reflective and relaxing moment, I also had the opportunity to observe leaders in our fields talking about leadership at the institutional and programmatic levels at a conference held at the University of North Texas. These two experiences have both inspired me and brought me to reflect on the convolution of politics, positions, polemics, and the importance of clear thought and understanding the territory you are seeking to govern. As a result, I would like to say a few words about why we are here today, how we got here, and why it is important that organizations like NASAD are around.

NASAD started with a discussion among a small group of art school leaders who were concerned about the proliferation of programs, primarily in industrial design, that arose at the end of World War II, ostensibly to help returning GIs learn important skills for employment. The concept of standards for the field was developed, and a platform for further discussion was created. Our organization has grown significantly in size and scope since but never lost sight of the deliberative focus of that first purpose, and the leadership through service that purpose implied. As a student, I first became involved with art in school because I always enjoyed making things. I would say that, early on, I had artistic intent and a utilitarian bias, which probably is how I ended up in administration, as well. I attended my first NASAD meeting in 1985 when I really needed to learn more about how the programs could be helped and preserved so that I could do my own work more effectively. The organization has been invaluable to me ever since.

Today we have a curious convolution of economic stress and political agendas in the nation, where otherwise quite conservative organizations and individuals generally opposed to government intervention are paradoxically seeking greater and greater federal governmental control over higher education, seeking a single model to apply to all institutions. They have allies from opposite camps. As in many political arguments, the galvanizing issue is public funding; in this case, student loans. Several important principles can become lost in the heat of debate, however. First, while emergencies can be described as “unforeseen combinations of circumstances calling for immediate action,” not all situations described as emergencies are in fact emergencies. Second, if immediate action is indeed called for, one needs to be careful who takes charge and determines the action to take. Expertise helps; clarity and understanding are essential. And third, while nature may abhor a vacuum, administrators and politicians should be grateful for the occasional void that does not need a new law, a new organization, or more oversight. It may actually be a welcome opportunity for reflection, upon which you may find the void filled already.

Such is the case with accreditation and oversight in higher education. There is no emergency requiring drastic action, there is no void that needs filling, thanks to organizations like NASAD, ACE, ASPA, and others, which are already there.

These are serious matters though and have demanded serious attention. I am truly grateful to Sam and Karen and many others for the attention they have given to the discussion and its details.

When I was in college back in what were the early days of environmental consciousness and health and safety regulations, back when we stored jars of lead oxide and uranium dioxide in the

ceramics studio, mixed powdered clay in the classroom, pouring materials down the drain you can't even purchase today, one of my professors, recognizing the dawn of federal environmental health regulations, argued that artists ought to have a particular exempt status, because the things we made with those hazardous substances and processes were so beautiful and socially important. I agreed with him about the beauty and crucial need to experiment but have always been uncomfortable with exemptions like that. One of my concerns was: if schools were exempt from these concerns, where and when would people learn about the need for them before it was too late?

NASAD accreditation standards and policies establish points of dialogue in the field and points of reference. But they are not laws, they are membership criteria. The standards recognize the individuality of the institutions; they change over time and encourage the acquisition of knowledge: what are the best practices of people who are doing the sorts of things you are doing now? NASAD became an important force, not in making people meet particular guidelines, but in making them aware of the principles and applicability of those guidelines, and the ways to determine the appropriate practice for the institution.

One truth we know from art and design is that nuances make all the difference. The concept of one-size-fits-all is simply not appropriate in creative fields or education in general, and is not present in our standards or practices. What is present, however, is trust in expertise, a belief in progress, and a well-founded respect for the collaborative decision making process. There is a core belief that together, we can determine what should be done for the good of the people we serve.

This fall, I was privileged to hear Ray Allen, our former president, talk about his role as a "reluctant leader" in the arts. Ray said being a good leader implies the ability to work with the unique culture of the institution. So it is appropriate for our national organization to be in a leadership position as well, however reluctantly, placing us all in the context of excellence in education nationally and finding the best ways to develop standards in the fields and communicating those. I thank them for their understanding of the culture of Washington DC, and thank you for your attention! I hope you enjoy and learn from the remainder of the conference.