

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF ART AND DESIGN
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Report of the President

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First of all, it's great to see all of you here today. I suspect that you have made the effort to attend this annual meeting because you feel that NASAD has, in some way, assisted you in raising the level of quality and discourse at your home institution. I hope that you, as I, have been won over—possibly many times—from a position of skepticism that accreditation can only be about bean counting to realizing that peer-generated evaluation really can be about substantive content and the ability to reflect, in our programmatic development, the creative process that we all teach. To have a discipline-specific advocate, such as NASAD, in the sometimes rigid world of regional and national assessment is a huge benefit to our member institutions.

Another benefit of membership in NASAD, and possibly the most valuable, is the opportunity to talk with colleagues from a variety of institutional types about visual arts education: the models, the challenges and the possibility of future innovations.

Now, I've already asked how many of you are here for the first time. Anyone changed your mind?

How many of you are from public institutions? State colleges? Research universities? Private liberal arts colleges? Private art colleges? Community colleges? For-profit institutions? (Don't be shy; we all share common attributes.)

All of us, regardless of how we are categorized, have other group affiliations in addition to NASAD: some of us are part of state systems (as we've just identified), others are members of consortia of regional private institutions, or freestanding arts colleges, etc. But here at NASAD, we can look across the field and gain insight into where we can go individually and collectively in visual arts education. As collaboration has gained currency in art making, it has increased value to us as we think about our collective future. This conversation can only be had in a group that represents the varied aspects of our field. Look around—we are a large percentage of higher-ed visual arts education. Get to know each other, learn from each other, see what you can share, where you can partner...dare I say it? Be creative!

Now, let's take a larger perspective and consider the higher education landscape as a whole. It is not a surprise that it is in flux. It is changing. The value of a college degree is questioned in the press, and as a result, college-ready students are asking whether a college degree or experience is an essential aspect of finding a career, making a living, or having an enriched life. We all know that several years ago, a study said that students

would have an average of five careers and the last two had not yet been invented. In fact, I think I heard that statement at one of the first NASAD conferences I attended. Now we say to students that they will have to invent each of their careers. If that is the case, what better degrees to pursue than those in the creative practice and study of visual art, where thinking in non-traditional ways is the norm?

And what about those of us who are the faculty members, administrators and staff in institutions of higher learning? We no longer find ourselves in jobs where we teach in secluded environments and quietly pursue research or studio practice. Rather, we are increasingly in a more demanding atmosphere of curricular adaptation and programmatic evolution spurred by the demand of relevancy and accountability inside the academy and outside by the expectations of prospective students, their families, their potential employers, and the general public.

The emerging trends we are seeing include gap years, students piecing together an education at multiple institutions and from a variety of sources. Until recently, an accepted belief was that a college education assured higher salaries over a lifetime. Yet a recent report stated that is no longer true for people of color—what does that say? Is it evidence of a widening culture and income gap? It is certainly evidence that a college education is no longer universally perceived as essential for a successful life.

Let's look at another trend: the creative approaches that Dan Pink, Richard Florida, and IDEO brought to the fore may seem distant memories these days. Design thinking and creative problem solving as valuable attributes have gone through many iterations since the article "The MFA Is the New MBA" first took hold in the art and business worlds. More recently, the mantra has been evolved by other writers and thinkers, including our keynote speaker today, Jane Brown, and others who have expanded that thinking in a variety of directions. For example, William Deresiewicz has put forth the premise that the country is in danger of educating a class of students that is incapable of thinking outside a set structure. We, in visual arts higher education, certainly have the antidote to that! But I digress.

Now, I've raised a number of trends and reports that are part of our daily discussions at our home institutions. What can we do in this environment? Where do we go? How do we process these trends into decision making? Well, we can approach these trends and the challenges that foster them in several ways. We could take the lead from Woody Allen's movie *Sleeper* (some of you in the audience may remember that one) and find encouragement that a trend that is popular now, may well be disproven in the future—and we can wait for that to happen.

Or we can be aware, gather information, make informed decisions, discuss and collaborate with our colleagues and find directions that will help ensure that our students have the opportunity for a substantive, rich visual arts education.

This will require change. It may require new models of curriculum delivery and organizational structure. I'm reminded of a situation over a decade ago. A few schools were out in front creating new models. This was a challenge to accrediting agencies as these models did not fit into the then commonly accepted structures. A good accreditor supports such initiatives and is not an obstacle to new directions. At that time as now, discipline specific accrediting agencies like NASAD were, and are, allies to strong, forward-thinking programs and to survival in a changing world.

So let's make the most of this annual meeting. We are fortunate to have as our keynote speaker, Jane Brown, an extraordinary thinker and designer to inspire us. The sessions will give us content to take back to our home colleges and universities to incorporate into our institutional work and activities. But most of all, we have the opportunity to communicate with our fellow attendees. Make an effort to talk with someone from an institution as different from yours as possible. You may be surprised; it may make for an invigorating conversation if you ask the right questions.

We're all working to ensure the future of a vibrant visual arts education in the U.S. and beyond—that should not be a difficult task for an association of those devoted to visual art and design.

Thank you.