

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF ART AND DESIGN  
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## **Futures Observations**

**Samuel Hope**  
**Executive Director**

*The following remarks constitute the final portion of Mr. Hope's last oral Report of the Executive Director after 38 years of service. The first portion included introductions and appreciation to staff and family, announcements, congratulations to Karen P. Moynahan who will succeed Mr. Hope on January 1, 2014, and expressions of gratitude to officers, board members, commissioners and the membership.*

As we all know, artists and designers are important creators of the general future, not just the futures of their fields. In working with NASAD and its members I have seen individuals, institutions, and associations address many kinds of futures issues. I learned how visual artists and designers play with the future intellectually and artistically, and manifest the results in their work, and how scholars play with the results in another way, and teachers in yet another. The play is hard work. The dynamism of these interactions is fun to be in and wonderful to behold. It produces a swirling galaxy of creativity, possibility, and force that builds what is next.

NASAD and its various efforts are centered on the disciplines of art and design, the way those disciplines work, and the way people engaged in those disciplines work. Of course, disciplines and people work in all sorts of different ways, specific work changes as time changes, and changes result from specific work. There is infinite variety and constant movement, the futures-building dynamism that I spoke of earlier.

This centering on disciplines, people, work, and their evolving relationships enable many things—the continuing development of student competencies and capacities, for example. Keeping centered on these fundamentals also enables institutions and the Association to face any future, to make wise decisions both short- and long-term, to be nimble and resilient, to sustain as well as be sustainable.

This centering attribute sounds so obvious that it need not be stated. But today, it does need to be stated and affirmed because propaganda and policy wars rage against disciplines, people, work, and their evolving relationships. We seem to be living in a culture of permanent accusation and thus a culture of devaluation, and thus under pressure from forces that narrow even as they divide.

Education, the people who do it, many of the disciplines that comprise it, the institutions that provide it, the work that it accomplishes, and the relationships among them are all under constant generic attack. Whether obvious or subtle, too many of these attacks seem intended to destroy trust rather than improve conditions. They seek to demean, to produce a knee-jerk negative reaction whenever higher education is mentioned. These knee-jerk reactions become an important basis for seeking redistributions of power in favor of centralized control, and increasingly centralized federal control. Often these redistributions occur one tiny bureaucratic action at a time, virtually invisible unless one knows the situation in detail, and is watching closely.

As these attacks and power redistribution efforts proceed, faculties and administrations and institutions lose independence. Students become merely commodities. Parts-and-wholes relationships become distorted. Things begin to narrow toward the simplistic. Proposed solutions focus on embarrassment rather than assistance. And it becomes easier and easier for the center to shift from disciplines, people, work, and their relationships to negotiating the buzzy worlds of trendy rhetoric and ever-changing regulation, to paying ever-escalating time taxes that reduce attention to teaching and learning, to answering questions of quality in terms that are far removed from the nature of advanced work in any artistic and intellectual endeavor, to dealing with ever-escalating substitutions of process for content. In other words, a situation where central purpose and support system have changed places, a situation where coercion has replaced cooperation and reciprocity, a situation that too often stifles dynamism, thwarts creativity, and slows the realization of potential.

NASAD and its member institutions and programs in art and design may have to live in conditions we do not like, but we do not have to treat these conditions as being either acceptable or permanent. This does not mean returning to some mythical past, or embracing utopian visions as potential realities. It simply means staying centered on the evolving essence of what we do in and for the visual world, and all we do to connect the visual world to other worlds. It means nurturing our students as individuals, building their unique potential, and using assessment to serve our students rather than using our students to serve assessment. It means complying as necessary without endorsing or helping that which is negative or counterproductive. It means showing and doing something better and better spirited.

The future contains challenges about what is at center, especially given our roles as teachers of future artists, designers, educators, scholars, and so forth. It contains small and large opportunities to transcend and rise above any given ordinary or typicality, to work at least part of the time in a jargon-free zone, to remove ourselves from the echo chamber of current discourse and advocacy long enough to ask and answer questions for ourselves in our terms, for our own place. Even more important, it contains opportunities to assist our students to gain the capability, capacity, and vision to transcend and rise even as they deal with the sequence of transient nostrums and conditions present in their own spans of years. It is our job to nurture the dynamism no matter what.

The future also contains wonderful opportunities to extend present connections and build new ones. Connections with new technologies come to mind immediately. Technological advances will expand the creative space for all disciplines and professions, but not necessarily in the same ways. The prospects for art and design professionals are exciting, both as generators and users, and even as critics of new technologies.

Other connections are equally important.

Connections between financial support and freedom, or governance and freedom, for example. The liberty question for institutions and individuals: How much liberty and under what conditions?

Connections between support and justification systems on the one hand, and on the other, the provision of environments that truly embrace creativity and its attendant culture of experimentation, speculation, faith, and patience. Environments where assessment is about service rather than power.

Connections within and among various art and design disciplines as knowledge, capability, and sophistication grow; and connections with other disciplines, prospectively toward ever deepening capacities for integrations. A challenge is to help individual students gain and learn to combine different kinds and levels of disciplinary knowledge so that they are truly ready to contribute productively to group and multidisciplinary efforts.

Connections with questions of knowledge and skill balances and proportions as conditions change. These questions must be faced continuously as institutions and faculties choose content and set priorities for teaching and learning.

Connections with the context in all its complexity; the various interacting ecologies; our sets of responsibilities in terms of people, conditions, environments, economies, and so forth; our contributions to values development and the creation of value; and especially our responsibility to stand for the individual person, not in isolation from community, but as the unique indivisible unit that is the basis for community. Treating the individual as the unique indivisible unit is the first condition for diversity.

There are many more areas of connection. In conclusion, I ask you to consider just one: the connections that are made when you work with each other in general, but especially through NASAD. I have had the honor of seeing what your work together has accomplished over a 38-year period. In over seventy accreditation Commission meetings, I have had the privilege to see institutions and the field as a whole grow in multiple dimensions.

Instead of the incompetence and dysfunction reported incessantly by higher education critics, I see institutions on the move: developing students, building their curricular offerings, working with technology and other forces influencing the future. I see good people toiling daily to provide and improve opportunities for students in their institution, deeply engaged in the various art and design disciplines and their futures, and working mightily to develop and sustain requisite support of all kinds. Of course, everything is not ideal anywhere, and certainly not everywhere. Of course there is room for improvement. But room for improvement does not mean that people do not know what their problems are or what they are doing. It does not mean they are opponents of change. The yearning for understanding, improvement, and advancement among members and applicants to this Association is palpable.

The improvements of the last 40 years are astounding in the aggregate, because year after year individuals in local institutions consider the future and its possibilities carefully, discover where they want to go, understand what they need to do to improve, and seek the help of NASAD and others to effect change for the better.

NASAD and its members have a great deal of practice with innovation and change. In many respects these days, it is hard to keep up. It is easy for all of us to become unnerved and impatient at times. It helps to remember that no matter what speed things are traveling, careful deliberation remains a critically important approach for individuals, institutions, and NASAD. Careful does not mean slow. Careful deliberation does not mean lack of interest or concern but just the opposite. In NASAD's case, it simply shows respect for the complexities of general and specific situations, the national scale of the Association's work, and the need to preserve conditions supporting new ideas and many types of diversity. Careful deliberation shares with creativity the attributes of experimentation, speculation, faith, and patience. This is one reason careful deliberation often leads to creative solutions that are truly effective, because no matter

how radical, they continue building a foundation that sustains future work. Careful deliberation helps avoid dead ends.

In NASAD you are joined together to help each other learn and improve. You are joined together to speak for the fields of art and design in higher education, especially with regard to the threshold standards for degrees and programs applicable to specific fields. You are joined together to contribute to the whole and its parts, whether on the scale of an individual, and institution, or the field.

The standards you have created and continue to evolve provide a framework of commonality within which there is room for virtually infinite creativity and individuation. But the NASAD standards not only provide a kind of macro-framework, they provide specific protection because they represent a national consensus based definition of what is necessary when certain educational purposes and goals are chosen. These standards are referenced regularly throughout higher education. They are a powerful force for content-based transcendence and institutional continuity with regard to fundamentals.

Joined together you have built the approach NASAD takes to accreditation, an approach that is service-oriented and based in realistic appraisals of connections among content-based knowledge and skills, expertise, trust, working room, and effectiveness. This approach provides the best basis for dealing with futures issues and making wise decisions at both institutional and association levels. It is the best basis for staying focused on what matters even in contexts that deny what matters and become replete with self-delusion.

NASAD's service-oriented approach to accreditation is its approach to everything else it does. The Association's values and attitude are centered in certain basic realities of the human condition. Everyone needs support and help, for example. A productive relationship between the individual and the community is important, for another. The Association's basic values and attitudes are keys to the future. They are the keys to remaining centered on, on expanding and deepening connections of all kinds, to maintaining the trust necessary to continue the positive relationship between individual and community that is a hallmark of NASAD, and to maintaining the highest possible level of dynamism to nurture the fields of art and design and the students who will carry these fields further in the future.