

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC
2006 Annual Meeting**

**Oral Report of the Executive Director
Samuel Hope**

General sessions at the NASM meeting enable us to see and feel the combined energy of hundreds of institutions. The experience strengthens us all. As we look around this room, we can be thankful for the decades of effort that have brought us to where we are today. In each institution, and in the Association, we are blessed with the results of this work. These results are our foundation; and what a strong foundation it is.

This has been a year full of achievement. Through your participation and shared wisdom, NASM made major steps forward with the votes taken yesterday on the Standards for accredited institutional membership and the Association's Code of Ethics. As our materials show, we are working with other U.S.-based organizations and our colleagues in Europe on projects of various kinds. Just one example: Next year in Salt Lake City, the College Music Society and NASM will produce joint conference sessions on Music in General Studies and the Preparation of College Teachers at the Graduate Level. And in our member institutions, the wealth of effort and accomplishment is simply astounding. This year, we have all rejoiced to learn of a number of spectacular endowment gifts to schools of music, a tremendous symbol of faith in the value of music in higher education and in American civilization.

Of course, there are difficulties. There is always a dark side. Our nation and our system of higher education, NASM and your institutions and programs all face serious challenges. Sometimes these challenges seem so severe that we forget the strength of our foundation and start to lose faith. It is important not to do this. We must ensure that the difficulties we face in the short term do not result in reducing our ability to advance over the long term. Our president gave us a critically important message about this yesterday. Today, I want to mention a few realities that confirm the strategic value of what he said.

Let us look at a fact. Another achievement this year is the birth of the 300 millionth American. This achievement is not something that NASM or its member institutions can take credit for, at least as far as I know. In any case, this is an astounding number of people to serve, inspire, and even lead in terms of music. And, we are told that somewhere between 2040 and 2050, the population of the United States will be 400 million. Our population will grow by one third in just forty years, the working lifetimes of most of the students in our institutions today. Given these numbers, it should not be hard to argue against those who believe that we are training too many professional musicians. Another important demographic fact is that the baby-boom generation will begin to retire within the next ten to fifteen years. This means that new leadership for music is necessary and that it must be found relatively quickly and in large numbers.

Taking a grand view of things, how are we spending our time preparing for these eventualities? What are we most worried about? What do we think our priorities should be?

One way to answer this question is by posing another: "What is our vision for music and music study in the United States from now until 2050?" The founders of this Association had a vision. In part, it was that the glorious art of music could be spread throughout the United States by embedding the highest quality of music instruction in American higher education. This vision has been realized after decades of work by thousands of people.

What is our vision; what do we want to happen in terms of music? Too often, this kind of question is not as central to us as it might be. We are too busy to engage on so grand a scale. We often feel like the minister in a small southern community who went down to the depot daily to watch a scheduled train go through. One day, someone asked him why he did this. His response was: "I have to for my sanity; it's the only thing moving in this town that I don't have to push."

In addition to our own daily struggle to keep everything going, we face enormous pressures from visions based on power, organization, accountability, change-for-its-own-sake, and of course, visions of winning. We

have just had the report of the commission on the future of higher education empanelled by the U.S. Secretary of Education. Its vision is American success in global competition. Winning. American visions used to be expressed in terms of grand projects—in terms of some identifiable thing—great scientific, medical, cultural, and educational aspirations, or in terms of the human spirit—freedom, honor, compassion, and generosity. Our education system, public and private, was built on providing and advancing knowledge and skills in fields and disciplines. Of course, winning has its place, but winning for its own sake is a poor and potentially dangerous substitute for real accomplishment in terms of disciplines, fields, enterprise, and art.

Today, our educational and cultural climate seems focused on identifying the very best thing in areas where there is no single best or where best does not matter. If we only ate food from the 50 most fertile farms, almost everyone in our nation would starve. We face those who favor the evaluation approaches of Enron, dubbed graphically, “rank-and-yank.” We face visions of centralization and a corresponding lack of respect for local knowledge and initiative. The vision of the Secretary's report on the future of higher education is not a vision of promise; it is not a vision of content; it is not a vision of service; it is not a vision of spirit; it is a vision of fear. It is a vision derived from fear, based on fear, intended to produce fear, and full of proposals to shape the future of higher education through fear. Fear is not and must never be the basis for an American vision in anything. Freedom and fear do not go well together.

This brings us back to the question of our vision for music and music study from now until 2050. Whatever our respective answers, in order for our work to prosper, music must be at the center of our aspirations. Images of success are important, but visions focused on moving up a few points on some sort of superficial scale are not visions of depth or substance. It is far more powerful to say that our vision is to teach music as a great art at the highest levels we can, to as many people as we can, in the best way we can, using all the resources that we can muster.

In closing, I want to mention a critical conceptual symmetry that we must all work to preserve. This is the symmetry between what is common and what is individual or unique. There is a common future, and there is the future of each individual or each institution or program. We must as a nation, as a system of higher education, as an Association, and as individual institutions at all levels manage this conceptual symmetry. We must work together, and we must work separately. Our work together and our work separately need to reinforce each other. This is the basis for wise and effective reciprocity. The forces of centralization that are on the march in the education policy arena are seeking asymmetry. These forces seek more power over education centralized in Washington. The field of assessment and testing, indeed the whole concept of evaluation, has been appropriated as an arena where gains for centralization are to be sought.

I was speaking with a wise friend the other day and he suggested that we both ponder a possibility. That possibility is that a manic focus on assessment, accountability, and status usually appears when vision is lacking or faltering in terms of content, intellect, individual mind, and spirit. In other words, if vision is centered in the humanistic and the spiritual, in the substance and essence of things, in the content-based arenas of the disciplines and professional action, the whole world of evaluation and assessment are servants and assistants in achieving the vision. When the vision turns to power and control or the achievement of empty things, assessment, accountability, and status become masters and not servants.

Part of our challenge is making decisions consistent with the kind of world that we want to live in. For over 82 years, NASM has made its choice. The Association works with and through assessment and evaluation, but always in terms of a larger vision for music and music study. Accreditation is our servant not our master. And so, as we go forward in our discipline, forward in reciprocity, forward with the values and working patterns which have made us successful, and yes, forward into the challenges of countering ideas contrary to the transcending interests of our nation's higher education system, let us remember the great visions and values that have made us successful. Let us look at the enormous prospect ahead in terms of serving millions of new citizens. Let us work on the challenges of artistic, administrative, scholarly, and pedagogical leadership as we undergo generational change. Let us be sure that nothing moves us off our center as our President so wisely counseled yesterday. And, given the challenges we face, let us deepen our mutual effort to find new ways forward and evolving conditions. We have plenty of wonderful prospects to create new visions worthy of the greatness of our field. Let us always be focused primarily on that task.