

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC
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Report of the President

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Trust, service, autonomy balanced by mutual accountability, broad consultation in decision-making, and emphasis on results achieved and functions served rather than educational philosophies and methods. These are core values guiding the work of NASM. They can be found on the NASM website, and they are manifest in all aspects of the work of the Association. While the values that have shaped the work of NASM have remained constant throughout its distinguished history, the challenges and opportunities facing our profession have varied over time, perhaps no more dramatically than in recent years.

We all know of the extraordinary difficulties brought about by the current fiscal crisis. While the challenges to our programs resulting from this crisis will differ for each of us and our responses will likewise be distinctive, other significant challenges also confront our profession—challenges that can only be addressed through the efforts of organizations like NASM. NASM's ongoing presence at the national level has ensured that the values of our Association and the concerns of our profession are properly represented and appropriately considered. In addition, its presence demonstrates the very high regard accorded NASM in the national arena.

In my comments today I'd like to begin by citing a couple of important national policy areas where NASM has represented our collective interests during the past year. I will then provide a few thoughts regarding our continuing work in the area of undergraduate professional curricula and close with a review of the sessions we have planned on this important topic for this meeting.

You may recall receiving an urgent message from Sam Hope this past May concerning an initiative proposed by CHEA, the *Council for Higher Education Accreditation*. If implemented as initially presented, this initiative would threaten the balanced relationship between institutions and accreditors. Furthermore, it would place institutions in public-relations jeopardy every time they engaged in any accreditation-related project, resulting in an eventual loss in honesty and candor in self-studies and visitors' reports. In essence, the values, principles and effectiveness that have characterized the work of NASM and enabled it to contribute in such a positive fashion to the profession would be put at great risk. This and other CHEA proposals raised considerable concern throughout higher education. For example, as you may recall, the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors wrote and spoke against the proposals and the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities essentially asked CHEA not to proceed. Other CHEA proposals were equally troubling, including provisions that would enable CHEA to intervene in specific accreditation reviews. Many were concerned that implementation of such proposals would undermine hard won accomplishments to protect institutional freedom in the 2008 reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act and open the door to future federal regulation of the accreditation process in areas formerly the responsibility of institutions and accreditors. Our national office invested time and effort to cooperate with others in order to respond to these CHEA

proposals from a policy perspective. One major concern is potential erosion of institutional autonomy and accreditation effectiveness in higher education as a whole. Another is the accumulation of negative impacts on our institutions and programs and on the work of NASM.

I regret to report that fundamentally, CHEA has decided to proceed with its proposals. Your Executive Committee is studying the situation carefully and consulting with other organizations. NASM will remain true to its core values. For 86 years, we have assembled as an association to assist each other, and we will continue to do so in the years to come.

Along similar lines, the American Council on Education recently led an effort to respond to proposed federal regulations on higher education program integrity. Sam Hope was one of three representatives from specialized accreditation on a working group that developed an extensive response document eventually endorsed by over seventy other higher education and accreditation organizations. The higher education organizations that signed primarily represent institutions as a whole such as ACE and AAU and the land grant, state, and community college communities.

Issues of great concern included the breadth of the proposed regulations, the specific issues addressed, and the dramatic increase in compliance costs, especially for institutions. The federal government recently released its final regulations on program integrity. In response to comment, some of the original proposals were ameliorated and clarified, but the basic policy thrusts are unchanged. For example, the federal government has now established a federal definition of the credit hour, a regulatory step strongly opposed by signers of the ACE letter and many others. The final regulations on this point do provide greater interpretation flexibility to institutions and accreditors than the original proposal. The text clarifies that accreditors retain their standards-setting and supervisory role. Otherwise the text would be completely inconsistent with recently enacted provisions of the 2008 Higher Education Opportunity Act. However, improvements of these kinds are not the central policy issue. Defining the meaning of the credit hour is an academic responsibility, not a federal one. Conceptually, the step taken is a large one. It is a strategic loss for higher education.

The final regulations also contain provisions on misrepresentation of institutional information that are helpful, but others that are so broadly stated as to invite numerous interpretation issues, including escalating litigation costs. For example, the regulations do not make a clear distinction between recipient misunderstanding and institutional misrepresentation. Someone who doesn't understand can claim misrepresentation. The problem is obvious.

This set of regulations also addressed the issue titled "gainful employment." Gainful employment was also the subject of a later set of proposed regulations that received so much opposition that the finalization schedule has been delayed.

It would take far more time than we have today to explain these issues further. NASM has monitored and provided analyses in Washington-based work on all of these issues because they strike at the heart of the academic enterprise and the freedom of that enterprise.

No reasonable person is against the concept of regulation. Regulations are necessary. In this case, no one wants fraud or systems that cheat students and the public through misrepresentation or

failure to have reasonable and functioning credit hour requirements. The issue is not whether to do something about these things, but rather what should be done.

By law, there is to be a clear line between federal authority and the authority of institutions and accreditors when it comes to academic decision-making. If that line is crossed, the content and operational decisions associated with academic work are no longer the final responsibility of the academy.

More immediately, there are the costs. As we all know a disproportionate amount of institutional time, energy, and money is increasingly being dedicated to the demonstration of compliance. Compliance requirements keep escalating, in part driven by federal regulations that continue to expand no matter which party is in power. Here is the financial bottom line. The more institutions are forced to invest in meeting new compliance requirements, the fewer resources there are for the processes and personnel dedicated to the education of our students.

While there are many other issues and concerns in this arena, a principal reason for reviewing these initiatives is to make clear the very important work done on our behalf by the executive director of NASM. It is not just the representation in certain arenas. Far more important is the time, patience and knowledge required to study long documents that appear somewhat at random, to analyze extremely complex issues thoroughly, to work with others diplomatically, and to draft and redraft until consensus is reached. This is work that none of us is in the position to do individually, and work that NASM cannot do alone. Just this week the *ACE working group on program integrity* has reconvened to consider the final regulations and next steps, and our executive director is there once again. NASM has earned a place that is often at the center of these kinds of important policy discussions through years of quiet, highly effective analytical work. I would like to thank Sam, Karen and the staff for their continuing efforts to represent our interests in the national conversation on these and other topics. NASM has always focused its policy efforts on the critical conditions necessary for the work of the membership. Without continued attention to national initiatives that may affect these, the core values ensuring the continued effectiveness of NASM would be put at great risk. Please watch for periodic updates concerning the national-level efforts of the Association, and take the time to follow-up at the local level as appropriate. NASM may not always be speaking, but it is always working.

As many of you know, a significant portion of the last year's national meeting was devoted to the undergraduate curriculum, and in particular to efforts to provide a greater sense of opportunity for institutions to articulate and implement local solutions to the broad statements of content included in the NASM Standards, the standards we and our predecessors have evolved over 86 years. During that same time frame, curricular models have also evolved. In some ways, however, a traditional model has emerged and become a typical operating procedure. But this procedure is not the same as the NASM standards. The NASM standards articulate achievement goals, not procedure. There is room to do things differently. When we consider how things might be different, however, we all feel the constraints imposed by our tradition-bound curricular model—I assure you that I do. At the same time, I am sure that I find it as difficult as each of you to identify content areas ripe for a change in priorities or even deletion. We have accumulated these areas and our approaches to them for all the right reasons. Each area seems essential, and our approaches are time-tested. However, over the past three years curricular discussions have started within some member institutions. These discussions have not centered on the NASM

standards themselves, but rather on how the goals they contain can best be fulfilled in a specific institution, at this time, for students who have a future of work in music ahead of them. This distinction between NASM standards and local approaches and procedures is critical and important to keep in mind as we approach our discussions in the sessions to follow.

Returning to the NASM standards themselves for a moment, it is appropriate to note their heightened significance during times of fiscal challenge and budget cuts. The NASM standards make clear the content and the minimum time and effort deemed essential for music study. Because they carry the power of more than 600 member institutions they serve also to protect us, and it is not in our collective interest to water them down simply to create flexibility in our curricular models. Our standards are truly comprehensive. At the same time, “comprehensive” need not imply “all-inclusive” or “equal priority.”

I recently had the opportunity to read Matthew Syed’s book, *Bounce: Mozart, Federer, Beckman and the Science of Success*. Syed, working from original research conducted and reported by my FSU colleague Anders Ericsson, asserted that expert skill requires 10,000 hours of “purposeful practice” to attain. Much of the book is dedicated to demonstrating that this 10,000-hour threshold applies to many disciplines, including music. While any educational program may be described as a process of developing both knowledge and skill, the case Syed builds to support the 10,000-hour theory draws particular attention to a reality we all know well—it takes a lot of time to develop the skills required to be a musician—a disproportionate share of curricular time when compared to many other disciplines.

Throughout my reading of this text and my cursory review of other works by Ericsson, I kept thinking of those double-reed players who have clocked thousands of hours in ensembles too numerous to list in our limited time together today. While those countless hours of ensemble rehearsals and performances certainly advanced those young artists closer to the magic threshold of 10,000 hours, those rehearsal hours are clearly not equivalent to the “purposeful individual practice” considered essential for the development of high level of expertise by Ericsson and Syed. In the end, our double-reed charges are certainly no closer to stardom than their contemporaries with more appropriate ensemble commitments. Just a thought.

While Syed, a former world-class athlete, is clearly most comfortable applying his theory to various sports, and his arguments applied to that domain are generally quite persuasive, I must admit the application of the 10,000-hour threshold to music struck me as a bit oversimplified, even though the original research by Anders Ericsson that inspired Syed’s work involved violin students at the Music Academy of West Berlin. Perhaps my cautionary response to the application of the 10,000-hour model to high level musical expertise was influenced by Syed’s assertion that Kenny G “invented” circular breathing—I don’t know for sure who did, but I know that it wasn’t Kenny G.

In any event, whether or not one accepts 10,000 hours as a threshold to attain expert skill, it remains clear that the time devoted to development of musical performance skills will remain a major share of undergraduate professional curricula. Where then can we find some flexibility in our curricula? The revised standards we just approved provide opportunities.

Following our vote today, the standard on technology is no longer a “curricular” standard for all professional undergraduate degrees. Rather, the focus has shifted to the need to provide appropriate hardware and software to support current music technology and to applications for certain majors. While the inclusion of instruction in the use of technology is still appropriate for *consideration* by individual institutions, effective today, such instruction will no longer be *required* for all accredited institutions offering Bachelor of Music degrees. Given the awareness and sophistication in matters of music technology demonstrated by many students today, this seems most appropriate. In his recent book, *Remix*, Lawrence Lessig throws light on the creative energy that current technology has released in our young people as well their ready adaptation to the opportunities and challenges presented by that technology. For the most part, our students are quite successful engaging technology on their own. Indeed, the past few years have seen the music technology classroom evolve from an environment taught by “faculty” to an environment inhabited by highly motivated students teaching each other and themselves. As we consider the content of our undergraduate curricula, it might be useful to ask if a given bit of content or skill actually requires instructional time or if it might be something that students would be capable of learning or achieving on their own.

Both the revision of the composition/improvisation standard and the addition of the “all level, all specialization” standard in music education represent moves to a higher, more general level, with a focus on function served. In each case, music units will now be able to make choices among content/skill areas that were all included in the previous versions of these standards. As noted earlier, “comprehensive” need not imply “all-inclusive” or “equal priority.” As more and more institutions explore possibilities locally, there is no reason that we cannot explore other ideas nationally. We already have a model that provides varying options within a “comprehensive” set of standards; perhaps we will find new ways to refine this model further.

Finally, while standards revisions such as those approved today will provide greater flexibility to music units, the greater constraints we all experience remain those associated with the “tradition-bound” curricular model that I spoke about earlier. The NASM standards are foundational. We and our faculties construct our specific curricular house. It is important to remember that we all have options in the manner we choose to deliver instruction and the relative time we devote to the development of skill and knowledge. The most flexibility can be found through our own efforts at home.

Today’s sessions are designed to encourage your participation in our ongoing discussion of the undergraduate curriculum. Our discussions today are focused on those decisions that you and your faculty make. We hope that you will put these discussions in your own local context, that you will use the perspective of your own institution. Let us use this time together to encourage creative thought, to explore, to challenge ourselves.

In *Creative Approaches to the Undergraduate Curriculum – Part I* that begins following this session, we hope you will participate in discussions on content, instructional process and learning. Please choose either the core curriculum track or the music education track, and within that track, the appropriate group according to the enrollment sizes listed in the program. After lunch, the following general session, *Creative Approaches to the Undergraduate Curriculum – Part II*, will focus on your role in considering, leading and facilitating discussion and possible change at the local level in your institution. Again this year, we will also have Member Roundtables to continue

our curricular discussions and explore other issues of concern to us all. Our keynote speaker on Monday morning will provide a broad context for understanding the ongoing fiscal challenges we will likely face in the months ahead. We also have an array of interest sessions developed by members and guests. I would like to thank all who are presenting and also our regional chairs for their work in developing programs for Monday afternoon. We hope all of these presentations will be helpful to each of you as you look to the local challenges and opportunities you might face.

I look forward to the contributions each of you will make to our sessions in this meeting. Every time we assemble we are working with our future, and that of our students. I hope each of you reaches Tuesday morning inspired, energized, and informed by the support of your colleagues. And finally, for those of you who may choose to initiate discussions in your home institutions concerning new approaches to the undergraduate curriculum, I would like to leave you with a couple of thoughts. First, our faculty colleagues, like each of us, have typically devoted well beyond 10,000 hours in the acquisition of their knowledge and skills. We should expect them to have strongly held opinions regarding content and skill development. Second, it bears remembering that in a typical faculty search process, we frequently find greatest enthusiasm for candidates who stand apart from the pool of candidates in some special way. We hire them for their distinctive differences and lament when they don't always play well together. So, if you find that your curricular discussions are not progressing as smoothly as you might wish, try to be gentle and understanding --- but also be persistent. If your efforts result in curricular changes that take best advantage of the distinctive strengths of your institution while enhancing the preparation of your students for the challenges and opportunities they will face across the many years of their professional lives, your time and effort will be well spent indeed.

Thank you.

References

Lessig, L. (2008). *Remix: Making art and commerce thrive in the hybrid economy*. New York: Penguin Press.

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