

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF DANCE
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“Expertise, Trust, and Effectiveness”

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NASD has been serving the field of dance for a third of a century. It hardly seems that long ago when representatives of professional studio schools, colleges, and universities met in Arlington, Virginia, and established a service-oriented organization to benefit students of dance, institutions that teach dance, and the field of dance as a whole.

NASD was built using an American-style accreditation framework. Creating such an organization for dance would accomplish many purposes. Consensus-based standards would provide national statements of competencies and expectations, a basis for local advocacy to support the needs of existing programs, and reference points for the development of new programs. The dance field would gain accreditation parity with many other recognized professions. As a result, dance would have a place at the national table with the other arts and with other professions and groups of institutions in certain higher education and accreditation discussions. Independent dance schools and programs would have access to federal higher education funding. Dance leaders from all types of programs would have an expanded forum for mutual consultation, consideration, and support.

Aspirations were high from the beginning. Those assembled saw growth ahead. Dance in higher education seemed poised to expand. More colleges and universities were beginning to see dance as a field of study that belonged on their list of programs and majors. Professional studio schools were deepening their capabilities and capacities, and adding to their offerings.

In addition to aspiration, there was vision. Those present wanted an organization of unassailable artistic, academic, and operational quality and integrity. They wanted an organization that could help all interested individuals and institutions of higher education in any future that might develop. They sought ways to invest in capacity and capability.

NASD remains young in years and spirit. In pursuing its aspirations and vision, it has never wavered or faltered. It has continued to fulfill its basic purposes with greater distinction, year after year. On basic purposes, there is no change in sight. On potential for growth and working effectively in evolving conditions, there is no end in sight. NASD continues to grow in membership, influence, and sophistication. This growth is important and gratifying, but there is something even more important, even more basic: NASD’s commitment to service and integrity centered on and derived from the art of dance.

NASD has been blessed with a strong institutional membership. Outstanding individual leaders have represented member institutions. A rotating group of these individuals is elected to leadership roles. Commitment to service and integrity centered on and derived from the art of dance have deep roots in the values held by NASD’s elected leaders, and by its staff, institutional representatives, and member institutions. The high level of artistic and academic commitment and integrity in this organization could never be legislated or created by a set of regulations. These attributes are intrinsic, internally driven by the spirits and intellects of individuals, and beyond price.

Yes, NASD has standards, but its standards are manifestations of artistic and academic content, commitment, and integrity, not their causes. Our standards and way of working reflect who we are, far more than they shape who we are. Our standards are merely a written codification of what we know and believe collectively about what is essential. Our way of working demonstrates our mutual commitment to respect each other and help each other, to treat others as we would be treated.

As has been said many times, NASD standards provide a framework. The framework is structured to foster institutional and individual creativity. It seeks to create a proper relationship between what is shared and what is individual. This approach works in part because it is consistent with the nature of how art itself works. That which is foundational and permanent is the basis for building creative structures of infinite variety. Think about what dancers have done artistically with gravity, for example. The framework approach both reflects and generates sense, sensibility, and wisdom.

NASD carries no brief for any utopian fantasy, in part because as artists we know the value, integrity, and beauty of multiple solutions. We see searches for perfection primarily in individual and local terms. We know the nature of limits. We comprehend the interacting attributes of dynamic conditions. We know how to find and create infinities within the confines of what is merely possible.

This afternoon, I ask you to explore with me several relationships among three infinities: expertise, trust, and effectiveness.

Every arts discipline teaches many lessons about this relationship. Dance does so in its own unique way. In today's policy climate, however, large-scale questions about expertise, trust, and effectiveness are increasingly important as dance administrators and faculties address multiple challenges, consider the future, and make daily decisions.

When the word "expertise" is spoken, high fluency and efficiency enabled by high competence come to mind. High competence, fluency, and efficiency are in terms of particular bodies of knowledge, skills, and practice. A field. A specialization. An expert has expertise in some particular thing, some specific area of human endeavor.

As we all know from experience, high-level expertise is hard to acquire. It cannot be obtained casually. It is virtually impossible to gain it in more than one or two areas. Expertise is not evenly distributed, not only because of personal interest and innate ability, but also because individuals use the time they have to pursue different goals. Expertise requires more than study. Years of practice are necessary. Study and practice continually nurture each other. Expertise in one thing is not the equivalent of expertise in another content-based thing. Expertise is not essential for all achievement, but it usually is an absolute requisite for achievement at the highest levels.

By now you may be asking yourself why I am stating all these obvious generalities. The reason is simple. Today, many of these truths are being deeply discounted or simply ignored, as various education policies are being conceived and promulgated. Let us look together at three of the many reasons for this situation.

First, the very presence of expertise in an individual separates that individual from others who do not have the same or any expertise. Normally, expert knowledge has more value than non-expert opinion. This is why the aggregate knowledge of institutional representatives to NASD is valuable and powerful. You are in a better position to know what the NASD standards should say and how evaluations of dance programs should be conducted than experts in other fields. When each of you

engages with the artistic, scholarly, and educational work of dance, you know what you are seeing. You know what other experts in the field expect to see. You know the natures, components, qualities, and manifestations of dance expertise. You know how the field works. You know how its evaluation mechanisms are structured. You know what it takes to produce work of the highest quality. You are able to make informed judgments about value and potential.

Experts are able to see both general and specific work in their field from a holistic perspective. They know the parts and how they work together. They know that one part is not the whole, no matter how essential that part may be. They are able to order and prioritize among possibilities and make effective choices to fit specific situations. In these and many other ways, they are simply more qualified than those without expertise in their field. Concepts of peer governance and peer review grow from this reality.

Peer review reminds me of a story from the early formation period that led to the establishment of NASD. The Martha Graham School was among the professional studios that first sought accreditation, in part to connect to federal funding. When Ms. Graham was informed that her institution was to have a site visit based on peer review she asked, “Who is my peer?”

A few moments ago, I said that the concept of expertise is under pressure. I mentioned one source of pressure: the fact that expertise separates individuals according to the type and amount of expertise they hold. Expertise refutes the notion that anyone can do anything, or that organizational authority is equivalent to disciplinary capability. In many respects, expertise delineates who can do what, who can play in what territory, who has authority, who must have control in various settings and circumstances if certain purposes are to be fulfilled. These delineations can be powerful sources of envy, resentment, and negativity. When these feelings are nurtured and channeled politically, fact and reason usually lose. A clear example seems permanently before us: the oft-expressed view that teachers aren’t competent, don’t do enough real work, and are paid too much.

A second pressure on expertise is derived from a basic feature of the human condition. Expertise can be applied to positive and generative purposes, but also to negative and destructive purposes. There is expertise in high artistic communication through dance and the other art forms. There is also expertise in communication using highly manipulative and destructive propaganda technique. There is expertise in creating work and expertise in stealing what has been created. There is expertise in developing conditions of freedom and expertise in producing conditions of rigid control, oppression, and tyranny. There is expertise to build and expertise to destroy. Further, it is always possible for individuals with expertise in a certain field to act selfishly, unfairly disadvantage others, or collude against the public interest. Of course, such negative manifestations produce negative reactions that can also be nurtured and channeled politically. Sometimes fact and reason hold sway, sometimes not. Often a sense of proportion is lost.

There are two basic ways to address the reality of positive and negative applications of expertise. One is to identify, attack, and control against specific destructive practices. The other is to blame the presence of any destructive practice on the mere existence of experts and expertise, and use that argument to justify reducing freedom, decision-making authority, and resources for all experts in a specific field. The first approach is based on policing; the second, on regulating. It is easy to get into a situation where efforts to address certain negative applications of expertise produce applications of other types of expertise to a negative effect. For example, expertly conceived student loan fraud is countered by expertly developed federal regulations that increase financial and time costs on every institution of higher education.

A third pressure on the concept of expertise comes from reactions to the inconvenient fact of complexity. The expertise generated by multiple disciplines and specializations continues to produce complex conditions, operations, and interacting sets of findings. There are collisions among different types of expertise. Some occur naturally; others are engineered. And of course, among experts in various fields there are basic philosophical differences and ways of thinking and working. For these and other reasons, work in complex fields and situations, and the workings of complex systems in dynamic conditions, can be managed but not controlled, and certainly not centrally controlled. The scale is too great. There are simply too many unique actors, situations, and conditions all interacting second by second. The New York Stock Exchange is centrally managed, but its daily results are not centrally controlled. The results are the aggregate of millions of individual decisions. The Soviet Union brutally centralized control of agriculture and obviated individual and local decisions, calling it “collective farming.” Millions of citizens starved to death.

The gap between what and how much can and cannot be centrally controlled widens as expertise grows and spreads geographically, work advances and combines in various fields, work locations expand in number, and complexity continues to build on itself. In higher education, this is one reason why various disciplines or groups of disciplines have their own institutions or administrative units. The expert entities you represent are the best basis for interaction with other expert entities within and beyond the institution, for example, in relationships between dance and computer technology. There can be no inter- or multi-disciplinarity or team effort without disciplinarity and disciplinary expertise. Zero plus zero still equals zero.

As we just noted, the relationship among multiple expertise, complexity, and power distribution produces situations that can be managed overall, but cannot be centrally controlled, especially in a society as large as the United States. There is a big difference between management that recognizes and works with independence and freedom in decision-making, and control that tries to standardize everything and punish independent action. However, we don’t have to look very far to see how control-oriented many of our organizational and governance structures have become, or how much passion some exhibit for greater and greater centralization of control. Tendencies to deny complexity, promote the simplistic, value only certain disciplines, and place experts in highly regulated environments are natural by-products of this increasingly pervasive urge to control at ever-greater levels of detail. Currently, we are all witnessing a massive advocacy campaign for the powers of big data. Control bliss is being promised in article after article. We are all to become subjects of algorithms that will compute what we are expected to do based on what we and others deemed to be like us have done. How confining, how dehumanizing, how boring.

We have just looked at expertise as a concept with multiple perspectives and uses. We have noted that there are many kinds of expertise, and that expertise can produce envy, that it can be used for a vast range of purposes, including those that are positive and those that are negative. We have noted relationships among expertise, complexity, and control. We have contrasted control and management. Clearly, expertise questions are both critical and complicated in a society where so many highly developed fields work, interact, and compete. This sequence brings us to an interesting question. How is the concept of expertise being treated in discussions about what to do with and for education in the United States?

From my particular observation post near Washington, I don’t observe much respect for specific content-based expertise in the higher education policy arena. There are many demands for the development of such expertise, but not much interest in the policy views of those who have developed it. On many occasions, disciplinary and professional experts and expertise are taken for

granted, bypassed, or more often discounted and denigrated as special interests. It is suggested that improvement is to be had by removing influence and control from groups of experts who actually have in-depth knowledge of particular disciplines or professions, and giving it to those with expertise in generalized assessment or management or planning or funding, or to heavily subsidized pundits in foundations and think tanks. Of course this is not what is said, but it is the likely effect of many proposals being presented. The notion is that by denying decision-making authority or participation to those who are truly knowledgeable, we gain objectivity, fairness, financial savings, and of course, accountability. Here it is easy to see the combination of envy, reactions to negative applications of expertise, and denial of complexity, all integrating to produce the rationale for this view.

A vicious irony is present, however. The concept that experts or groups of professionals in the same field are likely to collude with each other against the general interest does not apply equally to all expert or professional groups. This double standard is particularly noticeable in educational evaluation where experts in assessment are usually portrayed as working in the public interest, but experts in content-based disciplines actually delivering education are not.

This vexing double-standard approach has an equally deceitful buddy: narrowed priorities for education. The purpose of higher education used to be focused on building civilization, with *civilization* being defined as cultivation of all the areas of human action and achievement. The scope of this goal reflects mature realizations about the presence and nature of complexity. Working toward the goal requires addressing complex disciplines, professions, and endeavors, and their interactions. Pursuit of this goal produces more complexity as advancement proceeds. Realization of the goal demands high levels of content-based and integrative expertise.

Within the education-as-civilization-building value system, disciplinary pursuit of the arts is welcomed to its natural place. Artistic work and activity are indigenous and central to the human condition. Therefore, expertise in the arts disciplines is important and valuable, the cultivation of individual potential for high levels of artistic expression and scholarship is worth supporting, and personnel development associated with teaching the arts disciplines, professionally and to the general public, is a natural purpose. But when values and priorities change from civilization building to something else, the arts may not be as welcome, or not in the same way.

A moment ago, I spoke about the problem of extracting parts of the whole and attempting to pretend as though they are the whole. A perfect example is the abstraction of science, technology, engineering and math from all the other components of civilization. Doing so produces a radical change of perspective, from civilization as a whole that includes science, technology, engineering and math, to science, technology, engineering and math as the primary purpose to which all else relates. The radical change is from comprehensiveness to narrowness. To many, such illusions about the value of narrowness must act like a drug against the humbling realities of complexity. The narrowing agenda seeks to make things smaller and simpler, in part because small and simple things appear easier to control. This works, of course, only if the thing being addressed is truly small and simple. If it is not, illusions become the basis for policies where narrowness breeds more narrowness and danger grows. As Einstein said, "Everything should be as simple as possible but no simpler."

The same kinds of narrowing problems occur when first priorities for higher education, both general and professional, move from civilization building to job acquisition. Over the past year, a number of states and other organizations have produced data correlating various college majors with earnings

immediately following graduation for a specific set of institutions. The correlations provide nothing new but institutional specificity, the kind of specificity that can so easily deceive students and the public. One goal seems to be to narrow the concept of worth to certain immediate and simplistic terms in an attempt to influence students in their choices of major field or institution. This practice calls to mind the old saying about those who know the price of everything and the value of nothing. This mindset seems influential in producing the kind of higher education environment that can laud multiculturalism and exhort attention to globalization, while deleting foreign language requirements, closing foreign language departments, and minimizing the importance of the arts and humanities; in other words, the multiple cultural aspects of the world beyond science.

For those of us in the arts and humanities, all this narrowing for control is producing conditions that are troubling. As General Lewis “Chesty” Puller said during the Second World War, “We’re all in the same pickle.” If we are not careful, American higher education could move in a direction that kicks down the ladder on which we have climbed, leaving ourselves stranded with narrowness.

Considerations of expertise lead naturally to considerations of trust. When we have a legal question, we turn to attorneys because we trust that they know more about what the law is and how it works than we do. When choosing a lawyer or any other expert, we also look for integrity. We want someone who will use what they know in a fair, appropriate, and right way, someone who will work for our best interests.

All of these principles apply to the field of dance where trust is central. You may already be thinking about ways that dancers in a performance must trust each other, the individuals producing the performance, and the musicians accompanying them. The individual dancer must trust that everyone else will do the right thing at the right time. The necessity of trust produces a sense of continuing responsibility that builds expertise as it is exercised in the work of dance. It also builds a culture of reciprocity. Of course, most individuals observing a performance expect to see virtuosity, expressivity, and perhaps beauty. Obscured is the fact that trust enables all these other attributes to emerge in artistic synergy. Trust in each other’s expertise and professionalism is an essential part of the whole.

It is clear that we live in a society where all sorts of active measures are employed to reduce trust. We have already talked about efforts to manufacture mistrust in experts and expertise and manufacture devaluation of certain disciplines. But producing mistrust in individuals and institutions is regularly used as a means to gain and retain power. Advertising and propaganda techniques are used to reduce thought and analysis in favor of a knee-jerk response. When these efforts gain traction, important distinctions between disagreement and mistrust are lost. This loss begins as something regrettable and often grows to become something tragic. “A house divided against itself cannot stand.”

On a more operational level, lack of trust destroys efficiency. Lack of trust diverts resources from production to protection. It divides communities. It reduces the possibility of open discussion and vitiates conditions necessary for negotiation. Normally, reductions in trust channel funding to entities promising to replace trust in people with something else. Often, that something else is data. But, replacing trust with numbers doesn’t really work.

One reason is that data deemed disadvantageous or misleading is regularly attacked along with those who produced it. I am reminded of Winston Churchill’s comment that “the only statistics you can trust are those you make up yourself.”

Another reason is that numbers alone do not and cannot reveal all factors creating the complexities faced in most decision-making environments, big-data capabilities notwithstanding. Numbers and data are important and essential in many situations, but they are simply one aspect of the whole. They reveal much but fail to explain all in any situation where human beings are interacting. Manic data obsession is no more reasonable and safe than any other manic obsession. Manic obsession is just another manifestation of dangerous narrowness.

“We are all in the same pickle.” Let us look at some aspects of the higher education pickle. After thirty years of conditions that featured denigrating the expertise and stewardship of professors and teachers, breathless promotional rhetoric about the overriding powers of data, continuous assertions that negative incidents are normal occurrences, selective presentations of fact, narrowing perspectives, and constant applications of propaganda technique, American higher education now faces knee-jerk mistrust and a combination of interests seeking the imposition of ever-more centralized control systems that replace trust in expertise with data-based assessment, often on terms that have nothing to do with content or with artistic, scholarly, and educational work. These terms include graduation rates, percentages of individuals enrolled in higher education, student loan default rates, and so forth. Too many Democrats and Republicans; legislatures and bureaucracies; foundations and businesses; and a whole gaggle of think tanks, consulting organizations, and testing companies are now feeding the culture of mistrust in higher education. The mistrust they are creating is used to justify the decisions that they are making or seek to make, many of which bureaucratize and centralize and narrow perspective even further. Regulations are exploding in number, specificity, and cost. Most of you are living in a context that is permeated with this situation, and policies created in this context come out to visit you on a regular basis. At times it seems that the goal is to remove as many decisions as possible from individual faculty and local institutions and move them to the state house or to Washington.

There is much more that could be said about trust. There is not time to explore the issue much further. However, before moving on to effectiveness, I want to state an obvious point. Trust is not a one-way proposition. If people trust us, we tend to trust them. If people don't trust us, we tend not to trust them either. In the culture of permanent accusation that characterizes our society and the smog of distrust and mistrust it creates, we need to be careful that we do not start distrusting ourselves, or losing trust in the value of our expertise, or agreeing that what we do is only important in terms of something else deemed more important. We shouldn't let ourselves feel that way; we also shouldn't let ourselves talk that way. It is important not to send inadvertent signals of surrender on something so fundamental.

We have considered a few aspects of expertise, trust, and their relationship. We have noted positives and negatives, transcendent truths, and present realities. All this is just a prelude to talking about effectiveness. And I want to talk about effectiveness in terms of NASD and its past, present, and future contributions.

NASD is effective for many reasons that are obvious. Its member institutions and their administrators and faculties, its services and documents, its distinguished and thoughtful elected leaders, its technical capabilities and staff support, its growing recognition in the field, its inspiring annual meetings, all of these are attributes of a successful organization. I have emphasized expertise and trust today, because I think these two attributes and their relationship are foundational, values-based reasons for NASD's success. Maintaining a healthy internal relationship between expertise and trust is critically important in the future. A healthy relationship provides a context for thoughtful internal decision-making at home, and for working externally in the accreditation and higher

education policy arenas. Given the challenges of our time, certain external policy arenas may not be especially friendly to basic NASD values or to the value of what NASD and its member institutions do.

It is unfortunate, but today, NASD's and the dance field's way of working with the concepts of expertise and trust and their relationship is somewhat countercultural. We don't reject the single subjects of current enthusiasm, but rather view them and work with them in terms of a larger whole. For example, we respect the powers of data; however, we are not interested in data as the only answer, but rather data in support of content-focused expert analysis and action. We want to work within an expert-developed, consensus-based framework, not be confined in a straitjacket of detailed regulations. We want mutual responsibility, not one-way accountability. We want recognition that many problems have multiple good answers and that one-size-fits-all solutions are often counterproductive.

As we ponder evolving conditions of challenge and difficulty, we should also ponder the fact that dance has always come through. The art of dance has transcended everything, all the eras, all historic problems and stupidities, even its own professional and aesthetic disagreements and chronic lack of funding.

Expertise in dance and matters of dance has been cultivated irrespective of whether that expertise has been respected or considered to have value. Dancers have always gained the capabilities in their art form to enable them to trust each other in common effort, even when the general culture was fragmented, even in extreme conditions such as tyranny or war. Dance has always been able to keep expertise and trust in a sufficiently strong relationship to continue and build the artistic, educational, and research-oriented work of the field.

NASD has been successful, in part, because it continues to use lessons learned in the field of dance and applies them to several areas of common effort undertaken by the organization. NASD has not sought power, but rather endeavored to serve expertise in multiple ways and to build trust through understanding, trust through fair dealing, checks and balances and rule-of-law principles, trust by fostering a climate of cooperation and mutual support. As I have indicated, the existence of NASD has coincided almost exactly with a period in American higher education where expertise and trust have been under increasing pressure. Attacks have been both indirect and direct, and they have been facilitated through code words such as "outcomes," "assessment," "accountability," "transparency," and so forth, words that now have the characteristics of a toxic tune. I am reminded of *The New Yorker* cartoon where a group of executives are huddled and one says to another, "Everybody sees right through your damned transparency."

To its great credit, NASD has lived in this pressured environment and kept its basic values. It has continued to show the deepest respect for expertise in content. NASD has not abandoned the idea that those who know most about dance should be responsible for articulating common standards frameworks for dance, for conducting evaluations, and for owning and managing the organization. NASD's structure and its ways of working are an affirmation of democratic values, consent-based governance, and consensus-based standards development. Over its 33 years of existence, NASD has done with its portfolio of responsibilities the same thing that the field of dance has done for centuries with its portfolio of responsibilities. It has stayed true to the nature of what it does, centered on content, cultivated expertise, and recognized the critical importance of nurturing trust, all as a basis for effectiveness.

The cultivation of expertise is humbling. So is the cultivation of trust. Think about it. NASD has not boasted. It has not swaggered. Rather, it has worked humbly, quietly, persistently, and relentlessly. It has sought content-based effectiveness rather than image-based perceptions of its power. It has recognized where the real focus should be: on people and dance and both together in a wide variety of local circumstances. Translated, this formula means bringing each student into the best possible relationship with dance by providing the best possible circumstances for the study of dance in institutions and programs. NASD and its members have always pursued the highest goals for artistry, scholarship, and teaching, and recognized the centrality of expertise in reaching those goals. NASD members have sought to strengthen each other by giving time to each other in consultation and accreditation settings and during annual meetings. They have cultivated deep trust in each other and in NASD. And the result is effectiveness, lasting effectiveness, a continuation of the best that dance has been over the centuries, a contribution to that effectiveness that is unique in our time and place, a contribution that is joined with other efforts in schools, companies, libraries, and research locations.

This approach to work produces transcendently effective results because it is based in truth and reality, essentially humble, and thus intrinsically wise. Even though such an approach may be disrespected in certain moments of time, like gravity, truth and reality win in the end. Bubbles of illusion, policy, and methodology grow and burst. It is better to avoid bubbles when they appear; it is even better to be able to recognize them as they are forming and figure out how to stay out of harm's way.

As the future becomes the present, there will be changes. But, as you all know from the work you do in dance, the important thing is not just change for its own sake, but change for the better. Change for the better usually means having the wisdom to discern a productive way forward and, in any situation, to make wise decisions about what can and cannot change. As we have already noted, this discernment comes through self-questioning and careful analysis about content, expertise, trust, effectiveness, and their relationships. Through such humble questioning, results of great power and transcendence come forth. It is that way in dance; it is that way in NASD. When times are tough and challenges come, it is important to remember the essential conditions of transcendence. When times are abundant, it is even more important to remember the essential conditions of transcendence. I have every confidence this organization will continue, grow, and strengthen itself by taking on all the challenges of the future while never forgetting or abandoning the conceptual foundations on which it is built.

Let us return in closing to infinities. At the beginning I characterized expertise, trust, and effectiveness as infinities, and they are. But in dance, these infinities are important for more than practical reasons. Expertise, trust, and effectiveness are important beyond price, because they enable and connect us to synthesis, wonder, mystery, and beauty, all infinities of being, meaning, and spirit that are the subject and essence of art.

Best wishes to all of you and your successors as you continue to explore all of these infinities, as you use your expertise to connect them in the work you do in and for dance, and as you nurture them in NASD and in your institutions on behalf of your students.