

UCAE SYMPOSIUM HELD SEPTEMBER 25TH 2009
AT METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
by Rick Lasher, Program Committee

Following is a description of the last year's UCAE Symposium. Plans are currently underway for a Symposium with a Curriculum Focus.

The University Council for Art Education, a New York City based organization of visual art education leaders, on September 25th 2009 invited colleagues to connect with national leaders and participate in a conversation of critical issues at this time of change and transition for visual art education.

Participating in the Symposium, held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on September 25th, were Scott Pearson, F. Robert Sabol, David Rhodes, Dennis Fehr and Judith Burton.

Scott Pearson, Associate Assistant Deputy Secretary in the Office of Innovation and Improvement at the US Department of Education reported on the strong support of the arts in education by the Obama administration. He referred to the letter Secretary Arne Duncan wrote to School and Education Community leaders "At this time when you are making critical and far-reaching budget and program decisions for the upcoming school year, I write to bring to your attention the importance of the arts as a core academic subject and part of a complete education for all students. The ESEA/NCLB defines the arts as a core subject, and the arts play a significant role in children's development and learning process." He went on to announce that the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics plan to undertake a survey to assess the condition of arts education in grades K-12 and invited audience members to comment.

F. Robert Sabol, NAEA President-elect and Professor of Visual and Performing Arts and Chair of the Division of Art and Design at Purdue University and a national researcher on the impact that ESEA/NCLB has had on Arts Education reported on his national study of the affects NCLB has had on art education programs. The National Art Education Foundation funded the research. Current information is posted on the NAEA website.

The study focuses on staffing, teaching loads, funding, scheduling, curriculum, enrollment, teaching and instruction and assessment and involved 3412 art educator responders, at all educational levels, representing every state and DC.

Dr. Sabol's research has found that 1. Generally art programs have not experienced negative consequences because of NCLB in areas of staffing, teaching loads and enrollment; 2. Art programs have experienced increased schedule interruptions, deductions in courses, class time and enrollments and reductions in funding; 3. Art educators generally have negative attitudes about the overall impact NCLB has had on their art programs and on improving the status of art education; and finally, 4. Art educators feel that because of NCLB they have become more reflective about their programs and teaching, spent more time revising curriculum and instructional practices and have increased their emphasis on assessment of art learning.

David Rhodes, President of the School of Visual Arts and Commissioner Emeritus of Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Higher Education, noted that NCLB is in large measure an integral part of the assessment and accountability movement, but it is flawed for some obvious reasons. There is no correlation between high stakes testing and educational achievement as practiced under NCLB. Students take the tests because they must. They do not learn anything from the tests because they do not have a chance to review their work to see what they answered correctly, and what not, and to learn why they made mistakes and why they achieved what they did.

Dennis Fehr, Director of the National Education Taskforce, and a faculty member at Texas Tech University pointed out that the 21st Century is an image driven time. It is important that art teachers give students the critical filters they need to navigate through this image world. He points out that we must teach our students visual literacy. Since we are now dealing with images we want to teach students how to view them critically, to "see" them, not merely "look" at them; how to view them and not allow themselves to be manipulated.

Judith Burton, Professor Art & Art Education, Teachers College, Columbia

University moderated the panel discussion following the individual keynote presentations.

During a discussion on testing Dr. Rhodes made the point that when it comes to measurement and assessment we need to

1. Make the units of analysis the students, not the teacher and certainly, not the school. After all it is what happens to the children that really matter.
2. Make testing diagnostic. We need to know where students are doing well and not so well and ask the most important question. Why we're getting the results we are getting?
3. We need to begin to understand how children learn and by extension, why they don't so that we will be able to develop successful strategies to insure that, in fact, no child is left behind.

At the end of the session Dr. Burton received a strong commitment from the speakers that they will continue their roles as advocates for the arts.