



A Feasibility Study to Measure Interactive and Cooperative Opportunities Between the Academic Specialties of Both the American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE) and the National Association of Industrial Technology (NAIT)

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Introduction

It should be noted that the title of this presentation includes the terms “interactive” and “cooperative” with respect to opportunities for collaboration between the American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE) and the National Association of Industrial Technology (NAIT) and makes no mention of safety program accreditation. However, as I accumulated data and ideas for this presentation, and in my numerous conversations with colleagues and members of both ASSE and NAIT, all roads eventually led back to the topic of safety program accreditation and how ASSE and NAIT should, or should not, be cooperative in that endeavor. It should be noted here that ASSE does *not* accredit safety programs but has a long-standing professional relationship with the American Board of Engineering Technology (ABET) for that purpose. While it was certainly not my intention, I don’t think I could have stumbled upon a topic with more academic opinion and passion than the one I have chosen to undertake here. Additionally, I am quite unsure if my colleagues who prompted me to raise this issue were wishing me ill or well. Remember the old proverb...don’t kill the messenger. In most cases the only way some safety professionals would even discuss the issue was under the condition of anonymity. At any rate, here goes.

Background and Bylaws/Objectives

While ASSE and NAIT have, for many decades, been the most influential organized bodies of association, collaboration, and education in all things occupational safety and industrial technology in the United States, the American Society of Safety Engineers is, without question, the leading body of safety education and the premier sponsor and advocate for safety professionals around the country. As a professional organization ASSE provides educational programs, sponsors safety oriented legislation, and is a strong promoter of professional membership development among its members. Having worked with ASSE for many years both as a safety professional and a safety academic, I have nothing but praise for the leadership and mission of ASSE and the support they have given to our academic specialty group. ASSE, by its very name, *is* safety.



Similarly, the National Association of Industrial Technology provides the same professional opportunities to its membership encompassing a wide range of specialties across the industrial technology profession. Having recently attended the NAIT executive board meeting in St. Louis, I can testify to the passion these men and women have for the field of industrial technology, both academic and professional. The NAIT executive director and associate director were adamant in their desire to provide only the very best for their organization. One major difference that is painfully obvious between ASSE and NAIT is that while ASSE can focus efforts solely on safety related issues, NAIT encompasses a vast array of specialties including, safety, graphics, manufacturing systems, industry, and electricity/electronic/computer technology to name just a few. The NAIT specialty divisions are many and the resources, as in all academics, few.

Both organizations seek out the very best for their membership and the many hundreds and thousands of college students influenced by their members and programs. The bylaws and objectives of both the American Society of Safety Engineers and the National Association of Industrial Technology's Safety Division promote safety and foster the advancement of safety related issues and are reprinted here by their permission:

NAIT Safety Division Bylaws/Objectives

- **Mission.** The Mission of the Safety Division shall be to carry out the purposes and objectives of the National Association of Industrial Technology as they apply to Industrial Technology professionals working in the area of Safety.
- **Authority.** The provisions of these bylaws shall not be in conflict with the Constitution and Bylaws and the Articles of Incorporation of the National Association of Industrial Technology (hereafter referred to as the Association): and in the event they may be, the Association Constitution and Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation shall govern.
- **Purpose.** The major purpose of the Safety Division of the Association shall be to foster the improvement and expansion of Safety efforts in colleges and universities and the continuing professional development of the graduates of these programs.
- **Objectives.** Specifically, the Safety Division shall:
 1. Promote the establishment and maintenance of Safety courses and programs in colleges and universities.
 2. Promote the establishment and maintenance of appropriate personnel classifications within business and industry for graduates of Safety programs.
 3. Support the Association's efforts in providing an accreditation process for the recognition of appropriate standards for Safety courses and programs.
 4. Support the Association's efforts in providing a certification process for the recognition of the attainment of appropriate standards for professionals who are graduates of Safety programs in colleges and universities.
 5. Provide opportunities for the study and discussion of all questions, issues, and problems related to Safety programs.
 6. Promote programs in Safety through the collection, development, and dissemination of information.
 7. Promote the objectives and interests of the Association by cooperating with other Association Divisions and with other local, regional, and national organizations having similar interests.



(NAIT, 2001)

ASSE Bylaws, Purpose, and Objectives

Sec. 1: (PURPOSE) The American Society of Safety Engineers shall promote the advancement of the safety profession and foster the professional well-being and development of its members, as set forth in the Articles of Incorporation.

Sec. 2: (OBJECTIVES) In fulfilling its purpose, the Society shall have the following objectives:

(A) To promote the growth and development of the profession.

(B) To provide leadership and guidance to the profession and to advance the science, methods and technology of safety.

(C) To establish and maintain standards for the profession.

(D) To develop and disseminate material that will carry out the purpose of the Society.

(E) To develop and promote educational programs for obtaining the knowledge required to perform the functions of a safety professional.

(F) To promote and conduct research in areas which further the purposes and objectives of the Society.

(G) To provide forums for the interchange and acquisition of professional knowledge among its members.

(H) To provide for liaison with government agencies and related disciplines and organizations in matters of concern to the profession.

Sec. 3: (DEFINITION) The definition of the safety profession as used in these Bylaws is: The safety profession is composed of individuals engaged in one or more of the specialties within the various sciences for the primary purpose of developing and/or implementing methods, procedures, systems, devices, and/or standards toward the reduction, control, or elimination of hazardous exposures to people or property. It is intended that the term "safety" be interpreted within the framework set forth in the "Scope and Functions of the Professional Safety Position," as adopted by the Society Board of Directors.

Sec. 4: (DISCLAIMER) Nothing contained herein shall authorize the Society to engage in any activities or practices which would cause it to lose its status as a tax-exempt organization within the meaning of Section 501(c)(6) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended, or the corresponding provisions of any future revenue law of the United States. (ASSE, 2002)

Questions and Discussion

In recent years, NAIT has ventured to expand into more occupational safety related college and university programs and has, unwittingly or not, created a great deal of discussion among professors and department chairs of occupational safety who, until now, were narrowly focused and totally reliant on ASSE. Because of this new venture, the following questions are asked:

1. Can these two organizations coexist and, if so, what pressures will be brought to bear on academic programs and professors to align themselves with one of both bodies?
2. What price will be paid if programs attempt to remain neutral as colleagues become more vocal in their allegiance to one organization or the other?
3. Is there any adequate or feasible way for the two organizations to align themselves and cooperate for the betterment of the profession?
4. What about the accreditation issue? Should programs attempt to gain accreditation from both NAIT and the ASSE sponsored ABET?

These are the type of questions this presentation will focus on in an attempt to, not answer with a definitive yes or no, but rather foster discussion among the representatives in this academic forum. Is



there room for both associations among our occupational safety academic ranks or will this turn into an either/or situation whereby safety academics must choose between the two? Can we afford to be members of both...in time *or* money?

In the infancy of the research for this presentation I emailed over 60 educators asking for candid and anonymous (for the purposes of this presentation) input to the types of questions above. Due to the volatility of the topic my hope was that I would receive 10-15 usable responses from which I could discern the pulse of my colleagues on the issue. To date I have received over 35 responses from ASSE and NAIT members. Some contacts in person, others by email or telephone. Many contacting me numerous times with additional information and opinion. Some colleagues are affiliated with both ASSE and NAIT due to the diversity of their programs and provided fascinating insight with regard to balancing allegiances. Factor in the repeat phone calls and one-on-one conversations at meetings and seminars and it becomes apparent that this issue is not going away any time soon.

Too many of our colleagues want to discuss the issue but are fearful of being ostracized for their efforts. It is amazing to me that so many of us fear retribution. If these types of thoughts cannot be discussed among academics, where then can they possibly be discussed? Concern over the perceptions of others seemed to be more apparent among the ASSE members than those of NAIT. Perhaps that is largely due to the perception that ASSE is the organization with much more to lose if NAIT should sweep universities off their feet, so to speak, and begin to gain in strength among safety departments. I gained new insight into the professional lives of many and increased and renewed respect for the sensitive positions many others are in. Fear not colleagues, as I indicated in my email questionnaires and personal conversations, no names or institutions will be used in the responses and quotes that follow.

With regard to the question, can these two organizations, ASSE and NAIT, coexist in the realm of occupational safety education and, if so, what pressures will be brought to bear on institutions and professors who are vocal in their alliance with one or both? Surprisingly, the majority of responses to this question were both positive and encouraging. Most agreed that the two entities could coexist in harmony but that some boundaries would have to be relaxed before professors would feel safe enough to speak of either organization in settings where “the other” was sponsoring. It was thought by more than one responder that while the local colleges and universities might not have difficulty with dual existence, the national leadership of both ASSE and NAIT might have difficulty with cooperative interaction. A matter of territory if you will.

The fact that the territorialism issue might create great stresses upon any successful working relationship was also recognized by several. Some of the responses, while enlightening and entertaining, were rather caustic and will not be used here. This presentation is not designed to divide but rather to seek common ground, or at the very least, to measure any possibility of common ground. I will try to differentiate between ASSE and NAIT colleagues where possible so as to give a better idea from which group the speaker may be aligned.

One insightful ASSE colleague wrote “ASSE is the ‘specialist’ organization within the field and NAIT offers the operations expertise and training to be a thoroughly effective safety manager.” In speaking about the possibility of cooperation and collaboration between the two organizations, at the NAIT executive committee meeting I was struck by the many positive comments by NAIT members. I learned that most NAIT accredited schools offer safety courses within their programs and that the safety component is 25% of the NAIT certification exam. While safety may not be in the actual title of NAIT, it



surely is involved in almost everything the organization does. How can one attempt industrial technology without safety? I think it would be impossible.

One educator with both ASSE and NAIT affiliations wrote, with regard to cooperation, "I see no disadvantage. Both should be trying to prepare safety professionals and not be hung up on enhancing their prospective organization." More than one responder offered the idea that it would be much easier for a college or university to accredit many programs at one time if they were able to use one agency for all. It would be much cheaper too. Another comment, "They spend too much time worrying about who gets credit for what and how many schools they can crow about in the end of the year reports or on their websites. If they would just let us [educators] make the decision without worrying about territory infringement it would all run a lot smoother and the students would reap the benefits."

I think it is human nature to think in terms of "territory" although I despise that term. At any rate, both ASSE and NAIT have invested a lifetime for the sole purpose of providing their respective memberships with the very best in research, education, and development. I think it would be rather simplistic to believe that these two organizations could just drop everything and "join up" so to speak. There is much more at stake here than a partnership. One major question that becomes obvious is the type of membership each organization espouses. Just how much occupational safety is involved in industrial technology education and what are the credentials of those involved? It is my understanding, from a couple of my NAIT responders that most industrial technology programs offer but one course in actual safety. Since the very essence of ASSE is safety, will the emphasis of industrial technology education expand to meet the professional needs of the ASSE members?

The second question, what price will be paid if programs attempt to remain neutral was answered in much the same way as the first question. It was believed that sooner or later every institution would have to take a stand with either ASSE, NAIT, or if the cooperation idea is successful, both. This would be especially true as deans and vice-presidents of academic affairs continue to pressure academic departments to gain some type of professional accreditation in order to satisfy national university accrediting bodies such as Southern, North Central, etc. Neutrality may be impossible as time goes by.

ASSE has offered wonderful opportunities to universities, professors, and students over the years with multiple thousands of dollars in scholarships, internships, co-ops, and research opportunities not to mention the networking opportunities among its 33,000+ members. Because of the strength of the American Society of Safety Engineers in the professional safety world it is believed that most schools will continue their alliance with ASSE rather than remain neutral. It was felt by a small group that ASSE might levy some type of penalty against institutions that "went the other direction" but most responders didn't offer any negative comments in that arena.

Is there any feasible way for the two organizations to align themselves and cooperate is another question put to the responders. While the surface question has already been discussed in question one, the second part, and it seems, the one most responders keyed on, is that of accreditation. Linking this question with the accreditation question seems to be the way most educators responded. While I was more interested in simple cooperation among the entities I seem to be in the minority. By far the majority of the responders wanted to focus on the accreditation issue.

Some of our colleagues question the whole accreditation issue. One member with ties to both ASSE and NAIT expressed disdain for the entire accreditation process. He considered it "hoop jumping" and just another attempt to tell him how his program needed changing. In all fairness, he felt the same



way about other accreditation agencies, not just ASSE or NAIT. He was not alone. That idea popped up several times in my questioning. Again, to be fair, one major positive that accreditation accomplishes is that of quality assurance. Is one school any better than the other? Perhaps not but at least the potential employer has assurance that the new graduate has completed an approved curriculum that is comparable to any other accredited institution within that particular discipline.

In my discussion with one ASSE educator this idea was fronted. "What about the majority of our schools that don't have 250 students enrolled in a safety division? We can't afford to lose the majority of our students in order to meet the current accreditation guidelines. Our programs will dissolve if we try to make engineers out of everyone." Another wrote, "As far as I can tell, not one school has increased their enrollment due to accreditation. Rather, just the opposite has occurred. I'm not prepared to terminate professors because we lose half our enrollment."

As indicated earlier, I'm not sure how long departments will be able to avoid the whole accreditation issue. Whether one agrees with the concept or not, it is the way of the future. Accreditation does provide some building blocks regarding quality control of programs and curriculum. Accreditation also can be very helpful in increasing budgets and teaching resources, facilities, and faculty. Yes, even a certain degree of pride accompanies the accredited program.

Resources, or a lack thereof, was another issue raised by some. Even some schools with large enrollments are having difficulty with inadequate resources. It will be interesting to see how NAIT will handle that issue in their accreditation visits. It takes a great deal of resources and funding to meet current engineering accreditation requirements and smaller schools, especially state supported smaller schools, just don't have them. It was suggested by a caller that "perhaps NAIT can fill a void that currently exists among our programs. The majority of us that can't meet current accreditation requirements but are still under the gun to find accreditation somewhere to satisfy our deans might find refuge with NAIT." Another respondent thought the accreditation process was nothing more than a matter of ego. "Those schools that have it always try to lord it over the rest of us. Even though we far outnumber them and, as a whole, place far more graduates into the field than they do." That sentiment is not one that will be solved by either ASSE or NAIT I'm afraid but rather one of personalities and opinions over which neither ASSE nor NAIT has control. In any profession, there will always exist the feeling of "have and the have not."

One insightful professor wrote "I see advantages to both agencies as well as to universities seeking accreditation. I'm not so sure it will ever happen due to economic and political agendas." This same educator did not see any advantage to seeking dual accreditation "I don't see this happening...again due to cost." He also had concerns with regard to the actual accreditation process and expressed a need to know whether or not NAIT was sending out auditors with actual occupational safety background to potentially accredit safety programs or if any industrial technology background would do. A viable question. Would the quality of the NAIT accreditation be up to the standard of the current ABET accreditation or would we be looking at a second tier type of accreditation. If the later is true, what would be the benefit to the students? The only way any cooperative accreditation would be successful is if the accreditation was recognized by everyone as being equal. A difficult proposition to be sure.

Another question would be ASP and CSP professional designations. As we all know, the ASP and CSP designation is of utmost importance in professional safety. What would the Board of Certified Safety Professionals (BCSP) think of NAIT accreditation? Some would ask why this is an important issue. For one, the importance is that of students being able to sit for the ASP exams while in their last



semester or immediately following their last semester if they graduate from an ABET accredited program. This is currently one of the major selling points of program accreditation. If NAIT accredited programs are not recognized by the BCSP for the ASP exam, then that would be a major hurdle to any school considering pursuing the accreditation process. The CSP question would be taken care of with experience on the job but universities will need to closely follow the BCSP stance on the ASP question.

Many questions to be sure and no easy answers. The only way I see any possibility for success would be a conference with equal representation to hammer out the differences between the two organizations. Topics such as philosophy, safety emphasis, program change and resources, accreditation inspection criteria and quality, and personnel credentials would have to be discussed. Egos must be checked at the door. Easier said than done.

American Society of Safety Engineers. *Bylaws, Purposes, and Objectives*. 10 September, 2002.
<http://www.asse.org/bylaws-09-10-02.doc>.

National Association of Industrial Technology. *Safety Division Bylaws*. 1 January 2001.
<http://www.nait.org/divisions/safetydivisionbylaws.html>.