

# The NERA Researcher

## The President's Message



**Happy New Year, NERA Members!** I am honored and excited to serve as NERA President this year. Since my first year as a graduate student in 1998, NERA has played a significant role in shaping both my professional and personal life. I still remember my first presentation—an experience that left a lasting impression on me. Now, stepping into this leadership role, I feel humbled to contribute to an organization that has meant so much to me.

Rather than adding more initiatives, my goal this year is to strengthen and enhance the incredible work already in place. I look forward to collaborating with our outstanding Board of Directors and dedicated committees, whose experience, wisdom, and thoughtfulness continue to impress me.

If you are new to NERA, I encourage you to get involved—whether by joining a committee, attending webinars, or engaging with colleagues at the conference. There are many opportunities to contribute and connect.

Planning for the NERA 2025 Conference is already underway! I am thrilled to work alongside an exceptional team of conference co-chairs:

- **Eduardo Crespo-Cruz** (University of Massachusetts Amherst)
- **Hongyu Diao** (American Board of Internal Medicine)
- **Nate Smith** (American Board of Internal Medicine)
- **Dongwei Wang** (American Board of Surgery)

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This year's theme, "**Illuminating the Margins: Redefining Inclusion in Education**," will focus on fostering engagement and dialogue around inclusion—particularly for invisible differences. We are also introducing some exciting new elements, including discussion prompts, an enhanced Keynote experience, expanded mentoring opportunities, and even some conference swag!

Additionally, we are ramping up our **webinar series**, so stay tuned for upcoming sessions.

Please feel free to reach out if I can support you in any way: [president@nera-education.org](mailto:president@nera-education.org). I look forward to a fantastic year ahead!

Warmly,  
Lisa Keller  
NERA President

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and Research Studies**



The NERA Researcher is the official newsletter of the Northeastern Educational Research Association.

## Message from the Editors

Hello NERA members—new and returning. We hope you all had happy holidays.

We'd like to thank NERA Past President Jonathan Steinberg and the 2024 co-chairs Javier Suárez-Álvarez, Hannah Smith, Siyu Wan, and Caroline Prendergast for a most stimulating 55th annual NERA conference. Special thanks to Jonathan for his engaging and insightful presidential address—see page 4—and Beverly Leon and Shaun Nelms for their interesting and educational keynote addresses. Equally enlightening were the wide variety of workshops, panels, and sessions, as well as the exciting social events, where we had the chance to reconnect with friends and colleagues- a highlight of our annual gathering!

We'd also like to welcome our new NERA President, Lisa Keller, and her co-chairs: Eduardo Crespo-Cruz, Hongyu Diao, Nate Smith, and Dongwei Wang.

In this issue, you will find updates from many of our committees, including news from NERA's new Corporate Governance Committee chaired by Hank Johnson. Be sure to read our two Member Spotlights to learn more about a new NERA member, Laila Baudinovna Issayeva, and a seasoned NERA member, Kristen Huff. And don't forget to read part II of Stacey Kite's series on Qualitative Instrument Development.

Stay warm and start thinking about that proposal you're going to submit in the not-too-distant future.

2025 Editorial Board  
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## Appointed Positions

- 2025 Conference Co-Chairs:**  
**Dongwei Wang**  
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- Eduardo Crespo-Cruz**  
*University of Massachusetts Amherst*
- Hongyu Diao**  
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**Bo Bashkov**  
*IXL Learning*

## 2024 Presidential Address

### Promoting Social Responsibility in Educational Research: The Human Thing to Do<sup>1</sup>

Jonathan Steinberg, NERA Past President

*Delivered October 9, 2024*

It is great to see you all tonight and I hope you are enjoying the conference so far. I just wanted to offer a few words before I speak. In case you are wondering, I do have a lot of experience being on a stage giving speeches. Every summer at my synagogue, I always volunteer to give a sermon at a Saturday morning service. The sermons can only be 10 minutes and the crowd is typically about one-fourth the size of who we have here tonight. These almost always have at least these three components: some kind of meaningful message rooted in Jewish tradition and practice, a connection to a popular pop song, and my personal favorite, some kind of reference to the six movies featuring the original cast of Star Trek, all contained on a handful of pieces of paper, delivered in the style of one of FDR's fireside chats. That is the model I will follow tonight, which means no slides, and I hope not too long.

Once again, gathering together in this early autumn season has proven to be a wonderful opportunity to reconnect and recharge with friends and colleagues. I am confident that over these past two days, so many of you have asked each other questions like, "How have you been?", "How's your family?", "What is going on with <enter your favorite sports team of the season here>", "What ever happened when you tried adding a c parameter into your IRT model?". It is not just because I have had the honor and privilege of being your president this year, but whether the NERA conference was in Rocky Hill or for the better part of these last 10 years in Trumbull, I have felt a sense of joy and anticipation as I near one of my happiest places. This feeling can be summed up by something I saw on the side of the Merritt Parkway driving up during one of those early years after the transition. Nothing tells you more convincingly that you are going to an educational research conference when you see a sign that says "Survey Work in Progress."

<sup>1</sup> Modified from the presented version.

## Member News

**Krishna Chaitanya Rao Kathala**, co-chair of the Mentoring Committee, earned his PhD in Education (Learning Science and Technology). His dissertation examined how hackathons can foster self-efficacy in computing and innovation among middle and high school students. He now serves as Assistant Director of Analytics at the University of North Carolina, where he leads analytics initiatives for institutional research.

**Dr. Sara Finney, Dr. Jonathan Stewart, Riley Herr, Kate Schaefer and Autumn Wild**, from James Madison University's Center for Assessment & Research Studies (CARS), have received the ACPA Excellence in Equity-Centered Assessment award. For more information, see [this LinkedIn Post from JMU CARS](#) announcing the award.

**Kai Fuentes** published an article based on their NERA presentation last year. It is entitled [Less is More: How a measured, respectable approach to interviewing yields more insights.](#)

**Nailah Harvey**, M.A.Ed, is a 10 times published author, book editor, and third-year doctoral student at Howard University (HU). Last fall, she reached a milestone in her doctoral journey and presented a variation of her research, 'Closing the College Entrance Exam Gap in Writing for Black High School Students in California,' at the NERA 2024 Conference. She currently serves as the Communications Director for the HU School of Education Graduate Student Advisory Council and is a dedicated advocate for literacy, thought leadership, and the transformative power of writing.

*Continued on next page*



The timing of the conference this year coincides with the most solemn period in the Jewish calendar, the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It is a time of deep introspection and reflection, with prayers offered and good wishes exchanged between family and friends for a happy, healthy, and sweet new year, and a goal of overall self-improvement. I do want to say again how appreciative I am for your flexibility in accommodating the change in the schedule this year. With that in mind, I am reminded of the following incident.

On October 13, 1992, two very profound questions were posed by an older gentleman on a college campus - "Who am I?", "Why am I here"? Some of you may recognize that those words were spoken by the late Retired Admiral and Vice-Presidential candidate [James Stockdale](#). While the setting was the Vice-Presidential debate stage, I found myself reflecting on that moment in the early months after being elected in how to shape this conference. Those two questions resonated strongly with me. After analyzing how COVID affected our work, I felt it was time to re-center our focus on why social responsibility in educational research is important, emphasizing why we do the work that we do, how we do it, and who we do it for, but also as my former ETS colleague and [NERA webinar](#) presenter this year [Jane Shore from Revolution School in Philadelphia](#) pointed out to me, who we do it with and through.

Your presence in this ballroom tonight not only reflects your enthusiasm for the work you and your colleagues do, but it is also a symbol of your passion and support for this beloved NERA organization, which proudly celebrates its 55th anniversary this year. As I enter my 18th year of membership, I am honored to share this milestone with you. When I first experienced the magic and family atmosphere of NERA in 2007, my son was just 13 months old. Now, as I stand before you, I am a week and a half removed from visiting him for Parents Weekend during his first year of college. The sense of family that NERA provides was an unbelievable source of support for me when my professional circumstances suddenly changed just over 18 months ago. I said it last year, and I will say it again - thank you.

Early this summer, as the co-chairs and I were beginning to get our bearings on getting out proposal review assignments, we were informed of a loss in our NERA family. Dr. Anne Niccoli, a member of the Leadership Development Center at the Coast Guard Academy, and frequent presenter at NERA passed away on June 8th, just after we closed the proposal submission system. The news came to us from Arthur, her beloved husband of 52 years.

*[Continued on page 35](#)*

**Rebecca S. Natow** and **Jordan McCaw** have a new publication entitled *The role of a school-community partnership in enhancing special education within a school district*. The study sought to understand both the influences on and the influences of the school-community partnership. Factors considered by the partnership included research, data, expertise, resource constraints, and lived experiences. For more information, the citation is provided below:

Rebecca S. Natow & Jordan McCaw. (2024). The Role of a School-Community Partnership in Enhancing Inclusive Special Education within a School District. *Leadership & Policy in Schools*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2024.2411293>

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Please consider submitting your professional accomplishments to *The NERA Researcher* for recognition! News can be submitted year-round to [theneraresearcher@nera-education.org](mailto:theneraresearcher@nera-education.org) and will be published in the next issue.



## Supporting the Next Generation of Medical Professionals

The AAMC (Association of American Medical Colleges) developed and administers the Medical College Admission Test® (MCAT®), which tests the foundational concepts and reasoning skills students need to succeed in medical school.

The AAMC provides comprehensive resources to help learners prepare for and take the MCAT exam. Learn more at [aamc.org/mcat](https://aamc.org/mcat).

The MCAT exam is one of many AAMC resources designed to help admissions officers make informed decisions about the academic readiness of applicants. Learn more at [aamc.org/admissions](https://aamc.org/admissions).

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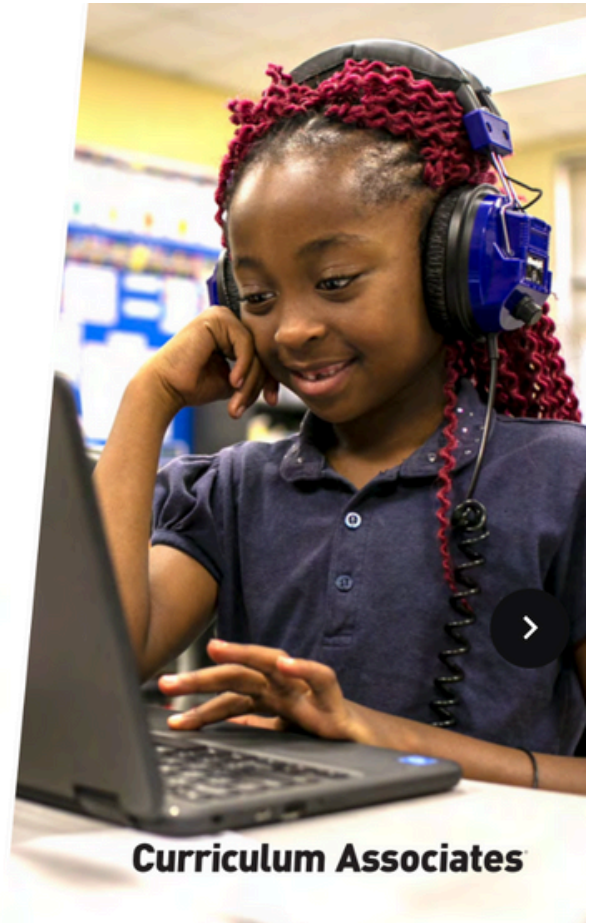


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## 2024 Conference Report and Highlights

Javier Suárez-Álvarez, Caroline Prendergast, Hannah Smith, and Siyu Wan

Dear NERA Community,

As we embrace the new year, we trust you are all forging ahead with resilience and optimism. We hope the enriching experiences shared at the NERA 2024 conference serve as a reminder of how strong we are together. We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to each attendee, volunteer, presenter, and contributor whose dedication and efforts are the lifeblood of NERA. As we conclude our work as conference co-chairs, we are pleased to present this final conference report to you.

With our theme of *Promoting Social Responsibility in Educational Research*, the NERA 2024 program consisted of more than 106 proposals presented as papers, symposia, posters, and panels across 30 sessions throughout the three days. Altogether, we had 217 registrants at the conference in 2024, many of them attending for the first time.

We were fortunate to have keynote speakers like Beverly Leon and Shaun Nelms, whose presentations were thought-provoking and deeply inspiring. Their insights reinforced our collective commitment to promote ethical practices and social responsibility within educational research, now more than ever. The Presidential Address delivered by our esteemed colleague, Jonathan Steinberg, was both motivating and timely. His reflections gave us a poignant charge, urging us to consider the future directions of our work as education researchers. The pre-conference and in-conference workshops explored a variety of specific and relevant topics, including responsible qualitative interview techniques, key concepts for ensuring quantitative research success, insights into content development for large-scale standardized assessments, and strategies for conducting anti-bias, anti-oppressive educational research, all of which were well attended by our members. Similarly, the social events throughout the conference, from 3MT to Music Bingo, GSIC to Mentoring, were all great spaces for networking and connection with NERA colleagues.

NERA is a volunteer-run organization, and we depend on both our membership and our sponsors to bring this conference to the community each year. We thank all of our sponsors who contributed a total of \$26,600 in support of the 2024 conference. We also want to thank the members who contributed an additional \$925 in personal donations. We are pleased to report that, despite facing rising food costs, we managed to cover all conference expenses without increasing the conference fees while still delivering an engaging and meaningful experience for all attendees.



As we conclude our tenure as conference co-chairs and pass the baton to the 2025 team, we sincerely thank you for your support and active participation in NERA 2024. We wish you a resilient year as we continue to shape the future of educational research together. We look forward to seeing you back in Trumbull, CT, for NERA 2025!

Javier Suárez-Álvarez, Caroline Prendergast, Hannah Smith, and Siyu Wan  
2024 Conference Co-Chairs



*2024 President Jonathan Steinberg with Panelists and Presenters*



*James Madison University*

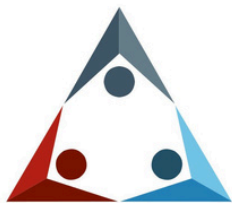


*University of Massachusetts Amherst*





*Tricia Clarke and Kate Schaefer, recipient of the 2023 GSIC Best Paper Award*



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## Creation of the Corporate Governance Committee

Hank Johnson, *NEIT*, Chair

The Northeastern Educational Research Association (NERA) is pleased to announce the formation of a Corporate Governance Committee, a significant step toward strengthening our organizational framework and enhancing our commitment to excellence, accountability, and transparency.

This committee is tasked with the critical responsibility of developing, implementing, and maintaining governance policies that align with evolving corporate laws and regulatory changes. As the legal landscape surrounding governance continues to shift, this committee will ensure that NERA remains compliant, proactive, and aligned with best practices. The Corporate Governance Committee will also oversee board governance processes, ensure clear oversight of ethical practices, and maintain policies that foster responsible leadership at every level of the organization.

The establishment of this committee is a proactive measure to promote sound decision-making, safeguard organizational integrity, and build trust among our stakeholders, including members, partners, and the broader research community. By prioritizing governance excellence, NERA reaffirms its commitment to long-term organizational sustainability and continued leadership within the educational research sector.

For any questions, or if you would like more information about the Corporate Governance Committee, please reach out to the committee chair, Hank Johnson, at [hjohnson@neit.edu](mailto:hjohnson@neit.edu). Thank you for your ongoing support as we work together to advance NERA's mission and values.



## Member Advocacy Committee Update

Sarah Hammami, *Buros Center for Testing*, Chair

Hello NERA Members,

Happy New Year! As we begin this new year, the Member Advocacy Committee (MAC) is gearing up for our first meeting of the year to explore how we can make NERA a more inclusive and welcoming organization for all its members.

### Welcome to Our New Members!

We are thrilled to introduce and welcome two incredible individuals who are joining the MAC this year:

- **Archangel Gundula**, from the University of Massachusetts Amherst
- **Marjorie Blicharz**, from Rowan University

Their contributions will undoubtedly bring fresh perspectives and energy to our committee!

### Current Initiatives and Ideas

While our plans are still in the early stages, here are some initiatives we are currently considering to foster inclusivity and support within NERA:

#### Quiet Rooms at Conferences

We aim to provide dedicated (quiet) rooms at the NERA conference where members can take a break from the stimulation of conference activities. These spaces would offer a calm environment for anyone needing a moment of rest or reflection.

#### Webinar Series

We are exploring the possibility of hosting one or two webinars this year, including:

- A session focused on students' experiences with equity (details forthcoming).
- A webinar on "How to Be a KIND and HELPFUL Discussant," inspired by the brilliant suggestion from our very own April Zenisky. We'll be ironing out the specifics soon!

## Expanding Inclusivity for Diverse Members

We are brainstorming ways to make NERA more inclusive for high school and undergraduate members, as well as members from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs); Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and others.

We want to hear from you! If you have ideas about how to make NERA a more inclusive and safer space for everyone, please don't hesitate to reach out!

### Members of the MAC:

Marjorie Blicharz	Richie Diaz	Pamela Kaliski
Tajma Cameron	Archangel Gundula	Kristin Weyrick
Kevin Coppersmith	Maria Hamdani	April Zenisky



## REASSESS THE FUTURE: SUPPORTING THE NEXT GENERATION OF PHYSICIANS

In collaboration with the medical education community, NBME is exploring how new, innovative and inclusive assessment tools can help future physicians develop not only the knowledge, but the skills and behaviors needed to better serve their patients.

Learn about the initiatives and research currently underway to make this possible at [ReassessTheFuture.org](https://ReassessTheFuture.org).



[REASSESTHEFUTURE.ORG](https://REASSESTHEFUTURE.ORG)

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## New Member Spotlight



### Laila Baudinovna Issayeva *(she/her/hers)*

#### Doctoral Student, Graduate Assistant

James Madison University, American Psychological Association, Psychometric Society

**NERA Member since 2025**

[LinkedIn](#)

#### Where do you call home?

I call Aktobe home—it's a city in western Kazakhstan where I was born and spent most of my life 🏡.

#### What's one of your favorite things about that place/your home?

My mom still lives there, which makes it extra special ❤️.

#### What's something you'd like to learn more about/spend more time doing?

I'd love to spend more time in nature 🌿 — exploring different states 🗺️, hiking 🥾, and cycling 🚲 across the country.

#### What is your favorite dish to cook or eat?

I love grilled salmon and shrimp with plenty of fresh greens 🍷🔥🥘🥗.

#### Do you have a favorite quote?

"If you fear something, don't do it. If you do it, have no fear." — Tamerlane

#### Are there any goals you're working toward?

I'm determined to earn a doctorate in Quantitative Psychology and make a meaningful impact in the field of Educational Measurement 🎓📊.

Interested in being considered for our next Member Spotlight? Learn more [here!](#)



## Seasoned Member Spotlight



**Kristen Huff**  
*(she/her/hers)*

**Head of Measurement**  
Curriculum Associates

**NERA Member since 1999**

[LinkedIn](#)



**Where do you call home?**

Beautiful Piedmont North Carolina, tucked between the mountains and the sea.

**What's one of your favorite things about that place/your home?**

The flora and the fauna, the community cats, and the kindness of Southern people.

**Do you have any favorite family traditions?**

We play music together. Think: 1970s sing-along classics, like Horse with No Name, Bobby McGee, and everything by Cat Stevens.

**What's something you enjoy that you think more people should consider doing/learning?**

Journaling. I have not missed a day in over 12 years. I credit it for helping me keep a positive mindset.

**Do you have any words of wisdom you live by/would like to share?**

Ruthlessly interrogate yours and others' assumptions. Most problems in any realm are because someone has made an incorrect assumption and acted upon it.

**Are there any goals you're working toward?**

Figuring out how AI prediction models fit into contemporary notions of validation.

**Interested in being considered for our next Member Spotlight? Learn more [here!](#)**



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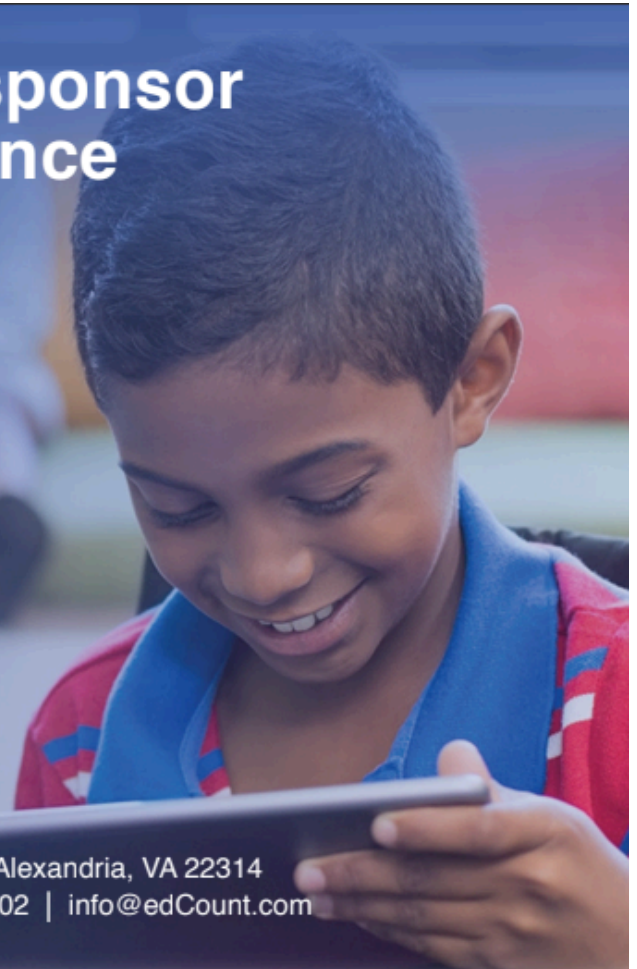
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## Graduate Student Issues Committee (GSIC) Update

Tricia C. Clarke, *Fordham University*, Chair

The Graduate Student Issues Committee (GSIC) exists to support graduate students throughout their graduate school journey. At the Fall 2024 NERA Annual Conference, students at the GSIC Social had an opportunity to connect in an informal gathering before participating in conference activities. One highlight of the event was a brief talk by Dr. David Earls, GSIC Committee Member, on the insidiousness of mental health issues during graduate school with a charge that we intentionally care for our wellbeing while pursuing graduate studies. Students can read more of Dr. Earls' tips in our **GSIC Toolkit for Graduate Student Success**.

The GSIC Toolkit is composed of carefully curated topics about graduate school and beyond and is presented through key phases. Developed by Dr. David Earls, Committee Member (Emmanuel College), Dr. Matthew Speno, Past Chair and Committee Member (Salem State University), Dr. Rachel Satter, Past Committee Member (Oregon State University), and Tricia Clarke, Chair (Fordham University), the GSIC Toolkit includes guidelines for advancing through the dissertation, a publishing how-to, career options during and beyond graduate school, and much more! Graduate students are invited to contribute to the next phase of Toolkit development by sharing their experiences and ideas. Additional details about writing for the Toolkit will be unveiled at an upcoming GSIC event.

GSIC's 2024 Best Paper award process is currently underway. First authors on a paper, who presented at the NERA 2024 Conference, submitted papers for the **2024 Best Paper by a Graduate Student Award competition**. One submission was a blind copy without any author identifying information on the title page and one copy included a title page with the names, affiliations, and email addresses of each author. The recipient of the GSIC 2024 Best Paper award will be recognized at the 2025 NERA Annual Conference! Thank you to students who have already submitted their papers! Peer reviewers, thank you for your willingness to read and review each paper submitted!

On **Wednesday, March 12, 2025, 6:00 pm - 7:15 pm**, the GSIC committee will host an online panel of recently graduated graduate students and professionals in the field. This event promises to be a space where students can feel motivated and inspired by the experiences and strategies shared by the invited online panelists and gain insight into the various directions to take their careers after graduation. Additional details will be shared in the coming weeks! **Register via this link:**

<https://lnkd.in/eQgUcneJ>

The GSIC is both a committee that plans and organizes events for and with graduate students and serves as a space to network with others. We invite students to join GSIC to socialize, network, and learn from and with their peers as members (accepted on a rolling basis). For more information, please contact GSIC Chair, Tricia Clarke at [tclarke11@fordham.edu](mailto:tclarke11@fordham.edu). We look forward to seeing you soon!

Your GSIC Committee,

Tricia C. Clarke (Fordham University), [NERA GSIC](#) Chair

Matthew Speno, Ed.D. (Salem State University), [NERA GSIC](#) Past Chair and Committee Member

David Earls, Ph.D. (Emmanuel College), [NERA GSIC](#) Committee Member



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## Leo D. Doherty Memorial Award for Outstanding Leadership and Service

### Rochelle Michel, *Smarter Balanced*

The Leo D. Doherty Memorial Award is presented to a longstanding NERA member who “has generously given of self to NERA, to advance its mission and to enable it to thrive.” The award, instituted by the NERA Board of Directors in 1981, honors the memory of Leo D. Doherty who was instrumental in the development and growth of NERA as a professional association for educational research. His leadership qualities, both ethical and compassionate, encouraged others to pursue and achieve their goals. Thus, this award, now given annually, is presented to a NERA member who has shown outstanding leadership and service to our organization.

The recipient of the 2024 NERA Leo D. Doherty Memorial Award for Outstanding Leadership and Service is **Rochelle Michel**. Rochelle has exemplified the caring, supportive leadership qualities that embody this award.

A few of us first met Rochelle when she started an internship at The College Board while pursuing her doctorate in psychometrics and quantitative psychology at Fordham University, while also working as a math educator in a post-secondary institution. Rochelle commented how much she loved teaching after people marveled at how much she was doing. At the center of her love of teaching is the care for others that is characteristic of Rochelle.





NERA members got to know Rochelle in her many leadership positions at NERA:

- Lorne H. Woollatt Distinguished Paper Award Chair for two cycles in 2011–2012; 2020–2024, and still continuing.
- Conference Ambassadors Chair, welcoming newcomers and graduate students from 2015–2017.
- Teacher-as-Researcher Chair, Rochelle really promoted this group, particularly since she has been, and continues to be, a teacher for others.
- Board of Directors (2012–2015).
- President (president-elect 2018; president 2019; past president and chair of the Nominations Committee in 2020).

Rochelle has also been involved in presenting, mentoring, and leading initiatives that promoted the NERA mission. In Rochelle’s letter of support, her nominator commented how struck they were by Rochelle’s excitement to support new NERA traditions like the 3MT contest.

The 2024 Doherty Award Committee, comprised of Tia Fechner, Sara Finney, Steven Holtzman, Hank Johnson (chair-elect), and Thanos Patelis (chair), extends its warm congratulations to Rochelle Michel, the 2024 Doherty Award recipient.

**Leo D. Doherty Memorial Award for Outstanding Leadership and Service**

**2025 Call for Nominations**

Hank Johnson, *NEIT*, Chair

The Leo D. Doherty Memorial Award is presented to a longstanding NERA member who exemplifies the qualities that Leo Doherty brought to NERA members, his colleagues, and students throughout his career. The award, instituted by the NERA Board of Directors in 1981, honors the memory of Leo Doherty. He was instrumental in developing and growing NERA as a professional association for educational research.

His leadership qualities, both ethical and humane, encouraged others to pursue and achieve their goals. Thus, it is awarded to NERA members who have exhibited outstanding leadership and service to our organization.

Please nominate a NERA member exemplifying these qualities.

Send a nomination letter in Word or PDF format as an attachment via email to Hank Johnson ([hjohnson@neit.edu](mailto:hjohnson@neit.edu)) by June 30, 2025. The nomination letter should indicate the name of the nominee, the nominee's e-mail and mailing address, and a concise, compelling indication of the nominee's leadership and service to NERA. Please include input from at least three other NERA members about the nominee's leadership and service either in the nomination letter or separate ones.

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## Thomas F. Donlon Memorial Award for Distinguished Mentoring

### *April Zenisky, University of Massachusetts Amherst*

The committee for the 2024 Thomas F. Donlon Memorial Award for Distinguished Mentoring is pleased to recognize **Dr. April Zenisky** as this year's recipient. As Research Professor and Director of Computer-Based Testing Initiatives at the Center for Educational Assessment at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Dr. Zenisky has demonstrated an exceptional commitment to mentorship, profoundly shaping the academic and professional paths of her mentees. Her dedication to mentorship continues to strengthen the field of educational research and practice.

Dr. Zenisky's mentorship is defined by compassion, thoughtfulness, and an unwavering dedication to her mentees' success. She fosters an environment where individuals are encouraged to excel while remaining mindful of the broader impact of their work in education. Her open-door policy ensures ongoing guidance, helping mentees navigate professional challenges with confidence.

A hallmark of her mentorship is her ability to balance professional excellence with personal commitments. She exemplifies how success in academia can coexist with family responsibilities, serving as an inspiration to those striving for this balance. Her willingness to conduct meetings from the sidelines of her daughter's horse shows is just one example of how she models this integration, reinforcing the idea that personal and professional lives need not be in conflict.

Beyond academic guidance, Dr. Zenisky instills resilience, adaptability, and a commitment to community. She cultivates a network of scholars who are not only technically proficient but also socially responsible and dedicated to improving educational practices. Her mentorship extends far beyond individual relationships, as her mentees carry forward her values and leadership into their own careers.

On behalf of the committee, we extend our congratulations to Dr. Zenisky. Her influence is far-reaching, shaping the next generation of scholars in education and beyond. We celebrate her contributions and look forward to her continued impact.

The Thomas F. Donlon Memorial Award Committee:

Marcia Delcourt, *Western Connecticut State University*, Co-Chair

Samuel Fancera, *William Paterson University*, Co-Chair

## Thomas F. Donlon Memorial Award for Distinguished Mentoring

### 2025 Call for Nominations

Dr. Samuel Fancera, *William Paterson University*, Chair

The Thomas F. Donlon Memorial Award for Distinguished Mentoring was established in 2000 in recognition of Tom's long and valued contributions to NERA, particularly as a mentor to so many colleagues. Since then, the award has been presented annually to NERA members who have demonstrated distinction as mentors of colleagues by guiding them and helping them find productive paths toward developing their careers as educational researchers.

Mentoring in education has been going on for centuries, and most of us can name a person who helped us move our careers along by being more than just a friend or colleague. That person may have been an advisor in developing your research agenda, or perhaps brought you to NERA for the first time after suggesting that you might be ready for a conference presentation.

Nominations are again being sought for this annual award. Nominees must be NERA members and may be nominated by any member(s) of NERA to whom they served as mentors. If you would like to see a member of NERA who was your mentor be recognized for their contributions to your success, send your nomination, including:

- a. A nomination letter
- b. Three to five letters of support indicating how the nominee distinguished themselves as a mentor.

The award will be presented at the annual NERA conference. Please contact the committee Chair if you have any questions about the Donlon Award or the nomination process. Send all nomination materials to Dr. Samuel Fancera via email at [fanceras@wpunj.edu](mailto:fanceras@wpunj.edu) by June 1.



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## 2024 Lorne H. Woollatt Distinguished Paper Award

### Injila Rasul

Congratulations to **Injila Rasul** and co-authors on the paper entitled, *Assessing the Impact of Professional Learning Communities on Teacher Enactment of Culturally-Responsive Computer Science Curriculum*, for winning the 2024 Lorne H. Woollatt Distinguished Paper Award.

The award-winning paper assessed the quality and effects of Research-Practice-Partnership strategies, i.e., professional learning communities, that are designed to increase the rate and depth of teacher adoption of culturally-responsive computer science pedagogy.

Injila Rasul will receive a NERA travel stipend to present this paper at the 2025 meeting of the American Educational Research Association. The paper was rated by the award committee members on its relevance, theoretical backing, clarity, design, analytical procedures, and presentation of results and conclusion, and received the highest average rating by the Lorne H. Woollatt Distinguished Paper Award Committee.



The Lorne H. Woollatt Distinguished Paper Award is named in honor of Lorne H. Woollatt, a distinguished New York State educator and NERA member. It is awarded annually, and a plaque is given to the recipient at the subsequent year's conference (October 2025). Research papers from the 2024 NERA conference were submitted by their authors to the award committee for this competitive award. Any questions about the award can be directed to the committee chair, Rochelle Michel at [nera.woollatt.award.submission@gmail.com](mailto:nera.woollatt.award.submission@gmail.com).

*This article is the second in a series of three articles on instrument development. The first article discussed the importance of constructs and operational definitions. This article continues to discuss the instrument development process, focusing on initial item development and instrument validation. The third and final article will address pilot testing of the instrument and evaluating its reliability.*

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## **Quantitative Instrument Development Part Two: Item Development and Validation**

**Stacey Kite**

*Johnson & Wales University*

*You cannot create accurate measures, only useful ones.*

*~Babbie*

Creating a quantitative instrument that yields accurate, useful results is arduous. The process to develop requires careful planning, including critical thinking and multiple revisions to craft the final instrument. It may be difficult to determine whether an instrument will accurately measure the intended construct—there is likely no way to be absolutely certain that it will measure it. Therefore, caution should be used in the application and the degree of confidence placed in the findings of one study (Babbie, 1990; Cronbach & Meehl, 1955; Lilienfeld & Strother, 2020).

The instrument development process begins with identifying the purpose and the lens from which you view the problem. These factors must both align with the research questions for the study. Once this is clear, you can identify the variables and constructs, operationally define them, and identify background items such as demographics and cue items. Once you complete this groundwork, create the initial instrument, validate it with experts and non-experts, and then pilot the instrument with a similar sample to the study's population.

### **Identify the Purpose**

As discussed in the first article, defining the purpose of the instrument is a critical first step in the development process. It is essential to be clear as to why the study is being conducted and how the results are to be used. This clarity influences not only what variables and constructs are measured but also how the items will be worded. Understanding the purpose helps ensure that the results will be relevant to the problem and address the study's research questions.

The purpose of the study provides a broad rationale for why a study is conducted, but the research questions specify what aspects of the problem will be investigated. Most problems are

multifaceted; trying to measure all aspects with a single instrument may lead to superficial results. Intentionally focusing on the component(s) of the problem that is being addressed allows for a deeper, more meaningful investigation. Since the research questions drive the study, they must capture the focus of the study accurately, or the results will be of limited value. It is important to note that research strives to inform and aid in decision-making, not to provide a final solution. The research addresses a problem formulated into a research question, but it does not answer the question.

### **The Lens**

Once the study's purpose is clear, the research questions are finalized, and the use of the results is determined, you should consider the lens from which you are addressing the problem. The lens determines how the construct will be viewed and measured. Depending on the study, the lens may be perspectives, attitudes, satisfaction, usage, agreement, frequency, importance, comparison, or knowledge (test). For instance, measuring the frequency of use is different from measuring satisfaction, even if both are referencing the same topic. In some studies, multiple lenses are utilized. If that is the case, they should be measured separately.

### **Construct Validity**

Construct validity is the degree to which you are accurately measuring the intended construct (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). The first step is determining how you operationalize constructs for the study, making sure they align with the research questions. You want to consider the significance of the study, desired outcomes, and how the results might be applied when making this selection.

When creating an operational definition, you break down the construct into components or characteristics. There are several ways to accomplish this: selecting an existing published instrument, consulting the literature, or referring to established standards or protocols.

#### **Using an Existing Published Instrument**

When using an existing published instrument, begin by identifying each of the items on the instrument you want to measure. If multiple constructs are involved, isolate the construct you wish to measure. These details are often located in the methodology section of a study or the technical manual for a published instrument. Bring all relevant items into your instrument and modify the wording slightly to make it more applicable to your study or to modernize the language; however, you want to refrain from making any significant changes or removing items until you validate and pilot the instrument.

Keep in mind that existing instruments were created with a specific study's purpose in mind. Therefore, choose an instrument that matches your purpose closely. Despite reported validity and reliability, you must always validate the existing instrument for your study. Validity and reliability refer to results, not instruments. They are contextual in that they follow the sample and the data.



Changing any aspect under investigation, such as the sample, setting, or timing, could change the validity and reliability of the measure.

If you are using an existing published instrument, always request permission from the author prior to using it and be transparent about the modifications planned. Moreover, it is vital to recognize the limitations of this process. The validity of a measure is contextual; measures created for one study may not be generalizable or valid in another setting or with another population. There are no universally valid instruments; instead, data gathered using the instrument are only valid for the context and setting in which they were developed and applied.

### ***Example***

You may be investigating students' sense of belonging—"a feeling that members (of a group) matter to each other and the group" (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 4). There are many existing instruments in this area; however, most, if not all, are contextual. As with most constructs, a sense of belonging is tied to the situation, and the feelings or ratings may change as the situation presented changes. The existing instruments may focus on various contexts such as higher education, elementary/secondary education, measures of job, social group, and community sense of belonging. Within the instruments, the focus may be such constructs as academic major, school community, peers, gender. Choosing the appropriate focus is essential since the items may change substantially.

### **Using the Literature to Measure the Construct**

If an appropriate existing instrument to measure the construct is not available, empirical articles or literature may be used to define the construct and its components. This process may be time-consuming, requiring careful selection of appropriate sources to ensure they accurately capture the construct. Once appropriate sources are identified, use the definitions and components to develop initial instrument items. The use of cognitive interviews (discussed later in this article) can assist in the final development and wording.

### ***Example***

If you are investigating teacher attitudes toward a new curriculum, Thurstone and Chave's (1929) definition of the construct attitude: cognitive (knowledge), affective (feelings and emotions), and behavioral (intention to act), may be used to guide the development of individual items. The new curriculum would be measured under each of the three areas: cognitive, affective, and behavioral, with approximately 5–8 items for each to fully capture the dimension.

### **Using a Protocol or Standard**

When the construct aligns with existing standards or protocols, it may provide a structured framework to guide the item development, which is advantageous when the construct is held to a widely accepted protocol or standard in practice. Create the items from the protocol components,

matching the study lens (e.g., agreement, frequency, satisfaction).

### **Example**

If you were investigating teachers' use of social-emotional learning, the CASEL standards may be used to define your construct of social-emotional learning, with items measuring usage or frequency. On a Likert scale, it is either from strongly disagree to strongly agree, or a modified Likert scale. Additionally, if the study sought attitude toward social-emotional learning, you would have a secondary construct of attitude. Thus, you would create a layered construct measuring their knowledge, feelings, and behaviors toward social-emotional learning (CASEL standards).

### **Draft Initial Instrument**

Once you have identified the variables and constructs for your study, create an outline of the key areas that need to be addressed on the instrument: constructs, variables, demographics, and so forth. You want to make sure that the specific variables and constructs needed to address your research questions are directly linked to the items on your instrument to ensure that you have included all necessary items. It is helpful to create a map, linking specific items on the instrument to the appropriate research questions. When measuring a construct, each component should be composed of approximately 6–8 items for the first draft to ensure thorough coverage. The grouping of items for each component is called a dimension. These dimensions are converted to a single aggregate score during the data management step under data analysis.

Next, consider what additional demographic items are necessary. Demographic items are essential not only to address research questions but also to control for moderating variables such as socioeconomic status or years of experience. Demographic items are also essential in describing the composition of the final gathered sample. This is not only important to fully understand the findings, but also to address generalizability and to determine if the collected sample is representative of the population.

After creating the initial draft of the instrument, consider the need for additional supporting items. Background information may be necessary to achieve a better understanding of the findings. Additionally, context or cue items may be needed to support the respondents in accessing necessary information and spark the respondents thinking about the topic prior to responding to later essential items.

Finally, organize the order and scaffolding of the items on the instrument, beginning with the least taxing items. Consider items that may be burdensome for the respondents and create additional items to ease this burden by allowing the respondents to begin to access the part of the brain where this information is stored.

## **Wording**

Careful wording is crucial to improve accuracy, avoid bias, and elude confusion, including avoiding leading and loaded questions, ensuring clarity, avoiding jargon, and establishing response choices that are both mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive. An abundance of sources are available with detailed guidance discussing challenges and considerations with the wording of items on an instrument (Babbie, 1990; Dillman et al., 2009; Fowler, 2014).

## **Response Format**

The response format used on your quantitative instrument is guided by what you are seeking to learn and how you will use the findings. Reflect on the most appropriate way to develop the response choices and the type of response needed. Moreover, the response format should be simple for the respondent to follow. The type of response format needed may depend on how the results will be used or the resulting actions.

Response choices on a questionnaire may include dichotomous (nominal), ranking (ordinal), scales or metric responses (interval), or open-ended questions. In most cases, scales (e.g., Likert scales) or metric responses (true numbers, e.g., income) are recommended as they allow for a wide variety of statistical analyses.

*Note.* A Likert scale is a statement with 5-point responses ranging from Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree. Any deviation from this denotes a Likert-type scale.

## **Response Process Model**

Many factors can limit the accuracy of the results of a study. “Much of the measurement error in surveys stems from problems that the respondents have in carrying out the cognitive operations needed for accurate answers” (Tourangeau, 2017, p. 169). It is important to understand the process the respondents endure when they are responding to the items on your instrument. A respondent may not have reflected on the topic of your study as much as you have; therefore, the process of responding may be more onerous than you realize. The model describes the subconscious process a respondent experiences when replying to items on a questionnaire. They are comprehending, retrieving information, applying knowledge, making a judgment regarding the item, and finally reporting the decision through a response. First, they must comprehend the questions and understand exactly what you are asking. Then, the respondent must recall from their memory anything they feel will assist them in addressing the question. They may consider knowledge and past experiences with the topic or feelings and emotions. Next, the respondents will consider the information retrieved and the questions asked to make a judgment of how they will respond. At this stage, they may be swayed by social desirability bias, choosing to respond in the way they think they should. Finally, the respondent will respond. One way to relieve the burden on the respondent is through cognitive-focused interviews.

## Validation

Instrument validation is a complex process and draws on skills, expertise, and resources from several sources. Validation improves the chances that the instrument measures what you intend to measure (Campbell & Stanley, 1963).

There are three types of validity: criterion validity, construct validity, and content/face validity. Criterion validity determines if the results from the instrument yield data that align with an established measure (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). To do this, the results are compared with existing data or known cases to test against. For example, an educator may benchmark a new exam with past behavior in a class. Or a teacher may compare their assessment in reading with a reading program like i-Ready®.

Construct validity is the extent to which you are measuring what you intend to measure, the construct (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). This process, described above, uses the literature or an existing published instrument to determine how the construct might be operationalized. The literature used to create the items, along with the results of cognitive interviews, are also used to support construct validity to determine whether the respondents view the item as you intended.

Content (and face) validity evaluates the content on the instrument to ensure it is complete, relevant, accurate, and covers all facets of the construct (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Content validity is addressed using expert review to evaluate the content of the instrument, while face validity is addressed using non-experts.

### Content Validity

Accurately assessing both content and face validity involves three distinct groups: subject matter experts (SMEs) to evaluate content validity, non-subject, non-academic individuals to evaluate face validity, and individuals similar to the target sample to evaluate both face and content validity.

### *Subject Matter Expert Evaluation*

First, the content validity is evaluated using experts in the field. SMEs should be selected based on their knowledge of the topic or construct. SMEs evaluate the accuracy and completeness of the instrument. They should be independent of the sample for your study and external to the researcher's circle to reduce researcher bias.

Purposefully select individuals who are subject matter experts so they can critically assess the instrument for accuracy and completeness. It is recommended that 5–10 SMEs be selected. You may need to diversify the group (e.g., gender, age, years in the profession) to assess the content accurately. The quality and accuracy of the feedback you receive are dependent on the proper selection of SMEs.



Once you identify content experts, invite them to check the items for accuracy and completeness. Provide detailed explicit instructions and develop pointed questions to guide the feedback. Additionally, you may create a rubric or chart for the feedback to be recorded. If the SMEs do not know what you are looking for or the expectations you are placing on them, they may not provide quality feedback. This process may also be completed in person, either individually or as a panel, where you would guide the feedback process.

### ***Non-subject, Non-academic Evaluation***

Next, you assess the face validity of the items by having non-subject, non-academic individuals review the instrument for clarity. This group is more likely to identify jargon and ambiguous language. Use the same process described above for this evaluation.

### ***Individuals Similar to the Target Sample Evaluation***

Finally, send your instrument to individuals who are “similar” to the sample without using possible members of your population. Instruct the subjects to complete the instrument, noting issues or thoughts (add comment boxes after each item). It is also recommended that you conduct cognitive-focused interviews with this group, described below. Exploring how individuals similar to your population interpret items may be very different from the SMEs or you.

### **Cognitive-Focused Interviews**

Tourangeau’s (1984) response model highlighted the burden on respondents and the risk of errors from misunderstandings, leading to a push for clearer communication. This model contributed to the development of cognitive interviews through the interdisciplinary work at the Cognitive Aspect of Survey Methodology seminar (CASM ). In 1984, Jabine et al. outlined the process, and Loftus (1994) expanded it by introducing protocol analysis. Ericsson and Simon (1993) developed a blueprint for the method. Finally, in 1994, Willis emphasized the importance of probing and created several guides, including two books widely used in instrument design. (Willis, 2005).

Cognitive-focused interviews aim to help identify potential misunderstandings and gauge how a respondent views and interprets the items on a questionnaire. Moreover, they may reveal the retrieval of information needed to respond, leading to the need for cue items.

Begin by asking the subject to complete the instrument on their own as intended. Next, ask them for their sense of the instrument; what do they think the instrument was measuring? Were items difficult to answer or unclear? Next, read through each item individually, asking the questions and allowing the subject to answer without response choices. This step will enable you to see if your response choices are appropriate and exhaustive. Finally, use probing questions to clarify their understanding. Mark all areas needing clarification. This process should be repeated with several individuals until it is clear.

## Conclusion

There are many types of questionnaires, some more complex than others. Developing a valid instrument is a detailed and deliberate process. This article outlines a simplistic, straightforward approach that a novice researcher can follow. The goal of instrument development is to appropriately measure what you intend to measure. By using the literature to accurately define the construct and using SMEs, non-SMEs, and subjects similar to your sample to review for content validity, you can improve the validity of the final instrument. No matter how much time and effort you put into the development of an instrument, if the respondents do not understand the questions, your findings will not be useful.

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We don't know if she had been ill, but from reading her [obituary](#), it was very clear that preparing something for the next big conference was something she truly enjoyed. It came as no surprise that Anne and two of her colleagues had submitted a strong proposal that we were happy to accept. In addition to her contributions to our conference and the NERA community, she lived a life of dedicated service to our country. She joined the Air Force at the age of 20 and supported the Vietnam War effort while in Plattsburgh, New York, working in Base Operations at the base there, and where she met Arthur, but also served on the faculty at West Point. Anne, may your memory truly be for a blessing to your family and thank you for your service to NERA and to our country.

I have a pretty good idea that many of you out there who have been attending this conference for years share my sentiments about this organization. Part of what I want to convey to you tonight is that your NERA family needs you now more than ever. I know that many of you have dedicated yourselves to NERA in various roles because you genuinely care for its well-being and success. I completely understand the challenge of balancing work and home life. I have spent 25 years searching for it and am still on that quest. However, after helping to run a very successful virtual NERA conference in 2021, one of my favorite Jewish teachings resonated with me, reminding me that there was more I could do for NERA. The [teaching](#) says that it is not incumbent on you to finish the job, but you are not free to shy away from it, which motivated me to run for President the following year.

For our newer members, please consider getting involved in committee work. It is a great way to meet other NERA members and help contribute to the success of our annual conference, and to the overall welfare of the organization. For our more long-standing members, if you have thought about running for the Board of Directors or higher office, with apologies in advance, after my transition tomorrow to become Past President and Chair of the Nominations Committee, I will be in your ear all year to encourage you as Michael Bolton said to, "[go the distance](#)", and take that next step. You have already achieved so much and you have a lot to offer future generations of this community, but the family needs you now. That is why with every social media post we make, I have been doing my best to add to it by tagging NERA to raise awareness to try and build interest for our brand, both regionally through organizations like NEERO and NEAIR, but also with AERA Division D where we advertised our Call for Proposals. I feel that by taking these steps we heed the warning given by Nassim Nicholas Taleb in his 2004 book, [Fooled by Randomness](#), where he wrote, "The longer animals can go without encountering the rare event, the more vulnerable they will be to it." The rare event we need to avoid is NERA being without a strong leadership pipeline advocating for the great work we do and the great experience we provide every year at our annual conference.

Let me take that Jewish teaching I just mentioned one step further. In Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home, most of the story takes place in 20th century San Francisco and Chekov (no, not the playwright) tries to escape questioning after taking photons from a Naval aircraft carrier which were needed to regenerate his crew's stolen Klingon ship's dilithium crystals. While running from the authorities, he falls off the deck, hits his head, and lands in the hospital. Once the Enterprise crew is able to find him, Doctor McCoy pleads with Admiral Kirk to let him save Chekov from being

treated using 20th century medicine. Spock overhears this, joins the conversation, and lends his support for McCoy's plan. Kirk questions whether this was the logical thing to do given they were not in their own time. As only Spock could, he delivered the most perfectly impactful response, saying words that I felt would be perfect for the title of this talk in the form of disagreement that "it is the human thing to do."

I am very proud of some of the things we have been able to accomplish this year: six webinars, piloting a travel grant program, following AERA's lead to have a code of conduct, and working to enhance the conference experience in four ways by offering attendees to list pronouns on their nametags, meeting up with colleagues so as not to travel alone, and finding drop-in childcare options, and a dedicated AI strand which got great session attendance. Most importantly though, we worked to ensure the health of NERA as an organization, successfully completing a critical and thorough evaluation of our corporate governance. With many thanks to Hank Johnson for leading the effort with the assistance of several others, going through this review process allowed us to evaluate how we needed to become up-to-date with current standards, and finally allow for the editing of our Handbook in a way that does not require every little change to be subject to a membership vote.

Additionally, we were able to convene three invited panels at this conference: one on the importance of civic education, one to raise awareness about what is going on at minority-serving institutions, and the last to address the quickly growing population of student parents. I again want to thank all those who listened and bought into my pitches for why we needed your voices and agreed to serve as part of these sessions, in some cases traveling great distances to get here.

I do not think I need to remind you about the significance of what is circled on the calendar for four weeks from yesterday. When planning this conference, I knew it was important to be socially responsible and convene a panel on civic education and why I immediately thought to ask Laura Hamilton from AIR to moderate it. In 2020 when she was at RAND, [Laura and her colleagues Julia Kaufman and Lynn Hu](#), documented how social studies teachers, specifically in high school, are struggling and looking for better ways to improve students' civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. At a time when the stakes are so high, the role teachers play in fostering a sense of what justice and community means, can help humanity as a whole evolve. Former NERA keynote speaker and newly inducted American University president Jonathan Alger, has put civic life as one of his areas of emphasis. That is why it was a pleasure to have [Beverly Leon from Local Civics](#) deliver her keynote last night.

When the Biblical statement is made, "justice, justice you shall pursue" (Deuteronomy 16:20), the pursuit is made not just because it is the logical thing to do, but because it is the human thing to do. In Hebrew, the phrase "you shall pursue" is represented by a single word and there is a tradition that [every Hebrew letter has a numeric value](#). When you sum up the values of the four letters in that word, you get 18 which is the value of the word "chai", meaning life. I believe pursuing justice is about ensuring the quality of life itself by doing what we can to promote equity.

A great example of this is rooted in another institution which is celebrating its 55th anniversary, Sesame Street. When I was very young, I remember hearing this cool song but only recently found

out the correct title. The song, "[My Name is You](#)", has a whole series of children talking about where they are from, the color of their hair, what they like to do for fun, among other things. The refrain is what hits closest to me with the closing words, "We all sing with the same voice. And we sing in harmony."

Emphasizing the power of voices was a contributing factor for me in working to develop the other two invited panels we convened at the conference. To coincide with Hispanic Heritage Month, this morning we convened our panel on culture at minority-serving institutions. According to [2024 eligibility data](#), in our general NERA region from Maine to Virginia, there are 14 Historically Black Colleges and Universities, or HBCUs, 11 Predominantly Black Institutions or PBIs, about 90 Hispanic-Serving Institutions, or HSIs, and 43 Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions, or AANAPISIs.

For context, let me share a Bible story you may or may not have heard. There was a small town with only a few inhabitants. A mighty king came upon the town and surrounded it, and towers were built overlooking it. Present in the city was a poor, wise man who could not even sustain himself, but his wisdom proved more effective than strength by being able to deal effectively with the king and dispel his anger. Yet prior to this incident, no one held him in esteem and everyone questioned what good he was to society. This story was written by Solomon, toward the end of his life, in Ecclesiastes (9:14-18). The message is that although the words of the wise are soft-spoken and not shouted compared to say a king's military orders, they are heard and accepted.

During my time at ETS, many people would often contact me for consultations about data, analysis, sampling, strategy, and access. I used to joke with colleagues that I should have opened a bakery with the line I would theoretically sometimes have outside my office, but sadly I didn't have any cinnamon babka for sale. I actually started thinking I had to fit more on my business card because through all these interactions, I acquired skills in a whole range of other professions: magician, surgeon, plumber, detective, mechanic, firefighter, diplomat, singer, dancer, artist, weaver, storyteller, and probably others.

Through it all, I was always humbled when other managers would encourage any new staff to seek me out for advice and I appreciated the opportunity to support my colleagues. I apply the same approach when people reach out to me on LinkedIn whether to hear about my story, how they should approach the current job market, or of course to learn more about NERA. I have always tried to be just as engaging but also realistic and supportive through these interactions, not because it was the logical thing to do, but because it was the human thing to do.

I admit I didn't always have the answers to everyone's questions, but I guess to borrow a line from a conversation between McCoy and Spock, also from Star Trek IV, enough people felt [safer about my guesses than most other people's facts](#). One of my favorite stories to tell is from 2017 when I was working the registration desk at a conference in Philadelphia. One of my ETS colleagues came up to me and said, "I could use your help with something". Thus began my immersion in collaborative problem solving research which would take me through my remaining time at ETS.

To go back a bit though, in September 2008, I received a consultation request that would lead to one of the most professionally and personally impactful experiences of my life. At that time, ETS

was engaged with HBCUs across Tennessee, led by a team at Tennessee State University, who were responding to a call from state legislators to find a way to improve outcomes for students and teachers in elementary mathematics due to very low NAEP scores. The request was to help with interpretation of assessment data, something I was very comfortable doing.

About a year later, I was asked to go to Tennessee to better understand how the schools were measuring student achievement. I had only been in the state once when on a flight from San Antonio to New York, we had a layover in Nashville. During that initial work trip to Tennessee, I visited the participating schools along the I-40 corridor starting in Memphis, then in Jackson, then in Nashville, and finishing in Knoxville.

When walking through the halls of those buildings and peering into classrooms, it brought me back to how my interest in underrepresented communities began. In my childhood, I sometimes accompanied my mother to her elementary school in Brooklyn. Upon returning to ETS after seeing the potential in those children in Tennessee, I began to understand why we needed to exercise our sense of social responsibility to find any way possible to generate success and build community, not because it was the logical thing to do, but because it was the human thing to do. This is something you see a lot of in [Shaun Nelms' book](#) as he not only had to negotiate classroom culture but school and district culture to build capacity through distributed leadership. That is why I was glad he was able to deliver the keynote at lunch this afternoon.

Those visits to Tennessee reinforced two key lessons for me: (1) there is immense value in being physically present where data are collected, giving you critical context for analysis and (2) the power of building a relationship with your client by listening and being available, even late in the day if needed. I was able to see firsthand how HBCUs struggled when it came to having on-site resources for certain tasks. This was made pretty clear during an on-site meeting in Nashville where the client had boxes of paper-based workshop evaluation forms that needed to be entered and analyzed. I took one look and basically said, send them up to Princeton and we'll take care of it for you.

However, it was also while part of this project that I got a big wake-up call as to how all the best plans for a study can go sideways in an instant. After a conference call with school principals, one person asked me a question which at that time I never expected to hear. What would happen if my school district is rezoned during the study? I was caught so badly off guard, all I could basically say in response was that she could not see how far up my eyebrows were on my head. They don't exactly prepare you for that kind of circumstance in school, you know.

When the project expanded under Race to the Top, we had to state a condition in our new scope of work that we would not be responsible if a school district did something like that again during the study. It actually did almost happen but the project ended before the change was carried out. Why do I say this collaboration was so meaningful? Well, that one request in September 2008 was the start of what would become a 2,385-day life-altering journey for me. You think that's impressive? What if I told you that the sum of the digits in 2,385 is 18. Remember what I told you about the significance of that number? The other thing to drive home about this and why this MSI panel was needed is that MSIs struggle to find their voice to be competitive with the bigger players



in higher education.

During my time on this project, we lost one of our HBCUs in Knoxville, just one example of how many MSIs try so hard to keep up enrollment in order to stay financially viable. The city of Nashville is a great example of that, with TSU at one end of town with a [\\$91.1 million endowment as of 2021](#) and Vanderbilt University at the other end of town with a [\\$9.7 billion endowment as of 2023](#). Based on those numbers, put another way, for every one dollar received from TSU, 106 dollars and change are received by Vanderbilt. It should be noted though that more recently, we have seen similar happenings outside the MSI world that have led to complete closures: [The College of St. Rose in Albany](#) where my mother-in-law completed her undergraduate studies and two Philadelphia-area institutions, [Cabrini College](#) and the [University of the Arts](#).

To paraphrase a hit song from years ago by Rachel Platten, MSIs are like small boats on the ocean, sending big waves into motion. They have a rich history such that when you sit and listen to their stories, as the song continues, it is like how a single word can make a heart open, and they might only have one match but they can make an explosion. This is their [fight song](#). If our field and society are to continue to grow and evolve, the MSI community needs to be able to be part of that, so now tell me what the socially responsible thing is to do. As Sara Barielles said, [“show me how big your brave is.”](#)

The final panel I helped organize focused on student parents, an ever-growing demographic. I was first made aware about this during an informal virtual panel discussion I participated in just prior to leaving ETS. [ETS has had a long-standing grant-funded relationship with the University of Texas at San Antonio](#), providing summer research internship opportunities for undergraduate students. During this virtual panel, I met Brenda Valdes, who amazed me with the quality of her questions, and later I learned more about her story, trying to work towards graduation while also raising her family. I am pleased to say Brenda is now at Stanford University working toward a Ph.D.

I also appreciate her introducing me to Air Force veteran Megan Brown, a student parent herself, and spouse of an Active-Duty service member, who thanks to the [McNair Scholars Program](#), served as a member of the panel this afternoon. It was around the time I met Brenda that I also began to follow posts on LinkedIn trying to further promote the need to better support the student parent community, mothers and fathers, with research, programming, services, and funding. That is how I came to meet [Haley Dillon from Cal State-Sacramento](#) who is doing incredible work there and convinced her to submit a proposal last year, which was accepted, and she had a great time. I was very appreciative of her accepting my invitation to moderate this afternoon's panel.

There is one last key point I would like to make on the subject of social responsibility. For those in the audience tonight who have aspirations of inserting your voices into some form of educational research or data analytics alone or in tandem, I wanted to tell these stories tonight for a reason. If you are applying for a new position, I hope you receive true appreciation for your potential value beyond what your resume or CV might say, and if for some reason a certain opportunity may not work out, that you receive honest feedback on why it did not work out and perhaps what you can do to improve for that next application. If you have been with an organization for 18 days, 18 months, or 18 years, you should be proud of your accomplishments and the inherent value those

and your own personal qualities bring to the organization. If you are faced with the toughest of times when hard business decisions need to be made, you have the right to be told honestly what those decisions were, why they were made, and by those who had to make them, but regardless of the outcome, you should be genuinely thanked for your service. All of this should be done, not because it is the logical thing to do, but because it is the human thing to do.

At this point, to paraphrase a line from Falstaff in Shakespeare's Henry IV (not the same Henry who inspired the Broadway show, *Six*, as that was Henry VIII), I am very much aware of the chimes ringing that figuratively it is midnight and time to wrap up. As Shakespeare wrote for Juliet, "parting is such sweet sorrow that I shall say goodnight till it be morrow." We still have about 16 hours to create more memories from this 55th NERA conference that we will carry with us when tomorrow, we leave the friendly confines of this hotel. In *Star Trek: Generations*, a movie providing a bridge from the original Enterprise crew to the new one, Captain Jean-Luc Picard said, "[Time is a companion that goes with us on the journey, and reminds us to cherish every moment. Because they'll never come again.](#)"

In reflecting on this pending transfer of leadership tomorrow given all that we have accomplished together, I am reminded of a powerful quote I only learned recently was uttered by Charles Dickens' character Sydney Carton in *A Tale of Two Cities*, "It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known." I realize not everything may have gone according to plan with these proceedings, so I certainly hope unlike Sydney Carton, nobody will hang me or my team over any grievances. However, as my esteemed predecessor Bo Bashkov is always good to point out, we are a volunteer organization, so this reflects our best effort possible. When we conclude our proceedings tomorrow, the reins will officially be handed to Lisa Keller who will lead you in the year ahead, so please lend her your support. Please enjoy the rest of the conference beginning with the Presidential Reception when we conclude here. I wish you safe travels home, and again, my sincere thanks to all of you for being here and listening.