

The NERA Researcher

The President’s Message



Dear NERA Members,

Paris was awarded the Games of the XXXIII Olympiad on July 31, 2017, giving their committee seven years to prepare for hosting athletes from over 100 countries in the world’s most anticipated event. Similarly, when I was elected to be the 2023–2024 President, I embraced the responsibility to spend the next two years working to create the best possible experience for all of you—a moment now only a few short weeks away. My conference team, Board of

Directors, and committee chairs have worked hard this year, and I cannot thank them enough for their efforts and support.

Like the lead-up to the Olympics, many of you have answered the call to lend your talents through research to secure your spot in the 2024 edition of our esteemed organization’s 55th annual conference program. After making all the arrangements to get to the conference—by plane, train, automobile, or other means, whether alone or with friends and colleagues—with gratitude to the outstanding service provided by Linda Anderson, her team, and the staff at the Trumbull Marriott Shelton, maybe you will feel like you are walking through an Olympic village. Attending a conference, perhaps for the first time, and meeting so many new people can be very overwhelming, but thanks to the efforts of several of our core committees, we aim to make that experience as smooth as possible. A great appreciation goes to our Member Advocacy Committee for arranging to have my former ETS colleague, Joseph Rios, now at the Center for Measurement Justice, host a webinar on September 18 to review some tips and tricks for presenting.

As much as I know you are all looking forward to the workshops, keynote speeches, invited panels, award presentations, sessions, and social activities, I hope you also anticipate the Presidential Address at dinner on Wednesday, October 9. While I have presented at NERA almost

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The NERA Researcher

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

Message from the Editors

Fall is upon us, which means NERA is just around the corner! We are excited to see you all at the October conference in Trumbull, CT! NERA President Jonathan Steinberg and the co-chairs Javier Suárez-Álvarez, Hannah Smith, Siyu Wan, and Caroline Prendergast have worked hard to organize and bring to life a conference full of engaging sessions and opportunities. Of note are the keynote speakers– Beverly Leon and Shaun Nelms– who will be sharing their insights, and the range of workshops, panels, and sessions that cover a wide variety of interests. Equally exciting are the social events and informal gatherings, where we'll have the chance to reconnect with friends and colleagues- a highlight of our annual gathering! In this issue, you will find updates from many of our committees, including news from NERA's new Bylaws/Constitution Committee. Thank you to our many committee chairs who wrote in with updates, the members who shared their news, and the two members highlighted in our spotlight. As you all know, NERA is volunteer-driven, and we encourage you to volunteer in a committee or another role if you're able. Last but certainly not least, don't forget to read Jonathan's presidential article that offers a glimpse into what is sure to be a thought-provoking address during the conference. As always, we look forward to another wonderful conference and seeing all of you amidst the fall foliage!

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Appointed Positions

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every year since my first attendance in 2007, most of those sessions took place in conference rooms, not in the main ballroom. Though I am accustomed to leading parts of prayer services at my synagogue and am comfortable on stage, the significance of addressing you all in this setting feels profoundly different. Given that I attribute much of my professional success to my accomplishments with NERA and have gained numerous friends and colleagues through my 17-year membership, you may understand why this moment holds special meaning for me.

For those of you planning to attend the address, the structure of my remarks will be in the same spirit as what I have written in previous *Researcher* issues and my website posts. My predecessors often wove personal stories into their addresses, and I plan to do that as well. While the conference is surely a community “simcha,” as we say in Hebrew—a joyous occasion filled with opportunities for learning and connecting—it also represents a chance to reflect on our organizational accomplishments and how each of us can contribute to NERA’s bright and successful future. The idea that we should be socially responsible in allowing our field to evolve also extends to the organization. I will touch on this during my speech.

However, as you are hopefully reading this before making the trip to Trumbull, I would like to share a little secret now. I feel that given the gravity of the moment, the depth of the thoughts I want to share with you cannot be put into a slide deck. Harking back to one of my first written pieces referencing FDR’s fireside chats, I hope my words and the inherent emotions accompanying them will convey the messages I want to leave you with when the conference ends. In keeping with the true spirit of NERA presentation sessions and in line with my personal speaking style, I have great respect for the time I am allowed, especially since I expect that afterward, many of you will be eager to gather at the reception and belt out some favorite tunes during karaoke time.

While we don’t have overly formal and dramatic opening and closing ceremonies as is the tradition at every Olympic games, my wish as the conference approaches is that the flame that burns in each of you to make NERA an important part of your personal and professional lives continues well after the conference ends. Safe travels to everyone, and make sure to have at least a little fun.

Please continue to spread awareness about NERA and the upcoming conference through our [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Instagram](#) pages.

Best to you all,
Jonathan Steinberg
2023-2024 NERA President

Member News

Bo Bashkov, NERA’s Past President and Nominations Committee Chair, has been promoted to Senior Manager of Research at IXL Learning, the largest educational technology company in the U.S. He and his team conduct efficacy and implementation research on IXL and other products to help educators make the best use of technology to support student learning and achievement.

Ariel Cerruto recently received her Post Professional Doctorate Degree in Occupational Therapy from the New England Institute of Technology (NEIT). Her doctoral research won an award at the Society for Advancement in Management conference in Florida. She has accepted a new position within a public school system.

Shu Jen Chen-Worley, Associate Professor at Touro University, has a new publication:

Chen-Worley, S. J. (2024). Using game-based learning activities to promote foundational literacy skills, inclusion, and equity. *US-China Education Review A*, 14(6), 384-389. <https://doi.org/10.17265/2161-623X/2024.06.006>

Sarah Hammami recently received her M.A. in Quantitative, Qualitative, and Psychometrics at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Her thesis is titled “Regression Discontinuity Designs within a Latent Variable Framework: Measurement Considerations for the Accuracy of the Treatment Effect.” [Hammami, Sarah, "Regression Discontinuity Designs within a Latent Variable Framework: Measurement Considerations for the Accuracy of the Treatment Effect" (2024). College of Education and Human Sciences: Dissertations, Theses, and Student Research. 435.] <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cehdiss/435>. Sarah is a first-year PhD student at UNL.

Continued on next page



Stephanie A.N. Levin, Ed.D.
Candidate at Rowan University,
published an opinion piece with
EdSurge titled: "Many Students
Don't Inform Their Colleges About
Their Disability. That Needs To
Change." The link to her op-ed can
be found here:

<https://www.edsurge.com/news/2024-03-01-many-students-don-t-inform-their-colleges-about-their-disability-that-needs-to-change>.

Stephanie is also writing a course book with Lived Places Publishing, titled *Picking Up the Pieces: Finding my Way as a Visually Impaired Woman in Higher Education*. Stephanie's book will tell the story of her experiences of becoming visually impaired in higher education. Her book will also seek to educate and raise awareness of the many challenges visually impaired students experience in post-secondary education.

Kelsey Nason, a doctoral student at James Madison University, recently completed a psychometrics summer internship with the American Board of Surgery (ABS) during which she conducted a research project involving LLM-powered chatbot capabilities on a medical board exam.

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

2024 Conference Updates

Tuesday, October 8–Thursday, October 10, 2024

Trumbull Marriott Shelton, Trumbull, CT

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

Dear NERA Members,

We are thrilled to share our latest updates for the 2024 conference!

Join us for a transformative journey filled with new ideas, meaningful connections, and the opportunity to engage with professionals who will push your boundaries and help you grow. Whether you're looking to learn, lead, or explore new horizons, this conference is the place to be.

Mark your calendar for **Tuesday, October 8, to Thursday, October 10, 2024**, and stay tuned for more exciting details—this is an event you won't want to miss!

This year's theme is:

Promoting Social Responsibility in Educational Research

*In the ever-changing world of education and educational research, we need to continually reflect upon the fundamental reasons for our work in the field of education and the responsibilities that come with it. We need to remember that we **serve learners of all types**. Our roles require us always to question the status quo with clear intent; collaborate with diverse groups of people representing different races, ethnicities, gender identities, cultural backgrounds, expertise, and experiences; ensure we collect the appropriate data from the appropriate constituencies while **embracing and promoting intersectionality**; be explicit about the methods we use; and openly and transparently communicate the results we find, whether these are significant, not significant, or inconclusive. Our ability to succeed depends on continuously working to maintain strong and healthy communities of practice, **ensuring all stakeholders' voices are heard and represented** so that we support positive changes both in the field of education research and in society as a whole. Let us join together in this journey of rediscovery and recommitment to our shared values and mission as an organization.*

Our keynote speakers and thought leaders will share fresh perspectives on promoting social responsibility in educational research and encourage you to think differently and challenge your ideas constructively. Join us for two inspiring sessions:

- **Beverly Leon** (Tuesday, October 8th, at 7 PM): Beverly is the Founder and CEO of Local Civics, with a rich background in social entrepreneurship and educational leadership. She holds an MSc in Social Policy from the University of Oxford, where she specialized in Education and Labor Market Policy. She graduated from Columbia Business School, focusing on social entrepreneurship, and holds a BA in History from Columbia University. With over a decade of experience as a youth educator and coach, she has played pivotal roles, including serving as a Program Coordinator for Level the Field NYC and as a Teaching Fellow for Columbia University's Freedom and Citizenship Civics Education Program.
- **Shaun Nelms** (Wednesday, October 9th, at 12 PM): Shaun is the Vice President of Community Partnerships at the University of Rochester, NY, where he fosters strategic collaborations to enhance community engagement. In 2018, Shaun was appointed the inaugural William and Sheila Konar Director for the Center for Urban Education Success (CUES) at the Warner School of Education at the University of Rochester. Previously, he served as the Superintendent of East Upper and Lower Schools in Rochester, where he developed a nationally recognized, replicable school reform model for urban settings. He is a distinguished speaker on equitable school systems and leadership in education.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

NERA 2024 Conference KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Tuesday @7pm
October 8th, 2024

Marriott Shelton
Trumbull, CT



Beverly Leon
CEO of Local Civics,
New York

NERA 2024 Conference KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Wednesday @12pm
October 9th, 2024

Marriott Shelton
Trumbull, CT



Shaun Nelms
Vice President of Community
Partnerships, University of
Rochester

SCHEDULE OVERVIEW

Tuesday	
8:30 – 5:30	<i>Registration Table Open (Foyer)</i>
9:00 – 12:00	Workshops: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Less is More:” Responsible Qualitative Interview Practices for More Inclusive and Illuminating Responses • Data Quality: the More you Know. Key Concepts and Approaches to Ensure Quantitative Research Success. • Opening the Black Box: Understanding Content Development for Large Scale Standardized Assessment • Educational Research for Equity: A Workshop on Anti-Bias, Anti-Oppressive Educational Research Practices
1:30 – 3:00	<i>Paper Sessions / Symposia</i>
3:15 – 4:45	<i>Paper Sessions / Symposia</i> Panel: Perspectives on Civic Education
5:00 – 5:45	Graduate Student Issues Committee Social (Foyer)
6:00 – 8:00	Dinner and Tuesday Keynote Address: Beverly Leon (Ballroom)
8:00 – 11:00	NERA Welcome Reception (Merritt)

Wednesday	
8:30 – 5:30	<i>Registration Table Open (Foyer)</i>
7:00 – 8:15	Breakfast (Ballroom) & NERA New Member Breakfast (Salon)
8:15 – 9:45	<i>Paper Sessions / Symposia</i>
10:00 – 11:30	<i>Paper Sessions / Symposia</i> Panel: Perspectives on Culture at Minority Serving Institutions
11:30 – 1:00	Lunch and Wednesday Keynote Address: Shaun Nelms (Ballroom)
1:15 – 2:45	<i>Paper Sessions / Symposia / Roundtables / Poster Session</i>
3:00 – 4:15	<i>Paper Sessions / Symposia / Poster Session</i> Panel: Perspectives on Student Parents
4:30 – 5:45	<i>Paper Sessions / Symposia</i>
5:45 – 6:30	NERA Mentoring Program Happy Hour (Parallel Post Bar)
6:30 – 8:30	Dinner and Presidential Address (Ballroom)
8:30 – 11:00	NERA Presidential Reception (Merritt)

Thursday	
8:00 – 10:00	<i>Registration Table Open (Foyer)</i>
7:00 – 8:30	Breakfast and NERA Business Meeting (Ballroom)
8:30 – 10:00	<i>Paper Sessions / Symposia</i>
10:15 – 11:45	<i>Paper Sessions / Symposia</i>
11:45 – 12:00	Farewell and To-Go “Snack” (not a meal) (Ballroom)

WORKSHOPS

Tuesday, October 8, 2024 | 9:00 a.m.-10:30 a.m.: “Less is More:” Responsible Qualitative Interview Practices for More Inclusive and Illuminating Responses

Facilitator: Kai Fuentes, Ebony Marketing Systems

Abstract: Learn how a qualitative interview approach that uses fewer questions yields more participation from interviewees fulfilling the goal of richer, deeper, more illuminating data than a traditional lengthy discussion guide and/or quantitative alone provides. This approach shifts the power rightfully from the interviewer to the interviewee. Together we will practice: recognizing interviewee topic sensitivity; iterative discussion guide editing; the grace of the pause; the art of soft vs. hard probes; preparing and caring for the interviewer. Incorporates two published case studies on significant health/wellness challenges of Black women. Suitable for all knowledge levels, from beginner to advanced researchers.

Tuesday, October 8, 2024 | 10:30 a.m.-12 p.m.: Data Quality: The More You Know; Key Concepts and Approaches to Ensure Quantitative Research Success

Facilitator: AJ Kierans, Good Human Partners

Abstract: Explore essential strategies for ensuring data quality in quantitative market research. Learn techniques to identify and address common data issues, improve accuracy, and enhance the reliability of your research findings. This workshop provides practical insights and actionable steps to optimize data quality throughout the research process, from data collection to analysis and interpretation. Gain valuable skills to elevate the credibility and effectiveness of your quantitative market research endeavors. Together we will look at the current landscape, technologies available and best practices to ensure confidence as well as data integrity and stability for your research.

***Tuesday, October 8, 2024 | 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.: Opening the Black Box:
Understanding Content Development for Large Scale Standardized Assessment***

Facilitators: Dr. Alexander M. Hoffman, AleDev Research & Consulting, and Marjorie Wine, Accessible Teaching Learning and Assessment Systems (ATLAS), University of Kansas

Abstract: Recently, the estimable Kristen Huff stated publicly that she would not hire psychometricians who do not know how the business works or how the product is made. Educational measurement data come from the tests that content development professionals (CDPs) produce, and innovative test designs are implemented through CDPs' work. This workshop digs into the content development workflow, the largely unexamined nature of content development work and the principles that underlie it. It is aimed at educational measurement graduate students and faculty and may interest educational measurement professionals who do not work in content development. All curious educators are welcome.

***Tuesday, October 8, 2024 | 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.: Educational Research for Equity:
A Workshop on Anti-Bias, Anti-Oppressive Educational Research Practices***

Facilitators: Dr. Detritus Honora Adelabu, Pooja Aradhya, Rohan R. Arcot, Adine A. DeLeon, & K'Nadja Sims, Boston University Wheelock College of Education and Human Development

Abstract: Even the Rat was White: A Historical View of Psychology was an early rallying call to challenge inequities in research (Guthrie, 1976). Nearly 50 years later research inequities persist and hinder progress toward improving educational outcomes for all students. In this workshop, interactive small group activities will encourage participants to collaborate, share ideas, and co-create practical solutions to inclusive, equity focused research. Participants will leave with an outline for a positionality statement, a tool to assess and combat research bias, a curated reference list, and a strategy to leverage their research for educational change.

PANELS

Perspectives on Civic Education

Panelists: Laura Hamilton, American Institutes for Research (moderator); Dena Pastor, James Madison University; Beverly Leon, LocalCivics; Miriam Bart, Maryland Department of Education; Elyse Alter, Sphere Education Initiatives.

Cultivating Social Responsibility: Amplifying how MSIs support students' social and economic mobility

Panelists: Laura Lara-Brady, WestEd (moderator); Claude Tamaze, Lincoln University; Andrés Castro Samayoa, Boston College; Kyndra Middleton, Howard University.

Perspectives on the Student Parent Population

Panelists: Haley Myers Dillon, California State University-Sacramento (moderator); Megan Brown, University of Texas-San Antonio; Miriam Cullimore, Minnesota Office of Higher Education; Brittani Shaw Williams, Generation Hope.

Interview Preparation Panel

Panelists: Matthew J. Madison, University of Georgia; Ross Markle, DIA Higher Education Collaborators

We look forward to sharing more details regarding the 2024 NERA conference as we continue our planning for October, so keep an eye out for updates!

NERA is a volunteer-based organization. We need your help to ensure a high-quality conference in October. Please sign up to be a session chair or discussant!

[Volunteer to be a session chair or discussant.](#)

Your 2024 NERA Conference Co-Chairs

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

nera.cochairs@gmail.com

Conference and Hotel Registrations

Joining NERA or Renewing your NERA Membership

All attendees of the 2024 NERA Conference must be current NERA members. Before you can register for the conference, you must either join NERA or renew your membership if you have not done so already.

Visit the NERA website at <https://www.nera-education.org/> and go to the *Member Log In* section in the upper right corner to find the links to join, renew, or log in. Feel free to reach out to the conference co- chairs with questions at NERA.CoChairs@gmail.com.

Registering for the 2024 Conference

Once you are a member of NERA, you can register for the conference by clicking [here](#)

NERA Registration fees include meals, so the registration process includes questions about which meals you anticipate having at the conference. To accurately estimate how many people will be at each meal, *we ask that you take the time to indicate which meals you will attend*.

We are pleased to be able to offer free workshops for NERA this year. While workshops are included in the registration fee, estimates of attendance for each workshop are also helpful for planning purposes, so *please indicate which workshops you intend to attend during the registration process*.

All online conference registration fees are processed through PayPal, but you do not need to have a PayPal account to make a payment—you can pay by credit card on the secure PayPal site.

Please note that to receive the early-bird registration rate, you must register by **September 17, 2024**. After this date, a late fee will be added to the regular rates. The early registration rates for this year are listed below by member type, followed by the late registration rate in parentheses.

Professional Member—\$250 (\$325)

Full-time Student—\$100 (\$150)

Retired Member—\$170 (\$170)

Booking your room at the Trumbull Marriott

Book your room by **September 23, 2024**, to receive the discounted rate of \$161 per night! After that date, the price is subject to increase.

Follow [this link to book your room for the NERA conference](#). You may also call reservations at 800-682-4095 and ask for the NERA Annual Conference Room Block to make your reservation.

If you are an existing BONVOY member or wish to become one, please check out [this link](#) for additional perks.



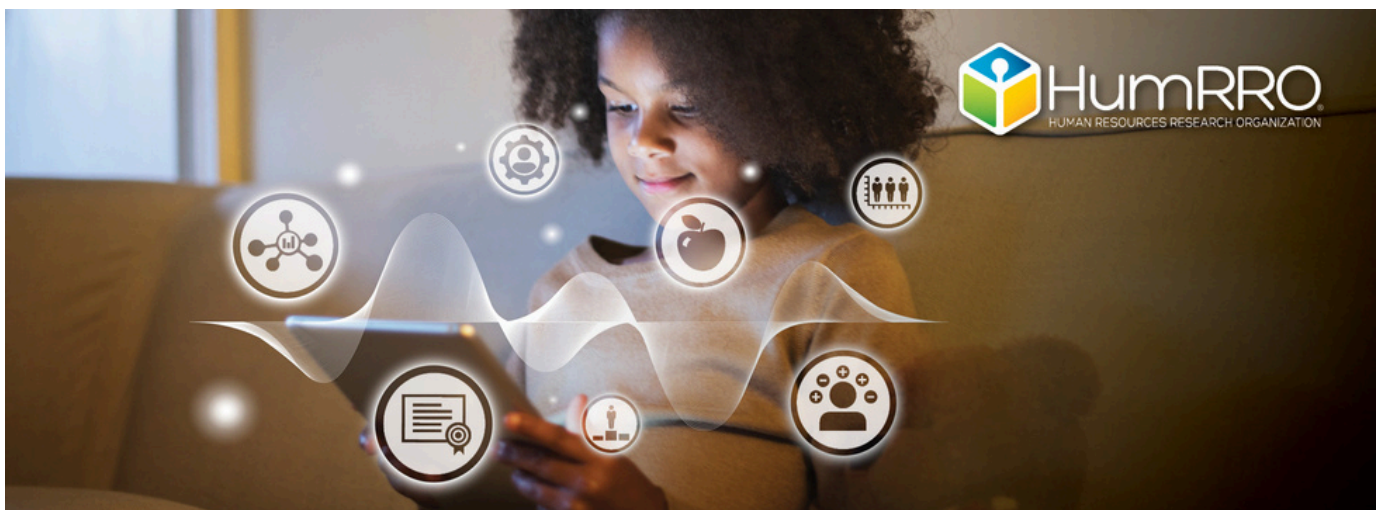
Supporting the Next Generation of Medical Professionals

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.

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.

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Nominations Committee Update

Bo Bashkov, *IXL Learning*, Chair

I am happy to report that via self-nominations or nominations by colleagues we have secured enough candidates to run for office in this year's NERA election. Please look out for more information, including candidate bios, in September.

Infrastructure Committee Chair Kate Schaefer and I will coordinate and run the election via OpaVote as in the last couple of years. Stay tuned for that email in mid-September. If you are a member, please exercise your vote.

Bo Bashkov

Past President and Nominations Committee Chair





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Bylaws/Constitution Committee Update

Dear NERA Members,

We are pleased to inform you that the NERA Board of Directors has initiated the formation of a Bylaws/Constitution Committee to oversee a comprehensive revision of our bylaws. This revision is essential to align our governance structure with the evolving landscape of legal requirements, technological advancements, and best practices in corporate governance.

The Bylaws/Constitution Committee, comprised of Shelby Perry, Jonathan Steinberg, Sarah Ferguson, April Zenisky, Steven Holtzman, Katrina Roohr, and Hank Johnson, has been tasked with reviewing and updating the bylaws. These updates are designed to ensure that our organization remains robust, compliant, and well-positioned for future challenges.

While these revisions are critical, they are not expected to significantly impact our day-to-day operations. Instead, they will reinforce our commitment to transparency, accountability, and fiscal responsibility, which are the cornerstones of our governance philosophy.

The key changes:

- 1. Creation of a Corporate Governance Committee:** This newly established committee will be responsible for ensuring that NERA adheres to both state and federal regulatory requirements. As legal landscapes become increasingly complex, this committee will play a pivotal role in maintaining compliance and upholding the integrity of our operations.
- 2. Establishment of a Finance Committee:** In our ongoing efforts to enhance financial stewardship, the Finance Committee will be charged with reviewing and monitoring the annual budget. Additionally, this committee will provide oversight on various financial matters as determined by the Board, ensuring that our financial practices align with best practices and support the long-term sustainability of our organization.

These changes are aimed at strengthening our governance framework, enabling NERA to operate with greater efficiency and effectiveness. We believe that these updates will better equip us to navigate the challenges of today's environment while positioning NERA for continued success in the future.

We appreciate your support as we implement these revisions, and we remain committed to maintaining the high standards of governance that our members expect and deserve.

Should you have any questions or require further details, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

NERA Bylaws/Constitution Committee



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It's our mission to make sure every student who wants to go to college has a clear path to get there. So everything we offer—from classes to tests to scholarships—is all about giving more students more access to more opportunities.

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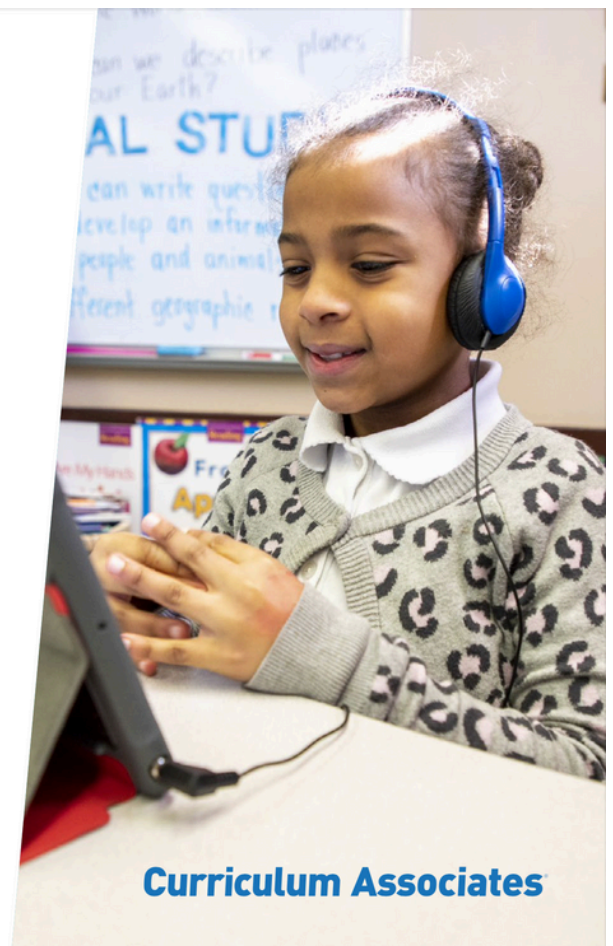
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Curriculum Associates

Member Advocacy Committee Update

Pamela Kaliski, *American Board of Internal Medicine*, Chair

Hello NERA Members!

Just like that, we are approaching the Fall season. On behalf of the Member Advocacy Committee (MAC), we hope you have had a wonderful summer! October will be here before we know it, and we look forward to connecting at this year's conference.

With the NERA conference approaching, we are excited to share that we are co-hosting a NERA Webinar with GSIC on Wednesday September 18th from 3-4pm Eastern. All NERA members should have received an email invitation to register for this webinar, and we hope you can join. The topic is "Presentation Tips and Tricks" and the speaker is Dr. Joseph Rios. We are particularly excited about the timeliness of this webinar, as it will certainly help NERA presenters get ready for their presentations at this year's conference. Dr. Rios will cover preparation tips for both paper and poster sessions, and also the socio-emotional components of preparing and delivering a presentation. Whatever you are doing right now—stop, and go register for this Webinar!

In other news, my term as Chair of the MAC is ending after this year's conference, and Sarah Hammami will begin her term as Chair. Congratulations to Sarah—we look forward to watching the MAC continue to serve NERA members in important ways under her leadership.

Finally, we would like to remind everyone of the NERA Spotlight on members that will be included in each NERA Researcher issue. We'd love to highlight YOU in a future issue! If you'd like to be featured, please complete the short form that is located [here](#).

As a reminder, the charge of the MAC is to advocate for all of the types of diversity that NERA members represent, with a focus on making NERA members feel included in every aspect of the association. NERA is for everyone, and this committee will help create a safe space that reflects our many layers of diversity. As always, if you have any areas of interest or concern that this committee should consider, please feel free to reach out to us. We are grateful to those of you who have shared thoughts, suggestions, and ideas, and we look forward to listening and learning from you all.

Pamela Kaliski, Chair of the NERA Membership Advocacy Committee

Members of the Member Advocacy Committee:

Tajma Cameron	Maria Hamdani	Thai Ong
Kevin Coopersmith	Sarah Hammami	Kristin Weyrick
Richie Diaz	Samantha Harmon	April Zenisky



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New Member Spotlight



Sarah Hammami
(she/her/hers)

Graduate Student
Buros Center for Testing

NERA Member since 2023

[Email](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

Where do you call home?

Quebec.

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

Montreal and its cultural diversity.

Do you have any favorite family traditions?

We used to go to Tunisia (where my parents are from) every year!

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

Explore the U.S.!

Do you have a favorite quote?

"Don't follow the crowd, let the crowd follow you."

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

Don't let others tell you who you are!

What languages do you speak?

English and French.

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

Seasoned Member Spotlight



Sara Finney

Professor
James Madison University

NERA Member since 2006

[Email](#)

[LinkedIn](#)



Where do you call home?

Massanutten, VA

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

It's a four-season resort with ample things to do year-round.

Tell us about your family and/or pets!

Mave, my husband, is a talented graphic designer and musician. He also loves cycling through the mountains of Virginia. Our cat Lucy is smart, sassy and fast. She loves my graduate students more than me (which is kind of annoying).

Do you have any favorite family traditions?

We travel to Nebraska Cornhuskers games each fall. Go Big Red!

What do you like to do in your free time?

Travel! I love going to new places nationally and internationally. I am fortunate to have great friends around the world who love to get together each year.

Is there a personal accomplishment you'd like to share?

I feel so proud and so fortunate to have worked with so many talented graduate students. It brings me such joy to watch their careers and celebrate all of their accomplishments. I am forever grateful for my time working with them, all that I learned from them, and my continued relationships with them.

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



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Communications Committee Report

Yu Bao, *James Madison University*, Interim Chair

Dear NERA colleagues,

Hope you had a great summer! The annual conference is just around the corner. The Communications Committee would like to thank everyone for their support regarding several changes that happened in the summer.

Committee Member Transitions

As Jerusha is on leave until the end of this year, I am temporarily substituting in her role as the Communications Committee Chair while still maintaining my role as a webmaster. We continue to welcome your communication requests as we get close to the conference. Please feel free to email me if you have any questions about navigating the communications with our NERA members via email, social media, and web posts.

Social Media

If you aren't already, please follow NERA's official pages on our various social media sites.



Communication Request Procedures

With our committee member role transitions, we have a new [Communication Request Form](#). You can always find the latest form on NERA's [Downloadables page](#).

Please submit your forms at least two business days prior to the target date for dissemination. That will allow the committee sufficient time to review and approve prior to sharing your communication.

As a reminder, forms should be submitted to me (Yu) at bao2yx@jmu.edu with a copy to any coordinator whose communication mode you want to be leveraged for your request:

- Email: Archangel Gundula (agundula@umass.edu)
- Social Media: Shelby Perry (slperry@neit.edu)
- Website: Yu Bao (bao2yx@jmu.edu)

Yu Bao

Interim Chair, Communications Committee

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Conference Ambassadors Update

Kelsey Nason, *James Madison University*, Chair

Greetings NERA members!

On behalf of the Conference Ambassadors Committee, I hope all of you had a brilliant summer and are eager to attend the NERA conference in October. For those who may not know, our committee welcomes new and returning members to the annual conference. We accomplish this by encouraging interaction among attendees, sharing our own NERA experiences, and facilitating new connections. This year, we have a few different plans for the conference. As we have done in recent years, we will be hosting a new member breakfast on Wednesday morning. Please join us for breakfast, coffee, conversation, and prizes. Additionally, we are planning a networking game to help you get to know your fellow conference attendees (also with prizes). We will share additional details about these events and introduce ourselves to you so you know who we are as we get closer (we will also make sure you can easily find us at the conference). Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions, suggestions, or other feedback. We look forward to seeing you in October!

Kelsey Nason

Chair, NERA Conference Ambassadors Committee (nasonkt@jmu.edu)



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Call for NERA 2024 Mentoring Program: Match with a Mentor or Mentee!

Tabitha Bellamy, *New Jersey Department of Education*, Co-Chair
Krishna Chaitanya Rao Kathala, *University of Massachusetts Amherst*, Co-Chair
Duy Pham, *New Meridian Corporation*, Co-Chair

Dear NERA Community,

We are excited to invite all NERA 2024 Conference attendees to participate in the NERA 2024 Mentoring Program during the upcoming conference at the Trumbull Marriott Shelton in Trumbull, CT from October 8–10, 2024.

Since 2012, the Mentoring Committee has been facilitating successful mentor-mentee matches, connecting seasoned professionals in NERA-related fields with graduate students and early-career professionals through a carefully curated process. This program has offered participants the opportunity to form meaningful connections beyond their existing networks, share research interests, discuss career goals, and explore areas for growth.

The 2023 Mentoring Program was a resounding success, with 23 mentors and 32 mentees participating. Nearly 20 mentors and over 25 mentees engaged in enriching discussions on topics such as graduate school advice, dissertation guidance, manuscript writing for publication/conference proposals, professional development, leadership, and career/industry insights. Many of these connections have continued beyond the event. Our post-event survey received 23 responses, all reflecting a 100% positive feedback rate, with every respondent expressing eagerness to recommend the program to colleagues and friends—a true testament to its impact.

During this year's conference, matched pairs will have the opportunity to meet at a dedicated **happy hour on Wednesday, October 9, 2024, at 6:00 p.m.** We encourage mentors and mentees to continue their relationship beyond the conference, fostering lasting connections.

We invite all in-person conference attendees to join the program.

Sign up to become a mentor if you:

- Have at least four years of career experience in education or educational measurement
- Are interested in advising a graduate student or early career professional

Sign up to become a mentee if you:

- Are currently enrolled in an undergraduate/graduate program OR are an early-career professional (fewer than five years of post-graduate experience) in a NERA-related field
- Are interested in advice on your educational path, dissertation, or career

Please use the link below to register and provide information about your research interests, career goals, or areas for growth:

Registration link: <https://bit.ly/NERA2024>

The registration deadline is **Sunday, September 22, 2024**. Based on your responses, the Mentoring Committee will match you with a mentor/mentee who shares your interests. Please note that by signing up, you are committing to participate in the program and will be matched accordingly. If your plans change, kindly inform the Mentoring Committee so we can ensure all interested participants have a suitable match.

We look forward to seeing you this October and to fostering meaningful connections in our vibrant community!

All the best,

Your Mentoring Co-Chairs

Tabitha Bellamy,
Krishna Chaitanya Rao Kathala,
Duy Pham
Email: mentoring@nera-education.org

3MT and NERA: How it All Started

Rochelle Michel, *Smarter Balanced*

Communicating clearly and effectively is a key skill for those of us conducting and disseminating our research. However, most of us often find it a challenge to succinctly explain our line of research or the current research project in which we are involved in a way that is clear to the general public.

The Three Minute Thesis (3MT) was developed in 2008 by The University of Queensland as a competition celebrating the research conducted by Doctor of Philosophy students and cultivating students' academic, presentation, and research communication skills. The competition was an opportunity to demonstrate their capacity to effectively explain their research in three minutes in a manner appropriate for a non-specialist audience.

As the 2018-2019 NERA President, I worked with my conference chairs (Alejandra Garcia, Paola Heinke, and Bridget Thomas) to hold the inaugural NERA 3MT Competition. We had eight participants from two competition groups, graduate students and professionals. Each participant had three minutes to efficiently explain the breadth and significance of their research in a presentation aimed at a general, non-specialist audience. The competition included a panel of esteemed NERA judges and audience participation through a "People's Choice" award. With a full room, an engaged audience, and a 3-minute timer in place, there began NERA's history of hosting the Three Minute Thesis.

As we come together for the 2024 Annual Conference in October, look for opportunities to meet colleagues from other disciplines, exercise your communication skills, and share your research in three minutes or less!

Sign up to participate in the 2024 3MT [here!](#)





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This article is the first of three articles on instrument development. This first part discusses the importance of constructs and operational definitions. The second part of the series then discusses initial item development and instrument validation. The third and final part of this series will describe pilot testing of the instrument.

Quantitative Instrument Development Part One: Operationalize your Construct

Stacey Kite

Johnson & Wales University

*If you change the rule for counting people, you come up with a new number.
~Deming, 1993.*

With three decades of experience as a Professor of Research, I have observed the challenges students face with developing quantitative instruments; specifically questionnaires. While numerous resources on instrument development exist, these resources often cater to a more advanced audience, overwhelming the novice researcher. This series intends to break down the instrument development process into three stages: operationalizing your construct, creating and validating your measure, and pilot testing the instrument.

Manifest Variables and Constructs (Latent Variables)

Most questionnaires are composed of manifest and latent variables. A manifest variable is a variable that can often be directly measured (e.g., age, grade level, etc.). A latent variable, also referred to as a construct, is an abstract concept that is not directly measured (e.g., attitude, satisfaction, etc.) as stated by Nunnally (1978). The research process would be simpler if the instruments measured all manifest variables; however, most research instruments focus on a construct. Combining manifest and latent variables is usually necessary, although it confounds the struggle to develop an instrument since the more abstract a construct is, the more difficult it is to operationalize and, thus, measure.

Although manifest variables, on the surface, appear to be easily measured, restrictions and/or specifications are often required to clarify exactly what you are attempting to measure, especially when the research is being conducted at multiple sites where processes may be different. For example, if you were measuring student absenteeism, the numerous differences in how schools categorize an absence may present challenges. These differences may include counting excused and unexcused absences in the total or considering a student absent if they arrive at school after a

certain time of the day. Additionally, school absences versus class absences may not be consistent. The process requires reflecting on the purpose of the variable in relation to the study to determine the most useful criteria. The more a manifest variable requires boundaries to fit a population, the more it mirrors the functionality of a construct.

Unlike manifest variables, constructs (latent variables) are often sophisticated and multi-faceted, requiring more thought and research to accurately define and measure. When developing a questionnaire, defining the constructs carefully and accurately is important. If you begin with the wrong definition of the construct or fail to define it properly, the results of your measure will not yield useful results. Identifying and defining each component is critical to fully measuring the construct. In most cases, a construct cannot be measured with a single item or question, it requires multiple items to fully capture the essence of the construct.

Operational Definitions

Operational definitions convert the abstract nature of a construct or manifest variable into a concrete, measurable item or variable. Operational definitions “operationalize” the construct or variable into a measurable or quantifiable form by breaking down the components into smaller, functionally measurable variables.

Operational definitions are often contextual, meaning that they need to be crafted and bound by the understanding of the participants involved in the study. The demographics of the population sample, such as age, race, ethnicity, level of education, and geographic location, may contribute to the operationalization. There are endless choices for measuring a given construct, and each decision may alter the study’s outcome. According to Deming (1993), “An operational definition is a procedure agreed-upon for translation of a concept into measurement of some kind” (p. 105). Deming discussed the importance of operational definitions, stressing that understanding the judgment of the data collection process is necessary to interpret what the data actually measured. Operationalizing a construct is not an exact science, it is a series of give-and-take to determine the best way to measure the construct for your purposes.

Importance of Aligning the Operational Definition with Purpose

In order to create an operational definition that will be useful for your study, you need to determine what the findings will be used for or how they will be applied. Understanding the context in which you gather the information and the problem you seek to address is essential. Finding a way to measure (quantitatively) constructs that are not directly measurable is challenging. In this process, avoiding the easy option is difficult. A common construct measured in academic research is academic achievement. Although educators have long felt that standardized testing scores are not a fair indicator of academic achievement (Popham, 1999; Stanford, 2023), many studies use them as a measure because they are readily available. The quality of the results and usefulness of a study using standardized test scores as a measure of academic achievement may be threatened.

Creating useful instrument items takes time and thought. Understanding the population, their view, culture, biases, language, etc., is critical to developing items that accurately measure the construct at hand. The use of ex post facto data to measure a construct presents risk. The lack of control over the data collection and data handling may lead to inaccuracies. The research must fully disclose how and why the data were gathered to assess usability and value.

Operational Definitions of Manifest Variables and Constructs

Operationally defining variables ranges from simplistic to complex, setting boundaries for manifest variables to complex measurements of a construct with numerous definitions. Below are some examples ranging from simplistic to complex.

A simplistic definition of a manifest variable with boundaries might be an operational definition of a class year in college. The most obvious choice would be categorizing students into freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior year—a simplistic definition. This definition, however, only accounts for students who move through their academic careers at one college, taking the prescribed number of courses each year. This definition does not consider transfer students, students who have taken college credits in high school, or students who modify the prescribed credits each year by taking fewer courses or possibly changing their major.

Alternatively, you may define class year by the number of credits, e.g., 30 credits = 1 year, 60 = 2 years. The challenge here is that respondents may not know this information, or they may count all of the courses they have taken in college, even those taken elsewhere. A manifest variable may not always be simple. Avoid falling victim to the assumption that manifest variables are always a clear and absolute measure of the variable, as stated. The key is to think about how you will use the information so you may determine the best way to define it.

A moderate definition of a variable is a first-generation student. In theory, first-generation students may struggle in college since they often do not have a support system at home to assist in college search and completion. There are various definitions; therefore, the first step is to choose a definition to guide you. Focusing on the purpose is critical to understanding how the results will be used. The issue is that regardless of the definition chosen, a student may likely not know if they are a first-generation student since it is not widely discussed outside of higher education. In this case, it may be necessary to develop a series of items that will allow the researcher to categorize the student as first generation.

A complex construct takes the most effort to define operationally. One such construct is self-efficacy. According to Bandura (2006), “perceived self-efficacy is concerned with people’s beliefs in their capabilities to produce given attainments (p. 307). Self-efficacy is contextual, meaning it may change when referring to different tasks or subject areas. It is important to differentiate self-judgment of perceived capability from actual ability. Knowing what you are measuring and its limitations is important.

To measure self-efficacy, Bandura (2006) recommends using a series of items to test a scale ranging from “I can do” to “I cannot do.” The actual content for the task, however, needs to be researched. As with most complex constructs, the items to measure self-efficacy are multi-faceted and must be carefully selected. The next article in this series will discuss operational definitions of complex constructs and item development.

Conclusion

Babbie (2012) contends that creating a perfect measurement tool in the social sciences is difficult. Instead of perfection, the focus should be on the usefulness of the information the instrument will produce. The quality of a quantitative instrument begins with a clear understanding of the information you seek, why you need the information, and what you will do with the findings. Operationally defining a construct to yield accurate, useful information is a vital step in proper instrument development.

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