

## **2022 NERA Election Candidate Statements**

Biographies and photos of candidates for the offices of President-Elect and Director are below.

There are two open Director positions—each for a three-year term, beginning at the conclusion of the 2022 conference.

The candidate elected President-Elect in 2022 will begin a one-year term as President following the 2023 conference, and Past-President following the 2024 conference.

# NERA Candidates for President-Elect

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## Hank Johnson



Henry “Hank” Johnson takes an organization’s vision and makes it reality through sound strategy and financial development. He is an inspirational leader who engages with colleagues to inspire action that maximizes organizational capacity while at the same time being grounded in financial information that leverages the business. Many nonprofit and start-up organizations respect Hank as a credible voice in decision making, establishing sound corporate governance, and financial management.

Currently, Hank is the department chair of business management and associate professor of public health at New England Institute of Technology (NEIT). He is the 2019 recipient of the prestigious Phil Carrol Advancement of

Management Award in Business Education.

Hank began his time with NERA in 2016. He served on the Graduate Students Issues Committee as a member from 2017-2020 and as chair in 2018. He also served as conference cochair in 2021. Hank currently serves on the board of directors and has volunteered for other ad hoc NERA roles.

Hank’s professional work experience includes serving as executive director of Education in Action, a non-profit organization based in Providence, Rhode Island. Under his leadership, the organization formed new community partnerships and programs for the Providence Transition Academy and the Providence Autism School to Tomorrow Academy. He also designed and coordinated several innovative after-school programs across the state.

Hank currently volunteers for Shadowcasting Community Arts, serving as board treasurer. He is chairman of the board for the Rhode Island Chapter of the Society for Advancement of Management and serves on the national board as its 2nd vice-president.

Hank holds a Master of Business Administration and Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies in Educational Leadership from Johnson & Wales University.

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## Jonathan Steinberg

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In 2007, as a mid-level data analyst at Educational Testing Service (ETS), I was first introduced to NERA by an ETS colleague and project team member to submit a poster proposal on noncognitive assessment for the annual conference. That being my first conference ever, it was amazing to meet so many people doing similar work and hearing about their work on pertinent educational research, policy, and psychometric issues. I immediately recognized NERA was a community with which I could form a connection, which has only gotten stronger, now 15 years later after joining and presenting that first year. Whether in person or virtually, I have always had great anticipation reuniting with colleagues at the annual conference and having an opportunity to make new connections from research organizations, colleges and universities, or elsewhere.

I have served NERA in various capacities. I have served as an annual conference proposal reviewer since 2008, including the Best Paper by a Graduate Student (2012-2014, 2018). In 2012, I started doing committee work, first chairing the Communications Committee (2012-2014), instituting a review process for outgoing messages and social media postings, advising until 2018, then chairing the Infrastructure Committee (2018-2020), in part overseeing the adoption of a new online election platform. As one of the 2021 Conference Co-Chairs, my team and I led by former President Steven Holtzman executed a highly successful online event, with many of the over 300 registrants outside the Northeast. I now serve on the Conference Ambassadors Committee. While I have presented almost every year at the conference, I have often been a session chair and occasionally, a discussant. I have also been active in AERA Division D since 2009 as an annual conference proposal reviewer and former chair of the Communications Committee (2018-2020).

Since 2015 as Manager, Data Analysis & Computational Research at ETS, while I continue to be involved and apply my statistical training and skills in domains such as teacher licensure assessment, collaborative problem solving, basic reading skills and comprehension assessment, I also mentor three senior analysts (Steven is one) and often summer interns, some of whom I originally met at NERA and later joined ETS full-time. This shows the great emphasis I place on nurturing and developing the pipeline in our field, always encouraging people, especially emerging researchers as young as high school students, to take advantage of the great experience NERA offers to support and promote high quality educational research and open doors to possible future opportunities.

If given the privilege to serve as NERA President, I will work with our Executive Committee, Board of Directors, committees, and members to continue exploring ways for supporting our mission and expanding our footprint. This may be in content, such as qualitative research, in offerings, such as online symposia for those who may not have the ability to attend or present at a conference, such as teachers and undergraduate students, or through further collaborations with institutions and organizations, such as those representing diverse learners and important social justice issues.

Thank you for your consideration and support and I look forward to my continued future involvement with NERA.

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# NERA Candidates for Director (two positions)

## Thilagha Jagaiah



I am an Assistant Professor of Special Education in the College of Education, Nursing, and Health Professions at the University of Hartford (UHART) in Connecticut. I train pre-service teachers to develop essential teaching and assessment skills to be highly effective licensed general education and special education teachers to P-12 students.

My research focuses on three overarching themes: 1) identifying sentence-level constructs in complex sentence structures that will improve writing quality in argumentative, informative, and narrative essays, 2) implementing interdisciplinary research on facilitating student engagement for children with postural dysfunction, and 3) developing a feasible special education funding model that provides

equitable services for students with special needs.

I have served as the Recruitment and Retention (R&R) coordinator and Program Director at UHART. In this leadership role, I have developed an extensive R&R policy and annual plan to improve recruitment strategies and increased enrollment in the education programs. I am also the lead writer for the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) 2022 accreditation report.

I have experience organizing Interprofessional Education forums with panel members from interdisciplinary fields: education, nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, radiology, and other health professions. To create awareness on diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice I will be organizing a Poverty Simulation project in the Fall.

I have been a NERA member since 2017 and have actively participated in most of the NERA conferences held in person and virtually as a presenter and discussant. I find NERA to be a very welcoming and a safe environment for all researchers to present their ideas and findings with other inquisitive participants. Hence, I encourage my students to present at the NERA conference for them to learn, build confidence, and connect effectively with other researchers.

I support NERA's mission on hosting high quality educational research and providing opportunities for experienced and new researchers. NERA has given me the opportunity to present my research ideas and as such I would like to contribute to this organization by serving as a board member with the skills and expertise I possess.

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## Kate Nolan



I am currently a research scientist at Curriculum Associates and have been a NERA member since my first year of graduate school in 2012. There was one other Penn State student in my program who attended and I decided to take her word for it that NERA was truly a great, tight knit community. It didn't take long for me to agree that the NERA community was indeed something special. The friends I made at that first conference are friends I still have today and who I look forward to seeing every year at the conference. While I am based in NJ, I spent a year living in southern California and during that year I still had to fly home for the NERA conference. At NERA, I have been able to present my research in a welcoming and engaging space, learn from some of the top professionals in our field, and

have so many professional development opportunities that just aren't possible at the larger conferences in our field.

In my current role at Curriculum Associates, I support computer adaptive and fixed form interim assessments that serve millions of students across the country. We strive to make the classroom a better place for teachers and students, and I find this intersection of research, educational technology, and practical application truly rewarding. Prior to this role, I was a psychometrician at Questar where I provided psychometric support to several large-scale statewide summative assessments. Before completing my PhD in Educational Psychology at Penn State University, I worked as a data scientist for a financial technology company, Payoff as well as serving as an intern at College Board for several years.

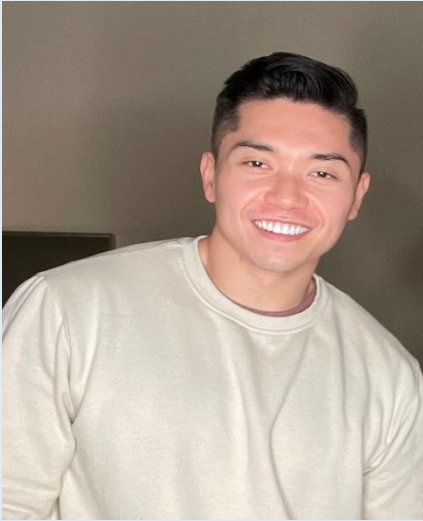
I have been involved in many roles since becoming a NERA member. I served on the Graduate Student Issues Committee, was a NERA ambassador during several conferences, was the co-editor of the *The Researcher*, and am now a co-chair for the upcoming 2022 conference. All these various roles have helped me to understand the many perspectives of our NERA community. Now I am humbled to be nominated to serve as a member of the NERA Board and I hope to continue to serve NERA in this role.

I strongly believe a small regional organization, like NERA can play an important role in supporting students, facilitating connections, building professional networks, and impacting the educational research community as a whole. I am an advocate for NERA in my professional organization. I am enthusiastic about expanding and diversifying our membership as well strongly support our current students and professional members. Thank you for considering me a member of the NERA Board. Serving as a Board member would be an honor and one more small way for me to give back to NERA.

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## Thai Ong



My name is Thai, and I am a Psychometrician at the National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME). In my role, I oversee scoring and score reporting activities for several exam programs, provide psychometric consultation on organizational-wide initiatives, and conduct research on operational issues and considerations. The psychometrician role is unique at NBME such that we are provided the opportunity to do both operational and research work – I am thankful for the chance to engage with the research community, such as NERA members, while still being able to do the operational work that I trained in graduate school for.

I attended NERA as a M.A. student in the Quantitative Psychology Program at James Madison University and it was (really) love at first sight – I know that was cheesy but facts are facts. Prior to attending NERA, I was told so many great things about the conference, including the friendly interactions you get with established researchers in the field, the free workshops you can attend that are normally hundreds and hundreds of dollars, and the unique networking experiences you can only get from the small-knit community. I didn't know what the faculty meant by all these things initially but after my first NERA conference, where I got a photo with Andrew Ho, took an R workshop, and built connections with JMU alumni (now colleagues), I knew that NERA is truly a special conference. These experiences are what continuously bring me back to NERA 8 years later now as a graduate from the Assessment and Measurement PhD program at James Madison university and one of the primary reasons why I am running for the NERA Board of Directors.

I have been involved with NERA in numerous roles. In 2015, I served as a member on the Graduate Student Issues Committee (GSIC) and eventually became the committee chair in 2016. In 2019, I served as a member on the Conference Ambassadors Committee, helping incoming NERA members feel connected and “at home” like how I felt during my first NERA conference. In 2020, I had the pleasure of serving as conference co-chair to plan the first fully remote NERA conference for all of you. Most recently, I serve as the chair for the Conference Ambassadors Committee, working with a small committee to strategize ways to promote inclusion for new members.

I would be honored to serve NERA in a different role as a Board member. If elected, I would push the NERA organization to think critically about how we can a) provide support to under-represented graduate students and b) diversify and expand on NERA membership. I believe that I wouldn't be where I am in my career without the advice from colleagues I met through NERA, and I hope to continue making a positive impact on the NERA organization through becoming a board member. Thank you so much for your consideration.

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## Beth Perkins



My name is Beth and I am a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U). Much of my research centers on the VALUE Initiative - a rubric-based system for assessing essential learning outcomes in higher education. In addition to conducting research, I manage the VALUE database, collaborate with individual institutions to analyze data and report findings, and help support a number of institutes that are run by the Office of Curricular and Pedagogical Innovation.

I attended NERA for the first time in 2017 as a first-year student in the Assessment & Measurement program at James Madison University. NERA was the first professional conference I had ever attended. From the first day of that conference I felt completely welcomed into an incredible community of researchers, teachers, and fellow graduate students. With every year came a deeper sense of connection with fellow NERA members. NERA is a fantastic conference for sharing research and connecting with other professionals - but it is so much more than that to me. Engaging with NERA members, being mentored by NERA leadership, and having the opportunity to give back to the organization through multiple roles has helped me find my place in the educational research world. NERA will always feel like home and I will forever look forward to the trip to Connecticut every October.

After attending my first conference, I knew that I wanted to help support NERA in whatever way I could. I served as a member of the Graduate Student Issues Committee (GSIC) from 2018-2021. During that time, I was the GSIC chair and graduate student representative on the Board of Directors from 2019-2020. I also served as a member of the Infrastructure Committee from 2018-2021 and chaired the committee from 2020-2021. I am currently serving as a conference co-chair for this year's conference. In addition to these volunteer roles, I have had the opportunity to present research, facilitate workshops, serve as session chair, and be a mentee in the mentor program.

It would be an honor to continue to serve the NERA membership as a Board member. If elected I will continue to advocate for our graduate student members. This organization was so influential in my professional development as a student and that impact will stay with me forever. I want to continue to foster this excitement for NERA in new members and hope to help make graduate students feel as welcomed into the community as I did not so long ago. NERA has had an immeasurable impact in my life and for that I will always support the organization and members in any way that I can. Thank you for your consideration of me as a candidate for Board member.

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## Matthew Speno



Greetings and Salutations! I am grateful and humbled to ask for your vote of confidence to serve NERA as a Board Director.

Two years before our Global community became what I consider the *upside-down*, I travelled from Maine to my first NERA Conference. Little did I know that you and our NERA colleagues would become my family of scholars! Over the years, NERA has become an important part of my identity as an academic and for that, I am thankful. As a service minded individual, it was a no-brainer to accept my first opportunity to work on behalf of our wonderful organization. When Hank Johnson invited me to step into the GSIC Chair role, I think I may have answered him before he finished; at least I did in my head! I have held this role for two years. Knowing from experience as a graduate student who sought out NERA, our organization provides such a valuable experience for one of our most essential

membership constituents. My service to NERA is a responsibility I do not take casually!

### Why me?

Calling upon my commitment to cultivating diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (D.E.I. & J.) as I journey through each day, I expect the same from you! I currently sit on several Boards, from local school districts to a national educational organization and truth be told, if I did not conduct myself through a D.E.I. & J. lens, my impact on social change would be shallow. Think book banning, personal belief attacks, and hateful language from various stakeholders. Unfortunately, as indicative of the times we are in, I am tested each week to ensure my service is unemotional and celebrates, while tolerating, the diversity of viewpoints and perceptions which are different from my own. I rely on asking powerful questions to provide D.E.I. & J. the chance to flourish in every organization I serve. For example, my role as the Special Populations Lead for the national Association for Career and Technical Education allows me to address D.E.I. & J. issues that marginalized groups face during their engagement in a vocational educational pathway for success.

My Non-Profit Board experience is considerable. I hold various roles as a Board consultant, Board member, Committee Chair (Policy, Finance, Personnel), and Board Vice-Chair. I am verse in the details of organizational development. In my service for NERA, along with holding the GSIC Chair, I have accepted the opportunity to act as Co-Chair for our 2023 Conference. Whilst I will have to step down from that role if elected, I will ensure a comprehensive transition from my Conference planning responsibilities, and I have also let my Co-Chair colleagues know I will be available for consultation if needed.

I earned my M.S. Ed. and Ed. D. from the University of New England. My career goal is to secure a tenure track professorship at a research university where I can continue to develop and execute research to provide the narrative and data to make our educational institutions accessible to all. To that end, I have a six-year plan to do so, and I am excited to share I have accepted a fellowship with the Center of Childhood and Youth Studies out of Salem State University. This opportunity will be my inaugural into the publish or perish mentality! Currently, I spend my days reading, writing, and enjoying time with family and friends.

As your next NERA Board member, I will exhibit the courage to ask powerful questions and call upon the same to sit down and listen, I will employ audacity to create a fair, safe, and rigorous research environment for NERA members, and I will continue my efforts to promote collegiality for current and future NERA members.

Thank you for your time. Vote Dr. Matthew Speno as your next NERA Board member!