

# The NERA Researcher

## The President's Message



Craig Wells

Dear NERA Colleagues,

I am certain you are enjoying the arrival of this beautiful spring weather as much as I am. Although I do not want to rush the long awaited warm season, I want to tell you why I am eagerly anticipating our annual NERA conference in October. Every year, I look forward to the opportunities this conference provides our community — the opportunity to interact with colleagues and friends, discuss important educational challenges and possible solutions, present and listen to research on educational issues, and hear from experts in the field on contemporary topics that are influencing education. The conference committee has been working hard to create an engaging program and already has exciting things planned for this year. For example, the keynote speaker, Virginia Edwards, who served as editor of *Education Week* for many years, will share her extensive experience in education with the NERA membership. In lieu of a second keynote speaker, we decided to construct a keynote panel to address important issues pertaining to school choice. The panel members will include Preston Green, Professor of Educational Leadership and Law at University of Connecticut, and Jeffery Henig, Professor of Political Science and Education at Columbia University; both of whom have published extensively on topics related to school choice. This panel format was selected to encourage the exchange of ideas and audience participation with the goal of better understanding the issues surrounding school choice, such as the advantages and disadvantages of vouchers and charter schools. We have also planned an engaging panel discussion comprised of NERA past-Presidents, including John Young, April Zenisky, Darlene Perner, Lynn Shelley, and Kristen Huff, who will discuss and facilitate participation of conference attendees about future issues in educational research. Lastly, we have planned an interactive conversation with Kurt Geisinger who is the Director of Buros Center for Testing and Professor at University of Nebraska. The conversation will partly be driven by questions raised from the audience via social media that will be presented to Dr. Geisinger at the session, allowing for both pre-submitted questions and real-time discussion. When our conference committee set about their work in designing our meeting, their mission was to encourage the engagement of all our conference attendees, and their efforts are evident in the program thus far.

The theme of the 2017 NERA conference, *Using Technology to Advance Education: Challenges and Opportunities*, is particularly relevant given that the role of technology is continuing to grow in education; and, if implemented appropriately, technology will enhance the education of all students. An effective education system involves many aspects, including having a strong curriculum, instruction based on best practice that supports competence, autonomy, and

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## The NERA Researcher

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

### Message from the Editors

Happy Spring NERA Members,

We hope that everyone is enjoying the re-emergence of warm weather as we transition into Spring! Transition is also occurring at the NERA Researcher, as we welcome Katrina Roohr as the new Content Co-Editor. Thank you to Haifa Matos-Elefonte for serving in this role for the past three years!

This issue contains important information related to the 2017 Conference, including a call for proposals. Additionally, please find updates from our various committees and calls for award and elected position nominations. You might also be interested in polishing your knowledge of "noncognitive skills" by perusing Ross Markle's article, "Noncognitive factors: What's all the buzz about?" or learning more about urban education reform by reading Rosa Aghekyan's analysis.

As always, a special thank you to Barbara J. Helms for her continued assistance in editing The NERA Researcher!

Katherine Reynolds and Katrina Roohr  
The Editors

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differentiation, and an assessment system that provides useful and immediate feedback that informs instruction. Technology can help support several of these goals, especially related to instruction and assessment. For example, computer software can be used to provide adaptive learning where the lessons are tailored to the student's experience and current level of skills that can supplement in-person instruction. This is particularly helpful in large, heterogeneous classrooms where it is difficult to personalize or differentiate instruction. Having students work on computers and tablets to supplement in-person teacher instruction is particularly helpful as classroom sizes continue to increase, making it difficult to address individual student needs. This same technology can be used to develop assessments that are tailored to each individual student's current level of proficiency via computerized adaptive testing. Recent advances have explored how video game-like technologies can be incorporated into instructional platforms where students remain engaged with lessons for which the level or difficulty is determined based on the student's current level of skills. Furthermore, while the students are playing the games, data are collected that can be used to infer how much the student is learning, relative weaknesses and strengths in the student's understanding, and whether the student has mastered the material and should progress to the next level.

For the technology to be effective, however, we need to rely on strong educational research that establishes the foundations of specific domain knowledge. For example, having a well-tested and clear description of a learning progression in algebra for middle-school students that is connected to curriculum and instruction is necessary so that we can construct software that can provide appropriate lessons given the student's current level of skills and knowledge. We also need a clear model for how to assess student learning, especially for providing feedback to students on how well they are progressing, and to identify the subsequent level of instruction for the student. To accomplish these goals, the development of the software and technology must be created using a multi-disciplinary approach with curriculum, instruction, and assessment experts working together with software designers. One consequence for the use of technology in classrooms is that it may require us to revisit how we train graduate students, especially related to their curriculum, so that they can have the skills necessary to support effective instruction.

I am very excited for the future of learning and education. One of the reasons for my excitement is the advances in technology to support effective teaching practices and student learning. Although technology cannot replace great teaching, it can certainly support and enhance learning experiences. The appropriate use of technology may allow teachers and educators to spend more time with students who are struggling, while at the same time providing other students with lessons that they can work on at their own pace. Another reason why I am excited for the future of education is because we have some of the best and brightest minds working on improving education, as exhibited at the NERA annual conference. To continue our tradition of excellent research, I strongly encourage you and your colleagues to submit a proposal for the upcoming conference. If you know graduate students or colleagues who are doing interesting research in education, but are not aware of NERA, then encourage them to submit a proposal to the annual conference. We are looking for multi-disciplinary experts to join our conversations in October.

## Member News

**Kathryn Strom** and **Adrian Martin** published the book (released January 2017) entitled *Becoming-Teacher: A Rhizomatic Look at First-Year Teaching*.

Citation: Strom, K. J., & Martin, A. D. *Becoming-Teacher: A Rhizomatic Look at First-Year Teaching*. Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense.

NERA webmaster **Bo Bashkov** published the following:

Bashkov, B. M., & DeMars, C. E. (2017). Examining the performance of the Metropolis-Hastings Robbins-Monro algorithm in the estimation of multilevel multidimensional IRT models. *Applied Psychological Measurement*. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0146621616688923>

Bashkov, B. M., & Finney, S. J. (2017). Apples to apples: How to investigate whether you are measuring the same construct over time. *SAGE Research Methods Cases*. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781473993334>

**Lisa Wisniewski** receive her doctorate from the Educational Leadership program at the University of Hartford. She is now working at Goodwin College.

Please consider submitting your professional accomplishments for recognition in *The NERA Researcher*!

Submissions may be sent to [theneraresearcher@nera-education.org](mailto:theneraresearcher@nera-education.org).

## 48th Annual Conference Overview and Welcome

October 18-20, 2017

Trumbull Marriott Merritt Parkway, Trumbull, Connecticut

Hello NERA Members,

We are in the midst of planning what should be an exciting and engaging 2017 conference! First, we want to thank everyone for responding to the 2016 conference evaluation survey, as it has been useful in helping us plan the next conference. We would also like to extend our appreciation to the 2016 Conference Chairs, Molly Faulkner-Bond, Joshua Marland, and Scott Monroe, as well as Past President Charles DePascale for their great work in making the 2016 conference a resounding success.

This year's conference will return to the Marriott Hotel in Trumbull, CT for the third time. The dates of the Conference are October 18-20, 2017. Membership and conference registration forms will be available on the NERA website (<http://www.nera-education.org>) this summer. This year's conference theme is "*Using Technology to Advance Education: Challenges and Opportunities*". Continuing from last year, we want to provide the opportunity for you to connect your research to the conference theme. As you submit your proposals, we invite you to indicate whether your paper directly relates to the theme for possible inclusion in a Spotlight session.

Additionally, we have a number of other great sessions and activities planned:

**Professional Development Workshops:** There will be both pre- and in-conference workshops at this year's conference. For the first time we have solicited proposals for workshops. We received many excellent submissions and look forward to announcing the accepted workshops in the near future.

**Mentoring:** The mentoring program will provide graduate students with the opportunity to meet with professionals in the field. Mentors can provide individualized feedback on research projects and/or dissertations, as well as provide guidance during the conference.

**Conference App:** Following our theme of technology, we will continue using the conference app to provide conference information, facilitate interactions among NERA members at the conference, as well as allow researchers to easily share their slides and papers with their colleagues.

**Technology Demonstrations:** To further highlight our theme, we will be working with organizations to demo new educational technologies at NERA.

We are excited to announce our keynote and invited speakers, who have expertise in a number of different areas:

**Keynote Speaker:** Our keynote this year will be given by **Virginia Edwards** who served as editor of the esteemed newspaper *Education Week* (<http://www.edweek.org>) from 1989 to 2016 and who led the establishment of *Education Week's* digital presence.

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# NERA

## NORTHEASTERN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

**Keynote Panel:** We will be hosting a panel discussing various aspects of the school choice movement given the new administration's policy platform. Currently, this panel will feature **Dr. Jeffery Henig**, Professor of Political Science and Education at Columbia University and **Dr. Preston Green**, Professor of Educational Leadership and Law at University of Connecticut, with the hope of adding one more leader in educational policy.

**Invited Panel:** Former NERA President **John Young** has assembled a panel of past NERA presidents including **April Zenisky**, **Darlene Perner**, **Lynn Shelley**, and **Kristen Huff** to discuss previous and potential future trends in educational research based on their abundant and diverse experience.

**Invited Interactive Conversation:** We are excited to announce an interactive conversation focused on changes in educational technology with **Dr. Kurt Geisinger**, Director of Buros Center for Testing and Professor at University of Nebraska. We will be soliciting audience questions through social media that will be presented to Dr. Geisinger at the session allowing for both pre-submitted questions and real-time discussion. Details on how to submit questions will be provided soon.

We hope that you are planning to attend the conference, and that you will also encourage friends and colleagues to attend. This year, we will continue using the online proposal submission process. Please see the Call for Proposals and FAQ for more information. We also encourage you to distribute the Call for Proposals to other educational researchers who may not have access to this publication. The proposal system will open in early May and you will have until **June 2<sup>nd</sup>** to submit your proposals.

We are looking forward to another successful and exciting NERA conference! Email us if you have any questions: [NERAConferenceChairs@gmail.com](mailto:NERAConferenceChairs@gmail.com).

Thank you!

Best,

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## Call for Proposals

48TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

October 18-20, 2017

Trumbull Marriott Merritt Parkway, Trumbull, Connecticut

NERA invites proposals for our annual meeting spanning all areas of educational research. We welcome proposals from new and experienced researchers and will consider both completed and in-progress research. Below you will find the conference theme, general requirements for NERA proposals, as well as specific guidelines corresponding to the four session formats. For more information about the conference, including FAQs about NERA proposals, visit NERA at [www.nera-education.org](http://www.nera-education.org).

**Conference Theme:** *"Using Technology to Advance Education: Challenges and Opportunities"*

The rapid expansion and accessibility of innovative technology has altered the way we conduct standard activities and interact with the world around us. For example, some of you may be reading this on your smart phone or tablet, a feat scarcely imaginable two decades ago. Education, as we have seen, has not been immune to the influence of technology. Perhaps the most noticeable example is how the internet has transformed the accessibility and dissemination of knowledge. In the classroom, tablets have begun to replace textbooks; smartboards have challenged the traditional whiteboard; and social media has been utilized to expand communication beyond classroom walls. Educational assessments have also evolved with those technological developments. Computer and web-based testing have largely supplanted paper and pencil exams. The wide ranging impacts of technology have provided educational researchers and professionals a plethora of new opportunities and challenges. However, the speeds at which these developments have evolved make it difficult for the research to keep up. For the 2017 conference, we encourage NERA members and affiliates to be innovative and bring greater focus to how technology is evolving in education and the challenges experienced during this process. **Although we encourage session proposals related to the conference theme, this is not a requirement for submissions.**

### Submission Requirements

- Complete information for author(s) including affiliation(s)
- Descriptive title (**maximum: 15 words**)
- Three keywords
- Description of paper to appear in conference program (**maximum: 50 words**).
- Proposal, NOT including tables, figures, and references (**maximum: 1000 words**).
- Proposal should include: study purpose, theoretical framework, methodology, results, conclusions, and educational implications.
- **Proposal should be blind**, removing any author names and affiliations.
- *Note:* Refer to the Proposal FAQ for details about organization for proposals that may not lend themselves to each of the sections listed above.
- Warning: Proposals with more than 1000 words will not be accepted.

### Submission Format


The proposal submission form will be online and accessible from the NERA website by May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017. At the time of submission, authors will be required to select from a list of descriptive keywords to categorize the proposal.

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## Submission Review Process

- Proposals *must* be submitted electronically by **Friday, June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017 (11:59pm EST)**.
- 2 to 3 NERA members will conduct blind reviews of each proposal.
- Each proposal will be judged according to the following criteria: educational or scholarly significance, perspective or theoretical framework, appropriateness of methodology, clarity of expression, and appeal to NERA membership.


Proposal decisions will be emailed to first authors in mid-August. Details about session dates and times will follow when the program is finalized.



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## Session-Specific Guidelines — NERA 2017 Conference

When submitting your proposal, you will be asked to indicate which of the following session formats you prefer for your research. We encourage submitters to select more than one possible option, as selecting multiple options increases your likelihood of acceptance. Regardless of the session you choose, your paper will be subjected to rigorous peer review by NERA volunteers. As each format provides a medium for contributing your research to the field, all session formats are equally important. We hope to maintain a variety of sessions this year to maximize the educational experience for NERA members.

### **Individual Presentations**

#### **Individual Paper:**

Proposals should describe completed or nearly completed research to be presented in 10-15 minutes. Sessions will be organized so that 3-5 individual presentations will be grouped according to similar research areas. In most paper sessions, a discussant will be assigned to read the set of papers in advance and present a 10-15 minute synthesis, critique, or analysis of the set of papers to spur discussion.

#### **Roundtable:**

Roundtable sessions allow maximum interaction among presenters and with attendees. There is greater emphasis on discussion between the authors and participants during a roundtable session. Each table will have 3-5 researchers of accepted papers clustered around shared interests. Each session will have a designated chair knowledgeable about the research area to facilitate interaction and participation, and when appropriate, a discussant will be assigned to a roundtable session as well.

#### **Individual Poster:**

Proposals should describe a research project, either completed or nearly completed, that lends itself to a visual display, and that would benefit from informal individualized discussion and feedback. Similar to the individual paper presentations, each poster will have a discussant. Specific directions for the size of the poster will be posted on the NERA Conference website.

### **Theme-Based Paper Session/Symposium**

Proposals should describe a set of 3-5 presentations organized around a common theme. The chair and discussant for this session must be identified in the proposal. The format and procedure for these sessions are identical to the *Individual Paper Presentation* sessions.

### **Link your proposals to the conference theme**

We would like to encourage individuals submitting proposals to indicate on the proposal form how their research directly touches upon our conference theme of *Using Technology to Advance Education: Challenges and Opportunities* for possible inclusion in a spotlight session centered on the theme. **Note that this is not a requirement for proposals.**

### **Special call for teacher researchers!**

Click the following link for more information about the special call for teacher researchers to attend NERA and present their research: [http://www.nera-education.org/award\\_nominations.php](http://www.nera-education.org/award_nominations.php)

### **Call for conference volunteers and reviewers!**

We will be sending out a survey asking for NERA members to volunteer as proposal reviewers, session chairs, or discussants. Keep an eye out for the survey!

If you have any questions, please contact the conference chairs at [NERAConferenceChairs@gmail.com](mailto:NERAConferenceChairs@gmail.com).

Thank you,

Whitney Smiley  
American Board of Internal Medicine

Daniel Jurich  
National Board of Medical Examiners

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## Frequently Asked Questions

48TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
October 18-20, 2017  
Marriott Hotel, Trumbull, Connecticut

**2017 Conference Theme:** *"Using Technology to Advance Education: Challenges and Opportunities"*

### **Does my research project have to be complete to be accepted to NERA?**

Not necessarily. In-progress or nearly completed research will be considered for the conference, but the research should show potential of being ready for presentation by the date of the conference. We strongly encourage individuals to submit their in-progress work as roundtable presentations. This format facilitates greater discussion between participants and the audience, allowing you to receive input and feedback that could inform your research or help to overcome potential hurdles.

### **How are the proposal descriptive keywords used?**

These terms are used in several ways. Specifically, they will be used to match the proposals to the appropriate reviewers, to place the proposal in the best-fitting session, and to assign an appropriate discussant to the session. Please select the descriptor that is the best match to your proposal as your first-choice, and two additional descriptors as next-best options.

### **What is the review process like?**

Reviewers are NERA member volunteers, who have self-identified as being willing to review proposals in the same topic area as the proposal keyword. The conference chairs make final decisions, based on both the reviews and availability in the conference program.

### **When will my research paper need to be ready?**

Discussants must be able to review research papers prior to the session in order to properly prepare for discussion. You will be asked to email your research paper to the discussant no later than October 1<sup>st</sup>.

### **Will a projector and laptop be available in my session?**

Institutional sponsors will be supplying LCD projectors for each session. Arrangements only need to be made to have a laptop present at the session. The chair of the session will arrange the laptop and file transfers to the laptop by email before the session. Presenters are expected to cooperate with chair requests.

### **What if I am accepted to NERA, but I am unable to attend NERA when the time comes?**

Submitting to NERA is a sign that you intend to attend the conference if accepted. If something prevents you from being able to attend, and co-authors or colleagues cannot present in your place, you must withdraw your presentation *before* the session by emailing [NERAConferenceChairs@gmail.com](mailto:NERAConferenceChairs@gmail.com).

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## **What size should my poster be?**

Easels with foam display boards will be available for poster presentations. Poster size should be no larger than 36" x 48". The display should be easily read and clear from a distance of at least 3 feet from the board. The title, author, and affiliation should be at least 36 point font. The rest of your lettering should be at **least 28 point font**. Be sure to include diagrams, figures, photos, bulleted text, or other visuals that describe your research. More information regarding posters will be posted on the NERA website.

Presenters should also prepare four PowerPoint slides (maximum) which will be shared electronically prior to the poster session to give attendees a short preview/overview of each study.

## **You have several session options for submitting proposals. Are any considered more rigorous than others?**

No. All formats are peer-reviewed methods for disseminating your research. The rigor of the peer review process is the same for **all** proposals submitted to the conference. Peer review allows NERA to maintain an appropriate level quality for the experience of those presenting their research, as well as those receiving the research.

## **What are the submission parameters for theme-based paper sessions/symposia?**

Those presenting theme-based paper sessions or symposia are only required to submit one proposal for all papers in the session, with a maximum of 1,000 words. The submission should include a description of how the papers are related to each other, as well as a short description of each of the papers that are included in the session. Lastly, during submission, proposers can indicate that they are submitting a theme-based paper session or symposia.

## **What is the role of the Chair?**

The role of the chair is to facilitate the organization of the presentation session. Duties may include collecting the papers, communicating with authors, managing audio/visual equipment, and ensuring the timeliness of the session. In some cases, the chair would assist in facilitating discussion among the audience members and authors.

## **What is the role of the Discussant?**

Discussants are responsible for drawing from their expertise to comment on papers and presentations. The goal is to provide professional and constructive criticism and raise issues for broader consideration that connect to these works.

## **How do roundtable sessions work?**

Roundtable sessions offer the most opportunity for interactions among presenters and participants. Three to five researchers with similar interests are assigned to a table, along with a moderator with some expertise in the topic area. Individual researchers do not make a formal presentation as in a paper session, but may provide a brief overview of their work and specific issues that they would like to discuss. The majority of the time during a roundtable session should be devoted to discussion among the assigned researchers and other participants.

## **What are the conference registration fees?**

Registration fees will be posted on the NERA website later this spring. For planning purposes, we anticipate that the conference registration fees will be Professionals: \$185; Retirees: \$120; Students: \$60. Late fees will be instituted after October 1. Similar to 2016, the 2017 registration fees will include all meals during the conference. This fee structure is different from registration fees prior to 2016. All registrants must also be NERA members. Information about membership and dues can be found on the NERA website ([www.nera-education.org](http://www.nera-education.org)).

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## **Are my registration fees adjusted if I just come for one day or part of a day?**

NERA makes a great effort to keep registration fees as low as possible for all attendees; therefore, it is not possible to provide adjusted registration fees for partial attendance.

## **What is the room rate at the Conference Hotel?**

The Conference will be held at the Marriott Merritt Parkway in Trumbull, CT. Room rates for the 2017 conference are \$145 per room per night (not per person). Note that meal costs are no longer incorporated into the hotel room rate.

## **How will I submit my NERA proposal?**

An online submission system to submit proposals will open on May 1, 2017.

You may contact the conference co-chairs with further questions at [NERAConferenceChairs@gmail.com](mailto:NERAConferenceChairs@gmail.com).

Thank you,

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As expressed in the NERA statement on diversity, NERA believes that when a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints converge, the result is an advanced understanding of research and education. We need your help to ensure that NERA's leadership reflects that belief. Please consider nominating yourself or a colleague for one of these important positions in our community of researchers. Note that all nominees must be current members of NERA.

Please send your nominations for the positions listed above to Charlie DePascale, NERA Past President, at [cdepascale@nciea.org](mailto:cdepascale@nciea.org) by May 31, 2017.

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## Urban Education Reform Analysis

Rosa Aghekyan, Rutgers University

The educational system and its reforms have always been at the center of the American government's attention. However, the vision of good public education and ideas for improving American education have varied from government to government. For example, Thomas Jefferson emphasized the importance of a tax-funded, unified educational system for the newly formed country (Comer, 2004). This vision never reached culmination, and public education remains mostly a local affair in the United States. Yet, there have been many reform attempts by the central government, in addition to local governments and communities, to reshape public education and achieve the same goal: the improvement of student learning and attainment of better educational outcomes.

Early school reforms were mostly concerned with expanding public education to include minorities and other disadvantaged groups. For example, after the Civil War was over, the Tuskegee Institute was formed by Booker T. Washington with the goal of educating African Americans, and hoping that education would help in overcoming racial obstacles (Thornbrough, 1969). Harvard graduate W.E.B. DuBois believed that African Americans should receive the same education as whites, and he believed that the Tuskegee Institution equated to accepting racial discrimination (Bankston & Caldas, 2009). Segregation of public schools ensured that education was unequal. Dianne Ravitch, an educational historian, cited in her book that only one-third of black children attended school in general, and that few children had access to high school. Moreover, by the 1930s, the average spending per white student was eighty dollars in contrast to the fifteen dollars per African American student (Ravitch, 2000).

After school integration during the Civil Rights era of the 1960s, inequality of education due to racial discrimination was mostly eliminated. However, other issues, like inadequate funding, poor teaching quality, unequal socio-economic conditions, and dysfunctional neighborhoods with high crime rate, remained. Modern school reforms try to address these problems by either taking comprehensive, nation-wide approaches or implementing community-specific strategies. For example, the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) refers to the agenda of a multifaceted school improvement

program, which includes the incorporation of development of effective instructional practices, improvement of curriculum and assessment, and the supporting of community partnership programs that strengthen parent and community involvement in education (Slavin, 2007). The School Development Program (SDP), one of the earliest school intervention programs designed by an African-American Yale psychiatrist, was focused on improving the test scores, behavior, and attendance of poor and/or socially marginalized students. This program relied on a connected community and parent population to help towards improvement of students' behavior and motivation (Comer et al., 1996).

Currently, urban education reform attracts more attention from policy makers, educators and researchers than any other types of school reform. Since the 1980s, almost every large school district adopted some form of market-driven reform (Lipman, 2004). Many public and private organizations, including the Gates, Carnegie, Annenberg, and Walton Family foundations, as well as individual philanthropists such as Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg, have provided tremendous funding to assist with educational reform. Since many urban schools still lack important educational resources (Sadowski, 2001), this money is not unwanted. However, the effectiveness of these monetary contributions in improving the quality of education is not that evident (Noguera, 2004). It is indisputable that many schools, especially urban poor high schools, are in need of reform. However, in order to be effective, it makes sense to understand the purpose of reform first, before undergoing any transformation (Noguera, 2004). Moreover, as Anyon (2008) argues, school reform by itself may not be a full solution for problems taking place in urban education, unless economic reform is integrated as well.

### Teach for America

Some school reforms embrace the overhaul of the teaching staff including hiring of the members of Teach for America (TFA). TFA is a non-profit organization which recruits "a diverse group of leaders with a record of

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achievement who work to expand educational opportunity, starting by teaching for two years in a low-income community" (<http://www.teachforamerica.org>). The educational benefits of using TFA teachers to teach students are subject to a contentious debate both in the educational policy area and in education research. This debate deliberates both the short-term and long-term impact of TFA on teaching staff quality, development, and retention, in addition to its effects on students' educational outcomes. Most studies in this area are inconclusive with mixed results; some studies show better student achievement, whereas others indicate no significant improvements in students' performance (Baker & Dickerson, 2006; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005; Decker, Mayer, & Glazerman, 2004; Xu, Hannaway, & Taylor, 2011).

Additionally, teacher retention is a very important factor for long-term educational success, since research demonstrates that teachers' performance improves after three to five years of teaching (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005). Incidentally, the attrition rate of TFA teachers (especially, after two years of service) ranges from 50 to 90% depending on district (Heilig & Jez, 2010). Since the experience of teachers plays such an important role in their performance, the high attrition rates of TFA teachers make the long-term benefits of the TFA program questionable. While there are some short-term improvements, after TFA teachers leave, these improvements quickly vanish. Instead of trying to have fast, but short-lived results, the school districts should invest in improving their teachers' performance by providing more training and adopting better instructional strategies. It is an established fact that increased teacher learning can improve student achievement (Phillips, 2003). The need for good teachers can be fulfilled by using various intensive, high-quality professional development programs that can assist the district in training and retaining excellent teachers (Phillips, 2003). Improving curriculum and instruction can also make a big difference in the long run, instead of trying to increase student achievement by teaching different test-taking strategies to students who are academically behind in hopes that this will help them in passing the state exam (Noguera, 2004).

## Charter Schools

Transforming some district-operated schools into charter-operated schools is another tool frequently used by school reformers. The expansion of charter schools is motivated by the reformers' observation that many charter schools have a better track record of success

compared to district-operated schools. However, although some school reformers and politicians view charter schools as a key constituent in improving underperforming urban education, there are various studies that demonstrate that it is not a perfect solution. For instance, Orfield (2009) argued that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and charter schools foster segregation, and suggested the changing of these policies. In their study conducted in two major California urban school districts, Zimmer and Buddin (2006) showed that charter schools were not promoting academic achievement among minority students, in spite of support given to the charter schools by mayors and superintendents. Similarly, Hanushek et al. (2006) found no significant difference between regular and charter schools in Texas with respect to student achievement in mathematics and language arts. Also, when the test performance data taken from the New Jersey secondary charter schools was compared to test results of low-income, underperforming schools in New Jersey, there was almost no difference in the results (Fabricant & Fine, 2012).

Furthermore, Miron et al.'s (2010) study on the Education Management Organization (EMO)-operated charter schools revealed segregation, instead of integration, in already segregated schools. In spite of charter school proponents' claims that these schools take high minority and economically disadvantaged students, Miron et al. (2010) found that many charter schools were highly segregated by student income — some schools had students from mostly high income families, while others had mostly low-income students. In addition, both special education students and English Language Learners (ELLs) were underrepresented in these schools. There is strong evidence that charter schools are less likely to enroll special education students and accept ELL students (Buckley & Sattin-Bajaj, 2011), whereas public schools have to take all students regardless of their learning disabilities or language deficiencies. Abedi and Dietel (2004) argued that ELLs usually underperform with respect to other students. For example, even though data analysis conducted in a Massachusetts' district demonstrated overall performance improvement for both ELA (English Language Art) and ELL students, the gap between these two groups was significant: 61% proficient ELA students versus 12% proficient ELL students. Likewise, Nelson et al. (2004) uncovered a large disparity between academic outcomes of special education students having emotional or behavioral disorders (E/BD) and their

*(Continued on page 17)*

regular education peers. This leads to the conclusion that districts with a high population of special education and ELL students will underperform on their standardized tests, whereas charter schools, which have only small numbers of special education and ELL students, will maintain inflated results.

Another problem with charter schools is with respect to high student and teacher attrition rates. The Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) is a network of more than 60 charter schools in which students were making above average progress compared to their local and national norms (Payne & Knowles, 2009). However, Henig's (2008) analysis demonstrated that student and teacher attrition was high in KIPP. Yet, charter schools remain an attractive alternative as long as improvements in urban education by other means continue to be inadequate. Although there recently was some improvement in urban education as witnessed by increased test scores and graduation rates, the change is fragile and dependent on ever-changing political arrangements (Payne & Knowles, 2009). Due to the fragility of this change, the Obama administration supported the expansion of charter schools as an alternative to failing urban schools. Payne and Knowles (2009) mention three main appeals in the charter schools reform: (1) providing new schooling options to students, especially to students who did not have these opportunities before; (2) engaging new institutional partners as responsible stakeholders in education; and (3) providing more flexibility in staffing decisions by making the hiring and firing process of teachers easy. Likewise, President Donald Trump and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos are big proponents of school choice and charter schools. However, it remains to be seen how their plans and propositions regarding the expansion of charter schools will evolve. The promise of charter schools remains too attractive to politicians and administrators.

### **Parenting and Socio-Cultural Factors**

Parenting has an enormous impact on student learning. Lareau (2011) described different parenting styles that are dependent upon the parent's socioeconomic status. In her book, Lareau (2011) argued that unlike middle-class parents, working-class parents do not make a concerted effort to cultivate their children's social, cultural and behavioral skills. They do not engage their children in a variety of leisure activities, and more importantly, do not elicit their children's thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, the working-class

parents favor natural growth, meaning that their children have frequent opportunities to interact with their close relatives and have much longer free leisure time. This comes at the expense of time spent on interacting with non-relatives and doing extra-curricular activities. Since parenting style can greatly influence student learning, school districts should ask parents to become more involved with their child's learning and balance the time children spend on different social and educational activities.

Additionally, instituting acceleration, reengagement and retainment programs can help in combating high dropout rates. The dropout rates are anticipated to increase every year. This dire prediction is supported by research findings (Educational Trust, 2002; National Education Association, 2001) that show that the dropout rate is often above 50% in high-poverty high schools with predominantly African-American and/or Latino student bodies. The acceleration programs try to change this regrettable state of affairs by assisting students who fell behind to catch up, thus reducing the dropout rate. Reengagement and retainment programs help students who have disconnected/dropped out of school to return to their learning path, and to try to earn their high school diploma. This, in turn, gives them a chance to pursue college.

There is strong evidence that urban school reforms failed in the past (Noguera & Wells, 2011) due to failure to address poverty in communities (Rothstein, 2004). Klein, Lomax, and Murguia (2010) argued that American public education couldn't be fixed unless students' well-being, family problems, and poverty issues are resolved. Indeed, the school reforms of the 1960s and 1970s were focused on both desegregation and poverty measures (Barton & Coley, 2010). Kirp (2011) highlighted the fact that, in poor neighborhoods, the fear of violence is high. This causes constant stress, in addition to deteriorated physiological and psychological well-being. Consequently, it is not surprising that urban children's lack of personal safety and financial stability often negatively impacts their development and learning (Noguera, 2011). Therefore, it is important to augment school reforms with anti-poverty and crime reduction programs such as the Newark, New Jersey's Broader, Bolder Approach (BBA) program which tried to address some of the negative social and economic factors impacting children's education (Noguera, 2011).

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## Good Teaching Matters

Instruction is another area that should be carefully looked into for any successful urban school reform. As was discussed above, Project Based Learning was an integral part of Newark's BBA school reform program. However, this reform plan, called "One Newark," did not mention any specific changes in educational instruction. Wilson (2008) found that in many charter schools, direct instruction dominates. By increasing the number of charter schools, "One Newark" might have moved Newark public schools towards this type of instruction. Payne and Knowles (2009) argued that direct instruction practices do not provide students with 21st century skills. In order to be ready for college, students should be able to think critically, make valid arguments, provide strong evidence, and analyze and evaluate data. Interestingly, Thompson, Runsdell, and Rousseau (2005) found that the most effective urban teachers, whose students showed academic success in their standardized tests, taught teacher-centered classes. However, Kohn and Henkin (2002) claimed that standardized tests measure superficial knowledge that students gained through repetition and memorization. Moreover, they argued that filling worksheets does not help urban students in fully grasping the concepts and ideas as their more affluent peers do with their constructivist teachers. Likewise, Rubin (2006) argued that classroom practices and discourses needed to be relevant, meaningful, allow learners to activate their prior knowledge, and instill the belief into students that their ideas are worthwhile. The direct teaching strategy contradicts current inquiry-based teaching and learning methodologies that require teachers to be facilitators rather than lecturers.

According to Rothstein, the solution of achievement gap problems needs transformation of social and labor policy along with strong school reform (Rothstein, 2004). The urban regime theory (Stone, 1998) can be utilized toward revising the urban educational and economic developmental policies and updating urban policy agendas (Mossberger & Stoker, 2001). The Civic Capacity and Urban Education Project was an example of this type of revision. Putnam (1993) described social capital as a collaborative relationship among people; when people work together, they build trust and reciprocity. However, Stone (2001) argued that in spite of being a positive human behavior, social capital does not yield to civic capacity. In other words, although both terminologies have similar meanings, there is a distinct difference between them. Civic capacity is when various

sectors of community, such as parents, educators, local office holders, and non-profit organizations work together and develop common agendas (Stone, 2001).

Many other factors contribute to urban students' low academic performance. Very often, teachers' unreflective teaching, lack of cultural awareness, low expectations of their urban students, and inability to create rapport with the students may contribute to students' poor academic performance (Marx, 2006). The research found that some White teachers have low expectation and disrespect towards their students and students' families, which leads to ineffective teaching (Darder, 1991; Douglas et al., 2008). Ferguson (1998) argued that Black children mostly learn from Black teachers, but even Black teachers who teach Black students of disadvantaged background may need help and support. Similarly, Douglas et al. (2008) highlighted the teachers', administrators', and counselors' important role in Black students' academic achievement, and argued that school professionals should hold the same high standards for all students regardless of their race, social status, and background. Teacher preparation programs should have courses designed for future urban teachers, where issues like race, cultural awareness, stereotypical beliefs, biases, and prejudices can be effectively addressed. The research shows that the New York City Teaching Fellows (NYCTF) program inadequately prepares candidates for teaching (Pabon, 2011). Furthermore, Muschell's (2008) study recommends a specially designed Urban Teacher Preparation and Certification program to prepare culturally-responsive teachers.

## Conclusion

Many seemingly intractable problems plague urban education. This makes the need of transforming urban education unquestionable. Urgent urban education reforms are needed to improve urban students' academic performance, reduce their dropout rate, and increase their college readiness, in addition to other pressing problems. However, do we have a clear understanding of the purpose of such a reform (Noguera, 2004)? Even if we do, merely understanding and applying the right educational reform might not be a sufficient remedy for problems of urban education, as economic reform may also be needed along with an educational one (Anyon, 2008).

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This paper has examined the controversial opinions with respect to various educational reform practices, such as the use of teachers from TFA, the need for improving the curriculum and instruction, strategies for retaining effective educators, parenting styles and parents' involvement in their children's education. Additionally, the paper has discussed whether opening more charter schools is an appropriate solution for fixing urban education.

The current trend in education reform is Harvard Professor Paul Reville's view regarding urban education, which he called "The Education Redesign Lab." This initiative has many tenets that have been addressed by various urban education reformers in the past, but the one that appears to be a missing link in education reform is personalized instruction (<http://edredesign.org>). The new hope is that this novice system, targeted toward reinventing the K-12 system, will be effective. Despite that this "new engine," with its imbedded differentiated schooling and personalized instruction may lead to pedagogical paradigm shifts, it might work. After all, one size does not fit all.

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## 2016 Leo D. Doherty Memorial Award for Outstanding Leadership and Service

Elizabeth Stone, *Educational Testing Service*

The 2016 Leo D. Doherty Memorial Award for Outstanding Leadership and Service was awarded to Dr. Elizabeth Stone, Research Scientist at the Educational Testing Service and former NERA Treasurer. 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 Doherty who was instrumental in the development and growth of NERA as a professional association for educational research. Leo’s leadership qualities, both ethical and compassionate, encouraged others to pursue and achieve their goals.

Liz exemplifies the generosity of self that was so essential to Leo Doherty along with his dedication to NERA — qualities which are honored by this award. She has engaged in service to NERA in a wide range of roles, from appointed roles (including, but not limited to, Program Co-Chair and Treasurer) to elected roles (Director). Throughout her years in and around NERA’s governance, Liz has been a thoughtful and meticulous voice for NERA and its membership time and time again, whether the conversation is debating proposals for constitutional changes or evaluating proposals for organizational technology and infrastructure. As Director and then Treasurer, she acquired a vast and encyclopedic knowledge of all things NERA, with an uncanny and impressive ability to remember details, decisions, and conversations at precisely the right moment. Her observations and comments have influenced countless governance decisions, by ensuring that all of us in NERA’s leadership not only consider our history, but also be mindful of looking forward, all the while being informed by logic and practical knowledge of NERA’s organizational systems.

Throughout her term as Treasurer, Liz has been dedicated to building on our previous Treasurers’ efforts to professionalize NERA’s infrastructure and member services. Her efforts in that regard are largely behind-the-scenes to members, but have resulted in continued improvements in members’ experiences from an administrative perspective.

Elizabeth Stone has advanced NERA’s mission and enabled it to thrive, in the words of the criteria for the Leo D. Doherty Memorial Award. As an organization, NERA is far better off because of her involvement and her service. Her actions and contributions to NERA make her eminently worthy of this important award.

On behalf of the Leo D. Doherty Award Committee and NERA membership, thank you, Liz.





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## 2016 Lorne H. Woollatt Distinguished Paper Award Winner

Anne Niccoli, *United States Coast Guard Academy*

Congratulations to Anne Niccoli, the 2016 winner of the Lorne H. Woollatt Distinguished Paper Award for the paper entitled, *Effects of Reading Mode and Format on Decision Making*, presented at the 2016 conference. The award-winning paper examined the effects of reading mode (tablet or paper), photos (two versions), and format (single or two pages) factors on decision making. Adult students were presented with an ethical prompt containing the same text, but differing in reading mode, photos, or format, then asked to make a decision. Chi-square tests of independence for mode (paper, tablet) and page format (single, two pages) showed significant differences in decisions. Most significant were differences in responses between formats and within the same mode. The change in decision choice between single and two-page format indicates an influence of photo framing for tablets compared to unchanging decisions for paper mode.

Dr. Anne Niccoli is affiliated with the Leadership Development Center of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, CT. She thanks the Boat Forces School, Chief Warrant Officers Professional Development School, and Senior Enlisted Leadership Course students at the U.S. Coast Guard Leadership Development Center, giving special thanks to the school chiefs for their support of this research.

She will receive a travel stipend to present this paper at the 2017 meeting of the American Educational Research Association consortium of State and Regional Educational Research Associations. If you are going to be at AERA, Anne will be presenting her paper on Friday, April 28, 10:35 am to 12:05 pm in the San Antonio Marriott Rivercenter, Third Floor, Conference Room 15. Her 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 overall rating of eligible submissions.

The Lorne H. Woollatt Distinguished Paper Award is named in honor of Lorne 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. Research papers from the 2016 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, Abby Cahill at [lauar@jmu.edu](mailto:lauar@jmu.edu).



NORTHEASTERN EDUCATIONAL  
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## ANNOUNCEMENT

The Teacher-as-Researcher Award is presented annually by the Northeastern Educational Research Association (NERA) to a PK-12 teacher who has conducted a self-initiated classroom research project or applied research findings to inform his or her own teaching. The project must be conceptualized, developed, and implemented as part of the nominee's own teaching practices, and have had at least one cycle of trial and evaluation. The project should also be related to a clearly defined theoretical focus and represent an innovation that has led to concrete change in practice.



Classroom teachers are invited to apply directly for this award or be nominated by NERA members, school administrators, faculty, or other education personnel familiar with the teacher's research. All applications should be submitted no later than June 30, 2017.

The 2017 awardee will be invited to speak about the research project at a session in October at the 48<sup>th</sup> Annual NERA Conference in Trumbull, CT and will be presented with the award at that time. The award includes a plaque, NERA membership, and \$150 toward travel, meals, or lodging at NERA's conference site.

For an application form or other inquiries about the award, please contact:

Dr. Darlene Russell  
TAR Award Committee Chair  
William Paterson University  
E-mail: russelld@wpunj.edu

# TEACHER-AS-RESEARCHER AWARD

## TEACHER-AS-RESEARCHER AWARD APPLICATION

48<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE, October 2017

Marriott Hotel, Trumbull, Connecticut

Name of Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation of Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_

Position of Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address of Applicant (after June 1, 2017):  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Attach the following information using the guidelines provided:

1. Descriptive title of the research
2. Abstract (Please summarize the research project in **no more than 250 words**, including its purpose, procedure, and outcomes)
3. Description of research: (**maximum of 1000 words**)
  - a. Rationale for conducting the study
  - b. Description of project methods, including participants, site, and procedures
  - c. Report and analysis of research findings
  - d. Discussion of the impact of the research on teacher's practices that occurred or will occur as a result of the project
  - e. Bibliography of relevant references related to the research
  - f. Any other information seen as relevant by the nominee
4. Significance of study to educators (Describe how the results contribute to improved educational practice or professional knowledge of educators in your field; **maximum 100 words**)

Name of Nominating Person (if other than applicant): \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation and Position of Nominating Person: (Please Print)  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Nominating Person: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Send the application coversheet and narrative as a Word document to:  
Dr. Darlene Russell, [russelld@wpunj.edu](mailto:russelld@wpunj.edu) no later than **June 30, 2017**.

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## CALL FOR NOMINATIONS FOR THE THOMAS F. DONLON MEMORIAL AWARD FOR DISTINGUISHED MENTORING

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.

The practice of 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.

At this time 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 his/her contributions to your success, send your nomination to **Deborah Bandalos** via email at [dbandaldl@jmu.edu](mailto:dbandaldl@jmu.edu) by **June 30, 2017**. In addition to the nomination letter, all nominations must be accompanied by at least three letters of support indicating the ways in which the nominee distinguished him/herself as a mentor. Up to five separate letters of support can be sent for each nominee. The award will be presented at the 2017 NERA conference. Please contact Deborah if you have any questions about the Donlon Award or the nomination process.

## CALL FOR NOMINATIONS FOR THE LEO D. DOHERTY MEMORIAL AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE TO NERA

The Leo D. Doherty Memorial Award is given to a longstanding NERA member who exemplifies the qualities that Leo Doherty brought to NERA members, his colleagues, and students over his career. The award, instituted by the NERA Board of Directors in 1981, honors the memory of Leo Doherty. He was instrumental in the development and growth of NERA as a professional association for educational research. His leadership qualities, which were both ethical and humane, encouraged others to pursue and achieve their goals. Thus, this award is presented to NERA members who have exhibited outstanding leadership and service to our organization.

The Leo D. Doherty Award Committee for 2017 strongly encourage nominations for this award. Nomination letters should be sent as an email attachment to **Barbara Helms** at [barbarajhelms@outlook.com](mailto:barbarajhelms@outlook.com) no later than **June 30, 2017**. Nomination letters should explicitly name the nominee and offer a concise and compelling case for the candidate in terms of their leadership and service to NERA. Inquiries regarding this award may also be sent to Barbara.

## Update from the Communications Committee

Monica Erbacher, *University of Arizona*

Happy Spring, NERA members! While there is still ample time to prepare for the 2017 NERA Conference, we would like to take this opportunity to highlight how much the Communications Committee, as well as all the other Committees involved in NERA, rely on member involvement. NERA has maintained an inspiring amount of member involvement over the years, and we hope you will consider volunteering some of your time in the future. To those of you who are involved in one or more committees already, thank you for your time and effort!

In the spirit of facilitating committee involvement, we would like to tell you about the purpose of the Communications Committee, what roles or positions we currently have, and the types of changes we are considering for the future.

### What does the Communications Committee do?

Our mission is to distribute important information to the NERA community efficiently (i.e., without overloading inboxes), and to facilitate electronic communication between NERA community members. This information includes topics such as award announcements, conference updates, and particularly pertinent information from our parent organization, the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Currently, communication responsibilities are divided by outlet. Members of the Communications Committee each take on one outlet category: the NERA website, social media, or e-mail. Individuals who would like to send out a formal communication fill out the communication request form on the NERA website (<http://www.nera-education.org/downloadables.php>), and the form is directed to the committee member in charge of the desired outlet. More information on the outlets we currently use and the positions responsible for maintaining them are below.

If you are interested in sharing duties for a particular outlet, initiating use of a new outlet, or providing other support to the committee, please contact Monica Erbacher at [MonicaKErbacher@gmail.com](mailto:MonicaKErbacher@gmail.com), or find us at this year's NERA conference!

### What positions does the Communications Committee include?

Currently, the Communications Committee consists of six team members. The major duties for each team member are outlined below. However, we are currently discussing additional social media positions. Most of these positions are meant to rotate every few years. If you are interested in getting involved in current duties or potential new initiatives, either now or in the future, please contact us!

Monica Erbacher, University of Arizona, Committee Chair  
- Reviews and approves communication requests, synthesizes reports

Duy Pham, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, E-mail Coordinator  
- Manages and distributes e-mail communications, works with Vieth software

(Continued on page 31)



Bo Bashkov, American Board of Internal Medicine, Webmaster  
- Manages and updates website content

Chastity Williams-Lasley, Duquesne University, Social Media Coordinator  
- Manages and updates social media outlet content

Additionally, we are lucky to have continuing support and guidance from two excellent former chairs:

Jonathan Steinberg, Educational Testing Service, Advisor/Formal Chair

Jeanne Horst, James Madison University, Advisor/Formal Chair

#### **Future Additions & Benefits of Involvement**

We are currently in the process of broadening our reach on social media. Keep an eye open for new social media positions that may open up soon. Please join our Facebook and LinkedIn pages and follow us on Twitter if you have not already done so. These social media communities keep you posted about important events and opportunities, as well as facilitate networking between NERA members. Keep an eye on the NERA bulletin boards and social media outlets for job postings, conference pictures, and other news.

Getting involved in a committee is a fantastic way of networking with individuals at other institutions. In the Communications Committee, not only do we correspond with our fellow committee members, but we also correspond with anyone making a communications request, and anyone following our social media sites. For graduate students and newer faculty members in particular, committee involvement is a great way to get your name out there.

We hope you will consider getting involved in one or more committees this year. NERA has become what it is thanks to enthusiastic volunteers and members like you. Thank you for a wonderful 2016 conference and we look forward to seeing you in 2017!

## Membership Matters

The Membership Committee is looking toward AERA from April 27 to May 1 and making sure that NERA is well represented at the meeting and with the consortium of State and Regional Educational Research Associations (SRERA). NERA membership chair Tabitha McKinley currently serves as second vice president for Organization and Development of SRERA, and will be hosting the SRERA booth during AERA. Dr. Anne Niccoli will be presenting her 2016 distinguished paper on April 28 at 10:35 am at the San Antonio Marriott Rivercenter, Third Floor Conference Room 15 and we hope you will all come and support her.

The membership committee would like for NERA to have a strong presence at the SRERA booth as the geographic borders of NERA overlap with those of the New England Educational Research Organization (NEERO) and the Eastern Educational Research Association (EERA). We are looking for other volunteers who are NERA members and will attend AERA to assist us in manning the booth and promoting our educational research association! Since EERA holds its annual meetings in Florida, and always has a number of recruitment materials and brochures, the committee is concerned that a number of potential NERA members are lured to EERA based on their marketing. If any NERA members would like to assist us by donating candies or other regional treats (example: salt water taffy for New Jersey), please notify membership chair, Tabitha McKinley at: [tabitha.mckinley@state.doe.nj.us](mailto:tabitha.mckinley@state.doe.nj.us).

In addition, as we prepare for the conference and calls for proposals the committee is very interested in collecting data on membership satisfaction from our body! Please complete the survey at [http://jmu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_a3itMqW3KIZZaxn](http://jmu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_a3itMqW3KIZZaxn).

Results will be shared in the next NERA newsletter.

Making the Most of Your Membership,

### NERA Membership Committee

Tabitha McKinley (Chair)  
*New Jersey Department of Education*

Francis Rick  
*University of Massachusetts Amherst*

Matthew Madison  
*University of California Los Angeles*

Nick Curtis  
*James Madison University*

Rochelle Michel  
*Educational Testing Service*

Tanesia Beverly  
*University of Connecticut*



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## Noncognitive factors: What's all the buzz about?

Ross Markle, *Educational Testing Service*

It seems like you can't go to a conference or pick up an educational research journal without hearing the term "noncognitive," and indeed, this popular buzz matches a wave of interest in the field. In 2015, the [Educational Testing Service \(ETS\)](#) announced that noncognitive measures would be included on the 2017 administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has included noncognitive measures on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and [emphasized the importance](#) of developing such skills for improving educational, labor, and other life outcomes. In addition to ETS, organizations such as [ACT](#), [Gallup](#), [the Carnegie Foundation](#), and [the College Board](#) have researched the role of noncognitive skills in educational and occupational success.

While you may have heard the term "noncognitive," you might not be fully up to speed on all the research related to defining, assessing, understanding, and impacting these skills, behaviors, and mindsets. This article will hopefully give you a quick introduction into the world of noncognitive factors, as well as a few interesting pieces of research to cite at your next conference mixer.

### *Why are they called "noncognitive" factors?*

Noncognitive factors are those skills, behaviors, and mindsets that are not part of traditional conceptualizations of academic achievement or cognitive ability. They can be both predictors and outcomes of success in a variety of educational settings. Invariably, when I talk about noncognitive assessment, someone raises the point that they don't care for the term "noncognitive." There are certainly legitimate qualms to be had. First — and I hear this one quite a bit — people ask, "isn't everything cognitive?" That's an understandable point, but it's important to note that the term doesn't refer to cognition, it refers to cognitive ability.

There are two large-scale studies, both in economics, which spurred much of the current conversation in this

area. In 2001, Bowles, Gintis, and Osborne examined the relationships among cognitive ability, years of schooling, and earnings. While they found a significant relationship between years of schooling and earnings, they found that very little of that relationship could be accounted for by measures of cognitive ability. In other words, most of the "returns" of schooling are *noncognitive*.

Other results from research into the GED (see Heckman & Rubenstein, 2001) program showed that GED recipients have higher cognitive ability than other high school dropouts, but when controlling for prior performance, have lower levels of schooling, hourly wages, and overall earnings. Heckman and colleagues attribute this to some difference in "noncognitive" characteristics, important skills unaccounted for by a system that signals only cognitive ability.

The second most common issue with the term is that it's a negative reference, and something that's received so much attention should be able to stand on its own, not just as "anything that's not cognitive ability." Alternative terms have been developed and used in various contexts. "Psychosocial" has been used by Steven Robbins and others (e.g., Robbins et al., 2004). "Affective" is a common term for those who've followed the work of Benjamin Bloom (e.g., Markle & O'Banion, 2014). The National Research Council (NRC; 2011) has put forth frameworks that distinguish between cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills. "Character" is also a term that has been used by some researchers (e.g., Tough, 2013) and in the field of college admissions (see an example from [the College Board](#)).

Ultimately, each of these names has failed to gain sufficient traction. My hypothesis about the naming issues involves the sheer breadth of this construct space and the tendency for any seemingly logical term to inadequately address that space, inappropriately favor a single part of that space, or both. For example, while "affective" provides a fitting contrast to the "cognitive" outcomes of Bloom's taxonomy, psychologists will

*(Continued on page 34)*



quickly note that “affective,” to them, refers to emotion, which excludes the behavioral, attitudinal, and other skills that comprise the noncognitive space.

In my opinion, for all its faults, the term “noncognitive” is as fitting as any, and I’ve come to peace with using it, particularly when that use is accompanied with an understanding of its origination and true meaning.

#### *What exactly are noncognitive skills?*

In their studies, the economists mentioned above were quick to point out that, while the data they had were able to identify something missing from their models, they were not inclined to suppose what those missing factors might be. As Heckman and Rubenstein (2001) so aptly put it, “We have established the quantitative importance of noncognitive skills without identifying any specific noncognitive skill. Research in the field is in its infancy” (p. 149). The latter part of that statement, however, was only partially true.

Personality and educational psychologists would argue that research to define these critical skills has been going on for decades. Self-efficacy, motivation, goal setting, and other noncognitive factors have been widely discussed in these realms for quite some time.

However, efforts to create more holistic frameworks are more recent. Kyllonen (2013) argued that the development of the five-factor model of personality — including conscientiousness, openness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism — which has received considerable empirical support over the last three decades, facilitated an accepted, common language for psychologists.

Indeed, at least two notable efforts by ACT and ETS (i.e., Robbins et al., 2004; Markle et al., 2013, respectively) draw direct parallels to the big five model. Additionally, when considering some of the domains of the big five, one can quickly identify some skills, behaviors, and mindsets within the noncognitive space that are relevant to educational research.

Conscientiousness (e.g., industriousness, reliability, orderliness) is likely the most evidently relevant, dealing

with students’ organizational skills, attentiveness, and perseverance toward a goal. These tend to be the achievement-oriented behaviors that are most identifiable by educators. Other common terms that relate to this area would be study skills and the perhaps overly-broad designation of “motivation.”

Extraversion (e.g., outgoing, sociable, talkative) and agreeableness (e.g., tolerant, courteous, trustworthy) deal with the ways students engage with others, and can frame the way students seek help, engage with others, or feel a sense of belonging in academic settings.

Emotional stability (or “neuroticism” in some cases, which includes self-reliance, calmness, and confidence) generally addresses students’ self-regulatory responses in academic settings, including stress, self-efficacy, or test anxiety.

It is important to note that these are not fully overlapping constructs. Conscientiousness is not study skills and study skills are not entirely conscientiousness. Self-efficacy, for example, is a complex construct, formed by several underlying factors, such as previous experience, social norms, and personality, and has relationships to several other theoretical perspectives. My goal here is simply to acknowledge the broad, complex space that is covered by the term “noncognitive.” There are many skills, behaviors, and mindsets that comprise this space, and to lump them all together and assume any similarity would be akin to assuming that “creative writing” and “organic chemistry” were similar because they were both labeled “academic” domains.

#### *How do we assess noncognitive factors?*

In addition to the Robbins and Markle studies cited here, I would also refer you to the NRC’s (2011) paper on “Assessing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills” as an excellent example of building a holistic framework of these skills across the educational spectrum. One of the members of that NRC committee, Patrick Kyllonen, has written extensively on the value of noncognitive skills, as well as the pros and cons of various methods of assessment (e.g., Kyllonen, 2005; Kyllonen, Walters, & Kaufman, 2005; Naemi et al., 2013).

*(Continued on page 35)*

The most popular method of assessment remains the use of Likert-type items, commonly referred to as “self-report.” In this practice, test-takers respond to several statements, generally indicating level of agreement or frequency (e.g., “I take notes in class”) in order to estimate their level of the construct of interest. While this methodology is often questioned for its susceptibility to socially desirable responding — either through intentional response distortion or less intentional response biases — it often provides valuable data and valid use in low-stakes settings (e.g., Markle, Wang, Sullivan, & Russell, 2015). After all, nearly all of the research findings mentioned to this point relied on various forms of self-report.

Other methodologies have been used to limit the impact of self-report. Forced-choice items (Christiansen, Burns, & Montgomery, 2005) present test-takers with two, seemingly equally desirable options, and ask them to choose which option is more like them. (In some cases, more than two options can be provided, and/or test-takers can be asked to pick a positive statement that is least like them.) Situational judgment tests (or SJTs; Cabrera & Nguyen, 2001) provide test takers with a scenario and ask them to identify which behavioral response is appropriate (or, in some cases, which they are most likely to employ). The ratings of others, such as teachers, friends, or parents, have also been shown to provide valuable insight into noncognitive skills (Connelly & Ones, 2010).

Each of these methodologies limit (but do not completely remove) the impact of socially desirable responding, though often at a cost. Forced-choice items use fairly advanced, item response theory-based models for scoring. SJTs often take longer to administer, are more costly to develop, and ultimately limit the breadth of constructs that can be addressed within an assessment compared to self-report items. The use of others’ ratings obviously requires the availability of others’ perspectives, and the additional time and burden of gathering such information. What’s more, the perspectives of others are susceptible to their own biases (e.g., halo effects; see Connelly & Ones, 2010).

As with any assessment, it is important to ensure that the methodology aligns with the intended use of scores. Kyllonen and others have cautioned against the use of

many types of measures, particularly self-reports, in high-stakes settings such as college admissions, due to the susceptibility of those assessments to faking, coaching, and other validity threats. Still, a teacher or faculty member looking to survey their class’ level of time management skills should not feel obliged to develop a battery of SJTs or forced-choice items, when meaningful data could be gathered from self-report items. Overall, the issue of measurement methodology continues to be an area of research and debate among noncognitive researchers and practitioners.

### *Can noncognitive factors be changed?*

This is another common question I hear when discussing noncognitive skills, particularly when they are framed within the context of personality. People often wonder if we can change these things, or — if they are part of a student’s personality — should education even dare to try?

From a practical perspective, I echo comments I’ve heard from my colleague, Steven Robbins. He often points out that we are not looking to alter the fundamental make-up of a person’s being (i.e., personality). We don’t seek to make an introvert out of an introvert any more than we would seek to change a student’s major or career interest. While, in many cases, that growth may happen organically, it is not the intent of interventions in the noncognitive space.

Rather, we are often seeking to teach students strategies — behavioral, metacognitive, or otherwise — that are conducive to success both within and beyond academic settings. For example, if we know that organizational skills, such as making lists or keeping a planner, generally help students succeed, wouldn’t we want to promote those? Students may still be “inherently” disorganized, or lack conscientiousness, but we can provide them with the strategies, tools, and resources that can help them persist and succeed.

There is also empirical evidence that these changes occur as a result of experience and development. A meta-analysis by Roberts, Walton, and Viechtbauer (2006) showed significant changes in several personality

*(Continued on page 36)*

characteristics over the lifespan, with many factors showing notable changes between the ages of 18 and 30. One salient example was the notable increase (Cohen's  $d=0.37$ ) in Openness to Experience observed in samples between the ages 18-22.

Whether a developmental change in students, or an adoption of adaptive strategies, the potential for influence is clear. Personally, I feel that changing many of these constructs is the intent of many curricular and co-curricular interventions. In fact, a study by Oswald et al. (2004) found that the missions of many colleges and universities explicitly state as much. This is hardly done with any ill intent. Rather, we often seek to remove challenges that impede student success, such as social isolation or a lack of awareness of key academic expectations. In other cases, we seek to develop the key outcomes — factors such as civic engagement, leadership, or cultural sensitivity — that are the hallmarks of many of our academic institutions. More often, the question is not whether or not these factors can be changed, but rather, are we changing them enough?

*What are some emerging trends in noncognitive research?*

In terms of future directions, change is indeed an important area of interest. While the relationship between noncognitive factors and student success has been well established, the ability to understand how we can develop such factors has been less so. Just recently, the Tennessee Board of Regents [announced work with](#) the Center for the Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning to evaluate the effectiveness of various mindset interventions in college students. [The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, or CASEL](#), has already produced several reports demonstrating the effectiveness of interventions in K-12 settings.

CASEL has also been a proponent of including noncognitive factors in state standards and curricula, a concept which led to some recent debate about whether the use of noncognitive measures should be used for accountability purposes. While several pros and cons have been raised on this topic (the measurement issue addressed above being primary among them), no popular consensus has yet been reached, and this is

likely to continue to be a topic of future discussion in many states (see also Rikoon, Petway, & Brennenman, 2016).

There are several other issues that I commonly encounter when reading about noncognitive skills, discussing them with colleagues, or working with schools that are looking to better assess them with students. Improved assessment technology, infusion into instruction, and a host of others come to mind. While this article doesn't allow the space to discuss these more deeply, I will say this: I am greatly encouraged by the attention noncognitive skills are receiving. An education system that produces students who are fluent in reading, writing, and mathematics is certainly important, but one that produces students who are global citizens, life-long learners, and collaborators is inspiring. I can't say I've ever come across someone who has discounted the importance of noncognitive skills, both to the success of students and the mission of our educational systems, but yet educators tend to focus on the traditional knowledge, skills, and abilities we know so well. As researchers continue to generate understanding in this area, we can hopefully better integrate noncognitive factors into common educational practice. And maybe at that point, they'll even have a better name...

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## Update from the NERA Mentoring Program

Jerusha Henderek, *National Board of Medical Examiners*

Juliette Lyons-Thomas, *Regents Research Fund*

The NERA Mentoring Program would like to thank Jonathan Rubright for his dedicated service as co-chair over the last year. We welcome Jerusha Henderek from the National Board of Medical Examiners as our newest co-chair!

The Mentoring Program strives to facilitate meaningful connections for NERA participants through two key approaches: 1) conference-based connections, and 2) an online message board through the NERA website.

The conference-based Mentoring Program has existed since 2012 and serves as a focused, hand-selected match-making process. Each year, the Mentoring Program co-chairs collect information from members who volunteer to be a mentor or want to be mentored. Mentor-Mentee pairs are matched based on research interests, career goals, or areas of desired growth. Pairs are encouraged to communicate before and meet during the annual NERA conference. Participants in this process benefit from receiving a structured and informed match, having dedicated time during the conference to meet, and being able to make new connections outside of their existing social networks.

The other approach that is offered is the mentoring message board. This service is available 24 hours a day and can be accessed via the *Mentoring Board* link listed in the *Mentoring* dropdown tab on the [NERA website](#). From there, members can sign up to be a mentor, or potential mentees can view the contact information for mentor volunteers. Using this approach, members can sign-up or reach out at any point throughout the year, and have the freedom to form their own mentor-mentee relationships. This may be especially useful to members who cannot attend the NERA annual conference, or would like to set up time to meet at another professional meeting.

The co-chairs will be sending along information this summer about how to participate in the conference-based Mentoring Program. Please feel free to reach out to Jerusha ([jhenderek@nbme.org](mailto:jhenderek@nbme.org)) and Juliette ([juliette.lyons-thomas@nysed.gov](mailto:juliette.lyons-thomas@nysed.gov)) should you have any questions or suggestions for improving the Mentoring Program. We are looking forward to working with the NERA membership over the coming year!



## The Graduate Lounge

Elisabeth Pyburn  
*James Madison University*

**Our Mission:** The mission of the Graduate Student Issues Committee (GSIC) is to support the involvement and professional development of NERA graduate student members and to reach out to new graduate students in an effort to increase the diversity of institutions represented at NERA.

### GSIC News

The GSIC has selected topics for the two GSIC-sponsored sessions at this year's conference: "Interviewing Tips" and "Publishing." Though aimed towards graduate students, we hope these sessions will appeal to a wide range of NERA members. If you have questions or thoughts about either of these sessions, feel free to contact us at [neragraduatestudents@gmail.com](mailto:neragraduatestudents@gmail.com).

### GSIC Call for New Members:

Serving on the GSIC is a great way to get involved with NERA and build relationships with other graduate students! Responsibilities include collaborating with students from various institutions to plan GSIC-sponsored in-conference sessions, and the GSIC student social. New members are selected each year after the NERA Conference.

**For more information on how to apply and get involved, please contact**  
[neragraduatestudents@gmail.com](mailto:neragraduatestudents@gmail.com).



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