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## Enjoy Your Membership Benefits:

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- Online access to the latest issue of the [Journal of Assessment & Institutional Effectiveness](#)
- Visit the [Job Board](#) to see what's out there
- [Contact us](#) with your ideas, interests, and what you might like to see next issue of this quarterly newsletter

**If you're not a member and these benefits sound attractive to you, consider [joining NOW](#)**

## Upcoming Events

- **7 February 2023 Webinar – Taking Stock: Our Roles, Dilemmas, and the Future of Assessment (1-2pm ET)**
  - This panel presentation takes a cross-sectional look at the current field of assessment and practices that need to be strengthened, developed, transformed, or retired as we look to the future. Discussion will broadly explore the role of the assessor and the goals of assessment.
  - Join the conversation by registering [now](#). Free for members; \$15 for non-members
- **March 2023 Dialogues in the Disciplines**

## Presidential Corner by *Craig Pepin*

Recently I attended the annual conference for the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies, my “other hat” academically. It’s always very eclectic, with sessions on philosophy and epistemology of interdisciplinarity, mixed in with topics drawn from across the academy as well as more practical sessions on interdisciplinary pedagogy and program development.



Not exactly a hotbed of support for

## Presidential Corner (cont.)

learning assessment, as one might expect from a conference that primarily draws on academics from the humanities and social sciences. But one presentation caught my attention, “Interdisciplinarity of Wonder, Science-Humanities Integration and the Future of Universities,” from Ellen Moll and Stephen Thomas at Michigan State. Titles can be a little misleading at times, and what this turned out to be was a thoughtful exploration of how awe and wonder could be incorporated into pedagogy on a more systematic, planned basis. Or in other words, how could a “culture of awe” and “moments of wonder” become learning outcomes, or at least guiding principles of course design?

To their credit, Moll and Thomas were quick to recognize that this required some reconciliation with assessment. They said (or at least as best I can recollect what they said from my notes), that without addressing the question of how this could be measured, assessment processes might move it to the backburner. Less measurable outcomes (like this one) still had to be foregrounded lest they be lost from sight.

This is not an entirely new thought. Others including NEean’s own Ray Shaw (“Assessing the Intangible in our Students”, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2017) have made similar points. Ray wrote then, “If we neglect the ineffable outcomes in our efforts to understand ... what we accomplish in higher education, they could disappear from our attention, our aspirations, and eventually from our teaching.”

In response, Moll and Stephens challenged those present to make awe and wonder part of their practice and teaching, to consider how “course structures can foster and build on student wonder (e.g. assessments, lessons & activities).” I don’t recall a satisfactory answer to the question of how to measure it - sadly, no silver bullet answers there either. But the challenge has stuck with

me since, as I prepare to teach yet another new course this Spring. How can I build moments of wonder - defined by Neel Burton as “a heightened state of consciousness and feeling brought about by something very beautiful, rare, or unexpected” into my teaching? For one thing, I’m rereading my friend at Champlain, Erik Shonstrom’s book *Wild Curiosity* (from whence I got that Neel Burton quote). And taking his advice about building ambiguity, unplanned moments, less structure into the course plan. More opportunities for students to pursue topics and formats of their own choosing.

So where does assessment come into this? Putting my assessment professional hat back on, I would say that for one thing, start in the curriculum process by not requiring that all learning outcomes be easily measurable. I like to tell my colleagues to tell me what they really want the students to learn and be, and we’d worry about the measurement part later. Think of them as goals rather than outcomes, if that helps.

And then sometimes we find ways to measure them after all. When my institution added Creativity as an institutional learning outcome, we came to the conclusion what we really wanted was Creative Thinking. Originality was both too high a bar for every student, and also inherently difficult to teach, but we could teach the elements of creative process (and assess whether students followed them). When designing the rubric, the faculty committee did add one criteria that was basically a translation of our college’s latin motto: Audacity. (I believe my friend Erik was involved, come to think of it). I bit my tongue and said nothing.

Now, three years later, we’re assessing

## Presidential Corner (cont.)

Creativity in our Degree Design Lab (a pilot program where students demonstrate “proficiency” in our institutional learning outcomes), and there’s Audacity. Our response is reflective portfolios, where students make a case for some things they have done being audacious. In practice, if the student makes a good case, then they’re very likely to pass. Not the most methodologically rigorous, but along the lines of a culture of wonder, educationally productive. By describing it as an outcome, and communicating its importance, students know early on that this is an expectation. They consider, as they progress through the program, how they could be audacious: “Valuing and demonstrating openness to new possibilities and experimental ideas by seeking them out.”

Each does so in their own way, so the results are hardly comparable. And yet, there is still a form of measurement, and more importantly, the educational goal is made clear to the students, and they incorporate it into their praxis. Which ultimately, is all that assessment can ask for.

## A Community of Practice: Volunteer Opportunities

The Network is first and foremost a community of practice. We pride ourselves on our welcoming and supportive mission to further efforts at assessment so as to improve teaching and learning. Our network functions and thrives through a robust committee structure. We would like to invite our members to consider joining us in this work. The following committees are always looking for volunteers: Programming, Communications, and Membership. If you are interested in any of these committees, or if you have any ideas that you would like to share with them, then please don’t hesitate to contact us at [neean.assess@gmail.com](mailto:neean.assess@gmail.com)

## Fall Forum 2022 Recap

This year’s Fall Forum was held as a hybrid event, bridging two days and two modalities.



On Thursday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, presenters and participants gathered virtually in the afternoon, and then the following day, Friday the 4<sup>th</sup>, the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester once again hosted our network for a full day of presentations and workshops.

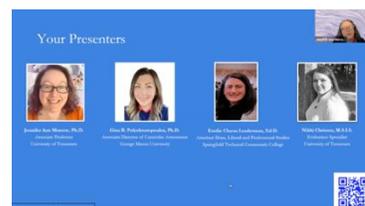
[Thursday’s virtual line-up](#) began with a plenary session, titled “Managing the Demands of Multiple Stakeholders – Assessment in International Settings.”



Moderated by NEean’s own Carlos A. Gonzalez Campos, this panel shared the

challenges confronted by “two institutions that have institutional and programmatic accreditation both in the US and Mexico.” This theme suggests that one of the silver linings of the pandemic is that NEean’s network has truly gone global.

If this international theme wasn’t proof enough that NEean’s reach extends beyond New England, then the diverse group of presenters in the following three concurrent sessions



certainly add to the argument. From the University of Utah to the University of Tulsa to the University of Tennessee to James Madison University and more,

## Fall Forum Recap (cont.)

the panels and presentations ranged widely, as did the topics covered.



One of the other silver linings of the pandemic pivot is that the virtual presentations on the first day of the Fall Forum were

recorded. So, if you weren't in attendance, then follow these links to watch them:

- [The Future of Assessment in Accreditation](#)
- [Implementing Specifications Grading](#)
- [Moving from Student Evaluation to Learning Reflection](#)
- [Preparing Faculty, Staff, and Partners for Successful Site Visits](#)
- [Using Rubrics to Advance Equity and Inclusion for Diverse Populations](#)
- [Connecting LMS with Student Advising](#)
- [Training Emerging Assessment Professionals](#)

Following the afternoon sessions, there was a virtual happy hour, designed to give participants a chance to network with each other.

Apropos a happy hour, the gathering was not recorded, but rest assured much fun was had!



Friday brought sunshine to the hilltop campus of the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, and of course, our keynote presenter, Dr. Stephen Hundley. As promised, Dr. Hundley's presentation, *New Realities, Promising Opportunities: Trends in Learning, Assessment, and Improvement for Our "Next Normal"*, engaged the audience in directed conversation at their tables with reporting out to the entire audience. In his

concluding remarks, Dr. Hundley offered a twist on the old adage about institutional change. Rather than approaching change with the sequence



of "unfreeze – move/adapt – refreeze," Dr. Hundley argued that in the next normal attempting to

refreeze structures and procedures would prove impossible. Instead, he encouraged everyone to embrace the slushie, or semi-frozen, constant state of flux that allows for more flexibility and innovation.

Following this charge, participants enjoyed four different concurrent sessions through the remainder of the beautiful, late fall day.



Clearly the conference committee did a fine job of organizing, because the presentations ranged widely from "How to Write Assessable Student Learning



Outcomes" to "Adopting Online Proctoring While Managing Student Test Anxiety" to

"Leveraging Data Governance and Literacy Efforts for Student Success." For further details and copies of some of the presentations, please visit the [Member Materials](#) on our website.

We once again thank our sponsor, [Honorlock](#), for supporting the Fall Forum, and we thank all the participants too!