

14th Annual
AMCOA
Conference



**The Work of Assessment Remains
Essential: New Challenges to
Maintaining Education Quality**

**Statewide Conference
on Assessment in
Higher Education**

**MASSACHUSETTS
Department of
Higher Education**

Friday, April 17, 2026
8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Fitchburg State University,
Hammond Hall, 160 Pearl Street,
Fitchburg, MA 01420

Morning Agenda

	Location
8:30 a.m. Registration and Continental Breakfast	Main Lounge Foyer, 3rd Floor
9:15 a.m. Greetings & Welcoming Remarks <i>Donna Dodge, Ph.D., President, Fitchburg State University</i> <i>Richard Riccardi, Sc.D., Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs & Student Success, Massachusetts Department of Higher Education</i> <i>Robert J. Awkward, Ph.D., Assistant Commissioner for Academic Effectiveness, Massachusetts Department of Higher Education</i>	Hammond Main Lounge, 3rd Floor
9:45 a.m. Morning Plenary Session Dr. Will Miller, Associate Vice President for Continuous Improvement & Institutional Performance and SACSCOC Liaison, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Assessment Unbound 2.0: From Compliance Theater to Faculty-Centered Improvement in an Uncertain Era <i>Will Miller, Ph.D., Associate Vice President for Continuous Improvement & Institutional Performance and SACSCOC Liaison, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University</i> <p>Higher education is navigating sustained uncertainty—enrollment pressure, political scrutiny, AI disruption, and growing demands to demonstrate value. In this environment, assessment professionals are being asked to do more than report results. They are being asked to make assessment matter.</p> <p>Yet a familiar challenge persists: a disconnect between institutional assessment and faculty practice. Accreditation systems emphasize program-level proof, while faculty operate in the day-to-day reality of course-level learning. The result is often compliance-driven activity that produces reports, not improvement.</p> <p>This session builds on the “Assessment Unbound” framework and pushes it forward. Rather than asking how to get faculty to comply, it reframes the work: how do we design assessment systems with which faculty would choose to engage?</p> <p>Participants will explore why faculty rationally default to “proving” over “improving” learning, and how assessment leaders can respond by aligning processes with faculty time, incentives, and professional identity. Using a practical typology of faculty engagement, the session offers targeted strategies to move skeptics, support explorers, and leverage advocates.</p> <p>The session moves from philosophy to execution, providing concrete approaches to embed formative, improvement-focused practices without adding burden—and to translate that work into credible narratives for accreditors and stakeholders.</p> <p>In a time when higher education is being asked to prove its value, this session argues for a different path: assessment that improves learning in ways that are visible, meaningful, and sustainable.</p>	Hammond Main Lounge, 3rd Floor
10:45 a.m. Transition Time	



11:00 a.m. **Morning Breakout Sessions | Academic Assessment**

Session A. Faculty First: Building Goodwill and Better Assessment Through Customized Workshops

G19, 2nd Floor

Presenters: Sarah Beth Gable, Assessment Coordinator; Lauren Webb, Ph.D., Director of Academic Program Review and Accreditation; and Leslie M. Killgore, Ph.D., Director of General Education and Professor of Sociology, all from the Community College of Rhode Island

Explore how a community college transformed faculty engagement through a customized summer assessment workshop series. Learn how personalized sessions, flexible support, the use of AI for curriculum mapping, and human-centered design built trust, inspired innovation, and strengthened assessment culture across departments.

Session B. Toward a Post-Bloom Philosophy of Assessment in the Age of AI

G01B, 2nd Floor

Presenter: Raymond J. Shaw, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology, Merrimack College

In an era where AI can replicate content mastery, assessment must shift toward enduring intellectual skills, dispositions, and transformational learning. This session challenges the behaviorist, Bloom-based paradigm, offering a post-Bloom framework that honors faculty perspectives, embraces diverse methods, and fosters innovative, mission-driven assessment aligned with institutional values and student success.

Session C. NECHE's New Standards for Accreditation: What's Changed and How Will It Impact Your Work?

G01, 2nd Floor

Presenter: Laura Gambino, Ph.D., Vice President, New England Commission for Higher Education

In December 2025, the New England Commission for Higher Education (NECHE) approved new Standards for Accreditation that will go into effect on July 1, 2026. What's changed? How will this impact your work around student learning and success? What are the drivers for this change from the regional and federal level? We will review the revised Standards and their implications for your work, addressing these questions, along with any other questions you may have during this session.

12:00 p.m. **Transition Time**

12:15 p.m. **Lunch**

Hammond
Main Lounge,
3rd Floor

1:15 p.m. **Transition Time**

1:30 p.m. **Afternoon Breakout Sessions | Assessment Practitioner Tools**

Session A. Defining Return on Investment (ROI) for Community Colleges to Meet New Accreditation Standards

G19, 2nd Floor

Facilitator: Kirsten Kortz, Dean of Academic Affairs, Northern Essex Community College

This session will be an opportunity to take up a question that arose during the March 20th virtual Amcoa Team meeting: "What does Return on Investment (ROI) mean and how do we measure it?" Under NECHE's new Standard Four, colleges will be required to consider ROI as one part of "post-enrollment/post-graduation success," but individual institutions do not have a standard definition of this concept or a set of metrics to use to measure it. During this session, participants will brainstorm how ROI could be defined for MA community colleges and for the students who attend them. This will include an exploration of potential data sources and public resources for tracking post-enrollment outcomes. The goal is to begin to develop a draft definition that can be shared among the 15 community colleges.

Session B. Continuing the Dialogue About the Use of AI in Assessment and a Specific Use Case

G01B, 2nd Floor

Presenters: Robert J. Awkward, Ph.D., Assistant Commissioner for Academic Effectiveness, Mass. Department of Higher Education; and Gabriel Rodríguez, Senior Assessment Analyst, Office of Assessment, Survey, and Effectiveness Research (ASER), University of Massachusetts Amherst

Last fall, an *AI & Assessment Guide* was presented to the statewide assessment community to serve as a resource and guide for the effective utilization of AI in our assessment practices. Eight months later, we are curious if the assessment community has utilized the *AI & Assessment Guide*, how they have utilized it, and why they have not utilized it. In either case, we wish to have an interactive discussion about the practical use of AI in assessment. As a way of showcasing the utility of the *AI & Assessment Guide*, a specific use case using a GenAI Agent that runs within the UMass Amherst GenAI environment. The agent is set up to be a dashboard assistant that users can ask it questions about specific data questions, and the agent uses the database of information on our dashboards to provide links to relevant dashboards and insights on what information is on that particular dashboard. This is known as a RAG (Retrieval-Augmented Generation) Agent, which refers to using external data to ground the AI's answers and reducing hallucinations. This use case was co-developed by Gabriel Rodríguez.

Session C: Defining the Return on Investment (ROI) for Four-Year Institutions to Meet New Accreditation Standards

G01, 2nd Floor

Facilitator: Anne Beauchamp, Ph.D., Director of Institutional Assessment & Accreditation, Framingham State University

This session will be an opportunity to take up a question that arose during the March 20th virtual Amcoa Team meeting: “What does Return on Investment (ROI) mean and how do we measure it?” Under NECHE’s new Standard Four, institutions will be required to consider ROI as one part of “post-enrollment/post-graduation success,” but individual institutions do not have a standard definition of this concept or a set of metrics to use to measure it. During this session, participants will brainstorm how ROI could be defined for MA four-year institutions and for the students who attend them. This will include an exploration of potential data sources and public resources for tracking post-enrollment outcomes. The goal is to begin to develop a draft definition that can be shared among the nine state universities and the four University of Massachusetts Campuses.

2:30 p.m. **Transition Time**

2:45 p.m. **Closing Remarks**

Robert J. Awkward, Ph.D., Assistant Commissioner for Academic Effectiveness, Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

Hammond
Main Lounge,
3rd Floor

3:00 p.m. **Program Ends**

Presenter Bios

Robert J. Awkward, Ph.D.

Bob is the Assistant Commissioner for Academic Effectiveness for the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. In this role, Bob is responsible for leading the advancement of a culture of assessment and the increase utilization of open educational resources for the 29 public institutions through convening, professional development, and statewide program coordination. These roles involve efforts regionally and nationally. Bob is also the Program Coordinator and Academic Advisor for the Master of Human Resources (MHR) program in addition to serving as a visiting professor of human resource management at Framingham State University.

Bob possesses a Ph.D. in Higher Education from the University of Massachusetts Boston; a M.Ed. in Human Resources Development from Boston University; and both a M.S. in Economic Policy & Planning and a B.A. in Political Science from Northeastern University.

Anne Beauchamp, Ph.D.

Anne serves as Director of Institutional Assessment and Accreditation at Framingham State University, where she promotes a university-wide culture of assessment grounded in equity and inclusivity. She leads the development, implementation, and sustainability of FSU's comprehensive assessment program, using evidence to support continuous responsiveness to student needs. Anne oversees NECHE reporting and strategic plan progress and outcomes monitoring, and partners with faculty to develop practical, meaningful approaches to assessment and improvement.

Anne began her career as a middle school math teacher, an experience that led her to earn a PhD in Educational Psychology and Research from the University of Kansas. Her doctoral work focused on development, cognition, and motivation, including research on how salient biases influence performance and persistence. Since 2005, she has conducted applied research across education and healthcare settings, with a focus on program evaluation, grant development, and helping leaders use data to drive equitable outcomes. Prior to joining FSU, she supported data-informed improvement in Hudson and Wellesley Public Schools (MA), and as a Harvard Strategic Data Project Fellow with Providence Public Schools (RI).

Sarah Beth Gable

Sarah joined the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) as Assessment Coordinator in 2024. Prior to this role, she held positions in Student Services and Institutional Research at Brandeis University including Assessment Coordinator and Program Manager for the Brandeis Undergraduate Group Study (BUGS) program. She also contributed to data analytics and knowledge management projects for the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. She is the recipient of multiple teaching fellowships and has taught College Writing and History courses. She is currently finishing her dissertation on the Committees of Correspondence and Political Violence in rural Massachusetts during the American Revolution. Prior to her academic career, she worked in corporate sales and client management for BASF and Givaudan Fragrances Corporation. She is ABD at Brandeis (History), received her MSc. from the University of Edinburgh and BA from the Randolph-Macon Woman's College.

Laura M. Gambino, Ph.D.

Laura is a Vice President for the New England Commission of Higher Education, where her work focuses on helping institutions and the Commission use data and conduct assessment for institutional learning and improvement. Prior to joining NECHE in 2018, Gambino was Associate Dean for Assessment and Technology and Professor of Information Technology at Guttman Community College (CUNY) and a Visiting Scholar at the Community College Research Center (CCRC), Teacher's College, Columbia University. Laura also worked for 13 years at Connecticut's Tunxis Community College as a Professor/ePortfolio Coordinator. From 2011 to 2014, Dr. Gambino was the Research Coordinator for the FIPSE-funded Connect to Learning project at LaGuardia Community College (CUNY). Gambino, a leading ePortfolio and assessment practitioner and researcher, served as a Coach for the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA).

Leslie Killgore, Ph.D.

Leslie is Director of General Education and Professor of Sociology at the Community College of Rhode Island. As Director, Leslie serves ex-officio on the Faculty Senate General Education Committee, organizes general education assessment projects, and provides support to faculty on a variety of Blackboard and curriculum-related topics. She also represents Academic Affairs on the AI Institutional Coordinating Committee. Prior to her appointment as Director, Leslie taught courses in the Social Sciences department at CCRI and, previously, at Johnson and Wales University and College of the Holy Cross. Leslie received her Ph.D. in Sociology from Brown University in 2004, focusing on complex organizations and higher education

Kirsten Kortz

Kirsten is the Dean of Academic Affairs at Northern Essex Community College. Kirsten recently moved into this role after two and a half years in Institutional Research, and over five years of leading assessment efforts at NECC. Her scope of work touches on a range of areas, including post-enrollment outcomes and definitions of success for students.

Will Miller, Ph.D.

Will serves as Associate Vice President for Continuous Improvement and Institutional Performance and SACSCOC Liaison at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, overseeing assessment, accreditation, and state authorization across three campuses and more than 100 global sites. He was elected in 2026 to the Board of Trustees of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and is a national leader in reimagining institutional effectiveness and continuous improvement in higher education. Founder of the Continuous Improvement Summit and President of the Florida Association for Institutional Research, he also serves on the boards of SAIR, AALHE, and the Center for Leading Improvements in Higher Education.

Gabriel Rodriguez

Gabriel is the Senior Assessment Analyst, Office of Assessment, Survey, and Effectiveness Research (ASER) where he applies his extensive background in educational measurement and data analysis to support the university's commitment to academic excellence. Gabriel joined ASER in 2023, bringing nearly two decades of experience at UMass Amherst.

Gabriel holds a master's degree in Educational Assessment and Policy Studies, completed in 2016, and is currently ABD in the Research, Educational Measurement, and Psychometrics Ph.D. program at UMass Amherst. His research interests are rooted in psychometrics and educational assessment, with a focus on validation, measurement error, and the sociocultural factors influencing assessment practices.

Raymond J. Shaw, Ph.D.

Raymond Shaw is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Merrimack College. He earned his doctorate at the University of Toronto in Cognitive Psychology. At Merrimack, he has served as department chair, President of the Faculty Senate, Associate Dean, Vice Provost, and Director of General Education. As Vice Provost, he oversaw assessment efforts, and served as accreditation liaison with NECHE, coordinating the decennial self-study for re-accreditation. He has been a member of the board of directors of the New England Educational Assessment Network since 2015, and most recently served as co-editor of the *Journal of Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness*.

Lauren Webb, Ph.D.

Lauren is the Director of Academic Program Review and Accreditation at the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI), where she facilitates assessment, academic program review, and accreditation. Since joining CCRI in 2017, she has served as Director of Career and Technical Education; Assistant Dean of Business, Science, Technology and Math (BSTM); and Interim Dean of BSTM. She has led several initiatives, including the launch of the P-TECH early college program, the implementation of several academic data platforms, the expansion of professional development opportunities for faculty focused on assessment, and the college's comprehensive evaluation for reaccreditation in 2024. Before CCRI, Lauren was a research analyst at Eduventures, a higher education consulting and market research organization, and contributed to the growth of assessment in the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University. Lauren holds a bachelor's degree in Sociology from Drew University and a Ph.D. in Sociology from Northeastern University.

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Special Thanks to:

Dr. Richard Riccardi, Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs & Student Success

Dr. Lane Glenn, President, Northern Essex Community College
and Assessment Advisory Council Chair

Assessment Advisory Council

AMCOA Team

And the Presidents, Chancellors, Vice Presidents, and Chief Academic Officers
of the Massachusetts Public Higher Education System