

CARS News

Fall 2023

New Workshop Launched

In June 2023, CARS and Ethical Reasoning in Action supported an ambitious professional development offering, called Initi8. It marries two of JMU's most innovative efforts: ethical reasoning and learning improvement.

During the weeklong workshop, faculty teams from the Naval War College and Wichita State learned about the following:

- Effective strategies for teaching ethical reasoning skills
- Methods for assessing ethical reasoning skills
- Strategies for implementing a program level ethical reasoning intervention
- A general framework for implementing any learning improvement project

In addition, several organizations sent representatives to participate including SACSCOC, the Distance Education Accrediting Commission, WASC, MCAT, IUPUI, The University of Hawaii-Manoa, and Blue Ridge Community College. The event was a big step forward in moving higher education beyond a culture of assessment into a culture of improvement. The hosting JMU team included Christian Early, Kacey Damaty, Keston Fulcher, Tanya Laffler, and Cara Meixner. We're hopeful that we can expand this offering in the future.



Pictured left to right: Kacey Damaty, Christian Early, Cara Meixner, Keston Fulcher



The Center for Assessment and Research Studies

Welcome these new students to our program:

- Jack Gilmore, Masters
- Juste Mehou, Masters
- Soul Nwaokoro, Masters
- Barnabas Suva, Doctoral
- Autumn Wild, Doctoral

We hope to see you at these upcoming conferences:

- NERA Conference, Oct 18-20 in Trumbull, CT
- IUPUI Assessment Institute, Oct. 29-31 in Indianapolis, IN.
- Virginia Assessment Group Annual Conference, Nov 15-17 in Richmond, VA
- SACSCOC Annual Meeting, Dec 2-5 in Orlando, FL.

CARS' Faculty and Student Research Leads to Change in Professional Standards

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), a consortium of professional associations in higher education, promotes the use of professional standards for the development, assessment, and improvement of student learning and programs. Comprised of over 40 professional associations representing over 115,000 professionals in higher education, CAS has developed 49 sets of standards and 3 cross-functional frameworks within diverse areas of the college student experience.



Pictured: Sara Finney

Dr. Sara Finney (Associate Director of the Center for Assessment and Research Studies; Professor in Graduate Psychology) was invited by the CAS governing board to review the current CAS standards (version 10) and provide feedback and updates. Based on Sara's research over the past couple of decades, she helped CAS craft wording for two new standards: Program Theory and Implementation Fidelity. These new additions were added to the General Standards that apply to all functional areas on campus and are embedded in each individual set of CAS functional area standards. These General Standards are the foundation of the CAS Standards. CAS uses the words "must" in the General Standards to signify that these standards apply to institutions of all kinds (e.g., large, small, public, private) as well as remote and in-person educational settings. Hence, Program Theory and Implementation Fidelity are now expected aspects of program development, assessment, and improvement due to Sara's contributions to Version 11 of the CAS Standards.

"Two topics included in the 2022 General Standards revision are the use of program theory and implementation fidelity in various sections. Sara Finney and her colleagues have promoted the use of program theory and implementation fidelity (Smith et al., 2017) in higher education program design, implementation, and assessment. Program theory is "the construction of a plausible and sensible model of how a program is supposed to work" and it "clarifies the set of cause-and-effect relationships" connecting activities students engage in to the intended outcomes (Bickman, 1987, p. 5). While program theory undergirds program development and execution, implementation fidelity regards the extent to which the programs are implemented as designed (Dhillon et al., 2015). A program is most successful when all staff are familiar with the theory base(s) guiding its design and implementation." (CAS Standards, 2023, p. 42)

Sara's research on Program Theory and Implementation Fidelity with JMU Ph.D. alumni Jerusha Gerstner, Andrea Pope, and Kristen Smith, in addition to collaboration with JMU colleagues Aaren Bare and Keston Fulcher, made a practical change in how higher education programming will be designed, evaluated, and improved.

[Link to the full story on the CAS website.](#)

CARS Talk on Internships

On September 8, several Assessment and Measurement Students gave presentations about their recent external internship experiences.

- Sarah Alahmadi interned at ACS Ventures LLC, *Rethinking Precedents and Reimagining Norms in Current Assessment Practice*;
- Mason Jones interned at The Career Leadership Collective, *Exploring Post Graduation Outcomes: The National Alumni Career Mobility Survey*.
- Nicolas Mireles interned at Human Resources Research Organization, *A Summer as a HumRROvian*.
- Kate Schaefer interned at Human Resources Research Organization, *A Summer at HumRRO: Reflecting on Graduate School and Plans for the Future*.
- Yelisey Shapovalov interned at the American Board of Surgery, *Examining repeat testing effects and related factors for oral certification exams*.



Pictured left to right: Mason Jones, Nicolas Mireles, Yelisey Shapovalov, Sarah Alahmadi

Assessment IOI Dates Announced

Assessment 101 is a 5-day virtual workshop that explores topics such as: writing student learning outcomes; mapping the curriculum; creating instruments; examining implementation fidelity; analyzing data; reporting results; and using results to make evidence-based decisions.

In 2024, we are offering Assessment 101 in two formats.

1. Extended (five Fridays across five weeks): This is ideal for attendees who would like to distribute their learning across time. The Fridays are most heavily loaded with synchronous content, with asynchronous homework in between.
 - Dates: Fridays 10am to 4pm EST on Feb. 2, Feb. 9, Feb. 16, Feb. 23, Mar. 1st.
2. Bootcamp (five consecutive days): This is ideal for attendees who can focus intently for a week with little interruption. Each day has a mix of synchronous and asynchronous content.
 - Dates: June 3 – June 7.

Upcoming Conference Presentations

Northeastern Educational Research Association (NERA), Trumbull, CT.

- *Multiple priming questions can provide a solution to issues with low examinee response time effort in a testing session.* Mara McFadden, & Sara Finney.
- *Real or fake? Connecting student learning and graduation rates across time.* Autumn Wild & Joseph Kush.
- *The influence of disengagement on the factor structure of a non-cognitive measure: Practical solutions.* Katarina Schaefer & Sara Finney.
- *A Novel Examination of Testing-Taking Context: Steps to Identify and Address Low Motivation (Symposium)*
 - *Context Matters: The Impact of External Events on Low-Stakes Assessment.* Kelsey Nason
 - *The Influence of Disengagement on the Factor Structure of a Non-Cognitive Measure: Practical Solutions.* Katarina Schaefer
 - *Do Multiple Doses of the Question-Behavior Effect Provide a Solution to Issues with Low Effort Later in a Testing Session?* Mara McFadden

Assessment Institute, Indianapolis, IN.

- *Assessment 101 (Full-day workshop).* Sarah Alahmadi & Keston Fulcher.
- *Leveling up your assessment skills.* Keston Fulcher, Sara Finney, & John Hathcoat.
- *Program theory and implementation fidelity: Critical components to learning improvement.* Riley Herr, & Sara Finney.
- *A mutually beneficial partnership between a student affairs division and an assessment office: How to create it and sustain it.* Katarina Schaefer & Sara Finney.

SACSCOC Annual Meeting

- *Six Steps to Learning Improvement at Scale.* Keston Fulcher, Katarina Schaefer, Kelsey Nason.

Transitions

After serving for a year as the Interim Director, Dr. Megan Good was appointed as Executive Director of CARS. In this role, she oversees assessment support available to degree programs, student affairs, general education, and special projects geared towards improving student learning and development. Megan is a graduate of the Assessment and Measurement doctoral program (2015) and prior to returning to CARS, she served as Auburn University's inaugural Director of Academic Assessment and as SACSCOC liaison.



Pictured: Megan Good

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