



**Assessment, Accountability, and Student Learning Outcomes
at Historically Black Colleges and Universities**

Verna F. Orr

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NILOA Mission

The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment's (NILOA) primary objective is to discover and disseminate ways that academic programs and institutions can productively use assessment data internally to inform and strengthen undergraduate education, and externally to communicate with policy makers, families and other stakeholders.

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Abstract

The inaugural convening of the Historically Black College and University (HBCU) Collaboration for Excellence in Educational Quality Assurance (CEEQA) took place June 21-22, 2018, on the historic Morehouse School of Medicine campus in Atlanta, GA. Candid conversations around student learning outcomes assessment happening on HBCU campuses framed the conference agenda. These discussions centered on solutions to common assessment challenges and the need for an official HBCU collaborative of practicing and retired assessment professionals. This collaborative, the first of its kind, seeks to help address accountability measures while being true to HBCU missions and culturally relevant assessment approaches. Hence, as both internal and external accountability mandates increase, so too has the need for a strong HBCU alliance.

The group met over the course of two-days and immersed themselves in professional development sessions and group work. From the Transparency Framework to the Role of Culture and Cultural Competence to Quality Assurance, the culmination of the event produced a newly formed collaborative including an organizational structure and future convenings. We found that CEEQA can offer significant resources and specific expertise to the HBCU community and higher education community writ large. This report presents the background and subsequent founding of the Collaboration for Excellence in Educational Quality Assurance.



Assessment, Accountability, and Student Learning Outcomes at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Verna F. Orr

All higher education institutions are responding to rapid transformation where transparency, accountability, and evidence of positive student learning drive the conversation (Ewell, 2009). Likewise, the higher education community must be able to demonstrate that student learning outcomes are being acted out in life, where students develop the knowledge and skills that are identified as essential (Kinzie, Hutchings, & Jankowski, 2015). In other words, what kind of outcomes are students achieving as a result of the curriculum? Hutton et al., (2012) suggested, the parent writing the check wants to know, “what is my child getting for the money?” One thing is, obviously, a job. But what else are students obtaining? Is their son or daughter more mature? More astute? Students want to know if the cost of attending college is worth it—in terms of time, effort, and future opportunities. Similarly, employers are asking: are students and graduates able to work with people from diverse backgrounds?

Equally important is the ability to effectively communicate results of assessment, or the process an institution undertakes to gather and present evidence of improved student learning and institutional improvements, and what they mean to specific audiences (Kinzie, Hutchings, & Jankowski, 2015). Assessment is an effective mechanism by which to know what institutions are doing to support and achieve student learning, and includes evidence of the skills, knowledge, and dispositions a graduate should have. In short, through evidence of student learning, students, parents, policy makers, and the federal government should receive an agreeable message with different contexts regarding institutional outcomes.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), like other higher education institutions, must also be responsive to the public by providing evidence of student learning. An HBCU is a college or university that existed before 1964, and has a historic and contemporary mission of educating African Americans while being open to all students (Anderson, 1988; Provasnik & Shafer, 2004). HBCUs historically have served large populations of underrepresented, low-income, first-generation, and students of color (Nahal, Thompson, Rahman, & Orr, 2015; Wilson, 2007), while being severely underfunded (Anderson, 1988; Provasnik & Shafer, 2004; Toldson, 2016). Thus, it is important to know how HBCUs respond to internal tensions (various needs of diverse student populations) and external tensions (potential families, the public, funding agencies, legislators, etc.).

One of the many HBCUs’ strengths that helps define what makes them successful is their culturally relevant assessment practices (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017), but how have they communicated or are communicating their success stories? The inaugural convening of CEEQA provides insight into the positive and negative

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aspects of accountability and transparency and unpacks the present assumptions about HBCU assessment practices and student learning outcomes.

There is very little knowledge about assessment, accountability, and student learning outcomes at HBCUs. Conversely, there is a significant problem in the current literature on assessment and student learning at HBCUs in that it has been studied primarily from a western European ideology (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Ewell, 2002; Hood & Hopson, 2017; Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017). This is problematic for many reasons, namely because western European philosophy does not consider diverse cultural contexts in which identities are constructed, or the effect of these social contexts on students studying at HBCUs. Undoubtedly, there is a dearth of literature on assessment practices and student learning outcomes at HBCUs that can be filled by listening to and learning from united voices of those who do the work, every day.

HBCU Collaboration for Excellence in Educational Quality Assurance

The inaugural convening of the HBCU Collaboration for Excellence in Educational Quality Assurance (CEEQA) took place June 21-22, 2018, on the Morehouse School of Medicine campus in Atlanta, GA. Assessment and institutional effectiveness professionals from ten Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) gathered for an invite only event that included candid conversations on assessment of student learning outcomes happening on their campuses. Other invited guests included representatives from the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), a representative from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, and Watermark, an assessment technology vendor.

Discussions centered on solutions to common assessment challenges and the need for an official HBCU collaborative of practicing and retired assessment professionals and advisory committee. The group met over the course of two-days and immersed themselves in professional development sessions and group work: From “E-Solutions to Outcomes Assessment” to “Quality Assurance in Assessment” to “Trends of Assessment,” the culmination of the event produced a newly formed collaborative including an organizational structure and future convening schedule.

Planning and Execution

Siloed conversations about an official organization of and for HBCU assessment professionals have been happening for years. Out of those discussions a more intimate dialogue was taking place among members of the HBCU community within the Southern region. These colleagues enjoy a working relationship rooted in collegiality, mentorship, and professional development. Some met as members of a special interest group of the Association for Institutional Researchers (AIR)

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while others have worked together as campus level administrators, and others met while serving as assessment coaches. These comrades who share 35+ years of experience at HBCUs teamed up to conceptualize and seek guidance on a formal convening of HBCU assessment professionals. It is noteworthy to share that all but one of the original group member's institutions are a part of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SASCOC).

2017 Assessment Institute

To stay informed on the latest research on assessment, some soon to be CEEQA founding members attended the 2017 Assessment Institute in Indianapolis, IN. During this conference they gathered and attended various plenary sessions together. This particular conference presented an opportunity for organizers to glean ideas and discuss the impending convening. Every chance they got to gather as a group during this two-day conference—between sessions, lunch, and dinner—HBCU colleagues strategized and sought out advice from seasoned assessment experts. Before the 2017 Assessment Institute's closing activities, the group gathered one last time to support colleague's featured on the NILOA Track panel, "Assessment at Historically Black Colleges and Universities" where nine different HBCUs were highlighted. As one member stated, this panel was the perfect climax to end a collegial experience and "finally not feel alone" at the Assessment Institute or my home institution.

Participants returned to their campuses reenergized and ready, and agreed to move forward with scheduling their first official meeting for the following summer. The first order of business included identifying local colleagues who could assist with administrative support and soliciting sponsorship from an established organization that focuses on assessment and student learning outcomes. They also agreed that the first meeting would be held in Atlanta, starting as a small work group headed up by members of the Atlanta University Center Consortium—Clark Atlanta University, Morehouse College, Morehouse School of Medicine, and Spelman College—that will eventually evolve into a national convening for HBCUs.

This invitation only event targeted HBCU assessment directors, institutional effectiveness professionals, and vice/assistant presidents for research, etc. (see Appendix A). Colleagues from the Atlanta University Center Consortium undertook the task of getting the word out and raising interest, while Florida A&M's Office of University Assessment was instrumental in surveying potential participants regarding their specific needs and interests. The HBCU Collaborative Interest Survey (see Appendix B) was launched on April 19, 2018.

As researchers and practitioners, CEEQA founding members are aware that little attention has been paid to the specifics of how HBCUs provide a variety of options for gathering, documenting, using, and sharing meaningful actionable evidence of

These comrades who share 25+ years of experience at HBCUs teamed up to conceptualize and seek guidance on a formal convening of HBCU assessment professionals.



student learning on their campuses. In that spirit, it is important to note (1) the inaugural institutions represented at the convening and (2) the deliverables (noted below) that highlight CEEQA's commitment to the cause.

Convening Deliverables

By the end of the 2-day professional development event, participants:

1. Created an organizational structure,
2. Refined the vision and scope of the collaborative,
3. Determined salient points of collaboration for the initiative,
4. Outlined a plan and timeline for future engagements, and
5. Committed to scholarly collaboration for publication opportunities.

CEEQA Statement

The Office of Educational Outcomes and Assessment at Morehouse School of Medicine, the Office of University Assessment at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, along with the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment teamed up to conceptualize the HBCU Collaboration for Excellence in Education Quality Assurance (CEEQA).

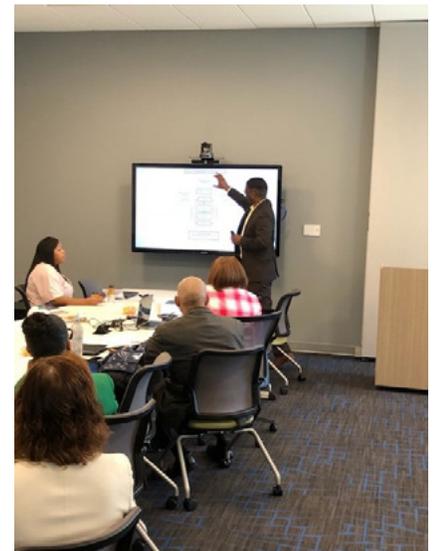
The goals of CEEQA are to:

1. Maximize the use of tools, processes, and human resources dedicated to outcomes assessment and evidence-based decision making at partner HBCU institutions,
2. Enhance the use of systematic, evidence-based practices for assessment and institutional effectiveness among partner institutions to more effectively communicate assessment outcomes to internal and external stakeholders,
3. Provide a platform for showcasing the culturally relevant assessment and evaluation practices that are used at HBCUs to tell our story and to demonstrate the impact of HBCUs within the academy, and
4. Provide an opportunity for shared scholarly output in the form of joint research, publications, and conference presentations for assessment, institutional research, and institutional effectiveness professionals at partner institutions.

Vision Statement

The vision of CEEQA is *to leverage the collective expertise of assessment professionals to promote the use of best-practices in assessment and evaluation and to demonstrate the effectiveness of HBCUs in the achievement of common educational aims.*

The inaugural convening included a community of scholars of color dedicated to build on rich histories and legacies in ways that speak to our current terms about quality assurance, accreditation, and assessment.
—CEEQA Founding Member, 2018



Work Group Outcomes and Takeaways

1. HBCU assessment professionals work centers on culture, competence, care, and compliance.

Perhaps some of the ways we assess are not viewed in the typical vein of PWIs. We are constantly doing qualitative assessment because we have to pay attention to our surroundings (as a part of our survival as a people). We understand our students, particularly first-generation students, who perhaps don't need as much academic support as navigating college culture and language. We teach out of love, we mobilize resources, a lot of what we are doing is in service to our students. The literature does not validate what we are doing all the time - but we are doing it.

–CEEQA Founding Member, 2018

2. Institutional leadership is vital in supporting assessment activities.

I think it's not so much that we don't know what we need to do in order to help students be successful but is more so that we have not had the constant leadership and the courage to do what we need to do in order to help our students be successful. Only truly viable institutions are those that are servant led where they put the interest of others before their own.

–CEEQA Founding Member, 2018

3. Intentional, intrusive, and appreciative advising is the heartbeat of their work.

Constant contact with students goes hand-in-hand with mentoring, peer mentoring, etc. It is essential for students to understand their transition to the university and how important it is to be a part of this particular community... and the great responsibility they have as members of this community.

–CEEQA Founding Member, 2018

4. It is important, indeed vital for HBCUs to be at the forefront of their student learning outcomes success stories.

We have skirted around trying to explain our relevance or to prove why we are relevant...we are relevant because we do this for our community. There are two choices 1. Tell our own story, or 2. Our story being told for us...but the story will be told.

–CEEQA Founding Member, 2018

5. HBCUs must remain student focused and address myriad possibilities and challenges their diverse student populations possess.

We need to understand where our students are excelling and falling short. We should celebrate successes and seek to understand shortfalls from an empirical standpoint versus an anecdotal standpoint and then develop and fund proven evidence-based programs and strategies that are going to fill those gaps. In some

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instances we can identify and know where the gaps are but we don't find the strategies that we need to plug those gaps and oftentimes try to put on superficial Band-Aids with the hope that it will be addressed somewhere down the road.

–CEEQA Founding Member, 2018

6. HBCUs employ various assessment approaches that consider various needs (i.e. culture and diversity) of their student populations.

Culture reflects the way people give priorities to goals, how they behave in different situations, and how they cope with their world and with one another. Culture is transmitted from generation to generation. Likewise, culture and traditions at HBCUs are deeply rooted in the consciousness of their leaders, faculty, staff, and students.

–CEEQA Founding Member, 2018

7. There is an HBCU compliance and authenticity tug of war.

Oftentimes when institutions frame this work around accountability namely SACSCOC and/or specialized accreditation what you get is what I call the path of least resistance—where we are engaging this work in an effort to get a clean bill of health and that can be superficial because what oftentimes happens within our institutions is that it masks the real issue, you get a clean bill of health, but it masks the core issues because we are not really reflecting on the process in a way that is tied to continuous improvement.

–CEEQA Founding Member, 2018

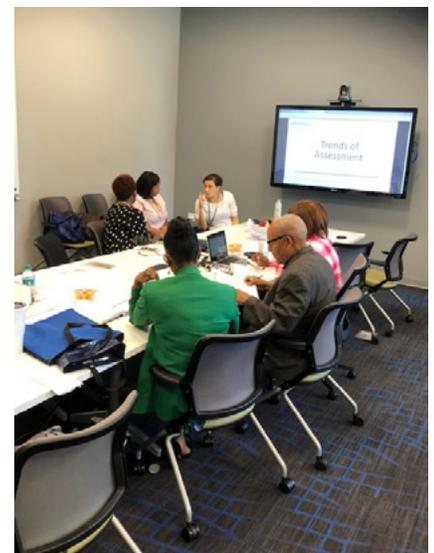
Summary

Grateful to be at the table, with people that lead and do this work every day... humbled, and sort of saddened by the fact that there were not more of us there, but I know that is not an indication of their lack of commitment. There is so much going on on our campuses that PWIs have no clue about - so we have to cherry pick on what we can engage in. A lot of hearts were with us, but they could not all physically be there.

–CEEQA Founding Member, 2018

Understanding how HBCUs respond to the needs of their students is deserving of scholarly attention. Again, HBCUs historically have served large populations of underrepresented, low-income, first-generation, and students of color while being severely underfunded (Anderson, 1988; Nahal, Thompson, Rahman, & Orr, 2015). Distorted images and stereotypes based on race and gender have obstructed the larger society's view of HBCUs and subsequently their relevance in the 21st century. CEEQA was created as a safe space and repository of information where HBCUs can collaborate and share best practices. This collaborative aims to tell the HBCU assessment story and functions as an active professional learning community.

HBCUs employ various assessment approaches that consider various needs (i.e. culture and diversity) of their student populations.



The inaugural convening of the Collaboration for Excellence in Educational Quality Assurance provided a distinct, first glimpse into an intentionally organized gathering of assessment and institutional effectiveness professionals at HBCUs. CEEQA members shared mechanisms for respecting and acknowledging their diverse student populations and their experiences as they lead assessment initiatives on their campuses. Our hope is that after absorbing the lessons born out of CEEQA's founding and mission, sincere, substantive, scholarly inquiry of student learning outcomes at HBCUs will follow.

CEEQA is a timely collaborative gathering and a step in the right direction to foster more inclusive discussions on assessment and student learning outcomes at HBCUs. CEEQA is a collective movement that is positioned well to fill gaps in the literature, create opportunities for change, and be the new voice embedded in practice implications and consequences. Additionally, CEEQA is thoughtfully moving in the right direction by identifying potential partners, publishing and building on this new level of scholarship. The deep rooted culture and traditions at HBCUs have always been closely held by steady and careful hands - now their student learning outcomes success stories and lessons will positively impact the larger assessment conversation with CEEQA at the lead.

Our hope is that after absorbing the lessons born out of CEEQA's founding and mission, sincere, substantive, scholarly inquiry of student learning outcomes at HBCUs will follow.



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Appendix A

Founding Members

Rhea Brinson - Morehouse School of Medicine, Atlanta, GA

Valerie Gardner - Morehouse School of Medicine, Atlanta, GA

Angelita Howard - Morehouse School of Medicine, Atlanta, GA

Mark Howse - Morehouse School of Medicine, Atlanta, GA

Natasha Jankowski - National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, Champaign, IL

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Stephanie Suddith - Clark Atlanta University, Atlanta, GA

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Cassandra Ward - Meharry Medical College, Nashville, TN

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Pamela Woods - Morehouse School of Medicine, Atlanta, GA

Maggie Yin - Clark Atlanta University, Atlanta, GA

Appendix B

HBCU Collaborative Interest Survey & Results

Survey:

1. Name
2. Title
3. Institution
4. Years of service in position
5. Rank the following in terms of importance:
 - a. Quality Assurance in Assessment Processes
 - b. Professional Development Plan for Assessment
 - c. Curriculum and Assessment Alignment Maps
 - d. Program Assessment Rubrics
 - e. Elements of Academic Program Review
 - f. Data Visualization Tools
 - g. Assessment and Accreditation
6. What best practice or strength can you share with others as part of this collaborative?
7. What issue or topic of discussion would be most beneficial to you in the work of this collaborative?
8. What suggestions or thoughts can you offer to strengthen the value and success of the collaborative?

HBCU Collaborative Interest Survey Results

Table 1. CEEQA Members' Position Title at the Time of Convening

Position Title	%	Count
Director of Assessment	7.14%	1
Assistant Vice President with responsibility for Institutional Effectiveness	14.29%	2
Director of Institutional Effectiveness	14.29%	2
Other	64.29%	9
Total	100%	14

Table 2. Detailed Position Title of CEEQA Members Who Answered “Other”

Position Title b – Other (Please specify your position title)
Vice President of OIPRE (IE Responsibility)
Executive Director of Institutional Research and Analysis
Chairperson - College of Education
Associate Dean, Curriculum Evaluation & Effectiveness
Associate Dean, Curriculum Evaluation & Effectiveness
Director of Institutional Research & Assessment
Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness and Strategic Initiatives
Director, Institutional Research

Table 3. Time (in years) CEEQA Members Have Held Their Current Position

Time in Current Position	%	Count
Less than one year	15.38%	2
1-2 years	23.08%	3
2-4 years	15.38%	2
4-6 years	7.69%	1
6-8 years	15.38%	2
8-10 years	7.69%	1
More than 10 years	15.38%	2
Total	100%	13

Table 4. CEEQA Members' Ranking of Most Important Support Activities and Points of Emphasis for CEEQA

Note: Participants were asked to rank the following items 1 through 7 in terms of importance (with 1 being very important). The yellow boxes highlight which item was most likely to be ranked 1-7 respectively. For example, "Assessment and Accreditation" was most likely to be first on participant's rankings, "Quality Assurance in Assessment Process" was most likely to be second, and so on.

Item	% Rank 1	# 1	% Rank 2	# 2	% Rank 3	# 3	% Rank 4	# 4	% Rank 5	# 5	% Rank 6	# 6	% Rank 7	# 7	Total
Quality Assurance in Assessment Process	41.67	5	50.00	6	8.33	1	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	12
Professional Development Plan for Assessment and IE Personnel	8.33	1	16.67	2	0.00	0	8.33	1	0.00	0	33.33	4	33.33	4	12
Curriculum and Assessment Alignment Maps	0.00	0	0.00	0	41.67	5	25.00	3	8.33	1	25.00	3	0.00	0	12
Program Assessment Rubrics	0.00	0	0.00	0	16.67	2	16.67	2	41.67	5	16.67	2	8.33	1	12
Elements of Academic Program Review	0.00	0	0.00	0	8.33	1	33.33	4	33.33	4	25.00	3	0.00	0	12
Data Visualization Tools	0.00	0	8.33	1	8.33	1	16.67	2	8.33	1	0.00	0	58.33	7	12
Assessment and Accreditation	50.00	6	25.00	3	16.67	2	0.00	0	8.33	1	0.00	0	0.00	0	12

Finally, CEEQA members were asked to share their valuable insights and takeaways from the convening so that others may learn and advance this work on their own campus. Specifically, participants were asked:

1. What best-practice and or strength can you share with others as a part of this collaborative?
2. What issue or topic of discussion would be most beneficial to you in the work of this collaborative?
3. What suggestions or thoughts can you offer to strengthen the value and success of the collaborative?

Some of their responses are highlighted in the following page.

What best-practice and or strength can you share with others as a part of this collaborative?

- *I can share our experiences transitioning from a paper-based process to documenting assessment activities to an institution-wide cloud-based platform designed to help manage the process in addition to affording programs and units the ability to align outcomes to accreditation standards and strategic priorities at the institutional level.*
- *I have written books, books chapters, and articles and have made multiple presentations nationally and internationally on Evaluation (i.e., products, programs, processes, personnel).*
- *Culturally Responsive Evaluation.*
- *As a IR person, I can share the databases we had at my institution which support assessment for best practice.*
- *Leading program area faculty through curricular/assessment/accreditation reviews Introducing faculty to VALUE rubrics (nationally recognized) assessments for improved outcomes and narratives of their degree programs.*
- *Determining metrics for program evaluation and evaluating programs.*
- *Professional development for shifting and creating assessment cultures for higher education.*
- *Institutionalize Assessment so that the units do not lose momentum in completing on-going assessment work as turnover occurs in the organization.*
- *Models for IE, Framework for assessing quality, strategic planning models.*

What issue or topic of discussion would be most beneficial to you in the work of this collaborative?

- *Building and sustaining an institutional culture for meaningful assessment that serves to move the institution forward.*
- *How we can identify promising practices (a.k.a. best practices) and support each other to improve our own practices.*
- *Constructing Learning Benchmarks responsive to liberative epistemologies.*
- *How to build campus climate of using IR data for assessment purpose.*
- *The utilization of data analytics.*
- *How to be creative with your University's resources and support for assessment.*
- *Best practices for collection of evidence and artifacts and integrating those in the assessment cycle for analysis and decision-making.*
- *Assessing Student Learning.*

What suggestions or thoughts can you offer to strengthen the value and success of the collaborative?

- *Plan in advance, identify key roles and responsibilities, and most importantly expected outcomes.*
- *Hopefully we will include sense making sessions that consider the intersectionality of justice issues and traditional discipline outcomes which often times frames the context of content in the HBCU setting.*
- *Thoughts on establishing responsive/collaborative/systemic practices and protocol (campus culture) that live (or outlive) beyond individuals and turnover in Institutional Effectiveness units at HBCU.*
- *At the onset, I would like the collaborative to establish outcome measures and set timelines for publishing and presenting at national conferences.*
- *Provide as many easy to follow, practical steps as possible to guide work when the participants return to their institutions. Maybe a practitioner's guide or checklist?*
- *Be willing to share with transparency.*

About NILOA

- The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) was established in December 2008.
- NILOA is co-located at the University of Illinois and Indiana University.
- The NILOA website contains free assessment resources and can be found at <http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org>.
- The NILOA research team has scanned institutional websites, surveyed chief academic officers, and commissioned a series of occasional papers.
- NILOA's Founding Director, George Kuh, founded the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE).
- The other co-principal investigator for NILOA, Stanley Ikenberry, was president of the University of Illinois from 1979 to 1995 and of the American Council of Education from 1996 to 2001.

NILOA Staff

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Gianina Baker, *Assistant Director*

Katie Schultz, *Project Manager*

Erick Montenegro, *Communications Coordinator and Research Analyst*

Verna F. Orr, *Research Analyst*

NILOA Senior Scholars

Peter Ewell, *Senior Scholar*

Pat Hutchings, *Senior Scholar*

Stanley Ikenberry, *Co-Principal Investigator*

Jillian Kinzie, *Senior Scholar*

George Kuh, *Founding Director, Senior Scholar, and Co-Principal Investigator*

Paul Lingenfelter, *Senior Scholar*

David Marshall, *Senior Scholar*

If you would like more information on the innovative work of CEEQA, please contact us at niloa@education.illinois.edu.

