

**New England Schools Develop Regional Connections  
for Improving Assessment**

**By Jean Woodbury, Bernard Gill, and Susanne M. Tracy**

The New England Educational Assessment Network (NEEAN) has been active in New England for more than two years and includes faculty and administrators from two- and four-year institutions, both private and public, in the New England area. NEEAN, which evolved from a regional conference on assessment jointly sponsored by the Northeast Consortium of Colleges and Universities in Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Faculty Development Consortium, and North Shore Community College, was created to provide a means for systematically conveying information to New England schools about assessment methods, problems, and successes.

Following the jointly sponsored regional conference, the Office of Outcomes Assessment at North Shore Community College in Massachusetts took the lead in establishing NEEAN. A survey was distributed to schools in the New England area that confirmed the need for a network to support ongoing communication and a regional referral system regarding assessment issues. In November 1995, the college hosted a planning meeting for professionals interested in establishing the network. Forty people from twenty-nine New England institutions attended. The participants created a governing board charged with developing an organizational framework, completing the mission statement, and establishing goals and objectives based on the results of the assessment survey. Specifically cited on the survey were requests for sharing assessment tools, methods, and strategies; providing collaborative help on assessment projects; and holding a series of assessment workshops. Individuals representing institutions from New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Maine, and Massachusetts volunteered to serve on the governing board. By January 1996, over 160 individuals representing more than sixty institutions had expressed a desire to participate in NEEAN. Since that time NEEAN has responded to regional interest by offering four assessment conferences, each hosted by a different college or university.

Topics at the conferences have spanned a wide range of issues, including accreditation and assessment, academic freedom and responsibility, access and standards, internal and external accountability, and using assessment in measuring institutional effectiveness. In addition, New England-area professionals with expertise in particular assessment areas have led focus sessions on many other topics. Sessions are designed to be interactive so that participants can share their knowledge and expertise.

NEEAN's mission is to provide a forum for administrators, faculty, and staff in higher education to share information about assessment methods, problems, and successes. In achieving this mission, responding to feedback from regional colleges and universities has been essential.

NEEAN has established the parameters of a website, has completed a participant mailing list with Internet addresses, and has begun developing a referral list of educators in the region who have experience in specific areas of assessment. Information about the design of assessment methods, strategies for problem solving, and data showing the value of doing assessment have been shared in direct response to the original survey on assessment completed in 1995.

At a time when measuring institutional effectiveness is a growing concern for colleges and universities across the nation, New England's institutions of higher education have responded by reaching out to each other to develop regional connections for improving assessment – the New England Educational Assessment Network is the result.

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