2026 VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

Thursday, July 23, 2026

10:00 AM TO 2:00 PM (EDT)

Register now at :

https://www.air-nj.org/

ONLY SOME OF OUR AMAZING SPEAKERS!!

Lathish Baskaran
- *Data Scientist*
- *Rowan University*

Jia Hui Seow
- *Institutional Research Analyst*
- *Santa Clara University*

Susan Ahern
- *Director Office of Accreditation and Assessment*
- *Kean University*

Meghana Bangari
- *AI communicative Analyst*
- *New Jersey Institute of Technology*

Victoria Coty
- *Research Assistant*
- *Heldrich Center for Workforce Development*

Jamie Kifferly
- *Assistant Director - Institutional Research*
- *Rowan University*

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njair
NEW JERSEY ASSOCIATION for INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

Mission of NJAIR is

To promote communication and cooperation among higher education researchers in New Jersey.

The goals of NJAIR include:

- promoting professional development (sharing information, information technology, research methods, etc.)
- facilitating information/data sharing
- identifying and analyzing the emerging issues in higher education
- facilitating networking among colleagues

History

NJAIR began with a breakfast gathering of New Jersey institutional researchers attending the NEAIR conference in Baltimore in 1994. The meeting was called to generate interest in forming an association that would bring together institutional researchers from all sectors of higher education in New Jersey. The group decided that the best way to move forward would be to hold a conference on topics of general interest to which institutional researchers from all the colleges and universities in the state would be invited.

Georgian Court College hosted and subsidized the first annual meeting, held in March 1995. The restructuring of higher education in New Jersey, SPRE, and the Student-Right-to-Know Act were the hot topics addressed at the meeting. After lunch, the idea of forming a multi-sector association was presented and approved by the group. The first steering committee was selected from volunteers interested in turning an idea into an organization.

By 1996, the time seemed right to begin to formalize NJAIR. A mission statement was written and the steering committee began to be structured. In 1997, NJAIR became an officially recognized affiliate of AIR. In the fall of 1997, the steering committee moved to incorporate as a nonprofit organization and to collect dues in order to upgrade the kind of services the association could offer. Besides the annual meeting, NJAIR now sponsors a listserv and this website.

In 2021, NJAIR went on hiatus due to the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, NJAIR revivied to continue its work of connecting higher education researchers from across the state to connect, learn from each other, and tackle today's issues in higher education. Join your colleagues from throughout the state at NJAIR's 2025 conference!

Thursday, July 23, 2026

Schedule at a Glance

10:00 am - 10:15 am	**Opening Session**	
10:15 am - 10:30 am	**Decision Support**	**Technology & Tools**
	From Static Reports to Task-Based Intelligence: Building Power BI, Azure, and AI-Enabled Course Evaluation Dashboards for Institutional Research	Understanding Within Classroom Dynamics
10:30 am - 10:45 am	**Research & Policy**	**Assessment**
	Institutional Research: Providing Quantitative Evidence that Informs Narratives of Mission, Goals, and Outcomes	Who Responds to Course Evaluations? Using Response Rate and Response Bias Analysis to Strengthen Interpretation of Student Feedback
10:45 am - 11:00 am	**Break**	
11:00 am - 11:30 am	**Assessment**	**Assessment**
	Turning Requests into Results: Smart Survey Consultations	From Assessment to Action: Developing A Student Learning Outcomes Dashboard
11:30 am - 12:00 pm	**Technology & Tools**	**Research & Policy**
	From Comments to Clarity: A Course-Feedback Dashboard Combining Student Ratings with Open-Ended Survey Responses	A Look at Research Products Using the NJSDS
12:00 pm - 12:30 pm	**Break**	
12:30 pm - 1:00 pm	**Technology & Tools**	**Decision Support**
	Making Sense of Sparse Student Feedback: A Hybrid AI Framework for Open-Ended Survey Responses	Bridging Data Consistency, Peer Selection, and Benchmarking with Rowan University's IPEDS Agent
1:00 pm - 1:30 pm	**Technology & Tools**	**Technology & Tools**
	From Surveys to Systems: A Conformed Star Schema for Reusable Analytics	AI-Driven Student Insights to Enable Personalized Communication and Early Intervention
1:30 pm - 2:00 pm	**NJOSHE Updates**	

10:00 am - 10:15 am

WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

Jeremy Reich

Jeremy Reich

- *Assistant Director for Assessment and Accreditation, Off of Institutional Effectiveness*
- *Acting Chair, NJ-AIR*

Breakout Room 1: Decision Support

10:15 am - 10:30 am

FROM STATIC REPORTS TO TASK-BASED INTELLIGENCE: BUILDING POWER BI, AZURE, AND AI-ENABLED COURSE EVALUATION DASHBOARDS FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

Isha Jagtap

- *Data analyst*
- *New Jersey Institute of Technology*

Traditional course evaluation reporting often relies on static reports that provide summary statistics but do not adequately support the diverse decision-making needs of institutional stakeholders. Institutional researchers, department chairs, deans, faculty affairs leaders, and assessment professionals require different views of the same data to answer distinct operational and strategic questions. This session presents a practical framework for transforming course evaluation reporting into a task-based analytics ecosystem that aligns dashboards with real institutional workflows.

The presentation demonstrates how Power BI, Azure, automated ETL pipelines, and AI-enabled analytics can be integrated to build scalable, role-based course evaluation dashboards. The framework incorporates quantitative metrics, qualitative analysis of open-ended student comments, secure role-based access, automated data refresh, and conversational AI capabilities that allow users to explore course evaluation data through natural language queries. Governance considerations, including privacy, small-cell suppression, access control, and responsible AI practices, are also discussed.

Participants will gain a replicable framework for designing modern institutional research dashboards, practical guidance for automating course evaluation reporting, strategies for implementing role-based analytics, and ideas for incorporating AI-assisted inquiry into existing assessment and institutional research workflows.

Breakout Room 2: Technology & Tools

10:15 am - 10:30 am

UNDERSTANDING WITHIN CLASSROOM DYNAMICS

Vrushali Koli

- Graduate Survey Research Assistant
- *New Jersey Institute of Technology*

Stakeholders utilize course evaluations for administrative decisions, quality assurance, and instructional development. In these instances, stakeholders need to engage in exploratory and context-sensitive course evaluation analysis. At the same time, they need structured guidance that situates their analysis within a coherent framework, ensuring the data's complexity does not overwhelm them or reduce their engagement.

We collaborated with multiple stakeholders at a US higher education institution and developed a principled approach towards calibrating and visualizing consensus among student responses. We share the technical challenges and lessons learned from developing an interactive visual analytic dashboard anchored on consensus. Findings are grounded in rigorous pilot studies we've conducted with stakeholders who routinely analyze course evaluations.

Lightning Talks

Thursday, July 23, 2026

Breakout Room 1 : Research & Policy

10:30 am - 10:45 am

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH: PROVIDING QUANTITATIVE EVIDENCE THAT INFORMS NARRATIVES OF MISSION, GOALS, AND OUTCOMES

Jed Marsh

- Vice Provost for Institutional Research
- *Princeton University*

Higher education is in a period of rapid change where institutional researchers are asked to provide quantitative evidence that informs planning, policy and compliance. To support this change, institutions release very granular data to third parties that are transformed and repackaged without institutional involvement. As our institutions strive to be data informed, institutional researchers are using more sophisticated methodologies creating a widening gap between methodology and understanding. Audiences struggle with statistical concepts and limitations associated with those methodologies. The integration of AI-enabled tools is presenting additional challenges. Taken together institutions are losing the ability to contextualize or explain their data and by extension to their ability to shape their narrative. Consequently, institutional researchers need to be translators, educators and narrators to explain their work and support institutional narratives of mission, goals and outcome. In this presentation we will share findings that contextualize the program earnings narrative and describe steps that we are to bolster data confidence in our community and enable greater data self-sufficiency.

Breakout Room 2 : Assessment

10:30 am - 10:45 am

WHO RESPONDS TO COURSE EVALUATIONS? USING RESPONSE RATE AND RESPONSE BIAS ANALYSIS TO STRENGTHEN INTERPRETATION OF STUDENT FEEDBACK

Meghana Bangari

- AI communicative Analyst
- *New Jersey Institute of Technology*

Course evaluations are widely used to inform teaching improvement, program assessment, faculty review, and institutional decision-making. However, the validity and usefulness of course evaluation results depend not only on what students say, but also on who responds. When response rates vary across courses, modalities, instructors, student groups, or performance levels, results may reflect patterns of participation as much as patterns of instructional experience. For example, if students earning A grades are more likely to respond than students earning D, F, or W outcomes, or vice versa – course evaluation findings may overrepresent particular perspectives and should be interpreted with appropriate context. This session presents an institutional framework for examining response rates and potential response bias in course evaluation data. Using several years of course evaluation results linked with administrative course outcome data, we analyze who responds, who does not, and how response patterns vary by final grade, course level, delivery modality, college, department, enrollment size, and other course characteristics. The analysis is designed to help institutional researchers and academic leaders better understand the representativeness of course evaluation data and the conditions under which results may require additional context.

The session will also demonstrate a dashboard developed to support response rate and response bias analysis. The dashboard provides a practical framework for monitoring evaluation participation, comparing respondent and nonrespondent characteristics, identifying sections with low or uneven response patterns, and contextualizing course evaluation results before they are used for reporting or decision-making. Rather than treating response rate as a single institutional metric, the dashboard allows users to examine participation patterns across multiple levels of aggregation and ask more meaningful questions about data quality, representativeness, interpretation, and appropriate use.

Participants will leave with a practical analytic framework for evaluating course evaluation data quality, examples of response bias questions that can be examined with existing institutional data, and strategies for communicating findings to faculty, department chairs, deans, and other stakeholders. The session emphasizes that response bias analysis is not intended to dismiss student feedback, but to strengthen the responsible interpretation and use of course evaluation results.

10:45 am - 11:00 am **BREAK**

Breakout Room 1 : Assessment

11:00 am - 11:30 am

TURNING REQUESTS INTO RESULTS: SMART SURVEY CONSULTATIONS

Kristen Lindsay

- *Director of Institutional Research and Assessment*
- *The University of Findlay*

Survey requests often begin with a proposed instrument rather than a clearly defined problem, leading to misaligned data collection and limited impact. This session addresses the opportunity to reframe survey work as a consultative process—one that helps requesters clarify goals, identify the most appropriate methods, and – as necessary – consider alternatives. Through a guided role-play activity, participants will practice navigating real-world consultation scenarios and be exposed to a structured set of questions designed to uncover purpose, audience, decision points, and constraints. Attendees will leave with a repeatable consultation approach, a toolkit of strategic questions, and increased confidence in steering conversations toward assessment that produces actionable results.

Breakout Room 2 : Assessment

11:00 am - 11:30 am

FROM ASSESSMENT TO ACTION: DEVELOPING A STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES DASHBOARD

Susan Ahern

- *Director Office of Accreditation and Assessment*
- *Kean University*

Nima Sherpa

- *Lead Data Analyst, SADI*
- *Kean University*

Institutions routinely collect large volumes of student learning outcomes (SLO) assessment data, yet many struggle to transform that information into meaningful insights that support continuous improvement and institutional decision-making. This session highlights how Kean University's Division of Strategic Analytics and Data Illumination (SADI) developed an interactive Student Learning Outcomes Dashboard that converts assessment data collected through the Canvas Learning Management System into accessible, dynamic visualizations for faculty, department chairs, deans, and institutional leaders.

Presenters Nima Sherpa, Lead Data Analyst for SADI, and Susan Ahern, Director of the Office of Accreditation and Assessment, will demonstrate how the partnership between institutional analytics and assessment led to the development of this innovative dashboard. They will discuss the dashboard's design, data integration process, visualization strategies, and implementation lessons learned. A live demonstration will illustrate how users can filter results, drill down into student learning outcomes, export data, and generate evidence to support assessment reporting, accreditation, and data-informed decision-making.

10:45 am - 11:00 am **BREAK**

Breakout Room 1 : Technology & Tools

11:30 am - 12:00 pm

FROM COMMENTS TO CLARITY: A COURSE-FEEDBACK DASHBOARD COMBINING STUDENT RATINGS WITH OPEN-ENDED SURVEY RESPONSES

Shivam Sarang

- *Data Science and Survey Analytics* Specialist
- *New Jersey Institute of Technology*

Institutions collect thousands of course-evaluation responses each term, but the most valuable part is the students' open-ended written comments, is usually too many to read and too unstructured to analyze at scale. As a result, decision-makers lean on numeric ratings alone and lose the "why" behind the scores.

This session will present an interactive Course Evaluation Survey Analytics dashboard that brings the quantitative and qualitative sides of student feedback together in one place. On the quantitative side, it tracks teaching-effectiveness and educational-value ratings over time, by term, and by instructor. On the qualitative side, it uses an in-house Guided BERTopic model, which is a topic-modeling approach we trained and refined with institutional domain knowledge to raise the quality and interpretability of extracted themes, grouping free-text comments into clear, labeled topics such as "best features," "areas to improve," and instructor-related feedback.

The dashboard then lets users move fluidly between the two: comparing rating trends alongside the themes students actually wrote about, drilling from a whole course down to a single instructor or section, viewing longitudinal topic-share heatmaps, and responsibly surfacing comments flagged for review. A built-in glossary and methodology view keep the analysis transparent and reproducible.

Attendees will leave with:
(1) a practical framework for pairing quantitative ratings with qualitative topic modeling,
(2) an understanding of how domain-guided BERTopic improves topic quality over off-the-shelf approaches, and
(3) concrete dashboard design patterns that they can adapt to turn raw survey text into insight their own campuses can act on.

Breakout Room 2 : Research & Policy

11:30 am - 12:00 pm

A LOOK AT RESEARCH PRODUCTS USING THE NJSDS

Victoria Coty

- *Research Assistant*
- *Heldrich Center for Workforce Development*

Kirsten Meidlinger

Questions like which educational pathways lead to strong employment outcomes and how financial aid affects completion require data from multiple agencies to answer. Before the New Jersey Statewide Data System (NJSDS), the State of New Jersey's longitudinal data system, these questions were extremely difficult to answer. NJSDS links data from four state agencies: the New Jersey Department of Education, the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the New Jersey Higher Education Assistance Authority, and the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, enabling cross-sector data analysis to address questions about education and workforce outcomes. Researchers from the Heldrich Center will present examples of research conducted using the NJSDS, including the Examining the Benefits of Education in New Jersey report, the New Jersey Financial Aid Outcomes dashboard, and the New Jersey Postsecondary Employment and Earnings dashboard. Attendees will gain an understanding of the NJSDS, findings of research made possible by linking state agency data, and how to access research products.

12:00 pm - 12:30 pm **BREAK**

Breakout Room 1 : Technology & Tools

12:30 pm - 1:00 pm

MAKING SENSE OF SPARSE STUDENT FEEDBACK: A HYBRID AI FRAMEWORK FOR OPEN-ENDED SURVEY RESPONSES

Karthik Piedy

- *Research Assistant (Student)*
- *New Jersey Institute of Technology*

Open-ended survey responses are a critical source of evidence for understanding student experience, improving survey design, and informing institutional decision-making. Yet in institutional research, these data are often difficult to analyze systematically, especially when response volumes are modest, comments are brief or unstructured, and individual responses contain multiple themes. While our prior work with course evaluation comments benefited from large response volumes and annual response rates of 50% to 60%, recurring institutional surveys often produce lower response rates, closer to 20%, requiring a different analytic strategy. In these settings, traditional topic modeling alone may surface broad patterns but often falls short in producing stable, interpretable, and action-ready classifications.

This session presents a practical framework for using AI-assisted methods to convert open-ended student feedback into structured, interpretable topic classifications. The approach uses a hybrid inductive-deductive design. In the inductive phase, topic modeling supports exploratory discovery of recurring themes in student comments. These preliminary topics are then reviewed, refined, and consolidated into a topic taxonomy grounded in institutional context. In the deductive phase, a locally hosted large language model assigns all applicable topics from the finalized taxonomy to each response, allowing for multi-label classification when a single comment reflects more than one issue.

The session will highlight how this framework can help institutional researchers move beyond one-time manual review or opaque automated models toward a more transparent, replicable, and privacy-conscious workflow. Participants will learn how topic modeling, expert review, and local LLM-based classification can be combined to produce analysis-ready outputs that support survey reporting, dashboard development, survey redesign, and evidence-based action.

Breakout Room 2 : Decision Support

12:30 pm - 1:00 pm

BRIDGING DATA CONSISTENCY, PEER SELECTION, AND BENCHMARKING WITH ROWAN UNIVERSITY'S IPEDS AGENT

Jamie Kifferly

- Assistant Director - Institutional Research
- *Rowan University*

Bharathwaj Vijayakumar

Basic institutional questions, such as how much financial aid was awarded or what current enrollment looks like, can yield different answers depending on who you ask, since offices often pull from different sources, apply different definitions, or reference different time periods. Without one institutionally validated source of truth, this inconsistency chips away at confidence in the numbers before any deeper analysis even begins. A related but distinct challenge is peer selection: understanding how a university is truly performing depends on comparing it to the right set of peer institutions, similar in size, mission, and student population, yet peer lists are often built informally, based on memory or outdated assumptions, rather than through a defensible, data-driven process. Even after peers are chosen, pulling, cleaning, and visualizing comparison data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) remains a slow, manual process. To address these challenges, the IPEDS Agent developed at Rowan University:
Provides a single, institutionally validated source of truth for core questions like financial aid and enrollment, removing inconsistencies caused by offices working from different data or definitions.
Uses clustering methods and data-driven variable combinations to help identify defensible peer groups, rather than relying on memory or subjective selection.
Offers a built-in plotting and comparison interface to visualize IPEDS metrics, including multi-year enrollment trends by race and ethnicity and undergraduate degree-seeking attendance, across a chosen peer set.
Brings all of this together in one conversational interface, letting users move from validated data, to peer selection, to visual comparison, simply by asking questions in natural language.

Breakout Room 1 : Technology & Tools

1:00 pm - 1:30 pm

FROM SURVEYS TO SYSTEMS: A CONFORMED STAR SCHEMA FOR REUSABLE ANALYTICS

Jia Hui Seow

- *Institutional Research Analyst*
- *Santa Clara University*

Institutional Research surveys are often stored as isolated, wide-format files that limit reuse and require repeated dashboard redevelopment. This session demonstrates a Conformed Survey Star Schema that restructures survey data into five standardized, metadata-driven tables. Attendees will see how a single survey is transformed into these files and how the resulting structure supports multi-year surveys and enables a fully reusable Tableau visualization. By separating responses, variables, value labels, themes, and survey metadata, the approach makes survey data survey-agnostic, question-agnostic, and visualization-agnostic. The demonstration highlights how this technique enables scalable analytics and reduces long-term maintenance for IR offices.

Breakout Room 2 : Technology & Tools

1:00 pm - 1:30 pm

AI-DRIVEN STUDENT INSIGHTS TO ENABLE PERSONALIZED COMMUNICATION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

Lathish Baskaran

- *Data Scientist*
- *Rowan University*

Bharathwaj Vijayakumar

- *Assistant Vice President - Office of Institutional Data & Analytics*
- *Rowan University*

This session presents an AI-driven students insights platform, built using real institutional data at Rowan University, that unifies data from learning management system, student information system, and advising platforms into a single view of each student's academic and engagement history. At its core, the platform uses a benchmarked machine learning pipeline (evaluating 70+ candidate models) to generate continuously updated retention probability scores, while a generative AI and natural language layer lets advisors query student populations, generate plain-language summaries, and draft personalized outreach — all with human review built into every recommendation. Attendees will learn how predictive AI and generative AI can be combined into a production-ready advising workflow and leave with a practical framework for evaluating and piloting similar tools at their own institutions.

1:30 pm - 2:00 pm

NJOSHE UPDATES

Justin Schaffer

- *Assistant Director of Research*

Mark Walzer

- *Research Analyst*

During this session we will present some major updates for the 2026-27 research and reporting period that will impact institutions. We will focus on federal IPEDS survey changes and any associated changes to State level data collections. We will focus on specific state-level data collection activities and preview some upcoming changes and issues for discussion. We will also preview and review some current research activities and deliverables developed by the OSHE research team.

NEW JERSEY INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

American Institute of Medical Sciences and Education
Assumption College for Sisters
Atlantic Cape Community College
Bais Medrash Mayan Hatorah
Bais Medrash Toras Chesed
Bais Medrash Zichron Meir
Bergen Community College
Berkeley College
Best Care College
Bet Midrash Ohel Torah
Beth Medrash Govoha
Brookdale Community College
Caldwell University
Camden County College
Centenary University
Chamberlain University
County College of Morris
CTOR Academy
DeVry University
Drew University
Eastern International College - Jersey City Campus
Eastern School of Acupuncture and Traditional Medicine (ESATM)
Eastwick College
Essex County College
Fairleigh Dickinson University
Felician University
Georgian Court University
Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine
Hudson County Community College
Jersey College
Kean University
Kean Jersey City (formerly New Jersey City University)
Keser Torah-Mayan Hatalmud
Manara College
Mercer County Community College
Middlesex College
Monmouth University
Montclair State University
Mosdos Yaakov V'Yisroel
New Brunswick Theological Seminary
New Jersey Center for Teaching and Learning
New Jersey Institute of Technology
Ocean County College
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Pillar College
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Princeton University
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Rabbinical College of America
Rabbinical Seminary M'kor Chaim
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Rider University
Rowan College at Burlington County - Mt. Laurel Campus
Rowan College of South Jersey
Rowan University
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Saint Elizabeth University
Saint Peter's University
Salem Community College
Seminary Bnos Chaim
Seton Hall University
St. Sophia Ukrainian Orthodox Theological Seminary
Stevens Institute of Technology
Stockton University
Strayer University
Sussex County Community College
Talmudical Academy
The College of New Jersey
Thomas Edison State University
UCNJ Union College of Union County, NJ
Warren County Community College
William Paterson University of New Jersey
Yeshiva Bais Aharon
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Yeshiva Gedola Tiferes Yerachmiel
Yeshiva Gedola Zichron Leyma
Yeshiva Gedolah Keren Hatorah
Yeshiva Gedolah of Cliffwood
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Yeshiva Toras Chaim
Yeshiva Yesodei Hatorah
Yeshivas Be'er Yitzchok
Yeshivas Chemdat Hatorah
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