

# SOUTHEAST EVALUATION ASSOCIATION



May 2009

## SEA's 2009 Annual Conference The Wolf is At the Door: Adding Value in Lean Times

By Kathy McGuire

It was great to see many of you at our 21st Annual Conference despite the challenges of the economy. Jonathan Walters, senior correspondent for *Governing Magazine*, was our keynote and pre-conference speaker. Mr. Walters' workshop focused on "Evaluators as Allies," or how to help managers use evaluation data to assess programs and make the best choices in lean budget times. His keynote addressed how to deal with the press, for example, "Don't be afraid to say "I'll have to get back with you on that" if you need more time to think through or research an answer." Copies of his book are available from *Governing Magazine* and their [website](#).

We enjoyed 36 sessions on a wide variety of topics ranging from the

outcomes of teen abstinence programs to local government performance measures to using NVivo software. The conference also included a leadership track to explore topics including succession planning, motivating staff when your wallet is empty, using Adobe and GoToMeeting to replace meetings that require long-distance travel, and "Do Ask, Do Tell" on building effective networks with stakeholders.

Amy Baker, Director of the Florida Legislature's Office of Economic and Demographic Research (which provides financial forecasts for the Governor and Legislature) spoke to a very attentive audience on her office's economic forecasts for the next few years (yes, it was rather gloomy). We were also fortunate to



Keynote Speaker Jonathan Walters  
Photograph courtesy of

have a writing class by Connie Ruggles and a presentation on the code of ethics by Virlindia Doss, Deputy Director of the Florida Commission on Ethics. Another highlight, which we hope to continue at future conferences, was the Emerging Issues lunch sessions in which attendees could choose from among five topics to join their peers for an informal discussion on *(continued on page 2)*

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### Special points of interest:

- AEA is coming to Orlando, Florida November 11-14, 2009.

**EVALUATION 2009** Orlando, Florida  
**CONTEXT AND EVALUATION**  
 Conference: Nov 11-14  
 Workshops: November 9-11 & 15

The American Evaluation Association (AEA) invites evaluators from around the world to attend its annual conference to be held Wednesday, November 11, through Saturday, November 14, 2009 in Orlando, Florida. We are fortunate to be at the

world class Rosen Shingle Creek Resort, providing us with a beautiful venue and context for learning from one another as well as building in some time for relaxation and fun.

AEA's annual meeting is expected to bring together approximately 2,500

evaluation practitioners, academics, and students, and represents a unique opportunity to gather with professional colleagues in a supportive, invigorating atmosphere. The conference is broken down into 41 Topical Strands that examine the field *(continued on page 3)*

## The President's Message

By Kathy McGuire

### SEA President Kathy McGuire



Photograph courtesy of Kathy McGuire

Thank you for renewing your membership to SEA! It is an honor to serve as President with this enthusiastic board. For an organization in which much of the work is done by volunteers, we have an amazing number of activities going on, thanks to our membership and active board (see profiles in this issue). Our part-time coordinator, Bernadette Howard, also works hard to bring our ideas to fruition.

This year the board will focus on providing training and professional development opportunities to help

compensate for the very constrained training, conference, and travel budgets in most of our offices. Because our membership is spread throughout the southeast, we will experiment this year with some webinar-type training that all members can access free of charge. If you have particular topics that you would be interested in hearing about or presenting on, please contact our coordinator Bernadette Howard or any of our board members.

For those of us with travel money, this year will also afford

an excellent chance to attend the national American Evaluation Association conference, as AEA is meeting in Orlando November 9-14, 2009. We also are already planning our next SEA conference in Tallahassee in February 2010.

We look forward to working with you this year! If you have ideas for topics or speakers for our monthly meetings or our conference, or a social event you would like to see, please let us know. Thank you for joining us!



*Over 22 years, the Southeast Evaluation Association has achieved a list of accomplishments unique in the nation.*

Recently, Linda Schrader, our liaison to the American Evaluation Association (AEA); Susan McNamara, our immediate past president; and Kathy McGuire, our current president, had a phone interview with the staff director of AEA. One of the topics of the call was to discuss Southeast Evaluation Association's accomplishments. When we stopped to think about it, we have quite a list of accomplishments, many of which are unique in the nation.

1. SEA has been ongoing for 22 years. We believe we are the longest lived AEA regional affiliate.
2. SEA also has hosted an annual conference and pre-conference workshop for 21 years.

## Reasons for Pride SEA Accomplishments in 22 Years

By Linda Schrader

3. SEA enjoys regional and international members.
4. SEA is unique in joining our four sectors (local, state, private, and university communities) into a single organization.
5. SEA has formal bylaws and tax-exempt status.
6. SEA support has evolved from an all volunteer effort to an internship position to a part-time coordinator who is an experienced evaluator.
7. SEA hosts a three day Essential Evaluation Skills Workshop.
8. SEA hosts an active website, publishes quarterly newsletters, and uses PayPal to facilitate membership drives and program registration.
9. SEA provides ongoing professional development and networking through its regular brown bag lunch sessions.
10. SEA sends its members information on employment.
11. SEA sponsors a Non-Profit Initiative to assist non-profit community organizations.

Thank you all for making SEA such an active, useful organization!

### SEA's 2009 Annual Conference (continued from page 1)

evaluation and political topics that are heating up during this legislative session. Planning is already underway for next year's conference! Please contact our Coordinator **Bernadette Howard** or our Conference Chair **Gary Walby** if you have ideas on sessions you would like to see or lead or speakers you would like to hear!

**Dillman, D., Smyth, J.D., & Christian, L.M., (2008) *Internet, Mail, and Mixed Mode Surveys: The Tailored Design Method*. 3rd Edition. John Wiley & Sons: Hoboken, New Jersey. 499 pp. \$75.00.**

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of Dillman's classic text, Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2008) respond to the recent drastic changes in the survey environment. Lists of telephone numbers no longer constitute a universal sampling frame. New modes for surveying such as cell phones and the Internet have appeared. In addition, computer technology has made surveying easier and cheaper, resulting in an explosion of surveys, particularly marketing surveys. The latter has predictably produced survey exhaustion, with declining response rates.

Dillman et al (2008) advocate changes in survey design: 1) the use of mixed mode (paper, phone, and internet) surveys, 2) the reduction of cognitive burden on respondents, 3) the increase of efforts to build trust between respondents and surveyors, and 4) the tailoring of each survey to the particular needs of the project. The underpinning of these proposed changes are rooted in social exchange theory of social psychology with some Gestalt psychology for visual design and organization.

Monetary incentives sent prior to completion of

the survey tend to produce a desire to reciprocate (social exchange) but money payments for completion of the survey produces economic exchange. The former builds trust but the latter diminishes trust and doesn't increase response rates.

One of Dillman's major points over the years is that the visual design of survey should reduce the cognitive burden on the respondent. Visual design can also decrease error rate as well. This involves structuring a survey like a conversation with logical connections linking proximate questions and consistent and distinct formatting for each element of a survey (directions, stimulus; prompt, and answer space). Dillman et al (2008) recommend high contrast formatting for the answer space, with white answer space and grey or colored background. This new edition devotes considerable space to visual design elements on the internet.

Just as I was finishing this book, I worked on a team developing a customer satisfaction survey. I saw some completed surveys that

someone else had designed, with Yes/No questions interspersed with Likert-scale questions, and open ended questions. It was not always clear where you were to answer, or even what type of response was to be made (points on a scale, binary choice, etc). This survey appeared difficult to understand and complete. Among the completed surveys that I saw several had errors directly traceable to poor visual design. This made me appreciate Dillman et al's work even more.

Dillman et al (2008) base their principles on empirical work, citing specific studies with quantitative outcomes for different elements. If you have to argue with your boss why a particular element is necessary, it is always good to be able to base your position on a study showing demonstrable results. Each chapter also separates out the main points as guidelines which can be photo-copied and used as a checklist or tacked to a cubicle or office wall.

The new edition would work well as graduate school level text in survey design or for the professional library. The reference section is seventeen pages long and would be good place to start further research.

Reviewed by Sean Little

*Computer technology has made surveying easier and cheaper, resulting in an explosion of surveys, particularly marketing surveys. The latter has predictably produced survey exhaustion, with declining response rates.*

### **Sean Little, Editor & Book Reviewer**

Sean Little currently works in Monitoring and Evaluation for Child Support Enforcement in Fort Lauderdale. His background is in HIV prevention and Substance Abuse from a Harm Reduction perspective – fields to which he hopes to return. He has an MA in Psychology (Social) and a BA in Sociology. Currently, he is studying evaluation through The Evaluators' Institute. He is also a transit minority, preferring public transportation to the inconvenience and expense of owning a car. He used to rely on public transit in Broward County during daylight hours until, after two rate hikes and decreasing service, it became cheaper to drive. He also misses side walks.

Persons with suggestions of books to be reviewed, or those who wish to submit a review should contact Sean Little at [Little25@bellsouth.net](mailto:Little25@bellsouth.net)

### **AEA Conference (continued from page 1)**

from the vantage point of a particular methodology, context, or issue of interest to the field as well as the Presidential Strand highlighting this year's Presidential Theme of "Context and Evaluation." Presentations may explore the conference theme or any aspect of the full breadth and depth of evaluation theory and practice.

## Meet Your 2009 SEA Board Members!

### SEA President Kathy McGuire



Photograph courtesy of Kathy McGuire

Kathy McGuire serves as deputy director of the Florida Legislature's Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA). Prior to that date, she served as staff director for the criminal justice policy area. For more than 15 years she has conducted and led a wide variety of program evaluations and policy analyses. McGuire also has attended the Legislative Staff Management Institute at the University of Southern California. She has served on the SEA Board since 2007.

Dr. Gary Walby is a senior evaluator with the Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida. He designs and executes evaluations both private and governmental funded with expertise in qualitative and mixed methods evaluation models as well as policy analysis and sustainability planning. Prior to his experience at the Ounce, he led evaluations targeting mental health service programs, educational organizations. He is an adjunct instructor in evaluation at Florida State University and contributes regularly at national, state, and local conferences.

### SEA President-Elect & Conference Chair Gary Walby



Photograph courtesy of Dr. Gary Walby

### SEA Secretary Kathy Pilkenton



Photograph courtesy of Kathy Pilkenton

Kathy Pilkenton is a Senior Management Analyst II with the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) where she coordinates special projects and reviews for the Inspector General. She has held various management and senior analyst positions in Florida state government at several agencies including the Department of Health, the Correctional Medical Authority, the Office of the State Courts Administrator, and the former Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services. Kathy is a Certified Inspector General Investigator.

Jennifer Johnson is a Chief Legislative Analyst with the Florida Legislature's Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA). Since 1999, she has conducted and led evaluations and policy analyses in health and human services. In particular, Jennifer has evaluated policy issues related to both Florida's Medicaid program and public health system. In addition, she assists with the publication of OPPAGA's electronic newsletter, "The Florida Monitor Weekly".

### SEA Treasurer Jennifer Johnson



Photograph courtesy of Jennifer Johnson

**SEA Past  
President  
Susan McNamara**



Photograph courtesy of Susan McNamara

Susan McNamara has been involved in SEA since its first conference, was Communications Chair for 14 years, and designed the original SEA website and listserv. She was presented with a lifetime membership award in 2003. Susan currently works at the Agency for Health Care Administration in Medicaid and Research Policy. Her responsibilities include managing the Family Planning Waiver Evaluation contract, assisting with the Medicaid Research Conference, and researching issues for the public concerning health care for the uninsured.

Dr. Constance C. Bergquist is President of Evaluation Systems Design, Inc. For the last eight years she has worked closely with the Florida Department of Education in developing and implementing a statewide system for evaluating Florida's Professional Development System, including reviews of all 67 school districts' system. She designed, collected, and presented five evaluations of exemplary education projects which were approved by the National Joint Dissemination Review Panel in Washington as exemplary education programs for national dissemination.

**SEA Program  
Co-Chair  
Constance Bergquist**

**SEA Program  
Co-Chair  
Tamara**



Photograph courtesy of Tamara Bertrand-Jones

Dr. Tamara Bertrand Jones currently serves as the Director of the Office of Research in the Division of Student Affairs at Florida State University. She is responsible for assisting divisional and departmental efforts in assessment and evaluation, in addition to developing a division-wide research agenda. Her research interests are assessment and evaluation in higher education (student affairs), culturally responsive evaluation, mentoring Black graduate students, and the transition of graduate students to junior faculty. She serves as the Co-Chair for the Multi-Ethnic Issues topical interest group in AEA and as Program Chair for the Research on Evaluation special interest group in AERA.

Dr. Fred Seamon is a Senior Partner with MGT of America, Inc. He is very familiar with the higher education environment, having been involved in virtually all of MGT's projects with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). For over 12 years, he was a full-time faculty member at Florida State University and served an adjunct professor at Florida A&M University for over 10 years. While at Florida State University, he chaired accreditation site teams for the Council on Social Work Education including accreditation site visits to HBCUs.

**SEA Private  
(for profit)  
Sector**



Photograph courtesy of Dr. Fred Seamon

**Kenisha Thompson,  
Private  
(not-for-profit)  
Sector**



Photograph courtesy of Kenisha Thompson

Kenisha Thompson is the Corporate Training Lead Instructional Designer for Citizens Property Insurance Corporation. She is completing her M.S. degree in Instructional Systems; from The Florida State University with a focus in Performance Improvement and Human Resource Development. Her career has included applications in evaluating, designing, developing, and facilitating leadership and management training for not-for-profit and community-based organizations, business and industry, and the U.S. Navy. Kenisha presented a workshop on "Organization Cultural Transformation" at the 2009 SEA Annual Conference and is a member of American Society for Training and Development and the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI).

Dr. Lantry Brockmeier is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology at Valdosta State University. His professional experiences include being a middle school health educator, high school Biology teacher, evaluator, and psychometrician for a statewide testing program. Dr. Brockmeier's research interests include educational measurement, research methodology, high stakes testing, teacher efficacy, and teacher attribution theory.

**Lantry Brockmeier,  
University Sector  
Representative**



Photograph courtesy of Lantry Brockmeier

**Barbara Gill,  
Local Sector  
Representative**



Photograph courtesy of Dr. Barbara Gill

Dr. Barbara Gill is the Director of Educational Research at Tallahassee Community College (TCC). In that role, she assists instructional and non-instructional divisions of the College in assessing and evaluating their programs and services. She is a member of the College's Institutional Effectiveness and Planning Committee, and she serves as TCC's accreditation liaison to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Prior to joining TCC, she was a Research Associate at the Learning Systems Institute at Florida State University. She holds a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instructional Systems from the University of Minnesota and a Ph.D. in Instructional Systems from Florida State University.

John Austin has spent the last nine years serving public and non-profit organizations as an analyst and planner. His primary focus is in increasing productivity and effectiveness of programs. He currently works for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) as an internal consultant to the Director of the Division of Law Enforcement. In his prior employment, he has worked as a program evaluator for the DEP Office of Inspector General and for a not-for-profit consulting firm, WellFlorida Council, Inc., where he conducted program evaluations, needs assessments, and market plans. He has also held responsibility for strategic planning for the University of Florida Health Science Center, and has served as a commissioner on the Florida Transportation Disadvantaged Commission representing the Agency for Health Care Administration.

**John Austin,  
State Sector  
Representative**



Photograph courtesy of John Austin



## AEA Liaison Linda Schrader



Photograph courtesy of Dr. Linda Schrader

Dr. Schrader has a long history of involvement in SEA serving as one of its charter members in 1986, and as President ten years later. She is an Associate Professor in Program Evaluation in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Florida State University. Previous to this appointment in 2001, she worked as an evaluation consultant for 15 years, and was responsible for directing research and evaluation studies for various educational and human service organizations at both the federal and state levels. She enjoys a variety of outdoor activities: camping and hiking with her husband and daughter, and, when weather permits, saltwater fishing.

## A Letter of Invitation to Submit for Evaluation 2009

The theme of the 2009 presidential strand is "Context and Evaluation." As evaluators, we recognize that context matters. But what do we mean by context? Context typically refers to the setting (time and place) and broader environment in which the focus of the evaluation (evaluand) is located. Context also can refer to the historical context of the problem or phenomenon that the program or policy targets as well as the policy and decision-making context enveloping the evaluation. Context has multiple layers and is dynamic, changing over time.

Increasingly, we are aware of the need to shape our methods and overall approach to the context. Each of the dimensions within the context of an evaluation influences the approaches and methods that are possible, appropriate, and likely to produce actionable evidence. In tandem, some evaluations embrace context and include it within the study, rather than simply attempting to control its effects. Attention to context helps to produce findings that are

generalizable and useful to a broader set of stakeholders outside the local decision-making context.

Some of the questions we may begin to tackle at Evaluation 2009:

- What dimensions of context influence the type of evaluation questions that can be addressed?
- How does the nature of the political context influence utilization? How does it interact with the type of evaluation conducted?
- What dimensions of context influence method-choice?
- How does culture within context affect evaluation practice?
- How do our evaluation theories guide us in thinking about context?
- How can we learn about context in multisite studies?
- What are the implications of a context-sensitive evaluation for analysis and dissemination?

- How can we incorporate context into our evaluation inquiries?

Focusing on context at the conference will facilitate our ability to look across studies and produce an understanding of the ways context shapes the methods we use, the configuration of our study teams, the nature of the relationships we have, and strategies for disseminating our findings.

Through the theme, we will inform current debates and controversies in our field by eliciting information on how best to match methods to context to produce findings that can enlighten decision makers and inform actions. The conference provides an opportunity to address these debates through a rigorous examination of our collective experiences.

I am honored to serve as the 2009 President of AEA and am looking forward to a conference that will be both stimulating and fun. Our setting next year is one you will not want to miss.

*"I invite you to submit a proposal to present at Evaluation 2009!"*

*- Debra Rog, 2009  
AEA President*

For those of you who want to build in time before or after the conference, we are in an ideal location to take in all that Orlando has to offer.

Moreover, within the resort itself, there are many opportunities for recreation and fun, from lazing around beside one of the four heated pools, to pampering at the spa, to a round of golf, or an afternoon of canoeing or walking the resort's trails by the creek.

I invite you to submit a proposal to present at Evaluation 2009!

Debra Rog  
2009 AEA President

**SOUTHEAST EVALUATION  
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We're on the web!  
[www.southeastevaluation.com](http://www.southeastevaluation.com)

The **Southeast Evaluation Association (SEA)** is a regional affiliate of the American Evaluation Association. We represent evaluators and evaluation-related professionals from the state, university, school system (local) and private sectors. Our members come from a variety of backgrounds: policy analysis, program auditing, teaching, program evaluation, and performance measurement. SEA's annual conference attracts nationally recognized speakers and participants from the entire southeast region. Several agencies use our programs and conferences as low cost training and networking opportunities for their employees.

**Annual membership** (\$30; \$10 for full-time students) offers reduced registration fees for the Annual Conference, Pre-Conference Workshop, Essential Skills Workshop, and the various training sessions held throughout the year. Members also receive a periodic newsletter throughout the year. The newsletter is a great way to keep up with the SEA activities and innovative research in the field of evaluation. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to **email** us.

## *Suggestions*

SEA welcomes all ideas for topics for future workshops, brown bag lunches, and conference sessions. Please contact Bernadette Howard ([seacoordinator@southeastevaluation.com](mailto:seacoordinator@southeastevaluation.com)) with your ideas!

## *Thank You*

Many thanks for getting this newsletter out are due to the diligent work of the Newsletter Production Crew:

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