

A Somewhat Longer ‘Brief History’ of the Southwest Educational Research Association (SERA)¹



Bruce Thompson,²
SERA Executive Director *Emeritus* / Historian

There are various ways to “date” the creation of an Educational Research Association (e.g., the date of the first oral agreement to form, the date the first By-Laws were initially approved). But I chose to “date” the creation of an ERA as the date of the ERA’s first annual meeting. As these current remarks were recently presented as the “Historian’s Report” in the February 19, 2026 annual Business Luncheon at the 49th annual SERA meeting in New Orleans, obviously I consider SERA to be roughly 49 years old.

SERA was created for two reasons. First, there was a feeling that AERA had grown too formal and somewhat inaccessible due to its large size. Second, there was a feeling that AERA did not provide an ideal venue for mentoring graduate

© Copyright, Bruce Thompson, 2026. All rights reserved.

¹ One of the other “Founders” of SERA, **John Hedl, Jr.**, previously in 2009 posted to the web a somewhat *brief* “brief history” of SERA: <https://sera-edresearch.org/history>. Sadly, John passed in June, 2014.

² **Bruce Thompson** was an inaugural “Co-Founder” of SERA. Prior to retirement Bruce was Distinguished Professor and College Distinguished Research Fellow of Educational Psychology, Distinguished Professor of Library Science, Texas A&M University, and Adjunct Professor of Allied Health Sciences, Baylor College of Medicine (Houston).

students. This second reason, in fact, was the *primary* motivation for creating SERA. Students were, and always have been, the primary focus of SERA. If you ask the current SERA Board members whether SERA was the first professional conference at which they presented a professional research paper I would not be surprised if the vast majority, or even all of them, said, “SERA”!

In these early days AERA was not sure what to make of the new and emerging State and Regional Educational Research Associations (SRERA’s). The state and regional ERA’s are not controlled or governed by AERA. Of course, AERA felt that it would be appropriate to help the state and regional ERA’s because that would impact education and educational research more broadly. So, AERA initially offered exactly two forms of support:

1. AERA offered to provide the new state and regional ERA’s with postal mailing labels for all the AERA members living in given states or regions. This was very important because this was before e-mail and later cell phones had been invented.
2. AERA also offered to identify and facilitate the participation of prominent AERA scholars to serve as SRERA keynote speakers. Of course, AERA did not offer to pay the travel expenses of these SRERA keynote speakers!

After a half dozen years or so of its initial existence SERA created the annual “SERA Outstanding Paper Award”. Subsequently, several SRERA’s combined to form the AERA Consortium of State and Regional Educational Research Associations and each year the Consortium hosts 3 or 4 AERA sessions in which the various SRERA “Outstanding Paper Award” winners present their research at the AERA annual meeting. The annual “SERA Outstanding Paper Award” winner receives a cash stipend to help defray any travel expenses associated with presenting the SERA winner’s paper at AERA.

Naturally, there have been various other changes in SERA’s structure and functioning over the years:

1. After about 5 years the SERA Program Chair position was modified from being a Presidential Appointment to being merged with the office of SERA President-Elect.
2. After about 10 years the SERA Board was changed from 6 members with 2-year terms to 9 members each with 3-year terms.

3. After about 25 years (in 2000) the appointed office of SERA Executive Director was created and I became the first SERA Executive Director. After serving 15 years I resigned in 2014 during the annual SERA Business Luncheon and the then SERA Deputy Director, Linda Reichwein Zientek, Sam Hoston State University, became SERA Executive Director. Linda served for 11 years until she resigned and the then SERA Deputy Director, Forrest Lane, Stephen F. Austin University, became the SERA Executive Director.³

Over the past roughly 50 years SERA has met in various locations. For the first roughly 35 years *all* the SERA annual meetings were held *only* in Texas cities. For a long time initially, there was a regular Dallas-Austin-San Antonio rotation with Houston also in the mix. Then about 15 years ago we met for the first time in New Orleans at the historic Monteleone Hotel. For the last few years SERA has alternated annually meeting at the New Orleans Monteleone Hotel and the historic San Antonio Menger Hotel.

Over the years SERA has faced various challenges. For the first 25 years or so SERA met (1) Thursday through Saturday and (2) in mid-to-late January. Of course, this meant we inevitably confronted some ice storms. One of the *very first* SERA annual meetings more than 45 years ago was at the San Antonio St. Anthony Hotel. The ice storm hit just as people were trying to get there. The annual SERA Business Luncheon included only about 6 SERA members (including me) who had somehow managed to get to San Antonio. The number of hotel waiters in the luncheon room exceeded the number of SERA members and the hotel waiters indeed were not happy!

In 1985, the year I was SERA President, SERA met in what was called a “motel” (i.e., the Villa Capri Motel) situated on I-35 in Austin. Guess what? An ice storm hit and only about half the SERA members arrived in time for the conference and the other half could *never* get there! The ice on surfaces was so thick that we could barely walk across the parking lot to the motel restaurant and that restaurant, being unable to get re-supplied, ran out of numerous food choices quite quickly! SERA also faced ice storms hampering travel to and/or from the SERA annual

³ You may wish to be *very cautious* about accepting any SERA job title containing the word “Deputy” (e.g., Deputy Executive Director, Deputy Treasurer)!

meetings once also in Dallas and also later a second time in San Antonio. So, we eventually figured this out, and then SERA began instead meeting (1) Wednesday through Friday and (2) in February or early March rather than in January! We believe that the later scheduling change (i.e., not the shift to Wednesday through Friday) was what helped lessen SERA ice storm challenges!

Roughly 28 years ago, in 1998, SERA created the “John J. Hedl, Jr. Lifetime Service Award”, and the first recipient was, you guessed it, John J. Hedl, Jr., the first SERA Historian. The expectation for the “John J. Hedl, Jr. Lifetime Service Award” was that the recipient *must* have contributed at the very least 20+ years of *continuous* service to SERA. But it was also recognized that SERA members may have contributed *very important* but *less sustained* service to SERA and in 2007 the first “SERA Extended Service Award” was presented to Kathy Mittag, UTSA, sometimes known as the “President’s Suite Marguerita-Maker Maven.”

Of course, any organization almost 50 years old must have faced various crises. For example, SERA has *never* sponsored a journal. But around 25 years ago SERA did create an annual book series, Advances in Educational Research. I was the first SERA Book Series Editor. I edited the submitted SERA papers and had the book printed by the Texas A&M University Printing Department. I arranged with a commercial publisher to sell and distribute copies of the books in the annual SERA Book Series. After the first book was published and distributed initially at the next SERA annual conference the first SERA “crisis” occurred. Our SERA Treasurer at this time developed a life-threatening illness and subsequently became too ill to function and so moved to Colorado. Unfortunately, our treasury was unavailable to us for many, many months, though we did eventually recover all our monies, but that killed the SERA Annual Book Series. Our SERA Annual Book Series is probably the *only* 1-volume annual book series *ever* known to academia!

SERA’s second major difficulty when a new SERA President-Elect/Program Chair stepped down from that role. So, the SERA Board then named a former SERA President, Shirley Matteson, Texas Tech University, to be the new SERA President-Elect/Program Chair. This is why so many SERA members call Shirley, often to her face, the “SERA Grover Cleveland”, or simply, “Grover”, because she is the *only* person in SERA’s roughly 49-year history to have served two terms, indeed two *non-contiguous* terms (just like U.S. President Grover Cleveland) as SERA President!

Thus, SERA now continues its march into its sixth decade. I do not know exactly what the next years will bring. But I somewhat confidently predict (1) some more crises and (2) a continued SERA focus on mentoring graduate students! And hopefully *no more* ice storms!

To see a video of Bruce lecturing on “How to Publish Scholarly Research”
CLICK:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emL_SsxiPBg

To read Bruce’s web page lessons on “How to Play Bridge” CLICK:

<https://esther-bridge.com/index.html>

To see 2 bears frolicking in the front yard of Bruce’s Carolinas’ retirement mountain home CLICK:

<https://esther-bridge.com/jpg/2bears.mp4>