



*Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast* | **TRANSCRIPT**  
Episode 22: Virtual 106th NCA Annual Convention Update

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**\*\*Please note: This is a rough transcription of this audio podcast. This transcript is not edited for spelling, grammar, or punctuation.\*\***

**Participants:**

Trevor Parry-Giles  
David T. McMahan

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**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Welcome to *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*. I'm Trevor Parry-Giles, the Executive Director of the National Communication Association. The National Communication Association is the preeminent scholarly association devoted to the study and teaching of communication. Founded in 1914, NCA is a thriving group of thousands from across the nation and around the world who are committed to a collective mission to advance communication as an academic discipline. In keeping with NCA's mission to advance the discipline of communication, NCA has developed this podcast series to expand the reach of our member scholars' work and perspectives.

**Introduction:**

This is *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*.

**David T. McMahan:**

This year gathering together and meeting is going to be that much more important given the cancellation of other conventions this year. This will mark one of the first times people have an opportunity to come together as a community. That interaction, even virtually, is going to be refreshing and renewing. I know I for one am just looking so forward to it.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Hi, listeners. Welcome again to *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*. This year in 2020, NCA is holding its 106th annual convention and the theme of the convention is Communication at the Crossroads. Thousands of scholars are going to attend the 2020 convention, this year for the first time in history a fully virtual convention. And they'll be engaging in deep discussions about many topics related to communication. As a preview, what we've done today is invite the first vice president of NCA, David T. McMahan to join the podcast and talk about some of the highlights of the convention. First, a bit more about attending and registering for the NCA annual convention. This year NCA has discounted memberships by half for all members who make less than \$100,000 annually and all current members can register for the annual convention for free.



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Synchronous programming and special events will take place November 19th through the 22nd and attendees should note that if they plan on attending any live virtual pre-conference sessions, those are scheduled for November 18th. That's a Wednesday. Attendees can watch asynchronous convention programming beginning on November 1st and you still have time to register if you're interested in attending. So, everybody who wants to come join us in the virtual world of the NCA annual convention should visit [natcom.org/convention](http://natcom.org/convention) for more information.

My guest today is NCA's first vice president David T. McMahan and for listeners who may be new to NCA, the first vice president is in charge of planning the program for the annual convention. That's their main job responsibility. Dr. McMahan is also a professor of communication at Missouri Western State University and researches social aspects of media and technology, personal relationships and rhetorical criticism. Dr. McMahan has published more than 10 books including *Internet Communication*, *Introduction to Communication Criticism*, *Relational Communication*, *The Basics of Communication* and the best-selling *Communication in Everyday Life* series. Hi, David. Welcome to Communication Matters.

**David T. McMahan:**

Hi, Trevor. Thanks for having me.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

So, this big responsibility that the first vice president has for planning the program for the annual convention, what was your favorite part of doing that?

**David T. McMahan:**

Well, probably the answer for most academics is just learning. Through this, you learn a greater understanding of the expansiveness and the strength of the discipline and the association. And it wasn't just the strength in terms of scholarship, it's the strength in terms of our perseverance. What still amazed me whenever the submissions were due earlier in the year, we were in the height of the pandemic when it was still largely unknown—not that we know a great deal more now. But at that time, people weren't leaving their homes. Whenever their packages were delivered, they were sprayed with disinfectant and remained by the doorstep for a few days. And nevertheless, the number of submissions were on par with the previous years. And so, as a discipline, as an association, we are persevering. We're strong as academics and we're strong as scholars.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

One of the primary responsibilities that go along with planning the program is picking a theme and the theme you chose was Communication at the Crossroads. What does it mean to you? What can we take from it I guess?



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**David T. McMahan:**

Well, originally crossroads with crossroads of America, Indiana. It was of course originally going to be in Indiana and the motto of Indiana is crossroads of America. So, that was a handy-dandy theme right there linking it in. But more than that, crossroads symbolized connection and convergence of scholarship. What I like to see is people coming together and sharing their ideas across the areas of the discipline. So, often if someone studies media, they study media and nothing else. Someone studies relationships, they study relationships and nothing else. Yet there's so much more we can learn by coming together and talking with people outside our areas of expertise. So, I wanted to kind of convey the need to do that and the importance of doing that through the theme. Another is whenever you come to a crossroads, you have an opportunity for choice and direction, taking one way, taking another way, deciding one road is good, one road isn't so good. And so, it symbolizes choice and direction for our research and our teaching. And it also symbolized choice and direction for the discipline. Now more than ever we're at a place of transformation in the discipline and our association. And that theme encourages people to take part in some of those important conversations that take place through the association conventions each year.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Do you think there are any layers of meaning that come to the theme and this notion of communication at the crossroads as a result of the global pandemic?

**David T. McMahan:**

This year, gathering together and meeting is going to be that much more important. Given the cancellation of other conventions this year, this will mark one of the first times people have an opportunity to come together as a community. That interaction even virtually is going to be refreshing and renewing. I know I for one am just looking so forward to it.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

I think that's probably right and one of the things that most people, many people look forward to at our annual conventions every year are the signature events, the opening session, the Carroll Arnold lecture, the presidential address and awards presentation. All of those are still going to happen. They're going to happen virtually and they're going to happen synchronously usually in Eastern Time. And so, the opening session which we are happy to have sponsored by the Waterhouse Family Institute for the Study of Communication and Society is this year going to be about "Mental Health at the Crossroads: Intersections in Health and Society". It'll be Thursday night, November 19th from 5:00 to 6:30. Can you tell us more about that panel and what they're going to be discussing, who's going to be on it, what people can look forward to for the opening session?



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**David T. McMahan:**

Yeah. Well, the panelists will be David Berman who's part of the Mental Health America of Indiana, Diane Francis at the University of Kentucky, Emily Krebs who's at the University of Utah and Gary Kreps of George Mason University. And panelists will examine the ways in which mental health intersects with race, gender, sexual orientation, educational attainment and income. So, it brings together scholars and Indianapolis community leaders whose work is dedicated to understandings of mental health and social justice. I chose this because I always felt the discipline of communication could contribute a great deal to issues of mental health. It's not my area of expertise. I've never done any work in the area. But I think scholars of communication would have a lot to say and can make a valuable contribution to that area. So, I'm really looking forward to that opening session.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

So, that'll be synchronously Thursday night, November 19th from 5:00 to 6:30 P.M. Eastern Time. You can do the math for those of you on the West Coast and you'll hopefully join us at two o'clock in the afternoon for the opening session of the 106th annual convention. Now every year and it's been this way for many years, we have a Carroll C. Arnold distinguished lecture and this year you've chosen and again, this is one of the responsibilities of the first vice president is to select the Arnold lecturer. You've chosen one of our newest distinguished scholars, Professor Tom Nakayama of Northeastern University. And so, his Arnold lecture will be Friday, November 20th also from five to six o'clock P.M. Eastern Time. Nakayama is going to talk about the challenge of global whiteness. And boy, is that timely or what? Did he plan on doing that before the summer or is this just a very timely topic for Tom to discuss?

**David T. McMahan:**

Well, whenever I asked Tom to deliver the lecture, I told him talk about whatever he wants because I knew whatever he did, he could talk about the weather and it was going to be wonderful. He's just a tremendous scholar and I couldn't have asked for a better topic. It's incredibly important. I wanted someone whose work transcends particular areas. You don't want to go to lecture if you are a media scholar and they're just talking about relationships in spite of what I said earlier about I want people to listen in. You want something that would attract the largest number of people in the association and the discipline and work that transcends a particular area. So, this goes beyond intercultural communication or critical cultural studies. Whiteness is not simply about racialization but about a much larger entrenched system that's shaped by local, national contexts. All areas of communication are impacted by whiteness. And so, this is going to be a tremendously important presentation. And just like mental health, it's not one of my areas of expertise or study. So, I'm looking really forward to see what he has to say.



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**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

For listeners who may not be able to listen synchronously to the Arnold lecture or the opening session, as every year, we tape and we'll make available to anybody, the broader public, these really important discussions because I think you're right. Tom's topic is both fascinating and timely and important. And if I know anything about Tom Nagayama, it'll be a gang buster of a lecture too. So, that'll be good. On Saturday night, November 21st from 5:00 to 6:30 P.M., there's a double header. We have the presidential address and then we have the annual NCA awards presentation. NCA President Kent Ono from the University of Utah is scheduled to focus his address mostly on civic activism and social justice. How important do you think Kent's topic is given our current circumstances?

**David T. McMahan:**

Oh, incredibly important once again. Increasingly, people are looking at how their scholarship and professional engagement can not only advance the discipline but also make an impact on the world. And it's important for many people in the association but especially younger scholars. Younger scholars often ask about the value of being in a professional association like NCA. Well, membership helps support the discipline but more personally, they can gain access to information, tools, social network to assist in making a social impact and making their scholarship even more meaningful than it is already. I'm really looking forward to that. Kent's an incredible scholar, even a better person and he's going to be a hard act to follow whenever I have to do it next year.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Yeah. You'll have to give your address perhaps in Seattle. That's the hope. Right. A lot of the social activists and social justice folks in our discipline I've noted are receiving awards and that's obviously to the good and nicely consistent with Kent's address. We're going to honor those recipients following Kent Ono's speech that same Saturday night and of course, we congratulate all of the award recipients, the NCA award recipients. It's a time of kind of uncertainty for higher education. A lot of schools are facing budget realities and enrollment pressures and a variety of concerns. Why is it important for us to come together and give out awards in this time of uncertainty do you think?

**David T. McMahan:**

I don't know. Sometimes, in the simplest, you just need to celebrate and you just need to honor and gain some sense of normalcy. And it does highlight the sense that we're continuing to move forward, continuing to advance in spite of all that's going on in the world. Pandemic and otherwise, we are still moving forward. We're still doing great things and it's just a good thing to come together and honor one another and celebrate the small victories in life.



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**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Yeah, that's good. One of the other fun parts of planning the program for the annual convention is coming up with a special series. And so, you have the Communication at the Crossroads series of sessions and they're going to look at a variety of things, COVID-19 and higher ed, the shift to online instruction, the future of the discipline, the future of associations like NCA and all the other communication associations that we're part of. What are some of the insights that you're hoping folks will get from these different sessions?

**David T. McMahan:**

Well, one in particular I'm especially excited about is administrators discussing the discipline and its future. And this is an idea I actually took from you. You went to a convention of another learned society and they featured administrators who were talking about that particular area. And as you mentioned a little while ago, there are faculty cuts, communication scholars departments are competing with other disciplines for scarce financial resources. And so, what this particular session will do will bring together various administrators to share how the discipline of communication is generally understood and viewed by their counterparts. Then they'll also talk about what changes to expect through the next decade, specifically focused on the discipline of communication and what can be done to ensure its advancement. Those in attendance can gain a greater understanding of administrators at their own institutions and an awareness of what they might do to advance and secure their departments in the coming year. Got some great presenters on that one. Brooke Barnett from Butler, Shawn Long, Kennesaw State, Jeanette Muir, George Mason, Janetta Sims, the University of Central Oklahoma and Shawn Wahl who's at Missouri State University. So, that should be a really, really good program. Another one is just the difficult decisions and the future of our associations. That'll bring together former presidents, current presidents, executive directors of communication associations and talk about what being an association means and what do we do moving forward. These are trying times not just for departments but also for associations and how we need to serve our members and advance the discipline. Those attending that will have a greater understanding of the discipline, how people function and decision making processes in academics. And then another one is going to look at COVID-19, the implications for instruction and communication. This will be one of the first times that research is shared about what happened during the shutdown initially in beginning of the year, how people addressed it, what they learned from it and what we need to do moving forward. So, should be a lot of fun. Should be a really enjoyable series.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

I know you and I have talked about this before and one of the most gratifying parts of our annual convention is walking up and down the hallways and bumping into old friends or going to a session of a scholar that you've never met before but getting to know them more fully or bumping into somebody at a reception that you've always wanted to meet and finally get the opportunity to do



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it. We call all of this networking and how that happens at our annual convention is usually based on the fact that we're all in a strange city somewhere together or in a hotel together face-to-face. What are we going to do this year? What are our opportunities for networking virtually at the NCA convention?

**David T. McMahan:**

Well, it's going to be a challenge but there's still going to be opportunities for people to come together to discuss and to visit with one another and just interact in general. During his convention that he planned in Salt Lake City, Star Muir developed the NCA evening playlist and he's agreed to continue that this year. There's going to be opportunities for people to take part in Zumba and guided meditation and he informs me the very first NCA costume and dance party. So, it should be interesting. I think my costume will probably be professor. I don't know how inspired that might be but that's what I'm going to go as. And then also there's something that we're going to be using called Discord. And Discord is very popular with younger people and I don't know much about it but I'm looking forward to it. And not to turn around questions on hosts but what can you tell me about Discord, Trevor?

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Well, you're right. It's about younger people and it tends to be widely used. What it does nicely is allow participants to set up special chat areas. They're almost like rooms but not really. They're characterized by hashtags. And so, you could do it on just about any topic, any interest group meeting, that sort of thing. And then people enter into that discussion. It also allows people to upload video of themselves speaking. It's not necessarily synchronous video discussion. So, it's not like Facetime or anything along those lines. But you can put up a video of yourself or something else onto the Discord thing with a hashtag that gets it into a conversation. I think it'll be a nice way to try and get some networking and conversation going a little more spontaneous, not all bound up within all of the sessions and the meetings and all of that. So, knock on wood, hopefully, it'll go well.

**David T. McMahan:**

It's what all the cool kids are using. So, it's an appropriate communication scholars are there.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

That's right. A lot of those cool kids are the graduate students who come to the convention and we know looking over our registration statistics that a lot of the people who come to our convention every year are graduate students or master's students and a lot of undergraduate students come to the convention. Some of them are going to be concerned about where the career center stands and the graduate student open house. I can say that these events will be happening virtually.



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Could you talk a little bit more about how we're going to forge these events in ways that can be of great assistance to these prospective and current graduate students?

**David T. McMahan:**

Yeah. Well, I'm glad we were able to continue both of these because it's very important for those who are, especially those who are just starting out in the discipline. We'll continue with the graduate school open house. This year there'll be video presentations for participating schools. So, we're showcasing their program, their faculty, their campus. And then the career center, there'll be the job fair which will highlight available jobs. There'll be CV consulting. So, these will be online, one-on-one discussions where people can polish their vita. And then there's going to be three prep talks which will be short presentations for job seekers. And so, it should be really valuable.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Those prep talks continue something that we've been doing the last few years at the convention itself and again, like with the big opening sessions and the like, we make them available on NCA's YouTube channel and on our website. So, that's great. I know we've had a pretty robust registration attendance to the graduate student open house. So, I've been pleased about that. It's good to know that our graduate programs are still going to be out there trying to entice young prospective students to come to their programs. All of this is going to happen and the information about those events, the job fair and the graduate student open house are all found in the program in Convention Central which is a platform that many of our listeners are going to be very familiar with because it's been used by NCA for so many years. And they can put together personal schedules in that platform. What are some of the highlights on your schedule?

**David T. McMahan:**

Oh, there's a few. I hate to highlight. They're all going to be good which is probably the standard answer you want to hear from the program planner. One in particular though I'm looking forward to is the Carolyn Calloway-Thomas inclusivity speaker series, "Black Women in the Discipline: Academy and Beyond." Carolyn Calloway-Thomas is one of my personal heroes, just a wonderful person. I know you worked with her whenever you were at Indiana University getting your PhD.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

She was our grad director when I was there.

**David T. McMahan:**

Oh, is that right?





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**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Yeah, yeah.

**David T. McMahan:**

Yeah. But the Carolyn Calloway-Thomas inclusivity speaker series was developed for the Central States Communication Association. This was supposed to be its inaugural year before that convention was canceled due to the pandemic. So, as first vice president, I sponsored this panel which features some of the speakers which are going to be taking part this year. So, it should be a lot of fun. I'm looking really forward to that one.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

That's good. I don't know about you but I've been going to NCA conventions since 1984 and I have several very positive wonderful memories of those conventions. What's your favorite memory of an NCA annual convention?

**David T. McMahan:**

Oh, so many good memories. Probably the highlight and I think it's a highlight for many people is my very first one. It was 1996 in San Diego and it just so happened my mentor Jim Chesebro was president that year and my first NCA, my mentor is president and I took a look around and said this is what I want to do. Just so many special memories. I haven't missed one since.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Funny story. At that one when my partner and I got to the hotel, our room wasn't available. I don't know. There'd been some glitch. We ended up getting a presidential suite that the hotel had to give us and boy, it was luxurious and it was the suite that Bob Dole had stayed at when the Republican National Convention was in San Diego. So, yeah, that was—we only got it for one night. We had to move.

**David T. McMahan:**

Yeah. You got to experience it.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Yeah. It was nice. But that is not my favorite memory of an NCA convention but it is one. What about future conventions? The leadership of NCA and all of us are thinking ahead to 2021 and beyond and we've got our sites selected for several years down the road. But what do you think is going to happen? What changes can we plan on and what advice are you going to give to Roseanne Mandziuk and other program planners to come and what have you learned and what can we take forward for future conventions there?



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**David T. McMahan:**

Yeah, I guess my advice would be plan one taking place in person. That would be nice. But it's been a challenge this year but it's been really enjoyable. So, there's a lot to be said about tradition but there's also a lot to be said about change and adjusting. And I think within all of education, within the university, college level and even with an association, we recognize that change is taking place whether we like it or not. And I think we're all moving toward the virtual. We would have been there eventually but just like with teaching, we got there a little bit quicker than we had anticipated. So, I think we're going to see more virtual experiences as virtual capabilities increase and people become increasingly used to the virtual experience. And in terms of the advice I would give to future planners is just enjoy it. There's a tremendous amount of work and sleepless nights but you learn so much and receive so much satisfaction from serving the associate in the discipline. So, just take time out and enjoy the experience.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Well, you share a distinction with only one of your predecessors. NCA has never canceled or dramatically altered as we are this year its annual convention except for 1918 when in the midst of the Great War and another pandemic. We decided to not host the fourth annual convention.

**David T. McMahan:**

Well, the internet connection wasn't very good back then.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

No, no. That's a distinction you share with Howard Woodward who was the president at the time. But yeah, I think you're right. I don't know. I'm curious about your thoughts on this. I'm anticipating that people are going to be adjusting to the new virtual but at the same time really nostalgic for and missing the face-to-face. And when it becomes feasible for us to do it again, do you think people are going to want to come back to our convention and other conventions? Or is it an obsolete thing that has gone away?

**David T. McMahan:**

I really do. I think people are going to flock to Seattle and ideally, we'll be in Seattle next year. And as soon as we're able to travel, as soon as we're able to meet face-to-face once again, people are going to start coming back. Now, again, at some point as technological advances continue, we're going to get a lot of that face-to-face interaction through the virtual experience and we already do that to a certain extent but we're not at that same level just yet. And so, we still need to have that face-to-face interaction. If nothing else, we need to feel a sense of normalcy once again.



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**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

I think you're right and here's hoping that we rebound as a country, as a world and get ready for Seattle in 2021. But in the meantime, listeners, I hope you will join us for the virtual 106th annual NCA convention throughout the month of November. Again, please visit [natcom.org/convention](http://natcom.org/convention), [natcom.org/convention](http://natcom.org/convention) for more information and to register. And thanks, David, so much for this great preview and this great discussion of what's to come next month and off into the future. It's been great having you on Communication Matters.

**David T. McMahan:**

Oh, thanks for having me, Trevor. I really appreciate it.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

So, we do want to wish all the participants the best in their presentations and in their participation with the, as I've said before, virtual 106th NCA annual convention. In NCA news, I want to highlight a few facts about the upcoming NCA annual convention. To view the convention guide, best practices documents and more, visit [natcom.org/convention](http://natcom.org/convention). You may have seen some of these facts in recent weeks on NCA's social media accounts and if you Tweet or post about these facts, please use the hashtag NCA20Fact or hashtag NCA20. First, all synchronous sessions for the virtual 106th annual NCA convention are scheduled in Eastern Time. If you're planning on attending a synchronous session or event, please mark your calendar accordingly. All those synchronous sessions are scheduled for Eastern Standard Time in November. Second, while registration is free for all NCA members whose membership is current through December 1, members still need to register for the convention to access the virtual content. So, be sure to register online at [natcom.org/convention](http://natcom.org/convention) if you plan on attending. Finally, all synchronous sessions will be recorded and uploaded in NCA Convention Central following the convention. If you miss any sessions or presentations during the convention, you can catch them online until December 31st. If you have registered for the annual convention. And listeners, mark your calendars for the next episode of communication matters on November 12th. The episode will be of special interest to NCA members because I'll be chatting with the two candidates running for NCA second vice president this year, Professor Walid Afifi of the University of California at Santa Barbara and Professor Bonnie Dow of Vanderbilt University. So, I hope you'll tune in to this important episode about the future of NCA before you vote in the December NCA elections.

Be sure to engage with us on social media by liking us on Facebook, following NCA on Twitter and Instagram and watching us on YouTube. And before you go, hit subscribe wherever you get your podcasts to listen in as we discuss emerging scholarship, establish theory and new applications, all exploring just how much Communication Matters in our classrooms, in our communities and in our world. See you next time.



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**Conclusion:**

*Communication Matters* is hosted by NCA Executive Director Trevor Parry-Giles and is recorded in our national office in downtown Washington DC. The podcast is recorded and produced by Assistant Director for Digital Strategies Chelsea Bowes with writing support from Director of External Affairs and Publications Wendy Fernando and Content Development Specialist Grace Hébert. Thank you for listening.

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