



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 23: Conversation with NCA Second Vice President Candidates

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

Walid Afifi

Bonnie Dow

[Audio Length: 01:02:44]

RECORDING BEGINS

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*.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

In December, members will be asked to vote in the 2020 NCA election. In the spirit of informed participation, today on *Communication Matters*, we'll hear from the two candidates running for NCA second vice president, Professor Walid Afifi of the University of California at Santa Barbara and Professor Bonnie Dow of Vanderbilt University. Professors Afifi and Dow will each share their experience and their vision for the future of NCA. Before we discuss the candidates themselves, I would like to provide a bit of background on the role of second vice president. The second vice president serves on NCA's executive committee and leadership development committee. After their first year as second vice president, they become the first vice president and serve as the primary program planner of the NCA annual convention during that year. So, Walid or Bonnie, whoever wins this election, will serve as the primary program planner for our 2022 convention scheduled for New Orleans, Louisiana. After one year as first vice president, the first vice president then becomes the NCA president.



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Now a bit of information about our two candidates. Walid Afifi is a professor of interpersonal health communication and director of The Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of California Santa Barbara. Professor Afifi has authored or co-authored more than 70 articles, chapters and books and served as chair of the interpersonal communication division for both the NCA and the International Communication Association. Dr. Afifi also served as the chair of the task force responsible for conceiving NCA's Center for Communication, Community Collaboration and Change. And recently, Professor Afifi's research has focused on immigrant communities and communities experiencing trauma. Walid, thanks so much for running and for joining us today on *Communication Matters*.

Walid Afifi:

Thanks for hosting us. It's a really incredible honor to be doing this and also to be doing this with Professor Dow. It's definitely a highlight of my career.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Bonnie Dow is a professor of communication studies and dean of academic affairs for the College of Arts and Science at Vanderbilt University. Dr. Dow researches in the areas of rhetoric, representation and feminism in the United States. Professor Dow is the author of *Watching Women's Liberation, 1970: Feminism's Pivotal Year on the Network News* as well as *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture and the Women's Movement since 1970*. A former editor of *Critical Studies in Media Communication* and the journal *Women's Studies in Communication*, Dr. Dow has also served as chair of NCA's publications council and is a former chair of NCA's doctoral education committee. Hi, Bonnie. Thanks for joining us today on *Communication Matters*.

Bonnie Dow:

Hi, Trevor. Hi, Walid. I'm really happy to be here.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

So, you're all vying for this exalted leadership position within the National Communication Association and NCA and it would be great if you could tell our listeners a little bit about your experiences in leadership roles, particularly within NCA and talk about your leadership experience overall. And I guess we'll go alphabetically so we can start with Walid and have him tell us a little bit about his leadership capacities.

Walid Afifi:

Thanks, Trevor. So, in thinking about this, I was thinking back, trying to look back to the first I guess really involvement, service involvement with NCA. And it was almost now 30 years ago which is brings mixed feelings. But it was the second year in grad school. I was the reader for the student section in 1992 and then soon later, I was the reader for the interpersonal division. So,



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I've been involved in NCA for a long time. But my first leadership role I guess was I was elected as vice chair for the interpersonal division in 2003. Then became, of course, the division chair. Represented the division in legislative assembly. And then from there, I was asked to join the NCA units task force in 2009 which was a really great experience in terms of really trying to figure out, getting a better sense for the unit structure and what changes might have been needed. Then I was asked to go on the bylaws task force right after and that was also really insightful in terms of the bylaws and some of the changes part of which was to create a more inclusive sort of decision making structure. And then the task force on inclusivity in the discipline which I actually spent four years and as I'll talk about later was sort of my really entree into really taking on inclusivity as a strong commitment of mine. And then that ultimately also led to the diversity council which we currently have. And most recently, Ron Jackson asked me to be chair of a task force that produced, as you mentioned, the NCA Center for Community, Collaboration and Change. That ended in 2019.

Outside of NCA, I was chair of the University of Iowa which was my undergraduate alma mater and that was a great experience. I was there for three years as chair. And I've served graduate director of both Penn State and UCSB. And also, as you mentioned, I'm currently director of The Center for Middle Eastern Studies. I've also served leadership roles at ICA including chair of their interpersonal division and on their task force which I'll talk about later tied to inclusivity and diversity. So, that's probably what I would say is my sort of highlights of my leadership roles with focus on NCA.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Great. Bonnie.

Bonnie Dow:

Hi. So, I was a department chair here at Vanderbilt for 10 years and I've now been an associate dean for three years in The College of Arts and Science and those are different kinds of leadership although they have some consistencies between them. The major similarity that I see in them is that in both cases, I've worked to create the conditions that support faculty members to do their best work in both research and teaching. Within NCA, I've had a variety of leadership roles over the past 30 years. I think it's amusing that Walid and I have the same span here for talking about leadership. And those roles in NCA range from serving on multiple committees, award committees, for instance, as well as say the doctoral education committee to attending the convention every year to editing an NCA journal. I edited *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* about 15 years ago. Perhaps most important to my decision to pursue a leadership role as an officer was my recent service as chair of the publications council which oversees, of course, the very large publications program of NCA and its 11 journals which also led to me serving as a



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member of the executive committee and the legislative assembly although I had done an earlier stint on the legislative assembly as well.

But generally, participating in decision making on behalf of the association, being exposed to the breadth of concerns across NCA's membership and experiencing firsthand the dedication of the officers and the NCA staff, I was really convinced of NCA's importance to the growth and development of its members into the field of communication as a whole. And so, it made me deeply interested in the possibility of running for office in NCA. I should also say that serving as an associate dean for the past three years, I've developed a much broader view of higher ed, both its long-standing problems and its potential to really change people's lives. And scholarly societies like NCA serve a key role in higher education. They support scholarship through journal publication. I'm intimately familiar with that. But they also foster networking and exposure to cutting-edge research through conferences and they promote professional development in countless ways. So, I think that there is a lot of overlap between the kinds of concerns that I have now as an associate dean and the kinds of concerns that an NCA officer deals with.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

As you all both know, the communication discipline is pretty vast, pretty wide. It encompasses a number of what we might call sub areas or subfields or specialties. And in many ways, the president of NCA has to traverse across a variety of constituencies in the association. I'm curious as to what you would describe as your sort of guiding philosophy in that regard and how would that motivate a complete understanding of your goals and priorities for NCA for let's say the next five years, bringing together this vast conglomeration of academics?

Walid Afifi:

A guiding philosophy that I really sort of take on increasingly but sort of generally as I approach any role that I take, certainly in terms of service, certainly in terms of leadership is to sort of walk in this world with humility. And an integral part of that commitment is vulnerability and listening and that's something that is always a work in progress but it's something that I really strive to do. So, one of the sort of guiding philosophies that I certainly would have is to really create spaces of decision making where voices that have been left out are welcomed in. It's often not an easy task. In fact, it's often a very difficult task especially since historical structures are set up to prevent that. NCA is better than many organizations on this front. In some ways though, it's too often I hear that it has a ways to go especially from minoritized groups. And so, there's real work to do in any leadership spaces including NCA to really create spaces for everyone to be able to participate and to sort of reflect their experience.

But I'll also carry lessons I've learned in other service sort of roles I've played. I remember very distinctly my first year at Iowa, I wanted to create a department culture that was centrally engaged



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with the community. There was already that culture but I wanted to kind of push it even further and began a series that we called community conversations. And the first call I made was to leaders in the local black community. The black community had grown in size in Iowa City and still is growing in size and was really experiencing the really deeply embedded structures of systemic racism. It's a liberal, progressive city. It's a great city. I love Iowa City. It's sort of my second home. But the structures have been set up here in Iowa City as well to really leave out non-white communities. And so, they were experiencing that. In many ways, they still are. And so, I reached out to them to sort of be the first in this community conversation series and their response took me aback for a second and then it really resonated in many ways. And their response was we're tired of conversation. So, unless you plan on actually making change, we really have no interest in talking about this. And I had to reflect on that a bit and it really resonated. And since it really resonated, it resonated really frankly my own experience as an Arab-American, as a Palestinian in terms of being tired of conversation. And it's really been something that I've taken with me and taken to heart moving forward, that if we are going to ask communities, ask minoritized groups and give them spaces or work together in spaces for voices in conversation, it needs to go well beyond just listening to actually to change.

And so, that commitment to humility has to be combined with the commitment to speak forcefully when inequities are revealed or when barriers are stubbornly resistive to change. And so, anyone I think who knows me knows that I'm not particularly a sort of wilting flower on most conversations and I wouldn't plan to be that way and I continue to not be that way I guess, that to continue to be a really strong advocate and to not only sort of as someone has said provide a microphone to minoritize groups but to just give them that mic to create spaces where they actually have that that microphone. And so, that's one strong guiding philosophy that I think I would have as an NCA officer.

Bonnie Dow:

Communication studies is a really broad field which is something that I've always viewed as a strength and NCA has a very broad definition of it, that we're the discipline that studies all forms, modes, media, the consequences of communication. And I think that one is very useful. I mean I generally view my understanding of it as the communication scholars and teachers study how people make meaning in countless ways, how they influence each other in private and in public and how they use symbols of all kinds, verbal, non-verbal, visual to make change. And I think this is really important to keep in mind as an NCA leader because one of the things that I would consider incredibly important in this role is to constantly reaffirm the importance of what communication scholars and teachers do and how it can meet the needs of this moment. These are very, very tough times for the nation, for all levels of education, for all disciplines. We're living through a pandemic and we're reckoning again with broad recognition of tremendous injustice and some serious dysfunction at various levels of government.



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But every problem that ails us as a discipline and as a society calls for communication expertise, in our classrooms, virtual though they may be, in our research and creative expression and in our service. Most importantly, in our dealings with each other and here I think I will have some echoes of what Walid's been saying. But more specifically to a communication context, we are the scholars, teachers and artists who know how to bridge boundaries, how to listen mindfully and mediate conflict, how to use language with careful intention and a knowledge of context. Our knowledge and abilities are really crucial I think in these dramatically changing circumstances. We should use them to educate our students towards citizenship for a better world and we should insist on the relevance of our research and creative practice to help create that world. Equally as important as we face the challenges of confronting various injustices and disparities in our own field, we have to recognize our obligation to serve our discipline and each other as scholars, teachers, artists and citizens who believe that we can, in fact, work together to create a more just future for the association, for our campuses and for our communities.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Consistent with those questions about justice and our commitments, I trust that you both know that in 2018—and I think, Bonnie, you might have been there—the NCA executive committee and the legislative assembly revised its mission statement to include language about the importance and centrality of diversity and inclusiveness to the association and all that we do. I know you both have deep, strong, important commitments to diversity, equity, inclusion, access, justice, all of those sorts of things. Can you think specifically about some things that NCA might do to further live up to its mission and to those commitments that I think virtually all of us share to creating a more just world and a more diverse association?

Walid Afifi:

NCA has done a lot the last few years on this front to create more equitable spaces, more spaces and more ways and with more structures in which the vast sort of population of voices can be heard. There's still a lot to be done and some of that is deeply embedded within our histories and deeply embedded within the structures all the way from K through 12 to colleges, universities and graduate programs and who we're reading and who we're not reading. I mean it's embedded in every level and every space of our discipline and change is really difficult and takes time and more than frankly what we're doing now but glad that we're sort of on that process. In terms of specifics, I'm also part of the diversity side. It's called the IDEA, inclusion, diversity, equity and access task force of ICA as well. And there are many, many good ideas. I don't know that sort of a five-minute response to this is really going to be satisfying to anyone. But they span certainly publications. I mean this is not new and Bonnie as chair could certainly speak to this much more fully than I can. But like I said, it's far more than a five-minute conversation. We work together on a content analysis of interpersonal communication samples and communication journals over a



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five-year period from 2014 to 2019 and found not surprising but really striking data that speak to sort of the communication so-white, rhetoric so-white sort of reflection.

In this case, specifically the vast majority were white American college students, that the samples are white American college students. I mean massive, massive over-representation of the United States, of white communities in the United States, etc. There's not a single sample collected in India, 1.3 billion people. Not a single sample collected in Mexico. Eighty people in the Arab world which has the same size as United States and all those 80 were a study that I collected, etc., etc., etc. This is five years, every single interpersonal communication study. And what was also really striking was that I think—I can't remember the exact data—but something like 40% did not even have demographics reported. Now what does that say specifically about how we even think about universality of our claims in the social sciences let's say when we don't even believe we need to report these demographics? So, there are definitely some concrete things that I think editors can do, that reviewers can demand, that we can require as an association from at least our own journals that can make some changes on that basic front.

But it goes obviously much further than that. It goes into our syllabi. It goes into the representation of different groups in our association, in all the spaces of decision making, etc. So, oftentimes we're thinking of the membership of NCA. But who's not actually at the table even? Who's not joining NCA because they don't feel welcome at NCA? Because we're not creating spaces for them whether it be in the United States and I know NCA's sort of focused on as a national communication association but also creating spaces outside of the United States for voices that we don't hear sufficiently that might really encourage a greater diversity of voices for knowledge production but also for pedagogy. I mean we're teaching mostly white knowledge to our students and no wonder we're not attracting a more diverse set of undergraduates to our discipline. So, I mean this is something that I think there are really smart ideas that are out there that are already a lot of very, very smart people doing very, very good work, hard work to get some of these ideas into spaces where we can make decisions. And certainly, that's something that I would really look forward to doing is really putting a mic to those voices and really breaking down on each of these levels what are the things that NCA can do to create radically more inclusive spaces in our discipline?

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Okay. Bonnie.

Bonnie Dow:

So, let me start by reading a little bit of NCA's language around inclusivity from a strategic plan that pledges the association to the support of "inclusiveness and diversity among our faculties, within our membership, in the workplace and in the classroom. Also, we are committed to



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advocacy for inclusive, positive, just and safe academic workplaces to policymakers, campus administrators and the public.” And that's really good language. That's a really broad statement. It leaves a lot of different arenas in which to pursue inclusivity and it certainly is the case that these crucial commitments have acquired a new urgency, not just over the past say five years as Walid was talking about but over the past eight months, right? As we have seen a variety of things happening nationally that we know have echoes in our own association, right? We know that there's structures within NCA that perpetuate white privilege and that enable systemic racism, if unwittingly. And certainly as a white academic, I'm implicated in those issues. As a feminist scholar committed to intersectional analysis, I've been engaged with them for decades in my own work. I've grappled with them in my scholarship and my teaching, in my past service for NCA and in my work as an academic administrator. These issues are front and center at Vanderbilt and we're talking about them all the time.

But it is the case that when you talk about these issues, you have to be prepared to have really difficult conversations and sometimes it is hard to even figure out how to start those conversations and how to guide them. And one of the things that I think is really important—I'm so glad Walid brought this up—is the importance of data around these things, right? The review that he talks about of interpersonal scholarship and figuring out the problems with the samples that are used in that research has a kinship to my experience on the executive committee in 2018 when we were navigating one of the issues related to communication so-white and that was in fact, issues around the selection of journal editors. And that was directly really, really important to me as the outgoing director of the publications council. And what we did was gather data around who had been recruited to apply for editorships of journals, how many non-white or international journal editors we had. And those statistics are not that good, right? But it's also the case that in the conversations we had, we realized that we were not dealing with a situation where we had had lots of say scholars of color who had indicated interest in editing our journals and had not been chosen for those roles by the publications council. Rather what we were dealing with was a paucity of people that we were even getting nominations or applications from which is really the problem that had to be addressed, that there needed to be much more work that went into that process of encouraging people toward journal membership, of really nurturing people's interest in it and making sure that people felt as though their interest in that activity and that kind of leadership would be welcomed.

So, these are always issues that end up getting talked about or often issues that end up getting talked about at one level when what you really need to do is like dig down three or four levels to find out exactly the problem that you need to solve. And I was really, really impressed with the conversations that were happening then. But it certainly is the case that those conversations are not over and the work that needs to be done has not been done yet. And it's a very much an ongoing process and it's not going to happen all that quickly. For myself, the issues in my own



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work, the issues around inclusivity that I deal with now are very much at the level of diversifying our student population, diversifying our faculty, making sure that Vanderbilt is a place where all kinds of students and all kinds of faculty and staff feel like they can succeed. So, I'm involved with all kinds of efforts toward that end on my campus. But I will say that one of the things that really helps me when I'm in these conversations is a series of questions that I ask that have been really important during the pandemic in particular where, of course, we see the intersection of all these things because the pandemic is so much—and here I can speak at the campus level and at the community level and certainly we all know about the national level which we can read about all the time—but that is the pandemic is spoken about as the great equalizer. No one can escape it from celebrities to the homeless. But in fact, not so much really because it is hitting certain populations and certain communities so much harder and it is hitting certain populations of our students and our campuses so much harder. So, it is in fact just another example of what systemic racism and social injustice creates when social conditions reach their very worst point.

So, the questions that I am asking myself as I deal with this in various contexts not only at the university but also with several non-profit organizations that I work with locally that are struggling in this moment, those questions include first of all, how do we serve our community in the face of so many constraints? How do we identify and adapt to changing needs among our diverse constituencies? And when I say diverse there, I'm talking about all kinds of diversity, certainly socioeconomic, demographic diversity but also diversity of interests, diversity of access. How do we maintain and build our connections to our multiple publics? And especially important, how do we aid, protect and empower the most vulnerable and disempowered among us? And these are all questions I think that will serve whoever ends up in this position over the next two or three years because the reverberations from the pandemic are not going to end in 2021, 2022 or even 2023. We're going to be living with this for years. It's going to fundamentally restructure much of what happens in higher education, in education in general and in scholarly societies like NCA. And I think that as we think about that fallout and figure out how to adapt to it, we always have to keep at top of mind how different parts of our membership, let's say, if you're talking about NCA, are experiencing these things in diverse ways and with dramatically varied levels of impact.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

One of the more specific effects that COVID and the coronavirus has had on NCA—and it relates to questions of justice and access and equity and all of those issues—is the convention, our annual convention. As you know, the 2020 convention originally slated for Indianapolis is going to be virtual, all virtual. And we're still kind of waiting to see where we are for 2021 in Seattle. If I'm betting, I suspect it'll be sort of a hybrid kind of arrangement but we'll see. Hopefully, by 2022, well, you're right, Bonnie, things will still be different. Maybe we can get back to some sense of normalcy with our convention and that would be the convention that you get to plan. So, what kind



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of plans are you thinking for the convention? What would you like to see different or change a little bit in New Orleans in 2022?

Walid Afifi:

So, I think one of the things that's really interesting and important about what we're seeing and what we're experiencing during this pandemic with our conferences being all online and virtual and synchronous and asynchronous, etc., a lot of things that we miss that were sort of I knew we would miss and that in fact we are missing, the face-to-face connections, meeting friends and going places for food or drink and the conversations that happen spontaneously. So, those are going to be things that I'm really looking forward to getting back to. But there are also some things that I think, some innovations that we found that actually I think will when combined with the things that work and have worked in the past in the face-to-face and some of the things that broaden our notion of inclusion through more sort of virtual formats could make some really interesting and stronger conferences. And that's one of the things that I really look forward to doing is really assessing as a group what has worked, what is working in these virtual formats, what are ways in which we're able to bring voices and folks who are not otherwise able to make it to the conference, what are some forms of presentation that are potentially better in this fashion than would otherwise? What are the things that are working and then what are the things that we're really missing and sort of how can we combine those things? So, that's a general sort of promise that I see about a conference in New Orleans more broadly about the things that are working and the things I'd like see differently.

So, one of the things that NCA has started to do that I would like to see much more of both in the conference and just generally in our discipline is I really feel strongly that community engagement needs to be a stronger part of our DNA as a discipline. Certainly, there's definitely folks who are doing that work incredibly well across all methodologies, epistemologies, etc. in our field. But I think it's very important as we move forward in the next 10, 20, 30 years in our discipline that it's just a stronger part of our DNA, it's a stronger part of our classes, a stronger part of our graduate programs. We're able to train our graduate students for what that looks like. We train on public scholarship. We train on a wide range of what it means to be a public scholar, a wide range for what it means to be community engaged. Not that everyone has to do that but certainly a bigger percentage. There's many, many students who want to do that but frankly, aren't finding the graduate programs that are able to train them for this, aren't finding support for the kinds of panels that do this, aren't finding the funding support, etc., etc. The 10-year sort of process doesn't really reward that in our field. And I think NCA can play a really crucial role in creating structures within our discipline that promote, encourage and support public scholarship, community engaged scholarship, etc. This podcast is actually a really good example of the type of thing that NCA has been increasingly doing that I really appreciate. But there's lots of other interventions and efforts



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that NCA is doing that is promising on that front. But I think we can do more and I really look forward to a convention that does more of that.

The other aspect of the convention that I think needs some really careful attention other than obviously figuring out structures that maximize inclusivity and take that seriously as again we're trying to do. I mean there's certainly experiences even our last conference where that was problematic. But there seems to be a tug between the conference being something that is really critically important for the financial well-being of the association and creating inclusive spaces for a range of ideas from the incomplete research ideas to the fully developed ones to a sense by some folks that the quality of the presentations has diminished in part because we're accepting too big of a percentage of submissions. And somewhere along that, and I think there's some truth in all of that and there's some realities in all of that, but obviously it's critically important. I know we've lost some folks because of a sense that NCA, they feel like there's some quality of the presentations that is diminished. And so, they don't go to the conference because of that. Now some of that is perceptual, potentially some truths and certainly the percentage of acceptances and submissions in some divisions may sort of suggest that that may be the case.

One thing that I would really emphasize is to find ways in which the quality of the work that we're talking about whether it's preliminary or whether it's complete—which is by the way very strongly tied to notions of inclusivity—is top notch, that we are presenting the best that we can present in our discipline and that we do so with an eye towards the financial well-being of the association but examine closely whether that balance has been skewed in some ways. I'm not saying it has or hasn't. But I'd want to take a very close look at that. That would benefit the discipline and the association. So, that's kind of where, I mean what, sort of what would you be doing and that is one, really increase the sort of the community engaged aspect of this, the public scholarship aspect of this, make sure that we have processes that are highly inclusive and that use both the best of what we've learned from this pandemic in terms of presentation formats, asynchronous, synchronous, etc. as well as ensure processes that maximize the quality of the presentations.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Okay. Bonnie? What about New Orleans in 2022?

Bonnie Dow:

That was such a rich response from Walid that I probably will not be as detailed because I think he said some things that I absolutely would say. There's a lot of pluses and minuses to a virtual convention. Obviously, travel costs go away and everybody's travel funds have dried up including mine because who wants to go anywhere? And universities, of course, are strapped. So, the virtual convention on the one hand does increase accessibility for people and that's a real plus. On the other hand, as Walid also said, it takes away those sorts of informal ad hoc interactions



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that people really love about conventions and that can be really serendipitous for networking and for just the fun aspect of conventions. I do think it's going to be very interesting actually to see how convention hotels and convention centers respond. Because if we do move forward to a world in which we have sort of hybrid conventions, in which some people will come and other people will participate virtually, we're going to have to have much better technology than we usually have at convention sites. And so, that's something that we can't really affect in NCA but we can, along with other groups that use those venues, we can put pressure on them, that it will make them more competitive if they can supply those things for us. But I think that's going to be interesting to watch.

As far as the role of NCA, I actually do think that we could stand some very hard thinking about the mission of the conference so to speak. That is what is it that it's intended to do, what are its purposes. Because I think people often have dramatically differing notions of what NCA should do. It's a really large convention. We also have small conventions in the field. This is true for most disciplines. We probably have fewer small conventions than many fields and we could probably have more of them because some of the kinds of things that people bemoan about NCA, the presentations are too short, they're not developed enough, the quality is low, some of that is just the nature of large conventions. And it's usually in small conferences where people have the chance to make much more in-depth presentations and a lot more engagement with a smaller audience. And frankly, NCA can both continue to do sort of the large conference things well and also, foster, that is the association can foster the development of small conferences as they have done. NCA has done that work in the past and it's produced some conference experiences that are really satisfying for people. I guess my feeling is that we cannot expect NCA to do every single thing for every single person. But it can certainly be involved in the development of alternative kinds of conferences and opportunities for people to gather that might be more satisfying in some ways. It's a very unwieldy thing, a large convention that is trying to include lots and lots of different kinds of people doing different kinds of work. So, that's one thing.

As far as public engagement, I am a huge fan of this. I run two different grants that are both concerned with the public humanities. So, I'm really, really immersed in public humanities work and it's worked at NCA. It's not just in the podcast. But a couple years ago I was on an NCA panel about science communication that was held in Denver. It was open to the public and the really great thing about that panel which is one of my favorite things I've done in last few years is that there were a bunch of scientists in the audience. So, there were all these rhetoricians of science in the front of the room. I was just moderating the panel. I'm not a rhetorician of science. But there were these rhetoricians of science in the front room talking about science and how science works and how it's communicated better and worse and all these kinds of things. And then there were actual scientists in the audience that were standing up and asking questions and making observations. Now most of those scientists were probably academics but it was a way that NCA



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enabled the reach of our ideas outside of say the communication bubble which is a really, really important thing and it is not something I think to be taken lightly. And NCA that year was doing a variety of those kinds of panels and it's done them around lots of different themes including, for instance, health disparities which is closer to Walid's work than to mine. But I think that we shouldn't sell short the kinds of investments in public scholarship than NCA's already made. But I absolutely agree that there is room for lots more.

Walid Afifi:

And I'll echo that. That's exactly Bonnie sort of the type of panel that I'm thinking of because I've been to those. And as another sort of example, I went to a conference again when I was a chair at Iowa. I was trying to figure out what are some models for doing this well. And I learned of and then went to their conference, an association called Imagining America. Bonnie, you may be familiar with it given your work. But the conference was amazing. Very, very few panels were actually in place. Actually most of their panels are in the community. So, they bus people to the high school and to these neighborhoods and these mural projects and there is a scholarly conversation but it's together with publics in their spaces in which they live and they work and they do and they create and it was such an enriching, kind of like you're saying, people that oftentimes don't talk to one another. So, there are formats that we can sort of adapt that will really I think—again, not everyone is going to be drawn to this—but just I think creating more spaces for this kind of thing I think would really strengthen our conference.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

One of the things that I've been particularly pleased about over the last few years is the conversion of the opening session at our national conference. It used to be just kind of whatever was of interest to the first vice president. But with support from the Waterhouse Family Institute for the Study of Communication and Society, we've converted it into a sort of community outreach program that looks at a pressing issue in communication and the broader local community and we bring in community members activists, etc. to the convention side. And I think they've been very successful and I think they've been really productive. So, hopefully, it'll virtually work out as well next month. So, along those lines and similarly, if you are elected, you will be the 109th president of the National Communication Association in 2023. So, what are some of your goals as the uber officer of the association come 2023?

Walid Afifi:

I laid out sort of five goals. They're pretty general and a lot of times the general is not very helpful. And so, I really look forward to much more of the concrete sort of discussions about how this actually happens and what this looks like. But the five were that I would strive to work towards a more inclusive discipline across all levels of education and forms of instruction and knowledge production/scholarship. Two, a discipline that values community engagement as a more central



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part of its DNA which I already have talked about. Three, a discipline that is a leader in the quality of a scholarship, both humanistic and scientific. Four, a discipline that is a leader in instructional innovation and support. And five, an association that is more active in advocacy for freedom of speech and basic human rights. And I realize that the fifth one isn't something, is sort of something that I think NCA has struggled with deciding whether that's even something, how much of that we want to do and what is tied to communication, etc. So, I acknowledge that sort of historical challenge and just challenge moving forward. But in some cases, I think NCA can play a very important role especially as it relates to policies and other sorts of structures and systems. It does play an advocacy role for a particular sort of communication related phenomena. So, those are the five sort of that I've laid out. And again, I think it's more important that we think of rather than these broad goals, what does this actually translate to specific structural changes in each of these. I sort of go back to what I was saying in terms of we're tired of conversation and I'm tired of conversation frankly and if it's not tied to very concrete goals towards change.

But I think again and as we've talked about before, the leadership of NCA has really, the various presidents, the various committees, the various executive committees, the structures and most importantly the members and those who are not members because their frustration have created a space frankly historically and today that makes it so that we can really lead in some of these ways. And so, it's really because of their work that frankly I even feel comfortable putting my name in for this. Those of you who don't know me, wonder about my name. But my dad's Palestinian. They fled Palestine in 1948 in the Nakba. They ended up not being in refugee camps strictly because they were landowners until that land was taken away and their assets frozen. But it's a very thin line. I recognize that privilege that I have. It's a very thin line between where I would have been in the refugee camp and where I ended up. And my mom is from Missoula, Montana and ventured to Beirut, Lebanon when she was a teenager. And then I moved from Beirut when I was 14 in the middle of civil war. So, my background even though I'm very much white-passing and I've gotten the benefits of that, I'm an immigrant and a refugee of war and that experience has certainly affected my view of some of these goals and some of these needs in our discipline and where I feel welcome and where I don't feel welcome. And again, I say this is someone who's really gotten many of the privileges that come my way, both in terms of economic privilege, in terms of being male, being cisgender and being white-passing. But increasingly committed and in conversations and in spaces where those privileges aren't there and certainly, Bonnie has spoken in her career to some of the many challenges that women have faced in our field and more broadly. But that's just one I guess part of my background that may not be obvious to those who see me, may be surprised by my name but that certainly will shape my sort of commitments as a leader of NCA.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Okay. Bonnie?



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Bonnie Dow:

I think Walid and I have some important overlap in what our goals as an officer would be because certainly one of mine would be the development of structural paths to create a more diverse and inclusive association and whose members feel supported in doing the kinds of teaching and scholarship that inspires them and that works toward a better world for our students, colleagues and fellow citizens. We really need to explore new ways to identify leaders that represent and enact inclusivity, to identify new modes of scholarship, teaching and creative expression that empower our members and that speak to the most pressing social justice issues of our time. And we also need new paths for disseminating our ideas to the rest of the academy and to the public at large. You can certainly see some overlap there. I will say that when we think about what we can do in the space of time that we are in this leadership position, I think that it's important to also think about paths that NCA is already on and how to strengthen them or paths that current leaders are following and how to continue them. So, for instance, it absolutely is the case that Roseanne Mandziuk who is currently our second vice president has also committed herself to creating paths for a more inclusive leadership in the association and I don't think that should just be the work of one officer. It should be the work of the next officer as well. So, I'm really delighted that Walid and I are agreed on that.

And the thing is that we know, there's research that tells us that people tend to mentor people that are like them, people tend to elevate when they're in a position to develop leaders, they tend to elevate people that look familiar to them. And we can fight that inclination that people tend to have but what we also need to do is think really hard about creating diverse leaders in the association. Because those people will then be most inclined to lift up people who are like them. So, I mean people need to see inclusivity at all levels of leadership in the association because that's what inspires more inclusivity and we can all do that work but we can do it in lots of different ways.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

So, a follow-up to all of that from both of you and I think you're correct in saying that NCA is committed to this broader idea of inclusiveness and bringing more folks in. How do you do that? What are some specific advice that you would give to say younger scholars or people who are interested in working their way into NCA leadership? How especially in these really difficult times when their university is precarious in terms of budgets and they're having to adapt all of their courses assuming they're teachers to an online platform, etc., etc.? What would you say to them to encourage them to be a leader in NCA?

Walid Afifi:

So, I mean first of all, let me say that if the answers those questions were easy, they'd be done. And so, I certainly want to echo what Bonnie is saying. There is a commitment to creating more inclusive spaces at NCA and I'm really pleased to see that we will both be continuing those. What



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that looks like in concrete ways, NCA does need to commit itself and what I would be doing is I would be going to diversity council. Sort of one of the things I would be planning is listening sessions frankly. It's great spaces where we can really listen from both NCA members, those are currently leadership and those who are not, those who are not members. But really creating open spaces to listen and to get the best ideas for how to do this, ideas that have really not been in our in our leadership spaces. And that's probably going to and definitely will involve budgetary implications. It will involve probably structural changes in NCA. It will involve serious thinking about how can we create pedagogical expectations in communication departments that bring more diverse knowledge and inclusive knowledge to our students.

I mean so this isn't going to be solved by certainly adding labor to those communities who are already carrying an abundance of labor around these issues and certainly not by not creating a reward structure that would make them taking on additional labor is something that I would recommend. Right now, I wouldn't recommend that they do a lot of these service roles, let's say editor, because as it is, there are barriers to their success in our discipline and now we're asking them to take on additional work that's going to make it even harder for them to meet those barriers that they themselves face where others don't. So, we need to radically think about the reward structures frankly. We need to radically think about maybe it's multiple associate editors, maybe it's multiple editors, maybe it's more financial incentives. I mean there are, and like I said, I'm not the only one suggesting this and there are smarter minds at work on these issues. But we need to be willing as a discipline and certainly as an organization to radically rethink some of these processes from the start, from K through 12 and our impact on K-12, from bringing in teachers that we have working in K-12 spaces and really elevating their voices and their role in our association. Because frankly, that is a direct line to communication majors being not very diverse to then graduate programs not being diverse to our knowledge processes not being diverse, etc., etc. So, I think it's a long-term process. But to really create change and create more inclusive spaces, we need to be very honest about the many ways that historically our discipline has failed and what can we do radically different to start the process of changing that which again we're starting but sort of push forward further than we're at right now.

Bonnie Dow:

So, answering this question in a somewhat more narrow frame, I would say that as far as pursuing leadership in NCA which is what I understand this question was about, there's obvious and less obvious ways to do that. So, one obvious one is simply to get involved because there's a lot of labor that happens in NCA, a lot of volunteer labor whether it's reading papers for a division, for NCA or volunteering to do some kind of work within a division, serve on a task force, serve on a committee, etc. Usually, there's not enough people that want to do those things. So, that is one fairly simple way to go about learning things about NCA, getting involved, getting to know people, etc. if you're interested in doing leadership. But I really don't think that we can overlook the



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importance because we are a scholarly society of people actually focusing also on the development of their research. Because scholarship gives you visibility and that kind of visibility and the scholarship itself gives you a kind of credibility that opens doors for you. It is no accident I think that this NCA second vice president election features two candidates who are both accomplished scholars. One of the reasons why Walid and I were chosen by the nominating committee I'm sure is because we both have well-developed research profiles and that also will give us a sort of similar advantage in terms of the election from the membership as a whole. And that's pretty crucial. And I think sometimes people overlook that and don't think about that aspect of sort of building a leadership profile in the association. Because again, we are a scholarly society. One of the things NCA is here to do is to promote the creation and dissemination of scholarship. And so, in my mind, that is one of the crucial attributes of leadership.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

So, by way of conclusion and to wrap things up, I'd be interested to know if there's one thing that you all think that NCA is not focusing on right now that you would like to see the association focus on, just one thing that maybe over the next five years if you were able to wave your magic presidential wand, NCA would start focusing on this one thing that it's not doing enough of right now. Walid, you get to go first.

Walid Afifi:

I'm going to answer this way. It may not be surprising because I was chair of the task force that created The Center for Community Engagement essentially. And I've talked about this before and repeated it but I think that community engagement, public scholarship needs to be a bigger part of the DNA of our discipline. And I actually think that that also is tied to the inclusivity goal because I think the more that we are engaged in communities, the more that we are in communities, the more that we are having conversations with communities in a scholarly way, the more we are being humble in our approach to communities and learning from communities, the more that we will be a welcoming space for a wide variety of communities and their members. And so, I think I would double down on the commitment that NCA has started in supporting community engaged research and creating structures that can help train our members on forms of public scholarship, on creating incentives whether grants or otherwise in changing our conference in ways that bring in community, bring us to community more and bring community to us more. So, I think if I was to sort of not belabor what I've already said here but sort of add to it and sort of reify it, that I think our scholarship is going to improve when we do this and our impact is going to improve when we do this. And so, that's probably where I would double down in terms of commitments of NCA.

Bonnie Dow:

So, my answer will be sort of a little more general. I've been thinking about sort of future planning and strategic planning for a few different organizations, my own college and also some community



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organizations I work with. And one of the concepts that keeps rising to the top of these conversations that I really think should be at the forefront of NCA as well is resilience. We're in very, very difficult times and we need to think at every turn about how the organization, how the association can be resilient. Because at this moment, we don't even see the end of this pandemic. But as I said earlier, even when it is over, we're still going to face the reverberation. There's going to be a restructuring of higher education for one thing after this. We're going to have fewer colleges and universities in this country in a couple years than we do now and that's going to have implications for all kinds of people and lots of our members. So, NCA needs to be resilient I think and nimble in the face of what's happening now and the changes to come. And resilience requires, of course, adherence to your core values—what are you about, what is the organization's mission—combined with creativity and openness to alternative ways of thinking and doing. So, the questions then become how can we adapt, how can we be creative, what do we need to do differently as we navigate the pandemic and its aftermath, what do we need to do differently in particular to serve our members and to fulfill our mission? And I really I hesitate to be more specific than that because I think that we really don't know exactly what's around the corner. I mean Walid and I both, of course, have talked about our commitment to inclusivity, to developing a more sort of public face for the association, etc. And I think those are key goals. I think the association's already up to that. I mean they're already working in that direction although Walid and I would both like to see the association do more. But if there's one sort of watch word that I could give NCA for the next few years, it would, in fact, be resilience.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Great. Thank you so much, both for running, for agreeing to serve in this leadership capacity one way or the other. And Walid and Bonnie, thank you so much for joining me today on *Communication Matters*. This is an inward looking sort of episode of the podcast. It's not as publicly engaged as some of our other episodes. But it's still very important for our members to get a chance to hear from both of you in an extended way. And members, remember that you can vote in the NCA election beginning on December 1st. Balloting will close on December 28th at 5:00 PM Eastern Standard Time and all individual members of NCA as of November 30th are eligible to vote in the election. Incidentally, members of NCA can register for free for the 106th annual virtual convention to be held in November as well. So, make certain that your membership is current and that you're able to attend the convention and vote in the election. For the complete ballot and more information about Bonnie Dow and Walid Afifi, about voting, about receiving a ballot and everything going on in the NCA 2020 election, visit natcom.org/2020Election. That's natcom.org/2020Election, all one word. And as always, thanks so much for listening today to *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*.

In NCA news, we recently launched the new online version of NCA's time-honored magazine *Spectra*. In the first collection of themed features, communication experts address President



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Trump's rhetoric around the COVID-19 pandemic, the infodemic associated with the coronavirus pandemic, the hidden challenges facing communities because of health disparities and anti-Asian racism associated with the coronavirus pandemic. You can read the full magazine which includes other things as well like a column from NCA president Kent Ono, information about the upcoming NCA election and much more at natcom.org/Spectra. That's natcom.org/spectra. NCA also invites submissions of field notes essays for publication in *Spectra*. These rapid response articles are intended to provide NCA members students and the communities we serve with the communication focused insights they require to make sense of what is happening in our ever more complicated democracy. You can learn more on the NCA website or submit a field notes essay by emailing spectra@natcom.org. That's spectra@natcom.org. And listeners, I hope you'll tune in for the next episode of *Communication Matters* on November 25th when we'll focus on contemporary issues in sports communication such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic health concerns related to football and other sports, political activism by athletes and the representation of teams via inappropriate mascots. Professors Jason Edward Black, Daniel A. Grano and Abraham Khan will join the podcast for this ever timely discussion.

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.

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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