



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 6: Conversation with NCA Research Council Chair Chuck Morris

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

Chuck Morris

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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 this episode of *Communication Matters*, I'll be speaking with Charles E. Morris III. Dr. Morris is a professor and the chair of the department of communication and rhetorical studies at Syracuse University. Dr. Morris is also an affiliated professor of LGBT studies also at Syracuse. Chuck is an expert in archival research and specializes in research related to LGBTQ history and memory. For example, in 2018 along with Jason Edward Black, professor and chair of the department of communication studies at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte, Dr. Morris was awarded a \$9,000 research grant from the Waterhouse Family Institute for the Study of Communication and Society to support their project, *Milk Delivery: The Queer Columns of Harvey Milk*, an annotated analogy of the late LGBTQ activist, Harvey Milk's serialized bi-weekly column Milk Forum which was published in the San Francisco Bay Area Reporter from 1974 to 1978.

Dr. Morris is also the chair of NCA's research council and he's new to this job. The research council is responsible for supporting the creation and circulation of knowledge about human



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Episode 6: Conversation with NCA Research Council Chair Chuck Morris

communication. So, we've invited Dr. Morris on the podcast today to discuss research and communication generally and some of NCA research council's goals for 2020. Thanks a lot for joining us today, Chuck.

Chuck Morris:

Thanks for having me.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

As I mentioned in my introduction, you've received numerous accolades, several awards for your work in the areas of rhetoric and LGBTQ memory and history. How do you think the field has changed since the years when you began researching o so long ago?

Chuck Morris:

Well, it's certainly changed in terms of LGBTQ studies in the discipline. For instance, there's a lot more of it and it's happening in all of the major journals in the field. It's true too that the division, LGBTQ division within NCA has grown greatly. I think it's up maybe even almost 30% over the last year in terms of members which is extraordinary. And I think students now have greater opportunities to study with experts, doing LGBTQ work on faculty. So, in my alma mater for instance at Penn State, I'm delighted that now as of next Fall there will be two queer-identified scholars. And so, when I think about students who are applying to graduate schools in our discipline, it's really heartening to see how many opportunities now are there for their students and I wouldn't have imagined when I was in graduate school almost 30 years ago that, for instance, communication scholars would be able to have the opportunity to create a journal in LGBT studies which I've had the opportunity to do with Tom Nakayama.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

That's great. What are some trends more broadly that you see in communication research do you think?

Chuck Morris:

Well, I put that very question to the research council today because I didn't want to speak only on my own behalf. But we all had very similar responses to that question and among the things that were offered, queer people of color and intersectionality which now is taken much more seriously across sub disciplinary domains within the field, performance studies, globalization, indigeneity and decolonial work, environmental justice, collaborative technology, digital media among the many things that seem to be trending in the field. And I think I guess I'd want to underscore the ways in which decolonizing the field and responding to *communications so white* has made a lot of difference in terms of where people are putting their energies and investments even as recently as within the last six months.



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 6: Conversation with NCA Research Council Chair Chuck Morris

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Right. What research do you hope to see in the future in the fields of rhetoric and LGBTQ studies in the next few years and think about how those directions might intersect with the intersectionality that the research council seems to think at the basis of a lot of what we're doing?

Chuck Morris:

There is some work that is being done that's emergent in queerness and environmental justice for instance which I think is crucially important and will be invaluable and I hope there's a lot more of it. And I think one other response that crosses my mind to your question is that we are sort of expanding how intersectionality is being thought through in the kind of work that's being done. And so, just to offer two examples. So, I'm currently working on a project with Dan Brower at Arizona State University on Hart Island which is essentially the Potter's Field of New York where a million New Yorkers over more than a century have been buried when they didn't have enough money to fund their own burial or their families didn't know where the family member was, etc. And so, one of the things that we're thinking a lot about in terms of that project is the way that poverty is part of an intersectional understanding of queer memory. And so, that's just one example that crosses my mind. But other people's really exciting work comes to mind too in terms of how trans identities are mattering in an intersectional way that scholars are now talking about they haven't been talking about before.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Right. Now I want to shift gears a little bit and discuss disciplinary service issues. Why did you decide to run to be the research council chair? And was there any particular experience that you felt really prepared you for this?

Chuck Morris:

Well, I had served on the publication board. And so, I very much liked the service that was being provided by the councils. And so, when I finished my term on the publications board, I almost immediately thought I would like to do more service. I didn't immediately think of the research council but when the opening presented itself, I thought well, I'll put my name in as a member and then—but in a broader sense, I was thinking a lot about your question about service and prepping for our conversation today. And I think the answer to the question why am I interested in service has changed over the course of my career. Right? So, when I was a young emergent scholar in the field, part of what appealed to me about service which is why very early on, maybe too early on in some ways, I chaired divisions for instance or an interest group within NCA was because it's one way to get visibility, it's one way to network, it's one way by alternate means to have your scholarship and conversation with other people. All of that might be under the category of ambition. I think that's perfectly healthy too. But it didn't take all that much longer



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 6: Conversation with NCA Research Council Chair Chuck Morris

in my career to realize that I feel very indebted to those who helped make my path possible and I wanted to do everything I could do—I still feel that way—to make opportunities available for other scholars in the field. I mean for me it's the definition of what community should be about. And so, I've enjoyed doing that. It's gratifying especially when you see what it can do for other people in the field.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

For those of you who may not know, the research council chair is a three-year term and the individual serving in that capacity also serves on the NCA executive committee. I'm wondering about what your goals are. What do you think you're going to accomplish or try to accomplish in your first year to further research specifically in the field of communication and beyond that where we might be going down the road?

Chuck Morris:

We talked quite a bit about that today at our meeting and I inherited from Mindy Fenske, the previous chair of the council and the council members from last year, I sat in last year in my sort of shadow transition year and they were developing the draft for what is now called the Research Cultivation Grant. And so, one of the projects that we're definitely working on is to try to see that through to fruition and the spirit and the aim of that grant is to try to encourage first-time grant seekers in the field perhaps especially those who don't have any experience and want a track record so that they can pursue other kinds of grants later in their career an opportunity and as those with much more grant seeking experience than I have the committee have also pointed out that communication grants are fairly rare or communication scholars are too seldomly given grants by other funding institutions. And so, the idea that we would create a grant that might provide that foundation for scholars maybe especially young scholars although it's not exclusive to young scholars in the field seems really valuable to us. So, that's one answer. We also were talking quite a bit about the mission of the council is to help support both the creation of knowledge in communication but also to circulate it, to distribute it widely. And so, we spent quite a bit of time today talking about how we can better promote the field by having conversations with people outside of the field to explain it whether that be deans at one's institution or other learned societies or grant institutions and so forth.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

On the grant front, it's interesting. I'm sure you know. The National Science Foundation has repositioned many of the grant programs in the social and behavioral science directorate and one of those repositionings has been a renaming of a program called the Science of Science and now it is the Science of Science: Discovery, Communication and Impact. And to the best of my knowledge, it's the first time that communication specifically has been mentioned in the title and the mission of a granting program at the National Science Foundation and we're going to



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 6: Conversation with NCA Research Council Chair Chuck Morris

have a podcast episode talking about this with the director of the SBE at NSF, Skip Lupia coming up down the road a few weeks hence. But I'm hopeful that this cultivation grant program that you guys are working on would be a nice way to rethink some of the understandings that we have about planting the seed literally and cultivating research in communication.

Chuck Morris:

Well, that's excellent news. Two other things that we talked about in terms of initiatives that I hope get momentum and bear some fruit during the time that I'm the chair of the council, one is to do even more as I think all the councils are dedicated to doing even more in terms of cultivating and deepening diversity, equity and inclusion within the discipline. We talked quite a bit today about the ways in which we can try to foster greater cross council collaboration in order to seek those ends. The other thing we talked about is that the research council I think historically has been focused and successful on scholars early in their career and at mid-career. So, the research council offers a mid-career scholar's writing retreat every two years to help those scholars who are at the associate level and would like some inspiration and time, community for a week in the summer to try to reboot or restart or finish a project, all of which is really great. We were talking today also about what happens to those at the end of their careers and the ways in which even distinguished scholars who may have slowed down in terms of their research trajectory might be reengaged by those in the community in order to start a new project. We talked about it in terms of kind of a reciprocity or a kind of mentorship that works in the other direction in which those who are on the cutting edge of certain kinds of research in the field might reach out to scholars who are more seasoned or in the late phases of their own time in the academy to try to generate a kind of collaboration or again inspire in a different kind of way how research is taken on when one is at the end of a career.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Yeah. That's really good. I also was interested in something you said the research council was talking about which is the broader dissemination of communication research and I'm wondering beyond the podcast which we'd like to think is one way that we advanced the discipline of communication, what are some other ways do you think that NCA can work to distribute and disseminate communication research to broader publics, to people outside the discipline and those sorts of things?

Chuck Morris:

We took the question up together today as well and I mean there's certainly a strong sense that whatever we can do to circulate, better narrate what it is we do as academics within the field of communication is of great value especially since from its inception the discipline seems to have been one that is deeply invested in being a publicly engaged form of research, for instance, and to sort of lean into and embrace what I think has also been an assumption from the beginning



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 6: Conversation with NCA Research Council Chair Chuck Morris

that teaching and research are always entwined and that teaching not only is what happens in classrooms but in fact is what we do when we take our research into the public sphere and I think all for the good. And we also talked about the importance of us always thinking about what it means to translate for others what it is we do in part to demystify and, of course, you often will hear academics complain some about assumptions that are made about what we do professionally and how for instance it is different in terms of temporality for us than it is for other people but not just that. But I think again, when I think about all of the inspiring people in the field who are doing variations of what we would describe as engaged scholarship, then I think probably one of the first things that happens in engaged scholarship is to translate in some sense how it is we're transitioning into the public sphere to engage based on the expertise that we bring to the table and what we hope to gain through collaboration in the public sphere by what others can bring to us. Right? So, I mean I'm also really mindful of the fact that just in the case of the history of queer theory for instance that so much queer theory was already being conceptualized on the streets by the activists who were transforming politics and culture in the U.S. and elsewhere around the world. But often, perhaps too often, it's the case that academics are not given due credit to those in the public sphere who are also teaching us when we take our expertise to the table there.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

That's an important lesson and I think regular listeners of this podcast *Communication Matters* will recall we had an episode with Rick Cherwitz from the University of Texas and Catherine Baxter from The OpEd Project and they were talking about just that issue. Now, how do we translate what it is we do and what we think about and what we find in our research for broader public audiences to make a difference in the, as you say, public sphere or the public realm? And so, I think everybody will be pleased to know that the research council is thinking through those issues as well.

Chuck Morris:

And so many opportunities to create a variety of relationships where that would be really valuable in the public sphere. So, it's great.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

That's a great way to wrap this up. Thank you, Chuck, for being with us today. I really appreciate you talking with us about your research and about the future goals for the NCA research council.

Chuck Morris:

Thank you.



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 6: Conversation with NCA Research Council Chair Chuck Morris

Trevor Parry-Giles:

And thank you, listeners of *Communication Matters*.

In NCA news, check out NCA's Concepts in Communication video series. The series features short videos on communication concepts including speech anxiety, digital activism, identifying fake news and microaggressions. These videos are suitable for introducing important concepts in the communication classroom, as starting points for communication training workshops or for anyone seeking to improve their communication knowledge and skills. So, visit NCA's YouTube channel today at [YouTube.com/user/nationalcomm](https://www.youtube.com/user/nationalcomm). That's [YouTube.com/user/nationalcomm](https://www.youtube.com/user/nationalcomm) to watch these videos today.

Listeners, guess what? We are trapped at home as a result of the covid-19 pandemic. But the podcast continues and *Communication Matters* will be coming to you next week probably, hopefully with a special episode looking at the different communication dynamics surrounding the covid-19 pandemic or coronavirus. We're going to be speaking with Dean Matt Seeger who is the dean of the College of Fine Arts and Communication at Wayne State University and an expert in crisis and risk communication. So, he'll be talking with us about some of the dynamics surrounding the communication patterns in the ongoing covid-19 situation. So, stay tuned. We're glad to be coming to you from our homes. That's the beauty of podcasts and the capacity that we have at NCA to continue with producing episodes of *Communication Matters, the NCA Podcast*.

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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