

Jennifer Jessie

Nationally-recognized college admissions & test-optional policy expert

February 7, 2024

[5:00 pm] [Dr. Pam Luster \(@DrPamLuster\)](#)

We're back for another #EquityChat sponsored by @CollegeFutures w/your hosts @lamkeithcurry @DrTammeil & @DrPamLuster. This week, we're chatting about all things college admissions with @JennTheTutor. Welcome Jenn!

[jennthetutor](#) [#TestFree \(she/her\)](#) [@jennthetutor](#)

Thanks for having me! Haven't been on twitter in some time so it's good to be back and you all are the only ones who could convince me to return [#equitychat](#)

[Dr Pamela Luster #EquityAvengers #RealCollegePrez @DrPamLuster](#)

Thx for making the journey back to join us!

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

Yes, thank you! I'm barely here either...so it's a Wednesday journey for me. :)

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Love being here [#equitychat](#) [#equityavengers](#)

[5:05 pm] [Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson \(@DrTammeil\)](#)

Q1 @JennTheTutor. As you engage in equity-focused work, what is your walk-up song or anthem?
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I think I'm going to go Motown with this and say I'm coming out by Diana Ross or Ain't no Mountain High Enough by Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell [#equitychat](#) [#equityavengers](#)

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

Both are amazing selections! Today I'm feeling you on Ain't No Mountain High Enough. A love song to the racial equity work!

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But I'm also fond of Whitney- I wanna dance Proud Mary by Tina Turner

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson](#) [@DrTammeil](#)

Ooh, we have a whole playlist going! Another great set of jams.

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I do regret not calling my business Jenn Thee Tutor instead of Jenn The Tutor as I am a huge Meg fan [#equitychat](#) [#equityavengers](#)

[Dr Pamela Luster](#) [#EquityAvengers](#) [#RealCollegePrez](#) [@DrPamLuster](#)

I love all of this-

[5:11 pm] [Dr. Keith Curry](#) ([@lamkeithcurry](#))

Q2 @JennTheTutor. You are recognized as an expert in college admissions, college essays, test prep, and test-optional policies. Was there a defining moment or experience that catalyzed your journey to engage in this work? [@DrPamLuster](#) [@DrTammeil](#) [@CollegeFutures](#) [#EquityChat](#) [#EquityAvengers](#)

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My mother decided when she was on the school board to tell a lot of students I would work with them pro bono [#equitychat](#) [#equityavengers](#)

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I was working for a tutoring firm at the time and went from pet to threat [#equitychat](#) [#equityavengers](#)

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I was forced to start my own tutoring business to continue and had already started to have concerns about the sat and act [#equitychat](#) [#equityavengers](#)

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When I came on twitter I came on to market and with the mindset that the SAT and ACT produced diamonds in the rough but started to see research that aligned with my experience [#equitychat](#) [#equityavengers](#)

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And realized through Jay Rosner how the test was working against us and started being exposed to the idea that we shouldn't have to swim up stream of be Black and excellent while others were average/mediocre and given access to college [#equitychat](#) [#equityavengers](#)

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Then I attended [@AcceptGroup](#) and [@spamfriedrice](#) [#hackthegates](#) and realized that the system was not working with us but working by design against us [#equitychat](#) [#equityavengers](#)

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And that there were pathways out and better practices to ensure that Black students and students from other marginalized groups didn't have to work 2x or even x10 as hard to get to the same place [#equitychat](#) [#equityavengers](#)

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The pandemic allowed me to break from test prep as my community demanded I step into an application role instead [#equitychat](#) [#equityavengers](#)

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson](#) [@DrTammeil](#)

From college admissions to so many other arenas... Grateful for your vision & work!

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson](#) [@DrTammeil](#)

I love that your mom singing your praises as a tutor got you started! Although, pro bono is tough! Some side cash might have been nice. No, but seriously. Pretty amazing.

[5:18 pm] [Dr. Luster](#) ([@DrPamLuster](#))

Q3 [@JennTheTutor](#). With renewed conversations around standardized testing requirements, can you tell us more about test-optional policies and how they support racial equity? [@DrTammeil](#) [@lamkeithcurry](#) [@CollegeFutures](#) [#EquityChat](#) [#EquityAvengers](#)

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Let's just start at the fact that this test was created to support Eugenics and work back from there [#equitychat](#) [#equityavengers](#)

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We know questions that BIPOC, first gen, disabled, and other marginalized groups perform well on get tossed out through norming The test is literally not designed for us [#equitychat](#) [#equityavengers](#)

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The SAT and ACT demands we be excellent and be an outlier while allowing our peers to perform at their average and receive the same opportunities [#equitychat](#) [#equityavengers](#)

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Dartmouth's decision this week to return to the SAT and ACT after bragging about record high enrollment for BIPOC and low income students was telling [#equitychat](#) [#equityavengers](#)

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They said in their New York Times release the test proves that low income students can survive difficult environments and thrive But they don't demand their legacy students thrive or survive- they just have to be born to a Dartmouth alumni and perform average t [#equitychat](#)

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[#survive](#)

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The SAT and ACT, in my experience and others, is the only thing that gives my students the impression that they are "not college ready" it's the only factor that makes them question whether they are going to survive college [#equitychat](#) [#equityavengers](#)

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Low grades, lack extracurriculars, lack of clubs, lack of service work, tuition concerns will make them feel pressure about college but the SAT and ACT score report is the only thing I know that makes students feel they are not ready and not welcomed in college [#equitychat](#)

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Agree! Chose my doc program based on who required the GRE [#EquityChat...](#)

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson](#) [@DrTammeil](#)

It was the case for me when I went to college--even back in the Stone Ages. If you even saw my SAT scores...Honestly. Thank you, affirmative action, [@UCBerkeley](#) Early Outreach Programs (TRIO), and people who believed. I would never have gotten in without these opportunities.

[Dr Pamela Luster](#) [#EquityAvengers](#) [#RealCollegePrez](#) [@DrPamLuster](#)

Me too [@DrTammeil](#) my saving grace was [@SJSU](#), my SAT was ok, my GPA ok, but I would not even come close to competing now.

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson](#) [@DrTammeil](#)

[@jennthetutor](#) vs. The World. Let's go!

[5:25 pm] [Dr. Gilkerson \(@DrTammeil\)](#)

Q4 @JennTheTutor. In what ways has the #SCOTUS decision on #AffirmativeAction changed the way you approach admissions counseling with BIPOC students? @DrPamLuster @IamKeithCurry @CollegeFutures #EquityChat #EquityAvengers

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Initially there was all this talk about how students shouldn't or maybe should discuss race in their application [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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I rejected that immediately I am never going to coach a student to hide or magnify their identity as I don't want them going into college with that mindset [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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I thought it was only going to impact the essay but now with the decisions coming in and my diversity of clients I am seeing how BIPOC students are receiving more deferrals and rejections than average and privileged, affluent, and well resourced students are being accepted

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To the schools that are their reach [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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And I am hearing the same from other counselors working with marginalized students Student who we would never suspect would ever get rejected and have the same qualifications as their privileged peers are now being deferred or rejected more often [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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I'm sitting here in real time just deflated to her this. Imagining that it has always been this way, but to hearing that it's getting harder just sucks. [#EquityChat](#)

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

Me too...I have heartburn.

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For me that's not something I put on the students After this season ends I will have to figure out who is standing by my students and working to include them and who isn't [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

[5:32 pm] Dr. Curry (@iamkeithcurry)

Q5 @JennTheTutor. What impact will the most recent FAFSA delay have for current student applicants? How can we best support those navigating this process? @DrPamLuster @DrTammeil @CollegeFutures #EquityChat #EquityAvengers

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Financial aid letters tell students the truth for the first time We tell them that college is going to be way too expensive An admissions officer convince them scholarship will rain from the sky [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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When the first financial aid letters drop student who applied early find out the truth and the news spreads that this college has been over promising and under delivering [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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And that news spreads throughout the school [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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Students start to understand that some of their options are out of their budget The list for early students expands The list for regular students get reshaped [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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Right now there are students out there who don't even realize the colleges that accepted them will not be delivering on their promise of financial support [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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So other than crying under my desk sporadically I am working with student leaders like my assistant Chance who is telling me the time as we speak to come up with solutions [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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And we are discussing how are we going to convince students to not take out a ton of debt for colleges sitting on millions if not billions in endowments [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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Exposing them to rolling colleges and reminding them we hit the jackpot when [@NOVAcommcollege](#) decided to make investments here [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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Reminding students that the name brand on their sweatshirt isn't going to define their future And to stop looking at colleges that aren't as well known as back up options or "safety" but instead colleges that genuinely care about their future [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

Yes, yes, yes! Let's start a revolution! We also see a consistent lack of support or pressure when students select community colleges as their first choice with their families and friends. It's so frustrating. Affordable, higher quality, and a pathway to transfer.

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And honestly, I love that Last year a lot of my students turned down big brand names to go to colleges that actually cared that maybe their friends never heard of [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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Or to go into [@NOVAcommcollege](#) with excitement and a plan So we are taking it day by day and reminding students there is a college out there looking for them and these other name brand high ranked colleges may not have their interest in mind [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

I'm so feeling you! Thanks to Chance for encouraging you to do both--speak up & offer solutions. So important in sustaining hope in what seems hopeless. [#ibelieve!](#)

[5:39 pm] [Dr. Luster \(@DrPamLuster\)](#)

Q6 @JennTheTutor. To do this work, we must continue learning and partnering with others. How do you educate yourself and who is informing your practice? @DrTammeil @lamkeithcurry @CollegeFutures #EquityChat #EquityAvengers

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I mean I credit a lot to [@AcceptGroup](#) and [@spamfriedrice](#) because [#hackthegates](#) allowed me to learn within a community

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I am still reading rethinking college admissions by [@spamfriedrice](#) and Michael bastedo

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Reading the privileged poor by Anthony Jack [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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I also really love [@akilbello](#) [@JonBoeckenstedt](#) [@Annalvey](#) [@nikklani](#) [@ASPDallas](#) and others work (sorry yall I'm being told I'm running out of time to tag the rest of you)

[#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

[Dr Pamela Luster](#) [#EquityAvengers](#) [#RealCollegePrez](#) [@DrPamLuster](#)

following and checking my libby!

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I am lucky enough to have [@Wh10Sean](#) in my circle I've learned more from him than I've read in books [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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But [@NACAC](#) conferences [@AcceptGroup](#) papers and conversation is how I educate myself But honestly the students and my community teaches me the most [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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I know everyone said it was wild to drive a student from Maryland/Virginia to Texas but in my community driving a student to college or a job opportunity or to even a doctors appointment is a normal practice- we take care of our own [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson](#) [@DrTammeil](#)

And this is why your mother said you'd tutor pro bono. "We take care of our own." Love this, [@jennthetutor](#) [#grateful](#)

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EQUITY AVENGERS

I also rely on people like [@CandiMundonKing](#) and [@KennyBoddye](#)
[#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#) and my own parents who happen to be
school board members

[5:46pm] [Dr. Gilkerson \(@DrTammeil\)](#)

Q7 [@JennTheTutor](#). We all have a vision of the future we want to live in. What is your freedom dream for higher education and what gives you hope for its future? [@DrPamLuster](#) [@lamkeithcurry](#) [@CollegeFutures](#)
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Liberation and dismantling of the idea that students who are in marginalized groups should have to be "high performing" or as Dartmouth said have to overcome difficulties and prove they can thrive in order to gain access [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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I wake up every morning hoping to make David and Janet and the SAT and ACT less relevant I want to be a force that they can't tackle and let our students make the best decisions for them
[#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

[Dr Pamela Luster](#) [#EquityAvengers](#) [#RealCollegePrez](#) [@DrPamLuster](#)

How fortunate we are to have you in the corner of our young students navigating this maze. TY
[@jennthetutor](#) [#EquityChat](#)

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I want colleges who want equity, diversity, access, inclusion to know it comes at a cost and that racism and inequity are systemic and therefore one fix- test optional or waiving fees or travel vouchers are not going to fix it [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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I want colleges who want equity but do not want to pay the cost and still preserve legacy or inequitable practices to stop coming to my community to pick "the good ones" and force us to assimilate to have access [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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We won't be free in higher education until marginalized students are able to step away from "high performing" and be average like their peers and still have opportunities I want my students to be the same level of average as their privileged peers but get access to opportunity



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What gives me hope is my students and the fact my mother went to jail during the civil rights movement and never thought while she was in jail that segregation would actually end but woke up one day and discovered some segregation was dismantled [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

[5:53 pm] [Dr. Curry \(@iamkeithcurry\)](#)

Q8 [@JennTheTutor](#). The road to racial equity is long. How are you sustaining yourself? What practice would you recommend to other [#EquityAvengers](#)? [@DrPamLuster](#) [@DrTammeil](#) [@CollegeFutures](#) [#EquityChat](#) [#EquityAvengers](#)

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Well I just turned 40- so I make it a point to spend more time getting ready and taking care of myself when I wake up and go to sleep [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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So great that you're investing in that now-I was 2 decades older and a cancer diagnosis in before I realized that grinding at 110% was not the answer. People bash self-care, and it's so much more than the flip bath bombs tropes. [#EquityChat](#)

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I decided this year that I am responsible for my own vision and realized how much fundraising for my pro bono efforts were draining me so I am looking into consulting and speaking to get additional streams of revenue [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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I also am doing 40 days of spa treatments for my 40 years And one really cool thing that I now do is take students to events with me like [@uche_blackstock](#) book launch event or [@ava](#) origin where they can see powerful versions of their wildest dreams [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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This year when the students got so stressed that one cried I called time of death on the session and we went to the movies to see The Marvels I got to be the one who introduced a student to the Marvel universe [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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We also take a lot of walks and I openly discuss how I feel when they get rejected or waitlisted or deferred and let them talk about it and do a whole "what if" without interruption Then we grab some food, and go back to our lives [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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I also find that surrounding myself with past students who have gone on to college and inviting them in to work with current students has been such a game changer and stress reliever [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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I couldn't have even done this chat without Chance an alum of our program screaming via zoom "it's time..." or "stop writing" or "you got move on" being around the students after they go off to college has been a huge stress reliever because they constantly tell me why I do this

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

I loved every moment. You were amazingly impactful in limited characters. I can only imagine you in the flesh and I'm sure it's 10xs. Damn the system, but thank you. Bless you, Chance. Bless you, [@jennthetutor](#).

[jennthetutor](#) [#TestFree \(she/her\)](#) [@jennthetutor](#)

Thank you and thank Chance for telling me it's time to move on if you want to have an impact on the next question [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

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I am doing my first float pod tomorrow and I've never been able to float so it requires a lot of letting go and surrendering that I need for this fafsa chaos time [#equityavengers](#) [#equitychat](#)

[6:00 pm] [Dr. Luster \(@DrPamLuster\)](#)

TY [@jennthetutor](#) for joining us & sharing your work on [#EquityChat](#) sponsored by [@CollegeFutures](#) !
Join us next wk as we offer a themed Best of [#EC](#) for those observing- enjoy [#AshWednesday](#) & [#ValentinesDay](#) - [@Iamkeithcurry](#) [@DrTammeil](#) [@DrPamLuster](#) [@equityavengers](#) OUT!