

James Walters

Executive Director

National Council for Marketing & Public Relations (NCMPR)

April 10, 2024

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

Welcome to #EquityChat sponsored by @CollegeFutures w/your hosts @lamkeithcurry @DrTammeil & @DrPamLuster. Tonight, we're excited to have James Walters, Exec Dir. @ncmpr_national share the importance of comms professionals in our work to advance #racialequity. Welcome James!

[NCMPR @ncmpr_national](#)

Thank you for the introduction. I am so happy to be here.

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

We are excited to have you here-

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

Yay!

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

Q1 James @ncmpr_national. As you engage in equity-focused work, what is your walk-up song or anthem?
@DrPamLuster @lamkeithcurry @CollegeFutures #EquityChat #EquityAvengers

[NCMPR @ncmpr_national](#)

OK, THIS was one of the toughest questions I've had today. I'm going to go with Brave by Sara Bareilles. (Mic drop) we're done here!...

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

There must be a story here [@ncmpr_national](#)

[NCMPR @ncmpr_national](#)

Love Sara Bareilles and just feel this song has always been uplifting. It says, be who you are, and own it. Love the message.

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

A great [@SaraBareilles](#) song! "You can be amazing You can turn a phrase into a weapon or a drug You can be the outcast Or be the backlash of somebody's lack of love Or you can start speaking up Nothing's gonna hurt you the way that words do" <https://youtu.be/QUQsqBqxoR4>

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

Q2 James [@ncmpr_national](#). Was there a defining moment or experience that catalyzed your journey to engage in this work, particularly from a marketing and communications perspective? [@DrPamLuster](#) [@DrTammeil](#) [@CollegeFutures](#) #EquityChat #EquityAvengers

[NCMPR @ncmpr_national](#)

(1/9) I'd heard from underrepresented members who had past experiences at our events that that did not feel welcoming. They felt like it was too clickish. that's not OK. That's not what we as an org. represent, & it's not who our members represent.

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(2/9) Our surveys show our membership is overwhelmingly white women, which matches the higher edu marketing industry. It was important to me early on that potential members see NCMPR as a place where they are welcome, where their opinions are valued.

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(3/9) How do we reflect this in our organization's leadership, and the materials and programming we are putting out there? Those were the things that I challenged the NCMPR board to work on.

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(4/9) In the past three years we have implemented new DEI strategies, developed a nationwide DEI committee; lead by one of our director at large positions, and we have implemented a Communications/DEI Manager position to assist with incorporating DEI into all we do.

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(5/9) Before coming to NCMPR, I spent 23 yrs at Skagit Valley College. There, I led Mar Comm efforts in support of a \$3.1 million capital campaign, rooted in equity.

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(6/9) All funds raised were focused on removing barriers to students traditionally underserved, including emergency funds & childcare assistance. Many groups of students have been marginalized or excluded within higher ed due to systemic disparities & discrimination.

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(7/9) We must be committed to equity in education and address the disparities in access, resources, and opportunities for all students. In the midst of the campaign, I desperately sought resources to assist with equity-minded mar comm but was unable to find adequate support.

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(8/9) I knew when coming to NCMPR I wanted to be that resource for marketing and PR pros who don't know where to start or need someone to connect with & learn from.

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(9/9) We have a lot of work to do, but I think our strategies are starting to make a difference in the diversity we are seeing at our conferences, in our membership and in the leadership of the organization. We have a ways to go, but we are on the path.

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

We all have a way to go--this is about building for the long term, and I'm heartened by the intentional work you're leading.

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

That's a lot to accomplish, but my Spidey senses tell me that you are absolutely on the right track. [#EquityChat](#)

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

Q3 James @ncmpr_national. You have been Executive Director of NCMPR since 2020. What are your top 3 priorities for the organization? @DrTammeil @IamKeithCurry @CollegeFutures #EquityChat #EquityAvengers

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(1/3) making sure new members feel welcome & valued. 2, Empowering members to excel in their roles through cutting-edge knowledge, tools, and support.

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(2/3) providing programming & events that are relevant, on top of trends &, yes, fun. Giving them a safe space to talk about these and other issues.

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(3/3) We spend a third of our lives at work—it's vital for our mental health that that time spent isn't a drag.

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

I couldn't agree more!!!

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

Q4 James @ncmpr_national. From your perspective, how do you see marketing and PR professionals having an impact on racial equity in #highered? As an organization, how does NCMPR support these efforts?
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(1/5) Not all the states our members come from are supportive of DEI initiatives, or have placed barriers on how colleges can talk about DEI. It falls to our colleges marcom & PR pros to help students know they are welcome & supported.

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(2/5) The materials they use and the content being delivered should be a reflection of the community and student population. Many of our members do an excellent job at reaching diverse populations and delivering on what students in their community need.

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(3/5) We see how our members prioritize this & we see the excellent work they are doing, inspiring, and becoming DEI champions, helping colleagues at other colleges who may need guidance.

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

Having a network of colleagues for support is critical, especially when things aren't always easy. Your roles are very critical to helping everyone feel seen and communicated with. Tough needle to thread at times. However, it is important not to be bullied.

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(4/5) We have a category in our medallion awards program that focuses on DEI marketing campaigns. We have seen some excellent work coming from our members in this category. I'm so proud to work for an org that amplifies & celebrates those efforts.

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(5/5) It's also simply being there for one another, knowing you have a network of 1,700 members from 589 community & technical colleges going through the same challenges as you. Having that support is comforting. We gotta be brave & ask for help & support one another.

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

Bravely asking for support...we ALL need to get better at it.

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

Q5 James @ncmpr_national. How can #higherled leaders most effectively partner with their marketing and PR teams to affect transformative change on their campus? @DrPamLuster @DrTammeil @CollegeFutures #EquityChat

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Leaders, you have to give your marcom & PR folks a seat at the table. They should be members of your president's councils & cabinets. These are the folks on staff who have the stats & the know-how to ensure your programs & student support are promoted & successful.

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

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

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(1/3) Our members are our best resources. They're doing amazing work in DEI. We also turn to experts like Dr. Curry, bringing them in to be our conference keynotes.

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(2/3) We partner with experts like TaChelle Lawson with FIG Strategy & Consulting in Las Vegas to provide training to our staff & board.

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(3/3) We spotlight those experts in spots like "Can You Make It Pretty?", NCMPR's podcast <https://www.ncmpr.org/can-you-make-it-pretty>

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

Will definitely check it out [#EquityChat](#)

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

Yes, looking forward to it!

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

Q7 James @ncmpr_national. 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 @IamKeithCurry @CollegeFutures #EquityChat #EquityAvengers

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(1/3) This feels naïve to say, but if you're talking about dreams ... We have an upcoming Can You Make It Pretty? interview with a member from the country's only joint HBCU/HSI community college.

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(2/3) The ep focuses on crisis comms, about how they dealt with a racially motivated bomb threat last year. We must have these conversations, they're absolutely vital.

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(3/3) My freedom dream is for episodes like this upcoming one to be unnecessary. Where these bomb threats and other instances of hate are so far a part of the past, they're brought up only as reminders of how it used to be.

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

Q8 James @ncmpr_national. 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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(1/3) I'm a people person. I thrive on relationships. My friends sustain me. Talking to people like you about these topics sustains me. For other [#EquityAvengers](#), it's important to keep having these conversations.

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(2/3) I also remind myself that the evidence is irrefutable- diversity increases innovation, decision-making, creativity, employee & student engagement, productivity, and talent attraction and retention.

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(3/3) They're not always easy, but we can't improve anything if we shy away from discussing DEI. To call back to my walkup song: "Show me how big your brave is"!



[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

+beginning "Everybody's been there, everybody's been stared down By the enemy Fallen 4 the fear & done some disappearing Bow down to the mighty But don't run, stop holding UR tongue Maybe there's a way out of the cage where you live Maybe 1 of these days U can let the light in"

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Sing it loud!!!

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

I am right now!

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

TY James @ncmpr_national for sharing your work with us tonight on #EquityChat! Next week, we host Dr. Felecia Russell @PresImmAlliance to chat about her new book on Black undocumented student voices. Until next time - @lamkeithcurry @DrTammeil @DrPamLuster @equityavengers OUT!

[NCMPR @ncmpr_national](#)

Thank you! so fun, sooo important!

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

You had us singing, thinking, and enjoying a 'lil [#EquityChat](#) with you! Thanks for taking the time and for the work you're doing!