

Dr. Felecia Russell

Director of Higher Ed Immigration Portal, President's Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration

Author of *Amplifying Black Undocumented Student Voices in Higher Education*

April 17, 2024

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

Welcome to #EquityChat sponsored by @CollegeFutures w/your @equityavengers @lamkeithcurry @DrTammeil & @DrPamLuster Tonight we are excited to chat with Dr Felicia Russell Director, @PresImmAlliance . Welcome Dr Russell!!!

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Felecia: It is great to be here.

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

Happy to have you!

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

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

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Felecia: Definitely, "She is a bad mama jama" by Carl Carlton—that song just has so much life and makes you feel you can change the world. [#EquityChat #EquityAvengers](#)

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

Awww, yes! A classic hit! <https://t.co/azqxnaEZkd>

I wish I were half the things he sings about, but I dance like I am!

Love this line:

"She's poetry in motion  
A beautiful sight to see"

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

Q2 Dr. Russell @PresImmAlliance. Congrats on the release of your book this week! What catalyzed your journey to share your story and the experiences of other undocuBlack students in this medium?  
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(1 / 3) Felecia: Growing up, I thought of my undocumented status as a limitation, as a liability, but once I shared my story with my counselor, and he responded so kindly, I realized that instead of looking at my status as a hindrance,

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(2 / 3) I should change my mindset about it. I started to see my status as a superpower and I want other Black undocumented immigrants to see their status as such as well.

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

I love this, Felecia! Thank you for sharing this powerful part of your personal story. You're in the company of [@equityavengers](#) who are actively disrupting what superpowers are seen, valued, and fostered. Proud to be in the community with you.

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(3 / 3) The other 15 stories in the book are a testament of hard work, drive, and resilience. The goal is to contribute to the immigration conversation and make it more nuanced. [#EquityChat](#)  
[#EquityAvengers](#)[#EquityChat](#)

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

If you haven't picked yours up yet. Amplifying Black Undocumented Student Voices in Higher Education <https://t.co/oQuUEXziNB>

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

Thank you for good counselors!

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

Q3 Dr. Russell @PresImmAlliance. How do undocuBlack students' intersectional identities uniquely impact their sense of belonging on campus, particularly within their own student groups? @DrTammeil @lamkeithcurry @CollegeFutures #EquityChat #EquityAvengers

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(1 / 3) Felecia: Well, for one, [#UndocuBlack](#) students often feel they cannot fully exist in undocumented spaces as both Black and undocumented. They often have to choose one over the other and that can feel debilitating.

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(2 / 3) They have to compartmentalize their different identities. The same is true when they are in Black student spaces- they have to ignore their immigration status and solely focus on their Blackness. That too,

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I've heard this from many undocumented and mixed-status students--that the confines of our Westernized identity structure limit their expression as immigrants and cloak them in a very narrow definition of themselves based on how others view them.

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(3 / 3) can impact how comfortable they feel in those student spaces. It is a constant back and forth in terms of their identity. [#EquityChat](#)

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

Q4 Dr. Russell @PresImmAlliance. Can you share more about the dangers of invisibility and why it's important for scholars to include undocuBlack voices in the immigrant narrative? @DrPamLuster @lamkeithcurry @CollegeFutures [#EquityChat](#) [#EquityAvengers](#)

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(1/5) Felecia: Invisibility leads to a lack of advocacy, overcriminalization, and further marginalization of [#UndocuBlack](#) immigrants. As for lack of advocacy, it is like a double edged sword. [#EquityChat](#) [#EquityAvengers](#)

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(2/5) [#UndocuBlack](#) students don't see themselves represented in the immigrant spaces, they stay silent.

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(3 / 5) That silence leads to inaction. Practitioners leading the immigrant spaces are not aware of [#UndocuBlack](#) voices, so they don't include stories or the experiences of undocuBlack students- which perpetuates invisibility.

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(4 / 5) This invisibility ultimately leads to a lack of advocacy from higher education practitioners, leaders, educators, and policymakers. Without understanding the full picture of the undocumented population, [#UndocuBlack](#) immigrants are left behind.

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(5 / 5) Another danger of invisibility is overcriminalization—undocuBlack immigrants are twice as likely to be deported than any other immigrant group, this is in part, due to invisibility. [#EquityChat](#) [#EquityAvengers](#)

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

Wow, this surprised me, but sadly, it didn't surprise me.

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

Q5 Dr. Russell @PresImmAlliance. Tell us about the Higher Ed Immigration Portal. How can #higher ed practitioners best utilize its resources to support and create spaces for undocuBlack students? @DrPamLuster @DrTammeil @CollegeFutures #EquityChat

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(1/4) Felecia: The Higher Ed Immigration Portal is a digital resource hub for [#HigherEd](#) leaders, policymakers, students, and the general public can easily access evidence-based research and data,

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(2/4) policy analysis, personal narratives, and resources. As for how to create safe spaces for [#UndocuBlack](#) students, we have a communities of practice directory for practitioners,

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(3/5) Also, a private institution tool that practitioners can use to help students learn about undocumented friendly policies on certain campuses. <https://bit.ly/445bB6xwhere> [#EquityChat](#)

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(4/5) We also have an “ask an expert” form where practitioners can submit questions to us and we follow up within 48 hours to lend our support. <https://t.co/zTfWLQ75uM>

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

What an amazing resource!

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(5/5) The portal has narratives and research, so practitioners can tap into those resources. They can also reach out to me and I can look at their undocumented student programming and support in that way as well. [#EquityChat](#) [#EquityAvengers](#)

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

Q6 Dr. Russell @PresImmAlliance. 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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(1/3) Felecia: I'm continuously staying up to date with the policy context. The portal is good for that because we have a state legislative tracker where people can learn about pending legislation related to [#UndocumentedStudents](#).

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Bookmarking now! We need to have eyes on policy and practice.

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(2/3) <https://bit.ly/4455u1Z> [#EquityChat](#)

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(3/3) We also have a new FAFSA landing page with recent updates to the [#FAFSA](#) issues. And in August of 2024, we will be releasing a college advising guide for high school counselors and teachers to support undocumented students. <https://t.co/hqEPxF24hg>

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

Q7 Dr. Russell @PresImmAlliance. 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 [#EquityChat](#) [#EquityAvengers](#)

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(1/3) Felecia: Wow, such a great question. My freedom dream would entail accessible [#HigherEducation](#) for all students who desire to pursue it. We know that when folks are educated, they are more likely to



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(2/3) have positive impacts on their community & pursue life goals. In that dream, all states have equitable tuition access for [#Undocumentedstudents](#) and open access to [#FAFSA](#). [#EquityChat](#)  
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[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

I'm co-signing this freedom dream! Let's go!

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(3/3) Finally, from a diversity and inclusion standpoint, racial diversity in [#HigherEducation](#) should be representative of students who reflect the racial composition of the U.S. which has been impacted tremendously by recent immigration. [#EquityChat](#)

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

Q8 Dr. Russell [@PresImmAlliance](#). The road to racial equity is long. How are you sustaining yourself? What practice would you recommend to other [#EquityAvengers](#)? [@DrPamLuster](#) [@DrTammeil](#) [@CollegeFutures](#)  
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(1/2) Felecia: Since my work is also tied to my well-being, it can often be arduous and fetid. Exercise and physical activity helps ground me. I stretch daily, box twice per week, lift, and take short walks.

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Okay, now I'm feeling some sorta of way... [#MimiGoals](#)

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(2/2) Getting the blood pumping is a mood booster! I always have non-work related books I like to read. I also think community is important. Find your community and stay connected to them. And, focus on the things that bring you joy. [#EquityChat](#)

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

No, but seriously...I admire your commitment to your physical and mental health! You are so right!

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

TY so much for joining us on [#EquityChat](#) Dr Russell [@PresImmAlliance](#) & sharing your work ; we are excited to see your new book and hope we've elevated it here. We will be announcing our next guest soon, watch this space! [@iamkeithcurry](#) [@DrTammeil](#) [@DrPamLuster](#) [@equityavengers](#) OUT!