

Iris Aguilar

Executive Director of Equity & Community Impact

Foundation for California Community Colleges

May 8, 2024

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

Welcome to #EquityChat sponsored by @CollegeFutures w/ your hosts @lamkeithcurry @DrTammeil & @DrPamLuster tonight our guest is Iris Aguilar, Exec. Dir. of Equity & Community Impact at @FoundationCCC #EquityAvengers Welcome Iris!

[FoundationCCC @FoundationCCC](#)

Thank you so much for having me on the [#EquityChat](#)! I am honored to be sharing this space with you all. – Iris

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

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

[FoundationCCC @FoundationCCC](#)

Love this question! My walk-up song is "Look at This (Remix)" by The Halluci Nation, a First Nations group that promotes pan-indigenous solidarity, environmental justice, and a decolonized future. The song gets me pumped, to say the least! Listen at full blast:

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

I love being introduced to new music and artists! I'm blasting it now! Just checked out the [@atribecalledred](#) website and there is so much to explore! TY, Iris!

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

Q2 Iris @FoundationCCC. You have over 19 years of service to the California Community Colleges. Was there a defining moment or experience that catalyzed your journey to engage in this work? @DrPamLuster @DrTammeil @CollegeFutures #EquityChat #EquityAvengers

[FoundationCCC @FoundationCCC](#)

Lifelong mentors instilled my passion for community and social justice by taking me to marches and community advocacy events. In college, I mentored and connected peers to holistic resources and saw firsthand how basic needs impact retention in underserved communities. This fueled my drive to empower students. Fast-forward to 2004: I joined FoundationCCC and now lead the Equity and Community Impact divisions—a full-circle moment! – Iris [#EquityChat](#)

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

I know those full-circle moments, Iris! I remember when I first went to work for [@berkeleyeaop](#) after benefiting from the program and mentors as a middle school student. Grateful for the mentors in your life who exposed and celebrated you because you are having an [#EquityImpact!](#)

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

Amazing opportunities unfold when we reach into our circles and gather

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

Q3 Iris [@FoundationCCC](#). You led the statewide expansion of the Student Ambassador Program. Can you tell us more about the program and how the peer-to-peer model uniquely addresses racial equity gaps and basic needs insecurities? [@DrTammeil](#) [@lamkeithcurry](#) [@CollegeFutures](#) [#EquityChat](#) [#EquityAvengers](#)

[FoundationCCC @FoundationCCC](#)

(1/3) The Student Ambassador program is building our next gen of leaders through paid experience and peer-to-peer outreach. Since 2016, we've trained over 500 ambassadors across 90 colleges to connect fellow students on campus with critical resources like CalFresh, Crisis Text Line, low-cost auto insurance, etc. [#EquityChat](#)

[FoundationCCC @FoundationCCC](#)

(2/3) Our ambassadors reflect the rich diversity of our communities, including veterans, parenting students, English language learners, foster youth, and dreamers. With an established trust in their community, they create a culture of peer support that makes students feel comfortable reaching out for help. [#EquityChat](#)

[FoundationCCC @FoundationCCC](#)

(3/3) It's a life-changing experience that reduces basic needs barriers for our students while inspiring lifelong commitment to serving others. The program's success is exciting, but it shows there's a growing need and even more work to be done. – Iris [#EquityChat](#)

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

Q4 Iris @FoundationCCC. As we kick-off #AAPIHeritageMonth, can you share more about your newer AANHPI Student Achievement Program and how it will transform the landscape of education for AANHPI students? @DrPamLuster @iamkeithcurry @CollegeFutures #EquityChat #EquityAvengers

[FoundationCCC @FoundationCCC](#)

(1/3) We are incredibly proud of the new AANHPI Student Achievement Program! It is the first state-funded, AANHPI-focused [#communitycollege](#) program in the nation and provides culturally responsive services for low-income, first-gen AANHPI students and other underserved communities. [#EquityChat](#)

[FoundationCCC @FoundationCCC](#)

(2/3) This historic achievement was made possible after years of tireless advocacy, coalition building, and storytelling from our partners at [@CACCommissionAPI](#), [@calcommcolleges](#), and [@APAHEnational](#). We're proud to serve alongside them as the Central Office, which includes activities like outreach, technical assistance, and research, among others. [#EquityChat](#)

[FoundationCCC @FoundationCCC](#)

(3/3) In the last two years, over \$12.9M has been distributed to 50 colleges to support efforts ranging from AANHPI-focused curriculum developments like Ethnic Studies to mental health support and services for this population. \$8M in ongoing funding will be available to support these transformative efforts every year. – Iris [#EquityChat](#)

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

Q5 Iris @FoundationCCC. Last year, Climate Action was designated 6th area of impact for @FoundationCCC. What role does climate action have in driving racial equity and community impact? @DrPamLuster @DrTammeil @CollegeFutures #EquityChat

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(1/2) Communities of color are disproportionately burdened by the effects of a changing climate, so centering their voices in solutions is critical. [@calcommcolleges](#) have close ties to those communities and can serve as critical links to resources for harder-to-reach populations. [#EquityChat](#)

[FoundationCCC @FoundationCCC](#)

(2/2) Our org works to leverage those community ties and foster student leadership in climate equity to raise awareness of opportunities like clean transportation incentives, green jobs, etc. These efforts help move us towards a future that's not just greener but more equitable! – Iris [#EquityChat](#)

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

Q6 Iris @FoundationCCC. 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

[FoundationCCC @FoundationCCC](#)

I volunteer with local orgs supporting immigrant communities and mentor youth in [#highered](#), learning every day from our students and college partners. Also, I carve out space for my own PD; right now, I'm reading "Under the Skin" by Linda Villarosa and "We See Each Other" by Tre'vell Anderson. Highly recommended! – Iris [#EquityChat](#)

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

Q7 Iris @FoundationCCC. 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

[FoundationCCC @FoundationCCC](#)

(1/2) I envision a college experience where institutional barriers are removed and where joy and academic success are intertwined as equal priorities. A place where we nurture minds, bodies, and spirits, fostering a sense of community and unconditional belonging. [#EquityChat](#)

[FoundationCCC @FoundationCCC](#)

(2/2) The brilliance and resilience of our students, along with the relentless drive of our college partners, inspire me daily. Each student deserves holistic support that addresses their intersectional needs and ensures they feel honored, uplifted, and empowered. – Iris [#EquityChat](#)

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

Q8 Iris @FoundationCCC. The road to racial equity is long. How are you sustaining yourself? What practice would you recommend to other #EquityAvengers? @DrPamLuster @DrTammeil @CollegeFutures #EquityChat

[FoundationCCC @FoundationCCC](#)

Creating intentional space to honor your cultural traditions is essential. I've been practicing Danza Mexica (Aztec dance) since I was a child and being in ceremony with family and community is therapeutic on so many levels. Danza Mexica teaches discipline, activism, and spirituality; it keeps me grounded, centered, and ready! – Iris [#EquityChat](#)

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

Thank you Iris Aguilar, Exec. Dir. of Equity & Community Impact at @FoundationCCC for joining us on #EquityChat and sharing your work. We will be announcing our next guest vey soon...until then @lamkeithcurry @DrTammeil @DrPamLuster @equityavengers OUT!