



*Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast* | **TRANSCRIPT**  
BONUS Episode: Conversation with NCA President Kent Ono

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\*\*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

Kent Ono

*[Audio Length: 0:17:43]*

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**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'm speaking with Kent Ono. Dr. Ono is a communication professor at the University of Utah and the president of the National Communication Association for 2020. Professor Ono's research focuses on media representations of race, gender, sexuality, class, and nation. Additionally, Dr. Ono is a scholarly leader in the area of research on race and colonialism. A good example of this expertise is his book *Contemporary Media Culture and the Remnants of a Colonial Past* which studies the rhetoric of colonialism in the United States. Professor Ono is also the past editor of communication and critical cultural studies and a past co-editor with Ron Jackson of critical studies in media communication. So, we've asked Dr. Ono to come talk with us today about their vision and goals for 2020 for NCA and for everything to come. Hi, Kent.

**Kent Ono:**

Hi, Trevor. How are you?



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**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Good. Congratulations. You know, it's the new year and a new presidency for you and that's pretty exciting. One of the things that we're always interested in is how our leaders come to leadership. Why you decided to run for NCA office, what motivated you to seek this exalted position?

**Kent Ono:**

Yeah. Well, I had been thinking about running for president for a long time and the opportunity arose. I wasn't doing any other administrative work and communication is central to my career and to who I am as a scholar and has given me a lot. NCA in particular has given me tremendous opportunities and allowed me to be who I am as a scholar. And so, becoming a leader, becoming the president seemed the right thing to do to give back to the association. Additionally, I had a lot of experience in administration and therefore, felt like I had a lot of experience that I could bring to the position to help the organization move forward and strengthen itself.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Do you think that administrative experience is important? I mean should that be a requirement as we think about future leaders for NCA and who we might recruit?

**Kent Ono:**

I think it's a really important barometer of the potential for people to lead the organization in a successful way. There are many skills that one develops as an administrator that are directly pertinent to the job of being president of the National Communication Association and I don't know that it needs to be a requirement so much as it's, as I indicated, a barometer, an example or a kind of sign that someone has the kinds of experience necessary to be able to lead a large organization like this.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

One of the things that we always hope our leaders will do is recruit future leaders, think about ways to mentor future leaders for the association. And besides this notion of thinking about administrative experience, what are some other ways do you think that we might motivate other scholars to become involved in NCA and what do you think you're going to be saying to those scholars about ways to serve the discipline, to serve NCA and that sort of thing?

**Kent Ono:**

Yeah. Well, I think administration on a university campus is one kind of administrative experience but there's also different kinds of administrative experiences that one can gain within an organization such as the National Communication Association. So, being a chair of a division, for example, is excellent experience to prepare one for future leadership, being chair of a council or being in some other kind of role in the association. So, you know, being chair of a department or being a provost or a dean or something like that is not necessary necessarily but you can get



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other kinds of experience within the organization that are directly relevant to other administrative positions within the organization. So, one thing I would say to other people is start small within the organization. Perhaps be a secretary of a division or even if you're a student, be a student representative of a division, run for the legislative assembly, run for some kind of other office that exists like, for example, webmaster within a division and just see how the sausage is made before thinking about some higher level of administrative work that one could do later on.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Well, I think a lot of our leaders too have come from leadership positions in regional associations or other settings and I think those can also prepare for you for NCA leadership as well. No?

**Kent Ono:**

Absolutely, absolutely. Both the regional associations and other allied associations, scholarly professional organizations and other scholarly professional organizations also have positions that can help train people to be prepared to help lead NCA.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

One of the things that we're particularly proud of and I think focused on at NCA is that we're an organization amongst all of those in the communication association universe who actually think about and respond to in many ways many of the challenges and the threats that face higher education more generally and that we come to those challenges from a particular disciplinary perspective as communication scholars and teachers. What are you thinking are some of the bigger challenges that our communication discipline faces and that our members face in terms of the broader higher education landscape and how do you think NCA's in a good position, or not perhaps, to address some of those challenges in this upcoming year?

**Kent Ono:**

I think of three different challenges that scholarly associations like NCA face for the future. One of them is just simply the huge loss of students that we're about to see in higher education more broadly. So, there are a lot of predications and there's quite a bit of discourse right now talking about the loss of students in universities and colleges across the country. And that is going to affect us a field. Another example of a challenge that we face is just the changing attitudes toward freedom of speech. What is an acceptable civic contribution and discursive contribution? That is what can people say on campus and what is allowed and how do we promote freedom of speech while at the same time trying to promote other kinds of values like civic engagement and respect for others and fairness? So, for example, there are a lot of speakers who come to campuses and then they're protested and then they're not able to give their talks. And so, universities as a whole are in a position of having to kind of think through what do we do, how do we address these issues, should we create speech guidelines or speech policies that limit certain kinds of speech, speech that protest, speech that disrespects or speech that invalidates.



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And so, as a field, I think we have a particular role that we can play in helping to guide these kinds of conversations, addressing the fact that there are multiple kinds of values that we might share as communities that there isn't just always an overriding value that everyone can agree on and that it takes discussion and conversation and work together to be able to create some kind of response to these sorts of problems that emerge on college campus. And I think that communication as a field is well-positioned to be able to help and facilitate and provide guidance for these kinds of conversations about difficult discourse because we have from the beginning I think understood that there are different values, that behavior is not the same thing as thought, that one tries to get along in the end as a goal even as one is trying to forge rules, for example, for engagement, those kinds of things that communication scholars are very well-versed in but that are not at the forefront of the conversation typically. The conversation is often about the conflict. It's rarely about the knowledge that we have about conflict.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Yeah. That's a great perspective. I think that's really interesting especially given that we have all of the credos and the public statements and the ethical statements in NCA's history about these very issues. It's really palpably present for everyone so that's great. What about NCA as an organization, Kent? I mean are there particular issues that face the association in the coming year that you're interested in and how best do you think we can address some of those challenges?

**Kent Ono:**

Well, I think the big issue for me is mentorship and I ran on a platform in which I discussed the importance of mentorship to the association. I also think NCA as a discipline is very well-poised to take on this issue of mentorship. We have a lot of knowledge about mentorship but also we need to practice what we teach. Mentorship to me is key for all of the reasons that we've been discussing already here: to help people become leaders in the association, to help them become better scholars, to help them attain their own academic goals. And mentorship is not necessarily well understood broadly and yet there's a lot of information and knowledge about it. So, my goal in the next year to kind of promote—as my goal has been for the past year as well, essentially since I became an officer, my goal has been to promote thinking and serious contemplation of mentorship and to enact different processes that facilitate mentorship. So, this year we'll find out what the taskforce on mentorship comes up with, their recommendations, their ideas. We have Michael Lechuga who is at the helm of the taskforce and we'll be bringing forward new ideas from a very engaged and excited committee to think about in terms of what NCA can do in the future, in terms of mentorship and facilitating it, helping to promote it, helping to create mentors, helping to find mentors, etc.



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**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

We had an issue of Spectra devoted to mentorship and so, keeping that challenge going I think is important. Any other challenges that you anticipate that we're going to be confronting at NCA?

**Kent Ono:**

Well, I think just in general and this is from a lot of experience in my academic life, we as an association are going through a growing process as we always will be. But in this growing process, we're becoming a more diverse organization and I think when people think about diversity, they think we need more of it. And so, most of the efforts go into creating diversity. Right? Bringing people into the fold, finding people who bring diverse perspectives and encouraging them to be part of the organization, encourage them to be part of the association and a part of the field as a whole. And so, a lot of energy goes into trying to recruit diverse people or people who bring diverse experiences and ideas and less attention focuses on what happens after that. And I think for us an institution, as an organization, our goal for this coming year probably ought to be how do we change to adapt to the diverse ideas and the diverse people, the diverse bodies who now inhabit the association. And it's a very different question. It's a very complex and nuanced challenge that I think we face but it's one that I'm very excited about and it's one that I relish and one that I think is very, very positive for us as an association and I'm looking forward to those kinds of conversations and seeing what people come up and how they address this and how we can grow it and build and strengthen it as an organization as a result of it.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Great. I think that's nicely sympathetic I think and relevant to the issues of mentorship as well. And so, they work hand-in-hand with one another. I do want to thank you, Kent, for joining us on Communication Matters, the NCA podcast, all about promoting why communication matters in our lives, in our daily work, and in our society. And so, you're certainly in a great position to contribute to those discussions.

**Kent Ono:**

Thank you so much, Trevor. It's been a pleasure and Happy New Year to you.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Thanks for joining us again on this episode of Communication Matters. In NCA news, NCA recently released a profile of the communication doctorate. This is a report based on the National Science Foundation's survey of earned doctorates and the report presents data on communication doctorates conferred in 2018 including the number of doctorates conferred and post-graduation plans for communication graduates. You can read the full report, *A Profile of the Communication Doctorate* at the NCA website. Also in NCA news, submissions are now open for the 106th NCA annual convention to be held this year in Indianapolis, Indiana November 19<sup>th</sup> through the 22<sup>nd</sup>. Submissions are open until March 25<sup>th</sup> and you can find information about the



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convention and how to submit your work at [natcom.org/convention](http://natcom.org/convention). We hope you tune in for the next episode of Communication Matters which will feature a conversation with Mary Beth Tinker, a petitioner in the 1969 case *Tinker vs. Des Moines*, the landmark case that affirmed the free speech rights of students in public schools. Steve Smith, a freedom of expression scholar and professor emeritus of communication at the University of Arkansas also joins us for this exciting podcast episode.

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 and 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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