Eric Barber
RECIPIENT OF THE EVERETT E. GOURLEY AWARD

Given each year to a leader and educator whose concern for students and colleagues is an inspiration to those who serve in admission.

Congratulations on being the Everett E. Gourley Award recipient this year! It’s clear that you have had a remarkable impact on students and colleagues throughout your career. What helped shape your approach to leadership?

EB: I’m lucky to have had many great mentors, so that’s been a gift. But one particular piece of advice that stands out is from my prior head of school Ronnie Codrington-Cazeau as I was moving up the ladder. She told me, ‘As you climb higher on the organizational chart, you lose control but you gain influence. If you try to manage what everyone is doing, you’ll burn yourself out. Instead, be the Chief Influencer. Help guide the ship—the actions people take and the choices they make—rather than control it.’ That stuck with me. When you engage with your team and ask for their input, you’re planting seeds of influence while empowering their decision making.

When you accepted the award at AC21, you spoke about the importance of engagement and being seen in the enrollment profession. Can you elaborate on your message?

EB: I think it’s incredibly important for enrollment professionals to connect with and learn from each other, which is why I really appreciate EMA. I think Heather’s Hoorie’s leadership, and her focus on steering the culture toward a more member services-oriented operation, has helped both EMA and all of us. The EMA staff are so engaging, and I’ve always appreciated how responsive the team has been—little things like answering my calls or texts when I have an idea. I would encourage new and older members alike to continue to use EMA to expand your network and expand your toolkit.

EMAs How do you guide your team so they can grow in their own careers?

EB: One thing I believe in is getting to know everyone’s story, and sharing my story in return. That’s how you really understand what makes people tick, which helps build trust and goodwill. Understanding their goals and fears helps me provide them opportunities for growth. Everyone on my team has done either ATI or ADI. My team spends a lot of time together. Our team culture is one of continuous improvement, so we focus a lot on professional development. We meet regularly, we do a few off-campus retreats each year, we celebrate birthdays together. It keeps morale up so that everyone feels seen and included. Work-life balance is important and my team knows family needs come first. We’re a very humane, relationship-based school, so elevating the human side of our roles is part of our philosophy.

With such a close-knit team, how did you maintain engagement and morale during COVID? What helped your team adapt?

EB: We got organized. We began using Microsoft Teams, which was new to us but is now something we rely on. It’s one of our “COVID keepers.” Our elementary assistant director Joy Sevillano also prepared and delivered a year’s worth of DEI training for our team, which provided us with a really beneficial framework for discussing critical topics. It was very personal, it kept us close together, and it made us stronger.

How have students inspired you to grow in your career over the years?

EB: The most important thing I’ve learned from students is that we are dealing with their education, not ours. There are a lot of decisions that you can make in enrollment that are very adult-centered, and I really believe in student-centered decision making. We must listen to students and take care of them. We must encourage students to use their voices, even when they use those voices to call you out and hold you accountable. Students tell you when you’re doing great, and they also tell you when you’re not doing enough. They’ve held me accountable, which is good because it is their education.

What advice would you give to other enrollment professionals during this busy time of the year?

EB: Continue practicing self-care. If you don’t have a self-care routine, you should develop one. At this time of year, you can let your own needs slip until you’re suddenly burnt out or unwell. I know that if I can’t take care of myself, it will be really hard to take care of my team, so I do small things like taking two walks a day at work—and I will ask someone on my team to join me if they can. Our profession can be a lonely job, and it can be misunderstood in our schools. It’s up to all of us to support each other, stay connected, and take care of one another.
Sheila Bogan
RECIPIENT OF THE WILLIAM B. BRETNALL AWARD

Given each year to a leader and educator who has made significant contributions to the field of admission.

As this year’s William B. Bretnall Award winner, you’re being recognized for your meaningful contributions to the admission profession. What does this award mean to you?

SB: I’m a huge collaborator, and I love working with other enrollment professionals. Hopefully, this recognition will allow me to add even more people to my circle. This is a wonderful field because it brings together like-minded individuals who share in the most non-competitive ways. It’s such a breath of fresh air.

Of your achievements in enrollment management, what has been your proudest?

SB: There’s not one thing; there are small moments that accumulate. I’m proud of the kid I took a chance on, who I watched excel at our school and walk across the stage at graduation. I’m proud when I see a nervous 8th-grader get involved in clubs and teams and transform into a full person. I’m still in touch with families I worked with 20 years ago when I started in higher education admissions. That’s why I’m in this. It’s not for recognition—which is nice—but I’m in this for the students, and the relationship building, and being part of the school fabric. That means so much to me. I just recently lost a close friend, and it was very sudden and put everything in perspective. I realize I’m so lucky to truly love what I do. Who knew a job could be like this?

Of the people who save you.

SB: This has been a year of changes, challenges, and compounding issues. Yet what gets us through as enrollment professionals is staying flexible and recognizing we don’t know everything. I’m confident that when you have the right people to lean on when new challenges arise, you can handle anything. Don’t get so consumed by obstacles that you forget the job you’re supposed to be doing, which is finding the right match for these students.

What would you say to other enrollment professionals who are just starting on this career path?

SB: Find your people—literally. Network, be present at industry events, put yourself out there. Don’t stay in your hotel room! I know it can be a little scary. I remember my first time attending an EMA event and it was intimidating—and I’m good at talking to people. But this is the type of group and the kinds of people who are open to connection. You will find someone to talk to, someone to go to dinner with. If you’re going to do it anywhere, do it here.

Finally, with all the current challenges and opportunities facing independent schools, what do leaders need to do now to prepare for future success?

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Rohan M. Arjun
RECIPIENT OF THE RISING STAR AWARD

Developed by the Admission Leadership Council and a sub-committee of EMA’s Board of Trustees, this award honors professionals with 10 years or less experience who have distinguished themselves and/or their schools in the field of enrollment management.

EMA: You’re officially a Rising Star! As someone who has distinguished themselves in fewer than 10 years in enrollment management, what advice would you give other newer professionals in the field?
RA: I’ve always tried to pay it forward because I remember being the young admission professional at the conference, or on the road traveling at fairs, and having colleagues who were more seasoned take me under their wings. So today, when a new admission professional reaches out to me to talk, I make time for them—and when they ask how they can thank me, I tell them to do the same when someone emails or calls them for advice in the future. In addition, it is very important to have a network of mentors and friends in the admission field, who you can reach out to, share ideas, learn from, and confide in. Seek out mentors. Find your people.

EMA: How did mentorship impact your own career trajectory thus far?
RA: I've been very fortunate that there have been people who have seen something in me that I may not have seen in myself right away. There are too many to mention, but two examples I think about are Henry Fairfax and Anne Behnke. Henry, the incoming head of school at Concord Academy, at the time was director of admission at Haverford School. After meeting me at NAIS’ People of Color Conference (PoCC) in 2010, where I was serving on faculty for the Student Diversity Leadership Conference (SDLC), I shared that I had just graduated from Temple University and thought I had an interest in returning to independent schools as an admission professional. He invited me to shadow him at Haverford, where I observed an interview, went on tour, and sat in on his team meeting. I left Haverford that day knowing my calling. Anne, who is a giant in this field, on my first day at St. Mark’s School, she asked me what I wanted to do with my career. At that time, I said I wanted to be a director of admission one day. From that day forward, she helped me gain the experiences I would need to feel comfortable and confident stepping into my own directorship. She supported me when I went to get my master’s degree. The experiences I had while I was working for her—the things that I learned—were invaluable.

EMA: What does it feel like for your work in the field to be recognized in this way?
RA: I’m honestly humbled. I’ll never forget sitting at an EMA conference a few years back and watching them announce the winners of the Bretnall Award and the Gourley Award, and the recipients were people who were big names in the industry. I thought, this is wonderful—but what about the newer professionals? How do we acknowledge and motivate these people? Especially because, at the time, there was data from the State of the Industry survey that showed individuals stay in the admission field for five years on average.

So, I tweeted EMA about it. Fast-forward three years, and I had the opportunity to join the ALC and contribute my ideas as they were developing this new award. To now be the recipient of the award, and to stand on that stage, made me feel seen and heard. It helped me realize how my work has an impact—and that’s important for other young admission professionals to understand. They can see that making a difference is really possible.

EMA: This past year has shown that the industry is constantly changing. What do you think you, and other enrollment professionals at the beginning of their careers, need to do now to prepare for the future?
RA: Helping your school identify and clearly articulate their value proposition is more important than ever. Gone are the days when your school’s only competition is the other private school down the street. Today, your competition includes all the ways that a family can spend upwards of $25,000 a year. That’s a new car, vacations, saving for retirement, college tuition, mortgage payments, country club memberships—all of these things are your competition. You need to articulate why a family should spend that money with you, and how the value and outcome of their investment in an education at your school will last a lifetime.

EMA: What has surprised you most about becoming a leader in the field?
RA: The part about being a leader that no one talks about is managing others—and often you don’t have the opportunity to gain experience in that area before you’re sitting in the manager’s seat. I would recommend that younger professionals who are interested in leadership take advantage of learning opportunities, such as the ones offered through EMA. Sign up for a webinar, look into Future Leaders, listen to podcasts. You need to try new things, remain flexible, and be innovative. COVID showed us that. When EMA says the admissions practices of the past will not sustain the independent schools of the future, they’re right.