LEAVING ONE’S HOME AND STARTING OVER IN AN UNFAMILIAR COUNTRY can be daunting for anyone, but there are unique challenges when embarking upon a career as an enrollment leader at a new school on a new continent. To provide a roadmap for enrollment professionals considering the journey, we have begun a series of interviews with international enrollment professionals at all phases in their international enrollment careers.

**REFLECTIONS On the Journey to International Enrollment**

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> **EMA:** What attracted you to move abroad and work at an international school?  
> **JL:** I grew up as a Third Culture Kid (TCK) and spent much of my childhood outside the United States attending German, British, and international schools. I was not actually looking to go abroad. Instead, the opportunity sort of came my way. In my 20s, I was asked to join a panel focused on Third Culture Kids and relocation. At this conference, I made a professional connection, and a few years later, I was asked to apply for a job in London. While this opportunity may have serendipitously come my way, I am a firm believer in the power of relationships and connections... as well as storytelling.

What was supposed to be a two-year adventure in London has turned into 16+ years in international school enrollment. The diversity in international schools—the wealth of experience both amongst faculty and students—is so rich. The life experience for children growing up in cultures outside of their home culture created learning opportunities beyond anything taught in a classroom.

> **EMA:** What do you feel are the biggest enrollment challenges and opportunities that are unique to international independent schools?  
> **JL:** The biggest challenge for international schools is the rolling nature of enrollment. In schools where most students are expatriates, you will find students moving in and out throughout the school year (companies do not always consider the academic calendar when making decisions about moving a family across the globe). As a result, there is no such thing as an ‘admissions season’ at an international school. Because of this, the job is ever-evolving, never dull, and quite exciting!

It’s important for enrollment professionals transitioning from the United States to prepare for the shift from a traditional admissions cycle to a rolling admissions process. The rolling admissions process is often shorter, and decisions are made more frequently and quickly. For us, there is no longer the luxury of the traditional methods of cultivating relationships over a period of time. Often, we learn about a family moving to the country with only a few weeks between inquiry and potential enrollment.

The unique opportunities for international schools center on the inclusive nature of these schools. For the most part, international schools are incredibly well-resourced and therefore can accommodate a range of learners. There is often a range of academic offerings available to suit different students’ needs. Due to the nature of the type of students who enroll,

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international schools can’t simply follow a cookie-cutter or one-size-fits-all approach.

EMA: What new things did you need to learn when transitioning to international enrollment practices?
JL: Admittedly, I have spent more time in international school enrollment than I did in U.S. independent school enrollment (7 years in the United States, 16 years international). However, my initial training and experience was in U.S.-based enrollment, and I continue to leverage the skills from my early days in admissions. I suppose my roots will always be there.

What struck me immediately when I entered the international school enrollment world was the non-traditional decision-making process (or what I perceived to be non-traditional). In many international schools, you will find less of an admissions committee model and more top-down admissions decision making. Divisional principals are often heavily involved in the decision making. This was new for me, and in both schools that I have worked in, I had to earn the trust of my colleagues and “prove” that I could make admissions decisions based on my knowledge and experience.

Historically, and still, in many international schools, the admissions team is seen as the tour guides for the school. Admissions teams are often there to walk families through the admissions process, market the school accordingly, and pass the applications on to the decision makers (divisional principals).

In my experience, I had to spend time cultivating relationships with my colleagues to build the trust needed to bring the autonomy of decision making back to the admissions team. In both schools, I was successful in doing so, and the response has been extremely positive.

EMA: How have you used mentorship, networking, and other resources to keep growing in your career? What has been most successful for you?
JL: I have been incredibly fortunate to have met some remarkable admissions professionals in my career. I mentioned it earlier, but relationships and connections have been so important in my professional life. In every school I have worked in, both in the United States and abroad, I have made a point of reaching out to my colleagues in other schools. Here in Asia, we have a strong network of international schools (EARCOS) that meet regularly (more so since the pandemic with regular online catch-ups). In addition to the opportunity to learn from each

continues...
For 2022, I want to pause and reflect on what has worked well in the pandemic and what we might want to keep as the new normal as we move forward. I am trying to focus on the positive that has come with the pandemic. Some of our more traditional approaches to admissions could not work in the pandemic, and we were forced to shift our thinking about best practices, and we came up with some great ideas. I hope to further develop some of these Band Aid practices as new standard operating procedures for admissions.

Additionally, my focus is on transitions-care in international schools. As admissions professionals, we are so much more to families than just the opening act. If there is one thing that I am taking away from this pandemic, it is the need to focus our dialogues around well-being more than simply academic results. I am currently taking a course with SPAN (Safe Passages Across Networks) and building a transitions-care team in my school.

What is missing from the international school enrollment world is the ability to access professional development (PD) opportunities at the level that you would have in the USA. Those of us who have been in international school admissions for a long time have worked hard to find opportunities for PD, but they are limited.

**EMA** If you were mentoring someone just beginning their journey at an international school, what three skills would you suggest they need in this kind of role or what advice would you offer?

1. **Be open-minded, patient, and flexible.**

   International school enrollment work, while similar in many ways (at the core, we are all looking to make the best fit between family and school), can involve a very different approach. If you are coming to an international school from the United States, be prepared to understand that few people at your new school may understand the professional level of admissions that exists in U.S.-based independent schools.

2. **Learn as much as you can about international relocation, Third Culture Kids, and the importance of transitions-care in schools.** We all know that choosing a school and then matriculating to a new school comes with challenges for all students (and families). Add to this an international relocation, the loss and grief that comes with saying goodbye to the familiar and starting new somewhere, language barriers, cultural differences, etc. This is a lot for students to process in addition to becoming familiar with their new school routines. Be prepared to offer transitional support to families. As an international school enrollment professional, you are not only introducing new families to all the great things about your school—but you are also expected to know about the area, good places to live, where to buy certain necessities, etc. You are often the lifeline for these families.

3. **Enjoy the adventure! I’ve been in enrollment for 23 years and what keeps me going is that every day is unique.**

   Every day, I am forced to look at my school through a different set of eyes. This keeps me on my toes and reminds me of the value that enrollment professionals bring to schools. We are the first people that families will meet in a school. We build the trust. We cultivate the relationships and then hand them over to the rest of the school (with every bone in our body crossed that others will also take care of their needs). Not only do we do good work—it’s fun. Enjoy it!

4. **I know you said three, but I feel the need to add a fourth. Ensure you have strong relationships with other colleagues in the field.** Enrollment can be a lonely job in schools. Reach out and introduce yourself to other colleagues. Ask for help. Offer help. Build your support bubble. You’ll need it!

**JULIA LOVE** is the director of admissions at the International School of Kuala Lumpur (ISKL) and has been in this role since 2012.

other, this camaraderie has been critical in my professional growth. While there are a number of people to reach out to, I have developed a strong relationship with a handful of colleagues in other schools whom I can call on for advice, support, or just to talk through an idea. I want to think that I’ve been able to mentor a few colleagues, and equally, many have been mentors to me.

While relatively simple, regular communication has been the best resource to keep growing. Building and developing strong relationships with colleagues in the region has been key to my success (and sanity!).

**EMA** What are your top professional development goals for yourself in 2022? What steps do you plan to take to achieve them?

**JL:** So much has transpired in the past two years and we have all had to shift and reimagine how we approach enrollment. This has been amplified for international schools that cannot meet families due to border and travel restrictions globally. Over the past two years, I have engaged in an enormous amount of professional development to support our new admissions methods.