Influencers + Innovators

Highlighting enrollment professionals who are leading the way through their practices, career pathways, and achievements.

Filling In the Blanks at The Hockaday School

Regardless of the type of school a person is seeking, there’s one thing every applicant craves: connection.

That’s what Tiffany Nelson learned when she made the transition from higher education admissions to becoming the Director of Admission and Enrollment Management at The Hockaday School in Dallas, Texas.

“In higher education, you’re dealing with teenagers who are transitioning from high school into college, or adults who are pursuing advanced level degrees. For independent schools, you’re often working with parents who are exploring the best options for their child,” Nelson said. “While these are very different audiences, one thing remains the same: everyone wants to find the perfect fit—and they’re hoping your institution is the one. They’re looking for you to fill in the blanks.”

To successfully steward a family through the admissions process, Nelson believes in strong customer service, personalized guidance, and tailored communications. “People want to feel like the institution they want wants them back,” said Nelson, whose previous roles include Director of Admissions at Spelman College and Director of Admissions and Enrollment Management at Emory University Rollins School of Public Health.

Nelson, who started at Hockaday in the summer of 2020 while COVID raged as a disruptive force, said she sees the challenges of the past year resulting in K–12 admissions innovations, and expansive thinking, more broadly speaking.
"In the past, admission departments felt we had to get people on campus in order to interact and engage with our schools," Nelson said. "But COVID showed us it doesn’t have to necessarily be that way. We can still create meaningful connections with families and individuals virtually—and in some cases, we’re able to make our processes more expansive and inclusive because we’re providing more opportunities for interaction."

Nelson believes successfully navigating these changes will require cross-departmental collaboration and a willingness to try new things. "Admissions cannot be a singular job," she said. "We need to look within our teams and across campus for strength, and push forward together."

Reflections on an International Career Path

Canadian International School of Phnom Penh

BY BRITTANY HANEY, CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF PHNOM PENH

While my professional life has always been dedicated to education, I must admit that I stumbled upon the opportunity to build a career in independent schools. In my final year of graduate school in Shanghai, I decided to stay in the city long-term. During my job search, and to my surprise, I discovered a posting at a well-known international school in the city.

I didn’t know anything about independent schools, but I knew that I wanted to be a part of a community with a mission to educate students and develop global citizens in a culturally-diverse environment. After an initial four-hour round trip commute to the school and four interviews, I became an international/independent school professional.

My career path has aligned with my life passion of connecting people to opportunities that allow them to thrive. From designing study abroad programs in the past to leading advancement efforts at my current school, working in education allows me to live out my passion.

Self-reflection, adventure, and being a lifelong student have helped me navigate my career growth. Sometimes I review past decisions and experiences as personal case studies and ask myself a series of questions regarding the outcome. I’m eager to learn and adapt easily to change, so new opportunities excite me. I’m also not afraid to search for opportunities to grow outside of my organization if needed.

My process for planning and achieving career growth begins with creating attainable goals and relying on the team of experts around me to be my mentors. Knowing that I depend on them for help also empowers them as leaders and helps them grow. In addition to my team, I’m also inspired by other Black professionals succeeding and doing what they love.
Moving overseas was an easy decision because traveling feeds my soul. During my time in Asia, I’ve had the privilege of connecting with extraordinary people. What has surprised me most about my transition from the US to life overseas is the science of relationship building in multinational spaces. Intercultural communication skills and self-awareness are key for creating meaningful connections that respect the cultures and social boundaries of others. Mastering these skills has helped propel me both professionally and personally, and I consider them the “superpowers” for anyone considering a career as an international advancement professional.

She continues, “At CFS, we focus on how we wish to attract people and find ways to check ourselves and better understand our biases in supporting stronger relationships. DEI at CFS is not a series of boxes we seek to check in order to become an equitable place. As employees and stakeholders, we make time for introspection to examine our identities, and we actively seek to develop policies and practices that engage our collective values at the school.”

CFS initiated a school climate program called Peaceful Schools in 2009, a program that works to promote positive and peaceful learning environments in all schools (public and private) as well as regional community organizations. Recent momentum in reimaging education has led schools and organizations to ask questions such as: “How do we practice effective restorative discipline?” and “How do we assess students without grades?” Because these practices are at the heart of and are an integral part of a CFS education, there have been incredible opportunities for CFS to share, inspire, and serve as an example within their local community.

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A North Carolina native, BRITTANY HANEY serves as the head of institutional advancement for the Canadian International School of Phnom Penh. She has worked in education for 11 years and began a career in independent schools in 2016. She has lived in Asia for nine years and considers herself to be a traveler by nature.