



If you were lucky, at some point early in your career a mentor came along and showed you the ins and outs of your chosen profession. Helped you gain new skills. Provided opportunities to lead. Expanded your knowledge base. Navigated you through a difficult situation. Opened doors.

Providence Day School in Charlotte (NC) is taking luck out of the equation for young professionals by offering a one-year, fully-immersive Fellowship in its Office of Institutional Advancement. The position is designed to prepare a recent college graduate for the next chapter in their career, and to help grow the Advancement profession in independent schools.

The concept was borne from the idea of establishing an incubator for young professionals interested in exploring the advancement field, says Jeffrey Appel, Associate Head of School for Institutional Advancement. Appel, a 32-year veteran in the field, both in independent schools and higher education, has seen first-hand the shortage of candidates ready to fill entry-level positions.

Appel sought to create a program that would provide an opportunity to learn and fully understand the four areas often subsumed under Advancement offices in independent schools: alumni relations, major gifts/annual giving, advancement services, and marketing/communications. Appel stressed the importance of including all facets of advancement in the program to ensure a well-rounded experience. The Fellow would have the potential benefit of determining which area was of greater interest for future job considerations.

The sponsoring office, of course, also gains additional resources to enhance or expand their services or initiatives in a given year. That extra boost to productivity comes with a commitment, though, and should be fully embraced by school leadership as well as team members who will take on the responsibility of managing the Fellow's activities and progress.

"The concept must be embraced by the Head of School," explained Appel. "You have to find the funds. Directors need to specifically identify projects that the Fellow can do and own completely. It can't be a one-off. And you should be very deliberate about making sure it's a value-added for both parties."

The Advancement Fellow program at Providence Day is a very deliberate and strategic professional development opportunity for the successful candidate. Each fall, the Fellow embarks on a weeklong trip visiting other independent schools in the Southeast to learn about those institutions and gain insight on their advancement/development operations and begin building their own professional network in the field. Coaching and valuable insight is also provided for exploring job openings beyond the year-long fellowship.

Opportunities like this are much needed, according to Jonathan Ball, managing associate at Carney Sandoe & Associates. During his 19-year career recruiting for independent schools, he's noticed the education sector gradually facing strong challenges in terms of its perception as a viable job choice. It's vital to the future success of our collective institutions to help create the pipeline of qualified, well-trained, knowledgeable advancement professionals.

"If we're not taking the lead in promoting and growing our industry, pulling people in and giving them these entry-level jobs, where are they going to come from?" Ball asks.

He underscores the need for schools to create awareness and interest in educational careers, giving college graduates a direct path to study, learn and grow across all channels in advancement work, and then supporting their career transition as a means to ensure independent schools thrive well into the future. He appreciates Appel and Providence Day for the vision and institutional will it took to design a program with such robust mentoring and professional support.

"I really applaud and support the work that's been done and the initiative around this program," said Ball. "It's invaluable, really smart, and forward-thinking."

For the school's very first Advancement Fellow in the '15-16 school year, the impact was immediate and long-lasting. Patricia "PJ" Kolman came to Providence Day after graduating from Duke University in 2015. She is a 2011 alumna of the Hun School of Princeton.

"When I first got the Fellow position, I felt like I had won the 'Golden Ticket' of advancement jobs," she explained. "Throughout my job search, I was unsure about what positions...would be the best way to start a career in advancement. I also did not know which field, like marketing or annual giving or alumni relations, I wanted to pursue. When I was introduced to the Fellow position, I realized it would be a unique opportunity to immerse myself in every aspect of advancement at an exceptional institution."

Her responsibilities were both broad and varied: creating annual giving materials, producing videos, planning alumni and parent events, writing for internal and external audiences, building web resources, researching donor prospects, and attending professional development conferences, among many other activities. She also found time to serve as assistant coach of the Middle School swim team.

Bolstered by those experiences, Kolman was a much sought-after candidate at the conclusion of her year-long Fellowship. Ultimately, she accepted a Development Officer position at King's Academy in Jordan. In this capacity, she is designing fund-raising appeals, managing a portfolio of regional and overseas donors, preparing for the school's Tenth Anniversary year celebrations, assisting in the formation of the Alumni Association, and serving as a dorm parent.



*Caption: Patricia "PJ" Kolman engages with students at Kings Academy (Jordan) during a "Donor Love" event on Valentine's Day 2017.*

"My transition into greater responsibility and decision-making power at King's was infinitely smoother because I had the directors [at PD] as role models," she said. "Providence Day is an outstanding school and a phenomenal place to work. It encourages teamwork, excellence, and school pride from its Transitional Kindergarten students to senior administrators. After working there, I strive to create the same collaborative atmosphere in every place I work."

This year's Fellow, Myers McGarry, is also benefiting from a diverse and wide-ranging set of tasks and projects. A 2016 graduate of Washington & Lee and a 2012 alumna of Charlotte Latin School, McGarry has been embraced by the Providence Day community as one of its own. "I feel like the entire community has taken me under their wing," she said.

Already McGarry has filmed and produced several videos, written executive-level communications, collaborated with Admissions on a drip-marketing campaign, created social media editorial calendars, updated donor files, implemented volunteer engagement activities, and helped plan alumni events. Additionally, her visits to other independent schools in the region produced invaluable perspective on the different strategic approaches to Advancement work.



*Caption: Myers McGarry, the current Advancement Fellow, captures classroom activities for a video.*

She is just beginning the job search, and is leveraging her time at Providence Day as a distinguishing characteristic. “People are impressed by the breadth of projects that I do at PDS,” she said. “I feel more confident applying for positions at other schools with this year of experience.”

Both Kolman and McGarry encourage other schools to consider similar Fellow positions. “I would suggest looking internally and asking if each member of your team possesses the ability to handle their own responsibilities and take on a mentee,” explained Kolman. She also cautioned that location, housing options and costs, social environments, and faculty demographics could impact a program’s viability. McGarry enthusiastically proposed schools “go for it!”

Providence Day is currently evaluating candidates for its third Advancement Fellow, who will begin their tenure this summer.

It’s been said that luck is when preparation meets opportunity. Advancement Fellow programs – crafted thoughtfully and intentionally -- can be a win-win-win-win for the candidate, the school, the profession, and the industry. And then we’ll all be lucky.