



Externships

The Importance of Experiential Learning: A Conversation with Mr. Norman Kim-Senior, Director of Externships at Episcopal High School

By Britney Duong | Published October 17, 2023

Seek your light, bring it, and then wherever you end up, make the most of that opportunity.

- Norman Kim-Senior

In the quest for preparing students for their careers, different paths of learning have taken center stage. Not only can students explore their interests in the classroom, but also in actual workplaces through internships and externships. This hands-on experience is crucial to developing mere interest into passion, and allowing students to flourish in their professional careers.

To delve deeper into this topic, Gateway's Co-founder and CEO, HanhLinh Ho, sat down with Mr. Norman Kim-Senior, the Director of Externships at Episcopal High School. We asked Mr. Kim-Senior to share his insightful thoughts on the importance of hands-on work, the vision and impact of Episcopal's externship program, and the benefits of their partnership with Gateway.



HanhLinh Ho (Left) and Norman Kim-Senior (right)

Meet Mr. Kim-Senior:

Mr. Norman Kim-Senior is a Spanish Teacher, student advisor, and the McCain-Ravenel Center Director of Externships at Episcopal High School. He earned his B.A. in Spanish and Economics and pursued a master's degree in Spanish. With an impressive 19 years of experience in independent schools, Mr. Kim-Senior joined Episcopal High School in 2018. He has dedicated his career to building and sustaining good communities both within schools and in society.

How do you view the importance of hands-on work experience on students' short-term and long-term success?

In our interview, Mr. Kim-Senior emphasizes the value of hands-on learning in education, especially from an *"experiential approach,"* which are out-of-the-classroom opportunities that provide real-world impact. He highlights the difference between classroom simulations and internships/externships, as the latter has the ability to give live feedback and build students' confidence in their abilities.

Additionally, he stresses the importance of early responsibility in shaping a strong foundation for future success and personal growth, as internships and externships allow students to *"go forward into the college years with a lot more certainty."*



What makes Episcopal unique?

Mr. Kim-Senior first reflects on the essence of boarding schools and what sets them apart from other schools, which is the aspect of community. While acknowledging the value of a low student-teacher ratio, he accentuates that what truly distinguishes these schools is the sense of a shared learning community that constantly grows together. He notes that Episcopal in particular *"does community really well,"* where everyone's actions have a meaningful impact. This community support helps students navigate challenges and cherish moments of celebration, making it a unique and special aspect of Episcopal.

Additionally, Mr. Kim-Senior begs the question, *"How is it that this place has been able to survive for 183 years? Think about it. They've had 183 years of practicing being a community."* Amidst technological changes and uncertainties, Mr. Kim-Senior finds comfort in knowing he has his *"people"* with him, and that he isn't navigating alone. That community is exactly what students who join Episcopal get to be a part of, and if all goes well, they become part of a tradition of passing on this sense of community to future generations.

What's your vision for the Episcopal Externship Program?

He envisions the externship program at Episcopal School as a transformative experience for students. He emphasizes the importance of elevating students' strengths along with addressing any weaknesses or lack of experience. The ultimate goal is for students to become more well-rounded individuals who can contribute to professional communities, experience success, and bridge their academic achievements with future success.

Furthermore, he wholeheartedly believes that everyone will benefit from building strong relationships between students, schools, businesses, and organizations. In fact, he states that he's yet to meet a person who hasn't felt refreshed from having the chance to work with and support young people. In his eyes, the externship program allows the community to have a *"direct hand"* in preparing the next generation of leaders, fostering confidence and innovation for the future.



Bird's eye view of Episcopal High School

As both a classroom teacher and the director of the externship program, can you share an example of how the externship program has helped students grow and thrive?

He recalls a young man interested in computer science who participated in the externship program. As a junior, he had the opportunity to work with a company, gaining up-to-date knowledge about the field and how professionals operate in the current landscape. He worked directly with the Chief Technology Officer, which provided invaluable real-world experience.

This practical experience transformed his approach to learning, and as a result, he became more driven by intrinsic motivation and curiosity rather than typical *"Get good grades at school because you have to"* expectations. Thus, the program allows students to find their own purpose that fuels them in their journey ahead.

You're able to produce that magic point that you want as a teacher, which is where the student's learning is being driven by intrinsic motivation—their love for the topic—and not just *"somebody said I should do this,"* or *"this is going to help me get a good job."*

- Norman Kim-Senior

What are the industries and types of organizations that Episcopal students have gone on to work in?

Mr. Kim-Senior discusses Episcopal's approach to the externship program, which is student-centric. Their program caters to a wide range of student interests, including politics, finance, education, mortuary science, journalism, and more. With its flexibility, the program allows students to explore diverse fields as long as it aligns with their interests and community needs without compromising their safety or the school's reputation.

He stresses that the goal is to help students become well-rounded individuals with moral and intellectual courage, empathy, and strong principles, capable of responding to various needs and *"breaking new ground"* in society while maintaining a sense of joy, connection, and purpose.

What would you advise high school students to do to navigate the changing and competitive college admissions landscape?

With all the changes in college admissions processes, such as affirmative action and college essays, Mr. Kim-Senior acknowledges the feeling of being overwhelmed by these changes. He wants students to focus more on what they can control rather than what they can't, and to work towards their own desired future. He encourages them to avoid pursuing schools solely based on rankings and instead *"seek your light, bring it, and then wherever you end up, make the most of that opportunity."*

He reveals that he has colleagues who went to Ivy League schools, state schools, and community colleges who pursued PhDs and other degrees. He knows how those differences can affect how much money you make but wants to highlight that he and his colleagues basically ended up in the same place trying to help students secure the future they want. So, in the end, he asserts that happiness, feeling whole, having community support, and having resources for personal growth are what truly matter in the end.



What would you advise high school students to do to navigate the changing and competitive workforce?

He believes it is crucial to continuously learn and be adaptable in one's professional life, regardless of the industry or technology. According to him, the key is to focus on problem-solving and having empathy, as these skills are valuable in any field. The workforce is rapidly changing, but Mr. Kim-Senior encourages students to see themselves not as victims but as contributors to these changes.

How does Episcopal's partnership with Gateway benefit your students, faculties, and the school?

Mr. Kim-Senior is well aware that here at Gateway, we have access to valuable information about industry trends and changes that educators may not have. He hopes that Gateway can be the *"gateway"* or bridge between educators and students, ensuring open communication and that students receive accurate and up-to-date guidance regarding career paths and job search processes.

The job application process is ever-changing, with machine-readable resumes and AI-driven applicant tracking systems, so students need to be adequately trained and prepared in order to succeed with this new system. Thus, he believes educators should incorporate this information into the classroom to prepare students effectively for the evolving job market.

What is one thing you are excited about in the 2023-2024 school year?

Mr. Kim-Senior's primary goal is to enhance the skills and effectiveness of their team on campus, especially in advising students during the externship process. He aims to provide their team with the latest information and techniques related to the job search process and the professional landscape. Through their partnership with Gateway, he envisions streamlining and constantly improving the externship program to ensure that advisors feel better equipped and excited to assist students. This long-term structural improvement will strengthen the program's ability to adapt to changing circumstances and challenges.

Final Words:

That concludes our interview with Mr. Norman Kim-Senior, the Director of Externships at Episcopal High School. We greatly appreciated his valuable insights, his exceptional advice, and his commendable commitment to student well-being. With a bright future ahead, we look forward to transforming education in our partnership with Episcopal!

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