

FFWPU USA: Emily Kise replaces Frank LaGrotteria as Headmaster of Bridgeport International Academy

Naokimi Ushiroda
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"I stumbled onto the path toward my career," says Emily Kise. "I didn't necessarily have a goal in mind, I just kept going and found myself guided in this direction of education, and I'm so grateful for that. Saying 'yes' to opportunities led me to be here."

In June, Kise became the new headmaster of Bridgeport International Academy ([BIA](#)), a private college preparatory school in Connecticut founded by the late Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon. A native of New York, Kise joined BIA's faculty eight years ago, serving as the residential coordinator of the dorms before becoming the vice headmaster for the last three years. However, Kise's journey as an educator started in college as a special education teacher's aid.

"Working with special needs kids in kindergarten during such a formative time in my life - in my late teens and early 20s - taught me the uniqueness of each child," she says. "I was really able to absorb that. I got my degree in English, and then pursued a math degree, which led to teaching math in Connecticut ... I'm grateful for this patchwork of experiences I've had from every level in the teaching field."

At BIA, Kise discovered a new realm of the education sector as she worked with students from a wide range of backgrounds. "Coming to an international school like BIA, I really felt our school invested in the

care and love and guidance of our students," she says. "I've been like a mom to 30 teens at once when I ran the dorms, so I've seen it all. Watching students change over four years of high school and adjust into who they become and how they turn out is amazing."

As a parent of two young girls, Kise says her nurturing role easily extends to the workplace, too, where her family also has a presence. "It's a learning process and also about balance," she says, "but my daughter comes in and hangs out in my office before school starts. I appreciate the visual she gets of the world; she gets to see the unity and harmony and the interaction of students who have different cultures and languages. Growing up in this global community is priceless."

Since opening its doors in 1997, BIA has developed rich diversity in drawing students from all over the world. Today, as much as 40 percent of its student body comes from overseas. However, this wasn't always the case. Dr. Frank LaGrotteria, who recently retired after seven years as headmaster, pioneered the expansion of BIA's international presence, promoting the school in Vietnam, China, Japan, and Korea, among other countries.

"I came in with an administrative and operational background, but not a school background," says Dr. LaGrotteria. "So I had to apply my skill set to take on obstacles, including recruiting and enrollment. I was pretty excited about the school and my contribution ... I partnered with recruiting agents overseas and we began to really see the fruits of that in 2019 when we had full enrollment."

During his tenure, the beloved headmaster navigated a variety of challenges, including financial solvency, renovation after two floods, and, most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic. "I handled our tuition, parent relations, and growing and sustaining the school," he says. "Every day I was confronted with my own limitations and giving until there was nothing left to give, and then giving some more. This has really been a mission of substance, and we accomplished the unthinkable."

It was also a mission that hit close to home. Dr. LaGrotteria's daughter sought to attend BIA after participating in the GOP program in Korea. He was then tapped in 2013 to serve on BIA's board as secretary before becoming the headmaster in 2015, and later the chairman in 2021.

"I worked with the Universal Peace Federation prior to joining BIA, so there was a learning curve with improving and professionalizing the school's profile and taking it to the next level," he recalls. "I took a two-year Harvard business course and received a certificate in School Management, because when we do everything we can to reach our goal, this paves the way for God's help."

Dr. LaGrotteria has now returned to working with UPF, but he believes BIA is in good hands, referring to Kise as "the right person at the right time" for this new era of leadership. "I think every leader brings a certain skill set and things they prioritize," he says. "Emily brings a vision. She has the capacity to steer the school, and she has a very good character and is strong-willed."

Still, Kise's vision, in part, stems from the mentorship of her predecessor. "I've inherited a lot from Dr. LaGrotteria," she says. "It's a mission to serve the students and the world through the students." And both agree the sky's the limit for BIA's future, noting renewed international interest and continued support from the local community.

"I'm looking forward to growth, new opportunities, and seeing how far the school can go with opening more doors in Africa, Europe, and South America," says Kise. "When the school was founded, that was the idea, and I think the world is primed for this."

You can learn more about Bridgeport International Academy, including application information, [here](#).



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Fast Facts



6:1

Student/Teacher Ratio

44

Countries Represented

47,000+

Service Hours Logged

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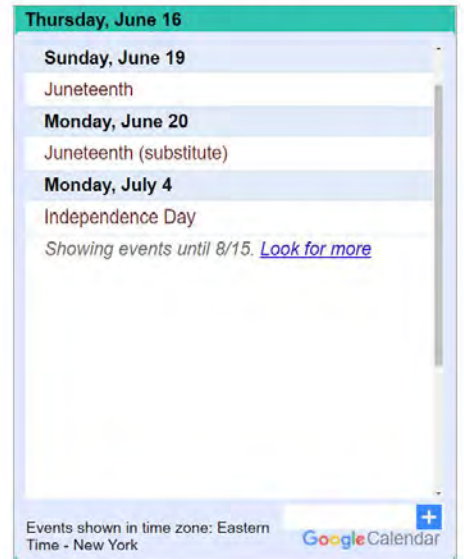
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Who We Are



Mr. Gukwon An (Faculty)

"Each student can find, with his/her education, a role: to be purposeful by challenging academic interests, to be supported by seeking help from the faculty or diverse student body, and/or to be compassionate by serving others through his/her academic strengths."



Thu Pham (Student)

"BIA is small, but this house is also capable enough to contain all love from students, concern from teachers and sharing from everyone. As an international student, BIA gives me many opportunities to study, to try and reach out to my dreams."



Jeanne Bessell (Parent)

"I can not think of any better school where I would want my kids to be. Great environment, great teachers, great kids. I love BIA!"



Willow Marks (Alumni)

"If you're searching for going global citizenship look no further than BIA. During my time at BIA, I've created connections with people across the globe via learning the true meaning of camaraderie and the importance of celebrating what connects us all."

ABOUT

Bridgeport International Academy,
where students meet the world!

BIA is a learning community where students grow in heart and mind as they gain an excellent academic foundation for their college careers. [more](#)

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