

Fordham Footsteps: A Conversation with Nick Endo, FCLC '16

Matt:

Hey listeners. Welcome to Fordham Footsteps, the podcast that features Fordham alumni and discusses their path from their time as a student to their current career.

Sara:

Some will have a direct correlation to their majors and others will describe how they took some unexpected turns. Either way, expect an insider's guide to certain industries and some great stories from our esteemed alumni.

Matt:

I'm Matt Burns, Associate Director for Young Alumni and Student Engagement.

Sara:

And I'm Sara Hunt Munoz, Senior Director for Strategic Initiatives.

Matt:

With us today is Nick Endo. Nick is a graduate of Fordham College at Lincoln Center class of 2016 and a double major in international political economy and theology. Welcome, Nick.

Sara:

Welcome.

Nick:

Thanks so much for having me.

Matt:

Great to have you here. So tell us about those majors. How'd you pick them?

Nick:

Well, it took a while to pick them. I entered Fordham undecided. Wasn't sure quite what I wanted to do. I actually ended my freshman year thinking I was going to be a natural science major on the premed track after taking a really awesome natural science class my freshman year. My dad's a doctor. I thought it all lined up pretty well. And then the day before sophomore year started, I thought about it some more. Realized I really did not like the sight of blood so I dropped all of my classes. I thought I was going to do econ and then ended that year with those two majors, mostly because of classes that I took that

year. My core theology class, my professors were awesome. Really just fell in love with theology. Realized I had gone to Catholic school my entire life and hadn't really thought about it so much as an academic subject until that year, and just really fell in love with it.

Nick:

And IPE came about because I thought I wanted to do econ, realized I wasn't super passionate about that major, but liked elements of it and appreciated that the IPE major combined that with my language studies in Spanish, along with some anthropology.

Sara:

Who were those theology professors that were so impressive?

Nick:

Karina Hogan. She was great. She became my advisor. Big shout out to her.

Sara:

What did you plan to do with those majors? Did you have a life plan when you were taking those courses or were you just trying to get through school and then decide?

Nick:

Definitely no life plan at that point. I think that's one of the reasons why I thought I wanted to be a natural science major because doctor seemed like such a solid career choice. I ended up in these two majors not because I had a career in mind, just because I liked those fields of study. So definitely did not have anything in mind at that point. No.

Sara:

What do you do now?

Nick:

I work for a school management organization called Partnership Schools. We run a network of Catholic schools in the South Bronx and Harlem. I serve as the enrollment manager, which means I support our school teams at our seven schools with enrollment and parent recruitment efforts.

Matt:

So you didn't do that right out of school, right?

Nick:

No, I did not.

Matt:

What did you do first?

Nick:

I took two years. I spent two years abroad. I first went to Yap, Micronesia where I served as a theology teacher at a Jesuit high school out there, and then spent a year working in El Salvador with a study abroad program run by Santa Clara University. So two years in Jesuit education abroad before coming back to New York.

Matt:

How did you find those programs?

Nick:

The first year, my first year abroad in Yap, I found that program through Fordham alumni, actually. I was pretty heavily involved in campus ministry during my time at Fordham and there was a senior when I was a freshman who, after he graduated, went on to Yap Catholic. So I'd known about it throughout my time at Fordham. Never thought I was going to do it. I actually was planning on going to El Salvador right after I graduated.

Nick:

But the study abroad program I worked for eventually ended up getting canceled that year. So I didn't know what I was going to do. And then my boss in campus ministry, Father Shea, recommended that I check out this Yap Catholic program. I knew that I wanted to do some kind of post-grad service so I had that in the back of my mind, but didn't know much about Yap. So I looked into it, knew I was also interested in education so it fit all the factors and I went for it.

Matt:

And you did a Global Outreach project when you were a student, correct?

Nick:

I did. I did a few. My freshman year I got involved in did GO! Ecuador. My sophomore year I did GO! Dominican Republic and then my senior year I led GO! Ecuador again.

Sara:

Wow. Great.

Matt:

What happened after that? You get back to the United States. What'd you do?

Nick:

So I came back to the United States. I started working for Partnership Schools. I'd interned for them at Fordham the summer after my sophomore year. I was looking for an internship in the city. I knew I was interested in education at that point and looked through some listings on Idealist. Found Partnership Schools, which I thought was perfect for me just because it was hedged with Catholic schools. I had gone to Catholic schools my whole life. It was also a paid internship so that caught my eye. It all lined up once again. When I was coming back to New York, I reached out to them to see if they had any openings and they did, and I joined them.

Sara:

Do you feel that your coursework lends itself to the roles that you've had recently or do you wish you had had more of an education background?

Nick:

No. I think they all have lended themselves pretty well to what I've been doing. I don't... I haven't... I mean, I taught in Yap but the other two jobs, while in education, haven't been teaching so I haven't felt like I've lacked any teaching background. I think they've lent themselves since pretty well. And one, because I stayed in Catholic education having studied theology. I actually didn't think I was going to be using my theology degree quite as much as I have been using it when I was at school, because I feel like there's a stereotype of, what am I supposed to do with a theology degree? But I think having stayed in Catholic education, I've used it in so many more ways than I would have thought.

Sara:

Can you talk a little bit more about that?

Nick:

Totally. I mean, one, I taught my first year when I was in Yap and I was teaching theology, which was pretty awesome. I had some curriculum that I was using in my classes, but I had a lot of freedom in choosing what I wanted to include in that curriculum as well. So I brought in a lot of what I had learned the previous year at Fordham, which was really awesome getting to see how, I mean, I got to teach some really, really smart high schoolers and watching them work with the texts that I had wrestled with the previous year was pretty impressive.

Matt:

Like what?

Nick:

Oh my gosh. Now I'm two years removed from that, but it was early Christian texts from these old philosophers and theologians and they're pretty dense.

Matt:

The page-turners.

Nick:

Yeah. Page-turners indeed. But yeah, so it was cool to be able to implement what I had been learning the previous year into my curriculum. And then the following two years less of a direct link, I think, between what I was studying, but certainly just being steeped in the world of Jesuit education and Catholic schools. Even this year we're, at my current job, Partnership Schools, we're working on developing a tool that's going to let us measure the quote-unquote Catholic school advantage. There's a lot of research that shows that graduates of Catholic schools achieve a lot more success than their counterparts in public and non-Catholic schools. Research shows that Catholic school graduates vote more often, are more civically engaged, achieve more success in high school and college. And so we're working on this project and we had to do some theological research to ground some of what we're looking for in the tool. I got to help work on that, which was another example of using theology when I was never expecting to.

Matt:

Looking at any of that data you've seen, any particular reasons graduates of Catholic institutions end up performing better in those areas?

Nick:

That's something that we're trying to be able to measure now with the tool that we're developing, but I think just being Catholic schools and... Actually, I mean, I spent my entire life in Catholic schools, starting in preschool going through Fordham and then in the years since. All Catholic schools.

Matt:

And the infamous high school you attended, what was that?

Nick:

St. Joe's Prep. Go Prep. Yeah. I think what sets Catholic schools apart and creates the quote-unquote Catholic school advantage is just the way in which the schools, certainly the schools that I've been to and the schools I work in now, they marry academic rigor with a really intentional values-driven education. I think values education is something that I think is becoming a little bit more popular in the education world, but it's really hard to do. I think it's something that Catholic schools do really well because you go to a Catholic school and all the Catholic schools that I went to, they all have a set of core root beliefs.

Nick:

You see those beliefs play out in every single aspect of the school day from morning assembly to class, to the way the teachers interact with students and parents, the way the students interact with each other. I think it's really hard to do values education just by sitting in front of a class and teaching kids this is what respect is. This is what kindness is. It's a clearly different thing when you're infusing every single aspect of your day with a set of values. I think that's what Catholic schools do and they do it really well.

Matt:

Yeah. I might call that Cura Personalis.

Sara:

I might. Yeah.

Nick:

Yeah.

Sara:

I want to go back for a minute to your minor.

Nick:

Totally.

Sara:

Were you conversant in Spanish before you started minoring in it?

Nick:

I had taken Spanish classes almost all my life before Fordham, throughout elementary school and middle school. Had it, I think, twice a week and then took two years of it in high school. That actually was going to be another part of my minor major story was I actually had a Spanish major for a period of time while starting at Fordham and then switched it to the minor once I found these other two majors. So I was conversant to a degree, but certainly I'd taken it my freshmen and sophomore year of high school. So when I came back to Fordham, I was not quite as familiar with it. But I was really driven to do so. I had gone to El Salvador the summer before I went to Fordham and rediscovered a passion for Spanish and really wanted to get conversant in it.

Sara:

What other courses do you take in a minor? Do you take-

Matt:

Literature? Do you take-

Sara:

... culture?

Nick:

Totally. Yeah. I mean, so there are the core language classes where you're learning grammar and structure and all of that. I took some literature classes. I mean, I studied abroad for a year, my junior year, in Spanish speaking countries. I was in El Salvador for a semester and Spain for a semester. So I had

classes in Spanish, but I mean, focusing on other studies. So I had a history class in Spanish, a government class in Spanish. So I got those to count for my major.

Matt:

And very different Spanish speaking countries.

Nick:

Very different Spanish speaking countries, which is one reason why I intentionally chose to go to those two places. Yeah. So I mean, that was an incredible opportunity, especially for my Spanish minor.

Sara:

Let's talk a little bit about the clubs and activities you were involved in while you were a student.

Nick:

Totally.

Matt:

Yeah. So you were part of the F-Sharps.

Nick:

I was. F-Sharps as a tenor.

Matt:

How does music fit in your life?

Nick:

Music is something that I've always been pretty heavily involved in, I think. I mean, another reason why I love Catholic schools is they are very focused on providing a well-rounded education to kids. So not just focusing on math and ELA, but also making sure that kids are well-versed in the arts. So going to my Catholic pre-K through eighth school, there was a huge emphasis placed on the arts. So we took music classes. I got to take piano lessons there and clarinet lessons and some choir and the musicals and all of that. Continued some of that at the Prep. And then when I was at Fordham, was involved in the F-Sharps. I continue to sing. I'm now part of an a cappella group called Choral Fixation, which is comprised mostly of Fordham alumni. We rehearse every week and perform throughout the city.

Sara:

Fun.

Nick:

Yeah.

Matt:

Great to see connections that you made outside of the classroom stay strong after you graduate. Sometimes they're the most important relationships you end up building while you're a student.

Nick:

Absolutely.

Matt:

So jumping ahead a bit, we talked about you got to the role you have now. Tell us a little bit more about the work you do day to day.

Nick:

Totally. Well actually, so I just moved into a new role. So I've gone through a few different roles at this job and I'm in the first week of my new role, so I'll speak a little bit on my last role and then move on to the new one. But when I first came back, I was working directly underneath our superintendent. So the way our schools are run is we're an autonomous network of Catholic schools. So we are archdiocesan schools... For listeners who are unfamiliar with the Catholic education system here in New York, the archdiocese, which runs a majority of [Catholic] schools, about six years ago they gave us control of six of those schools, six K-through-eight schools, pre-K-through-eight schools as an experiment to see what would happen if they turned over operational academic control of these schools to an independent network.

Nick:

And it's been a huge success. We're given this autonomy and we've implemented our curriculum and professional development, and we've seen a lot of really awesome results. And so when I came back to work for Partnership Schools, I started off working directly for our superintendent who manages and oversees all things, academics and operations at our six schools, or now seven schools. We had six schools and just added a seventh one last year, which was pretty exciting. So a lot of it was of admin work. I was special projects manager and executive assistant to the superintendent. So I did her calendar and meetings and all those kinds of things, which was a lot to adjust to after spending two years abroad, going into a fast-paced office where I was responsible for keeping someone organized. But I also just got to work on any special projects that she was working on, so the tool we're developing to measure the Catholic school advantage, her research and writing. She's a pretty influential person in the field.

Nick:

When I recently transitioned to enrollment manager, I realized I missed being a little bit more connected to folks on the ground or families and students and our school teams. So my boss, just super supportive and let me transition to a new role where I support our school teams to find families and students to bring to our school communities, help them move through the admissions process and just spread the word about our schools.

Matt:

I always like to ask former student leaders... We mentioned the F-Sharps. I know you were also a huge part of New Student Orientation, Lincoln Center Society,

Nick:

Lincoln Center Society. I was in APAC for a bit. GO! Campus ministry. I loved Fordham. I loved being involved.

Matt:

So how do those skills that you picked up in the extracurriculars translate to the work you do now? Or how do they help inform or help you do your job better?

Nick:

Totally. I mean certainly I think I gained a lot of just leadership skills from doing those things. I mean, facilitating groups. I was a retreat leader and an NSO leader. You spend a lot of time facilitating groups and serving as a point person for people that you're working with. So I think those skills translated. I mean, I think more than anything, I was fortunate to be pretty involved in activities like Global Outreach and campus ministry that taught me to be really mission-driven. I think that's something that informs my work certainly now, as I understand my role in serving the larger community beyond myself. I strive to not only achieve success for myself, but for others and that's something that I learned at Fordham in these activities.

Sara:

So I know you're new to this role, but what do you see down the road? What's the next step for you after this? Do you want to stay in education? Do you want to continue working where you are?

Nick:

It's a great question. It's something that I'm discerning now. I see my vocation. This is something I think I also learned at Fordham. I see my vocation as the intersection of what I'm good at, what I enjoy and what the world needs for me. I'm trying to figure out now what lies at that intersection. I didn't think I wanted to stay in education after a year at Partnership Schools. I mean, I really loved my job, but was feeling drawn to other things. And now having been here a little longer, realizing that I really am interested in education, so I'm not totally going to feel like I want to leave that yet.

Nick:

But at the same time, I'm interested in so many other things as well. I think that's something I also appreciate about Fordham was just the opportunity to take a set of core classes and not just have to focus on one major, but get to learn about so many different things, which is a blessing and curse because now I feel like I am struggling sometimes to figure out what exactly it is I want to focus on.

Matt:

How to narrow that down.

Nick:

Exactly. I think I'm at a point in my life where I'm currently... I know I want to go back to school within the next few years. I'm discerning either law or public policy and just figuring out what exactly is the right path for me.

Matt:

Do you have any mentors in your life or did you have any mentors while you were a student who can help you with this kind of discernment?

Nick:

Oh, absolutely. I feel so fortunate to have so many mentors. I feel like my first ever professor, Lenny Cassuto, who was our... I was in the honors program at Fordham. I was really lucky to be a part of that group. We had a very small cohort freshman year. He was our point person. Taught our honors English class. The first professor we had class with and he's remained a person who I really appreciate for advice. Was in a mentor role to all of us while at Fordham. I mean, Karina Hogan, who I mentioned before. I've been in contact with her. She's been really helpful. And then I certainly have mentors outside of that as well. I mean, my boss right now is really incredible, has been really supportive and has a lot of really great wisdom to share. My bosses in El Salvador who ran the study abroad program.

Nick:

I consider them great mentors. Folks in campus ministry. Carol Gibney was a huge mentor for me. Overflowing with mentors, Fordham.

Sara:

So get mentors. Stay connected.

Nick:

Yeah.

Sara:

What else would you tell current students to do as they're embarking on their careers?

Nick:

Oh gosh. I mean, those two are great ones. Stay connected. Get mentors. I think something that I am realizing especially now is just to not stress so much about where you're going. I think when I graduated Fordham and went off and was abroad for two years, and when I came back, I think I was stressing a lot about now I'm back in New York and what is my career going to be? How has this fit into my career path? I need to make a decision now. I'm getting so old. And I've had really great friends and mentors who've been like, "Nick, you're 25. You're not that old. You have plenty of time. There's no set timeline in which you're supposed to be making decisions."

Nick:

I feel like I put a lot of pressure on myself to do that. I had this whole imaginary timeline in my head where I'm like, "I have to have finished school by the time I'm 30 so I can start a family and be set on my career." I think it's really helpful to remember that that's all imaginary and to not put that pressure on yourself and just really enjoy the journey and where you're going and exploring your interests, especially if they're varied.

Matt:

Well, Nick, I think that's all we have for you. Thanks so much for being here.

Nick:

Thanks so much.

Matt:

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Sara:

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