



March 2, 2018

Dear BUA Community,

As I do each year at this time, I am writing to share some big-picture updates on strategic initiatives as well as some organizational information for the months ahead. This letter does not reflect the entirety of the work we are taking on at BUA, but rather highlights some of the most important projects in which our faculty and administrators are currently engaged. The areas I will focus on in this letter are:

- Educating the whole student
- Student involvement
- Health and wellness
- Teaching and learning

I will also provide updates on:

- Admission
- Fundraising
- BUA's 25th anniversary celebrations

My annual August letter, which is sent to families before the start of the new school year, will contain updates about our long-range priorities and the process of creating BUA's next strategic plan, in addition to the usual back-to-school logistics.

Educating the Whole Student

As I announced in News and Notes, we have confirmed [Dr. Walter Fluker](#), Martin Luther King, Jr. Professor of Ethical Leadership at BU's School of Theology, as **BUA's 2018 Commencement keynote speaker**. This moment in our nation's history – and as we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. – is an ideal time to hear from this esteemed educator in the field of ethical leadership. Importantly, Dr. Fluker's work on building "[character, civility, and community](#)" in emerging leaders dovetails with our stated goal of educating the whole student – academically, socially, emotionally, and physically.

Dr. Fluker defines ethical leadership as the "critical appropriation and embodiment of traditions that have shaped the character and shared meanings of a people." Put more simply, it is leadership informed and directed by respect for ethical beliefs and for the dignity, values, and the rights of others. Our hope is for BUA students to become ethical leaders of – and ethical participants in – their local, national, and global communities. But it's hard to be an ethical leader if you don't have an understanding or awareness of the way other people live their lives. To that end, we endeavor to expose students to unfamiliar – and often uncomfortable – topics so that they have a broader frame of reference on which to build.

Empathy is a key component of ethical leadership. We aim to develop empathy in our students by opening windows onto the experiences of others – especially those whose lives are very different from our own. At BUA, one of the key ways in which we open these windows is through our **All-School Learning Experience (ASLE)**. In our last two ASLEs, we have taken on issues of civil discourse in politics and social justice. Over the past several weeks, we have continued our conversations on race and mass incarceration by watching the documentary *13th* and holding student-led discussions on the film and this year's book-in-common, *The New Jim Crow*. These dialogues open up a space for

students to engage with each other on challenging topics and to explore issues that impact our society and country at large.

In the 2018-2019 academic year, **our All-School Learning Experience will be focused on the local and global implications of climate change.** Next year's ASLE will be led by **Dr. Travis Bain** in conjunction with a group of students who will help determine content and facilitate discussions. Using BU's [Climate Action Plan](#) and its extensive research about the implication of climate change on BU's campus as a resource, we will examine climate change from a variety of angles – scientific, social, and political. We will explore the implications of climate change near and far, from flood maps along Commonwealth Avenue to drought and food security across the globe.

Our aspiration for this, next, and every year's ASLE is to increase awareness of difficult issues and to foster discourse and nuanced understanding of complex topics. Helping our students to be involved participants within our school and in their home communities lays the groundwork for them to become engaged citizens in their lives and the world beyond BUA.

Student Involvement

We work hard to create opportunities for student leadership and channels for student input and feedback, which are critical components of any thriving high school. I have been impressed by the work of BUA's Student Council and the leadership its members have demonstrated through organizing events, soliciting student input on school improvement, and bringing proposals to the faculty and administration for consideration. In the past year, Student Council has presented thoughtful proposals for:

- A school-wide **Annual Day of Service**, which was adopted and will be implemented on May 16, 2018
- A once-per-month **open-lunch policy** for sophomores, which was adopted and implemented in October 2017
- An all-school **Field Day**, which the faculty approved in January (details of this event are forthcoming)

Another arena in which students have demonstrated effective leadership and involvement is **the Quiet Study Room (QSR) Working Group**. The QSR was created a decade ago – at the request of students – to provide a dedicated place to read and do homework. Now, with the evolution of our Computer Lab (adjacent to the QSR) serving as a quiet study space, the QSR has become redundant. We have brought together students, faculty, and administrators to reimagine uses for this room. This working group has visited the [Think Tank](#) at BU's College of Arts and Sciences to see one example of forward-thinking use of space. The reinvention of the QSR is part of a larger space planning project to better utilize classroom and study areas within the Academy building (described below in the Fundraising section). In the interim, we will reopen the QSR as a small-group gathering space.

The above initiatives are direct results of feedback we've heard from BUA students and parents. In this spirit of data collection, this spring **Assistant Head of School for Academics and Student Affairs Rosemary White** and I will also introduce a set of senior student and parent surveys to collect input on the overall BUA experience.

Additionally, for the first time, we will host lunches with groups of seniors throughout the spring to hear firsthand about their time at BUA. Our goal is to affirm what we do well and to learn about areas in which we can continue to grow so that we can offer the best possible holistic educational experience to our students in partnership with their families.

Health and Wellness

In my annual Town Hall All-School Meeting last month, a student asked me a direct question about what specific steps we are taking to live up to our commitment to promoting student mental health and wellness at BUA. I love that we're the kind of school where a student feels comfortable asking that question in such a forum, and this student was right to call out the importance of making progress in these areas.

As I have emphasized since my arrival two-and-a-half years ago, enhancing health and wellness is one of the most important steps we can take toward educating the whole student. In the past several months, we have made progress on this objective, including:

- Limiting homework over breaks to 45 minutes per subject so that students can enjoy holidays and vacations with their families
- Partnering with BU's [Fitness and Recreation Center](#) (FitRec) to offer BUA students broader access to the wealth of physical fitness opportunities that FitRec provides
- Engaging outside consultant [Suzanne Baumann](#) to work with **School Counselor Stacey Weiskopf** on evolving BUA's health and wellness curriculum (Suzanne spoke to the [BUA Parents' Network Meeting on February 23](#))
- Soliciting input from students on topics they would like to see addressed in BUA's health and wellness programming

Suzanne Baumann has engaged with peer advisors and also with students by grade level to identify a list of health and wellness topics that students want to learn more about. This spring in Class Meetings we will host guest speakers from the [Wellness Collaborative](#), [Planned Parenthood](#), and [BU's Sargent Nutrition Center](#), among others, to further address some of these areas, including:

- Mental health, mood disorders, stress, and sleep
- Work habits and procrastination
- Substance use/abuse
- Addiction
- Phone and device use/abuse
- Social media
- Juuling and e-cigarettes, including insight into the marketing of these devices
- The ethical implications of purchasing illegal drugs and related paraphernalia
- "Roasting" (sensitivity in how students talk to one another and being aware of taking jokes too far)
- Pornography and misogyny
- Sexual assault and the #metoo movement
- Life skills for seniors including financial fluency and anticipating separation from parents and friends

Taken individually, these health and wellness initiatives may seem like a collection of small steps. In aggregate, however, we believe they represent a meaningful and coordinated stride toward decreasing student stress, promoting physical activity, and encouraging balance – all of which, the research shows, improves mental health and overall adolescent wellbeing. At a time when studies show dramatically rising levels of depression, anxiety, and other mood disorders among high-schoolers, our goal is to create a coherent health and wellness program as part of holistically supporting our students.

Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning is and will remain at the core of the BUA experience. To this end, in addition to developing our student support, health, and wellness programming, we are actively seeking ways to further develop our curriculum and refine our collective teaching pedagogy.

We have learned, both through casual feedback and from data gleaned from our 2016 multi-constituent surveys of current students and alumni, that the Senior Thesis program is not serving some of our students as well as we want. The fact that it works for some but not for others is problematic: we want the Senior Thesis program to be a valuable

capstone experience for *all* BUA seniors. I have tasked a Senior Thesis Working Group with finding ways to improve both the senior thesis research and writing experience itself and also the scaffolding that leads up to it in the earlier grades. The working group will deliver their findings and recommendations in time to be implemented for the class of 2020.

Last month, **Mathematics Instructor Srdjan Divac** gave a presentation to the faculty on a new curriculum he is implementing in his pre-calculus class. Called the “MA-70 Project,” Mr. Divac has introduced a method of teaching pre-calculus that:

- Incorporates and develops all strands of mathematical competence
- Promotes cross-competency understanding
- Blurs artificial divisions between geometry and other branches of mathematics
- Develops a culture of sense-making, bringing the classroom discourse closer to the discourse of the academic disciplines

Mr. Divac aims to accomplish this by:

- Asking non-standard, interesting questions
- Encouraging students to engage in problem-solving
- Having students present their work in small groups
- Promoting a culture of fear-free, fun, and civilized discourse

Encouraging and supporting our talented teachers in this kind of curricular innovation is one of the key ways BUA lives up to its commitment to continuous improvement – even in the areas, like academics, where we are already operating at a very high standard.

Admission

Thanks to the excellent and tireless work of **Director of Admission Nastaran Hakimi** and **Assistant Director of Admission Meg Shannon**, we broke our record again this year for the number of applications received. We’ve seen another significant increase of high-quality candidates, including many strong underrepresented minority candidates. BUA extends its reach through our relationships with schools and organizations like A Better Chance (ABC), Beacon Academy, and The Steppingstone Foundation, which are dedicated to promoting educational opportunities for students of color and underserved communities. Admission decisions will be released on March 10. We are grateful to the student and parent volunteers who will help with our yield efforts over the coming weeks!

Fundraising

The generosity of our community accelerates our progress in teaching and learning, student health and wellness, and improvements to our physical plant. We are pursuing several important and exciting fundraising initiatives in our 25th anniversary year. Thank you to all of you who have already chosen to support one or more of these efforts!

- **2017-2018 Annual Fund:** Our goal is to reach a record \$370,000; with over \$270,000 raised to date, we are 73% of the way to this goal.
- **BUA Great Teachers Fund for Academic Enhancement:** We have raised \$134,800 to date for this new endowed fund to support teaching and learning at BUA in honor of retiring teachers.

- **Classroom Furniture and Technology:** The proceeds from BUA's 25th Anniversary Gala Celebration silent auction will kick off a multi-year project to improve our classrooms and student spaces. We are working with a planning team from BU to create a comprehensive plan for our space at One University Road. This multi-phase effort will be the most significant physical plant initiative at BUA since the opening of the arts wing, and will begin with a focus on classroom furniture and technology.

25th Anniversary Celebrations

We look forward to honoring the history and achievements of our school with the extended BUA community on May 4-5.

On Friday, May 4, we will kick off the celebrations with musical performances and an alumni panel discussion. In the afternoon, we'll host Senior Thesis presentations and special classes with BUA faculty. That evening, we will gather for the 25th Anniversary Spring Concert featuring performances by students, alumni, and faculty and the debut of an original composition by Joy Blanchard '16.

On the evening of Saturday, May 5, we will host our Gala Celebration at the [State Room](#) in downtown Boston. This event will bring together the BUA community for a festive celebration featuring the silent auction and a special performance staged by our visual and performing arts faculty and current students. With the help of generous donors, we are pleased to offer complimentary tickets to current and former faculty, as well as reduced-cost tickets for alumni and families who need financial assistance. You can find more information about the 25th Anniversary Celebration Weekend at www.bu.edu/bua25.

I hope that reading this update has illustrated some of the key ways in which BUA strives to provide the best possible holistic educational experience for our students and families every day, while at the same time seeking ways to be even better in the future. As always, I am eager to hear from you about *your* BUA experience. Please feel free to reach out to me during my weekly open office hours, through email, and at community events. I look forward to seeing you on May 4-5, if not before.

Best wishes for a fun and relaxing spring break,



Dr. Ari M. Betof
Head of School