



August 31, 2026

Dear BUA Students and Families,

I write to you profoundly optimistic about the year ahead. I spent vibrant class sessions during last week's orientation with groups of new ninth graders analyzing the School's mission statement – deconstructing the language, sharing observations, and speculating about what could perhaps be changed to better reflect today's BUA. What a joy it is to be with students whose happy place is the classroom, whose questions come from a place of genuine curiosity, and who relish the opportunity to work together on an intellectual puzzle. These new students were already living into our mission's promise that BUA is a place where “students who love learning are challenged to read deeply and think critically.”

A few days later, I joined the senior class during their annual retreat. The highlight was a 90-minute generative discussion of what specific behaviors they would like to see more and less of around campus to strengthen the community they cherish and what, as leaders, they could do to inspire that kind of action. In an age where our public discourse is notably devoid of reasoned debate, where individual attainment is celebrated over the common good, and where technology is crowding out deep human inquiry, these young people give me great hope – not just that the culture of kindness and curiosity here at BUA is in good hands, but also about the world our students will shape.

Below, you'll find some brief reflections on the past year and notes about the year ahead.

Smartphone Policy

We trust our students. Time and again, they have shown that they deserve that trust — from their extraordinary grace adapting to COVID protocols several years ago, to the independence they show on BU's campus, to the daily kindnesses they show one another. We do not, however, trust the creators of the technological devices and apps that are designed to steal our students' attention. The research is now overwhelming that smartphones in the hands of school-aged students – even unusually mature, independent ones – distract them not only from schoolwork but also from the kinds of in-person, face-to-face exchanges that lie at the heart of our school and promote social-emotional health. The Massachusetts House and Senate have both advanced legislation implementing a “bell-to-bell” ban on cell phones and similar devices, which would put this state in line with two dozen others with similar policies. Nearly all of our peer schools, including our neighboring independent high schools in the City of Boston, have already adopted parallel rules, generally asking students to check their smartphones at the front desk upon entry to the school.

Over the last several weeks, I have held listening sessions on this topic with students across grades. Regardless of the preferred solution, all students I spoke to noted that smartphones were getting in the way of connection and community, particularly in the younger grades. During an exercise at our senior retreat, the Class of 2027 identified smartphone usage at BUA and the corresponding disengagement from social situations as the behavior that they most hoped to see less of around campus. Parents I have spoken to are asking the School to help.

At our opening meetings last week, BUA's faculty and staff voted on a smartphone policy to help our students and preserve the community we cherish. The differentiation and nuance in the policy are meant to respond to the particular setting of BUA – the practical and safety concerns associated with our integration into an urban college campus where older students regularly engage across BU. In broad strokes:

- 9th and 10th-grade students will be asked to deposit smartphones in a cabinet by the front desk when they arrive at school in the morning, with narrow exceptions for certain medical conditions, disability accommodations, or other school-approved reasons. Slots in the cell-phone cabinet will be labeled with each student's name. They can retrieve those devices at the end of the school day or at any time they leave the BUA building without a BUA adult. Students heading to a BU class or to lunch at the GSU, for example, can take their phones with them and deposit them again when they return. If a student needs to use their phone during the day in the building – e.g., for security authentication into BU technology systems – they can ask permission at the front desk to briefly access their device. Parents who need to reach their children during the school day are invited to call the front desk or email academy@bu.edu.
- 11th and 12th graders are welcome to keep their smartphones with them in the BUA building. We ask, however, that they only use those devices in the Junior-Senior Room and the front area of the Student Commons – keeping the hallways, staircases, and other areas as smartphone-free zones. In line with existing policy, students should deposit their devices in the teacher's phone caddy while in class.
- As a corollary, we ask that any piece of technology – smartphones, smartwatches, tablets, *and* laptops – only be used for a school-related purpose or in case of emergencies during the school day. Games, social media, and videos will generally not qualify, unless part of a school project or faculty-advised extracurricular or club.

The full policy will be outlined in the BUA Student and Family Handbook, which will be shared later this week.

I am confident in the judgment of the faculty and staff and agree that these are the right steps for our community. I am also confident that, like any significant change, there will be disagreement, challenges, surprises, and changes over time. I have spoken about this policy in depth with the senior leaders of our Student Council. They embrace the need for a shift – to make the BUA school day more like the smartphone-free, engagement-rich experience they enjoyed as 9th and 10th graders at Camp Burgess – and are eager to work with the faculty and the student body on how we make this a reality. Over the coming months, the faculty and I will work with those student leaders and their counterparts on the policy, PR, and resources subcommittees to determine how we can support implementation, gather feedback, navigate obstacles, and make common-sense tweaks as we go.

In the meantime, thank you for your patience and understanding as we try to do the right thing by our students and the community. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out using the contact information at the end of this letter.

Historical Restoration Project

Our long wait is nearly over. For the past twelve months, BUA's building has undergone a major exterior [historical restoration](#) to reinforce and replace the facade on two sides and improve the safety of the structure after almost a century of Boston winters. The scaffolding on the front is already down; the remainder will come down in mid-September. What it will reveal is a replica of the original – complete with fluted columns and the sea-life frieze referencing the building's initial

purpose, housing the Shell Oil Company. We thank our partners at Boston University for spearheading and funding this project – a reflection of BU's long-term commitment to BUA.

BU's New Provost

In July, BU welcomed Dr. Colin Duckett as the [new University Provost](#) – the University's chief academic officer and second-ranking leader at BU. Dr. Duckett oversees BUA along with the other 17 schools and colleges across campus. I report to the Provost, as do the other deans at BU. He has already visited us once over the summer and plans to return to address the community at an all-school meeting later this year.

NEASC Reaccreditation

Every ten years, BUA engages in a reaccreditation process through the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), like our peer independent schools. The faculty and staff will engage in a self-study process this year – analyzing the school's performance against a set of indicators and producing a report. In October and April, a team of visitors from NEASC schools across New England will visit BUA and get to know us – with the task of confirming that we are meeting the standards for reaccreditation. While there is little question that BUA will be reaccredited, this process does provide an important opportunity for self-reflection and growth.

Admissions, Enrollment, and Financial Aid

It was a remarkable admissions year. Strong applications again well outpaced available seats, despite the fact that demographic trends indicate fewer school-aged children in our area. We open our doors with 226 students and 61 incoming ninth graders.

Part of what makes this community so special and attractive is our diversity. Our students come from 44 cities and towns. 59% identify as students of color. 37% of them speak another language at home. 27% receive financial aid. For the sixth year running, we accepted and fully funded every student we felt should be here – with no financial-aid waitlist. Few schools can say that, and we will strive to keep this school accessible to the most wonderful students regardless of their family's financial situation.

College Admissions

Colleges and universities recognize what we already know: our students are exceptionally ready to excel in the college classroom and make a difference on campus. I am proud that our students, with the expert support of our college counseling team, work hard to find a school that is the right fit for them – the best predictor of a happy and successful college career. You'll see that reflected in the broad array of [colleges and universities the Class of 2026](#) will attend this fall.

Fundraising

I am humbled by the generosity this community showed last year. We finished the fiscal year with \$1.3 million in total giving. To the 84% of our families who made BUA a philanthropic priority on top of the significant investment you are already making in tuition, thank you. Thanks, too, to the hundreds of alumni, parents of alumni, faculty, staff, and friends of BUA who joined them. The impact is immediate. Because of your generosity, we were able to say yes to wonderful students and families who qualified for financial support and yes to teachers – for professional development, curricular development grants, and the other resources they need and deserve.

State of the School - February 19

BUA will host its biennial State of the School event on Friday, February 19 from 6:00-9:00 p.m. at the WBUR CitySpace. This is an opportunity for parents, caregivers, alumni, and friends to hear about the direction of the School, as well as connect with one another. We look forward to seeing you there.

Additions to Parents & Caregivers Day - September 29

Parents & Caregivers Day – where current families shadow their students through their BUA classes – is one of the highlights of the year. This year, we are expanding the day's content. In addition to the morning class shadowing, we will offer afternoon sessions where parents can take a deeper dive into a number of areas: hearing from a panel of BU professors who teach our students; getting a sense of the college admissions landscape from our college counseling team; learning about our global travel offerings; and sitting in on master classes with BUA faculty members.

Expanded Community Service Offerings

Two years ago, BUA launched the Boston Afterschool Service Fellows program. Cohorts of BUA students volunteered weekly in the afterschool program at local elementary and middle schools. Building on that success and under the leadership of Ms. Paula Jurado, plans are in place to expand that program this year to involve more BUA students and potentially add more sites. We are also exploring weekend service opportunities periodically throughout the year with local partners.

Grading Consistency

For the past two years, BUA faculty and staff have engaged in a project analyzing a decade of grades in all BUA classes and discussing implications of that data. While there were no major problems identified, the conversations revealed a desire to build systems to ensure consistency in grading across courses and disciplines. There have never been, nor are we implementing, any forced grading curves or strict limits on the numbers of A, B, and C grades. But students have a fair expectation that grading patterns be largely consistent, regardless of the academic department, course, or teacher. In that spirit, we have created standard language for all academic disciplines defining what A, B, C, D, and F grades mean – language that will be published in the Student and Family Handbook. We will also annually analyze and share grades with teachers and departments internally – providing teachers with the information and context to better align their grading with that of their colleagues.

Math Curriculum Evolution

This fall, BUA will roll out the second course in a [new three-course math sequence](#) featuring two exciting innovations: an integrated approach where students see the connections between algebraic concepts, geometry, and other areas; and a problem-based approach designed to help students build confidence as problem solvers. BUA math faculty are developing these courses from scratch specifically for BUA students. Last year, the math department gathered feedback on the new curriculum – as any good school should do when adopting a new program. Students reported that they appreciated the problem sets; they saw the connections between seemingly disparate topics and enjoyed the challenge involved in determining what concepts to apply to which problems (rather than drilling the same types of problems repeatedly). They also saw value in presenting solutions to their peers in class; explaining something to others is a great way to solidify your own understanding. But some also identified an area for improvement: a desire for more

teacher-directed moments of explanation and scaffolding. The department has taken the feedback to heart. This year, the teachers in these courses have decided to more intentionally mix student presentations with traditional teacher-directed instruction and exploration. Each course now has a strongly suggested textbook to serve as a reference supplementing the problem sets – a place where students can go (in addition to their teacher and classmates) for help.

The department is also, for the first time, offering a [one-year course combining Calculus I and II](#). Historically, Calculus I has only been offered at BUA as a year-long course, followed by semesters of Calculus II and Multivariate Calculus. Year-long Calculus I still serves many students well and will continue to be the default option for BUA students after Pre-Calculus. But we have found that some students are ready to engage with the material at a faster pace, hence the addition of the new, combined course.

Entrepreneurship & Innovation

This will be the first year of a new 11th-grade Entrepreneurship & Innovation Seminar. It will run alongside the two longstanding optional junior [seminars](#) – STEM and HEAR (humanities and arts) – designed to give students exposure to important fields and prepare them for the senior thesis. The Entrepreneurship & Innovation Seminar will offer insights into the basics of the start-up ecosystem, business planning, and the role of AI in innovation, as well as serving as an early-stage incubator where students can develop their own concepts. We see this as potentially one part of a broader entrepreneurship and innovation program, unleashing what we perceive as strong interest and ability among some BUA students in this area.

Supporting Diversity & Belonging

Diversity and belonging are central to our school's mission and core values. Since English teacher Dr. Monica Alvarez inaugurated the Director of Equity & Inclusion role in 2023, there has been remarkable growth in the student affinity-alliance programs and in the evening events we host for students and families celebrating cultural heritage. To sustain that growth while creating space for Dr. Alvarez's classroom priorities, we are activating two other institutional resources. Ms. Victoria Perrone, in her role as Director of Student Life, will work with Dr. Alvarez and the faculty mentors of each affinity-alliance group to provide an additional layer of support for them; they will now be integrated into and be able to leverage the existing infrastructure for clubs and activities at BUA. The School's Advancement team will support Dr. Alvarez and the relevant faculty advisors to organize and strengthen the periodic evening cultural programs like Garba, the BSU Cookout, Lunar New Year, the Tu BiShvat Seder, the Eid Dinner, and Carnaval. We expect that these shifts will strengthen the critical work we do around belonging, diversity, and community.

New Faculty and Staff

We are excited to welcome six [new members of the BUA faculty and staff](#). They bring not only expertise in their respective fields, but also warmth, empathy, and positive energy.

Ms. Bailey DiOrio joins us as our new Associate Director of College Counseling. She will work with Ms. Jackson, who has stepped into the Director role. Prior to her time at BUA, Ms. DiOrio served for nine years as an Associate Director of Admissions at Brown University and five years in a similar role at Princeton University. She knows BUA well, having served as Brown's representative to BUA and having read BUA student applications.

We are excited to welcome Dr. Tamara Griggs in a one-year history-teaching position filling in for Dr. Jim Davis's sabbatical. Dr. Griggs comes to BUA with deep experience teaching in higher

education, including eight years at Harvard in the History & Literature department and Expository Writing program as well as teaching postings at Stanford, the University of Chicago, and UMass Boston. Originally from California, she graduated with a BA in English literature from Reed College and earned her PhD in history from Princeton University.

Ms. Jackie Holmes is our new Athletic Trainer and Assistant Athletic Director. Before joining BUA, Ms. Holmes served as Head Athletic Trainer in the City of Medford, her hometown. An independent school alumna of the Cambridge School of Weston, she received her BS in athletic training from Westfield State University, and her MS in sports leadership from Endicott College.

A 2022 graduate of BUA, Ms. Katie Kara'a joins us as our new Advancement & Digital Marketing Associate. She received her BS in Media, Culture, and Communication with a minor in Studio Art from New York University. She began her career in New York City, working in guest services at the Paley Center for Media and interning with KCMConnect, a boutique fashion and beauty PR agency.

Ms. Delia Moore will serve as an Assistant Director of Admission this year during Ms. Shannon's parental leave. Ms. Moore is a graduate of Colby College with a BA in psychology and educational studies. A Belmont Day School alumna, she remained an active member of the community, working at the school's summer camp throughout college and serving in a variety of leadership roles, including athletic director intern, business and social media intern, and member of the summer administration team.

We are delighted to welcome back Ms. Hanna Woo as our Learning Specialist and Liaison to BU's Disability & Access Services. In addition to serving in a one-year role at BUA in the 2024-25 school year, she previously filled student-support roles in Cambridge Public Schools, Landmark College, and Lesley University. Ms. Woo brings deep experience to BUA as a learning specialist and executive function coach, supporting students in developing organizational, time management, study, reading, and writing skills. She earned her BA in political science from Amherst College and her EdM in special education from Simmons University.

Other Faculty and Staff News

To better reflect her expanding role, our School Psychologist, Ms. Stacey Weiskopf, will take on the additional title of Director of Counseling & Learning Services. She will continue with her core duties of providing social-emotional support, coaching, and referrals to students and families. She has also taken on oversight of the advising program, wellness and life skills seminars, and learning support systems – in collaboration with a robust [Student Support Team](#).

Before we begin in earnest tomorrow, I want to pause to offer thanks. First to my talented, committed colleagues who devote their careers to these extraordinary young people. Second to our families – thank you for trusting us with the most precious thing in your lives. And of course, to the 226 students who are our reason for being and who, every day, renew my faith.

As always, please reach out to the [team](#) here at BUA or to [me](#) in the days and weeks ahead with any questions. Wishing us all a wonderful school year!

Warmly,

Chris Kolovos
Head of School