

U.S. Department of Education
2017 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [X] Title I [X] Charter [] Magnet [] Choice

Name of Principal Dr. Clement Ukaoma
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name University Academy-Upper School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 6801 Holmes Road
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Kansas City State MO Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 64131-1382

County Jackson

Telephone (816) 412-5902 Fax (816) 410-0320

Web site/URL http://www.universityacademy.org E-mail ukaomac@universityacademy.org

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent*Mr. Tony Kline E-mail klinet@universityacademy.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name University Academy School District Tel. (816) 412-5902

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board
President/Chairperson Mr. Bush Helzberg
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

**Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

Part I – Eligibility Certification

The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. All nominated public schools must meet the state's performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2017 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2011 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, or 2016.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
8. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
9. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
10. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
11. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
12. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2016-2017) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 0 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 1 K-12 schools
- 3 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
 - Suburban with characteristics typical of an urban area
 - Suburban
 - Small city or town in a rural area
 - Rural
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2016 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	33	50	83
10	22	31	53
11	12	26	38
12 or higher	20	23	43
Total Students	87	130	217

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 1 % Asian
 - 96 % Black or African American
 - 1 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 1 % White
 - 0 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2015 – 2016 school year: 5%

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	9
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	9
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	190
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.047
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	5

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0%
1 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

French

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 65%
 Total number students who qualify: 140
8. Students receiving special education services: 3%
6 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- 1 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 0 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 1 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 0 Other Health Impaired
- 4 Specific Learning Disability
- 0 Speech or Language Impairment
- 0 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 0 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
- 0 Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 11
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	15
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	0
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	1
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 15:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	95%	96%	96%
High school graduation rate	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**
Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2016.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	38
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	32%
Enrolled in a community college	4%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	1%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	1%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.
Yes No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school's mission or vision statement.

The mission of University Academy is to prepare students to succeed in an institution of higher education and to participate as leaders in society.

16. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

University Academy is a public charter school. Our students come from a designated geographical area within Kansas City, Missouri. Student selection is by lottery, however, exceptions are made for siblings, children of staff, and children of alumni.

PART III – SUMMARY

The Upper School is the flagship of University Academy Public Charter School. The charter school system is located in Kansas City, Missouri. University Academy is organized as a K - 12, college preparatory school and overseen by a Superintendent and a Board of Directors. The mission of University Academy is to prepare students to succeed in an institution of higher education and to become leaders in society. The school's vision is to be the best K-12 college preparatory charter public school in the country with an emphasis on college preparation, career development, community service and leadership. There are three distinct schools within the University Academy system: a K - 5 Lower School, a 6 - 8 Middle School, and a 9 - 12 Upper School. Each school has its own administrative staff with a Principal and an Assistant Principal; Lower School has an additional Assistant Principal (a total of two) to accommodate the larger number of students enrolled in the lower grades.

Pursuant to its 1998 charter legislation, the state of Missouri, granted University Academy its first operational charter in 1999. University Academy Upper School (UAUS) was, thus, among the first charter schools established in Missouri. Although the school received its charter in 1999, the founders took a year to plan out all aspects of the school before enrolling the first cohort of students in 2000. That original cohort consisted of students in grades 7 through 9 and operated out of a former dairy facility leased from University of Missouri, Kansas City, the school's institutional sponsor. The original plan was to promote and enroll students progressively until grades 5 through 12 were populated. Four years after first enrolling students, the Upper School graduated its first class in 2004. Then, with the completion of the school's new facility on 6801 Holmes Road in 2005, the idea of adding grades K - 3 to the mix became the next logical progression.

Now in its seventeenth year of operation, and as the school prepares to graduate its 14th class, the Upper School has reached important milestones, which include these: for eleven consecutive years, 100% of all students who began the fall semester as seniors have gone on to complete high school. Further, 100% of these graduates have been admitted into institutions of higher learning--nearly 95% of them into four-year colleges. UAUS has also been recognized by U. S. News & World Report for the past five years as one of the nation's top high schools. In 2015, Newsweek recognized UAUS as one of its "Beating the Odds" school, nationally ranking UAUS 199th on its list. The listing honors high poverty schools with high academic achievement. Additionally, a third-party clearing house of state testing data, Schooldigger.com, ranked the Upper School first among Missouri high schools based on our students' 2016 performance on the state assessments. The state of Missouri recognized the entire University Academy school system for reaching 100% of the measures on its Annual Performance Rating (APR) for schools in 2016. Recent milestones include selection as a distinguished Title 1 school by the National Title 1 Association, and being one of eight Missouri schools nomination by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Schools for consideration as a National Blue Ribbon school. To be so recognized serves as further validation of the hard work of UAUS, its students, teachers, and administration.

The idea of University Academy grew out of a discussion among members of one of Kansas City's most philanthropic families concerning the poor state of public education in the city. Specifically, they wondered what might be done to improve educational opportunities for the inner-city youth of Kansas City, Missouri. The quest for excellence is hardwired into every aspect of the school and our parents send their students here because of the rigorous curriculum, the dual-credit opportunities that our seniors and juniors are able to avail themselves of, the various leadership development opportunities to which our students have access, including our experiential learning programs, and travel abroad programs. Two unique features of our school are that juniors and seniors are required to enroll in two, consecutive yearlong seminar classes that focus on all aspects of college preparation; our three travel and experiential learning programs (NOLS, EIL, and SDC) constitute a second, unique feature. Of the 38 students who graduated from the Upper School last year, 22 visited countries on four continents--traveling, living with foreign host families, and learning about their hosts' cultures.

Starting with its first graduating class of 13 in 2004, a total of 420 students have matriculated from the Upper School into college. The class of 2017 boasts 47 students. According to data from FriendsOfUA.org, the total college graduation rate for UAUS currently stands at 53.5%--a figure that far exceeds the college

graduation rate for African-Americans. Yet, we are not resting on our laurels, our goal is to raise the graduation rate to 75% on our way to matching the 83% college graduation rate of Asian Americans and Americans in the highest economic strata.

UAUS continues to be guided by the core values that support its vision: to be the best K-12 college preparatory charter public school in the country with an emphasis on college preparation, career development, community service, and leadership.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

UAUS's curriculum focuses on preparing every student for college. Students must earn four credits in each of the four core subjects of English, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science in order to graduate from University Academy. Our rigorous 4+4+4+4 curriculum plan meets ACT's and College Board's College and Career Readiness standard. The English classes emphasize reading comprehension and writing clearly with minimal grammatical errors. By the junior and senior years, students begin focusing on college reading and learning to write compelling literary critiques. In mathematics, students move quickly through number sense, the rules of Algebra and other mathematical principles, Geometric theorems, solutions and strategies. Students then learn how to apply these theorems and strategies to solving mathematical problems of increasing complexity, culminating in proficiency in college level mathematics. In science, students learn the scientific principles, methods, and processes, as well as conduct experiments to learn how these processes apply to real life situations, including the investigation of larger scientific principles and systems. Finally, in social studies, students begin by learning about the world, its history and cultures, then move on to America history. We focus on helping students gain fundamental understanding of our democratic system, its institutions, and the problems that are inherent in democratic pluralism; the role of individuals and groups in fostering our democratic way of life, including an exploration of the role of economics in politics and everyday life.

UAUS's curriculum is designed to orient students toward college success and eventual post-career choices. Upper School students essentially receive a modified IB-type curriculum. The typical 9th grader takes seven classes of 55-minute duration each school day: World Literature, World History, Physical Science or Biology, Algebra I or Geometry, Physical Education, Health, French I or Spanish I, and Speech. The typical 10th grader also takes seven classes of 55-minute length during the school day: American Literature, U. S. History, Biology or Chemistry, Algebra II or College Algebra, French II or Spanish II, Fine Arts, Practical Arts, electives. The typical 11th grader takes seven classes of 55-minute length during the school day: Comparative Literature, Government and Personal Finance/Economics, Chemistry or Anatomy & Physiology, College Algebra, AP Statistics, or Pre-Calculus, Advanced Electives, or dual-credit coursework, Fine Arts, Practical Arts, and Junior Seminar--overview of college entry requirements, including preparation for college entry examinations like ACT and SAT, and college visits. Similarly, the typical 12th grader takes seven classes of 55-minute length, though a growing proportion of seniors also take off-campus college courses at Rockhurst University: College Composition (dual-credit) with University of Missouri, Kansas City or College Reading, Psychology, African-American History, dual-credit American History or Western Civilization, College Algebra, AP Statistics, or Pre-Calculus, Anatomy & Physiology, or Physics, Fine Arts, Practical Arts, and Senior Seminar, which extends lessons learned in Junior Seminar, focusing on applying to college, securing four letters of college admissions, retaking college entrance examinations if needed, and completing the FAFSA. The school-sponsored college visits also occur as part of the seminar classes.

Generally, as students enter the higher grades in the Upper School, their elective choices become freer and more driven by their interests.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Fine Arts Requirement (1.0 credit):

The Upper School offers its students a wide array of Fine Arts courses in Music (Orchestra, Marching Band, Jazz band, Choir, Show Choir), Art (Drawing and Painting I and II, Ceramics I, II, Sculpture I and II, AP Studio Arts--2-D and 3-D, and Photography).

Physical Education/Health Graduation Requirement (1.5 credits):

The typical 9th graders at UAUS is automatically enrolled in the year-long course in Physical Education. In addition to being a required elective, Physical Education focuses on exposing students to the rules of team and individual events as well as the principles of physical fitness. Physical Education is usually taken concurrently with Health, which emphasizes all aspects of healthy living, including the part that good

nutrition plays in a healthy lifestyle.

Foreign Language(s) Requirement (2.0 credits):

UAUS requires its students to complete two consecutive years of coursework in French or Spanish for graduation. The scope and sequence for the Foreign Language classes moves students from I to II to III. Those students showing exceptional facility in either language are eligible to take an advanced foreign language course (French or Spanish) off-campus at Rockhurst University.

Practical Arts/Computer Literacy Requirement (1.0 credit):

These are courses deemed necessary to fleshing out the college preparatory education that Upper School students are exposed to here. We consider that no 21st century education can be complete without a course in computer technology, an understanding of the rudiments of law, personal finance, psychology, accounting, entrepreneurship, and journalism. These subjects make up the school's offering in practical arts.

Advanced and Other Required Electives (2.0 credits)

Junior/Senior Seminar--

These two unique and eponymous classes have been instrumental to actualizing the mission of UAUS. Junior seminar serves the central venue where all juniors meet once a day, five times a week, to receive standardized information about college planning. Admissions Representatives visiting the Upper School are able to speak to juniors directly in Junior Seminar. Juniors are also enrolled in a mandatory ACT preparation, culminating in the actual ACT. Then, in Senior Seminar, seniors receive similar information, though much of it becomes more focused on ensuring that they are able to secure the four college acceptance letters that is required to graduate from UAUS.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

At the core of teaching and learning in UAUS is the Mastery Learning Protocol (MLP). Almost ten years ago, the Upper School principal and teaching staff collaborated to develop the MLP to meet the peculiar needs of our students. Here is how it works: Every quarter, which coincides with the time it takes a typical Upper School teacher to finish a unit of lessons, a mastery test is scheduled. But, before each mastery test is administered, the protocol requires the teacher to conduct a review of what the test will cover with students. Students, then have three opportunities to score 80%, which is the mastery threshold. Scoring 80% or higher on a mastery examination is proof that the student has demonstrated mastery of the taught content. Students who do not master must undergo remedial tutoring with the teacher before taking their second attempt and so on until the third and final mastery attempt has been taken. This is all accomplished during the school day because each Upper School teacher is required to tutor students twice a week from 3:15 pm to 4:15 pm.

Occasionally, a student will exhaust the allotted three options without mastering. When this happens, a grade of "0" is entered in the teacher's grade book for the student. Generally, any student who fails two or more mastery tests is deemed NOT to have mastered the content and must either qualify to recover the grade in summer school or repeat the course in its entirety. Summer school is by which only invitation hinges on the student earning at least 53% in the first semester of the course plus a grade of "C" or better in the second semester of the course.

The state of Missouri requires its students to take the following End-of-Course (EOC) examinations: in mathematics, Algebra I and Geometry (9/10 grades); in language arts, English II (10th grade); in science, Biology (10th grade); in social studies, Government (11th grade); in college/career readiness, ACT college entrance examination (11th grade). But, because UAUS takes its college preparatory mission seriously, our students are also required to take additional tests that the state considers optional: in mathematics, Algebra II (10th/11th grades); in language arts, English I (9th grade); in science, Physical Science (9th grade); in social studies, American History (10th grade). For the past two years, a representative sample of Upper School 15-year-old students have also taken an annualized version of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development/Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD)/(PISA). The test assesses what these students know and can do in reading, mathematics, and science. Following the test, Northwest Educational Association (NWEA), the administrator of the computerized version of the test, issues a comprehensive, 158-page report that we then use to further guide instructional efforts.

Over the past several years, these efforts and others we have implemented to address students' needs, such as teachers tutoring twice a week on designated days, have resulted in the UAUS being recognized as a high-achieving school both by Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Federal Department of Education. The school's student body is majority-minority, meaning that 96% are African-American. Yet, while on the whole, UAUS students have done well academically, there remain a small pocket who lag behind their peers, struggle with the coursework, and fail to progress confidently through the grades. These students continue to be a focus of our remedial efforts: double-enrollment, mandated tutoring, and other interventions have shown some promise with these students. In fact, almost all of these students eventually catch up and ultimately graduate with their peers. Being a small high school to begin with, we take extra steps to ensure everyone succeeds--the alternative is intolerable to us.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

The motto of University Academy, "Learning to Soar," succinctly captures the spirit of hard-work, emphasis on mastery, and mutual acceptance and respect between teachers and students that has come to define the UAUS experience. On any given day, a visitor to the Upper School will see inspirational and celebratory posters: Quarterly Honor Roll lists (this is done quarterly instead of by semester as is common with other high schools because we have found that doing this quarterly seems to help more students get and stay on the Honor Roll), a two-week calendar outlining upcoming events, student EOC achievements, etc. The visitor will also find a white banner bearing the University Academy Mission hanging in the Upper School office and throughout the building. Our students are engaged around the intentional structures that under-gird the events and activities of the school day. Students have access to a variety of clubs, activities, and events to engage with throughout the year. For instance, students may run for officers in the Student Council (STU-CO); so long as students are in good standing they may also run for Class Office, participate in clubs such 20/20 Leadership, Harvester's Food Drive, or organize any club they see a need for by requesting a teacher to sponsor it. These activities support students to do well in school and in life.

As mentioned earlier, UAUS teachers open their classroom doors to students for tutoring twice a week. Our School Counselor and Special Education Case Manager collaborate with our teachers to address students' academic, social, and emotional needs. Our school counselor's work is guided by the Missouri Comprehensive Guidance Counselor matrix. Then, beginning in the junior year, a College Adviser who also teaches Junior and Senior Seminar takes over all pre-college planning for juniors and seniors. Talk of college is commonplace in UAUS.

UAUS has the lowest employee turn-over rate of teachers in the University Academy system, suggesting that our teachers feel supported enough to want to stay. Teachers consistently report that student misbehavior is swiftly and fairly resolved. The low incident of discipline problems and the timely manner in which discipline issues are handled the few times they occur, add to teachers' feelings of safety--another marker for teacher valuation and satisfaction. The protocol used by UAUS to monitor teacher growth and student engagement, Network for Educator Effectiveness (NEE), requires teachers to rate their administrator every year for effectiveness and perceived teacher support. According to NEE data, UAUS teachers report consistently high satisfaction as well as high perceived support from their administrators. Finally, UAUS teachers' salaries are competitive for the area. A recent salary survey showed that, compared to surrounding schools and districts, University Academy paid among the highest starting teacher's salary in the region.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

By definition, public charter schools that enroll students by lottery are schools of choice. Each year in winter, University Academy holds an admissions lottery for students in kindergarten, 6th grade and 9th grade. Then, in late spring, the UAUS holds Class Meeting for parents and their students, starting with rising 12th graders and ending with rising 9th graders. Over the years, UAUS administration and staff have used these Class Meetings to set common expectations about the school for students and their parents. Because the meetings are grade-specific, everything from the importance of Grade Point Average (GPA), credits, promotion criteria, ACT and SAT college entrance examinations, and requirements that apply to specific grades are clearly explicated for parents and students. Patrons are also able to ask any questions they might have of administration and staff.

The UAUS has an ad hoc Parents' Advisory Committee (PAC), which meets every third Thursday of the month. Meeting agendas are set around a specific topic to ensure high engagement. For instance, last fall's FAFSA Frenzy was combined with the September PAC meeting and was geared toward parents of juniors and seniors, although any other parents who wished to attend could do so.

Before the start of the fall semester every year, UAUS holds a formal Freshman Orientation. The 9th

graders get introduced to the inner workings of high school. These 9th graders get to walk the halls of the Upper School, rotate through sessions such as: The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens, How to Keep an Eye on your GPA through PowerSchool, Mastery Learning Is Your Friend, The Uses of a Planner and so on. Finally, t-shirts are handed out to every 9th grader. Each t-shirt is emblazoned with a quote, and on the left front breast, each shirt also bears "University Academy Gryphons" emblem, below which is the cohort's graduation year--"Class of 2020" for instance.

Throughout the school year, parents are also kept abreast of goings on in the Upper School through a bi-monthly Parents' Newsletter (the PNL) an electronic version is shared with parents and guardians through e-mail. Additionally, a monthly district-wide newsletter is mass-mailed to each student's homes. University Academy also maintains an up-to-date website which aggregates and disseminates news and other relevant information about the school that parents and students could use.

Finally, UAUS benefits from the outstanding work of Friendsofua.org, a 501 (c), non-profit organization, which raises and allocates funds from supporters of University Academy. Without Friendsofua, much of the programs that supplement our efforts and, therefore, lead to the success the school has enjoyed--whether it be the travel abroad programs and NOLS--would not exist. Additionally, Friendsofua.org operates an Alumni Success Program which completes the arc of what a college-preparatory school like ours makes possible for inner-city youth.

3. Professional Development:

One secret to the success of University Academy is that it takes advantage of its charter status to operate organically and with maximum flexibility. Good ideas routinely bubble up from stakeholders at each school that ultimately make a big difference. Rather than seeking to purchase the latest hot, new program, or to fly off to the latest destination conference, University Academy focuses its professional development efforts on solving actual problems within each school. The Assistant Superintendent coordinates all testing and district-wide professional development activities for the three schools that make up University Academy. An example of a decision made district-wide was the adoption of Network for Educator Effectiveness (NEE), our common teacher observation and evaluation protocol used across all three schools. Parenthetically, NEE is a protocol developed by the University of Missouri following the blue print published by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

Eleven years ago, UAUS was organized as a grade 6 - 12 Upper School. It was routine for "smart" 7th and 8th graders to be enrolled into Chemistry, even though they had not had Algebra I or Geometry. The result was that these students failed, not because of any fault of theirs but, because courses lacked predictable scopes and sequences. The school performed below the AYP target in Communication Arts (only 27% of eligible test takers scored proficient and advanced versus the AYP target of 38%). The picture was barely different in Mathematics, where (only 22% of eligible test takers versus the AYP target of 27%). Further, only 40% of students who were enrolled in Algebra I in the 2006-2007 school year were passing at the end of Quarter 1. Faced with this stark reality, the UAUS staff undertook a book study of Standards and Mastery: Aligning Teaching and Assessment so All Children Can Learn (Gentile & Lalley, 2003).

Following that first book study that was spearheaded by the principal, the teaching staff worked to craft the Mastery Learning Protocol. Staff then engaged parents and guardians, making the case that, unless students, teachers, and parents made common cause by insisting that students matter what they were being taught in school, the mission of University Academy could not be actualized. A plurality of parents and teachers approved of Mastery Learning and it has remained at the core of teaching and learning in the Upper School since the protocol was first implemented and ironed out in the intervening years. Over the years, students have supported MLP as measured by our annual survey of staff and students. Since its adoption, every teacher new to the Upper School is required to read the Gentile & Lalley book, and complete a panel of practitioners piece made of veteran teachers to get up to speed. Something of that collaborative spirit has remained in the Upper School and informs the structure of our professional development efforts. NEE also provides our teachers targeted, on-line support in the form of webinars hosted by EdHub. Each year, teachers are observed using four pre-selected NEE standards. They are also expected to complete 6 modules over their two lowest standards as measured by administrator

observations. University Academy operates a New Teacher Induction program for all teachers new to any of its schools. The program has a set curriculum and mandatory meeting dates and has been cited by teachers new to the school as being instrumental to their success.

The Upper School, to borrow a cliché, is a learning organization. Through webinars, book studies, and Teach Outs (where individual teachers teach their colleagues something of interest they just learned, read about, or something they did in class that was especially successful), the teaching staff learns together. Our most recent professional development was on "Turn It In," a plagiarism prevention software that allows students to correct their papers before submitting them for grading.

4. School Leadership:

The degree to which the mission of University Academy influences UAUS's leadership philosophy and practices is uncanny. The leadership structure of the Upper School is simple, flat, democratic, and holistic. A full-time Principal, now in his 11th year is at the helm of the school, and plays the role of ringmaster. In the role of Assistant principal is a former PE/Health teacher and Athletic Director who used to split her time between Athletics and student discipline for the Upper School. She is now in her second year as the full-time Assistant Principal for the Upper School. Last year, the Upper School reclassified the position of its veteran Administrative Assistant promoting her to Manager of Upper School Operations. Because two of her sons also attended and graduated from the Upper School, she brings a mother's perspective to her job. With 17 years experience as an Administrative Assistant, eleven of those at UAUS, she attends to every last detail and has a keen memory. She brings good counsel and wisdom to the Upper School's leadership team. In addition to its professional School Counselor, the Upper School is unique in having a College Counselor who drives our college-going efforts. Finally, an Activities Director, co-ordinates all athletic and co-curricular activities for the entire University Academy system--K - 12. These individuals constitute the Upper School leadership team.

There is a familial feel to the Upper School: student success is celebrated and failure is seen as an opportunity for soul-searching and re-examination. An attitude of "What could we be doing better or differently?" The fact that the entire staff meets every Wednesday for roughly an hour, facilitates these frank conversations pervades every aspect of UAUS operations. The structure of the Wednesday meetings is that topics alternate between nuts and bolts concerns, like attendance, dress code, discipline, Chromebook checkout procedures, etc., and review of data on students' academic performance. Examples of the sorts of data reviewed include Quarterly Failure Lists by class, Quarterly Honor Rolls, the latest ACT results.

The Upper School principal meets once a week with the superintendent on Wednesdays to exchange views, listen to school-level concerns, and to provide general oversight. Finally, the Parents' Advisory Committee (PAC) serves a venue for parents to share concerns of importance to them about how the Upper School is operated. More importantly, PAC allows parents to make suggestions to the leadership of UAUS.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Perhaps the one principle that has made UAUS successful is that we have a clear school mission: "...to prepare students to succeed in an institution of higher education and to participate as leaders in society." We begin with the student and then ask ourselves a simple question: "What will it take to prepare this student to succeed in college and become a leader?" In other words, the school's mission challenges us to first understand our students before developing programs to help prepare them for college. No two cohorts of students entering the UAUS is ever the same, but, rather than throwing up our hands and stopping there, the staff strives to understand each cohort's strengths and weaknesses. Much of our success as a school comes from the fact that we deal with the students in front of us rather than the students we wish, or hoped we had. The teaching staff has learned that, rather than complaining about how low the skill levels of a particular cohort, or those of individual students within a cohort, our success comes from discovering students' skill gaps and working to fill it. The fundamental mindset we seek to promote can be summed up in an old adage: if at first you don't succeed, try, try, and try again.

Four examples illustrate our approach:

(1) ACT PREPARATION FOR JUNIORS AND SENIORS

When we realized that our students' ACT composite scores were not high enough to get them into the colleges and universities of their choice, we investigated the issue and arrived at two decisions: align our courses to better meet the College Board's recommendation about courses that are likely to deliver the content knowledge students need in order to be successful at the ACT. But, we did not stop there, we also secured the services of Kaplan, Inc., an ACT test preparation company to teach our students successful strategies for the ACT--Princeton Review is our current vendor.

(2) COLLEGE VISITS

Many of our students will be the first in their families to attend college. This means that many of these students have, at best, a rather cursory exposure to college--many have not even been on college campuses. Consequently, we expose students to college campuses, beginning with a half-day college visits for freshman, a day's visit to multiple college campuses for sophomores and juniors, and a two-day, multi-state visits for seniors. This means that, by the time a UAUS freshman completes high school, he or she would have visited the campuses of at least 10 colleges and universities. These visits serve to expose these students to college and university campuses; more importantly, these visits give our students realistic understanding of what college expects of them.

(3) SENIOR THESIS PROJECTS

When we noticed that our seniors were graduating with poor presentation skills, we instituted a senior thesis project as a graduation requirement. Each individual thesis is to be written on a topic of a student's choosing. The thesis consists of a 10-page paper, with at least, thirteen citations. Once the student receives approval for his topic, the paper must be completed in MLA format. This capstone activity also requires that the student also prepare a power-point to be formally presented to a panel of faculty and the student's peers.

(4) ANNUAL BOARD GOALS

Finally, our Board of Directors sets goals for each school at the beginning of every school year. These Board goals are a big driver for our achievement. Without them there would be no external inducement pushing us to do better. The Board goals challenge us--in powerful, tangible, and measurable ways--to reach even higher than we would otherwise reach on our own.