

University Park Campus School

12 Freeland Street
Worcester, MA 01603
Principal: Ricci Hall

Before the University Park Campus School (UPCS) opened in 1997, the Main South neighborhood of Worcester, Massachusetts, was in severe social and economic decline. As part of a broad neighborhood revitalization plan, the local school district opened UPCS to provide an educational opportunity that would prepare neighborhood students to go to and succeed in college. UPCS was established as a grade 7–12 school and was designed to prepare every student for college through a strong academic program within a nurturing culture. To further facilitate the college preparation of its students, UPCS partners with Clark University, a neighboring four-year liberal arts college.

- ◆ Middle-High (7–12)
- ◆ 40% Hispanic
- ◆ 32% White
- ◆ 21% Asian
- ◆ 7% Black
- ◆ 78% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- ◆ 10% English Language Learners
- ◆ 12% Special Education

In 2008-09, 92% of students scored proficient or advanced on the state English assessment, and 82% on the state math assessment. To date, nearly 100% of UPCS graduates have passed the rigorous Massachusetts state graduation exam, and 95% of graduates have attended college. Nearly all of these students are first-generation college-goers.

Establishing a Rigorous and College-Going Academic Program

Instruction across subject areas focuses on the cognitive skills students will need in college and the 21st century workforce. Students are at the center of the learning process. They are required to analyze, interpret, evaluate, cite evidence, be precise and reflect on their performance in every class.

UPCS offers a common curriculum that emphasizes the core courses of English, mathematics, science, social studies, and foreign language, with few electives. All high school-level classes are considered college preparatory. The school offers some elective courses but since the school is small and focused on core subjects, students take highly specific electives at Clark University.

UPCS implements a seventh- and eighth-grade curriculum that is designed to prepare students with the skills and strategies they need to succeed in rigorous high school coursework and to fill any gaps in reading and mathematics. These classes help students develop the organizational and study skills they will need to succeed in the high school's rigorous curriculum. Teachers review students' achievement data when they enter ninth grade. Based on these data, teachers work with students to develop a course plan that will allow students to meet their postsecondary and career goals. Coursework in grades 9 and 10 focuses on core curricular areas. Students in grades 11 and 12 may take college-level courses for credit at Clark University.

Teachers regularly engage, both in class and informally, in in-depth discussions with students about their learning. Class sessions are designed to help students develop such critical thinking skills as reasoning and connecting concepts rather than just finding the right answer, for example:

- In math class, eighth-grade students may work in small groups with cutout shapes of triangles and rectangles to determine the Pythagorean Theorem.
- In English class, tenth-grade students may explore differences in the writing styles of two poets by writing their own poems in the tones they associate with each poet.

The purpose of these activities is to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are needed to succeed in college. To further facilitate literacy development and promote students' enthusiasm for reading, teachers post on their doors the list of books they are currently reading.

The small number of staff at UPCS works collaboratively on the school's mission of getting students ready for college. Each staff member teaches at least one class. For example, the principal teaches an anatomy and physiology class, and the guidance director leads a college seminar class. Teachers regularly review research and obtain feedback from UPCS alumni to refine their teaching and ensure that coursework adequately prepares students for success in college. A College Transition and Alumni Support Coordinator ensures that all students take, and succeed in, the appropriate classes that will allow the students to matriculate into college.

Based on feedback from school alumni and a review of research, UPCS redesigned its senior year to more closely reflect the academic behaviors necessary to succeed in college. As such, the schedule and expectations for seniors changed. Classes now meet several times per week rather than every day and are driven by a syllabus, with fewer assignments and more lectures. For example, a class may be structured similar to a college class—thus having only one midterm, one final, and one research paper. Teachers also expect students to communicate with them as they would with a college professor. For example, if a student will be turning in an assignment late or will be absent from class, he or she must email the teacher in advance. This redesign also includes a senior project and other activities to support the transition from high school to college. Since the redesign was implemented, alumni have reported that they feel better prepared to transition to college.

Using Assessment Data to Ensure College Readiness

Staff members use several assessments to track students' progress. Student achievement data are available to all teachers. Teachers review data on students before they enroll in grade 7, then revisit these data regularly, either on their own or in staff development sessions. Teachers work collaboratively to evaluate students' assessment data to determine the most appropriate strategy to meet the needs of the students. Students whose data indicate that they need further academic support are provided this additional assistance before or after school. A significant number of students arrive early and/or stay late to take advantage of this support.

Assessment data are also used to inform decision making as it pertains to the school. Student achievement data (e.g., grade point average and state assessment scores) at UPCS are compared with that of students across the state. Combined with the

qualitative feedback from alumni and experts from Clark University, these data help to inform curricular and instructional changes that will benefit all students at UPCS.

Creating a College-Going Culture

UPCS emphasizes a college-going culture from the moment students arrive on campus. Small class sizes allow teachers to regularly engage students in their progress toward college and career goals. In addition, several students from Clark University serve as college mentors for UPCS students. Each eleventh- and twelfth-grade student is assigned a mentor who provides guidance about the college application and entry process.

Located within a short walk of UPCS, Clark University essentially serves as an extension of the UPCS campus. All UPCS students have ID cards that afford them access to the college campus. UPCS students can use the ID cards to check out books from the Clark University library and use the gymnasium and other facilities on campus. Easy access to the college campus allows UPCS students the opportunity to become familiar and comfortable with the idea of college. UPCS students also become very familiar with faculty and staff at Clark University.

Through this relationship with Clark University, UPCS students are afforded extensive college experiences throughout their high school careers. Professors from the college teach college preparatory seminars to students in grades 9–11. Additionally, eleventh- and twelfth-grade students have the opportunity to participate in college courses. Students can take any college class for which they have completed the prerequisites. Approximately two-thirds of UPCS students take advantage of this opportunity. The experience of taking and succeeding in actual college courses helps to increase students' confidence to successfully make the transition to postsecondary education.

UPCS celebrates students who are accepted to college. A bulletin board outside the guidance counselor's office advertises students' college acceptances and scholarship awards. Teachers also support students in their activities outside the classroom, such as sports or drama, which may further prepare them for college and career experiences. UPCS alumni who attend Clark University continue to have regular access to the College Transition and Alumni Support Coordinator to guide their transition into college.

Assisting With the Application and College Entry Process

Teachers and counselors at UPCS are readily available to help students with their college applications. Students receive assistance with such activities as writing essays for applications, securing letters of recommendation, and completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and other financial aid forms. Staff at UPCS regularly follows up with students regarding upcoming application deadlines and updates on college acceptances. Students can also receive support from staff at Clark University.

UPCS engages with families as part of the key support it offers for the college and financial aid application process. A College Awareness Day is held for eleventh- and twelfth-grade students and their families and is attended by school staff, alumni, and representatives from local universities. This session focuses on what to expect in the college application process. UPCS also offers a Financial Aid Award Night, whereby members of the community work one-on-one with students and parents to help them

understand the financial aid process. This particular session explains the different financial aid packages that are available at each college in which a student is interested. Through these sessions, students and their families can better determine the “true” cost (i.e., after taking into account financial aid) of attending college and how much debt they might incur.

UPCS alumni who attend Clark University can complete their college degrees tuition-free. In addition, they can continue to receive support from the College Transition and Alumni Support Coordinator at UPCS and serve as mentors to other UPCS students.

To date, nearly 100% of UPCS graduates have passed the rigorous Massachusetts state graduation exam, and 95% of graduates have attended college. Nearly all of these students are first-generation college-goers. With such accomplishments, UPCS is recognized as a successful high school model that helps increase students’ access to postsecondary education. With support from Jobs for the Future, a nonprofit organization, The UPCS Institute was established to help make the school’s methods transparent and replicable at other schools in the United States.