



March 2022

Dear Class of 2026,

Congratulations on your acceptance to San Francisco University High School! The lifeblood of our school is students who, like you, have demonstrated the capacity to engage in the meaningful, invigorating academic experience we are proud to facilitate. I'm very much looking forward to meeting you in person at New Families Saturday next month.

As your Dean of Teaching and Learning, my goal is to ensure that we are all learning together as a community, students and adults. This means engaging with and adapting to the changing world around us. It also means staying true to our core values of inquiry, care, integrity, agency and interconnection. I'd like to take this opportunity to share a few reasons why I have come to love this school community, and why I personally continue to find UHS such an inspiring place to learn and grow.

I was first drawn to UHS as a physics teacher because of its orientation toward student-centered inquiry. Our 9th grade physics classrooms are built around shared tables with whiteboards for student use. There is little infrastructure for - or interest in - long lectures; rather, students are expected to engage in their own investigations in a guided, hands-on way, and to discuss their findings together. I see little point, particularly in the age of COVID, in going through all the trouble of bringing everyone together in a room if we aren't then interactively learning alongside one another most of that time.

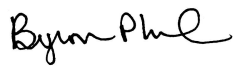
I have come to find that UHS is a place for kids who love school, who are invested in building a kind and thoughtful place to learn and take action toward making the world a better place. I was privileged to watch UHS live out its values of care and integrity when I joined the school as a member of the first team of mentors. Our mentoring program has since gained national recognition for its innovative and strongly-resourced approach to student support. As a mentor, I act as the point-person for each student in my cluster; we meet weekly and stay together for four years. I serve as a big red "HELP" button, answering but also asking questions: *how are you enjoying your experience here? What types of support do you need?* Time is a valuable commodity in a school. Your 9th grade mentor receives a full course release to make sure they have the time and energy to make a meaningful connection to you.

Our students routinely surprise me in how they search for meaning and relevance in their coursework. From the amazing Student Drama Series - a series of one-acts written, produced, and directed by seniors in our Advanced Projects in Theater course - to our junior/senior English Seminar

courses like Afrofuturism, Literature and Honor, Reading Hyperreality, and Contemporary Women's Literature, to our accelerated, group-work based Precalculus and Differential Calculus course, to our required 9th grade Mexican History course - our students learn from each other as much as from their teachers and textbooks. These interconnections form the heart of our school and set us up to make profound and positive change in an increasingly integrated world.

I know you'll come to love UHS in your own way. I look forward to meeting you and your family soon! In the meantime, finish strong at your school and enjoy these last few months of school.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Byron Phil". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small dot above the "i" in "Phil".

Byron Philhour, Ph.D.  
Dean of Teaching and Learning