

Upper School Curriculum

Keeping young adults constrained on a high school campus, even one with many electives and opportunities to explore their interests and keep them engaged for 35+ hours a week, does them a disservice. This is insufficient preparation for a self-directed and successful path through college and beyond. High school is not preparation for life; it is life.

University School Upper School students aren't your typical high school students. Academically, they are comparable to high-achieving students across America. What distinguishes them is their civility and direct experience with life beyond a school. With an active role in their education, our upper school students have the agency to explore and advocate for their individual interests.

In contrast to their peers at traditional high schools, USL seniors applying to colleges and universities have experienced 100+ field trips. They have talked to religious leaders at 15 or more houses of worship, met representatives of the four major political parties, completed over 200 hours of community service, traveled all over America, heard from a wide range of speakers of all ages and occupations, and had multiple job shadow experiences to learn more about potential career interests. They have visited 10+ college campuses across America, and both sat in on classes and completed classes at a college with all of the different ages, religions, and viewpoints that one could expect.

University School seniors have seen and experienced the world and its diversity and possibilities in a unique and impactful way.

Signature Programs

The **Learning Outside the Classroom (LOTC)** program is a hallmark of our curriculum. Students participate in weekly field trips (30 per year) covering various disciplines and career fields. Students visit areas of historical significance, hospitals, houses of faith, military bases, etc., to learn first-hand from experts on-site. Over four years in high school, a University School student will engage in over 120 field trips. In addition, during their tenure, an Upper School student will take three week-long trips outside of the Southeast and one out of the country. These excursions include college explorations and tours.



Preparation for College-style Courses and Learning – Most Upper School classes are formatted like college classes, meeting less frequently and placing more of the learning onus onto the student. Students have “Flex” periods where they independently work and can call upon colleagues or faculty if needed.

Dual Enrollment – Students regularly observe classes at our local colleges. Each student is encouraged to take at least one course at the College of Charleston for direct experience in a college classroom. This is not traditional dual enrollment based on our campus: our students travel to the College of Charleston and take the classes there. For the 2020–2021 graduating class, seven students completed approximately 30 college classes before high school graduation.

[Click here to watch a YouTube conversation about the impact of dual enrollment from a parent’s perspective.](#)

Integrated Service Program – Upper School students guide the mentoring of younger students, oversee the cleanliness of the campus, and lead committees that focus on various aspects of campus and student life. Our students host shared community programs and venture into the world each week for field trips, where many experiences are service learning-based. Over the course of four years in high school, a student will complete over 200 hours of service to the community, fostering the development of adults and citizens who will engage and uplift the communities to which they belong.

Faith Exploration – To become informed citizens of the community and the world, University School students learn first-hand about different faiths by visiting houses of worship and exploring all religions represented in our region and across the globe through yearly overnight trips. Over the course of four years in high school, a student will explore 12–15 different houses of worship.

Independence and Life Skills – To prepare students for life in college and beyond, University School gives ample independence to leave and return to campus during the day to those in good standing. We also coordinate practical field learning experiences including apartment hunting and signing a lease, basic car maintenance, preparing meals, filing taxes, etc.

Leadership and Mentoring Program – University School is a small, vibrant school where students of all ages regularly interact with each other. Younger students have older students with various interests and goals to inspire them, and older students help guide younger students to become good citizens and learners.



Citizenship and Government – Students keep abreast of current events daily, examine comparative government, and study the democratic process in America. They are given the opportunity to meet and hear from many candidates representing different political parties to further explore issues of governance and civics. Students participate in a yearly exit poll project on Election Day. Many of our students conduct exit polls across the county and neighboring precincts to make statistical predictions based on their collected data. Our upper school students aged 16 and up serve as poll workers.

Art and Cultural Appreciation – Exposure to different artistic mediums and forms of cultural expression is woven through the University School of the Lowcountry curriculum. Every year, the school hosts and shares 4-5 cultural programs, and students take part in 5-7 art and cultural field trip opportunities. A high school graduate attending all four years will experience approximately 50 distinct artistic and cultural experiences and field trips focused on profound lessons in empathy and creativity.

