The Roommate Experience
Living and Learning Together
Making the most of living with others

Whether you have one, two, or three additional roommates, living with others is an amazing opportunity to build lasting connections. Having a good relationship with your roommate involves making an effort. Although the room might be smaller than what you are used to, each room takes on a unique atmosphere that brings out the personality of each person living in the room. Living in residence halls at UMass Amherst is what you make it to be!

At UMass Amherst, Residential Life provides roommates with resources and staff to help develop great roommate relationships and address problems that may arise.

We encourage you to think of living with a roommate as a great way to live with and learn about another person’s life and interests. One of the most important documents that you and your roommate(s) can develop is a Roommate Agreement. This online document is easy to use and can be revisited by you and your roommate(s) as often as needed.

You can access the Roommate Agreement at: www.housing.umass.edu/living/RoomAgr.html
Creating a Roommate Agreement

**Step 1:** Take some time to meet and get to know your roommate(s). Where are they from? What is their academic major? Common interests and hobbies? If you both live in a RAP, why did you choose to live there? What are you hoping to get out of this experience?

**Step 2:** Next, think about your ideal living style and what your expectations are for sharing a room. The more upfront and direct you can be about your style, the better able you will be to articulate your needs if situations arise.

**Step 3:** Sit down and talk to your roommate(s), before you and your roommate(s) put anything down on the agreement. Go through each section and decide what you are comfortable with. As you fill out the agreement, be as specific as possible. It will help make it less awkward to resolve conflicts that may arise as the year goes on.

**Step 4:** Go online to www.housing.umass.edu/living/RoomAgr.html and complete the roommate agreement. Follow the directions on the site.
Common Roommate Myths

Below are some common things believed by many students prior to arriving at college. While each situation is different, please consider the following:

Myth 1
My roommate(s) will be my best friend.

Reality 1
While sometimes roommates become best friends, most of the time they become good friends. You do not have to be best friends to have a fun and rewarding experience, but it is important that you learn to respect one another no matter what relationship you choose.

Myth 2
It’s best to room with someone you already know.

Reality 2
Rooming with someone you don’t already know is a great opportunity to meet someone new. Often friendships can be strained if the roommate component is added.

Myth 3
My roommate(s) is inconsiderate and irritating.

Reality 3
All of us have things we do which might annoy or frustrate other people. We know that living with another person can be one of the best and most meaningful experiences that you can have while at UMass Amherst. We also know that living together can be challenging and that at times you might think your roommate is being inconsiderate.

If this happens try to take a step back from the situation. Ask yourself why you are frustrated. Have you talked to your roommate about this issue before? We encourage you to work out problems as they arise and not allow them to build up. Be honest with your roommate(s) about why you are frustrated. They may be able to share some of their perspective with you that helps you to better understand the situation.

Myth 4
If I don’t like my roommate(s), I will make them move out or I’ll change rooms.

Reality 4
Residential Life staff can assist in roommate mediations to help make the situation an easier one. If you really feel moving could be the best option, speak with the residence hall staff. While there are options for students to change their assignments, it may be limited by high occupancy in the halls. You and your roommate(s) should be aware that it may be easier to try to work things out between you.

Please note, if you behave in a way that interferes with your roommates’ right to occupy the room, hoping your roommate(s) will move out, you may be held accountable through the student conduct process.
Developing Good Habits

We recognize that living with others can be challenging and rewarding as everyone has their own way of doing things. This includes different sleeping and studying habits. As you approach living with a roommate, we have listed a few things to keep in mind:

**Hear each other; really listen to why your roommate(s) maintain certain habits.**

**Always be ready to compromise.** If your style of sleeping with the radio on is preventing your roommate(s) from resting, consider using your iPod and headphones.

**Back off.** Remember that it shouldn’t be about you changing your roommate(s). Rather, you should be interested in creating the best environment for both of you.

**Identify your differences early on.** Pushing them aside or trying to ignore them won’t help anyone!

**Touch base frequently.** Even if your habits are okay during the first month of school, the stress of midterms in October might change things. It’s good to check back in on a regular basis.

**See the good in others.** You and your roommate(s) can learn a lot from one another! Be open and excited for such experiences to take place.
Disagreements between people happen, especially in a roommate situation where people live together and interact on a daily basis. Conflicts usually occur when changes are needed and when behaviors, thoughts, and feelings need to be reexamined. It’s important that, as roommates, you work through conflicts effectively. Don’t be afraid to approach your roommate(s) about what is bothering you. Knowing how to deal with conflict positively and productively will serve you and your roommate(s) not only in the current living situation but also in your time after UMass Amherst.

We encourage you to work out conflicts first with your roommate(s). This is an important first step. If the conflict continues or is severe, your RA/ALA can serve as a great resource for you and your roommate(s). The staff has been trained on how to resolve and mediate conflicts.

The following seven steps can be used to help facilitate conflict resolution:

**Step 1 - Identify the problem**
- Know what is specifically bothering you so that you can effectively communicate the issue to your roommate(s).
- Look at your own behavior. Are you doing anything that could be causing the conflict?
- Make sure everyone that is a part of the problem is involved. Try not to involve other people who live on the floor.

**Step 2 - Explore how the problem affects everyone involved.**
- Roommates should take turns describing their perception of the situation, how they feel about it and what they want.
- Use “I” statements as it makes you take ownership of your feelings and reduces blame and in turn the defensiveness of your roommate(s).
**Step 3 - Brainstorm changes that can be made to resolve the problem.**
- When you think your roommate(s) is making demands that are unreasonable identify to them how that makes you feel and why you think it’s unnecessary. Part of being a good roommate is being able to effectively advocate and voice your concerns and needs. If you don’t, you could build resentment towards your roommate(s).
- We know that resolving roommate issues can be challenging and emotional. It’s important that you treat each other with respect and dignity.
- Make sure all parties are willing to make the necessary changes.

**Step 4 - Evaluate how the changes will impact the parties involved.**
- What will you expect of your roommate(s)?
- What will they expect out of you?

**Step 5 - Compromise on a mutually agreed upon plan.**
- Make sure it is realistic and takes everyone’s ideas into consideration.

**Step 6 - Plan for who will do what and when.**
- Make sure you both follow through on your agreements.
- If someone doesn’t do something that they agree to, it’s important that you share this with them. They may not realize that they aren’t holding up their end of the agreement.
- If you have requested the roommate(s) to change their behavior, give them a chance to change. Thank them for making attempts to change. This will be more effective than continually complaining.

**Step 7 - Continue to talk openly with one another.**
- Talk about what has gone well.
- Be honest with your roommate if there are things you need to renegotiate (it’s okay to update your roommate agreement as needed).
Roommate Rights and Responsibilities

As a Roommate, YOU have the following RIGHTS:

• To read and study free from undue interference in one's room.
• To sleep without undue disturbance from noise, guests of roommate, etc.
• To expect that a roommate will respect one's personal belongings.
• To a safe and clean environment in which to live.
• To free access to one's room and facilities without pressure from a roommate.
• To personal privacy.
• To host guests who respect the rights of the host's roommate(s) and other hall residents.
• To be free from fear of intimidation, physical, and/or emotional harm.
• To expect reasonable cooperation in the use of “room shared” appliances (TV, DVD player, computer, fridge, micro-fridge, etc.) and a commitment to honor agreed upon procedures.

As a Roommate, YOU have the following RESPONSIBILITIES:

• To keep your door locked when you and your roommate(s) are not home.
• To let your roommate know of your wishes and preferences for hours of sleep, study, and guest visitation, and to work through any differences you may have in a peaceful manner. To listen to your roommates’ wishes and respond appropriately.
• To read and follow the rules and regulations established to support the educational purposes of the University (see your Daily Planner for Academic Success) and to sustain a safe and comfortable living community in the residence halls. You are responsible for what happens in your room.
• To examine your own behavior when confronted by another and work toward resolving conflicts. You also have the responsibility to confront others in a non-aggressive and non-threatening manner.
• To notify a staff person of your concern in a timely manner, and to cooperate with the staff as they work with you to solve your concern.
• To participate in floor meetings and to adhere to and enforce community policies and guidelines.
• To recognize that community cannot exist if any individual is excluded. Action, direct or covert, that discriminates on the basis of race, color, religion, creed, sex, age, marital status, national origin, mental or physical disability, political belief or affiliation, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression or genetic information cannot be tolerated in a community based on mutual respect and cooperation.

For additional resources and support contact your Resident Assistant, Assistant Residence Director or Residence Director.