Greetings from the Office of Parent Services!

Happy New Year to you and your student! We hope you had a safe and peaceful holiday season. Here in the office, we're preparing for another great semester and can't wait to welcome your students back to campus. We want to extend our well wishes to all parents of new UMass Amherst students as they begin their first semester at UMass Amherst. Below are some important dates and useful information for a successful start of the spring semester.

Residence halls reopening
Students may return/check-in to residence halls for the spring 2016 semester on Sunday, Jan. 17, 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. or Monday, Jan. 18, noon to 11 p.m.

If your student is returning to the same room assignment for spring, remind them to bring their key and UCard with them to campus. Students who have lost either or both should immediately contact Residential Life Student Services, (413) 545-2100 so a new key can be available upon their arrival to campus. Your student will receive more information from Residential Life Student Services soon with steps for completing a spring check-In. For more on move-in procedures, visit the Residential Life website.

It's FAFSA time
For many students, financial assistance is commonly overlooked after the freshmen school year. All students who hope to obtain financial assistance must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) each year and may do so beginning January 1. The form is available online at www.fafsa.ed.gov. Students should file the form by February 14 to meet the March 1 priority deadline. Refer to our timely topic article for the 2016-2017 financial aid process timeline and share that information with your student.

Fall grades, spring classes
Students can view their fall grades by logging into SPIRE. Remind your student to check their grades, if they haven't already. Grades are only accessible online.

Hopefully your student had a successful fall semester. If your student struggled with academics last semester, have an honest conversation with them to determine why there were problems, and encourage them to access campus resources early in the spring semester. It's important that they review and assess the strategies they used last semester, evaluate what worked and what didn't, and determine which areas they can improve upon this semester. It's common for college students to experience one semester of academic difficulty; however, careful planning is necessary for academic improvement in the future.

The first day of classes for the spring 2016 semester is Tuesday, Jan. 19. If a student does not attend the first two classes of the semester, the professor can remove them from the class. Encourage your student to start the new year off on the right foot by attending all class meetings. The academic calendar for the full semester is available on the Registrar's website.
Spring semester transitions

Spring semester is an opportunity for students, regardless of their academic classification, to start fresh. As your student returns to campus, encourage them to set realistic goals for themselves to increase motivation and achievement. Here are some helpful tips to share with your student to get them back to academic normalcy and make the transition easier:

- Suggest that they create a calendar to keep track of assignments, tests, and end-of-semester projects. Remind them to build some free time into their calendar for social activities; balance is key to sustained motivation.
- Talk to them about the importance of taking advantage of campus resources and building rapport with their advisor and professors. For help with tutoring, they can visit the Learning Resource Center. For help with writing papers, your student can contact the Writing Center. University Health Services and the Center for Counseling and Psychological Health are also available if your student is ill or is having trouble coping. They can talk to a health specialist about test anxiety, depression, homesickness, etc. and receive tips on overcoming these health issues.
- Encourage them to get involved in student activities, clubs, athletics, and student events this spring to interact with others, expand their horizons, and build leadership skills. A great way to get started is the Activities Expo, Wednesday, Jan. 20, 4 to 6 p.m.
- Remind them to make good use of the Career Services. Whether it's for summer job opportunities, internships or a professional job after graduation, it's never too early to learn how to create a resume and cover letter, prepare for an interview, and learn about employers and what they look for in a potential candidate.
- If your student hasn't declared a major, encourage them to talk to their Exploratory Track advisor or visit Undergraduate Advising. They offer a wealth of useful information for students who are undecided or considering changing majors.

For families of new students

Winter Welcome Week

We have some exciting programs for the first week of classes to welcome new students, including the Winter Welcome on Sunday, Jan. 17 at 4:30 p.m., the Activities Expo, Wednesday, Jan. 20, the Five College New Student Night, Friday, Jan. 22, and much more. Encourage your student to attend as many activities as possible to meet campus leaders, make friends, learn more about the university, and get involved. We encourage new students to move in early Sunday, Jan. 17 so they have time to get settled before attending the Winter Welcome at 4:30 pm. New students should visit the Winter Welcome Week website for more detailed information (e.g. activities, description, time, and location).

My Student Body

All new students entering UMass in spring 2016 are required to take and pass MyStudentBody, an online health education course. Find complete information and access the course here. The deadline to complete and pass MyStudentBody is Monday, Feb. 8. Failure to complete the course by the deadline will result in a hold being placed on your student's SPIRE account which will prevent them from registering for fall courses. Parents/families can also access MyStudentBody to learn more about the risks and consequences of alcohol and drug abuse and find ways to talk to students about these issues. Go to MyStudentBody, click "Register Here" and enter the school code: umassaparent.

New students and the Student Health Benefit Plan

Massachusetts requires college students to have comprehensive healthcare insurance. New freshman and transfer students starting at UMass this spring are automatically enrolled in the Student Health Benefit Plan and charged on the semester's tuition bill. If your student has comparable coverage, they may be eligible to waive the plan; waivers must be submitted by midnight Monday, Feb. 29. Learn more at University Health Services.
Immunizations
State law requires students to have certain immunizations before coming to school. Students can access University Health Services' patient portal to enter immunization data and provide supporting documentation. Returning users should click the button and sign in using their UMass Amherst email address. New users should click the button and follow the registration instructions, then use their UMass Amherst email address to log in. Those with questions about the portal can email uhsportalhelp@umass.edu.

Completed immunizations are due by the add/drop date of the student's first semester. Failure to provide immunization information will result in a registration hold being placed on their SPIRE account, preventing them from enrolling in the next semester's classes.

UHS is committed to protecting students' personal information. Data they provide cannot be viewed by anyone else on the web and is securely maintained by industry-standard SSL (secure socket layer) encryption and decryption technology when needed.

Emergency text message alerts
To keep our community informed about emergency situations or conditions that could disrupt campus activities, the university uses a comprehensive emergency communication system. UMass Amherst Alerts includes emergency text messaging to subscribers, email distribution to all "@umass.edu" email addresses, and outdoor warning sirens on campus. The goal is to efficiently communicate emergency information in different ways to as many people as possible.

It is recommended that all students sign up to receive emergency text alerts. Encourage your new student to log into SPIRE with their Net ID and password. From the SPIRE menu, they'll click on UMass Amherst Alerts > Cell Phone Info and enter their cell phone number. Students can also enter a secondary email and cell phone number into their account.

Other methods of communication used by the university include:

- The university's homepage, which may display a distinctly-colored stripe containing pertinent status updates and information related to ongoing emergencies.
- Social media, where following UMass Amherst on Twitter and Facebook can provide up-to-the-minute updates on ongoing situations.

We've moved
Our mailing address has changed. We're now located in Knowlton Hall, 691 North Pleasant OFC. Please update your address book.

January poll
January's poll question is: How do you communicate with your student? Participate in the poll and view last month's results here.

Important dates
- **January 1** FAFSA applications available for 2016-2017
- **January 11** Spring semester bills due
- **January 17** Residence halls re-open for the spring semester at 9 a.m.
- **January 17** New Students Winter Welcome program, 4:30 p.m., Campus Center Auditorium (new students only)
- **January 18** Martin Luther King Jr. Day – no classes
- **January 19** First Day of Classes for spring, 2016
- **January 20** Activities Expo, 4 to 6 p.m., Student Union Ballroom
February 1  Last day of add/drop period
February 1  Immunization records due
February 8  MyStudentBody deadline for all new students

Helpful links
FAFSA
Financial Aid Office
University Health Services
Office of the Registrar
Residential Life
Office of Emergency Management

We encourage you to continue to research our sites and become more familiar with campus resources to better direct your student to the appropriate office or department as they continue to learn how to handle their own problems and concerns.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact the Office of Parent Services. Our office is open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. We're more than happy to assist you.

Sincerely,
Jeanne Horrigan, Director
Office of Parent Services

Treating Our Parents as Partners

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Office of Parent Services Website
UMass Amherst Parents on Facebook
UMass Amherst Family to Family on Facebook
Send a UMass postcard

We're interested in your opinion! Take our monthly one-question survey.

Update your email address or unsubscribe from future messages

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