Greetings from the Office of Parent Services!

It's hard to believe the fall semester is already coming to an end. With a few days left before exam week, students are working hard to complete final projects and studying for exams. Here in the office, we're putting the finishing touches on Winter Orientation, to welcome families beginning their UMass Amherst journey in January. This e-mail highlights final exams, winter break, and the newly-established UMass Amherst Family to Family Facebook group, along with some important reminders about FAFSA deadlines and spring tuition bills.

Join the UMass Amherst Family to Family Facebook group
The UMAPA Advisory Council's new Facebook group, UMass Amherst Family to Family, provides UMass parents and families an opportunity to network with one another and discuss topics relevant to parents of college students on a more personal level. This is a closed group for parents/families to share insights and learn from each other. You can lead a discussion about student and parent issues, organize meetups, and stay up-to-date on events. Click to join the group or cut and paste this link into your browser: https://www.facebook.com/groups/1511631422486897.

Final exams
Final exams begin Monday, Dec. 14 and conclude Saturday, Dec. 19. Visit the Registrar's website for the complete final exam schedule; students can also view the schedule on SPIRE.

Studying for and taking final exams can be stressful if students aren't physically and mentally prepared. Here are some tips to help your student cope:

- If they haven't drafted a plan to tackle the work that remains, suggest they do so by breaking tasks down day by day. Projects seem less intimidating and more manageable, and it's easier to create a daily 'to-do' list.
- Be available if they need to talk or debrief. They may need a boost in the morning and very late at night.
- Listen and provide constructive feedback. Don't judge or tell them what to do; instead help them think critically and figure things out on their own.
- Cards or joyful emails and texts are great ways to lift your student's spirit during this stressful time. Send them a note or an e-postcard from our website to remind them how much you care about them.
- Remind them to care for themselves and manage stress or mild illness. Encourage them to get plenty of sleep, eat well, exercise, and make time between exams and studying to relax with friends.
- Beginning Friday, Dec. 11, the library is open 24 hours a day; it will close Saturday, Dec. 19 at 6 p.m. It's the ideal place for students to study if they can't get work done in their rooms or need a change of scenery.
**Winter break information for residence halls and off-campus housing**

**Residence hall closing**
- All residence halls except break housing halls and the North Area apartments close at noon Saturday, Dec. 19. Students and families should plan to depart campus accordingly.
- Students who don't vacate or check out of their residence hall by the deadline will be charged a $150 unauthorized occupancy fee.
- Students who've cancelled for spring and those who've either completed a roommate pull-in or requested an appointment for online room selection must fully check out of their current room assignment.
- First-year students living in Wheeler have the option to remain over the winter break. Interested students should contact the Residential Life Student Services office.

For more information about residence hall closing, call the Student Services office, (413) 545-2100.

**Mail and packages**
The last day to send mail and packages to non-break residence halls is Tuesday, Dec. 15. Please update your mailing records for any packages that may be delivered after this date.

**Student belongings**
Remind your on-campus student to take all essential medications and valuables home. Students returning to the same room for the spring semester may leave non-essential items in their rooms over the break. Encourage your student to pack before their ride arrives, so departure can be quick and easy. Expect some congestion in the Commonwealth Honors College Residential Community, as space to park and load is limited.

**Off-campus students**
Off-campus students leaving for winter break should take the following steps to prevent issues in their apartments and houses:

- Set thermostats at 55 degrees.
- Close and lock windows and doors. Opening cabinet doors under sinks in bathrooms and kitchens can prevent frozen pipes and water leaks.
- Take valuables such as electronics and jewelry with them, or store items in inconspicuous places.

**Spring 2016 opening**
Students may return and check into residence halls for the spring semester Sunday, Jan. 17, 9 a.m. – 10 p.m., or Monday, Jan. 18, noon – 11 p.m. Visit the Residential Life website for more information on check-in procedures.

**Spring registration**
All returning students should have completed spring semester course registration by now. If, for some reason, your student hasn't done so, encourage them to contact their academic advisor now to set up an appointment. It's important that they have a spring schedule before leaving for winter break.

**Free Application for Federal Student Financial Aid (FAFSA)**
The 2016-2017 FAFSA form can be submitted as early as January 1, and should be filed by February 14 to meet the March 1 priority deadline. Applications received after then are considered for financial aid.
aid awards based on funds available. The form and more information are available on the [FAFSA website](http://www.fafsa.gov). Remember, the form must be submitted each year, even if your student is currently receiving aid. You may estimate your income based on last year's taxes. After completing your 2015 taxes, update the estimate with the actual information using the IRS data retrieval tool on the FAFSA website. Encourage your student to call Financial Aid Services, (413) 545-0801 or email finaid@finaid.umass.edu if they have questions.

**Tuition bills**
Starting Tuesday, Dec. 15 students can view their spring tuition bills on SPIRE. Encourage them to check their bill several times a semester to ensure all charges are current and accurate. Spring semester bills are due by Monday, Jan. 11; it's the student's responsibility to pay the balance in full and on time every semester to remain in good financial standing. More information about billing and payment plans is available at the [Bursar's Office](http://www.umass.edu/humanresources/financialaid/finalydro7f).

**December graduates**
Congratulations to all December graduates' parents and families! This is one of the most significant moments of your life and we're honored to have been a part of your student's remarkable achievement. As a reminder, the university does not offer a winter ceremony; December graduates are invited to attend commencement in May. Detailed information will be available in the spring on the [commencement website](http://www.umass.edu/commencement). We certainly hope your student will stay connected to their alma mater as an active member of the [UMass Amherst Alumni Association](http://www.umassalumni.org/).

Parents and family members of graduates remain on our e-newsletter list until they choose to unsubscribe. If you wish to cancel your subscription or change your e-mail address, use the unsubscribe link at the end of this message.

**December poll**
December's poll question is: Which of the following technologies do you use? Participate in the poll and view last month's results [here](#).

**Important dates**
- **December 11**: Last day of classes
- **December 14-19**: Final exams
- **December 15**: Last day of mail and package delivery for fall semester
- **December 15**: Bills post for spring semester
- **December 19**: Residence halls close for winter break at noon
- **December 28**: Final grades due
- **January 11**: Spring semester bills due
- **January 17**: Residence halls re-open for the spring semester at 9 a.m.
- **January 19**: First day of classes

**Helpful links**
- [Bursar's Office](http://www.umass.edu/humanresources/financialaid/finalydro7f)
- [FAFSA](http://www.fafsa.gov)
- [Family to Family Facebook group](http://www.facebook.com)
- [Office of the Registrar](http://www.umass.edu/humanresources/financialaid/)
- [Residence hall opening/closing information](http://www.umass.edu/humanresources/financialaid/)
- [UMass Amherst Alumni Association](http://www.umassalumni.org/)

Happy holidays!
Enjoy the holiday season, and most of all, savor the moments with your loved ones. We look forward to welcoming you and your student back next year.

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

Email: umassparents@umass.edu
Phone: 413-577-4444 • Fax: 413-545-9631
Office of Parent Services Website
UMass Amherst Parents on Facebook
UMass Amherst Family to Family on Facebook
Send a UMass postcard