Greetings from the Office of Parent Services!
We hope your students have settled in well and are discovering the many opportunities available to them! This edition brings you information on the FAFSA priority deadline, domestic exchange program, fall semester room selection, Commencement, and more.

**FAFSA deadline approaching**
Students interested in receiving financial aid must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) each academic year. The 2016-2017 FAFSA should be submitted this month to meet the March 1 priority deadline and ensure Financial Aid Services can generate a preliminary award package. For more information, students can visit the Financial Aid website; go to the main office, 243 Whitmore, during regular business hours; or stop by the satellite office in the Center for Multicultural Advancement and Student Success, 105 Wilder Hall, Thursdays, 2:30 to 4:30 p.m.

**Recruitment season is here**
February brings many career fairs and summer opportunities, including internships, outdoor programming, study abroad, and more. Talk with your student about their interests, encourage them to explore offerings through Career Services, academic departments and other avenues, and support them in identifying ways to accomplish their goals.

**From Exploratory Track to a major**
Sophomore year is an empowering time for students, bringing growth and a renewed focus on academics. It's also a time when Exploratory Track students begin concentrating on a course of study. Sophomores who haven't yet identified a plan should:

- Schedule an appointment with an academic advisor, and talk to faculty members and teaching assistants from various departments to discuss opportunities. Advisors are trained to ask questions that help students visualize and choose a career path.
- Familiarize themselves with the many UMass schools, colleges, and departments. More than 90 majors, 60 minors, and 40 certificate programs are available. Attend some of the numerous information sessions and events offered throughout the academic year to learn more.
- Connect with classmates who have similar interests. Students often discover their passion by interacting with others through study groups, student organizations, service learning projects, and similar opportunities. Encourage them to get involved and stay open to new discoveries.

While it's up to your student to declare a major, offering your guidance and support through regular conversations about their goals, courses, and experiences goes a long way.

**Stress relief dogs are back!**
Each semester, the Center for Health Promotion's Peer Health Educators welcome certified therapy dogs to campus to help ease midterm stress. Remind your student to stop by the Student Union Ballroom or the W.E.B. DuBois library Wednesday, February 24, 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and relax with some amazing furry friends!
**Coming soon: fall 2016 room selection**

Students and families will receive information about [fall 2016 room selection](#) in the mail within the next week. Please review the materials and the Residential Life website, and speak with your student about their housing plans for the upcoming academic year.

**Residence hall spring break schedule**

All undergraduate residence halls except break housing, North Apartments, and Lincoln Apartments will close Friday, March 11 at 6 p.m. and reopen Sunday, March 20 at 10 a.m. Students and families should make departure and return plans accordingly. Those who do not vacate their residence hall by closing time will be assessed a $150 unauthorized occupancy fee. Students requiring on-campus housing over break should email [Residential Life Student Services](mailto:).

**Domestic exchange information sessions**

Domestic exchange offers students ways to enhance their educational experiences and stand out from the crowd. Students can study for a semester or a year at one of 180 state universities and colleges in the country, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. [Domestic exchange information sessions](#) are held Wednesdays at 4:45 p.m., and Thursdays and Fridays at 2:30 p.m. in 613 Goodell while classes are in session. Attendees receive an application and all the information necessary to apply; the application deadline for the upcoming academic year is March 1.

**Commencement updates**

[Undergraduate Commencement](#) takes place Friday, May 6, 4:30 p.m. at McGuirk Alumni Stadium; school and college senior recognition ceremonies are Saturday, May 7. Tickets are not required for graduates or guests, and there is no limit on the number of guests a graduate may bring. Guest seating is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Here are a few updates as your family makes plans to attend graduation:

- **Residence Hall lodging:** Staying on campus is the best way to be close to Commencement activities. Single or double occupancy accommodations in the Southwest Residential Area offer casual comfort at affordable rates. Nearby parking is free, and linens and towels are provided. A few rooms are available for guests with disabilities; be sure to indicate any special accommodation needs. Make [reservations](#) by Friday, April 1 at 5 p.m.
- **Special raffle for UMass license plate UM 16:** Commemorate your student's accomplishments or congratulate a 2016 graduate with a chance to win UMass license plate number UM 16. Purchase raffle tickets [online](#) at $5 each or three for $10. Email [Diane Barstow](mailto:) for more information.

Visit the [Commencement](#) website for details on school and college ceremonies, on-campus dining, shuttle and parking information, Hotel UMass and other places to stay, and more.

For questions related to degree requirements or other graduation-related academic matters, call the Office of the University Registrar, (413) 545-0555, or email [reggrad@registrar.umass.edu](mailto:).

**Important dates**

- **February 23:** Diversity Career Fair, 1 to 5 p.m., Student Union Ballroom
- **February 24:** Career Blast 2016, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Campus Center Auditorium
- **March 1:** Domestic exchange and 2016 study abroad application deadline
- **March 3:** Mid-semester date (last day to drop with "W" and select "P/F")
- **March 11:** Residence halls close for spring break
- **March 20:** Residence halls reopen
- **March 21:** Classes resume
As always, if you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact the Office of Parent Services, 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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UMass Amherst Parents on Facebook
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We're interested in your opinion! Take our monthly one-question survey.