Welcome to UMass Amherst!

Our university is committed to fostering an environment that encourages personal and intellectual growth for all students. From the start, your first-year seminar will provide you with a strong base to be a successful and engaged student. Although each will be unique in structure, style, and activities, all seminars will incorporate three common elements proven to enhance success in college.

The common experience will revolve around these themes:

◊ **Self-Guided Learning:** Mindful time management, study strategies, and intentional planning all lead to high academic achievement and pathways to success.

◊ **Building Connections:** Developing new relationships will assist in the transition to college, and help you feel at home in the UMass Amherst community.

◊ **Enhancing Engagement:** Being well informed about the wide array of opportunities and resources on campus will lead to a satisfying and successful college experience.

You will notice we repeatedly use the word “*intentional*”. We cannot overstate the benefits of taking charge of your college experience. *Why?* Imagine driving a car on autopilot…Although you will likely get to the destination programmed at the start of the trip, you will not have the ability to make turns or change your course based on the interesting things you see along the route, potentially missing out on some incredible opportunities.

*Don’t let your limited time in college happen on autopilot.* Be intentional on your journey. Use this Resource Guide and your Academic Planner for Student Success; both are designed to support and enrich your experience at UMass to help you make the most of your time in college.

Becoming a *Self-Guided* Learner

**Getting Grounded, Being Intentional**

You just entered an entirely new kind of environment and will likely have more freedom for how you manage your life, study time, your eating schedule, and your social time.

Living intentionally means being present in the moment, and noticing what is working and what can be improved.

**Throughout the year, periodically consider these questions:**

⇒ Are my study habits producing the grades I want?

⇒ Am I starting assignments at a reasonable time, or am I always scrambling to finish in the nick of time?

⇒ Do I allocate enough time to eat, exercise, and/or relax?

*These questions can help you refine your study methods, time management, and life balance throughout college.*

Check out each month of the planner for a section titled “**Reflections on the Previous Month**” to help you reflect on how things are going.

**Making Use of Course Syllabi**

A syllabus is FULL of critical information - don’t just glance at it and toss it in your bag! Using a syllabus with intention increases your engagement with the material and instructor.

⇒ Syllabi contain more than just due dates. They are full of specifics regarding expectations about participation, how to approach assignments, how to use Moodle, and more.

⇒ Check to see if the syllabus has a rubric and/or hints for how to best prepare for an exam or write a particular paper.

⇒ Look ahead at the deadlines for the whole semester. Plan to begin work on a date that ensures you have time for writing drafts and/or getting feedback.

*Instructors put a lot of consideration into their syllabi, with the intention that they can be used as a guide for success in the course.*

For a more thorough breakdown for using your syllabus, check out the planner section titled “**Planning and Tracking Your Work**”.

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[Academic Planner for Student Success](#)
Building Intentional Connections

**With professors, advisors, and staff:** You have no doubt been told how they can help with problems, but that is just the tip of the iceberg. There are so many professionals with whom you can create intentional relationships, opening doors for now and later down the road.

When you make time to have conversations with instructors and/or advisors it gives them a chance to learn about your interests, goals, strengths as well as challenges. Once they know you well they can make suggestions for courses you will enjoy and connect you with research and internship opportunities. And, they can write meaningful reference letters!

**With peers:** One of the ways college is special is that it brings together a large community of people in your age range. With age as a common factor, there is great diversity in the variety of towns, states and countries students are from, their academic interests, and cultural backgrounds. Interacting with such a multi-faceted group of people will give you the opportunity to learn so much about yourself and others.

In addition to first-year students, there are upper level students (some in student-staff positions) who can also support you. Ask them for advice about their transition, RSO’s they’ve loved, favorite classes, etc.!

As you meet students, advisors, instructors, staff...each new connection will expand your network, social web, and options for your future. This networking isn’t linear; you never know what one great conversation might lead to. Making connections with people is a lifelong process—and college is a great time to master it!

Check out these pages for tips and contact information for making connections:

- Pages 10-15
- 20-25
- 44 & 97

Making Intentional Choices

Think of college as a “choose your own adventure” story. There is no one path that fits everyone, and no choice is exclusively right or wrong. Some experiences may lead to wonderful and exciting places, while others help you learn what you don’t want to do, which is equally valuable. Either way, learning to reach out is an essential part of being a successful student, and will lead to a more enriched college experience.

**Utilizing Resources Proactively**

Of course, it’s important to seek help if you encounter a crisis, either emotional or academic. But, what about going for help to ensure you are not just “getting by” but so that you can thrive? Be proactive by using campus resources preventatively or for a boost, rather than waiting until you need them as a reaction to an issue.

**Where to Start?**

Getting help is not a sign of weakness - studies show that the most successful students are the ones who get help early, before an issue arises. UMass has an extensive support system of free tutoring, counseling, identity-based support, and more! Talk with your Peer Mentor and/or advisor for suggestions and ideas.

Turn to pages 23-25 for resources centered on identity & wellness (mental health, cultural centers, LGBTQ+, etc.). Check out Page 31 and various “Resource Spotlights” in the Monthly Pages for information on career & academic support.

For additional resources, visit us at: Umass.edu/studentsuccess

**Exploring Engagement Opportunities**

There are many ways to create a path of engagement. Is there something you have always wanted to try, maybe learning conversational French or playing Quidditch? What about taking classes at a small local college, or studying in a different state or country? Get involved with social justice dialogue courses or activism? By trying a variety of opportunities, you are sure to find a few that you love and one may even influence your future! And don’t worry—Netflix will be there when you get back to your room after the meeting or event!

**Where to start?**

Next time you’re taking quizzes on Buzzfeed, pause & explore Campus Pulse, make an appointment with one of the offices listed in your planner, or explore future research or internship opportunities. Keep in mind that many programs require advance planning. It’s never too early to start gathering information!

Check your planner to connect with engagement opportunities, related to academics as well as events and activities outside class.