


**Guide to
Understanding
Graduate
Financial Aid
2009-2010**



**GRADUATE FINANCIAL AID OFFICE
ACADEMIC AFFAIRS**

University of Massachusetts Amherst
243 Whitmore Administration Bldg.
181 Presidents Drive
Amherst, MA 01003-9313
Tel 413-577-0555
TTD 413-545-9420
Fax 413-545-1700
Email grads@finaid.umass.edu

GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING GRADUATE FINANCIAL AID

GRADUATE FINANCIAL AID OFFICE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Obtaining a graduate education at the University of Massachusetts Amherst is intellectually, professionally, and personally rewarding. Affording your education requires careful and thorough planning. Regardless of your income or eligibility for need-based financial aid, there are programs available to assist you in funding your education.

HOW TO APPLY

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the only application used to apply for financial aid for the academic year (fall and spring term) at UMass Amherst. The information on the FAFSA is used to determine your eligibility for Federal Direct Loans, the only form of financial aid available through the Graduate Financial Aid Office.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) should be completed online at www.fafsa.ed.gov. Be certain to list UMass Amherst on your application by indicating our school code: 002221 (in Section 5.) Access to your online application does require a Personal Identification Number (PIN). If you have started or completed a FAFSA previously and not received a PIN or are unable to locate this number, please go online to www.pin.ed.gov. FAFSA's are available after January 1st for the upcoming academic year. Once you complete your FAFSA, please be diligent about attending to any requests for additional information that may be required by the Graduate Financial Aid Office. Requests and communications may be sent through email or postal mail and can also be viewed on your Spire "To-Do" list (www.spire.umass.edu).

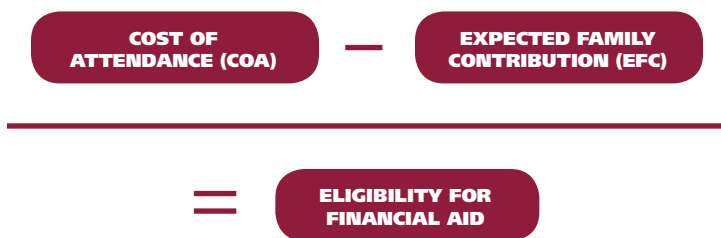
If you are applying for summer financial aid there is an additional form available at www.umass.edu/umfa/forms/0910forms/ that must be filed with the Graduate Financial Aid Office at 243 Whitmore Administration Building.

RECEIVING FINANCIAL AID

Financial aid eligibility will be reviewed in early June for all students who have completed a FAFSA and have responded to all requests for additional information. If your application is complete, you will be awarded federal loans up to the estimated Cost of Attendance (COA) or your annual limit and notified with a financial aid award letter that will be mailed to your permanent address. UMass Amherst determines your COA, which includes billed and non-billed expenses related to your graduate education. Billed expenses are those that are charged through the Bursar's Office and include tuition, curriculum, health, service fee, graduate senate tax, etc. Non-billed expenses include the cost of items such as books, supplies, off-campus room and board, personal expenses (clothing, laundry, recreation), and transportation needs. Please keep in mind that the COA is based on the assumption that you will be taking at least 9 credits per semester. Please notify our office if you will be taking less than 9 credits (unless you are in the PMBA Program) or will be on program fee as billed charges vary for these programs and your loan eligibility may be affected.

The information provided on your FAFSA is used by Federal Student Aid Programs to calculate an Expected Family Contribution (EFC). Consideration is given to your income (and your spouse's income, if married), assets, number of dependents, and the number of family members enrolled in college. Your EFC calculation is printed on your FAFSA summary or Student Aid Report (SAR).

THE FORMULA USED TO DETERMINE YOUR FINANCIAL AID "NEED" IS:



FEDERAL FINANCIAL AID

The Federal Direct Subsidized and Unsubsidized Loan programs are the primary sources of financial aid for many graduate students and require at least half-time enrollment. Annual loan limits are based on the cost of attendance and individual eligibility, with a maximum of \$20,500. If a loan is subsidized, the borrower is not responsible for the interest that accrues during the time the borrower is enrolled at least half-time and during grace periods and deferments. Students qualify for subsidized loans based on financial need, which is determined by the information reported on their FAFSA and the COA for their academic program. If a loan is unsubsidized, interest accrues from the date the loan is disbursed and may be paid during times of enrollment or capitalized (added to the principal) at a specified time.

FEDERAL DIRECT GRADUATE PLUS Loans may be available to students enrolled at least half-time in a graduate degree program. Grad PLUS borrowers may borrow up to the COA for the period of enrollment, minus other estimated financial assistance received for that period. Grad PLUS Loans are subject to credit review; however, a Grad PLUS applicant who has an adverse credit history may be able to obtain the loan with an endorser who does not have an adverse credit history. To apply for a Graduate PLUS Loan, a student must first maximize their Federal Direct subsidized and unsubsidized loan eligibility. The Pre-Application for Graduate PLUS Loans is available on line at: www.umass.edu/umfa/forms/0910forms/.

A MASTER PROMISSORY NOTE (MPN) is required from all first-time borrowers of Federal Direct Loans. This is a legal document in which you promise to pay back the loans with interest. Your signed MPN is valid for any Federal Direct Loan awarded within 10 years. During subsequent years, Financial Aid Services will notify you of your loan eligibility and the loans will automatically credit to your bursars account unless you request otherwise.

ANNUAL MAXIMUM FEDERAL DIRECT LOAN LIMITS: You may borrow up to \$20,500 (or up to the cost of attendance minus other financial resources (grants, scholarship, waivers), whichever is less) in a combination of subsidized and unsubsidized loans. The subsidized portion is not to exceed \$8,500 per year. Please be aware that there is an aggregate borrowing limit of \$138,500, with an aggregate subsidized loan maximum of \$65,500. Aggregate borrowing limits do include unpaid undergraduate loans.

ALTERNATIVE FINANCIAL AID RESOURCES

An alternative loan is a loan that is from a source outside of the federal government and is to be used for education expenses. Private educational loans (also called alternative loans) may be available when the federal loans are insufficient to cover the student's COA. These loans are non-need-based, unsubsidized funds provided by lenders for educational purposes. For additional informational about alternative loan options, please visit our website: www.umass.edu/umfa/aidtypes/gradloans/.

BILLS

The Bursar's office has now transitioned to electronic billing. Beginning the Spring 2009 semester, students will no longer receive paper bills. QuikPAY is the electronic system for all student to view, print and or make their payment online. To obtain more information about QuikPAY, please visit the Bursar's website at www.umass.edu/bursar.

We encourage you to log on to your SPIRE account at <http://spire.umass.edu> for up to date information on your university bill. If additional information is required, please call the Bursar's Office at (413) 545-2368 or by email at bursar@admin.umass.edu.

EXCESS FUNDS / REFUND CHECKS

If the amount of financial aid and other credits on your university bill exceed the tuition, fees, and other charges, and you do not have a previous balance, you may receive an excess (refund) check. To ensure timely processing of your excess check:

- Register for your classes early.
- If you are receiving a Graduate Appointment make sure your contract and all payroll paperwork is complete and submitted to the Graduate Assistantship Office.
- Sign, complete, and return your Direct Loan Promissory Note and Entrance Interview Form to Graduate Financial Aid Services.
- If you are a Program Fee / Continuous Enrollment Fee student, update your enrollment status (half time or full-time) with the Graduate Records Office. Be sure that your Graduate Program Director sends a memo to the Registrar's Office confirming that you are considered enrolled at least half-time.
- Sign up for Excess Express, a service offered by the Bursar's Office to speed excess check refunds to students. With this service, funds will be electronically deposited into the USA checking or savings account of the student's choice. To enroll, log in to your SPIRE account and go to the 'Finances' panel.

ADJUSTMENTS TO FINANCIAL AID

Federal regulations stipulate that your total financial aid award including all sources (Federal, State, University or outside) may not exceed the estimated Cost of Attendance (COA). Financial Aid Services will adjust or reduce your award if you receive scholarships, non-working fellowships, loans, or University waivers that will cause your total financial aid to exceed your COA. Other reasons for adjustments may include:

- Requests initiated by you to reduce the amount of loan(s) awarded. You may initiate a request by completing the reverse side of your award letter and returning it to Financial Aid Services or by calling our office at (413) 577-0555. Student initiated reductions can only be made until the last day of classes
- **Enrollment Status:** Financial aid awards are initially based on 9 credits per term (except PMBA). If your enrollment differs, please notify Graduate Financial Aid Services before the semester begins. Adjustments to Financial Aid occur after the Add/Drop period each term. Your loan eligibility may be reduced if you enroll in less than 9 credits or are on Program Fee/Continuous Enrollment Fee.
- **Residency:** If your residency changes during the academic year (e.g. out-of-state residency to in-state residency), your financial aid may be adjusted.
- **Verification:** The University and the U.S. Department of Education randomly select financial aid applicants for a process called verification. If your application is selected, you will be required to supply our office with your 2008 Federal tax return and a 2009 - 2010 Graduate Verification Worksheet. If any discrepancies are found between the information on the FAFSA and other documents, your awards may be adjusted.
- **Loan Default or Loan Aggregate Limits:** If you are in default on a Federal loan or have reached your aggregate loan limit, your award may be cancelled or adjusted.
- When awarding your Direct Loan(s) we assume that you may receive a Graduate Appointment. If you do not receive a Graduate Appointment, please contact the Graduate Financial Aid Office, since this may increase your loan eligibility. This information does not apply to students in the PMBA program.
- If you receive any other waiver or outside scholarships, your loan eligibility may be affected.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS ELIGIBILITY

PROGRAM FEE STUDENTS / CONTINUOUS ENROLLMENT FEE

Graduate students who are not enrolled for any course credits but who are candidates for a degree, must pay a program fee for each term to be considered for continuous registration until the degree is formally awarded. Program Fee students may be eligible for a Federal Direct Student Loan if the research work on their degree requirements is classified as equivalent to at least half-time (6 credits per term). Students on Program Fee / Continuous Enrollment Fee do not qualify for Federal Work Study. If you are on program fee and would like to borrow a Direct Loan, you must update your enrollment status each semester with the Graduate Records Office by providing them with a letter from your Program Director. It is your responsibility to notify the Graduate Financial Aid Office as your loan eligibility will be affected. Financial Aid eligibility is directly related to your billed expenses. Your enrollment status will be verified online by the Financial Aid and Bursar's Offices after the add/drop period has ended.

NON-DEGREE STUDENTS

Graduate non-degree students enrolled at least half-time (6 credits per term) may be eligible for a Federal Direct Loan for up to \$6,250 per semester under the following conditions: the student applied for admission to a graduate degree program and will be considered for admission at a later date and the coursework is verified by a Graduate Program Director as preparatory / prerequisite in nature before admission to a degree program. A memo from the Graduate Program Director to the Graduate Financial Aid Office is required every semester to verify this information before a non-degree student may be awarded federal loans. A non-degree memo template is available on our website at www.umass.edu/umfa/aidtypes/ndprogramfee/. Please note that after 12 consecutive months (two semesters) of non-degree status you must be enrolled in a degree granting program to receive federal loans. Students are only eligible to receive federal loans as a non-degree student once during a life time.

OTHER GRADUATE RESOURCES:

GRADUATE SCHOOL ASSISTANTSHIP OFFICE (GSAO)

The GSA Office posts assistantship opportunities and processes graduate appointments and associated waivers. This Office does not assign nor determine who gets assistantships. GSAO can be reached at 413-545-5287. Please visit the GSAO website at www.umass.edu/gradschool/assistantship.

GRADUATE STUDENT GRANT SERVICES (GSGS)

Located in 517 Goodell Building. This service helps students at the graduate level apply for grants and fellowships from funding sources outside the university. GSGS can be reached at 413-545-5279 or via Email: gsgs@ora.umass.edu.

GRADUATE SCHOOL FELLOWSHIPS

A limited number of competitive Graduate School Fellowships are awarded to graduate students on a University-wide basis. These fellowships provide for tuition, curriculum fee and health fee waivers. They are intended to encourage and assist superior students in pursuing graduate studies and in completing the requirements for graduate degrees in the minimum time possible. Graduate School fellowships are awarded for one year and may be renewed upon departmental nomination and Fellowship Committee recommendation. A recipient of a Graduate School Fellowship must be enrolled as a full-time student. Consideration for a fellowship can be indicated on the Graduate School's application form. Completed applications should be submitted to the Graduate School faculty for review before January 15 for the following September. Awards are announced by April 1. Please note that a non-working fellowship will affect your loan eligibility.