Student Handbook
Revised for fall 2016

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UWW Philosophy of Education

At UWW we believe that learning is a basic human function that occurs throughout the life cycle. As a UWW student you will have an opportunity to further develop a broad range of skills that are necessary for learning in any situation: the ability to understand what you read, hear, and see; to write clearly and expressively; to think critically and objectively; and to pursue independent research. In addition, you will better understand your own background and your experiential learning.

UWW also believes in the importance of integrating theoretical learning with practical experience, and we try to view students within the wider context of their overall lives. Students find that studying, learning and completing a degree has a positive impact on many aspects of their lives for years to come.

University and UWW Requirements

To graduate from the University of Massachusetts Amherst as a University Without Walls major, you must fulfill both university and UWW requirements. We represent the educational mission and standards of the University in seeing that you receive a general education spanning a variety of disciplines and that you build on that foundation a more specialized and extensive understanding of a particular field or concentration, often incorporating learning you have gained through experience.

University Requirements

Total credits: completion of 120 credits, 45 of which must be residency credits. Of those 45 credits at least 15 must be graded. Residency credit includes credits earned through the prior learning portfolio, as well as all other coursework or independent studies taken through the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

General education courses: UMass Amherst students are required to fulfill general education requirements (a minimum of 13 courses totaling at least 39 credits). These courses can be taken through UMass Amherst, transferred in through other colleges and universities, or taken via CLEP.

- Writing: 2 courses
  - college writing (CW) or an equivalent
  - junior year writing (JW), generally completed by taking UWW 370 Writing About Experience.
- Social world category: 4 courses; at least 2 of these courses must have a cultural diversity designation (see below).
  - 1 arts or literature (AL or AT)
  - 1 historical studies (HS)
  - 1 social and behavioral science (SB)
  - 1 other course in the social world category (AL, AT, HS, or SB) or an interdisciplinary course (I)
- Biological and physical world: 2 courses
  - 1 biological science (BS)
  - 1 physical science (PS)
• Analytical reasoning: 2 courses
  o basic math (exemption exam or course) (R1)
  o 1 analytical reasoning (R2)
• Diversity: 2 courses
  o 1 focused on diversity in the United States (U)
  o 1 focused on global diversity (G)
  o The U and G designations may be combined with social world courses with designations like ALU, ALG, ATU, ATG, HSU, HSG, SBU, SBG, IU or IG.
• Integrative Experience: 1 upper level integrative experience course (IE); must be completed in major department or program; the UWW “reflections” courses satisfy this requirement.
• Additional general education requirements: 2 additional courses may be selected from the following categories: Basic Math Skills and Analytical Reasoning; Biological and Physical World; Social World; or Integrative Experience.

UWW Major Requirements

The UWW requirements include:

• completion of a four-credit introductory course, UWW 191G Frameworks of Understanding. This course can also be used to satisfy a social world general education requirement.
• two of the four UWW “experiential reflections” courses (UWW 310, 320, 330, and 340). These courses also satisfy the IE general education requirement;
• approval of a degree plan identifying a concentration and outlining a course of study;
• completion of the course of study outlined by the plan or with substitutions approved by your UWW advisor;
• completion of the junior year writing requirement, UWW 370 Writing About Experience, during which most students develop a prior learning portfolio;
• completion in the concentration of at least 15 graded credits of upper level course work (usually 300 and above) - not including internships or practica - only 3 credits of which can be an independent study or an additional “experiential reflections;”
• completion of at least 45 credits within the concentration, including upper level course work and prior learning credits, if applicable.

Appeal Process

In special circumstances, UWW students may petition for a variance to a specific university policy by sending an explanatory letter to the Committee on Admissions and Records or General Education Variance Committee. UWW students may also petition for a variance to a specific UWW academic policy by sending a letter to the UWW Academic Matters Committee. The letter should clearly indicate the nature of the request and the reasons why you feel an exception is warranted. Before submitting the petition, speak with your advisor, who can help you evaluate the strength of your case.

Interdisciplinary (I): One “I” course may be used to satisfy the final social world requirement. An ‘I’ course that has a social and cultural diversity designation (IU or IG) may be used to fulfill a diversity component. UWW 191G Frameworks of Understanding carries an interdisciplinary designation.
UWW Courses

Because UWW views adult learners as people who have been and will be learning throughout their lives, our curriculum emphasizes the following two categories of skills that are crucial to any educational effort, whether inside the university or out:

**Communication skills**, including competence in expository or analytical writing, oral expression and/or audio and visual forms of communication.

**Critical thinking**, including the ability to identify and critique the assumptions and values upon which arguments are based and conclusions premised, to gather and evaluate information, to make connections between seemingly unconnected thoughts or ideas, and to use these capabilities to address problems.

Frameworks of Understanding (UWW 191G)

*Course Description:* This course, which carries an interdisciplinary (I) general education designation, is designed to develop the skills in critical thinking, analytical and reflective writing, and research necessary for the UWW student to design an individualized, interdisciplinary degree and to develop a prior learning portfolio. It is in this class that you will develop your degree plan. Course assignments include readings about critical thinking and analytical writing and across disciplines, as well as exercises and papers designed to apply these skills, particularly to the examination of experience. A portion of the course will be devoted to identifying and evaluating source materials for academic writing and then incorporating and documenting them in papers.

*Goals:* To help students:

- expand analytical reading and critical thinking skills;
- learn more about how theories are developed, how they are supported by evidence, and how they change (or do not change) in the face of new evidence;
- use different kinds of evidence to clarify thinking and to communicate ideas to others more effectively;
- explore ways to put personal experience in larger social, historical, and theoretical contexts;
- investigate different approaches to research and to develop information literacy skills; and
- research and develop individualized degree plans

Writing about Experience (UWW 370)

*Course Description: Writing about Experience* is an advanced course designed to help students enhance their writing skills, using their own experience and reflections as the subject matter. The students enrolled in the course develop and revise a prior learning portfolio based on experiential learning that may later be evaluated for academic credit. (Not all students elect to submit their portfolio for prior learning assessment.) Portfolios written in this course may be submitted for up to fifteen credits. Those seeking more credits may write two additional sections after the course is completed. Details about the portfolio process are included within the Prior Learning Portfolio Handbook.
Writing about Experience meets the University junior year writing requirement (JW). The academic credits awarded for the prior learning portfolio are evaluated separately from the course. Pre-requisites: UWW 191G and two of the following “reflections” courses are to be taken prior to or concurrently with UWW 370: UWW 310, 320, 330, 340.

Goals: In addition to the creation of a prior learning portfolio, the course will also teach students to:
- develop organized and consistent themes throughout a longer piece of writing;
- integrate descriptive, analytical, and reflective writing;
- develop a voice in one’s writing;
- respond to others’ work with helpful comments and suggestions; and
- revise sections to create a coherent whole.

The UWW Reflections Courses

UWW students will select two of the following courses to be taken prior to or concurrently with UWW 370 Writing about Experience:

Experiential Reflections of Technology (UWW 310)

In this course students will examine the principles and frameworks of technology as a way to better understand their professional and other life experience. Prerequisites: UWW 191G Frameworks of Understanding taken prior or concurrently.

Goals:
- to briefly outline human technological advancement from muscle-powered agricultural ways of life up to the present;
- define the meaning of modern “technologies” and seek to understand their on-going relationship to the natural sciences;
- examine the influence of technologies on social relations, cultural forces, human connectedness and individual practice through the exploration of student experience and practice with technology;
- discuss how technologies may both “include” or “alienate” through an understanding of how humans adapt, embrace, or reject technology; and
- demonstrate the ability to critically reflect on, integrate, and apply his or her learning and experience derived from exposure to the various general education disciplines to his or her area of concentration.

Experiential Reflections of Leadership (UWW 320)

Students will examine the principles and frameworks of leadership from both the perspective of leaders and those serving leaders within their professional and other life experience. Prerequisites: UWW 191G Frameworks of Understanding taken prior or concurrently.

Goals:
- reflect upon and write about personal experiences with leading and being led;
- explore the dynamics of leadership in various groups and organizations;
- place personal experiences with leadership in a larger context through the study of leaders and ideas about leadership; and
• demonstrate the ability to critically reflect on, integrate, and apply his or her learning and experience derived from exposure to the various general education disciplines to his or her area of concentration.

Experiential Reflections of Public Policy (UWW 330)

Students will examine the principles and frameworks of public policy and its impact on their professional and other life experience. Prerequisites: UWW 191G Frameworks of Understanding taken prior or concurrently.

Goals:
• understand the theoretical framework of public policy-making and the environment within which policy is created and implemented at the national and state levels;
• develop familiarity with the major features of several areas of public policy, such as privatization policy, housing policy, or others;
• identify an area of public policy that has impacted his or her own life, work, or community, and develop, through research and classroom work, an understanding of the main issues that are at play in that area of policy; and
• demonstrate the ability to critically reflect on, integrate, and apply his or her learning and experience derived from exposure to the various general education disciplines to his or her area of concentration.

Experiential Reflections of Organizations (UWW 340)

Students will examine the principles and frameworks of organizations as key elements in their professional and other life experience. Prerequisites: UWW 191G Frameworks of Understanding taken prior or concurrently.

Goals:
• define the term organization within the context of this course;
• define what we mean by formal and informal organizations in terms of their similarities and differences;
• explain the key features of systems theory as they apply to living systems;
• describe and analyze in detail a familiar organizational system and our role within it;
• define organizational culture and describe the levels that comprise it;
• describe and engage more effectively in the processes through which organizational culture is created and re-created, and how it transmits to organizational members and impacts them;
• describe the culture of a familiar organization and discuss the implications of that culture for organizational members and the organization’s purpose;
• apply the above knowledge to a familiar organization, focusing on an analysis of past collaborative efforts, approaches to conflict management, and organizational and individual experiences with change;
• identify opportunities within that familiar organization for organizational development and cultural renewal; and
• demonstrate the ability to critically reflect on, integrate, and apply his or her learning and experience derived from exposure to the various general education disciplines to his or her area of concentration.
Experiential Reflections on Health (UWW 350)

Students will examine the principles and frameworks of health as a way to better understand their professional and other life experience. This course seeks to address and understand varying responses to the questions “What is health?” and “How do we define ‘quality of life’?” These questions will be addressed through the use of reference material housed in the disciplines of public health, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, political science, communication, history, medicine, humanities, education, and economics. Prerequisites: UWW 191G Frameworks of Understanding taken prior or concurrently.

Goals:
- illustrate how a multidisciplinary approach to understanding “health” and “quality of life” can inform an understanding of public and individual health;
- illustrate how a universal experience like “health” is experienced differently depending on culture, diagnosis, context, history, social determinants, and personal knowledge;
- prepare students for writing about individual experiences for their Prior Learning Portfolio in the University Without Walls program;
- provide a structured, credited context for students to reflect on and integrate their learning and experience from the broad exposure in their general education courses;
- provide the opportunity for students to practice general education learning objectives (collaboration, critical thinking, and interdisciplinary perspective taking) at a more advanced level; and
- offer a shared learning experience for applying prior knowledge and experience to new situations, challenging questions, and real-world problems.

Experiential Reflections of Learning and Education (UWW 360)

Students will explore formal, informal/incidental, and non-formal learning across the life span, beginning with early childhood and continuing into adulthood. Learning is defined as “the way in which individuals or groups acquire, interpret, re-organize, change or assimilate a related cluster of information, skills and feelings. It is also the primary way that people construct meaning in their personal and shared organizational lives” (Marsick, 1987, p. 4). Education is the delivery system for some, though not all, of this learning; much learning is acquired directly or indirectly through experience. Readings for this course will draw on a number of disciplines including education, technology, psychology, anthropology, history and sociology. Prerequisites: UWW 191G Frameworks of Understanding taken prior or concurrently.

Goals:
- deepen our understanding of learning and education across a variety of contexts;
- deepen our understanding of the ways in which formal, informal/incidental and non-formal learning influences our experience and that of others;
- demonstrate the ability to critically reflect on, integrate, and apply our learning derived from exposure to the various approaches to learning and education to our lives;
- describe the similarities and differences among formal, informal/incidental and non-formal learning and education;
- reflect upon and write about personal experiences with learning and education;
- research, analyze and reflect on a specific issue or problem in learning or education in depth;
- work collaboratively with others in the completion of academic assignments; and
- develop an action plan for lifelong learning.
The Degree Plan

Creating Your Degree Plan

The UWW degree plan includes:
- the title of your concentration;
- a statement defining the essential components of your concentration;
- a list of courses and other credited learning experiences already on your transfer credit evaluation (TCE) transcript in SPIRE, and those yet to be completed.

Each of the above components should relate to the others, so that the degree plan represents a coherent course of study and meets the requirements of a UMass Amherst bachelor’s degree. The title, for instance, should reflect the actual courses you select, and the statement should explain what the title means. Your advisor will be helpful as you think through the planning of your degree.

Your UWW Concentration

Your UWW individualized interdisciplinary concentration identifies the focus of the course of study that you intend to explore in depth. Your concentration crosses the boundaries of traditional disciplines to match your specific interests and needs rather than forcing them to fit into a predetermined departmental structure. Those students seeking to design concentrations with few courses offered through Continuing & Professional Education will likely have to attend some courses during the day or transfer them in from another institution.

You have a great deal of latitude in defining an individualized concentration, but it must meet the following two expectations:

*Depth and Breadth:* The concentration includes a broad view of the field of study and a focused exploration of a particular aspect of that field.

*Theory and Practice:* The concentration should demonstrate theoretical learning (the ability to attach meaning and interpretations to experience) and practical learning (the ability to test theoretical learning through practical application).

Critical Thinking and the UWW Process

*Why does UWW put so much emphasis on critical thinking and analytical writing in the core curriculum?*

Because the essential philosophy of UWW’s approach to education emphasizes student-centered learning, in which:
- you make decisions about what you want to study and how to best bring together previous and new learning in the process;
• you reflect on learning gained through unaccredited experience in a process that requires you to recognize patterns, uncover evidence, draw conclusions, and make evaluations;
• your experience becomes the context and testing ground for theories in your field.

If you stand at the center of this UWW teaching and learning process, then UWW has a responsibility to help you first sharpen your intellectual skills. It would be irresponsible to ask you to construct a mansion with a rusty hammer, a few nails, and a dull saw. Critical thinking, like student-centered learning, is an active process. It is not enough to walk out of a course with a head full of information and a grade. Active learning involves sifting, measuring, discovering, connecting, evaluating—all activities rather than subjects. Too many of us have jobs and household responsibilities that keep us so focused on tasks that we're not even aware of how and why we do what we do. The UWW courses give you a time-out to stop and think and look afresh at the world you've been so enmeshed in.

How does planning a degree fit into all of this?

Most majors have lists of courses you must take or have fulfilled with transfer courses prior to entry. Being a UWW student is more like sewing a patchwork quilt, bringing together the bits and pieces of your life and your education to create a comprehensible and satisfying pattern.

Your task is to start assembling the pieces and thinking about the pattern—the first step in the degree development process. Within a few weeks, you'll have a plan for the rest of your undergraduate degree to submit for approval. Some of you may have a clear idea of what you want to study, have browsed the course catalogs for likely courses to support the field, and may just be a few fairly simple steps away from developing a solid degree plan. Others, however, may not be certain of how to best construct a degree. You may have questions about what you most would like to do for a career, about how you can design the degree so you can finish as quickly as possible, or how to discover your passion.

And so, what do I do next?

During UWW 191G Frameworks of Understanding, you should adhere to the following steps to move you along in the degree planning process:

Fill in the background. Read this Student Handbook, review the degree planning questions funnel, go over the titles of possible concentrations (see the degree plan form), study the general education requirements. Being familiar with this material will prepare you for knowing the constraints and taking advantage of opportunities when planning the degree.

Ask questions! Not sure about some of these guidelines? Maybe you have a precise question, or maybe you want someone to guide you along a path. Don't hesitate to ask questions of your advisor, but please do the reading first. You will be able to make the most of your contact with your advisor if you start with background on the degree-planning process and with specific questions in mind. Nothing brings out those questions faster than working with your SPIRE academic advisement report and unofficial transcript, and the UWW degree plan form.

Scope out the possibilities. Planning an individualized degree can seem daunting if you have to pull a topic and a curriculum out of your head. But you don't. We have developed tools to help you. Not sure what you want to study? Review the list of areas of concentration UWW has already defined as possibilities. This can be found in the degree plan form available at the UWW.
Student Center. Most of you will probably find the topic that fits fairly closely to what you want to study. Though we have presented you with some defined titles, we have not prescribed a set of courses for each. Two or three students studying the same topic (such as health care administration) may have very different transcripts when they graduate because, though components certainly overlap, each degree reflects the student's particular interests, previous course of study, and experience.

Asking and Answering Questions in Degree Planning

The central element of the degree planning process is learning how to ask the right questions of yourself and others and then figuring out how to tap into the necessary resources to get the information you need. The degree planning process involves a funneling of questions, research, and decision-making over a few weeks to lead to a degree plan that satisfies you, your advisor, and the UWW academic review team.

Seeing these typical questions laid out and categorized may help you realize that there's a natural progression in this process. Most--but not all--of you will have resolved the life questions sufficiently at this point so that you have a general view of what you would like to do. Instead you're more likely to be struggling with the more specific research, degree, and task questions.

Don't let yourself get stuck at a particular stage. Sometimes moving up or down the funnel can help you get unstuck. For instance, if you feel you have no idea what you want to focus your degree on or what you want to do with your life, but do know that you need this degree as quickly as possible to improve your marketability after a layoff, then it may help to skip down to the degree questions and use the credit calculating tool on the degree plan form to sketch out the courses you have, the ones you know you need, and the experience you can write about. Or if you find yourself feeling no enthusiasm for the area you thought you wanted to study, then move back up to the life questions and talk them over with someone close to you, someone who can help you shape the questions and do the self-exploration needed to find the right path for you.
Degree Planning
Start Here

Life Questions
These require you to look at yourself, identify your own desires, needs, circumstances to answer.

Research Questions
These assume basic choices have been made and now you are looking at the implications for your degree. These questions provide a focus for your information-gathering.

Degree Questions
These pertain specifically to putting the degree together once you have decided on a concentration. The materials in the degree planning module should help you figure them out, and you can ask questions.

Task Questions
These questions are about just getting it done. Answers are related to time management skills.

Resources
Partners, friends, mentors, career counselors, etc.

Library and web research, advisors, faculty, people working in the field, journals, etc.

Your advisor, classmates, web research of other university sites for the names of relevant subject areas.

The calendar, the clock, caffeinated beverages, your own inner resources, etc.

What do I want to do with my life?
What makes me happy?
What career should I pursue?
Should I follow my passion or pursue the best job prospects?

How can I prepare myself to move ahead in my current career?
Should I plan to go to graduate school? What do I need to be admitted?
How do I incorporate previous courses into a concentration that will lead me in a new direction?
What courses should I include in my concentration to round it out and make it a strong degree?

Do any of the UWW titles fit my interests?
How many portfolio credits should I aim for and what areas should I seek credit in for the portfolio?
Should I plan to take summer courses to speed up the degree?

How can I get this degree plan done by the deadline?

The degree plan
**Concentration Title:** In selecting or creating a title for your concentration, think carefully about what that title implies and whether or not your degree plan fulfills the expectations set up through the title. UWW degree titles may not duplicate the titles of any existing majors or academic programs within the University. Students selecting one of the identified concentrations may also indicate a special focus they will give to the concentration. Those choosing a title different from the generic ones on the list of titles must also write a description of their field similar in style and content to the descriptions given.

**Statement:** If you select a concentration provided by UWW, you can simply copy and paste the appropriate statement from the definitions page in the Excel form. If you decide to develop your own description of your course of study, remember to define the course of study and provide a rationale for the courses included in your degree plan.

**Lists of credited learning experiences:** This section of the degree plan (pp. 2 and 3 of the degree plan form) outlines both the courses you have taken previously and your plan for completing all the university, UWW, and concentration requirements. Remember to check for the following:

- General education requirements
- Minimum total of 120 credits, maximum of 75 transfer credits, minimum of 45 residency credits and 15 graded credits
- UWW curriculum: UWW 191G, UWW 370 (unless you have previously taken junior year writing through another UMass Amherst department and don’t wish to submit a portfolio), and two of the reflections courses (UWW 310, 320, 330, 340)
- Minimum of 45 area of concentration credits, including both transfer and UMass Amherst credits
- Upper level courses: Minimum of 15 credits of upper level learning (usually 300 and above) in the concentration. A maximum of three of these credits can, with the advisor’s and the team’s approval, be filled by a theory-based independent study, UWW 370 (if appropriate in a writing-focused area of concentration), or a third reflections course

Remember to include the department name and numbers from the schools at which the courses were taken (with UMass equivalents in parentheses only for those being transferred in with upper division numbers), short titles for independent studies, general education designation (if any), UMass or transfer identification, and number of credits for each course or learning experience listed. Example:

**Bus 110  Foundations of Management (Mgt 301) TR 3**

NOTE: In the above example, the course Bus 110 taken at Elsewhere U. was transferred in as the equivalent of the UMass course MGT 301 Principles of Management and could be used as an upper division course in a business-related concentration.

If you intend to submit a prior learning portfolio for credit, list the learning areas for which you hope to receive credit through the assessment process, as well as the specific experience on which the learning is based. List only those experiences that you expect to write about in some depth, usually no more than three or four.
Approved Degree Plan

When the entire degree plan is ready for review, it is submitted to an academic review team, and, when applicable, to the external faculty evaluator. This review team is responsible for reviewing and granting final approval of the degree plan. Once approved by advisor and academic review team, the degree plan is placed in your permanent file and serves as a guide for your subsequent semesters in the program.

The Prior Learning Assessment Process

You have entered the University of Massachusetts Amherst with knowledge acquired through work and other life experiences. In the world outside the classroom, you have acquired skills for organizing and interpreting important information. Developing a prior learning portfolio through UWW can help you accomplish the following:

• make intellectual contact with your theories, skills, and understanding;
• clarify your thinking;
• find out what you know--and what you don’t know--about your field;
• organize your ideas, your knowledge, and your skills in ways that allow you to communicate them more effectively to others;
• obtain university credit towards the completion of your degree; and
• satisfy the UWW degree requirements.

Because most students engaging in this process need a good deal of support and guidance, developing a portfolio is addressed in a separate handbook specifically about the prior learning assessment and special transcript processes. It is distributed through the Writing about Experience sections, but you can also download a copy from the UWW web site at www.umass.edu/uww (click on My UWW).

Steps in the UWW Program

The First Semester

• UWW 191G Frameworks of Understanding: Each new UWW student is required to take this course to refresh and further develop sometimes rusty skills in reading, writing, and thinking from a critical perspective, to understand the principles of research and information literacy, and to become engaged in a UWW learning community. Because UWW students normally pursue one of a list of selected topics, degree planning is a simpler process and is completed within the Frameworks course.

• A UWW “Reflections” Course: Students select one of the required reflections courses as their second course during the first semester. These courses both satisfy the integrative experience general education requirement and prepare students for writing their prior
learning portfolio.

- **Final Submission of the Degree Plan:** Once the degree plan has been approved by the advisor and the UWW academic review team, the final plan will be submitted and entered as approved on the UWW student records, usually by the end of the first semester.

- **Regular Advising:** The instructor for your Frameworks class will serve as your advisor and work with you until graduation. Advisors may answer questions through e-mail, meeting with you in person, or by making a phone appointment with you. Whatever the appropriate mode, your advisor will be able to guide you through the full requirements of completing a degree.

### The Second and Subsequent Semesters

- **Coursework:** UWW students usually enroll in a second reflections course during the second semester to complete the pre-requisites for enrolling in *Writing about Experience*. There is no requirement to take the writing course in a particular semester, however. In the second or later semesters, you will begin other coursework in your degree plan. On occasion, students are unable, for scheduling or other reasons, to take one or more of the specific courses listed on the degree plan. The advisor must approve all substitutions. In selecting substitutions, be sure that all key components of the concentration continue to be well-represented as you pursue the degree.

- **Prior Learning Assessment:** Most UWW students who seek credit for prior learning will take *Writing about Experience* and *UWW 296Y Assessment of Prior Learning* (a placeholder course) during their second semester, although they may choose to enroll in the course in a later semester. Students may submit the portfolio completed in the writing course for up to fifteen credits, but students seeking more credits will write additional material, either on their own or in another class, during the semester following the course. All portfolios must be submitted by October 1st. The [Prior Learning Portfolio Handbook](#) offers more details about the process.

- **Final Review and Awarding of Prior Learning Credits:** When your prior learning portfolio is complete, you will confer with your advisor to discuss the approval process. Portfolios of 15 credits or fewer require approval and a credit award only from the advisor or writing course instructor (and, if the content is outside the faculty member’s expertise, an additional faculty evaluator). Portfolios of 16-30 credits also require approval by the UWW academic review team.
Required Approval in the Prior Learning Assessment Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advisor or Writing Course Instructor</th>
<th>Academic Review Team</th>
<th>Faculty with Expertise in Field (if outside standard concentration areas)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-15 credits</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-30 credits</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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- **The Final Semester/Graduation:** As graduation approaches, you should make a final review of your degree progress in SPIRE to be certain that all of the requirements have been met. Your advisor will help you with this task and will clear you for graduation. If you entered UWW prior to fall 2012, you must submit an Intent to Graduate form accompanied by a $75 commencement fee. February, May, and September graduates within the current year celebrate with the UWW faculty and staff at the annual May graduation ceremony, and all UWW graduates of that year are eligible to attend the UMass Amherst senior recognition ceremony. Review the UWW Graduation Instructions and Commencement Guide for more information.

**TIP**

Make sure your anticipated date of graduation is correct. It matters for financial aid & it’s easy. From the SPIRE homepage > Scroll down to “Expected Graduation Term” > Click on “Graduation Term” > follow instructions.
Ways of Earning Credit

UMass Amherst Continuing & Professional Education offers courses during the evening hours or online in the fall, winter, spring, and summer semesters. These courses are listed in SPIRE.

UMass Amherst day division courses (officially, “university-scheduled” courses) When they meet the day division course requirements, UWW students may sign up for these courses through Continuing & Professional Education during the CPE registration period. You may want to call or e-mail the instructor, review the syllabus, or speak with the department secretary or undergraduate advisor. Some courses require permission of the instructor to enroll. Learn more about enrolling in day-division classes.

Courses at other colleges or universities can be an important part of a UWW degree. Students taking transfer courses at other colleges after matriculation in UWW must first seek permission from their advisor to insure transfer to UMass Amherst. Once the course is completed, students need to request an official transcript to be sent to UWW so that credits may be posted to your record here. Remember that no more than 75 transfer credits may be counted toward the required 120 graduation credits at UMass. All credits accepted by UMass Amherst from other institutions will appear on the University transcript, but however many are transferred in, students must still have a minimum of 45 UMass Amherst residency credits.

Portfolio assessment refers to the process by which UWW awards credit for past learning gained outside the structure of formal education. When UWW students write and submit a portfolio, they earn UMass Amherst credits this way.

Special transcript evaluation assigns college credit to trainings, workshops, and courses that are directly related to the student’s area of concentration and conducted outside of an accredited college environment that reflect an integrated and sustained curriculum. Many UWW students have participated in extended workplace trainings related to their concentrations. A fee is charged for each special transcript submitted. With proper documentation (official verification of topic, dates, completion, and contact hours), college-level trainings are generally awarded one credit for each sixteen verified contact hours, although there are exceptions to this formula depending on the type of training you are requesting credit for. The coursework/training/certification must be college-level and directly related to the student’s area of concentration. All documentation is submitted through the student’s UWW advisor to the Transfer Admissions Office for review, assessment, and credit award. These credits are considered “transfer” credits and the student will be charged $75.00 per request. Please speak with your advisor to find out how many credits you may be able to anticipate.

Special transcript evaluation – residency through portfolio consideration is an alternate way of receiving special transcript credit. All documentation outlined in the special transcript evaluation process above must be submitted through the student’s UWW advisor who will submit the material to the respective Academic Review Team for review, assessment, and credit award in conjunction with the assessment of the prior learning portfolio. The credits will be considered non-graded residency credits and will not exceed 30 credits in combination with the written portfolio. Under this method, an additional document called “Reflections on Non College-Level Sponsored Coursework” will be required.

Military trainings may be accepted for transfer credit. UMass Amherst uses the American Council on Education (ACE) guidelines and applies the same standards to credits for military education as
those applied to coursework from accredited colleges and universities. Request your JST military transcript be sent to UMass Amherst via the Joint Services Transcript (JST) website. You will receive 3-4 credits for basic training, and additional trainings will be evaluated for credit by the Admissions Office and, when appropriate, your advisor.

CLEP exams test college-level learning in a variety of subject areas, offering an option for a less expensive and faster way to meet general education requirements, demonstrate independent learning, and earn credit. Here is a list of CLEP/DANTES exams accepted by UMass Amherst. Before signing up for a CLEP exam, you should check with your advisor to be sure it is accepted for transfer. You may need to complete and submit for approval the CPE Prior Approval form available by clicking Continuing and Professional Education forms in the UWW Student Center prior to registering for certain CLEP exams. CLEP exams are administered by the College Board and are included on the transcript as transfer credit.

ACE, DANTES, UExcel, AP and SAT II credits may also be accepted by UMass Amherst. Here is a list of CLEP/DANTES credits accepted by UMass Amherst. AP credits and SAT II credits may also be accepted, no matter how old they are.

Challenge Exam refers to the process by which a student, with permission from the instructor of a course, could take an exam that proves their complete knowledge of the course material and receives credit for that course. The choice to allow a challenge exam, and how the exam is administered is up to the instructor. If you live at a distance, an instructor may or may not agree to allow you to take a challenge exam by proctor. Speak with your advisor more about this option.

Foreign Language Challenge Exam refers to the process by which a student may receive 6 UMass Amherst credits for demonstrating that they are fluent in a foreign language. These exams are set up through the Office of Undergraduate Advising whose role it is to locate instructors who can evaluate fluency. Depending on the language you speak, they may or may not be able to locate an instructor able to evaluate your fluency. If you live at a distance, they will attempt to secure an instructor willing to administer a long-distance evaluation. Speak with your advisor more about this option.

Independent learning contracts help students pursue credited learning under the supervision of a UWW or other faculty member outside the classroom. Using the contract form available in the forms section of the UWW Student Center, the student proposes the contract and outlines learning goals and activities to be undertaken to meet those goals. The crediting faculty member helps to sharpen those goals, decide on learning activities, and choose a means of evaluation. At the end of the semester, the faculty member submits the grade to the UWW advisor if the student is enrolled under a UWW course number. A student should expect to spend a minimum of three hours a week for fifteen weeks on the project for each enrolled credit. Learning contracts may be done in a variety of formats, for example:

- **Independent studies** provide a vehicle for pursuing research, reading and writing projects outside a traditional course format. They are used to investigate questions and subject matters not covered by courses in the Continuing & Professional Education or University catalog. They may also be used to structure a program of directed readings covering essential literature in a field of study. An independent study of this kind is limited to a maximum of six credits in one semester.

- **Practica** are based on learning contracts directed towards hands-on experiential learning to extend and broaden one's experience in a field; they typically involve learning projects pursued within an organizational setting. A practicum may involve an exploration of a field through interviews and observation in various settings, or creative work in the arts, or other personal projects. While students sometimes pursue practica...
in the context of current job responsibilities, their focus must be on new learning. Often an on-site supervisor will be involved in structuring and evaluating the student’s learning. Practica are useful ways to apply theory in the field and bring the depth of experience to one’s learning. A practicum is limited to a maximum of twelve credits in one semester.

Designing the Independent Learning Contract
Some students work with a faculty member from a related department to conduct projects as an independent study course within that department. Others enroll under a UWW independent study or practicum course number provided by the student's UWW advisor. Whether as a UWW course or as a course in another department, the initial steps in designing an independent learning project include:

- drafting a learning contract form;
- discussing with the sponsoring faculty member (from UWW or outside department) the course number level, number of credits, learning goals, activities, and means of evaluation;
- submitting the independent learning contract form signed by both the student and the sponsoring faculty member (and on-site practicum supervisor, if relevant) to the UWW advisor; and
- registering for the independent study course using the Continuing and Professional Education independent study registration form and faxing it to your advisor.

Normally each credit of independent study or practicum reflects an average of three hours of related work per week over the semester. A twelve-credit practicum, then, would commit the student to approximately thirty-six hours per week, nearly the equivalent of a full-time job.
Graduating with Honors

Latin Honors

All graduating seniors are eligible for Latin honors designations on diplomas and transcripts if his/her complete academic record shows at least 54 calculable (graded residence) credits at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and he/she meets one or more of the following criteria:

- GPA places them among the top 5% of the graduating class of their school or college, then they will receive the degree – summa cum laude.
- GPA places them among the top 10% of the graduating class of their school or college, but not among the top 5%, then they will receive the degree – magna cum laude.
- GPA places them among the top 25% percent of the graduating class of their school or college, but not among the top 10%, then they will receive the degree – cum laude.

At the start of the fall semester, the University Registrar’s Office posts on its website the GPA needed to secure a place in the top 5, 10, and 25 percent in each school or college based on the average of the previous three years’ graduating classes.

Pursuing Departmental Honors

Departmental Honors is awarded for completion of Commonwealth Honors College requirements with a four-or-more-course focus, including the Honors Thesis or Project, in approved Departmental Honors Programs.

UWW students who wish to focus honors work in their areas of prior experiential learning and/or concentration should consider undertaking UWW Departmental Honors (DH). UWW honors courses are non-honors courses with an honors colloquia attached. Colloquia are 1-2 credits and may have 2-25 students enrolled. Or, students may choose to complete an honors independent study (1-3 credits). Both honors colloquia and honors independent studies are designed to complement, deepen, and extend the experience of an academic major, area of study, or concentration. NOTE: There is no additional fee associated with UWW Departmental Honors at this time.

Students interested in UWW Departmental Honors should speak with their advisor and the UWW Honors Program Director, Connie Griffin (cgriffin@uww.umass.edu) upon completion of a minimum of 12 UMass Amherst graded credits with a 3.75 minimum GPA.

The specific requirements for satisfying UWW Departmental Honors requirements are as follows:

- One honors course, colloquium, or independent study at any level in the UWW program (196H, 296H, 396H, 496H), or in the student’s area of concentration;
- One honors course, colloquium, or independent study at the 300-level or above in the UWW program (396H, 496H), or in the student’s area of concentration;
  - i. UMass Amherst 600, 700, 800-level graduate courses in student’s area of concentration satisfies one honors course, as does a non-honors course linked with an honors colloquium.
  - ii. UMass Amherst graduate courses at the 500-level may be petitioned for honors course credit provided they:
1. Are three or more graded credits
2. Have a maximum enrollment of 25 students
3. Feature a high degree of interaction between professor and students
4. Feature a rigorous syllabus

And one of two options:

- A six to eight credit independent study honors thesis. Students writing a thesis sign up for 499Y and then, 499T (usually in the following semester);
- A six to eight credit independent study honors project. Students developing a project sign up for 499Y and then, 499P (usually in the following semester).

**NOTE:** Three of the independent honors thesis or project credits may apply to the student’s 15 upper-level area of concentration (AOC) credits if the thesis or project is thematically focused within the student’s area of concentration.

UWW honors students must:

- Maintain a minimum of six credits during the fall/spring semesters, unless on a leave of absence. Students may petition for an exception to this policy;
- Complete the residency requirement of 45 graded (not pass/fail) credits earned at UMass Amherst (not transferred);
- Maintain a 3.75 cumulative GPA.

**ADDITIONAL NOTE:** Nine graded residency credits – added to the 45 required to graduate – will equal 54 graded residency credits, also making students eligible for consideration for Latin honors degree designations: summa, magna, and cum laude.

**Application Guidelines**

Please write a carefully crafted, one-page, single-spaced personal statement in which you explain why you want to engage in honors work and how honors work will help you realize your academic goals.

As you compose your personal statement, keep in mind that this statement is both an opportunity to articulate your commitment to the pursuit of academic excellence and the only sample of your formal writing available to the application review committee. The review committee will also expect clear, well-developed writing with compelling examples. The review committee will also expect careful proofing, including structure, spelling, and grammar. Submit your essay to Connie Griffin, UWW Honors Program Director at cgriffin@uww.umass.edu.

Include a header with the following information:

- Your full name and UMass email
- Your SPIRE ID number
- The Honors curriculum sub plan to which you are applying (UWW Departmental Honors)
- Your current major or pre-major as listed in SPIRE (UWW)

When composing your personal statement, pay particular attention to the questions below:

- What are your academic interests?
• What concentration or major (UWW)-appropriate topics might you address for your honors thesis or project?
• If your concentration crosses academic departments and fields of study, how will you integrate your interests across disciplines?
• Do you have in mind specific faculty with whom you would like to work?

Additionally:

• What academic experiences – courses, workshops, lectures, films, books – have you found to be intellectually rewarding?
• Have you participated in any extracurricular activities that relate to your academic interests and future goals?
• What contributions can you see yourself making to a community of academic peers?

Acceptance decisions will be sent to students’ “…@umass.edu” email addresses.

**Thesis or Project?**

The UWW Honors thesis may be either an analytical work (typically about 30-50 pages in length) or a substantial creative work, typically called a “project” (for examples, a collection of poems and stories or one longer work of poetry, fiction, or nonfiction; artistic work; or other proposed project).

The thesis or project is developed under the supervision of at least two faculty members. It is the student’s responsibility to initiate meeting with the Honors Program Director and then, to meet with and ask faculty to serve on his or her committee. Assembling a faculty committee (minimally, to include a chair and one member) can be challenging, so this step should be undertaken in advance of the final two semesters at UMass Amherst.

To begin the thesis or project, a thesis or project proposal, signed by both faculty chair and committee member, as well as the UWW Honors Program Director, must be submitted to the Honors Program Director prior to the final two semesters of coursework. Students will work closely with their committee chair to discuss research, drafts, and revision (committee members may serve as readers).

For further information about the UWW Departmental Honors Program, contact the UWW Honors Program Director, Connie Griffin at cgriffin@uww.umass.edu.

**Alpha Sigma Lambda**

UWW students are eligible for membership in Alpha Sigma Lambda, a national honors society established “to recognize the special achievements of adults who accomplish academic excellence while facing competing interests of home and work.” The national standards for student membership in Alpha Sigma Lambda are as follows:

• Members must be matriculated and have a minimum of 24 graded semester hours or the equivalent and shall be matriculated students in an undergraduate degree program. These 24 college credits must not include transfer credits. All credits must be taken through and graded at the matriculating institution, and must be included in the student’s GPA.
• At least 12 of a student’s total credits should be earned in courses in Liberal Arts/Sciences. If the student has not earned 12 Liberal Arts/Sciences credits within the 24 credits completed at the matriculating institution, accepted transfer courses may be used to meet this requirement.
• Members shall be selected only from the highest 10 percent of the class who have 24 graded credits and are matriculated in an undergraduate degree program.
• Those selected must have a minimum grade point average of 3.2 on a 4.0 scale or its equivalent. The cumulative scholastic record of the student as interpreted by the institution where membership is to be conferred shall be the basis for computing scholastic eligibility.

Each spring, the UMass Division of Continuing and Professional Education inducts new members into Alpha Sigma Lambda, and many UWW students have become members. Students may contact Connie Griffin, UWW Honors Program Director at cgriffin@uww.umass.edu or Lucinda Butler at lbutler@cpe.umass.edu.

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Avoiding Common Pitfalls

Drawing on the expertise of faculty, staff, and fellow learners in UWW and the University will help you to avoid common pitfalls, such as:
• taking on too many credits in the first semester and feeling overwhelmed;
• finding yourself either over- or under-qualified for certain courses;
• finding yourself falling behind in an online course;
• accumulating a number of incompletes;
• getting nowhere in an ill-defined independent study and then floundering; and/or
• finding yourself missing a requirement at the point of graduation.

Resources

Your Advisor

Your advisor will communicate with you in person, by phone, by Skype, or by e-mail as needed in the first semester when you are developing a degree plan. After that, you should contact your advisor at least in the beginning of the semester. Your advisor is a key figure in your development as an independent learner as she or he offers encouragement, helps you clarify academic goals, and assists you in designing a plan to meet these goals. To aid you in the process, your advisor may also:
• suggest appropriate courses or learning activities;
• help you design independent studies when appropriate;
• give you names of potential faculty members in your field;
• guide you through and help you master the University’s administrative processes;
• assist you in the clarification of learning areas within your prior learning;
• suggest a range of credit for the prior learning award;
• present your degree plan and prior learning portfolio to an academic review team; and
• help review your degree requirements in preparation for graduation.

It is important that you take some initiative in contacting your advisor and in keeping her or him informed about changes in your plans, such as adding or dropping courses or changing your expected graduation date. At UWW we can usually find a remedy for most of the administrative problems that arise, but the solution must be carried out correctly with all the right forms in the right places at the right time.

Fellow students

Your fellow students can be extremely helpful in:

• suggesting good courses;
• sharing their degree planning and prior learning experience with you;
• sharing study tips,
• helping with the logistics of going back to college (purchasing texts less expensively, setting up car pools and arranging for childcare for blended courses, etc.); and
• offering support and encouragement.

Places to Go For Help

**UWW Student Center** is your one-stop-shop for staying informed and connected. When in doubt, go to the UWW Student Center! The UWW Student Center contains up-to-date information, links to important resources, instructions, forms, handbooks, scholarship information, and opportunities to connect with classmates via social media. You can access the UWW Student Center from the UMass UWW website. Just look for the UWW Student Center blue star at the top of the homepage. To login to the UWW Student Center just enter your NetID and password (these will be emailed to you by the UMass Office of Information Technologies- OIT).

**UWW staff and faculty advisors:** We’re here to help so contact us any time.

**SPIRE** allows you to have direct secure access via the web to your student record, including course registration, course schedules, grades, billing information, and financial aid status. Check your SPIRE account regularly.

**Continuing & Professional Education** can help you with the registration process (including adding and dropping courses), obtaining transcripts and CPE forms, and questions about CPE and University policies.

- Registration 800-922-8211 regoff@cpe.umass.edu
- Business office 413-545-0337 busoff@cpe.umass.edu

**Financial Aid Office** (make sure you identify yourself as a UWW student) 413-545-0801

**Bursar’s Office** can help you with questions regarding billing and payment information.

413-545-2368 bursar@admin.umass.edu

**Office of Information Technologies (OIT) Help Desk** can assist with problems regarding SPIRE and UMail logins and passwords and related issues. They can also help if you are unable to get into Blackboard Learn using your NetID and password. Remember to identify yourself as a UWW student.

413-545-1378 uww@uww.umass.edu www.umass.edu/uww
student and have your student number handy.

413-545-9400 help@oit.umass.edu

**Blackboard Learn Technical Support** offers 24/7 technical support through live chat, email and phone to students taking online courses. Please note that if there’s something wrong with your log in credentials for Blackboard Learn, you must call OIT for that.

1-888-300-6407 amherstsupport@umassonline.net

**UMass E-learning** is the second line of defense for students having technical problems with Blackboard Learn. They are available Monday-Friday 8:30-5pm.

413-545-9583 elearning@cpe.umass.edu

**UMass Amherst Libraries:** UMass Amherst has one of the finest university libraries in the world with vast online access. As a UMass UWW student, you have access to online research databases, e-books and articles, and if you have a [UMass student ID](#) (either a UCard or a Distance Learning Card), you can have UMass Amherst library books and articles mailed to your home through a service called Library Express! And that’s not all… Visit [Library Services for Distance Learners](#) to learn more about what the UMass Amherst libraries have to offer. Even better, UMass UWW has its own UMass library webpage and librarian. The [UMW library webpage](#) is a portal that will connect you to everything the library has to offer and provides resources on topics such as how to choose a paper topic, how to conduct a search, and how to find books and journals. You can even live chat with a UMass reference librarian. Your friendly UWW librarian is named Dave. Feel free to [call or email him](#). He’s here to help.

**PeopleFinder** Look up professors, staff and students.

**Writing Center** The UMass Writing Center offers [online writing tutoring](#).

**Career Services** provides personal and career counseling in-person and via phone or Skype, vocational and other testing, a career library, and short-term (three-session) workshops on a variety of topics of importance to students.

413-545-2224 ccnhelp@acad.umass.edu

**Veteran Services** provides assistance with veterans benefits and the [Veteran’s Resource Center](#) offers community and support at their walk-in center, and by phone and email.

Veteran’s Services 413-545-0939 vetservices@stuaf.umass.edu

Veteran’s Resource Center 413-545-5792 jgagnon@stuaf.umass.edu

**Disability Services** helps students with learning and other disabilities. The Disability Services office is a starting point for testing for a learning disability, registering for sign language interpreters, and obtaining other services.

413-545-0892 ds@educ.umass.edu

**Ombud’s Office** will advocate for students who have encountered bureaucratic or academic problems for which they feel they have not obtained an equitable solution.

413-545-0867 ombuds@ombuds.umass.edu

**Center for Woman and Community**- women can receive quality services, share information, support each other, and work together in a comfortable multicultural environment.

413-545-0883 ewcmail@admin.umass.edu

**Stonewall Center BGLQT resource center** 413-545-4824 stonewall@stuaf.umass.edu

413-545-1378 uww@uww.umass.edu www.umass.edu/uww
Committee on Admissions and Records and General Education Variance Committee: These two committees act as boards of appeals for such petitions as reinstatements after dismissal, retroactive withdrawal from prior semesters because of illness or other intervening circumstances, acceptance of an alternative course to meet a general education requirement, and so on. UWW students should consult with their advisor about whether their requests are appropriate for these committees to consider. The UWW chief undergraduate advisor will write a letter of support if they consider the case substantive. More information about these committees and other academic regulations is available in the Academic Regulations posted on the Registrar’s site.