

Standard Ten: Public Disclosure

Description

In 1998, UMass Amherst presented itself to the public primarily through its print publications. At that time the campus had just appointed a web design team to maintain and develop the official campus website. Since then, the campus increasingly has relied on technology to provide information to its constituents. The UMass Amherst website now serves as the primary platform for delivering information; the website is augmented by numerous print and electronic publications. This has enabled the campus to be more transparent and has improved the quantity and quality of information available to varied audiences about the campus and its mission of teaching, research and outreach. Provision of this information facilitates informed decision-making on the part of the campus's varied constituents—students, faculty and staff, alumni, policy makers and others.

Official statistics about the institution, undergraduate and graduate catalogs, policies and procedures, and news stories about students, faculty and staff are now accessible through the [campus website](#). Detailed descriptions about academic offerings are also available through the [Admissions website](#).

As a public institution, UMass Amherst complies with relevant federal and state laws regarding public access to information. These include the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), concerning privacy of student and personnel data, and the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), pertaining to open records.

Reasonable ad hoc requests for information that do not violate FERPA or other privacy laws are reviewed and responded to by the appropriate office. The Office of the University Registrar has established a process to review requests for public information that could potentially infringe on privacy. The Directory Information Policy Committee helps facilitate this process. The Committee includes representatives from the Registrar's Office, Dean of Students, University Relations, and Office of Institutional Research (OIR). The Committee seeks advice when needed from University Counsel.

Information about the institution, its faculty, staff and finances is accessible through various institutional websites, including the home page, <http://www.umass.edu/umhome/about>. The [Office of Institutional Research \(OIR\) website](#) contains extensive information about the campus. The OIR site links to a [public disclosure site](#) from which information may be accessed about the institution, major publications, FERPA regulations and financial statements. Other websites, such as those of the Budget Office, (http://www.umass.edu/af/budget/Budget_Office_Data_Statistics.htm), the [Chancellor's Office](#), and the Admissions' Office, http://www.umass.edu/admissions/fast_facts, also provide detailed information about the campus and its academic offerings.

The undergraduate and graduate catalogs are published annually. The [Guide to Undergraduate Programs](#) is available both in print and as a web-based publication. Beginning in 2008-09, the [Graduate Bulletin](#) became exclusively web-based. Information concerning the [Stockbridge School of Agriculture](#), which offers the associate's degree, is currently available only on its website, while a revised print publication is under development. [Continuing and Professional Education](#) lists courses and programs it offers, along with information about them on its website. Whether electronic or paper, these catalogs provide accurate information on academic programs and support services. Some of this information appears in the *Undergraduate Viewbook*, a print publication that is sent to prospective students, and much of this information also is available on the [Admissions website](#).

University regulations for undergraduate students appear in the annually revised [Academic Regulations](#) and in the [Guide to Undergraduate Programs](#); those relating to graduate students are found in the [Graduate School Handbook](#) and the [Guidelines for Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations](#). Information on these topics also may be found in the publications and websites of individual academic departments and programs.

Information on student fees, charges and refund policies appears in the *Guide to Undergraduate Programs* and the *Graduate Bulletin*; Financial Aid Services publications, such as the *Guide to Financial Aid*, (<http://www.umass.edu/umfa>); and on the [Bursar's website](#).

All undergraduate students are responsible for complying with the rules, regulations, policies and procedures detailed in the [Code of Student Conduct](#). The *Code* appears in multiple print publications, including the *Daily Planner*, and is updated and distributed to all undergraduates at the beginning of the academic year. It is available in electronic form on the Dean of Students Office website. Policies and procedures pertaining to graduate students appear in the [Graduate Student Handbook](#).

A list of current full-time faculty is published annually in the [Guide to Undergraduate Programs](#) and in the [Graduate Bulletin](#). The information provided includes department or program affiliations, degrees held, and the institutions awarding them. Tenure-system faculty members are identified separately from non-tenure system faculty, and members of the graduate faculty, who are authorized to supervise graduate-level work, are noted in the [Graduate Bulletin](#). These publications also list faculty affiliated with the Five Colleges consortium, as well as those from other campuses in the University of Massachusetts system. These materials also list key administrative officers. Members of the [University Board of Trustees](#) are posted on the University system website and the [Massachusetts Department of Higher Education Board Members](#) are listed on its website.

The campus currently offers five degree-granting programs that may be completed partially or exclusively at off-campus locations: Master of Business Administration; M.S. in Plant and Soil Sciences; M.Ed. and C.A.G.S. in Education; and M.P.H. in Public Health. These programs serve non-traditional students and may be completed in the evenings, on the weekends or during the summer. They are administered by UMass Amherst Continuing and Professional Education (CPE). Many of the courses are taught by full-time Amherst campus faculty. CPE has a dedicated advising office; 24-hour online technical support is available for students and faculty. Academic advising is also offered by individual programs, and faculty members often hold office hours at these locations. A list of these [programs](#) and associated [student support services](#) can be found on the [CPE website](#) and program-specific websites.

Campus policy requires that undergraduate and graduate catalogs list only approved courses that either have been offered during the previous two years, or will be offered in the upcoming academic year. Catalogs are used in conjunction with a schedule of courses published each semester; this is available on the [Registrar's website](#). The availability of programs, courses and services listed in the catalogs is updated annually and archived for future reference.

UMass Amherst publishes, both in print and electronic form, updated campus information, such as the size and characteristics of the student body, the campus setting, physical resources, and the range of both curricular and co-curricular opportunities available to students. Information about the campus is prominently displayed on the [campus website](#) with links to other sites containing more detailed information. A schedule of events and other information on programs and activities also appears regularly in the weekly electronic publication *In the Loop*, on the [Arts and Events](#) section of the campus website, the [Daily Collegian](#) student newspaper, and in a range of specialty publications, such as those listing intramural sports activities. The [Office of Institutional Research](#) (OIR) maintains a website with comprehensive information on enrollment, retention and graduation rates; faculty and staff; and financial and other institutional measures. It also publishes [UMass at a Glance](#), a summary of pertinent statistical information about the campus. Admissions publications, including the *Viewbook*, are annually distributed to more than 75,000 potential students, parents and others interested in learning about UMass Amherst, and the [Admissions website](#) annually receives more than 25 million hits.

A statement of learning goals for each academic program is included in the descriptions appearing in the [Guide to Undergraduate Programs](#) and the [Graduate Bulletin](#). Program websites and publications also provide supplemental information on academic goals and expected outcomes. A full description of the campus's program of learning outcomes and their assessment is included in Standard Four and the E-series tables accompanying this Self-Study. The Office of Institutional Research (OIR) produces a series of analyses

on the retention and graduation rates of undergraduate students, both first-year and transfers (<http://www.umass.edu/oapa/topics/students.php>). This information also is reported in the [Common Data Set](#), an annual publication that includes information about admissions, transfer students, enrollment and financial aid.

Student outcomes also are monitored at the graduate level. A doctoral student tracking system has been developed in recent years, and program-level information on doctoral student retention and graduation rates is also available on the [Departmental Profiles](#) section of the OIR website. The campus [public disclosure website](#) has links to information on institutional pass rates on the Massachusetts Educator teacher certification test and performance on the National Council Licensure Examination for nursing graduates.

The stories of student success form the basis for student recruitment material and are reflected in a significant portion of the lead stories and photographs on the [campus website](#). These students are prominently featured in the alumni magazine, [UMass Amherst Magazine](#), which is annually distributed to more than 190,000 alumni and friends of the institution.

The campus publishes information about financing a college education on its website (<http://www.umass.edu/umfa/basics/costs>) and in print. The [Guide to Financial Aid](#) is intended to help current and prospective students and families understand education-funding options, including the cost of attendance, financial-aid eligibility, and the types of grant aid and loans for which students may be eligible. The *Guide* also lists other financial-aid resources. The *Guide* further addresses debt management and includes examples of loan repayment plans so that students may estimate their post-graduation loan repayment schedule. A companion publication, [Financial Aid Facts & Figures](#), supplies additional information about how to apply for aid.

The Office of News and Media Relations promotes the achievements of UMass Amherst, explains campus policies, and enhances recognition of UMass Amherst accomplishments as a national research institution and as the state's flagship public university. The staff follows a thorough process to identify and verify the accuracy of information released about campus achievements. The achievements of faculty, staff, students and alumni are documented through individual interviews, peer-reviewed publications, grant applications and awards, database and web research, and news releases issued by awarding groups. The office also tracks and records rankings issued by general interest publications, such as *U.S. News & World Report* and *SmartMoney*, as well as trade publications ranging from *Combined Cycle Journal*, a power-plant publication, to *Restaurants and Institutions* magazine.

Many publications produced by the campus, such as the undergraduate and graduate catalogs, handbooks, Fact Book and promotional materials are reviewed and updated annually. When appropriate, the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) reviews statistical data for accuracy and consistency.

UMass Amherst prints accurate information about its accreditation status in both its undergraduate and graduate catalogs. The status of various professional program accreditations, such as Nursing, Management and Engineering, appears in relevant sections of catalogs and in other print and [electronic publications](#). Drafts of this Self-Study have been available on the [campus accreditation website](#), which invited individuals to review the report and provide feedback. The final version of the Self-Study submitted to the New England Association of Schools and Colleges will remain available on that website for the duration of the accreditation review. Prior to the accreditation team visit in November 2009, notice of the reaccreditation process will be published in area newspapers and publications distributed to alumni, to families of current students, and to other supporters who have contributed to campus development efforts. In each instance, readers will be invited to submit comments about UMass Amherst to NEASC.

Appraisal

UMass Amherst positions itself online and in its collateral materials as one of the nation's finest public research universities and the state's flagship public university. It takes pride in offering a top-quality education in a state known for educational quality. As such, the campus goes into great detail and

elaboration about the wide range of academic disciplines, pursuits and interdisciplinary opportunities available at the institution.

For many years, the campus had a decentralized communications and marketing structure that did not adequately serve the institution in building a clear and compelling identity in the minds of key constituents. This resulted in low alumni association membership, lower-than-peer-average private support, and a perception that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts did not adequately understand or support its flagship institution. However, student interest in UMass Amherst remained strong, and student quality and the number of applications rose steadily.

In 2008-09, the new administration led by Chancellor Robert Holub centralized communications and marketing efforts and built a new University Relations team. The team pulls together staff previously spread throughout five administrative areas on the campus. UMass Amherst is presently engaged in a comprehensive planning process to understand and improve its identity in the minds of key constituents. This effort, described in the [Framework for Excellence](#) as a top institutional priority, has included market research, focus groups, and surveys and interviews with key internal and external constituents and others. This new approach to external relations is described in a presentation, [Update to Campus Communicators](#). The new strategy already is proving beneficial in building partnerships across internal boundaries. For example, the regional planning process presented to the UMass Amherst Foundation Board, an organization of key supporters designed to promote increased fundraising efficacy, links efforts in University Relations, Admissions, Development and campus Schools and Colleges to achieve specific, tangible goals ([Creating the Momentum](#)). In addition, there has been a redesign of the UMass Amherst homepage, launched in March 2009; the creation of a free design service for the entire campus; the implementation of a state-of-the-art media distribution system; and the creation of “Look, Tone and Feel Guidelines” to help create broad consensus and consistency in the campus message. All these efforts are strategically designed to connect the campus with its many constituents – and to help the UMass Amherst advance as a top public research university.

The campus [public disclosure website](#), with links to relevant consumer information, was developed in response to the Higher Education Act of 1998. Some provisions in the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008 require disclosure of new measures of accountability and consumer information for current and prospective students. In recent months, the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) has reorganized and expanded the site, which contains much of the consumer information mandated by HEOA. Another enhancement is the increased visibility of the site: It will be accessible from various campus websites, including those of Admissions, Financial Aid, the Registrar, OIR, and SPIRE, the student portal where students manage academic records, view billing and financial aid information, and view course and schedule information. In addition to satisfying public disclosure requirements, availability of more comprehensive information will inform decision-making for students and their families as well as members of the campus community.

Projection

The newly constituted University Relations group plans to unveil a comprehensive brand strategy and image campaign in fall 2009. This plan will include key messages for the institution, will share research findings and data, and will build appropriate tools and tactics for the institution and its units to achieve their external-relations goals.

University Relations will drive much of its work around market-research. This will provide useful assessment information to enhance campus performance in priority areas, such as admissions and fundraising. Its goal is to improve the coordination of the communication strategy for the campus, and more effectively link that strategy to key university priorities in the areas of student recruitment, fundraising, alumni, government and community relations, and internal communications. This plan is an ongoing effort and will be evaluated regularly.

At this time, the details of some of the proposed regulations of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 as they pertain to public disclosure have not been finalized and, like many other campuses, UMass Amherst is awaiting guidance from the U.S. Department of Education. Most of this information currently exists, but it will require coordination among offices, such as Institutional Research, Registrar and Financial Aid, to assemble and display this information. It is also the intent that much of the consumer information will be incorporated in the Integrated Post Secondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS) data collection and made available on the [U.S. Department of Education College Navigator](#) website. During 2009, the campus will begin its participation in the [Voluntary System of Accountability](#) (VSA). The campus will use a standardized reporting mechanism, called the “College Portrait,” to provide the public with consumer information, much of which is specified in the HEOA. Once the program is implemented, information will be reviewed and updated annually.

The campus is also exploring the adoption of a content-management system to generate the undergraduate and graduate catalogs. This will ensure greater accuracy and consistency of information contained in the publications and will facilitate the annual update process.

Over the last 10 years, with an increased reliance on electronic media, the campus has been challenged to ensure that information is reported accurately and consistently and is updated in a timely manner. Although no formal process is in place, the various information providers (e.g., Institutional Research, Admissions, University Relations) strive to report data consistently using common data definitions. These efforts will continue.

Institutional Effectiveness

UMass Amherst has an improved communication strategy that emphasizes consensus and consistency in the campus message. Further, it has taken extensive measures to ensure that its publications and reports contain reliable and accurate information. Presenting information that is complete, accurate, accessible, clear and sufficient for intended audiences will be an ongoing priority.