Greetings from UMass Amherst Office of Parent Services (OPS)!

Thanksgiving is next week! While many students will head home to visit family and friends, a few will stay in the area to work or study. Compared with the month-long semester break, Thanksgiving recess is short and can feel hectic or rushed. In this issue, you'll find useful tips on helping your student tackle end-of-semester assignments, the first visit home, projects while on break, and much more.

Re-entry into family life after being away at college

When your student arrives home for break, you may notice that they have become more independent and perhaps more opinionated. As they grow, students find their voice and express their views in ways that can sometimes be challenging and require extra patience. For perspective on navigating difficult interactions with your student over break, we recommend this blog post by Melissa Goldman, UMass Amherst alumnus, and former Advisory Council chair. If your student will stay in the Amherst area or at the Mt. Ida campus, encourage them to take part in any activities available for students who remain on campus. Amherst students can use their residential meal plan at Worcester Dining Commons, 8 a.m. – 9 p.m. over the Thanksgiving break. Additionally, Dining Services will host a Thanksgiving dinner at Worcester Dining Commons, November 25, 11 a.m. – 9 p.m.

Refining study habits and time management

Final projects and exams come quickly after Thanksgiving. It can be daunting for students to think about schoolwork over break, but the more your student gets done, the easier their last few weeks will be.

- Encourage them to assess their study habits and modify as necessary.
- Remind them to continue to prioritize studying, attending class, and submitting assignments and projects on time when they return from break. If they’re pressed for time, they should go over big-picture concepts instead of trying to study every detail at once.
- They should talk to their professors, instructors, and teaching assistants ahead of time if they’re going to be late with assignments and to get advice on how to prepare for big projects and final exams.
- Encourage them to review their syllabi for important deadlines and to make sure they haven’t overlooked anything.

Final exams and academic support

Final exams begin Friday, December 10 and end Thursday, December 16. The complete exam schedule is posted on your student’s SPIRE account, and they should review it ahead of time. If students have an exam conflict (three or more exams in one day, and/or two exams on the same day at the same time) they should go to the Registrar’s Office, 213 Whitmore, for help resolving the conflict. In addition, the Student Success Office helps students feel prepared and confident for finals. Students can attend or watch discussion sessions dedicated to preparing for exams. Students can also take advantage of the Learning Resource Center (LRC), which provides free tutoring and supplemental instruction.

Winter Session 2022

UMass Amherst’s Winter Session offers a wide variety of online courses for students. Up for grabs is everything from Film and Literature to Chemistry and Calculus and much more. Your student will be able to explore, at length, their chosen course during our five-week Winter Session. It will also heighten their ability to make steady progress toward graduation. Encourage your student to take advantage of the extended term and the broad range of class offerings. They’ll be that much closer to graduation.
Registration is still open, and classes run from December 17 through January 22. Available classes & associated information on tuition & fees can be found here.

Get ready for winter
It’s never too early to prepare for winter weather, especially because essential items can sell out quickly when there is a storm in the forecast. Student drivers should take time during Thanksgiving break to stock their cars with a winter storm kit, including a shovel, a small bag of sand or cat litter, and a sturdy scraper.

Spring online room selection has begun
While the majority of students remain in the same room for spring semester, students interested in changing rooms can request an appointment for spring online room selection in SPIRE until November 29. Room Selection will take place December 2 – December 8 at 4 p.m. Students who select a new assignment must check out of their current room by removing their belongings and returning their key to the Residential Service Desk before leaving for winter break. Students who do not check out properly will be reassigned to their fall space. Other room change options include roommate pull ins and swaps.

For more information about assignment change options, please visit the Residential Life website.

Stress relief and relaxation
Remind your student to make a plan before exams to reduce stress and increase productivity. Encourage them to sleep, relax, stretch, eat well, exercise, listen to their favorite music, and give their brain time to process information. Students should break study blocks into shorter periods (one or two hours) to help reduce stress and better recall material. In addition, advise them to set reasonable short and long-term goals, and reward themselves when they meet these.

To help de-stress throughout the academic year, students can participate in workshops and same day consultation appointments with the Center for Counseling and Psychological (CCPH); weekly guided meditation classes through the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life; and yoga and group fitness classes through Campus Recreation. Before finals, peer health educators from the Center for Health Promotion host Paws therapy dog sessions (the next one is Wednesday, December 8). Students can also consult with peer wellness coaches in the Center for Health Promotion for help dealing with stress or visit the CCPH website for other stress relief techniques and apps.

Positivity and Relaxation Training (PART) course at UMass
Learn more about a 1-credit program being offered this upcoming spring semester to help your student learn effective ways to cope with life’s challenges. Developed at the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine (BH1) at Massachusetts General Hospital, the Positivity and Relaxation Training (PART) program teaches participants a variety of mind body practices and self-care interventions, including:

- How to recognize their personal responses to stress
- Meditative techniques that elicit the relaxation response
- How to change thought patterns and emotional outlook to adaptive and positive perspectives
- Techniques to improve sleep, eating, and physical activity
- Ways to harness creativity, humor, and appreciations to cultivate positivity and personal wellbeing

Students can register in SPIRE.

In case of an emergency
You don’t want to think of the worst happening to your student, but it’s good to have conversations so that in the event of a wellness-related emergency, you’re all on the same page. Make sure your student understands how to use their insurance, campus resources, who to call in an emergency, and how to support friends and roommates if they need help.

Remember, if your student is over the age 18, University Health Services staff cannot discuss their health information with you unless your student has listed you on their Communication and Designation Disclosure Form. This form can be completed by your student on the UMass Patient Portal under “Forms.” For more information about HIPAA and for a family to family perspective, we invite you to read the blog article from
Amy Chisholm, a former Advisory Council member.

**Lifesaving information to share with your student**

**Center for Counseling and Psychological Health**

Services for all UMass students, wherever they live or study. Services include consultations and crisis intervention; same-day appointments are available.  
[umass.edu/counseling](http://umass.edu/counseling) | 413-545-2337 (including 24/7 crisis help)

**Crisis Text Line**

Free, 24/7 confidential crisis support by text  
Text HOME to 741741 | [crisistextline.org](http://crisistextline.org)

**Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

Free, 24/7 confidential phone and chat support for those considering suicide, concerned about a friend, or in need of emotional support.  
1-800-273-8255 | [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

**Care package reminder**

Please be advised that the Office of Parent Services does not coordinate care packages of any kind. When placing an order with any third party, including UMass dining, be sure to keep a record of your order along with a phone number or web link to track it or follow up. OPS cannot help locate third party vendors or order information.

**Advisory Council adds new members**

The Parents Advisory Council has added nine new members to its roster for the 2021-2023 academic years. The council accepts applications year-round, with decisions made during the fall and spring semesters. Applications for the spring semester are due by January 31. Visit the Advisory Council’s website for more information about the group and its members and officers.

**Conversation starters**

Supportive and consistent messages and discussions about academics, social life, health, and wellbeing can play a significant role in a student’s college success and development. Here are some questions to continue meaningful conversations for a deeper relationship with your student.

- Who have you listed as your emergency contact?
- Who would you call if your roommate was too sick to leave the room?
- If you need a prescription, how will you get it filled?
- What are you doing to stay active this semester?
- How are you spending your free time?
- What campus activities have you joined?
- What social interaction have you had with students in your residence hall, in your classroom, and around campus?
- Where will you seek help if you are struggling with academics, social life, and mental health?

**November poll question**

When your student has academic concerns, who is typically their first point of contact? Participate in the poll and view previous results on the [OPS website](http://opswebsite).

**Important dates**

- November 23: Thursday class schedule followed
- November 24: Residence halls close for Thanksgiving break at 10 a.m.
- November 28: Residence halls re-open at 10 a.m.
- November 29: Classes resume
- December 8: Last day of classes
- December 10 – 16: Final exams
- December 17: Snow day for exams, semester ends
December 17: Residence halls close at 10 a.m.
December 17: First day of optional winter session

**Links to UMass Amherst websites**
Disability Services
Learning Commons
Math Tutoring
Writing Center

We encourage you to look through our sites and become more familiar with campus resources so you can better direct your student to the appropriate office or department as they learn how to handle their questions and concerns.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact the Office of Parent Services, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. We’re more than happy to assist you.

Sincerely,
Rose M. Boulay, Director
Office of Parent Services
Bartlett Hall #280
130 Hicks Way
University of Massachusetts Amherst
Amherst, Massachusetts 01003-9269

**In case of a campus emergency**, always follow the university’s main web page at www.umass.edu. The website will display a distinctly colored stripe at the top containing pertinent status updates and information related to ongoing emergencies.

Email: umassparents@umass.edu • Phone: (413) 577-4444 • Fax: (413) 545-9631
Office of Parent Services website • UMass Amherst Parents on Facebook
• UMass Amherst Family to Family blog and Facebook group
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