

February 11, 2021

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

As you know, the Amherst campus experienced a recent surge in COVID-19 cases, causing the operational posture to be raised to “High Risk.” We are aware that this change presents major challenges for our students and families, and we remain hopeful that through increased compliance with guidelines the campus may return to a less restrictive posture after two weeks. Refer to these continually updated [FAQs](#) for the latest information, and remind your student to [manage stress](#), [exercise](#), [stay connected](#), [seek support](#), and to reach out for assistance with [medical](#), [mental health](#), or [other](#) concerns.



COVID-19 Call Center

Do you need help finding answers about UMass services and policies in the pandemic? Call 413-577-2999 to speak with staff Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m., or write to covidinfo@umass.edu. Staff will answer your questions or get you to the right office for additional details. For any reports about student conduct, it's best to use the [Dean of Students online reporting tool](#).

Health, safety, hazing, and code of conduct communications

As part of our commitment to the health and safety of the university community, all students receive a series of [emails](#) at the start of each semester outlining university policies and community expectations. Since you play an important role in influencing your student's decisions and values, we encourage you to review these communications and discuss them with your student.

Strategies for a successful academic spring semester

If your student struggled with academics last semester, have an honest conversation with them to brainstorm/identify potential barriers and possible solutions including encouraging them to access university resources early in the spring semester. Instructors care about your student and their success. Encourage your student to contact their instructors or advisor if they have concerns. It is common for college students to experience one semester of academic difficulty, but with careful planning and by using the strategies below, they can improve.

- **Set goals:** Encourage them to make a list of their academic goals so they can assess progress. Weekly lists are helpful in achieving both short- and long-term goals.
- **Create a timeline and use a planner:** Once they know their goals, they need to prioritize by making a timeline. They should pay attention to projects that require more time and effort, that are time sensitive and more demanding, or classes they do not understand as easily.
- **Establish a positive and productive work environment:** Creating a space that is exclusively set aside for their academic work will help create a healthy mindset. Phones, TV, video games, and loud music can become distractors. Students may want to block off a certain time of the day to check texts and emails. They should also develop a daily routine and stick to it.
- **Avoid procrastination:** Some students have the tendency to put things off until later. If this sounds familiar, suggest they strategize ways to approach and complete their assignments/projects as soon as they receive them, even if they are busy with previously assigned work. Likewise, one of the best ways they can ensure they'll do well in their courses is by utilizing the resources and support available to them right from the start. They don't have to wait until their first exam or project is due to ask for help.
- **Prioritize mental health:** Your student's [health](#) is paramount. Encourage them to take time to focus on their emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing. We hope they will take time out of their busy schedule to participate in Wellbeing Wednesdays and use the many online resources noted here. Making sure there is a healthy balance in their life is extremely important.
- **Prepare for and attend classes:** Although most classes are online, students are still expected to be present, participate, and take notes. It also helps if they do assigned reading/sections prior to

attending synchronous lectures. There is always something to learn and discover in each class a student takes and preparation is key.

The college transition process continued

Spring semester is an opportunity for students, regardless of their academic standing, to start fresh.

Encourage your student to:

- Take advantage of university resources and build rapport with their advisor and professors. They can schedule virtual sessions with the [Learning Resource Center](#) for tutoring, the [Student Success office](#) for help with study skills, personal finance, and more, and the [Writing Center](#) for help with papers. To find information on coping with isolation, anxiety, depression, homesickness, and more, they should visit the [Center for Counseling and Psychological Health's website](#). [University Health Services](#) is also available if your student is ill, and [Disability Services](#) can help secure appropriate accommodations.
- Use [Campus Pulse](#) to learn about and get involved in student activities, clubs, athletics, and student events this spring to interact with others, expand their horizons, and build leadership skills.
- Talk to their Exploratory Track (ET) advisor, if they haven't declared a major. ET advisors offer a wealth of useful information for students who are undecided or considering changing majors.
- Talk to their [school/college career advisor](#) to learn more about opportunities in their field of study and how to apply and prepare for jobs and internships.



How to help your student decide on a major

Choosing a major is a big step toward graduation, but the process will vary from student to student. Some may choose a major in the first year, while others may change their major(s) multiple times. As a parent or family member, it may be difficult for you to step back and allow your student to make this decision. It may take some trial and error before your student settles on something concrete, and it might not be the major you have in mind for them. Regardless of your student's situation, it's important not to pressure them to make a

decision sooner than necessary. Also, please keep in mind that choosing a major is not the same as choosing a career; your student's choice does not necessarily determine their future.

Suggest that they explore subjects that would be a good fit for their interests, values, skills, and goals. Their passion for a particular major shouldn't be the only thing that drives them—they should also feel passionate about the required classes, know why they want that particular major, and have ideas of how they plan to use it in the future.

If your student does not have any specific major or career path in mind, they should set up an appointment with a [career advisor](#) in their college/school to assess their interests and abilities and learn about different career options.

Conversation starters for you and your student

Sometimes it can be hard for students to open up about how they are doing, and as a family member, we know you want to know. Here are a few questions to jump start a meaningful conversation for a deeper relationship with your student.

- How often do you check and read your UMass emails?
- How are you connecting with friends, faculty, and staff?
- What is your plan for Wellness Wednesdays (see date below)?
- What classes are you most excited for this semester and why?

Message from the Dean of Libraries

I hope this message finds you and your loved ones healthy and well! As I write, the spring semester is underway at UMass Amherst. When the operating posture returns to guarded, we look forward to offering limiting building occupancy and have established a seating reservation system to aid us in de-densifying those study spaces that will be available. All of these details will be added to [the Libraries' website](#), and any changes to our protocols will be posted there. [Read more](#).

Poll Question

What does your student primarily do for self-care? Participate in the poll and view previous results on the [OPS website](#).

Important dates

February 15: Presidents' Day (classes will be held)
February 17: Career fair held virtually (Campus-wide Career & Internship Fair)
February 18: Career fair held virtually (Engineering and Tech Fair)
February 24: Wellbeing Wednesdays (no classes)
March 1: FAFSA priority deadline, Wednesday class schedule followed
March 29: Last day to drop with "W" and select "P/F"

Links to UMass Amherst websites

[Isolation Instructions](#)
[Quarantine Instructions](#)
[Mindfulness](#)

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 problems and concerns.

OPS staff is working remotely this spring semester to monitor emails and return call back requests. 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,
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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
[Office of Parent Services website](#) • [UMass Amherst Parents on Facebook](#)
• [UMass Amherst Family to Family blog](#) and [Facebook group](#)
Treating Our Parents as Partners

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