

# First-Year Guide to Student Success

## Welcome to UMass Amherst!

Our university is committed to providing an environment that fosters personal and intellectual development for all students. You will find our core values and community standards woven into classes, residential programming and activities across campus. Throughout your time here you will experience a campus culture that supports students as they prepare to enter the global community.

As you transition from high school to college life you will discover a new world of possibilities as well as challenges. Please know:

- Students who bring a strong personal drive and a willingness to **seek out new opportunities and build connections across campus** will be sure to have a satisfying and successful college experience.
- Research is clear that great successes come to those who **take charge of their lives by being fully present in the moment.** We encourage you to be: well informed, open to new ideas and experiences, thoughtful and reflective, and willing to grow.
- UMass Amherst is filled with upper class peers, staff and faculty at the ready to guide and support you in this new chapter.

**This student guide is filled with tips and strategies designed to help smooth your transition to college and provide you with the foundation for an exceptional college experience.**

## Create a schedule...and be flexible about it

- ◆ **Homework**
  - ◇ Plan on an average of 3 hours of study time for each hour of class.
  - ◇ Choose the times of day when you are most productive.
  - ◇ Identify a study space — consider the library, a study room in your residence hall, an academic building, outside on the grass, a café in town...be creative!
- ◆ **Healthy lifestyle:** Be sure to balance the pressures that life may bring with activities that are just for fun. Hang out with friends, exercise, take time to relax.
- ◆ **Daily life:** Plan time for meals, laundry, and errands. And don't forget to sleep!

## Live Intentionally

As you develop and implement your new habits in college, it is important to recognize both your strengths and your weaknesses. With this awareness you can make conscious decisions to follow a mindful path to success.

Consider this three-step approach:

**REVIEW:** Look back over your work (grades and instructor comments), your study system, your life balance.

**REFLECT:** Think about what is going well and what could use improvement.

**REVISE:** If it works, do it more. If it doesn't work, make necessary changes.

### Apply this three-step strategy to:

**Your Study Methods:** Are you productive with your study time, place and strategies? Are your choices resulting in good grades?

**Your Life Balance:** Are you eating well? Exercising? Do you take time for relaxing? Are you taking care of personal business, communicating with family and friends?

**Your Work:** Get feedback on work so that you can make improvements before turning it in. Be sure to read, consider and respond to the comments that instructors write on your papers and tests.

## The Power of Action & Interaction

Developing professional relationships with professors and teaching assistants will increase your success in college. Meeting with an instructor will help your motivation, engagement, and often lead to a higher grade. And, when instructors know you, they can write meaningful reference letters! Each instructor will have contact information on their syllabus. Don't hesitate to go to office hours or email for an appointment.

**It is also critical to meet with your Academic Advisor.** The advising staff from your major/college can help ensure that you are on track making progress toward your degree. Your advisor/advising center is listed under "Primary Advisor" in the Student Center section of Spire.

**Remember, it is up to you to seek out these connections!**

**Academic Honesty:** All students are expected to follow all the rules and policies regarding honesty. Details at [umass.edu/honesty](http://umass.edu/honesty)

# RESIDENTIAL ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

## What's unique about the RAP experience?

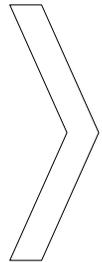
RAP brings classroom learning into the residence hall, strengthening students' connections to their course content and each other.



RAP students form strong connections with their RAP course instructors.



The RAP structure enables students to have meaningful discussions about thought-provoking issues in a safe, supportive environment.



## The UMass General Education (Gen Ed) Program & RAP

"Have you ever taken off your 3D glasses in an IMAX movie? You can still see most of the images on the screen; however ... the blurred images remind you that the picture is missing a degree of **breadth, depth and clarity**. As you put your glasses on, the entire image changes and you soon feel like you are a part of the entire scene, dodging every obstacle and shifting in your seat at every exciting moment. Going to college is not just about getting a degree. *It's about getting an education.* It's about finding your 3D glasses so that you can fully understand the way the world works and be prepared to face life's challenges."

From the UMass Gen Ed Website: [umass.edu/gened](http://umass.edu/gened)



The UMass Gen Ed program guides students to develop three crucial dimensions (3D glasses) of their education: *depth, breadth and clarity*. This is achieved through the Gen Ed requirements which include approximately 12 courses in a variety of curriculum areas and two courses taught in your major department: Junior Year Writing and Integrative Experience (IE). For more information, review the Gen Ed learning objectives on the website.

## RAP Courses Integrate Important Elements Of the Gen Ed Program

### Tips for deriving success from your Gen Ed courses:

1. **Consider the Gen Ed requirements as more than a "checklist"!** Each Gen Ed course is infused with academic and life skills that are valuable to all students in every major. Recognize and engage these skills!
2. **Be open minded!** When taking classes outside of their major, students often discover exciting new areas of study that could lead to an additional major, minor or certificate program. Try a course in a new area!
3. **Reflect and Connect!** One of the best ways to master new information is to link it to something we already know or are encountering in a different environment. This is the basis for the Integrative Experience (IE) requirement. Identify ways to connect learning from different courses!

Following these guidelines will likely lead to deeper understanding, higher grades, and a sense of satisfaction.

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## GLOBAL PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS

GPS Panels are led by upper class students who share their personal stories about ways they have been engaged on campus and in both local and global communities. In these one-hour events, students describe how the experiences have been a meaningful part of their college years and beyond. Each panel will showcase a variety of opportunities. Since there are so many options, it is often hard to know which to choose - the panelists will share their processes for discovery and suggest ways for you to get started.

- **The six panel dates/times and sign up instructions will be announced in class.**
- **Opportunities shared will include those listed on the back page and more!**

# RESIDENTIAL ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

## Taking Care of Business

### Respect in the Classroom

“The University of Massachusetts Amherst strives to create an environment of academic freedom that fosters the personal and intellectual development of all community members....A necessary condition for these pursuits is an acceptance of the spirit of inquiry and a respect for diverse ideas and viewpoints. For true academic freedom to exist, this acceptance and respect must exist in both the overall campus environment and in the classroom.”

*From Guidelines for Classroom Civility & Respect*  
Dean of Students Office

### Respect in Email Communication

Dear Student,

When sending an email to an instructor, advisor or any adult, be sure to:

- ✓ Use your **UMass email** address — a message sent from your personal email account might end up in a spam folder.
- ✓ **ALWAYS** put your name and course name in the subject line.
- ✓ Begin all emails with a salutation – ‘Dear Professor Walker’ (messages that begin with ‘hey’ don’t make a positive impression.)
- ✓ Make the body of your email short, concise and grammatically correct. Remember to proofread— autocorrect can be dangerous!
- ✓ In your closing, use: ‘Sincerely’, ‘Best’, ‘Regards’, or ‘Thanks’, your full name and your SPIRE ID NUMBER .
- ✓ **DO NOT** “reply all” unless specifically requested to do so.
- ✓ Don’t expect a professor to respond instantaneously. Many professors state expected email response time in their syllabus.

Sincerely,

RAP Staff, SPIRE ID 1234567

### Respect in Feedback and Evaluations

As a university student, you will be asked to provide feedback to your instructors regarding your classroom experience. This opportunity comes with responsibility.

As you complete evaluations:

- ◆ Think carefully and take your time.
- ◆ Be sure your feedback is constructive.
- ◆ Use the comment section to explain your answers.
- ◆ Include thoughts on what worked as well as what didn’t.

Keep in mind that the *manner* in which you communicate will have a direct correlation to the value given to your words.

**Communicating with civility and respect makes your message more effective.**

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### Making Use of your Course Syllabi

College instructors use syllabi to communicate important information about their course. It is a contract which both informs students and holds them accountable. Most syllabi outline required materials, course objectives, assignment details and how you will be graded. Instructors may not always review the entire syllabus in class, but you are expected to familiarize yourself with the document and ask the instructor for clarification if necessary. Reading your syllabi carefully at the beginning of the semester will give you a strong sense of the workload expected of you for each course, and allows you to plan ahead.

**Follow these steps at the beginning of the semester:**

**Step 1:** Gather all of your syllabi and look carefully at the course expectations and workload.

**Step 2:** Plot your exams and due dates in your Academic Planner, noting when you have overlapping deadlines. *If you know that you have two papers due the same day for two different courses, you’ll know to start your writing process early!*

**Step 3:** If you have any concerns (assignments or overall course load) **speak with an advisor before Add/Drop on Sept 18th.**

Be intentional,

# Expand Your Horizons

One primary difference between high school and college is that in college, the ball is in **your** court to explore the options and choose your path. **Make the most of your years at UMass — participate!** (Don't get stuck in your room watching shows!)

Here are just a few ideas to get you started:

## Internships

- ◆ Gain valuable work experience on or off campus
- ◆ Explore your career goals
- ◆ Part-time and full-time options

Attend an information session in Career Services (508 Goodell)  
[umass.edu/careers/career-services-calendar](http://umass.edu/careers/career-services-calendar)

## Civic Engagement & Service-Learning (CESL)

CESL provides opportunities to connect your classroom experiences with meaningful work on campus and in the surrounding communities.

- ◆ Take courses and/or earn a certificate

611 Goodell    [umass.edu/cesl](http://umass.edu/cesl)    413-545-2015

## Office of Undergraduate Research and Studies (OURS)

OURS is a resource for all undergraduate students in all majors. OURS helps students find research and scholarly opportunities on and off campus for any semester or summer session. They also help students with all stages of the application process.

10th floor Du Bois Library    [umass.edu/ours](http://umass.edu/ours)    413-545-5334

## Education Abroad: International Programs Office

Explore the many options; semester, year, or even summer.

- ◆ Over 400 program options
- ◆ More than 50 countries

70 Butterfield Terrace    [umass.edu/ipo/](http://umass.edu/ipo/)    M-F 10AM-4PM

Find an ever-growing list of clubs and events by logging into **Campus Pulse**: [umassamherst.campuslabs.com/engage/](http://umassamherst.campuslabs.com/engage/)

The college experience often includes encountering academic, social and/or emotional challenges. There are many offices filled with staff whose job is to help you. **Seek out support early... don't wait until it's urgent!**

See your Academic Advisor or visit Undergraduate Student Success (5th floor Goodell) for more suggestions.

# Your Community Resources

## Learning Resource Center (LRC)

- ◆ Free drop in services Sundays—Thursdays 1-10 PM
- ◆ 1:1 tutoring for over 200 courses
- ◆ Large and small group support available

10th floor Du Bois Library    [www.umass.edu/lrc](http://www.umass.edu/lrc)    413-545-5334

## The Writing Center

- ◆ Free 1:1 assistance, face to face and online options
- ◆ Assistance at any stage of writing
- ◆ Register online to make appointments

Lower level Du Bois Library    [umass.edu/writingcenter](http://umass.edu/writingcenter)

## Center for Counseling & Psychological Health (CCPH)

- ◆ Mondays—Fridays 9AM—5PM call 413-545-2337
- ◆ Weekends and holidays after 5PM call 413-577-5000
- ◆ Life threatening emergency—call 911

[umass.edu/counseling](http://umass.edu/counseling)

## Center for Multicultural Advancement & Student Success (CMASS)

- ◆ Peer mentoring and social connections
  - ◆ Help navigating offices: FinAid, Bursar, Registrar and more.
- 101 Wilder Hall    [umass.edu/multiculturalaffairs](http://umass.edu/multiculturalaffairs)

## Disability Services

161 Whitmore Building    413-545-0892    [umass.edu/disability](http://umass.edu/disability)

## Financial Aid Services

243 Whitmore Building    413-545-0892    [umass.edu/umfa](http://umass.edu/umfa)