

Common Cents:

How Not to Go Broke in College



A financial wellness guide to life at

UMassAmherst

written by your fellow students in SAM

Learn About Your Loans



Pro-tip:

Consider making small monthly payments while you are in school.

Why?

Monthly payments (no matter if it's \$25 or \$250) will help build good credit, and it will save you money in the future. Due to compounding interest, paying off \$200 of your loan now **will save you much more in the future!**

Stay on top of your federal loans! Track your financial aid and find your federal loan servicer by visiting www.nsls.ed.gov

To see private loans, log into your private loan issuer's website.

You'll find:

- Federal loan servicer
- Current loan balances
- Interest rates
- Options for repayment

Stay Current! Make sure to check in on your federal and private student loans by frequenting their loan servicer websites.

Create a spreadsheet for a snapshot! Update it with all of your loan information on a monthly basis so you always know what you owe. This is important to keep updated every semester, especially when accepting loans for the new school year.

Get SPIRE Savvy

Register for classes and secure housing on campus using SPIRE. Make sure your bill is paid in full or establish a payment plan to avoid a registration hold!

In the "Finances" tab, you can:

- **Authorize your parent/guardian to pay your bill,** which is necessary unless you are paying for college by yourself.
- **Check out your bill,** Click "Account Summary" to see the charges making up your bill, as well as the payments and financial aid applied to them.
- **See how much you owe** Visit My Debt Center inside of Financial Aid each semester to keep track of your federal loan debt from UMass.
- **Sign up for Excess Express,** in order to receive any refunds as a direct deposit to your bank account.
- **Waive University-provided healthcare,** Do this if you have your own coverage to save money on your UMass bill. (and save lots of money!)





Find a Job or Work-Study Position



Pro-tip:

Making money is great, but it's equally important not to work more than you can handle. You may be making \$100 a week, but if you do poorly in a class because of it, you're actually losing thousands. Try to avoid working more than 20 hours per week while enrolled full-time.

There are many job opportunities available on and off campus if you are looking to make some money while you are in school.

Check out the "UMass Amherst Job Board" at www.umass.edu/umfa/job-board for a list of open positions, keeping in mind that the earlier you look, the more options you may have.

If applicable, you can refine your results to display work-study positions. To find out if you were awarded the opportunity to seek work-study employment, see "View Financial Aid" within SPIRE. Keep in mind that work-study does not apply directly to your bill.



Find a Bank

When deciding on a new bank, it's important to weigh your options carefully with what is most important and convenient for you.

How to Compare Banking Institutions:

- **You shouldn't have to pay to have an account.**
There are several free checking account options locally. Do your research!
- **Be aware of expirations and limitations on "student accounts".**
You want to make sure you don't start getting fees once you graduate.
- **Read the Terms**
Some checking Accounts may include fees for things like overdraft and low-balance. Weigh how important this is to you.
- **How convenient is it for you?**
Are there locations nearby?
- **Where are the perks?**
Look for high-interest savings accounts, and budgeting tools integrated with their online or mobile banking platforms.

Banks vs Credit Unions

Credit Unions are non-profit institutions that are cooperatively run by member-owners. They usually have lower interest rates on loans, and higher savings rates.

Banks are for-profit institutions. They typically offer the same banking services as Credit Unions with different interest rates and fees.

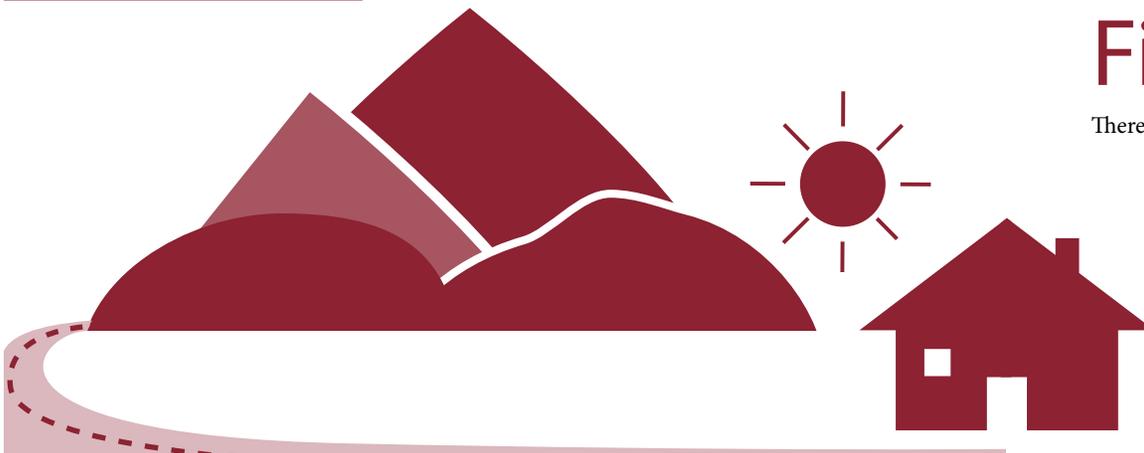
Banking at UMass

- UMassFive College Credit Union
- Bank of America

Find Your Way Home

There are plenty of affordable ways to get home for visits:

- The UMass and Five College Rideshare group on Facebook allow you to find people with cars that are going towards Boston, NYC, or your hometown, especially on long weekends and vacations.
- Check out VanGO (www.vangoexpress.com), a weekend express shuttle from UMass to Boston as an alternative to a Peter Pan Bus.
- Wheeli— Download the Wheeli app to find or offer rides with other students in the area
- The Peter Pan bus line has rides to Worcester, Springfield, Boston, Connecticut, and New York City..



Beware Identity Theft



Pro-tip:

Download Anti-malware software for free straight from the UMass IT website. Run a scan once a month to keep your computer protected.

Lost your ID?

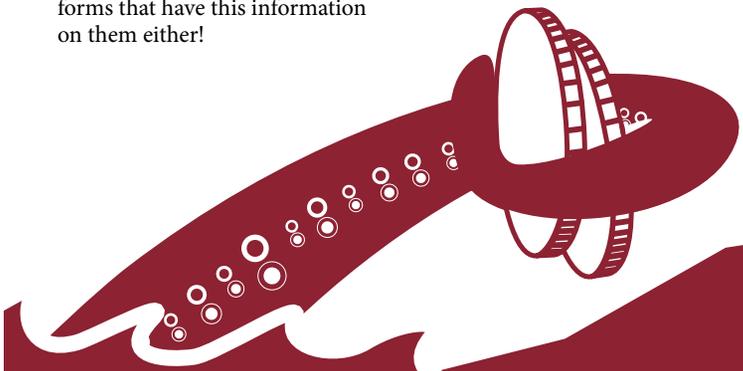
- **Pay a fee to get a new UCard (and photo)** The UCard office is located in Whitmore right near the Haigis Mall
- **It's OK to wait 24 hours to see if someone finds and returns it.** Facebook groups or your res hall are useful places to look for lost-and-found UCard, but be careful. Your UCard displays your ID number—and the longer you wait, the more likely someone else could be using your money (dining dollars, meal swipes, Udebit)
- **Note: Found an ID?** If you find someone else's card, try emailing the student, or posting a photo in the Facebook groups, but make sure to cover their student ID Number. Drop off the card in the UCard office where the owner can pick it up.

Watch for fraudulent emails!

- If you receive a job offer you didn't apply for, a scholarship opportunity from a non-trusted source, or invitations to academic honor societies with no further contact information for you to verify them with, send it to spam, and report it to the IT department by forwarding it to itprotect@umass.edu.
- Always research institutions before filling out any forms with personal information.

Don't give out your personal information!

- This includes your student ID number, credit card information, license number, social security number, etc.
- Never take pictures of cards or forms that have this information on them either!



Ways to Save Money



Pro-tip:

Now that you're a card-carrying college student, local businesses are competing for your dollar. As a result, many of them will offer a discount to students. Don't miss out on the savings!

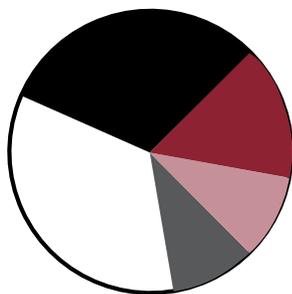
- **Ask if there's a student discount.** Asking never hurts when it comes to spending money - and you may receive a discount on your bill, or a free perk.
- **Before Buying, Check Student Coupon Sites.** Create an account on sites like Unidays.com and StudentUniverse.com to save on travel, fashion, tech, and more with exclusive student discounts.
- **Check UMass IT for Software.** UMass IT offers free and discounted software programs to students like Microsoft 365 and Sophos Endpoint Protection. Check there before you buy any software while you are a student.
- **Check The UMass Store for discounts on computers.** Not only does the UMass Store offer a student discount on computers, but also, through a partnership with UMassFive College Credit Union, offers low rate financing on computers if you don't have the cash up front.
- **Take the Bus!** The PVTAs busses to and from campus are free for students!
- **Attend the New2U Tag sale.** and check UMass Facebook groups for great deals on textbooks and room decor.
- **Explore Meal Plan & Housing Options.** Compare costs and evaluate your needs to choose the meal plan and housing options that fit your lifestyle and budget.
- **Search Alternative Resources for Textbooks.** Connect with other students or comment in Facebook groups to buy and sell used textbooks. Also check the library and sites like Chegg.com & AllBookStores.com for the best deals.



Your Credit Score:

The Five Factors

- ◇ **Payment History—35%**— Late payments on bills such as mortgages, credit cards, or car loans can cause your score to drop. The more on-time payments you make, the better your score.
- ◆ **Amounts Owed / Credit Utilization—30%**— A ratio of current revolving debt (like credit cards) to total available credit; essentially, how much credit is being used at the time. You can improve your score by paying off debt and keeping balances low to offset this ratio. Keeping your utilization below 10% will improve your score, while balances exceeding 50% of your available credit will negatively affect your score.
- ▲ **Length of Credit History—15%**—This is exactly as it sounds; As long as you pay your bills on time – the longer you have a credit account, your score should stay stable or improve.
- ▲ **Types of Credit—10%**—This refers to what kinds of credit you have managed. A combination of things like fixed loans and credit cards shows you have experience managing multiple kinds of debt.
- ▲ **New Credit—10%**—Applying for a lot of credit in a short amount of time (especially for credit cards, retail store accounts, and personal loans), can be viewed as risky and lower your score. Only open new accounts when truly necessary, and try not to close long-standing accounts.



The Scale

Your credit score is a numerical forecast that gives lenders a sense of how likely successful repayment of a loan will be. These numbers are dynamic, and change based upon five factors of financial activity that are weighted by importance to calculate risk.

Highest Risk	Higher Risk	High Risk	Fair	Good	Excellent
300-560	560-599	600-659	660-699	700-759	760-850

660 and below is subprime

Different financial institutions have slightly different breakdowns, but all are similar.

Why it's Important

Why do I need a strong score?

If you ever wanted to live off-campus while in school, or rent an apartment post-graduation you'll want to have a strong credit score. Landlords run a credit check on applicants because your credit score typically reflects how reliably you pay your bills each month.

If your score is in need of improvement, you may be required to find a parent or guardian to co-sign the lease with you.

A strong credit score can also help you get the best deals on credit cards or loans, which can save you a lot of money.

How can I check my credit?

By law, everyone is entitled to a free copy of their credit report from each of the three credit bureaus (Equifax, Experian, & Transunion) once per year. Visit annualcreditreport.com to get yours.

Note: your credit report will not list your numerical credit score. Many services exist to view your score—such as Mint or Credit Karma—but these are all estimations, (as your score is constantly changing,) and may not be accurate.



Pro-tip:

Request your free credit report from each bureau at different times throughout the year to keep yourself on a close lookout for fraud and errors.

How to Improve Your Score

- **Pay on Time.** Try to get current on any past-due bills and make future payments on time. The longer you make timely payments, the more your credit score will improve.
- **Clear up Debt.** Try to pay off your debt instead of moving balances around. Every time you accept a new credit card, you are impacting the “new credit” consideration affecting your score.
- **Keep Balances Low.** Keep your balances low in relation to available credit limits. When a creditor is reviewing your credit report, they consider the percentage used of available limits. High balances (over 50%) that aren't “maxed out” can still have a negative impact. Maintaining a utilization below 20% is good, and below 10% is optimal.
- **Correct Errors.** Clear up any inaccurate information you find on your report. Are all the accounts that have been closed listed as such? Do you show open balances that are incorrect? If you find a mistake on your credit report—an account that isn't yours, or a disputed amount—you'll need to file a dispute by mail or online. This process may seem to take a long time because creditors have 30 days to respond to a charge of a discrepancy, and during that time any charge that is in dispute will still show up on your report.

Budgeting 101

Stay up-to-date with your finances!

It is always important to track your income and expenses, but it is especially important now that you're on your own in college. Getting in the habit of creating a budget for yourself or simply tracking your expenses is a great life skill.

- **Use Excel**
(which you can download for free through UMass IT if you don't already have it!)
Excel has budget templates or you can create your own budget/expense tracker.

- **Use verified financial apps.**
Here are some of the top financial apps available for free download:

Mint: an all-in-one money management resource that helps create a budget, analyze your spending, billing alert to help you avoid late payments, and even generates custom advice based on your spending habits. You can connect your checking and savings accounts, loans and credit cards so that everything you need is in one place. Includes free updates of your credit score with brief explanations for positive and negative impacts on your score.

PocketGuard: easy-to-use budgeting app with the option to create subcategories in your budget and decide how much you want to allot to each category (i.e. groceries, entertainment, etc.). Users can then record and track how much is being spent in each category, making it easy to adjust.

Wally: easy to use expense tracker that allows you to take photos of your expenses making it easy to keep track.

Prism: offers great budgeting tools and tracks expenses. Expenses are categorized for convenience with the option to store photos of receipts. Option to upgrade to a premium subscription which allows multiple budgets, savings wallets, and more.



Utilize UMass Resources

Learning Resource Center

The LRC on the 10th floor of the W.E.B. Du Bois Library provides academic support for students through tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, & Exsel group study programs. They're also the home of OURs—the Office of Undergraduate Research and Studies. Meet one-on-one with a tutor or OURs research mentor, attend SI sessions for your classes, enroll in an Exsel study session, or stop by for guidance in finding research opportunities on and off campus.

Financial Aid Open Office Hours

Advising available in Whitmore in their office during their hours of operation: 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Student Care Supply Closets

Provides free toiletries and household items to students facing economic insecurity and/or unexpected financial emergency.

There are 5 locations across campus (listed on the Dean of Students website under Student Care Supply Closets).

Dean of Students Microgrant and Short-Term Loan Program

Funds available to assist students in unexpected emergency situations.

Smart About Money (SAM)

How We Can Help:

- **Peer-to-Peer Coaching**— Schedule an appointment or stop by to meet one-on-one with a peer financial coach. It's okay if you don't know what to ask or where to start. Your peer financial coach will ask you to complete a quick form to guide the conversation and will use the SMART goal model to help create a plan to reach your goals
- **Workshops**—Invite SAM to your event or RSO general body meeting for a personal finance workshop catered to your group's needs
- **Events**— Join us at one of our many events including Family Feud in the fall and Cash Cab in the Spring!

UMass Amherst



Heard About SAM?

Smart About Money (SAM) is a financial wellness program here on campus. SAM's peer financial coaches are here to help you become smart about money and give you the tools to manage your financial life.



You can talk
to SAM about

- Making your financial goals a reality
- Managing student loans & repayment
- Building & Monitoring your credit
- & More! See the **Utilize UMass Resources** page for more information on how we can help!

Connect with us



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@umasssam



@SmartMoneyUMass



smartaboutmoney@umass.edu



umass.edu/smart-about-money

Join UMassFive Today!

Bank Your Way,

Visit our branch conveniently located in the UMass campus center, bank online or on your phone with our mobile app, or visit any of the 5,000+ branches in the Co-op Shared Branching Network across the country.

& Get Rewarded

With our Buzz Points debit card rewards program, you earn points for every debit card purchase you make that can be redeemed for discounts at local merchants on and off-campus.

This Booklet Presented by

