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University of Massachusetts-Amherst

Founded in 1863, the University of Massachusetts-Amherst (UMass-Amherst) is the flagship state university for the Commonwealth State. With 21,300 full-time undergraduates, UMass-Amherst is not a large state university, considering that Massachusetts has a larger population than Tennessee, Indiana or Maryland, all states that have larger flagships and more public college options. But UMass-Amherst offers something the flagships in those states do not: the opportunity to be part of a college community that also includes four fine private liberal arts colleges: Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke and Smith.

UMass-Amherst has ten undergraduate schools: the Isenberg School of Management, Humanities and Fine Arts, Education, Social and Behavioral Sciences, Nursing, Engineering, Public Health and Health Sciences, Natural Sciences, Computer and Information Sciences and the Stockbridge School of Agriculture. Each has its own degree requirements as well as the requirements for the major. While freshman retention (90 percent) and the four-year graduation rate (67 percent) are excellent for a state school, it will take some careful planning, or more time, to complete a degree with double majors from two different schools.

The university as a whole offered admission to 60 percent of the students who applied last year to join the Class of 2020. But UMass-Amherst admissions vary in selectivity depending on the academic program. The Nursing program, for example, accepts only 12 percent of its applicants. Those who take a liking to UMass-Amherst are advised to apply by November 1st. Seventy-one percent of those who did in 2015-16 were admitted. The university also waitlisted over 6,000 applicants, nearly 1,800 accepted a place on the list, and just over 500 were later admitted.

The average SAT for the students who entered in 2016 was 1230. The average ACT Composite score was 28. The average GPA was 3.8. That's very similar to a profile for an entering class at schools such as Penn State-University Park or Rutgers-New Brunswick. But the university has higher expectations for applicants not only in Nursing, but also Business, Computer Science and Engineering. The 3.8 GPA will be viewed favorably for those who have taken on the rigor in math and science, but the SAT scores should be 1260 or better. For nursing it should be 1300 or better. The admissions office will also recalculate high school GPAs to account for more rigorous academic courses.

Applicants must commit to a school within the university when considering UMass-Amherst. [However, the university offers "second choice" admissions to those who are not admitted to the school that they selected.](#) In some cases, second-choice admits are invited into the Exploratory Track for the school that they selected. In other cases they may choose an Exploratory Track in another schools within the university.

UMass-Amherst draws three quarters of its undergraduate student body from in-state. Most of the remaining US citizens come from the neighboring New England states and five percent come from other countries. In addition to considering other state universities, incoming students were also likely to consider schools such as Boston University or Northeastern University.



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Costs

Resident tuition and fees at UMass-Amherst are around \$15,600 while non-residents are assessed about \$33,600. The average charges for room and board are approximately \$12,600, reasonable for a state university.

Just over half of the Class of 2020 received a need based scholarship. Interestingly, while just under a fifth of Massachusetts residents in the 2016-17 freshman class received merit-based scholarships, more than 40 percent of non-residents received them, too.

However, the average indebtedness for students borrowers who graduated in 2016 was high, just over \$31,000. More than two-thirds of the class graduated with debt.

Curriculum

UMass-Amherst has signature programs in Agriculture (especially Food Science), Business (especially Hospitality/Tourism and Sports Management), Computer Science, Education, Nursing and Public Health as well as an opportunity to create a self-designed major that can cut across subjects offered in more than one school.

The [Honors College](#) technically offers every major available at the university as well as access to smaller honors-level courses. It also offers opportunities for admission to not only for incoming freshmen but also rising sophomores or juniors who have attained high academic achievements. Those who like UMass-Amherst and are admitted into the Honors College are encouraged to take the offer. It offers the nicest undergraduate student housing as well as the most help in navigating the university's academic bureaucracy.

It is not difficult to complete a double major within, for example, Humanities and Fine Arts or the Social and Behavioral Sciences, or even to combine one with a Computer Science degree. There are a decent number of minors including these subjects as well as the Natural Sciences. But it can be tricky to double major if you are enrolled in the Isenberg School of Management. And, within Isenberg, a major is the only option; there are neither minors nor certificates in business subjects. Interestingly, while the business school offers no business minors, the College of Engineering offers a minor in Engineering Management for majors in all engineering fields.

UMass-Amherst also stands out for offering opportunities to take courses outside of the university, not only within the [Five College Consortium](#) schools but also within the member universities of the [National Student Exchange](#). These programs work best for liberal arts majors and those who choose a self-designed major. They do not have as many required courses as their classmates who are enrolled in pre-professional degree programs.

You're going to have large classes at UMass-Amherst. Less than half of all classes offered by the university in 2015-16 had fewer than 20 students while 17 percent had more than 50. But students also have the option of taking small elective classes, most likely liberal arts courses, at the other four Five College schools.



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UMass-Amherst students gave their faculty a rating of 3.71 (out of a possible 5) on RateMyProfessors.com. They are fortunate to have access to schools with highly regarded faculty at the other Five Colleges: Amherst (4.0). Hampshire (3.88), Mount Holyoke (3.88) and Smith (3.91). UMass-Amherst students hold about the same regard for their faculty as their peers at Penn State-University Park (3.71) Rutgers-New Brunswick (3.74) and Boston University (3.7).

Community

UMass-Amherst has an interesting mix of 19th, 20th and 21st century buildings in varied conditions. The campus is laid out in rings: academic buildings at the center, residences and dining halls in the next, then parking and athletic facilities. Parking is more than adequate for residents, though the permit fee (\$300/year) is high. While UMass-Amherst has some very sleek academic buildings, the upkeep of the student union, campus center (home to the university's main store) and dining halls could be better. But look away from campus and you'll set your eyes on one of the more breathtaking mountain views from any college campus anywhere.

The Five Colleges collectively have around 30,000 undergraduates; the majority, by far, go to UMass-Amherst. Amherst is one of the nicest college towns in the US, offering practically any dining or shopping experience an undergraduate could want. There's less of a need to have a car here than at other large state schools. The public bus system is more accessible than others in college towns, and it is free to students. There's no need to spend time hunting for parking in Amherst or feed a parking meter after you find a spot. In addition to Amherst, Northampton, home to Smith College, has a college town feel to its downtown. It's also easy to take a bus to Boston or New York City; they come right to the campus.

While UMass-Amherst has over 300 clubs and organizations, many student groups at the other Five College campuses also open their memberships to UMass students. Add the opportunities for skiing and other outdoor recreation and you have the making of a very nice place to spend your college years, unless you are also looking for school spirit and sports.

The Mullins Center, opened in the middle 1990s during UMass' glory days in men's basketball, is state-of-the-art for indoor facilities in major college athletics. But the university is less invested in varsity scholarship athletics than most other flagship state schools. While UMass-Amherst is one of only 15 universities in the nation that plays Division I FBS football and Division I men's ice hockey, it competes in a low-profile mid-major conference in basketball (Atlantic 10) and has no conference affiliation in football. Even after recent renovations the football stadium seats only 17,000 fans. That's too small to attract the neighboring University of Connecticut to do an "home and away" series for two or four years, let alone interest from the three major sports conferences that field teams in the Northeast and MidAtlantic states (American Athletic Conference, Atlantic Coast Conference, Big Ten).

UMass-Amherst has been more open than most at reporting incidents of sexually related crimes in its [Clery Report](#) than similar schools while the number of reported drug-related incidents was low for a school of this size.



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Comforts

UMass-Amherst houses 60 percent of its undergraduate student body, high for a flagship state university, and offers [an impressive selection of living options](#). The university proudly advertises that its students have the highest satisfaction with the food served in the dining halls, as reported to the *Princeton Review*.

First-year students may opt to live in smaller [Residential Academic Program \(RAP\) groups](#) that share a common interest through a [common course](#) that also helps to fulfill a general education requirements. Incoming students should visit and check out different living options as well as the RAPs available in each. Some of these halls are of a colonial style design that is really showing its age. The residence life team has also created [four living-learning communities for sophomores](#) as well as [Defined Residential Communities](#) for sophomores, juniors and seniors.

There is also a true [Honors Community](#) with traditional (several double rooms/shared bath) living for freshman but suite and apartment-style housing for upper-class students. Those who are offered admission into this community pay slightly more for the housing as well as programming, but it is worth the extra money.

Six fraternities and five sororities have chapter houses at UMass-Amherst; the other 26 Greek social organizations do not. Greek life attracts only ten percent of the undergraduate student body.

The university has a resourceful off-campus housing office that maintains a very user-friendly [off-campus listing Web site](#). While [there are rentals at rates competitive with on-campus housing](#), [there are also premium rentals that are more expensive](#). The university and community are quite accommodating to varied housing budgets considering that Amherst and the surrounding towns are also quite desirable to working professionals and retirees.

Connections

Of the more than 171,000 UMass-Amherst alumni registered on [LinkedIn.com](#), 55 percent are based in a larger New England metropolitan area (Boston, Springfield, Hartford, Providence) with nearly 68,000 around Boston alone. But there are is also a very large base in and around New York City (over 15,500) as well as San Francisco (4,400), Washington DC (3,900), Los Angeles (2,800) and Philadelphia (2,700). There are also more than 1,000 alumni each in the Denver, Chicago and Atlanta metropolitan areas.

The university has more than enough career development staff, services and connections to help any diligent student, even if they want to work in major cities such as Boston, New York or Philadelphia in a summer or school year opportunity. UMass-Amherst career services offer students the options for [credited internships](#) or [cooperative education](#) for majors excluding those that already have clinical assignments or practicums built into the degree program. [The university also extends these opportunities to graduating seniors and alumni](#), for a \$512 fee. In addition to having a central career development office that coordinates the internship and cooperative education processes as well as on campus recruitment and networking events, the individual colleges also have their own career development centers.



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Conclusion

UMass-Amherst has almost everything academic, social and career related program that can be expected of a flagship state university—and its based in one of the most livable college settings in the country. This can be a very good school for someone who enters committed to a major, especially in the liberal arts or the Honors College as well as subjects such as Computer Science, Education, Food Science, Public Health, Hospitality/Tourism and Sports Management.

But UMass-Amherst is not the best place for students who might be, for example, uncertain between science vs engineering or business vs a social science when they arrive as a freshman. Nor is the best place for those who want a “spirit and sports” experience mixed with their education or want a campus dominated by ivy-covered buildings. But if a UMass-Amherst student wants to trek around a more traditional setting or make new friends off campus, all they need to do is ride a bus to Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke or Smith.

Report Card: University of Massachusetts-Amherst

- Four-Year/Six-Year Graduation Rates: A
- Freshman Retention: A
- Costs: B
- Curriculum: A
- Community: A
- Comforts: B+
- Connections: A