

Prospective Student Commonly Asked Questions



My sister, a senior in high school and a prospective UMass Amherst student, visited me at the University over Homecoming Weekend. As I got off the elevator on the 23rd floor of the [W.E.B. Du Bois library](#) to show her the incredible view of campus it offers, I was reminded of the many informational sessions I hosted over the summer for prospective students.



This past summer, I worked as a Peer Ambassador for Commonwealth Honors College. In addition to performing reception duties, I met with prospective students and their families to provide them with an overview of CHC and answered any questions they may have had about Commonwealth Honors College, UMass Amherst as a whole, or even college in general.

Below I have listed some of the most commonly asked questions and my typical responses. Please leave your own comments in the submission box below or call our office to speak with a current peer ambassador at 413-577-2610 to ask questions or even schedule your own info session!

What is the relationship between Commonwealth Honors College and UMass Amherst as a whole?

This was usually the question asked first and it was the trickiest to answer! Some people have misconceptions about Commonwealth Honors College and think it is entirely separate from the rest of the University, but there is incredible overlap. In fact, in order to stay on track to graduate from Commonwealth Honors College in the typical four years, a student only needs to take 1-2 honors classes a semester. This means that the rest of a student's schedule is usually made up of non-honors courses. Commonwealth Honors College students do not have to live in a different residential area than the rest of the UMass Amherst population and they certainly do not only meet other honors students. Commonwealth Honors College is a small community of scholars within a larger, publicly-funded, research-based institution—the best of both worlds!

What is the biggest difference between honors classes and non-honors classes? Which do you prefer?

The most obvious difference between honors and non-honors classes is size. Honors classes are capped at about 25 students, but in my experience, are usually less. Consequently, there is a greater expectation from the instructor for critical thinking and contributions to class discussions. Since honors classes are so small, it is easy to get to know the instructor well. Like I mentioned in the previous answer, most CHC students only take 1-2 honors classes a semester. Personally, I love the change of pace. I like going from a 200-person Biology of Social Issues lecture to a class of about twenty students sitting around an oval table to discuss the Arab Spring in Honors Comparative Politics. All UMass professors and teaching assistants are required to hold office hours each week so students can meet with them. From my experience, they are happy to talk with students about anything during office hours-- **from the weather to last week's homework assignment!** There are plenty of opportunities for students to get to know their professors better, but in an honors class, you do without even trying!

What are RAPs and Honors RAPs? Would you recommend participating in an Honors RAP?

UMass Amherst offers both RAPs and Honors RAPs. Commonwealth Honors College students can choose to enroll in either. RAPs, or residential academic programs, are themed academic learning communities for first-year students. Basically, in RAPs, a community of students with similar academic interests live together in a residence hall and have one or more classes in common, some of which may be taught in the residential area. First-year students are not required to be a part of a RAP, but many students find that it makes the transition to college life easier because it helps them feel like they are a part of a small community within such a large university by connecting with students with similar interests, which can be especially helpful for forming study groups, or better yet, organizing study breaks!

<http://youtu.be/2aAarDLOpmA>

Most first-year students opt to live in a RAP or an Honors RAP. It's a personal decision, but I loved my experience in an Honors RAP. My closest friends on campus now were students who lived on the same floor as me during my first year. The summer before my first year of college, I was able to sign up for a RAP online. I chose to join the Ancient Culture Honors RAP to take Honors Ancient Roman Civilization and an honors seminar called Ideas That Changed the World. Please note that RAPs vary slightly year to year. For example, the Ancient Culture Honors RAP now features Honors Greek Civilization instead of Honors Ancient Roman Civilization.

Learn more about [RAPs](#) here. Pay special attention to the [FAQ section](#) and the listings of RAPs and [Honors RAPs](#).

How will living arrangements for Commonwealth Honors College students differ once the new [Honors Residential Complex](#) is completed?

Commonwealth Honors College students have freedom to choose where they live on campus, and of course, off campus arrangements are always an option, too! With that being said, CHC first-years who do decide to participate in an Honors RAP live together on the same floor of a dorm building. This year, the Orchard Hill residential area is home to eight Honors RAPs, the Central residential area is home to three, and the Northeast residential area is home to one. When the [Honors Residential Complex](#) is completed in the summer of 2013, honors students will have the option of living there.

This is what the view from the athletic fields will look like once the Honors Residential Complex is completed in 2013. The blue is the new complex, but the rest of the buildings shown already exist on campus! :)



What other colleges and universities did you consider applying to and what made you choose UMass Amherst?

I applied to UMass Amherst during my senior year of high school, as well as a few other universities in Boston and Washington, D.C. I always knew that I either wanted to attend a big university or a college or university in a big city for all the excitement. I was also very sure that I wanted to study political science and international relations. To me, Boston and Washington, D.C. offered many valuable educational and work opportunities for that field and had that city "hustle and bustle" I was looking for. I was either accepted or wait-listed to all of the schools I applied to, but ultimately, UMass Amherst appealed to me the most, especially as a student who grew up in Massachusetts.

UMass Amherst is a city in itself! There is always something to do on campus, downtown, or at one of the other local colleges in the [Five College Consortium](#). Before I made my decision, I realized that the opportunities other colleges and universities boasted about could be found here at UMass Amherst just as easily and for about half the cost! For example, my concerns about getting an internship in politics melted away the more I heard about the helpful Career Services office, the amazing network of alumni mentors, the experience of department advisors, as well as the countless informational sessions held about how to land awesome internships all over the world. (UMass Amherst was recently named one of the top 10 national universities producing the most interns by the U.S. News & World Report!) A UMass Amherst education is a great value. The University is attracting impressive students from all over the world and is becoming more and more reputable every year.

In addition, the invitation I received to join Commonwealth Honors College played a major role in my decision to attend UMass Amherst because it promised to greatly challenge its students in the areas of analysis, research, leadership, and community engagement.

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