

Differentiating Admission Standards at UMass-Amherst to Meet Out-of-State Enrollment Targets

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Introduction

UMass' flagship Amherst campus has become increasingly prestigious over the last decade and a half. The school has climbed the national rankings, reaching 27th on the U.S. News & World Report's top public national university list in 2017.¹ The growing prominence of UMass Amherst has made the school competitive with the nation's most elite public universities. However, the policies that have largely driven the school's standings have controversial implications for Massachusetts residents seeking to enroll there. Massachusetts students are finding it increasingly difficult to gain admission, and some parents of rejected or waitlisted UMass applicants share concerns that the University has prioritized maximizing the financial benefit derived from accepting out-of-state students over serving in-state applicants.

Pioneer Institute found that high school grade point averages (GPAs) and SAT scores for non-resident students accepted at UMass Amherst were actually lower, on average, than for in-state applicants for the period from 2010 through 2016.

At many public universities across the country, out-of-state students pay higher tuition and fees, helping to shore up institutional budgets. In 2014, UMass aimed to have a quarter undergraduate students enrolled at the Amherst campus be from out-of-state by the fall of 2017,² up from actual enrollment of 18.7 percent in 2004. However, some public universities in other states are moving in the opposite direction by capping non-resident enrollment. The University of California, for example, capped non-residents at 20 percent of the total student population in 2017.

In addition to paying higher tuition, the general belief has been that non-resident students help augment intellectual rigor on campus. However, UMass Amherst data on admission standards for incoming freshman for the past several years cast doubt on that notion, since those students have no better qualifications than their in-state peers.

At UMass Amherst, the average high school GPA and SAT scores of accepted students have ratcheted up over the last decade, believed in part to be due to the high quality of non-resident students and the competitive factors they bring to the school. While that in fact may be true, a closer look at the numbers reveals a trend that may run counter to that perception. Through a public records request of the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, Pioneer Institute found that high school grade point averages (GPAs) and SAT scores for non-resident students accepted at UMass Amherst were actually *lower*, on average, than for in-state applicants for the period from 2010 through 2016.

Public universities employ varying recruitment policies to determine acceptance rates for out-of-state and in-state applicants. The University of California, for instance, had been on a similar course as UMass when a state audit found that the University had lowered its standards for non-resident admissions.³ For example, the audit revealed that at the Berkeley campus, the flagship of its university system, the average high school GPA of accepted non-residents students was lower than the average GPA of accepted in-state students.

The audit sparked public uproar and advanced a policy whereby the University would only accept out-of-state students with higher academic qualifications than the average of accepted in-state students. Under the new practice, accepted out-of-state students at Berkeley in the fall of 2017 far out-performed in-state accepted students, scoring on average 115 points higher on the combined SAT. The average GPA of non-resident accepted students was also higher than the average of in-state accepted students.⁴

At UMass Amherst in the fall of 2016, the average combined SAT scores of accepted, in-state, first-time degree-seeking students were 23 points *higher* than the average of similar students accepted from out-of-state. The numbers imply that Massachusetts residents are held to a higher standard for admission.

The Growth in the Out-Of-State Student Population

UMass has admitted a growing number of out-of-state students over the last decade. Figure 1 shows that out-of-state undergraduate enrollment doubled at the four undergraduate UMass campuses, from 5,036 in 2004 to 10,077 in 2016. In terms of raw numbers, UMass Amherst had the largest numerical increase in out-of-state enrollment, growing 63 percent from 3,401 students in 2004 to 5,540 in 2016. Amherst's in-state undergraduate population increased by 3,095 over the same period. UMass Boston grew from 630 to 2,082 out-of-staters during this time, representing a 230 percent increase. UMass Dartmouth increased 71 percent, from 354 non-residents in 2004 to 605 in 2016. Finally, UMass Lowell's out-of-state undergrad population increased by 184 percent, from 651 in 2004 to 1,850 in 2016.

Figure 2 shows UMass' out-of-state enrollment as a percentage of each year's incoming class of first-time freshmen. Out-of-state freshman enrollment at UMass Amherst has increased by nearly 13 percent since 2004, according to self-reported data. In 2016, out-of-state students made up 26.4 percent of the freshman class.

Figure 1 – Undergraduate Enrollment (Total, In-state, Out-of-state), by UMass Campus⁵

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Change from 2004 – 2016	% Change from 2004 – 2016
Total Undergraduate Enrollment															
UMASS SYSTEM	39,017	44,180	45,344	46,928	48,705	50,444	51,966	52,987	53,901	54,671	55,392	56,258	56,861	17,844	45.7%
Amherst	18,139	19,394	19,823	20,114	20,539	20,873	21,373	21,812	21,928	22,134	22,252	22,748	23,373	5,234	28.9%
Boston	8,027	8,958	9,246	10,008	10,478	11,041	11,568	11,866	12,124	12,366	12,700	12,949	12,847	4,820	60.0%
Dartmouth	6,535	7,519	7,626	7,927	7,982	7,982	7,749	7,580	7,562	7,437	7,454	7,295	6,999	464	7.1%
Lowell	6,316	8,309	8,649	8,879	9,706	10,548	11,276	11,729	12,287	12,734	12,986	13,266	13,642	7,326	116.0%
In-state Undergraduate Enrollment															
UMASS SYSTEM	33,981	37,988	38,924	40,209	41,864	43,632	44,503	44,756	44,914	45,064	45,312	45,817	46,784	12,803	37.7%
Amherst	14,738	15,670	15,820	16,018	16,402	16,838	16,932	17,047	16,952	16,900	16,949	17,277	17,833	3,095	21.0%
Boston	7,397	7,797	8,219	8,890	9,493	10,082	10,467	10,556	10,610	10,639	10,734	10,866	10,765	3,368	45.5%
Dartmouth	6,181	7,114	7,245	7,586	7,633	7,636	7,400	7,214	7,123	6,969	6,939	6,762	6,394	213	3.4%
Lowell	5,665	7,407	7,640	7,715	8,336	9,076	9,704	9,939	10,229	10,556	10,690	10,912	11,792	6,127	108.2%
Out-of-state Undergraduate Enrollment															
UMASS SYSTEM	5,036	6,192	6,420	6,719	6,841	6,812	7,463	8,231	8,987	9,607	10,080	10,441	10,077	5,041	100.1%
% of Total Enrollment	12.9%	14.0%	14.2%	14.3%	14.0%	13.5%	14.4%	15.5%	16.7%	17.6%	18.2%	18.6%	17.7%		
Amherst	3,401	3,724	4,003	4,096	4,137	4,035	4,441	4,765	4,976	5,234	5,303	5,471	5,540	2,139	62.9%
% of Total Enrollment	18.70%	19.20%	20.20%	20.40%	20.10%	19.30%	20.80%	21.80%	22.70%	23.60%	23.80%	24.10%	23.70%		
Boston	630	1,161	1,027	118	985	959	1,101	1,310	1,514	1,727	1,966	2,083	2,082	1,452	230.5%
% of Total Enrollment	7.8%	13.0%	11.1%	1.2%	9.4%	8.7%	9.5%	11.0%	12.5%	14.0%	15.5%	16.1%	16.2%		
Dartmouth	354	405	381	341	349	346	349	366	439	468	515	533	605	251	70.9%
% of Total Enrollment	5.4%	5.4%	5.0%	4.3%	4.4%	4.3%	4.5%	4.8%	5.8%	6.3%	6.9%	7.3%	8.6%		
Lowell	651	902	1,009	1,164	1,370	1,472	1,572	1,790	2,058	2,178	2,296	2,354	1,850	1,199	184.2%
% of Total Enrollment	10.3%	10.9%	11.7%	13.1%	14.1%	14.0%	13.9%	15.3%	16.7%	17.1%	17.7%	17.7%	13.6%		

Figure 2: First-Year Freshmen Enrollment (Total, In-state, Out-of-state), by UMass Campus⁶

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Change 2004–2016	% Change 2004–2016
Total First-Time Freshmen Enrollment															
Total	7,129	7,841	7,963	8,226	8,248	8,144	8,672	8,845	8,797	9,105	9,332	9,370	9,343	2,214	31.1%
Amherst	4,222	4,427	4,190	4,286	4,144	4,124	4,469	4,688	4,592	4,621	4,642	4,661	4,643	421	10.0%
Boston	565	781	947	997	1,020	987	1,129	1,297	1,267	1,413	1,542	1,680	1,651	1,086	192.2%
Dartmouth	1,330	1,545	1,592	1,700	1,556	1,511	1,440	1,429	1,443	1,435	1,509	1,431	1,367	37	2.8%
Lowell	1,012	1,088	1,234	1,243	1,528	1,522	1,634	1,431	1,495	1,636	1,639	1,598	1,682	670	66.2%
In-state First-Time Freshmen Enrollment															
Total	5,813	6,660	6,796	6,912	6,916	6,950	7,040	7,015	7,001	7,282	7,292	7,378	7,548	1,735	29.8%
Amherst	3,137	3,496	3,218	3,263	3,189	3,233	3,249	3,378	3,333	3,353	3,338	3,360	3,418	281	9.0%
Boston	512	695	937	862	887	892	957	999	958	1,094	1,133	1,262	1,298	786	153.5%
Dartmouth	1,252	1,473	1,515	1,626	1,484	1,440	1,376	1,372	1,373	1,371	1,416	1,354	1,265	13	1.0%
Lowell	912	996	1,126	1,161	1,356	1,385	1,458	1,266	1,337	1,464	1,405	1,402	1,567	655	71.8%
Out-of-state Undergraduate Enrollment															
Total	1,316	1,181	1,270	1,322	1,332	1,194	1,632	1,830	1,796	1,823	2,040	1,992	1,795	479	36.4%
% of Total Enrollment	18.5%	15.1%	15.9%	16.1%	16.1%	14.7%	18.8%	20.7%	20.4%	20.0%	21.9%	21.3%	19.2%		
Amherst	1,085	931	972	1,023	955	891	1,220	1,310	1,259	1,268	1,304	1,301	1,225	140	12.9%
% of Total Enrollment	25.7%	21.0%	23.2%	23.9%	23.0%	21.6%	27.3%	27.9%	27.4%	27.4%	28.1%	27.9%	26.4%		
Boston	53	86	113	135	133	95	172	298	309	319	409	418	353	300	566.0%
% of Total Enrollment	9.4%	11.0%	11.9%	13.5%	13.0%	9.6%	15.2%	23.0%	24.4%	22.6%	26.5%	24.9%	21.4%		
Dartmouth	78	72	77	82	72	71	64	57	70	64	93	77	102	24	30.8%
% of Total Enrollment	5.9%	4.7%	4.8%	4.8%	4.6%	4.7%	4.4%	4.0%	4.9%	4.5%	6.2%	5.4%	7.5%		
Lowell	100	92	108	82	172	137	176	165	158	172	234	196	115	15	15.0%
% of Total Enrollment	9.9%	8.5%	8.8%	6.6%	11.3%	9.0%	10.8%	11.5%	10.6%	10.5%	14.3%	12.3%	6.8%		

Acceptances for students from outside Massachusetts have increased by almost 133 percent since 2004

The strategy of growing out-of-state admissions is not unique to UMass. California is another of the many states where public universities have expanded out-of-state enrollment in recent years. After non-resident enrollment at the University

of California (UC) increased by 82 percent from 2010–11 to 2014–15, a state auditor's report found that the UC system actively evaded their own requirements that only allow a non-resident student to be accepted if he or she meets or exceeds the median qualifications for resident students. The report found that UC admitted almost 16,000 non-residents with lower qualifications over

the period examined, and denied approximately 4,300 residents whose qualifications were higher than the median of non-resident qualifications.⁷ Additionally, the report accused the system of making resident enrollment “less appealing” by

often denying residents admission to their first-choice campus, while accepting out-of-state applicants to their first-choice location.⁸

North Carolina provides another instructive example. To curb growing out-of-state enrollment, in 1986 the University of North Carolina capped the number of out-of-state students it enrolls to 18 percent of total enrollment.⁹ In 2016, UNC's flagship campus at Chapel Hill was penalized for exceeding its non-resident enrollment cap for the second consecutive year, with 19.5 percent of enrollees coming from out-of-state.¹⁰

UMass Amherst Applicant Profiles

Without distinguishing between resident and non-resident profiles, standards for admission to UMass Amherst have risen significantly over the past decade. This is identifiable in terms of both high school GPA and standardized test scores, two central criteria universities weigh in assessing applicants' candidacies.

Figure 3: High School GPA and SAT Scores of First-Time Degree-Seeking Students Admitted to (Enrolled and Not Enrolled) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst by Massachusetts Residency¹¹

		Fall-2010		Fall-2011		Fall-2012		Fall-2013		Fall-2014		Fall-2015		Fall-2016	
		Out-of-State	In-State	Out-of-State	In-State	Out-of-State	In-State	Out-of-State	In-State	Out-of-State	In-State	Out-of-State	In-State	Out-of-State	In-State
Average High School GPA		3.57	3.77	3.61	3.77	3.63	3.82	3.67	3.87	3.70	3.91	3.75	3.95	3.78	3.97
Count of High School GPA Provided	Not Provided	34	71	53	67	27	55	41	80	28	78	30	80	29	57.00
	Provided	8,454	11,617	9,070	11,418	9,291	11,143	10,210	11,505	10,273	11,624	10,456	11,576	9,884	11780.00
	Total	8,488	11,688	9,123	11,485	9,318	11,198	10,251	11,585	10,301	11,702	10,486	11,656	9,913	11,837

		Fall-2010		Fall-2011		Fall-2012		Fall-2013		Fall-2014		Fall-2015		Fall-2016	
		Out-of-State	In-State	Out-of-State	In-State	Out-of-State	In-State	Out-of-State	In-State	Out-of-State	In-State	Out-of-State	In-State	Out-of-State	In-State
Average SAT Scores	SAT Combined	1182	1215	1197	1229	1202	1234	1215	1249	1221	1256	1238	1263	1242	1266
	SAT Verbal	581	597	589	604	591	606	594	613	596	616	604	621	611	624
	SAT Math	601	619	608	624	611	628	621	636	625	640	634	642	631	642
Count of SAT Provided	Not Provided	1,141	589	1,409	600	1,413	718	1,825	828	2,109	1,060	2,543	1,504	3,147	1,875
	Provided	7,347	11,099	7,714	10,885	7,905	10,480	8,426	10,757	8,192	10,642	7,943	10,152	6,766	9,962
	Total	8,488	11,688	9,123	11,485	9,318	11,198	10,251	11,585	10,301	11,702	10,486	11,656	9,913	11,837

Between 2004 and 2017, the average combined SAT scores of an entering first-year student at UMass Amherst rose from 1137 to 1268¹². During the same period, the average high school GPA rose from 3.29 to 3.89. Between 2009 and 2017, average composite ACT scores increased from 25 to 28.

Based on information provided to Pioneer Institute by the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education in response to a public records request, there are notable differences when comparing the profiles of in-state and out-of-state students accepted at UMass Amherst. For fall admission periods from 2010 to 2016, the average GPA of admitted Massachusetts

first-time degree-seeking residents was 3.87, while the average GPA of a non-resident was 3.67. Figure 3 shows that for fall 2016 admissions, the average GPA for accepted in-state and out-of-state first-time degree-seeking students was 3.97 and 3.78, respectively. Average composite SAT scores for admitted in-state and out-of-state first-time degree-seeking students were 1245 and 1214, respectively. For fall 2016 admissions, the average SAT composite scores

were 1265 and 1242 for in-state and out-of-state admitted first-time degree-seeking students, respectively.

Figures 4 and 5 show sustained differences in application standards for resident and non-resident students that underscore what’s already common knowledge about Amherst and its counterparts: While UMass has become harder to get into overall, the differential between in-state applicants than their out-of-state peers suggests that admissions standards are higher for the former. The clear distinctions in the academic profiles of admitted out-of-state and in-state students should be important considerations for public officials contemplating the future mission of UMass.

Acceptances

In 2004, UMass Amherst received 17,930 applications. In 2017, the campus received 41,922 applications, a 134 percent increase. Meanwhile, the overall acceptance rate dropped from 81.4 percent in 2004 to 57.5 percent in 2017. The discrepancy between acceptance rates of in-state and out-of-state students over this timeframe is noteworthy (see figure 1). Between 2004 and 2017, the in-state acceptance rate decreased from 81.1 to 56.6 percent. Over the same span, the out-of-state acceptance rate decreased slightly less, from 81.9 to 58.5 percent. Furthermore, the in-state acceptance rate has been lower than that for out-of-state applicants since 2008.¹³

The number of acceptances of in-state and out-of-state

The goal is for 25 percent of undergraduates to be from outside of Massachusetts by FY2018

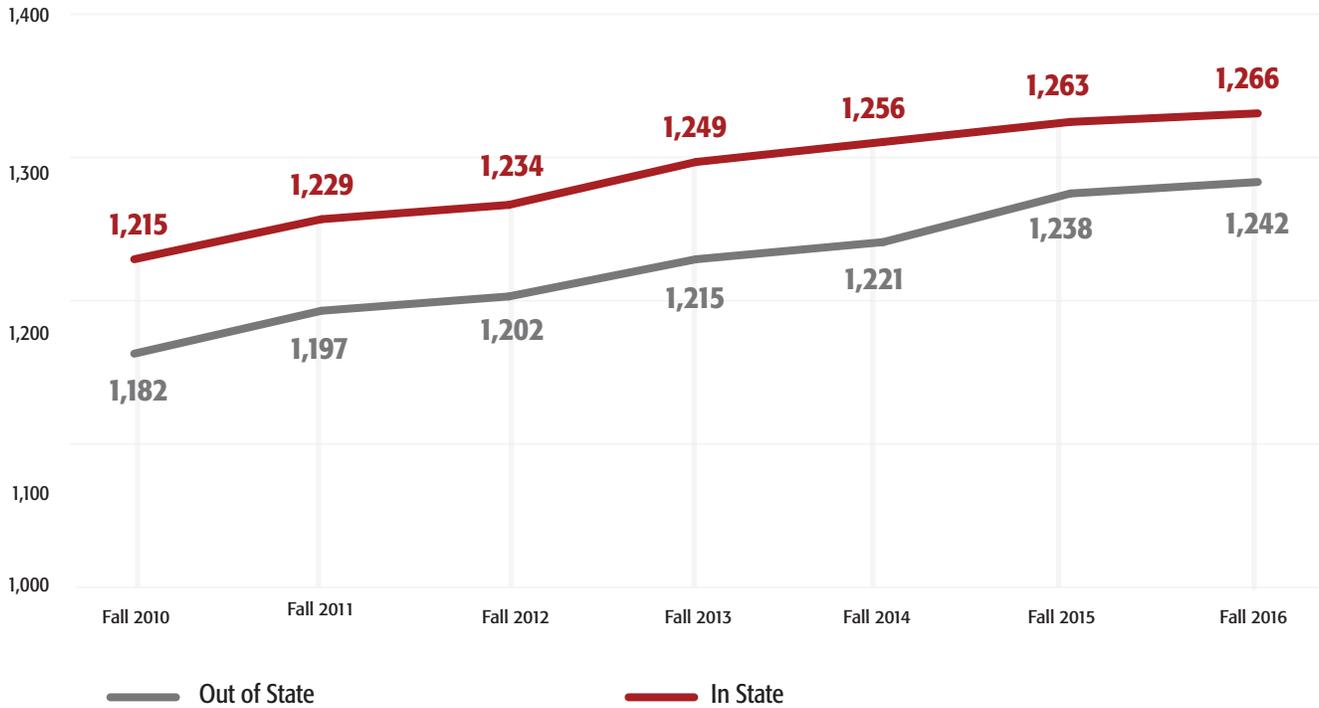
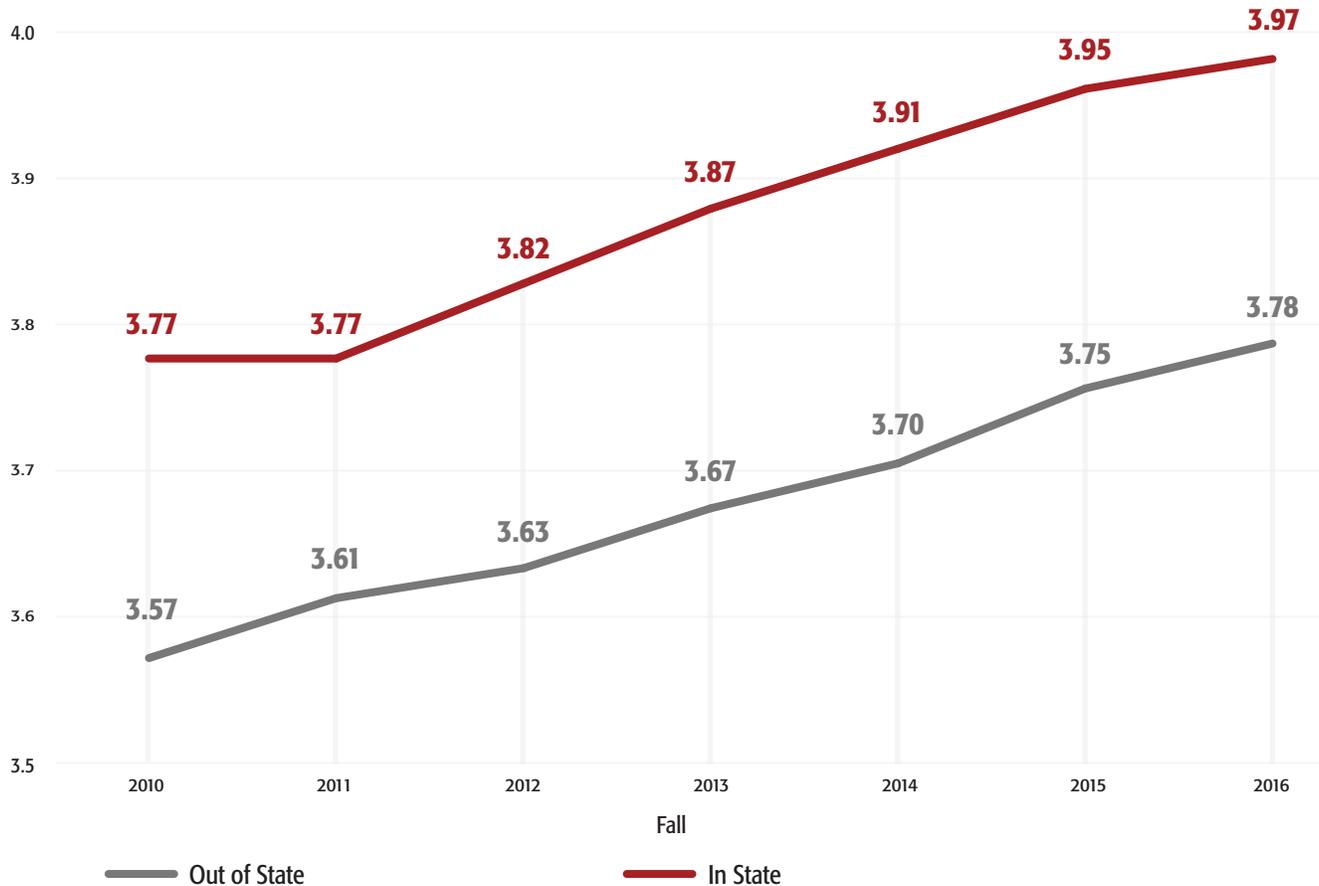
Figure 4: Changes in In-state versus Out-of-state Applicants' Average Combined SAT Scores¹⁴Figure 5: Changes in Averages of In-state versus Out-of-state High School GPA's of First Time Degree-Seeking Students Admitted to UMass Amherst¹⁵

Figure 6: Changes in UMass Amherst In-state versus Out-of-state Acceptance Rates (Fall 2004 – 2017)¹⁶

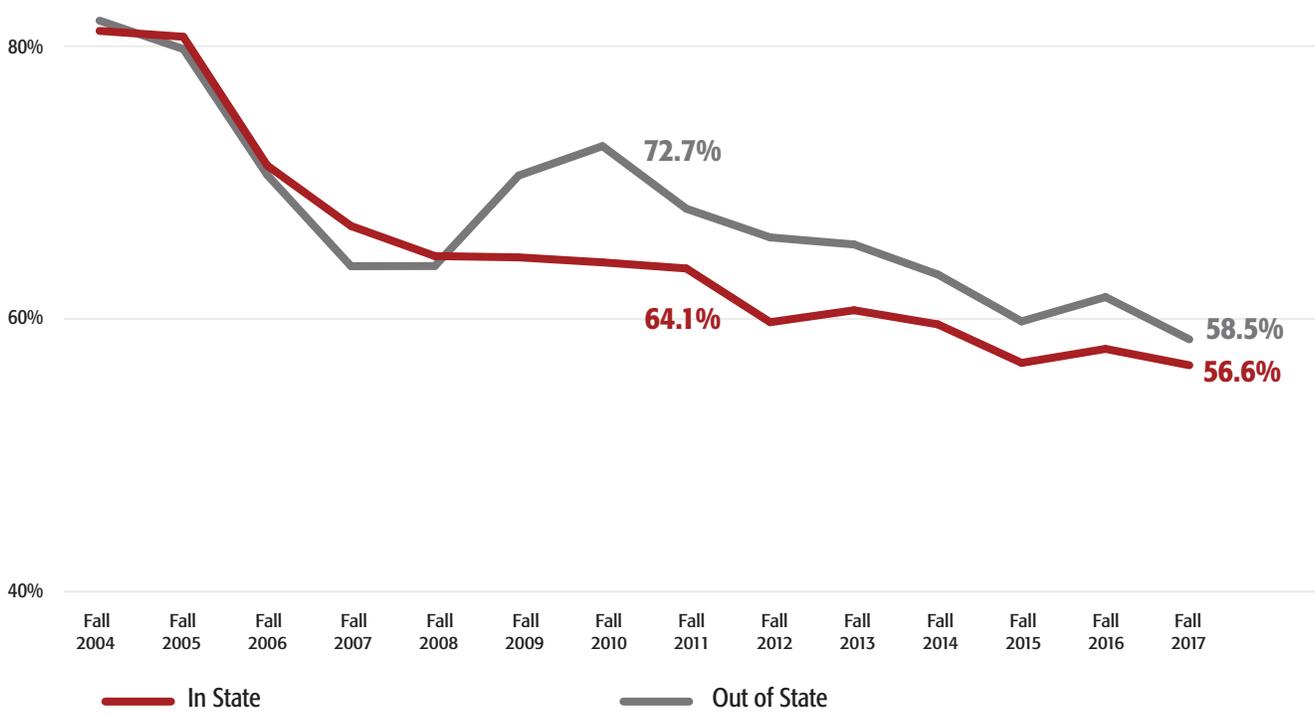
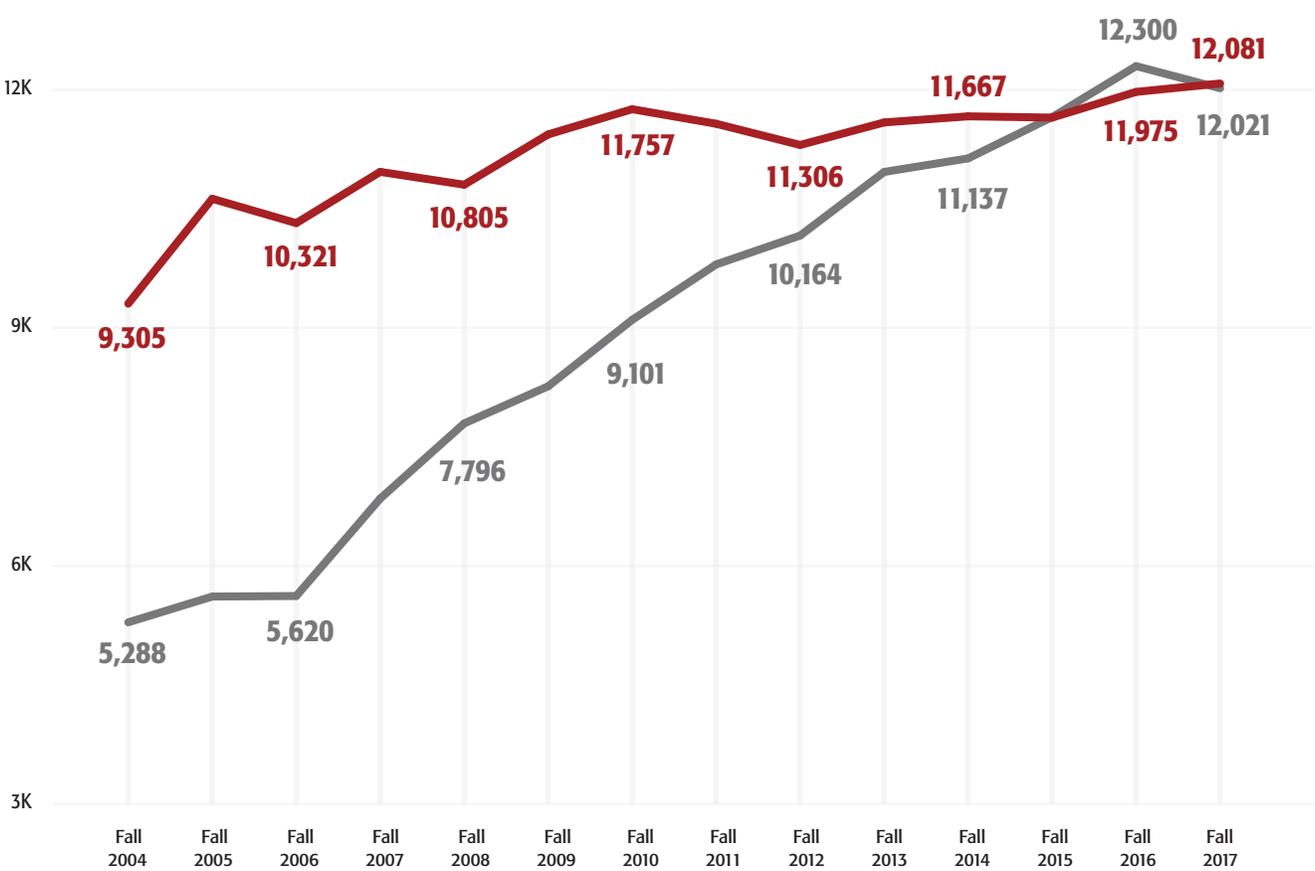


Figure 7: Changes in Number of Raw Acceptances of In-state versus Out-of-state Applicants (2004 – 2017)¹⁷



students from 2004 to 2017 (see figure 7) offers deeper insight into the UMass system's shifting recruitment trends. Earlier, this report stated that UMass Amherst admitted more out-of-state students than in-state students for the 2015 – 2016 academic year. When looking at the University's self-reported admissions data over the past 13 years (through 2017), this fact squares with the school's trajectory of increased out-of-state admissions. In-state acceptances to UMass Amherst have increased by approximately 30 percent since 2004. By contrast, acceptances for non-residents have increased by 127 percent since 2004. From 2010–2017, in-state acceptances remained relatively constant but out-of-state acceptances increased by 32 percent in this period alone.

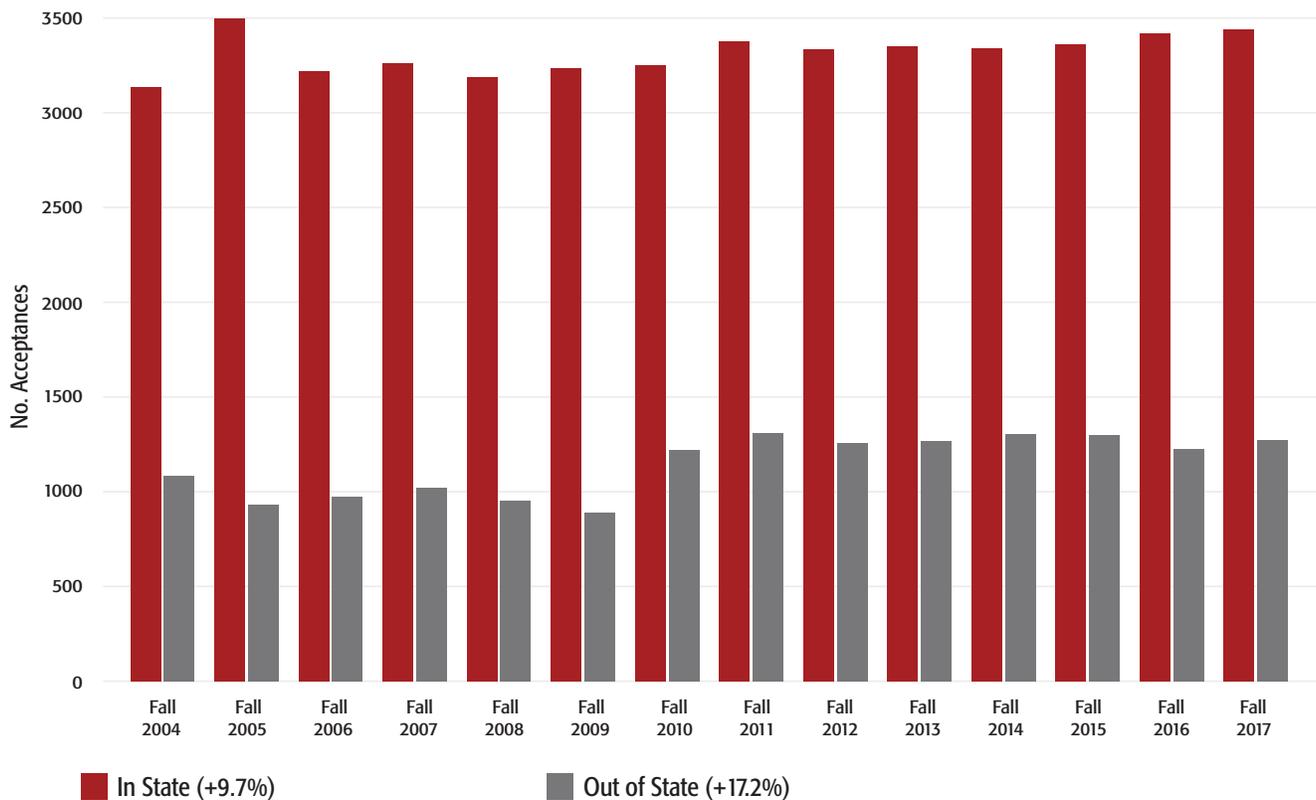
These admissions changes, taken from publicly reported UMass Amherst data¹⁸, show a pattern in which a higher proportion of out-of-state students have been accepted to UMass each year for over a decade, with the exception of fall 2017, when more in-state than out-of-state students were accepted for the first time since 2014. The combined trends of increasing the volume of out-of-state acceptances and a slightly higher acceptance rate for this cohort suggest that it is getting easier for out-of-state students to matriculate at UMass Amherst, while admissions standards have become disproportionately more rigorous for Massachusetts residents.

Enrollment

Amherst is not the only campus where these trends are observable. As described in Pioneer's 2016 UMass Reports¹⁹, out-of-state enrollment rose by 84.5 percent across the other four UMass undergraduate campuses between 2008 and 2015. Over those eight years, in-state enrollment overall dropped by 8 percent. For UMass Amherst specifically, enrollment changes are not as dramatic as those for acceptance. From 2004 to 2017, in-state enrollments have increased at Amherst by almost 10 percent, while out-of-state enrollments have increased by more than 17 percent. In other words, Figure 8 shows that UMass is increasing the number of out-of-state acceptances, but it is not translating into significantly more enrollees. The freshman yield ratio (the number of matriculants versus acceptances) for out-of-state students is falling while acceptances for out-of-state students rose 76 percent from 2004 to 2017, actual enrollment during this period only increased by 3 percent for out-of-state students. Thus, Amherst is having to accept larger numbers of non-residents to maintain their target level of out-of-state enrollment and matriculation.

For the Amherst campus to maintain its current percentage of out-of-state enrollment, it has to recruit non-residents much more aggressively, even if that means accepting students with academic credentials that are less competitive on

Figure 8: Changes in UMass Amherst In-state versus Out-of-state Enrollments (2004 – 2017)²⁰



average. While state residents still make up the majority of each incoming class, in-state students may see the opportunity to attend UMass Amherst slip away due to the university's goal of increasing out-of-state enrollment.

This trend is small, but steady. The University of Massachusetts 2014 Planning Report²¹ sets forth enrollment growth goals for both in-state and out-of-state cohorts. FY2013 numbers indicate actual figures, while FY2018 numbers reflect annual targets.

Figure 9: Enrollment Growth Targets for UMass System²²

UMass System – Total Students		FY2013	FY2018	Increase
Undergraduate	In-state	44,911	47,966	6.8%
	Out-of-state	8,990	12,146	35.1%
Graduate	In-state	9,400	10,182	8.3%
	Out-of-state	7,473	9,324	24.8%

Figure 10: Enrollment Growth Targets for UMass Amherst Campus²³

UMass Amherst		FY2013	FY2018	Increase
Undergraduate	In-state	16,592	17,063	2.8%
	Out-of-state	4,976	5,688	14.3%
Graduate	In-state	2,270	2,210	-2.6%
	Out-of-state	4,038	4,290	6.2%

UMass aims to increase out-of-state enrollment among both undergraduate and graduate students across its five campuses. For the Amherst campus, the University is seeking to increase its out-of-state undergraduate population by 14.3 percent from FY2013 to FY2018, while increasing in-state enrollment by less than 3 percent. If the FY2018 plan is realized, out-of-state students will grow to over 20 percent of total system-wide enrollment. At the flagship Amherst campus, the goal is for 25 percent of undergraduates to be from outside of Massachusetts by FY2018. As of the fall of 2017, the number was 23 percent.²⁴

UMass Amherst's graduate enrollment targets are even more aggressive. FY2018 targets show that the campus is looking to decrease in-state graduate enrollment by almost 3 percent and increase out-of-state by over 6 percent. While these changes are slight, the strategic decrease in graduate enrollment for in-state students suggests the policy might compromise enrollment opportunities for qualified Massachusetts residents.

Conclusion

The UMass system has aggressively sought to increase its out-of-state population, and UMass Amherst in particular has defended its nonresident recruitment efforts. Data presented by the 2016 Pioneer reports combined with information in this paper delineate UMass' proactive out-of-state recruitment. In addition to less rigorous admissions standards for out-of-staters than for their Massachusetts counterparts, the disparate allocation of scholarships—while not a central focus of this paper—likewise makes it harder for state residents to attend the University and is a topic that warrants further research. While a geographically diverse student body is important, the central mission of the University of Massachusetts is to serve the commonwealth's citizens.

Despite UMass being significantly less expensive for in-state students, individuals facing difficult financial challenges cannot take advantage of what has traditionally been an affordable avenue to a college degree if they are not admitted.

What can be done to address these trends and ameliorate the harm to Massachusetts residents? Examples from other state university systems offer useful guidance.

One option is to implement a nonresident enrollment cap. Several state universities facing a similar problem have mandated in- and out-of-state quotas to prevent residents from being excluded. The University of California and University of North Carolina systems recently instituted strict enrollment caps after significant public outcry about the schools' growing inaccessibility to residents. Just this year, UC regents approved an 18 percent nonresident undergraduate enrollment cap²⁵. UNC-Chapel Hill was fined \$1 million in 2016 for going 1.5 percentage points above its 18 percent nonresident cap²⁶ in 2016.

The University of Massachusetts should also consider conducting an analysis to determine how many out-of-state students ultimately make Massachusetts their permanent home after graduation. State taxpayers, who heavily subsidize UMass, should be informed of the ultimate fruits of the subsidies they fund. If out-of-state graduates stay here in large numbers to expand our economy and fill jobs in sectors where labor shortages exist, the long-term impact of the school's present policy may show benefits. Without such an analysis, the public is left in the dark and should rightfully question UMass' approach to enrollment.

Endnotes

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About Pioneer

Pioneer Institute is an independent, non-partisan, privately funded research organization that seeks to improve the quality of life in Massachusetts through civic discourse and intellectually rigorous, data-driven public policy solutions based on free market principles, individual liberty and responsibility, and the ideal of effective, limited and accountable government.

