



## **MASSACHUSETTS UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS STANDARDS**

**MASSACHUSETTS STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM AND THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS**

### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**April 2016**

The purpose of this document is to provide answers to additional frequently asked questions about the minimum undergraduate admission standards for Massachusetts State Universities and University of Massachusetts (UMass) campuses. This updated document provides responses to new questions that have been asked by students, parents, and family members; college admissions officers; and high school principals, teachers, and counselors.

The Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (DHE) has also published a "Reference Guide" with a full description of the Commonwealth's approved undergraduate admissions standards, for Massachusetts public colleges and universities. This is available at the following website: <http://www.mass.edu/forstufam/admissions/admissionsstandards.asp>.

This Undergraduate Admission Standards Reference Guide includes detailed information about the subject-matter, GPA, and other standards that have been adopted by the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education (BHE). If you have other questions or require additional assistance, please contact Susan Lane (slane@bhe.mass.edu) at DHE or Nyal Fuentes (nfuentes@doe.mass.edu) at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE).

To assist in key areas, this FAQ is organized around those key areas to provide additional clarity.

### **Undergraduate Admission Requirements and High School GPA**

#### **1. What is the rationale behind establishing the minimum undergraduate admissions standards?**

These admissions standards were established to emphasize the importance of successfully completing a rigorous academic course of study in high school (example MassCore, a

recommended program of studies that includes specific numbers and types of courses across academic subjects) to ensure that students are well prepared to begin college courses and their path to degree. Further these minimum undergraduate admissions standards increase consistency across the state universities and UMass campuses.

**2. Do these minimum undergraduate admissions standards apply to all state university and UMass campuses? What about community colleges?**

Yes – these standards apply to undergraduate admissions at all state universities and UMass Amherst, UMass Boston, UMass Dartmouth, and UMass Lowell. The standards do not apply to the community colleges, which implement open admissions and enrollment policies. For additional information about admissions policies at the community colleges, please contact the admissions office at the institution(s) to which you are interested in applying.

**3. If a student meets these minimum undergraduate admission standards, is he or she guaranteed admission to a state university or UMass campus?**

No. Eligibility for admission is not an entitlement of admission for any applicant; as such, meeting the minimum standards does not guarantee admission, since admissions officers consider a wide range of factors when reviewing students' applications, and the state universities and UMass campuses can establish additional requirements. For information about any additional requirements, please contact the admissions office at the institution(s) to which the student is interested in applying.

**4. Are students required to earn a minimum high school GPA in order to be admitted to a state university or UMass campus?**

The minimum average GPA for freshman applicants, weighted for accelerated (Honors and Advanced Placement) courses, is 3.0 for both the state universities and the UMass campuses. However, if an applicant does not have an average weighted GPA of 3.0, s/he must earn specific SAT or ACT scores in order to be considered for admission. Detailed information about the sliding scale for SAT and ACT scores is presented in the DHE Reference Guide, available at: <http://www.mass.edu/forstufam/admissions/admissionsstandards.asp> . **No applicant with a high school GPA below 2.0 will be admitted to a state university or UMass campus.**

**5. How is the GPA weighted?**

Each state university or UMass undergraduate campus to which a student applies will calculate the weighted GPA for purposes of applying the admissions standards. High school GPA's are calculated following policies of the high school. Detailed information about calculating the weighted GPA is presented in the Appendix of the DHE Reference Guide.

**6. Does the minimum required GPA have to be based on grades earned in all high school**

**courses, or just in the required academic courses?**

The average and weighted GPA will be calculated based on all high school level academic courses completed and grades received for courses in which the student is currently enrolled (for example, mathematics courses in which the student is enrolled during the senior year of high school).

**7. What if a student wants to apply for early admission to a state university or UMass campus?**

Early admission applicants should submit grades earned during their first six semesters of high school. Grades earned during remaining semesters should be forwarded to the state university or UMass campus as soon as they become available, but the weighted GPA does not need to be recalculated.

**8. If a high school student fails a course during the regular academic year and is not admitted to an institution, could s/he be eligible for admission if s/he successfully completes the course during summer school?**

If a student successfully completes a course during the summer after the end of his/her senior year and after most colleges have made final admissions decisions, admissions officers may choose to reconsider the student's admissibility if the failing grade was the sole reason for denying admission to the institution. The average and weighted GPA may be recalculated to reflect the additional course.

**High School Program Considerations and Exemptions for Specific Student Groups****9. Who is considered an English Language Learner?**

An English Language Learner or limited English proficient student is defined as a student who does not speak English (or whose native language is not English) and is not currently able to perform ordinary classroom work in English, or a student who was identified as an English Language Learner or limited English proficient student at any point during his or her high school career.

**10. What exceptions, if any, are made for students who are English Language Learners?**

Students who are English Language Learners must complete the required number of academic courses, but with two exceptions: 1) these students may substitute up to two academic electives based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks\* for the two required foreign language courses; and 2) they may also substitute up to two years of English as a Second Language courses for English courses.

Note: \* The Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks refer to core academic areas/courses of ELA, Math, History/Social Science, and Science/Technology Engineering.

**11. If students with disabilities cannot meet specific components of the undergraduate admissions requirements, can they still be admitted to a state university or UMass campus?**

These students must complete the required academic courses and meet the GPA requirement, but detailed information about specific provisions for students with disabilities is available in the updated DHE Admissions Reference Guide. In addition, if a student cannot meet a particular requirement, s/he could still be admitted to a state university or UMass campus within the special admissions category of an institution. Special admissions students are limited to 10% of new enrollees at the state university or UMass campus.

**12. If a student is enrolled in a career/vocational technical high school program at which two years of foreign language courses are offered, will any exceptions be made if s/he does not meet the two-course requirement?**

Students enrolled in career/vocational technical high school program who do not meet the foreign language requirement – the completion of two courses in the same language – must complete an additional academic elective course based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks\* and also satisfy one of the additional requirements: 1) the completion of the equivalent of at least one full academic year of study or its equivalent of a foreign language; 2) a full academic year of study of science technology/engineering, which need not be a laboratory course; or 3) a full academic year of study in computer science.

Note: \* The Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks refer to core academic areas/courses of ELA, Math, History/Social Science, and Science/Technology Engineering.

**13. Does Massachusetts have specific requirements regarding the education of students who are home schooled, and can these students meet the admissions standards?**

Students can be home schooled in accordance with education plans that are approved by the superintendent of the school district in which the student resides.

Additional information about home schooling in Massachusetts is available at the following websites:

- <http://www.mhla.org/supt/FAQforsupt.htm>; and
- <http://www.mhla.org/information/resourcesarticles/guidetohomeschoolinginma.pdf>.

Students who are home schooled are subject to the same admissions requirements as other students. As such, a weighted high school GPA must be calculated. However, if a student's high school transcript does not meet the curricular and GPA requirements identified in the Undergraduate Admissions Standards for Massachusetts State University System and the University of Massachusetts (posted on the DHE website <http://www.mass.edu>), and the

student does not qualify for specific exceptions or allowances, s/he could be admitted to a state university or UMass campus under the special admissions category. Special admissions students are limited to 10% of new enrollees at the state university or UMass campus.

**14. If a student transfers into a Massachusetts high school and is unable to meet the academic course requirement, could that student apply to a state university or UMass campus as a special admissions candidate?**

Applicants not eligible for undergraduate admission based on the standards for freshman, transfer, or non-traditional students may be admitted based upon the demonstration of their potential for academic success at a state university or UMass campus. Appropriate indicators of success include steadily improving high school grades and academic achievement, a high class rank, special talents, and/or strong recommendations from appropriate individuals who have direct knowledge of the student's ability to succeed in college (such as teachers, principals, and school counselors; employers; and mentors). NOTE: Special admissions students are limited to 10% of new enrollees at the state university or UMass campus.

## **High School Curriculum**

**15. Given the variety and large number of mathematics, science, social science and other subject-matter courses that are offered at high schools across Massachusetts, will the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) issue specific guidelines or requirements regarding the alignment of these courses to the admissions standards?**

School district and high school administrators in Massachusetts have the flexibility to offer courses that are aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks at a minimum; these courses can also address additional issues and topics that are not included in the Frameworks. In addition, high school students in Massachusetts are not required by the Commonwealth to complete specific academic courses in order to graduate. Course requirements for graduation are set at the local level. Therefore, ESE will not issue additional guidelines or requirements.

DHE, ESE and districts will provide the following undergraduate admissions guidance. DHE and ESE staff members will continue to respond to questions about the admissions standards. District and high school administrators and educators should review the admissions requirements, especially the subject-matter requirements, to ensure that the content and sequence of high school courses will enable students interested in applying for undergraduate admissions to state universities and UMass to meet all requirements. In addition, these administrators and educators should review course titles and descriptions to ensure that

college admissions officers will clearly understand how specific courses meet the admissions standards. **Lastly, high school transcripts should clearly indicate which courses are designated as mathematics, science, or comparable courses so that admissions officers can easily determine if the student has met all academic course requirements.** Note: Comparable courses are defined as coursework that is equal to or beyond the content defined in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

**16. How should college courses taken through a dual enrollment program be considered with regard to meeting the academic course and GPA requirements?**

Courses completed through dual enrollment programs may be used to meet the academic high school course requirement.

**17. What is the required length of a high school academic course?**

A high school academic course is equivalent to one full year of study. In many high schools, two- or three-semester courses may be equivalent to a full year course, or one full year of study may be completed over the course of one semester. Applicants to the state universities and UMass campuses are required to successfully complete the specific number of courses/years for each academic discipline. Detailed information about the course requirements is presented in the DHE Admissions Reference Guide.

**18. Are applicants required to earn a specific class rank in order to be admitted to a state university or UMass undergraduate campus?**

Class rank is not included in the minimum undergraduate admissions standards for admission. However, state universities and UMass campuses could consider class rank when reviewing the candidate's application; for information about any additional requirements, please contact the admissions office at the institution(s) to which the student is interested in applying.

**19. How will additional information or any updates about the minimum undergraduate admissions standards be shared with students, parents and family members, educators, and others?**

If new policies that have impact on the minimum undergraduate admissions standards are adopted by the Board of Higher Education or the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, DHE and ESE will partner with high school teachers, guidance counselors, principals, admissions officers, and others who work with students to ensure that updated information is disseminated to all stakeholders in a timely manner. In addition, updated information will be posted on the DHE admissions standards website at:

<http://www.mass.edu/forstufam/admissions/admissionsstandards.asp>.

## **Specific Clarification Related to Math and Science High School Course of Study**

Mathematics Requirement: 4 course/years (Algebra I & II and Geometry or Trigonometry, or comparable coursework) including mathematics during the final year of high school

The new mathematics requirement, effective in Fall 2016, has two goals:

- to ensure solid mathematical preparation in Algebra including successful completion of Algebra II, and
- to ensure expanding and deeper knowledge of mathematics skills and application completion of increasingly complex mathematics courses, expanding knowledge and use, each year in high school.

A student must have completed Algebra II and complete the remaining courses to meet the mathematics' course requirement including mathematics in the final year. High school students have several options to address these requirements. This is needed due to the locally determined course of study in each Massachusetts' high school. Given differences among high schools with regard to course structures and schedules, the total number of years of mathematics completed by the student, not the duration of the courses, will be considered in admissions.

### **20. Does a pre-Algebra course count toward the requirement that students must successfully complete four mathematics courses?**

No. Pre-Algebra is not considered to be a high school mathematics course. Freshman applicants are required to complete four mathematics courses/years, including Algebra I and II and Geometry or Trigonometry (or comparable coursework), as well as a mathematics course during the final year of high school.

### **21. Will all levels of mathematics courses count toward the four-year requirement?**

No. Only mathematics courses that are designed as high school level or higher and identified as mathematics courses on the student's high school transcript will count toward the requirement.

### **22. What is meant by "comparable" coursework?**

Comparable courses are defined as coursework that is equal to or beyond the content defined in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Due to the locally determined course of study in each Massachusetts' high school, "comparable" coursework will vary but should be a mathematics course that expands and deepens mathematical skills and application, and provides increasing complexity of mathematical knowledge and concepts. Courses should be offered by the mathematics department. If a "mathematics based course", is offered outside

of the mathematics department the high school transcript should indicate that the high school considers this a “comparable mathematics course” which can be used to meet the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education’s mathematics admissions requirement.

**23. If Algebra I is offered as a two-year as opposed to one-year course, and a student successfully completes this course by the end of the sophomore year and then completes Geometry or Trigonometry, Algebra II, and another mathematics course during the senior year, will s/he meet the four-course/year mathematics requirement?**

Yes. If Algebra I or II and Geometry or Trigonometry is offered as two-year courses by the high school, and the student successfully completes all required mathematics courses by the senior year, s/he will meet the requirement. Given differences among high schools with regard to course structures and schedules, the total number of years of math completed by the student, not the duration of the courses, will be considered by admissions officials.

**24. What exceptions, if any, are made for students who are unable to take mathematics in the senior year?**

Generally, students admitted to four-year institution of public higher education in Massachusetts are required to pass four mathematics courses (including Algebra I and II and Geometry or Trigonometry, or comparable coursework) including during the final year of high school.

In limited cases, where a student has taken and passed four years of high school-level mathematics based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks including coursework beyond Algebra II (for example, pre-calculus, calculus, AP Calculus/Statistics, trigonometry) by the end of their junior year due to the organizational structure of a high school (e.g. block scheduling), that student may be considered to have met the minimum requirements for admission if there are not other available mathematics courses for the student to complete. If a student falls into this category and is unable to enroll in a math course in their senior year, the student/high school should address this early in the admissions process.

**25. What types of science courses meet the requirement that students must complete three science courses (drawn from Natural Science and/or Physical Science and/or Technology and Engineering), including three courses with laboratory work? In addition, how should these courses be labeled on high school transcripts?**

In Massachusetts district and high school administrators have the flexibility to offer courses that are aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks but also include additional topics. As such, high schools can offer a wide range of science courses and science lab courses in the Natural and Physical Sciences as well as Technology and Engineering, and decisions about which courses are designated as science or science lab courses are made by district and school



administrators. Admissions officers should contact high school counselors and other individuals to request additional information about specific courses as necessary.

Massachusetts does not have a common transcript or common course titles and descriptions, so courses will be labeled differently on students' transcripts. District and high school administrators and educators should review course titles and descriptions to ensure that college admissions officers will clearly understand how specific courses are aligned with the requirement for science courses and ensure it is labeled accordingly on the student's transcript.

**26. Are computer science or programming courses considered “mathematics” or “science” courses?** Computer science courses may be credited as electives or as a mathematic or a science course based on the inclusion of rigorous mathematical or scientific concepts and topics. If the courses are considered mathematics or science courses by the high school, then they should be accepted by college admissions officers. However, high school administrators and educators could be required to present additional information justifying the application of the courses toward the mathematics or science requirement.

## **Clarification for use of SAT Redesigned Scores In the Admission Process**

### **27. Which scores will be used?**

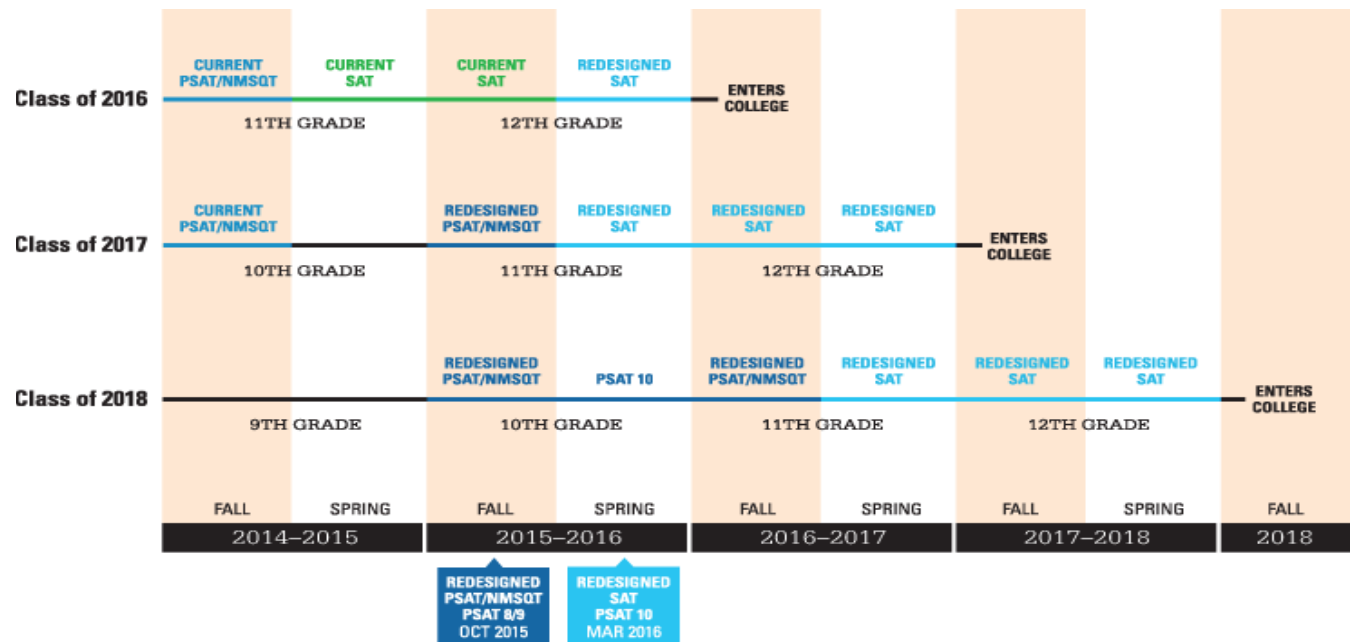
The Massachusetts State University System and the University of Massachusetts will accept current and redesigned SAT scores for admission. Applicants may submit scores from either the current SAT or the redesigned SAT (offered beginning March 2016).

### **28. What score will be required for admission, scholarship, or other program using cut scores?**

The Department of Higher Education will release required scores on the current SAT and their corresponding scores on the redesigned SAT, based on official concordance tables. Concordance tables will be available from the College Board after the first administration of the redesigned SAT in Spring 2016.

## 29. What is the schedule for the redesigned SAT launch?

### Testing Options for the Classes of 2016, 2017, and 2018



#### 2015-2016

- **Fall – Redesigned PSAT/NMSQT October 2015**

- o Class of 2016 – Current SAT (12th Grade)
- o Class of 2017 – Redesigned PSAT/NMSQT (11th Grade)
- o Class of 2018 – Redesigned PSAT/NMSQT (10th Grade)

- **Spring – Redesigned SAT March 2016**

- o Class of 2016 – Redesigned SAT (12th Grade)
- o Class of 2017 – Redesigned SAT (11th Grade)
- o Class of 2018 – PSAT™ 10 (10th Grade) 2016-2017

## **2016-2017**

- **Fall**

- o Class of 2016 – Enters College
- o Class of 2017 – Redesigned SAT (12th Grade)
- o Class of 2018 – Redesigned PSAT/NMSQT (11th Grade)

- **Spring**

- o Class of 2017 – Redesigned SAT (12th Grade)
- o Class of 2018 – Redesigned SAT (11th Grade)

## **2017-2018**

- **Fall**

- o Class of 2017 – Enters College
- o Class of 2018 – Redesigned SAT (12th Grade)

- **Spring**

- o Class of 2018 – Redesigned SAT (12th Grade) 2018

For more information, please visit:

<https://www.collegeboard.org/deliveringopportunity/sat/redesign>