[Having a] Life in the Happy Valley - 1.2

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Abstract

Graduate school can be a lot of fun, but it can also be quite demanding. The quality of your life outside the academic realm will strongly influence your well-being, your happiness, and ultimately your ability to function academically. This little write-up is intended to give you some ideas of what is available in our community to make your life better.

We give hints and tips on life outside academics in the Amherst[1], Mass., area, also known as "The Happy Valley," henceforth simply "the Valley." Specifically, we discuss food, cultural and recreational activities, and other essentials to a balanced and healthy life.

1 From Point A to Point B

The 5-College area boasts an extensive network of fare-less buses[2] (operated by PVTA: 586-5806). For coming into campus they are usually better than a car because they run frequently, and it takes a long time anyway to get a parking permit to a lot close to our building. Besides, in winter buses come pre-warmed, unlike your car. Buses are also a nice way to commute across the bridge from Northampton and beyond, as there is heavy traffic at peak hours there.

Unfortunately, other destinations (e.g., the supermarket) may be unreachable or inconvenient, entailing a transfer somewhere. You may still be able to do without a car if you make arrangements for those routine trips, for example, with a housemate. Still, you should probably consider buying a car; see below.

[1] http://www.amherstcommon.com/
[2] http://www.umass.edu/campus_services/transit/index.html

A good part of the year, bicycling is a good alternative; you may even combine bus and bicycle, as many buses are equipped with bicycle racks in front (check with PVTA for routes). When biking, use common sense, as most of the time you will share the road with cars, and many drivers are not prepared or plainly do not see bicycles. So wear bright clothes, use lights when appropriate, use a helmet. Outside the downtown of Amherst you can ride on sidewalks, off the street; there is also a bike trail joining Amherst and Northampton and extensions planned.

When parking the bike (there are racks outside our building, but do not use the handrails), also use common sense and good locks: theft of bikes is very high in the area, especially on campus. Should you want to bring your precious two-wheel into the building, be considerate of others, and do not drip water and mud, do not leave bikes on exits or other fire sensitive areas, etc.

Buying a Car

Buying a car is tricky, so be patient and ask for help. Private car sales are advertised in the Hampshire Gazette[3] (the Amherst Bulletin is free and carries the same ads, but appears only weekly), the Auto Shopper magazine (free and available in campus center), the local for-sale newsgroups, and various other places. Pleasant Journey in Northampton seems to have a good reputation selling used cars, mostly Toyotas, but ask around for recommendations, and read the Consumer Reports annual Auto issue (available at the Jones Library; ask at the reference desk).

The approximate price of any used car appears in the Blue Book[4]. Another useful source is Edmund's[5]. You can find out the reliability of a car model in Consumer Reports (mentioned above). Make sure to get a "pre-purchase" inspection done by a mechanic of your choice before buying a used car, and if buying from a dealer, get any warranties in writing.

Consider also future maintenance and insurance costs; on used cars, they may quickly dwarf the purchase price. It might make sense to buy a new car under certain circumstances; but in either case, do not overextend yourself financially.

2 Food: Raw or Prepared

The Valley has plenty of sources of nourishment, both in food stores and various eateries. Some of the time, you can even hunt, fish or gather your own if you are

[3] http://www.gazettenet.com/
[4] http://www.kbb.com
[5] http://edmunds.com/used/

so inclined (but be aware of regulations). If you want to buy food, either raw or prepared, read on.

Groceries

There is a couple of large self-service type supermarkets: Stock & Shock[6] and Big Y[7] are the largest, located on the commercial strip on Route 9, on the Amherst-Hadley boundary. It is possible, but not too convenient, to ride the PVTA bus there. A smaller convenience market is The Cousins on North Pleasant St.

Farther West on Rt. 9, on the Dead Mall, you can find Bread and Circus, which stocks pricey but high quality organic and generally natural foods and supplies.

Northampton has its own Stop & Shop and Big Y on its own commercial strip (King Street, Routes 5 & 10), but also some smaller neighborhood food stores.

Eateries

The area has a lot of restaurants. We cover some in Amherst, but Northampton and the region have many more. Ask around, or read the restaurant guide in the Valley Advocate.[8] A good way to find out what is out there is to attend the Taste of Amherst and the Taste of Northampton,[9] three-day festivals which take place in the Summer where local restaurants sell samples of their food at sidewalk kiosks.

For excellent Italian food, try Pinocchio's[10] on Boltwood Walk, right downtown. Try it for lunch; it is very expensive for dinner. Pasta e Basta is very good food and an excellent value (Main St.). Around the corner (on North Pleasant St.) you can find inexpensive and excellent pizza by the slice at Antonio's; when you go, notice the extremely fast service regardless of the number of customers.

There's a couple of Indian food restaurants in Amherst, one on Main St. and the other on Boltwood Walk. Amherst Chinese is a favorite but some prefer Panda East for Chinese food. Amber Waves has good and very inexpensive southeast Asian food. Bueno y Sano offers decent Mexican fare. Across from the common you find La Veracruzana, another good Mexican restaurant.

The coffee is best at Amherst's own coffee-roaster, Scott Rao's, but you can find decent coffee in a couple other places, for example Bart's which also offers good icecream (for excellent icecream, go to Herrell's in Northampton).

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[6] http://www.stopandshop.com

[7] http://www.BigY.com/

[8] http://www.valleyadvocate.com/

[9] http://www.noho.com/

[10] http://www.virtual-valley.com/pinocchios/

To find food late at night you have to leave Amherst. The best known 24-hour diner is the Whately Diner, just off Interstate 91 at the Whately exit (a couple of miles north of Northampton).

3 Entertainment and Culture

Here we outline some of the entertainment opportunities available to people in the Valley. For lack of expertise, no discussion of bars and other watering holes is included, focusing instead on movies, theater, music, fine arts.

Film and Video

The most reliable place in the Valley for intelligent, interesting films is Pleasant Street Theater in downtown Northampton. Its offerings tend towards the picks of the Sundance and Cannes film festivals, plus the occasional revival. Sometimes a director will put in an appearance to speak about their work.

Two other good places, holdouts against the national trend towards sanitized multiplex theaters in malls, are The Academy of Music, a beautiful converted opera house in downtown Northampton, and The Amherst Cinema in downtown Amherst, which has not yet followed through on its repeated threat to close. They carry some of the better Hollywood films.

Along the same lines is the Latchis Theater in Brattleboro, Vermont. Its interior design is a quirky vision of classical Greek Arcadia. Though it's 40 miles up the Interstate, combining a movie with a visit to one of the nice local restaurants or cafes makes the drive worthwhile.

For more mainstream Hollywood fare, drive to the Mountain Farms Mall (aka the Dead Mall) in Hadley. When its four screens go dark this autumn, they will be replaced by the enormous new multiplex with stadium seating opening next door at the Hampshire Mall (aka the Live Mall).

Listings for these and other area cinemas can be found in the Valley Advocate[11]

You can also see movies at the Five Colleges. The best way to find out what is showing is from the Five College Calendar.[12] Closest to home is "Something Every Friday" in the UMass Campus Center: typically a live show show and a movie for free. You will see posters for this on campus.

Films that are shown for courses might or might not get listed in the Five College Calendar. So be alert to offerings from the language departments and film

[11] http://www.newmassmedia.com/fil.phtml?code=wma

[12] http://www.metaevents.com/FiveCol/

studies programs. Many of these are open to the public.

A couple of special events: Keep an eye out in late autumn for the Northampton Film Festival,[13] which features independent films and videos. And in the summer you can enjoy outdoor films in the evenings on the Amherst Common.

Finally, if you wish to stay at home, there are video stores galore. Of particular note in Northampton is Pleasant Street Video, next door to the theater, which offers an outstanding selection and very knowledgeable staff. In Amherst, Video To Go on University Drive is also excellent.

Music, Theater, Dance

We are fortunate to have one of the nation's great jazz clubs nearby in Northampton. Major acts often make a tour stop between Boston and New York City to play the Iron Horse Music Hall. In addition to jazz, booker Jordi Herrold brings in styles ranging from folk to Tuvan throat singing.

Herrold also books acts into two larger Northampton venues: the Pearl Street Nightclub and the elegantly restored Calvin Theater. All three venues run a combined advertisement in the weekly Valley Advocate.

We haven't mentioned numerous smaller clubs. You may wish to check the Advocate, or listings online at www.masslive.com[14].

The University receives touring companies and orchestras at The Fine Arts Center.[15] Student tickets are very inexpensive, at \$5 - \$9 for most performances. Season tickets are also available.

There are also frequent live performances elsewhere in the Five Colleges. You can find out about these in the Five College Calendar.[16] The biggest acts come to The Mullins Center[17] (watch out for terrible traffic jams on campus and along Route 9 on those days). On the other end of the spectrum is alternative performance space of The Red Barn at Hampshire College.

A welcome addition to the Valley in the past few years is the Massachusetts International Festival for the Arts, or MIFA.[18] Festival is a misnomer, as there is no concentrated flurry of events and there is no clear theme. Rather this is an organization that books acts into a number of area venues. However, much of what they bring is excellent (the plays that MIFA books into City Stage in Springfield

[13]http://www.nohofilm.org/
[14]http://www.masslive.com
[15]http://www.umass.edu/fac/
[16]http://www.metaevents.com/FiveCol/
[17]http://www.mullinscenter.umass.edu/frontdoor.html
[18]http://www.mifa-net.org/mifahomepg.html

are much more provocative than those that City Stage programs itself.)

During the summer, be sure to head an hour west along the Mass Pike or Route 2 to the Berkshires.[19] The Boston Symphony Orchestra[20] makes its summer home at Tanglewood, where you can enjoy a concert while picnicking on the lawn. The Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival[21] attracts the best in modern dance. Shakespeare is performed at The Mount,[22] former home of famous American writer Edith Wharton. And innovative new theater can be found at the Williamstown Theater Festival.[23]

Locally, in the summer, there are outdoor concerts on the campus pond during the Bright Moments Festival. Shakespeare Under The Stars can be seen at The Lord Jeffrey Inn in Amherst. And there is excellent summer theater under a tent at Mount Holyoke College.

Fine Arts

The art museums at the colleges, especially the Smith College Museum of Art but also the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum[24] and Amherst College's Mead Art Museum have impressive collections. Galleries at UMass exhibit innovative works by UMass graduate art students.

A trip an hour west on Route 2 will be well rewarded by two excellent art museums. The Clark Art Institute[25] in Williamstown is internationally respected for its Impressionist collection. And, just opened, with enormous exhibition spaces to accommodate contemporary installation art, is MASS MoCA[26] in North Adams. Note that the Route 2 drive goes over hills and winding roads that cautious drivers might wish to avoid at night and in bad weather (especially in winter).

Boston of course offers excellent museums that rival those of New York City.

Participatory Arts

The Five College environment offers many possibilities for direct participation in the arts. Members of the Computer Science Department have sung in university choirs and given instrumental and dance performances on campus.

[19] http://www.berkshireweb.com/
[20] http://www.bso.org
[21] http://www.jacobspillow.org/
[22] http://www.shakespeare.org/
[23] http://www.wtfestival.org/WTFestival/HomA.htm
[24] http://www.mtholyoke.edu/offices/artmuseum/
[25] http://www.clark.williams.edu/
[26] http://www.massmoca.org/

We will draw your particular attention to the active social dance scene in the Valley. The Hooked on Swing Society of Western Massachusetts (HOSS[27]) has been sponsoring area swing dances long before the nationwide resurgence of interest in this 1930's-50's dance style. It sponsors monthly dances, usually with a live band, in the glorious space at the top of the Northampton Center for the Arts. There are also weekly dances on Wednesday nights in this space, organized by impresario Bill Tenanes.[28] And, from our own department, Stephen Siegel[29] organizes dances in Hadley that are dedicated to the Lindy style of swing. Beginners are welcome at all of these events, and lessons are offered.

4 Mens Sana in Corpore Sano

You can exercise in various settings. There are plenty of trails and some tracks to run. You can rollerblade and play tennis in the summer and ski and play racquetball in the winter. There's a couple of swimming pools on campus and several health clubs off campus, including the YMCA in Northampton. You can take tennis or tango classes on campus or off. Read the Advocate and the course listings, and ask around.

Working out and organized activities

There's a couple of options for working out and sports on campus. Paying the athletic fee gives you right to a locker and use of swimming pools and some installations, but check schedules first because the athletic department clearly prioritizes use of anything by the varsity teams. If you want to work out and can do without a locker you may want instead to buy one of the various plans to use the Body Shop. These are gyms with Nautilus machines, a few free weights, and various aerobic machines (treadmills, stairmistresses, nordictrack ski machines, etc.); you pay per visit or per semester. Totman Gym (diagonally across the LGRC) has one in the basement, and you can use Totman's showers et al. without paying the athletic fee (about $35/semester) if you don't need a locker. To use the Mullins installations (racquetball and ice-skating) you must pay a different fee (!) but it's not high (maybe $10/semester).

The Amherst Leisure Services offers a number of activities and courses; they also organize soccer, volleyball, and other leagues. You can take classes on how

[27] http://www.javanet.com/ hoss/
[28] http://www.javanet.com/ btenanes/
[29] http://wedgwood.cs.umass.edu/ siegel/lindy/

to fix your bicycle, on American Sign Language, yoga, dance, etc. (check their quarterly guide of activities).

Hiking and Outing Club

Hiking trails of different lengths and difficulty crisscross the area. The Notch visitor center (on Rt. 116 in South Amherst) is a good starting point, but there are trails closer to downtown Amherst; ask. The UMass Outing Club[30] leads organized hikes, camping trips and other excursions and even rents equipment.Information about nearby state parks and forests is available from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management[31]. Also see: AmherstCommon.com's outdoor recreation pages[32], Appalachian Mountain Club (Berkshire Chapter),[33] Dayhiker's Guide to Northampton.[34] If you go on hikes into remote areas, be aware that there is some hunting for a few weeks of the year. Again, ask!

In the early Fall you can go hiking to see New England's famous foliage colors. Colors peak at slightly different times each year and in each region; for up-to-date information call the following numbers. Connecticut: 800-282-6863; Maine: 800-533-9595; Massachusetts: 800-447-6277; New Hampshire: 800-386-4664; Rhode Island: 800-556-2484; Vermont: 802-828-3236.

Biking

With miles of winding roads and mountain-biking trails, the area is a great place for bicycling at all levels of difficulty. For an easy, flat ride that is free of cars, try the bike trail that connects Amherst and Northampton. (Entrance on Route 116 just south of Amherst College.) For more extensive exploration, Valley Bicycle[35] sells a bicycling map of Western Massachusetts that shows virtually every road and rates them according to traffic level and difficulty (slope). Other useful links: MassBike Online (Pioneer Valley Chapter),[36] Franklin-Hampshire Freewheelers.[37]

[30] http://www-unix.oit.umass.edu/ outing/
[31] http://www.state.ma.us/dem/forparks.htm
[32] http://www.amherstcommon.com/outdoorrecreation.html
[33] http://www-unix.oit.umass.edu/ berkamc/
[34] http://www.crocker.com/ vhoyt/
[35] http://www.amherstcommon.com/valleybike/
[36] http://tdc-www.harvard.edu/bicycle/groups/mbpv/
[37] http://www.freewheelers.org/index.htm

Skiing

In the winter you can ski cross-country (nordic) on various trails[38] in Amherst or go to Northfield or places farther away.[39] With the closing of Mt. Tom for skiing, you have to travel a bit farther for downhill (alpine). You can drive between two and four hours to very good ski places in the Berkshires, Vermont and New Hampshire. Check out Gorp.com[40] for more info.

5 Getting Away

Yes, the Happy Valley is wonderful, but sometimes you want to get away from it all. For real peace, head north to Vermont or New Hampshire, or even to the nearby Berkshires. Otherwise, Boston, New York, and Montreal are not far, and the the Interstate Highway System, trains, buses and planes for the rest...

Driving distance: cities

Boston[41] (see Yahoo's guide[42]) is a very nice city, with amenities that rival New York, and yet the manageability that comes with one-tenth the size. For example, Boston's Museum of Fine Arts[43] has an excellent collection of painting and sculptures and is a stop for any worthwhile itinerant exhibit. A favorite place near Boston, where you can see art outdoors, is the De Cordova[44] Museum and Sculpture Park.

It takes about two hours to drive the 90 miles there (hint: from Amherst use Rt. 202 then Rt. 2, except in poor weather, when I-90 is safer). If you go for the day and use Rt. 2 you can park in the Alewife station of the MBTA (Boston's mass transit system, aka the T) and take the train into town from there. Or you can ride the monopolistic Peter Pan[45] bus there, but it takes a good three hours, unless you catch the rare express ones (usually only Fridays and Sundays; check).

New York[46] is... New York: all kinds of things, all kinds of people. It is about

[38] http://www.nexcski.com/xcenters/ma.htm
[39] http://www.nexcski.com/
[40] http://www.gorp.com/gorp/activity/skiing/down_ne.htm
[41] http://www.boston.com/
[42] http://boston.yahoo.com/
[43] http://www.mfa.org
[44] http://www.decordova.org/
[45] http://www.peterpan-bus.com/
[46] http://nyc.yahoo.com/

150 miles from Amherst, and you can drive (hint: avoid I-84), take the bus,[47] or take a train[48] from Amherst (the once-a-day Vermonter[49]), or, cheaper and more frequent, from Springfield[50].

For a a little European flavor, Montreal[51] is about five hours by car, but better yet is Quebec City[52] just another hour or two farther north. It still has the fortified old city with its narrow streets, beautiful views of the St. Lawrence river, and excellent food.

Farther Away: the logistics

To fly within North America, Bradley[53] airport (BDL) (on I-91 between Springfield, Mass., and Hartford, Conn.) is the most convenient airport. It is about an hour from Amherst, parking is cheap, and its medium size makes getting in and out very easy. However, there are limited nonstop flights. Southwest Airlines[54] will begin operating out of BDL end of October 1999, hence fares to/from there are expected to fall across all carriers. Other nearby airports where Southwest's presence has already pushed down airfares are Manchester, NH (MHT),[55] and Providence, Rhode Island (PVD).[56]

It is usually worthwhile to compare fares from Boston's Logan[57] and from the three New York airports as sometimes the fare differences with Bradley are substantial. Most of the time it does not make sense to fly from Bradley to Boston or New York: it is expensive and you may miss your connection, so it is best to go by surface. You may drive (I-90) to and park in Logan, but traffic can be very bad in the airport access (a tunnel); instead, you may want to park in Framingham (on I-90) and take the Logan Express[58] there. For the New York airports there is a relatively expensive but reliable service (Connecticut Limo[59]) that takes you from

[47] http://www.peterpan-bus.com/amhnyc.html
[48] http://www.amtrak.com
[49] http://www.mcs.net/~dsdawdy/Amtrak/e_vermt.html
[50] http://www.mcs.net/~dsdawdy/Amtrak/#CT
[51] http://ca.yahoo.com/Regional/Countries/Canada/Provinces_and_Territories/Quebec/Regions/Montreal/Cities/Montreal/
[52] http://ca.yahoo.com/Regional/Countries/Canada/Provinces_and_Territories/Quebec/Regions/Quebec/Cities/Quebec_City/
[53] http://www.bradleyairport.com/
[54] http://www.iflyswa.com
[55] http://www.flymanchester.com/
[56] http://www.pvd-ri.com/
[57] http://www.massport.com/logan/
[58] http://www.quickaid.com/airports/bos/stop/bos1509/sb.html
[59] http://www.ctlimo.com/

Hartford (Union Station, exit 48 on I-84) to JFK[60], La Guardia[61], or Newark[62] without getting into the city.

6 Favorites

Some personal favorites:

- Easy hike: up Mount Holyoke at Skinner State Park, off Rt. 47 south of Hadley. Foliage hike: Mount Toby in Sunderland. Long (4-6 hour) hike: The Notch to Skinner.
- Italian food, inexpensive: Pasta e Basta in downtown Amherst. Not-so-inexpensive: Mulino's in Northampton. Expensive: Carmelina's in Hadley.
- Excellent icecream: Herrell's in Northampton, open daily till fairly late, around the corner from Thornes Market.
- Good local produce: Atkins farms, South Amherst on Rt. 116 towards South Hadley. In the Spring and Summer, roadside stands and the Farmers' Market, Amherst Common on Saturdays.
- Coffee: Rao's in Amherst, Haymarket Cafe in Northampton, both downtown. Coffee and books and plain beautiful place: The Montague Book Mill ("books you don't need in a place you can't find").
- Cross-country skiing. In Amherst, Amethyst Brook, on Pelham Road. Nice groomed trails and affordable equipment rental: Northfield, about half an hour North of Amherst on Rt. 63.
- Good People-Watching: Haymarket Cafe, Northampton. Harvard Square, Cambridge (nice to do after a day of hard tourist work in Boston).
- The Norwottuck Rail Trail –so named because it runs on a defunct railroad bed– , from Northampton to Amherst and beyond, for biking, rollerblading, etc.
- Movies: the Tower Theaters in South Hadley, all seats are excellent and they accept reservations over the phone.

7 Resources

Here we list together places to obtain information about events and activities, as well as some pointers on where to obtain help.

[60] http://travel.epicurious.com/travel/c_planning/06_airports/us/newyorkjfk.html
[61] http://travel.epicurious.com/travel/c_planning/06_airports/us/newyorklga.html
[62] http://travel.epicurious.com/travel/c_planning/06_airports/us/newyorkewr.html

Calendars, Guides, Schedules

- Local info on the Web: Virtual Valley[63] and Computer Science's Valley Links[64].
- Events, movies, performances: Valley Advocate[65], available free on various places late Wednesdays. On-campus events appear on the Five College Calendar[66], available in print at the beginning of the month in the campus center.
- Outdoor and indoor activities: The Amherst Leisure Services guide, published four times a year, available in the Bangs Community Center (Boltwood Walk, Amherst) and also mailed to residents. For outdoors activities, rafting, camping, etc., check the UMass Outing Club.[67]
- Local bus schedules[68] are available on the PVTA buses and at the Campus Center.
- Long distance bus schedules[69] to New York, Boston, etc. are available at the Peter Pan's offices in Amherst and the Campus Center. Amtrak[70] train schedules[71] are available at the travel agency on campus or by calling 1-800-USA-RAIL.

Getting Help

Life in graduate school can be very rewarding, but sometimes it is overwhelming. If have problems, ask for help: talk to a friend. Talk to a more senior graduate student, your advisor, or other colleague whom you feel comfortable approaching. Do not fall in the trap of believing you are the only person who has ever had a problem! Chances are someone will be able to understand your situation and suggest ways of improving it, or simply lend you a sympathetic ear.

If you want to ask for professional help with psychological, academic performance, emotional, or relationship problems, the university offers counseling both on- and off-campus, although they will pay for a limited number of sessions off-campus, and you will need a referral. You can get help from UHS Mental Health in Hills North; their webpage also lists all the other on-campus counseling resources available.

There is of course the dental and medical services at the University Health Services[72] (and elsewhere with their authorization); these are covered abundantly

[63] http://www.virtual-valley.com
[64] http://www.cs.umass.edu/csinfo/valleylinks.html
[65] http://www.valleyadvocate.com/
[66] http://www.metaevents.com/FiveCol/
[67] http://www-unix.oit.umass.edu/ outing/
[68] http://www.umass.edu/bus
[69] http://www.peterpan-bus.com
[70] http://www.amtrak.com
[71] http://www.mcs.net/˜dsdawdy/Amtrak/
[72] http://www.umass.edu/uhs

in the literature you got from the University. Of note: UHS administers anonymous tests for HIV. They also sell contraceptives at low prices and will dispense the "day-after" contraceptive pill under appropriate circumstances.

8 Feedback and Acknowledgments

Of course, this little write-up can be much improved. Please send your criticisms, suggestions, and addenda to the author[73]. or the graduate student representatives[74].

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- Jonathan Shapiro[78] updated the mens sana in corpore sano section.

Naturally, this document's faults lie solely with its author[79], etc., or read this disclaimer[80] and adapt it as necessary.

[73] http://www.cs.umass.edu/ cris/
[74] mailto:gradrep@cs.umass.edu
[75] http://www.cs.umass.edu/˜coelho
[76] http://www.cs.umass.edu/˜xqzhang
[77] http://www.cs.umass.edu/˜friedman
[78] http://www.cs.umass.edu/˜jshapiro
[79] http://www.cs.umass.edu/ cris/
[80] http://www.cs.umass.edu/ gradweb/mmc/20Nov1995