

DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

**PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE 2018 HONORS DAY CRITERIA FOR SELECTING
DISTINGUISHED COLLEGE SCHOLARS IN THE 2018-2019 GENERAL INFORMATION CATALOG**

On behalf of the Educational Policy Committee, Seema Agarwala (Committee Chair and Associate Professor, Molecular Biosciences) submitted the following proposal to change the criteria for selecting distinguished college scholars in the *General Information* catalog. The Educational Policy Committee approved the changes on February 9, 2018. The proposal will be considered by the Faculty Council at its meeting on February 12, 2018. The Secretary has classified it as emergency legislation in order to meet the Registrar's deadline. Final approval resides with the Executive Vice President and Provost on behalf of the President.



Alan W. Friedman, Secretary of the General Faculty and Faculty Council
The University of Texas at Austin
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**PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE 2018 HONORS DAY CRITERIA FOR SELECTING
DISTINGUISHED COLLEGE SCHOLARS IN THE 2018-2019 GENERAL INFORMATION CATALOG**

Purpose: The program used to identify students who qualify for recognition as Distinguished College Scholars at Honors Day is not in alignment with the intent of the criteria previously approved by the Education Policy Committee (EPC) and the Faculty Council and published in the General Information Catalog.

Background: Ten years ago, the EPC was asked to address a problem of having too many students designated to participate in Honors Day. Across campus 26% of all juniors and seniors were recognized, and in some colleges almost 50% were recognized. The primary culprit was understood to be grade inflation, coupled with the fact that the criteria for College Scholars was a 3.50 GPA and the criteria for Distinguished College Scholars was a 3.8 GPA. The recommended solution was to limit the total number recognized to the top 20% and replace the higher GPA criterion for Distinguished College Scholars with a more stringent percentage; top 4% was chosen to align with the criteria for highest honors at graduation.

The reason the decision was made to use percentage of class rather than a strict GPA cut-off was to prevent grade inflation, which was clearly happening and, even worse, was not uniform across colleges, from reducing the status of these awards and resulting in inequities across colleges. Although it is hard to conceive of a class not having a true top 4%, we nevertheless now see this happening. In April 2017, because there were fewer than 25 students in the senior class of Undergraduate Studies (UGS), the criterion for Distinguished College Scholar switched from top 4% to 4.00 GPA. As a result, a student in UGS with over 60 credit hours was recognized as a College Scholar. This student's GPA (3.86) was higher than all other "seniors" in UGS and also higher than all "juniors" in UGS, including the junior who was recognized as a Distinguished College Scholar. Paradoxically, this student would have been a Distinguished College Scholar if the student had 7 fewer credit hours (and so had been classified as a member of the junior class or if there were a few more students in UGS with more than 60 credit hours).

To prevent this glitch, we propose the following changes:

The Existing Criteria: The existing policy for College Scholars (including Distinguished College Scholars) states in the General Information Catalog:

College Scholars

On Honors Day each spring, the University designates outstanding students as College Scholars and Distinguished College Scholars, on the basis of registration and grade point average requirements for courses taken in residence at the University, as specified below. Students who are eligible for recognition receive invitations to the Honors Day convocation about three weeks before Honors Day.

To be designated a College Scholar, a student must meet all of the following requirements:

1. The student must be registered as an undergraduate in the current semester. Students who hold a bachelors degree or are registered in-absentia are not eligible.
2. The student must have completed at least thirty semester hours of coursework in residence at the University, and at least sixty semester hours of college coursework, including transferred work and credit by examination.
3. The student must rank in the top 20 percent of their class in each college or school in which he or she is pursuing a major, based on in-residence cumulative grade point average.
4. The student must have an in-residence University grade point average of at least 3.50.

To be designated a Distinguished College Scholar, a student must meet all of the following requirements:

1. The student must meet the first, second, and fourth College Scholar requirements stated above.
2. The student also must rank in the top 4 percent of their class in each college or school in which they are pursuing a major, based on in-residence cumulative grade point average.

One important aspect of these criteria is that the calculations are done separately on pools of students divided by college and also within college by class (juniors and seniors). Only students classified as juniors or seniors are eligible, since the second criterion is to have a minimum of 60 credit hours. However a glitch of these selection criteria is that when a class of students is smaller than 25, the qualifying GPA for Distinguished College Scholars is automatically set at 4.0, even though the required minimum GPA is 3.50. This happens because with a class smaller than 25 students, calculation of how many students constitute the top 4% results in a value less than one. While this may seem like a very rare or impossible situation (how many colleges have fewer than 25 seniors?), the truth is it happened in 2017, and will continue to happen often, in the School of Undergraduate Studies.

Proposed Changes: To not exclude students from small class cohorts (i.e. juniors, seniors) from being designated Distinguished College Scholars we propose:

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3. The student must rank in the top 20 percent of their class in each college or school in which he or she is pursuing a major, based on in-residence cumulative grade point average.
4. The student must have an in-residence University grade point average of at least 3.50.

To be designated a Distinguished College Scholar, a student must meet all of the following requirements:

1. In each class, of all students meeting criteria 1, 2, and 4 above, the student with the highest GPA should be recognized as a Distinguished College Scholar.
[The student must meet the first, second, and fourth College Scholar requirements stated above.]
2. In each class, of all students meeting criteria 1, 2, and 4 above, any additional students who rank in the top 4% of the entire class should also be recognized as Distinguished College Scholars. [The student also must rank in the top 4 percent of their class in each college or school in which they are pursuing a major, based on in-residence cumulative grade point average.]

Changes are proposed for the current year to allow further consideration by the EPC and other University wide entities:

Discussion amongst the EPC, UGS, the Registrar's Office and The Office of University Events acknowledged that the proposed changes do not respond to the issue of whether or not students to be honored must be accepted into a specific major, nor does it address the concern that these criteria do not require a higher minimum GPA for Distinguished College Scholars. Thus, all groups agreed that further consideration was required before the proposed changes are entered into the General Information Catalog.

However, the College Scholar and Distinguished College Scholar designations are honors that appear on student transcripts and the EPC does not want to keep any deserving students from receiving these honors in 2018. Since the deadline for the selection of students who will receive these honors is 2/12/18, we suggest that our proposal be adopted for the year 2018 only. This will permit a manual scan to identify all deserving students this yearend permit the EPC to undertake an in-depth analyses of this issue in future meetings.