DEAN LOWE: So welcome, everybody. This is the College of Liberal Arts and Jackson College faculty meeting to discuss honors, summa cum laude honors for graduates of the class of 2015 for Sunday, and also we have some candidates for August graduation. I am Carmen Lowe, dean of Academic Advising and Undergraduate Studies, and I'm going to turn it over to George, the chair of the committee.

PROFESSOR McNINCH: I'm the chair of the Academic Standing and Honors Committee, and I wouldn't have gotten the name of the -- anyway, thank you.

So the committee met yesterday and went through the list of students that we solicited from the department for recommendations and such, and we went back through and found the ones that had made the GPA cutoff and ascertained whether they had the requisite number of A's in distribution and A's in their major and have a recommendation by their department.

And so the outcome, this 139-candidate list, is the ones that we certified or verified or decided if they had met those requirements. So I'm sort of putting them to you as a slate, and I'm certain that there will be questions. Maybe I'll do an overview of it. So that's the slate. The first list of candidates is the ones who determined met those requirements.

PROFESSOR DeVOTO: You mean the formal requirements?

PROFESSOR McNINCH: There is one requirement that they have not met, and that is the vote of this group.

PROFESSOR DeVOTO: In other words, they come with a recommendation from the honors committee?

PROFESSOR McNINCH: That's correct.

DEAN LOWE: Yes, recommend these candidates for summa honors, and we want you to look over this and just if there are any questions about students in the first section, let us know.

PROFESSOR McNINCH: Yes, the formal requirements being GPA, number of A's in distribution, number of A's in major, recommendation by a department, which the committee and we have as a practice been requiring a letter and a vote of the department.
DEAN LOWE: So we would hold off on asking questions about students who are not on this list. We'll get to those questions later. We just want to focus on the students in the first part.

PROFESSOR ORIANS: The first part, meaning the whole document?

PROFESSOR McNINCH: No. Page 4 has two candidates who we thought were going to graduate, but aren't for various reasons. In one case -- I guess it doesn't matter. They have met the formal requirements, as it is said. One of them is taking a course this summer, and the other one I think was ill and had some incompletes.

PROFESSOR ORIANS: She's my student.

PROFESSOR McNINCH: Right. So we expect this to be fine, but I guess we're proposing to have a provisional vote, so voting, assuming that they maintain the GPA.

PROFESSOR DeVOTO: If you don't mind if I speak, not being a member of the faculty, but recalling the old days when I was, the way it worked was there would be a departmental nomination, which would be considered by the honors committee, and the honors committee would make a recommendation, irrespective of whether the candidate had met the formal requirements.

PROFESSOR McNINCH: Unfortunately, that's not how I read the requirements, as stated in the Bulletin.

PROFESSOR DeVOTO: Just thought I should ask.

PROFESSOR McNINCH: Yes. I mean, that's not what the Bulletin says.

PROFESSOR DeVOTO: It may have changed since I retired.

PROFESSOR EVRIGENIS: So a different version of the same question. I recall discussions where we have given summa honors to candidates who have not met the formal requirements. Either they lacked an A or A-minus in one of the distributions. If we're sticking to what the Bulletin says, why are we discussing this?

DEAN LOWE: Well, we have some questions that come up about certain students every year. So we're first presenting the students who we have certified met all the criteria and just require a faculty vote of the full faculty before -- like if anyone has objections to any of these students, we need to know about it.

PROFESSOR EVRIGENIS: How could we object to somebody who's met the criteria?
DEAN LOWE: There might be something we don't know about. I don't know.

PROFESSOR McNINCH: There's also the statement that summa cum laude is awarded only by special vote of the entire faculty. So it's a formal requirement.

PROFESSOR LURZ: There's a typo in one of my student's names.

DEAN LOWE: It won't be on the diploma.

PROFESSOR McNINCH: I apologize for that. Sorry about that.

PROFESSOR ORIANS: So you want a motion, or you want us to look at this?

DEAN LOWE: I think we're ready for a motion.

PROFESSOR McNINCH: I'm happy to have a motion.

PROFESSOR ORIANS: I move that we approve.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Second.

PROFESSOR McNINCH: I need to call the vote. All ayes (139 approved). Any nays? Any abstentions? So that approved the 139 candidates who have the GPA and so on.

PROFESSOR McDonALD: Just a question before we move on. It seemed to me that there's someone who we had recommended who would have met these requirements who wasn't on the list?

DEAN LOWE: Could we talk about those, because there's a bunch of them that we're going to talk about after we do the next couple.

PROFESSOR McDonALD: Thank you.

PROFESSOR McNINCH: I actually don't know how the provision will --

DEAN LOWE: So we don't do the provisional, and then the questions.

SECTION REDACTED – Discussion of individual students

PROFESSOR McDonALD: Since the point has been brought up sort of twice, I'd like to echo was
Christiane last said. If people agree that we use the time to vote on some of these people who nearly made it, even if it's 3.77 instead of 3.79. Because it's true that just the grade point average, the way this has been done, doesn't consider, for instance, extraordinary senior honors theses, if that's something that you want to throw into the ring.

DEAN LOWE: They get highest thesis honors.

PROFESSOR McDonalD: I understand. Magna cum laude is a wonderful honor. I would have been fine with that when I graduated. But if we're here, why don't we put people forward and vote on it? There are different kind of thoughts in the room. Maybe I'm saying does the body agree to vote on people who have lower than 3.8 if we don't agree (inaudible).

DEAN LOWE: How long do you want to be here?

PROFESSOR McNINCH: I can't imagine how we would do that in a fair way.

MS. DUBMAN: We haven't advertised that as a topic for discussion or vote at this particular meeting, so I feel like it's impossible to take a vote on that right now without advertising that as an option to have more people participate in that discussion and vote.

PROFESSOR ORIANS: The only vote we could take is to vote to consider it in the future --

MS. DUBMAN: At an A&S meeting.

PROFESSOR ORIANS: -- at an A&S meeting to have that discussion. I remember a long discussion a few years ago where some members wanted to recommend but the departments said no because of the GPA, and we went back and forth and decided no, the department has the final say. And so there are reasons why we have discussions sometimes. I think none of us are prepared to argue for individual students today.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Well, that's not true. Some of us are not --

PROFESSOR McNINCH: I would reconsider whether volunteering to chair the committee again next year under those circumstances. In my view, if you look across the country, summa means more or less a grade point average criteria. If you're an employer looking at a transcript, that's what it means to you. It may mean something else locally. It's a good question, how much effort is worth expending toward that.

PROFESSOR PROCTOR: I think every year that I've attended these, the same discussion comes up about whether someone below the GPA cutoff should be considered. So I do think that maybe there's something that we should have a broad faculty discussion on next fall to decide if the
current policy is the policy that we want to have. Because we have the same discussion almost every single year, and we end up in the same spot where it's said that the Bulletin says one thing, so we really can't do anything, and then other people say, well, in the past, we were able to discuss these things. So I think it would be useful to actually have a discussion on this at a full faculty meeting so that we can resolve it at least once and for all.

PROFESSOR BERNHEIM: I agree with that, but I don't know if people remember this. When Joe DeBold was head of the committee, we used to have 3.7 for summa cum laude, and then we had a full faculty meeting to discuss whether we should move it up to 3.8, because the faculty members at the time were concerned that too many students were graduating with summa. So we moved it from a 3.7 up to a 3.8.

And that was very explicit and taken at an open meeting, at an A&S meeting, and voted on. So the 3.8 did not appear mysteriously in the catalog. That was a faculty vote at an A&S meeting, not done arbitrarily. And it's very emphatically stated you don't round up. If you had a 3.79, it was not a 3.8. Now, if you want to change the rules for the future, that's fine. But I agree with Jillian, you have to do it at an open meeting, not here.

There's very few people here, and I think that would be a disservice to the students who don't have advocates here who are at a 3.79, and students who are 3.77 did have advocates that would just open a can of worms. And I can't even imagine what the parents would do if they found out about it at the unfairness of it at this late date in the semester. So that's a possibility, but it should be done in a proper way at an open meeting at A&S.

PROFESSOR ZEHL ROMERO: I agree. The Honors Committee should make a move to present this issue, think about the issue, and present it to the A&S meeting.

PROFESSOR McNINCH: The consensus on the Honors Committee that I'm aware of is more that it should be more automated, not less.

PROFESSOR ROMERO: But the point is, and has been -- and maybe we should reconsider that, too -- if the GPA is the only thing that we consider. It's not the only thing. It hasn't been the only thing. It has to have a departmental recommendation. Now, the group can overrule it, but it has to have that as well. GPA is not the only criteria.

PROFESSOR McNINCH: I'm aware of that. We just spent two hours yesterday in a meeting.

PROFESSOR RICHARDS: I don't know if we need to have an extended conversation now, but it seems to me that GPA is not the only thing, but that's the role of the departments, that when they look at people -- in biology, they look at people with 3.8, and economics, they look at people with 3.8. Some of them might not actually make it through.
But I think for a broad faculty group, if they started talking about an economics student or a biology student, and say, well, we really agree that that person is -- even though he had a 3.77 or -- that's going to be a very difficult conversation to have, I think. So I kind of like the current situation, but I think the departments use their discretion to make decisions about who they're going to recommend. And then more or less, we're going to ratify that in checking for possible omissions or mistakes.

PROFESSOR EVRIGENIS: So I'm fully persuaded by the history and the arguments, but I would then say that there needs to be an amendment to the process, which is that you should not request that advisors write letters in support of students. Either the student meets the criteria, or the student doesn't, in which case the letter is moot. And then the committee could go back if there's a marginal case and talk to the advisor. But what's the point of submitting evaluations on top of a departmental vote that recommends a student?

DEAN LOWE: Well, we ask the departments to look in March, April at any student who has the potential for meeting summa cum laude. We don't know what their final GPA is going to be. We don't know until this morning sometimes.

PROFESSOR EVRIGENIS: I understand that. All I'm saying is that the departmental vote should suffice. Once you have the GPA and the departmental vote, the letter is superfluous. There's nothing that the letter adds to the consideration --

DEAN LOWE: What I'm saying is you don't know what a student's final GPA is until like after the end of the semester.

PROFESSOR EVRIGENIS: But the letter doesn't change anything about the GPA.

PROFESSOR McDONALD: I'm finding I'm kind of in agreement with this. And when we're presented with materials, you give us everyone who would be magna or summa, or likely to be, right? So how hard would it be to not have letters for summa, but only letters for people who look like they're going to get magna, and then we write the letters for those people, thinking that they may get the 3.8, and we understand in so doing that they may not.

Because (inaudible), we did four summa recommendations to whom didn't quite make it. So that's why I want to be here and advocate for them, as I would if it was a Phi Betta Kappa situation.

PROFESSOR SMITH: Maybe I'm reflecting many, many years, the 38 years I've been here, but my department continues to take seriously not just the grade point average, just whether they've done research, but whether their grades in distribution within our department reflects the kind of learning of philosophy that we think is appropriate for a summa cum laude. And we're more than
capable of turning somebody down with a 3.8. This is of course a small sample of what used to show up at these things. The case I always remember and like to tell about is a young lady who had a 3.9 average majoring in Spanish, but her department didn't recommend her, and everybody was up in arms, until they pointed out that she started in Spanish 1, and her native language was Spanish. She was not voted summa.

So I say vote the letter. I see this whole procedure very sensible. Though, indeed, it gets dominated by a number, each department can override that consideration. Biology has for a long (inaudible). I don't think we have consistently (inaudible), but we at least discuss it every time.

PROFESSOR McDonald: So the override is simply not writing a letter, or voting it down?

PROFESSOR SMITH: Yes, formally voting it down.

DEAN LOWE: The people who would vote it down by their department?

SECTION REDACTED – Discussion of individual students

PROFESSOR ORIANS: So I just want to go back to this why did I spend those hours writing the letters. So I want to try to understand what you use the letters for? Do you use them for anything meaningful? If the department votes, and they vote on a 3.89 that doesn't make it, that person doesn't get a letter written because they didn't make it. You only write letters who you think are going to make it, in which case it does seem like a waste of time, unless you're actually in your two-hour meeting yesterday going through each and every one of those letters.

DEAN LOWE: Sometimes departments will provide a departmental letter of support, and sometimes the student's advisor will supply a letter to the department. So different departments handle it differently.

PROFESSOR ORIANS: I wrote them all for environmental studies, but that's my time.

DEAN LOWE: Yes, and Ben has written them all for computer science, and --

PROFESSOR ORIANS: But is it really worth my time? That's my question.

DEAN LOWE: We were talking about this letter. We read some of the letters that were just lovely, and we felt guilty that we didn't read all of them, every single sentence of all of them. And we said, “Well, maybe we should let the faculty know that a concise paragraph, letting us know how strongly an advisor or department feels about a student's candidacy would be more -- would be sufficient.” We need to know that you are supporting the student --
MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: (Inaudible)

DEAN LOWE: You would be surprised how sometimes it's unclear.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Can we get a form to check?

DEAN LOWE: We've tried.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: The reason we're doing it is because it's in the Bulletin.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So this can go in the list of things that we will talk about --

PROFESSOR McNINCH: It does say that.

DEAN LOWE: It does say that. It's also sometimes the department might be divided. We did have a student who the department vote was 2-2. She ended up not meeting the GPA cutoff. So sometimes the advisor letter is for a department's discussion about how strong a student is, or sometimes the department will say, well, her advisor didn't support her and didn't provide a letter and didn't really have enough to say in the letter.

PROFESSOR McNINCH: The answer is occasionally, it's not the advisor writing it. It's one person for the department.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I just know it's an extra step of things that I have to do, and if it wasn't being considered, I just would love to not do it. But if you think it's -- I'll get a form. It's basically close to a form letter now. I think it would be (inaudible) a little bit. I will keep doing my close to a form letter. I'm happy to share it with anybody.

PROFESSOR McNINCH: Other comments?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Shouldn't we be considering (inaudible)?

SECTION REDACTED – Discussion of individual students

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That comes from your committee, too. I suspect it won't get to the faculty if (inaudible).

DEAN LOWE: I mean, the committee is talking about planning some possible changes to summa and discussing those and bringing them to the faculty in the fall, anyway.

PROFESSOR McNINCH: They were not the same kind of changes. I have to say this is a pretty
open-ended task, and it's hard to -- even being objective, we've worked pretty hard for the last ten years.

DEAN LOWE: I would also like to say -- and maybe I'm stepping on Jillian's toes here -- that there are some committee members who are rolling off this committee, and we need some more members to serve on this committee next year. So if anyone is really enthusiastic about summa, the Liberal Arts and Jackson College Committee on Academic Standing and Honors really needs some more faculty members to serve on this committee. It's not just summa. It also involves academic standing, which is putting students on academic probation, requiring them to withdraw for a semester, or permanently leave Tufts because of academic disaster. So this committee really needs support, and if you're interested, talk to Jillian.

PROFESSOR McNINCH: Other business? So move to adjourn, or I ask someone to move to adjourn.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So moved.

PROFESSOR McNINCH: Any objections. And we want these back. So Carmen and I will sit down and go through and see if I missed accidentally.

MEETING ADJOURNED

Respectfully Submitted,

Jillian Dubman
Secretary of the Faculty for Arts, Sciences & Engineering