Latin Honors requirements

LA&J Committee on Academic Standing and Honors

March 29, 2017

1. Summary
The committee is proposing what amounts to two changes in the language of requirements for receipt of Latin Honors upon graduation with a degree in Arts and Sciences at Tufts University. For the full text of the proposed language, see below. Here is a quick summary:

- The proposal removes the current requirement that to be eligible for summa, students must “...earn at least one credit of A or A- in four of the five areas of the distribution requirement”

- The proposal streamlines the departmental role. Current language in the Bulletin states that eligibility for magna or summa requires recommendation by the student's department, and a letter from the department supporting the recommendation. The new language asks only for a vote of the departmental faculty.

2. Explanation and Justification

2.1. General remarks
The requirements for Latin Honors at Tufts are more complex than requirements at many peer institutions. At many other Universities, award of summa (and magna) to a student simply reflects GPA. This likely affects how persons external to Tufts interpret Latin Honors on Tufts degrees and transcripts.

This observation seems to argue that - as a general matter - we should prefer objective and straightforward criteria to requirements that are complex and subjective.

2.2. Concerning A's in Distributions
The requirement that students achieve a grade of A in four of the five distribution areas was originally formulated as a Breadth Requirement. However, we note that in practice

- very close to all students who meet the GPA requirement meet this requirement, and

- in close to all cases, students who are otherwise eligible for summa but fail to meet this requirement do so because they are transfer students who satisfied distribution requirements prior to arrival at Tufts.

Moreover,

- Currently, verifying the “A's in distribution” requirement is fairly time consuming for the
The committee has concluded that the complexity of this requirement seems to outweigh its utility.

2.3. Concerning departmental role

The existing bulletin language stipulates departmental recommendation as a requirement for eligibility for summa. The committee has interpreted this language as a requirement for a departmental vote. The proposed new Bulletin language would make this interpretation more explicit.

The existing language also stipulates that a letter of support from the major department is a requirement for summa eligibility. In practice, the letters that the committee sees for summa candidates vary quite a bit. Some departments send what amounts to a form letter confirming recommendation for summa, while others send lengthy letters. The proposed new language eliminates the requirement for a letter.

The committee notes that some departments have long-standing requirements which students must meet to receive a departmental recommendation for summa honors. The proposed new language accounts for this; it reads:

Students must further satisfy any requirements stated by their major department or program for highest distinction, which will be confirmed by a vote of that faculty.

Departments should make such requirements clear to students – for example, by posting them on the departments website. Some examples are included below.

As graduation approaches, Departments are asked to consider recommending students who might have a sufficient GPA to be eligible for summa (or magna); in the end award of Latin Honors depends on GPA and on this recommendation. The committee feels strongly that departments should only decline to recommend a student for summa when that student has failed to satisfy some objective, stated departmental criteria.

3. Issue for future consideration

The percentage of students receive summa has risen in recent years, so it may be time to revisit the numerical GPA requirement (currently 3.80 for summa). The committee has so far not carefully considered this question.

4. Examples of explicit “Departmental Requirements”

These descriptions are taken from the website of the indicated departments.

- Psychology: “In recommending students for honors and awards, the Psychology Department gives special attention to research done by the student. To graduate summa cum laude, a student MUST do independent empirical research deemed relevant to psychology; sponsored either by a faculty member in a department at Tufts, or by an individual outside of Tufts.”

- Drama: “We expect each Drama major to gain experience in the creative aspects of drama and/or dance through involvement in the department's production program. Graduation magna cum laude or summa cum laude with a drama major is contingent not only on scholastic achievement, but also on significant participation in productions.”
• **American Studies**: “In recommending summa cum laude, program faculty will look for additional evidence of academic distinction (including but not limited to the completion of an SSP, HT, substantial independent project, or a record of significant coursework at an advanced level (100+ or Integrative Seminar level courses in excess of the basic major requirements).”

• **Biology**: “to be eligible for summa honors in Biology, students are expected to have had at least one research experience during their undergraduate career.”

(The Biology concentration checklist then asks for details about “Research experience [not required for the major; required for candidates for summa cum laude]” )

5. Proposed Bulletin language for Latin Honors requirements

Here is the proposed language for the Bulletin:

For determination of eligibility for Latin Honors, a student's cumulative grade point average (GPA) will mean the cumulative average of all grades earned at Tufts. Scores in courses taken at institutions other than Tufts shall not be used to calculate GPA, nor shall they be used to satisfy Latin Honors requirements for the number of A's earned in a major. Exceptions to this rule are: courses taken through cross-registration, Tufts domestic exchange programs, and programs abroad. (See also: Thesis Honors Program.) Advanced placement scores are not interpreted as grades.

• Distinction (cum laude) is conferred at commencement on liberal arts students who achieve a record of five credits of A or A- in the courses required for one of their majors, including related fields, and whose cumulative GPA is 3.50 or higher.

• High distinction (magna cum laude) may be conferred at commencement on liberal arts students who achieve a record of six credits of A or A- in the courses required for one of their majors, including related fields, and whose cumulative GPA is 3.65 or higher. The department must vote to confirm high distinction.

• Highest distinction (summa cum laude) may be conferred at commencement on liberal arts students who achieve a record of six credits of A or A- in the courses required for one of their majors including related fields, and whose cumulative GPA is 3.80 or better. Students must further satisfy any requirements stated by their major department or program for highest distinction, which will be confirmed by a vote of that faculty. Finally, summa cum laude is awarded only by special vote of the entire faculty, recognizing extraordinary achievement in the breadth, as well as the depth, of the student’s intellectual development. Students whose record includes a serious disciplinary infraction will not normally be eligible for summa cum laude honors. Exceptions to this policy can be made only after disclosure by the Dean of Student Affairs of the details of the infraction and subsequent vote by the faculty.

Here is the current language in the Bulletin:

Grades in courses taken at institutions other than Tufts shall not be considered as criteria for honors. Exceptions to this rule are courses taken through cross-registration, the domestic exchange programs, the Mystic Seaport Program, or Tufts programs abroad.

See also Thesis Honors Program.

- Distinction (cum laude) is conferred at commencement on liberal arts students who achieved a record of five credits of A or A- in satisfying their concentration requirements, including related fields, and whose cumulative average for all Tufts courses is 3.50 or higher.

- High distinction (magna cum laude) may be conferred at commencement on liberal arts students who achieved a record of six credits of A or A- in satisfying their concentration requirements, including related fields, and whose cumulative average for all Tufts courses is 3.65 or higher. Students must be recommended in writing by their departmental major.

- Highest distinction (summa cum laude) may be conferred at commencement on liberal arts students who achieved a record of six credits of A or A- in satisfying their concentration requirements and whose cumulative average for all courses is 3.80 or better. Such candidates must also have earned at least one credit of A or A- in four of the five areas of the distribution requirement. All of these A or A- grades must be received in courses offered by a department or interdisciplinary program at Tufts or in Tufts Programs Abroad. Please note that Advanced Placement scores are not interpreted as grades.

It is important to emphasize that the numerical criteria for magna cum laude and summa cum laude determine only eligibility for consideration; actual award of these honors is contingent on departmental recommendation. A description of additional departmental criteria (such as independent research) for honors recommendations is available from each academic department or program. In addition, for students recommended for summa cum laude, the department must supply a letter supporting the recommendation. Finally, summa cum laude is awarded only by special vote of the entire faculty, recognizing extraordinary achievement in the breadth, as well as the depth, of the student’s intellectual development. Students whose record includes a serious disciplinary infraction will not normally be eligible for summa cum laude honors. Exceptions to this policy can be made only after disclosure by the Dean of Student Affairs of the details of the infraction and subsequent vote by the faculty.