



Proposal to Lower the University's GPA Cutoff for Latin Honors Eligibility (Senate Document #19-20-10)

Academic Procedures & Standards (APAS) Committee | Chair: William Reed

Senate Chair Lanford and the Senate Executive Committee request that the Academic Procedures & Standards (APAS) Committee review the attached proposal entitled, *Proposal to Lower the University's GPA Cutoff for Latin Honors Eligibility*.

The APAS Committee should:

1. Review the provisions for Latin Honors in the [University of Maryland Undergraduate Catalog](#).
2. Review the Latin Honors [GPA level specifications](#) for each college.
3. Review similar provisions and GPA level specifications at Big 10 and other peer institutions.
4. Review data on the impact of potential changes to existing procedures.
5. Consult with the proposer.
6. Consult with a representative of the Office of Undergraduate Studies.
7. Consult with a representative of the Registrar's Office.
8. Consult with a representative of the Office of the Senior Vice President & Provost.
9. Consider whether the provisions for Latin Honors appropriately recognize top-tier graduates of the University.
10. Consider whether the University's rationale for assessing Latin Honors as percentages instead of absolute GPA thresholds is appropriate.
11. Consider whether the percentage or GPA level thresholds should be revised.
12. Consult with a representative of the Office of General Counsel on any proposed changes to the University's policies or procedures.
13. If appropriate, recommend whether the University's procedures should be revised.

We ask that you submit a report to the Senate Office no later than **February 7, 2020**. If you have questions or need assistance, please contact Reka Montfort in the Senate Office, extension 5-5804.



Proposal to Lower the University’s Latin Honor Eligibility GPA Cutoff

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UNIT	N/A	CONSTITUENCY	N/A

DESCRIPTION OF ISSUE

At the University of Maryland – College Park, hereinafter UMD, the lowest qualifying GPA for graduating seniors to achieve cum laude is 3.5 on a 4.0 scale (College of Information Studies). Currently, 10 out of the 13 (76%) of the colleges at the University have requirements between 3.85 to 3.91 to simply qualify for cum laude, the lowest Latin honor distinction. In addition, UMD only considers the GPAs of the top 10% of graduates when determining the GPA cutoffs for the following academic year.

After researching a myriad of universities including; Ivy Leagues, similarly academic ranked institutions, and peer colleges within the BIG 10 Conference, I found a stark disconnect between the high GPA threshold to achieve Latin honors at UMD in comparison to other comparable institutions. For brevity, I will discuss the schools with the same rank as UMD according to the 2020 U.S. News and World Report (<https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities>).

Currently, the University of Maryland – College Park is ranked #63 under the National Universities category along with George Washington University and the University of Connecticut (U-Conn). According to their respective Offices of the Registrar, achieving Latin honors requires a GPA of the following:

- The George Washington University: 3.4–3.59 (**cum laude**), 3.6–3.79 (**magna cum laude**), 3.8–4.0 (**summa cum laude**).
- U-Conn: at least a 3.0 total GPA (**cum laude**), 3.4 – 3.69 (**magna cum laude**), 3.7 – 4.7 GPA (**summa cum laude**).

Latin honors distinctions are important to high achieving students, of which the UMD prides itself on. If UMD wants to recruit, retain, and graduate students who excel academically, the University must acknowledge and reward students of high academic performance to a proportionate degree of their peer institutions.

UMD graduates are competing against students from other universities for admission into the nation’s most prestigious graduate programs and job opportunities. However, UMD graduates fall short when graduates from other institutions are achieving the prestigious Latin honor titles and UMD graduates are not, simply because of the high GPA threshold. The limited honors

acknowledgement for UMD students creates a disadvantage for them amidst these already difficult and competitive processes.

Due to the GPA cutoff to qualify for Latin honors at UMD, I believe the University is neglecting high achieving students by depriving them of the honored distinction. In its current form, UMD's Latin honors policy is dismissive towards students of high academic excellence and ultimately does an incredible disservice to UMD graduates. Thousands of families and students have paid great sacrifices to attend the University of Maryland - College Park, and as it stands, this high threshold sends a nonverbal message that their academic achievements are not enough to be acknowledged or rewarded.

I believe the University should consider adjusting the University's Latin honors system and GPA threshold to align more closely with other peer institutions.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTION

The University's current Latin honor's system needs to be changed to align with universities of a similar rank and/or other universities in the BIG 10 Conference. See the Office of the Registrar's website <https://registrar.umd.edu/current/Policies/latinhonors.html> for a comprehensive outline on UMD's Latin honors eligibility.

After speaking with Dr. Ann Smith, Assistant Dean in the Office of Undergraduate Studies, it was made clear that the University currently determines its GPA cutoff for Latin Honors by referring to the GPAs of graduating seniors from the previous academic year.

For example, the GPAs of the top 1% (summa cum laude) of graduating seniors of the College of Behavioral Sciences in the 2018-2019 academic year will determine the GPA cutoff for the students graduating in the 2019-2020 academic year who receive the summa cum laude distinction.

It is my goal to have the University abandon the aforementioned system and adopt one that expands the GPA/percentage cutoff to align with other peer institutions.

SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO IMPLEMENT LATIN HONORS POLICY CHANGE

The majority of universities in the BIG 10 Conference have their Latin honors data published on their Office of the Registrar websites. UMD could use the Latin honor systems of other schools in the Big 10 as a model for an appropriate GPA threshold to receive a Latin Honor title. If the University chooses this approach, UMD's Office of the Registrar can average the GPA cutoffs of other BIG 10 universities to determine a standardized GPA range for each Latin honor title. Information on the GPA ranges for other Big 10 universities can be found under the "Additional Information" section.

However, if UMD wishes to keep the percentage system (i.e. the top X% of students in the class receive a Latin Honor title) and uphold the integrity of the degrees and Latin honors titles awarded, then the University's Registrar should consider expanding the percentage of students who are eligible to receive Latin honors from the top 10% to the top 20-25% (please refer to

Indiana University, Northwestern University, or Purdue University under the “Additional Information” section).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Below is all the Latin Honors data published by universities in the **BIG 10 Conference**:

Indiana University: <https://commencement.indiana.edu/what-to-wear/students/honors-criteria.html>

University of Michigan (College of Literature, Science, and the Arts):
<https://lsa.umich.edu/advising/graduation/diplomas-distinction.html>

Michigan State University: <https://reg.msu.edu/ROInfo/GradHonor/GraduationHonors.aspx>

The Ohio State University

- College of Engineering: <https://advising.engineering.osu.edu/current-osu-students/graduation-honors-and-distinction>
- College of Education and Human Ecology: <https://ehe.osu.edu/ugss/advising-basics/honors/graduating/>

Pennsylvania State University: <https://www.registrar.psu.edu/graduation/distinction.cfm>

Rutgers University (See “Graduation with Honors” tab):
<https://sasundergrad.rutgers.edu/major/additional-academic-programs/honors-opportunities#graduation-with-honors>

University of Illinois – Urbana Champaign

- College of Liberal Art and Sciences: <https://las.illinois.edu/academics/distinctions>

University of Minnesota: <https://policy.umn.edu/education/degreshonors-faq>

University of Nebraska

- College of Education and Human Sciences: <https://cehs.unl.edu/cehs/deans-list-and-degrees-distinction/>

Northwestern University

- School of Communication: <https://advising.soc.northwestern.edu/registration-and-policies/honors/>

- Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences:
<https://www.weinberg.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/enrichment-opportunities/honors-awards/college-honors.html>
- McCormick School of Engineering:
<https://www.mccormick.northwestern.edu/students/undergraduate/student-prizes-awards.html>
- School of Education and Social Policy (page 33):
<https://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/ugrad/files/pdfs/sesp-student-handbook-2018-19.pdf>

Purdue University (See Section C “Graduation with Distinction”):
<http://catalog.purdue.edu/content.php?catoid=9&navoid=10530>

University of Wisconsin: <https://registrar.wisc.edu/grading-honors/>

Below is all the Latin Honors data published by universities in the **Ivy League Conference**:

Cornell University (for Bachelor’s of Science): 3.50 – 3.74 (**cum laude**), 3.75 – 4.0 (**magna cum laude**), 4.00 or greater (**summa cum laude**).

<https://cals.cornell.edu/academics/registrar/degree-requirements/academic-honors/>

University of Pennsylvania: 3.40 – 3.59 (**cum laude**), 3.60 – 3.79 (**magna cum laude**), 3.80 or higher (**summa cum laude**).

<https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/graduation-honors/>

Columbia University (College of General Studies): 3.50 – 3.66 (**cum laude**), 3.67 – 3.89 (**magna cum laude**), 3.9 or above (**summa cum laude**).

<http://bulletin.columbia.edu/general-studies/undergraduates/academic-policies/academic-honors/>

Appendix 2

LATIN HONORS CUTOFFS

Fall 2019, Spring 2020, and Summer 2020 Graduating Classes

College of Agriculture and Natural Resources

Summa	4.000 - 3.960
Magna	3.959 - 3.905
Cum Laude	3.904 - 3.831

School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation

Summa	4.000 - 3.923
Magna	3.922 - 3.771
Cum Laude	3.770 - 3.655

College of Arts and Humanities

Summa	4.000 - 3.984
Magna	3.983 - 3.940
Cum Laude	3.939 - 3.868

College of Behavioral and Social Sciences

Summa	4.000 - 3.976
Magna	3.975 - 3.932
Cum Laude	3.931 - 3.852

Robert H. Smith School of Business

Summa	4.000 - 3.966
Magna	3.965 - 3.912
Cum Laude	3.911 - 3.837

College of Computer, Mathematical, and Natural Sciences

Summa	4.000 - 3.980
Magna	3.979 - 3.941
Cum Laude	3.940 - 3.895

College of Education

Summa	4.000 - 3.993
Magna	3.992 - 3.986
Cum Laude	3.985 - 3.962

A. James Clark School of Engineering

Summa	4.000 - 3.975
Magna	3.974 - 3.931
Cum Laude	3.930 - 3.846

College of Information Studies

Summa	4.000 - 3.808
Magna	3.807 - 3.674
Cum Laude	3.673 - 3.592

Philip Merrill College of Journalism

Summa	4.000 - 3.943
Magna	3.942 - 3.893
Cum Laude	3.892 - 3.830

School of Public Health

Summa	4.000 - 3.938
Magna	3.937 - 3.850
Cum Laude	3.849 - 3.77

School of Public Policy

Summa	4.000 - 3.892
Magna	3.891 - 3.890
Cum Laude	3.889 - 3.816

College of Undergraduate Studies

Summa	4.000 - 3.929
Magna	3.928 - 3.896
Cum Laude	3.895 - 3.827

Appendix 3

University	Uniformly Distributed	GPA or Percentage	Minimum Threshold	GPA/Percentage for each Latin Honors Level
University of California: Berkeley	Yes, but students may enroll in their major's honors program as well which have varying specifications	GPA	Complete at least 50 units in the University of California -43 of those 50 units must be letter graded. -30 of the 50 units must be completed in residence at Berkeley. Meet the GPA requirement for Distinction in General Scholarship. *Each major program has an honors policy and program. Students may enroll in their major's honors program provided they have the required GPA in courses in the major and the approval of the major department. Students participating in the honors program in their major may enroll in fewer than 13 units. Honors in the major is noted on the transcript and diploma as Honors, High Honors or Highest Honors. Visit your undergraduate major adviser (UMA) for details.	General Distinction: 3.747 High Distinction: 3.860 Highest Distinction: 3.953
UCLA	No: differs by college	GPA	Eligible students must have completed at least 90 (98 for the School of Nursing) University of California units for a letter grade.	Varies by college
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	Yes	Percentage	Summa Cum Laude GPA 3.96 Magna Cum Laude GPA 3.91 Cum Laude GPA 3.84 Must complete one of the following: 25 honors hours, OR 35 advanced hours (300/400 level), OR LAS James Scholar Graduation Honors, OR Departmental Distinction	Top 3% Summa Cum Laude Top 7% Magna Cum Laude Top 12% Cum Laude
Indiana University: Bloomington	No: differs by college	GPA	Varies by college	Varies by college
The University of Iowa	No: differs by college	GPA	Varies by college	Varies by college
University of Michigan	Yes	Percentage	Highest Distinction: 3.957 – 4.000 High Distinction: 3.865 – 3.956 Distinction: 3.722 – 3.864	Top 3% "with Highest Distinction" Next 10% "with High Distinction" Next 25% "with Distinction."
Michigan State University	Yes	Percentage	The specific minimum grade-point averages required are determined by the Office of the Provost following a review of the standards by the University Committee on Undergraduate Studies. the GPA thresholds are adjusted following each Spring semester for the following calendar year.	Top 20% 6% receive the degree With High Honor 14% receive the degree With Honor
University of Minnesota: Twin Cities	Yes	GPA	Must complete an Honors Thesis consistent with the level of Latin Honors they are attempting. Must meet the residency requirement of 60 graded credits on campus. Students whose GPA is 0.100 or less below one of these three bands may be awarded Latin Honors based on exceptional thesis work as determined by the student's campus honors program	cum laude: 3.50 GPA or higher magna cum laude: 3.66 GPA or higher summa cum laude: 3.75 GPA or higher
University of Nebraska: Lincoln	No: differs by college	GPA	Varies by college	Varies by college
UNC Chapel Hill	Yes	GPA	To graduate "with Distinction" or "with Highest Distinction" a student must have completed at least 45 academic hours at UNC-CH and have obtained a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.5 and 3.8 respectively.	Distinction: 3.5 Highest Distinction: 3.8
Northwestern University	Yes	Percentage.	The GPA cutoffs for each level of honors based on the stated percentages are not made public	Top 25% of the students in each school 5% of the school's class are awarded summa cum laude Next 8%, magna cum laude Next 12%, cum laude
Ohio State University	Yes	GPA	No	Cum laude: 3.50 to 3.69 Magna cum laude: 3.70 to 3.89 Summa cum laude: 3.90 GPA
Penn State	No: differs by college	Percentage	Must have at least 3.5 GPA and 60 credits	Top 12% of a college's graduating class, GPA standard varies by college

Purdue University	No: differs by college	GPA, except for Highest distinction honors	No	Three-tenths of the graduates having the highest overall GPA shall be designated as graduating with highest distinction, irrespective of the schools from which they graduate. Regular Honors decided by individual colleges
Rutgers University	Yes	GPA	No	Summa Cum Laude: 3.850 or better Magna Cum Laude: 3.700 to 3.849 Cum Laude: 3.500 to 3.699
University of Wisconsin-Madison	Yes	Percentage	<p>will be noted on the transcript of students who have earned a grade GPA that places them within the top 20 percent of students graduating that term provided the student has earned 60 or more credits at UW-Madison.</p> <p>The award of Distinction in the Major is granted at graduation, upon the recommendation of a department to the Dean of the College of Letters & Science, to any L&S undergraduate student not earning the Honors degree (i.e., Honors in the Liberal Arts, Honors in the Major, Comprehensive Honors) who has done outstanding work in the major and who has passed a comprehensive examination on that work.</p>	Distinction: top 20%