

Proposed Changes to the Policy on Departmental Honors in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

February 19, 2019

An extensive discussion of the policy on departmental honors was initiated in the Policy and Awards Subcommittee in response to student petitions. In light of these discussions, we propose that the overall academic record requirement (minimum 3.25 overall GPA including all transfer coursework and courses completed at KU) be removed as a criteria for departmental honors within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. The rationale is that students who exhibit exceptional achievement in their major should not be disqualified from “departmental honors” because of their performance in coursework taken in other disciplines. The overall GPA requirement discourages students who, for a variety of reasons, may not have a strong overall academic record, but have demonstrated remarkable abilities in a specific department. While there is a petition mechanism in place for those that do not meet specific College requirements, in the case of this specific requirement we feel this is an unnecessary barrier.

Last April, Departmental Honors Coordinators were sent an email and asked for feedback on this policy change and a majority of departments who responded were in favor. Two departments were not supportive; however, their concerns were related to the importance of a strong GPA for completing the independent research project, and the potential of an influx of students wanting to do departmental honors that could not be accommodated. While the College sets the minimum requirements for departmental honors, the policy clearly states that individual departments and programs can set additional requirements (that must be approved by CUSA). If this proposal moves forward, we recommend that departments be reminded of this provision before the change comes into effect.

DEPARTMENTAL HONORS

Most departments and programs allow qualified majors to work toward graduation with departmental honors. Graduation with departmental honors is awarded in recognition of exceptional performance in the major ~~and~~, completion of a program of independent research or an alternative project, ~~and a strong overall academic record.~~

In addition to the requirements of individual departments and programs (which must be approved by the College committee on undergraduate studies and advising), the College requires the following for graduation with departmental honors:

1. Candidates must declare the intention to work for departmental honors with the appropriate departmental honors coordinator(s) no later than the time of enrollment for the final undergraduate semester, but sooner if required by the department(s). Copies of the intent form should be returned to College Student Academic Services.

2. At the end of the final undergraduate semester, the candidate must have achieved ~~an overall grade-point average of at least 3.25 and~~ a grade-point average of at least 3.5 in the major, including. ~~Both overall and major grade-point averages include~~ work completed at other institutions, as well as at KU. No minimum grade-point average is required to declare candidacy for graduation with departmental honors unless specified by the department.
3. Each candidate's departmental honors work must include independent research or an acceptable alternative project. The results of research are presented in a form appropriate to the requirements of the major department. Equivalents to the independent research component are established by approved departmental honors programs. In courses meeting the independent research requirement, the candidate must earn a grade of B or higher. Successful completion of all departmental honors requirements must be certified to the departmental honors coordinator(s) by a panel composed of at least three members of the College faculty who have read the report of the independent research and heard the oral presentation, where required.

Petitions

A department or program may petition to award graduation with departmental honors to deserving students who, for good reason, do not meet every College and departmental requirement. Send petitions to the committee on undergraduate studies and advising, [College Advising & Student Services](#).

Late Completion of Honors Requirement

Requirements for graduation with honors may be completed after the date on which certifications are requested from departments, and in some cases, requirements, if not needed for graduation, may be completed after a student has graduated. However, the Incomplete policy does apply and grades would lapse at the time of graduation. When a candidate finishes all requirements, departments must notify [College Advising & Student Services](#) in writing.