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Date: September 18, 2009

To: University of Houston Undergraduate Council

From: College of Technology Undergraduate Academic Committee, College of Technology Faculty, and Dr. Jerry Waite,

Re: Graduation with Honors

OVERVIEW

The University of Houston currently requires undergraduate students to complete 66 hours of letter-grade courses in residency at UH in order to receive honors upon graduation. Due to the changing environment at UH, including the reduced number of hours required for graduation as well as the state's emphasis on transferability of courses and its desire for students to graduate with few (if any) hours beyond their majors, this 66-hour rule needs to be reviewed.

EXTERNAL FORCES

The State of Texas' Higher Education Coordinating Board is influencing UH students' degree plans and academic plans in three primary ways. First, there is a movement to decrease the total number of hours required in degree plans to 120 (detailed justification is required for degree plans exceeding this limit). Second, the state encourages students to complete core requirements at community colleges before matriculating to baccalaureate-level universities. Finally, the state penalizes students who take more than 30 hours over their degree plans by charging them out-of-state tuition (http://www.uh.edu/provost/stu/stu_enrollcapqs.html).

Decreased Degree Plan Hours vs. the 66-Hour Rule

The 66-hour rule for Graduation with Honors was enforced when degree plans regularly exceeded 120 hours. By way of example, the Technology Leadership and Supervision (TELS) Program in which I teach required 129 hours in the late 1990's. Currently TELS requires 123, and, in conformance with state guidelines, the total will be reduced to 120 in the near future. The 66-hour rule does not take into consideration the decrease in degree-plan hours that has been implemented over the last decade. Whereas students were once required to complete about half their coursework in residency in order to earn honors at graduation, now we require 55% (66/120) to be completed at UH.

Transfer Students vs. the 66-Hour Rule

Note: All data referenced in the following paragraphs was provided by Mark Fiore (IR Research/Systems Analyst, U of H Office of Institutional Research). Many students rightly consider the cost of education before beginning their collegiate experience. Community colleges, funded largely by local property taxes, are a bargain for students during their lower-division studies. From a state perspective, community colleges are also a bargain because *local* property taxes fund their programs whereas *state* funding is required for public universities. The University of Houston is responding to this trend by increasing its efforts in recruiting transfer students from community colleges. In particular, a total of 2501 students transferred from community colleges to UH in Fall 2008 and 28.9% of those students ($n=722$) transferred-in 60 hours or more.

If these 722 students wish to earn honors at graduation, they will currently be required to complete a minimum of 66 additional hours in residence at UH. This means that they will, at the very minimum, need 126 hours of college coursework. This requirement is inconsistent with the intent of the state when it acted to decrease the number of hours required for baccalaureate degree plans. It also prohibits from honors consideration those students who follow the state's preferred path for undergraduate education: i.e., community college for lower division followed by university for upper division.

If UH is serious about recruiting community-college transfer students, it should not prohibit their consideration from graduation honors or require them to complete additional hours in order to earn honors designation. UH depends highly on transfer students (a total of 3362 in fall 2008, 2501 of which were from community colleges). In fact, 48% of all new undergraduate students in Fall 2008 were transfer students ($3670 \text{ FTIC} + 3362 \text{ transfer students} = \text{fall 2008 cohort of } 7032$) and 36% of the fall 2008 cohort studied first at a community college ($2501/7032$). We should not exclude such a high percentage of our student body from achieving graduation honors.

Associate-Degree Requirement vs. the 66-Hour Rule

Students who enroll in a community college before transferring to UH are allowed to transfer-in up to 66 hours. So, community colleges often build their degree plans around this limit (I serve on three community college program advisory boards and their associate's degree plans are generally 66 hours). Therefore, students who complete AA/AS/AAS degrees and then transfer to UH would need to complete a minimum of 132 hours in order to qualify for honors at graduation (66 at the community college and an additional 66 hours of letter-grade coursework at UH). This exceeds the state's recommended baccalaureate-level requirements by 12 hours (an entire semester).

Community College Transfer Students are Honor's Material

Some might assert that the quality level of community college programs and their graduates are not on a par with those at UH. The facts do not, however, support that assertion.

In fiscal year 2008, UH conferred undergraduate degrees on 4691 students. Of those students, 2011 (42.87%) began their studies at a community college. If so many students were able to complete their upper division studies at UH, the core competencies they learned at their respective community colleges must have been adequate.

However, the quality-level of the students who transferred to UH goes beyond *adequate*. Indeed, the *average UH* grade point average (GPA) of FY 2008 undergraduate degree recipients who began their academic careers in community colleges was 3.03 (this average GPA reflects *only* those courses taken at UH). More importantly, however, a total of 665 baccalaureate-degree recipients in FY 2008 began their degrees at community colleges *and* earned *UH GPAs* in excess of 3.25. This means that 33% of our graduates who began their degrees at community colleges *could not have earned honors* even though they earned honors-level GPAs (unless they completed coursework going beyond their degree-plan requirements). When compared to the entire graduating cohort, the current 66 hour rule denied honors to 14% of our graduating class (665/4691).

Additionally, Mr. Mark Fiore (IR Research/Systems Analyst, U of H Office of Institutional Research) reports that a student's incoming community college GPA positively correlates to his or her UH GPA. He states: "the correlation coefficient for these two variables is approximately .56 (.55647) and it is statistically significant." In other words, it is likely that an honors-level community college student will be an honors-level UH student.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The 66 hour rule should be changed to accommodate honors transfer students who graduate at or near their UH degree plan's credit-hour requirements. The 66 hour rule also connotes negatively to the efforts of faculty and administrators at community colleges with whom we work and on whom we depend.

Since UH degree plans are, for the most part, being altered to reflect the state's 120-hour recommendation and since community college students are permitted 66 hours of transfer coursework, it is recommended that graduation with honors require the respective GPA (for honors, high honors, and highest honors) based upon the last 60 hours of UH letter-grade coursework ($\frac{1}{2}$ coursework completed at UH, $\frac{1}{2}$ at community college) instead of the last 66 hours.

Note: This proposal was supported unanimously by the College of Technology Undergraduate Academic Committee on September 11, 2009 and unanimously by the College of Technology Faculty assembled at their Fall 2009 Faculty Meeting on September 18, 2009.

TO: Larry Williams, Chair
Undergraduate Council

FROM: Simon Bott
Academic Policies and Procedures Subcommittee

SUBJECT **Subcommittee Report November 18th, 2009**

DATE: November 10th, 2009

The committee met on October 21st. Members participating in the discussions (including other email communication): Amanda Baumle, Barbara Carlin, William Munson, Charles Peters, Kevin Simon, Rebecca Achée Thornton, Louis Williams, Djuana Young, Mariam Zakaria and Simon Bott. Guests present were Michelle Lestage, Joshua Bush, and David Harden.

The following document was discussed:

UC 10472 09F Graduation with Honors

This document suggested that the current standards for graduation with (Latin) honors be reduced from 66 to 60 hours. The primary justification for this was so that transfer students would still be able to bring in their maximum number of hours yet still graduate with a "honored" UH Degree. The SGA passed (unanimously) a resolution that was identical in scope.

Given previous recent discussions of council, before discussing this document, we reviewed the standard at relevant Texas institutions. These are as follows:

School	Hours required	GPA requirements*
Texas A&M	At least 60 hours at A&M; all A&M courses count	3.90, 3.70, 3.50
Texas Tech	At least half of degree including senior year. All Tech courses count.	3.90, 3.70, 3.50
North Texas	30 UNT hours; ALL COURSES count	3.90, 3.70, 3.50
UT	At least 60 hours at UT; all UT courses count	Percentage by college. Recent levels are 3.97, 3.88, 3.73
UTA	At least 45 hours at UTA;	3.90, 3.70, 3.50 – these can only be for the last 45 hours as long as overall GPA is 3.7, 3.5, 3.3
UTD	At least 45 hours at UTD; all UTD courses count	Percentage by college. Recent levels are > 3.89, 3.70, 3.46

ORIGINAL

*listed for summa, magna, and cum laude.

Using these data, the committee recommends the following policy change:

- a) As the state has mandated a 120 hour degree plan, and UH accepts up to 66 hours of transfer work, we suggest that Honors graduation require **54 hours in UH courses, ALL OF WHICH MUST BE A,B,C,... grades (letter-grade courses)**
- b) The GPA requirement be raised to **3.90, 3.70, 3.50** from the current values of 3.75, 3.50, 3.25 to conform to the standards across the state. The GPA should be calculated for **ALL students based on their last 54 UH hours**. This calculation should include all hours completed in the semester in which the first of those 54 hours was completed.

To be effective fall 2010 for all students entering UH fall 2010 and after.