Proposed revision of the minimum grade point average requirement for departmental honors, as approved by the Arts and Science Faculty Council, April 1, 2014:

**Departmental Honors**
To encourage individual development and independent study in a special field of interest, many departments and interdisciplinary programs of the College of Arts and Science offer honors programs for selected, superior candidates. Students normally begin departmental honors work in the junior year, but exceptions may be made in the case of outstanding seniors. To qualify for consideration, students must have (a) attained a minimum grade point average of 3.300 in all work previously taken for credit and in the major program of concentration, and (b) exhibited to the department(s) and/or interdisciplinary program(s) concerned such other evidence as may be required to indicate a capacity for independent study. Some departments and interdisciplinary programs require higher grade point averages in all work previously taken for credit and/or in the major. Formal admission is by the Office of the Dean after election by the department(s) and/or interdisciplinary program(s) concerned, with the approval of the director of honors study, who supervises the program with the aid of the Committee on the Honors Program.

Clean copy:

**Departmental Honors**
To encourage individual development and independent study in a special field of interest, many departments and interdisciplinary programs of the College of Arts and Science offer honors programs for selected, superior candidates. Students normally begin departmental honors work in the junior year, but exceptions may be made in the case of outstanding seniors. To qualify for consideration, students must have (a) attained a minimum grade point average of 3.300 in all work previously taken for credit and in the major program of concentration, and (b) exhibited to the department(s) and/or interdisciplinary program(s) concerned such other evidence as may be required to indicate a capacity for independent study. Some departments and interdisciplinary programs require higher grade point averages in all work previously taken for credit and/or in the major. Formal admission is by the Office of the Dean after election by the department(s) and/or interdisciplinary program(s) concerned, with the approval of the director of honors study, who supervises the program with the aid of the Committee on the Honors Program.

(Replacing paragraph in Vanderbilt 2013-14 Catalog, p. 94)
Dear Jonathan and Lou,

Last week, CASP met and decided on two changes that I believe need to go before the Faculty Council for its deliberation. They are as follows:

1) GPAs for students in the Honors Programs

We agreed that the minimum GPA for departmental honors be raised from the current 3.0 to 3.3. (This is only a minimum; many departments have already set higher levels, and the right of a student who does not meet the minimum grade level to petition for special consideration has not changed.)

Consequently, on page 94 of the Catalog, under "Departmental Honors", the current statement:

Students normally begin departmental honors work in the junior year, but exceptions may be made in the case of outstanding seniors. To qualify for consideration, students must have (a) attained a minimum grade point average of 3.000 in all work previously taken for credit and in the program of concentration, and (b) exhibited to the department(s) concerned such other evidence as may be required to indicate a capacity for independent study.

is to be changed to:

Students normally begin departmental honors work in the junior year, but exceptions may be made in the case of outstanding seniors. To qualify for consideration, students must have (a) attained a minimum grade point average of 3.300 in all work previously taken for credit and in the program of concentration, and (b) exhibited to the department(s) concerned such
other evidence as may be required to indicate a capacity for independent study.

2) In an attempt to discourage business-oriented and similar pre-professional independent study programs, the following changes are to be made to the Catalog:

(a) On page 88, under “Individually Designed Interdisciplinary Majors”, after the sentence “The program’s purpose may include topical, period, or area studies.”, the following sentence is to be inserted: “The program should not be designed with a focus on pre-professional training (e.g., pre-business, pre-law, or pre-medicine).

(b) The last sentence of the paragraph, i.e., “A student who wants to develop such a program must first discuss it with a dean.” is to be deleted.

(c) A new paragraph is to be inserted after the first, reading as follows:

“Each student must identify a major adviser who will offer advice and guidance. The major adviser must be a full-time faculty member or senior lecturer.”

Please let me know if you need any clarifications or additional information about these proposed changes.

Thanks,

Tim

*******************************************************************************
Timothy P. Hanusa
Professor of Chemistry
Department of Chemistry
Vanderbilt University
VU Station B #351822
Nashville, TN 37235-1822

Phone: (615)322-4667
Fax: (615)343-1234
E-mail: t.hanusa@vanderbilt.edu
*******************************************************************************
Hello Jonathan,

As for the GPA requirement, as you say, it is fairly obvious why it is needed. Members of the FC might be interested to know that the 3.00 number was set when the college first transitioned to the 4.0 grading system, sometime in the early 1980’s (before my time here, so I don’t know the exact year). The (unfortunate) grade inflation and the (fortunate) rise in quality of students in the ensuing 30+ years has made the adjustment in the requirement for admission to honors necessary (and overdue, which is why many departments have raised it on their own).

The rise of the individually-designed interdisciplinary major (INOTs) over the past 10 years has been dramatic: in 2004, there were only 27 such majors; in 2013, there were 77 INOTs, equal to those in English. Although there have been some truly well-designed examples, most are narrowly focused on pre-professional topics such as business, management, entrepreneurship, and the like. These not only create some conflict with offerings from Owen, but also fail to capture what is to be the truly interdisciplinary nature of such majors. This is not to say that courses from a variety of departments aren’t required—they are—but they are still selected to facilitate a narrowly conceived goal (e.g., entrance into a professional school), rather than to explore the intersection of disparate worlds of thought. The change in language is to reemphasize the interdisciplinary nature of INOTs, encourage students to take more responsibility for designing a coherent proposal, and give some guidance to the advisers and approvers of such majors.

We considered other qualifiers other than “should”, and decided not to be too restrictive (e.g., with “must”), because we felt that it might be possible for a student to come up with an appropriate business-oriented INOT, for example, that was not simply focused on making the student more attractive to post-graduate business schools. We felt that the bar should be raised on what constituted an acceptable INOT, however. A Vanderbilt student has over 50 majors to choose from, and there should be some very good reasons presented if a custom-designed major is contemplated.

I hope this helps. Let me know if I can provide any additional information.

Thanks,

Tim

On Mar 26, 2014, at 3:13 PM, Bremer, Jonathan E <jonathan.e.bremer@Vanderbilt.Edu> wrote:

Hi Tim;
Honors

Founder’s Medal
The Founder’s Medal, signifying first honors, was endowed by Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt as one of his gifts to the university. The recipient is named by the dean after consideration of faculty recommendations and overall academic achievements, as well as grade point averages of the year’s highest ranking summa cum laude graduates.

Latin Honors Designation
Honors noted on diplomas and published in the Commencement program are earned as follows:

- Summa Cum Laude. Students whose grade point average equals or exceeds that of the top 5 percent of the previous year’s Vanderbilt graduating seniors.
- Magna Cum Laude. Students whose grade point average equals or exceeds that of the next 8 percent of the previous year’s Vanderbilt graduating seniors.
- Cum Laude. Students whose grade point average equals or exceeds that of the next 12 percent of the previous year’s Vanderbilt graduating seniors.

Graduates who complete the requirements of the College Scholars program are awarded “Honors in the College of Arts and Science,” and this designation appears on their diplomas. Candidates successfully completing departmental honors programs are awarded honors or highest honors in their major field, and this designation appears on their diploma.

College Scholars Program
Entering first-year students with outstanding academic records and students who achieve academic distinction during their first semester at Vanderbilt are invited to participate in the College Scholars program. These students have the exclusive opportunity to pursue advanced scholarly work in honors seminars and enriched courses or independent-studies projects. They may earn the designation “Honors in the College of Arts and Science” on their diplomas.

To earn the designation, College Scholars must accumulate fifteen “honors points” by achieving the grade B or better in approved courses and projects. A maximum of thirteen of these honors points may be earned in honors seminars. Honors seminars in the humanities, natural sciences, and the social sciences serve toward satisfaction of AXLE requirements in these areas. For a complete description of how honors points may be earned and a listing of honors seminars offered, see the entry on Honors in alphabetical order under Courses of Study.

College Scholars are not required—although many will choose—to earn honors in the College of Arts and Science; all, however, may enroll in as many honors seminars as they want. To remain in good standing in the program, students must maintain a minimum grade point average of 3.000. Further information on the College Scholars program and honors in the College of Arts and Science may be obtained from Associate Dean Russell McIntire.

Departmental Honors
To encourage individual development and independent study in a special field of interest, many departments of the College of Arts and Science offer honors programs for selected, superior candidates. Students normally begin departmental honors work in the junior year, but exceptions may be made in the case of outstanding seniors. To qualify for consideration, students must have (a) attained a minimum grade point average of 3.000 in all work previously taken for credit and in the program of concentration, and (b) exhibited to the department(s) concerned such other evidence as may be required to indicate a capacity for independent study. Some departments require higher grade point averages in the major. Formal admission is by the Office of the Dean after election by the department(s) concerned, with the approval of the director of honors study, who supervises the program with the aid of the Committee on the Honors Program.

Provisions vary somewhat from department to department (see descriptions in the appropriate department sections of this catalog), but generally honors students are exempted from some normal junior and senior class work in their major fields in order to devote time to independent study under the supervision of a faculty adviser. Candidates are required to demonstrate some degree of originality and maturity in the methods of independent investigation, analysis, and criticism, and skill in the written presentation of independent work. This standard usually requires a senior thesis but may be satisfied, in departments that have gained approval of this procedure, by a series of briefer critical papers.

Departmental honors work culminates in an examination given in the second semester of the senior year. The examination shall be both oral and written except in departments where honors students must take all courses required of standard majors in addition to those required of honors students. These departments have the option of making the examination either oral or both oral and written. The examination shall be conducted by a committee with a majority of examiners who have not participated in the candidate’s honors work. Where feasible, examiners from other institutions may be included. The examination shall cover the thesis and specific fields of the independent work and may, at the discretion of the department, include all of the major work. Successful candidates are awarded honors or highest honors in their field, and this designation appears on their diploma.

Dean’s List
The Dean’s List recognizes outstanding academic performance in a semester. Students are named to the Dean’s List when they earn a grade point average of at least 3.500 while carrying 12 or more graded hours, with no temporary or missing grades in any course (credit or non-credit), and no grade of F. A student must be in a degree-granting school.

Phi Beta Kappa
The Alpha Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa in the state of Tennessee honors scholarly attainments in the liberal arts and sciences and annually elects seniors and juniors to membership during the spring semester.

Seniors who have completed at least 60 semester hours in
**Departmental Honors**

To encourage individual development and independent study in a special field of interest, many departments of the College of Arts and Science offer honors programs for selected, superior candidates. Students normally begin departmental honors work in the junior year, but exceptions may be made in the case of outstanding seniors. To qualify for consideration, students must have (a) attained a minimum grade point average of 3.000 in all work previously taken for credit and in the program of concentration, and (b) exhibited to the department(s) concerned such other evidence as may be required to indicate a capacity for independent study. Some departments require higher grade point averages in the major. Formal admission is by the Office of the Dean after election by the department(s) concerned, with the approval of the director of honors study, who supervises the program with the aid of the Committee on the Honors Program.

---

**Departmental Honors**

To encourage individual development and independent study in a special field of interest, many departments of the College of Arts and Science offer honors programs for selected, superior candidates. Students normally begin departmental honors work in the junior year, but exceptions may be made in the case of outstanding seniors. To qualify for consideration, students must have (a) attained a minimum grade point average of 3.300 in all work previously taken for credit and in the program of concentration, and (b) exhibited to the department(s) concerned such other evidence as may be required to indicate a capacity for independent study. Some departments require higher grade point averages in all work previously taken for credit and/or in the major/program of concentration. Formal admission is by the Office of the Dean after election by the department(s) concerned, with the approval of the director of honors study, who supervises the program with the aid of the Committee on the Honors Program.