August 2016

MCB HONORS GUIDELINES

The following outlines how honors recommendations are made for MCB concentrators:

1. A preliminary ranking is established, based on a numerical average of courses accepted for concentration credit that is calculated as follows:

   Thesis candidates: 2/3 average of all concentration course grades + 1/3 average of the three thesis grades

   Non-thesis candidates: average of all concentration course grades

2. Tutors are asked to provide brief recommendations for their tutees, including information on topics such as performance in tutorial and research not presented as a thesis.

3. A concentration honors committee meets and considers each candidate. Precise numerical cutoffs are not established in advance. Moreover, a student whose numerical average is a bit lower than a classmate's may receive a higher recommendation if their record shows more rigorous courses, improvement over four years, and a strong recommendation for performance in tutorial. Although assessing the rigor of each student's course selections is inevitably a bit subjective, we believe that individual consideration of each student's overall record is fairer than a purely computerized approach. The quality of the thesis project (if applicable) and the strength of the tutor's recommendation are given due consideration.

4. In recommending Highest Honors, we look both for a first rate thesis and an interesting program of challenging courses. Rarely have we recommended Highest Honors with a numerical average of less than 3.9, but a ranking above 3.9 in no way guarantees such a recommendation.

5. In recommending High Honors, we again look for more than "just grades", and we try especially hard to reward good theses (if applicable), challenging courses, etc. The lower limit for a High Honors recommendation varies a bit from year to year, but in general is around 3.7 for thesis candidates and 3.8 for non-thesis candidates.

6. The lower limit for an Honors recommendation is generally around a 3.5 for thesis candidates and 3.6 for non-thesis candidates. Research experiences, participation in tutorial, and the rigor of the plan of study are important factors in our final recommendations.

7. Concentrations make "English honors" (Honors, High Honors, and Highest Honors) recommendations to the College. The Faculty of Arts and Sciences makes Latin honors (*cum laude*, *magna cum laude*, and *summa cum laude*) recommendations based on the overall record. A complete description of the Harvard College honors process is described in the Student Handbook (see "Academic Information: Requirements for Honors Degrees).

8. We encourage students to remember that distinctions among levels of Honors in fact make little difference in the outside world. The biggest difference between a "*summa*" and a "*cum*" may be in the reaction of family and friends on commencement day, and some of our most promising students graduate "*cum*". So please do not design your plan of study with distinctions of honors in mind. A sensible and exciting program of courses and research is what matters - not a bit of Latin on your diploma.

9. The most important advice we can give is to construct a creative and challenging academic program based on your interests and the concentration requirements, engage in laboratory research so that you can experience the excitement of contributing to the discovery of new knowledge in the field, and take tutorial seriously as an opportunity to be mentored by a senior scientist.

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