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A Proposal for a New Policy on Latin (Graduation) Honors

The College at Brockport, College Senate

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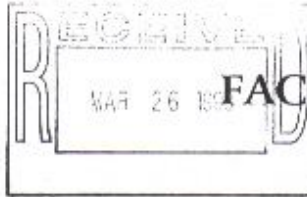
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BROCKPORT

Faculty Senate
State University of New York
College at Brockport
350 New Campus Drive
Brockport, NY 14420-2925



**Resolution#12
1998-99
FACULTY SENATE**

TO: Dr. Paul Yu, College President
FROM: The Faculty Senate Meeting on: *February 15, 1999*
RE: X I. Formal Resolution (*Act of Determination*)
 ___ II. Recommendation (*Urging the Fitness of*)
 ___ III. Other, For your Information (*Notice, Request, Report, etc.*)
SUBJ: *A Proposal for a New Policy on Latin (Graduation) Honors*
Signed: *Thomas Bonner* Date Sent: *3/22/99*
(*Thomas Bonner, Faculty Senate President*)



TO: The Faculty Senate
FROM: Dr. Paul Yu, College President
RE: I. **Decision and Action Taken on Formal Resolution**
 a. Accepted. Effective Date: *9/1/99 or next publication opportunity.*
 b. Deferred for discussion with the Faculty Senate on ___/___/___
 c. Unacceptable for the reasons contained in the attached explanation
II, III.
 a. Received and acknowledged
 b. Comment: _____

DISTRIBUTION: *Administrative Group - please share with appropriate staff.*

Distribution Date: *4/1/99* Signed: *P. Yu*
(*President of the College*)

Resolution Disk::9899-12::ayk

A PROPOSAL FOR A NEW POLICY ON LATIN (GRADUATION) HONORS

INTRODUCTION

Latin (graduation) honors have a long history in American higher education as a means of recognizing high academic achievement at the undergraduate level. *Cum laude*, *magna cum laude* and *summa cum laude* are, in fact, terms with which most educated adults are familiar, and are frequently used by the popular press when describing the educational attainments of a newsworthy person.

While the educated public correctly perceives that Latin honors are given in recognition of high academic achievement in pursuit of the baccalaureate degree, it is mistaken in a second assumption – that the calculations involved in determining Latin honors are based on a student's *total* undergraduate academic experience. Most people would be surprised, for example, to learn that a Brockport transfer student can be graduated *summa cum laude* based upon only 48 credits taken at Brockport, a mere 24 (eight courses) of which carry a letter grade, out of a total of 120 credits required for graduation.

Their assumptions would have been true in the era when most students' undergraduate experience was limited to a single college. They are wildly inaccurate today, when about half of Brockport's entering students are transfers (bringing credits with them, but not grades). While it is common practice in American undergraduate institutions to transfer credits but not grades, this practice creates a *de facto* two-tiered system for the award of Latin honors in colleges with a significant transfer population.

Consider the modal transfer student, a recent graduate of a community college, transferring 64 credits to Brockport. That student's Latin honors will be based on, at a minimum, 56 credits, while a native student's will be based on a minimum of 120. Given that students typically do their academic best in their upper-division courses, when they have settled into a major, completed courses they didn't necessarily want or feel any affinity for (general education), and gotten through their adjustment-to-college problems, this places native students at a serious disadvantage. In the wildest (and perhaps unlikely) example, a native student who completes 64 credits with a 2.0, then jumps into high gear for a 4.0 for the remaining 56, will graduate with less than a 3.0. In the meantime, a community college student who amasses the same 2.0 while completing his 64-credit degree, then does the same 4.0 at Brockport for the last 56, will graduate from Brockport with a perfect 4.0, and *summa cum laude* on his transcript and his diploma. A splendid finish for the transfer student, but is that even remotely fair to the four-year Brockport Student?

RECOMMENDATION

Inasmuch as there is a general presumption on the part of the educated public that Latin honors are based upon the entire undergraduate experience, and inasmuch as our current system for calculating Latin honors creates a two-tiered system that is clearly unfair to native students, it is recommended that Latin honors at SUNY Brockport be based upon all course work taken at all institutions. It is further recommended that a student's transcript show three separate GPAs, one based upon all courses taken other than at SUNY Brockport, one showing the GPA for all courses taken at Brockport, and a third showing the combined GPA - upon which Latin honors will be based.

11/11/98