

# LATIN HONORS & HONORS DISTINCTIONS

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Faculty Senate Meeting

April 20, 2022

# Primary motivation for proposed changes

- To address disparities across colleges
- Inequities repeatedly raised as a concern by students, especially those in cross-college majors

	CALS	CAS	COE	CHE
% of juniors and seniors affiliated with cross-college major (FA21)	54%	40%	39%	12% (+30% projected for Brooks School)

# Overview of proposed changes

- ❑ Replace current divergent approaches to the award of honors based on GPA only with standard approach across all UG colleges/schools
  - Use consistent labels and criteria: Summa cum laude (top 5%); Magna cum laude (next 10%), Cum laude (next 15%)
- ❑ Colleges/schools continue to make local decisions about awarding honors based on academic achievements that go beyond GPA remains with colleges/schools
  - Use single naming convention – “Distinction in X” – with “X” and the associated eligibility criteria identified at the local level (e.g., “Distinction in Research”)
  - Can be awarded at the level of the degree or major
- ❑ Eliminate dean’s lists

# Benchmarking

## Proposed changes align with approach at other Ivy institutions

- GPA-only honors is awarded at degree-level at all our Ivy peers except Princeton, with Latin Honors label
  - At Princeton, honors are awarded by the department (combination of GPA & senior thesis)
  - At Harvard, students are eligible for Latin Honors based on GPA alone in some but not all conditions
- Completion of honors thesis or independent project is associated with award of honors at the department level at all our Ivy peers (i.e., not at the level of the degree; not referred to as Latin Honors). Labels vary across institutions
  - “Distinction”: Yale
  - “Honors”: Princeton (also offer “High Honors” and “Highest Honors”)
  - “Departmental Honors”: Columbia, Harvard (also referred to as “English Honors,” with opportunity to earn “Highest Honors”), Brown (“Concentration Honors”)
  - “Honors [or High Honors] in the major”: Dartmouth

# Current state: Honors based only on GPA

College	Label	Criteria	Dean's List	Degree vs Major
CALS	Latin Honors	Summa cum laude: $\geq 4.0$ Magna cum laude: $\geq 3.75$ Cum laude: $\geq 3.5$	3.5	Degree
COE	Latin Honors	Summa cum laude: $\geq 4.0$ Magna cum laude: $\geq 3.75$ Cum laude: $\geq 3.5$	3.5	Degree
CAS	Distinction in all subjects	GPA in top 30%	3.6	Degree
SHA	Latin Honors	Summa cum laude: $\geq 4.0$ Magna cum laude: $\geq 3.85$ Cum laude: $\geq 3.75$	3.75	Degree
CHE	High Distinction Distinction	$\geq 4.0$ $> 3.75$	3.7	Degree
AAP	<i>none</i>	-	3.8	-
ILR	<i>none</i>	-	3.3 (FY), 3.4 (SO), 3.6 (JR & SR)	-

- All UG colleges except AAP and ILR currently award Honors at the level of the *degree based on GPA only*
- All UG colleges award Dean's list based on semester GPA, but using different thresholds
- The criteria used to determine honors vary (% vs absolute GPA; degree of selectivity)
- The labels vary: 3 colleges use "Latin Honors" and 2 use "distinction" language

# PROPOSED: Honors based only on GPA

College	Label OLD	Label NEW	Criteria OLD	Criteria NEW	Degree vs Major OLD	Degree vs Major NEW
CALS	Latin Honors	Latin Honors	Summa cum laude: $\geq 4.0$ Magna cum laude: $\geq 3.75$ Cum laude: $\geq 3.5$	Summa: top 5% Manga: next 10% Cum Laude: next 15%	Degree	Degree
COE	Latin Honors	Latin Honors	Summa cum laude: $\geq 4.0$ Magna cum laude: $\geq 3.75$ Cum laude: $\geq 3.5$	Summa: top 5% Manga: next 10% Cum Laude: next 15%	Degree	Degree
CAS	Distinction in all subjects	Latin Honors	GPA in top 30%	Summa: top 5% Manga: next 10% Cum Laude: next 15%	Degree	Degree
SHA	Latin Honors	Latin Honors	Top 10-15%	Summa: top 5% Manga: next 10% Cum Laude: next 15%	Degree	Degree
CHE	High Distinction Distinction	Latin Honors	$\geq 4.0$ $> 3.75$	Summa: top 5% Manga: next 10% Cum Laude: next 15%	Degree	Degree
AAP	<i>none</i>	Latin Honors	-	Summa: top 5% Manga: next 10% Cum Laude: next 15%	-	Degree
ILR	<i>none</i>	Latin Honors	-	Summa: top 5% Manga: next 10% Cum Laude: next 15%	-	Degree

\*Dean's list would be eliminated in all colleges

# Current State: Honors based on GPA+

College	Label	Criteria	Degree vs Major
CALS	Distinction in Research	GPA $\geq$ 3.0 Honors thesis	Degree
AAP	Honors	GPA $\geq$ 3.7 Honors thesis	Major (URS only)
CAS	Latin Honors	Evaluation of thesis	Major
SHA	Distinction in Research	Based on honors thesis, GPA Honors thesis grades in HADM 4970 & 4971	Degree
CHE	With Honors	GPA $\geq$ 3.2-3.5, depending on major Honors thesis	Major
COE	With Honors	GPA $\geq$ 3.5 Honors thesis	Major
ILR	With Honors	GPA $\geq$ 3.7 Honors thesis	Degree

- All UG colleges award honors based on achievement beyond GPA
- Criteria vary
- Labels vary (only CAS awards “Latin” honors at level of the major [offered at degree level in CALS, COE, and SHA])
- Some awarded at level of degree, others at level of major
- In some colleges, available only in some majors (e.g., CAS, AAP)

# PROPOSED: Honors based only GPA+

College	Label OLD	Label NEW	Criteria OLD	Criteria NEW	Degree vs Major OLD	Degree vs Major NEW
CALS	Distinction in Research	Distinction in X*	GPA $\geq$ 3.0 Honors thesis	Achievement beyond GPA (TBD by college)	Degree	Degree or Major (TBD by college)
COE	Honors	Distinction in X*	GPA $\geq$ 3.7 Honors thesis	Achievement beyond GPA (TBD by college)	Major (URS only)	Degree or Major (TBD by college)
CAS	Latin Honors	Distinction in X*	Evaluation of thesis	Achievement beyond GPA (TBD by college)	Major	Degree or Major (TBD by college)
SHA	Distinction in Research	Distinction in X*	Based on honors thesis, GPA Honors thesis grades in HADM 4970 & 4971	Achievement beyond GPA (TBD by School)	Degree	Degree = Major (TBD by School)
CHE	With Honors	Distinction in X*	GPA $\geq$ 3.2-3.5, depending on major Honors thesis	Achievement beyond GPA (TBD by college)	Major	Degree or Major (TBD by college)
AAP	With Honors	Distinction in X*	GPA $\geq$ 3.5 Honors thesis	Achievement beyond GPA (TBD by college)	Major	Degree or Major (TBD by college)
ILR	With Honors	Distinction in X*	GPA $\geq$ 3.7 Honors thesis	Achievement beyond GPA (TBD by School)	Degree	Degree = Major (TBD by School)



# CONCERNS RAISED

Concerns raised all relate to GPA-only honors (i.e., Latin Honors):

- 1) Due to significant variability in GPAs across majors, conferring Latin Honors at the level of the degree will result in inequities
  - Concern seems to be particularly acute within A&S (will STEM students be disadvantaged?)
  - Should Latin Honors instead be awarded at the level of the major?
- 2) If Latin Honors are based solely on GPA, students will no longer be motivated to do research/honors theses
  - Concern seems to be particularly acute within A&S
- 3) Proposed changes will exacerbate grade obsession and competition by conferring Latin honors based solely on GPA

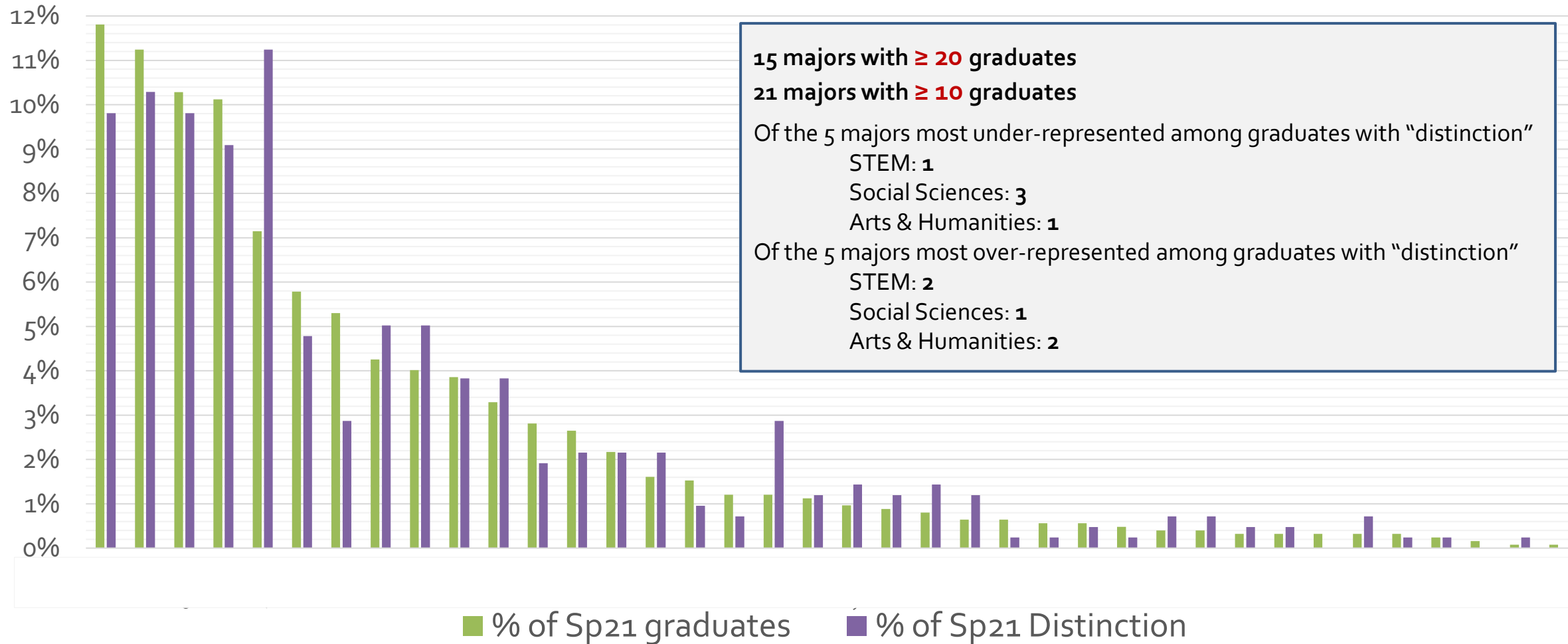
# CONCERN #1

(Due to significant variability in GPAs across majors, conferring Latin Honors at the level of the degree will result in inequities)

*However...*

- In every case, current GPA-only honors are awarded at the level of the degree
- Course requirements for majors only account for ~1/3 of total credits required for graduation (range is 30-50 of 120 credits in A&S)
- Some majors are too small for it to be meaningful to award GPA-based honors at the level of the major
- Awarding GPA-based honors at the level of the major could introduce other inequities:
  - Students in cross-college majors can be held to very different degree-level requirements (e.g., CS major in A&S vs ENG)
  - Some students could be awarded honors with much lower GPA (if situated in major with relatively lower GPAs)
- GPA data (from A&S) suggests differences across majors are not large, and do not conform with expectations stated by some (e.g., lower in math & sciences than arts & humanities)

## % of students who graduated with “distinction” in A&S, by major, in spring 2021 (top 30% by GPA)



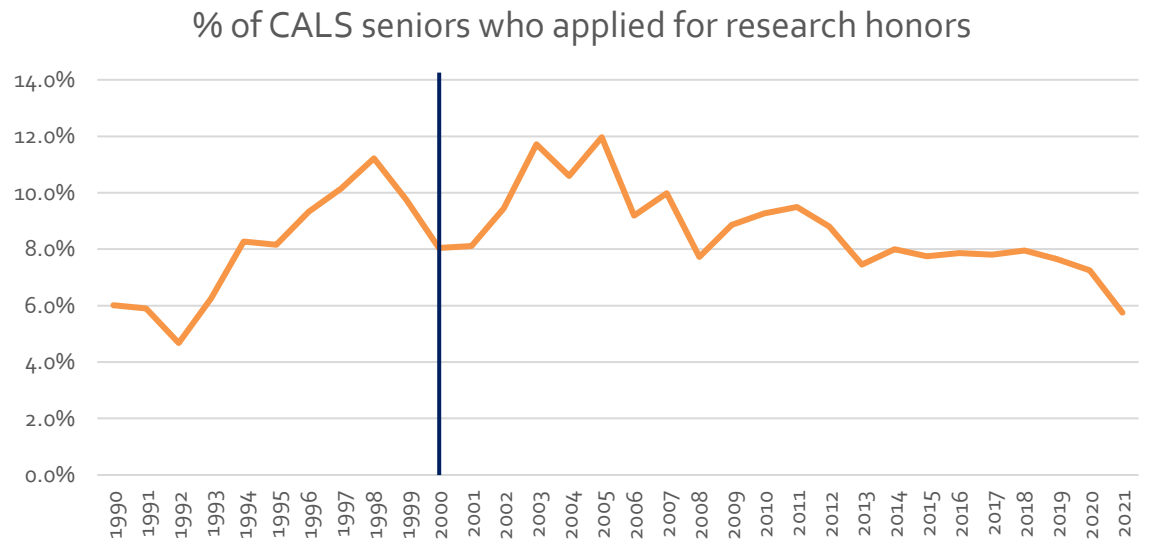
# CONCERN #2

(If Latin Honors are based solely on GPA, students will no longer be motivated to do research/honors theses.)

*Underlying assumptions:* (a) students are driven to do research/honors thesis because of the award they will receive; and (b) students are motivated more by award of Latin honors than award labeled “honors/distinction in research”

*However,* historical data from CALS suggests this is unlikely.

	Before 2000	After 2000
Name of honors for GPA+research	Honors	Distinction in Research
Availability of GPA-only honors	none	(1) Dean’s List (2) Latin Honors



## CONCERN #2

(If Latin Honors are based solely on GPA, students will no longer be motivated to do research/honors theses.)

Making degree-level Latin Honors contingent on GPA *plus* completion of research/thesis could introduce other inequities

- There are many departments that do not offer the option to complete a thesis to earn honors (→ this would need to change; in order to be equitable, all departments would need to offer similar opportunities)
- Not all departments offer opportunities for research or have the faculty capacity to meet student demand

# CONCERN #3

(Proposed changes will exacerbate grade obsession and competition by conferring Latin honors based solely on GPA.)

- *Underlying assumption:* The proposal alters the awards landscape by increasing opportunities for awards based solely on grades and/or by making the award that some may perceive to be the most prestigious (Latin honors) based on GPA-only.
- *However:*
  - Proposed changes would not add to the number of GPA-only awards, but rather would reduce them
  - There is no clear evidence that Latin honors have more cachet than dean's lists or distinctions. In fact, professional academic advisors in the colleges note that the dean's list fuels students' competitive drive the most (and exacerbates parental pressure)

# Student concern:

Elimination of Dean's Lists will disadvantage Cornell students

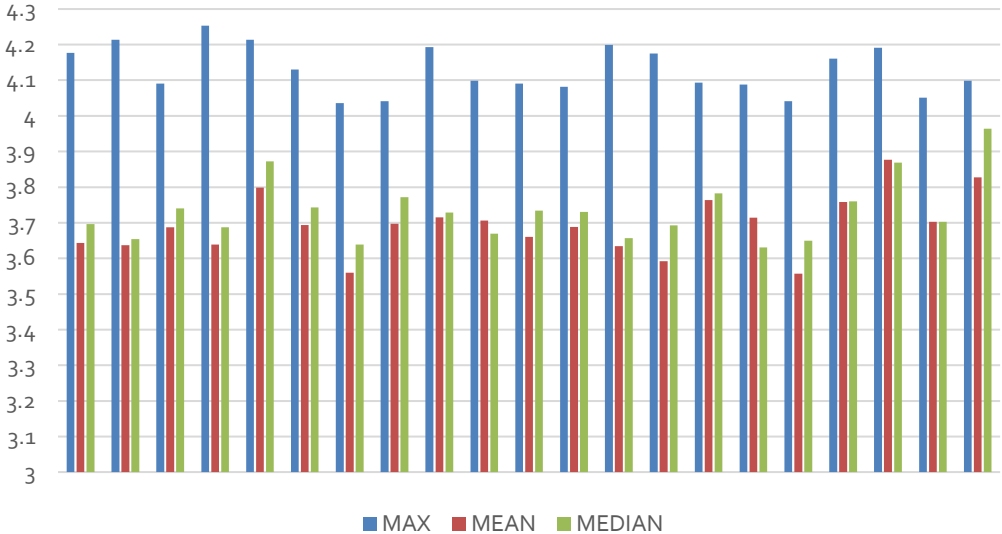
- Most other Ivy institutions do not have Dean's Lists (the two exceptions are Columbia and Penn)

# DISCUSSION



GPA data (from A&S) suggests differences across majors: (a) are not large; and (b) and do not conform with stated expectations (e.g., lower in math & sciences than arts & humanities)

A&S: 2021 graduates from departments with  $\geq 10$  graduates (from largest [left] --> smallest [right])



SORTED BY MEAN GPA	DISCIPLINARY AREA*	SORTED BY MAX GPA	DISCIPLINARY AREA*
3.88	A&H	4.25	M&S
3.83	SS	4.21	M&S
3.80	M&S	4.21	M&S
3.76	A&S	4.20	M&S
3.76	SS	4.19	M&S
3.72	M&S	4.19	A&H
3.71	A&H	4.18	SS
3.71	M&S	4.18	M&S
3.70	A&H	4.16	SS
3.70	A&H	4.13	SS
3.69	SS	4.10	SS
3.69	SS	4.10	M&S
3.69	SS	4.09	A&H
3.66	A&H	4.09	SS
3.64	SS	4.09	A&H
3.64	M&S	4.09	A&H
3.64	M&S	4.08	SS
3.63	M&S	4.05	A&H
3.59	M&S	4.04	A&H
3.56	M&S	4.04	SS
3.56	SS	4.04	M&S