Proposal to Lower the University's Latin Honor Eligibility GPA Cutoff

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DESCRIPTION OF ISSUE

At the University of Maryland – College Park, hereinafter UMD, the lowest qualifying GPA for graduating seniors to achieve cum laude is 3.5 on a 4.0 scale (College of Information Studies). Currently, 10 out of the 13 (76%) of the colleges at the University have requirements between 3.85 to 3.91 to simply qualify for cum laude, the lowest Latin honor distinction. In addition, UMD only considers the GPAs of the top 10% of graduates when determining the GPA cutoffs for the following academic year.

After researching a myriad of universities including; Ivy Leagues, similarly academic ranked institutions, and peer colleges within the BIG 10 Conference, I found a stark disconnect between the high GPA threshold to achieve Latin honors at UMD in comparison to other comparable institutions. For brevity, I will discuss the schools with the same rank as UMD according to the *2020 U.S. News and World Report* (https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities).

Currently, the University of Maryland – College Park is ranked #63 under the National Universities category along with George Washington University and the University of Connecticut (U-Conn). According to their respective Offices of the Registrar, achieving Latin honors requires a GPA of the following:
- The George Washington University: 3.4–3.59 (**cum laude**), 3.6–3.79 (**magna cum laude**), 3.8–4.0 (**summa cum laude**).
- U-Conn: at least a 3.0 total GPA (**cum laude**), 3.4 – 3.69 (**magna cum laude**), 3.7 – 4.7 GPA (**summa cum laude**).

Latin honors distinctions are important to high achieving students, of which the UMD prides itself on. If UMD wants to recruit, retain, and graduate students who excel academically, the University must acknowledge and reward students of high academic performance to a proportionate degree of their peer institutions.

UMD graduates are competing against students from other universities for admission into the nation's most prestigious graduate programs and job opportunities. However, UMD graduates fall short when graduates from other institutions are achieving the prestigious Latin honor titles and UMD graduates are not, simply because of the high GPA threshold. The limited honors

acknowledgement for UMD students creates a disadvantage for them amidst these already difficult and competitive processes.

Due to the GPA cutoff to qualify for Latin honors at UMD, I believe the University is neglecting high achieving students by depriving them of the honored distinction. In its current form, UMD's Latin honors policy is dismissive towards students of high academic excellence and ultimately does an incredible disservice to UMD graduates. Thousands of families and students have paid great sacrifices to attend the University of Maryland - College Park, and as it stands, this high threshold sends a nonverbal message that their academic achievements are not enough to be acknowledged or rewarded.

I believe the University should consider adjusting the University's Latin honors system and GPA threshold to align more closely with other peer institutions.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTION

The University's current Latin honor's system needs to be changed to align with universities of a similar rank and/or other universities in the BIG 10 Conference. See the Office of the Registrar's website https://registrar.umd.edu/current/Policies/latinhonors.html for a comprehensive outline on UMD's Latin honors eligibility.

After speaking with Dr. Ann Smith, Assistant Dean in the Office of Undergraduate Studies, it was made clear that the University currently determines its GPA cutoff for Latin Honors by referring to the GPAs of graduating seniors from the previous academic year.

For example, the GPAs of the top 1% (summa cum laude) of graduating seniors of the College of Behavioral Sciences in the 2018-2019 academic year will determine the GPA cutoff for the students graduating in the 2019-2020 academic year who receive the summa cum laude distinction.

It is my goal to have the University abandon the aforementioned system and adopt one that expands the GPA/percentage cutoff to align with other peer institutions.

SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO IMPLEMENT LATIN HONORS POLICY CHANGE

The majority of universities in the BIG 10 Conference have their Latin honors data published on their Office of the Registrar websites. UMD could use the Latin honor systems of other schools in the Big 10 as a model for an appropriate GPA threshold to receive a Latin Honor title. If the University chooses this approach, UMD's Office of the Registrar can average the GPA cutoffs of other BIG 10 universities to determine a standardized GPA range for each Latin honor title. Information on the GPA ranges for other Big 10 universities can be found under the "Additional Information" section.

However, if UMD wishes to keep the percentage system (i.e. the top X% of students in the class receive a Latin Honor title) and uphold the integrity of the degrees and Latin honors titles awarded, then the University's Registrar should consider expanding the percentage of students who are eligible to receive Latin honors from the top 10% to the top 20-25% (please refer to

Indiana University, Northwestern University, or Purdue University under the "Additional Information" section).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Below is all the Latin Honors data published by universities in the **BIG 10 Conference**:

Indiana University: https://commencement.indiana.edu/what-to-wear/students/honors-criteria.html

University of Michigan (College of Literature, Science, and the Arts): https://lsa.umich.edu/advising/graduation/diplomas-distinction.html

Michigan State University: https://reg.msu.edu/ROInfo/GradHonor/GraduationHonors.aspx

The Ohio State University
- College of Engineering: https://advising.engineering.osu.edu/current-osu-students/graduation-honors-and-distinction
- College of Education and Human Ecology: https://ehe.osu.edu/ugss/advising-basics/honors/graduating/

Pennsylvania State University: https://www.registrar.psu.edu/graduation/distinction.cfm

Rutgers University (See "Graduation with Honors" tab): https://sasundergrad.rutgers.edu/major/additional-academic-programs/honors-opportunities#graduation-with-honors

University of Illinois – Urbana Champaign
- College of Liberal Art and Sciences: https://las.illinois.edu/academics/distinctions

University of Minnesota: https://policy.umn.edu/education/degreeshonors-faq

University of Nebraska
- College of Education and Human Sciences: https://cehs.unl.edu/cehs/deans-list-and-degrees-distinction/

Northwestern University
- School of Communication: https://advising.soc.northwestern.edu/registration-and-policies/honors/

- Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences: https://www.weinberg.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/enrichment-opportunities/honors-awards/college-honors.html
- McCormick School of Engineering: https://www.mccormick.northwestern.edu/students/undergraduate/student-prizes-awards.html
- School of Education and Social Policy (page 33): https://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/ugrad/files/pdfs/sesp-student-handbook-2018-19.pdf

Purdue University (See Section C "Graduation with Distinction"): http://catalog.purdue.edu/content.php?catoid=9&navoid=10530

University of Wisconsin: https://registrar.wisc.edu/grading-honors/

Below is all the Latin Honors data published by universities in the **Ivy League Conference**:

Cornell University (for Bachelor's of Science): 3.50 – 3.74 (**cum laude**), 3.75 – 4.0 (**magna cum laude**), 4.00 or greater (**summa cum laude**).

https://cals.cornell.edu/academics/registrar/degree-requirements/academic-honors/

University of Pennsylvania: 3.40 – 3.59 (**cum laude**), 3.60 – 3.79 (**magna cum laude**), 3.80 or higher (**summa cum laude**).

https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/graduation-honors/

Columbia University (College of General Studies): 3.50 – 3.66 (**cum laude),** 3.67 – 3.89 (**magna cum laude)**, 3.9 or above (**summa cum laude**).

http://bulletin.columbia.edu/general-studies/undergraduates/academic-policies/academic-honors/