November 4, 2009

Dr. Steven Leslie
Executive Vice President and Provost
MAI 201 (G5000)

Dear Steve:

The Faculty Council has submitted to President Powers the enclosed “Proposal to Change the Requirements for Designation as a College Scholar or Distinguished College Scholar,” Documents of the General Faculty 7339-7341. This legislation was approved by the Faculty Council at its meeting of October 26, 2009. Prior to making his decision, he would like to receive your written recommendations regarding this legislation. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thanking you for your help, I remain

Sincerely yours,

Charles A. Roeckle
Deputy to the President

CAR/am

Enclosure

cc: President William Powers, Jr.
    Dr. Gretchen Ritter, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and Faculty Governance
    Dr. Janet Staiger, Chair, Faculty Council
    Dr. Sue Greninger, Secretary, General Faculty and Faculty Council
    Dr. Alan W. Friedman, Chair, Educational Policy Committee
    Mr. Shelby Stanfield, Associate Vice President and Registrar
    Ms. Debbie Roberts, Executive Assistant
October 27 2009

William Powers Jr.
President
The University of Texas at Austin
MAI 400
Campus Mail Code: G3400

Dear President Powers:

Enclosed for your consideration and action is a proposal to Change the Requirements for Designation as a College Scholar or a Distinguished College Scholar (D 7339-7341). The proposal was unanimously approved by the Faculty Council at its meeting on October 26, 2009.

Please let me know if you have questions or concerns regarding these recommendations.

Sincerely,

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The General Faculty and Faculty Council

Enclosure
SAG:dI

xc: Steven Leslie, executive vice president and provost
Charles Roeckle, deputy to the president
Shelby Stanfield, registrar
Janet Staiger, chair, Faculty Council
Alan Friedman, chair, Educational Policy Committee
DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

PROPOSAL TO CHANGE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR DESIGNATION AS A COLLEGE SCHOLAR OR DISTINGUISHED COLLEGE SCHOLAR

Professor Alan Freidman (English), on behalf of the Educational Policy Committee, has filed a proposal to change the requirements for designation as a college scholar or distinguished college scholar. The secretary has classified the proposal as general legislation. It will be voted on by the Faculty Council at its meeting on October 26, 2009.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The Faculty Council

This legislation was posted on the Faculty Council web site (http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/) on October 12, 2009.
PROPOSAL TO CHANGE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR DESIGNATION AS A COLLEGE SCHOLAR OR DISTINGUISHED COLLEGE SCHOLAR

This proposal is intended to clarify, simplify, and standardize the designation of students as College Scholars and Distinguished College Scholars and to more equitably recognize students who are pursuing degrees in more than one college. The proposal would change the specification of requirements for these honors in the General Information catalog as indicated below. This proposal was developed by administrative staff in the President’s Office, Provost’s Office, and the School of Undergraduate Studies and was reviewed, edited, and approved by the Educational Policy Committee in May 2009.

College Scholars
On Honors Day each spring, the University designates outstanding students as College Scholars and Distinguished College Scholars, on the basis of registration and grade point average requirements for courses taken in residence at the University, as specified below. Students who are eligible for recognition receive invitations to the Honors Day convocation about three weeks before Honors Day.

To be designated a College Scholar, a student must meet all of the following requirements:

1. The student must be registered as an undergraduate in the current semester, [for at least twelve semester hours of coursework in residence, unless he or she lacks fewer than twelve hours to complete degree requirements.] Students who hold an undergraduate degree or are registered in absentia are not eligible.
2. The student must have completed at least twelve semester hours of coursework in residence in either the spring or the fall semester of the previous calendar year.
3. The student must have completed at least thirty semester hours of coursework in residence at the University, excluding credit by examination, and at least sixty semester hours of college coursework, including transferred work and credit by examination.
4. The student must rank in the top 20% of their class in each college or school in which they are pursuing a major, based on in-residence cumulative grade point average.
5. The student must have an in-residence University grade point average of at least 3.50.

To be designated a Distinguished College Scholar, a student must meet all of the following requirements:

1. The student must meet the first, second, and fourth College Scholar requirements stated above, [be registered as an undergraduate for at least fifteen semester hours of coursework in residence, unless he or she lacks fewer than fifteen hours to complete degree requirements. Students who hold an undergraduate degree are not eligible.]
2. The student also must rank in the top 4% of their class in each college or school in which they are pursuing a major, based on in-residence cumulative grade point average, [have completed at least fifteen semester hours of coursework in residence in either the spring or the fall semester of the previous calendar year.]
3. The student must have completed at least thirty semester hours of coursework at the University, excluding credit by examination, and at least sixty semester hours of college coursework, including transferred work and credit by examination.
4. The student must have an in-residence University grade point average of at least 3.80.

Rationale. To revise these criteria (a) to bring them in line with honors in graduation, (b) to insure that only top students are honored, and (c) to eliminate criteria that have turned out to be brutally difficult to apply.

College Scholar and Distinguished College Scholar status are recognized at Honors Day. The criteria, as redesigned for the 2008-10 catalog, have turned out to be brutal for the deans’ staff and the registrar who must apply them. (“Brutal” is their word.) Nearly 10% of the students to be honored had to be handled by a system of

1 Amended by the Faculty Council at its meeting on October 25, 2009.
2 Modified on October 23, 2009 to match the 2009-2010 General Information catalog wording.
appeal and override. And in the end, 26% of eligible students were honored overall, with nearly 50% being honored in some colleges.

The main problem is the complicated rule for the number of hours for which a student must be registered in current and preceding semesters. This rule is unfair to students in science or engineering with schedules that add up to fourteen hours, as well as to students in part-time internships. The rule is also hard to apply to students in their final semesters, when they need fewer hours to graduate. The rule accommodates those students but at a huge cost in labor to the deans. This troublesome rule was adopted as an incentive to students to take full schedules, but it has not served that purpose, according to advisers. The proposed language greatly simplifies the task of identifying which students qualify, so that deans' office and registrar's office staff don't have to work "around the clock" for days checking a wide variety of complex and interacting criteria. Under the new proposed rules the registrar's office will be able to generate the lists of qualified students once the spring twelfth class day has passed. Separate calculations will be made for juniors and seniors in each school and college.

Other considerations were to recognize students at Honors Day every spring regardless of which semester they actually graduate, to bring the standards for Distinguished College Scholar recognition into line with the standard for graduation highest honors (top 4%), and to prevent students from "declaring" a second major in a field with generally low GPAs from qualifying for honors based only on that field (previously a double-major student qualifying in either major would be recognized, regardless of the number of hours completed in the qualifying major). The proposed language would require students with multiple majors to meet the qualifying standard in their most competitive major, rather than only in their least competitive major.

Preliminary analysis of data from spring 2009 data suggest that if these recommendations had been in place the number of students recognized would have been approximately 4,800 instead of the 6,500 who were honored, a reduction of a little more than 25%. In seven of the twenty-two cases studied (two classes in each of twelve undergraduate colleges and schools) the proposed new standards would have produced no difference from the actual number of qualifying students this spring. In the other fifteen cases, the reductions ranged from about 12% to about 60%. The most influential aspect of the changes appears to be the limitation of honors to the top 20% in each class (juniors and seniors) in each college or school. This analysis showed that there were 24,520 students in spring 2009 who had at least 60 semester credit hours (SCH) of coursework and at least 30 SCH in residence, well over half of the undergraduate student body. These students, divided into class by school, formed the basis from which the respective 20% and 4% numbers were calculated.

Other options to reduce the total number of students honored, which were considered and rejected include limiting students to only two recognitions (either one as a junior and one as a senior or simply any two times) and limiting seniors to recognition only in the semester they are graduating.

If approved, these changes will be added to the 2010-2011 General Information Catalog and will go into effect in spring 2011.