UMBC UGC Program Changes & Other Request: <u>Philosophy Department: Honors Program Policy</u>

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Specifics (see instructions):

The Philosophy Department would like to slightly alter and also clarify the eligibility requirements, application process, and overall description of its Honors Program. Please see the attached sheet, which displays the proposed new policy as it would appear on the Department Website and in the university catalog.

1. Currently we require an overall university GPA of 3.25 and a Philosophy GPA of 3.5 in order to qualify for the Honors program. We want to eliminate the overall GPA as requirement, and require a GPA within Philosophy of 3.6 for upper division Philosophy courses in particular.

2. We want to eliminate the current different requirements for transfer and other students, and instead require of all applicants to the Honors program that they have completed two upper division philosophy courses, with at least one at the 400 level (but excluding PHIL 400), by the beginning of the semester in which they are applying for admission into the Honors program, and that they have completed four upper division courses with at least two at the 400 level by the end of the semester in which they are applying. Students who do not meet the eligibility requirements may petition the Honors Coordinator for admission to the Program by filling out the Honors Application Form.

3. We want the application process to involve students submitting a standard form stating how they meet the eligibility requirements (see attached form) and also a brief description of the project, to the Honors Coordinator during the second semester of the applicant's junior year, by the end of September (Fall semester) or end of February (Spring semester). If the applicant meets the basic requirements for the Honors program and has an adequate background in the field of the project, the Honors Coordinator will then direct the applicant to an appropriate faculty advisor. The applicant will then develop, in consultation with this advisor, a 4 page proposal for the project, including a preliminary bibliography, which is due to the Honors Coordinator by the end of November (Fall semester) or end of April (Spring semester). If the project is approved, the applicant will be given permission to enroll in PHIL 405 for the following semester (the first semester of their senior year).

Rationale (see instructions)

1. Both students and faculty are often confused by the current Honors Program guidelines, regarding application procedures as well as expectations during the key first semester (PHIL 405) of the Honors course sequence. We believe it is better for everyone to have clear and uniform application and approval procedures spelled out in detail, with firm deadlines, along with a clear picture of workload expectations for the student.

2. We doubt that overall university GPA is predictive of philosophical abilities. We recognize that very talented students squander their first two years in college, not performing optimally, particularly when enrolled in a first major that they are either disenchanted with or lack talent for. We've also seen philosophy majors who didn't start strongly in courses at the lower division level who eventually blossom in their upper division courses, and so don't want their initial struggles with philosophy to hurt their chances for eligibility for the Honors Program. A 3.5 GPA in upper division philosophy courses is consistent with getting as many B's as A's, which is not a sign of academic excellence in philosophy and doesn't project well for a successful Honors project.

3. We don't think there is a relevant distinction between transfer and other students once upper division Philosophy GPAs as well as the stated upper division course requirements are being used as the primary criteria for admission into the Honors program, especially when some real leg work is being required of students in working up a detailed proposal under the guidance of a faculty advisor before the project is approved. We also will be considering (explicitly stated in the admissions guidelines) whether the student has adequate background in the area of the topic being proposed, allowing us to consider any unusual circumstances involving transfer credits.

HONORS PROGRAM IN PHILOSOPHY

The Honors Program in Philosophy enables philosophy majors to receive the B.A. in Philosophy with Honors by successfully completing a two-semester independent study (PHIL 405-406) of an approved topic during the senior year, culminating in the production of a research paper of roughly 30-50 pages. The point of the Honors Program is to provide an opportunity for eligible students to pursue the study of a philosophical topic in depth and engage in original research. Typically this topic will be in an area in which the student has done upper division Philosophy course work, and will develop a paper that they have written in such a course.

In the first semester of the program (PHIL 405), students will read and discuss material related to the project with their faculty advisor, and also engage in regular, short writing assignments. By the end of the first semester, they will produce a 10-15 page paper containing a detailed description of the project as well as sketches of critical directions that the project will take. The faculty advisor, together with the Honors Coordinator, will decide whether this paper is of sufficient quality and promise to warrant continuing to the second semester of the Honors program (PHIL 406), in which a much longer and more detailed paper is produced. If the paper doesn't meet this standard, the student will receive a grade for a one-semester independent study (PHIL 405) and the project will end.

Application Procedure:

Students applying for admission to the Honors Program in Philosophy must declare their interest by filling out and submitting to the Honors Coordinator the Honors Application Form (which can be found here). The deadline for submitting this application is in the second semester of the applicant's junior year, by the end of September (Fall semester) or end of February (Spring semester).

If the applicant meets the basic requirements for the Honors program (see below), and has an adequate background in the field of the project, the Honors Coordinator will then direct the applicant to an appropriate faculty advisor. The applicant will then develop, in consultation with this advisor, a 4 page proposal for the project, including a preliminary bibliography, which is due to the Honors Coordinator by the end of November (Fall semester) or end of April (Spring semester). If the project is approved, the applicant will be given permission to enroll in PHIL 405 for the following semester (the first semester of their senior year).

Eligibility Requirements:

Applicants must have earned a grade point average of 3.6 or above in all upper division Philosophy courses, including those in which they are enrolled in the semester in which they apply. They must also have completed two upper division Philosophy courses (at least one of which must be at the 400 level, and excluding PHIL 400) by the semester in which they apply, and four upper division Philosophy courses (at least two of which must be at the 400 level) prior to beginning the Honors project. Students who do not meet all the eligibility requirements may petition the Honors Coordinator for admission to the Program by filling out the Honors Application Form.

Honors Coordinator: Dr. Steve Yalowitz (yalowitz@umbc.edu)

PHILOSOPHY HONORS PROGRAM APPLICATION FORM

Date_____

Name_____

Planned Graduation Date_____

Overall GPA in all completed Philosophy 300 and 400 level courses_____

List all completed Philosophy courses with final grades:

List all Philosophy courses in which you are currently enrolled:

Proposed Honors topic (100-200 words)

Which upper division philosophy courses will you have taken that provide suitable background for this topic?