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MEMORANDUM

ATTENTION Senate
FROM David Paterson, Acting Chair
Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies
RE: Degree Standing (SCUS 10-07 Revised)

DATE July 9, 2010
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Action undertaken by the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies at its meeting of July 8, 2010, gives rise to the following recommendation:

Motion 1:

That Senate approve the alteration of the designation *First Class Honours* into the designations *with distinction* and *first class with distinction* for students graduating from honours programs, with requirements as detailed in the attached table, effective for students entering honours programs during the 2011 Spring term.

Motion2:

That Senate approve the introduction of the designations *with distinction* and *first class with distinction* for students graduating from non-honours programs, with requirements as detailed in the attached table, effective for students graduating from the 2010 Fall term.



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MEMORANDUM

ATTENTION Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies **DATE** June 30, 2010
FROM Kate Ross **PAGES** 8
Registrar & Senior Director, Student Enrolment
RE: Degree Standing

At the February 2010 Senate meeting, a proposal to alter the University's degree standing designations for undergraduate students was referred back to the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies for re-examination. Following additional consultations, the following revised system is proposed:

Motion #1:

that SCUS approve and recommend to Senate the alteration of the designation *First Class Honours* into the designations *with distinction* and *first class with distinction* for students graduating from honours programs, with requirements as detailed in the attached table, effective for students entering honours programs during the the 2011 Spring term.

Motion #2:

that SCUS approve and recommend to Senate the introduction of the designations *with distinction* and *first class with distinction* for students graduating from non-honours programs, with requirements as detailed in the attached table, effective for students graduating from the 2010 Fall term.

Proposed System

Students graduating with a first undergraduate degree will be awarded one of the following designations based on their overall course work (CGPA) as well as the upper division subset of that work (UDGPA):

- Students who have obtained 4.00 or greater on both the CGPA and UDGPA will receive the designation *first class with distinction*.
- Students who have obtained 3.50 or greater on both the CGPA and UDGPA will receive the designation *with distinction*.

Degree and Designation	Cumulative GPA
Honours Degree <i>first class with distinction</i>	4.00 or greater
Honours Degree <i>with distinction</i>	3.50 or greater
Honours Degree	3.00 or greater
Degree <i>first class with distinction</i>	4.00 or greater
Degree <i>with distinction</i>	3.50 or greater
Degree	2.00 or greater

Rationale for Timing

For students graduating from non-honours programs, the creation of the designations would be to the advantage of the students, and the changes could be implemented as soon as possible.

For students graduating from honours programs, we would be introducing substantial changes and in order to be fair some lead time needs to be given prior to implementation. Some students may also be in the process of applying to honours programs under the current system, and these students should be given the opportunity to do so. Implementation for students who enter honours programs after the beginning of the 2011 Spring term provides sufficient time so that students, properly informed, can select the appropriate system for them. All students in honours programs prior to 2011 Spring will be grandfathered, and awarded designations based on the existing system.

Current System

In 1967, prior to any decision being taken by Senate, the Faculty of Arts graduated honours students as "Honors First Class" and "Honors Second Class." The dissatisfaction expressed by students receiving "Honors Second Class" led to discussion at Senate's meeting in December 1967, and the decision made that there be no standings recorded for Honors students below First Class. This caused a number of degrees to be reissued with the corrected designations. Senate then asked the faculties and departments to examine definitions for First Class. For much of 1968, students appear to have received First Class only on nomination of the department.

After discussion at the March, April, May and September 1968 meetings of Senate, the requirements for "First Class" for Honours students was approved by Senate in October 1968, using the standard of 3.5 on either the overall cumulative grade point average (GPA) or the GPA over 60 upper-division credits. At the same meeting, Senate chose to make no distinction in general degrees, although the minutes do not record Senate's reasoning. Further clarification was issued on GPA calculations by Senate in December 1968. At the time that the standard of 3.5 was approved, SFU used a 4.0 scale grading system.

Currently, students graduating from honours programs are eligible to receive the standing "First Class" if they receive a minimum of 3.5 in 4 different GPAs – the GPA over all courses (CGPA), the GPA over all upper-division courses (CUDGPA), the program GPA over all courses, and the program GPA over all upper-division courses.

Degree and Distinction	Cumulative GPA
Honours Degree with First Class Honours	3.5 or greater
Honours Degree	3.0 or greater
Degree	2.0 or greater

Process

At the Deans Council meeting of 20 May, 2009, the Registrar's Office was asked to investigate methods of expanding the current system of degree standing to better recognize outstanding students, and specifically to look at a system to reward outstanding students who are not in honours programs.

After research and discussion at the Enrolment Management Coordinating Committee meeting of 26 November 2009, a discussion paper was presented to the Deans at the Deans Council meeting on 9 December 2009. Feedback received at that meeting and the subsequent EMCC meeting of 17 December 2009 led to a proposal presented to the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies on 7 January 2010. At Senate on 8 February 2010, the proposal was referred back to SCUS. The chairs and directors of academic departments were consulted at their meeting on 10 March 2010.

Honours

It is important to distinguish between an SFU honours degree and the meaning of honours at many other institutions in Canada and around the world. General degrees began as a three-year degree, and honours degrees were introduced, requiring four years, to provide additional depth of study in a particular field. Initially adopted in the United Kingdom, this system is in use in many countries with higher education system derived from the UK system.

Within Canada, some institutions in Ontario and the Atlantic Provinces offer both three-year general and four-year honours degrees. Many institutions require an "honours degree" to obtain entry to graduate programs – in these cases, it is simply a requirement that a student have completed a four-year degree, and nearly every SFU program will meet that criteria.

It is worthwhile to note that SFU is alone, at least within Canada, in requiring more than 4 years of study for an honours degree. While most institutions require 120 credits for an honours degree, SFU's current minimum requires 132 credits.

Rationale for Designations

There is a desire for SFU to recognize outstanding students, regardless of whether or not they choose to complete an honours program. It was also important in proposing a solution that, in the interests of clarity, systems for honours students and non-honours students were in alignment, and preferably used the same language.

The systems used across Canada fall into three broad categories – Latin honours, derived from the system popularized in the United States; class honours, in part derived from the system used widely in the United Kingdom and some Commonwealth countries; and distinction honours, which uses language such as “with distinction” to mark success. A survey of the systems used at different Canadian institutions is included as an appendix, but it is important to note that some institutions mix systems – some use one for honours students and one for non-honours students, while others mix them within the same group.

From the survey it becomes clear that there is no accepted standard on degree recognition within Canada. While there are few universities using Latin honours, there are a large number of institutions that use class and distinction honours. It also becomes clear that even where the same language is used – First Class, for example – the standard used can be very different. First Class, First Division and similar accolades can begin at GPAs of 3.25 (4.0 scale), 3.5 (4.0 scale), 3.6 (4.0 or 4.30 scale), 3.67 (4.33 scale), 3.80 (4.5 scale), 3.83 (4.33 scale) or an average of 80%, and in one case (the University of Northern British Columbia) isn't even the highest designation available.

The principles we used when looking at possible systems were:

- That our intention is to celebrate outstanding student success, and not to de-value student accomplishments;
- That any system should extend to all students regardless of the route taken to a degree, whether it be honours, major, joint honours or major, two minors, or a general degree;
- That any system should be clear and concise; and
- That any system should not place additional administrative burden on faculties, departments, faculty or staff at a time of budget constraints.

SFU's traditions and history contain very little, if any, Latin – even our motto is French. Combined with the relatively small amount of usage that the Latin honours system sees in Canada, it does not seem to be the appropriate choice for SFU.

One element of the feedback we received from the Deans was that the range of 3.5 to 4.33 – that currently used for First Class Honours – would be too wide for a single designation if it were to be expanded to non-honours programs. This group accounted for 19.7% of all graduands in the 2009 calendar year (Fall 2008 to Summer 2009 graduands). By using multiple designations, this group could be split into two, providing better recognition of our top students while still recognizing students that do very well in their studies.

Given that SFU's present system only allows for a single level of recognition, and the feedback received at the Chairs & Directors meeting did not support the use of “Second Class” – the logical extension if the current system was to be divided into two levels – we felt that a variation on the Distinction system would be best system to use at SFU. Additional feedback from the academic chairs and directors was that using two separate words was more difficult to interpret, and that linking the wording used was preferable. First Class is also part of our history at SFU, and has long been used, and finding use for it in the proposed language would keep ties to our current system. Based on this, this proposal is suggesting the use of *with distinction* and *first class with distinction*.

A suggestion received was that we should look at using the English equivalent of the Latin *cum laude*. For degree standing, *cum laude* is usually translated as “with honour.” This would lead to SFU degrees with “Honours with honour,” a scenario felt to be less than ideal. The other common translation used outside academia is “with praise,” though we feel that this doesn't convey the proper meaning, either. Distinction was felt to be a close translation while retaining the correct meaning for degrees.

Another concern expressed was around second degree programs. These programs typically only require the completion of 45 credits of coursework, as opposed to the standard 120 credits for a first degree. In some programs, as few as 15 credits of this coursework are graded on the full scale, with the remaining 30 credits completed on a pass/fail basis – essentially basing a designation decision on as little as one term of coursework. In 2009, 14.3% of students receiving a first degree had GPAs of 3.5 or above, while 57.7% of second degree students achieved this standard. Based on this information, this group of students is sufficiently different that they should not use the same system of recognitions.

Program Grade Point Average

In order for a student to be awarded either Honours or First Class Honours, they must meet certain program GPA requirements when they graduate. Currently, calculation of program GPA is a manual process. The calendar states:

In addition, program GPAs are the required minimum to satisfy the requirements of an honors, major, extended minor or minor program. In each case, the program GPA must be obtained both on the overall course work (CGPA) as well as on the upper division subset of that work (UDGPA) in the program area.

This definition is so vague that departments apply different standards based on their own experience. Some departments ignore the program GPA when doing graduation requirements checks, while some calculate it based on courses used to satisfy degree requirements, and others use all courses taken within their specific subject code. Based on those differences, it seems nearly impossible to use the program GPA to fairly and consistently assess all students.

Currently there is no approved definition for program GPA. If we were to continue to use this as a criterion, it would require defining program GPA so students are treated consistently and fairly in its calculation. This option will require agreement on a definition and then modifications to SIMS to implement.

When we met with the Deans, we asked whether any proposal should include program GPA. The feedback we received was that they felt it was more important to recognize overall success in courses, rather than courses within a specific area – we were recognizing the credential, not the subject area. Based on what we heard from the Deans and the issues around program GPA, this proposal is not including it as a requirement.

Note that this proposal would not change the program GPA requirement for Honours, only for the designation.

Appendix: Survey of Systems in Use at Canadian Universities

While not all Canadian universities have been surveyed below, an attempt has been made to survey those similar to SFU. Institutions that do not award degree standing are not listed; in cases where the institutions allow faculties to set their own policies, the focus is on the faculties with programs similar to those available at SFU. Only standings available to those that have completed a four-year degree are listed.

University of Victoria

- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - With Distinction (6.5 or above, 9.0 scale, roughly equivalent to 3.5 on a 4.33 scale)

University of British Columbia

- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - First Class (80% or higher, roughly equivalent to 3.67 or higher)
 - Second Class (65% to 79%, about 2.35-3.67)
 - Pass (50% to 64%, about 1.00-2.35)

University of Northern British Columbia

- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - With Distinction (4.00 or above, 4.33 scale)
 - First Class Honours (3.67-4.00)
 - Upper Second Class Honours (3.50-3.67)
 - Second Class Honours (3.00-3.67)

University of Alberta

- Honours Programs
 - First Class Honors (3.50 or above, 4.00 scale)
- Non-Honours Programs
 - With Distinction (3.50 or above)

University of Calgary

- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - With Distinction (3.60 or above on final 15 full-course equivalents, about 3 years of coursework, 4.00 scale)

University of Lethbridge

- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - With Great Distinction (3.75 or above, 3.80 in Education)
 - With Distinction (3.50-3.74, 3.60-3.79 in Education)

University of Regina

- Honours Programs
 - With High Honours (85% or above)
- Non-Honours Programs
 - With Great Distinction (85% or above)
 - With Distinction (80%-84.9%)

University of Saskatchewan

- Honours Programs
 - With High Honours (75% or above overall, 80% or above in program area)
 - With Honours (70% or above)
- Non-Honours Programs
 - With Great Distinction (80% or above)
 - With Distinction (75%-79.9%)

University of Manitoba

- Honours Programs
 - First Class Honours (3.80 or above, 4.5 scale)
- Non-Honours Programs
 - With Distinction (3.80 or above)

Brock University

- Honours Program
 - First-class Honours (80% or above in major, 70% or above in other courses)
 - Second-class Honours (70% or above in major, 60% or above in other courses)
- Non-Honours Program
 - With Distinction (80% or above)

Carleton University

- Honours Programs
 - With Highest Honours (8.0 or above overall, 10.0 or above in program, on a 12.0 scale)
 - With High Honours (7.0 or above overall, 9.0 or above in program)
- Non-Honours Programs
 - With High Distinction (9.5 or above overall, Faculty of Engineering & Design only)
 - With Distinction (8.0 or above)

University of Guelph

- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - With Distinction (80% or above, roughly equivalent to 3.67-4.33)
 - With Honours (70%-79.9%, about 2.67-3.67)
 - With Standing (less than 70%)

Lakehead University

- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - First Class Standing (80% or above)
 - Second Class Standing (70-79.9%)

McMaster University

- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - With Distinction (9.5 or above, on a 12.0 scale, roughly equivalent to 3.5 on a 4.33 scale)

Queen's University

- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - With Distinction (80% or above, no failed courses)

Ryerson University

- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - With Honours (3.50 or above, 4.33 scale)

University of Toronto

- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - With High Distinction (3.50 or above, 4.00 scale)
 - With Distinction (3.20-3.49)

University of Western Ontario

- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - With Distinction (80% or above, no grade below 70%, no failed courses)

Wilfrid Laurier University

- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - With High Distinction (11.00 or above, 12.0 scale, roughly equivalent to 4.00 on a 4.33 scale)
 - With Distinction (10.00-10.99, roughly equivalent to 3.67-4.00 on a 4.33 scale)

University of Windsor

- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - With Great Distinction (12.0 or above, 13.0 scale, roughly equivalent to 4.00 on a 4.33 scale)
 - With Distinction (11.00-11.99, roughly equivalent to 3.67-4.00)

York University

- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies and Faculty of Health
 - *Summa cum laude* (8.00 or above, 9.00 scale, roughly equivalent to 4.00 on a 4.33 scale)
 - *Magna cum laude* (7.80-7.99, roughly equivalent to 3.93-4.00)
 - *Cum laude* (7.5-7.79, roughly equivalent to 3.83-3.93)
 - Dean's Honour Roll (7.00-7.50, roughly equivalent to 3.67-3.83)
 - Faculty of Science & Engineering
 - First class with distinction (8.00 or above, roughly equivalent to 4.00 on a 4.33 scale)
 - First class (7.50-8.00, roughly equivalent to 3.83-4.00)

Bishop's University

- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - With Distinction (80% or above)

McGill University

- Honours Programs
 - First-Class Honours (3.50 or above, 4.00 scale)
- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - Dean's Honour List (top 10% of faculty's graduating students, based on CGPA)
 - With Distinction (next 15% of faculty's graduating students)

Mount Allison University

- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - With Distinction (3.7 or above, 4.3 scale)

University of New Brunswick

- Honours Programs
 - First-class Honours (3.60 or above, 4.30 scale)
- Non-Honours Programs
 - Distinction (3.75 over final 60 credits; no grade less than C over final 90 credits)
 - First Division (3.5 or above)
 - Second Division (2.5-3.5)
 - Third Division (Less than 2.5)

University of Prince Edward Island

- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - First-class Standing (80% or higher)
 - Second-class Standing (70%-79.9%)
 - Pass Standing (50-69.9%)

Acadia University

- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - University Scholar (3.5 or above, 4.0 scale, minimum 90 credits at Acadia, no mark below B-)

Cape Breton University

- Honours Programs
 - First Class Honours (80% over final two years in program courses)

Dalhousie University

- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - Distinction (3.70 or above, 4.30 scale, at least 50% of classes completed at Dalhousie)

St. Francis Xavier University

- Honours Programs
 - First Class Honours (80% over final 3 years, 80% in program courses in final 3 years)
- Non-Honours Programs
 - Distinction (80% over final 3 years)

Saint Mary's University

- Honours & Non-Honours Programs
 - *Summa cum laude* (4.00 or above, 4.30 scale)
 - *Magna cum laude* (3.85-3.99)
 - *Cum laude* (3.70-3.85)

Memorial University of Newfoundland

- Honours Programs
 - First Class Standing (3.25 or above, 4.00 scale, 3.50 or above in subject area)
 - Second Class Standing (2.75 or above)
- Non-Honours Programs
 - First Class Standing (3.50 or above)
 - Second Class Standing (2.75-3.50)
 - Third Class Standing (2.00-2.75)