

GRADUATE POLICY FOR GRADUATION WITH DISTINCTION

A. Policy

For the purposes of awarding degrees with distinction at the graduate level, the overall performance of degree candidates in each department or equivalent academic program will be judged in relationship to the performance of degree-seeking students in that unit, not in relation to other university graduate students. Two criteria will be used in evaluating students to determine if they merit a notation of distinction: grade point average and the quality of the work produced by the student for the culminating experience.

To graduate “with distinction,” a graduate student must

1. have a cumulative grade point average of 3.8 or higher at the time the student’s degree is posted,
2. have completed at least 18 units in residency, and
3. be nominated for distinction by a unanimous vote of his or her dissertation/thesis/project/examination committee or equivalent academic program committee.

Each department or equivalent academic program may establish a graduation with distinction policy, but is not required to establish such a policy. The University recognizes that each discipline has its own mechanisms and standards for evaluating student work. Departments or equivalent academic programs desiring to nominate students to graduate with distinction must specify the standards and procedures that will be used to judge or measure distinction in the culminating experience, including but not limited to originality of the work, mastery of knowledge of the discipline, and/or broader significance as a contribution to learning.

Although there can be no rigorous quota on the number of graduate students awarded distinction, the standard of merit should be such that no more than ten percent of graduating students in each department or equivalent academic program will be selected to receive the designation of distinction. Departments or equivalent academic programs may elect not to nominate any candidates for this designation in a given semester.

B. Reporting Mechanism

Three years after the adoption and implementation of this policy, the Dean of Graduate Studies will issue a report to the Faculty Senate detailing:

1. how many and which departments or equivalent academic programs opted out of the distinction policy;
2. how many degrees were awarded “with distinction” in the previous three years per department or equivalent academic program, and
3. what percentage that number constitutes of total graduate degrees awarded per department or equivalent academic program.

The Faculty Senate can use this data to determine if the policy is being implemented fairly and equitably and to make any changes to the policy, if needed.

C. Procedures

In determining whether a student should be awarded a degree “with distinction,” the following guidelines should be followed.

1. In accordance with department or equivalent academic program-level policies and procedures, and upon completing the culminating requirement, a student may be nominated for distinction by a unanimous vote of his or her dissertation/thesis/project/examination committee or academic program.
2. If so nominated, the committee chair or academic program designee shall draft a letter outlining the qualities of the student’s dissertation/thesis/project/examination that merit the award of distinction, including but not limited to originality of the work, mastery of knowledge of the discipline, and/or broader significance as a contribution to learning.
3. The letter of nomination shall be forwarded to the Graduate or Program Coordinator, who in consultation with the designated Department, Program, or Graduate Committee Chair shall make the determination as to whether the student’s record meets the department or equivalent academic program standards for distinction
4. If in agreement with the nominating committee, the designated Coordinator or Chair shall send formal written notification and documentation to the Dean of Graduate Studies of the nomination.
5. Prior to the posting of the degree, the Graduate Dean will review the nomination and ascertain whether the student’s final GPA meets the 3.8 threshold and, if so, register the notation. The student’s permanent transcript will state whether the student completed a dissertation, thesis, project, or examination and note the completion of the culminating experience was “with distinction.”

Approved by the Faculty Senate April 18, 2013 (FS 12/13-86)

Approved by the President April 30, 2013