

YALE COLLEGE DEAN'S OFFICE

COMMITTEE ON HONORS AND ACADEMIC STANDING

110 SSS

March 200*

To: Directors of Undergraduate Studies

From: Mark J. Schenker, Committee on Honors and Academic Standing,
110 SSS, Extension 2-2920

Subject: Nominations for Distinction in the Major

Nominations for Distinction in the Major are due in the Yale College Dean's Office, 110 SSS, by 5 p.m. on Friday, May *.

I realize that this is a difficult deadline and that in the case of some students it will be particularly so, because the last day of final examinations will be May *.

With Commencement on May *, however, there is no choice. The Committee must inspect the nominations before approving them. We will draw up a list of the awards for presentation at the Yale College Faculty meeting of May * and for announcement to the registrar and the residential colleges on the same day. In some cases the Committee will not be able to approve nominations until after that day, but just as soon as nominations are approved, the information will be conveyed to the appropriate persons so that the award can be made and recorded.

The deadline is in fact not so bad as it looks at first. Please note that in order to submit a nomination, you do not necessarily need to have all of a senior's second-term course grades. Once a student with a grade of A or A- on the departmental examination or senior project has passed the three-quarters point of A or A- grades in the major, then he or she is eligible to be nominated, even if a late course grade or so is still unavailable.

By now you should have received from the Registrar's Office up-to-date transcripts for your seniors, showing the courses in which they are enrolled for the second term. This will enable you to begin preliminary work on your nominations at once. You can identify seniors who look as if they are going to be eligible for Distinction in the Major, and identify also the second-term courses for which you will need grades in order to nominate them. If you can find time during the month of April to do such preliminary work, your task in May might turn out to be reasonably light and uncomplicated. In order to make nominations for Distinction in the Major, directors of undergraduate studies have always had to make some last-minute phone calls to instructors in order to get information about second-term grades for seniors; the Committee regrets that the calendar makes this necessary, but we are very grateful for your help.

Nomination forms are enclosed.

I. CRITERIA FOR DISTINCTION IN THE MAJOR

The Yale College Faculty has voted the following regulation on the award of Distinction in the Major:

Distinction in the Major will be conferred at graduation upon any senior who, on nomination by the student's department or program, and with the concurrence of the Committee on Honors and Academic Standing, merits such an award for the quality of work completed in the major subject.

Distinction may be awarded to students who have earned grades of A or A- in three-quarters of the credits in the major subject or program, with a grade of A or A- on the senior departmental examination, senior essay, or senior project. All courses taken for the major are included in these calculations for Distinction in the Major. Grades of F as well as marks of CR in courses taken on a Credit/D/Fail basis are included as non-A grades.

[From the YCPS, Chapter I, page 30]

II. GENERAL DIRECTIONS

1. ***The main principle in calculating a student's eligibility for distinction is that all courses in the major carrying credit toward the degree are to be counted, and should bear the same weight that they do for the degree.*** Thus, for example, a grade of A or A- in one term of a two-term laboratory course carrying one term course credit for the year would count as one-half a course unit, and a double-credit term course would count as two term course units. ***All courses in the major must be counted.*** If a student has taken more courses than are required for the completion of the major, then all his or her courses must still be taken into account. A student may not be nominated on the basis of his or her twelve or fourteen best grades; the performance in all courses taken in the major field determines his or her eligibility.

2. ***Courses that are not offered in the department of the student's major, but which routinely and automatically count toward the fulfillment of the requirements of the major, should be included in your calculations.***

3. ***If your department or program allows students to count related courses in other departments, you must include such courses in your calculations if they constitute part of a particular student's major program.*** "Related" courses in excess of what a student needs to fulfill the requirements of the major should ordinarily not figure into your calculations. If they do, please describe the reasons for including them on the back of the nomination form. If, without making a specific arrangement, a student has taken several related courses *acceptable to, but not automatically counted toward the major*, you may count the student's best grades up to the number needed to satisfy the requirements of the major. The implementation of this policy may be complicated in some programs, but it is important that all students in a given major be treated alike.

4. *Whether or not prerequisites should be counted as part of the major proper is a decision for each department to make for itself, on the basis of what is appropriate to the discipline.* But a department should adhere uniformly to its own decision: if prerequisites are omitted in general, they may not count in a particular case.

III. PROCEDURES FOR CONSIDERATION OF THE SENIOR PROJECT

1. If your department's senior essay or senior project carries course credit, then your calculations should treat it like any other course. (Example: A history major has seven grades of A and three other marks in a total of ten regular term courses in history; he or she has also earned a grade of A or A- in History 495, *The Senior Departmental Essay*, which carries two term course credits. He or she should therefore be regarded as having earned A or A- in nine term courses out of a total of twelve term courses.)

2. If your department gives a departmental examination, or if the senior project does not carry course credit, then you should add one term course credit to your calculations. (Example: A student has seven grades of A or A- and five other marks in courses in the major, and he or she has earned a grade of A or A- in the departmental examination. To the twelve regular term courses you should add one additional term course unit; the student thus has eight grades of A or A- out of a total of thirteen term course units.)

IV. EXCEPTIONAL DISTINCTION IN THE MAJOR

The Faculty approved this special category of Distinction on the grounds that there would "occasionally be students whose work in the major is extraordinary even when compared to the work of other students who receive Distinction." It is to be a "rarely-used classification." It is assumed that "many departments, even the larger ones, might go for years without making such a nomination." The award is "an unusual and infrequent exception to a general policy of granting Distinction only in one category."

It is difficult in advance or in general to describe the "requirements" for an award that is by definition special, but a few observations may be useful. Clearly, even a straight-A record in the major is in itself not sufficient grounds for the award of Exceptional Distinction. The candidate must show a genuine breadth of scholarship in the field and have made significant original, even if unpublished, contributions to it. His or her qualifications for the award must be so strong as to be almost self-evident; a doubt or reservation on your part should be taken as evidence that a nomination is not in order. A nomination must be full and detailed, and must include the following:

1. A letter on behalf of the department from the director of undergraduate studies or the chairman, setting forth full the student's qualifications.
2. Supporting letters from at least two other members of the faculty who are familiar with the student's academic career, giving careful evaluations of the significance of the student's work, with regard both to scope and to depth.
3. Appropriate example of the student's work, including the senior project.

The Committee is charged to inspect nominations for Exceptional Distinction with great care. If the materials submitted do not conclusively justify the award, the Committee will not approve it. Typically, in a class of more than 1250 students, there are no more than one or two awards of Exceptional Distinction.

On the other hand, the Committee does not want the wording of these criteria or the busy schedules of faculty members to discourage you from taking the necessary early steps to prepare a nomination. In most departments, the director of undergraduate studies is in the best position to recognize a potential candidate and to solicit letters from appropriate persons. Although it is most desirable for this award to be announced at graduation, the Committee will accept late nominations. If the award is made after Commencement, the student will be notified immediately and invited to return his or her diploma for the proper inscription.

V. MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION

1. Calculations of Percentage of Grades in A or A-. To save everyone time, the Committee has prepared the enclosed chart to be used in calculating Distinction. Once you determine the total number of courses in the major, and the total number of A or A- grades for such courses, then the chart will make it clear whether the student has three-quarters of his or her grades in A or A-.

2. Transfer Students. Recommendations for transfer students should be based chiefly on the Yale record. If, however, the student has taken notably fewer Yale courses in the major than other seniors (for example, only eight term courses instead of ten or twelve), then the department is urged to refer to the student's previous record (on file in the residential college dean's office), and to inform the Committee of the basis of the recommendation.

3. Junior Year or Term Abroad. Recommendations for students who were on a Junior Year or Term Abroad should include their junior year grades in courses offered for the major. Transcripts of work done on a Junior Year or Term Abroad are on file in the office of Dean Barbara Rowe, Chair of the Committee on the Junior Year or Term Abroad, Office of International Education and Fellowship Programs, 55 Whitney Avenue (ext. 4-8332) and in the offices of the residential college deans.

4. Courses Completed at Another American University. You may have awarded credit toward the major for work done outside Yale to a student who is neither a transfer student nor a student who was on a Junior Year (or Term) Abroad. Such would be the case, for example, of a student who took one or two course credits in the major at the summer session of another American college or university. On the principle that all courses counted toward the requirements of the major should be included in calculations of eligibility of Distinction, ***these outside credits should be counted as well***. Presumably you will have kept departmental records of outside courses you have credited toward the major. These outside credits are recorded on the student's transcript by title, but without grades. If you need to find out grades, you may call the office of the student's residential college dean. In the student's folder there will be the original transcript from the other institution showing the grade(s) earned.

5. Conditional Nominations. If it is impossible for you to learn all of a student's grades by the May 13 deadline, but you expect them all to be submitted before Commencement, you may forward a *conditional nomination*, including all major courses and clearly indicating how many of the outstanding grades must be A or A- for the award to be made. You may then telephone the missing grades to my office—although in some cases I can learn them even before your call—and the nomination will be either approved or canceled.

6. Nominations of Students from Previous Classes and Students Who Completed Degree Requirements at the End of the Fall Term. During the course of the year, the Registrar's Office may have sent you the completed records of students from previous classes who may have qualified late for the degree; and you will have received from the Registrar's Office the records of students in the present graduating class who completed degree requirements at the end of the fall term. It is appropriate to submit nominations for Distinction for such students at this time if you have not already done so.

7. Additional Nomination Forms. You may procure these from Ms. Clare Schlegel, 110 SSS, ext. 2-2920.

8. Questions or Problems. Please do not hesitate to call me at ext. 2-2920.

Please phone my office (2-2920) if your nominations for Distinction are going to be late or (and this is most important) *if your department does not have any nominations for Distinction in the Major.*