

From an email sent on March 24, 2020

To: Directors of Undergraduate Studies and Special Programs
cc: Department and Program Chairs and DAAFs

While Columbia University has made the institutional decision that Spring 2020 will be a mandatory pass/fail term -- i.e., all final grades for Spring 2020 will be either "pass" or "fail" -- we are committed to acknowledging the academic excellence of our most stellar undergraduate students, especially those who have completed senior theses and those who have earned school and department honors. To this end, the Columbia College - General Studies Committee on Instruction now offers the following guidance to Directors of Undergraduate Studies and other faculty advising thesis work:

Guidance on evaluating senior theses

The senior thesis represents a tremendous academic achievement for some of our graduating seniors. Therefore, although the final grade for a senior thesis course must be either "pass" or "fail," the COI recommends that any faculty member who is advising a senior thesis provides a robust evaluative summary of the level of achievement, which can be shared both with the student and with the sponsoring academic unit. This evaluative summary should reflect in specific narrative terms whether the faculty advisor recommends the student for relevant graduation honors and prizes; academic units will then be able to take into account the achievement of the senior thesis when determining departmental honors.

The COI recommends that faculty do not give letter grades to the thesis itself, since that thesis grade will not translate to a final grade for a thesis course. Faculty are encouraged, though, to keep records for themselves of the thesis evaluation, so that they are prepared to write detailed letters of recommendation in the future for students who may need faculty support for applications to graduate school, professional schools, competitive opportunities, etc.

Guidance on awarding honors, awards and prizes

During this time when all students are working under unusual duress, it is more important than ever that we recognize, whenever possible, the talent and perseverance of our students through the awarding of honors, awards, and prizes that permanently commemorate their academic achievements. Given the unusual exigencies of this term, CC-GS COI offers the following guidance for graduation honors for Spring 2020.

To allow faculty to have more access to academic work that they are evaluating for honors, awards, and prizes, the announcement of most honors, awards, and prizes will be delayed until mid- to late May. School administrators will communicate revised deadlines for soliciting faculty evaluations accordingly.

Valedictorian and Salutatorian: Valedictorians and Salutatorians for both CC and GS will be selected according to standard school policy and process.

Academic Prizes and Awards: Recipients of academic prizes and awards will be selected according to standard school or department processes.

Dean's List: Because we have moved to a mandatory Pass/Fail grading system for the term, and the

awarding of Dean's List is based solely on GPA, Dean's List will not be awarded for the Spring 2020 term.

Latin Honors: Latin Honors will be awarded according to standard school policy, with the understanding that grades for Spring 2020 will not be taken into account in calculating Latin Honors.

Phi Beta Kappa: Phi Beta Kappa will be awarded according to standard school policy, in which grades and faculty evaluations are considered for each eligible student. The national Phi Beta Kappa Society has confirmed that students can be elected to Phi Beta Kappa even in the absence of an in-person induction ceremony.

Departmental Honors: Under normal circumstances, departmental honors are awarded to no more than 10% of graduating seniors. In acknowledgement of the challenges and resilience of our students this semester, academic units may extend departmental honors to up to 20% of graduating seniors.

Thank you again for all of your efforts in making this year for our graduating seniors as special as possible, despite the massive disruption to our residential college community. Please feel free to share with us any ideas you have for other ways in which we can celebrate our seniors in our virtual world, whether individually or collectively.