A&S Procedure for selecting the Founder’s Medalist and Banner Bearer

Proposed revision December 2007

To be eligible for the Founder's Medal or be Banner Bearer in a graduating class, seniors must have a cumulative GPA of 3.982 or higher at the end of the fall semester prior to graduating the following spring. This GPA figure indicates, approximately, two A-minuses among otherwise straight As by the end of the fall semester of the senior year. However, in the event that the GPA threshold of 3.982 or higher yields either 1) fewer than five eligible seniors or 2) considerably more than five eligible seniors in any particular year, the Dean may adjust this threshold in consultation with the Chair of Committee on Academic Standards and Procedures (CASP) so that there are generally at least five, and preferably not many more than five, senior candidates to consider for these two awards in any particular year. This latitude of discretion and flexibility on the Dean's part is needed because past practice has shown that the ideal number of senior candidates to consider is approximately five. To go well beyond five raises false hopes among lower-ranking seniors who are technically eligible but are unlikely to be awarded, and it creates needless faculty and administrative work.

The Dean will request each of the eligible seniors to provide a list of three (and no more than three) faculty members who are familiar with their academic accomplishments and to provide a statement in their own words describing their academic achievements and other academic activities not reflected in their transcripts. The Dean will solicit the letters of recommendation from the students’ lists of faculty members and compile a dossier on each eligible senior consisting of 1) the three letters of recommendation from the faculty members, 2) the statement of academic achievements from the student, and 3) the student’s official transcript including all grades earned through the end of the fall semester of their senior year. Upon receipt of these materials in the Dean’s office, the eligible seniors are officially candidates for one of these two academic awards.

Faculty members serving on CASP will review the dossiers, rank order the candidates, and recommend to the Dean two candidates to become Founder’s Medalist and Banner
Bearer. Given the extremely thin margin among GPAs among our top seniors, CASP members in their deliberations must rely on information about the candidates’ academic achievements as related in the faculty letters and the candidates’ statements. Thus CASP members, in arriving at their recommendations, need to keep in mind that the other information worth considering must pertain to the candidates’ academic achievements, including the rigor of course choices within the candidates’ respective majors. This focus on the most distinguished academic profile is in keeping with Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt’s goal in endowing the Founder’s Medal, which “signifies first honors” and is to be awarded by “considering faculty recommendations and overall academic achievements, as well as grade point averages of the year’s highest ranking summa cum laude graduates.” The Banner Bearer is to be determined by the same criteria, insofar as this award serves to honor the second most deserving senior candidate.

The candidates’ dossiers should be completed as soon as possible in the spring. Once all the dossiers are ready, CASP members should review them in a timely way, confer together, and reach their decision. This CASP recommendation is necessarily preliminary, pending the completion of spring courses for the eligible candidates and their final cumulative GPA results. As experience in past years has shown, the two preliminary recipients recommended by CASP usually remain the two strongest contenders as Founder’s Medalist and Banner Bearer once the spring grades are reported and the final cumulative GPA results are known. Nonetheless, the final determination of the recipients must await this added information, which is generally not available until the week of graduation on the Monday immediately prior to the Friday Commencement. If the GPAs of one or both of the top two preliminary recipients were to decline in their spring course performance relative to the other eligible senior candidates, the Dean and CASP members will confer promptly to determine whether to reconsider which two candidates merit these academic honors.