

GUIDELINES FOR MEMBERSHIP UVM CHAPTER OF PHI BETA KAPPA

Phi Beta Kappa is the nation's oldest honor society. The Alpha Chapter of Vermont is located in Burlington at the University of Vermont, but it is independent of the University of Vermont. We are a constituent chapter of the national Phi Beta Kappa Society, which has published its stipulations for membership at http://www.uvm.edu/~phibeta/national_stipulations.html.

We adhere in general to those stipulations, although we maintain our chapter's historical independence from being bound by some of the national organization's rules.

Undergraduate students should discuss the following criteria with their academic advisors in planning course schedules for the remainder of their undergraduate program. Academic advisors are encouraged to bring these criteria to the attention of their students. Officers of the Phi Beta Kappa chapter are neither authorized nor able to provide more specific or more appropriate academic advice than that which is outlined below. Responsibility for students' academic advising lies with the University. Responsibility for a student's academic choices rests with the individual student.

Membership is by Invitation: one cannot apply

Becoming a member of Phi Beta Kappa is the result of a process. A student cannot apply for membership in Phi Beta Kappa: he or she must be invited by the chapter. The process which leads to extending an invitation is as follows. The membership committee reviews student transcripts and selects those meritorious individuals who fulfill the spirit of the guidelines outlined below. A student who has been selected is a 'candidate.' Next, the candidates' transcripts are presented at a chapter meeting and the chapter votes on whether or not to extend an invitation to each candidate. Those who are approved by the chapter are extended invitations and an initiation is held to initiate those who accept the invitation. Participation in the induction ceremony is a required part of membership; new members sign the chapter's constitution in a volume that has been in continuous use since 1848.

What is expected of those who are invited?

Note well that these are expectations, not explicit requirements, and all are matters of judgement, not precise cut-and-dried measurement. The judgement involved is that of the current membership committee and those who attend the chapter meeting. In other words, there is no way exactly to identify the minimum criteria which will lead to an invitation and there is no way easily to point out who makes the decisions. Also note that any specific examples listed below are given to illustrate the spirit of the guidelines: we will not be bound by the letter of any such example. Our chapter of Phi Beta Kappa wants to invite students who have achieved maxima, not minima, and so we try to describe our criteria in those terms when possible.

1. A significant proportion of a candidate's coursework should be liberal in the sense that it is not aimed pri-

marily at practical, professional, or explicitly pre-professional purposes. The phrase 'liberal education' implies intellectual exploration across the broad scope of coursework in arts, sciences, and humanities. It is different from coursework that involves career training or technical knowledge, which might be called 'pre-professional' or 'practical'. 'Liberal education' further implies a pursuit that is done primarily for its own sake, not primarily for some end external to itself: 'art for art's sake' and 'knowledge for knowledge's sake' are expressions that reflect this attitude towards what we are calling 'liberal' pursuits.

Notes: "Practical, professional, and preprofessional" refers to courses intended primarily to develop skills or vocational techniques in such fields as business administration, education, engineering, home economics, journalism, library science, military science, physical education, communications, secretarial studies, speech, and applied art and music. Candidates in different colleges may have differing standards applied to them. To put it in extreme form: a student who has every opportunity to take a variety of liberal courses but only takes the minimum is very different from a student who has little opportunity to take more, but finds the time to take as much as possible.

Stipulations of the national Phi Beta Kappa organization call for 75% (90/120 hours) in non-professional coursework, but our chapter recognizes that some majors involve pre-professional training that is by its nature also liberal in part. Others are by their nature more preprofessional than liberal. We look to the overall record and not to a specific percentage of defined coursework. We pride ourselves on having invited and initiated students from every college at the University of Vermont.

2. A significant proportion of a candidate's coursework should be liberal in the sense of a broad and representative spread of coursework in the courses offered at UVM that fit the criterion for 'liberal' described above. All things considered, a student who takes multiple courses in diverse areas is a better candidate than a student who takes the minimum required outside of his or her major(s) and/or minor(s) and has major(s) and minor(s) in closely allied fields.

Notes: The presence of all three of mathematical sciences, foreign language, and natural science are the most important signs of breadth in this sense, for the simple reason that few students choose all three. These areas are also of particular interest because of their longstanding emphasis in the history of Phi Beta Kappa.

Ordinarily, fulfilling the equivalent of all seven of the College of Arts and Science distribution requirements is a credible indication that a candidate's studies are liberal in a basic sense. (These Arts and Sciences distribution areas are: Mathematics, Foreign Language, Natural Science, Literature, Humanities, Social Sciences, Fine Arts. Different minimum credit hours are required in these areas.) There are rare exceptions both in which a student has ful-

filled the letter of the requirements and yet has not fulfilled the spirit of our criteria for membership and also in which a student has not fulfilled the letter of the distribution requirements and yet has fulfilled the spirit of our criterion.

For mathematical sciences, see number 5 below.

3. Our criteria are sometimes flexible. Some examples follow that illustrate the spirit of this flexibility. It is hazardous to give specific examples, and we will not be held to the letter of the following examples.

A Mathematics major, French minor, who happens to have also taken four art history courses (i.e. a good deal more than would fulfill distribution requirements) might be invited even though he or she had taken only one social science course (and hence did not fulfill the College of Arts and Sciences distribution requirement for social sciences). Conversely, a Spanish major, theatre minor who has taken a good deal more social science than he or she needed to might be invited in spite of having taken only one humanities course (especially since Spanish and theatre must include some humanities content).

Notes: This criterion is intended to spell out the sort of flexibility that might earn an invitation for a candidate even though the candidate has not fulfilled all seven of the Arts and Sciences distribution requirements. It is mostly applicable to non-Arts and Science students, graduate student candidates, and candidates who are especially attractive because of other factors, such as extremely high GPA (e.g. 3.9), faculty acclaim, or outstanding life experience that is in the spirit of Phi Beta Kappa.

This criterion is also intended to encourage exploration and deepening of areas that are far from a candidate's major or minor.

4. We expect excellence, as defined both by a student's GPA and by coursework that is simultaneously of a high intellectual caliber and outside the student's major area of study. We expect students to enjoy intellectual challenges.

Notes: Courses designed for majors (usually 100-level or above) are in general better indicators of intellectual interest than are courses for non-majors. Natural science, mathematics, and foreign language are among the indicators of excellence, because, unless there is an immediate connection with their major, these are the areas which students most often overlook completely or in which they take the minimum.

This criterion may justify the elimination of a candidate who has "played it safe", taken the path of least resistance, and has a very high cumulative GPA and all of the Arts and Science distribution requirements if that student does not fulfill the spirit of Phi Beta Kappa.

Generally, transcripts of students with cumulative GPA's that are 3.5 or higher are the ones reviewed by the membership committee.

5. Students are expected in particular to exceed the minimum described by the College of Arts and Sciences distribution requirements in mathematical sciences. Our expectation is usually that a student will have taken a course in calculus. Failing that, however, a student will nonetheless be impressive if he or she has taken more than one course that would fulfill the distribution requirement (e.g. a computer programming course and a statistics course, or MATH 17 and statistics, or some other combination).

Note: This is an area in flux to some degree: there have been a number of discussions about it in membership and chapter meetings. The membership is leaning towards a tougher standard than the current Arts and Science distribution requirement.

If you feel that you have clearly fulfilled the spirit of Phi Beta Kappa but that our membership committee would only know that by knowing things that are not on your transcript, we encourage you to talk to your advisor about it and have your advisor contact us with the additional information if he or she agrees. Among things we would like to know about are the following:

- 1) if you are a native speaker or are fluent in a foreign language, but have taken no foreign language at UVM;**
- 2) if you are a serious musician, artist, dancer, or actor with a portfolio or list of performances for us to examine, but you have not taken UVM fine arts courses; or**
- 3) if you had a previous career or period of life that covers an area of liberal studies which you have not indulged in at UVM.**