

SAMPLE OUTLINES

Persuasive Speech Outline

General Purpose: To persuade my audience to take a specific position on a proposed policy

Specific Purpose: To persuade my audience to support the elimination of honors designations for university and college graduates.

Thesis: Universities and colleges should eliminate honors designations for college and university graduates because they do not mean much anymore.

Introduction

I. Attention Getter: Ask yourselves this question: "When everyone is an honors student, where is the honor in your achievement?"

A. Across the country students in colleges and universities all feel like a disappointment when they do not graduate with honors.

B. So, they pressure faculty to give them better grades in classes so they can graduate with honors.

II. Introduce Topic: The fact is, honors designations seem to mean a lot to students, but when they are over-awarded, then the honors distinctions means very little to anyone else.

III. Thesis/Argument: In order to stop this nonsense and allow grades to mean what they indicate for a student, universities and colleges should eliminate the honors graduation designation.

IV. Establish Credibility: As a student myself who values my degree I looked into this issue over the past few weeks and discovered I am not alone in wanting to eliminate honors designations.

V. Preview: Today I want to provide you with the reasons why I believe there is no honor in the honors system.

A. To make my case I will first show you two of the popular models colleges use to determine who will graduate with honors.

B. Next, I will explain how these approaches damage the idea of graduating with honors and do a disservice to the students.

C. Finally, I will explain how eliminating the honors designation for graduates is the solution to this problem.

[Transition: The problem with honors is a function of the way in which universities choose to bestow it, as we will now see.]

Body

I. Main Point #1: Universities and colleges in the United States typically use one of two models for determining which graduates will receive honors when graduating.

A. Subpoint: Most higher education institutions award the best students the designation “summa cum laude,” the next tier of students “magna cum laude,” and a final group of students “cum laude” to differentiate them from the rest of the students.

1. Sub-subpoint: Each of those three titles comes from Latin, meaning “with the highest praise,” “with much praise,” and “with praise.”

2. Sub-subpoint: The use of these titles has been practiced in academia for centuries.

B. Subpoint: Many institutions today set GPA standards for each honors category, and students must graduate with a cumulative GPA that meets the threshold of that category to receive the honor.

1. Sub-subpoint: For example, on a 4.0 scale, if a student achieves between a 3.9–4.0 as a cumulative GPA then at schools like the University of Alabama, University of New Mexico, and George Mason University the student will receive summa cum laude on their diploma.¹

2. Sub-subpoint: On the same scale at the same schools, if a student achieves between a 3.7–3.89 cumulative GPA then they will receive magna cum laude on their diploma.²

3. Sub-subpoint: Finally, students who finish with between a 3.5–3.69 will be designated cum laude.³

[Transition: The GPA standard is not the only manner in categorizing student graduation honors used by schools today.]

¹ Adam Sikula, “Faculty Senate Proposal,” UNLV, Spring 2006.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

II. Main Point #2: Some schools choose to award honors only to the top 10% of their students, regardless of their GPA.

A. Subpoint: In this selection method, students receive honors regardless of their GPA, but instead the focus is on their standing at the completion of their career—a percentage of their class rank, in other words.

B. Subpoint: This method allows for only a fixed number of students to receive honors, but the top performer, regardless of their GPA is guaranteed to receive the distinction of summa cum laude.

1. Sub-subpoint: The University of Nevada Las Vegas uses a variation of such a method whereby the top 1% of graduates receive summa cum laude, the next 4% receive magna cum laude and the final 5% of the top 10% of the class receive cum laude.⁴

2. Sub-subpoint: New Mexico State uses a different version of this method by giving only one person summa cum laude a year, then the top 1.5% of the class receives magna cum laude and the top 15% receive cum laude.⁵

[**Transition:** Regardless of whether this method or the GPA threshold method is used, these categories for graduates do not accurately recognize student achievement and thus do more harm than good to the students.]

III. Main Point #3: If honors truly showed the best and brightest students, they would mean something, but unfortunately, as I will now show you, they do not do that.

A. Subpoint: The first criticism I will make addresses the GPA threshold method, which essentially says if you meet a certain GPA you receive that category's honors designation.

1. Sub-subpoint: The problem here is related to grade inflation and the fact too many students reach the honors threshold.

2. Sub-subpoint: For example, in 2001 half of the grades received by Harvard University students were in the A- to A range.⁶

3. Sub-subpoint: At Princeton between 2004 and 2007, 47% of grades received by undergraduates were some form of A.⁷

⁴ Patricia Velasco, "Grad Status Under Debate," *The Rebel Yell*, (April 27, 2006), available at: http://archive.unlvrebelyell.com/print_article.php?ID=9279 (last accessed: January 14, 2009).

⁵ Sikula.

⁶ "Grade Inflation Scrutinized at Harvard and Elsewhere," *Academe Online*, <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2002/MA/NB/Grade.htm?PF=1>, (last accessed: January 14, 2009)

⁷ Thomas Bartlett and Paula Wasley, "Just Say 'A': Grade Inflation Undergoes Reality Check," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, vol. 55, issue 2, September 5, 2008, A1-A12.

4. Sub-subpoint: This problem isn't recent either; in 1997 the City University of New York awarded almost 50% A's and B's to students.⁸

B. Subpoint: When 50% of the students are A students, what, then, is average and how can you adequately and fairly determine who deserves to graduate with honors?

[Transition: Even though the GPA threshold method is problematic, the percentage of class rank method is not much better at finding out who deserves honors.]

IV. Main Point #4: Using the percentage of class rank to determine who deserves honors is not much better than using GPA thresholds because it only identifies who was best in a group, not who excelled.

A. Subpoint: When you take GPA out of the mix and go with class rank it is possible that a student with a low GPA could end up receiving summa cum laude.

1. Sub-subpoint: Take this case for example: Students who finish #1 in their class with a 3.45 GPA would, according to the class rank system, receive summa cum laude.

2. Sub-subpoint: This designation does not accurately represent the student's achievement.

B. Subpoint: Even if you don't think that is likely, what about a situation where many students finish with a 4.0, how do you differentiate who should receive summa cum laude from who should receive magna cum laude?

1. Sub-subpoint: For example, at UNLV in 2005 78% of the grades given to students in the College of Education were A's, and the average GPA of students was 3.6.⁹

2. Sub-subpoint: When everyone is getting A's then everyone is worthy of honors.

C. Subpoint: The third and final point I want to make here, is that students in this system do not receive a comparable degree to someone at another institution.

1. Sub-subpoint: By this, I mean that students from two universities, each using a different system for marking honors, who receive the same grades would not receive the same honor upon graduation thus making one degree appear better than another's.

2. Sub-subpoint: This does not allow for any type of reasonable comparison between honors at two different institutions.

[Transition: With such an unfair system for bestowing honors upon graduates, the best solution is to just eliminate the system altogether.]

V. Main Point #5: Eliminating honors designations for graduates at the university level will help reduce grade inflation and equalize the worth of degrees from different schools.

A. Subpoint: The elimination of honors will help reduce grade inflation by reducing the pressure on students to make honor rolls.

1. Sub-subpoint: Students will not feel like outcasts or underachievers when they do not hit a specific grade level.

2. Sub-subpoint: Additionally, when students are close to the level for a type of honors they beg for grade changes, resulting in inflation; if honors are eliminated then this practice will be minimized at least, stopped at best.

B. Subpoint: Eliminating honors is also better than the class rank percentage model because the GPA will stand for itself.

1. Sub-subpoint: Whereas in the class rank method of honors selection a student with a 3.8 could possibly graduate without honors, when you eliminate honors altogether that 3.8 shows that the student did very well.

2. Sub-subpoint: Students with high GPAs that miss honors are cheated out of the distinction their GPA should have, so by eliminating honors for all the GPA becomes the distinguishing feature for everyone.

C. Subpoint: Most importantly, eliminating honors designations at all universities and colleges equalizes the playing field for all graduates.

1. Sub-subpoint: When all employers have to go on is GPA, instead of an honors label that was determined differently for each graduate, then all students are on a more level playing field in the application process.

2. Sub-subpoint: Graduates will be evaluated by performance and not an inconsistent designation of honor.

[Transition: Put succinctly, eliminating honors designations for graduates is the fairest and most equitable way to distinguish one student's performance at one school from another student's performance at a different college.]

Conclusion

I. Signpost: In conclusion, honors designations for college graduates are a terrific idea, but terrible in execution and thus should be eliminated.

II. Summary: Honors designations based on GPA thresholds contribute to grade inflation and thus make the honors label worth less than it should be.

A. Using a system based on percentages of the rank in the graduating class also is unfair because it may leave students who achieve high marks out of the honors category altogether.

B. Most problematic, however, is that both methods are used by various institutions across the country, making the meaning of honors inconsistent for all graduates.

C. To solve the problem of inconsistent and unfair honors labels we must abolish honors designations altogether and let the GPA stand as the distinguishing criteria for determining student achievement.

IV. Restate Thesis/Argument: Only when our true performance, illustrated by our GPA, is the measure of our honor and abilities will the gamesmanship and pressure for higher grades so students can receive honors designations stop.

III. Clincher: The honor in student achievement should come from performance, not some watered-down label.

Bibliography

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