The Phi Beta Kappa Society

Stipulations Concerning Eligibility
for Membership in Course

Preamble: The Liberal Arts and Sciences

The Greek initials Phi Beta Kappa stand for a phrase that can be translated "Love of Learning is the Guide of Life." Accordingly, the Phi Beta Kappa Society honors and advocates excellence in the liberal arts and sciences. Invitation to membership both recognizes achievement by the prospective member and recommends that high attainment to others. To qualify for this honor, a candidate must have realized, to a very high degree, the aims of liberal learning, and should espouse the values implicit in that endeavor. Therefore, invitations to membership should reflect Phi Beta Kappa’s commitment to:

- Academic excellence
- Rigorous pursuit of the liberal arts and sciences
- Breadth of intellectual perspective
- Cultivation of capacities of deliberation and ethical reflection
- Love of learning as the guide of life.

To this end, the Society has specified requirements for eligibility. As a consequence, chapters should identify candidates whose academic records demonstrate not only excellence but also breadth and depth in the traditional disciplines of the natural sciences, mathematics, social sciences, and humanities.

Demonstrated excellence in undergraduate studies is a necessary condition for election to Phi Beta Kappa, but it is not sufficient. These stipulations are intended to ensure that candidates for induction into the Society have met certain minimum curricular thresholds of liberal education. For example, because the love of learning implies some command of quantitative reasoning, prospective members should show an appropriate engagement with mathematics. Because it also implies breadth of expression and inquiry, they should also show evidence of appropriate acquaintance with a language beyond a single native language. While conclusive definition of the liberal arts and sciences may be neither possible nor desirable, these stipulations will govern chapters under the authority of the Society in the election of members in course.
The Stipulations

Stipulation 1. Eligible students shall be candidates for a bachelor’s degree. The student’s record shall include coursework in the liberal arts and sciences equivalent to at least three-quarters of the credits ordinarily required for a bachelor’s degree in these fields (e.g., not less than 90 semester hours of work if 120 hours are normally required for such a degree). The liberal arts and sciences encompass the traditional disciplines of the natural sciences, mathematics, social sciences, and humanities. Select courses in other programs of study may be included only if they unambiguously embody the liberal arts and sciences.

Because Phi Beta Kappa honors excellence in the liberal arts and sciences, applied or pre-professional coursework shall not be considered in determining eligibility. This stipulation excludes professionally focused courses and courses devoted to the acquisition of practical skills.

Stipulation 2. Weight shall be given to the breadth and depth of study in liberal arts and sciences, taking into account the number, variety, and level of courses taken outside the requirements of the major, and the proportion of the candidate’s overall program those courses constitute. Consideration shall also be given to the number of elective courses taken above the introductory, or general education, level.

Stipulation 3. Candidates shall have demonstrated, by successful work in high school or college, or in the two together, a knowledge of a second or non-native language at least minimally appropriate for a liberal education. In no case shall this mean less than the completion of the intermediate college level in a second, or non-native, language, or its equivalent.

Stipulation 4. The candidate’s undergraduate record shall include at least one course in college-level mathematics, logic, or statistics, with content appropriate to a liberal arts and sciences curriculum. The course should introduce the student to mathematical ideas, abstract thinking, proofs, and the axiomatic method.

Stipulation 5. In keeping with the Founders’ interest in fostering not only academic excellence but also friendship and morality, invitation to Phi Beta Kappa should be extended only to persons of good moral character.