

# Method for Awarding the Governor General's Silver Medal

According to the Governor General Medal Guidelines:

“The Governor General’s Academic Medal is one of the most prestigious awards that a student in a Canadian educational institution can receive. The Governor General of Canada continues this tradition of encouraging scholarship across the nation and *recognizing outstanding students*.

The medals are known as the "Governor General's Academic Medals" and are awarded only for *academic excellence*. In order to maintain a spirit of universality across the country, the Directives were designed to ensure that the Medals are awarded on *academic excellence only*, regardless of the more intangible qualities of student life, such as good citizenship, moral behaviour or popularity. It is the responsibility of the educational institution to determine a clear winner every year based on these directives. Students cannot jointly be awarded one medal. Canadian citizenship is not a prerequisite for award of the medal.” (Bold and italics added - [http://www.gg.ca/honours/awards/acmed/01\\_e.pdf](http://www.gg.ca/honours/awards/acmed/01_e.pdf) )

The award represents the *highest Academic Achievement* upon graduation from a Bachelors (for the Silver Medal) or Diploma Program (for the Bronze Medal). Unfortunately, UCFV has yet to define what ‘highest Academic Achievement’ means. For example, Academic Achievement can be determined according to the (credit) grades a student earns and is calculated based on all grades across all semesters – Cumulative GPA. Academic Achievement, however, can also be determined by looking at only those courses that a student uses towards their program – Program GPA. Both measures have benefits and costs and contain subtle nuances that can impact the ultimate winner of the Governor General’s Award.

As such, it is the purpose of this discussion paper to provide information that can help identify a method of calculating GPA and thereby defining the highest Academic Achievement upon which the Governor General’s award will be based.

## ***Measuring What We Value***

### **Any Measure is Biased**

Whether Program GPA, Cumulative GPA, or whether to include/exclude Transfer credits in either calculation, someone will benefit from the calculation and someone will not. We must remember, however, that there are few value-neutral statistics for post-secondary education. Therefore, the criteria for awarding the Governor General’s Medal must meet three criteria:

1. They must meet the spirit and intent of the guidelines set out by the Governor General’s office.
2. UCFV’s metric/measurement should be designed around and incorporate UCFV’s core values.
3. UCFV’s metric/measurement should be easily explainable to UCFV students, faculty and staff.

## ***How Do Other Institutions Determine/Define Academic Excellence?***

### **The question:**

We are reviewing how we determine Governor General's medal winners.

We have used program GPA, but it requires calculating GPAs by hand (we haven't gotten into degree audit software yet.).

An alternative is to use the cumulative GPA. This leads to a discussion of whether to include transferred credit. Since we haven't been recording failing grades on transfer, students who do transfer may have an unfair advantage over ones who didn't.

I've been told that everyone in Canada uses the cumulative GPA, although transferred credits wasn't mentioned.

What are you doing?

thanks,

Bill Cooke, Registrar

University College of the Fraser Valley

### The responses summarized:<sup>1</sup>

There were responses from 31 people/institutions. There were split almost evenly between the program and cumulative GPA. If the criteria went beyond a simple GPA or limited it then the comment "+ more" was used.

An interesting side benefit was the information on whether grades were recorded with transfer credit, but that's another survey.

GPA-used	Transfer-credit	Transfer-credit-grades	Comments	Number	%
CGPA	excluded			6	19%
CGPA	excluded		+ more	4	13%
CGPA	excluded	no grades recorded		4	13%
CGPA	excluded	no grades recorded	+ more	1	3%
CGPA	included	grades recorded		1	3%
<b>Total</b>				<b>16</b>	<b>52%</b>
other				2	6%
<b>Total</b>				<b>2</b>	<b>6%</b>
program GPA				2	6%
program GPA			+ more	2	6%
program GPA	excluded			3	10%
program GPA	included			3	10%
program GPA	included	grades recorded		1	3%
program GPA	included	grades recorded	+ more	2	6%
<b>Total</b>				<b>13</b>	<b>42%</b>
Grand total				31	100%

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A for the complete set of responses.

## What Does our Data Show?<sup>2</sup>

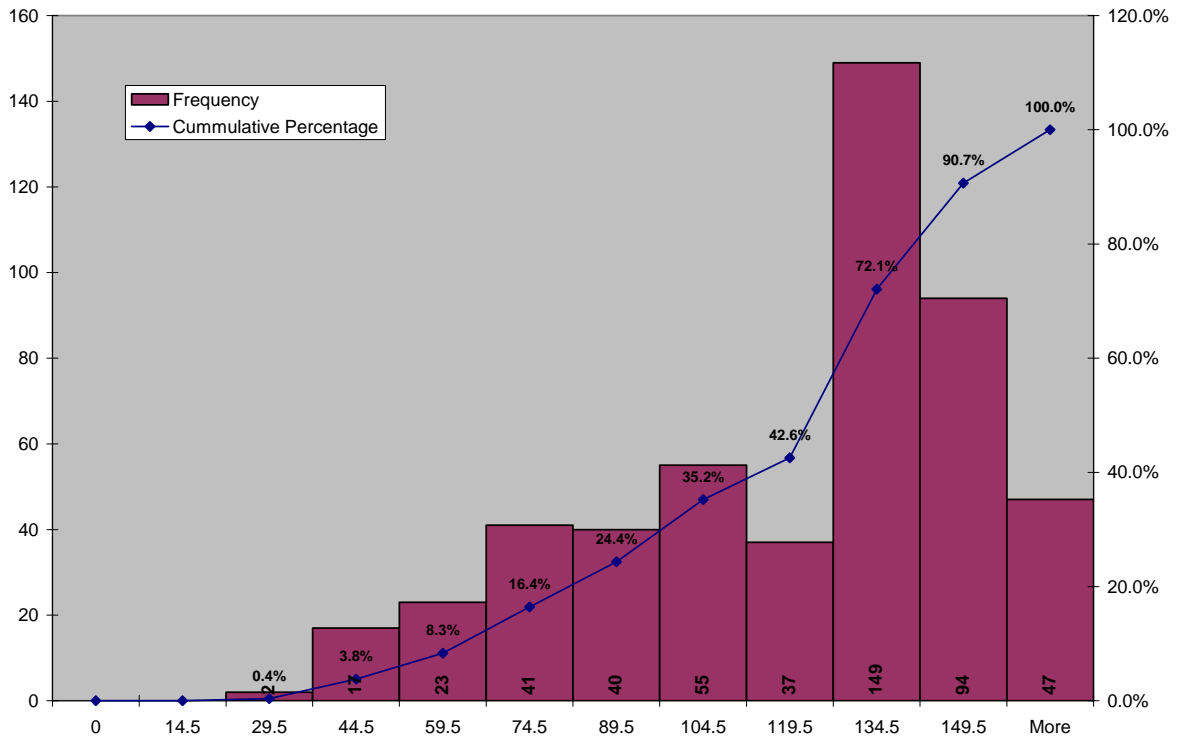
### Residency Requirements

Faculty	Degree or Diploma	Program	Page	Total Credits	Residency Requirements (# of Credits that must be taken at UCFV)	%	Upper Level Credit Requirements	Residency for Upper Level Credits
Arts	Degree	Bachelor of Arts degree (Except where noted)	57	120	60	50%	45	67%
Arts	Degree	Bachelor of Arts (Adult Education)	86	120	30	25%		
Arts	Degree	Bachelor of Arts (Criminal Justice) degree program	87	124	31	25%		
CABIT	Degree	Bachelor of General Studies	109	120	30	25%		
CABIT	Degree	Aviation degree	115	120	34	28%		
CABIT	Degree	Business Administration degree	123	120	45	38%	10	
CABIT	Degree	Bachelor of Computer Information Systems	134	132	33	25%	30	
SHHS	Degree	Bachelor of Science	156	120	30	25%	44	50%
SHHS	Degree	Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree	173	132	53	40%		
SHHS	Degree	Bachelor of Kinesiology degree	178	120	30	25%	48	
SHHS	Degree	Bachelor of Arts in CYC	183	120	30	25%	42	
SHHS	Degree	Bachelor of Social Work degree	198	120	48	40%		

The data indicates that a student can receive a degree from UCFV if a minimum of 30 credits is completed at UCFV. Although the minimum residency requirement is only 30 credits for most programs, the vast majority of students graduate with far more than the minimum number of UCFV credits (Figure 1).

<sup>2</sup> To limit discussion and length, I have provided data on Bachelor degree graduates only. The same criteria should be used for the Silver and Bronze Medal.

**Number of Graduates by Cumulative UCFV Credits**



## **Cumulative GPA without Transfer GPA vs. Cumulative GPA with Transfer GPA**

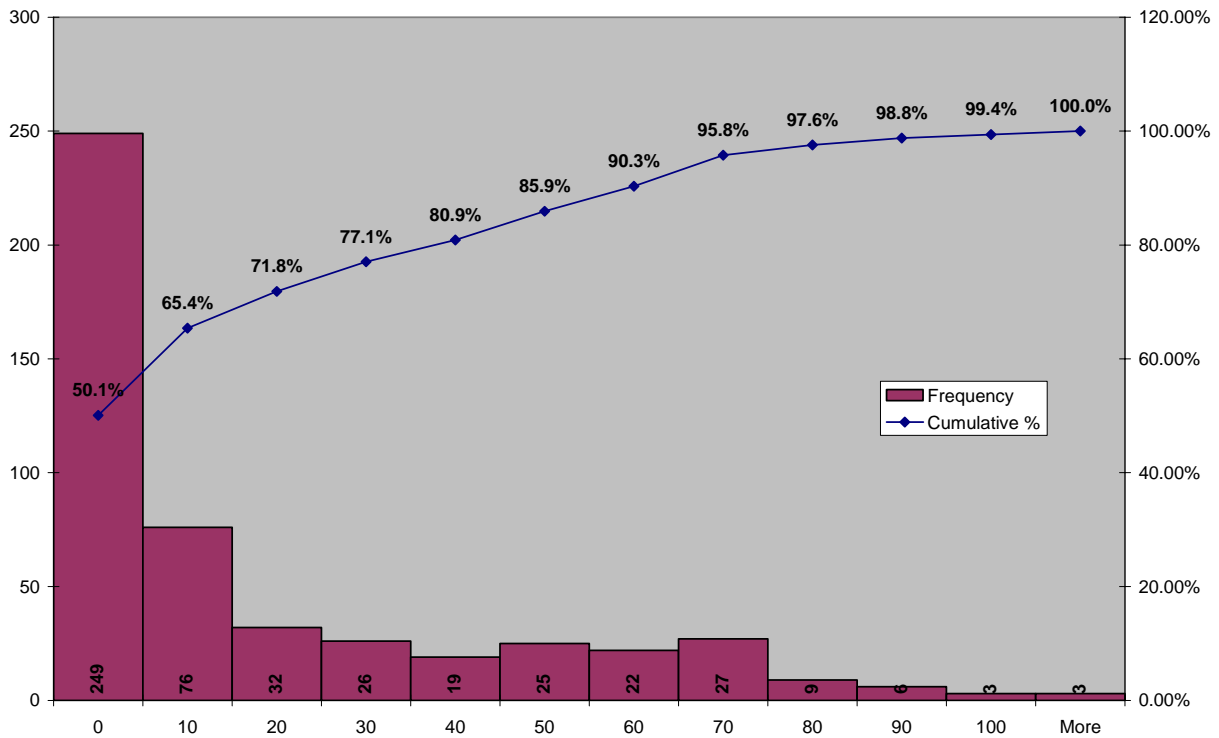
### **Transfer Credits**

Figure 2 indicates that 50% of the students who graduated in 200505 had some amount of transfer credits.

### **Issues with Transfer Credit**

- Not all transfer credits have grades attached (i.e. block transfer). This is not a significant issue because UCFV offers courses that are graded credit/no credit and are excluded from the GPA calculation
- Failing grades on transfer courses are not transferred in. Therefore, our records are only a partial indication of the academic history of a student. Transfer GPA will overstate the actual GPA that a student received at another institution because of this business practice. This practice also advantages transfer students over 'UCFV only' students because if a UCFV student fails two or three classes, their GPA will reflect this fact and it will be noted on their academic record.
- Not all credits taken elsewhere get recorded on the student record. Again, our records are only a partial indication of the academic history of a student. In this case, transfer GPA will overstate or understate the actual GPA that a student received at another institution because of this business practice.

**Figure 2**  
**Number of Transfer Credits for 200505 Graduates**



### Cumulative GPA

UCFV calculates a grade point average (GPA) based on grades for all courses taken by a student. The UCFV cumulative GPA includes only the higher grade of a repeated course. Although cumulative GPA is shown on the official transcript, it may not be the appropriate measure to use when awarding the Governor General’s award.

If by Academic Excellence we mean “always excellent”, then a student should not be able to repeat a number of courses and receive a higher grade and ultimately end up with the Governor’s General Award. Therefore, any calculation that is used to rank graduates for the award must exclude repeated courses. Governor General Award GPA must be a separate calculation wherein

1. Multiply the number of credits for each course by the grade point value of the grade to determine course grade points. Include only the first instance of any course taken.
2. Add up the course grade points.
3. Divide the total course grade points by the total number of credits.

This then leads us back to the issue of transfer credit. If a student repeats a course at UCFV that was taken elsewhere (and the transfer grade was not recorded), then a transferring student has an advantage over a non-transferring student.

### The Data

Any analysis of transfer vs. non-transfer GPA is limited because of the foregoing issues. This being said, if we look at the cumulative GPA for 2005 grads with transfer credits and those without, we see that if we include transfer credit in the calculation, there is no significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the two groups (Table 3). We must be careful not to jump to the conclusion that including transfer credits is the

best solution. The foregoing discussion on transfer credits indicates that the transfer GPA on the student's UCFV record may actually understate the true transfer GPA because of excluded courses.

If we ignore transfer credits, we then see the group that has transfer credits does significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) better than the group without transfer credits (Table 4).

**Table 3**  
**t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances**

	<i>Cum. GPA (including transfer courses ) For those with Transfer courses</i>	<i>Cum. GPA For those without Transfer courses</i>
Mean	3.14	3.11
Variance	0.16	0.18
Observations	246	251
Pooled Variance	0.17	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	495	
t Stat	0.777	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.219	
t Critical one-tail	1.648	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.437	
t Critical two-tail	1.965	

**Table 4**  
**t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances**

	<i>Cum. GPA (Excluding transfer courses ) For those with Transfer courses</i>	<i>Cum. GPA For those without Transfer courses</i>
Mean	3.22	3.11
Variance	0.19	0.18
Observations	246	251
Pooled Variance	0.18	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	495	
t Stat	2.877	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.002	
t Critical one-tail	1.648	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.004	
t Critical two-tail	1.965	

**Recommendation:**

It is recommend that the Governor General's Silver Medal be awarded based on the following criteria:

1. Final 30 Upper Level UCFV credits
2. Ignores all transfer courses
3. Ignores any repeated course

4. If there is a tie, the next highest graded course will be considered for each student until the tie is broken.

**Rationale**

The criteria recognize UCFV's residency requirements and do not exclude any student from being considered. By looking at the final 30 credits for any program, transfer students are not advantaged over 'UCFV only' students. Because we are focusing on the UCFV only credits, transfer courses are excluded. By excluding repeated courses the criteria recognize the 'always excellent' aspect of the award.

**Appendix A:**  
**How Do Other Institutions Determine/  
 Define Academic Excellence?  
 Complete Responses**

<i><b>Governor General's Medal and GPA responses</b></i>			
<i><b>Institution</b></i>	<i><b>GPA-used</b></i>	<i><b>Transfer-</b></i>	<i><b>Comments-</b></i>
<b>Alberta College of Art &amp; Design</b>	CGPA	excluded	We are using CGPA and do not include transfer credits.
<b>Athabasca University</b>	program GPA	excluded	We use program GPA and do not use transferred credits.
<b>BCIT</b>	program GPA	+ more	The Governor General's Award is presented to a student in a 2 year full-time Technology program. The award is based on the student's cumulative average over the final two academic terms. The student must have carried a 100% course load in both terms.
<b>Briercrest College</b>	CGPA	excluded	We use cumulative GPA for every academic award. We avoid the issue of transfer credit factoring into the GPA by not transferring grades. When we transfer credits to Briercrest, only the credits come, not the grades. When we give awards to incoming students, we base them on the cumulative GPA from their previous school. Once the student is here, we only use their cumulative GPA from Briercrest to assess eligibility for awards.
<b>Emily Carr</b>	program GPA	excluded	We use the Emily Carr cumulative gpa. We do not enter transfer credit gpa's.
<b>Georgian College</b>	program GPA	excluded	We use the program GPA but we do use transferred credits. You raise an interesting point however in that those students will have an advantage over other students where we calculate failed grades into the GPA...
<b>Kwantlen University College</b>	program GPA	included	We use the program GPA (Banner CAPP does a great job). That may include some transfer credit if it was specifically required for the program. The only time it might make a difference is if there was a tie. At that point a student taking all their courses at Kwantlen might be viewed more favourably than a transfer student.
<b>Langara College</b>	CGPA	excluded	We use cumulative and do NOT include transfer credit.
<b>McGill</b>	CGPA	excluded	We use the CGPA to determine the medal winners. As for transfer courses, we do not add the transfer no grades recorded grades to our system, only the credits so the grade is not included in our CGPA.
<b>Mount Allison</b>	CGPA	excluded	At Mount Allison, we use the CGPA. Transfer credits are recorded with credit value only, no grade and are not included in GPA calculations.
<b>Mount Saint Vincent University</b>	program GPA	included	We have three year and four year BA and BSC degrees along with four year professional degrees (business, public relations, etc.) We use the cumulative GPA for the last three years of a student's program. Transfers would be included.
<b>Nipissing University</b>	CGPA	excluded	We are using an overall GPA without transfer credit.

## ***Governor General's Medal and GPA responses***

<i><b>Institution</b></i>	<i><b>GPA-used</b></i>	<i><b>Transfer-</b></i>	<i><b>Comments-</b></i>
<b>Northwest Community College</b>	program GPA	included	I calculate GPA by hand using all courses used to meet the requirements of the credential, this includes transfer courses.
<b>Olds College</b>	program GPA	included	We use the program cumulative GPA - calculated by Banner. The criteria specifically says ' must be a full time program student in a two year diploma ' - therefore if a student is awarded Advanced Standing (credit for a course taken elsewhere), and there is someone who has taken the complete two year program at Olds College, we would choose the student who completed the complete two year program in two years. If someone has received Advanced Standing you can't really consider them as a full time student in a two year program. We also governed by the definition of full time for funding purposes and we use that as a determinant as well (min. 18 credits in a semester. I have had to deal with four students with 4.00 as their GPA so through a process of elimination I ended up using another 'scoring' system. So far I haven't been challenged (touch wood).
<b>Redeemer University College</b>	CGPA	excluded	Redeemer uses the cumulative GPA - which only includes institutional credits. Transfer credits, Letter of Permission and Off campus program grades are not included in the CGPA
<b>Ryerson - grad studies</b>	CGPA	excluded	Since I only deal with Graduate GG Gold Medal winners, we (and other Graduate Schools) define academic excellence as a combination of CGPA and academic accomplishments, which includes research accomplishments, publications, etc. We would not use transfer credits, since these are not included in the student's GPA.
<b>Simon Fraser University</b>	CGPA	excluded	I'm not sure how we determine GGs but we never use external marks in our cgpa- they are discrete. The cgpa is on our grades only hence possibly more consistent.
<b>St.Francis Xavier University</b>	other		We do not use a cumulative GPA, but rather have a print out of each student's average for each year, and then do a sum. If one year is missing because of study elsewhere, I look at the transcript from that university to see where those marks fit. In other words, if a student had studied in France for the third year, the marks would not bump up the sum nor hurt the student's chance at the medal. All things are considered for that student and the others in the running.
<b>The King's University College</b>	program GPA	included	For the GG medal, we use our graduating GPA, which is determined on the last 60 credits completed, including transfer credit. This rule has been in place for a long time, and is frankly a little difficult to manage as it requires "translation" between grading systems, and some judgment calls on the sequence of courses included. It has taken me until this year to get this sufficiently automated that the automated calculation is correct 99% of the time! So, despite what we do, if I were to recommend something it would either be to use the cumulative GPA excluding transfer, or to use what another institution in Edmonton uses which is to count all and only courses counted towards degree completion (i.e. this

## ***Governor General's Medal and GPA responses***

<i><b>Institution</b></i>	<i><b>GPA-used</b></i>	<i><b>Transfer-</b></i>	<i><b>Comments-</b></i>
			excludes failures and extra to degree courses, but includes transfer credit).
<b>Trent University</b>	CGPA	excluded	<p>Trent is subdivided into smaller units which we call colleges; each college has a Senior Tutor who is responsible for the academic status of all students within that college. Colleges, by the way, are a mixture of students - colleges are not discipline specific. In May, the Senior Tutors review the academic summaries of students with the highest undergraduate standing, as determined by the cumulative GPA. The summaries are anonymous - all identifying information is removed so that the process is fair, although I admit it is difficult in a smaller institution. Generally Senior tutors can recognize a student from the courses taken.</p> <p>According to our calendar, the Governor-General's silver medal is awarded to the student with the highest standing on graduation with an Honours degree. Generally, the student has taken all of their courses at Trent. We did have a case last year of a student with spectacular standing who was a transfer student. Her file was not considered because of the amount of transfer credit.</p> <p>At the same time that the Senior Tutors are selecting the GG's medal, they are selecting 4 winners of the Symons Medals, awarded to students in the Honours program who achieve high overall standing on graduation and 2 winners of the Bagnani Medals, awarded to students in the General program who achieve high overall standing on graduation. Note that the regulation is not 'highest'. Senior Tutors will pick and choose, looking for students with breadth in their program, for a variety of arts or science students etc.</p>
<b>Université de Moncton</b>	program GPA		Our Cumulative GPA is the program GPA. It is this average that we use to determine the GG's medals. Transfer courses are neutral in the GPA calculation so they are not a factor.
<b>University of Calgary</b>	CGPA	excluded	As there may be a number of students with the same GPA in final year, we consider a cumulative gpa as well as a cumulative course load of courses taken at the U of C in order to break a tie. We don't consider the GPA for transfer courses although if a student has transfer credit, the number of courses transferred is provided to the committee as an additional piece of information.
<b>University of Manitoba</b>	CGPA	included	We use cumulative gpa and we do include transfer credits (we record all transfer grades). One of the reasons behind including transfer grades is that there are quite a few students who study abroad for one semester or year on an exchange program. If we don't use transfer grades, this group of students would be eliminated from consideration.
<b>University of Regina</b>	CGPA	excluded	Uses the CGPA, and does not include marks from other institutions.
<b>University of Regina Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research</b>	CGPA	excluded	We use the cumulative grade point average (no transfer credit grades), and an internal rating on the quality of oral and written defense.

## ***Governor General's Medal and GPA responses***

<i><b>Institution</b></i>	<i><b>GPA-used</b></i>	<i><b>Transfer-</b></i>	<i><b>Comments-</b></i>
<b>University of Saskatchewan College of Arts and Science</b>	program GPA	excluded	We use the CPA based on the courses required for the degree and we do not include transfer grades from other institutions.
<b>University of Toronto</b>	CGPA	excluded	The transferred credits are simply recorded in U of T course terminology (e.g.PHY 100Y) with no grade appended, and identified as transferred. Because they have no grade attached, it is impossible for them to be included in any GPA calculations. It must be CGPA, because we don't calculate program GPA.
<b>University of Toronto School of Graduate Studies</b>	other		<p>You may be referring to the Silver medals at the undergraduate level; however, I will share with you our practice for the Governor General's Gold medal award at the graduate level. We evaluate overall academic performance and do not have a specific preference for GPA or CGPA, but since we are looking for consistent and continued academic success, we place more emphasis on the CGPA at the graduate level. Having said that, we don't have the same problem because nominees who have failed or done poorly at the undergraduate level are not even considered.</p> <p>With regards to your issue, I would be inclined to judge the academic standings of the nominees predominantly on the last two years of their undergraduate studies -- so use GPA in these cases As you indicate, CGPA would give transfer students an unfair advantage and strong non-transfer students who may have had a rocky first or second year would be unfairly disadvantaged.</p>
<b>University of Windsor</b>	CGPA	excluded	<p>We use the cumulative GPA for the Governor General's Medal. Transfer credits are never used in average calculations because we don't assign grades to them.</p> <p>For the Governor General's Medal we start with the GPA but run it through another calculation to rank students from different academic programs. We first calculate group means and standard deviations based on the cumulative averages of all graduating students from each academic unit / department over the past 3 years. How a student's average ranks within this unit is then compared with how other students rank within their units. This is done in an attempt to even the playing field for students in typically low average programs with those in high average programs. It does have it's downsides however, since a student in a low enrollment program that typically has high averages will never be able to get the award. These calculations are all done within reports so none of the calculations have to be done by hand. The student's original GPA is always stored within their record so it's available for these calculations. If you want further details then please contact our Director of Student Awards, Ms. Aase Houser. I have copied her on this email.</p>
<b>University of Winnipeg</b>	program GPA	+ more	We use the best minimum number of credit hours required to satisfy degree requirements. The cumulative GPA gives a rough ranking. If students have taken the exact number of credit hours prescribed by their programs (e.g. 120 credit hours for an Honours degree), then the cumulative GPA is

## ***Governor General's Medal and GPA responses***

<i><b>Institution</b></i>	<i><b>GPA-used</b></i>	<i><b>Transfer-</b></i>	<i><b>Comments-</b></i>
			accurate. However, in many instances, students take more than the prescribed minimum. Some manual calculation is often required to ensure that all degree requirements are included in the 120 hours used in the GG medal calculation.
<b>VCC City Centre</b>	program GPA		"We used program gpa and based it only on courses successfully taken at City Centre that produce grade points. For example, S/U grades generate no grade points and TC does not generate grade points. Although they need these courses in order to graduate. We already did this when we granted the credential so we had it on hand. The actual calculation of the program gpa (grade points/credits) was provided to the awards committee so they could see if someone had an advantage (lots of TC)