Phi Beta Kappa

The Oldest and Most Prestigious Academic Honor Society in the United States

Phi Beta Kappa is synonymous with excellence in the liberal arts, and membership in the society is considered to be a great honor. A Phi Beta Kappa key is widely held as an emblem of academic and personal achievement. Davidson is one of only 283 colleges and universities to have a Phi Beta Kappa chapter. As an honorary society, Phi Beta Kappa is not a social group like a fraternity or sorority.

Founded on December 5, 1776, the Phi Beta Kappa Society is as old as our nation, and its symbols, traditions, and motto—“Love of learning is the guide of life”—date back to this time. In the two centuries since its founding, Phi Beta Kappa has continued to promote and celebrate academic achievement.

While Phi Beta Kappa has grown since 1776, it remains highly selective. Each chapter can elect only a small percentage of students to membership.

The Davidson College Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa

The Davidson College Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa—Gamma of North Carolina—was established in 1923. It grew out of the Mimir Society, a local society established in 1915 for the recognition of attainment in scholarship.

Since its founding, the chapter has elected 2,810 students to membership in Phi Beta Kappa. These initiates are among the academic elite and include Rhodes Scholars, Watson Scholars, National Science Foundation Fellowship holders and others who have followed careers in medicine, law, business, the arts, and academia.

Election to Phi Beta Kappa

At the beginning of each spring semester, the faculty and staff who are members of the Gamma of North Carolina Chapter meet to elect new members. There is no application; chapter members will review your college record through December of your senior year.

While it’s essential that you maintain a strong academic record if you want to be considered for Phi Beta Kappa, that alone will not guarantee election. There are other requirements as well.

According to the constitution of the Phi Beta Kappa Society, “the qualifications for membership … are high scholarship in the arts and sciences and good character.” In addition, the bylaws of the Davidson College Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa stipulate that, to be considered for election, a student must:

- Be a senior in good standing.
- Be of good character.
- Have completed eighteen (18) courses at Davidson, which must:
  - have been graded by Davidson professors (pass/fail courses and courses taken at other institutions, whether graded or not, are not counted);
  - be considered to be part of the liberal arts (courses in military science and those that focus primarily on skills or vocational techniques are not counted);
  - have a grade point average of 3.600 or above;
  - be in the top eighth (12.5%) of the senior class.
Note: Election to membership is not automatic based on the attainment of a certain grade point average. The chapter can elect no more than one-eighth (12.5%) of a given year’s senior class.

More than 70 Davidson faculty and staff, including emeriti, are members of the Gamma of North Carolina Chapter. Among many illustrious Davidson alumni who have been elected to Phi Beta Kappa are:

- Joel Conarroe ’56, President Emeritus, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, former president, PEN American Center
- William Eskridge ’73, John A. Garver Professor of Jurisprudence, Yale Law School
- Elizabeth Kiss ’83, Rhodes Scholar, President, Agnes Scott College
- John Kuykendall ’59, President Emeritus, Davidson College
- Dean Rusk ’31, U.S. Secretary of State, Kennedy and Johnson Administrations
- John Spratt ’64, U.S. House of Representatives, S.C.

Things to consider as you choose a major and make plans for study abroad

- You need to have completed at least 18 countable, graded courses at Davidson in order to be considered for Phi Beta Kappa.
- Courses taken pass/fail do not count.
- Courses taken at other institutions and not graded by Davidson professors do not count.

For more information, talk to your academic adviser and consult the following:

Davidson College Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa
(Gamma of North Carolina)
www.davidson.edu/Documents/Administrative%20Department/Academic%20Affairs/Phi%20Beta%20Kappa/pbk_brochure.pdf

National Phi Beta Kappa Society
www.pbk.org

From the Phi Beta Kappa initiation ceremony:

“[Phi Beta Kappa] holds aloft the old banner of scholar-ship, and to the students who have turned aside from the easier paths and by their talent and fidelity have proved themselves to be worthy, it gives the fitting recognition of a special distinction.”

—Charles Evans Hughes, Chief Justice, U.S. Supreme Court, 1930–41

Davidson College Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa
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704-894-2323
www.davidson.edu/offices/academic-affairs/phi-beta-kappa

Phi Beta Kappa
Gamma of North Carolina Chapter

The most prestigious academic honor society at Davidson College

The oldest and most respected academic honor society in the United States