

Scholar of the College & McCarthy Prizes

Program Description & Guidelines (2025-2026)

Scholar of the College (SOC) is a designation given at Commencement to exceptional students who have excelled academically in their undergraduate studies and who have done substantial, independent work of the highest quality for a significant part of their senior year under the supervision of faculty scholars.

The McCarthy Prize is a recognition awarded at the Scholars Banquet for what is judged by dean's reviewers as the best scholars' project in the areas of the Natural Sciences, the Social Sciences and the Humanities. The program is administered by the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences Dean's Office.

Contacts: Associate Dean for Seniors, Thomas Mogan (thomas.mogan@bc.edu)
Stokes South 132

SCHOLAR OF THE COLLEGE

Qualifications

To qualify for Scholar of the College consideration, students in the class of 2026

- must have and maintain an overall *cumulative* GPA of 3.700 or better as an indication of their mastery of the entire undergraduate program;
- receive departmental approval to complete a substantive research project under the direction of a faculty scholar with appropriate expertise in the field of inquiry;
- and be registered in a special 6-credit Advanced Independent Research course for both semesters as described below.

THE MCCARTHY PRIZES

Nomination for McCarthy Prizes

The McCarthy Prizes are awarded at the Scholars Banquet for what are judged by the Dean of Morrissey College and the Dean's McCarthy Prize Selection Committee as the best scholars' project in the areas of the Natural Sciences, the Social Sciences and the Humanities. Scholar of the College projects submitted by the April 16 deadline may be nominated by the advisor and the department chair for consideration as McCarthy Prize winners. **Projects submitted after Wednesday, April 15, 2026 cannot be considered for the McCarthy Prize, but may still be submitted for consideration in Scholar of the College recognition until Wednesday, April 22, 2026.**

Final determination of the McCarthy Prizes is the responsibility of the Dean. The Dean's Office will notify the registrar of those students who have been granted Scholar of the College recognition. This prestigious award will be noted on the student's transcript and recognized at the Senior Awards Ceremony and in the Commencement brochure in May.

Procedures – fall semester senior year

1. Interested students must obtain departmental approval to become a SOC candidate by submitting to the department Chair or the Chair's designee a written proposal for a project sufficiently substantive to warrant a two semester, 6-credit/semester, advanced independent research project (in general this means about 240 hours of work per semester) accompanied by a supporting letter from the faculty advisor *prior to the beginning of the senior year classes*.
2. The Chair will review the proposal considering the scholarly nature and level of sophistication of the project, the feasibility of the research, the preparation of the student to undertake the project, and how the research fits the overall academic development of the student. If the Chair decides to admit the student to the department's Advanced Independent Research course, a letter of nomination along with copies of the proposal and advisor's letter should be sent to Associate Dean Tom Mogan (thomas.mogan@bc.edu) no later than **Wednesday, September 17, 2025**. The **preferred deadline for submission** is **Wednesday, September 3, 2025**, so that students may gain approval prior to the drop/add deadline. The dean's review will include confirmation that the students' cumulative GPA is at least 3.700 with no outstanding incompletes, missing grades, etc.
3. If approval is granted, the student should be enrolled in the department's Advanced Independent Research course both senior semesters.

N.B. for Off-campus Projects with an External Advisor: In cases where the Scholar's project is being conducted off-campus under the primary guidance of an external advisor, *the student must also have a co-advisor who is a regular, full-time member of the department under whose course number the student will register*. The BC co-advisor assumes the responsibility to consult with the external advisor as to progress of the student's project, to review the final project before submission, to request any changes or edits deemed necessary, and to submit the final grade.

N.B. for 9 credit Scholar's projects: If during the first semester, a 3-credit honors thesis or advanced undergraduate research project develops into a significantly more advanced project, the advisor and chairperson may, in consultation with the dean, propose a change to a 6-credit Advanced Independent Research project for the second semester. Such "9 credit" projects would qualify for consideration for Scholar of the College and could be nominated for a McCarthy Prize. Complete application materials as described above must be sent to Associate Dean Tom Mogan (thomas.mogan@bc.edu) by **January 14, 2026**. *Importantly, letters in the packet must specifically address how the project has gone significantly beyond its initial conception and a normal, 3-credit thesis project and therefore merits the requested change*. Note that permission for such spring entry into the SOC program is relatively rare.

Students with a December graduation term can participate in the SOC Program, but they must consult the Associate Deans during Drop/Add in the January a year advance of graduation for alternative deadline dates and special instructions.

Procedures – spring semester senior year

1. While completion of two semesters of Advanced Independent Research is normally required for Scholar of the College status, it does not guarantee the Scholar's designation for a student. Candidates must maintain their overall outstanding academic record, their 3.700 GPA and their projects, when near completion, must be formally nominated for Scholar review, and, upon completion, must be submitted to both the research advisor **and** a second, independent reviewer appointed by the Chair for evaluation.

2. Formal nominations for a Scholar of the College award must be submitted by the advisor to the Dean's Office, Stokes 132 South, no later than **Friday, January 16, 2026** of senior year for students graduating in May. This must include an advisor's report indicating the likelihood of successful completion of the project (Part 1), and the name of a second, independent, reviewer appointed by the Chair (Part 2), who is reasonably independent of the project and who has appropriate expertise to judge the student's work and has agreed to evaluate and grade the completed project in the required timeframe. The second reader's report should be confidential and submitted directly to Tom Mogan via email (thomas.mogan@bc.edu).
3. In cases where student's progress in the Advanced Independent Research course is judged by the advisor to not merit further consideration for Scholars status, no second reviewer letter is required and the student can simply be graded in the Advanced Independent Research course or the advanced course can be reduced to a 3-credit Undergraduate Research course in consultation with the dean.
4. To receive the Scholar of the College award at Commencement, the completed thesis or project should be emailed to Associate Dean Tom Mogan (thomas.mogan@bc.edu) by **Wednesday, April 15, 2026**, for **McCarthy prize consideration** or **Wednesday, April 22, 2026**, for **Scholar of the College consideration**.
5. The advisor's evaluation and the second reader's review for *all* projects must be submitted by **Wednesday, April 29, 2026** for both **McCarthy Prize consideration** and **Scholar of the College consideration**.

GUIDELINES for Submission & Evaluation

To be considered for Scholar of the College recognition and for the McCarthy Prize, the following must be adhered to:

- Must be double-spaced, and have a title/cover page.
- Must contain an abstract or introduction. A table of contents is optional.
- Must be submitted no later than **Wednesday, April 15, 2026** for **McCarthy prize consideration** or **Wednesday, April 22, 2026** for **Scholar of the College consideration**.
- Must receive a final grade recommendation of A- or better from both the advisor and second reader as indicated in their evaluation letters.
- Acknowledgements are optional.

Projects accepted for Scholar of the College designation are expected to be well written, well referenced, and "publication ready" as one copy will be submitted to the Boston College library and may be accessible to others. In addition, the student will be expected to have maintained their cumulative average of 3.700 throughout the senior year.

Advisor and Second Reader Evaluation Letters

Projects awarded Scholar of the College status are meant to represent the very highest level of undergraduate research and thesis work in the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences. Roughly 10-20% of those who enroll in Advanced Independent Research and who are thereby candidates for Scholars convert their work to more regular undergraduate research or thesis designation.

The letters of evaluation by the research advisor and the second reader are very important documents. Both must contain a recommendation for a grade of A or A- for the 9 or 12 credit project. *Both evaluations are carefully reviewed by the deans and the judges for the McCarthy Prize.*

If the project is deemed to fall short of Scholar's level, either by receiving lower grades or by recommendation, the student will still earn course credits for the work so that their graduation will not be jeopardized.

Since the faculty advisor and the second reader will likely have more expertise in the particular area covered by the project, **it is important that in their letters they comment on how the student's work fits in and contributes to the field as well as the level of scholarship represented by the project (publishable, equivalent to master's level, etc.).**

Also important are comments regarding the level of effort put forth by the student; how the work exceeds the norm for undergraduate research or thesis projects; and relative comparisons with other similar projects (acceptable but below par, good and typical, or one of the best). It is generally assumed that all of the work in the project is that of the student alone except for guidance by the advisor. However, if the project is a portion of a team effort or if some of the data presented in the project was collected or produced by others it is very important for this to be explained and attributed.

Timeline for Scholar of the College & McCarthy Prize Consideration 2025-2026

Note: Students waiting to learn if they are accepted into Advanced Independent Research should register for regular research and/or thesis courses and then add/drop if accepted into the program.

For May 2026 Graduates	
Submission of packet with chair's comments & decision, advisor's letter, and proposal due*	<p>Wednesday, September 3, 2025 - Preferred Deadline</p> <p>Wednesday, September 17, 2025 - Final Deadline</p>
Expected Enrollment in Advanced Independent Research Courses	Fall & Spring of Senior Year
<p>1. Scholar's Status & Progress Report from advisor due (Part 1)*</p> <p>2. Appointment of Second Reviewer due (Part 2)*</p>	Friday, January 16, 2026
Submission of final version of Scholar's projects due for McCarthy Prize consideration*	Wednesday, April 15, 2026
Submission of final version of Scholar's projects due for Scholar of the College consideration*	Wednesday, April 22, 2026
All Faculty Advisor and Second Reader evaluations due*	Wednesday, April 29, 2026
Scholar of the College Banquet (McCarthy Prize winners announced)	Monday, May 4, 2026

*Please email all deliverables to Associate Dean Tom Mogan (thomas.mogan@bc.edu)