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Honorary Degrees, Awarding of

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## Summary

Guidelines have been adopted that establish the purposes of honorary degrees and the selection process for degree recipients.

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## Policy

### Guidelines for the Awarding of Honorary Degrees

The honorary doctorate degree is the highest form of recognition offered by the State University to persons of exceptional distinction.

- A. The Purposes of Honorary Degrees Awarded by the State University of New York
  1. To recognize excellence in the fields of the degrees authorized at State University campuses as well as business, philanthropy, public affairs, and public service which exemplify the mission and purposes of the State University of New York.
  2. To honor meritorious and outstanding service to the University, the State of New York, the United States, or to humanity at large.
  3. To recognize men and women whose lives and significant achievements serve as examples of the University's aspirations for its diverse student body.
  4. To elevate the University in the eyes of the world by honoring individuals who are widely known and highly regarded for achievements in their respective fields of endeavor.
  
- B. The Nature of the Honorary Degree
  1. The Board of Trustees shall award all honorary degrees in the name of the State University of New York. As authorized by law\* and in accordance with the Rules of the Board of Regents,\*\* the State University Board of Trustees has selected to offer the following registered honorary degrees:
    - Doctor of Fine Arts (D.F.A.)
    - Doctor of Humane Letters (L.H.D)

Doctor of Laws (LL.D)

Doctor of Letters (Litt.D)

Doctor of Music (Mus.D.)

Doctor of Science (Sc.D.)

2. The specific honorary degree awarded shall be appropriate to the nature of the attainment which is being recognized.

\*Education Law, 355(2) (f) [Laws of 1979, Chapter 213].

\*\*Title 8, Official Compilation of Codes, Rules and Regulations of the State of New York, 3.48, 3.50.

#### C. Criteria for Selection of Degree Recipients

1. The basis for the selection of a degree recipient shall be consistent with the **Purposes of Honorary Degrees** stated above.
2. The nominee must be distinguished, and the person's achievements must be both relevant and appropriate to the nominating campus. Eligibility for nomination is restricted to persons of state, national, or international stature.
3. The nominee should have a connection with the campus or the State University as a whole. He/she may be an alumna/us. The nominee could have participated in campus programs, partnered in scholarly or creative activity with its faculty or students, or assisted the campus with programmatic development. Furthermore, the connection could be national or international prominence in a particular discipline in which the campus has a program. Alternatively, the candidate may have achieved recognized national or international prominence in their field.
4. Substantive service to the University or the particular campus is not sufficient justification for an honorary degree if the individual does not meet the other criteria for honorary degrees. Instead, a campus award is recommended.

#### D. Time, Place and Method of Awarding Degrees

1. Honorary degrees shall be conferred at University ceremonies authorized by the Board of Trustees, including commencement exercises. The presentation of honorary degrees may also be permitted outside the normal procedures in unusual circumstances, such as to recognize visiting dignitaries and, in other special cases, as recommended to the Board by the Chancellor.
2. Honorary degrees may be awarded in **absentia**, but only upon recommendation to the Board by the Chancellor in the case of extraordinary and compelling circumstances. In the event of unexpected inability to appear at the scheduled time, the conferral may be postponed to the next appropriate ceremony, provided that the degree is conferred within one year after being authorized. A degree may be awarded posthumously if a recipient dies after notification of selection but before the ceremony.
3. Honorary degrees shall be bestowed by the Chancellor, by the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, or by a Trustee designated by the Chairman or, in their absence, on behalf of the Board of Trustees by the President if the ceremony is conducted on a campus. If no Trustee is available, and the campus President desires a SUNY Central Administration representative, the President should contact the Chancellor.
4. Campuses must use the existing University-wide format for the Honorary Degree diploma.

#### E. Number of Degrees to be Awarded

The Board of Trustees shall determine the number of honorary degrees to be awarded in any academic year, with a maximum of 75. Subject to this authority, the Chancellor may issue additional guidelines on numbers of degrees to be awarded.

#### F. Number of Nominations per Campus

Campuses should limit the number of nominations to those who would be certain to enhance the prestige of the University. In no case shall a campus submit more than five nominations, nor award more than four in any academic year.

#### G. Limitations on Eligibility

1. Except under unique and unusual circumstances, honorary degrees shall not be awarded to:
  - Members of the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York, the Councils at the State-operated campuses, the Board of Trustees of the State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry, and the Board of Trustees of the Community Colleges during their terms of service to the University.

- b. Members of the teaching or administrative staff, or any other employee in the University system while employed by the University.
- c. Current holders of New York elective public office or active candidates for elective public office.

Since honorary degrees are conferred by the Board of Trustees for the State University and not individual campuses, no one already holding an honorary degree from the State University shall be eligible to receive a second honorary degree.

#### H. Procedures for Selection of Degree Recipients

All SUNY campuses, the University Faculty Senate, the Faculty Council of Community Colleges, and the System Administration are eligible to submit honorary degree nominations.

Coordination of the selection and nomination process for honorary degree recipients is the responsibility of the campus President who shall empanel an advisory committee and review thoroughly that committee's recommendations. Throughout the procedure, the utmost care should be taken to ensure confidentiality. To verify the qualifications of nominees, campus nominating committees should consult confidentially with appropriate academic departments for review of proposed candidates.

Nominations for degree recipients shall be encouraged from any member of the University community, including students, faculty, administrative staff, alumni and alumnae, members of Councils, Trustees, and friends of the University.

Nominations originating on a campus should be submitted to the President of the institution. The nomination submission must [also] include a clear and convincing statement regarding the relevance and/or appropriateness of the nominee to the nominating campus, directly addressing each of the purposes and criteria for the honorary degree. Additional suggested elements of the nominating portfolio include a detailed curriculum vitae, reviews or articles about the nominee's work, list of major awards, and any other resource material that supports the selection criteria in C3 above.

Nominations from other sources within the University community should be made directly to the Chancellor with the same documentation as above.

Campus Presidents shall empanel either an advisory committee or a selection committee which includes representatives from faculty and staff, and which may also include representatives from other constituencies such as College Councils and the community, including Alumni and Foundation Board members. Small enough to ensure confidentiality, the committee shall have the responsibility of recommending nominees to the President. The President shall review the campus committee's recommendations, ensure that a rigorous review of the qualifications of nominees has been conducted, and be responsible for recommending nominees to the Chancellor. The President shall make the final selection and forward the name(s) to the Chancellor for consideration.

The Chancellor shall submit all nominations to the University-wide Committee on Honorary Degrees at a time determined by the Chancellor. If multiple campuses submit the same nominee, the Chancellor may designate the campus for which the award will be considered.

The Committee on Honorary Degrees, chaired by the Provost, will review the nominees to ensure that they meet the qualifications established by the Board of Trustees. The Provost will forward a list to the Chancellor and the Board for final selection. The Committee shall consist of 15 persons: 10 eminent faculty members in the University appointed by the Chancellor for three-year staggered terms, two senior administrators, two members of the Board of Trustees and the Provost. The Committee shall follow these Guidelines in its deliberations, and shall submit the list of qualified nominees to the Chancellor. In those rare cases where the request to award the degree is submitted outside the established timetable for such submissions, the Honorary Degree Committee Chair will not reconvene the University-wide Committee for review, but will, instead, discuss the nomination with three or four Committee members and then inform the entire Committee of the recommendation.

The Chancellor shall submit the list of qualified nominees, with appropriate recommendations, to the Board of Trustees which shall make the final selection of degree recipients. In certain circumstances, the Chancellor may forward nominations or make recommendations on campus and other submitted candidates directly to the Board of Trustees.

The Chancellor shall notify campus Presidents regarding the Board's selection of degree recipients. Upon receipt of the Board's approval to proceed, Presidents shall issue invitations to nominees directly, on behalf of the Chancellor, the Board of trustees, and themselves. Copies of these invitations must be provided to the

Chancellor and the Provost.

Nominees' responses to campus Presidents must then be forwarded to the Chancellor and the Provost in a timely manner, so that Board resolutions can be prepared for those who accept the University's invitation.

The Board requires that confidentiality be maintained throughout the procedure as a matter of professional courtesy to candidates.

### I. Revocation of Degrees

The authority to revoke a previously awarded honorary degree rests with the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York. The Board of Trustees may revoke an honorary degree if, in its judgment, the recipient of the degree has engaged in conduct that: 1) is inconsistent with the mission and/or values of the State University of New York; 2) undermines the accomplishments that were cited as the basis for awarding the honorary degree; or 3) is injurious to the reputation of the State University of New York or any of its constituent campuses. The Board of Trustees' revocation of an honorary degree must be supported by the Chancellor's recommendation, made after an evaluation of the necessity for such action using the same procedures articulated in this policy for the selection and nomination of an honorary degree recipient.

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## Definitions

There are no definitions relevant to this policy.

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## Other Related Information

There is no related information relevant to this policy.

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## Procedures

### Honorary Degree Review Process

Nominations for honorary degrees undergo multiple levels of review on the campuses and at the System level. Listed below are the chief steps in this process:

- Campus president appoints honorary degree committee;
- Committee proposes candidates, collects background information;
- President reviews nominations and makes final selection of campus candidates;
- President sends campus nomination materials to Secretary of the University at State University of New York System Administration;
- Secretary's Office compiles and reviews campus nominations for:
  - nominees proposed by two or more campuses (must be adjudicated);
  - nominees who have already received an honorary degree from another State University campus (cannot receive a second honorary degree from SUNY);
  - completeness and appropriateness of nomination materials;
  - potential University concerns relating to the nominees.
- Provost convenes early fall meeting of the University-wide Committee on Honorary Degrees, composed of senior faculty, trustees, and administrators, to:
  - review all nominations, make suggestions on appropriateness of degrees, request further information as needed;
  - identify those to go forward and those which cannot be approved;
- Chancellor and Board of Trustees informally and confidentially review results of Honorary Degree Committee's deliberations and either confirms the Committee's decisions or raise concerns regarding nominees;
- Secretary notifies presidents of approval status for their nominees;
- Campus president sends letters of invitation to nominees;
- Nominees who accept are officially and publicly approved by the Trustees in the form of Resolutions presented for vote at regular Board meetings;

- Campus may publicize nominees only following official Board approval;
- Campus awards honorary degree(s) at appropriate ceremony (usually Commencement).

### **Preparing Campus Nominations**

The campus Presidents should solicit suggested nominations from as wide a group as possible. The nomination process, however, should be kept strictly confidential. All those who participate in making and reviewing nominations must understand that they are not to contact the nominees or in any way communicate to them that they are being considered for an honorary degree. This kind of premature communication can lead to embarrassment to the University or to the nominee if either party chooses to end the process before the nomination is completed. The campus committee charged with preparing nomination submissions must conduct a rigorous review of the qualifications of the candidate(s), including confidential consultation with appropriate faculty able to evaluate the accomplishments of the nominee(s). When the committee has completed its nomination process, the President makes a further review and submits supporting materials to the Office of the Provost for each nominee he or she is recommending.

### **Required Documentation**

For each nominee, the President should electronically submit via email to [Trustees@suny.edu](mailto:Trustees@suny.edu) the following materials to the Secretary of the University. All of these materials are necessary in order for the Honorary Degree Committee to evaluate the candidates. Omission of any part of the nomination materials could result in the nominee's rejection by the Committee. Please submit the material in the order listed (1-4).

1. The nomination form included with the guidelines should be completed and attached as the top sheet of the nominee's supporting materials.
2. A one-page summary about the nominee should follow the nomination form. This summary, printed on campus letterhead and signed by the President, should begin by identifying the nominee by name, title, present position, and/or profession. The remainder of the page should summarize the nominee's most important achievements and the relevance of these achievements to the nominating campus. (This page summarizes the justification described in number 3.)
3. A three- to five-page justification is the third part of the nomination materials. The justification explains, in specific detail:
  - a. why the nominee's achievements justify the awarding of an honorary degree;
  - b. why the particular type of degree is being recommended; and
  - c. how the nominee's achievements are relevant to the nominating campus.
4. Additional supporting documentation should follow the justification. These materials will vary for different nominees, but appropriate materials include a detailed vita, Who's Who entries, reviews or articles about the nominee's work, a list of major publications, a list of major awards, and the like. Supporting documentation should be kept to a maximum of 10 pages. A confidential statement of support for the nomination should also be included from a faculty member in the relevant discipline, when the nominee is an academic.
5. Presidents should keep a copy of the nomination materials on campus, as well as any additional documentation about the nominee which was not sent to the Secretary.

### **University-wide Committee on Honorary Degrees**

The Committee on Honorary Degrees, chaired by the Provost, will review the nominees to ensure that they meet the qualifications established by the Board of Trustees. The Provost will forward a list to the Chancellor and the Board for final selection. The Committee on Honorary Degrees consists of fifteen members: ten eminent faculty members in the University System appointed by the Chancellor for three-year staggered terms, two senior administrators, two members of the Board of Trustees, and the Provost.

Campuses which have a member on the University-wide Honorary Degree Committee are expected to cover the expenses of that member for meetings of the Committee (usually one meeting per year).

### **Authorization to Invite**

Campuses whose nominations may go forward will be informed by a letter from the Secretary of the University listing the nominees approved for invitation. Presidents may then proceed to invite honorary degree candidates directly, on behalf of the Chancellor, the Board of Trustees, and themselves. Copies of these invitations must be

provided to the Chancellor's Office. Campuses whose nominations were not approved will be notified by the Secretary at the same time.

Sample letters of invitation are attached. *Remember that official Board approval will be granted only after the nominee has accepted, the campus has notified the Secretary, and the Board has acted in the form of a resolution.*

### **Distribution of Degrees Among Campus Types**

All SUNY campuses, the University Faculty Senate, the Faculty Council of Community Colleges, and the System Administration are eligible to submit honorary degree nominations.

### **Limitation on Number of Degrees SUNY-wide and by Campus**

In any given year, the maximum number of honorary degrees which may be awarded Statewide will be 75. Each campus may submit up to five nominations. The Provost, in working with the campus Presidents and in making the recommendations to the Board of Trustees, will ensure that the maximum Statewide number is not exceeded.

### **Previous Degree Recipients**

No one already holding an honorary degree from the State University shall be eligible to receive a second honorary degree. Please see the enclosed list of honorary degrees awarded or pending award. We have attempted to make this list as accurate as possible; however, we also ask each President's Office to check the list for any omission of degrees awarded at your campus in the past.

### **Site of Conferral of Degree**

Honorary degrees may be conferred during the commencement exercises of the campus which initiated the nomination or, after approval, at other appropriate ceremonies.

### **Commencement Speakers as Nominees**

Presidents who wish to nominate a possible commencement speaker for an honorary degree should follow the same nomination procedure outlined above. The same confidentiality rules apply to commencement speakers nominated for honorary degrees as for all other nominees. That is, speakers should not be told in advance that they are being nominated for honorary degrees, since Committee approval will not be automatic and these nominees will have to meet the same criteria for selection.

### **Campus Arrangements for Recipients**

- Diploma cases and citations in the standard format will be furnished by System Administration. Once the campus has received notification of a nominee's acceptance, the campus shall draft a citation and forward it to the System Administration Office of Governmental and University Relations. That Office will work with the campus to arrive at the final text of the citation and will then provide the appropriate documents to the campus.
- Campuses must order and cover costs for all of their recipients' academic regalia.
- Campuses are expected to cover the entire travel and entertainment expenses of their honorary degree recipients.
- Individual campuses should not publicize their honorary degree recipients until after the Board of Trustees has publicly approved the names, and the Office of Governmental and University Relations at the System Administration has released its announcement of recipients to the press. The Office of Governmental and University Relations will coordinate its press releases with the individual campuses so that they may prepare their publicity concurrently.

### **Revocation of Degrees**

Recommendations for revocation of honorary degrees shall be submitted by or to the campus which initially

sponsored the degree recommendation or by or to the Chancellor for honorary degrees originating from other University sources.

The campus based honorary review committee shall collect and review any information relating to a recommendation to revoke, determine if such information provides a substantial basis to support revocation and submit such information with its recommendation on revocation to the campus president for consideration. The campus president will consider such revocation recommendation and submit her/his recommendation to the University-wide Committee on Honorary Degrees for consideration.

In circumstances where an honorary degree originated from a non-campus based University source, a recommendation for revocation shall be submitted by the Chancellor to the University-wide Committee on Honorary Degrees. The University-wide Committee on Honorary Degrees shall collect and review any information relating to a recommendation to revoke and determine if such information provides a substantial basis to support revocation.

The University-wide Committee on Honorary Degrees will submit its recommendation regarding revocation to the Chancellor for her/his consideration. After consideration of the recommendation of the University-wide Committee on Honorary Degrees, the Chancellor shall submit a recommendation to the State University Board of Trustees for determination. In the event the Board of Trustees determines that an honorary degree should be revoked, it shall revoke such degree by adoption of a formal Board resolution. After revocation, SUNY shall use reasonable efforts to attempt to notify the former degree holder that her/his honorary degree has been revoked.

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### Forms

There are no forms relevant to this policy.

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### Authority

The following link to FindLaw's [New York State Laws](#) is provided for users' convenience; it is not the official site for the State of New York laws.

[NYS Education Law §355](#) (Powers and duties of trustees - personnel functions.)

In case of questions, readers are advised to refer to the New York State Legislature site for the menu of [New York State Consolidated](#).

[8 NYCRR §§3.48, 3.50](#) (Requirements for Earned Degrees and Registered Degrees)

State University of New York Board of Trustees Resolution 80-71, adopted April 23, 1980.

State University of New York Board of Trustees Resolution 2015-66, adopted November 5, 2015

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### History

Memorandum to presidents from the office of the vice chancellor for academic programs, policy and planning, dated June 4, 1980.

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### Appendices

[Appendix A](#) - Chancellor's Additional Guidelines for Honorary Degrees

[State University of New York Board of Trustees Resolution 2015-66](#) - Amendment to Policy Regarding the Awarding of Honorary Degrees