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Honorary Degrees, Awarding of

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Table of Contents

[Summary](#)

[Policy](#)

[Definitions](#)

[Other Related Information](#)

[Procedures](#)

[Forms](#)

[Authority](#)

[History](#)

[Appendices](#)

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## Summary

This policy establishes the purpose of honorary degrees and the selection process for degree recipients.

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## Policy

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

### A. The Purposes of Honorary Degrees Awarded by SUNY

1. To recognize excellence in the fields of the degrees authorized at SUNY campuses as well as business, philanthropy, public affairs, and public service which exemplify SUNY's mission.
2. To honor meritorious and outstanding service to SUNY, the State of New York, the United States, or to humanity at large.
3. To recognize those whose lives and significant achievements serve as examples of SUNY's aspirations for its diverse student body.
4. To elevate the SUNY 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 Board of Trustees has

elected 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 achievements which are being recognized.

#### 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 SUNY as a whole. The nominee may be a graduate of SUNY, may 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 may be established through national or international prominence in a particular discipline in which the campus has a program. Alternatively, the candidate may have achieved national or international prominence in their field.
4. Substantive service to SUNY or the particular campus is not sufficient justification for an honorary degree if the individual does not meet the other criteria for honorary degrees. Under those circumstances, 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 an individual Trustee selected 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

Nominations should be limited to those who would be certain to enhance the prestige of SUNY. In no case shall a campus, or entity identified in section H1 below, submit more than five nominations, nor be granted authority to 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:
  - a. Members of the SUNY Board of Trustees, the councils at the State-operated campuses, the Board of Trustees of the State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry, and the boards of trustees of the community colleges during their terms of service.
  - b. Members of the teaching or administrative staff, or any other employee in the SUNY system while employed by SUNY.
  - c. Current holders of New York elective public office or active candidates for elective public office.
2. Since honorary degrees are conferred by the SUNY Board of Trustees and not individual campuses, no one already holding an honorary degree from SUNY shall be eligible to receive a second honorary degree.

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

1. All SUNY campuses, the University Faculty Senate, the Faculty Council of Community Colleges, the Chancellor, the SUNY Board of Trustees and its individual Trustees are eligible to submit honorary degree nominations in response to an annual call for nominations issued by the Provost on behalf of the Chancellor.
2. Coordination of the selection and nomination process for submissions by campuses 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.

Campus nominations for degree recipients shall be encouraged from any member of the campus community, including students, faculty, administrative staff, SUNY alumni, members of Councils, Trustees, and friends of SUNY.

Nominations originating on a campus should be submitted to the president of the institution. The nomination submission must 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.

Campus presidents shall empanel either a local, advisory, or honorary degree 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.

3. Nominations from the University Faculty Senate and the Faculty Council of Community Colleges should be made directly to the Chancellor by each entity's respective president or chair with the same supporting statement and documentation as set forth in item H(2) above. The Board of Trustees, or any of its individual Trustees, may submit nominations, together with the supporting statement and documentation set forth in item H(2) above to the University-Wide Honorary Degree Committee for consideration. The Provost shall serve as Chair of the University-wide Honorary Degree Committee.
4. The Chancellor shall submit all nominations, including those originating from her/him, to the University-wide Honorary Degree Committee by the deadline established by Chair of the Committee. In certain circumstances, the Chancellor may forward nominations or make recommendations on campus and other submitted candidates directly to the Board of Trustees. If multiple campuses submit the same nominee, the Chancellor may designate the campus for which the award will be considered.
5. The University-wide Honorary Degree Committee will review the nominees received from the Chancellor and the Board of Trustees or its individual members to ensure that they meet the qualifications established by the Board of Trustees. The University-Wide 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 the parameters set forth in this Policy 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 Chair will not reconvene the University-wide Committee for review, but will, instead, poll the members electronically.
6. The Provost will forward the list of nominees approved by the University-wide Committee to the Chancellor.
7. The Chancellor shall submit the list of qualified nominees, with appropriate recommendations, to the Board of Trustees which shall confidentially discuss the Committee's recommendations and then approve affirmed candidates via a formal resolution. This approval of affirmed candidates by the Board of Trustees authorizes the issuance of invitations to candidates to receive the honorary degree. The Chancellor will conduct a final review of all nominees who accepted campus invitations to ensure that there is no new information publicly available that would disqualify the candidate for the award under this policy. If the Chancellor determines that the nominee is not qualified to receive the award, the Chancellor shall transmit his/her recommendation to the Board of Trustees for final determination.
8. The Provost shall notify campus presidents regarding the Board's selection of degree recipients. Upon notice of the Board's approval to proceed, presidents shall issue invitations to nominees directly, on SUNY's behalf. Copies of these invitations must be provided to the Chancellor and the Provost.
9. Nominees' responses to campus Presidents must be forwarded to the Provost in a timely manner, so that the Chancellor can conduct the final review described above. The final approval will be communicated to the nominating entity by the Provost.
10. Announcement or promotion of nominees is prohibited until final approval has been communicated.

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 SUNY Board of Trustees. 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 SUNY's mission and/or values; 2) undermines the accomplishments that were cited as the basis for awarding the honorary degree; or 3) is injurious to the reputation of SUNY 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 followed for the selection and nomination of that 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

There are two sets of procedures related to this policy:

- [SUNY Campus Honorary Degree Procedures](#) (Updated August 2018)
- [SUNY Honorary Degree Procedures For Non-Campus Nominating Entities](#): SUNY Board of Trustees, Individual Trustees, Chancellor, University Faculty Senate and Faculty Council of Community Colleges (Created August 2018)

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### Forms

Each year the System Provost prepares a nomination form that must accompany all nominations. A sample, from the 2018-19 academic year, is provided here by way of example.

[Honorary Degrees - Sample Nomination Form](#)

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### Authority

Official compilation of Codes, Rules and Regulations of the State of New York. Title 8. Education Department. Chapter 1. Rules of the Board of Regents. Part 3. University of the State of New York; State Education Department.

Diplomas and Degrees. [8 CRR-NY 3.48](#) Requirements for honorary 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.

State University of New York Board of Trustees [Resolution 2018-44](#), adopted June 14, 2018

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## History

This 2018 revision of the Awarding of Honorary Degrees policy incorporates and supersedes:

- Amendment to Policy Regarding the Awarding of Honorary Degrees, [Document #1200.2](#).

This 2018 revision supersedes:

- Chancellor's Additional Guidelines for Honorary Degrees. [Document #1200.1](#)
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## Appendices

There are no appendices relevant to this policy.