

University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Posthumous, Extraordinary, and Honorary Degrees

Approved by Faculty Senate 11/15/2018

The awarding of a degree is the pinnacle of the college experience. It is an honor bestowed upon those that satisfactorily complete a course of study. Occasionally events take place where the need to consider additional degree options arise.

The goal of these policies is to honor those who have provided exemplary service to the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and/or to extend sympathy and compassion to the families and friends of deceased students. Below is a means of addressing different circumstances surrounding the awarding of Posthumous, Extraordinary, and Honorary Degrees and the procedure associated with each degree.

Posthumous Degrees

Posthumous degrees may be awarded to students who are deceased prior to but nearing formal completion of all degree requirements of the undergraduate or graduate program being pursued.

Criteria: A Posthumous Degree may be awarded to a person who satisfies the following:

- The student was in his/her final year before graduation
- The proposal is endorsed by the major/program department and by the student's college.
- For a graduate degree, the capstone experience was near completion.

Extraordinary Degrees

Extraordinary Degrees may be awarded to students who are unable to complete a college degree due to extraordinary circumstances (e.g., permanently physically or cognitively incapacitated during their course of study, or deceased but not yet in their final year). Awarding of an Extraordinary Degree recognizes achievement of the student while at UWL and acknowledges the extraordinary circumstance to the university, family and friends, and extends to them the opportunity to share in the success of the student.

Criteria: An Extraordinary Degree may be awarded to a person who satisfies the following:

- The student had been enrolled at UWL and contributed to the life of the University.
- The proposal is endorsed by the major/program department and by the student's college (or, if undeclared, the Provost).

Procedures for Posthumous or Extraordinary Degrees

1. Any interested party may initiate consideration of awarding a posthumous or extraordinary degree.
2. The interested party will contact the Executive Director of the Alumni Association. The Executive Director will work with the interested party to write a short proposal to submit to the home department of the student's first degree for approval. The department will review the student's credentials and make a recommendation for a posthumous or extraordinary degree and provide their recommendation for approval. If approved, the department will forward the proposal with their recommendation to the Dean associated with the department for approval. If the Dean approves, the recommendation will be submitted to the Chancellor for final approval who will notify Records & Registration, the Office of Student Life, and the Executive Director of the Alumni Association. For an extraordinary degree associated with a student without a declared major, the Provost will review and make a recommendation to the Chancellor.
3. Upon prior approval of the family, the name of the deceased student will be announced at Commencement, and the diploma holder will be given to a family member or a representative chosen by the family.
4. A short statement about the student may be submitted for reading at the awarding of the degree.

Honorary Degrees - From time to time the university has the opportunity to award a degree to those who have demonstrated cause to be honored. This non-academic degree is available to only a select group of highly deserving individuals who merit special recognition for genuine achievement and distinction in a field or activity consonant with the mission of the University. The criteria and process of awarding an honorary degree at UWL reflects the Regent Policy Document 4-20 indicated in italics below.

Scope

This policy applies to all University of Wisconsin institutions that award honorary doctorate degrees. UW institutions are not obligated to award honorary degrees; those that do so shall award the degrees consistent with this policy.

Purpose

This policy specifies the requirements for honorary doctorates and for submitting nominations for University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents review.

Policy Statement

An honorary doctorate is the highest award conferred by the University of Wisconsin System. An honorary doctorate constitutes recognition of distinctive achievement that has added materially to knowledge and to the betterment of society.

Eligibility

An honorary doctorate may be awarded to an individual who has achieved acknowledged eminence in cultural affairs, in public service, or in a field of knowledge and scholarship, consistent with the ideals and purposes of the university. An honorary doctorate recognizes extraordinary and lasting distinction. Nominees need not have been educated at or otherwise associated with the University of Wisconsin institution conferring the degree. Honorary degrees are not awarded to encourage or reward financial contributions to the university. However, honorary degrees may serve to bring renown to the university by honoring individuals who are highly regarded for achievements in their fields of endeavor.

Ineligibility

To insulate the honorary doctorate from partisanship and to prevent potential conflicts of interest, the following three categories of individuals are ineligible for an honorary doctorate from an institution of the University of Wisconsin System, in accordance with the exceptions that follow this list:

- 1. Individuals serving in professions as public officials and political appointees, including serving members of the Wisconsin Legislature and the Wisconsin congressional delegation, elected and appointed officials, and all members of the state judiciary;*
- 2. Members of the Board of Regents; and*
- 3. University of Wisconsin System employees, including faculty, staff and administrators at each university and in UW System Administration.*

Persons in any of these three categories could be eligible for consideration two years or more after they have vacated office or terminated employment. However, emeritus faculty are only eligible for honorary degrees if they have achieved distinction in a second career following retirement.

Degree Designations

Honorary degree designations shall be limited to the following: (1) Doctor of Laws (LL.D.), (2) Doctor of Science (SC.D.), (3) Doctor of Humane Letters (L.H.D.), and (4) Doctor of Literature (D.Lit. or D.Litt.), with the exception that the University of Wisconsin-Stout may grant an honorary Doctor of Vocational Education (D.V.E). In addition, as doctoral institutions, UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee are authorized to award occasional highly specialized honorary doctorates as best reflect the recipient's accomplishments. While a significant and important award, an honorary doctorate does not have the same standing as an earned doctorate and should not be represented as such.

Limitations

The nomination and review process is confidential. No disclosure is to be made until after Board of Regents review and the institution's subsequent invitation to the nominee. As a matter of policy the Board generally limits to one the number of honorary degrees any individual may receive from the UW System. Honorary degrees are to be awarded in person and not in absentia. A degree may be awarded posthumously to a nominee if, after accepting the chancellor's invitation, the nominee's death occurs before the scheduled conferral.

In awarding honorary degrees, the University of Wisconsin System does not assume any legal obligations. The recipients receive no honoraria, but the institution would generally be expected to assume the expenses incurred by the recipients in connection with their participation in the commencement ceremony.

Oversight, Roles and Responsibilities

Each UW institution that nominates candidates for honorary doctorates shall have an honorary degree committee that recommends candidates for honorary degrees consistent with procedures, policies, and criteria developed at each institution and consistent with this Regent Policy Document.

At least two months prior to the commencement ceremony at which an honorary degree is to be conferred, and at least three weeks prior to a regularly-scheduled Board of Regents meeting, the UW institution shall forward to the Executive Director and Corporate Secretary of the Board of Regents: (1) a letter from the chancellor indicating the

name of the nominee(s) and expressing the chancellor's approval; (2) the curriculum vitae or résumé of the nominee(s); and (3) letters of recommendation and other documentation of the contributions of the nominee and the merits of the nominee as an honorary degree recipient. It is the responsibility of the UW institution to exercise due diligence in ensuring that a nominee is of high moral character.

Upon the timely receipt of an honorary degree nomination from a UW institution, the Executive Director and Corporate Secretary shall: (1) review nominations to verify consistency with the requirements of this policy and to confirm, to the extent possible, that a nomination poses a low risk of reputational harm to the University of Wisconsin System; (2) if any concerns are identified, consult with the President of the Board of Regents, President of the UW System and chancellor, as appropriate; (3) after any concerns are addressed, place the nomination on the agenda of the Board's next regular meeting for Board of Regents review; and (4) notify the chancellor of a favorable review by the Board.

After the Board's review, the chancellor may invite the candidate to attend the commencement ceremony at which the degree is to be conferred.

Honorary Degree Procedure

1. Any member of the university may nominate and serve as an advocate for an individual nominee.
2. The Executive Director of the Alumni Association will determine the appropriate timeline for the review of the nominee in order to comply with UW System policy requirements for honorary degrees.
3. The Executive Director will work with the interested party to generate an application for review by the Honorary Degree Committee. If applicable, the application should be endorsed by a college, department or program, office or a division of the university (i.e., the Office of Student Life or the Office Multicultural Student Services.) The Honorary Committee will evaluate all applications. The applications should include:
 - Letter of Nomination
 - Resume
 - Information on nominee's connection to campus, philanthropic activities, professional achievements and academic credentials.The following criteria should be considered when making a determination about awarding the degree:
 - Eminence, in the course of a career, in some field of scholarship, in public service, or in an artistic, literary, governmental, religious, financial, or other endeavor.
 - Support for the University through the individual's achievements and the mission or life of the University.
 - Reflection of the diversity of interests, backgrounds, and concerns forwarded by the University community and the society and world served by the University.
4. Honorary Degree Committee Structure. When a recommendation is made for a special degree, a committee will be convened and chaired by UWL's Executive Director of the Alumni Association composed of the following individuals: one faculty/IAS representatives from each degree-granting academic unit (business, education, liberal arts, and science and health) and one member of the Alumni Association board of directors, to consider and evaluate each application. The Executive Director of the Alumni Association will remain as a permanent member and will select the committee members rotating the membership as needed.
5. The committee should determine if the nominee reflects the criteria for the degree and indicate the type of honorary doctorate to be awarded following Regent policy. If approved by the committee, the Executive Director will request approval by the Chancellor. If Chancellor's approval is provided, the Executive Director will complete the process with UW System. If approved by System, the Chancellor's Office will communicate the results to the campus community in order to prepare for the commencement events.