

University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Special Posthumous, Extraordinary, and Honorary Degrees Policy

Approved by Faculty Senate 2/27/2025

The awarding of a degree is the pinnacle of the college experience and 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.

Posthumous Degrees

Posthumous Degrees may be awarded to students who are deceased prior to 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 a current student at UWL at the time of death.
- The proposal is endorsed by the major/program department and by the student's college (or, if undeclared, the Provost).

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). Awarding of an Extraordinary Degree recognizes the contribution of the student while at UWL and acknowledges the extraordinary circumstance to the university community, 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).

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.