

Honorary Degree Policy **10.9.2023**

Committee

The Honorary Degree Committee is composed of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, a representative from Advancement, a staff representative, a student representative, a faculty representative from Sciences, a faculty representative from Social Sciences, and a faculty representative from Arts & Humanities.

Qualities of Candidates

Our tradition has been to identify candidates who can speak to the mission and values of the College, and to use personal or professional connections to candidates who are more likely to participate without an extravagant fee. In short, candidates of accomplishment who can speak directly to the Ursinus mission are prioritized over those with already high public recognition.

The award should represent the highest intellectual and moral values; it should reflect the very character and quality of the College itself. The awarding of an honorary degree is recognition of a person whose life and achievements serve as examples of the College's aspirations for its students. The three criteria used for selecting honorary degree recipients are listed below. Nominees should distinguish themselves in at least two of the three categories:

1. Distinguished professional, scholarly, intellectual, or creative achievement
2. Demonstrated interest in activities that contribute to the public good, including public service and/or philanthropy
3. Connection and/or interest in the mission of Ursinus College

An honorary degree may be offered to a person who has contributed significantly to cultural, scientific, and/or social development. At Ursinus, special consideration will be given to those individuals who exemplify the ideals of the College and its mission and values. The individual receiving an honorary degree should have a sustained reputation over a period of years.

The activities of the individual should contain outstanding contributions in scholarly research, teaching and learning, the arts, public service, and/or business. For example, the person might be a distinguished scholar in the natural, physical or social sciences, the arts or humanities, or a distinguished person in public life, business, the professions, or the performing arts. Evaluation will be based on the level of intellectual and professional attainment and the significance of the contributions to the enrichment and/or welfare of others.

The Committee will seek to maintain a balance among various fields of activity, both in a given calendar year and in a cycle of years. A program in the awarding of honorary degrees should maintain a reasonable balance between academic and non-academic recipients, and various fields of endeavor. The Committee will make an effort to recognize the achievements of those underrepresented in their fields, consonant with the equal opportunity goals of the institution.

Note: An honorary degree cannot be awarded to an active member of the College faculty, administration, staff, Board of Trustees nor to an appointed or elected official of Pennsylvania state government. Persons in these categories are eligible for nomination three years after retirement or resignation from their positions at the College or in state government.

Nominations

College community members (faculty, staff, trustees, and students) are encouraged to send nominations for commencement speakers (who are also recipients of honorary degrees) to the Dean's Office. An annual reminder will go out to the community approximately 18 months prior to the May commencement being planned (in other words, in January of the calendar year *prior* to the commencement being planned). Nominations need not be lengthy (a paragraph will suffice), but should explain how the nominee reflects the qualifications outlined above, identify connections to the college and/or its mission and values, and provide any known contact information for the nominee. The list of nominees will be maintained over multiple years as candidates' availability and prominence can vary. Beyond nominations, the Honorary Degree Committee may suggest additional candidates based on other sources that identify upcoming leaders, such as recent MacArthur prize winners.

Selection and Approval

The Honorary Degree Committee will review all nominations and identify 2-5 candidates for commencement speaker/honorary degree recipient. The Honorary Degree Committee may recommend conferring an additional honorary degree to someone not delivering the commencement address in any given year. The Honorary Degree Committee will request social media and background/legal checks for all candidates; these requests are coordinated through the President's Office. Upon reviewing all social media and background/legal checks, the Honorary Degree Committee will decide if any candidates can no longer be considered. The remaining slate of candidates will be ranked. As per the Faculty Handbook, the slate must come before the full faculty for approval; the faculty will vote separately on each person included on the slate. The slate must be included with a faculty meeting agenda emailed in advance of the faculty meeting so faculty have time to consider and/or research candidates to make informed choices about approval. Once the slate or a portion thereof is approved, it will be shared with the President for the President's input and approval. The slate approved by the faculty and President will be provided to the Board of Trustees for its approval as per the Bylaws. The President will make the initial outreach to the top candidate for commencement speaker to assess interest, availability, and speaking fees. Communications and the events team will make decisions as to public announcements.

Note: Social media and background/legal checks and approval by the faculty in one academic year do not carry forward to future academic years; social media and background/legal checks as well as faculty approval must be resecured if a name is again included on future slates.

Timing

It is preferable to have the commencement speakers secured six months to one year in advance of the commencement. This means that the Honorary Degree Committee will create a slate of candidates based on nominations early in the spring semester of the year prior to the planned commencement, faculty will vote mid-late semester, and the negotiation process can occur over the summer. If this timeline proves problematic because of extenuating circumstances, this process will be expeditiously executed at the beginning of the fall semester.

Other Honorary Degrees

It is typical for the Baccalaureate Speaker (arranged separately by Religious and Spiritual Life) to receive an honorary degree. It is expected that candidates for Baccalaureate Speaker also have the

ability to speak to the mission and values of the college. This speaker typically does not receive an honorarium beyond travel expenses. Candidates for Baccalaureate Speaker must also have social media and background/legal checks prior to being approved by the Honorary Degree Committee, President, faculty, and Board of Trustees. Occasionally the College has bestowed other honorary degrees, typically for alumni with exceptional service to the College. These must also be approved by the Honorary Degree Committee, faculty, President, and the Board of Trustees, but do not involve speeches at commencement events.