

SUBJECT: University of Wisconsin System Guidelines on Awarding Honorary Degrees

Issued: 05/09/88
Revised: 02/01/89

11.01 BACKGROUND

Historically, the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents has limited the awarding of Honorary Degrees to those institutions authorized to award the doctorate. Recent Resolution 140, 4/7/72, and Resolution

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Effective December 8, 2016,
Unclassified Personnel Guideline #11 has been superseded
by
[Regent Policy Document 4-20 Honorary Doctorate Degrees](#)

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Nationally, the prevailing practice among Governing Boards is to grant authorization to their four-year, non-doctoral institutions for the awarding of a limited number of honorary degrees each year at commencement exercises. Wisconsin, therefore, is somewhat unique in its exclusionary practice.

11.02 POLICY STATEMENT

Consistent with national practice (and the maturation which has occurred since merger within the University of Wisconsin System), the Board of Regents now extends to the eleven regional universities the authority to bestow honorary doctoral degrees on individuals of exceptional accomplishment and distinction who have made significant contributions to the university, region, state or nation; or within their field of endeavor. Each of the universities may award such honorary degrees each year beginning with the 1988-89 academic year, subsequent to approval by the board, of each institution's written standards, criteria, and procedures must now be submitted for board approval. No institution is obligated to award honorary degrees under this policy.

Honorary degree designations shall be limited to the following: A) Doctor of Laws (LL.D.), B) Doctor of Science (SC.D.), C) Doctor of Humane Letters (L.H.D.), and, D) Doctor of Literature (D.Lit.), with the exception that the University of Wisconsin-Stout may grant an honorary Doctor of Vocational Education (D.V.E). As doctoral institutions, UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee are authorized to award occasional highly specialized honorary degrees as best reflect the recipient's accomplishments.

11.03 GUIDELINES

Each university shall have an Honorary Degree Committee whose purpose and function shall be to consider and recommend candidates for honorary degrees consistent with procedures, policies, and criteria developed at each institution and approved by the chancellor and the Board of Regents. The University of Wisconsin System president and the Chancellor of the institution shall be ex-officio members of these committees.

Board approval must be obtained at least two months prior to the commencement at which the degree is to be conferred. For a Spring commencement the nominations must be received for first reading by the board in February and for a Winter commencement not later than the October board meeting.

As a matter of policy the board will generally limit to one the number of honorary degrees any individual may receive from the UW System. Therefore, the UW System Office of Academic Affairs shall serve as a formal information exchange office to avoid duplication of nominees being advanced to the board. Chairpersons of institutional committees must clear nominees with this office before final institutional selections are determined.

Particular attention should be devoted to the identification of women and minority candidates for

consideration for honorary degrees.

Each chancellor conjointly with the System president will recommend nominees to the board.

All activities related to the nomination of candidates, the review of documentation supporting each nominee, and recommendations to the board must be conducted with a confidentiality appropriate to personnel actions.

Upon board approval of the institutional nominees for honorary doctorates, the chancellor invites the candidates to attend the commencement convocation at which the award is to be conferred. Honorary degrees are not awarded in absentia.

To insulate the honorary degree from partisanship, to protect the award from possible conflicts of interest and to protect nominees from possibly compromising positions, the following three categories of individuals are ineligible for an honorary degree from an institution of the University of Wisconsin System:

(1) Public Officials and Political Appointees

Included are serving members of the Wisconsin Legislature and the Wisconsin congressional delegation; elected and appointed officials; and all members of the state judiciary.

(2) Regents

Included are serving members of the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents.

(3) University of Wisconsin System Employees

Included are currently employed faculty or staff at each university and in 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 not eligible for honorary degrees unless they have achieved distinction in a second career following retirement.

In awarding honorary degrees, the University of Wisconsin System does not assume any legal obligations. The recipients receive no honoraria but the institution shall assume all expenses incurred by the recipients which are associated with their participation in the commencement.

11.04 CODIFICATION

Upon adoption of the revision to Regent Resolution 1303, (Granting of Degrees, Honors and Awards) by the Board of Regents, these administrative guidelines on awarding honorary degrees shall be in effect. Each of the eleven regional institutions shall proceed to develop appropriate written protocols and procedures, incorporating the elements cited above, and submit them to the System president for transmittal to the board for approval. Existing policies on honorary doctoral degrees at UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee should be reviewed, revised if necessary, and submitted to the System president for transmittal to the board for approval.

Institutions are not authorized to proceed with the implementation of new or revised institutional policies until official notification of approval by the board has been received.