

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION BTRU Board of Trustees		POLICY NUMBER BTRU 2.01	
POLICY TITLE Honorary Degrees and Institutional Commencement Speakers			
SCOPE OF POLICY USC System		DATE OF REVISION December 19, 2023	
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER Secretary of the Board of Trustees		ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE Board of Trustees	

PURPOSE

The award of an honorary degree is the highest honor that the University of South Carolina may bestow. For that reason, the University selects to bestow an honorary degree only to those individuals of genuine distinction who have a sustained record of excellence of accomplishment or exemplary service of lasting significance. Recipients of honorary degrees should enhance the reputation of the University. This policy describes the process by which the University of South Carolina may select candidates for the receipt of an honorary degree.

When not selected to receive an honorary degree, any person selected to deliver a commencement address at a USC System institution will be approved through a process described here.

POLICY STATEMENT

The Board of Trustees has established the following guidelines for the nomination and selection of individuals to receive an honorary degree from the University of South Carolina and for consideration of the revocation of honorary degrees previously conferred by the University of South Carolina. In addition, separate guidelines apply to the selection of a person to deliver a commencement address at a System institution, if that person will not receive an honorary degree.

PROCEDURES: HONORARY DEGREES

A. Criteria For Award of Honorary Degree

Recipients of honorary degrees are restricted to those persons outstanding in their contributions or service to the University, State of South Carolina, the nation, or the international community, or in their profession or field of endeavor. Areas of excellence shall include scholarship; the arts; the learned professions; public service; and cultural, scientific, economic, or humanitarian activities.

Candidates should represent the highest values of the university and exemplify its motto: “Learning humanizes character and does not permit it to be cruel.” Strength of character as it relates to the values and mission of the University is essential.

Direct association with the university is not a qualification for serious consideration and, except in extraordinary circumstances, persons who have spent the greater part of their careers as members of the University faculty or administration will not be considered.

Honorary degrees shall in no instance be presented *in absentia* or posthumously.

Over time, nominees will be chosen who represent the breadth of commitments of the University.

B. Nomination Process

All constituents of the University of South Carolina should be encouraged to submit nominations for an honorary degree. Nominations for honorary degrees may be made as follows:

1. The Faculty Committee on Honorary Degrees “shall recommend recipients of honorary degrees to the president and the Board of Trustees. The provost or appointed representative shall be *ex officio* chair.” (Faculty Manual)

Nominations from the Faculty Committee on Honorary Degrees shall be submitted to the Secretary of the Board of Trustees.

2. Any person may submit to the Secretary of the Board of Trustees a nomination for an honorary degree.

In all cases, nominations must be made on the nomination form set forth in Appendix A of this policy. The completed form should be returned to the Secretary of the Board of Trustees. A cover letter and/or a brief biographical description of the nominee may be attached to the nomination form.

C. Role of the Secretary of the Board of Trustees

The Secretary of the Board of Trustees shall maintain a record of all nominations for honorary degrees and shall present the nominations to appropriate persons or bodies, as outlined in this policy.

D. Role of the President

The President shall review all nominations for honorary degrees before these nominations are presented to the Subcommittee on Honorary Degrees. The President shall prepare for the Subcommittee a recommendation regarding the suitability for approval of each nomination. These recommendations are intended to inform but not to bind the Subcommittee on Honorary Degrees.

E. Role of the Subcommittee on Honorary Degrees

There shall be a Subcommittee of the Academic Excellence and Student Experience Committee composed of the Chair of the Academic Excellence and Student Experience Committee and two other members of that Committee, who will be appointed by the Chair of the Academic Excellence and Student Experience Committee; the Chair of the Board in an *ex officio* capacity; the Vice Chair of the Board in an *ex officio* capacity; and the Secretary of the Board of Trustees as an *ex officio*, non-voting member. The Subcommittee shall meet, receive information regarding the potential nominees, and discuss all potential nominees as collected by the Secretary of the Board of Trustees from all potential sources. The Subcommittee shall

receive and review also all recommendations issued by the President regarding nominations. The Subcommittee shall consider honorary degree nominations and recommendations in executive session. After thorough review and upon majority vote in open session, the Subcommittee shall forward to the Academic Excellence and Student Experience Committee those names considered worthy of receipt of the University's highest honor.

F. Role of the Academic Excellence and Student Experience Committee

The Academic Excellence and Student Experience Committee shall review from time to time all recommendations forwarded by the Subcommittee. The Committee will consider honorary degree nominations in executive session. Unless there is substantial opposition to a recommendation, the nomination will be presented to the full Board.

G. Role of the Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees considers honorary degree recommendations from the Academic Excellence and Student Experience Committee in executive session. Unless there is substantial opposition to a recommendation, the nomination lays on the table for a period not to exceed five years, after a vote of approval by the Board in open session. When a nomination lays on the table, the President, Board Chair and Vice Chair, and Secretary of the Board of Trustees are authorized to coordinate the potential presentation of an honorary degree to the candidate.

H. Expiration of Nominations

Nominations that have laid on the table for a period of five years without being removed from the table and approved for the award of an honorary degree by the Board of Trustees shall expire and be automatically removed from the list of active nominations. Such nominations may be resubmitted through the process set forth above.

I. Revocation of Honorary Degree; Criteria

The authority to revoke a previously awarded honorary degree rests with the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees may revoke an honorary degree of a living recipient if, in its judgment, the recipient of the honorary degree has engaged in conduct that:

1. is inconsistent with the values and mission of the University of South Carolina;
2. is injurious to the reputation of the University of South Carolina or any of its System campuses;
3. undermines the accomplishments that were cited as the basis for awarding the honorary degree; or
4. results in a conviction, by trial or guilty plea, of a state or federal criminal offense involving
5. moral turpitude.

J. Revocation Process

1. Role of the Subcommittee on Honorary Degrees

Recommendations for revocation of an honorary degree shall be submitted by the President or a voting member of the Board of Trustees to the Subcommittee on Honorary Degrees for consideration. The Subcommittee shall collect and review information relating to the conduct of the honorary degree recipient and shall determine if such information provides a substantial basis to support revocation. The Subcommittee shall submit its recommendation on revocation and all relevant information to the Academic Excellence and Student Experience Committee.

2. Role of the Academic Excellence and Student Experience Committee

The Academic Excellence and Student Experience Committee shall consider the recommendation of the Subcommittee on Honorary Degrees and shall determine if an honorary degree should be revoked. If the Committee supports revocation, the Committee’s recommendation shall be forwarded to the Board of Trustees for consideration and final action. If the Committee does not support revocation, the Committee shall notify the Board of Trustees of its decision and such decision shall be final unless the Board of Trustees, by majority vote, directs the Committee to forward the matter to the Board of Trustees for further consideration and action.

3. Role of the Board of Trustees

Upon recommendation of the Academic Excellence and Student Experience Committee or action of the Board of Trustees pursuant to Section J.2 herein, the Board of Trustees shall consider and determine if an honorary degree shall be revoked. Approval by a three-fourths vote of the members present at the Board meeting at which the matter is presented shall be required to revoke an honorary degree.

K. Reconsideration

A decision by the Board of Trustees (i) to revoke a previously awarded honorary degree, or (ii) not to support the revocation of a previously awarded honorary degree, shall not be reconsidered by the Board (except in accordance with Article X, Section 13 of the Bylaws of the Board of Trustees) unless significant evidence not available at the time of the Board’s previous consideration of the matter is presented to the Board.

PROCEDURES: COMMENCEMENT SPEAKERS

When not selected to receive an honorary degree, any person selected to deliver a commencement address at a USC System institution must be approved by the President.

HISTORY OF REVISIONS

DATE OF REVISION
October 19, 2006
April 11, 2008
February 28, 2013

April 13, 2018
December 13, 2018
February 09, 2022
June 23, 2023
December 19, 2023

APPENDICES

Appendix A: [Honorary Degree and Commencement Speaker Nomination Form](#)

NOTE: Revisions to the Honorary Degree and Commencement Speaker Nomination Form may be made without necessitating the Board's approval of any revisions to this policy. Likewise, URL locations for the Honorary Degree and Commencement Speaker Nomination Form may be updated within this policy without necessitating the Board's approval of any revisions to this policy.