

Policy on the Awarding of Honorary Degrees

Policy Title	Policy on the Awarding of Honorary Degrees
Policy #	01.006.2
Policy Owner	University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees
Contact Information	Questions regarding this policy should be directed to the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at (401) 874-4341
Approved By	University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees
Effective Date	November 3, 2023
Next Review Date	No later than December 31, 2028
Who Needs to Know About this Policy	Faculty, staff, and students at the University of Rhode Island as well as all members of the University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees
Definitions	Honorary Degree Committee. The University committee charged with soliciting names and making recommendations of candidates to the President for the receipt of honorary degrees by the University as described in the University Manual.
Statutes, Regulations, and Policies Governing or Necessitating This Policy	RIGL § 16-32-2 RIGL § 16-32-10 University Manual, Sec. 5.60.10, et seq.
Reason for Policy / Purpose	To delineate the role of the University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees in both the awarding and revocation of honorary degrees by the University of Rhode Island.
Forms Related to this Policy	None

Policy Statement

An honorary degree is one of higher education's most significant accolades. The University of Rhode Island (also, "University") awards honorary degrees at its annual Commencement ceremony on a selective basis to distinguished individuals who merit special recognition by meeting the criteria and eligibility requirements specified below. The selection of individuals to receive honorary degrees from the University is a multifaceted process, derived through the principles of shared governance, involving the roles of the University faculty, the University President, and the University of Rhode Island Board of Trustees (also, "Board of Trustees" or "Board"). The Board of Trustees is vested with the exclusive power to authorize the award or revocation of an honorary degree through RIGL § 16-32-10, which provides: "The board of trustees, with the approval of the president and a committee of the faculty of the

university, shall award academic degrees and diplomas and confer honors in the same manner as is customary in American colleges.”

This policy pertains to the role of the Board of Trustees in carrying out its statutory responsibilities with regard to the awarding and/or revocation of honorary degrees. It does not address the roles of the faculty, the Honorary Degree Committee, or the President as delineated in the University Manual.

1 Criteria

An honorary degree may be awarded to an individual of outstanding academic, professional, and/or civic attainment with a demonstrated connection to the mission and values of the University and/or important contributions to the State of Rhode Island, with exceptional achievements reaching far beyond normal expectations. Honorary degree recipients will serve as inspiring examples to members of the University of Rhode Island community, and their association as an honorary degree recipient will bring honor to the University.

In recognition of the University’s commitment to gender equality and social, economic, national, racial, and cultural diversity, the Board of Trustees is committed to the award of honorary degrees to recipients who reflect the diversity of interests, backgrounds, and concerns reflected in the University community and the society and world served by the University. Decisions to award honorary degrees will be made without regard to, and will not be based on, the political affiliations of recipients.

2 Eligibility

- a. Persons receiving an honorary degree from the University must appear in person at the appropriate or agreed upon Commencement Ceremony. If a recipient is unable to attend the ceremony, the conferral of the degree can be deferred to an alternate opportunity. (Note: In rare situations, the University may award an honorary degree posthumously).
- b. Current faculty, staff, and students of the University are not eligible to receive an honorary degree until three (3) years after the completion of their term at the University.
- c. Nominees must not be actively holding or seeking political office in or representing Rhode Island. Eligibility will begin three (3) years after the completion of service.
- d. Past honorary degree recipients are not eligible to receive additional honorary degrees.
- e. Except in special circumstances when the President, in consultation with the Chair of the Board of Trustees, determines otherwise, current members of the Board of Trustees are not eligible to receive an honorary degree.

3 Nominations and Approvals

- a. Pursuant to RIGL § 16-32-10, the Board of Trustees shall make the final determination regarding the conferral of an honorary degree.
- b. The President is responsible for making recommendations to the Board of Trustees, if approved by the President in accordance with the University Manual, Sec. 5.60.10, et seq.
- c. The Board of Trustees expects that, before the President recommends any nomination to the Board of Trustees for consideration, an amount of focused due diligence will be conducted to ensure the nominee’s qualification and eligibility for the degree.
- d. The Board of Trustees shall consider nominees for honorary degrees to be presented at a Commencement Ceremony in May during a regular meeting of the Board of Trustees.

- e. If a nominee is approved by the Board of Trustees, the individual will be notified of the Board of Trustees's decision by the President of the University.
- f. An honorary degree may be awarded to an approved candidate at any time within two (2) years of the Board of Trustees's granting of that approval.

4 Revocation of an Honorary Degree

Once awarded, honorary degrees are awarded for life. Recipients reflect the values and personify the mission of the University and are expected to continue to do so. If at any time during the life of an approved nominee or honorary degree recipient the University becomes aware of conduct inconsistent with the values and mission of the University, including documented evidence of criminal, unethical, or immoral behavior or activity on the part of the awardee, the Board of Trustees has the right to rescind a standing approval at any time prior to the awarding of an honorary degree or to revoke the honorary degree.

Any evidence warranting the rescission of approval prior to the award of an honorary degree or the revocation of an honorary degree shall follow the same process as nominations and approvals.

If the Board of Trustees votes to rescind a standing approval for an honorary degree of which a nominee has been notified or to revoke an honorary degree previously awarded, the individual will be notified of the Board's decision by the President of the University.

5 Confidentiality

To the extent permitted by law, care is taken to ensure strict confidentiality at all stages of the honorary degree process. Not all excellent candidates can be recognized and knowledge of a failed nomination can be embarrassing and harmful. Upon final approval by the Board of Trustees, official notification of the University's wish to confer, rescind a standing approval for, or revoke an honorary degree is made by the President on behalf of the Board.

Exceptions

None other than those noted above.

Policy Review and Revisions

(Versions earlier than the first policy number may be paper only)

Policy #	Effective Date	Reason for Change	Changes to Policy
01.006.1	November 5, 2021	n/a	n/a
01.1106.2	November 7, 2023	Scheduled Review	Eligibility clarification