



Policies, Procedures and Guidelines

Complete Policy Title:

Guidelines for the Awarding of Honorary Degrees

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n/a

Approved by:

- Senate

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Responsible Executive:

President & Vice-Chancellor

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Policy-Specific Enquiries:

[Office of the President](#)

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Accessible Format Requests and General Policy Enquiries: policy@mcmaster.ca

Criteria for Awarding an Honorary Degree

1. There are three general categories of people upon whom the University confers honorary degrees:
 - a) individuals who are distinguished scholars or who have made outstanding contributions to the creative or performing arts;
 - b) individuals who have distinguished reputations in the area of public service at the national or international levels or who have had long and distinguished careers in professions such as law or as educators, for example; and
 - c) individuals who have made important and noteworthy contributions to McMaster University and/or the local community.
2. Individuals in any one of these three categories are given special consideration if they are alumni of the University or are, or have been, associated with the University in some way.
3. In line with McMaster University's commitment to inclusive excellence, the Committee on Honorary Degrees will integrate principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion in its processes for soliciting and assessing candidates for honorary degrees.
4. Active faculty, staff, members of the Board of Governors, members of the Senate, and active politicians are not typically eligible for an honorary degree. Retired faculty/staff/members may be nominated at least three years after retirement.
5. Honorary degrees are not typically awarded posthumously or *in absentia*.
6. Honorary degrees may be awarded to a group provided that the group fulfils the requirements for an honorary degree recipient. In such cases, the degree is awarded to the group as a whole and not to the individual members.

Number of Degrees Granted

7. Typically, one honorary degree is granted at each Convocation ceremony, although this varies depending on the circumstances and the honorary degree recipient.

Usually, there is a relationship between the recipient's field of interest and the Convocation at which the honorary degree is conferred. Although it is convention to award an honorary degree at each convocation, there may be times when the University elects not to do so at one or more convocation.

Degrees Conferred

8. At this time, the University confers three honorary degrees:
 - a) **Doctor of Letters (D.Litt.)** awarded for outstanding achievement in the humanities or in the performing or fine arts;
 - b) **Doctor of Science (D.Sc.)** awarded for outstanding achievement in the pure and applied sciences, usually through research; and
 - c) **Doctor of Laws (LL.D.)** awarded for outstanding academic achievement in the Social Sciences and/or for significant community contributions at the local, national, or international levels.
9. Any decision to award a degree other than those specified above requires a formal resolution to the Senate. The matter would also have to be referred to the Senate Committee on University Ceremonials for the design of the appropriate academic regalia.
10. All nominations are valid for a period of three years (the year of nomination plus two years). Nominators should be aware that no information about the status of a nomination will be shared aside from the public announcement of those who have agreed to accept the offer of an honorary degree.