

Policies, Procedures and Guidelines

Complete Policy Title

Guidelines for the Awarding of Honorary Degrees

Policy Number (if applicable):

Approved by

Senate

Date of Most Recent Approval

March 10, 2021

Date of Original Approval(s)

December 12, 1977

Supersedes/Amends Policy dated

April 24, 1978
February 1, 1982
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November 29, 1996
November 11, 1997
November 25, 1999

Responsible Executive

President and Vice-Chancellor

Policy Specific Enquiries

President and Vice-Chancellor

General Policy Enquiries

[Policy \(University Secretariat\)](#)

DISCLAIMER:

If there is a Discrepancy between this electronic policy and the written copy held by the policy owner, the written copy prevails.

POTENTIAL CANDIDATES

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.

NUMBER OF DEGREES GRANTED

4. Normally, one honorary degree is granted at each Convocation ceremony, although this varies depending on the circumstances and the honorary degree recipient. 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. In rare cases, if there are before the Committee on Honorary Degrees a relatively large number of individuals who are well-qualified to receive honorary degrees, then the Committee might recommend that two or three honorary degrees be conferred at a particular Convocation.
5. There are, at present, eleven Spring Convocations:
 - a) one for the Faculty of Humanities and the Arts and Science Programme, and
 - b) two for each of the Faculties of Business, Engineering, Health Sciences, Science, and Social Sciences.
6. There are also three Fall Convocations which include graduands from all disciplines and Faculties. Usually there is a relationship between the recipient's field of interest and the Convocation at which the honorary degree is conferred.

DEGREES CONFERRED

7. At this time, the University confers four honorary degrees:
 - a) Doctor of Divinity (D.D.) awarded for outstanding service to or scholarship in the religious community
 - b) Doctor of Letters (D.Litt.) awarded for outstanding achievement in the humanities, or in the performing or fine arts
 - c) Doctor of Science (D.Sc.) awarded for outstanding achievement in the pure and applied sciences, usually through research
 - d) 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
8. Any decision to award a degree other than these specified here would require a formal resolution to Senate. It should also be noted that the matter would have to be referred to the Senate Committee on University Ceremonials for the designing of the appropriate academic regalia.