

# University Honorifics and Honorary Degrees

## Policy Memorandum No. 70

Recommended by the Commission on Faculty Affairs: December 13, 1985

Approved by University Council: April 7, 1986

Approved by the President: April 7, 1986

Approved by Board of Visitors: May 16, 1986

Effective: Immediately

Virginia Tech has awarded only three honorary degrees in its history, the most recent in 1929. In recent years, a number of faculty, alumni and others have suggested that the University could benefit by awarding honorary degrees if appropriate procedures and criteria were developed. At the same time, suggestions were made for the establishment of a committee not only to review nominations for honorary degrees but also to review credentials and achievements of candidates for University awards.

In response to these suggestions, the Commission on Faculty Affairs and Provost's Office developed two recommendations: the first was to establish a University Honorifics Committee, the second was to approve a proposed policy for the awarding of honorary degrees. Following are the two approved resolutions establishing the Committee and procedures:

CFA RESOLUTION 85-86A: The Establishment of a University Honorifics Committee

**WHEREAS**, the University is frequently requested to nominate faculty members to outside agencies for awards for which eligibility extends beyond departmental or collegiate boundaries, and

**WHEREAS**, certain internal University honors require review and recommendation by peers who have experience in recognizing unusual professional accomplishments,

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that a new standing University Committee be formed, named the University Honorifics Committee, with membership and duties as specified below. The Committee will report to the Commission on Faculty Affairs upon request.

### University Honorifics Committee

1. Composition - The Committee is chaired by the University Provost or a designate from the Office of the University Provost. The other members are:

One University Distinguished Professor

One Alumni Distinguished Professor

One member of the Academy of Teaching Excellence

One member of the Academy of Faculty Service

One recipient of the Alumni Award for Extension Excellence

One recipient of the Alumni Award for Research Excellence

Members will serve three-year terms, staggered to provide continuation of three of the members each year in addition to the chairperson.

Members will be appointed by the President from nominations provided by the Faculty Senate.

## 2. Functions and Duties

To review credentials and achievements of candidates of nominees for University awards or for University nominations for external awards as charged by the Provost or President (where that responsibility is not vested in other committees), and to make recommendation to the Provost or the President, as appropriate. In addition, the Committee shall review nominations for honorary degrees to be awarded by the University.

### CFA RESOLUTION 85-86B: Procedures for Awarding Honorary Degrees

**WHEREAS**, the University has no established process whereby honorary degrees are granted, and

**WHEREAS**, there are a number of individuals, either alumni or persons who have had some other significant association with the University, whose professional achievements merit substantial recognition by Virginia Tech, and

**WHEREAS**, honorary degrees, like other degrees, should be awarded on the basis of criteria established and reviewed by faculty,

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Board of Visitors approve the awarding of honorary degrees according to the process described below.

1. The honorary degree awarded on approval of the Board of Visitors is not one obtained "in course" but is a GRADUM HONORS CAUSA awarded for professional or scholarly distinction not in the standard course of professional service to the University. The degree awarded shall be one of:

Litt.D. Letters  
Sc.D. Science

2. The University Honorifics Committee will supervise the nomination and review process.
  - a. The Committee will issue a call for nominations for honorary degrees to be awarded in the following spring commencement exercises. Any member of the General Faculty of the University may make a nomination. The Committee will establish a deadline, preferable November 1, for the receipt of nominations.
  - b. Nominations for honorary degrees shall include:
    1. a summary of the distinguished contributions made by the nominee to scholarly fields, to the arts, to technology, to the professions, or to public service.
    2. an indication of the extent to which the nominee has been associated with Virginia Tech.
    3. the names of at least three persons from whom letters of reference could be requested by the Committee.

- c. The Committee will identify those nominees for whom dossiers are to be collected, and may call upon the nominator for assistance as appropriate. The Committee will seek confidential letters of support for these identified nominees, such letters to address the achievements and the association with Virginia Tech.
  - d. The Committee will review the dossiers and will submit at most three nominations to the President.
3. The President will review the nominations and make confidential recommendations to the Board of Visitors.
  4. On the approval of the Board of Visitors, the President will determine whether the nominees will be willing to receive the degree at commencement. An honorary degree will be awarded IN ABSENTIA only under the most unusual circumstances.
  5. The President will report the outcome of these findings to the Honorifics Committee.
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President's Policy Memorandum

**URL: <http://purl.vt.edu/vtdocs/policies/ppm70>**