



Policy on External Awards

No. 12015

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Affected Parties:
Faculty
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1.0 Purpose

The following policy and procedures apply to the conferral of university-level honors to individuals external to the university as described in sections 2.2 and 2.3. The University External Awards Committee will take under consideration nominations for the William H. Ruffner Medal and the University Distinguished Achievement Award. In contrast, commemorative namings of physical spaces and specific academic units, such as departments, schools, colleges, institutes, or centers, and the hanging of plaques, portraits or other permanent memorials honoring individuals or organizations on the campus or outlying properties of the university are the purview of the Commemorative Tributes Committee (university policy #12005) and not subject to this policy. Moreover, the policy and process for the conferral of honorary degrees are described in Presidential Policy Memorandum #70.

2.0 Policy

The university will approve the conferral of university-level honors to individuals external to the university in appropriate instances where the university has significantly benefited from the relationship with the person and such recognition brings no adverse reflection on the university. The process is as follows:

1. The university External Awards Committee is responsible for receiving nominations for and recommending to the President the annual recipients of the William H. Ruffner Medal (considered the university's highest award) and the University Distinguished Achievement Award to ensure that conferral of the recognition to the individual recommended will reflect honor on the university as well as upon the person recommended.*
2. After review, the President will submit his/her selections for the William H. Ruffner Medal and the University Distinguished Achievement (UDA) Award recipients to the Board of Visitors.
3. The Board of Visitors will act on those recommendations made by the President. Final approval rests with the Board of Visitors.
4. Under circumstances in which the timing of the selection does not align with the Board of Visitors' meeting schedule, the Board delegates to the President of the university, after consultation with the Rector, the authority to approve the recipients of these awards, contingent upon subsequent ratification by the full Board of Visitors.

*In extraordinary circumstances, the External Awards Committee may recommend the conferral of a Special Citation or Award or the conferral of more than one Ruffner Medal in a given year.



2.1 External Awards Committee

On October 16, 1981, Charles O. Gordon, Sr., then-Rector of the Board of Visitors, appointed a committee representative of the faculty, administration, students, emeritus faculty, and alumni to consider individuals to whom the William H. Ruffner Medal might be presented. The committee was asked to make an annual recommendation to the Board, through the President, of one or more individuals for consideration for such an award. The Board later expanded the responsibilities of the committee to include recommendations of individuals of such national recognized achievements that they would be deserving of the University Distinguished Achievement Award.

The External Awards Committee currently consists of the following:

1. Vice President for Advancement, Chair
2. Executive Vice President and Provost
3. Senior Vice President for Operations and Administration
4. Vice President for Strategic Affairs and Vice Provost for Inclusion and Diversity**
5. President of the Faculty Senate (or designee)
6. President of the Student Government Association (or designee)
7. One Alumni Distinguished Professor*
8. One University Distinguished Professor*
9. Two emeritus faculty*

*Selected by the President upon the recommendation of the Vice President for Advancement

**In the event that the role of Vice President for Strategic Affairs and Vice Provost for Inclusion and Diversity is no longer held by one person and divided into two individual holders of the aforementioned positions, then the committee membership would be realigned to the senior administration role designated for the leadership of Inclusion and Diversity.

(As the university's organizational structure evolves, the President is authorized by the Board of Visitors to adjust the titles of the committee's membership to reflect those organizational changes; significant changes require approval of the Board of Visitors.)

2.2 History and Criteria for the William H. Ruffner Medal

In 1976, the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors authorized the William H. Ruffner Medal to provide appropriate public recognition to individuals who have performed notable and distinguished service to the university. The Ruffner Medal is considered university's highest award. The name of the medal honors a member of the university's first board who was instrumental in shaping the curricula of the fledgling college, then known as Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College. Ruffner was also Virginia's first state superintendent of public instruction.

Although the criteria were drawn purposely broad to provide the board with freedom in considering "notable and distinguished" service of a proposed recipient, examples of such service would include the following:

- Outstanding achievement in efforts devoted to the promotion, improvement, and development of the university's mission as a land-grant university.
- Significant service on one or more of the official, informal, university-related, or otherwise designated advisory, counseling, volunteer, or other action groups serving the university.



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- Extraordinary interest in and support—including material support—of the well-being of the university and its students, faculty, and staff in efforts to provide educational opportunities and research and public service programs on behalf of the citizens of the commonwealth and the nation.

No individual affiliated with Virginia Tech as a student, faculty, or staff member, administrator, or trustee, or anyone in a similar capacity would be eligible for the William H. Ruffner Medal; individuals affiliated with the university in any of these capacities would remain ineligible for at least 12 months after ending such affiliation. Exceptions may be granted in extraordinary situations. The Ruffner Medal is not restricted to alumni, although an appropriate relationship with the university is desirable.

2.3 History and Criteria for the University Distinguished Achievement Award

The Virginia Tech Board of Visitors reauthorized the University Distinguished Achievement Award under that designation on March 22, 1982. The award previously had been identified as the University Distinguished Alumni Citation. In reauthorizing the award (a specially designed medal), the Board stipulated that nominees should meet the following criteria:

- Nationally distinguished achievement, personal and/or professional, in any field of endeavor of enduring significance and value to society.
- An identifiable and appropriate relationship with this university so that presentation of the award would reflect favorably both on the award recipient and the institution.

No individual affiliated with Virginia Tech as a student, faculty, or staff member, administrator, or trustee, or anyone in a similar capacity would be eligible for the University Distinguished Achievement Award; individuals affiliated with the university in any of these capacities would remain ineligible for at least 12 months after ending such affiliation. Exceptions may be granted in extraordinary situations.

While it would appear that most persons selected for the award should be alumni or alumnae or previously would have had some faculty, staff, or trustee relationship with the university, presentation of the award to a commencement speaker, visiting scholar, public official or individuals with other such relationships is not precluded. The potential recipients of the University Distinguished Achievement Award would not necessarily have had the same close association with the institution as is required for the William H. Ruffner Medal. Although the award is not restricted to alumni, an appropriate relationship with the university is desirable.

3.0 Procedures

As chair of the university's External Awards Committee, the Vice President for Advancement will solicit nominations for the Ruffner Medal and University Distinguished Achievement Award from the university's deans and vice presidents. The committee will also entertain nominations from other members of the university community. Contact the Office of the Vice President for Advancement for detailed procedures.

4.0 Definitions

5.0 References

Policy 12005: Policy on Commemorative Tributes
<http://www.policies.vt.edu/12005.pdf>



Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Presidential Policy Memorandum #70: Awarding of Honorary Degrees
<http://policies.vt.edu/assets/ppm-70.pdf>

6.0 Approval and Revisions

William H. Ruffner Medal authorized by the Board of Visitors in 1976.

University Distinguished Achievement Award reauthorized by the Board of Visitors on March 22, 1982.

University Policy #12015 on External Awards formalizing the criteria and selection process for the Ruffner Medal and University Distinguished Achievement Award established by the Board of Visitors on November 5, 2018.

Approved by the Vice President for Advancement, Charles Phlegar on November 5, 2018.