

BLACK HILLS STATE UNIVERSITY
Policy and Procedure Manual

SUBJECT: Honorary Degrees

NUMBER: 2:16

Office: Office of the President

Source: [BOR Policy 2:18](#)

Associated Forms: [Honorary Degree Nomination Form](#)

1. Purpose

This policy implements BOR Policy 2:18 and sets forth the process for the nomination and awarding of honorary degrees at Black Hills State University (BHSU).

2. Policy

- a. The honorary degree is the highest honor conferred by the Board of Regents and Black Hills State University and is reserved for only those candidates whose extraordinary accomplishments have benefitted society. The purpose of conferring the honorary degree is to pay tribute to worthy individuals and the degree is not equivalent to, nor a replacement for, an earned bachelor, masters, or doctorate degree.
- b. Honorary Doctorate degrees may be conferred as following:
 - i. Doctor of Humane Letters
 - ii. Doctor of Laws
 - iii. Doctor of Letters and Literature
 - iv. Doctor of Public Service
 - v. Doctor of Science
- c. The recipient must be present at the convocation or ceremony to receive the degree.
- d. In rare circumstances, the institution may determine that an honorary degree at the bachelor or master's level is more appropriate as determined by the level of

significance of accomplishments. That is, the level is significant but does not rise to the extraordinary level of an honorary doctorate.

- e. At the master and bachelor's levels, the honorary degree is restricted to those degrees approved by the Board of Regents to be offered at BHSU. These recipients need not be present to receive their honorary degree.
- f. Honorary master and bachelor's degrees may be awarded as following:
 - i. Master of Arts
 - ii. Master's in Business Administration
 - iii. Master of Education
 - iv. Master of Science
 - v. Bachelor of Arts
 - vi. Bachelor of Fine Arts
 - vii. Bachelor of Science
- g. The honorary bachelor/master's degrees may be awarded to a student who is terminally ill and in the final stages of earning his/her degree.
- h. The following restrictions apply:
 - i. Anyone actively serving as an employee of the BOR system, the Regents, or elected government officials serving South Dakota.
 - ii. Any immediate family member of any actively serving employee of the BOR system, the Regents, or elected government officials serving South Dakota.
 - iii. Past or anticipated philanthropic activities or services rendered to the university are not considerations for conferring honorary degrees.
- i. In rare occasions, a posthumous degree may be awarded in recognition of meritorious but incomplete work toward a degree. In most cases this happens when a student is enrolled in good standing and in the final stages (last few semesters) of completion of a degree. The awarding of posthumous degree requires Board of Regents approval prior to commencement or the awarding of such degree.

3. Procedures

a. Guidelines for Selection:

- i. Substantial evidence must be presented that extraordinary achievement has been accomplished. Substantial evidence should include a significant degree of creativity, resourcefulness, humanitarian concern, personal dedication, intellect, and other qualities consistent with the intent of an honorary degree. Therefore, careful distinction must be made between the extraordinary effort of talented, selfless, and energetic individuals who have performed beyond the call of duty in service to humankind, in contrast to normal expectations in fulfilling service, employment, or professional requirement (including longevity).
- ii. Consideration will be given to biographical information which may include, in addition to personal data, itemization of civic and social service awards unrelated to the proposed honorary degree, political or business achievements not associated with the primary reason for the nomination.

b. Eligibility for Honorary Degree:

- i. Any person who has made extraordinary contributions or service that benefits society will be eligible for this recognition. This includes individuals who have provided significant service to South Dakota and graduates of this university who have achieved outstanding national or international distinction in his/her profession.

c. Honorary Degree Committee

- i. An honorary degree committee shall be appointed by the President of the University. The committee shall consist of a minimum of six members with composition as follows:
 1. The President of the University or designee who shall serve as Chair of the committee.
 2. Provost of the University or designee
 3. Vice President of University Advancement or designee
 4. President of the Faculty Senate or designee
 5. President of the Staff Senate or designee

6. Current or former President of the BHSU Alumni Association
 - ii. The committee shall serve on an annual basis but may be appointed for renewed service from year to year if deemed appropriate.
- d. Nomination Process:
- i. As a matter of professional discretion, the entire process must be kept confidential from the moment of nomination through contacting the successful nominee. The nomination process is as follows:
 1. The Honorary Degree Committee shall solicit nominations for honorary degrees.
 2. Nominations for an honorary degree can be made by any individual or group. The title selected for an honorary degree shall not duplicate any existing earned degree title held by the nominee.
 3. Nominees must submit the Honorary Degree Nomination form with 2-3 letters of support, and may also include the CV or resume of the nominee.
- e. Review and Selection Process:
- i. All nominations must be submitted no later than February 1st to the University President who will submit the nominations to the Honorary Degree Committee members for review.
 - ii. The Honorary Degree Committee will verify the background and validity of all nominations including an online search of the nominee to review recognitions, authored articles, published opinions, or any other information that will be helpful to the committee in making its recommendation.
 - iii. The Honorary Degree Committee is responsible for formulating and documenting a response to the nomination. This response shall then become part of the nomination package.
 - iv. Nominations receiving favorable committee support will be moved forward for a vote by the committee. A majority vote will be required for final approval to confer an honorary degree.

- v. The President will forward the institution's recommendation for Board of Regents consideration prior to commencement or time of awarding the degree. Typically, this request must be approved during the March/April BOR meeting at latest.
 - vi. Normally, no more than two honorary degrees will be awarded per academic year. An award may be delayed and presented in a following year to accommodate the schedule of the person receiving the degree.
 - vii. The Office of the President will retain on file for two additional years all nominations not put forth by the Honorary Degree Committee. The nominations will be re-submitted for consideration by the committee, along with new nominations, for up to two subsequent years. If a nomination is not approved after three years, the committee will remove such nominations from further consideration.
- f. Conferring of Honorary Degrees:
- i. Honorary Degrees are typically conferred at the spring commencement ceremony.
 - ii. Nominators and/or respective colleges are encouraged to plan other recognition activities/receptions to honor the individuals.
- g. The Office of the President will retain a list of all prior nominations and will post all Honorary Degree recipients to the University website.
- h. Revocation of Honorary Degrees:
- i. Honorary degrees are awarded for life. Awardees reflect the values and personify the mission of the University. If at any time during the life of an awardee the University becomes aware of documented evidence of criminal, unethical or immoral behavior or activity, the University has the right to revoke the honorary degree.
 - ii. The President will present to the University Administrative Team evidence warranting the revocation of an honorary degree. The Administrative Team will review and consider this evidence and, where it finds sufficient evidence to warrant revocation, forward its

recommendation regarding revocation to the Honorary Degree Committee for a vote.

- iii. If revocation is approved, an awardee will be notified in writing of the decision by the University President.

4. Responsible Administrator

The University President, or designee, is responsible for the annual and ad hoc review of this policy. The University President is responsible for approval of this policy.

SOURCE: Approved by President Laurie Nichols on 2/8/2021.