Memorandum to Presidents

Date: June 4, 1980

From: Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Programs, Policy and Planning

Subject: Guidelines for the Awarding of Honorary Degrees

Attached are the Guidelines for the Awarding of Honorary Degrees, as passed by the Board of Trustees on April 23, 1980. These guidelines will be effective as of June 1, 1980.

Also attached are the Chancellor's Additional Guidelines for Honorary Degrees.

James E. Perdue

Attachments

This memorandum addressed to:
Presidents, State-operated Campuses
Presidents, Community Colleges

Copies for information only sent to:
Deans, Statutory Colleges
President Neville
Vice President Cook
Guidelines for the Awarding of Honorary Degrees
State University of New York Board of Trustees
April 23, 1980

A. Purposes of Honorary Degrees awarded by the State University of New York

1. To recognize excellence and extraordinary achievement in the fields of public affairs, the sciences, humanities and the arts, scholarship and education, business and philanthropy, and social services which exemplify the mission and purposes of the State University of New York;

2. To honor meritorious and outstanding service to the University, the State of New York, the United States, or to humanity at large;

3. To recognize persons whose lives and significant achievements should serve as examples of the University's aspirations for its students.

B. The Nature of the Honorary Degree

1. The Board of Trustees shall award all honorary degrees in the name of the State University of New York. As authorized by law* and in accordance with the Rules of the Board of Regents**, the State University Board of Trustees has selected to offer the following registered honorary degrees:

   Doctor of Fine Arts (D.F.A.)
   Doctor of Humane Letters (L.H.D.)
   Doctor of Laws (LL.D.)
   Doctor of Letters (Litt.D.)
   Doctor of Music (Mus.D.)
   Doctor of Science (Sc.D.)

2. The specific honorary degree awarded, which should normally bear a relationship to an academic discipline in the curriculum of the University, shall be appropriate to the nature of the attainment which is being recognized.

*Education Law, §355(2)(f) (Laws of 1979, Chapter 213)
**Title 8, Official Compilation of Codes, Rules and Regulations of the State of New York, §§3.48, 3.50
C. Criteria for Selection of Degree Recipients

1. The basis for the selection of a degree recipient shall be consistent with the Purposes of Honorary Degrees outlined in these Guidelines.

2. The nominee must be distinguished; competence, even excellence, is not sufficient. The eminence of the person must be widely recognized by the leaders of the field which the person may represent.

3. Service or benefaction to the University do not in themselves provide justification for the award of an honorary degree.

4. An honorary degree recipient must have demonstrated the humane values that are the aim of education as well as significant contributions in that person's chosen field.

D. Time, Place and Method of Awarding Degrees

1. Honorary degrees shall be conferred at such University ceremonies, including commencement exercises, as the Board of Trustees may authorize.

2. No honorary degrees may be awarded in absentia; in the event of unexpected inability to appear at the scheduled time, the conferral may be postponed to the next appropriate ceremony provided that the degree is conferred within one year of being authorized. A degree may be awarded posthumously in the event that a recipient dies following notification of selection but prior to the ceremony.

3. Honorary degrees shall be bestowed by the Chancellor, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees or a Trustee designated by the Chairman, or in their absence, on behalf of the Board of Trustees by the President if the ceremony is conducted on a campus.

4. One University-wide format for the honorary degree diploma shall be used.

E. Number of Degrees to be Awarded

The Board of Trustees shall determine the number of honorary degrees to be awarded in any academic year. Subject to this authority, the Chancellor may issue such additional guidelines on numbers of degrees to be awarded as may be appropriate to assist the University community in the nomination and selection process.
P. Limitations on Eligibility

1. Except under unique and unusual circumstances, honorary degrees shall not be awarded to:

   --members of the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York, the Councils at the State-operated campuses, the Board of Trustees of the State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry, and the Boards of Trustees of the Community Colleges during their terms of service to the University;

   --members of the teaching or administrative staff or any other employee in the University system during their periods of employment;

   --current holders of elective or appointive public office or active candidates for elective public office.

2. Since honorary degrees are conferred by the Board of Trustees for the State University rather than for the campus on which the ceremony may be held or which may have nominated the candidate, no person holding an honorary degree from the University shall be eligible to receive a second honorary degree from the State University.

G. Procedures for Selection of Degree Recipient

At all points of the procedure the utmost care is to be taken to ensure confidentiality. A breach of confidentiality could seriously embarrass the University and a person whom the University community esteems highly.

1. Nominations for degree recipients shall be encouraged from any member of the University community including students, faculty, administrative staff, alumni and alumnae, members of Councils, Trustees, and friends of the University.

2. Nominations originating on a campus should be submitted to the President of the institution with as complete a curriculum vitae as possible and a statement of justification for the nomination.

3. Nominations from other sources within the University community may be made directly to the Chancellor with the same documentation above.

4. Campus Presidents shall establish a faculty committee, small enough to ensure confidentiality, to assist in the development of materials in support of the nominations. Relying upon such consultation as the President may deem appropriate, the President shall select the names to be forwarded to the Chancellor for consideration.
5. The Chancellor shall submit all nominations to the Committee on Honorary Degrees at such times as the Chancellor shall determine.

6. The Committee on Honorary Degrees shall be charged with evaluating all nominations and developing a list of qualified nominees from which the Chancellor and the Board of Trustees shall select the final recipients. The Committee shall consist of six persons: five eminent faculty members in the University system appointed by the Chancellor for two-year staggered terms and the Vice Chancellor for Academic Programs, Policy and Planning as Chairperson (non-voting ex officio). The Committee, which shall be guided in its deliberations by the provisions of these Guidelines, shall submit the list of qualified nominees to the Chancellor.

7. The Chancellor shall submit the list of qualified nominees, with appropriate recommendations, to the Board of Trustees which shall make the final selection of degree recipients.

8. The Chancellor shall communicate with the prospective degree recipient inviting the nominee to accept the award.

9. It is re-emphasized that confidentiality is essential at all steps to avoid embarrassment to all concerned.
5. The Chancellor shall submit all nominations to the Committee on Honorary Degrees at such times as the Chancellor shall determine.

*6. The Committee on Honorary Degrees shall be charged with evaluating all nominations and developing a list of qualified nominees from which the Chancellor and the Board of Trustees shall select the final recipients. The Committee shall consist of eighteen persons: seventeen eminent faculty members in the University system appointed by the Chancellor for two-year staggered terms and the Vice Chancellor for Academic Programs, Policy and Planning as Chairperson (non-voting ex officio). The Committee, which shall be guided in its deliberations by the provisions of these Guidelines, shall submit the list of qualified nominees to the Chancellor.

7. The Chancellor shall submit the list of qualified nominees, with appropriate recommendations, to the Board of Trustees which shall make the final selection of degree recipients.

8. The Chancellor shall communicate with the prospective degree recipient inviting the nominee to accept the award.

9. It is re-emphasized that confidentiality is essential at all steps to avoid embarrassment to all concerned.

*Presented here as amended by the Trustees on September 24, 1980.
A. Nominating Source of Degrees

Honorary degree nominees will be considered in four categories based upon type of SUNY institutional nominating source:

1. University Centers and Medical Centers
2. Arts and Science and Specialized Colleges
3. Agricultural & Technical and Community Colleges
4. Central Administration and Other

B. Number of Degrees

In any given academic year, the maximum number of honorary degrees which may be awarded will be 50 (up to this maximum). Although there will be no fixed number assigned to each campus, the SUNY-wide Honorary Degree Committee will be sensitive to the importance of there being some nominees at least in each of the four categories each year. Achieving such a distribution shall not be at the expense of system-wide comparability or the standards of selection.

C. Site of Degree Conferred

The honorary degrees of those persons chosen may be conferred during the commencement exercises of the campus which initiated the nomination. The fourth category will be conferred by the SUNY Board of Trustees at the annual convocation of Distinguished Faculty.

D. Commencement Speakers

Presidents who wish to have a possible commencement speaker considered for an honorary degree will be required to submit the nominee to the SUNY-wide Committee on Honorary Degrees, and, if chosen, thence to the SUNY Board of Trustees as is done by all other nominees. Caution should be exercised to avoid any advance commitment on such a possibility in extending an invitation to a speaker since committee approval will not be automatic, and the four criteria for selection contained in the general guidelines will equally apply. (Indeed, submission of the honorary degree nomination prior to extending the invitation to speak may be preferable.)

E. General Timetable

1. Nominations should be received by the Committee on Honorary Degrees no later than Oct. 15th in each academic year.

2. The Committee's selections should be submitted to the Chancellor no later than Nov. 15th for final consideration by the Board of Trustees at their December or January meeting.

3. Exceptions to this timetable may be granted in rare instances at the discretion of the Chancellor.