Honorary Degree Policy

Statement of Policy  An honorary degree is recognized as one of education’s most significant accolades. Western Michigan University (WMU) intends to award honorary degrees on a selective basis to exemplary individuals who merit distinguished recognition for genuine achievement and contribution within a field or activity that aligns with WMU’s mission. Only the Board of Trustees may authorize an honorary degree. The Board’s authority is codified in Section 2 E of the WMU Board of Trustees Bylaws.

Summary of Contents/Major Changes:  Renovation of the Honorary Degree Policy to better align intent with process. Development of dual pathways for vetting nominations through either a scholastic or service lens.

Responsible Office and Responsible Enforcement Official:  Board of Trustees Office and Secretary to the Board of Trustees

Classification:

- [X] Board of Trustees Policy
- [ ] Board-delegated Policy

Categories:

- Powers and Limitations of the Board
1. **Purpose of Policy**
To recognize persons of exceptional scholarly, artistic, professional, or humanitarian achievement who exemplify the mission of Western Michigan University and whose career or lifetime accomplishments serve as models of University ideals and aspirations for its students, faculty, staff and alumni.

2. **Stakeholders Most Impacted by the Policy**
Individuals seeking or awarding an Honorary Degree

3. **Key Definitions**

3.1. **The Honorary Degree Scholastic Committee**: seven board-appointed faculty, chosen by the President upon recommendation of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

3.2. **The Honorary Degree Service Committee**: five voting members, including a member of the Western Michigan University Board of Trustees, the Vice President for Advancement, President of the Faculty Senate, President of the Graduate Student Association, and President of the Alumni Association. The Secretary to the Board of Trustees will serve as a non-voting Chair.

4. **CRITERIA FOR SELECTION AND DEGREES CONFERRED**

4.1. The honorary degree is reserved for individuals whose scholarly, artistic, professional, or humanitarian achievement is exceptional, which achievement is expected to result in a significant and lasting contribution to society. Nominees need not be alumni, however, alumni and others with a momentous connection to the University shall be given special consideration. Honorary degree recipients should represent the full range and diversity of the Western Michigan University community and should not be limited to specific disciplines or professions.

4.2. To avoid potential conflicts of interest and uphold the distinguished nature of an honorary degree, the highest recognition WMU may bestow, nominees must meet the expectations set forth below.

4.3. Current WMU employees, current WMU Board of Trustees members, and current elected or appointed public officials of the State of Michigan are ineligible for consideration, except under extraordinary circumstances as determined by – and at the direction of – the Board of Trustees.

4.4. **Honorary Degrees Conferred**

The following represents the different categories of honorary degrees that may be conferred:

4.4.1. Doctor of Humane Letters, honoris causa (L.H.D.), given to persons with outstanding achievement in the humanities
4.4.2. Doctor of Science, honoris causa (Sc.D.), given to persons with outstanding contributions to and service in the sciences

4.4.3. Doctor of Letters, honoris causa (Litt.D.), given to outstanding scholars in specific disciplines, exclusive of the sciences and humanities

4.4.4. Doctor of Laws, honoris causa (L.L.D.), given to persons with outstanding service to humankind at large, to learning, and/or institutions benefiting the public

4.5. NOMINATION GUIDELINES

4.5.1. Nominations and the review process are routed through one of two distinct pathways depending upon the type of honorary degree being conferred.

4.5.1.1. Nominations with connection to the Doctor of Humane Letters, Doctor of Science, or Doctor of Letters will be routed through the Honorary Degree Scholastic Committee.

4.5.1.2. Nominations affiliated with Doctor of Laws will be channeled through the Honorary Degree Service Committee.

4.5.2. The Honorary Degree Scholastic Committee

4.5.2.1. The Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs will solicit recommendations for participation on the Honorary Degree Scholastic Committee from the Faculty Senate and other academic units on campus.

4.5.2.2. Committee members should demonstrate scholarly achievement in their chosen field as well as reflecting one of the three pillars of Western Michigan University and its core mission: learner-centered, discovery-driven and globally-engaged.

4.5.2.3. The President of the Faculty Senate and the Dean of the Graduate College or their designee will also serve on the Honorary Degree Committee.

4.5.2.4. Appointments of the faculty members on the committee will be for a three-year term and will be rotated yearly to provide continuity as well as turnover of faculty representation. The chair of the Honorary Degree Scholastic Committee will be rotated annually by election of the committee and no member will serve in that role more than twice.

4.5.3. The Honorary Degree Service Committee

4.5.3.1. The Secretary to the Board of Trustees will convene the Honorary Degree Service Committee as necessary to review nominations pertaining to the Doctor of Laws degree.
4.5.4. Application Process and Procedure

4.4.4.1. Nominations will be solicited annually by the Honorary Degree Scholastic Committee Chair in collaboration with the Secretary to the Board of Trustees. A call for nominations will be announced to the University community at the start of the academic year in September. The call will be issued via the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Faculty Senate Office, the Advancement Office, as well as being posted on the WMU home page.

4.4.4.2. The Secretary to the Board of Trustees will route all nominations to the appropriate committee. The committees will review all nominations received and will make recommendations to the President.

4.4.4.3. Nominations for honorary degree award consideration may be submitted by any member of the WMU faculty, administration, professional staff, student, or alumni. Complete nominations must include the following:

A description (e.g. dossier, portfolio, resume) of the nominee's degrees, accomplishments, appointments, intellectual and creative abilities and contributions, honors, previous honorary degrees and other pertinent information.

A minimum of three letters of nomination, at least one of which must be from a WMU administrator, faculty, staff member, student, or alumni. The letters should describe, in detail, the accomplishments of the candidate, how these accomplishments exemplify the mission of the University and how the candidate's achievements serve as a model of University ideals and aspirations for its students, faculty, staff and alumni.

4.4.4.4. The two committees will meet as needed to review the nominations and will inform the President of the names of candidates under consideration. Scholastic nominations deemed by the committee to warrant further consideration will be forwarded to the Chair(s) or Director(s) of the department(s) or program(s) most closely related to the discipline of the candidate, together with the Dean(s) of the appropriate college(s).

4.4.4.5. Both the Chair(s) or Director(s) and the Dean(s) will review the scholastic nomination(s) and provide a written recommendation to the committee regarding whether the scholarly, artistic or professional achievements of the candidate are sufficient to confer an honorary degree.

4.4.5. Committee Review Process

4.4.5.1. Both committees will thoroughly vet all nominations and provide one of three summary evaluations for each nomination:

(A) Recommend proposed candidate to receive an honorary degree.
(B) Do not recommend proposed candidate to receive an honorary degree.

(C) Do not recommend candidate to receive an honorary degree in the current year, but do recommend retaining nomination for future consideration.

4.4.5.2. All deliberations and recommendations of both committees will be kept strictly confidential.

4.4.5.3. If the review is not favorable, the affiliated committee Chair will notify the nominator of the decision.

4.4.5.4. Affirmative recommendations will be forwarded to the President through written evaluation together with any input from the affiliated committee, nominators, academic Chair/Director, Dean of the appropriate college, and others. If the President further recommends the nomination, it will go forward to the Board of Trustees for approval as an action item at a Board Meeting.

4.4.5.5. If a candidate is selected for an honorary degree, both the nominee and the nominator will be informed by the President that the Board of Trustees has approved the nomination. Honorary degrees will be conferred within one year of the candidate's selection. Honorary degrees may be awarded in conjunction with commencement ceremonies or conducted at other times throughout the academic year to best engage students, faculty, staff, and other university stakeholders.

4.5. Communication
The Secretary to the Board of Trustees will communicate and implement this Policy. It will be posted on the University’s Policy web page.

4.6. Exceptions
Exceptions to the honorary degree policy will only occur under extraordinary circumstance and at the direction of the Board of Trustees.

5. Accountability
The Secretary to the Board of Trustees is responsible for maintaining accountability throughout the honorary degree selection process with oversight from the Board of Trustees.

Honorary degrees will only be awarded if they meet the requirements of this Policy.

6. Additional Information
N/A

7. Applicable Procedures and Guidelines
Addressed in Section 4.5.4, above
8. FAQs

Whom should I contact if I have questions about this policy?
Answer: The Secretary to the Board of Trustees

Related Policies: N/A

References: N/A

History:
   a. Effective date of current version: December 12, 2019
   b. Date first adopted: May 16, 1975
   c. Revision history: N/A
   d. Proposed date of next review: December 12, 2022

Certified by:  At the Direction of:
Responsible Enforcement Official  [Board/President/VP]

/s/ ________________________________  /s/ ________________________________
[Position/Title]  [Title]
[Date]  [Date]