

Policy 2117 Honorary Degrees

Date of Current Revision: April 2022

Responsible Officer: President and Provost/Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

1. PURPOSE

This policy articulates the university's policy and procedures for awarding honorary degrees, which denote an individual's accomplishments as they relate to the values and ideals of James Madison University.

2. AUTHORITY

The Board of Visitors has been authorized by the Commonwealth of Virginia to govern James Madison University. See Code of Virginia § 23.1-1600; § 23.1-1301. The Board has delegated the authority to manage the university to the president.

3. DEFINITIONS

Honorary Doctorate

One of the highest and most significant honors the university can confer. The university may confer the following types of honorary doctorates: Doctor of Arts, Doctor of Humanities and Doctor of Science.

Nomination Committee

The President and Provost shall appoint a Nomination Committee for honorary doctorates comprised of:

- Provost – Chair
- Secretary to the Board of Visitors
- Three (3) faculty members, one of which is recommended by the Speaker of the Faculty Senate
- Student Government President
- Alumni relations representative
- Two (2) Academic Deans
- Chief of Staff to the President

4. APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to the award of any honorary degree given by James Madison University.

5. POLICY

Honorary degrees are conferred to recognize an individual who exemplifies personal qualities and values consistent with James Madison University and would serve to inspire and encourage others to strive to make a positive difference in the world. The university and the Board of

Visitors recognize the tremendous and unique prestige that comes with the awarding of such a degree; thus, the process is extremely selective.

6. PROCEDURES

6.1 Criteria

To be considered for an honorary doctorate, individuals should have made a significant contribution in their field, to society, or to humanity in general. Eminence that can be clearly defined should fall in one or more of the following areas: their career; intellectual, scholarship or creative activity; public service or in an artistic, literary, governmental, financial endeavor; national or international recognition; and/or contributions that have enhanced society as a whole.

A relationship with the university or a connection between the individual's achievement and the university's mission and strategic priorities should be considered.

The university is committed to diversity and supports the awarding of honorary doctorates that reflect the diversity of interests, backgrounds and opportunities represented in the JMU community, the society, and the world that we serve.

6.2 Nomination Process

- a. Nominations must be solicited from the entire JMU community. All representatives on the committee should solicit nominations from their respective areas.
- b. Nominations must be made using the standardized Nomination Form.
- c. The Nomination Committee will send its recommendation(s) to the President and Vice Presidents for review.
- d. Approved nominations must be presented to the Board of Visitors (BOV) for approval.
- e. Notification of an honorary doctorate will be made by the Rector or their designee.

6.3 Nomination Timeline

Nominations will be accepted throughout the year.

Nominations and vetting for the May graduation ceremony must take place prior to October 31 for presentation at the November BOV meeting. Nominations and vetting for the December graduation ceremony must take place prior to March 31 for presentation at the April BOV meeting. Exceptions can be made as needed to accommodate special circumstances.

6.4 Timing of Award

Honorary doctorates may be awarded at appropriate university events such as commencements, Madison Week or other significant events. Except under unusual circumstances, no honorary degrees are to be awarded in absentia.

6.5 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a strict consideration regarding all nominations and the supporting materials. Under no circumstances should the nominated individual be notified of their nomination prior to the receipt of their invitation to the event at which they will receive the Honorary Degree.

6.6 Revocability

The Board of Visitors shall, upon motion of a board member, revoke an honorary degree by a two-thirds vote of the Board of Visitors if it is determined that the action(s) or inaction(s) of the honorary degree recipient are or were grossly inconsistent with the ideals, values, and beliefs of the JMU community.

7. RESPONSIBILITIES

It is the responsibility of the President and Provost to appoint a nominating committee.

It is the responsibility of the President, Vice Presidents, and Board of Visitors to review and approve the nominations for honorary doctorates.

Individuals who have been approved for an honorary doctorate must accept the award in person at the appropriate university event, except in unusual circumstances.

All departments, offices and employees that generate, receive, or maintain public records under the terms of this policy are also responsible for compliance with Policy [1109](#) – Records Management.

8. SANCTIONS

Sanctions will be commensurate with the severity and/or frequency of the offense and may include termination of employment or expulsion from the university.

9. EXCLUSIONS

Honorary doctorates are not awarded to the following:

- Current faculty or staff
- Current holders of political office
- Current JMU Board of Visitor members
- Current students

Honorary doctorates are not awarded posthumously, unless the offer has been made and accepted prior to the individual's death.

10. INTERPRETATION

The authority to interpret this policy rests with the President and is shared with the Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs.

Previous version: October 2021

Approved by the president: April 2022