

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Office of the Provost

Formalizing the Process for Faculty Representation in the Selection of Honorary Degree Recipients

Summary

The Provost seeks the advice of the University Committee on Faculty Affairs on a proposed model for the selection of faculty to serve on the Honorary Degree Committee.

Background

An honorary degree is the highest academic honor that Michigan State University can bestow to the world's most distinguished scholars and citizens. Michigan State University awards honorary degrees to formally recognize and honor people for preeminent achievement in their professions or in service to society within the scope of the arts and letters, sciences and the professions (e.g., law, medicine), and public service recognized and promoted by the University. Since 1885, deserving individuals have received honorary degrees during MSU's commencement ceremonies, sharing in the celebration of outstanding lifetime accomplishments with MSU students. A list of recipients can be found here: [MSU Honorary Degree Recipients, 1885-2021](#).

The Board of Trustees confers honorary degrees. [Article 9, "Courses of Instruction and Degrees"](#) of the Board of Trustees Bylaws specifies that "No honorary degree may be granted except upon the recommendation of the *President and faculty*, or an agency representing it." (*emphasis added*). Prior to the conferral of an honorary degree, a rigorous selection process occurs through a faculty selection committee, the Honorary Degree Committee (HDC). The Honorary Degree Committee is charged to review nominations (see Appendix I) for the honorary degree on an annual basis and provide recommendations to the President on the award of honorary degrees. The President then makes a formal invitation to degree recipients.

Committee members should demonstrate a high degree of commitment confidentiality to this process and any materials reviewed, as well as deliberations and recommendations sanctioned under it.

Up until recently, the Honorary Degree Committee was coordinated through the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation. Beginning in fall of 2023, the committee will be coordinated by the Office of the Provost.

A Proposed Model for the Selection of Faculty for the Honorary Degree Committee

With the transfer of the coordination of the Honorary Degree Committee to the Office of the Provost, the opportunity arises to formalize the selection process for faculty representation on the committee. Due to staff turnover, it is unclear how faculty were selected to serve on the Honorary Degree Committee in years past. Therefore, the Provost seeks to create and formalize a process that provides suitable and inclusive faculty representation on the HDC that best enables the selection of recipients of an honorary degree on behalf of MSU.

The committee composition will include the following:

- Chair: Senior Associate Provost (voice, vote)
- Faculty Representation (5 members, with vote)
- Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate School (voice, vote)

Ex-Officio members:

- VP for Governmental Relations
- Staff (FASD)

With delegation from the President, the Provost will invite five MSU faculty members to serve on the Honorary Degree Committee. The Provost will select faculty members drawn from a combination of the following:

- 3: Nominations obtained from the Faculty Senate and the Council of Deans.
- 2: A list of University Distinguished Professors, endowed and/or named professors, and those selected as recipients of the Beal Outstanding Faculty Award (formerly Distinguished Faculty Award).

Key principles for the selection of faculty members:

- The selection of the committee's membership must ensure a diverse representation.
- Committee members must be tenured faculty who themselves have outstanding records of teaching, research, and/or public service.

Faculty chosen for this assignment will be asked to serve for a term of three years, with staggered terms initially.

Timeline

It is suggested that this approach be shared with the University Committee on Faculty Affairs as an agenda item in fall 2023 to seek their feedback and advice. The committee selection process is to be implemented for the Spring of 2024 honorary degree selection.

Appendix I Honorary Degree Nomination Process

Who can be nominated

The Faculty Committee on Honorary Degrees is in the continuing process of developing a list of outstanding nominees to receive honorary degrees. The award of an honorary degree is a chance to bring attention to deserving individuals.

Nominees should meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Distinguished graduate of MSU (any field)
- Distinguished scientist, humanist, scholar of the arts, or distinguished member of one of the professions (law, medicine, etc.)
- Distinguished person in public life or business

Please note:

- It has been the practice not to nominate members of our own faculty
- Self-nominations are not accepted
- Nominees do not need to have a connection with MSU, but should exemplify the values inherent in MSU's mission and values
- Nominees should not be aware of their nomination

Invitations to nominees are issued only by the president of Michigan State University. In addition, the president retains the option of designating speakers for the commencement ceremonies to receive honorary degrees.

Who can submit a nomination

Nominations may be submitted by an individual faculty member (active or retired), a group of individuals with at least one MSU faculty member, or an academic unit. Suggestions from outside the University must be coordinated through a college dean's office, and the dean will determine if a nomination is appropriate. Please visit the college website listing to contact the appropriate office.

All completed nomination packets must be approved by a dean before submission to the Honorary Degree Committee.

Nomination deadline

Nomination packets will be accepted twice per year, for fall and spring commencement, with rolling consideration of packets from previous cycles.

Nomination packet

Information should be as complete as possible so that the committee will be able to arrive at a decision based on the material submitted. Each nomination must include the following documentation, assembled in this order:

- [Honorary Degree Nomination Form \(via Qualtrics survey\)](#).
- Nomination Statement (two-three pages) explaining why the nominee should be considered for an honorary degree from MSU
- Supporting Letters (at least two) from qualified recommenders who are familiar with the professional accomplishments and achievements of the nominee. Must be SIGNED
- Resume or Vita
- Other supporting materials as deemed necessary by the nominator

Please note:

- Incomplete nominations cannot be reviewed by the committee, and will be sent back to the nominator for correction.
- Care should be taken so that candidates are not aware of their nomination

Completed packets can be submitted electronically via [Qualtrics Survey](#) or in hard copy form to the Faculty Committee on Honorary Degrees, c/o the Provost's Office, 430 Administration Building, 426 Auditorium Rd., East Lansing, MI 48824-1046

Please email honorifics@msu.edu or call (517) 432-1075 with any questions.