

	Honorary Degree Policy #4.13	
CATEGORY: Senate Policy	APPROVAL DATE: May 25, 2026	
EFFECTIVE DATE: June 2026	REVIEW DATE: Five years from effective date	
APPROVAL: Senate		
RESPONSIBLE COMMITTEE(S): Senate Academic Policy and Planning Committee (SAPPC); Honorary Degree Committee (HDC), a sub-committee of Senate.		
CONTACT(S): Senate Secretariat		
PREVIOUS VERSIONS: N/A		

SUMMARY:

This policy provides rules and procedures that govern the nomination, adjudication, granting and revocation processes for honorary degrees at OCAD University.

SCOPE:

This policy applies to all honorary degrees or fellowships granted by OCAD University.

POLICY:

Purpose and Eligibility

An Honorary Doctoral Degree is the highest honour conferred by OCAD University, awarded to individuals who have made outstanding and exemplary contributions to art, design, civil society, culture, or education, and whose service and achievements reflect the ideals of the University. Areas of accomplishment typically include one or more of the following:

- the advancement of art & design practice or research;
- service to community as cultural leaders (e.g. Indigenous Elders, knowledge-keepers);
- leadership within the art & design community, or within society more broadly, including nurturing and cultivating diversity and equity within their field, industry, or society at large;
- mentorship of the next generation of professional practitioners and industry leaders; or
- the betterment of the University, the local community, or society.

Nominees may be from Canada or abroad. Artistic partnerships or small collectives in which each artist meets the eligibility requirements may also be nominated. Honorary degree candidates are normally recognized for a lifetime of achievement, but outstanding early or mid-career nominees will also be considered.

Honorary Doctoral Degrees are awarded at the University's convocation ceremonies. Honourees address the graduating class with brief remarks.

Exclusions

The following exclusions apply:

- Members of the OCAD University Board of Governors are normally not eligible for nomination until a minimum of three years has elapsed following their departure from active service.
- OCAD University faculty, administrators, and staff are normally not eligible for nomination until a minimum of five years has elapsed following their departure or retirement from active service. Emerit faculty not otherwise serving at the University are eligible for nomination after this five-year period.
- Other than in exceptional circumstances, honorands must be present at the convocation ceremony to receive a degree.
- The nominee must be living. If the candidate dies after accepting the nomination, but prior to its award, the degree will be awarded posthumously.
- Active politicians and senior members of the public service are normally excluded.

Selection Criteria

In assessing the contributions of nominees, as indicated in Purpose and Eligibility above, the Honorary Degree Committee will consider the following criteria:

- In what ways is the candidate's achievement or service truly outstanding?
- Will this candidate's achievement or service be seen to be meaningful and exemplary to the students who will graduate at Convocation?
- Given its vision, mission, and strategic and academic priorities, is it appropriate for OCAD University to honour this person at this time?
- Has this candidate been sufficiently recognized by other honours and awards?
- Does this candidate help OCAD University achieve the goal of reflecting the diversity of Canadian society or the academic diversity of the University in the honours it bestows?
- Is the candidate already aware of OCAD University and would they appreciate the significance of the award?
- Is the candidate likely to contribute meaningfully to the goals of the University following the conferral of the award?
- Does this nominee help OCAD University raise its stature and standing in civil society, broadly defined?

In addition, in determining the annual slate of nominees, the Honorary Degree Committee will assess the nominees as a cohort, with consideration of diversity in representation, including representation from Indigenous communities and other minorities within Canadian society; balance among the University's academic disciplines; and balance among the range of achievements indicated under Purpose and Eligibility, noted above.

Types of Degrees

At present, the University offers the following honorary degrees:

- Doctor of Design *honoris causa*
- Doctor of Fine Arts *honoris causa*
- Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*
- Doctor of Letters *honoris causa*

Prior to 2003, the Ontario College of Art & Design granted Honorary Fellowships instead of Honorary Doctoral Degrees. The University considers Honorary Fellowships to be equivalent honours to Honorary Doctoral Degrees.

Nomination and Selection of Candidates

Candidates are nominated and selected as follows:

1. Nominations may be made at any time via an online form maintained by the Senate Secretariat. Nominations will be accepted from anyone within the OCAD University community, including alumni, former members of the Board of Governors, and former recipients of honorary degrees or fellowships. Nominators may not nominate themselves or a close family member. Nominators must not inform the nominee of the nomination, to prevent any misunderstandings or ill-will, should the nomination be unsuccessful.
2. At least once a year, the Senate Secretariat will issue a formal call for nominations to the University community.
3. Each year, all eligible nominations received by a deadline set by the Senate Secretariat will be forwarded to the Honorary Degree Committee for adjudication. In its deliberations, the Honorary Degree Committee may also consider nominees from previous years. A confidential list of past nominees is maintained by the Senate Secretariat.
4. The Honorary Degree Committee will select a slate of candidates for the next convocation as per the eligibility and selection criteria, above. At least one candidate, and normally not more than two, will be selected for each convocation ceremony. In vetting potential candidates, the Honorary Degree Committee may, as it deems appropriate and necessary, confidentially consult with other members of the OCAD U community. In recognition of the University's commitments to reconciliation, the Honorary Degree Committee will confidentially consult with members of the OCAD U Indigenous community on its final list of candidates.
5. The President and Vice-Chancellor, on behalf of the University, will contact each candidate to request their acceptance of their nomination. Should a candidate decline, the President may contact an alternate candidate, as selected by the Honorary Degree Committee, or may reconvene the Honorary Degree Committee to determine further candidates. At the discretion of the President, a candidate may defer their candidacy for one year.
6. Once candidates have confirmed their acceptance of the award, the candidates' names will be forwarded to the Senate Executive Committee for recommendation to the OCAD University Senate for final approval. The approved slate is forwarded to the Board of Governors for information.

7. Following approval, the President will make the final assignment of the honourees to the convocation ceremonies and determine who will introduce each honouree at convocation. In consultation with the Vice-President, Academic and Provost, the President determines the type of degree to be conferred on each honouree.

The nomination and adjudication processes, and all associated documentation, are confidential, and all governance processes take place *in camera*. The final slate of approved candidates is strictly embargoed from dissemination until publicly announced by the University.

Revocation of Honorary Doctoral Degrees or Fellowships

In rare and exceptional circumstances, an Honorary Doctoral Degree or Honorary Fellowship may be revoked when an honouree is found to have conducted themselves in a manner that undermines the University's public reputation and/or is inconsistent with the University's mission or principles. Examples of causes for revocation might include:

- Conviction for a serious criminal offense.
- Removal from the official register of a professional association for malfeasance or other professional misconduct (e.g. disbarring).
- Discovery that fraud, deception, false information or misrepresentation had, in full or in part, informed the bestowing of the honour.
- Abuse of the rights and privileges associated with an honorary degree or fellowship.

In recognition of the University's commitments to reconciliation and equity, special consideration will be given to behaviour or conduct that is recognized as injurious to Indigenous peoples and other historically oppressed minorities within Canadian society.

Consistent with the University's commitment to academic freedom, as defined in the University's collective agreements, and freedom of expression, as defined by law, disagreement with views expressed by an honouree is not, in and of itself, grounds for review or revocation.

The process for the revocation of an honorary degree or fellowship is as follows:

1. Any member of the University community may write the President or the Chair of Senate requesting that an honorary degree or fellowship be revoked. Requests for revocation may also be initiated by the President or Chair of Senate.
2. If the President or Chair of Senate deems that there may be reasonable grounds for revocation, the Honorary Degree Committee will be convened to further consider the request.
3. The Honorary Degree Committee will investigate the matter, reviewing any material and documentation submitted with the request along with any other publicly available information. The Honorary Degree Committee may consult with other members of the community, and may also seek legal advice. In cases that might impact Indigenous communities, the Honorary Degree Committee will confidentially consult with Indigenous community members.
4. In the interest of procedural fairness, if the committee is satisfied that there may be grounds to proceed with a revocation, the recipient will be contacted by the President, on behalf of the Honorary Degree Committee, and informed of the grounds for the potential

revocation. The recipient will be invited to submit a response within a reasonable amount of time, determined by the President, but not less than 30 calendar days.

5. The Honorary Degree Committee will then review the response and documentation submitted by the honouree, if any. The Honorary Degree Committee may send further requests for information to the recipient and will share for response any new evidence or grounds for revocation that have arisen since the first request. In all cases, the recipient will be given a reasonable amount of time, as determined by the President, to respond to each request.
6. The Honorary Degree Committee will produce a report with a recommendation to revoke or not revoke the degree, with associated rationale. If the recipient has offered to voluntarily return the honorary degree or fellowship, the Honorary Degree Committee will make a recommendation as to whether this offer should be accepted.
7. The report will then be sent to the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) for recommendation to the OCAD University Senate for final approval. The SEC or Senate may return the report to the Honorary Degree Committee for further consideration.
8. If the degree or fellowship is revoked, or an offer to return the award accepted, this action will be noted in the Senate minutes and the former honouree's name removed from the public lists of recipients. The Senate Secretariat, through the President, will request that the honorary degree parchment be returned.
9. Further communication to the community will take place at the discretion of the President.

All procedures, consultations and documents associated with revocation are confidential, and all governance sessions held *in camera*. Any motion to revoke or accept the voluntary return of a parchment will be deemed a major question and must be approved with a two-thirds (2/3) majority at each level of governance.

In cases where the President or Senate Chair consider that a revocation request does not have merit, the HDC will be informed of the request at its next regular meeting. If the HDC disagrees with the initial assessment, it may proceed with an investigation as per the process above.

Normally, honorary degrees/fellowships are not revoked posthumously. Instead, if such a request is received, and is deemed to have merit, the President or Chair of Senate may recommend to Senate, in consultation with the Honorary Degree Committee, that the University issue a statement to acknowledge the concerns surrounding the recipient and provide any necessary contextualization. This statement would normally be posted on the institution's website.