



# Awarding Honorary Degrees and Other Special Awards

**Policy Type:** Local - Board of Visitors  
**Responsible Office:** Office of the President  
**Initial Policy Approved:** March 2001  
**Current Revision Approved:** September 13, 2024

## Policy Statement and Purpose

This policy addresses the requirements and processes for awarding honorary degrees and other special awards on behalf of the President and the Board of Visitors.

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## Who Should Know this Policy

Members of the university community who nominate, review, and/or manage the award process for awards identified in this policy, or serve on any related committees are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the contents and provisions of this policy.

## Definitions

**Honorary Degree** – An honorary degree is a doctorate degree conferred upon someone who is not a current student of the institution, to honor the recipient for which the University has waived the usual

requirements, such as matriculation, residence, a dissertation and the passing of comprehensive examinations. It confers no privileges, rights or academic credentials on the individual receiving the Honorary Degree. The Honorary Degree is bestowed based on information known and available at the time of conferral.

## **Contacts**

The Office of the President officially interprets this policy and is responsible for obtaining approval for any revisions and questions regarding this policy should be directed to this office.

## **Policy Specifics**

### **The Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters (Honorary Degree)**

The Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters (honorary degree) is one of Virginia Commonwealth University's highest forms of recognition for an individual who has made outstanding societal contributions such as scholarship, public service, humanitarianism, science or art. The award of the Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters is made to:

- Honor individuals who have distinguished themselves through extraordinary achievements in scholarship, the professions, or other creative endeavors; and
- Reflect and elevate individuals who embody and model the university's most fundamental commitments and values by honoring those whose accomplishments and achievements in their fields of endeavor serve as exemplars.

To preserve the prestigious honor such a degree carries, all honorary degrees are awarded with great care and respect. When determining eligibility, the University will consider that the public may associate recipients with the University indefinitely. There must be sufficient rationale to support why an individual is recognized and their specific contribution to the University community or society as a whole.

Candidates for honorary degrees must be persons of great accomplishment and high ethical standards who exemplify the ideals of Virginia Commonwealth University. Honorary degrees are conferred in accordance with University policies, including its nondiscrimination policy, and are based upon facts known at the time the degree is conferred. Factors to be evaluated in awarding honorary degrees include, but are not limited to:

- Intellectual distinction in a particular field;
- Extraordinary achievement, which the university wishes to acknowledge;
- Extraordinary contribution to the university, Commonwealth of Virginia, nation, world, or society; and
- Sufficient stature to bring additional prestige to the university.

Current and former members of the VCU Board of Visitors, Emeriti Faculty, and current employees may be considered for an Honorary Degree on a case-by-case basis. Only one honorary degree can be awarded to an individual and consideration of potential future acts cannot serve as the basis for the award of an honorary degree.

An honorary degree is usually conferred at a commencement ceremony and must be approved by the Board of Visitors in advance of the ceremony. An honorary degree will not be presented in absentia unless it is awarded posthumously.

The Board's conferral of an honorary degree does not give the individual holding such a degree the right to or interest in continuing to hold such a degree. The Board of Visitors, in its sole discretion, has the authority to revoke honorary degrees. The Special Awards Committee shall make a recommendation to revoke an honorary degree to the President, who shall make a recommendation to the Board of Visitors. In addition, a member of the Board of Visitors may make a direct recommendation to the Board to have an honorary degree revoked.

The reasons for revoking an honorary degree include, but are not limited to, the following:

- 1) The honoree engaged in conduct inconsistent with the mission and/or values of the University,
- 2) Facts are discovered that negate the accomplishments that were cited as the basis for awarding the honorary degree, or
- 3) The honoree's conduct injures the reputation of the University or Commonwealth of Virginia.

The President or the Rector of the Board of Visitors (through the Assistant Secretary to the Board of Visitors) will notify the honoree of the revocation. The Board of Visitors' determination is final.

### **Edward A. Wayne Medal**

The Edward A. Wayne Medal is named after the former Chairman of the *Commission to Plan for the Establishment of a Proposed State-Supported University in the Richmond Metropolitan Area* (the "Commission"). The Commission recommended, and the General Assembly approved, the establishment of Virginia Commonwealth University in 1968. In addition, Mr. Wayne, who was a past president of the Federal Reserve Bank, served as VCU's first Vice-Rector.

The Edward A. Wayne Medal is a high honor bestowed by the University for extraordinary generosity and service to the University and community. To be eligible, an individual must have:

- a) served as a volunteer leader in a major role for a campaign or fund drive at VCU,
- b) demonstrated a commitment to the Commonwealth and its citizens through leadership and/or personal philanthropy,
- c) served in a leadership role for one of the University's related foundations, advisory boards or alumni associations, or
- d) contributed a leadership gift to the University.

An individual may receive only one Edward A. Wayne Medal from the University. The Edward A. Wayne Medal is usually awarded at a commencement ceremony and must be approved by the Board of Visitors in

advance of the ceremony. The Edward A. Wayne Award Medal will not be presented in absentia unless it is awarded posthumously.

### **Presidential Medallion**

The Presidential Medallion is a high honor bestowed by the University and is awarded in recognition of outstanding contributions by a member of the University community. The award will recognize extraordinary achievement in the world of learning and dedication to the University as evidenced by a series of outstanding contributions to several areas of University life. In order to recognize outstanding contributions by members of the University community, the President recommended, and the Board of Visitors approved, the establishment of this award in March 1984. An individual may receive only one Presidential Medallion from the University. The Presidential Medallion is usually awarded at a commencement ceremony or during the annual Faculty Convocation upon recommendation of the President. The Presidential Medallion will not be presented in absentia unless it is awarded posthumously.

Current members of the VCU Board of Visitors and current employees of the University are generally not eligible for the Presidential Medallion.

### **Special Awards Committee**

The Special Awards Committee (the “Committee”) is comprised of individuals appointed and charged by the President and/or his/her designee(s) to receive nominations, and to review and make recommendations for:

- (a) Commencement ceremony speakers,
- (b) Honorary degree recipients,
- (c) Edward A. Wayne Medal recipients, and
- (d) Presidential Medallion recipients.

All members of the Committee are expected to serve in an impartial manner—free of conflicts or the appearance thereof. If a personal or professional conflict exists, the affected individual must disclose such conflict or bias to the Committee Chairs. The Committee Chairs shall establish a written process to determine whether any conflict(s) exist.

Committee members may include:

- Members of the President’s Cabinet
- Assistant Secretary to the Board of Visitors
- Faculty representative
- Staff Senate representative
- Board representative
- Members from the Student Government Association
- Other individuals as determined by the President

The President shall appoint the chair(s) and committee members every fiscal year. The President reserves the right to modify the committee’s membership as necessary, including filling vacancies.

### **Nominations and Approvals**

## **Honorary Degrees**

Nominations are generally solicited from the representative bodies of the University's key stakeholder groups and submitted to the Office of the President and Assistant Secretary to the Board of Visitors for consideration in advance of a Board of Visitors regularly scheduled meeting. The President (or designee) will review the recommendations and make the final selection for presentation to the Board of Visitors for approval.

The Board of Visitors makes the final decision related to the honorary degree and there is no appeal process.

## **Special Awards**

Nominations for special awards such as the Edward A. Wayne Medal or Presidential Medallion are solicited from the representative bodies of the University's key stakeholder groups, including but not limited to the following:

- **Edward A. Wayne Medal:** Board of Visitors' Finance and University Resources Committee, Development and Alumni Relations Division, Council of Deans, Council of Chairs, etc.
- **Presidential Medallion:** Alumni of the University, alumni groups, Faculty and Staff Senates, University Council, President's Cabinet, Student Government Associations, student groups, Council of Deans, etc.

Recommendations are made to the Special Awards Committee, which makes recommendations to the President. The President shall present the nominations for the Edward A. Wayne Medal to the Board of Visitors for final approval. Reasonable efforts should be made to notify the nominating body or individual of the Board's final decision on all selections.

The Board of Visitors makes the final decision related to the Edward A. Wayne Medal, and the President makes the final decision related to the Presidential Medallion. Once those decisions have been made, there is no appeal process.

While the President makes the final selections and/or decisions related to recipients of the Presidential Medallion and the final selections and/or decisions related to the recommended Edward A. Wayne Medal recipients, it is not without significant support and assistance from the work of the Special Awards Committee and an open nominations process.

## **Forms**

Nomination forms that are required in this process can be found on the Office of the President's website specifically <https://president.vcu.edu/nominations/>

## **Related Documents**

Overview and instructions for submission can be found <https://president.vcu.edu/nominations/>

## Revision History

This policy has been revised on the following dates:

March 2001	Originally Adopted
March 22, 2019	Amended
September 13, 2024	Amended

This policy revokes and replaces any and all policies related to conferring Honorary Degrees and/or awarding the Edward A. Wayne Medal and/or the Presidential Medallion.

## FAQ

### **If the request is not approved for awarding an Honorary Degree, the Edward A. Wayne Medal, or the Presidential Medallion is there an appeal process?**

The Board of Visitors makes the final decision related to the Honorary Degree and the Edward A. Wayne Medal, and there is no appeal process.

The President makes the final decision regarding the Presidential Medallion and there is no appeal process.

### **Can an Honorary Degree be revoked?**

Yes. The Board of Visitors makes the final determination on whether an Honorary Degree may be revoked. Such determination is made upon (a) a direct recommendation from a member of the Board of Visitors to the Board to have an Honorary Degree revoked; or (b) upon the recommendation of the President to the Board of Visitors, and an evaluation and recommendation of the necessity for such action by the Special Awards Committee.

The reasons for revoking an Honorary Degree include, but are not limited to the following:

- 1) The honoree engaged in conduct inconsistent with the mission and/or values of VCU,
- 2) Facts are discovered that negate the accomplishments that were cited as the basis for awarding the Honorary Degree, or
- 3) The honoree's conduct injures the reputation of the VCU or the Commonwealth of Virginia.

### **If the Board of Visitors decides that the Honorary Degree should be revoked, is there an appeal process?**

No, once the Board of Visitors has revoked the degree there is no appeal process.