Honorary degree rules defined

By Mike Heinzman

Every quarter at graduation ceremonies, the University awards "honorary degrees" to persons it feels are deserving of recognition. Persons are chosen for honorary degrees through a committee made up of five faculty members.

Robert G. Turnbull, a member of the Honorary Degrees Committee, said such a degree's main purpose is to recognize "very serious achievements" by the recipient.

He said a person may be chosen for a degree one of two ways. The University president may choose a person for a degree simply by obtaining approval of the Board of Trustees, Turnbull said.

The more standard method is for someone to submit a name to the committee for an extensive evaluation. Turnbull, chairman of the Department of Philosophy, said the committee must agree unanimously that the nominee is qualified, or the candidate is immediately turned down.

Two-thirds vote

If the Honorary Degree Committee approves the name, it goes to University Senate, which must agree with the committee by a two-thirds majority vote. The trustees must then make final approval, Turnbull said.

According to faculty rule, to nominate a person, a dossier containing the following material must be submitted to the degrees committee:

- A letter telling why the nominee should be recognized;
- A biographical sketch of the nominee, which must include achievements, activities and other relevant facts;
- Letters from persons who have been associated with the nominee; and,
- Other documents, including published articles written by the candidate.

Turnbull said there is no other tangible value to a degree.

"A person isn't going to get a pay raise simply because he has an honorary degree," he said.

In 1967, the criteria and the policy of issuing the degrees came under fire when comedian Bob Hope was nominated. The Senior Class Committee had recommended Hope that year, but one degree committee member voted against it.

Interpretation varies

The chairman of the degree committee still attempted to present Hope's name to Faculty Council (which is now University Senate), saying he interpreted the rule requiring a unanimous agreement in a different way.

The debate continued for two years. Hope was finally given the degree, but only after former President Novice Fawcett nominated Hope himself. The nomination was then able to go directly to the trustees, without the degree committee's approval.

However, Turnbull said, "We (the degree committee) have been scrupulously honest about turning down persons who are not distinctive."

The University will award four honorary degrees at the end of this quarter:

- Hal Anger, a faculty member of the University of California, will receive an honorary doctor of science degree. He has developed new equipment to be used in the field of nuclear medicine.
- Paul Kramer, a faculty member of Duke University, will receive an honorary doctor of science degree. Kramer received a doctorate degree from Ohio State in 1931 and is a nationally known botanist.
- Elburst Osburn, the director of the U. S. Bureau of Mines, will receive an honorary doctor of science degree. He has been active in trying to improve working conditions for miners.
- Jesse Owens, a former Ohio State track star and Olympic champion, will receive an honorary doctor of athletic arts degree. He was to receive the degree at Summer Quarter commencement, but was in Munich, Germany, for the Olympics.
November 23, 1982

TO: Deans, Directors, Chairmen, and Faculty

FROM: C. Ray Williams, Chairman, University Honorary Degrees Committee

You are urged to give some thought to nominations for honorary degrees. Our recognition of the world's finest scholars, artists and leaders (those who have had connections with O.S.U. and those who haven't) demonstrates our continuing commitment and support for scholarly excellence. This cadre of widely recognized and highly visible leaders can do much to establish and maintain our institution as one of the finest in the world.

As you may be aware, nominations are considered by this committee, the University Senate and the Board of Trustees. In addition to the several nominations which are reviewed and recommended by this committee each year, the President is permitted to present as many as four names directly to the Board of Trustees for their approval.

Nominations should be submitted to the Chairman of the Honorary Degrees Committee (College of Education, 202 Arps Hall, The Ohio State University). To facilitate action on these nominations, the following should be included:

1. A letter of nomination from the person who places the name of a candidate before the Committee, addressing those specific contributions which distinguish the candidate as one of the finest scholars or artists in the world.

2. A detailed curriculum vitae, including a list of publications or works, a list of positions held, honors received, etc., as well as a two-page summary vita which can be submitted to the University Senate.

3. A minimum of three letters of recommendation from within the University from senior professors, distinguished scholars and/or distinguished leaders.

4. A minimum of three letters of recommendation from distinguished scholars, artists or leaders from outside the University.

5. Any other materials that the nominator would like to bring to the attention of the Committee.

All materials, including the letter of nomination, should be submitted in five copies.

A Xerox copy of the Principles and Criteria for the Awarding of Honorary Degrees at The Ohio State University is enclosed.

Sincerely,

C. Ray Williams (m)
C. Ray Williams, Chairman
Honorary Degrees Committee
HONORARY DEGREES COMMITTEE

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THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Principles and Criteria For The
Awarding of Honorary Degrees

Principles

1. The awarding of honorary degrees should be regarded as a method by which
the University expresses its ideals and recognizes exceptional achieve-
ments.

2. An honorary degree should be awarded only for extraordinary distinction.

3. An honorary degree should be awarded to a member of the academic world
only when it can be demonstrated that the recipient has made contributions
far beyond the expected high standards of the profession.

An honorary degree should be awarded to a person in the non-academic
world only when it can be shown that he has made a contribution which
adds a significantly new dimension to society's well-being.

4. A program in the awarding of honorary degrees should include recognition
of attainment from all over the world, keeping a reasonable balance
between local and non-local, academic and non-academic recipients, and
various fields of endeavor.

5. The faculty and the community should regard an honorary degree as an
integral part of the evaluation of attainment, which, in principle, is the meaning of the regular degrees of the University.

6. Since the University is intimately related to society, it is proper to
award an honorary degree to a person who has exceptionally demonstrated
his appreciation for the idea of a University.

7. As the University's prime purpose is instruction and research, the
preponderance of honorary degrees awarded shall be to members of the
academic world, and honorary degrees shall be awarded to persons in the
non-academic world only in those exceptional cases where their
attainments are of the highest order. Honorary degrees shall not be
based upon financial and political considerations. Recognition shall
be given in accordance with the principles set forth in paragraphs
1 to 7, subject to the following weighted** categories:

(a) Persons who have served The Ohio State University as teachers
or otherwise

(b) Members of the academic world, other than those who have served
The Ohio State University

(c) Alumni of The Ohio State University not covered by (a) or (b)
above

(d) Persons in the non-academic world, who have made their careers
in Ohio, not covered by (a), (b), or (c) above

**For an illustration of the weighting of categories: a person in category
(a) would qualify for recognition much more easily than one in category (e).
Principles (continued)

(e) Persons in the non-academic world who have made their careers outside Ohio, not covered by (a), (b), (c), or (d) above.

Criteria

1. The recipient must exemplify the purposes and ideals of the University.

2. An honorary degree may be offered to a person who has made eminent contributions even though, in the nature of his work, he may be known to relatively few.

3. An honorary degree may be offered to a person well before the end of his career when his accomplishments are eminent or his activities worthy of highest commendation.

4. In awarding an honorary degree, it must be considered that the achievement will have continued importance.

5. The recognition by the University of its own faculty and graduates rests upon the fact that their contributions are likely to be well known to the University, which is in a good position to assess them. However, a degree should not be given to an individual while he is on active duty in the University.

6. Proposals may be submitted to the Committee on Honorary Degrees either through the University's administrative channels or directly. A broad procedure insures the greatest freedom and fullest consideration in a matter where there can be a wide range of evaluation.

Documentation of Nominations

1. A narrative letter must be submitted, indicating in non-technical language the importance of the achievements and the reasons why these achievements should be honored.

2. A biographical sketch must be submitted, giving the training; experience; activities, professional and general; appointments; offices; distinctions and awards.

3. Letters supporting the proposal should be written only by persons who have been associated with the proposed recipient or who are particularly competent to evaluate his achievements.

4. A bibliography should be submitted, when appropriate. It should be analytical and evaluative, indicating the quality, originality, scope and level of attainment.

5. Other documents, such as reprints, should be submitted. It is desirable to have highly technical matters abstracted into non-technical language.

Approved by the Faculty Council, March 10, 1955.
Reported to the Board of Trustees, April 10, 1959.
OSU selective in giving honorary degrees

By Tom Sheehan
Dispatch OSU Reporter

Members of a very exclusive “club” at Ohio State University count among their numbers the first man to walk on the moon and a former U.S. president. This “club” has been in existence since 1878 and has had 369 members through the years. All the members have received honorary degrees from OSU.

Most recently, five people received their honorary degrees from OSU during spring commencement exercises on June 8. They joined such members as astronaut Neil Armstrong and former President Gerald Ford.

“It’s the highest academic honor of the university,” said Sven B. Lundstedt, a professor of public administration at OSU who is chairman of the university’s honorary degree committee.

“WE TAKE this very, very seriously,” he said. “It’s symbolic of our desire to have the most respected and most accomplished individuals honored.”

OSU has some very stringent guidelines governing how people are chosen to receive honorary degrees.

The guidelines and principles, in general, state that the awarding of an honorary degree at OSU will go to people who exemplify the purposes and ideals of the university and who have made eminent contributions to society.

And, while students make up the largest number of people on the campus, they are not directly involved in the honorary degree nomination process, Lundstedt said, unless they are able to get a faculty member to make a nomination for them.

“Normally, it is the province of the faculty and the board of trustees and the university president,” he said.

THE REVIEW process of nominations can take as long as three months, Lundstedt said. Only the honorary degree committee and the university’s president can recommend people for honorary degrees to the OSU board of trustees, he said. The degrees are given at OSU commencements.

Although the university president is limited to four recommendations a year, the degree committee is not limited.

However, Lundstedt said, it would be impractical to submit many recommendations. “If you had 50 people being honored that would take all day,” he said.

OSU’s guidelines have been relatively intact since 1929 but before that the faculty wasn’t always in favor of a state university giving out honorary degrees.

BETWEEN 1878 and 1896, 14 honorary degrees were handed out. In 1896, at the urging of the faculty, the giving out of such degrees was stopped and was not renewed again until 1929.

According to records from the university archives, several efforts were made during that 33-year period to reinitialize the policy of giving out honorary degrees, but were unsuccessful.

Recipient of honorary degrees from OSU over the years include:

OSU President Emeritus
William Oxley Thompson; Charles F. Kettering; U.S. Sen. John Glenn, D-Ohio; Orville Wright; U.S. Statesman Ralph Johnson Bunche; Eddie Rickenbacker; and Jesse Owens.
Committee: Making nominations for honorary degrees easier now

By Gemma McLuckie

The Committee on Honorary Degrees has made it simpler to nominate candidates for recognition.

"We are asking the faculty to do some homework and send along a single letter outlining the candidate's accomplishments and a vitae," Bruce Walsh, chair of the committee and professor of psychology, told the University Senate Jan. 20. If a vitae is not available, the committee will accept a biographical statement published in Who's Who or other source.

If the honorary degree committee finds the nomination promising, it will ask the nominator for additional evidence necessary for a complete review.

"The committee believes that this new review process will expedite procedures and increase the number of highly qualified candidates for honorary degrees," the committee wrote in its annual report to the Senate.

In a letter to faculty late last year, the committee noted, "We are looking for individuals who have made extraordinary contributions to human understanding."

Since 1970, the University has granted 229 honorary degrees.

Earlier this year, the Senate approved a committee recommendation that the president be able to nominate eight recipients each calendar year to the Board of Trustees, up from four per year.

For copies of the guidelines for granting honorary degrees and for making nominations, contact the University Senate office, 292-2423.

The Senate approved a proposal to combine the Department of Geodetic Science and Surveying with "Department 1427," which was formed last year by merging the departments of Civil Engineering and Engineering Graphics in the College of Engineering. The Senate also approved calling the new unit the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering and Geodetic Science.

The proposal now goes to the Board of Trustees for consideration.

In a matter related to restructuring, the Steering Committee has asked the Council on Academic Affairs to do a review one year after administrative restructuring occurs, reported Jane Fraser, chair of Steering and associate professor of industrial, welding and systems engineering.

A CAA ad hoc subcommittee is developing follow-up questions that will be answered by deans and individual members of an academic unit. Alan J. Randall, chair of CAA and professor of agricultural economics and rural sociology, is leading the ad hoc group.

At the Jan. 19 CAA meeting, Randall suggested that the one-year follow-up be done to make sure a unit is functioning soundly. CAA would concentrate on governance issues such as adoption of a Pattern of Administration (POA); evenhanded application of principles guiding tenure, promotion, salary adjustments and workload assignments; and a fair and equitable process of adopting the POA, tenure and promotion principles and so forth.

Steering also has asked the University Oversight Committee on Restructuring to report on why some academic units have not made or completed restructuring proposals.

The Senate will meet at 9 a.m. March 2 in 103 Kottman Hall.