

FAQs

Q. What is the purpose of awarding honorary degrees?

A. Honorary degrees are awarded to people who will inspire the graduating class, bring honor to the university, and pay tribute to the diversity of the country. Honorary degrees are conferred on people who remind us of the value of hard work, dignity, and integrity.

Q. What does GW look for in honorary degree nominees?

A. Nominees must display outstanding achievement and strong character demonstrated by notable achievement in the following:

- **Scholarship in any discipline** – major breakthroughs in knowledge in fields of scholarly work;
- **Creative arts** – in the broad sense of the term: literature, music, architecture, dance, poetry, etc;
- **Professions** – distinguished contributions, innovative work of distinction;
- **Public service** – outstanding achievement in statesmanship, administration, legislative activity, the judiciary.

The trustees especially invite the nomination of distinguished female and minority candidates. Administrators, faculty, or staff of the University are not eligible for an honorary degree until one year after their retirement. For more detailed information, see the [Criteria](#) for honorary degree nominees.

Q. What honorary degrees does the university award?

A. One of the following honorary degrees may be awarded:

- Doctor of Letters
- Doctor of Literature
- Doctor of Science
- Doctor of Music
- Doctor of Fine Arts *honoris causa*
- Doctor of Laws
- Doctor of Civil Law
- Doctor of Social Science
- Doctor of Commercial Science
- Doctor of Public Service
- Doctor of Divinity
- Doctor of Humanities
- Doctor of Humane Letters

NOTE: When a degree, such as Doctor of Music, can be either earned or honorary, the words “*honoris causa*” are added to indicate that the degree is honorary and was conferred in honor of the recipient’s achievements.

Q. When are honorary degrees awarded?

A. Honorary degrees are awarded at the all-university commencement in May and may also be awarded at special convocations throughout the academic year.

Q. Who can make a nomination for an honorary degree?

A. Anyone--students, faculty, administrators, deans, alumni, and members of the general public--can nominate a person for an honorary degree

Q. How do I make a nomination?

A. Complete an Honorary Degree [nomination form](#) with the following information:

- 1) The name of the individual being nominated and date of birth (if available)
- 2) Contact address
- 3) Academic background (colleges attended, degrees earned, dates the degrees were earned)
- 4) Occupation/profession
- 5) Current position/endeavors
- 6) A description of the nominee’s achievements and honors
- 7) Any special connections to the George Washington University (**for example, an alumnus, a former professor or administrator, a benefactor**)
- 8) Brief explanation of why you believe GW should award this candidate an honorary degree.

Nominators must provide their name and contact address in case more information about the nominee is required.

Due to the confidential nature of the proceedings, nominations should not be discussed with the nominees. Every year, many worthy people are nominated for an honorary degree but not all can be recognized. Official notification of the university’s intention to confer an honorary degree upon an individual is made by the president on behalf of the Board of Trustees.

Q. When are nominations due?

A. Nominations are accepted at any time during the year but those received after **November 15** of each year will be held and may not be considered for the coming May commencement.

Q. Who reviews the nominations?

A. The Honors and Academic Convocations Committee of the Faculty Senate, the president of the university, the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees, and finally, the entire Board of Trustees. See [Process](#) for more complete information.

Q. When will I hear if my nomination has been accepted?

A. All deliberations about honorary degrees are kept confidential. Each year the Board reviews previous nominations that have not been acted upon by the trustees. It is not unusual for a candidate to be selected a few years after the initial nomination.

Additionally, the Board often receives multiple nominations for the same candidate. For these reasons, the University Marshal and the Board of Trustees are unable to discuss the status of a nomination with any nominator.

Q. Can I nominate someone who has received an honorary degree from GW in the past?

A. No, individuals may only receive one honorary degree from GW. Please see the list of [past recipients](#) before submitting a nomination.