Honorary Degree Guidelines and Procedures

Board of Trustees Meeting

September 6, 2012
Status of Process

• Most recent guidelines amended by the Chancellor, December, 2009

• BOT review and approval of 2011-12 nominations tabled due to questions about the process

• Education Advisory Board asked to conduct a Custom Research Brief: Policies and Procedures for Awarding Honorary Doctoral Degrees
EAB Custom Research Brief

• Who comprises honorary degree selection committees at other institutions?
• What is the role of University Advancement in the selection process?
• What is the role of potential nominees giving history and/or potential in the selection process?
EAB Custom Research Brief

• What is the impact of political background or affiliation on the selection of recipients for public institutions?

• Do selection criteria include contributions to the public good versus or in addition to the institution?

• Is a progression in awards leading to this most prominent recognition necessary for selection?
EAB Custom Research Brief

- Is a connection to the university a prerequisite for the award at other institutions?
- Is the honorary degree selection process a mechanism for identifying the commencement speaker?
- What is the role of the Board of Trustees in selecting or approving the nominations?
- Do students have a role in the selection or is this the domain of the faculty?
EAB Custom Research Brief

• Institutional web sites of 19 public institutions reviewed
• Secondary research conducted on 16 public institutions including several of UNCG’s peers
• Institutions included a mix of predominantly high and very high research universities
Key Observations

• The selection criteria outlined in most profiled honorary degree policies include distinguished scholarly or artistic achievements; regional, national or international contributions to the public arena; and/or substantial contributions to the university and the university community
Key Observations

• Most profiled institutions do not allow current university employees, students, or trustees, elected or appointed public officials, and past or future university benefactors to be nominated
Key Observations

Eight of the 16 profiled institutions accept nominations from any member of the university community, including students, faculty, staff, alumni, council members, trustees, and friends of the university.
Key Observations

- Across profiled institutions, typical honorary degree selection committee consists of nine members including the following: tenured faculty members elected by various constituents (e.g., faculty senate, provost, university president, and vice president for research), senior administrators, lower level administrators and staff, and campus community members.
Key Observations

• Across profiled institutions, common honorary degree candidate approval processes involve the selection committee, faculty senate, university president, and board of trustees
Key Observations

• Although most profiled institutions expect an honorary degree recipient to deliver brief remarks at commencement, no policy explicitly states that the honorary degree selection process may be used as a mechanism for identifying the commencement speakers
Considerations for UNCG

• The call for nominations should come from the Chancellor and nominations should be submitted to the Chancellor

• Association with the University should not be a prerequisite for an honorary degree

• Limitations on Eligibility should be added to honorary degree guidelines
Considerations for UNCG

• The Faculty Senate chairperson should serve on the selection committee
• The President of the Student Government Association should serve on the selection committee
• Letters of recommendation (3-6 both internal and external to the University) should be added to the nomination package
Considerations for UNCG

• Candidates not selected by the Chancellor should be removed from the pool of BOT-approved nominations after 3 years

• Selection of honorary degree candidates should remain separate from other honorific awards at UNCG

• A separate mechanism should be created for selection of commencement speakers
Issues for Discussion

• Should University Advancement have representation on the selection committee?

• Should consideration for any past, present, or future donations/gifts to the University disqualify individuals from consideration?
Additional Questions/Discussion?
I. Guidelines

A. Honorary degrees at the University, as at other colleges and universities, serve a dual purpose. They both recognize men and women of high achievement and celebrate values that we profess as an institution of higher learning. They are a way of telling the larger public that certain people and accomplishments are important.

B. In choosing individual recipients for these degrees, the one overriding consideration is the distinction of the candidate, though that distinction may be measured in a number of ways.

C. As a public institution we are committed to openness and diversity, and our choices for honorary degrees should express that commitment. Nominees should represent a broad spectrum of noteworthy achievements whether national, regional or local. No calling or career serving a humane purpose should be excluded from consideration, so long as the achievement in question is distinguished.

D. A previous connection to the University or state should be viewed as a strength in a candidate, but to insist upon it for all would be limiting. It is, then, highly desirable but not mandatory.

E. Finally, distinction and diversity are what we should seek. Neither allows for an easy or consistent definition, for like all such terms, they must be defined in practice. There will inevitably be honest disagreement among us as to what they mean and as to those persons who best exemplify them.

II. Honorary Degree Types

Recognized academic degrees shall not be awarded as honorary degrees. Instead, the recognized honorary degree titles shall be used. These titles include, but are not limited to the following:

A. Doctor of Laws (LL.D.): contributions to government or public service.

B. Doctor of Letters (Litt.D.): contributions to literature or the creative or performing arts.

C. Doctor of Science (Sc.D.): contributions to any field of science, social science, engineering or technology.
D. Doctor of Humane Letters (L.H.D.): contributions to the humanities or to human welfare.

III. Procedures

The procedures for proposing and awarding Honorary Degrees are as follows:

A. The honorary degrees committee shall be a University committee appointed by the Chancellor and designated the "University Committee on Honorary Degrees." The General Faculty of UNCG shall carry out its constitutional duty for recommending individuals for honorary degrees through appointment and participation of faculty members on the University Committee on Honorary Degrees.

B. The solicitation for nominees for honorary degrees shall normally be undertaken in the fall semester of each academic year.

C. Nominations shall be solicited from the faculty, individual members of the Board of Trustees, the Alumni Board, UNCG staff, and the rising senior class. Nominations from other sources will also be accepted. All nominations shall be made in writing in accordance with application guidelines and in strict confidentiality.

D. The University Committee on Honorary Degrees shall be free to make nominations of its own in writing and in accordance with application guidelines and in strict confidentiality.

E. The University Committee on Honorary Degrees shall present its nominations for honorary degrees to the Board of Trustees as specified in Section V below.

F. The University Committee on Honorary Degrees shall maintain a pool of honorees already approved and of certain other nominees for reconsideration.

G. The University Committee on Honorary Degrees shall assist the Chancellor in making arrangements for those chosen for such degrees to accept them.

H. Normally the University will present at least one honorary degree each year.

I. Honorary degrees shall be awarded only at the Spring Commencement.

IV. Honorary Degree Committee Membership

The University Committee on Honorary Degrees is appointed by the Chancellor. Its membership shall include four (4) faculty members nominated by the Faculty Senate in the Spring if needed, and approved by majority vote of the Faculty Senate and two (2) trustees selected by the UNCG Board of Trustees. Terms shall be staggered as four-year (academic year) appointments. The Provost shall serve as an ex officio member.

V. Nomination and Approval of Honorary Degrees by the Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees is the final authority in granting the honorary degree. As such, they will receive regular reports about the nomination and selection process through the appropriate Trustee committee.
The usual process for the cycle of determining recipients for honorary degrees is noted below. It may be that individuals nominated in one year may be proposed for an honorary degree in the next academic year depending on the number of nominations and other considerations.

September/October: The Provost will seek nominations of individuals for consideration, setting an appropriate deadline for submission.

October/December: The Committee will review nominations and seek additional information as may be necessary to complete its work.

January/February: The Committee will recommend recipients to the Board of Trustees through the appropriate Trustee committee.

The Committee will submit a recommendation to the Board of Trustees of which nominees should receive honorary degrees. The Board of Trustees shall grant final approval of honorary degree recipients.