



# University Policy: Posthumous Degrees

**Policy Category:** Student Policies

**Subject:** Awarding of Posthumous Degrees to Undergraduate and Graduate Students.

**Offices Responsible for Review of this Policy:** Office of the University Registrar, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies, Dean of Graduate Studies

**Procedures:** Incorporated Herein

**Related University Policies:**

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## I. SCOPE

This policy, governing the criteria for awarding of posthumous degrees to undergraduate and graduate students, applies only to students in degree-awarding undergraduate and graduate programs at American University.

## II. POLICY STATEMENT

This policy is designed to establish standard criteria and procedures under which posthumous degrees may be awarded to undergraduate and graduate students in degree programs.

## III. DEFINITIONS

*Posthumous Degree* means a degree conferred by the University to a deceased student.

## IV. POLICY

This policy establishes a consistently administered means for the University to recognize the academic achievements of students who were enrolled in the University at the time of their death and to commemorate their achievements. This recognition is reserved for degree candidates who, in addition to current enrollment in a degree program in the university and good academic standing, have substantially completed all degree requirements, including coursework, capstone, internship and research requirements. Awarding of posthumous degrees requires evaluation of the student's record to ensure the integrity of the academic degree and the institution. Therefore, posthumous degrees may only be awarded in cases when specific criteria are met via evaluation of the student's academic record, pursuant to the procedures described below.

## VI. CRITERIA FOR ELIGIBILITY

1. At the time of the student's death, he/she was enrolled in the university, was in good academic standing and was making adequate progress toward the completion of requirements for a specific undergraduate or graduate degree program.
2. Requirements for the award of the degree are "substantially complete." Specifically:
  - a. For undergraduate degree candidates, (a) all coursework and other degree requirements would have been completed in the semester that the student died or (b) within one additional semester of university attendance.
  - b. For masters's degree candidates in degree programs without a thesis requirement, all coursework and other degree requirements would have been completed in the semester that the student died. In addition, for masters's degree candidates in degree programs with a thesis requirement, the Dean of Graduate Studies or the Dean of the Washington College of Law shall consult with the Chair and members of the thesis committee and make a determination that the thesis was substantially completed, i.e., that a full draft exists and that the student could have defended the thesis during the semester in which he or she died.
  - c. For doctoral degree candidates, all coursework and other degree requirements would have been completed in the semester that the student died. The Dean of Graduate Studies or the Dean of the Washington College of Law shall consult with the Chair and members of the dissertation committee and make a determination that the dissertation was substantially completed, i.e., that a full draft exists and that the student could have defended the dissertation during the semester in which he or she died.

## **VI. PROCEDURES**

A deceased student who is enrolled in a degree program in the university at the time of his/her death may be nominated for a posthumous degree by a member of the university community or a member of his/her family. If the nomination is forwarded by someone other than a member of the immediate family of the deceased, the Dean of the academic unit must obtain approval from the student's family prior to a fuller consideration of the nomination. The Dean of the academic unit in which the student is enrolled will recommend the candidate for a posthumous degree in the form of a formal written request to the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies or the Dean of Graduate Studies, as appropriate. The request must include the name and ID number of the student, the degree to be awarded, and the recommended semester for degree conferral.

Upon submission of the request to the Office of the Provost, the death of the student, his or her enrollment status, academic standing and progress on degree requirements will be verified. Once these steps are completed, the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies or the Dean of Graduate Studies will make a recommendation to the Provost. The Provost will then initiate and oversee the progress of the request of consideration for awarding of a posthumous degree.

If supported by the Provost, the Provost or designee will notify the Office of the University Registrar via memo to initiate the process for a degree posting. The Office of the University Registrar will notify the appropriate personnel for commencement arrangements. The Dean of the academic unit will inform the immediate family of the university's decision to recognize the student

with a posthumous degree. If the family desires to represent the student and receive the diploma at a commencement ceremony, this arrangement must be conveyed sufficiently early to be included in the planning process for commencement. The Dean of the academic unit will also advise the individual who made the request of its final disposition, if the person who forwarded the nomination to the Dean is not a member of the deceased's family.

Unless otherwise requested, a posthumous degree will be conferred at the next regularly scheduled commencement ceremony. The posthumous degree may be presented to a member of the student's family or their representative. A posthumous degree may also be presented by an appropriate university official to the family in a private gathering, separate from the commencement ceremony. The commencement program will note that the degree was awarded posthumously. The graduation application fee shall be waived.

The Office of the University Registrar will post the notice of the award of the posthumous degree to the student's transcript. There will not be any indication of a posthumous award of the degree on the student's diploma.

## **VII. EFFECTIVE DATE(S)**

This Policy is effective January 30, 2014.

## **VI. SIGNATURE, TITLE AND DATE OF APPROVAL**

This policy needs to be signed by the appropriate officer (listed below) before it is considered approved.

Approved:

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Provost

Date Approved: January 30, 2014